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'Memo on Mussondomom'

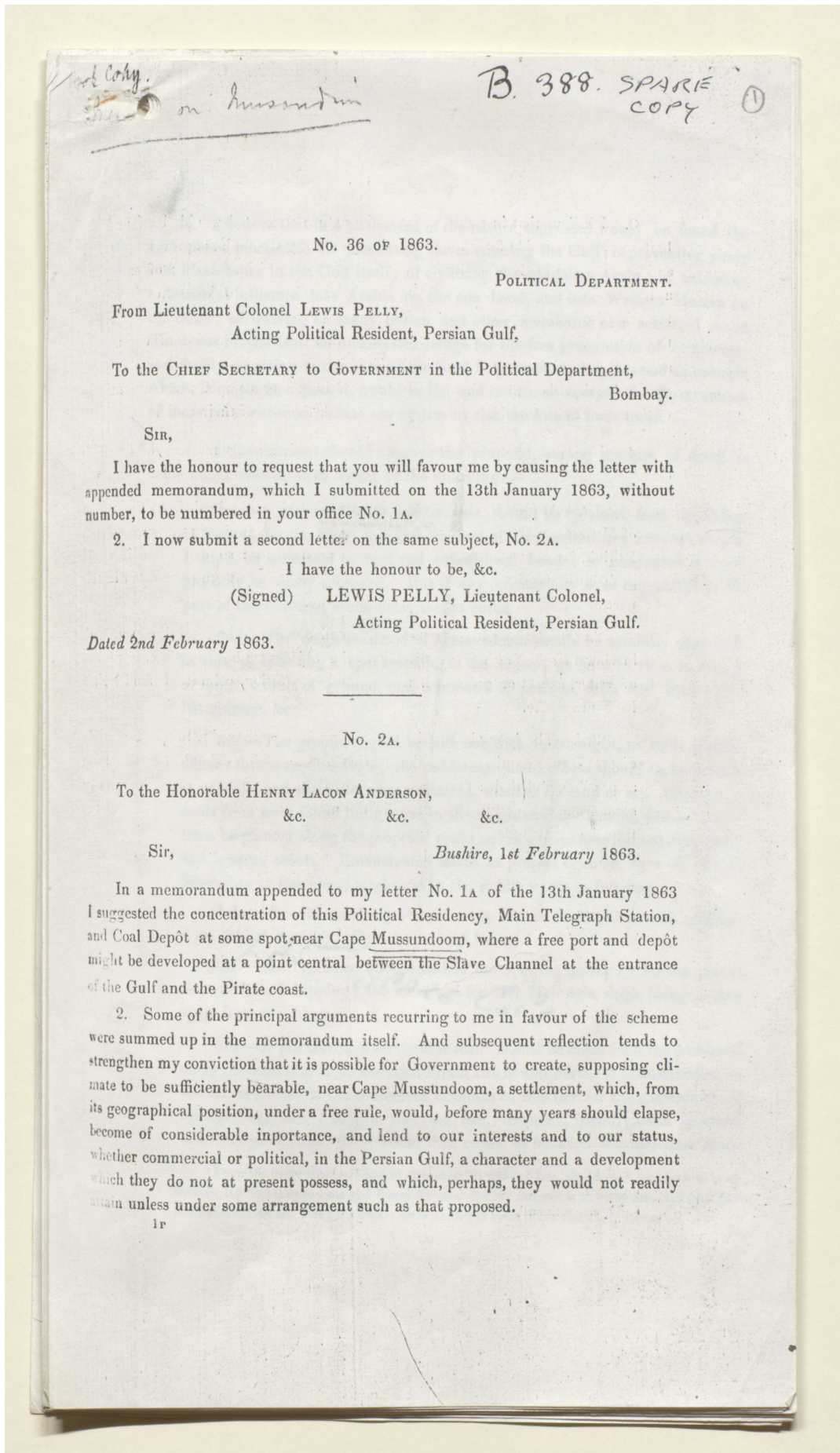
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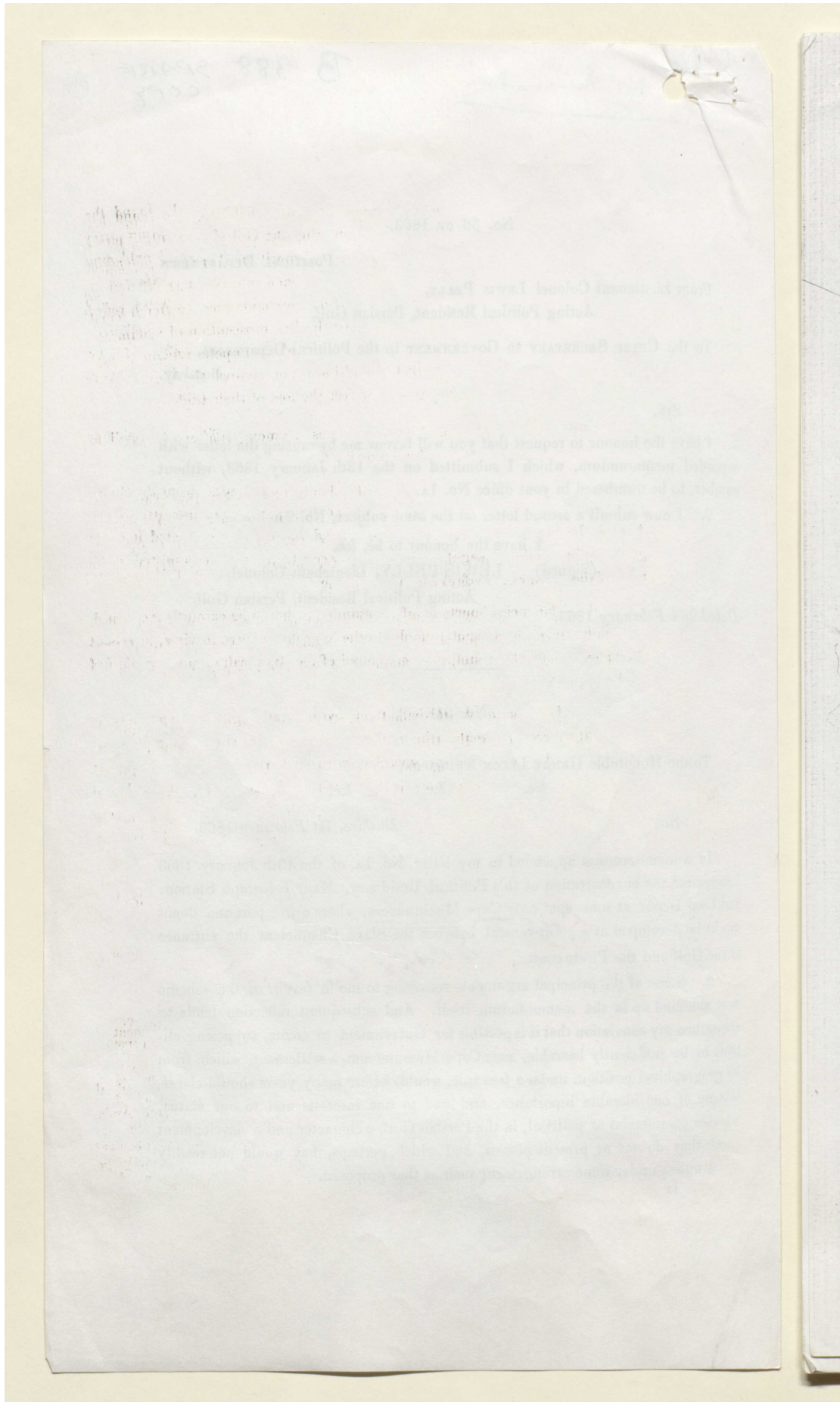
About this record

