



DEBATE PACK

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Centenary of the Balfour Declaration

Westminster Hall

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Debate initiated by Dr Matthew Offord

The proceedings of this debate may be viewed on Parliamentlive.tv

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Summary

2017 marks the centenary of the Balfour Declaration. The Balfour Declaration as it became known, was a letter sent on 2 November 1917 by the then Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, to the Jewish community leader Lord Rothschild. The letter expressed support for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”

Many Israelis regard the Balfour Declaration as an historic step on the road to statehood, but others argue that the Balfour Declaration laid the foundations for future conflict in the region.

In July 2016, it emerged that the Palestinian Authority was preparing to sue the UK Government on account of the Balfour Declaration. Riyad al-Maliki, its Foreign Minister, claimed that the Declaration “gave people who don’t belong there something that wasn’t theirs.” News of the PA’s proposed lawsuit met with strong condemnation from supporters of the Balfour Declaration. Kenneth Jacobson, Deputy Director of Israel’s Anti-Defamation League, argues that such a move “will only play into the notion in Israel that the Palestinians will never reconcile themselves to Israel’s existence.”

In this centenary year there has been much discussion as to how this anniversary should be marked in the UK. In remarks made in September 2017, the Israeli ambassador to the UK [Mark Regev said](#):

The Balfour declaration was important as it recognised the right of the Jewish people to self-determination. We mark with pride the role that Britain played in helping the establishment of the only true democracy in the Middle East.

Asked about her recent discussion with the Israeli Prime Minister on the subject of the Declaration, [Theresa May told the House](#):

During my discussion with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 9 October we discussed his forthcoming visit to the UK on the anniversary of the Balfour centenary. We are proud of the role we played in the creation of Israel, and will mark the centenary with pride and respect.

The Government is said to be planning to mark the event with a dinner, to which Prime Minister Netanyahu will be invited.

The Palestinian Mission to the UK has decided to stage an advertising campaign called ‘Make It Right’ to highlight Palestinian objections to the Declaration. Part of the campaign was to involve putting up posters across the London underground network, but these were [blocked](#) by Transport for London on the grounds of political controversy. A spokesman for TfL said the adverts “did not comply fully with our guidelines,” These guidelines refer to “images or messages which relate to matters of public controversy or sensitivity.

In a [statement](#) the Palestinian Mission to the UK characterised the move as an “attempt to suppress Palestinian voices and censor the Palestinian narrative” and commented further that they were “disappointed” that

TfL wouldn't run what they called a "modest advocacy campaign which aimed to raise awareness." The advertisements will be displayed on taxis, which are subject to less stringent advertising rules.

The UK's Chief Rabbi has composed a special [prayer](#) to commemorate the anniversary. The prayer will be recited in Orthodox synagogues around the country on November 4, the Shabbat closest to the anniversary. On the same weekend several pro-Palestinian organisations including the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, the Stop The War Coalition, the Friends of Al Aqsa and the Muslim Association Of Britain, are planning a march through central London entitled 'Justice Now: Make it right for Palestine.'

1. News and media

The following is a small selection of recent press and media articles relevant to this debate.

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[Balfour Declaration's Legacy Is Toxic for Both Israelis and Palestinians](#)

Haaretz
Anshel Pfeffer
21 October 2017

[The contested centenary of Britain's 'calamitous promise'](#)

Guardian
Ian Black
17 October 2017

[Palestinian anti-Balfour posters banned from London transport network](#)

Middle East Eye
Mustafa Abu Sneineh
17 October 2017

[Anger as UK university allows Balfour 'celebration'](#)

Al Jazeera
Shafik Mandhai
16 October 2017

[Prime Minister: Balfour Declaration is 'one of most important letters in history'](#)

Jewish News
29 September 2017

[One hundred years: 'from Balfour to Brexit'](#)

Jerusalem Post
Greer Fay Cashman
17 September 2017

[Balfour celebration organisers 'surprised' at scope of groups seeking support](#)

Jewish News
14 June 2017

[UK rules out apology to Palestinians for Balfour declaration](#)

Middle East Eye
25 April 2017

[Scottish Jews protest Church of Scotland report on Balfour](#)

Jewish News
20 April 2017

[Britain should apologise for Balfour Declaration – peer](#)

BBC News Online
03 April 2017

[Royal family to mark Balfour centenary with official visit to Israel](#)

Times Online
Catherine Philp, Gregg Carlstrom, Valentine Low
09 March 2017

[Theresa May wants British people to feel 'pride' in the Balfour Declaration. What exactly is there to be proud of?](#)

Independent
Robert Fisk
02 March 2017

[Balfour Declaration centenary celebration plans unveiled](#)

Jewish News
Justin Cohen
02 November 2016

[Centenary of the Balfour Declaration](#)

Matthew Offord

2. PQs

Balfour Declaration: Anniversaries | 107033 **17 October 2017**

Asked by: Jared O'Mara

To ask the Prime Minister, what recent discussions she has had with the Prime Minister of Israel on the centenary of the Balfour Declaration.

Answered by: Theresa May

During my discussion with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 9 October we discussed his forthcoming visit to the UK on the anniversary of the Balfour centenary. We are proud of the role we played in the creation of Israel, and will mark the centenary with pride and respect.

