

The Balfour Declaration

How 67 Words Changed History

Rabbi Philip Moskowitz

Boca Raton Synagogue

20th Century Moments that Mattered

Sponsored by Debbie and Simcha Firestone

What we will learn tonight?

- ✿ *The historical context of the Balfour Declaration*
- ✿ *What was life like in Palestine before the Declaration?*
- ✿ *Why did the British support it?*
- ✿ *The Evolution of the Balfour Declaration*
- ✿ *Rabbinic responses to the Balfour Declaration*
- ✿ *The aftermath of the Balfour Declaration*
- ✿ *The British legacy in Palestine*

Britain's Original Sin?

Balfour: Britain's original sin

Britain must atone for the original sin of the Balfour Declaration by helping to end the occupation of Palestine.

Sharif Nashashibi

He is a regular contributor to Al Jazeera English, Al Arabiya News, The National, The Middle East magazine and the Middle East Eye.

November 2 marked the 97th anniversary of the infamous Balfour Declaration, a letter written in 1917 by Britain's then-Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour to Baron Rothschild, a leader of the Zionist movement. In the letter, Balfour said the government viewed

"with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people", and would use its "best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object".

The effect of this declaration was best summed up by the late British author and journalist Arthur Koestler: "One nation solemnly promised to a second nation the country of a third."

It had no moral or legal right to do so.

The declaration contradicted Britain's previous promise of "complete and final liberation" for the Arabs if they rose up against their Ottoman rulers. Their subsequent revolt was pivotal to the weakening of the Ottoman empire, and thereby the outcome of World War I.

Arthur Balfour

Address to the House of Lords



"Our policy may fail; I do not deny that this is an adventure. Are we never to have adventures? Are we never to try new experiments?"

