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Middle East Committee and Eastern Committee

Holding Institution	British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers
Reference	Mss Eur F112/273
Date(s)	18 Jan 1918-31 Dec 1918 (CE, Gregorian)
Written in	English in Latin
Extent and Format	1 file (21 folios)
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About this record

This file relates to two War Cabinet committees: the Middle East Committee (originally named the Mesopotamian Administration Committee), and the Eastern Committee, both chaired by George Curzon.

The first half of the file consists almost entirely of printed minutes of meetings of the Middle East Committee, dated 19 January, 26 January, 2 February, and 18 February 1918 respectively (ff 2-9). The main topics of discussion in these minutes are British policy in Palestine and future British policy in Mesopotamia.

The second half of the file contains correspondence received by Curzon regarding the workings of the Eastern Committee, which inherited the responsibilities of the Middle East Committee (ff 10-21). The correspondents are as follows: Maurice Pascal Alers Hankey, War Cabinet; Edwin Samuel Montagu, Secretary of State for India; Robert Cecil, Foreign Office. The letters discuss the dissemination of the committee's minutes among military representatives, the frequency and attendees of committee meetings, and whether the committee should be severed from the War Cabinet and absorbed by the Foreign Office's recently created Middle East Department. One letter touches on Anglo-Persian relations.

Also included is a note by Curzon, dated 27 October 1918, regarding a memorandum from the advisory committee of the Foreign Office's Eastern Department (ff 17-18).

Lord Curzon. ①

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S E C R E T.

M.E.C.-1.

WAR CABINET.

MIDDLE EAST COMMITTEE.

Summary of Information No.1, for week
ending January 18th, 1918.

APPRECIATION.

The outstanding questions for this next Meeting will be as follows:-

- i. Organisation of Palestine and Hejaz political machinery.
- ii. Palestine Administration.
- iii. The functions and status of the Zionist Commission and question of a liaison officer thereto.
- iv. Consideration of Sir P. Cox's telegram 388.

After points i.ii. & iii have been decided, it is submitted that a full "Policy" telegram should be despatched both to General Clayton and Sir R. Wingate in addition to the telegrams explaining administrative decisions.

These officers both require a clear lead on the many thorny and complicated matters with which they have to deal.

It should also be noted that General Clayton is evidently short handed, and requires serious additions to his staff.

The functions and status of the Zionist Commission will require careful consideration, the Commission must be entirely subordinated in its movements and actions to the wishes of the G.O.C.I.M.C., consequently the appointment of the liaison officer is important.

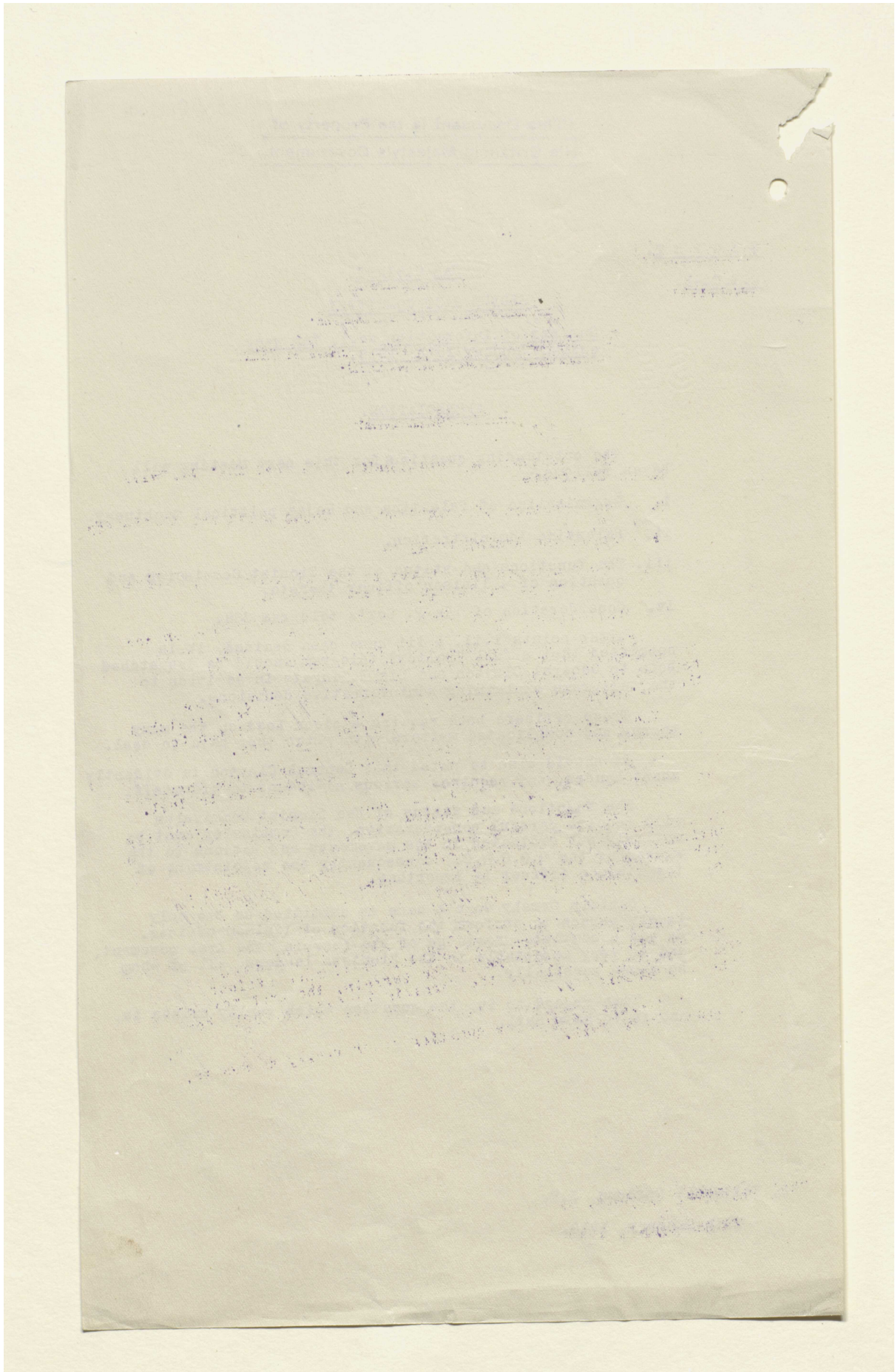
Captain Ormsby Gore's name is submitted as the only likely person to perform the function of liaison officer. He has a complete knowledge of the terrain, the Arab movement, and is very acceptable to the Zionists leaders, all of whom he knows personally.

With regard to iv, the question which really arises is, who is to have Hail.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.

18th January, 1918.

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Lord Curzon. ②

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Printed for the War Cabinet. January 1918.

SECRET.

M.E.C. 1st Meeting.
(New Series.)

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WAR CABINET.

MIDDLE EAST COMMITTEE.

Draft Minutes of a Meeting of the Middle East Committee held in the Secretary of State's Room at the Foreign Office at 11:30 A.M. on Saturday, January 19, 1918.

Present :

The Right Hon. The EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.
(*in the Chair*).
Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M., M.P.
Right Hon. LORD HARDINGE OF PENSHURST, K.G., P.C., G.C.B., G.C.S.I.,
G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., I.S.O.
Sir MARK SYKES, Bart., M.P.
Major-General Sir G. M. W. MACDONOGH, K.C.M.G., C.B.
Right Hon. LORD ISLINGTON, G.C.M.G., D.S.O.
Mr. SHUCKBURGH.
Captain Hon. W. ORMSBY-GORE, M.P. (*Secretary*).

Palestine :
Position of General
Clayton.

1. THE Committee considered telegram No. 97, dated the 15th January, from Sir Reginald Wingate, which formed a reply to the Foreign Office telegram No. 59 to Sir Reginald Wingate. From this telegram it appeared that both Sir Reginald Wingate and General Allenby were satisfied with the *status quo* in regard to the position occupied by General Clayton and the line of demarcation between operations under their respective commands. It was pointed out to the Committee—

- (1.) That at present General Clayton had to serve two masters, viz., in Palestine he was under General Allenby, whereas as head of the Arab Bureau and Brigadier-General, General Staff, for operations in the Hejaz, he was under Sir Reginald Wingate.
- (2.) It was desirable from a political and diplomatic point of view that a clear line of demarcation should be drawn between Palestine and Egypt.

It was further pointed out that it was desirable to draw a distinction between the function of Chief Political Officer and Supreme Political Adviser in Palestine on the one hand and the function of Director of Military Administration in the occupied territories on the other.

It was suggested that, while General Clayton should fulfil the former function, the latter should be entrusted to another officer.

It was suggested that a new and separate branch of the Arab Bureau should be established in Palestine under General Clayton, who would be an independent Political Adviser to the Commander-in-Chief in Palestine, while the Cairo branch of the Arab Bureau should remain at Cairo under Sir Reginald Wingate, and another officer appointed as its head.

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Discussion took place, upon the suggestion of Sir Mark Sykes, that a new line of demarcation should be drawn between the theatres of operations under General Allenby and Sir Reginald Wingate respectively.

It was suggested that, as the more energetic portion of the Arab forces were now operating in co-operation with General Allenby's forces east of the Dead Sea, these Arab forces which were based upon Akaba should be transferred from Sir Reginald Wingate to General Allenby. Operations in the area south of Tebuk might continue as heretofore under the control and guidance of Sir Reginald Wingate.

In view of the above considerations, the Committee decided—

That, after consultation with the Foreign Office, the War Office should send telegrams to General Allenby and Sir Reginald Wingate laying down clearly the importance of separating political responsibility in Palestine from that in Egypt and the Hejaz as the set policy of His Majesty's Government. That General Allenby and Sir Reginald Wingate should be invited to reconsider the re-allocation of duties and areas for which each was responsible in view of this policy.

The Committee also decided—

That the Foreign Office should instruct General Clayton direct on all questions affecting policy in Palestine, and a telegram concerning this should be despatched to him forthwith.

Zionist Commission.

2. The Committee were informed that for some weeks past negotiations had been in progress between the Foreign Office and the responsible leaders of the Zionist organisation in this country with a view to sending out a Zionist Commission to Palestine. The need of such a Commission appeared urgent for the following reasons :—

- (1.) The important political results that had accrued from the declaration of His Majesty's Government to the Zionists and the need for putting the assurance given in this declaration into practice.
- (2.) The inadequacy of existing Zionist representations in Egypt and Palestine.
- (3.) The necessity of bringing the British authorities in Egypt and Palestine and the Arabs into contact with the responsible leaders of the organisation in *Entente* countries.

Sir Mark Sykes pointed out that it was apparent that considerable uneasiness existed in Palestine and Egypt regarding the progress of Zionism, and this was largely due to a misunderstanding of Zionist aims and intentions. For instance, it was thought that Zionism involved the expropriation of Arab proprietors and the handing over to future Jewish tutelage of Christian and Moslem sites. Both these objections had been clearly and emphatically disavowed by the responsible leaders of Zionism, who were not at present represented in Palestine. It was pointed out that the functions and activities of the proposed Zionist Commission must be clearly subject to military considerations and to the political authority vested in the Commander-in-Chief. It would therefore be necessary to entrust the Commission to a British officer who would act under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, *i.e.*, under General Clayton.

General Macdonogh stated that no communication had yet been sent by the War Office to General Allenby regarding the proposed Zionist Commission.

Middle East Committee and Eastern Committee [3r] (5/42)

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Mr. Balfour stated that Dr. Weizmann had visited him on the 16th January, with a view to ascertaining his views with regard to four special points regarding the possible duties and functions of the Commission. These four points were embodied in a letter addressed by Dr. Weizmann to Sir Mark Sykes, dated the 16th January, copies of which were laid before the Committee.

Mr. Balfour stated that, as drafted, Dr. Weizmann's letter seemed to underline rather too definitely certain expressions of approval and sympathy which he—Mr. Balfour—had made. He thought therefore that a carefully worded reply should be sent to Dr. Weizmann. In regard to one of the four points—the prevention of speculation in land—Mr. Balfour felt very strongly that some action should be taken, but that such action would have to be very carefully considered in the light of advices received from Palestine.

The Committee approved of the despatch of the Zionist Commission, under the leadership of Dr. Weizmann, accompanied by a specially detailed British Political Officer, with the following objects:—

- (1.) To help in establishing friendly relations between the Jews on the one hand, and the Arabs and other non-Jewish communities on the other.
- (2.) To form a link between the British authorities and the Jewish population in Palestine.
- (3.) To help with relief work in Palestine, and to assist in the repatriation of evacuated persons and refugees, so far as the military situation will allow.
- (4.) To assist in restoring and developing the Jewish colonies, and in re-organising the Jewish population in general.
- (5.) To collect information and report upon the possibilities of future Jewish developments in Palestine in the light of the declaration of His Majesty's Government.

The Committee decided—

That the War Office should inform General Allenby of the desirability of the Commission proceeding to Palestine as soon as possible and inviting his concurrence, and that the Foreign Office should submit a statement regarding the functions and duties of the Political Officer in charge of the Commission to the Army Council for their approval.

Ibn Saud.

3. The Committee had before them a telegram from Sir Percy Cox asking for a reconsideration of the policy adopted by the Committee at their last meeting towards Ibn Saud (reference Secretary of State for India's telegram to Viceroy's Department, P. 181, dated 14th January).

After some discussion the Committee requested that the War Office should prepare a memorandum upon the situation in Central Arabia for their consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.

Hit.

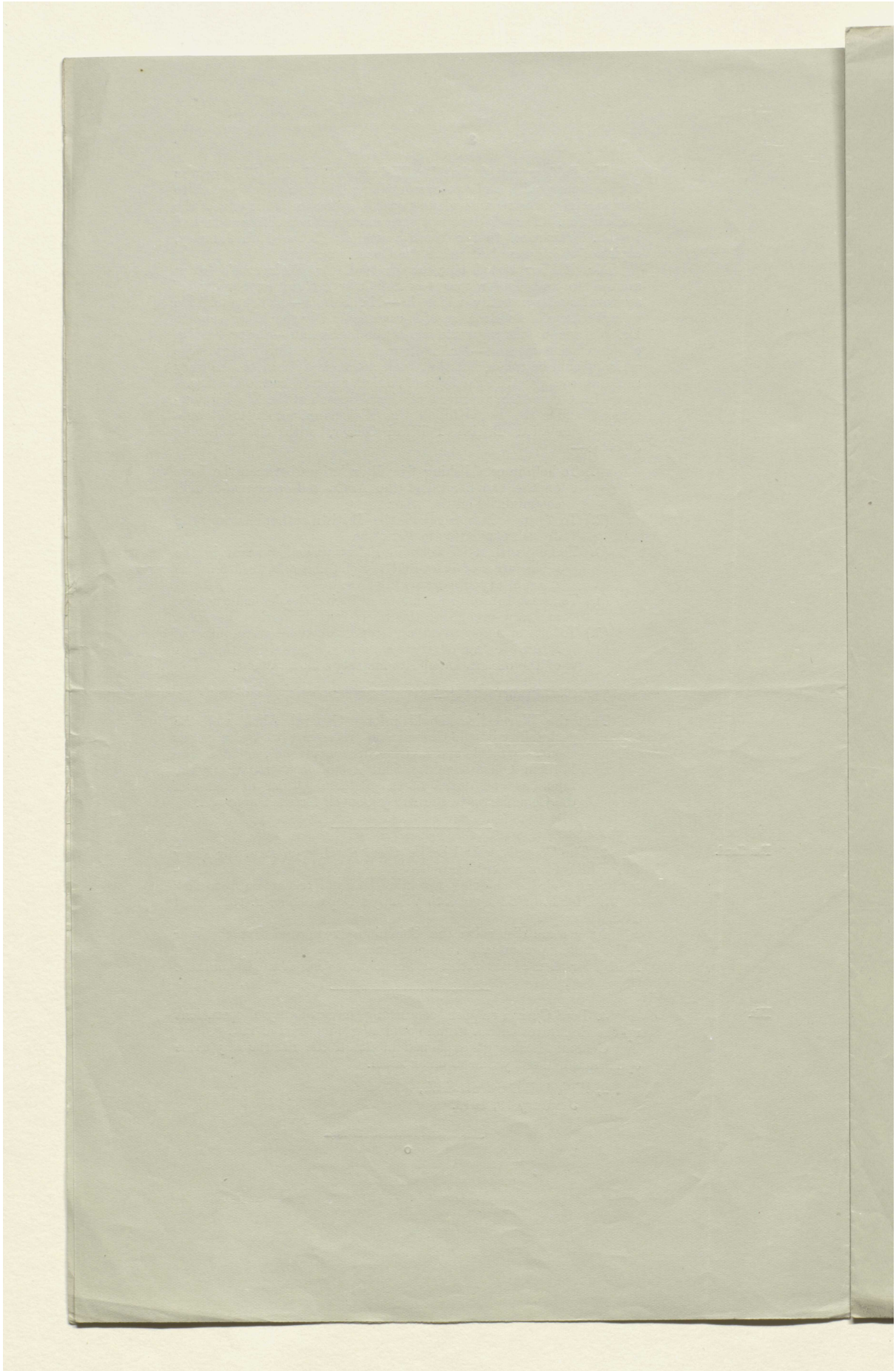
4. Lord Curzon enquired concerning the possibility of operations up the Euphrates with a view to obtaining possession of Hit.

