

AN INDIAN MILITIA FOR INDIA'S DEFENCE.

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THOUGH Russophobia dates back to the beginning of the last century, costly action to strengthen our position in Northern India against attack by Russia only began in 1838, when for the first time we invaded Afghanistan. Soon afterwards, under the same obsession, we conquered and annexed Sindh (1842) and the Punjab (1849), thus extending our dominion to the line of the Indus. There, for the next twenty-five years, we sat still in fancied security, closing our eyes to Russia's progress towards us. We woke up in 1877-78 to find her in military possession of Central Asia as far south as the Oxus, and her envoy in Kabul negotiating a treaty with the Amir. To convince the latter that England, not Russia, was his friend, we drove him from his country, and after two years of warfare and vicissitude installed as his successor a friendly and capable member of his family, engaging that so long as he held no intercourse with the rival Power, and left the management of all his foreign affairs to us, we should pay him annually a fixed subsidy, and guarantee the integrity of his kingdom.

Though at the time the territories comprising it were known and loosely described, the exact boundaries had nowhere been clearly ascertained and defined; hence, before

the engagement could become effective, the delimitation of Afghanistan with Russia, Persia, and India was necessary. Work in the field was soon after begun, and, in spite of delays, difficulties, and the Panjdeh crisis in 1885, has been slowly and thoroughly carried through, with the result that all the States and tribes, parties to the operations, have exact knowledge of their common frontiers and the political relations subsisting between them. In each case the actual boundary-lines, marked by cairns of stones or mounds of soil, and the lands adjacent thereto, have been mapped in a way which would compare favourably with the Ordnance Survey sheets of English counties.

In prosecuting the work, once preliminaries were settled by negotiations, Russia was slow, determined, but fairly reasonable, and Persia evasive and obstructive. Our greatest troubles occurred in surveying and fixing the lines between the eastern front of Afghanistan and the Pathan tribes occupying the mountain ranges immediately west of the valley of the Indus. However, after twenty years of persistence, and the expenditure of many lives and much treasure, the whole series of operations—with one small exception in Mohmand territory—has at last been accomplished, and India has now a triple line of defence against aggression by Russia—viz., (1) Afghanistan, a buffer State; (2) the belt of highlands between our actual and Afghan frontiers, held by a number of independent Pathan tribes within our exclusive sphere of influence, and extending for 500 miles from the Pamirs to Biluchistan; and (3) our actual frontier, mostly acquired in 1849, loosely described as the valley of the Indus.

The strength of our most advanced and weakest line depends on the will and ability of the two responsible powers—the Amir of Afghanistan and the British Cabinet of the day—to fulfil their respective obligations. Whether or not we should have the power—assuming the will—to do our duty would depend upon the number of soldiers we

should be able to put in the fighting line and maintain there, and the amount of loss we could inflict upon Russia by the blockade of her ports and destruction of her sea-borne commerce. The strength of our second line, the western hinterlands of the Pathan highlanders just beyond our actual frontier, is problematical; it corresponds with the "scientific frontier" of the late Lord Lytton, and has some excellent defensive positions, which it would be difficult to turn or take if the local tribes were with us—an "if" upon which no reliance will ever be possible, depending as it would upon the success of our arms in the field and the amount of well-paid service which we should give the tribesmen.

The strength of the third line, that actually held by us, is enormous, the eastern ends of the only two present-day army approaches to India, those *via* the Khyber on the north and Kandahar and Biluchistan on the south, being strongly fortified and garrisoned, the former at Peshawar and Rawal Pindi, the latter at Quetta. In addition, all the secondary positions of strategic value throughout the Indus valley are interconnected by railways, which are linked up with the main lines of the Indian peninsula. So satisfactory is this, our ultimate line of defence—a glacis of roadless mountains and unproductive wilds for a depth of 400 miles beyond it, and behind it all the resources of the Indian Empire ready to hand—that *if we had a sufficient number of reliable troops to hold it*, and were not bound by treaty to defend Afghanistan, the two more-advanced lines might be wholly disregarded, and we might await in perfect security the slow and exhausting nearer approach of Russia towards the Indus.