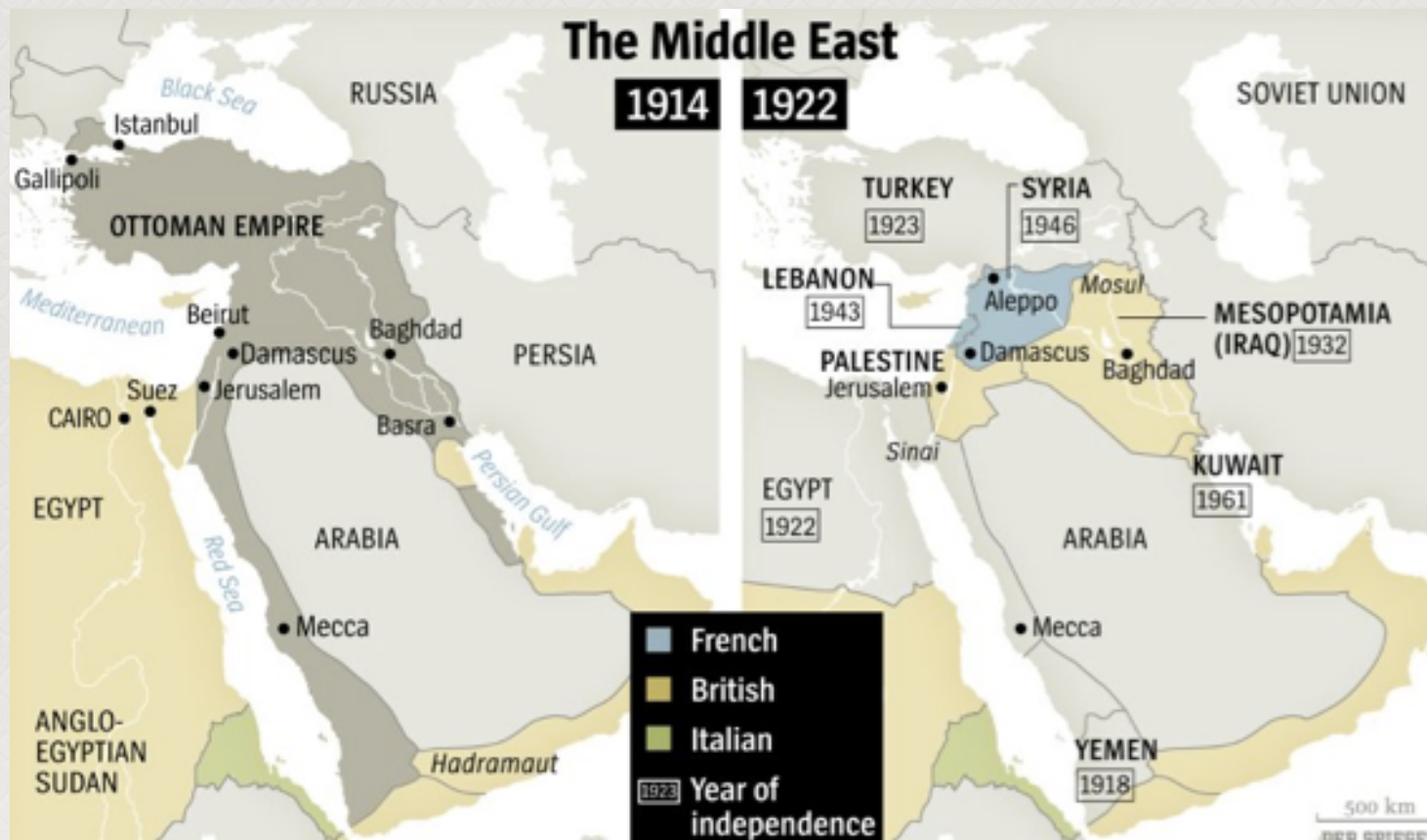
Major Dates in Modern Jewish History

- ✿ *Dreyfus Trial - 1894*
- ✿ *Theodor Herzl publishes *Der Judenstaat, The Jewish State* - February 14, 1896*
- ✿ *1st Zionist Congress, Basle - August 29, 1897*
- ✿ *The Fifth Zionist Congress decides to establish Keren Kayemet LeIsrael (KKL) - The Jewish National Fund. - 1901*
- ✿ *British Government proposes "Uganda Scheme," rejected by the Sixth Zionist Congress. - 1903*
- ✿ *Kishinev massacre increases Jewish exodus from Russia. - 1903*
- ✿ *First World War - 1914*
- ✿ *Sykes-Picot Agreement divides Middle East into spheres of British and French influence. - 1916*
- ✿ *The Balfour Declaration - November 2, 1917*

Palestine Before WWI

- ✿ *700,000 inhabitants*
- ✿ *Extremely poor communities*
- ✿ *Jerusalem was among the largest towns - In 1911 - 60,000 inhabitants (7,000 muslims, 9,000 christians, 40,000 jews)*
- ✿ *“a dirty town...the streets are ill-paved and crooked, many of them being blind alleys, and are excessively dirty after rain.” (T.E. Lawrence)*
- ✿ *Common occurrences of typhoid, smallpox, diphtheria, and other epidemics.*

