

Genesis of Britain's 1917 'Balfour Declaration': Zionist Jews' Sanction to Populate Palestine

Biot Report #394: September 01, 2006

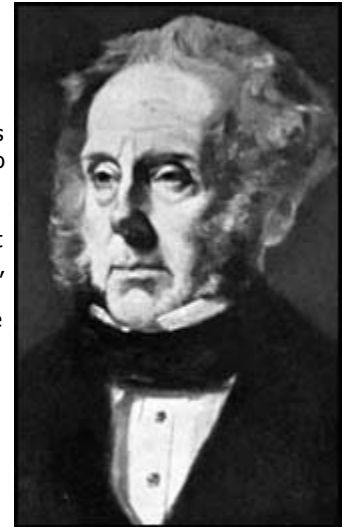
The British Government first had contact with the Zionist Movement (1) in 1902, but the first murmurings about the idea of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine had surfaced some 60 years earlier. Britain's Foreign Secretary in 1840, Lord Palmerston (1784-1865) (born Henry Thomas Templeton), was determined that Muhammad Ali, the renegade Ottoman governor of Egypt, should not succeed (with French connivance) in making himself master of Syria (which then included Palestine) as well as Egypt, as described elsewhere. (2) Palmerston instead wanted to prop up the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire and end Muhammad Ali's quest to extend his personal empire.

During this crisis in Syria/Palestine, "the idea of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine captured the imagination of certain religious circles in England," notes Leonard Stein, author of the 1961 definitive treatise on the Balfour Declaration. (3) In the summer of 1840, when the nine years' Egyptian occupation of Palestine was about to be ended, Palmerston took up with relish the idea of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine in the belief that Turkey stood to gain by getting the Jews and their friends on her side.

Palmerston was relentless in his solicitude for the Jews. He wrote to the British Ambassador in Constantinople on August 11, 1840 the following:

"There exists at present among the Jews dispersed over Europe, a strong notion that the time is approaching when their nation is to return to Palestine....It is well known that the Jews of Europe possess great wealth, and it is manifest that any country in which a considerable number of them might choose to settle would derive great benefit from the riches that they would bring into it....The Jewish people, if returning under the sanction and protection of the Sultan, would be a check upon any future evil designs of Mehemet Ali or his successor....Even if the encouragement held out by the Sultan to the Jews were not practically to lead to the settlement of any great number of them within the limits of the Ottoman Empire, still the promulgation of some law in their favour would spread a friendly disposition towards the Sultan among the Jews in Europe, and the Turkish Government must at once see how advantageous it would be to the Sultan' cause thus to create useful friends in many countries by a single edict." (3)

Several weeks later Palmerston again wrote the Ambassador that "a sympathetic response by the Sultan would gain him the goodwill of 'the religious party in this country,' as well as enriching his Empire by attracting many wealthy immigrants." (3) Later, he reminded the Ambassador that "the Jews who are scattered through other countries in Europe and Africa should be induced to go and settle in Palestine." But, he noted, the Jews would require "some real and tangible security"—British protection—and be "allowed to transmit to the Porte [Sultan], through British authorities, any complaints which they might have to prefer against the Turkish authorities." (4) In fact, Palmerston had one year earlier in 1839 instructed the British Vice-Consulate in Jerusalem to "afford protection to the Jews generally."



Lord Palmerston. Source: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRpalmerston.htm>; accessed September 2, 2006.

Palmerston's notion that the Jews had power and influence that could be useful to friends was a seminal idea that recurred frequently in the British handling of the Palestine Question in 1916-1917 during the lead up to publication of the Balfour Declaration. This declaration, reproduced below, states that the British Government supported Zionist plans for a Jewish "national home" in Palestine, with the condition that the rights of existing communities, i.e., Arab Muslims (the majority), Christians and Jews, not be harmed.

