The Balfour Declaration, November 1917

Introduction

One of the most important statements of British foreign policy of the twentieth century, the 'Balfour Declaration' was no more than a short, vague letter that had no legal status. It had not been debated in Parliament. Yet it was one of the most significant events leading ultimately to the creation of the state of Israel and conflict between Jews and Arabs.

In this letter of 2 November 1917, Britain's Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, wrote to Lord Lionel Walter Rothschild, as a figurehead of the Jewish community in Britain:

> 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.

This letter was later incorporated within the terms of Britain's Mandate for Palestine, and so became a legal requirement upon Britain.

Where did the idea of the declaration come from originally?

In 1903 the British government had offered part of East Africa to the Jewish people as a homeland and refuge from persecution; this was known as the 'Uganda Scheme'. Zionist opinion was split between those who welcomed Uganda as a temporary refuge, and those determined to hold out for a homeland in Palestine. The Zionist Congress of 1905 declined Britain's offer.

Emerging from this cul-de-sac, Zionists continued to lobby for a homeland in Palestine, (then part of the Ottoman Empire) and made significant inroads into the British political establishment.

Once Britain declared war on Turkey on 5 November 1914, the idea of a Jewish homeland in Ottoman Palestine began to seem less remote. Presuming that the Turks would eventually be defeated, Britain began to think in terms of carving up the Ottoman Empire. On 9 November 1914, Lloyd George spoke in Cabinet about the 'ultimate destiny of Palestine' which, he told Herbert Samuel, he saw as becoming a Jewish state.[1] In early 1915, Samuel, (himself Jewish), put forward to the Cabinet a memorandum, 'The Future of Palestine', which advocated the annexation of Palestine by Britain to allow for the ultimate self-government of Jewish immigrants.[2] Prime Minister Asquith thought the idea absurd, but from then on the government became increasingly sympathetic to Zionist goals.

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[1] Monroe, E, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1956,* (Methuen, London, 1965), p. 26; Samuel, Rt Hon Viscount, *Memoirs*, (The Cresset Press, London, 1945), p. 142.

[2] Samuel, H, 'The Future of Palestine', Memorandum to the Cabinet, January 1915, The National Archives of the UK, hereafter TNA, CAB 37/123/43.

In March 1916 the Foreign Office responded to a suggestion from Lucien Wolf, a Jewish opponent of Zionism, that the Allies should make a declaration supporting the settlement of Jews in Palestine as a refuge from persecution. Foreign Secretary Edward Grey was prepared to go further, in supporting an autonomous Jewish settlement in Palestine, and saw this as having the potential to win the acclaim of world Jewry for Britain.[3] But Weizmann and the Zionists fundamentally disagreed with Wolf about the reasons for such a settlement, which they envisioned not just as a refuge from persecution, but as a home for a homeless people, where they could stop being the assimilated members of other cultures.

What was the role of Weizmann?

Chaim Weizmann was a Russian Jew who came to Britain in 1904 to work as Lecturer in Chemistry at Manchester University. He soon became the chief spokesman of the Zionist cause in Britain, winning the adherence of such influential figures as CP Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*. Weizmann used his remarkable charm and audacity to lobby for the Zionist cause at the highest levels, representing himself as the mouthpiece of the whole Jewish people.[4]

By the First World War Weizmann, the chemist, had also discovered something of critical importance to the war effort: a means of producing the ingredients for large quantities of explosives through bacterial fermentation. Offering his process for making acetone to the government, at a time when the need for munitions had never been greater, undoubtedly enhanced Weizmann's reputation amongst the political establishment, not least with the Minister of Munitions, Lloyd George, who was already sympathetic to Zionism. Although Lloyd George later suggested that the Balfour Declaration had been a reward for Weizmann's chemical work, there is no evidence for this, and Weizmann himself denied the idea.[5]

Why were British politicians predisposed to the idea of Zionism?

Lloyd George had first been connected with the Zionist cause in 1903 when his law firm acted for Herzl concerning the 'Uganda Scheme',[6] a project which the then Prime

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[3] The Foreign Secretary told Britain's ambassadors in France and Russia in March 1916 that his colleagues believed that Wolf's scheme 'might be made far more attractive to the majority of Jews if it held out to them the prospect that when in the course of time the Jewish colonists in Palestine grow strong enough to cope with the Arab population they may be allowed to take the management of the internal affairs of Palestine (with the exception of Jerusalem and the Holy Places) into their own hands. […] our sole object is to find an arrangement which would be so attractive to the majority of Jews as to enable us to strike a bargain for Jewish support'; telegram, Grey to Bertie and Buchanan, 11 March 1916, TNA, FO 371/2817/43776.

