

The Balfour Declaration – The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict
by Jonathan Schneer.
Bloomsbury Publishing 2010.

The brief letter sent by the Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, to Lord Rothschild in November 1917 contained a mere 117 words, but its promise, to 'view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people' has made it by far the most important document in the history of the modern Middle East, and although nearly 100 years old, possessed of a contemporaneity and relevance unlike that of any other diplomatic correspondence.

Professor Jonathan Schneer. Professor of modern British history at the Georgia Institute of Technology, has produced in this eponymous work an analysis of the Balfour Declaration that is, to date, without equal. In the course of twenty five chapters, divided into five parts, Sirocco, London and Zion, the Battle for the Ear of the Foreign Office, the Road not Taken and Climax and Anticlimax, Schneer not only traces the development of British policy towards the Middle East in general and Palestine in particular, but considers in minute detail the characters of the key players whose influence on events was the most significant.

Much is published about the modern Israeli/Palestinian/Israel-Palestine struggle but without understanding the origins of the State of Israel as reflected in the meagre words of the Balfour Declaration and the political outcomes that flowed from it one's comprehension remains flawed.

The Balfour Declaration is as sound, well researched and comprehensible an account as one could wish to read of the sources of an on-going conflict that impacts on so much of the world's troubles in the 21st century.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh