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### 'British relations with the Wahabees'

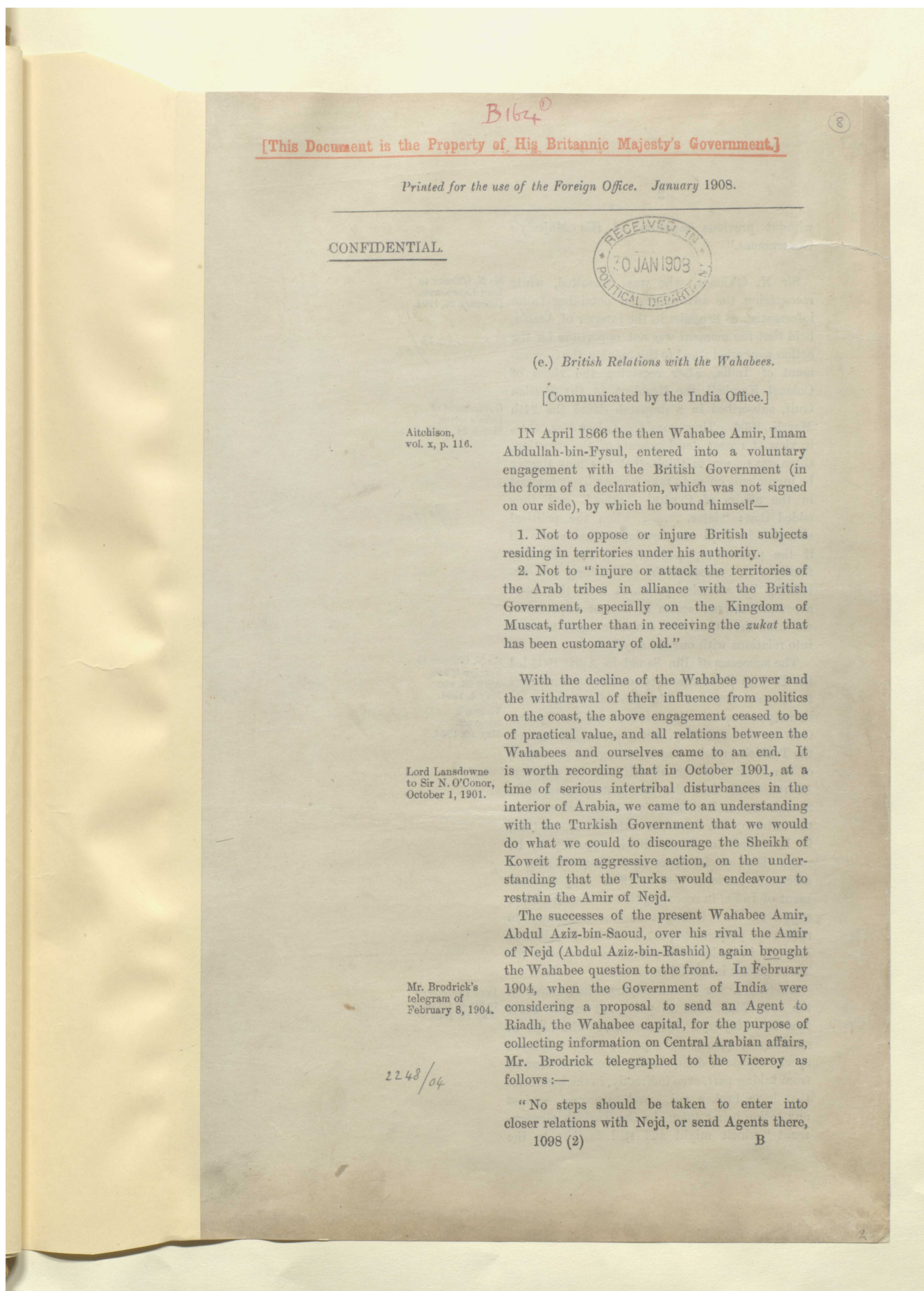
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#### About this record

Printed report communicated by the India Office and printed for the use of the Foreign Office. The report concerns British relations with the Wahabees [Wahhabi] emirs, from 1904 to 1907, the growing influence of Ibn Sa'ūd [Āl Sa'ūd, 'Abd al-'Azīz bin 'Abd al-Raḥmān bin Fayṣal] and the British proposal to send a Political Agent to Kuwait, to contrast the Turkish influence over Central Arabia.

