

# President Truman George Marshall and Israel

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

American Jewry is split over whether Donald Trump is the most pro-Israel or pro-Jewish president in the history of the USA. It illustrates how divided and antagonistic the different parts of the so-called United States and the Jewish community are.

Before Trump, most people who knew anything about history would have said it was Truman who in 1947 supported the idea of partitioning the Palestine Mandate into a Jewish and Arab territories. He then voted to recognize Israel at the United Nations, following Israel's declaration of Independence after the Arab states rejected compromise and declared all-out war. And this, against the overwhelming opposition of his advisors, the State Department, the WASP establishment and the antisemitic lobbies.

I have just been reading *George Marshall; Defender of the Republic* by David L Roll. Marshall was one of the most powerful and influential of American Generals, diplomats and political figures at that time. He was the man who organized and facilitated the invasion of Europe. He was the father of Marshall Plan that rebuilt Germany and Europe after the war, for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1954. We might also mention how his directives rehabilitated millions of Nazis and how that was excused as necessary to stop the communists. He was also Secretary of State over the period of negotiating the future of the Jewish State.

When I got to the pages in this biography that related to the emergence of the State of Israel, I could see how strongly he and the top echelons of the USA were opposed to a Jewish State and did all they could to block it. Incredibly Truman stood up to them and won. But it was a very close-run thing and he outcome quite miraculous.

The British were eager after the Second World War to get out of the Mandate for Palestine. It had been created by the League of Nations and assigned to Britain in April 1920 as part of the carve up of the Ottoman Empire. The rise of Arab Nationalism, the massacres by Arabs of Jews in Hebron in 1929 and the failure of the British army and police to deal with the conflict was proving a burden too heavy to bear. Especially for a country so weakened by war as it was trying to divest itself of much of its Empire and responsibilities.

After the war Truman, who as vice president succeeded Roosevelt in April 1945, asked the British to roll back their ban on Jewish immigration to Palestine and allow 100,000 holocaust survivors in. But they refused.

Instead in 1946 they agreed to an Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry. My late father Kopul Rosen who was then the Principal Rabbi of the Federation of Synagogues gave evidence to it. One of the American members, Bartley Crum, wrote in his memoirs how impressive and influential his evidence had been.

The Committee recommended that Britain relent on immigration and recommended that both Jew and Arab should run their own communities, eschew violence and the ban on immigration lifted. But it advised against either a Jewish or an Arab State. Britain would not agree. The matter was handed to the United Nations to deal with.

In the summer of 1947 the United Nations Anglo-Palestine Committee recommended by seven to four that the area should be partitioned into two States, Jerusalem should be an international city under UN Trusteeship and Jewish immigration (banned by the British Mandate Government) should be permitted). The Jewish Agency welcomed the proposal even if the land offered to them was far less than they had hoped for. Something was better than nothing.

George Marshall as the senior American politician and Secretary of State had to decide whether the US should support partition or not. He convened a meeting of John Foster Dulles, UN Ambassador Warren Austin, Loy Henderson State Department General John Hildring and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. The meeting was antagonistic to Jewish interests and overwhelmingly opposed to partition. Only Hildring and Mrs. Roosevelt spoke in favor.

Marshall was neutral. Although he tried to placate the Arabs by switching the Negev from Jewish hands to Arab. In Truman's circle only Roosevelt, Clark Clifford Truman's lawyer and David Niles, were in favor of partition. Marshall very reluctantly agreed to the President's wish to support partition.

On 29 November 1947, the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine was passed, by 33-12 votes. It called for separate Jewish and Arab states operating under economic union, with Jerusalem being transferred to UN trusteeship. Jamal al Husseyni nephew of the Nazi Mufti of Jerusalem announced that they rejected the vote and said "We will defend every inch to the last drop of blood." He swore to drive the Jews out. King Ibn Saud wired

Truman that " the dispute between Arab and Jew will be violent long lasting will lead to the shedding of much blood." The British Colonial Secretary Arthur Creech Jones announced that the British were washing their hands and the Mandate would terminate on 15 May 1948. The British incidentally provided men and arms to the Jordanian Arab Legion who soon captured the Old City of Jerusalem and razed the Jewish Quarter.

Immediately George Kennan and the State Department tried to annul the idea of partition. They argued that Truman would be in danger of losing the upcoming 1948 Presidential election because he would be seen as favoring the Jews. On the other hand Truman knew that no Democrat had ever won the Presidency without New York and New York Jews were on this issue very pro the Jewish State. Truman tried to buy time. He promised Marshall and Dean Rusk that he would not support an independent Jewish State. Marshall and his allies seemed to be winning.

Into this stepped Eddie Jacobson, Truman's army buddy, business partner and friend from Kansas City. On March 13<sup>th</sup> he turned up unofficially at the White House on a Saturday when most staffers were away. For two hours he sat with Truman and tried to persuade him to meet Chaim Weizmann to hear his point of view. Something Truman hitherto had refused. Truman reacted negatively. Complained the Jews were pressurizing him. Jacobson recalled " Truman at that moment was as close to being an anti-Semite as a man could possibly be." Jacobson persevered and Truman capitulated. Weizmann came in secretly and convinced him to support partition and to vote to recognize a Jewish State if one was declared.

Meanwhile Marshall's office leaked news on March 19<sup>th</sup> that the US was backtracking on partition in favor of trusteeship. Truman was furious at being blindsided. Once again on April 11<sup>th</sup> Eddie Jacobson went back to remonstrate with Truman who promised him that he would recognize the Jewish State

Marshall and Lovett ( who had succeeded Dean Acheson) heard that Truman had ordered his representative at the UN to recognize the Jewish State before the Soviet Union or any other nation did. Marshall was furious. May 12<sup>th</sup> at a crucial meeting Lovett shouted at the President that he should resign. Marshall himself threatened to resign. The meeting ended in deadlock. Truman gave Marshall time to cool down and then approached him privately and Marshall finally agreed not to oppose him. His words, when asked why should be pasted over the entrance to the White House today were "You don't accept a post and then resign when the man who has the constitutional authority to make a decision, makes one you do not like !"

12.01am on My 15<sup>th</sup> Ben Gurion declared Independence. At 6:11 pm in the USA "The United states recognizes the provisional and De Facto authority of the New State of Israel." The USA did not recognize Israel De Jure until January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1949.

Was Marshall antisemitic? Clark Clifford and Richard Holbrooke in a book "Counsel to the President" in 1991 wrote that Marshall was indeed amongst the anti-Semites who opposed the establishment of Israel. Roll claims not. He argues that both Marshall and the State Department were concerned with strategic factors alone. Oil, the huge Arab population, and the number of Muslim States at the United Nations. But he agrees that antisemitic sentiment played a large part in the whole issue.

Who knows for sure? I am sure the State Department like the UK Foreign Office in London, were not favorably disposed towards the Jews at best. Indicative of the times and the attitude to Jews was that Truman's wife had always refused to have a Jew step across the doorstep of her house, even Eddie Jacobson his close friend and partner. So who was the hero and who the villain? Either way, Jews are treated much better in Washington now than then.