Wise, Stephen
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Office of Dr. Wise
40 West 68th Street
New York 23, N.Y.

March 21, 1945

Dear Chaim:

Having just learned from Meyer that D.T. is about to leave for London, I hasten to send you a report of my recent conversation with the Chief.

When I saw him just before he left, and he told me that in connection with our hopes he was arranging to see Ibn Saud and Farouk and Selassie, I urged that he see you. He did not say he would not or could not, but I could feel that he felt it would not be fitting because of your nominal lack of majesty. I am sure that was in his mind.

I saw him again last Friday, March 16, when we had a very full talk together. I began by congratulating him upon a gloriously successful mission. Whereupon his mournful comment was, "I have had a failure. The one failure of my mission was with Ibn Saud. Everything went well, but not that, and I arranged the whole meeting with him for the sake of your cause." He told me very fully -- I cannot write it out at this time -- the substance of his four-hour conversation with Ibn Saud. The underlings in the State Department -- with or without the help of Hull, apparently with the final help of Sumner Welles and, it may be, with the help of your Prime Minister -- did a very good job in magnifying I.S. in the President's eyes. He said, "I tried to approach the Jewish question a number of times. Every time I mentioned the Jews he would shrink and give me some such answer as this -- "I am too old to understand new ideas!" When, for example, the President began to tell him about what we have done for Palestine through irrigation and the planting of trees, Ibn Saud's answer was, "My people don't like trees; they are desert dwellers. And we have water enough without irrigation!" The Chief added, "I have never so completely failed to make an impact upon a man's mind as in his case." When the Chief began to speak well of Jews, I.S.replied, "Yes, the native Jews of Palestine are good, but the Jews of London, New York, Moscow.....!" He added that Churchill had spent the next day with I.S., and again made no impression. It may have been his own fault, because he set out to browbeat the old man for two hours, after which he changed his tack and was

sweet as honey with him, but nothing availed.

We then settled down to a discussion of I.S., I insisting that he was exaggerating the place of I.S. in the Arab world, he insisting that all the others gave him their allegiance. I tried to explain to him why that was not true, and then he spoke of the army of I.S. — 700,000 men. Saslani, who is here, said there are not 300,000 men bearing his arms -- and what an army!

Two things are certain — one, that he saw I.S. for our sake; and two, that he is under the lamentable misconception that all that I.S. has to do is to unite the armies of the Arab states, and he could destroy the Jewish people of Palestine! I told him that is not true; that two or three hundred thousand men in Palestine could take care of Palestine; that the Arabs dreaded lead and steel; and that "my young fellow Jews are ready to give their lives in order to keep and build up Palestine as their National Home!" Whereupon he expressed surprise that I, a religionist, should talk in the terms of hundreds of thousands of men giving up their lives. I could only answer that "I am sure this would be their choice, and they have the right to choose not to come under an Arab-Hitler regime as a minority, instead at last of being a clear majority in their ancient and reborn land." I may come back to I.S. before this letter goes off.

My earliest questions elicited the following -- one, that there was no change as far as W.C. was concerned with regard to Zionist plans. And when I asked him whether he was not mistaken with regard to the rumor which he repreated to me before he left about Stalin being disaffected, he said I was mistaken, that there is nothing in that rumor; that Stalin is all right and he is with us.

In the course of the discussion of I.S. and Farouk, I could not help remarking how sad it was that these countries -- Iraq, which had been hostile; Egypt, which had been painfully neutral -- should be free to go to San Francisco and represent their people, whereas as far as I knew no plans had been made looking to the presentation of the Jewish case. The President listened carefully as I added, "Dr. Weizmann is pre-eminently the man to present the case of the Jewish people at San Francisco." He nodded assent, and then, curiously enough, he added, "Would it not be better to have a native Palestinian, a person who represents (and here he used the terms, 'the Jewish Nation' - the 'Jewish State')?" I could not help asking,

"Do you mean a man like David Ben Gurion, the Chairman of the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine?" "Yes, I do!" I quickly added, "But of course Dr. Weizmann, though not a native Palestinian, does represent as no other living person does the Jewish people and their hope for the Jewish State." And I added that if a Palestinian must present the case in part, I presumed both Dr. Weizmann and a Palestinian could present our case. In order to clinch matters, I said to him, "I am happy about your agreement, and I take it for granted I may discuss this as soon as I can arrange a meeting with Ed." Meaning, of course, the Secretary of State. He authorized me to do that, and I may add a copy of a letter which I have this day addressed to Stettinius who, I must add, is very friendly, though he was very much irritated, and in some degree alienated, by the Silver tactics in Washington during December and January.

In the course of the conversation I told him of the pitiable case of these twelve hundred Jewish exiles who, after finally being released from Bergenbelsen, were permitted to remain for a little time in Switzerland; and when we heard that there was danger of their being shipped to Algiers, Goldmann, Goldstein, Greenberg, Shulman, and I had a conference with Lord Halifax, and made clear to him the injustice and the wrong of sending these people to Algiers instead of to Palestine. "You, of course, know about this, and yet to Algiers they went instead of to Palestine." I added: "The doors of Palestine must be opened and kept open to Jewish immigration and resettlement!" Whereupon he said, "I have discussed the matter with W.C., and he says 'don't talk about the White Paper or regulations; but we will let the Jews come in.'" Whereupon I added, "It is very fine for W.C. to say that, but some underlings of the Colonial Office and of the Palestine Government will see to it that W.C.'s wish be contravened!" Nothing

As a result of this moment of our talk, we here are preparing a memo for the President and for the State Department, dealing sternly with the whole question of immigration. I hope that by the end of the week it will be in readiness, and that we shall be able to send it to you through George B. I daresay you have seen W.C., but if you have not you ought to see him at once, and tell him how happy you and we are over his work to the President, that Jewish immigration to Palestine must be continued, and that the doors will be left open. Your and our Chiefs ought to be moved to make a joint statement on that, unless W.C. is prepared to make his own, with the spoken

or unspoken assent of the President.