[4] Israel Sieff, one of Weizmann's circle of allies in Manchester, commented in his memoirs on how Weizmann behaved as though he had a Jewish state behind him, when actually he had no more than a handful of supporters; Glancy, J, 'Chaim Weizmann and how the Balfour Declaration was made in Manchester', *The JC.com*, 1 November 2012, http://www.thejc.com/lifestyle/lifestyle-features/89026/chaim-weizmann-and-how-balfour-declaration-was-made-manchester [accessed September 2015].

[5] Weizmann, C, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann,* (Harper and Brothers, New York, 1949), p. 150.

[6] Hamilton, J, *God, Guns and Israel: Britain, the First World War and the Jews in the Holy Land,* (Sutton Publishing, Thrupp, 2004), pp. 86-7.

Minister, Arthur Balfour, also endorsed. Balfour himself met Weizmann in 1906.[7] However, the active Zionism of both men seems to have grown after a meeting between Weizmann and Lloyd George, Herbert Samuel and Josiah Wedgwood, arranged by Scott in December 1914. Weizmann was surprised to discover that everyone present seemed favourably disposed to his ideas.[8] So what had inclined these political figures to the Zionist cause?

Lloyd George's Zionist convictions stemmed from a convergence of religious ideals, romantic notions and imperialist objectives: what the Zionists wanted in Palestine dovetailed with both his religious formation and what would serve British interests. Through his Welsh Chapel upbringing, he had been seeped in the history of the Jewish people in its biblical heyday. In Palestine he saw 'a historic and sacred land, throbbing from Dan to Beersheba with immortal traditions'.[9] Zionism offered (the now atheist) Lloyd George the romantic prospect of putting Israel back on the map, where to him it belonged, in the course of providing 'a national hearth and a refuge for the hunted children of Israel'.[10]

In his memorandum on the 'Future of Palestine' in 1915, Herbert Samuel had reminded the British Cabinet that 'widespread and deep-rooted in the Protestant world is a sympathy with the idea of restoring the Hebrew people to the land which was to be their inheritance' and that there was in Britain 'an intense interest in the fulfilment of the prophecies which have foretold it'.[11] From his childhood, **Arthur Balfour** had been steeped in precisely this Bible-reading, evangelical culture, and his resulting interest in the Jewish people made his later conversion to Zionism a simple matter. Long before he met Weizmann, he had believed that Christendom's debt to Judaism had been shamefully repaid by the Christian world. To return the homeless Jewish people to Zion would allow Britain the honour of righting this wrong.[12] Once Balfour became Foreign Secretary in late 1916, his meetings with Weizmann became more intense, on one occasion continuing into a long walk in the small hours. It was after this that Balfour informed the Cabinet, in March 1917, that he was a Zionist.[13]

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[7] Weizmann, pp. 109-11.

[8] Ibid, p.150. The role of C.P. Scott as a highly connected facilitator cannot be underestimated in explaining how Weizmann gained the sympathy of key establishment figures. Weizmann recounts: 'It became a practice with me, whenever I happened to be in London, and Mr Scott came up on the night train, to meet him at Euston Station for breakfast. His usual greeting to me was: "Now, Dr Weizmann, tell me what you want me to do for you," and breakfast would pass in conversation on Zionist affairs'. Ibid.

[9] Lloyd George, D, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference,* Vol. 2, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1939), p. 721.

[10] Ibid, p. 722.

[11] Samuel, H, 'The future of Palestine', Memorandum to the Cabinet, January 1915, TNA, CAB 37/123/43.

[12] Dugdale, B, *Arthur James Balfour, 1906-1930,* (Hutchinson, London, c.1936), p. 159-60.

[13] Amery, L.S, *My Political Life,* Vol. 2, (Hutchinson, London, 1953), p. 114.

