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'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section'

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About this record

This note was written by the Arab Bureau, Iraq Section, in Basra in January 1917. It reviews the rise of Ibn Sa'ud [ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin Fayṣal Āl Saʿūd], his fight against Ibn Rashid and the role of Captain William Henry Irvine Shakespear, Political Agent, Kuwait, in this conflict. Other topics are Ibn Sa'ud's relationship with Shaikh Mubarak of Kuwait and Ibn Sa'ud's battle against the Ottoman Turks in the context of British interests.

'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section' [1r]
(1/10)

B. 251.

RELATIONS WITH IBN SA'UD.

Note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section.

1. 'Abdul 'Aziz Ibn Sa'ud, the present Hakim of Najd, may be said to have begun his reign in 1901, when he was proclaimed Governor of Riyadh by his father, 'Abdul Rahman. The Sa'ud family were at that time in exile, having been driven out of their dominions in 1891 by their hereditary foe, Ibn Rashid. In 1902, 'Abdul 'Aziz, with the help of Mubarak Ibn Sabah, Shaikh of Kuwait, recovered Riyadh in a daring raid which he led in person, and by 1906 he had so far re-established the old supremacy of the Sa'ud as to carry hostilities to the gates of Hail. During the years succeeding his return to Riyadh he acted in close alliance with the Shaikh of Kuwait, who had every reason for desiring the curtailing of Rashid influence. For the Rashid were allies and, in a remote acceptation of the term, vassals of the Ottoman Empire, subsidised and backed by Constantinople, and they represented in Arabia the Turkish policy of centralisation which the Shaikh was covertly resisting in his own territories. His geographical position on the shores of the Persian Gulf had placed him in relations with the British Government; since 1899 we had had a friendly understanding with him, and had promised to support him against Ottoman aggression. But the existence of this connection made us unwilling to see him drawn into the confused and uncertain feuds of the interior; and acting on the principle laid down in 1897 that we were "not disposed to interfere more than was necessary for the maintenance of general peace in the Persian Gulf," we had discouraged him from embroiling himself in Central Arabian affairs. Ibn Sa'ud, in spite of his growing importance, was outside the limits of our interest, thus appointed, and it was not until 1911 that special attention was drawn to him in our official reports. In that year Captain Shakespear, the Political Agent at Kuwait, while on tour, met him by chance in the desert and was hospitably entertained in his camp. Ibn Sa'ud expressed to him a desire to be received into a recognised relationship with Great Britain; he referred to Colonel Pelly's visit to Riyadh in 1865, and to the overtures made to us by his father, 'Abdul Rahman, in 1904, when a British Agent was first appointed to Kuwait. He spoke in strong terms of the hatred which the Arabs entertained for the Turks and of his own resentment of their occupation of the Hasa, a province which he was particularly anxious to regain, not only because it formed part of his ancestral dominions, but also because it would give him access to the sea and control over the tribes from Riyadh to the coast. He regarded with grave apprehension the aggressive policy of the new régime in Turkey, and would welcome, if he recovered the Hasa, a British Agent in one of his ports; and he added that our trade would benefit from the increased security which he would maintain on the caravan routes. Captain Shakespear could make no other rejoinder than that the British Government confined its interests to the coast, and had never challenged Turkish claims to the ordering of affairs in Central Arabia, with which we had no concern; that we were, moreover, on amicable terms with Turkey and should be averse from anything in the nature of intrigue against the Ottoman Government; but in his comments on the report of this interview, Sir Percy Cox pointed out that as the Porte seemed disposed to be intractable in the adjustment of matters relating to British interests in the Gulf, we could not afford to ignore Ibn Sa'ud's attitude. His personal authority had greatly increased and it would be well to entertain cordial if distant relations with him. The Foreign Office, however, decided that it was impossible at that time to swerve from our policy of strict non-interference.

2. Two years later Ibn Sa'ud, without the assistance which he had tried to obtain from us, though he was credited throughout Arabia with having

S 1 30 2/18

A

'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section' [1v]
(2/10)

2

secured it, overran the Hasa, ejected without difficulty the small Turkish garrisons and established himself on the coast at Qatif and Ojair. Captain Shakespear, on his return to England in June 1914 from a long projected journey across Arabia, in the course of which he had visited Riyadh, bore witness to the strong personal domination which Ibn Sa'ud's vigorous and commanding personality had established, and from other reports it was clear that he was regarded beyond his own frontiers as the coming man. He proved more than a match for the ineffective efforts of the Turks to retake the Hasa: they resorted to diplomacy and opened negotiations with him through Saiyid Talib of Basrah. Early in May Tal'at Beg had formulated in private conversation at the British Embassy the expectations of the Ottoman Government in terms which seemed to his hearers little consonant with actual conditions. He proposed to establish a strictly delimited frontier between Ibn Sa'ud and Ibn Rashid, place representatives of the Sultan at Riyadh and at Hail, and rely upon the guile of these officials to control without the aid of force the actions of the two Amirs. As for the Hasa, Ibn Sa'ud would be appointed Mutasarrif of the province, but the collection of the Customs would remain in Turkish hands and Turkish garrisons would be replaced in the ports.