Palestine: Non-Jewish Population | 783 c151 **26 June 2017**

Asked by: Lord Collins of Highbury

My Lords, I welcome the Minister's continued commitment to the two-state solution. I also welcome her commitment to promoting peace. One way to commemorate the Balfour Declaration would be to promote intercommunity relationships. Can she give us examples of where the Government will be doing this to mark the centenary, so that they are not talking just with Governments but with people, promoting intercommunity relationships, particularly in schools and among children?

Answered by: Baroness Goldie

The noble Lord, Lord Collins, makes an important point. I believe that a very positive dividend can often be reaped by such activity as that to which he refers. Certainly, in trying to encourage fresh negotiations to address the current challenges and difficulties, the UK Government are working through multilateral institutions, including the United Nations and the EU, to support resolutions and policies that encourage both sides to take steps that rebuild trust. The Arab League and Arab states also have a key role in that peace process and we are discussing with them ways that we can move the situation forward.

Balfour Declaration | 782 cc844-6 **03 April 2017**

Tabled by Baroness Tonge

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to commemorate the centenary of the Balfour Declaration.

Asked by: Lord Warner

My Lords, on behalf of the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, and at her request, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in her name on the Order Paper.

Answered by: Baroness Anelay of St Johns

My Lords, we will mark the centenary of Balfour with pride. The Prime Minister has extended a guest of Government invitation to Prime Minister Netanyahu to visit the UK on the centenary. We are proud of our role in the creation of Israel. However, we recognise that the declaration should have called for the protection of political rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine, particularly their right to self-determination. This is why we support a two-state solution.

Lord Warner

First, I am sure that the whole House wishes the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, a speedy recovery, and recognises the huge contribution she has made on Palestinian matters. I thank the Minister for her reply. She recognises, I think, that there was a conditionality on granting in the terms of the Balfour Declaration the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. That conditionality was very clear, as the declaration states,

“it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

Does the Minister agree that successive British Governments, both under the British mandate and subsequently, have failed to deliver that declaration protection to the Palestinian people? Furthermore, should we not mark the centenary with a gracious apology from the British Government and Parliament for the suffering that that failure has caused and try to make amends —

Noble Lords *[interruption]*

Too long.

Lord Warner

We have waited a long time, my Lords — with a clear commitment to recognition of a viable independent Palestinian state?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns

First, my Lords, I send my good wishes to the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge, and wish her a strong and full recovery. The Balfour Declaration was an historic statement and one for which the United Kingdom has no intention to apologise. We are focused on encouraging the Israelis and Palestinians to take steps which bring them closer to peace. That is the whole thrust of government policy which has underwritten the work of this Government, the coalition Government, and the Labour Government before that. We continue to carry that work forward. With regard to recognition, perhaps in the future, of Palestine as an independent state, bilateral recognition does not deliver reality. We will make sure that we recognise a Palestinian state when we judge that it is in the best interests of peace and a lasting negotiated solution between Israel and the Palestinian Authorities to do so.

Lord Collins of Highbury

My Lords, I associate myself with the remarks of the Minister about the noble Baroness, Lady Tonge. I also welcome the commitment again to

the two-state solution, which the Opposition have supported historically. The most important thing we can achieve, 100 years after the Balfour Declaration, is to ensure that peace talks commence. Can the Minister tell us how she can put direct pressure on both parties to start talking to each other rather than firing rockets at each other?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns

My Lords, that point is extremely well made. I assure the noble Lord and the House that we are making our best efforts to encourage both sides to come to the table for discussions. When my right honourable friend the Foreign Secretary visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, he made just those points. When I had discussions last week in New York with Nikki Haley, who is a member of the President's Cabinet, I too made those points, and we agreed entirely that it is important that we all work together to get the interested parties to the table to talk, not fire weapons.

Lord Leigh of Hurley

My Lords, at the 34th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva on Friday last week regarding Israel, Her Majesty's Government expressed regret that neither terrorism nor incitement was a focus of that council's meeting. Syria's regime butchers and murders its people on a daily basis, but it is not Syria that is a permanent item on the council's agenda. Since 2007, it has been only Israel — the one country in the Middle East that protects human rights for women and gays, among others. Therefore, I welcome the Minister's statement that, if things do not change in the future, Her Majesty's Government will adopt a policy of voting against all resolutions concerning Israel in the Occupied Territories and Palestine. What steps have been taken to encourage our European partners to adopt the same principled and even-handed statements? I declare my interest.

Baroness Anelay of St Johns

My Lords, we are in active discussions with like-minded partners to support the council in addressing the fact that there appears to be a disproportionate focus on Israel in the council, which we believe hardens positions on both sides.

The Lord Bishop of Worcester

My Lords, will the Minister accept that there is grave concern about facts on the ground tending to suggest the impossibility of a two-state solution?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns

My Lords, the right reverend Prelate raises a vital issue. Announcements such as the one made last Friday by the Israeli Government about building a new settlement in the West Bank — the first such government decision there for over 25 years — make one worried that it is becoming more difficult for negotiations that could lead to a two-state solution, and it is necessary to ensure that they do not proceed with such settlements.

Lord Hughes of Woodside

My Lords —

Baroness Northover

My Lords, the Minister referred to the Balfour Declaration, which says that nothing should be done,

“which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”,

and I welcome that. However, with the tinderbox in the Middle East, is it not even more urgent than ever that the future of Israel and the Palestinians is taken forward, and does that not mean reversing rather than expanding the settlements?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns

Yes, my Lords.

