

BALFOUR DECLARATION

The Balfour Declaration issued by the British was but a single sentence consisting of sixty-seven precisely chosen words, that took more than ten months and at least seven drafts to create. Its purpose was to express sympathy for the Zionist desire for a Jewish nation in Palestine. It also contained a now-forgotten statement of understanding that existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine were not to be disturbed.

The Declaration has been condemned by one historian as the greatest mistake in Britain's history. Another criticized it as "one nation's solemn promise to give a second nation the country of a third, which belonged to a fourth."

The Declaration resulted from two decades of intense effort by two Zionists, Theodore Herzl and his successor, Chaim Weitzman, to gain approval of their goal to establish a homeland for Jews in Palestine. Zionism was spawned in Czarist Russia as an effort to escape the pogroms, persecution, massacres and social ostracism which the Jews endured in Russia since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. The situation was exacerbated by the assassination of Czar Alexander II by six revolutionaries (including one Jewish woman) in 1881. Life for Russian Jews deteriorated to the point that they were left with three options: To emigrate to a Western country, to stay home and work for the revolution, or to emigrate to Palestine and establish a separate homeland. Only a very small faction (the founders of Zionism) chose Palestine.

At this point in time, Hertzl appeared on the scene (in France). Stimulated by the famous Dreyfus Affair, he published his tract, *The Jewish State* which used as its thesis that anti-Semitism could not be eradicated, and that the only solution for Jews was to create a nation for Jews, in Palestine. Although Hertzl sought endorsement of his solution from European and Middle-Eastern governments, he was unsuccessful. He did, however, establish a friendship with an individual, David Lloyd George, who fourteen years later became the British Prime Minister. Through an alternative British offer of land in Uganda, he also met Arthur James Balfour, the future author of the Balfour Declaration, and gained Balfour's acceptance of the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Hertzl died in 1904 at the age of 44.

The importance of Zionism was eclipsed by the circumstances leading up to World War I. The concept lay dormant for fourteen years. It was awakened by a combination of politics, chance, the ability to make the best of an opportunity and upon forceful influential personalities.

Chaim Weitzman emigrated from Russia to Manchester, England in 1906. Manchester was an active center of British Zionism, and the political home of Arthur Balfour, David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill. These individuals were brought together by C.P. Snow, an influential newspaper editor and Zionist. Snow was also Lloyd George's personal confidant. Weitzman first met the group in 1906, and profoundly impressed Balfour with his Zionist concepts.

The British situation in 1915 during World War I was desperate. A series of disastrous defeats, the toll taken by U-boats, and more than a million and a half Allied casualties portended a bleak outlook. It was thought Britain could lose the war. Britain needed help from an outside source, but U.S. President Woodrow Wilson had already rebuffed overtures to join the cause. Some way had to be found to coerce the U.S. join the Allied war effort.

History now intervened. Lloyd George opened his campaign against the Turks in Palestine, which gave a signal to Weitzman that the ultimate fate of that country was in question. Weitzman met with Mark Sykes, the official who was designated as responsible for post-war disposition of the Middle East, to discuss Zionism. Sykes was opposed. But two days later, after Germany announced its policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, Sykes reversed his position. It is thought that this was caused by an agreement that British Zionists would try to persuade the U.S. to enter the war, in exchange for British endorsement of the Zionist proposal for Palestine.

The preparation of the Balfour Declaration began in June 1917. Lloyd George was reluctant to release the document without U.S. approval. Political machinations within the U.S. at the highest level of government resulted in eventual approval of the Declaration, on the condition that President Wilson's endorsement would not be publicly disclosed. Specifics of the details taken by the Zionist leaders to influence the final decision are not known. The Declaration was issued on November 2, 1917.

Subsequent post-war statements and circumstantial evidence tend to add credence that granting Zionist demands for Palestine was a *quid pro quo* for the Zionist commitment to secure the entry of the U.S. entry into World War I.

BALL FOUR

Thirty-three years ago a young knuckleballer, Jim Bouton, wrote a book entitled *Ball Four*. In the words of its author, “[I]t was not your typical sports book about the importance of clean living and inspired coaching.” *Ball Four* was Bouton’s unvarnished assessment of what really went on in baseball. It did not glorify home run hitters or strikeout kings.

