

Australia and the Birth of Israel: Midwife or Abortionist*

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Introduction

When the First Committee of the Special Session of the United Nations convened on 6 May 1947, they had before them the 2 April request, of Sir Alexander Cadogan of the United Kingdom, to place the question of Palestine on the Agenda and “to make recommendations, under Article 10 of the Charter, concerning the future government of Palestine”.¹ In order to expedite the process, Cadogan requested the Secretary-General to convene a special session of the General Assembly to constitute and instruct a Special Committee to prepare a report for the General Assembly. The Committee became known as UNSCOP.

UNSCOP consisted of eleven “neutral” countries — two Commonwealth nations (Canada and Australia), two Eastern European nations (Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia), three Latin American countries (Guatemala, Peru and Uruguay), two Asian nations (India and Iran) and two Western European nations (Sweden and the Netherlands). UNSCOP recommended partition by a vote of seven for, three against (they wrote a minority report supporting a federal solution), and one abstention — Australia.

Using that report, a special Ad Hoc Committee chaired by the Rt Honourable Dr H. V. Evatt, then Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs, as well as Chairman of the Australian Delegation to the UN, recommended partition to the General Assembly. In the alphabetic roll call on the vote in the Ad Hoc Committee, even though Australia held the Chair, Australia cast the first yeas vote for partition after Afghanistan voted against and Argentina abstained. On 29 November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted by more than a two-thirds majority to support partition.

Evatt was showered with cables and telegrams from Jewish organisations in Palestine.² Evatt describes how, after the partition vote in the United Nations, the Jewish people and their supporters’ “display of gratitude towards myself was most touching”. Evatt went on to say, with uncharacteristic modesty, that “I had only done what I believed was just and right as a good United Nations follower”.³ Between that declaration of the UN and the date when Israel was born on 15 May 1948, Evatt was regarded as one of the champions of Israel. He fought attempts by the USA and the UK to reverse the pro-partition

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resolution and substitute a UN trusteeship. "I could not leave Australia at that time but I sent a message which was broadcast throughout the world with the object of making it clear that the proposed trusteeship plan was not only inadmissible and indefensible in itself, but represented a complete setting aside of the decision of the previous Assembly."⁴ He advocated that the Security Council intervene with force to stop the Arab invasion. In January 1948 under Evatt's leadership and inspiration, Australia was the first government to give *de jure*, that is, full recognition, and not just *de facto* recognition to the new state of Israel.

Evatt was considered strongly pro-Zionist.⁵ He had close connections with the Jewish business community in Australia.⁶ Though the only Jewish parliamentarians in Australia at the time were on the Right, "Labor gained support (from Jewish voters) through Dr. Evatt's key role at the United Nations in the establishment of Israel".⁷ Evatt was credited with being one of the most important foreign statesmen in the creation of Israel. He can even be said to have been a midwife at Israel's birth. Evatt "chalked up the birth of the State of Israel to his credit as chairman of the United Nations *ad hoc* committee on Palestine. The tiny Republic, which embodied the age-old dreams of world Jewry and militant Zionism, was born in 1948 with Evatt as midwife. Great was the acclaim he received from Jewish people at home and abroad. When he attended functions in his honour given by Jewish organizations, he was always sure of the nearest thing in Australia to a hero's welcome."⁸

However, very little has been written about Evatt's role on the substantive issues at stake when the matter was first put before the United Nations and when it was considered in UNSCOP. Chapter X of his book, *The Task of Nations*, deals with the first phase of UN involvement in the Palestine issue in the setting up of UNSCOP. Other than crediting Australia with "the initiative at the General Assembly in the appointment of UNSCOP"⁹ and the initiative in keeping the five great powers from being members of UNSCOP, the main thrust of Evatt's own account is concerned to convey the impression that he acted as an exemplary impartial chairman of the proceedings of the Ad Hoc Committee dealing with the UNSCOP report while, at the same time, being resolute in ensuring that the work of the committee moved expeditiously and made a decision. "In its handling of the Palestine dispute ... [Evatt] felt the Assembly had approached the problem not on the basis of expediency but impartially and solely in terms of the best interest of the inhabitants."¹⁰