Viscount Waverley

My Lords, given the increasing vacuum from the United States and the concern expressed by Arab partners, is it now realised that Israel can become a strategic ally in the common cause of combating terrorism and Islamist extremism?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns

My Lords, I think it is incumbent on all those who believe in peace around the world to do exactly that, and I hope and expect that Israel would be part of that work.

**Foreign Policy: Anniversaries | 56622
13 December 2016**

Asked by: Michael Gove

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to mark the centenary of the Balfour Declaration.

Answered by: Tobias Ellwood

Firm plans have not yet been made for how we will mark the Balfour Declaration's centenary in November 2017.

**West Bank | 617 c743
22 November 2016**

Asked by: Philip Hollobone

Will Her Majesty's Government use the opportunity of the centenary next year of the Balfour Declaration to be bold and launch a peace initiative of their own to solve all these issues of settlements, security and the whole Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Answered by: Tobias Ellwood

As I mentioned in the Westminster Hall debate on the Balfour Declaration, we will be announcing plans as to how we will mark the year. It is also the anniversary of the mandate for Israel and Palestine

and the withdrawal of Britain from the area. Also, we should not forget that it is almost 25 years since the Oslo accords, and therefore there is more work to be done. This is an international effort; it is also an effort that requires the Palestinians and the Israelis to work together, and we stand ready to provide support and make this happen.

West Bank | 617 c741
22 November 2016

Asked by: Catherine West

As we approach the centenary of the Balfour declaration, we must renew our commitment to both aspects of that historic statement: the preservation of the state of Israel as a safe and stable national home for the Jewish people, but also the protection of the

“civil and religious rights of...non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

With that in mind, will the Minister make it clear today that the United Kingdom Government oppose proposals to legalise outposts in the west bank retrospectively, or to build new illegal settlements?

Answered by: Tobias Ellwood

We had a very frank and thorough debate about the history and context of the Balfour declaration only last week. However, the hon. Lady is right to say that the role that the settlements are playing undermines the message that is coming from Israel, and leads people to ask whether Israel is serious about a two-state solution. The longer the settlements continue to be built, the more difficult it becomes to envisage the possibility of such a solution.

Israel: Palestinians | HL1506
15 September 2016

Asked by: Lord Palmer of Childs Hill

To ask Her Majesty's Government, in the light of the remarks made by the Foreign Affairs Minister of the Palestinian Authority calling for legal action against the UK over the Balfour Declaration, what representations they have made to the Palestinian Authority regarding the delegitimising of the State of Israel.

Answered by: Baroness Anelay of St Johns

Officials from our Consulate-General in Jerusalem have discussed the remarks with Palestinian officials and politicians.

**Israel: Palestinians | HL1505
15 September 2016**

Asked by: Lord Palmer of Childs Hill

To ask Her Majesty's Government, in the light of the remarks regarding litigation over the Balfour Declaration made by the Foreign Affairs Minister and the President of the Palestinian Authority, what representations they have made to the Palestinian Authority regarding a return to direct negotiations without preconditions between it and the government of Israel.

Answered by: Baroness Anelay of St Johns

Officials from our Consulate-General in Jerusalem have discussed the remarks about litigation with Palestinian officials and politicians. We continue to urge a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although we have not called for a return to direct bilateral negotiations without preconditions. The UK's vision for a future two-state solution is clear. It should be based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and with a just, fair and agreed settlement for refugees.

3. Debates

[Balfour Declaration Centenary \[Extract\]](#)

05 July 2017 | House of Lords | Vol 783 cc948-72

Lord Turnberg

My Lords, I am delighted and overwhelmed in equal measure that so many noble Lords have agreed to speak in this debate. The topic is clearly of wide interest, and I will have to listen very carefully indeed if I am to catch everyone's fleeting words.

Arthur Balfour would have despaired to know that, 100 years after the British Government's declaration bearing his name, the Arabs and Jews had still not settled their differences over who has the right to what he described as a "small notch of land" that the Arabs could not possibly begrudge, given their vast Arabian Middle East. There remains considerable controversy both about the declaration itself and about its significance. There are still those who believe that it was the biggest error of judgment that a world power could make, while there are many others who believe it was the most magnanimous gesture by an imperial nation for an oppressed people.

The Zionists see Palestine as the biblical homeland of the Jews, who had been repeatedly driven out, always returning and always yearning for it in their prayers, while the Palestinians see what they believed was their land being given away by a western power whose land it was not theirs to give to someone else — seemingly incompatible aims that the wording of the declaration tried to overcome by offering a home for the Jews with the proviso that,

"nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights",

of the indigenous population. It was a hopelessly optimistic idea and, at the time, little thought was given to how one group, the Jews, were supposed to protect the right of another group, the Arabs, who were immediately trying to kill them off.

It was not Balfour alone, of course. He had the full support of Lloyd George's wartime Cabinet — a remarkable phenomenon given that in 1917 the Brits were bogged down in a war in Europe that was going badly wrong. They obviously thought it was important enough to produce the declaration.

It is sometimes said that the declaration was a purely British affair, but that would fly in the face of the evidence. Despite their history of anti-Semitism, the French had already given their written approval for a Jewish home in Palestine, as had the Italians, the Americans and the Japanese, and even the Pope was favourably disposed. So it was not simply Britain and Balfour.

However, it was not a legal document in any way. It was not a treaty and had no status in international law. It was simply an expression of support — the Government looking with favour on a Jewish homeland

— sent in a letter to Lord Rothschild. It could easily have got lost at any time.

