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'Relations of the British Government with the Tribes of the Aden Hinterland'

Holding Institution	British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers
Reference	IOR/L/PS/18/B155
Date(s)	19 Mar 1906 (CE, Gregorian)
Written in	English in Latin
Extent and Format	1 file (3 folios)
Copyright for document	Open Government Licence



About this record

The file consists of a memorandum detailing the relations of the British Government with the tribes of the Aden hinterland by Richmond Thackeray Willoughby Ritchie, India Office, Secretary to the Political and Secret Department.

It discusses the following: boundary lines, difficulties with the Turks which led to the delimitation, British responsibility resulting from the demarcation, relations with the Amir of Dthala [Aḍ Ḍāli'] in particular, and protectorate agreements; it also gives a summary of troops stationed across the hinterland.

It makes several references to 'the attached Memorandum' which is a separate file: IOR/L/PS/18/B156 'Memorandum respecting the Aden Frontier Delimitation'.

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Confidential.

B. 155.¹

1906.

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the Aden Hinterland.

The attached Memorandum,* compiled by the Foreign Office in consultation with this Office, gives a brief account of our treaty relations with the Aden tribes, and of the delimitation. It will be seen that a line has been laid down from a point on the sea opposite Perim to the River Bana,

* B. 156.

180 miles in length,† fixing a definite

† Amiri border, 42 miles.

frontier between Turkish territory and

Hanshabi border, 36 miles.

the Subaihi, Haushabi, and Amiri

Subaihi border, (about) 100 miles.

tribes. Beyond the River Bana it has been recognised in the Procès Verbal,

signed by the British and Turkish Commissioners on the 20th April 1905, that, in accordance with the Sultan's Iradé of the 12th February 1903, the line (demarcation of which is not at present contemplated) runs north-east to the Desert. The Procès Verbal states that the whole of the Aulaki, and all the districts of the Yaffai (including Rubeaten, Nawa, and Dhabiani) lying to the south and east of the line to the Desert, belong to the Nine Tribes. It is silent as to Behan, with which we have a treaty, and which we regard as Aulaki, and as to Beda, with which the Aden authorities were authorised on the 18th June 1903 to conclude a treaty which has not yet been executed. Beda is apparently neither Aulaki nor Yaffai, but lies south of the line north-east to the Desert.

In the past the practical difficulties with the Turks which led to the delimitation occurred on the Subaihi, Haushabi, and Amiri borders, which have been actually defined. Beyond the River Bana our dealings with the tribes have been so slight that, in the treaties made in 1903 and 1904 (under the stress of the complications which arose during the work of demarcation) with representatives of the Upper Yaffai, the Upper Aulaki and Behan, we were dealing with what may be described as an unknown quantity. In this connection it may be added that the control of the delimitation proceedings passed to a great extent into the hands of Sir N. O'Connor, after the appointment to the Commission in November 1902, in accordance with his wishes, of Mr. Fitzmaurice, a Dragoman of the Embassy, in whom he had special confidence.

As regards the increase of British responsibility resulting from the demarcation, it was stated by Lord Lansdowne in the House of Lords, on the 30th March 1903, in reply to a question whether the delimitation extended the British sphere of influence:—"With regard to the responsibility for these territories, I do not see why what has taken place should make any difference in those responsibilities. We have never desired to interfere with the internal and domestic affairs of the tribes. On the other hand, we have throughout made it perfectly plain that we should not tolerate the interference of any other Power with them."

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As far as Turkish interference goes, it remains for experience to show whether the definition of the boundary will have diminished the constant difficulties which led in 1901 to the decision to join the Turks in delimitation. The need for delimitation had been pointed out as far back as 1886 in the Government of India's letter of the 6th August, discussing the question of treaties with the tribes.

