

The Serendipitous
Evolution of the
Balfour Declaration
of November 2, 1917

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By

Paul Goldstein and Eyal Lewin

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PREFACE

The Balfour Declaration was one of the most important events in the history of the Jewish people prior to the Holocaust, signaling the beginning of a new era of self-determination in the reconstituted Jewish homeland after nearly 2000 years of life in exile. While commemorated every year as a milestone in the history of the Jewish nation, very few of the celebrants have any knowledge or awareness of the momentous historical background that led to this historic event.

The purpose of this study is to provide an all-inclusive understanding of the complex geopolitical elements that had shaped the facts on the ground in the Middle East. Analyzing the chain of events that led to the Balfour Declaration in a unique holistic approach, we demonstrate how the national interests of the nations involved in the World War I theatre intersected with those of the Jewish nation in the final phase of its long march towards political sovereignty. Like the multiple parts of precision clockwork, each element, regardless of shape or size, played an essential part in the functioning of the whole, while the absence of one of them could have altered the outcome of the entire process.

Even scholars of Israel studies have little awareness to what this comprehensive study validates, and that is – that the Balfour Declaration was not merely the product of a short-lived diplomatic episode during the penultimate year of World War I. The process that led to the Balfour Declaration was largely driven by the relentless persecution of Russia's Jewish population which activated and fueled the development of political Zionism during the 128-year period that started with the French Revolution and culminated with the promulgation of the Declaration in 1917.

This study started with an extensive review of the secondary literature dealing with the Balfour Declaration and any of its aspects. Most of the secondary accounts were found to provide only episodic fragments of the subject matter and were often tainted by hindsight-driven subjective biases. By limiting their research to specific aspects and episodic time frames, the various authors did not provide an overall explanation of the processes that led to the proclamation of the Balfour Declaration. Consequently, the focus of this study moved to seek information in primary sources. These included archives, diaries, autobiographies and first-hand accounts. Major

sources included *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, without which it is impossible to draw a realistic picture of the man's personality, ideas, diplomatic skills and unsparing efforts towards the realization of his objectives; and the complete minutes of the 1917 British War Cabinet meetings which covered all the issues related to the final wording of the Balfour Declaration.

To avoid any distortion of the historic realities that constituted the background to the Balfour Declaration, each episode of this study was insulated from rearview mirror interpretations of the geopolitical developments that unfolded in the wake of its proclamation post-November 2, 1917.

A large body of literature was found to be devoted to the roles played by the British government and the other World War I participants in the development of the Balfour Declaration. This has allowed this study to develop a detailed answer to the question as to what led the British government to commit itself to a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

By methodically tracking the stages that transformed the Jewish ethos from the amorphous stage of social and political impotence in the oppressive world of the Diaspora to the politically dynamic pursuit of the return to sovereign nationhood in the land of their forefathers, this study has identified three major developments that fueled this arduous journey and which are mostly wanting in the existing literature. Without the development of these crucial independent variables there would have been no political Jewish representation for the British government to engage with as part of its World War I strategy in the Middle East, and no Balfour Declaration.

The first was the gradual emergence of the emancipation of the Jews, triggered by the French Revolution which resulted in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, in 1789. Jewish emancipation brought forth the *Haskala* [Jewish Enlightenment]. It was the cultural transformation inspired by the *Haskala* which led to the development of political Zionism which turned out to be the lodestar of the Jewish path to the Balfour Declaration.

The second shortcoming in the existing literature about the Balfour Declaration is the general failure to identify the cruel conditions of Jewish life in nineteenth century Russia, which had the largest Jewish population of any country in the world, as one of the major game-changing episodes that provided the critical mass for the development of political Zionism. Hence, we also describe in this book the relentless persecution of Russian Jewry by the tyrannical tsarist regimes and how it gave rise to the Zionist political awakening that paved the way to the Balfour Declaration.

The third major deficiency brought to light by this study is the insufficient recognition of the role played by Theodor Herzl in the conception and development of the Zionist movement as an internationally recognized political entity. This book, therefore, includes a complete description of Herzl's unique personality, ideas, social and diplomatic skills, and of his unsparing efforts to obtain the backing from the major European powers and leaders in the financial world in his quest for a sustainable homeland.

The identification of the essential components of the geopolitical clockwork that made the Balfour Declaration possible would not be complete without the inclusion of the vital role played by the Americans. Our study shows how their entry into World War I assured the defeat of the Central Powers and the liberation of the Middle East from Ottoman control. It also covers the diplomatic process that led to President Wilson's decision to support the Balfour Declaration, thereby satisfying one of the major conditions that had to be met before the British War Cabinet would authorize Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to issue the Declaration.

To have a clear understanding of what was achieved by the Balfour Declaration, it is essential to have a clear perception of the political etymology of the verbal material that went into its deliberately ambiguous fabric. Rothschild submitted a Zionist draft declaration to Balfour on July 18, 1917, but on November 2, 1917 Balfour sent Rothschild the text of the declaration approved by the War Cabinet, which was substantially different. In poking into the nature of the challenges that caused this change in wording we show how the progressive exchange of versions between the Zionist leadership and the British government reflected the considerations that influenced both sides.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Pericles, the prominent Greek statesman, wrote some 2,400 years ago: "*What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others.*"

I am especially indebted to my friend and assistant of 20 years, Mary Arangio, whose support and dedication were vital to the successful completion of this study. In addition to her invaluable computer skills, she also contributed many helpful editing suggestions. During our many brainstorming sessions, she proved to be an excellent and productive sounding board. Being both uncompromising perfectionists, we sometimes argued stubbornly until we found common ground, and always with the best possible results in mind.

