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## 'Middle East Committee. Note Prepared for Meeting of 12 January 1918. Policy in regard to Bin Saud'

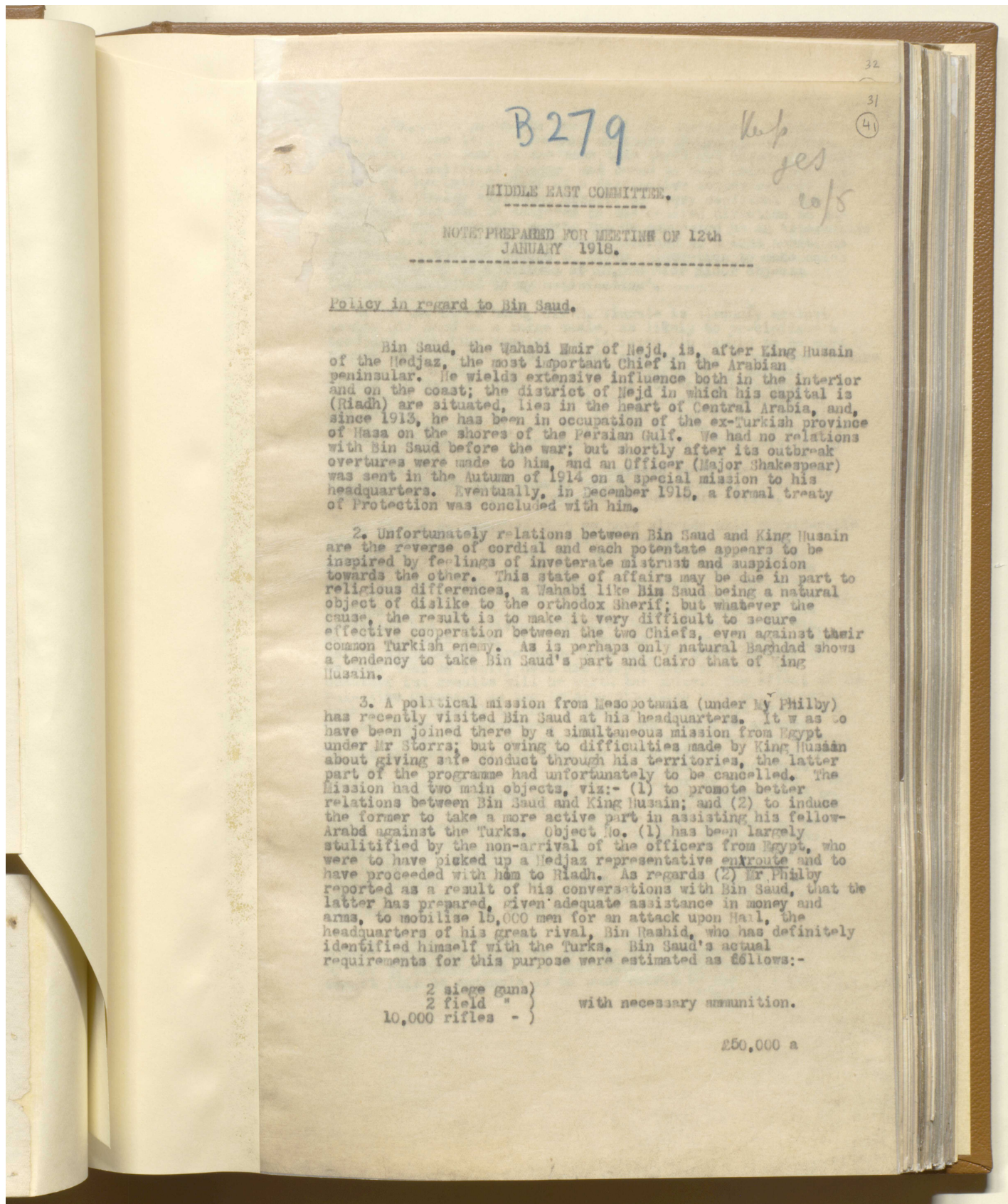
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### About this record

