



This PDF was generated on 18/01/2022 from online resources of  
the **Qatar Digital Library**

The online record can be viewed at:

[http://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc\\_100000000833.0x0002b4](http://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100000000833.0x0002b4)

It contains extra information, high resolution zoomable views and transcriptions.

### 'Administration of Mesopotamia'

<b>Holding Institution</b>	British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers
<b>Reference</b>	IOR/L/PS/18/B290
<b>Date(s)</b>	Oct 1918 (CE, Gregorian)
<b>Written in</b>	English in Latin
<b>Extent and Format</b>	2 folios
<b>Copyright for document</b>	<a href="#">Open Government Licence</a>



#### About this record

This memorandum is a note by John Evelyn Shuckburgh, Political Department of the India Office, dated 21 Oct 1918, concerning the British administration of Mesopotamia, the status of the vilayets of Basra and Baghdad, and the establishment of a commission from London to research administrative problems and future arrangements.

'Administration of Mesopotamia' [95r] (1/4)

B290

85  
29. (95)

Administration of Mesopotamia.

(Baghdad Telegrams Nos. 7725, 8031, and 8075, dated 15th, 25th and 27th September 1918; Viceroy's Telegram of 6th October 1918.)

NOTE BY POLITICAL DEPARTMENT, INDIA OFFICE.

1. The Secretary of State's telegram of the 29th March 1917, which was framed under the directions of a Committee of the War Cabinet shortly after the British occupation of Baghdad, laid down in some detail the principles which His Majesty's Government, as then advised, proposed to apply to the future administration of the occupied territory. The following clear differentiation was made between the status of the Basra Vilayet and that of the Baghdad Vilayet :—

- (1) Basra was "to remain permanently under British administration," its western and northern limits being specifically defined.
- (2) Baghdad was to be "an Arab State with a local ruler or Government under British protectorate in everything but name." Behind its "Arab façade" the vilayet was to be "administered as an Arab province by "indigenous agency and in accordance with existing laws and institutions "as far as possible"; and stress was laid on the importance of making all administrative arrangements introduced into the vilayet conform strictly from the very outset with the principles enunciated by His Majesty's Government.

2. In other words, our original policy was (1) to annex Basra, and (2) to set up in Baghdad an Arab State under British protection and supervision. The importance of differentiating between the two vilayets was again emphasised by the Secretary of State on the 10th May 1917, when, in a telegram replying to the criticisms of Sir P. Cox and the Government of India on the proposals of His Majesty's Government, he laid it down that "nothing that can be avoided should be done during military occupation that would prejudice subsequent introduction of above-mentioned "principles, and in particular establishment of separate administrative systems for "Basra and Baghdad." This policy held the field for a considerable time; and, though it is understood that the annexation of Basra is no longer regarded as a practicable measure, the principle of differentiation between the two vilayets has never been formally abandoned.

3. It was originally proposed, at Sir P. Cox's suggestion, that a Commission from England should visit Mesopotamia during the cold weather of 1917-18 to examine the whole administrative problem on the spot, and submit detailed recommendations for the approval of His Majesty's Government. Owing to circumstances connected with the then military situation it was not found practicable to carry this project into execution, and it has remained in abeyance ever since, until revived by Captain Wilson in his telegram of the 27th September 1918. In the early part of the present year Sir P. Cox was summoned to England to discuss the whole question of the future of Mesopotamia with His Majesty's Government. While in England Sir P. Cox embodied his views and recommendations in a memorandum which was submitted to the Eastern Committee, and which, after personal discussion with the writer, received their full approval. This document, which has been forwarded to the Government of India by formal despatch for the information and guidance of the political authorities at Baghdad, may presumably be regarded as the authorised statement of the Mesopotamian policy of His Majesty's Government.