Foreign Office,
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

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

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

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

Y. W.
Arthur Balfour

The Balfour Declaration. Source: Front matter. Leonard Stein: "The Balfour Declaration" Simon and Schuster 1964

When in the 1880s, Jewish immigrants began to trickle into Palestine from Eastern Europe, the British Government chose not to follow up on Palmerston's grandiose scheme for their resettlement. A few years later, when the Turkish Government began to restrict admission of Jews to Palestine, Britain did, however, join other powers in beseeching the Turks to permit the migration, but to no avail. Beyond this expression of good will, Britain remained detached from Zionist aspirations until 1902, when the Balfour Government was approached by the Zionist Organization, established in 1897 by Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), with proposals for a Jewish settlement in the Sinai Peninsula ("Egyptian Palestine"). (5)

Soliciting the German and Ottoman Governments in 1895-1902

Before appealing to Britain's Balfour Government in 1902, Herzl had made the rounds to at least two other major powers in hopes of obtaining protection for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. He first looked to Germany in 1895 where large numbers of unpopular Jews resided. Herzl reasoned that the Kaiser should be interested in their migration out of his country. The German Kaiser did receive Herzl for one hour in Constantinople (the Kaiser was on his way to Palestine). When the Kaiser brought up the Zionist scheme with the Ottoman Sultan, he was rebuffed and then became "frigid" toward Herzl in their subsequent meetings. By 1898 Herzl had given up on the Kaiser and Germany. One thing that peeved Herzl was that the Kaiser demanded the use of German, not Hebrew, as a language of instruction in certain Jewish educational institutions in Palestine.

Next Herzl went directly to the Ottoman Sultan and offered the possibility of using Jewish wealth to extricate the tottering Empire from financial embarrassments that were making it susceptible to exploitation by other powers. The Sultan met with him in 1901 and twice in 1902, and finally decided that Herzl was bluffing and did not have the wealth he claimed. The Sultan did encourage migration of Jews to other parts of the Ottoman Empire, but Palestine was out. Herzl responded by counting the Ottoman Empire out.

Soliciting the Balfour Government in 1902

Then Herzl visited Britain where he looked up British-born Jews who had connections with Zionism and politicians. One such person, Leopold Greenberg, introduced Herzl to Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914) who in 1902 became interested in the Zionists' Sinai Peninsula scheme (also called the El Arish proposal). Herzl's



impassioned arguments had undoubtedly made a deep impression on Chamberlain," wrote Chamberlain's biographer. "Hitherto his interest in Zionism had been chiefly humanitarian; he now saw in it some positive opportunities for British policy. By supporting Zionism, Britain could enlist the sympathies of world Jewry on her behalf. She could also secure Jewish capital and settlers for the development of what was virtually British territory [Britain was the dominant power in Egypt at the time under Lord Cromer]. Looking, moreover, to the future, a Jewish colony in Sinai might prove a useful instrument for extending British influence in Palestine proper when the time came for the inevitable dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire." (6)

Herzl wrote in his diary about what he told Chamberlain in April 1903 when the El Arish scheme was again discussed: "We shall get [Palestine] not from the goodwill but from the jealousy of the Powers. And if we are in El Arish under the Union Jack, then our Palestine will likewise be in the British sphere of influence." Herzl noted that this suggestion was "not at all ill-received." (6) In the end, the Egyptian Government strenuously objected to the scheme because of the requests for water for irrigation of the Jewish settlement, and was backed up by Lord Cromer (1841-1917) (born Evelyn Baring), the British Agent in Egypt, for three reasons: "the Egyptian Government persisted in its opposition, the experts believed the scheme to be unsound, and the administration of Egypt already presented problems enough and it would be unwise to add to them." (7)

Chamberlain then suggested a Jewish homeland in East Africa and hired a firm of solicitors—Lloyd George, Roberts and Company—to draft the scheme in 1903. When the British settlers in East Africa got wind of the scheme, they voiced their bitter discontent, and the idea died. The Zionists never really wanted to go to East Africa anyway. Lloyd George was to become an important figure later in the genesis of the Balfour Declaration.

