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SYRIA AT THE UNITED NATIONS, 1945-1955: THE STRUGGLE FOR SOVEREIGNTY  
AND TERRITORIAL CLAIMS IN PALESTINE

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## Abbreviations

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
MAC	Mixed Armistice Commission
SSNP	Syrian Social Nationalist Party
U.K.	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCIO	United Nations Conference on International Organization
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCOP	United Nations Special Committee on Palestine
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
U.S.	United States
U.S.S.R.	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## Abstract

This study is an examination of the Syrian government's strategic political engagement with the United Nations from 1945 to 1955. Specifically, this work provides an in-depth analysis of Syrian interaction within the United Nations' primary security and political organs the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly. Leveraging an extensive collection of United Nations primary sources, U.S. diplomatic and intelligence reporting, and Arabic memoirs of officials directly involved in UN activity, this study provides the first ever comprehensive overview of Syrian-UN political engagement on matters directly impacting the Syrian state during the first ten years of the UN's founding. Counter to the view that Syrian decision-making was driven by either pan-Arab ideology or by Syrian Social Nationalist Party ideals, and contrary to the view that Syrian officials were content with the borders established under the French Mandate, this dissertation argues that Syrian officials operated strategically in pursuit of alternative territorial boundaries and the United Nations was a critical component to that strategy. Investigating bids for independence and definitions of sovereignty from 1945 to 1955, I show how Syrian diplomats made crucial territorial claims to portions of pre-colonial, late Ottoman understandings of Syria that were subsequently situated in Palestine, along the north-eastern bank of the Jordan River. The time period of this first decade after World War II is critical to our understanding of a neglected but central vision of territorial state sovereignty—one articulated by former Ottoman officials and other diplomats raised with this pre-colonial and Ottoman vision of Syria that reflected the past and helped determine Syria's future.

In addition to offering a historical account of Syrian interaction with the United Nations during the organization's formative years, this study also provides a framework for understanding the Syrian government's twin strategy of UN engagement and force to achieve its

strategic territorial objectives. This study proposes that while the Syrian state's preferred tool for acquiring sovereignty over territory was the United Nations system, when that avenue failed, the Syrian state resorted to armed force to maintain its territorial claims. However, given the military superiority of the Israeli state vis-à-vis Syria, armed force also had its limits and the Syrian state was forced to return to the UN negotiating table. This framework is critical for understanding Syria's military decision making at this period and demonstrates that Syria's use of force was strategic and not purely in the service of dogmatic hatred of the state of Israel. This study will be of interest to historians of post-colonial Syrian history, experts of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and UN historians interested in understanding how the past can inform decision makers understanding of Syrian-UN engagement during the Syrian crisis of the post-2011 era.

## Introduction

“It is my humble submission and my loud declaration that no state can claim sovereignty by alienating the rights of the people, and a state that can exist only by the alienation of the people of the country is not worthy of statehood and does not possess the attributes of statehood. A state can only exist by the existence of its people, and a state which can survive only by driving out the people of the country is neither a state nor does it possess the attributes of a state.”<sup>1</sup>

## Background to the Present Study

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the United Nations has played an active role in mitigating the effects of the ongoing war and in mediating the crisis. Described as the worst humanitarian disaster of the twenty-first century, over half a million people have been killed in the Syrian conflict,<sup>2</sup> over 5.4 million have become refugees, 6.1 million remain internally displaced, and over 13 million are in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>3,4</sup> As United Nations involvement in the conflict has increased over time, the Syrian government has been accused of leveraging the international organization for strategic political and military gains in its fight for survival. With so much global attention on UN efforts to find a just resolution to the

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad al-Shukairy, Syria’s United Nations representative born in Lebanon and of Palestinian descent, discussing the Palestine Question before the United Nations General Assembly’s 503<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Session on 4 December 1954.

<sup>2</sup> “Syrian Observatory Says War Has Killed More than Half a Million,” *Reuters*, March 12, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria/syrian-observatory-says-more-than-half-a-million-killed-during-war-idUSKCN1GO13M>.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Syria Emergency,” UNHCR, accessed April 18, 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch | 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor | New York, and NY 10118-3299 USA | t 1.212.290.4700, “World Report 2018: Rights Trends in Syria,” Human Rights Watch, January 2, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/syria>.

Syrian conflict, the need for a deeper understanding of the UN's strategic role in the Syrian government's political and military calculus is essential.

This study represents an attempt to provide a historical framework for understanding the Syrian government's strategic engagement with the United Nations at the organization's founding in 1945 to 1955. There are several reasons to begin a historical analysis of Syrian-UN engagement at the United Nations' inception. First, to understand the history of Syrian-UN engagement, it is critical to recount the origin story and explain how Syria's early experiences with the United Nations shaped its perception of the organization as well as its utility. Secondly, reporting on this time period not only fills a critical gap within the UN scholarly literature, but contributes in new ways to secondary literature on Syria's independence and post-colonial era. Third, this study also provides a unique vantage point for understanding the Arab-Israeli conflict which is often dominated by narratives of Egypt and Jordan—two neighboring powers that contended for regional dominance in this period who therefore have been understood as the driving forces in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Fourth, by identifying a Syrian policy towards the United Nations from the beginning, I hope to contribute a foundational piece of Syria's historical strategic engagement with the UN that long predates the current Syrian crisis. Finally, given the pivotal role of the United Nations in newly established World War II global order, this study demonstrates that the UN was not perceived simply as a platform for rhetoric, but also served as an important institution for policymaking and influencing the trajectory of the Middle East particularly after 1948. Through this approach, I argue that from 1945 to 1955, Syria, as an emergent country, leveraged the United Nations as a political tool to secure its independence and sovereign claims at home and in portions of neighboring Palestine. When its political

engagement with the UN failed, I argue that the Syrian government relied on force to achieve such objectives.

## Literature Review

Although the question of Syrian strategic engagement with the United Nations has received little scholarly attention, the secondary literature has examined various aspects of Syrian political interactions with the international community and UN machinery during this study period. Within the United Nations literature, the Syrian policy of UN engagement has sadly been a neglected topic of interest despite Syria being one of the organization's founding members over seventy years ago and being the first Arab state to hold a full two-year term on the UN Security Council. In keeping with the pioneering UN-country studies—sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace—that evaluated the experience of twenty-one countries in anticipation of the UN's first ten-year review, this study hopes to fill the gap on Syria's pivotal contributions to the UN's early history. A dissertation on Syria at the UN from 1945 to 1952 authored by Albert Coudsi was written in 1953, but the author of that study explicitly noted that his intent was to simply highlight some of the Syrian government's early participation in political, economic and social discussions but not to analyze that participation stating, "*Nous présentons la participation syrienne à la vie de l'O.N.U. mais nous ne voulons pas juger cette participation ni les avis qu'elle comporte.*"<sup>5</sup> Also, the current Syrian government's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Bashar al-Ja'afari has reportedly written a book entitled *The United Nations and the New World Order*,<sup>6</sup> which may shed light on the Syrian leadership's views of the international organization, although the author of this present study has

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Coudsi, *La Syrie et l'O.N.U.: Essai de bilan (1945-1952)* ([S.l.]: L'auteur, 1953), 3.

<sup>6</sup> "H.E. Bashar Ja'afari, Ph.D. | Syria," accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.un.int/syria/staff/he-bashar-jaafari-phd>.

been unable to locate a copy. Finally, other works on the UN activity more broadly during this period are useful in situating select episodes of Syrian engagement within the broader context of international developments at the United Nations.<sup>7</sup>

While the topic of Syria at the UN has been an underexamined independent case study, Syrian interaction within the UN has been the subject of broader analyses to include studies on Arab bloc politics at the UN.<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that despite political competition on the inter-Arab level during this period, the historical record of Arab-UN engagement does show a great deal of unity in policy efforts vis-à-vis voting patterns in the organization. However, such studies examining the broad policy of Arab alignment within the UN make it difficult to unpack an independent Syrian strategy and how Syrian officials understood and articulated problems before the UN. On the other hand, UN studies that have been written on Syrian-UN interaction have often adopted an UN-centric perspective and focus on the effectiveness of local UN machinery to maintain peace between Syria and Israel rather than articulate a Syrian state policy vis-à-vis the UN.<sup>9</sup>

While the Syrian government's early leveraging of the international system in its quest for independence and territorial claims in Palestine had a lasting impact on the country's period of state formation, most historical accounts of Syria during the post-independence era focus more on inter-Arab struggles and the link between this period and the subsequent rise of the Ba'ath

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the following works: Anthony Gaglione, *The United Nations under Trygve Lie, 1945-1953*, vol. no. 1, *Partners for Peace*; (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2001); and Peter Heller, *The United Nations Under Dag Hammarskjöld, 1953-1961*, *Partners for Peace 2* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2001)

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Mohamed el-Hadi Afifi, *The Arabs and the United Nations* (London: Longmans, 1964); Georges Moussa Dib, *The Arab bloc in the United Nations* (Amsterdam: Djambatan, Ltd., International Educational Publishing House, 1956); and Abdulrahman Abdulla Zamil, "The Arab Group Behavior in the United Nations, 1946-1963" (University of Southern California, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, David Brook, *Preface to Peace: The United Nations and the Arab-Israeli Armistice System* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1964); Nathan A. Pelcovits, *The Long Armistice: UN Peacekeeping and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1960* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993); and Eedson Louis Millard Burns and Mu'assasat al-Dirāsāt al-Filasṭīnīyah., *Between Arab and Israeli* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969).

Party in the 1960s. Patrick Seale's seminal study on post-colonial Syria for example, remains the standard reference for understanding Syria's position in regional and international affairs describing Syria "a mirror of rival interests on an international scale".<sup>10</sup> However, rather than evaluate how the Syrian government's sovereign pursuits influenced its engagement with regional and international players Seale's work focuses more on the story of the Syrian government's position often as a target of regional and international struggle for dominance in the Middle East. Gordon Torrey and Derek Hopwood have also written detailed accounts of this formative time period in Syrian history, although their interest is more in tracking the turbulence of the post-independence period, the rise of the military in politics and the eventual end of Syria's democratic era.<sup>11</sup> A more recent work on this period by Rami Ginat examines how Syria's political ideology of Arab neutrality influenced its foreign policy and its strategic alignment with Cold War players, emergent powers like India and political blocs like the Non-aligned movement. While offering greater attention to the United Nations in his study, it provides only a window into the role of Syrian engagement with the UN which remains one of several institutions and political forces examined by Ginat during this time period.<sup>12</sup> Finally, other historians covering post-independence Syria have tended to examine the history of this early period with an eye towards explaining the subsequent and enduring Ba'ath Party controlled state that continues to dominate in Syria to this day. Thus, rather than viewing the policies of Syria's early diplomats as having a lasting impact on the trajectory of Syria's state formation process, such studies tend to focus on changes happening at the popular social level such as the

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (London ; New York; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1.

<sup>11</sup> See Gordon Torrey, *Syrian politics and the military, 1945-1958* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964) and Derek Hopwood, *Syria 1945-1986: politics and society* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Rami Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism: From Independence to Dependence* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic, 2010).

rise future Ba'ath Party loyalists from among the peasants and minorities as well as their entry into politics.<sup>13</sup>

As it relates to Syria's logic on the use of armed force, another category of literature focuses on the contentious border relations between Syria and Israel in the 1948 war<sup>14</sup> and beyond.<sup>15</sup> Such works dealing with Syria and Israel during this period can be divided into two categories. The first category, exemplified in the writings of Elie Podeh and Itamar Rabinovich focus on the evaluating the potentialities of Israel brokering a peace agreement in 1949 with the Arab world's first military dictator, Syrian President Husni al-Zaim (1897-1949).<sup>16</sup> Useful in the detail they provide on Za'im's demands for sovereign claims in Mandatory Palestine, the focus on one brief interlude however fails to contextualize Syria's sovereign claims as part of a broader strategy. The second category examines Syria and Israel's interaction under the UN Armistice system from the signing of the UN agreement in 1949 until the end of this study period.<sup>17</sup> Such literature is perhaps the most abundant in unpacking Syria's interaction under the UN system from 1949 onward, but occasionally suffers from a sharp ideological bias against Syria in favor of the Israeli position advanced at the UN. As a result, such analysis tends to overlook any

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the following works: Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'athist Syria: Army, Party, and Peasant* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990); Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'ath Party* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> See for example, Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); and Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1947-1951* (London: Tauris, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Elie Podeh, *Chances for Peace: Missed Opportunities in the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015); and Itamar Rabinovich, *The Road not Taken: Early Arab-Israeli Negotiations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Aryeh Shalev, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); and Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); and Nissim Bar-Yaacov, *The Israel-Syrian Armistice: Problems of Implementation, 1949-1966* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1967).

strategic rationale behind Syria's decision to use armed force in pursuit of its sovereign objectives. This present study aims to change that perception.

By unpacking Syria's strategic pursuit of sovereign claims over this formative ten-year post-independence period, this study also makes a novel intervention in the literature regarding the extent to which Syria's diplomats pursued a territorial policy in line with the prevailing pan-Arab and Syrian nationalist ideological forces or not. The scholarly debate on what constituted Syria's desired territorial boundaries during this period is vast. Three major political currents at the time underscore this competition of what Syria's natural boundaries are or, in theory, should be. The first, and largest territorial expanse is the one advocated by Pan-Arabists like the Ba'ath Party in Syria founded in 1947 by Michel Aflaq (1910-1989) and Salah al-Din al-Bitar (1912-1980). Pan-Arabism as defined by Bassam Tibi is a "version of Arab nationalism that demands political unification among Arab states because they derive their authority and legitimacy from the Arab nation."<sup>18</sup> According to this philosophy, Syria is but one part of a much larger Arabic-speaking nation. Within the literature of Arab nationalism, there has been a tendency to accept the baseline premise argued by Pan-Arab nationalists that the Arab nation constitutes a long-standing reality, whose ideological influence remained dormant until its rediscovery by various western educated elites. Seeking to unpack the historical chain of transmission of this idea until its full bloom in the post-World War II era, several scholars have written of the influences of Christian Arabs exposed to western secular concepts who greatly contributed to the Arabic literary renaissance or *nahdah*, and Arab Islamic modernists seeking to rise from the ashes of the crumbling Turkish-led Ottoman Empire.<sup>19</sup> For his part, James Gelvin critiques the notion that

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<sup>18</sup> Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry*, ed. Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 22–23.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1946), 1–13; Hisham Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914*

Arab nationalism was the sole creation of a “select group of indigenous elites,” arguing instead that such policies would have had no weight if they did not articulate the aspirations of the broader populous—therefore ascribing multiple influences to the rise of Arab nationalist ideals.<sup>20</sup> Other recent scholarship has also tried to trace the origins of the Arab national consciousness by looking to contributions of local pre-modern intellectual and cultural influences that pre-date Arab exposure to Western secular norms and concepts.<sup>21</sup> Following the rise of the Arab nationalist Ba’ath Party in Syria in 1947 and their seizure of political power in 1963, the long-term narrative arch suggests a continual progression and durability of pan-Arab ideals and their influence in state politics.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, given Syria’s broad sectarian landscape encompassing a wide array of Jewish, Christian and Muslim creeds, Arab nationalism seemed to prove a unifying ideology to bridge such divides. However, this study is less interested in tracing the history and utility of Arab nationalism as an ideology and more on what Syria’s early leaders actually advocated as their desired borders within the halls of the United Nations.

The second camp in the literature suggests a more limited view of Syria’s desired territory by pointing to the ideological forces of Syrian nationalism over Pan-Arabism being the driving force motivating a view of Syria belonging to its “natural” borders as opposed to being inseparable from the broader Arab nation. This idea of a “geographic” or “natural” Syria existing as a distinct political entity from the rest of the Arab world was articulated by Antun Sa’adeh (1904-1949) who founded the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) in 1932. According to

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(Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 64–65; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Sylvia G. Haim and Sylvia Kedourie, *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (University of California Press, 1962), 15–34; and C. Ernest Dawn, “The Rise of Arabism in Syria,” *Middle East Journal* 16, no. 2 (1962): 145–68.

<sup>20</sup> James L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 5, 9.

<sup>21</sup> “The Arab Nahḍah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement,” *Edinburgh Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*, 2013, 1–10.

<sup>22</sup> David Roberts, *The Ba’ath and the Creation of Modern Syria* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 1–5.

Sa'adeh's theory, Syrians constitute a distinct biological people from the Arabs who have occupied a specific geographic space since time immemorial.<sup>23</sup> By advocating a return to Syria's natural borders which he defined as comprising the Fertile Crescent, southern Anatolia, Cyprus and the Sinai, Sa'adeh argued that Syria should exist as a separate political entity from the Arabs.<sup>24</sup><sup>25</sup> Again, while the concept of Syrian nationalism advocated by Sa'adeh has similarly had its intellectual origins retraced by scholars,<sup>26</sup> this present study asks the question to what extent the territorial objectives advocated by Syria's UN diplomats from 1945 to 1955 actually aligned with the prevailing political ideologies popular after Syria gained its independence in 1945.

The final camp of scholars point to the policy level pursuit of Arab unity within the framework of the Arab state system whose boundaries were defined by colonial powers.<sup>27</sup> This group of scholars suggest that Syria's leadership, with the exception of the SSNP-aligned Syrian President Adib Shishakli (r. 1949-1954), was content during this period with limited territorial designs constituting a reduced French Mandate Syria.<sup>28</sup> This meant that, rather than try and regain territory in Palestine or Lebanon, the Syrian government was content on consolidating a narrow and "truncated Syria"<sup>29</sup> inherited from the French mandatory authorities who left in 1946. This latter position is supported by many scholars within the literature who contend that while

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<sup>23</sup> Labib Zuwiyya Yamak, *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 76–88.

<sup>24</sup> Adel. Beshara, *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, vol. 10, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern History ; (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 341–63.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Pipes, *Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 13–16.

<sup>26</sup> Asher Kaufman, "Henri Lammens and Syrian Nationalism," in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011), 108–22.

<sup>27</sup> Michael N. Barnett, "Sovereignty, Nationalism, and Regional Order in the Arab States System," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (1995): 481.

<sup>28</sup> Emma Lundgren Jörum, *Beyond Syria's Borders: A History of Territorial Disputes in the Middle East*, vol. 155, Library of Modern Middle East Studies ; (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 23.

<sup>29</sup> Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*, Princeton Studies on the Near East (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 23.

the popular inclinations leaned towards Arab unity, most governments opted to seek limited independence and sovereignty for their often inherited national boundaries.<sup>30</sup> Such view of a limited state-centric sovereignty has also been applied to Syria at this time, given the country's hesitance to join unity schemes with colonial-backed Arab monarchs, and due to Syria's willingness to see Lebanon break off and become an independent state.<sup>31</sup> However, as I explain further below, Syria's leaders in practical terms pursued a limited territorial expansion of the state's boundaries during this period that does not conform perfectly to the ideological forces of Pan-Arab unity, Syrian nationalism, or state-centric Arab nationalism.

### **Syrian-UN Strategic Framework: An Analytic Tool to Unpack Syria's Sovereign Pursuits**

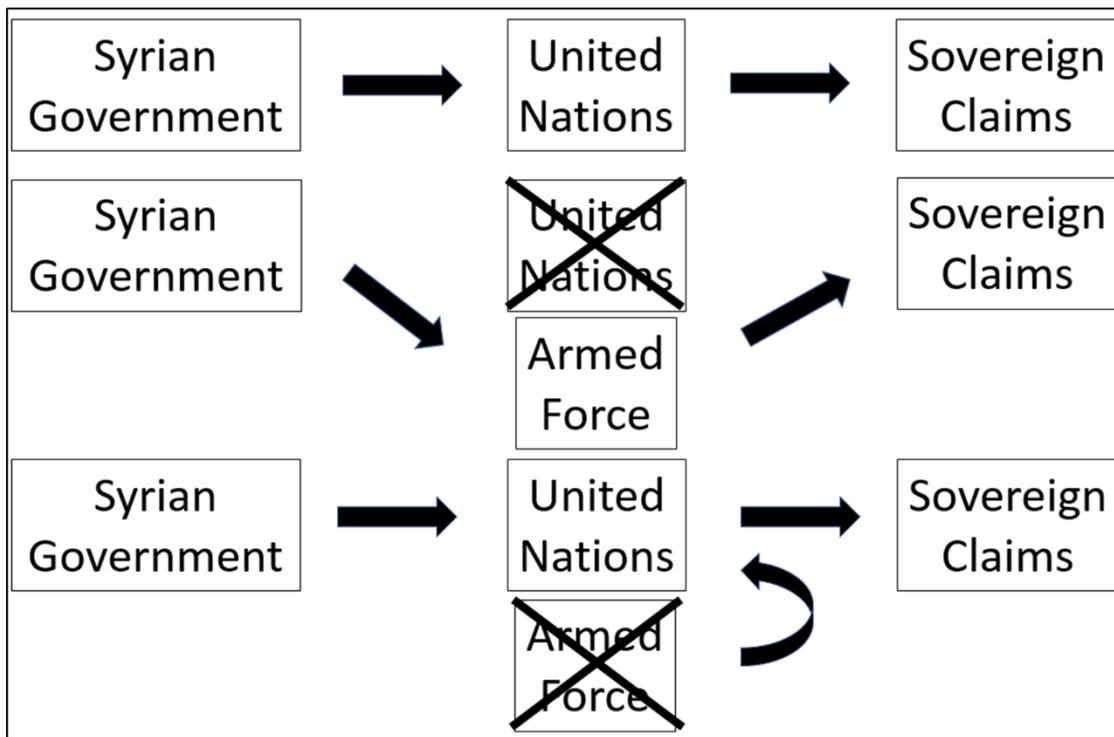
The central argument of this study maintains that from 1945 to 1955 the Syrian Government engaged the United Nations strategically in pursuit of its early independence and subsequent sovereign claims in portions of northeastern Palestine along the eastern bank of the Jordan River. Leveraging international law enshrined in the United Nations Charter, and in UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, Syrian diplomats secured international recognition of their independence within French Mandatory Syria and continued to leverage the UN in pursuit of its sovereign claims over portions of "southern Syria" or Palestine. However, the United Nations did not always accept the territorial arguments advanced by Syrian diplomats,

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, 1958-1967: A Study of Ideology in Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Elie Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World: the Struggle Over the Baghdad Pact* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995); Elie Podeh, "The Emergence of the Arab State System Reconsidered," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 9, no. 3 (November 1, 1998): 50–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592299808406095>; and Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Crystallization of the Arab State System, 1945-1954*, 1st ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Crystallization of the Arab State System, 1945-1954*, 1st ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 29-31; Malik. Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Pan-Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 47; Emma Lundgren Jörum, *Beyond Syria's Borders: A History of Territorial Disputes in the Middle East*, vol. 155, Library of Modern Middle East Studies ; (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 23; and Fred H. Lawson, "Westphalian Sovereignty and the Emergence of the Arab States System: The Case of Syria," *The International History Review* 22, no. 3 (2000): 529–56.

and instead ruled in favor of Israeli territorial claims, or at a minimum failed to reach consensus on the matter, thereby opening the door for *de facto* Israeli control over said territory. When the UN system failed to uphold its resolutions or safeguard Syria’s perceived legal-based sovereign claims, the Syrian government relied on force to preserve its desired territorial holdings. However, Syria’s militarily weaker position vis-à-vis Israel rendered a long-term reliance on force impractical, and as such, when the limits of violence were reached, Syria returned to UN political engagement. The logic of this framework is laid out visually in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1. Syrian-UN Strategic Framework, 1945-1955.**

(Note: the United Nations functions as the key mechanism in Syria’s sovereign pursuits)

The logic of this framework suggests that during the time period under study, the Syrian government’s chief political objective on the international stage was the pursuit and preservation of sovereign claims. To achieve this objective, the Syrian Government relied primarily on the

United Nations as its key political tool to gain international backing for its sovereign territorial claims. When this pivotal mechanism failed to help Syria achieve its sovereign claims, the Syrian Government relied on force to maintain its territorial stakes. The strategic use of violence served two important purposes. First, it allowed Syria to impose control over territory it believed it could legally claim. Violence was thus Syria's preferred alternative negotiating tool in the absence of an internationally sanctioned mechanism to recognize its claims or at least hold its sovereign claims in abeyance pending a final settlement of borders. Secondly, if the United Nations failed to see the importance of Syria's sovereign claims, by escalating tensions via armed conflict, the UN would be forced to address the situation and thus grant Syria another opportunity to make its case. As such, strategic violence (even Syria's limited capabilities) could temporarily preserve its sovereign claims and also force the United Nations to reconsider the question of sovereignty in Syria's disputes.

Regarding the terms *sovereignty* and *sovereign pursuits* used throughout this study, a brief explanation of each is warranted. In terms of sovereignty, which F.H. Hinsley notes is closely linked to the concept of the state, this study takes the standard definition as provided by Weber who described the state or sovereign as the institution that holds a monopoly on violence and exclusive political authority within a defined territory.<sup>32</sup> For Syria during this time period, the ideal situation is gaining "external,"<sup>33</sup> or UN, recognition of that sovereignty. What this means in practical terms for this study is that wherever Syria desired sovereignty, it aimed to gain UN authorization to assume full control over that territory. In the absence of full recognition

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<sup>32</sup> See, Max Weber, "IV. Politics as a Vocation" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. (London: Routledge, 1991) 66-92; and Francis H. Hinsley, *Sovereignty*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, "The Social Construction of State Sovereignty" in *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*, ed. by Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 2.

of sovereignty over Syria's desired territory, officials in Damascus during this period were willing to accept at a minimum, a form of international legal sovereignty that would at least recognize Syrian territorial claims while preserving the area's juridical independence until final negotiations on borders could be concluded.<sup>34</sup>

In practical terms, what specific territory did Syrian diplomats hope to gain sovereign control over via UN engagement and why? As detailed throughout this study, after gaining independence, the key territory that Syrian diplomats and military forces sought sovereign control over was the land adjacent to Syria's southwestern frontier along the east bank of the Jordan River running southward through Lake Tiberias. In specific terms, this pursuit often took the form of a struggle over the Demilitarized Zone (or DMZ) in Palestine established after the 1948 War. Known as Israel's War of Independence or as *al-Nakba* ("the catastrophe") to the Arab side of the battle, the 1948 War was a war fought between Jewish and Arab forces over control of Mandatory Palestine following the withdrawal of British forces from the territory. After losing the war, the Arab states, with UN encouragement, concluded Armistice Agreements with Israel aimed at separating their respective forces to prevent further conflict. As the last of the Arab states to do so, Syrian officials negotiated an Armistice Agreement in July 1949, agreeing to withdraw its forces from areas it captured during the war in exchange for its sovereign claims to DMZ being "held in abeyance" by the international community. The Syrian government hoped to achieve full sovereign control over the entire DMZ which comprised three separate sectors: a small northern zone between Banias and Kibbutz Dan; a larger central sector running southward along the eastern bank of Lake Hula opening up into a westward pointing triangle south of the lake towards the no longer extant Arab village Kirad al-Baqqara near

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<sup>34</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 10–11.

Mishmar HaYarden narrowing south-east towards the east bank of the Jordan River; finally, the third and largest sector begins where the Jordan River pours into Lake Tiberias from the north, running along the east bank of the lake to a depth of two to three kilometers beginning near the site of the former Arab village of Nuqeib just north of Ein Gev, all the way south towards the Yarmouk River as far east as the former Arab village of al-Hamma and west just south of Lake Tiberias. Syrian officials struggled in earnest to maintain its sovereign claims over such territory through UN engagement and when that approach failed, via armed force.

Given that this study emphasizes Syrian clashes with Israel over water resources along the Jordan River, this work naturally speaks to the question of hydro-politics. As the smallest major watershed in the region, compared to the Nile in Egypt and the Euphrates in Syria, the Jordan River has been the site of numerous clashes and has been described as the most likely flashpoint for future water clashes.<sup>35</sup> This vital resource is seen as an essential cornerstone to any future peace settlement in the region as it will undoubtedly feature as a necessary part of any continued Israeli development or future Palestinian state capable of absorbing a large refugee population.<sup>36</sup> The importance of water in state-building projects, such as the state of Israel, has led some within the field to speak of a hydraulic imperative, meaning that states will forcibly seize control of vital water resources and territory to meet their national water needs.<sup>37</sup>

However, while it may be true that control over the water resources along the Jordan River were of vital importance to Israel's state building project, the same rationale for access to

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<sup>35</sup> Joyce Starr and Daniel Stoll, eds., *The Politics of Scarcity: Water in the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 10.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Aaron T. Wolf, *Hydropolitics along the Jordan River: Scarce Water and Its Impact on the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Tokyo, New York: United Nations University Press, 1995), 3; and Alwyn Rouyer, *Turning Water into Politics: The Water Issue in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000), 1–2.

<sup>37</sup> Fida Nasrallah, "Middle Eastern Waters: The Hydraulic Imperative," *Middle East International*, April 27, 1990, 21–22.

the Jordan could hardly apply to Syrian officials who possessed many more water resources throughout their country. Instead, as historians like Donald Neff have argued,<sup>38</sup> this study shows that Syrian officials clashed with Israel over such resources in pursuit of its sovereign claims to territory along its pre-colonial and late Ottoman boundaries between Syria and Palestine. Whereas Israeli diplomats appealed to the international community to support their economic development by recognizing their de facto control of the water resources, Syrian diplomats during this period remained focused on maintaining sovereign claims on the basis of their legal rights enshrined under the 1949 Armistice Agreement.

Answering the question of why Syrian diplomats desired such territory is a more challenging question to answer. As shown above, several competing ideologies like Pan-Arabism, SSNP ideals, and an Arab unity through the existing state structures were in circulation when Syrian officials secured their country's independence after World War II. However, none of these ideas adequately capture the practical pursuits of territory on the east bank of the Jordan River that Syrian officials sought in earnest in this period. Absent definitive testimony from the historical record, there are two possible explanations for why Syrian officials pursued this territory. The first possibility is that nationalist leaders in Syria, who fought for two and a half decades against French colonial designs, were merely attempting to complete the full roll-back of French and British colonial legacies such as the 7 March 1923 border adjustments between Mandatory Syria and Palestine. Known as the Paulet-Newcombe agreement, this agreement placed the water resources of the Jordan River, Lake Hula and Lake Tiberias within the borders of Mandatory Palestine, while recognizing continued Syrian fishing and navigation rights in

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<sup>38</sup> Donald Neff, "Israel-Syria: Conflict at the Jordan River, 1949-1967," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 4 (1994): 29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538209>.

those waters.<sup>39</sup> This return to the pre-colonial status quo ante is tied to the second possible reason Syria's nationalist leaders pursued sovereign claims in the area. As is shown throughout the paper, many of Syria's nationalist and early post-World War II leaders, particularly Faris al-Khury (1877-1962)—the first Syrian Representative to the United Nations—were reared in the late Ottoman period, during which the late Ottoman boundary between Syria and Palestine was the Jordan River. By advocating a return to a pre-colonial conception of Syria's boundaries between Syria and Palestine, Syrian UN officials advanced an image of Syria's "natural" boundaries in conformity with late Ottoman understandings of that border along the Palestine frontier. As such, these sovereign pursuits can be understood as not only a continuation of the anti-colonial struggle, but also as a personal quest by individuals who sought a return to late Ottoman Syrian boundaries which included the Jordan River.

Ultimately, deciphering the exact factors motivating the territorial policy Syrian diplomats pursued within the halls of the United Nations from 1945 to 1955 will likely continue to be the subject of academic debate. Ideology of political parties, in other words, does not explain Syrian strategic and diplomatic decisions. However, rather than apply one rigid mode of analysis to express Syria's sovereign ambitions, the reality, much like the overlapping and competing political ideologies in circulation at the time, is much more complex. To say that Syria was guided by Pan-Arab or Greater Syrian ambitions does raise important questions when considering Syria's willingness to part ways with Lebanon and the northwestern administrative region of Alexandretta which the French gave to Turkey. However, defining Syria's sovereign ambitions as solely limited to a reduced sovereign entity bequeathed by France, ignores the

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<sup>39</sup> "No. 565. Exchange of Notes Constituting an Agreement Between the British and French Governments Respecting the Boundary Line Between Syria and Palestine from the Mediterranean to El Hamme. Paris March 7, 1923" (League of Nations - Treaty Series, 1924), 372, [http://www.assidmer.net/doc/British-French\\_Boundary\\_Agreement,\\_1923.pdf](http://www.assidmer.net/doc/British-French_Boundary_Agreement,_1923.pdf).

sovereign ambitions of Syria to the demilitarized zone which is the subject of over half of this study. Instead, I propose an alternative category to express Syria's objectives—Pan-Regional sovereignty. By pan-regional sovereignty, I mean that Syria's government officials—whether motivated by Pan-Arabism, Greater/Natural Syria, Syrian nationalism, anti-colonial or late Ottoman aspirations—were not satisfied with the territory they were given after gaining independence. Regardless of how small the territory Syria's government desired from former Mandatory Palestine, they fought politically at the UN and militarily on the battlefield to secure sovereign control over the territory. While some might suggest that Syria's decision to fight for such limited territory was to pay lip service to Arab nationalism or demonstrate a tough stance against Israel, I argue in this dissertation that Syria's decision to fight was directly linked to events at the United Nations as opposed to a response to some ground swell of popular discontent. Whether or not Syria needed a military victory against Israel to appease its populace does not change the fact that its hybrid Pan-Arab/Greater Syrian/Syrian nationalist/Anti-Colonials/Late Ottoman sovereign pursuits extended beyond its borders on behalf of fellow "Arabs" in "southern Syria".

### **Methodology and Sources**

This study is a political history of the Syrian government's strategic foreign policy pursuits within the United Nations from 1945 to 1955. As such, it represents the view from Damascus looking out, and does not analyze how Syria's engagement at the United Nations served its domestic political interests. In keeping with the premise advanced by international organization specialist John Trent, this work adopts Trent's suggestion that, "for most states, most of the time, the United Nations is primarily an instrument of foreign policy to protect

interests, enhance influence, or achieve specific goals.”<sup>40</sup> As noted above, the central argument in this study is that from 1945 to 1955 the Syrian Government was chiefly concerned with leveraging the United Nations to achieve its sovereign pursuits—first securing a locally sovereign and independent Syria, and then pursuing its territorial claims in “southern Syria”. When its UN strategy failed to achieve its desired results, the Syrian government leveraged armed force as a tool to preserve its sovereign claims.

To make the case that Syria struggled for sovereignty at the United Nations from 1945 to 1955, I provide a detailed historical analysis of the Syrian government’s interactions within the international and local United Nations machinery. At the international level, the two main UN political organs examined are the UN Security Council and UN General Assembly both founded on 24 October 1945 with the signing of the United Nations Charter. According to the UN Charter, the UN Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, has the authority to determine the existence of a threat to peace or act of aggression, and can authorize the application of sanctions and armed force to restore peace if deemed necessary. Its ranks consist of the permanent “big five” members (United States, Russia [formerly the Soviet Union], China, France and the United Kingdom) and ten non-permanent members elected to two-year terms.<sup>41</sup> During this study period, Syria not only held a two-year term on the Security Council but participated in several debates as a party to disputes with Israel over sovereignty. For its part, the General Assembly is the most representative body with all UN countries members of the organization and constitutes the main deliberative body for

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<sup>40</sup> John Trent, “Foreign Policy and the United Nations: National Interest in the Era of Global Politics,” in *The United Nations System: The Policies of Member States*, ed. Chadwick Alger, Gene Lyons, and John Trent (Tokyo, New York, Paris: United Nations University Press, 1995), 466.

<sup>41</sup> “United Nations Security Council,” accessed April 19, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/>.

UN policymaking.<sup>42</sup> The General Assembly's resolution on the Partition of Palestine in 1947 is featured extensively in this study, as well as Syria's numerous attempts to preserve pan-regional sovereign claims in Palestine. Of note, in addition to Syria, the following Arab countries gained membership in the United Nations during this study while the Secretary General of the Arab League gained UN observer status in 1950<sup>43</sup>: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia in 1945; Yemen in 1947; and Jordan and Libya in 1955. At the local level, examination is also given to the Syrian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission established in 1949—a UN observer organization designed to monitor violations of the Syrian-Israeli Armistice Agreement and settle disputes raised by Syria and Israel's attached representatives. In each of these three relevant UN institutions, Syria's sovereign pursuits are extensively detailed and analyzed.

Due to the present study's focus on Syria's interaction within the United Nations, a comprehensive evaluation of UN Security Council, General Assembly and Mixed Armistice Commission reporting involving Syria was conducted. This entailed analyzing thousands of pages of Syrian-associated UN resolutions, letters, meetings, speeches and debates. While the present study is limited to an examination of Syria's direct sovereign pursuits at home and in Palestine, the conclusions presented in this study are also the result of a comprehensive political analysis of Syria's interactions on a wide range of issues including: support to independence movements in the Arab world and elsewhere, support for Palestinian refugees, maintaining a principled position in support of the admission of all peace-loving applicants to the UN, Cold War tensions and emergent neutralist power blocs, the Korean War, and other Arab disputes with Israel. In each of these separate topics, Syria's UN delegation continued to champion the right of

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<sup>42</sup> "General Assembly of the United Nations," accessed April 19, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/>.

<sup>43</sup> "477 (V). Permanent Invitation to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States to Attend Sessions of the General Assembly" (United Nations General Assembly, November 1, 1950), 74, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/060/75/IMG/NR006075.pdf?OpenElement>.

states to sovereignty and independence, often drawing parallels between its own experiences and other countries. Although not the subject of this present study, the case of UN deliberations on the Korean War (1950-1953) for instance provide an interesting example of how the Syrian UN delegation sought to draw parallels between the North and South Korean DMZ to issues along its own DMZ with Israel, possibly to set UN legal precedents that it could leverage in its own sovereign pursuits.

Relying on United Nations sources for this study has several benefits. For one, the United Nations records represent a more or less complete and largely accessible account of all of Syria's interactions within the international organization. For scholars of Syria's post-war history, this consistency of source material offers a refreshing alternative to the often fractious, scattered, suppressed or missing sources that mirrored the disruptive political environment of this ten-year period when Syria experienced five major changes of governments owed largely to military coups. With one set of consistent and abundant source material I am able to see through the chaos of this turbulent period and highlight interesting continuity of sovereign pursuits during this period of extensive change. The second major benefit of relying on UN source material is that it offers an unedited, contemporaneous account of the Syrian government's official position on debates at the UN. Rather than suffer from hindsight bias, such meticulous record keeping on the part of the UN allows for a more accurate assessment of events as they transpired. Thirdly, UN sources also are unique in that they are often accompanied by independent UN investigations into disputes as well as contain the simultaneous opinions of events held by other countries. This allows for a comprehensive picture of what the UN disputes meant to other members, and what they meant to the Syrian government.

In addition to the extensive reliance on UN source material, United States diplomatic and intelligence reporting as well as Arabic primary sources were evaluated to corroborate the concept of Syria's active and strategic engagement with the United Nations. At the end of World War II, the United States, as a country with no colonial legacy in the Middle East, was viewed by Syria and others in the region as a potential neutral arbiter in the post-war international relations. As such, the Syrian government regularly engaged with U.S. officials during this period and U.S. reporting not only corroborates the importance of Syria's sovereign pursuits but occasionally lends credence to the validity of Syria's legal arguments. Primary Arabic sources, including memoirs and biographies of individuals directly involved in the Syrian UN delegation's work, have served to confirm the baseline argument of this study that the United Nations was a strategic arena where Syria's UN officials actively engaged to advance its objectives.

Critics of this study may point to the limited reliance on local media sources as undermining the strength of the central thesis, and as such I wish to openly address some of those critiques. After sampling Syrian newspapers at various archives, I came to two key conclusions on the potential utility or drawbacks of including such sources in this present study. First, issues of gaps in Syrian newspaper holdings aside—in part due to state bans on newspapers such as Adib Shishakli's media suppression policy in 1951—media reporting on Syria's UN activity was largely geared towards popular consumption and local politics. In fact, Syria's UN activity was covered quite frequently in local media often in the form a short front-page news item. In terms of its utility to this study, such reporting rarely offered anything substantively different from the details found within UN documents and carried little to no analysis. However, given the extent of Syrian news coverage on the UN—particularly showcasing the prominent role and initiatives Syria's UN delegates put forth on the international stage—a companion study to this dissertation

on the strategic role of the UN in domestic Syria politics is warranted. Regarding the potential drawbacks of including extensive local media coverage in this study, I find that demagogic language used in news stories discussing Israel—Syria’s chief rival at the UN—detracts from a soberer analysis of Syria’s official UN statements on its strategy vis-à-vis Israel. Syria’s media during this time has been described as the most hostile to Israel of the Arab States, leading some scholars to conclude that the Syrian government’s actions were caused by a visceral hatred of the state of Israel or carried out to appease the angry masses consuming such vitriolic media. Again, although such reporting on Israel is critical when unpacking the role of the UN in Syrian domestic politics, this study demonstrates that Syria’s political and military actions are closely aligned to the timing of debates at the United Nations—debates that are not dictated by Syria’s newspapers. As such, while included when relevant, Syria’s extensive newspaper coverage on UN activity is worthy of an entirely separate analysis as a companion to this present study.

## **Chapter Outline**

This study is broken down into two parts with three chapters devoted to each section. The first part details the rise and fall of Syria’s early positive achievements at the United Nations from 1945 to 1949. Chapter 1 details Syria’s major and arguably most important victories at the United Nations in 1945 and 1946—international recognition of its independence and sovereign control over its territory. In it I argue that the United Nations, rather than any single country, was instrumental in bringing about Syrian independence in 1945 and ushering in the withdrawal of foreign British and French troops in 1946. Chapter 2 follows with a discussion on the erosion of Syria’s confidence in the UN over the course of 1947, particularly as a result of the UN’s decision to partition Palestine. This happened, I argue, not as a result of Arab or Syrian incompetence or inability to advance valid legal arguments during UN debates, but rather due to

the international community's desire to find a solution to the plight of the European Jewish community following the holocaust. Failing to secure its pan-regional sovereign ambitions in Palestine through UN engagement, in Chapter 3 I argue that Syria went to war in 1948 to preserve its pan-regional sovereign claims. In doing so, Chapter 3 showcases the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework in action by laying out the sovereignty calculus behind Syria's decision to go to war in Palestine in 1948 and subsequently sign an UN-brokered Armistice Agreement with Israel in 1949. The Syrian-Israeli Armistice Agreement signed in 1949 is also analyzed and marks the turning point of this study discussed in Part II.

Part II of this study details the Syrian government's dual pronged approach of UN political engagement and armed force in pursuit of its strategic sovereign objectives from 1950 to 1955. Central to the Syrian Government's political strategy during this period is the introduction of a new legal document, the UN brokered Syrian-Israeli Armistice Agreement signed in July 1949. This document, in addition to the Syrian government's long-standing reliance on the UN Charter and other international resolutions, becomes the primary legal mechanism leveraged by the state in its UN engagement to address three separate major disputes. Chapter 4 lays out the context and UN discussions of Syria's first major Armistice complaint against Israel's decision to begin draining Lake Hula in 1951. I argue that, counter to claims that the Lake Hula drainage project was purely for economic reasons, the Hula drainage project threatened Syrian territorial claims in the central DMZ and therefore the Syrian government leveraged diplomatic and armed means to preserve its claims. Here again, the Syrian-UN strategic framework plays out as Syria leverages political engagement and force to maintain its sovereign claims within the Demilitarized Zone. Chapter 5 recounts Syria's next major Armistice complaint against Israel's decision to divert the Jordan Canal in 1953 from the DMZ to support irrigation projects across

Israel. Again, I argue that the Jordan Canal diversion project similarly threatened Syrian territorial claims within the DMZ and so Syrian diplomats resisted such initiatives. This chapter critically underscores the idea that Syria's use of violence was strategic. Unlike other disputes discussed in this study, with political momentum on its side during the course of these UN debates, Syrian armed forces did not fire a single shot to preserve its sovereign claims in the DMZ. Finally, Chapter 6 recounts the road to Israel's cross-border attack into Syria in late 1955 in response to disputes over sovereign control of Lake Tiberias. Here as in all the cases presented in this study, I argue that preserving Syrian sovereign claims to territory, this time within Lake Tiberias, was the paramount objective of the Syrian government's diplomatic and military maneuvers during this period. Following Part II of this study, I will conclude with an assessment of Syria's first ten years with the UN, some thoughts on the contributing factors to Syria's successes and failures, as well as some thoughts on what Syria's early experience might mean for subsequent years. Overall what this study demonstrates is that Syrian political success within the United Nations during these first ten years was not the sole result of its claims being legally valid. Rather, it was the confluence of many factors, including great power support, concerns about the UN's credibility, and Israel's international standing, that contributed to periods of Syrian successes and failures in its pursuit of territorial claims in Palestine.

## **Historical Background**

Throughout its history, the term "Syria" has been used interchangeably to refer to both a geographic region and a political entity. Coming into usage in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, the name Syria is widely accepted by scholars to originate from the Greek word *Sýroi*, itself derived

from *Aššūrāyu* referring to the ancient Mesopotamian empire Assyria.<sup>44</sup> During the Hellenistic era, Syria was defined geographically by what Alexander the Great referred to as “*Eber-Nari*” (Across the River) or the lands west of the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. The first known use of the term Syria to refer to a geo-political entity occurred in 64 BCE when Pompey of Rome conquered the areas south of Asia-Minor, north of the Sinai and Arabian deserts, west of the Syrian Desert, and unified the region under one administrative unit. The Byzantine Empire would continue to subsequently refer to this region as Syria.<sup>45</sup>

Following the advent of Islam and the early Arab conquests of the seventh century, “Syria” was incorporated into the new Muslim polity and was henceforth referred to as *bilād al-Shām* or “the lands to the left”. Bilad al-Sham, while still referred to as Syria in western sources, was divided into four military *ajnad* or districts by the second Caliph Umar in 639 CE. This division of Bilad al-Sham into the districts of Damascus, Homs, Jordan, and Palestine remained largely unchanged—with the exception of an additional fifth district of Qinnasirin later replaced by Aleppo—until the coming of the Crusaders following the fall of Edessa in 1098.<sup>46</sup> During this period, Damascus became one of the major centers of the known world, serving as the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750) which stretched from the Atlantic Ocean and Pyrenees to the Himalayas and from the Nile to Oxus Rivers. Bilad al-Sham would come under the rule of the Abbasid Caliphate following their successful revolt against the Umayyads and would continue to be administered as under Umayyad rule until the late eleventh century.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, “The Name of Syria in Ancient and Modern Usage,” in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011), 17–19.

<sup>45</sup> Pipes, *Greater Syria*, 13.

<sup>46</sup> Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, “The Name of Syria in Ancient and Modern Usage,” 21.

<sup>47</sup> Tabitha Petran, *Syria*. (London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1972), 36–37.

In comparison to the long narrative arc of Muslim control of Bilad al-Sham, Crusader rule over Syria from 1099 to 1265 was short-lived. During that time however, the Crusaders reorganized Syria into the Outremer states of the County of Edessa, the Principality of Antioch, the County of Tripoli, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Following the re-conquest of Bilad al-Sham, initiated by Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, the Ayyubid Dynasty was soon replaced by the Mamluk Sultanate. The Mamluk Sultanate, who ruled over Bilad al-Sham from 1250 to 1516 reverted the administrative division of the region back to the Abbasid-Fatimid system, dividing Syria into six provinces: Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Tripoli, Safad, and al-Karak.<sup>48</sup>

Following Selim I's victory in the Battle of Marj Dabiq in 1516, Bilad al-Sham was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. Under early Ottoman rule, Bilad al-Sham was divided into three large *wilayat* or provinces each broken down into smaller *sanajiq* or districts. The three provinces of Bilad al-Sham at this time included Damascus having ten districts, Aleppo with nine districts, and Tripoli with five districts. A century later, a fourth province was added, the province of Sidon, which contained three of its own districts.<sup>49</sup> This new administrative division would remain largely the same until the year 1800.<sup>50</sup>

During its four hundred year-long rule over Bilad al-Sham, Ottoman administration of Syria can be broken down into roughly four phases. The first phase of Ottoman rule in Syria was largely decentralized and limited to concerns of maintaining Ottoman dominance, tax collection, keeping the hajj pilgrimage routes safe and open, and maintaining the status quo. This phase included Ottoman efforts to regularly rotate local leaders in and out to ensure their loyalty remained towards the state and that they did not derive their authority from an independent

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<sup>48</sup> Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, "The Name of Syria in Ancient and Modern Usage," 21–22.

<sup>49</sup> Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Abdul Latif. Tibawi, *A Modern History of Syria, Including Lebanon and Palestine* (London: Macmillan, 1969), 23.

power base of their own making.<sup>51</sup> In many ways the Ottoman defeat at the Battle of Vienna in 1683 marked the start of the second phase, ushering in continual Ottoman retreat from territorial holdings along its frontiers. Faced with numerous military defeats in the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire was forced to sign various capitulation treaties granting outside powers and their local, primarily Christian, clients economic and political privileges unavailable to the majority Muslim populace.<sup>52</sup> Concerned with continued loss of territory, the Ottoman central authority at this time opted to decentralize power to a greater extent, giving rise to local strong men or notables,<sup>53</sup> like the al-Azm family in Damascus,<sup>54</sup> who were either Ottoman governors or local leaders and who would continue to have disproportionate influence even after the end of the Ottoman order.<sup>55</sup> This delegation of central authority and limited distribution of financial resources to the Ottoman provinces often resulted in excessive exploitation of locals for tax revenue and crop collection, and occasionally violent coercion against frustrated locals such as under the rule of Ahmad Pasha “al-Jazzar” (the butcher) from 1777 to 1804.<sup>56</sup>

In response to increased European encroachment, the Ottoman Empire opted to modernize its military, civil, economic and social institutions along western lines. As ambitious as such efforts were in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, constant fighting along the frontiers made it difficult for the central authorities to establish firm control in the interior regions like Bilad al-Sham, and the area remained largely under local notable and temporarily

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<sup>51</sup> Moshe. Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840-1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society*. (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1968), 4.

<sup>52</sup> Petran, *Syria.*, 42.

<sup>53</sup> Philip Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus, 1860-1920* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), ix.

<sup>54</sup> Abdul-Karim Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus, 1723-1783*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), 77–94.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Sluglett, “Municipalities in the Late Ottoman Empire,” in *Syria and Bilad Al-Sham under Ottoman Rule: Essays in Honour of Abdul-Karim Rafeq* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 531–42.

<sup>56</sup> Dick. Douwes, *The Ottomans in Syria: A History of Justice and Oppression* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 213.

under Egyptian central control until 1840.<sup>57</sup> The third phase of Ottoman control over Syria can thus be said to start with the Ottoman modernization efforts under the *tanzimat* or “reorganization” period from 1839 to 1876. These new reforms and their emphasis on adopting western governing and administrative practices led to the emergence of a new civil servant class that was valued for their knowledge of western laws and languages as opposed to knowledge of Islamic law and the traditional Ottoman court languages. The adoption of western legal modes of thinking culminated in 1876 with the signing of a French-style constitution that preserved the powers of the Sultan yet contained a bill of rights and mechanism for elected representatives.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the biggest societal changes to occur for the religiously diverse Bilad al-Sham were the two official Ottoman edicts, the 1839 *Gulhane hatt-i sharif* and 1856 *islahat fermani*. These two documents, brought on in part by the urging of outside powers who continued to demand special treatment for their minority clients, called for equality under the law of all Ottoman subjects—Muslim, Christian, and Jewish alike.<sup>59</sup> However, such initiatives also required changes to trade laws, which brought with it large scale European economic intervention into the empire. France, who built up long-standing concessions for Maronite Christians in the region, developed a special claim to Syria and issued high-interest loans to support local development projects. Deep indebtedness would put Syria in France’s cross-hairs decades later following World War I when the French government was ready to collect in the form of colonial privileges.<sup>60</sup>

European encroachment in the Ottoman Empire also brought with it western educational impulses and philosophies, chief amongst them nationalism. The arrival of western educators and missionaries in the early and mid-nineteenth century for instance, spurred the translation of

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<sup>57</sup> Ma‘oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840-1861*, 11.

<sup>58</sup> Petran, *Syria.*, 49.

<sup>59</sup> Ma‘oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840-1861*, 186.

<sup>60</sup> Petran, *Syria.*, 47–48.

western texts into Arabic and advanced the development of the printing press to make such western works widely accessible. This revival of the Arabic language and gradual increase in literacy spurred an intellectual *nahda* (renaissance) among Syria's educated classes. However, the revival of the Arabic language did not immediately translate into a growing sense of Arab nationalism. Many within Ottoman Syria, even among the new Arab intellectuals continued to find ways of reconciling Arab identity within a broader Ottoman context as did intellectual and educator Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883).<sup>61</sup> Other currents like Syrian nationalism similarly took shape at this time, with the rediscovery of ancient archaeological sites and the spread of ideas teaching the existence of a unique Syrian race by individuals like the Belgian Jesuit missionary and orientalist Henri Lammens (1862-1937).<sup>62</sup>

The fourth and final phase of Ottoman rule over Syria arguably began with the abolition of the 1876 constitution and the Ottoman Empire's rededication to its Islamic traditions. Under the rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (r. 1876-1909), decades of reform and a new constitution failed to stem the continued collapse of the Ottoman Empire's frontier holdings. As such, Abdul Hamid II abolished the constitution in 1878 and reinstated the former Islamic trappings of the state and even oversaw the construction of the Hijaz railway station in Syria to rededicate Ottoman emphasis on traditional concerns such as the maintenance of hajj pilgrimage routes through Syria. Many locals in Syria, cut off from the intellectual pursuits of the elite favored the religious revival of the state and attempts to restore the Sunni community's traditional standing in society.<sup>63</sup> Abdul Hamid II's reign also brought with it the Empire's final reorganization of Bilad al-Sham's boundaries, divided into six regions of *Wilayat Suriya* (the name "Syria")

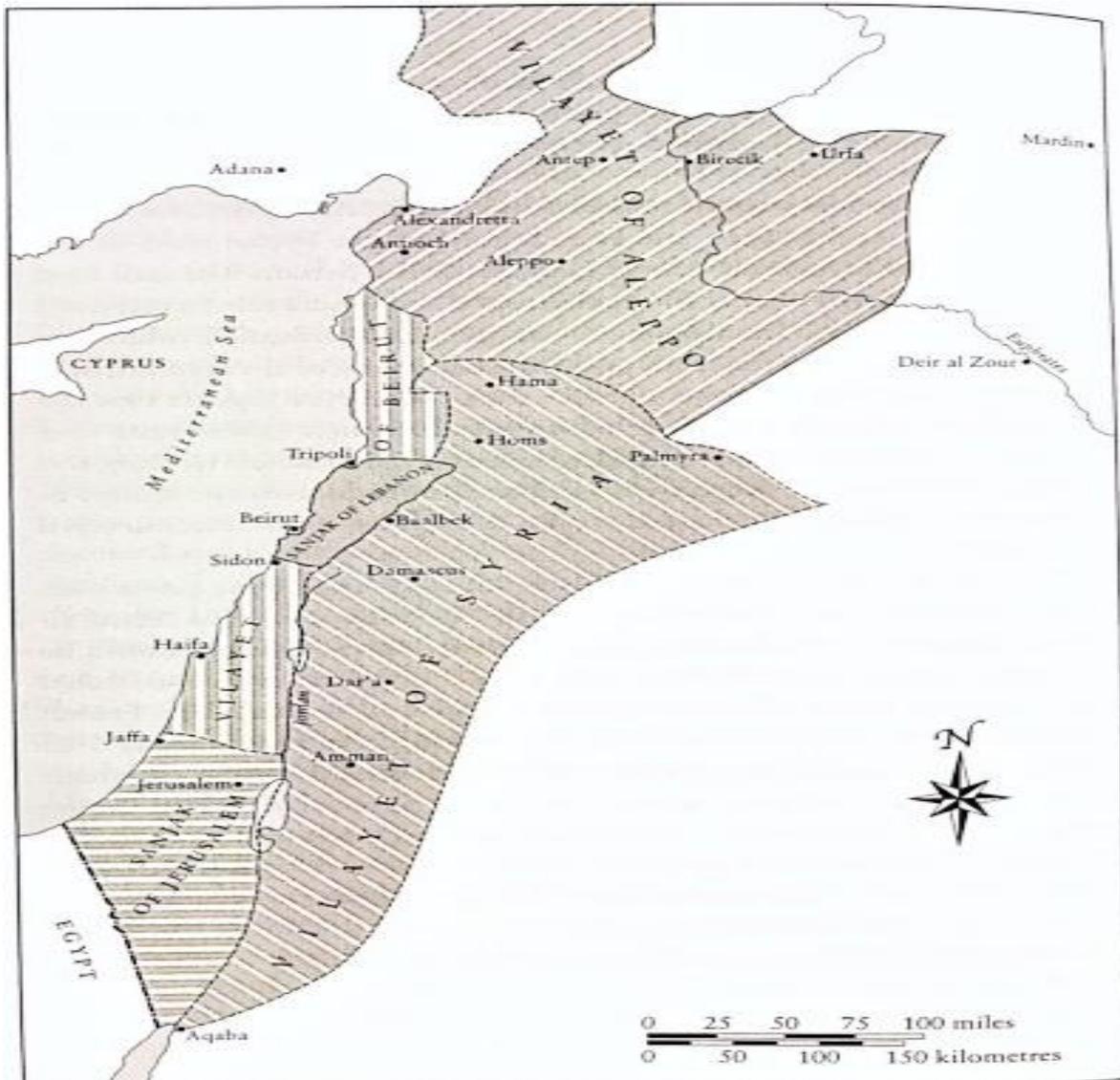
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<sup>61</sup> Stephen Sheehi, "Butrus Al-Bustani: Syria's Ideologue of the Age," in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011), 57–78.

<sup>62</sup> Asher Kaufman, "Henri Lammens and Syrian Nationalism."

<sup>63</sup> Petran, *Syria.*, 51.

resurfacing as an official Ottoman name in 1864) which included the four districts of Damascus, Hama, Hawran, and Kerak; *Wilayat Aleppo*, and *Wilayat Beirut*. This division of Ottoman Syria would remain in place until the end of World War I in 1918.<sup>64</sup> Of note, the separation of Wilayat Syria from Wilayat Beirut by the Jordan River will be of particular importance for Syria's sovereign claims after gaining independence.



**Map 1. Late Ottoman Administrative Division of Greater Syria**

Map from *Syria: A History of the Last Hundred Years* - Copyright © 2014, 2015 by John McHugo. Reprinted by permission of The New Press. [www.thenewpress.com](http://www.thenewpress.com)

<sup>64</sup> Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, "The Name of Syria in Ancient and Modern Usage," 22–23.

Instead of spurring loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, the abolition of the 1876 constitution gave rise to an underground movement of pro-constitutionalists. Syria's intelligentsia took part in the initially underground Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) comprised of supporters in favor of restoring the constitutional monarchy and continuing the modernization efforts of the previous era. Over time the CUP developed into a full-scale political party and merged with the Young Turks who spearheaded the CUP's efforts and actively recruited soldiers of the Ottoman military to its cause. In 1908, the Young Turks staged a revolt against Abdul Hamid II who capitulated under pressure to reinstate the constitution. Following a counterrevolution to reinstate the full authority of Abdul Hamid II, the Young Turks ousted Abdul Hamid II and replaced him with his brother Mehmed V (r. 1909-1918). Sensing the real threat posed by forces loyal to Abdul Hamid and his policies, the Young Turks engaged in a series of Turkification policies in 1909 aimed at solidifying their hold on authority.<sup>65</sup>

Meanwhile, debates over the future of the Arab peoples of the Ottoman Empire continued to develop in earnest, with Syria the hub for political discourse and inquiry. Both in Syria and across the region, a new array of overlapping yet competing ideologies published in books and newspapers spoke at length about the various solutions the Arabs should adopt to address their seemingly weak standing both regionally and globally. Such ideas were advanced by those who championed a more secular Arabism—often by Christians like Bustani and his proteges<sup>66</sup>—, those who continued to support maintaining the Ottoman order—albeit with greater decentralization for the Arab provinces—like Rashid Rida (1865-1935) and Shakib Arslan

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<sup>65</sup> William L. Cleveland and Martin P. Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 4th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 133–43.

<sup>66</sup> Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 274.

(1869-1946),<sup>67</sup> and those who advocated separation from the Turks entirely and the creation of a post-Ottoman and Arab-led Islamic Caliphate like Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1849-1903).<sup>68</sup> New ideas, combined with the spread of western (and western-modeled) educational institutions and increased travel to Europe led to the creation of a new generation of educated elites. Many individuals reared in this period would go on to be the leading voices of Syria's national struggle against French colonial rule, to include Syria's first UN representative Faris al-Khury.<sup>69</sup>

Despite continued Arab support for maintaining the Ottoman order, the Turkification policies of the Young Turk movement and the unequal implementation of 1876 constitution gave added momentum to the nascent Arab national consciousness brewing over the previous century. Two prominent Arab political movements that rose during this time were *al-Fatat* ("The Youth") and *al-Ahd* ("The Covenant"), the former drawing members from the notable Syrian families and European educated Syrians while the latter came from army officers mainly from Iraq.<sup>70</sup> The Arab currents that arose, although initially in favor of constructing a bi-national empire, soon gravitated towards independence as the Young Turks continued to prioritize state building around the Turkish identity, placing Turkish officials in positions of power. As Europeans continued to encroach on Muslim lands, the Italians seizing control of Libya for instance at this time, the Arabs of Syria found themselves at a cross-roads. Should they hold on to a rump Ottoman Empire designed for Turks or seize control of leadership for the Arabs at the opportune moment—World War I provided that opening.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Albert Hourani, 301.

<sup>68</sup> Albert Hourani, 271.

<sup>69</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 23.

<sup>70</sup> John McHugo, *Syria: A History of the Last Hundred Years* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2015), 50–51.

<sup>71</sup> Petran, *Syria.*, 52.

With the outbreak of a world war in 1914 pitting the Triple Entente (Britain, France, Russia) against the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary), the Ottomans could not turn down the opportunity to strike at their longstanding Russian rival. The four-year long war had devastating consequences for Syria, bringing famine, and widespread loss of life compounded by Entente naval blockades, drought, and a plague of locusts.<sup>72</sup> With the Ottoman decision to go to war wreaking havoc on an increasingly disconnected Arab populace, the formation of an Arab-Entente military alliance served as a catalyst for the Arab national movement. In July 1915, Sharif Husayn—a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and the Ottoman Amir of Mecca—began a series of negotiations with the British High Commissioner in Egypt Sir Henry McMahon, aimed at securing a post-war independent Arab polity over all of Arabia, Syria and Iraq, in exchange for supporting the Entente war effort against the Ottomans. Subject to ambiguous British language, the Husayn-McMahon correspondence (July 1915-March 1916) included British promises to recognize a post-War Arab political entity whose final borders would be subject to future negotiation. On 10 June 1916, Husayn's tribal forces began the Arab Revolt, and within two years' time his son Amir Faysal (backed by British forces the likes of T.E. Lawrence) captured Damascus and began establishing an Arab Kingdom over Syria in accordance with presumed British promises made to his father.<sup>73</sup> Syria thus was the seat of the first Arab government, and became a hub for Pan-Arab discourse where politicians and intellectuals from across the Levant including Palestinians, trans-Jordanians, Lebanese, and Iraqis met.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 19–23.

<sup>73</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 149–60.

<sup>74</sup> Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, 141–46.

Despite British promises of an independent Arab polity over the Ottoman Empire's Arabic-speaking lands, Entente powers had other territorial designs for the region. Of the two Entente powers with long-standing geo-political interests in the region, the British and French hoped to capitalize on the Ottoman collapse to preserve their economic interests and regional dominance. In contravention to promises made to Sharif Husayn of Mecca, the British and French devised an arrangement known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, granting Britain direct administrative control over southern Mesopotamia and a large stretch of "indirect" control from Palestine up to Kirkuk, while the French gained direct control over the Syrian coast from Lebanon up to Anatolia and "indirect" control over the rest of Syria. The British also engaged in double deal with leaders of the Zionist movement in the form of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 wherein British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour pledged Britain's support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine in a letter to Lord Rothschild. By World War I's end, the Ottoman Empire was largely divided by the Allied Powers and would fundamentally restructure and solidify the nature of Bilad al-Sham's centuries-old fluid borders.<sup>75</sup>

In the aftermath of World War I, the Allied victors established an intergovernmental organization in 1920 called the League of Nations with the stated purpose of achieving international peace and security. This new organization, which was the predecessor to the United Nations, determined that part of the process of establishing world peace was governing the territory lost by Germany and the Ottoman Empire to the Allied powers during the war. The League of Nations thus enshrined the mandate system in Article 22 of the League's Covenant granting authorization to Allied members to govern the former Axis territories until such people were deemed capable of self-government. Given its long-standing involvement and ties to clients

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<sup>75</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 161–63.

in Syria and Lebanon, France was granted a mandate by the League of Nations to administer that portion of Bilad al-Sham.<sup>76</sup>

The decision by the League of Nations to impose French rule was flatly rejected by aspiring nationalists in Syria. Not only did the French mandate constitute a breach of western promises in support of Arab independence but it replaced the Ottoman Empire with an even more unrepresentative system of western and un-Islamic government. Rejecting France's externally derived authority, Arab forces in Syria loyal to Amir Faysal resisted, but were ultimately defeated in the Battle of Maysalun in July 1920. Resistance to the French would continue over the subsequent years, most notably in the form of a localized Druze revolt that devolved into a nationwide armed rebellion from 1925 to 1927. The failure of the armed revolt left a deep impression on Syria's nationalist leadership—Syria's first UN representative Faris al-Khury no exception—and convinced them of the importance of diplomacy and negotiations. This ushered in a period of “honorable cooperation” with French Mandatory authorities that would largely continue until the outbreak of World War II.<sup>77</sup> Of note, during early British and French negotiations on borders between their respective mandates over Palestine and Syria, the two sides abolished the Ottoman administrative divisions and established the Paulet-Newcombe line in 1923, demarcating the frontier between the two sides in a move that situated Lake Tiberias, the Jordan River to the north and Lake Hula within Mandatory Palestine. This British and French innovation would serve as a major point of contention when Syria's independent leadership sought to reconstitute Syria's “natural” boundaries along the Jordan River.

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<sup>76</sup> “The Covenant of the League of Nations,” The Avalon Project, accessed May 15, 2018, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp).

<sup>77</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 539.

After two and a half decades of colonial rule, Syria's nationalist leadership finally gained independence at the end of World War II. In accordance with the Yalta Communiqué signed by the leading Allied nations, Syria agreed to join the war effort against the Axis powers, thereby ensuring its membership in the United Nations and with that, recognition of its independence by the international community. Of note, Lebanon which was also a part of the French mandate followed suit and gained independence along with Syria as a separate and independent state. Largely untested at direct governance and, with no foreign entity to blame, Syria's nationalist leadership struggled early on to manage the affairs of their nascent state. Their mismanagement of the 1948 war effort against Israel including a scandal involving dismal quality army food rations, spurred widespread resentment with the traditional leadership in power for decades who seemed to feel entitled to their position of power by virtue of their single achievement of independence. In 1949, the first military coup in post-war Arab world brought about a disruption to the long-standing "politics of notables" and introduced greater military involvement in state politics. The man who orchestrated the coup, Brigadier General Husni al-Zaim (1894-1949) was a long-standing military officer of Kurdish origin who served in the late Ottoman army and the subsequent French-controlled army in Syria before becoming the Chief of Staff of the Syrian military during the 1948 war. Lasting only four months in power, al-Zaim was ousted by his second in command Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi (1896-1950), another long-standing military officer from the late Ottoman era who supported the SSNP's Greater Syria ideology and clashed with al-Zaim after the latter extradited SSNP leader Antun Saadeh to Lebanese authorities for execution. Al-Hinnawi's SSNP co-conspirator and junior military officer Adib al-Shishakli (1909-1964) in turn staged the third coup of the year, ousting al-Hinnawi over the latter's push to

unify Syria with the Hashemites in Iraq—a move al-Shishakli strongly rejected.<sup>78</sup> Al-Shishakli's rule from 1949 to 1954 would bring a period of relative political stability to the Syrian state and with it the continued development of political ideologies like Pan-Arabism and Greater Syrian nationalism. In 1954, to avoid the potential outbreak of war in Syria, Shishakli stepped down, and the reins of power once again returned to civilian leadership for a time under Khalid al-Azm (1903-1965). Khalid al-Azm, who hailed from a prominent Damascene family, was the son of a wealthy Ottoman aristocrat who served as Minister of Religious Affairs for the former empire while Khalid himself was a leading figure in the nationalist struggle against the French. Khalid al-Azm would continue to serve on and off as Syria's Prime Minister for a total of six times over the course of his political career.<sup>79</sup> Despite this early period of profound political upheaval on the domestic front, within the halls of the United Nations, Syria's leadership pursued a policy of relative continuity: the pursuit of sovereignty and territorial claims to lands in “southern Syria.”

What follows is the start of that Syrian diplomatic engagement with the United Nations towards the end of World War II. Pursuing its independence and sovereign claims through the United Nations would become a cornerstone piece of the Syrian government's diplomatic strategy over the subsequent decade. Both the positive and negative experiences of Syrian diplomats with the United Nations would have a profound impact on the course of its pursuits as it leveraged a combined strategy of diplomacy and violence in its struggle for sovereignty and territorial claims in Palestine.

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<sup>78</sup> Sami M. Moubayed, *Steel & Silk: Men and Women Who Shaped Syria 1900-2000*, Bridge between the Cultures (Seattle, WA: Cune, 2006), 336–37.

<sup>79</sup> Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958*, 132–47.

## **Part I: 1945 – 1949**

The following section will recount the rise and fall of the Syrian government's initial optimism that the United Nations could serve as a consistently reliable tool to safeguard Syria's sovereign interests. Beginning with the Syrian government's accepted request in 1945 to join the ranks of the international community as an independent and sovereign state, the following chapters outline how the Syrian government sought to build on this momentum by formally securing independence and the withdrawal of foreign troops from its country in 1946. While the Syrian government's UN successes would continue in early 1947 with the election of the Syrian state to the UN Security Council, this positive trend soon began to reverse. Hoping to work towards long-term Arab unification and regain territory along the River Jordan, the UN's decision to partition Palestine in 1947 between Arabs and Jews dealt a major blow to Damascus' confidence in the international system. This development would ultimately result in the 1948 War between Israel and its neighbors. By 1949, the Syrian government negotiated an Armistice Agreement with Israel which maintained that sovereignty over the territory controlled by Syria during the 1948 War would remain in abeyance until a final status solution on borders is reached by the two signatories to the agreement. Part II looks further into the new dynamic of Syrian-UN engagement brought on by the institution of a new Armistice Agreement.

This section also puts to test the Syrian-UN strategic framework proposed in the introduction. That framework suggests that from 1945 to 1955 the Syrian government leveraged the United Nations in pursuit of sovereignty and territorial claims in Palestine or "southern Syria". When UN engagement failed to secure Syria's strategic objectives, the Syrian government opted for war to preserve its territorial claims. However, given the Syrian government's military inferiority vis-à-vis Israel, war similarly had its limits and when such a

point was reached the Syrian government returned to UN engagement. Part I of this study demonstrates this framework in action perfectly by showing how Syria avoided the use of force until the UN sanctioned a situation in Palestine that threatened its sovereign interests. Once Syria had exhausted its military options, holding out as the last Arab state to sign an agreement with Israel, officials in Damascus only then opted to negotiate an Armistice Agreement that would at a minimum safeguard the status quo—namely Syrian territorial claims in Palestine. Part I of this study concludes with a brief overview of the Armistice Agreement and its implications on the course of events discussed at length in Part II.

## Chapter 1: Securing Syrian Sovereignty and Independence Through UN Engagement

### Intro Argument

In 1945, the creation of the United Nations—an international organization formed to maintain global peace and security based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all members—proved to be a profound opportunity for Syrian nationalists to achieve their long elusive goal of independence. In the decades following World War I, when French rule over Syria was enshrined under the League of Nations Mandatory System, Syria’s local leadership failed to independently forge an end to Western tutelage. Their attempts at armed rebellion were violently suppressed, while their more prudent direct negotiations with the French were indefinitely stalled. However, while French authorities in Paris continued to explore ways to prolong their rule over Syria, World War II Allied Powers as a collective were preparing to establish an organization that would bring an end to outside aggression and would support local rights to self-determination. The creation of a new international order based on sovereign equality and independent nation states provided the window of opportunity for Syria’s nationalists to finally achieve independence and the withdrawal of foreign occupying forces.

While support for this new world order was based on the consensus of numerous nations, historians have long attributed Syria’s independence primarily to local factors in the country or to the efforts of one or two outside countries. The dominant opinion in the historical literature is that British military and political pressure was the critical change that prompted France to recognize Syrian independence and finally withdraw its troops from the country.<sup>1</sup> For his part,

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (London ; New York; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1965), 26; Gordon H. Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military, 1945-1958*, vol. no. 3, The Graduate Institute for World Affairs of the Ohio State University. [Publication] ([Columbus]: Ohio State University Press, 1964), 19; and John McHugo, *Syria: A History of the Last Hundred Years* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2015), 110.

while Philip Khoury also points to British intervention as a key turning point in Syria's quest for independence, he suggests that it was British intervention combined with Syrian tactics of popular protest and patient negotiation.<sup>2</sup> For her part, Salma Mardam Bey, the daughter of one of the leading Syrian nationalists Jamil Mardam Bey (1893-1960) who hailed from a prominent Damascene family, argues against "the myth that Syria was liberated by the British," suggesting instead that Syrian nationalists gained independence by exploiting British and French suspicions of one another, British interests in the Arab world, and the emergence of the U.S. and U.S.S.R. as new superpowers.<sup>3</sup> Rami Ginat similarly points to a "tactical move" by Syrian nationalists to curry good favor with the U.S. and U.S.S.R. in order to achieve independence since both opposed the principles of imperialism and would support Syria's cause.<sup>4</sup>

While it is certainly the case that multiple factors contributed to Syrian independence in this period, historians tended to overlook the critical shift in the international system that gave such contributory factors actual effect. Regarding the dominant opinion that the British were key in forcing France to withdraw, each argument fails to explain why the British, who were eagerly pursuing a new arrangement whereby France would retain a privileged status in Syria, suddenly changed course. Similarly, those like Khoury and Mardam Bey who argued that it was the persistent struggle of Syrian nationalists that resulted in Syrian independence also fail to explain why similar, and even more aggressive, efforts in the past failed, yet worked in 1945. Rami Ginat's view comes the closest to recognizing the impact of changing global forces, such as the rise of the U.S. and U.S.S.R. as superpowers yet does not explain why the British or French would simply yield to American or Soviet demands.

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<sup>2</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 617–18.

<sup>3</sup> Salma. Mardam Bey, *Syria's Quest for Independence, 1939-1945* (Reading: Ithaca, 1997), 222, 226.

<sup>4</sup> Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, 40.

Instead, I argue that the key contributing factor to Syrian independence and the withdrawal of foreign troops at this time was the creation of an internationally agreed upon system governing relations between members called the United Nations. This new international system would prove to be a force multiplier in the Syrian nationalist pursuit of sovereignty and independence and became a key tool in their diplomatic arsenal. For instance, faced with the possibility of the French imposing their continued presence in the country, local Syrian officials strategized as to how they might leverage this new international organization to finally secure their independence. According to Syria's UN strategic framework, when presented with a particular security or political challenge, the United Nations can serve as a key mechanism to safeguard Syria's sovereignty and right to political independence. At this point in Syria's history, the key political challenge it faced was the threat of continued French occupation after World War II. If the UN and its guiding Charter—its creation planned for during an upcoming conference in San Francisco—lived up to its promises of a new international order, then Syrian nationalists may finally have the opportunity to control their territory and chart their own destiny.

Thus, by leveraging the 1945 United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO) convened in San Francisco for the purposes of drafting the UN Charter, and other United Nations bodies, Syrian officials from 1945 to 1946 secured political independence and sovereignty for their country in two phases. The first phase in 1945 addressed the question of independence. Before Syrian nationalists could pursue a path of self-determination, they would first have to gain formal international recognition of their independence even as French authorities actively worked against such an outcome. Once securing recognition of their independence, Syrian leaders in 1946 turned again to the UN to force the final withdrawal of

French authorities and occupying troops. In the following sections I provide a historical overview of Syria's engagement with the United Nations machinery from 1945 to 1946 and utilize the UN Strategic Framework as a tool to analyze Syrian engagement as conducted in the service of its strategic objectives of sovereignty and political independence.

### **The Road Towards Creating the United Nations**

With the onset of World War II in 1939, it became increasingly clear to the framers of the League of Nations system that their efforts to preserve international peace, prevent aggression and territorial aggrandizement had failed. Total war rapidly engulfed the parties to the conflict, resulting in massive casualties and the destruction of vital resources and infrastructure on all sides. By 1941, the Axis Powers led by Germany, Italy and Japan had the momentum in the fight and overran much of Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

Eager to achieve more than a military victory on the battlefield, the Allied Powers aimed to create a new peaceful post-war international order that would improve upon the deficiencies of the League of Nations system. In June 1941, Allied members Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Yugoslavia convened at St. James's Palace in London to declare their shared commitment to work towards establishing a world where all free people can enjoy economic and social security, without fear of aggression. Building further on these objectives, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared a series of common principles known collectively as the Atlantic Charter, which notably included: an end to all forms of aggrandizement; no territorial changes against the

wishes of the people; the right to self-government including for those historically denied such a right; equal economic access; and an end to the use of force.<sup>5</sup>

By the end of 1941, the United States finally entered World War II and took a much more active role in the post-war peace efforts following Japan's devastating surprise attacks on 7 December against a U.S. naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Thus, in January 1942, representatives of 26 Allied Powers convened in Washington, D.C. to declare their support for the aims and principles of the Atlantic Charter. By the meeting's end, the powers signed The Declaration by United Nations, vowing to leverage their collective resources for the war effort and agreeing not to reach any separate peace agreement with other parties.<sup>6</sup>

With international consensus growing amongst the Allied Powers on the need to forge a peaceful post war political system, the leading Allied Powers—the United States, United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and China—held four additional high-level meetings to strategize and implement a United Nations system. In October 1943, foreign ministers and diplomats from the four leading Allied Powers convened in Moscow to declare the necessity of establishing a new international security system, based on the principle of sovereign equality that is open to all peace-loving states, both large and small. By December of that year, the three leaders of the United States, United Kingdom and the Soviet Union met in Tehran to discuss their final plans for victory on the warfront, reaffirming the essential role of the forthcoming United Nations to establish a lasting peace in the world. The following year, representatives of the four major Allied powers met at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington D.C. from August to October to devise the purposes and principles of the United Nations to include its main organs such as the Security

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice* (United Nations, 2015), v–vii.

<sup>6</sup> Nations, vii.

Council and General Assembly. As World War II approached its end, Roosevelt, Churchill and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin held a conference in Yalta, Crimea on 11 February 1945 to agree on any outstanding issues—such as great power veto rights within the Security Council—and called upon Allied members to participate in the drafting of a new international charter during the upcoming United Nations Conference in San Francisco scheduled for 25 April 1945.<sup>7</sup>

### **Sovereignty and the bid to Secure Independence**

From the perspective of Syrian nationalists who struggled for a quarter century against the French for independence, the imminent creation of the United Nations signaled a defining moment to achieve what armed struggle and direct negotiations failed to accomplish. Promising political independence, sovereignty equality, peace and prosperity to all of its members both big and small, the United Nations offered Syria an immediate path to liberation if it could secure membership in the organization. However, French authorities also had their own designs for Syria's future, and would pursue all political and military means available to retain a privileged status in the country regardless of Syria's potential UN membership. Syrian leaders in Damascus would ultimately have to wager their hopes on the Western-dominated international system to deliver on promises to a community that they historically failed to keep.

In order to gain membership in the United Nations—and thus recognition as an independent state—Syrian officials needed to secure an invitation to participate in the upcoming UN San Francisco Conference. According to the 11 February 1945 Yalta Communique, participation in the San Francisco Conference was limited to the current signatories to the Declaration by United Nations and “such of the Associated Nations as have declared war on the

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<sup>7</sup> Nations, vii–ix.

common enemy by 1 March 1945.”<sup>8</sup> Although the text itself defined the associated nations specifically as Turkey and the eight Latin American countries who also declared war on the Axis powers, Syrian leaders inquired as to how they too might join the United Nations. According to a 21 February letter from the U.S. Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Syria and Lebanon, Mr. George Wadsworth, to the U.S. Secretary of State, Syrian officials were eager to find out “how Syria might sign [the] pact of [the] United Nations.” In the meeting with Mr. Wadsworth, Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli (1892-1967)—a former Ottoman civil servant, a long-standing opponent to French rule in Syria and one of the leading Arab nationalist figures from Damascus—stressed that he did not trust in France’s good-will to negotiate Syrian independence and asked if Syria needed to declare war on the Axis powers in order to receive an invitation to the UN conference. For his part, Wadsworth attempted to reassure al-Quwatli that any French treaty with Syria would be in accordance with the Atlantic Charter—to which the UN principles were based. However, al-Quwatli doubted the French would willingly negotiate a treaty that guaranteed Syrian sovereignty and would await Wadsworth’s answer on how to sign the UN pact.<sup>9</sup>

With the Yalta deadline approaching, and no response from the U.S. Envoy, Syrian officials offered up their country to the war effort, boldly declaring war on the Axis powers on 26 February followed by Lebanon the next day. In giving up some sovereignty to the Allied war effort, the Syrians hoped that they could achieve full international recognition of their independence by securing an invitation to participate in the San Francisco Conference. However,

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<sup>8</sup> “No. 1416 Protocol of the Proceedings of the Yalta Conference,” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945, Volume II - Office of the Historian, March 24, 1947, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945Berlinv02/d1416>.

<sup>9</sup> “Doc. 1016 The Minister to Syria and Lebanon (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, February 21, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1016>.

as noted above, the Yalta Communique did not specify that any nation who declared war on the Axis powers could join the UN, and therefore some Western authorities raised concerns regarding how to handle Syria and Lebanon's declaration. According to a telegram from the US Ambassador to the United Kingdom John Gilbert Winant, the British reportedly warned Syria and Lebanon that the two countries were not listed in the Yalta Communique as nations who could participate in the upcoming UN conference. According to Winant, the British doubted whether or not someone would intervene on Syria and Lebanon's behalf, especially given France's efforts to maintain a privileged status in the area.<sup>10</sup> However, the specter of a new international organization that promises sovereign equality to all, blocking the membership of small countries like Syria may have altered the Great Powers' calculus. Thus, the four sponsoring countries of the upcoming conference—the United States, United Kingdom, Soviet Union, and China—agreed to invite all nations who declared war on the axis powers, and on 29 March 1945 Syria and Lebanon received an invitation to attend the San Francisco Conference.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Syrian officials achieving de facto recognition of their independence by securing an invitation to the UN conference, French authorities were concurrently pressuring Syrians to sign a treaty guaranteeing their continued privileged status in the country. In the run-up to the San Francisco Conference, French authorities attempted to pressure Syrian officials by threatening them with the fragmentation of their country. They did this by distributing weapons to Alawite villages in the coastal region of Syria promising that the French would restore the autonomous state Alawites had from 1936 to 1939 in exchange for their alliance and support.

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<sup>10</sup> "Doc. 1022 The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Winant) to the Secretary of State," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, March 2, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1022>.

<sup>11</sup> "Doc. 94 The Acting Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic Representatives," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, General: The United Nations, Volume I - Office of the Historian, March 24, 1945, 94, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v01/d94>.

Syrian President al-Quwatli noted that the French not only incited violence in that area but prevented the Syrian government from suppressing the riots. Al-Quwatli assessed of France's actions that "on least alarming construction all this seems designed to put pressure on us to sign their kind of treaty."<sup>12</sup>

French pressure to negotiate a privileged status in Syria also extended to its communications with U.S. officials. In discussions with the head of the U.S. Near Eastern Affairs Division Paul Ailing, France's Ambassador to the U.S. Mr. Francis Lacoste noted his disappointment with the U.S. unwillingness to recognize France's "privileged" status in Syria. Although France's use of the ambiguous term "privileged" remained a frequent source of frustration in their communications with Syria and the U.S., sources indicated that the French wanted to secure a similar arrangement to the one held by the British in Egypt and Iraq that included a right to permanent air and naval bases.<sup>13</sup> Mr. Lacoste expressed to the U.S. in his meeting that "France had given Syria and Lebanon the benefits of French culture and civilization which had greatly benefited them and had cost the French a great deal of money. France deserved some return for this investment."<sup>14</sup> Although not explicitly stated at this point, subsequent threats by the French suggest they would be willing to undermine the nascent United Nations if the U.S. did not recognize this privileged status.

For its part, Syrian officials, like prominent Aleppine and Ambassador to the U.S. Nazim al-Qudsi (1900-1998) attempted to persuade the U.S. that advancing Syrian sovereignty was a noble pursuit in its own right, viewing any other arrangement that subjected Syria to French

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<sup>12</sup> "Doc. 1016 The Minister to Syria and Lebanon (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State."

<sup>13</sup> "Doc. 1018 The Ambassador in France (Caffery) to the Secretary of State," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, February 22, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1018>.

<sup>14</sup> "Doc. 1023 Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs (Kohler)," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, March 10, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1023>.

demands as an affront to the UN's core principles. One issue raised to illustrate this point was the Syrian desire for complete sovereign control over all native Syrian forces in the country to include the French-controlled *Troupes Spéciales du Levant*. Although willing to hand the indigenous force over to Syrian control in exchange for a special treaty, Syrian officials argued to U.S. officials that without control over their own military they would never possess the strength to be independent while an arrangement with France would guarantee their lack of independence. In a detailed letter drawing a connection between the principles of the new UN international system and Syria's right to sovereign control over its own forces, Nazim al-Qudsi—a Western educated political leader from Aleppo and Syria's first Ambassador to the United States—sent the following to the U.S. Secretary of State on April 16, 1945:

“Sir: I have the honor to inform you it has come to the attention of my Government that the French Foreign Office has opened up negotiations with the British Government with a view to the separation of the “French” army in Syria from the Allied Middle East Command and the withdrawal of the British forces from the Syrian territory. It is the view of my Government that, prior to any decision in this matter, it is necessary to transfer the immediate command of the forces in Syria which are now under French command to the Syrian Government. The so-called French army in Syria is predominantly composed of Syrian nationals, and it is only fair and legitimate that it should be placed under the authority of the Syrian Government. The independence of Syria has been internationally recognized. She has declared war on the Axis powers and joined the ranks of the United Nations. There remains no reason why such an independent and sovereign state should not possess the command of its forces within its territory. Without an army, independence and sovereignty lose much of their force and meaning.”<sup>15</sup>

With the lines in the sand drawn between Syria's determination to achieve full independence and sovereignty through the UN and France's goal of securing a privileged status in Syria, the San Francisco Conference was set to begin.

