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**Subject:** "There was nothing called a Palestinian people" in 1917, says Palestinian historian

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 PMW

**Bulletin**  
**Nov. 5, 2017**

## **"There was nothing called a Palestinian people" in 1917, says Palestinian historian**

Itamar Marcus and Maurice Hirsch

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To mark the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, Mahmoud Abbas, the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority published [an op-ed](#) in the British *Guardian* newspaper. After castigating Lord Balfour for promising "a land that was not his to promise" he went on to describe the Palestinian people as "a proud nation with a rich heritage of ancient civilisations, and the cradle of the Abrahamic faiths." [*The Guardian*, Nov. 1, 2017]

Contradicting Abbas' historical revision, just a day before, PA official TV broadcast an interview with the historian Abd Al-Ghani Salameh, who explained that in 1917 there was no Palestinian people.

During the broadcast, the host of the program asked:

"There always was a historical struggle over Palestine, and many wanted to rule it. How did the aspirations to rule affect the Palestinian existence, the Palestinians' options, and the Palestinians' possibilities of development?"

Salameh responded:



"Before the Balfour Promise (i.e., Declaration) when the Ottoman rule ended (1517 - 1917), **Palestine's political borders as we know them today did not exist**, and **there was nothing called a Palestinian people** with a political identity as we know today, since Palestine's lines of administrative division stretched from east to west and included Jordan and southern Lebanon, and like all peoples of the region [the Palestinians] were liberated from the Turkish rule and immediately moved to colonial rule, without forming a Palestinian people's political identity."

[Official PA TV, special broadcast for the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, Nov. 1, 2017]

In his article in *The Guardian*, Abbas continued to revise history claiming:

"I was 13 years old at the time of our expulsion from Safed."

This contradicts [Abbas' own words in 2013](#), when he admitted on PA TV that the residents of Safed were not expelled but rather left Israel in 1948 on their own, as previously reported by [Palestinian Media Watch](#):



"The [Arab] Liberation Army retreated from the city [Safed in 1948], causing the [Arab] people to begin emigrating. In Safed, just like Hebron, people were afraid that the Jews would take revenge for the [Arab] massacre [of Jews] in 1929. The 1929 massacre was most severe in Safed and Hebron (Note: 65 Jews were killed in Hebron, 18 in Safed). Let's mention the 3 men from these cities who were executed (by the British Court, for "brutal murders"): Ataa Al-Zir, [Muhammad] Jamjoum and Fuad Hijazi. Hijazi from Safed and the other two from Hebron. The people (of Safed in 1948) were overcome with fear, and it caused the people to leave the city in a disorderly way."

[Official PA TV, Jan. 1, 2013]

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*The Balfour Declaration of Nov. 2, 1917 was a letter from British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Baron Rothschild stating that "His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." In 1922, the League of Nations adopted this and made the British Mandate "responsible for putting into effect the declaration," which led to the UN vote in 1947 and the establishment of the State of Israel.*

*The Ottoman rule of the area started in 1512 and lasted for over 400 years.*



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