This printed memorandum is a note, dated 10 January 1918, prepared by John Evelyn Shuckburgh, Political Department of the India Office, for a meeting of the Middle East Committee on 12 January 1918, concerning British policy towards Bin Saud [ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin Fayṣal Āl Saʿūd (Ibn Saud)], the Emir of Nejd [Amir of Najd]. The note includes an overview of Ibn Saud's importance and status in the Arabian Peninsula vis-à-vis British policy and other Arabian leaders, including King Husain [Ḥusayn bin ʿAlī al-Hāshimī] of the Hedjaz [al-Ḥijāz,] and Bin Rashid [Ibn Rashīd]; Harry St John Bridger Philby's mission to Ibn Saud at Riyadh [Riyadh]; arms, ammunition and monetary allowances given to Ibn Saud; and the opinion of Sir Reginald Wingate against arming Ibn Saud.

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MIDDLE EAST COMMITTEE.

NOTE PREPARED FOR MEETING OF 12th  
JANUARY 1918.

Policy in regard to Bin Saud.

Bin Saud, the Wahabi Emir of Nejd, is, after King Husain of the Hedjaz, the most important Chief in the Arabian peninsular. He wields extensive influence both in the interior and on the coast; the district of Nejd in which his capital is (Riadh) are situated, lies in the heart of Central Arabia, and, since 1913, he has been in occupation of the ex-Turkish province of Hama 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 on a special mission to his headquarters. Eventually, in December 1915, a formal treaty of Protection was concluded with him.

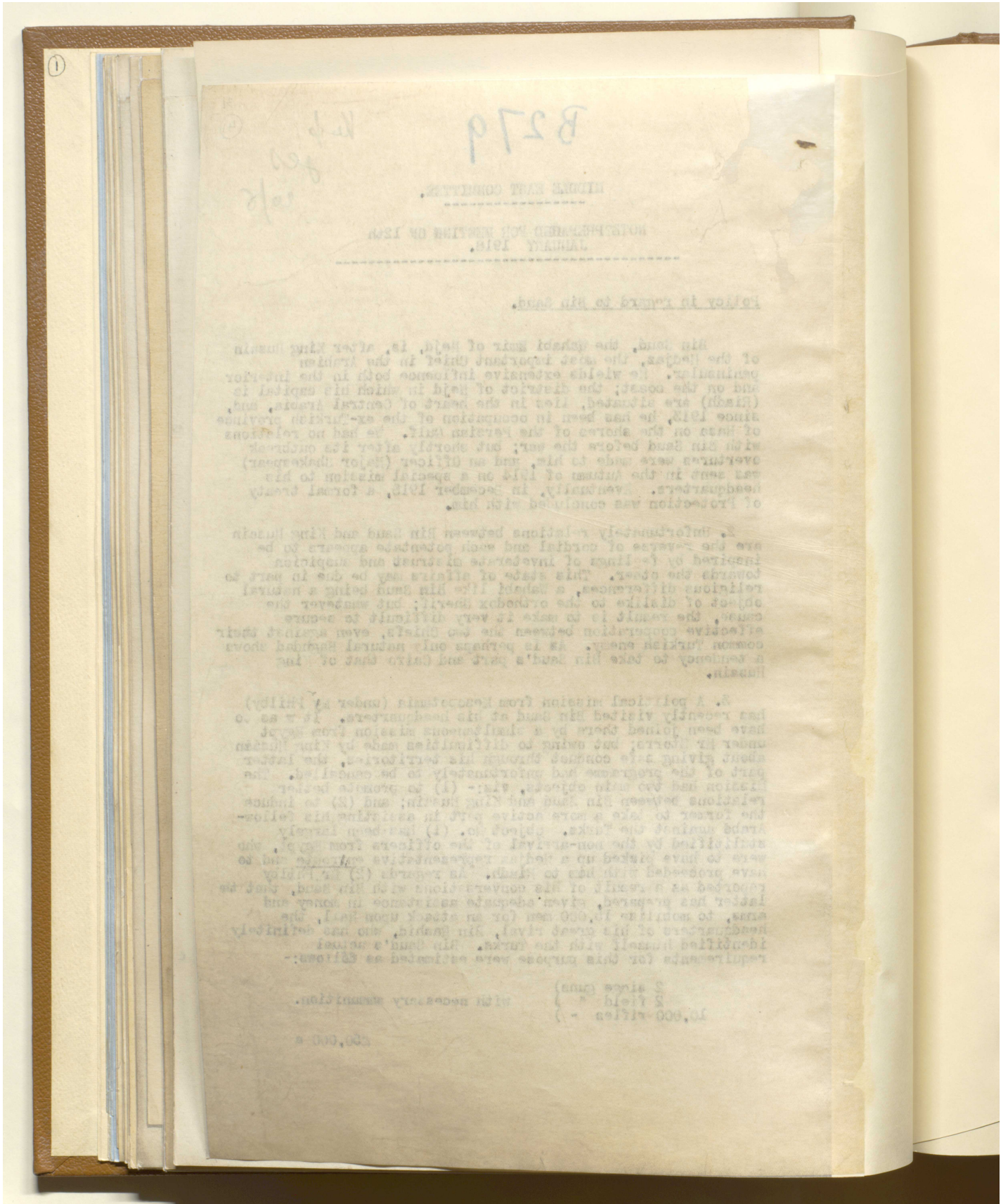
2. Unfortunately relations between Bin Saud and King Husain are the reverse of cordial and each potentate appears to be inspired by feelings of inveterate mistrust and suspicion towards the other. This state of affairs may be due in part to religious differences, a Wahabi like Bin Saud being a natural object of dislike to the orthodox Sherif; but whatever the cause, the result is to make it very difficult to secure effective cooperation between the two Chiefs, even against their common Turkish enemy. As is perhaps only natural Baghdad shows a tendency to take Bin Saud's part and Cairo that of King Husain.

