

Who wrote the Balfour Declaration and why: The World War I Connection

Excerpted from *Against Our Better Judgment: The Hidden History of How the U.S. Was Used to Create Israel* by Alison Weir

Most analysts consider WWI a pointless conflict that resulted from diplomatic entanglements rather than some travesty of justice or aggression. Yet, it was catastrophic to a generation of Europeans, killing 14 million people.[i]

The United States joined this unnecessary war a few years into the hostilities, costing many American lives, even though the U.S. was not party to the alliances that had drawn other nations into the fray. This even though Americans had been strongly opposed to entering the war and Woodrow Wilson had won the presidency with the slogan, “He kept us out of war.”[ii]

President Wilson changed course in 1917 and plunged the U.S. into that tragic European conflict. Approximately 320,000 Americans were killed or injured.[iii] Over 1,200 American citizens who opposed the war were rounded up and imprisoned, some for years.[iv]

A number of reasons were publicly given for Wilson’s change of heart, including Germany’s submarine warfare, Germany’s sinking of the British passenger ship *Lusitania*,[v] and a diplomatic debacle known as the Zimmerman Telegram episode.[vi] Historians also add pro-British propaganda and economic reasons to the list of causes, and most suggest that a number of factors were at play.

While Americans today are aware of many of these facts, few know that Zionism appears to have been one of those factors. *[Zionism was a political movement to create a Jewish state in Palestine. When this movement began, in the late 1800s, the population of Palestine was 96 percent Muslim and Christian. The large majority of Jews around the world were not Zionists.]*

Diverse documentary evidence shows that Zionists pushed for the U.S. to enter the war on Britain’s side as part of a deal to gain British support for their colonization of Palestine.

From the very beginning of their movement, Zionists realized that if they were to succeed in their goal of creating a Jewish state on land that was already inhabited by non-Jews, they needed backing from one of the “great powers.”[vii] They tried the Ottoman Empire, which controlled Palestine at the time, but were turned down (although they were told that Jews could settle throughout other parts of the Ottoman empire and become Turkish citizens).[viii]



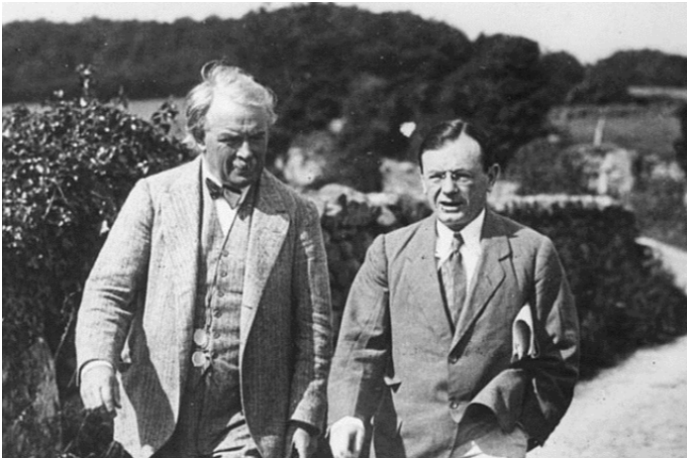
(L-R) Chaim Weizmann, future president of Israel, with Louis Brandeis, U.S. Supreme Court Justice, in Palestine, 1919. The two were instrumental in obtaining the Balfour Declaration, a British document that many feel was a critical step in the establishment of Israel. Zionists’ promise that they would get the U.S. to join Britain in “the Great War” was the enticement.

