

UN Palestine Commission - Establishment of Arab and Jewish Provisional Councils of Government - Working paper - Question of Palestine

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

Considerations Affecting Certain of the Provisions of the General Assembly [Resolution](#) on the “Future Government of Palestine”: Establishment by the Commission of Arab and Jewish Provisional Councils of Government.

(Working Paper Prepared by the Secretariat)

1. The first sub-paragraph of paragraph B.4 of Part I of the [Plan](#) adopted by the General Assembly reads as follows:

“The Commission, after consultation with the democratic parties and other public organizations of the Arab and Jewish States, shall select and establish as rapidly as possible a Provisional Council of Government. The activities of both the Arab and Jewish Provisional Councils of Government shall be carried out under the general direction of the Commission.”

2. Three points are stressed in this subparagraph: first, the Commission is instructed to consult with democratic parties and public organizations; second, the urgency of setting up the Provisional Councils of Government is emphasized; third, it is made clear that the Councils are to function under the supervision of the Commission.

3. The relationship of the Commission with the Provisional Councils of Government is dealt with in Working Paper A/AC.21/W.6. The necessity of setting them up speedily is self-evident and needs no elaboration. The present section, therefore, deals exclusively with the first point: preliminary consultation by the Commission of democratic parties and public organizations in both the future States.

4. The Commission itself will naturally decide how best to implement this provision of the [Plan](#). It would seem, however, useful to indicate the method followed by UNSCOP during its work in Palestine.

5. UNSCOP established direct contact with most of the Jewish organizations listed in this section and gave hearings to bodies representing the large majority of them. It dealt principally, however, with the Jewish Agency for Palestine, which has a special position as the representative body of the Jewish people, both in Palestine and elsewhere. The representative position of the Jewish Agency is made clear in the Mandate and was re-emphasized by the United Kingdom Delegate to the Special Session of the General Assembly where the Jewish Agency was officially recognized as representing the Jews of Palestine. It was reiterated by the Vaad Leumi which assured the General Assembly in a cable that the “sole representative of the Palestine Jewish Community vis-a-vis the United Nations is the Executive of the Jewish Agency”. UNSCOP recognized this special position by giving the

Jewish Agency the exclusive right among Jewish bodies in Palestine to appoint permanent liaison officers to assist the Special Committee in its work. In regard to Arab Palestine, since the Arab Higher Committee is the body which has been officially recognized by the United Nations as representing the Arabs of Palestine, a similar invitation was extended to it to appoint liaison officers. The invitation was, however, refused. Since the Arab Higher Committee had decided that UNSCOP should be boycotted by the Arab population of Palestine.

6. The following notes outline the scope and character of organized bodies which the Commission might wish to consult with a view to setting up provisional councils of government in the Arab and Jewish States. The notes are divided into two parts, Jewish bodies and Arab bodies.

A. Jewish Bodies

7. The two principal bodies in Jewish Palestine are the Jewish Agency for Palestine and the Vaad Leumi (General Council of the Elected Assembly of the Jewish Community in Palestine). These two bodies are the spokesmen for all the Jewish "democratic parties and public organizations" of any political importance in Palestine and for its Jewish community in general.

8. It may be asked why, since the Jewish Agency is the body which officially represents Jewish Palestine and, as indicated above, is recognized as such by the Vaad Leumi itself, the Commission should consider consulting with the Vaad Leumi as well as with the Jewish Agency for the purpose of setting up a provisional council of government. It should be borne in mind, however, that the Vaad Leumi represents the Jews of Palestine on the widest basis and exclusively, whereas the Jewish Agency represents Zionist Jews throughout the world in addition to those in Palestine. Further, that since the Vaad Leumi is the executive body of a community that is organized and recognized as a religious community, it will be able to speak and act as an intermediary before the Commission for organized Judaism in Palestine. Thirdly, as mentioned above, the Vaad Leumi and not the Jewish Agency has under the present regime been responsible for the actual administration, as regards the Jewish population, in certain important fields such as health and education.