3. Nothing was more certain than that Ibn Sa'ud's appearance on the coast must ultimately bring him into direct contact with ourselves, whether we welcomed it or sought to avoid it; and this anxiety underlay and possibly accelerated the action of the Porte. But at the moment Turkish fears were groundless. We were concerned wholly with the conclusion of prolonged negotiations with Constantinople, touching interests in Mesopotamia and the Gulf which were of vital importance, and were less inclined, if possible, than before for Arabian adventure. We made a friendly offer of mediation which was refused, and when in April 1914 the Amir met the British Agent, Colonel Grey, outside Kuwait, he was given to understand that we had recently concluded a comprehensive agreement with Turkey and could hold out to him no hope of support. Ibn Sa'ud was thrown back on his own resources, but these were considerable, and the secret treaty which was signed in May by himself and the Wali of Basrah fell short of Tal'at Beg's anticipations. He accepted the title of Wali and Military Commandant of Najd which was offered to himself and his descendants as long as they should remain loyal, and engaged to fly the Turkish flag, but he was to have charge of the Customs on behalf of the Ottoman Government, raise his own levies and provide the garrisons for Qatif and Ojair. Deficiencies in the Najd budget were to be met from the Customs, and no revenue from any local income was to be paid to Constantinople until such time as there was a surplus, an eventuality of doubtful occurrence. But while exercising in his own territories an authority which was in all but the name that of an independent ruler, his correspondence with foreign Powers was to be conducted solely through the Porte, and in case of war he was to come to the assistance of the Sultan.

4. What would have been the upshot of a treaty which so imperfectly reflected the convictions of the contracting parties can scarcely admit of doubt. The guiding trait of Ibn Sa'ud's character is what must be called a racial rather than a national patriotism, but this sentiment was not likely to evoke sympathetic consideration from the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress, who were blindly determined on the Ottomanization of the Arabs. As a strict Wahabi, the new Wali of Najd looked with abhorrence on the loose religious principles of the Turks and was far from admitting their pretensions to represent and direct Islam. He had, in conversation with Captain Shakespear, spoken with unexpected vehemence on this point, saying that in his eyes the Infidel was preferable to the Turk, since the latter broke the rule he professed to follow while the former acted in accordance with his own law: and to the same listener he declared that he had accepted the terms of the agreement only because he was assured privately that even the small measure of sovereignty accorded to Turkey would never be claimed. The Kuwait treaty was put to the test by the outbreak of European war and found wanting.

'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section' [2r]
(3/10)