General Macdonogh explained in detail the reasons why these operations had not yet been undertaken.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
January 19, 1918.

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Middle East Committee and Eastern Committee [4r] (7/42)

Lord Curzon,

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Printed for the War Cabinet. February 1918.

SECRET.

M.E.C. 2nd Minutes.
(New Series.)

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WAR CABINET.

MIDDLE EAST COMMITTEE.

Minutes of a Meeting of the Middle East Committee held in the Secretary of State's Room at the Foreign Office at 11.30 A.M. on Saturday, January 26, 1918.

Present :

The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M., M.P. (*in the Chair*).
The Right Hon. LORD HARDINGE OF PENSURST, K.G., G.C.B., G.C.S.I.,
G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., I.S.O.
The Right Hon. LORD ROBERT CECIL, K.C., M.P.
Lieutenant-Colonel SIR MARK SYKES, Bart., M.P.
Major-General Sir G. M. W. MACDONOGH, K.C.M.G., C.B., War Office.
The Right Hon. LORD ISLINGTON, G.C.M.G., D.S.O.
Mr. J. E. SHUCKBURGH, India Office.
Colonel J. BUCHAN.

Captain Hon. W. ORMSBY-GORE, M.P. (*Secretary*).

Palestine :
(a.) Inclusion of
French and
Italian Officers in
Administration.

1. General Macdonogh reported the receipt of a telegram from General Allenby (E.A.-770), in which the Commander-in-Chief expressed his view that it was not practicable to appoint any French or Italian officers to administrative posts in Palestine, as had been suggested by the Committee.

Mr. Balfour accepted the decision of the Commander-in-Chief, but wished it to be clearly understood that, in the event of a time being reached when such appointments might be made, the French and Italians should be treated on an equal footing.

Palestine :
(b.) Religious and
International
Difficulties at
Jerusalem.

The Committee had before them a telegram from General Allenby (E.A.-681) regarding the attitude adopted by M. Picot in regard to his official recognition at the Sunday Mass in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the consequent friction that had arisen with other nationals, particularly with the President of the Franciscans.

Sir Mark Sykes pointed out that M. Picot attached importance to the ceremony as it was the symbol of the French claim to exclusive protection of Latin Christians in the East; ever since the anti-clerical régime in France the Vatican had ceased to support the French claim.

He also pointed out the system now in vogue in regard to the guards placed over the Church of the Holy Sepulchre involved the mounting of troops of different nationalities on different days. This arrangement might very well result in abuses.

Lord Hardinge expressed the opinion that it might prove desirable that the arrangement should be altered and that British Military Police should be substituted for these different national guards.

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Middle East Committee and Eastern Committee [4v] (8/42)

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The Committee decided that—

Lord Hardinge should have a frank talk with the French Ambassador upon the situation, pointing out to him the indignity of allowing friction and disturbances in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre between Christian representatives of different nationality.

They further decided that—

Lord Hardinge, after his interview with M. Cambon, should provide the D. M. I. with material for a reply to General Allenby's telegram.

Palestine:
(c.) Propaganda.

It was pointed out to the Committee that further material for propaganda in regard to Palestine was required for dissemination from this country. Propaganda was more particularly required for—

- (a.) The Jews.
- (b.) Irish-Americans.
- (c.) Anglicans.

General Macdonogh suggested that some officer who understood the political conditions for which propaganda was required should be attached to General Clayton's staff, and that additional newspaper correspondence should be sent to Palestine.

Colonel Buchan suggested that Mr. Philip Gibbs, now serving as a correspondent on the Western front, would be a suitable person to undertake the preparation of newspaper propaganda in Palestine.

It was further pointed out to the Committee that Mr. Sacher, a leader writer on the "Manchester Guardian," was to be attached to the Zionist Commission.

The Committee decided that—

Among the orders given to Captain Ormsby Gore, the War Office should include instructions to him to inform General Clayton regarding the nature of the propaganda material required, and that Colonel Buchan should take the necessary steps to obtain, if possible, the release of Mr. Philip Gibbs from his present duties, with a view to his proceeding to Palestine at the earliest possible date.

Encouragement of
Arab Forces.

2. General Macdonogh informed the Committee that Captain Lloyd, who had recently returned from Egypt, had informed him that much might be done to encourage the Arabs by the transmission of congratulatory telegrams, and by the granting to Arabs of British decorations, such as the Order of the British Empire, and the gift of sundry articles, such as field-glasses, &c., to Arab officers.

The Committee approved the carrying out of the above suggestions.

Pan-Turanian
Propaganda among
Russian Moslems.

3. The attention of the Committee was drawn to telegram No. 64, dated the 8th January, from Petrograd, from which it would appear that the lines being adopted by Dr. Williams for combating Pan-Turanian propaganda in the Caucasus and other parts of the Russian Empire were of a very dangerous kind. It would appear that these methods included the spread of Pan-Islamic ideas.

General Macdonogh added in this connection that a telegram had been received from Sir Percy Cox suggesting that the King of the Hejaz should send a representative to Baku to explain to the Moslems in that neighbourhood the reasons why he was endeavouring to drive the Turks out of Moslem holy places.

The Committee were of opinion that this suggestion was most impracticable and undesirable.

Middle East Committee and Eastern Committee [5r] (9/42)

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The Committee decided that—

A telegram should be sent to Petrograd instructing Mr. Lindley that His Majesty's Government did not approve of the lines upon which Dr. Williams' suggested propaganda should be worked, and requested Sir Mark Sykes to get into touch with the Zionist leaders now in England with a view to arranging with them the best means whereby German-inspired Pan-Turanian propaganda might be combated.

Assurances to the King of the Hejaz with regard to our Intentions in Arabia and Neighbouring Countries.

4. The Committee had before them a telegram from Sir Reginald Wingate (No. 154—M.E.C. 37), dated 22nd January, asking for a re-statement of our intentions in regard to Arabia, Palestine, and Syria.

In this connection the Committee also had before them an extract from a recent speech delivered to the Syrians in Paris by M. Gout, the Chief Permanent Official of the French Foreign Office.

The Committee requested Sir Mark Sykes to prepare for their consideration at their next meeting a statement of the assurances which had been given from time to time by representatives of His Majesty's Government to the King of the Hejaz, together with a draft reply to Sir Reginald Wingate's telegram No. 154.

Lord Islington stated that it was thought desirable to obtain from Sir P. Cox at the present stage a considered opinion on the whole question of future policy in Mesopotamia, and that a draft telegram to this effect had been prepared at the India Office for the consideration of the Committee.

The Committee decided—

To reserve this question for consideration at their next meeting, and directed that the draft telegram should be circulated to members in the meantime. They also requested the India Office to prepare for their consideration at the next meeting a statement of the pledges and proclamations which had been given in regard to Mesopotamia, together with a draft telegram for despatch to Sir Percy Cox.

Central Arabia.
Ibn Saud.

5. The Committee had before them a memorandum prepared by the War Office on the subject of the policy to be adopted towards the Emir Ibn Saud. This memorandum recommended no change in the policy already laid down by the Committee.

It was accordingly decided that—

Lord Islington should send a telegram to Sir Percy Cox informing him that His Majesty's Government, after full reconsideration of the matter, had decided to adhere to their previous policy.

Pro-Turkish
Articles in the
"Morning Post."

6. The attention of the Committee was drawn to certain dangerous pro-Turkish articles which had appeared in the "Morning Post" issues of the 22nd and 23rd January. It was pointed out that if these articles fell into Arab hands they might have dangerous political and military consequences. It would seem that the articles in question infringed the Defence of the Realm Regulations.

The Committee decided that—

The Director of Military Intelligence should, if possible, see the editor of the "Morning Post," and should point out to him the serious character of the articles in question;

and, further—

Middle East Committee and Eastern Committee [5v] (10/42)

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That instructions should be given to the Censor to look out for further articles of a similar nature, and, in the event of their being published by the "Morning Post," to prohibit their export abroad.

Discussions with
the French
Government
regarding the
Future of the
Near East.

7. Sir Mark Sykes pointed out that he had paid several visits to Paris to discuss with the French Government affairs relating to the Near East. He thought it desirable that a representative of the French Foreign Office should be requested to come to London for a similar purpose.

This was agreed to by the Committee.

2, *Whitehall Gardens, S.W.*,
January 26, 1918.

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Lord Curzon (6)
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Printed for the War Cabinet. February 1918.

SECRET.

M.E.C. 3rd Minutes.
(New Series.)

WAR CABINET.

MIDDLE EAST COMMITTEE.

Minutes of a Meeting of the Middle East Committee held in the Secretary of State's Room at the Foreign Office on Saturday, February 2, 1918, at 11.30 A.M.

Present :

The Right Hon. EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.
(in the Chair).
The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M., M.P.
The Right Hon. LORD HARDINGE OF PENSHURST, K.G., G.C.B., G.C.S.I.,
G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., I.S.O.
The Right Hon. LORD ROBERT CECIL, K.C., M.P.
The Right Hon. LORD ISLINGTON, G.C.M.G., D.S.O.
Lieutenant-Colonel SIR MARK SYKES, Bart., M.P.
Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. GRIBBON, War Office.
Mr. J. E. SHUCKBURGH, India Office.

Captain the Hon. W. ORMSBY-GORE, M.P. (Secretary).

Assurances to
King Hussein.

1. THE Committee had before them two telegrams from Sir Reginald Wingate, Nos. 154 and 199 (M.E.C.-37 and 54), together with memoranda prepared by the India Office :—

- (1.) M.E.C.-60, giving a summary of the pledges made by, or on behalf of, the British Government to the Arabs and to King Hussein.
- (2.) Memorandum dated 31st January (M.E.C.-68, not previously circulated) entitled "The Future of Mesopotamia."

It was pointed out that both Sir Percy Cox and the Government of India had expressed the hope that in any reassurances to be given to King Hussein no further announcement should be made with regard to the future of Irak; further, the view was submitted that it might be desirable to inform Sir Percy Cox regarding the recent trend of political thought concerning the war aims of the *Entente* Powers.

Lord Islington said that what he had in mind was not any idea of requiring the Civil Commissioner and the officers under him to abandon their policy of reconstruction in Mesopotamia, but rather the desirability of explaining clearly to Sir Percy Cox the general trend of events in Europe, the specific declarations of President Wilson and the Prime Minister on the subject of Mesopotamia, &c., and the factors making for a peace based on the principles of "no annexations" and "self-determination." If Sir Percy Cox were fully apprised of the tendencies now operating on the situation, and

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of their probable outcome, he would be in a position to consider and report to His Majesty's Government on the local action best calculated to safeguard British influence in Mesopotamia against future contingencies. Lord Islington considered that even more might be done than had so far been attempted to render the British connection acceptable and indispensable to the people of the country at the end of the war.

On the other hand the view was expressed that any telegram suggesting to Sir Percy Cox that our intentions with regard to the future of Mesopotamia had undergone any recent change might have a very unfortunate result. It therefore seemed desirable that any communication of the kind suggested should be made to him by word of mouth. This could be done either by sending someone having full knowledge of the general political situation from England to Mesopotamia, or by arranging for Sir Percy Cox to come home on leave, or, at any rate, as far as Cairo. If the latter course was adopted, someone would have to meet him at Cairo.

The India Office undertook to study these alternatives and to submit recommendations to the Committee as to the selection of an envoy for the purpose.

In regard to the telegram to be despatched to Sir Reginald Wingate, Sir Mark Sykes stated that he had personally explained to King Hussein at Jeddah the difficulties which would ensue should King Hussein be burdened with the responsibility of the inclusion of Palestine, west of the Jordan, under his suzerainty. He thought that King Hussein fully realised the position in regard to Palestine, but that it was desirable that some definite "accord" in writing should be effected. The real apprehension at the back of King Hussein's mind was the accusation which might be cast against him by Moslems, that by his action and co-operation with England he had brought about the replacement of the Moslem by the Christian flag in Arab countries.

Sir Mark Sykes expressed the view that it would be possible for us to overcome this difficulty, and to obtain all the essentials which we require for the future, provided we could accommodate Moslem and Arab views with regard to the feelings which inspired King Hussein. In this connection he drew special attention to the declaration made recently by M. Gout that the French Government were not animated by any desire of colonial domination or annexation in Arab lands.

The Committee took the view that it would be quite impossible to recognise King Hussein as King of the Arabs until, at any rate, he had been recognised as such by the great mass of the Arab peoples and rulers, which was not at present the case.

Lord Islington was strongly of opinion that no new assurances referring specifically to Iraq should be given to King Hussein.

The Committee requested Sir Mark Sykes to draft a telegram to Sir R. Wingate embodying the above views for despatch as soon as the approval of the Chairman, the Foreign Secretary, and the Secretary of State for India had been obtained.

Zionist
Commission.

2. The Committee had before them a letter from the President of the English Zionist Federation to the Secretary (M.E.C. 53).

Mr. Balfour stated that he had seen Dr. Weizmann on the subject, and had agreed to his proceeding to America as suggested, and to the sending of a telegram to the British representative at Washington, pointing out the reasons for his mission.

Sir Mark Sykes expressed the view that it might prove undesirable that the departure of the Commission to Palestine should be delayed until Dr. Weizmann returned from Washington, as he had seen several letters from Palestine showing that the local Zionists and Jews were inclined to complicate matters with their

Middle East Committee and Eastern Committee [7r] (13/42)

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Arab neighbours. He thought that M. Sokolof could replace Dr. Weizmann, at any rate temporarily, as Head of the Commission, and that it might be desirable that M. Sokolof should see King Hussein at Jeddah.

The Committee agreed to the departure of the Commission as soon as the military situation permitted, and arrangements could be made for their journey, and instructed Sir Mark Sykes to communicate with the Zionist leaders as to the desirability of sending a representative in advance to Palestine, to help in dealing with the present situation.

Reorganisation of
the Arab Bureau.

3. The Committee had before them a memorandum by Captain Lloyd (M.E.C. 47) in regard to the reorganisation of the Arab Bureau.

Lord Hardinge pointed out that Captain Lloyd's proposal ran counter to the accepted policy of the Committee, which had been accepted by Sir Reginald Wingate.