9. Dr. Chaim Weizmann, formerly President of the Jewish Agency, occupies a unique position in the Zionist world, and his advice on the subject of the setting up of a provisional council of government in the Jewish State would undoubtedly be helpful to the Commission. His present relationship to the Jewish Agency is difficult to define; he appeared before UNSCOP, for instance, as an individual, whereas he was heard by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question as a spokesman for the Jewish Agency. Although he is wholehearted in his support of partition, on certain issues, notably in his friendly attitude to the British, he differs somewhat from the general outlook and policy of the Jewish Agency, and on the question of the establishment of a provisional council of government, his views may not necessarily be the same as those which the Jewish Agency might advance.

10. The range of political views held by the main parties of Jewish Palestine is considerable. The Jewish Agency may, however, be regarded as the authoritative spokesman for all these parties, since even in the case of "opposition" parties such as the Revisionists, and, until lately, the Hashomer Hatzair, they all abide by the disciplinary ruling of the Zionist Organization whereby, in representations before the outside world, a united front is presented. Furthermore, during the recent deliberations of the General Assembly on Palestine, the Jewish Agency was assisted by a Political Advisory Committee which included

members of the revisionist and Hashomer Hatzair Parties, It should be borne in mind that Jewish political parties in Palestine are not static and that particularly at the present time there may be expected to be in the process of adopting their general policies on basic issues.

11. A small number of movements and groups in Jewish Palestine are not represented by both the Jewish Agency and the Vaad Leumi. These bodies carry little weight owing to their numerical weakness or to the fact that they are not primarily political parties. Nevertheless, the Commission may wish to contact them as a gesture of good will and as a matter of general policy with a view to ensuring that the widest possible range of views is taken into account, rather than as a practical step towards the formation of a provisional council of Government.

12. The following brief notes outline first, the Jewish Agency; second, the Vaad Leumi; third, the main political parties represented by the Jewish Agency and the Vaad Leumi; and fourth, certain other movements and groups which are not represented by both the Jewish Agency and the Vaad Leumi.

(a) The Jewish Agency for Palestine.

13. Article 4 of the Mandate for Palestine provided for the recognition of a Jewish agency "as a public body for the purpose of advising and co operating with the Administration of Palestine in such economic, social and other matters as may affect the establishment of the Jewish national home and the interests of the Jewish population in Palestine, and, subject always to the control of the Administration, to assist and take part in the development of the country." The same Article recognized the Zionist Organization (founded in 1897 with the aim of creating a home in Palestine, secured by public law, for the Jewish people), as the Jewish agency referred to above.

14. In 1929 an agreement was reached between Zionist and non-Zionist Jews which resulted in the creation of an enlarged Jewish Agency with equality of representation as between Zionists and non-Zionists. The predominance of the Zionist Organization was, however, assured because the President of the Zionist Organization is *ipso facto* President of the Jewish Agency.

15. The Jewish Agency comprises the following organs: a Council of 70 members, which normally meets once every two years and is the supreme governing body of the Agency; an Administrative Committee of 40 members, which meets at intervals between meetings of the Council to supervise the work of the Executive; and an Executive, appointed by the Council and consisting at present of 19 members, under the chairmanship of Mr. David Ben Gurion. Its head offices are in Jerusalem. The Agency is divided into the following departments: Political Department, Treasury, Immigration Department, Department For Youth and Child Immigration, Department for Agricultural Settlement Department for Middle-Class Settlement, Agricultural Research Station, Department of Trade and Industry, Small Trade and Artisans' Section, Department of Labour, Maritime Department, Technical Department and Department for Housing of Immigrants, Economic Research Institute, Economic Bureau, Section of Statistics, Organization Department, Youth Section, information Office, Press Office, Bialik Foundation (Publishing House), Supply Station, Search Bureau for Missing Relatives, Department for Post-War Settlement of Soldiers, and General Secretariat. Departments dealing with health and education were transferred some years ago to the Vaad Leumi.

