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To cite this article: Eitan Bar-Yosef (13 Mar 2026): Balfour, Banksy, Brexit: The Balfour Declaration Centenary in Britain, November 2017, Atlantic Studies, DOI: [10.1080/14788810.2026.2641988](https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2026.2641988)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2026.2641988>



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Published online: 13 Mar 2026.



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Balfour, Banksy, Brexit: The Balfour Declaration Centenary in Britain, November 2017

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ABSTRACT

Issued in November 1917 to pledge Britain's support for the "establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people," the Balfour Declaration has had dramatic historical repercussions, paving the way for the founding of Israel in 1948, the Palestinian Nakba, and the persistence of bloodshed. Tracing the complex dynamic of postcolonial guilt, self-exculpation, and amnesia that characterized various British responses to the Declaration over the years, the article examines how this dynamic shaped the numerous events held across the United Kingdom in November 2017 to mark the Declaration's centenary. These commemorative events – allowing different communities to articulate the relationship between Britain's historical accountability, Israel's sovereignty, and Palestinians' grievances – are read in light of two interrelated "post-postimperial" developments preoccupying Britain in 2017: a new conservative backlash against the seeping British willingness to acknowledge Britain's colonial crimes, and the Brexit crisis, with its complex resonances of imperial legacies.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 December 2024
Accepted 4 March 2026

KEYWORDS

Balfour Declaration;
centenaries; British empire;
Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
historical accountability;
Brexit

Introduction: "Looking at the year 1917"

Speaking in the House of Commons on 20 December 1917, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George tried to put the year's military and political developments in a broader historical perspective. "It would be rather interesting looking at the year 1917, if it were possible to project ourselves into the year 2017 and to observe the events of this particular year," he mused.¹ He himself was absolutely certain that when "the history of 1917 comes to be written [...] these events in Mesopotamia and Palestine will hold a much more conspicuous place in the minds and in the memories of the people than many an event which looms much larger for the moment in our sight."² Although Lloyd George was also referring to the capture of Baghdad in March 1917, his comments were undoubtedly triggered by a much more recent event: less than ten days earlier, on 11 December 1917, General Edmund Allenby made his dramatic entry into the Old City of Jerusalem – a magnificent Christmas gift for a weary nation, marking a new phase in the history of the Holy Land.³

In a way, Lloyd George's prediction was accurate. In July 2014, when the centenary of the First World War began with a series of worldwide commemorations, the numerous events staged in Britain focused on the Western Front, with a decided emphasis on the experience of trench warfare.⁴ Things were very different, however, in 2017 – when it was indeed Palestine (though not Mesopotamia) that held a prominent place in public and media commemoration. Still, whereas Lloyd George was probably thinking about the conquest of Jerusalem, attention in 2017 focused first and foremost on the centenary of a slightly earlier event: the issuing of the Balfour Declaration on 2 November 1917.

Sent from Arthur Balfour (1848–1930), the British Foreign Secretary, to Lord Rothschild, the eminent Jewish leader, the Declaration famously stated that "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."⁵ The various motives and interests behind the Declaration have been debated for decades.⁶ Was it an attempt, rooted in anti-Semitic myths concerning the Jews' international

power, to mobilize world Jewry behind the Allies' war effort? Or perhaps a romantic philo-Semitic streak of Christian Zionist sentiments, envisioning the return of the Jews to the land of their fathers? And what did "national home" signify, exactly, in terms of political sovereignty? While answers to these questions have varied, there is little doubt that this brief yet incredibly dense letter – its three sentences, wrote Ian Black, combining "considerations of imperial planning, wartime propaganda, biblical resonances and a colonial mindset"⁷ – would have an immense impact on the postwar Middle East. Included in the British Mandate over Palestine, formally approved by the newly-created League of Nations in July 1922, the Declaration facilitated and cemented British rule in Palestine. However, it remained unclear how a Jewish national home could be established there without compromising "the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine" – as the Declaration noted in its second clause (though not even referring to the Arabs by name).⁸ Nor was it possible to square this pledge to the Zionists with earlier promises that Britain had made to the Hashemites, in 1916, recognizing Arab independence on a large region that included Palestine.

These contradictory promises, reflecting Britain's different interests, would go on to shape Britain's thirty-year rule in Palestine. The Arabs, furious, denounced the Declaration as a case in which "one nation solemnly promised to a second nation the country of a third" (as Zionist author Arthur Koestler, of all people, quipped).⁹ The Jews, too, felt betrayed by a series of White Papers that gradually modified the spirit of the original Declaration. First, in 1922, Churchill's White Paper partitioned off three-quarters of the territory of Mandatory Palestine, located east of the Jordan River, in order to create the Emirate of Transjordan. Later, in 1939, Britain responded to the Arab revolt (that broke out three years earlier) by issuing a White Paper that limited Jewish immigration and land purchase considerably. This occurred just when European Jews, facing the dramatic rise of fascism across Europe, were most dependent on Britain to uphold its legal commitment to expedite Jewish immigration to Palestine.¹⁰ As violence escalated, especially after the end of the Second World War, the British decided to withdraw from Palestine. They departed in May 1948, leaving the two sides to fight it out. This resulted in the founding of the state of Israel, the defeat and dispersal of Palestinians (the Nakba), and the persistence of a bloody conflict that continues to attract the world's attention.

Considering this ongoing calamity, no wonder that the Declaration's centenary in November 2017 was the subject of much contestation in the United Kingdom, reflected in an incredible series of activities – ceremonies, conferences, rallies, concerts, films, and lectures – organized by various political, religious, and ethnic players across Britain's metropolitan communities. Tracing and analyzing central events, the present essay asks what the centenary can tell us not only about the charged legacies of the Declaration – but also about the broader cultural and political dimensions of the metropole's "Afterlives of Empire."

Exploring how Britain's historical responsibility for shaping the contemporary geopolitical conditions in Israel/Palestine had been remembered – or, indeed, forgotten – in various cultural and political contexts in the years preceding the centenary, the first section of the study shows how allusions to the Declaration (or, in some cases, the noted absence of such allusions) reveal a complex dynamic of guilt, denial, and self-exculpation. With this dynamic in mind, the second section maps the major commemorative themes and trends that characterized the centenary. By tracing the different narratives articulated by diverse metropolitan communities, it demonstrates the Balfour Declaration's function as a litmus test of sorts, compelling commentators to define the exact relationship between Britain's imperial history, the development of Israel's regime (both in the state itself and in the Occupied Territories), and Palestinians' ongoing statelessness. Focusing on the British government's official responses to these different narratives, the final section reads the Balfour Declaration centenary in light of two major "post-postimperial" developments that Prime Minister Theresa May inherited from David Cameron: a new conservative backlash against the seeping British willingness to acknowledge Britain's colonial crimes; and the Brexit crisis, with its complex (post)imperial resonances. The postscript will demonstrate how, serving as shorthand for Britain's imperial heyday, Balfour's iconic figure continues to emerge in responses to the devastating escalation of violence in Israel/Palestine that began with the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, swiftly followed by Israel's war on Gaza.