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<sup>15</sup> “Doc. 1025 The Syrian Minister (Koudsi) to the Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, April 16, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1025>.

## San Francisco Conference and the Quest for Independence

On 25 April 1945, delegates from fifty nations, representing eighty percent of the world's population, convened at the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House for the opening ceremony of the United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO). Taking the four-power Dumbarton Oaks proposal as their guiding agenda, the attendees would spend the next two months hashing out the details of what would become the 111-article UN Charter. During the course of multiple meetings, delegates would draft the purposes and principles of the UN, determine the structure and voting procedure of the different UN organs, debate what constituted aggression, and much more.<sup>16</sup> Creating an effective charter with universal consensus was vital as it would serve as the framework to guide international interaction in the post-World War II era.<sup>17</sup>

Syrian attendance at the UNCIO constituted a pivotal moment in Syrian history that posed several risks and opportunities for this small, independence seeking state. Although representatives of Syria were seasoned diplomats, serving as intermediaries between their people and Ottoman and French authorities, never before did they navigate great power dynamics on an international stage. Adding to their vulnerable position, Syrian officials remained under the colonial rule of one of the international community's greatest players—France. Convincing world powers that Syrian aspirations for independence were more critical than France's geostrategic standing would require political savvy, determination, but most importantly international backing. If Syria's international newcomers failed to navigate global politics, they risked remaining under French tutelage or some form of an unfavorable arrangement. However,

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<sup>16</sup> "1945: The San Francisco Conference," United Nations, August 26, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1945-san-francisco-conference/index.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, ix–x.

if they could gain formal international recognition of their independence then they would have achieved what decades of armed rebellion and direct negotiations failed to achieve.

For their part, the French had their own concerns as to how the new United Nations system being devised in San Francisco might impact their political standing in places like Syria. According to US diplomatic and press reporting, as early as February 1945 the French threatened to boycott and thus undermine the UNCIO before it even began unless it, “obtains satisfactory information about the aims and the agenda.”<sup>18</sup> Among France’s chief concerns was the nature of the proposed Trusteeship Council—a UN system designed to administer former League of Nations mandates and other territory acquired during World War II (e.g. Syria on both counts).<sup>19</sup> To assuage French concerns, the U.S. State Department informed Paris via backchannels that the UNCIO would only discuss the structure of the organization not specific countries. Furthermore, the five nations sponsoring the San Francisco conference—including France—agreed to meet beforehand to draft proposals acceptable to the great powers.<sup>20</sup>

As host to the San Francisco conference and one of the UN’s leading architects, the United States had its own interests in ensuring that the diplomatic row between Syria and France not undermine the UNCIO before it even began. However, the U.S. balancing act posed a unique challenge to the aims of standing up a new trustworthy international order. On the one hand, the United States needed the participation of its ally France—one of the Big Five [U.S., U.K., France, U.S.S.R. and China] nations with proposed veto power in the UN Security Council. Yet, France’s desire to retain a privileged status in Syria risked undermining the new order based on

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<sup>18</sup> “Doc. 28 The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Caffery),” *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, General: The United Nations, Volume I - Office of the Historian*, February 20, 1945, 28, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v01/d28>.

<sup>19</sup> “Trusteeship Council,” United Nations, November 6, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/about-un/trusteeship-council/index.html>.

<sup>20</sup> “Doc. 28 The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Caffery),” 28.

the principles of equality and self-determination. On the other hand, Syria was a new player on the international stage and the US would have to decide whether alienating France was worth the gesture of good faith to the international community by supporting Syrian independence. In this context, reports surfaced just one day into the UNCIO that the U.S. planned to arm the Syrian military presumably to help it stand on its own two feet. Although Washington denied the reports, the mere suggestion signaled that the U.S. might be preparing to support Syrian independence over French interests.<sup>21</sup>

Despite great power reassurances that the UNCIO would not threaten French interests, France began taking military action to ensure that its privileged status in Syria could not be threatened. In light of reporting that the U.S. was aiding the Syrian military, the Paris delivered a “strongly worded memorandum” to Washington informing them that it was France’s responsibility to control, organize and arm local forces and the U.S. should gain France’s approval before engaging in such activity. To bolster its position in Syria, reporting subsequently surfaced that the French were preparing to rotate forces out of its North African protectorates and deploy them to Syria.<sup>22</sup>

In response to France’s military posturing, the United States responded by warning French officials that their actions in Syria risked undermining the San Francisco conference. Although some in Washington speculated that France’s military actions could have been tied to the ongoing war effort against Japan arguing that the Levant was a “highly important avenue for redeployment to the Far Eastern theatre of war”, others viewed this as tied to the Franco-Syrian

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<sup>21</sup> “Doc. 1029 The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Caffery),” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, April 30, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1029>.

<sup>22</sup> “Doc. 1029 The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Caffery).”

dispute.<sup>23</sup> For instance, in a telegram to the U.S. Ambassador in France, the U.S. Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew warned of the threat France's actions posed to UN's nascent efforts expressing:

“The relationships to be established at the San Francisco Conference between the major powers, including France, and the smaller powers, including the countries of the Near East, constitute an issue of the first importance. Even a minor act on the part of a major power at this time which could be regarded as provocative, would have an effect out of proportion to its intrinsic importance...As the French are already aware, we feel that the application by France of military force or even a threat on the part of France that it may resort to military force in order to bring about an accord with the Levant States would cause doubts to arise not only in the Middle East but in other parts of the world of the intention of the Great Powers of the United Nations to support the principles of international conduct which they have repeatedly enunciated. A friendly accommodation cannot be achieved between France and the Levant States if the element of compulsion is introduced into the situation.”<sup>24</sup>

Success at the UNCTO was thus defined by the United States as the international community having faith that the new order would stand by its principles. The outcome in Syria thus became a critical test of the UN's commitment to the rights of all nations, big and small.

### **Syria's Debut on the International Stage**

Representing his country on the international stage as the head delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic was then Syrian Prime Minister Faris al-Khury. Al-Khury was a career politician with varied international experience who played a leading role with other Damascus-based nationalists in the quest for Syrian sovereignty and subsequently independence as early as 1920 with the start of the French Mandate. In 1877, al-Khury was born to Orthodox Christian parents in the town of Hasbayya located 58 kilometers west of Damascus in modern day Lebanon. He later converted to Protestantism after spending years at the Syria Protestant College—the

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<sup>23</sup> “Doc. 1029 The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Caffery).”

<sup>24</sup> “Doc. 1029 The Acting Secretary of State to the Ambassador in France (Caffery).”

predecessor to the American University of Beirut—as both a law student and a professor. In 1908, he nominated himself for the Christian seat in the Ottoman Parliament rising to the level of Deputy to Damascus in 1914.<sup>25</sup> In his lifetime, al-Khury also supported two major armed revolts, the Arab revolt against Ottoman rule in Syria in 1916—that brought about King Faysal’s short-lived Hashemite reign—and the 1925 armed Druze-led uprising against the French Mandate. During this period of armed revolt, he also founded the People’s Party which was the first political movement against French Mandatory rule aimed at establishing a constitutional government in Syria with the goal of unifying Syria with Palestine, Jordan and parts of Lebanon. However, the subsequent failure of armed revolt against the French left a deep impression on al-Khury who realized that Syrian nationalists would need to leverage all available diplomatic means to pressure the qualitatively more capable French forces to leave the country. Thus in 1928, he co-founded the National Bloc along with an array of prominent Syrian notables, landowners, lawyers, civil servants and Ottoman-trained professionals across Syria, which aimed to end the French Mandate through diplomatic means. In 1936, the National Bloc reached a tentative agreement with Paris that would gradually end French rule in Syria in twenty-five years in exchange for political, economic, and military privileges for France—a treaty mirroring other regional arrangements Arab states like Egypt and Iraq made with the British. However, with World War II approaching the French chose not to ratify any agreement with Syria and tabled discussions during the war.<sup>26</sup>

Although initially open to negotiating a long-term path to independence, Syrian nationalists devised a new diplomatic strategy for immediate sovereignty and independence from the French that hinged on success at the San Francisco Conference. Since the objective of the

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<sup>25</sup> “Issue 18,” *United Nations Weekly Bulletin* 1 (December 3, 1946): 22.

<sup>26</sup> Moubayed, *Steel & Silk*, 277–79.

San Francisco Conference was to create a long-lasting UN Charter guided by universally accepted principles, the Syrian delegation aimed to include certain provisions that would guarantee their independence once the document was formally ratified. According to al-Khury's biography, after securing an invitation to attend the UNCIO, the Syrian delegation set out to accomplish two goals. The first objective was to ensure that Syria was recorded as an official member of the UN conference, while the second goal was "to include text in the [UN] Charter stipulating that the founding members of the Organization of the United Nations are completely and fully independent countries, and that these countries may not be subject to any of the institutions of Guardianship or Mandate." If they could accomplish this, the Syrian Government would then be in a position to argue in the international arena that continued French dominance in Syria was against the provisions of the UN Charter and a threat to the newly created international system.<sup>27</sup>

In his first speech before the UNCIO at the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House, Faris al-Khury underscored two dimensions of sovereignty as the key principles for the ultimate success of the new international order. The first aspect of sovereignty he addressed was the importance of giving states the liberty to control their own lands and how doing so will make the world a much more prosperous place for all. Addressing this aspect on 2 May 1945 during the eighth plenary session of the conference, al-Khury opened his remarks by suggesting that with sovereignty Syria could leverage its strategic geographic position to positively contribute to neighboring regions and ultimately the world. Beginning on this point, al-Khury stated:

"Syria, that part of the Arab motherland...finds herself still now, across the main routes of international intercourse, both in peace and war. Her very geographical situation made our land the medium for the exchange of ideas and trade and the bridge across which armies passed, and still pass. Her very geographical position is a fact of the highest international interest. On the one hand, it makes us close

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<sup>27</sup> Muḥammad Farḥānī, *Fāris al-Khūrī wa-ayyām lā tunsá* ([Bayrūt], 1964), 389.

neighbors to the nations of the world. Syria, in particular, and all the Arab nations in general, should fully comprehend what the contraction of our modern world means. It makes us even more ready than others to respond to the human call for a fuller mutual understanding and a closer cooperation. That same fact, on the other hand, puts us in the position where we can assume the most serious duties in a general organization for the safeguarding of peace and security and the enforcement of justice.”<sup>28</sup>

The second aspect to sovereignty raised by al-Khury was the reality that if the United Nations is going to be successful then states must also be willing to delegate some of their sovereignty to the organization in the form of agreeing to abide by UN laws and resolutions. For this to happen, al-Khury argued that the organization must be guided by just principles like those found in the Atlantic Charter, otherwise it will disintegrate like the previous League of Nations.<sup>29</sup> On this point, al-Khury claimed that:

“Each nation represented here will probably then feel more ready to do what is essential for our ultimate success in the way of delegating part of its sovereignty to the International Organization, if that essential delegation of sovereignty is done under the guidance of well-set principles of justice, security and fair dealings in international conduct.”<sup>30</sup>

Al-Khury’s opening remarks at the UNCIO are noteworthy for several reasons. As a country still vying for territorial sovereignty and political independence from the French, al-Khury’s first appeal to the world underscored Syria’s dependency on the international community for help. To start, his comments on the need for states to delegate sovereignty within the new international system is a direct acknowledgement that the United Nations, although an improvement to colonialism, still requires nations to act in a manner that is also in accordance with the desires of outside powers. His reference to the armies that passed and continue to pass

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<sup>28</sup> “Doc. 65 P/16: Verbatim Minutes of the Eighth Plenary Session,” in *Documents of the United Nations Conference on International Organization San Francisco, 1945*, vol. 1 (London ; New York: United Nations Information Organizations, 1945), 21.

<sup>29</sup> “Doc. 65 P/16: Verbatim Minutes of the Eighth Plenary Session,” 23.

<sup>30</sup> “Doc. 65 P/16: Verbatim Minutes of the Eighth Plenary Session,” 23–24.

through his country—a clear reference to the French—illustrates Syria’s military deficiency to unilaterally defend itself from outside interests. Furthermore, al-Khury’s description of Syria as a vulnerable land bridge, although desirous of primacy within its borders, would be willing to delegate some sovereignty if that meant the UN could help secure Syrian independence and prevent the country from falling victim to the interest of a single power, i.e. the French. Damascus’ fears were hardly far-fetched, and developments brewing back home risked boiling over into a larger conflagration.

### **Maintaining French Privileged Status in Syria**

As Syrian representatives continued to push for international recognition of their state sovereignty and independence, France opposed such efforts in what seemed to be a budding postcolonial order, aggressively sought to retain its privileged position in Syria. Implementing a two-pronged approach, the French leveraged their military position inside of Syria to force the local leadership into accepting some form of a treaty, while diplomatically fighting for the inclusion of UN articles that give priority to existing treaties, even if they violate a country’s sovereignty. However, France’s actions raised several concerns for US officials who feared French actions might undermine the success of the San Francisco Conference and the credibility of the United Nations.

To pressure Syrian officials into accepting four key demands that would guarantee France’s continued privilege status in the country, the French relied on military pressure in a bid to force Damascus to the negotiating table. On 6 May 1945, just four days after al-Khury delivered his country’s first remarks to the United Nations, the French deployed 800 of its Senegalese troops to Syria and Lebanon. Stating that its actions were intended merely to rotate out and bolster existing forces in the region, the U.S. Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew sent

a letter to the U.S. Ambassador to Syria and Lebanon relaying Washington's assessment that the French were landing forces for political rather than strategic reasons associated with the war. The French, the U.S. believed, were seeking to force the Syrians and Lebanese to either accept its four key demands or succumb to France's military might. Those French demands included: 1) airfields in Syria and Lebanon; 2) a "recognized position" for its cultural and educational institutions in the region; 3) a position of preeminence for its diplomatic personnel similar to what the British held in Egypt and Iraq; and 4) that France must be consulted and have a role in the organization of the local gendarmerie.<sup>31</sup>

In response to France's aggressive military action, Syria's leadership complained to the United States arguing that France's actions not only violated Syrian sovereignty but were directly contradictory to the aims of the United Nations. In a letter to Joseph Grew, Syrian Chargé in Washington Constantine Zurayk (1909-2000)—an Arab nationalist and historian from Damascus who received his Master's and PhD in history and philosophy from the University of Chicago and Princeton respectively—stated:

"The demands of the French Government for cultural and economic privileges and for military bases in Syria, as a condition for the transfer of the Troupes Spéciales [locally recruited minoritarian forces] to the Syrian Government, and its stipulation that even then these forces should remain under French military command, constitute an encroachment on the national sovereignty of our country, whose independence has been fully recognized by the United States Government and whose representatives are now participating with the representatives of the other United Nations at San Francisco in the drawing up of a Charter of International Organization. As one of the United Nations, Syria has always been ready and willing to shoulder her responsibilities in the new World Organization, and for this purpose she legitimately wishes to enjoy the rights of independence and full sovereignty, first among which is the possession of military authority over her own territory. It is the decided policy of the Syrian Government to cultivate cooperation and mutual understanding with all the United Nations. It

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<sup>31</sup> "Doc. 1045 Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Acting Secretary of State," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, May 16, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1045>.

sees no reason why it should grant any privileges to any single Power, especially when such privileges limit its independence and condition its sovereignty.”<sup>32</sup>

Following Zurayk’s letter, U.S. officials were growing increasingly concerned that if Syria and Lebanon did not agree to negotiate these terms with the French, then Paris might stage a coup d’état and install a more French friendly government in the two Levant countries.<sup>33</sup> Despite such concerns, U.S. Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew advised the U.S. Ambassador to Syria and Lebanon to inform the local governments that the French had wartime authority to operate in their countries and that they should do their utmost to prevent local unrest.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, back in San Francisco the French also attempted to legally safeguard their interests in Syria by means of the UN Charter. To accomplish this goal, Paris pushed to include a provision within the UN Charter stipulating that the international organization recognize pre-existing treaties between nations as an inviolable bond that should not unravel as soon as the Charter comes into effect. On 15 May 1945, during the United States delegation’s fortieth meeting held on the sidelines of the UNCIO, U.S. representatives discussed the French proposal to include a reference in the UN Charter on the inviolability of international treaties as a foundational principle. According to the French amendment to chapter one, paragraph one of the Charter, the purpose of the United Nations should be, “to maintain international peace and security...*while bearing in mind that treaties bind those who have signed them and that their*

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<sup>32</sup> “Doc. 1066 The Syrian Chargé (Zurayk) to the Acting Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, May 25, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1066>.

<sup>33</sup> “Doc. 1045 Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Acting Secretary of State.”

<sup>34</sup> “Doc. 1042 The Acting Secretary of State to the Minister to Syria and Lebanon (Wadsworth),” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, May 11, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1042>.

*observance constitutes one of the essential conditions of international order.*”<sup>35</sup> Although several U.S. representatives were perplexed at the timing of France’s proposal, one representative suggested that the French were trying to get treaties signed before the Charter goes into effect, “especially treaties in the Near East, including one with Syria before the mandate is transferred or Syria made independent.” Thus the U.S. official concluded, the French amendment did not appear to be an important moral principle but rather was “essentially a combination of French foreign policy and French legalism.”<sup>36</sup> However, the French amendment was ultimately not included within the charter, but a clause addressing treaties was included in the Charter’s preamble which read, “We the peoples of the United Nations determined...to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.” Despite including such a provision, without any agreement between the Syrians and French before such a charter goes into effect, the French would have no internationally binding claims to a continued privileged status in Syria.<sup>37</sup>

Aware that the Syrian government was unwilling to negotiate through diplomatic channels, the French instead chose to double down its military pressure on Syria with the aim of forcing Syria’s leaders to agree to its demands. However, pursuing this path while the San Francisco Conference was ongoing risked alienating France internationally and undermining the credibility of the UN given that one of the Big Five great powers was pursuing a path of aggression. Despite such risks, on 17 May the French landed an additional two battalions of soldiers in Syria and Lebanon bringing the total troop count to 2,000. The addition of French

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<sup>35</sup> “Doc. 231 Minutes of the Fortieth Meeting of the United States Delegation, Held at San Francisco, May 15, 1945, 6 p.M.,” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, General: The United Nations, Volume I - Office of the Historian, May 15, 1945, 231, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v01/d231>.

<sup>36</sup> “Doc. 231 Minutes of the Fortieth Meeting of the United States Delegation, Held at San Francisco, May 15, 1945, 6 p.M.,” 231.

<sup>37</sup> “Preamble,” United Nations, June 16, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/preamble/>.

troops had reverberations on the local, regional, and international level. Locally, Syrians and Lebanese began protesting in the streets demanding the withdrawal of French troops and the recognition of Syrian independence. Regionally, fellow Arab countries that were participants at the UNCIO submitted letters to U.S. officials warning of the grave implications French hostility could mean not only for Syria but regionally as well.<sup>38</sup> Finally, in a strongly worded indictment of how France's activity undermined the ongoing efforts in San Francisco, Loy Henderson, the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs at the State Department, submitted a long memorandum to the Acting Secretary of State outlining his concerns. In his 23 May letter to the heads of the State Department, Loy Henderson warned of the far-reaching consequences of French military activity in Syria, especially for the United Nations and international peace, stating:

“In spite of the friendly suggestions which the British and ourselves have been making to the French, they have persisted in pursuing a policy in the Levant States which certainly does not seem to be consistent with the principles which the United Nations have stated they are upholding, and which apparently ignores the purposes and aims of the International Security Organization which we are trying to form in San Francisco. On the same day that the French diplomatic representative in the Levant States presented to Syria and Lebanon demands which would give France a special position, including “strategic bases”, and which would infringe upon the sovereignty of Syria and Lebanon, the French landed additional armed forces from a French warship. It is clear that France is at present using force, or the threat of force, in order to extract from two members of the United Nations, which both France and we recognize as independent countries, concessions of a political, cultural and military nature. While we in San Francisco are talking about world security and are devising methods for combating aggression, France is openly pursuing tactics which are similar to those used by the Japanese in Manchukuo and by the Italians in Ethiopia. It will be difficult for any small nation or any great power to have any confidence in the effectiveness of the International Security Organization if, at the very time that it is being built, we close our eyes to what is taking place in Syria and Lebanon, merely because at this particular moment it would be politically inopportune, from an international point of view, for us to take a firm attitude towards France.

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<sup>38</sup> “Doc. 1057 The Chargé in Iraqi (Moreland) to the Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, May 22, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1057>.

So far as we are aware, French action with regard to Syria and Lebanon is the first instance since the formation of the United Nations in which a great Western power has deliberately set about by force and threats of force to work its will upon smaller powers, without provocation and in its own selfish interest...Western prestige in the Near and Middle East rises or falls to the extent to which the great Western powers live up to the principles which they themselves maintain they are defending. It is understandable, therefore, that the countries and peoples of the Near East are rapidly losing confidence in us and are beginning to question our good faith. In this, the first great test of the sincerity of our statements that we are determined to bring about a world system in which all small nations may have a sense of security, we are remaining silent and are allowing the exigencies of the moment to prevent us from taking action which might help to prevent the world from going back to the practices which, from 1931 to 1939, resulted in the present war.”<sup>39</sup>

While concerns over the potential impact France’s actions might have on the UN’s credibility, France’s military presence had a more immediate impact on the stability of the Syrian state. The local Syrian leadership in response pursued several political avenues to pressure the United States into forcing France to back down citing the impact French action would have on the local, regional and United Nations level. On the domestic front, protests against France’s military presence continued to swell, resulting in clashes with French police that prompted a downward spiral of Syrian deaths, riots, and French shelling of restive towns. Locally, the timing of the French crackdown coincided with the harvest season in Syria, and Syrian officials warned of the potential famine that could result from the lack of laborers who fled due to declining security situation.<sup>40</sup> Regionally, Syrian officials also argued that the state of unrest had the potential to spread to neighboring countries and could have a negative impact on the ongoing war effort in the Far East. Finally, given the escalation of unrest back home, Syria’s

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<sup>39</sup> “Doc. 1059 Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Acting Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, May 23, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1059>.

<sup>40</sup> “Doc. 1092 Memorandum of Conversation, by the Acting Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, May 31, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1092>.

Representative Faris al-Khury suggested that his country may decide to raise the issue of French actions in Syria to the UNCIO. Such a move would deal an embarrassing blow to France's diplomatic status and had the potential to undermine the UN's credibility. In response to the latter threat, the United States stressed to al-Khury that direct negotiations outside the halls of the UN conference in San Francisco were more appropriate. Although al-Khury understood why the U.S. would want to avoid an embarrassing situation at the UN conference, in a meeting with fellow Arab delegates and the State Department's Division of Near Eastern Affairs he countered claiming that the issue was:

“a Conference matter since the aggression of one of the so-called big five-powers against small states at the time when we were seeking to create an organization for future world peace and security was most disruptive to the atmosphere and hence to the work of the Conference at San Francisco.”<sup>41</sup>

The Chairman of the Saudi delegation Amir Faisal b. Abdul Aziz seconded al-Khury's comments in the meeting and warned that should the problem spread it would become increasingly difficult to fix.<sup>42</sup>

Syrian diplomatic efforts to avoid compromising their sovereignty and independence in the form of a special privilege treaty with Paris, were ultimately met with a severe military response by French forces in Syria. For Syrian officials, France's decision to escalate its crackdown was interpreted as a direct failure of the United Nations to live up to its promises. On the evening of 29 May, French forces responded to mounting protests, civil unrest, and attacks against French police and troops, by launching a number of air and artillery strikes against several population centers across Syria. The ensuing violence resulted in the death of at least

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<sup>41</sup> “Doc. 1078 Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs (Kohler),” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, May 29, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1078>.

<sup>42</sup> “Doc. 1078 Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Chief of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs (Kohler).”

several hundred Syrians spurring widespread outrage particularly following reports that the military equipment being employed against the Syrian population was the same equipment leased to France for the purposes of the war effort in the Far East. In a series of letters from Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatly to U.S. government officials, al-Quwatly condemned the French activity and lamented the apparent false hopes of the new international system being drawn up in San Francisco. Al-Quwatly bemoaned the present state of affairs expressing:

“Where now is the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms? What can we think of San Francisco?<sup>43</sup> ... Syria is the object of widespread destruction. French bombs have been showered pitilessly on peaceful unarmed cities. Homs, Hama and Aleppo have been subjected to unparalleled bombardments. For three days Damascus, the city that is historic and holy for the Arab and Moslem world, has been subjected to savage bombardments by planes, artillery and tanks. Fires following the bombardments have broken out everywhere. Entire sections and streets have been ravaged by fire, bombs and destruction. Several thousand persons have been killed and wounded in the streets and under the ruins. Bombardments and machine guns continue exterminating peaceful men, women and children. All these killings are supposed to be justified only because we refused to grant special privileges to France incompatible with our sovereignty and independence. Our country is destroyed despite assurances given by Allies recognizing our independence.”<sup>44</sup>

France’s latest act of military coercion in Syria sent shockwaves around the world, prompting the international community to finally intervene. Media reports of French atrocities poured into the United States and Europe, and sympathy within the halls of the UNICIO began building in favor of action to support Syria. In its state of desperation, Syrian President al-Quwatly requested that the British forces, stationed in garrisons across Syria as part of the allied war effort, help restore order.<sup>45</sup> In the face of mounting regional and international pressure

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<sup>43</sup> “Doc. 1088 Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson),” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, May 31, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1088>.

<sup>44</sup> “Doc. 1096 The Minister to Syria and Lebanon (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, May 31, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1096>.

<sup>45</sup> McHugo, *Syria*, 110.

against France for its latest act of aggression against a fellow member of the United Nations,<sup>46</sup> France agreed on 1 June to a ceasefire and a withdrawal back to French barracks.<sup>47</sup> In addition to the announced ceasefire, on 8 July the French announced plans to transfer the *Troupes Spéciales* to Syria and Lebanon. Ultimately, it was the result of international pressure particularly from those at the United Nations Conference on International Organization that Damascus was able to secure its long-elusive demands for sovereignty and independence.<sup>48</sup>

### **Conclusion of the San Francisco Conference**

Back in San Francisco, Faris al-Khury and the other Syrian delegates spent the remainder of the conference championing the principles of sovereignty and independence, and sought to ensure that the final version of the UN Charter covered the full range articles necessary to guarantee Syria's two overarching goals at the UNCIO. Underscoring the need to draft a complete charter that comprehensively safeguards Syrian interests, al-Khury addressed the UNCIO stating, "We shall not depend, dear Fellow Delegates, too much on future amendments. We all know how difficult they become. We must try to do our best now to elaborate a Charter which will live long."<sup>49</sup> Al-Khury's desire to get the full range of principles in writing not only reflects Syrian skepticism towards Great Power verbal commitments, but also points to the importance of the UN Charter in its strategic approach towards international engagement. To recall, at the outset of the conference, the Syrian delegation sought to accomplish two goals

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<sup>46</sup> "Doc. 1099 The Soviet Chargé (Novikov) to the Acting Secretary of State," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, June 1, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1099>.

<sup>47</sup> "Doc. 1101 The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Winant) to the Secretary of State," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, June 1, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1101>.

<sup>48</sup> "Doc. 1132 The Minister to Syria and Lebanon (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa, Volume VIII - Office of the Historian, July 13, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v08/d1132>.

<sup>49</sup> "Doc. 65 P/16: Verbatim Minutes of the Eighth Plenary Session," 23–24.

while in San Francisco they believed would safeguard their independence under the new international system. The first goal was to be included as a founding member of the organization and second, to include a clause in the Charter guaranteeing that the founding members not be subject to any form of trusteeship and could henceforth be considered free.

By the end of the debates, the Syrian delegation managed to secure two key articles in the UN Charter recognizing Syria as a founding members of the UN who therefore cannot be subject to outside tutelage. According to Article 3 of the UN Charter for instance, founding members of the organization are defined by two characteristics: “[1) those] original members of the United Nations states which, having participated in the United Nations Conference on International Organization at San Francisco ... [and 2)] sign the present Charter.”<sup>50</sup> Speaking to Syria’s concern of continuing to live under French control, Article 28 of the UN Charter states that “The trusteeship system shall not apply to territories which have become Members of the United Nations, relationship among which shall be based on respect for the principle of sovereign equality.”<sup>51</sup> With these two articles accepted as core precepts in the new international system, the Syrian quest for sovereignty and independence from the French was one step closer.

With their hard-fought objectives met at the San Francisco Conference, Syrian officials would soon sign and ratify the new UN Charter gaining formal international recognition of their independence. According to a biography of Faris al-Khury, the signing of the Charter at the conclusion of the UNCIO on 26 June 1945 represented the culmination of all that al-Khury struggled for against the French—independence. Recollecting his signing of the Charter, al-Khury described the event as, “the long-awaited moment in my political life, because the result of signing [the Charter] was the announcement of Syria’s true independence after having been

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<sup>50</sup> Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Nations, 21.

[only] superficially [independent].”<sup>52</sup> On October 19, 1945 the Syrian Parliament in Damascus officially ratified the Charter and was thus recognized internationally for the first time as an independent nation. The Syrian Government could now credit their engagement with the UN for the international recognition of their independence, a feat that decades of unilateral struggle against the French colonialists failed to accomplish.<sup>53</sup> However, this victory was not simply the result of Syrian engagement, but reflected an alignment of Syrian interests with the interests and sympathy of Great Powers like the United States and Britain. It remained to be seen if Syrian interests would continue to align with those of the international community to address the outstanding issues that remained between Syria and the French.

### **The Question of Foreign Forces in Syria and Lebanon, 1946**

The 1945 signing and ratification of the UN Charter was a major turning point in Syrian history. By betting on the international community’s desire to chart a new path of cooperation and mutual respect, Syrian officials could point to their internationally recognized status as an independent nation as proof of the UN’s effectiveness. It was diplomacy and the alignment of the international community’s agenda with Syrian interests, not war that brought about an end to colonial rule in Syria. This reality would leave a deep impression on Syria’s leadership and inspire them to see the value of leveraging the international community as a way of winning political battles despite being, by all measures, weaker than the Great Powers of the time.

Although Syrian officials could credit their UN engagement for gaining formal recognition of their independence, practically speaking, the country remained firmly under the control of French and British troops. With World War II officially over by September 1945,

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<sup>52</sup> Farḥānī, *Fāris al-Khūrī wa-ayyām lā tunsá*, 389.

<sup>53</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947* (Lake Success, New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations, 1947), 34.

Syrian officials viewed the continued presence of French and British troops in their country as no longer essential to the war effort but whose continued presence began taking on the form of an occupying force. This view became even more acute on 13 December 1945 when Syria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs "received detailed information on the new "Sykes-Picot" agreement" between the British and the French. Much like the original Sykes-Picot agreement, the December agreement was a secret arrangement between the two great powers guaranteeing France's continued influence in Syria and stipulating that any withdrawal of troops would require a negotiated arrangement guaranteeing France's privileged status.<sup>54</sup> Simply requesting the French to leave had failed and past experience suggested they were willing to violently coerce Syria to achieve their demands. From the military side, the Syrian government could attempt to unilaterally disrupt such a plan by confronting British and French forces with its newly acquired *Troupes Spéciales*. However, the troops were qualitatively weaker than the occupying forces and could hardly be trusted due to their decades of loyalty to the French.

Lacking a viable strategy for unilaterally securing true sovereignty and independence for their country, Syrian officials decided once again to leverage the United Nations to achieve their objective of forcing the withdrawal of foreign forces. Unsure of how to best proceed, the Syrian and Lebanese UN Representatives reached out to Trygve Lie, the Secretary General of the United Nations, to get his advice. Trygve Lie who was elected the UN's first Secretary General on February 1, 1946, was originally from Norway and represented the ideal compromise candidate between the burgeoning heavyweights in the international arena—the United States and the USSR. According to his memoirs, Lie, who was sympathetic to the Syrian and Lebanese

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<sup>54</sup> Meir Zamir, "From the President of the Council, the Syrian Foreign Minister to the Syrian Minister Plenipotentiary, Cairo (Document No. 265, Dec 13, 1945)," in *The Secret Anglo-French War in the Middle East: Intelligence and Decolonization, 1940-1948* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2014), 382.

situation, advised them to raise the issue to the Security Council. In his memoirs, Lie recounted his meeting with the Syrian and Lebanese representatives saying the following:

“Faris al-Khury, the venerable Syrian, and Charles Malik, a cultured Lebanese of Christian faith, approached me for my advice. I confess that I felt the willingness of France and Britain to depart from the Levant could do with a little prodding. Accordingly, I advised Mr. al-Khury and Dr. Malik to bring their countries’ case to the Security Council, for I was confident that London and Paris would respond.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, on February 4, 1946, the heads of the Syrian and Lebanese delegations to the United Nations submitted a letter to the UN Secretary-General calling for a hearing by the Security Council to evaluate their circumstances. For its part, in accordance with Article 31 of the UN Charter the Security Council agreed to place the Syrian and Lebanese Question on their agenda and invited both countries to participate without vote in the February 1946 meetings on the legal grounds that they were parties whose interests were directly affected by the council’s discussions.<sup>56</sup>

From 14-16 February 1946, the Security Council held five meetings to discuss the Syrian-Lebanese Question and debate whether the continued presence of French and British troops in the two Levantine states constituted a violation of the UN Charter and whether they should be forced to withdraw. Before diving into the substance of the question and hearing statements from the various parties involved, Egypt’s Representative to the Security Council Mahmoud Bey Fawzi requested that an immediate decision be made as to whether or not the Syrian-Lebanese Question constituted a “dispute” or a “procedural matter.”<sup>57</sup> Egypt’s rationale for asking this question and supporting the view that it be considered a “procedural matter” is

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<sup>55</sup> Trygve Lie, *In the Cause of Peace; Seven Years with the United Nations*. (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 33.

<sup>56</sup> “Report to the General Assembly, Covering the Period from 17 January 1946 to 15 July 1946 / by the Security Council (S/172)” (United Nations Security Council, September 30, 1946), 67, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/468423/files/S\\_172-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/468423/files/S_172-EN.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 341.

due to the different voting requirements needed to pass a resolution for each type of situation. According to Article 27 of the UN Charter, if a situation is deemed a procedural matter, then the Security Council only needs the affirmative vote of nine members to pass a resolution. If, however, the situation is not a procedural matter (i.e. a dispute, etc.) then the Security Council must secure nine votes including the unanimous concurrence of the five permanent members.<sup>58</sup> In response to Egypt's request, most members of the Security Council preferred to hear oral statements before reaching a decision on the Egyptian motion. For its part, the USSR was of the opinion that a dispute existed whenever one party made claims or accusations denied by another party, therefore the Syrian-Lebanese Question should be considered a dispute. While no formal position was adopted on this question, the Representatives of France and the UK noted their intention to abstain from voting on the issue, as parties to the dispute, in accordance with Article 27 of the Charter.<sup>59</sup>

Following the opening procedural debate, the Syrian and Lebanese Representatives presented their case as to why the continued presence of foreign forces in their countries constituted a violation of the United Nations Charter. Although both representatives acknowledged that they willingly invited the two countries in as part of the war effort, with World War II formally over, the French and British forces have over stayed their welcome and have maintained an occupying presence in a sovereign country against its will. Furthermore, the idea that the French and British would only withdraw after securing a favorable treaty guaranteeing France's continued privileged status was similarly a violation of the sovereign equality of all UN member states to self-determination. They further argued that if anyone was in a position to determine how international security was maintained, it was the United Nations'

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<sup>58</sup> Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 342.

responsibility and not the sole responsibility of the French or British.<sup>60</sup> Finally, Syria and Lebanon were of the opinion that the only viable solution to the current dispute was for France and the UK to unconditionally withdraw their forces from the region as soon as possible.<sup>61</sup>

In response to the Syrian and Lebanese statements, the French and British representatives justified their presence in the Levant as well as shared their openness to withdrawing from the region. French Representative Alexandre Parodi explained France's continued presence in the region by arguing that although the official war was over, the state of war persisted and Allied troops remained "stationed on the territory of every belligerent country."<sup>62</sup> Further he countered that the 13 December 1945 agreement did not mean that France planned to station troops in Syria and Lebanon indefinitely, noting that his country was open to negotiating the methods of French withdrawal. For his part, UK Representative Sir Alexander Cadogan underscored that his country remained in Syria at the invitation of the Syrian government, particularly following the Franco-Syrian hostilities in May 1945, and were asked not to withdraw so long as the French remained. Cadogan similarly echoed the view expressed by France that the 13 December agreement did not mean that they planned to stay indefinitely in Syria or Lebanon.<sup>63</sup>

To understand the subsequent reaction from other key Security Council members like the United States and Soviet Union, it is important to first address some of the underlying Cold War political tensions occurring as the backdrop to the Syrian-Lebanese Question. Concurrent with the debates on the situation in Syria and Lebanon, Western and Soviet powers were struggling to resolve the question of unilateral military withdrawal from another regional country—Iran.

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<sup>60</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 342.

<sup>61</sup> Robert William Zibell, "Syrian-Lebanese Question before the Security Council in 1946" (University of Montana, 1951), 61, <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/1082453362/abstract/564536BE26AE4746PQ/1>.

<sup>62</sup> "Report to the General Assembly, Covering the Period from 17 January 1946 to 15 July 1946 / by the Security Council (S/172)," 71.

<sup>63</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 342-43.

Following the outbreak of World War II, Iran, an officially neutral party to the conflict, was perceived by the Soviet Union and the British as friendly to the Axis powers given the Shah of Iran's pro-German sympathies. Both countries thus invaded Iran in 1941 and carved out zones of influence tied to oil producing regions in the north and south on the grounds that such energy sources were vital to the success of the war efforts.<sup>64</sup> With the conclusion of the war, local unrest similarly began to mount against continued foreign occupation of Iran and the United States was eager to see the Soviet Union in particular withdraw from oil-rich northern Iran.

Behind the scenes, the United States remained concerned about the optics of the United Nations taking a tough stand towards a Soviet and British withdrawal from Iran but not a French and British withdrawal from Syria. In a secret telegram from the US Secretary of State James Byrnes to the US representative to the United Nations Edward Stettinius, Byrnes stated that the U.S. should support a French and British withdrawal from Syria and Lebanon, noting on 9 February:

“The general policy of this Government is to support the rapid withdrawal of foreign troops from the territory of any member of the United Nations occupied during the war if the local government presses for their departure. It was in accordance with this policy that we addressed a note to the Soviet and British Governments in Nov 1945 suggesting the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iran, in view of the expressed desires of the Iranian Govt. Syria and Lebanon merit no less support than Iran in this respect. Moreover, we would not wish to take a strong stand where Soviet forces are primarily involved and to remain silent in a case where Soviet forces are not concerned. You should therefore make clear at an appropriate occasion during the public discussion the sympathy of the American Government for the Syrian and Lebanese request.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 190–91.

<sup>65</sup> “Doc. 596 The Secretary of State to the United States Representative at the United Nations (Stettinius),” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Near East and Africa, Volume VII - Office of the Historian*, February 9, 1946, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v07/d596>.

Regarding the Syrian and Lebanese desire to set a timetable for the French and British to simultaneously withdraw, the Secretary of State also informed the UN representative in a subsequent telegram on 15 February that the United States should support such an endeavor.<sup>66</sup>

Back at the Security Council, following the opening remarks from the parties to the dispute, several members submitted various resolutions each recommending some form of British and French withdrawal from Syria and Lebanon. The distinguishing factor between each of the proposed resolutions involved the question of when troops would leave, and the negotiated terms under which they would leave. For instance, the delegation from the Netherlands recommended that the foreign troops withdraw “at no distant date” either following negotiations or otherwise, while the Mexican delegation called for a simultaneous withdrawal “at the earliest possible date”—that date to be negotiated. The Egyptian delegation similarly called for a simultaneous withdrawal “as soon as possible” leaving room only for negotiations to discuss the technical aspects of the withdrawal as well as the timing.<sup>67</sup>

For its part, the U.S. United Nations delegation pursued a slightly amended policy towards the Syrian-Lebanese Question to that advocated back in Washington. Whereas many within the Security Council were sympathetic to the request by Syria and Lebanon to schedule an unconditional withdrawal, several direct talks with the French and British on this question seemed to have prompted the U.S. United Nations Representative to back a negotiated settlement of the crisis. The US representative thus submitted a proposal before the Security Council

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<sup>66</sup> “Doc. 598 The Secretary of State to the United States Representative at the United Nations (Stettinius),” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Near East and Africa, Volume VII - Office of the Historian*, February 15, 1946, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v07/d598>.

<sup>67</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 343.

requesting the parties involved to negotiate the terms of the British and French withdrawal via quadrilateral talks “as soon as practicable” and that negotiations “to that end” be conducted.<sup>68</sup>

In response, the representatives of the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union addressed their own concerns specifically towards the resolution submitted by the United States. For its part, the U.K. delegation disagreed with the U.S. amendment that only technical negotiations be held as that would bar the British from conducting any other negotiations, such as a diplomatic arrangement. Instead, the U.K. delegate suggested the addition of the phrase “independent of other issues” to follow the U.S. amendment on holding exclusively technical negotiations.<sup>69</sup> For his part, Mr. Vyshinsky of the U.S.S.R. delegation proposed amendments to the U.S. draft resolution calling directly on the British and French to withdraw their forces “immediately” and that only “technical” negotiations of that withdrawal be considered. However, the Soviet delegation’s amendments to the U.S. draft resolution failed to receive wide support from fellow Council members.<sup>70</sup>

On the last day of the Security Council’s deliberations of the Syrian-Lebanese Question, the U.S. draft resolution was put to a vote. The U.S. draft resolution received seven votes in the affirmative from Security Council members, two abstentions from the U.K. and the French, yet was vetoed by Mr. Vyshinsky of the U.S.S.R. delegation. The Soviet veto of the U.S. proposal to the Syrian-Lebanese Question was the first ever use of a veto in the UN’s history. Given the overwhelming support within the Security Council to support a withdrawal of troops from Syria and Lebanon, albeit less than ideal, the Soviet decision to veto the US proposal seemed more to do with political pressure from the US to force the Soviets out of Iran than it did with the actual

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<sup>68</sup> “Report to the General Assembly, Covering the Period from 17 January 1946 to 15 July 1946 / by the Security Council (S/172),” 78.

<sup>69</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 343.

<sup>70</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 344.

substance of the proposal.<sup>71</sup> From the UN Secretary General's perspective he too saw something worrisome with the Soviet Union's use of the veto. According to Trygve Lie's memoirs, he spoke of this moment in the following way:

“Why was this first veto cast? Not because Mr. Vyshinsky opposed the substance of the resolution, but because its language was not strong enough to please him. The first, almost lighthearted use of the veto that I hoped would rarely be exercised by any of the great powers disturbed me as much as the violence of the debate on the Greek question. Although I did not then foresee the long succession of fifty-odd Soviet vetoes cast during my term of office, the great majority of them for reasons no more substantial to Soviet interests and policy than this, here was another chilly forewarning of the “cold war” to come--the clumsiness, the rigidity of position, the refusal to participate, even in non-essentials, in the give-and-take and the hammering out of acceptable compromises that are the very lifeblood of politics and diplomacy among the Western democracies.”<sup>72</sup>

Despite the Soviet veto and its implications on the emerging Cold War, the British and the French representatives at the UN ultimately agreed to carry out the wish of the majority and pledged to withdraw their forces. In a telegram passed to the President of the Security Council on May 19, 1946, Syria's Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Saadallah al-Jabiri (1893-1947) reported that, “the evacuation of foreign troops from Syrian territory in compliance with the proposal of the representative of the United States of America has been accomplished during the first two weeks of April 1946.”<sup>73</sup> For their part, the Lebanese UN delegation also shared with UN Secretary General Trygve Lie that “It is certainly a historic event when two small States can, through the action of the Security Council, obtain satisfaction for their claims solely because they have a right to it.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Anthony Gaglione, *The United Nations under Trygve Lie, 1945-1953*, vol. no. 1, Partners for Peace ; (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 21–23.

<sup>72</sup> Lie, *In the Cause of Peace*, 34.

<sup>73</sup> Zibell, “Syrian-Lebanese Question before the Security Council in 1946,” 160.

<sup>74</sup> Lie, *In the Cause of Peace*, 33.

Syria's ability to secure the withdrawal of foreign troops through international engagement reaffirmed the powerful role the United Nations can play in helping officials in Damascus achieve their strategic goals of sovereignty and political independence. Speaking to this positive assessment of the UN's potential utility, Faris al-Khury outlined Syria's gratitude for the organization's accomplishments to date at the Forty-First Plenary Meeting of the first session of the UN General Assembly on October 29, 1946. Al-Khury opened by stating, "The Syrian delegation wishes, first of all, to express its satisfaction at the progress achieved by the Organization during the first few months of its history...we note with pleasure and increasing hope the many valuable and positive results already obtained in such a short period."<sup>75</sup>

Addressing the UN's positive contributions towards the withdrawal of foreign occupying forces, al-Khury stated:

"The Syrian delegation is delighted to note that, in the case which it presented to that body [the Security Council] during its session in London in February last, concrete results were obtained, and the rights of Syria and Lebanon were respected and upheld. This is an indication that the Council has within itself the possibilities of achieving the goal for which it was established in defending the right of nations irrespective of the strength of the opposing parties and without discrimination between small or big States."<sup>76</sup>

Despite such noteworthy achievements on the domestic front, the Syrian delegation continued to advocate for wider UN assistance to other nations seeking independence and self-determination, with a likely eye on the regional Arab arena. In that same October speech before the General Assembly, al-Khury called on the UN to establish the Trusteeship Council "as soon as possible...in conformity with the provisions of the Charter" so that the UN and not select states can assume the responsibility of guiding other aspiring nations towards independence.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> "Forty-First Plenary Meeting: 95. General Discussion (Continuation)" (United Nations General Assembly, October 29, 1946), 812, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/731281/files/A\\_PV.41-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/731281/files/A_PV.41-EN.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> "Forty-First Plenary Meeting: 95. General Discussion (Continuation)," 813.

<sup>77</sup> "Forty-First Plenary Meeting: 95. General Discussion (Continuation)," 812.

According to Chapter XI-XIII of the UN Charter, the Trusteeship Council was envisioned as the UN's administrative body responsible for overseeing the advancement, eventual independence, and self-determination of the former League of Nation Mandate countries who remained non-self-governing territories.<sup>78</sup> Al-Khury noted his delegation attached “great importance” to Chapter XI of the UN Charter, in particular to Article 73 referencing the “sacred trust” and “obligation to promote...within the system of international peace and security...the well-being of the inhabitants of these territories.”<sup>79</sup> Given the concern such an article gave to the condition of dependent peoples, al-Khury noted that “In our view, it represents one of the most significant advances of the Charter over all previous instruments of international conventions.”<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, by the end of 1946, the United Nations established the Trusteeship Council and Syria's UN representatives could again look favorably upon their accomplishments thus far as a result of their strategic engagement with the UN.

### **An Assessment of Syria's First Two Years with the UN**

In less than two years of engagement with the United Nations, the Syrian government achieved major diplomatic victories towards its local and regional objectives of securing sovereignty and political independence. By leveraging the international community, Syrian officials accomplished what decades of armed resistance and direct negotiations failed to achieve—international recognition of their independence and the withdrawal of foreign occupying forces. At the regional level their efforts also resulted in the same achievement for Lebanon, and their diplomatic engagement helped set in motion the Trusteeship Council which aimed to push for wider independence for aspiring nations.

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<sup>78</sup> Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 48–59.

<sup>79</sup> Nations, 48.

<sup>80</sup> “Forty-First Plenary Meeting: 95. General Discussion (Continuation),” 812.

However, one critical factor to the strategic success of Syria's UN engagement during this period was the alignment of the international community behind Syria's aspirations. What the historical record shows is that rather than being the result of genuine commitment to the UN Charter and objectively evaluating the merits of Syria's request, great powers were motivated by other political considerations. For instance, in both Syria's request for independence and the withdrawal of foreign troops, the United States was eager to avoid undermining the credibility of the new international institution particularly in the face of Soviet efforts to expand their post-War influence by force. Thus, while independence and troop withdrawal amounted to strategic success for the Syrians, it represented only one minor tactical victory by the U.S. against the Soviet Union. For their part, the Syrian delegation was aware of the need for great power support for the success of the United Nations, and al-Khury himself expressing, "in all frankness and sincerity...the maintenance of peace depends primarily, not upon the small, but upon the big Powers. Small States by themselves can hardly ever disturb world peace, and are unlikely to do so."<sup>81</sup>

Despite the pivotal role of international alignment in Syria's early diplomatic gains, Syria's success at the UN undoubtedly shaped its perceptions of the organization's utility and provides the context for Damascus's eagerness to continue playing a central role in the coming year. With British troops preparing to similarly withdraw from Palestine in 1947, the Syrian delegation was hopeful that it could replicate its own success and help a fellow Arab nation secure its sovereignty and political independence. The question Syrian leaders would soon ask themselves is whether or not there are limits to the UN's utility in security its strategic objectives and whether or not the state would have to rely on other means to defend its interests.

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<sup>81</sup> "Forty-First Plenary Meeting: 95. General Discussion (Continuation)," 813.

## Chapter 2: Championing Independence with an Eye Towards Palestine

### Introduction

After securing major political victories in 1945 and 1946 through its engagement with the United Nations, the Syrian UN delegation was shocked to see its positive momentum not only end, but begin to reverse. Hoping to build on the political progress they made for their country, the Syrian delegation in 1947 sought to leverage the precedent set by their own success to argue for sovereignty and political independence for other aspiring nationalists, particularly in Palestine. However, whereas international support was firmly behind Syria during its first two years, by 1947 there was growing international sympathy to find a solution for the Jewish victims of Nazi Germany's concentration camps. By late 1947, the United Nations recommended the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish national homeland in an area Syrians not only considered Arab, but also part of their historical patrimony.

Within the secondary literature, there is a general consensus amongst Israeli scholars that the passage of the Partition Plan for Palestine in late 1947 was partially the result of Arab political incompetence, particularly within the United Nations. For one, Ilan Pappé argued that Jews and Arabs alike did not regard the UN body investigating the question of Palestine as an organization to be "respected and obeyed".<sup>1</sup> He notes how it was the "diplomatic incompetence and political indifference of the Arab delegates" that resulted in Jewish success on this question.<sup>2</sup> For his part, Moshe Ma'oz goes so far as to describe Syria's rejection of the UN partition plan and the need to maintain the Arabness of Palestine as merely a "public proclamation". Instead, Ma'oz suggests that Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli "used the Palestinian Zionist issue as an

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<sup>1</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51* (London: Tauris, 1992), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Pappé, 42.

outlet for domestic pressures and as an instrument for strengthening his own political position,” as well as a means to counter Hashemite Jordan’s own ambitions for regional dominance.<sup>3</sup> Elie Podeh also supports the thesis that Arab disunity led to the partition plan’s success arguing that the “collective Arab performance against the report during the lengthy UN deliberations was not coordinated and was therefore politically insignificant.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite a sizeable consensus among Israeli scholars that a lack of Arab sophistication on the UN political front resulted in the UN partition, such arguments fail to do justice to the nature of Syrian engagement within the United Nations. For one, unlike Pappé’s suggestion that the Arabs did not take the work of the UN investigative body on the question of Palestine seriously, as demonstrated in this chapter, the Syrian delegation persistently engaged with a largely principled and serious legal approach towards the question of Palestine. For its part, Ma’oz’s critique that Syrian officials merely paid lip service against the UN partition plan, not only grossly ignores the numerous Syrian-led initiatives to counter the plan within the UN, but also fails to adequately capture the gravity of what the 1947 partition plan ultimately meant to the Syrians from an UN-engagement perspective. Finally, Podeh’s claim that the Arabs were uncoordinated at the UN not only lacks factual basis in terms of the numerous joint Arab initiatives during the debates, but is also contradicted by Podeh himself who says “During the debate over the report held at the General Assembly in late November, the Arab delegates presented a unified position that fully supported the Palestinian claims.”<sup>5</sup>

Instead, I wish to advance the argument that the ultimate passage of the UN Partition Plan of 1947 was *not* the result of Arab or Syrian political incompetence at the UN, rather its success

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<sup>3</sup> Moshe Ma’oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 17–18.

<sup>4</sup> Elie Podeh, *Chances for Peace: Missed Opportunities in the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, First edition. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Podeh, 40.

was the result of the international community's desire to find a quick solution to the plight of the Jewish people outside of Europe. In fact, this desire to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine arguably took precedence within the UN over the United Nation's own body of law and Charter—a view supported by U.S. intelligence community assessments. This relegation of the UN Charter to a political decision would ultimately have a profound impact on Syria's view of the United Nations by the end of 1947. Whereas the UN was willing to support Syrian sovereignty and political independence on the basis of the UN Charter's principles, the same reliance on UN principles was insufficient to achieve the same results in Palestine. What this means for the Syrian-UN strategic framework is that when the UN fails to preserve Syrian, and by extension "southern Syria" (i.e. Palestine), sovereignty and political independence, then Syria must resort to force to defend its domain.

The following chapter details the transition from Syria's initial optimism at the UN to its major let down by the end of 1947. It will begin with an overview of Syria's quest to defend sovereignty and political independence for other independence seeking groups in Palestine and elsewhere as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. It will then be followed by multiple Syrian attempts to block UN movement towards the partition of Palestine, as well as the shifts in Syrian rhetoric over time. Key to Syria's changing attitudes at each juncture will be the relative confidence they have in the international system to adhere to its principles, rather than emerging Cold War bloc politics, and defend the rights of those legally entitled to protection. Ultimately, the partition of Palestine at the end of 1947 would have significant implications for Syrian trust in the good will of the United Nations and would have disastrous implications for regional stability in the following year.

## **Admission to the UN Security Council**

At the beginning of 1947, the Syrian delegation to the United Nations was eager to build on its successful UN engagement by defending its newly acquired rights and the rights of other nations to sovereignty and independence. The critical issue driving Syrian-UN engagement during this period was the situation in Palestine and Syrian fears that the British would unilaterally establish, what Damascus perceived to be, an expansionist Zionist state near its borders. From the Syrian perspective, such a development would not only pose a direct threat to Syrian sovereignty but had wider implications for Arab sovereignty and political independence.

To ensure its views on sovereignty and political independence, particularly as it relates to Palestine, were considered on the international stage, the Syrian delegation vied for a position on the same UN body that supported its own unconditional rights to self-determination—the Security Council. To acquire a seat on the prestigious body, Syria would need to gain the approval of the majority of members within the General Assembly. Although a difficult case to make as a small, new country, the odds were not entirely against Syria. According to Article 23 of the UN Charter, the General Assembly is responsible for electing non-permanent members for a two-year term. Current non-permanent members of the UNSC are ineligible for immediate reelection, and the merit of new non-permanent members is based off the country’s contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security, their contribution to other purposes of the organization, and to fulfill the equitable geographic distribution of Security Council representatives.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the decision to choose Syria, the last clause of Article 23 referring to the “equitable geographic distribution”, was central to the debate. According to the guidance established by the United Nations in 1945, in addition to the five permanent members, the

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<sup>6</sup> Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 18–19.

regional groups of the non-permanent members at the time included the following: 1) one member of the British Commonwealth; 2) one country from Eastern and Central Europe; 3) one country from Northern, Western, and Southern Europe; 4) two countries from the other American Republics; and 5) one country from Asia or Africa.<sup>7</sup> Based off of this division, Syria fell within the latter category.

The chief contender within the Asian and African region for Syria's seat on the UNSC was India, which had the backing of the United Kingdom and British Dominions. According to U.S. internal communications, officials in Washington were also torn between supporting Syria or India for the UNSC seat. According to a top secret memo dated 1 November 1946, U.S. Representative to the UN David H. Popper noted that, "the Delegation had been advised by the [State] Department that if it was unprofitable to support Syria, India might be supported [...]. He said that he thought that it would be better to drop Syria since both Syria and India were from the general middle-eastern region."<sup>8</sup> However, the minutes from the meeting report that the Ambassador to Syria and Lebanon George Wadsworth countered Popper's suggestion that the U.S. should back India, noting that the Arab Middle East was a distinctly vital region stating:

"it was true that India was tied to the Middle East in the organization of the Department of State and was geographically in somewhat the same area as Syria. However, he felt that the Middle East area itself was a very vital one and should have a representative on the Security Council. The only possible alternatives were Greece, Turkey and Iran. The same argument applied to all three possibilities that they were under Russian pressure. The Turks did not want to have membership on the Security Council; therefore, the state must be an Arab state. Egypt was now on the Security Council and could not be reelected. Then the next best candidate was Syria. Moreover, Syria had the support of the other Arab states and also of many South Americans. Mr. al-Khury told Mr. Wadsworth that he had definite

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<sup>7</sup> "Doc. 343 Secretary's Staff Committee Working Paper (SC-171/8)," Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, General: The United Nations, Volume I - Office of the Historian, November 15, 1945, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945v01/d343>.

<sup>8</sup> "Doc. 107 Minutes of the Thirteenth Meeting of the United States Delegation, Held at New York, Hotel Pennsylvania, November 1, 1946, 9:00 a.M.," Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, General; the United Nations, Volume I - Office of the Historian, November 1, 1946, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v01/d107>.

assurance of support from Gromyko [the then Soviet Union UN Representative]. Al-Khury had sent his men to talk with each of the Eastern European bloc and found that each had instructions to vote for Syria [...] Mr. Wadsworth said that Mr. al-Khury had come to see him late the previous evening to say that he had talked with the Indians, who had assured him that India was not a candidate if it meant displacing Syria [...] Thus, Mr. Wadsworth said, all the countries in that part of the world agreed that Syria was the best choice.”<sup>9</sup>

The U.S. decision to support Syria was also driven by a desire to appease smaller states within the United Nations. Dissatisfied with the limited influence they had within the new international system, the U.S. stressed that it was very important that the smaller states felt as if they had a voice in the organization even if that voice gave the country, “influence greater than that represented by its own military and economic strength.”<sup>10</sup>

After back and forth negotiations, Syria achieved its third major UN victory and was selected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. On 19 November 1946, the General Assembly during its 32<sup>nd</sup> Plenary Meeting elected Belgium, Columbia, and Syria on the first-round ballot for a two-year term on the eleven-member UN Security Council. The newly-elected countries would replace the Netherlands, Mexico and Egypt who were the first non-permanent regional states elected for a one-year term. With its spot on the UNSC secure, the Syrian delegation was well positioned to defend its own Syrian and regional Arab interests, as well as champion the principles of sovereignty and political independence for other nations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Doc. 107 Minutes of the Thirteenth Meeting of the United States Delegation, Held at New York, Hotel Pennsylvania, November 1, 1946, 9:00 a.M.”

<sup>10</sup> “Doc. 99 Memorandum Prepared in the Division of International Organization Affairs,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, General; the United Nations, Volume I - Office of the Historian, October 1, 1946, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v01/d99>.

<sup>11</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 453.

## **Championing the UN Charter on the Security Council**

During the first few months on the Security Council, Syria's UN delegation, headed by Faris al-Khury, devoted much of its attention to the legality of procedural matters, and focused on qualifying terminology in UN proposals it found overstepped the Charter's Mandate. In his opening comments on January 7, 1947, during the eighty-ninth meeting of the UN Security Council, al-Khury declared:

“The Charter embodies the principles of justice and fair dealings which lie at the basis of international life. During our term of office in the Security Council, we shall remain loyal to these principles, and we shall be guided by them in our work...We look forward to successful co-operation with all the members of the Council, in contributing our share to the cause of peace and the realization of the ideals of the Charter.”<sup>12</sup>

Al-Khury would continue to champion this point in what became a common refrain of the Syrian delegation in matters ranging from procedural issues on the admission of new UN members, to border disputes along the Greek Frontiers.<sup>13</sup> This policy of advancing legal interpretations that champion the principles enshrined in the UN Charter would soon take on more political dimensions when debates were linked directly or indirectly to the situation in Palestine.

## **Syria Presides over the UN Security Council**

During the month of August 1947, the Syrian delegation under the leadership of Faris al-Khury presided over two key questions involving independence seeking nations in Indonesia and Egypt against more powerful occupying forces. Syria's right to serve as President of the Security Council was based on Article 30 of the UN Charter which states that the Security

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<sup>12</sup> “Eighty-Ninth Meeting: 2. Inaugural Speeches by the New Members,” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Second Year No. 1* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1947), 3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634786/files/S\\_PV.89-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634786/files/S_PV.89-EN.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> “Resolutions Adopted by the United Nations Security Council in 1947,” accessed April 20, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/1947.shtml>.

Council has the authority to set its own rules and procedures, including the process for choosing the Council's President—a position that rotates between the members each month typically based off the alphabetical order of the member states' names.<sup>1415</sup> Central to Syria's consideration of both questions was the situation in Palestine. If they could succeed in promoting the self-determination of the indigenous peoples of Indonesia and Egypt as well as the unconditional withdrawal of foreign forces from those two countries, then they theoretically stood a good chance at securing the same for Palestine.

The first major item on al-Khury's agenda as president of the UN Security Council was the Indonesian Question. Since the early seventeenth century, Europeans had considerable interest in establishing an economic presence in Indonesia with the Dutch East India Company being a prime example. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch had extended control over the entirety of the East Indies, a position they maintained until World War II. During the war, German forces diverted the attention of the Dutch military away from their overseas colonies to the home front, in a move that opened the door for a Japanese occupation of Indonesia and the destruction of Dutch colonial infrastructure. By the war's end, Indonesians who had already begun experiencing burgeoning nationalist sentiment since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century declared an independent republic in 1945, while the Dutch—who were willing to recognize the nationalists as the de facto heads of a republic—negotiated the Linggadjati agreement authorizing de facto independence so long as the Indonesian Republic remained under the authority of the Dutch Queen.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> "President of the United Nations Security Council," accessed April 20, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/presidency/>.

<sup>16</sup> "Indonesia," *Britannica Academic*, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://academic-eb-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Indonesia/106301>.

During the Syrian delegation's presidency on the Security Council in August 1947, the central debate on the Indonesian Question was how to resolve the recent outbreak of hostilities between independence seeking forces of the Republic of Indonesia and Dutch occupying forces from the Netherlands. On 30 July 1947, UN representatives from Australia and India submitted individual letters to the UN Secretary General warning that the recent flare up of violence in Java and Sumatra constituted a threat to international peace and security that could warrant punitive measures to restore peace in accordance with Articles 34, 35 and 39 of the UN Charter.<sup>17</sup> The representative of Australia further urged the speedy adoption of its proposed draft resolution calling on both sides to cease hostilities and settle their disputes through arbitration or other peaceful means.<sup>18</sup>

For the Netherlands delegation, the important piece missing from the discussions of the Indonesian Question was the issue of sovereignty. From the Netherlands perspective, the United Nations Charter only applies to sovereign states, and since the Dutch are the only sovereign entity in control of Indonesia, the UN have no right to influence a matter that falls within the domestic jurisdiction of any country. This Dutch viewpoint had implications for two steps the UN Security Council was trying to take to resolve the dispute: 1) pass a resolution to resolve the latest violence; and 2) inviting the Republic of Indonesia to take part in the deliberations.

Leading the charge on addressing the resolution of the Indonesian dispute, the Australian delegation proposed a draft resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and arbitration of the matter, and to allow the Republic of Indonesia to have a non-voting seat on the UNSC's deliberations. On both issues, the Netherlands again argued that the UN had no jurisdiction to

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<sup>17</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48* (Lake Success, New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations, 1949), 362–63.

<sup>18</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 364.

dictate internal matters related to arbitration, arguing that the Republic of Indonesia violated the terms of the Linggadjati agreement therefore freeing the Dutch of any obligation to arbitrate. Further, they argued again that Indonesia was not a sovereign state and therefore should not be allowed to speak before the UN Security Council on this issue.<sup>19</sup>

For its part, the Syrian delegation supported the Australian draft resolution wholeheartedly and balked at the Netherlands characterization that the Republic of Indonesia did not have any sovereignty in the country. During the 1 August 1947 discussions of the Australian draft resolution and question of inviting the Republic of Indonesia to speak, al-Khury stated that Indonesia possessed all the marks of an independent state, especially from an institutional perspective, and should therefore be treated as such by the UN arguing:

“I cannot conceive that a country recognized as a republic, having a constitution, a president, a cabinet responsible for the conduct of affairs, possessing a legislative body, and having an educational department, should not be independent. For these reasons, we are quite convinced that the Republic of Indonesia is an independent State, which desires to be considered as such and treated as such by the United Nations.”<sup>20</sup>

Drawing its line in the sand, the Syrian delegation supported Australia’s efforts to pass a resolution and include the Indonesians in the UNSC’s discussions. Momentum thus shifted against the Netherlands, and although they refused to back down on the question of Indonesian sovereignty, it agreed to abide by the resolutions and accept the calls for a ceasefire and arbitration. By 4 August 1947, both sides had implemented the UN’s call for a ceasefire and began taking steps to seek outside arbitration of their dispute.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 363–64.

<sup>20</sup> “Hundred and Seventy-Third Meeting: 269. Continuation of the Discussion on the Indonesian Question,” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Second Year No. 68*, 1947, 1701, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635195/files/S\\_PV-173-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635195/files/S_PV-173-EN.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 364.

Although Syria's position was accepted within the UNSC debates, success on the Indonesian question should only be viewed as a partial victory for the Syrian delegation. For one, the temporary halt in violence in August 1947 did not mean an end to the violence in Indonesia, and the country would not fully gain formal recognition of its independence until December 1949. Furthermore, the line of argument presented by the Syrian delegation that Indonesia should be independent because it possesses all the features of an independent government, would prove problematic when arguing against Israeli claims for statehood in the following months and years. However, it is probable that the Syrian delegation calculated that if the UN accepts this line of reasoning in the case of Indonesia then perhaps they might accept it for Egypt which they were set to debate next.

### **The Egyptian Question**

The second major question addressed by the Security Council during Faris al-Khury's presidency was the Egyptian Question. In broad terms, the Egyptian Question involved a dispute between Egypt and the United Kingdom, with the former arguing that British forces remained in Egypt against the will of the Egyptian people and must withdraw and allow for the historical reunification of Egypt with Sudan. This issue had particular resonance for the Syrian delegation given its own experiences petitioning the UNSC to force the withdrawal of British and French occupying forces from in its own country and its broader historical territorial claims.

However, not only did the Syrian delegation view this as an issue of Egyptian rights to sovereignty and political independence, but they also tied the outcome of this debate to the situation in Palestine. According to Syria's alternate UN representative Amir Adil Arslan's memoirs, there was concern that if the Syrian delegation failed on the Egyptian Question, then

that might mean failure for the similar situation unfolding in Palestine. In his memoirs, he noted towards the end of discussions on the Egyptian question that:

“Nothing pointed to success on the Egyptian Question in New York. I preferred to solve the two issues of Palestine and Cyrenaica [region of E. Libya] before the Question of Sudan, because if we fail on the Egyptian Question that will lead to our failure in these.”<sup>22</sup>

It remained to be seen how the actual course of events would unfold in the Egyptian Question and the implications a potential precedent on the Egyptian question might set for the situation in Palestine.

On 5 August 1947, the UN representative of the Egyptian Government was invited by the Security Council to deliver his country’s position on their dispute with the United Kingdom. Central to the Egyptian position was its view that the advent of the United Nations fundamentally changed the nature of the international legal system. In light of this new world order, any situation where the rights of sovereignty and self-determination of a UN member were in question, the UN principles should prevail. This issue was first brought to the attention of the UN on 8 July 1947 when Egypt’s Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mahmoud Fahmy al-Nuqrashy Pasha sent a letter to the UN Secretary General outlining Egypt’s demands. Those demands included a total and immediate withdrawal of British forces from Egypt and the Sudan as well as the termination of the British administration in Sudan.<sup>23</sup>

The Egyptian argument presented during the UNSC deliberations justifying the withdrawal of British troops rested on three key components. The first argument given by the Egyptian delegation was that after the failure to negotiate a bilateral solution, the continued presence of British occupying forces was becoming a major source of friction with the local

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Ādil Arslān and Yūsuf Ībish, *Mudhakkirāt al-Amīr ‘Ādil Arslān, al-Juz al-Thani (1946-1950)*, al-Ṭab‘ah 1. (Bayrūt, Lubnān: al-Dār al-Taḡaddumīyah, 1983), 690–91.

<sup>23</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 356.

populace and constituted a threat to peace according to Articles 33, 35, and 37 of the Charter. The second major argument centered around the Egyptian belief that the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936—an agreement allowing for the maintenance of 10,000 British troops in Egypt for a period of 20 years until the Egyptians were capable of protecting the Suez Canal— was no longer valid. The Egyptian delegation argued that the treaty was signed due to the impending World War II, but now that a new international system was in place to manage international security, and the Nazi threat was gone, the agreement no longer applies. The final argument they raised suggested that the continued presence of British occupying forces in Egypt also violated international law, specifically UN General Assembly Resolution 41 (I). According to UNGA Resolution 41 (I), the UN recommends the “withdrawal without delay” of “armed forces stationed in the territories of Members without their consent freely and publicly expressed in treaties or agreements consistent with the Charter and not contradicting international agreements.”<sup>24</sup> Regarding this final point, the Egyptians argued: 1) the 1936 treaty was signed under occupation and did not reflect the free will of Egyptians; 2) was inconsistent with previous international agreements such as 1888 Constantinople agreement guaranteeing international access to the Suez Canal; and 3) that Article 103 of UN Charter states that in the event of any disagreement involving international agreements, the UN obligations shall prevail.<sup>25</sup>

Naturally, the British held a different view of the situation from the Egyptians, arguing instead that this was a matter of the UN upholding the legal principle of *pacta sunt servanda* (agreements must be kept) in the case of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty. From the British perspective, nothing raised in the Nuqrashi letter nor the statements from the Egyptian UN

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<sup>24</sup> “Resolution of the General Assembly: Principles Governing the General Regulation and Reduction of Armaments,” Avalon Project - A Decade of American Foreign Policy 1941-1949, December 14, 1946, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/decad248.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decad248.asp).

<sup>25</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 356–57.

representative, sufficiently justified characterizing the Anglo-Egyptian dispute as a threat to peace. Instead, the British argued that the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty was still in effect and had nine years to go before either of the parties could demand revisions. Nevertheless, the British noted that they did begin negotiations with the Egyptians at the ten-year mark, but that it was the Egyptians who blocked negotiations from coming to fruition. Specifically, the Egyptians apparently refused to accept the British demand that Sudan be given the right to self-determination—a right the Egyptians demanded for themselves. Because of Egypt's unwillingness to accept this right for Sudan, the negotiations fell apart and the situation remained governed by their mutual treaty.<sup>26</sup>

Following the opening remarks by the Egyptian and British representatives, the UN Security Council members proposed three different draft resolutions in an attempt to resolve the dispute. The first resolution, proposed by Brazil, argued that before considering the situation a dispute, both parties should exhaust all means of negotiation and keep the council apprised of such proceedings. The second proposal came from Colombia which called on both parties to resume negotiations towards withdrawing British troops from Egypt, conditional on their mutual guarantee of security for the Suez Canal. The final proposal from China simply called for the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties, expressing confidence that such discussions would result in the early evacuation of British troops from Egypt.<sup>27</sup>

In response to the proposed resolutions, both the parties to the dispute and other council members raised several points of contention with the underlying implications of the different proposals, specifically regarding British troop withdrawal. For one, the British representative continued to raise questions about the validity of Egypt having the right to even raise this

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<sup>26</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 357–58.

<sup>27</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 358–62.

question before the Security Council, given that they were legally bound to the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty that called for the stationing of British troops in the country. Other representatives like the U.S.S.R. delegate argued against the Brazilian claim that the Egyptian Question did not constitute a dispute, while also critiquing the Colombian proposal for making British withdrawal conditional on some sort of mutual defense treaty. For their part, the French were of the view that the Security Council lacked the justification to impose any scenario on the two parties given that the treaty remained in place. Finally, the Egyptian representative reiterated his stance that so long as British forces remain in the country, no amount of negotiations could proceed from a position of equality and it will likely result in a breach of peace.<sup>28</sup>

Deviating from his traditional legal approach, Faris al-Khury of the Syrian delegation and President of the UNSC debate, approached the Egyptian Question from a completely different angle, linking the implications of this dispute to the situation in Palestine. The first notable redirection al-Khury suggested was that the presence of foreign forces against the will of the Egyptian people was a situation that justified the right to self-defense. In response to the British contention that the Egyptians did not have the right to raise this dispute before the Security Council, al-Khury not only countered this claim but argued the Egyptians could force British withdrawal militarily stating:

“In my humble opinion it does [have a right to raise this dispute to the UNSC]...The Egyptian Government correctly felt that these continuous encroachments upon its legitimate rights as a Member of the United Nations, entitled them to exercise all prerogatives of full independence and sovereign equality guaranteed by the Charter, would surely lead to a collision...The Egyptian Government is also justified in deeming that the continuance of these wrongs against its political and civil rights gives it full right to resort to self-defense under Article 51 of the Charter, considering that the presence of foreign armed forces on its land, against its free will, constitutes an armed attack upon it. In order to cope with these dangerous conditions, the Egyptian Government took

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<sup>28</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 358–62.

steps toward peaceful settlement in compliance with the recommendation in Chapter VI of the Charter.”<sup>29</sup>

Continuing on this line of reasoning, al-Khury argued that not only could an outbreak of violence in Egypt have a spillover effect in Palestine, but not resolving this dispute might lead Arabs in Palestine to say enough is enough, and fight back against British and Zionist forces there.

Addressing this point, al-Khury stated:

“The presence of United Kingdom forces in Egypt is harmful to the Egyptians, because it is a permanent source of vexation which touches their national pride and defies their sovereignty...I am afraid that a breach of the peace in that area, considering the most critical situation in Palestine, will not be confined to Egypt...The Arab people in the Near East, already upset by the flagrant injustice committed against them in the name of the Zionist dream, may not be able to endure another injustice in their fatherland. I mention this probable disastrous eventuality in order to call the attention of the Security Council to the magnitude of the danger which is likely to evolve from this dispute, the definite solution of which is of deep concern to the Security Council.”<sup>30</sup>

To understand the Syrian delegation’s turn from legal arguments towards threats of a potential outbreak of war, it is instructional to return to the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework. According to this framework, when a political problem is brought before the United Nations, the Syrian government will leverage the UN Charter and other organizational resolutions in defense of its twin objectives of sovereignty and political independence. The key component to the success of this strategy rests on the UN Charter and its principles remaining effective mechanisms for achieving these goals. If that central mechanism breaks down, then the Syrian government’s only remaining option is to either concede or fight to achieve its strategic objectives. What al-Khury’s remarks in the course of the Egyptian Question suggest, is that the Syrian delegation sees that the UN is backing away from its core principles and will refuse to

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<sup>29</sup> “Hundred and Ninety-Sixth Meeting: 342. Continuation of the Discussion of the Egyptian Question,” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Second Year No. 84* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1947), 2237–38, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635344/files/S\\_PV-196-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635344/files/S_PV-196-EN.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> “Hundred and Ninety-Sixth Meeting: 342. Continuation of the Discussion of the Egyptian Question,” 2241–42.

recognize Egypt's right to sovereignty and political independence. If that is the case, then not only should the UN expect Egypt to fight for such rights, but the same will also be true if progress is not made in the case of Palestine.

Ultimately, all three of the proposed draft resolutions in the Egyptian Question failed to gain approval within the Security Council. Making one final effort to coax the British into withdrawing from Egypt, al-Khury recommended that the British follow the precedent set forth by its own government along with the French for the unilateral withdrawal of forces from Syria. He noted that such a move would serve as a confidence building measure as the last unilateral withdrawal was "greatly appreciated in the Near East and in all the world at that time."<sup>31</sup> Despite such efforts, Amir Adil Arslan's prediction of failure on the Egyptian Question was correct and the British would remain in Egypt for the next several years. However, it remained to be seen if Arslan's fears that failure on the Egyptian Question would automatically spell failure for Palestine. Having failed to achieve a victory on the Egyptian Question, the Syrian delegation remained engaged and hoped to leverage its early successes and achieve a major victory on the Question of Palestine.

### **Question of Palestine**

In 1947, no issue dealt a greater blow to Syrian confidence in, and relationship with, the United Nations, than the Question of Palestine. Since the fall of Faysal's Arab Kingdom in 1920 which envisioned Palestine as part of an independent Syrian state, the Syrian press and public sphere continued to follow political developments in Palestine with particular interest. Seen from

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<sup>31</sup> "Two Hundred and First Meeting: 356. Continuation of the Discussion of the Egyptian Question," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Second Year No. 88* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1947), 2351, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635350/files/S\\_PV-201-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635350/files/S_PV-201-EN.pdf).

Damascus' perspective as a natural extension of its historical domain, resolving the Question of Palestine in its favor was important to Syria for both ideological and strategic purposes. From the ideological perspective, securing Palestinian sovereignty and political independence was seen as just one step in the process of correcting a legacy of colonial injustices that could ultimately lead to the reunification of greater Syria or even the Arab states as one powerful political entity. However, maintaining Arab dominance in Palestine was also a strategic consideration for Syrian officials. From Damascus' perspective, Zionism appeared to not only pose a threat to Palestine or the various Arab or Greater Syrian unity schemes, but it appeared to be an expansionist movement with vast territorial ambitions that could easily threaten Syrian sovereignty. With a ready-made precedent in the Syrian-Lebanese Question for encouraging foreign troop withdrawal and recognizing local independence, the Syrian UN delegation would fight in vain to replicate such success on the Question of Palestine, ultimately resulting in the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state.<sup>32</sup>

Vying for the independence and sovereignty of Palestine over the course of debates, Syrian engagement with the international system on the Palestine Question failed multiple times to achieve Damascus' strategic interests. Specifically, there were three major aspects to the Question of Palestine in 1947 that the Syrian delegation failed to influence to its liking. First, the Syrian delegation failed to safeguard Palestinian independence and sovereignty as the core objective of the UN General Assembly's First Special Session convened to establish a special committee to study the situation in Palestine. Secondly, the Syrian delegation failed to have any meaningful influence on the outcome of the special committee's investigation and their recommendations for the future of Palestine. Finally, the Syrian delegation ultimately failed to

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<sup>32</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, vol. 1, Plenary Meetings of the General Assembly (Lake Success, New York: United Nations, 1947), 135–38.

counter the political support within the General Assembly for the special committee's recommendation for the Partition of Palestine.

At each juncture in the debate, the Syrian delegation fruitlessly leveraged the UN Charter to defend Palestinian sovereignty and independence. However, with every failure it became increasingly clear from the Syrian delegation's rhetoric that the country was inching towards war. Should the UN—from Syria's perspective—continue to ignore the Charter and the organization's founding principles, then Syria would be forced to consider alternative means to safeguard its interests. The following section will retrace the three phases to the Palestine Question in 1947, as well as the changing nature of Syrian rhetorical engagement, with special emphasis on the shift away from legal arguments towards political language, indicating a slide towards war.

In early 1947, tensions in Palestine between Palestinian Arabs, Zionist settlers, members of the Zionist political movement, and the British Mandate (est. 1920) authorities were reaching a breaking point. The underlying source of frustration fueling the conflict in Palestine was the question of Jewish immigration. Before the outbreak of World War II, the UK Government responsible for administering Palestine had determined that unbridled Jewish immigration to Palestine was the leading cause of an Arab revolt in 1936-1939, and as such, determined to place restrictions on the number of Jewish immigrants as recommended in the British White Paper of 1939. However, the discovery of Nazi Germany's concentration camps and accounts of genocide from Jewish holocaust survivors, prompted widespread sympathy after World War II as well as international calls for finding a solution to the plight of the Jewish population. In response, the British, in coordination with the United States, established a committee to determine an appropriate solution for the holocaust survivors living in displaced persons camps. On 30 April

1946, the committee recommended the admission of 100,000 Jews to Palestine and the establishment of a binational state under the purview of a UN trusteeship.<sup>33</sup> However, the Jews and Arabs refused the committee's recommendations, accepting only partition (the Jewish demand) or independence for the whole of Palestine (the Palestinian and Arab demand). In response to the proposal, the British increasingly became the target of Zionist and Palestinian militancy. Faced with guerilla warfare, supply shortages and economic difficulties—having recently abandoned its colonial holdings in India as a result—the British appeared determined to end their Mandate in Palestine.<sup>34</sup>

As the situation continued to deteriorate in Palestine, British authorities announced in February 1947 their plans to terminate their Mandate in Palestine and turned to the United Nations to intervene. On 2 April 1947, Sir Alexander Cadogan of the UK United Nations delegation submitted a letter to the Acting Secretary General of the United Nations, Dr. Victor Hoo, requesting that the question of the future government of Palestine be placed on the General Assembly's agenda for the upcoming fall session. In order to ensure that General Assembly debates are productive, the British delegation also requested that the UN first convene a special session tasked with forming and instructing a special committee responsible for studying the situation in Palestine and submitting its recommendations to the UNGA on a way forward. Having received the concurrence of a majority of the UN's members, the Secretary-General called for a special session to be held in Flushing Meadows, New York beginning on 28 April 1947.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Pappé, 14.

<sup>35</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 276–77.

Unlike its strategy of unilateral engagement within the Security Council, to be successful in the inclusive General Assembly, the Syrian delegation needed to gain broad support on the Question of Palestine and turned to its Arab allies for help. However, by the start of General Assembly special session on the Question of Palestine, Syrian officials only had the support of four other Arab countries—Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia—who similarly began as founding members of the UN in October 1945.<sup>36</sup> While each Arab country had its own geostrategic interest in the region and towards Palestine in particular, there was a general consensus that on issues impacting the Arab arena, the Arab states would work towards presenting a unified voice.<sup>37</sup> With such support, the Syrian UN delegation sought to add one additional item to the UN’s agenda—the termination of the British Mandate over Palestine and the declaration of its independence.<sup>38</sup> As such, on 22 April 1947 Syria’s Minister in Washington Dr. Constantine Zurayk submitted a letter to UN Secretary General Trygve Lie—along with letters submitted by Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia—requesting the inclusion of their agenda item in accordance with rule 18 of the UNGA rules of procedure.<sup>39</sup> Per UN rules of procedure, the Syrian and fellow Arab request was included on the Supplementary List of

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<sup>36</sup> Of note, while not yet a member during the special session on the Question of Palestine, Yemen would soon join the ranks of the United Nations on 30 September 1947 in time for the vote on the UN Partition Plan for Palestine in November of that year. Additionally, although they occasionally submit letters and statements to the United Nations for the record, the Arab League did not gain official observer status until 1950 and could not vote on issues within the General Assembly.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Muḥammad al-Hādī ‘Afīfī, *The Arabs and the United Nations* ([London]: Longmans, 1964); and Georges Moussa. Dib, *The Arab Bloc in the United Nations* (Amsterdam: Djambatan, Ltd., International Educational Publishing House, 1956).

<sup>38</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:184-185 Annexed Documents.

<sup>39</sup> See, “Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly” (United Nations, New York, 2008), 6, <http://www.un.org/depts/DGACM/Uploaded%20docs/rules%20of%20procedure%20of%20ga.pdf>. Rule 18 of the General Assembly Rules of Procedure reads as follows: “Any Member or principal organ of the United Nations or the Secretary-General may, at least four days before the date fixed for the opening of a special session, request the inclusion of supplementary items in the agenda. Such items shall be placed on a supplementary list, which shall be communicated to Members as soon as possible.”

Additional Agenda Items for consideration by the General Committee along with the UK government's agenda item on the future government of Palestine.<sup>40</sup>

### **UNGA First Special Session – Debating the Inclusion of Arab Requests on the Agenda**

After convening in Flushing Meadows on 28 April 1947, members of the General Assembly's General Committee<sup>41</sup> held several preliminary meetings to debate whether the UK request, the Arab states' requests, or both should go on the First Special Session's agenda. The key differences in the debate surrounded the question of whether the inclusion of the Arab agenda item would actually limit the possible solutions for the future government of Palestine or whether or not the entire discussion was irrelevant since the UN guaranteed Palestine the right to independence. To facilitate discussions on this question, the General Committee authorized the participation of Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia in accordance with rule 34 of the General Assembly rules of procedure. According to the rule, General Assembly members who are not on the General Committee are allowed to participate in discussions they have raised but do not have a right to vote on the matter during the Committee's deliberations.<sup>42</sup>

Having secured a seat in the General Committee's meeting on the Question of Palestine, the Arab States pressed their demands for the inclusion of the Mandate's termination and the declaration of Palestinian independence. During the course of the debates, the Arab states advanced ten core arguments for why Palestinian independence should be a top priority for the United Nations. Such arguments included the following: 1) independence was the recognized goal of the League of Nations Class A Mandates as evidenced by the achievement of

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<sup>40</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 277.

<sup>41</sup> The General Committee is composed of the President of the General Assembly and 21 Vice-Presidents of the Assembly and the Chairmen of the General Assembly's six Main Committees. The five permanent members of the Security Council serve as Vice-Presidents, as well.

