Significance of the Jewish Collective Identity to American Jews prior to 1948: building the American Zionist lobby

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Upon their arrival to colonial America in the mid 17th century, the first Jewish settlers faced several challenges that were primarily in relation with their religious identity. Their seclusion from the American societal life drove them to start a new type of activism in order to first guarantee their social integration and secure, at a following stage, their political and religious emancipation. Yet their success in obtaining their basic rights and their integration in the American society was jeopardized by the rising tide of anti-Semitism in the 18th century which only reinforced the Jewish inner politics of recognition within the Jewish collectivity in the U.S. This reinforcement was achieved through the return to history, the use of collective memory and the attachment to the Judaic religion as opposed to the full assimilation attempts it took to achieve “American-ness”. Thus, the religious identity of American Jews was to them their drive towards harboring another national sentiment than to the U.S., that to the future Jewish state. This paper aims to highlight the significance of the collective politics of recognition to American Jews and the techniques the latter resorted to in order to renew their attachment to their religion and reinforce their lobbyism in the U.S. in favor of founding a home for the Jews in Palestine. After the rise and relative success of British Zionism in obtaining promises in this regard, American Zionists took the lead and proved the significance and the solidity of their collective politics of identity recognition. It is my concern in this paper to show how through their attachment to their Jewish origins and through their fear for the future of their Jewish brethrens were American Zionists able to follow the path of their fellow British comrades and obtain the American recognition of the State of Israel on May 14th, 1948.

Keywords: collective identity - politics of recognition – American Zionism – lobby

Abstract:
Teaching English as a third language to students who intend to specialize in it in their higher education necessarily implies teaching Anglophone culture, civilization, literature, philosophy and the way Anglophone media affect the world among other important linguistic courses. As a matter of fact, higher education in Tunisia is characterized by an abundance of research areas in English that are not directly related to English linguistics. My area of research is the study of cultures, identities, history of countries and peoples that were affected by Anglophone civilization. Within this scope, I situate my work as a philosophical and historical examination of how Britain and the United States affected history making and the way they affected the history of the Middle-East in particular. It is of extreme interest to university students to learn about the history of the creation of Israel and the role played by the U.K. and the U.S. in the matter as the Arab world is still affected by the Arab-Israel conflict to the present day. I strongly believe that teaching all the aspects of English and American
culture and history shape the students’ background on the language and on the history of its people.

This paper aspires to consider the connection between the Jewish collective memory and the Jewish ultimate quest for justice in the hope of examining how the Jewish past was used to shape the Jewish future. This future is represented in this case by the creation of the State of Israel in the much acclaimed Palestinian territory that has mostly been represented in Jewish thought by the word Zion, in reference to Mount Zion existing in what was called in ancient Jewish history the land of Judea, east of Jerusalem. In Jewish scripture as well, the word Zion referred to the city of Judea ( Isa. 10:24; 51:11) and to its inhabitants ( Isa. 51:16; 59:20).

In his book Zionism Past and Present (2007), Nathan Rotenstreich speculates on the Jewish understanding of concepts such as exile and return, highlighting the basis of the Jews’ relation to the land of Israel as one that “was conceived in the traditional religious context as a relation based on promise, destiny and the overcoming of the exile” (Rotenstreich 47). The exiled communities’ yearning to return to the “ancestral” land, especially after the destruction of the First Temple, in addition to their unconditioned faith in their destiny united them spiritually and informally into achieving one single goal: obtaining divine forgiveness and returning home, for what they considered as their status of captivity/exile was decided by God alone. In this respect, Rotenstreich describes the Jewish exile as a “supra-historical” act, referring at the same time to the divine promise of return and the divine conception of the Jewish destiny, disregarding thereby any secular reading of the historical dispersion of the Jewish communities from their hosting environments and further disregarding the two thousand years or so in which that land belonged to another people.

Continuing in the same outlook related to the religious conception of Jewish destiny, it is worth mentioning that the yearning of the Jews for the land of Israel has long existed in Jewish religious practices. In their prayers for example, one can sense an obvious longing for Zion as when the Jews say “And let our eyes behold Thy return in mercy to Zion”; or in the Psalms as in “By the rivers of Babylon, / There we sat down, yea, we wept, / When we remembered Zion” (Ps. 137:1).

According to David Hartman, writer of Maimonides Torah and Philosophic Quest (2001), the Torah has been a resourceful religious reference to which the Jews could resort for peace of mind, a better understanding of the past and a hope in the future as it “provided a conceptual framework for the understanding of nature and history […] The Torah also provided the Jewish people with the main political categories for understanding their condition in history [for] their history was not defined by empirical, secular, political realities but by God alone” (4). Viewed from this angle, the social, religious and political persecutions suffered by the Jews appear to have been foreseen by the Jews themselves since their first exile. The promise of forgiveness and the conditions set by God for the return to Zion were also poignantly clear from the beginning of Jewish exiles. Repentance alone was the key to the Jewish emancipation from divine punishment.

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1 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 21, p. 537
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 47
4 Psalms is a term of Latin and Greek origins, it literally means songs that are “sung to a stringed instrument,” they are a compilation of recitals and religious chants most of them allegedly written by the prophet David
5 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 16, p. 663
6 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 21, p. 539
In the same context, Hartman indicates that “the only action necessary before their [the Jews] condition in history could be changed was teshuvah, the turning to God and the Torah. The Torah was the key ‘to life and the good’” (5). Therefore, concepts such as martyrdom, death, and communal suffering were considered as purifying redemptive acts that would ultimately lead to the long sought-for closure of the Jewish diasporic and traumatic existence. Hartman even believes that such a closure was supposed to reveal itself one day or another and change the course of Jewish history. He says in this regard that “in Jewish experience redemption was a historical event that would show itself in the changed historical condition of the people [for] the quest was not for individual salvation but for salvation of the entire community” (5). From these ideals sprang Cultural and then Political Zionism that first found favorable ground in Germany with Herzl’s activism, then in Britain and Ultimately in the U.S. This paper traces the origins of American Jews in the U.S., examines their strategies of social acculturation and highlights their political activism which was able to obtain the land of Palestine as a permanent home for the Jewish people by the year 1948.