Evatt does comment critically on the minority report of UNSCOP recommending a federal state. "In the legislature of this state, representation would have been given to Arabs as well as Jews, but inasmuch as the Arabs outnumbered the Jews, the Jews would have had no effective control within any portion of the proposed state. Migration of the Jews could, and no doubt would, have been terminated or been drastically restricted by the Arab majority with the result that the Jews would have become a permanent minority in Palestine with serious repercussions, and disaster to all their hopes of national survival."¹¹ But it is unclear when he made this evaluation. For he states clearly that when he assumed the role of Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee, "I entered upon the work of the Committee without prejudices in favour of any particular solution".¹²

Commentators have had little to say about Australia's abstention and Evatt's transformation from a purported neutral spectator to an ardent pro-Israel advocate. Allan Dalziel simply said that "Evatt worked for the establishment of the promised national home for the Jews and the creation of the autonomous State of Israel".¹³ Kylie Tennant wrote that Evatt "supported the cause of Israel because he felt the Jewish people were a race that must have a sanctuary".¹⁴ In Alan Renouf's political biography, *Let Justice Be Done: The Foreign Policy of Dr. H. V. Evatt*, his role is summarised in one paragraph:

No better testimony exists to Evatt's pursuit of justice than the part he played in the establishment of the State of Israel. When Britain referred the Palestine problem to the General Assembly in April 1947, Evatt was instrumental in having the Assembly set up a committee of investigation. Australia was a member. In August the committee produced two reports: the majority report recommended partition into two independent states, one Arab, one Jewish; the minority report, one federated state. Australia supported neither solution. The General Assembly appointed another committee to examine the reports. Evatt was chairman. In this committee, Evatt came out for partition, and a plan for it was prepared, which the General Assembly approved on 29 November.¹⁵

The paragraph is more puzzling than insightful. On the one hand, it makes no reference to the British view, articulated by the Colonial Secretary, Arthur Creech-Jones,¹⁶ that the major factor which scuppered the British strategy and led the UN to endorse partition was Evatt's decision as Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question in the autumn to work, on the one hand, in two separate committees. One was pro-partition and one anti-, without any real effort at the same time at conciliation between the Arabs and the Jews in the third committee. The charge was that the very committee structure he set up mitigated against conciliation. The American State Department concurred in the British view of Evatt's failure to work for conciliation. Samuel K. C. Kopper of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs noted that "the abortive and utterly weak efforts of Dr. Evatt to bring conciliation to bear during the General Assembly session can hardly be classed as United Nations conciliation".¹⁷

On the other hand, Renouf provides no reason why Australia abstained in the UNSCOP major recommendation on partition, and then why Australia subsequently supported partition and Evatt became renowned as a champion of the Israeli cause. Furthermore why in the autumn of 1949, when a major diplomatic attack was made on Israel's jurisdiction over Jerusalem, did Dr Evatt, virtually to everyone's surprise at the behaviour of someone regarded as strongly pro-Israel, as one of his last acts as an international statesman, support the campaign to reaffirm the UN resolution on internationalisation? Abba Eban, liaison officer of the Jewish Agency to UNSCOP at the time and later Israel's ambassador to the UN and Foreign Minister, wrote that "We were never able to diagnose the cause for Herbert Evatt's strange obduracy in this matter".¹⁸ Was Evatt just an unpredictable person as the Americans believed?¹⁹

The reasons why Evatt was greeted as a champion of Israel are not hard to find. Evatt was almost certainly Australia's most brilliant External Affairs Minister. He was intelligent, ambitious, authoritative and a very assertive politician. He reigned supreme over Australia's foreign policy in the World War II and immediate post-World War II period and was the crucial figure in establishing Australia as a principal independent player in the international arena no longer tied to the apron strings of Mother Britain.²⁰ Allan Dalziel, his secretary for twenty years, portrays Evatt as the "defender of human rights and dignity" who was never "devious or ambiguous, conspiratorial or laodicean" but earned "enmity through nonconformity".²¹

