

50. Basis for Arab-Jewish Friendship.

London, 11 December 1918

Interview with Faisal¹

The Emir produced a map showing a plan of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and expressed his indignation with the arrangements contemplated by that Agreement, which, in his opinion, were equally fatal to Arabs and to Jews. He had no hope of arriving at any understanding with the French, who he considered were not in any way amenable to reason.

He explained to me that the present position of the Arabs was extraordinarily dangerous. If the Sykes-Picot Agreement held, they would be pushed back into the desert. The Arabs had set up some form of government centred at Damascus, but it was extremely weak. It had no money and no men. The Army was naked and had no ammunition. His great hope was in America, which he thought would be able to destroy the Agreement.

I replied that I was aware of the Agreement as long ago as 1915,² and that whenever I could, I had protested against it. I had an interview on the subject with Lord Robert Cecil in 1916³ and I had also referred to it in my letter to Mr. Balfour written from Palestine on 17 July 1918.⁴ In that letter I said that in my opinion the Agreement was as bad for the Arabs as for the Jews. We had asked our American Zionists to point out to the United States Government the meaning of the Agreement, and whenever possible, to act against it. In that our policies were absolutely identical. I informed him that a strong delegation of American Zionists was on its way to London, which

50. ¹ This is W.'s record of the meeting, which took place at the Carlton Hotel, T.E. Lawrence ('Lawrence of Arabia'; *Letters*, Vol. IX, Biog. Index) acting as interpreter. W. sent this record to Sir Eyre Crowe (*Letters*, Vol. VIII, Biog. Index), Asst. Under-Secretary at F.O. This Paper is also reproduced in *Letters*, Vol IX, pp. 69-71.

² The Agreement was signed May 1916. There is no evidence that W. had advance knowledge of it.

³ In fact, 1917 — see No. 32.

⁴ In *Letters*, Vol. III.

saw eye to eye with us on this matter, and would use its influence in favour of both Jews and Arabs.

I had also heard that the French had been trying to create trouble between ourselves and him (Faisal) but I quite understood their motives. At that point Faisal interrupted me and stated that there was no need to dwell on this point, as he saw through these French attempts at once. He thought that the trouble in Palestine at the present time was fomented by Turkish and pro-Turkish propaganda. The Turks always ruled by trying to divide the races under their sway. The Arabs in Palestine are still used to the methods of Turkish propaganda, but he was quite sure that he and his followers would be able to explain to the Arabs that the advent of the Jews into Palestine was for the good of the country, and that the legitimate interests of the Arab peasants would in no way be interfered with. He then expressed a desire to learn some details of our programme. I gave him the following details:

- (1) We expect the Peace Conference and Faisal to recognise the national and historical rights of Jews to Palestine.
- (2) We should ask for the appointment of Great Britain as the Trustee Power, which would set up a government in Palestine in which the Jews would expect to take an adequate share.
- (3) We should demand reform of the Land Laws in Palestine of such a nature as would render the land now in the hands of the *Effendis* and usurers available for colonisation.
- (4) We should then be able to carry out public works of a far-reaching character, and, I added, the country could be so improved that it would have room for four or five million Jews, without encroaching on the ownership rights of Arab peasantry.
- (5) Jews would be prepared to render him every assistance in brain and money, so as to help to revive his country.
- (6) Questions of boundaries and *Waqf*⁵ could be left until after the larger political settlement, and would be the subject of arrangement between them (Zionists and Faisal).
- (7) As for the Moslem Holy Places, the Jews considered themselves insulted by the French insinuation that there was a desire to interfere with them. They rejected with scorn all such allegations. The Jews have never made proselytes and did not intend to interfere with the religious interests of anybody.

⁵ Property in the ownership of Moslem religious endowment, and therefore not transferable.

At this point Faisal remarked that it was curious there should be friction between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. There was no friction in any other country where Jews lived together with Arabs. He was convinced that the trouble was promoted by intrigues. He did not think for a moment that there was any scarcity of land in Palestine. The population would always have enough, especially if the country were developed. Besides, there was plenty of land in his district.

As for Sursuk⁶ and similar *Effendis*, he did not trouble his head about them. He assured me on his word of honour that he would do everything to support Jewish demands, and would declare at the Peace Conference that Zionism and the Arab movement were fellow movements, and that complete harmony prevailed between them. He would try his best to obtain the British Government as Trustee Power for Arabia, and if he did not succeed he would try to get America to act. He hoped we would help him in his efforts. If he failed, he would have to fight for the existence of an Arab State.⁷

⁶ Beirut family owning extensive tracts in Palestine.

⁷ The two met again in London 3 Jan. 1919 and signed an Agreement to which Faisal added a Reservation in his own hand, in Arabic (facsimile in *Letters*, Vol. IX, between pp. 86–87). Subsequently, both because of his sense of betrayal by the Peace Conference, and interpretations of statehood given to Zionist demands, his attitude wavered — see, e.g., B. Litvinoff, *Weizmann: Last of the Patriarchs*, London and New York 1976.