

UNITED STATES POLICY AND
THE BELGIAN ROYAL QUESTION

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by

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The Royal Question, or the right of Leopold III to occupy the throne of Belgium following the Second World War, was and still is one of the most hotly debated issues of Belgian history. Throughout the war, Belgium's friends were aware of the growing controversy as attacks and counter-attacks surged through the press and private discussions. Critics of the king viewed his sudden surrender to overwhelming German forces in May 1940 as a betrayal of his country and the Allies. Important Belgian politicians protested Leopold's decision to share the fate of his soldiers and remain a prisoner in occupied Belgium rather than flee abroad with the cabinet. While the king's supporters praised his leadership in the prewar years, his opponents questioned his willingness to cooperate

(*) Le professeur Helmreich, auteur de *Belgium and Europe : A Study in Small Power Diplomacy*, La Haye-Paris, 1976, a découvert aux National Archives de Washington un dossier "Leopold III" dont il a tiré les pages qui suivent. Chacun en reconnaîtra l'intérêt exceptionnel en ce qu'il apporte d'informations inédites sur un sujet que commence à peine à toucher la recherche historique. Le texte n'a d'autre ambition que de fournir à partir de ce dossier du Département d'Etat les positions prises par la diplomatie et l'armée américaines face au problème que posait la présence du Roi dans leur zone d'occupation. C'est pourquoi nous avons estimé important de le faire connaître immédiatement aux lecteurs sans attendre l'insertion de ces données dans le contexte général de l'affaire royale en Belgique ou de l'examen comparatif avec la politique plus interventionniste de la Grande Bretagne. Nous remercions le Professeur Helmreich de cette primeur dont il gratifie notre revue.

Sur base d'archives belges, américaines et britanniques, deux chercheurs, J. Gérard Libois et J. Gotovitch, préparent un ouvrage d'ensemble sur la libération de la Belgique où la question royale occupera une place importante.

with duly elected ministers as a constitutional monarch should. Was his entourage too dictatorial in its behavior ? Should he have remarried during the war without ministerial approval ? What about his rumored visit with Hitler and his birthday greetings to the Fuhrer ?

So the arguments multiplied. The issue soon became deeply entangled with the long standing linguistic and religious diversions in Belgium, as Flemings and Catholics supported Leopold III, while for the most part Walloons and Socialists opposed him. Even before the debate became a truly public one and increased in bitterness, American observers were concerned that the Royal Question had the potential to destroy the unity of the small country, open a wedge for communist proselytizing, and stimulate upheavals which might hinder Allied military operations in Germany.

The seriousness of the situation took the Allies aback and posed problems. They needed to develop a common stance and were especially concerned how the Belgian government would interpret any statement or specific action. The Americans were faced with especially immediate questions, for Leopold, who had been deported from Belgium during the last stages of the German occupation, was rescued by American troops in Austria. Thus his living and travel arrangements became the responsibility of American occupation authorities.

Well before the king's location had been discovered, United States Ambassador to Belgium Charles Sawyer was warning his superiors that an immediate return by the king to Belgium would "precipitate serious difficulties." "There are deep differences even in the Royal family and the situation holds dynamite for Belgium and perhaps for Europe" (1). The procedure for Leopold's return was a military question to be decided by the Commander in Chief of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, General Dwight D. Eisenhower. But the effect of any decision would be political, and therefore Sawyer was anxious that he, British Ambassador to Belgium Sir Hugh Knatchbull-Hugessen, and General George Erskine, the British head

(1) UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE RECORDS (= USDSR), *National Archives*, 855.001 Leopold, Sawyer to Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Mar. 29, 1945. The best balanced English language account of the Royal Question is E. RAMON ARANGO, *Leopold III and the Belgian Royal Question*, Baltimore, 1961.

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of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force mission to Belgium, be consulted.

