

October 20, 2023(<https://www.syndicationbureau.com/2023/10/20/>)

Gaza-Israel War: Unwinding Britain's 'Knotted Ball of Mutual Hate' (<https://www.syndicationbureau.com/gaza-israel-war-unwinding-britains-knotted-ball-of-mutual-hate/>)

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At a time like this, one hesitates to delve into the rights and wrongs of the tragedy unfolding in Israel and Gaza. Certainly, it's worse than pointless to indulge in tit-for-tat condemnation based on a myopic perspective that looks back no further than the last outrage by one side or the other.

History, however, tells us clearly where the ultimate blame lies for the current situation, which is merely the latest consequence of the perpetual disaster initiated over a century ago by the perfidy of the British government.

Britain, with its back up against the wall at the height of World War I, had its own interests at heart when, in November 1917, Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour wrote a fateful letter to Lord Rothschild, scion of the international banking family and a prominent British Zionist.

The Balfour Declaration (https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp), as it came to be known, declared that "His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object."

Both the British government and the Jewish state that would eventually take root in this document soon forgot the proviso that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

Britain cared little for the Zionist ambition to create a homeland for the Jews in the Holy Land. Its motive was to secure the financial and political support of influential American Jewry for Britain's war against Germany.

It is, of course, an antisemitic trope to suggest that "the Jews" have, or have ever had, any kind of undue influence over the political or financial affairs of nations. But it's a fact, rather than a conspiracy theory, that at the height of World War I, powerful Jews in the United States and Britain successfully pressed the Zionist case for a Jewish homeland in Palestine at the highest levels of the two governments.

In the US, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, a friend and ally of President Woodrow Wilson and a prominent advocate for the "recreation" of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, heavily influenced American policy over the issue, and worked directly with Balfour.

What's not widely appreciated – but evidenced in the cabinet papers preserved in the National Archives – is that the Balfour Declaration was secretly submitted in draft form (<https://balfourproject.org/bp/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/War-cabinet-minutes-Oct-1917.pdf>) for the approval of 10 leading Jewish figures in Britain in October 1917, most of them prominent Zionists.

One was Lord Rothschild, to whom the finalized declaration would ultimately be addressed barely two weeks later. Another was his friend Chaim Weizmann, the Russian-born president of the Zionist Organization and the future first president of Israel.

Of course, even as they were wooing the world's Zionists, the British, in a successful bid to encourage the Arabs to revolt against the Turks, had already promised the Sharif of Mecca that the Arabs could have their own independent homeland on the territory from which the Ottoman Empire was soon to be evicted.

As if this duplicity weren't enough, in 1916, the British and the French signed the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, in which they agreed to carve up Ottoman lands at the end of the war.

As masters of Palestine under the mandate later awarded them by the League of Nations, the British reneged on their promise to the Arabs, a betrayal of which TE Lawrence, who talked the Arabs into rising up, later declared himself to be "continually and bitterly ashamed (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/30/revealed-te-lawrence-felt-bitter-shame-over-uks-false-promises-of-arab-self-rule>)."

Jewish immigration to Palestine, which had begun in the late 19th century in response to persecution in Russia, increased dramatically in the early years of the British mandate. The initial signs of tension between Jews and Arabs were soon seen, with the first riots breaking out in Jerusalem (<https://becc.bristol.gov.uk/records/2008/059/001>) in April 1920.

The British had created an impossible situation that remains insoluble to this day, as even they soon began to appreciate.

In January 1915, just two months after Britain had declared war on the Ottoman Empire, Herbert Samuel, the first practicing Jew to serve as a British minister, spotted the potential in the conflict for the Zionist cause and circulated a paper within the British cabinet entitled "The Future of Palestine (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Future_of_Palestine#/media/File:Future_of_Palestine_Herbert_Samuel_memorandum_1915_CAB_37_123_43.jpg)."

In it, he urged the government to consider annexing Palestine after the war and opening it to Jewish immigration. This, he said, "would win for England the lasting gratitude of the Jews throughout the world," especially in "the United States, where they number about two million."

After the war, in an extraordinarily insensitive move, Samuel was appointed British High Commissioner of Palestine.

The appointment alarmed even the post-war British military government of Palestine. The Arabs, wrote Field Marshal Edmund Allenby, would see the appointment as "handing country over at once to a permanent Zionist administration (https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1650658)." The Muslim-Christian Society warned that it "cannot accept responsibility for riots or other disturbances of peace (<https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1648029>)."

But as Jewish numbers in Palestine continued to increase, there was no going back. A UN vote in favor of a partition plan, which envisaged "an independent Arab State, an independent Jewish State" and "international trusteeship for the City of Jerusalem," led to a civil war in 1947. Finally, on May 14, 1948, the British threw up their hands and walked away.

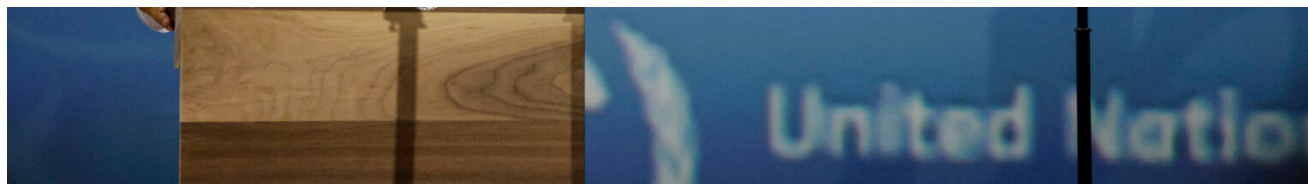
The next day, David Ben-Gurion, president of the World Zionist Organization, announced the foundation of the state of Israel.

If ending this seemingly unstoppable cycle of violence seems impossible, that's because it almost certainly is – none of the many initiatives designed to unravel the knotted ball of mutual hate and mistrust has ever succeeded in doing so.

Now, with the bloody and unjustifiable Hamas attack on Israel, and the equally bloody and unjustifiable Israeli reprisals in Gaza, the tragedy continues, embroiling another generation in the endless fight no one can win.

Jonathan Gornall is a British journalist, formerly with The Times, who has lived and worked in the Middle East and is now based in the UK.

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