Afterlives of the mandate: Remembering and forgetting British rule in Palestine

The 2 November 2017 edition of the leading British tabloid, *The Sun*, informed readers that this day was the centenary of the Balfour Declaration, "a 67-word statement from the British government which changed the course of history." The item explained that the Declaration was "the first expression of public support for the

establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine by a major political power"; that it "was enshrined in a League of Nations mandate in 1920"; that, following the Declaration, "the Jewish population in Palestine increased dramatically and with it came an increase in Jewish-Arab violence"; that "Arabs, in Palestine and around the world, were angered by their failure to receive nationhood and self-government"; and that in 1948, "Israel was declared after the end of a civil war which raged for six months in Palestine" as "hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were driven out."¹¹ While all this is undoubtedly true, *The Sun's* account obliterates any reference to Britain's proximity to these pivotal events – namely, to the fact that the Declaration was issued as Britain was conquering Palestine in 1917; that the "League of Nations mandate" was bestowed on Britain; and that it was Britain's abrupt withdrawal in May 1948, after three decades of British rule, that determined the result of the civil war (followed by the invasion of Arab armies). Indeed, the use of vague formulations and passive voice make it virtually impossible to understand that Britain ever controlled Palestine.¹² This kind of postimperial amnesia also marked Ken Livingstone's statement, in an interview to BBC London Radio in March 2016, that "when Hitler won his election in 1932, his policy was that Jews should be moved to Israel."¹³ In the row that followed, leading to the seasoned politician's suspension from the Labor Party, few seemed to note that "Israel" did not exist in 1932: Palestine was ruled by the British (under the terms of the Mandate), who considerably limited the number of Jewish refugees allowed to enter the country.

These examples of historical erasure are extreme but not uncommon. Ruth Sanz Sabido, who has studied the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the British press from 1948 onwards, has shown that "the presence of the British Mandate and Britain's overall role in the development of the conflict have been progressively erased," even from accounts that set out to historicize and thus explicate the violence.¹⁴ This suppression of "historical facts that underpin Britain's role in the development of the conflict before 1948 [...] represents an attempt to move away from the historical responsibilities derived from colonial encounters, and amounts to an impulse to defend contemporary political, financial and strategic interests."¹⁵

Beyond the defense of these "interests," however, lies a deeper difficulty in coming to terms with the legacies of British rule in Palestine. Britain's retreat from India in 1947 was presented in the United Kingdom as the triumphant culmination of the Empire's "civilizing mission," despite (or perhaps due to) the bloody implementation of partition.¹⁶ By contrast, events in Palestine in 1947/1948 – Britain's struggle to contain Jewish and Arab violence and to face mounting international pressure – could not support such an upbeat narrative: "It was impossible to see the withdrawal from Palestine as anything other than a humiliation for Britain."¹⁷ As in other episodes of decolonization, this feeling of humiliation was mingled with anger, shame, and guilt (or, sometimes, shame for the reluctance to feel guilt). Rage about the Zionists' lack of "fair play," as reflected in some horrific terrorist attacks (such as the Irgun's bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 1946), fused with genuine unease concerning Britain's White Paper policy of barring Jewish Holocaust survivors from entering Palestine – as reflected, for example, in the notorious *Exodus* affair in 1947.¹⁸ Nevertheless, unease concerning the trials and tribulations of wartime Jewish refugees was gradually complemented, then overshadowed, by a growing awareness of the Palestinians' tragedy.

Triggered by the founding of the Palestine Liberation organization (PLO) in 1964, interest in – and sympathy for – the Palestinian cause deepened after the 1967 War, which led to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. It grew further after Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, in which the Jewish State was seen as applying new levels of violence towards the already-dispossessed Palestinian refugees. These pivotal events dramatically reshaped the British Left's attitudes towards Israel.¹⁹ It was still possible to differentiate between "Israel proper" (that is, the state existing within the internationally-recognized 1949 Armistice borders, also known as the "Green Line") and the Occupied Territories, in which Israel's policies – brutal suppression of Palestinian nationalism, combined with the building of Jewish settlements and the exploitation of Palestinian labor – were quintessentially colonial.²⁰ For critics of Israel, however, these post-1967 colonial practices merely embodied the very essence of the Zionist project, from its very inception. Significantly, growing condemnation of Israel often went hand in hand with the aforementioned reluctance to acknowledge Britain's own colonial accountability for the fate of Palestinians – stretching from the Balfour Declaration's denial of Arabs' political rights to Britain's hasty withdrawal in 1948, refusing to implement the United Nations' partition plan of November 1947.

This political-psychological mechanism appears in *Via Dolorosa* (1998), a one-man-show written and performed by British playwright David Hare, depicting his experiences touring Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank in

November 1997. Exploring the genealogy, complexity, and repercussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hare makes no mention of Britain's contribution to the muddle: the monologue does not discuss Britain's imperial interests in the Middle East; nor does it mention the Balfour Declaration or the contradictory promises made to Arabs and Jews. The omission becomes even more glaring when one considers that Hare's research trip to the Middle East was funded by the Royal Court Theater, which commissioned him to write a play about the British Mandate in Palestine. Defending his decision to abandon the Mandate and focus on the conflict instead, Hare explains in the monologue that writers "can't always predict [their] own interests."²¹ Still, it is telling that when Hare attempts to portray Israel's colonial project in the Occupied Territories, he compares it to the American Wild West – rather than explore its resemblance to (and historical affinity with) Britain's own colonial practices in the exact same territory several decades earlier.²²