In October 1944 the Combined Chiefs of Staff of the Allied Forces had directed General Eisenhower, at the request of the Belgian ministers in exile in London, to prepare an order for the release of Leopold which the general was to hand to the Germans at the time of their surrender. Even earlier, Ike had been instructed that the Belgian government in exile in London was the only Belgian government recognized by the U.S. and U.K. He "should exercise great caution in dealing with any approach which you may receive from King Leopold or his emissaries during the period prior to the return of the Belgian Government to Belgian soil." (2)

The chiefs had not considered what would happen were Leopold released in the course of military operations. It was strongly felt in both Washington and London, however, that there should be no change made in established plans except at the request of the Belgian government. On March, 30, 1945, Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius informed Sawyer that the United States agreed with the posture of the British Foreign Office. Allied military authorities should avoid actions involving duress or restraint on the king's person; the "responsibility as to the king's future rests squarely on the shoulders of the Belgian Government." (3) Though Sawyer had suggested that the king be transported to Switzerland, Stettinius was against such a solution until the Belgian government and king had reached agreement on it.

This posture was conveyed to the Belgian Foreign Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, who in turn asked that as soon as the king were found, Leopold be requested to remain in a place agreeable to him until a delegation from the government could call on him. The American ambassador quashed Spaak's inquiry if it would be possible to keep discovery of the king secret. (4)

(2) USDSR, *National Archives*, European Advisory Commission, Records of Philip E. Mosely, Box 14, file 200, *final draft of Combined Civil Affairs Committee Directive for Belgium*, Message to General Eisenhower, Apr. 20, 1944.

(3) USDSR, *National Archives*, 855.001 Leopold, Stettinius to Sawyer, Mar. 28, 1945.

(4) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Stettinius, Apr. 2, 1945.

Sawyer's earlier mention of differences within the royal family referred to alleged difficulties between Leopold and his younger brother, Charles. The latter had been elected regent by the chambers on September 20, 1944, shortly after their return to liberated Brussels and discovery of Leopold's absence. Despite rumors that the brothers had not gotten along since youth, Sawyer was convinced that the prince regent desired nothing but the best interests of Belgium and the untroubled return of the king. The United States representative was aware, however, that Charles strongly disapproved of Leopold's morganatic marriage during the war to a Flemish commoner, Liliane Baels. When Charles suggested in early April that the king's wife and children might be with him and that to neutralize their influence and help achieve a more objective discussion the British and American ambassadors should accompany any Belgian delegation to the king, Sawyer grew cautious. So too did the State Department, which questioned what advantage could be gained from Sawyer's accompanying the Belgians. On the other hand, it did "see definite disadvantages in your becoming too deeply involved in this internal Belgian problem." (5)

Days passed but little could be learned of the missing king's whereabouts. The Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed that when found, he should be a guest of the Allies but remain in Germany. The British Foreign Office was relieved by indications that Leopold had been released by the Germans and would enter Switzerland on April 25; such a development would extricate the Allies from the embarrassment of mediating between the Belgian government and the king over his travel arrangements. The rumors proved false, as did those suggesting that Leopold was buying a chateau in Sweden. The possibility the king might be in France arose, and the British government rejected a Belgian request that Britain help persuade France to keep Leopold there for a while; that was up to the Belgian government itself to settle with the French. (6)

At the beginning of May, Sawyer reported on the split feelings within Belgium regarding Leopold. While abdication in favor of

(5) *Ibidem*, Asst. Secretary Dean Acheson to Sawyer, Apr. 7, 1945; see also Sawyer to Stettinius, Apr. 6, 1945.

(6) *Ibidem*, Gen. J. Hilldring to H.F. Matthews, Apr. 14, 1945; Winant to Stettinius, May 1, 1945.

Leopold's fifteen year old son by the late Queen Astrid was mooted, many of the king's opponents were reluctant to press for abdication as they considered Baudouin too young to assume the weighty responsibilities of the crown. There was nevertheless strong agreement on three points. First, Leopold must dismiss two long time aides, General Raoul Van Overstraeten and Count Robert Capelle, both of whom were considered to harbor fascist tendencies. The former had, however, already been retired in April by the Minister of National Defense on account of age. Second, the king must indicate his intention to govern in accordance with the spirit as well as the letter of the Belgian constitution. Third, an unequivocal statement of sympathy with the Allies and repudiation of totalitarian ideology was necessary. (7)

On May 7, 1945, American troops stormed a chateau at Strobl, Austria, near Salzburg, discovering and setting free the Belgian king and his family. Apparently Leopold did not know until moments before he was freed whether the SS troopers guarding him would shoot him or let him go. His nerves were deeply shaken, and he did not appear well composed when visited by the Belgian government delegation a few days later. Prime Minister Achille Van Acker described the king as "in a state approaching nervous collapse." (8) According to Van Acker, Leopold himself suggested that for reasons of health he not attempt a prompt return to Brussels. Sawyer reported that the prince regent discovered that "Leopold had had no expectation that he would not be welcomed back with enthusiasm by (the) Belgian populace." (9)