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without previous sanction of His Majesty's Government."

Sir N. O'Connor, who was consulted, while recognizing the advantages of obtaining fuller information as to affairs in the interior of Arabia, held that the moment was not opportune for the action suggested; and to this opinion the Government of India, after receiving the views of Colonel Kemball, the Resident in the Persian Gulf, subscribed in a despatch dated the 24th March, 1904. They considered, however, that, in view of recent developments of the situation, there was reason to think that "it may shortly be incumbent on us to take a more lively interest in the affairs of Central Arabia," and they added that: "later, . . . when the political situation in Nejd has developed, and above all if the present representative of the Wahabee family . . . succeeds in establishing and extending his ascendancy, which from the latest accounts received seems to be not improbable, we think that it may be desirable again to enter into relations with our old ally."

The successes of Bin Saoud in April 1904 led the Turkish Government to send troops and guns to the assistance of Bin Rashid. Bin Saoud thereupon wrote to the Resident in the Persian Gulf on the 2nd May, 1904, protesting against the Turkish invasion and soliciting the protection of Great Britain for himself and his country. At the same time the Resident received from Sheikh Mubarak of Koweit a letter addressed to the latter by Bin Saoud, in which he hinted that, if he failed to obtain British protection, he might have to fall back on the Russian offer of assistance made to him in 1903. The Government of India, in reporting this on the 20th May, suggested that it might become necessary to revive the proposal to post a British Resident at Koweit, in order to watch events, should the Turks persist in armed intervention.

Sir N. O'Connor had already been instructed, on the 10th May, 1904, to point out to the Porte that His Majesty's Government, in the hope of assisting to preserve the peace, had "employed special efforts to dissuade the Sheikh of Koweit from taking part, even indirectly, in the hostilities that have broken out," and to protest against any action being taken by the Turkish Government "which might add still further to the

Sir N. O'Connor to  
Lord Lansdowne,  
February 26, 1904.

2433/04

Government of  
India's letter,  
March 24, 1904.

701/04

Sir N. O'Connor to  
Foreign Office,  
April 26, and  
May 4, 1904.  
Viceroy's  
telegram.  
May 20, 1904.

Lord Lansdowne  
to Sir N. O'Connor,  
May 10, 1904.

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Lord Lansdowne  
to Sir N. O'Connor,  
May 21, 1904.

disturbed condition of this part of Arabia." On receipt of the Viceroy's telegram of the 20th May, 1904, Sir N. O'Connor was further instructed by telegraph to communicate at once with the Porte, and to repeat in urgent terms the representations he had already been instructed to make.

Sir N. O'Connor to  
Foreign Office,  
May 23, 1904.

Sir N. O'Connor replied on the 23rd May that it was difficult to see on what grounds the Porte could be pressed to refrain from assisting the Amir of Nejd, who was the party attacked. He considered that we should confine ourselves for the present to maintaining intact the territory of Kuwait and awaiting developments, but that, if the Turks persisted in rendering assistance to Bin Rashid, it might be expedient to reconsider the question of appointing a British Resident at Kuwait.

Viceroy's  
telegram,  
May 29, 1904.

The substance of Sir N. O'Connor's views was telegraphed to India on the 24th May. In reply the Government of India, in a telegram dated the 29th May, suggested that Sir N. O'Connor should be instructed to inform the Porte that we had no desire to assist Bin Saoud directly or indirectly, but that if, as a result of Turkish support, Bin Rashid became unduly powerful, our interests in Eastern Arabia might be injuriously affected. They held that British prestige at Kuwait would be impaired if, by preventing Mubarak from assisting his friend and ally Bin Saoud, and by stopping the importation of arms, we allowed Turkish influence to determine the supremacy of the Turkish nominee in Central Arabia. Their conclusions were that an Agent should be sent to Kuwait, and that the arms trade there should not be interfered with.

Mr. Brodrick's  
telegram,  
June 24, 1904.