By projecting its belated postcolonial guilt unto the sins of Zionism, the British Left could thus be said to absolve itself of colonial responsibility. A prominent example of this tendency appears in Peter Kosminsky's epic, six-hour long television series, *The Promise*. Broadcast on Channel 4 in 2011, this was the first British attempt to offer a major televised (or cinematic) historical depiction of Mandatory Palestine. Kosminsky's aim was "to remind British people that we have some culpability in one of the most tragic and intractable conflicts of our age."²³ Still, while *The Promise* begins with an attempt to reveal and denounce Britain's wrongdoings during the Mandate, the series' critique of Britain's conduct is gradually replaced by a harsher and much more systematic condemnation of Israel's history of violence and colonialist regime – after, but also before, 1967.²⁴ Significantly, the "promise" in the title refers not to Britain's colonial promise to the Jews – the Balfour Declaration is never mentioned in the series – but rather to the postcolonial promise to stand by Israel's Palestinian victims. "*The Promise* is a glossy exercise in self-exculpation," wrote historian David Cesarani: "Someone must be responsible, though, and the way he [Kosminsky] rewrites history that can only be the Jews."²⁵

While both Hare and Kosminsky erase Balfour from their narratives, other political or artistic projects have attempted to address Balfour's legacy directly. In 2011, a group of British academics, clergy, and peace activists who wondered how Britain will "mark the Centenary of the Balfour Declaration in 2017," founded the Balfour Project.²⁶ Melding advocacy and education, the initiative sought to increase public awareness of Britain's historical accountability for the situation in Israel-Palestine, focusing (as the name indicates) on the 1917 Balfour Declaration and mainly on the failure to implement its second clause, which promised to safeguard the rights of the Palestine's "existing non-Jewish communities." Calling on Britons to support Palestinians and Israelis in building a peaceful future "based on equal rights, justice and security for all," the initiative has also asked the British government to recognize the State of Palestine.²⁷ As the former Dean of Chichester Cathedral explained in a typical Balfour Project gathering in 2015, "Britain made the mess and should help sort it out."²⁸

A somewhat different approach has shaped Ben Brown's 2010 play which, also entitled *The Promise*, dramatizes the political intrigues behind the Balfour Declaration. Set primarily between 1914–1917 and exploring the complex political maneuvering that led to Britain's promise to support a Jewish national home in Palestine, the play situates Balfour on stage alongside a gallery of British policymakers. Still, Balfour (played in the original production by Oliver Ford Davies) remains only a marginal figure. Instead, the plot centers on the rivalry between two prominent Jewish politicians: the pro-Zionist Herbert Samuel (who became Britain's High Commissioner in Palestine in 1920) and his cousin Edwin Montague, who opposed Zionism, fearing it would compromise the rights and status of British Jews. That Montague's fiancée, Venetia Stanley, was also Prime Minister Asquith's love interest and confidant allows Brown to stress the linkage between political and personal motivations. *The Promise* concludes with Balfour's visit to Jerusalem in 1925, to attend the founding of the Hebrew University (a powerful symbol of Zionists' deepening presence in the land); the play ends as angry protests in Arabic are heard in the background, until the shouting "fills the auditorium."²⁹ Significantly, while the play presents the complexity of Britain's imperial interests, the emphasis on the Samuel-Montague enmity frames the Declaration – and the history of Mandatory Palestine that emanates from it – as a distinctly Anglo-Jewish affair, distancing mainstream Britons from the "mess" that Britain made.

Fusing certain elements from these two "Balfours," the Project's and the play's, is a third Balfour situated within the Walled Off Hotel in Bethlehem, which opened in March 2017. Initiated and designed by British

street-artist Banksy, this boutique hotel – nestled beneath Israel’s nine-meter-high concrete barrier – promises its patrons “the worst view in the world.”³⁰ The lobby’s interior design blends the quaint aesthetics of a traditional British colonial club with contemporary symbols of Israel’s occupation of Palestinians: CCTV cameras substitute traditional antelope heads, while crisscrossed sledgehammers and slingshots replace ornamental spears. Highlighting the historical affinities between British and Israeli colonial practices, then and now, it is only befitting that the lobby’s display includes an effigy of Balfour. Seated behind a desk and signing a document in a repetitive mechanical cycle, Balfour’s presence embodies the trajectory leading from the Declaration to Israel’s concrete barrier.³¹

All these responses to the Balfour Declaration reveal a complex web of historical and contemporary concerns. While *The Sun*’s account demonstrates the possibility of discussing the Declaration without even mentioning Britain’s thirty-year rule in Palestine, other projects or narratives have attempted to grapple with the question of Britain’s historical accountability for Palestinians’ plight. Still, what begins as a discussion of Britain’s imperial history and colonial practices often shifts to a condemnation of Israel’s contemporary treatment of Palestinians, both in the Occupied Territories and in Israel itself. As we shall now see, the Declaration’s centenary required the different communities or activists involved in its commemoration to formulate the exact relationship between these three historical “building blocks” – Britain’s colonial accountability, Israel’s present-day colonialism, and Palestinians’ ongoing victimhood – in the context of broader discussions about the legacies of Empire.

Fifty shades of Balfour: Participants and trends in the centenary events

The Balfour Project – geared, as we have seen, from its inception, towards the centenary – staged its main commemorative event on 31 October 2017 at the Methodist Central Hall (also known as Central Hall Westminster). Entitled *Britain’s Broken Promise – Time for a New Approach*, this was a sober, rather gloomy, soul-searching affair, focusing on Britain’s failure to uphold the Declaration’s second clause and calling “on the British Government and civil society to acknowledge this failure, and to take action in response.”³² This emphasis on the Declaration’s caveat was the moral and political axis on which the entire event hinged: Britain’s colonial crime was not the promise to the Jews (which was morally justified, especially in light of the Holocaust); rather, it was Britain’s reluctance or inability to safeguard the Declaration’s subsequent clause, stating that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine. Since the Declaration’s promise remained “unfinished business,” it was Britain’s duty to make amends.³³ Adhering to the familiar Two-State solution, speakers voiced their unwavering commitment to the existence of Israel within its pre-June 1967 borders but insisted that the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 should become a sovereign Palestinian state: “Ending the 1967 occupation through negotiation will realise the acknowledged right of the Palestinian people to self-determination; a right gained by Israel 70 years ago.”³⁴ “It should, and indeed can only, be on Israel’s shoulders to ensure the full delivery of the Balfour Declaration,” explained Conservative MP Crispin Blunt: “The best way for Israelis to commemorate it would be to ensure that, one hundred years after it was announced, the full measure of the text starts to be realised.”³⁵

The conference’s harsh condemnation of Israel’s occupation, balanced by an insistence on Israel’s legitimate right to exist, was thus mirrored by the equally bitter denunciation of Britain’s conduct in 1917–1948, balanced by an insistence on the Declaration’s twofold promise – in itself now divided, morally and chronologically, between Britain (having fulfilled the first promise) and Israel (yet to fulfill the second). This painstaking attempt to preserve equilibrium was reflected in the harmonious musical numbers, taken from a recent show called “Longing, Belonging & Balfour.” Written and performed by the *Chai for All* ensemble, it sought a reparative retelling of the story of the Declaration “with a mishmash of Jazz Klezmer, Arabic and Ottoman music, Salvation Army tunes, Story and Yiddish song.”³⁶ Still, even the Balfour Project’s meticulous balancing act failed when it attempted to sponsor a poetry competition in a Kent grammar school. Although the organizers were careful to state they the competition “marked” (rather than “celebrated”) the centenary, the undertaking was aborted when Jewish activists discovered that the school “only asked for submissions on the theme of Palestine.”³⁷

A counter-narrative to the Balfour Project’s “Britain’s Broken Promise” was offered a few days later, on 7 November 2017, by Britain’s Christian Zionist Evangelicals, under the title *Partners in This Great Enterprise*.

