

“I Won’t Say I Wanted the Job” The United Nations’ Search for a Special Municipal Commissioner in Jerusalem, 1948–49

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Abstract

As the British Mandate drew to a close, the future of Jerusalem was brought into full focus. The newly formed United Nations tasked itself with creating a solution for its own constructed problem: how the city ought to be administered. The findings of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) delivered the ever-familiar two-state solution, but also included a third, lesser-known aspect of post-British Palestine. Through the employment of a Special Municipal Commissioner for Jerusalem, the United Nations attempted to not only bring the Holy City under its purview, but also to implement the internationalization portion of its partition plan for Palestine. Despite its unsuccessful endeavor to install a commissioner in the city, the United Nations did manage to sow the seeds of resentment at a crucial stage of proceedings immediately before and after the Nakba. Through acts of continued imperialism, and under the facade of eventual self-determination as outlined in its charter, the United Nations sought to implement its mandate in Jerusalem while disregarding the desires of Palestinians, Arabs, and Zionists of the region. The result, ultimately, was a continuation of the British Mandate under a new name.

Keywords

United Nations; Jerusalem; internationalization; Quaker; Harold Evans; Palestine; Mandate.

The photo chosen for the front page of the *New York Times* depicted a man unequivocally thrust into an undesired responsibility: a truncated neck, an oversized tie, a smile signifying the last remnants of a hope soon to be dashed entirely.¹ A similar photo in the *London Times* was relegated to page eight surrounded by a litany of words and an overall lack of pomp or celebration.² Calling the new position a “thankless job,” his words were surrounded by advertisements for fashions and fur storage services, and a New Mexican senator describing U.S. actions in Palestine as “un-American.”³ Harold Evans was now the public face for the United Nations’ internationalization efforts in Jerusalem – although his path to the Holy City, and even out of the United States, was anything but smooth.

This is the story of the United Nations’ search for a Special Municipal Commissioner for the city of Jerusalem. The position was essentially a quasi-mayor – even dubbed an “emergency mayor” – and was to be part of the UN’s internationalization scheme for Jerusalem and its environs.⁴ No municipal commissioner ever arrived. Multiple abortive missions, along with the failure of the United Nations’ other endeavors in the Holy City, marred any chance of success for this position to be filled. By ignoring voices of Palestinians, Arabs, and Zionists against the municipal commissioner position, and toward internationalization in general, the United Nations continued a lineage of imperial being in its Palestine mandate inherited from Britain. The bungling of this project quickly became a microcosm for the struggles faced by the UN in the late 1940s in Palestine. Building from archival materials from the United Nations and the American Friends Service Committee, this paper aims to illuminate a crucial moment at the genesis of the Arab-Israeli peace processes, as well as problematize the role of the UN’s place in Palestine through the organization and its General Assembly’s quest for control over Jerusalem. Furthermore, this article argues that the search for a municipal commissioner for Jerusalem was an imperial act undertaken by Western imperial powers under the guise of the United Nations to further subjugate Palestinians, Arabs, and Zionists to foreign rule.

UN Involvement in Jerusalem

On 15 May 1948, the British Mandate in Palestine ended, and the United Nations took control of the region. The British governed the territory since 1923 through the League of Nations mandate system, but after World War II decided it could no longer solely rule over Palestine.⁵ Frequently referred to as a “problem,” Palestine, with its wide religious importance, constructed political binaries, and economic opportunities, proved to be too much for a single country to administer. As a result, the newly minted United Nations took charge to find a peaceful solution with itself as the governing force behind the new administration.

One of the key aspects of the United Nations plan for Palestine centered on Jerusalem. The famous UN Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947 partitioned the region into Arab and Jewish areas, but it also created an unusual third zone: an

international one.⁶ This “Special International Regime” was to be governed by the United Nations effectively to ensure the safe passage of all peoples to and from the Holy City regardless of religious or political affiliation.⁷ This plan would have seen Jerusalem become a distinct enclave outside of any Palestinian, Arab, or Zionist governmental sovereignty.⁸ Also known as *corpus separatum* (separate entity), the internationalization of Jerusalem was championed by various religious figures around the world, especially Christians, and ultimately came to represent the majority imperial position of the United Nations and the members comprising its General Assembly. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker social justice action organization based in Pennsylvania, wrote of the committee’s desire to see Jerusalem become an international zone with a neutral governor in order to “preserve . . . Jerusalem from the horrors of civil war.”⁹ Pope Pius XII penned two encyclicals calling for Jerusalem’s protection by promoting a “united effort of nations” to see Jerusalem reunited with “tranquility.”¹⁰ Various dioceses and patriarchates also contributed to the conversation by writing to the United Nations to implore a safe future for the Holy City.¹¹ The global Christian community, and to a much lesser extent Jewish and Muslim believers, looked toward the United Nations to be a mediating presence in the city that would put an end to the protracted violence.

Religious cooperation in Jerusalem was not a new concept, and a long history of past attempts at internationalization made Arabs particularly hesitant to welcome the United Nations to the city. A legally binding decree (*firman*) known as the Status Quo uniquely governed the Ottoman area of Jerusalem for nearly two centuries. As noted by the United Nations in April 1949, the Ottoman decree was created to ensure a peaceful state in the Holy Places.¹² Instituted by Sultan Osman III in 1757, this royal ruling legislated free access to the Holy Places and its vicinity for all religious denominations, local and foreign.¹³ Ottoman authorities reaffirmed the Status Quo decree in 1853 under Sultan Abdul Majid I in the wake of European imperial encroachments in the Holy Land.¹⁴ Attempts to sidestep Ottoman sovereignty in Jerusalem enforced a growing sentiment in Western imaginations that the Holy City held a special international status in relation to other urban centers. The Ottoman decree represented the only official “international arrangement” concerning the Holy Places, even after the United Nations included *corpus separatum* in multiple resolutions.¹⁵ The reaffirmation of the Status Quo in 1853 by the sultan continued the official policies of open access while simultaneously fostering greater disdain toward the Ottoman governmentalization of Jerusalem.

