The Race For Israel
Harry Truman, the Republican Party and Foreign Policy Considerations in the U.S. Recognition of Israel

JACOB L. SHAPIRO
UNDERGRADUATE SENIOR THESIS
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
APRIL 2010
Abstract

Jacob L. Shapiro

The Race For Israel:
Harry Truman, the Republican Party and Foreign Policy Considerations in the U.S. Recognition of Israel

Why did Harry Truman spurn the advice of his own State Department and recognize the State of Israel? The answer to this question is the subject of countless texts that identify several factors to explain Truman’s action. Truman’s religious fervor, the moral placement of the Jewish question in the post-Holocaust world and the political benefits of supporting Israel are the most popular explanations. By favoring one or two of these aspects above others, individual historians present contrasting pictures of Truman that influence the popular understanding of the President’s legacy. I argue that the Republican Party and greater foreign policy considerations are two critical factors that are undervalued and, in most cases, omitted from the discussion entirely.

The goal of this work is to introduce, and then inject these underutilized aspects into the existing narrative of Truman’s recognition of Israel. The paper discusses the traditionally cited motivators and then puts them in conversation with the impact of the Republican Party and the United States’ foreign policy agenda. The desired result is a more comprehensive understanding of the people involved, the motivating factors and the historical moment in time. From here, the individual reader will own the knowledge to make his/her own judgment as to why Truman recognized Israel. The answer will either change or reaffirm each reader’s understanding of Truman’s overall legacy.
# Table of Contents

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**INTRODUCTION**

**CHAPTER 1: CHURCH AND STATE**

**CHAPTER 2: THE GOP AND A FLEDGLING IDENTITY**

Dean VandenBerg

**CHAPTER 3: THE BIRTH OF MODERN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY**

A Foreign Policy Novice

Truman and the “Striped Pants Boys”

Bipartisan Foreign Policy

The First Arms Race

**CHAPTER 4: THE DEFINING MOMENT**

The “Jewish Vote”

A Lonely Winter

The “Reversal” of U.S. Policy

The Killer P’s: Public and Political Outrage

**CHAPTER 5: TRUMAN ON MOUNT RUSHMORE?**

Conclusions

**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Primary Sources

Secondary Sources
Acknowledgements

This project is dedicated and indebted to a number of people who lent their time and expertise to ensuring that I discovered and articulated an accurate account of these historical events.

My thesis adviser, Professor Samuel Roberts, steadily guided me through the frontier of history writing. I also cherish the time I have spent with my second reader, Professor David Eisenbach, over the past two years. Professors Roberts and Eisenbach are two of the most professional historians I know and they embody the exceptional traits that define the Department of History at Columbia University.

Professor Jonathan Adelman, of the University of Denver, was my chief consultant on this project from its inception. Jonathan, your careful guidance, prolific knowledge, and most importantly, your friendship have been invaluable to me—especially over these past few stressful semesters. I hope that this paper lives up to your prediction that “there is gold in them thar hills!”

Thank you also to my colleagues in Thesis Seminar C4398 who read multiple drafts of my paper and provided invaluable feedback throughout the process. It was a pleasure to share this expedition with you all.

Jenna Baldachin and Seth Samuels have struggled and celebrated with me throughout every small step of this process. Your encouragement is the only thing that saw me through the past four years and your help with this project is emblematic of all you’ve done for me.

Philly Levin drove with me through a total blizzard to access the Vandenberg Papers at the University of Michigan. Thanks again for your company and for your help with improving the quality of the images used in this paper.

Thank you also to Nicholas Osborne—who encouraged me to write this paper early in 2008—Carl Schrag and Harvey Gross for your support and generous feedback on this paper. Mary Cargill of Columbia University Libraries is a hidden gem whose enthusiasm and creativity have assisted many struggling students over the years.

I will always appreciate the support from my parents, without whom this project would not be possible. All throughout high school my father chided me for my horrible writing skills. I am finally ready to admit that his criticism contributed to the improvement of my writing, which I hope is evident in this paper.

And thank you to my younger brothers, Michael and Jordan, whose emulation of me gives me constant validation every day of my life.

Jacob L. Shapiro

New York, 2010
Introduction

Fitted in a handsome grey suit with his thin, white hair combed perfectly to the side, Harry Truman stood patiently in the library reading room at the Jewish Theological Seminary awaiting his introduction. It was November of 1953, and the president, having only returned to civilian life several months earlier, was making a quick visit to Morningside Heights to address some of the most esteemed Jewish theologians in the world. Accompanied by his former haberdashery partner, Eddie Jacobson, Truman listened as his friend introduced him to the scholars. Line after line, Jacobson rattled on, “This is the man who helped create the State of Israel.” Plainspoken as always, Truman blurted out, “What do you mean, ‘helped to create?’ I am Cyrus! I am Cyrus!”

The meaning of presidential legacy is always a point of contention between popular history and a president’s self-image. As early as 1953, five years into Israel’s existence, Harry Truman was actively promoting himself as the savior of the Jewish people. The former president was not shy in claiming his role in Israel’s creation and he wove this accomplishment into the larger presentation of his legacy. Over the past sixty years, historians have also utilized Truman’s recognition of Israel to promote their own understanding of his presidency. Historians agree that Harry Truman was an accidental president who left office as the most unpopular chief executive ever. But recently, with the help of titles such as David McCullough’s *Truman*, the late

---

2 Truman likened himself to Cyrus II of Persia who defeated the Babylonian Empire in the 6th Century and allowed the Jews to return to Israel.
3 Truman had not even served as Vice President (after replacing Henry Wallace) for three months when Roosevelt died. McCullough writes that “the realization that Harry Truman was President, struck like massive earth tremors in quick succession…To many it was not just that the greatest of men [Roosevelt] had fallen, but that the least of men—or at any rate the least likely of men—had assumed his place.” David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Touchstone, 1992): 349. Polling data on Truman’s unpopularity at the end of his presidency is provided in Chapter 5.
president’s legacy has not only been restored, but promoted to a heroic image of a hard-nosed fighter who acted on his beliefs. Just as each book on Truman adopts its own view of the President, sources dealing with his specific actions (such as the recognition of the State of Israel) also articulate specific viewpoints.

Truman’s recognition of Israel has provoked two main histories that are evident in the sources. One version adopts Truman as the triumphant savior of the Jewish people and various authors such as Michael Oren (Power, Faith, and Fantasy, 2007), Melvin Urofsky (We are One!, 1978), Michael Benson (Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel, 1997) and most recently Allis and Ronald Radosh (A Safe Haven, 2009) situate Truman in a larger history of America’s pro-Israel dispositions. Other histories including John Snetsinger’s Truman and Israel (1974), Evan Wilson’s Decision on Palestine (1979) and Dean Rusk’s As I Saw It (1990) question Truman’s real motivations for recognizing Israel and argue that the President acted primarily for political reasons given the issue’s proximity to the 1948 presidential elections. Importantly, both histories hearken back to the underlying views on Truman’s overall legacy.

The most challenging question associated with Truman’s recognition of Israel is “Why?” This question is of particular importance in that certain answers can advance historical renderings of Truman’s image and legacy. In an attempt to reconstruct the President’s state of mind, historical hypotheses identify several core factors that motivated Truman to act. Individual authors further narrow the scope of the discussion by crowning one or two factors as the primary sources of the President’s influence. The most popularly cited motivators are: the moral issues of the post-Holocaust world, Truman’s religious identity, and the impact of the “Jewish Vote.” I argue that the Republican Party and greater American foreign policy considerations, two aspects that are largely undervalued and overlooked, directly affected the President’s thought process.
In the 1940s, the Republican Party was out of power and again failed to claim the White House in 1948. Consequently, conventional wisdom describes the Republicans as impotent isolationists who lacked authority. Upon closer examination, the Republicans swept the 1946 congressional elections and were poised to win the presidency in 1948, during the exact timeframe when the Palestine question was at the forefront of world affairs. Furthermore, leading GOP figures such as Arthur Vandenberg, Robert Taft and Thomas Dewey voiced strong support for the creation of a Jewish state. These sentiments challenge traditional perceptions of Republicans in the 1940s as hardened, hermit isolationists. More importantly, they represent a central element in the quest to understand Truman’s decision to recognize Israel. While authors such as Urofsky and Snetsinger mention the Republican Party’s role in the creation of Israel, no sources seriously consider this aspect of the story. In fact, the most recent book on the topic (A Safe Haven by the Radoshes) provides more information on the Republicans than most of its predecessors, yet the book mentions the Republican Party just six times in its index, Robert Taft eight times and Arthur Vandenberg just once.

As a research topic, the “creation of Israel” also suffers from a lack of integration between different disciplines of study. Histories of “Truman and Israel” are often strictly focused on events in the realm of American politics. Thus, they fail to properly situate the creation of Israel in the postwar, proto-Cold War environment in which it was born. The relationship of Israel to the rest of the American foreign policy agenda is rarely contemplated, and therefore, a

---

4 Because Republicans of the era generally opposed U.S. intervention, authors tend to describe them as isolationists. Truman himself, who described Arthur Vandenberg’s “inspired self-reversal” to internationalism, refers to many of the Republican members of Congress as isolationists. (Truman, Memoirs, vol. 2, pg. 172). This term is particularly misleading because it suggests that “isolationist” legislators were against all U.S. involvement overseas and did not contemplate or concern themselves with America’s role in the world. The reality, as Chapter 2 demonstrates, was much different. While it seems paradoxical, Republican “isolationists” were deeply engaged in the nation’s foreign policy initiatives. The exclusion and scarce mentioning of Republican leaders and viewpoints in previous sources on this topic serve as an indirect argument that their positions were not meaningful or influential.
major area of influence on the president is omitted. Israel was not an insignificant issue in the domain of American politics and foreign policy, though it was certainly not the most important consideration either. Similarly, sources that discuss Israel in its geopolitical context often omit the domestic political considerations from their explanations. This essay will serve as a bridge. By describing Israel within the joint contexts of the United States’ overall foreign policy agenda and the political atmosphere at the time, a more comprehensive understanding of President Truman’s actions will reveal itself.

In order to isolate and understand the impact of the Republican Party and American foreign policy considerations, this paper utilizes the preexisting shell that tracks the development of Truman’s policy on Israel. However the project is limited in that it does not detail every progression of events. Instead, I describe specific instances that illustrate the importance of certain factors in Truman’s decision. Through this method, I will insert the impact of the Republican Party and American foreign policy into the narrative without subjecting the reader to a regurgitation of events that are already documented in a variety of other sources. Chapter 1 describes Harry Truman’s religiosity and initial contact with the Palestine issue. The Republican actors are introduced in Chapter 2, which includes the derivation of their support for a Jewish state. Chapter 3 focuses on the foreign policy considerations that affected Truman’s recognition of Israel. Chapter 4 describes the events that immediately preceded Truman’s recognition of Israel. Chapter 5 serves as a short epilogue and offers concluding observations and arguments. When the Republicans and the foreign policy details are contemplated together, two races emerge. One between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the other between Harry Truman and the Republican Party. It is only natural that we begin with him.
Chapter 1: Church and State

For Harry Truman, the notion of a Jewish State in the holy land was not a new one. Growing up as a devout Baptist, Truman was familiar with the geography and romanticized landscapes of the biblical narrative. The young resident of Independence, Missouri was a “dedicated student of the Bible,” yet Truman’s interest never extended to “complex theological issues.”\(^5\) When Truman entered politics, his religiosity crept into his speeches that were frequently “studded with biblical references.”\(^6\) George Elsey, one of Truman’s top speechwriters, maintained that the President was chiefly responsible for the religious infusions in his speeches and that verses and phrases were often added by Truman “in longhand very near the final draft of

---


\(^6\) Benson, *Truman and the Founding of Israel*, 32-33.
the speech.” More importantly, the bible served as a “moral guide” to Truman and this had immediate implications upon his election to federal office.

As Hitler’s war machine collapsed in Europe, Jewish leaders in America raised awareness of the growing displaced persons (“DP”) population overseas. While they never coordinated a sustained effort, individual members of Congress pressured the Roosevelt Administration to act. Adhering to his senatorial responsibilities in Missouri, Harry Truman secured visas for DPs who were related to his constituents. Gradually, Truman’s interest in the issue grew and in April of 1943, the Senator trashed the Nazi regime at the “United Rally to Demand the Rescue of Doomed Jews” in Chicago. Truman declared:

Today—not tomorrow—we must do all that is humanly possible to provide a haven and place of safety for all those who can be grasped from the hands of the Nazi butchers. Free lands must be opened to them. Their present oppressors must know that they will be held directly accountable for their bloody deeds…This is not a Jewish problem. It is an American problem—and we must and will face it squarely and honorably.

America did not awake in time to prevent the slaughter of European Jewry. At the war’s end, movements to rescue DPs and realize the Zionist dream of recreating a Jewish homeland steadily gained momentum. Back in 1941, Truman joined the American Christian Palestine Committee, a non-Jewish, quasi-Zionist advocacy group that described itself as “the vehicle for the expression of the sympathy and good will of Christian America for the movement to reestablish

7 Benson, *Truman and the Founding of Israel*, 33.
8 Hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors were kept in camps where they had no place to go, “for they neither had homes nor were wanted there.” A United Nations Relief Agency poll found that 17,712 out of 18,311 respondents wanted to go to Palestine. Melvin I. Urofsky, *We are One!: American Jewry and Israel* (Garden City, N.J., Anchor Press and Doubleday, 1978): 101-102.
9 Michael J. Cohen, *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990): 29. Cohen expends considerable effort to inform the reader that Truman’s initial dealings with the displaced persons issue were not initiated by the Senator himself.
10 Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 36-37.
11 Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, 36-37. Cohen notes that up until this time, Truman’s correspondence and actions had been neutral. The Senator was respectful, but not yet passionate over the issue.
12 Urofsky, *We Are One!*, 4-5.
the Jewish National Home in Palestine.”

