

THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER  
OF INDIA.

Carl Heath.

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NORTH-WEST FRONTIER  
OF INDIA

By  
Carl Heath

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## FOREWORD

THE North-West Frontier of India has long been regarded as suggesting a conundrum for pacifists. What would you do? Are not the operations there of the nature of police action? In any case those working for World Peace, and critical it may be of other nations or governments, have a clear duty in this British problem. Carl Heath's presentation of it will help readers to understand the situation with all its difficulties, and to see the failure of military action to achieve any solution; and above all it outlines a policy of constructive and healing pacifism.

FRANCIS E. POLLARD.



# The North-West Frontier of India

BY CARL HEATH

IT is of no small importance that the people of Great Britain should pay attention to what has been happening on the North-West Frontier of India, and to the events connected with 'the recent disturbances' in Waziristan. For though the *costs* of the military operations that are being carried forward are borne by the Indian taxpayers, the *policy* behind these operations, their determination and control, are in the hands of the Government of India and of the Cabinet and Parliament of this country, to which alone the Government of India is responsible. Indian opinion as to Frontier policy, or in respect to military operations arising therefrom, is neither sought nor considered at present. These things are reserved to the Viceroy and his Secretariat and the British Commander-in-Chief. The part assigned to India is to pay the bill. The purpose of this pamphlet is to examine this policy of the Government of India, with its long-continued history of punitive measures, culminating in the war in Waziristan of the last twelve months; and to consider the possibility of an alternative policy of greater political freedom, economic co-operation and friendship, and a non-imperialist object.

## PRESENT CONDITION

In 'the present disturbances', as the most recent *White Paper*\* calls them, 37,000 British and Indian troops have been engaged; approximately, that is, 32,000 Regulars and 5,000 Irregular troops (Tochi and Waziristan Scouts). The *White Paper* covers the period from

\* *Tribal Disturbances in Waziristan (25th November, 1936—14th June, 1937)*. Cmd. 5495  
Price 2d. net.

### A NOTE ON THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER.

The North-West Frontier Province of British India stretches from the Hindu Kush and Kashmir in the North-East to Baluchistan in the South-West. It contains a vast mountainous country inhabited by a great number of Pathan, Afghan and other tribes of a more or less primitive order. The Province is divided into an Administrative area and a Tribal one. The latter is contiguous with a similar tribal area under Afghan control, from which it is separated by the so-called Durand line. Peshawar is the capital of the Province and lies at the end of the railway coming up north from Delhi through Lahore and the Punjab Province.

the beginning of the troubles on November 25th, 1936 to June 14th, 1937. During this period there were 603 casualties on the British side, 163 killed and 440 wounded. The enemy's casualties in the same period are estimated to have been 1,380, or 720 killed and 660 wounded. But these estimates are obviously guess-work.

This killing and wounding is continuing from day to day. The British and Indian casualties in a struggle on the Ladha-Wana road on June 22-23rd are given by *The Times* (June 28th) as 53. A few days later 26 tribesmen were left dead in a fight with the troops; proof, says *The Times* correspondent, that the enemy was "severely punished, as they invariably endeavour to retrieve their dead".

This little war has now been in operation for over ten months. What it will cost cannot of course be estimated at present. An Indian newspaper reports that it is said in Simla that it may reach such proportions as to necessitate the cutting down of expenditure in other directions to a minimum. In any case an army of 37,000 men in the field, and in so difficult a country, is an expensive day-to-day item for the Government of India to meet.\*

The official explanation of the revolt of these Waziris is summed up under five heads:

1. Anti-Government and anti-Hindu propaganda of the Faqir (of Ipi, a place in the Tochi valley), i.e., religious fanaticism, 'Islam in danger'.
2. Religious excitability and impatience of any control of the youthful and turbulent elements in the tribes.
3. Hope of securing rifles and other loot.
4. Dissatisfaction with internal distribution of the allowances which are paid to a tribe by Government, and are designed to give them a stake in the maintenance of peace and order.
5. Feeling among the tribesmen that the constitutional changes in India indicate weakness on the part of the Government.

\* Stated in the Assembly October 5th 1937 to be about 140 lakhs of rupees, or £1,000,000 up to the month of September. (*Times*, October 6th.)

This last must surely have been conceived in Simla rather than in Waziristan!

