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'Question of British Consular Representation in El Hasa and Qatif'

Holding Institution	British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers
Reference	IOR/L/PS/18/B406
Date(s)	24 Sep 1928 (CE, Gregorian)
Written in	English in Latin
Extent and Format	1 file (1 folio)
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About this record

Memorandum providing an overview of the considerations of British representation in El Hasa [Al Hasa] and Qatif from 1904, with suggestions put forward by the Government of India and Sir Lionel Haworth, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf. It includes the reasons behind the need for representation, and the implications of relations with Ibn Saud [ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin Fayṣal Āl Saʿūd].

Written by John Gilbert Laithwaite of the India Office.

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Book copy.

INDIA OFFICE, B. 406.
P. 5206/28.

Question of British Consular Representation in El Hasa and Qatif.

1. The question is one which originally arose in 1904, when the Government of India, consequent on representations made during Lord Curzon's visit to the Gulf in 1903 by the British Indian merchants of Bahrein for the appointment of a British representative to protect their interests at Qatif against the vexatious action of the local Turkish Customs officials, recommended that the Political Agent at Bahrein should be appointed Vice-Consul for El Hasa, and that a native Consular Agent should be stationed at Qatif.

G. of I. Desp. of
March 31 1904.

2. His Majesty's Ambassador at Constantinople expressed himself as opposed to the proposal on the ground of the interpretation which the Turkish Government might place on it,² and, a satisfactory reply having been received to the representations addressed by His Majesty's Government to the Sublime Porte in regard to the grievances of the Indian traders, out of which the question arose, the matter dropped for the time being.

* S. of S. for I. to
G. of I., Aug. 5 1904.

S. of S. for I. to G. of
I., Dec. 20 1904.

3. There appear to have been no further developments until the beginning of 1914, when, consequent on the occupation of Hasa by Ibn Saud, the question of posting a native agent without further delay to Qatif was raised by the Government of India, who suggested that the matter was one in which advantage might be taken of the friendly attitude of Ibn Saud. The Viceroy added that the posting of an agent "will not only secure us desired foothold on this coast, but will enable us to render our good offices to Turkish Government in dealing with Ibn Saud, should they require them . . . and this might *ex post facto* be explained to Turkish Government." It was decided, however, in view of the general Turkish attitude, that the proposal was one which it would be useless to put before the Sublime Porte, since, however innocent might be the intentions of His Majesty's Government in appointing a British Agent to Qatif, his despatch would be intensely resented by the Turkish Government. The Government of India were accordingly informed that it was regarded as impossible to send a British Agent to Qatif pending negotiations.

Tel. from Viceroy
to S. of S. for I.,
Feb. 27 1914, P. 768.

Tel. from S. of S.
for I. to Viceroy,
March 16 1914,
P. 1030/14.

4. The outbreak of the war led to the question being dropped and it remained in abeyance until 1927. Consequent on the conclusion of the Treaty of Jeddah, it was, however, revived in that year by Ibn Saud, who, in a letter dated 12th October 1927 to the Political Resident in the Gulf, took specific exception to the local practice hitherto in force under which matters in dispute between Hasa and Bahrein had been settled by mutual arrangements with the Governor of Hasa, parties in cases being called to Bahrein to settle claims from the mainland and *vice versa*. The King of the Hejaz expressed surprise at the action of the Political Agent in asking that a Qatifi should be sent to Bahrein, and requested that "international rules should be adhered to."

Tel. from Pol. Res.
A.G./I., May 5 1928,
P. 2869/28.

5. In these circumstances Sir L. Haworth suggested that Ibn Saud should be asked whether he saw objection to the appointment as British Consul for Qatif and Ojair of the Political Agent, Bahrein. It would, he thought, be necessary for the Consul to push claims against Hasa and visit the port for that purpose. Sir L. Haworth explained that his proposal was no more than that the Political Agent should be Consul for Hasa and Qatif, in the same way as His Majesty's Government maintained the Consul at Jeddah. In reply to a further enquiry by the Government of India whether the Political Agent in present circumstances ever visited Hasa, and whether any danger would be involved in his doing so, the

Tel. from Pol. Res. to
C.O., April 17 1928.
P. 1968.

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Resident stated that, no necessity having arisen, no Agent had visited Hasa since 1919, and that no danger would be involved, since the Agent would visit Qatif or Ojair only with the sanction of and under arrangements made with the Governor of Hasa in order to settle cases.

C.O. to I.O. April 23
1928, P. 2026/28.

Tel. from Viceroy
to S. of S. for I.,
928 S., May 8 1928,
P. 2309.

6. The Government of India, after consideration, expressed the view that the proposal, to which no exception was taken by the Colonial Office, was *prima facie* sound. As, however, there was no immediate urgency, it was decided that the Political Resident should be instructed to submit it in a despatch which should deal with the chances of Ibn Saud raising a counterclaim for a Consul at Bahrein. The final recommendations in the matter of the Political Resident and the Government of India have not yet been received.

INDIA OFFICE,
24th September 1928.

J. G. L.