This is a copy of a printed memorandum, with correspondences by Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis Pelly, the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf at Bushire, dated January to February 1863, concerning locating the Persian Gulf Residency at Cape Mussundoom [Musandam]. In letter No. 2A (folios 1-4), dated 1 February 1863, with post-scripts dated 2 February 1863, to the Honorable Henry Lacon Anderson, Chief Secretary to Government in the Political Department, Bombay, Pelly enumerates some of the benefits of changing the location to Musandam and poses thirteen points for consideration should Government approve. Following this is an earlier letter, No. 1A (folios 5-9), dated 12 January 1863, Pelly writes to Anderson with his original memorandum proposing the change of location for the Persian Gulf Residency in the context of developing the Persian Gulf steam line and telegraphic communication. Pelly gives an overview to the background in which Bushire was chosen as the location for the Residency and why it was not well selected, and then gives reasons why Musandam would be better suited. Pelly lists eleven reasons, which include: centrality, telegraphic station, coal depot, and strategic location for policing piracy.

'Memo on Mussundomom' [1r] (1/18)



'Memo on Mussondomom' [1v] (2/18)



'Memo on Mussondomom' [2r] (3/18)

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3. I believe that in a settlement of the nature suggested would be found the best means practicable for preventing slaves entering the Gulf; of preventing piracy and disturbance in the Gulf itself; of civilizing the maritime Arabs; of extending a healthful influence into Arabia on the one hand, and into Western Mecran on the other; of offering to many Indian and other merchants now scattered round the shores of the Gulf an unmolested refuge for the free prosecution of commerce; and finally, of giving to the ports of the Gulf, in general, an impetus and an example which, it might be expected, would in the end induce or compel the Governments of these ports either to imitate our system or risk the loss of their trade.

4. If Government should approve the proposal, among matters of detail to come under consideration would be the following:—

1st.—A clear and valid written title should be obtained from the Sultan of Muscat for the land; and the conduct of this preliminary measure should, I think, be entrusted to cool and experienced hands: so conducted it would probably be easily arranged. But if any eccentricity were committed in this part of the business, much delay might ensue.

2nd.—The neighbourhood of Mussundoom should be carefully examined, in view to selecting a spot suitable to the objects we have in view, in respect of water, extent of ground, non-command of position, calm and land-locked harbourage, &c.

3rd.—The ground should be laid out with forethought, to meet possible distant future requirements; the public stores and offices should be as compact as possible, and their site uncommanded whether by land or sea. Cuttings or seeds from trees found indigenous in the neighbourhood should, without loss of time, be planted along the proposed roads and in groups near the watering places and landing points. Emancipated slaves, at present agented by a 30 Rupees Moonshee at Bassidore, might aid in the public works as free men.

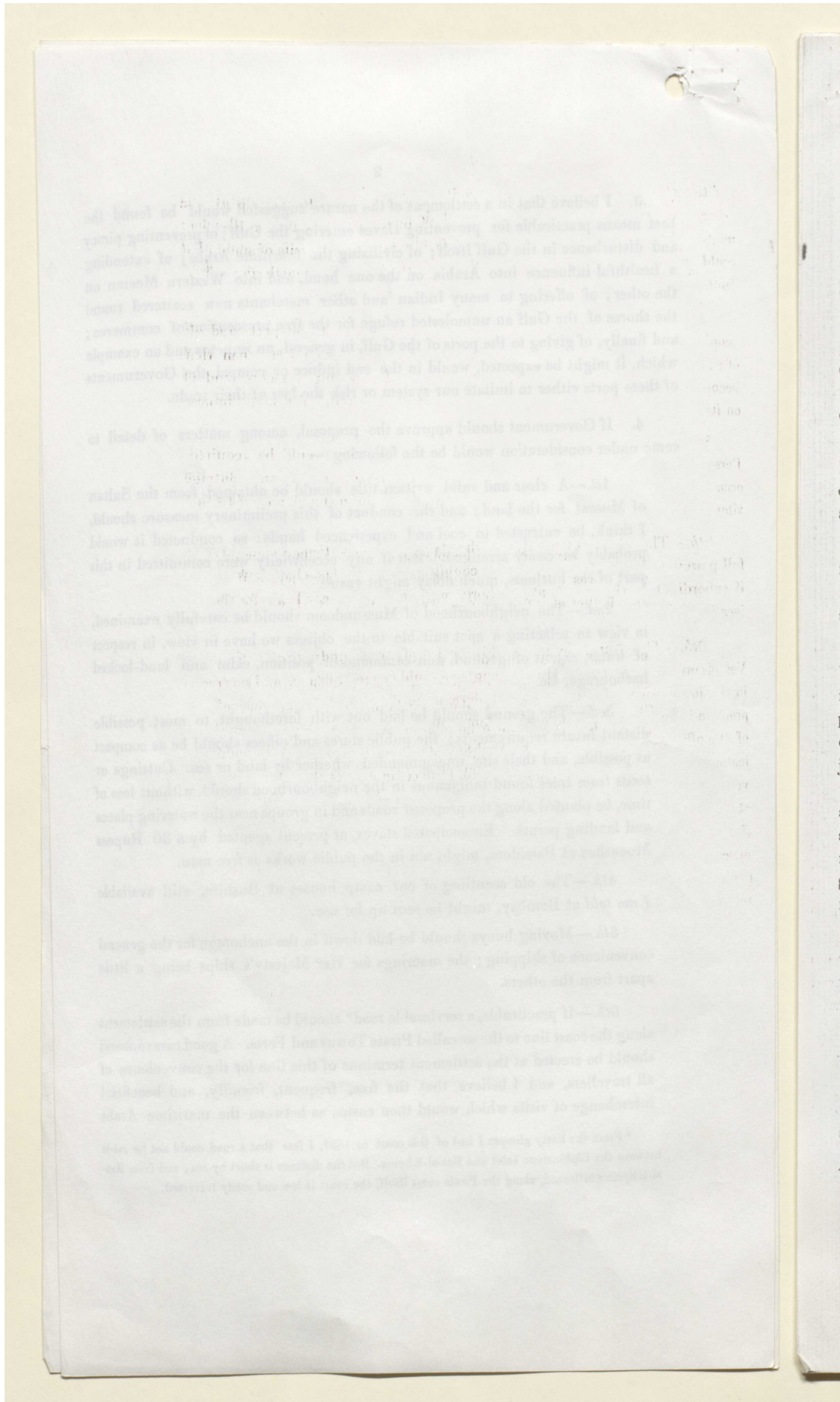
4th.—The old scantling of our camp houses at Bushire, still available *I am told* at Bombay, might be sent up for use.