The proposal to send an officer as Political Agent to Kuwait was approved by His Majesty's Government, and the Government of India were informed accordingly on the 24th June, 1904. It was decided at the same time to defer for the present any fresh measures for the prevention of the importation of arms at Kuwait. Captain Knox, the officer appointed, proceeded to Kuwait in August 1904.

Towards the end of August 1904 the Turks, who had hitherto supported Bin Rashid, made overtures to Bin Saoud, and the latter applied to Sheikh Mubarak for advice as to how the Turkish advances should be met. Mubarak approached

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the Political Agent at Koweit on the subject in October 1904, but Captain Knox informed him that he had no instructions to give advice, and that Bin Saoud should consult his own interests in the matter. On the 30th December, 1904, Mr. Brodrick telegraphed to the Government of India that "His Majesty's Government desire that it should be clearly understood that their interest and influence are to be confined strictly to coast-line of Eastern Arabia, and that nothing should be said or done to connect them even indirectly with warfare now in progress in interior. They agree that Knox should give no opinion on advice to be given by Mubarak to Bin Saoud, but should repeat to former warnings already given against entanglements in interior." It may be added that in February 1905 a meeting took place at Koweit between Sheikh Mubarak, the Turkish Vali of Bussorah, and Bin Saoud's father, and Bin Saoud seems subsequently to have come to terms, for the time being, with the Turkish Government.

Captain Knox to  
Captain Trevor,  
October 17, 1904.

2188A/04

Mr. Brodrick's  
telegram,  
December 30,  
1904.

3499/04

Mr. Townley to  
Foreign Office,  
February 12 and  
17, 1905.

Towards the end of 1905 Bin Saoud, whose successes in Nejd had continued unabated, paid a visit to El Katr and addressed letters to the Sheikhs of the Pirate Coast, announcing his intention of visiting their territories in the following spring. The most important of the Trucial Chiefs, the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, conferred personally with the Sultan of Muscat on the situation, both rulers regarding the prospect of Bin Saoud's visit with considerable apprehension.

Captain Trevor to  
Government of  
India,  
October 29, 1905.

285/06

The Government of India addressed the Secretary of State on the subject in a despatch dated the 11th January, 1906, in which they pointed out "how very serious to our prestige and influence the consequences might be if Bin Saoud should attack the Pirate Coast Chiefs or the Sultan of Muscat, or succeed in extending his influence over them, and how important it is that we should prevent, as far as lies in our power, such a contingency, especially now that the Wahabee Amir has recognized the suzerainty of the Sultan." They accordingly proposed that inquiry should be made, either through Sheikh Mubarak of Koweit or through the Sultan of Muscat, as to Bin Saoud's intentions, with a view to ascertaining "whether he is prepared to stand by the engagement of his predecessors not to oppose or injure British subjects residing in his

Government of  
India's letter  
January 11, 1906.

285/06

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'British relations with the Wahabees' [10r] (5/10)

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territories, and not to interfere with the Arab tribes in alliance with the British Government"; and that, failing a satisfactory assurance on his part, he should be warned that interference in those localities would be regarded as an unfriendly act, and that "suitable measures would be taken to frustrate it." "These measures," the despatch concluded, "might amount, in our opinion, to a more stringent embargo on the import of arms at Koweit and elsewhere on the Arabian coast of the Gulf, or even, in the case of an attack being imminent, to actual armed assistance from British ships to the Sheikhs threatened, as might be necessary."

India Office to  
Foreign Office,  
February 22, 1906.

285/06

In communicating this despatch to the Foreign Office, some doubt was expressed as to the practicability of the Government of India's suggestions, and it was suggested that no steps should be taken, "in the absence of any urgent necessity caused by Wahabee action," until Sir N. O'Connor had been consulted on the proposal to approach Bin Saoud otherwise than through the medium of the Turks.

Major Cox to  
Government of  
India,  
February 4, 1906.