(b) The Vaad Leumi

16. Article 15 of the Mandate stipulates that the Mandatory shall assure to the people of Palestine “complete freedom of conscience and the free exercise of all forms of worship.” In implementation of this Article the High Commissioner was empowered to make rules for the organization and recognition by the Government of any religious community that applied for this privilege. Under the Jewish Community Rules of 1928, statutory recognition was given to a “Community of the Jews in Palestine.” This community includes the overwhelming majority of Jews in Palestine. Membership is automatic for all Jews, men and women, who have lived in Palestine for not less than three months unless they “opt out”. The community’s principal organs are a Rabbinical Council; an Elected Assembly (the present Assembly, elected in 1944, is composed of 171 members); a General Council of the Elected Assembly (the Vaad Leumi), and Local Community Committees, set up in all places where not less than 30 adult Jews, registered as members of the recognized Jewish Community, have their residence.

17. The Vaad Leumi which is the executive organ of the Jewish Community, consists of 40 members elected by the Elected Assembly. Its president is at present Mr. Ben Zevis. It administers the lay affairs of the Jewish Community in accordance with the Elected Assembly’s decisions. Its functions are divided among departments: Political, Financial, Municipal, Educational, Health, Social Welfare and Religious Affairs. The social system administered by the Vaad Leumi includes a public school system comprising some 760 schools with over 93,000 pupils; a health service organized as a network of preventive and curative institutions; the Hadassah Medical Organization; a Workers’ Sick Fund, and a social welfare service with 50 officers, which is responsible for schemes such as school feeding, day nurseries, youth clubs, etc.

(c) Political Parties represented by both the Jewish Agency and the Vaad Leumi.

18. The following parties are represented by both the Jewish Agency and the Vaad Leumi:

(1) The Mapai (Palestine Jewish Labour Party) is the largest and most powerful party in Jewish Palestine, and is the chief support of the Executive of the Jewish Agency and the Vaad Leumi. It is affiliated to the 2nd International, and took an uncompromising stand in advocating the establishment of a Jewish State. Among its representatives on the Jewish Agency Executive are Mr. Ben Gurion (Chairman), Mr. Shertok (head of the Political Department) and Mr. Kaplan (Treasurer).

(2) Achdut Avoda-Poalei Zion. (Labour Unity – Workers of Zion). This is a fusion of two left-wing parties and differs from the Mapai mainly in being more radical in the home affairs and in having opposed partition. It favoured non-cooperation with the Palestine Government. Leading figures are Mr. I. Tabenkin, Mr. A. Zisling and Kr. J. Zerubavel. While represented on the Council of the Jewish Agency, it has no representation on the Executive.

(3) Hashomer Hatzair (“Young Guard” Labour Party) stands to the left of the Mapai and favours anti-capitalism and class war. In the past it has been firmly opposed to partition and has urged Arab-Jewish co-operation in a bi-national State. It has now, however, apparently changed its stand on partition. It has always been rigidly opposed to all forms of terrorism. The party controls over 40 collective settlements; among its leading figures are Mr. Ben Tov, Mr. M. Yaari and Mr. Y. Hazan. While represented on the Council of the Jewish Agency, it has no representation on the Executive.

(4) Mapoel Hamizrahi (Mizrahi Workers) is a socialist party which bases its domestic policy primarily on religion rather than on economics; its aim is the establishment of a Jewish State

based on the tenets of religious Judaism, It is represented on the executive of the Jewish Agency by Mr. Shapiro and Mr. S. Shragai.

(5) Aliya Hadasha (New Immigrants' Party) is a party of the Centre. It was founded in 1942 and its membership is largely drawn from immigrants from Germany and Central Europe. Its aim is constructive Zionist work which will gradually facilitate self-government and the promotion of Arab-Jewish understanding. It has consistently endeavoured to prevent the widening breach with England, and it seeks to unite the more moderate elements of other parties. It is supported by a group of agricultural settlements based on individual property combined with complete co-operation in marketing, supply and communal affairs. Leading figures are Dr. G. Landauer and Dr. F. Rosenbluth. While represented on the Council of the Jewish Agency, the party has no representation on the Executive.

(6) Histadruth Hazion Haklaliim (Confederation of General Zionists) is a Centre party and a branch of the World Confederation of General Zionists.

