

1 War Sufferers

Moving Money in War

The creation of the Joint Distribution Committee for relief to Jews overseas in 1914 marked not just the opening of transnational, institutionalized American Jewish philanthropy, but also a new and unprecedented form of American Jewish politics and diplomacy involving the State Department and the US military. Sending funds and individuals into war zones required diplomatic sophistication, especially after the United States entered the war in 1917. American Jewish aid was delivered before and after the United States became a belligerent, even though many recipients remained behind enemy lines and despite the British blockade. While states at war permitted international aid for desperate civilian populations, private organizations and neutral states had to navigate these treacherous waters and faced criticism at home and abroad.¹ The JDC and the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (Hias) carried out their overseas actions by maintaining a dual identity: civilian neutrality rooted in a Jewish philanthropic tradition and an increasing connectedness to US war operations. The story of American Jewish relief illuminates the complexity and limits of building and maintaining international networks of private actors in wartime to sustain beleaguered populations. Jewish relief organizations operated within a highly charged political environment characterized by the United States' march toward war, by state-sanctioned anti-Jewish violence along the Eastern Front and in the Eastern Mediterranean, and by internal dissent among Jews over the control of relief funds. Still, they struggled to carry on their tasks as advocates and relievers of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. This story ties the rise of American Jewry within international Jewish politics to the rise of America as a global power during the Great War. It explains how the bitterly contested nature of American Jewish relief among Jews was connected to these shifting dynamics.

From the start, the war changed America, and it changed American Jews. This chapter first explains how American Jews mobilized a humanitarian response in reaction to the war. Gathering together under the

banner of war relief, American Jews threw together “not a carefully planned organization, but ... what may be termed a fortuitous organization”:² the JDC.

The second part of this chapter shows how, during the war years in which America remained a neutral power, the JDC established three “theaters” of relief. These were to form a foundational organizing principle of relief at least until 1929. At the start of the war, these theaters were the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires and their occupied lands, the Russian Empire and its occupied territories, and the Ottoman Empire. Making the most of American neutrality, the JDC reached Jews across Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean by transferring funds to Jewish organizations located in the major cities of the various empires at war. These groups then distributed cash to Jews behind their respective war fronts. Navigating the war overseas brought American Jewish leaders into contact with the US state apparatus and the growing array of private American overseas philanthropy. The geography of Jewish relief was intimately connected to empire, war, and the war’s operational theaters. This explains some of the patterns and assumptions that undergirded Jewish international philanthropy throughout the twentieth century.

American Jewish relief efforts built upon preexisting and sophisticated, yet deeply threatened, philanthropic networks spanning Western and Central Europe and East Central Europe, Russia, and the Eastern Mediterranean. The wartime reordering of and reliance on a preexisting diaspora network was quite unlike the American Red Cross’s organization of relief, which employed American medics to provide direct medical aid to soldiers on the ground, and only in the Western war zones. The JDC was instead in the company of other American associations that provided relief to civilians.³ In scale, ambition, modern sophistication, and institutional endurance, however, the JDC outpaced other American organizations responding to the civilian crisis of war. The JDC straddled and embraced this inherent ambiguity of being one of the most prominent mainstream American philanthropic organizations, even as its non-state, diaspora-defined, Eastern-facing characteristics resembled a particularist interest group.

The third part of this chapter delves more deeply into the distinctive features of American Jewish relief, especially the aggregation of the individual input of many Jews, allowing for wide participation, if not leadership, in the project. Since American Jewish organizations focused on keeping Jewish communities and relatives connected across the Atlantic, American Jewish relief was more than the addition of an American component onto existing modern philanthropic institutions

and networks. The connecting project sought to restore, en masse, the fragile, individual links between American immigrants and their loved ones in the old country and to channel financial remittances through a central organization during the war. The difficult work of relief, in an environment where the rules were always changing, made the engagement of a broad base of Jews essential to the effective distribution of aid. The JDC's entanglement with Jewish politics and the constant attacks it experienced from donors and recipients pushed it to a pluralist, carefully circumscribed receptivity to a broad range of Jewish political ideologies and movements.

The last part of the chapter shows that US entry into the war solidified the new American Jewish international leadership, ensuring a future for Jewish overseas relief with enduring ties to the US government. The theaters of relief had already congealed. The primary task of American Jewish relief efforts was now to find ways of working around the existing relief system once the United States was at war. Ad hoc methods and familial networks from the period of US neutrality gave way to close cooperation with the US State Department. Superficially, remarkably little changed for Jews when the United States joined the conflict, but the shift that American Jews made toward cooperation with the US state apparatus was not insignificant. Rather, this Americanization of Jewish relief that occurred as America declared war signaled the start of a sustained closeness between American Jewish institutions, the US government, and international affairs.

During the war, the JDC dispersed about \$13.75 million across Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean to Jewish war sufferers.⁴ American Jewish war relief organizations branded their aid as "American" to deflect antisemitism. They also sought to keep Jewish dissent at bay by appearing neutral and benevolent, while maintaining American support for their efforts. They did so at the risk of refusal or confiscation of aid by belligerents. The relative success of the JDC's relief efforts in Palestine, compared to Eastern Europe, confirms that it was able to carry out its actions further in places where the United States had the greatest interests and diplomatic presence. This demonstrates both the advantage of acting in concert with the US government and the limits that American Jewish relief encountered when attempting to undertake relief where the American state was not willing to venture. Furthermore, wartime offered the JDC the opportunity to develop ways of managing and responding to Jewish dissent both at home and abroad while appearing externally American. The work of sending individual relief and general relief, along with multiple constituent fundraising agencies, made the JDC a powerful, hybrid organization that blended typical

models of diaspora charity, traditional Jewish charity, and Progressive American humanitarian relief.

Humanitarian Mobilization

The Great War changed America long before America officially entered it. The conflict transformed America's relations with the world and upgraded its position in the international hierarchy. It contributed to the growth of the American state in American society and provided new opportunities for individuals and organizations. America's businessmen, immigrants, engineers, the faithful, and social workers were suddenly called upon to address escalating misery across Europe. Coalescing under Wilson, many Progressive leaders turned their reformist habits outward in response to war. Uniting amid crisis overseas, compassionate Americans put to use abroad the latest developments at home. Humanitarianism became more secular and state oriented as American Progressivism became more international. American neutrality presented an occasion to spread the best elements of Progressive America to the world.

At the beginning of the war, debate simmered in the American Jewish community over the meaning of Germany's and Russia's involvement. The response of American Jews, who formed the largest and wealthiest Jewish community in a neutral country, suddenly mattered for Jews everywhere. Some Jewish leaders publicly declared pacifism or neutrality. While Judah Magnes never strayed from this position, most maintained it only when America officially remained neutral. For uptown German Jewish bankers accustomed to running and financing American Jewish affairs, this was a time of uncertainty and personal crisis. European associates needed their American capital. Jacob Schiff and others could not hide their pro-German, anti-Russian sentiments, and Kuhn Loeb would not underwrite the Allied cause. America's entry into the war against Germany became a liability for German Jewish banks in America, which were suddenly seen as potential internal enemies. Kuhn Loeb threw itself behind the American war effort; at least the United States was not a partner of Tsarist Russia after the revolution.⁵ For the first time, American Jews called for the creation of a broad-based institution to provide relief abroad. This was in part because sustaining the coordination that had become standard among major Jewish communities in Europe and the United States was impossible.⁶

The American Jewish Committee immediately responded to appeals by appropriating \$100,000, and in late October 1914, at the Conference of National Jewish Organizations, it called for unity "given the serious

exigencies confronting the Jewish people” due to the war in Europe. “We have the opportunity now for the first time of having an organization of American Jewry—an American Jewish community,” said Judah Magnes.⁷ Working hard at making “an American Jewish community” via the New York Kehillah, Magnes instantly saw the potential in a new overseas relief organization, not only for what it could do for suffering Jews abroad but also for how it would rally American Jews around the concept of Jewish solidarity in a time of need. But the Central Relief Committee, created by the Union of Orthodox Congregations, preempted the American Jewish Committee on October 4, 1914, as the first to formally organize in response to calls for relief. Central Relief planned to organize and fundraise among Orthodox Jews, building on a tradition of charity. The American Jewish Relief Committee (AJRC), which was formed in November 1914, functioned as a relief–fundraising offshoot of the American Jewish Committee. It was populated by the same individuals and attracted the same uptown donors. After several meetings that spawned many emergency organizations, the JDC was established. Later, labor unions and Jewish socialists formed the People’s Relief Committee, which became affiliated with the JDC in autumn 1915. Although American Jewish women had expertise and leadership that was at least equal to men at the local and national level in social work, immigrant welfare, and nursing – the main requirements for international humanitarian work – Jewish men blocked the qualified leaders of the National Council of Jewish Women from joining.⁸ The Joint Distribution Committee of American Funds for the Relief of Jewish War Sufferers was to act as its name suggested: as the joint distributing agent of these three constituent American fundraising committees to Jewish victims of the war. It did not take long before this tripartite organization became known as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, or “the JDC” in America and “the Joint” abroad.⁹

It was not inevitable that a distinctly Jewish organization would arise from the expanding ranks of American international humanitarian organizations. Alongside the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Great War called into being the American Relief Administration, the Near East Relief, and the American Friends Service Committee, and allowed other organizations to expand their reach, like the American Red Cross, the YMCA, and Hias.¹⁰ World War I put sectarian fundraising organizations in second place, as hyper-patriotism emphasized the importance of a single “American” identity.¹¹ Scientific rationalization and greater state involvement shifted American associational life away from separate organizations for different religions or ethnic groups. In a telling conversation, echoed by many others, JDC leaders Felix Warburg

and Louis Marshall debated whether there ought to be an independent Jewish sectarian organization. Warburg worried that the American Red Cross might see a separate organization as an excuse to exclude Jewish sufferers in its own plans and felt it would not be wise for Jews to be the first religious denomination to start a relief fund. Marshall countered: "All these non-sectarian, non-partisan dispensations of charity sound very well, but it only means that we receive nothing from the other altruists, but are giving up the money which of right belongs to those who have a distinct right to appeal to us, namely, our own co-religionists."¹² Even if there was minimal threat of anti-Jewish violence at home, American Jews saw antisemitism's dangerous reality overseas and called for a separate approach. Though other "sectarian" (defined along religious lines) and otherwise community-oriented associations of all stripes did arise,¹³ the Joint remained uniquely active and well funded, and continued its work for much longer. American Jews contributed to general relief campaigns as well as Jewish ones and made the case for an overseas American philanthropy that was diverse and yet united: pluralistic, in other words.

The New York leadership of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was mostly comprised of the uptown crowd. The men at its decision-making core in New York City were simultaneously associated with the patrician American Jewish Committee. Several leaders within the JDC, or those closely connected to them, were longtime friends and supporters of President Wilson who had campaigned for him as early as his run for New Jersey governor, which made possible close cooperation with the Wilson administration.¹⁴ These prominent men, including Felix Warburg, Louis Marshall, Jacob Schiff, Cyrus Adler, Judah Magnes, Stephen Wise, and Herbert Lehman, appointed themselves the new stewards of Jewish philanthropy in a time of war. The Joint pulled in other wealthy, well-connected, or rising Jews, like Ambassadors Henry Morgenthau and Abram Elkus, some of whom had not been especially involved in Jewish life.