**Characteristics of American Jewry from early settlements until the mass immigration movement of the 19th century:**

It is important to start the study of American Jewish lobbying with a brief overview of the early Jewish settlements in the U.S. in order to appraise their political and social evolution. I rely in this first part of the study principally on the work of Hasia R. Diner, considered as a specialist in immigration and ethnic history as well as in American Jewish history. Diner reports that the first Jewish refugees who reached American shores were 23 Jews from Brazil who arrived in September of the year 1654. They tried to settle in the Dutch colony called New Amsterdam which is present day New York City. For them to be able to do so they had first to obtain the approval of the authorities in charge of this community. The person in charge of the Dutch colony, called the governor, was Peter Stuyvesant, also a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. Governor Stuyvesant tried his utmost to prevent Jewish immigrants from obtaining the approval from Amsterdam to settle in his colony and wrote a letter to his superiors in his mother country disclaiming the right of the Jews—whom he accused of having the intention of “engag[ing] in ‘their customary usury and deceitful trading with the Christians’”—to settle in his colony. Stuyvesant also described the Jews in his letter as “hateful enemies.” The Jews on their part wrote a letter that they later addressed to the Jews of Amsterdam as the latter were enjoying far more religious tolerance than any other Jews of the time. The addressees intervened on behalf of their co-religionists with the Dutch West India Company, then proprietor of the Dutch colony in America, and managed to defeat Stuyvesant’s arguments by more properly formed reasons in favor of the establishment of a Jewish community in New Amsterdam. Eventually, as reported by Diner, in 1655, the Jews of New Amsterdam obtained a letter authorizing them “to travel and trade […] and live and remain there.”

Gradually, the Jews of New Amsterdam started asking for more rights, using the abovementioned document as the basis for their demands. However, Governor Stuyvesant did not allow them to fully mix with the Dutch society there by prohibiting them from joining the defense force of the colony and by imposing a tax on them instead. He also prevented them from trading outside the colony boundaries and from building houses which could be considered, as pointed out by Diner, a sign of “a permanent presence.” Yet, the determination of the Jews of New Amsterdam to claim their rights and blend in the society as

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 14
10 Ibid.
equal citizens ended in the annulment of all the preceding restrictions. They then gradually obtained the right to be considered citizens by the year 1657, thanks to the efforts and activism of Asser Levy\(^{11}\), the first to have obtained the right to serve in the guardianship of the colony\(^{12}\). In that same year, the Jews—unlike other religious groups in the colony such as the Lutherans for example—managed to obtain the authorization to practice Judaism under the condition that they “exercise in all quietness … within their houses.”\(^{13}\)

The Jewish quest for more religious liberties was shaped by the image the Jews had of America during the 17th century. The Sephardic and Marrano communities fleeing from the Spanish persecutions, inquisitions and forced conversions chose to settle in America because it represented religious freedom; in a way, to them “choosing America meant choosing Judaism.”\(^{14}\) According to Diner, “the Jews needed to reinvent themselves according to their ancestral identities,” \(^{(15)}\) which is the reason why they insisted in their activism upon acquiring more religious rights than they were first allowed. They had first asked for a plot of land of which to make a cemetery; then they built what is called in Hebrew a mikveh, which is a form of bath used by Jewish women to perform their purity rituals before there was even the slightest intention of organizing public places of worship.\(^{15}\)

The second Jewish group that landed on American shores came from London and landed in Georgia—then a British colony—on the Savannah River in the year 1733. These Jews were mainly escaping Prussian persecution, and they had been in London only for a short period of time. In spite of noticeable opposition from London authorities to the establishment of a Jewish community in Georgia, this particular group of 42 Jews easily settled and fit in, as the Georgia charter dictated that “forever, hereafter, there shall be a liberty of conscience allowed in the worship of God to all persons’ except Catholics.”\(^{16}\) According to Diner, it was the Georgian view of how practical and useful could the Jews be to the colony and to its trading system that mattered the most and helped Georgian Jews build their first Synagogue within only two months after their settlement in Savannah.\(^{17}\)

This newly founded community bought large tracts of land in the colony, provided medical services during epidemics and primarily engaged in the wine business, a field that was already familiar to some Sephardic (Jews of Spanish ancestry) and Portuguese settlers in the colony. Viewed from this angle, Diner summarizes the general American view of the Jews in those times as follows:

Those responsible for overseeing the colony primarily saw Jews not as adherents of a problematic religious tradition but as a people who could augment the colony’s wealth. They placed commercial concerns over spiritual purity and argued that despite their religious defects, Jews would benefit the colony. American religious tolerance flowered out of the soil of necessity.\(^{18}\)

Besides, religious tolerance in some American colonies was partly prompted by the ideas of such people as William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, and Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island. William Penn, a Quaker, described as “America’s first champion for liberty and peace,”\(^{19}\) designed a constitution limiting the government’s powers and guaranteeing

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\(^{11}\) Asser Levy was the first to have gained the status of a prominent Jew in later New York City

\(^{12}\) Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States: 1654 to 2000*, p. 15

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 16

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 17

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 19

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 20

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) By Jim Powell in his article “William Penn, America’s First Champion for Liberty and Peace” available at [http://www.quaker.org/wmpenn.html](http://www.quaker.org/wmpenn.html) accessed on 03/07/2011
larger freedoms and civil rights. As for Roger Williams, he insisted on the separation between Church and State, and guaranteed political equality to the settlers in his colony disregarding their ethnic origins.

These early Jewish communities of the 17th and 18th centuries set the standards that later immigrants followed. Unlike other communities that chose farming, the Jews strategically settled in port cities and engaged in trading activities. The strength of Jewish ties was primarily based on religious principles that dictated caring for one another and implied that Jews should start commercial ties with other Jews abroad. Family connections and informal recommendation letters allowed many new immigrants to merge with the Jewish American life style. According to Diner, the Jewish merchants even made significant social and economic profits by marrying their sons and daughters to those of Jewish partners, and soon family ties strengthened business partnerships and expanded the scope of Jewish wealth and might, from Pennsylvania to Rhode Island to Virginia and to South Carolina.

On the smooth ability of the Jews to acculturate in non-Judaic environments—and in some cases even in hostile environments—Hasia Diner says that the Jews knew how to remain balanced in their quest for more rights. They knew their limits and they knew when to seize an opportunity. She says in this respect: “Jews always had to remain aware of local realities and to devise strategies to live with whatever rights their jurisdiction offered them. They could never rest content with what rights they had; nor did they, however, believe that those rights could never increase.” This vision of gradual entitlement to civil rights was primarily supported, according to Diner, by the fact that the Jews in colonial America were not the only outcasts. Catholics and Africans suffered a greater deal of inequity in America on the part of the Protestants who constituted the dominant religious group in the colonies (Diner 24) than they did in Europe, where the divide was principally between the two larger religious groups of Jews and Christians (Diner 25). In addition, social status was mainly determined by the settlers’ ability to help their communities and colonies prosper economically, as these colonies principally represented mere sources of revenues to Britain.

