Sir N. O’Conor to Foreign Office.

No. 198 (Confidential.)

CONSTANTINOPLE;

1st April 1907.

Sub-envyex.
to Pro. No. 448.

Sir,

I have the honour to inform you that I have received from the Government of India a copy of their despatches to Mr. Morley, Pro. No. 764 in Secret E., 1907, and I venture to offer the following remarks on its contents.

It is difficult to forecast events in Turkey and particularly so in Arabia, where the Ottoman Government have so often re-established authority which seemed to have passed from their grasp.

But it looks just now as if Ibn Saoud might possibly consolidate a Wahabean dynasty by the absorption of Nejd, the practical expulsion of the Turks from Kassim and Boreyde, and by establishing friendly relations with Sheikh Jasim of Katr and the Hassa regions.

At the same time it would be unwise to conclude that the Turkish Government cannot recover their ground, or that Ibn Saoud will be able to amalgamate tribal
interests in such a manner as to resist the forces of the Supremacy Power and continue his victorious course.

It may be that all that is national, in feeling and aspiration, may group itself around Ibn Saud, but all the elements of a firm and stable regime are well nigh wanting so far, and I should be slow to assume that we are on the eve of important changes in those parts.

Moreover, Ibn Saud has not yet had to deal with a large Turkish military force, partly owing to tribal disturbances, and partly to his double faced policy towards the Sultan. It is by no means certain, however, that if he openly declares his hostility to the Caliph, the energetic commandant of the Sixty Army Corps, Pertev Pasha, who is now reorganizing this corps at Baghdad, will not crush him before he has time or means for resistance.

I confess I see nothing to be gained by entangling ourselves with him under present circumstances, and I do not see how we can, with political honesty, assist his insurrectionary movement against, for instance, El Hassa, which we recognize as an integral part of the Ottoman Empire. We can hardly approach the Porte with a declaration, disguised how it may be diplomatically, that we shall protect a
rebel who is in arms for the disintegration of the Empire. Even were we to do so, I should have no faith in the phenomenon of political gratitude from an Arab race.

Apart from this, I am not at all sure how far the establishment of a strong and fanatical Wahabbi dynasty in those parts would serve our interests; on the contrary, I am of opinion that our right policy is to interfere as little as possible with the internal affairs of these tribes, and let them work out their own destiny as best they can.

If, in the course of time, Ibn Saud, or another, should succeed in establishing their rule and authority under some more or less stable order of Government, it might be necessary to consider whether we should recognise them as representative of the will of the people, and even, perhaps, to consider how far it would be desirable to protect their coasts from predatory or other attacks.

But this is some way off, and before a confederacy of the Arab states of Mohammadah, Koweit, and Nejd is in existence, the chances are that the present Ottoman regime will have come to an end and be succeeded by a nationalist and popular Government, or that the disintegration of the component parts of the Empire will have begun.
In the latter cases we cannot escape our responsibilities, but I should be sorry to see England enter into relations with a new Turkish regime, having previously agreed to a secret arrangement with Ibn Saud for the disruption of the Empire.

The Moslems of this country would never forgive nor forget such a policy.

As regards the idea that I should be instructed to make representations to the Porte with reference to the passage of some Turkish troops through Koweit territory, I venture to submit that if these expostulations had been made within even a few months of the circumstances complained of, it might have been in place, but if we raised such a question after a lapse of eight months, it would provoke much ill-feeling without, so far as I can see, any corresponding advantages.

If we want to assert our predominance in Koweit, I would on the whole prefer to insist upon the evacuation of Babian Island should Ottoman gendarmes still be there.

But this I do not advocate at present, although at some future time we may have to remind the Porte of the subject.

I quite understand the unpleasant position in which Major Cox is placed by not being able to reply satisfactorily to the overtures of Ibn Saud or Sheikh
Jasim, I do not see how this can be avoided, and all it is better than pledging ourselves to unwise risks and responsibilities.

regards a descent of Ibn Said on the Oman coast his assistance in repressing piracy and his influence with the Trucial Chiefs, I venture to think there is a little chance of his being able to really useful to us as there is of his daring attack the maritime Chiefs who are under our protection.

I would be well, however, carefully to watch proceedings and policy of this somewhat active kh while strictly maintaining with the Sheikh Koweit the engagements which we have undertaken.

I have, etc.,

N. O'Connor,

The Rt Hon, Sir E. Grey, Bart., M.P.,

etc., &c., &c.