555/06

Meanwhile, on the 19th January, 1906, Captain Knox, the Political Agent at Koweit, had talked the matter over informally with Mubarak, and after inquiring as to the truth of the reports regarding Bin Saoud's intentions, gave the Sheikh a hint that any interference by the Wahabee Amir in the affairs of States in Treaty relation with us would not be likely to find favour with the British Government. Mubarak replied that he regarded Bin Saoud's plans as designed merely to extort money from the Sheikhs on the coast, and that he had himself written to Bin Saoud strongly advising him against persisting in any such attempt. Major Cox, in reporting this conversation to the Government of India, suggested that he should be authorized to inform all the Trucial Chiefs that the Government of India "would not regard with complacency the intrigues of any of them with Bin Saoud."

552/06

The Government of India telegraphed on the 15th March, 1906, supporting Major Cox's suggestion, which was approved, with the concurrence of the Foreign Office, by Mr. Morley's telegram dated the 9th April.

2838/06

As regards the warning to Bin Saoud contemplated by the Government of India, the Foreign Office adopted the views of Sir N. O'Connor, March 20, 1906.

Sir N. O'Connor,  
March 20, 1906.

1098 (2)

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O'Connor, who had been consulted and had recommended in a despatch dated the 20th March, 1906, that any such warning should be conveyed direct to Bin Saoud, and not through the agency of the Sheikh of Koweit or the Sultan of Muscat. Sir N. O'Connor further suggested that Bin Saoud, in the event of his visiting the coast, should be met by a British vessel of war at one of the places which he proposed to visit, and told that no tampering with the engagements and Conventions of the Trucial Chiefs would be permitted.

2834/06

In conveying the decision of His Majesty's Government to the Government of India, the Secretary of State wrote as follows in a despatch dated the 13th April, 1906 :—

Mr. Morley's  
despatch,  
April 13, 1906.

" His Majesty's Government accept the view that a warning to the Amir would be necessary if he were to carry out his reported intention. They consider, however, that it would be better that such warning should be conveyed to him only in the event of his appearing upon the coast, and that it should then be conveyed to him directly as proposed by Sir N. O'Connor."

Bin Saoud's reply to Mubarak's letter of advice was communicated to the Political Agent, Koweit, on the 25th February, 1906. Major Cox described it as a " very courteous response." The terms of Bin Saoud's letter, as translated from the vernacular, are obscure, but his apparent object was to disclaim any intention of objectionable action. As a matter of fact, Bin Saoud did not ~~not~~ visit the Pirate Coast.

Major Cox to  
Government of  
India,  
April 5, 1906.

874/06

In April 1906 news was received of the defeat and death of Bin Rashid at the hands of his rival, Bin Saoud.

On the 16th September, 1906, Major Cox again raised the question of entering into closer relations with the interior of Arabia. He drew attention to ~~the~~ overtures that had been made by and on behalf of Bin Saoud with a view to the establishment of a closer connection between himself and the British Government, and recommended that the opportunity should be taken to come to terms with the Wahabee Chief on the following grounds :—

Major Cox  
to Government  
of India,  
September 16,  
1906.

1817/06

1. That overtures had been made at various times by Bin Saoud himself, and by Sheikh

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Jasim-bin-Thani of Katr and Sheikh Mubarak of Koweit on Bin Saoud's behalf, with a view to securing for the latter some measure of British protection, and that if we neglected these overtures Bin Saoud and his following might regard us with hostility.

2. That if a friendly understanding were to exist between the British Government and Bin Saoud, both the Sultan of Muscat and the Trucial Chiefs would be fortified by the knowledge that any attempt on the part of the Wahabee to make a descent upon Oman would involve a preliminary rupture between him and the British Government.

3. That if Bin Saoud were our friend he would be able to assist us in suppressing piracies in the northern part of the Gulf.

4. That such a friendly understanding would facilitate Major Cox's dealings with the Trucial Chiefs and would render it possible for our officers to make occasional tours in the Nejd country.

5. That the Arabs of Central Arabia, apparently driven to desperation by Turkish interference, seemed disposed to make common cause to throw off the yoke, and were apparently trying to secure the support of the Sheikh of Koweit and even of the Sheikh of Mohammerah. Realizing, however, that they were not strong enough to stand alone, they saw the necessity of enlisting the support of a Christian Power, and if we did not respond they might approach some other Power.