Ball Four pulled the covers off to show baseball as the imperfect and often silly sport it is. It pointed out that ballplayers shared the same human foibles we all have. But Bouton’s most scathing criticism fell on baseball owners and management who abused the “reserve clause” to restrict salaries and control ball players. The Commissioner of Baseball called Bouton into his office and demanded that he issue a statement that the book was not true. Bouton refused.

Ball Four stunned the sports world. Bouton was damned as a traitor, a pariah and became an outcast. The San Diego Padres burned his book. To this date Bouton is not invited to Baseball’s Oldtimer’s Game.

While *Ball Four* may have changed the face of modern baseball forever, *Ball Four* is not the real subject of my paper tonight. Rather it is a homonym for another and much shorter publication of approximately the same title that is my real topic: **The Balfour Declaration**. More specifically, a review of the origins and reasons the British government issued it.

The Balfour Declaration is a single sentence of only 67 words, all very carefully chosen in a process that took more than ten months. Its purpose was to express British sympathy with the Zionist desire to establish a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. It also contained a long since forgotten statement of understanding that nothing would be done to disturb the rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.

The letter went through at least seven successive drafts over by more than a dozen contributors, each with different agendas and conflicting goals. The British refused to make it public until after it had been secretly approved by the President of the United States; an approval given only on the condition that his endorsement not be publicly revealed. It too changed the face of the world — this time the political world and not baseball — and has given us the present day State of Israel.

What prompted the Balfour Declaration? Its origins are still shrouded in a mystery of conflicting accusations, broken promises and deliberate ambiguities. But as one

historian put it, “It is a political document not a legal document.” Another historian, Barbara Monroe of Oxford, condemns it as the greatest mistake in Britain’s imperial history. Arthur Koestler criticized the letter as one nation’s solemn promise to give a second nation the country of third, which belonged to a fourth.

Theories abound as to why the British issued the Declaration.

One theory is that the letter was deliberately contrived to allow the British to get control of Palestine as a direct route to India and a protective buffer for the Suez Canal. A second theory is the letter was given to the Zionist leader Chaim Weitzman in gratitude for his contribution to the British war effort in WWI — the discovery of synthetic acetone. Another holds the letter was simply inspired by the fervently held religious beliefs of David Lloyd George and his cabinet that the Jews were entitled to return to Palestine. Still another is the letter was given in exchange for the Zionist commitment to secure support for the British war effort from Jews in the United States and Russia.

More than 85 years later the answers to the how, why and who which led to the issuance of the Balfour Declaration are still unknown. My purpose this evening is to explore the background and circumstances which led to the Declaration, with attention on the theory the Declaration was given in return for the Zionist’s agreement to secure the U.S. entry into World War I.

Let’s first examine the historic context from which the Balfour Declaration emerged.

The Balfour Declaration was the culmination of the 20-year efforts of two early Zionists, Theodore Herzl and Chaim Weitzman, to gain international approval of the Zionist goal for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It was an effort begun in the waning days of the Ottoman Empire completed at a time in World War I when Britain was struggling to survive.

Zionism was an idea first conceived in the 19th Century Jewish ghettos of Czarist Russia. Its initial goal was to create a separate homeland in Palestine for Jews seeking refuge from the pogroms and wretched conditions imposed on Jews by a Russian society that hated them. To a lesser extent it was the culmination of 1,800 years of persecution, massacres and social ostracism which had befallen the Jews after destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D.

The wall of anti-Semitism that had plagued the Jews for almost two millennium was first breached after the French Revolution when France decreed the emancipation of its Jews. The enlightenment had finally opened society’s doors

to Jews for full citizenship rights. Over the next hundred years, Jews moved from the ghetto into the mainstream of European life.

The Origins of Zionism

You may ask, with the entry into full citizenship in Europe, what relevance did a return to Palestine have for assimilated Jews? None. But Jewish assimilation in the 19th Century was a phenomenon of Western Europe — not Russia. The Enlightenment had stopped at the Russian border. There, anti-Semitism was not only rampant it was the official policy of the Czarist government.

Throughout its history the Russians had banned Jews absolutely. It was only after the partition of Poland in the late 18th Century that Russia acquired over a million Jews. Immediately it restricted them to an area known as the “Pale of the Settlement.” There they were referred to as “the Jewish Problem,” a problem to be solved through either assimilation or expulsion.