They then turned to Britain, which was also initially less than enthusiastic. Famous English Middle East experts such as Gertrude Bell pointed out that Palestine was Arab and that Jerusalem was sacred to all three major monotheistic faiths.[ix]

Future British Foreign Minister Lord George Curzon similarly stated that Palestine was already inhabited by half a million Arabs who would “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.”[x]

However, once the British were embroiled in World War I, and particularly during 1916, a disastrous year for the Allies in which there were 60,000 British casualties in one day alone,[xi] Zionists were able to play a winning card. While they previously had appealed to religious or idealistic arguments, now Zionist leaders could add a particularly powerful motivator: telling the British government that Zionists in the U.S. would push America to enter the war on the side of the British, if the British promised to support a Jewish home in Palestine afterward.[xii]

In 1917 British Foreign Minister Lord Balfour issued a letter to Zionist leader Lord Rothschild. Known as the Balfour Declaration, this letter promised that Britain would “view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” and “use their best



British Prime Minister Lloyd George with Leopold Amery, Jan. 1, 1918. (Amery was a secret and fervent Zionist.)

endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object.”

The letter then qualified this somewhat by stating that it should be “clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.” The “non-Jewish communities” were 92 percent of Palestine’s population at that time,[xiii] vigorous Zionist immigration efforts having slightly expanded the percentage of Jews living in Palestine by then.

The letter, while officially signed by British Foreign Minister Lord Balfour, had been in process for two years and had gone through a number of edits by British and American Zionists and British officials.[xiv] As Zionist leader Nahum Sokolow later wrote,

“[e]very idea born in London was tested by the Zionist Organization in America, and every suggestion in America received the most careful attention in London.”[xv]

Sokolow wrote that British Zionists were helped, “above all, by American Zionists. Between London, New York, and Washington there was constant communication, either by telegraph, or by personal visit, and as a result there was perfect unity among the Zionists of both hemispheres.” Sokolow particularly praised “the beneficent personal influence of the Honourable Louis D. Brandeis, Judge of the Supreme Court.”[xvi]

The final version of the Declaration was actually written by Leopold Amery, a British official who, it came out later, was a secret and fervent Zionist.[xvii]

It appears that the idea for such a declaration had been originally promoted by Parushim founder Kallen. [*The Parushim was a secret Zionist society described by professor Sarah Schmidt and U.S. author Peter Grose; for more information and citations see Weir’s book Against Our Better Judgement.*] Author Peter Grose reports,

“The idea had come to [the British] from an unlikely source. In November 1915, long before the United States was involved in the war, the fertile brain of Horace Kallen... had come up with the idea of an Allied statement supporting in whatever veiled way was deemed necessary, Jewish national rights in Palestine.”

Grose writes that Kallen suggested the idea to a well-connected British friend who would pass the idea along. According to Kallen, such a statement “would give a natural outlet for the spontaneous pro-English, French, and Italian sympathies of the Jewish masses.” Kallen told his friend that this would help break down America’s neutrality, which Kallen knew was the aim of British diplomacy, desperate to bring the U.S. into the war on its side.

Grose writes: “Kallen’s idea lit a spark of interest in Whitehall.”[xviii]

While the “Balfour Declaration” was a less than ringing endorsement of Zionism, Zionists considered it a major breakthrough, because it cracked open a door that they would later force wider and wider open. In fact, many credit this as a key factor in the creation of Israel.[xix]

These Balfour-WWI negotiations are referred to in various documents.

Samuel Landman, secretary of the World Zionist Organization, described them in detail in a 1936 article in *World Jewry*. He explained that a secret “gentleman’s agreement” had been made in 1916 between the British government and Zionist leaders:

“After an understanding had been arrived at between Sir Mark Sykes and [Zionists] Weizmann and Sokolow, it was resolved to send a secret message to Justice Brandeis that the British Cabinet would help the Jews to gain Palestine in return for active Jewish sympathy and for support in the USA for the Allied cause, so as to bring about a radical pro-Ally tendency in the United States.”[xx]

Landman wrote that once the British had agreed to help the Zionists, this information was communicated to the press, which he reported rapidly began to favor the U.S. joining the war on the side of Britain.[xxi]

Landman claimed that Zionists had fulfilled their side of the contract and that it was “Jewish help that brought U.S.A. into the war on the side of the Allies,” thus causing

the defeat of Germany.[xxii] He went on to state that this had “rankled” in Germany ever since and “contributed in no small measure to the prominence which anti-Semitism occupies in the Nazi programme.”

