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Report on the Activities of the Arab Office, Washington, for the First Six Months Beginning Nov.1.1945 (Excerpts)

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Summary:

In March 1945, the Arab League (AL) was founded in Cairo. It arrived at the tail-end of a gargantuan four-year-long endeavor to economically integrate the entire Middle East and North and northeast Africa in order to make its polities more self-sufficient during the world war, in which shipping with Allied countries was dangerous and when military trumped civilian needs. This endeavor was supported by national authorities, aided by the United States, and directed by officials of the British Empire. Britain was paramount in the region, and by 1943 its armies, with the US military, evicted all German and Italian troops from North Africa.

Towards the end of the war, the British Empire developed a greater interest in allied Arab countries cooperating more closely. Hence, it backed the establishment of the AL. The latter was not at all simply a British project, though. It also reflected a highly particular version of pan-Arab nationalism: rather than promoting territorial or political unification, it allowed key states to assert their voice in the Arab World.

The Arab League had six founding members. These were Saudi Arabia, a British ally, and Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Transjordan, which all were in various ways British-ruled; so was Yemen, which joined in May 1945. Though Palestinians worked with it, Palestine was not an official founding member. Britain was not keen. As Palestine's Mandate power, it continued to heed Yishuvi interests. Moreover, AL member governments were not truly supportive either. They did, however, take a great interest in the Palestine conflict. In November 1945, the AL re-established the Arab Higher Committee (AHC), which first was founded at the start of the Palestine Revolt, in 1936, but outlawed by Britain in 1937. When the AHC imploded due to intra-Palestinian infighting, the AL in 1946 created the Arab Higher Executive, renamed AHC in 1947. Moreover, the AL in 1945 declared a boycott of all Jewish-owned businesses in Palestine. And in 1945, too, it executed plans going back to 1944 to open abroad public relations "Arab Offices" (AO), whose main writ was to explain why Palestine's Arabs, not the

Zionists, should become the sovereign in Palestine. One AO was in London. Another was in Washington, DC, open until 1948, and a third followed in 1946 in New York, open until 1947; they have been treated in Rory Miller's "More Sinned against than Sinning?: The Case of the Arab Office, Washington" (2004) and Daniel Rickenbacher's "The Arab League's Propaganda Campaign in the US Against the Establishment of a Jewish State" (2020).

Supported by some British officials, the AL opened AOs in the United States because it feared Zionist lobbying and public relations there and because it knew the US government would help shape the postwar Middle East, even if Britain was still the premier power. The man behind the idea of the AOs, Musa Alami (1897-1984), and a majority of AO officials, including Ahmed Shukairy (1908-1980), were Palestinians. There were other Arabs, too. One was the Lebanese Nejla Abu-Izzedin (1908-2008), who had received her PhD from the University of Chicago in 1934; another was the Anglo-Lebanese Cecil Hourani (1917-2020), brother of the famous historian Albert Hourani (1915-1993), who discussed the AO in *An Unfinished Journey: Lebanon and Beyond* (1984).

The text printed here, excerpts from a report, in English, reflects the work of the Washington AO, its travails, and the AL officials' views of the US. It is noteworthy that the original of the text forms part of a broader file created by the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, Jerusalem, the para-state government of the Yishuv in British Mandate Palestine. The file is kept at the Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

12.2.47REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ARAB OFFICE,
WASHINGTON, FOR THE FIRST SIX MONTHS BEGINNING NOV.1.1945.Introduction

To educate the Americans to an idea, is an extremely difficult process. To change their mind to remove false notions and impressions, is far more difficult. The reasons are obvious. In the first place, the U.S.A. is not a country, but a continent. It is 3,000 miles from coast to coast and has a population of some 140 million people.

Secondly, it is a country which has no center. Neither Washington nor New York should be considered as such. With the exception of the New York Times and the New York Herald Tribune, which circulate throughout the country, each state has its own papers and magazines, which generally sell nowhere except in that district. The number of daily papers throughout the country is over 1200 and the number of magazines amounts to some 1800.

These are the two main difficulties. There are, however, important contributory causes as well. There is, for example, the complete indifference of the average American to news of foreign countries. Unless such news affects the normal course of his life, the average American does not care very much. He is living in abundance and is out to enjoy every bit of it. When he finishes his work, he likes to go to parties, to bars, and to dancing places.

This indifference has encouraged the rise of group pressure. The result being that unless an idea is backed by action groups, it is not likely to make headway and manifest itself in tangible form.

Then there is the overwhelming literature emanating from numerous local societies representing action groups as well as foreign agents. Almost every country has its own information bureau in one form or another sending out literature which no American would possibly have the time to read.

