

# The Division of Palestine in 1947: Personal Policy or Strategic Interest?

Written by Emma Darkins

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1.

### Introduction

The decision by the United Nations to partition Palestine in 1947 was a major watershed in Middle Eastern history. Not only did it lead to the creation of the state of Israel, a Zionist aim since the eighteenth century, but it set in stone a conflict which still to this day remains unresolved.[1] Although the decision aimed to appease both Jews and Arabs, who laid differing ideological claims to the same territory and, as James L. Hsley stated, was the 'best of four unattractive and difficult alternatives,' it failed.[2] The result was war and bloodshed; a theme which has continued to dominate Arab-Israeli relations. This study will compare why America and Canada – in particular why Harry S. Truman, the American President and Lester B. Pearson, the Canadian Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs – decided to support the United Nations partition proposal, despite the fact it could never fully appease either side.

Britain presented the thorny issue of Palestine to the United Nations after three long decades of attempting to reconcile Arab and Jewish nationalistic desires on her own. Britain had certainly played a role in encouraging both Jewish and Arab nationalisms. In World War One, in an attempt to gain Arab and Jewish support against Turkey, Britain promised to grant both independence in Palestine. The Jewish promise came in the form of the famous Balfour Declaration which stated Britain viewed favourably the establishment of a 'national home' for the Jewish people in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration was a real turning point in the Zionist cause, it was 'enshrined' into the Palestine mandate which was given to Britain by the League of Nation in 1920, and had a tangible effect on encouraging Jews to migrate to Palestine.[3] The incorporation of the Declaration into the Palestine mandate as Michael Cohen states:

... transformed the Jewish community in Palestine from a vulnerable society ... into a protected national minority, whose language, religion, and communal institutions received legal recognition and protection.[4]

Increased Jewish immigration, however, was met with increasing Arab resentment. Palestinian Arabs, despite never enjoying autonomy in Palestine due to Palestine's position within the Ottoman Empire, believed that their majority status and British encouragement made Palestine their land.[5] Arab revolts in 1936 and 1937 showed clearly their discontent. Arguably they had a legitimate concern; by 1936 Jewish immigration into Palestine had already reached 400,000.[6] Their ultimate fear was that a Jewish 'national home' may become a Jewish nation state.[7] Britain responded by attempting to appease Arab concerns by issuing the 1939 White Paper, which limited Jewish immigration into Palestine to 75,000 over five years, after which no more Jews would be allowed to enter without Arab consent.[8]

However, the White Paper was to prove an issue of major contention after World War Two. Knowledge of Hitler's atrocities against the Jewish population in Europe, in which six million were exterminated and hundreds of thousands were left to survive in inhumane camps, brought extreme pressure on Britain to open the gates to Palestine.[9] In fact, 60,000 Jews were still in camps at the time of liberation, 20,000 of which died within a week.[10] The majority of the

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Jewish remnant, who had no homes to return to, wanted to go to Palestine. The Jewish community in Palestine were committed to their cause, actively endeavouring to smuggle Jews into the region.[11] Britain, however, was reluctant to allow for mass Jewish immigration. Not only would it go against the 1939 White Paper and have a negative impact on Anglo-Arab relations, but moreover Britain simply did not have the military strength in the region to maintain order.[12] This brought Britain much criticism, especially from America. It also resulted in a series of terrorist attacks from Jewish extremist groups such as the Irgun; the King David Hotel bombing being a notable example.[13] In October 1945, Britain agreed to co-operate in an Anglo-American commission. However, although the commission unanimously called for the allowance of 100,000 into Palestine, it was unable to agree on a practical solution. The commission was followed by the Morris-Grady proposal, a complicated federation plan, but this was also rejected. In January 1947, Britain made one last attempt to find a solution and invited both Arabs and Jews to a conference in London. However, the conference revealed nothing but the intransigence of the two parties.[14] Britain, tired and frustrated by the Palestine polemic, having exhausted itself trying to find a solution, now turned the problem over to the United Nations.

A United Nations Special Committee for Palestine (UNSCOP) was established and sent to Palestine for five weeks to investigate the situation and report back. On the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1947, UNSCOP reached its conclusion: proposing unanimously that the British Mandate in Palestine should be terminated and the country be granted independence at the earliest possible date.[15] A majority of eight states signed a plan to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states with economic reciprocity.[16] The Arab and Jewish states were to become independent after a two-year transitional period, during which Britain would continue to administer Palestine under the authority of the United Nations.[17] Jerusalem, however, was to remain under an international trusteeship.[18] A minority plan was also proposed, which suggested that Palestine become an 'independent federal state' after a transition of three years, during which time it would be governed by the United Nations.[19]

In October 1947 an Ad Hoc committee set up two subcommittees to examine the two proposals. Subcommittee One, studying the majority proposal gained the most attention for the federation plan, was never taken seriously.[20] However, it reached an immediate impasse when America and the Soviet Union disputed the idea of a two-year transition period prior to partition, and disagreed over who was to be the implementing authority.[21] A working group was subsequently established to resolve the issue. After much deliberation, a compromise proposal was put forward by Lester B. Pearson, which advocated that a 'small commission selected by the General Assembly, under the guidance of the Security Council,' would administer Palestine in the transitional period which was to last no later than August 1<sup>st</sup> 1948.[22] This gained the acceptance of both the United States and the Soviet Union. Subcommittee One delivered the majority plan, with the recommendations made by the working group, back to the Ad Hoc committee where it won support over the minority proposal. However, it did not receive the two-thirds majority needed for it to be passed.[23] After continued debate and persistent Jewish lobbying, the majority proposal was formally submitted to the General Assembly on the 29<sup>th</sup> November, where it received thirty-three votes in favour, thirteen opposed, and ten abstentions.[24] Thus, Resolution 181 declaring the partition of Palestine with economic union was passed having successfully gained a two-thirds majority.

Both Truman and Pearson have been accredited for aiding the acceptance of the United Nations Resolution 181 and thus allowing for the formation of the Jewish state.

Although much of the historiography, as will be discussed, has focused on the two individually, little has been done in providing a comparative analysis as to why they supported partition. This study seeks to rectify this by looking at the similarities and differences in the motives behind their decision. By examining the factors that determined their Palestine policy, this study will also evaluate whether their decision was based on a personal policy – in that it was supported because they personally believed it was morally right to create a homeland for the world's Jewish community – or was it a policy shaped by strategic interest – in that they supported partition as a means to make political or domestic gains.

The historiography of the early Cold War period, in which the partition of Palestine falls, has produced a wealth of work. However, such Cold War historiography tends to omit Palestine from their works. For example Walter LaFeber, in *America, Russia and the Cold War*, makes only a passing statement about Truman's role in the partition of

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Palestine.[25] This is despite the fact that Truman himself remembered that no issue he faced as President 'was more controversial or more complex.' [26] An explanation for this could be found in the idea that Palestine was not a 'Cold War problem; [27] it was no Berlin Blockade in which the Soviet Union posed a direct threat. However, there is no doubt that Cold War politics entered the Palestine question and, as a result, the issue certainly warrants more attention from Cold War historians.

Memoirs, from the American perspective, have provided a valuable insight into the motives behind Truman's decision. Truman's memoir *Years of Trial and Hope*, published in 1956, devotes several chapters to his role in Palestine, stating that 'the fate of the Jewish victims of Hitlerism was a matter of deep personal concern' to him.[28] Other memoirs, such as those of Clark Clifford and Evan Wilson's *Decision on Palestine*, are also helpful. Secondary literature has also been forthcoming as Michael Cohen, himself a prolific writer on Truman and the Palestine question, notes in *Truman and Palestine, 1945-48: Revisionism, Politics and Diplomacy*, that there exists two distinct schools of thought on the Palestine question: the 'State Department' and the 'White House.' [29] According to Cohen, the 'State Department' school adheres to the idea that Truman supported partition due to strategic interest. Historians such as Snetsinger, who wrote in *Truman, the Jewish Vote and the Creation of Israel* that 'Truman's Palestine policy offers an extraordinary example of foreign policy conducted in line with short-range political expediency,' [30] certainly belong to this school. The 'White House' school contradictorily argues that Truman supported the Zionist cause based on 'humanitarian, moral and sentimental grounds' and Michael Benson is a clear advocate of this sentiment in *Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*. [31] Arguably, an examination of these key texts is vital for this research as they grapple with the debate over whether Truman's decision was based on a personal bias or strategic interest.