5th.—Moving buoys should be laid down in the anchorage for the general convenience of shipping; the moorings for Her Majesty's ships being a little apart from the others.

6th.—If practicable, a serviceable road* should be made from the settlement along the coast line to the so-called Pirate Towns and Forts. A good caravanseraï should be erected at the settlement terminus of this line for the convenience of all travellers, and I believe that the free, frequent, friendly, and beneficial interchange of visits which would then ensue, as between the maritime Arabs

* From the hasty glimpse I had of this coast in 1857, I fear that a road could not be made between the Elphinstone Inlet and Ras-al-Khyrna. But the distance is short by sea; and from Ras-al-Khyrna northward, along the Pirate coast itself, the coast is low and easily traversed.

'Memo on Mussondomom' [2v] (4/18)



'Memo on Mussondomom' [3r] (5/18)

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and the settlement, would do more to civilize the former and to open up Arabia to commerce and progress, than would do all the menaces that a Resident might fulminate from Bushire, and than all the annual visits of state that could be made before the year 1900; a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump; and strong healthy life expels disease by its very nature.

7th.—Notification should be made of the freedom of the port, and all people should be invited to settle there without any other condition than that of paying rent or purchase-money for the ground they might secure, and of becoming subject to any municipal-rules which the community might impose on itself.

8th.—No Turkish wall, no works with plunging fire would be required. Persons entering the settlement must come unarmed, and if any outrage occurred, punishment, severe but prompt, should be administered, and no further altercation or retaliation dreamed of.

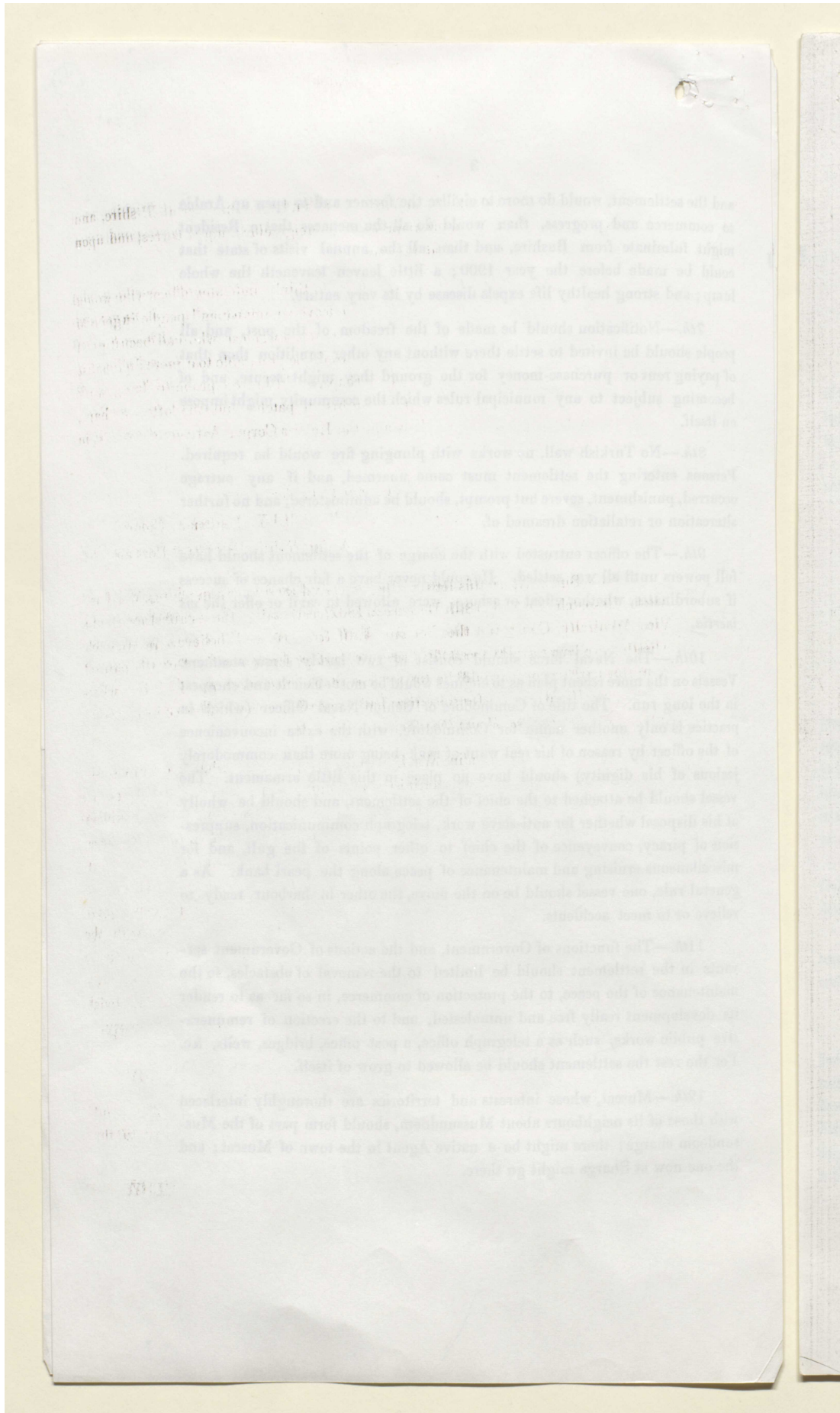
9th.—The officer entrusted with the charge of the settlement should have full powers until all was settled. He could never have a fair chance of success if subordinates, whether afloat or ashore, were allowed to cavil or offer the *vis inertia*.

10th.—The Naval force should consist of two handy screw steamers. Vessels on the more recent plan as to engines would be most efficient and cheapest in the long run. The title of Commodore or Senior Naval Officer (which in practice is only another name for Commodore, with the extra inconvenience of the officer by reason of his real want of rank being more than commodorely jealous of his dignity) should have no place in this little armament. The vessel should be attached to the chief of the settlement, and should be wholly at his disposal whether for anti-slave work, telegraph communication, suppression of piracy, conveyance of the chief to other points of the gulf, and for miscellaneous cruising and maintenance of peace along the pearl bank. As a general rule, one vessel should be on the move, the other in harbour ready to relieve or to meet accidents.