Britain Imposes Limits on Jewish Immigration to Britain in 1905

While Chamberlain was working to find the Jews a homeland, considerable numbers of Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe began to arrive in England. (8) The Jewish immigration was not on the "same spectacular scale as in the United States," wrote Stein, "but it was large enough to bring about a radical change in the make-up of the Jewish community. In 1880 there were about 60,000 Jews in England, many of them British-born and nearly all of them more or less anglicized. When the impact of Zionism first began to be felt in the late 1890s, Anglo-Jewry had already ceased to be the compact and cosy little group that it had been some twenty years earlier."

Stein continued: "Between 1881 and 1905 Jewish immigrants, mainly from Eastern Europe, settled in England in numbers not precisely known but usually estimated at about 100,000. Though cut down by the restrictive legislation introduced in 1905, immigration continued up to 1914, when about one-half of a total Jewish population of some 300,000 would appear to have consisted of fairly recent arrivals from Eastern Europe and their dependents." (9) Britain was developing its own "Jewish Question". Prime Minister Arthur Balfour (1848-1930) emphatically denounced anti-semitism as the alien immigration bill raced through Parliament, yet asserted the right of every country to choose its immigrants and spoke more pointedly about "the undoubted evils that had fallen upon the country from an immigration which was largely Jewish." (10) Balfour was later to become prominent in the eventual passing of the "Balfour Declaration".

Jews in Palestine 1882-1914

In 1914, 600,000 Arabs—overwhelmingly Muslim but some Christians, too—and about 85,000 Jews resided in Palestine, according to Stein. (11) Moreover, "the Jewish population had more than doubled since the beginning of the Back to Palestine Movement [Stein's phrase] in the early 1880s, when it is believed to have numbered about 35,000. Allowing for natural increase, the difference of 50,000 represents a net immigration of the order of 30,000-35,000 in the thirty-two years from 1882-1913." (11)

Most of the Jews who migrated to Palestine hailed from "Russia, Rumania, Austrian Poland and Hungary, with the Russians leading both in numbers and in influence and bringing with them ideas derived from the Russian intellectuals by whose teachings many of them were inspired. Among these immigrants from Eastern Europe were the founders of the agricultural settlements which, though still in their infancy, had by 1914 become a distinctive feature of the revival of Jewish life in Palestine and symbolized the cleansing of the stains of the ghetto by a return to the soil," wrote Stein. (12) The Turks tried to cut off further Jewish immigration but were inept and ineffective.

The number of Jews migrating to Palestine was insignificant compared to the more than 2 million who between 1882 and 1914 emigrated from Eastern Europe to America and until 1905 to Britain. Thus, the Jews who made their way to Palestine had a choice and were not pressured to go there. In 1914, a large portion of the Jewish population in Palestine (85,000) consisted of secluded Orthodox Jews who were carrying on the traditional study of the Law in the Holy Cities and being supported by Jews living abroad. The "dynamic" element—those Jews who had arrived since 1882 to work the land had been only 35,000 in number. (13)



Joseph Chamberlain. Source: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRchamberlainJ.htm>; accessed September 2, 2006.



Arthur Balfour. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Arthur_Balfour_%2C_photo_portrait_facing_left.jpg; accessed September 2, 2006.

Early Arab Response to Jewish Immigration to Palestine

In the 1880s, 1890s and early 1900s, Arabs in Palestine, who outnumbered the Jews by six to one, were relatively quiet about their new neighbors. But by 1914, the Arabs were becoming increasingly anxious about changes wrought to their environment by immigrant Jews, such as increased competition in trade and industry, land purchases, and failure to offer employment to Arabs. The older Jewish colonies situated on the coastal plains had provided steady employment to thousands of Arabs for years. The newcomer Jews, however, wanted to do all the work with their own hands on rural farms and as merchants in town. Indeed, the Jewish Labor Movement strongly advocated that employment provided by Jews or Jewish institutions must be reserved for Jewish workers. The rationale was that Jewish employment was necessary to build up a Jewish working-class population with varied skills and to develop a healthy economy. (14)