3. A political mission from Mesopotamia (under Mr Philby) has recently visited Bin Saud at his headquarters. It was to 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 stultified by the non-arrival of the officers from Egypt, who were to have picked up a Hedjaz representative enroute and to have proceeded with him to Riadh. 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 Hail, the headquarters of his great rival, Bin Rashid, who has definitely identified himself with the Turks. Bin Saud's actual requirements for this purpose were estimated as follows:-

2 siege guns)	} with necessary ammunition.
2 field " )	
10,000 rifles - )	

£50,000 a

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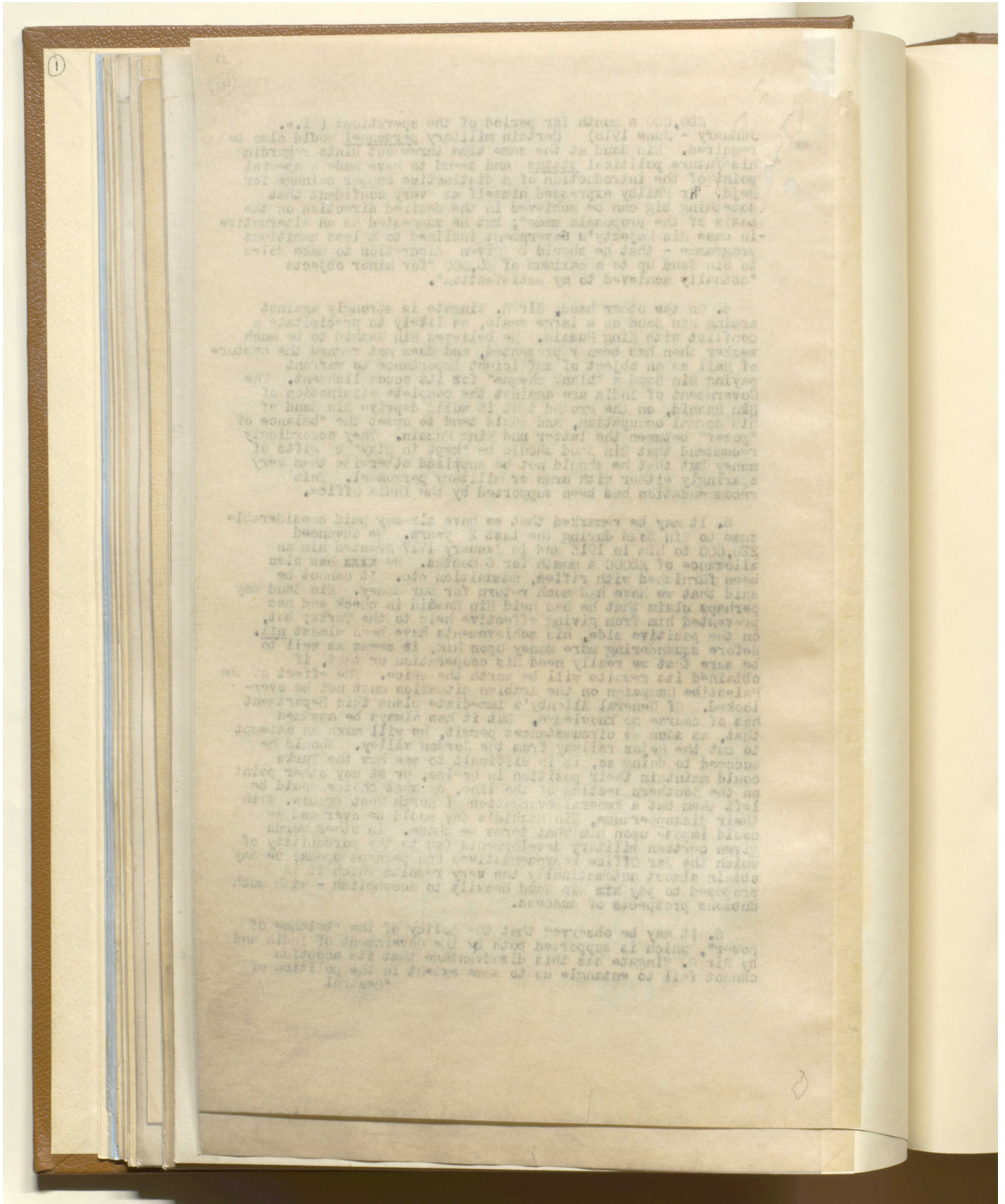
£50,000 a month for period of the operations (i.e. January - June 1918). Certain military personnel would also be required. Bin Saud at the same time threw out hints regarding his future political status and seemed to have made a special point of the introduction of a distinctive copper coinage for Hejaz. Mr Philby expressed himself as "very confident that something 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 £5,000 "for minor objects actually achieved to my satisfaction".

4. 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 Hussein. He believes Bin Rashid to be much weaker than has been represented, and does not regard the capture of Hail 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 Hussein. 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 either with arms or military personnel. This recommendation has been supported by the India Office.