The Russians spent the better part of the 19th Century creating an enormous system of discriminatory laws and bureaucracy to regulate the life of the Jew within the Pale. Some were never enforced and what remained could be, and often was, circumvented by bribery. Corruption was pervasive and persecution by pogroms was widespread.

Such was the condition of the Russian Jews in 1881 when six revolutionaries (including a Jewish woman) assassinated Czar Alexander II. Within weeks a resurgence of pogroms began that hadn’t been seen since the 16th Century. Literally millions of Jews took flight to America and Western Europe.

The aftermath of the 1881 pogroms created a deep spiritual malaise in Russian Jewry, especially those who had banked on the enlightenment of the west to liberalize Czarist Russia. These Jews had abandoned religious orthodoxy awaiting the expected emancipation to take hold in Russia. Now the pogroms had convinced them this would never happen. Having lost their faith in emancipation and in God, these Russian Jews were left with three options:

1. Immigrate to a Western country with hope of being assimilated;
1. Stay home and work for the revolution; or
1. Immigrate to Palestine and establish a separate homeland.

Most Russian Jews chose to migrate West or stay put. Only a very small fraction chose Palestine. It was this fraction who founded the Zionist Movement; the return to

Palestine for the purpose of establishing a Jewish home. Until the early 1880s the return to Palestine was limited to discussions in very small circles. It was an idea that had never taken flight. The pogroms of 1881 changed all that.

In the Spring of 1881 groups of young Jewish students met in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities to discuss how the Zionist idea would be put in motion. From these meetings emerged the first group of young Russian Jews — The Lovers of Zion — who would immigrate to Palestine in the Spring of 1882. Zionism had been born.

Zionism was a Russian concept. Until 1895 it had little attraction for the assimilated Jews of Western Europe. While anti-Semitism in Europe may have lurked below the surface, the enlightenment Jews were confident that their liberal governments would protect them from any excesses. Certainly they thought this was the case in France — the country that after all had spawned the enlightenment. But either through ignorance or self-delusion anti-Semitism was enjoying a renaissance in France — particularly among the right wing elements of the Catholic Church and the army.

It was onto this stage that Theodor Herzl, an assimilated Hungarian Jew, first appeared. Herzl had been trained as a lawyer and had been posted to Paris as a journalist for the *New Free Press* in Vienna. One of his first assignments was to cover the infamous trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus. Dreyfus, the only Jew serving on the French general staff, had been falsely accused of treason on trumped-up charges. Two weeks after attending the trial where Dreyfus was found guilty, Herzl was one of the few journalists to watch Dreyfus's final humiliation as he was publicly stripped of his rank and found "unworthy to bear arms." Herzl watched in amazement as Dreyfus protested his innocence and was marched around the parade ground while the crowd shouted "Death to Dreyfus, and death to the Jews."

The Dreyfus Affair was an awakening for Herzl. Within the year he published his now famous tract, *The Jewish State*. Its thesis was simple: assimilation had not worked for the Jew because anti-Semitism could not be eradicated. In the eyes of the gentiles a Jew would always be a Jew. It was ridiculous for a Jew to think he could assimilate into a non-Jewish world. What was needed was a Jewish state to provide them with sovereignty over an area sufficient to meet their national needs. And Herzl knew just the place: Palestine.

Herzl was not the first to express the idea. He was though the first to give Zionism a tangible political expression. More than that he was willing to, and did, devote the rest of his life to achieving that goal. But all to no avail. In 1904, after nine years of diplomatic and organizational failures, Theodor Herzl died at the age of 44. He had traversed the whole of Europe and the Middle East searching for the world power which would endorse the idea of creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Each time he was rejected.

In the last years of his life Herzl made two contacts that were to prove invaluable to the Zionist cause. The first occurred when on a chance referral, he hired a Manchester lawyer to represent the Zionist effort to establish a temporary Jewish homeland in the Sinai. The effort failed but in doing so he struck up a friendship with the lawyer who was not only politically well-connected but a biblical scholar who fully subscribed to messianic right of the Jews to a homeland in Palestine. That lawyer was David Lloyd George; the man who 14 years later would become the British Prime Minister and approve the issuance of the Balfour Declaration.