With the close of the 18th century and with the increase in number of the Ashkenazi Jews in America, the latter began to contribute more than the presumably considered “pioneers” of the Jewish communities, the Sephardim. Additionally, the Jews of Ashkenaz had been somehow “subjugated” to Sephardic rituals even in the Synagogue services they shared—in which wordings and chants were mainly in Portuguese or following the Sepharad halakha (moral laws)—which is why the separation in status and self identification of the Ashkenazi identity started to take shape and assert itself, without however perturbing the Jewish congregations. But in general, as concluded by Diner, “this blend of external harmony with the outside world and internal conformity to the dictates of Jewish tradition characterized the experience of these early American Jews” thanks to their ability to fit in their hosting societies. In 18th century America, the Jews enjoyed high social status due to their economic position earned by the economic prosperity they brought to their colonies. They had a relatively larger freedom of worship as long as they kept it private and modest compared to European Jews of the 18th century.

The following century (more specifically from the 1820s to the 1920s) was described by Hasia Diner in her book The Jews of the United States: 1654 to 2000 as “the pivotal

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20 Penn had however little influence concerning the abolition of slavery as he owned some slaves himself
22 Diner, p. 22
23 Ibid., p. 23
24 Ibid., p. 38
25 The year 1924 witnessed the enactment of the National Origins Act that restricted immigration to the U.S. based on a quota system.
century” due to the significantly increasing numbers of immigrants who headed towards America. She says in this regard: “of the massive Jewish population movements of that century, none surpassed that which brought Jews in the millions across the Atlantic to America. About one quarter of Europe’s Jewish population came to the Americas, most of them opting for settling in the United States.”

Diner divides the immigration waves into two categories: the first came from northern and western European regions (such as Norway, Sweden and Germany) and the second from southern and eastern European regions (such as Greece, Italy, Poland and Hungary) as of the 1880s. The Jews of Central Europe, however, started their immigration toward America only in the mid 19th century. Between 1820 and 1920, Diner reports that 3 million Jews reached American soil (Diner 115). With this high influx of Jewish newcomers, driven by severe oppression in their home countries and sometimes inspired by the revolutionary ideas that accompanied the 18th and early 19th centuries, Jewish aspirations surpassed economic prosperity and started to develop more focused attempts at acquiring political weight within the rising New World.

However, the highly significant influx of Jewish newcomers brought its share of discrimination, social ostracism and numerous instances of anti-Semitism from the late 19th to the early 20th century. As cited in the Encyclopaedia Judaica, anti-Jewish sentiment in the United States was apparent in various forms such as “housing, employment, admission to resort hotels, business, college quotas, [and] membership of social clubs.” Such early forms of social rejection started mainly during the Civil War when a military order involving Jews’ expulsion from the Border States for having allegedly engaged in illegal trading there at the end of the year 1862 was issued; the act was “immediately revoked by President Lincoln.” Then the years 1880s and 1890s witnessed further anti-Jewish sentiments due to the high number of Eastern European immigrants that were entering the U.S. by then and rapidly engaging in agrarian works. But, thanks to Jewish activism against these forms of anti-Semitism, social ostracism against the Jews noticeably decreased after the Second World War.

Through their struggle to counter anti-Jewish sentiments in the U.S., American Jews developed a predisposition to the Zionist ideology. In a report published by the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) in 1974, Jewish readiness to embrace Zionism is portrayed as one of the consequences of a long history of anti-Semitism, isolated life in the ghettos, and social rejection. In the same report, predisposition to Zionism was also accounted for in the American Jewish consciousness through the Jewish collective memory of persecution. Thus, once again, Jewish identity transcends nationality barriers in the way it uses its identity constructs in the service of its ultimate goal which is to transcend its traumatic past in the purpose of creating a permanent home for a centuries-long traumatized people. It is worth reminding here that the identity constructs used by the Jews along the centuries appear to be always linked to Jewish history, memory and religion above anything else. Therefore, Zionism, whether it be British, American or Eastern European, rests on principal memory constructs that constantly link the Jewish identity to its past. As argued by the MERIP report

This memory was kept alive in the synagogue with the annual retelling of the legendary history of enslavement and escape from Egypt, captivity and return from Babylon, and rebellion and repression in the Greek and Roman-dominated Middle

26 Diner, p. 74
27 Ibid., p. 82
28 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 02, p. 229
29 Ibid., p. 230
30 Ibid.
East. This collective memory was reinforced by the traditional religious ties to the holy land. Most important in this context were the actual personal memories of American Jews or their parents of the economic deprivation, degradation and recurring pogroms of Eastern Europe. This predisposition was reinforced by the third and most important factor: anti-Semitism.31

The memories carried by American Jews and by their forefathers and ancestors helped strengthen a will to resist ethnic discrimination, especially at a time when American ideals insisted on equality, liberty and the right to pursue happiness. From this will to resist, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) was founded in 1913 “in response to rampant anti-Semitism and discrimination against the Jews in the U.S.”32 The Encyclopedia of American Jewish History situates the rise of social ostracism and prejudice against the Jews in the late 19th century and early years of the 20th.33 One of the most significant figures active in the ADL was the American Jewish lawyer Sigmund Livingston, who volunteered the use of his office as the center of the ADL’s reunions. The main tasks undertaken by the ADL revolved around defending Jews against illegal discriminatory acts and accusations, defending the Jews from literary and other mediated stereotypes that were outrageously common at the time and, most importantly, around fighting the Ku Klux Klan’s bigotry34 in the early 1920s.

As Hasia Diner describes the period going from 1820 to 1920 as a “century of Jewish politics,”35 and in parallel to the rise of British Zionism, I dedicate the following sub-part to exploring the ways used by American Jews between 1820 and 1920 to develop and back up the Zionist political agenda that was developed through the Zionist congresses, and that gradually involved the United States in the project supporting the creation of a Jewish national home. This intermediate analysis will eventually lead to the subsequent part which will closely examine the development of American foreign policy in the Middle-East up to the American recognition of the State of Israel.

The rise of American Jewish lobbying before and during WWII

To the outside observer, American Jews of the 19th century may seem simply to have been involved in politics as “voters, officeholders, or as petitioners to government officials” (Diner 155), which is legitimate behavior to the standard American citizen. Yet in fact, Diner believes that beneath this simplicity lay a “more complicated world of American Jewish politics” (Diner 155). Like anywhere else where they enjoyed a certain extent of political freedom, American Jews developed institutions through which they could act on behalf of other less fortunate Jews abroad. Other than this purpose, and until the end of the 19th century, American Jewish voters and politicians alike did not venture to form united blocs of Jewish activism or Jewish parties due to the two party system adopted by the U.S. and the consequent fate that awaits minority groups in the event they intend to form a minority agenda, which would garner little support from American voters.