<sup>42</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 278.

independence of other former Ottoman territories; 2) other arrangements like the Balfour declaration are not only contrary to the League of Nations Covenant, but also to the principles of the United Nations' Charter; 3) all that is needed to solve the Palestine Question is an adherence to the UN's principles, and 4) a declaration of Palestine's independence by the General Assembly. Further, the Arab states argued that: 5) the matter was urgent; 6) that principles should be agreed to first as a committee would be useless without them; 7) Arabs and Jews are in agreement that independence is the only just solution; 8) discussing independence would not prejudge the situation as it was the League of Nation's goal already; 9) independence does not have to occur immediately; and 10) the independence of Palestine is a completely separate issue from the question of Jewish displaced persons.<sup>43</sup>

For its part, the Syrian delegation defended Palestinian rights to sovereignty and political independence by leveraging key lines of reasoning it advanced as justification for the withdrawal of French and British forces from its own country. The two main points raised by the Syrian delegation during the General Committee's preliminary discussions on the provisional agenda centered on the question of whether the British had the authority to issue requests on behalf of Palestine and whether continued Jewish immigration for state seizure purposes violated the UN Charter. On 29 April 1947, Syria's UN Representative Faris al-Khury began his remarks by warning of the consequences that might unfold if the Palestine Question is not adequately addressed stating, "The present state of affairs in Palestine and the atrocities committed there are threatening international peace and security in the Near East, in the Middle East, and perhaps other parts of the world will be disturbed."<sup>44</sup> Given that the Palestine Question constituted a

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<sup>43</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 278-79.

<sup>44</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 29 April - 7 May 1947*, vol. 2, Plenary Meetings of the General Assembly (Lake Success, New York: United Nations, 1947), 19.

threat to peace, al-Khury argued that it was the responsibility of the United Nations to address international threats to peace, not the British, and as such the matter should be the UN's sole responsibility. Further, he noted that following the establishment of the UN Charter, it was no longer legal for a state to stand in the way of a people's internationally recognized—according to the League of Nations Covenant—right to independence. He therefore called on the Committee to also study the matter of the British Mandate's legality. Turning to the question of Jewish immigration on 30 April, al-Khury also argued that continued immigration against the will of local inhabitants violated the UN Charter. He emphasized that while the Syrian delegation did not understand why displaced persons from Europe would need to settle in a region unconnected to the main World War II conflict, the problem of Jewish immigration from Damascus' perspective was that it violated UN resolutions against settlement in non-self-governing territories without the will of the local populace. He noted further that even if Jewish immigration to Palestine for the purpose of “domination” and creating a “sovereign state” was against “all the rules of the United Nations Charter” and even if the world did not accept the jurisdiction of the UN on this matter, al-Khury argued that such immigration even violated the British Mandate.<sup>45</sup>

Despite presenting their views at length, other General Committee members advanced a series of counterpoints against the inclusion of the Arab agenda item in the First Special Session's discussions. For some, the argument against its inclusion was based on practical considerations of wanting to conclude the First Special Session's work as soon as possible and stand up a special committee to study the Palestine Question from multiple perspectives and towards multiple ends before the General Assembly's Fall session. Another camp of delegates

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<sup>45</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 29 April - 7 May 1947, 2:21.*

argued that the question of Palestinian independence would naturally become a key consideration of any special committee's investigation, particularly given that Class A Mandates were already provisionally recognized as independent states. A separate camp argued that the question was simply too complicated to discuss it without a preliminary investigation and that substantive questions should be postponed until the UN could hear the views of the Arabs and Jews.<sup>46</sup>

One key delegation vying to secure a compromised solution to the question of whether or not to include the Arab agenda item in the First Special Session's discussions was India. Rami Ginat notes that in the late 1940s and early 1950s India navigated the Cold War divide between the U.S. and Soviet Union by charting a third way of political neutralism.<sup>47</sup> India's approach was particularly favorable to the Arabs, especially on the issue of Palestine, where U.S. and Soviet leaders supported the plan for partitioning Palestine. Throughout its discussions of the Palestine Question, the Indian delegation shared sympathy with many of the Arab state's views on Palestine's right to independence and the illegality of the British Mandate dictating the way forward. The Indian delegation did suggest however, that since everyone was in agreement that the independence of Palestine should be a key element to the General Assembly's debates, the Arab states should withdraw their proposal for a vote on their agenda item. For Syrian officials, India's position of neutrality in the debates was admirable and al-Khury responded by thanking the Indian delegation for its statements saying, "I am glad to say that he [India's UN delegate] has behind him four hundred million people in India, who support his statement and his analysis. They hold the same views as he does."<sup>48</sup> Despite aligning with the Indian delegation on its

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<sup>46</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 279.

<sup>47</sup> Ginat, *Syria and the Doctrine of Arab Neutralism*, xi.

<sup>48</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 29 April - 7 May 1947*, 2:53.

analysis, the Arab states refused to withdraw their proposals from consideration, although the Syrian delegation was the only Arab state not to issue a statement to that effect.<sup>49</sup>

Following preliminary discussions on the General Assembly's proposed agenda items, the UK and Arab proposals were put to a vote by the General Committee. The British proposal was widely accepted by the General Committee while the Arab proposal only received 1 vote in favor, 8 against and 5 abstentions. The General Committee's recommended agenda item was then passed on to the General Assembly to ratify its suggestions. Again, the General Assembly supported the recommendation for the inclusion of the UK agenda item and shot down the Arab request with 15 votes in favor, 24 against and 10 abstentions. Having failed to pass as one of the General Assembly's key items to debate, the matter of including the Arab proposal on the Special Committee's agenda would be passed on to the General Assembly's First Committee responsible for drafting the terms of reference for the pending investigative UN Special Committee on Palestine.<sup>50</sup>

In response to the General Assembly's decision to block the Arab agenda item, the Syrian delegation accused the General Assembly of overstepping its responsibilities in contravention of the UN Charter. In keeping with the logic of its UN strategic framework, the Syrian delegation sought to leverage the UN Charter and rules of procedure in the hopes of reversing the General Assembly's momentum towards a binational state in Palestine against the local Arab rights to sovereignty and political independence. On 1 May 1947, during the seventieth plenary meeting of the First Special Session, Faris al-Khury expressed his delegation's frustration at how the General Assembly was not only overstepping its mandate, but also failing to uphold proper rules of procedure. Regarding the first point, al-Khury argued that the General Assembly is not

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<sup>49</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 279.

<sup>50</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 280.

allowed to discuss matters under consideration in the UN Security Council. It should be recalled that at this time al-Khury had a non-permanent member seat and voting privileges within the eleven-member Security Council. If he could redirect discussions to that body, he would have a stronger voice to argue on behalf of Palestinian sovereignty and independence. On this point of the Security Council's right to discuss this question, al-Khury maintained that Article 12 of the UN Charter "clearly states that when a subject is under discussion and consideration in the Security Council, the General Assembly shall have no capacity to make recommendations on that subject."<sup>51</sup> Addressing the second point of the General Assembly's limited purview, al-Khury further noted that if the General Assembly moves forward with its discussions on the matter then they only have the limited jurisdiction to decide whether they wish to terminate the British Mandate or submit a Trusteeship agreement on behalf of Palestine.<sup>52</sup> Later that afternoon, Syria's UN Vice Chairman and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Naim Antaki echoed al-Khury's position on the need to focus on the legality of the issue by stating, "I believe rules and procedures are the very best way of protecting the rights of individuals... As a lawyer and as a parliamentarian I abide by rules of procedure."<sup>53</sup> Despite such appeals, the UN General Assembly was moving forward with the majority position and was preparing to give a greater voice to the Zionist perspective on the Question of Palestine.

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<sup>51</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:18.

<sup>52</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:20.

<sup>53</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:37.

## **Debating Zionist and Palestinian Requests to Speak before the General Assembly**

In addition to defining the agenda for the General Assembly's discussions of the Palestine Question, the General Committee was also tasked with handling non-governmental requests by Jewish and Arab organizations in Palestine to present their case before the United Nations. Representing the Zionist perspective, the General Committee planned to consider input from the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the Zionist Organization of America, the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation in Washington, and the Political Action Committee for Palestine. As the primary organization for encouraging the settlement and development of an independent Jewish state, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, founded in 1929 by Chaim Weizmann (President of the World Zionist Organization and subsequently Israel's first President), played a critical role in the Zionist movement. On the Arab Palestinian side, representatives of the Arab Higher Committee—an organization that unified the disparate Palestinian nationalist factions into one movement in 1936—composed of Emile Ghory, Rajai Hussein, Henry Kattan, Wasef Kamal, Isa Nakhleh and Rasem Khaldi, subsequently submitted their own requests for an opportunity to present their case for independence before the UN. The General Committee considered the requests from these two blocks from 2-6 May 1947.

During the General Committee's consideration of the Zionist and Palestinian requests to address the General Assembly, the discussion focused heavily on the question of whether or not the Palestinian Arabs even needed to have their own hearing before the UN. The leading voices in support of only granting a hearing to the Zionist organizations were Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the United States—each presenting their own draft resolutions and amendments to that effect. For its part, the United States representative justified this approach by arguing that the Arab side of the debate was already presented extensively by the Arab states and so the Jewish

side of the story should be heard. Ironically, when making the argument that the Arabs have already spoken for the Palestinian side, the US representative said that the UN should still keep in mind that the Jewish Agency did not speak on behalf of all the Jews in the world.<sup>54</sup>

In response to the apparent double standard towards Jewish and Palestinian participation in the General Assembly discussions, the Syrian delegation pressed for the inclusion of Palestinian voices in the debate. The Syrian delegation even suggested that if the Arab states have spoken on behalf of the Arabs in Palestine, then many countries within the western camp have already advanced the Zionist argument. However, in pressing for the right of Palestinians to independent representation before the UN, the Syrian delegation made an interesting argument about the implications the UN was making by suggesting that Syria speaks on behalf of the Palestinians. Speaking on this point during the seventy-fifth plenary meeting on 5 May was Syrian UN representative Farid Zayn al-Din (1907-1976?). Born to a Druze family on Mount Lebanon, Zayn al-Din studied law at the American University of Beirut and received a doctorate in international law from the Sorbonne in Paris. Active in the Syrian national struggle in the 1930s and 1940s, Zayn al-Din became Secretary General of the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1946 before becoming the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the USSR in 1947.<sup>55</sup> Speaking now as the Syrian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Zayn al-Din addressed the question of the inclusion of Jewish and Palestinian perspectives in the General Assembly debates stating:

“I do not think that the Zionist point of view has really lacked presentation to date... The second argument presented--and one which, to my mind, is completely unfounded--is that the Palestinian Arab point of view was presented here. The Syrian delegation, as well as delegations of other Arab States, does not represent the Palestinian Arabs. The Syrian delegation represents the Government

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<sup>54</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 281–82.

<sup>55</sup> Moubayed, *Steel & Silk*, 420–21.

of the Syrian Republic; unless it is to be implied that Palestine is within the confines of the Syrian Republic, we cannot say that we represent it in the least.”<sup>56</sup>

This subtle side comment by Zayn ad-Din on the implications of Syria speaking on behalf of the Palestinians should not be overlooked. Although advanced in the context of advocating for an independent Palestinian voice, the Syrian delegation has suggested in the past that their country was tied to Palestine historically. As the UN continues to move forward on the debates, largely ignoring the Syrian perspective, comments like this may suggest that the Syrians are prepared to take a more assertive role in defending historical Arab rights and its own claims in Palestine.

Following Zayn al-Din’s comments and requests by the Arab Higher Committee to participate in discussions, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Yugoslavia and the Byelorussian S.S.R. submitted their own resolution and amendments calling for wider Palestinian participation in the discussions. Submitted on 5 May, the resolution called for a hearing by the Jewish Agency for Palestine to present their case as well as “communications of a similar character by the Palestinian population.”<sup>57</sup> Noticeably absent from the resolution was a clear reference to the Arab Higher Committee as the representative body of the Palestinian people just as the Jewish Agency for Palestine was listed as the Zionist representative. After adopting the resolution, the General Assembly passed on the document to the First Committee for its evaluation. Responding to the apparent slight, the Arab Higher Committee withdrew its request for a hearing since they were not invited by the General Assembly to participate. In an attempt to remedy the situation, the First Committee submitted a subsequent proposal directly inviting the Arab Higher Committee to speak on behalf of the Palestinian community, however, the Arab Higher Committee refused to

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<sup>56</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:104.

<sup>57</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:114–15.

budge. To break the impasse, during the 76<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting of the first special session, the President of the General Assembly called for a new General Assembly resolution inviting the Arab Higher Committee to participate.<sup>58</sup> The Arab Higher Committee in turn accepted the gesture and the General Assembly was prepared to hear statements from both sides in Palestine.<sup>59</sup>

### **Statements by the Jewish Agency and Arab Higher Committee**

The UN's decision to invite representatives from the Jewish Agency and the Arab Higher Committee to speak before the General Assembly contributed greatly to the course of the debates as well as to the status of the Jewish Agency in particular. For the first time in its history, the Jewish Agency was recognized as the official representative of the Zionist movement on the international stage. Although the same could be said for the Arab Higher Committee and the Palestinians, the difference was the status of the Jewish Agency as representatives of the voiceless victims of World War II whereas UN members viewed the Arabs as also speaking on behalf of the Palestinians. The key question both parties would debate centered on the legality of pre-United Nations treaties or agreements. In the same manner the French argued in the case of maintaining a privileged status in Syria, the Jewish Agency argued that the Mandate itself as well as British promises to the Jewish people must be recognized as established rights by the UN. For its part, the Arab Higher Committee attempted to argue that such treaties were not only illegal because they disregarded the opinion of the local majority, but that such treaties, if legal, are null in void in the era of the United Nations. These positions would ultimately influence their

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<sup>58</sup> "A/307 Special Committee on Palestine Report of the First Committee," United Nations General Assembly, May 13, 1947, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/06F1E89B3B48291B802564B40049CC67>.

<sup>59</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 283–86.

respective views on whether a Jewish state should be established or if a unified Palestine should be declared independent.

Following the General Assembly's 6 May decision to grant a hearing to the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the President of the General Assembly called on the Jewish Agency to submit a list of representatives and participate in the upcoming discussions. On 8 May the General Assembly received a reply from the Jewish Agency for Palestine accepting the invitation and nominating the following leaders of the Palestine and America-based Zionist movement members to represent their organization at the UN: David Ben-Gurion (the Jewish Agency's head and leading voice of the Zionist movement in Palestine), Dr. Abba Hillel Silver (an American Rabbi known for mobilizing American support for Zionism), Moshe Shertok (the Arab affairs and land purchase agent of the Jewish community's parliamentary assembly in Palestine), Hayim Greenberg (a Jewish-American identity and Socialist Zionist thinker), Mrs. Rose Halprin (the President of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America), Nahum Goldman (the founder of the World Jewish Congress) and Dr. Emanuel Neumann (the Chairman of the executive of the Zionist Organization of America). On May 8, 9 and 12, the General Assembly's First Committee heard statements from Dr. Silver, Moshe Shertok and David Ben-Gurion.<sup>60</sup>

In their statements before the General Assembly's First Committee, the representatives of the Jewish Agency called for the reconstitution of a Jewish National Home in Palestine and offered legal, economic and moral arguments to justify their case. Speaking first on 8 May, Dr. Abba Hillel Silver expressed satisfaction that an international body was examining their case, noting that the UK government was the source of the present unrest in Palestine due to their treatment of Palestine as British sovereign territory, rather than serving as caretakers for the

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<sup>60</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 286.

Palestine Mandate. Jewish rights under the mandate, argued Silver, included the establishment of a Jewish National Home, immigration rights, and a preferred status in construction, the operation of public works, and the development of the country's natural resources. Silver further added that such rights were recognized in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the Mandate for Palestine, and insisted that the UN was responsible for respecting "obligations arising from treaties" as outlined in the UN Charter.<sup>61</sup> Silver advised that the Special Committee look at the record of Jewish technological and economic pioneering achievements in Palestine, that the committee visit the displaced persons camps in Europe, and understand that Jewish immigration to Palestine is not only possible but morally advisable. For his part, Moshe Shertok on 9 May criticized the draft resolution under consideration calling for independence as a possible solution to the situation in Palestine. He argued, as others before, that citing independence as the objective would pre-judge the situation and if anything, the primary objective listed should be the establishment of a Jewish National Home. Finally, on 12 May David Ben-Gurion argued that the British Mandate was not charged with solving the Palestine problem, but rather establishing a Jewish National Home in Palestine. By implementing the White Paper of 1939, the British authorities failed to uphold their Mandate. He concluded by suggesting that given there were Jews without a home and a vast unpopulated wasteland in Palestine, the only solution was the creation of a Jewish state and a Jewish-Arab alliance.<sup>62</sup> Doing so would not only solve the Palestine problem, but according to Ben-Gurion would, "enhance the moral authority and prestige of this great organization for world justice and peace."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 286-88.

<sup>63</sup> "Speeches by Jewish Agency Representatives in the General Assembly- May 1947," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1947-1974, May 8, 1947, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook1/pages/speeches%20by%20jewish%20agency%20representatives%20in%20the%20g.aspx>.

As General Assembly support for the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine grew, the Syrian UN delegation warned of the potential devastating security consequences that would follow. Speaking before the General Assembly, Faris al-Khury began by highlighting how peculiar it was for the General Assembly to have been so resistant, throughout the course of debates, to include any language within a resolution that guaranteed the independence of Palestine. However, after hearing the Jewish Agency appeal to the UN's moral authority al-Khury suggested that, "when we consider the Zionist programme as explained boldly and clearly by the spokesman of the Jewish agency here, the motive for deferring independence indefinitely becomes obvious."<sup>64</sup> Of the statements made by the Jewish Agency, the issue of mass immigration to Palestine constituted the key threat to Arab sovereignty and risked sparking a regional war. Underscoring the threat of mass Jewish immigration to Palestine, al-Khury stated:

"In the face of such upsetting aspirations, the Arabs in all the Middle East have reason to be excited and to resort to their right of self-defence... How can it be imagined that in the middle of the twentieth century and under the authority and the auspices of the United Nations and its Charter, such a religious Jewish crusade to the Holy Land could be contemplated? Such a programme is not only likely to be dangerous to peace, but it is sure to lead to lamentable results, not only in Palestine, but in the whole Middle East... The Arabs will never allow a wedge to be driven into the heart of their fatherland, nor will they allow the establishment of a bridgehead for future aggression. Any solution other than establishing Palestine as one democratic independent State, and stopping any future or further immigration shall not be accepted by the Syrian Government and the Syrian people."<sup>65</sup>

Al-Khury's remarks on the relationship between UN failure and an outbreak of violence are critical for understanding the Syria-UN Strategic Framework. In the case of the Question of

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<sup>64</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:240.

<sup>65</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:241.

Palestine, the challenge confronting the Syrian delegation is establishing the sovereignty and political independence of Palestine through the UN system. When describing Palestine, al-Khury reiterated its importance for the question of Arab sovereignty, as well as an issue for Syrian sovereignty. For the Syrian delegation, Zionism by its very nature is an expansionist movement that not only threatens the Arab heartland, but also could function as a “bridgehead for further aggression” against Syria if left unchecked. Palestinian sovereignty and independence is therefore not only an ideological matter of Arab Nationalism, but also a practical defense against threats to Syrian sovereignty and political independence. As such, al-Khury’s words should be interpreted not as bluster, or anti-Semitic demagoguery, but rather a reflection of Syria’s genuine concern for its territorial integrity and how serious and willing they are to defend their territory.

Concurrent to the Jewish Agency’s statements, the Arab Higher Committee similarly pressed their case, offering legal and historical arguments to demand the full independence of Palestine. Addressing the First Committee on 9 May, Henry Kattan, a renowned Palestinian jurist, began the Arab Higher Committee’s remarks by highlighting his delegation’s fear that the Palestinian people’s very existence and national right to self-determination were threatened. From his perspective, the crux of the Palestine problem was the decision by British authorities to implement the Balfour Declaration against the will of the Palestinian people and against the numerous pledges and legal agreements promising the independence of Palestine. He noted that prior to World War I, the Palestinian people—as inhabitants of Syria—had full rights of citizenship as Turkish subjects of the Ottoman Empire yet were promised full Arab independence by Allied powers if they rebelled against the Ottoman Turks. Kattan cited the Hussein-McMahon correspondences as further evidence of this pledge of Arab independence with the exception of land lying to the west of the Damascus up to Aleppo—not including

Palestine. Furthermore, Kattan noted that the Class A Mandate over Palestine established after the war in accordance with Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant meant that Palestine was supposed to be primed for independence just as other Class A former Ottoman territories were now independent. Despite all of this, Kattan argued that the Balfour Declaration prevailed and that Jewish immigration occurred against the will of the indigenous inhabitants, contrary to UN principles. Kattan concluded stating that the Jewish people could not justify colonization on the basis that they were more advanced than the Arab people, nor could they simply reverse twenty centuries of history to form a state, otherwise other advanced and historical nations could justify all forms of new conquests. Finally, on 12 May Emile Ghory argued that the question of displaced Jewish persons was a completely separate issue from Palestine, and any attempt to link the two at the expense of the Arabs would be met with opposition and undermine the success of the Palestine inquiry.<sup>66</sup>

The statements by the Arab Higher Committee calling for Palestinian independence to be the ultimate objective of any special committee ultimately had little impact on the trajectory of the UN's deliberations. In a last-ditch effort to reiterate the importance of the UN promoting Palestinian sovereignty and independence, the Syrian delegation advanced historical and religious arguments towards that end—a notable deviation from their traditional focus on the legal aspects of the UN Charter. In his final prepared statements before the General Assembly, Faris al-Khury began by highlighting the historic connection of Palestine to Syria, suggesting that the General Assembly's efforts to create a Jewish homeland in the Eastern Mediterranean are not only against the rights of the Palestinians, but the Syrians themselves. He noted:

“I think most of you, if not all, know that Palestine used to be a Syrian province. Geographical, historical, racial and religious links exist there. There is no distinction whatever between the Palestinians and the Syrians and, had it not been

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<sup>66</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 288–90.

for the Balfour Declaration and the terms of the mandate, Palestine would now be a Syrian province, as it used to be. Syria is intimately connected with Palestine, and is concerned with Palestinian questions more than any other State in the world.”<sup>67</sup>

Underscoring the threat posed by the Zionist movement to Palestine—a region linked intimately to Syria—al-Khury proceeded to characterize the Jewish immigration to Palestine, not as a benign movement of socially desperate individuals, but as a dominating political force seeking to destroy the local inhabitants, as they had done in the past. As a Christian, al-Khury sought to draw biblical parallels between the present Zionist immigration and the first Jewish immigration to Palestine, citing the destruction that followed as outlined within the Old Testament. He claimed that the Palestinians, as descendants of the Philistines who were present in Palestine “for forty centuries”, faced an onslaught of destruction from the successors of Moses who sought to annihilate the indigenous populations. Al-Khury noted:

“...they started to invade Palestine and occupy certain portions of it with the policy of exterminating everybody there--men, women, children, old and young, even the animals--in order not to leave any trace of the living population of that country; and the places which they succeeded in conquering were so dealt with to utter destruction and exterminations.”<sup>68</sup>

He continued expounding upon the history of the subsequent Jewish returns and expulsions and noted that the Arabs, starting with second Muslim Caliph Umar b. al Khattab, kept the Jewish community out until non-Arabs (i.e. the Ottoman Turks) let them return. He concluded by saying that it has become obvious that the entire migration to Palestine is not one driven by necessity, but by the political aspirations of the Zionist movement. He argued that if coming to Palestine was a humanitarian need, why would Jewish communities with ancestry from nations whose UN

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<sup>67</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:135–36.

<sup>68</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:138.

representatives extol the prevailing democracy and equality in their home countries, come to Palestine? Although the Arabs are hospitable he added, it would only allow groups that do not seek to dominate, like the Armenian refugees, to reside in Arab lands.<sup>69</sup>

Regardless of how earnest the Syrian delegation's efforts may have been, the General Assembly was preparing to finalize the terms of the UN Special Committee on Palestine. Although the Arab Higher Committee did have a voice in the preliminary discussions of the Palestine Question, offering their pan-Arab, anticolonial and legal defense of Palestine, the Arabs were inching towards failure in their efforts to secure Palestine's independence as a chief aim of the UN special committee. The Jewish Agency position on reconstituting a Jewish National Home in Palestine, although not necessarily the aim of the UN special committee, appeared to be gaining wide appeal among General Assembly members. The extent of that influence would have to wait the results of the UN Special Committee on Palestine's report at the end of the summer.

### **UN Special Committee on Palestine Report (Majority-Minority Views)**

As the First Special Session of the General Assembly listened to testimonies from various parties to the Palestine Question, the First Committee of that organization was preparing the scope of the upcoming UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) study. On 1 May 1947, the General Assembly tasked the First Committee with addressing this issue and on 7 May began deliberations. The three main areas the First Committee examined were UNSCOP's terms of reference, its composition, and its administrative organization. During the course of the

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<sup>69</sup> *Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record 28 April - 15 May 1947*, 1:144.

subsequent meetings, the First Committee considered numerous draft proposals, amendments, critiques, and prepared one final proposal for the General Assembly's consideration.

Regarding UNSCOP's terms of reference, the First Committee debates centered on to what extent UNSCOP should have an exhaustive list of responsibilities or a loose and broad scoped mandate that was flexible to their determination. Some of the exhaustive list items proposed, included placing priority on the establishment of an independent Palestine, on tying the issue of displaced Jewish persons to the Question of Palestine, and defining the scope of the UNSCOP's purview as a detailed fact-finding mission. On 10 May, a subcommittee of the First Committee, consisting of representatives from Argentina, China, Australia, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, El Salvador, France, the U.S.S.R. and the United States, met to synthesize the various proposals and amendments into one terms of reference document. On 12 May, the subcommittee released its proposal laying out various elements such as UNSCOP having the "widest powers to ascertain and record facts, and to investigate all issues relevant to the problem of Palestine."<sup>70</sup>

For the Syrian UN delegation, the one critical piece of the UNSCOP proposed terms of reference was article 5, enumerating several proposed statements calling for "the independence of Palestine" to be a lodestar for the UNSCOP investigation. However, the French representative submitted his own proposal calling for the deletion of this article on the ground that it did not add anything to the UNSCOP instructions and would be difficult to implement. Sensing the changing attitudes in the conversations the Syrian delegation sharply criticized the direction the debates were heading and outlined a number of concessions the Arabs were willing to make in order to achieve the independence of Palestine. The Syrian representative noted that the Arab League, in two separate meetings with the UK government in October 1946 and February 1947, proposed

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<sup>70</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 297-98.

numerous concessions including: the creation of an Arab and Jewish executive council presided by a British representative and the holding of free elections regardless of nationality, creed or faith. The Arabs would be willing to make such concessions with an aim towards establishing a unified Palestinian state, freedom of access to holy sites (supervised by the UN), religious courts for personal status matters, allowing Hebrew as a second official language in areas where it constituted the majority, and prohibiting further immigration until an independent government of Palestine could decide otherwise. Ultimately, Syria's comments were not successful in swaying the First Committee and France's proposal to remove the independence of Palestine as a goal of the UNSCOP was adopted with 29 votes in favor, 10 against, and 14 abstentions.<sup>71</sup>

After determining the terms of reference, the First Committee focused on the last two items on its agenda: the composition of the UNSCOP members and its administrative organization. Regarding the member states that would join the UNSCOP body, the UN deliberations centered on whether or not to only include representatives from "neutral" parties with the widest equitable geographic distribution, or whether the Big Five UN member states should be on the committee given their influence. The First Committee ultimately decided to not include the Big Five and selected with 39 votes in favor, 3 against, and 10 abstentions the following representatives to constitute the UNSCOP: Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay, and Yugoslavia. With the composition decided the First Committee voted to finalize the administrative organization of UNSCOP's responsibilities. Key tasks they were authorized to focus on that would be a major sticking point for the Arab states included giving the Special Committee permission to ascertain all information relevant to the "problem of Palestine" as opposed to the "future government of

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<sup>71</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 298-99.

Palestine” and allowing for UNSCOP to investigate “wherever it may deem useful” (i.e. Jewish displaced persons camps in Europe) as opposed to simply in Palestine.<sup>72</sup>

During the final deliberations on the First Committee’s UNSCOP proposal on 14 and 15 May 1947, the Arab states voiced their strong objections to the report. The Arab states noted in particular their frustration that their request for the independence of Palestine to be a key aspect of UNSCOP’s investigation was removed and that the Committee was trying to tie the displaced persons issue with Palestine by allowing UNSCOP to travel “wherever it may deem useful.” In promoting the central piece of the UN Strategic Framework, the Syrian delegation also stressed its frustration that an alternative proposal that the UNSCOP’s work be based on the principles of the UN Charter and the League of Nations Covenant was overlooked. With the UN failing to fulfill its covenant in the eyes of the Arab States, they all warned that this approach would not lead to peace in the Middle East. During the General Assembly’s 78<sup>th</sup> meeting on 15 May, the First Committee’s proposal was adopted with 45 votes in favor and 7 against.<sup>73</sup>

Frustrated with the outcome of the General Assembly debates, the Arab Higher Committee representatives from Palestine refused to participate in UNSCOP’s work. After convening for its first meeting at Lake Success, New York on 26 May to certify the representatives of the UN Special Committee on Palestine, the committee adopted its provisional rules of procedure including the appointment of liaison officers from the Mandatory Authorities, the Jewish Agency and the Arab Higher Committee. Responding to the request, the Mandatory Authorities appointed D.C. MacGillivray and H.C. Dodds, while the Jewish Agency dispatched Aba Eban and David Horowitz. For their part, the Arab Higher Committee sent a cable boycotting UNSCOP’s investigations on the grounds that: 1) UNSCOP’s terms of reference

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<sup>72</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 301.

<sup>73</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 302–3.

failed to include the termination of the Mandate and declaration of Palestinian independence; 2) it failed to separate the Jewish displaced persons issue from the Palestine Question; 3) the interests of Palestine's inhabitants was replaced by world religious interests which are not the subject of the Palestine Question; 4) and that Arab rights do not need investigation but deserve recognition in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter. Despite their withdrawal from the process, the Special Committee moved forward with its plans and the first group of special committee members left for Palestine on 10 June with plans to hear statements from the two groups and then tour Palestine.<sup>74</sup>

From the perspective of the Jewish Agency, the UNSCOP mission was a profound moment in the Zionist movement. Not only did they stand a better chance at influencing UNSCOP's opinions given the Arab Higher Committee's refusal to participate in the process, but they were one step closer towards international recognition and potential sovereignty over their ancestral homeland. The importance of this point was highlighted in the memoirs of Abba Eban (1915-2002). Eban, who was British educated and served as a British Army officer and aide to the British Minister of State in Cairo, became the Jewish Agency's political information officer in 1946 and subsequently served as the Agency's liaison officer to UNSCOP. Eban's gift at oratory and achievements he made in the service of the Zionist cause would lead him to become Israel's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations upon achieving statehood.<sup>75</sup> According to Aba Eban's memoirs, what initially seemed like a simple procedural matter of selecting liaison officers proved extremely significant over the subsequent months. On this point he stated:

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<sup>74</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, 303-4.

<sup>75</sup> "Abba Eban -- Britannica Academic," accessed May 17, 2018, <https://academic-eb-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Abba-Eban/31845>.

“By accepting liaison officers from the Jewish Agency, the United Nations was virtually acknowledging the legitimacy of Zionism as a national liberation movement. The Palestine Arabs contemptuously refused to nominate their liaison officers. We benefited greatly from Arab errors in those days. Their doctrine was that the end of the British Mandate could be followed by nothing except the establishment of an Arab Palestine, that the UN had no jurisdiction--there was therefore nothing to talk about and no need for liaison.”<sup>76</sup>

Eban further acknowledged how the Jewish Agency planned to leverage the fact that none of the UNSCOP representatives appeared “first-rank” nor had any knowledge of Jewish history or the Palestine problem. He noted for instance, how he and David Horowitz focused their attention on Garcia Granados of Guatemala because of his country’s own territorial dispute with the Britain over Belize that made Granados “prepared to believe the worst of Britain”.<sup>77</sup> Finally, he noted how their special access allowed UNSCOP members to meet privately with Ben Gurion and Moshe Sharet in Jerusalem where the former argued openly for partition so long as it included the Negev. From the Jewish Agency’s perspective, it appeared that the singular lobbying was paying off.<sup>78</sup>

In preparation for the drafting of its final report, the UNSCOP committee visited with local, regional, and international parties to gauge wide perspectives on how to address the “problem of Palestine”. Tasked with submitting a final report by September 1, 1947, the UNSCOP arrived in Palestine on 14 and 15 June and held a total of 16 public and 36 private meetings over the course of their entire planning and investigation stage. On the local level, UNSCOP met with liaisons from the Mandatory Authorities and representatives from the Jewish Agency like Abba Eban on several occasions. Hoping to encourage the Arab Higher Committee to reconsider its decision, the UNSCOP decided during its 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> meetings on 8 July to

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<sup>76</sup> Abba Solomon Eban, *Abba Eban: An Autobiography.*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1977), 76.

<sup>77</sup> Eban, 77.

<sup>78</sup> Eban, 76–80.

send a letter inviting them to participate. In response, on 10 July UNSCOP received a letter from the Vice-Chairman of the Arab Higher Committee, Jamal al-Husseini of a prominent Jerusalemite family and Palestinian nationalist, noting that his organization saw no reason to reverse its previous decision to abstain from collaborating with UNSCOP.<sup>79</sup>

In order to still gauge the Arab perspective, UNSCOP members recommended reaching out to regional Arab states to allow them to express their views. From the Syrian perspective, it was important for its representatives to express clearly the terms of the UN strategic framework: if the UN fails to uphold its principles then Syria has a right to self-defense. After accepting an invitation to participate in a discussion, the UNSCOP members paid a visit to Lebanon on 20 July and paid an informal visit to Damascus on 21 July. In Sawfar, Lebanon, the Syrian government was represented by its UN representative Amir Adil Arslan (1882-1954). Hailing from a prominent Druze family on Mount Lebanon, Amir Adil Arslan was a longtime supporter of the Ottoman Empire up until its collapse. He later advocated various unity schemes like Faysal's Kingdom of Syria, unity with Hashemite Iraq, and subsequently supported the Syrian National Bloc holding various advisory and diplomatic posts along the way.<sup>80</sup> In Lebanon for the UNSCOP meeting, Adil Arslan met with fellow Arab representatives and expressed his country's belief in the importance of the Arab states demonstrating a strong commitment to resist the UN's decisions politically or by force if the outcome is not promising. In a meeting the next day in Sawfar, Adil Arslan fielded questions from the Special Committee members. According to Arslan's memoirs, although some Special Committee members posed sound questions, one individual was clearly a "Zionist employee"—the representative targeted by Abba Eban from Guatemala, or as Arslan called it in an Arabic word play of Guatemala (غواة المال) "the one

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<sup>79</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 228.

<sup>80</sup> Moubayed, *Steel & Silk*, 140–42.

seduced by money”.<sup>81</sup> Arslan notes in his memoirs how the Guatemalan representative was combative in their meetings, prompting Arslan to issue a comment that silenced the official. Concerning the issue of Arabs avidly fighting against ceding control of the Negev as the Zionists wanted, the Guatemalan Representative reportedly asked, “I don’t know why you all are making an issue out of desert land like the Negev...in South America there are a lot of countries with this type of land and we give it to whoever wants it.” In response, Arslan countered, citing as an example the prominent war in the 1930s between Bolivia and Paraguay over control of the semi-arid lands on the northern part of the Gran Chaco region, stating:

“I would like to remind the delegate of a famous war that happened in modern history that happened between two states from South American countries for the sake of land no less desert-like than the Negev...I pointed to the Chaco War...then his face turned pale and he became silent.”<sup>82</sup>

Despite such warnings on why a potential war over Palestine is not only reasonable, but potentially necessary to guarantee their rights, the Special Committee remained committed to their course of action and was preparing to still travel to Europe to visit camps of displaced Jewish refugees.

Before finalizing its report, the UN Special Committee for Palestine dispatched subcommittees to displaced persons camps in Europe and to Jerusalem to study and incorporate those perspectives. Following a vote of 6 to 4 with 1 abstention, the Special Committee sent a subcommittee to visit camps at or near Munich, Salzburg, Vienna, Berlin, Hamburg and Hanover. That subcommittee also met with the Austrian Chancellor, the Military Governor of the United States’ zones of Germany and Austria and several United States and UK officials responsible for displaced persons affairs as well as representatives of the International Refugee

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<sup>81</sup> Arslān and Ībish, *Mudhakkirāt al-Amīr ‘Ādil Arslān*, 688.

<sup>82</sup> Arslān and Ībish, 688.

Organization. The Jerusalem subcommittee also studied the interests of the Holy places and submitted their different opinions for inclusion in the majority and minority report UNSCOP was drafting. During the Special Committee's 52<sup>nd</sup> meeting on August 31, 1947, the committee finalized its report and submitted their recommendations to the General Assembly.<sup>83</sup>

The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine report outlined several recommendations and two key proposals to address the Palestine Question, each of which would grant some form of independence or shared sovereignty for Jewish and Arab residents of Palestine. Of the twelve recommendations detailed in the UNSCOP report, the eleven unanimously agreed upon provisions included: the termination of the British Mandate and granting Palestine independence at the earliest practical date, the protection of rights to the area's Holy Places, addressing the issue of Jewish displaced persons, the creation of a democratic system of government and an end to privileged Ottoman-era capitulations, the economic unity of Palestine, and a reliance on the charter to address other disputes. The twelfth recommendation that received a majority, although not unanimous, support was the recommendation to separate any solution for Palestine from the question of the Jewish problem in general. Regarding the two proposals for the solution of the Palestine Question, the majority proposal—supported by the representatives from Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, Netherlands, Peru, Sweden and Uruguay—called for the partition of Palestine into an Arab state, a Jewish state, and the city of Jerusalem, with economic union across the three. After a two-year transition period, the majority proposal noted that independence would be recognized only if the two sides adopted a constitution in line with the UNSCOP recommendations and signed a treaty for economic union. According to the minority proposal, supported by representatives from India, Iran, and

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<sup>83</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 229.

Yugoslavia, Palestine should become an independent federal state under one Palestinian nationality with Jerusalem the capital of both an Arab and Jewish state. Under this recommendation, federal authority would be responsible for matters related to self-defense, foreign policy, immigration, while strong local government would be responsible for providing unique public services to Arab and Jewish areas. With UNSCOP's work concluded, it was now time for the international community at the General Assembly to debate and decide the future of Palestine.<sup>84</sup>

### **UN General Assembly Debates the Question of Partitioning Palestine**

On 16 September 1947, the UN General Assembly met in Flushing Meadows New York to convene the UN body's second regular session. Over the course of the next two months, the General Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee and main body would debate whether or not to accept UNSCOP's Majority or Minority proposals or propose another solution. For Syria, its UN representatives continued in earnest to defend Palestine's right to sovereignty and independence, finding UNSCOP's proposals inadequate in terms of addressing Palestine's right to independence. Although initially advancing legal arguments to make its case, the Syrian delegation's statements became increasingly political and threatening as the majority of UN members began gravitating towards UNSCOP's Majority proposal for the partition of Palestine. To prevent that from happening, the Syrian delegation would have to secure enough UN buy-in to block a two-thirds majority from approving the partition plan.

Hoping to find support within the General Assembly for the independence and unity of Palestine, the Syrian delegation soon found itself let down by its historical great power western backer—the United States. To date, the Syrian Government largely viewed the United States as

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<sup>84</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 229–31.

the only country in the Western camp to have taken a more positive attitude towards the Arab states in particular with regards to Syria's quest for independence. However, with the start of the General Assembly's second regular session, the United States appeared from Damascus' perspective to be moving firmly into the Zionist camp. In his opening remarks before the General Assembly on 17 September 1947, U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall relayed troubling statements for Damascus on the Question of Palestine. In light of the recent release of the UNSCOP report and the majority proposal recommending the partition of Palestine with economic union, Marshall delivered the following comments on the committee's findings:

“The Special Committee on Palestine is to be highly commended for its contribution to the solution of this problem. Although the members of the Committee were not able to agree unanimously upon a number of important issues, including that of partition, they have been able to find the basis for agreement on eleven recommendations to this Assembly. Their achievement in reaching unanimity on so many points represents definite progress. We realize that, whatever the solution recommended by the General Assembly, it cannot be ideally satisfactory to either of the two great peoples primarily concerned. While the final decision of this Assembly must properly await the detailed consideration of the report, the Government of the United States gives great weight not only to the recommendations which have met with the unanimous approval of the Special Committee but also to those which have been approved by the majority of that Committee.”<sup>85</sup>

Following the U.S. Secretary of State's speech before the General Assembly, Syria and the Arab states became increasingly concerned that the U.S. had come to the United Nations determined to support the majority UNSCOP proposal for the partition of Palestine. Furthermore, given that partition was wholeheartedly rejected by the Arab states while the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was a goal of the Jewish Agency, the Arab States interpreted that the U.S. had now shifted fully into the Zionist camp. In a memorandum by the Office Director of Near

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<sup>85</sup> “6-112 Speech to the United Nations General Assembly, September 17, 1947,” The George C. Marshall Foundation, September 17, 1947, <http://gcmfoundation2.wpengine.com/library/digital-archive/6-112-speech-united-nations-general-assembly-september-17-1947/>.

Eastern and African Affairs at the State Department, Loy Henderson, to the Under Secretary of State Robert Lovett, Henderson noted that the Syrian Government was losing confidence in the U.S.' ability to act as an impartial arbiter. Henderson noted that this perceived shift in U.S. attitude towards Partition had the adverse effect of threatening other bilateral ties with the Syrians stating that:

“Members of the Syrian and Lebanese Delegations consider Secretary Marshall’s statement that the United States gives “great weight” to the Majority Plan in the UNSCOP report as meaning full U.S. support for that plan. These members also observed that the U.S. Government, with the exception of the White House, had been neutral until today but that even the State Department was now following a pro-Zionist policy [...] Faris al-Khury, of the Syrian Delegation, was in hearty agreement with the Secretary’s address, with the exception of the passage on Palestine. Faris al-Khury was adamantly opposed to our Palestine policy, and said that the issue would hamper Arab-American cooperation on other problems.”<sup>86</sup>

Although not explicitly referenced, the reported impact the U.S.’ position towards Palestine might have on Arab-American cooperation was likely in reference to the U.S. efforts to negotiate the construction of the Trans-Arabian Pipeline. The pipeline, initially planned to carry oil from Northeastern Saudi Arabia to Haifa was rerouted to the Lebanese port city of Sidon due to the unrest brewing in Palestine. As a result, the pipeline would need to cross the Syrian Golan in order to reach the coast, and the Syrian Government held up the ratification of the Trans-Arabian Pipeline as a card to play in negotiating a more favorable solution to the Palestine Problem.<sup>87</sup>

Although the U.S. position in the UNGA discussions of the UNSCOP report may have reflected a policy shift in favor of the Jewish Agency, many within the State Department and U.S. intelligence community warned of the harmful implications partition might have on U.S. Arab relations. In a 22 September Top Secret memo to the Secretary of State, Loy Henderson

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<sup>86</sup> “Doc. 803 Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Under Secretary of State (Lovett),” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, The Near East and Africa, Volume V - Office of the Historian*, September 18, 1947, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v05/d803>.

<sup>87</sup> Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958*, 35.

warned of the far-reaching impact U.S. support for partition might have on “the friendship and cooperation of the Arabs and oilier Moslems” particularly in relation to its impact on the United Nations.<sup>88</sup> According to the document Loy Henderson noted of the threat to the United Nations:

“The proposals contained in the UNSCOP plan are not only not based on any principles of an international character, the maintenance of which would be in the interests of the United States, but they are in definite contravention to various principles laid down in the Charter as well as to principles on which American concepts of Government are based. These proposals, for instance, ignore such principles as self-determination and majority rule. They recognize the principle of a theocratic racial state and even go so far in several instances as to discriminate on grounds of religion and race against persons outside of Palestine. We have hitherto always held that in our foreign relations American citizens, regardless of race or religion, are entitled to uniform treatment. The stress on whether persons are Jews or non-Jews is certain to strengthen feelings among both Jews and Gentiles in the United States and elsewhere that Jewish citizens are not the same as other citizens. The United States is undoubtedly honor bound to take steps to make sure that the Jews in Palestine are not discriminated against and that they participate on at least an equal basis with other peoples in the Government of Palestine. We are under no obligations to the Jews to set up a Jewish State. The Balfour Declaration and the Mandate provided not for a Jewish State, but for a Jewish national home. Neither the United States nor the British Government has ever interpreted the term “Jewish national home” to be a Jewish national state [...] In our opinion, there is no ready solution of the Palestine problem to which both Jews and Arabs would acquiesce to such an extent as to render it workable. Any kind of an imposed solution opposed by the majority of either the Arabs or the Jews is bound to result in failure, involving much loss of property and bloodshed and loss of prestige to the supporters and executors of the plan, as well as to the whole United Nations.”<sup>89</sup>

Henderson further warned that should the United States be unable to maintain stability in the region as a result of moving forward on partition, then the U.S. may be hard pressed to prevent the Soviet Union from making further inroads into the Arab heartlands.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “Doc. 804 The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, The Near East and Africa, Volume V - Office of the Historian, September 22, 1947, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v05/d804>.

<sup>89</sup> “Doc. 804 The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State.”

<sup>90</sup> “Doc. 804 The Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs (Henderson) to the Secretary of State.”

Tasked with providing their own assessment on the consequences of partitioning Palestine, the Central Intelligence Agency determined that the region was likely to become increasingly hostile to the United States even if they were unlikely to abandon the United Nations. According to the CIA report, which was coordinated with the intelligence arms of the State and Defense Department, should the U.S. support partition, Washington would undoubtedly lose much of its prestige in the region and the resulting conflict that is likely to transpire would have harmful ramifications for U.S. interests. Such negative impacts on U.S. interests in the Arab world, the report warns:

“will seriously disturb the social, economic, and political stability of the Arab world, and US commercial and strategic interest will be dangerously jeopardized. While irresponsible tribesmen and fanatic Moslems are haphazardly blowing up parts of oil pipelines and attacking occasional Americans, it is possible that the responsible governments will refuse to sign pipeline conventions, oil concessions, civil air agreements, and trade pacts [...] The poverty, unrest, and hopelessness upon which Communist propaganda thrives will increase throughout the Arab world, and Soviet agents (some of whom have already been smuggled into Palestine as Jewish DP’s) will scatter into the other Arab states and there attempt to organize so-called “democratic movements” such as the one existing today in Greece.”<sup>91</sup>

Despite the negative consequences for U.S. interests in the region, the report adds that the Arab states are unlikely to sever ties with the international community and in particular the United Nations. The CIA report assessed that the Arab states owe a great deal of debt to the organization due to the amount of influence and accomplishments the UN has given them. In particular the satisfactory settlement of the evacuation of troops from Syria and Lebanon was highlighted as one such victory in addition to Egypt having the opportunity to voice its own grievances about the presence of British troops. Ultimately, the report notes that the Arab states will likely remain

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<sup>91</sup> “Central Intelligence Agency: The Consequences of the Partition of Palestine” (U.S. Government Printing Office, November 28, 1947), 1–2, [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0000256628.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000256628.pdf).

a part of the international organization as “The UN has provided a medium for the immediate recognition and participation in world affairs of the young Arab states.”<sup>92</sup>

Back in the halls of the United Nations, the Syrian delegation attempted to connect the Question of Palestine to U.S. domestic and international political interests in an effort to change Washington’s position on partition. On the U.S. domestic front, Syria’s UN representative Faris al-Khury warned of the harmful precedent U.S. support for the creation of a religious state could have in America. Appealing to the US representative, al-Khury said that the Jews shouldn’t be recognized as a nation as the report has done, just as the Quakers in the US shouldn’t be allowed to create their own national home in the U.S. arguing:

“Suppose the Quakers, who have their majority in the United States, were to rally their congregations and demand that the United States Government should satisfy their national aspirations for a national home and give them some state like Texas, for instance, to be established as a sovereign State. I do not know what would be the attitude and the reaction of the leaders of the United States policy in such a case.”<sup>93</sup>

On the international side, Faris al-Khury also attempted to target American Cold War fears by suggesting that, compared to the Soviet Union, the United States has been weak on the issue of finding a just solution to the situation in Palestine. Al-Khury remarked how even the Soviet Union made strides to offer a political solution to the territorial aspirations of the Jewish people by granting them land larger than Palestine and calling it the Jewish Socialist Republic of Birobidzhan. He expressed his hope that the U.S. might uphold the just UN principles it helped create by taking positive steps on the Palestine situation, concluding:

“I should like to state that the Arabs are convinced that the United States of America, whose money finances the widespread Zionist propaganda and their

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<sup>92</sup> “Central Intelligence Agency: The Consequences of the Partition of Palestine,” 6.

<sup>93</sup> “88th Plenary Meeting, September 22, 1947,” in *United Nations Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly Plenary Meetings of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record, 16 September - 29 November 1947*, vol. I, 80th - 109th Meetings, 16 September - 13 November 1947 (Lake Success, New York: United Nations General Assembly, 1947), 201.

terroristic underground activities, is able, if it wishes, to put an end to all these evils, and render, by such an act of justice and fairness, an honest service in support of the principles of the United Nations.”<sup>94</sup>

Wrapping up his comments, he reiterated Syria’s and the Arab state’s continued rejection of the Special Committee’s report and vowed to never allow a foreign wedge to be “driven into the heart of their fatherland.”<sup>95</sup>

The following day, representatives from the various Arab delegations (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia) held a private meeting with the United States’ UN personnel to further voice their frustration with the US’ 17 September speech in favor of the UNSCOP report. As the chief speaker for the Arab delegation, Faris al-Khury reiterated many concerns presented by the Arab countries regarding the unacceptability of a Jewish sovereign state in the region. Al-Khury noted that as a member of Syria’s parliament, he would not accept the UNSCOP report as a workable document and would refuse to cooperate with outside powers in its implementation. Regarding the potential impact the UNSCOP report would have on the regional situation, al-Khury warned that the “Zionist penetration in the Near East”, backed by tremendous support from abroad including the United States, was only the beginning and that attempts by the Zionist movement to make further inroads into the region would almost certainly trigger a war.<sup>96</sup> He concluded the meeting by stressing that just as the Crusaders attempted to dominate the Holy Land, and were ultimately ejected from the region, al-Khury predicted the Zionist movement would similarly share their fate.<sup>97</sup> In line with their strategic framework, the Syrian government warned that if the UN fails to uphold the principles of sovereignty and political independence,

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<sup>94</sup> “88th Plenary Meeting, September 22, 1947,” 202.

<sup>95</sup> “88th Plenary Meeting, September 22, 1947,” 203.

<sup>96</sup> “Doc. 806 Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Paul H. Alling, Adviser to the United States Delegation at the General Assembly,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, The Near East and Africa, Volume V - Office of the Historian, September 23, 1947, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v05/d806>.

<sup>97</sup> “Doc. 806 Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Paul H. Alling, Adviser to the United States Delegation at the General Assembly.”

they would be forced to rely on self-defense. However, the Syrian representatives would have to await the UN's final determination before moving forward with any armed actions.

### **Ad Hoc Committee – Preliminary Debates on Palestine and the UNSCOP Report**

Before proceeding with an open debate on the Palestine Question, the General Assembly requested a hearing with the concerned parties to the Palestine Question in order to gauge their initial impressions on the UNSCOP report. On 23 September 1947, during its 90<sup>th</sup> meeting of the second regular session, the General Assembly established an ad hoc committee consisting of all member states to place the Palestine Question, the UNSCOP report, and a Saudi/Iraqi request for the termination of the mandate on its agenda. After selecting their chairmen, the ad hoc committee also invited the Arab Higher Committee and the Jewish Agency to attend all of the committee's meetings. During the ad hoc committee's second meeting on 26 September, the committee agreed to hear testimony from the British Mandatory authorities, the Arab Higher Committee, and the Jewish Agency for the purposes of facilitating the committee's debates.<sup>98</sup>

As the first party to address the General Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee, the British Mandatory authorities expressed their willingness to help the UN implement any solution to the Palestine Question so long as both sides of the dispute agree. Addressing the committee on 26 September during its second meeting, the British representatives voiced their support for the twelve recommendations proposed in the UNSCOP report, specifically the termination of the mandate, the declaration of Palestinian independence, and the recommendation to urgently address the issue of displaced Jewish persons. However, the British authorities cautioned that they would not be in any position to impose a UN solution by force if the Arab Higher Committee and Jewish Agency disagree. Instead, the British representative suggested that the

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<sup>98</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, pgs. 227, 231.

UN should administer such a project and be prepared for a withdrawal of British forces from Palestine in the absence of any settlement.<sup>99</sup>

For its part, the Arab Higher Committee categorically rejected any UN solution that called for partitioning Palestine, or one that granted minorities a privileged status over the majority of Palestine's inhabitants. Speaking on 30 September during the ad hoc committee's third meeting, the representative of the Arab Higher Committee stated it was the sacred duty of Palestine's Arabs to defend themselves against aggression and that the UN's *raison d'être* was to help defend against aggression. He further noted that Zionist claims to Palestine had no moral or legal basis as such claims were predicated on privileging minority rights while discriminating against the rights of the local majority to self-determination. He further argued that the UNSCOP proposals should not be up for discussion as they were both against the Charter of the United Nations and League of Nations Covenant. He concluded by warning that the Arabs of Palestine would resist any means by outside powers to dissect Palestine or grant a privileged status to local minorities.<sup>100</sup>

Although the Jewish Agency similarly voiced reservations with the details of the UNSCOP proposals, they expressed their willingness to support the partition plan if that meant the immediate establishment of a Jewish State with sovereign control over its future. The main point of contention with the UNSCOP proposals raised by the Jewish Agency was the limited amount of territory set aside for the Jewish State. Speaking before the committee, the Jewish Agency representative recounted how David Lloyd George—the British Prime Minister who helped in the formulation of the Balfour Declaration—envisioned that the whole of Palestine and Transjordan should become a future Jewish state. The representative noted that while the Arabs

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<sup>99</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 231–32.

<sup>100</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 232–33.

occupy 1,290,000 square miles of territory, the UNSCOP report only allotted 10,000 square miles after removing Transjordan, and was now calling for its partition in half. Further, the representative protested against barring certain portions of Jerusalem from the future Jewish state. Interestingly, behind the scenes, Abba Eban noted that the Zionist movement was ecstatic with the UNSCOP majority proposal stating:

“The majority report offered the Jewish people a degree of sovereignty and territorial opportunity beyond anything proposed before. It was the first Jewish political victory for three tragic decades, and I was almost exhausted by the sheer emotion of it.”<sup>101</sup>

The Jewish Agency representative concluded on this point stating that his delegation would be willing to accept the partition plan subject to further negotiations on the actual territorial breakdowns. During the remainder of the representative’s comments, he critiqued the Arab Higher Committee for insisting that UN member states adhere to the UN’s principles while refusing to accept the UN’s proposal themselves. Finally, he critiqued the British as well for calling on the UN to find a solution to the Palestine Problem in the first place, while refusing to implement it their decision after they provided a solution.<sup>102</sup>

Following preliminary remarks from the Palestine representatives, UN member states shared their own strongly divided opinions towards the UNSCOP report’s recommendations. Beginning on 4 October during the ad hoc committee’s fifth meeting, and lasting until 16 October, the General Assembly debated the UNSCOP report over the course of 16 meetings and heard 17 different proposals from member states. Among those who supported UNSCOP’s majority proposal in principle, representatives from Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, Haiti, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Peru, Poland, South Africa, Sweden, United States, Uruguay

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<sup>101</sup> Eban, *Abba Eban*, 84.

<sup>102</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 233–34.

and U.S.S.R. held the view that the majority proposal, although not perfect, represented the best available compromise to the valid claims both the Arabs and Jews in Palestine. Representatives from Yugoslavia strongly supported the federated solution in UNSCOP's minority report, while the representative from India indicated his preference for granting significant autonomy to areas in Palestine with Jewish majorities. For its part, the delegation from China rejected both the majority and minority report, claiming that it was unsatisfactory to both parties and, as such, a new proposal should be drafted. Finally, the Arab states were of the opinion that the General Assembly had no authority under the UN Charter to recommend Palestine's partition, nor enforce that decision, and reiterated their calls for Palestine's independence. They also called for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice to study the Palestine question and grant an opinion before voting on the matter. Amongst those who supported the Arab position against partition were the representatives of Afghanistan, Argentina, Cuba, India, Iran, Pakistan and Yugoslavia, although Yugoslavia did not expressly support the idea of a unitary Palestine.<sup>103</sup>

During the course of the debates the Arab states also submitted various proposals focusing on the illegality of the UNSCOP recommendations and the dangerous repercussions of implementing such proposals. For its part, the Iraqi representative submitted a proposal calling for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice to determine whether the promises of Arab independence made by the British to Sharif Hussein of Mecca before and after World War I included the area of Palestine. The representative of Egypt also requested an advisory opinion on whether or not the General Assembly had the authority to recommend either the Majority or Minority proposals of the UNSCOP report and whether or not Member states could implement a solution on Palestine without the consent of the Palestinian Arabs. For its

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<sup>103</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 235.

part, the Lebanese representative submitted a proposal requesting that Member state refrain from providing assistance in the form of transport, arms, or money to immigrants in route to Palestine due to the harmful repercussions such action would produce.<sup>104</sup>

For its part, the Syrian UN delegation submitted two proposals that underscored both Damascus' twin objectives of sovereignty and political independence, and the importance of maintaining the principles of the UN Charter. The first Syrian proposal called on the United Kingdom, in accordance with Article 79 of the UN Charter, to reach an agreement with locals to manage Palestine as a trusteeship for a transitory period with an eye towards statehood. The terms of such an agreement would include: "1. That a Sovereign State for the whole of Palestine be established on a democratic basis," and that a constitutional government be established that guarantees basic human and minority rights as well as safeguards Holy Places and their free access. The second proposal, like several other Arab states, called on the International Court of Justice to issue an advisory opinion on the legality surrounding the decision to move forward with the UNSCOP report. The particular requests for an advisory opinion included the following questions: 1) is the British Mandate for Palestine consistent with the League of Nations covenant and rights to self-determination and International law?; 2) is the forcible partition of Palestine consistent with the British Mandate and principles of the UN Charter; and 3) does partition and its enforcement fall under the General Assembly's jurisdiction? In addition to highlighting the important components of the Syria-UN strategic framework, this last question in particular could also suggest that Syria hoped to shift the Palestine Question back to the Security Council where it had a seat and greater influence.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 237.

<sup>105</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 237.

In presenting its proposals the Syrian delegation once again laid out its position on why Palestine should become a sovereign and independent state. According to Amir Adil Arslan's memoirs, during the debates he outlined his key viewpoints as to why Syria was against plans to partition Palestine. Interestingly he made a deliberate statement to the effect that Syria's interest in this case was not about Syrian sovereignty over Palestine, but rather about Palestine itself stating:

“I gave my speech on the Palestine Issue and it lasted about an hour. It's gist was that Syria is not reclaiming Palestine—[a Palestine] that is [actually] a part of Syria—but rather it is demanding Palestine's right to freedom and independence.”<sup>106</sup>

Arslan continues in his memoirs explaining how from Syria's perspective, the Balfour Declaration was given as a reward to the Zionist movement for Chaim Weizmann's invention of a “poisonous gas”—a reference to Weizmann's development of the acetone–butanol–ethanol fermentation process used to make acetone and cordite, the latter of which was critical to the British War industry in World War I. He further notes that in addition to the Balfour Declaration's lack of legal substance, the Mandate was also illegal because it took over and spread throughout Palestine without consulting the locals and in contravention of the Versailles treaty of 1919 and the UN Charter. Arslan also tried to grab the United States' attention by warning them of the potential ramifications of supporting the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, suggesting that other countries like Spain or France might lay claims to historic territory they once claimed in the U.S. based off of this precedent.<sup>107</sup> Ultimately, with its proposals and positions on record, the Syrian delegation called for the creation of two sub-committees to study the Saudi and Iraqi proposal for the creation of a unitary, independent,

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<sup>106</sup> Arslān and Ībish, *Mudhakkirāt al-Amīr 'Ādil Arslān*, 718.

<sup>107</sup> Arslān and Ībish, 718.

Palestinian state, as well as a subcommittee to study the legal questions surrounding the Palestine Mandate.<sup>108</sup>

Following the conclusion of the Ad Hoc committee's general debate, the committee's chairman on 21 October called for the formation of two subcommittees to draw up plans for the implementation of the Majority report's recommendations as well as the recommendations put forward by the Arab states. The first subcommittee, consisting of representatives from Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, Poland, South Africa, United States, Uruguay, U.S.S.R. and Venezuela, drafted a detailed plan for implementing the UNSCOP majority report including a timeline for British withdrawal, the territorial boundaries of Jerusalem, a list of agreed upon recommendations, and an adoption of the partition plan with economic union as the guiding framework. The second subcommittee, included representatives from Afghanistan, Colombia, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, who were tasked with addressing the Saudi-Iraq proposal as well as the Syrian proposals. To tackle the various aspects of the Arab proposals, the second subcommittee established working groups, of which Syria—along with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia—stuck with its strategic framework and focused on the legal aspects of the problem. The proposal Syria's working group submitted included several questions for the International Court of Justice to answer before the General Assembly could move forward with partition. Such questions included: whether the indigenous people of Palestine have a right to self-determination in their lands; whether Western powers promised Palestine to the Arabs; whether the Balfour declaration was binding given it was issued without Palestinian Arab consent; whether the Palestine Mandate was still legal; and whether the General Assembly can impose a solution without the consent of the majority of Palestine's inhabitants.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 237.

<sup>109</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 237-41.

On 24 and 25 November 1947, the Ad Hoc committee casts votes in favor of the UNSCOP Majority report proposal and largely rejected the Arab proposals.<sup>110</sup> The proposal submitted by Syria on the legal problems surrounding the British Mandate were voted on in two parts, the first set of questions being rejected by a vote of 25 to 18, with 11 abstentions, while the last question it proposed was rejected by 21 to 20 with 13 abstentions. The other Arab proposal calling for the establishment of a unitary state of Palestine was similarly rejected by a vote of 29 to 12 with 14 abstentions. In contrast, the first subcommittee's proposal supporting UNSCOP's Majority plan was adopted having received 25 votes to 13, with 17 abstentions.<sup>111</sup>

As the Ad Hoc committee prepared to pass along its recommendation for partitioning Palestine to the General Assembly, it appeared, from the Syrian perspective, that its strategic reliance on the UN Charter to achieve its objectives were failing. This did not mean, however, that Syria was automatically preparing for the war path. According to Arslan's memoirs, he noted that despite the way the initial votes went, the Syrian delegation still had hope that they would be able to secure enough votes in the General Assembly to block the two-thirds majority needed to pass a partition resolution. He did qualify his delegation's hope on the assumption that certain delegations had not sold their votes to the Zionist cause and that the U.S. pressure on European and Latin American countries failed to solidify.<sup>112</sup> For its part however, the Syrian delegation would have to also consider recalibrating its own strategy as focusing on the questionable legal aspects of the UNSCOP proposal as well as the UN Charter's guiding principles, failed to resonate with United Nations members. In response to the ad hoc committee's determination to pass along the proposal for partition to the General Assembly,

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<sup>110</sup> "A/516 Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question," United Nations General Assembly, November 25, 1947, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/CB265C939B5A551F802564B40053D359>.

<sup>111</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 245.

<sup>112</sup> Arslan and İbîsh, *Mudhakkirāt al-Amīr 'Ādil Arslān*, 743.

Syria, Iraq and Egypt protested the decision as unjust, impractical, against the UN Charter, and a threat to peace. With the Syrian delegation's central pivot—the UN Charter—failing to protect Syrian interests of sovereignty and political independence, it was only a matter of time before the Syrian delegation's discourse began to shift towards more nationalist rhetoric as a last-ditch warning of the harmful repercussions if the decision is implemented.<sup>113</sup>

### **General Assembly Votes on the Ad Hoc Committee's Recommendations**

From 26 to 29 November, the General Assembly reconvened for its 124<sup>th</sup> to 128<sup>th</sup> plenary meetings to hear final testimony from UN members on the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations before taking a vote. Mirroring many of the same divisions on display within the Ad Hoc committee, the main body of the General Assembly similarly fell into various camps in support for or against the committee's recommendations for either partition or a rival plan for a unitary state. Although with certain misgivings regarding the plan's implementation, those in favor of partitioning Palestine with economic union were largely from the West and represented Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Byelorussia S.S.R., Canada, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Guatemala, Haiti, Iceland, Liberia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Sweden, Ukrainian S.S.R., Union of South Africa, U.S.S.R., United States of America, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Meanwhile, those against the ad hoc committee's recommendation to partition Palestine predominately came from Arab and Muslim countries, although not exclusively, and included Afghanistan, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen. Those who were against both partition, a unitary state, or did not ultimately vote as a party to the dispute included Argentina,

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<sup>113</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 245.

Chile, China, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Mexico, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia. These divisions would ultimately reflect the way the parties voted at the conclusion of the debates.

Before proceeding with a final vote on the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations, different nations presented their final appeal for or against the partition plan. For its part, the tenor of the Syrian delegation's arguments against partition reflected a significant deviation from their traditionally legal-based approach towards more politically charged comments. This change in approach, when measured against the Syria-UN Strategic Framework, likely reflected a growing disbelief that the UN Charter could achieve their objectives and thus the delegation offered a final ditch effort to advance other political arguments. Leading the changed approach, Amir Adel Arslan, a career politician born in Lebanon and brother to the prominent Ottomanist Shakib Arslan, was selected to deliver the Syrian statements. The first angle Arslan pursued as evidence against the right of partitioning Palestine was his attempt to reject the claim that the Jews constituted an actual race. Citing *The Races of Mankind*, a book published in 1946 by two Columbia University anthropologists on the differences between races, he points to a definition the authors give on the nature of Jewish identity. The definition defined Jewish identity as being limited to the profession of a Jewish religion whereas from a biological perspective Jews belong to all races and, referencing European Jews in particular, Arslan quotes the authors as saying such Jews "are very varied in origin and biological type." By denying the existence of a singly Jewish ethnicity, the Syrian delegation sought to undercut the claims that the Jewish people constituted a race worthy of having their own separate national homeland in Palestine.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> "125th Plenary Meeting November 26, 1947, 124. Continuation of the Discussion on the Palestinian Question," in *United Nations Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly Plenary Meetings of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record, 16 September - 29 November 1947, Volume II, 110th - 128th Meetings, 13 November - 29 November 1947* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations General Assembly, 1948), 1339.

The second non-legal argument put forward by the Syrian delegation against partition, was related to West's double standard sentiment towards historical and contemporary forms of Russian aggression on the one hand, and the aggression of a socialist Zionist movement on the other. To make his case, Arslan specifically singled out the experiences of Poland under Russian partition and the approach of the United States towards global communism. With regards to Poland's experience being partitioned by the Russians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Arslan noted Poland's hypocritical treatment of the Arabs on this issue stating:

“The Polish delegation which is usually so punctilious with regard to interpretations of the terms of the Charter, is silent when it is a question of violating that same Charter, because that violation is aimed at founding a Jewish State in Palestine which would allow Poland to get rid of its own Jews. May I remind the Polish representative that, when his country was partitioned between its neighbours, Russia, Prussia, and Austria, the only country that refused to recognize the partition was the Ottoman Empire, of which Palestine was part?”<sup>115</sup>

Turning to the United States, Arslan similarly pointed out the double standard of the US's policy of selectively targeting communism around the world. He addressed the US's seeming disregard of the Jewish socialist enclaves, or kibbutzim, present in Palestine arguing:

“The United States Government is fighting communism not only in its own country but everywhere; it is attacking communists from Hollywood to the frontiers of Manchuria; it is deporting foreign communists even if they are recommended by very highly placed persons; it is granting all sorts of loans to fight communism in Europe. But if the Black Sea ports could pour half a million communists into Palestine today, the delegation of the United States of America would be all the happier so long as Palestine was swarming with Jews. They are not satisfied with the one hundred and fifty thousand communists who are already in Palestine.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> “125th Plenary Meeting November 26, 1947, 124. Continuation of the Discussion on the Palestinian Question,” 1339.

<sup>116</sup> “125th Plenary Meeting November 26, 1947, 124. Continuation of the Discussion on the Palestinian Question,” 1340.

He concluded by making one final argument on the illogical rationale of allowing Jewish immigration to the Negev desert in southern Palestine and the threat such a move would pose to the interests of the neighboring states. He argued that any claim that Jews from Poland or Latvia could find more use from the dessert than the Bedouins currently residing there was “a type of logic quite peculiar to the Zionists and their friends.”<sup>117</sup> He suggested that such plans to control southern Palestine was evidence of a greater expansionist project that would be a threat to the Suez Canal, the Islamic Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, Arab interests in the Red Sea and the interests of Ethiopia.<sup>118</sup> Despite Arslan’s best efforts, the General Assembly continued to move forward with a planned vote on the partition of Palestine.

On the last day of scheduled debates before voting on the partition plan, the Syrian government made a last-minute attempt to pressure the United States to vote against partition, warning of the disastrous security implications of voting yes for partition. On 29 November 1947, the morning of the UN vote, Syrian President Quwatli warned the U.S. Chargé to Syria Robert Memminger that a yes vote by the United States would open up the Middle East’s doors to the Soviets and the small remote states presently subject to bribes and threats would be particularly vulnerable. He also indicated that the partition vote would undoubtedly result in bloodshed if the majority of the United Nations’ members voted yes, but that the United States had immense pull and could sway the majority.<sup>119</sup> However, put to a vote later that day, the plan for partition with economic union (Resolution 181(II)) passed overwhelmingly amongst the non-

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<sup>117</sup> “125th Plenary Meeting November 26, 1947, 124. Continuation of the Discussion on the Palestinian Question,” 1340.

<sup>118</sup> “125th Plenary Meeting November 26, 1947, 124. Continuation of the Discussion on the Palestinian Question,” 1340.

<sup>119</sup> “Doc. 895 The Chargé in Syria (Memminger) to the Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, The Near East and Africa, Volume V - Office of the Historian, November 29, 1947, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v05/d895>.

Arab states, signaling the current limits of Arab and Muslim bloc politics within the General Assembly and specifically related to the Question of Palestine.<sup>120</sup>

The decision by the United Nations to move forward with partitioning Palestine dealt a devastating blow to the Syrian delegation's confidence in the UN's willingness to find a genuine solution to the Palestine Question or to maintain the principles of its Charter. For his part, Faris al-Khury rejected the idea that the Ad Hoc Committee had done all it could to find an alternative solution to the future government of Palestine other than partition. Al-Khury argued, for instance, that while much attention was given to exploring UNSCOP's majority proposal, the minority proposal drafted by India, Iraq, and Yugoslavia was not given equal consideration. He countered the claim that a unitary state would render the Jewish community in Palestine a vulnerable minority as political membership would be based off of ideals, not religion, and so Jews could always join the political party of the majority. He warned however, that given the vote in favor of partition the US should be leery of the type of influence the Jews will wield in Palestine given that they make up one out of three individuals in Palestine yet have a disproportionate amount of influence already in the United States where they make up one out of thirty individuals.<sup>121</sup>

Perhaps the clearest signal that the Syrians had lost faith in the United Nations' commitment to its own principles was the statement given by Amir Adil Arslan. In his remarks, he articulates the critical role the UN Charter plays in the Syrian government's decision to

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<sup>120</sup> "A/RES/181(II): Resolution 181 (II). Future Government of Palestine," United Nations General Assembly, November 29, 1947, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/a06f2943c226015c85256c40005d359c/7f0af2bd897689b785256c330061d253?OpenDocument>.

<sup>121</sup> "128th Plenary Meeting, November 29, 1947," in *United Nations Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly Plenary Meetings of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record, 16 September - 29 November 1947*, vol. II, United Nations Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly Plenary Meetings of the General Assembly, Verbatim Record, 16 September - 29 November 1947, Volume II, 110th - 128th Meetings, 13 November - 29 November 1947 (Lake Success, New York: United Nations General Assembly, 1947), 1420–21.

engage with the United Nations in pursuit of its strategic objectives. Addressing what the partition decision means from Syria's perspective vis-à-vis the UN Charter, Arslan, who quoted his comments verbatim in his memoirs, stated:

“Even before the Assembly took this decision, I think that most of the delegations had suspected a dictatorial attitude. It is useless to speak about it at length, but as it is customary to allow those condemned to death to speak freely to their executioners, we shall address ourselves to ours. Gentlemen, the Charter is dead. But it did not die a natural death; it was murdered, and you all know who is guilty. My country will never recognize such a decision. It will never agree to be responsible for it. Let the consequences be on the heads of others, not on ours.”<sup>122</sup>

Arslan's explicit promise at the end that his country would never recognize this decision and that consequences will undoubtedly follow, further supports the theory of the Syrian-UN strategic framework. If, in pursuit of sovereignty and political independence, the UN Charter is knocked out of the equation, then the next recourse for the state is self-defense. With this framework in mind, it becomes clearer why violence was soon to follow.

The day following the United Nations passage of the plans for partition, anti-Western demonstrations touched off in Damascus. According to U.S. State Department documents a mob of roughly 2,000 predominately “Moslem brothers” stormed the U.S. legation in Damascus stoning windows and setting fire to three diplomatic vehicles. The reporting noted that the thirty police officers on duty in the area “watched with bemused indifference as [the] surging crowd reached [the] roof and tore down [the] American flag.”<sup>123</sup> In conversations with Syrian Prime Minister Jamil Mardam Bey, the U.S. Chargé reported that the Syrian Government “expressed profound regrets” saying Damascus was caught off guard by the speed in which the mob struck, noting they were organized by “foreign agents” whose violence would ultimately harm the Arab

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<sup>122</sup> “128th Plenary Meeting, November 29, 1947,” 1427.

<sup>123</sup> “Doc. 897 The Chargé in Syria (Memming) to the Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, The Near East and Africa, Volume V - Office of the Historian, November 30, 1947, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v05/d897>.

cause.<sup>124</sup> In response to the incident and the Syrian Government's expression of regret, the U.S. Acting Secretary of State asked that the U.S. legation relay the following message to the Syrian Government on how Washington expects Damascus to move forward:

“US Govt expects the Govt of Syria like that of any country with which it maintains diplomatic relations to extend full protection to American Legation, American property, and American citizens in territory under its control. Displeasure which Syrian Govt and people may feel towards any policy or action of American Govt in United Nations or otherwise is no ground for violence of this character [...] it is assumed that Syrian Govt will take prompt measures to make clear before whole world its disapproval of such acts, to proffer the appropriate apologies, to compensate for property destroyed, and to give adequate protection in future.”<sup>125</sup>

Although no further incidents were reported in Syria against U.S. diplomatic officials, riots against Jewish inhabitants and places of worship did occur in Aleppo, and protests against the U.S. and the British were organized most notably in Iraq, Egypt and Palestine.<sup>126</sup>

By the end of 1947, the initial hope that characterized the Syrian government's attitude towards the UN and its Charter back at the organization's founding was clearly dashed. Over the course of the discussions on Palestine, the above section captured the Syrian delegation's gradual shift away from its standard legalistic argument rooted in the UN Charter towards outright hostility towards the UN and its belief that the Charter was now dead. What the 1947 Question of Palestine experience taught the Syrian delegation was that UN principles do not always matter, and that if Syria wants to secure its objectives it should consider alternative options, force included. Feeling as if the UN or the United States could have done more to mediate a solution more favorable to the Arabs, the final statements delivered by Arslan suggest that the Syrians

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<sup>124</sup> “Doc. 897 The Chargé in Syria (Memminger) to the Secretary of State.”

<sup>125</sup> “Doc. 898 The Acting Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, The Near East and Africa, Volume V - Office of the Historian, November 30, 1947, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v05/d898>.

<sup>126</sup> “[CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF EVENTS, NOV. 24-DEC. 7, 1947],” *Chronology of International Events and Documents* 3, no. 23 (1947): 692, 700, 702.

would do whatever they felt necessary to prevent the General Assembly from implementing Resolution 181. In fact, according to Arslan's memoirs, in late 1947 he lamented the outcome of the Palestine Question but noted he planned to do more if his country had the resources to strike back stating:

“Poor Palestine. Whatever I said in defense of it, I will be free from guilt [lit. my liver will be free from ulcers], because I was not able to convince stakeholders in my country and in other Arab countries that there needs to be something more than just talk. If only Syria had a strong military whenever the Jews claimed that it is their country and when someone comes to their aid...Now we have a small army with little equipment barely able to stop in the face of a Zionist army if it marched from Huleh to Damascus suddenly and then fail to mobilize the people of the Golan to fight them. If the Arabs do not attack the Jews of Palestine before it becomes a state for them, then an attack on a wealthy independent state armed by the United States in one week, would not be possible while we are in this state.”<sup>127</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

The outbreak of a regional war between the Arab states and Israel just six months later is hardly surprising when one considers the simmering attitudes of the Syrian delegation brought to a boil by the plan for partition. Unlike the theories proposed by the Israeli scholars that the Arabs were politically incompetent and did not unify their strategy, this chapter demonstrates that they took the Question of Palestine extremely seriously and sought to combat partition at every juncture, using a globalized language of right to sovereignty, independence, and drawing comparisons between Palestinians and other nations. As will be indicated by the Syrians themselves in later sections, the only mistake the Arabs made was believing that the United Nations would actually uphold its own principles. As such, while the Syrian Government had a host of domestic and regional considerations for going to war against Israel in May 1948, the developments in the international arena should not be overlooked. Whether or not the Syrian

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<sup>127</sup> Arslān and Ībish, *Mudhakkirāt al-Amīr ‘Ādil Arslān*, 700–701.

delegation's statements over the course of the UN debates reflected a genuine response to international developments or an independently crafted policy to soften the blow of a premeditated war with Israel, its statements and involvement with the UN are indicative of a strategic interaction. If the Syrian government was not intent on gaining politically from its interactions with the UN we should not have observed its repeated attempts to recalibrate their argument strategy throughout 1947. The fact that drums of war had begun to sound may ultimately reflect Damascus' efforts to compensate for the limitations of the international system. By failing to secure Palestinian independence through its diplomatic appeals to Pan-Arabism and independence for post-colonial nations, Syria and its Arab allies were left with advancing Palestinian independence on the battlefield.

### **Chapter 3: The Limits of War in Palestine and a Return to UN Engagement, 1948-1949**

#### **Introduction**

On 15 May 1948, the Syrian army entered a regional war against the self-declared state of Israel, deploying roughly 1,000 troops into northeastern Palestine while retaining another 1,500 along the internationally recognized Syrian border. The war itself, lasting until the summer of 1949, represented a profound strategic failure for the Arab states. Of the 900,000 Palestinians in Mandatory Palestine before the onset of the war and whose sovereignty the Arab states proclaimed to defend, over 750,000 became refugees out of which nearly 90,000 fled to neighboring Syria.<sup>1</sup> On 11 May 1949, the state of Israel gained full recognition under international law by the United Nations over territory that far exceeded that envisioned by the UN partition plan for Palestine. In the midst of Israel's growing international standing, the Arab states separately signed Armistice Agreements with Israel to bring an end to the military phase of their conflict. Syria, the last of the Arab states to do so, signed an Armistice Agreement with Israel on 20 July 1949 that negotiated the withdrawal of Syrian military forces three sectors of territory along the eastern bank of the Jordan River and Lake Tiberias it occupied during the war comprising of 66.5 square kilometers of land. Despite Syria's earnest political and military efforts to preserve pan-regional sovereignty during this period, the net result of their efforts was the loss of de facto Arab sovereignty over much of Palestine and the international community's recognition of the State of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Palestine Refugees in Syria: A Recurring Tragedy," The Elders, accessed May 18, 2018, <https://theelders.org/article/palestine-refugees-syria-recurring-tragedy>.

<sup>2</sup> Joshua Landis, "Syria and the 1948 War in Palestine," accessed April 21, 2018, [http://joshualandis.oucreate.com//Syria\\_1948.htm](http://joshualandis.oucreate.com//Syria_1948.htm).

Within the secondary literature covering this period, scholars have generally presented the Arab states as politically incompetent and adopted a dismissive attitude towards the idea of there being any proactive strategic Arab policy vis-à-vis Palestine motivating the 1948 War and the signing of the 1949 Armistice Agreement. Regarding the 1948 war, several scholars have argued that “inter-Arab conflict,”<sup>3</sup> “the preservation of domestic stability”<sup>4</sup> or “the popularity of the war”<sup>5</sup> and “the momentum of their own rhetoric”<sup>6</sup> were reasons why Syria participated in the 1948 War. Of those scholars who do recognize that Syria would have liked to have won the war against Israel, they argue that Syria had “neither the battle plans nor the means to do so” and therefore concluded that the war must not really have been about Palestine.<sup>7</sup> Regarding the signing of the 1949 Armistice Agreement between Syria and Israel, other scholars have similarly dismissed any true agency on the part of Syrian diplomats themselves and attributed it to the pressure of individual personalities like Husni al-Zaim<sup>89</sup>—the Israel friendly leader of Syria who rose to power in a military coup before the Armistice’s signing—or the “urging” of the UN Mediator in Palestine Ralph Bunche.<sup>10</sup> To be certain, a fair amount of scholarship has examined the role of the United Nations in Syria’s military posture towards Palestine<sup>11</sup>, with some even

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<sup>3</sup> Joshua Landis, “Syria and the Palestine War: Fighting King ‘Abdullah’s “Greater Syria Plan”,” in *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 178.

<sup>4</sup> Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, 105.

<sup>5</sup> McHugo, *Syria*, 123–25.

<sup>6</sup> Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2008), 181.

<sup>7</sup> Joshua Landis, “Syria and the Palestine War: Fighting King ‘Abdullah’s “Greater Syria Plan”,” 178.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958*, 61–62.

<sup>9</sup> Elie Podeh in *Chances for Peace* is actually one of the few scholars who note that the decision to sign an Armistice Agreement actually began before Husni al-Zaim’s coup and even attributes it to a desire to preserve territorial holdings. However, the purpose of Podeh’s work is to identify if the Zaim episode was a missed opportunity for peace, not to identify Syria’s signing as part of a broader strategic policy and engagement with the United Nations.

<sup>10</sup> Nissim Bar-Yaacov, *The Israel-Syrian Armistice: Problems of Implementation, 1949-1966* (Jerusalem: Magnes P. (Hebrew University), 1967), 36.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Nissim Bar-Yaacov, *The Israel-Syrian Armistice: Problems of Implementation, 1949-1966* (Jerusalem: Magnes P. (Hebrew University), 1967), David Brook, *Preface to Peace: The United Nations and the Arab-Israel Armistice System*. (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1964), and Aryeh Shaley, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

suggesting that the 1949 Armistice Agreement was both a “mechanism to contain Israeli military advances”<sup>12</sup> or a moment that ushered in a combined strategy of “pragmatism and a policy of force.”<sup>13</sup> However, such studies are more interested in unpacking the effectiveness of the UN in mediating Arab-Israeli disputes, or in presenting Syria’s combined strategy of pragmatism and force as an evolution in their policy, and a missed opportunity for peace, rather than a conditional strategic approach.

Instead of treating Syria’s policy during this period as reactionary or for ulterior motives, I argue that Syria’s strategic engagement with the UN, the 1948 War, and the signing of the Armistice Agreements were all in the service of its foundational policy of preserving pan-regional sovereignty per the Syria-UN Strategic Framework. Success or failure in pursuit of such objectives should not be the determining factor in deciding whether or not Syria had a strategic policy towards the question of Palestine. As will be shown in this chapter, although Syria reached the limits of what it could achieve politically through UN engagement before the war, this did not mean that war with Israel would not have its own limits. Similarly, Syria’s decision to fight a war in 1948 and then sign an Armistice Agreement in 1949 should not be interpreted as a new strategic approach, rather it should be understood as a new tactic in pursuit of the same strategic objective. As will be discussed further in Part II, the signing of the Armistice Agreement in 1949 did not usher in the end of the use of force when UN engagement proved ineffective, rather it presented Syria with a new United Nations tool to leverage in pursuit of its goal. On a whole this chapter argues that when the limits of UN engagement were reached, Syria went to war to preserve its strategic objectives. However, this did not mean that the UN lost its

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<sup>12</sup> Nathan A. Pelcovits, *The Long Armistice: UN Peacekeeping and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1960* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Aryeh Shaley, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 6.

value to Syria, rather, when war also reached its political limits, Syria returned to UN engagement via Armistice negotiations to secure its objectives.

To make the case that Syria's political and military behavior in 1948 and 1949 was in pursuit of its pan-regional sovereignty objectives, I will analyze Syrian action during three major phases. The first phase examines Syrian efforts to politically engage the United Nations with an eye towards blocking the UN's partition plan for Palestine. The second phase will unpack the logic of Syria's decision to go to war in 1948 and how they earnestly sought to preserve the pan-regional integrity of Arab lands in Palestine. Finally, I will discuss the Syrian decision to sign the UN-mediated Armistice Agreement with Israel and the role that document played, from Syria's perspective, in preserving its claims to sovereignty in Palestine. Understanding the dual tactics of UN engagement and force in preserving Syrian pan-regional sovereignty and the signing of the armistice agreement is essential to understanding Syrian actions vis-à-vis Palestine in Part II of this study.

### **Implementing Partition**

In the days and weeks following the United Nation's passage of the 29 November 1947 Palestine Partition Plan, violence erupted in Palestine, which quickly deteriorated into a civil war. Frustrated with the trajectory of the UN's plan to partition their desired country, Palestinians staged a wave of attacks against Jewish buses, markets, and settlements, while Palestinian businesses went on strike.<sup>14</sup> Local Zionist forces soon struck back in a series of pitched battles and tit for tat clashes that would ultimately result in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Despite the onset of what was becoming a civil war in Palestine, the UN General Assembly and Security Council were tasked with continuing to studying the

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<sup>14</sup> Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, 76-77.

partition plan's implementation as well as maintaining peace and security should any party attempt to alter the partition plan by force.

For Syria as well as the broader Arab arena, the plan to move forward with partitioning Palestine was completely unacceptable. Regardless of Syria's ideological or strategic reasons for opposing the partition plan, the very integrity of the UN as a political mechanism was in question as, from Damascus' perspective, the UN had broken with its very own founding principles of sovereignty and political independence. In terms of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework, the failure of the UN to uphold its principles on the Palestine Question left Syria with little recourse other than attempt to secure its interests through force. As such, Syria and other Arab states would begin to take more aggressive action in supporting armed factions to prevent the implementation of the Palestine Partition Plan. In fact, Syria's President Shukri al-Quwatli reportedly led a regional effort to build a volunteer Arab fighting force called *Jaysh al-Inqadh* (translated as the Arab Liberation Army) to fight in Palestine following the announcement of UNSCOP's proposal to partition Palestine in October 1947.<sup>15</sup> With a volunteer Arab fighting force in Palestine designed to contain and/or push back the Israeli Defense Forces, Syrian diplomats would continue to do what they could politically to block partition at the UN.