By the mid 1940s the organization, which counted Presidents Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, Hoover and Roosevelt among the supporters of its cause, would boast a substantial membership that included sixty-eight senators, two hundred Congressmen and numerous state governors. In 1945, when the full atrocities of the Nazi regime were increasingly exposed to the world, Truman ascended to the Presidency. The new President continued his concern for the plight of refugees in the DP camps and wrote in his memoirs that “The American government could not stand idly by while the victims of Hitler’s madness were not allowed to build new lives.”

After reading a report on the horrors of the DP camps, an emotional Truman recalled, “The Jews needed some place where they could go,” and the President called for 100,000 more refugees to be admitted to British Palestine. Touched by the gruesome imagery emanating from Europe, Truman believed that assisting Jewish war refugees was not just a moral issue. Returning the Jewish people to Israel was “an inseparable part of the message” that Truman had learned in Sunday school. And the President’s religiosity was not lost on those that were vying for his influence. Chaim Weizmann, a leading activist and future President of Israel, played to Truman’s ears in an April 1945 letter.


14 The American Palestine Committee’s platform is perhaps one of the only places where such dissimilar characters appeared in the same sentence. Many of these presidents were of course dead by the time of the organization’s founding. But the group’s mission statement includes the language of a 1922 Congressional resolution (in support of a Jewish state) that President Harding signed. The subsequent presidents were said to have lent their “public endorsement” to it. American Palestine Committee, “Statement of Aims and Principles,” Box 733, legislative files, The Papers of Senator Robert A. Taft. Also, see Cohen, Truman and Israel, 86.

15 After Truman dispatched Earl G. Harrison (who was the Dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School) to write a report on the DP camps, Harrison wrote, “We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them, except that we do not exterminate them.” The camps, which Oren calls “nightmarish,” were filthy and the refugees had little to eat as they stood behind barbed wire under the guard of American troops. Oren, Power, Faith, and Fantasy, 483-485.

16 Oren, Power, Faith, and Fantasy, 483.

Weizmann claimed that, “the choice for our people, Mr. President, is between statehood and extermination. History and providence have placed this issue in your hands, and I am confident that you will yet decide it in the spirit of the moral law.”

Merkley asserts that the recognition of Israel serves as “unambiguous proof of a connection between religious faith and public action.”

Indeed, as the situation in Palestine evolved, Truman consistently looked to his religious upbringing for assistance. While the President initially cared about the situation from a humanitarian and religious perspective, at this point, he had not yet formulated a course of political action.

---

18 The emphasis is mine. Merkley, The Heirs of Cyrus, 8.
19 Merkley, The Heirs of Cyrus, x.
Chapter 2: The GOP and A Fledgling Identity

Figure 2: Senators Arthur H. Vandenberg (left) and Robert A. Taft (right) were the leaders of their respective wings in the Republican Party. (Printed in Patterson, Mr. Republican)

In the mid 1940s, the Republican Party was on the periphery in Washington. Franklin Roosevelt and the Democrats dominated the United States government presiding over the Great Depression, World War II and the transformation of the United States. If the World War I period is traditionally viewed as America’s departure from a Victorian society, the 1940s witnessed the country’s emergence as an international superpower.Republicans were influential in some circumstances and present in sizeable numbers, but the Democratic majority unquestionably determined the direction of American policy. With the conclusion of World War II, Americans entered a new era and adept political operatives viewed the post-war period as an opportunity to realign the nation’s strategies and their parties’ priorities.

As the 1946 Congressional elections neared, RNC Chairman Herbert Brownell coordinated a massive effort to reinvent the Republican Party. President Roosevelt’s death in April of 1945 had removed the greatest impediment to the Republicans who were never able to inflict much damage on the President’s popularity. Brownell introduced a new, strategic operating structure to the RNC that multiplied the number of staff and relied on advanced polling data, innovative fundraising tactics, and careful coordination with the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee. The new president, Harry Truman, was already struggling to govern in the shadow of Roosevelt’s legacy, especially given the surplus of pending issues that required immediate attention. In his own words, the President told reporters, “I felt like the moon, the stars and all the planets had fallen on me.” As the polls closed in early November, the Republicans celebrated their first victory in over a decade, picking off fifty-five Congressional seats and adding thirteen new senators to their ranks. For the first time in fourteen years, the Republicans held a majority in Congress. To all those involved—the press, the public and politicians on both sides—the tide was unmistakably turning Republican. For the next two years, most assumed that the next president was certain to be a Republican. This mistaken assumption—which is the subject of Chapters 4 and 5—led decision makers to act in distinct ways.

Although the Republicans were unable to break the Democratic control of Washington during the Roosevelt years, the party did feature several popular leaders who were influential in

---

22 Herbert Brownell later served as Dwight Eisenhower’s Attorney General. Interestingly, Thomas Dewey worked on Brownell’s campaigns for the New York State Assembly (in which he served from 1933-1937) before the two traded positions of politician and handler. Sean J. Savage, Truman and the Democratic Party (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1997): 94.

23 Savage, Truman and the Democratic Party, 94.

24 McCullough, Truman, 353.

25 Among the notable freshmen elected to the House of Representatives in 1946 were John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon.
the 1940s. Following the Republican victory in 1946, figures such as Senators Robert Taft of Ohio and Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan gained popularity and were instant favorites to win the White House in the 1948 election. While the war had changed America internally, its new position as a global superpower invited politicians to craft policy for this fresh, unexplored area of influence. This is not to say that the United States had been dormant in foreign affairs until the mid-1940s, but the war catapulted the country into a primary position that America had never occupied before. Furthermore, technological advances, cartographic alterations and decolonization were transforming the world into a very different place. In this realm, Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg was the undisputed Republican dean of American foreign policy.

Dean Vandenberg

![Image of Vandenberg signing UN Charter](image)

**Figure 3: Vandenberg signs the UN Charter in San Francisco in 1945 as Truman and (Sec. of State) Edward Stettinius look on. (Printed in Morris, Private Papers)**

Like his Republican colleagues, Vandenberg opposed the New Deal and was “a staunch isolationist before American entry in World War II.”26 A Congregationalist, Vandenberg

witnessed the world changing at a rapid pace and reconsidered his own perspective as a result. Eventually, the Senator underwent a total transformation and emerged from the war as the leader of the “mostly eastern, metropolitan, moderate-to-liberal Republicans who supported a bipartisan, internationalist foreign policy.”27 A senator since 1928, Vandenberg used his seniority to rally the legislators in his bloc and together, they built strong relationships with their Democratic colleagues. As such, Vandenberg was able to exert influence even when he was in the minority. The Michigander formed a friendship with then-Senator Truman from Missouri and when Truman assumed the presidency, Vandenberg sent him a message of “trust and faith.”28 The Grand Rapids native concluded that Truman “was a grand person with every good intention and high honesty of purpose” who could “swing the job.”29 After Truman took the oath of office, Vandenberg recalled the new President’s first actions in his diary, “Truman came back to the Senate this noon for lunch with a few of us. Indicative of my close relations with Truman, his military aide sent me today the last box of cigars they had in the old Vice Presidential office.”30 Truman was fond of Vandenberg, calling him “a great one,” and the President consistently addressed the senator as “Van,” even in his formal letters.31

Following the Republican victory of 1946, Vandenberg was elevated to the chairmanship of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which was tasked with developing strategic initiatives for the post-war world. White House staffer Ken Hechler recalls that the “strong bond of personal friendship” between Truman and Vandenberg developed over “the landmark foreign policy achievements between 1947 and 1949, when Congress was in

27 Savage, Truman and the Democratic Party, 95.
29 McCullough, Truman, 350. The emphasis is the Senator’s.
31 Morris, Private Papers, 319.
Republican hands.”32 Overwhelmed with his first days in office, Truman entrusted much of the American position at the San Francisco Conference (on the formation of the United Nations) to Vandenberg.33 In a display of sincere bipartisanship, Truman and Vandenberg worked closely together on initiatives such as NATO, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. As Truman prepared to give a major foreign policy speech (to request monetary aid for Greece and Turkey) in March of 1947, Vandenberg assisted him with the ideas and encouraged the President to “scare the hell out of Congress and the public,” to pass the measure.34 Vandenberg was so powerful that Truman frequently sent his staffers “with their hats in hand” to the Senator to plead for support, especially when funding was required.35 Articulating the cause of his career, Vandenberg believed that the nation required a foreign policy that “neither zigs nor zags—so there can be no alien excuse to miscalculate our fixity of purpose.”36

From his early isolationist years, Vandenberg supported the idea of a Jewish State in the Middle East. The Senator often talked of his “long-time interest in the ‘Jewish Homeland’ movement,” and repeatedly stated, “I have been glad and proud to be connected with this Zionist movement ever since its inception.”37 Vandenberg also maintained a close relationship with Dr. Abba Hillel Silver who influenced many Republican leaders at the time. Vandenberg found Silver’s brand of activism too aggressive at times, yet he consulted with, and consistently sought Silver’s approval on policy objectives.38 However, the Senator’s closest confidant on Jewish

34 Savage, Truman and the Democratic Party, 104-105.
35 Karabell, The Last Campaign, 34. In fact, Karabell cites several instances where high ranking State Department officials such as George Marshall and Dean Acheson had to plead with Vandenberg to release funds for their initiatives (including the rebuilding of Greece and Turkey).
36 Morris, Private Papers, 443.
37 Letter from AHV to Senator Joseph A. Block, 9 July 1947, Microfilm Roll 4, Volume XIX, Vandenberg Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.
38 Vandenberg was unsure of Silver’s aggressive stance on “forcing” the implementation of the Partition Plan (Letter from AHV to Robert Taft, 8 October 1947, Microfilm Roll 4, Volume XIX, Vandenberg Papers), but like many of
affairs was Philip Slomovitz, the founder of the Detroit-based periodical “The Jewish News.” Slomovitz, whose newspaper became one of the most influential Jewish media sources in America, maintained a vigorous correspondence with Vandenberg, sometimes exchanging several letters a week. Vandenberg usually replied in the form of a three-page letter outlining his candid assessment of the geopolitical situation. Due to its confidential nature, this correspondence presents an opportunity to understand the Senator’s true sentiments regarding his support for a Jewish state.

While Vandenberg never wavered in his position on the Palestine issue, he was concerned about the timing and context of the issue vis-à-vis other American foreign policy initiatives. During the war, the Senator cautioned that pushing for Jewish statehood at the moment could “jeopardize the best welfare of the Palestine movement as well as the American military position in North Africa.” In one wartime letter to Slomovitz, Vandenberg wrote, though “an exclusive Jewish community and Jewish Government…may be our ultimate objective,” at the present moment “this may be seeking too much…we may be better advised to proceed in stages—one step at a time.” Eventually, the Senator came to believe that “viable partition” was the “only possible hopeful formula to settle this long-standing challenge to the

____________________________

his colleagues, the Senator discussed confidential information with Silver and viewed him as an authority on the Zionist movement. For example, Vandenberg notes his intention to consult Silver regarding his own strategic view in a letter to Phil Slomovitz. Letter from AHV to Phil Slomovitz, 9 December 1944, Microfilm Roll 3, Volume XVI Vandenberg Papers.

40 Vandenberg would often disclose information to Slomovitz that was confidential. For example, see letter from Phil Slomovitz to AHV, 18 March 1944, Microfilm Roll 3, Volume XVI, Vandenberg Papers.
41 Letter from AHV to Phil Slomovitz, 22 January 1944, Microfilm Roll 3, Volume XVI, Vandenberg Papers.
42 The emphasis is the Senator’s. Letter from AHV to Phil Slomovitz, 16 December 1944, Microfilm Roll 4, Volume XVI, Vandenberg Papers.
world’s conscience.” Vandenberg also wrote of his support for a Jewish state to Senator Robert A. Taft, a Republican colleague who was also a constant intraparty rival. In response to an October 6, 1947 letter from Taft on GOP policy, Vandenberg wrote, “I think we can unequivocally continue to assert our belief that viable partition is the sound and hopeful answer.” But the cautious legislator maintained his refusal to support “the imposition of [a partition plan] by force under any arrangement which would make the Government of the United States primarily responsible for the contribution of this force.” In short, Vandenberg was careful to ensure that the implementation of Zionist goals was in concert with the remaining palette of American foreign policy objectives.

Interestingly, the Palestine question was not a topic of direct cooperation between the Republican leadership and the White House. After collaborating with the President on nearly all other foreign policy issues, Vandenberg maintained that, “President Truman has never discussed the Palestine question with me,” and that “Palestine has never been one of the subjects which the [administration] has brought within the scope of so-called bipartisan foreign policy discussions.”

