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THE ALLIES AND JEWISH LEADERSHIP ON THE QUESTION OF BOMBING AUSCHWITZ

Considerable publicity has been given by major news networks, *The New York Times*, *Life* and other publications, to photographs of Auschwitz taken by the United States military during World War II. Accompanying these photos, released by the Central Intelligence Agency, was a U.S. government statement that it did not know what Auschwitz was; nor did it know that thousands of Jews were murdered every day at that concentration camp complex. That is an entirely false impression given by the present day CIA.

As we view the history of the Holocaust period we find that most of the states refused to provide shelter to the Jews of Europe during the Nazi reign of terror. Yes, there were a few exceptions. But the refuge that Denmark, Sweden and Italy provided was limited, meagre and uncertain. Others like the United States, Brazil, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Cuba refused to provide even temporary asylum. Moreover, they refused to issue declarations and warnings to stop the Nazis from destroying European Jewry. Not until March 24, 1944, was such a declaration forthcoming.

The callousness did not end there. Not only did the Allies refuse to provide shelter, not only did they refuse to issue declarations which specifically referred to the murder of Jews, but they refused to help liberate the camps or bomb the railways and crematoriums. Some aspects of the Allied refusal to bomb the death camps have already been revealed by Chaim Weizmann and documented during the Eichmann trial.¹ But there is much more to this story.

Some Jewish leaders like Weizmann believed that if the railways and camps were bombed the deportations and exterminations would be slowed down, if not stopped completely. Others were opposed to bombing, and they called for Allied parachutists to liberate the

camps. Jewish leaders, as has so often occurred in the past, were divided, and they failed to provide a united front before the nonJews who wielded the power. And whatever requests the Jewish leadership made, the answer was always no.

On June 27, 1944, Ignacy Schwarzbart, a General Zionist and a member of the Polish National Council in London, wrote to Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, the Prime Minister of the Polish-Government-in-Exile, that the time was ripe to liberate the "victims imprisoned in diverse camps as Oswiecim, Majdanek, Treblinka . . . and many others" since the Polish Army (the underground) was carrying out extensive actions against the Germans. Schwarzbart suggested two ways in which this might be accomplished: "bomb from the air the administrative buildings . . . and arrange an armed attack on the camps by units of our Underground Army in order to rescue the victims." Acknowledging that both actions were fraught with danger and difficulties, he suggested that perhaps some "combined operation might achieve our purpose." This rescue would be the only way "to prevent Hitler from continuing his action of deporting people to Poland." Schwartzbart concluded by suggesting to the exiled Polish Prime Minister that Polish Jews should be armed and permitted to join the Polish underground.²

A few days later on July 1, 1944, A. Leon Kubowitzki, chief of the World Jewish Congress rescue division, wrote to John Pehle, director of the War Refugee Board, that he opposed bombing the camps. He urged that some other way should be found to destroy "the gas chambers," so that the "pace of extermination" could be "considerably slowed down." He reminded Pehle that in August and October of 1943, Jews had successfully revolted and that they had destroyed the murder apparatus in a number of camps. Moreover, the revolts resulted in the "escape of a large number of Jews from these camps." But he categorically stated his opposition to bombing the camps from the air:

The destruction of the death installations cannot be done by bombing from the air, as the first victims would be the Jews.³

Instead of bombing, Kubowitzki urged that the Russians be called upon to dispatch paratroops to seize the buildings, to "annihilate the murderers" and to free the inmates. Kubowitzki also urged that the "Polish Government be requested to instruct the Polish underground to attack these and similar camps to destroy the instruments of death."⁴

John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War, seemed to agree with Kubowitzki, for he wrote John Pehle that such bombings were "impracticable" because they would take needed air support away from the military "engaged in decisive operations." McCloy concluded that such bombings would be "of such doubtful efficacy that it would not amount to a practical project."⁵ American officials therefore would not support the bombings.