With the situation deteriorating in Palestine, the United Nations moved forward with the Partition Plan as the only viable solution to the seemingly irreconcilable positions of the warring parties. Of the two main UN bodies, the General Assembly was tasked with standing up a five-member Palestine Commission—consisting of representatives from Bolivia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Panama and the Philippines—to lead the effort in implementing the Partition Plan. The General Assembly was also expected to turn to the Security Council and receive as-needed

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<sup>15</sup> Joshua Landis, "Syria and the Palestine War: Fighting King 'Abdullah's "Greater Syria Plan"," 193–94.

guidance and support for their efforts. To facilitate the implementation process, the Palestine Commission sought the input and cooperation of the British Mandatory Authorities, the Jewish Agency and the Arab Higher Committee. While the first two parties agreed to assist, the Arab Higher Committee refused to cooperate underscoring its determination to “persist in [its] rejection [of the] partition and in [its] refusal [to] recognize [the] UNO resolution [in] this respect and anything deriving therefrom.”<sup>16</sup> Over the course of their preliminary investigation in early 1948, the Palestine Committee dispatched an advance investigative team to Palestine, and submitted two monthly progress reports in addition to a Special Report on the Problem of Security in Palestine.<sup>17</sup> Regarding the latter special report, the Palestine Commission was intimately aware of the Syrian and broader Arab strategy to undermine the Palestine Plan by force. Warning of the potential fallout if the UN fails to provide additional support to the implementation process, the Palestine Committee argued that it would set a bad precedent and set further violence in motion arguing:

“Powerful Arab interests, both inside and outside Palestine, are defying the resolution of the General Assembly and are engaged in a deliberate effort to alter by force the settlement envisaged therein...A dangerous and tragic precedent will have been established if force, or the threat of the use of force, is to prove an effective deterrent to the will of the United Nations...[British Mandatory forces] must be replaced by an adequate non-Palestinian force which will assist law-abiding elements in both the Arab and Jewish communities, organized under the general direction of the Commission, in maintaining order and security in Palestine, and thereby enabling the Commission to carry out the recommendations of the General Assembly. Otherwise, the period immediately following the termination of the Mandate will be a period of uncontrolled, widespread strife and bloodshed in Palestine, including the City of Jerusalem. This would be a catastrophic conclusion to an era of international concern for that territory.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “A/AC.21/7 United Nations Palestine Commission First Monthly Progress Report to the Security Council,” United Nations General Assembly, January 29, 1948, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/FECA435DAE3B3DEB85256C6000615518>.

<sup>17</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 256.

<sup>18</sup> “A/AC.21/9-S/676 United Nations Palestine Commission First Special Report to the Security Council: The Problem of Security in Palestine,” United Nations General Assembly, February 16, 1948, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/FDF734EB76C39D6385256C4C004CDBA7>.

Lacking the legal authority to impose its decisions by force, the General Assembly would continue to debate the merits of the partition plan as well as alternative solutions. Pending further guidance from the Security Council, the General Assembly was largely in a wait and see mode following the submission of its suggestions.

### **The Security Council and the Implementation of the Partition Plan**

As noted above, the Security Council was assigned the responsibility of providing support and guidance to the Palestine Committee's partition implementation efforts. On 9 December 1947, during its 222<sup>nd</sup> meeting, the UN Security Council convened to discuss the Secretary General's request that the UNSC cooperate with the Palestine Committee as well as discuss the Egyptian and Lebanese requests to participate as non-voting members in the UNSC debates. Agreeing to Egyptian and Lebanese participation in the discussions, the UNSC devoted more of its time to unpacking its responsibility as outlined by the UN Secretary General. One important element to their discussions was the Security Council's responsibility to determine if a legal "threat to peace" existed in Palestine. If a threat existed, which specifically included any attempt to alter the UN Partition Plan by force, then the Security Council was responsible for remedying the situation under the auspices of Chapter VII Article 39 of the UN Charter.<sup>19</sup>

With time and political options still available to block the partition of Palestine, the Syrian delegation continued to question the legality of the General Assembly's Partition Plan within the Security Council. Now that the topic of Palestine was back within the Security Council where Faris al-Khury held a voting seat and represented the only Arab voice on the council, it stood to reason that the Syrian delegation might be able to wield enough influence to convince the Security Council of the error of the UN's ways. During the 222<sup>nd</sup> meeting, Faris al-

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<sup>19</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 403.

Khury reiterated the same critique his delegation offered over the previous months that the partition plan was a violation of international law and transgressed the principles of the UN Charter. Hoping to press the UNSC to reconsider, al-Khury once again warned of the harmful repercussions that would follow should the Security Council make the same mistake and authorize the partition plan stating:

“Many members of the Security Council who have constantly championed respect for the Charter are now showing themselves meek and lenient in this regard, and are overlooking or bypassing these matters which are outside the jurisdiction of the Charter and in violation of it. Either we have a Charter and are bound by it, or we are free to do whatever we like, according to our own politics and our own fancies. This is another question which would lead us to results that the world would not like to see coming from the Security Council.”<sup>20</sup>

When examined against the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework, al-Khury’s comments highlight the clear importance of the UN Charter in Syria’s political calculus. Rather than critique the very purpose of the UN, al-Khury is instead critiquing what the UN has become and its deviation from its founding principles. By upholding its principles, the UN would not only elevate its standing on international stage, but Syria’s very strategic objectives could be achieved through proper UN intervention. However, although clear reference was made towards the importance of upholding the UN Charter, al-Khury left the door open for Arab aggressive action as a natural by-product of the United Nations failing to live up to its basic responsibilities.

In late February and early March 1948, the Security Council reconvened to examine the Palestine Commission’s recommendations in the Commission’s first monthly and special security reports. The specific item under the Council’s consideration was the question of authorizing a non-Palestinian military force to improve security in Palestine in order to facilitate

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<sup>20</sup> “222nd Meeting December 9, 1947, 422. Letter from the Secretary-General Regarding the General Assembly’s Resolution Concerning the ‘Future Government of Palestine,’” in *U.N. Security Council Official Records: Second Year No. 106* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1947), 2781, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/636297/files/S\\_PV-222-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/636297/files/S_PV-222-EN.pdf).

the Partition Plan's implementation. On 24 February, the Security Council began deliberations of this question during its 253<sup>rd</sup> meeting. To facilitate the debates, the Security Council welcomed the participation of representatives from Egypt and Lebanon, as well as a representative from the Jewish Agency to provide as-needed information. A similar invitation was given to the Arab Higher Committee if it so wished to participate, although the Committee continued to boycott the UN's partition efforts. Given that the Palestine Commission was duty bound to implement the specific letter of the Partition resolution, it was the Security Council's responsibility to render any political guidance it considered helpful.<sup>21</sup>

As the first country to address the Palestine Commission's recommendation, the United States argued that the UNSC must first determine if a threat to peace exists in Palestine before dispatching troops to the region. In an ironic shift on its stance towards the Palestine Question, the US representative noted that any precedent set on this question must be in full accord with the UN Charter. The US representative argued that at present, there was insufficient evidence to indicate that a threat to peace existed in Palestine. As such, the US recommended that the five permanent members of the Security Council stand up a committee to study whether or not a threat to peace exists in Palestine and to submit its recommendations for any action it deems appropriate. The US proposal also called on the various parties in Palestine to do all they could to reduce tensions in the area so that the Commission's work might continue in earnest. Of note, the UK representative stated that his country had every intention of leaving Palestine on 15 May and completing its withdrawal by 1 August. He further noted that the UK Government would not take part in any UN plan to enforce a situation in Palestine that both sides disagreed upon.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 403-4.

<sup>22</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 404.

In keeping with his attitude towards the Partition Plan, Faris al-Khury of the Syrian delegation called into question the General Assembly's right to partition Palestine and asked the Security Council to again reconsider the plan. To make his case, al-Khury relied on both his traditional legal arguments as well as a series of Arab nationalist tropes. Again, the inclusion of Arab nationalist rhetoric in al-Khury's speech is indicative of a declining confidence in the UN system alone and may suggest that its pure UN approach is no longer sufficient to achieve Syria's strategic objectives. To begin, on 24 February al-Khury advised the Security Council during its 254<sup>th</sup> meeting to reconsider the General Assembly's recommendations on the partition of Palestine. Specifically, he argued that the General Assembly does not have the power to create or violate the integrity of states, and now the Assembly is attempting to pass on the responsibility of implementing its illegal resolution to the Security Council. He also lamented the fact that the General Assembly did not consider his recommendation that the question be passed to the International Court of Justice to consider whether or not the General Assembly could even make such recommendations as partition. Further, on the question of approving a non-local military force to go to Palestine, al-Khury argued that the Security Council can only approve forces for the maintenance of international peace and security, not the internal security of a country.<sup>23</sup>

In a deviation from his traditional legal style, al-Khury supplemented his legal approach with a number of Arab nationalist arguments to make the case against the partition of Palestine. In an impassioned speech before the Security Council on 24 February, al-Khury argued that Palestine was a natural piece of the Arab world, and its control by Arabs and Muslims would not only be just legally, but would safeguard the status of holy sites in the area. On the first part of Palestine's significance and intimate connection to the region, al-Khury argued the following:

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<sup>23</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 404-5.

“To the Eastern nations, Palestine is a symbol of the struggle between power politics and international democracy, between the old order in which Asiatic and African peoples were considered legitimate objects of exploitation by the Western powers, and a new order which seeks equality of sovereignty among all nations and all peoples within their own areas. In view of all these facts, it follows that the representatives who voted against partition or who refrained from giving it their support cannot be held responsible for the implementation of a scheme which they consider invalid, illegal, immoral, unjust and violating the principles of the United Nations Charter... The people of the seven States of the Arab League are especially affected by inserting into their midst an alien State composed of a people whose wide ambitions of aggrandizement are well known to all the world. Palestine is surrounded by Arab countries and is intimately related to them by racial, linguistic, religious, political, cultural, economic, social and sentimental unity, and has been for the last thirteen centuries sharing with them the same destiny within the Arab and Ottoman Empires. It is natural that these Arabs should consider the driving of such a foreign wedge into the heart of their land a flagrant aggression against the vital basis of their existence.”<sup>24</sup>

On the importance of maintaining both Palestine’s Arab character, as well as its Islamic identity, al-Khury argued that the only group capable of safeguarding religious sites in Palestine, and therefore preventing sectarian clashes, were the Muslims. According to al-Khury’s logic, true protection of religious sites could only come from people who actually respected the sanctity of such locations. Since the Jewish people did not believe in the sanctity of Christian and Muslim sites, they were ill-equipped from a belief-perspective to protect all sites. As such, he argued that the world’s 400 million Muslims, as believers in the founders of the monotheistic traditions, would safeguard such sites better. Having “reverently guarded them throughout the last thirteen centuries of Islamic sway in Palestine,” al-Khury suggested that allowing the Jewish community to establish themselves as the sole rulers of the land, “should be seriously borne in mind, considering the sad results which this reaction [by Christians and Muslims] is likely to entail.”<sup>25</sup>

Undeterred by al-Khury’s remarks, the Security Council deliberations continued unabated.

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<sup>24</sup> “254th Meeting February 24, 1948, 38. Continuation of the Discussion of the Palestine Question,” in *U.N. Security Council Official Records: Third Year No. 30* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1948), 283, 285–87, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635320/files/S\\_PV.254-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635320/files/S_PV.254-EN.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> “254th Meeting February 24, 1948, 38. Continuation of the Discussion of the Palestine Question,” 285.

However, for the purposes of this study, the Syrian delegation's remarks should be interpreted as a sign of increasing desperation and an indication of its slide towards war.

In a sign of Arab political unity in the deliberations of the Palestine Question, the Egyptian and Lebanese delegation seconded many of the same comments raised by the Syrian delegation. On 25 February, the Egyptian delegate similarly called on the Security Council during its 255<sup>th</sup> meeting to reconsider the legality of the partition plan, arguing that the General Assembly's recommendations fall outside the General Assembly's jurisdiction under the UN Charter. The Egyptian delegate also denounced the General Assembly's decision to block several advisory opinions by the International Court of Justice on the legality of the partition plan. He further warned that the implementation of the plan would not only further inflame the situation in Palestine, but would also deal a "fatal blow to world peace".<sup>26</sup>

Following statements from the Arab states, the Jewish Agency wholeheartedly condemned any attempt to block the partition plan as illegal and a violation of international law. Speaking on 27 February during the Security Council's 258<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Zionist representative stated that the Jewish Agency sacrificed much by accepting the partition plan but noted they did so simply to gain sovereignty and join the community of nations. He criticized the fact that Arab states were flouting international law by now openly opposing the partition plan's implementation, while the British were also to blame for their policy of non-cooperation. With regards to sending an international military force to Palestine, the Jewish Agency representative offered an interesting alternative proposal. Rather than send a force to Palestine, the Jewish Agency representative suggested that the international community should provide the Jews with arms and place an arms embargo on those states that oppose the international community's

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<sup>26</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 405.

partition plan. He concluded his remarks by suggesting that the partition plan represented the absolute minimum the Jewish Agency was willing to accept, suggesting that they would be prepared to do anything to safeguard the land they were given under the plan.<sup>27</sup>

Over the following days, the Security Council reached a preliminary agreement on what next steps it should take vis-à-vis Palestine in light of the General Assembly's resolution and reports. As the only Arab state with actual voting power on the Security Council, Syria's assessment of the partition plan's illegality was overshadowed by the debate on the Council's role in implementing the General Assembly's resolution. Given the Council's focus on the question of implementing the partition plan, the Security Council passed a resolution (S/691) on 5 March calling for the permanent members of the Council to consult and provide recommendations within ten days to the Palestine Commission with a view towards implementing the partition plan.<sup>28</sup> The resolution was passed by a vote of 8 with 3 abstentions from Argentina, the United Kingdom, and Syria. Although the Council had not settled on implementing the partition plan, the resolution left open the door to its potential viability.<sup>29</sup>

### **Final UN Attempts to Reconcile Differences in Palestine Before the Outbreak of War**

In late March 1948, following deliberations on the feasibility of implementing the Partition plan, the United States presented a report of those consultations and proposed two resolutions on next steps to address the situation in Palestine. The report, broken down into two parts, stated that the positions of the Jewish Agency and Arab Higher Committee were irreconcilable and therefore partition could not be implemented through peaceful means. It

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<sup>27</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 405.

<sup>28</sup> "42 (1948). Resolution of 5 March 1948 [S/691]," March 5, 1948, 14, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/111963/files/S\\_RES\\_42%281948%29-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/111963/files/S_RES_42%281948%29-EN.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 405-7.

further noted that the continued infiltration of Palestine “by land and sea” would worsen the situation and, as such, the Security Council would have to take steps to maintain international peace and security. Based on these findings the U.S. Representative proposed two resolutions, the first calling for an immediate truce in Palestine, and the second calling for another special session of the General Assembly to again consider the future government of Palestine. Of note, underlying the U.S. resolution on the reconsideration of the future government of Palestine was Washington’s belief that a temporary trusteeship would be the best solution for managing the situation.<sup>30</sup>

The urgency to pass these two resolutions and achieve positive results on the ground in Palestine was driven in part by the Palestine Commission’s second monthly progress report submitted on 12 March. In the second monthly progress report, the Palestine Commission examined the pending termination of the British Mandate on 15 May 1948, and concluded that the situation in Palestine “leaves little hope for the achievement of continuity in administrative services and for an orderly transfer of authority to the Commission upon the termination of the Mandate.” The Commission thus reiterated its view that once the Palestine Mandate is terminated, the situation is likely to result in “chaos and widespread strife and bloodshed.”<sup>31</sup>

In response to the permanent members’ reports and U.S. resolutions, the Arab states and the Jewish Agency naturally held competing viewpoints on how to proceed in Palestine. For its part, and speaking on behalf of the Arab states, Syria supported the idea of establishing some form of a trusteeship over Palestine—a solution that the Syrian delegation long advocated. Al-Khury noted that the Arab states were prepared to help establish a just peace in Palestine and

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<sup>30</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 407–10.

<sup>31</sup> “A/AC.21/14 United Nations Palestine Commission Second Monthly Progress Report to the Security Council,” United Nations General Assembly, March 12, 1948, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/B43EADDEE73C904A085256C6A005A83BE>.

suggested that the current state of unrest was due to the UN's efforts to partition Palestine and the influx of arms and hostile Jewish immigrants. For its part, the Jewish Agency considered U.S. support for a temporary trusteeship as a "shocking reversal" of its position on the question of Palestine and would do significant damage to the prestige of the UN if partition was abandoned in the face of Arab aggressive pressure. Furthermore, the Jewish Agency again leveraged moral issues to argue against the report's conclusion on immigration arguing that the armed bands entering the country should not be equated with unarmed Jewish civilians settling in the only country they have. Responding to this last point, Faris al-Khury again argued against the idea that the Jewish people did not already have a state, suggesting that no religious group has a state but are part of numerous states around the world. He warned that if a precedent was set in the case of granting statehood to the Jewish people, other religions might lay claim to states wherever they are found.<sup>32</sup> Despite the gulf of opinion between the Arabs states and Jewish Agency, the UN Security Council ultimately passed the two US resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire and the reconsideration by the General Assembly of the future government in Palestine.<sup>33</sup>

During the month of April, the UN Security Council and General Assembly were pressed to resolve two interconnected challenges in Palestine before the termination of the British Mandate went into effect on 15 May 1948. For its part, the UN Security Council was tasked with reaching an immediate truce between the warring sides in Palestine in the hopes of creating the conditions for a negotiated settlement. On 15 April, the Presiding officer of the Security Council announced during the Council's 282<sup>nd</sup> meeting that after meeting twice with representatives of

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<sup>32</sup> "277th Meeting, April 1, 1948, 4. Continuation of the Discussion on the Palestine Question," in *U.N. Security Council Official Records: Third Year No. 52* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1948), 29, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635407/files/S\\_PV.277-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635407/files/S_PV.277-EN.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 408-11.

the Arab Higher Committee and the Jewish Agency, both sides remained entrenched in their irreconcilable views. Given the intractable positions of the disputing parties, the Council took it upon themselves to devise a truce arrangement which was presented in the form of a draft resolution by the Colombian delegation. The Colombian draft resolution called for the immediate cessation of violence on both sides, the cooperation of the factions with the Mandatory authorities, the avoidance of certain provocative actions, and the establishment of a UN observer force to assist in implementing the truce. Of note, two articles in the Colombian draft resolution were of particular importance for the subsequent debates. The first called on both sides to refrain from bringing individuals to Palestine who were “armed or capable of bearing arms”, while the second called on both sides to refrain from any “political activity which might prejudice the rights, claims or positions of either community.”<sup>34</sup>

The proposed Colombian truce resolution generated intense debate in the Security Council and the Arab representatives and Jewish Agency remained divided on the way forward. On one side of the divide, Syria—backed by the United States and Canada along with other Arab voices attending the Council meeting—supported the Colombian draft resolution. Al-Khury of the Syrian delegation argued that restricting certain provocative actions like Jewish immigration (those “armed or capable of bearing arms”) or implementing the partition plan (“political activity which might prejudice the rights...”) were essential to the success of any truce and as such the Syrian delegation was prepared to support the resolution. For its part, the views of the Jewish Agency, backed by the U.S.S.R. and Ukrainian S.S.R., were against several provisions of the Colombian draft resolution. Specifically, the Jewish Agency rejected the idea of ceasing all military activity and barring individuals “capable of bearing arms” as this would prohibit the

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<sup>34</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 412.

rights of self-defense and limit immigration to Palestine that they assessed as their right. The Jewish Agency further denounced the limits placed on the importation or acquisition of weapons or any political activity, so long as nothing barred regional Arab states from doing the same. In response, the United States representative reiterated that the truce was temporary, but in order to gain wide support struck any reference to individuals “armed or capable of bearing arms” from the resolution. With the exception of a request to stand up a UN observer force, the Security Council adopted the Colombian resolution on 17 April 1948 (S/723) passing it with 9 votes in favor and 2 abstentions (U.S.S.R. and the Ukrainian S.S.R.).<sup>35</sup>

On 23 April the Security Council reconvened to discuss what efforts had been made by the Arab Higher Committee and the Jewish Agency towards implementing the 17 April truce resolution. The representative of the Jewish Agency voiced his side’s willingness to commit to a ceasefire once the Arabs did, while the Arab Higher Committee noted they would cease as soon as the Jewish Agency froze the situation both militarily and politically. However, the Arab Higher Committee noted that the Jewish Agency continued to move forward with the Partition Plan and as such they would keep fighting to stop such a provocative political move. In response to a suggestion by the Syrian delegation, the United States proposed the establishment of a truce commission for Palestine composed of representatives of UNSC member states, with the exception of Syria, who had local consular personnel in Jerusalem that understood the situation and could help the Security Council with implementing the 17 April truce resolution. This resolution, with the exception of a few abstentions, also received the support of the UN Security Council.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 412–13.

<sup>36</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 415.

As the Security Council worked towards establishing a truce in Palestine, the General Assembly held its own deliberations in April on the question of the future government of Palestine. Per the Security Council's request, the UN Secretary General on 1 April called on the General Assembly to convene a Second Special Session beginning 16 April in Flushing Meadow, New York to reconsider the future government of Palestine. The convening of the Second Special Session in accordance with Article 20 of the UN Charter constituted the first time the Security Council had called for such a session, given that the first special session was convened at the request of the UK Government. After addressing various organizational and procedural matters, including the establishment of the General Committee and the selection of committee chairs for the six main General Assembly committees, the General Committee debated the Second Special Session's agenda. Although representatives from the U.S.S.R., Yugoslavia and Guatemala noted they did not see the purpose of standing up a special session to reconsider the future government of Palestine, the General Committee approved the agenda item and referred the future government of Palestine question to the First Committee for its evaluation and report.<sup>37</sup>

Much like the consideration of the Palestine Question to date, the deliberations of the First Committee on the future government of Palestine were equally divided. Over the course of the First Committee's 25 meetings, the key item up for debate was whether or not the 29 November Partition Plan should remain the basis of any post-mandatory governing structure in Palestine due to the difficulty in implementing the plan. As the country that originally called for the convening of a special session, the United States opened by noting how it has been conclusively proven that resolution 181 (II) [the Partition Plan] could not be implemented

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<sup>37</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 257-58.

peacefully, and as such a new arrangement was needed. Although also acknowledging that the truce proposal being hashed out in the Security Council was a positive step, the US representative called for the creation of a temporary Trusteeship over Palestine to handle the administration of the region upon the termination of the British Mandate on 15 May. Such an arrangement would prevent a vacuum from forming in Palestine and delay the question of who has the right to sovereignty in the area. For its part, the UK representative called on the General Assembly to reconsider its original partition plan, accusing the framers of impartially drafting certain components and forcing a situation that was causing further disruption in Palestine. The UK official concluded that member states should take more steps to open their countries up to Jewish immigration in order to lessen the pressure of continued Jewish immigration to Palestine.<sup>38</sup>

On the Arab and Jewish Agency side, both factions remained intent on achieving their political aspirations in Palestine in what signaled a clear intention to fight for their ambitions if needed. During the First Committee's discussions the Arab Higher Committee recounted how the history of the international community's treatment of the Palestine situation had been largely a sham. The Arab Higher Committee noted that since the beginning, the British Mandate was formed against the wishes of the majority of inhabitants and through British actions, hundreds of thousands of Jews had settled in Palestine within a handful of decades. The Committee continued by noting that the UNSCOP similarly ignored the aspirations of the Arabs of Palestine, and that now the Palestinian Arabs would accept nothing more than complete independence. If this does not happen, the Palestinians were prepared to fight for their rights on the basis of Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant and Article 28 of the British Mandate. For its part, the Jewish

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<sup>38</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 260–61.

Agency rejected as fallacious, the rationale that because the Partition Plan could not be implemented peacefully that a new solution was needed. The Agency argued that the problem was simple: Arab threats and violence had forced the UN to back down from its prior commitments and the UN must stop the Arabs from continuing to violate their obligations under the Charter. The representative concluded by underscoring that upon the termination of the British Mandate, the Jewish Agency was committed to governing in Palestine in the spirit of the Partition plan. With the lines drawn in the sand, and the termination of the British Mandate imminent, war between the two factions could easily be seen as imminent.<sup>39</sup>

### **Termination of British Mandate and Military Confrontation in May 1948**

In the midst of the ongoing UN deliberations over the future of Palestine, war between the two opposing factions appeared imminent as the termination of the British Mandate approached. To date, with British forces authorized under the terms of the Mandate to have temporary political and military control over Palestine, the question of Arab or Jewish sovereignty over Palestine had been held in abeyance. After determining that the Partition Plan could not be implemented without imposing it by force, the UN scrambled to find an alternative governing structure that could postpone the question of local sovereignty. However, unable to find a solution in time, the question of Arab and Jewish sovereignty in Palestine would be left open upon the termination of the Mandate.

With the termination of the British Mandate imminent, both Arab and Jewish forces pushed for what they believed was their sovereign right. For their part, the Arabs of Palestine believed they were entitled to all of Palestine per their rights to self-determination under the mandate, while the Zionists maintained that the Partition Plan remained the only legally binding

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<sup>39</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 261–62.

solution. However, the ultimate military putsch by Zionist forces was not merely designed to secure Jewish recognized territory as defined by the Partition Plan but extended beyond such dividing lines. Known operationally as *Tokhnit Dalet* (Plan D), Zionist forces focused on controlling all territory with Jewish inhabitants, including mixed areas and the city of Jerusalem, by launching waves of assaults against withdrawing British troops.<sup>40</sup> Although not officially directed by the Jewish Defense Forces, Zionist forces belonging to the rightwing Irgun (Etzel) militia conducted their own operations in conjunction with tokhnit dalet and notoriously killed between 100-200 Palestinian civilians in the village of Deir Yassin.<sup>41</sup> By 30 April, 1948 the Palestine Truce Commission noted in a letter to the Security Council that the situation in Palestine had deteriorated rapidly and that the British Mandatory's government offices and military bases were closing daily, being fought for and taken over by local inhabitants on both sides.<sup>42</sup> By 1 May, in a telegram to the Security Council, the Jewish Agency informed the UN body of the invasion of Palestine by Syrian, Lebanese, Jordanian, and Egyptian forces with reports an Iraqi column was en route, and stressed that it was determined to "resist this new phase of invasion at all costs."<sup>43</sup> In response to the pending fallout, the scheduled termination of the British Mandate the following day, and the question of sovereignty unresolved, David Ben-Gurion—the leader of the Zionist movement in Palestine—declared Israel's statehood.<sup>44</sup>

On 15 May 1948, with the termination of the British Mandate, the Secretary-General of the Arab League sent a cablegram to the UN Secretary General outlining the Arab states'

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<sup>40</sup> Netanel Lorch, *Israel's War of Independence, 1947-1949.*, 2d rev. ed. (Hartford: Hartmore House, 1968), 89.

<sup>41</sup> Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, 85.

<sup>42</sup> "CABLEGRAM DATED 30 APRIL 1948 FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PALESTINE TRUCE COMMISSION ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL (S/732)" (United Nations Security Council, May 3, 1948), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/649790/files/S\\_732-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/649790/files/S_732-EN.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> "TELEGRAM DATED 1 MAY 1948 FROM THE JEWISH AGENCY FOR PALESTINE TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL (S/730)" (United Nations Security Council, May 3, 1948), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/649788/files/S\\_730-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/649788/files/S_730-EN.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Derek Hopwood, *Syria 1945-1986: Politics and Society* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 34.

rationale for intervening in Palestine. Noticeably absent from the cablegram was any rationale for invading on the basis of nationalist or religious rhetoric characteristic of Arab media reporting at the time. Rather, the letter reflected a much soberer evaluation of the situation and outlined the Arab states' justification for intervening on the basis of the principles of the UN Charter and sovereign rights. In the letter, Abdul Rahman Azzam, an Egyptian diplomat and the first Secretary-General of the Arab League, noted that it had always been the right of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine to set up their own government on the principle of self-determination as outlined by the League of Nations and the UN Charter but that the UN had failed to find a fair and just solution to the problem.<sup>45</sup> The letter argued that not only did the violence prompt the mass exodus of Arabs from their homes, but the decision by the Mandatory powers to leave without transferring authority to an alternate government created a security vacuum which risked spreading the violence to neighboring Arab States. Further, in the absence of a trusteeship to replace the terminated British Mandate, the Arab states considered Palestine henceforth free and that the majority inhabitants were the only rightful people to determine a united Palestine's future. "For these reasons," Azzam concluded, "the Arab Governments find themselves compelled to intervene for the sole purpose of restoring peace and security and establishing law and order in Palestine."<sup>46</sup>

Back at the UN, the Security Council debated whether the deteriorating security situation in Palestine warranted UN intervention under the auspices of Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

From 17 to 29 May, the United States, the U.S.S.R. and the UK government proposed various

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<sup>45</sup> "CABLEGRAM DATED 15 MAY 1948 ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES (S/745)" (United Nations Security Council, May 16, 1948), 4, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/649818/files/S\\_745-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/649818/files/S_745-EN.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> "CABLEGRAM DATED 15 MAY 1948 ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES (S/745)," 5.

draft resolutions calling for a cessation of hostilities and debated the inclusion of potential UN intervention on the basis of Article 39 of the UN Charter, should the parties violate the cease-fire resolution. Central to the debate was first determining whether or not the situation in Palestine constituted a threat to peace. If the Security Council did determine a threat to peace existed in Palestine, then they would need to decide whether the UN was prepared to take further action and whether such action would further inflame tensions or not. To assist in their deliberations, the UNSC passed a resolution on 19 May that called on the warring factions to respond to a questionnaire within 48 hours that asked for clarification on the details of the fighting, the rationale for fighting, and the military objectives of the various sides.<sup>47</sup>

The details of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war have been the source of extensive academic inquiry and the reasons offered for the war's occurrence are numerous. Although beyond the scope of this present study, a brief overview of Syria's role in the war effort helps explain the importance of the UN in the achievement of Syria's strategic objectives. At the start of the 1948 war, the Syrian military was in a significantly weak standing compared to its Arab neighbors and Zionist adversary. After achieving independence from the French in 1946, the Syrian Government inherited a heavily minoritarian, French established, colonial force of questionable loyalty to the Syrian state. To safeguard against any subversive activity, the new Syrian government reduced the size of the military from 30,000 to about 6,000-7,000 forces.<sup>48</sup> With the state of its national forces so limited at the start of the war, the Syrian government was not willing to risk all of its forces in the war effort and contributed roughly 2,000-3,000 troops of which only 1000 entered Palestine while the rest protected the frontiers.<sup>4950</sup> It is certainly true

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<sup>47</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 417.

<sup>48</sup> McHugo, *Syria*, 124.

<sup>49</sup> Joshua Landis, "Syria and the 1948 War in Palestine."

<sup>50</sup> Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, 110.

that Syria orchestrated the creation of a volunteer Arab Liberation Army to supplement the war effort, but the majority of funding and fighters came from the collective pool of the Arab League members, and as such, failure on the Syrian front would be the collective's responsibility.<sup>51</sup>

The limited role the Syrian military was capable of playing directly in the conflict was further illustrated in the tactical maneuvers Syrian forces made during the war as well. According to Lt. Col. Netanel Lorch—a soldier in the Jewish Defense Forces Etzioni Brigade responsible for advancing on Jerusalem during the 1948 war—the incursions from Syria to Palestine were facilitated by the geographic military advantage the Syrian side possessed by virtue of its strategic location. He noted that the routes from Syria to Palestine had a “number of convenient approaches...which had served as invasion routes since ancient times...Good roads leading to the front lines [which] would insure the flow of supplies...excellent observation posts” and the security of preparing the invasion from the Syrian side of the border.<sup>52</sup> From these routes the Syrians dispatched three infantry battalions, an armored car battalion, an artillery regiment and a company of tanks south of Lake Tiberias.<sup>53</sup> Despite the apparent “advantages,” Syrian forces suffered immense losses in that incursion, resulting in 300 killed or wounded. Overall, the Syrian armed forces managed to reach territory along three water sources by the war's end (along portions of the Jordan River in the north, and south of both Lake Hula and Lake Tiberias). Advancing only 66.5 square kilometers beyond the Syrian controlled Golan Heights further underscores the limited nature of Damascus' involvement.<sup>54</sup>

Although its war efforts were limited, the Syrian government couched its actions as designed to secure Palestine's sovereign rights in accordance with the lofty ideals and principles

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<sup>51</sup> Joshua Landis, “Syria and the 1948 War in Palestine.”

<sup>52</sup> Lorch, *Israel's War of Independence, 1947-1949.*, 167–68.

<sup>53</sup> Lorch, 171.

<sup>54</sup> Joshua Landis, “Syria and the 1948 War in Palestine.”

of the UN Charter. Per the 19 May UNSC resolution calling on the warring parties to submit an explanation of their roles in the war effort and the basis for their military intervention, the Syrian Foreign Ministry underscored the importance of creating a permanent government in Palestine that reflected the interests of the majority inhabitants. Responding to a question on the military objectives of the Syrian campaign, the Foreign Ministry pointed to halting the Zionist insurrection, repatriating Arab refugees, and creating a Palestinian state as the core objectives stating:

“Their military objectives are to restore law and order, to help their brethren, the Arabs of Palestine, in suppressing the armed insurrection of the Zionist bands of terrorists, to repatriate the Arab refugees amounting now to a quarter of a million, expelled from their homes of Tiberias, Safad, Akka, Haifa, Jaffa, and other towns and villages, to enable the people of Palestine to establish a democratic regime for the future Government comprising all its population after putting an end of the state of anarchy now prevailing in Palestine. These operations are not directed against the Jews of Palestine but against the armed insurrection of the Zionist bands who intend to create for the Jewish minority a separate independent state in spite of the wishes of the majority in the country. The intention of the Syrian Government is to help the Palestinians to set up the democratic State of Palestine under which all inhabitants, Muslims, Christians, Jews and others may live side by side in harmony and peace enjoying the same rights and bearing the same obligations with strict and perfect security of the Holy Places and free access to them.”<sup>55</sup>

In addition to the outlining their military objectives, the Syrian Government explained that the basis of their intervention in Palestine was due to Syria’s many connections to Palestine, the potential spillover effect of violence into their own country, and that its intervention was carried out in response to an official request by the rightful authorities in Palestine. On this point of the basis for intervention, the Syrian foreign ministry stated:

“On the basis of considering Palestine an Arab territory linked with Syria and with the other Arab countries around it by all social, economic, political, racial,

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<sup>55</sup> “CABLEGRAM DATED 18 MAY 1948 FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL ADDRESSED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF SYRIA, AND REPLY THERETO SUBMITTED BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF SYRIA AT THE 301ST MEETING OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL (S/768)” (United Nations Security Council, May 22, 1948), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/469723/files/S\\_768-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/469723/files/S_768-EN.pdf).

geographical, linguistic and traditional inseparable links. Palestine is also an associate member in the Arab League which is a regional arrangement obliged to settle disputes within its area. The prevailing anarchy in Palestine reacted gravely on the security and order in Syria, especially when enormous hordes of destitute refugees flooded into Syria seeking refuge. Furthermore, the majority of the inhabitants of Palestine, which is the only legitimate organ in Palestine entitled to assume directive authority in the country after the termination of the Mandate, requested our military help. If we do not respond to this appeal the surviving Arabs in and out of the area coveted by the Zionists to be their own will be condemned to annihilation.”<sup>56</sup>

Ultimately, the letter from the Foreign Ministry concluded that not only have Jewish forces violated the Syrian frontier multiple times and blew up bridges, their declaration of statehood as a minority movement is seen as insurrection and as such has shut the door for negotiations.<sup>57</sup>

When looking at the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework, the timing and decision by Syria to militarily intervene in Palestine follows a clear logic. According to the framework, I argue that when the Syrian delegation fails to achieve its twin objectives of sovereignty and independence through UN engagement, the Syrian government must resort to other, armed means, to safeguard its strategic interests. In the case of intervention in Palestine, the stated rationale offered was the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state. Palestine’s independence was a political objective the Syrian government had argued for ad nauseam before the UN Security Council and General Assembly, yet to no avail. With the expiration of the British Mandate and the question of sovereignty up for grabs, the Syrian government and other Arab states sought to secure the rights they believed Palestine was entitled to per the purposes and principles outlined in the UN Charter. However, as will be shown, there are also limits to Syria’s use of force, and

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<sup>56</sup> “CABLEGRAM DATED 18 MAY 1948 FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL ADDRESSED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF SYRIA, AND REPLY THERETO SUBMITTED BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF SYRIA AT THE 301ST MEETING OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL (S/768),” 2.

<sup>57</sup> “CABLEGRAM DATED 18 MAY 1948 FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL ADDRESSED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF SYRIA, AND REPLY THERETO SUBMITTED BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF SYRIA AT THE 301ST MEETING OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL (S/768),” 3.

Syria's poor performance in the actual war effort could explain its willingness to ultimately return to leveraging the UN in pursuit of its objectives.

On the allied front, although unified within the halls of the United Nations, the other Arab states had their own strategic objectives for militarily intervening in Palestine. According to his review of the inter-Arab rivalries and competing regional competition in the run up to the 1948 war, Michael Doran notes that the Arab and regional states were divided into two main camps: the pro-British Turco-Hashemite Entente and the Triangle Alliance.<sup>58</sup> The first camp, or the Turco-Hashemite alliance, consisted of Turkey, and the Hashemite-led governments in Iraq, and Jordan. Turkey's interest in the Arab sphere at this time was born largely out of its concern with rising Kurdish nationalist sentiment in neighboring Iraq in conjunction with Soviet support for the short-lived independent Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in neighboring Iran. In an effort to prevent Kurdish national sentiment from spreading to its Kurdish dominated population in southeast of its country, Turkey sought to forge an alliance with Iraq from 1945 to 1947. Meanwhile, Hashemite Jordan was working towards creating a federation with the Hashemite government in Iraq and could use a great power patron like Turkey, particularly at a time when their British allies were in a state of retreat from the region. Though possibly a way to bolster their pan-Arab credentials, the potential Hashemite union between Iraq and Jordan was marred politically and on the popular street level by their ongoing alliance to the colonial British.<sup>59</sup>

For its part, the Triangle Alliance, consisting of Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, was in many ways a marriage of convenience between those Arab countries opposed to a strong pro-British Hashemite Arab bloc aligned with the Turkish regional counterweight. From the view in

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<sup>58</sup> Michael Doran, *Pan-Arabism before Nasser: Egyptian Power Politics and the Palestine Question* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Doran, 80–81.

Damascus, a powerful Hashemite bloc, with a history of ruling Syria in the form of Emir Faysal's Arab Kingdom of Syria, posed the most immediate regional threat to its established borders. King Abdullah of Jordan was the main visionary of this Greater Syria Project and Jordanian success in the 1948 War could spur wide popularity for the Hashemite bloc and push Syria on the road towards Arab unity with Jordan and Iraq. The Syrian government also did not look favorably upon rising Turkish influence in the region due to their ongoing territorial disputes over Alexandretta which the former French authorities ceded to Turkey in 1939. The Saudis similarly feared a popular unified Hashemite federation, although less so due to its pan-Arab credentials and more so to its religious claims as Muslim rulers who could challenge the Saudi claim to rightful protectors of Islam's sacred sites in Mecca and Medina. Furthermore, as the sole regional country with a strong alliance with the United States, the Saudis viewed the U.S. courtship of Turkey, as part of Washington's efforts to prevent the spread of Soviet communist influence into the region, with suspicion. If the U.S. decided to throw its weight behind Turkey, who was allied to the Hashemite bloc, then the Saudis would again face the potential threat from a rising Hashemite regional dominance. Finally, Egypt similarly opposed the Turco-Hashemite Entente primarily as part of its policy to bring about an end to British colonial rule in Egypt. If the Hashemites gained politically from the 1948 War then that would help solidify their regional position, likely maintain Britain's influence in the region, and make it more challenging to push for British withdrawal from Egypt.<sup>60</sup>

Looking at Palestine from the regional vantage point, the 1948 War was more than just a fight to maintain Arab sovereignty for the Palestinians, but it was truly a war fought for regional Arab dominance. For their part, if the Hashemites could seize control over a large portion of

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<sup>60</sup> Michael Doran, 83–84.

Palestine, that would bolster their position on the regional Arab stage and position them well to subsume Syria and possibly Mecca and Medina into its orbit. For Egypt, making a sizeable contribution to the war effort could not only maintain its dominant position, but potentially position itself to discredit the Hashemites for their pro-British, and colonial alliance. On the Syrian front, ruling officials pushed for the creation of a volunteer Arab Liberation Army to fight in Palestine, in addition to dispatching its own forces to the fight. This would allow Syrian officials to not only claim that its leaders wholeheartedly supported the Palestine cause, while also laying claims to the territory it deemed to be its natural frontier on the northeast bank of the Jordan River. With their positions set, the Arab states entered the 1948 fighting in earnest to preserve Arab sovereignty in Palestine while also angling to secure their status or gain as the dominant player in the region.

### **UN Efforts to Broker a Cease-fire Between the Warring Factions**

After receiving information from the warring factions in Palestine, the UN Security Council determined that the current state in Palestine did not constitute a threat to international peace requiring outside intervention per Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Instead, on 29 May, the Security Council adopted a UK resolution<sup>61</sup> calling on sides in the conflict to cease armed activity for four weeks, to end hostilities “without prejudice to the rights, claims and position of either Arabs or Jews”, to not mobilize military-aged men or introduce armed persons to Palestine, and to instruct the newly empowered UN Mediator for Palestine—Count Greve Folke Bernadotte—in coordination with the Truce Commission, to supervise the ceasefire agreement

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<sup>61</sup> “S/RES/50 (1948) 50 (1948). Resolution of 29 May 1948 [S/801],” United Nations Security Council, May 29, 1948, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/6B76F035CD9C4A36852560C200599BB7>.

and “promote a peaceful adjustment of the future situation of Palestine”.<sup>62</sup> The nephew of King Gustav V of Sweden, Count Bernadotte held a noteworthy career before being selected as the UN mediator by a committee of the UN’s Big Five countries in accordance with a 14 May General Assembly resolution.<sup>63</sup> A former Swedish soldier, humanitarian, diplomat, and the President of the Swedish Red Cross, Count Bernadotte was known for his substantive negotiations during World War II that resulted in the release of over 30,000 prisoners in German concentration camps.<sup>64</sup> Desiring to exhaust all political options first before considering armed action that might inflame the situation, the UK resolution further warned that failure to comply with the ceasefire would result in a UN reconsideration of the situation with an eye towards possible Chapter VII action.<sup>65</sup>

Naturally, the respective Arab and Jewish views of sovereignty in Palestine divided their stances on the question of UN Chapter VII intervention. Given that Syria viewed Palestine as a sovereign entity following the termination of the British Mandate, the Syrian UN delegation approved of the removal of Chapter VII intervention in Palestine on the grounds that: 1) Palestine is an Arab country and hence international peace would not be threatened; 2) they did not recognize the existence of a sovereign Jewish state; and 3) the Partition Plan was only a recommendation with no authority of enforcement. For its part, representatives of the Jewish Agency and Provisional Government of Israel viewed the resolution as biased towards the Arabs

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<sup>62</sup> “U.N. General Assembly Resolution 186 (S-2): Appointment and terms of reference of a United Nations Mediator in Palestine,” Text, The Avalon Project, May 14, 1948, 186, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/gres186.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/gres186.asp).

<sup>63</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 281.

<sup>64</sup> “Greve Folke Bernadotte (Af Wisborg) -- Britannica Academic,” accessed May 19, 2018, <https://academic-eb-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Greve-Folke-Bernadotte-af-Wisborg/78828>.

<sup>65</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 281.

and the terms restricting the mobilization of military-aged men and importing of weapons to be a violation of its own sovereignty within Palestine.<sup>66</sup>

With international consensus behind the UK government's 29 May resolution, Arab forces and the Provisional Government of Israel agreed to a conditional ceasefire. On 1 June 1948, the Provisional Government of Israel's UN representative Abba Eban submitted a telegram to the UN Secretary General on behalf of Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Shertok outlining his government's commitment to the 29 May resolution, assuming certain conditions. Chief among the Provisional Government of Israel's assumptions was that by agreeing to the terms of the resolution, the restriction blocking the mobilization of military aged men would in no way impair their freedom to admit immigrants into their controlled territory, regardless of their age.<sup>67</sup> The Arab states also submitted their own joint letter outlining their assumptions as to what the ceasefire agreement means for the future of Palestine. On 1 June 1948, Ahmed Mohammed Khashaba Pasha, the Foreign Minister of Egypt, issued a telegram to the UN Secretary General on behalf of the Arab League Members. In the telegram the Egyptian Foreign Minister expressed the Arab states' satisfaction that the UN appointed a Mediator, per the UNGA 14 May resolution, to find a just solution to the problem in Palestine. Explaining that a unified Palestine was what the Arab states meant by a just solution, the telegram stated, "The governments of the Arab states are confident that the United Nations Mediator and the members of the Truce Commission...will realize that any solution which does not ensure political unity for Palestine nor respect the will of the majority of the population of that country will not have the least

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<sup>66</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 425–27.

<sup>67</sup> "LETTER DATED 1 JUNE 1948 FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE JEWISH AGENCY FOR PALESTINE ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL TRANSMITTING A TELEGRAM FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL CONCERNING THE RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON 29 MAY 1948 (S/804)" (United Nations Security Council, June 1, 1948), 1–2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470049/files/S\\_804-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470049/files/S_804-EN.pdf).

chance of success.” However, the one concern the Arabs had was that if the political unity of Palestine is not the goal of the UN Mediator then the ceasefire will have negative effects stating:

“It will open the gates to Palestine, at the present time controlled by the Zionists, to receive hordes of Jewish immigrants of military age who are waiting at the ports of Europe and America for the first chance to go to Palestine in large numbers. Most of these immigrants have received a thorough combatant training, and their entry into Palestine will have the effect of reinforcing the bands of Zionist terrorists, which constitutes a serious threat to the Arabs of Palestine and to the Security of the Middle Eastern Arab countries. It is inconceivable that the Security Council could have intended to place the Zionists in a position to profit by the period of cessation of hostilities in order to receive a reinforcement of men who, although they come to Palestine as immigrants, are in reality nothing but trained fighters...”<sup>68</sup>

Recognizing that this issue was unlikely to be resolved in the short term, the UN mediator to the conflict requested that both sides agree to a temporary cessation of hostilities without conditions by June 11.<sup>69</sup> Both sides agreed on 9 June with the Arabs suggesting that this was proof of their “sincere desire for co-operation with the United Nations to achieve a peaceful and equitable solution of the problem of Palestine.”<sup>70</sup>

Over the course of the four-week long ceasefire, the UN’s Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte attempted, to no avail, to reconcile the differences of the two sides and provide the terms for an acceptable truce on the future of Palestine. Following his consultations with Jewish and Arab representatives on 28 and 29 June 1948, Count Bernadotte determined that at the core of the dispute between the two sides was the divergent views on the issue of partition, the creation of a Jewish State, and Jewish immigration. However, Bernadotte noted that the common

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<sup>68</sup> Ahmed Mohammed Khashaba Pasha, “TELEGRAM TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FROM THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF EGYPT DATED 1 JUNE 1948, CONCERNING THE RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON 29 MAY 1948 (S/810)” (United Nations Security Council, June 1, 1948), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470055/files/S\\_810-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470055/files/S_810-EN.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 430.

<sup>70</sup> M.F. Nokrashy, “REPLY RECEIVED FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF EGYPT ON BEHALF OF EGYPT, SAUDI ARABIA, LEBANON AND SYRIA IN RESPONSE TO THE CEASE-FIRE AND TRUCE PROPOSALS OF THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR (S/833)” (United Nations Security Council, June 10, 1948), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470361/files/S\\_833-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470361/files/S_833-EN.pdf).

denominator between the two sides was there shared belief in peaceful relations and economic unity. On this basis, Bernadotte outlined several suggestions on the way forward including turning back the clock on the question of sovereignty, proposing a return to the boundaries of Palestine as defined in the 1922 British Mandate that included Transjordan. A critical component to this arrangement would be negotiating the boundaries of the Jewish and Arab areas under a potential union. On the issue of negotiating borders Bernadotte suggested:

“That the boundaries of the two members be determined in the first instance by negotiation with the assistance of the Mediator and on the basis of suggestions to be made by him. When agreement is reached on the main outlines of the boundaries they will be definitely fixed by a Boundaries Commission.”<sup>71</sup>

In addition to reintroducing new negotiations to determine future borders, Bernadotte also set aside certain territory for Arab and Jewish sovereign control. For Arab territory, Bernadotte proposed that all or part of the Negev go to the Arabs as well as all of Jerusalem with municipal autonomy for the Jewish community in Jerusalem. For the Jewish side, all or part of the Western Galilee would go to the future Jewish area, while Jaffa’s status was left to be determined and free access to a port in Haifa and an airport in Lydda would be open to both. Although serving as the potential basis for future negotiations, Bernadotte left the door open for any counter-suggestions the two sides might have to his proposals.<sup>72</sup>

In response to Count Bernadotte’s suggestions on the future of Palestine, both the Provisional Government of Israel and the Arab states rejected the UN Mediator’s proposed territorial divisions. For its part, in a letter to the UN Secretary General, the Provisional Government of Israel rejected the Mediator’s proposal telling him “to reconsider your whole

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<sup>71</sup> “TEXT OF SUGGESTIONS PRESENTED BY THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR ON PALESTINE TO THE TWO PARTIES ON 28 JUNE 1948 (S/863)” (United Nations Security Council, July 3, 1948), 3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470499/files/S\\_863-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470499/files/S_863-EN.pdf).

<sup>72</sup> “TEXT OF SUGGESTIONS PRESENTED BY THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR ON PALESTINE TO THE TWO PARTIES ON 28 JUNE 1948 (S/863),” 4.

approach to the problem.”<sup>73</sup> Specifically, the letter highlighted the Provisional Government of Israel’s surprise that the Mediator’s recommendations ignored the Partition Plan, which it argued remained the only valid international adjudication on the future government of Palestine, as well as ignored the “effective establishment of the sovereignty of the State of Israel” within that area.<sup>74</sup> For their part, the Arab states similarly rejected Bernadotte’s plan and instead called for a unitary state over the whole of Palestine as their counterproposal. Interestingly, Bernadotte responded to the Arab counterproposal by arguing that the de facto situation in Palestine was such that a distinct cultural and political Jewish entity with military dominance has formed in the area and would be unlikely to subsume itself under a Palestinian state. On this point Bernadotte stated:

“It may be contended with considerable cogency that the creation of a unitary and sovereign state in Palestine with the processes of government based on proportional representation, is fully consistent with democratic principles and procedures. But this does overlook certain vital facts which are peculiar to Palestine. The Jews of Palestine have been all along and are now in fact a completely separate cultural and political community. Under the Mandate they were permitted to maintain their separate and virtually autonomous cultural and political institutions. Moreover, this Jewish community, from whatever motives and for whatever reasons, is imbued with an intensely nationalist spirit, a nationalism which rivals in intensity the nationals of Palestinian Arabs. A unitary state of Palestine with a substantial minority population of this kind could only be a troubled state unless the minority population and its nationalist aspirations were thoroughly crushed by forceful measures. It is futile to assume that the Jewish community could undergo a rapid change of heart.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> “LETTER DATED 7 JULY 1948 FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CONTAINING ISRAEL’S REPLY TO THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR’S SUGGESTIONS (DOCUMENT S/863) (S/870)” (United Nations Security Council, July 8, 1948), 4, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470511/files/S\\_870-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470511/files/S_870-EN.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> “LETTER DATED 7 JULY 1948 FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CONTAINING ISRAEL’S REPLY TO THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR’S SUGGESTIONS (DOCUMENT S/863) (S/870),” 1.

<sup>75</sup> “REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR ON PALESTINE TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL (S/888)” (United Nations Security Council, July 12, 1948), 14, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470746/files/S\\_888-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470746/files/S_888-EN.pdf).

Bernadotte concluded by urging the UN Security Council to make a determination on the use of force by Arab and Jewish forces in Palestine. If the use of force is forbidden, then Bernadotte predicted that Israel would become a reality, but if the use of force was allowed by the international community then he presumed that the ultimate outcome would be determined by war.<sup>76</sup>

Back on the battlefield, following the onset of the 1948 War, and during the four-week ceasefire, the Provisional Government of Israel benefitted politically and militarily vis-à-vis the Arab side of the conflict. Beginning as early as 14 May, the Provisional Government of Israel received de facto recognition from the US and USSR and continued to receive support from other nations like Guatemala over the subsequent period. The forces on the Israeli side also became more institutionalized as the three underground militant movements merged under the Israeli Defense Forces. During the truce, the Israeli side also managed to capitalize on the ceasefire by bringing in military-aged men and weaponry into their zones of control. This approach was largely in contravention to the terms of the cease-fire agreement, particularly the arms embargo jointly initiated by the United States and the British Government. In practice, this embargo was more detrimental to the Arab states, many of which received their arms from British military suppliers, while the Israeli side purchased weapons from the Eastern Bloc.<sup>77</sup> Further, while both sides capitalized on rotating soldiers in and out of the frontlines during the truce, the Israeli side significantly increased its number and quality of troops. Although barred from importing and mobilizing military aged men to the conflict, the Israeli Defense Forces, which were established just two weeks after the declaration of the state of Israel more than

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<sup>76</sup> “REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR ON PALESTINE TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL (S/888),” 17.

<sup>77</sup> Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, 142.

doubled between 31 May and 9 July, growing from 30-35,000 troops to 65,000. Of those new recruits that entered during this period as many as 4,000 soldiers (four times the size of the Syrian troops in Palestine) were volunteer fighters and veterans of the British, American, Canadian, and Czech Allied Armies of World War II. As a result of the truce, the Israeli Defense Forces were not only better equipped with arms and ammunition, but also had more battle tested forces and new recruits to push harder in the event of a resumption of violence.<sup>78</sup>

With the four-week truce set to expire on 9 July, Count Bernadotte called on the United Nations to urge the two sides to agree to a prolongation of the truce. In a memo sent to the UN Secretary General, Count Bernadotte offered a positive assessment of the truce's contribution to date noting that despite some complaints and violations he noted "on the whole, the truce has worked well."<sup>79</sup> In response to Bernadotte's call, the UK Representative on the Security Council urged his fellow council members to adopt his resolution calling on the parties to accept an extension of the truce "for such a period as may be decided upon in consultation with the Mediator."<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, on 7 July during the Council's deliberation of the UK proposal in its 330<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Council recognized for the first time the participation of the "representative of the State of Israel" in the discussions. This prompted a backlash from certain members—Belgium, Canada, China, Syria, the United Kingdom—who proposed overruling the reference to the state of Israel, and the Arab Higher Committee refused to participate in the debates if the

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<sup>78</sup> Morris, *1948*, 268.

<sup>79</sup> "CABLEGRAM DATED 5 JULY 1948 FROM THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CONCERNING THE PROLONGATION OF THE TRUCE IN PALESTINE (S/865)" (United Nations Security Council, July 6, 1948), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470504/files/S\\_865-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470504/files/S_865-EN.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> "PROPOSAL SUBMITTED BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM CONCERNING THE PROLONGATION OF THE TRUCE IN PALESTINE (S/867)" (United Nations Security Council, July 6, 1948), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470506/files/S\\_867-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470506/files/S_867-EN.pdf).

reference was not removed. Given that the critiques were overruled by the other Council members, the term State of Israel remained and the UK resolution was adopted.<sup>81</sup>

In response to the Security Council's call for a prolongation of the cease-fire, the Arab States voiced their resistance to any situation that would allow Israel to continue benefitting politically or militarily. Speaking before the Security Council, the Syrian UN representative noted that Israel violated the restrictions within the first truce regarding taking any action that would alter the political or military situation in favor of one side or the other. In particular, he pointed to the exchange of diplomatic personnel between the United States and Israel during the truce as evidence that Israel would only continue to take such actions in contravention to the 29 May resolution if granted an extension.<sup>82</sup> The Arab states for their part also cited a number of reasons why, despite their efforts to show good will and grant the mediator time to find a solution, they could not continue accepting the status quo of Israeli violations of the truce agreements. In keeping with the Syrian-UN strategic framework the following statement by the Arab States demonstrates that when the UN's efforts fail to deter action that threaten Arab sovereignty and independence, states like Syria must act stating that:

“[the] impossibility of persuading [the] Jewish minority to abandon [its] political ambitions always alluded to by [the] Mediator and its determination to impose its will by force and terrorism on the overwhelming majority of inhabitants of [the] country who form part of [the] Arab nation coupled with its violations of [the] conditions of [the] Truce and utilization of [the] interval as [a] means for intensification of aggression against Arabs and for overflowing [the] country with [the] continuous flow of immigrants all these factors make it imperative for [the] Arab States not to agree to [the] prolongation of [the] Truce under present conditions and to take all measures necessary to bring these conditions to [an] end.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 433.

<sup>82</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 433.

<sup>83</sup> “TELEGRAM FROM THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR DATED 9 JULY 1948 ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CONCERNING THE ARAB REPLY TO THE MEDIATOR'S PROPOSALS FOR PROLONGATION OF THE TRUCE (S/876)” (United Nations Security Council, July 9, 1948), 3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470618/files/S\\_876-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470618/files/S_876-EN.pdf).

Responding to the negative response by the Arab states, Count Bernadotte called on the parties the day the ceasefire was set to expire to accept a ten-day unconditional ceasefire. The Israelis readily accepted the offer while the Arab states refused to even reply to Bernadotte's request.<sup>84</sup>

With the end of the four-week truce, tensions on all fronts between Israel and its Arab neighbors resumed. The Arabs sought in earnest to hold on to the strips of land they secured during the initial invasion yet lost many forces in the process. On the Syrian front, the Israelis launched *Mitza Brosh* (Operation Cypress) aimed at destroying the Syrian bridgehead along Mishmar Ha-Yarden, south of Lake Hula. The strategy used by the Israeli Defense Forces to seize the area was to enter into Syrian territory by crossing Lake Hula and the Jordan River and then attack the enclave from the front and rear. For their part, the Syrian military forces built fortifications on surrounding mountain tops during the truce and managed to hold off the complete seizure of the region by the Israeli defense forces.<sup>85</sup> However, the efforts by the Israelis to launch surprise attacks within Syrian controlled territory by crossing Lake Hula and the Jordan River would become a major source of fear for Syria who viewed sovereign control over these regions as essential to prevent further territorial loss to Israel—this idea will be discussed in greater detail in Part II of this study.

Back at the UN, Count Bernadotte lamented his inability to secure a prolongation of the truce and called on the Security Council to act. In his testimony before the Security Council, Bernadotte noted that although he had exhausted all options on his end towards peace, he recommended that the Security Council call for an end to the use of force, the demilitarization of Jerusalem and to make the determination that if the truce is violated the Council would consider

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<sup>84</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 435.

<sup>85</sup> Morris, *1948*, 283–85.

action under Chapter VII rules.<sup>86</sup> Responding to Bernadotte's call, the United States proposed a heavily amended resolution that, in its final version, was adopted by 7 to 1 (Syria) on 15 July. The 15 July U.S. resolution opened by calling attention to the fact that despite the Mediator's efforts, and the Provisional Government of Israel's acceptance of the prolonged truce, the Arab states refused to comply. As a result of the renewed hostilities that followed, the resolution determined that the situation constituted a threat to peace in accordance with Article 39 of the UN Charter. Therefore, the resolution ordered that all participating parties desist from further military action no later than three days after the adoption of the resolution, and that failure to comply would prompt the Council to consider further action in accordance to Chapter VII rules. Finally, the resolution noted that the truce would remain in effect "until a peaceful adjustment of the future situation of Palestine is reached."<sup>87</sup>

During the consideration of the U.S. resolution, al-Khury of the Syrian delegation criticized several characterizations of the situation in Palestine as well as the threat to apply Chapter VII action. Al-Khury first responded to the U.S. resolution by criticizing the characterization that the Arab states were the ones to blame for the resumed tensions while completely ignoring the reasons compelling them to reject an extension of the truce. He also criticized as "erroneous" the idea that the situation in Palestine constituted a threat to peace when the UN had still not determined the status of Palestine upon the termination of the British Mandate. If, as the Syrians believed, Palestine was considered an independent and sovereign state, then the actions by the Jewish community would be subversive action by a minority group not interstate conflict. As such, al-Khury renewed his calls for an advisory opinion by the

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<sup>86</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 435–36.

<sup>87</sup> "RESOLUTION ON THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION ADOPTED AT THE THREE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL, 15 JULY 1948 (S/902)" (United Nations Security Council, July 15, 1948), 1–2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470028/files/S\\_902-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470028/files/S_902-EN.pdf).

International Court of Justice to determine the status of Palestine following the end of the British Mandate.<sup>88</sup>

The requests by the Syrian delegation faced opposition from the United States, Canada, the Soviet Union and the Jewish representatives. From the American and Canadian perspective, the Syrian draft resolution would only delay the necessary implementation of a lasting truce in Palestine, while the Soviets considered it a “belated and ill-masked attempt to turn back the clock” on Palestine.<sup>89</sup> The Jewish representatives also viewed the Syrian decision as a political maneuver since they made similar political references to the International Court of Justice previously to the questions of Egypt, Indonesia, and the treatment of Indians in South Africa. However, while some states expressed interest in pursuing al-Khury’s proposal as a supplementary step towards finding a solution to the problem, the Syrian proposal ultimately failed to receive enough votes and was sidestepped in favor of focusing on Bernadotte’s efforts to guarantee an indefinite truce.<sup>90</sup>

Despite voicing several apprehensions, the Arab States begrudgingly agreed to the 15 July ceasefire resolution. In an 18 July letter to the UN Secretary General the Arab League states voiced their unanimous “surprise” at the Security Council’s resolution and characterization of the situation in Palestine stating “The Arab States see no justification for the Security Council's attitude other than the desire of certain Great Powers to help the Zionists to realize their ambitions in Palestine to the detriment of the Arabs and contrary to the dictates of humanity.”<sup>91</sup>

The Arab states noted that in an effort to avoid aggravating the situation and subjecting

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<sup>88</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 433–37.

<sup>89</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 442.

<sup>90</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 442–43.

<sup>91</sup> “Telegram Dated 18 July 1948 from the Secretary-General of the Arab League to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Reply to the Resolution (Document S/902) Adopted at the 338th Meeting of the Security Council on 15 July 1948 (S/908)” (United Nations Security Council, July 19, 1948), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/647735/files/S\\_908-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/647735/files/S_908-EN.pdf).

themselves to sanctions, they have no alternative but to accept the resolution. They did caution however that any truce that fails to consider the position of the Arab states or ignores the underlying reasons for the current state of affairs would ultimately fail stating:

“This truce will not succeed in achieving its purpose unless it is subordinated to certain conditions to be determined in agreement with the United Nations Mediator... Foremost among these acts and breaches is Jewish immigration which should be completely stopped during the truce. Everyone knows that immigration is one of the principal causes of the present conflict. If it is permitted to continue it is likely to aggravate the situation in Palestine at a time when the misdeeds of terrorist Zionist bands have obliged 300,000 Arabs to abandon their homes. Those refugees must be enabled to return home by guaranteeing their lives and property during the truce.”<sup>92</sup>

Having accepted the terms of Bernadotte’s truce with significant reservations, the Arab States along with the Provisional Government of Israel issued ceasefire orders to their troops on 18 July 1948.<sup>93</sup>

Following the signing of the 18 July ceasefire resolution, this second truce agreement would last until 15 October with no major changes along the frontiers between the warring factions. However, numerous violations of the truce agreement were documented in UN reports during this period. Much like during the first truce, the Israelis capitalized on the second truce by absorbing more Jewish immigrants and suppressing Arab towns and villages under the auspices of internal policing while preventing the return of refugees to their homes through multiple frontier and internal security policies.<sup>94</sup> Along the frontiers, the city of Jerusalem was a key site of truce violations particularly from state and sub-state snipers. According to Bernadotte’s 12

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<sup>92</sup> “Telegram Dated 18 July 1948 from the Secretary-General of the Arab League to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Reply to the Resolution (Document S/902) Adopted at the 338th Meeting of the Security Council on 15 July 1948 (S/908),” 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 442.

<sup>94</sup> Morris, *1948*, 296–305.

August report of truce violations around the city of Jerusalem, the Israeli side was reported to have been responsible for most of the violations stating:

“It results from impartial reports that the Jews have generally speaking though not on all occasions been the more aggressive party since the renewal of the truce. Reports received from United Nations observers concerning last night’s firing support this appreciation, since firing began from the Jewish side.”<sup>95</sup>

For their part, the Arabs focused more on the political track, arguing that the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes and villages was a precondition to beginning peace negotiations.<sup>96</sup> This strategy was coupled with attempts by the Arab states to assist the return of Palestinians who wanted to return home during the truce or tend to their farmland. At the UN, such Arab backing and facilitation of Palestinian efforts to return home was raised by the United States as a clear violation of the renewed cessation of hostilities. Such a claim by the United States was appalling from the Syrian perspective, and al-Khury delivered an impassioned speech before the Security Council, appealing to the plight of the refugees and the bias of the UN system towards them. On 18 August, al-Khury denounced claims the Arab Palestinians were invaders stating:

“Is it just to have the Arabs forced to relinquish their homes and be dispersed throughout the country, in order to make place for those other people? It seems that the Security Council is only giving orders. It orders the Arabs not to make a move and leaves the refugees scattered in the desert without saying a word in their favour, even a word of sympathy. Nothing at all is said. I never heard a word from the representatives of the United States and the USSR to that effect, never a word of sympathy for those poor people who have been expelled from their homes and are now homeless. They bake in the sun during the summer and suffer the cold of the winter. How can one expect the Arabs and the people of the Near East to have confidence in the justice and good faith of the Security Council and United Nations when they see that they are dealing with them and treating them in such a way? These peoples are considered as invaders and aggressors. Why? Because they came in to repatriate their own people who were unjustly expelled. The Council and the United Nations do not consider as invaders those immigrants who are coming in from all parts of the world to a country which is not theirs, invading

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<sup>95</sup> “Cablegram Dated 12 August 1948 from the United Nations Mediator to the Secretary-General Concerning the Observance of the Truce in Jerusalem (S/961)” (United Nations Security Council, August 12, 1948), 3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/515654/files/S\\_961-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/515654/files/S_961-EN.pdf).

<sup>96</sup> Morris, 1948, 299.

the land and expelling the people from their homes in order that they may settle there. Those people who are coming in from all parts of the world are not considered invaders, and yet the owner of the house, if he wishes to return and be repatriated to his own house, is considered an invader.”<sup>97</sup>

In response to the series of truce violations and the difficulty of ascertaining whether the states or subaltern groups were responsible for the violence, the Security Council passed a joint resolution on 19 August by Canada, France, the UK and the U.S. calling on all sides to take responsibility for ending all violence by state and irregular forces.<sup>98</sup>

In the absence of negotiations between the warring sides, Count Bernadotte drafted a second plan calling for the explicit recognition of Israel, Jerusalem’s status as a *corpus separatum*, with the recommendation that the Arab areas of Palestine be annexed to Transjordan.<sup>99</sup> In Bernadotte’s second plan, specific reference was made towards granting the Negev to the Arab side while the Galilee should be Jewish territory. Furthermore, the plan recommended that the right of Arab refugees to return to their homes in Jewish controlled territory, or the right to compensation, should be affirmed as soon as possible. To facilitate the implementation of this proposal, Bernadotte also called for the creation of a Conciliation Commission.<sup>100</sup> After finalizing his report, Bernadotte left his offices on the Island of Rhodes in route to Israel on 17 September. Although local resistance to Bernadotte’s plan was expected, the international community was shocked when Bernadotte, on his way to visit UN officials in West

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<sup>97</sup> “352nd Meeting August 18, 1948, 209. Continuation of the Discussion of the Palestine Question,” in *U.N. Security Council Official Records, Third Year No. 106* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1948), 7, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/637243/files/S\\_PV.352-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/637243/files/S_PV.352-EN.pdf).

<sup>98</sup> “Draft Resolution on the Palestine Question / Submitted Jointly by the Representatives of Canada, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America at the 354th Meeting of the Security Council, 19 August 1948 (S/981)” (United Nations Security Council, August 19, 1948), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470962/files/S\\_981-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470962/files/S_981-EN.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, 160.

<sup>100</sup> “A/648 PROGRESS REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR ON PALESTINE SUBMITTED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR TRANSMISSION TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS,” United Nations General Assembly, September 16, 1948, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070310222732/http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/ab14d4aafc4e1bb985256204004f55fa?OpenDocument>.

Jerusalem the day after submitting his recommendations, was assassinated along with French UN Observer Colonel Andre Serot by four gunmen from the militant Zionist group Lehi, which was to the right of the Irgun.<sup>101</sup> The Security Council immediately convened a session in response to discuss the situation in Palestine and to pay tribute to their fallen steward for peace and to appoint Bernadotte's deputy Ralph Bunche to assume authority over the Palestine Mission until further notice.<sup>102</sup>

The assassination of Bernadotte proved a major embarrassment for the newly declared state of Israel, and the Syrian delegation sought to capitalize on Bernadotte's death to make political jabs against the Israelis. During the 358<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Security Council, Khaled al-Azm, Syria's Envoy Extraordinaire and Minister Plenipotentiary to Paris at the time, delivered the Syrian delegations remarks in French during the UN meeting. In his remarks, al-Azm not so subtly used the French word *holocauste* to describe the killing of Bernadotte at the hands of Jewish forces by describing his death as a "sacrifice [*holocauste leur âme*] on the altar of humanity."<sup>103</sup> He continued by expressing his hope that Bernadotte's death usher in a new phase in the Question of Palestine. He noted:

"The day of 17 September should mark a turning-point in the development of world events. Let us hope that it will be the beginning of the re-establishment of a just peace and of the suppression of the acts of terrorism of which Palestine has been the victim for some years past. The death of Count Bernadotte has drawn aside the veil which obscured the truth concerning the Holy Land and its future."<sup>104</sup>

Ultimately, repeated attempts to establish a truce continued to be violated as battles flared up along the frontlines. For their part, the Israelis remained intent on securing at a minimum the

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<sup>101</sup> Morris, 1948, 312.

<sup>102</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1947-48*, 450.

<sup>103</sup> "358th Meeting September 18, 1948, 2. Tributes to Count Bernadotte and Colonel Serot," in *U.N. Security Council Official Records, Third Year No. 110* (Palace De Chaillot, Paris: United Nations Security Council, 1948), 9, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/637289/files/S\\_PV.358-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/637289/files/S_PV.358-EN.pdf).

<sup>104</sup> "358th Meeting September 18, 1948, 2. Tributes to Count Bernadotte and Colonel Serot," 9.

territory promised to them in the 1947 partition plan, which meant pushing Arab forces particularly the Egyptians from the Negev. Aware of the likelihood of UN intervention, Ben-Gurion reportedly called on Israeli forces to fight in four to five-day increments—the time it would take the Security Council to respond and threaten sanctions.<sup>105</sup> This would continue for the remainder of the year as the UN scrambled to reach a more lasting truce.

### **UN Armistice Negotiations**

In the aftermath of Count Bernadotte's assassination, the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council sought in earnest to bring about a resolution to the conflict in Palestine. The UN's two-pronged approach towards the ongoing dispute between Arab and Jewish forces consisted of efforts to broker both a lasting military and political resolution to the crisis. For its part, the Syrian UN delegation continued repeatedly to leverage the international organization to prevent the breakup of Palestine and the de facto recognition of Jewish sovereign control in the region. Meanwhile, the Provisional Government of Israel rushed to establish by force, at a minimum, its writ over the area designated for a future Jewish State under the terms of the 1947 Partition Plan. Despite Syria's political engagement at the UN, by mid-1949 the United Nations formally welcomed Israel into the community of nations and recognized its sovereign control over territory via armistice agreements that exceeded the territorial limits set by the Partition Plan.

Once again, Syria's rationale for opposing the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine from 1948 to 1949 can be understood by examining the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework. As noted above, when faced with a threat to its pan-regional sovereignty the Syrian state leveraged the United Nations in an effort to safeguard its territorial dominance. When the

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<sup>105</sup> Morris, *1948*, 322.

United Nations failed to safeguard Syria's pan-regional sovereignty, the Syrian state will rely on force to safeguard its strategic and ideological interests. However, when the limits of military force have been reached, as in the case of the 1948 war, the Syrian state will redirect its line of effort towards the United Nations. Thus, Syria's behavior throughout the subsequent discussions should again be understood from the perspective of preserving as much of its pan-regional sovereignty as can be attained either through force or through the UN.

### **United Nations Two-Pronged Approach Aimed at Ending the Conflict in Palestine**

From September to December 1948 the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council pursued two key objectives throughout their deliberations: a political and military solution to the conflict in Palestine. Tasked with addressing the political side of the problem, the General Assembly would spend three months debating how best to implement a solution in Palestine before passing a resolution on 11 December 1948. Central to the debates was the extent to which the recently assassinated Bernadotte's proposed solution and legacy should serve as a basis for resolving the situation. Per a recommendation in Bernadotte's report, the UN Secretary General called on 21 September 1948 for the General Assembly to place his report on the agenda of the Assembly's third session—the least of Bernadotte's recommendations it could guarantee. In response, the Arab and Jewish sides flatly rejected to willingly implement Bernadotte's plan.<sup>106</sup>

Fearful that the General Assembly might call for the implementation of Bernadotte's plan, the Provisional Government of Israel continued to pursue its desired territory on the battlefield. It is worth recalling that according to Bernadotte's plan, Israeli-desired territory like

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<sup>106</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations 1948-49* (Lake Success, New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations, 1950), 167–68.

the Negev Desert was set aside for Arab control while central Palestine would be divided according to the Partition Plan, thus blocking Israeli control over Jerusalem. However, over the course of several attempted truces, Israeli Defense Forces were firmly in control over portions of western Jerusalem and were eager to fully secure the Negev in the south and the Galilee in the north.<sup>107</sup> Thus, in a final putsch before the General Assembly or Security Council could reach an agreement on the way forward, the Israeli Defense Forces launched Operation Yoav in the Negev and Operation Harim in the Galilee in late October 1948. Hoping to establish its boundaries as a *fait accompli*, the Israeli Defense Forces would continue on and off chipping away at Arab controlled territory before the UN could finalize its recommendations.<sup>108</sup>

Within the halls of the United Nations, the General Assembly tasked the First Committee with determining what parts of Bernadotte's recommendations, if any, the UN should implement. As with the Partition Plan, the central question during the debates was whether or not the UN should impose an imperfect solution, negotiate new solutions, or implement previous proposals. Over the course of thirty-five meetings, the First Committee heard testimony from the Acting Mediator Ralph Bunche, the Arab States and Provisional Government of Israel and debated several proposed resolutions. The United Kingdom proposed a draft resolution on 18 November calling for the formation of a conciliation commission for the purposes of implementing Bernadotte's conclusions on territorial divisions as written. The United States disagreed with the premise of imposing a solution on the parties and emphasized the "principle of consent" when delineating borders. In Guatemala's typical fashion, its delegation sided with the Israeli position calling on the 1947 Partition Plan serving as the basis of any territorial divisions, without actually excluding additional "mutually acceptable" territorial divisions. For its part, the USSR

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<sup>107</sup> Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, 172.

<sup>108</sup> Morris, *1948*, 325–27, 348.

delegation suggested that the 1947 Partition Plan was a ready-made solution to the problem and was agreed upon by the international community, most importantly by both the US and USSR. The USSR delegation viewed Bernadotte's suggestions as exceeding the terms of the Mediator's mandate and viewed the particular allocation of Arab lands in Palestine to Transjordan as serving the interest of British dominance and British and American monopolies. For his part, the Acting Mediator suggested whichever direction the General Assembly leans they should conclude six key points: 1) the existence of the State of Israel; 2) the need for (in)direct negotiations; 3) establishment of a conciliation commission; 4) guidance on territorial allocations; 5) right of Arab repatriation or compensation; 6) the internationalization of Jerusalem.<sup>109</sup>

Throughout the First Committee's discussions, the Syrian delegation presented its own draft resolutions with an eye towards securing an unified, sovereign and independent Palestine. On 26 November, during the First Committee's 214<sup>th</sup> meeting the Syrian delegation criticized any partition proposal—either on the basis of the 1947 Partition Plan or Bernadotte's report—arguing that the very notion of partition led to the war in Palestine. Instead, the Syrian delegation suggested that the General Assembly form a commission towards establishing a single state in Palestine on “canonization or federal basis” where all citizens participate on a democratic basis with wide autonomy in the various cantons.<sup>110</sup> The Syrian delegations' second proposal, considered on 1 December during the First Committee's 220<sup>th</sup> meeting, once again called on the International Court of Justice to issue a legal opinion on both the legal authority of the General Assembly vis-à-vis Palestine—specifically the question of partition and the establishment of

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<sup>109</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations 1948-49*, 167–69.

<sup>110</sup> “A/C.1/403 PROGRESS REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR ON PALESTINE: Consolidated Tabulation of Resolutions and Amendments Prepared by the Working Group of the First Committee,” United Nations General Assembly, November 27, 1948, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/CC33602F61B0935C8025648800368307>.

Jewish state against the wishes of the majority of inhabitants—as well as an opinion on the status of Palestine upon the termination of the British Mandate.<sup>111</sup> Despite its earnest attempts, both the single state resolution and the advisory opinion were rejected respectively by 26 to 14 votes with 8 abstentions, and 20 votes to 20 with 8 abstentions.<sup>112113</sup>

On 11 December 1948, the General Assembly considered the First Committee’s report and adopted a resolution that sought to reconcile the various viewpoints of UN members. Noticeably absent from Resolution 194 (III) was any reference to the 1947 Partition Plan or Bernadotte’s Report serving as the basis for the ultimate delineation of territorial control. Instead, the resolution called on the warring parties to “seek agreement by negotiations conducted either with the Conciliation Commission or directly, with a view to the final settlement of all questions outstanding between them.”<sup>114</sup> Of the elements it retained from Bernadotte’s Report, the 11 December resolution called for the establishment of a Conciliation Commission to assume the functions of the UN Mediator, for Jerusalem and its surrounding regions to be placed under UN control, and for refugees wishing to return home to be permitted to do so or compensated if they chose not to resettle in Palestine. The General Assembly expressed hope that its resolution would complement the work of the Security Council and help promote peace in Palestine, stability and economic well-being, and reconciliation between Arab and Jewish communities.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> “A/776 PALESTINE: PROGRESS REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR,” United Nations, December 7, 1948, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/3250094629DB0A8685256E5100598B26>.

<sup>112</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations 1948-49*, 169.

<sup>113</sup> “A/776 PALESTINE: PROGRESS REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATOR.”

<sup>114</sup> “A/RES/194 (III) 194 (III). Palestine -- Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator,” United Nations General Assembly, December 11, 1948, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A>.

<sup>115</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations 1948-49*, 170.

Meanwhile, the Security Council was confronted with the challenge of pressuring the warring sides to adhere to standing ceasefire agreements and cooperate with the Truce Supervision Organization. Beginning on 14 October 1948, the Security Council invited Acting Mediator Ralph Bunche to discuss a report he submitted on the difficulties facing the Truce Supervision in Palestine. According to Bunche's report, violations of the ceasefire agreement were continuing and neither side was willing to fully cooperate with the Truce Supervision's efforts noting, "there has been a disturbing tendency on the part of both Arabs and Jews to withhold co-operation...and to place obstacles in the way of its [Truce Supervision's] effective operation." Citing examples of such behavior, Bunche noted that among the most serious issues were the actual assaults upon UN supervision personnel in addition to the assassination of Count Bernadotte. He noted that within the Jerusalem area in particular, UN personnel, vehicles and aircraft have been shot at primarily by sniper fire and on two occasions clearly identifiable UN personnel had their vehicles and money stolen at gun point.<sup>116</sup> Responding to Bunche's testimony and recommendation that the Security Council remind the parties of their obligations under existing resolutions, the UK and Chinese government submitted a joint resolution towards that effect. The 19 October resolution specifically called on the parties to assist the Truce Supervision Organization by providing it ready access, freedom of movement, safety, and other forms of cooperation. The resolution also noted with concern the Provisional Government of Israel's failure to date to submit a report on the status of the investigation into Count Bernadotte's assassination.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> "Cablegram Dated 30 September 1948 from Ralph Bunche to the Secretary-General Concerning Truce Supervision (S/1022)" (United Nations Security Council, October 1, 1948), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470580/files/S\\_1022-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470580/files/S_1022-EN.pdf).

<sup>117</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations 1948-49*, 177.

During the same 19 October meeting, the Syrian delegation pushed a separate draft resolution designed to prevent the further loss of territory to the Israeli Defense Forces. The latest development driving the Syrian decision to draft such a resolution came in response to Egyptian complaints of continual “Zionist” violations of the truce agreements. Although previously rejecting Count Bernadotte’s report as the basis for any UN discussion on the situation in Palestine, the Syrian delegation drafted a resolution based on paragraph 18 of Bernadotte’s report calling for an immediate cease-fire with several suggestions on the basis of future negotiations. One key suggestion worth highlighting was suggestion (a) which called for the “Withdrawal of both parties from any positions not occupied at the time of the outbreak of fighting.” Although directly speaking to the dispute between Egypt and the Provisional Government of Israel, the Syrian delegation likely had both an eye on broader Arab territory and one eye on its own internationally recognized borders. Speaking to this point, the Syrian delegation expressed the view that Jewish forces aimed to convince the world of their intent to keep the Negev for themselves and that they had further hopes of “extending their frontiers and of expanding their territory.” On 19 October the Security Council also adopted the Syrian resolution (S/1044), although the Provisional Government of Israel was keen to remind the Council that the same situation it faced with Egypt existed in the north with Syria and Lebanon and noted that the idea of forcing the withdrawal to previous lines was contrary to the other 19 October resolution calling for negotiations on final status issues.<sup>118</sup>

As Israeli forces sought to impose their territorial control over the Negev and Galilee through force, the UN Security Council again called for the withdrawal of forces back to where they were on 14 October before the outbreak of recent hostilities. In discussions before the

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<sup>118</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations 1948-49*, 178–79.

Security Council on 28 October, the Acting Mediator informed the Council of a recent note the Truce Supervision Organization sent to Egypt and Israel calling on both parties to withdraw their forces to 14 October lines in accordance with the adopted resolution presented by Syria.

Although the Provisional Government of Israel once again expressed its view that the resolution was merely a suggestion not an injunction, the Acting Mediator interpreted the resolution as conclusive injunctions. He further noted that the situation had reached a point where the cease-fire and truce resolutions were insufficient to compel both sides to end the use of force and that a longer-term solution must be declared by the Security Council with an eye towards an armistice arrangement.<sup>119</sup> The representative of China and the United Kingdom thus submitted another joint draft resolution that was ultimately passed on 4 November calling on Egyptian and Israeli forces to withdraw their forces back to positions held on 14 October, to establish through negotiations permanent truce lines, and for a committee to study the possibility of further action under Chapter VII of the UN Charter if both sides violate the resolution. In response, the Lebanese delegation also called for the Security Council to pass a similar resolution for the Galilee region, although discussions on this point were postponed.<sup>120</sup>

### **UN Push for Armistice Agreements and the Recognition of Israel**

With periodic violations of the ceasefire and clashes in the north of Palestine continuing, the Acting Mediator called for the immediate establishment of an armistice agreement to transition the current shaky truce to a permanent peace in Palestine. In response to the Acting Mediator's call, the Canadian, French and Belgian representatives submitted a joint draft

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<sup>119</sup> "Note Dated 26 October 1948, Addressed by Truce Supervision Headquarters on Behalf of the Acting Mediator to the Government of Egypt and the Provisional Government of Israel Concerning Cease-Fire in the Negeb (S/1058)" (United Nations Security Council, October 27, 1948), 1–3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470591/files/S\\_1058-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/470591/files/S_1058-EN.pdf).

<sup>120</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations 1948-49*, 179–81.

resolution on 15 November suggesting that “an armistice shall be established in all sectors of Palestine” and that the warring parties should “seek agreement...with a view to the immediate establishment of the armistice”.<sup>121</sup> For its part, the Syrian delegation was furious with the proposed armistice resolution noting that an armistice could not simply be imposed on the parties but that any solution should be acceptable to both sides. The Syrian delegation further stressed that the Arabs would not accept negotiations on the basis that it had to recognize the existence of a Jewish sovereign state and abandon all of its claims, rights, and position. Instead, the Syrian delegation suggested that the existing resolutions currently on the books be respected and fully implemented before moving forward with new resolutions. The Provisional Government of Israel similarly viewed the resolution with contempt, arguing that it prejudiced negotiations and should make the distinction between foreign forces withdrawing and local forces merely reducing their presence. The Acting Mediator suggested that the armistice would simply be designed to withdraw forces with the intent of making future violence improbable and a step towards a more lasting peace. On 16 November, despite Syrian objections, the Security Council passed the armistice resolution, making the establishment of an immediate armistice a requirement on all the warring parties.<sup>122</sup>

In compliance with the 16 November armistice resolution, the Acting Mediator informed the UN Security Council on 6 January 1949 that Egypt and Israel unconditionally accepted a ceasefire and would begin negotiations towards an armistice. The announcement came a little over a week after the Security Council passed a 29 December resolution ordering an immediate cease-fire in response to both renewed clashes in Southern Palestine and in response to an Israeli

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<sup>121</sup> “United Nations Security Council Resolution 62, November 16, 1948 [S/1080],” The Avalon Project, November 16, 1948, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/scres062.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/scres062.asp).