The king regained his composure within a few days, and his attitude toward his critics stiffened. There was much debate within the chanceries and in the streets of Belgium as to when the king would return. Spaak, like Van Acker, was a leading member of the Socialist party, which strongly opposed Leopold's return. At the same time, he had been a former close friend of the king and greatly wished for the sake of Belgium that the Royal Question be resolved as soon as possible. Although he may have suspected that the king would eventually be forced to abdicate, Spaak told Sawyer that

(7) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Stettinius, May 2, 1945. Capelle eventually resigned in June of 1945.

(8) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Stettinius, May 14, 1945.

(9) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Stettinius, May 15, 1945.

Leopold should return to Belgium as soon as possible before conditions grew worse (10). Interestingly enough, many of the government figures who earlier had wanted Leopold to remain out of the country were now pressing for his prompt return.

The American cabled home that much depended upon the king's actions in the next few days. He expected Leopold to return, perhaps by the end of May. At that time "Belgium faces (the) greatest crisis in its history." The lines of political, religious, and especially linguistic cleavage were "very deep." If Leopold were to return, "revolution is not at all impossible and consequences are difficult to foresee." (11)

It was this possibility and these consequences that appeared to disturb diplomats in Washington and London the most. The State Department was aware that there was a political crisis "in full development" in Belgium, and it had advised its European representatives that the United States and Britain "are maintaining (a) complete 'hands-off' attitude..." (12) But were other countries? The Foreign Office feared that an increasing minority in Wallonia would demand either autonomy or annexation to France. James G. Winant, the American Ambassador to the Court of Saint James, reported a Foreign Office official's concern regarding irridentist propaganda in Wallonia and that "the French Ambassador in Brussels... is believed to have connived in the spreading of this propaganda." (13)

The possibility of the United Kingdom or the United States being pulled into the controversy increased in June. On the 10th of the month, the king invited General Erskine and his deputy, Colonel Sherman, to visit him along with Van Acker and Jacques Pirenne, the historian who later became the king's secretary. Sawyer had anticipated this possibility and had asked General Eisenhower to remind the American military authorities in contact with the king to be polite and correct, but not partisan. The British promptly checked with Washington to assure that the invitation would be rejected, for

(10) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Stettinius, May 16, 1945.

(11) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Stettinius, May 18, 1945.

(12) *Ibidem*, E.A. Gullion to Phillips, Matthews, P.T. Culbertson, May 11, 1945.

(13) *Ibidem*, Winant to Stettinius, May 26, 1945. There is no further mention in the file of any alleged French activities.

it "might be misinterpreted and be regarded by opinion in Belgium and elsewhere as an attempt by His Majesty's Government and the United States Government to intervene on the abdication issue." (14) This was indeed the policy followed. Even before receiving specific instructions from home, Sawyer and his British counterpart had arranged for Van Acker to tell the king that "as General Eisenhower does not care to advise or control the decision of the King it appears that no useful purpose can be served by this visit." (15)

If Eisenhower did not wish to influence the king's decision, it is clear from the correspondence that he was anxious that the king reach a decision soon. The frequent ferrying of Belgian government delegations and other visitors to Leopold was a bother, even though the king had been moved May 18 from Strobl to a more pleasant villa at nearby Saint Wolfgang. Moreover, there was the constant danger that somehow American military authorities would be pulled into the controversy or that their actions might be misinterpreted by one party or the other. The general therefore asked the Combined Chiefs of Staff to urge their governments to bring a prompt end to Leopold's residence in occupied territory.

The Foreign Office expected Leopold would reach a decision within two weeks. It was thought he would abdicate and that in any case he would not be taking steps which would aggravate the situation. The Allies should take no action which might upset the Belgian government, unless they were to transport Leopold to Switzerland at his request. The British urged this posture on the State Department, which promptly accepted it as its own (16). Any other course would create the very situation which both Sawyer and Eisenhower wished to avoid : the appearance of taking sides. On June 14 U.S. Undersecretary of State Joseph C. Grew did promise Sawyer that if the situation of the king were not resolved by July 9, the Department would consider measures "to relieve the Army of the King's presence." (17)

The king reached a decision that same day, but not the anticipated one of abdication. Rather, he planned to return to Brussels on June 18 and resume his duties. This was unacceptable to

(14) *Ibidem*, British *aide memoire* dated June 13, 1945; see also Sawyer to Stettinius, June 7, 1945.