Among the key individuals comprising this leadership was Louis Marshall, a renowned lawyer and the man behind the American Jewish Relief Committee, respected for his diplomacy but perceived as an autocrat who refused to relinquish personal control over American Jewish affairs.¹⁵ There was also the esteemed but aging Jacob Schiff, a leading banker at Kuhn, Loeb & Company and a philanthropist, committed to using his ample wealth to secure the safety of Jews around the world. Fiercely anti-Russian, he bankrolled war loans to Japan during the Russo-Japanese war.¹⁶ He sat prominently on the advisory board of Hias as a longtime champion of controlled immigration.¹⁷ Young Herbert and



Figure 1.1 Painting of the JDC founders. This 1929 painting by Geza Fischer depicts the JDC's founders meeting in 1918 in Felix Warburg's office in New York's Financial District. Louis Marshall and Felix Warburg (left), and Jacob Schiff (right) are closest to the viewer. Herbert Lehman, Albert Lucas, Boris Bogen, Sholem Asch, Harriet Lowenstein, Isidore Hershfield, Aaron Teitelbaum, Israel Friedlaender, and Cyrus Adler are included (left to right). (JDC, Artifact_00397)

Arthur Lehman, successive treasurers of the JDC, also from a banking family, would go on to become noteworthy figures in US government and at the United Nations. At the helm of the JDC sat Felix Warburg. Felix, the brother of the great German Jewish Hamburg-based banker, Maximilian Warburg, married Jacob Schiff's daughter and into the Kuhn Loeb bank. Warburg should be given "chief credit for building a strong and lasting machine out of such unlikely material," for his ability to persuade people to work together, famously making them ashamed to quarrel when there was important work to be done.¹⁸ He devoted more time to his philanthropic endeavors than to working in the bank, and the JDC became his "all-consuming passion."¹⁹ Warburg kept a low profile by staying far from controversy, and has barely been recognized

historically, despite his deep involvement in many Jewish and mainstream philanthropies of his time.

Headquartered in New York, the uptown leadership of the JDC did not represent the entire organization. The JDC had professional leaders in the field – Boris Bogen, Bernard Kahn, Frank Rosenblatt, Harriet Lowenstein, James Rosenberg, and Joseph Rosen – who made recommendations on how to allocate money. The JDC employed young social workers, engineers, doctors, nurses, rabbis, labor leaders, and military officers who spread out across East Central Europe and Ukraine, each having enormous responsibility in supervising relief over vast tracts of land in volatile places. Under them were local committees organizing the distribution of aid, and the New York relatives of members of those local committees, who weighed in on the pages of the Yiddish press and through numerous small donations. In America, a largely volunteer and women-driven fundraising organization developed across the country's Jewish communities. Its stable of young clerks were overseen by fundraising directors in New York. At the helm of New York fundraising sat yet another professional social worker, an immigrant from Lithuania who soon married Louis Marshall's daughter: Jacob Billikopf.²⁰ Women occasionally played a larger role in overseas activities, usually due to close ties with JDC men or professional experience that could not be overlooked; women served as accountants, social workers, nurses, and child welfare advocates.

The JDC formed a larger umbrella in that it consistently worked to pull *landsmanshaftn* (hometown associations) into the organization rather than allowing them to operate independently, which they still did, even after the JDC set up a special department for channelling *landsmanshaft* efforts.²¹ Still, the JDC was adept at facilitating limited Jewish pluralism within its own organization while running an operation with just a handful of primary decision-makers. Usually described as oligarchic and plutocratic, despite its complex organizational structure that reached into local communities, JDC leadership was responsive to outside pressures and to its own professionals' advice. During the war and in the years that followed, the relationship between the central distributing organization and its constituent fundraising organizations in the United States changed, becoming more centralized and similar to the leadership and decision-making norms of just one of its constituent organizations, the American Jewish Relief Committee, which also happened to contribute the largest dollar amount to the JDC.

The three JDC constituent organizations began raising funds, using methods familiar to other American relief organizations. In fact, separate fundraising networks remained what distinguished the constituent

organizations from one another. By the end of 1915, over \$1.5 million had been collected to relieve war sufferers, and a series of mass meetings raised even more funds. Wealthy American Jews set examples by publicly announcing donations and matching those of others. Local committees in cities with Jewish communities held their own fundraisers and strove to meet quotas under the guidance of the JDC, eventually contributing far more than New York Jews.²² These local efforts were often driven by networks of women and had a major impact toward institutionally and locally organizing Jews via philanthropy. The constituent organizations of the JDC also appealed to their own membership base; the AJRC received money from a few large donors on its own committee, while Central Relief collected in synagogues and People's Relief worked via door-to-door campaigns and button sales. President Wilson and the US Senate designated January 27, 1916 Jewish Relief Day.²³ Fundraising campaigns were designed to raise the largest possible amounts but also to ensure that tensions among local relief committees or the three constituents of the JDC would not be inflamed.²⁴ On behalf of the AJRC, Jacob Billikopf designed a remarkable fundraising strategy that guided the JDC through its first fifteen years.²⁵ In this way, the JDC brought unprecedented donations from Jews living across the United States, including philanthropists, professionals, immigrants, Orthodox Jews, laborers, women, and small business owners.

Like other American organizations, American Jews, following the State Department's lead, tried to separate relief from politics. While the distinction was superficial it made relief work easier to undertake. The stark gendering that occurred when Jewish women's organizations were sidelined, told to defer to the principle of unity and to put the community's interests ahead of women, was a clear indicator that Jewish humanitarianism was about political power within the Jewish world and its representation to the rest of the world.²⁶ The relationship between the American Jewish Committee and the JDC was quite unlike peer European organizations, which had long mixed diplomatic and philanthropic functions. The difference was more a question of membership composition than anything else. If the relief effort was going to bring in a wide variety of Jews, which was crucial for success, and if it was going to finally organize the American Jewish community behind a common goal, as Magnes and other Jewish leaders dreamed, it could not simply reproduce the patrician structure of the American Jewish Committee. American Jewish Committee men knew this from the start, and by acknowledging the need for a separate, "joint" institution, they more or less maintained their grip on the institution. They called for unity and centralization, much like other American groups that sought to avoid duplication and waste.

As much as the JDC sought to act as American Jewry's only humanitarian organization, it lacked the authority to enforce this. That left other organizations and individuals to seek alternatives when dissatisfied. They presented the JDC with the choice to absorb them, change its ways, or allow them to compete. The American Jewish Relief Committee retained a central position and became indistinguishable from the JDC, yet People's Relief and Central Relief remained an active part and consistently pushed the JDC to include their representatives on committees and as overseas delegates, and to give traditional Jews and workers a fair deal abroad. Furthermore, other American Jewish organizations continued to operate outside the realm of the JDC, pushing it to react. Despite organizational factionalization along many lines, including by geographical origin, political ideology, gender, cultural and religious values, and mission, individuals who engaged in the conversation around Jewish relief, at times acrimoniously, frequently crossed these divisions. It was often social welfare for the good of Jews abroad that induced individuals to step out of their rigid camps and cross into the orbit of the JDC, bringing their ideological position to a discussion of social welfare, or minimizing their own jockeying for power within the world of Jewish politics in favor of the common good. The JDC was a mirror of American Jewish politics, reflecting mostly the prettiest parts.

The war also propelled nascent movements within American Jewry that looked to open up politics and philanthropy to recent immigrants, arguing that business elites should not be the sole representatives of American Jews. The rival American Jewish Congress, seeking to democratize Jewish representation to the non-Jewish world and internal Jewish communal decision-making, also arrived on the scene thanks to opportunities presented by the Great War. A seemingly innocuous word, "congress," indicated a radical commitment to broadening the scope of participants in American Jewish politics, mainly to include immigrant voices. The American Jewish Congress elected American Jewish delegates to join an unrecognized Jewish delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, led by the same patrician leaders at the head of the American Jewish Committee and the JDC. Yet, the Congress Movement did not disappear after Paris and, with Rabbi Stephen Wise as its staunch leader, called upon the JDC to provide solutions beyond short-term, palliative relief to Jewish war sufferers.²⁷

American Zionists, while not part of the structure of the JDC, were a major part of the relief effort, especially when it came to Palestine. There were Zionists in all three of the JDC's constituent organizations, making them an integral part of the JDC, which put Palestine high on the JDC's agenda. Shape-shifting Zionist organizations also sat outside the JDC,

including the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs, the Federation of American Zionists (which became the Zionist Organization of America after the war), the Palestine Economic Corporation, and Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization. The war, the Balfour Declaration, and the British Mandate in Palestine transformed the Zionist Movement. Just as it was difficult for European Jewish organizations to manage relief efforts in Eastern Europe during or right after the war, the Zionist Movement experienced a shift toward American leadership once the war broke out. Hadassah, and later, the Palestine Economic Corporation, concentrated on practical social and economic interventions rather than high politics in their effort to build a Jewish homeland in Palestine, much like the Joint Distribution Committee.²⁸ Thus, the JDC not only funded projects in Palestine, but after the war, it directly funded Hadassah to carry out projects autonomously, rather than sending its own duplicate relief workers. An enduring need to cooperate, despite ongoing tensions over the relative needs of Jews in Palestine versus Eastern Europe, led to experiments in united fundraising for overseas needs throughout the 1920s, including the successful 1929 Allied Jewish Campaign.²⁹

Thanks to the Great War, Hias found itself operating independently and internationally. Its leadership overlapped with that of the People's Relief and Central Relief, but it filled a niche in the controversial area of migration, where the JDC had no desire to act. No longer content to wait for immigrants at Ellis Island, it set up bureaus along the West Coast to receive incoming immigrants who had crossed Siberia, and moved operations to Poland, the source of emigration after the war.³⁰ While independent and drawing on a large membership pool for funding, it operated in the shadow of the more powerful JDC and was subject to the whims and financial hardships of its members. Still, Hias and landsmanshaft leaders found that their immigrant ethnicity was just that – immigrant-based, and thus, situational. The delegates they sent to the old world, often poor and struggling in New York, were received as celebrities and rich American philanthropists when they came “home” with aid.³¹ They could command power “at home” while abroad, and had the advantage of seeming less aloof, bureaucratic, and clinical in their humanitarian efforts than the larger, more centralized JDC.

These organizations drew on coexisting and sometimes overlapping strains in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American society and foreign policy. They were also inspired by Western social trends originating outside the United States to build their international organizations. American Progressivism and domestic social welfare concerns, in particular, found their way into humanitarian impulses abroad. They all

benefited greatly from the 1917 tax law amendment increasing incentives for rich people to donate to philanthropy, a breakthrough that allowed them to collect unprecedented sums in the millions of dollars with comparative ease.³² The rapid development of various branches of science, technology, and management, in lockstep with Progressive activity, meant that American organizations were keen to incorporate and experiment with new rational methods in their work overseas as well as at home.³³

By focusing on a crisis beyond America's domestic space, American Jews discovered a coherent Jewish solidarity. American Jewish institutions went global, and entirely new ones emerged. These institutions are all still around today, showing remarkable resilience and representing some of America's oldest organizations in their fields. Coordinated American Jewish foreign relations represented a major break with the prewar American Jewish past, where facing the world was ephemeral. Furthermore, not unlike Jews who had built great Jewish–French, Jewish–British, Jewish–German, and Jewish–Austrian organizations and who now signed up for military service in France, England, German, and Austria, American Jews were anxious to prove themselves in mainstream society and to promote the American way outside America.³⁴ This was also the moment when American Jewish leadership turned its efforts away from Americanizing the Jewish immigrant to Americanizing the Jew, wherever that Jew could be reached.³⁵ American Jews joined America's expanding state at the critical juncture of World War I, participating in the soft diplomacy of humanitarian relief before American officially entered the war. They became part of American foreign relations and American empire, and in so doing, they became more American. But they were also still distinctively Jews, more tightly knit and organized than ever before.

Theaters and Operational Realities

In the years of American neutrality, Jewish Americans largely drew on existing, largely informal Jewish networks that stretched across the old country through family, professional, and philanthropic ties. The JDC entrusted money it raised from Jews across America to partners in Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, despite ever-shifting territorial divisions and waves of population displacement. As these transatlantic pathways materialized to send money to Jews in the war zones along the fronts, from behind the lines rather than across them, three distinct, stable theaters of relief developed: in German-occupied Poland and the Baltic, an offshoot of the *Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden* in Berlin,

called the Jüdische Hilfskomitee für Polen; in Russia, the Central Jewish Committee for the Relief of Sufferers of War (EKOPO) based in Petrograd; and in Palestine, which was still part of the Ottoman Empire, the American Relief Fund for Palestine.

I extend the word “theater,” used in connection with logistical operations and violent drama in combat zones, to its humanitarian corollary. The drama of the humanitarian theater persisted long after peace treaties were signed, as humanitarians sought to combat remaining human, infrastructural, and political damage. The Great War and the Jewish humanitarian response to it thus created a new Jewish geography with a new internal, international hierarchy not just for the war era itself, but also for the remainder of the twentieth century.