Last and most important thing of all, after telling me again and again of his failure with I.S., and describing in detail the manner in which he had sought to impact upon the old man, of whom the President said rather hopefully "He is seventy-five years old, and has swollen ankles, so that perhaps we had better wait until he goes!" And when I instantly demurred, and said,-"We cannot wait; a decision must be taken, and the decision must be announced at the earliest possible moment!"-- the President said this with a great deal of emphasis:- "I thought of another way of dealing with the problem. Since we cannot move I.S., and since the other Arab chiefs will go along with him, I have been thinking about the plan of our putting the case up to the first meeting of the Council of the United Nations, whenever it meets," -- indicating that the meeting would be relatively soon, within a few months after San Francisco. I did not feel I had the right to say what I was strongly tempted to say -- "That would mean putting things off, and the Jewish people cannot wait; and what is more, the Jews of Palestine will refuse to wait!" But my almost simultaneous thought was that there was involved here the necessity for making a decision which I had no right to make at that moment, but the decision could only be reached by the leaders of the Zionist movement, including primarily yourself and your associates of the Executive, and that there must be the greatest measure of heart-searching and exploration before we gave our reply to this proposal.

I believe the President is dead in earnest about this, and that if we were to agree with him, he would feel that he and Churchill must put it up to their associates and urge the imposition of a Jewish State on I.S. and his associates by the Council of the United Nations. But I see difficulties. The possibility is of a very real postponement, and that such plan might easily play into the hands of the Arab chiefs and of our enemies in American Jewish life, in Anglo-Jewish life, etc. The question is one that ought to be decided without delay, for the President will expect to have our reaction to his proposal. We may send him a tentative reply within the next few days indicating that no decision by me or by any one of us could be reached, save after fullest consultation with you and your associates, after your arrival.

Summing it all up, the President remains our friend as much as ever. I had in my pocket the statement which I submitted to the President, and which he initialed. He assented to the presentation of the Jewish case. He was fairly satisfactory on immigration, provided W.C. meant what he said to the President. And finally, he has an alternativ[redacted], though not too likely, plan in connection with the Council of the United Nations, for our sake and for our benefit.

I may add a postscript to this, giving you some further details of the conversation. I need hardly say to you that after D.T., the bearer of this note, and you have read it, it ought to be destroyed and not left in the records nor shared with anyone.

With deepest affection, dear Chaim,

Ever yours,

ssw:eh

SSW to C.W.

October 8, 1945

Dear Rabbi Wise:

I am horrified at Mr. Rosenblatt's letter but I am not quite certain what you want me to do, since he asked you to keep his letter confidential.

Would you like me to write to Judge Proskauer that I have been hearing rumors of things which he has quoted my husband as saying and that I would like to make sure that he is not being misunderstood?

My daughter and I both know exactly what he said on his return from the Yalta trip and what has given Judge Proskauer an erroneous impression. We have heard him confide enough to be quite sure of what he meant to convey.

Very sincerely yours,

R. Wise

The President felt that he had made a complete failure with Ibn Saud because he had not been able to persuade him to allow unlimited immigration into Palestine. He said that the old man insisted that as long as he lived he did not want a change in the Arab way of life, that he knew and liked the Jews who grew up in his part of the world, that both races were semitic and understood each other, but that he feared the Jews from the big cities like New York, London and Berlin would change the way of life of the area and he wanted none of it.

The President felt that the opposition was so firm that it would mean an uprising among the Arabs against the Jews if unlimited immigration were allowed, but he added that Ibn Saud was a very old man, had been wounded a number of times and probably would not live many years. He has somewhere around 42 sons and my husband felt that negotiations could begin again whenever he died. He also felt that there could be increased immigration and perhaps very much larger temporary quarters but like so many things, I think he took the long view that in the end one can accomplish one's objective even if for a short time it seemed difficult. He felt it could be done without Arab opposition employment of actual uprising.

If you want to use this you may do so.

Free Synagogue
NEW YORK

Synagogue House
40 WEST 68 STREET
NEAR CENTRAL PARK

October 5, 1945

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt
29 Washington Square West
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt;

I feel I owe it to you and to the memory of the President to send you this letter. It is such a base calumny of President Roosevelt. Throughout the San Francisco Conference Judge Proskauer said to people - Christians as well as Jews - that he had seen President Roosevelt a few days after I did in April and that the President had said these things to him, which are here quoted; and that when Judge Proskauer asked the President - "Why do you encourage Stephen Wise and talk about a Jewish State" -, the President's reply was - "I have got to say these things because I don't want to let a friend down". You will note what Mr. Rosenblatt writes in the last lines of the first page; that the President had changed his mind after Yalta. It seems to me such a base thing to do that I feel the time may come when you will have to deal with people like him and with the gentleman from the Near East, who falsely quoted the President and tried to make it appear that the President had made certain promises to Ibn Saud.

I am sorry to burden you with this wretched business. I cannot help feeling, however, that it might have been avoided if some of these near to President Roosevelt, like Judge Rosenman, had not insisted upon his seeing Proskauer, whom I knew the President had long held in utter detestation.

With most cordial greeting,

Faithfully yours,

Stephen S. Wise

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