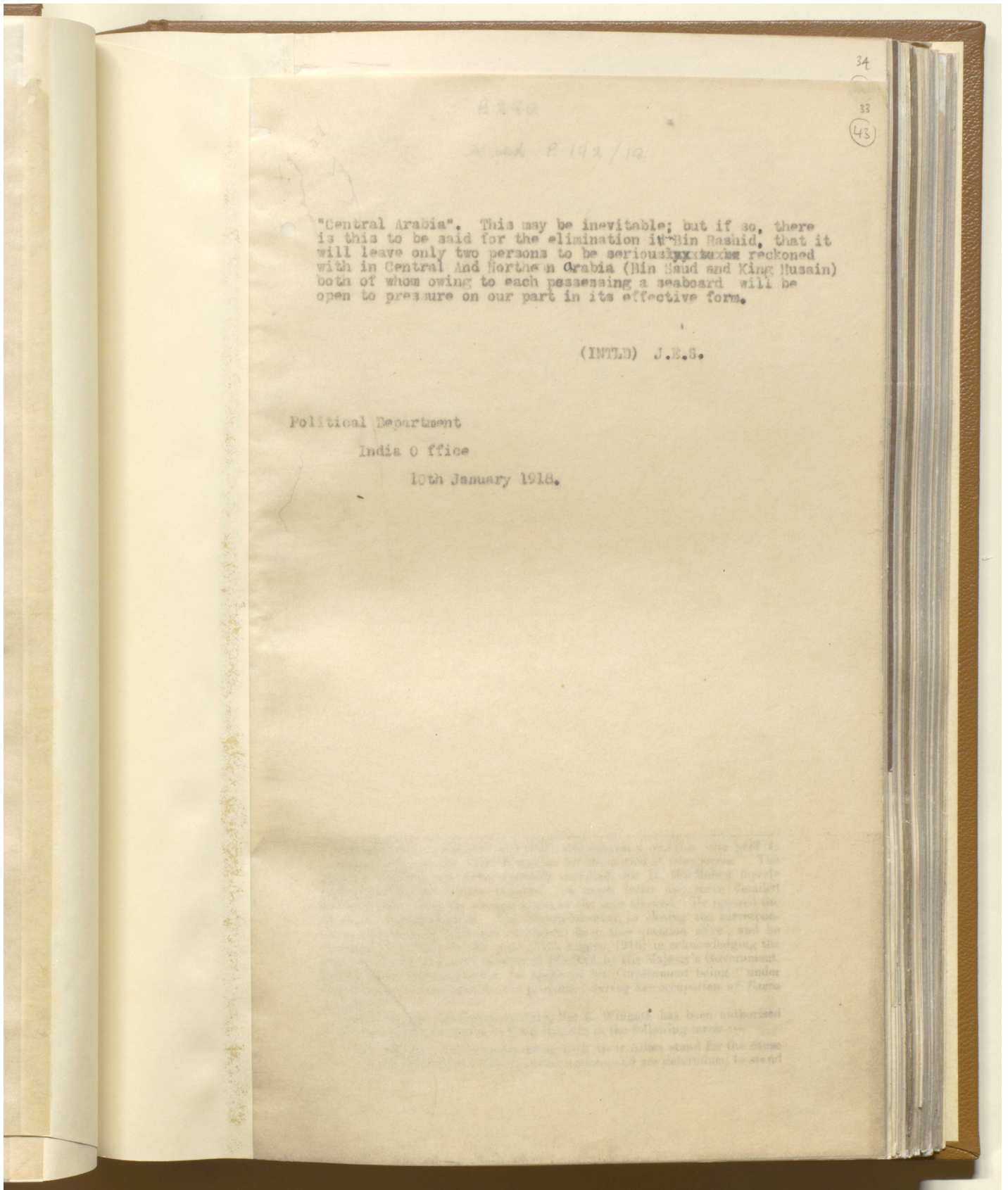
5. It may be remarked that we have already paid considerable sums to Bin Saud during the last 2 years. We advanced £20,000 to him in 1915 and in January 1917 granted him an allowance of £5000 a month for 6 months. He has also been furnished with rifles, ammunition etc. It cannot be said that we have had much return for our money. Bin Saud may perhaps claim that he has held Bin Rashid in check and has 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 need 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 and we could impose upon him what terms we chose. In other words given certain military developments (as to the probability of which the War Office representatives can perhaps speak) we may obtain almost automatically the very results which it is proposed to pay him 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 to entangle us to some extent in the political "Central

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"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.

(INTLD) J.E.S.

Political Department

India Office

10th January 1918.

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