

### Activity 3

## Turning Points in History

The moments that shaped the relationship between Israel and Great Britain

An Informal Educational Session for Students

(by Joel Meyer for UJIA)

Time: 1 hour 15 minutes

### Aims:

- To get to know the history of the relationship between Israel and Great Britain.
- To consider those moments that were of greatest meaning and consequence both for this relationship and for Israel.
- To consider the context of the Balfour Declaration as well as its influence and importance for Israel.
- To encourage the participants to consider their own views on the Great Britain-Israel relationship and the Balfour Declaration and to consider the future of the relationship and of Israel.

### Trigger (15 minutes):

*“According to the Collins Dictionary, a turning point is a moment when the course of events is changed.”*

To begin with, each person receives a blank sheet of paper and is asked to find their own space and to consider and write down four turning points in their lives so far.

Explain that they will not be required to show their papers if they do not wish to do so.

Ask that each person is frank and honest and writes down not only these key moments that have shaped their lives but also the reasons that lie behind them making these choices and the consequences of these key moments or turning points.

The participants are now seated in a circle and are invited to share some of these life-shaping moments:

### **Consider:**

- How did this affect you?
- How did things change following this event?
- What could or would have happened in the event that this turning point had not happened?
- Can anyone else identify with this example?

### Task 1: Arranging Events (15 minutes):



*“Today we shall be looking at defining moments or turning points in the historical relationship between Israel and Great Britain.*

*As you considered your own life turning points, we would like you to explore the key moments that have shaped the relationship between Israel and Great Britain.”*

Give each participant a collection of key historical moments in the history of Great Britain’s relationship with Israel (please see below), an assortment of dates (please see below), a blank A4 sheet of paper and some blue-tac.

Each individual participant has 15 minutes to read through the attached collection of moments and to arrange them in chronological order according to the dates supplied – to be stuck down on the paper with blue-tac).

### **Checking in Pairs (10 minutes):**

Each participant now finds a partner. In pairs the two participants help each other to form one improved list.

### **Scoring (10 minutes):**

Each pair passes their final list to the pair next to them for scoring. The Facilitator reveals the correct series of events and dates.

Every event that is placed next to the correct date scores a point. The winning team may be awarded a prize!

### **Task 2: Choosing the Four Turning Points (20 minutes):**

Returning to your original pairs, take 10 minutes to discuss which of the events you would consider to be the greatest turning points in the relationship between Israel and Great Britain before then choosing just four to take forward.

Each pair now unites with another pair to form a group of four – the two pairs together should take a further 10 minutes to argue their choices and choose a final four before choosing just one turning point that they consider to be the most important.

### **Task 3: Arriving at a Consensus (10 minutes):**

Sitting in a circle each group of four presents their chosen turning points and puts



forward just one to be a part of the whole group final list. If a group wishes to put forward a turning point that has already been presented they may choose another one from their list of four.

As the groups explain what they have discussed and chosen, the Facilitator writes up in front of everybody the 'final four' chosen by all the participants.

### **Sikkum – Final Activity (15 minutes):**

The Facilitator initiates a discussion:

- Is the final group list what you would have expected? Does it resemble the list that you compiled at the beginning of the activity?
- Are there any events that you think, but for them taking place, Israel may not exist today?
- For those of you that didn't consider the Balfour Declaration worthy of a place in your final four – why not? For those that did include it – why was it so important and what impact did it have?
- How would you like to see the future of Israel and the region?



|                                |
|--------------------------------|
| October 1915                   |
| 1916                           |
| 1916-1917                      |
| November 2 <sup>nd</sup> 1917  |
| December 1917                  |
| 1920                           |
| July 7 <sup>th</sup> 1937      |
| 1939                           |
| 1944                           |
| November 29 <sup>th</sup> 1947 |
| July 22, 1946                  |
| February 1947                  |
| 1956                           |
| November 10 <sup>th</sup> 1975 |
| 1982-1994                      |
| 1986                           |
| 2009                           |
| December 2009                  |
| 2011                           |
| 2014                           |
| 2014                           |

The McMahon Letters:

Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, offered Sharif Hussein of Mecca an independent Arab state in return for helping the British fight against the Ottoman Turks. Hussein's interest in ending Ottoman control meshed well with Britain's war aim of defeating the Ottomans.

Britain later denied that Palestine had ever been part of the area allocated to a future Arab state.

The Sykes–Picot Agreement was a secret agreement between Great Britain and France, defining their mutually agreed spheres of influence and control in the Middle East – based on the premise that together with Russia they would succeed in defeating the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

The Nili Jewish spy network, based in Zichron Ya'akov, passed intelligence to the British and assisted them in conquering Palestine from the Ottoman Turks. Nili's members believed that British control would be more favourable to that of the Ottomans and that the British would support the creation of an independent Jewish state.

Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, which called for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.

"Dear Lord Rothschild,

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

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

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

Yours,  
Arthur James Balfour



British General Allenby enters Jerusalem during the Sinai and Palestine Campaign of World War One. The British have now taken Palestine from the Ottoman Empire.