Not all portraits of Evatt are so flattering. Abba Eban, with his usual sharp tongue, said of Evatt that, "His self-confidence was absolute. Behind his abrasive exterior lurked an abrasive interior. He never allowed his resolution to be blunted by any confession of fallibility".²² Brian Urquhart, a career civil servant at the UN, was even more scathing. After describing Evatt as "unpredictable, ambitious, and later on an almost paranoid President of the General Assembly",²³ he went on to say that "Evatt was a brilliant but insecure man, almost paranoid in his desire to dominate and in his suspicion of those around him. He was even jealous of Eleanor Roosevelt".²⁴ Michael Comay, who headed the Israeli team at the UN, also considered that Evatt was insecure and had a weak ego. Comay believed that in May 1947 his flattery of Evatt and of his importance in the debate

had obtained Australia's commitment to support partition, even while he carried on a pretence of impartiality to advance his own career.²⁵

Evatt's role as a champion of Israel emerged because he applied his brain, political skills and determination as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly and ushered through the manoeuvrings and the debate that culminated in that historic vote on 29 November 1947 which recommended the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state. He also committed Australia's vote to support partition. As Evatt noted on 25 November 1947, "abstention in the vote is the worst course to follow as it would tend to lead to a situation of abdicated responsibility on the part of the United Nations".²⁶

Renouf explains Evatt's commitment to Israel as follows:

The issue was close to Evatt's heart. Near associates record him as saying, as early as September 1945, that the Jewish people had to have a permanent home, where they could live in dignity and self-respect, and that they had full historical rights in Palestine. If the Arabs refused it, the United Nations had to decree and guarantee it. The explanation for Evatt's attitude is justice. Aware of the Jews' sufferings, he tried to create the conditions where those sufferings would not recur. He led the investigation by the United Nations which suggested that there should be a Jewish state within Palestine; for Evatt there was, therefore, no alternative but to have the state established.²⁷

Though Renouf says Evatt "led the investigation" he is, in fact, referring to the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly, rather than UNSCOP, the investigating committee. The real question is why did Australia abstain on the partition recommendation by UNSCOP? Did John Hood, the career external affairs officer appointed to UNSCOP, act independently of government direction, as, in fact, did most of the other members of the Committee as they were expected to do? Not according to Evatt.

I had always insisted, right from the first meeting of the Security Council in London of 1946, that where there were disputed questions before a United Nations body, a proper foundation or basis for any recommendation must be discovered. It was therefore essential that the relevant facts should be declared authoritatively after the fullest investigation by an impartial committee or commission. We had also contended that full publicity must be given to all the findings of any such committees or commission.

Australia's point of view was pressed forward repeatedly with Security Council disputes in relation to Iran, Greece and many other subjects. The practice of enquiry and investigation had become fairly well settled.

Accordingly when Australia was elected to UNSCOP our delegates, John Hood and S. L. Atyeo, joined in the full report of the facts without committing Australia at the time to any firm decision in relation to the majority and minority recommendation of UNSCOP.²⁸

Two points are noteworthy. One, Evatt clearly implies that the Australian delegates voted according to Australian policy. Second, the rationale for abstention is given as the policy of investigating bodies having the responsibility for ascertaining the facts and, presumably, not making recommendations when there was a dispute over facts or recommendations that stemmed from the analysis of those facts. Thus, although Australia led the fight in San Francisco against the Yalta voting formula which allowed any one of the five great powers a veto in the Security Council, in the final vote Australia abstained.²⁹ Australia was also a member of the United Nations Special Committee on the Balkans (UNSCOB). "The Australian representatives ... dissented or abstained from categorical conclusions based on the presumption of observers."³⁰ When in October 1949, the First Committee of the General Assembly called upon the President of the General

Assembly to negotiate with the Greek government suspension of death sentences imposed on eight individuals convicted of "political" offences, Australia abstained.³¹