The case of propagating the Arab cause is further complicated by the unbridled campaign of abuse which the Zionists have been indulging in with a view to smearing the Arab reputation. The absence of any organization to counteract the pernicious manoeuver of the Zionists and to present the Americans with the actual facts helped much to further the Zionist thesis. The Americans, especially the politicians and party leaders among them, were further involved in the question of Zionism not in response to the demands of national interest, but due to certain egoistic reasons for wining favours from the Jews at the electorate. It is because of these reasons that we came to realise from the outset that the office had to fight against great odds. These difficulties have been all the more enhanced by the presence in America of various groups of anti-Semites who take a stand against the Jews as such and would welcome any scheme that would amount to the actual transplantation of these people to any territory out-side America. ...

Personnel

The first of the members of the Arab Office to arrive in the United States was Dr. Nejla Izzedin. She reached the States on May 8th, 1945, and was followed by a party of four consisting of Ahmed Shukairy, Khulusy Khairy, Aouney Dejany and Omar Abu Khadra. In November of that year Mrs Bedia Afnan came from Baghdad. Samir Shamma was next to arrive in Washington, transferring from the London Office. Rafid Al-Askari joined the office in February 1946 and was followed by Anwar Nashashibi. Cecil Hourani arrived on April 24, 1946, and assumed his duties as the Secretary of the office.

Ahmed Shukairy had to leave America for Palestine on November 28, 1945, and his post as Director was taken over by Khulusy Khairy. ...

Problems tackled

It should be made clear at the outset that although the office was entrusted with the duty of presenting the cause of the Arab Nation in general and that of each of the Arab States in particular, its attention was more or less directed to the Palestine question. ...

Articles and Letters to the Editor

... [From] November 1945 ... a number of articles and letters [which] appeared in different dailies and periodicals ... as follows:

The "New York Times"

The "New York Herald Tribune"

"Washington Post"

"Evening Star"

"Christian Science Monitor"

"Asia"

"The New Republic"

"The Nation"

"Jewish Chronicle"

"Religion Magazine"

"Saturday Review of Literature"

[...]

Air Forums

The office was invited to participate in three air symposiums on the question of Palestine. ...

Advertisements

There is a general agreement among publicity agents that advertisements are one of the most effective means to acquaint the American public with the facts of the unknown side of a problem. The Zionists apparently avail themselves to the maximum of this device due to their unrestricted command of financial and material resources.

In this respect the Arab Office is handicapped in view of the exorbitant charges on advertisements. However, the office published two advertisements both of which appeared in the New York Times. The first was printed on the 7th of November, 1945, carrying the title "The Arabs Insist on Their Rights" and occupied one-quarter of a page. The reaction to the publication of this factual piece has far exceeded any expectation, for the office received a tremendous number of letters commending this work and urging that it be reproduced in other local papers. ...

Brochures and Other Publications

Most of the booklets sent us by the Jerusalem and London offices were reproduced here in Washington. Members of the office worked also on an illustrated booklet called the "League of Arab States," which contained basic information, historical and otherwise, on the seven Arab States, members of the Arab League, Palestine included. These and other pamphlets are usually circulated to members of Congress, Governors, public libraries, public institutions, and outstanding journalists and radio commentators. The titles of the publications printed and distributed by the office are listed below: □ □□

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Name of Publication □□□ □□□ □□□

Number Distributed □□□ □□

□□□ □□□

1: □□□ □□□ □□□

Pact of the Arab League □□□ □□□ □□□

3,000 □□□ □□

□□□ □□□

2: □□□ □□□ □□□

The Arab World and the Arab League □□□ □□□ □□□

5,000 □□□ □□

□□□ □□□

3: □□□ □□□ □□□

The First and the Last (extracts from the King-Crane Report) □□□ □□□ □□□

3,000 □□□ □□

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4: □□□ □□□ □□□

League of Arab States □□□ □□□ □□□

6,000 □□□ □□

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5: □□□ □□□ □□□

Testimony before the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry (Prof. Hitti) □□□ □□□ □□□

2,000 □□□ □□

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6: □□□ □□□ □□□

Iraq's Point of View on the Palestine Question (Dr. Jamali's testimony before the Anglo-American Committee sitting in Cairo) □□□ □□□ □□□

3,500 □□□ □□

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7: □□□ □□□ □□□

The Problem of Palestine (evidence submitted by the Arab Office in Jerusalem to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, March, 1946) □□□ □□□ □□□

4,000 □□□ □□

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8: □□□ □□□ □□□

Papers on Palestine (Articles by prominent people, Arabs and Americans, on the Palestine question) □□□ □□□ □□□

500 □□□ □□

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9: □□□ □□□ □□□

Dilemma in Palestine (issued by the Committee on work among Moslems) □□□ □□□ □□□

4,000 □□□ □□

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10: □□□ □□□ □□□

Palestine Reality (by Shibli) □□□ □□□ □□□

1,000 □□□ □□

[...]