In terms of motivation and inspiration, I was driven by the memory of my heroic mother, Nessie Tiger Goldstein, who saved my life during the Holocaust and by the spirit of my beloved wife of over 50 years, Naomi, who passed away three years ago, halfway during my research for this project. Until the end, she took a great interest in the project as it progressed, and made many insightful and useful comments. The spirit of her unwavering love and support provided me with the energy and determination to keep extending myself to the limit of my capabilities to the completion of the many life-enriching projects we embarked on together.

In the final analysis, I was strongly motivated by the martyrdom of the Jewish people in the Diaspora, before, during and after the period covered in this book. The overriding impetus that cemented my determination to pursue the exploration of this seminal episode in the history of the Jewish people, was the responsibility that I felt my own survival bestowed on me to help ensure that their story be known and never forgotten.

Dr. Paul Goldstein

INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday October 31, 1917, the British War Cabinet agreed to authorize the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, to convey the historic eponymous policy statement that has become known as the "Balfour Declaration" to Lord Lionel Rothschild, head of the British Zionist Federation (National Archives, CAB 23/4/35).

On November 2, 1917, Balfour sent the following letter to Rothschild:

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 its 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. (Gauthier, 2007, p. 272)

The Balfour Declaration was one of the single most important events in the history of the Jewish people. Without the Balfour Declaration, there would not be a sovereign Jewish nation today. The British had made many pledges to the major players involved in the political jockeying that was driven by the perils and opportunities unleashed by the Great War. The Balfour Declaration was, however, their only promise made to a nation that had been separated from its homeland, dispersed around the world, without a territory of its own for close to two millennia, constantly subject to persecution and for whom accession to a national home had an existential urgency that was unique among all the nations aspiring to self-rule under the opportunities created by the historic geopolitical changes generated by World War I.

Why did the British government, in 1917, address the Balfour promise to the Zionist Federation, which represented only a small number of the general Jewish population, and not to the Jewish population as a whole? This question can only be answered in the context of the state of the world in the years preceding World War I. The fact that the promise of the

Declaration was made to the Jewish people but that it was addressed to the Zionist Federation reflects the emergence and mobilization of a new socio-political animus in the Jewish diaspora, the development of which constitutes the bedrock of this book.

This study traces the activities of all the parties involved that led from the Zionist hope of a homeland for the Jewish people to the unprecedented substantiation of that aspiration by the leading world power at the time, which brought the Jewish people from the depths of their politically impotent existence on the peripheries of the societies to which they had been driven by the currents of relentless sectarian hatred to the status of recognized participants at the diplomatic negotiating table with the most powerful nation in the world at the time. Among history's great occurrences, the fertilization of the dormant seed of the Jewish return to their ancestral homeland can truly be considered *sui generis*. As we shall see in the sequence of events covered in this book, the unrelenting and ever-ready to erupt "Lethal Obsession" of antisemitism, which kept burning in the hearts and minds of European Christendom, was the toxic social lubricant that defined the nature of both the Christian oppression and the Jewish resistance. This tangled web of elements that interacted to lead to the historic Balfour Declaration contained the socio-political DNA that shaped the Declaration's meaning, interpretations and ensuing developments.

To avoid the pitfalls of relying on often contradictory bias-driven interpretations of the same events by secondary sources, we have based our research to the fullest possible extent on primary sources, i.e. archives, diaries, autobiographies and first-hand accounts. Where second-hand data were the only ones available, we have reviewed their sources and analyzed the discrepancies between contradictory accounts.

The Balfour Declaration produced the first ray of light at the end of the nearly 1,900-year-long dark tunnel of persecution in the Jewish diaspora communities and signalled the beginning of a new era of self-determination in their reconstituted Jewish homeland. The Declaration was born in the geopolitical petri dish of World War I and marked the intersection of the national interests of the United Kingdom and the aspirations of the Zionist liberation movement. By breaking the mould of the colonial world order, which was characterized by the control of the majority of the world's people by a handful of industrialized European powers, World War I unleashed a Pandora's box of suppressed national identities and big power territorial rivalries.

A vast number of scholars have dealt with one or more of the independent variables that led to the Balfour Declaration, but in our review of writings on this subject by, among others, Jonathan Schneer, Leonard

Stein, Jacques Paul Gauthier, Doreen Ingrams, Victor Kattan, Walid Khalidi, Richard Ned Lebow, Donald Lewis, Ian Lustick, Michael Makovsky, William Mathew, Edwin Montagu, Joan Peters, Barbara W. Tuchman and Chaim Weizmann, we have not come across a comprehensive identification of the range of structural conditions and agency-driven elements that led to this unlikely event.

The 33rd Annual Conference of the Association for Israel Studies held at Brandeis University in Waltham, MA, on June 12–14, 2017 under the theme *A Century after Balfour: Vision and Reality* served as a telling barometer of the current level of awareness of the significance of the Balfour Declaration as a symbol of the lengthy and complex process that had transformed the political structure of the Jewish world during the 128 years preceding its promulgation.

Of the 321 presentations delivered by academics representing 92 universities and 40 academic learning centres from around the world, only 12 made any reference to the Balfour Declaration. Their observations focused primarily on the Declaration itself and on the impact of the Declaration on various aspects of political and social life in Israel in the post-Balfour Declaration era. These 12 academics, and the titles of their presentations, were as follows: Martin Kramer, Shalem College, *The Allied Balfour Declaration*; Ian Lustick, University of Pennsylvania, *The Balfour Declaration 100 Years Later: A Radically and Accidentally Relevant Document*; Leon Wieseltier of the Brookings Institution, who delivered the keynote address *Reflections on the Balfour Declaration*; Gershon Shafir, University of California at San Diego, *A Century of Balfour Declarations*; Maria G. Navarro, Universidad de Salamanca, *Preventive vs Proactive Policies: An Interpretation of Balfour Declaration's Political Vision*; Avital Ginat, Tel Aviv University, *Shifting Loyalties: The Balfour Declaration in the Transition towards British Orientation during and after First World War*; Itamar Rickover, Bar Ilan University, *From Balfour Declaration to the Six Day War-Changes in the Character of the Jewish Warrior*; Meron Medzini, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, *The Reaction of the Asian Nations to the Balfour Declaration*; Khinvraj Jangid, Jindal Global University, *Indian National Movement and Zionism: In the Light of Balfour Declaration*; Judah Bernstein, New York University, *From the Balfour Declaration to Cleveland: The 1921 ZOA Convention Reconsidered*; Walker Robins, University of Oklahoma, *The Influence of Judah Magnes on American Liberal Protestant Interpretations of the Balfour Declaration*; and Lindsay Katzir, Louisiana State University, *Rainbows Built of Bitter Tears: Anglo-Jewish Zionism Before The Balfour Declaration*.