The Committee decided to adhere to their previous decision.

Propaganda.

4. The Secretary read to the Committee a letter from Colonel Buchan, intimating that Mr. Philip Gibbs could not be spared for propaganda work in Palestine, and suggesting that Mr. Harold Begbie should be selected in his place.

The Committee approved of Colonel Buchan's suggestion.

French Activities
in Palestine.

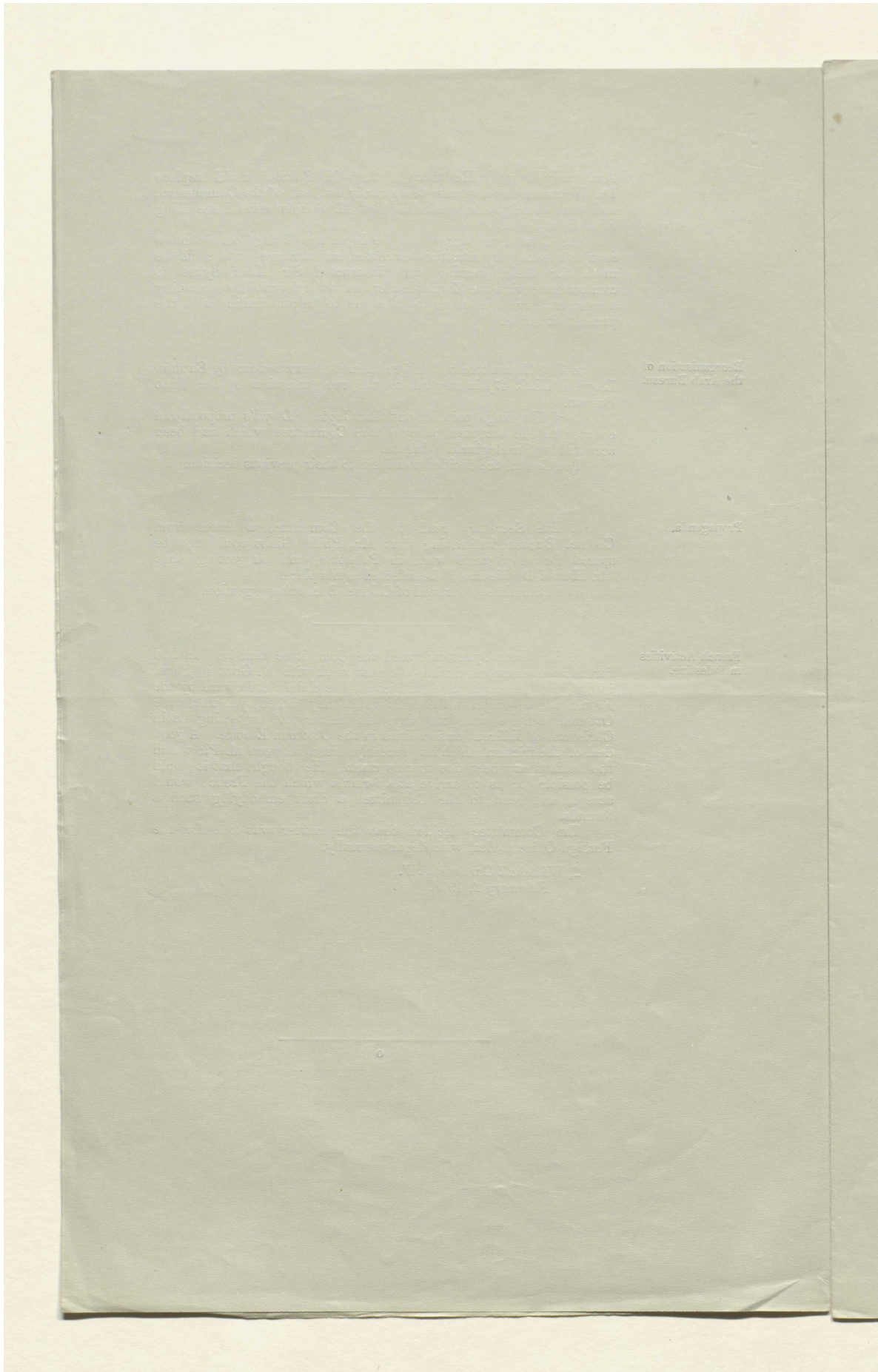
5. Sir Mark Sykes informed the Committee that he had had further conversations during the past week with M. Gout in Paris, in regard to the position of M. Picot. The claim put forward by the French had its origin in the right which they had enjoyed under the Ottoman Empire since the sixteenth century, of protecting Latin Christians of different nationalities in the Ottoman Empire. A good deal of the friction which had recently arisen between M. Picot and the Italians had been due to this claim. He thought that it would be possible for us to arrive at a formula which the French would accept, and read to the Committee a draft embodying such a formula.

The Committee decided that the matter was one for the Foreign Office to deal with departmentally.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
February 2, 1918.

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Lord Curzon. ⑧

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Printed for the War Cabinet. February 1918.

SECRET.

M.E.C. 4th Minutes. 2

WAR CABINET.

MIDDLE EAST COMMITTEE.

Minutes of a Meeting of the Middle East Committee held at the Privy Council Office on Monday, February 18, 1918, at 6 P.M.

Present :

The Right Hon. EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.
(in the Chair).

The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M., M.P.

The Right Hon. LORD HARDINGE OF PENSHURST, K.G., G.C.B., G.C.S.I.,
G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., I.S.O.

The Right Hon. LORD ISLINGTON, G.C.M.G., D.S.O.

Colonel SIR MARK SYKES, Bart., M.P.

Major-General Sir G. M. W. MACDONOGH, K.C.M.G., C.B.

Mr. J. E. SHUCKBURGH, India Office.

Captain the Hon. W. ORMSBY-GORE, M.P. (Secretary).

There were also present :

SIR WILLIAM CLARK, K.C.S.I.

Captain G. A. LLOYD, M.P.

Mr. ALWYN PARKER, C.B., C.M.G.

Mesopotamia.

THE Committee had before them a note by the India Office, dated 6th February, 1918, on the subject of the Report of the Mesopotamia Trade Commissioners (M.E.C. 72); also correspondence that had passed between Lord Hardinge and Lord Incheape (M.E.C. 90).

Lord Curzon stated that he gathered that the India Office took a favourable view of the proposal that Lord Incheape should be given a monopoly of navigation rights of the River Tigris and facilities for the immediate establishment of banking operations at Baghdad. This proposal was put forward on two grounds :—

Firstly, it was desirable that British commercial and financial institutions should be established in Mesopotamia forthwith so as to anticipate the creation of German and Japanese interests.

Secondly, that if any concessions were now to be guaranteed, Lord Incheape's firm had claims on the ground that such concessions as were now asked for had been nearly completed by negotiations with the Turkish Government in the summer of 1914.

[195—4] 9

On the other hand, he felt bound to point out to the Committee that the proposed concession raised a question of high policy, viz., "Was it either possible or desirable that His Majesty's Government should take any immediate step which assumed continued British occupation of Baghdad after the War?" The fact that the future of Mesopotamia lay on the lap of the Peace Conference rendered it hardly possible, even if desirable, that His Majesty's Government should give monopoly rights to a British firm now. Further, in the event of questions arising in Parliament, it would be difficult to reconcile the proposed action with the war aims of the Allies as stated by the Prime Minister and President Wilson. The view might be expressed that we were prosecuting the war for British capitalistic expansion. He also understood that Sir Percy Cox, while he was anxious that immediate steps should be taken to open up trade and banking facilities in Mesopotamia, was opposed to the creation of a monopoly. Sir Percy Cox was now on his way to Cairo to discuss these and other questions with a representative of the India Office, and he therefore thought that it would be premature to give any undertaking or enter into any arrangement with Lord Inchcape, pending the receipt of the report from the India Office representative regarding his conversation with Sir Percy Cox.

Lord Hardinge stated that the Foreign Office attached special importance to the opening up of banking operations in Mesopotamia. The Ottoman Bank at Baghdad was now closed, and such banking operations as were now being conducted were being carried out by the Eastern Bank Company, of which Lord Balfour of Burleigh was chairman, which bank had entered the field at the Government's invitation.

Mr. Parker, who had assisted Lord Inchcape on behalf of the Foreign Office, stated that the Inchcape navigation concession formed one of a set of twenty-two agreements negotiated in 1913 and 1914, two of which had been actually ratified, and all of which had been initialled.

The present proposal of Lord Inchcape amounted to a monopoly of river navigation rights on the Tigris and Euphrates, but not to a monopoly of banking.

Mr. Parker expressed his strong personal conviction that the sole effective means of preventing the capture by Germany or Japan of the river navigation, and the sole practical means of competing against foreign subsidies, was a well-controlled monopoly (with proper safeguards as to rates and services) under British management. He mentioned that 50 per cent. of the original share capital in Lord Inchcape's Company was placed at the disposal of the Ottoman Government, and this share might now be transferred to the new Government, whatever that might be, in Mesopotamia. This would give that Government a large interest in the monopoly. As regards banking, all that Lord Inchcape asked for was facilities to start operations, as soon as possible, at Baghdad. His idea was to promote a large banking syndicate to compete against such institutions as the Deutsche Bank.

Having talked to Sir John Jackson regarding the control of the Tigris, Mr. Parker gathered that Sir John Jackson took the view that navigation and irrigation in Mesopotamia were not necessarily conflicting, as contended by Sir W. Willcocks.

Sir John Jackson also thought that, in view of the present wasteful irrigation methods of the Arabs, with more modern methods there would be no difficulty in providing enough water both for irrigation and navigation purposes.

Mr. Balfour did not share this view; he thought that the interests of navigation and irrigation were always like to be coincident. He agreed that the conservancy of the River Tigris should be placed under one authority, but doubted whether this authority could be vested in a commercial firm or syndicate.

General Maedonogh stated that it is most desirable that such steps should be taken as were consistent with military exigencies as

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would open up trade in Mesopotamia during war. The experience of the past has shown that the virtual monopoly of British trade and shipping interests in the Persian Gulf in the hands of the British India Company, had been unfortunate. Lord Incheape's firm had been unprogressive and had facilitated the growth of German competition. This pointed to the desirability of competition on the Tigris.

Sir William Clark expressed the view that if the matter were left open and no agreement was made to encourage Lord Incheape's powerful interest in Mesopotamia the Japanese would come in. In his opinion it would be better to give Lord Incheape a monopoly than to bolster up the British trade in the future by means of subsidies.

Captain Lloyd stated that he thought it desirable that His Majesty's Government should take action at the earliest possible moment. As far as he was concerned, he was opposed to the proposal which would give monopoly to any one British firm, and thought that arrangements should be come to with other large British groups, and anything now arranged might of course be made subject to whatever might be determined at the Peace Conference. He agreed that the loss of British trade in the Persian Gulf before the war was largely due to the fact that British direct trade with Mesopotamia had been neglected in preference for the Indian trade. The openings which the Germans had got before the war were due very largely to the narrow and unenterprising methods of the British India Company, together with very inflated freight rates. He thought that the Government should reserve in its own hands the control of the conservancy of the River Tigris. It was undesirable to leave such rights to any company. The Tigris in Mesopotamia is like the Nile in Egypt, that is to say, the river is the country. Mesopotamian trade will be a most profitable trade, and enterprising firms would be only too glad to enter such a trade if given the right to go there.

Sir W. Clark feared that if Lord Incheape went out of the business no one else would come in, and he doubted if it would be possible to get British capital invested on a large scale in a country such as Mesopotamia without some form of Government guarantee, such as would be given by a concession.

On the other hand, Captain Lloyd thought that, provided it was made clear that the trade was not going to be handed over to one set of powerful hands, other firms, such as Strick and Ellerman, would be only too glad to seek a footing.

Sir Mark Sykes thought that, if we played our cards well and in accordance with the underlying political principles now current in the world, we should have a good chance of remaining in control of Mesopotamia after the war, but should we be charged with encouraging profiteering or establishing monopolies we should run grave risk of seeing Mesopotamia pass out of our control at the Peace Conference. The proposal put before the Committee was equivalent to handing over the future Mesopotamia and its inhabitants to Lord Incheape. Such proposal would be howled down in the House of Commons.

The Committee decided—

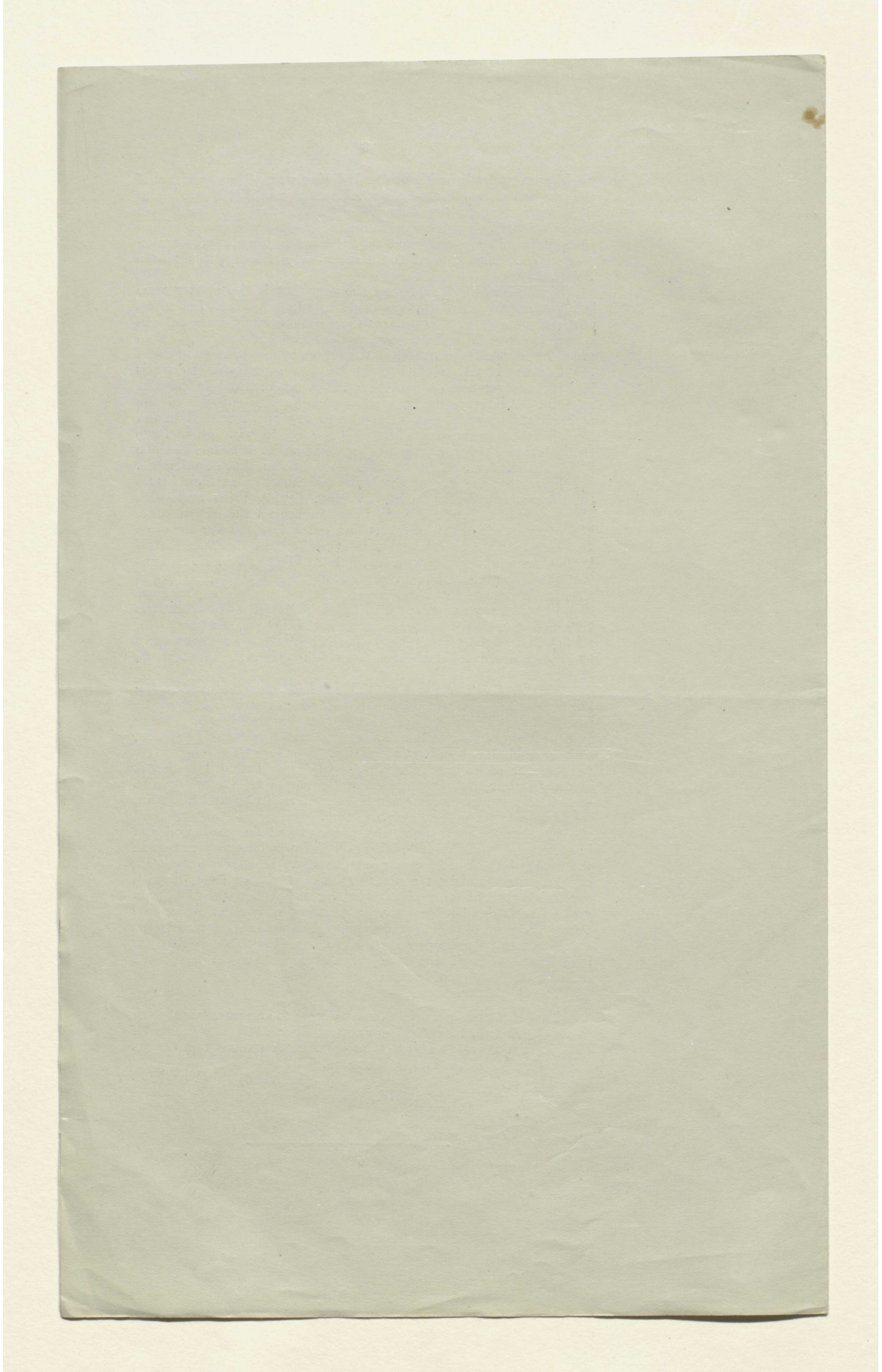
That no steps should be taken to come to an arrangement with Lord Incheape or any other firm until the views of Sir Percy Cox had been obtained regarding the various points raised in the discussion.