The rapid conversion of **Sir Mark Sykes** to Zionism took place in 1916 after meeting first Dr Moses Gaster, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi, and then a Gentile Zionist, James Malcolm, and seems to have stemmed from his deep hatred of injustice and sympathy for the Jews as underdogs. Sykes' conversion to this view was almost as significant as Balfour's; he seems to have galvanised the Cabinet to consider a Zionist declaration as a key to gaining American support in the war. Although no more than a Political Secretary to the Cabinet, during 1917 Sykes assumed the role of inter-mediary between the Zionists and Whitehall, keeping up persistent pressure on his political superiors to achieve a declaration.[14]

It was Sykes who opened the eyes of **Leopold Amery** to Zionism. Amery was another Secretary to the Cabinet, and in fact a secret Jew. Amery explained his new-found support for Zionism in strategic terms: there would be great advantage to Britain in having a grateful Jewish population in Palestine. He also foresaw a reduction in anti-Semitism once the position of the Jews was normalised and they had a land of their own. It would be Amery who made significant changes to the draft of the eventual declaration.[15]

Lord Alfred Milner, General Jan Smuts and Lord Robert Cecil also became converts who brought their 'eager and active influence' to bear.[16]

What is noticeable about the pro-Zionist sentiments of non-Jews like Lloyd George and Balfour is the way they combined a deeply emotional sympathy for the Zionist dream – Balfour could be moved to tears listening to Weizmann – with a scarcely-veiled anti-Semitism. Lord Robert Cecil, Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, used language characteristic of this attitude when he commented: 'I do not think it is easy to exaggerate the international power of the Jews'.[17] It was widely believed that some mysterious but well-organised Jewish conspiracy was bent on determining the outcome of the war; their influence and, above all, their money, could sway Russia, the United States or Germany, to Britain's good or ill. To gain the international favour of the Jews was therefore in Britain's vital interest; to offend could be fatal. Since Weizmann implied that Zionism spoke for the Jews of the world, it followed that the Zionists should be helped. It was, Lloyd George wrote later, a question of making 'a contract with Jewry'.[18]

How did the tide move in favour of the Zionist idea?

For most of 1916 there was no critical desire in the Cabinet to pursue the Zionist goal: Prime Minister Asquith was sceptical and Lloyd George was taken up with Ireland and

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[14] Sykes, C, *Two Studies in Virtue,* (Collins, London, 1953), pp. *180ff;* Amery, p.115.

[15] Ibid; see also Rubinstein, W, 'The Secret of Leopold Amery', *History Today,* 1 February 1999, http://www.balfourproject.org/the-secret-of-leopold-amery/ [accessed September 2015].

[16] Lloyd George, p. 723.

[17] Lord Robert Cecil, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, minuting a despatch, 11 February 1916, from McMahon in Cairo, who had received suggestions from the head of the Jewish community in Alexandria that Britain should support Zionist aspirations in Palestine; TNA, FO 371/2671/35433.

[18] Lloyd George, p. 726.

Munitions. However, in December 1916 there was a change of government, with Lloyd George becoming Prime Minister of an administration that included Milner, Balfour and Cecil – all convinced Zionists – supported by a secretariat that included the new Zionists, Sykes and Amery.

In February 1917 Sykes began discussions with Weizmann, (whose status in London was now semi-official, since the Zionists had been granted their request to use official channels for their international communications).[19] The Zionists were against any idea of an Anglo-French condominium over Palestine (as implied by the Sykes-Picot agreement). They had urged Britain to annex Palestine so that she could act as the sole protector of the Jewish cause.[20] The Cabinet was persuaded to jettison Sykes-Picot's plans for an international administration in Palestine, and move towards exclusive British control. When Allenby took over command of the Expeditionary Force in Palestine in June 1917, he was instructed to capture Jerusalem by Christmas. For the first time it began to look a practical possibility that Britain could champion a Jewish National Home.

Meanwhile there had been revolution in Russia in February 1917. After widespread mutinies in the Russian army, there was doubt that Russia would continue to fight on the Allied side. The British government was convinced that Russian Jews were mainly pro-Zionist, and that a British pronouncement in favour of Zionism would therefore help to keep Russia in the war.

Foreign Secretary Balfour returned from the United States in April 1917 with the support of President Wilson for a British declaration concerning Palestine. In June the French Foreign Secretary, Jules Cambon, also gave his support to 'Jewish colonisation in Palestine'.[21]

The same month, Weizmann warned London that the German government was planning to take up the Zionist cause, and that Jewish opinion could swing against Britain and in favour of her enemy. Whatever the truth of this claim, the 'German threat' remained a potent influence on the Cabinet right through to October, when the Declaration was approved.[22] Weizmann also implied that the majority of Jews worldwide were Zionists, who would applaud Britain's actions. In fact, Zionists remained a very small minority amongst Jews for some time to come.[23] Under this pressure from Weizmann, Balfour invited Lord Rothschild to submit a formula for a declaration supporting a Jewish National Home.