American Jewish activism started as a philanthropic enterprise created to provide aid and material assistance to ease Jewish suffering around the world. Russian and eastern European Jews, in addition to Jewish victims of the First World War, benefited significantly from generous American Jewish pockets. Diner cites contributions that sometimes topped $3 million from only one philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald; the total of American aid provided by

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32 Encyclopedia of American Jewish History, p. 242
33 Ibid., p. 243
34 Ibid.,
35 Diner, p. 155
the year 1918 reached $20 million from American Jews for the benefit of their eastern European co-religionists.36

The end of the 19th century witnessed a noticeable turn in the nature of American Jewish activism, especially with the rise of immigration rates from Russia to the U.S. *Hibbat Zion/Hovevei Zion*, the movement that was initially Russian-born, quickly spread around the world and soon reached America and established societies that were named *Shove Zion* in New York and *Chovevei Zion* in Philadelphia in the early 1890s. Such a movement, known for its attachment to the place where Mount Zion is situated, made the Zionist transfer idea quite palatable to World Zionists at large, to the extent that the agenda of the first Zionist Congress that was to be held in Basle was discussed by the editorial team of the *New York Times* on August 15, 1897, before the Congress took place, in an article entitled *The Jewish State Idea: Programme of the Zionists to Be Discussed in the Congress at Basle; Aims of Herzl and Nordau.*

In this article, the editors summarize the content of Herzl’s book *The Jewish State Idea* and give a broad outlook concerning the First Zionist Congress that was to be held within two weeks of the publication of the *NYT* article. Besides, the article provides an overview of the then-present situation in Palestine in an attempt to introduce the Jewish settlement idea to the common reader, who is also informed that by then Palestine contained 22 Jewish agricultural colonies, 70 synagogues and several Jewish schools that had made a positive contribution to the country. Additionally, the writers of the article do not fail to point out that twenty years earlier, Jaffa, for instance, was a town of no significance at any level; but it acquired a very interesting status thanks to immigrant Jews who had established communities as of the end of the 19th century. The description of the improvement of the economic situation in Jaffa thanks to the Jews goes on as follows

> Since the immigration of 1891 there are no less than 2000 Jewish souls in the town, following various pursuits. They are physicians, teachers, chemists, shoemakers and shopkeepers. Here even the children use Hebrew as the vernacular. There is a hospital, Shaare Zion (Gates of Zion), and the central committee for assisting immigrants has its official seat there. As the chief port of import and export, its prosperity marks the general increase in wealth of the entire community.

After the above description of Jaffa, there is also mention of an impressive agricultural school there that was supported by the Alliance Israélite Universelle and that was, it was stated, doing an incredible job forming students from neighboring countries over the duration of a five year course on agriculture. With so much detailed focus on the benefit brought by the Jewish immigrants to the under-developed Palestinian territories, and with little mention of the Ottoman colonization that was all but helping the development of these colonized territories, especially with the noticeable degradation of the economic might of the Ottomans, the writers of the *NYT* article drive the reader into the belief that Palestine would definitely be better off with the Jews. The article concludes: “the results of the meeting will be awaited with considerable interest.”

With political Zionism now in place in the world and through *Hovevei Zion* organizations in the U.S., and with the American media interested in following its moves, one can talk about the start of Jewish lobbying in the U.S. that was operating in favor of the establishment of a state for the Jews in Palestine. Such activism influenced Jewish philanthropists into specifically lending a hand to the Jews of Palestine, especially during WWI, when “the direct clash between the British forces and those of the Ottoman Empire under whom the Jews of Palestine lived often put them in harm’s way. As they had done before, and would do again, American Jews came to the rescue” (Diner 181). They sent

36 Ibid., p. 180
money to their brethrens in Palestine “aboard a U.S. battleship the U.S.S. North Carolina” (Diner 181) after having obtained permission to do so from American authorities. These financial rescues were first prompted by Jewish messengers from the already settled communities in Palestine. Such messengers—also called schluchim—used to go to the United States to ask for financial help from prominent American Jewish families.

One can trace the beginning of Jewish lobbying in the U.S. to 1906, the year in which the American Jewish Committee (AJC) was founded. Yet one cannot start speaking of American Zionism at that time because what the AJC cared about cannot be placed within the frame of Zionism, since the early American perception of Zionism implied loyalty to the future Jewish state at a time when American Jews could not give their loyalty to any other country than the U.S., that provided shelter and freedom to the oppressed Jewish immigrants during times of distress.

The foundation of the American Jewish Committee was primarily spurred by the miserable conditions of Russian Jews in Czarist Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. According to the Encyclopaedia Judaica, the AJC was established “to prevent the infraction of the civil and religious rights of Jews, in any part of the world.” The AJC’s intervention on behalf of Jewish immigrants had such an influence that it once defeated a bill requiring literacy tests as a pre-condition to entrance to the U.S. Along with the AJC, there was a need to found another institution to provide further assistance to Jews abroad and help propagandize Zionist aims in America, hence the establishment of the Federation of American Zionists (FAZ) in 1897, initially under the name of the “Federation of Zionist Societies of Greater New York and Vicinity” until 1902, when the 152 societies enrolled decided to merge and form the FAZ. The Federation published a monthly magazine entitled The Maccabean (1902) in addition to several pamphlets on the topics of which centered on Zionism such as “The Aims of Zionism” by Richard Gottheil, “The Progress of Zionism” by Herbert Bentwich, “George Eliot as a Zionist” by Rebecca Altman, “An Epistle to the Hebrews” by the prominent poet and scholar of Sephardi origin Emma Lazarus, and “Judaism and Zionism” by A. Tannenbaum.

Among the best known and significant figures who had once been major contributors to the FAZ with both generous financial donations and political and academic activism on behalf of destitute Jews one must cite Louis Dembitz Brandeis (1856-1941), a “U.S. jurist and the first Jew to be appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court” and Jacob De Haas (1872-1937), the editor of The Jewish Advocate published in Boston. Brandeis and De Haas both contributed to defying the most notable threat that faced American Zionism upon its birth, as the common American Jew started to feel torn between his loyalty to America and the one imposed by Zionism to a future Jewish state, which weakened Jewish Americans’ adherence to Zionism for a considerable amount of time. De Haas describes his vision of Zionism in America as follows

My approach to Zionism was through Americanism. In time, practical experience and observation convinced me that Jews were by reason of their traditions and their character peculiarly fitted for the attainment of American ideals. Gradually it became clear to me that to be good Americans we must be better Jews, and to be better Jews we must become Zionists. Jewish life cannot be preserved and developed [...]

