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# CABINET.

## PALESTINE AND THE BALFOUR DECLARATION.

*Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies.*

I CIRCULATE to my colleagues the accompanying Minute by Mr. Ormsby-Gore, together with a Memorandum prepared for me, setting out the history of the Balfour Declaration.

DEVONSHIRE.

January , 1923.

*Extract of Minute by Mr. Ormsby-Gore.*

I think it very important that the story of the negotiations which led up to the Balfour Declaration of the 2nd November, 1917 (before General Allenby's first great advance), should be set out for the Secretary of State and possibly the Cabinet. The Foreign Office and Sir Maurice Hankey both have material. The matter was first broached by the late Sir Mark Sykes early in 1916, and he interviewed Dr. Gaster and Sir Herbert Samuel on his own initiative as a student of Jewish politics in the Near East. Dr. Weizmann was then unknown. Sykes was furthered by General McDonogh, D.M.I., as all the most useful and helpful intelligence from Palestine (then still occupied by the Turks) was got through and given with zeal by Zionist Jews, who were from the first pro-British. Sir Ronald Graham took the matter up keenly from the Russian and East European point of view, and early in 1917 important representations came from America. The form of the declaration and the policy was debated more than once by the War Cabinet, and confidential correspondence (printed by Sir M. Hankey as a Cabinet paper) was entered into with leading Jews of different schools of thought.

After the declaration, the utmost use was made of it by Lord Northcliffe's propaganda department, and the value of the declaration received remarkable tribute from General Ludendorff. On the strength of it we recruited special battalions of foreign Jews in New York for the British Army with the leave of the American Government.

W. O.-G.

December 24, 1922.

## PALESTINE.

*History of the Negotiations leading up to the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917.*

This memorandum has been compiled from papers obtained from the Foreign Office and the Cabinet Secretariat. There are no records in the Middle East Department regarding these negotiations, which took place long before the Colonial Office had any concern with Palestine. Such papers as it has been possible to obtain are very meagre and do not afford material for anything like a complete statement of the case.

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The following explanation is given in an unofficial note furnished by the Foreign Office for the purposes of this memorandum :—

"Upon the origins of the Declaration little exists in the way of official records; indeed, little is known of how the policy represented by the Declaration was first given form. Four, or perhaps five, men were chiefly concerned in the labour—the Earl of Balfour, the late Sir Mark Sykes, and Messrs. Weizmann and Sokolov, with perhaps Lord Rothschild as a figure in the background. Negotiations seem to have been mainly oral and by means of private notes and memoranda, of which only the scantiest records are available, even if more exist."

The note adds that Sir Mark Sykes's official papers have unfortunately been dispersed and that, so far, little referring to the Balfour Declaration has been found among such papers as are preserved.

The Foreign Office papers that have been examined contain nothing relating to the year 1916. The earliest document in the collection is a letter dated the 24th April, 1917, in which a certain Mr. Hamilton suggested that a Zionist mission should be sent to Russia for propaganda purposes. It is clear that at that stage His Majesty's Government were mainly concerned with the question of how Russia (then in the first stages of revolution) was to be kept in the ranks of the Allies. At the end of April the Foreign Office were consulting the British Ambassador at Petrograd as to the possible effect in Russia of a declaration by the *Entente* of sympathy for Jewish national aspirations. The idea was that such a declaration might counteract Jewish pacifist propaganda in Russia.

In the same month (April 1917) Mr. Balfour, then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, went on his official mission to the United States. The Foreign Office note observes that "during this visit the policy of the declaration as a war measure seems to have taken more definite shape. It was supposed that American opinion might be favourably influenced if His Majesty's Government gave an assurance that the return of the Jews to Palestine had become a purpose of British policy."

The Foreign Office papers show that during the next few months various conversations took place with Dr. Weizmann and other Zionists, and that much telegraphic correspondence passed on the subject with Sir Mark Sykes, who was then at Cairo. There was a proposal, pressed by Sir M. Sykes, that Dr. Weizmann should go to Egypt, and another that Mr. Sokolov and Mr. Goldberg should go to Russia to attend a Zionist Conference at Petrograd.

On the 13th June Sir Ronald Graham put up to the Secretary of State an important minute, recording a conversation with Dr. Weizmann. Dr. Weizmann had informed Sir Ronald that "there was now very little doubt that the German Government were endeavouring by every means at their disposal to work upon the Zionists in Germany, with a view to utilising them for the purposes of a peace agitation." Dr. Weizmann had given various pieces of evidence in support of this statement, and had argued that the German policy was "calculated to drive a wedge into the Zionist organisation, to influence Jewish opinion, especially in America and Russia, and to utilise it in the interests of German propaganda against the *Entente*." He concluded by "urging very strongly that it was desirable from every point of view that His Majesty's Government should give an open expression of their sympathy with and support of Zionist aims, and should publicly recognise the justice of Jewish claims in Palestine; and he added that "this would only be a confirmation of the opinion which certain of the most eminent members of His Majesty's Government had expressed to him and to his colleagues and which had formed the basis of his negotiations throughout the last three years." These last words are significant, indicating as they do that some form of negotiation had been in progress since the outbreak of the war. As the official records are silent, it can only be assumed that such discussions as had taken place were of an informal and private character. They were in the main conducted by Sir Mark Sykes. At the end of his memorandum Sir Ronald Graham urged that "the moment has come when we might meet the wishes of the Zionists and give them an assurance that His Majesty's Government was in general sympathy with their aspirations." The upshot was that Mr. Balfour asked Dr. Weizmann to submit a formula for such an assurance. No doubt Dr. Weizmann complied with this request; but the Foreign Office papers do not show when or in what form.