But there are explanations for these and other abstentions other than ones of procedural principle. On the issue of the veto, it might have meant no Charter and no United Nations if Australia won. On the issue of Albanian, Bulgarian and Yugoslavian support for Greek guerrillas, the rationale for abstention was not attributed to lack of unanimity but to the drawing of categorical conclusions of *fact* on the basis of scanty evidence. On the Greek issue of the condemned political prisoners, "Australia's abstention may have arisen out of anxiety at the action of the Greek government without any intention of creating a precedent for intervention".³² And the principle of limiting UN jurisdiction *vis-a-vis* domestic issues was critical to Australia. In other words, wherever there was an abstention on the procedural principle, there seemed to be a substantive motive for Australia's abstention. Alternatively, a different procedural principle (related to evidential support, for example) was operative. What was the underlying basis for the abstention in UNSCOP if there was one?

Firstly, the abstention has no basis with respect to the restricted terms of reference to which Evatt referred. Though clause 2 of the Terms of Reference states that, "The special committee shall have the widest powers to ascertain and record facts, and to investigate all questions and issues relevant to the problem of Palestine", clause 6 makes it perfectly clear that UNSCOP was not just a fact-finding mission. "The special committee shall prepare a report to the General Assembly and shall submit such proposals as it may consider appropriate for the solution of the problem of Palestine."³³ How unusual and unexpected that abstention was can be gathered from the comments of other members of UNSCOP. For example, Nicolaas Blom, the Dutch representative on UNSCOP, a civil servant in the Dutch Foreign Office, and the one other delegate taking direct orders from his Ministry, referred to the Australian abstention as "incomprehensible" and "not greatly appreciated".

Wellicht moet uit de voormelde onzekerheden verklaard worden de houding aangenomen door de Australische gedelegeerde, die zich geheel heeft onthouden van het uitspreken van een oordeel. Dat deze houding onbegrijpelijk werd geacht en weinig waardering vond, behoeft geen betoog. Torecht, naar mijn oordeel, waren alle leden van de Commissie van mening dat de Verenigde Volken, welke aan de Commissie deze odpracht gaven, mochten verwachten, dat de leden zich niet aan het uitspreken van een inzicht zouden onttrekken.³⁴

But couldn't Hood have voted in the committee independently of Australian and, more particularly, Evatt's policy? As Allan Dalziel described it, "John Hood, and other senior officers like Dr. Anstey Wynes, never seemed to be at home with the Evatt brand of bustling diplomacy".³⁵ But if Hood voted contrary to Evatt's wishes, why then would Evatt, who saw to it that he was head of the UN delegation, appoint someone who would deviate, not only from Evatt's deep commitments, but from the majority of the members of the committee? Why would Evatt subsequently keep promoting Hood? In any case, Evatt said Hood was following the policy as set down by the Australian delegation, i.e., Evatt. Does the role the Australian delegate played in UNSCOP clarify whether Evatt was driven by expediency or was motivated by a passion for justice?

Dr John Burton, appointed by Evatt as Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, accused Evatt of duplicity. "In 1947 Evatt allegedly started to abandon principle in policy for expediency."³⁶ Renouf, after all his research and his own close personal service to Evatt, was unconvinced. Justice, not expediency, drove Evatt.

After the vote, as head of the UN delegation during a crucial period, Evatt led the battle against the UK and US State Department team attempt to push through a trusteeship proposal and reverse the UN position on partition.³⁷ On 8 April 1948, he issued an

instruction to John Hood, departmental head of the UN mission, as follows: "the Assembly decision was based on on-the-spot investigations by the United Nations and exhaustive discussion during the Assembly. The United Nations cannot lightly set aside a decision adopted by two-thirds of its members. Before, therefore, the Special Assembly agrees to reconsider its decision, those sponsoring reconsideration must give cogent reasons, and the Special Assembly, which is in control of its own business, must then decide whether in fact it will reconsider the decision."³⁸ He went on to argue that there were "no cogent reasons for reconsideration". Trusteeship, he concluded, "will not be considered to offer a real solution".