This listing does not imply any reflection on the quality of the few presentations that did refer to the Balfour Declaration. Its sole purpose is to illustrate the fact that this massive assembly of academics, meeting under the promising banner *A Century after Balfour: Vision and Reality*, did not provide any new knowledge or insights that would reduce the serious shortcomings in the existing literature about the Balfour Declaration that this study has undertaken to identify and correct.

This serious lacuna in the coverage of the past prevents an objective appraisal of the heavily politicized misinterpretation of the present. We intend, in this book, to amend this deficiency by tracing and connecting the causal elements that played a significant part in the conception and development of the Balfour Declaration.

What is new and unique in our analysis of this subject is that the holistic approach that we have adopted allows a clearer understanding of the complex geopolitical elements that have shaped the facts on the ground in the Middle East. Like forensic pathology that can trace the fundamental causes of current happenings by identifying common DNA patterns going back over long periods of time, so an objective scholarly analysis can connect the genetic political patterns that were established in 1917 with the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict today. The Balfour Declaration, as a result of its politically contrived ambiguity, the nature of which is described in detail in *Chapter 6: What's in a Word – Political Word-Craftsmanship*, was the spark that set off the chain of political upheavals that followed in its wake. It is impossible to deal with geopolitical challenges without understanding their roots.

This study demonstrates how the national interests of the nations involved in the World War I theatre intersected with those of the Jewish nation in the final phase of its long march towards political sovereignty. Like the multiple parts of precision clockwork, each element, regardless of shape or size, played an essential part in the functioning of the whole, while the absence of one of them could have altered the outcome of the entire process. While the Declaration itself embodied the fusion of the interests of two nations, the British and the Jewish, this political joint venture would never have come about if these two partners had not been able to circumnavigate the competing challenges of the other powers vying for the same spoils as the British and who, for their own geopolitical reasons, were opposed to the Zionist aim of redeeming their ancient homeland. They would only allow themselves to be induced to support the Declaration if it furthered the realization of their own territorial ambitions.

It is impossible to effectively identify the human dynamics that led to the dramatic social change that was embodied in the Balfour Declaration

without infusing the narrative with a graphic portrayal of the human experiences that ignited and fuelled the actions and counter-actions that drove the process. Merely recording events reveals only that they happened and reduces the narrative to an easily forgotten compendium of lifeless data. Only a qualitative cause-and-effect analysis can contribute to the understanding of how they impacted the actions of the leaders and the lives of their subjects. This book traces the episodic stages that transformed the Jewish ethos from the outwardly amorphous stage of socially and politically impotent stagnation in the oppressive world of the diaspora to the politically dynamic pursuit of their return to sovereign nationhood in the land of their forefathers.

The promise of a haven from persecution embodied in the Balfour Declaration was the outcome of a number of events occurring in different parts of the world which, while caused by totally unrelated political currents, were connected by one common thread, the fate of the Jewish communities which the diaspora has lodged among often hostile majorities. During the nearly 1,900 years that their ancestral homeland was occupied by intolerant despotic regimes, their own lives in the diaspora were subjected to harsh and restrictive conditions and any physical escape from persecution was out of the question; the “next year in Jerusalem” ritual incantation was just a ceremonial religious practice.

To fully understand why the Jews were treated in such a destructive manner, it is necessary to recognize the omnipresence of the social handicap of antisemitism that was the yeast that fermented and the social energy that ignited the Judeophobic outbursts of the host populations. It must not be forgotten that the embers of nationalism had been kept alive among diaspora Jewry, despite centuries of brutal attempts to deprive them of their identity and to stifle any manifestation of political activity. The scattered Jewish nation was like a dormant social volcano, with the tectonic plates of political and religious Judeophobia clamped down as firm lids on any manifestation of Jewish political self-assertion, precluding any possibility to translate their never-extinguished yearning for their ancestral homeland into political action. The tectonic shift that lifted this heavy lid and propelled the captive magma of Jewish self-assertion to the surface was the emancipation.

This seminal stage on the long Jewish path that led to the Balfour Declaration is the first of three major developments that fuelled this arduous journey that has been largely ignored by the academic world. The emancipation of the Jews was triggered by the French Revolution, which resulted in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789. The Jewish emancipation brought forth the *Haskala*, the Jewish

enlightenment, which provided its followers, the *Maskilim*, with the conceptual apparatus that made other movements such as nationalism and socialism comprehensible. It was the cultural transformation inspired by the *Haskala* which led to the development of political Zionism, without which there would have been no Balfour Declaration.

The second shortcoming in the existing scholarship about the Balfour Declaration is the general failure to identify the inhuman conditions of Jewish life in nineteenth-century Russia – which had a larger Jewish population than any other country in the world – as one of the major game-changing episodes that provided the critical mass for the development of modern political Zionism. This lacuna is filled in this book through a description of the relentless persecution of Russian Jewry by the tsarist regimes of the nineteenth century which gave rise to the Zionist political awakening that paved the way to the Balfour Declaration.