Based on both primary and secondary research it is clear that Truman supported a policy of providing a 'homeland' for the Jews in Palestine. In his letter to Carl M. Dubinsky on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1944, he wrote 'when the right time comes I am willing to help make the fight for a Jewish homeland in Palestine,' depicting that from as early as 1944 Truman was committed to the cause.[32] Truman's support for a Jewish homeland can also be seen by the pressure he exerted on Britain, from the time of his Presidency in 1945, to increase Jewish immigration into Palestine.[33] Truman's Yom Kippur statement on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 1946 is a clear example of such pressure. Although the American delegation at the United Nations General Assembly was ambivalent in the initial proceedings, Truman did finally instruct Ambassador Herschel Johnson, the acting United States representative at the United Nations, to declare American support for the majority proposal on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 1947.[34] Furthermore, Truman, after meeting with Cham Weizmann, was instrumental in stopping the American delegation supporting the transfer of the Negev to the Arabs, resulting in it being awarded to the Jewish state.[35] Lastly, Truman, despite significant State Department opposition headed by George Marshall, was the first head of state to recognise the proclaimed state of Israel, showing his clear support for the partition of Palestine.

Truman is often criticised by historians in both the 'White House' and 'State Department' schools for his so called 'reversal' in policy in March 1948, when he opted to support a Palestinian trusteeship. However, based on the evidence it is clear that Truman did not give up on partition.[36] The fact that Truman did go on to recognise the division of Palestine when he supported Israel's independence on May 14<sup>th</sup> is clear evidence of this. Arguably, such attention is therefore misplaced.

Whereas the historiography on Truman has been gradually forthcoming, historical analysis on Lester B. Pearson and his role in the partition of Palestine is still in its infancy. Pearson's memoirs, in particular his second volume *The International Years*, provides a valuable insight. However, even here Pearson does not devote a whole chapter to the topic, instead coupling it with the Suez crises of 1956, suggesting that Pearson did not attach the same significance to his role in Palestine as Truman did to his.[37] John Holmes' commentary in *Shaping of the Peace* also provides a valuable insight into the role played by Pearson. Holmes goes so far as to declare that Pearson's performance over Palestine in 1947 can be regarded as the beginning of 'Canada's role as a Middle Power.' [38]

Historians have tended to look more broadly at Canada's role in the partition of Palestine, such as Kay's *Canada and Palestine: The Politics of Non-Commitment*, Thornton's *Canadian Perspectives and Concerns about the Wider World: Britain and the Partition of Palestine, 1946-1948*, and P. Lyon and Tareq Ismael's *Canada and the Third*

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*World*. Interestingly, as with the secondary literature on Truman, two historians who have dealt more closely with Pearson's role have formed two opposing opinions. David Bercuson, in *Canada and the Birth of Israel*, argues persuasively that Pearson supported partition because it 'served Canadian policy and interests.' [39] However, he is ardently opposed by Elizabeth Tauber in *Personal Policy Making* where she argues that Pearson supported partition because he believed it to be 'morally right.' [40]

Pearson, unlike Truman, played a more direct role in the formation of the partition proposal. Pearson's position as chairman of the General Assembly Political Committee directly involved him in establishing UNSCOP. [41] He, as Tauber notes, was increasingly 'active' in Subcommittee One: presenting the weaknesses of the majority proposal and offering 'informal and tentative suggestions.' [42] Pearson's real contribution, however, came in the working group where, in his own 'personal capacity,' he suggested the compromise that the Palestine commission should be appointed by the General Assembly (meeting the Americans), but be responsible to the Security Council (meeting the Soviets) which gained both Superpowers' approval. [43] This suggestion was pure 'ingenuity' as it ultimately allowed for the acceptance of the majority proposal. [44] Pearson also did his best to make partition acceptable by striving to make the proposal less offensive to Britain. For example, he advocated that the Palestinian mandate be terminated on a date agreed to by Britain and the United Nations, giving Britain the opportunity to decide when to terminate the mandate if it desired to do so before August the 1<sup>st</sup>. [45] Furthermore, when King was replaced by St Laurent, with Pearson becoming Secretary of State for External Affairs, Pearson granted *de facto* recognition to Israel in December 1948, again showing his clear support for the partition of Palestine. [46]

In determining why Pearson and Truman supported partition it is clear there are three main similarities that shaped their decision. Firstly, their decision can certainly be seen to be shaped by their desire to provide a homeland for the thousands of Jewish refugees at the end of the war. This moral cause for advocating partition is certainly given credibility when one assesses their religious background. Secondly, both can be seen to have supported the majority proposal as a means of showing not only their support for the United Nations, but also to strengthen the newly formed organisation in international relations. Finally, the Cold War and the Soviet Union were instrumental in shaping the decisions of both Truman and Pearson, as partition was held to be the only solution that limited the possibility of the USSR advancing into Palestine and the Middle East. This study will examine each of these factors in turn, discussing how they shaped their decision, and then evaluate whether these factors indicate that their decision was made as a result of a personal policy or out of strategic interest.

This study will then go on to discuss the differences in the motives behind their decision, focusing on the North Atlantic Triangle and the Jewish vote. The North Atlantic Triangle (a Canadian concept of its relationship with America and Britain) was very important to Pearson throughout the Palestinian discussion; however it had no impact on Truman. On the other hand, the Jewish vote clearly shaped Truman's decision yet it had very little influence on Pearson. Again, this study will look at whether these motives led them to support partition based on a personal policy or strategic interest.

The division of Palestine is certainly an important issue for historical analysis. Arab-Israeli relations have been consistently punctuated by conflict, most notably in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982 with the conflict being reignited in December 2008. The fact that there still remains no resolution over who is to occupy the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordanian River makes any evaluation or analysis of how Palestine was partitioned and Israel formed a pertinent area for study.

## 2.

### Jewish Refugees and the Moral Cause

The Holocaust certainly created a humanitarian and moral cause for the Jewish state. The Nazi's persecution of the Jews not only witnessed the systematic annihilation of six million Jews – one third of the Jewish population – but it left 250,000 Jews in Allied refugees camps by the summer of 1946. [47] The Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) posed a

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distinct political problem as they, unlike the other thirty million DPs in Allied camps, either did not want to be repatriated, or could not be for fear of further persecution.[48] Palestine, however, was 'definitely and pre-eminently their first choice.'[49] The Jewish connection to 'Zion,' the Holy Land (Jerusalem and its surrounding area), began almost 4,000 years ago, with the patriarch of Abraham.[50] Jews maintained a presence in the Holy Land until 135 A.D when Jewish sovereignty was terminated, and Jews were dispersed throughout the world in a scattering known as the Diaspora.[51] From this date onwards it became a Jewish aim to return to Zion, an aim which became political in the late 1800s with the writing of Theodor Herzl and the formation of the World Zionist Organization.[52] In 1897 this organisation proclaimed its prime aim was to 'establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law.'[53] Therefore, the combined factors of their horrific persecution and the Jewish desire to go to Palestine made a very strong moral argument for supporting the partition of Palestine.

Arguably, this moral argument affected both Truman and Pearson's decision. The Jewish refugee issue was a major concern for Truman. In his memoirs, Truman stresses that his support for the majority proposal stemmed from his desire to 'relieve human misery' and provide a home for the survivors of Nazi barbarianism.[54] Truman was particularly disturbed by the Harrison Report of August 1945, which noted that Jews had essentially remained in concentration camps only now under American military guards instead of SS troops.[55] Truman forwarded the report to London along with Harrison's recommendation that 100,000 additional immigration certificates be issued immediately. He also added the conclusion that the only solution to the Jewish refugee problem was the 'quick evacuation' of as many Jews 'who wish it, to Palestine.'[56] This solution remained the very core of Truman's Palestine policy. Ultimately, Truman believed it was right to provide a homeland for the thousands of displaced Jews who had suffered the most heinous of crimes and who had nowhere else to go.