It may be explained that, in addition to the overtures of Sheikh Mubarak and Sheikh Jasim the subject had also been broached by an emissary of Bin Saoud himself, one Musaad-bin-Suweelim, who arrived at Bahrein in January 1906 and informed the British Agent there that Bin Saoud now felt himself strong enough to turn the Turks out of Hassa and Katif, and then wished to enter into Treaty relations with the British Government, allowing us, if we desired, to keep a Political Officer in Hassa or Katif in return for our protecting him from a sea attack by the Turks.

Major Cox's letter of the 16th September, 1906, was sent home for information in the ordinary course, without comment, in October 1906. On the 9th November Mr. Morley informed the Government of India by telegram that "His Majesty's Government maintain view  
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187/06  
Mr. Morley's  
telegram,  
November 9, 1906.



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that their interest and influence should be confined to coast." "No steps," the telegram added, "should be taken to enter into relations with Nejd or to send Agents into interior without my previous sanction."

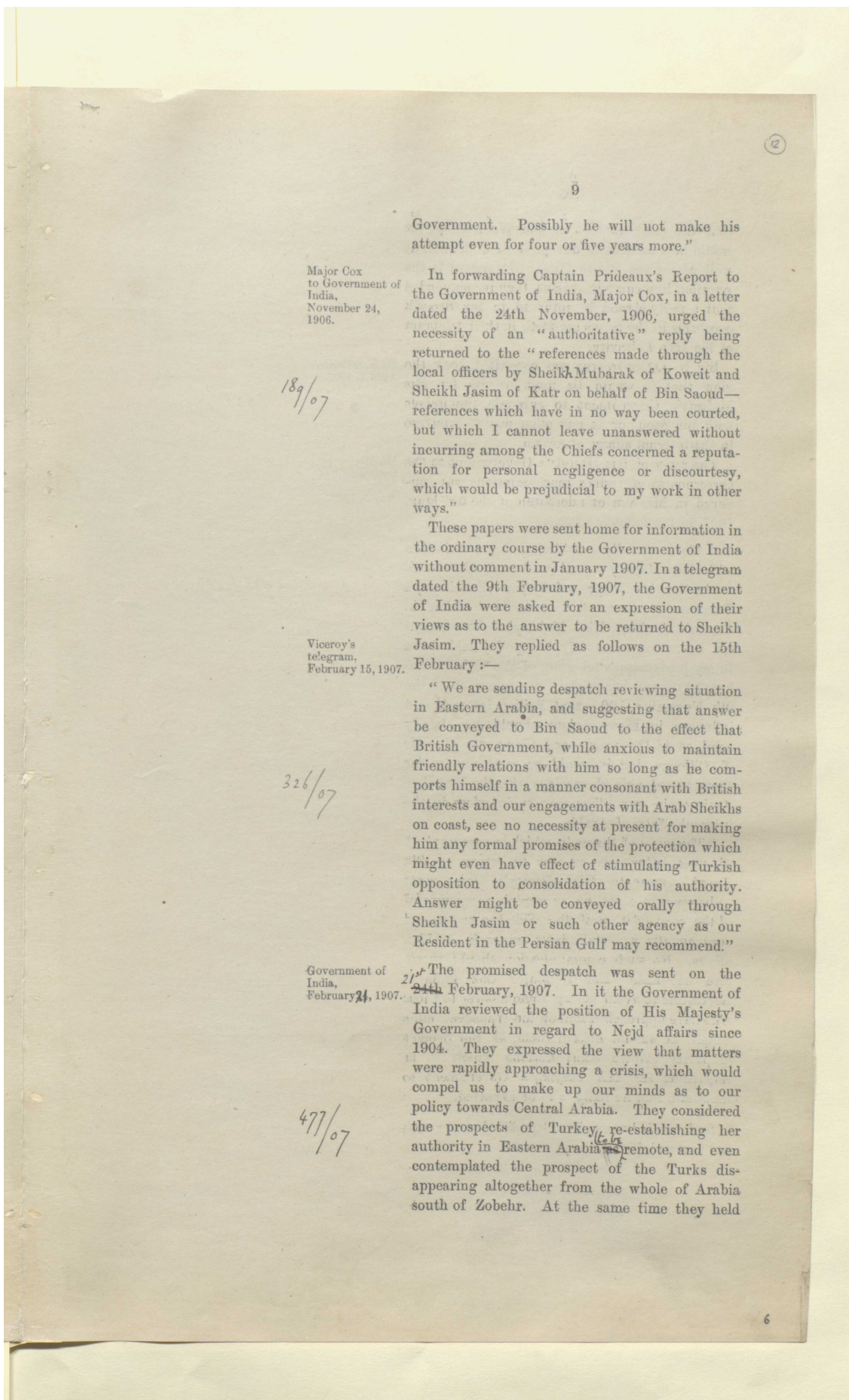
Bin Saoud lost little time in renewing his application. In October 1906 he sent a further message through Sheikh Jasim, in which his proposals were set forth in greater detail. This message, which was delivered by Sheikh Jasim to the interpreter of the British Political Agent, Bahrein, was thus reported by Captain Prideaux on the 17th November, 1906:—