The crux of the problem of defence was, is, and long will continue to be, that contained in the italicized words in the last sentence. Until the middle of the seventies, the advocates of inaction, with whom the Liberals identified themselves, had reason in their contention that the forward

policy was unwise—premature at least, as Russia's outposts were still separated from India by many hundred miles of sterile, difficult country, through which no large army could penetrate and survive as an organized field force, and that consequently, India being poor and already secure, her resources should be spent internally on improvements, and not externally in forcing our friendship upon Afghanistan, and probably provoking a quarrel with Russia. When, however, that Power reached the Oxus and began intriguing with the Kabul Government, public opinion in England realized that a new situation had been created which demanded from us energetic action of some sort, and before 1885 had generally endorsed the Conservative policy of delimitation, and the assumption of responsibility for the preservation of Afghanistan as a buffer State.

By guaranteeing the integrity of Afghanistan we advanced India's political frontier to the Russo-Afghan delimited line, and have since stood committed to defend it against aggression by Russia. When undertaking that obligation we doubtless supposed that, should events in Europe or Persia induce our rival to put our ability to the test, we should have the power to prove it, and to further secure the desired result we augmented our Anglo-Indian army by 10,000 British and 20,000 newly-raised Indian troops. Had we foreseen that before the passing of a generation Russia would be in a position to seize Herat and occupy Afghan territory up to the Hindu Kush before we could put a single division in Kandahar, and, further, that for every man we could maintain in the fighting line Russia would be able to keep five, it may be doubted whether we should have undertaken responsibilities so hopelessly beyond our means of performance as they were and still are.

What changed the whole situation was the rapid completion of Russia's system of strategic railways up to her Afghan-frontier—two lines linked up with her European systems, one on the south, from the Caspian to Merv, the Oxus, and Andijan, and the other on the north, from

Orenburg, in South-Western Siberia, connecting with it, supplemented by a branch extension from Merv to Kushk, a military outpost and depot only two forced marches from Herat. Even so equipped, we doubted whether Russia would be able to place and feed more than two or three divisions in Afghan Turkestan. Her recent war with Japan has now demonstrated that she could at any time maintain there or nearer the Indus, not 50,000, but 500,000 troops. In Manchuria, 5,500 miles from Moscow, and connected with it by the frail thread of a single-line railway, with a long break at Lake Baikal, she recently placed and supplied for eighteen months over half a million of soldiers. What she did in the Far East she could very easily do in the Middle East, at less than half the distance from her bases, with two railways in rear, and continuous sources of supply conveniently near the theatre of war—viz., Southern Russia, Persia, South-Western Siberia, and the more productive of her Central Asian districts. These sources are capable of contributing quite as much food to an army in Afghanistan as South-Eastern Siberia, Mongolia, and Northern Manchuria did in the late war to the Russian forces in the field. If, instead of forcing war upon Japan, Russia had thrown her weight upon Afghanistan, with India as her ultimate objective, she would have had a fair chance of overwhelming all the fighting forces of Afghanistan, India, and Great Britain combined. Fortunately for us, she preferred the line of most, not least, resistance, and is now for many years to come impotent for serious aggression against a first-class Power.

Even without the reserve of strength afforded by our happy alliance with Japan, we have now ample time wherein to solve the problem of India's defence against invasion. Being now a Continental Power, with a frontier which must be defended, marching with that of Russia for 700 miles, and she being almost invulnerable to our navy, how can we so increase our land forces as to be in a position to fight her on equal terms somewhere between the Oxus and the Indus? That is the problem. Whether