3

5. The disquieting attitude adopted by Turkey on the outbreak of war between Germany and the Entente Powers produced a profound alteration in our policy towards the Porte. It became necessary to reckon up our assets in Arabia, and early in October Captain Shakespear, who was in England, was ordered to return to the Persian Gulf and get into touch with Ibn Sa'ud, so as to prevent, if possible, the outbreak of unrest in the interior, and in the event of war with Turkey to ensure that no assistance should be rendered from that quarter. Before he could reach his destination war had been declared. A message had been despatched to Ibn Sa'ud informing him of Captain Shakespear's impending visit, recognising his position in Najd and the Hasa and guaranteeing him against reprisals by sea or land if he would commit himself to enter the lists against Turkey. The Turks, on their side, lost no time in approaching the Amirs of Central Arabia. Their scheme, which was that Ibn Rashid should aid in the campaign against Egypt while Ibn Sa'ud opposed the British advance in Mesopotamia, showed that they were as unaware of the feeling toward them which prevailed among the Arabs as they were ignorant of the conditions of the desert, where the network of tribal feud permits no man to withdraw his forces on a distant expedition without fear of attack on his unprotected possessions. Ibn Sa'ud, apparently in order to gain time, took advantage of his abiding enmity with Ibn Rashid and launched into open hostilities against him. In vain Enver Pasha urged him to abandon private quarrels, sent him a gift of money for the expenses of co-operation with the Sultan's armies, and ultimately entrusted Saiyid Talib with the task of bringing about a reconciliation. At this juncture Saiyid Talib was busily engaged in endeavouring, through the intermediation of Shaikh Khaz'al and His Majesty's Consul at Muhammarah, to drive a bargain with the British Government providing for his adherence to us in the event of war with Turkey, but the terms which he put forward were so extravagant as to be impossible of acceptance, and he was still hesitating over Shaikh Khaz'al's advice to him to abate them when the declaration of war left him stranded. Then it was that he saw in his proposed deputation to Najd a providential means of escape from Basrah, where his position had now become highly precarious, and he left hurriedly for Ibn Sa'ud's camp, *via* Zubair. Meanwhile the Wahabi Chief, in response to Turkish exhortation, had pleaded that he could spare no troops for the Iraq till he had reduced Ibn Rashid to his rightful state of vassalage. To the British message he replied that he was unshaken in his long-standing desire for intimate relations with us. But he was not unnaturally reluctant to take open part with us until he was satisfied that our change of front towards himself was likely to be permanent, and in spite of his personal confidence in Captain Shakespear it was with some misgiving that he consented to his visit. The meeting took place on 31st December at Khufsah, near Majma', in Sudair. Ibn Sa'ud spoke with great frankness. Before compromising himself wholly with the Turks he asked that our assurances of support should be embodied in a formal treaty, the terms of which were drafted forthwith. They included a guarantee of complete independence on our part and an undertaking on the part of Ibn Sa'ud that he would have no dealings with other Powers except after reference to the British Government. He informed Captain Shakespear that he had been in communication with the Sharif and with the heads of the northern 'Anazah confederation, and that they were resolved to stand together. He was holding in detention a party of four envoys sent by the Turks to urge him to join Ibn Rashid in a Jihad against us, but after consultation with Captain Shakespear the Turkish mission was dismissed with the reply that Ibn Rashid's forces were camped within two days of Ibn Sa'ud and that there could now be no question of peace between them. On 17th January a messenger arrived from Mecca bearing a letter from the Sharif's son 'Abdullah, who wrote that the Sharif had been called upon to proclaim the Jihad and was temporising till he heard what line Ibn Sa'ud proposed to take. Ibn Sa'ud made answer that he saw no advantage to the Arabs in joining the Ottoman Government and had himself dismissed a Turkish deputation empty-handed.

6. Upon the reports sent by Captain Shakespear from Ibn Sa'ud's camp, Sir Percy Cox was authorised to proceed with the negotiations for the treaty,

'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section' [2v]
(4/10)

4

but on 24th January battle was joined between Ibn Sa'ud and Ibn Rashid, and Captain Shakespear, unarmed and present only as a spectator, met his death. Ibn Sa'ud's version of the disaster was that he was shot dead by a Shammar rifle-bullet, but this statement is in any case based only on second-hand information, as it is undisputed that Captain Shakespear had taken up a position in a different part of the field from that where his host was located. Since then various and divergent accounts of what happened have been recited, one of little more value than another, but the balance of evidence goes to show that he was first wounded in the leg and disabled, and soon afterwards killed in the charge of Ibn Rashid's cavalry, which, overwhelmed the flank on which he was posted. In the *saue qui peut* which ensued it is feared that he was either abandoned or forgotten, but the precise circumstances of his untimely death will probably never be ascertained. Ibn Sa'ud expressed profound regret for the loss of one whom he regarded as a brother, and always refers to him with respect and affection.

7. The action was indecisive: both parties claimed the victory, and both were temporarily crippled and forced to retire. It was an unexpected and a somewhat disconcerting result, for Ibn Sa'ud's preparations had been made on an exceptional scale and his forces were said largely to outnumber those of Ibn Rashid, though he was inferior in cavalry. The accounts given by the Arabs attribute his defeat to the treachery of the 'Ajman. Ibn Sa'ud's personal courage is beyond question, but he not uncommonly falls short as a tactician, and Mubarak of Kuwait pronounced him to be a poor leader in battle. But if he had not dealt Ibn Rashid a crushing blow he had at least put him out of action and prevented him from joining the Turks, as he unquestionably would have done. The intervention of Ibn Rashid in the early part of the Mesopotamian campaign might have added considerably to our difficulties. Nevertheless, Captain Shakespear's death was a heavy price to pay for the advantage of immobilising him.

8. The two Chiefs held apart without further hostilities till the summer, when an agreement dated 10th June was concluded between them. Ibn Rashid recognised Ibn Sa'ud's claims, except that of overlordship, which he could scarcely be expected to acknowledge, and undertook not to play a treacherous game towards the Turkish Government, but to incline towards whichever Government was in alliance with Ibn Sa'ud. He confined his own jurisdiction to Hail and its villages and the Shammar tribes, while Ibn Sa'ud was acknowledged to hold all Najd from Al Khahaf to Dawasir. Al Khahaf is no doubt the Kahafah of Hunter's map, a little north of latitude 27°. In a tribal country the adjustment of frontiers can never be very exact, but it is clear that Ibn Rashid renounced all pretensions to the Qasim, a province whose rich oases had frequently changed hands. It is of interest to note that the tribes reckoned as subject to Ibn Sa'ud are the Mutair, 'Ataibah, Harb, Bani 'Abdullah, 'Ajman, Murrah, Manasir, Bani Hajar, Subai, Sahul, Qantan and Dawasir; but this catalogue must not be taken as exact, for the Mutair are mostly in Kuwait territory, and the 'Ataiban and Harb come for the greater part under the Sharif.