(15) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Stettinius, June 11, 1945.

(16) *Ibidem*, British *aide memoire* dated June 13, 1945.

(17) *Ibidem*, Grew to Sawyer, June 14, 1945.

Van Acker and other socialists in the cabinet. The government resigned, informing the regent that it could not take responsibility for the political events which might follow upon the return of the king and that it would be unable to maintain order after Leopold set foot in Belgium. The cabinet also recommended that Leopold III form a government before returning, knowing full well that the king would be unable to do so : Socialists and Communists would oppose him, the Liberal party had just come out for *effacement*, a polite way of saying abdication, and the Catholic party supporters of Leopold, while numerous, did not have sufficient strength in the chambers to form a majority one-party government.

Leopold did try his hand at forming a workable government coalition, and the Americans were kept busy flying Belgian politicians to and from Salzburg. Meanwhile the Allies were also considering the implications of any request from Leopold for transportation back to Belgium without the covering consent of a Belgian government.

Sawyer, Erskine, and Knatchbull-Hugessen met on June 18 to discuss the problem. Sawyer believed that a plane should be furnished to Leopold even if the Belgian government did not request it. Although SHAEF policy heretofore had been to provide Leopold transportation only at the request of the Belgian government, Sawyer reminded his superiors that the Allies had repatriated over 230,000 other prisoners of war. Refusal to furnish a plane would simply mean that Leopold would obtain a car and then ask occupation authorities for gasoline. Consistency would require the Allies to refuse this request also. "As a result (the) King will be a prisoner; having been a prisoner of Germany for one year he will now be a prisoner of the Allies." (18) Sawyer feared that if Leopold stayed at Saint Wolfgang because he had no means of leaving, he might not make any decision, which would prolong the difficult situation in Belgium. Even if furnishing a plane to the king without the consent of the Belgian government were interpreted as taking a side in the controversy, "the results in my opinion would be far less damaging than the results of the opposite course."

Sawyer's views received reply only indirectly. On the same day they arrived in Washington, Undersecretary Grew telegraphed Robert Murphy, U.S. political advisor for Germany who was then in

(18) This and the following quotation are from *ibidem*, Sawyer to Stettinius, June 18, 1945.

Brussels, that if the king asked for transportation without approval by the Belgian government, such transportation was to be refused and the request referred to SHAEF and to the Departments of War and State. Perhaps in response to Sawyer's cable, an additional line was added to the draft cable to Murphy, indicating that State "would be agreeable to a solution whereunder (the) King at his own request be furnished transportation to the Belgian frontier only (repeat only)." (19)

Grew also took up with Murphy another problem, namely the possibility that Allied troops would be asked to maintain order should difficulties break out in Belgium upon the king's return. Again, the issue was one of neutrality, but here Grew saw the main problem as being military. He recommended that the matter be left to SHAEF, but indicated that the State Department believed Allied military intervention should be undertaken only as a last resort when the military authorities saw it as necessary, and not merely on Belgian government recommendation. Such instructions are of course not surprising, yet it is interesting to note that this was the only occasion throughout the immediate postwar years that the Allied governments seemed prepared to disregard the wishes of the Belgian government on a matter related to the Royal Question. Again, the motivating cause was a desire to avoid mixing in an internal Belgian affair. (20)

The Allies' desire to keep hands off, yet to facilitate resolution of the disruptive issue, was reflected in their response to a new request by Van Acker. The Prime Minister was now convinced that Leopold had to be forced to abdicate and was ready to use nearly every tool possible to achieve that end. He was aware of rumors that Leopold had shown far too much willingness to acquiesce to Hitler's new order in a by then notorious interview between the two at Berchtesgaden in 1940. The Belgians therefore asked the Allies to interrogate a Dr. Meissner, who had served as a go-between Hitler and Leopold, and Paul Schmidt, the German interpreter at the meeting. The Allies refused to do so, for the issue was strictly Belgian. They did allow the Belgian government to arrange its own

(19) *Ibidem*, Grew to Murphy, June 18, 1945.

