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**'Middle East Committee. Note prepared for meeting of 12th January 1918. Sir
M. Sykes's memorandum on the Palestine and West Arabian situation'**

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About this record

The file consists of a note, dated 10 January 1918, written by John Evelyn Shuckburgh (Political Department, India Office) on a memorandum written by Sir Mark Sykes on the Palestine and West Arabian situation. The note was prepared for a meeting of the Middle East Committee. Shuckburgh comments on statements made by Sykes, and provides an account of the latest developments and plans for the region. A section is included on policy in regards to Bin Saud [Abd al-'Azīz bin 'Abd al-Raḥmān bin Fayṣal Āl Sa'ūd] (Wahabi Emir of Nejd), and tensions with King Husain [Hussein bin Ali] (Sharif and Emir of Mecca). Recommendations for action are given.

'Middle East Committee. Note prepared for meeting of 12th January 1918. Sir M. Sykes's memorandum on the Palestine and West Arabian situation' [28r] (1/6)

Memo. B. 272
1918
MIDDLE EAST COMMITTEE

NOTE PREPARED FOR MEETING OF 12th JANUARY 1918

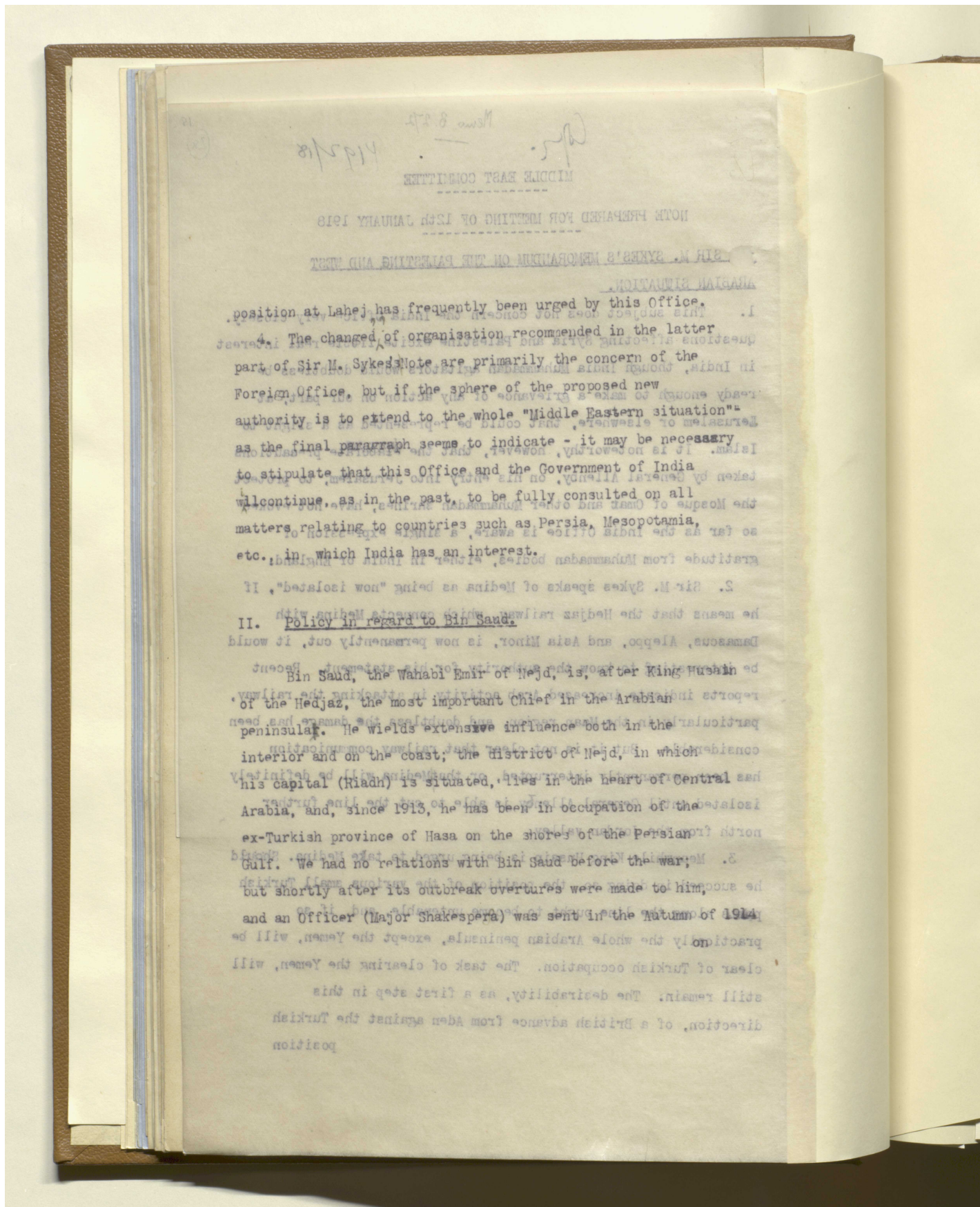
SIR M. SYKES'S MEMORANDUM ON THE PALESTINE AND WEST ARABIAN SITUATION.