Kubowitzki's intervention seemed strange. Didn't he know that the Russian Army had refused to help the fighters of the Warsaw Rebellion in January-May 1943? Did he also fail to consider that the Polish Home Army, the best equipped and most numerous element of the Polish underground, had for the most part refused to help the Jewish resistance fighters?⁶ Did he not know that some units of that Polish underground had even sought out Jews to kill them?⁷

While Kubowitzki expressed his opposition to bombings, Chaim Weizmann met with British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden to ask that the camps be bombed. On July 6, 1944, Weizmann discussed with Eden the Brand-Eichmann deal, and, at the same time, appealed to him that the Allies bomb the railways and crematoriums.⁸ When Eden maintained that he needed American and Soviet approval on such matters as the Brand deal,⁹ Weizmann pleaded that, in the interim, the Allies publish a declaration that they were prepared to accept Jewish refugees in all their territories and in neutral countries and that the Swiss should inform Hungary that they would be willing to issue documents of immunity and passports for the Jewish refugees. Finally Weizmann requested that the Allies issue a warning that anyone who helped in the deportation of Jews would be held responsible and punished.¹⁰

On July 15, Mr. Randall of the British Foreign Office, informed Moshe Shertok of the Jewish Agency that Weizmann's proposal to bomb the death camps and railways was under consideration.

The answer came on September 1, 1944, from Permanent Under-Secretary Richard Law:

You will remember that in your meeting on the 6th of July, you spoke with the Foreign Secretary about the bombing of the Birkenau death camp, and about the atrocities which were committed there by the Germans toward Hungarian and other Jews.

The matter was discussed to the fullest extent by a team of the Air Force, but I regret to inform you that because of the great technical difficulties involved, we have no choice but to refrain from using your proposal under the present circumstances. I understand that the decision will be a disappointment to you, but be sure that the matter was considered exhaustively.¹¹

What were those technical difficulties Richard Law referred to? He could not have been referring to the bombing capacity of the Allies because the Allies—by 1941—held air supremacy throughout Europe. Allied planes penetrated the entire region of Eastern and Central Europe in 1943–1944, dropping supplies to their troops and to the partisans and picking up their downed pilots. But they refused to drop weapons and supplies to the Jews.¹²

The official U.S. reply to Kubowitzki's suggestions came from John J. McCloy on September 3, 1944. McCloy advised that operation troops could not be diverted to liberate the death camps. According to McCloy:

The use of operational troops to which you refer in your letter must be subject to the discretion of the theater commander. Such operations as you suggest would fall within the jurisdiction of the Allied Mediterranean Commander, and he has been fully informed of the situation obtaining in the "death camp areas." He must be the judge of the practicality of such an operation and its likely results. I am sure he would do anything he felt he could to check these ghastly excesses of the Nazis. Perhaps an alteration in the tactical situation may make it possible for him to take some effective steps along the lines you propose.¹³

Kubowitzki refused to give up. He went directly to the Russians as did Nahum Goldmann. Kubowitzki informed the Russians that reliable information pointed to German plans to "speed up the pace of the killings going on in the death factories." He reminded the Russians that Goldmann had requested the Russian Ambassador to the U.S. to convey this request to the Soviet authorities in Moscow. Since there was "alarmingly little time left" to save the "victims of German barbarism," Kubowitzki again pleaded for Russian intervention on behalf of the people in the camps. Kubowitzki realized that "the use of operational troops must be subject to the discretion of the Theater Commander." He therefore asked that the Commander be advised of the conditions in the camps because thousands of inmates and millions of people throughout the world were hoping for "the speedy intervention of Soviet paratroops." Kubowitzki asked that the Soviet commander of the area warn the Germans and Hungarians "that inexorable retribution would be exacted from those who would lift their hands against them." He called for the railroads to be bombed, specifically the railroad hubs of Budapest, Novy-Zamkey, Satoraljaujhely, Kosice, Estergom, Komaron, and Gyor, in order to "paralyze the deportation movements by railroad."¹⁴

The World Jewish Congress representative also went to see John

J. McCloy on September 28. At this meeting he learned that the Allied Mediterranean commander had been informed of the situation concerning the death camps. McCloy sent the Jews to seek British assistance in this matter since, he claimed, the British were "in a better position to advise General Wilson on the steps which could be taken."¹⁵

Less than a week later, on October 4, 1944, Kubowitzki again contacted McCloy and appealed for U.S. military intervention to help save the remnant of Jews in the concentration camps. He told McCloy of German plans to kill off the remaining 50,000 prisoners of Oswiecim with "artillery and bombers so that all proof of the crimes committed by the Germans would be eliminated." The Jewish representative said that he was waiting "most anxiously" to hear "about the steps taken by the War Department in this connection."¹⁶ Kubowitzki and the rest of the Jews would have a long wait. The Allies still refused to help save the Jews. There remained "technical difficulties," and, according to the Allies, the bombing plans were of "doubtful efficacy" to help save Jews.