When these primitive tribesmen of the hills get on the war-path they engage in very violent and brutal things. They are accused in this case of the murders of two British officers on the 6th and 7th of February, 1937; of a series of raids into British administered and protected areas, with kidnappings and much loss of life and property; of the looting and burning of sixty Hindu shops; of the looting and destruction of lorries; and of extensive cattle and sheep lifting. Ten Hindu civilians were killed and thirty-one persons kidnapped, including twenty-three Hindus, seven Moslems, and one Sikh. Frequent attacks were made on troops and communications. Thus, up to June, 1937.

### BRITISH GOVERNMENT POLICY

Clearly no Government, or neighbouring Government, can treat lightly such happenings. And equally clearly something is seriously wrong that such happenings should occur at all. Moreover if this were a sudden and isolated series the Government of India, with the arms and the power it possesses and believes in, could not be expected to do other than to crush these 'present disturbances' with a strong military hand. It will do so. But that will neither explain nor solve this constant warfare on the Frontier. The problem will remain.

"The standing object of the general policy of the Government of India in regard to the frontier," says the *White Paper* (p. 7), "is to preserve the peace of the border and to foster good relations with the tribes with a view to their gradual pacification, civilization and economic betterment." (It is of course also a part of this policy, though not here mentioned, to safeguard the North-West Frontier of India in an international sense.)

This would be unimpeachable as policy were it not that the Government of India, in its actions from year to year, does not appear to get near to its professed objects. Two years ago it was written that: "Ever since 1852 there has been (in Waziristan) a constant succession of

expeditions and campaigns, culminating in the four years war which lasted until 1925." (Mr. F. G. Pratt, C.S.I.) In his book on *The Problem of the North-West Frontier*, 1896-1908., Captain Colin Davies refers to the fact that "the tribesmen are soon faced by the grim spectre of starvation," as the reason why "the British have sought to coerce the inhabitants of Waziristan by means of blockades, from 1849 onwards." The current edition of the *Indian Year Book*, dealing with the more recent events, speaks of the troubles that threatened to break out in 1930, "which were at the outset firmly dealt with"—and—"all went peacefully until the autumn of 1936". We are now in 1937, with 37,000 troops engaged in warfare in the same area!

Thus for nearly ninety years these military happenings have been frequent all along the border. "Between 1849 and 1890," says Captain Colin Davies, "no less than forty-two expeditions had been considered necessary to counteract the marauding proclivities of the turbulent tribesmen," (p. 27). In the Mohmand area disturbances during several years "culminated in the large scale operations of last year (1935) when 15,000 troops were in action and the R.A.F. dropped 2,500 bombs in the month of September, 1935". (Mr. F. G. Pratt).

There can be no question as to the courage, devotion and persistence, in the face of immense difficulties, displayed by military and political officers alike, in the watch and ward maintained on the Frontier during generation after generation. What is in question is the policy pursued. And it is not surprising that, seeing these interminable little wars, the widespread use of bombing, the thousands of troops in action against these hillsmen, the relatively huge military costs in India, and the complete failure to achieve any permanent settlement, Indian opinion as expressed by the political party that now controls seven of the eleven Governments of the British-Indian Provinces, should be wholly against the Frontier policy of the Government of India. At the meeting of the Congress Party in Faizpur in December, 1936, the nationalist view was expressed in unmeasured terms.



“This policy,” it declared, “has been pursued in the interests of imperialism and mostly with the object of justifying the heavy military expenditure in India, and of providing training under semi-war conditions for otherwise idle troops maintained for imperial purposes.” “This policy has signally failed in establishing peace on the frontier.”

Turning from the professed general aim of the policy in question, which, says the Simla correspondent of *The Times* (April 22nd, 1937) “has never been acclaimed perfect”, to the actual methods employed in its working out, we find *The Times* of the same date saying: “The policy to-day may be summarized as implying the building of roads when and where necessary, and the placing of troops behind the tribes with a view to securing their consent to develop the tribal areas for the purpose of improving the economic status of the tribesmen”. *The Times* in a leader on June 18th speaks of “the present policy of pacifying tribal territory by the construction of strategic roads and fortified cantonments”. And its correspondent in Simla, on the same date, writes of the possibility of “disarming those tribes which have been brought within the road encirclement scheme, which is an outstanding feature of present frontier policy”.