But though there seems no reason why, apart from the treatment of border difficulties with the Turks, the delimitation should affect our policy towards the Subaihi and the Haushabi, our relations with the Amir of Dthala have undoubtedly been affected by the arrangements which it was necessary to make with him, after he had been placed in possession of Jalela and other portions of territory from which the Turks had to retire in accordance with the demarcation. The Treaty of 1905, the terms of which were approved by our Despatch of 23rd September 1904, promises protection to the "territory of Dthala and all its dependencies," and gives the Amir and his successors a subsidy of 100 dollars a month in return for undertakings on his part not to deal with foreigners or part with any territory; to keep open and protect roads; to maintain the frontier line; to preserve order in Amiri territory, and to restrain his dependents from creating disturbances in the country beyond the border or interfering with Turkish subjects. The treaty also provides that the Amir shall maintain a force, not exceeding 50 men, to the satisfaction of the Resident, in return for which the Amir is to receive a further subsidy of 100 dollars a month. In addition to the above, a Political Officer has been permanently stationed at Dthala with an escort of some 20 men. There is also stationed at present in Amiri territory

* The total number in January 1906, a force of 840* men, and in view of In November and December 1905, the the healthy climate of the uplands, a figures were 945 and 885 respectively.

hospital is contemplated. It is not improbable that in time there will be a demand, in the interests of the health of the Aden garrison, for a hill station near Dthala, and also for a railway, especially if the Lahej Sultan brings to a successful issue his project for a line through Abdali territory to Nobat Dakim. Another source of difficulty in Amiri territory is that of the relation of the Amir of Dthala to the Kotaibi and other minor Sheikhs. The policy indicated in Government of India Despatch of the 31st August 1905 is that it is premature at the present stage to contemplate the grant of fixed stipends to any particular sub-tribe, though the Political Officer should be given a liberal discretionary power of making occasional or periodical presents, which would differ only from temporary stipends in that there would be no treaty engagement to pay them. The Government of India also held that no binding engagements should be made with any sub-tribe till it was clear that the Amir is unable, with the support of the Political Officer, to consolidate his position as paramount ruler; and they recommended that the appointment of a Political Officer at Dthala, which had been sanctioned experimentally for one year, should be made permanent. This was approved by Despatch of the 10th November 1905, No. 35 (Secret), as were the views expressed as to stipends for the sub-tribes.

In other respects it is not clear why the result of the demarcation should be to alter our policy towards the tribes. The necessity for not extending our responsibilities was impressed on the Government of India in Despatches

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of the 1st April and 15th July 1904 (copies attached). In the first of these it was pointed out that the "fundamental principle upon which British relations had been maintained with the tribes around Aden, described by the Government of Bombay as 'the principle of tribal responsibility coupled with a minimum of British interference,' had been vindicated by its success"; and that though in consequence of the delimitation "it may be necessary to impose upon the Amir of Dthala and other tribal chiefs, by fresh agreements, international responsibilities which they have hitherto evaded," the Secretary of State would "view with misgiving any tendency to extend the range of our interference with the tribes themselves or to weaken the defence of Aden itself by exciting opposition in the interior and taking part in tribal disputes which do not affect external relations." The increase of the military force at Aden is a contingency which, in view of Imperial obligations elsewhere, it is desirable to avoid." It was further laid down that "no action should be taken in the direction of establishing Agents in the interior, the introduction of the levy system, or the lease of land for sanatorium or railways without the full sanction of His Majesty's Government." The Despatch of the 15th July 1904 raised the question of the obligation imposed on the British Government by the promise of "gracious favour and protection" in connection with the recently ratified treaties with the Upper Aulaki Sultans. After reverting to the Despatch cited above, of the 1st April, the Secretary of State said—

"2. In that Despatch, whilst I recognised the obligation incurred by your Government in regard to the external relations of the tribes recently brought under the protection of the Aden authorities, I expressed my misgiving as to the extension of British interference with the tribes themselves in their internal affairs or their relations with each other. I shall be glad to receive at an early date the report of the Government of Bombay and the views of your Excellency in Council on this important subject, with a view to removing at the outset any misunderstanding as to the extent of your liabilities to the tribes. It may be possible by the superior influence of the Sultan of Lahej, or by a clear understanding with each separate tribe, to induce the tribes to come to a common arrangement amongst themselves. There are certain duties common to all of them, such as the protection of the trade routes, which the British Government must be prepared to enforce. There are others, as, for instance, those connected with religious and inter-tribal disputes, which it may be possible to leave to the settlement of the tribal Chiefs. I merely desire at this stage to indicate the need for a clear understanding as to the intentions and limitations of these protectorate agreements. It is unnecessary to alarm the tribes by public action or by general inquiry. As the Chiefs themselves visit Aden to draw their allowances, their views and opinions may be invited, and any explanations as to our intentions which it may be advisable to make can then be quietly given to them. But before the meaning of your obligations and the phrases of the treaties can be explained to the parties, it is desirable for your Government to review the whole subject carefully, and inform me as to your own

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“ views of the extent of your obligations and your means of
“ executing them.”