in the event of her seizing Herat we should, under any conditions, attempt to expel her by direct attack is a question which may be deferred for another generation, by which time Russia may be again aggressive, and we may have an army fit to oppose her. At present we have in India 220,000 soldiers, one-third of them British, the rest Indian. Of this Anglo-Indian army, 70,000 are already stationed in the Punjab and its two connected trans-Indus provinces, and that number will probably be raised to 100,000 within the next ten years. We have also scattered over India 30,000 volunteers, all Britishers, and some 20,000 Imperial Service troops. Though the aggregate—~~270,000~~^{300,000} men—is considerable, less than half would, in an emergency, be available for active trans-Indus service; and of our field force a considerable portion—the fraction depending on the theatre of war and the disposition of the intervening tribes—would be required to protect our lines of communication. As regards the troops retained on our actual frontier and cis-Indus, it must be remembered that we could not denude our Empire Dependency of its soldiers, garrisons being necessary for its strong places, arsenals, cities, and some districts and towns; nor would it be possible to call out the volunteers generally to replace troops moved forwards, because 12,000 of them are railway employés, and of the others the bulk are serving the Government in some capacity. Then, too, some of our Indian regulars—many of those recruited in the Deccan, for instance—are unfit for arduous warfare in Afghanistan, a mountainous country with a severe climate.

If we take 100,000 men as an extreme estimate of the number of troops we could put in our fighting line, and add thereto 30,000 half-trained and uncertain Afghans, and if we assume that this mixed Anglo-Indo-Afghan force could beat an equal number of Russian troops, our army in the field would still be overborne by the disciplined hordes Russia could hurl against it. Whence, then, are we to procure the additional troops necessary to defeat or wear

out the invader? The question has never yet been fairly faced and answered.

For some years now we here at home have been tinkering with our little British army, but, improve it as we may, until we enormously increase its numbers, we shall never in any crisis be able to spare, except at very great risk to ourselves, and at a cost which would be crippling, more than 40,000 to 50,000 foreign service soldiers as special reinforcements for India.

Lord Roberts recently, when appealing to the nation to adopt universal military training, pointed out that, in the contingency contemplated, it would be "imperative" that we should be in a position to put at least half a million British soldiers in the fighting line in Afghanistan, relegating the protection of our communications to Indian troops. That probably was intended as a counsel of perfection, for if we could mobilize a foreign service army of half a million men we should hardly waste it in Central Asia, but use it for counter-attack on Russia's Baltic littoral. By so doing we should reduce the cost per man by half or more, minimize our home risks from jealous European Powers, and force a quick issue; in Central Asia we might fight to mutual exhaustion without conclusive results in the field.

As it is obvious that, unless here in England we adopt the Continental military system—which is unlikely, our people shortsightedly relying on our navy and insularity, and shutting their eyes to outside factors—our small and costly home army will never be able to contribute largely for the defence of India, it follows that she must draw most of her material for that purpose from her own population. Dare we, then, take a new departure and convert a considerable fraction of that population into half-made soldiers? That is the question towards the solution of which I venture to offer some suggestions.

If we dare but hold that Indian troops, though recruited from the best available material, led by British officers,

and fighting in conjunction with British troops, are not sufficiently reliable to beat equal numbers of conscript Russians—*cadit quæstio*—we shall not be able to stem Russia's next movement towards India. On this preliminary point of quality I think the preponderance of expert opinion favours the belief that Sikhs, Ghoorkhas, Pathans, and after them the best classes of Hindu Jats, Rajputs, and Punjabi Musalmans, are as good fighting men as any in the world. Only a few months ago Sir Ian Hamilton, in his scrap-book on the first part of the Russo-Japanese War, recorded: "Every thinking soldier who has served on our recent Indian campaigns is aware that for the requirements of such operations a good Sikh, Pathan, or Gurkha battalion is more generally serviceable than a British battalion." In the next page he wrote: "Why, there is material in the North of India and in Nepaul sufficient and fit, under good leadership, to shake the artificial society of Europe to its foundations."

On the main question, that of trustworthiness, opinions will always differ. Certainly, for many years after the Mutiny we acted on a policy of distrust. Since early in the seventies our attitude has been gradually changing, as proved by the successive steps of the arming of the Indian troops with the same or as good a rifle as that in the hands of their British comrades, the establishment of corps of Imperial Service troops, the addition since 1885 of five new Indian mountain batteries to the six previously existing, and, finally, the partial introduction of Lord Kitchener's new distribution and concentration scheme.

Notwithstanding these indications of a broadening confidence in the loyalty of the most martial tribes and castes of India, the composition of our Anglo-Indian army continues to be one-third British to two-thirds Indian, and, with the exception of the mountain batteries just referred to, and one garrison battery, the whole of the artillery in India is British. Further, though from time to time Indians have petitioned to be enrolled as volunteers, and nothing in

the Indian Volunteers Act, 1869, as amended in 1896, shuts out any class of "loyal subjects" from so serving, Christianity, and a skin showing at least partial European descent, are still indispensable for eligibility.