It was only in 1920 at San Remo and two years later in Geneva when the League of Nations gave the mandate for Palestine to Britain and, furthermore, mandated it to provide the Jewish home there. All 51 nations of the league voted for it, with none against. The League of Nations spoke of a Jewish nation for the first time and of “reconstituting” it in Palestine. Balfour had only spoken of “establishing” it, yet here it wrote of “reconstituting” its ancient rights. It was this basis in international law that gave legitimacy to the Zionists’ claim to a Palestinian home, and it was this agreement that was accepted in full by the UN in 1947. Balfour and his Prime Minister, Lloyd George, had continued to make their presence felt in San Remo and in Geneva, so Britain should be proud not only for the Balfour Declaration but for pursuing it so assiduously in San Remo and at the League of the Nations.

And here is the surprise: the wider Arab leadership were at first very favourably disposed to the Jewish influx, modest though it was at the time, into what they regarded as a small, neglected corner of Arabia. They had welcomed the Jews as their brethren — there was a written agreement between Prince Faisal and Chaim Weizmann saying as much — and the daily newspaper in Mecca wrote of the two branches of the Semitic family, Arab and Jew, who understood each other. It was only when the Grand Sharif Hussein and his son in Mecca realised that they had been duped by the British and French that all that sweetness and light melted away.

Hussein had been led to believe that, if he and his tribes revolted against the Turks, he would be rewarded with a vast kingdom in the whole of Arabia after the war. However, when they heard that their land had been carved up by the French and British in their mandates, they knew they had been cheated. First in the Sykes-Picot agreement and then at San Remo and the League of Nations, the allies agreed that they could not trust the Arabs to rule themselves in such a strategically important part of the world. The Brits remembered that many Arab tribes in Palestine had sided with the Turks against them during the war. However, it was the characteristic British attitude that they knew how to rule over — this is a quote from the League of Nations —

“peoples not yet ready to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world”,

that justified their actions. Only then did Hussein and his son realise what had happened, and only then did they begin to see the Jewish influx as just another symbol of western colonisation — just another sign of British perfidy — and they turned against the Jews.

It was after that that there was a change in British government attitudes. In the 1930s and 1940s, severe restrictions were placed on Jewish immigration to try to placate the Arabs. The devastating consequences for the Jews of Europe, as they were herded into the gas chambers during the Second World War, changed Jewish attitudes towards Britain from gratitude to hostility, as they saw the escape route

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for the Jews being clanged shut. However, despite all that, and the attitude of the British Foreign Office after the war when boatloads of refugees were turned away, it remains the case that Israel owes an enormous debt to Britain for what it offered them earlier in 1917, 1920 and 1922.

Britain, too, has a lot to be grateful for. We should celebrate the fact that we in Britain provided the foundations of a democratic state in a part of the world where democracy is in very short supply. I like to think that, despite the problems that have to be overcome if we are to see a just and peaceful resolution of Israel's differences with the Palestinians, Britain should celebrate the fact that it was instrumental in providing the foundation of this democracy, where religious and ethnic differences are fully tolerated, the only Middle East state where the number of Christians has risen, where gay parades are a feature of life — indeed, the current British Ambassador to Israel was able to mount a float in a recent gay parade in Tel Aviv — and where 17 members of the Knesset, a supreme court judge, many academics, doctors and professionals of all sorts are all Arab, to say nothing of its leading place in science, technology, medicine, the arts and commerce. It is a country with which we share intelligence on cybersecurity and other threats to security, and in which trade links are increasingly important as we move into the post-Brexit era.

It is fascinating to note now that, 100 years ago, it was the British Government that opened the door for a Jewish home in Palestine. A century later, and after years of conflict with the Arab world at large, we are beginning to see the more pragmatic Arab states of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf states recognise a Jewish Israel. The Arab peace initiative is being offered provided that there is a meaningful peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The enormous advantages to both of them and to the wider Arab world of a peace deal are there for all to see.

Mr Abbas has to be able to bring himself to recognise what Balfour was aiming at — a Jewish state in Palestine — and Mr Netanyahu has to stop further encroachment on Palestinian land in the West Bank. Will it happen soon? We should not hold our breath, but the fact that we now have a range of Arab countries keen to see it happen must be a positive sign. Will it require new and braver leaders on both sides? I fear that it will. Is it worth all the effort? It absolutely is.

Meanwhile, surely we should be celebrating the critical role we played in the creation of a stable, democratic state in the Middle East that now more than ever needs one. Does the noble Baroness the Minister agree?

[...]

Baroness Hussein-Ece

My own heritage, being Turkish, Cypriot and Middle Eastern, has shaped my views rather differently from those of the majority of speakers here today. The Balfour Declaration has shaped the Palestinian experience and the wider Arab world. It has contributed to the disregard for the rights of the Palestinian people and is a document whose legacy continues to have devastating consequences for the

Palestinians, Arab Muslims and Christians — who are infrequently referred to — 5 million of whom are living displaced, mostly in poverty, around the Middle East. It is unfinished business.

The disregard continues today, with what has become an increasing charade of the “peace process”, which allows Israel to continue its expropriation of Palestinian land and expansion of illegal settlements, while stating its pursuit of “peace”. We all know that there is no current prospect of a peace plan or possibility of a two-state solution on the horizon — let us be honest about this.

The injustices are legion: more than 300 structures in the occupied West Bank were demolished by the Israeli authorities in 2016 alone, many part-funded by the EU or international NGOs. These are serious matters.