Arab national consciousness was gaining following the Turkish Revolution (1908-1909); for example, there were distinct signs of stiffening Arab opposition to Jewish purchases of land in Palestine. (15) But Arabs also were reported to have said that Jewish activities had been of advantage to Palestine and that Jewish settlers would be welcome, provided that they identified themselves with the rest of the Ottoman population, which was not a part of their agenda. Indeed one Arab nationalist wrote in April 1914 that the reason why Arab public opinion was turning against the Jews was that they kept strictly apart from the Arabs and aimed at establishing a Jewish State." (16) Another observer wrote: "Many natives of Palestine, whose national consciousness has begun to develop since the Turkish Revolution, look askance, quite naturally, at the selling of land to 'strangers' and do their best to put a stop to this evil." (16) A friend of Zionism wrote that Britain could not "afford to ignore the possible effect of...an Arab movement upon the state of Palestine and the future of the healthy Jewish nationalism which is at length striking root in its original home." (17)

Ahad Ha'am (the pen name of Asher Ginsberg, a Jew from Skvira, near Kiev, Ukraine) (1856-1927) (18) warned his fellow Jews about purchasing Arab land in Palestine: He wrote presciently in 1912 the following:

"We are in the habit of thinking that all the Arabs are wild men of the desert and do not see or understand what goes on around them. But that is a great mistake. The Arabs, especially the town-dwellers, see and understand what we are doing and what we want in Palestine, but they do not react and pretend not to notice, because at present they do not see in what we are doing any threat to their own future. ...But if ever we develop in Palestine to such a degree as to encroach on the living space of the native population to any appreciable extent, they will not easily give up their place." (19) [Bolding by editor.]



Ahad Ha'am. Source: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/ahadhaam.html>; accessed September 2, 2006.

Herbert Samuel (1870-1963), a British Jew and member of Parliament, who later became High Commissioner of the British Mandate of Palestine, wrote from Palestine in 1921 the following:

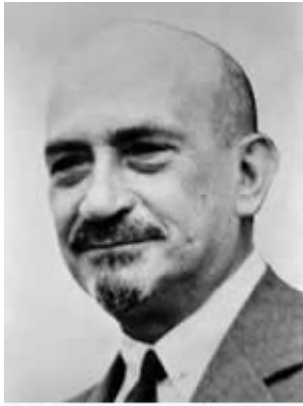
"There are those...who sometimes forget or ignore the present inhabitants of Palestine. Inspired by the greatness of their ideals, feeling behind them the pressure of two thousand years of Jewish history, intent upon the practical measures that are requisite to carry their purpose into effect, they learn with surprise and often with incredulity that there are half-a-million people in Palestine, many of whom hold, and hold strongly, very different views." (20)

Chaim Weizmann Appears on the Scene

In 1914 native Russian and devout Zionist Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952) was 40 years old and a naturalized British citizen. As a result of solving some pressing British munitions problems (he was a chemist) in the early days of World War I, he was able to meet Welshman David Lloyd George (1863-1945), then Minister of Munitions and later to become Prime Minister, who once joked that "acetone converted me to Zionism". (21) Weizmann made a good impression on Lloyd George who also said, "I am his proselyte...There is no man with a greater part in the conversion of the Gentiles running the war than my friend Dr. Weizmann...[He is] one of the noblest and most unselfish men I have ever met." (22)



Herbert Samuel. Source: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRsamuel.htm>; accessed September 2, 2006.



Chaim Weizmann. Source: <http://www.nndb.com/people/852/000092576/>; accessed September 2, 2006.



Chaim Weizmann in Palestine 1917. Source: http://www.weltchronik.de/dch/dch_2367.htm; accessed September 2, 2006.