British Colonial Secretary Lord Cavendish also wrote about this agreement and its result in a 1923 memorandum to the British Cabinet, stating:

“The object [of the Balfour Declaration] was to enlist the sympathies on the Allied side of influential Jews and Jewish organizations all over the world... [and] it is arguable that the negotiations with the Zionists...did in fact have considerable effect in advancing the date at which the United States government intervened in the war.”[xxiii]

Former British Prime Minister Lloyd George similarly referred to the deal, telling a British commission in 1935:

“Zionist leaders gave us a definite promise that, if the Allies committed themselves to giving facilities for the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine, they would do their best to rally Jewish sentiment and support throughout the world to the Allied cause. They kept their word.”[xxiv]

Brandeis University professor and author Frank E. Manuel reported that Lloyd George had testified in 1937 “that stimulating the war effort of American Jews was one of the major motives which, during a harrowing period in the European war, actuated members of the cabinet in finally casting their votes for the Declaration.”[xxv]

American career Foreign Service Officer Evan M. Wilson, who had served as Minister-Consul General in Jerusalem, also described this arrangement in his book *Decision on Palestine*. He wrote that the Balfour declaration “...was given to the Jews largely for the purpose of enlisting Jewish support in the war and of forestalling a similar promise by the Central Powers [Britain’s enemies in World War I]”. [xxvi]

The official biographer of Lloyd George, author Malcolm Thomson, stated that the “determining factor” in the decision to issue the Balfour Declaration was the “scheme for engaging by some such concession the support of American Zionists for the allied cause in the first world war.”[xxvii]

Similarly, Zionist historian Naomi Cohen calls the Balfour Declaration a “wartime measure,” and writes: “Its



Future Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion speaking at 19th Zionist Congress, Lucerne, Switzerland, 1935.

immediate object was to capture Jewish sympathy, especially in the United States, for the Allies and to shore up England’s strategic interests in the Near East.” The Declaration was pushed, she writes, “by leading Zionists in England and by Brandeis, who intervened with President Wilson.”[xxviii]

Finally, David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, wrote in 1939:

“To a certain extent America had played a decisive role in the First World War, and American Jewry had a considerable part, knowingly or not, in the achievement of the Balfour Declaration.”[xxix]

[Most Jews in the U.S and elsewhere, including in Palestine itself, were not Zionists, and some strenuously opposed Zionism. See the book for more information on this.]

The influence of Brandeis and other Zionists in the U.S. had enabled Zionists to form an alliance with Britain, one of the world’s great powers, a remarkable achievement for a non-state group and a measure of Zionists’ by-then immense power. As historian Kolsky states, the Zionist movement was now “an important force in international politics.”[xxx]

American Zionists may also have played a role in preventing an early peace with the Ottoman Empire.[xxxi]

In May 1917 American Secretary of State Robert Lansing received a report that the Ottomans were extremely weary of the war and that it might be possible to induce them to break with Germany and make a separate peace with Britain.[xxxii]

Such a peace would have helped in Britain’s effort to win the war (victory was still far from ensured), but it would have prevented Britain from acquiring Palestine and enabling a Jewish state.[xxxiii]

The State Department considered a separate Ottoman peace a long shot, but decided to send an emissary to pursue the possibility. Felix Frankfurter became part of the delegation and ultimately persuaded the delegation's leader, former Ambassador Henry J. Morgenthau, to abandon the effort.[xxxiv]

US State Department officials considered that Zionists had worked to scuttle this potentially peace-making mission and were unhappy about it.[xxxv] Zionists often construed such displeasure at their actions as evidence of American diplomats' "anti-Semitism."

Footnotes

[i] "Overview of World War I," Digital History, accessed January 1, 2014, <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/era.cfm?eraid=12&sm-tid=1>.

[ii] "Woodrow Wilson." *The White House*, accessed January 1, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140102081625/https://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/woodrowwilson>

[iii] Over 116,000 Americans died and about 204,000 were injured.