(20) *Ibidem*, The British planned to use their troops only to maintain lines of communication of military value, but not to suppress disorders. *Ibidem*, Winant to Stettinius, June 20, 1945.

questioning of the two men. While subsequently published documents permit varying interpretations of the Berchtesgaden interview, there is no doubt that the interrogation of Schmidt in particular strengthened Van Acker's determination to oust the king. (21)

The issue of providing transportation for the king's visitors and maintaining Leopold's household meanwhile remained a problem for the Americans. In Brussels, Charles Sawyer became upset by a dearth of communications from Washington and the apparent failure of personnel there to recognize the extent of the problem. Moreover, he was aware that the United States was following the British lead -- too blindly, in his opinion. On the 23rd of June, he protested that since the 5th of May he had sent some 44 cables to Washington on the royal issue, yet had received only 4 mostly routine cables in return on the same matter plus a copy of a cable to Murphy. The next day he revealed what may have been irritation that the Department was relying on Murphy, for he cabled that Murphy's understanding of the ability of the Belgian government to provide a plane and gasoline to Leopold without Allied help was completely wrong. On the 25th he insisted to his superiors that the United States had a different stake in the matter of possible uprisings in Belgium than did Britain. The problems in different zones could be different; the issue should be approached from a strictly United States standpoint. (22)

The complaints apparently did earn Sawyer some attention, as Grew sent a note of appreciation for the ambassador's thorough reporting. Two other events were more significant, however, in stimulating United States action on its problems in hosting the unwanted king. On July 3, 1945, James F. Byrnes was appointed Secretary of State, as Stettinius became the first American ambassador to the United Nations (23).

Then on July 14 Leopold sent an entirely unexpected message to the prince regent. Having resisted the early efforts of the Belgian cabinet to persuade him to abdicate, and more recently spurning the

(21) *Ibidem*, Grew to American embassy, Brussels, June 22, 1945; Sawyer to Stettinius, July 2, 1945.

(22) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Stettinius, June 23 and 25, 1945.

(23) This shift placed the experienced politician Byrnes, rather than Stettinius, in succession to the presidency which Vice-President Harry S. Truman had assumed upon the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in April.

cabinet's threat of a derogatory debate in the chambers if he did not give way, the king now told his brother that he would not make a decision until learning the people's will through a national consultation. Until the result of such a plebiscite were known, he would remain outside the country.

The refusal of the king to recognize the chamber's veto of his efforts to form a government as an expression of the national will, and the inability of the ruling parties to force abdication, meant stalemate. This in turn spelled long parliamentary debate which would range over both the king's actions and the constitutionality of the proposed consultation. Instead of the quick resolution so confidently expected two months before, the Americans now faced the possibility of making arrangements for Leopold over months or years.

The changed situation caused Byrnes to be in contact with Sawyer apparently while en route to the Potsdam meeting of the Big Three. On the 16th of July the ambassador cabled Byrnes a resume of the plan they had agreed upon the preceding day. Sawyer suggested that General Eisenhower be instructed to tell Leopold that for one week the United States Army would transport him anywhere up to the Belgian borders with Germany, which would take Leopold out of the United States zone of occupation. Meanwhile, no more transportation would be offered to visitors. If the king chose not to take advantage of the offer, at the end of the week he would be left on his own to obtain his rations and transportation however he could. (24)

Grew protested this policy to Byrnes :

"Unilateral action on our part, however justified, tends to place us in the position of an outsider interfering in a family quarrel. I agree that the King's vacillation creates a most unsatisfactory situation and that it is quite understandable that our military authorities should wish to get him off their hands. I believe, however, that it would be unwise to force the issue unless requested to do so by the Belgian government". (25)

(24) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Byrnes, July 16, 1954.

(25) *Ibidem*, Grew to Sawyer, quoting Grew's note to Byrnes, July 18, 1945.