1. This subject does not concern the India Office very closely. Questions affecting Syria and Palestine excite little real interest in India, though India Muhammadan agitators would doubtless be ready enough to make a grievance of any action on our part, at Jerusalem or elsewhere, that could be represented as a slight to Islam. It is noteworthy, however, that the elaborate precautions taken by General Allenby, on his entry into Jerusalem, to protect the Mosque of Omar and other Muhammadan shrines, have not evoked so far as the India Office is aware, a single expression of gratitude from Muhammadan bodies, either in India or England.

2. Sir M. Sykes speaks of Medina as being "now isolated", if he means that the Hedjaz railway, which connects Medina with Damascus, Aleppo, and Asia Minor, is now permanently cut, it would be interesting to know the authority for his statement. Recent reports indicate increased Arab activity in attacking the railway, particularly in the Maan region, and doubtless the damage has been considerable. But it is not clear that railway communication has been permanently interrupted, or that Medina will be definitely isolated until General Allenby is able to cut the line further north from the Jordan valley.

3. Meanwhile King Husain is being urged to take Medina. Should he succeed in doing so, the position of the various small Turkish posts along the line ought to become untenable, and if so practically the whole Arabian peninsula, except the Yemen, will be clear of Turkish occupation. The task of clearing the Yemen, will still remain. The desirability, as a first step in this direction, of a British advance from Aden against the Turkish position

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Middle East Committee
NOTE PREPARED FOR MEETING OF 12th JANUARY 1918

SIR M. SYKES'S MEMORANDUM ON THE PALESTINE AND WEST ARABIAN SITUATION

position at Lahej has frequently been urged by this Office.

4. The changed of organisation recommended in the latter part of Sir M. Sykes's Note are primarily the concern of the Foreign Office, but if the sphere of the proposed new authority is to extend to the whole "Middle Eastern situation" as the final paragraph seems to indicate - it may be necessary to stipulate that this Office and the Government of India will continue, as in the past, to be fully consulted on all matters relating to countries such as Persia, Mesopotamia, etc., in which India has an interest.

2. Sir M. Sykes speaks of Medina as being "now isolated".

II. Policy in regard to Bin Saud.

Bin Saud, the Wahabi Emir of Nejd, is, after King Hussein of the Hedjaz, the most important Chief in the Arabian peninsula. He wields extensive influence both in the interior and on the coast, the district of Nejd, in which his capital (Riadh) is situated, lies in the heart of Central Arabia, and, since 1913, he has been in occupation of the ex-Turkish province of Hasa on the shores of the Persian Gulf. We had no relations with Bin Saud before the war, but shortly after its outbreak overtures were made to him, and an Officer (Major Shakespear) was sent in the Autumn of 1914 to see him. He has since then been in communication with the British, and has been practically the whole Arabian peninsula, except the Yemen, will be cleared of Turkish occupation. The task of clearing the Yemen, will still remain. The desirability, as a first step in this direction, of a British advance from Aden against the Turkish position

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on a special mission to his headquarters. Eventually in the
December 1915, a formal treaty of Protection was concluded
with him.