It would thus seem clear that the main and dominating idea is to penetrate the tribal areas by encircling and strategic roads, coupled with subsidies to the chiefs, and, from time to time ‘pacification’ by armies of from 15,000 to 35,000 troops, not forgetting in so doing the potent teaching weapon of the exploding bomb.

## NORTH-WEST FRONTIER

### A BRITISH MILITARY TRAINING-GROUND

In this policy of tribal ‘appeasement’ is involved the other problem of frontier protection. It may seem astonishing to a layman that military strategy should be in any sense content with a policy that, after nearly a full century, has but left India with so insecure a frontier. For a frontier of seething discontent, bursting every few years into open revolt, would, in the interests of security alone, seem to call for a wholly new method of reaching the

tribal peoples. The maintenance of the present conditions does indeed lend some suggestion of truth to the accusation of the Congress party, and of many others that, for imperial and military purposes, the British Government is not unwilling to continue indefinitely the existence of a large training field of more or less continuous warfare. The special Tribunal set up in 1933 to determine certain matters of Defence Expenditure in dispute between the Government of India, the War Office and the Air Ministry (*White Paper*, Cmd. 4473), does indeed quite frankly state as one of the reasons why it favours an imperial contribution towards military expenditure in India:—"That India is a training ground for active service such as does not exist elsewhere in the Empire", and that the Army in India is in consequence "a force ready in an emergency to take the field at once . . . available for immediate use in the East, and which has on occasion been so used". (p. 15)

The use of the 'bomber' has become an accepted resource in military operations against the tribal villages. It is considered more effective. It is cheaper, and it does not involve the difficulties and the dangers of the old type of punitive expedition.

There are, it seems, three types of air action, as explained in the *White Paper*:

*a.* Action against villages, which are in effect the forts and headquarters of the tribal forces, either to prevent their use by the tribal forces, or for a short defined period to cause damage to buildings as a penalty for specific outrages.

*b.* The proscription of small defined areas; in such cases all the inhabitants, their families and livestock are ordered to evacuate the area, the object being either to reinforce political pressure against offending sections, or to make it possible to attack hostile forces in the area without risk to non-combatants; in each case convenient and adjacent asylums outside the proscribed area are available for the non-combatants.

*c.* The air blockade of the territory of a hostile section (naturally small in extent) the object being to exclude the offending tribesmen from their villages and from the use of their usual amenities and the interruption of their normal habits of life until they comply with specified terms.

This last form of air action has not, we are told, been used in the course of the present disturbances.

"It must be emphasized again that these three types of action are chosen with a view to the avoidance of casualties and not to causing them, and that action is invariably preceded by the distribution of notices which set out the reason and nature of the action to be taken and warn the tribesmen to keep themselves and their families out of the areas of danger which are clearly defined; air action does not begin till a sufficient period has elapsed to allow the area of danger to be evacuated and the inhabitants to find safe refuge in the neighbourhood, and experience shows that they do in fact find it in caves or the territories of neighbouring sections."—(*White Paper*, p. 6).

It would not appear that this very polite and careful bombing could be particularly useful in results, nor that we have here the whole of the story. And it is not possible to take the assertion of an entire lack of casualties as in any sense proven. It is in any case, a brutal enough method of enforcing submission, used against a people that has no air equivalent. Moreover no explanation is given as to how the warning notices are distributed in such a country, nor how it is supposed that the inhabitants can understand them, given the fact that these tribesmen are, with very few exceptions, illiterate.\*

Ten villages were destroyed by bombs during the period November-June, and much property. It is affirmed that no loss of life occurred in these villages owing to the warnings. In the open of course it is admitted that the tribesmen were constantly killed by bombs. In moving across the Khaisora River, says *The Times* of May 1st, the tribesmen "presented good targets, of which full opportunity was taken by aircraft". And again later "the enemy again afforded targets to artillery and aircraft."

### IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE POLICY?

What, it will be asked, is the alternative? No one who has seen this wild country will conceive that the Government of India is facing an easy or simple problem. It

\*In India road notices are of little use in giving information or direction to the peasants, who are illiterate. In the Khyber Pass the distinction between the car and lorry road, and that for the travelling caravans, is indicated by little designs of cars and of camels, together with understandable arrow-heads pointing the way.

may be asked, and India does ask it: Why a frontier India right up in this wild Pathan country? What defence is there for India in this forward policy? Is the driving motive a simple imperialism that will not, in the end, stop short of the Afghan border?