Staged at the Royal Albert Hall, this was the biggest indoor event of the centenary, and also the most joyous: more than 3,000 Christian (and some Jewish) supporters of Israel watched around 500 performers, singers and actors who reconstructed the events leading from the rise of political Zionism in the 1890s to the present day, including dramatizations of major events (such as Balfour's meeting with Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann), as well as Chasidic and Israeli folk-dancing. The Declaration was presented as a key moment in the fulfillment of God's promises regarding the Jews' restoration to the land of their fathers. "God chose Britain as the 'Cyrus Nation' to bring about his purposes," explained the lavish souvenir program: "For this reason, the Balfour Declaration has been called 'one of the most important letters in history,' as it led to the re-birth of the State of Israel."³⁸ The misgivings and guilt that define the Balfour Project's critique of Britain's colonial past were replaced here by an uninhibited, nostalgic celebration of Britain's imperial greatness.

The event was an impressive show of strength on behalf of Britain's Evangelicals, whose dominant theological and political presence in early twentieth-century Britain dwindled with time, overshadowed and then far surpassed by the work of their brethren in the United States. Israeli officials, who were all but absent from the Balfour Project's event,³⁹ were happy to endorse this one: Israel's President Reuven Rivlin sent a letter of congratulations and thanks, which opened the souvenir program; while the biggest ovation of the night was reserved for Israeli Ambassador Mark Regev, who described the gathering as "amazing. [...] In bringing the Balfour Declaration, the UK stood up for what is right."⁴⁰

This is not to say that the spectacle was altogether void of self-reproach. Even here, in this otherwise all-celebratory spectacle, Britain was reprimanded – not for betraying the Palestinians, of course, but for deserting Balfour's original vision. The Balfour Project's guilt for the Nakba was thus replaced here by the older guilt for the fate of Jewish wartime refugees: with the theme from *Schindler's List* playing in the background, the show's narrator referred to the "great betrayal" of 1939, when the British government issued its White Paper – following, he said, "violent opposition," though not specifying whose.⁴¹ That the Palestinians Arabs were never mentioned by name, not even once, throughout the two-hour Evangelical extravaganza is indicative of a pro-Israeli narrative that surpasses even Israel's own approach towards the Declaration – as reflected in the centenary events organized by Britain's Jewish community.

Shifting our attention to these events, we can trace fissures and tensions that replicated and sometimes deepened the trends in the broad "mainstream" (here, essentially Christian) community, described above. A talking heads film called *100 Years after Balfour* was produced by a radical fringe group, Independent Jewish Voices (IJV), founded in 2007 to question and resist the uncritical support for Israeli policies shown by established bodies such as the Board of Deputies of British Jews. "Within the Jewish community, many are celebrating this centenary," noted the film's opening captions: "But others take a very different view."⁴² The makers of the film, not unlike Peter Kosminsky (also an Anglo-Jew by birth), begin their narrative with a critique of Britain's dual promises during the First World War but then swiftly turn to focus on Israel's colonialism, particularly after 1967. Although IJV's political vision is probably very close to that of the Balfour Project, the initiatives' diverse constituencies dictated different framings of the Declaration's legacy: the Balfour Project's inclusive agenda required a careful balancing act between former British and present-day Israeli malpractices; while IJV's film was constructed as an in-house, intra-Jewish affair, concentrating almost exclusively on Israel's sins (and, implicitly but no less poignantly, on British Jews' sin of supporting Israeli policies wholeheartedly and uncritically).

In contrast, the mainstream Jewish community certainly celebrated – rather than "marked" – the centenary: a coalition of over twenty British-Jewish cross-communal and pro-Israel organizations staged more than 160 events all over Britain, under the banner "Balfour 100."⁴³ Still, the mood here was decidedly more sober than in the Christian Zionists' festival. This reserve was rooted in two intertwined historical embarrassments (beyond the slight, kneejerk unease about Israeli misdemeanors in the Occupied Territories, often dismissed as an inevitable result of the Palestinians' conduct). The first, already discussed above, was Britain's gradual retreat from the Declaration in the 1920s and 1930s, leading to the Zionists' violent terror campaign against the Mandate Government, especially after 1945. In Israel's national mythology, it was this anti-colonial struggle against "Perfidious Albion" that ultimately brought about independence.⁴⁴ A celebration of the Declaration's centenary naturally required a playing down of this enmity, although the contrasting account – namely, the narrative stressing the British-Zionist covenant during and immediately after the First World War – was equally embarrassing, because it threatened to present Zionism precisely as its

Palestinian victims saw it, a movement shaped and assisted by Western Imperialism (something that Christian Zionists reveled in, but remained somewhat unnerving for more liberal Jews). The inability to rejoice whole-heartedly was reflected in the carefully balanced conclusion of the public lecture presented by historian Simon Schama, the key event in the “Balfour 100” series: “It seems to me absolutely unequivocally right, with all these *tsuris* [problems, in Yiddish] notwithstanding, to celebrate the centenary unapologetically but thoughtfully.”⁴⁵

British Palestinians, the third community marking the centenary, professed anger and grief that were as deep and consistent as Christian Zionists’ exultation. For Palestinians, too, there was no need for balance: the affinity between former British imperialism and subsequent Israeli colonialism is absolute, an undeniable historical-ideological trajectory. The numerous events organized by British Palestinians, often in tandem with the more radical factions of the British Left, ranged from “Turning the page on the Balfour Declaration” (a pensive series of lectures honoring Palestinian cultural traditions) to a huge anti-Balfour march in central London. All these initiatives, however, conveyed a similar message: that the Declaration “laid the foundation for the 1948 Nakba, the ethnic cleansing of the majority of the indigenous people of Palestine at the hands of Zionist militias, and subsequently Israeli forces, to establish a Jewish-majority state in Palestine.”⁴⁶