A common trope in Western imaginations concerning the Israeli-Palestinian peace processes is that the two sides were, and remain, irreconcilable foes. Yet what the Ottoman Status Quo showed, and what was missed by the United Nations, is that conflict between Muslims and Jews (as well as Christians) has never been inevitable, nor has religion always been the primary marker of difference in the region.¹⁶ Only with the advent of Zionist settler-colonialism did the strength of religious pluralism in Palestine morph into a perceived weakness as the Israeli state served as a fulcrum to the dissolution of relative Ottoman-era coexistence.¹⁷ There was certainly violence

in the region as the UN took over; yet the idea that conflict was an inexorable aspect of Palestinian- and Arab-Zionist relations severely damaged perceptions of the international organization in Palestine, and hampered any success that may have been found had there been a more open-minded approach to the region's complexities. It was from the notion of constant conflict and of the safety of the Holy Places being in jeopardy that the need for a municipal commissioner came into vogue for the United Nations and its General Assembly.

In these initial stages of United Nations involvement in Jerusalem, the role of the municipal commissioner, or even how the city was to be governed, had not been fully conceptualized. Ideas of internationalization were nearly the exclusive purview of Western powers and served as a test of European imperial enterprises under a new likeness.¹⁸ This international form of governance was intentionally muddled to keep imperial rule hidden behind the veneer of eventual local self-determination.¹⁹ Ideas for internationalization in previous international treaties and agreements all guided Jerusalem toward an international status among Western imperial powers.²⁰ Backed by this diplomatic momentum, the report by the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) to the General Assembly on 3 September 1947 promoted partition and a three-state solution in Palestine: an Arab zone, a Jewish zone, and an international zone focused on Jerusalem and governed by the United Nations. Jerusalem would be home to a so-called international government in this iteration of the plan. Although members of UNSCOP debated the extent of internationalization, none outwardly refuted its necessity.²¹ Not once did UNSCOP consider supporting independence for Palestinians, in Jerusalem or Palestine more broadly, despite the express intent of the mandate system to prepare nations for independence.²² UN Resolution 181 formally took the whispered claims of Jerusalem's exceptionality and codified them into a new kind of mandate.

The General Assembly inherited the framework for acquiring a leader of the internationalized territory from its British predecessors; the organization did not merely state Jerusalem was going to be under its purview. The role of the municipal commissioner, and the terms of office that individual held, were clearly laid out in the Jerusalem Municipal Government Order of 1948 by the British high commissioner for Palestine. John Fletcher-Cooke, a member of the United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations, noted in a telegram to Andrew Cordier, the executive assistant to the secretary-general, in mid-May 1948 that "the Jerusalem Municipal Commissioner may take any action and give any directions which in his [sic] absolute discretion he [sic] deems appropriate for the Municipal Government of Jerusalem."²³ The *New York Times* reported the commissioner held "wide powers," and the post was "anomalous," or unprecedented, in the Palestinian context.²⁴ Clarence Pickett, executive secretary of AFSC, referred to the position as diplomatic speak "which really means the person in charge of the city of Jerusalem."²⁵ Semantic pedantic musings aside, the post of municipal commissioner clearly came with considerable clout and had a large bearing on the future of Jerusalem in its transition from British Mandate to United Nations international enclave.

The bulk of the action regarding the municipal commissioner occurred in a relatively short time, in May and June 1948. This flurry of activity not coincidentally occurred with the departure of Britain and the formal arrival of the United Nations into Palestine. Despite the Mandate ending, Britain was still very involved in the area and quite invested in the search for a new governing force through the proposed commissioner. For a commissioner to be appointed, the person had to be accepted by the United Nations, Arab delegations (a vague conglomeration of representatives primarily from Transjordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, but importantly not Palestine), the Zionist government, and the British high commissioner of Palestine.²⁶ Britain's inclusion and Palestine's exclusion in these discussions further elucidated an adamant Western-leaning geopolitical viewing of the Jerusalem "question."

The cementing of an imperial way of being – in other words intentional imperial actions – regarding the United Nations governance in Jerusalem went back to at least the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916.²⁷ While brief in its commentary about the city itself, Sykes-Picot was a clandestine agreement between Britain and France dividing Ottoman territory before the Ottoman Empire capitulated. The agreement spoke of a "brown area," coincidentally covering Jerusalem, which was to "be established [as] an international administration," ambiguous language open to interpretation and strategic maneuvering.²⁸ Seeing as neither of the two imperial powers wanted to see the city in the hands of the other, internationalizing the region became a method of compromise.²⁹ Building off Sykes-Picot and other international agreements in the 1920s to early 1940s, the General Assembly recommended that the Mandatory power appoint a municipal commissioner before 15 May – a move that ran counter to every notion of self-determination and respect for local autonomy.³⁰