9. After Captain Shakespear's death Ibn Sa'ud sent an immediate request that another officer should be accredited to him, or, failing this, that negotiations should continue through his agent in Basrah, 'Abdul Latif Mandil. No suitable officer was available, but Ibn Sa'ud was advised to sign a preliminary agreement on the lines of Captain Shakespear's draft and leave all details to be settled later. He signed and returned the new draft which had been sent to him, but with some important modifications, concerning which it seemed better to postpone further discussion till a meeting with the Chief Political Officer could be arranged. For the time, therefore, the conclusion of the treaty was suspended, Ibn Sa'ud being wholly engaged with internal affairs. His position at home at this epoch was the reverse of secure. His reputation among the tribes had suffered from the unsuccessful operations against Ibn Rashid, during which he had incurred much loss in material and equipments, and during the greater part of 1915 he was engaged with a dangerous rising in the Hasa on the part of the 'Ajman.

'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section' [3r]
(5/10)

5

He himself believed that the revolt was instigated by the Turks and Ibn Rashid, but it is doubtful whether his view was correct. Mubarak of Kuwait was convinced that there was no evidence to support it, but Mubarak, during the last few years of his reign, was not a lenient critic of Ibn Sa'ud's difficulties.

10. His opinion is so far borne out that the troubles with the 'Ajman seem to have begun with the occupation of the Hasa by the Amir in 1913. Up to that time the tribe had been on good terms with him and had generally recognised him as suzerain, but the extension of his direct authority to the Hasa, which is their headquarters, had strained their allegiance. He attempted to impose a poll tax upon them and stopped them from taking dues from caravans passing through the country, a toll which they had been accustomed to exact in the days of the Turks. The discontent of the 'Ajman was fanned by members of Ibn Sa'ud's family who had long been at enmity with him—the 'Araif, grandsons of his uncle Sa'ud. Two of the 'Araif cousins, Fahad Ibn Sa'ud and Salman Ibn Muhammad, had taken refuge with the Shaikh of Bahrein. The Shaikh made a half-hearted attempt to patch up a reconciliation in 1914, but the 'Araif refused his mediation and sought the protection of the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi, from whom they received some countenance when hostilities were renewed with Ibn Sa'ud in 1915. The rebellion now assumed serious proportions. Ibn Sa'ud sent for more troops from Riyadh and asked help from Kuwait, but before the arrival of either reinforcement he attacked the 'Ajman by night near Hofuf and met with a reverse, due partly to the cowardice of the Hofuf town levies. His brother Sa'ud was killed and he himself wounded. For a time his fortunes were at a very low ebb. He was in want of money and arms, and for all practical purposes was besieged in Hofuf. Ibn Rashid, oblivious of the agreement recently signed, seized the opportunity to raid the Qasim, but his advance was easily stopped, and the arrival of a force from Kuwait under the Shaikh's son, Salim, turned the balance in the Hasa. The 'Ajman were routed in September, harried on their retreat northwards by the Bani Khalid, and forced to take refuge in Kuwait territory, where they remained until Shaikh Mubarak's death in December. Fahad Ibn Sa'ud was killed in the retreat: Salman made his peace with Ibn Sa'ud at the end of the year. During the struggle we had facilitated the despatch of ammunition to Ibn Sa'ud from Bahrein, and done what we could to restrain Abu Dhabi. In October we presented Ibn Sa'ud with 1,000 rifles, and gave him a loan of 20,000. The Turks had not yet abandoned all hope of winning him over, and in July, previous to Ibn Rashid's raid, a Turkish emissary, Salih al Sharif al Hasni, communicated with him and proposed a meeting; but his request was refused, and on 26th December Ibn Sa'ud met Sir Percy Cox at Qatif, and the long-delayed treaty was completed and signed. Subject to certain safeguards, it provided Ibn Sa'ud with a dynastic guarantee in the dominions now in his possession, and promised him the support of Great Britain in case of unprovoked aggression from foreign Powers. On his side, Ibn Sa'ud engaged to hold no correspondence with any foreign Power, and to grant no concessions to foreigners; to keep open the roads to the Holy Places, and to commit no aggressive act on other Shaikhs under our protection.