For over ten years it was divided into two separate factions, the A-Zionists and B-Zionists. The two groups amalgamated in June 1946. The A-Zionists were originally followers of Dr. Weizmann, particularly as regards foreign policy and in their close collaboration with the Left. The B-Zionists, who were supported largely by middle-class elements and leaned towards the Right, were in favour of the building up of the National Home through private enterprise. It is evident that the fusion has given rise to a certain amount of uneasiness within the ranks of the Confederation, since the two groups have not entirely composed their differences. Although the Confederation is represented by eight members on the Executive of the Jewish Agency, it no longer plays a decisive role in public life in Palestine, and polled only 4% of the total votes in the elections to the 22nd Zionist Congress. Outside Palestine, and particularly in America, where the American branch of the World Confederation is led by Dr. A. H. Silver, the General Zionists are much more influential. Leading figures in Palestine are Mr. F. Bernstein, head of the Department of Trade and Industry of the Jewish Agency, and Mr. I. Gruenbaum, head of the Labour Department.

(7)

The Mizrahi Federation

is the right-wing branch of the orthodox Zionists. Like its counterpart on the Left, the Hapoel Hamizrahi, this party aims at establishing a Jewish State based on religious Judaism. Its members are drawn usually from the urban middle classes. Its Palestine representative on the Jewish Agency Executive is Rabbi Fishman. Its leadership was until lately apparently divided on the subject of partition.

(8)

The Revisionists

form the extreme right-wing party in Palestine. It has stood for the formation of a Jewish State "on both sides of the Jordan", has been bitterly opposed to the Palestine Government and highly critical of the Jewish Agency Executive. It tacitly sympathizes with the resistance movements/ Two of the underground resistance movements in Palestine, the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization) and the Stern Group (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel), derive from the Revisionists, as does the "Hebrew Committee of National Liberation" in America, which has conducted a campaign in support of the above-mentioned

resistance groups. The relationship between the party and these bodies is not, however, clear. The party is the second largest Jewish political party in Palestine and a further significant fact is that its ideology as regards the direct use of physical force has gained sympathy among many Jews in Palestine who have no affiliations with the party as such. The Revisionists, hitherto uncompromisingly opposed to partition, have recently changed their stand on this issue and, as mentioned above, were represented on the Political Advisory Committee which assisted the Jewish Agency during the meetings of the General Assembly. While represented on the Council of the Jewish Agency, the party no representation on the Executive.

19. An indication of the cooperative strength of the various Jewish Political Parties is given in the following two tables. The first shows the results of the most recent elections to the Elected Assembly of the Palestine Jewish Community, held on August 1944. In these elections the Hashomer Hatzair and Poalei Zion joined forces to form a "Left Front", while the Revisionists and the Union of General Zionists (General Zionists B, now merged in the Confederation of General Zionists) boycotted the elections. The second table shows the results of the most recent trial of strength of Jewish political parties in Palestine, namely the Palestine elections to the 22nd World Zionist Congress, held on 28 October 1946. The Communist Party of Palestine, not being affiliated to the World Zionist Organization, took no part in these elections.

1944 Elections to the Elected Assembly

| <u>Party</u> | <u>Votes</u> | <u>Seats</u> |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Mapai | 73,667 | 63 |
| Left Front | 24,773 | 21 |
| Aliya Hadasha | 21,383 | 18 |
| Poel Mizrahi | 19,372 | 17 |
| Ahdut Avoda | 18,168 | 16 |
| Mizrahi | 7,772 | 7 |
| Communists | 3,948 | 3 |
| Total | 168,508 | 134 |

1946 Palestine Elections to World Zionist Congress

| <u>Party</u> | <u>Votes</u> | <u>Delegates</u> |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Mapai | 68.939 | 28 |
| Revisionists | 26.964 | 11 |
| Ahdut Avoda-Poalei Zion | 24.049 | 10 |
| Hashomer Hatzair | 23.944 | 10 |
| Hapoel Hamizrahi | 19.176 | 8 |
| Aliya Hadasha | 12.055 | 5 |
| General Zionists | 7,616 | 3 |
| Mizrachi Federation | 4299 | 2 |
| Total | 197,042 | 77 |

(d) Other movements and groups

20. The following movements and groups are not represented by the Jewish Agency and the Vaad Leumi

The Communist Party (represented only in the Vaad Leumi)