The intent of naming and employing a municipal commissioner loomed large as the United Nations continued to push actions of internationalization onto Jerusalem. Abba Eban, a liaison officer of the Zionist government and later the first Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, asserted that the UN claim of legitimacy and sovereignty in Jerusalem was ridiculous and a shameful aim. A vote on the General Assembly floor on 14 May 1948 – the day before the Mandate expired – attempted to establish United Nations sovereignty in Jerusalem and empower the office of the municipal commissioner to fruition. The vote establishing sovereignty failed to pass, leading Eban to claim there was no legal basis for the United Nations to govern Jerusalem, let alone have the authority to appoint an overseer figure like a commissioner to the city.³¹ Arab governments were also skeptical of the municipal commissioner idea. The Transjordanian prime minister Tawfiq Abu al-Huda questioned the legal basis of the commissioner's appointment, especially as the United Nations had not succeeded in internationalizing Jerusalem at that juncture.³² Abu al-Huda thought Jerusalem should be internationalized first, and the appointment of the commissioner was a preemptive way to establish an international presence in the region and push an already unsuccessful agenda.³³ In a conversation with Pablo de Azcárate, the then secretary of the Consular Truce Commission in Jerusalem, King Abdallah of Transjordan reportedly launched into a "tirade" declaring that the United Nations had

no right to be so active in Jerusalem.³⁴ The firmly held position was a clear signal from the international organization that neither Palestinians, Arabs, nor Zionists had the capacity to govern the Holy City. It was also a continuation of foreign entanglements seemingly rescinded with the departure of the British Mandate. This retreat was meant to signal the end of a Western presence in Palestine; instead, the Western-guided mandate merely took on a new name.

The Search for a Commissioner

Despite reservations with the UN plans for the city, Arabs and Zionists did approve several people for the municipal commissioner post, respectively. Percy C. Clarke, the general manager of Barclay's Bank in Jerusalem, was recommended by United Nations secretary-general Trygve Lie for the position, but was not acceptable to the British high commissioner.³⁵ Sir Hugh Dow, a name put forth by the British government, was vetoed by the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem as an unfit candidate.³⁶ The first name that all four parties – Arabs, Zionists, the United Nations, and the British high commissioner to Palestine – approved was Clarence Pickett of the American Friends Service Committee.³⁷ This nomination was not terribly surprising as the U.S.-based group had already set a precedent in Palestine.

The Quakers, and more specifically the American Friends Service Committee, had been active in Palestine before one of its members was shoulder-tapped for the job of commissioner. While the initial foray into Palestine occurred in 1889, the work began in earnest with humanitarian efforts in Gaza during the Nakba.³⁸ The Friends sent a mission to Palestine from April–May 1948 to aid in Arab-Jewish relations and securing a truce for the Old City of Jerusalem.³⁹ With the pending British withdrawal from Palestine, a third mission goal emerged: to see an immediate appointment of a governor to supervise an international enclave which the Friends called a “Truce of God.”⁴⁰ This set the Friends up nicely for any future appointment of a governor – or commissioner.

Due to the complex – and troubling from an anti-imperial standpoint – position of the United Nations vis-à-vis the British Mandate, the desire to have a commissioner in place before 15 May became a crucial goal for the UN. With 15 May as a pivotal date since the Mandate and the high commissioner still officially held governing power in Palestine up to that date, after midnight it would hold no power whatsoever in governing the region. As such, the United Nations worked in close tandem with the departing imperial power to secure the governance of the region. Unfortunately for the United Nations, the commissioner search was subject to procrastination and no serious attempts were made until 7 May, a week before the deadline. That evening, UN executive secretary Cordier called Clarence Pickett of AFSC to ask him about the Jerusalem post.⁴¹ From Pickett's perspective, it seemed he was merely a recognizable name among the Friends and his nomination was based more on his position as executive secretary of AFSC than on any individual merits.⁴² His name was forwarded to Cordier by Rufus Jones, a Friend's member who was instrumental in calling for

a truce in Jerusalem during the 1947–49 war.⁴³ Since he was acceptable for all four parties needing to sign off on the position, it seemed as though the commissionership was decided.

But Pickett ultimately did not accept the post. Pickett himself was vague about his reasons for declining the esteemed municipal commissioner job, claiming he “would be of greater use in the scene” through his administrative role in the United States than working in Palestine.⁴⁴ Instead details came from Julia Branson, associate secretary of the Foreign Service Section at AFSC, who remarked in mid-May 1948 that Pickett had a doctor’s appointment on the afternoon of Cordier’s call. The physician instructed Pickett “to go a little slow” on account of waning physical fitness.⁴⁵ Heeding his doctor’s advice, Pickett determined his health insufficient to take on the international position. Cordier was hoping for an immediate positive response to get the commissioner job settled and was reportedly quite distraught at Pickett’s decision.⁴⁶ The process of name giving having begun, with Jones giving Pickett’s name to the United Nations, now it was Clarence Pickett’s turn to pass the metaphorical baton.

The name he passed along for consideration was Harold Evans. Pickett assumed the United Nations wanted a member of AFSC, and Evans’s history within the organization made him a suitable candidate. A Friend since the U.S. chapter was founded in 1917, Evans attended AFSC-run schools, worked as a humanitarian in Europe after World War I helping with German child nutritional needs, and practiced law out of Philadelphia.⁴⁷ Sixty-one years old, he had plenty of experience and was the next choice for all four parties to consider. Evans received the greatest consideration for the position from the United Nations regarding the municipal commissioner post. His selection set into motion a month of confusion, of renege assurances, and backpedalling leaving all involved confused and searching for new solutions to already solved problems.

At this juncture the tunnel vision of the United Nations became clear. The instant pivoting from one member of AFSC to another signaled the importance of the Quaker organization before the acumen of the individual appointed to govern the city. Jerusalem was going to be internationalized by UN rules, and this stance proved to be detrimental to all involved – within and outside the city.

Unfazed by the top-down approach to choosing the commissioner, the UN proceeded with the newest name of ASFC garnering attention. After Pickett’s refusal of the position on a Friday, Evans attended a series of meetings in Lake Success, New York, with United Nations personnel the following Tuesday.⁴⁸ The vice-chair of the Arab Higher Committee, Jamal al-Husayni, happened to be in New York on that day and gave his approval of Evans’s appointment.⁴⁹ Evans wrote to Cordier on 13 May to formally pass his name for consideration to the British High Commissioner “in view of the emergency situation which has arisen.”⁵⁰ The Jewish Agency, through a telegram from Arthur Lourie, confirmed the appointment on Friday, 14 May.⁵¹ Seeing as the British high commissioner had already confirmed the appointment of Pickett, Evans was automatically accepted by the British representative of the foursome. With

all four parties in agreement, Evans did “a good deal of deep searching of the heart” and decided to take the job as municipal commissioner on the evening of 14 May, before the Mandate ceased.⁵² Thus ended the search for the commissioner. Yet the activities surrounding the post had yet to reach a zenith.

Harold Evans as Municipal Commissioner

A day after Evans was featured on the front page of the *New York Times*, Clarence Pickett remarked that at his appointment, Harold Evans’s post “permits him to be almost a dictator – to run the city in any fashion he desires.”⁵³ This was a peculiar moniker to bestow upon a pacifist lawyer from Philadelphia, and an even more bizarre statement considering that his post was granted by the United Nations. For the new international organization, this was meant to be the opening salvo in a series of well-timed and well-executed strikes to make Jerusalem an international enclave and an international city. Evans never took up the post, however; and neither did the General Assembly have an insider governing the city in the way once hoped.

Immediately following Evans’s acceptance of the post of municipal commissioner, the geopolitical landscape of Palestine dramatically shifted. As 14 May transitioned into the fifteenth, and the Mandate left Palestine, the state of Israel was announced with the military and political leader David Ben-Gurion serving as prime minister of the new country. Famously, the United States recognized Israel a mere eleven minutes after its creation; a decision that was contested at the time and continues to draw scrutiny.⁵⁴ This decision was particularly frustrating for Transjordan who had been asking for official recognition from the United States for over three years.⁵⁵ As with many issues surrounding Jerusalem and Palestine, concerns expressed by Arab countries were as much about individual goals as they were about Arab unity for Palestinian causes.

Even within the United States the choice was hardly united. Internal strife among U.S. advisors either cautioned against recognition as a matter of U.S. prestige in the world, or advocated for it on account of staying firm on Palestine’s partition and discouraging Israel from turning to communism.⁵⁶ President Harry S. Truman received a telegram from Eliahu Epstein of the Israeli government on 14 May asking for swift recognition upon independence, and the U.S. president responded the same day that the United States recognized the provisional government as the de facto governing force in Israel.⁵⁷ When news of U.S. recognition reached the U.S. delegation at the United Nations, there was “pandemonium,” a strong sense of disbelief, as well as threats from other nations, such as Cuba, to withdraw from the United Nations entirely, although that never came to pass.⁵⁸ Arab personnel were “deeply disappointed,” “shocked,” and responded that U.S. recognition of Israel “had crushed the hopes of the Arabs.”⁵⁹ Britain realized that if the Israeli state received global endorsement the prospects of peace in Palestine were jeopardized. Britain sought to delay the outpouring of support for the new country as best as possible, albeit without much success.⁶⁰ The U.S. under-

secretary of state Robert Lovett remarked a few days later how political advisors failed in making Truman “a father of a new state,” but were determined to “at least make him the midwife” via the quick recognition.⁶¹

The action of recognizing Israel, while innocent on the surface, had seismic impact on the myriad of overarching political and conciliatory actions ongoing in Palestine. This move not only signaled to the United Nations that a major ally was operating on a separate agenda, but also told Palestinians that the promises of previous administrations – and in turn the opportunities for self-determination – were being discarded.⁶² Evans being a U.S. citizen only complicated matters for himself and the optics of the United Nations in Palestine. For the Quakers, having an internationalized Jerusalem was crucial for any support of the mediation processes – municipal commissioner or otherwise. If the city became either Palestinian, Arab, or Zionist territory, and Quakers were present, the image of the Friends in the region could be misconstrued as favoring one side over the others.⁶³ This worked alongside calls for a truce before Evans took up the commissioner’s position and his desire to be a mediating actor rather than a puppet to larger imperial actions through the United Nations. Much had transpired in a short time. Britain had absconded from Palestine, a new country governed by settler-colonialists had been founded and ratified by the Western hegemonic power, and a pacifist-inclined lawyer was en route to Jerusalem to preside over the city under the guise of an imperial collection of countries in a so-called postcolonial world led by the United Nations.

The following weeks were a cacophonous affair with a flurry of telegrams, meetings, and confusions. Even though the post had been filled, Evans could not immediately be present in Jerusalem due to the intensity of war that arose following the British departure and the creation of the state of Israel. The United Nations appointed Pablo de Azcárate, a Spanish diplomat already in Jerusalem working for the UN, as interim municipal commissioner until Evans reached the city. Azcárate began his duties as commissioner, though word did not trickle down to Arab or Jewish authorities who were expecting Evans to be at the helm.⁶⁴ The U.S. government received word that the actions of recognizing Israel had made Evans apprehensive about assuming his position. Rumblings in Washington wondered if he would ever make it to Jerusalem.⁶⁵

Due to his Quaker beliefs of pacifism, Evans refused to enter Jerusalem in a military convoy or have any sort of military protection as part of his job.⁶⁶ Evans contacted Azcárate and informed him he intended to remain away from Jerusalem until the fighting stopped, which Azcárate deemed to be “curious” and an “impossibility.”⁶⁷ The situation in Jerusalem, according to the new interim commissioner, needed to be met with people holding more than nominal authority.⁶⁸ Quietly, Azcárate seemed to question the logic of the United Nations promoting a pacifist to oversee the governance of a city embroiled in conflict.

Another event shook the confidence of the new municipal commissioner before he set foot outside of the United States. On 20 May, as conflict continued in Jerusalem, the United Nations appointed Count Folke Bernadotte as its mediator for the Palestine “question.”⁶⁹ Since the fighting was concentrated in Jerusalem, the city was a large

component of the Swedish national's efforts.⁷⁰ Both Zionist and Arab forces sought to stamp authority onto the city and saw Britain's departure as a chance to reclaim previously-ignored pleas for sovereignty.⁷¹ The appointment of Bernadotte, it was surmised years after the fact, must have hit Evans hard, as it seemed as though the United Nations pivoted from his appointment so quickly and created another similar position in the region.⁷² The United Nations successfully installed two people of power to oversee peace in Jerusalem in less than a week, and neither with Palestinian consultation. Bernadotte's mission was to negotiate a truce between warring Arabs and Zionists and bring peace back to Jerusalem.⁷³ Evans voiced his view on numerous occasions: he would only set foot in the Holy City if no military protection was needed, and if a truce had been successfully signed and continuously adhered to.⁷⁴ Until then, Azcárate acted as the municipal commissioner while the newly appointed mediator Bernadotte worked to establish the truce needed to get Evans to Jerusalem.

During this period, the United Nations was more focused on the bigger goal of an internationalized Jerusalem than the success of the chosen commissioner. Even without a truce in place, and with wider UN intentions beyond himself in mind, Evans travelled closer to Palestine and the city he was assigned to govern. On 23 May, he arrived in Cairo to be near Jerusalem when the ceasefire arrived.⁷⁵ In retrospective foreshadowing, Cordier informed Evans that "no constitutional difficulty" would arise should Evans have to leave the post.⁷⁶ By the time he reached the Egyptian capital, coincidentally, his tenacity in pursuing the post waned as Evans deemed Bernadotte effectively took his role.⁷⁷ Evans was accompanied by another Friend, James Vail, who was a part of AFSC's recent mission to Palestine, serving as the personal advisor to the municipal commissioner.⁷⁸

With Evans and Vail holed up in Cairo awaiting a ceasefire agreement, the United Nations sent Taylor Shaw, a UN staff member, to Amman to speak with King Abdallah about the prospects of the municipal commissioner's success in the near future. Shaw reported bluntly: "There is no hope for normalcy in Jerusalem for some time."⁷⁹ That same day, 5 June, Azcárate relayed communication of a meeting with the prime minister of Transjordan, Tawfiq Abu al-Huda, in which the Transjordanian government feared a recognition of the municipal commissioner would set a problematic precedent for the future governance of Jerusalem.⁸⁰ Azcárate travelled to Cairo and reported this to Evans in person as well, indicating the importance of the news for both Evans and the UN more broadly.⁸¹ Evans was viewed as "a U.N. man" and came to represent "the thin edge of the wedge" bringing about the actualization of the internationalization scheme for the United Nations and a further infringement upon the sovereignty of Arabs.⁸² All the while Azcárate, when not travelling between Arab states, had to run a "sniper gauntlet" and travel "on a goat track with a donkey" under the cloak of darkness to remain safe in Jerusalem.⁸³ With the prospects of stability in Jerusalem slim, the United Nation's dreams of governing the city seemed to be a distant memory only weeks into its tenure.

Looking from afar, the United Nations botched the job rather spectacularly up to this point. There had been frequent appointments of people with very similar tasks,

movements toward internationalization without much in the form of legally binding rights, and a government structure where the leader was not physically in the city due to religious beliefs made very clear from the outset. Bernadotte and Azcárate continued moving around the region talking to governments and officials attempting to scramble together some form of legitimacy in a quickly brewing quagmire. Examining the actions of the United Nations, the notion of Jerusalem being a “problem” was exacerbated by the incessant drive of the UN to see the city become part of a “special international regime,” and even through the very structuring of Jerusalem as a “problem” only it could solve.⁸⁴

These actions engendered animosities among Palestinians and Arabs, and made Zionists more skeptical of what the prized city might look like moving forward – especially with the strength of U.S. backing by recognizing Israel. The United Nations touted Evans’s position as a Quaker and his inherent neutrality as incentive for locals to latch onto the internationalization plan, but his appointment was still seen as unnecessary and as a UN attempt to place someone of the General Assembly’s choosing at the head of an unwanted government.⁸⁵ Even as a Christian, the UN vaunted Evans – and more specifically Quaker impartiality – to assuage the constructed fears of unavoidable religious turmoil in the city. Lost on the UN, however, was the fact that neither Palestinians, Arabs, nor Zionists were in a position to give up claims to the city in 1948, for reasons beyond religiosity. As such, the United Nations did not have the leverage needed to pry any side far enough away from the city for a permanent substantive stamp of authority.