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37 Hebrew for agents of the Almighty
38 Encyclopedia of American Jewish History, p. 204
39 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 02, p. 54
40 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 04, p. 121
44 Ibid.
assimilation cannot be averted, unless there be established in the fatherland a center from which the Jewish spirit may radiate and give to the Jews scattered throughout the world that inspiration which springs from the memories of a great past and the hope of a great future.45

Inspired by these ideals and by his acquaintance with De Haas, Louis D. Brandeis joined the FAZ and soon became its chairman. Brandeis developed the motto “Men! Money! Discipline!” to convince American Jews of the necessity to work seriously instead of debating over theoretical issues related to double loyalties, as the central goal of the federation was to collect money for the Jewish communities in Palestine.46 The FAZ managed to attract other active organizations under its tutelage, such American Jewish groups as the Women’s Zionist Organization, Poalei Zion (from the Socialist Zionist movement) and Mizrachi Zionists (or the religious Zionists) soon joined the movement.47 It is reported that “the ultimate proof that one could be a Zionist and a good American came in January 1916, when President [Woodrow] Wilson named Brandeis to the U.S. Supreme Court.”48

After being named a justice to the U.S. Supreme Court, Brandeis entrusted prominent American Jewish Lieutenants to preside over the Zionist movement after him. These lieutenants—Stephen Wise, Julian Mack and Felix Frankfurter—were reported to have had a hand in securing American support—through Jewish lobbying around president Wilson—for the support of the Balfour Declaration in spite of the State Department’s opposition to its content and its double promises49 to both the Arabs and the Jews. President Wilson was even described as a “pawn of the Zionists,” especially during his second term (1917-1921), as during those crucial years after WWI political Zionism started to see the buds of its first fruits. Brandeis’ work was described as secular in its essence due to its primary focus on practical and financial issues in the Zionist movement rather than to its religious character, which represented an issue to religious Zionists. Yet what Brandeis managed to achieve helped provide Zionism with the American consent it highly needed during the 1920s. The FAZ soon became called the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). It constituted one of the most powerful minority movements in the U.S. from the 1920s to the establishment of the State of Israel, after which the ZOA remained active solely as the center of pro-Israel lobbying in the U.S.

From the 1920s until the end of WWII, one can consider that American Zionism went through a pivotal period that deeply characterized American Jewish history, due to the rise of militant Zionism in the 1920s. At a time when American Zionism witnessed a chilling effect due to the Great Depression, which significantly affected American Jewish fund raising and contributions to the profit of the yishuv in Palestine, militant Zionism offered to American Jews an opportunity to envisage forming military units to fight for the land of Palestine and to revise the Jewish perceptions of the extent to which classical Zionism could achieve its goal. Hence, militant Zionism was also called post-Zionism and revisionist Zionism.

The founder of militant Zionism, Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940), was a Russian orator, soldier and a prominent scholar who grew up within and was influenced by politically oriented groups including Nahum Sokolow, Chaim Weizmann and Menachem Ussishkin.50 Jabotinsky was first known for his international campaign to form a Jewish legion to fight along British lines during WWI. He was among the soldiers who fought in Palestine against

45 Ibid.
46 Encyclopedia of American Jewish History, p. 205
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Rafael Medoff, Militant Zionism in America : the Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926-1948, p. 2
the Turks during that war, hoping that afterwards the British would honor the Balfour Declaration promises. Yet after the war was over, the British notably started to change their stance toward Zionism, and it was clear to Zionists everywhere that British foreign policy in the Middle East, and especially in Mandatory Palestine and Transjordan, was rather pro-Arab than pro-Zionist (Medoff 2). In his book Militant Zionism in America: the Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926-1948, Rafael Medoff describes, in the following passage, how Jabotinsky’s activism was not in line with mainstream Zionism as a result of the jeopardy to Zionism arising from British foreign policy in the Middle-East:

During the early 1920s, Jabotinsky grew increasingly dissatisfied at the Zionist leadership’s cautious response to the signs of a pro-Arab shift in Britain’s Palestine policy. He urged WZO president Chaim Weizmann to fight London’s opposition to the creation of a Jewish army in Palestine and to more aggressively oppose the English decision, in 1922, to bar Jewish settlement in the eastern part of Palestine, known as Transjordan. Weizmann, along with the growing Labor Zionist movement, favored quiet diplomacy and gradualist settlement activity as the way to slowly build a Jewish homeland. Jabotinsky, by contrast, preferred Herzl’s approach of staging dramatic acts of public pressure. Jabotinsky thought in grand terms—creating a modern army, forming alliances with world powers, establishing a powerful sovereign state stretching across both sides of the Jordan River. (Medoff 2)

The movement led by Jabotinsky was referred to as militant in reference to the formation of the legionary forces ready to fight Ottoman rule alongside the British army lines, hoping to “free Erez Israel” as a result of this movement. It was also labeled as revisionist and post-Zionist because it called for a serious revision of Zionist aims, arguing that if the Zionists set aside their primary objective of concretely fighting for the establishment of the Jewish state in the land of Palestine, this would signal the end of Zionism. Therefore, Jabotinsky’s activism was seen as a post-Zionist movement that carried with it a more militant outlook that the “old” Zionism did really lack. After the First World War, Jabotinsky insisted on keeping his Legion in Palestine in case the rioting Arabs would attack the Yishuv, but this request faced British opposition, and the legions were soon demobilized and ordered to leave the Mandatory Palestinian territory. In reprisal to what he considered a non-Zionist attitude on the part of the British, Jabotinsky formed the Haganah, the first Jewish defense forces based in Palestine, later to become the Israeli Defense Force, an action for which he was sentenced to 15 years of prison by the British authorities in 1920.

