

Biltmore Resolution,

Declaration adopted at a conference of American Zionists in 1942, explicitly advocating the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. In the spring of 1942, Zionist fortunes had reached their lowest ebb. Despite the dire straits of European Jewry, the cooperation of the Yishuv in the British war effort, and the collaboration of the Arabs with the Nazis, the British government adamantly refused to modify its White Paper of 1939, which limited Jewish immigration into Palestine and contemplated a Palestinian state with an Arab majority. Furthermore, American Zionists had failed to mobilize the crucial support of either American Jewry or the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. To counteract this situation, an extraordinary Zionist conference was called for May 10 and 11, 1942. Held in New York's Biltmore Hotel, it was attended by leading Zionist personalities, including Chaim Weizmann, Abba Hillel Silver, Stephen S. Wise, David Ben-Gurion, and Nahum Goldmann.

Despite the fact that no verified data existed at the time regarding the "Final Solution," it was clear to those at the conference that European Jewry was in the throes of a great catastrophe. Article 2 of the resolution offered "a message of hope and encouragement to [our] fellow Jews in the ghettos and concentration camps of Hitler-dominated Europe, and our prayers that their hour of liberation may not be far distant." The resolution further offered warm greetings to Jewish fighting men and women, and sent a proposal of peace and goodwill to the Arabs. However, the conclusion of the resolution was unambiguous: "The conference declares that the new world order that will follow victory cannot be established on foundations of peace, justice, and equality unless the problem of Jewish homelessness is finally solved" (Article 8). Consequently, the resolution urged "that Palestine be established as a Jewish commonwealth integrated into the structure of the new democratic world."

Events in Europe were not yet sufficiently clear for American, or Palestinian, Zionists to fully comprehend. The Riegner Cable was received in August 1942

and verified only late that November. Thus, the conference was responding to partial information and spoke of the need to relocate two million Jewish refugees at a time when nearly that number of Russian, Polish, and Romanian Jews had already been massacred. Even so, the resolution marked the first time that a majority of Zionists called openly for the establishment of Jewish sovereignty as the ultimate goal of Zionism. The resolution became central to the activities of Silver and Wise, as co-chairmen of the American Zionist Emergency Council. Indeed, although many non-Zionists in the United States (including those of the American Jewish Committee) did not support its stated demands, the resolution became the primary statement of Zionist goals until the United Nations opted for the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states on November 29, 1947.