Pearson was also deeply affected by the Holocaust. As the Canadian Ambassador in Washington, Pearson received in late 1944 an American report on the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps. Not only did the report contain eye-witness accounts, but it also estimated that more than 1,765,000 had been exterminated there between April 1942 and April 1944.[57] Pearson referred to the report as the most 'appalling' document ever published.[58] The Holocaust certainly shaped his decision. In 1947 he wrote, that the new Jewish state would bring 'relief' to 'those elements of the world Jewry that have suffered so terribly.'[59] He further stated that partition was 'necessary' because of 'the slaughter of Jews in Europe.'[60] Evidently he came to believe that it was the only right and workable solution. In his memoirs he noted that he felt that a 'national home' for the Jews in Palestine was a '*sine qua non*' of any settlement.[61] This sentiment was also conveyed in a conversation with Sam Zacks, a representative of the Jewish Agency, in October 1946 when he stated that 'partition in Palestine was the just and only solution to the Jewish problem.'[62]

Arguably given Truman's religious background, his support for partition appears even more likely. Truman had a great knowledge of the Bible. As a child, Truman spent much of his time reading, and the Bible was a favourite choice.[63] *Christian Century* even referred to Truman as 'one of [America's] more religious Presidents.'[64] Given this fact, Truman was evidently aware of the Old Testament's references to the Jewish connection to the Holy Land and, as Clark Clifford notes, he would often quote Deuteronomy 1:8 which states:

Behold, I have given up the land before you; go in and take possession of the land which the Lord hath sworn unto your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.[65]

With this in mind it appears almost logical that Truman would support the creation of a Jewish homeland. He, unlike any President before him, was in a unique position from which to carry out the words of the Bible and allow for the historic return of the Jews to the Holy Land, which for a religious man would have been hugely significant and a difficult decision to opt out of. Clark Clifford certainly believed that Truman's religious understanding made him support the partition of Palestine. In his memoirs Clifford notes that Truman was a 'student and believer in the Bible ... From his reading of the Old Testament he felt the Jews derived a legitimate historical right to Palestine.'[66] Benson further argues that Truman had a strong sense of Christian ethics which made him believe it was morally right to support the 'underdog.' [67] Thus, support for partition was the logical solution as it provided for the persecuted Jewish minority. After the creation of Israel Truman declared, 'I am Cyrus, I am Cyrus,' Cyrus the Great of course being the biblical figure who made possible the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, showing that the religious

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significance of this act was not lost on Truman.[68]

Similarly, Elizabeth MacCallum, Canada's only Middle East specialist and who ardently opposed partition, put Pearson's support down to 'religious exaltation.'[69]

Pearson was certainly raised in a religious environment. His father was a pastor for the Methodist church, which brought him an upbringing involving a cycle of 'home, church and school.'[70] He states in his memoirs that Church at times was 'oppressive' and felt more like 'conscripted,' but, he remembers fondly that Parsonage life was 'simple' and 'serene.'[71] Pearson himself felt that his religious upbringing impacted on his Palestinian policy, noting that he became 'emotionally involved' because 'we were dealing with the Holy Land – the land of my Sunday School lessons ... I felt I was concerning myself with something close to my early life and religious background.'[72] MacCallum certainly believed it would have meant a lot to him to be in a position to give real help to the Jews to 'return' to the Holy Land.[73]

Therefore, the moral cause can certainly be seen to be a key factor in shaping their decision. Both Pearson and Truman believed that due to their persecution, inability to be repatriated and religious connection with the land, that it was necessary that the Jewish people be provided a homeland in Palestine. This argument is given further credence by their religious backgrounds. Both men knew and understood the Bible and as a result understood the significance of partition. This suggests that their decision was not based on a strategic interest where they stood to gain from supporting partition, but rather a personal policy, based on their own moral and religious understandings.

However, this moral argument can certainly be questioned. Neither Truman nor Pearson did much to aid Jewish immigration to their own respective countries and this lack of action certainly did not go unnoticed in the United Nations General Assembly. Zafrullah Kahn of Pakistan and chairman of Subcommittee Two delivered an impassioned speech questioning the humanitarian motives of partition supporters:

Those who talk of the humanitarian principles, and can afford to do so most, have done the least at their own expense to alleviate this problem. But they are ready – indeed they are most anxious – to be most generous at the expense of the Arabs.[74]

Seemingly, Truman did do the 'least' he could. As Senator, Truman did not initiate or take part in any general campaign for the Jewish refugee problem. His aid extended only to helping old friends obtain immigration visas into the United States.[75] As President he did equally as little. On April 1<sup>st</sup> 1947, Congressman William Stratton introduced a bill which would allow for 400,000 DPs into America over the next four years. Truman thought the idea was 'preposterous.'[76] Truman's tactic, as Michael Cohen notes, was to maintain utter silence on the matter for six months. John Hilldring also came up with two solutions: one, the admittance of 150,000 DPs; two, the allocation of accumulated unused certificates for 1942-1945, a total of 572,057, to be used only for DPs.[77] Truman took up neither proposal. It was only after the acceptance of the partition plan that Truman made any commitment for allowing Jews into America, agreeing to a new immigration bill in March 1948. However, the bill was regarded as inherently anti-Jewish. Although it allowed for the admission of 100,000 DPs over two years, it confined eligibility to those who had been in Allied camps prior to December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1944, which excluded automatically 100,000 Jews who had fled from Poland and Russia to Allied camps during the summer of 1946.[78]

Similarly, Pearson was no 'maverick' when it came to Canada's refusal to admit Jewish refugees to Canada.[79] Pearson did not advocate that Canada accept more Jews, instead he advised they avoid set quotas and only accept a modification of their own existing immigration regulations, rather than accept a proportionate share of Jewish refugees. Although Canada did modify its immigrations policy by agreeing to accept a proportion of Polish veterans,[80] this did not significantly aid Jewish DPs. Furthermore Pearson, after having contacted the deputy minister of the Department of Mines and Resources in April 1947, knew full well the limited nature of Jewish immigration to Canada, yet he did not advocate more.[81] Canada only admitted 5,000 Jewish refugees in the period of Nazi rule 1933-1945, whereas the United States accepted 200,000, Britain, 70,000, Argentina, 50,000, Brazil, 27,000, and China, 25,000.[82] This shows, as Bercuson states so poignantly, 'Holocaust guilt did not count for much in Ottawa.'[83]

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Both Truman and Pearson's lack of action suggests that their alleged sympathy for Jewish DPs was in fact neither a consistent preoccupation nor motivating force.[84] There is certainly evidence that Truman became increasingly frustrated with the Jewish refugee issue. According to Henry Wallace, after the failure of the Anglo-American commission, Truman stated 'he had no use for [the Jews] and did not care what happened to them.' [85] He even stated in a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt that he feared 'Jews were like all underdogs, when they get on top they are just as intolerant and cruel as the people were to them when they were underneath.' [86] On these statements alone Truman appears somewhat anti-Semitic. Furthermore, Truman was keenly aware of public opposition to the acceptance of DPs; mail to the White House and to Congress ran seven to one against allowing in refugees. Among the most frequently mentioned objections were: the housing shortages; insufficient job opportunities; opposition to the Jews; fears of communist infiltration and the threat to the American way of life.[87] Congress also had objections, leading Marshall to conclude that 'Congress was anti-Jewish.' [88] With this in mind, Truman's decision can be seen to be based on *Realpolitik* rather than on a policy centred on humanitarian concern; partition effectively deflected Jewish refugees from coming to America, thus diffusing a potentially 'combustible' domestic issue.[89]

Likewise, Pearson's lack of support for Jewish immigration can be seen to have strategic connotations. Canadian immigration policy had always been 'ethnically selective,' with priority going to American and British immigrants, with 'Jews, Orientals and Blacks' being last.[90] When it came to selecting DPs, a memorandum dated February 12<sup>th</sup> 1947 stated there was a great difference in their 'quality,' noting that Baltic peoples were the most desirable, then Ukrainians, referring to Jews and Poles as the 'problem children.' [91] Jews were viewed as undesirable not only because of their poor condition resulting from their life in the concentration camps, but also because Jewish immigrants were less likely to engage in agricultural work, which due to Canada's underdeveloped nature was much needed, preferring city life instead.[92] As a result, Pearson's lack of encouragement for Jewish immigrants can be seen to be very much in line with traditional Canadian policy. Furthermore, after the Second World War, there was an even bigger imperative to limit immigration into Canada. The Canadian economy was already drained and it was feared that increased immigration would only drain it further; immigrants regardless of race would need housing, medical care and jobs. The civil service and government officials alike simply argued Canada did not have the 'absorptive capacity' to accept 100,000 Jews or more.[93] Consequently, the partition of Palestine was an ideal strategic solution; it would provide Jews with their own homeland, thus deflecting the need for Canada to absorb them. Canada's immigration law only loosened after Resolution 181 was accepted.[94]