Failing to secure a temporary home in the Sinai, Herzl's next and final effort was to consider a British offer of land in Uganda as a temporary Jewish Home. It was on this final occasion that Herzl came in contact with the man who was destined to author the Declaration: Arthur James Balfour. The Uganda offer was ultimately rejected by the Zionists after Herzl's death, but not before Balfour had been fully briefed and accepted the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

In many quarters it was widely thought that the Zionist movement had died with its creator. Herzl had founded it, inspired it, and led it. And in the wake of his death were left unsolved problems, new factions and in-fighting among his followers. But political Zionism didn't die with Herzl's death — it simply was eclipsed by a continuum of events that ultimately led to the outbreak of World War I in the Summer of 1914.

Herzl's greatest legacy was the diplomatic currency he had given to the concept of Zionism and the perception created in the eyes of world leaders that Zionism had worldwide support. This was hardly true of course. Less than one percent of world Jewry supported the concept, and in most Jewish quarters Zionism was opposed as an anathema to the Judaic religious tradition.

So how, you may ask, after twenty years of failure did a movement which had lain dormant for almost 14 years suddenly resurrect to a successful conclusion in less than ten months? The answer turns on a combination of factors: political horse trading, chance and the ability to seize opportunity. And, like most major turns in world history, it turned on forceful personalities.

Chief among them was Chaim Weitzman. Weitzman was a Russian Jew who had grown up in the Pale and knew firsthand the horror of the pogroms in Czarist Russia. Through skill, persistence and unflappable patience, he gained a doctorate in chemistry and arrived in Manchester, England in 1904 as a professor of biochemistry. He was an avowed Zionist who cultivated friends in high places.

Weitzman's arrival in Manchester was to prove a boom to the Zionist cause. Manchester was the second largest city in Britain and a very active center for Zionists. More importantly it was the political home of three key figures who would later be instrumental in the issuance of the Balfour Declaration: Arthur J. Balfour, David Lloyd George, and Winston Churchill. The catalyst for bringing these powerful figures together was C.P. Snow, the influential editor of the liberal *Manchester Guardian*. Snow was not only pro-Zionist, he was David Lloyd George's closest personal confidant.

Weitzman's first contact with this group was in 1906 when Balfour asked him for an explanation as to why the Zionists had rejected the offer of Uganda as a homeland. Weitzman, who with other Russian Jews had been the principal objector to the Uganda idea, provided this response:

"I said [Weitzman later recalled], 'Mr. Balfour, if you were offered Paris instead of London would you take it? Would you take Paris instead of London?'" Balfour looked surprised, but responded, "But London is ours!" Weitzman replied "Yes, but Jerusalem was ours when London was a marsh."

It was this exchange that left a profound impression on Balfour, not only about Weitzman but the Zionist cause about which he spoke.

Now let's fast forward to 1915.

The British had just suffered disastrous defeats at Gallipoli and in the Mesopotamia. Lord Kitchner, then directing the British war effort, did not want to commit any further British troops to a second front in the Middle East against the Turks. Rather, he sought to enlist Arab nationalism to do the job instead. To secure Arab support for this purpose, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Hugh McMahan, exchanged letters with the Arab leadership which committed the British to support Arab independence after the war in an area that generally included Palestine. No mention was made of Zionist interests.

Less than a year later another Kitchner protégé, Mark Sykes, concluded another secret agreement with the French agreeing to a post-war division of the Middle East between them, including joint control of Palestine. Again, there was no mention of Zionist interests.

Now let's shift to 1916.

By late 1916 the wartime fortunes of Britain and its Allies were in serious decline. By that date Lord Kitchner was dead, the victim of a U-boat sinking, and both Britain and France's casualty rates were soaring. Each side had lost more than a million and a half

men apiece. Britain alone lost 60,000 the first day in the Battle of the Somme. They continued to be bogged down in the senseless and systematic slaughter of trench warfare.

The cost in money and human life was enormous and there was little end in sight. Moreover there was a growing uneasiness that Britain might well lose the war. Its manpower reserves were greatly depleted; it was running out of money; and its merchant marine was losing tonnage to the German U-boats at an astonishing rate. Its Russian ally was facing revolution and its troops were threatening to mutiny. Overtures to the United States to join the Allied cause had been rebuffed by Woodrow Wilson. He had just won a very close election on a campaign theme that he had kept his country out of war. Where could Britain turn?

