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## **Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People: From the San Remo Conference (1920) to the Netanyahu-Abbas Talks**

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- According to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the real root of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians had been their ongoing refusal to recognize "the right of the Jewish people to a state of their own in their historic homeland" and he has singled out this issue as a key "prerequisite for ending the conflict." Netanyahu's proposal puts back on the global agenda a fundamental Jewish national right that was once axiomatic but today is rarely mentioned.
- Ninety years ago at the San Remo Conference following World War I (April 1920), the Supreme Council of the Principal Allied Powers determined the allocation of the Middle Eastern territories of the defeated Ottoman Empire and decided to incorporate the 1917 Balfour Declaration supporting a Jewish national home in Palestine into the British Mandate for the territory, a move which confirmed international recognition of the right of Jewish self-determination.
- The language adopted at San Remo was a triumph for Zionism, which saw a national solution to the problem of the Jews. It recognized the existence of the Jews as more than individuals who subscribed to a certain *religion* - Judaism - but rather as a corporate group deserving of *national* expression, in this case in the form of a national home. And this home was to be in Palestine, the ancient homeland of the Jews. The language agreed upon at San Remo was, as British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon put it, "the Magna Carta of the Zionists." It was clear at the time that the term "national home" really meant a state.

- Jewish self-determination was part of a process that ended up decolonizing the Middle East in an effort that led to Arab as well as Jewish independence. Repeated recent associations of Israel with colonialism - an ahistorical canard that erases the millennia-long association of Jews with the Land of Israel as an indigenous people - ignores the benefit that Zionism actually brought to the Arabs through the process of decolonization. The British Peel Commission Report of 1937 was quite clear on this. Indeed, it was the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel that gave critical mass to a distinct and unique Palestinian identity as well.
- The Jews have been brought back into history through the establishment of the State of Israel. This was accomplished with the aid of international institutions which recognized the justice and importance of Jewish national self-determination. These institutions accepted the validity of Zionism, the national liberation movement of the Jews. Today, those who deny the Jewish right to national self-determination, more than 60 years after the founding of Israel, engage in a new kind of anti-Semitism.

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