

See
Dulles

22 January 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILES OF LEWIS L. STRAUSS

As I attend the meetings of the National Security Council by invitation of the President and not as a statutory member of that organization, it has been my practice over the last five years rarely to speak on any subject unless questioned by the President or unless it is a matter bearing directly upon the responsibilities of the Atomic Energy Commission or dealing with information to which the Atomic Energy Commission has specific and unique access.

This morning, however, I violated this rule and under the following circumstances:

The meeting had been held on Wednesday instead of the usual Thursday date in order to accommodate the Secretary of State who wished to discuss some of the aspects of his forthcoming meeting with the Baghdad Pact nations for which purpose he was leaving Washington today. In the course of his discussion, Mr. Dulles referred to the recurrent and apparently insoluble problem of Arab-Israel relations, to the fact that the Arabian States were historically and continually at war with one another or in very strained diplomatic relationships, and that their one uniting theme was mutual fear and hatred of the new State of Israel. Among other things, he pointed to the fact that the constant influx of Jewish refugees into Israel, swelling the population of that little country, was regarded by the Arabs as a sure sign of eventual territorial expansion and that nothing he could think of would please the Arab States more than if some action could be taken by us and the British and the French to place a limitation of a very drastic nature on further immigration in Israel. He added, however, that the State of Israel was "the darling of world Jewry" and that it would be difficult under the circumstances for us to take action except perhaps as a unilateral position, for France and Britain almost surely would not go along with such a proposal.

At this point, Mr. George D. Allen, head of the U.S. Information Agency, and a long-time member of the Foreign Service, took the floor to say that he concurred (as a result of his own experience, with the views of the Secretary of State and suggested that one way in which immigration might be curbed would be if steps could be taken to remove the tax deductibility from contributions made in the United States to the Jewish overseas relief organizations or to the State of Israel itself.

At this point, I addressed the President and the members of the Council in somewhat the following words:

"Mr. President and Friends:

This is the moment for me to speak on the topic which is under discussion. Since I fear that we are about to pass to another item, it is important that my silence should not be misconstrued as assent to or concurrence with the views which have just been expressed by Mr. Dulles and Mr. Allen. I must respectfully differ with the Secretary of State in describing the State of Israel as "the darling of world Jewry". There are a very great many Americans of Jewish faith like myself, who took a dim view of the establishment of the State of Israel. I have, in fact, been characterized for this point of view both as anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic.

"It is true that the friends and proponents of the State of Israel may be more numerous -- and are certainly more vocal -- than those who feel that its establishment as an independent political unity was inadvisable. There can be no question, however, that it has resulted in saving the lives of perhaps as many as two million innocent men, women and children -- the remnant from the gas chambers and massacres of Hitler and his imitators. Had the rest of the world and the United States offered a haven for these harried people, we could then, with a clean conscience, discuss the subject of whether or not we would encourage or discourage or prohibit, if that lay within our power, immigration to Israel:

"Under the circumstances, that was the only place that these people had to go. It is still the only place to which those now being persecuted and discriminated against in the countries on the southern littoral of the Mediterranean can find refuge. Certainly, I shall want to assist them. I think the majority of people in the United States of whatever faith will feel likewise, and any attempt to handicap philanthropy by legal means will be resented by people of both political parties, of all religions and all nationalities. I cannot more strongly urge that this is an impolitic and inhumane and an un-American proposal."

There was a period of silence which lasted for about ten or fifteen seconds, but which seemed to be an eternity. The Secretary of State said, "Well, what I meant to say, Lewis, was

that even if we thought this was the sound thing to do by way of uniting the Arab States, it is impossible, and you are probably right -- you are undoubtedly right -- in saying that it is also unfair."

After the meeting was over, General Twining and General Goodpaster asked me to remain with them in the Cabinet Room for the consideration of a matter which the President had asked them to discuss with me. As we sat down to talk, General Cutler came up and said, "Lewis, that was the most eloquent presentation that I have ever heard made at a Security Council meeting, and you clearly had all the members with you."

My conversation with General Twining and General Goodpaster lasted about a quarter of an hour. When I left the Cabinet Room, I found that Mr. Allen had been waiting for me in the corridor. He said that he was very sorry if he had created a false impression in my mind by what he had said; that he wanted me to know that in a generally unsympathetic State Department, he had always been a sponsor of the State of Israel, and that he would, under no circumstances, have had me think otherwise; that it was a pragmatic approach to a problem that demanded solution which had led him to advance the suggestion that one way in which the flow of immigration could be controlled, if it were decided that that was desirable, was by the method he had suggested. He said, however, that he did not intend to pursue the matter any further since he was convinced that it was an improper course.

Lewis L. Strauss

LLS/vhw