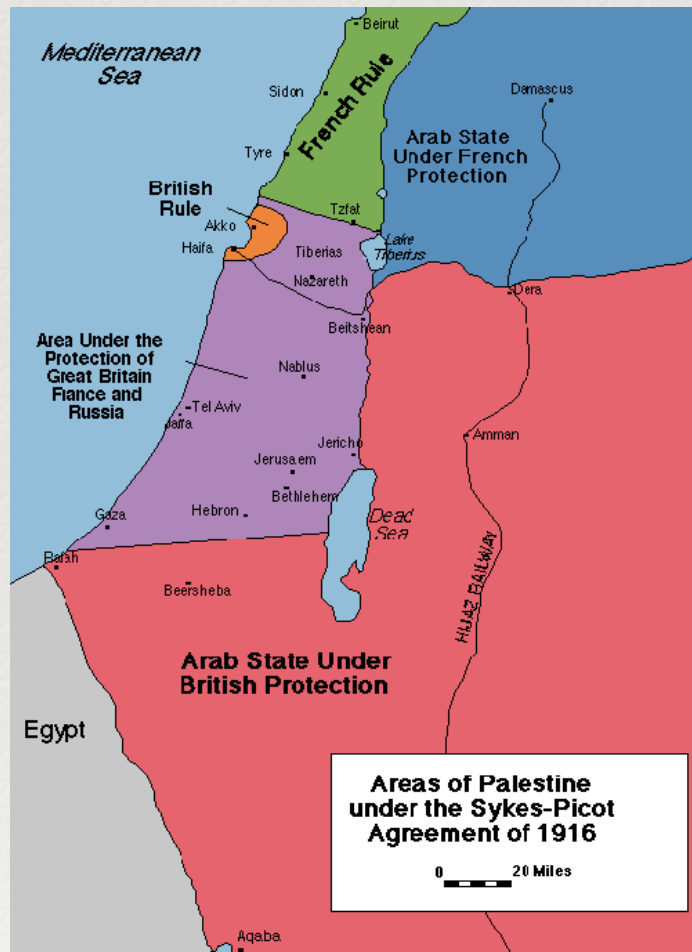
WWI - The Turning Point



British Promises

- ✦ ***The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence*** - *Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, offered Sherif Hussein of Mecca an independent Arab state if he would help the British fight against the Ottoman Turks.*
- ✦ ***Sykes-Picot Agreement*** - *On May 19, 1916, representatives of Great Britain and France secretly reach an accord, known as the Sykes-Picot agreement, by which most of the Arab lands under the rule of the Ottoman Empire are to be divided into British and French spheres of influence with the conclusion of World War I.*

Sykes-Picot Agreement



*“What we did not know in the early stages of our practical negotiations was that a secret tentative agreement, which was later revealed as the 'Sykes-Picot Treaty,' already existed between France and England! And the most curious part of the history is this: although Sir Mark Sykes, of the British Foreign Office, had himself negotiated this treaty with M. Georges Picot of the French Foreign Office, Sir Mark entered into negotiations with us, and gave us his fullest support, without even telling us of the existence of the tentative agreement! He was in effect, modifying his stand in our favour, seeking to revise the agreement so that our claims in Palestine might be given room. But it was **not** from him that we learned of the existence of the agreement, and months passed- months during which we carried on our negotiations with the British and other authorities- before we understood what it was that blocked our progress.” (Chaim Weizmann, Trial and Error, page 238).*

Why Did They Do it?

1. *"The main goal of the Balfour Declaration as far as Britain was concerned was to reduce the opposition of the American Jewish community to going to war on its side. Among the reasons the declaration was written as a letter to Lord Rothschild was also the consideration that the Rothschild family's connections with Jewish financiers in New York would aid in this mission."* - Shlomo Avineri
2. *Britain's leaders hoped that a formal declaration in favor of Zionism would help gain Jewish support for the Allies in neutral countries, in the United States and especially in Russia, where the powerfully anti-Semitic czarist government had just been overthrown with the help of Russia's significant Jewish population.*
3. *A genuine belief in the righteousness of the Zionist cause*
4. *A land bridge between the crucial territories of India and Egypt*



Biography of Chaim Weizmann

- ✿ *Born in Motel, Russia in 1874. Died on November 9, 1952*
- ✿ *Went to cheder and then moved to Pinsk to study science*
- ✿ *Traveled to Germany to study*
- ✿ *In 1899 he received his doctorate in Chemistry and sold an important patent to the German firm Bayer.*
- ✿ *Became an Assistant Professor in Geneva*
- ✿ *From Geneva, he took a post in exile (University of Manchester)*

World War I 1914-1918

THE TURNING POINT

- *Weizmann is considered to be the father of industrial fermentation. He used the bacterium *Clostridium acetobutylicum* (the Weizmann organism) to produce acetone. Acetone was used in the manufacture of cordite explosive propellants critical to the Allied war effort.*
- *Brought him into close contact with British leaders, including, Herbert Samuel and Lloyd George.*