The verdict on Jabotinsky and on his legions—each of his followers was sentenced to 3 years of prison—moved the Jews everywhere in the world against the presumably anti-Zionist attitude of the British. As depicted in the Encyclopaedia Judaica, “a storm of indignation broke out in Palestine, England, and America among Jews and gentiles” which caused the sentences to be removed, and Jabotinsky was freed by the British in the same year, 1920, thanks to the intervention of Herbert Samuel, the appointed High Commissioner of Palestine and a person who was “acclaimed a hero by all sections of the yishuv.” Jabotinsky went further with his struggle until his activism started to upset the World Zionist Organization, that opted for more diplomacy with the British; it was then that he formed the World Union of Zionist Revisionists—the Ha-Zohar—in 1925. This movement aimed at leading a “political offensive” against the British government in the hope of forcing it to

51 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 11, p. 11
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., p 11-12
54 Ibid., p 12
55 Ibid.
56 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 17, p. 260
amend its Middle-East policy in favor of the Jews as per the Balfour Declaration. It did so through exercising pressure to form more legitimate Jewish military units and introduce reforms on land purchasing policies and the fiscal system in place in Palestine. The Ha-Zohar movement was reported to have formed the largest opposition group to the World Zionist Organization that was then led by Chaim Weizmann; it had also opposed another major Zionist movement in the U.S.: the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor) founded in 1920 by David Ben-Gurion, the socialist Zionist leader of Russian origin living in New York. Ten years later (September 1935), the Ha-Zohar became the New Zionist Organization (NZO) with De Haas as Chairman and Jabotinsky as President. The NZO ceased its anti-British activism to focus all efforts on evacuating prosecuted Jews from Nazi-occupied Eastern European areas.

Due to the ideological disagreement that divided American Zionists into opposing camps, one can only describe American Zionism prior to the creation of Israel as a fluctuating force, yet one with the ability to institutionalize communal change in spite of some internal fissures. However, with the Jewish realization of the newly built entente between the British and the Arabs during the British Mandate, and with the United States’ involvement in the Second World War, British and American Zionists alike worked hand in hand with their already established networks in Palestine to exercise more pressure on the British on the one hand and to affect the then-indifferent American foreign policy on the other, all in the hope of grasping control over Palestine, even if this had to be done by force of arms. The next part will demonstrate how through pressure groups (also called interest groups), lobbying and militancy, American Jews managed to channel the course of events in the Middle-East into a much-awaited recognition of Israel by the United States.

The Zionist lobby and the American recognition of Israel:

By the time Hitler’s anti-Zionist party rose to power in the early 1930s, Zionism had already been rooted as a political ideology in Europe, Britain and the U.S. Although European Jews were overwhelmed by Hitler’s extremism towards them they could not afford to pursue their activism in Europe. As for British pro-Zionists and those of high stature who were backing them, they were rather immersed in building an Anglo-Arab entente so as to ease rising Arab nationalism and strategically win the Arabs over, since the latter, along with the Iranians, were by then quasi-masters of the richest oil deposits in the region. Therefore, fighting against the British during the Second World War seemed not only useless to the Zionist cause but also harmful as the British were fighting against Nazi Germany.

American Zionists had to finish what their European and British predecessors had undertaken for practically half a century, especially that the U.S. government under Franklin D. Roosevelt and his successor Harry S. Truman had little interest—as will be demonstrated hereafter—in supporting the Zionist cause. This section about American Zionism will display how Jewish lobbying managed to outweigh both American and British foreign policies in the Middle-East from the 1930s to 1948. For the purpose, I will include relevant descriptions of the administrations of the last two American presidents who served before the recognition of Israel, FDR and Truman, in order to form a picture of how the Jewish fight for a national home was going on in the U.S. in parallel to what evolved into a yishuv anti-colonization activism in Palestine during the same period.

From the early 1930s until the mid 1940s, the White House knew only one president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the outstanding Democrat who had won four successful terms,
nominations that demonstrated the extent to which this president and his administration were able to win over the American people’s votes. By the time the Nazis were committing their atrocities against the Jews of Europe, Roosevelt’s administration could do nothing to stop them, yet FDR continuously condemned the Nazi and Japanese barbarities. Under the terms of the Neutrality Act of 1937, FDR promised the American public that he would keep the United States away from the Second World War as long as that would be within his capabilities; yet he declared that he was not impartial, for “even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or his conscience” as he put it. But when the German troops approached Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France, Roosevelt managed to win support for his plan of preparing American troops to face the German hazard and ally with the British to protect the “Western hemisphere.” Starting from FDR’s third mandate (20 January 1941 to 20 January 1945), American support of the British during WWII was significantly valuable as the latter highly depended on the nations of the Commonwealth, but were at the same time facing national up-risings and calls for self government from most of their dominions. During this war, Roosevelt developed the ideology that the United States “must become the great arsenal for democracy” and support what he called the four freedoms: freedom of religion and speech and freedom from want and fear.

Upon the U.S. entrance in the Second World War following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Anglo-American relations evolved into what was described as a “full cooperation,” and the U.S. started setting up war aims, especially after the German attacks on the Soviet territories and the Japanese war on China. With Roosevelt’s administration fully immersed in concocting strategic war decisions and considering that the British were rather building an entente with the Arabs, the Zionist dream looked as if it would never be fulfilled. It is however reported that during the Holocaust years, American Zionism was at its peak and Jewish lobbying witnessed a noticeable growth, contrary to what is generally believed (Berman 11).

In his book Nazism, the Jews and American Zionism (1933-1948) (1990), Aaron Berman describes the effect of the Holocaust on the rise of American Zionism, a movement that was—prior to the 1930s—a weak institution that was unable to convince American Jewry of the benefits of its cause. He notices in this regard that it was “the Jewish refugee crisis [that] dramatically transformed American Zionist organizations [since] the plight of assimilated German Jewry seemed to validate the Zionist claim that Jewish nationalism was the only suitable survival tactic for Diaspora Jewry” (Berman 12). Berman situates the path followed by Jewish lobbying in the U.S. from the year the Nazis took power in 1933 to the year 1948, years that “completely transformed” the political world of American Jews (Berman 13).

Some prominent American Jews such as Louis Brandeis, Felix Frankfurter and Stephen Wise—founder of the American Jewish Congress—proved significantly influential in their efforts to change immigration policies and quotas in favor of their fellow German and Austrian Jews fleeing Nazi persecution as of 1933, despite the general opposition of the American public to the acceptance of more immigrants at that time. Stephen Wise, for example, directly approached Secretary of State Cordell Hull about the possibility of issuing

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60 Ibid., p 134. Quoted from Rosenman 1969, 8 :463-464
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., p. 135
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., p. 136
66 Frankfurter was a respected professor at Harvard Law School and later, like his friend Brandeis, a justice of the Supreme Court
67 Aaron Berman. Nazism, the Jews and American Zionism (1933-1948), p. 21
an order to allow more German Jews into the U.S. According to Berman, Wise was “shocked to find Hull ‘weirdly uninformed’ about the Jewish crisis in Germany.”