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[19] Sykes' son believed that the granting of official facilities for communications in 1916 was a crucial moment, after which the British Government was essentially obligated to accede to Zionist requests; Sykes (1953), pp. 187-88.

[20] Sokolov, Memorandum for the Foreign Office, 12 April 1916, TNA, FO 371/2817/63314.

[21] Cambon to Sokolov, 4 June 1917, TNA, FO371/3058/123458.

[22] For example, Graham to Lord Hardinge, 13 June 1917, ibid, describing Weizmann's warnings that the Germans might take up the Zionist cause for their own propaganda purposes.

[23] David Fromkin calculates that in 1913, the last date for which there were figures, only about one percent of the world's Jews had signified their adherence to Zionism. Fromkin, D, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922,* (Penguin, London, 1991), p. 294.

How was the declaration first drafted?

Jewish Zionists and government officials worked together on the first draft of a declaration that was eventually proposed to Balfour by Lord Walter Rothschild in July 1917.[24] The wording represented a victory for those who thought that a moderate wording was more likely to gain official approval over those who wanted to demand a Jewish state from the outset. Even this moderate wording required Britain to accept that Palestine should be reconstituted as *the* national home of the Jewish people, implying no place for the existing majority Arab population.

What kind of opposition was there to the idea?

From the outset, almost all the opposition to a declaration came from within the Jewish community itself. Very few Arabs were aware that such a proposal was in the offing, and so their voice was largely silent in the debate that raged through the summer and autumn of 1917. Sherif Hussein and Feisal had been informed of the plan via James Malcolm, Sykes and Lawrence, and had given their reluctant assent.[25] However, the Arabs in Palestine itself could not be consulted (Lloyd George later argued) as they were in enemy territory, and were therefore deemed to be fighting against Britain.[26] Only a few European voices were raised on their behalf.

The disagreement between Wolf and Weizmann which was developing in 1917 erupted in public controversy on 24 May when the Conjoint Committee of the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association wrote to *The Times*, advocating their more limited objective for Jewish settlement in Palestine.[27] Their letter condemned the Zionist plan as not only wrong, but dangerous, in claiming special rights for Jews over the local majority. The letter rejected the Zionist concept of the Jews as a homeless nationality that needed a home in Palestine. In what amounted to a power struggle within the English Jewish community, the Zionist faction narrowly defeated the Conjoint Committee the following month.[28] However, this was not the end of the protest from within the Jewish community.

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[24] For a description of the joint drafting of a declaration, see Lewis, G, *Balfour and Weizmann: the Zionist, the Zealot and the Emergence of Israel,* (Continuum, London, 2009), p. 145. Once a wording had been agreed, Rothschild wrote to Balfour on 18 July 1917: 'At last I am able to send to you the formula you asked me for. If HMG will send me a message on the lines of this formula, if they & you approve of it, I will hand it on to the Zionist Federation & also announce it at a meeting called for that purpose'. To this Balfour apologetically replied the following day: 'My dear Walter…I will have the formula which you sent me carefully considered but the matter is of course of the highest importance and I fear it may be necessary to refer it to the Cabinet. I shall not therefore be able to let you have an answer as soon as I should otherwise have wished to do'; Balfour to Rothschild, 19 July 1917, Private, TNA, FO 371/3083/143082.

[25] James Malcolm to Lord Peel, 17 August 1936, TNA, CO 733/319/5.

[26] Lloyd George, p. 737.

[27] See Lewis, pp. 138-9.

[28] Ronald Graham drew Lord Hardinge's attention to an extract from *The Times* on 18 June 1917, reporting 'the meeting of the Jewish Board of Deputies [which] resulted in a triumph for the Zionists, although this Board has hitherto been regarded as a stronghold of anti-Zionism, and the most that the Zionists expected was that a substantial minority of votes would be cast in favour of their policy. Mr Lucien

In August, Edwin Montagu, the (Jewish) Secretary of State for India, launched a vehement protest in the Cabinet entitled 'The Anti-Semitism of the Present Government'. Montagu's opposition to Zionism, which he called 'a mischievous political creed', was based on a fear that Jews like himself, who were thoroughly assimilated in another country, would be expected to uproot to Palestine, and thus lose the citizenship they coveted so highly. Montagu also asked whether the Zionist plan intended to move Palestinian Arabs out of the way for Jews.[29]

Montagu continued his attack on a declaration to the very end. Then in October 1917 there came another last minute protest, this time from Lord Curzon, Leader of the House of Lords. Ignoring the internal Jewish feud, the former Viceroy of India outlined the impracticalities and ambiguities, as he saw them, in the Zionist plan for Palestine. Were all the Jews of the world supposed to fit in this small country? Did the Zionists really intend to establish a Jewish state, or not? And what was to happen to the indigenous Arab population, who would never accept a subordinate role? The idea of a Jewish National Home was, he cautioned, a recipe for failure.[30]

How did the drafts of the declaration change during 1917?