Sawyer quickly countered Grew's message to Byrnes, pointing out that, since the liberation of the king, the United States had transported 138 people in thirty air trips, and had provided local transportation, gas, and rations. The king's household was now even receiving more rations than authorized for U.S. hospitals in the area. Were this to continue, the king would be taking advantage of the good nature of the Americans. The question of having the king in American occupied territory and of his transportation was not a purely Belgian one. The United States had to become involved. The "problem is to be involved as little as possible." (26) Though the British might not concur, Sawyer was "very clearly of the opinion that American interests as distinguished from all others call for some early although of course correct and courteous termination of this situation." (27)

Most of the State Department's attention was turned at this time to preparing President Harry S. Truman for his first meeting with his fellow Allied leaders, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin. Yet while Truman was at Potsdam, Byrnes obtained the president's approval of a policy stating that no air transportation should be provided to Leopold except at the request of the Belgian government. That Truman's signature was required is an interesting indication that apparently views within the State Department were such that the matter had to go to the very top. Before he signed, President Truman had also received a representation from his military chiefs indicating that both they and General Eisenhower were in agreement that broad transportation requests from Leopold had to be curtailed. (28) Sawyer's firm policy did not win out in detail just as his earlier views on transportation had not, but the United States was beginning to extricate itself from its role as generous host.

Leopold himself soon came to understand that he was overstaying his welcome. By the middle of August he had sent word to the American mission in Belgium that he desired to move to Switzerland. The Belgian government apparently had no objection, and the United States military was more than eager to facilitate the royal

(26) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Byrnes, July 19, 1945.

(27) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Byrnes, July 19, 1945.

(28) *Ibidem*, memorandum of Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall to Truman, July 21, 1945; memorandum of Byrnes to Truman, July 22, 1945.

transfer. When the trip was made on October 1, U.S. troops took Leopold only to the Swiss border, not to Geneva, and to "avoid adverse political implications" they transported his luggage only to the railroad station nearest Swiss territory. (29)

The Belgian Royal Question was to remain unresolved until the national consultation of 1950, the return of Leopold III to Brussels, the ensuing riots, and his eventual abdication in favor of Prince Baudouin, who officially became monarch on July 16, 1951. The American involvement in the immediate postwar years came to a close, however, with Leopold's move to Switzerland. Perhaps *involvement* is the wrong word to use, for the entire American effort seemed bent on non-involvement. That was not completely possible because of the king's residence in the American occupation zone. When it became clear that the problem would not evanesce in a few weeks and Sawyer made his point that the United States had to look out for its own interests, rather than simply follow the British lead, action was taken to reduce American exposure and the possibility of complications.

The story of the American role is simple and straightforward. Yet it is of some interest for that very reason. On more than one occasion, questions were raised not entirely *sotto voce* regarding the possibility that the Americans were "holding Leopold prisoner," preventing his return, or in some other way trying to influence the outcome of the Royal Question. (30) The documents suggest that,

(29) *Ibidem*, Sawyer to Byrnes, Sept. 7, 1945.

(30) For example, innuendoes which occasionally appeared in articles in *La Libre Belgique*, a Catholic Brussels daily which supported Leopold III. An article of June 15, 1945, implied that the Allies were not allowing newspapers and documents to reach the king. Leopold himself may have raised some question of this with his intimates. In February 1948 Leopold visited Cuba. While there he was joined by Hugh Gibson, a former American ambassador to Belgium and a personal friend. Gibson served somewhat as a press and protocol agent for Leopold during the Cuban stay. A few weeks later, Gibson was shown in confidence (according to a margin note) a memorandum drafted by W.G. Conklin of the State Department entitled "Claim of King Leopold of Belgium that he was prevented by U.S. authority from returning to Belgium in 1945." This memorandum rehearsed the story of American neutrality on this issue and reputed the claim. No explanation is given for the memorandum's composition; thus it may only be surmised that Gibson made some inquiry with his former colleagues in the Department. -- *Ibidem*.

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if anything, the United States was letting itself be tied in knots in an effort to be neutral, fearing that any action would be misinterpreted. This is in contrast with the impression created by United States policy in later years of meddling involvement in affairs which would have profited from being neglect by the Americans. In this instance, it is evident that both sides desired some nod of favor from the rescuing powers, and this was skillfully avoided.

The documents also show, for those who are interested in the details of the royal affair, how impressed the American observers on the scene were by the quickness of the rise of opposition to Leopold following the return to Brussels of the government-in-exile. Sawyer's cables reveal in this connection how disastrous for the royal cause was the delay in Leopold's liberation and, even more so, his hesitations during the crucial first few days after that liberation.