Still, the desires and the governance of the United Nations in Jerusalem rested on the shoulders of a Quaker awaiting peace in the Holy City. While this unfolded, another member of the United Nations in Palestine began to grow restless. Ralph Bunche, a United States diplomat, was on the Greek island of Rhodes negotiating an armistice between Zionists, Palestinians, and Arabs, and was generally unsympathetic to Evans’s concerns. Bunche thought the nominated commissioner should go to Jerusalem as soon as a truce was called, and ideally before.⁸⁶ It was Bunche’s opinion that peace was not an option in Jerusalem or Palestine in the short term, and a ceasefire was a best-case scenario.⁸⁷ According to Bunche, everyone involved in Palestine should be prepared to operate under the auspices of at least some hostility.⁸⁸ Evans commented how Bunche was the only one not supporting him and James Vail as the pair waited in Cairo for peace to be reestablished.⁸⁹ Bunche believed there needed to be people on the ground actively working toward a settlement rather than waiting for peace to fall into place.⁹⁰ Evans, then, had come to represent a latent aspect of the United Nations: maybe things would improve without doing much work, and then all would be suitable for the scheme. As Bernadotte and Bunche worked to make Jerusalem governable, and while Azcárate skirted danger in the city, Evans and Vail waited in Cairo for a cessation of hostilities and for settlements of peace. While justifiable through the lens of Quaker ethics, the practicability of hiring compromised members of government seemed to have delegitimized the reputation of the United Nations for Palestinians, Arabs, Zionists, and for UN members working without any moral restrictions.

In lieu of being completely stagnant, Evans began a series of correspondences with ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Azzam Pasha, the secretary-general of the Arab League in Egypt, to ascertain the prospects of a peace from the broad Arab perspective. This was suggested by Cordier, who stated that despite decisions about a truce taking place outside Jerusalem, contact should be made for when the United Nations inevitably situated itself in the city.⁹¹ Evans, seemingly oblivious that his position was directly linked to the United Nations’ goal of a “permanent international regime,” stated to ‘Azzam Pasha that his role had no future implications on the governance of the city.⁹² This gulf in understanding, or even the discrepancies in communication between Evans and the wider United Nations, indicated a growing divide between the individual and the organization. Relations with other Arab countries proved difficult for the United Nations in internationalization efforts as well. Transjordan’s head of state King Abdallah intended to become the “King of Jerusalem.”⁹³ Furthermore, Transjordan had not yet been admitted into the United Nations, or received official recognition from the United States, which hampered the view of the government toward a UN-backed administration scheme with a U.S. citizen at the controls.⁹⁴ Evans stated how he envisaged the municipal commissioner as a symbolic role uniting the city as one despite the ongoing divisions: divisions aggravated by the very position he occupied.⁹⁵

Two letters were sent to ‘Azzam Pasha. Bernadotte approved of these dispatches while Bunche did not.⁹⁶ Evans thought the best way to get support for the municipal commissioner, and in turn discover a peaceful environment in Jerusalem, was to circumvent Transjordan and instead focus on other Arab governments and organizations, hence the communication with the Egyptian delegate, and by proxy the wider Arab League.⁹⁷ Notably, however, there is no indication in the archival records of Evans or anyone affiliated with the municipal commissioner speaking directly with Palestinians or the Palestinian leadership. From the outset of the search for a commissioner, Palestinians were passengers rather than participants. The would-be commissioner was not idle in Cairo, though he was absent from his intended placement and not speaking to all of the region’s relevant parties. Writing in lament years later, the former British high commissioner Fletcher-Cooke described the Cairo days with retrospective melancholy, stating that it seemed “as though the dove I had so hopefully launched would never spread its wings over Jerusalem.”⁹⁸

The geographic space separating the decision makers played a massive factor in proceedings. People in Jerusalem saw a real immediacy for executive action; Evans and Vail saw a less intense but still time-sensitive project from Egypt; and those at UN headquarters in Lake Success took a full diplomatic mediation approach to the pertinent issues. Azcárate soon became critical of actions undertaken by the United Nations. He felt Palestine was heading for destruction just like his home country of Spain.⁹⁹ The frequent moving of personnel and the lack of communication between UN members on the ground gave Azcárate the impression of a ramshackle and unprofessional operation.¹⁰⁰ AFSC head Clarence Pickett recommended Evans and Vail cease communications with ‘Azzam Pasha and return to the United States to

mediate.¹⁰¹ The United Nations, meanwhile, wanted Evans close to Jerusalem for when the truce was signed and the armistice enacted.¹⁰² Evans wrote to Pickett in June: “With all due respect to those of you in the USA, we believe this is a case where decisions can best be made on the field.”¹⁰³ The varying opinions, from across oceans and in Palestine, brought confusion and strife to an already tense situation, and seriously hindered the ability of the United Nations to function as a cohesive unit and operate as the global stabilizing force its General Assembly imagined itself to be.

Even with the ongoing war, and internal squabbles of procedure, Evans, Vail and Bernadotte travelled around the Mashriq in June 1948.¹⁰⁴ On 12 June, the trio left Cairo for Jerusalem – the first and only time Evans ever set foot in the city he was assigned to govern. Azcárate claimed this brief stay in the city was more about the Quaker moral position than any municipal commissioner business.¹⁰⁵ The air to Azcárate’s writings weave less than subtle frustrations that this sojourn to the city had no proper diplomatic mission. Evans expected to be in the city for only a number of hours. He assured ‘Azzam Pasha of the Arab League that his visit had no bearing on the overarching question of his role as commissioner, but rather for him to gain an in-person view of the city.¹⁰⁶ Evans met with the Arab Legion authorities, the Jewish Agency, and the United Nations Truce Commission while in Jerusalem before continuing onto Tel Aviv, Haifa, Damascus, and Rhodes.¹⁰⁷ There were discussions of potentially returning to Jerusalem, but Evans nixed these notions thinking the Zionists and Arabs might play him for individual political means.¹⁰⁸ The lone three-day excursion, and more importantly the few hours spent in the Holy City, fully articulated the futility of his mission as municipal commissioner. Within days of returning to Cairo Evans submitted his formal resignation.¹⁰⁹ In a statement released through the United Nations, he claimed he could provide no help in solving the Jerusalem “problem.” As a result, he asked to return to the United States, which was approved by the secretary-general, Trygve Lie.¹¹⁰ Lie, for his part, communicated with Evans an appreciation for his attempts in the matter, and noted the “real contribution to the efforts” undertaken by the United Nations in Palestine.¹¹¹ Evans left for Philadelphia a few days later.