Britain establishes its authority under the Mandate for Palestine granted by the League of Nations, which was confirmed in the San Remo agreement of 1922.

The Peel Commission, a British Royal Commission of inquiry set up to investigate the causes of Arab-Jewish unrest in Palestine presented a plan for the partition of Mandate Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state. The British government accepted the plan in principle but the Higher Arab Commission in Palestine rejected the idea outright. The British District Commissioner for the Galilee, Lewis Yellard Andrews was assassinated by Arab gunmen in Nazareth.

The British White Paper called for the establishment of a Jewish national home in an independent Palestinian state within 10 years, rejecting the idea of the creation of a Jewish state as well as the idea of partitioning Palestine. It also limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 for 5 years, and ruled that further Jewish immigration to Palestine was to be determined by the Arab majority.

The policy was accepted by Amin al-Husseini of the Arab Higher Committee. Zionist groups in Palestine immediately rejected the White Paper, particularly incensed by the implementation of such a policy at the same time as persecution of Jews in Europe was worsening.

The Jewish Infantry Brigade Group, more commonly known as the Jewish Brigade, was a military formation of the British Army composed of Jews from the Yishuv in Mandatory Palestine commanded by British-Jewish officers that served in Europe during World War II. The brigade fought the Germans in Italy. After the war, many of its members helped Holocaust survivors to emigrate illegally to Mandatory Palestine.



The United Nations Partition Plan – for the formation of separate Jewish and Arab states in Palestine at the end of the British Mandate – is passed as Resolution 181 in a UN General Assembly vote.

The King David Hotel bombing in Jerusalem was the work of the Zionist underground organization – the Irgun – on the British administrative headquarters for Palestine, which were in the hotel. 91 people were killed and 46 were injured.

It was conceived as a response to a series of raids on Jewish targets conducted by the British authorities and was the deadliest directed at the British during the Mandate era (1920–1948).

The explosion caused the collapse of the southern wing of the hotel.

The Irgun sent warnings by telephone, including one to the hotel's own switchboard, which the staff decided to ignore, but none directly to the British authorities. Controversy remains over the timing and adequacy of the warnings and the reasons why the hotel was not evacuated.

The British government – having lost the will to maintain its power in Palestine, and having already decided to withdraw from India – announced it was handing the mandate for Palestine back to the League of Nations.

British-Israeli relations improved markedly during the Suez Crisis.

Egypt closed the Suez Canal to ships bound to Israel, whilst encouraging violent terror attacks into Israel via Egyptian-controlled Gaza. In November, Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt.

United Nations General Resolution 3379 is passed asserting that Zionism is a form of racism.

The United Kingdom voted against passing the resolution.

The resolution was repealed in 1991.

During the first Lebanon War, Britain imposed an arms embargo on Israel, which would not be lifted until much later on.

A diplomatic incident occurred when a bag containing eight forged British passports was discovered in a telephone booth in West Germany. The passports were believed to have been the work of Mossad – the Israeli secret service – intended for the Israeli Embassy in London, to use in covert operations abroad. The British government were furious, demanding guarantees from Israel that British passports would not be used in this way in the future.

The United Kingdom's Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs issued new guidelines concerning labelling of goods imported from the West Bank. The new guidelines required labelling to clarify whether West Bank products originate from Israeli settlements or from the Palestinian economy. The Israeli government expressed disappointment at the move.

An arrest warrant was issued for then leader of the Israeli opposition Tipi Livni due to alleged war crimes committed during the 2008-2009 Gaza War. Livni had been Foreign Minister at the time. This and similar incidents strained relations between Israel and the United Kingdom. A few months earlier, former military chief Moshe Ya'alon had called off a visit to Britain due to similar concerns.

Legislation passed in 2011 altered the law, and required that the Director of Public Prosecutions give consent to any private prosecution for war crimes under universal jurisdiction, to prevent politically motivated cases and to ensure that there was solid evidence.

A White Paper on Trade and Investment for Growth issued by the government of the United Kingdom pointed to Israel as a pivotal strategic partner for Britain's future. Figures showed that Israel was the United Kingdom's largest trade partner in the Middle East, with bilateral trade between the two nations amounting to £3.75 billion - up 34% from the preceding year. Matthew Gould, then Britain's Ambassador to Israel, pointed out that the figures demonstrated that the effect of boycott movements on trade between the U.K. and Israel was minuscule.

United Kingdom lawmakers voted overwhelmingly in favour of a recognizing the state of Palestine. Though the resolution passed was non-binding and not an official declaration, the impact in Israel was considered by many to be significant.

A poll conducted by GlobeScan and the Program on International Policy Attitudes for the BBC World Service found that the British public views Israel overwhelmingly negatively, while Israelis view the UK positively: 72% of British people were reported as holding negative views towards Israel, with only 19% holding positive ones. The same poll recorded that 50% of Israeli respondents viewed the UK favourably, with only 6% doing so negatively.