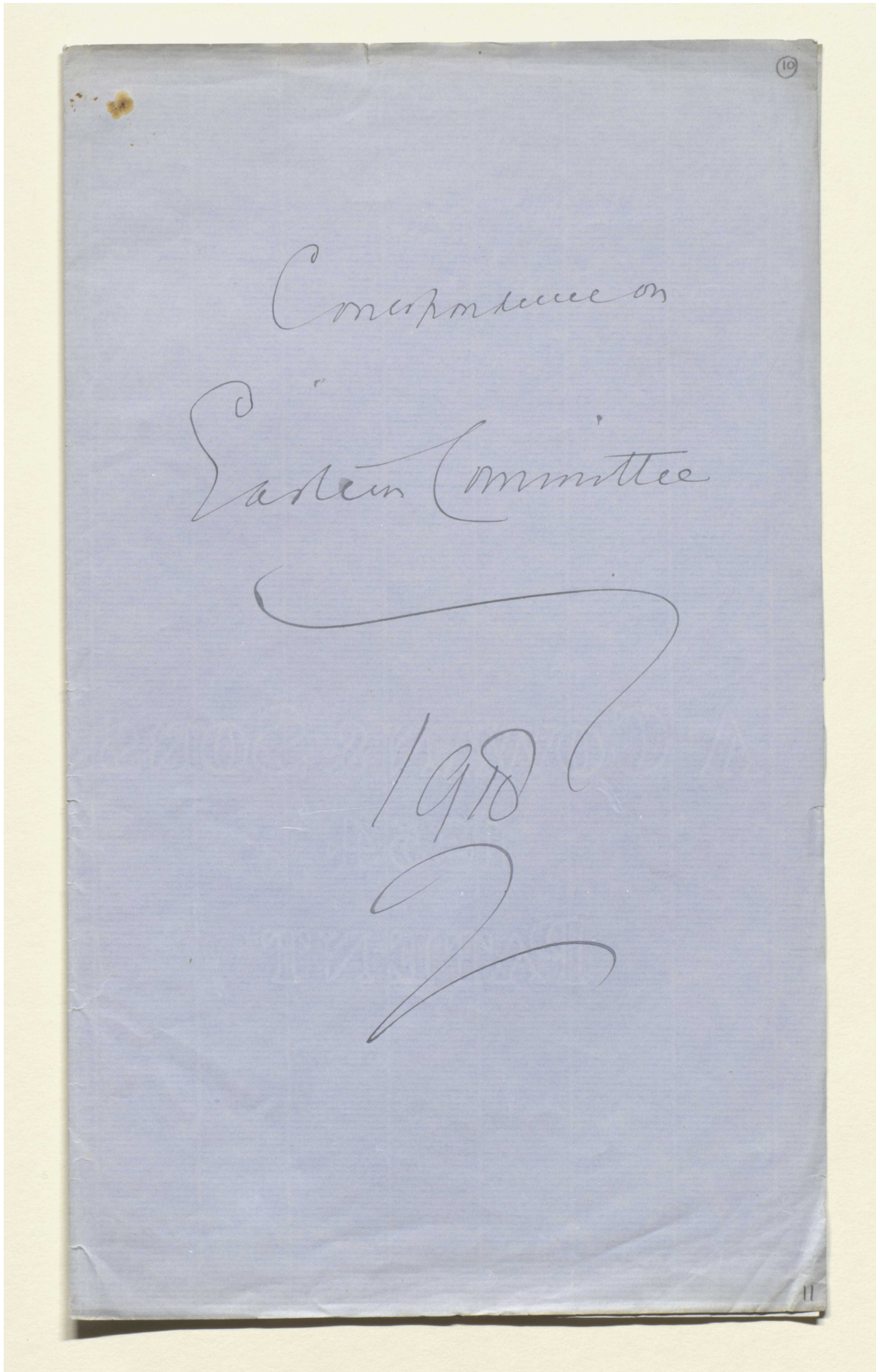
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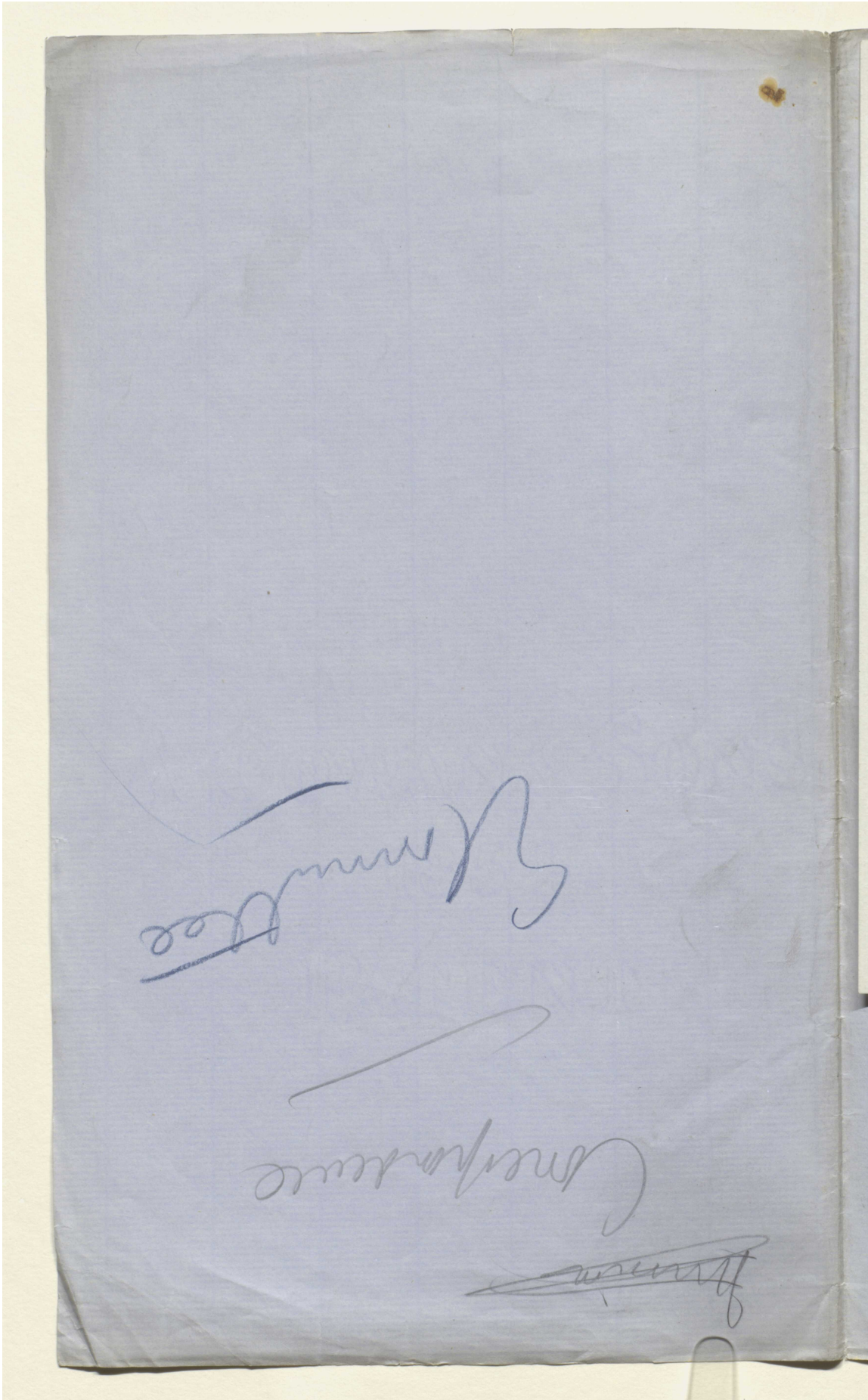
2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
February 21, 1918.

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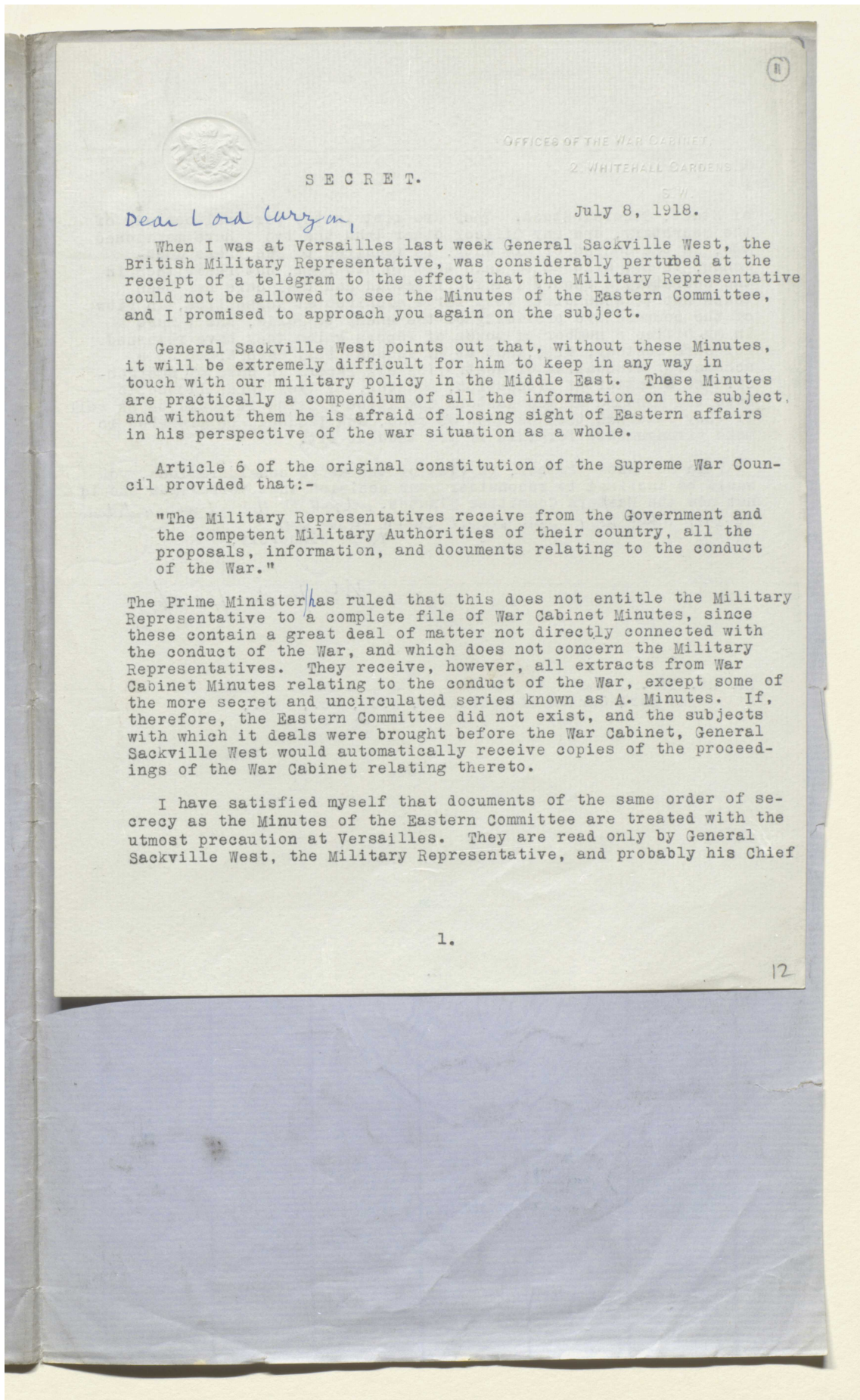
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Middle East Committee and Eastern Committee [11r] (21/42)



OFFICES OF THE WAR CABINET,
2, WHITEHALL GARDENS.

S E C R E T.

S. H.
July 8, 1918.

Dear Lord Curzon,

When I was at Versailles last week General Sackville West, the British Military Representative, was considerably perturbed at the receipt of a telegram to the effect that the Military Representative could not be allowed to see the Minutes of the Eastern Committee, and I promised to approach you again on the subject.

General Sackville West points out that, without these Minutes, it will be extremely difficult for him to keep in any way in touch with our military policy in the Middle East. These Minutes are practically a compendium of all the information on the subject, and without them he is afraid of losing sight of Eastern affairs in his perspective of the war situation as a whole.

Article 6 of the original constitution of the Supreme War Council provided that:-

"The Military Representatives receive from the Government and the competent Military Authorities of their country, all the proposals, information, and documents relating to the conduct of the War."

The Prime Minister has ruled that this does not entitle the Military Representative to a complete file of War Cabinet Minutes, since these contain a great deal of matter not directly connected with the conduct of the War, and which does not concern the Military Representatives. They receive, however, all extracts from War Cabinet Minutes relating to the conduct of the War, except some of the more secret and uncirculated series known as A. Minutes. If, therefore, the Eastern Committee did not exist, and the subjects with which it deals were brought before the War Cabinet, General Sackville West would automatically receive copies of the proceedings of the War Cabinet relating thereto.

I have satisfied myself that documents of the same order of secrecy as the Minutes of the Eastern Committee are treated with the utmost precaution at Versailles. They are read only by General Sackville West, the Military Representative, and probably his Chief

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OFFICES OF THE WAR CABINET
WHITEHALL GARDENS
LONDON

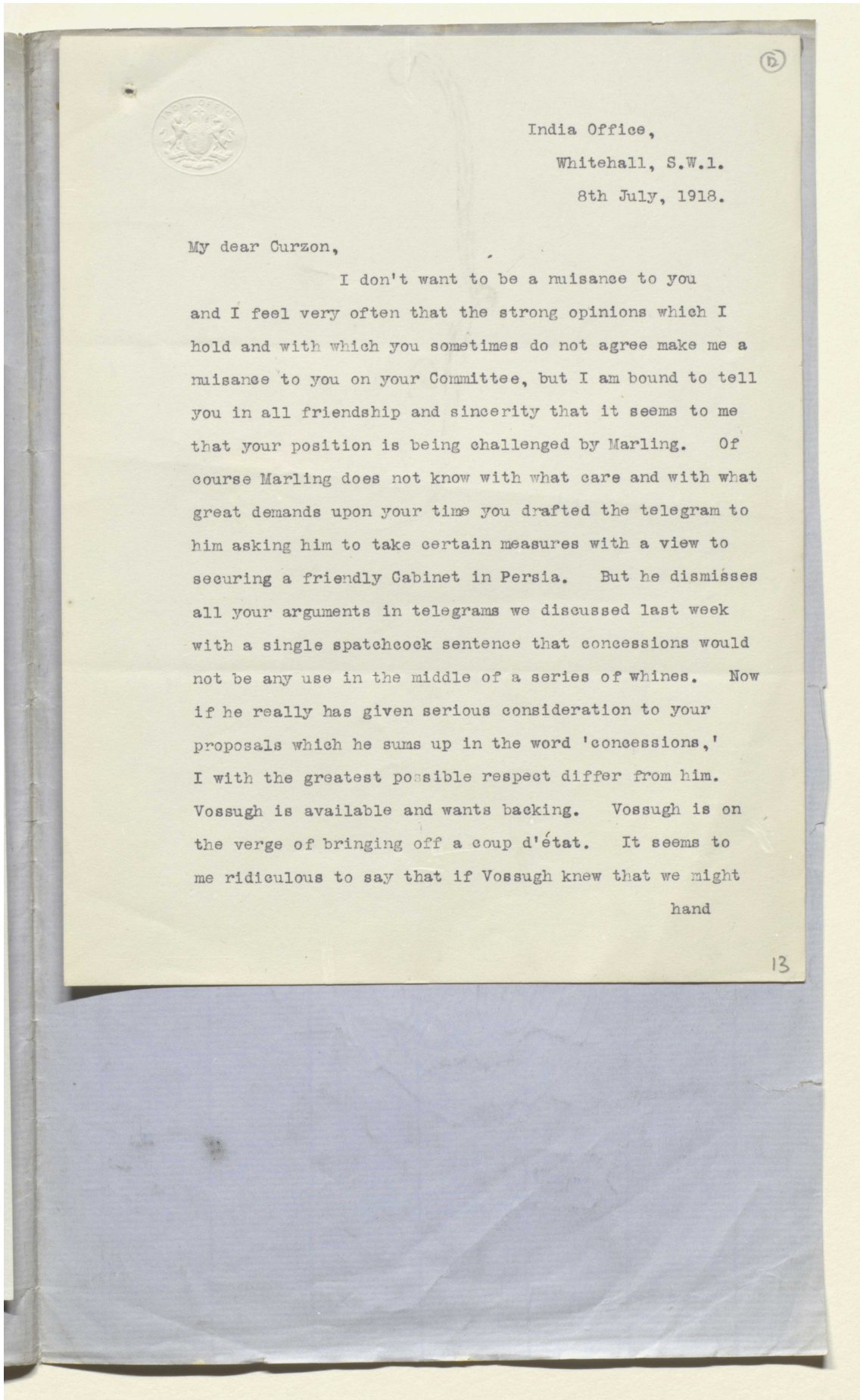
of Staff, General Studd. They are kept in the personal custody of the Secretary, and any Officer other than the two I have mentioned who, in the course of his duty, is required to see these documents, is not allowed to take them to his room, but reads them in the Secretary's room. // I think I should add that care has been taken not to accumulate very large archives at Versailles, in view of the comparative proximity of the enemy to Paris, and I have in my Office a number of boxes of Papers which they have returned for safe custody; also, that at my request they have drawn up a scheme for evacuating or destroying all Papers in case of emergency. As a matter of precaution, however, if they were allowed to have the Minutes of the Eastern Committee I think it would be as well if they returned them as soon as read, and I should be prepared to make arrangements for this if you thought fit.