Britain has a unique historical connection and a moral responsibility to the people of both Israel and Palestine, and it needs to show leadership in how to resolve this matter. In yesterday’s debate on the report of the International Relations Select Committee, *The Middle East: Time for New Realism*, many noble Lords spoke about this as the time to get real, and said that there is no possibility at present of the two-state solution. The UK needs to come to terms with the reality, especially in the way it presents itself to the Muslim and Arab world. Not to do so is not in Britain’s interest; it is no longer a colonial power.

We should mark the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, but there is no cause for celebration in my view and that of millions around the world, particularly in the Middle East. I ask the Minister whether she agrees with the respected journalist, Robert Fisk, who wrote:

“The British have grown used to apologising — for the British empire, for the slave trade, for the Irish famine. So why not for Balfour?”

[...]

Baroness Goldie

The first thing I want to do is set the scene — the backdrop to the debate. The United Kingdom is a close friend of Israel. Our excellent bilateral relationship is built on decades of co-operation across a range of fields, from education and hi-tech research to business, arts and culture. At the same time, we are a long-standing partner of the Palestinian Authority, committed to supporting the rights of Palestinians and helping them to build a state. I am anxious to emphasise that the UK Government are trying to be even-handed. Sometimes we may condemn one side, and likewise be condemned for doing so, but on another occasion we may condemn the other. All I am saying is that, if we see something that we think is wrong, we feel we must express our disquiet about that, and that is the right thing to do. Still, we are trying to be even-handed in our approach.

I reassure my noble friend Lord Polak that Her Majesty’s Government intend to mark the centenary of the Balfour Declaration with pride. The Prime Minister has extended an invitation to Prime Minister Netanyahu to come to the UK as a guest of the Government in November, although the programme for his visit has not yet been finalised.

While the UK is proud of its role in the creation of Israel, we recognise that the Balfour Declaration should have called for the protection of the political rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine, particularly their right to self-determination. I suggest to one or two contributors who clearly had reservations about the declaration that that recognition by the UK Government is important. The Government are conscious of the sensitivities surrounding the declaration and the events that have taken place in the region since 1917, so eloquently described by many contributors.

I was encouraged that many contributors found much that was positive in the Balfour Declaration while acknowledging — I think it was the noble Baroness, Lady Ramsay, who used this phrase — the vagaries. I am trying to explain that it was not always perfect but on the whole it was a very good start, and it has led to something positive, albeit that attendant troubles have accompanied that in a turbulent passage. I think what unites this Chamber is the conjoined desire that we try to find a route to peace in that region.

Looking to the future, our focus now is on encouraging the Israelis and Palestinians to take steps that bring them closer to peace. I thought the noble Lord, Lord Kestenbaum, articulated that optimism well, as did my noble friend Lord Maginnis. The best way to achieve that peace is through a two-state solution. Noble Lords will be aware that the UK Government are a leading donor to the Palestinian Authority. Our support helps to maintain stability, provide vital services and build and strengthen the institutions needed for a viable two-state solution.

With reference to the Middle East peace process, I was encouraged. Peace was a frequently reiterated theme of the debate, and I thought that was positive and helpful. We continue to support a negotiated settlement based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, with Jerusalem as the shared capital and with a just, fair and agreed settlement for refugees. That would mean a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. I think that is a worthy and positive aspiration. The Government understand and indeed share your Lordships' deep frustration at the lack of progress towards such a settlement; the noble Lord, Lord Warner, reflected that frustration.

[...]

This June marked the 50th anniversary of the occupation. It is high time we saw a just and lasting peace agreement that ends the occupation and delivers peace for both Israelis and Palestinians. To reach that goal, both parties must take steps to build an environment conducive to fresh negotiations. They must also avoid actions that potentially obstruct the process by undermining the viability of peace. One such action is building settlements, which continues seriously to undermine the prospect of two states for two peoples. So far in 2017, the Israeli Government have advanced plans for over 8,000 settlement units, including a new settlement deep within the West Bank, the first for over 25 years. This represents a significant increase on the 4,200 new units announced in the whole of 2016.

[...]

Other noble Lords raised a variety of issues. The noble Baroness, Lady Hussein-Ece, while expressing her reservations about Balfour, raised the important issue of demolitions. I make clear that the Foreign Secretary expressed our concern about demolitions to Prime Minister Netanyahu in his visit to Israel on 8 March. We have equally expressed our concerns about the continued demolition of Palestinian property by Israeli authorities, including proposals to demolish the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar.

Several contributors referred to the importance of Israel as a functioning democracy. The noble Baroness, Lady Deech, rightly condemned anti-Semitism — as we all do in this Chamber; we should be ceaseless in our condemnation of that conduct. It was rightly pointed out that Israel is an innovative, inventive state.

[...]

In conclusion, the United Kingdom is proud of its role in the creation of Israel, and we will therefore mark the centenary of the Balfour Declaration with pride. However, we also recognise the impact that the declaration has had on the Palestinian people — in particular, the omission of a reference to the protection of the political rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine. We remain committed to encouraging both sides to revitalise the peace process. International action has an important role to play. Ultimately, however, an agreement can be achieved only by direct negotiation between the parties. Only the Israelis and Palestinians can bring about the lasting peace that their people seek and that is long overdue.