11. Ibn Sa'ud was unaware of the exceedingly confidential correspondence which we had been carrying on with the Sharif during the winter of 1915-16, but the results to which it led could not leave him indifferent. Relations between the Hijaz and Najd had been dictated by conflicting sentiments. The Sharif had even more reason than Ibn Sa'ud to fear the Turks, but he was jealous of Ibn Sa'ud's position as an Arab Chief, and the feeling was reciprocated in Riyadh. The fluctuating allegiance of the tribes is a rich source of discord in Arabia, and the absence of any defined frontiers enhances the uncertainty of claims and obligations. In 1910 the Sharif 'Abdullah, asserting that he acted on behalf of the Ottoman Government, marched to the borders of the Qasim for the purpose of reasserting an authority which was probably a thing of the past and must at the best have been shadowy. The tangible results of the raid do not seem to have been

S 1

B

'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section' [3v]
(6/10)

6

more than a re-insistence on the Sharif's suzerainty over the distant sections of the 'Ataibah, a tribe which had once been under Ibn Sa'ud, but had largely seceded to the Sharif. A small tribute to Mecca from the Qasim villages was stipulated for by Abdullah before his withdrawal, but it is unlikely that it was ever paid. From 1913 the Sharif showed strong anti-Turkish proclivities, and before the outbreak of war he and Ibn Sa'ud drew together. They were in correspondence when Captain Shakespear paid his first visit to Riyadh in the spring of 1914. In January 1915 they were acting in concert, and Ibn Sa'ud told Captain Shakespear that in his view the Khalifate would revert to the family of the Prophet, of which the Sharif was the representative, if it dropped from the hand of the Sultan of Turkey. In November 1915 'Abdullah reappeared in Najd, with what object is not very clear. His own explanation was that he was sent on a mission to Ibn Sa'ud, with the further purpose of collecting dues in the Qasim and Sudair. Except for a doubtful suzerainty over wandering sections of the 'Ataibah, the Sharif does not seem in Beduin estimation to have rights in either province, his limits eastwards being somewhere between Long. 44° and Long. 45°, at Sha'arah, Duwadmi, Jabal Dhurai and Jabal al Nir. 'Abdullah is not reported to have advanced much beyond Sha'arah; he collected dues from the 'Ataibah, subdued the small allied section of the Buraih (by origin Mutair) and returned to the Hijaz; but Ibn Sa'ud, barely emerged from a perilous contest in the Hasa, not unreasonably regarded the expedition as inopportune and even suspicious. (These sentiments were reflected in his conversations with Sir Percy Cox in December. He reminded the Chief Political Officer that the Wahabis recognised no Khalif after the first four, and was careful to add that if the Sharif should assume the title it would make no difference to his status among other ruling Chiefs.) In June of the following year the Sharif rose in open rebellion against the Turks and declared the independence of the Arabs. Ibn Sa'ud, writing in July to the Chief Political Officer, acknowledged the receipt from him of official news with regard to the Hijaz, expressed his satisfaction at the discomfiture of the Turks, but put forward his own apprehensions that the Sharif might proceed to claim authority over parts of Najd, and in support of this fear observed that in declaring the independence of "the Arabs" the Sharif appeared to treat them as a compendious whole, an attitude which he regarded with anxiety.

12. In August he wrote again, saying that he had now received a letter from the Sharif in which the latter announced the occupation of Mecca and asked him for his help. Ibn Sa'ud gave a summary of his reply, and a copy of the original letter has since been received. He assured the Sharif that he would render all assistance which was in his power, but asked for a written undertaking that the Sharif would abstain from trespassing in his territory or interfering with his subjects. Ibn Sa'ud went on to ask Sir Percy Cox whether his relations with the Sharif might be regarded as a matter which affected the two chiefs alone, or whether they touched on our interests, in which case he would be guided by our wishes. According to Arab reports received at Kuwait the Sharif wrote three times to Ibn Sa'ud asking for aid, and on two occasions sent him 2,000*l*. Not improbably there is some truth in the rumoured remittance of small sums.

13. The Sharif's answer, dated 5th September, to Ibn Sa'ud's letter was, to say the least of it, unconciliatory, and aroused his lively indignation. His letter and the draft undertaking which had been sent with it for the Sharif's acceptance were sent back with the observation that Ibn Sa'ud's request could emanate only from a man bereft of reason. About the same time Ibn Sa'ud received a letter from 'Ali Haidar acquainting him with his appointment as Sharif in place of Husain by the Ottoman Government, and calling on him to join the Jihad; but in his reply Ibn Sa'ud expressed the resentment felt by the Arabs towards him and towards the Turks.