The views of the Government of Bombay were forwarded by the Government of India in a letter of the 9th February 1905 (copy attached). The Government of Bombay did not think it practicable either to work through any one Chief, such as the Sultan of Lahej, or to attempt to establish an inter-tribal arrangement. They were in favour, therefore, of adhering to the policy of treating each tribe as an independent factor to be dealt with direct, interference in internal or inter-tribal affairs being limited to occasions on which “ these have a bearing on their relations with “ ourselves or affect the safety of the trade routes. . . . The position of “ Government is substantially altered to this extent only that they are now “ compelled to control the actions of the tribes on the external frontier of “ the protectorate.” The Bombay Government, however, made the practical suggestion that, in view of the poverty of the tribes, generous treatment of the question of stipends “ may prove in the long run to be “ sound economy as well as good policy, and to be possibly the best means “ of enforcing inter-tribal peace.” The Government of India agreed generally in this recommendation as to the stipends, but thought that any increase should be accompanied by additional and definite obligations as in the case of the levies to be maintained by the Amir of Dthala. They preferred, however, to reserve their opinion till they saw how that experiment worked. On the larger question of our relations with the tribes, they gave an assurance that they had no intention or desire to extend their obligations, or to depart from the fundamental principles which have regulated our connection with the tribes in the past. They recognised, however, that “ recent events have tended to develop this connection and have unavoidably widened the sphere of our responsibilities.” But they hoped, on the other hand, that as in other parts of the Indian frontier, so at Dthala, the personal influence of the Political Officer stationed there would have a good effect on our relations with the tribes in touch with him.

At present practically all our treaties with the tribes are protectorate, and, with the exception of the Amiri treaty, are limited to binding the tribes not to deal with foreigners, not to part with territory, and to protect the trade routes. A complete list of the treaties (30 in all) with a summary of their provisions, was forwarded with the Government of India's letter of 9th February 1905.

As regards the protectorate clause in the treaties it will be seen, from the Foreign Office Memorandum, that proposals had been made in 1885 for treaties not of a protectorate character with the tribes other than the four nearest to Aden, which were to be under our protection; but that in 1887 it was decided to make all the treaties protective, in view of the opinion expressed by Lord Salisbury (Foreign Office letter of 19th November 1887) that “ the responsibility incurred by the British Government in either case “ is much the same, while a treaty of Protectorate gives a more “ complete control, and is more efficient to counteract interference “ by Foreign Powers than the less definite Agreements previously “ suggested.” It will also be seen from the Foreign Office Memorandum that as regards the Amiri the policy suggested in 1885 was that “ we “ should quietly desist from our attitude of opposition to the Turks,

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"allowing the absorption by them of the uplands and possibly pensioning off the Amir and his immediate successors." In pursuance of this policy no treaty promising protection had been made with the Amir at the time of the delimitation, though we had a treaty giving a him a stipend in return for good behaviour and the maintenance of trade routes. Nevertheless, neither at the time of the delimitation nor during the period of friction preceding it, was any proposal made, so far as official records show, to ignore the virtual claims of the tribe to our protection, and to leave them to be absorbed by the Turks.

R. RITCHIE.

19th March 1906.

P.S.—It should be added that, in addition to the garrison at Aden itself, the following troops are stationed* at various places in the Hinterland, exclusive of Dthala :—

			Native Infantry.
Al Hakl (north of Dthala)	-	-	17
Dthubiyat	-	-	26
Suleik	-	-	103
Al Mileh	-	-	28
Nobat Dakim	-	-	46
Bir Salim	-	-	8
Bir Syed Ali	-	-	8
Total			236

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