Lord Arthur Balfour

British Foreign Secretary



I looked at my listener, and suddenly became afraid that this appearance of interest and courtesy might be nothing more than a mask. I remember that I was sweating blood and I tried to find some less ponderous way of expressing myself. I was ready to bow myself out of the room, but Balfour held me back, and put some questions to me regarding the growth of the movement. He had heard of "Dr. Herz"—a very distinguished leader, who had founded and organized it. I ventured to correct him, pointing out that Herzl had indeed placed the movement on a new footing, and had given the tradition a modern political setting; but Herzl had died young; and he had left us this legacy of Uganda, which we were trying to liquidate.

→ Then suddenly I said: "Mr. Balfour, supposing I were to offer you Paris instead of London, would you take it?"

He sat up, looked at me, and answered: "But, Dr. Weizmann, we have London."

"That is true," I said. "But we had Jerusalem when London was a marsh."

He leaned back, continued to stare at me, and said two things which I remember vividly. The first was: "Are there many Jews who think like you?"

I answered: "I believe I speak the mind of millions of Jews whom you will never see and who cannot speak for themselves, but with whom I could pave the streets of the country I come from."

To this he said: "If that is so, you will one day be a force."

Shortly before I withdrew, Balfour said: "It is curious. The Jews I meet are quite different."

I answered: "Mr. Balfour, you meet the wrong kind of Jews."

Tension with Assimilationists

- ✿ *Limits the claims of Jews for full citizenship in all lands (national home of the Jewish People)*
- ✿ *Jews are dedicated, heart and soul, to the welfare of the countries in which they live. There should be no double allegiances.*
- ✿ *What about those who can't emigrate?*
- ✿ *“race” and “religion” are against post WWI democratic principles.*

Tension with Assimilationists

will to live. But I reserved for the end of my address to the conference what weighed most heavily on my mind. I said: "It is a matter of deep humiliation that we cannot stand united in this great hour. But it is not the fault of the Zionist Organization. It is, perhaps, not the fault of our opponents. It must be attributed to the conditions of our life in the Dispersion, which have caused in Jewry a cleavage difficult to bridge even at a time like this. It is unfortunate that there still exists a small minority which disputes the very existence of the Jews as a nation. But there need be no misgivings on that account; for I have no hesitation in saying that if it comes to a plebiscite and a test, there can be no doubt on which side the majority of the Jews will be found. And I warn you that this test is bound to come—and come sooner, perhaps, than we think. . . . We do not want to offer to the world a spectacle of a war of brothers. We are surrounded by too many enemies to be able to afford this luxury. But we warn those who will force an open breach that they will find us prepared to stand up united in defense of the cause which is sacred to us. We shall not allow anybody to interfere with the hard

Drafts of the Declaration

July 18, 1917

His Majesty's Government, after considering the aims of the Zionist Organization, accept the principle of recognizing Palestine as the National Home of the Jewish people and the right of the Jewish people to build up its national home under a protection to be established at the conclusion of the war, following upon the successful issue of the war.

His Majesty's Government are prepared to accept in favor of this principle the grant of internal autonomy to the Jewish nationality in Palestine, freedom of immigration for Jews, and the establishment of a Jewish National Colonizing Corporation for the re-establishment and economic development of the country.

The conditions and forms of the internal autonomy and a Charter for the Jewish National Colonizing Corporation should, in the view of His Majesty's Government, be elaborated in detail and determined with the representatives of the Zionist Organization.

October 4, 1917

"His Majesty's Government are prepared to accept in favor the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use its best endeavors to facilitate the realization of this object; it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed in any other country by such Jews who are fully contented with their existing nationality and citizenship."

Back and Forth



*Instead of the establishment
of a Jewish Nation Home,
would it not be more
desirable to use the word re-
establishment?*

*'Jewish people' not
'Jewish race'*

Balfour Declaration 1917

Foreign Office,
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country'

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Y. in
Arthur Balfour

It's a boy!