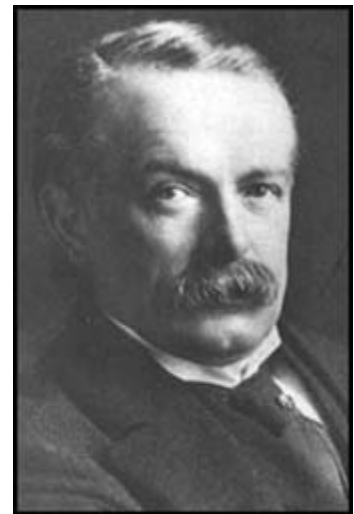
More on David Lloyd George

Recall that Lloyd George had first come into contact with Zionism in 1903 when Joseph Chamberlain asked Lloyd George's law firm to draft up the scheme to sell British land to Jews migrating to East Africa (see above). When Britain declared war on Turkey in November 1914, Lloyd George, who had remained quiet about his opinions on Zionism for a decade, told Herbert Samuel that he was "very keen to see a Jewish State established" in Palestine." (23) Thus, when Chaim Weizmann entered the picture in 1914, Lloyd George was "predisposed to be receptive", notes Stein.

Lloyd George had mixed feelings about Jews. Occasionally he would make remarks, such as: "There were a good many Jews they could well spare", while other times he would show sensitivity to the "Jewish mystique". (24) He admitted once that growing up in Wales he learned more about the history of the Jews in Old Testament readings than he learned about his own people. He loved those stories, including the prophecy about restoring the Jews to the Holy Land. He also related to Jews because, he said, he, too, belonged to a small nation [Wales].

Lord Balfour Again

Lloyd George became Prime Minister in December 1916 and decided right away to take the risk of a large-scale campaign for the conquest of Palestine, which he confided to a friend was "the one really interesting part of the War." (25) Meanwhile Arthur Balfour, former Prime Minister (1903-1905), joined the Lloyd George Government as Foreign Secretary at the end of 1916. In 1906, Balfour had actually met Weizmann at a Manchester meeting when the East African project was still roiling. Balfour recalled the meeting vividly. When Weizmann was attempting to connect with Balfour via a mutual friend, Balfour wrote in 1914: "I have the liveliest and also the most pleasant recollections of my conversation with Dr. Weizmann...and should be very pleased to hear from him." (26)



David Lloyd George. Source: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRgeorge.htm>; accessed September 2, 2006.

Weizmann wrote to Ha'am (see above) of the meeting with Balfour, as follows:

"I saw Balfour on Saturday...Our talk lasted an hour and a half. Balfour remembered everything we had discussed eight years ago, and this made it superfluous for me to repeat my exposition of the Jewish problem in its national aspect...When I expressed my regret that our work [in Palestine] had been interrupted, he said: 'You may get your things done much more quickly after the war...'. He said that, in his opinion, the [Jewish] problem would not be solved until either the Jews became completely assimilated here or a normal Jewish society came into existence in Palestine, and, moreover, he was thinking more of the West European Jews than of those of Eastern Europe. [Weizmann persuaded Balfour of the need to look at the plight of Eastern European Jews and asked to see Balfour again after the war.]

The two subsequently met several times in 1915 and 1916. Weizmann wrote that Balfour said: "Christian civilisation owes to the Jews a debt which it cannot repay." (27) Balfour hedged on British taking responsibility for Palestine for "she would be suspected of seeking territorial aggrandizement" and favored the United States undertaking the role of protecting the Jews in their development of Palestine, according to Weizmann who felt "ashamed of my giggling mind." (27)

Nevertheless, it turns out that stony Balfour revered Old Testament stories during his youth in Scotland, and, like Lloyd George, had a soft spot for the Jews and their dilemma. After the Balfour Declaration had been announced, Balfour said that both he and Lloyd George "have been influenced by a desire to give the Jews their rightful place in the world; a great nation without a home is not right." (28)

The British Invasion of Palestine in 1917

Just several months after David Lloyd George became Prime Minister in early December 1916, he began pushing the War Cabinet to invade Palestine. British troops had already cleared Egypt of Turks but Lloyd George wanted them to capture Jerusalem and then expel the Turks

from Palestine. Stein writes: "So far as Palestine was concerned, it is clear that Lloyd George was influenced by other than purely military considerations. He writes in his "Memoirs" that, when the question of going on with the Palestine campaign was discussed by the War Cabinet on 2 April 1917, 'we realized the moral and political advantages to be expected from an advance on this Front, and particularly from the occupation of Jerusalem.'" (29) Indeed, the object of the Palestine campaign was not merely to defeat the Turks there but to bring Palestine permanently under British control. (29)