Sending American Jewish aid to Berlin, Petrograd, and Palestine required carefully navigating war alliances and blockades. Developing a good working relationship with the US State Department became crucial to American Jews. On their own, Jewish overseas networks could not cross the hurdles created by war. Fortunately for them, the US government freely cooperated with the JDC and its partner organizations in facilitating the international transfer of funds and accompanying instructions. Almost all correspondence between American Jews and their European recipients moved through the diplomatic pouch of the US State Department – in particular, instructions for how the relief committees on the ground should use the money they were receiving.

Cooperation with the US government had its limits, which had to do with America’s own geopolitical considerations as a neutral power in the war. In particular, the US government deferred to the British government’s embargo on the importation of foodstuffs into the Central Powers, despite sustained lobbying by the JDC and Polish Americans.³⁶ In contrast, when it came to getting aid to Jews in Palestine, the JDC established a strong relationship with the US State Department and its consular officials in Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Alexandria, and were able to send material goods there. It probably helped that before and during the war, the Ottoman Empire was the only state to host an American ambassador who was Jewish; that American religious and business interests were growing in the Middle East; that Palestine had accessible port cities on a navigable sea; and that the Armenian genocide haunted the American conscience. Still, the JDC remained hopeful that it could do more for Jews in Eastern Europe. Although American Jews may have organized themselves in response to appeals from Jews in Palestine, really, the “first purpose for which [the JDC] was created [was] Poland and Russia.”³⁷ Basing its efforts on the

example of close ties between the State Department, its European embassies and consulates, and Herbert C. Hoover's privately managed Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB), the JDC regularly sought greater American governmental support to enable it to send material goods, especially food, directly to Polish Jews.³⁸ In fact, the JDC made every exertion to cooperate with and push the Rockefeller Foundation, Polish relief societies, and the Red Cross to replicate the CRB's successes in Poland, but the US government was only willing to provide limited support, and these efforts never came to fruition.

Tolerant as the American state was of American Jewish humanitarian initiative, it was not prepared to take risks or invest major resources in Jewish relief. The historical record clearly indicates that political expediency has always been a major factor in determining when states take, or fail to take, humanitarian action. A combination of the following reasons explains why the US government gave comparatively little support to Polish relief: The need for Polish relief was publicly established later than Belgian relief and thus from the outset faced more wartime restrictions; other American organizations did not want to involve themselves in the sectarian and nationalist complexities of the Eastern Front; the US government could not persuade the British government that it was logistically possible for material goods or large sums of money to reach Poland without confiscation by Britain's enemies; the Western Allies did not want to attract attention to Allied Russian atrocities in Poland by pointing out similar German outrages; and the US diplomatic presence in Eastern Europe was much weaker than in the Ottoman Empire and did not include officials who forcefully advocated for humanitarian relief.³⁹ Seen in this light, it is not surprising that the JDC's efforts to send food or American relief workers were largely unsuccessful outside Palestine. It was easier and of obvious political benefit in America to assist Belgians in Belgium or needy populations in Palestine.

Limited to sending money, the JDC utilized preexisting Jewish philanthropic networks in Europe, rather than depending on US consulates or sending their own American Jewish representatives for distribution. Since relief work exacerbated ideological ferment among Ashkenazi Jews, the JDC and Hias never fully trusted their Jewish organizational partners in Europe to distribute aid effectively and fairly, yet had no choice but to rely on them in the moment. Meanwhile, Jews on the ground were asked to tolerate not only the depravities of war, but also a new dependence on their American brethren and their interlocutors, on American terms, despite the limited nature of this relief.



Map 1.1 Map of Jewish homelands in peril in the First World War

To the Central Powers

Soon after the war began in Europe, Germany occupied territory that had been part of the Russian Empire, including Poland as well as the Baltics. Austria-Hungary also pushed eastward, occupying more of Poland and Galicia. The Central Powers failed to provide sufficient food in their occupied war zones. German occupiers in Poland inflamed the local situation by trying to win Jews to their side, providing them with immediate freedoms, but also turning Christian Poles against Polish Jews. Germany forcibly deported laborers to Germany, including Polish and Lithuanian Jews. In Germany and Austria, the presence of Eastern European Jewish refugees and laborers in major cities, the contact German soldiers had with Jews in their Eastern borderlands, and competition over scarce resources that were perceived as controlled by Jewish middlemen stoked antisemitic sentiments.⁴⁰

The suffering of civilians in Poland and Austrian Galicia presented an obstacle for outside relief. Hypothetically, the United States' neutrality allowed for pumping aid to civilians in Poland. However, early into the war, the US State Department made clear that it would only passively support relief to the Eastern Front, citing its "very strict rule that the Government of the United States could not act as the medium for the transfer of money from the United States to the subjects or citizens of the nations now at war; nor could it undertake the task of distributing relief among the civil population." Instead, the State Department encouraged transfers through private banks.⁴¹

The Joint Distribution Committee quickly found a way to effect such private transfers: It would send funds to Jews living in Berlin, who could then distribute the money where it was needed in now-German territory in Warsaw and the Ober Ost further north. Those same German Jews would also forward part of that money to Vienna for the Israelitische Allianz zu Wien (hereafter, the Allianz) to use throughout Austria-Hungary. From Berlin, and then Vienna and Warsaw, money could reach the majority of Jews living in the zones occupied by the Central Powers. At the peak of German occupation, American Jewish funds reached 252 cities and towns in Poland and Lithuania.⁴² The JDC sent nearly \$1.6 million to Jews in Austria-Hungary and over \$2.5 million to Polish Jews from January 1915 to July 1917. On the other hand, the American Jewish Committee calculated that the many American dollars being transferred to Poland represented "less than one cent a day per needy Jew."⁴³ Aware that they were far from meeting the need created by the humanitarian disaster, JDC leadership sought at least to ensure

accountability of the Jewish representatives charged with distribution, to make the process as “American” as possible, and to expand the nature of relief in Poland to include foodstuffs and medical supplies.

The Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden (hereafter, Hilfsverein) was the obvious, reliable choice for the JDC to seek out in Germany. An organization of well-to-do, acculturated Jews in Berlin, the Hilfsverein was a model for the American Jewish Committee. Maximilian Warburg, Felix Warburg’s brother and owner of the M. M. Warburg & Co. Bank based in Hamburg, was part of the Hilfsverein.⁴⁴ Even while living in America and chairing the JDC, Felix remained a partner in M. M. Warburg until 1917.⁴⁵

On January 1, 1915, Max appealed to Felix from Berlin, informing him that 2.5 million Jews in Poland needed relief, that the Hilfsverein was considering a special mission to Poland, and that “we need above all funds for distribution and foodstuffs,” and urging Felix to respond quickly.⁴⁶ The AJRC sent \$45,000 on January 9 to the Hilfsverein, and on January 19, cabled Max to release the funds for German-occupied Poland.⁴⁷ To effect this international transfer, the bank Felix had married into, Kuhn Loeb, New York, credited funds raised by the American Jewish relief organizations on behalf of the JDC directly to M. M. Warburg & Co. Max then turned over the funds to the Hilfsverein. Felix not only leveraged his personal financial connections to facilitate the distribution of JDC funds, but also sent notes through the diplomatic pouch of the US State Department to Max explaining how the money was to be used and forwarded. Besides taking care of the banking end, Max Warburg regularly sent back information and requests to the JDC concerning what was needed in Poland. This relationship remained essentially unchanged during the entire period of American neutrality.⁴⁸

The arrangement between the JDC and the State Department to safeguard and expedite transatlantic communications reflected the special connections that leading American humanitarian organizations often enjoyed with the US government. Close cooperation also signified a quasi-official status for the particular form of relief work and solidified the JDC’s claim to authority among American Jews. This was true even though the State Department rejected the idea of undertaking money transfers directly to Germany’s occupied territories.⁴⁹

The JDC seemed to think the best way to create a positive image of its work was to be associated with American humanitarian initiatives during the war. The JDC highlighted Americanness as routine procedure without its leaders reflecting on why they were doing it; yet, something about being marked as American did seem universally well suited to the

circumstances. The JDC was American, and this aspect of its institutional and operational identity seemed better to foreground than Jewishness.

Shortly after Germany occupied Poland, the Hilfsverein founded a committee, the Jüdische Hilfskomitee für Polen (hereafter, Hilfskomitee), with the explicit mission of providing relief to Polish Jews and to make clear that American funds, not German Jewish funds, were being distributed. The JDC linked its status to that of America's, and at a March 1915 meeting of its executive committee, was already hoping that, in order to prevent reprisals, Max Warburg could make it clear that the funds distributed by him were American.⁵⁰ In the summer of 1916, the JDC executive committee interrogated a representative of Hias, Isidore Hershfield, who had recently returned from Poland, inquiring if the money had been distributed "as from the German Jews or America." After Hershfield replied that he was unsure,⁵¹ the executive committee argued over whether having the Hilfsverein, the Hilfskomitee, or the Allianz distribute the JDC's money hurt the Jews in the territories. They proposed setting up separate American committees so it could be clear the aid was American.⁵²

The JDC assumed this "American" label would prevent reprisals in the form of anti-Jewish violence or the confiscation of funds. Perhaps the JDC figured that American aid would seem less suspicious to Poles or Russians or Germans than Jewish aid of any kind, given antisemitic tropes about Jews and money and heightened prejudice against Jews brought out by the war. The JDC may have recognized that American aid to Belgium, conspicuous and successful, had enhanced the legitimacy of relief delivered under "American" auspices. On the other hand, if the aid was obviously Jewish, and not in fact delivered by Americans, but by the German Jews of the Hilfsverein, then the aid could appear as something originating with their occupiers: the Germans. The fact that Yiddish resembled German, and that Jews were routinely suspected of German sympathies, was perhaps a good reason for the JDC to portray its aid as originating from a neutral source. Establishing the Americanness of the JDC's aid also minimized potential harm to its relief offerings in the event of the reconquest of the region by an avowedly antisemitic Russian army.

Meanwhile, the war's ongoing disruption to traditional Jewish leadership structures, combined with this new American Jewish interference, accelerated the Jewish political ferment that would characterize the inter-war period. Jews in Germany and Poland did not agree that funds from American Jews should be controlled by American Jews. German Zionists and Polish Jews complained about their lack of control over funds and

unfair distribution, blaming the Hilfsverein. German Jews disagreed over which German Jewish faction should direct American relief money. The German Zionist organization seeking to distribute relief, the Komitee für den Osten, protested its lack of involvement. Some German Jews had their own strategy until early 1917 of helping Polish Jews by convincing the Reich that Polish Jews could act as a “vanguard of Germandom” in a German Mitteleuropa, which of course fed directly into Polish and Russian concerns about Jews embracing German occupation.⁵³ In the Warsaw region and other Polish areas under civil German administration, Polish Jews of various ideological stripes accused one another and the feuding German Jewish organizations of various misdeeds and complained of unfair treatment.⁵⁴

In response, the JDC floated various proposals to have aid directed entirely by Polish Jews from a relief committee in Warsaw, which had been established at the beginning of the war by the Warsaw Jewish Community Council. This Polish Jewish-run relief committee would receive money via Max Warburg, who transferred money to the US Consul in Warsaw.⁵⁵ Elie Lewin-Epstein, a Zionist leader in America, went to Poland in the winter of 1915–16, reporting dissatisfaction with the Hilfsverein as an intermediary. He suggested that the American Consul in Warsaw direct money to Polish Jews via the Jewish relief committee in Warsaw. Lewin-Epstein thought the US Consul would be more capable of insisting on the rights of suffering civilians than German citizens.⁵⁶ But in May 1916, the Hilfsverein protested the JDC’s micro-management: “the spread of our organization threatens to be checked by the new demands, which, as you must know, are coming from America. We shall not permit these demands upon the organization to hinder us very much in the future. Meanwhile, we shall try to spread the net of our organization farther and farther.”⁵⁷