I do not know whether, in view of the above considerations, you would be inclined to reconsider your decision that Versailles should not see the Eastern Committee Minutes, *subject to the above conditions or any other that you might think desirable*

Yours sincerely,

M. P. A. Hankey

The Rt. Hon.
The Earl Curzon of Kedleston, K.G., &c., &c.,



India Office,

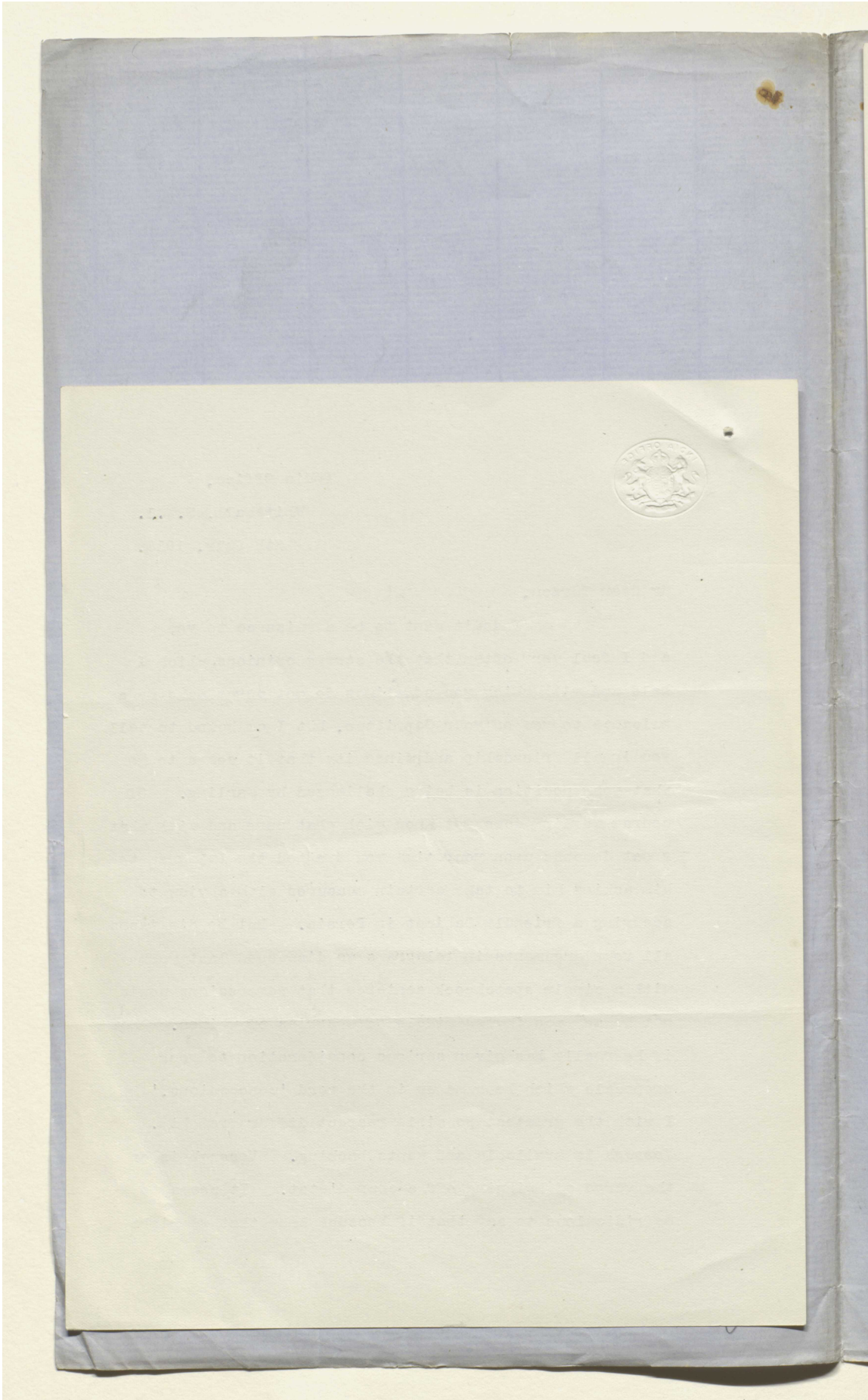
Whitehall, S.W.1.

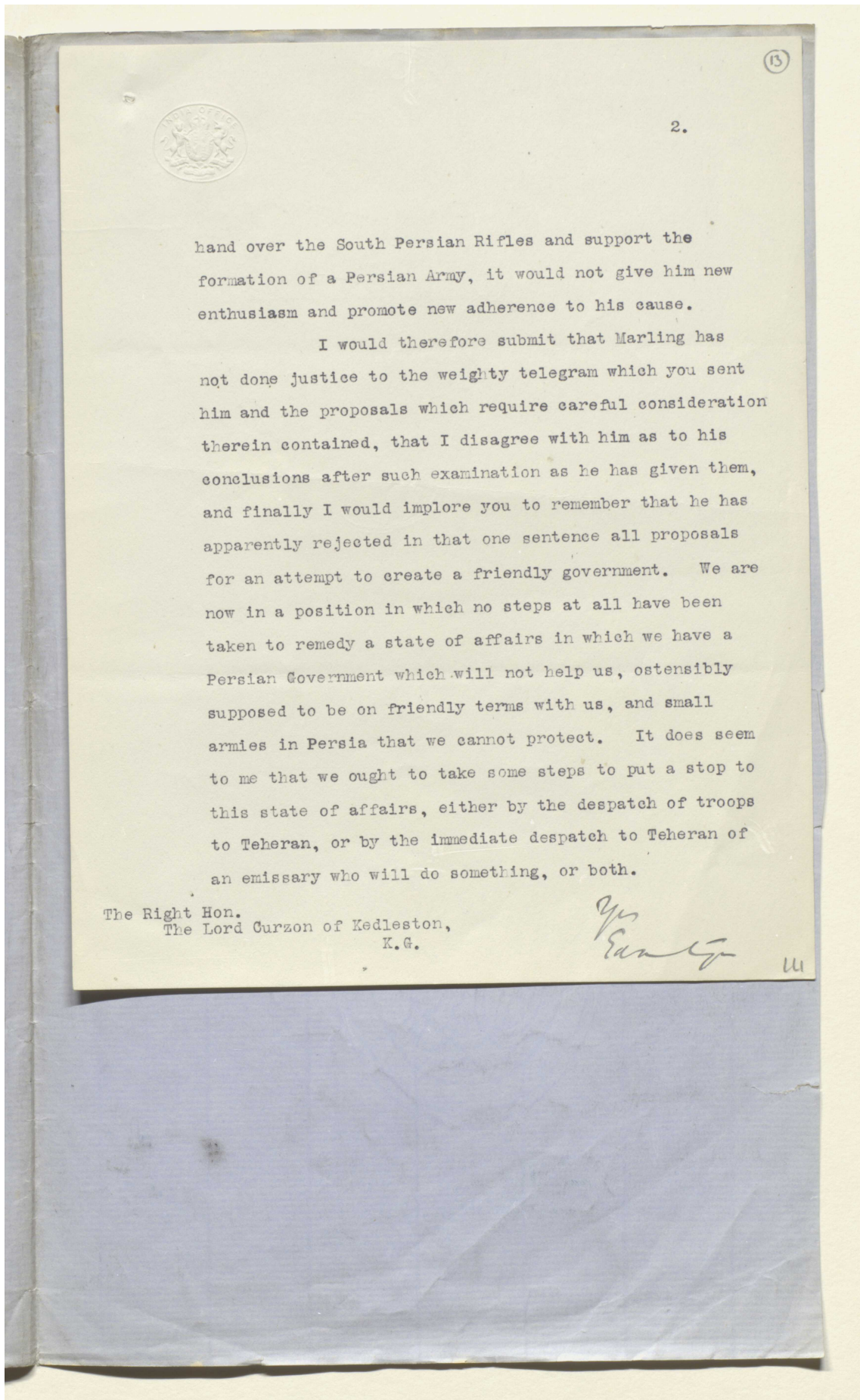
8th July, 1918.

My dear Curzon,

I don't want to be a nuisance to you and I feel very often that the strong opinions which I hold and with which you sometimes do not agree make me a nuisance to you on your Committee, but I am bound to tell you in all friendship and sincerity that it seems to me that your position is being challenged by Marling. Of course Marling does not know with what care and with what great demands upon your time you drafted the telegram to him asking him to take certain measures with a view to securing a friendly Cabinet in Persia. But he dismisses all your arguments in telegrams we discussed last week with a single spatchcock sentence that concessions would not be any use in the middle of a series of whines. Now if he really has given serious consideration to your proposals which he sums up in the word 'concessions,' I with the greatest possible respect differ from him. Vossugh is available and wants backing. Vossugh is on the verge of bringing off a coup d'état. It seems to me ridiculous to say that if Vossugh knew that we might hand

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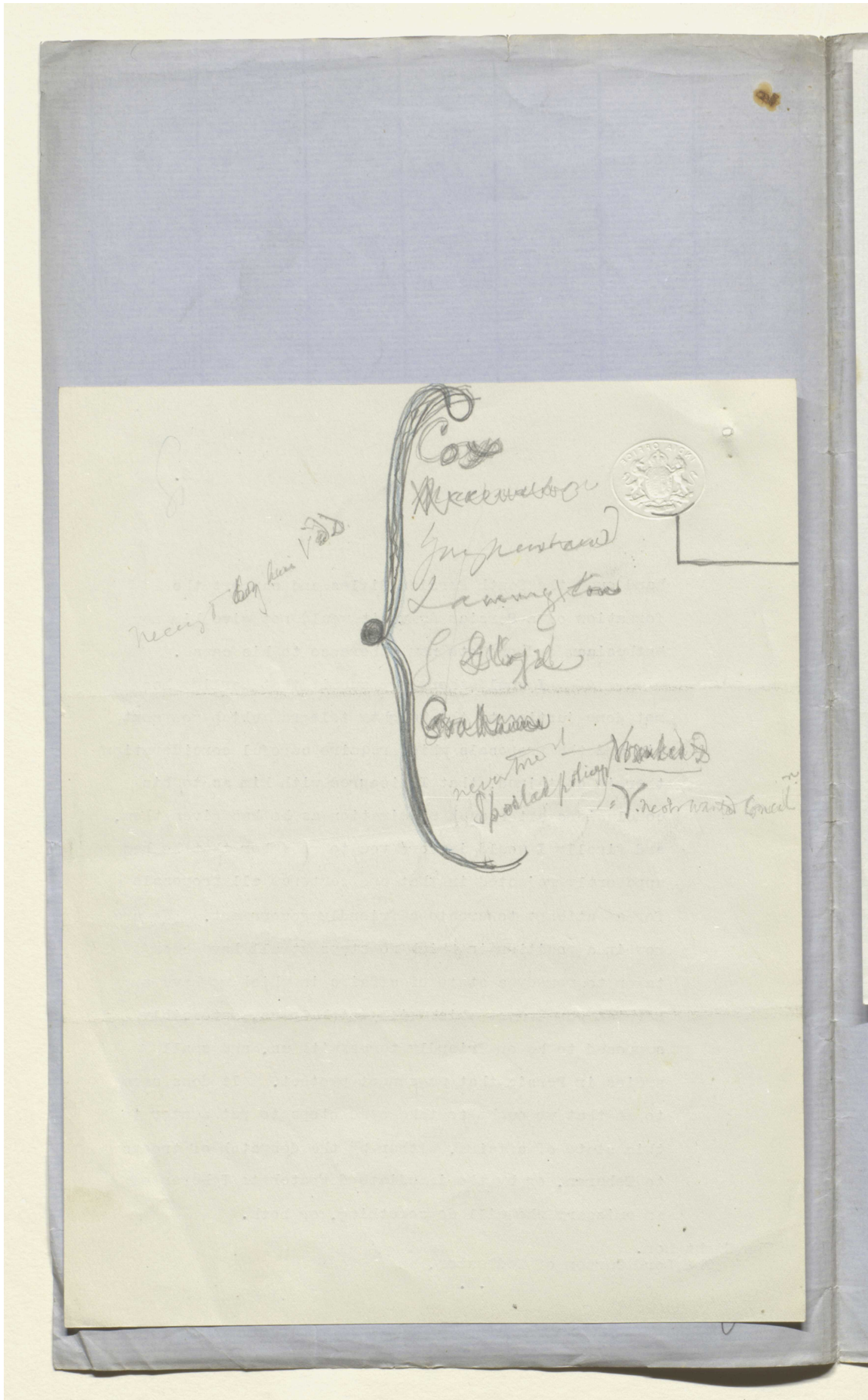
hand over the South Persian Rifles and support the formation of a Persian Army, it would not give him new enthusiasm and promote new adherence to his cause.