<sup>122</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations 1948-49*, 181–83.

decision to block UN observers access to the area. The day after agreeing to sign the Armistice Agreement, the Egyptian delegation also assumed the Security Council position held by Faris al-Khury over the previous two years. Pledging his commitment to carrying the banner held by Syria, during his 7 January 1949 opening statements at the Security Council, Egypt's UN representative Mahmoud Fawzi Bey expressed his views that while on the Security Council he will be representing not only the world but to a certain degree his region of the world. He noted that, "in this respect I consider myself to some extent as succeeding the representative of Syria Mr. Faris al-Khury, who has rendered such a great contribution to the work of this Council and to the work of the United Nations as a whole."<sup>123</sup> Counter to Egypt's belief that it was continuing where Syria left off, Amir Adil Arslan's memoirs suggest that his government believed that not all military options had been exhausted per the requirements of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework. According to Arslan's memoirs, he lamented the fact that more could have been done on the military side before engaging in agreements stating:

"London broadcasting stated that the ceasefire was in the interest of the Jews, and that the Jews received 110 planes after the ceasefire, and they did not have more than four planes before the agreement. This proves that the ceasefire was signed when the Arab governments had more than 100 planes against 4 Jewish planes...and despite this, the ceasefire occurred by English pressure and the Arab States accepted...without completely destroying Tel Aviv and without the Arab planes cutting off all of the Jewish lines of communication."<sup>124</sup>

Despite the military disparity, Egypt and Israel under the Chairmanship of the Acting Mediator, held forty-two days of negotiations on the island of Rhodes and signed an armistice agreement on 24 February 1949. Interestingly, Syrian media ran a headline story at the time portraying the agreement as a military settlement signed in "ineffaceable ink" with no bearing on the final

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<sup>123</sup> "397th Meeting January 7, 1949, 2. Statements by the President and New Members," in *U.N. Security Council Official Records 4th Year No. 1* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, n.d.), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634074/files/S\\_PV.397-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634074/files/S_PV.397-EN.pdf).

<sup>124</sup> Arslan and Ībish, *Mudhakkirāt al-Amīr 'Ādil Arslān*, 763.

delineation of sovereignty, and also as in accordance with the UN Charter.<sup>125</sup> On 3 March 1949, the President of the Security Council congratulated both sides for their sacrifices and for concluding the terms of the armistice agreement. For its part, the Egyptian delegation expressed its gratitude for the Council's help in this effort and stated that Egypt's willingness to implement the armistice agreement was proof of its desire for peace, and respect for the Council and a commitment to its resolutions.<sup>126</sup>

The same day that the Egyptians and Israelis signed an agreement at Rhodes, the Israeli UN Ambassador Abba Eban submitted a letter to the UN Secretary-General requesting that the question of Israel's application for membership to the United Nations be reconsidered by the Security Council and passed to the General Assembly for a vote in its upcoming meetings in April.<sup>127</sup> Throughout his time on the Security Council, Faris al-Khury made the case that Israel did not possess the requisite character of "peace-loving state" and should therefore be denied membership to the United Nations due to its history of aggression from its inception. Addressing this point of Israel's troubling aggressive foundation al-Khury noted that Israel was "simply manufactured by some imperialists who wished to secure for themselves certain profits and certain benefits in the Near East. This State has no foundation, no existence, except that it has gained by aggression."<sup>128</sup> When the question of Israel's membership was first raised as a consideration in December 1948 the Syrian delegation argued that there were twelve other countries whose applications for UN membership had been blocked for far less egregious

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<sup>125</sup> "Al-Itifaqiyya Waqa'at Bi-Habr La Yamha Ba'athat Bihi Hay'at Al'umum," *Alif Bā'*, February 26, 1949, Issue No. 7954 edition, 1, 4.

<sup>126</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations 1948-49*, 183–85.

<sup>127</sup> "Letter Dated 24 February 1949 from the Representative of Israel to the Secretary-General Concerning the Application of Israel for Membership in the United Nations (S/1267)" (United Nations Security Council, February 25, 1949), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/471588/files/S\\_1267-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/471588/files/S_1267-EN.pdf).

<sup>128</sup> "383rd Meeting 2 December 1948, 3. Israel's Application for Admission to Membership in the United Nations," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Third Year No. 128* (Palais De Chaillot, Paris, 1948), 18–19, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/637527/files/S\\_PV.383-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/637527/files/S_PV.383-EN.pdf).

behavior than that exhibited by the Provisional Government of Israel. Pointing out that when the UN debated whether or not to admit Bulgaria into the UN, the decision to block its membership was due to Bulgaria's refusal to allow UN observers access to its country. Al-Khury suggested that Israel's disregard for the UN was much greater, pointing to the numerous examples of Israel blocking access to UN members and again leveraging Count Bernadotte's death stating, "Bulgaria did not kill the observers, did not massacre them, deliberately and with premeditation, as in the case of the Mediator and his colleague, Colonel Serot."<sup>129</sup> Finally, regarding the arguments advanced by some Security Council members that Israel's existence was a *fait accompli*, al-Khury countered that aggression should not be the yardstick by which the UN measures acceptable qualifications for UN membership. On this point, al-Khury addressed those delegations that believed in accepting Israel as a state because it exists by stating:

"But they [those countries] do not care to examine this reality in order to determine how it came into existence and whether it is just and right and in conformity with international law. Actually, what we have here is simply an invasion by foreigners, by intruders who have come from all parts of the world to impose themselves on the population of Palestine with the help of some of the great Powers, to establish themselves against the wishes of the people of the country, to devastate the country and expel its population. That is aggression; it is invasion; it is conquest. Is the right of conquest going to be recognized by the Security Council? Invasions may be carried on by force in certain places, but they should not be accorded recognition by organs of the United Nations."<sup>130</sup>

Despite such arguments to date, the movement towards signing Armistice Agreements was bringing the international community closer to accepting Israel's statehood.

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<sup>129</sup> "383rd Meeting 2 December 1948, 3. Israel's Application for Admission to Membership in the United Nations," 19.

<sup>130</sup> "385th Meeting December 17, 1948, 3. Continuation of the Discussion on the Application of Israel for Admission to Membership in the United Nations," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Third Year No. 130* (Palais De Chaillot, Paris: United Nations Security Council, 1948), 7, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/637529/files/S\\_PV.385-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/637529/files/S_PV.385-EN.pdf).

Responding to Aba Eban's call that the Security Council reconsider Israel's statehood, the United States led the push in early March to formally recognize the State of Israel. Leveraging some of the same arguments used by al-Khury in 1947 in support of Indonesia's request for statehood, the United States argued on 3 March that "There is no doubt that Israel constitutes a State within the meaning of that term in international law."<sup>131</sup> He continued by highlighting all of the institutional progress Israel had made thus far to include creating a government under difficult circumstances, holding free and democratic elections, and progress on drafting a constitution. He proceeded to address Israel's capability of being a "peace-loving" country when he stated:

"The fact that Israel is a peace-loving State has been demonstrated by the conclusion at Rhodes of an armistice agreement between Egypt and Israel...Negotiations which are currently being held with the assistance of the Acting Mediator, Mr. Bunche, between Israel and Transjordan and Israel and Lebanon give further promise of peace and stability for Palestine...The conclusion of the armistice agreement last week is evidence that the State of Israel is able and willing to accept and carry out the obligations contained in the Charter"<sup>132</sup>

The following day on 4 March, the US representative submitted a draft resolution recommending that in light of the most recent armistice agreements, Israel has proven its ability to be a "peace-loving" state and recommended that the General Assembly admit Israel to the United Nations. The resolution was put to a vote and passed with 9 votes in favor, 1 against (Egypt), and 1 abstaining (United Kingdom).<sup>133</sup> With the resolution on the books, it would then proceed to the General Assembly for final consideration in April.

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<sup>131</sup> "413th Meeting March 3, 1949, 4. Application of Israel for Membership in the United Nations," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records 4th Year No. 16* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1949), 8, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634232/files/S\\_PV.413-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634232/files/S_PV.413-EN.pdf).

<sup>132</sup> "413th Meeting March 3, 1949, 4. Application of Israel for Membership in the United Nations," 9.

<sup>133</sup> "414th Meeting March 4, 1949, 3. Continuation of the Discussion on the Application of Israel for Membership in the United Nations," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records 4th Year No. 17* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1949), 14, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634234/files/S\\_PV.414-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634234/files/S_PV.414-EN.pdf).

## Signing a Syrian Armistice Agreement

As Lebanon and Jordan proceeded to negotiate an Armistice Agreement with the Provisional Government of Israel, signing on 23 March and 3 April respectively, Syria soon followed suit. Syria's decision to move forward with UN mediated armistice negotiations in late March 1949 should be interpreted as a defense of its pan-regional sovereignty per the Syrian-UN strategic framework. As repeated attempts to secure territory on the battlefield were failing, and the prospect of losing more under the existing truce arrangement likely, the Syrian government strategically leveraged the UN to safeguard its territorial holdings. However, to secure a freeze in the territorial divisions between itself and Israel, the Syrian government would make a major concession—the withdrawal from territory it occupied during the war to create a demilitarized zone; its sovereign status to be determined in future negotiations.

This idea of Syria leveraging the UN to preserve its territorial holding is supported by local media, memoir, and diplomatic reporting at the time. For instance, rather than characterize the decision to participate in Armistice negotiations as a failure, local media reported Syrian officials as characterizing their efforts as in accordance with UN resolutions. Reporting from the Damascus-based *Alif Ba* newspaper reported on 21 March that the Syrian government dispatched Farid Zayn al-Din to attend the negotiations in Rhodes in accordance with the UN's cease-fire agreement and in an effort to implement a similar agreement to the ones being mediated between the UN, "the Jews" and the Arab states.<sup>134</sup> Regarding the important territorial dimensions to the negotiations, according to the memoirs of then Syrian Prime Minister Khalid al-Azm, the Syrian government agreed to negotiate an armistice agreement in order to secure the territory it gained during the war. Furthermore, Syria feared that if they did not sign an armistice

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<sup>134</sup> "Mandub Suriya Yutir Ila Rhodes," *Alif Bā'*, March 21, 1949, Issue No. 7921 edition, 1.

agreement, they risked losing their territory in the event of a subsequent unilateral confrontation with Israel.<sup>135</sup> U.S. diplomatic reporting on the Syrian-Israeli armistice negotiations also point to the importance of preserving territorial holdings. According to 1 May telegram from the U.S. legation in Damascus to the Secretary of State, James Keeley notes that the Israelis demanded the Syrians withdraw from territory acquired during the war—something Keeley notes the Israelis were unwilling to do. On this point Keeley states of the Syrian-Israeli negotiations:

“Transparent hypocrisy in Sharret’s cable of April 27 to Dr. Mohn is doubtless already evident to all concerned...Israeli contention that [the] natural boundary desired by Syria as [the] armistice demarcation line might become [a] permanent alternation in [the] frontier between [the] two countries seeks to confirm Syria’s conviction that if Syria retires to old political frontier as armistice demarcation line, Israel will subsequently accept no alternation in that frontier particularly as Syria knows of no offer of Israel to withdraw from Western Galilee or other areas outside partition frontiers as earnest of willingness to have final sovereignty [over] all such areas for determination in peace talks...we can scarcely in good conscience ask Syria to relinquish [a] small salient within [the] partition frontier while remaining silent over Israel’s retention even provisionally of [an] extensive area outside partition frontier in Western Galilee conquered by Israel during and in violation of [the] truce.”<sup>136</sup>

Understanding such initial motivations to sign an UN-backed agreement is critical to understanding why Syria ultimately signed an armistice agreement—the last of the Arab states to do so after Lebanon (22 March) and Jordan (3 April)—on 20 July 1949.

As armistice talks were underway between Syria and the Provisional Government of Israel, Colonel Husni al-Zaim—the Chief of Staff of the Syrian military—orchestrated a bloodless coup that overthrew the civilian government in Damascus on 30 March 1949.

Although himself deposed four and a half months later on 14 August, al-Zaim’s coup was the

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<sup>135</sup> Khālid ‘Az̄m, *Mudhakkirāt Khālid al-‘Az̄m.*, al-Ṭab‘ah 2., vol. 1 (Bayrūt: al-Dār al-Muttaḥidah lil-Nashr, 1973), 381.

<sup>136</sup> “The Minister in Syria (Keeley) to the Secretary of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume VI - Historical Documents - Office of the Historian, May 1, 1949, 961–62, [https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1949v06/pg\\_961](https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1949v06/pg_961).

first military intervention in Arab politics in the post-World War II era Middle East. Ostensibly the by-product of mounting domestic frustration with the civilian government's mismanagement of the war effort against Israel, al-Zaim's coup was likely orchestrated with the support of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>137</sup> The U.S. decision to back al-Zaim—a military opportunist willing to accept Western pay to play in order to consolidate his power—was driven by fear of communism's rising influence in Syria and by a desire to finalize the Trans Arabian Pipeline deal that would transport oil from Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean Sea passing through Syria.<sup>138</sup>

On the Palestine front, al-Zaim was willing to go even further than the armistice arrangements required and broker a lasting peace with Israel. The initiative proposed by al-Zaim would allow for the exchange of diplomats, and military and economic cooperation, in exchange for economic support—requesting \$100 million from the United States in July 1949. Per the initiative, al-Zaim was willing to make a massive concession on the refugee front, supporting the resettlement of 300,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria, yet continued in the spirit of the prior government demanding territorial adjustments to the borders along the Jordan River and control of half of Lake Tiberias.<sup>139</sup> In addition to the financial benefits of concluding a peace treaty with Israel, al-Zaim also had justifiable reason to believe that individuals within the military might try to oust him as well and therefore could use military protection in Damascus instead of along the border with Israel.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Miles Copeland, *The Game Player: Confessions of the CIA's Original Political Operative* (London: Aurum, 1989), 50–54.

<sup>138</sup> Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, 192–93.

<sup>139</sup> Avi Shlaim, "Husni Za'im and the Plan to Resettle Palestinian Refugees in Syria," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15, no. 4 (1986): 68–80, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2536612>.

<sup>140</sup> Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 58–67.

Despite having a leader in Damascus more seemingly open to peace with Israel, Syria's position towards Israel remained largely unchanged within the United Nations. During the General Assembly's 207<sup>th</sup> plenary session on 11 May 1949, the question of whether or not to accept Israel's application for membership to the United Nations was open for discussion. For its part, the Syrian UN delegation, currently represented by Syria's alternate representative Counsel-General Rafik Asha—al-Khury reportedly too sick to travel<sup>141</sup> and perhaps boycotting Zaim's military takeover—shared its position on the question of Israeli statehood. In his remarks, Asha continued to champion the refrain that Israel's actions to date indicated that it was incapable of being peace-loving, regardless of its future intentions with the armistice agreements. Asha noted his country would reject Israel's application:

“...the creation of which had been made possible only by the use of force against the Arabs in Palestine. Syria would never accept or condone that fact; it did not regard the applicant State as peace-loving, in view of the circumstances in which it had come into being. Evidence of a love of peace must be sought not only in promises for the future but also in past and current actions. In the case of the applicant State, such evidence was altogether lacking...It would not be a happy omen for the United Nations if it were to reward aggression by approval and admit to membership a Government which had not only disregarded the wishes of the United Nations, but had also indicated its intention to continue to do so.”<sup>142</sup>

At the conclusion of the session, votes were cast and the motion to accept Israel's application to the United Nations passed despite votes against the measure from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iran, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Burma.<sup>143</sup>

With international recognition and three armistice agreements under its belt, the Israeli government was unwilling to broker a lasting peace deal with al-Zaim in exchange for border

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<sup>141</sup> Arslān and Ībish, *Mudhakkirāt al-Amīr ‘Ādil Arslān*, 809.

<sup>142</sup> “207th Plenary Meeting May 11, 1949, 161. Application of Israel for Admission to Membership in the United Nations: Report of the Ad Hoc Political Committee (A/855),” in *United Nations Official Records of the Third Session of the General Assembly, Part II, Plenary Meetings of the General Assembly Summary Records of Meetings 5 April-18 May* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations General Assembly, 1949), 314.

<sup>143</sup> “207th Plenary Meeting May 11, 1949, 161. Application of Israel for Admission to Membership in the United Nations: Report of the Ad Hoc Political Committee (A/855),” 330.

adjustments. Handing over control of half of Lake Tiberias as well as portions of the Jordan River to Syria was not only seen as waste of the military effort expended to restore the historic Jewish homeland, but such water resources were viewed as essential to the longevity of Israel's economic development and national irrigation projects. British reporting noted also that Israel was now only demanding the withdrawal of Syrian forces as a precondition for an armistice agreement, without offering anything in return. On the status of Israeli objectives vis-à-vis the Syrian Armistice Agreement, British diplomatic reporting stated:

“The main objective of the Israel authorities throughout was to secure the removal of Syrian forces to the old international frontier of Palestine. In this they have been successful... Indeed, as the moderate newspaper Haaretz has pointed out, the withdrawal of the Syrian forces is a signal achievement considering that Israel had nothing to offer in return”<sup>144</sup>

Furthermore, al-Zaim's rise and grip on power seemed tenuous, and there was no guarantee that a subsequent Syrian power would keep to such a peace agreement. As far as some within Israel's leadership were concerned, there was little reason to move beyond what the armistice agreement could provide—recognition of Israeli sovereign control over much of Palestine.<sup>145</sup>

Eager to preserve its territorial holdings and hopeful that it might gain more territory through future negotiations, the Syrian government concluded an armistice agreement with Israel in accordance with the 16 November 1948 Security Council resolution. The terms of the Syrian-Israeli Armistice Agreement would come into play as a new UN mechanism leveraged by the Syrian government during the period of 1950-1955 discussed more in Part II of this study.

Signed on 20 July 1949 in “no-man's land”<sup>146</sup> north of Lake Tiberias between Mishmar HaYarden and Al-Ja'una near Mahanayim, the Syrian-Israeli armistice agreement contained

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<sup>144</sup> Patricia Toye and Angela Seay, *Israel: Boundary Disputes with Arab Neighbours, 1946-1964*, vol. 3, No. 54 ([Neuchâtel]: Archive Editions, 1949), 374.

<sup>145</sup> Podeh, *Chances for Peace*, 62.

<sup>146</sup> Bar-Yaacov, *The Israel-Syrian Armistice*, 35.

eight major articles outlining the temporary boundaries and demilitarized zone, the responsibilities of both sides, and how disputes would be handled. Several articles in the armistice agreement referencing territorial holdings, armistice violations, and final status agreements were particularly important to the Syrian side of the dispute. For instance, Article V of the agreement states that the Armistice Demarcation Line and the Demilitarized Zone are temporary boundaries designed to separate armed forces and should “not be interpreted as having any relation whatsoever to the ultimate territorial arrangements...[or] prejudice...the ultimate settlement.”<sup>147</sup> The Syrian UN delegation’s interpretation of the word “normal” in another clause in Article V stating that the armistice should provide for “the gradual restoration of *normal* civilian life in the area of the Demilitarized zone” also related to the question of sovereignty equating normal with historical Arab territorial access and control. Regarding the Armistice Agreement’s commitment to preserve the status quo pending final status agreements Article II, clause 1 and 2 state:

“1) The principle that no military or political advantage should be gained under the truce ordered by the Security Council is recognized. 2) It is also recognized that no provision of this Agreement shall in any way prejudice the rights, claims and positions of either Party hereto in the ultimate peaceful settlement of the Palestine question, the provisions of this Agreement being dictated exclusively by military, and not by political considerations.”<sup>148</sup>

The Syrian-Israeli armistice agreement also called on both sides to refrain from any “warlike behavior” and noted that any military advance crossing the armistice line would constitute a “flagrant violation.” Furthermore, regarding the status of the demilitarized zone, the agreement

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<sup>147</sup> “No. 657 Israel and Syria General Armistice Agreement (with Annexes and Accompanying Letters). Signed at Hill 232, near Mahanayim, on 20 July 1949,” in *United Nations Treaty Series: Treaties and International Agreements Registered or Filed and Recorded with the Secretariat of the United Nations*, vol. 42, I. Nos. 645-657 (United Nations, 1949), 332.

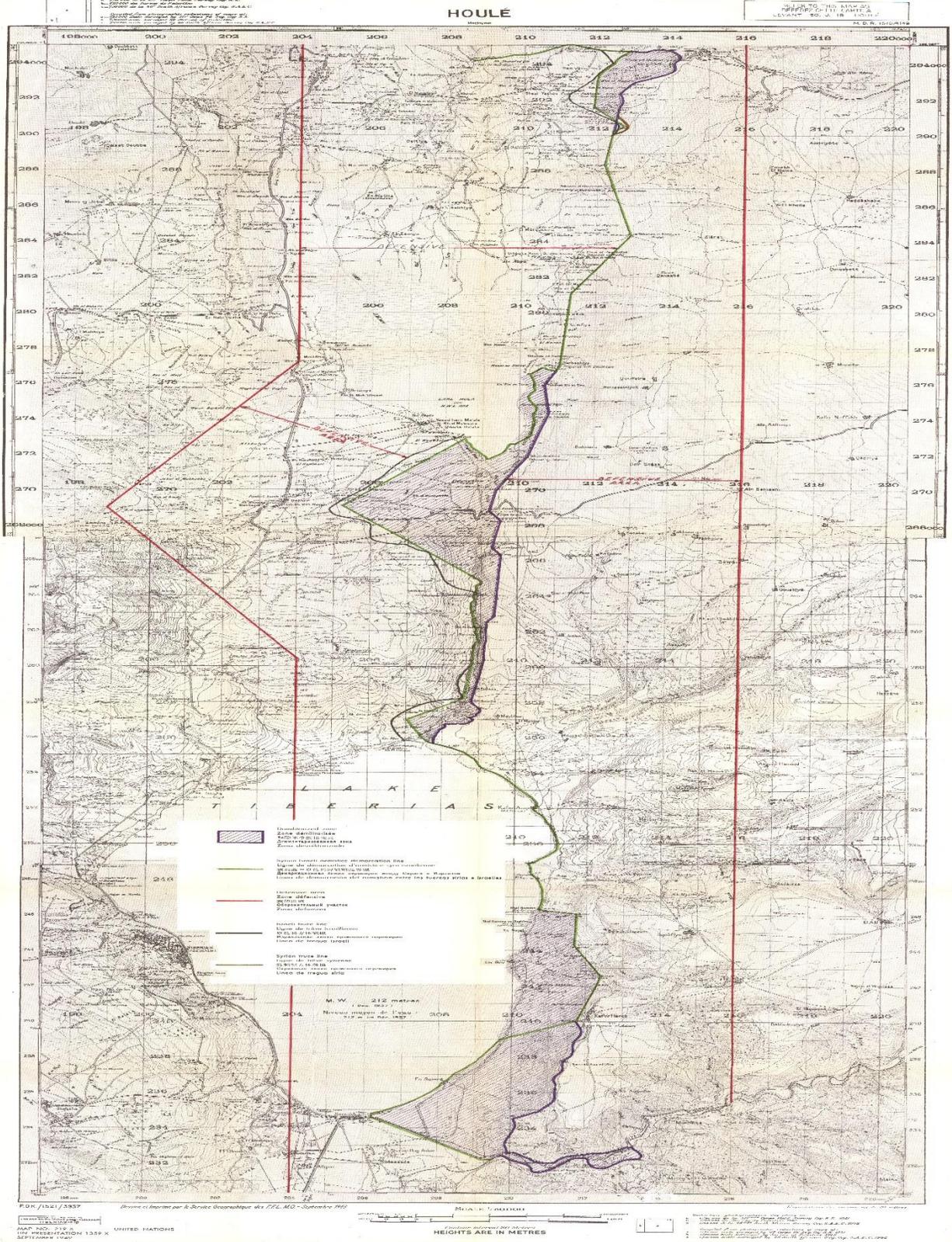
<sup>148</sup> “No. 657 Israel and Syria General Armistice Agreement (with Annexes and Accompanying Letters). Signed at Hill 232, near Mahanayim, on 20 July 1949,” 330.

states that no military forces are allowed entrance into the DMZ, the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission being responsible for facilitating the recruitment of “local” civilian police and authorizing the “return of civilians to villages and settlements” in the DMZ.<sup>149</sup> Finally Articles VII and VIII note that Agreement shall be supervised by a Mixed Armistice Commission comprised of five members—two from each side in addition to the Chairman of the committee—and decisions, to the extent possible, will be based the principle of unanimity. In the absence of unanimity, the agreement notes that the Chairman’s opinion shall prevail. From Amir Adil Arslan’s perspective the one condition of the agreement he found important was the idea that as a signatory to an armistice agreement, if Israel violated the ceasefire along any of the Arab fronts, Syria would be absolved of the ceasefire.<sup>150</sup> This agreement signaled the start of a new era governing Syria’s relations with Israel and would become a new document leveraged in debates against Israel within the United Nations.

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<sup>149</sup> “No. 657 Israel and Syria General Armistice Agreement (with Annexes and Accompanying Letters). Signed at Hill 232, near Mahanayim, on 20 July 1949,” 334.

<sup>150</sup> Arslān and Ībish, *Mudhakkirāt al-Amīr ‘Ādil Arslān*, 861.



**Map. 2 Syria-Israel Armistice Agreement 20 July 1949**

Source: Houlé, Map No. 219-X, September 1949, UNITED NATIONS. Reprinted with permission of gis@un.org

On the day following Syria's signing of an armistice agreement, the UN's Acting Mediator Ralph Bunche reported that the military phase of the Palestine conflict had ended, and the armistice agreements—which he defined as constituting non-aggression pacts that called for the withdrawal and reduction of forces—should now give way to lasting peace agreements.<sup>151</sup> Addressing his country's rationale for finalizing the armistice agreement, Rafik Asha expressed on 4 August that his country had reached this decision after much consideration and carried it out in accordance with its longstanding position of cooperating with the Security Council.<sup>152</sup> For his part, Aba Eban of the Israeli delegation attributed Syria's decision to sign an Armistice Agreement to the bilateral nature of the agreement but warned that for the agreement to succeed the UN should continue an arms embargo on the Arab states until the conclusion of lasting agreements. Asha countered Eban's explanation by championing Syria's commitment to the UN stating:

“As Mr. Eban knows full well, my Government entered into armistice negotiations only after most serious reflection. It did so, because there was an urgent appeal from the Security Council, and my Government has always been a good Member of the United Nations. Having entered into the armistice negotiations, which were long and arduous, my Government--as Mr. Eban also knows--did not authorize the signing of an armistice agreement until it had examined every provision most carefully. The Government of Syria honours its word and fully respects agreements into which it enters. Mr. Eban's Government may still be too young to know this, although the comparative records of the two parties with regard to the observance of the truce should greatly impress Mr. Eban in this regard. Mr. Eban refers to the moral force of a continued arms embargo, without, however, the system of inspection which existed under the truce. The basis which Mr. Eban seems to advance for this proposal is that his Government will abide by the Armistice Agreements, but that the Arab States cannot be trusted to do so... Can Mr. Eban tell us where and how his Government obtained the

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<sup>151</sup> “Letter Dated 21 July 1949 from the United Nations Acting Mediator on Palestine to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report on the Present Status of the Armistice Negotiations and the Truce in Palestine (S/1357)” (United Nations Security Council, July 26, 1949), 1–9, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/471974/files/S\\_1357-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/471974/files/S_1357-EN.pdf).

<sup>152</sup> “Letter Dated 4 August 1949 from the Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council Requesting That a Representative of Syria Be Permitted to Participate in the Council's Discussion of the Report of the Acting Mediator Dated 21 July 1949 (S/1357) (S/1363)” (United Nations Security Council, August 4, 1949), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/471993/files/S\\_1363-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/471993/files/S_1363-EN.pdf).

planes--the Spitfires and Flying Fortresses--the heavy tanks, and the ordnance which they did not have at the beginning of the truce but which appeared in subsequent fighting under the truce?"<sup>153</sup>

Asha concluded his remarks by noting that at the end of the day, when it comes to military matters, the internal affairs, security and steps a country takes for its own self-defense, it is not the business of the Israeli government or the Security Council but is the sovereign right of each country.<sup>154</sup>

Regardless of the Syrian government's motivations for concluding an armistice agreement with the Israelis under Husni Al-Zaim's rule, the military leader was himself ousted from power on 14 August 1949 less than four and a half months after seizing power. Al-Zaim was arrested at his home, sent to the notorious Mezza Political prison, beaten and shot. Al-Zaim's death however, was reportedly not because of his willingness to make movements towards peace with the Israelis but because of political developments on the domestic front.<sup>155</sup> Al-Zaim's attackers were members of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), a Syrian nationalist organization founded by Antun Sa'adeh who advocated the establishment of a secular, ethno-linguistic nation in the lands of "geographic Syria"<sup>156</sup> Following his coup, Al-Zaim sought to consolidate his control by sidelining his political opposition which included handing Sa'adeh over to the Lebanese authorities who subsequently executed him in July 1949. Meanwhile, Sa'adeh's followers in Syria gained the backing of other military officers, to include Colonels Sami Hinnawi and Adib Shishakli, both members of the "Greater Syria" focused SSNP. Colonel Hinnawi called for the restoration of civilian constitutional order and charged

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<sup>153</sup> "434th Meeting August 4, 1949, 5. The Palestine Question (Continued)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records, 4th Year No. 36* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1949), 30, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634593/files/S\\_PV.434-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634593/files/S_PV.434-EN.pdf).

<sup>154</sup> "434th Meeting August 4, 1949, 5. The Palestine Question (Continued)," 31.

<sup>155</sup> McHugo, *Syria*, 129.

<sup>156</sup> Adel Beshara, "Antun Sa'adeh: Architect of Syrian Nationalism," in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (London ; New York: Routledge, 2011).

longstanding Syrian nationalist Hashim Al-Attassi to lead the effort. On 19 December 1949, Adib Shishakli would launch the third coup in Syria's history, ousting his co-conspirator Hinnawi and ushering in a period of relative political stability for the coming years. It was primarily under Shishakli's military leadership that the new era of Syria's strategy of pan-regional sovereignty in Palestine would continue.

Syria's decision to go to war in 1948 and sign an Armistice agreement in 1949 were driven by a desire to preserve its pan-regional sovereignty in Palestine. Although tactically different approaches, at every major juncture, the Syrian UN delegation expressed its resistance to the partition plan, its rationale for fighting in Palestine, and its signing of an Armistice Agreement as in the service of its strategic objectives of preserving a semblance of sovereign control in Palestine. As the limits of political engagement were reached at the UN upon the termination of the British Mandate, the Syrian Government perceived that it lacked any recourse other than war to secure its objectives. Poorly equipped and left alone as the only Arab hold out against Israel, the Syrian state reached the limits of what military action could achieve and resumed UN mediated efforts through an armistice arrangement. When measured against the Syrian-UN strategic framework, Syria's move from UN engagement to war and back to engagement adheres to the proposed logic.

With an Armistice Agreement now governing its relations with Israel, it should not be assumed that Syria's military options were forever exhausted. Over the coming years, the Syrian government would continue to leverage armed force when the UN, in this case the Armistice Agreements, failed to preserve Syrian sovereignty. Although the period from 1948 to 1949 signified a new era in the Palestine conflict, Syria's continued reliance on the logic underpinning

the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework suggests a continued strategic policy in the face of repeated change.

## Part II 1950-1955

From 1950 to 1955, Syrian engagement with the UN on the question of its sovereign claims in Palestine was guided by the terms of the 1949 Armistice Agreement. To recap, Syria was the last of the Arab states to sign an Armistice Agreement with Israel, doing so eight months after the Security Council called for such an agreement. To satisfy a key Israeli condition for signing an Armistice Agreement, Syria withdrew its military forces from areas it controlled during the 1948 War to the internationally recognized boundary, established during the British Mandate, between Syria and Palestine. Although Syria agreed to withdraw from the territory, it did so after securing a clause within the Armistice Agreement that such territory would become a Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) whose sovereign status would be decided in future peace negotiations. Furthermore, Syria's position was that the Armistice Agreement did not finalize any permanent borders between Syria and Israel but merely set up a system to maintain the status quo and prevent further confrontations. However, Israel interpreted the Armistice Agreement as a purely military arrangement and insisted that the borders were now fixed and that it was the only state with recognized sovereignty over the DMZ. This Israeli position on the status of the DMZ and the boundaries separating it from Syria would prompt Israel to assert its sovereignty in the area, prompting several major clashes during this period.

Within the secondary literature on this period of the Syrian-Israeli Armistice Agreement, scholars have largely focused on providing detailed accounts of border skirmishes between the two sides while offering shallow analyses, from the Syrian perspective, on either the rationale or the timing of such armed clashes.<sup>1</sup> Regarding the rationale behind Syria's decision to occasionally engage in armed clashes, both Ma'oz and Morris are right to identify "sovereignty"

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<sup>1</sup> Fred J. Khouri, "Friction and Conflict on the Israeli-Syrian Front," *Middle East Journal* 17, no. 1/2 (1963): 14-34.

as Syria's main objective with Morris stating "Almost inevitably divergent claims to the DMZs resulted in armed clashes to assert or protect control and sovereignty."<sup>2</sup> However, regarding the timing of clashes they both offer divergent, and what I would argue as incorrect, viewpoints with Ma'oz stating Syria did not attack when it was "too weak"<sup>3</sup>, while Morris suggests Syria sought to avoid clashes and had one of the most secure borders of the Arab States due to Syria's "desire to avoid IDF reprisals and an uncontrolled slide to war."<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Shalev does identify, as I have argued, that Syria pursued a dual strategy of "pragmatism" (what I call UN engagement) and a "policy of force" but only in pursuit of its "national objectives" without fully defining those objectives. Where Shalev errs in my assessment is his view that Syria's decision to use force, like Israel, was "when one side believed it had the strength to enforce its own solution"<sup>5</sup>—a view adopted by Ma'oz. Shalev also mistakenly takes the view that after a certain point, Syria's pragmatism gave way to a favoring violence in pursuit of its national objectives<sup>6</sup> as opposed to constantly alternating between the two.

Another scholar who takes an extreme position and, in my judgement, errs on both the rationale and timing of attacks is N. Bar-Yaacov. According to Bar-Yaacov's study, the reason for clashes between Syria and Israel has nothing to do with sovereignty, as such land "is clearly situated within her [Israel's] territory"<sup>7</sup> but is prompted by differences surrounding "the legality of civilian activities in the demilitarized zone"<sup>8</sup>. As such, Syria's clashes are aimed at preserving the Syrian government's right to be consulted on civilian projects in the DMZ. Going further

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<sup>2</sup> Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel*, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956*, 1993, 96.

<sup>5</sup> Shalev, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Shalev, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Bar-Yaacov, *The Israel-Syrian Armistice*, 282.

<sup>8</sup> Bar-Yaacov, 9.

however, Bar-Yacoov denies any real strategic logic behind Syria's armed actions and the timing of its attacks stating "Our study has shown that armed incidents are the result of the persistent policy of the Syrian Government of opening fire on Israel policemen, fishermen and tractor-drivers."<sup>9</sup> According to Bar-Yacoov, Syria was not driven by any rational strategic considerations but rather pure dogmatic opposition to Israel stating:

"In the course of time, Syria has proved to be the most extreme of the Arab States in urging war on Israel at the earliest possible moment. This attitude has not been governed by considerations relating to Israel's compliance or non-compliance with the armistice conditions. It has been nourished by extreme hatred towards the State of Israel, which leaves no room for any co-existence between the two States."<sup>10</sup>

Such bias on Bar-Yaacov's part clearly underscores the need for an additional look at the Syrian-Israeli Armistice period with new perspectives on Syria's long terms strategy vis-à-vis Palestine and the United Nations machinery.

In this part, I argue that, from 1950 to 1955, Syria continued its dual pronged approach of UN engagement and the use of force to preserve its pan-regional sovereignty within Palestine. To make my case, I analyze Syria's rationale for militarily confronting Israel and engaging the United Nations politically looking at three major case studies involving: 1) Lake Hula; 2) the Jordan canal; and 3) Lake Tiberias. Counter to the arguments presented in the existing literature, I demonstrate that Syria did not give up on UN engagement in favor of military force but continued to leverage them both to preserve its sovereign claims to territory in Palestine. While attention is given in these three separate chapters to the Mixed Armistice Commission responsible for managing the Agreement, I also continue to analyze Syria's behavior, when

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<sup>9</sup> Bar-Yaacov, 285.

<sup>10</sup> Bar-Yaacov, 281.

relevant, within the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly on the Palestine Question.

## Chapter 4: UN Engagement and Clashes Over Lake Hula Project

### Introduction

For nearly eighteen months, the signing of the Syrian-Israeli Armistice Agreement on 21 July 1949 ushered in a period of relative calm along the lines separating Syria and Israel. However, this era of calm ended on 12 February 1951 when the Israeli Palestine Land Development Company began construction aimed at draining the southern end of Lake Hula within the central demilitarized zone. Ostensibly for the purposes of Israel's economic development and the reduction of malaria,<sup>1</sup> from Syria's vantage point the Hula Project constituted a direct threat to its sovereign claims within Palestine.

The view that the Palestine Land Development Project in Lake Hula was a thinly veiled effort to establish Israeli sovereignty within the DMZ is supported by some scholars within the secondary literature. Morris notes for instance that, economic motivations aside, the decision to launch the Hula drainage project was "in effect an assertion of Israeli sovereignty in the central DMZ."<sup>2</sup> Shalev similarly notes that the Lake Hula Project was intended to strengthen Israel's political position within the DMZ. To make his point on the political importance of the Hula Project, Shalev cites Israeli Chief of Staff Yigael Yadin who stated: "when we decided to drain the Hula and began to work, we had to start in the demilitarized zone, of all places...if the project weren't necessary for its own sake, we would have done it for political reasons."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the political importance of the Hula Project serving as a means of establishing Israeli sovereignty within the DMZ must not be overlooked.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Nissim Bar-Yaacov, *The Israel-Syrian Armistice: Problems of Implementation, 1949-1966* (Jerusalem: Magnes P. (Hebrew University), 1967) 68; and Moshe Ma'oz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 27.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956*, 1993, 362.

<sup>3</sup> Shalev, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955*, 51-52.

Syria's political and military reaction to Hula Drainage project is a clear example of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework in action. Given that the Hula project was a threat (or at least a perceived threat) to Syrian sovereign claims in Palestine, Syrian officials relied on both UN engagement and armed force as a means of preserving its sovereign claims within the DMZ. The following section will demonstrate this dual pronged approach by detailing Syria's primary reliance on UN engagement and use of force when its UN efforts fail to preserve its sovereign claims.

### **A Clash Over Sovereignty South of Lake Hula**

On 12 February 1951, the Palestine Land Development Company (*Haksharat HaYishuv*)—a land development construction company affiliated with the Zionist settler movement—began an agricultural development project within the demilitarized zone that required draining Lake Hula and its surrounding marshlands by straightening and deepening the Jordan River flowing south. The stated legal basis under which the Company's work proceeded was an Ottoman era concession, initially granted to two Beirut merchants in 1914 allowing them to drain Lake Hula and its surrounding marshes, that was eventually purchased by the Palestine Land Development Company in 1934. Similar to other arguments advanced by Israeli representatives, in the United Nations era, the work was considered legal by the Israelis as the UN Charter is supposed to recognize obligations under pre-existing treaties and other international law to include "civilian" concessions.<sup>4</sup> The project itself also symbolized the Zionist ideal of making the desert bloom, reviving agriculture, and promoting humanitarian needs by draining the malaria-ridden body of water. Although it ultimately proved to be an

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<sup>4</sup> Shaley, 52.

ecological disaster in the long run,<sup>5</sup> the initial hopes of the project featured regularly in Israeli press.<sup>6</sup> As such, the company moved forward with its efforts to drain Lake Hula.

To preserve its sovereign claims in the Demilitarized Zone via political means, the Syrian Government issued a complaint to the UN's Mixed Armistice Commission with an aim towards preventing the Hula Project from moving forward. Just two days after the Hula drainage project commenced, the Syrian delegation to the Mixed Armistice Commission (MAC) leveraged the Syrian-Israeli Armistice Agreement to denounce the Hula Project as a violation of that agreement that must be stopped. Specifically, the Syrian delegation claimed that the Hula drainage project violated two clauses of the Armistice Agreement. The first was Article II paragraph I which upholds the principle that "no military or political advantage should be gained under the truce." Regarding this point, the Syrian delegation argued that the draining of the Lake would give Israel an unfair military advantage against Syria that they could exploit by moving forces across the drained lake. The second clause cited in the Syrian complaint was Article V paragraph II which called for "the gradual restoration of normal civilian life in the area of the demilitarized zone". The logic behind citing this article was that by undertaking a massive construction project that would alter the available water in the region, local Arab farmers would not be able to resume their normal civilian life in this area. For its part, Israel raised no objection to Syria's complaint going on the MAC's agenda and on 21 February both Syria and Israel agreed to seek the United Nations Chief of Staff's opinion on whether the project constituted a violation of the Armistice Agreement.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Joel Greenberg, "Israel Restoring Drained Wetland, Reversing Pioneers' Feat," *The New York Times*, December 5, 1993, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/05/world/israel-restoring-drained-wetland-reversing-pioneers-feat.html>.

<sup>6</sup> "HaYom Omadat Lahitkhadash HaAvoda BiYibush HaHula," *Davar*, March 23, 1951, 1.

<sup>7</sup> "Letter Dated 12 March 1951 from the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report on the Status of the Operations of the Mixed Armistice Commissions (S/2049)"

Regarding the complaint, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) delivered an opinion rejecting and accepting certain arguments raised by the Syrian delegation at the MAC. On 7 March 1951, the UNTSO Chief of Staff Major General Riley—a decorated U.S. Marine known for his contributions to the Allied war effort in the Pacific during World War II—presented his opinion on Syria’s case. Addressing the Syrian complaint that draining Lake Hula would give Israel a military advantage, MG Riley did not agree as he assessed that by removing a natural military barrier, both sides would benefit equally with neither side having an advantage over the other. Adding to this point, MG Riley pointed out that the Syrians were also involved in civilian projects along Lake Hula that the Israelis could not complain against. Finally, on the drainage project’s benefits Riley also assessed that the drainage of the marshland would provide the Syrians with sanitary benefits of ridding the area of malaria. However, regarding the issue of the Hula Project preventing a return to “normal” life, MG Riley agreed arguing that the Israeli construction of a dam at the south end of Lake Hula for the purposes of loosening the flow into the Jordan River was against the will of locals and has resulted in flooding along the Syrian side which has disrupted the ability of Syrian civilians to return to normal life.<sup>8</sup>

In his final assessment on the legality of the Hula Project itself, MG Riley concluded that the project should cease until both sides could reach an agreement on the matter. Responding to the Israeli claim that the Palestine Land Development Company had the right to conduct its work due to its purchase of the Ottoman concession, MG Riley argued that since no side had sovereignty over the demilitarized zone, any laws existing before the Armistice Agreement

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(United Nations Security Council, March 21, 1951), [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479734/files/S\\_2049-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479734/files/S_2049-EN.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> “Letter Dated 12 March 1951 from the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report on the Status of the Operations of the Mixed Armistice Commissions (S/2049),” 9–11.

should be held in abeyance. Given that sovereignty had yet to be determined in the demilitarized zone, Riley concluded that the Hula Project should halt its operations until:

“such time as a mutual agreement is reached between the Governments of Syria and Israel, with respect to the work now being conducted in the demilitarized zone in connection with the drainage of the Lake Hula marshes, the Palestine Land Development Company or any successors are, in the opinion of the Chief of Staff, not justified in continuing such work. In the opinion of the Chief of Staff, the Palestine Land Development Company Limited should be instructed forthwith to cease all operations within the demilitarized zone, until such time as a mutual agreement is arranged through the Chairman between Syria and Israel for continuing this project.”<sup>9</sup>

On 12 March 1951, MG Riley submitted his conclusions on the status of the Hula Project as well as the current state of the Armistice Agreements in general to the Secretary General of the United Nations in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution of 17 November 1950 that called for the submission of periodic reports on the Armistice situation.<sup>10</sup>

The UN Truce Supervision Organization’s opinion to the United Nations that the Hula Project should cease operations was a major political victory for the Syrian Government. Through UN engagement, the Syrian government was able to obtain a UN ruling that reaffirmed the opinion that sovereignty over the DMZ is held in abeyance and as such, Israel could not move forward with a project that would strengthen its sovereign claims. To make MG Riley’s opinion official, the Syrian delegation called for a meeting of the Mixed Armistice Commission to vote on his opinion and cease the Hula Project once and for all. However, the Israeli delegation chose to postpone such discussions in order to allow their government to give the opinion full consideration. The Israeli side also noted that in the interim, Israel would continue to

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<sup>9</sup> “Letter Dated 12 March 1951 from the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report on the Status of the Operations of the Mixed Armistice Commissions (S/2049),” 12.

<sup>10</sup> “Resolution Concerning the Palestine Question at the 524th Meeting of the Security Council on 17 November 1950 (S/1907)” (United Nations Security Council, November 17, 1950), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479209/files/S\\_1907-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479209/files/S_1907-EN.pdf).

exercise its right of sovereignty within the demilitarized zone so long as it was in conformity with the Armistice Agreements. For its part the Syrian delegation complained again to the MAC calling on them to intervene and cease the working occurring south of Lake Hula. On 10 March 1951, the Chairman of the MAC requested that Israel cease all Hula Project activity until action has been taken by the MAC, however Israel continued to ignore such requests.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of the UN Truce Supervision Organization's opinion that the Lake Hula project cease until further notice, the Palestine Land Development Company continued its work in earnest. On 13 March, the day after MG Riley submitted his opinion to the UN Secretary General calling for the cessation of the Hula Project, Israeli workers brought earth-moving tractors into the demilitarized zone to begin the process of deepening and widening the canals.<sup>12</sup> Despite repeated requests by MG Riley that the project cease, the Israeli delegation refused to acquiesce arguing that MG Riley was not the competent authority to make such demands. The Israeli delegation further warned that if the stoppage of the Hula Project continued to be an agenda item of the MAC they would no longer attend the commission's meetings.<sup>13</sup>

As the Israeli company moved forward with drainage activity in the demilitarized zone, against the calls of United Nations officials, the Syrian Government shifted to a strategy of force. On 15 March, two days after earth moving equipment entered the east bank of the Jordan River within the DMZ, four Arab individuals—either local civilians or plain clothed Syrians—fired twenty to thirty shots at the workers. The incident reportedly occurred near the Banat Yaqub Bridge—the point along the Syrian Armistice line closest to the Jordan River—and targeted the Palestine Land Development Company's bulldozer and construction workers. Given the timing

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<sup>11</sup> "Letter Dated 12 March 1951 from the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report on the Status of the Operations of the Mixed Armistice Commissions (S/2049)," 12.

<sup>12</sup> Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956*, 1993, 362.

<sup>13</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1951* (New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations, 1952), 286.

of the attack along one of the most secure of the Armistice borders, it was likely an incident orchestrated at the highest levels of the Syrian government and underscores the relationship between the use of force when the UN fails to preserve Syria's sovereign claims. Although the urgency surrounding the incident prompted the Palestine Land Development Company to cease its activity the next day, the Israeli delegation to the MAC noted that the company planned to resume its efforts on 23 March. Absent more aggressive armed action on Syria's part, it would appear that its initial armed efforts had reached their limits.<sup>14</sup>

Turning back to the United Nations, the Syrian delegation attempted to raise the political stakes by going above the Mixed Armistice Commission and issuing a formal complaint against the Hula Project to the UN Security Council. As the Palestine Land Development Company continued its drainage activity, Israeli gunmen—local Jewish civilians or plain clothed Israelis—reportedly fired at UN representatives investigating Syria's complaint as well as at local Arabs similarly resisting the projects efforts. In response to this activity, Syria's representative Faris al-Khury submitted a formal complaint to the UN Security Council on 29 March regarding the latest activity within the Demilitarized Zone. Warning that the current situation might escalate and constitute a threat to peace, al-Khury called for UNSC intervention stating:

“...the Israelis have fired small arms and mortars from the Demilitarized Zone on the Arab inhabitants of the Demilitarized Zone and on the front lines of the Syrian Army. The Syrian Army did not return the fire. Moreover, the Israelis have fired automatic weapons over the heads of two United Nations observers who were investigating the Syrian complaint. These observers were using a United Nations white jeep which was in plain view...In view of the above, it is superfluous to state that the continued and repeated violations of the Armistice Agreement will not only aggravate the already critical situation but will also lead to very serious repercussions. My Government requests that the Security Council be kind enough to take note of this protest against the illegal behavior of the Israelis and to take

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<sup>14</sup> Shaley, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955*, 60.

the necessary measures with view to putting an end to these provocative and aggressive actions.”<sup>15</sup>

Holding out hope that the international community might help prevent Israel’s assertion of its sovereignty within the DMZ, the Syrian delegation waited for a response.

The day following Syria’s formal complaint to the Security Council, Israel sought to further assert its sovereignty within the DMZ through the “evacuation” of local Arab residents. On 30 March, Israel forcibly evacuated over 800 residents from the Arab villages of Kirad al Baqqar and Kirad al Ghannama within the central DMZ and relocated them to the village of Sha’b near Acre in Israeli territory. Indicative of its broader strategy of imposing its sovereignty within the DMZ beyond simply the area surrounding the Lake Hula Project in the central DMZ Arab residents were also pressured to leave the Arab villages of As Samra and Nuqeib in the southern DMZ.<sup>16</sup>

Continuing to politically engage the UN with an eye towards preserving its sovereign claims to the DMZ, Syria submitted another complaint three days later protesting Israel’s latest activity. On 2 April, in a complaint to the Security Council Faris al-Khury railed against the “illegal evacuation by force” of the Arab villagers of Baqqara and neighboring areas within the Hula Valley totaling what the Syrian Government estimated was around 980 individuals.<sup>17</sup> Al-Khury argued that such activity was in direct violation of Article V, Paragraph 2 of the Armistice Agreement which determined any activity that disrupted normal civilian life to be impermissible.

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<sup>15</sup> “Letter Dated 29 March 1951 from the Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/2061)” (United Nations Security Council, March 29, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/480561/files/S\\_2061-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/480561/files/S_2061-EN.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars, 1949-1956*, 1993, 362.

<sup>17</sup> “Letter Dated 2 April 1951 Addressed to the President of the Security Council from the Chairman of the Syrian Delegation to the United Nations (S/2065)” (United Nations Security Council, April 2, 1951), 23, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/637131/files/S\\_2065-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/637131/files/S_2065-EN.pdf).

The Syrian delegation hoped that the President of the Security Council would urgently take note of the incidents and circulate it to the other Security Council members for review.<sup>18</sup>

As Israel continued to assert its sovereignty within the DMZ in the face of several Syrian complaints to the UN, Syria once again resorted to the use of force to preserve its own sovereign claims. On 4 April, two days after Syria's latest complaint to the UNSC, the Israeli Defense Forces General Staff dispatched two police trucks deep within the southern demilitarized zone along the Yarmuk River towards the village of al-Hamma, ostensibly to inspect Israeli-owned property in the area. As the two police trucks approached the area, Israeli sources note that the trucks were fired upon by a Syrian military post in the area and that seven Israeli policemen were killed. In response, the Israeli delegation to the Mixed Armistice Commission insisted that the MAC proceed immediately to al-Hamma to investigate the situation. For its part, the Syrian delegation seemed intent on delaying the MAC's arrival—a likely indicator of its involvement in the attack—agreeing to investigate incident but insisting that a resolution be drawn up first claiming that, “such an agreement would help to prevent future incidents.”<sup>19</sup>

In response to the al-Hamma incident, UN observers attempted to establish the facts, identifying the deceased Israeli policemen but failing to definitively establish Syrian involvement. Arriving on the scene at 1930 GMT, after initial reports suggested they had been fired upon on their way to al-Hamma, a team of UN investigators spotted an Israeli police vehicle facing away from al-Hamma about fifty meters from the Syrian military outpost. The investigators soon discovered six dead police officers near the truck and one in a ravine one

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<sup>18</sup> “Letter Dated 2 April 1951 Addressed to the President of the Security Council from the Chairman of the Syrian Delegation to the United Nations (S/2065),” 24.

<sup>19</sup> “Letter Dated 10 April 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting an Interim Report on the Status of Operations in the Syrian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission (S/2084)” (United Nations Security Council, April 12, 1951), 7, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478763/files/S\\_2084-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478763/files/S_2084-EN.pdf).

hundred meters away. Two officers survived the incident with one wounded and another in the custody of the Syrian military outpost. The UN investigators interview the uninjured officer who recounted that the Israeli police arrived at the Syrian military outpost near the fork in the road leading to the village of al-Hamma around 1400 GMT. The officer then noted that an individual claiming to be the local Chief of Civilian Police stopped the Israeli police informing them that it was illegal for them to enter the area. The Israeli team then radioed back to their superiors who subsequently gave them “orders to occupy al-Hamma.”<sup>20</sup> The officer concluded by saying that they then began taking fire from local civilians and the Syrian outpost.<sup>21</sup> The UN observer team proceeded to interview the local civilian police and an officer attached to the Syrian military position, both of which denied any involvement in the incident by the Syrian outpost. As the observers continued their investigation, two UN vehicles coming towards al-Hamma from the Israeli side took fire from the direction of al-Hamma and the hills overlooking the roads, bringing an end to the investigation.<sup>22</sup>

The Israeli delegation subsequently sought to capitalize on the fallout that ensued from the attack on the UN vehicles to end its cooperation with the local UN machinery. On 5 April, the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission addressed a letter to the Syrian delegation complaining that their clearly marked white vehicles came under fire twice from the direction of al-Hamma while attempting to investigate the situation. Later that afternoon the Israeli

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<sup>20</sup> “Letter Dated 10 April 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting an Interim Report on the Status of Operations in the Syrian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission (S/2084),” 8.

<sup>21</sup> “Letter Dated 10 April 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting an Interim Report on the Status of Operations in the Syrian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission (S/2084),” 8.

<sup>22</sup> “Letter Dated 10 April 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting an Interim Report on the Status of Operations in the Syrian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission (S/2084),” 8–9.

delegation sent three letters to the Acting Chief of Staff the first of which requested that the following message be passed to the Syrian delegation:

“The Israel delegation to the Syrian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission has been instructed to attend no further meetings with the Syrian delegation while Syrian forces are firing on United Nations observers and on the police responsible for the security of the demilitarized zones.”<sup>23</sup>

The Acting Chief of Staff responded by questioning the Israeli delegation’s rationale for stopping at this point given that the UN had been targeted on other occasions and also asked the Israeli side to clarify what they meant by “the police responsible for the security of the demilitarized zones.”<sup>24</sup> As the Armistice Agreement states, only locally recruited police are responsible for the security in the area, not Israeli forces from outside.

In response to the al-Hamma incident, the Israeli government retaliated militarily to assert its sovereignty within the demilitarized zone. Following the confirmed death of Israeli police officers in the al-Hamma region, Ben-Gurion, with the backing of the Israeli Cabinet, authorized the bombing of the Syrian military outpost and targets near the ambush site as well as demolition of the “evacuated” Arab villages of Kirad al-Ghannama, Kirad al-Baqqara, As-Samra, and Nuqeib in order to establish its sovereignty and render the DMZ ‘clear of Arabs’.” As such, Israel reportedly scrambled four heavy bombers and four fighter jets to pound and strafe the area with machine gun fire resulting in a handful of casualties.<sup>25</sup>

Given the severity of Israel’s retaliation, the Syrian UN delegation requested a hearing by the UN Security Council and suggested that Israel was attempting to bypass a key mechanism in

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<sup>23</sup> “Letter Dated 10 April 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting an Interim Report on the Status of Operations in the Syrian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission (S/2084),” 10.

<sup>24</sup> “Letter Dated 10 April 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting an Interim Report on the Status of Operations in the Syrian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission (S/2084),” 11.

<sup>25</sup> Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars, 1949-1956*, 1993, 363.

its strategy—the United Nations itself. In a letter to the President of the Security Council on 6 April, al-Khury noted that at 1700 hours on 5 April five Israeli planes additionally bombed two military posts in Syrian territory beyond the defense line south of al-Hamma even though the Syrians did not return fire. Prior to this second attack, the Israelis sent fifteen officers to target the Arab Police Station in al-Hamma but the Syrian side repulsed the attack.<sup>26</sup> Noting that Major General Riley’s report expressly noted that no side to the Armistice Agreement had sovereignty within the area al-Khury argued that Israel did not respect the Armistice process nor the UN. Arguing that Israel was determined to proceed with its drainage projects regardless of its objections and the repeated requests by the UN to cease operations al-Khury stated:

“These incidents are the result of the obstinate determination of the Israeli Government to start and continue draining works in the Hula swamps, which are situated within the Demilitarized Zone, without the agreement of the Syrian Government nor the consent of the Arab land owners and against the repeated warnings of the United Nations Armistice supervisors.”<sup>27</sup>

Attempting to investigate the area on the afternoon of 6 April, three UN observers were stopped by a ground of armed Israelis on the road from Baqqara village to the Mishmar Ha Yarden police station. According to Major General Riley’s report, the group of Israelis “surrounded them and threatened them with death. They [the UN observers] were told that the next time they were found on that track, they would be shot.”<sup>28</sup> For its part, the Syrian delegation requested that the series of violations and the general discussion of the status of the Syrian-Israeli Armistice

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<sup>26</sup> “Letter Dated 6 April 1951 from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/2074)” (United Nations Security Council, April 6, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478753/files/S\\_2074-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478753/files/S_2074-EN.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> “Letter Dated 6 April 1951 from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/2074),” 1.

<sup>28</sup> “Letter Dated 10 April 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting an Interim Report on the Status of Operations in the Syrian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission (S/2084),” 12.

Agreement be placed on the Security Council's Agenda.<sup>2930</sup> Tying the latest incidents back to its original complaint, the Syrian delegation noted that despite the back and forth negotiations and attacks on the Syrian outposts, the Hula project has continued stating:

“This proves once more that the Israelis do not respect the General Armistice Agreement nor the United Nations authority represented by the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission...The Syrian delegation still recognizes the powers given to the Mixed Armistice commission by the General Armistice Agreement.”<sup>31</sup>

Given the back and forth accusations and inability of the Commissioner to bring about a solution to the disputes, the issue was submitted to the Security Council for its consideration.

### **Sovereign Claims to DMZ During UNSC Debates**

From mid-April to mid-May 1951, the Syrian Government attempted to leverage the United Nations Security Council to stall Israel's Hula drainage project, to repatriate evacuated Arabs, and to preserve its sovereign claims to the demilitarized zone. The Security Council's deliberations, presented extensively below, were held over the course of six separate meetings and concluded with the adoption of two UN Security Council resolutions on 8 and 18 May 1951. Central to the dispute was the question of whether Israel, Syria or both were in violation of the Armistice Agreement and whether the Hula Project was valid or an illegal imposition of Israeli sovereignty in the DMZ. To establish the facts of the case and consider the opposing viewpoints, the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine and representatives

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<sup>29</sup> “Letter Dated 6 April 1951 from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council Requesting a Meeting of the Security Council (S/2075)” (United Nations Security Council, April 6, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478754/files/S\\_2075-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478754/files/S_2075-EN.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> “Letter Dated 9 April 1951 from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council Suggesting Items for the Agenda of the Security Council (S/2078)” (United Nations Security Council, April 9, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478757/files/S\\_2078-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478757/files/S_2078-EN.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> “Letter Dated 10 April 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting an Interim Report on the Status of Operations in the Syrian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission (S/2084),” 15–16.

from Syria and Israel were invited to participate in the Security Council's discussions.<sup>32</sup>

Particular attention in the below discussion is given to the Syrian delegation's attempts to preserve its claims to sovereignty at almost every juncture of the UN's debates, even on the most mundane of issues. When the UN fails to safeguard Syria's claims, per the logic of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework, violence should follow suit.

As the first representative to address the Security Council, Syria's Faris al-Khury laid out the full range of his country's issues towards Israel's recent activity in the demilitarized zone, particularly the threat towards Syria's sovereign claims. Speaking on 17 April during the 541<sup>st</sup> meeting of the UN Security Council, al-Khury opened his remarks by criticizing as a threat to its sovereign claims the very title of the complaint submitted by Israel and placed on the UNSC's agenda. According to the official records of the Security Council's agenda, Israel's complaint presuming Israeli sovereignty in the DMZ was listed on the agenda and entitled "(f) Complaint of Syrian violation of the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Syria by persistent firing on civilian workers in the demilitarized zone *in Israel territory* near Banat Yakub on 15 March 1951 and between 25 and 28 March 1951 (S/2077)".<sup>33</sup> Al-Khury objected to such a title being placed on the Security Council's agenda and claimed that Damascus controlled the territory before the Armistice Agreement went into effect. He reiterated his country's long-held position that the Syrian government only withdrew its forces to create the DMZ in accordance with Article V of the Armistice Agreement. Despite agreeing to withdraw, he underscored that his government always considered the territory to be Syrian and therefore the Israelis should not be allowed to claim it as their territory in an official agenda item before the Security Council.

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<sup>32</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1951*, 286.

<sup>33</sup> "541st Meeting 17 April 1951, The Palestine Question," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Sixth Year* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1951), 3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629225/files/S\\_PV.541-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629225/files/S_PV.541-EN.pdf).

Attempting to assuage al-Khury's concerns, officials from the council noted that the agenda items in no way reflected the opinion of the Council but instead noted that complaints are placed on the agenda as submitted by the respective parties involved.<sup>34</sup>

Turning to more substantive issues, al-Khury criticized the entire process of the Hula drainage project as a violation of the Armistice Agreement. He argued how, from the onset, the Hula project began without the approval or consent of all relevant parties including the Chairman of the UN Armistice Commission, the Syrian government, and the local Arab inhabitants. Interestingly, al-Khury raised again as an issue, the argument that the draining of the Hula marshes would remove a natural barrier between the two countries and give Israel a military advantage in violation of Article II paragraph I of the General Armistice Agreement. As noted before, in his assessment of the Hula Project MG Riley determined that the draining of the Hula marshes would give both Israel and Syria the same military benefit and, as such, neither side would have an advantage. However, in a new twist to their original argument, the Syrian delegation argued that the Zionists in Israel held expansionist ambitions whereas the Syrians did not, and therefore the drainage project would facilitate Israeli expansionist goals to Syria's detriment. Finally, al-Khury argued that the Armistice Commission itself viewed the Hula drainage project as a potential catalyst for renewed conflict and therefore insisted that the work cease. Whereas within the Mixed Armistice Commission the Israeli representatives maintained that the matter should be decided at the local level—excluding Syria—al-Khury quoted the MAC Chairman's condemnatory response to this Israeli position stating, "I consider your attitude incorrect...and I stress that the full responsibility for the breach of the Armistice Agreement as well as for the eventual complications which could result, rests upon Israel..."<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, with

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<sup>34</sup> "541st Meeting 17 April 1951, The Palestine Question," 3.

<sup>35</sup> "541st Meeting 17 April 1951, The Palestine Question," 6.

each argument presented against the continuation of the Lake Hula project, the Syrian delegation was attempting to preserve its sovereign claims within the DMZ.

The Syrian delegation also expressed its concern that Israel was attempting to knock out the key mechanism of its UN-engagement strategy by ignoring the UN machinery and violating the Armistice Agreement. Al-Khury recounted how, on 27 March, his country requested the intervention by UN observers to investigate an incident involving Israeli forces firing shots on Arabs located on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. However, when the UN observers arrived at the scene, they encountered a six-man Israeli military patrol in the village of Ghanama located in the central sector of the DMZ that refused the UN's evacuation orders on the grounds that they were "acting under the orders of a higher authority."<sup>36</sup> In response to the incident, the UN Acting Chief of Staff submitted a letter to the Israeli Chief of Staff indicating that continued military activity within the DMZ was a flagrant violation of the Armistice Agreement and that the Israeli side needed to cease such activity. Al-Khury noted that despite the clear request by the authorities, not only did the Israeli side refuse to cooperate with the UN, but on 30 March they went so far as to forcibly remove Arab villagers within the DMZ "as a method of coercion" aimed at forcing other local Arabs to follow suit.<sup>37</sup> Both the refusal to cease operations, and to prevent the return to normal civilian life by ousting local Arab villagers were, from al-Khury's point of view, clear indications that the Israelis did not respect the UN nor the Armistice Agreement. He further noted that while Israel's flouting of the United Nations and its resolutions is shameful he is not surprised given their history of ignoring the UN with no fear of repercussions from the international community stating:

"It is not surprising to see the Israel Government defying the orders of the Chief of Staff in the Hula case after having seen this same Government defying the

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<sup>36</sup> "541st Meeting 17 April 1951, The Palestine Question," 7.

<sup>37</sup> "541st Meeting 17 April 1951, The Palestine Question," 11.

General Assembly resolutions, adopted at the third, fourth, and fifth sessions, ordering the repatriation of those Arab refugees wishing to return to their homes in Palestine and compensating those not wishing to return, and ordering the internationalization of the Holy Places including Jerusalem and its area. Israel has persistently and boldly been defying these resolutions, and in the meantime about a million persons have been expelled from their homes, scattered here and there in miserable conditions of life, suffering all the hardships of privation, with their homes, furniture, wealth, gardens and fields appropriated by foreign intruders coming from all corners of the world to possess the rich loot of this robbery...“Israel does not fear repercussions against it for it considers itself to be the pet beloved child of the United Nations. The Member States of the United Nations did not fly to arms in the face of Israel’s bold defiance, but the great majority of them did fly to votes, inviting Israel to membership in the United Nations, leaving Israel’s victims to their sorrow.”<sup>38</sup>

He concluded by suggesting that unlike the Israelis, the Syrians value the United Nations noting that in the twenty months since coming into force, there has been no incident initiated by the Syrian side as Damascus was “always loyal to their engagements and respectful of the principles and purposes of the United Nations.”<sup>39</sup>

Following opening remarks from the Syrian delegation, Israel’s UN representatives laid out their rationale for why Israel had the sovereign right to move forward with the Hula drainage project. Speaking on 25 April during the Security Council’s 542<sup>nd</sup> meeting, Israel’s UN representative Aba Eban maintained his country’s legal argument that the Hula Project was a private right that the UN could not impede. Eban further acknowledged that although Israel desired to keep the project going in order to cultivate their arid territory, he stressed that the Lake Hula’s importance for the creation of the Jewish national home was so important that Jewish authorities lobbied the Mandatory authorities after World War I to keep such water sources in Palestine and not Syria. Further, Eban noted that on 24 March 1938 the High Commissioner for Palestine granted that the 1934 Hula concession become Palestine law. Given its legal status

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<sup>38</sup> “541st Meeting 17 April 1951, The Palestine Question,” 17.

<sup>39</sup> “541st Meeting 17 April 1951, The Palestine Question,” 10.

before the termination of the British Mandate, Eban argued that the Hula Project is legally permitted to continue saying:

“It is clear, then, that on the expiration of the Mandate, the Hula concession possessed by the Palestine Land Development Company constituted a duly acquired private right which any new sovereign, whatever its identity, would be obliged by international law to honor and uphold.”<sup>40</sup>

As such, Eban underscored that the Palestine Land Development Company was well within its right to continue operating as it intended.

Broadening the topic of Israeli operations within the Demilitarized Zone a step further, Aba Eban characterized the DMZ as sovereign Israeli territory and thus justifying any of its activity in the area. On this point, Aba Eban specifically called into question the idea that Israel was not authorized to send its own police into the DMZ to provide security. Noting that barring Israeli policing within the DMZ would be counterproductive and result in a security vacuum and a state of lawlessness within the DMZ, Eban argued that Israel had the full right to police the DMZ stating:

“...the Chief of Staff’s legal theories would in their application lead the practical life of the area into a *reduction ad absurdum*, for if there is no Syrian or Israel sovereignty in the area, and since Mr. Bunche’s authoritative letter excluded any theory that the United Nations has administrative powers, the conclusion is that the demilitarized zone is a vacuum, a kind of no man’s land, a vacuum which is precisely what Mr. Bunche’s letter said it must not be. It would follow that the residents of the area have no civic obligations to any government, cannot be brought before any court in the event of crime, and constitute an island of anarchy within the area. This conflicts with the basic legal principle that legislation must retain its force until superseded by the legislation of a new sovereign in the area.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “542nd Meeting April 25, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Sixth Year* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1951), 5, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629226/files/S\\_PV.542-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629226/files/S_PV.542-EN.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> “542nd Meeting April 25, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 18.

Concluding his overall opening remarks, Eban rejected the Syrian accusation that Israel did not respect the United Nations or its resolutions citing the Arab military intervention to block the Partition Plan as clear evidence of Arab intransigence and disrespect for the UN's authority.<sup>42</sup>

During the 542<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Security Council General Riley, the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, was also invited to deliver some preliminary comments on the status of the armistice disputes between Syria and Israel. Riley noted that while neither party disagreed that unilateral military action within the DMZ constituted a violation of the Armistice Agreement, the central issue between the two parties involves the question of whether or not either party can carry out civilian activity in the area. Stressing that even determining which areas Syria or Israel is free to undertake civilian activity or not requires delineating sovereignty, Riley noted:

“In this regard, what must be made emphatically clear is that the Armistice Agreement did not in any way deal with the question of territorial sovereignty and that this question, generally and particularly in so far as the demilitarized zone is concerned, must rest in abeyance while the Armistice Agreement is in effect unless there is a mutual agreement of the parties to the contrary.”<sup>43</sup>

Citing evidence from Ralph Bunch, the former Acting Mediator, Riley highlighted that there are clauses built within the Armistice Agreement that allow for the Commission's interpretation of the agreement to prevail in the event of a dispute such as the present impasse. However, Riley called on the Security Council to clarify the position of the UN body towards this issue so that he can offer an interpretation that the parties must then be obliged to follow. He concluded by noting that situation was “unfortunate” and could have been avoided if both sides exercised more restraint and “less determination to undertake unilateral decisions with regard to the exercise of

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<sup>42</sup> “542nd Meeting April 25, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 25.

<sup>43</sup> “542nd Meeting April 25, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 28.

administrative authority and to civilian activity in the demilitarized zone.”<sup>44</sup> Following Riley’s comments, the Security Council refrained from taking any action until Council members could receive further clarification on the status of the Armistice dispute scheduled for their 2 May meeting.

On the day the Security Council was set to resume its discussions on the Lake Hula project, plain-clothed Syrian and local Arab forces sought to establish firm sovereign control over two Arab villages in the southern DMZ by force. Having concluded that other Arab villages within the DMZ might soon suffer the same fate as al-Hamma and the four villages forcibly evacuated, the Syrian government decided to seize control of three strategic elevation points near the Arab villages of Shemalneh and Diqa in the southern DMZ.<sup>45</sup> Those three points included the two hills of Shefekh and Dmut within the DMZ as well as a Tel al-Mutilla situated outside of the DMZ within Israel’s defensive area. At 9:00 AM on 2 May clashes ensued on Tel al-Mutilla after Israeli forces attempted to confiscate a herd of Syrian cattle, resulting in the death of three Israeli soldiers. Local Arabs also insisted that the Israeli forces killed 15 of their cows, although the Israelis claimed that they were killed as a result of the subsequent firefight.<sup>46</sup> Battles around Tel al-Mutilla would continue for the next two days as the Security Council continued to deliberate the Lake Hula Project.<sup>47</sup>

Later that day on 2 May, the Security Council reconvened to pose questions to Major General Riley on the legality of the Hula Project and the status of policing in the Demilitarized Zone. The first set of questions came from the United States representative Warren Austin who

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<sup>44</sup> “542nd Meeting April 25, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 32.

<sup>45</sup> Shaley, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955*, 78.

<sup>46</sup> “Cablegram Dated 3 May 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Addressed to the Secretary-General Submitting an Additional Report to the Security Council in Connexion with His Cablegram Dated 2 May 1951 (S/2113) (S/2118)” (United Nations Security Council, May 4, 1951), 1–3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479517/files/S\\_2118-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479517/files/S_2118-EN.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars, 1949-1956*, 1993, 364.

asked which country, Israel or Syria, had the right to police the demilitarized zone and whether the Hula Project could proceed without the approval of the Armistice Commission. Regarding the question on local policing, Riley clarified that security within Jewish and Arab villages should be managed at the local level with local Israeli recruited police and local Arab police responsible for overseeing their respective villages. At no point does either side, according to Riley, have the right to exercise full security control over the entirety of the DMZ. If a dispute occurs outside of the respective Jewish and Arab village zones then the Mixed Armistice Commission would oversee policing in those areas. Addressing the question of the Hula Project was legally permitted to move forward without Arab, Syrian or MAC approval, Riley stressed:

“No matter whether it is one dunum or twenty-eight dunums, it is land which belongs to refugee Arabs who have returned to the demilitarized zone, and it is interfering with the normal restoration of life there, as we agreed to carry it out in the Armistice Agreement. However, the land itself can be exchanged for other land without interfering to any great extent with the living conditions of the Arabs, if they want to exchange their land. However, I do not believe that it affects Syria itself unless there are Syrian citizens who own one or two of those dunums or who are concerned in ownership of any of them.”<sup>48</sup>

Other Western representatives posed similar questions about whether or not the Hula Project was inherently illegal and whether it could proceed on the basis of the Ottoman-era concessions. On this point Riley concluded that he was only qualified to speak on the Armistice Agreement and that he finds nothing inherently wrong with the Hula Project itself. Riley noted that although the Israelis have offered money and alternative land to the thirty to fifty Arabs who own the seven to eight acres concerned, they have refused to accept any offer and thus his only concern was

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<sup>48</sup> “544th Meeting May 2, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Sixth Year* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1951), 8, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629229/files/S\\_PV.544-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629229/files/S_PV.544-EN.pdf).

“protecting the rights of the refugee Arabs who are within the demilitarized zone and whose land is expropriated without their consent.”<sup>49</sup>

Before concluding the 2 May meeting, MG Riley offered a new opinion on the status of the Hula Project suggesting it could continue under certain conditions. Contrary to his previously issued opinion that the Hula Project should cease pending mutual agreement between Syria and Israel over its status, Riley reversed his view in a manner that seemed to recognize Israeli sovereignty in the matter. Noting that Israel would still need to respect the limitation of forces within the area, Riley argued that if Israel did not violate other aspects of the Armistice Agreement then he did not see any issue with the Hula Project continuing stating:

“The key to this problem is whether or not Syria can dictate what the Israelis do in the *Israel-controlled* territory. The swamps and Lake Hula come within Israel-controlled territory. If they are drained, then there is still the limitation of the number of defensive forces that can be in that area, because we have a defensive zone in that area that stretches back five or six kilometers from the demarcation line. So, if the Israelis desire to proceed with the drainage of Lake Hula and the swamps, and can do it without violating the Armistice Agreement or interfering with the normal restoration of life within that zone, then I do not consider that it is a matter in which Syria can dictate to Israel.”<sup>50</sup>

Despite Riley radically reversing his stance on the need for the Hula Project to cease, the Security Council again concluded the meeting without taking any formal stance on the issue.

On 3 May, the morning after Riley issued his new opinion on the possibility of resuming the Hula Project, the Palestine Land Development Company continued its operations. In keeping with the Syrian-UN strategic framework, Syrian and local Arab activity resumed as Israel sought to assert its sovereignty. Tensions, already high around Tel al-Mutilla near the southern DMZ, soon spread to the central DMZ in the Khury Farms south of the Banat Yaqub bridge where the Palestine Land Development Company continued its work. The Hula Project operations soon

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<sup>49</sup> “544th Meeting May 2, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 18.

<sup>50</sup> “544th Meeting May 2, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 26.

prompted a firefight to break out, likely under Syrian guidance, and came to an end around 09:45 GMT in response to the outbreak of rifle and automatic weapons fire.<sup>51</sup> Firefights also continued around Tel al-Mutilla the morning of 3 May as Arab fighters fired upon Israeli positions on the hill. In response Israel fired artillery on the southern end of the central DMZ. Despite calls for a ceasefire by the Chairman of the Syrian-Israel MAC, intermittent exchanges of fire continued.<sup>52</sup>

Back at the United Nations, the United States, United Kingdom, France and Turkey co-sponsored a draft resolution on 8 May calling on both parties to cease fighting immediately without assessing blame on one party or the other.<sup>53</sup> Speaking on their rationale for drafting the resolution in the hopes of a speedy acceptance by the rest of the Security Council, the co-sponsoring states each delivered brief comments on their assessment of the situation. For its part, the United States acknowledged that while the reports submitted by the Acting Chief of Staff to the Truce Supervision Organization and those submitted by other parties contained a lot of information, the US's representative Warren Austin argued that the information was too conflicting for the Security Council to assess blame one way or the other. Of note, he did state that whether or not either party is or is not eventually implicated for starting the fresh round of attacks, he noted that neither party should lay down conditions for accepting a cease-fire order.<sup>54</sup> Echoing the US's concerns, the representative of the United Kingdom Sir Gladwyn Jebb asked

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<sup>51</sup> "Cablegram Dated 3 May 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Addressed to the Secretary-General Submitting an Additional Report to the Security Council in Connexion with His Cablegram Dated 2 May 1951 (S/2113) (S/2118)," 2.

<sup>52</sup> "Cablegram Dated 3 May 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Addressed to the Secretary-General Submitting an Additional Report to the Security Council in Connexion with His Cablegram Dated 2 May 1951 (S/2113) (S/2118)," 1–3.

<sup>53</sup> "Draft Resolution Concerning the Palestine Question / Submitted by the Representatives of France, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States of America at the 545th Meeting of the Security Council on 8 May 1951 (S/2130)" (United Nations Security Council, May 8, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479735/files/S\\_2130-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479735/files/S_2130-EN.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> "545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Sixth Year* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1951), 5, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629230/files/S\\_PV.545-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629230/files/S_PV.545-EN.pdf).

that the Security Council authorize additional support and personnel to assist General Riley's Armistice efforts. Jebb concluded by noting his hope that once peace is restored the Council could ultimately grapple with the underlying factors that caused this recent spat noting "Palestine is an area in which the United Nations believes—rightly I think—that it has special responsibilities."<sup>55</sup> Francis Lacoste, representing the French Delegation, warned that the situation along the Syrian-Israeli frontiers was similar to the situation in July 1948 when the Security Council was pressed to get the warring sides to uphold their commitments to a truce. Lacoste noted his government's desire to see a "de facto return to peace" even before sorting out the current conflagration.<sup>56</sup> Finally, Selim Sarper, the Representative of Turkey who was also the rotating President of the Security Council for the month of April, expressed his country's concern as a country in the Middle East and of events that "are so close and so real to us" that he hoped the draft resolution would similarly be swiftly adopted. Following their remarks, the parties to the dispute were given an opportunity to speak.<sup>57</sup>

Responding to the draft resolution first, the Israeli delegation laid blame squarely on Syria for starting the recent border clashes and identified a strategic correlation between UN inaction and Syrian armed action. However, rather than assessing as the author does that UN inaction to stop the Hula Project prompted an armed response, the Israeli delegation argued that the lack of condemnation of Syrian action emboldened Syria to do more. To begin, Aba Eban rejected the assertion that Arab irregulars were responsible for the recent spike in violence, noting that only trained Syrian forces would have been capable of such operations. Eban noted how as early as 2 May his delegation complained to the Security Council about Syria's military

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<sup>55</sup> "545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 7.

<sup>56</sup> "545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 8.

<sup>57</sup> "545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 9.

incursion into Tel El Mutilla yet the Council concluded their discussions without taking any substantive action to address Israel's complaint. Eban suggested that there was a direct connection between the UN's inaction on 2 May and an emboldened Syrian government response stating that, "Thereafter, and perhaps consequently, Syrian aggression has developed with increasing scope and momentum into the climax of violence which has now led to Israel's formal protest and complaint."<sup>58</sup> Eban continued by noting that despite the intensification of violence over the subsequent days, UN observers did not visit the area until several days later. After fierce clashes on 6 May, two UN observers visited the site, accompanied by Captain Friedlander of the Israel delegation to the Mixed Armistice Commission. Eban noted that when the observers arrived at the scene they discovered "evidence" of a Syrian military incursion into the area which included French Chateau rifles, French grenades, Syrian army rations in their original packaging and a dead soldier in a full Syrian military battle uniform. Eban added that the trenches dug at the scene and at the height they had been dug, "had clearly been laid out by skilled military hands and shored expertly with sandbags".<sup>59</sup>

Based off of the logic that the Syrian military was responsible and not local Arab forces, Eban sought to divert attention away from the critiques against Israel. He noted as irrelevant the claims against Israeli forces of killing the 15 cows by calling on the Security Council to "sweep aside all these irrelevancies about shepherds and oxen, about civilians and cows."<sup>60</sup> Eban stressed that this recent incursion was the first attempt by a neighboring state to violate Israeli territory since the Armistice Agreements came into force and called on the Security Council to determine the extent of Syrian aggression and violation of the Armistice agreement. Eban

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<sup>58</sup> "545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 11.

<sup>59</sup> "545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 13.

<sup>60</sup> "545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 14.

concluded by arguing that there is no moral equivalency between the two parties' positions given that Israel does not desire Syrian territory yet the Syrians are trying to seize Israeli territory. Warning of the implications of further inaction by the Security Council in this regard Eban stressed that "If this does not constitute aggression, then there is no such thing as aggression. If this is not a flagrant violation of the Armistice Agreement, then that Agreement is not capable of violation."<sup>61</sup>

Following Eban's remarks, Faris al-Khury responded by dismissing the credibility of any evidence collected by the Israelis that proved Syrian culpability in the latest clashes. He opened by characterizing Eban's remarks as hearsay, suggesting there was no independent evidence to corroborate Israel's claims. Al-Khury countered that within the Security Council, one-sided accusations do not carry weight, but rather independent UN sources are the most reliable. Citing a letter from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization written on 4 May for instance, al-Khury drew attention to the Chief of Staff's statement that despite Israeli claims of a Syrian incursion UN observers had no evidence as of yet of such an incursion stating:

"Observers report that no—repeat, no—Syrian troops have been seen in demilitarized zone. They further report that mortar fire was directed from Israel territory on Arab positions in the demilitarized zone and in Israel territory...Observers state that they have no, repeat no, evidence of mortar fire or artillery fire being directed from Syrian territory towards the demilitarized zone or Israel territory. Observers report that Arabs in civilian clothes in the demilitarized zone have been seen firing with automatic weapons and rifles."<sup>62</sup>

If the Israelis had any evidence, al-Khury accused them of having staged a crime scene days later in anticipation of a UN observer investigation. Al-Khury noted that the Israeli government could not claim that the "evidence" of a Syrian military presence found at the scene on 8 May was

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<sup>61</sup> "545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 11–12.

<sup>62</sup> "545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 19.

proof of their presence when observers found no evidence of a Syrian incursion four days earlier stating:

“This took place five days after the event. It was not hard for them to collect all those clothes, those remnants and those pieces of equipment and put them in that place in order to show them to the team of observers. However, on the same day the event took place, the observers said that they could not find anything of the sort, neither dead nor wounded nor any of the Syrian equipment which was claimed to have been found there. It is well known and accepted that during an investigation on the spot in a criminal case nothing must be moved, everything must remain in the same state and in the same position in which it was when the crime took place...Who knows who put those things there and from where they were brought? It would not be hard for the Jews to bring in some clothing from the Syrian Army or some Syrian rifles. It is not normal for the Syrian soldier, if he leaves a place, to throw his rifle away and continue without it. If he had left, he would have taken his rifle with him.”<sup>63</sup>

Although the Syrian Government was later determined culpable in this operation, their elevation of the UN’s status as an independent arbiter with sole authority in these disputes still underscores the importance of the UN in Syria’s strategic engagement.

The Syrian delegation then warned of the negative consequences that would result if the UN Security Council did not demand Israel cease its military and construction activity within the DMZ. Underscoring the logic of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework, al-Khury argued that maintaining the integrity of the United Nations and its associated organs and resolutions is paramount to ensuring the continuation of peaceful relations in the region. However, the Syrian delegates comments suggest that Israel was attempting to knock out the central mechanism of its UN engagement strategy and that if that tool is gone, force would be the only option left. Arguing that Israel has held aggressive expansionist designs and has repeatedly disrespected the authority of the UN because it stands in the way of their regional program al-Khury posited:

“Why have they remained so adamant to all conciliatory procedures? Only because their object cannot be attained through legal channels. They hate to leave these Arab inhabitants in possession of the land where they wish to create a new

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<sup>63</sup> “545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 19–20.

settlement for the newcomers among their co-religionists. They wish to use these portions of land in their own way, and the Arabs who have been living there for centuries past are an obstacle in their path. It is now apparent that the Jews intend to dispose of those Arabs by purchasing their land and chasing them out, or, failing that, by frightening and molesting them in order to put them to flight, or by accusing them of rebelling against authority, blowing up their villages and forcing them to flee...Every time the Jews begin an attack in the execution of their criminal plan they open the campaign by giving wide publicity to a fictitious complaint that Syrian armed forces penetrated to the demilitarized zone and opened fire on the Israel police or on a settlement beyond the demilitarized zone, or by making similar false accusations in order to justify their subsequent guilty action of putting the native Arabs to flight, blowing up their homes and occupying their villages. It is well known that the Jews have great ability in promoting such publicity and propaganda to attract public opinion in their favor and to show Syria as the aggressor and throw guilt on innocent people, while a careful study of the situation shows the contrary to be true.<sup>64</sup>

Al-Khury concluded his remarks by urging the Security Council to immediately take action to stop Israel's behavior. In a manner reminiscent of the language used by the Syrian delegation in the run-up to the 1948 War al-Khury warned of the violence that would ensue if the UN failed to act. Prefacing his remarks as prepared statements from his government that he had been asked to read, al-Khury's concluding remarks outline in clear terms its UN framework in action when he read:

“The Syrian Government, desirous as it is of obtaining a decision by the Security Council on its legitimate complaints, finds it extremely difficult to exercise further restraint in face of the hostile and provocative demeanor of Israel and its utter disregard of the obligations imposed upon it by the Armistice Agreement. It is the fervent hope of the Syrian Government that the Security Council will call a halt to these aggressive actions immediately, and will assist it with an imperative resolution to maintain the peaceful efforts of my government in connection with this very grave situation. In the event that the Security Council does not take a firm stand in bringing to a halt the aggressive moves of Israel, the Syrian Government feels bound to resort to the last means at its disposal.”<sup>65</sup>

Following his remarks, both al-Khury and Eban submitted their own amendments to the draft resolution calling for the withdrawal of military and paramilitary forces from the Demilitarized

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<sup>64</sup> “545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 21–22.