Controversy surrounding the methods of distributing American Jewish relief in German-occupied Poland continued. In the summer of 1916, Judah Magnes went to Poland and other centers of East European Jewish life to investigate on behalf of the JDC.⁵⁸ What Magnes found on the ground was depressing. Known for his leadership of the New York Kehillah, the organization that successfully brought together “uptown” and “downtown” Jews, Magnes was respected by many Jewish groups.⁵⁹ Magnes wrote back to New York that it was “sickening to think of petty quarrels and intrigues in the face of this fearful calamity.” There was no food, no work, no clothes, no heat, and no medical care. Magnes concluded, “Jewish relief work in the occupied districts is altogether impossible without a strong Jewish German Committee in Berlin,” noting that the “transmission work of the Hilfsverein is really

remarkable.” He recognized that it was “of the utmost importance to have all sections of Jewry working together in the relief cause. But it is, for the present at least, of more importance that the Jews of Poland and Lithuania be helped.”⁶⁰ He dismissed fears that Russian Jews might get punished for receiving aid from Germans in case of Poland’s return to Russian rule to be “of no real concern.”⁶¹ Moreover, the US Consul, he noted, was far from influential. Concluding that the Hilfskomitee was the best option, Magnes prioritized the effective distribution of relief over the means of distribution, even though the JDC sought broad support at both the donor and recipient ends. He encouraged the Hilfskomitee to broaden its membership to include Zionists and Orthodox Jews. In New York, the JDC, after studying Magnes’s report, made some recommendations in that direction, expressing the hope that the Warsaw relief committee could continue to provide relief independently after German occupation and demanding a separation of the Hilfsverein and the Hilfskomitee so that the Hilfskomitee’s source of funding in America would become clearer.⁶² Accusations of the JDC’s favoritism were not, however, put to rest. Instead, Magnes’s investigation led to accusations that both he and the JDC were pro-German and favored philanthropies directed by assimilated German Jews.⁶³

Not every part of the Central Powers’ occupation was steeped in such internal dissent that it flowed to New York. The Ober-Ost region, east and north of Central Poland (Lithuania, Latvia, and Belarus) remained under direct German military administration and experienced less Jewish tension. The influence of German Jews ensured that sectarian relief could take place in this German militarized zone and the military administration made internal communications so difficult that direct reliance on the Hilfskomitee was the only plausible option.⁶⁴ And from Vienna, the Allianz provided relief for Jews in once-Russian, now-Austrian-occupied parts of Galicia and Poland. Max Warburg forwarded earmarked funds to the Allianz, which worked effectively and peaceably enough through cooperating committees in Budapest, Lemberg (Lviv), and Krakow.⁶⁵ Still, the JDC longed to remove troublesome intermediaries and capitalize on its American privileges by sending its own American Jewish social workers to German and Austrian territory to conduct relief work on the spot.⁶⁶

The JDC clung to the hope that more work could be done through American networks. It wanted the US State Department to push Britain to lift its blockade to allow for relief supplies.⁶⁷ The Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB), the private association led by Herbert Hoover and Progressive professionals, had succeeded in getting food into German-occupied Belgium and feeding millions of people daily, and



Figure 1.2 Jewish refugees in Galicia, 1916. A rare photograph of Jewish refugees traveling away from their homes along a deserted dirt road in Galicia during the Great War, October 1916. The JDC used this photograph in America to fundraise by appealing to Jewish solidarity, making what was distant seem close: “Merely because they are in Galicia, in Lithuania, in Poland, in Palestine, does not lessen your responsibility ... You are asked to give your aid for your very own, for the Jewish women and children and the aged such as are pictured here.” (JDC, NY_54912)

was a source of inspiration and frustration for the JDC.⁶⁸ As early as July 1915, Max Warburg requested sanitation supplies from the JDC for occupied Poland, not just money.⁶⁹ But these were not forthcoming because of the blockade. The State Department explained that the CRB was a partial exception to its rule of abstaining from relief.⁷⁰ The JDC looked to cooperate with other American organizations to make its case. In January 1916, the CRB and the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) asked the JDC to join them in a conference on sending foodstuffs to Poland.⁷¹ The RF and the CRB had already cooperated in getting food to Belgium, with the Rockefeller-owned Standard Oil chartering ships, but nothing similar emerged from the conference on Poland.⁷² Soon after, Magnes’s report urged, “serious efforts must be made to have our government take up again the question of bringing food-stuffs, clothing, shoes, medicines, into the occupied territories,” suggesting again that the JDC seek partnerships with the RF, the American Red Cross (ARC), and Polish American relief societies.⁷³ The State Department claimed it was

working on a solution to allow relief supplies into Poland, "by appealing to the sense of humanity of the principal belligerent powers of Europe."⁷⁴ Yet, nothing changed, and American private associations were shut out of sending relief to Poland.

Still, American Jewish aid to Polish and Habsburg Jews benefited greatly from official neutrality, which enabled aid dollars to enter war zones with striking ease. Of course, US neutrality had its limitations, and was insufficient without explicit State Department support for the cause of getting goods to Poland, not just Belgium. Preestablished connections on the ground, particularly in Berlin, turned out also to be of enormous use for American Jews, despite the ascerbic nature of the relief effort in the eastern reaches of the Central Powers. This combination of diaspora ties to civilian Jewish networks in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Poland, plus the tacit support of the neutral US government meant that, at the very least, American Jews were able to effectively get funds where they were urgently needed and partially avert the civilian suffering caused by war. On the other side of the Eastern Front, in Russian territory, things played out differently.

To Russia

In Russian territory along the Eastern Front, Jews were on the move, abandoning their small villages by force or in fear and heading in desperation toward the relative safety of nearby cities or remote destinations further east. Although the Pale of Settlement was abolished in August 1915, this did not in practice remove restrictions on Jews in Russia, and Jewish leaders suspected it was done only to court Western public opinion. Instead, some 30 percent of Jews in the Russian Empire faced expulsion. In March 1915, Russian military authorities began systematically deporting Jews from the Polish provinces still under Russian control, even if German troops remained far away, first by clearing small towns.⁷⁵ Whole Jewish communities were forced onto heated freight trains headed to unknown, unplanned destinations, while others were forced to leave on foot with whatever they could gather in a few hours' time.⁷⁶ The forced dispersal of Jews into Russia's interior continued after the Russian civil war, which, by 1923, increased the number of Jews living east of the Pale fivefold.⁷⁷ Jews in Galicia, at the eastern reaches of the Habsburg empire, who were captured by the invading Russian army were treated as enemies of state, even though they were civilians.⁷⁸

From the comparative safety of St. Petersburg (Petrograd), the established Jewish lay leadership quickly responded to the urgent humanitarian needs created by the war. American Jews found a ready partner in this

relief committee, EKOPO; the JDC transferred to it some \$2.2 million over the course of the war.⁷⁹ The JDC had no choice but to trust the relief committee in Petrograd and its associated committees, along with the sympathetic American ambassador in Petrograd as of 1916, David R. Francis. No JDC representatives were able to obtain Russian visas, the US State Department was weakly represented in Russia, and scarce information was available as to the situation on the ground. Although Russian Jews raised a significant part of their funds internally, American Jewish aid turned out to be particularly useful for assisting Jewish refugees who entered Russia from enemy territory, and who were considered enemy citizens. In Russia especially, activating the homegrown, preexisting tradition of empire-wide Jewish charity proved crucial to the war relief effort.

When the war broke out, Russian Jewish leaders immediately recognized the need to invigorate their developing philanthropic infrastructure and that they could use support from American Jews. Underestimating the war, as most did early on, the Jewish Colonisation Association's (hereafter, Ica) St. Petersburg office proposed to French headquarters in July 1914 a Russian-wide, independent network to concentrate remittances from American Jews and deliver them to Jews across the empire.⁸⁰ Ica was at the time the wealthiest Jewish philanthropy in existence, drawing funds from the estate of railway magnate Baron Maurice de Hirsch.⁸¹ But the war proved insurmountable for this transnational European Jewish migration organization. Instead, as remittances became insufficient and delivery untenable from August to September 1914, the Russian Jewish charitable elite based in St. Petersburg established a new organization, EKOPO (acronym for *Evreiskii komitet pomoshchi zher-tvam voiny*, meaning Central Jewish Committee for the Relief of War Sufferers) as the main, centralized body in Russia for Jewish war relief. Although imperial rule typically emphasized political restraint, wartime conditions encouraged Russian society to mobilize around philanthropy and relief, spawning groups like the Union of *Zemstvos* and the Union of Towns.⁸² EKOPO was granted permission in September 1914 to exist in the newly renamed Petrograd, but not to create branches, so EKOPO linked itself informally with independent local relief associations in Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, Vilna, and Odessa.⁸³ The war created the conditions for an overarching Jewish communal body in Russia for the first time since the late eighteenth century.⁸⁴

The leaders of EKOPO were the established leaders of Russian Jewry in Petrograd, who had made their fortunes in industry and finance. EKOPO had close ties to Baron Alexander Gunzburg of the Gunzburg family, the most prominent Jewish family in Imperial Russia, whose

members had long provided philanthropy and intercession on behalf of Russian Jews. Its first chair was Marc A. Varshavsky, banker, president of the St. Petersburg Jewish community, and president of the Russian Ica. EKOPO superficially resembled prewar Jewish philanthropic institutions in Russia, which were small, oligarchical, elitist, apolitical, familiar with the Russian elite, discreet, and modest in ambition.⁸⁵ Sitting and former Jewish members of the Duma, rabbinical leaders, and leaders of most other Jewish projects in St. Petersburg composed its membership.⁸⁶ These prewar organizations, including the ORT (occupational training), Ica (emigration, a branch of the French–British Jewish organization), OPE (education), and OZE (health), came to be affiliated with EKOPO.⁸⁷ Yet EKOPO's ambitions had to be much greater, its financial resources vaster, and its workforce more professional to deal with the unprecedented scale of the crisis.⁸⁸ Its backbone was a corps of traveling emissaries of young progressives who worked to establish new communities in the Russian interior and to rehabilitate communities in the Pale of Settlement.⁸⁹

For American Jews hoping to provide relief to brethren in Russia, EKOPO presented an ideal scenario; all that was needed from Jews outside Russia was money, not organizational support.⁹⁰ Any controversy surrounding EKOPO was not perceived as a problem that American Jews had to address as they did in occupied Poland. Nor was it up to American Jews to set up a mechanism for distribution, as will be seen in the case of Palestine. December 1914 marked the first delivery of general relief moneys from the JDC to EKOPO.⁹¹ The National City Bank in New York transferred AJRC dollars to the Ica account at the Azov Don Commercial Bank of St. Petersburg.⁹² Ica acted as the JDC's "agent in Russia."⁹³ EKOPO used preexisting, empire-wide networks formed by its affiliated prewar organizations to distribute money, or American money came through the Azov Don bank's Ica account, to be handled by EKOPO and prewar charities.⁹⁴

To aid refugees, EKOPO raised money through a Russian Jewish self-taxation scheme. It also received government funds, which made it a quasi-governmental agency, and derived prestige there from an arrangement to which the JDC might have itself aspired.⁹⁵ EKOPO secured food and clothing expenditures covered by the Russian government and solicited contributions from abroad, particularly from American, British, and South African Jews.⁹⁶ EKOPO organized "means of transportation for [displaced Jews], met them at way-stations with food and other necessaries, and did everything possible to help them to become self-supporting in their new environments."⁹⁷ EKOPO held joint meetings of its local committees and prewar organizations and set up relief in

war-torn provinces by sending delegates from Petrograd to look for people who could be trusted to distribute relief moneys.⁹⁸ EKOPO's reports noted a substantial relief infrastructure, including doctors organizing dispensaries to welcome patients, feeding stations and food store-houses, the provision of clothing and footwear, the provision of shelter in communal buildings and private quarters, occupational training, and cooperation with the Union of Towns. The reports also lamented the inadequacy of relief on behalf of children, especially schooling, even with the OPE providing education to refugee children.⁹⁹ By the summer of 1916, EKOPO was helping Jewish communities along the front, not just refugees.¹⁰⁰ Alexander Gunzburg, now chairman, wrote in early 1917 that EKOPO was providing relief to 238,000 people, describing more than half as children or elderly, and thus unemployable.¹⁰¹ This statistic indicated the extent to which recipients depended on relief and discouraged donors from believing that rehabilitation projects could replace charity. By summer, EKOPO refocused its work on economic crisis, refugees, relief in Poland (the part still in Russia), medical aid, the Jews of Galicia, Romanian Jews, and Jewish prisoners of war from Germany and Austria.¹⁰² This Jewish self-government through relief work generated a de facto Jewish autonomism, which extended even to Jews in Romania, Russia's war ally.¹⁰³