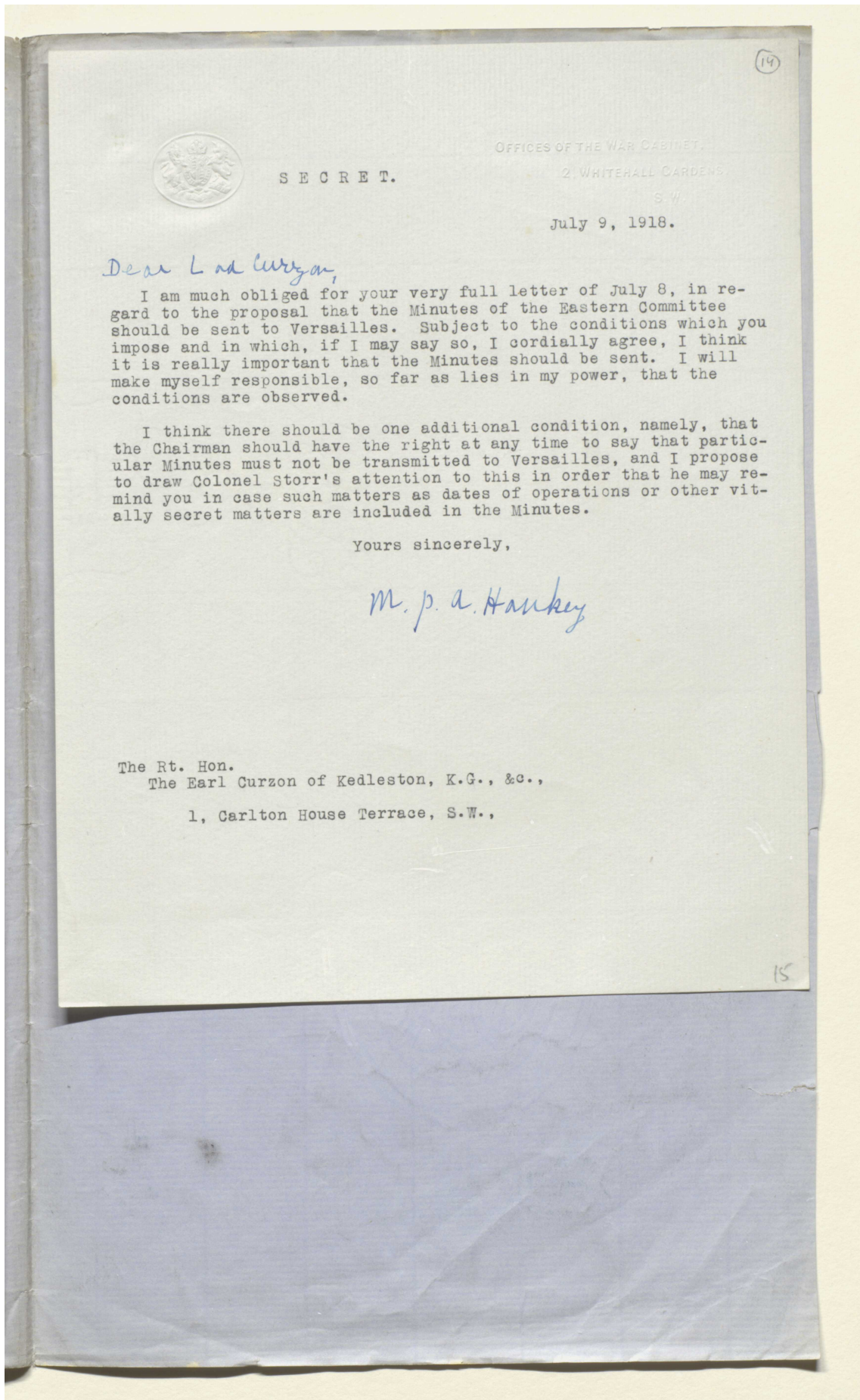
I would therefore submit that Marling has not done justice to the weighty telegram which you sent him and the proposals which require careful consideration therein contained, that I disagree with him as to his conclusions after such examination as he has given them, and finally I would implore you to remember that he has apparently rejected in that one sentence all proposals for an attempt to create a friendly government. We are now in a position in which no steps at all have been taken to remedy a state of affairs in which we have a Persian Government which will not help us, ostensibly supposed to be on friendly terms with us, and small armies in Persia that we cannot protect. It does seem to me that we ought to take some steps to put a stop to this state of affairs, either by the despatch of troops to Teheran, or by the immediate despatch to Teheran of an emissary who will do something, or both.

The Right Hon.
The Lord Curzon of Kedleston,
K.G.

Curzon

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S E C R E T .

OFFICES OF THE WAR CABINET,

2, WHITEHALL GARDENS,

S.W.

July 9, 1918.

Dear Lord Curzon,

I am much obliged for your very full letter of July 8, in regard to the proposal that the Minutes of the Eastern Committee should be sent to Versailles. Subject to the conditions which you impose and in which, if I may say so, I cordially agree, I think it is really important that the Minutes should be sent. I will make myself responsible, so far as lies in my power, that the conditions are observed.

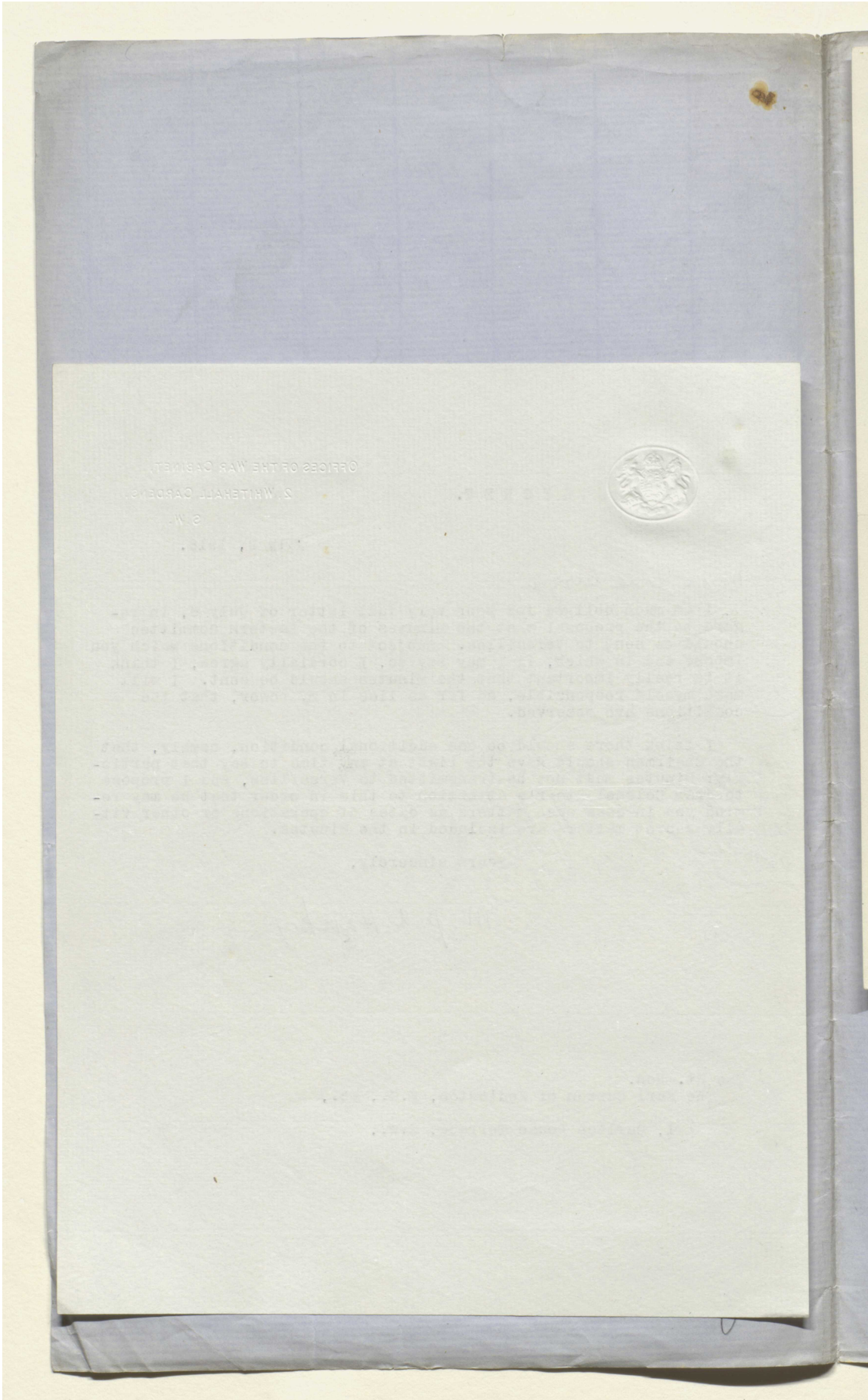
I think there should be one additional condition, namely, that the Chairman should have the right at any time to say that particular Minutes must not be transmitted to Versailles, and I propose to draw Colonel Storr's attention to this in order that he may remind you in case such matters as dates of operations or other vitally secret matters are included in the Minutes.

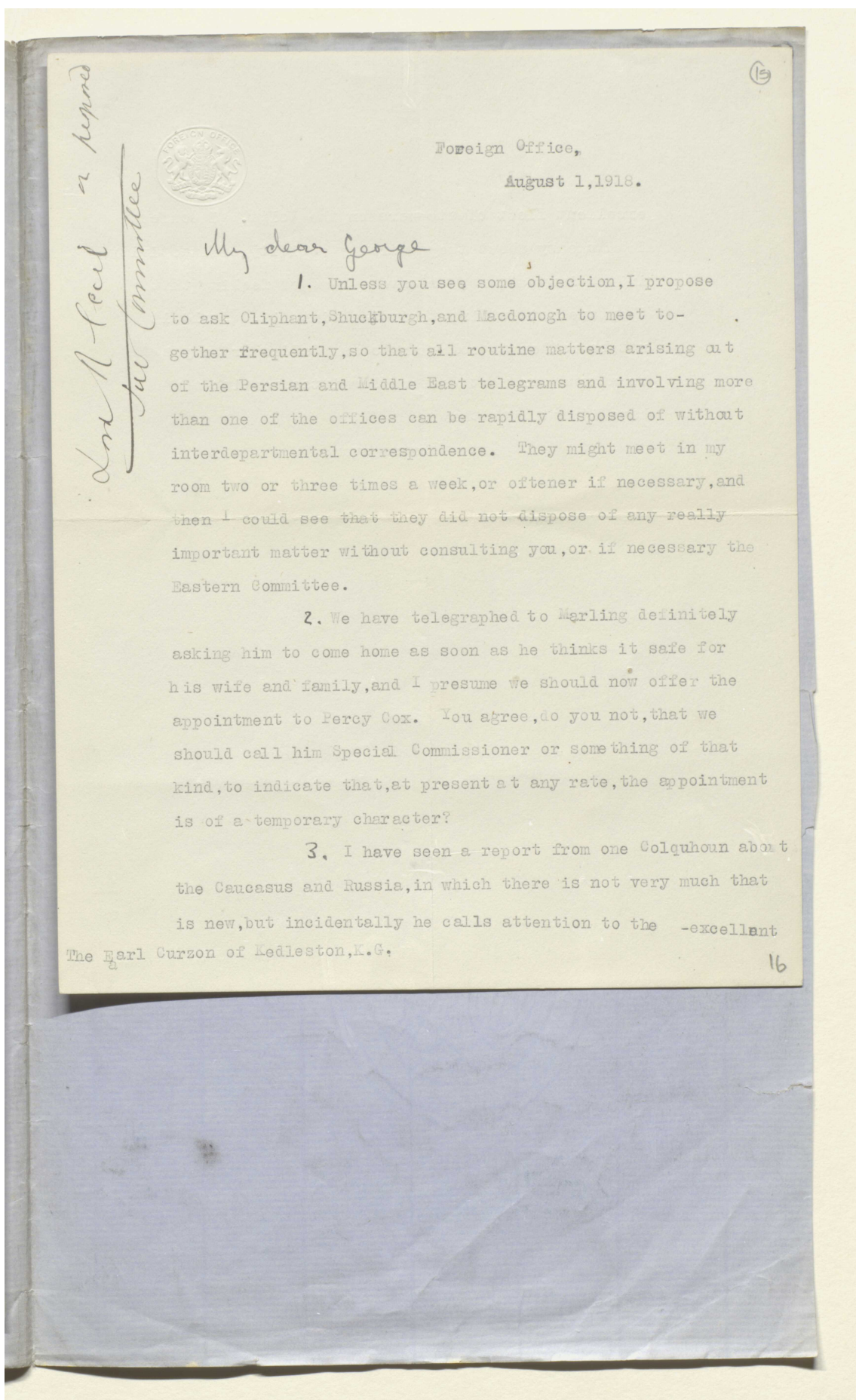
Yours sincerely,

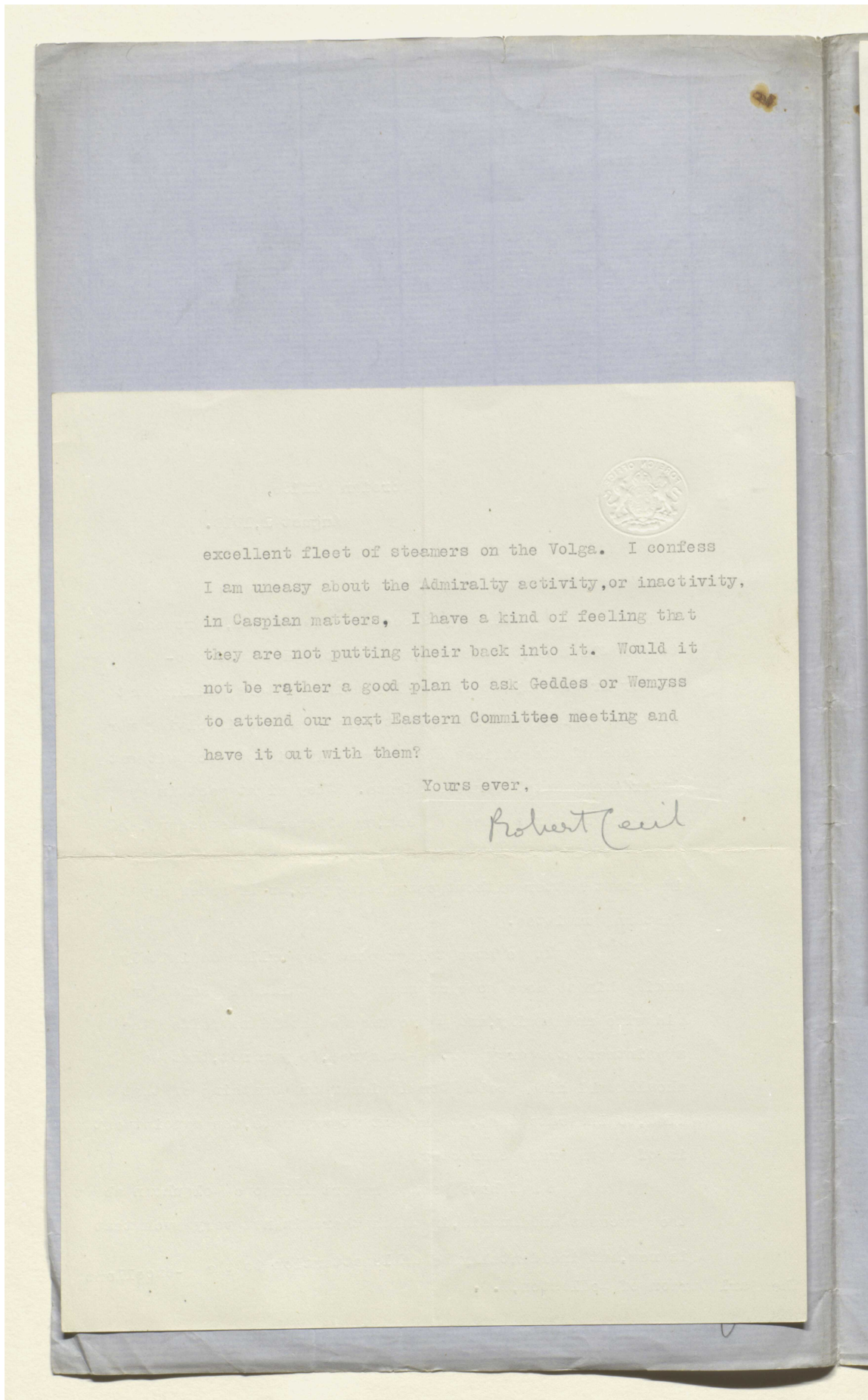
M. P. A. Hankey

The Rt. Hon.
The Earl Curzon of Kedleston, K.G., &c.,
1, Carlton House Terrace, S.W.,