The drafts of the declaration were discussed at three meetings of the War Cabinet, on 3 September, 4 October and 31 October, 1917.[31]

The 3 September Cabinet meeting considered a more conciliatory draft of the declaration from Lord Milner, which proposed Palestine as *a* home for the Jewish people, rather than *the* home of the previous draft. Under the force of Montagu's attack, the Cabinet deferred a decision on the declaration, and decided to seek the opinion of President Wilson on the matter.

During September Weizmann and Rothschild continued to pressure the government to issue its declaration, saying that Montagu only represented a minority 'assimilationist' view, whilst the Zionists represented the 'non-assimilated' masses.

Wolf was howled down each time that he attempted to speak and was not allowed to say a word. Had not a certain number of Deputies voted against the instructions given to them by their electors, the Zionist majority would have been larger. In any case this vote means the dissolution of the Conjoint Committee and it will no longer be necessary to consult that body…' Graham to Hardinge, Confidential, 18 June 1917, TNA, FO 371/3058/123458.

[29] Montagu, Memorandum, 'The Anti-Semitism of the Present Government', submitted to the British Cabinet, 23 August 1917, TNA, CAB 24/24/71. Montagu observed that whatever the 'Jewish National Home' meant, he assumed 'that it means that Mahommedans and Christians are to make way for the Jews and that the Jews should be put in all positions of preference'. Montagu was also extremely nervous that Zionism would call in question his credentials as a patriotic English gentleman, observing: '"I have been striving all my life to escape from the Ghetto"'; Lloyd George, p. 733.

[30] Lord Curzon, Memorandum submitted to the Cabinet, 'The Future of Palestine', 26 October 1917, TNA, FO 371/3083/207407.

[31] The relevant Cabinet minutes can be found in TNA, CO 733/347/7.

Because of the delays created by Montagu's objections, there was doubt as to whether the declaration would be approved at the Cabinet meeting on 4 October. Leopold Amery relates how, half an hour before the meeting, Milner asked him to draft additional clauses which would help meet the concerns about the declaration, both pro-Arab and Jewish, without changing its substance.[32]

The new Amery-Milner draft read:

> His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish race 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 in any other country by such Jews who are fully contented with their existing nationality.

Nevertheless, the October 4 Cabinet meeting continued to defer a decision on the declaration because of another plea from Montagu; it was decided to submit the new Amery-Milner draft to President Wilson and to representative Jewish leaders in Britain.

The declaration would now only be modified in very minor ways at the final Cabinet meeting of 31 October before it was sent to Lord Rothschild, who had been one of its original authors three months before.

What was the significance of the additional safeguarding clauses?

It would seem that Amery hastily tacked on the two safeguarding clauses (firstly, protecting the rights of the non-Jewish communities in Palestine, and secondly, the rights of Jews in other countries) the first to satisfy Lord Curzon, and the second to mollify Montagu.

The complaints of 'assimilated Jews' like Montagu had been at the forefront of public debate for months due to their fear that the very existence of a 'Jewish National Home' would call into question the patriotic loyalty of Jews in other countries – this being wartime - and could thus be a cause of anti-Semitism. The new clause, safeguarding the status of Jews in other countries, addressed this fear. This addition to the declaration is not entirely surprising, given what had gone before.

By contrast, there had been very little to suggest that the concerns of the Arab population of Palestine were likely to be heeded at this juncture. Unlike Jews, their voices were rarely heard in the debate, and so it was up to others to speak on their behalf. When challenged about the Arab population, Zionists like Lord Walter Rothschild insisted there was no question that the Jewish National Home would ever encroach on the rights of the local majority.[33] But the 'assimilationists' were not so sure. How could this apparent fairness be reconciled with the Zionist insistence that the Jews were an exceptional case, who must get special treatment when it came to unfettered immigration, for example?

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[32] Amery, p. 116.

[33] For example, Lord Rothschild, quoted in *The Times*, 18 June 1917.