<sup>65</sup> “545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 26–27.

Zone with al-Khury also calling for the repatriation or compensation of displaced Arabs. However, possibly due to the already late hour of the debates, both sides withdrew their amendments following a short recess.<sup>66</sup>

At the conclusion of deliberations on 8 May, the Security Council passed a resolution calling for the cessation of all armed activity. The resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority of 10 states to 1 (USSR), the latter abstaining due to its abstention on a previous resolution cited in the current 8 May resolution.<sup>67</sup> Of note following the vote, Faris al-Khury insisted that the record show Syria's full acceptance of the ceasefire reiterating that his government did not initiate the recent clashes. He went on to stress that, "The Syrian Army was always out of, and was never implicated in, this matter. Syria has not participated in the fight, and all the reports of the Chief of Staff confirm this. For this reason, I should like to put on record that Syria is not concerned by this cease-fire resolution."<sup>68</sup> However, while military activity within the Demilitarized Zone was addressed in the latest resolution, the question of the Lake Hula project remained unresolved.

Once again, in spite of direct UN calls for a ceasefire, violence erupted within the southern Demilitarized Zone near Tel al-Mutilla less than thirty minutes after the Security Council rose from its 8 May meeting. Although responsibility for the incident appeared inconclusive, the Syrian UN delegation leveraged the incident to cast doubt on Israel's commitment to international law and to raise the prospects of additional conflicts should the UN fail to achieve a meaningful solution to the current crisis. According to a cablegram received by the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization a Senior Syrian Delegate

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<sup>66</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1951*, 288–89.

<sup>67</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1951*, 289.

<sup>68</sup> "545th Meeting May 8, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 28.

reported that “Following [the] formal decision yesterday by [the] Security Council for [a] cease-fire, Israel forces have shelled and machine-gunned at 2400 GMT on 8 May Shamalne village in [the] demilitarized zone and Hassel in Syrian territory.”<sup>69</sup> According to a subsequent report by the Acting Chief of Staff to the Security Council, at 0800 GMT 9 May UN observers arrived at the Shamalne area and found ten impacts of twenty-five pounder shells in the vicinity of Syrian Army outposts at Hassel in Syrian territory. Speaking with Syrian and Israeli officials on the ground, the UN observers reported that the Syrians alleged that in the cover of the night Israeli troops were moving their outposts closer to the Shamalne village. For their part, the Israelis claimed that shortly before 2400 GMT on 8 May, small arms fire came from the Shamalne village area prompting the local Commander to order mortar and artillery fire on the area.<sup>70</sup> Later on 9 May Faris al-Khury submitted a follow up letter to the Security Council reiterating the details of the overnight incident adding that one woman was killed in the clash and warned of the danger of continued Israeli aggression. Speaking of overnight incident, al-Khury stated:

“This aggressive move took place after the cease fire resolution of the Security Council was adopted and relayed to the parties. It clearly proves that the verbal endorsement, which that resolution received from the representative of Israel, does not conform with the real intentions of his Government. I wish to protest in the most solemn manner against this new violation of Syrian territorial integrity, and to draw the attention of the Security Council to the grave consequences which such aggressive acts might cause if they were to continue unrestrained.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “Cablegram Dated 9 May 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Addressed to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report to the Security Council (S/2139)” (United Nations Security Council, May 9, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479741/files/S\\_2139-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479741/files/S_2139-EN.pdf).

<sup>70</sup> “Cablegram Dated 9 May 1951 from the Acting Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Addressed to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report to the Security Council, Further to His Report of 9 May 1951 (S/2139) (S/2141)” (United Nations Security Council, May 9, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479742/files/S\\_2141-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479742/files/S_2141-EN.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> “Letter Dated 9 May 1951 from the Chairman of the Syrian Delegation to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2143)” (United Nations Security Council, May 10, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479631/files/S\\_2143-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479631/files/S_2143-EN.pdf).

Despite tensions subsiding following the incident, the Security Council members spent the next several days drawing up a new resolution in anticipation of their meeting scheduled for 16 May to discuss the ongoing tensions between Syria and Israel.

On 16 May, the four sponsors of the 8 May resolution submitted a new cease-fire draft resolution designed to address both past grievances and offer an effective solution to the current impasse. In doing so, the resolution sponsored by the United States, the UK, France, and Turkey called for many of the same demands raised by the Syrian delegation—namely an end to Israel’s military *and* civilian activity within the Demilitarized Zone. The representative of the United States, Warren Austin, opened the meeting by reading the four-page draft resolution in full. Of note, the latest draft resolution, in addition to calling for both sides to abide by the terms of Armistice Agreement appeared to support Syria’s complaints that Israel’s civilian and military activity within the DMZ constituted a violation of the Armistice Agreement and should come to a halt. The draft resolution specifically highlighted the work of the Hula drainage project, Israeli aerial bombardments in April and the forced displacement of Arab civilians from the DMZ asserting that the latter should be allowed to return to their homes forthwith under the supervision of the Mixed Armistice commission.<sup>72</sup> Regarding the Hula drainage project in particular, the draft resolution stated:

“Noting that the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization in a memorandum of 7 March 1951, and the Chairman of the Syrian-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission on a number of occasions have requested the Israel Delegation to the Mixed Armistice Commission to insure that the Palestine Land Development Company, Limited is instructed to cease all operations in the demilitarized zone until such time as an agreement is arranged through the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission for continuing this project, and, Noting further that Article V of the General Armistice Agreement gives to the

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<sup>72</sup> “Revised Joint Draft Resolution on the Palestine Question / Presented at the 546th Meeting of the Security Council on 16 May 1951 by France, Turkey, United Kingdom and the United States of America (S/2152/Rev.1)” (United Nations Security Council, May 16, 1951), 1–3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/481792/files/S\\_2152\\_Rev.1-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/481792/files/S_2152_Rev.1-EN.pdf).

Chairman the responsibility for the general supervision of the demilitarized zone, Endorses the requests of the Chief of Staff and the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission on this matter and calls upon the Government of Israel to comply with them.”<sup>73</sup>

After reading the draft resolution and briefly recounting a series of incidents that led to the current impasse in Syrian-Israeli relations, Austin suggested that such incidents might lead some to assume that the Mixed Armistice Commission is incapable of handling the disputes between the two parties. Austin countered this assumption by noting that the Armistice Agreement—agreed to by Syria and Israel—has complete authority to handle any complaints and that the United States has confidence in the Armistice’s machinery and in individuals like General Riley to fulfill their mission. Thus, Austin concluded his remarks by noting that only with a lasting peace can the issue finally be resolved, but stressed until then, the Armistice Commission is the only party responsible for supervising and administering the DMZ.<sup>74</sup>

The three other resolution sponsors similarly shared their assessment of the situation, focusing heavily on the question of ascribing blame as well as Israel’s April aerial bombardments of Arab areas. Sir Gladwyn Jebb of the United Kingdom opened by expressing his satisfaction at the United Nation’s 14 May press release outlining that Syria and Israel had agreed to a ceasefire despite the recent conflagrations after 8 May. He, like his American counterpart, also stressed that Council members should only focus on the broad issues of the Armistice Agreements and not rush to judgement noting that the recent border skirmishes between Syria and Israel, to include the 5 April Israeli bombardment, are “questions on which we have at present no precise information and, in the view of my delegation, we must await more

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<sup>73</sup> “Revised Joint Draft Resolution on the Palestine Question / Presented at the 546th Meeting of the Security Council on 16 May 1951 by France, Turkey, United Kingdom and the United States of America (S/2152/Rev.1),” 1.

<sup>74</sup> “546th Meeting May 16, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Sixth Year* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1951), 6–9, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629233/files/S\\_PV.546-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629233/files/S_PV.546-EN.pdf).

detailed and considered reports from the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervisory Organization before any judgement can be reached.”<sup>75</sup> For his part, Mr. Francis Lacoste of France was much more critical of Israel’s actions, citing the 5 April bombardment of Syrian positions and the removal of Arabs from the villages of El Hamma, Baqqara and the Khouri Farms as evidence of Israeli violations of the Armistice Agreements. He noted however, that the underlying issue behind these clashes is that the Armistice Agreement has been in place for too long and that a lasting peace should have been established by this point. Stressing that prolonging the current arrangement would have dire consequences Lacoste maintained that:

“This, undoubtedly, is the root cause of the evil, and all States sincerely interested in peace in the Middle East ought not only to desire, but to hasten by every means within their power, a final stabilization of relations between the State of Israel and its neighbours.”<sup>76</sup>

Finally, in keeping with its strategic position of alignment with the British in the Turco-Hashemite alliance, Selim Sarper of Turkey shared similar concerns that the lack of information regarding a number of skirmishes between Syria and Israel made it difficult to level blame on one party or the other. However, Sarper contended that the use of Israeli aerial bombardments was a different story and was a serious development for Turkey as a country concerned with the stability of the region. Sarper noted in this regard:

“...we cannot adopt the same attitude towards the bombing that followed this incident. Aerial bombing is not a local incident; it is a very grave step which cannot be justified under the circumstances and which should not be passed over in silence in this Council.”<sup>77</sup>

He concluded his remarks by reiterating previous remarks that no conclusive position on the status of sovereignty within the DMZ should be determined until a final status between the two

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<sup>75</sup> “546th Meeting May 16, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 12–13.

<sup>76</sup> “546th Meeting May 16, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 14–15.

<sup>77</sup> “546th Meeting May 16, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 19.

parties has been reached. Following his remarks, the Security Council adjourned for one final time in anticipation of closing remarks and a vote on the draft resolution.

On 18 May the Security Council heard closing remarks from Council members, of note, from those in support of the Hula project continuing in the near future. Beginning with Antonio Quevedo Moscoso, the delegation of Ecuador expressed its confidence in the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission and his ability to find a near term solution to the crisis. However, he also voiced his country's hope that the Chairman could find a solution that allows the Hula marsh project to continue "without delay", assuming compensation for the Arabs, noting "In the view of my delegation, the project is beneficial to the entire area and might produce favorable results which would outweigh the damage done."<sup>78</sup> Mr. Von Balluseck of the Netherlands followed the representative of Ecuador voicing similar support for the draft resolution yet questioned whether ceasing the Hula marsh project would moving forward become an obstacle to the restoration of normal civilian life. Despite such concerns, Von Balluseck, drawing parallels to complaints of armistice violations by Egypt, Jordan and Israel in November 1950, suggested that the Security Council follow the same precedent set then when the Security Council passed a resolution referring the matter back to the local machinery.<sup>79</sup>

Before taking a vote on the resolution, the Council opened the floor up once again for final comments from the Israeli and Syrian delegations. Both took this moment as an opportunity to shore up their arguments vis-à-vis the Hula Project, to disparage the other, and spell out the potential violent implications of passing or not passing the latest UNSC resolution. Speaking to the idea of a Syrian-UN Strategic Framework, Aba Eban of the Israeli delegation emphasized

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<sup>78</sup> "547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Sixth Year* (Flushing Meadow, New York: United Nations Security Council, 1951), 4–5, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629235/files/S\\_PV.547-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629235/files/S_PV.547-EN.pdf).

<sup>79</sup> "547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 5–6.

that the Syrian Government was attempting to force the UN into stopping the Hula Lake project by threatening the international organization with an outbreak of violence if the UN failed to acquiesce to its demands. Eban began by recounting how after the Security Council's 8 May meeting and resolution calling for a cease-fire, Israel willingly signed the document on 9 May and entered into direct Armistice negotiations with the Syrians on 14 May. However, Eban noted that unlike Israel, the Syrian Armistice officials were unwilling to commit to any agreement until after consulting with their government. Eban charged that not only did this point to Syria's lack of commitment to peace, but argued that the UN emboldened the Syrians not to cooperate by beginning work on a new draft resolution the same day as the 14 May meetings.<sup>80</sup> Eban noted that this decision by the Security Council to move forward with another resolution before allowing the local machinery to find a solution not only emboldened Syria to take more aggressive moves, but had sparked more aggressive actions towards Israel reporting that:

“We have now received the grave news that Syria has not signed the cease-fire agreement presented to the parties by the Acting Chief of Staff on 9 May and signed by Israel on 11 May. We cannot doubt that the publication of this draft resolution has had this effect. Syria is not going to sign this agreement free of charge. It is going to sign it at a price, and it hopes to collect the price here today... it has encouraged in Damascus a buoyant hope that the desires of the Arab League if pressed by threats of force and by movements of troops, will find fulfilment in the chamber of the Security Council... This readiness, of course is noble of the Arab League. Yesterday, reinforced by the Grand Mufti, most renowned of surviving war criminals, this League was still waiting, a little more impatiently, for results. It now seems to be pleased with them, for this morning members of the Arab League expressed “thorough satisfaction” with this draft resolution. Presumably they have assessed it as a complete and uncritical acceptance of the Syrian viewpoint. But, since it is clearly their belief that the movement of troops has salutary political results, more such movements are announced. Damascus is pointing a pistol at your heads gentlemen, and asking for appeasement. Israel asks only to be left alone to drain its swamp. It is a dramatic choice between the sword and the ploughshare. How the Security Council responds to it will have precedence and effects far beyond the limits of this specific case.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 10–11.

<sup>81</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 11–12.

Eban proceeded to criticize how despite Israel's willingness to cooperate in "good faith" with the Syrians that individuals within the Security Council were secretly working on a draft resolution that was a "sour indictment of Israel" aimed at ceasing the drainage operations.<sup>82</sup>

The Israeli delegate to the UN then turned to the legal aspects of the case, arguing that the Hula Project had never definitively been determined a violation of the Armistice Agreement. On this point, Eban suggested that the Armistice Agreement was a document that both Israel and Syria signed after extensive deliberations and agreeing to the terms of the arrangement. He noted that Israel would never have signed a document that barred it from carrying out development projects like draining Lake Hula. Although citing VII of the Armistice Agreement which specifies that in the event of a disagreement the MAC's opinion shall prevail, Eban pointed to a clause in that article noting that the Commission can only *recommend* to the Parties modifications in the agreement as the need arises.<sup>83</sup> He warned that if the Mixed Armistice Commission was now in a position to dictate to the Israelis something that wasn't clearly forbidden by the Armistice Agreement then the document would cease to be an agreement between the two parties.<sup>84</sup>

Continuing to focus on the legal aspect of the case, the Israeli delegation suggested that the core issue at stake was not the Hula Project itself, but the land under construction. Citing evidence to this effect, Eban referenced General Riley's comments during the 2 May 1951 session wherein, in response to a question from the Netherlands as to whether or not the Hula project fell under the Armistice's jurisdiction, General Riley replied in the negative noting:

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<sup>82</sup> "547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 12.

<sup>83</sup> "No. 657 Israel and Syria General Armistice Agreement (with Annexes and Accompanying Letters). Signed at Hill 232, near Mahanayim, on 20 July 1949," 336-38.

<sup>84</sup> "547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued)," 13.

“I am not involving myself at any time in the Hula concession as a concession. I am only interested in protecting the rights of refugee Arabs who are within the demilitarized zone and whose land is expropriated without their consent...I have never found fault with the concession and I never will...Therefore I have no quarrel with the project itself. I feel that that is not a matter which affects either Syria or the United Nations.”<sup>85</sup>

Eban highlighted that despite agreeing with Riley on this point, the Israeli delegation differed with the idea that if a single individual from the seven acres of land did not accept the Hula project that the entire effort should be halted. Accusing the draft resolution and the Security Council for holding a double standard towards Israel by upholding Riley’s logic on this matter,

Eban stated:

“The same doctrine that the owners of these seven acres may indefinitely hold up a project which would liberate 10,000 acres from desolation and 25,000 acres from disease is upheld in the text of the draft resolution...The Security Council cannot really desire to uphold such a far-reaching subordination of public interest to private will. I doubt if any country in the world could ever have carried out a project of land development or irrigation if it had not been able to assert the public interest as a higher right than that of unconditional private ownership.”<sup>86</sup>

The Israeli delegate then proceeded to address the negative humanitarian and security implications that would follow should the UN Security Council decide to stop the Hula Marsh project. Quoting the work, *The River Jordan* by the American archaeologist Nelson Glueck, Eban emphasized the sections of Glueck’s book that highlight health risks associated with the Hula marshes. According to Glueck’s work, the Hula marshes are a “hot and feverish” body of water that in the spring and summer months—the time the Security Council was soon approaching stressed Eban—causes infants to die of malaria and ravages the elderly.<sup>87</sup> With regards to the security implications, Eban emphasized that by rewarding a state who threatens the

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<sup>85</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 14.

<sup>86</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 14–15.

<sup>87</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 16.

use of force, other states within the Arab-Israeli arena might feel emboldened to replicate Syria's success. On this point, Eban states:

“There is another aspect of this problem to which I must refer in all candor, because it determines the psychological background of this problem from the Israel point of view. One of the worst features of this recommend stoppage is that it seems to us to come in direct response to armed force and to a threat of renewed violence. It is because the workers engaged peacefully in draining the swamps since last October were shot at, and on many occasions killed, that the Security Council has this cease-work draft resolution before it...we have the shooting actively rewarded and its objectives secured. For, if this draft resolution were to be adopted, any Arab State might be confident that it could hope to prevent Israel's civilian activity at any point, with the aid of the Security Council, by directing its fire against that activity.”<sup>88</sup>

Legal, humanitarian and security arguments aside, the Israeli delegation concluded by suggesting the continuation of the Hula Project was ultimately a matter of strategic importance, that being the long-term survivability of Israel as a state. Recognizing that others within the Security Council might view such a loaded statement as hyperbole, Eban cited statements from British officials of Mandatory Palestine who similarly expressed the point of view that without water, “Palestine would be a wilderness”.<sup>89</sup> Indirectly stating why Lake Hula should fall solely under Israel's sovereign control, Eban referred to the area of Lake Hula as essential to Israel's survival stating:

“I do not believe that there is any area of similar restricted size which has so portentous a meaning for the survival and future of Israel...whoever holds the area of Lake Hula and its banks, together with the area to its north, clutches Israel at its throat, and commands its very prospect of existence and survival. Some members of the Security Council and other colleagues might have felt that this was putting too highly the essential and indispensable character of this area from the Israel point of view. But I think a few people will realize the historical fact that when the boundaries between the mandated territories of Syria and Palestine were under discussion, the United Kingdom announced its refusal to accept the mandate for Palestine unless the area now under discussion were included within its borders...”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 18.

<sup>89</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 26.

<sup>90</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 25.

Eban concluded by noting that the Israeli delegation could not in good conscious sign a new resolution that would render Israel a wilderness in the future and called on the other Security Council members to follow Eban's lead.

Turning to the Syrian side of the debate, Faris al-Khury underscored the importance of the UN bringing an end to the damaging status quo along the Syrian and Israeli demilitarized zone. One particular aspect of the status quo al-Khury called on to change was the continued Israeli disregard and manipulation of the United Nations and its resolutions to support Israel's expansionist agenda. He noted that in addition to the recent aerial bombardment of Syrian positions on 5 April—a violation of the Armistice Agreement—the Israelis have continued deny the return of Arabs to their homes as well as the right to indemnity for the property of those not wishing to return.<sup>9192</sup> Al-Khury suggested that Syria and the Arab world cannot continue to accept the status quo stating:

“It should be understood all over the world that this is a thing the Arabs would never accept. One million Arabs would be dispersed, expelled from their homes in Palestine, leaving their fields, their gardens, their furniture and their stores full of goods to be appropriated by foreign raiders coming from all four corners of the world who would enjoy them while the legitimate owners were living under tents or trees, seeking refuge and shelter in different places and exposed to all the hardships and privations of poverty after losing their riches, good positions and luxurious life in their own country.”<sup>93</sup>

Faris al-Khury further emphasized that the harmful status quo and violations of the Armistice Agreement were largely one sided as the UN never independently verified Israeli claims of Syrian misconduct. Rather al-Khury suggested that the Israelis were attempting to manipulate the situation stating:

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<sup>91</sup> “A/RES/194 (III) 194 (III). Palestine -- Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator.”

<sup>92</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 27.

<sup>93</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 27.

“the Syrians have never been accused of interfering with the free life of the inhabitants; it has never been said that the Syrians have molested any of the inhabitants of the demilitarized zone, Jewish or Arab; they have never deported them or massacred them or confiscated their lands or cattle.”<sup>94</sup> ...the Israelis wish to create certain provocations, certain incidents, in order to influence the meeting of the Security Council which is at hand. In every respect they are trying to create difficulties in these matters in order to complicate the situation. They are trying to create difficulties and disturbances in order to show that the Syrians are opposing them and are firing on them. But the Syrians never have done so and will not do so in the future.”<sup>95</sup>

Concluding on this point, al-Khury reiterated that his Government was ready for peace, but suggested that steps should be taken to fulfill the UN resolutions that have already been passed before moving on to new negotiations.

As the Israeli delegation had done, the Syrian UN delegation ended its closing remarks by emphasizing the key strategic issue under threat by the Hula Project—Syrian sovereignty within the Demilitarized Zone. Spelling out the situation for the Security Council, Faris al-Khury argued that the situation was not simply a matter of ridding seven acres of land of malaria but had serious implications for Syrian sovereign claims. Given that Syrian sovereignty was under threat, al-Khury stressed that the United Nations must fully grasp the implications of war breaking out as any nation had the right to defend what they consider their sovereign territory. Suggesting that the timing of Hula Project was tied to Israel efforts to illegally assert sovereignty within the recently established DMZ, al-Khury stated:

“The work is being carried on in the demilitarized zone, and the sovereignty of this territory has yet to be decided. Syria is claiming rights within the demilitarized zone, and that work might change the situation. The demilitarized zone was created to act as a buffer zone between Syria and Israel... This buffer zone certainly would be affected by the drainage work...A conflict would be imminent, and Syria would be obliged to establish great forces there. The representative of Israel has said that it is work of sanitation, which is being carried out. It may be sanitation work, but there are many means, other than drainage, to combat malaria...This concession, upon which the Jews now rely, has been in

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<sup>94</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 31.

<sup>95</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 30.

their hands for seventeen years. Why, since they say they could have done it during the period of the Mandate, did they not do it during that period? Now they wish to do it during this critical time, when the situation in the Near East is far from calm. By doing so, they certainly would be affecting the maintenance of peace and security in that area”<sup>96</sup>

Once again, the above comments from Faris al-Khury highlight the importance of the United Nations as a Syrian strategic tool for the defense of its sovereignty. Al-Khury’s remarks also underscore the logic within the Strategic Framework that when the UN fails to preserve Syrian sovereign claims, then they will rely on force and violence should thus be expected.

Before voting on the draft resolution, the framers of the document expressed that they did not intend to halt the Hula Project’s operations indefinitely, but until the dispute could be resolved. Opening first, Sir Gladwyn Jebb of the United Kingdom expressed his country’s view and the view of the fellow sponsors of the resolution that the Lake Hula drainage project was ultimately a good that would promote the general welfare of the area that they hoped would come into effect as soon as possible. However, he stressed that at present, the primary function of the draft resolution is to help create a situation wherein the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization could bring about a settlement to the present impasse and help those owners who were impacted by the land development project find an equitable solution. While this would entail the Lake Hula project to cease for the time being, Gladwyn expressed his assessment that this should not delay the project for long and “at the most, a few weeks.”<sup>97</sup> Acknowledging Israeli concerns that the Syrian side or the Arab landowners may seek to delay the work of the lake project indefinitely, Gladwyn noted that Israel could raise the issue of unilaterally implementing the project before the Security Council at a future date stating:

“we should not – I speak for the sponsors – be unsympathetic to this approach; and it might well be that, as it could, the Security Council would then bestow

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<sup>96</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 29.

<sup>97</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 34.

upon General Riley the necessary authority to this end, provided, in his judgement, such action was desirable in the interest of the maintenance of international peace and security.”<sup>98</sup>

Echoing British comments regarding the drainage project’s public health benefits, France’s Representative Mr. Lacoste qualified his statements by noting that this beneficial end did not entitle the Palestine Land Development Company free reign “to expropriate arbitrarily land which did not belong to it and to which it was denied access by the owners.”<sup>99</sup> However, similar to the British Representative, Mr. Lacoste noted that should the present resolution not yield a solution to the current impasse the Armistice Agreement contains within it the mechanism for Israel to bring its case back to the Security Council. According to Article VIII Chapters 3 and 4 of the Syrian-Israel Armistice Agreement, the parties to the agreement may upon mutual consent revise sections of the agreement, and where mutual agreement is not possible, either party may bring the matter to the Secretary-General who will schedule a conference to review the matter. If the conference does not solve the problem, then the matter may be referred back to the Security Council for final consideration.<sup>100</sup> After concluding his remarks, the Council heard similar statements from the US representative and the draft resolution was put to a vote, passing with ten yes votes from Brazil, China, Ecuador, France, India, Netherlands, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Yugoslavia and one abstention from the Soviet Union.<sup>101</sup>

In its final form, the 18 May resolution called on both parties to fulfill their obligations under the Armistice Agreement, under existing UN resolutions, and for the Hula Project to cease

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<sup>98</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 35.

<sup>99</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 35.

<sup>100</sup> “No. 657 Israel and Syria General Armistice Agreement (with Annexes and Accompanying Letters). Signed at Hill 232, near Mahanayim, on 20 July 1949,” 338–40.

<sup>101</sup> “547th Meeting May 18, 1951, The Palestine Question (Continued),” 41.

operations pending a future agreement. Regarding the cessation of the Hula Project's work, UN Resolution 93 [S/2157] endorsed the previous opinion by the UNTSO Chief of Staff stating:

“The Security Council...*Noting* that the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization, in a memorandum of 7 March 1951, and the Chairman of the Israel-Syrian Mixed Armistice Commission, on a number of occasions, have requested the Israel delegation to the Mixed Armistice Commission to ensure that the Palestine Land Development Company, Limited, is instructed to cease all operations in the demilitarized zone until such time as an agreement is arranged through the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission for continuing this project...*Endorses* the requests of the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization and the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission on this matter and calls upon the Government of Israel to comply with them”<sup>102</sup>

UN Resolution 93 further critiqued a number of actions taken by the Israeli government calling on both sides to refrain from forcibly displacing locals, to allow for local Arabs to return to their homes, to prevent aggressive activity (citing the 5 April aerial bombardment as an example) and to conduct policing on a local level. The resolution also reiterated its support for the return to normal civilian life and for both sides to cooperate fully with UN observers and to attend Mixed Armistice Committee meetings (another apparent slight against Israel).<sup>103</sup>

From a political standpoint, the 18 May Security Council Resolution was a political victory for the Syrian Government. Once again, Syria's UN representatives demonstrated that the United Nations was still relevant, could help them punch above their weight, and help them preserve their sovereign claims through strategic political engagement. However, unfortunately for Syria the resolution did not immediately result in the halt of the Hula Marsh Project. In a series of letters to the President of the Security Council in the week following the 18 May meeting, Faris al-Khury raised Damascus' concern that despite the recent passage of the UN resolution, the Israeli government has continued to allow the Hula project to continue within the

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<sup>102</sup> “S/RES/93 (1951) - S/2157 93 (1951). Resolution of 18 May 1951 [S/2157],” United Nations Security Council, May 18, 1951, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7B0D9E1D08CC405E852560C2006EC543>.

<sup>103</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1951*, 291.

demilitarized zone. Al-Khury noted that the Israeli Government had applied a “distorted meaning” and a “false interpretation...alien to the letter and spirit of the Security Council resolution” by arguing that the resolution only required them to cease operations in Arab owned lands but not Jewish-owned lands within the DMZ.<sup>104</sup> Al-Khury noted that in spite of Israel’s behavior and contravention of the UN resolution his government has exercised full restraint to date regarding this matter. However, al-Khury warned the President of the Security Council, per Syria’s standard strategic playbook, that the Syrian Government:

“would be less than frank, however, if it did not call once more the attention of the Security Council to the grave consequences which the continuous and willful disregard by Israel of its obligations under the Armistice Agreement, and the Security Council resolutions, may engender.”<sup>105</sup>

Continuing to underscore the importance of the UN remaining a meaningful institution by upholding its word, Al-Khury concluded by expressing his hope that the Security Council would see to it that a “strict and faithful observance” of the UN resolution would be implemented.<sup>106</sup>

In his capacity as Chairman of the MAC and UNTSO Chief of Staff, Major General Riley submitted a report to the UN Secretary General on the ongoing Israeli and Syrian disagreements over the status of the Lake Hula Project. In addition to outlining the steps he had taken to date towards implementing the 18 May Security Council resolution, General Riley noted that a key disagreement between Syria and Israel remained regarding the interpretation of the “intent” of the Security Council resolution. For Israel, according to Riley, the main intent of the resolution appeared to be the “safeguarding of legitimate rights and interests of Arab owners of land in [the]

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<sup>104</sup> “Letter Dated 24 May 1951 from the Chairman of the Syrian Delegation Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2168)” (United Nations Security Council, May 24, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/480223/files/S\\_2168-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/480223/files/S_2168-EN.pdf).

<sup>105</sup> “Letter Dated 21 May 1951 from the Chairman of the Syrian Delegation Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2161)” (United Nations Security Council, May 21, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479906/files/S\\_2161-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479906/files/S_2161-EN.pdf).

<sup>106</sup> “Letter Dated 24 May 1951 from the Chairman of the Syrian Delegation Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2168),” 1.

Demilitarized Zone affected by [the] Hula drainage operations.”<sup>107</sup> However, the Israelis stated that they did not think that the Security Council envisioned an indefinite halt to the work, particularly in areas that were Jewish owned land. For the Syrians, by contrast, the matter of work in the DMZ was not simply an issue of working on re-appropriated Arab-owned land, but it was a question about determining sovereignty and preventing Israel from gaining a political or military advantage. In the letter to the Secretary General, General Riley did admit that part of the problem was an “oral misunderstanding” on the part of the Israeli Government who took an oral opinion by General Riley that he did not believe work on Jewish owned lands was inherently a problem, as formal authorization to keep working in those areas. He noted that the situation was exacerbated by the Israeli publication of such communications in the media, but stressed that since the incident, he has called on the Israelis to cease their activities pending further investigation of the area.<sup>108</sup>

After offering the Israelis a significant exemption allowing them to soon resume their Lake Hula operations, General Riley informed the Security Council on 6 June that the Israeli Government stopped the work of the Palestine Land Development Company. In his report, Riley noted that the Hula Project’s operations ceased at 1630 local time on 5 June pending an investigation of the area by the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission. Once the investigation was complete, according to his report, “the Chairman will authorize the resumption

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<sup>107</sup> “Cablegram Dated 28 May 1951 from the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Addressed to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report to the Security Council (S/2173)” (United Nations Security Council, May 29, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/481628/files/S\\_2173-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/481628/files/S_2173-EN.pdf).

<sup>108</sup> “Cablegram Dated 28 May 1951 from the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Addressed to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report to the Security Council (S/2173),” 2–3.

of work on land ascertained by him not to be the subject of dispute.”<sup>109</sup> As such, Riley’s latest report opened up once again the possibility of continued work on the Lake Hula marshes.

In response General Riley’s report authorizing the potential resumption of Lake Hula operations, the Syrians sent a letter to the President of the Security Council condemning the “grave error” committed by the Chairman in his interpretation of the 18 May resolution. In a 12 June letter, Fayeze al-Khury (1893-1959)<sup>110</sup>—the Minister Plenipotentiary to the United States and Faris al-Khury’s brother—noted that the resolution only required General Riley to see to it that: 1) expelled Arab families could return to their homes if they so desired; 2) the drainage work in the whole of the DMZ stop; and that 3) an agreement be arranged between the two parties.<sup>111</sup> Warning of potential conflicts now that the situation has returned to the status quo ante with the resumption of the project, the letter goes on to state:

“In the opinion of the Syrian Government this was the clear and real intention of the Security Council because their recent conflict came about as a result of undertaking drainage work on Lake Hula without prior agreement. In his interpretation, General Riley brought back the situation to where it was at the beginning of the conflict; that is to say he reopened the door for more conflicts... The interpretation of General Riley of the Security Council resolution and the hasty action taken by him in authorizing the resumption of the drainage work in the demilitarized zone is a serious error which may lead to very grave consequences.”<sup>112</sup>

Despite raising the possibility of renewed conflict, no major decision was taken by the Security Council towards stopping the project on Jewish lands and General Riley proceeded with his work.

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<sup>109</sup> “Cablegram Dated 5 June 1951 from the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization for Palestine Addressed to the Secretary-General Transmitting an Interim Report to the Security Council (S/2185)” (United Nations Security Council, June 6, 1951), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/480570/files/S\\_2185-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/480570/files/S_2185-EN.pdf).

<sup>110</sup> Moubayed, *Steel & Silk*, 413–14.

<sup>111</sup> “Letter Dated 12 June 1951 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2193)” (United Nations Security Council, June 13, 1951), 1–2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/481376/files/S\\_2193-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/481376/files/S_2193-EN.pdf).

<sup>112</sup> “Letter Dated 12 June 1951 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2193),” 2.

The last major roadblock of 1951 to the 18 May resolution came from Israel's unwillingness to resettle displaced Arabs back within the Demilitarized Zone. According to a cablegram submitted to the Secretary-General on 9 July 1951, General Riley noted that despite repeated efforts to ensure that UN observers participated in the resettlement of Arab families to the DMZ, the Israelis repeatedly rejected their requests. General Riley noted that upon arriving in Shaab, Israel on 2 July where Arab families were presently detained, he began meeting with heads of families and interviewing them about their desires to return back to the DMZ or not. During his meetings, General Riley met with the heads of about one hundred families representing 632 of the 785 Arab civilians evacuated from the DMZ. Hoping to arrange times with the families for their return to the DMZ, the Senior Israeli delegate who was accompanying him refused his request noting that General Riley's job was only to collect signatures of those interested in returning. When General Riley subsequently requested he be allowed to return to Shaab to find the 153 other Arabs who were not present for his interviews, that request was also denied by the Israeli delegate. Finally, General Riley expressed his interest in having UN observers present when the 115 Arab civilians of Baqqara and Ghanamme returned to their homes, however the Senior Israeli delegate refused this request and stated that only 11 individuals would be allowed to return to that area. Of note, General Riley added in his letter to the Secretary General that a certain individual who owned considerable property in the Khury Farms area was also denied the right to return. Riley concluded by noting that thus far, the families who have returned to their land will have to live in tents and UNRWA food supplies until their property can be rebuilt.<sup>113</sup> Differences between Syria and Israel would persist

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<sup>113</sup> "Cablegram Dated 8 July 1951 from the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Further Interim Report on Steps Taken to Give Effect to the Security Council Resolution of 18 May 1951 (S/2157) (S/2234)" (United Nations Security Council, July 9, 1951), 1-3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479688/files/S\\_2234-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/479688/files/S_2234-EN.pdf).

throughout the remainder of 1951, but they largely went under the radar as the Security Council shifted its attention to other global matters, and more regionally to problems along the Egyptian-Israeli armistice lines.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As detailed above, Syria's UN engagement and armed action against the Lake Hula drainage project is a prime example of Syria's strategic defense of its pan-regional sovereign claims. For the Syrian Government, the aim of blocking the Lake Hula project was never couched in terms of the Syrian state's agricultural needs, nor its desire to deprive Israel of a strategic resource vital to its economic development. Rather, the question of sovereignty remained the core strategic issue for the Syrian Government. Infringement on Syria's sovereign claims was the one key element that prompted the Syrian government to relax its strictly controlled borders and wage attacks against Israeli military and civilian activity within the DMZ. Furthermore, this shift from a reliance on UN engagement to armed clashes is illustrated in the dynamic back and forth between changes in the UN machinery's opinion on the Lake Hula project and Syria's decision to allow violence to take place. Interestingly, as will be explained further in a subsequent chapter, Israel's exercising of sovereignty over the natural barriers between historic Syria and Palestine seems to drive more of Syria's armed behavior as opposed to a simple flouting of UN resolutions on Israel's part.

## **Chapter 5: Jordan River Project: Preserving Sovereignty Through Political Means**

### **Introduction**

On 2 September 1953, two years after its Lake Hula Project garnered international attention, Israel initiated a hydroelectric project in the central Demilitarized Zone that would require diverting a portion of the Jordan River westward into Israeli territory. Designed to mitigate the same backlash it received for the Hula Project, Israel maintained that its new Jordan canal project would not impact Arab-owned land, nor would it deprive locals of their “normal” access to the Jordan River. Despite such Israeli precautions, the Syrian Government protested this latest project as a violation of the Armistice Agreement and called on the UN Security Council to intervene. After four months of extensive deliberations, the Security Council failed to pass a resolution due to a Soviet veto. However, the UN Secretary General called for a standing order that the canal project cease operations to remain in effect. Like the Hula Project before it, the Jordan Canal Project remained stalled pending further consideration or agreement.

While detailed accounts of the Jordan Canal Project disputes are found in the secondary literature, analysis of the event and what it meant from the Syrian government’s perspective remains understudied. The question of whether or not this incident constituted a victory for Syrian diplomats is briefly answered in Shalev’s and Bar-Yaacov’s separate studies on the Israel-Syria Armistice. For Shalev, the outcome of the Jordan Canal dispute proved to be in Syria’s favor as the canal project ceased and a number of Syria’s arguments were viewed as viable considerations. However, Shalev attributes Syria’s success largely to what he considered to be political incompetence on the part of the new head of the UN Truce Supervision Organization. Shalev argues that whereas General Riley demonstrated “political perspicacity” during the Hula disputes, General Bennike in contrast “lacked political understanding and took a narrow

approach. [And] Bennike accepted the Syrian argument”.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, Bar-Yaacov adopts an opposite and even rosy assessment of the Jordan Canal Project, largely characterizing it as a political victory for Israel. Even though the final resolution failed to receive the necessary international consensus, Bar Yaacov argued that the majority of the Security Council was behind Israel and therefore Israel was entitled to continue its work stating, “As in the Hula case, Israel received international endorsement of her right to pursue such projects”.<sup>2</sup>

In my assessment, the cessation of the Jordan Canal Project constituted a political victory for Syria. Although not an absolute victory in terms of acknowledging Syrian sovereignty over the demilitarized zone, by blocking Israel’s hydroelectric project within the DMZ, the Syrian Government could still claim sovereign rights to the area. The disputes surrounding the Jordan River diversion project also reaffirm the logic of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework and the strategic nature of Syria’s use of violence during this period. During the four months of UN deliberations on the Jordan River canal project, not a single shot was fired from the Syrian side of the Armistice line.<sup>3</sup> I argue that this was a direct result of the Syrian Government obtaining exactly what it wanted—in terms of preserving its sovereign claims—through its political engagement with the United Nations. In this case, the politics worked in Syria’s favor and as a result no armed attack was launched by the Syrian side.

The following chapter will offer an extensive detailed and analytic account of Syria’s political victories during the course of the Jordan Canal Project disputes. Significant attention will be given to the proceedings of the UN Security Council debates and the arguments the Syrian delegation leveraged in defense of its sovereign claims to the Demilitarized Zone.

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<sup>1</sup> Shaley, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955*, 180.

<sup>2</sup> Bar-Yaacov, *The Israel-Syrian Armistice*, 161.

<sup>3</sup> Shaley, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955*, 179.

Pertinent regional and international developments that contributed to Syria's politically favorable environment will also be discussed. It is worth reiterating that the Jordan Canal Project question stands out as another example—much like Syria's own independence and the withdrawal of foreign troops—of Syria securing its political goals solely through UN engagement. A brief assessment of the role of the United States in this regard will be offered in the concluding remarks.

### **Armistice Lines After the Lake Hula Disputes**

Following the UN Security Council's adoption of the 18 May 1951 resolution, which called on the Palestine Land Development Company to cease its Hula operations, the situation along the Syria and Israeli armistice lines remained tense. Although kept largely out of the international spotlight, disputes between the two sides occasionally resulted in an exchange of fire and the loss of life. Central to the ongoing tensions between the two factions was the still undetermined delineation of sovereignty within the demilitarized zone. Eager to address this issue, Syria initiated a dialogue with Israel in 1951 with an aim towards determining the sovereign status of the DMZ once and for all.<sup>4</sup> However, Syria would remain frustrated with Israel's apparent unwillingness to uphold the 18 May resolution especially the clause allowing for the repatriation or compensation of local Arabs expelled from the DMZ.

After finalizing the agenda and the political level of the demilitarized zone negotiations, Syria and Israel held ten secret high-level meetings from October 1952 to May 1953. The negotiations, held between Syrian and Israeli military and foreign ministry officials and mediated by a UN representative of the Armistice Commission, focused on dividing sovereignty between the two parties and under what sort of framework. The Syrian side desired that the two parties

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<sup>4</sup> Shaley, 132.

focus on revising the terms of the Armistice Agreement and setting the Jordan river as the “natural boundary,” splitting Lake Hula and Lake Tiberias equally down the middle. Of note, the Syrian negotiators stressed that under such an arrangement they would not object to Israel engaging in irrigation projects so long as Syrians had access to enough water for their own consumption. When the Israeli side suggested that Syria wanted this for economic development reasons, the Syrian side objected to this characterization noting that access to water was not important to Syria because of its economic use stressing they only meant enough water for “those who live along the water” stating “We are not thinking of taking water from the Jordan for Quneitra or for Fiq.”<sup>5</sup> For their part, Israeli negotiators were only interested in dividing sovereignty under the framework of a lasting peace agreement or non-aggression pact. Furthermore, Israel’s Water Planning Authority objected to the proposed shared water plan and Israel’s negotiators were hard pressed to give up territory they viewed as their own—DMZ included—without Syria doing the same. Such differences and political pressures on both sides proved insurmountable and the talks ultimately broke down.<sup>6</sup>

Concurrent with the high-level negotiations, Syrian frustrations with Israel’s slow and selective implementation of the 18 May 1951 resolution remained a source of tension. Specifically, the issue of un-delineated sovereignty remained a point of contention, with the Syrian side also complaining that Israel was not fully cooperative in granting repatriation or compensation for evacuated Arab refugees. On 4 November 1952, the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Lt Gen William Riley, submitted a report to the Secretary General updating him on developments within the Mixed Armistice Commission from 1 November 1951 to 30 October 1952. Riley’s report noted that the MAC fielded 112 complaints, most from Syria

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<sup>5</sup> Shaley, 145–46.

<sup>6</sup> Shaley, 132–61.

regarding repatriation and compensation, and held four emergency meetings following armed clashes along the armistice lines. Regarding Syria's complaints of the limited repatriation of Arab refugees, Riley's report agreed that Israel had only allowed a handful of refugees to return. The report noted for instance that by the end of October 1952, over 1,000 Palestinians from the DMZ remained either internally displaced or had fled to Syria, with only five people allowed to return to date. The Israeli Government noted that it would be willing to allow an additional 115 to return to the DMZ who fled during the March-April 1951 events, on the condition that they never return to Syria. For their part, the displaced Arab population by and large refused to accept a conditional right of return that would limit their ability to conduct trade or have any other cross border communication with Syria.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, on the question of compensation, Riley's report noted that the Israelis refused to pay, claiming it was not their legal responsibility. However, he did note how, in one dubious case, the Israelis were willing to provide compensation to Arab residents of the Samra village. Located in the Southern Sector of the Demilitarized Zone, Samra village was home to about 300 Arabs who fled the area in 1951 to villages in and around Kahn and al-Hamma. The villagers who cultivated the lands of Samra for many years did so in their capacity as sharecroppers, and it was an Iranian owner who sold or leased the land to the Jewish National Fund. Rather than accept compensation for their loss in this case, the villagers from Samra refused in the hope of negotiating a return to their former village.<sup>8</sup> So, despite Israel's expressed willingness to compensate the villagers in this case, no compensation had been given to families from the DMZ

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<sup>7</sup> "Letter Dated 30 October 1952 from the Chief of the Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report on the Decisions Made during the Period 1 Nov. 1951 to 30 Oct. 1952 by the Mixed Armistice Commissions (S/2833)" (United Nations Security Council, November 4, 1952), 16–17, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/618178/files/S\\_2833-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/618178/files/S_2833-EN.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> "Letter Dated 30 October 1952 from the Chief of the Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report on the Decisions Made during the Period 1 Nov. 1951 to 30 Oct. 1952 by the Mixed Armistice Commissions (S/2833)," 17.

and General Riley noted “They [Israel] have not, insofar as is known, indicated willingness to pay compensation in other cases.”<sup>9</sup> The Syrian side objected to this Israeli approach, noting that it was illogical to expect Syria to move forward negotiating any new agreement with Israel when they continue to flout the resolutions already on the books.

Finally, of the 112 complaints raised within the Mixed Armistice Commission, in four instances the MAC held four emergency meetings to defuse what it considered had the potential to escalate into another border conflict. In three of the four emergency meetings held between December 1951 and March 1952, Israeli representatives accused the Syrian military of “unprovoked” gunfire against fishing boats in and around Lake Hula and Lake Tiberias, resulting in the death of at least two Israeli fishermen. In these instances, the Syrians argued that the boats were either police boats or escorted by police and therefore interpreted as an imposition of sovereignty over the whole Lake—water the Syrians desired in their sovereignty negotiations. In the latter incident, the MAC agreed with Israel’s complaint and determined that Syrian forces violated various articles of the General Armistice Agreement—a charge the Syrian delegation denied. However, the MAC found what appeared to be an Israeli retaliation for the death of the two fishermen the next day on 28 December 1951, to similarly be a violation of the Armistice Agreement and strongly condemned the action. Finally, in two of the four incidents, to include an Israeli complaint that Syrian military forces fired on a boat carrying a UN observer, the MAC did not consider the evidence sufficient to blame Syria and abstained in a separate yet similar

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<sup>9</sup> “Letter Dated 30 October 1952 from the Chief of the Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report on the Decisions Made during the Period 1 Nov. 1951 to 30 Oct. 1952 by the Mixed Armistice Commissions (S/2833),” 19.

Israeli complaint against Syrian forces. Ultimately, no regional conflagration, similar to the Hula incidents the year before, erupted along the Syrian-Israeli border.<sup>10</sup>

### **Israel's Jordan River Diversion Project**

With the question of sovereignty over the DMZ still unresolved, and little evidence that the 18 May 1951 resolution was holding, Israel's decision to begin a new construction project within the DMZ was bound to escalate political tensions. On 2 September 1953, under the cover of Israeli police, the Palestine Land Development Company initiated a hydroelectric construction project along the Jordan River in the central demilitarized zone. As the first phase of a national irrigation project designed to bring water to the arid Negev region in the south, this latest project involved constructing a canal from the Jordan River, south of the Banat Yaqub Bridge, and diverting a portion of the water westwards into Israeli territory and connecting it to Lake Tiberias. Beginning forty meters above sea level, the canal would dip to two hundred meters below sea level where the falling water would be used to generate 24,000 kilowatts of electricity per hour. Like the Hula Project before it, this latest Jordan River canal project was conducted under the auspices of a 5 March 1926 concession granted to the Palestine Electric Corporation for the use of water from the Jordan and Yarmuk Rivers to generate electricity.<sup>11</sup>

To avoid any potential Armistice restrictions to its Northern Irrigation Project, Israel applied lessons learned from its Hula experience to ensure its latest operations could continue. Israel sought to do this in two ways: 1) by avoiding the use of Arab-owned land; and 2) by

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<sup>10</sup> "Letter Dated 30 October 1952 from the Chief of the Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report on the Decisions Made during the Period 1 Nov. 1951 to 30 Oct. 1952 by the Mixed Armistice Commissions (S/2833)," 20–21.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Aryeh Shaley, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 165-166, and Nissim Bar-Yaacov, *The Israel-Syrian Armistice: Problems of Implementation, 1949-1966* (Jerusalem: Magnes P. (Hebrew University), 1967), 114.

allowing local Arabs to continue accessing the Jordan River for their own irrigation use. Israeli officials even sought approval from the Mixed Armistice Commission and received the verbal green light from the Acting Chairman Colonel Tillotson. Hoping to receive a consent letter in writing, the Israeli government sought official approval from the Mixed Armistice Commission in order to guarantee its work could proceed. However, on 7 September the Syrian delegation issued a complaint to the MAC and Tillotson reversed his initial opinion. The next day, General Vagn Bennike—the new Chief of Staff of the UN Truce Supervision Organization—called on Israel to immediately halt its Northern Irrigation Project until he could assess the situation fully.<sup>12</sup>

After studying the details of the Northern Irrigation Project and visiting the construction site on the Jordan River, General Bennike determined that the canal project should cease its operations pending a final agreement on the matter. In his 23 September report, General Bennike noted several issues that were potential violations of the Armistice Agreement. The first issue regarded the question of land ownership in the area where the project was initiated. Although the Israeli side maintained that no Arab land was in the area, this was disputed by locals and the MAC was investigating the land registers to establish the facts in this case. Second, after Bennike was shown two Arab water mills on the east bank of the Jordan river that were no longer working due to lower water levels, Bennike noted that the resumption of normal civilian life was also at stake. He further noted that this canal project risked impacting a total of nine water mills in the area, in addition to impacting irrigation for the Buteiha Farms—lands owned by Syrians—which already suffered during previous Israeli gate tests south of Lake Hula. Finally, Bennike determined that the canal project would give Israel a military advantage in

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<sup>12</sup> Shaley, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955*, 169–70.

violation of Article V of the Armistice Agreement, as Israel would be able to dry up the river at will allowing for the movement of forces across this otherwise deep water natural barrier. As such, Bennike concluded that the project should cease operations immediately pending a final settlement of the issue.<sup>13</sup>

In response to Bennike's report, the Israeli delegation refused to comply with opinion, citing several points of disagreement with Bennike's conclusions. In a letter to General Bennike, Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett began by questioning the very competence of the newly minted Chief of Staff. In his opening he challenged the authority of Bennike's conclusions by citing his divergence from previous rulings as evidence of his incompetence saying:

“the substance of your views and their underlying assumptions appear to be at marked variance with the position far maintained by the competent organs of the United Nations as regards works of this nature in the Demilitarized Zone.”<sup>14</sup>

Sharett continued by characterizing the present Syrian complaint issued against the project as baseless and connected with Syria's “established policy of economic warfare against Israel”. He noted that such a development project is part of the very resumption of normal civilian life within the DMZ and is based on established private rights. Sharett further maintained that no Arab land would be impacted by the project and dismissed the two non-functioning Arab water mills as having been non-operational for years. Regarding the suggestion that digging the canal would give Israel a military advantage, Sharett suggested that this would be true if Israel harbored aggressive designs, countering that Israel “consistently abjured aggression. Were it nursing aggressive designs, it would be thwarting its own purposes by digging the canal.” In fact,

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<sup>13</sup> “Report Dated 23 October 1953 by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Security Council (S/3122)” (United Nations Security Council, October 23, 1953), Annex I, 1-4, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634041/files/S\\_3122-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634041/files/S_3122-EN.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> “Report Dated 23 October 1953 by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Security Council (S/3122),” Annex II, 1.

Sharett claimed, Syria was the aggressive party in the equation, and as such the construction of a canal would add a military barrier and contribute to more stability between the two sides. Sharett concluded by noting that his country did not see any reason to stop the project's operations stating "Israel fails to see any justification for the conclusion that the peaceful work...should now be interrupted." As such construction would continue despite Bennike's opinion on the matter.<sup>15</sup>

### **Syria's Political Standing on Jordan Canal Dispute**

The timing of Syria's decision to raise Israel's continued construction activity within the demilitarized zone to the Security Council was politically fortuitous for the Syrian Government's cause. Hoping to bring a halt to the Israel's activity within the demilitarized zone as it had done with the Lake Hula project, the Syrian side of the debate was bolstered by political momentum following regional and international developments that isolated Israel. With the politics largely on its side, the Syrian Government would rely on its UN political engagement instead of force on the Jordan Canal project debates in order to preserve its sovereign claims to the demilitarized zone.

On 12 October 1953, Rafik Asha (1910-)—Syria's new Permanent Representative to the UN who studied economics at the American University of Beirut and was the former Chargé d'Affaires and Minister Plenipotentiary to Washington—sent a letter of complaint to the UN Secretary General aimed at putting political pressure on Israel by accusing it of violating the terms of the Armistice Agreement and of flouting the local UN machinery. Further the letter interestingly also laid out key aspects of Syrian sovereign claims in the area. In the letter, Asha

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<sup>15</sup> "Report Dated 23 October 1953 by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Security Council (S/3122)," Annex II, 1-6.

recounted how on 2 September Israel began work in the central sector of the demilitarized zone, accompanied by military operations, aimed at changing the bed of the Jordan River to divert the river into Israeli controlled territory. By allowing a “military force” to enter the area and conduct work against the expressed wishes of the Chairman of the MAC, Asha claimed that Israel had violated Article V of the Armistice Agreement on two accounts: 1) by violating the military force provision and by administering the zone in the manner of a sovereign entity. In further violation of Article V, Asha argued that the effect of Israel’s project would be to “deprive the riparian inhabitants along the Jordan” of the water needed to irrigate their lands and thus impede their “normal” livelihood. On this point, Asha made an interesting brief statement on Syria’s sovereign claims beyond simply the demilitarized zone. Laying out Syrian sovereign claims Asha argued in his letter to the UN that the Jordan River is Syria’s natural border stating:

“The Jordan separates Syria from Palestine. It also provides water for the irrigation of land on Syrian territory. The rights of Syrian riparian landowners to the Jordan water are of long standing and have never been disputed”<sup>16</sup>

Leaving this point aside, Asha continued by arguing Israel’s diversion of the Jordan River had given it a military advantage that was also a violation of Article II of the Armistice Agreement. Asha concluded his letter by accusing Israel of “arbitrary and illegal” behavior for their refusal to comply with General Bennike’s request to cease their operations to date. Of note, at no point in Syria’s letter was a request made at this time for a hearing by the Security Council to evaluate this problem.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Letter Dated 12 October 1953 from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations to the Secretary-General (S/3106)” (United Nations Security Council, October 13, 1953), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/633597/files/S\\_3106-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/633597/files/S_3106-EN.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> “Letter Dated 12 October 1953 from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations to the Secretary-General (S/3106),” 2.

As Syria leveraged the UN to apply political pressure on Israel, Israel's own harsh response to an incident along the Armistice line with neighboring Jordan gave Syria the political environment it needed to be successful in the Jordan Canal disputes. On 13 October, the day after Syria informed the UN Secretary General of Israel's Jordan Canal project, Arab "infiltrators" from Jordan launched an overnight grenade attack on the eastern edge of the Israeli settlement of Yehud killing a woman and two of her children. This attack followed a similar pattern of grenade attacks over the previous months by Arab irregulars from Jordan that also resulted in civilian casualties. On 14 October, in a meeting of the Jordanian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, Jordanian officials unusually voted with Israel in condemning the attack and vowed to bring the perpetrators to justice. For their part, Israeli officials were not satisfied with handling matters solely within the local UN machinery.<sup>18</sup>

In response to the Yehud attack, the Israeli Government launched a violent retaliatory operation that would have significant political consequences. On the night of 14/15 October, at least 130 soldiers of the Israeli Defense Forces launched a full-scale assault on the Jordanian village of Qibya—an Arab village long suspected of harboring violent "infiltrators". Authorized at the highest levels of government, Israeli officials decided that fifty of the village's 280 houses should be blown up and the IDF was given the instruction "to attack and temporarily occupy the village, carry out destruction and maximum killing, in order to drive out the inhabitants of the village from their homes."<sup>19</sup> The Israeli defense forces systematically targeted dozens of homes, a village school and a reservoir with explosives and small arms fire. In order to provide cover to the retreating forces, Israeli support troops shelled Qibya's neighboring villages of Budrus and Shuqba from inside Israeli territory. By the morning, sixty-nine bodies of mostly women and

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<sup>18</sup> Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956*, 1993, 244.

<sup>19</sup> Morris, 245.

children had been uncovered in the rubble, while no Israeli casualties were reported. That same morning the Jordanian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission held an emergency meeting condemning the Qibya attack and called on Israel to prevent further incidents. However, the Jordanian side called for immediate UN action fearful that the situation might deteriorate stating “this criminal Israeli aggression is so serious that it might start a war in the area.”<sup>20</sup>

Israel’s Qibya attack was not only a political boon for Syria’s regional standing in its Jordan Canal dispute, but the attack also risked undermining Israel’s position in a concurrent United States peace initiative involving development projects along Jordan River. On 14 October, U.S. President Eisenhower dispatched Eric Johnston as his special representative to initiate Arab-Israeli discussions on a comprehensive plan to develop the Jordan River Valley. The plan, announced by Eisenhower on 16 October, involved addressing the plight of Palestinian refugees which he described as “one of the major causes of disquiet in the Near East”. The plan, designed to create conditions for a more lasting peace, would allow for the mutual development of the Jordan River in a way that would give displaced Palestinians a means of livelihood to become self-sufficient. If the Syrian Government could leverage the U.S. initiative and the Qibya incident effectively, they might be able to not only stop the Jordan Canal project, but also extend their sovereign control to the Jordan River as they desired.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Letter Dated 16 October 1953 from the Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Jordan to the United States of America Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3113)” (United Nations Security Council, October 19, 1953), 1–2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/633976/files/S\\_3113-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/633976/files/S_3113-EN.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> “6 Statement by President Eisenhower on Eric Johnston-s Mission to the Middle East- 16 October 1953-,” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1947-1974, October 16, 1953, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook1/pages/6%20statement%20by%20president%20eisenhower%20on%20eric%20johnst.aspx>.

## Syria and the Jordan River Diversion Project in the Security Council

Leveraging its improved political standing following the fallout of Israel's Qibya attack and the U.S. plan for Arab and Israeli development of the Jordan River, the Syrian Government requested the UN Security Council to consider the legality of Israel's Jordan Canal Project. Given the new regional and international political dynamics, it is no surprise that Syria revised its initial 12 October complaint to a formal request on 16 October for an official hearing by the Security Council to examine the situation.<sup>22</sup> It is also worth keeping in mind that during the course of the UN's deliberations on the Jordan Canal Project, simultaneous discussions on the Qibya attack were also taking place from 19 October to 24 November. Those deliberations which resulted in international condemnation and the UN expressing the "strongest censure" of Israel's Qibya attack undoubtedly colored the discussions on Israel's canal project.<sup>23</sup>

In a further sign of its attempt to leverage the political dynamics to halt the Jordan Canal Project, Syria's leadership linked U.S. regional efforts to the Qibya attack and the UN Security Council Jordan Canal deliberations. According to U.S. diplomatic reporting, Syrian officials expressed concern to U.S. officials that violence from local Syrians might erupt if the canal project continued. Speaking to U.S. Ambassador to Syria James Moose on 17 October, Syrian President Shishakli repeatedly warned of the dangers of the Jordan canal project continuing, noting that U.S. financial aid had made the project possible and therefore the U.S. had a special responsibility on this issue. Shishakli further warned that local Syrian residents may not be able to wait for the UN Security Council to finish their deliberations and a similar incident to Tel al-Mutilla might ensue. Concerned about the success of Johnston's pending Syria visit to discuss

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<sup>22</sup> "Letter Dated 16 October 1953 from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3108/Rev.1)" (United Nations Security Council, October 16, 1953), 1–2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/633965/files/S\\_3108\\_Rev.1-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/633965/files/S_3108_Rev.1-EN.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1953* (United Nations, New York: Department of Public Information, 1980), 223.

the Jordan River plan, the U.S. Ambassador noted in his secret telegram to the State Department that the U.S. may wish to stop the project to curry favor with Syria suggesting:

“It [is] clear from [the] foregoing, that settlement [of the] Banat Yaacov affair [is] of paramount concern [to] Shishakli and [the] Johnston mission would have better reception here if it can be disclosed prior [to] his arrival that [the] USG [is] taking positive action [to] secure stoppage [of] Israeli works. To improve [the] chances [of] Johnston’s success, [the State] Department may wish [to] authorize me [to] inform Shishakli of measures already taken by [the] USG to discourage further work on [the] Israeli diversion scheme.”<sup>24</sup>

One major political signal sent by the U.S. Government in this regard was its 21 October decision to withhold U.S. economic aid to Israel until it complies with General Bennike’s request to halt the Jordan Canal project until a final agreement on the matter is reached.<sup>25</sup> Around noon that same day, U.S. Ambassador Moose spoke with Shishakli who voiced his satisfaction with the U.S. decision noting it had bolstered his confidence in the Eisenhower administration. However, in still keeping with Syria’s UN Strategic Framework, Ambassador Moose noted that Shishakli observed that, “Israel continues to work on the diversion canal in defiance [of] UNTSO and said [that] if peaceful means fail [the] Syrian Government could not divest itself of [its] responsibility to protect legitimate Syrian interests.”<sup>26</sup> With its cards on the table and the political situation in its favor, the stage was set for Syria to once again leverage the United Nations to preserve its sovereign claims in the demilitarized zone.

On 27 October 1953, General Vagn Bennike was invited by the UN Security Council to give testimony on the current tension along the Armistice lines, with particular reference to the

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<sup>24</sup> “Doc. 693 The Ambassador in Syria (Moose) to the Department of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, October 17, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d693>.

<sup>25</sup> “Doc. 699 Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to the President,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, October 21, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d699>.

<sup>26</sup> “Doc. 701 The Ambassador in Syria (Moose) to the Department of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, October 21, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d701>.

Qibya attack and the Jordan Canal Project. The Qibya Incident—as it was referred to in UN reporting—was by far the most egregious armistice violation to occur in 1953, and the results of the UN investigation into the incident marked a low point in Israel’s international standing. Called for by France, the United Kingdom and the United States, the latest Security Council session aimed to establish the facts of the UN observer investigation into the events before holding deliberations. Although the Qibya events themselves had no direct bearing on the tension within the Syrian-Israeli demilitarized zone, the fact that the Security Council considered the Syrian complaint while the Qibya deliberations were ongoing, highlights the potential rationale and timing of Syria’s latest complaint to the Security Council. Presenting the results of the UN investigation into Qibya, General Bennike noted in his report that the “Qibya incident” should not be seen as an isolated event, “but as culminating points or high fever marks” in a general trend of increasing tension along Israel’s various armistice lines to include Egypt in the south.<sup>27</sup> Recounting the process of the investigation, Bennike noted that UN observers arrived at 6:30 a.m. on the scene at Qibya on 15 October 1953 following the night time raid by Israeli military personnel just hours before. Upon reaching the village the Acting Chairman discovered the following:

“he found that between thirty and forty buildings had been completely demolished, including the school, the water-pumping station, the police station and the telephone office. Near the police station one lorry had been completely destroyed by fire. The necks and trigger attachments of incendiary bombs were found nearby. Bullet-riddled bodies near the doorways and multiple bullet hits on the doors of the demolished houses indicated that the inhabitants had been forced to remain inside until their homes were blown up over them. There were several small craters along the western perimeter of the village, and the tails of 2-inch mortar shells were found. Four gaps, approximately 3 meters in width, had been

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<sup>27</sup> “630th Meeting October 27, 1953, The Palestine Question: Compliance with and Enforcement of the General Armistice Agreements, with Special Reference to Recent Acts of Violence, and in Particular to the Incident at Qibya on 14-15 October 1953 (S/3109, S/3110, S/3111) (Continued),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 7, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631616/files/S\\_PV.630-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631616/files/S_PV.630-EN.pdf).

blasted in the barbed-wire protective fence surrounding the village. Fragments, easily identifiable as parts of Bangalore torpedoes, were found near these gaps.”<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, witnesses at the scene described Israeli soldiers in uniforms attacking the village and throwing hand grenades of which unexploded grenades with Hebrew writing with a recent manufacture date as well as three bags of TNT were found at the scene. Elmo Hutchison, the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission determined that the Israeli military was wholeheartedly responsible for the raid that killed at least 53 Arab inhabitants and demolished at least 40 homes. Hutchison’s rationale for making this determination was based off of the sophisticated nature of the raid and how only a well-trained military could have carried out such an operation. On this point he stated:

“The method of attack. The evidence noted indicated that this raid was well planned and carried out by men expertly trained in the fundamentals of sudden and sustained attack. It seems highly improbable that other than active military forces could have carried out this raid without suffering heavy casualties from their own fire, or from the explosions of their demolition charges. The approach to these villages from inside Israel is through an area protected by Israel military forces. No group the size of that employed in the Qibya-Budrus-Shiqba attack could move into this area undetected. In my estimation between 250 and 300 well-trained Israel soldiers carried out this operation.”<sup>29</sup>

This condemnation of Israel’s violation of the armistice agreement with Jordan was summed up in a resolution passed in an emergency session of the Mixed Armistice Commission on 15 October that characterized the Israeli raid that killed men, women and children as “cold-blooded murder”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “630th Meeting October 27, 1953, The Palestine Question: Compliance with and Enforcement of the General Armistice Agreements, with Special Reference to Recent Acts of Violence, and in Particular to the Incident at Qibya on 14-15 October 1953 (S/3109, S/3110, S/3111) (Continued),” 4.

<sup>29</sup> “630th Meeting October 27, 1953, The Palestine Question: Compliance with and Enforcement of the General Armistice Agreements, with Special Reference to Recent Acts of Violence, and in Particular to the Incident at Qibya on 14-15 October 1953 (S/3109, S/3110, S/3111) (Continued),” 7.

<sup>30</sup> “630th Meeting October 27, 1953, The Palestine Question: Compliance with and Enforcement of the General Armistice Agreements, with Special Reference to Recent Acts of Violence, and in Particular to the Incident at Qibya on 14-15 October 1953 (S/3109, S/3110, S/3111) (Continued),” 5.

In the same presentation of his report on the Qibya attack, Bennike turned briefly to situation on the Syrian-Israeli frontier, describing its cause as being linked to the question of sovereignty. While calling for an easing of tension between Jordan and Israel, Bennike noted that the problem on the Syria-Israeli side was not one of stopping infiltration but of managing affairs within the demilitarized zone. He suggested that to resolve the Syrian-Israeli dispute, both sides should recognize the authority granted to the MAC for managing the affairs in this zone. Citing comments of his predecessor General Riley, to which both sides agreed, regarding Israeli or Syrian claims to have rights to do as they wish within the DMZ, “under the provisions of the Armistice Agreement, neither party could validly claim to have a free hand in the demilitarized zone over civilian activity, while military activity was totally excluded.” By adhering to these two principles, and granting the MAC the final say on disagreements, Bennike argued that the Syrian-Israeli disputes could be resolved before spiraling into further clashes similar to the cross border incidents in 1951.<sup>31</sup>

Following Bennike’s presentation on the Qibya and Jordan Canal Project situations, the Security Council sought in earnest to bring about an easing of tensions with the start of their deliberations on the Syrian complaint. At the onset of the UNSC’s 629<sup>th</sup> meeting, Pakistan’s Representative Zafrulla Khan suggested that before considering the Syrian complaint, the Council should issue a resolution in accordance with General Bennike’s 23 September request calling on Israel to immediately suspend its operations while the Security Council deliberates the dispute. Likely in response to mounting international pressure and the U.S. withholding of funds, Aba Eban of the Israeli delegation shared that his Government was willing to arrange a

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<sup>31</sup> “630th Meeting October 27, 1953, The Palestine Question: Compliance with and Enforcement of the General Armistice Agreements, with Special Reference to Recent Acts of Violence, and in Particular to the Incident at Qibya on 14-15 October 1953 (S/3109, S/3110, S/3111) (Continued),” 15.

temporary suspension of the project. Responding to Israel's positive gesture, the Pakistani representative called for enshrining Israel's commitment in the form of a resolution. However, the representative from France balked at the idea considering it "pointless" and suggested that "a visitor from Mars... would be somewhat perplexed" at requiring a resolution when a state has already given their government's word before the Council.<sup>32</sup>

Although the Pakistani-French resolution dispute seemed minor, the Syrian delegation considered it essential for the stability of the demilitarized zone. Representing Syria in the dispute, Farid Zayn al-Din underscored the importance of the Security Council still passing a resolution to guarantee that Israel would not be able to justify saying something one day and then changing course the next. Zayn al-Din made his incredulity of Israel's willingness to comply apparent when he stated, "The statement just made by the representative of Israel does indicate some change in the Israel Government's view. Up to now, the government has had a totally recalcitrant attitude regarding the acceptance of General Bennike's decisions."<sup>33</sup> Zayn al-Din further suggested that if Israel was serious about complying with the request then passing a resolution would only further affirm its commitment and help diffuse an already tense situation. With a resolution, Zayn al-Din concluded, the 15,000 people with property rights in the area could rest assured knowing that their lands and water will not continue to be at risk while the international community deliberate over their fate.<sup>34</sup> It is worth recalling how on this last point, Shishakli already warned the U.S. that if the Jordan Canal project continued during the

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<sup>32</sup> "631st Meeting October 27, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev. 1) (Continued)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 8, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631617/files/S\\_PV.631-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631617/files/S_PV.631-EN.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> "631st Meeting October 27, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev. 1) (Continued)," 3.

<sup>34</sup> "631st Meeting October 27, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev. 1) (Continued)," 4.

deliberations, his government may not be able to prevent a situation similar to the Tel al-Mutilla clashes. As such, securing a resolution in this regard was essential to keeping Syria engaged on a purely political level. Bowing to pressure, the French delegation submitted an unanimously adopted resolution noting with satisfaction Israel's positive statement and deeming it desirable that the Jordan Canal project suspend operations during the Council's discussions.<sup>35</sup>

In response to Israel's UN commitment to temporarily suspend its Jordan Canal project, the United States released economic aid to Israel. On 21 October, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles issued a press release recommending that President Eisenhower grant Israel economic aid in the amount of \$26 million, accounting for six months of funding from the current fiscal year. Dulles stressed that the initial reason for withholding funds to Israel, earmarked under the Mutual Security Act of 1953, was to support the local UN machinery after Israel "did not meet General Bennike's request." However, Dulles noted that since Israel has now agreed to cease its operations the initial roadblock had been removed stating:

"The policy of the United States to support the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in this matter has thus been realized, and the impediment to the present grant of economic aid to Israel has been removed."<sup>36</sup>

Conscious that its decision might upset regional leaders, the U.S. State Department informed its ambassador in Syria to relay to the Syrian government that its decision to withhold and then grant funds "was based solely upon our desire back up UN machinery in the field." The dispatch noted it was important for Syria to realize that it could not be beholden to additional conditions in this regard as other nations may attempt make such demands on other U.S. economic aid

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<sup>35</sup> "The Palestine Question - France: Draft Resolution [on Suspension of the Works Started on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone] (S/3128)" (United Nations Security Council, October 27, 1953), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634105/files/S\\_3128-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634105/files/S_3128-EN.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> "Doc. 711 Department of State Press Release," Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Historical Documents - Office of the Historian, October 28, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d711>.

programs.<sup>37</sup> Responding to the U.S. Ambassador on 29 October, Shishakli expressed his satisfaction that the U.S. took “effective measures” to support Bennike’s ruling and hoped that the U.S. would leverage its influence in the future to ensure Israeli compliance with UN resolutions. Commenting back to the State Department, Ambassador Moose noted that the political environment seemed ripe for Johnston to propose his Jordan Valley initiative but to capitalize on Shishakli’s favorable attitude, Moose suggested that the Security Council “should deal effectively with current Syrian complaint.”<sup>38</sup>

Following Israel’s compliance with the latest French resolution, the Security Council reconvened to consider Syria’s complaint. On 30 October 1953, the Presiding Representative of the UNSC session, Mr. W. Borberg of Denmark, opened the meeting with a letter from Major General Bennike on the status of Israel’s compliance. The letter noted that, pursuant to the Council’s 27 October request, the work had been suspended on 28 October, a dam which prevented water flowing into the Western channel of the Jordan River removed, and another dam at the entrance to the new Israeli canal was completed although divers were still patching up holes.<sup>39</sup> As the newest Arab delegate on the Security Council, Lebanon’s representative Charles Malik picked up the mantle of the Arab struggle in the UNSC. A renowned diplomat, academic, and philosopher, Charles Malik represented the Lebanese delegation since the San Francisco Conference and notably contributed to the drafting of the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human

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<sup>37</sup> “Doc. 713 The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Syria,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, October 28, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d713>.

<sup>38</sup> “Doc. 716 The Ambassador in Syria (Moose) to the Department of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, October 29, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d716>.

<sup>39</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (United Nations Security Council, 1953), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631619/files/S\\_PV.633-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631619/files/S_PV.633-EN.pdf).

Rights in 1948. During the present debates he opened by pointing out that the continued work of the divers might constitute a violation of the latest resolution, however Mr. Borberg interrupted tabling all substantive discussions until after hearing from the two parties to the dispute.<sup>40</sup>

As the complainant in the dispute, the Syrian delegation addressed the Security Council first, and delivered a detailed warning of the dire consequences that could arise should Israel continue to flout its UN obligations. Of note, the Syrian delegation's opening comments have significant bearing on the logic of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework. Making no mention of the political motivations behind the timing of the Syrian complaint, Farid Zayn al-Din opened by explaining that his government was compelled to raise the matter to the Security Council because of Israel's continued disregard for the local UN machinery and the Armistice Agreement.<sup>41</sup>

Although fully cognizant of the simultaneous Qibya discussions underway, Zayn al-Din argued that the Jordan Canal project signified one of the most important issues ever faced by the Security Council saying "This issue under consideration is undoubtedly the most important one that the Security Council has had to deal with since Count Bernadotte became United Nations Mediator in 1948."<sup>42</sup> Although a thinly veiled attempt to paint Israel as a habitual aggressor and violator of the UN by referencing Bernadotte, the linkage between Count Bernadotte and Zayn al-Din's following comments underscore the importance of the UN system remaining an effective mechanism to secure Syria's strategic interests. On this point, Zayn al-Din argued that Israel continues to take steps in contravention of the United Nations in order to render the

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<sup>40</sup> "633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 2.

<sup>41</sup> "633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 2-3.

<sup>42</sup> "633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 5.

international system meaningless. If this happens, war would be a natural byproduct as the Syrian government would be compelled to defend its interests by force arguing:

“In view of the attitude of Israel, something more must be done by the United Nations or else the policy of Israel, based on defiance of the United Nations authority and on the creation of what Israel considers to be accomplished facts, may lead to the use of the full right of legitimate defense in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. The choice before us is clear...It is evident that Israel is now trying hard to knock out the central piece and pivot of the United Nations machinery in the area so that the whole machinery will be stilled or destroyed. That central piece of the machinery is the function of the United Nations Chief of Staff, whose authority Israel wants to destroy. If that authority is destroyed, for all practical purposes there would no longer be an armistice...At one time, the United Nations appointed a Mediator, Count Bernadotte. He was slain. Thus, the authority of the United Nations—which he represented—was destroyed in cold blood...That was the signal for a new trend in Israel’s policy... Today, the Tel-Aviv authorities flout, in their argumentative and intellectually dishonest and arrogant manner, the decisions not of a mediator or conciliator but of the holder of international authority—authority acquired in virtue of the Security Council’s actions and of an agreement to which the Tel-Aviv authorities are a party.”<sup>43</sup>

Given Israel’s alleged policy of UN obstruction, Zayn al-Din emphasized the importance of the Security Council’s discussions remaining focused on the key issues at stake in the dispute.

From the Syrian delegation’s perspective, one key aspect of the Jordan Canal dispute was the military dimension. Given that the two sides of the dispute were bound together by a military Armistice arrangement, Zayn al-Din warned the Security Council against straying into economic and political conversations likely to be raised by the Israeli delegation. Zayn al-Din noted that whenever a question related to Palestine is raised before the Council, the Israeli delegation brings up erroneous topics turning “a simple and clear question into a complex one in order to confuse the discussion and to befog the atmosphere of the Council.”<sup>44</sup> Sticking to the Syrian delegation’s

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<sup>43</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 9.

<sup>44</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 5.

military argument, Zayn al-Din argued that “Israel has penetrated the demilitarized zone to try to steal the Jordan” and its subsequent diversion scheme would impact the military situation on the ground.<sup>45</sup> Citing the military impact of diverting the Jordan River of the river Zayn al-Din suggested:

“The river as an obstacle to the movement of troops in the demilitarized zone is, in the place where it now flows, within firing range of our artillery and infantry, should Israel forces move to attack. Were the river to be removed from the demilitarized zone to Israel, the entire defense set-up would be changed, and a military gain would be realized by the other side.<sup>46</sup>

Zayn al-Din then proceed to list a series of other military advantages Israel would gain as a result of diverting the river out of the DMZ and into Israeli-controlled territory. He suggested that Israel, should it complete its project and construct dams, could shut off water at will, creating dry zones for its military forces and equipment to cross on their own terms. Alternatively, with the river flowing completely on the Israeli side of the border, Israel could merely construct bridges over the river to give themselves a military advantage on moving troops into the area. Finally, the ability to create fortified structures on both sides of the river would mean that Israel could divert its forces elsewhere in the country which would be another military gain.<sup>47</sup>

Diverging briefly from his own request to limit the conversation to military matters, Zayn al-Din also highlighted the impact the canal project would have on the Arab inhabitants and Arab lands within the Demilitarized Zone. Taking a different opinion from the standard ruling that civilian work on non-Arab land could proceed, the Syrian delegate suggested that such views are “immaterial” as the DMZ is considered “one unit.” He noted that if Israel constructed the canal

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<sup>45</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 11.

<sup>46</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 11–12.

<sup>47</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 12.

project anywhere within the DMZ—on Arab lands or not—it would risk disrupting the restoration of civilian life in violation of the Armistice Agreement. On this point, Zayn al-Din notes that the project “would put the whole civilian life of the demilitarized zone literally at the mercy of Israel” since Israel could control the flow of water Arab farmers and families are dependent upon. He further stated that this would not only impact the property that is “99 per cent” Arab-owned but would also jeopardize any future work that the Republic of Syria and Kingdom of Jordan may wish to conduct along the river.<sup>48</sup>

Zayn al-Din concluded his opening remarks by calling on the Security Council to take more effective measures to strengthen the UN institutions and insure Israel’s compliance with such international machinery. He warned that absent an effective international mechanism in place, Israel would continue to violate UN resolutions suggesting that Israel’s latest compliance only happened as a result of political and economic pressure from the international community and the United States.<sup>49</sup> Regarding this element of international pressure, the Syrian delegate noted that more could be done in this regard by the UN such as calling out the “actions of some big Powers” who offer wholehearted support to Israel at the military, diplomatic, and economic levels despite Israel’s alleged lack of cooperation with the international organization. On the point of calling out member states for their unwavering support to Israel and closing with another reference to Count Bernadotte, Zayn al-Din noted that “Even the terroristic organizations which slew the late Count Bernadotte have their centers in other countries, some of which are in this city of New York, the seat of the United Nations.” The Syrian delegate finished by suggesting

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<sup>48</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 12–13.

<sup>49</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 4.

there are promising cracks in the firm edifice of Israel's supporters who can no longer justifiably support the state as it continues to flout its international agreements.<sup>50</sup>

For its part, the Israeli delegation implored the Security Council to support its canal project, citing legal, economic and moral reasons. Aba Eban opened his country's remarks by emphasizing that the debate at hand was not about land-ownership within the demilitarized zone, rather Eban suggested the topic was a matter of Israel's long-term survival and economic independence. After critiquing Zayn al-Din's comments as "unfounded...vituperation" Eban stated he would begin by delivering "the first serious contribution of today's discussion" and hoped that the Security Council would not be swayed by the false claims of the Syrian representative.<sup>51</sup> He began by recounting the historical basis for Israel's right to construct the canal within the demilitarized zone. According to a 12 September 1921 concession granted by the British High Commissioner for Palestine to Pinhas Rutenberg, a Zionist entrepreneur involved in electric generation in Palestine, Pinhas was given the authority to use water in the Auja Basin near Jaffa to generate electricity. In 1923 Pinhas created the Palestine Electric Company and was granted a second concession from the British on 5 March 1926 to generate electricity from the Jordan and Yarmouk Rivers.<sup>52</sup> On the basis of this concession, Eban noted that the Palestine Electric Company currently working in the DMZ had a private right to do so stating, "It is a right which, according to the principles of international law, any government would be obliged to respect and to uphold."<sup>53</sup> However, beyond the question of private rights and the claim that the water would only temporarily divert from the Jordan before emptying into

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<sup>50</sup> "633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 15.

<sup>51</sup> "633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 15.

<sup>52</sup> Margit Cohn, *Energy Law in Israel* (Kluwer Law International, 2010), 46.

<sup>53</sup> "633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 16.

Lake Tiberias, Eban noted that supporting the project was also a moral imperative. On this he stated:

“The question is whether Israel’s access to the only meagre source of natural power and surplus water available to it shall be submitted to the mercy of a neighboring State implacably opposed to co-operation with Israel and bent upon our economic downfall. If any such sinister veto policy were approved—which we cannot believe will happen—our country would face economic servitude and dependence; its bright vision of social progress and stability would be obscured; large areas would be doomed to perpetual aridity, while surplus waters in the north remained piled up in useless swamps, imprisoned by an illegitimate Syria veto. Israel would have nothing before it but permanent dependence, even for its daily bread, upon external sources of aid. What is for Syria a single phase of its avowed political and economic warfare against Israel, and for other countries an international dispute of marginal importance, is for Israel a vital issue of national freedom and economic independence... This project for the construction of an electric power station on Israel’s soil deserves nothing but sympathy and support”<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the highlighting the canal project’s permissibility on the basis of private right and alleged moral imperative, Eban dismissed Syrian claims that the project would give Israel a military advantage. Rather than creating a military advantage, Eban suggested in standard fashion that the project would add a military barrier and therefore not contradict the Armistice Agreement. To bolster his case, Eban maintained that jurisprudential precedence on the Lake Hula project was instructive in this matter. Citing General Riley’s remarks from 1951, Eban specifically highlighted Riley’s conclusions that as the Chief of Staff of the Mixed Armistice Commission his only concern in the case of the Hula Marshes was whether or not the project would adversely impact the rights of Arab land owners. He also read Riley’s comments stating “I feel the United Nations should never impede progressive work... [and] I have never questioned the right of the Hula concession as a whole.”<sup>55</sup> Eban noted that the very integrity of

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<sup>54</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 17.

<sup>55</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 20–21.

the armistice system would be in question if there was no consistency in the institution's legal rulings on matters especially in relation to the same countries and dispute.<sup>56</sup>

Eban concluded his opening statements by once again arguing that supporting Israel's project was a moral necessity for an otherwise helpless country. Eban justified this view by stating that Israel's neighbors already have plenty of land and resources and are in no need of the Jordan River. Speaking to fact that Israel needed the Jordan River more than the Arab states and should therefore be entitled to it, Eban pointed to the fact that the Arab states were in possession of a vast territorial expanse as well as water resources including the Nile, the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Orontes and Litany River. Meanwhile, Israel controlled only 8,000 square miles of territory of which much of it is desert. Eban referred to the "meagre" resources of water flowing from the Galilee to south of Lake Tiberias as "the bloodstream and the life artery" of Israel that should be protected from "covetous eyes".<sup>57</sup> As such, the Israeli delegation hoped that the UN Security Council could, on the basis of the facts he just presented, swiftly remove any obstacles to this "wholly peaceful and constructive work".<sup>58</sup>

Before concluding the first major debate, the Lebanese and Syrian delegates challenged Eban's claim that Israel was the vulnerable party surrounded by resource rich and aggressive neighbors. First to respond, Charles Malik delivered an impassioned statement about Israel having more resources at its disposal than the one's referenced in Eban's remarks suggesting:

"...what the Arab world is actually dealing with is not only that tiny territory, but with that tiny territory with influence and supporters all over the world. It is, therefore, the Arab world versus practically the entire world, which is at stake, and not just the Arab world and that tiny territory... That picture is a false one.

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<sup>56</sup> "633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 23.

<sup>57</sup> "633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 32.

<sup>58</sup> "633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 33.

The real picture is this: enormous forces, the enormous international forces, are supporting Israel from all over the world. The Arab world is really the poor world surrounded by forces on every side. It is the exact opposite of this beautiful geographic story which has been depicted for us.”<sup>59</sup>

Echoing many of Malik’s comments, Zayn al-Din also pointed out that what Eban’s 8,000 square miles comment left out was that ninety percent of that land was Arab owned territory whose owners are now destitute refugees barred from returning by Israeli authorities. Preparing to also dismiss the idea that the Lake Hula rulings were analogous to the canal project, the session was brought to a close and debates were set to resume on 10 November.<sup>60</sup>

In the interim, the United States continued to grapple with Syria’s United Nations and sovereignty demands in their negotiations over the Jordan Valley development project. Known as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) project, the plan—modeled off of the TVA’s success in supporting the Tennessee Valley’s electrical and agricultural development—would bring serve as the basis for joint Arab and Israeli cooperation on the future economic development of the region.<sup>61</sup> However, in meetings with U.S. officials, Syria’s President Adib Shishakli cited two key issues he had with the plan. The first issue raised by Shishakli related to the conditions under which Syria would agree to such a plan. According to U.S. diplomatic reporting, Ambassador Moose noted in his 1 November meeting with Shishakli that the Syria’s expected a quid pro quo in the UN discussions on the Jordan Canal project noting that Shishakli “steadfastly insisted on hinging Syrian acceptance of TVA plan on Israel’s “compliance with UN Resolutions”. The second issue Shishakli raised with the TVA plan involved the question of Syria’s sovereign

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<sup>59</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 35.

<sup>60</sup> “633rd Meeting October 30, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 40.