2. Unfortunately relations between Bin Saud and King
Husain are the reverse of cordial and each potently appears to
be inspired by feelings of inveterate mistrust and suspicion
towards the other. This state of affairs may be due in part
to religious difference, Bin Saud being a Wahabi and Bin
Husain a natural object of dislike to the orthodox Shenis; but whatever
the cause, the result is to make it very difficult to secure
effective cooperation between the two Chiefs against their
common Turkish enemy. As this perhaps only natural
shows a tendency to take Bin Saud's part and Cairo that of
King Husain's. In case His Majesty's Government inclined
to political missions from Mesopotamia (under Mr Philby)
has recently visited Bin Saud at his headquarters. It was
have been joined there by a simultaneous mission from Egypt
under Mr Storrs; but owing to difficulties made by King Husain
about giving safe conduct through his territories, the latter
part of the programme had unfortunately to be cancelled.
The mission had two main objects, viz: (1) to promote better
relations between Bin Saud and King Husain; and (2) to induce
the former to take a more active part in assisting his fellow
Arabs against the Turks. Object No. (1) has been largely
frustrated by the non-arrival of the officers from Egypt, who
were to have picked up a Hejaz representative en route to
Ismirion have proceeded with him to Riyadh. As regards (2) Mr Philby
reported as a result of his conversations with Bin Saud, that
the latter has prepared, given adequate assistance in money and
arms, to mobilise 15,000 men for an attack upon Haik headquarters
of his great rival Bin Rashid who has definitely identified him-
self,

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self with the Turkish and Bin Saud's actual requirements for this purpose were estimated as follows:-

2 siege guns)
with necessary ammunition.
of 10,000 rifles (of course the reverse of cordial and friendly relations)

£50,000 a month for period of the operations (Jan-June 1918) of certain military personnel would also be required. Bin Saud at the same time threw out hints, regarding his future political status, and seemed to have made a special point of the introduction of a distinctive copper coinage for Nejd. Mr. Philby expressed himself as "very confident that something of a big can be achieved in the desired direction on the basis of the proposals made"; but he suggested as an alternative in case His Majesty's Government inclined to a less ambitious programme that he should be given discretion to make doles to Bin Saud up to a maximum of £50,000 for minor objects actually achieved to my satisfaction.

On the other hand, Sir R. Wingate is strongly against arming Bin Saud on a large scale, as likely to precipitate a conflict with King Husain. He believes Bin Saud Rashid to be far much weaker than has been represented, and does not regard the capture of Ha'il as an object of sufficient importance to warrant paying Bin Saud a "blank cheque" for its accomplishment. The Government of India are against the complete elimination of Bin Rashid on the ground that it would deprive Bin Saud of his normal occupation, and would tend to upset the "balance of power" between the latter and King Husain. They accordingly recommend that Bin Saud should be "kept in play" by gifts of money, but that he should not be supplied otherwise than very sparingly with arms or military personnel. This is the recommendation of Sir R. Wingate.

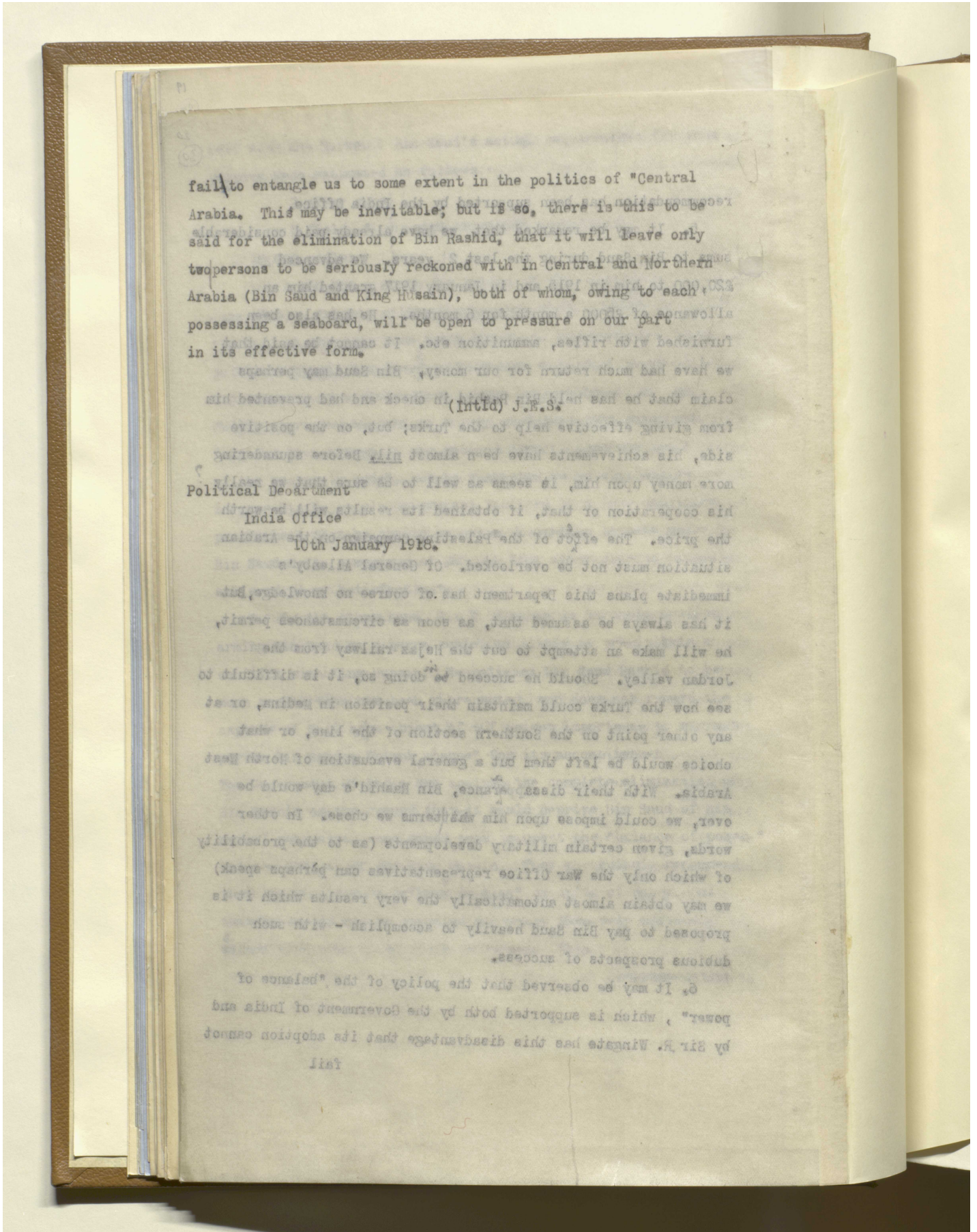
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recommendation has been supported by the India Office.