Captain Prideaux  
to Major Cox,  
November 17,  
1906.

"The resources of Nejd are stated to have been strained to the utmost by the recent internecine wars, and Bin Saoud considers that the oases of Hassa and Katif were always the most profitable possessions of his Wahabee ancestors. He is anxious, therefore, to recover the two districts, and he proposes that a secret understanding should be arranged between the British Government and himself, under which he should be granted British protection from Turkish assaults at sea, in the event of his ever succeeding in driving the Turks, unaided, out of his ancestral dominions. In return for this protection the Amir is willing to bind himself to certain agreements (probably similar to those of the Trucial Chiefs), and to accept a Political Officer to reside at his Court. The details of this secret Treaty he wishes to be settled or discussed at an interview which he is ready to give me, either in person or with his brother representing him, at some convenient rendezvous in the desert. Bin Saoud is determined to make an effort to obtain possession of Hassa and Katif, for without the additional revenue which he can derive from these tracts he admits that he is unable to control the tribes who menace the highways of commerce and pilgrimage. He proposes, therefore, in the first place, to apply to the Sultan for the *Mutasarrif-lik* (Governorship) of the districts, and to throw off the Turkish yoke as soon as he considers the moment favourable after establishing himself. If his application is refused, he will invade the districts as soon as he is ready, and, having captured them, he will appeal openly to the British Government for protection. If he fails, he will never betray the secret understanding between himself and the

189/07

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that the establishment of the Wahabee power would be a menace to our position at Koweit as well as on the Pirate Coast. In regard to the question immediately at issue, they recommended that a reply should be returned to Bin Saoud's overtures in the terms set forth in their telegram of the 15th February.

Sir N. O'Connor, who was consulted, took the view that it would be most unwise for His Majesty's Government to entangle themselves with Bin Saoud or in any other way to interfere in the internal affairs of Arabia.

Sir N. O'Connor,  
April 1, 1907.

2938/07

The reply of His Majesty's Government to the Government of India's representations was conveyed in Mr. Morley's despatch of the 3rd May, 1907, in the following terms:—

Mr. Morley to  
Government of  
India,  
May 3, 1907.

"After carefully considering, in consultation with His Majesty's Ambassador at Constantinople, the views expressed by your Excellency's Government as to the general situation in Central Arabia, His Majesty's Government see no reason to modify the policy laid down in my predecessor's telegram of the 30th December, 1904, and repeated in my telegram of the 9th November, 1906, that British interests and influence in those regions should be strictly confined to the coast; and they agree with Sir N. O'Connor that it would be most unwise for them to entangle themselves with the Wahabee Amir or in any other way to interfere in the internal affairs of Arabia.

2938/07

"The terms of the reply, which in paragraph 11 of your letter you propose to return to Bin Saoud, appear to His Majesty's Government to be open to objection, as implying an approval of the consolidation of the Wahabee power, and consequently a certain interference in Arabian affairs. No such communication should therefore be made. But if Major Cox finds it impossible to avoid giving some answer to those who have approached him on the Wahabee Amir's behalf, he should inform them, as Bin Saoud's proposals involve considerations which it is impossible for His Majesty's Government to maintain, that no reply is to be expected."

So far as is known, Bin Saoud's advances were not renewed during the year 1907.

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