The third major deficiency in the existing scholarship is the insufficient identification of the vital role played by Theodor Herzl in the conception and development of the Zionist movement as an internationally recognized political entity. Leonard Stein and Jonathan Schneer, while generally considered major authorities on the subject, fail to adequately address these organic parts of the genesis and development of political Zionism. Hence, we include in this volume a complete description of Herzl's unique personality, ideas, social and diplomatic skills and of his unsparing efforts to obtain the backing of the major European powers and leaders of the financial world to succeed in his endeavours to obtain Palestine as a sustainable home for his people

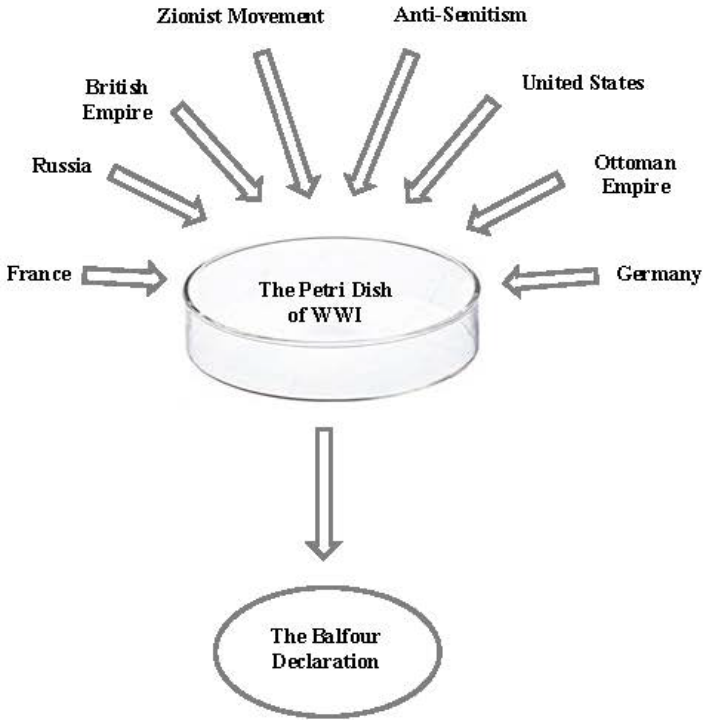
While all the elements necessary for the development of the Balfour Declaration eventually became interconnected, the process and its outcome were completely unpredictable. A number of social and political dynamics that were totally independent came together, in ways that could not have been foreseen, in a historically highly significant document called the Balfour Declaration. The development of this landmark promise combined the interconnectivity of a geopolitical clockwork with the serendipity of an unplanned but felicitous outcome for those who aspired to its fulfilment. As noted by University of Pennsylvania political science professor Ian Lustick in referring to the Balfour Declaration:

Trivial accidents of policy, casual ideological or personal prejudices by colonial officers and relevant ministers, and other minor factors, often drove massive impactful interventions. (Lustick, 2017, p. 2)

It is important to realize that the various entities that played a part in the shaping of the future political map of the territory of Palestine conducted

their affairs for the sole purpose of serving their own national interests and ambitions. These included not only the British Empire and the Zionist movement but also the Ottoman Empire, Germany, Russia, the United States and France, as shown in *Chart I-1: The Clockwork Evolution of the Balfour Declaration*. By following the concomitant but not necessarily parallel paths pursued by the various factions and by identifying the crossover points, one can obtain a more realistic awareness of the cause and effect dynamics of the major events that played a seminal role in the creation of the Balfour Declaration.

Chart I-1: The Clockwork Evolution of the Balfour Declaration



While the Balfour Declaration itself was a promise by the British government, the other participants in World War I also had a significant impact on the formulation of the wording of the Declaration, which had to take into account their political and strategic interests. Although the Arabs

were also participants in the conflict, they did not play a significant role in the development of the Balfour Declaration. In 1917, they were embarking on their own phase of nationalism and had been appeased by the British promises made during the secretive Hussein-McMahon negotiations. It was only after the Balfour Declaration had been issued and the implementation process began that the Arab reaction became a crucial element of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

We review the roles played by the various protagonists as well as their motivations, specific activities and decisions that shaped the fates of the unwitting populations involved. Our intention is to identify the major political tributaries that coalesced into the mainstream that led to the undertaking by the international community to foster the reconstitution of the ancestral homeland of the remnants of the Jewish diaspora, including the part played by antisemitism in shaping the events that marked the build-up to the Balfour Declaration.

This research provides the basis for a comprehensive understanding of the significance of the Balfour Declaration, on which it is now possible to construct a more realistic picture of the events that followed in the wake of its issuance. This book aims at liberating the pivotal critical juncture of the Balfour Declaration from the suffocating layers of Judeophobic distortions that have blurred its true meaning and betrayed the expectations it generated.

Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, Professor of Communications Research at the University of Mainz and founder of the Public Opinion Research Center in Allensbach, Germany, developed the concept of “the spiral of silence” in her comprehensive theory of public opinion. Her findings provide a useful tool for understanding how truth and facts can be distorted to serve the prejudices of the majority at the expense of a targeted minority. Her research led her to conclude:

Even when people see plainly that something is wrong, they will keep quiet if public opinion (opinions and behavior that can be exhibited in public without fear of isolation) and, hence, the consensus of what constitutes good taste and the morally correct opinion speaks against them. (Noelle-Neumann, 1993, p. x)

Accordingly, our work is also essential, then, to liberate the agendas of the social and political entities which have a stake in the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict from the propaganda-driven “spiral of silence” described by Noelle-Neumann (1993) so that the vital elements of truth and justice can be applied to the morally just treatment of the populations involved.

