

KARL BAEHR'S LETTER TO SECRETARY OF STATE HERTER

September 21, 1959

The Hon. Christian A. Herter
Secretary of State
U.S. State Department
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

May I share with you some troubled thoughts I have about the execution of one major aspect of our foreign policy in the Middle East, especially as it is stated and carried forward in Jordan? My anxiety grew out of my last trip to the area -- my sixth in eleven years -- as leader of a study group of civic, political, and religious leaders and, specifically, out of a lengthy session the group and I had with Ambassador Sheldon Mills and his staff in Amman last July.

As you know, study tour leaders often apply to U.S. embassies for briefing on local problems and I have generally been grateful for the informative talks that have been the fruit of this practice. I literally shudder to think, however, at the harvest reaped among unsuspecting American visitors who avail themselves of this opportunity in Jordan.

To begin with, I had assumed that the basic foundations of our foreign policy on the Arab-Israel issue were: a sympathetic understanding of the legitimate needs and aspirations of both the Arabs and Israelis; a determination to tolerate no change in the present status of these countries through violence but to foster instead every effort at responsible negotiations; and a genuinely felt sense of the importance of making a major contribution to the peaceful development of the area's resources -- for the benefit of all of its peoples as well as of our own vital interest in defending the Middle East against Soviet encroachments.

If this in essence is our policy, I can only express my consternation at the attitude, judgments, and program of our embassy in Jordan. Ambassador Mills and his staff were belligerently anti-Israel. I realize that an important attribute of our representatives abroad, and particularly in a troubled region like the Middle East, must be a sympathetic approach to the culture and feelings of the host country. But there are limits, or should be, to the degree of empathy that is sought. It by no means follows that our representatives must reflect the full emotional coloration of the people to which they are assigned.

Let me elaborate on my concern. In his talk to us, Mr. Mills, after noting that sympathies for the Jews had been created by the Hitler era, declared that "the Jews have committed an equally great crime in driving the Arabs from their homes." Such a statement, coming from an American ambassador, is shocking. Can he, even assuming the sole guilt "of the Jews" for the Arab refugee exodus, so easily equate six million dead with 900,000 refugees (not all of whom are bona fide refugees from what is presently Israel)? Isn't the history of the Arab-Israel war and the creation of the Arab refugees a bit more complicated legally and morally than the implication