While the cabinet was in session, approving the final text, I was waiting outside, this time within call. Sykes brought the document out to me, with the exclamation: "Dr. Weizmann, it's a boy!"

Well—I did not like the boy at first. He was not the one I had expected. But I knew that this was a great departure. I telephoned my wife, and went to see Achad Ha-am.

Responses from Palestine



Celebration in Haifa after the Balfour Declaration



Hanbill the day of the Declaration

Rav Kook

Letter from Rav Kook to Lord Rothschild



ב"ה ך"ג מרחשון תרע"ח.

ברכה מציון ומקודש להאדון המרומם לארד ראטשילד נ"י, ה'תרע"ח

שלו' רב

אדוני הנעלה,

מרוב רגשי שמחתי על הסכמתה העדינה של ממשלת בריטניה, ירום הודה, על הגשמת תקותנו הלאומית, להשיב לנו את ארץ אבותינו אשר זכית אתה אדון יקר להיות הציר המבשר את הבשורה הטובה הזאת, אשר קבלת מאת הדרת המיניסטר הפנימי מר באלפאר.

הנני לברך את כבודו מעומק לבבי בברכה נאמנה, שתחזקנה ידיו בעבודת הקודש של בנין עמנו על ארץ חמדתנו. והזכות הגדול הזה של בשורת ראשית הצעד של צמיחת קרן ישועת ישראל, יעמד לו לראות בקרוב את משאת נפשנו בהתמלאותה בכל כבודה והדרה, כי יושע יהודה וישראל ישכן לבטח על ארצו, ושבת אשור שבת מלכותנו יהיה מעוז ומחסה לשלו' עולמים לכל העמים, כדבר ד' הנאמן ביד נביאיו הקדושים, ולתפארת נצח לדורות עולם, לממלכת בריטניה, הגדולה והנאורה, אשר משמים נפל עליה הגורל, להיות הראשונה בעבודת הקודש הזאת של בנין גוי קדוש על אדמת הקודש.

ברגשי כבוד מאד כבירים, ובצפיית ישועה קרובה לגוי קו"קו ומבוסה, אשר בזאו נהרים ארצו.

הק' אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק

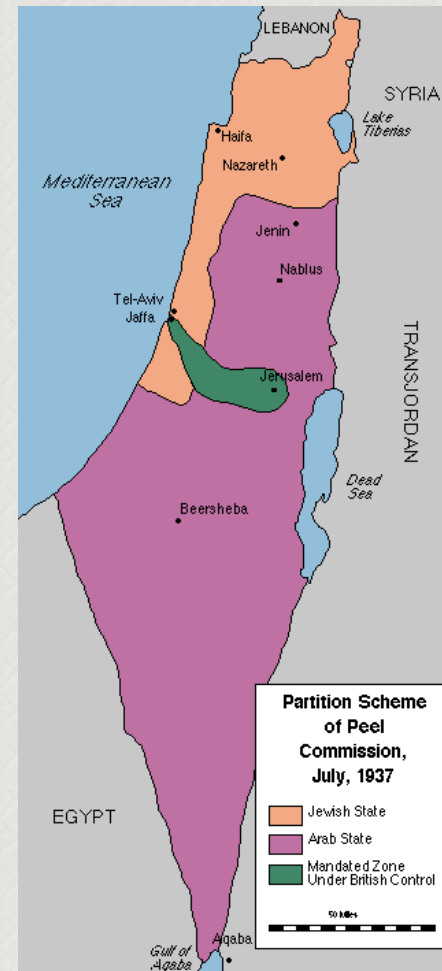
Palestine Arab Revolt - 1936-1939

- ✿ *An end to Jewish immigration to Palestine*
- ✿ *An end to the transfer of lands to Jewish owners*
- ✿ *A new “general representative government”*



The Peel Commission

At the height of the 1936-39 disturbances, a royal commission of inquiry came to Palestine from London to investigate the roots of the Arab-Jewish conflict and to propose solutions. The commission, headed by Lord Robert Peel, heard a great deal of testimony in Palestine, and in July 1937 issued its recommendations: to abolish the Mandate and partition the country between the two peoples.