Felix Frankfurter, on his part, was able to talk to President Roosevelt in person about the same issue concerning the exceptional situation facing European Jews during those years (1933). Roosevelt promised with assurance that German Jews would particularly be benefiting from special treatment in terms of visa issuing. Unconvinced by a mere promise, Louis Brandeis then took the matter in hand, meeting Hull and asking him for more executive and efficient decisions, a matter that was taken seriously by Hull to the extent that by the year 1937, 42% of the visas allowed for German Jews were actually granted.

American Jewish lobbying was however very careful not to attract further criticism as signs of anti-Semitism started to spread within some American social circles and even in Congress, as noted by Berman, who found out that “a much more threatening sign was the growth of rabidly anti-Semitic movements on the fringes of American politics.”

He cites the example of obvious and uncensored anti-Semitic feelings spread by the priest Father Charles E. Coughlin in his radio broadcasts, and he also cites another case in which President Roosevelt was accused of being under the control of American Jews. Through urgent conferences and meetings summoned by American Zionists, Jewish activism turned all eyes towards Palestine as the one and final solution to the Jewish dilemma, a solution that was first laid on table by Herzl in 1896.

Since not much was to be further expected from the American immigration policy makers, American Zionists shifted their attention to Palestine as the only locus for their schemes related to the absorption of Jewish refugees. Knowing that Palestine was by then a British protectorate, American Zionists tried to influence their British counterparts to open up more prospects for Jewish labor in Palestine. The British, however, were unwilling to do so as they feared this would jeopardize the Arabs’ prospects in the land, a fear that was at the origin of the White Papers issued from 1930 to 1939. This series of documents that were also called “statements of policy,” was issued by the British government and addressed to the British parliament in which issues with relation to the British Mandate in Palestine and the related immigration restrictions were raised and discussed.

As noticed by Berman, “the British were responding to Arab pressure” which is why such an influential American Zionist lawyer as Robert Szold thought a program to exercise more pressure on the British was highly needed to counter the effect of the Passfield White Paper issued in 1929. With the help of David Ben-Gurion, by then leader of the Zionist enterprise based in Palestine, smooth and slow lobbying was able to ease the British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine, so that from 1932 to 1933 the number of admitted Jews increased from 9,553 to 30,327, ultimately reaching 61,854 in 1935.

As the war approached, British policy in Mandatory Palestine proved to be more pro-Arab, and the White Papers of 1938 and 1939 confirmed a sentiment of abandonment that was deeply felt by members of the American Jewish community active in the ZOA. The White Paper of 1938 was issued following a report by the Woodhead Commission appointed by the British government to study the possibility of the establishment of a Jewish community in Palestine. This commission concluded that a meeting was to be arranged between representatives of Palestinian Arabs and neighboring states and of the Jewish Agency to

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., p. 23
70 Ibid.
71 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 21, p. 36
72 Aaron Berman. Nazism, the Jews and American Zionism (1933-1948), p. 27
73 Ibid.
confer about future policy, including the question of immigration to Palestine." In case no agreement was reached the British would then handle the situation. This White Paper was followed by another one in May of the following year, called the Malcolm MacDonald White Paper that dictated that “His Majesty’s Government now declares unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish state.”

The two White Papers resulted in tremendous frustration on the part of the Jews, who felt they were alone in the world with no possible outside help as it was put by Rose Jacobs, the American teacher, activist and one of the founding members of the Women’s Zionist Movement known as the Hadassah movement. As a reaction to the British White Papers, Berman reports that two hundred Jewish leaders and nationalists “agreed to travel to Washington to lobby among representatives and senators.” There, Jewish leaders arranged protests in the hope of bringing the matter to the attention of the League of Nations. The latter, however, proved its inability to instigate change in the British policy, something that was described by Berman as a sort of “impotence” on the part of the League in facing the Chamberlain government.

American Jewish lobbying did not fail to impose the Jewish question on a number of political circles but it was mostly the Nazi Holocaust that gave the cause an urgent character. Facing the failure of Franklin Roosevelt’s government to stop the Nazi atrocities or to lead the Jewish state plan to a closure with the British, American Jews turned their focus towards their brethren in Palestine. The latter transformed Zionist diplomatic lobbying into a military resistance in situ. The head of such resistance was undoubtedly David Ben-Gurion, who realized at an early stage that winning the Jewish quest for a national home could only be done through force. After his vain attempts to lobby in New York about the acceptance of some kind of partition plan to divide Palestine into two states, one for the Jews and one for the Palestinians, he declared the following in a Haganah meeting in 1936: “we must prepare ourselves in earnest to become a substantial force in the country, capable of withstanding a massive assault and able to talk with the English in a different language.” As defined by the Encyclopaedia Judaica, the Haganah was “the underground military organization of the yishuv in Erez Israel from 1920 to 1948.”

Throughout the decisive years of the Second World War, and most importantly due to the shock provoked by the White Papers, and America’s lack of reaction to them, Ben-Gurion participated in highly important meetings such as the St James Conference in 1939 held in London, a round table that united delegates from the Jewish and from the Arab side to discuss the possibility of a partition plan for the land of Palestine. Realizing that such meetings were to no avail, Ben-Gurion started a resistance program based in Palestine declaring that “the yishuv would fight on the side of the British against the Nazis as if there were no White Paper, and continue to fight against the White Paper as if there were no war against the Nazis.” Ben-Gurion’s war against the British continued until after the Second World War as he then realized more than ever that the British had no intention of changing their White Paper policy restricting Jewish immigration quotas as per the consent of the Arabs.

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74 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 21, p. 37-38
75 Ibid., p. 38
76 Aaron Berman. *Nazism, the Jews and American Zionism (1933-1948)*, p. 69
77 Ibid., p. 70
78 Ibid.
80 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 08, p. 200
81 Bauer, p. 346
82 Quoted from *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, V. 03, p. 345
The year 1945 witnessed the sudden death of U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt while he was still in office on April 12\textsuperscript{th}. The appointment of his successor, who was his Vice-President, Harry S. Truman, added to the turmoil of American foreign policy in the Middle-East as he was hardly informed of his predecessor’s strategy, plans and contacts in the region.\textsuperscript{83} A few months before his death, Franklin Roosevelt was reported to have met King Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia, also called Ibn Saud. During that meeting he brought up the Jewish question but was met with a harsh response from the Saudi king who “apparently threatened an Arab uprising if the Zionist program was put into effect” (Bauer 347). Ibn Saud’s reaction caused Roosevelt to “back off” from his support of the Zionist cause. A week before his death, Roosevelt replied back in a letter in which he promised “that he would do nothing that might be interpreted as a hostile act toward the Arab nation and that no change in the state of Palestine would occur without prior consultation with the Jews and the Arabs” (Bauer 347).