For Belgium, its people, its ministers, and its king, the Royal Question was a tragic affair. The Americans were happy simply to be out of it without serious damage to their relations with any of the parties involved.

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DE POLITIEK VAN DE VERENIGDE
STATEN EN DE KONINGSKWESTIE
(maart-oktober 1945)
door
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SAMENVATTING

Tussen maart en oktober 1945 vormde de aanwezigheid van de vorst in de Amerikaanse bezettingszone voor de Amerikaanse diplomatie de kern van de hele Belgische Koningskwestie. Het dossier "Leopold" bewaard in het archief van het *State Department* maakt het mogelijk om doorheen de briefwisseling tussen Sawyer, ambassadeur te Brussel, en de verschillende instanties te Washington de afwikkeling van dit probleem te volgen. De Britten beslisten voor wat de politieke aspecten van de zaak aanging. De Verenigde Staten van hun kant

stonden in voor de vorst en voor het vervoer van zijn bezoekers (138 in 30 reizen) en hoopten op een vlugge oplossing van het probleem. Sawyer drong erop aan dat er met de specifiek Amerikaanse belangen voldoende rekening zou gehouden worden; de Verenigde Staten wensten zo vlug mogelijk van de vorstelijke aanwezigheid verlost te worden, zoals van een kruitvat dat op springen stond.

De hier bestudeerde documenten laten toe twee belangrijke punten vast te stellen. Washington werd zeer vlug op de hoogte gesteld van de stijgende antikoningsgezindheid in België en van de mogelijke troebelen waarmede een onmiddellijke terugkeer van de vorst zou gepaard gaan. Afgaande op die gegevens kwam men in Washington al gauw tot een besluit. Het *State Department* wilde onder geen voorwaarde de indruk wekken als zou het partij gekozen hebben binnen het conflict. Het sloot zich dan ook aan — ook op het hoogste niveau — bij het advies van de SHAEF en van de Britten om de verplaatsingen van de koning maar te laten gebeuren, mits de toestemming van de Belgische regering. Het was een grote opluchting toen vernomen werd dat de vorst zich in Zwitserland zou terugtrekken : op die wijze waren de Verenigde Staten van iedere verantwoordelijkheid ontlast. Het artikel stelt duidelijk in het licht hoe belangrijk het was voor het verdere verloop van de Koningskwestie dat het zolang duurde voordat de vorst ontdekt werd en voordat omtrent zijn persoon een definitieve beslissing viel.

LA POLITIQUE DES ETATS UNIS
ET LA QUESTION ROYALE
(mars-octobre 1945)

par

Jonathan E. HELMREICH

RESUME

Entre mars et octobre 1945, la question royale belge se résuma essentiellement pour la diplomatie américaine à la présence du souverain dans sa zone d'occupation. Le dossier "Léopold" dans les archives du Département d'Etat permet de suivre, à travers la correspondance entre Sawyer, ambassadeur à Bruxelles et divers échelons à Washington, les aspects successifs du problème. Si les positions politiques déterminantes furent le fait des Britanniques, les Etats Unis qui avaient la charge du souverain et du transport de ses visiteurs (138 en 30 voyages) espéraient une solution rapide et Sawyer insistait pour que les intérêts spécifiques US soient mieux pris en compte. Ceux-ci consistaient essentiellement à se débarrasser au plus tôt d'une présence qu'ils jugeaient encombrante car potentiellement explosive.

Les documents étudiés permettent de fixer deux points essentiels.

Washington fut très rapidement alerté sur la montée de l'opposition au Roi en Belgique et des troubles possibles consécutifs à un retour immédiat. Sa conduite en fut définitivement fixée. Redoutant par dessus tout d'apparaître comme ayant pris parti dans le conflit, le Département d'Etat — jusqu'au plus haut niveau — se rangea à l'avis du SHAEF et des Britanniques de n'assurer tout déplacement du souverain qu'avec l'assentiment du gouvernement belge. La décision du Roi de gagner la Suisse fut donc accueillie avec le plus grand soulagement car elle dégageait désormais les USA de toute responsabilité dans l'affaire. L'article met clairement en lumière l'importance décisive qu'eurent pour le déroulement ultérieur de la question royale le long délai passé avant la découverte du Roi et les hésitations des premiers jours.