"Military and Civilian War Related Deaths Through the Ages," *Tom Philo*, accessed January 1, 2014, <http://www.taphilo.com/history/war-deaths.shtml>. https://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/cas-death_pop.html

https://web.archive.org/web/20140214202625/http://www.pbs.org/80/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html

[iv] Wilson's Espionage and Sedition Acts resulted in the jailing 1,200 American citizens.

"Walter C. Matthey of Iowa was sentenced to a year in jail for applauding an anticonscription speech. Walter Heynacher of South Dakota was sentenced to five years in Leavenworth for telling a younger man that 'it was foolishness to send our boys over there to get killed by the thousands, all for the sake of Wall Street'... Abraham Sugarman of Sibley County, Minnesota, was sentenced to three years in Leavenworth for arguing that the draft was unconstitutional and remarking, 'This is supposed to be a free country. Like Hell it is.'"

Bill Kauffman, *Ain't My America: the Long, Noble History of Antiwar Conservatism and Middle American Anti-imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan, 2008), 74.

One of the songs that helped recruit Americans to fight in the war, "Over There," was written by George M. Cohan, who received the Congressional Medal of Honor for it in 1940, when America was about to join another world war.

"Who's Who - George M Cohan," First World War, August 22, 2009, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/cohan.htm>

[v] The fact that the *Lusitania* was carrying munitions, a charge made by Germany at the time and since corroborated by divers going to the wreck, was largely suppressed for many years.

Few people are aware that the *Lusitania* was being used by the British as a high-speed munitions carrier. On her final voyage she was carrying even more contraband than usual, including eighteen cases of fuses for various caliber artillery shells and a large consignment of gun-cotton, an explosive used in the manufacture of propellant charges for big-gun shells. ("Deadly Cargo" <http://www.lusitania.net/deadlycargo.htm>)

Stolley, Richard B. "*Lusitania: The Epic Battle over Its Biggest Mystery.*" *Fortune*, May 5 (2015): n. pag. Web. 11 May 2015. <http://fortune.com/lusitania-gregg-bemis-legal-battle/>. <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/lusitania.htm>, http://www.divernet.com/home_diving_news/156070/ordnance_found_ aboard_lusitania.html

https://web.archive.org/web/20131127214325/http://www.divernet.com/home_diving_news/156070/ordnance_found_ aboard_lusitania.html

Germany had warned Americans not to ride on the *Lusitania*. The Library of Congress reports: "The German Embassy published a warning in some newspapers to tell passengers that travel on Allied ships is "at their own risk." The *Lusitania* is mentioned specifically in some of the discussion about the warning in the week leading up to its departure." ("Topics in Chronicling America - Sinking of the *Lusitania*." Sinking of the *Lusitania*. Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/lusitania.html>.

For a discussion of events leading up to the U.S. entry into the war see Windchry, Eugene G. "Chapter 12 World War I (1917 to 1918)." *Twelve American Wars: Nine of Them Avoidable*. Bloomington, IN: IUniverse, 2014. According to Wilson's top advisor, even after the *Lusitania* sinking, 90 percent of Americans were opposed to entering the war.

[vi] Some intriguing articles speculate that Zionists might have played a role in making the Zimmerman note public. While the article is speculative, the editors called it "...an original and very plausible explanation of a major event in world history for which no previous rationale has ever seemed satisfactory."

John Cornelius, "The Balfour Declaration and the Zimmermann Note," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, August-September (1997): 18-20. Print. Online at <http://www.wrmea.org/component/content/article/188-1997-august-september/2646-the-balfour-declaration-and-the-zimmermann-note.html>, <http://www.wrmea.org/2005-november/special-report-the-hidden-history-of-the-balfour-declaration.html>

Please visit iakn.us/2lbnkzxa to view all thirty-five footnotes that accompany this article. Many contain much additional information of significance. We also recommend people read the full book, *Against Our Better Judgment: The Hidden History of How the U.S. Was Used to Create Israel* by Alison Weir, for additional information.