In fact, the Zionists had come up with what they deemed a solution to the 'Arab problem'. Since it was plainly unrealistic to impose a small Jewish population on an Arab majority, the answer was for Britain to run Palestine, and while she kept order, for Jewish immigration to increase to the point that there was a Jewish majority. At that moment the Jews would be strong enough to govern themselves. Beyond this plan for eventual domination, and assurances that Arabs would not suffer as a result of the declaration, Zionists seemed unwilling or unable to engage with the issue of how Arabs would react when a Jewish National Home was planted in their midst.

Nor was there any serious attempt to deal with this issue at governmental level until Curzon intervened at the eleventh hour. Some lone voices had spoken out from the East. Britain's Chief Political Officer in Egypt, Gilbert Clayton, had cautioned against any public pronouncement in August 1917, observing that it would not help matters if the Arabs were to be provoked at this time by Zionism.[34] Gertrude Bell, who criticised the Zionists for talking as though Palestine was empty of people, conveyed her views to the Cabinet via Edwin Montagu.[35]

However these warnings were too little, too late, to have any fundamental effect. The clause protecting the rights of the 'non-Jewish communities' was not the result of serious discussion about what would happen to the Arabs. If the Cabinet had been deeply concerned about the future status of Arabs in Palestine, it might have been expected that this new clause would make mention of their political rights. However, by referring only to their civil and religious rights, it seems that the Cabinet believed that Palestinian Arabs had no political rights. When, at the San Remo conference of 1920, the French tried to insert the word 'political' into the list of 'non-Jewish' rights that the British would be required to protect under the Mandate, the suggestion was rejected.[36]

Why was the declaration finally adopted?

Despite the concerns of Lord Curzon, the Cabinet meeting of 31 October was persuaded by Balfour's arguments that there was a vital propaganda asset to be gained by making

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[34] Stein, L, *The Balfour Declaration,* (Valentine Mitchell, London, 1961) p. 523.

[35] Howell, G, *Daughter of the Desert: The Remarkable Life of Gertrude Bell,* (Pan, London, 2007) p. 383. Republished in 2015 as Howell, G, *Queen of the Desert: the Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell,* (Pan, London, 2015).

[36] This was discussed at San Remo on 24 April 1920. In arguing for political rights to be granted to the non-Jewish community, the French were actually seeking to protect what they regarded as the traditional rights of the Catholic religious community in Palestine. They feared that if the wording of the Balfour Declaration was inserted into the peace treaty, only the Jews would have political rights. Millerand explained that they were only seeking electoral rights for members of the religious community, not collective political rights for the Arabs. Nevertheless, Curzon insisted that the first proviso of the declaration could not be changed because the wording of the declaration in its entirety was regarded as a charter of rights for the Jewish people. He had met with Zionist representatives just prior to the Conference and had personally undertaken to preserve the original text of the Declaration.
The proceedings at San Remo can be found at Minutes, Meeting Number 12, 24 April 1920 in TNA, FO 371/5244/E5636. However, it would seem that Curzon knew his hands were tied and so he said what he knew he was obligated to say. In private he minuted, 'I am quite willing to water *(sic)* the Palestinian Mandate which I cordially distrust'; referred to by Hubert Young in his letter to Robert Vansittart, 30 June 1920, TNA, FO371/5244/7369.

the declaration, because world Jewish opinion would then swing behind Britain and the Allies, and not against them, especially in revolutionary Russia, and the United States, where the majority of Jews, (or so they had been convinced by Weizmann), were pro-Zionist. Balfour gathered that all the Cabinet were 'now agreed that from a purely diplomatic and political point of view it was desirable that some declaration favourable to the aspirations of the Jewish nationalists should now be made'. If such an assurance could be given then 'we should be able to carry on an extremely useful propaganda both in Russia and America'.[37]

The motives articulated by the War Cabinet for finally approving the Declaration were therefore pragmatic ones, related to an assessment of Britain's war interests. But this 'propaganda asset' explanation should not obscure why Balfour and Lloyd George were disposed to the Zionist cause in the first place. On a number of later occasions Balfour explained that his heartfelt desire had been to give the Jewish people what he regarded as their rightful home.[38]

Leonard Stein, the highly placed Zionist historian of the Declaration, observes that this sympathy for the homelessness of the Jews might 'have little to do with the War Cabinet's conscious motives for approving the Declaration, but without this background neither its origins nor its significance can be understood'.[39]

[37] Cabinet minutes, 31 October 1917, TNA, CO 733/347/7.

[38] See, for example, Meinertzhagen, R, *Middle East Diary, 1917-1956,* (The Cresset Press, London, 1959), p. 8.

[39] Stein, p. 552.