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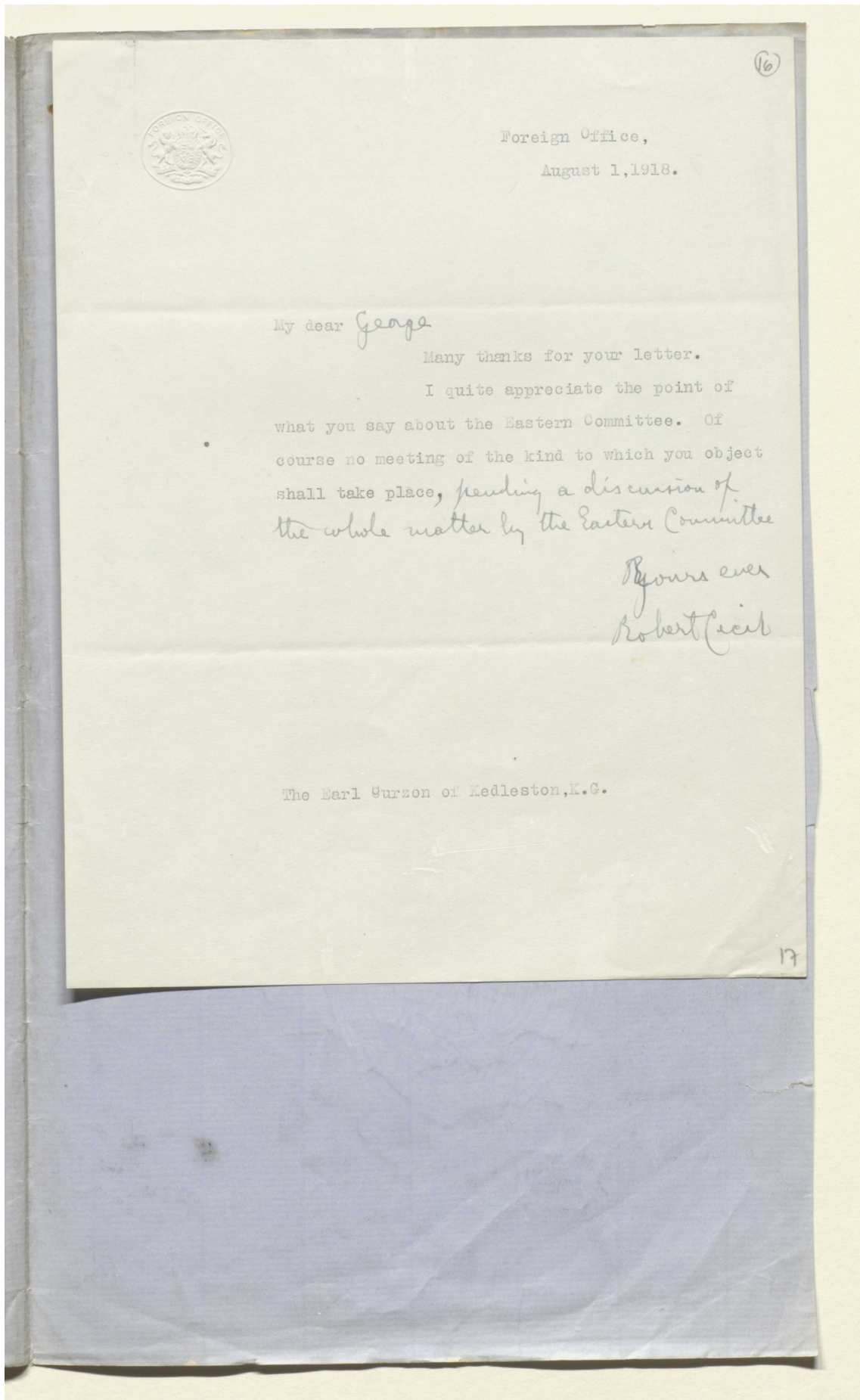


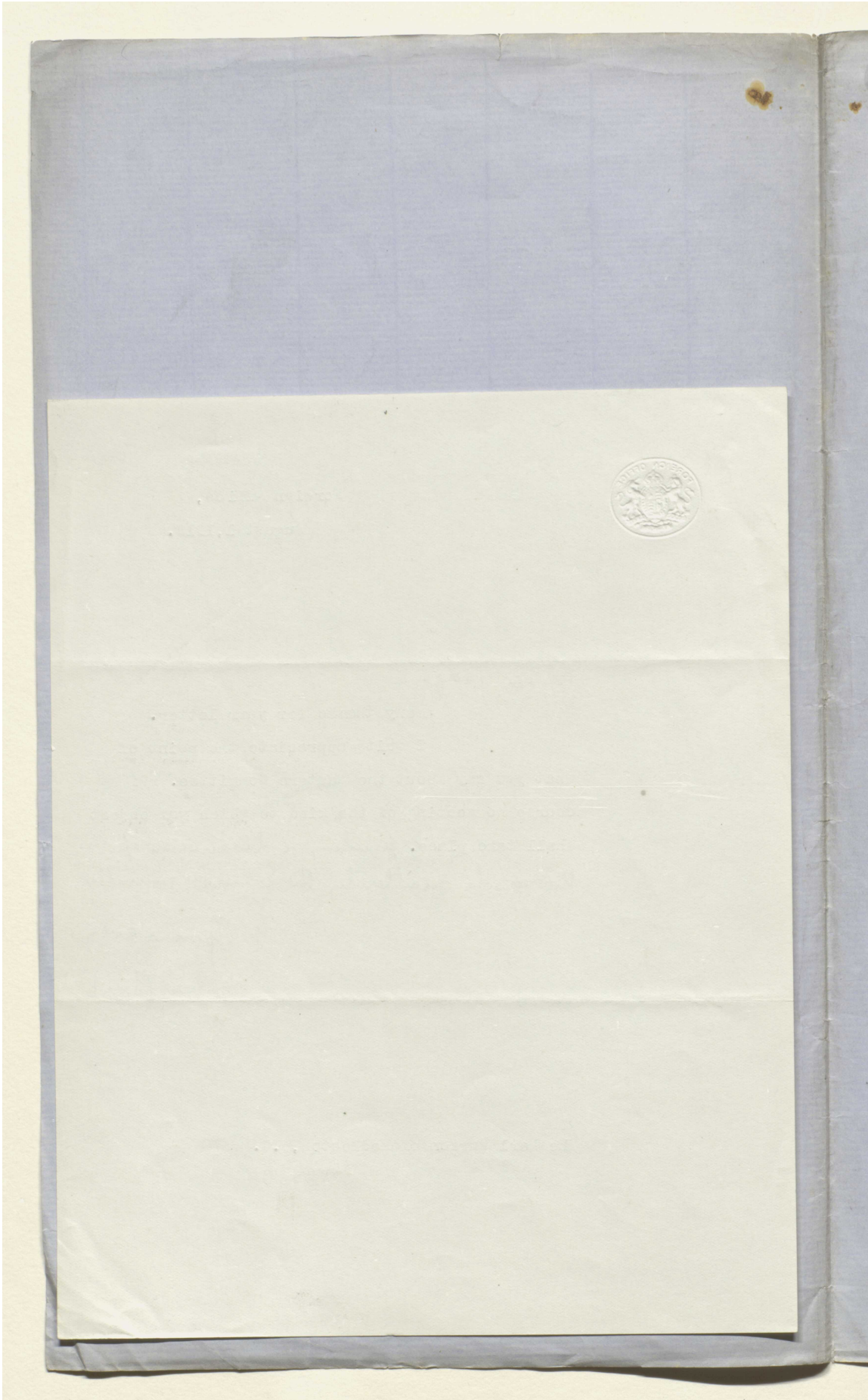


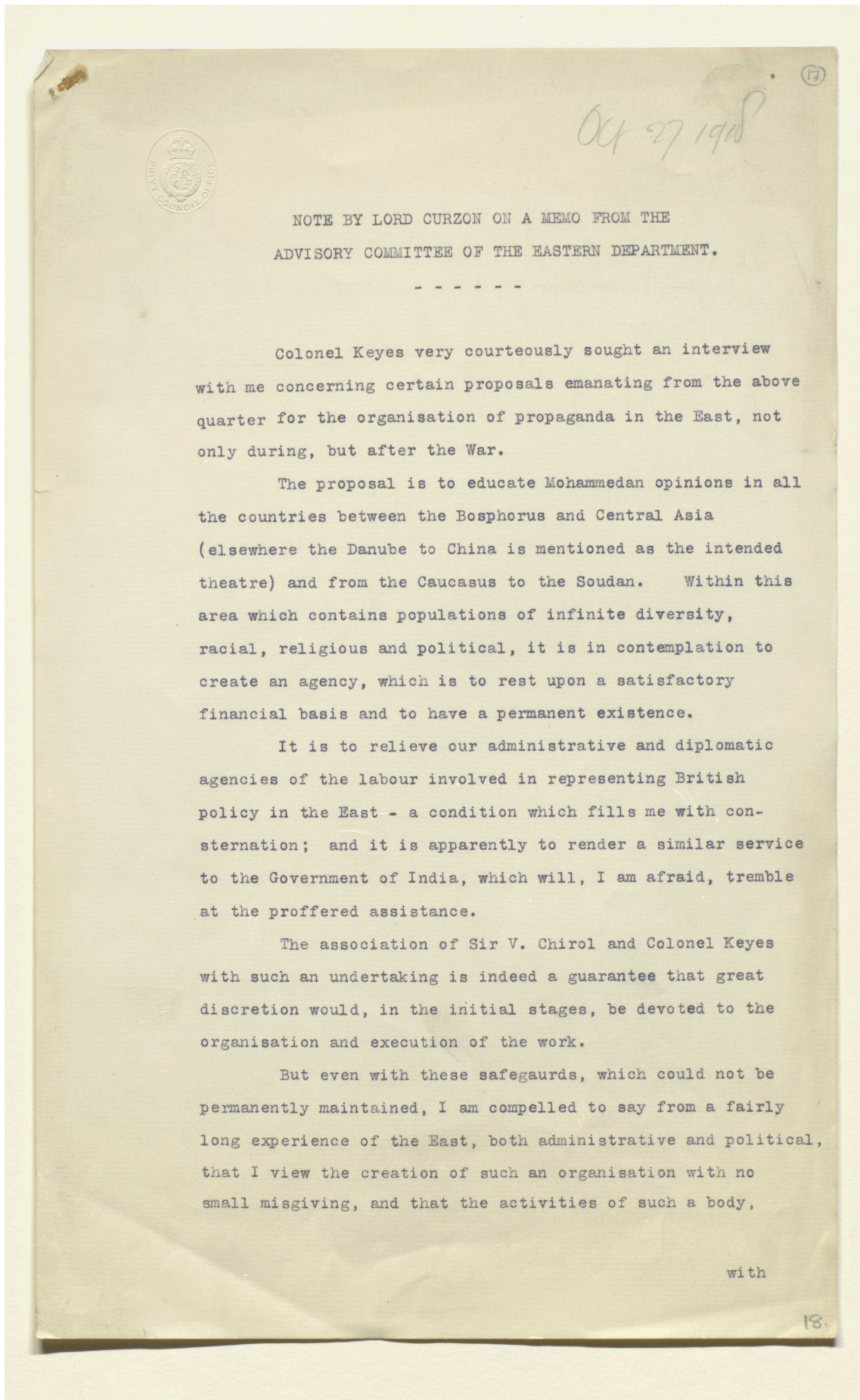
excellent fleet of steamers on the Volga. I confess
I am uneasy about the Admiralty activity, or inactivity,
in Caspian matters. I have a kind of feeling that
they are not putting their back into it. Would it
not be rather a good plan to ask Geddes or Wemyss
to attend our next Eastern Committee meeting and
have it out with them?