It has been maintained by an able but anonymous writer in *The Times* that a far sounder policy would be to draw a purely defensive line along the border of the Administrative Province, and to leave the mountaineers to themselves. The Government of India would then content itself with the making of raiding into India very costly for the tribes, if not impossible. This is sometimes known as 'the closed border' policy. The cost of such a policy, it is affirmed, would be but a fraction of the present heavy and recurring costs.

In Simla and Delhi\* it appears to be supposed that there are but three policies available, viz., the present one of a restrained but forward policy (more encircling and strategic roads with each fresh trouble, together with a tightening grip); the one of withdrawal within the Administrative Province, outlined above, i.e., the closed border policy; and that of establishing full military control right up to the Durand line, that is, the line separating the tribal sphere of British India from that of Afghanistan. Military imperialism however does not appear to be prepared for any such drastic step as this last at present.

### THE REAL ALTERNATIVE

There is, however, a fourth policy, widely demanded in India, and one which opponents of war methods, and of air bombing in particular, should support. It is a policy which combines a political freedom, or guarantee against imperial incursion and penetration for the tribal territories; an economic co-operation so that the mountain tribes do not suffer from an ever-recurring winter starvation; assistance in educational and hospital services, both of which are badly needed; and the development of a genuine friendship between these peoples and their kinsmen on the Indian side of the border.

Like all hill peoples these mountaineers are intensely

\*The summer and winter capitals of the Government of India.

of their freedom. They resent the military roads and the increasing domination, which they certainly do. They actively resist their construction, realizing only too well their 'encircling' and 'strategic' purpose.

In these bare lands the primitive mountaineer is often without food. Therein lies the economic problem of the frontier, which, after all is at the root of much of the recurring trouble, and which is not met by *danegeld* subsidies to chiefs. "It is," says Sir John Maynard, "the economic question which we must look upon as the most important of all. These people are locked up in a country which does not provide them with the means of subsistence. Therefore they must do one of two things—they must either sit still and starve or go and raid the rich plains".\* Sir Francis Younghusband, whose experience both as a military and as a political officer in the north of India is outstanding, has said of the raiders into Central Asia, whose activities he was sent to stop: "The ultimate reason (for the raids) was that the raiders had not sufficient food in their own country and therefore in accordance with the custom of ages they raided the inhabitants of countries which had more food at their disposal". Applying this fact all along the Frontier, what seems to be needed is an inquiry into the economic needs of the tribes. Such an inquiry however can only be effective in so far as it is made by and with the co-operation of sympathetic Indians, and notably Pathans of the North, men of the same kindred, the same language, and the same religion.

Little need be said of the civilizing values of educational and social services, and what these mean in the hands of competent persons. They are obvious, but are too frequently impossible because of the costs and exigencies of military rule and expeditionary expense.

When thinking of friendship, honour may well be done to the name of Dr. Theodore Pennell, a medical missionary who, unarmed, understood how to win the affection and confidence and respect of the tribesmen. Of this man the Commander-in-Chief is said to have remarked that he was worth two regiments on the Frontier. Colonel Roland Milne said at a Conference on the Frontier Problem

\*Report of Conference on *Frontier Problems and Policy*, April, 1936.

in London in April, 1936: "Dr. Pennell was a man in a million. You cannot run a policy on the supposition that you are going to get an unlimited supply of Dr. Pennells. You cannot. Nor can you run a policy of constructive peace and civilization on an imperial basis, 'pacifying' by bayonets and bombs, and 'civilizing' by military roads, cantonments and fortifications. These things do not appease, and as soon as there is opportunity there is trouble again.

An integral policy of internal freedom and economic co-operation without ulterior imperial purpose, of educational and social services, and of a disinterested friendship, has yet to be tried on the Frontier of the North-West and under frontier conditions. And tried by and with the sought co-operation of the kinsmen on both sides of the border.

There are several policies for *enforcing order* on the Frontier when conditions become too violent, and for *maintaining order* and pursuing penetration by road-making meanwhile. There is, however, but one way of *appeasement*, and that is along a path of constructive, co-operating kinship. Britain has tried the several policies of force for nearly a century, with no permanent success. She is to-day, with 37,000 troops in the field, engaged in one more repression. It is time that the way of peace were tried. But it is well to understand with clarity that in these days, with the eleven Provincial Governments of India in Indian hands, this cannot be done imperially, without India and the Indian people, *and succeed*.

October, 1937.