4. Sir P. Cox started with the assumption that "if at the end of the war we find "ourselves in a sufficiently strong position, and in effective administrative control, "we should still hope to annex the Basra Vilayet and exercise a veiled protectorate "over the Baghdad Vilayet." In a subsequent paragraph he wrote :—

"Alluding for the moment to the question of relative status as between the Basra and Baghdad Vilayets respectively, it is my very definite opinion that



'Administration of Mesopotamia' [95v] (2/4)

2

a homogeneous administration in all practical aspects is not in any way incompatible with a technical difference of political status, and that it is essential in the interests of the country that the administration of both vilayets should be uniform, that of the Basra Vilayet being brought into line with Basra in due course."

5. In view of the above passage, Captain Wilson seems to be justified in claiming (telegram No. 7725 of 15th September) that his decision to combine the administration of the two vilayets under a single headquarters office at Baghdad is "in conformity with the general instructions given by the Eastern Committee" to Sir P. Cox, provided it is understood that, where differences of system exist, Basra methods must be assimilated to those of Baghdad, and not *vice versa*. There is force in the Civil Commissioner's contention that the "maintenance of an artificial distinction, *where in reality none exists*," would necessarily involve some lack of co-ordination." That the distinction is a purely artificial one was pointed out by Sir P. Cox as long ago as the 7th April 1917. He then telegraphed:—

"I feel convinced . . . that no attempt to differentiate fundamentally in regard to working principles and details of the two administrations will produce satisfactory results, and that they should be so similar as to be indistinguishable in the working. The difference would be one of technical political status and nomenclature which need not make itself felt on the spot. To attempt to run the two vilayets, *which are from every point of view inseparable*, on conflicting lines and inconsistent principles would, I am sure, result in great prejudice to all interests concerned."

Up to a comparatively recent period there was this practical point of difference between the two vilayets, that Baghdad was still a war area, whereas Basra was being administered under what were, to all intents and purposes, peace conditions. To-day, as Captain Wilson intimates, this distinction has largely disappeared; and recent events have rendered its reappearance in the highest degree improbable. There remains the question of the post-war settlement. Will the ultimate differentiation of status between the two vilayets—supposing this forms part of the settlement—be prejudiced by uniform administration during the period of military occupation? In 1917 it was feared that this might be the case. But Sir P. Cox, speaking from more than a year's experience of the actual administration of the two vilayets, is evidently of opinion that the fear was groundless. His views having been generally adopted by His Majesty's Government, we need not cavil at the steps taken, primarily on grounds of administrative convenience, to carry them into effect.

6. Captain Wilson has revived the question of a *Commission from England* at what seems to the Department a rather opportune moment. Last year the proposal was dropped because of the likelihood, as it then appeared, that serious military operations would take place during the winter season. No such likelihood exists now. Moreover, the prospect of peace discussions has been brought within measurable distance by the events of the last few weeks. We may find ourselves, much sooner than we expected, called upon to argue and justify our Mesopotamian case. We shall plainly be in a position to do so with much greater effect if we have a considered and coherent policy to place before the world. It is true that the Government of India (who have criticised adversely several of Captain Wilson's recent recommendations) regard the proposal as "altogether premature," and consider that "no useful purpose would be served by the despatch of a Commission at the present stage." But their criticism appears to be directed rather against the choice of subjects for investigation by the Commission than against the principle of the Commission itself. What seems to be required is, not to tie down the Commission to particular lines of enquiry, but to give them a free hand to examine and report, in consultation with the local authorities, on the wider aspects of administrative policy in the occupied territories. We want to form a clearer idea in our own minds as to the main lines on which we are to proceed. The lack of a clear-cut programme will not only hamper us at the Peace Conference; it is already hampering us in regard to a number of practical questions that arise from day to day. To take a few examples: proposals were recently submitted for the improvement of banking facilities in Mesopotamia; the British Trade Corporation has raised the question of sending out an unofficial

<sup>1</sup> The text of the telegram is rather corrupt in this passage, but the sense appears to be as given here.