It is unfortunate that the current generation of Jews in Israel and in the diaspora have not been provided with a comprehensive account of how the recreation of a sovereign Jewish state on the site of their ancient homeland came about. There is no greater proof of the importance of the need to reconstruct the events that led to this historic development than the deplorable fact that the 128-year transformational period that paved the way has been completely ignored by the Israeli education system. The book *Israel – A Jewish and Democratic State*, the textbook authorized by the Israeli Ministry of Education that serves teachers in every Israeli high school, except for the ultra-Orthodox ones, and on which the matriculation exams are based, devotes barely half a page to the Balfour Declaration. It reads as follows:

At the beginning of 1917 negotiations took place between representatives of the British Foreign Ministry and Zionist representatives headed by Haim Weizman concerning a declaration that would express encouragement of the Zionist aspirations. At the end of these consultations the British government issued on November 2, 1917, the document later known as the Balfour declaration, in the form of a letter written by the British Foreign Minister Lord Balfour to Lord Rothschild, who was Honorary President of the Zionist federation in England.

In the Balfour declaration, for the first time in modern Jewish history, a major power acknowledged the national aspirations of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. The declaration determined that the British government ruled that a Jewish national home would be established in the Land of Israel. Notably, Britain would not establish the national home, but it would encourage political and other essential infrastructure that would make it easier for Jews to establish their national home.

What is a national home? The origins of this expression are within the Zionist Basel Plan. It was also offered by the Zionist representatives, for tactical reasons – to make it easier for the British government to issue a declaration with no commitment to a Jewish state.

In the Balfour declaration there is nothing about sovereignty, authority or borders, but it formed a framework – one that was later shaped in the international post-WWI arrangements, such as the San Remo agreement and the British Mandate, which the Jews were eventually expected to fulfil. (Shahar, 2013, pp. 15–16, trans. E. L.)

It is regrettable that the sovereign Jewish state which resulted from the struggles and sacrifices of their forefathers has not produced a comprehensive textbook account of the costly path that led to this modern-day miracle.

To avoid any distortion of the realities that constituted the background of this historic event, each episode covered in this study is insulated from rearview mirror interpretations of the geopolitical developments that

unfolded in the wake of the proclamation of the Balfour Declaration. We demonstrate how seemingly unrelated social and political currents drove different national protagonists, each navigating their own course in pursuit of their particular socio-political agendas, into the all-encompassing political vortex of World War I. Prior to the war, the various national actors who would eventually enter the stage created by the conflict were like sails passing in the wind, unaware of their potential connection to the transformational changes that were starting to influence social and political agendas around the world.

This book analyzes how this multi-faceted process developed and gave rise to the promulgation of the Balfour Declaration, which was a one-off event that resulted from the interaction of a multitude of political developments unleashed by the politically liberating but physically devastating impact of World War I. While the Balfour Declaration was not the main theme of World War I but a sub-plot which became a consideration for the Allies only halfway through the conflict, it was of existential importance for the Jewish people in their historic quest for the recovery of their status as a sovereign nation.

In this study, we provide a holistic description of the process that brought about the Balfour Declaration. We identify each contributing component which, if absent, would have prevented the Balfour Declaration from happening. Our main thrust is that the Balfour Declaration was the result of the fortuitous convergence of geopolitical interests of a significant array of national entities, the dynamics of which brought about this historic document.

The Jewish path to the Balfour Declaration was significantly more complex than the British motivation. The British motivation developed over a relatively short time span. Britain's practical involvement only emerged and became mobilized towards the end of War World I and primarily preoccupied the members of the War Cabinet. By contrast, the Jewish path, which had its wellspring in the French Revolution, ran through different phases, time frames and complex social political patterns caused by the dispersion of the Jewish people among different nations, geographical areas and political regimes.

The impact of Germany, the Ottoman Empire, France and Russia, which also played a significant part in the complex narrative of the evolution of the Balfour Declaration, was of a dual nature. These nations had two motivations. One was to deal with the Jewish populations in their midst who were trying to survive and eventually escape the oppressive antisemitic grip in which they were held. The other motivation was the fact that they were in constant strife with each other to either expand or

protect their territories in their native states as well as in the colonial world. Their connectivity to the core issue of this study was of a quasi-organic and episodic nature and not the result of any national political agenda.

The impact on the Balfour Declaration of all the nations involved is fully covered within the various chapters in this book. *Chapter 1: The British Motivation* addresses the British motivation behind the development of the Declaration. It describes the competing territorial ambitions of the British and the Germans which triggered the devastating conflict of World War I, with the ensuing drives by both sides to enlist every possible source of support, leading to the duplicitous political deal-making between the British and the Arabs, the British and the French, the British and the Jews, and the British and the Ottoman Empire.

Chapter 2: Emancipation shows how the French Revolution, by triggering the emancipation of the Jews, started the first phase of the awakening of the Jewish mind from its nearly two-thousand -long political slumber.

Chapter 3: Persecution – Tsarist Russia, the Nineteenth-Century “Egypt” describes the relentless persecution of Russian Jewry by the tyrannically tsarist regimes of the nineteenth century, which led the persecuted Jewish people to ride the waves of emancipation, which started in central Europe, towards more tolerant environments and gave rise to the Zionist political awakening that paved the way to the Balfour Declaration.

Chapter 4: The Development of Zionist Political Thinking traces how the Zionist project developed from the first manifestations of Zionist political thinking during the second half of the nineteenth century to its full-blown development into a dynamic political movement. This chapter also covers the thirteen-year period following Herzl’s death in 1904 to the issuance of the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917. While the Zionist efforts to secure a territorial solution to the desperate plight of European Jewry failed to make any progress prior to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, significant positive developments in respect of resolving its internal ideological conflicts occurred within the Zionist movement during this period. This chapter also explains how the outbreak of World War I broke the political impasse and kindled the hope that the Zionist dream might be realized after all.

Chapter 5: The American Factor reviews the impact of the United States’ entry into World War I on the diplomatic process which drove the development of the Zionist project. The perilous military situation in Europe caused the British and French to pursue the American participation in the war against the Central Powers, while the Germans attempted to

keep the Americans out through devastating assaults on the American merchant navy and the abortive attempt to induce Mexico to declare war on the United States.