In Abella and Troper's *None is Too Many*, Canada's poor immigration record was put down to the fact that Canada 'cared little and did less,' focusing especially on the anti-Semitic prejudices of Frederick Charles Blair, the director of the Immigration Branch and Mackenzie King, the Canadian Prime Minister.[95] Indeed there is ample evidence to show Canada had anti-Semitic tendencies; when a Gallup poll asked, in October 1946, whether barred Jewish refugees should be admitted to Canada, sixty-one percent said no; twenty-three percent yes; and ten percent were undecided.[96] Anti-Semitism was particularly significant in Quebec which showed considerable vocal opposition to both Jews and Jewish immigration, and Kay's research has revealed that King received numerous letters full of virulent anti-Semitic statements.[97] Furthermore, Quebecois newspapers persistently warned the government against opening the doors to European Jews. *L'Action Catholique* regularly denounced Jews.[98] Similar denouncements were found in an Ontario paper, the *Sudbury Daily Star*, which shockingly reported a 'Perfect Solution' to the Jewish question was for Jews to 'hold their breath for thirty minutes,' thus solving the Jewish problem in Palestine for good.[99]

However, although Abella and Troper provide a persuasive argument, they can be critiqued for their biased nature. In their preface they immediately discredit economic factors, stating 'it is seductively easy to lay Canada's dismal showing on refugees at the foot of the Great Depression – easy, but wrong.' [100] However, this is erroneous; economic considerations certainly did play a pivotal role in Canada's immigration policy. Canada, faced with dollar shortages in 1947, feared another Great Depression, a fear that we can not comprehend in retrospect, however, it would have shaped policy.[101] Civil servants and members of government, who had been brought up in the Great Depression, would have been unlikely to pursue an immigration policy which would further economic instability. The fact that Abella and Troper play down economic factors is wrong and serves only to emphasize the biased nature of their book. *None is Too Many* ultimately endeavours to depict Canada as an anti-Semitic nation in the 1930s and 1940s and, while this aim is realised, it comes at the expense of the books' objectivity.

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Furthermore, the idea that they partitioned Palestine based on a moral and humanitarian concern is questionable considering neither Truman, when making foreign policies, nor Pearson, when advising on foreign policy, appear to place these issues at the top of their agenda. Truman certainly did not place humanitarian concerns at the top of his agenda when he decided to drop two atomic bombs in August 1945, killing over one hundred thousand Japanese civilians.[102] Arguably, if he was capable of making this decision, which he claimed to have 'never lost any sleep over,' it seems unlikely that he would put the humanitarian concern of 250,000 Jews at the top of his agenda in 1947.[103] Similarly, Pearson was a realist and, as Bercuson notes, a 'faithful servant' of Canada's political leaders.[104] Although he could only advise due to his role as a civil servant, it seems unlikely that he would place humanitarian concerns at the top of his agenda, especially when it was not the obvious concern of his superiors.

In conclusion, although moral and humanitarian concerns can be seen to shape their decision, so can a strategic interest. By supporting partition, Truman and Pearson could effectively deflect Jewish immigration to Palestine; a significant strategic gain for both considering it was believed that Jewish refugees would be detrimental to the economy and would have a major negative impact on domestic politics due to anti-Semitic tendencies. This argument can be further supported by the fact that neither showed an exceptional preoccupation with humanitarian issues. They were ultimately realists, and in this equation the support for partition was logical, given the economic and domestic imperatives. Therefore, Truman and Pearson's decision to support Resolution 181 can be seen to be based more on a strategic interest, rather than a personal policy based on humanitarian and moral concerns.

## 3.

### The United Nations

Britain's decision to surrender the Palestinian mandate to the United Nations was of great significance. Although Palestine was not the only issue which demanded the organisation's attention, ranking alongside disarmament and atomic energy control, it was the only issue that had been submitted by a Great Power for which a solution was needed to restore peace and security to the region.[105] There was no doubt that the value of the United Nations would be significantly increased if it succeeded in resolving the Palestinian question, especially considering Britain had been unable to do so. However, it was also clear that if it failed its value and prestige would certainly be damaged.[106] The majority of members within UNSCOP, the United Nations agency created to find a solution, advocated partition, believing it to be the only workable solution to the problem. As a result, it can be argued that both Truman and Pearson backed partition to show their support for the organisation, but also to allow the United Nations to appear successful and thus strengthening its validity in international affairs.

Truman was undeniably committed to supporting the UNSCOP majority proposal, and this is shown by the very 'personal part' he played in persuading other states to support partition. [107] Although Truman does deny this in his memoirs,[108] both Nahum Goldman and David Horowitz, who were observers at the General Assembly, testify that Truman was instrumental in bringing about support for the partition resolution in the days leading up to the decisive vote on November 29<sup>th</sup>. [109] Furthermore, a State Department memorandum, dated September 30<sup>th</sup> 1947, indicates that Truman's decision to support the majority proposal was based on his desire to emphasise the United States' 'confidence' in the United Nations.[110] This point was further reiterated in a letter to King Ibn Saud after Truman formally adopted the partition plan, in which he stated that he supported partition because it was in line with the United States' 'support' for the United Nations.[111] Therefore, Truman's decision was certainly shaped by his support for the United Nations. He believed Palestine 'was the kind of problem' that the United Nations was created for and, as a result, backed partition to see it succeed.[112]

Similarly, as Bercuson notes, Canadian diplomats in 1947 had high hopes for the United Nations and did not want to see it fail over Palestine.[113] When chairing the First Committee Pearson explicitly stated that the 'prestige and the reputation of the United Nations itself' demanded an efficient treatment of the question.[114] He further stated in a memorandum to St Laurent, dated 10<sup>th</sup> November, that it was imperative that 'every possible effort be made to reach a solution' because if not the United Nations would 'fail.' [115] Pearson was certainly true to his word; it was his, as



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the *New York Times* stated, 'tireless efforts,'[116] which brought the compromise agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union which effectively allowed the United Nations to succeed in reaching a solution to the Palestinian problem. Furthermore, Pearson worked to make the majority proposal more acceptable despite Mackenzie King's disapproval. King was highly critical of both the United Nations and of Pearson's role within it, noting in his diary that 'he was much too active in the name of Canada.'[117] According to Kay, King saw the United Nations as 'somewhat useless and an arena for Soviet propaganda.'[118] As a result, Pearson's decision can be said to have been shaped by his desire to see the United Nations succeed. Not only did he back partition, the proposed United Nations solution, but he also worked tirelessly to make the solution more acceptable, even in defiance of his superior.

However, supporting partition simply to see the United Nations succeed does appear to be a classic example of agreement for agreement's sake. This critique was certainly levied at Pearson's compromise solution by Robert Spencer who argues that not only was it 'a dangerous example of agreement for agreement's sake,' but it was in 'defiance of keeping the United Nations within the realms of the practicable.'[119] To an extent this is true; Pearson did accept Resolution 181 even though he questioned whether the General Assembly had the legal authority to grant sovereignty to the commission which was to govern Palestine in the interim period.[120] However, although this may be the case, there is no doubt that both Truman and Pearson believed that the partition solution was the only solution worthy of their support.[121] The other solutions arguably were unworkable; the minority proposal was, as Pearson asserted, 'out of the blue and into the blue,'[122] and would not be accepted by either Arabs or Jews.[123] Furthermore, to do nothing was no solution at all; not only would it be an instant failure for the United Nations but it would also potentially lead to further violence. As a result, support for partition as a means of strengthening the value of the United Nations was not necessarily an example of agreement for agreement's sake, but rather a calculated decision in which both supported partition because not only was it the best solution, but it also had the added benefit of strengthening the newly established organisation.