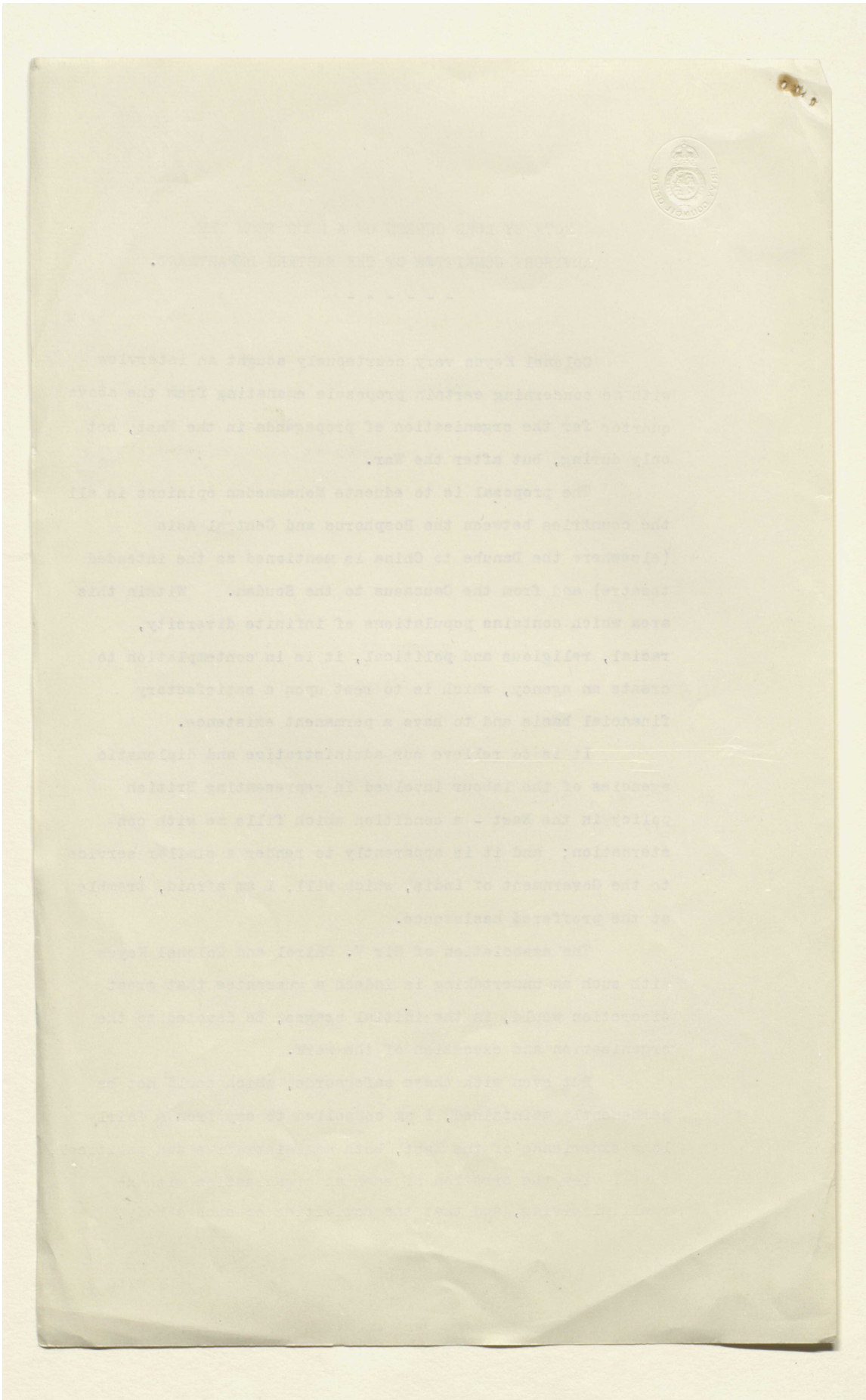
Yours ever,

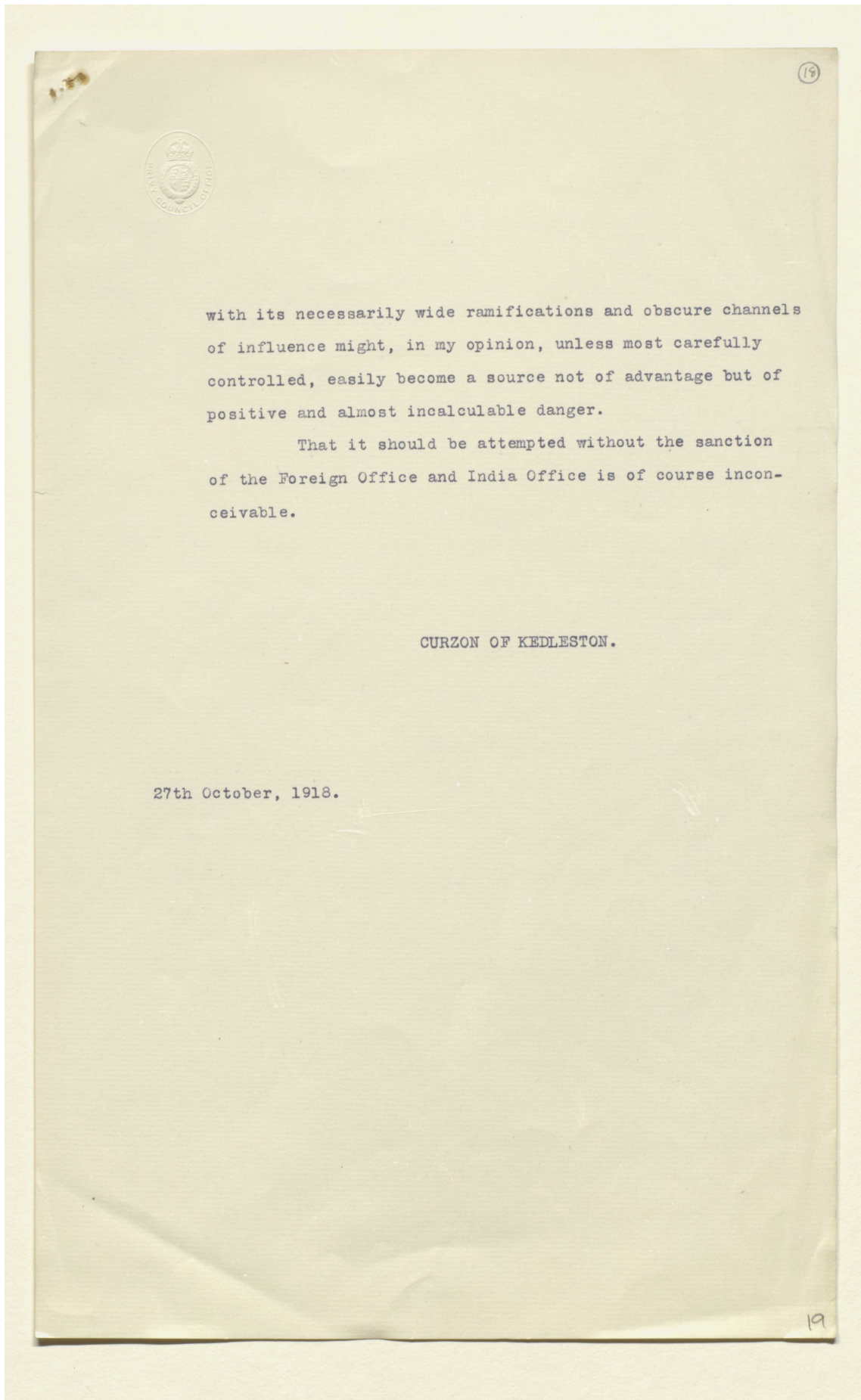
Robert Cecil

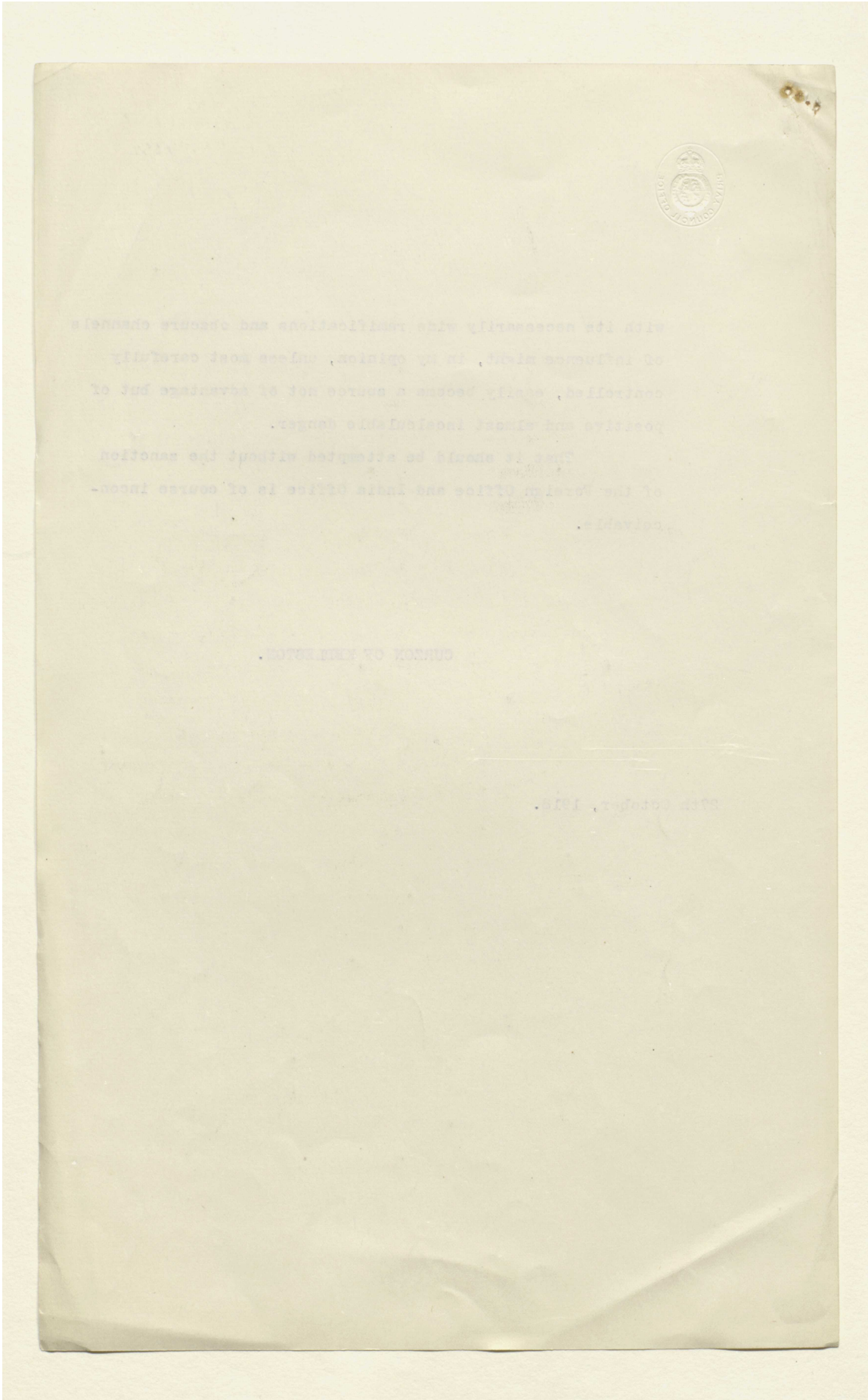




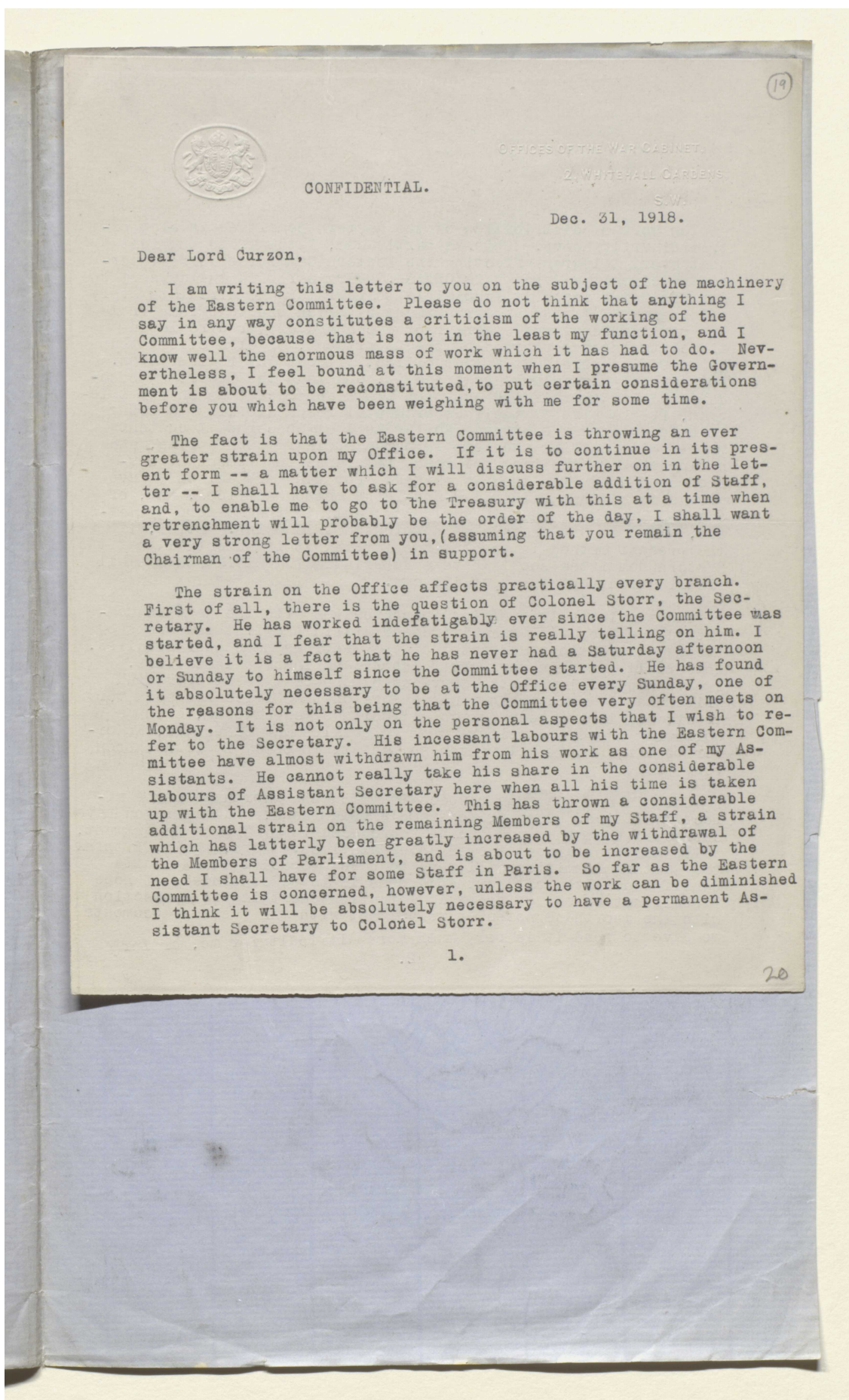








Middle East Committee and Eastern Committee [19r] (37/42)



OFFICES OF THE WAR CABINET
A. WHITEHALL CHAMBERS
S. W. 2



The work of distribution of the Eastern Committee is also extraordinarily heavy. This is partly due, I think, to the fact that every telegram affecting the Eastern Committee is registered and circulated from this Office. Very early in the days of the War Cabinet I found it impossible to register and circulate every telegram, and I made an arrangement by which the telegrams from the various Departments were reproduced and either circulated direct to those concerned, by the Department, or else circulated by my Office merely as a post office, without any registration. Moreover, I have always regarded it, and made the Departments understand it, that if the question arose for decisions on any telegram, it was part of their departmental responsibility to bring it before the War Cabinet. So far as I am concerned I content myself with putting the more important telegrams on a file, and having them in the room for ready reference the moment a question connected with them is raised. For the War Cabinet I have always found that this rough-and-ready method sufficed, but, of course, it may be that it would not apply to the Eastern Committee, and I do not venture an opinion on this point. Still, if the present method is to continue I think it is essential that the Eastern Committee should have a Superintending Clerk and a small Distribution Department of its own.

The strain on this Office in connection with the Eastern Committee has been very much increased within the last few weeks by the fact that shorthand notes of the Meetings have been required. This really means a very great labour and inconvenience here. I have had to give up the services of one of my best shorthand writers at a moment when the pressure on the Office has been very great, and I have been put to all sorts of expedients, such as borrowing shorthand writers from Versailles and elsewhere, in order to carry on at all. Even so, the strain on my Staff has been very great.

This is not the only respect in which the shorthand notes affect my Office. They are extremely voluminous, and after you have corrected them they have to be reproduced in my Typing Department, which has been almost snowed under at times. Here, again, I think the Eastern Committee will have to have a special staff of its own if the system of shorthand notes is to be continued. I hope I shall not be out of order if I mention one thing in connection with the shorthand notes, namely, that with the mass of documents we have to read it is very much more difficult for me, or for

Middle East Committee and Eastern Committee [20r] (39/42)

G.R.

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Members of the War Cabinet, to keep abreast with the affairs of the Eastern Committee than when relatively short Minutes are available. Personally, I have found great difficulty in finding the time to read the shorthand notes, though I believe I am as industrious as anyone in reading War Cabinet documents.

All this brings me up to a great point of principle, namely, as to whether the time has not come to separate the Eastern Committee in some form from the War Cabinet Secretariat, and on this point I should like to remind you of some precedents. The War Trade Department grew out of the old War Licences Committee; the War Trade Intelligence Department, I think, grew out of the Trading with the Enemy Committee; the Blockade Department out of the Contraband Committee, the Ministry of National Service out of the Man-Power Committee; and two very important Committees, which you presided over, namely, the Air Committee and the Shipping Control Committee developed in due course into the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Shipping, respectively.

Personally, so far as I have had anything to do with the matter, I have aimed at severing from the War Cabinet and the various War Committees, &c., that preceded it, all Committees and organisations that were tending to outgrow the parent Committee.

It seems to me that this stage is approaching, if it has not already been reached, in the case of the Eastern Committee. Under your care this infant threatens to outgrow its parent. Colonel Storr claims that more Papers are issued to the Eastern Committee than to the War Cabinet -- though I confess I do not think the claim well founded.

At any rate, from the point of view of machinery, which is the only one from which I am entitled to approach the question, I do suggest most seriously to you that the time has now come for the severance. The Eastern Committee might become an organisation of its own like the War Priorities Committee; it might become a Department like the Ministry of Shipping; or it might be affiliated to some Department. My own opinion would incline to its absorption by the recently created Middle East Department of the Foreign Office. This, however, is a matter on which you would be a much better judge than I.

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I am sorry for troubling you with so long a letter, but I felt that, at the moment when the Government is to be reconstructed, I ought to write to you on the subject, in order that, in the event of your sharing my views, you might make such representations to the Prime Minister as you think fit.

Needless to say it is quite unnecessary to answer this long letter to me.

Yours sincerely,

m. p. a. Hankey

The Rt. Hon.
The Earl Curzon of Kedleston,
K.G., &c., &c.,