Finally, *Chapter 6: What's in a Word – Political Word-Craftsmanship* describes how the political interests of all the players involved in the process, which included the British Empire, the Zionist movement, Germany, the Ottoman Empire, France, Russia and the United States, influenced the arduous process of the wording of the Balfour Declaration.

As we can see in these chapters, the forces at work inside these separate socio-political entities reached out beyond their own spheres of interest with significant, often unintended effects on each other's fortunes.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BRITISH MOTIVATION

Introduction

In this chapter, we explore the political and cultural factors that motivated the government of the largest power in the world, at the onset of World War I, to make the historic promise that turned the Jewish diaspora's centuries-old spiritual dream of the return to their ancient homeland into a political reality.

The British government did not suddenly find itself in support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine on November 2, 1917, the day the Balfour Declaration was issued. The road that led to this juncture had been a long and arduous one, a tangled web of international diplomatic and internal political manoeuvres. While British support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was enhanced by the cultural and spiritual background of the leading class of British statesmen that happened to hold the reins of power at the time of the Declaration, the strategic consideration that public endorsement of the Zionist political aspirations would significantly bolster Britain's imperial ambitions was the fundamental impetus. The ultimate objective of the British was to come out as the victors of World War I so that they could consolidate their world power status, retain control over the international routes and territories that constituted the British Empire, including their vital oil resources, and expand this dominion by strengthening their grip on the soon to be conquered Middle Eastern territories of the Ottoman Empire.

During World War I, the British found, however, that they were no longer an island unto themselves. Not only did they have to deal with the devastating military stalemate on the Western Front, they also had to contend with the competing ambitions of friend and foe alike. This chapter will show how their dogged pursuit of their ultimate objectives led them to subordinate integrity to expediency, especially in their dealings with the Arab populations of the Middle East, with their French allies and, eventually, with the fledgeling Zionist movement.

The following sections address the religious, military and political dynamics that drove the British government's wartime agenda and led it to issue the historic Balfour Declaration.

Religion

While the need to muster any military, economic and political support that could tip the scales in their favour was the main motivation that drove the British political agenda at the time, these geopolitical considerations were not the sole British motivators behind the Balfour Declaration. An extensive study of the subject cannot fail to take into account the influence of biblical prophecy and the evangelical movement in shaping the mindset of the British Cabinet in approving the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917. According to church history professor and author Donald M. Lewis, it is only by understanding the phenomena of Christian philosemitism and Christian Zionism that one can make sense of the religious and cultural influences that worked together to create a climate of opinion among the political elite of Britain that was well disposed to the Balfour Declaration (Lewis, 2010, p. 10).

In his elaborate historiography of the British evangelical interest in the Jews, Lewis focused on the role of Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (known as Lord Ashley), as the "leading proponent of Christian Zionism in the 19th Century and the first politician of stature to prepare the way for Jews to establish a home in Palestine." Shaftesbury's devotion to the Jews was a manifestation of his concern for the plight of ethnic minorities in general, but it was greater than his concerns for the Welsh, the Scots or the Irish as it was rooted in his religious identity, which he derived from his Anglican heritage (Lewis, 2010, p. 107).

Lewis noted that there had been Gentile projects to resettle the Jews in Palestine and to establish them in their ancient homeland long before the Zionist movement began to pursue these ideas as practical political possibilities in the late nineteenth century. Shaftesbury was the chief advocate of the idea to return the Jews to Palestine as a nation, well before it gained currency with the British political and imperial establishment (Lewis, 2010, p. 114).

Lewis' main objective was to understand why Christian support for the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was so prevalent in Victorian Britain and how this forms an important part of the background to the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (Lewis, 2010, p. 8). His exploration led him to conclude that historians had not been giving sufficient consideration to the importance of the religious and ethnic backgrounds of the British War

Cabinet. Lewis notes that, significantly, the War Cabinet was dominated by non-English members: David Lloyd George, although born in England, had been raised in Wales and was thought of as Welsh. Scotland had four members (Balfour and the two Labour members, Arthur Henderson and George Barnes, plus the New Brunswick-born Andrew Bonar Law, who from the age of 12 had lived in Scotland). Edward Carson was an Irish Protestant. Six of the ten members were thus from the Celtic fringe. A seventh member was Jan Christian Smuts, born in the Cape Colony, and the eighth non-English member was the German-born Alfred Milner. The resulting spiritual inclination of the British War Cabinet, in 1917, was the first indispensable thread that contributed to the process that brought about the Balfour Declaration. The fact that seven of the nine Gentile members had been raised in evangelical homes or personally embraced evangelicalism disposed them to think of the Jews as a “people,” a “race,” and a “nation,” and thus inclined them towards the idea of a Jewish homeland and the idea that Britain had a special role in enabling this to happen (Lewis, 2010, pp. 332–334).

A number of other scholars have also traced the origin of this evangelical strand in the mindset of the 1917 British War Cabinet and identified Lord Ashley as the leading proponent of Christian Zionism in the nineteenth century. According to history professor Isaiah Friedman, it was Shaftesbury who, on August 1, 1838, propounded the scheme for the promotion of Jewish settlement in Palestine to then British foreign secretary Lord Palmerston, who became a determined advocate for the evangelical idea that Britain was to be “a chosen instrument of God for the Restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land” (Friedman, 1968, pp. 28–29).