(d)

Other movements and groups

20. The following movements and groups are not represented by the Jewish Agency and the Vaad Leumi:

(1)

The Communist Party

(represented only in the Vaad Leumi): The party is opposed to Zionism and believes in the practicability of Arab-Jewish co-operation, once Palestine is free of outside influence. In its evidence before UNSCOP, which consisted largely of an indictment of British policy, it declared that it had worked for the transfer of the Palestine problem to the United Nations, that it greeted United Nations intervention as “an achievement for the peoples of Palestine” and that it favoured continuing United Nations responsibility for the achievement of its objective: a bi-national State. The party’s membership is estimated at 6,000. Its leading figures are Mr. Meir Vilner, Dr. Ehrlich and Mr. Mikunis; all three represented it before UNSCOP.

(2)

Palestine Communist Union

: This is a small party, numbering approximately 700, which seceded from the Communist Party of Palestine because its members favoured Zionist aspirations. It has taken no part in elections to the Elected Assembly and is not affiliated to the World Zionist Organization. Its spokesman before UNSCOP was Mr. Preminger, who outlined a scheme for “territorial federalism”, i.e., a joint Arab-Jewish State composed of districts possessing regional authorities of their own.

(3)

Ihud (Union) and the League for Jewish-Arab Rapprochement

: These two movements are not strictly speaking political parties and they take no part in elections.

Ihud aims at the inclusion of a bi-national Palestinian State, based on numerical parity, within the framework of a Middle Eastern Federation. In his evidence before UNSCOP on behalf of Ihud, Dr. Magnes (President of the Hebrew University) stressed that Arab-Jewish co-operation, the kernel of the Palestine problem, had never been recognized as such by the Zionists, the leading Arabs or the British Government. He suggested that Palestine should be transferred for a transitional period to the Trusteeship System of the United Nations, and that, once the bi-national State was set up, the decisive voice on major controversial issues such as immigration should be that of the United Nations. A second spokesman for Ihud, Dr. Rainer, pointed out to UNSCOP the technical objections to partition, on the assumption that

a proposed partition scheme would follow the lines of the Royal Commission's partition plan. After the publication in the press of the UNSCOP majority recommendations on partition, Dr. Manes in a long letter to the New York Times voices his personal apprehensions concerning partition.

Ihud is a sell group whose influence is due chiefly to the personal prestige of its leading figure, Dr. Magnes.

The League for Jewish-Arab Rapprochement includes Ihud and a number of members of other parties, chiefly of the Hashomer Hatzair, Achdut Avoda-Poalei Zion and Aliya Hadashe.

(4) Agudath Israel ¹ This is an organization of orthodox Jews which, while not opposed to the idea of a Jewish national home, holds that it will be accomplished by God in His own time and is therefore opposed to the present trends of political Zionism. The Agudath Israel further regards the Jewish Community in Palestine as an essential political and economic, not a religious community, and its leaders opted out of the Jewish Community of Palestine. Its members do not take part in elections to the Zionist Congress or the Elected Assembly. Its strength has been estimated at 50,000, including adults and children.

B. Arab Bodies

21. It is obvious that in view of the attitude of the Arab population in Palestine towards the United Nations [plan for partition](#), the Commission will be faced with a difficult task in endeavouring to consult Arab "democratic parties and public organizations" on the subject of setting up a provisional council of government in the Arab State. It is thought; however, that a brief indication of the general character of Arab political life in Palestine, and short notes on the principal Arab bodies now active, may serve a useful purpose.

22. Arab parties in Palestine came into existence only after the British occupation of the country. They differ considerably from political parties as the term is generally understood in Western countries. Their leaders frequently differ on grounds of personal enmity or rivalry rather than on questions of principle; generally speaking, a party is influential in localities where the family influence of its leaders is strongest; there is very little party organization, and the leaders are not chosen by elections in the Western sense of the word.

23. In general, the Arabs of Palestine have in the past been aligned, in two camps belonging to two wealthy and long-established families the Husseinis (the family of the Ex-Mufti of Jerusalem) and the Nashashibis. The feud between the two families and their followers is now no longer at its height.