Though it is true that, as a whole, our combined Anglo-Indian army constitutes India's defence against external enemies, it is equally true that the British third is more England's garrison in India than India's reserve of force against hostile movements from outside. The belief that justice is the basic principle on which the stability of our rule in India depends is no doubt correct, but ultimately it depends also on our power to enforce order, and this we preserve by maintaining the perfect equipoise of the forces of possible disturbance. To that end we determine the composition of the class and caste regiments of the Indian army, and the ratio of British to Indian troops.

This policy of equipoise, analogous between nations to what is called "the balance of power," is undoubtedly sound, but if we compare conditions in the sixties with those of the present time, it will, I think, be conceded that what may have been necessary or advisable then is so no longer. Progress in education, great industries, communications by sea and land, and world knowledge acquired by reading, observation, and travel, has borne in upon all Indians of insight and intelligence a reasonable conception, if not of their citizenship in the British Empire, at least of the solid advantages enjoyed by them from their place in it; and as to the masses whose aspirations hardly extend beyond the next full meal, they know that their daily bread is more secure under the British Government than it would be under either of the two possible alternatives, Russian or Home rule.

If the above views of the oneness of India with our Empire be accepted, the desired equipoise *quâ* forces inside India would be preserved were we to considerably reduce not only the numbers of the Anglo-Indian army, but the standard ratio of its white to its brown constituents as well.

India, however, being liable to land attack by Russia, and in a minor degree by France also, requires for her security an army fully twice as numerous as that which she now possesses, and as limitations of men and money render it difficult or impossible for us to send her large reinforcements from this country, the best and most economic means for increasing her defensive forces would be, I believe, by the creation of an Indian militia.

About fifteen years ago, in conjunction with a brother civilian, now the head of a department under the Government of India, I submitted proposals on the subject to the military authorities, and there the matter ended; we were told our ideas were impracticable, as they involved a departure from the established proportion between the British and Indian soldiers. Perhaps, in view of the circumstances sketched above, the subject may now be considered, examined, and decided upon its merits.

Recruitment for the militia would, of course, be by voluntary enlistment. Since 1880 Indians have from time to time petitioned to be enrolled as volunteers, but, so far, the movement has been confined to urban "intellectuals," particularly Bengalis, a class which, however loyal and patriotic, would be unfit to resist Russians or the Afghan climate. For militia service we should have to draw; certainly in the first instance, on the hardiest of the cis-Indus peasantry of Northern India, namely, on those tribes and classes who supply most of the Punjabi recruits for the army—Sikhs, Jats, Rajputs, and the group loosely congregated in the Army List as "Punjabi Musalmans," in which term are included the many-branches of Pathans and Biluches who are settled in the districts immediately east of the Indus. All are of good physique, inured to hardships, and imbued with fighting traditions; hence for rough campaigning under any conditions it would be difficult to find better raw material.

Though army service is generally popular with them, they are, Sikhs excepted, so numerous that the great bulk

of their active manhood remain in their villages occupying themselves in husbandry and other rural pursuits for nearly nine months in the year. For three and a half, from about the middle of November to the end of February, there is little or nothing for them to do in the field. The cold weather, then, the busiest time for soldiers, is the idlest for agriculturists. In those months they would be proud and happy to serve the Government in any capacity, provided that the work was honourable, remunerative, and, if possible, congenial and not very far from home. No employment better fulfils the first three provisos than soldiering, and service in a tribal and territorial militia would further fulfil the last. Thus the Government has ready to hand a practically unlimited source of supply for an Indian militia of the best quality, and if the matter be taken up and wisely and considerately worked, I am certain—and I lived amongst and interested myself in the Punjab peasantry for over thirty years—that by the time when Russia will have recovered from the effects of her last war and its domestic consequences, we should be able to put as large an army in the field against her as she is ever likely to move and maintain south of the Oxus, if not in Afghan-Turkestan, certainly cis-Hindu Kush, in which case India's preparedness would be the best possible guarantee for Russia's peacefulness.