In a letter to Democratic strategist Robert Hannegan, Vandenberg described himself as a “guinea pig” for bipartisan foreign policy who had made sacrifices to maintain the partnership. Greatly irritated, Vandenberg “informed the White House that Republicans wanted

---

43 Essentially, the phrase “viable partition” meant a sustainable existence (i.e. not requiring a peacekeeping force) between the new Jewish and Arab states after the land was divided per the UN’s recommendation. Letter from AHV to George Weiswasser, 20 September 1947, Microfilm Roll 4, Volume XIX, Vandenberg Papers.
44 Letter from AHV to Senator Robert A. Taft, 8 October 1947, Microfilm Roll 4, Volume XIX, Vandenberg Papers. The emphasis is mine.
45 Letter from AHV to Phil Slomovitz, 24 October 1947, Microfilm Roll 4, Volume XIX, Vandenberg Papers.
46 It is especially curious that the Truman Administration did not discuss the Palestine issue with the Republican minority. One explanation, explored in Chapter 4, is that the Democrats wanted to claim the issue in order to maximize its potential political value.
47 Ironically, Hannegan was the very man who pushed Truman to utilize foreign policy as a campaign issue during the 1948 campaign! Letter from AHV to Robert Hannegan, 28 October 1946, Microfilm Roll 4, Volume XVIII, Vandenberg Papers.
to be in on the ‘takeoffs’ as well as the ‘crash landings’ in foreign affairs.\textsuperscript{48} And because he lacked “the [Presidential] authority to make things happen” with respect to Palestine, Vandenberg urged his colleagues to refrain from putting “ourselves in a position at the moment where we can be charged with responsibility for what happens.” Instead, Vandenberg thought, “the less said the better at the moment.”\textsuperscript{49} Indeed, the initial lack of coordination between Vandenberg and the Truman Administration continued to cause extreme tension on the 1948 presidential campaign trail.

\textbf{The Senator and the Rabbi}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{two_heads_better_than_one.png}
\caption{Cartoon depicting the "two heads" of the Republican Party. (Photographed by the author at: The Arthur Vandenberg Papers, Scrapbook Volume XX, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan)}
\end{figure}

While Vandenberg represented one wing of the Republican Party, Senator Robert A. Taft, as the title “Mr. Republican” would suggest, led the old guard faction of the party. The son of a president, Taft was elected to the Senate from Ohio in 1938 and quickly became the most


\textsuperscript{49} Letter from AHV to Senator Robert A. Taft, 8 October 1947, Microfilm Roll 4, Volume XIX, Vandenberg Papers.
popular opponent of the New Deal. Within the Republican ranks, Taft was an outspoken leader on domestic issues and, with respect to foreign affairs; the Senator developed “an informal understanding” with Arthur Vandenberg.50 Like Vandenberg, Taft was initially a strict isolationist and the Senator opposed U.S. involvement in World War II. According to Clarence Wunderlin, Taft’s opposition to U.S. interventionism stemmed from his doubt that the U.S. could “rule any more effectively than the British had during the nineteenth century.”51 Furthermore, Taft referred to Puerto Rico as a prime example “where we have been for forty-five years without relieving poverty or improving anyone’s condition.”52 Taft and Vandenberg constantly disagreed, but “both men conscientiously sought to avoid direct conflict.”53 Taft even went as far as abstaining “from rallying isolationist Republicans” to obstruct “major foreign policy measures favored by Truman and Vandenberg.”54

Surprisingly, Taft was a steadfast supporter of “the creation of a Palestinian homeland for Jews” from the early stages of his political career.55 Often described as a total isolationist, Taft’s support for a Jewish state challenges the traditional understanding of him as well as his Republican colleagues.56 This fervent support led the Senator to call for U.S. involvement in the

---

50 Morris, Private Papers, 318-319
52 RAT Speech for Commencement at Grove City College, PA, 22 May 1943. Wunderlin, Papers of Robert A. Taft, Vol 2. 446-447.
53 Morris, Private Papers, 318-319.
54 Savage, Truman and the Democratic Party, 104.
56 Authors such as Karabell (The Last Campaign, 78) and Craig (William M. Craig. "Robert A. Taft: An Analysis of His Foreign Policy." Masters Thesis, Columbia University, 1963: 14-15) oversimplify the Senator’s foreign policy positions by constantly referring to him an “isolationist.” Some scholars, like Weinberg (Alan M. Weinberg. "The Foreign Policy of Robert Alphonso Taft: 1939-1941." Masters Thesis, Columbia University, 1959: 29-31) and Wunderlin (Clarence E. Wunderlin, Robert A. Taft: Ideas, Tradition, and Party in U.S. Foreign Policy (Lanham: SR Books, 2005): 1-6.) describe the intricacies of the Senator’s belief system. In his introduction, Wunderlin carefully describes Taft as an “anti-interventionist” and outlines the complex, multi-faceted ideas that formed the Senator’s foreign policy positions. Additionally, Chris Kulawik, in his senior thesis, notes that the public memory of Taft is also deeply rooted in the usage of the term “isolationist” “as political fodder in each of his three presidential bids.” The term, which Kulawik calls “terribly effective,” was used by
Middle East even though the State Department warned that action in the constantly unstable region could have serious implications.\(^{57}\) When the British issued the “White Paper” of 1939—which contradicted earlier, pro-Jewish sentiments described in the Balfour Declaration of 1917—the newly seated senator argued that the document was “a repudiation of [previous British] obligations.”\(^{58}\) Uncharacteristically, “Mr. Republican” also partnered with Senator Robert Wagner, a Democrat from New York, and together, the senators introduced repeated legislation calling for “unregulated immigration and the eventual creation of a state.”\(^{59}\) Taft also joined the aforementioned American Palestine Committee and as the keynote speaker at a dinner in early 1944, he “castigated the Allied leadership for its wartime ban on Jewish immigration to Palestine.”\(^{60}\) The fiery Ohioan declared, “Now is the time. The [Taft-Wagner] resolution we have introduced is not only an act of justice to an oppressed people, but it is the common-sense solution of the first of our great post-war problems.”\(^{61}\)

Later that summer, Taft pushed for the inclusion of Zionist positions in the 1944 Republican platform which eventually read: “We condemn the failure of the President to insist that the mandatory of Palestine carry out the provisions of the Balfour Declaration and of the

---


\(^{58}\) Taft was particularly confident in his position because it was also the view of respected Prime Minister Winston Churchill. In fact Taft admitted that Churchill’s viewed informed his viewpoint “which is perhaps newly formed.”

\(^{59}\) Over several years, Taft and Wagner fought for passage of their bipartisan resolutions calling for Jewish immigration to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth. The State Department and White House shut down their efforts until the senators personally shepherded “the resolution through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee...the floor of the Senate” and the House of Representatives. A version of the resolution passed in December of 1945. In Taft’s papers, at the Library of Congress, a section is devoted to the saga of the Taft-Wagner resolution(s). For a full discussion of their collaboration, see Wunderlin, *Robert A. Taft*, 133-134. Also, see The Robert A. Taft Papers, Boxes 733-734, Library of Congress.

\(^{60}\) Wunderlin, *Robert A. Taft*, 133.

\(^{61}\) RAT speech at the American Palestine Committee dinner, 9 March 1944, Box 734, legislative files, The Papers of Senator Robert A. Taft.
Mandate while he pretends to support them.”62 He also criticized the State Department and “even proposed making the $3.5 billion American loan to the British conditional on a change of British policy in Palestine.”63 Unlike Vandenberg, who believed in a unified American foreign policy position, looking ahead to the 1948 election, Taft wrote that, “foreign policy should be one of the main issues in the next election.”64 Although he disagreed with Vandenberg’s approach, Taft understood the value of having a unified party position. On October 6, 1947, Taft deferred to Vandenberg, “I would not like to go any further on the subject of Palestine without discussing the matter with you fully and reaching some kind of a Republican position.”65

Michael Cohen describes how the Republican Party had “harbored” anti-Semites in previous decades, calling the New Deal the “Jew Deal” and making up “the majority of the membership of New York’s exclusive Colony Club, which barred Jews.”66 Therefore, Republican pro-Zionist sentiments in the early to mid 1940s display a marked shift in the party’s membership and beliefs. Tending to focus on history’s “winners,” Republicans of the 1920s and early 1930s are discussed in mainstream history, but the party’s presence does not reemerge until Eisenhower’s presidency in the early 1950s. As Taft’s actions indicate, the Republican Party of the 1940s was in the midst of a transformation that was fostered, to some degree, by the party’s stance on the question of a Jewish state.

Taft first learned the details of the Palestine issue at the behest of Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of Cleveland, Ohio. In a speech in honor of Silver in March of 1945, Taft attributed his

63 Cohen, Truman and Israel, 123.
65 Vandenberg’s reply is included above in the section on Vandenberg. This was not the first discussion that the two senators had on the subject of the Republican foreign policy positions. Letter from RAT to AHV, 6 October 1947, Microfilm Roll 4, Volume XIX, Vandenberg Papers. Also, see Wunderlin, Papers of Robert A. Taft, Vol. 2, 535.
66 Cohen, Truman and Israel, 61.
passion for the issue to “Dr. Silver’s clear presentation of the facts and the ideals which make it an attainable goal to be vigorously sought.” Taft and Silver built a strong friendship that strengthened when Silver invited the Senator to speak at his synagogue during a difficult campaign. Patterson claims that Taft “never fully explained his motivation for such a [pro-Israel] stand,” but notes that the Senator “immersed himself in the literature, then summoned [Rabbi Silver] for questioning” before emerging “early in 1944 as an ardent champion of Zionism.” Taft certainly recognized the political benefits of supporting the Zionist cause (given Ohio’s sizeable Jewish population), but “his remarkable zeal, which long survived [Taft’s Senate re-election] campaign of 1944,” proved his genuine interest in the issue. As opposed to other examples of U.S. intervention, Taft viewed the Palestine question in a moral sphere. The Senator maintained that, “Nothing in modern history can equal the barbarity with which the Jews have been treated in the Axis countries.” And according to Patterson, when “he placed issues on the plane of justice, there was no changing his mind.”

67 RAT speech at testimonial dinner for Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, 21 March 1945, Box 734, The Papers of Senator Robert A. Taft.
69 Patterson, Mr. Republican, 280-81.
70 Patterson, Mr. Republican, 281.
71 RAT speech at the American Palestine Committee dinner, 9 March 1944, Box 734, legislative files, The Papers of Senator Robert A. Taft.
72 Patterson, Mr. Republican, 282.
The Plastic Candidate

Figure 5: Senator Taft (left) shares a laugh with Governor Dewey (right).  
(Printed in Karabell, The Last Campaign)

While Robert Taft had disagreements with Vandenberg in the Republican ranks of the Senate, neither senator was impressed with the plastic governor of New York, Thomas E. Dewey. Rising though the ranks of the Manhattan DA’s office, Dewey won his second election for governor in 1942 and would be the Republican presidential candidate for the next two contests. As opposed to Taft, Dewey represented a new set of liberal Republican principles. He rejected the notion of “red baiting” and believed in America’s role in foreign affairs. To promote a unified American position, Dewey and his primary foreign policy advisor, John Foster Dulles, made an agreement with Secretary of State Cordell Hull to omit foreign policy issues from the 1944 campaign.\(^\text{73}\) After losing the 1944 election to Roosevelt, Dewey began preparing to capture the nomination again in 1948.

Throughout the mid-to-late 1940s, Governor Dewey publicized his support for a Jewish State in Palestine. In a welcome message to the 51\(^{st}\) American Zionist Conference, Dewey called Israel “a good omen for the free world” and hoped to “secure the future existence of Israel,” as

\(^{73}\) Cohen, \textit{Truman and Israel}, 161.
president.\textsuperscript{74} However the Republican candidate delegated most of his foreign policy considerations to John Foster Dulles. An international law attorney and longtime diplomat, Dulles found his first appointment in foreign policy in 1918, charged with representing the United States at the Versailles Conference.\textsuperscript{75} Although he held no official diplomatic position in 1948, anticipating a Republican victory, Dulles was primed to be the next Secretary of State.\textsuperscript{76} His status earned him a seat at the table negotiating foreign policy with Truman and Vandenberg, and he accompanied Dewey to all foreign policy meetings.\textsuperscript{77} Dulles even traveled with the sitting Secretary of State, George Marshall, to a UN General Assembly meeting in Paris and the veteran diplomat “was treated, and behaved, very much like a Secretary of State already.”\textsuperscript{78} Surprisingly, Dulles—who repeatedly challenged Israel during his tenure in the Eisenhower Administration—supported the founding of the Jewish state. Dulles was key in inserting a pro-Jewish state plank into two successive Republican platforms and Dewey viewed foreign policy through the lens of his trusted adviser.\textsuperscript{79}

However, while he had maintained certain positions regarding the United States’ standing in the world, Dewey was “unwilling to confront the president over foreign policy,” during the 1948 campaign.\textsuperscript{80} Crowned as the next president by the press, the New Yorker ran a safe, bland and uninspiring campaign that acknowledged the Truman Administration’s foreign policy achievements. Although the initiatives were true, bipartisan accomplishments, the electorate


\textsuperscript{76} Westerfield, \textit{Foreign Policy and Party Politics}, 309.


\textsuperscript{78} In fact, Westerfield refers to Dulles as “Co-Secretary of State.” Westerfield, \textit{Foreign Policy and Party Politics}, 309.


\textsuperscript{80} Donaldson, \textit{Truman Defeats Dewey}, 176.
viewed them as Democratic programs, which weakened the GOP. Dewey’s aura also failed him late in the campaign. In many ways, Thomas Dewey was too good at being a politician. His smile was eerily perfect and the intonation, enunciation and cadence of his voice were tailored.81 The Governor was too composed and overly prepared. Even his handler, Herbert Brownell, noticed a disconnect between Dewey and his audiences. “[Dewey] was much more likeable in private conversations and social affairs than he was on the stump,” Brownell remembered. “He always appeared to be acting a little bit when he was campaigning. Once he got on stage, he was an actor.”82 During the 1948 Republican National Convention, The Nation had referred to Dewey as “the Nominee Nobody Loves,” and many described him as “a man you had to get to know really well to dislike fully.”83

“Put not your faith in princes.”