The Palestinian conviction that “the Zionist hand slipped effortlessly into the British imperial glove”⁴⁷ was reflected in an advertising campaign, “Make It Right,” commissioned by the Palestine Mission to the United Kingdom (and blocked by Transport for London for being politically controversial). Each advertisement juxtaposed two contrasting images of Palestinian life, labeled “before” (a vibrant urban scene) and “after” (a man seated among rubble or overlooking refugees’ tents). The accompanying text quoted the Declaration’s clause defending “non-Jewish communities in Palestine,” before concluding: “100 years ago a developing, increasingly progressive society was stamped out at the stroke of 67 words. Today, the legacy of the British Government’s broken promise still continues.”⁴⁸ The linearity of this historical-ideological trajectory is captured by the imagery’s imprecise temporality, depicting various moments before and after 1948 (and not 1917) – although the year of the Nakba is not mentioned, and neither is Israel.

Israel was also missing from one of the centenary’s most interesting initiatives: *100 Balfour Road*, a short film produced by the Palestinian Return Center (PRC) in London, seeking – like the “Make it Right” campaign – to appeal to British public opinion (in contrast to IJV’s short film which seemed to target British Jews). *100 Balfour Road* attempts to highlight the effects of the Balfour Declaration by showcasing the Joneses, an ordinary family in a London suburb whose tea is interrupted by a knock on the door: a government official introduces a homeless family, the Smiths, who require help. Mr. Jones offers clothing for the children, but the official wants much more: ruthless soldiers evict the Joneses, forcing them to live in appalling conditions in their own backyard, while the Smiths, backed by the soldiers, take over the house. This contemporary plot is interlaced with flashbacks to 1917, showing a pensive Lord Balfour, dictating the Declaration to his secretary (as if the composition of the document was not a long and highly-charged process, with numerous players involved).⁴⁹ Balfour here becomes the historical embodiment of British colonial conceit and brutality; while the Palestinian tragedy is both allegorized and domesticated, reimagined in a residential British setting void of any Semitic or Middle Eastern context (beyond the timer on the Jones’s oven, which reads 19:48). Israel, the Nakba, and the Occupation are only mentioned in a textual slide just before the closing credits.

While Palestinians were not mentioned in the Evangelicals’ extravaganza due to their absence from Biblical prophecy, Israel’s omission from the “Make It Right” campaign and *100 Balfour Road* reflected British Palestinians’ attempt to utilize the centenary not to condemn Israel, yet again, but rather to focus on the issue of Britain’s accountability. That this merely reinforced, indirectly, the idea that Israel was established as a western imperial enclave in the Middle East merely made this path even more relevant.

Indeed, the short film was part of the Balfour Apology Campaign, initially launched by the Palestinian Return Center in 2013, and renewed following a speech given by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the UN General Assembly in September 2016: “We ask Great Britain, as we approach 100 years since this infamous declaration, to draw the necessary lessons and to bear its historic, legal, political, material and moral responsibility for the consequences of this declaration, including an apology to the Palestinian people for the catastrophes, misery and injustice this declaration created.”⁵⁰ “We are not addressing Israel or challenging their right to exist,” explained Sameh Habeeb, head of communication at the PRC, a few weeks later: “We are just addressing the U.K., and we are asking them to apologize for the direct and indirect

damage they did by playing a central role in arming and encouraging Jewish militias.”⁵¹ Tracing the British government’s response to this demand, the next section will situate the events of the Balfour centenary within Britain’s political landscape in 2017. As we shall see, the Palestinian demand – and the centenary at large – came at a particularly charged moment in the history of Britain’s postimperial self-fashioning.

A Brexit Balfour: Britain’s official response and the afterlives of Empire

The broader postimperial resonances of the Palestinian demand were articulated by the Balfour Apology Campaign’s website, which presented the apology as a common practice in British politics:

There are many precedents in which UK Prime Ministers recognised Britain’s role in causing suffering in its former colonies. For example, Tony Blair in 1997 apologised to the Irish for the famine the country endured in the middle of the nineteenth century. Gordon Brown in 2009 issued a formal Government apology to thousands of British children who were shipped from Australia and other Commonwealth countries between 1920s and 1960s. Similarly, Cameron in 2011 recognised that Britain’s colonial history made it responsible for much of the historic problems in the world when he was discussing the dispute in Kashmir.⁵²

David Cameron’s admission, in April 2011, that the United Kingdom “caused many of the world’s problems” certainly demonstrated how Britain’s official attitudes toward its colonial past had shifted within a few years.⁵³ Back in 2002, when Foreign Secretary Jack Straw (Labor) announced that Britain’s imperial past – including the Balfour Declaration and the “contradictory assurances” given concurrently to the Arabs – was to be blamed for many of the modern political problems in the Middle East, the admission was deemed highly exceptional.⁵⁴ Ten years later, when Straw’s Tory predecessor, William Hague, declared that Britain must “get out of this post-colonial guilt,” his comments not only reflected the familiar movement of the postimperial pendulum, forever swinging between national pride and self-flagellation, but also suggested the extent to which this self-reproach had become a familiar feature of contemporary British culture.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Hague’s rebuke seemed to mark a conservative backlash which sought to delimit the practical dimensions, at least, of this guilt. It is noteworthy, for example, that Cameron certainly did not apologize for the Amritsar massacre when he visited India in February 2013. And although Hague himself, a few months later, stated that the British government “sincerely regrets” the torture and abuse inflicted on thousands during the Mau Mau uprising in 1950s Kenya, he insisted that the historical compensation settlement did not establish a precedent “in relation to any other former British colonial administration.”⁵⁶ “Britain has said sorry to the Mau Mau,” concluded historian Caroline Elkins, whose scholarship was the basis for the former Mau Mau detainees’ successful legal claim against the British government: “The rest of the empire is still waiting.”⁵⁷

To be sure, the complexities of postimperial apology, restitution, and compensation have not been limited to the British case.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, debates regarding Empire’s legacies and responsibilities attained a new sense of urgency in Britain as the country braced itself for the June 2016 “Brexit” referendum on whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union: “Leavers and Remainers alike invoked the Empire – some as the antecedent to a glorious Global Britain of the future, others as the symbol of an anachronistic longing to return to the past.”⁵⁹ Theresa May inherited this volatile public mood when she became Prime Minister in July 2016, following Cameron’s resignation in the wake of Leavers’ victory. Signaling a return of the (colonial) repressed, President Abbas’ demand in September that Britain apologize for the Balfour Declaration fed into an already bubbling cauldron of imperial and post-imperial fantasies and anxieties.