At first the War Cabinet wavered about an offensive in Palestine, but eventually moved forward with it, which had the effect of bringing the Zionist question into the foreground. On April 3, 1917, Lloyd George saw Weizmann who was subsequently told to be ready to leave for Egypt within the next ten days by diplomatic advisor Sir Mark Sykes who "showed interest in [Weizmann's] proposal that a statement of British policy in a pro-Zionist sense should be prepared for publication in Palestine at the first opportune moment." (30)

British War Cabinet Considers a Pro-Zionist Public Announcement

The British War Cabinet first began to discuss the advisability of a public pronouncement in favor of a Jewish national home in Palestine in summer 1917. Weizmann on June 13, 1917 wrote to Sir Ronald Graham that "it appears desirable from every point of view that the British Government should give expression to its sympathy and support of the Zionist claims on Palestine. In fact, it need only confirm the view which eminent and representative members of the Government have many times expressed to us, and which have formed the basis of our negotiations throughout the long period of almost three years." (31)

The Foreign Office, led by Lord Balfour, agreed, and on June 13, 1917, suggested that the time had arrived "when we might meet the wishes of the Zionists and give them an assurance that His Majesty's Government are in general sympathy with their aspirations." (31) United States President Woodrow Wilson and France did not object. Stein writes that "Weizmann and his colleagues were being encouraged to impress upon the American and Russian Jews that if Great Britain gained control of Palestine, she could be relied upon to favour the building up of a Jewish Commonwealth. They had hinted, or more or less hinted, that they were authorized to give this assurance, but it would be all the more convincing if a friendly interest in Zionism had been openly expressed by the British Government itself. (31) Indeed Weizmann in June persuaded Balfour to receive "a declaration which would be satisfactory to us [Zionists], and which he would try and put before the War Cabinet." (32)

Anti-Zionist Jews Respond Bitterly

It took a while to hammer out the wording of the declaration. Meanwhile, non-Zionist Jews caught wind of the arrangement and complained bitterly. An good example of their sentiment is in the words of Mr. Montagu, as follows: "**The Government has dealt an irreparable blow at Jewish Britons and they have endeavored to set up a people which does not exist; they have alarmed unnecessarily the whole Moslem world; and, in so far as they are successful, they will have a Germanised [militaristic] Palestine on the flank. Why we should intern Muhammad Ali in India for Pan-Mohammedanism when we encourage Pan-Judaism I cannot for the life of me understand. It certainly puts the final date to my political activities.**" (33) [Bolding by Editor.]

APPENDIX

SUCCESSIVE DRAFTS AND FINAL TEXT OF THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

ZIONIST DRAFT JULY 1917 (see p. 470)	BALFOUR DRAFT AUGUST 1917 (see p. 520)	MILNER DRAFT AUGUST 1917 (see p. 520)	MILNER-AMERY DRAFT 4 OCTOBER 1917 (see p. 521)	FINAL TEXT 31 OCTOBER 1917 (see p. 545)
1. His Majesty's Government accepts the principle that Palestine should be reconstituted as the national home of the Jewish people.	His Majesty's Government accept the principle that Palestine should be reconstituted as the national home of the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to secure the achievement of this object and will be ready to consider any suggestions on the subject which the Zionist Organisation may desire to lay before them.	His Majesty's Government accepts the principle that every opportunity should be afforded for the establishment of a home for the Jewish people in Palestine and will use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object and will be ready to consider any suggestions on the subject which the Zionist organisations may desire to lay before them.	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 (and citizenship).	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.
2. His Majesty's Government will use its best endeavours to secure the achievement of this object and will discuss the necessary methods and means with the Zionist Organisation.			(Note: words in brackets added subsequently—see p. 525)	

Successive drafts and final text of the Balfour Declaration.

Source: Leonard Stein: "The Balfour Declaration." Simon and Schuster, 1961, p. 664.