Evatt led the charge in the First Political Committee and the Fourth Trusteeship Committee in opposition to the high powered cabal of the State Department of the USA, the UK and France which was then trying to reverse the partition decision. Even Canada capitulated and supported trusteeship.³⁹ Though it was eventually dropped, Australia sponsored a rival resolution to reaffirm partition. Australia could not see why any thought should be given to interfering with partition, "especially as the authority and credit of the United Nations was involved".⁴⁰

Evatt, it must be remembered, was one of the visionaries of and architects behind the trusteeship system.⁴¹ His support for trusteeship was bounded by two principles. "The first was his refusal to go any further than self-government as the end goal of trusteeship. The second was his insistence on no interference with the sovereignty of the countries to hold trusteeship."⁴² Evatt had argued for transferring mandates to trusteeships at San Francisco, but without granting sovereignty. Why had he now changed his mind and instead demanded independence *and* opposed trusteeship?

Evatt's championship seemed brave but also foolhardy. For he coveted the Presidency of the General Assembly (a fact which was well known), and just lost out at the beginning of the current session.⁴³ His stand on partition risked alienating the pro-Arab vote for that reason alone. But he went further and advocated the use of force by the Security Council against the Arabs. That position risked alienating the Americans as well as the Arabs. He worked assiduously to get the Security Council to take up the issue of Palestine prior to the 15 May 1948 deadline so that the Security Council could declare a threat to peace and adopt coercive measures to prevent or inhibit an Arab invasion of Palestine after 15 May. One draft resolution prepared by the Australian delegation called upon "the Arab states to cease their defiance of the clearly stated intentions of the majority of the members of the United Nations". Another draft included this passage: "DRAWS THE ATTENTION of the Security Council to what must clearly be regarded as a threat to international peace and security, and earnestly requests it to take such action under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter as might remove or alleviate this threat". The same draft called upon "the Security Council to impose economic sanctions on Arab countries which send forces into Palestine".⁴⁴ However, Australia ended up as one of the leaders of the rearguard action to prevent the UN from backsliding on its decision; there was no real opportunity, or realistic prospect, to advance the principle contained in the United Nations Charter whereby the United Nations would act collectively to repel aggression. Nevertheless, at the beginning of May 1948, he advised Truman (contrary to the known policy of the US, both against the involvement of its own forces and an even stronger opposition to any military involvement of the USSR in the Middle East) to lead the intervention of the Great Powers in the Palestine conflict. Truman thought his suggestion was preposterous.⁴⁵

Evatt had championed the trusteeship system without any entailment of sovereignty. Now he opposed trusteeship and pushed independence. Evatt was critical of the role of the Great Powers, particularly the US and the UK, but now advocated their intervention in the Middle East. Australia had abstained in UNSCOP and now had become one of the most

ardent supporters of partition. The last line of the report of the Australian delegation on the whole debate stated that, adopting partition "was the only possible course that could be taken and the only one consonant with the proper authority and dignity of the United Nations".⁴⁶ How does one explain all these apparent inconsistencies?

UNSCOP

Australia had not always given evidence of being an active champion of the Zionist cause. Quite the reverse. When the United Nations had been called into special session in the spring of 1947 to deal with its first major crisis — Palestine — Australia was a very cooperative partner for the British in preventing the movement of illegal immigrants to Palestine. Australia went so far as to refuse to issue passports to its own citizens if their destination was Palestine and they had not received prior approval from the British to travel to Palestine. In a memo dated 24 June 1947 from the Department of Immigration to the Department of External Affairs in Canberra, it was noted that "facilities for travel to Palestine (will only be granted) where it is clear that applicants are eligible to enter that country in accordance with Palestine immigration regulations. In cases of doubt it is the invariable rule to make prior reference to the Commissioner for Immigration, Jerusalem, and to withhold the grant of passport facilities unless and until advice is received from that official that an intending traveller will be permitted to land."⁴⁷

Nor could Evatt be said to be unaware of this policy. In fact the UK had sent a special letter to Dr H. V. Evatt, Minister of State for External Affairs in Canberra, to do "all in their power to discourage illegal immigration while the question remains *sub judice*".⁴⁸ Evatt may even have been the architect of the policy.