Zionist historian Leonard Stein similarly referred to the body of devout and high-minded English Christians who, as early as the 1840s, believed that the time was at hand for the fulfilment of prophecy with the return of the Chosen People to the Holy Land and that it was God’s will that the British nation should be His instrument for achieving His purpose. While acknowledging Shaftesbury as the most eminent representative of the early nineteenth-century movement for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine, Stein expressed a dim view of Shaftesbury’s evangelically inspired philosemitism and held that, rather than being a friend of the Jews, he was primarily motivated by his purpose to see the Jews lose their identity by becoming Christians. Not only was Shaftesbury no friend of the Jews in domestic politics, neither did he demonstrate any sympathy with the ideas that later led to the politicization of the Zionist movement. “It is an illusion to suppose that he was a Zionist before his time” (Stein, 1961, pp. 10–11).

According to diplomatic history scholar and author Dr. Michael Makovsky, England had, since the sixteenth century, been receptive to the prospect of a revival of the historic connection between Jews and the Holy Land. He found that various English writers, clergymen, thinkers and politicians have thought about Jewish restoration to the Holy Land and their conversion to Christianity as part of a millennial vision. Lord Ashley saw Britain as God's chosen instrument to restore Jews to the Holy Land and trigger the Second Coming. This prompted Lord Palmerston to encourage the Ottoman Sultan to allow Jews to return to Palestine and to establish the British consulate in Jerusalem in 1839 (Makovsky, 2007, pp. 51–52).

International relations professor Alan Dowty, in describing the various motivations that led the British government to issue the Balfour Declaration, similarly noted that “some British leaders, including Prime Minister David Lloyd George, were Gentile Zionists drawn to the idea of Jewish revival in the Holy Land on religious and biblical grounds” (Dowty, 2012, p. 74).

Norman Bentwich, the British-appointed attorney-general of Mandatory Palestine, characterized the British people as a Bible-reading nation, which led many of them to believe the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament about the return of the Jews and the British government to recognize that purpose in its Near East policy. This political support began with the appointment in 1837 of a British Council in Jerusalem, which had the function of protecting Jews generally in Palestine. That function gradually evolved to support the foundation of a national home (Bentwich, 1960, cited in Gauthier, 2007, p. 279).

International law specialist Howard Grief, in his comprehensive legal case for the legitimacy of Israel's sovereignty over Mandated Palestine, traced the religiously minded support for the restoration of the Jewish people to Palestine to the days of Shaftesbury and Palmerston in the context of the synergy between their evangelical form of Zionism and their relations with Ottoman Turkey. While Palmerston's efforts to encourage the Jewish resettlement of Palestine were not successful at the time, they did pave the way towards the British policy which, 75 years later, resulted in the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917 (Grief, 2008, p. 534).

While it is clear that the British evangelical mindset, whether driven by philosemitic or antisemitic sentiments, was in harmony with the Zionist credo and thus facilitated this politically motivated nexus embodied in the Balfour Declaration, in the final analysis, as we shall see in the following sub-chapters, the Declaration resulted almost entirely from purely pragmatic political considerations. The implementation of the British

political agenda hinged on the developments on the battlefronts, where the physical realities of the political dynamics were being played out.

The Military Picture

In 1917, WWI was still in full swing, with staggering casualties on all sides. The state of affairs on the Western Front showed the cumulative effects of the debilitating war of attrition that had brought the opposing sides there to a stalemate. American historian and author Barbara Tuchman goes back to the Battle of the Marne in September 1914 as the beginning of the exhausting battle of attrition that characterized the state of the war between the Allies and the Germans during the first three years of the conflict. While this is not the place to replicate the detailed description she provides of this pivotal battle (Tuchman, 2004, pp. 479–524), she effectively encapsulated its significance when she stated:

The Battle of the Marne, as all the world knows, ended in a German retreat. Between the Ourcq and the Grand Morin, in the four days that were left of their schedule, the Germans lost their bid for “decisive victory” and thereby their opportunity to win the war. For France, for the Allies, in the long run for the world, the tragedy of the Marne was that it fell short of the victory it might have been. (Tuchman, 2004, p. 518)

During 1916, which John Keegan, an English military historian and author, referred to as “The Year of Battles,” the protracted trench warfare took a heavy toll in casualties on the armies of Germany, France and Great Britain. The Battle of Verdun, which pitted the Germans against the French, started on February 21, 1916. By May 8, French and German casualties already exceeded 100,000 killed and wounded each. By the end of June, with over 200,000 men killed and wounded on each side, Verdun had become a place of terror and death that could not yield victory. On July 11, after a final effort by the Germans was beaten off, they ceased their attempt to destroy the French Army at Verdun and relapsed into the defensive. The Battle of Verdun ended on December 15, 1916, with the French recapturing much of the ground they had lost since the beginning of the battle (Keegan, 2000, pp. 284–286).

During the same year, on July 1, 1916, “while Verdun still raged,” nineteen British and three French divisions had launched the Battle of the Somme. Keegan provides a detailed description of this ill-planned and recklessly executed attack, which he referred to as a catastrophe and the “greatest loss of life in British military history.” He noted that the advance achieved nothing; most of the dead were killed on ground the British had

held before the offence began. The Battle of the Somme exemplified the war of attrition, where “fresh divisions were sent in monotonous succession only to waste their energy in bloody struggles for tiny patches of ground. [...] By July 31, the Germans on the Somme had lost 160,000, the British and French over 200,000, yet the line had moved scarcely 3 miles since July 1” (Keegan, 2000, pp. 295, 297).

By November 19, 1916, when the Allied offensive was officially brought to a halt, the furthest line of advance, at Les Boeufs, lay only 7 miles forward of the front attacked from July 1. Yet, the losses suffered by both sides were staggering: “The Germans may have lost over 600,000 killed and wounded in the effort to keep their Somme positions. The Allies had certainly lost over 600,000; the French casualty figure being 194,451, the British 419,654. [...] To the British, it would remain the greatest military tragedy of the 20th century, indeed of their national military history.” Keegan concluded his observations about the Battle of the Somme with the statement that “The Somme marked the end of an age of vital optimism in British life that has never been recovered” (Keegan, 2000, p. 299).