11th.—The functions of Government, and the actions of Government servants in the settlement should be limited to the removal of obstacles, to the maintenance of the peace, to the protection of commerce, in so far as to render its development really free and unmolested, and to the erection of remunerative public works, such as a telegraph office, a post office, bridges, wells, &c. For the rest the settlement should be allowed to grow of itself.

12th.—Muscat, whose interests and territories are thoroughly interlaced with those of its neighbours about Mussundoom, should form part of the Mussundoom charge; there might be a native Agent in the town of Muscat; and the one now at Sharga might go there.

'Memo on Mussondomom' [3v] (6/18)



'Memo on Mussundomom' [4r] (7/18)

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13th.—There should be a Vice-Consul under the minister at Bushire, and who, though directly subordinate to the Foreign office, might correspond upon Gulf affairs with the chief at Mussundoom.

5. The proposed settlement would flourish, I think, under any officer who would use common sense on its administration, and leave commerce and people in general to manage their own business. Perhaps, however, an officer who had been trained in a good school for general administration would be preferable to a mere diplomatist or a pure soldier, for the former is, perhaps, a little too prone to fancy work done when he has given the last polish to his despatch; and the latter, perhaps, occasionally forgets that Martial Law and the Habeas Corpus Act cannot co-exist in one and the same jurisdiction.

I have the honour to be, &c.

(Signed) LEWIS PELLY, Lieutenant Colonel,
Acting Political Resident, Persian Gulf.

P.S.—Since writing this letter I have received and am transmitting Mr. Eastwick's despatch, No. 7 of 18th December 1862, advocating the establishment of a Vice-Admiralty Court for the Persian Gulf, &c. It is, I believe, questionable whether we have a right to establish such a Court on foreign soil. But the natural point for such a court would be the settlement at Mussundoom. In brief, wherever I turn, I find reasons for selecting that as our fulcrum of influence in the Gulf, *provided always that the climate be sufficiently bearable.*

The whole drift indeed in Mr. Eastwick's despatch is to show the embarrassments which surrounded the administration of justice towards British subjects on Persian soil. I really cannot define what my magisterial powers are as a Resident at Bushire. Nor do I perceive in what way I could punish a criminal. So far as my personal observation in Persia goes, I am disposed to think that our relations with this Government in regard to judicial matters are on a vague and unsatisfactory footing; and that the obtainment of justice for a British subject depends more upon the personal influence which British representatives may possess with the Persian authorities, than upon the real merits of the plaintiff's case. All this (in so far as the precincts of the Gulf are concerned) would be obviated by having our own port and settlement in the Gulf. I do not lay much stress on oaths as Mr. Eastwick seems to do. In my opinion a law of perjury operates much like a law of usury.

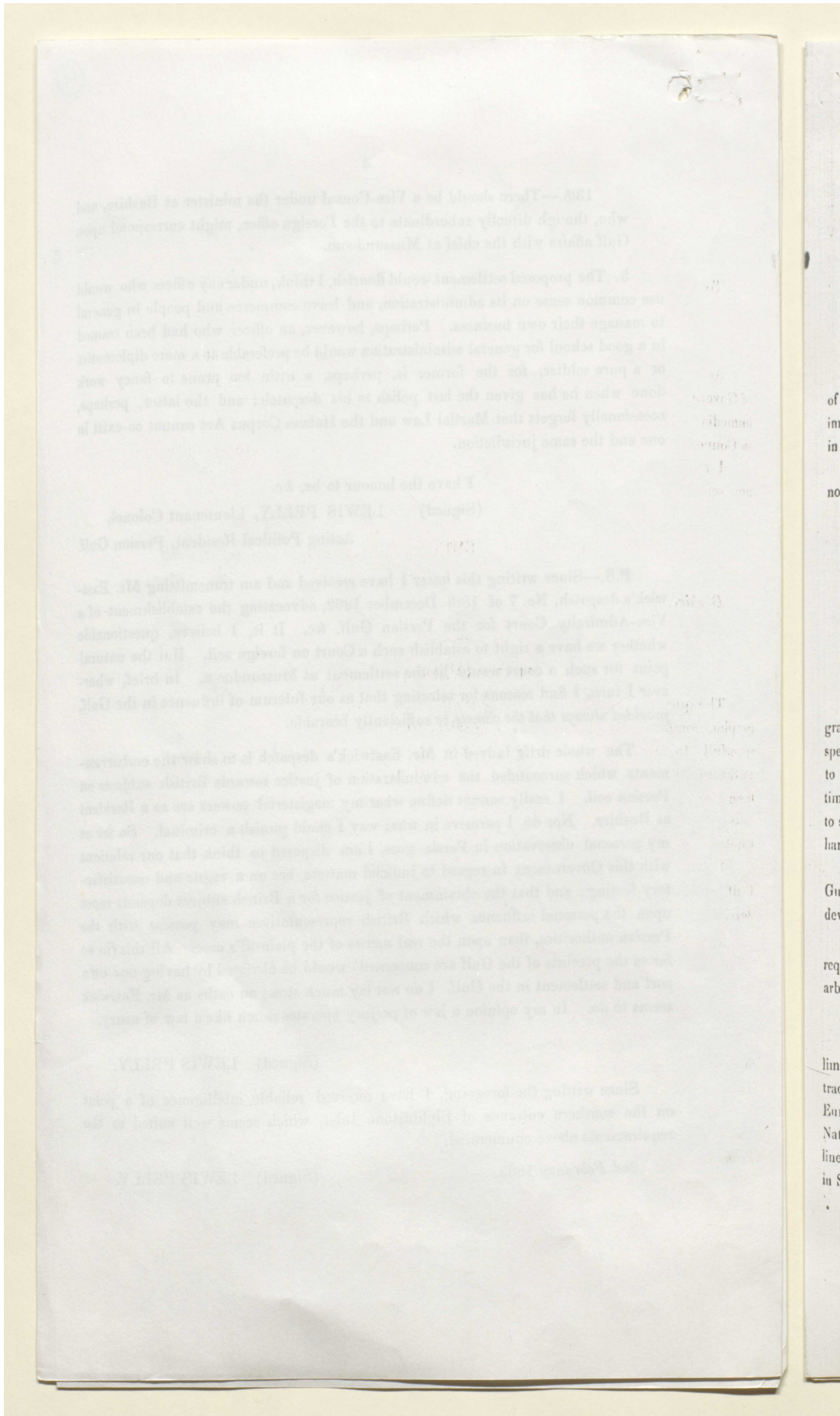
(Signed) LEWIS PELLY.