The War Cabinet' Decision on the Declaration is Once More Delayed

Undeterred, the War Cabinet discussed the final draft declaration on October 4, 1917 after being assured by the Chief Rabbi that the proposed declaration would be welcomed by the overwhelming majority of Anglo-Jewry. (34) Balfour "was reminded that the Zionists had

been kept waiting more than three months for a reply" to their missives. (35) Most Jews in Russia were Zionist, and if the Jews could be made to realize that the achievement of Zionist aims depended on an Allied victory, a powerful element in Russian life would be enlisted on the side of the Entente, Zionists explained. (35)

Then on October 24, 1917 Lord Curzon, former Viceroy of India, proposed to circulate another memorandum about the Declaration, which he opposed. Mrs. Weizmann wrote in her diary: "For the third time the War Cabinet has had on the agenda the Palestinian Declaration, and for the third time it was put off owing to our Jewish enemies. On the even, Lord Curzon came in to say that the question is too important and he would like to postpone it in order to present a memorandum on the subject. Sir Mark Sykes, Ormsby-Gore and Sir Ronald Graham were furious and saw in it nothing but obstruction." (35)

According to Stein, Curzon's memo did not concern itself with the dispute between Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews (see above). Rather, **Curzon raised the question as whether the "proposed declaration might not embarrass the British Government by encouraging hopes incapable of being realized. Palestine, he pointed out, was a poor country, devoid of natural resources—'a country calling for prolonged and patient toil from a people inured to agriculture, and even so only admitting after generations of a relatively small population.' It was already inhabited by some half-a-million Arabs, who 'will not be content either to be expropriated for Jewish immigrants or to act merely as hewers of wood and drawers of water for the latter.'**

Curzon continued: **"It is not obvious that a country which cannot within any approximate period contain anything but a small population, which has already an indigenous population of its own of a different race...cannot, save by a very elastic use of the term, be designated as the national home of the Jewish people?' On a realist view, the most that could be done, so far as the Jews were concerned, would be to 'secure to the Jews (but not to the Jews alone) equal civil and religious rights with the other elements of the population, and to arrange, as far as possible, for land purchase and settlement of returning Jews.' I would gladly give my adhesion to such a policy...But in my judgement it is a policy very widely removed from the romantic and idealistic aspirations of many of the Zionist leaders whose literature I have studied."** (36) [Bolding by Editor.]

The Declaration is Passed on Halloween, 1917

On October 31, 1917, the War Cabinet decided that showing sympathy with Jewish aspirations would be a valuable adjunct to [British] propaganda [in Russia and America]. As to the 'meaning of the words 'national home', to which the Zionists attach[ed] so much importance, [Balfour] understood it to mean some form of British, American, or other protectorate, under which full facilities would be given to the Jews to work out their own salvation and to build up, by means of education, agriculture, and industry, a real center of national culture and focus of national life. It did not necessarily involve the early establishment of an independent Jewish State, which was a matter for gradual development in accordance with the ordinary laws of political evolution." (37)

On November 1, 1917, Sir Ronald Graham sent privately to Weizmann the text of the "Balfour Declaration" and on November 2, 1917, Balfour sent it to Lord Rothschild to forward to the Zionist Federation. The original was deposited by Lord Rothschild in the British Museum.

How Did Weizmann Understand the Balfour Declaration?

Twelve months after the Declaration was passed, Weizmann told Balfour the following:

"...The Englishness of England is determined by the fact that the preponderant influence in this country...is English. This state of affairs does not preclude the development of non-Jewish [sic] [?non-English] individuals. Any law-abiding citizen of Great Britain, whether he is of English extraction or not, can...take part in the life of the country without any hindrance. In a Jewish Commonwealth there would be many non-Jewish citizens...but the preponderant influence would be Jewish...." (38)

Stein offers his interpretation of Weizmann's statement: **"There can be no doubt as to the underlying assumption. Jews would wish, and would be encouraged, to settle in Palestine in numbers large enough to ensure their predominance. If, when this point had been reached, Palestine was given self-government, the result would be a Jewish Commonwealth according full equality of rights to what would by that time have become an Arab minority."** (39) [Bolding by editor.]