24. The Arab Higher Committee: The principal Arab organization in Palestine, and the one which has been officially recognized by the United Nations as representing the Arabs of Palestine, is the Arab Higher Committee. The Arab Higher Committee is not itself a political party, although when it was first formed all the majority Arab political parties co-operated in it. The present Arab Higher Committee (also known as the Arab Higher Executive) is the fourth in a succession of Arab Higher Committees, the first of which was founded in 1936 under the leadership of Haj Amin el Hussein, then Mufti of Jerusalem and President of the Supreme Moslem Council. The Fourth Arab Higher Committee was formed as the result of a meeting of the Arab League at Bludan in Syria in June 1946. Mr. Jawal el Hussein (leader of the Palestine Arab Delegation to the General Assembly and a relative of the Ex-Mufti) is its Vice-Chairman and Dr. Hussein el Khalidi is its Secretary. The post of Chairman is tacitly

held open for the Ex-Mufti himself, now in exile.

25. The Arab Higher Committee comprises the following departments: Treasury; Department of National Economy (concerned in particular with the Arab boycott of Jewish goods); Department of Lands (mainly concerned with preventing the sale of Arab lands to Jews); and Department of National Reconstruction and National Aid. Although the Committee's headquarters are in Jerusalem, its meetings are frequently held in Egypt.

26. At the invitation of the British Government, the Arab Higher Committee sent a delegation to the London Conference on Palestine in January 1947, and since its formation one or more of its members have been present as observers at meetings of the Arab League. It represented "the Arabs of Palestine at the Special Session on Palestine and at the recent meetings of the General Assembly. It refused UNSCOP's invitation to appoint liaison officers to work with the Special Committee and to testify in Jerusalem on behalf of the Arabs of Palestine.

27. The Palestine Arab Party was founded in 1935 under the presidency of Mr. Jamal el Hussein. It is essentially the party of the Ex-Mufti. Its objectives are those which were repeatedly put forward to the General Assembly by the Arab Higher Committee and the delegations of the Arab States: the termination of the Mandate, and the establishment of Palestine as an independent, unitary Arab State. The Palestine Arab Party has always been the largest and most influential of the Arab parties, and all the members of the present Arab Higher Committee belong to it. The youth movement "Futuawah" is affiliated to it. No figures giving the membership of the Palestine Arab Party are available.

28. The Arab League of National Liberation, founded in Haifa in 1914, is organized more or less on Western lines and is Communist in its outlook. It holds that Arabs and Jews can co-operate in establishing an independent Palestinian State, once the country is freed from the influence of Britain and of Zionism. It has consistently urged that the Palestine problem should be transferred to the United Nations, and at one stage advocated that the question should come before the Security Council, not the General Assembly. The Arab League of National Liberation is the only Arab body which has publicly expressed hostility to the Arab Higher Committee and demanded the setting up of a body which would represent the Palestine Arabs on a democratic basis. No figures giving the League's membership are available. The Arab League of National Liberation and the Jewish Communist Party have attempted to work together, but such co-operation has been rendered difficult by the violently nationalistic spirit of the rank and file of both parties.

29. Various other Arab political parties, such as the National Defence Party, the Arab Reform Party, the National Bloc Party and the Istiqlalist Party, ceased to function when Arab political activity in Palestine was suspended following the Arab disturbances of 1936-39 and the outbreak of the war, and they have not resumed activity. They were all highly nationalistic in outlook.

30. The difficulties pointed out above in regard to consultation of Arab bodies should not lead to the definite conclusion that there is no chance of the Commission finding any co-operative elements among the Arabs. Co-operation obviously will not be easily forthcoming because of Arab opposition to partition; nor is it likely that any organized group of Arabs will modify its attitude of intransigent hostility on this issue. It is possible, however, that many individuals will realize the practical advantages offered by economic union in essential condition for any co-operation from individuals would be certain minimum guarantees of protection against reprisals.

31. The fact should not be overlooked that practical co-operation between Arabs and Jews is possible, even in the present atmosphere of bitterness and strife. Arabs and Jews work together in the Government service, in the Municipality of Haifa, and, under Government auspices, on the Citrus Board.