While the answer was obvious at the time, at the time it lay beyond the grasp of the British government. But some way had to be found to persuade the United States to join the Allied war effort. But how could the British overcome the United States' refusal to abandon its neutrality position? Even after Germans had sunk the *Lusitania* in 1915, the United States refused to go to war. Its refusal was based on a number of factors: (1) Woodrow Wilson viewed himself as a peacemaker, not a militarist; (2) the German community in the United States was substantially comprised of both immigrants and first generation Germans who opposed any sort of conflict with their mother country; (3) there was an equally large number of immigrant and first generational Irish who were simply anti-British; and (4) the large Jewish population in America stubbornly refused support for any cause which would aid Czarist Russia.

At this juncture the historic cross currents were beginning to align in favor of Zionism. First, Lloyd George opened his campaign against the Turks in Palestine which sent a clear signal to Chaim Weitzman that the ultimate fate of that country was in play. In response, Weitzman sought out Mark Sykes, the British official whose job it was to negotiate the post war disposition of the Middle East.

Weitzman's first meeting with Sykes was on January 28, 1917. At that meeting Sykes refused to consider the Zionist demands. Neither did he tell Weitzman about his earlier agreement with France for the division of the Middle East.

Two days later, the German government announced its new policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. Still Wilson, while critical of the German decision, refrained from declaring it an act of war. A week later, on February 7, 1917, Weitzman met again with Sykes, a meeting at which Sykes later admitted he reversed his earlier position and agreed that Britain would join in support of the Zionist proposal for Palestine.

What caused this reversal of Sykes' earlier position when he had adamantly opposed the Zionist proposal? Could it have been an agreement that Britain would provide

an endorsement of the Zionist proposal for Palestine in return for the Zionists persuading the United States to enter into the war?

There are several factors which support this conclusion. One was the close relationship between Woodrow Wilson and Louis Brandeis, one of America's foremost lawyers. Brandeis was a committed Zionist and in 1915 had been elected head of the American Zionist Organization. As a preeminent lawyer he had publicly supported Wilson's presidency in 1912 and in fact authored his campaign platform. Brandeis continued to be a close confidant and advisor, and in 1916 Wilson appointed him to the Supreme Court. Notwithstanding his new judicial role, Brandeis remained an active Zionist supporter and behind-the-scenes advisor to the president. He firmly believed that to be a good Jewish American, one had to be a Zionist.

Drafting of the Balfour Declaration began in June, 1917. By the Fall of 1917 it had gone through the seventh draft. When a final draft was agreed upon in mid-October 1917, Lloyd George was hesitant to release it publicly, insisting it must receive a final approval from Wilson. When Wilson's approval was solicited that Fall, his first response was to delay release of the document. Shortly thereafter, Justice Brandeis was contacted and asked to meet Colonel House, Wilson's chief aide, about the matter. Two days later after the House-Brandeis meeting, Wilson reversed himself, approving the Declaration — but only on the condition that his endorsement not be publicly disclosed. On November 2, 1917 the Balfour Declaration issued.

The details as to the meetings and approaches made by Zionist leaders to influence the United States' decision to enter their war are not recorded. However, there are numerous references in the post-war statements of British and Zionist leaders that in fact this is exactly what happened.

On the floor of the House of Commons in 1922, Winston Churchill acknowledged that the Balfour Declaration issued in consideration of the effort which the Jews provided, but “particularly in the United States . . .”. On another occasion he stated:

“The Balfour Declaration was not a promise given for sentimental reasons; it was a practical measure taken in the interests of a common cause at a moment when that cause could not afford to neglect any factor of moral or material assistance.”

An article in the *London Times* by the official biographer of Lloyd George stated that the British offer to restore Palestine to the Jews was done knowing full well that it would attract the “very powerful influence of American Jews, including Judge Brandeis, the friend and advisor of President Wilson.” Samuel Landman, secretary of the World Zionist Organization, was much more explicit:

“The only way to induce the American President to come into the war was to secure the cooperation of Zionist Jews by promising them Palestine, and thus enlist and mobilize the powerful forces of Zionist Jews in America and elsewhere in favor of the Allies on a *quid pro quo* contract basis.”

Even Chaim Weitzman acknowledged in later life that the negotiations between his Zionist colleagues and Mark Sykes had been about seeking Zionist support for the Allied cause in America.

No doubt a multitude of motives lay behind the Balfour Declaration, including political, diplomatic, and strategic considerations, but a substantial body of circumstantial evidence points to a Zionist commitment to secure the entry of the United States into the war in America.

“BALL FOUR”

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