Meanwhile, the US State Department readily admitted that its endeavors to help Jewish relief in Russia were limited. Jewish relief in Russia could make do regardless; neutral American money was already traveling from the JDC to EKOPO in St. Petersburg. Diplomats in the Russian Empire had limited power, and American consular officials focused on "general" rather than sectarian aid where it existed.¹⁰⁴ This was especially true until the spring of 1916, when a American ambassador, David R. Francis, friend of Paul Warburg, another of Felix's brothers, was appointed to Petrograd.¹⁰⁵ Francis proved friendly to the cause of Jewish relief, communicating regularly with the JDC, EKOPO, and Ica Petrograd, handling messages sent through the US diplomatic pouch and sometimes working on transferring funds. In particular, the JDC found it useful to send Francis money earmarked for the American envoy in Jassy (Iași), Romania, Charles Vopicka, on behalf of Jews in Romania. David Francis also assisted Judah Magnes arrange a visit to Russia during his summer 1916 JDC fact-finding trip to Eastern Europe, but visas were not forthcoming.¹⁰⁶

The greatest benefit to EKOPO and Russian Jews from the infusion of American Jewish dollars was neither infrastructural nor diplomatic support; instead, American money provided a way for Russian Jews to succor so-called enemy Jews who had formerly lived in non-Russian

territory, namely, in the Galicia region of Austria-Hungary. EKOPO experienced difficulties helping Jews from Galicia due to continuing restrictions on Russian Jewish movement and to the Russian government's categorical insistence on treating Galician Jewish non-combatants as enemies because they were from Austria-Hungary. The JDC's oft-repeated refrain that EKOPO (and its European partners) should "make public this is American money"¹⁰⁷ was put to work when it came to helping Jews in Galicia, "the most miserable country of all."¹⁰⁸ Jews in Galicia, fleeing their homes "voluntarily" under Austro-Hungarian military rule and then under Russian military authority, suffered acute distress: dislocation, poverty, and violence. At first, Russian Jewish relief workers were not allowed to enter Russian-occupied Galicia and had to rely on general Russian relief organizations. EKOPO/Ica's David Feinberg managed to convince the Russian government to let in Jewish aid workers and allow a relief committee to form there in early 1915 to distribute American, rather than Russian, relief money.¹⁰⁹ In January 1916, when the JDC realized that EKOPO was not altogether capable of getting help to Galician refugees who were deported into the interior of Russia, the American consul in Moscow sidestepped these obstacles and sent help with American Jewish funds.¹¹⁰

EKOPO was something of a Jewish proto-government or a "para-statal complex," which made unimportant the American provenance of its funds.¹¹¹ Its well-connected St. Petersburg Jewish leaders had little difficulty finding ways to receive aid from abroad, raise money at home, and put it all to use across the empire. The JDC acted as just one (albeit crucial) fundraising entity for an autonomous Russian Jewish charity.¹¹² Although American support would become more critical to the ability of the JDC to help Jews in Soviet Russia, before the revolution, it was nearly inconsequential for the highly organized Russian Jewish community. To the south, in the Ottoman Empire, and in Palestine especially, there was yet a third situation requiring attention from abroad.

To Palestine

Jewish residents of Palestine were the first Jewish war sufferers whose pleas were heard by American Jews. Although war had not yet come to Palestine, the *chalukah* support they relied upon from European Jewish communities suddenly vanished in the summer of 1914.¹¹³ Due to the confluence of war and natural disaster, the entire population of the Ottoman Empire was going hungry, and Jews were dying of hunger and disease alongside everyone else.¹¹⁴ The terrible fate of the Armenians haunted the Jews of the Yishuv. Russian Jews numbered

about half of Palestine's 100,000 Jews, and were expelled in 1914, mostly ending up in Alexandria, Egypt, which harbored more than 11,000 deportees.¹¹⁵ Jews in the Ottoman Empire called for emergency relief from a new source: America. Growing Zionist support in America bolstered their appeals.

Since Jewish welfare in Palestine was decentralized and highly dependent on outsiders before the war, American Jews could not simply channel money to existing or newly formed groups. But unlike Europe, where the JDC was never able to send supplies or food, the US State Department was able to negotiate multiple relief shipments to Palestine. There was also significant energy dedicated to the cause, as American Zionists were intent on using the cause of relief toward building the Jewish nationalist program. This was helped by the US State Department's privileged status in the Ottoman Empire, whose officials were sympathetic both to the Jewish presence in Palestine and humanitarian relief work in general. The JDC sent nearly \$800,000 to Palestine from the United States from the beginning of war until March 1917, a figure that does not include additional moneys from the Provisional Zionist Committee.¹¹⁶

In the early days of the war, in September 1914, Henry Morgenthau, the US ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in Constantinople and an American Jew, sent urgent telegrams to the American Jewish Committee. Via the State Department, he requested \$50,000 for the 60,000 or so Jews in Palestine who were cut off from their European lifeline. Both the JDC and the Provisional Zionist Committee (formally, the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs, PZC for short) coalesced institutionally in response to these same early appeals coming from Palestine.¹¹⁷ Henry Morgenthau's nephew, Maurice Wertheim, landed in Jaffa later that month with money he had brought at his uncle's request. He instructed that funds be distributed according to the American Jewish Committee's directives: to give money where it would afford greatest relief and to give preference to "productive" uses rather than handouts.¹¹⁸ Wertheim established a small committee in Jerusalem to oversee future distributions: the American Relief Fund for Palestine. The fund divided relief, destined for Jaffa and Jerusalem, for "Humanitarian Institutions," especially soup kitchens, loans for mechanics and laborers, and to establish shops and a provision store.¹¹⁹ Difficulties inexorably arose in distribution, but never reached the level of conflict that marked the relief effort in the Central Powers. The preeminent Jacob Schiff of the American Jewish Committee insisted for a time that a non-Zionist serve on the otherwise Zionist distributing committee, but disagreements abated when he eventually withdrew this demand.¹²⁰

The American Relief Fund was headed by Dr. Arthur Ruppin, who trumpeted the way in which relief created close connections between Palestine and America. Ruppin was a German Jewish sociologist and demographer who moved to Israel to direct Zionist settlement, acting as the Zionist Organization's "chief technocrat" in Palestine.¹²¹ Unlike his counterparts in Europe, he predicted the prestige and security this relief connection would bring the Jews of Palestine, who would thereby demonstrate that they had the most powerful neutral country, America, to support them.¹²² He told Judah Magnes, "The establishment of this Fund has been regarded in this country as the first step towards a close and permanent connection between America and Palestine."¹²³ Ruppin sought to associate private American Jewish relief with the full power of the United States, a view helped along by its official-seeming arrival via a US ambassador.

But American state support required elaborate negotiations at the highest levels. Given the nature of the blockade, which ostensibly blocked supplies from entering Poland, it is in some sense surprising that aid made it to Palestine, since the blockade applied there, too. Only a few consulates remained open in Jerusalem to help with any aid coming in – the American and Spanish were among them. The US Navy had to employ its own ships, the British and French governments had to lift their naval blockade, and the Ottoman authorities had to cooperate.¹²⁴ Illustrating this point, US Consul Otis Glazebrook in Jerusalem sent notice in November 1914 that the precarious wartime humanitarian situation continued after Wertheim's visit. The State Department contacted Louis Marshall once again, who then asked if protection from belligerent states could be assured if the American Jewish Relief Committee sent a food ship. The State Department checked with Ambassador Morgenthau in Constantinople and the American ambassadors in London and Paris to ascertain if Turkey, Britain, and France would consent, and after some negotiation, they did. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels was then persuaded by his friend, Jewish journalist Herman Bernstein, to support the cause of relief, and Daniels accordingly facilitated the Navy's cooperation, beginning by offering shipping space on the USS *Vulcan*.¹²⁵ Finally, Judah Magnes, as the chairman of the Palestine Relief Ship subcommittee of the JDC, purchased flour through Hoover's CRB at a low price and bought other supplies to send to Palestine.¹²⁶ The *Vulcan* set sail in March 1915 carrying 900 tons of food and medicine, with Louis Levin accompanying the ship on behalf of the AJRC to help with the distribution. Jews received 55 percent and the rest was distributed on a nonsectarian basis by Consul Glazebrook.¹²⁷

The *Vulcan* was not the last relief to make it from American Jews to Palestine during the war. Over the course of 1915, US naval ships brought medical and agricultural supplies for Jews, Muslims, and Christians, supplied by the JDC, the RF, and the ARC.¹²⁸ In addition, the same US naval ships transported people, namely American citizens and Russian Jewish refugees who were expelled by the Ottomans, which was yet another tricky diplomatic question requiring extensive negotiations between the US government and Ottoman authorities. Meanwhile, for American Zionists, war opened new possibilities to demonstrate Jewish national solidarity through humanitarian relief and have it tacitly endorsed by mainstream, non-Zionist Jewish leaders. Zionists in each of the three constituent organizations of the JDC ensured that Palestine remained high on the JDC agenda despite a lack of official representation. While the PZC and JDC split costs and negotiation efforts with the State Department, the PZC sent additional money to sustain Jewish institutions, Jewish agricultural colonies, and the Palestine Office and the Jewish Agency in Constantinople.¹²⁹ The funds moved by several means, including via the State Department to Consul Glazebrook in Jerusalem or to Morgenthau in Constantinople, via the Standard Oil Company, or even on ships.¹³⁰ In late 1916, however, with war escalating in the region, the movement of goods and people became impossible, and supplies in transit languished until the end of the war.¹³¹

Relief funds in Palestine betrayed obvious American governmental involvement. The conspicuous arrivals of US warships, resulting non-sectarian distribution, the Americans who sometimes accompanied the relief, and the noticeable involvement of one of the only consuls of any country left in town surely made an impact on the local population. Jaffa and Jerusalem were simply too small, the economy was in such distress, and very little other outside aid of any kind was provided to the Ottoman Empire, even during wartime famine, for that kind of presence to go unnoticed. It must have seemed that the American government was highly dedicated to the Jews, particularly in comparison with the lesser aid provided by Americans to suffering minority Armenian and Syrian populations also under Ottoman rule. While the JDC “negotiated constantly with [the State Department] to secure the transport of relief supplies for Palestine,” it also did so even more strenuously for Poland, but to less effect.¹³²

What explains the relative success of American Jewish relief in Palestine, compared to other wartime humanitarian initiatives aimed at the Ottoman Empire and to American Jewish relief in Europe? US support for American missionaries, for American business, and for relief to Jews in Palestine dovetailed in the war years, blending the articulation

of US foreign policy with the private, sectarian interests of the JDC and PZC. US leaders saw several reasons to make use of the war to attach America to the Eastern Mediterranean more deeply, building on an array of prewar American initiatives and ideologies.¹³³ The political situation could not be described as easier than in Europe, but the diplomacy and logistics played to America's favor. The US State Department credited its own influence in the region to "the existence of extraterritorial rights in Turkey [that] give the American Consuls a very different status and the United States Government much greater rights than is the case in Russia,"¹³⁴ which had to do with the capitulations. America maintained long-standing cultural interests in the Middle East, enhanced by President Wilson's and Consul Glazebrook's special religious attention to the region.¹³⁵ American business interests had been developing in the Ottoman Empire since the turn of the century, and it was Standard Oil, already installed there, that enabled the transfer of philanthropic funds. Missionary and philanthropic work was an established, primary American interest in the region.¹³⁶

Jews appeared as the logical, instrumental connection between the Middle East and America. The appointment of Jewish American diplomats in the region, when American ambassadors elsewhere were never Jews, was due to the long-held assumption that "the Jews represented a natural bridge between Muslim Turks and Christian Americans."¹³⁷ The exertions of US ambassadors in the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, and later, Abram Elkus, both American Jews, turned out to be critical for the war relief effort.¹³⁸ American Jewish relief was able to make the furthest inroads in the places where the US State Department supported them best and the American name could take them farthest. Before the United States entered the war, Palestine was that place.