[Centenary of the Balfour Declaration \[Extract\]](#)

16 November 2016 | House of Commons | Vol 617 cc93-116WH

Caroline Ansell

I beg to move,

That this House has considered the centenary of the Balfour Declaration.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I am pleased to have secured this debate. It is particularly fitting as just a few days ago, on Tuesday 2 November, we marked the beginning of a year of events leading to the centenary of the Balfour declaration — one of the most defining moments in the UK's shared history with Israel.

On that November day back in 1917, a Conservative Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, gave the official approval of His Majesty's Government to the Zionist movement's aspiration for Jewish self-determination. That paved the way for the creation of the state of Israel in their historic homeland following centuries of exile and persecution around the world. This landmark letter, composed of just three

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paragraphs, has been the subject of intense historical debate right up to, and I am sure including, today.

[...]

This landmark letter, comprising just three paragraphs and the subject of our debate today, sets out that aspiration for a Jewish homeland. I am proud that our country supported the establishment of that national home, and I am also proud of the strength of the UK-Israeli relationship. Our partnership in trade, technology, medicine and academia, and our shared values, have flourished in the 68 years of Israel's young life.

[...]

The League of Nations, the precursor to the United Nations, formally recognised, and this is critical to what follows,

“the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine”

and

“the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country”.

Through its use of the term “reconstituting”, the international community formally recognised the pre-existing ties of the Jewish people to their homeland, in which there had been a continuous Jewish presence for millennia.

[...]

Events to mark the declaration's centenary began earlier this month and will continue until the 100th anniversary in November 2017. Jewish communal and Israel advocacy organisations have launched an official Balfour 100 campaign, providing helpful educational resources, and will be hosting a series of events. The Prime Minister has expressed her desire to mark the occasion, as has the Minister, and I thank him for his remarks.

[...]

Tom Brake

How should the UK Government be celebrating, commemorating or marking the centenary? That is obvious. They should fully support any peace initiatives that seek to implement the two-state solution before time runs out. I hope Members will agree that there is a real risk that time will indeed run out. We know that the election of President Trump is unlikely to help with implementing a two-state solution. As far as I am aware, the only game in town, in terms of peace initiatives, is the one that the French are currently running. The Israeli Government have said that they believe the French plan

“greatly harms the possibilities for advancing the peace process.”

I wonder whether the Minister agrees with the Israeli Government on that score.

Will the Minister take this opportunity to express a difference of opinion with the Israeli Education Minister, who says that there is no two-state solution? As far as I am aware, the UK's position is that that is what our Government are seeking to implement, so I hope the Minister will challenge that statement from a senior Israeli Minister. Is the Government's position that they want to encourage the Israelis to engage with that initiative in the way that Abbas has? Will the Minister support proposals from that initiative that would lead to greater economic co-operation — that is an area in which Israelis and Palestinians can mutually benefit — or proposals to strengthen ties between Palestinian and Israeli civil society organisations, perhaps as a first step towards a more meaningful peace process?

The UK has a particular historical responsibility towards the Palestinian people. We failed to honour our promises nearly 100 years ago. We have a duty now to actively support the peace process and to secure a viable Palestinian state. That is what our Government must do — indeed, a number of Members have said today that they want the Government to do it. It will be the most effective and meaningful way of marking the Balfour declaration and would mean that in future years its anniversary could be celebrated by both the Jewish people and the Palestinian people.

[...]

Bob Blackman

We should clearly be talking about the celebration of the centenary of the Balfour declaration. I take the point that the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) made, but the meeting that was held in the House of Lords under the auspices of the Palestinian Return Centre was a Balfour apology campaign. The President of the Palestinian state has sought to get Britain to apologise for the Balfour declaration and potentially to sue the British Government for it. That is the context in which we must put the debate.

[...]

We should celebrate the Balfour declaration, but the one element that was not put in it was the borders of the state of Israel. Had those borders been determined at the time, when Britain was drawing lines on maps in many other parts of the world, possibly we would not still be trying to reach the two-state solution that we talk about today. It took three years for the Balfour declaration to be accepted worldwide, but accepted it was. Israel has since had to endure the second world war; the Holocaust; the 1948 war of independence, when it was attacked by Arab states that sought to wipe Israel off the face of the planet on its inception; a war in '67, when it was invaded again; and a war in '71, when it was invaded. Yet Israel continues to exist.

[...]

We have also heard the reality of the situation in this country. Anti-Semitism is on the rise; it is often conflated with a belief that the state of Israel should not exist at all or with attacks on the Government of the

state of Israel. We have to confront anti-Semitism wherever it rears its ugly head. We must ensure it is understood that it is unacceptable to express such views and that it is unacceptable that anyone in this country should have to suffer anti-Semitism.

[...]

Catherine West

As we approach the centenary of the Balfour declaration, the Labour party is glad to commemorate that historic anniversary. We express our continued support for the state of Israel. We remain committed to seeing the achievement of lasting security, stability and peace in the region. However, we find ourselves in something of a deadlock with the peace process. The Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan), referred to that earlier. Will the Minister enlighten Members as to what the Government are doing to rejuvenate the moribund approach to peace in this critical area of the middle east?

[...]

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Tobias Ellwood)

The Balfour declaration had its flaws. It called for the protection of the

“civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”

It should have protected their political rights, too, most especially their right to self-determination: a right that underpins the British commitment to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We will mark the centenary of the Balfour declaration next year. Planning is still at an early stage, but I want to make it clear that we will neither celebrate nor apologise.