<sup>61</sup> Marsha Freeman, “The Tennessee Valley Authority: A Model for World Development” 17, no. No. 49 (December 21, 1990): 12.

claims. During the same 1 November meeting Ambassador Moose noted that Shishakli feels that the TVA plan “disregards Syria’s legitimate rights and took [the] position that Syria had right to half of the waters of the Jordan between Hula and Tiberias.”<sup>62</sup> In a further indication of the importance of sovereign claims in the area, the U.S. Secretary State noted in a meeting with Farid Zayn al-Din that the Syrian delegate appeared “more interested in [the] strategic position of [the] Jordan channel and in preserving Syrian frontage thereon than in [the] economic aspects [of] Israel use [of] Jordan water.”<sup>63</sup><sup>64</sup> Given the potential impact such a project could have for the resolution of sovereign claims along the DMZ, Eric Johnston recommended that the U.S. move forward with the plan as a means of resolving many of the outstanding disputes between Israel and its neighbors.<sup>65</sup>

Back at the Security Council, the Syrian delegation resumed its assault on Aba Eban’s testimony, devoting much attention to distinguishing the current Jordan canal dispute from the Hula drainage project. On 10 November, Farid Zayn al-Din devoted an exhaustive two-and-a-half-hour-long meeting to refuting Aba Eban’s 30 October statements. Before diving into the distinguishing features however, Zayn al-Din began with a standard defense of Syria’s strategic interests, noting the Jordan Canal Project was not about the Jordan River’s economic importance, but the implications the project will have on the final delineation of sovereignty. Zayn al-Din did

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<sup>62</sup> “Doc. 720 The Ambassador in Syria (Moose) to the Department of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, November 1, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d720>.

<sup>63</sup> “Doc. 722 The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Syria,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, November 3, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d722>.

<sup>64</sup> Of note, this meeting between the U.S. Secretary of State and Zayn al-Din happened in response to Israel’s 2 November decision to continuing working at the Canal site in apparent contravention of the Security Council’s resolution.

<sup>65</sup> “Doc. 732 Report by the President’s Special Representative (Johnston) to the President,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, November 17, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d732>.

point out, however, that if the Canal project was about economics, then Israel's unilateral project would thwart other international development efforts like the U.S. TVA project that would yield greater economic benefit.<sup>66</sup> Turning back to the point of sovereignty, Zayn al-Din noted that in its pursuit of control over the region's waters and over civilian life in general, Israel has relied on armed forces to guarantee the project's progress. He argued that permitting Israeli armed forces to operate within the Demilitarized Zone to protect the canal project "would allow the Israel authorities to exercise acts of *sovereignty* over the zone...because Israel cannot proceed to work in that Arab area except by exercising sovereignty through its forces there."<sup>67</sup> Aside from denying any Syria's territorial claims, Zayn al-Din noted that the Israelis continued to deny the Chief of Staff's ruling on the projects permissibility under the Armistice Agreement. Summarizing his understanding of Eban's remarks Zayn al-Din argued that the Israeli position consisted of five elements: 1) no Syrian right to object to Israeli projects; 2) no UN authority to make them cease their activity; 3) no return to normal civilian life; 4) no international rights to the Jordan River; and 5) no relevant military considerations.<sup>68</sup> Given the huge gulf in the two countries positions on the demilitarized zone, the Syrian delegation argued that the only viable solution to address this impasse is by a full implementation of the Armistice Agreement and an adherence to the international machinery of the Chairman and Mixed Armistice Commission. Failure to implement the Armistice Agreement would have wide reaching implications for regional security for, according to Zayn al-Din, it would send the message that, "agreements and international guarantees of any kind were of no real value in stopping Zionist expansion into the

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<sup>66</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1953*, 226.

<sup>67</sup> "636th Meeting November 10, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/31/08/Rev.1) (Continued)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631622/files/S\\_PV.636-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631622/files/S_PV.636-EN.pdf).

<sup>68</sup> "636th Meeting November 10, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/31/08/Rev.1) (Continued)," 4.

demilitarized zone and beyond the demilitarized zone.”<sup>69</sup> In keeping with the standard logic of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework, Zayn al-Din argued that without an effective international mechanism to safeguard regional interests, the Arabs would have to rely on self-defense to stop such territorial expansion and disregard for international norms.

Turning to the distinguishing features between the Jordan Canal Project and the Hula drainage project, the Syrian delegation emphasized that the key difference was the issue of sovereignty. Suggesting at first that the possibility that an imminent conflict might break out between the two parties was reason enough to distinguish the two incidents, Zayn al-Din claimed in hyperbolic fashion that Israel’s canal project is “undoubtedly the most important issue that the Security Council or the United Nations authorities in the field have had to deal with since the Palestine incidents of 1948.”<sup>70</sup> On the more substantive front, Zayn al-Din noted that what separated the two projects was the fact that the Hula project did not, on a whole, infringe on the sovereign rights of Arab and Syrian farmers to the extent of the Jordan canal project. In the cases where the Hula project did impact Syrian farmland rights, he recalled that the project was compelled to stop such as happened when seventy percent of water declined in the Buteiha region in Syrian territory. In contrast, for the Syrian government the Jordan River constitutes the “life-line of the demilitarized zone and also of the area in southern Syria which is watered by it.”<sup>71</sup> Zayn al-Din emphasized that contrary to Israeli claims that the Syrian Government has no claims or authority within the DMZ he maintained that:

“The plain fact is that over 99 per cent of that area of the demilitarized zone, not to mention Syrian territory affected by the diversion, is owned by Palestinian and

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<sup>69</sup> “636th Meeting November 10, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/31/08/Rev.1) (Continued),” 6.

<sup>70</sup> “636th Meeting November 10, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/31/08/Rev.1) (Continued),” 9.

<sup>71</sup> “636th Meeting November 10, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/31/08/Rev.1) (Continued),” 9.

Syrian Arabs. Syria has a legitimate interest in keeping the demilitarized zone intact and protecting the interests of its nationals, both in the demilitarized zone and in Syrian territory.”<sup>72</sup>

Concluding on the importance of sovereignty in and around the Demilitarized Zone, Zayn al-Din suggested that regarding existing claims to the Jordan’s waters, at present more land in Syrian territory is irrigated by water than in Palestine. He noted that Eban’s suggestion that Syria merely wanted to deny water to Israel as part of an economic war overlooks the existing reliance of Syrian farmers to such waters. However, at the end of the day, given that the question of sovereignty within the DMZ is pending final status negotiations, neither Israel nor Syria should be exercising its sovereignty within the DMZ. To date, Zayn al-Din quipped, it is Israel who continues to violate the Armistice Agreement and make illegal territorial claims.<sup>73</sup>

At the end of its exhaustive account of the current situation, the Syrian delegation emphasized once again the importance of the United Nations remaining an effective institution. To do so in this case, Zayn al-Din called on the United Nations to see to it that the Armistice Agreement is fully implemented especially on matters involving sovereignty and the resumption of normal civilian life. He maintained, per his government’s logic, that an effective international institution would safeguard peace in the region and prevent a situation wherein states are left with no option but to rely on self-defense to confront aggressors. Ending with a final plea for the UN to maintain its effectiveness Zayn al-Din stated:

“Syria was compelled to bring this issue to the Security Council because it feels so strongly its duty to preserve peace in the Near East. Peaceful solutions and healthy progress can result only from peaceful conditions and actions. We should not be turned from the course of peace by expansionist, unilateral, aggressive

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<sup>72</sup> “636th Meeting November 10, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/31/08/Rev.1) (Continued),” 12.

<sup>73</sup> “636th Meeting November 10, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/31/08/Rev.1) (Continued),” 15–19.

actions. Help us to preserve peace and to keep the Armistice Agreement, its only bulwark, real and effective.”<sup>74</sup>

With the Syrian case presented to the Security Council, the 636<sup>th</sup> meeting concluded with plans to begin opening the floor up to other delegations.

### **Lebanon and the Debate Between Syria and Israel**

As the first non-party to the dispute to address the Security Council, Charles Malik of the Lebanese delegation began his remarks by laying out what his country viewed as evidence of Israel’s Armistice Agreement violations. Speaking on 18 November during the 639<sup>th</sup> UN Security Council meeting, Charles Malik identified seven key areas where the Israelis had violated, from his perspective, both the letter and spirit of the agreement. He recounted how from the beginning the Jordan Canal project in the DMZ: 1) started unilaterally without agreement or consultation with the other party; 2) without the authorization of the Chief of Staff of the Mixed Armistice Commission; and 3) without making arrangements with local inhabitants whose water, lands and properties would be impacted. Malik noted further that the work would have several lasting impacts on the region to include: 4) substantial modifications to the geophysical features of the DMZ; 5) would benefit Israel militarily per the Chief of Staff’s determination; 6) would result in the definite integration of the DMZ into Israel’s economic and hydro-electrical system; and 7) would have a lasting change to the flow of an international river. Malik suggested that any one of these Armistice violations were reason enough to bring a halt to Israel’s Canal project.<sup>75</sup>

Potential Israeli violations of the Armistice Agreement aside, Charles Malik, like the Syrian delegation, identified sovereignty as the key underlying issue in the Jordan Canal

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<sup>74</sup> “636th Meeting November 10, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/31/08/Rev.1) (Continued),” 27.

<sup>75</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1953*, 226.

disputes. Acknowledging that both Israel and Syria often claim sovereignty for the same reasons, Malik noted that for Israel their claims to sovereignty were based off of the land delineations outlined in the 1947 Partition Plan, whereas Syrian claims were based off of its military occupation of the area during the 1948 War. Recounting how Israel's UN delegation has sought to dismiss Syria's sovereign claims that occupation does not equate with territorial right under international law, Malik pointed out statements from Israel's government officials whose remarks suggested a logic of territorial seizure as the basis for Israeli claims to the DMZ. According to 11 August 1953 comments by Israel's President Ben Gurion in *Look* magazine, Ben Gurion reportedly refused the idea that Israel would ever withdraw to UN recognized boundaries stating, "To go back to the lines originally set by the United Nations, never!" Malik also quoted remarks from Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett claiming that, "our territory was increased by war, and only war can alter it." Malik concluded on the Israeli perspective by noting the contradiction in the statements from Israel's highest government officials and those representing the country at the UN. On the basis of Ben Gurion and Sharett's comments, he noted, Syria should have its sovereign claims recognized within the DMZ.<sup>76</sup>

While acknowledging that Syrian sovereign claims over the DMZ were based off of its prior military occupation of the area, Malik noted that the position that really mattered in this dispute was the opinion of the United Nations machinery. Repeating comments from General Riley during the 542<sup>nd</sup> meeting, who himself was quoting his predecessor Ralph Bunche, Malik stated that the opinion of the Chief of Staff of UNTSO was that, "Questions of permanent boundaries, territorial sovereignty, customs, trade relations and the like must be dealt with in the

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<sup>76</sup> "639th Meeting November 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 7, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631625/files/S\\_PV.639-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631625/files/S_PV.639-EN.pdf).

ultimate peace settlement and not’—I repeat not—‘in the Armistice Agreement.’”<sup>77</sup> Malik also quoted General Riley’s opinion on the issue of sovereignty from a report he wrote in 1951 wherein Riley stated:

“...neither party to the Armistice Agreement...enjoys rights of sovereignty within the demilitarized zone. Any laws, regulations or ordinances in force prior to the Armistice Agreement which affected any areas included in the demilitarized zone are null and void.”<sup>78</sup>

Malik further cited opinions of UN Security Council members such as the United Kingdom, Turkey, the Netherlands, and India, all of which concurred with the position that so long as the armistice remains in place the question of sovereignty remains in abeyance. Lastly, Charles Malik suggested that the Hula case could be instructional in the Jordan canal case as the Israelis suggested by citing the final resolution on the case stating that policing within the DMZ, “will be on a local basis, without raising general questions of administration, jurisdiction, citizenship, and sovereignty”—and I wish to emphasize these last words.”<sup>79</sup>

Charles Malik ended his extensive analysis of the situation by noting several conclusions could be drawn on the question of sovereignty within the Demilitarized Zone. First, regardless of Syrian or Israeli territorial claims to the DMZ, the opinions of the UN machinery and Security Council are such that the question of sovereignty remains an outstanding question yet to be solved. Secondly, given that no state has sovereign rights over the DMZ, no single state can decide whether or not the work of the Palestine Electric Company can continue or not. Third, since neither state has sovereignty within the DMZ, no work should be conducted that

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<sup>77</sup> “639th Meeting November 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 8.

<sup>78</sup> “Letter Dated 12 March 1951 from the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Transmitting a Report on the Status of the Operations of the Mixed Armistice Commissions (S/2049),” 11–12.

<sup>79</sup> “639th Meeting November 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 9.

predetermines the fate of the land's ownership, such as the diversion of water into Israeli-held territory. Malik concluded by reading the position of his government which held that:

“the work of the corporation in the demilitarized zone should be suspended either until the question of sovereignty in the demilitarized zone is decided in a final settlement between Syria and Israel or until Syria and Israel have agreed on the legality and the usefulness of the work...any project in Syrian or Israeli territory which, if extended to the zone might effectively and practically predetermine one way or the other the question of sovereignty over the zone and, therefore, the destiny of the zone, must be stopped.”<sup>80</sup>

Before handing the conversation back to other Security Council members, Aba Eban took a moment to once again express Israel's rationale for viewing the DMZ as Israeli territory as opposed to Syrian. From Eban's perspective, the Israeli government's rights to access water within the DMZ—to the exclusion of Syria—is based off of geography, history, topography, and law. Concerning geography, Eban explained that the Jordan River, from the point of its rising north of Lake Hula down to its entry point in Jordan south of Lake Tiberias, only runs through one sovereign country—Israel. For its part, the Syrian frontiers never touch the Jordan River, and Eban suggested that one would have to commit an act of aggression against Israel to reach the river. Eban further contended that even if the Jordan River “belongs” to the DMZ, as the Syrian delegation claims, that would be further proof that it does not belong to the Syrians since the Armistice Agreement said specifically that administration of the DMZ rests with “Israelis” and “Arabs” locally recruited, not Syrians. The only territory Eban was willing to concede had some access to water in the area were the Buteiha Farms. However, he noted that the Buteiha farms were not contiguous to the Jordan River, and that while they may have received water from Jordan River canals, the Buteiha Farms also received water from other sources.<sup>81</sup> With regard to

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<sup>80</sup> “639th Meeting November 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 10.

<sup>81</sup> “639th Meeting November 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 10–27.

the historical dimensions of the dispute, Aba Eban argued that when the British and French sought to divide the territory of the former Ottoman Empire after World War I, the British refused to accept the Palestine Mandate boundaries if the sources of the Jordan River were not included. Eban noted how France, in its wisdom and logic, acquiesced to the British request—particularly given the abundance of other water resources in Syria—and laid out such terms within the Franco-British Agreement of 1923.<sup>82</sup>

In his closing remarks, Aba Eban characterized Syria's attitude throughout the process as obstructionist and troublesome given its threat of relying on "self-defense" to solve the impasse. Looking again to the precedent set by the Hula case, Eban noted that the present situation did not warrant granting Syria a right to veto the current canal project that serves the economic development and progress of the State of Israel. It is Israel that has been pursuing a *constructive* approach, he noted, in contrast to Syria's obstructionist behavior. On this latter point Eban warned of the dangers of Syria taking its obstructionist stance a step further by declaring a right to self-defense. Eban concluded by characterizing the Syrian government's obstructionist behavior as absurd for attempting to block electric power, energy projects as well as Israel's natural access to the Jordan.<sup>83</sup>

In a last-ditch effort to defend its case, the Syrian delegation interjected leveraging desperate language to argue against the dangers of Israel's Jordan canal project continuing. Zayn al-Din began by recalling how in the 633<sup>rd</sup> meeting he warned that his "Zionist opponents" would bring up points unrelated to the Syrian complaint and the violation of the armistice, in an attempt to befog the conversation and detract from the conversation at hand. He argued that even

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<sup>82</sup> "639th Meeting November 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 15, 27.

<sup>83</sup> "639th Meeting November 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 29–30.

if such historical, topographical, and geographical issues were true—which he said they were not—Syria would still have the Armistice Agreement on its side and the opinions of the UN machinery operating within the DMZ. Furthermore, Zayn al-Din criticized Eban’s suggestion that Syria had plenty of other water and therefore should be able to part with the Jordan. On this point, Zayn al-Din attributed the relative calm along the Syrian-Israeli frontier due to the very presence of the natural border of the Jordan River separating the two countries. If Israel were to gain full control over it, he warned, then events like the Qibya attack would be more frequent and Syria would be forced to respond. He concluded by drawing parallels to Israel’s actions vis-à-vis the Jordan River and the Shakespearean play widely considered anti-Semitic, the Merchant of Venice.<sup>84</sup> In his analogy, Zayn al-Din warns of the harmful repercussions to farmland and the potential outbreak of war if the Jordan is taken stating:

“Without in the least giving any anti-Semitic connotation to what I am going to say, or any anti-Semitic feeling, for we have none, I would like to recall the Merchant of Venice. In that story, one individual had debts against another, and the creditor was called Shylock. He had debts and he wanted a pound of flesh. But that pound of flesh would destroy the life of somebody else, and it was refused him. Israel has no debts to collect from other countries. Israel cannot take the River Jordan without having its ounce of blood, that is, by destroying the life of the area and disturbing its peace.”<sup>85</sup>

With its testimonies noted, the Security Council could finally begin its deliberations on the canal project and propose a way forward for to resolve the situation.

### **The Security Council and its Draft Resolutions**

From December 1953 to January 1954 the Security Council debated two proposed draft resolutions on how best to address the Jordan Canal disputes. At the heart of the debate was

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<sup>84</sup> “639th Meeting November 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 33–37.

<sup>85</sup> “639th Meeting November 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” 37.

whether or not the Canal project should continue to operate or not and on what basis. For supporters of Syria's position, they maintained that by spelling out in a resolution Syria's right to consent to any activity within the demilitarized zone, it would preserve the idea that neither side held absolute sovereignty to the area—and thus Syria's sovereign claims would be preserved. On the Israeli side, supporters of the canal project maintained the view that regional development projects were essential and that the only relevant issue to discuss was whether or not the canal project violated any aspect of the Armistice Agreement. In the end the debates would prove inconclusive with the final resolutions shot down. As in the previous section, the following is a detailed account of how Syria's interaction on the Jordan Canal question remained focused on the issue of sovereignty, with the Syrian delegation fighting at every juncture to insure its sovereign claims were secured.

Before opening the floor to the drafters of the two proposed resolutions, the UN Representatives of Pakistan and Lebanon offered their assessment as to why sovereignty remained the key issue driving the Jordan Canal dispute. During the 645<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the UN Security Council on 3 December, Zafrulla Khan of Pakistan argued that what was at stake in this dispute was not whether the canal project was beneficial or not, but whether the project violated the Armistice Agreement particularly on the aspect of sovereign rights. Citing the opinion of General Riley who stated “at no time do the Israelis have the authority to assume full control over non-military activities within the zone that extends beyond those [Israeli] villages”, Khan argued that under the current project Israel was exercising sovereignty over the DMZ by diverting a River that was not solely owned by and on the land of Israeli villagers.<sup>86</sup> In an effort

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<sup>86</sup> “645th Meeting December 3, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 9 (referencing 544th meeting, para. 25), [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632012/files/S\\_PV.645-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632012/files/S_PV.645-EN.pdf).

to help illustrate what the project might look like if the roles were reversed, Khan claimed that if Israel were allowed to divert water for local Israelis, on the basis of the Armistice Agreement, then Syria, who is also a party to that agreement, could choose to divert the river further north into Syrian held territory or even to Arab villages in the DMZ. If such a suggestion seemed problematic, then, Khan argued, it should be easy to see how this might appear to Syria as grounds to repudiate the whole Armistice Agreement with Israel. He therefore concluded that the Security Council should support General Bennike's request that the project be stopped until an agreement can be reached by the parties involved.<sup>87</sup>

Addressing the Council next on 11 December, Charles Malik of the Lebanese delegation warned that by allowing the Jordan Canal Project to continue, the question of sovereignty in this case would be greatly impacted in two important ways. Firstly, Malik contended that if the Security Council authorizes the Canal Project, they would in effect, grant de facto recognition of Israel's annexation of the Demilitarized Zone. Doing so, he warned, would further provide international backing for Israel's "expansionist ambitions" in pursuit of natural resources.<sup>88</sup> To date, Malik noted, Israel has flouted international resolutions and calls by the UN institutions to cease its activities in contravention to the Armistice Agreement. Specifically, he cited evidence from General Bennike who reported that despite calls by the UN to cease its activity beyond Israeli villages within the DMZ, "Israel police acting under orders from police headquarters outside the demilitarized zone exercise control over practically the entire demilitarized zone."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> "645th Meeting December 3, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1) (Continued)," 15.

<sup>88</sup> "646th Meeting December 11, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122) (Continued)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632013/files/S\\_PV.646-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632013/files/S_PV.646-EN.pdf).

<sup>89</sup> "646th Meeting December 11, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122) (Continued)," 3-4 (referencing 635th meeting, annex, section V, question 14).

According to Malik, such efforts to “Israelize” the DMZ were not limited to the Israel-Syrian frontier but extended to the border with Egypt and Mt. Scopus in Jerusalem. This he suggested was all part of a “premeditated plan gradually to “Israelize” all of Palestine.”<sup>90</sup>

The second point raised by Malik was the idea that if the Council approves the Jordan Canal project, they would be enshrining a dangerous precedent that places the “doctrine of progress” over Arab sovereign rights. According to Malik, the doctrine of progress is the idea that social and economic development—a key objective outlined in the UN Charter—is more important than questions concerning territorial control or other political issues in a given area. On this topic, Malik saw a direct link between UN tolerance of Israeli settlement activity and economic development with the dispossession of Arab lands stating:

“If we [Arabs] attach particular importance to this question of sovereignty, it is because the modern history of Palestine has taught us that development and settlement were never pursued in the Holy Land for innocent purposes but always concealed ulterior motives. Territorial expansion and the dispossession of others of their sovereign rights have been behind all such allegedly dynamic and constructive moves.”<sup>91</sup>

Continuing his critique on the doctrine of progress, Malik suggested that no amount of economic development could ever justify the seizure of natural resources. However, Malik noted that Israel continues to argue that the canal project should be judged from the perspective of its beneficial economic impact for Israel, not on the humanitarian impact it is having on Arab refugees nor its infringement on Arab sovereign rights under international law. On this last point, Charles Malik, like the Syrian representative, ended his remarks by targeting the Jewish identity of Israel for advocating this “doctrine of progress” concluding:

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<sup>90</sup> “646th Meeting December 11, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122) (Continued),” 5.

<sup>91</sup> “646th Meeting December 11, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122) (Continued),” 6.

“Is this the idea of “progress” which Israel is importing into the Near East? Is this the new dispensation wherewith we are to be saved? Is this the new Absolute, the new God, before which we should bow the knee? And what about the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, the Living God, to whom Pascal cried in the most crucial moment of his life? Has Israel outgrown this God?”<sup>92</sup>

Following his remarks, the debates of council members were temporarily concluded so that discussions on the two pending draft resolutions might be discussed.

Hoping to offer a solution to the dispute, on 16 December, France, the United Kingdom and the United States proposed a draft resolution calling for the temporary suspension of the Canal Project until an agreement could be reached. A key contentious piece of the tripartite draft resolution was the absence of any clear reference to Syrian claims in the dispute. According to paragraph 11 of the tripartite draft resolution, the Chief of Staff was empowered to reconcile “the interests” involved in the dispute without clearly identifying whose interests were at stake. Furthermore, the paragraph endorsed the concept of promoting the development of natural resources saying:

“[The Security Council] Requests and authorizes the Chief of Staff to explore possibilities of reconciling the interests involved in this dispute including rights in the Demilitarized Zone and full satisfaction of existing irrigation rights at all seasons, and to take such steps as he may deem appropriate to effect a reconciliation, having in view the development of natural resources affected in a just and orderly manner for the general welfare”<sup>93</sup>

After presenting their proposed resolution, the three drafters outlined their views behind supporting the local Mixed Armistice Commission machinery while leaving room for the Jordan Canal Project’s future operations. Having introduced the draft resolution, Henry Lodge of the United States expressed the view that the Canal Project should be evaluated

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<sup>92</sup> “646th Meeting December 11, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122) (Continued),” 21.

<sup>93</sup> “The Palestine Question: France, United Kingdom and United States - Draft Resolution (S/3151)” (United Nations Security Council, December 16, 1953), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/539475/files/S\\_3151-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/539475/files/S_3151-EN.pdf).

solely on the basis of its conformity with the Armistice Agreement. He noted that so long as the Chief of Staff of the MAC determines its compliance, no country (i.e. Syria) had the right to veto the work and the project should be encouraged to proceed. For his part, Gladwyn Jebb of the UK delegation expressed his dismay that a potentially beneficial project would have to be considered on its legality due to Israel's refusal to comply with General Bennike's request. Demonstrating his support of the local UN machinery, Jebb posited that the Chairman of the Mixed Armistice Commission is "probably the only barrier against complete chaos" in the region.<sup>94</sup> However, he noted that his delegation was not convinced by the arguments advanced before the Council requiring Syrian consent and dismissed the notion that in the absence of a lasting peace development projects should cease. Finally, after recounting the history of the dispute, Henri Hoppenot of France hoped that a final status agreement might be reached to settle this dispute and expressed in the interim his hope that a development project not be held up by potential "theoretical" military exercises.<sup>95</sup>

The following day, Israel and Syria shared their perspectives on the strengths and deficiencies of the tripartite draft resolution, giving special attention to the resolution's potential impact on their respective sovereign claims. Opening the 649<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Security Council on 17 December, Aba Eban voiced support with the drafters' rejection of Syria's right to veto the project, while drawing the line further by denying the UN and Syria sovereign claims in this matter. Regarding the UN's concern, Eban noted that while

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<sup>94</sup> "648th Meeting December 16, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151) (Continued)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632015/files/S\\_PV.648-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632015/files/S_PV.648-EN.pdf).

<sup>95</sup> "648th Meeting December 16, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151) (Continued)," 3–6.

his country was willing to comply with the Armistice Agreement, he noted that it was solely a military arrangement, and as such his country did not agree that the UN could dictate matters involving an economic development project. In fact, Eban dismissed even the Armistice Agreement's normal civilian life clause by suggesting the Canal project would "have nothing but beneficial effects, easily reconcilable with all the affected interests."<sup>96</sup>

The Israeli delegation further rejected the idea that Syria held any rightful sovereign claims to the Demilitarized Zone and outlined the limits of what Israel understood to be Syria's actual frontiers. On this point, Eban suggested that it was preposterous to think that a country that does not border the Jordan River could have any say on the use of a water source—"which is a non-Syrian river from its first drop of water to its last"—that runs completely through Israeli territory from the Dan to south of Tirat Tsevi.<sup>97</sup> The "only connection" Syria had to the area, according to Eban, was Syria's occupation of the area through armed force. Rather than enshrining Syria's sovereign claims to the area, Eban suggested that the Armistice Agreement called for Syria's withdrawal from the area so that rightful sovereign claims could eventually be established.<sup>9899</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> "649th Meeting December 17 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, 5/3122, 5/3151) (Continued)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 1–2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632016/files/S\\_PV.649-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632016/files/S_PV.649-EN.pdf).

<sup>97</sup> "649th Meeting December 17 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, 5/3122, 5/3151) (Continued)," 3.

<sup>98</sup> "649th Meeting December 17 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, 5/3122, 5/3151) (Continued)," 18.

<sup>99</sup> Of note, Eban concluded the 17 December meeting by criticizing Charles Malik for his closing remarks in the previous meeting. Noting his offense to the comments he acknowledged that Malik was free to debate the question of Israel's alignment with the philosophy and thought of Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Hegel, Kant, Pascal and Buber, but drew the line on religion stating, "but he should not invoke the Divine Name or the prophets and patriarchs of the Hebrew faith for the sake of a political attack in a political context."

Responding to Eban's dismissal of Syrian sovereign claims in the area, the Syrian delegation cited historical evidence to the contrary and countered that it was Israel that held no rightful sovereign claims in the area. Closing out the 649<sup>th</sup> UN Security Council meeting, Zayn al-Din argued that Syrian sovereignty over the Jordan River has been an established fact since "time immemorial". "Not a single drop" of the Jordan River, he continued, has ever been used in Israel-held territory, but countered saying "these waters have been used in Syria and continue to be used there."<sup>100</sup> Just as Israel had limited the scope of Syria's territorial claims, Zayn al-Din defined Syria's historical frontiers as encompassing the full range of the demilitarized zones and beyond stating:

"The fact is that Syria extends in a southerly direction to the east of the Jordan, far further to the south than the present place in the demilitarized zone and even to the south of Lake Tiberias, into which the River Jordan flows. In that case, there is Syrian territory in which the waters of the Jordan can be used"<sup>101</sup>

By claiming that Syria had no sovereignty over any portion of land along the Jordan River, Zayn al-Din noted that Israel was trying to negate Syria's established rights to such land as had existed well before the arrival of Zionism.<sup>102</sup>

Addressing once again the logic of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework, the Syrian delegation warned that violence would erupt if the UN continues to allow Israel to infringe on Syria's sovereign claims. Zayn al-Din suggested that there were troubling patterns forming within the United Nations of allowing Israel to carry out some action of territorial exploit and then scrambling to offer some legal basis for Israel's actions through a resolution or agreement.

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<sup>100</sup> "649th Meeting December 17 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, 5/3122, 5/3151) (Continued)," 20.

<sup>101</sup> "649th Meeting December 17 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, 5/3122, 5/3151) (Continued)," 22.

<sup>102</sup> "649th Meeting December 17 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, 5/3122, 5/3151) (Continued)," 23.

According to Zayn al-Din, this pattern began with the large-scale arrival of Zionist immigrants who displaced one million Arabs from their homes. As a result of this massive arrival of immigrants, he claimed that “Syria was dismembered and a Palestine Mandate was created.”<sup>103</sup> The Syrian delegation proceeded to argue that since that time, the Israelis have continued to pursue a policy of territorial aggrandizement—this Jordan canal project being the latest attempt to expand its sovereignty over more territory. With the issue of sovereignty in abeyance, the Israelis had no special rights to the DMZ that the Syrians did not have, and if the UN sanctioned this activity, then, Zayn al-Din warned, Syria will be forced to start its own diversion project further north. Realizing this would never be supported, he assumed that by allowing Israel to proceed, the UN would be sanctioning “an act of aggression,” and the Arab states would be forced to defend themselves. Zayn al-Din claimed that such self-defense would only be to counter Israel’s “reckless and dangerous” behavior and would have the support of the entire Arab region stating:

“in the whole Middle Eastern area there is not a single country which recognizes Israel, with or without frontiers. There is no country in the world, east or west, which has recognized any fixed frontiers for Israel. Israel itself realizes that it has no frontiers. What it has is only an armistice demarcation line.”<sup>104</sup>

Zayn al-Din concluded that any further activity in the demilitarized zone would be construed as a breach of peace and lead “the use of force and violence on a large scale in the area.” He therefore called on the UN to stop sanctioning aggrandizement with new agreements warning that the consequences would be dire.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> “649th Meeting December 17 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, 5/3122, 5/3151) (Continued),” 33.

<sup>104</sup> “649th Meeting December 17 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, 5/3122, 5/3151) (Continued),” 24.

<sup>105</sup> “649th Meeting December 17 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, 5/3122, 5/3151) (Continued),” 24–35.

Resuming the Security Council's debate on 18 December, the Chinese and Pakistani delegations denounced the tripartite resolution for failing to directly address Syria's complaint. Opening the Security Council's 650<sup>th</sup> meeting, Mr. Tsiang of the Chinese delegation stressed that the tripartite resolution was largely inadequate for failing to make Syrian agreement a key component of the solution. Tsiang suggested that the very fact that Bennike considered Syria's initial objection serious enough to grant it a hearing was evidence enough of Syria's valid claims in this matter. As such, the Chinese delegate pressed for making Syrian interests and agreement a core piece of Paragraph 11. For his part, Mr. Bukhari of Pakistan also critiqued the resolution for ignoring core pieces of Syria's complaint as well as undermining the authority of the Chief of Staff. The Pakistani representative found it odd that no aspect of Syria's complaint was answered such as whether the project violated the Armistice Agreement and specifically whether it would create a military advantage. He further noted that Paragraph 11 was "full of most dangerous ambiguities"<sup>106</sup> and should spell out clearly Syria as one whose interests might be affected. On undermining the local UN machinery, the Pakistani delegate criticized the Security Council for thinking they were a collection of military experts who could decide whether the Canal Project would give Israel a military advantage. Rather than support the relevant UN military officials, Mr. Bukhari suggested that this resolution has dismissed Bennike entirely by sending the message that "We have no respect for your opinion as a military authority holding the responsibility of the United Nations in that troubled area." Absent substantive changes, the Chinese and Pakistani delegates warned that they could not support the resolution.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> "650th Meeting December 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151) (Continued)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 3–4, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632017/files/S\\_PV.650-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632017/files/S_PV.650-EN.pdf).

<sup>107</sup> "650th Meeting December 18, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151) (Continued)," 6.

In response to the continued impasse, Charles Malik of the Lebanese delegation presented his own draft resolution that underscored the importance of the demilitarized zone for both parties. Malik noted that he sought to make clear three key points in his draft resolution on the Jordan Canal Project: 1) the inviolability of the Armistice Agreement, 2) the inviolability of the DMZ's status, and 3) the possibility of some future negotiated regional water sharing arrangement. Of note, his resolution cited General Bennike's opinion that on the basis of restoring normal civilian life, preserving the value of the demilitarized zone for both parties, and separating armed forces, that no party should carry out work that prejudices the object of the Demilitarized Zone. Concluding, Malik underscored that his resolution also referenced Israel directly suggesting that the continuation of Israel's work would "likely to lead to a breach of peace."<sup>108</sup><sup>109</sup> With two resolutions before the Council, members broke to consult with their governments on next steps.

Over the course of the next four meetings, the Security Council devoted much attention to deliberating the sufficiency of the two resolutions in addressing Syria's complaint, and whether or not the Council should break for the holidays and new year. Of note, Mr. Vyshinsky of the Soviet Union—a country with veto power—sharply criticized the tripartite resolution during the Council's 651<sup>st</sup> meeting on 21 December noting it was full of "serious defects" and had "no connection with the complaint by Syria." He shared that it was impossible not to agree with the various criticisms leveled against the tripartite resolution and suggested that the Western

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<sup>108</sup> "The Palestine Question - Lebanon: Draft Resolution (S/3152)" (United Nations Security Council, December 18, 1953), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635165/files/S\\_3152-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/635165/files/S_3152-EN.pdf).

<sup>109</sup> Of note Charles Malik chose to respond to Aba Eban's critique of his earlier statements that the doctrine of progress appeared to be replacing the religion of the Jewish patriarchs. On this point, he highlighted that Israeli press attempted to smear him saying his remarks were "full of abuse and invective against Israel the Jewish people." However, he replied that international opinion was beginning to side with Charles Malik's position that Israel's labeling of people as anti-Semitic was mere propaganda saying, "happily the moral climate is such, and they have actually so over-reached themselves, that more and more people are seeing through their methods."

Powers referred to unspecified “interests” in Paragraph 11, not out of concern for Syria or Israel, but out of concern for themselves. Mr. Vyshinsky suggested that the Council break and allow for the disputing parties to find a solution rather than imposing an inadequate solution. Following several fits and starts, the Security Council agreed to reconvene on 29 December to submit revised versions of their resolutions.<sup>110</sup>

Behind the scenes, the Syrian UN representatives urgently pressed the United States to change the tripartite resolution in a way that secured its sovereign claims. On the morning of 26 December, during a meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State, Syria’s UN Representative Farid Zayn al-Din urged the U.S. official to make clear in Paragraph 11 of the tripartite resolution that Syrian agreement is essential for the continuation of Israel’s construction activity. As a recommendation, Zayn al-Din suggested that in reference to the “interests” the following phrase specify interests as those “of the parties to the dispute on the basis of mutual agreement.” Zayn al-Din also voiced interest in strengthening a key mechanism in Syria’s UN strategy by insisting that the U.S. also push for the inclusion of a clause calling on Israel to cooperate with the Mixed Armistice Commission on matters arising within the Demilitarized Zone.<sup>111</sup> In a subsequent meeting with the U.S. State Department on 28 December, Zayn al-Din reiterated his Government’s stance on the importance of Syria’s consent being recognized in matters where Syria’s rights were concerned. Zayn al-Din pointed out to the State Department officials that Syria’s longstanding use of the Jordan River has been widely known, but as far as Israel is concerned, no area west of the Jordan River had ever been irrigated until the start of this project

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<sup>110</sup> “651st Meeting December 21, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151, S/3151/Rev.1, S/3152) (Continued),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 5, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632018/files/S\\_PV.651-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632018/files/S_PV.651-EN.pdf).

<sup>111</sup> “Doc. 757 The Secretary of State to the United States Mission at the United Nations,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, December 26, 1953*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d757>.

and as such, Syria not Israel, had more rights to the Jordan. According to U.S. diplomatic reporting, Zayn al-Din further raised the issue of maintaining Syria's sovereign claims stating that the Syrian official noted:

“The Demilitarized Zone was an area in which each side had reserved its rights and where neither side had rights of sovereignty. Syria was much disturbed by Israel's policy, carried on since 1951, of encroaching on the Zone first by sending in Israeli police to control it, and finally by diverting water and simultaneously asserting that Israel was sovereign in the Zone and that Syria had no rights whatever in it.”<sup>112</sup>

Zayn al-Din concluded by reaffirming the importance of maintaining Syria's sovereign claims in the resolution and warned that the Soviet Union was likely to veto the resolution if such deficiencies in the resolution were not addressed.

Reconvening on 29 December 1953, the Security Council remained at an impasse and suggested resuming debates with the start of the new year. Given the inability of the council to agree to the terms of the three-power draft resolution or provide a suitable alternative in its place, the Pakistani Representative Mr. Bokhari suggested that the council adjourn *sine die* (i.e. with no set date for the next meeting). What this would mean in practical terms is that the term of the current presiding officer, the Representative of Greece, would come to an end and the next scheduled President of the Security Council, Mr. Charles Malik of Lebanon, would be allowed to resume the discussions on a day he saw fit. In response to the Pakistani representative's suggestion, Sir Gladwyn Jebb of the United Kingdom suggested that this would put Charles Malik in a “slightly invidious position” with regards to setting a date on the Syrian complaint.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> “Doc. 758 Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs (Hart),” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, December 28, 1953, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d758>.

<sup>113</sup> “654th Meeting December 29, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.1, S/3152)

For his part, Mr. Vyshinsky of the Soviet Union supported the idea of adjourning *sine die*, arguing that the three-power draft resolution was “inappropriate” and “fallacious” in that it did not address Syria’s complaint at all.<sup>114</sup> Mr. Vyshinsky suggested that this was due to the fact that the three powers were not interested in actually solving the problem, but using this resolution as a means of expanding its own economic control in the region.

On this point of the western intentions, Mr. Vyshinsky said that the draft resolution:

“does not relate directly to the question we are discussing here, but constitutes an attempt to substitute for this question the problem of how the United States monopolies can obtain mastery over the economy of the Middle and Near East, using the, so to speak, God-given opportunity provided by the dispute between Syria and Israel regarding the building of the canal and the hydro-electric station.”<sup>115</sup>

In an attempt to offer an alternative, Mr. Tsiang of the Chinese delegation suggested that the Council reconvene on this question sometime between 7 and 15 January 1954. Put to a vote, the council agreed to the Chinese suggestion with the Soviet Union and Chile abstaining. The delegates thus ended 1953 by thanking the representative of Greece for presiding over the discussions and thanking the representatives of Pakistan and Chile for their two-year term that was set to expire.<sup>116</sup>

Over the intervening weeks the Syrian government continued to hold high level meetings with U.S. officials to press their case further on preserving Syrian sovereign rights in the

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(Continued),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eighth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1953), 3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632236/files/S\\_PV.654-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632236/files/S_PV.654-EN.pdf).

<sup>114</sup> “654th Meeting December 29, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.1, S/3152) (Continued),” 5.

<sup>115</sup> “654th Meeting December 29, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.1, S/3152) (Continued),” 12.

<sup>116</sup> “654th Meeting December 29, 1953, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.1, S/3152) (Continued),” 10–16.

tripartite resolution. In meetings with U.S. State Department officials both Farid Zayn al-Din and Syrian President Adib Shishakli reiterated the importance of adopting an effective UN resolution and warned of such hostilities that might ensue if this approach fails. Declaring emphatically the severity of the Jordan Canal Project, Zayn al-Din argued in a 9 January meeting with Ambassador Moose that the Arab States were in agreement as to its importance, particularly for future final status agreements expressing that, “Arab delegations regarded SC action on this question more important than that on [the] Qibya massacre because [the] tripartite draft attempts to alter terms of armistice agreement and [the] vote will provide [an] indication of future Western attitude.” Zayn al-Din further warned that while a Soviet veto in support of Syria’s position was unpredictable and a risk, Syria preferred that option to accepting the resolution.<sup>117</sup> In a separate 13 January meeting with Ambassador Moose, Adib Shishakli made four key points: 1) Syria desires a Security Council Resolution on the Jordan Canal project; 2) Syria’s sole aim is to preserve its claims to the Jordan River; 3) Syria demanded nothing short of explicit recognition of its rights; and 4) that if the resolution would not change, then Syria would rely on the Russian veto. Responding with a State Department directive,<sup>118</sup> Ambassador Moose warned Shishakli that Israel might move forward with the canal project if no resolution is passed. In keeping with the logic of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework, Shishakli responded with a warning that violence would ensue if the UN did not protect Syria’s sovereign claims with Moose noting that “he [Shishakli] recognized [the] risks and emphasized Syria would use all its

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<sup>117</sup> “Doc. 762 The Ambassador in Syria (Moose) to the Department of State,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Office of the Historian, January 9, 1954, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d762>.

<sup>118</sup> “Doc. 764 The Department of State to the Embassy in Syria,” Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Historical Documents - Office of the Historian, January 11, 1954, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d764>.

resources [to] defend its rights in [the] event work resumed. [And] Added [that] “this time Syria will not be kicked.”<sup>119</sup>

On 21 January 1954, the UN Security Council reconvened during its 655<sup>th</sup> meeting to resume discussions on the Syrian complaint. Presiding over this month’s session, Lebanon’s delegate Charles Malik opened by welcoming the newest members to the Council from Brazil, Turkey and New Zealand and explained for the record why the council failed to meet between 7 and 15 January as planned. Malik noted that the reason for the delay was due to a 13 January request by the sponsors of the three-power draft resolution to delay discussions until 21 January. Having coordinated with the Secretary-General and received concurrence from the fellow delegates to the council the meetings on the Syrian complaint were pushed back.<sup>120</sup> On a final administrative matter before proceeding with the debate, Charles Malik requested, in accordance with rule 20 of the rules and procedures, to give up his seat as the Presiding officer so that he could participate in the debate as a normal council member given his direct interest in the topic. As such, the position was passed alphabetically to the next representative, Mr. Munro of New Zealand—a country participating for its first time on the Security Council—and the debates thus resumed.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> “Doc. 766 The Ambassador in Syria (Moose) to the Department of State,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East, Volume IX, Part 1 - Historical Documents - Office of the Historian*, January 13, 1954, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v09p1/d766>.

<sup>120</sup> “655th Meeting January 21, 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Ninth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1954), 1–6, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632237/files/S\\_PV.655-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/632237/files/S_PV.655-EN.pdf).

<sup>121</sup> “655th Meeting January 21, 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 6.

During the fifteenth meeting on the Syrian complaint, the representatives from the United Kingdom and France presented their latest draft resolution that included a direct reference to “Syrian interests” in the dispute. Long a contentious piece in the Jordan Canal disputes, the new paragraph, which the British representative referred to as “the heart of the draft resolution,” replaced Paragraph 11 of the original draft resolution and called on the Chief of Staff to reconcile Israeli and Syrian interests noting:

“[The Security Council] Requests and authorizes the Chief of Staff to explore possibilities of reconciling the Israeli and Syrian interests involved in the dispute over the diversion of Jordan waters at Banat Yaqub, including full satisfaction of existing irrigation rights at all seasons, while safeguarding the rights of individuals in the Demilitarized Zone, and to take such steps in accordance with the Armistice Agreement as he may deem appropriate to effect a reconciliation”<sup>122</sup>

On this point, the French Representative Mr. Lucet noted that within the DMZ “there is a kind of vacuum of sovereignty” and as such, it requires an evaluation of the complex rights individuals have at the local level. Therefore, the Chief of Staff is vested with such authority as to determine a workable solution for the parties concerned, if feasible. Furthermore, the document flipped the onus of responsibility on Syria and Israel to cooperate with the Chief of Staff in this regard and Sir Gladwyn Jebb of the United Kingdom expressed his hope that this new wording would minimize any impression that the three-powers were critical of Chief of Staff’s work to date.<sup>123</sup>

The first to respond to the latest draft resolution was Charles Malik, who noted that despite the subtle changes in language, he still opposed the vagueness of the draft resolution. Malik’s primary concerns with the document centered around the question of the Chief of Staff’s

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<sup>122</sup> “The Palestine Question: France, United Kingdom and United States: Revised Draft Resolution S/3151/Rev.2” (United Nations Security Council, January 20, 1954), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/539477/files/S\\_3151\\_Rev.2-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/539477/files/S_3151_Rev.2-EN.pdf).

<sup>123</sup> “655th Meeting January 21, 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 7–10.

authority to reconcile Syria and Israel's differences and the question of existing irrigation rights. On the first point, Malik pointed out that the phrase "Israel and Syrian interests" was too vague and could include interests that were not in accordance with the terms of the Armistice Agreement.<sup>124</sup> For instance, if it was in Israel's *interest* to control all or part of the DMZ—a right not guaranteed to it under the Armistice Agreement—then attempting to reconcile that interest should be considered a violation of the Agreement and therefore not allowed. Regarding the point on existing irrigation rights, Malik was surprised that the Security Council still considered Israel to have any rights to water in the DMZ given his and other's extensive treatment of an alleged Israeli plot to use this latest diplomatic row as a pretext for greater expansion.

Bewildered, Malik expressed:

"We had thought that, during the lengthy discussion of this question which has already taken place, we had proved beyond any doubt that Israel's intentions were not limited to hydro-electrical questions and were not connected only with its existing irrigation rights. We thought we had proved that Israel had long-range, very extensive irrigation plans and that the present project was only the barest first act in carrying out those plans."<sup>125</sup>

Given the deficiencies of select clauses within the draft resolution, Malik called for the resolution to be voted on by paragraph and expressed frustration that no one to date has discussed his own draft resolution that remained on the agenda as an item to vote for.<sup>126</sup>

Reacting negatively to the revised tripartite draft resolution as well, Mr. Vyshinsky of the Soviet Union and Mr. Leme of Brazil expressed their own concerns with the broad authority

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<sup>124</sup> "655th Meeting January 21, 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued)," 13.

<sup>125</sup> "655th Meeting January 21, 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued)," 13.

<sup>126</sup> "655th Meeting January 21, 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued)," 12–14.

granted to the Chief of Staff in this latest document. From the Soviet perspective, a noteworthy piece missing from the document that his delegation pushed for was the concept of consent. Mr. Vyshinsky pointed out that the document only calls on the Chief of Staff to explore the possibilities of reconciliation while allowing for him to take steps as “he may deem appropriate” towards that end. Vyshinsky concluded that the latest tripartite resolution was not a real improvement over the last as it still fails to make a determination on Syria’s original complaint and “contains not the slightest mention of this important, and to me quite obvious, principle [of consent].”<sup>127</sup> Finally, for his part, Mr. Leme of Brazil similarly voiced concerns raised by Charles Malik and alluded to by Vyshinsky that the Chief of Staff, although fully competent, should not have free reign to ask the parties to agree to a solution that contravenes the Armistice Agreement.<sup>128</sup>

### **The Security Council’s Vote on the Jordan Canal Dispute**

On 22 January 1954, the Security Council convened for one final session—its sixteenth meeting on the Syrian complaint—to offer final testimony and cast their votes. Before proceeding with the vote, Charles Malik and Mr. Vyshinsky both noted their dismay that the core issue of sovereignty fueling this problem was not adequately addressed.<sup>129</sup> For the Lebanese delegate, the concept of reconciling “Israeli and Syrian interests” seemed to suggest that both sides have different interests when it comes to what happens within the demilitarized zone.

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<sup>127</sup> “655th Meeting January 21, 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 18.

<sup>128</sup> “655th Meeting January 21, 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 19–22.

<sup>129</sup> “656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, S/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Ninth Year* (United Nations Security Council, 1954), 1–26, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/636333/files/S\\_PV.656-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/636333/files/S_PV.656-EN.pdf).

Charles Malik noted that this very idea was in contravention to the Armistice Agreement which held that sovereign claims of both parties remained in abeyance such that neither side could claim interests independent of the other. Going further on the question of sovereignty, the Lebanese delegate suggested that regardless of Syrian or Israeli claims to the Jordan River, the actual side most deserving control over the Jordan River are the displaced Palestinians. Malik concluded that by sanctioning the canal project and granting Israel sovereignty of the demilitarized zone the outcome would be devastating for the Palestinian people stressing:

“If you are going to make it possible by international action for these poor people who have been driven from their homes, which they have occupied for thousands of years, to lose any rights to these waters, which are their waters, then you will have compounded the international injustice that has been committed in that part of the world.”<sup>130</sup>

For his part, Vyshinsky of the Soviet Union echoed his comments on the importance of mutual agreement in this issue and its direct connection to the question of sovereignty within the demilitarized zone arguing, “The crux of our position is that Israel is carrying out this work in the demilitarized zone and not in its own territory. The Government of Israel is master in its own territory, but there are two masters in the demilitarized zone: the Government of Israel and the Government of Syria.”<sup>131</sup>

As Lebanon and the Soviet Union drew their line in the sand, the British co-sponsor of the tripartite resolution stubbornly rejected Lebanon’s request to vote on the resolution in parts and instead called for an immediate vote on the document as a whole. Sir Gladwyn Jebb explained that it was clear from Vyshinsky’s condemnatory remarks on the absence of a mutual

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<sup>130</sup> “656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, 5/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 8.

<sup>131</sup> “656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, 5/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 16.

agreement or consent clause that he was willing to block the resolution as a whole and “rely on his privileged vote, or veto, to eliminate one important paragraph.”<sup>132</sup> With regards to the Syrian complaint, the refusal to vote paragraph by paragraph on the resolution was another first in the UN’s history where Syria was involved. Responding to Jebb’s decision, Charles Malik was shocked that, although within his right, the British delegate would take such an unprecedented move particularly on a matter as important as the situation in Palestine stating:

“this provision is now being invoked for the first time in the history of the United Nations by... him in connection with matters related to Palestine, with which his Government has been dealing since 1917, I would say only that this will not help the situation in the Near East at all... it will go on record that every fundamental departure from normal precedent and procedure that has occurred in the United Nations seems—by a kind of nemesis which I do not understand, or which I really understand too well for me to express it to the Council—to have taken place with respect to Palestine.”<sup>133</sup>

Mr. Vyshinsky also responded to Sir Gladwyn’s claim that the Soviet’s planned to exercise a *privilege* by vetoing the paragraph. The Soviet delegate noted that his ability to veto was not a privilege, but a right enshrined within the UN Charter for his and the other big five nations.

Expressing his willingness to vote in favor of certain paragraphs if given the opportunity, Mr. Vyshinsky suggested that the UK government did not want him to do so in order to characterize his country as stonewalling the process stating:

“you do not want me to vote for those paragraphs because it suits you to depict me as the champion of the veto... You force me to use my right, and then you transform that right into a privilege, and almost transform that privilege into a crime...”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> “656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, 5/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 23.

<sup>133</sup> “656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, 5/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 24.

<sup>134</sup> “656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, 5/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 26.

Ultimately, the President of the Security Council called for a vote on the resolution as a whole, per the UK's request, with China and Brazil abstaining and Lebanon and the USSR voting no. Given that one of the negative votes was from a permanent member of the council, the draft resolution on the Syrian complaint failed to pass.<sup>135</sup>

After sixteen extensive Security Council to discuss Syria's complaint on Israel's Jordan canal project, the council failed to find an adequate solution acceptable to the international community and involved parties. Following the vote, the presiding officer of the Security Council called on various delegates to offer an explanation for the record on why they voted as they did. Of those who spoke, Sir Gladwyn Jebb of the UK again represented the three power drafters of the resolution, while the delegates from the USSR, Lebanon and China explained why they voted against the resolution or abstained. Addressing the Council first, Sir Gladwyn Jebb expressed shock at the outcome describing the situation as a "melancholy and a sinister occasion". He noted that once again the Soviet Union vetoed a resolution that continues to send a bad signal for international cooperation within the United Nations. In another first for the international organization—specifically with regards to an issue involving Syria directly—Jebb also lamented the fact that the "veto has been applied for the first time in connection with the affairs of the Middle East," referring broadly to the Palestine Question. Jebb concluded by stating that the only alternative option the Security Council had at this point was to consider Charles Malik's draft resolution, which he claimed is a thinly veiled attempt to acquire

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<sup>135</sup> "656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, 5/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued)," 27.

international backing for the principle of “Syrian agreement” before any action within the DMZ can move forward.<sup>136</sup>

For those in the no and abstention camp on the vote for the draft resolution, they similarly traded barbs with the UK official while offering their final critique of the resolution’s shortfalls. Mr. Vyshinsky found Jebb’s logic surprising when considering that a no vote was somehow not in the interest of the Middle East. He argued that his no vote had the full support of the Lebanese representative Charles Malik who was the only Arab representative within the Security Council at the time. If voting against the resolution was truly against the interests of those in the Middle East, why then would Malik, Vyshinsky asked, vote against his own people? Vyshinsky suggested that any vote against the UK seemed to be a crime and therefore those who abstained also committed a crime for they voted against peace and “the guardian angel of which today is, to the complete surprise of all, Sir Gladwyn Jebb.”<sup>137</sup> Following Vynshisky, Charles Malik looked to the composition of those who voted against the resolution or abstained, with the exception of Brazil, determining that it was no coincidence that they represented voices from the Asian continent. Malik wondered why the Western powers seemed so “opposed to the Powers throughout Asia,” suggesting that the they should not be shocked nor against the outcome when there was such little consensus on this issue particularly from those whose continent was concerned. Briefly outlining his country’s rationale for abstaining, Mr. Tsiang of China made the case that peace in the Middle East can only occur once friendly relations among the warring factions are established. From his delegation’s point of view, he surmised that the effects of the

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<sup>136</sup> “656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, 5/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 27.

<sup>137</sup> “656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, 5/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 29.

three-power draft resolution would likely have the opposite effect of furthering friendly relations between Syria and Israel.<sup>138</sup>

At the conclusion of all the delegates remarks, the United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold appeared before the Security Council to offer a final assessment of the situation and provide a way forward. Hammarskjold began by recounting the history of the Syrian complaint and noted how the issue had been before the Security Council for over three months with nothing new to show for it. In light of the circumstances, the Secretary General expressed that he was “deeply concerned at the developments” but called for two actions to be taken. First, Mr. Hammarskjold called on the United Nations to be guided by General Bennike’s initial recommendation that Israel continue to suspend any further work on the canal project in the absence of an agreement. Second, he called on General Bennike to resume working towards an agreement between Syria and Israel and to report back within ninety days on the status of the situation. With that, the Security Council closed the debates on the Syrian complaint allowing the status quo ante to remain in effect.<sup>139</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

Despite failing to gain international recognition of its sovereign claims to the demilitarized zone enshrined into international law, the Syrian Government’s engagement on the Jordan Canal project constituted a political victory. By virtue of the UN Secretary General’s guidance, Israel was required to cease its Jordan diversion project pending a future agreed upon

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<sup>138</sup> “656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, 5/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 31–32.

<sup>139</sup> “656th Meeting January 21 1954, The Palestine Question: Complaint by Syria against Israel Concerning Work on the West Bank of the River Jordan in the Demilitarized Zone (S/3108/Rev.1, S/3122, 5/3151/Rev.2, S/3152, S/3166) (Continued),” 33.

arrangement between Israel and Syria. Syria's decision to remain politically engaged with the United Nations for over three months without firing a single shot also speaks to the strategic logic behind Damascus' calculus when it comes to the use force. As argued throughout this study, from 1945 to 1955 the Syrian government strategically leveraged the United Nations to preserve its claims to sovereignty. When that central mechanism in its political strategy failed, the Syrian government relied on force. Given the political momentum on its side, the Syrian government never felt compelled to use force as a means of preserving its sovereign claims.

As in previous situations where Syria secured its sovereignty solely through UN engagement, it is worth noting that the global political situation seemed to play a critical role in Syria's success. In the Jordan Canal Project, three major political factors buoyed Syria's political momentum during the debates. During the first phase, Israel's violent assault on the village of Qibya brought wide international condemnation and isolation of Israel, putting them in a particularly vulnerable political position at the onset of the debates. Given the U.S. decision to withhold economic funding to Israel following the incident, Israeli authorities were likely unwilling to risk confrontation with Syria over the canal project for fear of further isolation. Again, the timing of the Syrian complaint coinciding a low point in Israel's international political standing in its conflict with Jordan should not be overlooked. The second key element was the U.S. Tennessee Valley Authority peace initiative aimed at fostering peaceful ties through economic cooperation along the Jordan River. Eager to deliver on its peace initiative, the Eisenhower administration held countless negotiations with Syrian government officials in the hopes of winning their support in the Security Council. Finally, as international tensions between the United States and Soviet Union continued to grow, the Security Council increasingly became an arena of increasingly divided Cold War politics. It was likely the combination of all three of

these forces that kept political momentum behind the Syrian Government, rendering the use of force unnecessary to preserve its sovereign claims within the Demilitarized Zone. However, the situation ultimately remained unresolved and the possibility remained for additional flare ups along the DMZ which would come to characterize the situation in 1954.

## Chapter 6: Syrian Sovereign Claims and the Lake Tiberias Dispute

### Introduction

On the night of 11/12 December 1955, Israeli armed forces launched a large-scale attack into Syrian territory on the eastern banks of Lake Tiberias. The attack followed a series of Armistice violations by Israel and Syria from 1954 and 1955, many centering around the northeastern corner of Lake Tiberias. However, the December 1955 attack, ostensibly carried out in retaliation for repeated shooting incidents by Syrian forces against Israeli boats in the vicinity, prompted the Syrian UN delegation to demand Security Council intervention, citing the attack as a continued violation of the Armistice Agreement and an Israeli attempt to assert its sovereignty over the whole lake. Recalling the positive impact economic and political pressure played in coaxing Israeli compliance in the Jordan Canal Disputes, the Syrian delegation insisted that the UN implement sanctions and consider expelling Israel from the United Nations. On 19 January 1956 the Security Council passed a resolution in the Lake Tiberias case. Although the final resolution contained no punitive measures against Israel, it unanimously condemned Israel's attack as an unjustifiable flagrant violation of Israel's UN commitments and called on the parties to comply with their Article V commitments under the Armistice Agreement.<sup>1</sup>

Within the secondary literature, there is a varied debate regarding the reasons for the Lake Tiberias clashes in 1954 and 1955 and their culmination in the overnight Israeli attack in December 1955. The debates typically focus on identifying the rationale behind Syria's violent actions in this period, and the relationship between Syrian behavior and Israel's decision to carry out a sharp retaliation. Regarding Syria's armed activity during this period, Ma'oz attributes the

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<sup>1</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1955* (United Nations, New York: Department of Public Information, 1956), 34–35.

tactical cause of the Lake Tiberias clashes to “attempts by Syrian troops...to prevent Israeli fishing.” Suggesting a potentially deeper purpose to Syria’s violence, Ma’oz attributes Syria’s violence to domestic political considerations surmising that Syria attacked “possibly in order ‘to divert Syrians’ attention from their internal problems’ and strengthen the prestige of the leftist radical elements.”<sup>2</sup> Although acknowledging the shooting incidents and Syria-imprisoned Israeli soldiers as minor causes of the clashes, Morris, citing IDF documents, finds no evidence on an increase in Syrian attacks or a deterioration in the border situation during this period as reason for the 11/12 December attack. In contrast, he describes the incident as an unilateral Israeli attack designed to activate a recently signed Syrian-Egyptian mutual defense pact and “provoke the Egyptians into retaliating against Israel.”<sup>3</sup> While convinced of the Egyptian angle, Morris interestingly cites a rationale—similar to the one argued in this paper—offered by Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion who attributed UN failure to the attack writing, “if UN intercession failed to curb Arab violations of the armistice, ‘then we ourselves must act’.”<sup>4</sup>

Another camp in the literature suggests, as I argue, that the Lake Tiberias attacks were not about fishing rights, but about sovereignty. Shalev—who was an Israeli representative to the Syrian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission at the time—notes a subtle pattern, as I have argued throughout this paper, of Syria’s armed actions on the ground being intimately tied to events within the UN machinery. On this point about the importance of sovereignty in the dispute and its connection to the UN Shalev notes that the Lake Tiberias clashes were:

“a full-fledged confrontation over sovereignty in the northeastern part of Lake Tiberias... The struggle over sovereignty and rights in the northeastern part of Lake Tiberias took place both on the lake and in the Mixed Armistice

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<sup>2</sup> Ma’oz, *Syria and Israel*, 50–53.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars, 1949-1956*, 1993, 281.

<sup>4</sup> Morris, 367.

Commission... Moves taken by both sides on the ground were closely interwoven with the Commission's handling of the various problems."<sup>5</sup>

Another backer of the sovereignty thesis motivating the Lake Tiberias clashes is Bar-Yaacov. In his work he argues that the December 1955 attack was a final attempt to assert its sovereignty in the area noting, "The Lake Kinneret [Tiberias] incidents are the consequence of Syria's determination to extend her *de facto* authority to the area of the lake west of the international frontier".<sup>6</sup> Rather than stop at this analytic finding, Bar-Yaacov reveals his bias against the Security Council's condemnation of Israel's disproportionate attack asking, "what is the correct proportion of a counter-attack... It is clear that...only superior armed forces could silence them [Syrian armed forces]."<sup>7</sup>

In keeping with many of the points raised by Shalev, my analysis of Syrian interaction with the United Nations machinery suggests that the Lake Tiberias clashes and the Security Council complaint were designed to preserve the Syrian government's sovereign claims in the area. It is certainly true, as some scholars have suggested, that the fighting on the lake and the discourse surrounding the clashes dealt primarily with the question of fishing rights. However, I argue that the tactical focus on fishing or irrigation rights was designed to justify Syria's sovereign claims to the lake. On the question of Syria's sovereign claims to Lake Tiberias, I differ from the view argued by Shalev that, "there was no place for Israeli-Syrian disagreement over the status of Lake Tiberias." From Shalev's perspective, Israel possessed full sovereign claims to Lake Tiberias from the get go, and Syria had no justifiable claims to the water. However, as I will show in the below section, Syria did have reasonable claim under the resumption of normal civilian life clause of the Armistice Agreement. Arguing that Syrian

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<sup>5</sup> Shalev, *The Israel-Syria Armistice Regime, 1949-1955*, 188, 194.

<sup>6</sup> Bar-Yaacov, *The Israel-Syrian Armistice*, 236.

<sup>7</sup> Bar-Yaacov, 239.

fishing on the lake was a historic past time, Syrian UN officials theoretically could argue that such rights were legitimate under the Armistice Agreement. As such, when the United Nations failed to recognize these claims and the Israelis sought to impose their own sovereignty over the area, the Syrian government relied on force.

The following chapter details numerous Syrian Armistice complaints before the local and international UN machinery regarding the government's sovereign claims in and around Lake Tiberias. Starting with the situation in the aftermath of the Jordan Canal diversion disputes, this chapter will retrace the series of Syrian disputes raised at the local armistice level from 1954 and 1955. This section will then provide a detailed account of Syria's complaint before the Security Council of Israel's 11/12 December 1955 attack. At each juncture, I will argue that Syria's engagement during this period remained in the service of securing its sovereign claims along the armistice frontier. Thus, the Lake Tiberias incidents similarly support this paper's overall theory that, failing to secure its sovereign claims through the UN, the Syrian government felt compelled to do so by force.

### **The 1954 Armistice Situation in the DMZ Following the Jordan Canal Disputes**

Following the close of the Jordan Canal dispute in January 1954, Syria was no longer the subject of any major debates within the Security Council for the remainder of the year. However, in what appeared to be a broader Arab campaign of sustained UN pressure against Israel, Lebanon submitted a separate complaint against Israel on behalf of Jordan that was the source of debate within the Security Council from April through May 1954. The Lebanese complaint came following an attack on the Nahhalin Village on 28-29 March 1954 by a group of militarily trained Israeli individuals resulting in the death of five national guardsmen, three Arab legionnaires, one woman, and the wounding of fourteen male and female villagers. For its part,

the Israeli delegation also countered with several complaints of its own in 1954. Such topics included complaints against Egyptian restrictions on Israeli shipments within the Suez Canal, and a complaint against Jordan following a mid-March incursion and attack against an Israeli passenger bus near Scorpion Pass killing eleven people.<sup>8</sup>

Instead, throughout 1954 Syrian and Israeli border disputes were confined to the local machinery of the Mixed Armistice Commission. Although not the subject of Security Council deliberations, the border incidents handled at the MAC at times risked reaching the level of international involvement. From February to March 1954, the situation within the Demilitarized Zone remained largely unchanged from where it was when Syria first raised its complaint against the Jordan canal project in October 1953. Speaking to the static situation within the DMZ, on 1 March 1954, the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization submitted a report to the Security Council informing the UN body that “the difficulties to which I referred on 27 October 1953...remain unaltered...[and] the work which was started last September has not been resumed in the Demilitarized Zone.”<sup>9</sup> Absent continued work on the canal project, the complaint was largely shelved pending some form of agreement between Syria and Israel on the technical questions of water rights, land redistribution and or compensation.

With Israel largely cooperating with the Security Council’s request to cease construction work on its Jordan Canal project, the Syrian government needed the right pretext to resume its push for sovereign claims within the Demilitarized Zone. The opportunity to bring its dispute with Israel back into the spotlight occurred on 26 April 1954 when Israeli armed forces killed two Arab civilians and wounded a third in the Shamalneh sector, just north of Lake Tiberias in

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<sup>8</sup> *U.N. Security Council Official Records: 9th Year 655th Meeting to 686th Meeting 1954* (United Nations, 1954).

<sup>9</sup> “Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Security Council Pursuant to the Council’s Resolution of 24 November 1953 (S/3139/Rev.2) (S/3183)” (United Nations Security Council, March 1, 1954), 9, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602581/files/S\\_3183-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602581/files/S_3183-EN.pdf).

the southern Demilitarized Zone.<sup>10</sup> Following the attack, Syrian UN delegate Rafik Asha submitted a letter to the President of the Security Council recounting the details of the incident and voicing his country's frustration with the Mixed Armistice Commission's handling of the situation. He noted that following the incident, the Syrian government requested an emergency meeting to discuss the latest infraction within the DMZ but the Israelis declined stating that they did not recognize the Syrian government's rights to issue complaints regarding the situation within the DMZ. For his part, Lt. Colonel Van Horen, Chairman of the Israel-Syrian Mixed Armistice Commission, insisted that the two parties hold an "urgent meeting" at the Israeli town Rosh Pina on Friday 30 April at 9:00 AM. Hoping to actually delay the meeting until Saturday, the Israeli's informed Lt. Colonel Van Horen at noon that Friday of their request to delay. After arriving on time, the Syrian delegation noted that the Chairman of the MAC did not arrive until 2:25 PM at which point he held a private meeting with fellow members of the MAC to discuss the situation. At the conclusion of that meeting, Van Horen informed the Syrian delegate that the meeting would be postponed until Monday 3 May in light of Israel's absence. The Syrian representative protested the decision to postpone and insisted on still holding the meeting. However, short of discussions on what the meeting's agenda would look like, the Chairman's decision to postpone was the final ruling. In response, the Syrian government submitted a letter of protest to the President of the Security Council saying that the Chairman exercised a right of veto over Syria's request to hold the meeting, which it argued, was beyond its rights under the Armistice Agreements. The Syrians noted that such a move on the part of the MAC would set

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<sup>10</sup> "Letter Dated 3 May 1954 From the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3208)" (United Nations Security Council, May 3, 1954), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602730/files/S\\_3208-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602730/files/S_3208-EN.pdf).

“dangerous precedents” for the Armistice system if unaddressed.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the Syrians also argued that Israel’s activities continued to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the Armistice Agreement noting:

“Blood has flowed and innocent lives have been lost in a zone which has been placed under the protection of the United Nations and which should be a haven from fighting and tumult. The Israel authorities have once again demonstrated that they do not respect the rules governing the status and development of this zone.”<sup>12</sup>

Although Syria choose to remain engaged, lack of progress on this very issue risked armed action by the Syrian Government if such incidents persisted.

Following the Syrian decision to inform the Security Council of the MAC’s handling of the official complaint, General Bennike sought to defend the MAC Chairman’s actions as in full accordance with the Armistice Agreement. By dismissing Syrian charges and bringing the matter back to the local machinery, Bennike indirectly prevented Syrian officials from raising their sovereign demands once again before the international arena. In a letter submitted to the Security Council and Syrian delegation, General Bennike argued that the rules of procedure do not restrict the Chairman of the MAC on such matters and in fact grant him wide authority when it comes to scheduling emergency meetings such as the one following this incident. Bennike therefore concluded that he could not concur with the Syrian delegation’s view that the Chairman’s postponement of the meeting constituted a violation.<sup>13</sup> In a subsequent letter, Syrian officials countered arguing that the Rule 2 of the rules of procedure do not allow one party to repeatedly

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<sup>11</sup> “Letter Dated 10 May 1954 From the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3212)” (United Nations Security Council, May 11, 1954), 1–4, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602831/files/S\\_3212-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602831/files/S_3212-EN.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> “Letter Dated 10 May 1954 From the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3212),” 5.

<sup>13</sup> “Letter Dated 17 June 1954 From the Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3231)” (United Nations Security Council, June 18, 1954), 1–3, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602926/files/S\\_3231-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602926/files/S_3231-EN.pdf).

“evade its obligations under the relevant instruments by refusing to attend a meeting of the Commission”<sup>14</sup> and thus called upon the Chairman to uphold its responsibilities by working within the framework of the Armistice Agreement.<sup>15</sup> On 2 June 1954, over a month following the armed attack, Israeli and Syrian officials to the MAC finally held their meeting. However, the Syrian delegation complained that the Israeli side “resorted to numerous procedural maneuvers in order to impose its mistaken views on the Commission” and again called on the Chairman of the MAC to ensure that Israel complies with its obligations under the Armistice Agreement.<sup>16</sup>

In mid-July 1954, the Syrian delegation tried again to resume discussions on the status of the Demilitarized Zone following the alleged resumption of Israel’s Jordan canal project. On 19 July 1954, Rafik Asha submitted a letter to the President of the Security Council alleging that Israel appeared to be resuming its canal diversion project in contravention of the standing 27 October 1953 resolution. Asha expressed his country’s concerns that it was possible Israel would ultimately finish its diversion project before the UN actually resolved the dispute. As has been the Syrian modus operandi to date, in the absence of a political solution to a standing dispute, the Syrians warned that they would rely on self-defense to safeguard its rights if need be. He concluded his letter stating:

“In bringing these facts to the notice of the Security Council, I wish to state, on instructions from my Government, that my Government will not consider itself

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<sup>14</sup> “Letter Dated 26 May 1954 From the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3218)” (United Nations Security Council, May 26, 1954), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602847/files/S\\_3218-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602847/files/S_3218-EN.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> “Letter Dated 7 June 1954 From the Permanent Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3225)” (United Nations Security Council, June 7, 1954), 2, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N54/164/35/PDF/N5416435.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>16</sup> “Letter Sent on 17 June 1954 to the President of the Security Council by the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations (S/3230)” (United Nations Security Council, June 17, 1954), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602924/files/S\\_3230-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/602924/files/S_3230-EN.pdf).

responsible for the inevitable consequences of any resumption of work in the Demilitarized Zone.”<sup>17</sup>

Following the complaint, there appeared to be no further indications of Israeli infractions of the standing resolutions barring work on the canal project. The situation on this front would continue to remain unresolved throughout 1954.

Syria had one final opportunity in 1954 to elevate the Syrian-Israeli disputes to the Security Council following the December interdiction of a Syrian passenger aircraft by the Israeli military. Although outside of the Demilitarized Zone, if Syrian officials could elevate the situation to the Security Council, they could theoretically resume discussions on the underlying cause of the continued dispute—namely the question of sovereignty. On 12 December 1954, a passenger aircraft of the Compagnie Aérienne Syrienne left Damascus en route to Cairo via Beirut when the aircraft was approached over water by two Israeli Gloster Meteor fighter jets. According to the Syrian letter of complaint to the Security Council, the Syrian passenger plane was under threat of attack and was forced to land in Lydda (Lod) inside Israeli controlled territory. In addition to the crew, the aircraft had onboard five passengers which included two women and an American citizen. Given that the Armistice Agreement remained the only document governing relations between Syria and Israel on the military level, this action was presented by Syria as a flagrant violation of the Agreement and of the UN Charter whose principles of freedom of the air and seas was universally recognized and enshrined in international law. The Syrian delegation characterized the interdiction in its letter to the Security Council as “tantamount to an act of banditry and piracy,” and demanded an investigation and

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<sup>17</sup> “Letter Dated 19 July 1954 From the Permanent Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3269)” (United Nations Security Council, July 19, 1954), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/603269/files/S\\_3269-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/603269/files/S_3269-EN.pdf).

immediate release of the passengers.<sup>18</sup> For his part, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN M.R. Kidron submitted his own letter to the Security Council complaining that the Syrian letter contained terminology which should have barred it from being published as an official UN document. He continued to note however, that some of the passengers had been released on 12 and 13 December and that the remaining crew and passengers were able to leave “unconditionally” on 14 December to continue its route.<sup>19</sup> Again, the dispute de-escalated before becoming a major international concern.

Although the above three incidents never reached the level of Security Council deliberations, they are instructive in understanding Syria’s logic of UN engagement in pursuit of its sovereign claims. In each of the separate incidents, two involving the DMZ and one involving freedom of the air, the direct critique leveled by the Syrian delegation against Israel was Israel’s failure of upholding its international agreements. This question of the enforceability of UN agreements is inextricably linked to the logic of Syria’s UN engagement. As noted, when pursuing its sovereign interests, the Syrian government will primarily rely on UN engagement to meet this objective. However, when UN engagement fails, it relies on the method of force. Still, if force is beyond Syria’s means then it would have to return to the UN to secure its rights. The implication of the UN failing to be a viable option would ultimately mean that Syria would have to increasingly depend on force to meet its objectives. This idea would become more apparent in the debates over Lake Tiberias in 1955.

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<sup>18</sup> “Letter Dated 14 December 1954 From the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations, Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3330)” (United Nations Security Council, December 14, 1954), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629595/files/S\\_3330-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629595/files/S_3330-EN.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> “Letter Dated 20 December 1954 From the Representative of Israel Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3332)” (United Nations Security Council, December 20, 1954), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629597/files/S\\_3332-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/629597/files/S_3332-EN.pdf).

## **Syrian Complaints Over Sovereign Claims within DMZ and Lake Tiberias**

By 1955, the situation along the Syrian-Israeli demarcation line remained tense, owing largely to the ongoing disputes over sovereign claims in the area. From the perspective of Syrian officials, the longer their disputes with Israel continued without any meaningful progress towards achieving their sovereign claims, the greater the risk to the reliability of the central pivot in their strategic political framework—namely the UN system. As such, in pursuit of their sovereign claims, Syrian officials continued to demand that the UN uphold its resolutions and compel Israel to do the same. During this period, preserving the UN as a reliable mechanism would take the form tactically of upholding the Armistice Agreement, specifically the clause referring to the restoration of normal civilian life. Syrian officials would fight hard to uphold this clause in their Armistice meetings, even if it was to the short-term detriment of Arab civilians within the Demilitarized Zone. This emphasis on the normal restoration to civilian life would eventually extend to claims over Lake Tiberias during this period, setting up the stage for an eventual clash at the end of 1955.

Towards the end of 1954, the Syrian delegation to the Mixed Armistice Commission submitted a number of complaints concerning Israeli violations of the Armistice Agreement, and the impact it was having on Syria's sovereign claims. In a report dated 6 January 1955, the newest Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization Major General E.L.M. Burns of Canada informed the UN Secretary General that on 13, 14, and 15, December 1954, the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs submitted a number of general and specific complaints regarding Israel's unwillingness to implement the Armistice Agreement. The first general complaint raised by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs fell under the heading "Powers of the Mixed Armistice Commission and its Chairman respectively" and had direct bearing on central mechanism of

Syria's strategy vis-à-vis the United Nations, in this case the MAC. Interestingly, when describing the powers of the Mixed Armistice Commission, the Syrian Foreign Ministry spoke exactly in the same terms as I outline in the strategic framework. According to the report, the Syrians complained that the Israeli side of the Mixed Armistice Commission continued to boycott the MAC's meetings, claiming the Israelis do not view it as a competent institution to make judgements on one another's complaints. In response to this, the Syrian Foreign Ministry described Israel's actions as designed to knock out the central mechanism of its UN strategy stating:

“This attitude is intended to paralyze the MAC's work in order to enable the Israel authorities to have a free hand in the demilitarized zones with special status and to exercise in them an absolute sovereignty which they had been prohibited from exercising by the GAA [General Armistice Agreement], and Mr. Bunche's explanatory letter incorporated in the Security Council resolution adopted on 18 May 1951.”<sup>20</sup>

From Syria's perspective, this attitude towards the MAC also manifested as a general disregard for Israel's other obligations under the Armistice Agreement to include recruiting police in the DMZ on a local level—that is, not recruited from elsewhere—a restoration of normal civilian life, and a demilitarization of the DMZ as opposed to installing military observation posts.<sup>21</sup>

With regards to Syria's specific complaints, MG Burns divided them into four major categories all falling broadly under Israeli efforts to undermine the restoration of normal civilian life in and around the DMZ. The first Syrian complaint dealt specifically with the situation of Arab inhabitants of the Baqqara and Ghanname villages in the central sector of the DMZ.

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<sup>20</sup> “Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria (S/3343)” (United Nations Security Council, January 11, 1955), Appendix A, pg. 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/570434/files/S\\_3343-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/570434/files/S_3343-EN.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> “Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria (S/3343),” Appendix A, 3-6.

According to Burns' report, in the villages of Baqqara and Ghanname, roughly 350 Arab residents had returned to the area after their villages had been destroyed in March 1951 when they were forcibly removed from the area by Israeli forces. Burns noted that the residents were "living under very bad conditions", staying in tents and mud huts, and had no school, medical facilities, prohibited from leaving their village without securing passes each time from Israeli police, and were not allowed to cross into Syria. Economically, the local Arab crops of wheat, barley, tobacco and citrus fruits were also "subject to Israeli economic pressure" according to the report, and Arab residents often had to sell their goods at very low prices. The report further noted that as of 23 December 1954, they were not given the opportunity to sell their goods at all. Instead, Burns noted that the Israelis did propose an alternative arrangement of schools, medical facilities, and a store but the Arab residents—who he said refused to become Israeli subjects or live under Israeli control—"have not always, it seems, been reasonable in their attitude."<sup>22</sup>

To ameliorate the living conditions of Arab residents in Baqqara and Ghanname, local mukhtars and notables voiced their desire to leave the DMZ and live in Syria, however the Syrian government refused to accept the villagers. The rationale for doing so, fell within the logic of Syria's strategic framework of maintaining its sovereign claims while not allowing the central mechanism of its UN strategy—the Armistice Agreement's clause on the restoration of normal civilian life—to be sidestepped and undermined. According to an interview with the Syrian Foreign Minister, Burns stated that the Syrians could not accept the entry of Arab inhabitants into their country and instead called on the Chief of Staff to implement that various agreements that already guarantee them the right to live a peaceful life in the DMZ. To remedy the situation, MG Burns contacted the Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces asking to

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<sup>22</sup> "Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria (S/3343)," 11.

permit the residents to sell their goods and allow for emergency UNRWA aid to help with groceries. For their part, the Israeli authorities denied the request allowing UNRWA aid describing it as “unnecessary and tending to encourage undesirable dependency on the part of the villagers” but did ultimately allow them to sell their crops.<sup>23</sup>

The second major complaint the Syrian delegation put forth to the Mixed Armistice Commission dealt with the lack of progress on reconstructing the Arab village of Nuqeib. This complaint similarly fell within the framework of the normal restoration of civilian life. According to the report, the village of Nuqeib was destroyed during the course of the 1948 war and subsequently during the March-April 1951 incidents. In response, the Syrian government proposed the idea of reconstructing the village as part of the process of restoring normal civilian life back to the DMZ. The logic for promoting such a project would be to ensure an Arab presence remained within the DMZ, and thus Syrian sovereign claims, and so the area did not become a vacuum that the Israelis could fill. In 1952, the Syrian proposal was approved by the Mixed Armistice Commission, which included plans for the reconstruction of homes, installation of irrigation systems, building a school, and providing agricultural assistance to the village. However, according to General Burns’ report, the Israeli government refused to accept the plan unless the personnel employed as technical directors and technical assistants came from Israel. The Israeli government further expressed its unwillingness to allow UNRWA or Damascus to provide support to the Palestinians for the execution of such a project. As a result, the project remained dormant and the UN continued to issue monthly expenses to a village that General Burns opined could have been self-sufficient by this point.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria (S/3343),” 12.

<sup>24</sup> “Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria (S/3343),” 13.

The third major complaint raised by the Syrian delegation at the end of 1954 dealt more directly with the issue of sovereignty and concerned the Israeli imposition of sovereignty over an Arab village in the DMZ. The case involved a dispute over Israeli sovereign claims over UN-recognized Arab farmland located on the east and west side of the Tel-Katzir kibbutz located on Hill -98. The area had been a frequent site of clashes between Israeli settlers and Arab farmers around harvest time since the DMZ came into force. Following one such incident on 31 December 1952, the Israeli representatives to the MAC suggested that the area south west of Lake Tiberias constituted a vital security zone and therefore they could not accept Arab residents from neighboring Tewafiq farming on the land. The most recent incident occurred on 5 December 1954 when eight Israeli State policemen fired on two Arab farmers in the area wounding one of them.<sup>25</sup> On 12 December 1954 the MAC held its 72<sup>nd</sup> emergency meeting to discuss the Syrian complaint, however the Israeli delegation did not attend the meeting. According to the MAC's report, the Commission determined that the presence of regular Israeli police force in the southern sector of the DMZ was a violation of Articles III and V of the Armistice Agreement and called upon the Israeli authorities to discontinue their "hostile and aggressive acts" and withdraw Israeli police from the area. The MAC report further instructed the Chairman of the Commission to ensure that Israeli tractors cease their illegal activity on Arab owned land and requested the Israelis pay the wounded Arab farmer an appropriate compensation. In short, the Mixed Armistice rulings supported Syria's position towards claims of Arab sovereignty within the DMZ.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria (S/3343)," 13–14.

<sup>26</sup> "Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria (S/3343)," Appendix C, 1-2.

Whereas Syrian officials managed to preserve their sovereign claims in several complaints to the Mixed Armistice Commission, on the question of sovereign rights to Lake Tiberias, the MAC refused to acknowledge Syria's territorial claims in this instance. Like the other issues before it, the question of sovereignty over Lake Tiberias similarly involved Syrian efforts to legally validate, via United Nations rulings, its claims to sovereign control over territory in the area. Couched in the same general tenor of its other complaints, the Syrian delegation was of the view that as part of its efforts to restore normal civilian life to the DMZ and surrounding areas, local Syrian farmers, fishermen, and shepherds should be allowed to resume their customary access to water on the east bank of Lake Tiberias. Despite such claims, the Syrians have noted that the Israeli naval forces continue to fire upon and intimidate local farmers seeking to gain access to water as has historically been their practice.<sup>27</sup> In response, the MAC noted that they were not in a position to satisfy the Syrian complaint particularly as it would require them to authorize Syrian crossing of the Armistice line. According to resolutions adopted by the Mixed Armistice Commission on 20 July 1950 and 15 March 1954, the Armistice Line follows the international frontier set by the British and French Mandates of Palestine and Syria which was demarcated at 10 meters east from the edge of Lake Tiberias all the way up until it joins the central sector of the DMZ at a point on the shore about a kilometer north of the village of Nuqeib. For their part, the MAC was of the opinion that the Syrian strategy in regards to the MAC ruling on the issue "appears to be that they feel their rights in this matter should be established with legal effect by the Mixed Armistice Commission or the Security Council."

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<sup>27</sup> "Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria (S/3343)," Appendix A, 9-10.

However, as noted, the MAC stated that they were not in a position to grant the Syrian request in this case.<sup>28</sup>

Concluding his report to the Security Council, General Burns assessed that the continued source of friction between Syria and Israel remained their conflicting views over which side held sovereign authority in different locations. From the Israeli delegation's perspective, their claims to sovereign rights over the DMZ had been well established by various resolutions, yet it was Syria that was trying to subvert those resolutions by staking sovereign claims. Interestingly, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated their belief that Syria's strategy was not limited to a legal mechanism at all but instead cited the 1948 invasion and Tel al-Mutillah incidents in 1951 as evidence that "Syrian efforts to arrogate to herself rights in the D.Z. are not confined to the framework of legal issues." Therefore, the Israeli side believed that Syrian attempts to make inroads into the DMZ constituted the "principal dangers" to the Armistice Agreement. For the Syrians, they were of the opinion that Israel violated the Armistice Agreement by preventing the restoration of normal civilian life, by stationing state police illegally in the DMZ, by carrying out a policy to force to expel Arab residents, and by not respecting the opinions of the MAC. In light of these positions, General Burns was of the view that only a negotiated final status agreement could adequately address the situation within the DMZ. One possible solution he suggested was for Israel and Syria to provisionally agree to a division of administrative responsibility within the DMZ with an eye towards settling the disputes over sovereign claims that have been held in abeyance. Absent such a solution, General Burns predicted that the DMZ "will remain a dangerous trouble spot."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria (S/3343)," 14–15.

<sup>29</sup> "Report by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement Between Israel and Syria (S/3343)," 16–18.