Supporting partition as a means to strengthen the validity of the United Nations does suggest that their decision was based on strategic interest rather than on a personal policy. The United Nations came into being 'determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.'[124] It was designed to be able to resolve challenges to international peace and security by using mechanisms such as collective action. As a result, it was very much in Truman's strategic interest to secure the United Nations. Although by 1947 it had little success in solving issues such as that of nuclear disarmament or the Iranian crisis,[125] it had the potential to be an effective organisation for solving international differences. Truman certainly believed this, stating even in 1952 that he believed the organisation was the 'world's best hope for peace.'[126] Furthermore, from its creation it was clear that the organisation was a strategic asset for the United States; it effectively ruled out the possibility of the United States having to govern the post-war world on its own. Mechanisms such as the Security Council unburdened the United States of this sole responsibility. Also, the United Nations was certainly not powerful enough to prevent the United States from acting unilaterally, as shown by the Truman administration's decision to independently provide economic aid to Western Europe.[127] Therefore, the existence of the United Nations could only benefit Truman and the United States and, as a result, it was very much in Truman's interest to see it succeed over the Palestinian question.

Similarly, for Pearson the survival of the United Nations was vital given Canada's Middle Power status. John Holmes described a Middle Power as a state 'that did not claim great-power status but was far from negligible in military and economic resources, [and] ought to be assured more influential positions.'[128] The United Nations provided Canada with a forum in which to be more influential; it gave, as Angelika Sauer noted, Canada a 'place at the table.'[129] Canada was certainly ready to take on more international responsibility; it had been a key player in the Allied war effort and Canada's Department of External Affairs had rapidly expanded in the post-war years. It was believed Canada had 'come of age' and should, as St Laurent asserted in his Grey Lecture, play more of an active role in international affairs.[130] Pearson was a firm believer in 'participatory internationalism,' concluding that it allowed Canada to play a role in the world around her and contribute to its development.[131] Pearson in fact became synonymous with Canadian internationalism, with the term Pearsonianism being coined to describe Canadian policies which, Hillmer argues, 'engaged the word and tried to make it better.'[132] Therefore, Pearson's decision was motivated by strategic concerns; partition secured the survival of the United Nations and secured Canada's voice on the international stage. Also, an argument could be made for the idea that the United Nations not only gave Canada a voice on the international stage, but it also allowed Canadian diplomats, such as Pearson, to come to the

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fore and make significant names for themselves. There is no denying that Pearson's active role in the United Nations won him favour with St Laurent, making his transition from diplomat to politician an easy decision for St Laurent when he became Prime Minister in August 1948.[133] Perhaps, then, Pearson's active interest in Palestine was to a degree governed by his own strategic interest and a desire to further his own political career.

However, for Pearson there was one further strategic motive behind securing the United Nations. The organisation effectively allowed Canada to 'escape the dangers of a too exclusivist continental relationship.'[134] There was certainly a danger of being left alone with its powerful friend and neighbour. The United States was economically, military and culturally strong in the post-war period and, as Pearson noted, there was a genuine fear given their close proximity, not of 'rape' but of 'seduction.'[135] The United Nations provided an ideal remedy for Canada's fear; it provided 'security in numbers,' allowing Canada to balance its inevitably close relationship with the United States with that of the wider world.[136] For Pearson, acting to support the United Nations was necessary as it provided Canada with security against its truly tempting neighbour.

Therefore, another strategic argument can be made as to why both Truman and Pearson supported the partition of Palestine. They did so as a means to protect the United Nations, believing that if the newly established organisation failed over Palestine it would be rendered redundant, denying them both of a strategic asset. Thus their decision was based on *Realpolitik* and the desire for the United Nations to succeed rather than a personal policy.

### 4.

#### The Cold War and the Soviet Union

Another contributing factor which shaped their decision was undoubtedly the Soviet Union and the Cold War. By 1947 there was a clear breakdown in relations with the Soviet Union. Although this has sparked fierce historiographical debate among historians, there is no doubt that the Soviet Union appeared aggressive in the immediate post-war period; not only aiding communist takeovers in Poland, followed by Romania, Bulgaria and then Czechoslovakia in 1948, but also appearing totally uncompromising in the United Nations.[137] There was a genuine fear that given the geostrategic importance of Palestine and Soviet expansionist tendencies that the Soviet Union would use the Palestine polemic as a welcome pretext in which to move into the region. Palestine and the Middle East were certainly viewed as strategically important; it was the 'buffer between Russia and the British Mediterranean life line,'[138] with military bases in the region acting as potential springboards from which to attack the Soviet Union.[139] Furthermore, oil in the region was seen as strategically important as it was vital for both Europe and European recovery.[140] As a result, it could be argued that Truman and Pearson supported partition because they believed that it was the only solution which would keep the Soviet Union out of the Middle East.

By 1947 the Cold War dominated the international landscape. June 1946 saw the introduction of the Truman Doctrine followed in July 1947 by the Marshall Plan; two distinct policies designed to contain the Soviet Union.[141] The Cold War made Truman determined to avoid sending troops to the Middle East for fear that the Soviet Union would retaliate. There was also a fear that the Palestinian problem could, if direct action was taken, turn the Cold War hot. With these concerns in mind, partition was the logical policy to pursue as it effectively prevented direct military action. The fact that Truman made it clear that the United States was 'not going to pick up the... responsibility for the maintenance of law and order in Palestine'[142] resulted in the commission, which was to govern Palestine between the termination of the mandate and the establishment of the two independent states, being given 'full responsibility' for maintaining 'internal order' in Palestine.[143] This certainly pleased the War Department who had argued from as early as 1945 that the United States, given demobilisation and its European commitments, did not have the troops to spare in Palestine.[144] Furthermore, it was believed that partition would deter the Soviet Union from acting unilaterally in Palestine as the partition proposal effectively placed it under the auspices of the United Nations and, as a result, any unilateral act would be met with international opposition. Therefore, the Cold War certainly shaped Truman's decision. The East-West rivalry dominated all foreign policy decisions and in this instance, it was forced Truman to base his Palestinian policy on keeping the Soviet Union out of Palestine, a strategically important region.

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Again, showing Truman's decision was based on strategic interest rather than on a personal policy.

The Cold War can also be accredited for Truman's subsequent support of a United Nations trusteeship proposal and his recognition of the state of Israel.[145] The communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 brought about a genuine fear that the Cold War would become a 'shooting war';[146] this fear even pushed Truman to reintroduce conscription in March 1948.[147] Events in Palestine had led the State Department to conclude that partition was unworkable and that troops would be needed to enforce it, a very unattractive solution considering that troops may be needed in Europe against the Soviet Union. As a result, the trusteeship proposal became a logical policy to pursue; it would not require troops, allowing the United States' military to focus all of its attention on Europe.[148] Similarly, Truman's decision to recognise Israel can be seen as a direct response to the Soviet Union. Doing so was a means to forestall the Soviet Union so that they would not gain the 'monopoly on Israeli gratitude.'[149] Jewish support was of great importance given the Cold War context and the fear of communist expansion. Therefore, the Cold War certainly shaped Truman's later decision on Palestine forcing him to act, as Cohen notes, based on *Realpolitik* rather than on 'compassion' and 'conscience.'[150]

Canada's introduction to the Cold War came as early as September 1945, when Igor Gouzenko, a cipher clerk at the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa, revealed that Moscow had run a spy ring of civil servants and military officers in Canada.[151] This showed that not all was well in the East-West relationship. Pearson certainly believed the Soviet Union was a threat to Western security, noting that to have ignored 'the armed might, the aggressive ideology, and totalitarian despotism of the communist empire ... would have been wrong and perilously short-sighted.'[152] In his memoirs Pearson sets Palestine within this Cold War context, stating that rejection of partition at the United Nations would have increased the danger of 'exploitation by the USSR.'[153] Pearson also stressed that 'failure to adopt any plan would give the USSR a much better opportunity to intervene unilaterally' in the region,[154] demonstrating that not only did Pearson view the Palestinian issue from a Cold War perspective, but that it also shaped his decision. The Cold War context also highlighted the potential geostrategic significance of having a pro-Western Jewish state in the Middle East. There was no doubt that the Soviet Union was courting the Arab camp, shown evidentially by communist activity in Greece, Turkey and Iran. Partition effectively provided for a Jewish state which, Pearson agreed, 'might be of great consequence to the Western powers in the future development of the Middle East.'[155] Arguably, Canada would not have played such a significant role over Palestine had the Cold War not existed. Prior to 1947 Canada had no Palestinian policy, believing it to be a British problem.[156] However, the threat of Soviet intervention provided Canada with the incentive to act, as any gain in the Cold War system for communism was a potential threat to Western security.[157] Thus, Pearson's decision can be seen to be very much shaped by the Cold War and based on strategic interest rather than on a personal policy.