By the onset of 1917, what had been, until then, mainly a war of attrition in its various theatres reached the phase of desperate final efforts to call on the last reserves of physical strength and willpower to break the stalemate and hopefully administer a decisive knock-out blow. In Germany, in Britain and even in France, so grievously wounded by losses of life in defence of the homeland, the popular will nevertheless remained intact. In Germany, there was still no thought of accepting an unsatisfactory outcome. In Britain, the *Annual Register* recorded that “The prospect of [...] sacrifices [...] appeared to be quite powerless in effecting any modification of the national resolution to prosecute the war to a successful conclusion.” Even in France, the bond of “sacred union” that united all segments of the nation had also persisted until the end of 1916, on the basis that “France had been the target of foreign aggression and had therefore to be defended. [...] Illogically, the belief that the war might be ended quickly, by a German collapse or a brilliant French victory, persisted as well” (Keegan, 2000, p. 321).

In 1917, the situation was nearing the point wherein the will to fight was not sufficient by itself to lead to victory if it was not backed by adequate human and material resources. Unfortunately, before this critical point was reached, none of the warring sides were prepared to face reality and were willing to spend whatever resources they could muster to force the issue. It was in this spirit that the British, assisted by the French, launched the Third Battle of Ypres, which Keegan referred to as Britain’s

“most notorious land campaign of the war” (Keegan, 2000, p. 355). This battle takes on specific importance as it illustrates the growing disconnect between political considerations and military hubris. Prime Minister David Lloyd George was oppressed by the rising tide of British casualties; already a quarter of a million dead, a high sacrifice in lives without significant military returns. Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army on the Western Front, on the other hand, favoured a counter-offensive that would break the German line. During a session of the Committee on War Policy on June 19–21, when Haig outlined his plans and asked for their endorsement, Lloyd George wondered how the offensive could succeed without significant superiority in infantry and artillery. Yet, despite Lloyd George’s fears about casualties, compounded by the difficulties of finding any more men from civil life to replace those lost, Haig insisted that it was necessary to go on engaging the enemy. The nub of the difference was that Haig wanted to fight, while Lloyd George did not. The Prime Minister could see good reasons for avoiding a battle: it would cause many men to be lost for little material gain, it would not win the war, neither the French nor the Russians would help, the Americans were coming, and, in consequence, the best strategy was for a succession of small attacks rather than a repetition of the Somme. His chief failing, unexpected in a man who so easily dominated his party and parliamentary colleagues, was a lack of will to talk Haig down. In the end, he felt unable, as a civilian prime minister, to impose his strategic views on his military advisors and was therefore obliged to accept theirs (Keegan, 2000, p. 358).

After a fifteen-day bombardment of the German positions, at 3:50 a.m. on July 31, 1917, the assaulting troops of the Second and Fifth Armies, with a portion of the French First Army, moved forward, accompanied by 136 tanks. By late morning, the familiar breakdown of communication between infantry and guns had occurred. By two in the afternoon, the German counter-attack was unleashed with an intense bombardment so heavy that it drove the leading French troops to flight. A combination of German shells and a torrential downpour soon turned the battlefield to mud (Keegan, 2000, p. 361).

Rain and lack of progress prompted Sir Douglas Haig to call a halt to the offensive on August 4 until the position could be consolidated. While total casualties, included wounded, numbered about 35,000 on the Allied side and the Germans had suffered similarly, Haig nevertheless insisted to the War Cabinet in London that the attack had been “highly satisfactory and the losses slight.” The Germans, however, remained in command of the vital ground and had committed none of their counter-attack divisions.

On the evening of July 31, Crown Prince Rupprecht, who commanded the Sixth Army opposite the British in Flanders (Keegan, 2000, p. 180), recorded in his diary that he was “very satisfied with the results” (Keegan, 2000, p. 362).

By September, after many casualties and little success, Lloyd George, reviewing the whole state of the war, argued that, with Russia no longer a combatant and France barely so, it would be strategically wiser to husband British resources until the Americans arrived in force in 1918. Haig insisted that it was precisely because of the other allies’ weakness that the battle must continue. Keegan comments that since there was no obvious successor to Haig, in spite of his ill-judged strategy and its harmful effect on his long-suffering army, the campaign was to be continued for want of a better man or plan. The “battle of the mud at Ypres – Passchendaele” would therefore continue, but not with British soldiers in the vanguard. Those had fought themselves out in August and early September, and the only reliable assault divisions Haig had left were in his ANZAC and Canadian Corps, which had been spared the worst of the battles in the year before. Between October 26 and November 10, 1917, the New Zealanders had suffered nearly 3,000 casualties, and the Canadian Corps, 15,634 killed and wounded (Keegan, 2000, pp. 365–368).

Keegan concluded that the Germans had another army in Russia with which to begin the war in the west all over again, while the British had given their all and had no other army. Like France, it had, by the end of 1917, enlisted every man that could be spared from farm and factory and had begun to compel into the ranks recruits that included “the hollow-chested, the round-shouldered, the stunted, the myopic and the over-age. Their physical deficiencies were evidence of Britain’s desperation for soldiers and Haig’s profligacy with men. On the Somme he had sent the flower of British youth to death or mutilation; at Passchendaele he had tipped the survivors into the slough of despond” (Keegan, 2000, p. 368).

On October 13, 1917 – three weeks before the Balfour Declaration – the British commanding generals approved a plan for a tank offensive on Third Army General Sir Julian Byng’s front, which ran across dry, chalky ground on which tanks would not get bogged down, as they would on the muddy grounds of Flanders, where the main battles had so far taken place. By early November, with the battle at Passchendaele lapsing into futility, Haig was anxious for a compensatory success of any sort and, on November 10, at Byng’s urging, gave his consent to the offensive at Cambrai (Keegan, 2000, p. 369).

The lack of proper coordination between men and machines on the British side and the formidable counter-attacking power of the German