However, Australia's cooperation with Britain and lack of sympathy with the Zionist cause was much more home grown than simply the product of a compliant ex-colony doing the mother country's bidding. This became clear in Australia's initial role on UNSCOP. Australia had won its place on UNSCOP by only one vote over the Philippines. The vote was 21 to 20. This was in spite of the fact that Australia campaigned to win the appointment (in contrast to Canada or the Netherlands, both of which had been reluctant to take on that role). In fact, in a ministerial memo dated 22 April 1947, it was declared that the "main purpose of Australian participation in session is to secure for this country a place on the body to report to the regular session".⁴⁹ The marginal support may have been the result of a perception by other delegates that Australia would serve as a ringer for the UK.

UNSCOP was charged with studying the situation and bringing back recommendations to the United Nations Special Assembly so that it could determine a course of action. "The primary function of the committee was to ascertain the facts and make a recommendation to the regular General Assembly."⁵⁰ In the final report of UNSCOP tabled at the beginning of September of 1947, other than supporting the unanimous recommendations calling for an end to the Mandate and the granting of independence to the peoples of Palestine, the Australian delegate, John Hood, neither supported the majority recommendation for partition backed by the seven delegates from Sweden, Canada, Uruguay, Peru, Guatemala, the Netherlands and Czechoslovakia, nor the minority recommendation of India, Iran and Yugoslavia for a Federal State. The Australian *abstained*.

This abstention could have had grave consequences. For the divisions in the committee were much greater than they even appeared in the final report. The Dutch delegate, Dr Nicolaas Blom, like Hood, and unlike many of the others who were judges or politicians,

was a career civil servant. He had spent most of his life as a colonial administrator in Indonesia. He and Hood seemed to share an affinity in the UNSCOP committee in their methodological and unassuming approach to issues. Both played their cards very close to their respective chests. David Bercuson drew the same conclusion I did after reading the minutes of UNSCOP that John Hood "took great pains, during his tenure at UNSCOP, not to reveal to his fellow committee members his innermost impressions or thoughts on the issue at hand".⁵¹ Neither took the lead in most of the discussions. But when the committee — armed with the rationale that part of its terms of reference called for the parties to the conflict to desist from acts of violence while the Committee was doing its work — appeared to them to be veering off course when it decided to complain to the British against the British decision to hang three convicted Irgun terrorists, Hood and Blom joined together to protest strongly. They believed this was a gross deviation from the terms of reference of the Committee and an interference with those charged with the administration of the Mandate.

This pro-British stance was in sharp contrast to the original worries the British had about Hood. "Australian Delegation have received instructions to press strongly for Australian representation and Australian Government have indicated to their delegation that Hood would be their choice ..." and it would, therefore, be "useful to United Kingdom Delegation to have some indication from Windle as to Hood's suitability in light of Balkan Commission's experience".⁵²

Blom had clear instructions from the Dutch foreign office to avoid alienating the Arabs as the Dutch needed their support to retain control over Indonesia.⁵³ It was only when it was clear that the evidence overwhelmingly favoured partition, and that there was a clear majority in favour of partition, that the Dutch delegate was permitted by the Foreign Office to commit his vote to support the majority recommendation. But Hood had no inkling of the Dutch instruction, though he did sense Dutch opposition to partition in early August.⁵⁴ The reluctance of the Dutch to confide in the Australians was probably rooted in a combination of diplomatic reserve and the conviction that Evatt and Australia were hostile to the interests of the Netherlands in Indonesia.⁵⁵ Fighting had broken out between the Dutch government and the indigenous population of Java and Sumatra on 20 July 1947. On 30 July it was Australia that brought the issue before the UN Security Council which Holland declared to be interference in its domestic jurisdiction. The mutual suspicion of Holland and Australia meant that Hood and Blom, in spite of or because of similar civil servant styles and subservience to their ministries, were not able to collaborate.