![Telegram Image]

Figure 6: Original telegram sent to Vandenberg from Silver praising the Senator’s work on the passage of a 1945 resolution. (Photographed by the author in: The Arthur Vandenberg Papers, Scrapbook Volume XVII, item 57, page 140, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan)

While the ultimate decisions were left to the politicians, it is critical to examine the substantial impact that Dr. Abba Hillel Silver had on the formation of Republican sentiments.

81 For example of Dewey’s speaking style, access www.YouTube.com and search for “Thomas Edmund Dewey.”
83 Karabell, The Last Campaign, 77.
towards the Palestine issue. A Lithuanian immigrant, Silver claimed the pulpit at Cleveland’s “The Temple,” the largest Reform synagogue in the United States, where he served as a congregational rabbi for forty-six years. The Rabbi fought for several causes during his career including labor rights and Zionism, where he was recognized as one of the most prominent leaders in America and paired with Rabbi Stephen S. Wise as the co-chairmen of the American Zionist Emergency Council. The Rabbis visited President Truman together on several occasions, but as World War II dragged on, Silver began to associate himself with the Republican minority and supported an outwardly aggressive strategy for seeking the realization of the Jewish State.

Interestingly, Silver never described himself as a Republican although most observers take his close relationships with Republican leaders as a reliable manifestation of his political ideology. As Grose reminds us, “Silver had in fact voted for Roosevelt twice and for Al Smith and Norman Thomas [a Socialist Party candidate] before that.” In fact, Silver supported the 1944 pro-Israel plank in the Democratic platform and publicly praised its superiority over the Republican approach. However, the stern Rabbi became increasingly frustrated with what was in his mind the inability of successive Democratic administrations to reach tangible progress on the formation of a Jewish State. According to Abba Eban, a career Israeli diplomat, “Truman regarded Silver with severe aversion regarding him not inaccurately as a supporter of the Republican Party which came second only to the Soviet Union as a primary target of President

---

84 Although Stephen Wise is not acutely pertinent to this paper, he was a significant character in the creation of the State of Israel. See Allis Radosh and Ronald Radosh, A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009): 7, and Urofsky, We Are One!, 9, for further reading.
85 Sources (such as Urofsky, We Are One!, 89) often call Silver a Republican without any further explanation. This can be harmful to understanding his role in the creation of Israel depending on the context.
87 Grose, Israel in the Mind of America, 166.
Truman’s distrust.”88 Adopting the motto, “Put not your faith in princes,” Silver believed that drumming up support for Zionism in the Republican ranks would increase the pressure on the administration to act.89 At a Zionist Executive Committee meeting in 1944, Silver pointed out, “One of the main weaknesses of our Zionist work in this country was that the Administration was led to believe that it had the Zionist movement in its vest pocket.”90 Over the next few years, Silver attacked that assumption and his actions had profound implications on Truman’s decision-making process.

By the mid-1940s, Silver owned relationships with influential Republicans and established himself as an expert consultant for lawmakers. While Wise sought to keep domestic politics out of the Zionist cause, Silver believed that it was imperative to convince the administration that “it would suffer politically if it continued to disregard its pledges to the Jews.”91 If politicians were entitled to use the Jewish state as a political football, Silver felt that he should be able to play as well. In one meeting with Truman in 1948, Silver reportedly banged his fists on the President’s desk in outrage over a point of disagreement.92 This act, which shocked many in Washington, caused Silver to become “persona non grata at the White House,” and caused Chaim Weizmann to nickname him “the mufti from Cleveland.”93, 94 Writing to his aide David Niles in May of 1947, a sarcastic Truman joked “We could have settled this Palestine thing if U.S. politics had been kept out of it. Terror [attacks in Palestine] and Silver are the

89 Urofsky, We Are One!, 9.
90 Druks, The Uncertain Friendship, 13.
91 Cohen, Truman and Israel, 63.
92 Benson, Truman and the Founding of Israel, 96. Also, see McCullough, Truman, 599.
93 Cohen, Truman and Israel, 63.
94 A “mufti” is technically a Muslim legal expert. Weizmann was most likely referring to Silver as a mufti in jest, perhaps to analogize him with the hard-line Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Mohammad Amin al-Husayni, a notorious figure at the time. Al-Husayni, who was vehemently anti-Semitic, traveled in Nazi Germany encouraging the extermination of the Jews. Benson, Truman and the Founding of Israel, 96.
contributing causes of some, if not all, of our troubles." According to Cohen, Truman clearly understood Silver’s strategy as “a call for Jews to abandon the Democrats.” With Truman correctly interpreting Silver’s threats, the Rabbi’s scheme was already influencing the President. Even so, Silver delivered action on top of his words. Although his conduct was crass at times, Silver proved to be an effective persuader and organizer for the Zionist cause. The Rabbi not only advised influential Republicans on policy positions; he also generated genuine and sustained interest in the topic. His tactics increased the pressure on the administration and created a point of bipartisan agreement.

Regardless of the preconceived notion that the Republicans were hermit-like isolationists in the mid to late 1940s, it is clear that many RepublicanCongressmen—and especially those in the leadership—cared deeply about U.S. foreign policy and the creation of a Jewish State. Furthermore, the Republican Party’s influence on the public debate and the Truman Administration at the time is undeniable. These two facts, combined, are grounds for a further examination into the influence that the Republican Party had on President Truman’s decision-making process with respect to the recognition of Israel.

96 Cohen, _Truman and Israel_, 63.
97 By blanketing the Republicans as “isolationists,” some sources fail to explore the intricacies and differences of opinion that existed. For further discussion, see footnote 4.
Due to the wealth of material on Truman’s domestic political concerns, most authors fail to consider Israel’s role in the broader context of American post-war foreign policy. It is irresponsible and myopic to exclude foreign affairs considerations from the discussion on the President’s motivation for recognizing Israel. In surveying the historiography, Bruce Evensen concludes that most sources “fail to take proper account of the Cold War setting in which the policy was first framed and then re-shaped.” Indeed, the debate over the Jewish state was heavily grounded within the American agenda for the post-war world and policy makers viewed the issue almost exclusively within this category.

The following chapter presents three topics that profoundly impacted the President’s understanding of the issue. It covers the role of the State Department, the short-lived experiment

---

98 Some sources, like A Safe Haven (2009), are noticeably light in their discussions of foreign policy from the outset. Other authors, like Cohen (Truman and Israel, 1990) and Benson (Truman and the Founding of Israel, 1997) present foreign policy concerns, but they fail to grapple with the most serious questions. Because Truman was at odds with the State Department, most foreign policy chapters in books on the subject do not look past this aspect of the story when in reality, the recognition of Israel had much wider implications.

of “bipartisan foreign policy,” and the implications of the Soviet Union’s support for a Jewish state. These topics, with the possible exception of the State Department, are largely unexplored in terms of their direct relationship to the U.S. recognition of Israel. The confines of this paper restrict an expansive analysis of these topics, however, this chapter introduces foreign affairs considerations into the discussion and visibly illustrates their impact on President Truman.

**A Foreign Policy Novice**

As the president who would direct one of the most important chapters of American foreign policy in history, Harry Truman could not have been less prepared. A no-name senator from Missouri, foreign policy was not something Truman came in contact with frequently. Although he was a World War I veteran, the former artillery captain never attained the high rank that previous or future military presidents had. In the Senate, Truman’s issues of interest lay elsewhere and his knowledge of foreign policy did not improve after his elevation to the vice presidency. Roosevelt only met with Truman on two occasions and decidedly excluded his vice president from his strategic objectives.\(^\text{100}\) Even when his health began to falter, Roosevelt left Truman out. As the famous story goes, upon learning of Roosevelt’s death, Truman asked the first lady, “Is there anything I can do for you?” Eleanor Roosevelt replied, “Is there anything we can do for you, Harry? For you are the one in trouble now.”\(^\text{101}\) When it came to foreign policy, Mrs. Roosevelt was certainly correct. Aside from Roosevelt’s strategic agenda, Truman was entirely unaware of the “Manhattan Project,” which would soon make him famous.\(^\text{102}\)

\(\text{\(^{100}\) The movie }\textit{Truman}, (starring Gary Sinise) based on McCullough’s biography, portrays this scene rather well. As an eager Truman begins to ask Roosevelt about serious policy issues, the visibly frail president, pretending not to hear Truman, instead asks his vice president about his family. David McCullough and Thomas Rickman, }\textit{Truman}, DVD, directed by Frank Pierson, HBO Films, 1995: 47:47-49:14.\)


\(\text{\(^{102}\) McCullough }\textit{Truman}, 333 and Radosh, }\textit{A Safe Haven}, 39-40. The Radoshes note that, ironically, Stalin knew about the new atomic weaponry long before Truman.\)
In just eighty-two days, the rural senator morphed into President of the United States. Truman voraciously read through policy memos and with little choice, he retained most of Roosevelt’s cabinet and wartime advisers. An outmatched Truman scrambled with preparations to attend the Potsdam Conference later that summer with battle-hardened leaders Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin. However, Oren writes that, “it was in the foreign policy field, the one in which he was least expected to succeed, that Truman truly excelled.”  

In the opening months and years of his presidency, Truman brought Germany and Japan to their knees, assisted in the creation of the United Nations, enacted the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine and, of course, recognized the State of Israel. Along the way, the President was informed, lobbied and challenged by his own State Department, which promoted a different view of the world.

**Truman and the “Striped Pants Boys”**

Truman’s initial dealings with the State Department were positive, but that relationship quickly deteriorated into one of the most trying aspects of his presidency. The two main points of contention stemmed from Truman’s belief in the supremacy of the office of the presidency and his disgust with the careerist diplomats whom he encountered. Truman’s decision to recognize the State of Israel exemplifies these beliefs and illustrates his inclination to overrule his own State Department. Popularizing the phrase, “The Buck Stops Here,” Harry Truman was a decision maker who would not allow others to make up his mind for him. Secretary of State George Marshall reportedly said, “the capacity for decision was the rarest gift of God to man, and that Harry S. Truman had it abundantly.”

And after making decisions, Dean Acheson, who

---

104. For more on initial dealings with the State Department, see McCullough, *Truman*, 370-375.
would serve as the President’s second Secretary of State, remembered that Truman “was completely without the most enfeebling of emotions: regret.”¹⁰⁶

Wolf Blitzer’s book, *Between Washington and Jerusalem*, examines this phenomenon in the context of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Blitzer argues that the tension between Truman and the State Department initiated “the political-versus-diplomatic struggle within the U.S. government” that “has still continued, although less stridently,” to this day.¹⁰⁷ Blitzer delineates “two major strains” of policy that pit career diplomats interested in the “global perspective” of U.S. policy against “astute” politicians whose only concern lies in “the domestic implications of foreign policy decisions.”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, State Department officials frequently rebuked Truman and his staff for their “transparent attempt[s] to win the Jewish vote.”¹⁰⁹ And the Office of Public Affairs (the public relations wing of the State Department) believed that the experienced diplomatic corps was not in existence “to follow American public opinion, but to lead it.”¹¹⁰ Blitzer correctly points out this source of tension, but his view is too narrowly defined. Nearly all presidential candidates since the end of World War II have publicized their foreign policy goals and many politicians hold genuine beliefs on this topic. Hence, a president’s international agenda can collide with the State Department’s long-term goals even if domestic politics are not the main motivation for the president’s actions. It was in this context that Harry Truman saw his job as the policymaker: “Some of the experts, the career fellas in the State Department, thought that they ought to make policy but…as long as I was President, I’d see to it that I made policy.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Benson, *Truman and the Founding of Israel*, 42.
Part of Truman’s aversion for State Department officials, whom he nicknamed “striped-pants boys,” is traceable to their respectively different upbringings. For example, in comparing Truman to Dean Acheson, Benson notes the “legendary” differences between the two men:

Acheson was everything Truman was not: educated at Groton, Yale, and Harvard Law School, Acheson served two full years as a Supreme Court clerk at Justice Felix Frankfurter’s request before becoming a highly successful Washington attorney. Acheson had received the finest education available, and he showed it and exuded it. Conversely, Truman was the only president in the twentieth century who did not get beyond high school.”

While Truman’s background clashed with many in the State Department, he had deep respect for his popular Secretary of State, George C. Marshall. Marshall’s leadership in World War II earned him the admiration of the American public and according to the President, “He was one of the men you could count on to be truthful in every way, and when you find somebody like that, you have to hang on to him.” Aside from advising the President, Marshall, who was “arguably the most respected figure in America,” played an important political role due to his popularity. Marshall’s influence could rally public opinion in both directions vis-à-vis the president. Truman took advantage of this fact, and used the General’s name to secure passage of the “Marshall Plan,” but with respect to the Palestine issue, Marshall’s reluctance to support the idea of a Jewish state created dissonance within the administration. According to Dean Rusk, Kennedy’s future Secretary of State, “Everyone knew that George Marshall was the adviser to President Truman on foreign policy. I know of only one case—Jewish lobbying with the White House over Palestine—when his authority over foreign policy was challenged.”

In the debate over the Jewish state, a chorus of respected voices including Dean Acheson, Dean Rusk, James Forrestal and Robert Lovett joined Marshall in his dissent. The President’s

112 Benson, Truman and the Founding of Israel, 79.
114 Oren, Power, Faith, and Fantasy, 489.
115 Dean Rusk, As I Saw It, Edited by Daniel S. Papp (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990): 151. The emphasis is Rusk’s.
dislike of career diplomats contributed to a schism that started to “bifurcate the White House.”

