

Jewish opposition to partition

(excerpts from Henry Cattán, *The Palestine Question*, pp. 34-5)

The partition of Palestine was opposed not only by the Palestinian Arabs and by the Arab States, but also by the indigenous Orthodox Jews of Palestine who lived on good terms with their Arab neighbors. In fact, the concept of a Jewish national home was foreign to the indigenous religious Jews in Palestine. Ronald Storrs, the first British Governor of Jerusalem, wrote: 'The religious Jews of Jerusalem and Hebron and the Sephardim were strongly opposed to political Zionism'¹

Opposition also came from leading Jewish statesmen. Notable among the opponents of partition were Sir Herbert Samuel, the first British High Commissioner in Palestine and J.L. Magnes, President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Both men, as we have seen in discussing the Balfour Declaration, had proclaimed their opposition to its leading to a Jewish State. In a speech at the House of Lords on 23 April 1947, Sir Herbert Samuel, then Viscount Samuel, said: 'I do not support partition, because knowing the country as I do, it seems to be geographically impossible. It would create as many problems as it would solve'². In his testimony before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, J.L. Magnes declared:

The Arabs have great natural rights in Palestine. They have been here for centuries. The graves of their fathers are here. There are remains of Arab culture at every turn. The Mosque of Aksa is the third Holy Mosque in Islam . .

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In a memorandum to UNSCOP dated 23 July 1947, J.L. Magnes formulated the case against partition in the following terms:

We have been asked for a statement as to why we are against th partition of Palestine ... We believe genuine segregation to be impossible. No matter where you draw the boundaries of the Jewish state, there will always be a very large Arab minority ... It is impossible to draw satisfactory economic boundaries ... The larger the Jewish state, the more impossible becomes the economic existence of the Arab state ...

Satisfactory 'national boundaries', if the object is to promote peace, cannot be drawn. Whenever you draw these boundaries, you create irredentas on either side of the border. Iffedentas almost invariably lead to war ... There are those who say that we should accept partition now, because 'borders are not eternal' ... In other words, the partitioned Jewish Palestine would be a bridge-head for the further conquest of the whole of the country.

Many Jews are in favour of partition . . . But there are many Jews, moderates and extremists, religious and not religious, who are opposed to partition. Almost all the Arabs are opposed to partition ... Imposing partition would therefore be a hazardous undertaking.

Under all these circumstances, we find it strange that anyone should claim for partition that it, at least, gives finality. To us it seems to be but the beginning of real warfare ... perhaps between Jew and Jew, and warfare between Jew and Arab."⁴

¹ Ronald Storrs, *Orientalisms* (Nicholson and Watson, London, 1945), p. 340

² From Viscount Samuel's speech at the House of Lords, 23 April 1947

³ J.L. Magnes, *Palestine - Divided or United* (Jerusalem, 1947), p. 32

⁴ Regarding the role played by President Harry Truman to secure the acceptance of partition by the UN, see Henry Cattán, *Palestine and International Law*, 2d edn. (Longman, London 1976), pp.82-7