14. The Chief Political Officer dealt at length with the Hijaz question in a letter to Ibn Sa'ud dated 19th October. He pointed out how important it was to the Arab cause, which it was the policy of the British Government to support, that all the great Arab Chiefs should work together and in

'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section' [4r]
(7/10)

7

co-operation with us in the common task of expelling the Turks from Arabia. As to Ibn Sa'ud's own position, he need have no misgivings, for he had been acknowledged by us to be an independent ruler, and the Sharif must recognise the full import of the treaty. The British Government had no reason to believe that he entertained any hostile intentions against the tribes and territories of Najd.

15. In the negotiation over the treaty in December 1915, Sir Percy Cox had discussed with Ibn Sa'ud the possibility of his giving us assistance against Ibn Rashid. The Hakim of Najd then thought that Ibn Rashid would either come in or maintain a strict neutrality; if, however, he showed himself actively hostile, Ibn Sa'ud would attack him and incite the northern 'Anazah against him. This intention, however, he failed to carry out. During the spring and summer of 1916 he was occupied with a rebellion of the Murrah, following on, and perhaps connected with, that of the 'Ajman, which endangered his communications with the Hasa. Though a large proportion of the fighting men of the Shammar had gone north with Ibn Rashid against the 'Iraq, no effective attack was made on Hail in their absence. In late June or early July, Ibn Sa'ud's son, Turki, raided Jabal Shammar, and the news may have hastened Ibn Rashid's retreat from our frontiers. In September or October Turki renewed hostilities against some of the Shammar Shaikhs and an allied section of the Harb, but the affair resulted only in the capture of a small amount of booty, and Ibn Sa'ud's doctor, passing through Bahrein, brought a message to the effect that the Amir could do nothing against the Shammar as long as the fugitive 'Ajman remained on his flank. The true reason for his inactivity was no doubt his own insecurity at home, but the implacable hostility which he entertained toward the 'Ajman, whom he regarded not only as rebels, but as the murderers of his brother Sa'ud, threatened to become a problem of some difficulty.

16. When Shaikh Mubarak died in December 1915, Ibn Sa'ud pressed his son and successor in Kuwait, Jabir, to drive out the 'Ajman Shaikhs. Jabir made a temperate reply. He was unwilling to eject the 'Ajman, fearing that they would be thrown into the enemy camp; but he could not hold out against Ibn Sa'ud's insistence without creating an open breach, and he expelled the tribe in February 1916. As he anticipated, they turned for protection first to 'Ajaimi and then to Ibn Rashid, but in May they asked and obtained permission from the Shaikh of Zubair to settle quietly near Safwan, and subsequently several of the leading Shaikhs made submission to us. When Ibn Rashid returned to Hail only two of the 'Ajman Shaikhs remained with 'Ajaimi and they had little or no following. Ibn Sa'ud's ardent desire to direct his energies upon the extermination of this tribe was not one with which we had any sympathy, at all events at the present juncture.

17. Shaikh Jabir, new to his office, could not hope to exercise the influence over Ibn Sa'ud which had been possessed by that practised and weighty diplomatist, his father; moreover, for some years before Mubarak's death, relations between Riyadh and Kuwait had been growing cooler. Ibn Sa'ud bitterly resented Mubarak's attitude during the negotiations between himself and the Ottoman Government in the spring of 1914. According to his account, the Shaikh had at first counselled him to accept the Turkish offers; but when he reached Kuwait in April, Mubarak changed his note without explanation and advised Ibn Sa'ud not to come to terms with the Turks, refusing at the same time to be present at his meeting with the delegates. So indignant was the Amir that he expressly stipulated with Captain Shakespear that Mubarak should not be consulted in the negotiations with ourselves. The asylum given to the 'Ajman was another grievance, and in 1916 Ibn Sa'ud complained of the incidence of the transit dues which had been, from time immemorial, levied in Kuwait.

18. While Ibn Sa'ud's anxiety as to the ambitions of the Sharif and his growing estrangement with Kuwait showed that the chiefs allied with ourselves had not reached a satisfactory understanding with each other,

S 1

C

'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section' [4v]
(8/10)