Since writing the foregoing, I have received reliable intelligence of a point on the southern entrance of Elphinstone Inlet, which seems well suited to the requirements above enumerated.

2nd February 1863.

(Signed) LEWIS PELLY.

'Memo on Mussondomom' [4v] (8/18)



'Memo on Mussondomom' [5r] (9/18)

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No. 1A.

To H. L. ANDERSON, Esquire.
&c. &c. &c.
SIR,

As the arrangements for the Gulf are under the immediate consideration of Government I believe, I venture to submit the appended memorandum as an immediate paper, and to request your good offices in laying it before His Excellency in Council at your early convenience.

I request the favour of a copy for my own record, as I have written the one now sent without placing it in the hands of my clerk.

I have the honour to be, &c.,

(Signed) LEWIS PELLY, Lieutenant Colonel,
Acting Political Resident, Persian Gulf.

Bushire, 12th January 1863.

MEMORANDUM.

The question of the development of the Persian Gulf line of Steam and Telegraphic communication is under the consideration of Government, and I beg respectfully to submit the following remarks bearing on that question in its relations to the Political Residency for the Persian Gulf. In order to avoid occupying the time of Government longer than may be absolutely necessary, I offer what I have to say in the form of *results* of thought. It will be easy for Government, map in hand, to trace the steps which led to these results.

1. The principal objects in establishing a Political Residency in the Persian Gulf were the suppression of piracy, the suppression of the slave trade, and the development of trade.

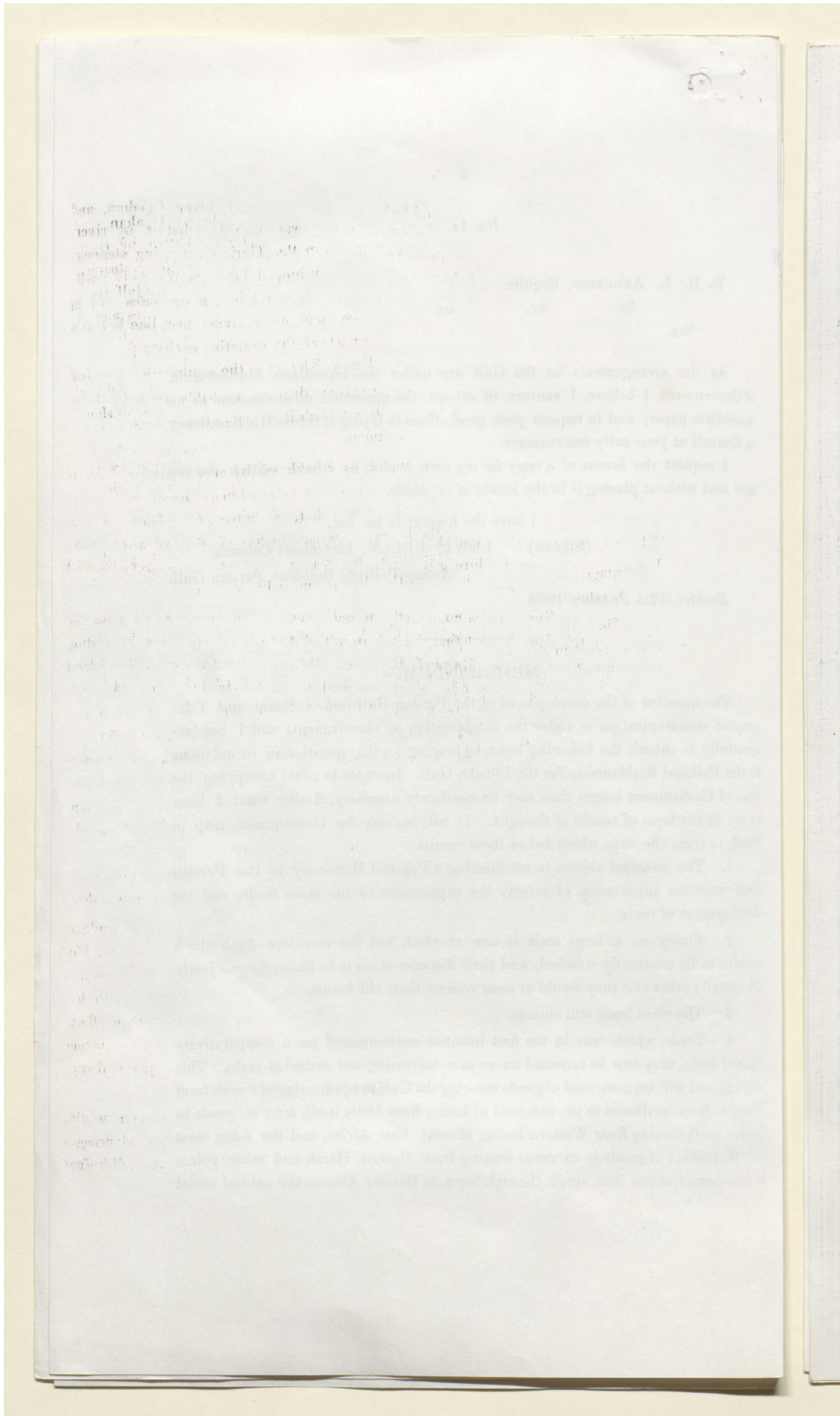
2. Piracy on a large scale is now checked, but the maritime Arab chiefs require to be constantly watched, and their disputes at sea to be promptly and justly arbitrated; otherwise they would at once resume their old habits.

3. The slave trade still obtains.

4. Trade, which was in the first instance contemplated on a comparatively limited scale, may now be expected on an ever-increasing and extended scale. This trade is, and will be, composed of goods entering the Gulf in square-rigged vessels from Europe, from territories to the eastward of India, from India itself, &c.; of goods in Native craft coming from Western India, Muscat, East Africa, and the Aden coast line of Arabia; of goods in caravans coming from Meshed, Herat, and other points in Southern Central Asia, down through Seyd, to Bunder Abbass, the natural outlet

2 P

'Memo on Mussondomom' [5v] (10/18)



'Memo on Mussondomom' [6r] (11/18)

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for all such trade; of goods coming in caravans by way of Teheran, Ispahan, and Shiraz, down to Bushire; of goods coming down the Tigris, whether by river-steamer or boat, to Busreh, and there being transhipped into sea-going steamers or craft for transit down the Gulf; of a pearl and fishery trade in the Gulf itself, especially along its western and Arab shore; and of a trade in dates and in miscellaneous goods coming from and to the ports of the western coast line between Khewait or Graine to the Northward, and Ras-al-Khyma to the southward.

5. The Residency was first established at Bushire, probably for political reasons, and because it was not then safe to establish it on the opposite Arab shore, which was, moreover, reputed of deadly climate.