As the centenary approached, the mood at Whitehall became increasingly nervous. On 16 February 2017, the Balfour Apology Campaign initiated a petition calling “on the British Government to apologise for the Balfour Declaration and lead peace efforts in Palestine.”⁶⁰ The aim to collect 100,000 signatures failed, however, following May’s announcement on 18 April that she would seek elections on 8 June (forcing early closure of all standing petitions; consequently, and perhaps not inconveniently for the government, the Balfour Apology petition secured only 13,637 signatories). A few days later, on 21 April, the government responded that the 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.”⁶¹ Ministers told Manuel Hassassian, the Palestinian ambassador to the United Kingdom, that an apology

"would open a Pandora's box of demands about Cyprus and Kashmir and other festering imperial wounds," wrote the *Guardian's* Ian Black, quoting a senior politician: "It can't be all bells and whistles to support Israel, but nor can it be complete sack-cloth and ashes and let's hear it for those who would recover Palestine [...]. It's about finding a line between those two."⁶²

Finding that line was not a simple task. Theresa May continued to insist that she will celebrate the centenary of Balfour declaration with "pride" (overlooking, of course, all that Britain had done to hinder the establishment of Israel). Yet she insisted that the British Government "must also be conscious of the sensitivities that some people do have about the Balfour declaration" and recognize "that there is more work to be done."⁶³ Superficially, at least, this view of the Declaration as unfinished business resembled the official stand of the Balfour Project, advocating "change in government policy today, not an apology for the past."⁶⁴ Yet while the Balfour Project called for Britain to recognize Palestine immediately, May had no such intentions, stating only that the United Kingdom remains committed to the Two-State solution.⁶⁵

Both strands, "pride" and "unfinished business," featured in the carefully balanced speech that May gave on 2 November 2017 at the formal dinner marking the centenary. Held at Lancaster House, the dinner was attended by 150 dignitaries and VIPs, headed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; the Labor leader, Jeremy Corbyn, known for his staunch pro-Palestinian views, turned down the invitation, but was replaced by Labor's Shadow Foreign Secretary, Emily Thornberry. Yet it is telling that this lavish event was a private affair, hosted by the current Lords Balfour and Rothschild, and not an official or even a public event (no media was allowed).⁶⁶ In fact, as Israeli journalist Anshel Pfeffer (*Haaretz*) noted, the only official, state-sanctioned event organized by Her Majesty's Government was a low-key, rather thinly attended reception at the British ambassador's residence near Tel Aviv.⁶⁷

Indeed, the British government simply did not have the political and moral will, or ability, to come to terms with the Declaration's charged legacy. Playing down the centenary as much as possible was the only way out. It fell, yet again, to Banksy to offer moral guidance. A tongue-in-cheek "street party" staged outside the Walled Off Hotel included "scorched bunting and flags, cakes and helmets painted with union flags set at a table beneath the looming concrete separation wall." A performer masquerading as Queen Elizabeth II then unveiled a new work, etched into the concrete: a mock apology to the Palestinians reading "Er ... SORRY."⁶⁸

But was all this really about the fate of Israel/Palestine? Sitting in Central Hall Westminster, listening to the Balfour Project's speakers calling Britain to live up to its "sacred trust," Pfeffer realized that the event "wasn't about Israel. Not even about the Palestinians. It was about Britain and its unique combination of tortured conscience for the sins of the empire and its delusions of grandeur and of still being a world power capable of influencing events around the world."⁶⁹ Of course, in November 2017, all of these phrases – "tortured conscience," "sins of empire," "delusions of grandeur," "world power" – were part and parcel of the national mood following the Brexit referendum, as Pfeffer himself was quick to note: "As Britain's divided and dysfunctional leadership struggles to extricate itself from the European Union, still without a clear idea of its new position in the world, the idea of Britain promising another nation somewhere in the world a 'national home' of their own is too distant to even be ridiculous."⁷⁰ Ian Black agreed: "It is impossible to conceive today – joking apart – of a 'Boris Johnson declaration' that could have even a fraction of the impact of the one made by Balfour."⁷¹

Other commentators focused not so much on the differences between 1917 and 2017, as on the similarities. As historian David Reynolds wrote in the *Spectator*,

What seems remarkable now is the cavalier way in which the Balfour Declaration was formulated: as a response to immediate wartime needs, with little thought as to how it would be implemented on the ground, let alone harmonised with Britain's other wartime pledges. One might wonder how a government could have been so irresponsible in the making of foreign policy. On the other hand, given what has happened in Britain over the past 18 months, one might not.⁷²

Building on Reynolds's shrewd analysis, one could add that the parallels were not only to 1917 but to 1948 as well. For what was Britain's decision to withdraw from Palestine unilaterally – with no plan and no real solution for Jews and Arabs – if not a "hard Brexit" of sorts, an extreme, banging-one's-head-against-the-wall policy?⁷³

Thus, while Brexit colored and shaped British metropolitan responses to the Balfour centenary, the Declaration itself emerged from the centenary events as a grand ur-text, anticipating (and facilitating)

a series of imperial and subsequently postimperial calamities, the muddle thickening in inverse proportion to Britain's diminishing status in the world – and culminating, for now, with Brexit.⁷⁴

It is not surprising, then, that alongside the daunting themes of postimperial longing, guilt, or denial, the affinity between the Balfour centenary and Brexit also surfaced in a scandalous episode of petty politics which gripped Whitehall and the media just as Britain was awash with Balfour commemorative events. The scandal involved top Brexiteer Priti Patel, who was forced to resign from her role as Secretary of State for International Development, following embarrassing revelations about her recent summer holiday in Israel: breaching the Ministerial Code, she attended a series of meetings with Israeli officials (including Prime Minister Netanyahu), accompanied by a powerful pro-Israel lobbyist, without informing Downing Street or the Foreign Office. Patel recommended, moreover, that the Department for International Development give international aid money to field hospitals run by the Israeli army in the Golan Heights (which Patel visited during her visit, although the United Kingdom does not recognize Israel's annexation of that region).⁷⁵ The convergence of these two events in the first week of November 2017, the centenary and the diplomatic fiasco, offered a fascinating illustration of Britain's dramatic decline. Fusing imperial nostalgia (reflected in Patel's decisive role in the Brexit's Leave campaign) and unabashed pro-Israeli sympathies, Patel's puerile diplomatic blunder became a grotesquely miniaturized version of Balfour's magnanimous gesture towards the Jewish people, with its disastrous human and political ramifications. If only Lloyd George could project himself one hundred years into the future, he would have agreed with Karl Marx that history repeats itself – first as tragedy, second as farce.