8

there was evidence that the Turks were still active in Arabia. News was received from Ibn Sa'ud and from other sources of the despatch of an agent (Muhammad Taufiq ibn Fara'un of Damascus) for the purpose of buying camels for the Ottoman Government; the emissary was well chosen, for he was a personal friend of Ibn Sa'ud and had visited Najd on the same business the previous year. But on this occasion the Amir was pressed by us to prevent him from obtaining camels; he accordingly arrested Ibn Fara'un, confiscated 700 camels which had been purchased in the interior, and sent them to Kuwait. Various reports, some of which came from Ibn Sa'ud, indicated that another attempt to stir up Ibn Rashid against us was in the wind. Rushaid Ibn Lailah, Ibn Rashid's representative at Constantinople, joined him at Hail, with a few German and Turkish officers, a small body of Turkish soldiers, and some guns; accounts varied as to the exact composition of the mission, but its presence in Hail in some form seemed fairly certain. Ibn Sa'ud had written in September that he would be glad of a personal interview with the Chief Political Officer to discuss the question of co-operation with the Sharif or offensive action against Ibn Rashid. In October he repeated the request urgently, and on all grounds it seemed advisable to accede to it. Sir Percy Cox met him at Ojair on 11th November. Ibn Sa'ud explained to him his position in detail. He had lost considerably in men and material in the fight with Ibn Rashid in January 1915. Since then he had been almost continuously in the field, first against the 'Ajman and then against the Murrâh. Most of the normal trade of Najd was with Syria, and the tribes were accustomed to sell their camels to Damascene dealers; the strict blockade imposed by Ibn Sa'ud—the seizure of Ibn Fara'un's camels bore witness to its reality—grew more and more galling; the Najdis grumbled, the tribes were restless, all asked wherein lay the advantage to themselves of their Chief's attitude, and it was increasingly difficult for him to keep them in hand. With regard to the Sharif, Sir Percy Cox was able to give Ibn Sa'ud the fullest reassurance. Our treaty with the Amir had been communicated to Mecca, and when the Sharif announced to us his intention of proclaiming himself King of the Arabs on 5th November, we had insisted on a formal admission that he claimed no jurisdiction over independent rulers. The news of the coronation at Mecca had not yet reached Central Arabia, and was not discussed. During conversation with the Chief Political Officer at Basrah, Ibn Sa'ud made a passing remark about the Sharif's calling himself "Sultan," but his mind seemed to be set completely at rest on hearing that his rights were safeguarded by us, and that the Sharif had explicitly denied any design on the independence of himself or his compeers.

19. Ibn Sa'ud having expressed to the Chief Political Officer at their meeting at Ojair his inclination to pay a brief visit to Shaikh Jabir of Kuwait before returning home, the project was cordially encouraged as appearing eminently expedient, and Sir Percy Cox recommended that he should be presented with the K.C.I.E. at a Majlis which was to be held at Kuwait where the Shaikh was to be invested with the C.S.I. When he intimated to Ibn Sa'ud that this honour was to be accorded to him, the Chief Political Officer was authorised to inform at the same time that his rights had been carefully reserved in all dealings which the British Government had held with the Sharif, and Ibn Sa'ud in his reply said that he was entirely satisfied on this point.

20. The Majlis took place on 20th November. The Shaikh of Muhammarah had come to Kuwait for the occasion, and many Beduin were present, including the friendly headmen of the Shammar Aslam and Dhafir, and Shaikhs of the Mutair. The Chief Political Officer, in presenting the decorations, alluded to our satisfaction in feeling that the great Arab chiefs were bent with us upon a common purpose. The Shaikh of Muhammarah followed him with words which were warmly pro-British, and Ibn Sa'ud struck the keynote of the meeting in a speech which was as spontaneous as it was unexpected. He said that the Turks had placed themselves outside

'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section' [5r]
(9/10)

9

the pale of Islam by the iniquities which they had committed on other Moslems. He contrasted their policy with that of Great Britain, pointing out that the Turks had sought to weaken the Arabs by fomenting their differences, whereas the British Government encouraged them to unite in their own interest. He praised the action of the Sharif, and urged the obligation of all true Arabs to co-operate with him in forwarding the Arab cause. When he had brought his speech to an eloquent close, the three chiefs, Kuwait, Muhammarah, and Ibn Sa'ud, swore together that they would work with us for the achievement of a common end.

21. This scene made a deep impression on the local notables and on the Beduin Shaikhs present, who will, no doubt, carry the tale far and wide. During the receptions at Kuwait, Ibn Sa'ud showed in all his utterances how clearly he had grasped the principle which guides our relations with Arabia. He quoted as an example of our benevolent policy towards the Arab cause the fact that we were ready even to promote a reconciliation between himself and Ibn Rashid if the latter would abandon his attitude of hostility. The arrival of Ibn Fara'ud's 700 fine camels, each branded with the *wasm* of that well-known dealer, gave a dramatic completeness to the Kuwait gathering.