**Climax**

Roosevelt’s successor, Truman, was known for his lack of interest and experience in foreign policy making in general and in Middle Eastern affairs in particular; the latter “were not a major focus” in his agenda (Ferrell 113). In his appraisal of Truman’s efficiency in managing State affairs, Robert H. Ferrell describes Truman as one who “did not lack confidence that he could handle the presidential office. His problem, he knew, would lie in foreign policy, about which he knew so little.”\textsuperscript{84} Ferrell describes him thus as “well up on domestic matters, but he knew no more about foreign affairs than the average American who read a newspaper or listened to the radio news.”\textsuperscript{85} This lack of knowledge in foreign policy was probably due to the fact that Roosevelt did not involve him in any of the current topics to which he and his selected cabinet members were devoting their interest. Ferrell also reports that, as a vice president, Truman did not benefit from any “information [n]or briefings on national and international issues”\textsuperscript{86} nor did he even ask for such information. Besides, with Communism looming over Europe with threats in Greece and Turkey, fighting it consumed considerable effort and time in Truman’s administration, especially in 1947.\textsuperscript{87} However, with the British Empire in retreat after the war, Truman stated that

> as long as Britain could stem this tide, Washington preferred to let it play the primary role there. As the months went by, though, the British Empire seemed everywhere in retreat: from India (January 1947), turning to the UN to decide the future of Palestine (Feb 1947), and from Greece (Mar 1947). America […] must take up the burden (Rubin 225)

In his book *The Great Powers in the Middle East 1941-1947: the Road to the Cold War* (1980), Barry Rubin\textsuperscript{88} says that the turning point in the history of the Middle East that allowed the U.S. in and kept the British out of Palestine were notes sent from the British Embassy to the American State Department on 21\textsuperscript{st} February 1947 “which expressed London’s inability to carry on its leading position in providing for the security of the Middle-East” (Rubin 225-226). It was only then that President Harry Truman took over the task of deciding on the Jewish problem at a time when what was later labeled by the Israelis the War of Independence was at its peak in Palestine during the years 1947-48.


\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., p. 18

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{88} professor at the Interdisciplinary Center in Israel, director of the Israel-based Global Research in International Affairs Center (GLORIA) of the IDC and editor of *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* (MERIA)
As per his position with regards to the Zionist cause, Truman was generally described as rather pro-Zionist in spite of his occasional frustration at the way the Jews tended to lobby using political pressure on the U.S. government (Ferrell 115). In this respect, Ferrell quotes Truman from his diary as he says:

The Jews, I find are very, very selfish. They care not how many Estonians, Latvians, Finns, Poles, Yugoslavs or Greeks get murdered or mistreated as Displaced Persons as long as the Jews get special treatment. Yet when they have power, physical, financial or political neither Hitler nor Stalin has anything on them for cruelty or mistreatment to the underdog (Ferrell 138).

Ferrell reports that Truman underwent considerable pressure from prominent American Jews such as the ex-secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau (Ferrell 137). The latter was a distinguished U.S. activist who had provided highly significant services to the Zionist cause during Roosevelt’s days in office, such as his intervention with Secretary of State Cordell Hull to grant the American government’s approval to a program arranged by the World Jewish Congress that consisted in raising and transferring American funds to aid French and Romanian Jews.

In an article entitled “How It All Began: Truman and Israel” published on June 3rd, 2006 in the online political Newsletter Counterpunch, Harry Clark argues that had it not been for the American Jewish community, “Zionist achievements in Palestine would have been for nought” for several reasons. First of all Truman’s two top administrative aides were Jews; Clark cites David Niles and Max Lowenthal, the latter of whom was the special assistant on Palestine matters to Truman’s key advisor on the region, Clark Clifford, who was not a Jew himself but a lawyer who considered Zionism as very advantageous to the U.S. Clark points out as well that wealthy prominent Jews were behind Truman’s success in his “penniless” campaigns as he describes them. He mentions Dewey Stone, a Zionist businessman, who according to Clark had financed Truman’s vice-presidential campaign of 1944. He also cites Abraham Feinberg and “Jewelry magnate” Edmund Kauffman as major fundraisers of the 1948 presidential campaign. Feinberg had by then started a tradition that incorporated Jews into fundraising activities on behalf of the Democratic Party.

Other forms of pressure were on the menu for Truman on the part of the Jews such as initiating a competition to obtain the Jewish vote for Democrats or Republicans. This plan was started in 1944 by Rabbi Abba Silver, a Zionist from Cleveland, and Emmanuel Neumann, a Zionist official who founded the American Palestine Committee of notables in 1941, which included 68 senators, 200 congressmen and many state governors, constituting what Clark describes as “an entirely Zionist front”. According to Clark, “ensuring the traditional loyalty of Jewish voters was a paramount concern of Democratic politicians up to the president himself”.

The climax for Jewish pressure to recognize the independence of what the Jews already considered their state was reached on May 14th 1948, the day on which British troops were expected to clear the grounds of Palestine. Truman’s two top aides, Niles and Lowenthal, were busy coordinating the commissioning of the request for Israel’s recognition with the help of the Jewish Agency based in Washington and delivering it to President Harry Truman, a conspicuous work that was personally supervised by Clark Clifford. “At 6:11 pm on Monday 14th Truman announced de facto recognition of the State of Israel” in spite of the

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90 Encyclopaedia Judaica, V. 14, p. 489
92 Ibid.
opposition from the State Department represented by Secretary of State George Marshall. The latter considered that such a decision would jeopardize peace in the region especially without the approval of the recently constituted United Nations. Secretary Marshall also expressed his fears that such a Jewish military victory would be ephemeral and that the Jews would venture in partitioning Palestine and Transjordan without the Arabs’ approval.

The direct circumstances leading to the U.S. recognition of Israel were particular in the way they were especially designed by American Jewish lobbying, in addition to anything else that might have helped the Zionist cause in those crucial years. Truman himself declared three days after he signed the statement of recognition of the State of Israel that “he treated [the matter] somewhat as a joke,” but he privately thought of it as a “hell of a mess.” It was indeed an undoubted “mess” yet not only in the way things went for Britain and the U.S. during and after the Second World War, but also in terms of how politics were being carried on in Palestine especially during World War II. The socio-political situation in Palestine was in such disorder that one can assert that, given the general backdrop of the 1930s and of the first half of the 1940s, nothing could have impeded the impacts of the rising tide of Zionist lobbying in both Britain and the U.S., or even on the Palestinian battlefield.

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93 Ibid.