White Paper

Issued on May 17, 1939, it rejected the Peel Commission's partition plan on the grounds that it was not feasible.

- ✿ *Limited Jewish immigration to Palestine to 75,000 over the next five years*
- ✿ *It ended Jewish land purchases*
- ✿ *Called for Independence for Palestine within 10 years*
- ✿ *It is NOT the British policy that Palestine become a Jewish State.*

White Paper

"His Majesty's Government believe that the framers of the Mandate in which the Balfour Declaration was embodied could not have intended that Palestine should be converted into a Jewish State against the will of the Arab population of the country. [...] His Majesty's Government therefore now declare unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State. They would indeed regard it as contrary to their obligations to the Arabs under the Mandate, as well as to the assurances which have been given to the Arab people in the past, that the Arab population of Palestine should be made the subjects of a Jewish State against their will." *White Paper of 1939*

historical facts vs. modern recognition

“300 years ago, there came to the New World a boat, and its name was the Mayflower. The Mayflower’s landing on Plymouth Rock was one of the great historical events in the history of England and in the history of America. But I would like to ask any Englishman sitting here on the commission, what day did the Mayflower leave port? What date was it? I’d like to ask the Americans: do they know what date the Mayflower left port in England? How many people were on the boat? Who were their leaders? What kind of food did they eat on the boat?”

“More than 3300 years ago, long before the Mayflower, our people left Egypt, and every Jew in the world, wherever he is, knows what day they left. And he knows what food they ate. And we still eat that food every anniversary. And we know who our leader was. And we sit down and tell the story to our children and grandchildren in order to guarantee that it will never be forgotten. And we say our two slogans: ‘Now we may be enslaved, but next year, we’ll be a free people.’”

David Ben Gurion, testimony before the Peel Commission, January 7, 1937

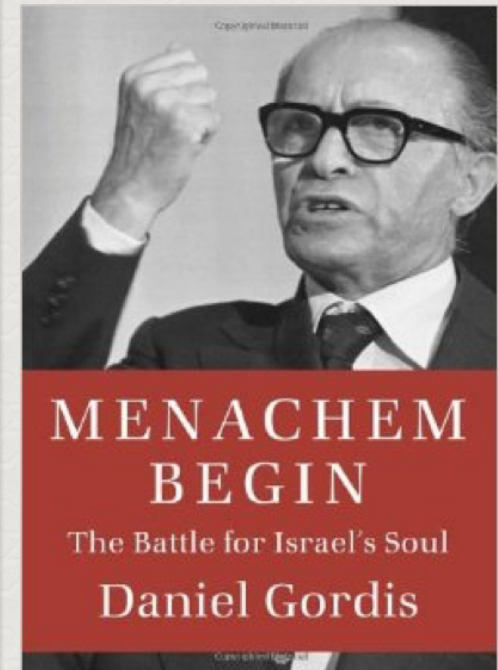
historical facts vs. modern recognition

I say on behalf of the Jews that the Bible is our Mandate, the Bible which was written by us, in our own language, in Hebrew in this very country. That is our Mandate. It is only recognition of this right which was expressed in the Balfour Declaration.

*David Ben Gurion, testimony before the Peel Commission,
January 7, 1937*

The British Legacy

Begin had never shared the prevailing Jewish gratitude to the British Empire for the Balfour Declaration. In 1943, awaiting news of his parents—who like millions of European Jews had been barred by the British from finding sanctuary in Palestine—he was more convinced than ever that if the Jews were intent on creating their own sovereign state in their ancestral homeland, there would be no choice but to treat the British as the enemies that they were. Given what was unfolding in Europe, the Jews, more than ever before, needed a country of their own; and the British—who were preventing homeless Jews from entering Palestine and were thus complicit in the ongoing deaths of thousands of Jews—would depart Palestine only if staying became too costly and painful.



What is the legacy of
20th century zionism?

The ability to choose our destiny