While Nazis were wiping out European Jewry and the Allies refused to stop them, American Jewish organizations and their spokesmen continued to be divided. Joint Distribution Committee representatives were most unhappy with the World Jewish Congress' intervention in rescue work in Spain and Portugal, and they refused to go along with a suggestion that there be a clearinghouse of representatives from various Jewish organizations to help rescue Europe's Jews.¹⁷

When Weizmann suggested that the British parachute hundreds of Jewish volunteers into Hungary to help rescue Jews, British military authorities considered such a move helpful to the Allied cause, but the plan was rejected by the Foreign and Colonial offices for political reasons. What those political reasons were we still do not know. Perhaps the Allies did not want to see an end to extermination? The fewer survivors the less problems in Europe and in Palestine. It may have been related to Anthony Eden's 1943 complaint that he would not know what to do with all the Jews if the Germans let them go:

If we do that (rescue 60,000 from the Balkans) the Jews of the world will be wanting us to make a similar offer in Poland and Germany. Hitler might well take us up on such an offer and there simply are not enough ships . . . in the world to handle them.¹⁸

British and American officials were reluctant or unwilling to

help stop the Nazi German killers from massacring Jews. Was it because those Allied officials were anti-Semitic? The answer is not quite that simple. The British were concerned with empire. They wanted to maintain their control over the area they called Palestine. They rejected the idea of a Jewish Army and accepted only 25,000 of 130,000 Yishuv volunteers because they did not want to encourage Jewish independence. That is why they refused to accept the thousands of Yishuv volunteers who were prepared to parachute behind enemy lines.

Many European Jews wanted to go to Palestine even though Britain had closed the gates with its White Paper of May 15, 1939. The Holocaust, supported by the silence of indifferent officials, persuaded the survivors that they could feel secure only in their own state. The British did not want their precarious controls in Palestine disturbed and the U.S. did not wish to disturb the British. Jewish leaders outside of Nazi Europe were divided and were unable to present a united front on what relief they wanted.

The six million are gone.

NOTES

1. *Eichmann Trial*, District Court Jerusalem, Criminal Case No. 40/61, 29, 30 May, 1961, File No. 56 and No. 57.
2. Ignacy Schwarzbart, Letter to Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, 27 June, 1944, World Jewish Congress Archives, New York City.
3. A. Leon Kubowitzki, Letter to John W. Pehle, 1 July, 1944, World Jewish Congress Archives, New York City.
4. Kubowitzki, Letter.
5. John J. McCloy, Letters to John Pehle, 24 June, 4 July, 1944, War Refugee Board, pp. 750, 767.
6. Nora Levin, *The Holocaust, The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-1945* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), pp. 353-4; Tuvia Borzykowski, *Between Tumbling Walls* (Tel Aviv: Beit Lohamei Hagettaot, 1976), p. 201.
7. Charles Goldstein, *The Bunker* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), pp. 101-107; Vladka Meed, *On Both Sides of the Wall* (Tel Aviv: Beit Lohamei Haghettaot, 1977), pp. 112, 115, 197; Isaiah Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 47-49.
8. *Eichmann Trial*.
9. *Eichmann Trial*.
10. *Eichmann Trial*.
11. *Eichmann Trial*.
12. *Eichmann Trial*.
13. John J. McCloy, Letter to A. Leon Kubowitzki, 3 September, 1944, World Jewish Congress Archives, New York City.
14. A. Leon Kubowitzki, Letter to Kaperstein, 1 October, 1944, World Jewish Congress Archives, New York City.
15. A. Leon Kubowitzki, Letter to Ignacy Schwarzbart, 16 October, 1944, World Jewish Congress Archives, New York City.

16. A. Leon Kubowitzki, Letter to John J. McCloy, 4 October, 1944, World Jewish Congress Archives, New York City.
17. Note dated June 9, 1944, on 2 June, 1944, Conference of World Jewish Congress and Joint Representatives, World Jewish Congress Archives, New York City.
18. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 27 March, 1943, (Washington: Department of State, 1963), III, pp. 38-39.