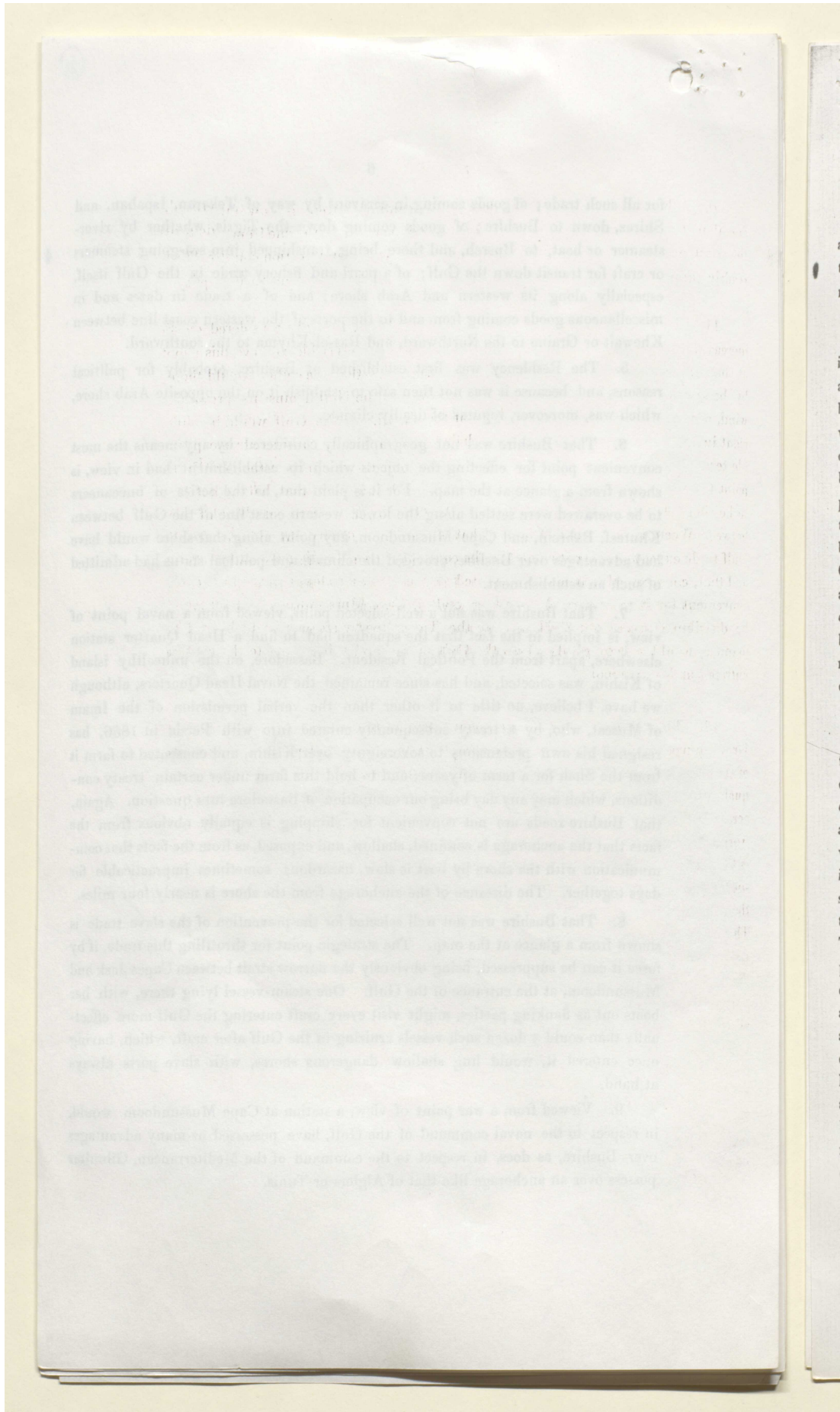
6. That Bushire was not geographically considered by any means the most convenient point for effecting the objects which its establishment had in view, is shown from a glance at the map. For it is plain that, as the series of buccaneers to be overawed were settled along the lower western coast line of the Gulf between Khuteef, Bahrein, and Cape Mussundoom, any point along that shore would have had advantages over Bushire, provided the climate and political status had admitted of such an establishment.

7. That Bushire was not a well-selected point, viewed from a naval point of view, is implied in the fact that the squadron had to find a Head Quarter station elsewhere, apart from the Political Resident. Bassadore, on the unhealthy island of Kishin, was selected, and has since remained the Naval Head Quarters, although we have, I believe, no title to it other than the verbal permission of the Imam of Muscat, who, by a treaty subsequently entered into with Persia in 1856, has resigned his own pretensions to sovereignty over Kishin, and consented to farm it from the Shah for a term of years; and to hold this farm under certain treaty conditions, which may any day bring our occupation of Bassadore into question. Again, that Bushire roads are not convenient for shipping is equally obvious from the facts that the anchorage is confined, shallow, and exposed, as from the facts that communication with the shore by boat is slow, hazardous, sometimes impracticable for days together. The distance of the anchorage from the shore is nearly four miles.

8. That Bushire was not well selected for the prevention of the slave trade is shown from a glance at the map. The strategic point for throttling this trade, if by force it can be suppressed, being obviously the narrow strait between Capes Jask and Mussundoom, at the entrance of the Gulf. One steam-vessel lying there, with her boats out as flanking parties, might visit every craft entering the Gulf more effectually than could a dozen such vessels cruising in the Gulf after craft, which, having once entered it, would hug shallow dangerous shores, with slave ports always at hand.

9. Viewed from a war point of view, a station at Cape Mussundoom would, in respect to the naval command of the Gulf, have possessed as many advantages over Bushire, as does, in respect to the command of the Mediterranean, Gibraltar possess over an anchorage like that of Algiers or Tunis.

'Memo on Mussondomom' [6v] (12/18)



'Memo on Mussondomom' [7r] (13/18)