Over several years, these State Department personalities schemed to prevent Israel’s creation for a myriad of reasons. James Forrestal, “the depressive but strong willed defense secretary,” argued that the Arab majority in Palestine warranted a right to rule the territory. Robert Lovett thought that supporting a Jewish state “would be injurious” due to uncertainty as to what “kind” of state Israel would become. The State Department was aware of the connections between the Soviet Union and the Jewish settlers in Palestine and did not want to endorse the creation of a communist country—a blunder Lovett referred to as “buying a pig in the poke.” However, the State Department’s main concern with approving a Jewish state was the feared reaction by its oil-rich Arab neighbors. The Administration and the State Department continued to disagree, and thus the President searched for allies in other pastures.

**Bipartisan Foreign Policy**

At odds with the State Department, Harry Truman utilized the wartime unity to horde liberal Republican partners who proved to be his closest associates on foreign policy issues. Arthur Vandenberg collected a group of newly “enlightened” Republicans whose isolationist fervor dissolved during the war. Politicians on both sides recognized the opportunity to bolster American power and increasingly believed in the dangers of the Soviet Union. Echoing popular sentiments, Truman proclaimed that, “the Government of the United States must stand as a unit in its relations with the rest of the world.”

---

120 For a full explanation of the State Department’s views with respect to this issue, see Druks, *The Uncertain Friendship*, 100-106, and Blitzer, *Between Washington and Jerusalem*, 18-19. Druks provides a worthy counterargument noting that “the Arabs needed the U.S. more that the U.S. needed them. With or without partition, the Arabs would continue selling oil to the West. Clifford said the Arabs “must have oil royalties or go broke.” Druks, *The Uncertain Friendship*, 100.
bickering, “but rather it was the recognition that the goals and objectives of foreign and security policy were more important than minor political advantages.” Furthermore, Karabell demonstrates that “the gap between words and intent, between rhetoric and belief did not exist in the public mind” as they do today. Politicians were far more direct and Truman recalled that, “there were occasions when Senator Vandenberg disagreed with my policies but he never attempted to sabotage them.” The President reciprocated, duly rewarding Republicans with appointments to the State Department and White House.

The period of bipartisan foreign policy produced several momentous achievements, but in the end, proved far too idealistic to maintain. This era was undoubtedly a product of the moment in time, the personalities at the government’s helm, and the relatively similar goals that both parties shared for America’s role overseas. Nevertheless, the brief period of intense collaboration with the Republicans had a profound impact on the President’s decision to recognize Israel. The Republican support for a Jewish state, although not a point of specific cooperation with the administration, provided the President with a giant political blanket. Instead of opposing the Jewish state, the Republicans’ fervent support made Truman virtually impervious to criticism on that issue. If the experimental Jewish state collapsed, Truman could argue that he was not alone in wanting it to exist. But if it was a success, as the president, he would be in a position to claim a major victory.

123 Karabell, *The Last Campaign*, 27.
125 Although it was less explicit, Lansford notes that the bipartisan efforts at the start of Truman’s presidency “laid the foundation for future national security cooperation during the Cold War.” Lansford, “Pragmatic Idealism,” 28-29.
126 It is critical to note here that the short-lived bipartisan foreign policy structure existed at the *exact* time when the creation of Israel was being contemplated.
127 By the best estimates of the U.S. government, Israel did not have long to live even after becoming a state. Adelman cites a newly released CIA memo that predicted Israel’s fall within two years. In presenting how analysts
The First Arms Race

As the Cold War crept up on the world, the Truman Administration developed a determined strategy to prevent the spread of Communism.\textsuperscript{128} Nearly every foreign policy initiative of the era was hatched or tailored to accomplish this goal. But historians tend to forget that immediately following World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union were still allies. Americans were increasingly suspicious of Stalin’s plans, but the Soviet Union had not yet assumed the villain’s role in the West’s eyes. Complicating things further, the creation of a Jewish state was one of the few issues that the Soviet Union and the United States agreed upon—at least for their own reasons. Stalin’s regime, which abused its Jewish community, sharply altered its policies when the British announced the termination of their mandate in Palestine. The Soviets were aware that the majority of Jewish settlers in Palestine, and nearly all of their leaders, were of Russian origin. The pioneers cherished their “revolutionary heritage” and their link to “militant sociali[st]” ideology was “undeniable.”\textsuperscript{129, 130} Desperate to secure support from a world superpower, Jewish leaders and activists made overtures to the Kremlin detailing the mutual benefits of a potential Soviet-Israeli alliance.\textsuperscript{131} At the Consulate-General in New York, Zionist leaders Moshe Shertok, Eliahu Epstein and David Horowitz held intense meetings with Soviet diplomat Semyon Tsarapkin.\textsuperscript{132} One successful meeting ended when Tsarapkin poured his


\textsuperscript{129} Adelman, \textit{The Rise of Israel}, 37.


visitors glasses of wine and offered a toast “To the future Jewish State!”

For the Soviet Union, anti-Semitism quickly subsided in favor of assisting a new communist ally in “the strategic heartland of the Middle East.”

In the opening stages of post-war negotiations, the Soviets mildly supported both Jewish and Arab aspirations, which led to several benefits. If Soviet support for the Jews forced the United States into backing Israel (more fervently to upstage Stalin), the Russians could then exploit “the resentment of Arab nationalists to play both sides of the Palestine issue.” Wryly, Walter Laqueur explains that the true nature of the Soviet Union’s Middle Eastern policy “is neither pro-Arab, nor pro-Israel; it is pro-Soviet…This is the long and short of it.” Relations between Great Britain and the United States were beginning to dissolve and the Palestine question was “Moscow’s opportunity to split the post-war Western alliance.” In one action, the Soviets could oust the British from Palestine, dismantle the Anglo-American alliance, and gain a valuable asset in the form of a Jewish state.

The Soviet Union officially reversed its policy on the formation of a Jewish state in May of 1947. Speaking to the United Nations, Ambassador Andrei Gromyko, who became famous for his role in the Cuban Missile Crisis negotiations, proclaimed:

The aspirations of a considerable part of the Jewish people are linked with the problem of Palestine and of its future administration…During the last war, the

---

137 The relationship between the two war allies, which is already embellished in popular memory, was especially strained during post-war negotiations. The United States plotted to curtail the power of Britain’s empire supporting movements such as Gandhi’s quest for independence in India. Many also forget that the iconographic Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was speedily defeated after the war and replaced with socialist Prime Minister, Clement Atlee. The British government rejected American requests to admit more refugees to Palestine and Truman deemed them “exceedingly non-cooperative.” Britain also backed the Arabs during the violence in the late 1940s and sold them immense quantities of arms. Furthermore, the United States also gained a stake in the region’s valuable oil trade, which the British had handsomely profited from, due to outstanding U.S. loans to Britain from World War II. These sentiments were not lost on Harry Truman, and were certainly key for Joseph Stalin, who used the Palestine issue to drive a wedge between the Western allies. Krammer, “Soviet Motives in the Partition of Palestine,” 108.
Jewish people underwent exceptional sorrow and suffering...The fact that no Western European State has been able to ensure the defense of the elementary rights of the Jewish people and to safeguard it against the violence of the fascist executioners explains the aspirations of the Jews to establish their own State. It would be unjust not to take this into consideration and to deny the right of the Jewish people to realize this aspiration.138

In November, the United Nations called a vote on a plan to partition the territory of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states.139, 140 As the voting results crackled over the radio, listeners heard a shocking feat: the Soviets and Americans were both in the “yea” column.141, 142 The Soviet Union maintained its pro-Jewish stance by recognizing Israel four days after the state’s declaration of independence.143 More importantly, the Russians authorized the sale of surplus weaponry from Czechoslovakia to Israel which “proved to be critical” in enabling the Israelis to survive the attacks of nine Arab armies.144 Israel’s first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, maintained that, “They [Soviet weapons] saved the State. There is no doubt of it. Without these weapons, it’s doubtful whether we could have won. The arms deal with the Czechs was the greatest assistance we received.”145 Furthermore, feeding Israel’s intense need for manpower, “the Soviet Union allowed 280,000 Polish, Hungarian, Romanian and Czechoslovak Jews to

140 At this juncture, it is important to note that the Palestine question was one of the first issues that the United Nations dealt with. Aside from the strategic concerns over the issue, diplomats and governments on all sides were unsure of how the newly formed organization would function. We cannot allow our modern perceptions of the UN to cloud our understanding of how government officials viewed it in 1948.
141 The U.S. decision to support the Partition Plan and to rally other nations to do the same is another interesting chapter in this history. Michael Oren’s Power, Faith, and Fantasy along with the Radoshes’ A Safe Haven provide excellent accounts for further reading on the subject.
142 The votes by Russia’s satellites were particularly important to the partition plan’s passage. The resolution passed by a 33-13 vote. Ten countries, including Great Britain, abstained. Adelman, The Rise of Israel, 193.
143 McCullough, Truman, 618-619.
board refugee ships to Palestine” from 1945 to 1950.146 So while the United States’ recognition of Israel still garners attention, as Merkley notes, “it is an awesome thought as well that Israel could not have come into the world without the assistance of Joseph Stalin.”147 Years before these two adversaries raced for military superiority, the Soviets and Americans were running a different race: one for Israel.

On the American home front, discussions of Soviet intentions seeped into the mainstream debate. Leading columnists and newspapers published articles echoing government officials’ concerns that Soviet troops may land in Palestine to protect the nascent Jewish state.148 After criticizing the Truman Administration for its vacillating policies, Hannah Arendt, a leading Jewish political analyst wrote in Commentary Magazine, “Of all the member states of the United Nations, only Soviet Russia and her satellites made it unequivocally clear that they still favored partition and the immediate proclamation of a Jewish state.”149 As the press warned, if Stalin became the primary supporter of the Jewish state, Soviet influence in the region (and possibly military presence) was certain to rise. It is impossible to quantify the impact that Soviet actions had on Truman, but the press and public discourse on the issue “proved to be more than bystanders in the policy-making process.”150,151 Evensen argues that the White House considered the Soviet Union’s actions at every instance. For example, when Moscow decided to support the UN Partition Plan it forced Truman into “the awkward position of postponing any American

147 Merkley, The Heirs of Cyrus, 10.
150 Influential people, such as Clark Clifford and Eleanor Roosevelt, pushed Truman to “preempt” the Soviet Union’s recognition of Israel. The former first lady wrote, “If we are going to recognize it, I think it would be a mistake to lag behind Russia. I personally believe in the Jewish State.” Cohen, Truman and Israel, 211.
151 Evensen, “Truman, Palestine and the Cold War,” 123.
endorsement of a partition plan so long as the Soviets supported one.”  

152 Although Soviet support for the Jewish state “is still not fully comprehended,” Truman’s worldview and strategic goals were undoubtedly affected by Moscow’s behavior.  

153 Evensen, “Truman, Palestine and the Cold War,” 126.
Chapter 4: The Defining Moment

Unbeknownst to all, action surrounding the Palestine question and the 1948 elections would intensify simultaneously. While many government officials hoped to deal with the issue after the election, external factors thrust the question to the President’s desk in the midst of the election season. This chapter examines how President Truman understood his role vis-à-vis the Palestine question and distills how the affecting factors impacted his ultimate decision. A comprehensive timeline of events leading to Israel’s creation and recognition is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, the chapter focuses on specific episodes that illustrate Truman’s thought process culminating in the United States’ recognition of Israel in mid-May, 1948.

154 Several sources do a superb job of detailing the timeline of events. The most comprehensive of them are: Radosh (A Safe Haven), Benson (Truman and the Founding of Israel) and Cohen (Truman and Israel).
As early as the mid-1940s, Thomas Dewey, already pegged as a Republican challenger in the 1948 elections, bolstered his public support for a Jewish state. Dewey called for the admittance of “not 100,000 but several hundreds of thousands” of Jewish refugees into British Palestine. The determination of the Republicans particularly worried DNC Chairman Robert E. Hannegan, who was convinced that Jewish voters would cast their ballots for the party that best upheld the Zionist agenda. Truman’s approval rating dipped below thirty-five percent and the Democratic Party “seemed ready to jettison him in favor of someone, anyone, who might stand a better chance in the general election.”

While most observers cast Truman aside, several of the President’s aides still believed in his chances to win a full term in office. David Niles, one of just two Roosevelt aides to carry over to Truman’s administration, encouraged presidential action to aid DPs and warned that failure to compete for the Jewish vote could cost the Democrats in the next election. As the Truman Administration drafted a strategy for the 1948 elections, Clark Clifford replaced Niles as the President’s most influential advisor on the Middle East. “Tall, strikingly handsome, articulate and effective,” Clifford is still unanimously credited (by scholars) as the number one engineer of Truman’s epic victory. On November 19, 1947, Clifford presented an election blueprint called, “The Politics of 1948,” to the President. The forty-three-page memo, which Truman “kept in his desk drawer throughout the campaign for handy reference,” consisted of two parts: “The

157 Karabell, The Last Campaign, 40.
158 Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 41.
160 Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 94-97.
Probabilities” and “The Course of Action.” Clifford accurately predicted Thomas Dewey’s nomination by the Republican Party and former Vice President Henry Wallace’s candidacy as a third party contender. The memo discussed the impact of large voting blocs such as labor and liberals and also focused on minorities including African Americans, Italians, Catholics and Jews. Unsure if the Jewish community “can be thought of as a bloc,” Clifford believed that “the Jewish vote is important only in New York.” He cautioned, however, that “Except for Wilson in 1916, no candidate since 1876 has lost New York and won the Presidency, and its forty-seven [electoral] votes are naturally the first prize in any election.” At this point, Clifford refrained from instructing the President to make foreign policy decisions because of “political expediency” and instead urged Truman to act based on the “intrinsic merit” of the scenario.