22. From Kuwait Ibn Sa'ud went to Muhammarah as the guest of Shaikh Khaz'al, who co-operated most heartily in the endeavour to make Ibn Sa'ud's visit profitable to him. The two chiefs arrived at Basrah on the evening of 26th November. Early next morning the Chief Political Officer, accompanied by the two chief military representatives of the Army Commander present in Basrah, went on board the Shaikh's launch and presented Ibn Sa'ud with a sword of honour and a message of welcome from the Army Commander. The day was spent in exhibiting to him the base camps and organisation and the latest machinery of warfare, including the aircraft, in which he took an eager interest. Dhari ibn Twalah and Humud al Suwait, Shaikhs of the Shammar Aslam and the Dhafir, were present, while Shaikh Ibrahim of Zubair and several Sunni notables of Basrah and refugees from Baghdad had an audience with Ibn Sa'ud on the launch.

23. The Kuwait Durbar and Ibn Sa'ud's visit to Basrah have placed us in a singularly strong position. Three powerful chiefs have made public protestation of their friendship with each other and their confidence in the British Government. A telegram received from the Sharif, congratulating them upon their zeal in the Arab cause and regretting that he had not had time to send a representative to Kuwait, confirmed the identity of his aims with their own, and in a further message he apologised for any deficiencies in his previous letters, on the ground that while he was in the throes of war he might unintentionally fall short as a correspondent. The dream of Arab unity which engaged the imagination of the Liberals of Damascus during the year before the war has been brought nearer fulfilment than dreams are wont to come, but the rôle of presiding genius has been recast. Instead of the brilliant, unscrupulous Saiyid Talib, gyrating in the blast of his own ambition, the Chiefs of Eastern and Western Arabia have united at the instance of the British Government.

24. Besides this knitting together of Arab leaders, the meeting at Kuwait has produced certain immediate results. In the first place the extent and nature of Ibn Sa'ud's share in future hostilities with Ibn Rashid, if such should occur, were agreed upon. He undertook to maintain 4,000 men under arms; if Ibn Rashid moved in force towards the Iraq, he would move up parallel with him towards Zubair and join the friendly tribes and a contingent from Kuwait. He informed the friendly Shaikhs that he would support them if Ibn Rashid threatened to attack them in strength. If, however, Ibn Rashid should remain at Hail, Ibn Sa'ud would harass and attack him as opportunity offered, using the Qasim as a base. In view of the strain upon his resources during the last two years, he has been given 3,000 rifles with ammunition, as well as four machine-guns, and granted a monthly subsidy of 5,000*l.* to cover the expenses he will incur in maintaining

'Relations with Ibn Sa'ud: note prepared by Arab Bureau, Irak Section' [5v]
(10/10)

10

his men in the field. Active co-operation with the Sharif was not considered practicable, but Ibn Sa'ud was ready to send one of his sons with some 40 men to Mecca as a sign of goodwill, if the Sharif would make a special request for them.

25. Secondly, a letter was written by Ibn Sa'ud, in the name of the three chiefs, to 'Ajaimi, Ibn Sa'ud urging upon him the harm which he was doing to the Arab cause by his present attitude, inviting him to enter into communication with them and promising him friendly consideration and an opportunity for honourable submission.

26. Finally, with the co-operation of Shaikh Jabir of Kuwait and the diplomatic skill of the Shaikh of Muhammarah, who was throughout of the highest service to the Chief Political Officer, the delicate problem raised by the presence of the 'Ajman among the friendly tribes reached a satisfactory solution. For the period of the war a truce between Ibn Sa'ud and the 'Ajman was agreed upon and instructions were drafted defining the position of the fugitive Shaikhs with respect to all tribes under our protection. On his return to Basrah Sir Percy Cox called in the 'Ajman leaders. They had been profoundly disquieted by the advent of Ibn Sa'ud, thinking that it augured ill for themselves, but the principal and more courageous headmen met the Chief Political Officer at Zubair and accepted the proposed terms, in return for which they were promised a monthly allowance similar to that received by the other friendly Shaikhs of the Shamiyah. They evinced little doubt that the remaining headmen of the 'Ajman, including the two who were still with 'Ajaimi, would come in as soon as they heard of the happy issue of their own venture.

27. Letters have been written to Fahad Beg Ibn Hadhdhal informing him of the Kuwait meeting and inviting him to join the league of Arab Chiefs in expelling the Turks. These have been sent through a man from Fahad Beg's tents who was in Basrah at the time of Ibn Sa'ud's visit and went to see him at Muhammarah, where he received advice and instructions from Shaikh Khaz'al in full measure. He was entrusted also with letters from the Sharif which have been waiting opportunity of despatch to Fahad Beg, Hachim al Muhaid, 'Ali Sulaiman of the Dulaim and others, and with presents in money to guide Fahad Beg's decision and to encourage the amicable disposition of the Shaikh of the Dahamshah, Jaza' ibn Mijlad. Communications of the same nature are on their way to 'Atiyah al Qulal of Hajaf and Muhammad 'Ali Kamunah of Karbala.

Basra,
12th January 1917.