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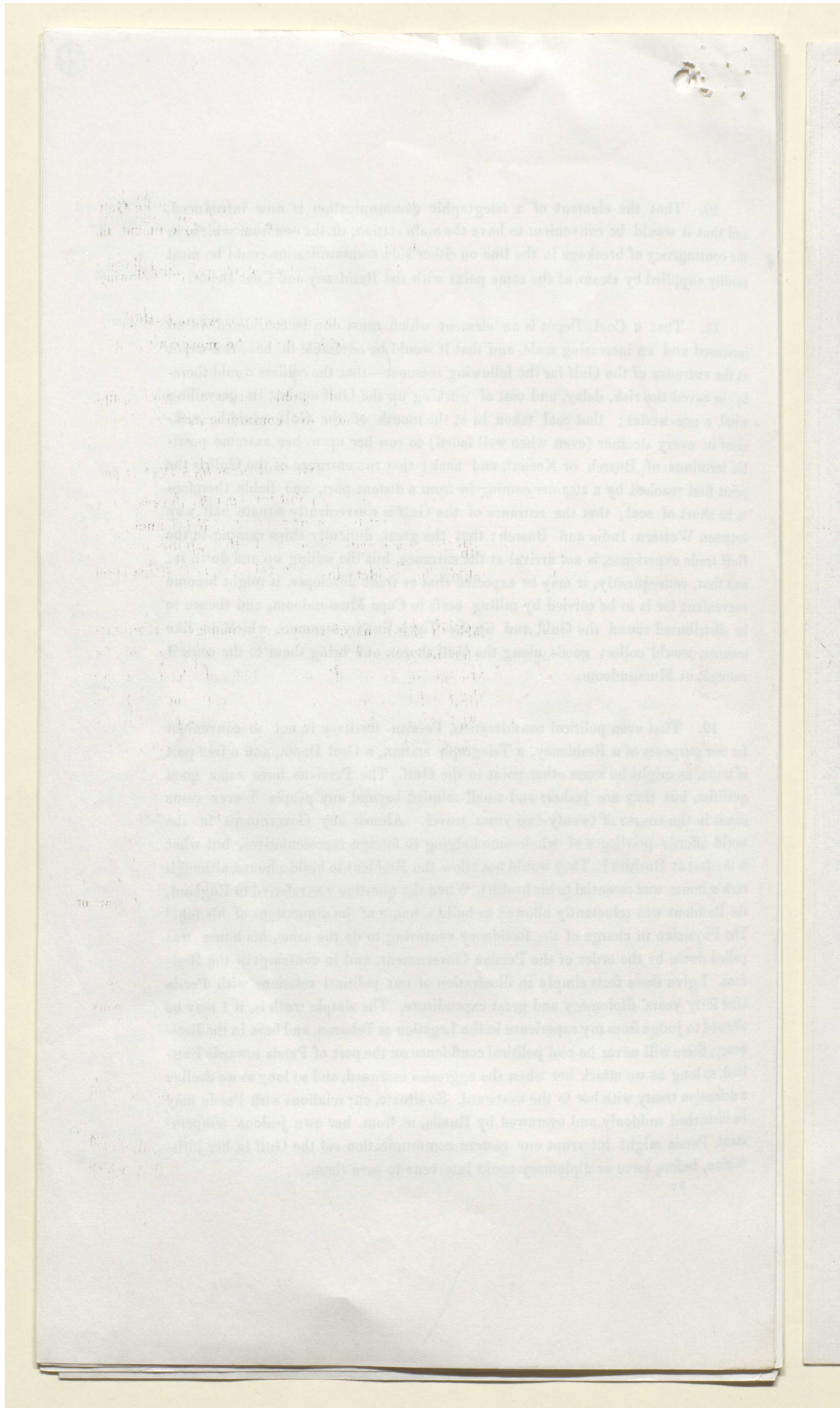
10. That the element of a telegraphic communication is now introduced, and that it would be convenient to have the main station, or the one from which, in the contingency of breakage in the line on either side, communication could be most readily supplied by steam, at the same point with the Residency and Coal Depôt.

11. That a Coal Depôt is an element which must now be considered on an increased and an increasing scale, and that it would be advisable to have this depôt at the entrance of the Gulf for the following reasons:—that the colliers would thereby be saved the risk, delay, and cost of working up the Gulf against its prevailing wind, a nor-wester; that coal taken in at the mouth of the Gulf would be sufficient in every steamer (even when well laded) to run her up to her extreme possible terminus of Busreh or Koonah and back; that the entrance of the Gulf is the point first reached by a steamer coming in from a distant port, and liable therefore to be short of coal; that the entrance of the Gulf is conveniently situate half way between Western India and Busreh; that the great difficulty ships coming to the Gulf trade experience, is *not* arrival at the entrance, but the sailing up and down it; and that, consequently, it may be expected that as trade develops, it might become convenient for it to be carried by sailing craft to Cape Mussundoom, and thence to be distributed round the Gulf, and up the Tigris line by steamers, which, in like manner, would collect goods along the Gulf shores, and bring them to the central entrepôt at Mussundoom.

12. That even political consideration, Persian territory is not so convenient for our purposes of a Residency, a Telegraph station, a Coal Depôt, and a free port of trade, as might be some other point in the Gulf. The Persians have some good qualities, but they are jealous and small-minded beyond any people I ever came across in the course of twenty-two years' travel. Almost any Government in the world affords privileges of wholesome lodging to foreign representatives, but what is the fact at Bushire? They would not allow the Resident to build a house, although such a house was essential to his health! When the question was referred to England, the Resident was reluctantly allowed to build a house of the dimensions of his tent! The Physician in charge of the Residency venturing to do the same, his house was pulled down by the order of the Persian Government, and in contempt of the Resident. I give these facts simply in illustration of our political relations with Persia after forty years' diplomacy and great expenditure. The simple truth is, if I may be allowed to judge from my experience in the Legation at Teheran, and here in the Residency, there will never be real political confidence on the part of Persia towards England, so long as we attack her when she aggresses eastward, and so long as we decline a defensive treaty with her to the westward. So situate, our relations with Persia may be disturbed suddenly and overawed by Russia, or from her own jealous temperament, Persia might interrupt our eastern communication *via* the Gulf in her jurisdiction, before force or diplomacy could intervene to save them.

3 P

'Memo on Mussondomom' [7v] (14/18)



'Memo on Mussondomom' [8r] (15/18)

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13. That at the present moment, and while all our relations with the Gulf are under reconsideration, it would, perhaps, be worthy the time of Government to solve permanently the following problem:—

To find a point somewhere in the Persian Gulf which shall offer the following advantages:—

1st.—*Centrality*, as a free port, where trade may concentrate, where re-shipment may take place, and where goods transhipped may be most conveniently distributed.

2nd.—Which shall possess centrality as a telegraphic station, and most readily afford means of maintaining on either hand communication by steamer in the event of accident to the cable.

3rd.—Which should be the most central and convenient point for a Coal Depôt.

4th.—Which should be the most dominating point for keeping the sea-police along the Pirate Coast, and for settling or preventing quarrels among the maritime Arabs with the least possible delay, with the minimum cost of fuel, and without taking the Resident to any great distance from his Head Quarters.

5th.—Which should enable the Resident of the Gulf to manage, without embarrassment, the relations in the Muscat as well as those in the Gulf, for the territories of Muscat are so mixed up with those of Persia and the Arabs, and its political relations are so interwoven with the politics of the Gulf, that it would be obviously, and apart even from reasons of finance, it would be very desirable that they should be under one and the same superintendence.