The Jewishness of Jewish Relief

So far, we have looked at what the JDC called "general relief": the centrally organized collection of money in the United States and its rationalized distribution in the Central Powers, Russia, and Palestine. "Individual relief" constituted another critically important dimension of the relief apparatus conceived to aid Jewish war victims. Individual relief mobilized a feature of American immigrant life: financial remittances from immigrants, sent from America to families and friends in the old country. The neutrality of the United States and its tolerant attitude toward private initiatives for humanitarian purposes at the start of the war allowed creative solutions to flourish, such as the creation of a postal route from Poland to Hias offices in New York and the merging of

remittances into institutionalized humanitarian relief. Mainstream organizations like the ARC or the CRB utilized only “general relief,” while “individual relief” was replicated by other organizations that drew on immigrant ties, like the Near East Relief. Although Jewish organizations hardly had a monopoly on individual relief, Jewish individual relief was, by definition, particularly Jewish in its reliance on intimate Jewish networks and Jewish knowledge.

Individual relief helped the JDC augment and retain the support of immigrants; use the knowledge and networks of immigrants who were more closely connected to suffering Jews than most of JDC leadership; send relief in excess of the War Trade Board’s restrictions on general relief; and channel aid efficiently where it was urgently needed without bureaucratic decision-making. The institutionalization of individual relief took several forms. The JDC built a transmission bureau, which accepted and delivered individual remittances, developing a tracing service in the process. Hias set up a postal route to reconnect individuals. Landsmanshaftn were drawn in to provide information and activism clustered around certain geographical locations. Information was gathered from individuals to inform organizational decisions.

Less centralized, less public, and thus harder for the historian to study, individual relief efforts linking Jewish immigrants, Jewish banks, the Jewish press, landsmanshaftn, Hias, synagogues, the JDC, Zionist organizations, European Jewish organizations, and Jewish war sufferers marked a sphere of distinctly Jewish collective humanitarianism. This section will loop back over the three operational theaters to focus on individual relief that was bundled into the general Jewish humanitarian effort in each region, reflecting on the nature of this unprecedented merger between private relationships and modern humanitarian relief.

Long before 1914, American Jewish immigrants were already sending remittances in the millions of dollars to the East European old country and Palestine.¹³⁹ The war meant that immigrants seeking to send remittances faced censored postal services, banks that could not guarantee transfers abroad, and no way of keeping track of the location of fleeing relatives and friends. Among American Jews, it became clear that the relief effort would have to reconnect broken threads across individuals and hometowns so that relief could travel within kinship networks. “It was felt that aiding in the transmission of moneys on the part of people in this country to their needy relatives and friends abroad was as much a work of charity as giving from general funds to needy people in the war zone,” stated Harriet Lowenstein, the JDC’s comptroller and Felix Warburg’s philanthropic adviser.¹⁴⁰ The benefit of remittances was that they made practitioners and recipients feel independent of charity, and

sometimes more willing to give and accept them than to partake in general relief.¹⁴¹ The question organizations faced was how to reenact this traditional practice and make efficient use of it alongside top-down, rationally planned general relief.

The JDC established a remittances bureau to accept small sums designated for individual recipients and bundle it with general relief appropriations. A month into the war, Harriet Lowenstein had the idea to set up a station to transmit individual remittances at market rate on behalf of the AJRC. The resulting Transmission Bureau began as a cramped office staffed by young women, volunteers, and inexperienced clerks. As demand increased, the AJRC began transmissions to Russia, Austria, the Ottoman Empire, and German-occupied Poland.¹⁴² When an interruption in operations in 1916 elicited a stream of complaints, Herbert Lehman, treasurer of the JDC, took over the Transmission Bureau with a full staff of clerks; it was clear that the JDC needed to continue and expand remittance work, if only to keep immigrants supportive of the JDC as a whole.¹⁴³ By November 1916, the JDC was working on a plan to make remittances more accessible by setting up branches of the Transmission Bureau in Jewish institutions across New York City and in communities across the country.¹⁴⁴ Branches with after-work hours opened on the Lower East Side, in the Bronx, and in Brownsville.¹⁴⁵ By January 1917, the JDC had sent 90,000 individual remittances to Russia, Poland, Galicia, Lithuania, Palestine, Turkey, and Romania.¹⁴⁶ A sum of \$500,000 amassed in small denominations remitted by thousands of concerned family members were sent this way by summer 1917.¹⁴⁷

The Transmission Bureau, beloved by immigrants desperate to reach loved ones, handled extraordinarily challenging logistics for a private philanthropy. It had to be both flexible enough to accommodate changing conditions and simple enough for untrained persons to use it and act as paying agents. It also had to be compatible with the JDC's system of general relief without creating significant overhead costs. Given these constraints, the JDC designed the Transmission Bureau as a tracing and distribution service, recorded and tracked through a standardized system of receipts. The dual function of the Transmission Bureau, which delivered otherwise undeliverable cash relief and traced missing people, proved its value. Information on recipient whereabouts was critical to the relief operation as a whole, demonstrating how remittance work had its own efficiency apart from general relief.

The process began when an individual in the United States formally requested a search for a relative or friend by remitting any sum of money through the JDC Transmission Bureau. Remittances and their receipts, drawn up in New York, were bundled into the general relief money

transfers of the JDC. Then the already engaged JDC distributing organizations in Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean had to find and deliver these remittances to their designated recipients. The Hilfskomitee for Poland and the Russian Ica labored to track down the addresses of the intended recipients and deliver the money, collecting a signature from the recipient in any language. The remarkable success rate of German Jewish remittance delivery in occupied Poland was a good reason for JDC leaders to keep the Hilfskomitee in place. Ica also worked assiduously, reporting to its Paris office in July 1915 that it had processed over 1,000 individual inquiries that had come in from abroad, from Hias, the Industrial Removal Office, the AJRC, Canada, Argentina, and beyond. The US State Department also assisted directly in this transmission of funds and tracing recipients, finding that this was within its capabilities.¹⁴⁸ Upon payment, local organizations would return receipts with recipient signatures, sometimes including letters and appeals for help directed at relatives in the United States, to the Transmission Bureau. Once received in the United States, the Transmission Bureau would summon the original sender to inspect the signature, offering an updated account of the livelihood and recent location of the recipient.¹⁴⁹

Although Jewish institutions besides the JDC, including the PZC, Hias, and private banks, sent remittances at times, the JDC Transmission Bureau was uniquely and dependably successful at covering a vast geography despite wartime disruption at the lowest possible rates. The Transatlantic Trust Company and immigrant banks also remitted money, but at a higher rate and with less reliability. When the Transatlantic Trust announced it could no longer make payments to individuals in Galicia, the JDC picked up the slack; Lowenstein engaged Ica's representative in Lemberg to distribute remittances in Russian-occupied Galicia after early 1915.¹⁵⁰ When Hias debated whether it should have its own agreement with a bank, it eventually decided to stick with suggesting that members transfer through the JDC. The JDC's singularly impressive remittance services were sometimes even utilized by non-Jewish organizations, like the ARC and the Polish Fund, foreshadowing the humble remittance's entry into mainstream relief work after the war.¹⁵¹

Beyond the cash-only JDC Transmission Bureau, a major feature of wartime relief became the act of reconnecting families and friends. This took on many forms, during the war and for decades after. With the JDC taking care of remittances, Hias, for example, investigated alternative ways of connecting relatives.¹⁵² In this pursuit, it sent Isidore Hershfield, an American-born lawyer, to German-occupied territories in 1915.¹⁵³ Seeing the effective relief work of the Hilfsverein,

Hershfield focused on a complementary mechanism for tracing.¹⁵⁴ In February 1916, Hershfield cabled that he had obtained special permission from German and Austrian officials for individuals living in occupied territories to send mail to the United States. He distributed postcards pre-addressed to Hias New York and published announcements in the local press explaining that these cards could go directly to America, if they were written in Polish or German, with only the desired relative's name and address, a prefabricated sentence (translated to "We are well, but need financial assistance. Please help us. We send heartfelt greetings."), and the sender's name and address on it.¹⁵⁵ These special postcards, mailed by Europeans living under German and Austrian occupation, bypassed censors and arrived swiftly at Hias offices in New York. While designed for Jewish use, these Hias postcards were not restricted to it. The Polish National Society and Lithuanian National Society also made use of this special mail route.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Russian Jewish families passed unaddressed letters to Ica to forward via the JDC to American Jewish societies, asking their own relatives in the United States to send money to relieve their distress.¹⁵⁷ Hias and the National Council of Jewish Women traced the intended American Jewish recipients of these appeals, as Hias did with its postcards, via name-reading ceremonies, publishing lists in Jewish newspapers, through organizational literature, and posting lists at remittance bureaus.

Hias and the JDC complemented each other when it came to individual relief. They were also able to incorporate the institutional force of American Jewish women on the home front, allowing women's roles to expand slightly from fundraising to include tracing work within America. The JDC, never relishing remittance and tracing work, did not mind that Hias enhanced connections by other means, while Hias could maintain its *raison d'être* during a time of severely restricted immigration. This postcard project in fact marked the moment when Hias became an international organization. Instead of reacting to events abroad, helping immigrants on American soil, and lobbying the US government on immigration, Hias took action abroad. By war's end, Hias had processed 300,000 communications and even helped facilitate the immigration of 7,000 women and children by connecting them to male relatives in the United States.¹⁵⁸

Meanwhile, *landmanshaftn* were also interested in undertaking relief work. The JDC had two main reasons to seek their cooperation: to add more funds to the JDC's general pool, and to find valuable, hyper-local information regarding the volatile situation in Eastern Europe. *Landmanshaft* members were personally touched by the war's horrors as they heard about the decimation of their former hometowns, and as a

result, had a personal stake in providing relief to their hometowns. Just two weeks after war was declared, one landsmanshaft had already begun to raise money on its own. Landsmanshaftn solicited donations from their US members and tried to send money to their hometowns in the old country in a number of ways. Previously competitors, landsmanshaftn began banding together for the purposes of relief, forming regional federations. Intent on maintaining links to their hometowns, they called mass meetings to share information that was gathered from new arrivals from the old country.¹⁵⁹

Still, these federations were no match for wartime conditions. They typically ended up hoarding money to use postwar or relinquished it to the JDC, the only American Jewish institution with the administrative capacity to deliver funds abroad in war. Landsmanshaftn reluctantly participated in all three of the JDC constituent groups, particularly through the Central Relief and People's Relief. Landsmanshaftn made extensive use of the JDC's transmission services, sending remittances to locations rather than individuals. They also contributed to Hias' work, since it was, after all, partially an outgrowth of a landsmanshaft and run by immigrants. But their combined distrust for these institutions and deep concern for their specific hometowns, which the JDC could not always reach, led to erratic evasion of the JDC. The Federation of Galician and Bucovinean Jews of America, for example, attempted a side project, encouraging its affiliates to send money via the Austrian embassy to the Israelitische Allianz zu Wien. They then abandoned that project in favor of trying to connect refugees in Austria to relatives in America by transmitting letters and publishing the names of recipients. They mimicked the strategies of the JDC and Hias, but attempted, with mixed to poor results, to go it alone.¹⁶⁰

There was mistrust between the JDC and landsmanshaftn. For some immigrants, the JDC seemed too bureaucratic, assimilated, and not necessarily invested in the towns they represented. To the JDC, the landsmanshaftn appeared amateurish and wasteful.¹⁶¹ Like with remittances sent by individuals, the ethnic, seemingly non-American nature of landsmanshaftn frustrated the JDC, which sought to absorb them into an American way of operating, meaning cooperation and non-duplication. The landsmanshaft practice of providing their own funds and, once the intense danger of war passed, sending their own delegates, continued well after the war, along with the JDC's and Hias' continued attempts to harness and corral them.