Bulletins

Around the first week of November the office added another feature to its work, namely, that of the bulletins. These bulletins are issued every fortnight and contain two main items - an editorial on major problems and a news letter. ... [T]he office has compiled a mailing list containing 3,000 names, among whom are Congressmen, institutions, libraries, and important journalists and commentators. ...

Press Releases

Press releases are usually issued on special occasions to make known the viewpoint of the Arabs on certain important developments. So far the Arab Office has released to the press five statements. ...

Lectures

Both Dr. Izzedin and Dejanya were assigned for lecturing. They were later joined by Nashashibi. They gave lectures in almost one-third of the United States. The audiences were varied but very carefully chosen. Some lectures were given in colleges and universities A number of women's associations were reached, especially groups of university women, the Foreign Policy Associations and similar associations came in for a few addresses. Rotary Clubs were addressed and there were two talks on the radio, one in Cleveland and the other in Chicago. Other

members of the office participated in occasional debates and lectures in Washington, New York, and nearby places.

In trying to reach audiences certain difficulties were encountered. There is some suspicion with regard to propaganda agencies and a shying away from controversial issues. ... However, when the contact was made and the audience was reached, the response has been invariably encouraging. The American public, on the whole, knows very little about the Arabs and in some cases it has been misinformed, but, on the whole, it is a good public to reach. The Americans are good listeners at a lecture and eager to be informed; they are modest and grateful for honest information. ...

It has been observed that for lectures to be effective, they should be carefully prepared, well thought out and planned. Their content must be substantial and they should be delivered in a simple manner. The Americans do not like theatrical gestures and poses.

In conclusion, despite the difficulties which have been encountered there are many elements in our favour. There is above all this justice of our cause. There is also the essential honesty of the American people, then there is a growing interest in the world affairs in general and the stakes which the United States has in the Middle East; oil, trading, communications, strategic position, moral prestige and ideology. However, it will be some time before our case is adequately known. ...

Social Contacts

This has been the most difficult of the methods of approach to the American mind and the greatest part of the burden fell on the shoulders of Mrs Afnan. However, by December it has become possible for this office to hold its first housewarming party which was attended by some 150 distinguished guest [sic], among them members of the State Department, with Mr. Henderson at the head, some members of the British Embassy which included Mr. Butler, Sir Vivian Gabriel and Mr. Tandy, (in charge of the Palestine Desk) all our Ministers and members of the Legation, and a number of the most outstanding journalists and commentators in Washington, and leading members of the Arab community in Washington. A series of smaller parties followed that [sic] to which were invited some Senators, Congressmen and journalists.

Enquiries and Information

Letters, cards, and other forms of communication are being daily received in the office from individuals, cultural institutes and other organisations seeking information about different aspects of Arab life. These letters are by no means confined to the Palestine question, but often deal with other problems of the Arab world. With the reply the office sends some of its literature giving fuller information as to the points raised. Such communications are of great propaganda value for the simple reason that they are written by people who are interested and our replies thereto are usually long and detailed ones.

Reports

In addition to all this the office sends out to the headquarters in Jerusalem at intervals, reports on developments in the United States which are of concern to the Arab world in general and the Palestine questions in particular. Of such reports, so far 21 have already been sent.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the Zionists have pinned all their hopes on the United States. The importance which they attach to the winning of American public opinion cannot possibly be exaggerated. To achieve this, the Zionists have organized a tremendous campaign which penetrates into every nook and cranny of the country and reaches almost every publication. Their tactics are largely based on capitalising the sentiments of the Americans towards the refugees and displaced persons in Europe, as well as on the resentment with which the average American views the persecution inflicted by the Nazis. In addition, the Zionists have to a great extent succeeded in mobilizing Jewish influence in the United States - financial and otherwise. What non-Zionist Jewish element exists, which might be large in number, is nevertheless hardly articulate. The result is that in addition to the sympathy of a large section of the American public, the Zionists are able to exert political group pressure to drive the Congress and the executive to support their thesis. With this last element there is nothing that the Arab Office can do. The group pressure is indoctrinated and very

little can be done to make them change their minds. However, group pressure alone cannot secure unlimited support of the United States Government for the Zionist program, especially since this group pressure is almost purely Jewish in program, [sic] and character and the Zionists feel that in order to win they must have the active support of a large section of the American public. It is with a view to prevent his mobilisation of the Americans that the Arab Office has carried on since it has been established.

The activities of the Arab Office, detailed above, represent a modest effort towards this goal.