However, it is difficult to ascertain how significant a threat the Soviet Union really appeared in 1947. Although both Truman and Pearson's memoirs would have their readers believe that they knew the Soviet Union was expansionist and aggressive, it is very difficult to judge the extent of the impact the Soviet Union had in shaping their foreign policy decisions. Furthermore, a convincing argument can be made for the idea that Truman supported partition based on a personal policy, given that the State Department consistently argued partition went against the national interest; asserting that it would push the Palestinian Arabs and Arab states into the Soviet camp; would affect America's access to Middle Eastern oil; and would create a Soviet 'fifth column' due to the Jew's inherently communist nature.[158] However, this also indicates that Truman did not find the State Department's arguments very convincing, given that there would be no logic in supporting a policy that actually damaged the United States' national interest. This is certainly true with regards to the State Department's argument that partition would restrict American access to Middle Eastern oil; neither Truman nor his White House aides believed this was true given Arabic dependence on American trade.[159] What this does suggest though, is that Truman found other strategic arguments, such as partition preventing Soviet intervention into the area, to be more convincing.

In conclusion, in determining whether their decision was based on a personal policy or based on strategic interest, it is clear that the Cold War context ensured that their decision was motivated by strategic concerns. Given the threat of Soviet expansion into the strategically important Middle East, Palestine was automatically viewed from a Cold War perspective. There was a genuine fear that the Palestine polemic would provide a welcome pretext for Soviet intervention into the region, or worse explode into an all-out confrontation. Partition effectively deterred Soviet

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intervention by bringing the problem under the auspice of the United Nations. It also provided for a Jewish state which was predicted to be a pro-western bastion in the Middle East, which undoubtedly would be a strategic asset and invaluable given the Cold War atmosphere.

### 5.

#### The North Atlantic Triangle

In looking at the differing motives behind their decision to support the partition of Palestine, it is abundantly clear that the North Atlantic Triangle was one factor that shaped Pearson's Palestinian policy, but not Truman's. Canada was inextricably linked, as C.C. Eldridge notes, 'economically, strategically and culturally, with its increasingly isolationist (but undeniably) powerful neighbour to the south, and the fading (but still truly global) power across the Atlantic with which Canada shared close familial ties.' [160] Canada in the post-war world was, as Norman Hillmer notes, an 'alliance member first, last and always,' functioning 'almost exclusively in the context of her British and American alignments.' [161] This was certainly true with regards to trade; Canada traded almost exclusively with these two powers, with fifty percent of its trade being confined to the sterling bloc, [162] and seventy percent of imports coming from the United States. [163] This dependence on both necessitated good Anglo-American relations for, as Pearson noted, if these two powers diverged and Canada had to 'choose,' such a situation would be 'impossible' and 'fatal' for Canada's 'national existence.' [164] Consequently, Pearson's Palestinian policy was certainly shaped by the North Atlantic Triangle; it led him to support partition as a means of easing Anglo-American tensions and maintain unity.

It was clear by 1947 that what had previously been a divergence of views over Palestine was likely to develop into an 'open and bitter split.' [165] Anglo-American differences over Palestine had originated over the issue of immigration. Truman from as early as August 1945, after reading the Harrison report, pressed Britain to accept more refugees into Palestine. [166] However, a Britain determined to maintain good relations with the Arab world openly refused, sending Jewish immigrants to Cyprus or, as in the *Exodus* affair, back to Germany. [167] Tensions only increased at the United Nations. America seemed determined to burden Britain with the maintenance of law and order in Palestine, which Britain outright stated it was not prepared to do. [168] Differences further increased as fighting broke out in Palestine in December 1947. Truman even stated to Eban A. Ayers (assistant press secretary) that he had gone 'pretty far towards threatening Ernest Bevin as to what we might do in the Mediterranean if the British drew out of Palestine.' [169] As a result, Pearson can be seen to support partition as a means of restoring the North Atlantic Triangle. It was the only solution which was workable, likely to gain the two-thirds majority, and would see the withdrawal of Britain from Palestine, enabling the removal of the 'strain' currently extended on the Anglo-American relationship. [170]

The desire to maintain the North Atlantic Triangle also made Pearson committed to reconciling the British and American 'points of view' in the working group. [171]

Pearson clearly felt such a process was difficult, in a speech given after the acceptance of partition he asserted that Canada 'almost automatically' stops 'playing the triangle in the international symphony when the British and American instruments were out of harmony.' [172] Although he stated that he would have liked to have taken an 'independent stand,' Pearson's desire to maintain Anglo-American unity dictated that he had to pursue a policy that bridged the gap between these two powers. [173] Although Britain did not accept partition, Pearson's efforts certainly made it 'less offensive.' [174] For example, Pearson's compromise solution placed the ultimate responsibility for the maintenance of order, in the transition period, on the commission under the guidance of the Security Council and not, as America wanted, on British forces. [175] Thus,

Pearson's desire to maintain the North Atlantic Triangle certainly shaped his decision; it made him support partition and also work to make it as acceptable as possible to both Britain and America as a means of minimising their differences.

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Arguably, Pearson's commitment to the North Atlantic Triangle can be seen by the offence he took when Britain asserted that Canada had been 'disloyal' to Britain over Palestine.[176] Pearson argued such statements were 'regrettable' and 'inopportune,' contending that the Canadian delegation 'consistently did [its] best to represent the United Kingdom.' [177] He further argued that it was 'quite impossible' to abandon the British line given that no one in 'public or private' could 'discern what that line was,' adding that if it were not for Canada, negotiations would have broken down with the 'failure' being firmly 'fixed' on the United Kingdom.[178] This clearly illustrates that Pearson felt that he had done all that he could to aid the British position.

Pearson's desire to maintain the North Atlantic Triangle over the Palestine question can be viewed as a personal policy. Geoffrey Pearson, Pearson's son, certainly saw his father's desire to maintain good relations between America and Britain as a personal policy, noting that Pearson 'understood both, liked both, had lived in both' and found it natural to act as a 'go-between.' [179] However there was, in maintaining the North Atlantic Triangle, one very clear, strategic incentive, and that was the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Throughout the period in which Palestine was being debated over at the United Nations, Canada, Britain and America were working, as Escott Reid notes, on the conception of NATO.[180] By 1947 a regional alliance was seen as imperative due to the fact the United Nations appeared unable to adequately deter Soviet aggression as evidenced by the Soviet-aided communist coups in Eastern Europe and the misuse of its veto power. Furthermore, it was also believed that a regional alliance would provide further security by acting as a restraint on the 'trigger-happy American military,' which could, if left to its own devices, easily provoke the Soviet Union into an all-out conflict.[181] However, in order for such a security pact to be concluded, as Dean Acheson emphasised to the Canadian government, 'an understanding over Palestine was necessary.' [182] There was ultimately a fear that disunity over Palestine would become an obstacle to NATO's fruition.[183] As a result, Pearson's decision to support partition was certainly based on a strategic interest. By supporting it and working to make it acceptable to both parties, Pearson aimed to minimise Anglo-American differences and remove any potential obstacles to the signing of NATO.