Despite relinquishing his post, Evans remained on the financial books of the United Nations for several months despite not fulfilling any duties. The lack of official resignation was noted by the legal advisor to the chief of staff, H. Courtney Kingstone, in February 1949.¹¹² Cordier contacted Evans again on 24 March 1949, when Evans’s formal letter of resignation was finally accepted by the United Nations.¹¹³ Lord Cadogan, the United Kingdom’s permanent representative to the United Nations, called Evans “a transient, embarrassed phantom” due to his lack of service as municipal commissioner and his prolonged compensation for duties never undertaken.¹¹⁴ Evans did not really want the commissioner job in any event. His actions indicated a hesitancy to go beyond established comforts and assume the post, and as such he never occupied the sole role to which he was entrusted.

Alberto Gonzalez Fernandez and Another Attempt

Following Evans's withdrawal, the United Nations began the process anew of making Jerusalem an international enclave. The passing of UN Resolution 194 and the creation of the Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC) ushered in a new phase of proceedings with an eye to the establishment of a "permanent international regime" for Jerusalem and the surrounding area. The main PCC task, alongside working with the ongoing refugee crisis, was creating a draft statute for the General Assembly outlining the procedural necessities of making and keeping Jerusalem a UN-governed space.¹¹⁵ Along with this draft statute came a reengagement with a familiar governmental strategy: the special municipal commissioner.

The UN's desire for a municipal commissioner did not end with Evans's return to the United States. Alberto Gonzalez Fernandez, a Colombian diplomat who had been present for a number of conversations about Palestine at the General Assembly, was chosen for the post more than a year after Evans's departure, on 10 September 1949.¹¹⁶ Azcárate retained his position as interim commissioner during this extended period. Much like Evans, the appointment of Gonzalez Fernandez was not lacking for dramatics. UN actions between June 1948 and September 1949 made the realities on the ground all the more complex for the incoming commissioner.

By the time Gonzalez Fernandez received the call for the commissionership, the United Nations had established and nearly completed another commission: the PCC. The commission had been created to, among other tasks, present the General Assembly with a draft instrument for the establishment of a permanent international regime for the city of Jerusalem. With this presentation on 1 September 1949, the commission's role was essentially finished.¹¹⁷ The creation of the draft instrument meant the United Nations continued so-called international designs on the city, which angered other political figures, especially Palestinians, Arabs, and Zionists who sought the city under different domains. Israel's Moshe Sharett noted how the UN instrument infringed on the sovereignty of the city and essentially froze the citizens of Jerusalem under an international mandate.¹¹⁸ Arab delegates asked what was meant by the term "final settlement" and pressed the PCC to elaborate more on what its intentions were in Jerusalem, as Arab leaders across the Mashriq, broadly speaking, were focused on the refugee crisis facing the region more than territorial disputes.¹¹⁹ It was from this continued pursuit of Jerusalem's internationalization that the idea of the UN municipal commissioner was once again brought to the fore. It was hoped – by relevant UN personnel – that this period from early September to the presentation of the draft statute and new political maneuvering might be smooth and seamless for the United Nations. It was not by any metric.

The other major event between Evans and Gonzalez Fernandez was the assassination of Count Bernadotte on 17 September 1948 in Jerusalem. Carried out by members of the Stern Gang, or Lehi – a Zionist paramilitary terrorist group – the assassination was a clear message against international meddling in Jerusalem specifically and Palestine more broadly.¹²⁰ The United Nations was on guard, not only for the safety of its

members in the region but also governmental claims of Jerusalem made by Zionists in the wake of Bernadotte's death.¹²¹ Numerous delegations at the UN voiced displeasure at Israel for its "lukewarm attitude" in searching for the perpetrators of this murder.¹²² Ralph Bunche was appointed the new mediator for Palestine. Yet the tensions between locals and the United Nations were no longer on the periphery.

On the day of Gonzalez Fernandez's appointment, 10 September 1949, with the memory of Bernadotte's assassination still in mind, Cordier was warned by UN spokesperson George Barnes that the naming of a new municipal commissioner could incite strong responses from Zionists and Arabs both for and against internationalization.¹²³ Naming another mediator-type almost one year to the day after Bernadotte's killing gave cause for alarm for UN personnel with knowledge of recent history. Increasing the number of guards in the city was discussed, and the "adequacy [of] security conditions" in Jerusalem were checked.¹²⁴ There was an impression of more eyes being placed upon the city as yet another political move was made. Israel advanced toward making Jerusalem the capital of the Zionist state, albeit cautiously, as there were still ambitions of being admitted into the United Nations and Zionists did not want to throw away that possibility by rashly acting on territorial desires.¹²⁵ These ambitions notwithstanding, the Israeli government renewed vocal displeasure at the appointment of a new commissioner.¹²⁶ Eban cabled his reluctant support for the appointment while stating how the notion of a municipal commissioner superseded the terms of the initial resolution of December 1948.¹²⁷ With the PCC nearing a completion of its mandate and disdain shown by supposedly cooperative governments, the post seemed to be in even more doubt than in 1948.