Political timing aside, it was clear that on May 15, 1948, the President would have to act. Yet something was different about this issue. Truman’s closest advisors and campaign strategists swarmed him with details of the impact that his decisions would have on the election. In short, the President’s verdict on the Palestine issue would either create an opportune moment for an appeal to Jewish voters or become a disastrous decision that could drive the Jewish electorate to the Republican Party.

---

162 The original version of the memo was compiled by New Deal lawyer James H. Rowe. Rowe’s version of the memo was thirty-three pages long. Clifford then edited the document, tailoring its contents to include his analysis. For a full account of the creation of “The Politics of 1948,” see Allen Yarnell’s *Democrats and Progressives*, Chapter III.
163 Clifford did not forecast the emergence of Strom Thurmond and the Dixiecrat Party, which threatened to steal votes from the Democratic south. Thurmond went on to win four states for a total of thirty-nine electoral votes, all in the South.
164 Snetsinger, *The Jewish Vote*, 96.
165 Yarnell, *Democrats and Progressives*, 35-36.
The “Jewish Vote”

Over the past fifty years, authors have waged a bitter war on the impact of the so-called “Jewish Vote” as a central motivator for President Truman’s decision to recognize Israel. A historiographical examination of the issue untangles the reality behind the most highly cited “incentive” for the President’s ultimate decision. The main source of this debate stems from John Snetsinger’s 1974 book, *Truman, the Jewish Vote and the Creation of Israel*, in which the author argues that Truman’s desire to secure the politically influential “Jewish Vote” was the supreme motivator in prompting his actions. Snetsinger’s argument is based on an assertion that, although there were only five million Jews in the United States at the time, their residency in key swing states magnified their importance.\(^{166}\) Aside from Jewish presence in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois, Snetsinger points to the state of New York where forty-eight percent of the American Jewish community lived, representing seventeen percent of the total electorate.\(^{167}\) In an election that would require 296 electoral votes to win, New York’s 47 votes—not to mention the 88 votes spread between Illinois, Ohio and Pennsylvania—were understandably critical.\(^{168}\) Other authors subscribe to three categories of thought on this issue: some believe that the “Jewish Vote” was a central consideration for Truman; others acknowledge that Truman considered Jewish voters, but deny their overall importance; and still others disagree about the very existence of the “Jewish Vote.” Evan Wilson and Michael Cohen agree with Snetsinger to varying degrees on the importance of the “Jewish Vote,” but some commentators such as Naomi Cohen, Michael

\(^{166}\) Snetsinger, *The Jewish Vote*, 12.

\(^{167}\) Snetsinger, *The Jewish Vote*, 78.

Benson, Paul Merkley and Bruce Evensen categorically disagree.\textsuperscript{169} Representative of the others, Naomi Cohen argues that Jews did not vote in blocs and instead voted “based on economic and social status like most Americans.”\textsuperscript{170} Benson opens and closes his book by railing against the “trenchant [revisionist] writers and their incessant impugning of Truman and his record.”\textsuperscript{171} And Merkley laments that casual observers and scholars alike “take [the Jewish vote theory] for granted” when its basic premise “was never true, not even in the beginning of the story.”\textsuperscript{172}

Regardless of whether or not the “Jewish Vote” existed, for the historian interested in the President’s decision-making process, examining the \textit{perceived} influence is far more important. To accomplish this task, one must set modern statistics and revelations aside in favor of understanding how the President and his advisers viewed the Jewish electorate. Snetsinger and his allies point to the emphasis that Truman’s advisors placed on the importance of the Jewish vote. Indeed, DNC Chairman Bob Hannegan—whose priority was politics, not policy—was quick to point out that aside from their votes, leaders in the Jewish community were a critical source of campaign contributions for the party.\textsuperscript{173} And Hannegan was not incorrect. In 1944, before Truman even assumed the vice presidency, Dewey David Stone, a Jewish political operative and fundraiser, contributed $25,000 to his campaign without even meeting Truman in person until 1948.\textsuperscript{174} Hannegan also befriended Abraham Feinberg, a wealthy business executive, in the early 1940s. Feinberg met Truman in 1944 and “the two immediately struck up

\textsuperscript{169} Evan Wilson (\textit{Decision on Palestine}, 1979 and \textit{A Calculated Risk}, 2008) and Michael Cohen (\textit{Truman and Israel}, 1990) are not in full agreement with Snetsinger, but they both agree that political considerations affected the President’s actions. On the other hand, Naomi Cohen (\textit{American Jews and the Zionist Idea}, 1975), Michael Benson (\textit{Truman and the Founding of Israel}, 1997), Paul Merkley (\textit{The Heirs of Cyrus}, 2004) and Bruce Evensen (“Truman, Palestine and the Cold War,” 1992) challenge the notion that acute political concerns are the best or main explanation for Truman’s behavior.


\textsuperscript{171} Benson, \textit{Truman and the Founding of Israel}, x-xi.

\textsuperscript{172} Merkley, \textit{The Heirs of Cyrus}, 229.


\textsuperscript{174} Cohen, \textit{Truman and Israel}, 70.
a warm friendship.” 175 Late in the summer of 1948, when the Truman campaign was running out of cash, the Democratic fundraiser pledged to provide $100,000 with Ed Kaufman, the owner of Kay Jewelers, to finance the completion of the “Whistle-Stop Tour.” 176 The campaign, which was initially shocked, was even more astonished when “Feinberg apparently raised the money not in two weeks but in two days.” 177 So while the likes of Stephen Wise, Abba Hillel Silver and Eddie Jacobson lobbied Truman politically, Feinberg, Stone, and others influenced the President with their donations. Epitomizing the difference, Feinberg rejected “the use of threatened pressure” and instead utilized his access to promote “quiet diplomacy.” 178 Robert Hannegan proved to be a shrewd broker by connecting the idea of campaign contributions to that of a free Jewish state. Hence, a budding phalanx of wealthy Jews was energized to help a desperate president who was willing to listen. 179

Hannegan also tried to sell Truman on the electoral implications of the “Jewish Vote.” In an especially stark warning to Truman, Senator Howard McGrath joined Hannegan in insisting that failure to adhere to a consistent Palestine policy would likely cause the party “to lose two to three states in the presidential elections, which would swing the results against him.” 180 So for

---

175 Cohen, Truman and Israel, 71.
177 Cohen, Truman and Israel, 72.
179 The Truman campaign was penniless from the start, but in October of 1948, its coffers were totally exhausted. While the thought of a sitting president lacking basic campaign funds is astonishing in the modern era, Truman pleaded with donors to finance his “Whistle-Stop” campaign and declared, “Boys, if I can have the money to see the people, I’m going to win this election.” While on tour, Truman ran out of money several times, causing the railroad company to physically stop the train on the tracks. On at least eight occasions, the President called his western finance chair, Tom Evans, and pleaded with him to raise amounts as little as $1,500 to $5,000 on an emergency status to restart the train. Eddie Jacobson and his Jewish contacts were key sources of emergency funds and Cohen notes that at one time, Jacobson physically “flew to meet Truman with the money in his pocket.” Cohen, Truman and Israel, 71, 74-75., Karabell, The Last Campaign, 212., and Urofsky, We Are One!, 190.
180 Cohen, Truman and Israel, 151.
some Democratic political operatives, it was just that simple: support the Jewish State and win a long shot election and an outright term.

Recent writers on this subject have reverted to the view that the impact of the “Jewish Vote” was minimal if influential at all.\textsuperscript{181} Although a clear conflict of interest exists, Clark Clifford’s reflections are valuable nonetheless. With respect to this issue, Clifford spoke of his detest for “revisionist historiography” that “portrays the birth of Israel…as somehow illicit and ignoble. It is clear to me that the facts totally refute the assumptions of the revisionists.”\textsuperscript{182} Indeed, David McCullough affirms Clifford’s view, arguing that the “Jewish Vote” theory “is a cynical, unrealistic misunderstanding of the people involved.”\textsuperscript{183} One argument against the revisionist theory lies in the rapport that the Roosevelt Administration built with the Jewish community. At a time when the Republican Party displayed anti-Semitic tendencies, Roosevelt appointed Jews to positions in his administration and to the Supreme Court.\textsuperscript{184} While Truman was not Roosevelt, the Jewish support for the Democrats was strong enough to carry over to the next election—and indeed, Jewish affiliation with the Democratic Party continues to this day.\textsuperscript{185} But perhaps the best argument against Snetsinger’s hypothesis comes from Cohen, Merkley and Benson who assert that Truman’s vacillation on the issue is proof enough that attracting Jewish voters was not the primary goal. Had this been the case, the administration would have moved


\textsuperscript{183} 1993 interview with Michael Benson, cited in Benson, \textit{Truman and the Founding of Israel}, 6.

\textsuperscript{184} Cohen, \textit{Truman and Israel}, 61.

swiftly to implement the creation of a Jewish state.\textsuperscript{186} Even after recognizing Israel, Truman denied the country de jure recognition and refused to terminate the arms embargo or approve Israel’s loan application—two requests that the nascent country required for survival.\textsuperscript{187} Simply stated, if Truman’s sole motivation for recognition rested on the “Jewish vote,” he would have adhered to a calculated strategy designed to maximize the benefits of his actions within the electoral timeframe.

After considering the arguments on this contentious issue, it appears that the actual effect of the so-called “Jewish Vote” on Truman’s decision-making process lies somewhere in-between the two theories. While this moderate view appears to be an “easy way out” for the historian, it is quite accurate as well. The facts prove that the desire to appeal to Jewish voters was not Truman’s main motivation. If this were the case, primary evidence describing these intentions would likely exist.\textsuperscript{188} Truman’s reluctance to provide full support to Israel is as clear a piece of evidence as any revisionist reinterpretation of documents. The Truman campaign’s decision to downplay foreign policy as a campaign issue—which will be discussed in the following chapter—further proves that granting recognition was not a simple campaign ploy as Snetsinger views it. With that said, the creation of a Jewish state was the major demand of the American Jewish community. Even if a Jewish voting bloc did not really exist, this small community of citizens definitely had a larger impact on the election than their numbers would suggest. Wealthy Jews, after all, financed the final legs of the President’s campaign tour.\textsuperscript{189} Furthermore, Truman put sincere trust in his advisers—who ultimately led him to an upset victory—and after hearing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{187} Merkley, \textit{The Heirs of Cyrus}, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{188} The current evidence cited by those who support the “Jewish Vote” hypothesis is mainly grounded in interpretations of documents that do not explicitly articulate those ideas. This does not necessarily discount the theory, but it appears that historians have yet to come across a “smoking gun” at this point.
\item \textsuperscript{189} See note 179.
\end{itemize}
the same message from multiple sources the ideas seemed plausible. David McCullough’s assertion that recognizing Israel was “good politics” is perhaps the best way to describe the issue with respect to the “Jewish Vote.” Stated otherwise, when Truman lay in his bed at night, considering his options on this issue, the presumption that recognizing Israel would make him more popular with the Jewish electorate was only another positive reason to do so. It was not his main consideration, yet it did provide another justification for choosing recognition.

A Lonely Winter

As winter blanketed Washington, Truman came under smothering pressure from multiple parties with regard to the Palestine issue. At a meeting in the Oval Office, Truman received Stephen Wise and gave him his word, something that Harry Truman valued more than anything, and in turn, the President was scolded by the State Department. As he later recalled:

I said as far as I was concerned, the United States would do all that it could to help the Jews set up a homeland. I didn’t tell [Stephen Wise] that I’d already had a communication from some of the ‘striped pants’ boys warning me…in effect telling me to watch my step.

Although the administration seemed openly supportive of a Jewish state in Palestine, certain actions caused observers to be suspicious of the President’s true intentions. In December of 1947, just weeks after the UN vote, the State Department placed an arms embargo on the Jewish settlement in Palestine due to an increase in violence. While many Zionist leaders repudiated the use of force, the Jewish settlements badly needed weapons. The Arabs scoffed at the thought of accepting the UN Partition Plan and purchased more than $37 million of surplus weapons

---

190 McCullough, *Truman*, 596.
191 Miller, *Plain Speaking*, 215.
192 Miller, *Plain Speaking*, 215.
193 Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 493. The Radosh team notes that Truman and his staff were unaware of the embargo until it was made public; although Truman was irate over the constant, three-way skirmish ensuing between the Jews, Arabs and British that often resorted to terrorist activities. See Radosh, *A Safe Haven*, 278 and Snetsinger, *The Jewish Vote*, 53.
from the British.¹⁹⁴ With no heavy machinery and more soldiers than weapons, David Ben Gurion was bracing for a massive war that was imminent.

On February 17th, New York’s 24th district (covering the Bronx) held a special election to fill a vacant Congressional seat. The initial polling data favored Karl Propper, “a candidate of Edward Flynn’s regular Democratic organization.”¹⁹⁵ But an American Labor Party candidate named Leo Isacson snagged 55.8 percent of the vote crushing Propper who mustered just 31 percent.¹⁹⁶ Representing 55 percent of the district, as the New York Times reported, Jewish voters sided with Isacson due to his “militantly pro-Palestine appeal[s].”¹⁹⁷, ¹⁹⁸ Using the opportunity to exact revenge on the party that dumped him from the ticket, Henry Wallace campaigned heavily in the district and “scored Truman for his failure to promote United Nations implementation of partition.”¹⁹⁹ Wallace concluded his speeches with a pithy line claiming that Truman “still talks Jewish but acts Arab.”²⁰⁰ The White House panicked as election results and media coverage suggested that Jewish voters were not only angry over Truman’s erratic behavior, but were willing to abandon the Democratic Party. Warren Moscow, a leading political analyst for the New York Times, wrote that the election “unquestionably reflected dissatisfaction with the present United States attitude on implementing the Palestine partition.”²⁰¹ Veteran politico James

¹⁹⁴ As was mentioned before, the British were favoring the Arab states during this time and “had no intention of canceling existing arms contracts” with Arab states. Especially not after exhausting their treasury during two consecutive World Wars. Radosh, A Safe Haven, 278.
¹⁹⁵ Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 80.
¹⁹⁶ Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 80.
¹⁹⁸ It must be noted that Karl Propper was extremely supportive of a Jewish state in Palestine as well, but he struggled in the polls due to his association with the Truman administration. Warren Moscow, “Wallace Man Wins Sweeping Victory in Bronx Election.” The New York Times, 18 February 1948 (ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed on March 3, 2010): 1.
A. Hagerty argued that the election yielded “a political realization that Truman had little, if any, chance of winning New York State in the fall of 1948.”  