Postscript: 108 Balfour road

The Balfour Declaration centenary was a major commemorative event in Britain, affecting a broad spectrum of communities. While centenaries of the First World War, from the summer of 2014 onwards, focused on major episodes in the long, four-year history of the war (the Christmas Truce in 2014, Gallipoli in 2015, the Somme in 2016, Amiens in 2018), the Declaration offered a unique case – a distinct, compact event (in fact, a text) with ongoing historical repercussions.

Interestingly, there were several other temporal milestones in the history of Israel/Palestine that occurred around the same time: the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 War (6 June 2017); the seventieth anniversary of the pivotal UN Partition Resolution (29 November 2017); and the seventieth anniversary of Israel's establishment (15 May 2018). The commemoration of the Balfour Declaration easily overshadowed these other anniversaries. This may have been rooted in the symbolic weight associated with the number 100, or in the idea that the issuing of the Declaration, the earliest historical event in this sequence, functioned as harbinger or condition for subsequent occurrences. Yet the exceptional attention given to the Declaration also reflected Lord Balfour's status as an iconic embodiment of British colonialism. Represented in various media – textual, visual, theatrical, and cinematic – Balfour's imposing, slightly drooping, moustached figure became shorthand for the heyday of Empire, both for those who yearn to restore British eminence and those who condemn Britain's colonial meddling and its tragic aftermaths.

No one, in November 2017, especially not those who continued to call for a peaceful solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict, could have envisioned the horrors of the Israel-Hamas War which began on 7 October 2023, when Palestinian militant groups, mainly Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, launched a major attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip. It continued with Israel's invasion of Gaza, displacing millions of Palestinians and killing tens of thousands in what has become the deadliest war since 1948, often perceived as a continuation of the Nakba.⁷⁶

While the specter of Brexit has continued, and continues still, to haunt British culture and politics in numerous ways, the Israel-Hamas war had a strikingly tangible impact on the UK's public sphere, evidenced by numerous rallies, demonstrations, campus encampments, and other initiatives that began in October 2023 and persisted throughout 2024. Considering Balfour's iconic status, no wonder that British, mainly British-Palestinian, anger and frustration has often turned to Balfour. In December 2023 social media was awash with references to an official letter released by the University of Edinburgh, apologizing to the Palestinian people for the 1917 Declaration whose author was Chancellor of the University from 1891 to 1930. It was later revealed that the letter was actually part of a playful performance lecture called "Balfour Reparations (2023–2043)" by Palestinian dance artist and scholar Farah Saleh.⁷⁷ In March 2024, protesters defaced a

1914 portrait of Balfour by Philip Alexius de László, held in Trinity College, Cambridge. A statement from “Palestine Action” explained that an activist “slashed the homage and sprayed the artwork with red paint, symbolising the bloodshed of the Palestinian people since the Balfour Declaration was issued in 1917.”⁷⁸ On “Balfour Day,” 2 November 2024, tens of thousands took to London’s streets to protest Israel’s actions. “The anniversary of the Balfour declaration, the notorious document which laid the foundations for the dispossession of the Palestinian people, reminds us of the depths and length of British complicity with these rights violations,” said Ben Jamal, the PSC Director:

Every Palestinian knows who Balfour was and every Palestinian knows of the guilt of Keir Starmer’s Government in aiding and abetting the current genocide against them. Their demand is the same as it has been since 1921 when a delegation of Palestinians including Shibli Jamal, my Great Uncle, came to London asking for the declaration to be overturned: End your complicity – support us in realising the rights that you enjoy and that you have helped deny to us for over 100 years. Stop doing us harm.⁷⁹

It may have been the conviction that every Palestinian “knows who Balfour was” that compelled members of the Balfour Project, shaken to their very core by the unprecedented violence, to rechristen their initiative: Balfour’s name had become a liability. “After thorough discussions and valuable advice from our stakeholders, we have decided that from 13 March [2025] we will be known as the Britain Palestine Project (BPP),” explains the mission statement on the revamped website:

This was no easy decision. Since the charity was formed eight years ago, the Balfour Project name has become widely recognised and [...] respected both in the UK, where our advocacy and educational work is focused, and elsewhere. But greater public awareness brought with it controversy. Some people assumed – wrongly – that the name implied we were apologists for the 1917 Balfour Declaration, when Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour promised the Zionist movement British support for a Jewish homeland in the Ottoman territory of Palestine. Now is not the time to be operating with a name that requires explanation.⁸⁰

One wonders whether the “Britain Palestine Project” captures the group’s scrupulous efforts to preserve balance. Indeed, some people might assume – perhaps not wrongly – that the new name implies a stauncher pro-Palestinian stand (understandable, perhaps, in light of the utter devastation in Gaza). It is highly ironic, however, that the very initiative advocating for Britons’ awareness of their imperial history and responsibilities now finds Lord Balfour too toxic to be explained – a stuffed imperial effigy that must be exorcized. Naturally, one’s thoughts turn to the deserted lobby of Banksy’s Walled Off Hotel. “Due to major developments in the region we have with regret chosen to close the hotel for the time being,” noted the proprietors on Instagram, a few days after 7 October 2023: “We will post updates here as the situation evolves.”⁸¹ And so we still await glad tidings from Bethlehem, where the effigy of Balfour still sits at his desk, forever signing the Declaration.⁸²

Notes

1. United Kingdom, Hansard, Fifth Series, House of Commons Debate 20 December 1917, 100 c.2212.
2. Ibid., c.2211.
3. Bar-Yosef, “The Last Crusade?”.
4. Cornish, “Sensing War”; Wilson, “Still Fighting.”
5. “The Balfour Declaration (November 2, 1917),” in Laqueur and Rubin, *Israel-Arab Reader*, 16.
6. Stein, *Balfour Declaration*; Levene, “Balfour Declaration”; Renton, “Historiography”; Segev, *One Palestine*, 43–50; Schneer, *Balfour Declaration*.
7. Black, “Contested Centenary.”
8. “The Balfour Declaration (November 2, 1917),” in Laqueur and Rubin, *Israel-Arab Reader*, 16.
9. Koestler, *Promise and Fulfilment*, 4.
10. Segev, *One Palestine*, 117, 440–441.
11. Wheatstone, “What Is.”
12. Ibid. British rule in Palestine is hinted at in one of the photo captions: “British politician Lord Arthur Balfour points out a feature of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to Governor Sir Ronald Storrs during a visit to Jerusalem.” Still, it does not state that Storrs was then Governor of *Jerusalem*.
13. Swinford, “Ken Livingstone.”
14. Sabido, *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 189.
15. Ibid., 190. Sabido surveys the press coverage during five historical periods: May–June 1948 (the end of the British Mandate and the beginning of the First Arab-Israeli War); June 1967 (the 1967 War); November–December 1987

(the beginning of the First Intifada); December 2008 to January 2009 (Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip); and March-May 2018 (the Great March of Return, coinciding with the seventieth anniversary of the creation of Israel). She does not refer to the Balfour centenary – and, interestingly, her own account makes almost no mention of the Declaration.

16. Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 58–68.
17. Morgan, *Britain Since 1945*, 51.
18. *Exodus 1947*, a ship carrying thousands of Jewish Holocaust survivors attempting to immigrate to Palestine, was intercepted by the British in July 1947 and then forced back to Europe, generating international condemnation.
19. Hollis, "Palestine and the Palestinians"; Feldman, "Zionism."
20. Penslar, "Zionism," 97. A detailed survey of the debate concerning Zionism's colonial credentials – which has burgeoned in recent years, with the resurgence of settler colonialism as a major interpretive framework (Busbridge, "Israel-Palestine") – is beyond the scope of this article.
21. Hare, *Via Dolorosa*, 22.
22. Bar-Yosef, "Just a Pen," 266–267, 270.
23. Dysch, "Peter Kosminsky."
24. N. Cohen, "Love and Surveillance," 52–55.
25. Cesarani, "The Promise."
26. Balfour Project, "Balfour Project Origin Story."
27. Balfour Project, "Mission Statement."
28. Balfour Project, "Britain Made the Mess."
29. Brown, *Promise*, 98.
30. Khader, "Dystopian," 138.
31. *Ibid.*, 144.
32. Balfour Project. *Britain's Broken Promise* (booklet), 2.
33. Balfour Project, *Britain's Broken Promise* (souvenir programme), 13.
34. *Ibid.*, 7.
35. Balfour Project, *Britain's Broken Promise* (booklet), 5.
36. Crowdfunder, "Longing Belonging and Balfour."
37. Weich, "School Cancels."
38. Thurley, *Partners*, 3.
39. The only Israeli figure featured in the Balfour Project's souvenir program is Alon Liel, a committed leftist who had been Director General of Israel's Foreign Ministry and Israel's ambassador to South Africa.
40. J. Cohen, "Royal Albert Hall."
41. Hatikvah Films, *Partners*.
42. Frost, *100 Years*.
43. *JC Reporter*, "Israel has Proved."
44. Segev, *One Palestine*, 483. See Podeh, "Diversity," for a detailed discussion of the role played by this mythology in shaping Israelis' view of the Balfour Declaration over the years and its representation in state-sanctioned commemoration.
45. Schama, "Balfour Centenary Lecture."
46. BNC statement, "Balfour Declaration."
47. B. Cohen, "Year Zero."
48. Black, "TfL Bans Ads."
49. Alkarmi, *100 Balfour Road*.
50. Arshad and Nichols, "Palestinians' Abbas."
51. Harman, "The Battle."
52. Balfour Apology Campaign, "Why."
53. Kirkup and Hope, "Cameron: UK Caused."
54. Kampfner, "The Foreign Secretary."
55. Murphy, "Hague: Stop."
56. Press Association, "UK to Compensate."
57. Elkins, "Britain Has Said Sorry."
58. See Bentley, *Empires of Remorse*; Aldrich, "Apologies, Restitutions, and Compensation."
59. Rasch, "'Keep the Balance,'" 212. See also Ward and Rasch, *Embers of Empire*; Saunders, "Brexit and Empire."
60. Palestinian Return Center, "Balfour Declaration Apology."
61. "Petition: UK Must Apologise."
62. Black, "Contested Centenary."
63. Cowburn, "Theresa May."
64. Balfour Project, "FAQs."
65. Cowburn, "Theresa May."
66. Pfeffer, "Netanyahu: Real Tragedy."
67. Pfeffer, "Britain Downgrades."

68. Beaumont, "Palestinians Crash."
69. Pfeffer, "Balfour Declaration Centennial."
70. Ibid.
71. Black, "Contested Centenary."
72. Reynolds, "100 Years On." Exploring this same analogy in 2019, Garland Thompson stressed the parallels between the two leaders: "Separated by 100 years, two Davids – Prime Ministers Lloyd George and Cameron – made decisions which in one case certainly, and in the other case almost certainly, changed the course of history. [...] Both Davids were short-sighted, careless, and too clever by half." See Thompson, "The Perils."
73. I am grateful to Adam Sutcliffe for this insight.
74. Writing in 2020, Lindsey Moore has noted that although Brexit literature (sometimes called "Brexitlit") has yet to engage directly with Britain's relationship to the Middle East, the two histories are subtly intertwined: "When viewed in a certain light, Brexit motifs of enclosure, displacement, and propinquity limn the Palestinian crisis as well as the spectre of anti-Semitism, revealing Britain's role in the shaping of the modern Middle East as part of contemporary British literature's political unconscious." See Moore, "Brexit Literature's Present Absentees," 621.
75. Dejevsky, "Priti Patel's Meetings."
76. Khalidi, "A New Abyss." As of March 2026, the war is in a state of a fragile ceasefire under the first phase of a peace plan led by the United States.
77. Reuters Fact Check, "Fact Check."
78. Dunne, "Pro Palestine Group."
79. Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), "Tens of Thousands."
80. Britain Palestine Project, "Mission Statement." Fittingly, six months later, on 21 September 2025, Prime Minister Keir Starmer declared the UK's recognition of Palestine, ushering in a new phase for the Project, now emphasizing that recognition was only a first step – one that had to be translated into meaningful action.
81. Velie, "Banksy Hotel."
82. Glad tidings did finally arrive as this essay was being prepared for publication: the hotel reopened in late December 2025, albeit on a drastically limited scale. Wisam Salsaa, the hotel's manager and co-founder, told *Haaretz.com*: "It was about hope [...]. For the people, for the artists, for our employees and for Bethlehem. If we didn't take this step, we would only deepen the feeling that everything is over" (Zbeedat, "Occupation Vacation.")

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Israel Science Foundation [grant number 933/17].

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