Bercuson in particular emphasises that when it became evident that partition would not work, North Atlantic unity became the 'prism through which the Palestinian problem was viewed and the cause to which it was subordinated,' [184] arguing that Canada retreated from partition simply to concert itself with American and British policies.[185] However, to an extent this is a harsh assessment of Canada's policy. Although King's retreat from partition was certainly motivated by the desire to please Britain and America, it was also a logical response. Partition, due to the outbreak of war, certainly appeared unworkable. King feared continued support for partition would 'set the heather wholly on fire,' and would demand Canadian troops being sent into the region, which King absolutely refused to allow.[186] Furthermore, as Richard Owendale notes, Palestine was 'just an unhappy triangle,' [187] in that although Anglo-American relations were strained, they were not at breaking point. Canada undoubtedly would have understood this, given that the Soviet menace and matters of European recovery and security were drawing these two powers together. As a result, Bercuson can be critiqued for placing too much emphasis on North Atlantic unity and its impact on Canada's retreat from partition; although it was a factor, Canada's retreat was also based on its own national interest.

There is no doubt that the North Atlantic Triangle was not an issue for Truman. Truman was not dependent on Britain or Canada and this was reflected in his policy. Throughout the Palestinian crisis, Truman did more to inflame relations with Britain than to harmonise them; shown by his Yom Kippur speech which Truman gave despite Bevin's plea not to.[188] Bevin blamed America for Britain's failure in Palestine, claiming that American pressure only served to make it harder for Britain to find a solution.[189]

Therefore, Pearson's desire to maintain the North Atlantic Triangle was certainly a motive behind his decision, and suggests that his Palestinian policy was based on strategic interest. From Pearson's perspective, partition was the only solution which would remove the 'strain' on Anglo-American relations, thus removing any potential obstacles to the signing of NATO. Although to some extent Pearson can be seen to pursue a personal policy based on his fondness of both states, ultimately he pursued a policy which he himself admitted was based on 'practical and realistic considerations.' [190]

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## 6.

### The Jewish Vote

The Jewish vote is another factor which can be seen to have motivated Truman's support for the partition of Palestine. This motivation is the most hotly debated;

John Snetsinger and Evan Wilson are two firm believers that Truman's decision was based on 'domestic political considerations' rather than on 'humanitarian ideals.' [191] Richard Owendale goes as far as to note that Truman was 'obsessed with his domestic electoral position' and allowed the Jewish vote to 'dictate' United States foreign policy. [192] On the other hand, this perspective is bitterly resented by historians, such as Michael Benson and David McCullough, and even Truman's White House aides, such as Clark Clifford. Clifford went as far as to state, 'to portray the President as risking the welfare of his country for cheap political advantages is bitterly resented by all of us who admired and respected him.' [193]

There was no doubt that the Jewish vote was considered to be crucial for Truman in the 1948 presidential campaign.

The 1948 election was hugely significant for Truman given that he was not an elected president, rather becoming President as a result of Roosevelt's death. The 1948 election was thus Truman's opportunity to show that he was the popular choice. [194] In November 1947 Clark Clifford, wrote the 'blueprint' [195] for the 1948 electoral campaign, in which he stressed the political importance of the Jewish vote. As he pointed out:

The Jewish vote ... is important only in New York. But (except 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. [196]

With the Jewish vote amounting to forty-seven votes in New York, with only ninety-four votes being needed to win the state and only 266 needed to win the election, the Jewish vote had the potential to swing the Presidential election. The Jewish vote was also important in Pennsylvania (thirty-six votes), Illinois (twenty-seven votes) and Ohio (twenty-three votes). [197] Given this and Truman's determination to win the presidential campaign, it appears likely that Truman's decision to support partition was motivated by his desire to gain Jewish support. The Jewish population certainly supported partition; in 1945 a poll revealed that only one Jew in ten was against establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. [198] On the other hand, Arab voters opposed partition; but they were politically less valuable. As Truman so aptly stated: 'I have to answer to hundreds and thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism: I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents.' [199] As a result, Truman's decision can be seen to be very much based on a strategic interest; support for partition appeared to be the guaranteed path by which to secure valuable votes.

In looking at the evidence, the Jewish vote appears to have had a direct bearing on Truman's decision to recognise Israel, which showed his firm support for partition. There was no denying that Truman's popularity had dropped among Jewish voters as a result of his support for the State Departments' trusteeship proposal. Zionists such as Rabbi Silver saw it as a 'shocking reversal' in American policy. [200] There were also reports indicating that Truman would fail to carry the State of New York given that the 'Jewish vote against him would be overwhelming.' [201] Clark

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Clifford saw recognition as an ideal opportunity through which to restore Truman's standing with the Jewish population,[202] arguing that it was of the 'greatest possible importance to the President from a domestic point of view,' given that the election was just six months away.[203] However, the State Department rejected Clifford's arguments believing that recognition would be like 'buying a pig in a poke' in that there was no idea what the state would be like. In particular Lovett argued that the United States should adopt a 'wait and see' approach, to see how the new state developed before being given recognition.[204] Nevertheless, Truman recognised Israel, eleven minutes after it declared independence, showing that Clifford's domestic argument had been persuasive. Truman certainly received significant criticism from both Lovett and Marshall who argued that Truman's decision appeared as a 'very transparent bid to win the Jewish vote.'[205]

Another example of where the Jewish vote seemingly exerted direct influence on Truman's Palestinian policy is over his Yom Kippur statement in which he advocated 'a viable Jewish state.'[206] The evidence suggests that he gave this speech as a direct result of wanting to pre-empt a similar speech by his rival, the Republican leader Thomas Dewey thus carrying favour with Jewish voters first. Ernest Bevin certainly believed Britain's problem in Palestine was being made the 'subject of local elections.'[207]

But this argument lacks consistency. If the Jewish vote was the major determinant of his Palestinian policy then why did Truman back the trusteeship proposal which would so obviously lose him Jewish support? Truman even expresses this sentiment in his memoirs.[208] Furthermore, in his memoirs Clifford notes that neither he nor the President believed that Palestine was key to the Jewish vote, but rather a 'continued commitment to liberal political and economic policies' was.[209] This transpired to be true as, despite supporting partition, Truman lost key Jewish states. Fortunately he went on to win the election regardless.[210] There is also evidence to suggest that Truman's recognition of Israel was not a response to the Jewish vote but rather a result of Truman wanting to avenge the State Department for 'circumventing presidential policy.'[211] This argument is given credence when one reads Truman's memoirs. He felt the announcement of the trusteeship proposal was a betrayal of his position and was initiated by the 'striped-pant boys' who wanted to 'cut his throat.'[212] Thus, by recognising Israel Truman was showing, as he noted in his memoirs, that 'no one in any department [could] sabotage the President's policy.'[213] However, given that both these arguments come from Clifford's and Truman's memoirs their value is questionable, most likely both Clifford and Truman, when writing them, had their eye to their historical record.

Seemingly, a fair assessment of the impact of the Jewish vote on Truman's decision would be that while it did aid his decision, he was only supportive of partition as a means of gaining Jewish votes when it was clear that it would not harm the United States' national interest. This explains why he opted for the trusteeship proposal, as with the deteriorating Cold War climate and the apparent need to send troops, it appeared illogical and harmful to the national interest to support partition. However, in every other case Truman supported partition because not only would it be strategically beneficial, as previous chapters have shown, but it was also logical given the prominence of the Jewish vote and the fact that Jewish voters supported partition.[214] Furthermore, given that an October 1947 Gallup poll revealed that sixty-five percent of Americans favoured partition,[215] showed that not only American Jews but the majority of America favoured partition, making support for this policy not only the logical solution because of domestic self-interest, but also logical on constitutional grounds.

With regards to Pearson, it is clear that the Jewish vote was not of direct importance to him, considering that he, unlike Truman, was a diplomat – a position not dependent on public votes. However, the Jewish vote had very little bearing on Canadian policy even with regards to politicians, due to the fact that the Jewish vote was not numerous in Canada and most backed the Liberals (who were already the elected government) without condition.[216]

Therefore, the Jewish vote clearly shaped Truman's decision. Not only was it clear that partition was the most logical policy to pursue given that it would deflect refugees from America, strengthen the United Nations, and prevent Soviet intervention, it would also gain him valuable Jewish votes which was imperative given the 1948 presidential election. This again shows that when it came to Palestine Truman's policy was motivated more by strategic concerns rather than a personal policy.