The search for credible information was so crucial that the JDC always hoped to send its own representatives to act in the most professional and expert way possible, instead of relying on landsmanshaftn. Yet Judah

Magnes was the only official JDC visitor to the war zones, and he alone could hardly provide a complete account, especially since he never made it into Russia. Given the inadequacy and datedness of many reports, the JDC decided that the best way to obtain correct information was to cross-reference a wide variety of reports from various sources to make informed decisions about where and how to send money. Although firsthand accounts were episodic and lacked the coherency the JDC may have desired, they filled the innumerable gaps in knowledge created by evolving war operations and censorship. Intimate, relatively recent information and local contacts culled from the diaspora network gave Hias and the JDC legitimacy to act separately from other, mainstream humanitarian associations on behalf of Jews since no other organizations could make a claim to their specific knowledge.

The JDC responded to appeals from abroad or reports of violence and destitution by trying to ascertain correct information. It required recipients to provide detailed reports on how their funds were distributed and used to make rational decisions for general relief. Continued funding was contingent on regular information provided by the main distributing agents.¹⁶² The JDC drew on Jewish networks abroad for information, particularly British Jews, who had organized their own relief committees. JDC clerks read the Jewish press, keeping relevant clippings and writing summaries. The JDC made requests of the State Department to investigate an issue through its officials overseas. The State Department almost always complied, even if it kept plenty of its findings classified and reported only half-truths. Finally, the JDC interrogated commissioners that other organizations managed to send abroad, American Jewish foreign correspondents, and American Jews sent abroad to serve in non-Jewish capacities.¹⁶³

While the American Jewish war relief effort seemed centralized, it was actually a hybrid operation, combining traditional Jewish charity, diaspora remittances, information gathering both anecdotal and statistical, and planned philanthropy. Although JDC leaders were inclined to operate in a progressive, institutional, corporate, American style befitting their own professional status and the success they wished to achieve, they also realized the multifaceted potential of harnessing the collective will and knowledge of individuals for their own relief purposes. Ordinary Jews, not just the leaders of the JDC or Hias, had roles to play in wartime relief. Most individuals were not decision-makers themselves, but informants and donors who relied on the US government and established American Jewish organizations to make use of these contributions. By coordinating individual remittances, cooperating with *landmanshaftn*, and seeking knowledge, the JDC brought together various diasporic links

to make them work for general, American-style relief. The JDC's extension into the arena of individual relief is what allowed it to nearly corner the market in American Jewish relief. The Jewish overseas humanitarian project was itself galvanizing American Jews into constituting a cohesive Jewish community. On the home front, the JDC appealed to large donors, small donors, American organizations, and the US government, as well as a wide range of Jewish organizations. Acting abroad, it had the support of these organizations behind it and the collective knowledge of immigrants, distributing organizations, and high-level US officials to act effectively. Once the United States entered the war, sending representatives became impossible and funds were more restricted, but individual remittances and connecting relatives continued.

America Enters the War

In April 1917, the United States declared war; for most Americans, this signaled the beginning of war. For Jewish relief agencies, by contrast, the war had been ongoing for years. For Jewish life overall, America's entry into the war was far less significant than the Russian Revolution or the Balfour Declaration. Though America's entry into the war marked the beginning of the end of the war, this too was not particularly significant for Jews, since paramilitary violence, interstate war, and civil war persisted for years along the Eastern Front. So while the totality of the war upended Jewish life, American belligerency mostly meant that American Jewish relief efforts had to navigate even more obstacles. American Jewish humanitarian leaders moved closer to the US war government to find ways of continuing their relief efforts and relied more heavily on Jewish individual relief.

While procedures became more bureaucratic and limits stricter in April 1917, the Wilson administration began to rely on relief from private organizations and to think of aid to civilians as having essential strategic and ideological importance. American relief signified US commitment to Allied Europe and toward a European future premised on international community and stability. The American Red Cross was deployed across Europe for civilian relief in June 1917.¹⁶⁴ This was a good time for private associations to do their work with the full backing of the US government. On the other hand, Jewish associations in America faced a conundrum: They still wanted to get aid to civilians in what was now enemy territory without aiding the enemy. In other words, they wanted to continue relief to Polish Jews even though America was now officially at war with Poland's German occupiers. This situation was resolved when the US State Department and the JDC worked together to negotiate a

solution with the still-neutral Netherlands, whereby money would pass through the Netherlands on its way to Berlin and Jerusalem, which turned it into neutral, humanitarian money. The revolution in Russia, however, meant a breakdown in relief transmission to Jews within Russia, which was then cobbled together on the promise of future peaceful relations between America and Russia.

Over the spring and summer 1917, the JDC faced its biggest diplomatic challenge yet: finding a way, with the State Department's approval, to send aid to still-desperate Jews in places occupied by the enemy. Negotiations centered on still-neutral Spain, which the JDC hoped could distribute relief through its embassies in enemy territory.¹⁶⁵ Dr. Stephen S. Wise, a rabbi who frequently spoke out on Jewish nationalism and rights and who was close to President Wilson, allegedly negotiated on behalf of the JDC executive committee with William G. Phillips, the assistant secretary of state. Wise, with Louis Brandeis' backing, suggested to Phillips that the JDC organize a committee of Jews in a neutral country such as Holland rather than having Spanish embassies distribute relief, arguing that the Commission for Relief in Belgium already operated in a similar way. Wise thus shifted the distribution logistics away from Spanish consulates and from the Hilfskomitee and instead toward Zionists in a neutral country – a pro-Zionist move that was not what the JDC executive committee had intended. But the damage to the Spanish option was done, with the Spanish ambassador refusing his good offices. Henry Morgenthau, Oscar Straus, Louis Marshall, and JDC executive secretary Albert Lucas went to Washington to meet with Phillips and discuss a change of plans. The State Department sent out a few inquiries and in May, entered negotiations with the Dutch government. After intense diplomatic negotiations through April and May, the JDC and the State Department settled on Holland.¹⁶⁶

There were still some problems with the German government accepting these terms, but no way to resolve German hesitations from America. The JDC sent a capable social worker, Boris Bogen, to the Hague to investigate the situation and try to make a Holland route work. Bogen's trip to Holland was to launch him into many field projects on behalf of the JDC, which transformed him into a key early figure of the Joint. Originally from an educated Jewish merchant family living in Moscow, he moved as an adult to the United States and became a social worker. While providing social services to Jews in Cincinnati, Ohio, he earned an outstanding reputation. He spoke many languages – Russian, English, Yiddish, Polish, German – and took a particular interest in war relief work. He had already been considered a candidate to accompany

Judah Magnes to Europe. For this mission to Holland, Bogen was accompanied by his colleague from Cincinnati, Max Senior.

After a long and uncertain journey across the Atlantic, the pair arrived in London in mid-September 1917. In Bogen's recounting, he described how after their treacherous trip across the Atlantic, they discovered that the US representative in Holland had not been alerted to their arrival, nor had he heard of the JDC.¹⁶⁷ When the relevant paperwork finally arrived several days later from the United States, Bogen and Senior organized a committee of Dutch Jews to forward money, under the rationale that "[w]ith money the beneficiaries could buy what they needed within the occupied territories. And it satisfied the current patriotism to believe that, buying foodstuffs within the occupied territory, our people would diminish the resources of the enemy to an extent." Once this was completed, the Dutch Jewish committee negotiated with the German government without letting on that there were Americans involved.¹⁶⁸ The German government accepted that a Dutch committee could forward funds, but not distribute aid directly, and appointed a German Jew in the Hague as facilitator. Bogen and Senior tested the plan by sending money to Warsaw and waiting for a receipt: it came. By the time they left Holland in January 1918, they had already sent \$500,000 to Poland and Lithuania.¹⁶⁹

Accordingly, a committee of Dutch Zionists received money and sent it to Dutch diplomatic officers posted in war zones. It was distributed according to guidelines sent from New York to Holland. General and individual relief thus continued through America's belligerency, passing in this way not only to Jews in German territory in Warsaw and Lithuania, but also still to Jews in Austria-Hungary. Since enemy subjects could not touch this money under US law (i.e., the German Jews of the Hilfsverein or the Austrian Jews of the Allianz), Dutch consuls handed relief funds to local committees of Jews under occupation by the Central Powers that had previously distributed for the Hilfsverein and Allianz.¹⁷⁰

In creating this Netherlands route, the JDC had to carefully negotiate a delicate but far from impossible situation. Germany was willing to accept humanitarian relief, since it was facing severe shortages due to the blockade, and outside support would ease its own burden.¹⁷¹ As American Consul in Warsaw Hernando de Soto noted, "the Germans distinctly favor foreign relief measures in Poland."¹⁷² The US government allowed limited American relief to travel to Poland, as Assistant Secretary of State William Phillips wrote, to maintain Polish-American support for the war and to prevent Poles from turning against the Allies.¹⁷³ Phillips was well aware that this would aid Germany, but in

contrast to British policy, he thought the benefits of relief outweighed the disadvantages. De Soto agreed: "Without American aid the Poles will be taught to look upon Germany as their only savior and friend. In fact, direct American relief would serve to increase the enthusiasm already prevailing among the Poles ... over the utterances of President Wilson."¹⁷⁴

Regarding Palestine, the JDC maintained its relief link through Western/Central Europe. Since relief traveled so similarly through the Central Powers, the JDC kept hoping that East Central Europe and Palestine could merge into one humanitarian theater. Upon declaring war on Germany, the United States recalled its American diplomats, including Ambassador Elkus and Consul Glazebrook, from the Ottoman Empire. For a brief period, relief funds went to the Spanish Consul in Jerusalem.¹⁷⁵ Once the Netherlands route was established, however, a Dutchman in Palestine, Siegfried Hoofien, began to receive moneys from the Dutch committee in Amsterdam. Assistant director of the covertly operating Anglo-Palestine Bank that held the American Relief Fund's account, Hoofien acted in the same way Glazebrook had, transferring money to local relief committees. Approximately \$500,000 reached Palestine during US involvement in the war.¹⁷⁶ Concurrently, the Jewish National Fund had relocated to neutral Holland, and this Zionist organization also sent money to Palestine to sustain its agricultural colonies there.¹⁷⁷ Despite British occupation of Palestine in December 1917, ports were not yet active, and Palestine remained isolated from food supplies. The British military governor of Jerusalem, Ronald Storrs, ordered food from Egypt, but it was not forthcoming from America until after the war.¹⁷⁸

Meanwhile, the Russian Revolution began in March 1917. Since America entered the war during this Russian upheaval, relations with this Allied Power were uncertain. The United States took a noninterventionist stance, and American Jews let their Russian brethren guide their efforts. In April 1917, the American Consul in Petrograd announced the abolishment of restrictions on Russian citizens based on race and religion; the emancipation of Russian Jews had come at last.¹⁷⁹ Displaced Jews in the Russian interior could return to the former Pale of Settlement. Although Russia was not a US war enemy, the confusion created by the revolution and the US government's ambivalence toward it challenged continued relief efforts. Meanwhile, the Russian revolutionary government diminished its support for Jewish relief; the autonomy of EKOPO and associated local relief groups was falling apart amid a mounting humanitarian crisis. With refugees returning and pogroms becoming increasingly violent and widespread across Ukraine, and no

way to address these issues, Russian Jewish life was headed toward catastrophe.¹⁸⁰ After the fall of the tsar, the American ambassador remaining in Petrograd, David R. Francis, told the State Department on March 26, 1917, that financial help by American Jews would be welcome but would have to be done with discretion. It was not clear to all American Jews that relief was necessary after emancipation. There were the usual worries about helping the Russian government or inflaming antisemitism, too.¹⁸¹ Yet when EKOPO cabled for assistance, the JDC responded. From March 1917 to December 1917, it sent a total \$450,300.¹⁸²

But the October Revolution brought trouble. Informed that funds sent in September were the last to reach their intended destination, the JDC set up a committee to find a way for money to reach Russia. The Committee on Russia tried several different paths and, in their exertions over the course of 1918, corresponded with other private associations and the State Department. The JDC's main source of information and line of communication with EKOPO was the journalist Herman Bernstein, the same man who had mustered US Naval support for Jewish relief in Palestine and who would soon write the pioneering study (*The History of a Lie*, 1921) of the infamous Russian antisemitic text, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Bernstein happened to be on a reporting trip to Russia during the winter of 1917–18 and became the de facto representative of the JDC. It was Herman Bernstein who, in April, cabled the JDC that EKOPO had received nothing since September. He wrote that the Petrograd EKOPO requested \$1 million and said that after the JDC made a decision regarding an appropriation, they would send recommendations on how to transfer the funds.¹⁸³ As Jewish relief and remittances stopped amid revolutionary turmoil and the ongoing chaos, restrictions, and deprivation of the Great War, conditions in Russia deteriorated.

