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Small wonder that Britain is called Perfidious Albion.

During the first world war, Britain behaved very cynically in promising support for an independent Arab kingdom under Hussein the Sharif of Mecca, in return for the Sharif of Mecca mounting an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Turks. He kept his side of the bargain; Britain reneged on its side of the bargain and let him down. Then in 1916 Britain reached a secret agreement with the French, the Sykes-Picot agreement to carve up the Middle East between themselves in the event of victory. This contradicted the first promise made of Arab independence. Then in 1917 Britain issued a public declaration of support for a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.

Today the Sykes-Picot agreement is in the news. People are talking about the unravelling of the Sykes-Picot system. ISIS have demolished a border post between Syria and Iraq, and they had a poster which said "We are doing away with the borders of Sykes-Picot". But they are wrong. Their ignorance of history isn't their only fault - because these borders were not the Sykes-Picot borders. Sykes-Picot was a process which began with an agreement and then it was negotiated and renegotiated and Britain wriggled out and went back on its commitment to the French. It was at San Remo that the borders were settled, and they are still the borders today.

The issue today isn't the borders, because all the Arab states are committed to the borders. They are not illegitimate. The only exception are the Kurds who would like a state of their own which was promised to them after the First World War - a promise that was not kept.

The Sykes-Picot agreement remained important at a symbolic level. For Arab nationalists from then until today, the two main terms of reference were the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration. Sykes-Picot symbolised the colonial control and domination of the Arab land, and the Balfour Declaration symbolised the British support for the Zionist project in Palestine.

The Balfour Declaration was a product of a colonial mentality which paid no attention to the aspirations of the rights of the great majority - the Arabs who were 90% of the population of Palestine, and only awarded national rights to the Jewish minority - who were 10%.

The Balfour Declaration was based on a misconception - a misconception mainly by David Lloyd George who by this time was Prime Minister. Britain was losing the war and Lloyd George saw that by making this gesture Britain would acquire a really important strategic ally.

But he was wrong, because the Jews were an impotent minority. The Jews were a small minority within a minority. Not all Jews supported the Zionist project. Two members of the British Cabinet - Sir Edwin Montagu Secretary of State for India, who was Jewish, was opposed to the Balfour Declaration on the interesting grounds that a Jewish State in Palestine would undermine the struggle for equal rights for Jews everywhere. But whatever the motives behind it, the Balfour Declaration was a colossal blunder. It was one of the greatest of blunders in British Imperial history. It saddled Britain with commitments to the Zionist movement, and Britain got nothing in return for its support for the Zionist movement. The argument went on throughout the British mandate until the bitter end. The Jews said "You promised us a state", and the British said "No, we didn't promise you a state, we promised you a national home" - which isn't the same as a Jewish state.

The history of Britain's involvement in the Middle East since then has been a history of further and further betrayals of the Palestinians. There is a long series of British betrayals of the Palestinians from Balfour to Tony Blair. The upshot of the Balfour Declaration was that Britain sponsored a Jewish National movement which was aggressive and expansionist. In the early days when the Zionist movement had very limited military capability it compensated for it with a very sophisticated and resourceful diplomacy. Since 1948, and especially today, Israel has very little diplomacy, very little care about public opinion, but it has a very strong military, and it imposes its will and its colonial control on the Palestinians by force.

On a personal note, I would like to point out that Oriental Jews - Jews of Arab lands - were also the victims of Zionism. I myself was born in Baghdad. I am an Iraqi Jew. When I was five years old in 1950, my family suddenly ended up in Israel - an upheaval that destroyed centuries of coexistence between Jews and Arabs and Muslims in the Arab world.

Anti Semitism is a European phenomenon - it's not a Middle Eastern phenomenon. My family had very little understanding and no sympathy for the Zionist project, but for reasons which were completely beyond our control we ended up living in the state of Israel. So what I am trying to say is not that we are refugees; we are not. We were not mistreated in Iraq, we were not pushed out, but in a very real sense my family and I are victims of the Arab-Israeli conflict

What are the lessons for Britain today? A very dismal story. The lessons are to stop trying to punch above our weight; to not continue on the course of military intervention as we embarked on in Iraq in 2003, and most recently in Libya. And last but not least to reverse Britain's position on the Israeli - Palestinian conflict. To begin with an apology to the Palestinians for all the betrayal going back to the Balfour Declaration, and with a commitment to support a Palestinian State. Thank you.