There is little to indicate the stages by which the negotiations subsequently advanced. On the 21st August, 1917, Mr. Philip Kerr, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, in a note to the Private Secretary at the Foreign Office, spoke of an



"official statement" as being "now under consideration" regarding the Zionist aims in Palestine. Mr. Kerr's note was written *à propos* of a letter from the Jewish congress at Salonica, asking for a message to be sent to their congress which was to meet on the 2nd September. The Foreign Office comment on this note was to the effect that the "Rothschild message should suffice for all purposes." This is evidence that it was then in contemplation that the proposed declaration should take the form, which in the event it actually did take, of a letter to Lord Rothschild; but it is quite clear that much must have been passing behind the scenes to which the official papers give no adequate clue.

Early in October 1917 further evidence reached the Foreign Office that the Germans were endeavouring to make use of Zionist aspirations for their own ends. A despatch from the British consul at Berne, dated the 2nd October, transmitted an account of a meeting said to have taken place at Berlin, at which Herr von Kühlmann, Jemal Pasha and a leading Zionist were present. The object of the meeting was "to discuss the Palestine question." It was stated that certain pledges had been given to the Jews in order to obtain their co-operation in a new war loan; also that the German Government had promised a safe passage to certain Jews who had gone to America from Palestine. The Foreign Office comment on this paper is: "We have already heard that the Germans are frightened of our Zionist propaganda."

The whole question came before the War Cabinet on the 4th October, 1917. According to the official minutes, Mr. Balfour, in presenting the case to the Cabinet, relied upon three main arguments:—

1. That the German Government were making great efforts to capture the sympathy of the Zionist movement;
2. That the movement, though opposed by many wealthy Jews in England, had behind it the support of a majority of Jews, at all events in Russia and America, and possibly in other countries; and
3. That the movement was based upon the "intense national consciousness" of the Jews, who "regarded themselves as one of the great historic races of the world, and who had "a passionate longing to regain once more their ancient national home in Palestine."

The minutes add that Mr. Balfour, at the end of his speech, read a very sympathetic declaration by the French Government, which had been conveyed to the Zionists, and stated that he knew that President Wilson was extremely favourable to the movement. Mr. Montagu, then Secretary of State for India, argued strongly against the proposal, whilst Lord Curzon raised objections on practical grounds, and urged that to secure for the Jews already in Palestine equal civil and religious rights would be a better policy than to aim at repatriation on a large scale. It was ultimately decided that, before coming to a decision, the War Cabinet should hear the views of some of the representative Zionists as well as of Jews of the opposite opinion, and that, in the meantime, the draft declaration, as it had been submitted to the Cabinet, should be referred confidentially (1) to President Wilson, (2) to the heads of the Zionist movement, and (3) to representative persons in Anglo-Jewry opposed to Zionism.

The question again came before the War Cabinet on the 31st October, 1917. Whether President Wilson's views had been obtained in the interval does not appear from the records, but the Cabinet had before them the following additional papers:—

1. A long memorandum by Lord Curzon on the "Future of Palestine," in which he developed his arguments against the policy of converting Palestine into a Jewish State;
2. A paper written about a year before by the late Lord Cromer;
3. Notes by a number of representative Jewish leaders; and
4. Seven variants of the proposed draft Declaration.

The Jewish leaders whose views were under consideration numbered ten in all, including Mr. Montagu. Of these six were generally favourable to a Declaration in favour of Zionism, while four (including Mr. Montagu) were unfavourable. In stating the case to the Cabinet Mr. Balfour, according to the official minutes, again laid stress on the diplomatic argument. "He gathered," he said, "that everyone was now agreed that from a purely diplomatic and political point of view it was desirable that some declaration favourable to the aspirations of the Jewish nationalists should now be made. The vast majority of the Jews in Russia and America, as, indeed, all over the world, now appeared to be favourable to Zionism. If we could make a declaration favourable to such an ideal we should be able to carry on an extremely useful

"propaganda both in Russia and America." Lord Curzon "admitted the force of the diplomatic arguments in favour of expressing sympathy," and recognised "that some expression of sympathy with Jewish aspirations would be a valuable adjunct to our propaganda," though he thought that "we should be guarded in the language used in giving expression to such sympathy."

The outcome was the famous Balfour Declaration of the 2nd November, 1917, the actual text of which was drafted by Colonel L. S. Amery, M.P. It was in the following terms:—"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."

*Colonial Office, January 1923.*