Albert Lucas, JDC secretary, hoped to push the United States toward establishing a postrevolutionary relationship with the Soviets through civilian relief. Writing to Secretary of State Lansing in summer 1918, he explained:

The interest of the President of the United States in the future prosperity of the Russian people is a matter of public knowledge. The Department of State has during all the time that the Joint Distribution Committee has been in existence given its unqualified support to all the efforts of that Committee to enable the Jews of America to relieve their brethren in Russia and elsewhere. The present moment seems to be opportune for an effort to be made to re-establish the means of assistance which have hitherto existed between the people of the United States and the people of Russia.¹⁸⁴

In August, Warburg, Lucas, Bogen, and Jacob Billikopf traveled to Washington, DC, to look into getting Boris Bogen permission to travel to Russia to recreate the Netherlands success, enlisting the help of Major Samuel Rosenson of the War Department to speak with State Department officials on behalf of the JDC.¹⁸⁵ However, this effort to deploy Bogen was doomed – the Soviet government would not allow a former Russian subject to return for the purposes of relief.¹⁸⁶ Ambivalence on the part of the State Department meant no funds were transferred and no relief could be undertaken in Russia. As government routes floundered, the JDC sought possibilities and information through the ARC, the YMCA, and the Russian Information Bureau in New York in spring and summer 1918. The ARC and the YMCA had both been able to undertake limited relief in Russia, but the JDC's overtures to follow in their stead led nowhere.¹⁸⁷

Herman Bernstein cabled the JDC in spring 1918 with good news: He had ensured that relief could still take place without Bolshevik interference if distributed by EKOPO.¹⁸⁸ He added that the JDC could wait to send money until after the war as long as it informed EKOPO how much it was setting aside for that purpose; EKOPO could secure borrowed funds immediately.¹⁸⁹ Sending relief to Russia remained difficult for years to come, largely because cooperation with other American associations or the government was not possible for what had become Soviet Russia. The JDC's fundamental reliance on US foreign relations was becoming clear in a way that the period of US neutrality had not made visible.

US belligerency created a closer relationship between Jewish relief and the US State Department. According to the US Trade with the Enemy Act of 6 October 1917, the War Trade Board had to approve and license money and supply transfers in advance. Once the war transfer routes were in place, the State Department still restricted the relief funds destined for enemy countries.¹⁹⁰ Interestingly, the State Department became further involved in Jewish relief, as it, rather than private banks, became responsible for the transmission of funds. New bureaucratic matters necessitated by the US declaration of war meant the State Department read years of overseas Jewish correspondence, while affording Jewish organizations the opportunity to learn the State Department system and network. Meanwhile, the JDC was undertaking multimillion-dollar fundraising campaigns, setting aside "chests" of money for postwar reconstruction. It became dependent on the US government and an ambassador of American goodwill to occupied populations in wartime. To assure the continued, critical cooperation of the US government, the JDC chose to align itself with the US war effort, making arguments that appealed to a sense of humanitarianism and to

desires to win the war. Complying with caps created by the War Trade Board, the JDC still sent more than \$5 million in general relief abroad in 1918, not including remittances.¹⁹¹

The Washington-based lawyer, Fulton Brylawski, usually communicated with the State Department pro bono on behalf of the JDC. When the JDC needed to send a message to a Jewish relief committee in Germany, Russia, or elsewhere, he received the message from JDC New York and took it to the State Department where it would travel through the department's diplomatic pouch to an American consular official in Berlin, Petrograd, Vienna, Bucharest, Constantinople, or Jerusalem. That American official would then pass the letter to the relevant local Jewish relief committee. These messages usually carried instructions for using the money. Brylawski received replies sent through the diplomatic pouch and forwarded them accordingly. After May and June 1917, when Brylawski hashed out plans to transfer the relief route through Holland, he had to run back and forth to get licenses from the War Trade Board for every financial transaction and communication to enemy countries. He also deposited checks at the State Department for transfer to the American Minister at Holland. Hias' representatives in Washington, Simon Wolf and then Louis Gottlieb, also facilitated communications via the State Department, and of course, discussed cases of potential immigrants who were having difficulty entering the United States.

On occasion, the JDC approached the State Department with potentially difficult requests. As has been seen, well-known and well-connected Jewish leaders would travel from New York and elsewhere to direct Jewish initiatives with the State Department, President Wilson, or Congress. Brylawski and other JDC representatives mostly discussed matters with William Phillips, assistant secretary of state. Alvey Adee, also assistant secretary of state, and Secretary of State Robert Lansing were also part of the conversation. But the JDC's reliance on sending Jewish leaders from New York as well as recruiting Jews in American government to its cause meant that clusters of leading Jews could also go to Washington without the sanction of the JDC and have the US government's ear, as did Stephen Wise and Louis Brandeis. There was no authorized Jewish body, just personal networks and reputation. Relief negotiations thus provided the State Department with an opportunity to glimpse inside the world of American Jewish politics and provided Zionists a way to build their own relationship with the US government.

The burgeoning American Jewish-State Department relationship did not bear immediate results; the US government actually reduced the amount of money the JDC could send.¹⁹² After March 1918, the State

Department permitted the JDC to send only \$300,000 monthly to Poland (\$100,000 of it individual remittances), far lower than the JDC's intended \$700,000. The State Department controlled where it was sent, announcing that nothing could go to Lithuania as of April 1, 1918, due to fears that Lithuania supported Germany and that Lithuanian Jews might work against Allied interests.¹⁹³ Although the State Department was reluctant to allow too much relief, permitted amounts were much more generous than, say, what London, having blocked aid before US entry and now opposing it as aid to Germany, allowed.¹⁹⁴ Despite comparative US benevolence, the JDC relentlessly pursued the challenge of getting food and clothing into Poland. While cutting the amounts it would let humanitarian organizations send to Poland, the State Department continued to negotiate with the JDC. In November 1917, Albert Lucas proposed adapting the model of the CRB to Poland. Warburg explained that it would take convincing President Wilson to make this Hoover plan a reality, and that despite some remaining optimism and Morgenthau requesting a conference, the frustrations of dealing with the government resembled "a very beautiful game of going around a circle."¹⁹⁵ The circle game persisted until war's end, but it positioned the JDC to demand inclusion in immediate postwar relief in Poland. Meanwhile, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 bolstered Zionist claims and supported what had already been an intense American effort to provide relief in Palestine.

Naturally, the US government did not protest that funds sent by Jews abroad were called "American." Humanitarian relief in war-torn regions put America in a positive light, such that when the United States declared war, the War Trade Board notified the JDC that "all receipts [for individual remittances of any character destined for Poland or Turkey] should indicate that these funds are of American origin."¹⁹⁶ The US government stated that it wanted even private funds coming from America through its official diplomatic channels to be perceived as unambiguously American. Given that these funds were going to populations that were not all well disposed toward their current rulers, the US government was strategically self-interested in informing these unfortunate civilians that American goodwill was helping them, and that Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottomans were their oppressors. The War Trade Board's diktat was a central part of a clearly designed foreign policy strategy to turn the Jewish population in Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean against America's enemies and to inculcate support for the Allies as liberating humanitarians.¹⁹⁷ It just so happened that this evolution in US policy coincided perfectly with the JDC's long-standing policy to emphasize the Americanness of its aid.

The JDC was happy to oblige the US government and play the patriot, even if its own reasons for deploying Americanness might have differed.

Throughout the war, the JDC made its requests to the US government politely and never put the State Department in a position where it would have to formally refuse the JDC. The JDC was careful to pick its battles and make sure it would never be met with outright government rejection, no matter how much American Jews resented wartime decrees and ambiguous responses from the government.¹⁹⁸ JDC leaders knew well that getting any relief whatsoever to their brethren was entirely dependent on the goodwill of the State Department. This was the case even as the JDC used its neutrality, as an organization of civilians and servers of humanity, to encourage Germany and the Ottomans to accept aid. Balancing these seemingly irreconcilable positions was essential to the JDC's continued campaign to aid Jews.

Accordingly, William Phillips wrote in late 1918, "I have always found the officers of the [Joint Distribution] Committee anxious to cooperate with the Department [of State], to be guided by its advice and to take no step which did not have the cordial approval of the Government." His words of praise did not end with JDC compliance. Overall, Phillips, the State Department official in closest contact with the JDC, had a favorable impression of American Jewish relief efforts toward the end of the war: "I should have liked to express in person my intense admiration for the vast humanitarian work of the Jews in this country and of their untiring efforts to ameliorate the suffering of whole populations in Europe and the Near East. It has been my good fortune to occupy a position where I could watch and sometimes help this great task of relief."¹⁹⁹ Given the chaos and restrictions of war, American Jews fared well when it came to their relationship with the US government and resulting ability to work abroad. After all, American Jewish relief was close to the only relief to reach Poland and Palestine throughout the war. This solidifying relationship with the highest levels of the US government continued to pay dividends in the years to come. American Jews were set to take the lead in postwar Jewish international affairs.

The Americanness of Jewish Relief

American humanitarian organizations extracted major concessions from the belligerents and overcame formidable obstacles. Carrying out relief work and navigating the diplomatic perils of wartime involved great skill. For the JDC, Hias, and PZC, credible information to make decisions was difficult to obtain. These organizations worried constantly about inciting antisemitic sentiment in places where they were supposed to be providing

relief, and they had to contend with internal debates in every Jewish community they touched. They did not accomplish everything they hoped to do in the manner they intended in sending Americans to conduct relief on the ground, making more use of US diplomats in Europe, and sending food, medicine, and clothing anywhere but Palestine. Yet they provided critical support to Jews across a vast geographic space.

Although these organizations provided relief intended for other Jews, the war provided them with a way to become more American. American Jews discovered that they could operate freely on behalf of Jews directly affected by the war within a broader American humanitarian movement that embraced aid to distressed populations. A cartoon designed by JDC secretary, Albert Lucas, appealing for funds, illustrates this duality: An imposing arch on US soil facing an impoverished population on the shores of Europe reads both “Jewish Mutual Responsibility” and “American Jewish Opportunity.”²⁰⁰ Jewish organizations, moreover, realized that they could appropriate an American identity rather than an ethnic immigrant identity by labeling their aid “American.” This maneuver gained credence with the State Department’s initially informal and then more expansive association with Jewish relief.

The relatively harmonious and unrestricted situation in which the JDC and the PZC operated in Palestine was an excellent example of what was possible when American state interests and the interests of Jewish Americans aligned. Since relief figures went down once the United States declared war, it might seem as if these organizations became incapacitated or lost their credibility with the State Department, when in fact, organizing the relief route via the Netherlands, continuing regular relief payments in enemy and revolutionary states, and doing it under an “American” brand were remarkable feats.

Yet the distinction between private and state organizations was stronger between the Jewish organizations and the state than, say, for the American Red Cross, the Commission for Relief in Belgium, or even the Rockefeller Foundation. As Jewish associations, a particular identity defined everything from their fundraising pool, committee members, solidarity with strangers, fears, and overseas networks. In a way, these American Jewish organizations were inherently international and neutral from the outset: concerned with Jewish survival everywhere.

The American Jewish response to Jewish war sufferers sets the scene for the rest of this book. The Joint Distribution Committee and Hias aided war sufferers for the next decade. It was only after the end of the war that the Joint Distribution Committee and other organizations were able to spend their amassed funds and physically enter previously war-

torn territories to administer relief, distribute aid, and rebuild infrastructure. Based on wartime collaborations, these organizations took decisive steps to continue working hand in hand with other Americans, most especially, the American Relief Administration, and move to the field to carry out a vast plan for the relief and eventual reconstruction of Jewish life in Europe for the next ten years. They brought aspects of their relief with them to the greater field of American humanitarian relief – namely, institutionalized remittance delivery – and tied themselves closer to America, increasing the distance with their immigrant past even while continuing to aid relatives from the old world.