We will not apologise, for the UK is a diverse country in which the historical show of support for the world’s Jewish community means a great deal to many people. We continue to support the principle of a Jewish homeland and the modern state of Israel, just as we support the critical objective of a Palestinian homeland. Nor will we celebrate the centenary as others have called on the British Government to do. The seriousness of the situation faced by millions still affected by the conflict is testament to the fact that the achievement of Jewish and Palestinian self-determination in the former British mandate of Palestine is a task as yet unfulfilled. I remain conscious of the sensitivities surrounding the declaration and the events that have taken place in the region since 1917.

We cannot change the past, but we can strive to influence the future. It is approaching 100 years since the Balfour declaration, and, as has been mentioned by hon. Members, it is 50 years since the occupation began. It is 70 years since UN resolution 181 in 1947 first proposed partition and the end of the British mandate. It is 23 years since the Oslo accords and 16 years since the Camp David discussions. It is 25 years since the Madrid talks and 18 years since the Wye River discussions. All those

were opportunities when stakeholders were brought round the table to seek a long-term solution, and still that eludes us.

[...]

Not everyone will be happy with the Government's position on the anniversary of the Balfour declaration. I fully accept that. Some will want to celebrate the anniversary unreservedly and will see our position as insufficient. Some will condemn it. They will want us to make the apology and will consider marking the anniversary improper. There is no denying the document's significance. I hope that it will not be used as a vehicle to incite violence or distract us from taking the steps we need to take to secure the two-state solution.

[...]

4. E-petitions

[UK must apologise for the Balfour Declaration and lead peace efforts in Palestine](#)

Date closed: 03 May 2017 | 13,637 signatures

We call on Her Majesty's Government to openly apologise to the Palestinian people for issuing the Balfour Declaration. The colonial policy of Britain between 1917 and 1948 led to mass displacement of the Palestinian nation.

HMG should recognise its role during the Mandate and now must lead attempts to reach a solution that ensures justice for the Palestinian people.

Government response: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Balfour Declaration is an historic statement for which HMG does not intend to apologise. We are proud of our role in creating the State of Israel. The task now is to encourage moves towards peace.

The Declaration was written in a world of competing imperial powers, in the midst of the First World War and in the twilight of the Ottoman Empire. In that context, establishing a homeland for the Jewish people in the land to which they had such strong historical and religious ties was the right and moral thing to do, particularly against the background of centuries of persecution. Of course, a full assessment of the Declaration and what followed from it can only be made by historians.

Much has happened since 1917. We recognise that the Declaration should have called for the protection of political rights of the non-Jewish communities in Palestine, particularly their right to self-determination. However, the important thing now is to look forward and establish security and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians through a lasting peace. We believe the best way to achieve this is through a two-state solution: a negotiated settlement that leads to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, based on the 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

We believe that such negotiations will only succeed when they are conducted between Israelis and Palestinians, but with appropriate support from the international community. We remain in close consultation with both sides and international partners to encourage meaningful bilateral negotiations. We do not underestimate the challenges, but if both parties show bold leadership, peace is possible. The UK is ready to do all it can to support this goal.

5. Press releases

["We believe the way to achieve lasting peace is through a negotiated two-state solution"](#)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

18 October 2017

Statement on the Middle East and Iran by Ambassador Jonathan Allen, UK Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, at the Security Council.

Thank you Mr President and may I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča, and through him, Special Coordinator Mladenov, for all of his work.

From the outset, I would like to make clear, as we approach the centenary of the Balfour Declaration next month, that the UK understands and respects the sensitivities many have about the Declaration and the events that have taken place in the region since 1917.

The UK is proud to have played a role in helping to make a Jewish homeland a reality. And we continue to support the principle of such a homeland and the modern state of Israel.

Just as we fully support the modern state of Israel as a Jewish homeland, we also fully support the objective of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. The occupation is a continued impediment to securing the political rights of the non-Jewish communities in Palestine. And let us remember, there are two halves of Balfour, the second half of which has not been fulfilled. There is therefore unfinished business.

With the approaching centenary, we believe it is important to look forward, not backward: forward towards establishing security and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians through a lasting peace.

We believe the way to achieve this lasting peace is through a negotiated two-state solution that leads to a safe and secure Israel living alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state, based on 1967 borders with agreed land swaps, Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and a just, fair, agreed and realistic settlement for refugees.

Mr President, we continue to watch developments on intra-Palestinian reconciliation closely. Our longstanding policy on reconciliation is that we support the Palestinian people in realising self-determination through an independent, sovereign, and unified Palestinian state encompassing the West Bank and Gaza.

We continue to closely monitor the situation in Gaza, and welcome Egyptian efforts on this important issue. We also join the Secretary-General in welcoming the Palestinian Authority's return to Gaza on 2 October, and the agreement to allow the Palestinian Authority to resume administrative control. This is an important and positive step toward the full restoration of Palestinian Authority control and effective governance in Gaza. We encourage those involved in the talks to

engage in good faith, to allow the Palestinian Authority to fully resume its government functions, and ensure compliance with the Quartet Principles.

Our policy on Hamas remains clear: Hamas must renounce violence, recognise Israel and accept previous agreements. We expect now to see credible movement towards these conditions, which remain the benchmark against which its intentions should be judged. We call on those in the region with influence over Hamas to encourage Hamas to take these steps.

Mr President, in support of the two-state solution, we must continue to press the parties on the need to refrain from actions which make peace efforts more difficult. We are clear that the repellent phenomena of terrorism and incitement pose a grave threat to the two-state solution, and must end.