Truman, who was equally suspicious of the State Department as he was of the Zionists, retreated into the confines of his own administration. What began as a small, humanitarian interest in providing for a downtrodden group of people had turned into a massive headache for the President.

The “Reversal” of U.S. Policy

The President’s own behavior was not making the situation any easier. Truman refused to discuss Palestine with the press, which “indicated that the future direction of American policy was under examination.” After announcing the arms embargo, the State Department hatched another plan: to turn the proposed partition of Palestine into a trusteeship that would confer management of the land to the United Nations. Originally drafted by “Arabists” Loy Henderson and George Kennan, the trusteeship plan gained favor with other diplomats who developed a strategy to shift the American position away from partition. On February 24th, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., Warren Austin, “delivered an ambiguous and confusing” speech in the General Assembly officially advocating for the trusteeship plan. Austin claimed that partition was currently unfeasible and held that U.S. support for partition was conditional on the premise that military action (which he now deemed necessary) would not be required.

---

203 The Truman movie does a decent job of depicting the President’s frustration with the situation. At one point, Truman complains to Eddie Jacobson, "The Zionists have been in here and the more I say I’m for them the more pressure I get. They cannot take “yes” for an answer.” David McCullough and Thomas Rickman, *Truman*, directed by Frank Pierson, 1:21:45-1:23:04. See also, Snetsinger, *The Jewish Vote*, 84-86.
206 Radosh, *A Safe Haven*, 290. Also, see Urofsky, *We are One*, 166.
Scholars continue to argue over Truman’s awareness of Austin’s speech, but it is clear that he was briefed on the State Department’s intentions. More importantly, the introduction of the trusteeship plan illustrates the lack of coordination between the White House and the State Department under Truman. Indeed, Evensen highlights this incident as the day when the administration “lost control of its Palestine policy.” As was discussed in the previous chapter, Truman understood his role as the sole decision maker and was not afraid to recognize Israel over the desires of the State Department. However, the lack of meticulous oversight, coupled with the State Department’s determination to proceed with its own initiatives, wounded the President in both the public and political realms.

The Killer P’s: Public and Political Outrage

Almost immediately, public outrage exploded across the country. Zionists were furious that the administration had (apparently) reneged on its prior commitments to an independent Jewish state and linked it to Truman’s previous failure to ensure the admittance of the 100,000 Holocaust refugees. In New York, 30,000 protestors gathered at Yankee Stadium and over 100,000 people rallied at Madison Square Garden—forming the largest crowd in the history of the arena according to the police department. On April 4th, 50,000 Jewish veterans marched down Fifth Avenue against what they viewed as a reversal of policy on Israel by the administration. A New York Times editorial called the “reversal” the “climax to a series of moves which has seldom been matched, for ineptness, in the handling of any international issue

\[207\] Some authors argue that Truman signed off on the speech only to “cover it up” later by claiming ignorance. Others, such as Oren and Radosh, believe that there was a misunderstanding between Truman (who was on vacation—which the Radoshes fail to mention) and the State Department. And still others claim that Truman was totally unaware of the plans for Austin’s presentation. However, the Radoshes and Evensen argue that Truman was certainly aware of the possibility of the trusteeship plan and point to documents to prove it.

\[208\] Evensen, “Truman, Palestine and the Cold War,” 137.

\[209\] Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 97-99.

\[210\] Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 100.

\[211\] Urofsky, We Are One!, 168.
by an American Administration.”¹² P.M.,” a liberal newspaper from New York, deemed the day (of Austin’s speech) “Black Friday” and the New York Post’s Editor in Chief, T.O. Thackrey denounced the reversal as a pure “betrayal.”¹³ A massive mail campaign flooded the White House with letters advocating at a 22:1 ratio in favor of supporting a Jewish state.²¹⁴ An overwhelmed Truman sarcastically wrote, “I put [all of the Jewish letters in favor of partition] in a pile and struck a match to it—I never looked at a single one...”²¹⁵ Truman later said that the pressure he felt from the Zionists was even greater than when he fired MacArthur, “there’d never been anything like it before, and there wasn’t after.”²¹⁶ Regardless of Truman’s true intentions, it is clear that the American public was not convinced of his support for a Jewish state.

Politicians, especially those of the Republican brand, did not leave all the criticism to the media and instead feasted on the President’s battered image. Thirty-three State Legislatures passed resolutions in favor of a Jewish state, and half of Congress along with over forty governors signed on to resolutions as well.²¹⁷ A slew of Republican members of Congress called for an official investigation into the reversal of policies and presidential hopefuls reiterated their pro-partition views.²¹⁸ Thomas Dewey scolded the President’s “vacillating and inadequate” behavior and Robert Taft assured voters that he would recognize Israel immediately should he become president.²¹⁹ Even the President’s fellow Democrats, who were not only worried about their own jobs, but unsure of Truman’s status as their nominee, made their opinions known.

²¹² Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 84.
²¹⁴ Urofsky, We Are One!, 167. The Radoshes also describes the mail volumes from 1947-1948. Radosh, A Safe Haven, 288.
²¹⁵ Truman wrote these words in a letter to Senator Claude Pepper of Florida in an effort to explain his preference for the UN to handle the issue. He believed that the UN was “acting in a judicial capacity and should not be interfered with.” Radosh, A Safe Haven, 288.
²¹⁶ Miller, Plain Speaking, 216.
²¹⁷ McCullough, Truman, 603-604.
²¹⁸ Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 98.
Francis J. Meyers, a senator from Pennsylvania, was infuriated that “our country is ‘selling out’ the Jewish people and undercuts the UN structure.”220 And, in a loaded statement, Congressman Arthur G. Klein of New York called the speech “the most terrible sellout of the common people since Munich.”221 With Clifford’s help, Truman tried to reaffirm his support for a Jewish state, but there was little evidence that the Jewish community, let alone the public, believed him.

As spring set in, Truman appeared to be more irrelevant than ever before. The President’s approval rating was “a paltry thirty-six percent” and in the presidential election polls, he trailed most of the pool including Thomas Dewey, Harold Stassen, Arthur Vandenberg and Douglas MacArthur.222 The New Republic cover from April 5th displayed the bold headline “Truman Should Quit,” encapsulating the public’s perception of their chief executive.223 Overwhelmed by the pressure on this single issue, Truman adhered to a moratorium on receiving leaders from any perspective.224 But the man from Missouri could not refuse to see his longtime haberdashery partner now-turned-Zionist-activist, Eddie Jacobson. In a famed, dramatic meeting, Jacobson convinced Truman to meet with Chaim Weizmann, the elderly spokesman for the Zionist cause soon to become the first President of Israel. On March 18, Weizmann sneaked past the press into the Oval Office where Truman once again handed out his most prized possession: his word, assuring Weizmann that the United States would continue to support the partition plan.225

Just weeks later, war in the Middle East drew closer. As the British soldiers in Palestine packed their belongings, nine Arab armies prepared to attack what would be the newly declared

220 Radosh, A Safe Haven, 290.
221 Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 98.
223 Goldzwig, Truman’s Whistle-Stop Campaign, 17.
224 Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 100.
225 Miller, Plain Speaking, 217-218.
State of Israel. As Michael Oren writes, “By the second week of May, only two uncertainties remained: whether the impending Jewish state could survive the Arab onslaught and, if so, whether America would recognize the Jewish state.”

On May 12, Truman brought both sides together in a meeting Clifford deemed as the “Showdown in the Oval Office.” Truman sat, like a judge in divorce court, in-between George Marshall and Robert Lovett from the State Department and David Niles and Clark Clifford from the White House staff. The President pretended to be the neutral moderator and instead ordered Clifford to present the most controversial propositions to an eerily imposing Marshall. Before the meeting Truman instructed Clifford to “be as persuasive as you possibly can be,” indicating his preference for Jewish statehood. But the President had a clear idea of how the meeting would proceed and encouraged Clifford to prepare his arguments “just as though you were going to make an argument before the Supreme Court.”

And so, on a “cloudless sweltering day,” Clifford dove into his arguments in favor of recognizing Israel while Marshall critiqued the administration’s credibility and strategies. Marshall blurted out, “I don’t even know why Clifford is here. He is a domestic policy adviser and this is a foreign policy matter.” When the President tried to answer, Marshall angrily cut in, and Lovett followed by claiming that the proposals were “a very transparent attempt to win the Jewish vote” that would “lose more votes than it would gain.” Marshall then silenced the room, declaring, “If the President were to follow Mr. Clifford’s advice and if in the elections I

---

226 Oren, Power, Faith, and Fantasy, 497.
227 Radosh, A Safe Haven, 330.
228 Oren, Power, Faith, and Fantasy, 497-498.
229 Radosh, A Safe Haven, 324.
230 Radosh, A Safe Haven, 324.
231 Radosh, A Safe Haven, 333.
232 Radosh, A Safe Haven, 333.
were to vote, I would vote against the President.”\textsuperscript{233} Apparently forgetting that his “The Buck Stops Here” plate sat on his desk, Truman succumbed to Marshall stating, “I understand your position, General, and I’m inclined to side with you in this matter.” The last to leave the Oval Office, Clifford faced the President who consoled him, “Well, that was rough as a cob. That was as tough as it gets…Let the dust settle. I still want to do it. But be careful. I can’t afford to lose General Marshall.”\textsuperscript{234} In a matter of minutes, the President had shuttled between positions again. At a press conference the next day, when asked about the Jewish state, Truman murmured, “I will cross that bridge when I get to it.”\textsuperscript{235, 236}

Adding to the President’s problems was the pressure to outbid the Soviet Union. Several important figures urged Truman to preempt the probable Soviet recognition of Israel. Eleanor Roosevelt chimed in, “If we are going to recognize it, I think it would be a mistake to lag behind Russia. I personally believe in the Jewish State.”\textsuperscript{237} But the race against the GOP was also looming. An apt Clifford informed the President in a memo that the Republicans would demand recognition “before, during and after their convention…but that pressure could be eliminated from the Republican campaign” if Truman acted immediately.\textsuperscript{238} Two days later, the time had come. On Friday afternoon, Truman met with Clifford and gave him his final decision: the U.S.

\textsuperscript{233} Oren, \textit{Power, Faith, and Fantasy}, 498.  
\textsuperscript{234} Radosh, \textit{A Safe Haven}, 333-334.  
\textsuperscript{235} Radosh, \textit{A Safe Haven}, 335 and Oren, \textit{Power, Faith, and Fantasy}, 498.  
\textsuperscript{236} In the movie, several consecutive scenes are devoted to Truman’s recognition of Israel. The first scene recreates the “Showdown in the Oval Office” although it takes place in a White House conference room. The second scene depicts Eddie Jacobson’s famous meeting with the President, except in the movie version, Jacobson pleads for recognition, not for a meeting with Chaim Weizmann. The third and final scene presents Truman’s signing of the recognition of Israel. It stages Marshall, Acheson, Jacobson and a cast of others around the President’s desk, although this was not actually the case. It also includes a quotation (“God put you in your mother’s womb…” see Chapter 5) which was spoken by the Chief Rabbi of Israel a year later. David McCullough and Thomas Rickman, \textit{Truman}, directed by Frank Pierson, 1:19:02-1:24:13.  
\textsuperscript{237} Cohen, \textit{Truman and Israel}, 211.  
\textsuperscript{238} Druks, \textit{The Uncertain Friendship}, 109.
would recognize the new Jewish state.\textsuperscript{239} At 6 P.M. on May 14\textsuperscript{th} the White House received word that the State of Israel had been proclaimed in Tel Aviv. With the Jews and Arabs now officially at war, Harry Truman sat alone in the Oval Office contemplating his decision.\textsuperscript{240} At 6:11, Press Secretary Charlie Ross announced, “The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the new State of Israel.”\textsuperscript{241}

Figure 9: Original draft of the press release announcing the U.S. recognition of Israel. Signed and dated by the President. (Printed in Devine, Israel and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman, 26)

\textsuperscript{239} Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 109.
\textsuperscript{240} Oren, Power, Faith, and Fantasy, 499.
Chapter 5: Truman on Mount Rushmore?

The long-awaited recognition of Israel set off celebrations across the country. In New York, people danced in the streets and rallied at the Polo Grounds. Even the media took an anti-Truman hiatus and praised the President’s actions. The *Washington Star* noted that Truman’s vacillation on the issue “is completely overshadowed at the moment…by the swift and dramatic decision of the United States to take the lead among all nations in recognizing the new Jewish State of Israel. It is a wise decision and a heartening one.” George Marshall, vehemently opposed to recognizing Israel, refrained from making a public statement. Tasked with running interference for the White House, Robert Lovett reminded Marshall that ultimately, the decision “was the President’s choice.”