Following the release of General Burns report, the Syrian Foreign Ministry submitted a number of complaints to Burns about his characterization of the Armistice disputes and his opinion on Syrian sovereign claims along Lake Tiberias. In the thirty-seven-page Syrian rebuttal, which officials in Damascus requested be forwarded to the Security Council, the Foreign Ministry noted two primary complaints: 1) the neutral and passive language used in General Burns' report (making both parties seem equally responsible for the lack of progress), and 2) Burns' comments on the status of the ten-meter strip on the eastern bank of Lake Tiberias. Regarding the first point, the Syrian report cited numerous examples of vague language that, from its perspective, served to minimize the primary role Israel played in the lack of peaceful progress within the DMZ. One such example cited in the report was the passive language used to describe the destruction of the Arab villages of Baqqara and Ghannama in March 1951. According to the Syrian complaint, General Burns' report "delicately omits to mention who caused the destruction" and instead paints an image of Syria being the blameworthy party for not allowing the displaced Arab residents to settle in Syria. Instead, the Syrian rebuttal mentions that the just thing to do would have been to restore their normal life by rebuilding their destroyed homes rather than turn them into refugees. Of note, in Burns' own memoirs he recounts how he told the *mukhtars* Jabr Ali of Baqqara and Osman Hamid of Ghannama that they would not receive UNRWA aid if they left for Syria and told them "they were better off where they were, and should stay."<sup>30</sup> The Syrian Foreign Ministry further explained that General Burn's report considered the residents of Baqqara and Ghannama to be unreasonable in their objections to accept Israeli proposals to organize a school and medical facility, despite the fact that such initiatives required Israeli teachers and doctors which would only serve to further make residents

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<sup>30</sup> Eedson Louis Millard Burns and Mu'assasat al-Dirāsāt al-Filasṭīnīyah., *Between Arab and Israeli* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969), 116.

dependent on Israeli authorities.<sup>31</sup> The Syrian complaint on this particular point concluded by saying:

“It should also be pointed out that up to the present Syria has received a vast number of Arab refugees expelled from their homes by the Israel authorities and is not prepared to receive more and thus to sanction, by a misplaced gesture of chivalry, a solution which is contrary to the provisions of the General Armistice Agreement and the Security Council resolution of 18 May 1951.”<sup>32</sup>

Such remarks further underscore the importance of the central legal UN mechanism in the Syrian strategy which is aimed at preserving Syrian sovereign claims within the DMZ.

The second major Syrian point of contention with General Burns’ report dealt with the question of sovereignty over the ten-meter strip on the eastern bank of Lake Tiberias. From the Syrian perspective, the question of the ten-meter strip had two dimensions: 1) whether the ten-meter strip actually constituted the international frontier between Syria and Israel, and 2) whether civilians are prohibited from crossing the demarcation line to access the water per their normal civilian practice. Regarding the first aspect, the Syrian Foreign Ministry was of the opinion that the ten-meter strip did not constitute an actual agreed upon frontier, but like other sovereign claims under the Armistice Agreement, was left in abeyance pending final status agreements. Syrian sovereign claims to the area were based off of long-standing “immemorial and ancestral” access to Lake Tiberias that was even officially demarcated under the Ottoman period as belonging to the Damascus Eyalet of Ottoman Syria in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> However,

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<sup>31</sup> “Report to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Syria: Addendum / by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization (S/3343/Add.1)” (United Nations Security Council, April 4, 1955), 8–9, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/570483/files/S\\_3343\\_Add.1-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/570483/files/S_3343_Add.1-EN.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> “Report to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Syria: Addendum / by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization (S/3343/Add.1),” 9.

<sup>33</sup> “Report to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Syria: Addendum / by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization (S/3343/Add.1),” Annex, 15.

the status of the Syrian official access to the east bank of Lake Tiberias changed on 7 March 1923 under a Franco-British agreement delineating the frontiers of the British and French Mandates that included the ten-meter strip under the British controlled mandate. Despite the mandatory era territorial change, the Syrian delegation maintained that the Armistice Agreement did not specify the ten-meter strip as constituting the international frontier and in fact left that up to future negotiations in a 20 July 1950 resolution which stated:

“Syrian delegation is entrusted with the initiating of necessary orders to prevent any Syrian subject to enter the ten-metre strip parallel to the water line of Lake Tiberias, and to recommend strict adherence to orders to all Syrian army forces not to take any action against Israelis on the above ten-metre strip or on the lake, *pending final settlement of the ten-metre question.*”<sup>34</sup>

The Syrian rebuttal stated that the Israelis were attempting to convince the MAC of the view that the frontier was in fact this ten-meter strip, however the Syrians refused to accept any subsequent views that contradicted the 1950 resolution.<sup>35</sup>

The second dimension raised by the Syrian Foreign Ministry linked to sovereign rights over the ten-meter strip east of Lake Tiberias, suggested that civilians are permitted to their long-standing riparian rights along the lake. The Syrian basis for this argument centered mainly on Article V of the Armistice Agreement which emphasized the military nature of the arrangement designed to separate the forces of Israel and Syria while allowing for the gradual restoration of normal civilian life. From the Syrian perspective, so long as the individuals crossing the demarcation line are engaged in normal civilian activity and are not military forces, they are permitted to access Lake Tiberias for fishing and other watering needs. In contrast, the Israeli

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<sup>34</sup> “Report to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Syria: Addendum / by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization (S/3343/Add.1),” 13–14.

<sup>35</sup> “Report to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Syria: Addendum / by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization (S/3343/Add.1),” Annex, 6-7.

side viewed Article IV, paragraph 3 of the Armistice Agreement which read as follows constituted a prohibition of civilian crossing of demarcation lines:

“Rules and regulations of the armed forces of the Parties, which prohibit civilians from crossing the fighting lines or entering the area between the lines, shall remain in effect after the signing of this Agreement, with application to the Armistice Demarcation Line defined in article V, subject to the provisions of paragraph 5 of that article.”<sup>36</sup>

However, given that Article IV is also subject to other paragraphs of Article V, the restoration of normal civilian life being the second paragraph, the Syrians argued that civilian crossing was permitted in the case of ancestral practice of accessing Lake Tiberias water.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, in both cases involving the characterization of Israeli and Syrian activity within the DMZ, and sovereign claims over the ten-meter strip, the Syrian delegation was attempting to safeguard its strategic interests via UN resolutions and agreements. Regarding the status within the DMZ, the Syrians attempted to characterize its actions as being in conformity with the Armistice Agreement for trying to restore normal civilian life for the residents of Baqqara and Ghannama. Secondly, Syrian sovereign claims to the eastern bank of Lake Tiberias are also based on the restoration of normal civilian life as enshrined in the Armistice Agreement. Here again, the Syrians are attempting to leverage UN law to preserve its sovereign claims and thus its approach on these otherwise low-level disputes within the MAC fit within its strategic framework.

From the perspective of United Nation’s documents, the 1954 tensions along Syrian-Israeli frontier continued in fall of 1955 and remained linked to the debate over the status of the

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<sup>36</sup> “Report to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Syria: Addendum / by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization (S/3343/Add.1),” Annex, 2.

<sup>37</sup> “Report to the Secretary-General Concerning Complaints as to the Observance of the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Syria: Addendum / by the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization (S/3343/Add.1),” Annex, 3-4.

Armistice Agreement and specifically sovereign rights to the east bank of Lake Tiberias. In a letter to the President of the Security Council, Syria's representative to the UN Rafik Asha informed the President of a series of Armistice violations committed by Israel to include Israeli forces entering Syrian territory. Several of the violations from 14-27 October included Israeli patrols attacking the villages of Baniyas, Dreijate, resulting in the death of a woman and several injured, and the damming of an area where the Jordan River flows out of Lake Hula, flooding neighboring land and destroying crops over an area of 5,000 hectares.<sup>38</sup> For his part, Mordecai Kidron, the Israeli representative to the UN, submitted his own letter of complaint during this period claiming the Syrians had been engaged in a series of violations. In what appeared to be tit-for-tat attacks targeting farmlands, the Israelis claimed that on 5 September, Syrians started a fire on local Israeli crops and began sniping those who tried to put out the fire, wounding a farmer. The Israeli complaint suggested that this was part of a repeated pattern of aggressive Syrian behavior claiming that "hardly a day passes without fire being opened from Syrian positions situated on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee."

Particularly worrisome from the Israeli perspective was its assertion that the Syrian government was not only engaged in its own acts of aggression, but was supporting a larger regional Arab military build-up effort to target Israel to include allowing Egyptian-controlled fedayeen (self-sacrificers) to carry out a "campaign of murder and sabotage" in northern Israel against civilian and soldier alike.<sup>39</sup> Over the course of 1955, Syria did sign on to two regional military defensive initiatives, possibly to bolster its military position in the event the

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<sup>38</sup> "Letter Dated 28 October 1955 from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3451)" (United Nations Security Council, October 28, 1955), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/606205/files/S\\_3451-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/606205/files/S_3451-EN.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> "Letter Dated 22 October 1955 from the Representative of Israel Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3448)" (United Nations Security Council, October 24, 1955), 1-2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/605929/files/S\\_3448-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/605929/files/S_3448-EN.pdf).

international system failed to safeguard Syrian sovereign claims. Beginning in March 1955, in an effort to create a buffer of states to contain the spread of communism from the Soviet Union to the Middle East region, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan established the Central Treaty Organization (CENTCO) or “Baghdad Pact”. Unwilling to thwart its own political independence and place itself once again under the tutelage of a western power, Syrian officials refused to join the initiative. Instead, the Syrians, Egyptians and the Saudis forged their own alliance in March, with Syria and Egypt agreeing to sign their own joint defense agreement by 19 October 1955. Couched as their own defense agreement to contain aggression from their near enemy Israel, the historical record suggests that this agreement likely had more to do with competition between Iraq and Egypt for primacy in the Arab arena, and for Syria to maintain its independence and preserve its sovereignty.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, Benny Morris argues that from Israel’s perspective, the eventual signing of the Syria-Egypt defense pact was a threat to Israel’s security as the pact, “gave an added dimension to the threat that Egypt and Egyptian-led Arab radicalism posed to Israel’s security, and also turned Syria, a potential major enemy, into fair game.” If, as Morris suggests, Israel viewed Syria as an increasing threat because of its defense pact with Egypt, then Israel’s decision to initiate conflict can be understood as an attempt to directly undermine or test the strength of that agreement.<sup>41</sup>

In what appeared to be an imminent Israeli effort to assert its sovereignty over portions of the Syrian-Israeli Armistice line by force, the Syrian government issued two complaints to the MAC warning the commission of the armed backlash that would ensue if the MAC failed to hold Israel to its UN obligations. According to 28 October letter, the Syrians alleged that an army detachment of 150 Israeli commandos crossed the demarcation line into Syrian territory just

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<sup>40</sup> Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958*, 213–24.

<sup>41</sup> Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars, 1949-1956*, 1993, 364.

before 10:30 PM. Equipped with heavy arms, the Israeli commandos laid ambush to Syrian military positions about two kilometers into Syrian territory setting fire to military vehicles, seizing five Syrian soldiers, and killing three others. United Nations observers who visited the scene also reported on other traces of brigandage in the area and discovered evidence of hand-grenades, mines and a large quantity of ammunition.<sup>42</sup> Less than a week later, Rafik Asha submitted another letter to the President of the Security Council informing him that Israel had begun amassing a large number of troops near the demarcation lines on both the Syrian and Egyptian frontiers in a violation of the Armistice Agreement requiring the separation of military forces. The letter also noted that on 1 November, Israeli armored boats on Lake Tiberias unleashed artillery fire on the Syrian posts of Hassel, Tal al Fahl, and Maachara, although the Syrian units did not return fire. Asha warned in his letter that unless the UN is able to pressure Israel into ceasing its activity his country would be “obliged to exercise their legitimate right of self-defense.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, from the Syrian perspective, a repeated failure on the UN’s part to stop Israeli aggressive action could devolve into a major armed conflict.

### **The December 1955 Israeli Attack**

On 11/12 December 1955, the situation on the Syrian-Israeli frontier finally came to head as Israeli forces launched a large-scale cross-border attack into Syrian territory on the east bank of Lake Tiberias. In many ways, the attack vindicated the Syrian fear that its sovereignty had been under threat, and portrayed this Israeli attack as constituting a “most flagrant violation [of the Armistice Agreement] ... and an act of open aggression and provocation.” At 2:30 AM, the

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<sup>42</sup> “Letter Dated 28 October 1955 from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3451),” 1.

<sup>43</sup> “Letter Dated 3 November 1955, Addressed to the President of the Security Council by the Representative of Syria (S/3455)” (United Nations Security Council, November 3, 1955), 1, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/606339/files/S\\_3455-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/606339/files/S_3455-EN.pdf).

morning of 12 December, Israeli commandos, estimated in size at around two infantry companies (roughly 200-300 soldiers) landed boats along the whole side of the eastern bank of Lake Tiberias and launched a concentrated ground attack against Syrian military posts at Buteiha Farms and Koursi backed by armored vehicles, airplanes and heavy artillery. The armed assault lasted roughly six hours as Israeli forces occupied four observation posts parallel to Lake Tiberias and attempted to push further eastward to occupy strategic defensive positions. However, Syrian soldiers repelled the further assault and the Israelis subsequently withdrew from the area. In total, the attack resulted in the killing of five officers, thirty-two soldiers, 12 civilians (including three women)—who appeared to have been crushed in their demolished homes—and eight other soldiers were wounded and thirty taken prisoner. In a formal protest to the UN, the Syrian government requested the Security Council to convene immediately to resolve the situation.<sup>44</sup>

Following the Syrian complaint, the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization submitted his own independent report confirming many of details raised by Syria and provided his general conclusions about the Israeli operation inside Syrian territory. According to the report, the attack was a well-coordinated, two-pronged assault by the Israeli commandos based largely on the material evidence found at the scene. Such physical evidence included an assessment of damaged property and military positions as well as automatic weapons, rifles, pistols, hand and rifle grenades, and demolition charges, and ammunition with “Israeli markings”. The final assessment given in the report on the death toll for both sides was higher than what was provided in the Syrian complaint and included fifty-six Syrians (including five

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<sup>44</sup> “Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505)” (United Nations Security Council, December 13, 1955), 1–2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/608270/files/S\\_3505-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/608270/files/S_3505-EN.pdf).

male and three female civilians) killed with dozens more wounded or missing, and on the Israeli side six killed and ten wounded.<sup>45</sup>

General Burns continued his report by assessing Israel's justification for launching the assault as unwarranted and highly disproportionate. He noted that on 11 December 1955 the Israeli Press Office issued a background paper on "Fishing in the Lake of Galilee" in which they stated that over the course of ten months in 1955, Syria had opened fire on Israeli fishing boats on at least twenty-five different occasions resulting in the loss of life and property. The most recent incident on 10 December, ostensibly the trigger for the assault, was shooting incident by Syrian forces against Israeli police boats protecting fishermen on the eastern banks. General Burns noted in his memoirs that "no one with any knowledge of military affairs would believe that such an elaborate, coordinated attack had not been planned well before, and probably rehearsed. Certainly it was not improvised in a few hours."<sup>46</sup> Burns also recounts in his memoirs how before the 10 December incident—which he described as probably the result of a deliberate Israeli provocation—the Syrians had actually taken measures to prevent shooting incidents during the fishing season from November to April.<sup>47</sup> General Burns noted that according to the records of the Israel-Syrian MAC, the Israeli delegation submitted twenty-two complaints alleging Syrian firing, yet in none of the instances did they call for an emergency meeting or request an investigation or suggest that any Israeli was killed or wounded. Instead most of the complaints were in regards to Syrians firing upon Israeli police boats that often got very close to the shore in order to prevent Syrians from crossing the ten-meter strip to fish in the area. Such

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<sup>45</sup> E.L.M. Burns, "Report Dated 15 December by the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the Lake Tiberias Incident of the Night of 11-12 December 1955 (S/3516)" (United Nations Security Council, December 20, 1955), 1–5, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/608285/files/S\\_3516-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/608285/files/S_3516-EN.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Burns and Mu'assasat al-Dirāsāt al-Filastīnīyah., *Between Arab and Israeli*, 108.

<sup>47</sup> Burns and Mu'assasat al-Dirāsāt al-Filastīnīyah., 118.

action would be in keeping with Syria's strategic framework of relying on force to maintain its sovereign claims in the absence of UN backing. General Burns concluded that the Israeli justification given for the assault "would hardly appear to be the sole cause". He instead suggested that the failure to negotiate an exchange of prisoners during the year was extremely agitating Israeli public opinion. This sentiment was particularly building after the Syrians captured five Israeli soldiers on 8 December 1954—one of which committed suicide in captivity (UN investigations determining no foul play)—for carrying out an intelligence operation inside Syria. Whatever the rationale motivating the assault, General Burns considered the action to have been unjustified and risked escalating the situation. On this point he stated:

"The Israel action on the night of 11/12 December was a deliberate violation of the provisions of the General Armistice Agreement, including those relating to the Demilitarized Zone, which was crossed by the Israel forces which entered Syria. Like the Qibya and Gaza incidents with which the Security Council has had to deal, the Tiberias incident has been explained by Israel as a retaliatory action on a large scale. In these three cases Israel forces have acted by surprise and, after striking a heavy blow, they have returned to their base. There is, however, a risk in such retaliatory action, viz., that the attackers may not be able to limit the extent of the operation to that planned. Such actions may well produce a violent reaction by the forces of the attacked country and what had been conceived as a limited raid develops into full-scale hostilities... There is a striking disparity between the scale of the retaliation and the provocation which was cited by the Israeli Government."<sup>48</sup>

Burns report concluded by suggesting a way forward might include an exchange of prisoners and a "gentleman's agreements" whereby Syria recognizes Israel's right to send police boats throughout Lake Tiberias and Israel allow local Syrians to cross the ten-meter strip to access water on the lake.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> E.L.M. Burns, "Report Dated 15 December by the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the Lake Tiberias Incident of the Night of 11-12 December 1955 (S/3516)," 10–11.

<sup>49</sup> E.L.M. Burns, 6–12.

With a case against Israel's incursion into Syria building, the Israelis submitted their own evidence to the United Nations accusing the Syrian government of attempting to subvert the Armistice Agreement by imposing their claims to sovereignty over the lake by force. In a letter dated 21 December 1955, Aba Eban submitted a report with annexed Syrian documents collected during raids of Syrian posts on the eastern bank of Lake Tiberias. According to the classified Syrian military documents, organizational orders were given from Syrian army headquarters on how Syrian military forces in the vicinity of Lake Tiberias should respond to Israeli military water patrols or fishing boats. The documents reveal a view held by the Syrian military as late as 8 November 1955 that Israeli military boats should not enter into the 250-meter limit of "Syrian territorial waters" nor should Israeli fishing boats land on the eastern shore. Should either line be crossed the Syrian military was instructed to fire upon such vessels.<sup>50</sup> According to Aba Eban's report, the veracity of the collected documents was confirmed in an interview, monitored by a UN observer, of a Syrian prisoner of war captured during the 11/12 December Israeli incursion. The report concluded by suggesting that Syria's actions along the lake were not isolated incidents, but rather part of a broader strategy "to transfer from Israel to Syria the effective control of a part of Lake Tiberias and Israel territory on the northeastern shore." Given the apparent Syrian agenda, Aba Eban called on the Security Council to prevent Syria from encroaching on Israeli sovereignty.<sup>51</sup>

When looked at as a whole, the question of sovereignty remained at the core of the escalating tensions along the Syrian-Israeli frontier throughout 1955. Whether depicted as a

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<sup>50</sup> "Letter Dated 21 December 1955 from the Representative of Israel Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3518)" (United Nations Security Council, December 22, 1955), Appendices 1-4, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/608447/files/S\\_3518-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/608447/files/S_3518-EN.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> "Letter Dated 21 December 1955 from the Representative of Israel Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3518)," 1-4.

mutual frustration over fishing rights or prisoners of war, what appears to be fundamentally motivating Syria and Israel's actions is a desire to assert sovereignty over some or all of Lake Tiberias. From the Syrian complaints and the classified documents collected by the Israeli commandos, the Syrian government appears intent on guaranteeing a right it believes the Armistice Agreement is expected to preserve—namely, the restoration of civilian life i.e. traditional Syrian access to the lake. According to the framework offered in this dissertation, when the central UN mechanism fails to uphold what Syria believes should be guaranteed, the country is likely to resort to force to achieve its strategic objectives. As such, Syria's actions of firing upon Israeli vessels should be interpreted in this light. For Israel, the same rationale holds true. From its perspective, everything within the 1923 Franco-British demarcated frontier between Syrian and Palestine constitutes Israeli territory. As such, no Syrian has the right to cross that boundary, to include the ten-meter strip on the eastern bank of Lake Tiberias, nor assert any sovereignty over that area. Given Syria's interest in maintaining territorial claims to that region, the Israelis took it a step further by invading Syrian territory as opposed to merely firing upon the Syrians within what they considered to be "Israeli" territory as the Syrians had done in territory they considered "Syrian". It remained to be seen how the Security Council would interpret the situation and what final determinations General Burns would make in light of the additional evidence provided by Israel.

### **Israeli Incursion into Syria Discussed at the Security Council**

On 16 December 1955, the UN Security Council convened to consider Syria's complaint against Israel's 11/12 December military incursion into Syrian territory. For the Syrian delegation, countering Israeli claims that continued Syrian civilian and military activity on and around Lake Tiberias constituted illegal interference and therefore justified the attack, was of

immense importance. From the Syrian perspective there were two critical points its UN delegates sought to make in order to dismiss the notion that it had no right to access Lake Tiberias. The first point related to the definition of the “Syrian-Palestinian border” depicted in armistice maps as constituting the international boundary set by British and French mandatory powers that included Lake Tiberias plus a ten-meter strip on the eastern bank as part of Palestine. Even though that constituted the border as defined by mandatory powers some three decades prior, the Syrian delegation noted that it never agreed to the delineation arguing that it signed a military Armistice and separation of forces agreement, not an agreement on political boundaries. Secondly, the Syrian delegation would argue that the restoration of normal life clause in Article V of the Armistice Agreement guaranteed long-standing riparian rights to Syrian farmers and fishermen. In each of the two points, the sole purpose for adopting such positions was to continue to hold out hope of preserving its sovereign claims through the international system. It remained to be seen how the Security Council’s ruling would fall on the matter and whether it was still convinced of the viability of its strategic framework.

With the opening of the Security Council debates, a number of Security Council members voiced their sharp condemnation of Israel’s activity, while others sought to reserve judgement until General Burns could provide his final assessment of the situation. In the remarks by Council members, the Syrian delegation was given many condolences while representatives from Turkey, Iran and the Soviet Union took it a step further in their judgements of Israel’s action. Mr. Sarper of Turkey for instance, called the incursion a “tragic incident” and noted that although Mr. Burn’s report has not been received, all of the other available information points to the recent loss of life as a direct result of Israel’s incursion. He like Iran, noted their strong appreciation of Syria’s “restraint” in such a situation as well as by the other Arab states. For his

part, Mr. Sobolev of the Soviet Union condemned Israel's action as a violation of the UN Charter and called on the Security Council to take "effective measures to prevent similar incidents in the future."<sup>52</sup>

While taking a wait and see approach to the incident, other UN delegates similarly offered condolences to those who lost their life in Syria. Countries who held this view included the US, the UK, France, Peru, Belgium, and China, although Mr. Tsiang of China did characterize the Israeli action as unprovoked. For his part, Mr. Lodge of the United States stated that they will wait for Mr. Burn's final report to determine whether or not the incident was provoked by Syria yet acknowledged that the use of force is not a recognized right under the UN Charter as a means to settle disputes. He noted that it was a shame that Israel had pursued this path again after similar incidents with its other neighbors stating, "It is greatly to be regretted that Buteiha should now be added to the list of military actions which Israel initiated at Gaza, at Qibya and at El Hamma." Following remarks by the various Security Council members, the Secretary General announced that General Burns' report will be sent by mail the following day so the council members would have an opportunity to discuss it in the following week.<sup>53</sup>

Following opening remarks from Security Council members, Syrian UN representatives relied on the logic of its strategic framework to respond to the 11/12 December attack. As the last major cross border incident of this study period, it is apt that Syrian remarks underscored the logic of its strategy vis-à-vis the UN and the importance of the UN resolutions in that framework. To recap, the logic of Syria's strategy suggests that when faced with a problem, the

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<sup>52</sup> "707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505)," in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Tenth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1955), 1-5, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631393/files/S\\_PV.707-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631393/files/S_PV.707-EN.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> "707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505)," 2-6.

UN Charter and resolutions serve as the primary mechanism for safeguarding its sovereign ambitions. When that mechanism fails to safeguard sovereignty, as in the case of this recent Israeli incursion, either the UN mechanism must be strengthened or Syria will only be left with war as a means of preserving its interests. As will be detailed below, Syria's statements of the implications of the Lake Tiberias incident follows its long-standing logic.

Delivering the Syrian government's opening remarks which criticized Israel's actions as a complete disregard for the central pivot in its UN strategy was Ahmad al-Shukairy (1908-1980). A noteworthy choice to represent Syria at the United Nations, Ahmad al-Shukairy was born in Tebnine (in modern day southern Lebanon) to a Turkish mother and a Palestinian father by way of the Hijaz. The son of an Ottoman Parliamentarian, al-Shukairy would similarly go on to practice law and politics, graduating from the American University of Beirut and the Jerusalem Law School before becoming active in the Palestinian national movement. The choice of a Palestinian to represent the Syrian UN delegation, who was also the sitting Assistant Secretary General of the Arab League at the time, should not be overlooked given the Syrian government's long-standing claims of intimate ties to southern Syria or Palestine.<sup>54</sup> In keeping with the standard Syrian strategic framework, al-Shukairy's following statements underscored the importance of the UN as a central pivot of the Syrian strategy, suggesting that if the UN fails to function then war is inevitable. In doing so, the Syrian delegation called into question the very effectiveness of the UN and demanded that the UN fulfill its role in safeguarding peace and security. On this point, al-Shukairy in somewhat demagogic language stated:

“Israel has made an attack of a shocking nature, of unspeakable brutality and incredible savagery. This treacherous attack was not only an open breach of the Charter, a flagrant violation of the Armistice Agreement, an act of overt aggression, but a serious disregard for the principles of morality and international

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<sup>54</sup> “Ahmad Shuqayrī | Palestinian Political Leader,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed May 20, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ahmad-Shuqayri>.

decency. It brings to our memories the ghastly war tactics of the Nazi regime against which the United Nations mobilized its material and spiritual resources. The Security Council is therefore called upon, with all its heart, with all its mind and with all its will to live up to its sacred responsibility of maintaining peace and order.”<sup>55</sup>

He continued by characterizing the Israeli incursion as an “act of war”, possessing all the attributes of war “except bravery and courage”. He noted that Israel could have resolved any complaint it had by working within the framework of the United Nations machinery but instead resorted to such an “unprecedented” crime for which it should be condemned. Furthermore, al-Shukairy spoke in direct terms about the central importance of the UN and what happens when resolutions lack protective measures, stating:

“Israel could have complained to the MAC, but resorted to force instead of complaining.... Israel has severed itself from the law of nations. Israel has acted as though the Armistice Agreement existed no more, as though the Mixed Armistice Commission was no longer in operation, as though the Security Council functioned no more. This is the crux of the question.”<sup>56</sup>

Instead of acting in accordance with UN resolutions, the Syrian delegation accused the Israeli government of following a policy of retaliation—an approach condemned by international law. Citing the examples of Israel’s disproportionate retaliatory action in Qibya and Gaza, al-Shukairy pointed out that several countries called on Israel to cease such retaliatory actions in the past, yet the events on Lake Tiberias still transpired. Noting this tendency by Israel to retaliate, the Syrian delegate stated that history and evidence has shown that these are not isolated incidents but part of a broader Israeli strategy stating:

“The question of retaliation is not foreign to the Security Council. There is a lengthy line of jurisprudence that has been decided in this connection by this body. It has been through Israel’s violations that this jurisprudence has been built up in the deliberations of the Security Council...The cases I have cited permit us

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<sup>55</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 7.

<sup>56</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 10.

to diagnose that Israel is afflicted with the disease of war and aggressive tendencies. The cases I have cited disclose a system, a policy, a pattern which Israel is following persistently and consistently”<sup>57</sup>

He further maintained that this policy reached the highest levels of the Israeli government, citing October statements by General Moshe Dayan published in *Jewish Frontier* wherein the Israeli General claimed its actions were not “vengeance” but rather “punitive” and a “warning” of further “havoc” should assaults on Israel continue.<sup>58</sup>

From the Syrian perspective, in light of Israel’s policy of persistent aggression, the UN must take a firm stance against such activity and not shirk its obligations as the Israeli state has done. Just as the UN showed itself weak in this regard, to reestablish its credibility the Syrian delegation called for upholding its resolutions as well as taking firmer action. One possible course of action, suggested by Rafik Asha, was the expulsion of Israel from the United Nations. Leveraging the United Nations Charter to his benefit, Asha based this suggestion in accordance with Article 6 which states that a member who persistently violates the principles of the UN Charter may be expelled from the UN by the General Assembly upon recommendation of the Security Council.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, Asha noted that Israel’s expulsion would not be enough, but rather tough economic sanctions should also be placed on Israel to curb its behavior. On the point of economic sanctions, he stated:

“Israel has chosen to ignore the standards of morality, the basic principles of international decency, the provisions of the Charter, the terms of the General Armistice Agreement and, finally, which is most important, the condemnations of the Security Council. It is therefore high time to apply economic sanctions against Israel.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 11, 13.

<sup>58</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 14.

<sup>59</sup> Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 15.

Asha concluded on this point by noting that it was “fabulous amounts” of money from overseas that was enabling, either directly or indirectly, the aggressive policies of Israel in the region.<sup>61</sup>

In alignment with the proposed framework, the Syrian representative concluded that if the UN fails to live up to its obligations by expelling or slapping sanctions on Israel, then the only recourse Syria would have, is war. Attempting to appeal to the religious sensibilities of the Security Council and the timing of their meetings in the run up to Christmas, Asha called one final time for UN action to prevent an inevitable conflict. Speaking to the holiness of the area and its connection to Christianity and Christmas, Asha stated:

“The time and place of this tragic event must inspire the Council to action, and effective action. The commission of this international offence took place around Lake Tiberias and the river Jordan, where the Messenger of peace uttered his eternal sermons. We need hardly recall that those areas have been consecrated by the prayers of millions of believers all over the world. The time is inspiring too. The time is almost Christmas, the birthday of the great Master in the land of peace—the holy land which was made unholy by the terror and horror of Israel.”<sup>62</sup>

Asha continued by drawing the Security Council’s attention to a 15 December 1955 letter from Egyptian Prime Minister Gamal Abd al-Nasser to the Secretary-General warning the UN of the potential hostilities should the UN fail to act against Israel. Reading the letter, Asha quotes Nasser’s statements on the repercussions of UN inaction which read:

“...I should like to inform you that the Egyptian Government is bound to deal with the situation itself, including the use of its armed forces, land, air and navy, with a view to ensuring its safety and maintaining peace in the area. That is the only natural action, since the Security Council has not prevented the recurrence of such attacks.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 15.

<sup>62</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 15–16.

<sup>63</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 16.

Concluding, Asha remarked how Nasser's remarks were "frank, sincere and bold" and put the whole question before the UN in its proper context. The onus was thus placed on the UN to uphold its obligations and bring Israel to account for face more regional instability.<sup>64</sup>

Following the Syrian delegation's opening remarks, Aba Eban offered Israel's rationale for crossing into Syrian territory. Although wholeheartedly against the Israeli government's rationale and decision to carry out the attack according to his memoirs, Aba Eban offered a passionate denouncement of the Syrian government's hostile stance towards Israel. The basis of Eban's argument rested on the premise that the Syrian government was motivated by a simple hatred of the Israeli state and was seeking to deny the country its most basic means of survival such as fishing in Lake Tiberias. He began by recounting how the latest incident was in many ways a result of the ongoing tension between Syria and Israel since 1948. Those tensions, according to Eban, were the result of "the implacable hostility of Syria towards Israel" and were designed "to reduce Israel to a wilderness by denying it the use of water resources which are exposed with special vulnerability to Syrian encroachment."<sup>65</sup> To support the view that this was an institutionalized position of the Syrian state, Aba Eban cited recent public remarks by Syria's Prime Ministers Sabri al-Asali and Said al-Ghazzi rejecting any alternative solution to the current impasse other than conquest. Said al-Ghazzi reportedly stated on a 20 September 1955 radio broadcast that:

"Israel is Syria's avowed enemy. We shall not rest as long as this thieving enemy still dwells on the holy soil of the Arab world. My Government will therefore reject all peace proposals and decline all forms of contact with the enemy. My

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<sup>64</sup> "707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505)," 16.

<sup>65</sup> "707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505)," 17.

Government will keep before it the task of strengthening the blockade against Israel with effective means in order to continue the struggle against it.”<sup>66</sup>

According to Eban, unlike Syria—whose apparent position was simple hostility towards the state of Israel—Israel only desired the most “minimal tranquility” in an area where farmers and fisherman sought to pursue their livelihood in peace. Concluding on this point Eban noted that the only objective of the Israeli Defense Forces in this area was “to ensure a minimal tranquility for these innocent and fruitful enterprises, while safeguarding the established territorial integrity of the State.”<sup>67</sup>

Aba Eban continued by explaining how his country held no aggressive designs, but rather crossed into Syrian territory to safeguard its own internationally recognized territory. The basis of Israel’s territorial claims can be found in two resolutions passed by the Mixed Armistice Commission on 15 March and 29 July 1954. The first resolution of 15 March 1954 was issued by the MAC after an incident when Syrian military personnel opened fire on Israeli police boats on Lake Tiberias. The resolution considered Syria’s actions to be a violation of the Armistice Agreement and called upon Syria to ensure “no interference within Israel territory.” Thus, Israeli officials concluded from the resolution that the United Nations machinery confirmed that Lake Tiberias was in fact Israeli territory. The subsequent resolution on 29 July went a step further in delineating the territorial frontiers between Syria and Israel, noting that a ten-meter strip of land on the eastern bank of the shore was off-limits to Syria. From Israel’s perspective, this meant that not only was Lake Tiberias Israeli territory, but also a ten-meter-strip all along the eastern shore should be considered Israeli. Therefore, not only could Syrian soldiers not claim sovereignty on

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<sup>66</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 18.

<sup>67</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 19.

the lake, but Syrian civilians would not be allowed access to the lake without Israeli permission.

On the basis of these territorial claims, Israeli officials issued their communique from Jerusalem

the night of the incursion into Syria stating:

“Tonight, Israel forces advanced against Syrian positions to silence the batteries responsible for this attack, in order to avert further Syrian aggression and to ensure the security of Israel citizens engaged in their lawful occupations. Syria has been repeatedly called upon by the Mixed Armistice Commission to put an end to interference with Israel activities inside Israel territory, particularly with fishing in the lake. The Mixed Armistice Commission’s decisions have, however, proved of no avail, and all efforts by United Nations representatives to bring about their implementation have failed. Syrian batteries on the lake have, on repeated occasions, attacked Israel fishermen and police boats. The season in the lake has turned into unabated Syria aggression against Israel, during which considerable damage and casualties have been inflicted.”<sup>68</sup>

Eban further stated, counter to the logic advanced in this study, that if Israel did not occasionally defend itself then such Syrian violations would be more regular and likely lead to a more volatile frontier. The assumption again being that Syrian violence was motivated by pure hatred of Israel rather than a deeper strategic calculus. In conclusion, Eban suggested that in the absence of a constructive relationship between the two countries, perhaps the two could simply leave each other alone and in doing so produce a more positive situation between the two countries.<sup>69</sup>

In response to Eban’s remarks, Syrian officials maintained the view that the Armistice Agreement was of a purely military nature, and that no international frontiers along Lake Tiberias or otherwise have been formally established. On 22 December 1955, in what had become a typical refrain of Syria’s UN delegation, Ahmad al-Shukairy began his rebuttal of Eban’s remarks by highlighting Israel’s repeated attempts to “becloud” discussions with irrelevant information, when the only issue at hand should be Israel’s admission of guilt in this

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<sup>68</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 22.

<sup>69</sup> “707th Meeting December 16, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 26.

operation. In specific terms, al-Shukairy called into question the very justification Eban offered as a reason for Israel's violation of international law—namely defense of Israel's sovereign rights over Lake Tiberias and defense of their border with Syria. Instead, al-Shukairy suggested that no frontier between the two countries had been established and that Syrian rights to Lake Tiberias are as ancient as the lake itself. Once again, just days before Christmas, al-Shukairy cited religious ties to the lake as evidence of Syria's long-standing connection to the water, stating:

“Lake Tiberias is as ancient as antiquity. Fishing rights in the lake are as old as human existence. If any testimony is needed, it is to be found in the New Testament. It was around Lake Tiberias that the great Master, Jesus Christ, found his early disciples, who were no more than ordinary fishermen. All subsequent generations of Syrian fishermen have led a life of peace and tranquility. Today Israel finds it fitting to set up the plea of fishing rights as a justification for murder and as a justification for destruction... Mr. Eban has accused me of religious prejudice, precisely because I referred to the holiness of Lake Tiberias and its worthy place in the life and preaching of Jesus Christ... Today, Mr. Eban might charge me with religious prejudice for my reference to the early disciples who met their Master while they were in their boats with their nets over their shoulders on their holy lake, Lake Tiberias. I simply ask: is it religious prejudice to make such references? If it is religious prejudice to mention all these events with reverence and dignity, then I, as a Syrian, an Arab, a Muslim, am glad to accept this charge with honor and with pride.”<sup>70</sup>

Al-Shukairy concluded on this point by stating that the lines separating Syria and Israel are only demarcation lines of a military character. Syria's political claims therefore to both the ten-meter strip on the eastern bank of Lake Tiberias, as well as portions of the lake are still up for political negotiation.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> “709th Meeting December 22, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Tenth Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1955), 3–4, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631394/files/S\\_PV.709-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/631394/files/S_PV.709-EN.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> “709th Meeting December 22, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 6–7.

The Syrian UN delegation once again proceeded to characterize Israel's actions in provocative terms, calling on the UN to stand up to Israel's aggression as they had against Nazi Germany. Al-Shukairy argued that Israel's latest act of aggression, if left unanswered, posed a direct threat to the very fabric of the United Nations and its *raison d'être*. The Syrian delegate noted that the entire international order established after World War II under the United Nations aimed to bring about respect for the sovereign rights of nations and an end of territorial aggrandizement through war and aggression. In doing so, al-Shukairy drew a direct parallel between the territorial aggrandizement and acts of aggression of Nazi Germany and the State of Israel. Just as the world powers came together to counter Germany's ambitions, al-Shukairy called on the UN to once again fulfill its mandate. On the relationship between Israel's latest military operation in Syria and the actions of Nazi Germany, al-Shukairy stated:

“This is not only a violation of the armistice, of the Charter, or of the resolutions of the Council; this is a warlike tendency, a poor imitation of the Nazi and Fascist regimes. This warlike policy is the very evil which the United Nations was established to uproot. It is this warlike tendency of the Nazis that was fought by the United Nations, which gave this Organization its name and fame. The United Nations paid in terms of dear life in the Second World War to eradicate this Hitlerite ideology, if it could be designated as an ideology. But it seems that Israel leaders are nothing but the miniatures of Hitler and his clique...It now rests with the Security Council to take effective measures to uproot this evil in the Middle East as it was uprooted in Europe. The Security Council must act and act effectively before this pest gains root in the soil of the Holy Land. This is the crusade which the Security Council must wage, not under the banner of religion but under the banner of international peace and security.”<sup>72</sup>

To effectively counter Israel, al-Shukairy noted that the United Nations must do more than condemn Israel's actions, but should pass a resolution that states clearly that Israel's actions violated the Armistice Agreement, the UN Charter, and was an act of aggression. Al-Shukairy thus submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council for its consideration that included four

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<sup>72</sup> “709th Meeting December 22, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 4–5.

provisions: 1) that Israel's incursion be referred to as an "outrageous attack"; 2) decide that the attack be considered an act of aggression under Article 39 of the UN Charter; 3) that member states place economic sanctions on Israel and that Israel be expelled from the UN; and 4) that Israel pay compensation for the damage and loss of life. In a final address to Israeli claims that Syria was merely seeking its destruction, al-Shukairy agreed that such an outcome was inevitable, but it would happen at the hands of the Israelis themselves stating: "The destruction of Israel is bound to take place, but it is Israel that will destroy Israel. It is Israel's arrogance, Israel's militarism and Israel's aggressions which will bring about the destruction of Israel."<sup>73</sup>

In response, Aba Eban of the Israeli delegation similarly accused the Syrian government of pursuing an illegal policy of territorial aggrandizement and therefore becoming unworthy of holding UN membership. Eban noted that al-Shukairy's comments were nothing more than a repeat of the same "offensive demagogic overtones" heard in the previous Security Council session. He similarly stated that the Syrian government "lacks every moral quality" to pass judgement on the actions of the Israeli state when it was Syria that attempted to destroy Israel in 1948 yet was still allowed to remain a member of the United Nations. From Israel's perspective, this latest spat along Lake Tiberias falls within the same vein of what the Eban described as a continued policy of creating, "a *de facto* military situation as a basis for illicit encroachments and territorial claims." Although suggesting a different motivation for staking territorial claims, Eban's characterization of Syria's actions as in pursuit of territorial objectives is similar to the author's assessment of Syria's pursuit of its sovereign claims.<sup>74</sup> Regarding Syria's actions along Lake Tiberias, Eban stated:

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<sup>73</sup> "709th Meeting December 22, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505)," 8.

<sup>74</sup> "709th Meeting December 22, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505)," 10-13.

“What we are facing at this juncture is...a proven Syrian attempt to assert and exercise jurisdiction over Israel territory and Israel waters by the pressure and threat of armed force. There has, in other words, been a use and a threat of force by Syria against the territorial integrity of the State of Israel, a policy specifically forbidden by the Charter of the United Nations.”<sup>75</sup>

All of these actions and standing military orders, Eban noted, have been established clearly in the classified documents collected from the Israeli incursion into Syrian territory.

In a final rebuttal before hearing General Burn’s report on the latest incident, the Syrian delegation once again accused the Israeli delegation of deflecting from the issue by bringing up issues that are immaterial to Israel’s incursion into Syrian territory. Al-Shukairy noted that the Security Council was presently holding discussions not to discuss any standing Syrian military orders, but rather to discuss Israel’s violation of the Armistice Agreement and military incursion into Syrian territory. In an attempt to redirect the conversation, al-Shukairy noted:

“The item before us is the ghastly attack of 12 December by Israel military forces. In my original statement, and again today, I warned Mr. Eban against injecting any element foreign to the item before us. The item before us is the military raid against Syria, against its army, and against its people. To talk now of standing orders is really rather amusing at a meeting of the Security Council dealing with a very serious matter.”<sup>76</sup>

However, despite accusing Eban of deflecting from the topic at hand by raising the issue of Syria’s pursuit of territorial claims, al-Shukairy also suggested that Israel’s actions were part of a larger policy of reclaiming control over all of ancient Israel. Citing a confidential memo within the United Nations signed by Aba Eban, al-Shukairy noted that the Israeli government considered the land currently under its control as “merely a part of its historical patrimony.” Al-

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<sup>75</sup> “709th Meeting December 22, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 14.

<sup>76</sup> “709th Meeting December 22, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 16.

Shukairy suggested that if Israel viewed the territory under its control as only “a part” or mere fraction of their historic patrimony, then the Security Council must decide what should become of that other portion of Israel’s historic patrimony before they seize it for themselves. With the winter holidays approaching, the Security Council postponed its deliberations on the Lake Tiberias incident until the new year.<sup>77</sup>

At the start of 1956, the Security Council reconvened to discuss the latest report submitted by the UNTSO Chief of Staff on his mixed impressions of the political positions held and armed behavior exercised by both sides. The general tenor of the UNTSO Chief of Staff’s report was largely conciliatory to both sides of the dispute, acknowledging the possible rationale for Syrian soldiers to fire on seemingly hostile Israeli boats in Lake Tiberias as well as nod to Israeli territorial holdings. Of note, in General Burns’ report, the Chief of Staff agreed with the Syrian point of view that the Armistice Agreement does not in any way prejudice the rights, claims or positions of either party regarding any final status peace agreement. However, he also noted that while territorial claims are not finalized, that does not mean that Syria can operate as if it has sovereign rights over waters in Lake Tiberias or along the ten-meter strip separating the two sides. General Burns therefore concluded his report by reiterating his suggestion that the best way forward would be for the two sides to enter into a “gentleman’s agreement” whereby the Syrians agree not to fire on Israeli boats, and Israeli boats agree not to come within a certain distance of the shoreline neighboring Syrian controlled territory.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> “709th Meeting December 22, 1955, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria Addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 16.

<sup>78</sup> “Report Dated 15 December 1955 by the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the Lake Tiberias Incident of the Night of 11-12 December 1955 (S/3516/Add.1)” (United Nations Security Council, December 30, 1955), 1–4, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/608440/files/S\\_3516\\_Add-1-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/608440/files/S_3516_Add-1-EN.pdf).

After considering the two parties' positions and General Burns' report, a number of Security Council members submitted their own draft resolutions and amendments to the Syrian proposed resolution. The most notable alignment with Syria's draft resolution came from the delegates of the USSR, Iran, and Yugoslavia. The draft resolution proposed by the USSR for instance replaced paragraphs 2 and 3 in the Syrian resolution and instead called on Israel to prevent future such actions plus a warning that repeated action would force the Council to consider further punitive measures in accordance to Article 39 of the Charter.<sup>79</sup> While each of the three countries differed slightly in terms of the language they used to describe the Israeli incursion—such as calling it a flagrant violation instead of an outrageous attack—they all agreed that Syria was entitled to some form of compensation for the losses it incurred. The three countries were also of the view that no mention of Syria's involvement in events on Lake Tiberias prior to the Israeli incursion should be included as those events were immaterial to Israel's attack and in no way justified the violation of Syrian sovereignty. Representatives from Australia, China, Cuba, France and the United Kingdom also agreed with the view that Syrian involvement on the Lake in no way justified the subsequent attacks launched by Israel. However, delegates from Belgium Cuba, France, Peru, the UK and the United States did not support the idea of compensation given the legal and practical difficulties of applying the principle of compensation equitably.<sup>80</sup>

During the debates, the United States, France and the United Kingdom also submitted a draft resolution outlining their largely condemnatory view of Israel's incursion while leaving room for reconciliation. According to the draft resolution submitted by the western powers on 11 January 1956, Israel's 11-12 December incursion into Syrian territory was considered a "flagrant

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<sup>79</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1956* (United Nations, New York: Department of Public Information, 1957), 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1956*, 4.

violation” of the 1948 cease-fire agreement, the General Armistice Agreement, and Israel’s obligations under the United Nations Charter. The western countries further noted their “grave concern” at Israel’s failure to uphold its obligations despite previous warnings that any military action that is in violation of the Armistice Agreement, in retaliation or not, is unacceptable. However, against Syria’s hopes, the draft resolution stopped short of imposing any form of economic sanctions, compensation, or including any provision for Israel’s expulsion from the United Nations. Rather the draft resolution called on Israel to uphold its obligations, or face further measures from the UN, as well as for both Syria and Israel to work through the UN machinery and Mixed Armistice Commission to resolve their disputes and adhere to its guidance on reducing tension along the frontier.<sup>81</sup> However, in an effort to reach some form of consensus with the other Security Council members, the three-powers submitted a third version of their draft resolution on 18 January 1956 with an additional clause stating that Syria’s actions on Lake Tiberias prior to the incident in no way justified the actions taken by Israel and called on both parties to swap prisoners as a means of reducing tensions.<sup>82</sup>

Before proceeding with a final vote, the Syrian delegation made a last appeal for the Council to reconsider punitive measures against Israel. Speaking for the Syrian delegation, Ahmad al-Shukairy described resolution in short as a condemnation of Israel’s attack and a warning for the future. Noting that the tripartite draft resolution contained the “resentment of the civilized world” proved the stance taken over the years by Syria and the Arab states, al-Shukairy expressed:

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<sup>81</sup> “The Palestine Question: France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America: Joint Draft Resolution (S/3530)” (United Nations Security Council, January 11, 1956), 1–2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/566467/files/S\\_3530-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/566467/files/S_3530-EN.pdf).

<sup>82</sup> “The Palestine Question: France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America: Revised Joint Draft Resoluion (S/3530/Rev.2)” (United Nations Security Council, January 17, 1956), 1–2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/566244/files/S\\_3530\\_Rev.2-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/566244/files/S_3530_Rev.2-EN.pdf).

“The verdict of the Council establishing the guilt of Israel is surely not to remain as an international instrument in the archives of the United Nations. For us in the Middle East, the verdict against Israel is an additional ground to prove the correctness of the policy we have followed ever since the Palestine question was brought before the United Nations.”<sup>83</sup>

However, al-Shukairy posited that while such a pronouncement would normally deter any other member of the United Nations from future aggressive acts he noted that “Israel’s policy is deeply embedded in aggression... The only remedy is to apply effective measures to cut the evil out at the root.”<sup>84</sup>

Regarding certain substantive disagreements with the content of the tripartite draft resolution, the Syrian delegation voiced contention with the clauses referring to Syrian interference on Lake Tiberias and prisoner swaps. In keeping with Syria’s sovereign claims to access on Lake Tiberias, al-Shukairy argued against the characterization of Syria’s rightful actions on the Lake as interference stating:

“Our conduct has not been at fault regarding activities on Lake Tiberias. Our rights of fishing, of navigation and of irrigation in Lake Tiberias and its shores, apart from the Palestine question as a whole, *ab antiquo* as they are, have been endorsed by international treaties. Our peaceful exercise of these rights cannot be described as interference in any manner. It would be an interference on the part of Israel if Israel hampered the free exercise of our rights.”<sup>85</sup>

With regards to the draft resolutions call for an immediate exchange of all military prisoners, al-Shukairy criticized as a false equivalency the notion that the Israeli spies held in Syrian custody were of the same character as the Syrian soldiers abducted from Syrian territory. He noted that Israel’s acts of espionage and subversion were well documented in the Mixed Armistice

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<sup>83</sup> “715th Meeting January 19, 1956, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” in *United Nations Security Council Official Records Eleventh Year* (New York: United Nations Security Council, 1956), 2, [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/633068/files/S\\_PV.715-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/633068/files/S_PV.715-EN.pdf).

<sup>84</sup> “715th Meeting January 19, 1956, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 2.

<sup>85</sup> “715th Meeting January 19, 1956, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 2.

Commission's reporting and their distinction from Syria's soldiers "too glaringly flagrant" to classify the two in the same category. Al-Shukairy concluded his final appeal by urging a reconsideration of the Council's approach.<sup>86</sup>

Despite al-Shukairy's last minute appeal to reconsider including punitive measures in the resolution, consensus within the Council was growing behind tripartite resolution. To facilitate the closing of the debates, Iran dropped its calls for including Israeli compensation to Syria as a provision in the resolution and instead expressed hope that Israel would be moved to pay compensation on its own. Moving forward with the vote, the Security Council decided by a vote of 8 to 2 with 1 abstention to give priority to the revised three-power draft resolution submitted by the US, UK and France. On 19 January, the Security Council unanimously agreed to the draft resolution.<sup>87</sup> After passing the resolution, the Presiding member of the Security Council Mr. Belaunde of Peru praised Syria's moderation and restrained response allowing it come before the Council as "the victim of an attack."<sup>88</sup> Al-Shukairy, in response to the resolution's passage, noted that while the document contained some praiseworthy components questions of expulsion, economic sanctions and compensation have not been dealt with and his delegation would raise the issue at a future date. In concluding, al-Shukairy again underscored his delegation's vindication at the conclusion of the debates. Of note however, in what may be a sign of cracks in the edifice of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework by 1955, al-Shukairy noted that force would have to be increasingly the weapon of choice given the failure of UN pronouncements to deter Israeli action concluding:

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<sup>86</sup> "715th Meeting January 19, 1956, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3505)," 3.

<sup>87</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations: 1956*, 4.

<sup>88</sup> "715th Meeting January 19, 1956, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3505)," 26.

“I should like to seize this opportunity to state that the deliberations of the Council have reinforced our conviction that preaching, sermons, or even condemnations and warnings are, by themselves, no security against aggression. Aggression is repelled by all measures of self-defense, as declared in the Charter. This is the message which I shall convey to my country as an additional experience in support of our sublime cause. It goes without saying that, when aggression is launched, we shall defend our country by all the means at our disposal. Yet we are for peace—a peace based upon right, upon justice and upon human dignity.”<sup>89</sup>

From 1954 through 1955 the Syrian representatives to the UN Security Council and local machinery remained engaged politically in pursuit of their sovereign ambitions. Whether issuing complaints against Israeli activity in the DMZ or asserting its sovereign claims by force on Lake Tiberias, the Syrian government continued to rely on a dual pronged approach of UN engagement to preserve its sovereign claims and leverage violence when the UN approach proved insufficient. However, Syria’s response in early 1956 to the provocative Israeli military incursion into Syrian territory on 11/12 December 1955 appeared to portend the coming of a new phase in Syria’s UN strategic engagement. Hoping to secure more substantive punitive measures over verbal condemnation of Israeli actions that the UN had done in the past, the Syrian delegation seemed to be losing confidence in the UN remaining an effective mechanism in its quest for sovereignty. Al-Shukairy’s closing remarks that aggression (equated with Israeli behavior) can only be repelled by self-defense suggests the opening of a new phase in Syria’s strategic framework the relies less on the UN and more on force. This new thesis, however, requires a deeper examination before more definitive conclusions should be drawn.

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<sup>89</sup> “715th Meeting January 19, 1956, The Palestine Question: Letter Dated 13 December 1955 from the Representative of Syria to the President of the Security Council (S/3505),” 28.

## **Aftermath: Reviewing the First Ten Years**

In its first ten years with the United Nations, the Syrian government gained major political achievements and suffered significant political setbacks during the course of its UN engagement. Able to credit the UN for its early international recognition as an independent nation, Syria could also credit the UN for backing the creation of a political rival along its border. The creation of the State of Israel posed a significant challenge to Syria's pan-regional ambitions—the establishment of Syria within its “natural” frontiers and the potential reunification with the broader liberated Arab community. Following Israel's establishment, Syria would spend the remainder of the study period attempting to challenge Israel's sovereign claims to territory within the borders set by colonial outsiders who initially pledged support to the creation of an independent Arab polity in the region. By 1955, the new status quo of the UN holding Syria's sovereign claims in abeyance within and around the Demilitarized Zone and Armistice Line along the Jordan River remained intact. Such a political situation would not continue for long.

This study is the story of Syria's UN engagement from 1945 to 1955 on issues of immediate political and security concern to the Syrian government, namely its independence and sovereign claims. However, this represents only the top tier of political challenges the Syrian government faced during this period. As varied as the global political challenges were during the UN's first ten years of existence, so too was Syria's UN engagement wide-ranging. On topics ranging from Cold War disputes, world-wide independence movements, the Korean War, the admission of new UN members, to humanitarian support for Palestinian refugees, the Syrian government remained actively engaged. In every case however, an underlying policy of promoting sovereignty and keeping the United Nations machinery strong was discernable.

Before providing an assessment of Syria's engagement strategy during its first ten years with the United Nations, it is instructive to first recount how Syria perceived its own experiences with the UN from 1945 to 1955. The holding of a UN conference in 1955 to evaluate the organization's progress over the first ten years offers a natural window into the Syrian government's view on a range of challenges confronting the UN as well as an evaluation of the UN's standing at the end of this study period. This conference provides a useful frame of reference for analyzing the study period of 1945 to 1955 before providing some concluding remarks and implications on what Syria's early experience with the UN may have meant for subsequent periods.

#### **A Return to San Francisco to Review the UN's Progress over the First Ten Years**

In response to an invitation from the city of San Francisco, and in accordance with a 17 December 1954 General Assembly resolution, the United Nations held a meeting at the San Francisco Opera House—where they first drafted the UN Charter—in commemoration of the UN's first ten years as an organization. Representing the Syrian delegation was Syria's esteemed Foreign Minister Khalid al-Azm, a five-time Prime Minister and prominent Damascene, and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the United States of America Dr. Farid Zayn al-Din. Speaking on behalf of his country, Khalid al-Azm's remarks reinforced the position argued throughout this study that the Syrian strategic objectives vis-à-vis the United Nations of securing independence and preserving pan-regional sovereign claims (both Syrian and Arab) remained unchanged. Al-Azm additionally highlighted his country's long-standing positions on a

number of related topics such as the importance of upholding the UN Charter—the central mechanism in its strategy—and of promoting the sovereign equality of all nations.<sup>90</sup>

From 20 to 26 June 1955, world leaders from around the world convened in San Francisco to commemorate the tenth anniversary since the signing of the UN Charter. The conference itself was organized by the UN Secretary General in cooperation with a committee of representatives from Belgium, Canada, China, Czechoslovakia, Ecuador, France, India, Lebanon, Turkey, The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, and in consultation with the civic authorities of the City of San Francisco. Of the sixty governments represented in the United Nations at the time, thirty-seven were represented by government officials at the Foreign Minister level—the most high-level representatives of any UN meeting since the signing of the Charter back in 1945. Regarding the program, the representatives did not meet to debate any particular issue or pass a resolution as they would during a General Assembly session. However, the gathering of nations on the tenth anniversary of the UN's founding provided an opportunity for the world's nations represented in the organization to offer their perspective on the situation of world affairs in particular the role of the United Nations in the international arena.<sup>91</sup>

The first day of the conference opened at 3:00 PM on 20 June, a Monday afternoon, with welcoming addresses from the Mayor of San Francisco, the UN Secretary General and the presiding officer of the meetings Dr. Eelco N. Van Kleffens of the Netherlands. The opening two-hour remarks were followed by a reception at the Mark Hopkins Hotel and a subsequent

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<sup>90</sup> *Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Charter of the United Nations in the City of San Francisco on 26 June 1945: The City of San Francisco, 20-26 June 1955.* (New York: United Nations, 1955), 63–66.

<sup>91</sup> *Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Charter of the United Nations in the City of San Francisco on 26 June 1945: The City of San Francisco, 20-26 June 1955.*, 7.

performance at 9:00 PM by the San Francisco Orchestra at the Opera House. The following day, the UN commemorative meetings reconvened Tuesday morning at 10:00 AM to begin hearing statements from various countries in attendance. The Syrian delegation was among the first countries to speak before the international gathering. Following statements from Belgium, the UK, and Brazil, Khalid al-Azm delivered his country's remarks on the state of the international community and his views on the role of the United Nations. According to al-Azm's memoirs, the script of the speech was prepared by Syria's UN representative Zayn al-Din and delivered in English—al-Azm a speaker of French—so as to be understood by the widest audience possible.<sup>92</sup> As mentioned above, his comments reiterated the long-standing strategic policy of the Syrian government vis-à-vis the United Nations that centered around the defense of pan-regional sovereignty, and the preservation of political independence.<sup>93</sup>

Khalid al-Azm opened his remarks by offering a broad assessment of the shifts in the international community from the initial optimism in 1945 to the power struggles of bloc politics characteristic of UN by 1955. Mirroring his country's own optimism in 1945, having secured international recognition of its independence and the subsequent withdrawal of French forces, al-Azm stated:

“Ten years ago, the creative forces of history brought forth on this world the United Nations. From the shadows of war, chaos and anguish, emerged the United Nations in all its magnificence: a Charter embodying the common resolve of peoples, a centre to harmonize actions of nations for peace, justice, self-determination and mutual co-operation... Since then, the varying desires, policies and ideologies of the Powers have taken the field. International confusion, then tension, became the order of the day. The hopeful world left by the San Francisco

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<sup>92</sup> Khālid ‘Azm, *Mudhakkirāt Khālid al-‘Azm.*, al-Ṭab‘ah 2., vol. 2 (Bayrūt: al-Dār al-Muttaḥidah lil-Nashr, 1973), 425.

<sup>93</sup> *Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Charter of the United Nations in the City of San Francisco on 26 June 1945: The City of San Francisco, 20-26 June 1955.*, 12–13.

Conference was thus turned into an arena, where power bloc struggle against power bloc to fashion the world's future in the image of their desires.”<sup>94</sup>

Speaking in reference to a question set for the General Assembly's tenth session in the Fall of 1955, al-Azm argued that the problem of international tension throughout the community to this point was not due to the inadequacies of the UN Charter, but rather due to its lack of application. Since its drafting, the Syrian delegation has maintained the position that the only true safeguard against threats to international peace, sovereignty, and political independence, is the adherence of all states to the provisions of the United Nations Charter. Such remarks underscoring the importance of the UN remaining a viable mechanism in its political strategy.

Al-Azm continued by attributing one major challenge to the international political landscape as the onset of the Cold War. According to al-Azm, the Cold War bloc politics have plagued nations for “some ten tormented years” pulling nations into is “dismal vortex” and hindering their pursuit of “self-determination, liberty and national unity.” He also noted that the Cold War set forth a dynamic of mutual containment and a new equilibrium that not only forces nations into two competing camps, but threatens a foundational principle of the UN Charter, namely sovereignty. Speaking on the threat of the Cold War to sovereign decision making, al-Azm stated:

“Nations with an objective outlook have, thus, become social outcasts in that society of power. Free nations are not to be left free to find their way, unless each one follows either the star of the east pole or the star of the west pole of power...even to the point of telling them what policy, social order, regime, or government they should have... [This has resulted in the] classification of nations into leading nations and led nations, in opposition to the sovereign equality of States, big and small.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Charter of the United Nations in the City of San Francisco on 26 June 1945: The City of San Francisco, 20-26 June 1955.*, 63.

<sup>95</sup> *Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Charter of the United Nations in the City of San Francisco on 26 June 1945: The City of San Francisco, 20-26 June 1955.*, 64.

Concluding on this point, al-Azm argued that the policy generated by the Cold War of “you are either with us or against us” has only continued to justify policies counter to the UN Charter such as continued colonialism to include its “Zionist offshoot”. Despite such pressures to conform to the wishes of the international community on matters of bloc politics or the alignment with pre-formed majorities or minorities, al-Azm noted that his country’s pursuit of sovereign independence can help explain the Syrian delegation’s decision to abstain in numerous UN debates.<sup>96</sup>

Likely indicative of a tactical shift in Syria’s UN engagement strategy, al-Azm did note one favorable development to occur since 1945—the increase of independent voices in the UN. In general terms, the Syrian delegation spoke of the recent liberation movements across the Asian and African states whose voices, representing over 700 million people, were now heard within the halls of the United Nations. This new trend was important for two key reasons. First, over the course of the UN’s first ten years, Cold War divisions rendered the UN Security Council largely broken as both the United States and Soviet Union began vetoing one another’s initiatives. This forced the UN General Assembly to pass the “Uniting for Peace” Resolution 377 (V) in 1950, which gave the General Assembly authorization to pass resolutions towards maintaining peace when the Security Council failed to reach consensus. As such, if the General Assembly now had the authority to make decisions on matters related to threats to international peace (i.e. Syria’s disputes with Israel), then Syria stood a chance at winning such disputes if more like-minded countries were members of the United Nations. In specific terms, al-Azm noted that the April 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia represented this positive trend of

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<sup>96</sup> *Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Charter of the United Nations in the City of San Francisco on 26 June 1945: The City of San Francisco, 20-26 June 1955.*, 64.

greater involvement in the international arena by those who do not subscribe to one bloc or the other. On the Bandung Conference, al-Azm stated:

“Bandung was not a conference to produce another power bloc. It was not an assembly of so-called neutrals, wavering and indifferent...There are no neutrals towards peace, inseparable from justice, or towards indivisible war...The Bandung Conference sought a wider vision than that seen from the angles of Europe and North America. It was a positive contribution because it consecrated, with the fact of Asian-African liberation, the determination of the Asian-African nations to practice their wide international responsibilities. It implied that, henceforth, countries of all continents would share, more effectively than before, in assuming the duties of dealing with world affairs and efforts to fashion a future of peace, liberty and development.”<sup>97</sup>

From 1945 to 1950, the United Nations had only grown in membership by nine countries, largely due to blocked applications by the Cold War contenders. By December 1955 another sixteen-member states were added to the UN and by 1960 that number increased again by another twenty-three members. This new strategy posed by al-Azm would likely begin to influence Syria’s strategy over the subsequent ten-year period.<sup>98</sup>

Moving on from the topic of the importance of admitting new members to the organization, Khalid al-Azm spoke at length on the topic of pan-regional sovereignty and what that meant for Syria. Describing its support and defense of pan-regional sovereignty as a consistent policy since the UN’s founding, al-Azm said the following of its overall strategy vis-à-vis sovereignty:

“Syria, let it be remembered, is part of the Arab homeland. Its people are an integral part of one and the same Arab nation. *Its cardinal policy, therefore, has continued unchanged since its liberation.* It is this: (1) To work for the completion of the liberation of the Arab homeland and the achievement of the National Arab Reunion. The question of liberation and that of the reunion are indeed for us two phases of the same reality of a free and full natural life. Until such time as reunion is achieved, and with a view to its realization, we are intent

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<sup>97</sup> *Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Charter of the United Nations in the City of San Francisco on 26 June 1945: The City of San Francisco, 20-26 June 1955.*, 64–65.

<sup>98</sup> “Growth in United Nations Membership, 1945-Present | United Nations,” accessed January 30, 2017, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/member-states/growth-united-nations-membership-1945-present/index.html>.

upon seeing that the Arab States act collectively in the international field. Lately a step in that direction was taken by Syria to bring about a better and fuller co-ordination of policies in the economic, foreign and security fields with some of the other Arab States. This step is in response to the popular urge in the Arab countries and is a substantial move towards Arab reunion. Hence, our efforts and our fundamental objectives are liberating and constructive.”<sup>99</sup>

Al-Azm’s statements are noteworthy for several reasons. For one, this is the first time in a speech before the United Nations that a Syrian official has outlined, in explicit terms, his country’s policy of pan-regional sovereignty. When viewed as “two phases of the same reality”, the process of Arab reunion has been to support the political independence of fellow Arab states and their sovereignty with a view towards linking their politics and territories together under one Arab umbrella structure. This approach has been most notable in the case of Palestine. Since 1945, the Syrian delegation, although altering over the years how it referred to “southern Syria”, has viewed the territory and political independence of Palestine as inextricably linked to its own destiny. Whether it can be argued that this focus on Palestine was to protect what was left of Syria from Israeli territorial aggrandizement or was driven by irredentist aspirations of a united Arab homeland, the mechanism of promoting pan-regional sovereignty remained the same. The fact that the pattern of supporting Arab independence movements and their sovereignty extended to North Africa suggests that pan-regional sovereignty—sovereignty for Syria’s natural borders within an even larger sovereign Arab entity—was plausibly a genuine goal of the early Syrian government.

Speaking directly to this question of broad pan-regional sovereignty, al-Azm was even interrupted during his speech by the President of the Conference after voicing his support for the national liberation of north Africa. Interrupted after saying, “The liberation of the North African

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<sup>99</sup> *Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Charter of the United Nations in the City of San Francisco on 26 June 1945: The City of San Francisco, 20-26 June 1955.*, 65.

part of the Arab homeland is an objective which is real and in accordance with the principles of the Charter,”<sup>100</sup> al-Azm, not understanding the English of the Conference President simply continued reading his prepared remarks. After returning to his seat he would voice his anger to Zayn al-Din at the apparent double standard the UN had to Syria recounting in his memoirs:

“By God it is indeed shameless that this man intended to take this attitude towards a representative of a small country, while he was silent yesterday during Molotov’s speech that violently attacked the United States regarding the military bases it established in different parts of the world.”<sup>101</sup>

Al-Azm later learned from Zayn al-Din that the president of the session was from Holland and al-Azm believed that there was no doubt that he interrupted al-Azm in revenge for the harsh speech al-Azm delivered before the Bandung Conference criticizing the Dutch for their ongoing colonization of Indonesia and need to hand the land over to its people. The next day the same interruption would happen to the representative of the Philippines who voiced similar frustration about the double standard in cutting off Syria and then the Philippines while turning a blind eye to others asking “Is there a difference between representatives of big states and representatives of small states regarding the right to speak?”<sup>102</sup>

Finally, in another sign of changing UN tactics, Al-Azm concluded by briefly expressing his hope that the United Nations continue to support the economic development of under-developed nations in the world. This view of minimizing the differences between states was tied in the Syrian government’s mind towards the idea of promoting the sovereign equality of all members. If the world continued to be divided between those who had power, both militarily and economically, the logic would suggest that small countries like Syria would forever remain

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<sup>100</sup> *Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Charter of the United Nations in the City of San Francisco on 26 June 1945: The City of San Francisco, 20-26 June 1955.*, 65.

<sup>101</sup> ‘Azm, *Mudhakkirāt Khālid al-‘Azm.*, 1973, 2:425.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Azm, 2:425–26.

vulnerable to outside powers imposing their will. However, with increased economic development al-Azm suggested this would, “help to bring all countries nearer together in a state of balanced cultural and economic equilibrium.” Al-Azm finally concluded by asking the international community to agree to move forward in a hopeful and resolute manner and allow the Charter signed ten years prior to “prevail as the standard of international behavior.”<sup>103</sup> Despite the many challenges it faced under the new international system, the Syrian government’s hope in the UN Charter prevailing as a viable covenant taken by all UN members, suggests the continued value the country placed in the United Nations.

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<sup>103</sup> *Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary of the Signing of the Charter of the United Nations in the City of San Francisco on 26 June 1945: The City of San Francisco, 20-26 June 1955.*, 65–66.

## **Conclusion: An Assessment of Syria's UN Engagement from 1945 to 1955**

In order to assess the nature of Syria's UN engagement, a brief recap of the major disputes Syrian officials brought before the international system, as well as their outcome, is in order. The first goal the Syrian government sought to achieve via UN engagement was international recognition of its independence from French Mandatory powers. Following two and a half decades of unsuccessful armed resistance and political negotiations, the replacement of the failed League of Nations system with the United Nations generated new international political momentum in favor of promoting the sovereign equality of all nations. Risking its sovereignty by participating in the Allied World War II effort, the Syrian government secured a seat at the San Francisco conference in 1945 and lobbied for the inclusion of clauses in the UN Charter that recognize the political independence of all UN members and conference participants. Therefore, its first foray into the international system can be viewed as a major success. This early success would color the Syrian government's impression of what was possible through UN engagement.

The second major goal the Syrian government sought to achieve through United Nations engagement was the removal of foreign occupying troops in its country against the will of the local inhabitants. This challenge constituted the first major dispute the Syrian government brought before the UN Security Council and represented the first real test of the UN's commitment to its principles and Charter on an issue involving the newly independent Syrian state. Although failing to pass a definitive UN resolution calling for the withdrawal of foreign occupying troops, the net result of its engagement was the removal of foreign occupation troops in 1946, and thus another success.

The third goal brought before the United Nations was Syria's hope of securing an independent Palestinian state. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, the

Syrian government lobbied ad nauseam for maintaining a unified Palestinian political entity that would secure Arab political dominance in the region. However, its political efforts to block international support for the partition of Palestine at every juncture in the UN's debates failed. Its UN engagement efforts in 1947 were thus a major political failure, and Israel's subsequent declaration of statehood over Palestine prompted Syria to fight for the preservation of its pan-regional sovereign claims in 1948.

The fourth major goal Syria sought to achieve via UN engagement was the preservation of its sovereign claims in Palestine through the 1949 Armistice Agreement. Although negotiated on the heels of a poor military performance in the 1948 war and a political loss in the form of the UN's recognition of Israel, the Armistice agreement itself provided the Syrian government an international legal mechanism for holding the question of sovereignty within and along the Demilitarized Zone and Armistice Lines in abeyance. This gave the Syrian government recourse to maintain political influence and leverage over territory in "southern Syria" frustrating Israeli efforts to assert sovereignty in three major instances: Israel's Hula drainage project, its Jordan canal diversion project, and direct sovereign claims to Lake Tiberias. Although Syria never gained full sovereign control over the desired territory, during the duration of this study it managed to maintain the status quo by blocking Israeli initiatives that would have established Israeli de facto sovereignty over the area. As such, this fourth goal on a whole can be viewed as mixed success.

So how can we understand the cases when Syria's UN engagement proved successful, proved to be a failure, or yielded mixed results? In each dispute, the Syrian delegation hoped that the principles of the UN Charter and legal precedents established in the form of UN resolutions, would lead the UN to rule in Syria's favor. However, while Syria's reliance on the UN was a

consistent policy, the outcome of its engagement varied, suggesting that the conditions at the UN were not always the same. It is these unique conditions which require further unpacking.

In cases where the Syrian government's engagement with the United Nations proved successful, there were two key conditions that played in Syria's favor: 1) Great Power backing; and 2) UN Credibility Concerns. What these two conditions suggest, is that for Syria to have had success in its UN engagement from 1945 to 1955, Syria needed the support of at least one Great Power (primarily the United States or Soviet Union) and needed a political environment wherein the credibility of the United Nations was at stake. This idea can be expressed roughly in the following equation:  $\text{Success at the UN} = f((+) \text{ Great Power Support}, (+) \text{ UN Credibility})$  wherein Syria's success at the UN is a function of the existence of great power support and the existence of UN credibility concerns. These two factors were critical to Syria's early success in securing its independence and the withdrawal of foreign troops. In the first case, the threat posed to Syria's independence aspirations were French attempts to militarily coerce Syria's nationalist leadership to negotiate a treaty granting France continued privileged status in Syria. Due largely to U.S. pressure, and the fear that France's actions might undermine the success of the San Francisco Conference, Syria was given the political top cover it needed to withstand France's military efforts and take its place amongst the community of nations at San Francisco. Syria's success at securing the withdrawal of foreign troops can also be attributed to a slight modification of these two factors. Just as in the first case, US officials in Washington pressed the British and French to be mindful of the negative image it would send the world if the UN put pressure on the Soviets and British to withdraw from Iran but remained silent when it did not involve the Soviets. However, when it came to the actual deliberations at the UN, the US government modified its approach by not supporting Syria's call for an unconditional

withdrawal. In this case, it was the Soviets who vetoed the U.S. resolution calling for some form of negotiated withdrawal of troops from Syria. In this case, great power pressure from the Soviets—and perhaps the international specter of the UN bowing to Soviet pressure—prompted the British and French to adhere to the spirit of the UN resolution and Syria gained sovereignty as a result. Although in both cases, particular conditions were required for Syria to achieve success, without the existence of the United Nations, the Charter, and the political environment to support it, it is doubtful that Syria would have achieved independence and sovereignty at this time.

In 1947, a new factor capable of frustrating Syrian success via UN engagement was the building political momentum in favor of supporting the creation of the State of Israel. In addition to the widespread devastation brought on by World War II, one of the most disturbing features of the war was Nazi Germany's campaign of genocide against the Jewish people. The fact that a holocaust of such a scale transpired weighed heavily on the conscious of the international community prompting world leaders to search for a viable solution to the plight of the Jewish people. The existence of a Zionist movement with established connections in, and decades-long efforts at settling, Palestine proved to be the international community's preferred choice.

In its quest to secure Arab independence in Palestine, the Syrian government lacked all of the political conditions that made its previous engagement with the UN successful. Furthermore, the addition of a new "Israeli" factor further complicated Syria's calculus for success. On the question of support for Arab independence over all of Palestine, or a partition of Palestine to support the aspirations of the Jewish people, all relevant political factors worked against Syrian government ambitions. On the great power side, both the United States and the Soviet Union reached rare consensus on the issue of supporting the partition of Palestine to

address the plight of the Jewish people. Further, UN credibility to adhere one hundred percent to the letter of international law was not at risk, rather failure of the UN to act in support of Israel may have harmed the image of the UN's moral character. Finally, international support was largely behind Israeli aspirations for statehood, and as such Syrian officials failed politically on all counts. This picture of Syrian failure can be depicted by the following equation: Syrian Failure at the UN =  $f$  ((-) Great Power Support, (-) UN Credibility, (+) Israeli International Standing) wherein Syria's failure was a function of having no great power support, of the UN's credibility (i.e. adherence to the letter of the law in support of Syria's case) not being on the line, and Israel's positive international standing. The factors of this equation would remain relevant in future disputes.

Finally, in cases involving mixed Syrian success through UN engagement, securing sovereign claims through the Armistice Agreement was Syria's chief objective. This pursuit should first be understood as mixed success for three important reasons: 1) Syria never secured formal sovereignty over the territory it pursued in the DMZ and along the Armistice Line [thus failed overall in this pursuit]; 2) Syria maintained its claims to territory by leveraging the UN [success]; 3) Syria had to occasionally rely on force to achieve its objectives [mixed success]. In the Armistice disputes wherein the net effect of Syria's UN engagement resulted in mixed success, UN credibility concerns remained a fixed constant whereas Great Power support and Israel's political standing varied. The reason UN credibility concerns remained a constant was due to the fact that a major war between Israel and its neighbors had already erupted, and if the UN Armistice Machinery that was created to prevent future clashes failed to adequately handle disputes, then another regional conflict could transpire. As such, Syria could more or less count

on the UN maintaining the rule of law to prevent either Syria or Israel from concluding that the UN was treating the situation inequitably and therefore trigger a conflict.

The first variable component to Syria's overall mixed success in its Armistice disputes, was the fluctuating position adopted by the Soviet Union. In the three major disputes raised by the Syrian delegation—Lake Hula, Jordan Canal, and Lake Tiberias disputes—the Soviet Union voted in three different ways. During the Lake Hula dispute, the Soviet delegation took a mostly passive approach, abstaining due to its belief that the 1947 partition plan remained the only internationally agreed upon document to resolve the Palestine Question and imposing a new solution would be less than ideal. On the Jordan Canal dispute, the Soviet Union vetoed the US-backed resolution due to it lacking direct bearing on Syria's concerns and neglecting the question of Syrian consent on civilian activity within DMZ. Finally, on the Lake Tiberias issue, the Soviet Union supported a largely condemnatory resolution against Israel in another case of Security Council consensus. In the first dispute, the Soviet Union's decision to abstain—allowing the U.S. resolution which backed General Riley's position that the Hula project cease pending future agreement—worked in Syria's favor. In the Jordan Canal project, the Soviet decision to veto a U.S. resolution allowing the Chief of Staff to explore ways of reconciling Israeli and Syrian interests, prompted the UN Secretary General to push for the Canal project's continued suspension and prevented the introduction of a non-negotiated element to become international law—thus another success. Finally, the Soviet Union's support to a widely condemnatory resolution against Israel that also upheld the importance of the Armistice Agreement allowed Syria to maintain its sovereign claims, even if not achieving them. Overall, Syria could preserve its sovereign claims through Soviet action, but never secured sovereignty therefore contributing to mixed success in Syria's UN engagement.

The last variable condition to Syria's overall mixed success in its Armistice disputes was the international political standing of Israel at the time of the Syrian complaint. Although securing a halt to Israel's Hula drainage project—pending a negotiated resolution to the dispute—many within the international community did not look negatively upon Israel's drainage project, hoping that it could soon resume operations and address humanitarian concerns like malaria. In this case, Syria preserved its sovereign claims within the DMZ, but Israel also preserved its claims to the future operations of the Hula Project and thus Syria's success was again mixed. In the following Jordan Canal project disputes, Israel's international political standing was significantly tarnished following its decision to carry out a large-scale attack on civilians in the Arab village of Qibya. Although not directly tied to events in Syria, the international community widely condemned the Qibya attack which undoubtedly influenced the simultaneous discussions on the Syrian complaint. Of note, Syrian forces did not fire a single shot to influence the course of discussions on this issue, likely due to the widespread political momentum against Israel's actions. It was during these deliberations, that the Soviet Union pressed the UN to address Syria's underlying frustrations rather than brush them under the rug, as the US resolution attempted, and vetoed the US resolution preserving the status quo—another mixed success. Finally, in Syria's Lake Tiberias complaint, the Syrian state was targeted directly in an Israeli cross-border attack that generated international opprobrium. Falling short of implementing sanctions against Israel, the latest resolution warned Israel of future punitive actions should they conduct a similar operation in the future. The situation also preserved the status quo which granted Syria a semblance of rights to Lake Tiberias beyond the Armistice Line and in this way represented a success. This phase of mixed success can be explained in the following equation: Syrian Success at the UN =  $f$  ((+) Great Power Support for the *Status Quo*,

(+) UN Credibility, (+/-) Israeli International Standing) wherein Syria's mixed success is a function of great power support (either U.S. or Soviet) for the status quo—not Syria's complaint—, a constant concern for UN credibility and impartiality, and Israel's predominantly negative international standing during the course of UN debates.

### **The Limits of Syrian-UN Engagement**

Given the Syrian government's mixed track record of success at UN engagement from 1945 to 1955, a few points are worth noting on the limits of Syrian-UN engagement and the implications those limitations have for future Syrian decision making over the subsequent years. To begin, it is helpful to start by unpacking the implications of the Syrian-UN Strategic Framework proposed in the introduction. To recap, this framework suggests that when Syria is unable to secure its strategic objectives through UN engagement, it will rely on force to either preserve its claims or force the UN to reconsider the matter from Syria's perspective. What this means for Syria—who had early political successes, then failure, and then mixed results—is that overtime it had to rely more on force in pursuit of its objectives. This suggests that unless the international community begins to take Syria's side in its disputes—a hope al-Azm implied with the admission of more neutral Afro-Asian countries to the UN—more clashes with Israel should be expected.

The expectation of a greater Syrian reliance on force, instead of the UN, to pursue its strategic objectives has implications on Syria's military preparedness. As a newly independent state, the Syrian government inherited a colonial era military of questionable loyalty and subsequently gutted the institution to start anew. Its poor performance in the 1948 war underscored its weakness as well as the limits of armed force as a political tool. Syria would continue to struggle militarily following subsequent purges of military members through

successive coups and remain several steps behind Israel's military capabilities. This military weakness compared to Israel has its own implications for the Syrian-UN strategic framework and greater expectations for future conflict. If the trajectory of Syria's successes in the first ten years are any indication of the trends to follow, then Syria should expect to rely on more force to achieve its objectives. However, if it is militarily weaker than Israel, then this too will be a problematic approach. It should logically follow then that Syria would desire to improve its military standing in its quest towards "strategic parity" with Israel. Syria's decision to sign regional defense pacts in 1955 and a Soviet arms deal in 1956 are indicative of the importance of improving Syria's military standing to achieve its political objectives. If the UN continues to prove an unreliable tool over the subsequent years, then we should expect to see the Syrian government make earnest efforts to improve its military standing and rely more on armed force.

Another limiting factor to Syrian-UN engagement was its connection to Israel's political standing. What the track record of Syria's first ten years suggest, is that when Israel's international political standing was positive, Syria stood no real chance of achieving its territorial objectives through UN political engagement. This means that for Syria to have a real stake politically at the UN on issues related to its sovereign claims in Palestine, Israel's political standing would need to be negative. However, as seen in the first few years, Israel's negative standing was not simply the result of engaging in economic development projects—designed to assert de facto sovereignty—but happened only when Israel conducted disproportionate retaliatory attacks as in the case of the al-Hamma raid, the Qibya attack, and the Lake Tiberias incursion into Syria. In each one of those instances, Syria or another Arab state gave local irregulars either free reign or state direction to carry out attacks or subversive activity on Israeli claimed territory. This pattern of relying on non-state actors who provoked Israeli attacks seemed

to be the right formula for generating negative international attitudes towards Israel. This might suggest that if Syrian officials wish to have a chance to advance their political claims within the UN for sovereign claims in Palestine, they would need to continue cultivating ties with non-state actors to provoke attacks by Israel while retaining plausible deniability in involvement.

Great power backing also served as a limiting factor to Syrian success in its UN engagement. What this means is that lacking any military alternative to impose its will on a situation, to get a resolution passed in its favor the Syrian government required some form of great power support. Within the Security Council in particular—the UN organ responsible for addressing threats to international peace—the right by great powers to veto resolutions played an important role in how the international community chose to act on a complaint raised by Syria. Whereas the United States served as the leading voice of the Western Cold War camp and the primary backer of Israel, the Soviet Union adopted more of a status quo position on legal issues which largely served the interests of the Arab States. However, this support for the status quo did not necessarily advance Syria's agenda of securing sovereignty over territory within "southern Syria" but did allow Syria to maintain such claims. Occasionally, the Soviet Union's own agenda worked against Syrian interests most notably on the question of partitioning Palestine. Here, the absence of great power support rendered Syria's UN pursuits fruitless and war ensued.

Finally, the reliability of the UN to function as a credible organization based on the rule of international law also determined the success or failure of Syria's sovereign pursuits. Unfortunately for Syria, the determining factor driving UN credibility concerns was the political environment within the international community. For example, in Syria's quest for independence at the San Francisco conference in 1945, the United States' desire that the UN gain early widespread support as a credible institution pushed others to faithfully observe the principles of

the new organization—and thus recognize Syrian independence. However, the opposite was also true in the case of partitioning Palestine and recognizing the state of Israel. In this case, the international community prioritized finding a humanitarian solution to the plight of holocaust survivors and displaced persons over a strict adherence to the existing norms under international law. Only in instances following armed conflict or situations that might devolve into armed conflict between Syria and Israel did the international community seek to uphold the rule of law. This most notably occurred under the Armistice Agreement wherein, to prevent a return to conflict, the UN machinery chose to uphold the letter of the law and prevent a change to the status quo—in this case Syria's sovereign claims in Palestine. The importance of UN credibility to Syrian success also has implications for the future. If the Syrian government is going to control this critical variable, it likely stands a better chance at maintaining its sovereign claims if the threat of war exists, rather than depend on the international community to politically support Syria's claims on their own. This would push the UN to favor upholding the status quo if it determined that war was inevitable. Once again, to address UN credibility concerns, it would be more logical for Syria to engage in armed conflict or threaten conflict if it perceives that its interests are at risk of being lost.

Ultimately, what Syria's experience at the UN in its first ten years tells us is that the international organization was a strategic tool in Damascus' political arsenal. Regardless of the domestic, regional, and international political forces contributing to Syria's turbulent decade after independence, the United Nations remained a constant feature of Syria's political engagement. This study represents just the beginning of an analysis of Syrian engagement within the international community. Several topics during this period such as Syrian involvement in UN economic discussions, other international disputes, as well as the role of the UN in Syrian

domestic politics require further examination. Developing a fuller understanding of Syria's past experience with the international organization will prove essential as subsequent scholarship seeks to unpack the strategic role of the United Nations during the Syrian crisis—one of the most critical security challenges of the early twenty first century.

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