Gonzalez Fernandez never served as municipal commissioner and only held the title for nine days. The Colombian wrote the secretary-general on 19 September officially declining the offer bestowed upon him. He believed the appointment was "belated," that another plan for the governance of the city was announced almost simultaneously with his promotion, and the prospects of limited cooperation between the office of the commissioner and the Jewish Agency made the appointment irrelevant.¹²⁸ All these factored into his hesitancy. Gonzalez Fernandez also cited his wife's illness as a reason for spurning the job.¹²⁹ Concluding the long list of reasons for turning down the offer, the recently named commissioner believed he could do little for the prestige of the United Nations and that his post ultimately proved to be "of no avail" in the bigger Palestinian picture.¹³⁰ The failure to appoint yet another commissioner, according to the U.S. consul in Jerusalem William Burdett, strengthened the belief among Israelis that the United Nations lacked the fortitude to actually enact internationalization.¹³¹

No other municipal commissioner was named by the United Nations. The fourth progress report of the PCC, released three days after Gonzalez Fernandez's resignation but obviously written beforehand and unedited, stated: "The Commission is convinced that Dr. Gonzalez Fernandez will receive, on the part of the Arab and Israeli authorities, the assistance necessary for the accomplishment of his task."¹³² Even the United Nations could not keep up to date with its activities.

Conclusions and the Demise of the Internationalization Scheme

A combination of United Nations' imperial ambition, Quaker morality, U.S. recognition of a settler-colonial state, and wavering truce negotiations doomed the Jerusalem municipal commissioner mission for Harold Evans who never stood a legitimate chance of becoming commissioner in any meaningful way. Alberto Gonzalez Fernandez's appointment never had much helium either due to the continued insistence of the United Nations on forcing a governing scheme that was antithetical to local calls for self-governance. The actions of the United Nations in Jerusalem regarding the municipal commissioner set a damaging precedent of ignoring the desires of local leaders, infringing upon the sovereignty of Palestinians, Arabs, and Zionists, and cementing the imperial ways of being carried over from the British Mandate. The commissioners were either vetoed before being appointed or accepted the post and retracted employment due to the unworkable conditions, be it religious-based, tardy appointments, or the recent assassination of a similarly tasked member of the international team. The issues with the commissioners themselves were real and corrosive, but the bigger repercussions – and the larger overall ramifications – came from the consistent calamities of the United Nations. The UN and its member states on the General Assembly floor were so determined to make internationalization a reality that it appointed people with abandon until the region was saturated with folks tripping over themselves unable to operate as initially planned.¹³³ This confounding choice can be attributed to the rush of settling the region after the Mandate's retreat and the feigned fears of religious strife inherently present in the region, but the impact had a wide reach beyond its intentions. Already dubious Palestinians, Arabs, and Zionists used the municipal commissioner fiasco as ammunition in the opposition to further United Nations presence in Jerusalem.

Arab governments remained vocal against internationalization in the immediate aftermath of the 1949 commissionership failure. Referred to as the "Jerusalem scheme," the Jaffa-based newspaper *al-Difa'* concluded that the West, writ large, had actively discarded Palestinian rights and infringed on Palestinian sovereignties through continued efforts in Jerusalem.¹³⁴ Some Arab representatives, including Iraq's Muhammad Fadhil al-Jamali, pointed to Israeli favoritism enacted by the United Nations as further justification for Palestinian and Arab leeriness of UN designs on Jerusalem.¹³⁵ The cognizant, intentional choice by the United Nations to leave Palestinians and Palestinian leadership out of the commissioner discussions led to other Arab countries needing to be the de facto voice for the stateless nation. As such, Palestine could not directly express its opinions as countries such as Iraq and Transjordan had other ideas about Jerusalem's future aside from Palestinian interests. Furthermore, and equally detrimental for all involved, was the homogenization of Arabs and Arabness adopted by the United Nations during the commissioner business. The dichotomous creation of Arabs against Israelis set a precedent for skirting complexity, and the legacy of this decision continues to haunt the region.

Tangible internationalization fizzled out soon after Gonzalez Fernandez rejected his appointment. The Palestine Conciliation Commission produced the draft instrument and handed over the tactical planning of internationalization to the Trusteeship Council – the United Nations’ equivalent of the League of Nations’ mandate system – that found little success. After 1952, the UN found the task was stagnant unless Palestinians, Arabs, and Zionists drastically changed their respective positions on the issue of United Nations presence in the city.¹³⁶ Jerusalem never became the international enclave the United Nations desired, or how UN resolutions 181, 194, or (eventually) 303 envisioned. Instead, in part because of the failure to have the municipal commissioner govern on the ground, the plans remained merely plans. There was never any substantive action taken to make them a reality.

The failure to secure a municipal commissioner for Jerusalem was not the sole culprit of the United Nations’ failure to internationalize the city. The lack of a commissioner only abetted the demise of intentions. Appointing Azcárate as an interim commissioner filled the position, but not the void. The connection between the departing British Mandate and the municipal commissioner signaled a clear continuation of a previous regime detrimental to the aspirations of self-determination harbored by both local and settler populations. Furthermore, the recognition of Israel and the lack of unity within the United Nations and its member states placed the Quakers in an unbalanced position and promoted the continued stagnation of Evans and his party from entering the city and governing it. Jerusalem would never be closer, or farther, from having a stable, unified government than when Harold Evans was waiting in Cairo – a government of top-down, imperial-promoting, self-serving intentions perhaps, yet a government that could have been a voice in the myriad of disputes gripping the city down the decades: a voice to comment on embassies, on walls, on holy sites and on water supplies. Instead, the United Nations fostered images of checkbox consultation and an inability to follow through with stated aims. The municipal commissioner could not have fixed the Palestine “problem,” or solved the Jerusalem “question.” Rather, the United Nations’ plan to install a special municipal commissioner complicated the quandary without providing any semblance of a resolution.

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