---

242 McCullough, *Truman*, 618.
244 McCullough, *Truman*, 619.
After Israel’s inception, the new nation continued to play an important role in the 1948 presidential election. Both parties were, “as usual, seeking to outdo each other in support for Israel.” Democrats bragged about their primary role in Israel’s creation while Republicans questioned the administration’s vacillation on the issue. Under Vandenberg’s guidance, the Republican’s ratified an internationalist foreign policy platform that included a section on Israel. Influenced by the Republican version, the Democratic plank on Israel, crafted just a month later, was three times as long and far more technical, but it essentially promoted the same message. As the summer wore on, the mutually respected Vandenberg presided over the election, denouncing both campaigns for politicizing foreign affairs.

Claiming that “the Democratic Party would not be willing to relinquish the advantages of the Jewish vote,” on July 28th, Dulles and Dewey courted Zionist leaders at the posh Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York and “promised them everything.” But the real debate surfaced in the late summer when a UN appointed mediator in Jerusalem published a report that questioned

245 Westerfield, Foreign Policy and Party Politics, 234.
246 Vandenberg fought off continuous attempts from party leaders to draft him for the nomination. Instead, the respected Senator spent his time haggling in the platform committee to ensure that the Republican foreign policy plank “did not know to the isolationist wing of the party.” Westerfield, Foreign Policy and Party Politics, 146.
247 The Republican’s were angered by Truman’s decision to exclude them from the negotiations on the Palestine question over the past two years. In their platform, the GOP boasted that it was “the first to call for the establishment of [Israel],” and criticized the “vacillation of the Democratic administration on this question.” In short, Republicans promised to swiftly implement the very initiatives that the Truman Administration had postponed discussion on until after the election. The complete version of the GOP plank on Israel can be found in: Westerfield, Foreign Policy and Party Politics, 234.
248 Druks argues that the Republican stance on Israel “helped influence the Democrats to draft a plank that was likewise favorable to Israel.” Drucks, The Uncertain Friendship, 135. For a complete version of the Democratic position on Israel, see: Westerfield, Foreign Policy and Party Politics, 234-235.
249 Still sore about his exclusion from the debate on several issues, Vandenberg argued that “‘Bipartisan foreign policy’ applies only where cooperative consultation and mutual cooperation exist from start to finish…This has not been the case in China, Palestine, or Japan.” Gullan, The Upset That Wasn’t, 129. Vandenberg also delivered a major speech on bipartisan foreign policy to answer Truman’s charges about the 80th Congress during the campaign. Morris, Private Papers, 450-451.
Israel’s borders. When George Marshall endorsed a later version of the plan on September 21st, Dewey mildly criticized the administration causing the Truman campaign to respond. This, in turn, caused Robert Taft to come out swinging. In a late October statement, Taft highlighted Truman’s hypocrisy claiming that the President’s recent remarks on Israel were “as uncertain and wavering as his previous course.” Keeping score, Taft noted, “the present step is the fifth reversal of administrative policies on Palestine.” Vandenberg’s bipartisan bond appeared to be unraveling over the Israel issue.

While the “overriding issue” of the 1948 campaign was foreign policy, the major party candidates rarely emphasized it. Israel being the exception, the bipartisan agreement hatched in Washington held firmly on the campaign trail and there was little dissonance regarding the nation’s stance on its larger foreign policy concerns. The candidates believed that their


252 At first, Dewey refrained from attacking the administration even after Dulles begged him to “consider cashing in on the Zionists’ anger.” Eventually, Dulles prevailed and his boss offered a brief statement reaffirming his belief that “the Jewish people are entitled to a homeland in Palestine which would be politically and economically stable.” Clark Clifford excitedly wrote, “I consider Dewey’s action a serious error on his part and the best thing that has happened to us to date.” Truman responded in the form of a statement on October 23rd, but the President saved his strongest words for a massive speech on October 28th at Madison Square Garden in the heart of New York City. The speech quelled all fears about Truman’s stance on Israel. See Cohen, Truman and Israel, 251-252., Westerfield, Foreign Policy and Party Politics, 236., Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 130 and Harry S. Truman. "Address in Madison Square Garden." (1948), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=13075&st=israel&st1= (accessed on March 20, 2008).


254 While the debate over Israel may not be considered an “October Surprise,” its placement towards the very end of the campaign is interesting. Taft continued: “Only when the people of Israel took action on their own initiative did the President recognize the State of Israel de facto. Now the President tries vainly to reconcile his own promises and those of the Democratic platform with the action and policies of his Secretary of State. We should insist on the original partition plan of November 1947, and on the boundaries outlined in the plan. We should recognize the State of Israel de jure and grant a reasonable rehabilitation loan. RAT Statement on the Recognition of Israel, Washington, D.C., 26 October 1948, Wunderlin, Papers of Robert A. Taft, Vol 3. 468-469.

255 Former Vice President Henry Wallace (running as a third party candidate) continuously brought up foreign policy. See Yarnell, Democrats and Progressives.

256 In his memoirs, Truman recalled, “One of the things I tried to keep out of the campaign was foreign policy.” And Dewey refrained from challenging the President’s foreign policy decisions choosing only to criticize his “confused and inefficient management.” Truman, Memoirs, Volume 2, 246., and Gullan, The Upset That Wasn't, 127.
unity was the best defense against communism, but as Donaldson points out, “from a political standpoint, the bipartisan plan gave Truman a tremendous advantage.”\(^{257}\) Israel was not the feature of stump speeches, but historians overlook the State’s importance both in terms of policy considerations and Jewish campaign financing—which had a substantial impact on the outcome of the election.\(^{258}\) As the famous story goes, Truman awoke on the morning after Election Day to the surprising discovery that he would remain president.\(^{259}\) Despite his overtures to the Jewish electorate, “Truman won only seventy-five percent of the Jewish vote compared with Roosevelt’s ninety percent” four years earlier.\(^{260}\) The President narrowly lost New York, but edged out victories in Ohio, Illinois and California to make up for it.\(^{261}\) Upon hearing the news, Vandenberg simply stated, “You’ve got to give the little man credit.”\(^{262}\)

\(^{257}\) Clifford and the campaign team expected Dewey to raise foreign policy issues, but with a galloping lead in the polls, Dewey announced, “We shall not allow domestic partisan irritations to divert us from this indispensable unity.” Donaldson attributes part of Dewey’s failure to his “me-tooism on foreign policy” that allowed Truman to appear “in control of the nation’s foreign policy.” This image neutralized a serious threat, casting Truman as virtually impervious to criticism on foreign affairs issues. Donaldson, Truman Defeats Dewey, 176-177.

\(^{258}\) See the discussion of Jewish campaign financing in Chapter 4.

\(^{259}\) The President earned 49.51% of the popular vote to Dewey’s 45.12% and executed a stunning 303-189 victory in the Electoral College. The Democrats ended the short-lived Republican command of Congress by turning a six-seat deficit into a twelve-seat majority in the Senate and by flipping a 246-188 ratio (in favor of the Republicans) around to a 263-171 edge (for the Democrats) in the House. The Democrats also took a 29-19 edge in governors whereas the ratio had been deadlocked at 24-24 prior to the election. Karabell, The Last Campaign, 254. and Savage, Truman and the Democratic Party, 138.

\(^{260}\) Historians tend to agree that the appeal of Henry Wallace’s campaign caused some Jews to abandon Truman, whom they otherwise would have voted for. See Savage, Truman and the Democratic Party, 141., Cohen, Truman and Israel, 258., and Yarnell, Democrats and Progressives.

\(^{261}\) In furthering his hypothesis, Snetsinger argues that Jewish votes may have saved the election for Truman because Dewey only fell short by a combined 29,294 votes in California, Illinois and Ohio. This argument is appealing, but there are, of course, many explanations for why Truman edged out Dewey in those states. Snetsinger, The Jewish Vote, 134.

\(^{262}\) Morris, Private Papers, 460.
Conclusions

Despite the odds, at the start of 1949, both Harry Truman’s presidency and the State of Israel were still in existence. And this connection was not lost on the President, who increasingly presented himself as a biblical savior of the Jewish people. Basking in the image of the underdog, Truman molded the narrative of Israel’s creation into a tight timeline casting himself as the steady, unwavering hand. In one interview, Truman remembered, “When it came time to do something and set the thing in shape, then I agreed to go ahead with it, and we got it done.”

Appreciative supporters also aided the President’s legacy by describing his actions in a quasi-biblical historical context. Following a parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, Chaim Weizmann, now the President of Israel, presented Truman with a Torah scroll (the five books of Moses) at

---

the White House.  

In a 1949 ceremony at the White House, Isaac Halevi Herzog, the Chief Rabbi of Israel, praised Truman and pronounced, “God put you in your mother’s womb so you would be the instrument to bring about the rebirth of Israel after two thousand years.” David Niles thought that Herzog “was overdoing things, but when I looked over at the President, tears were running down his cheeks.”

Truman’s recognition of Israel serves as the perfect microcosm for the debate over his wider legacy. Israel was not the most important issue that Truman handled as president, but it was not insignificant either. Indeed, McCullough identifies the Israel issue as one of three decisions that “revealed the inner core and character of the president.” For many revivalist historians, this issue embodies Truman’s grit, determination, and status as an underdog. This narrative features a rural senator who became president and stood up to Ivy League diplomats. The President, like the Jewish people, fought against great challenges, and with the world in opposition, he overcame them. It is no wonder that McCullough does focus on Israel in his biography—a book that served as one of the main vehicles for revitalizing Truman’s legacy. In opinion polls, Truman is consistently ranked (by the American public) in the top five or seven best presidents ever. And the Jewish community still sees Truman as a savior and describes

---

264 Urofsky, We Are One!, 185.
266 Giangreco, Dear Harry, 151.
267 While a steady corpus of literature has developed on the topic of “Truman and Israel,” in most books about Harry Truman in general, Israel garners little attention.
268 Benson, Truman and the Founding of Israel, 24.
him as the first “pro-Israel” president.\textsuperscript{270} Recognizing the potential for his legacy, Truman remarked, “A statesman is nothing more than a politician who has been dead for several years.”\textsuperscript{271} However, those that lived through Truman’s presidency may remember him differently.

In fact, Truman ended his second term in office with just a thirty-one percent approval rating.\textsuperscript{272} Strapped for cash, the President drove home to Missouri with no Secret Service protection lodging in cheap motels along the way.\textsuperscript{273} Clearly, the American people in 1952 did not view Truman as a fighting pit-bull who had their best interests in mind. Polls and approval ratings surely do not tell the whole story, but they cannot be ignored either. Some historians choose to use Truman’s handling of the Palestine question as a key example of the President’s incompetency. John Snetsinger’s account informs a larger portrayal of Truman as an indecisive, pandering politician. Although these histories are often deemed “revisionist,” in some ways, they are more truthful to the moment in time than the pro-Truman works. Truman’s legacy will always be open for interpretation, but it is clear that the handling of the Palestine question serves as a worthy example to illustrate either position. In many ways, the race continues to this day, between the “revivalist” and “revisionist” accounts of history, each vying to claim Truman’s legacy.

In reality, it appears that Harry Truman was neither a straightforward savior of the Jewish people nor a careless, pandering politician. Truman certainly possessed and acted on his strong

\textsuperscript{270} This knowledge is drawn from my personal experience.
\textsuperscript{271} Benson, \textit{Truman and the Founding of Israel}, 22.
\textsuperscript{273} Truman’s only income after leaving the White House was his $95.66 monthly Army pension salary. The president did not receive a pension until 1958. Weber, \textit{Talking With Harry}, xv.
belief in the viability of a Jewish state. But he also vacillated on the issue and fell victim to the political implications of the day. It is in this context that the Republican Party and the wider foreign policy considerations inform the discussion on Truman’s legacy. The vocal and united Republican support for a Jewish state impacted the press, the electorate, and the President. Republicans increased the pressure on the White House and affected Democratic campaign strategy. Perhaps unknowingly, the Republicans also provided Truman with the political cover he needed to endorse the Jewish state, especially given the animosity between the White House and the State Department. Although Truman still commands the most attention, the United States’ support for Israel was a bipartisan goal from its inception and this phenomenon certainly led to Truman’s decision to recognize the state.

Furthermore, the position of the Palestine debate in the context of American post-war foreign policy certainly affected the President’s thinking. While many negative outcomes were predicted, the Soviet Union’s involvement in the Jewish question increased the sense of urgency surrounding the issue. With the British ousted, the Soviet Union and the United States were thrust into direct competition for influence at the behest of the new Jewish state. As in the case of the Republicans, an outside actor who agreed (in principle) with the idea of a Jewish state influenced Truman’s actions.

The President certainly considered his religious upbringing and beliefs, the direct political implications of his actions and the moral implications of the issue. However, the actions, opinions and political strategies of the Republican Party coupled with the placement of the Jewish state in its foreign affairs context were motivating factors that most sources ignore. It is impossible to rank the factors that caused Truman to act, but a more comprehensive
understanding of their existence allows for the individual reader to make his/her own judgment—and thereby answer the ever-present question of *Why?*
Selected Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archival Collections

Robert A. Taft Papers
   The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Arthur H. Vandenberg Papers
   The Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan

The Harry S. Truman Library (Online), Independence, Missouri

Books


Government Documents


Interviews and Oral Histories

Herbert Brownell


George M. Elsey


Thomas E. Dewey

Abraham Feinberg


Periodicals


Published Papers


Secondary Sources

Academic Theses:


Articles:


Books:


———. With Eyes toward Zion II: These and Sources in the Archives of the United States, Great Britain, Turkey and Israel. Edited by Moshe Davis. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1986.


**Films:**


**Periodicals:**