We strongly condemn the use of racist, hateful and anti-Semitic language. It is right that we continue to urge against any type of action and language that makes it more difficult to achieve a culture of peaceful coexistence.

Settlement construction is a significant barrier to achieving the negotiated agreement we seek, and seriously threatens the physical viability of the two-state solution.

We have witnessed an unacceptable acceleration of settlement activity throughout 2017, both in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. To date, Israel has advanced plans for over thirteen thousand settlement units - the highest number of units since 1992. Reports also indicate that a significant number of units may be advanced this week, and new settlement construction permits were approved in Hebron for the first time in fifteen years. We condemn each of these illegal acts in the strongest terms.

Mr President, moving briefly to Iran:

As we have heard, President Trump has taken the decision not to recertify Iran's compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to Congress. The UK stands committed to the JCPOA and its full implementation by all sides. We believe that preserving the JCPOA is in our shared national security interest. The nuclear deal was the culmination of 13 years of diplomacy and was a major step towards ensuring that Iran's nuclear programme is not diverted for military purposes. The JCPOA was unanimously endorsed by this Council in Resolution 2231. The International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly confirmed Iran's compliance with the JCPOA through its long-term verification and monitoring programme. Therefore, we encourage careful consideration of the implications to the security of the US and its allies before taking any steps that might undermine the JCPOA, such as re-imposing sanctions on Iran lifted under the agreement.

As we work to preserve the JCPOA, we share concerns about Iran's ballistic missile programme and regional activities that also affect our

security interests. We stand ready to take further appropriate measures to address these issues in close cooperation with the US and all relevant partners. We also look to Iran to engage in constructive dialogue to stop de-stabilising actions and work towards negotiated solutions. We believe this approach entails the best path to regional security.

Thank you, Mr President.

Foreign Secretary visits Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories
British Embassy Tel Aviv
13 March 2017

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson has today (8 March) visited Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories for a number of high level meetings to discuss a range of regional issues, including the Middle East Peace Process, Iran, Syria and Daesh.

Foreign Secretary Johnson met with President Reuven Rivlin and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and discussed the strong bi-lateral ties between the countries in trade, innovation and science and the close security co-operation. Mr Johnson also met with Leader of the Opposition Isaac Herzog and MK Tzipi Livni and Yair Lapid, leader of Yesh Atid.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Foreign Secretary met President Mahmoud Abbas, Foreign Minister Riyad al Malki and other senior Palestinian officials. The non-governmental organisation, Peace Now also briefed him on the latest trends in settlement growth. In his meetings, the Foreign Secretary reaffirmed the UK's long-standing support for a two-state solution, outlined the UK approach to the centenary of the Balfour Declaration and highlighted UK commitment to the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state that guarantees the political rights of Palestinians, alongside a safe and secure Israel.

Speaking after the visit, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

"I was delighted to visit Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories for the first time as Foreign Secretary.

"I have held a number of constructive meetings with President Rivlin, President Abbas, Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Malki to discuss a range of issues and to reaffirm the UK's support for a two-state solution to secure peace and prosperity for both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

"We will continue to support efforts to improve conditions on the ground to enable negotiations to resume and look forward to working with the parties, the new US Administration and the wider international community to make progress in 2017 and beyond."

PM meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu: 6 February 2017

**10 Downing Street
07 February 2017**

Prime Minister Theresa May met with Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel and discussed free trade, security and Iran.

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

“The Prime Minister hosted Prime Minister Netanyahu at Downing Street today for their first bilateral meeting and a working lunch.

“In their discussions, the Prime Ministers committed to working together to build on our longstanding relationship and the strong ties that already exist between our 2 countries in a wide range of areas, from trade and investment, to innovation and technology, and defence and security.

“They discussed their shared belief in free trade and agreed to establish a new UK-Israel Trade Working Group to continue the progress we have seen in our burgeoning trade and investment relationship, and to prepare the ground for a post-Brexit trade agreement. It was noted that Lord Price will visit Israel soon to take this forward. They also discussed opportunities to increase investment in research and development and technology, and strengthen partnerships in these areas between our governments, universities and businesses.

“They talked about the important work we do together on intelligence-sharing and cyber-security, and committed to talk further about how we can deepen this co-operation, to help keep our people safe.

“They also discussed a number of international issues. On Iran, the Prime Minister was clear that the nuclear deal is vital and must be properly enforced and policed, while recognising concerns about Iran’s pattern of destabilising activity in the region. They also talked about the Middle East Peace Process and the UK’s firm commitment to a 2-state solution as the best way to bring stability and peace to the region. The Prime Minister reiterated the UK’s opposition to settlement activity.

“As we prepare to mark 100 years since the Balfour Declaration, the Prime Minister underlined that Britain remains a close and firm friend of Israel and reiterated our support for Jewish communities in the UK. She invited Prime Minister Netanyahu to attend events taking place in the UK to mark the anniversary in November, as a Guest of Government. He also invited her to visit him in Israel.”

6. Further reading

[The Balfour Project: Marking the Centenary](#)

The Balfour Project was created by British citizens to highlight Britain's record in Palestine before and during its Mandate.

[Centenary of the Balfour Declaration](#)

Lords briefing pack LBP-2017-0051
28 June 2017

[Embracing peace and working for justice: a joint report of the World Mission Council and Church and Society Council on the centenary of the Balfour Declaration](#)

May 2017

[Balfour Declaration](#)

Commons briefing paper CBP-7766
14 November 2016

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