Early British Doubts about the Declaration

By 1919 when the terms of the British Mandate in Palestine were under consideration, the British Government moved progressively further away from any commitment to the idea of a Jewish State or Commonwealth in Palestine. Stein wrote that an influential group of Zionists began insisting again that the British Government insert in the Declaration a reference to the eventual establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth. Weizmann was warned that the Zionists had better desist from their pressuring if they wanted a British Mandate. (39) The story of the genesis of the British Mandate is another story.

Summary

Stein's monumental work 681-page treatise on the Balfour Declaration conveys seven important points. First, the content of the Balfour Declaration originated with Lord Palmerston in the 1840s and was not a seat-of-the-pants, last-minute idea. Second, the Russian Zionists (Herzl and Weizmann in particular) relentlessly pressed leaders of the British Government to function in the role of protector during the Jewish build up of their population and culture in Palestine. Third, the Arab Question was discussed by British leaders before passage of the Declaration but was passed by. Fourth, Anti-Zionist Jews washed their hands of the entire project after warning about its unrealistic

expectations and failure to examine carefully the Arab Question. Fifth, Zionists did achieve their goal in the passage of the Declaration because of "the jealousy of the Powers", as predicted by Herzl. Sixth, Old Testament stories were powerful motivators for the Scotsman Balfour and the Welshman Lloyd George. Seventh, the British and Americans sincerely believed that Jewish settlement in Palestine would stabilize the region.

Notes and Sources:

1. "Zionism" is "the national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel, advocated, from its inception, tangible as well as spiritual aims. Jews of all persuasions, left and right, religious and secular, joined to form the Zionist movement and worked together toward these goals. Disagreements led to rifts, but ultimately, the common goal of a Jewish state in its ancient homeland was attained. The term 'Zionism' was coined in 1890 by Nathan Birnbaum." Definition is from: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionis...>; accessed September 1, 2006. "The connection between the Jews and Palestine was of the essence of the Zionist creed," noted Leonard Stein (see #3 below), p. 30.

2. For more information on Muhammad Ali and his quest for control of Syria and Palestine, please see SEMP Biot #393: "Who are the Palestinian People?" (August 30, 2006) available at: <http://newsgroups.derkeiler.com/Archive/Soc/soc.culture.israel/2007-07/msg00293.html>

3. Leonard Stein: "The Balfour Declaration." Simon and Schuster, New York, 1961, pp. 5-6.

4. Ibid, p. 7.

5. Ibid, p. 17.

6. Ibid, pp. 24-5.

7. Ibid, p. 26.

8. Ibid, p. 32.

9. Ibid, p. 78.

10. Ibid, p. 79. See also pp. 149-150.

11. Ibid, p. 81.

12. Ibid, p. 82.

13. Ibid, p. 84.

14. Ibid, p. 85.

15. For more on the Turkish Revolution, please see: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/boshtml/bos126.htm> ; accessed September 2, 2006.

16. Ibid, p. 89.

17. Ibid, p. 90.

18. For more on Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg), please see <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biogra...>; accessed September 2, 2006.

19. Stein, p. 91.

20. Ibid, p. 94.

21. Ibid, p. 120.

22. Ibid, p. 141.

23. Ibid, p. 142.

24. Ibid, p. 143.

25. Ibid, p. 145.
 26. Ibid, p. 153.
 27. Ibid, p. 156.
 28. Ibid, p. 158.
 29. Ibid, p. 328, p. 335.
 30. Ibid, p. 331.
 31. Ibid, pp. 462-463.
 32. Ibid, p. 465.
 33. Ibid, p. 501.
 34. Ibid, p. 543.
 35. Ibid, pp. 544-545.
 36. Ibid, pp. 545-546.
 37. Ibid, p. 547.
 38. Ibid, p. 553.
 39. Ibid, p. 554.
 31. Ibid, p. 346.
 32. Ibid, p. 349.
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