5. It may be remarked that we have already paid considerable sums to Bin Saud during the last 2 years. We advanced £20,000 to him in 1915 and in January 1917 granted him an allowance of £5000 a month for 6 months. He has also been furnished with rifles, ammunition etc. It cannot be said that we have had much return for our money. Bin Saud may perhaps claim that he has held Bin Rashid in check and had prevented him from giving effective help to the Turks; but, on the positive side, his achievements have been almost nil. Before squandering more money upon him, it seems as well to be sure that we really get his cooperation or that, if obtained its results will be worth the price. The effect of the Palestine Campaign on the Arabian situation must not be overlooked. Of General Allenby's immediate plans this Department has of course no knowledge, but it has always been assumed that, as soon as circumstances permit, he will make an attempt to cut the Hejaz railway from the Jordan valley. Should he succeed in doing so, it is difficult to see how the Turks could maintain their position in Medina, or at any other point on the Southern section of the line, or what choice would be left them but a general evacuation of North West Arabia. With their disappearance, Bin Rashid's day would be over, we could impose upon him what terms we chose. In other words, given certain military developments (as to the probability of which only the War Office representatives can perhaps speak) we may obtain almost automatically the very results which it is proposed to pay Bin Saud heavily to accomplish - with such dubious prospects of success.

6. It may be observed that the policy of the "balance of power", which is supported both by the Government of India and by Sir R. Wingate has this disadvantage that its adoption cannot fail

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fail to entangle us to some extent in the politics of "Central Arabia. This may be inevitable; but if so, there is this to be said for the elimination of Bin Rashid, that it will leave only two persons to be seriously reckoned with in Central and Northern Arabia (Bin Saud and King Husain), both of whom, owing to each possessing a seaboard, will be open to pressure on our part in its effective form.

(Initia) J.E.S.

Political Department

India Office

10th January 1918.

It has always been assumed that, as soon as circumstances permit, he will make an attempt to cut the Hejaz railway from the Jordan valley. Should he succeed in doing so, it is difficult to see how the Turks could maintain their position in Medina, or at any other point on the southern section of the line, or what choice would be left them but a general evacuation of North West Arabia. With their bases in the Hejaz, Bin Rashid's day would be over, we could impose upon him whatever terms we chose. In other words, even certain military developments (as to the possibility of which only the War Office representatives can perhaps speak) we may obtain almost automatically the very results which it is proposed to pay Bin Saud heavily to accomplish - with such dubious prospects of success.

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