Everyone knew the Peruvian delegate would vote any way as long as the Vatican was satisfied and the Holy places were secured from the Muslim *and* Jewish factions by an international jurisdiction. Dr Arturo Garcia Salazar, a devout Catholic, was Peru's ambassador to the Vatican. "His religious views coloured his approach to the Palestine question and inclined him to concentrate on the issue of Jerusalem and the holy places more than any other aspect of the problem".⁵⁶ If the Peruvian and the Dutch defected from the majority, there would be only five for partition and five against. Hood, the Australian would have had the deciding vote.

Who was Hood and why did he abstain in the UNSCOP committee?

John Hood

John Hood was a career civil servant who joined the Department of External Affairs six months after his twin daughters, Catherine Bridget and Anna Elisabeth, were born. He

was assigned to Australia House in April 1936. He finished his probationary period on 14 October 1936 and received his first promotion in April 1937, one year after he joined the department. Hood was appointed Officer-in-Charge of Political Section in Canberra, received another rise, and returned to Australia after 15 December 1938.

Hood was not very useful to his political masters in predicting the ensuing conflagration. In that he shared the predominant isolationist and appeasement attitudes that dominated Australian perceptions, particularly those of the Labour party. On 26 May 1939, Hood welcomed Halifax's recent statement on Anglo-German relations and supported the Chamberlain strategy. Evatt was far more prescient for he warned Australians about the gathering storm clouds. Hood was also mistaken in a number of specifics. He thought that a Soviet-German pact was impossible. On 14 June 1939 he wrote a departmental memo stating that he was "doubtful about the military value of Russia, and I have never regarded as serious the possibility of an arrangement being arrived at by Germany and the USSR".⁵⁷ As war became more and more imminent, Hood became more and more resistant to accepting the impending reality. "The Government has given no 'proof' of any sort of emergency and ... Australia has allowed itself to be caught up in a war scare which has no real foundation."⁵⁸

Nevertheless, in spite of these shortcomings as a prophet, he continued his rapid rise in the Department. And in spite of being totally at odds with Evatt about the coming war, during and after the war he moved closer to the centre of power. In 1945, John Hood, as the senior representative of the Department, along with Sam L. Atyeo — who would become the Australian alternate on UNSCOP — travelled with Evatt on a Special Mission to London via Jerusalem, a trip which began on 4 September 1945 after Evatt had returned from his triumph in San Francisco.⁵⁹ Whether the stop in Jerusalem had any relationship to the special mission, I was not able to learn.

Hood was very busy. Using London as a base, he went for six days to Paris, after being stranded for two days in Brussels, and then went on to The Hague to establish an Australian legation where he held "a roaming commission as charge d'affaires".⁶⁰ He returned to London on 23 November only to set off again for Holland three days later and to Berlin on the 30th to establish a military mission. Hood was a member of the Australian Delegation to the Reparations Conference.

Hood subsequently took up his position as departmental head of the Australian delegation at the UN. He could only have attained that position in Evatt's beloved UN because Evatt had great trust that Hood would serve him well. Evatt was too dominating a personality to tolerate a strong minded wilful individual in the institution that was so close to his heart. Evatt did not choose Hood because of his brilliance as a political prognosticator. Hood was no more prescient at the UN than he had been in 1939. With respect to Palestine, he wrote in a widely shared conviction that the "probabilities are in favour of its [the USSR] supporting the Arab claims".⁶¹

Though Hood would go on to serve as Ambassador to Indonesia from 24 June 1950 to 26 February 1952,⁶² and from 1952 to 1958 served as Ambassador to Germany, following which he was appointed Director of Scientific Secretariat, International Atomic Energy Commission, and even became Ambassador to Israel, Hood's moment of international glory came when he was appointed to UNSCOP in April 1947. Abba Eban described Hood as "a professional diplomat whose sharp mind was concealed by an easygoing disposition and a very marked taste for conviviality".⁶³ The department had recommended that Moore be appointed,⁶⁴ but Evatt saw to it that Hood got the position. Atyeo, "Evatt's eyes and ears on the world",⁶⁵ was appointed as his alternate. Evatt now had his two most trusted lieutenants on a Commission that would make the critical recommendation on the future of Palestine.