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## Conclusion

There is no doubt that both Harry S. Truman and Lester B. Pearson played a defining role in bringing about the partition of Palestine. Truman has been eulogized by Jews around the world for being instrumental in bringing about the Jewish state.[217] Similarly, Canadian Zionists dubbed Pearson as the 'Balfour of Canada.' [218] However, it is important to note that the state of Israel, as it is today, was not the intended consequence. Resolution 181 called for the formation of two independent states with set boundaries. But, due to Jewish determination and arguably Arab weakness, only a Jewish state was proclaimed with boundaries which did not conform to those outlined in the United Nations resolution. This shows that despite the efforts of Truman and Pearson and the international community at large in finding a solution to an internal problem, ultimately it was to be internal factors which dictated the course of events. Despite this, there is no doubt that their support for partition was significant; it effectively paved the way for a new state on the international stage which, despite all the odds, remains in existence.

This essay has taken a comparative approach to looking at the motives which governed Truman and Pearson's decision. Although this study acknowledges other actors were key to the partition of Palestine, such as Chaim Weizmann and the Yishuv community, an analysis of their role remained out of the scope of this essay. In light of this, a good area for future research would be to assess how these actors impacted on the decision to partition Palestine.

This study has shown that there were three main similarities in the decision to support the partition of Palestine by Truman and Pearson. Firstly, their decision was motivated by their desire to deflect refugees from coming to their respective states. Secondly, they were both motivated to support partition because they believed not only would it show their support for the United Nations, but it would allow the newly established organisation to appear successful, thus strengthening its validity to international affairs. Their decision was also shaped by the Soviet Union and the Cold War, as partition was the only solution which would limit the potential for the Soviet Union to advance into the region. This study then looked at two differences in their motives. Looking firstly at the North Atlantic Triangle, which clearly shaped Pearson's decision; it effectively led Pearson to support partition, as a means of removing the strain on the Anglo-American relationship. This was considered essential considering that disunity could have adversely affected the formation of NATO. This study looked finally at the impact of the Jewish vote on Truman, concluding that it led Truman to support partition because not only was it the most logical policy, but it also had the added benefit of gaining him significant votes in the presidential election.

It is clear that strategic interests dictated Truman and Pearson's decision rather than a personal policy. Both men were realists, formulating policy within a Cold War context and, as a result, viewed the Palestinian question not as a matter of humanitarian concern, but rather as an opportunity to make political and domestic gains. Partition effectively prevented their need to accept Jewish refugees which they believed would drain their economies; it strengthened the United Nations which was seen as crucial to international peace and security; and it prevented Soviet penetration into a region of great strategic importance. Partition also prevented a further split in Anglo-American relations, thus preventing Palestine from becoming an obstacle to NATO, as well as gaining Truman significant domestic support. As a result, support for partition was the logical decision considering it provided them both with significant gains.

One could argue that neither Truman nor Pearson would have supported partition had the Holocaust not occurred; indicating partition was based on their own personal desire to aid survivors of Nazi barbarianism. Although counterfactual history provides for interesting debate, the reality is the Holocaust did happen and Palestine was partitioned, however this does not mean the two were directly related. Very rarely are foreign policy decisions based primarily on humanitarian concerns and given the anti-Semitic nature of the 1940s, coupled with the fact that neither had done much to support the acceptance of refugees into their own respective states, suggests that Palestine was certainly not its first example. But rather the wealth of strategic gains to be made, both politically and domestically, led Truman and Pearson to support partition.

The partition of Palestine was truly a significant act and arguably one of the most significant acts of the twentieth



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century considering it still to this day ignites passions. It was a unique set of circumstances which brought the Palestinian question to the forefront of international politics: most notably the Holocaust; Britain's decline in power; Jewish determination; and even the Cold War. However, when one looks at all the evidence, there is no doubt that neither Truman nor Pearson took the decision lightly. Partition was accepted only, as Pearson noted, after much 'heart-searching' and 'careful consideration.' [219]

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[175] Memorandum 'The Policy in Regard to Palestine of the Canadian Delegation to the Second Session of the General Assembly,' December 27, 1947, *DCER*, Vol. 13, 1947, p. 943 and also see Tauber, p. 44.

[176] Pearson to Roberson, December 30, 1947, *DCER*, Vol. 13, 1947, p. 949.

[177] *Ibid.*, p. 949.

[178] *Ibid.*, p. 949.

[179] Geoffrey Pearson cited in Peter Stursberg, *Lester Pearson and the American Dilemma* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1980), p. 74.

[180] Escott Reid, *Time of Fear and Hope: The Making of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 1947-49* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 11.

[181] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[182] John Baylis, *Diplomacy of Pragmatism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p. 104.

[183] *DCER*, Vol. 14, 1948, edited by H. Mackenzie (Ottawa: Queens Printer, 1994), pp. 304-5.

[184] Bercuson, p. 237.

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[185] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[186] Kay, *Canada and Palestine: The Politics of Non-Commitment*, p. 140.

[187] Ovendale, *Britain and the United States and the End of the Palestine Mandate, 1942-1948*, pp. 306-7.

[188] Snetsinger, p. 47.

[189] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[190] Memorandum 'The Policy in Regard to Palestine of the Canadian Delegation to the Second Session of the General Assembly,' December 27, 1947, *DCER*, Vol. 13, 1947, p. 948.

[191] Snetsinger, p. 140 and Evan Wilson, p. 149.

[192] Ovendale, *Britain and the United States and the End of the Palestine Mandate, 1942-1948*, p. 306.

[193] Benson, p. 6.

[194] Peter Grose, 'The President versus the Diplomats,' in *The End of the Palestine Mandate*, edited by Wm. R. Louis and R.W. Stookey (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1986), pp. 32-60 (p.50).

[195] Snetsinger, p. 95.

[196] Clark Clifford cited in Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 60.

[197] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

[198] Snetsinger, p. 5.

[199] Truman cited in Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 89.

[200] Rabbi Silver cited in *Ibid.*, p. 191.

[201] Dean Alfange to Major General Harry Vaughan, May 5, 1948, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 208.

[202] *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency: The United States' Recognition of Israel*, Vol. 24, edited by Dennis Merrill (Bethesda: University Publications of America, 1998), pp. 115-121.

[203] Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State Lovett, May 14, 1948, *FRUS*, Vol.5, Part Two, 1948, p. 1006.

[204] Snetsinger, p. 108.

[205] Memorandum of Conversation, by Secretary of States, Marshall, *FRUS*, Vol.5, Part Two, 1948, p. 975.

[206] Truman's Yom Kippur Statement, October 1946, cited in Benson, p. 70.

[207] Snetsinger, p. 47.

[208] Truman states in his memoirs: 'the Jews would read this as a complete abandonment of the partition plan,' Truman, p. 192.

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[209] Clifford, p. 14.

[210] Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 60.

[211] Truman, p. 193.

[212] Truman cited in David McCullough, *Truman* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1992), pp. 610-11.

[213] Truman, p. 194.

[214] Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 89.

[215] Benson, p. 187.

[216] Bercuson, p 235.

[217] Israel's Chief Rabbi stated in 1949, 'God put you in your mother's womb so that you could be the instrument to bring about the rebirth of Israel after two thousand years,' cited in Benson, p. 190.

[218] Cited in Spencer, p. 147.

[219] Pearson, *Memoirs 1948-1957: The International Years*, p. 214.

## List of Characters

### Canada

Holmes, John Canadian Diplomat

Ilsey, James L. Minister of Justice and member of the Canadian United Nations Delegation

King, Mackenzie Prime Minister of Canada

MacCallum, E. Second Political Division of the Canadian Department of External Affairs

Pearson, Lester B. Canadian Under Secretary of State for External Affairs

St Laurent Secretary of State for External Affairs

### United States

Austin, Warren United States Ambassador to the United Nations

Clifford, Clark White House Council

Henderson, Loy Director of the State Department's Near East Agency

Hilldring, John American Representative at the United Nations

Johnson, Herschel United States Ambassador to the United Nations

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Lovett, Robert      Under Secretary of State

Marshall, G.C Secretary of State

Roosevelt, Eleanor    Delegate to the United Nations General Assembly

Truman, Harry S.    President of the United States

Wilson, Evan Head of the Palestine Desk in the State Department

## **Other**

Attlee, Clement      Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Bevin, Ernest British Foreign Secretary

Weizmann, Cham    President of the World Zionist Organisation

## **Abbreviations**

*DCER* Department of Canadian External Relations

*FRUS* Foreign Relations of the United States

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