6th.—Which might become a colony, or rather the inoculation, with an atom of civilized life, in the body of barbarism along the Arab coast, tending to expel that diseased barbarism by the wholesome, healthful, and slow, but natural, means of introduced civilization. I think you would find such means more permanent, and in the long run more successful, both towards suppressing piracy and slavery, than you will even find ships of war or menaces, &c. and visits of state from your Resident.

7th.—Which shall be as secure as practicable from political difficulties.

8th.—Which may afford us an indisputable title to the ground we occupy.

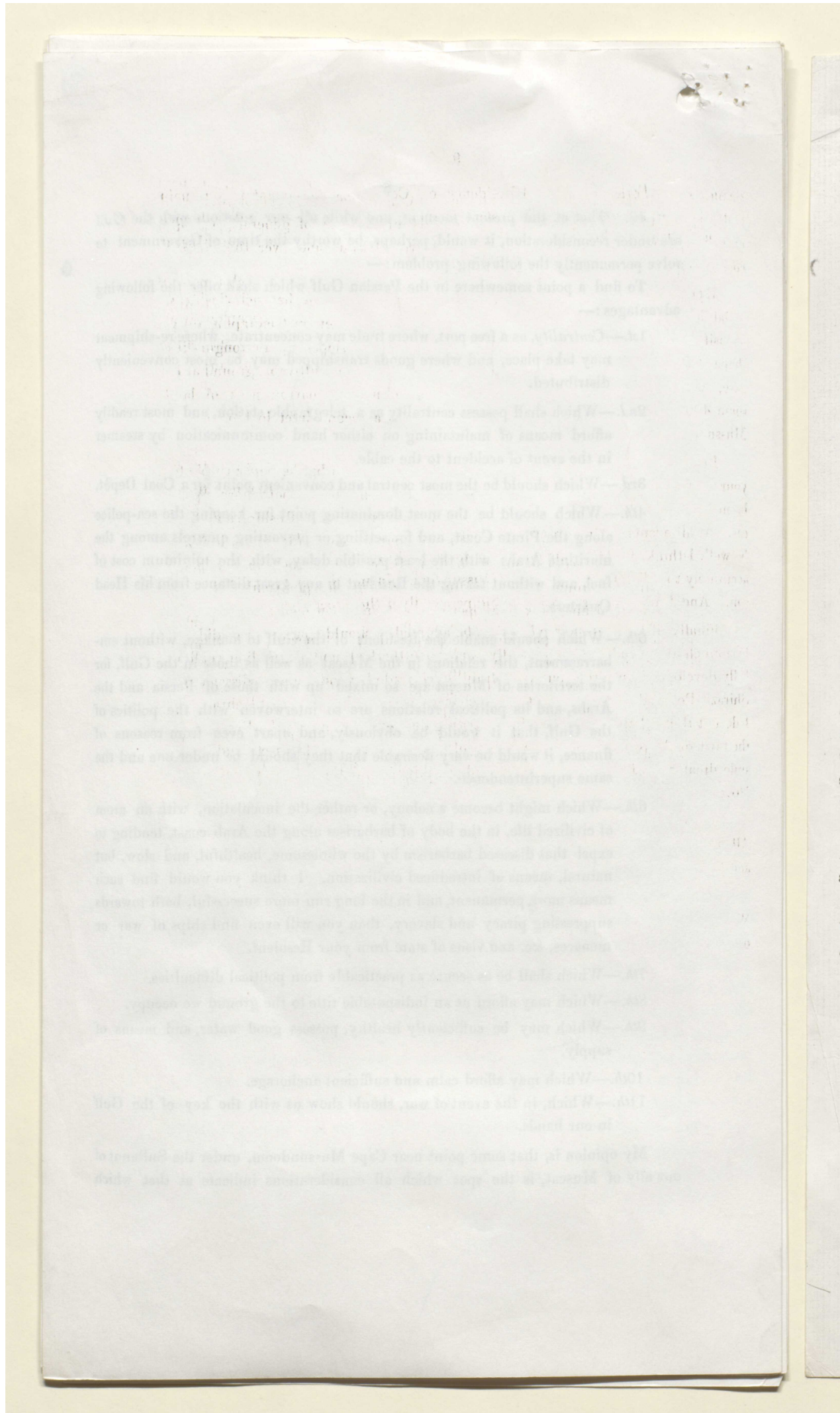
9th.—Which may be sufficiently healthy, possess good water, and means of supply.

10th.—Which may afford calm and sufficient anchorage.

11th.—Which, in the event of war, should show us with the key of the Gulf in our hands.

My opinion is, that some point near Cape Mussundoom, under the Sultanut of our ally of Muscat, is the spot which all considerations, indicate as that which

'Memo on Mussondomom' [8v] (16/18)



'Memo on Mussondomom' [9r] (17/18)

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should be our Port, our Political Residence, our Central Telegraph station, our main Gulf Coal Depôt, our anti-slavery station, and our fulcrum of general influence over the Gulf, over the Pirate Coast, over Western Mekran, and over the Muscat coast, climate being sufficiently favourable.

Lieutenant Stiffe, I. N., just arrived at Bushire, assures me that such a point is findable just west of Mussundoom ; that a few weeks ago, when on telegraphic duty, he visited a headland called, I think, Ras Sheikh, which slopes up in tongue-like shape to the height of 1,000 feet, with good water and some cultivable ground at its base, with ample and land-locked anchorage, leading to a narrow neck of land some 400 yards wide, on the other side of which is a second inlet looking east of Mussundoom.

I consider such a position, if sufficiently healthy, would be the best possible for your Gulf and Muscat Residency, and that the Political business of both might thence be more efficiently managed than either can be separately from Bushire and Muscat. At all events, in the present conjuncture of your Persian Gulf affairs, it would be well, I think, for Government to go to some little trouble and expense to test accurately the climates around Cape Mussundoom during the approaching hot season. And I am sure I am ready to aid personally in the experiment.

Finally, if the plan now pointed at be adopted, I should consider we did not lose much at Bushire. Commercially, and when the Gulf and Tigris line shall be fully developed, Bushire should not drain much trade beyond the arrondissement of Shiraz. Politically, it forms part of the charge of H. M.'s Mission at Tehran, and I do not think that Government in the least gains much by having the Residency in the town of Bushire, where there is little of real importance to transact, and where subordinates gossip and have likings and dislikings, and these come to injure the Government business in the long run.

The Residency at Bushire might be sold or disposed of as Government please. All that would be lost would be some little personal conveniences to the Resident and his establishment, and the possibility of retreat to the neighbouring hills.

The immediate gains are, I think, obvious on reading the scheme map in hand. What the future gains might be would become more manifest should a crisis ever occur in our Red Sea line of communications.

(Signed) LEWIS PELLY, Lieutenant Colonel,
Acting Political Resident, Persian Gulf.

Bushire, 12th January 1863.

'Memo on Mussondomom' [9v] (18/18)