s is not in any way status, and that it is administration of both being brought into line

e justified in claiming ine the administration had is "in conformity ttee" to Sir P. Cox, Basra methods must is force in the Civil cial distinction, where co-ordination." That Cox as long ago as

ate fundamentally in o administrations will e so similar as to be ld be one of technical ake itself felt on the e from every point of ent principles would, erved."

al point of difference a, whereas Basra was ses, peace conditions. largely disappeared; the highest degree settlement. Will the supposing this formation during the period ight be the case. But actual administration groundless. His views e need not cavil at the ce, to carry them into

ssion from England at Last year the proposal, that serious military such likelihood exists ight within measurable elves, much sooner than case. We shall plainly ave a considered and vernment of India (who commendations) regard o useful purpose would nt stage." But their bjects for investigation on itself. What seems ar lines of enquiry, but ntation with the local e occupied territories. ain lines on which we only hamper us at the a number of practical mples: proposals were s in Mesopotamia; the ling out an unofficial

appears to be as given here.

Mission to study the commercial development of the country; and overtures have been received from a number of individual firms, some of them of high standing, who desire to enter the new field for commercial enterprise that is being opened out. In all these matters, the importance of which cannot be disregarded, the uncertainty of the future makes it very difficult to take any decided line. The Department, it need hardly be said, has no desire to place the Government of India at a disadvantage in regard to "questions vitally affecting Indian interests." But the Government of India will be directly represented on the proposed Commission; and it would perhaps meet the case if their representative were given a discretion to remove from the scope of the enquiry, or at any rate to reserve for subsequent reference to his Government, any points on which the interests of India were directly concerned.

7. *Composition of the Commission.*—As already indicated, the Department supports Captain Wilson's suggestion that one member of the Commission should be nominated by the Government of India. Perhaps the Egyptian Administration might be asked to nominate another, leaving the Chairman and Secretary to be appointed by His Majesty's Government. A representative of the General Officer Commanding, Baghdad, could be added after the arrival of the Commission in Mesopotamia. The proposal that an officer on the spot should be deputed to clear the ground in advance seems a very good one, as also the suggestion that the Commission should be empowered, at its discretion, to co-opt heads of local administrative Departments. It is submitted that, as a first step, the proposed Commission should be approved in principle. Details of its composition, terms of reference, &c., will then be taken up without delay.

8. It may be added that this note is concerned only with the points immediately at issue, viz.—(1) the amalgamation for practical purposes of the administrative systems of the Basra and Baghdad Vilayets; and (2) the appointment of a Commission from England to study further administrative problems on the spot. It is not desired to raise in this connection the wider questions of international policy, &c., which will have to be taken into account when the future of Mesopotamia is ultimately settled. It is enough to say that the measures now under consideration will not in any way prejudice these wider issues, though they may serve to strengthen the hands of His Majesty's Government in dealing with them.

9. It is accordingly recommended—

- (1) that Captain Wilson be informed that the steps taken by him to amalgamate the Basra and Baghdad administrative systems as reported in his telegram No. 7725, are approved, with the proviso that, in harmonising the two systems, his guiding principle should be to bring the Basra system into line with that of Baghdad, and not *vice versa*;
- (2) that the proposal to send a small Commission from England to Mesopotamia during the present autumn to examine administrative problems on the spot, and make detailed recommendations to His Majesty's Government, be approved in principle, subject to the reservation of the rights of the Government of India in regard to questions affecting Indian interests, and that the Government of India and the Civil Commissioner, Baghdad, be informed accordingly; and
- (3) that, pending the appointment and arrival of this Commission, Captain Wilson be authorised to place an officer on special duty in Mesopotamia to make preliminary arrangements for the Commissioners' investigations.

POLITICAL DEPARTMENT,  
INDIA OFFICE,  
21st October 1918.

J. E. S.



'Administration of Mesopotamia' [96v] (4/4)