From the following statement the fields of enlistment in each part of the Punjab and the British cantonments within each area of population will be seen at a glance :

Tribe or Class.	Approximate Numbers (Census of 1901).	Locality of Densest Population.	British Cantonments within the Locality.
Sikhs ...	2,200,000	Central plains	Lahore, Amritsar, and Jallunder
Jats (mostly Hindus)	5,000,000	South - East and Mid-Punjab	Ferozepore and Umbala
Rajputs (mixed)	1,800,000	Eastern hills and generally eastern half of the province	Jallunder and Umbala
Punjabi Musalmans	3,000,000	Western plains and Salt Range	Rawal Pindi and Multan

Out of the aggregate 12,000,000, the males between twenty and forty years of age would certainly be one in eight, or 1,500,000, from a sixth to a third of whom would probably be keenly eager to serve in the militia. Whether the establishment of an Indian militia on a large scale will be practicable, safe, and a good investment, or the reverse, can only be proved after giving the experiment a fair trial. Personally, I am convinced that it is the only possible form of insurance against invasion, risks, and scares open to us. Some of the grounds for this opinion have already been given.

All interested in India know that the peasant and yeoman-proprietary of the Punjab are sturdy, laborious, manly, and very poor; that the land revenue annually collected from each holding does not average more than thirty shillings; and that Government employment in the agriculturists' idle season would be very popular. It may not be so well known that in their villages the soldier is the most honoured, the *muafidar* the most envied of men; the latter term means the holder of a *muafi* or revenue-free parcel of land. If, then, the Government, in addition to paying the militiaman at military rates during his few weeks of annual training, were also to grant him a small *muafi* on all or some of his unmortgaged fields, not only would almost every small farmer volunteer, but the prize of a *muafi* would be a spur to his speedily mastering his drill in cantonment and practising thrift in his village. Once an "effective," four or five weeks' training in each subsequent year would probably suffice to keep him up to standard. As after each course his rifle and uniform—excepting, perhaps, some symbol of his honourable calling to wear on occasion at home—would be kept for him by the military authorities, he would, whilst a civilian, revert to his position in the body politic of unarmed peasant. In the event of being called out to prepare for active service, probably a few months of hard drilling and rifle practice would qualify him for duty on the line of communications; thence, as regiment

after regiment approached the standard of the 'regulars, they would be pushed forward to feed the fighting line.

As regards risk, it is hard to see where the element of possible danger to our security comes in. *Per se* a drilled but unarmed peasant *muafidar* must be a better supporter of order than an ignorant yokel, whose world knowledge only extends to his village boundary. The annual expense of drill in a large cantonment would prove a liberal education for him. After all, too, even were risk possible it should be faced. There is no alternative. We must safeguard the land approaches to India, and that is impossible unless we can at short notice double our fighting forces in India. As we have not the men or, for that matter, the money to put and keep in the fighting line trans-Indus 100,000 British troops—Lord Roberts demands five times that number—we have no alternative but to use Indians for India's defence.

As regards the value of the investment, the upkeep of a militia force 100,000 strong would be less than that of 20,000 Indian or 8,000 British troops: hence the cost would not be great; moreover, the whole of the money would circulate in the country. The heaviest outlay would occur during the first two years from the date of raising each regiment, as arms, kit, shelter, would all have to be provided, and the period of training would be longer than afterwards. As a small set-off, there would at first be a saving in the recurring item of *muafies* for efficient. Then, too, the scheme would come into full operation very gradually, and would probably be worked out, once the experimental stage was passed and success assured, in such a way that by the time that the initial expenditure of constitution of regimental units had practically ceased to appear in the militia budgets, the complement of strength, whether 100,000 or more, would be reached.

In elaborating the scheme the matter of greatest difficulty would be the provision of British officers. In peace-time: probably two per regiment would suffice. If the existing

complement with ^{native} ~~mounted~~ infantry regiments were increased by that number, the Indian army might be drawn upon during the training periods for that purpose. How best to meet the case of a general mobilization for active service, when hundreds of additional British officers would be required, is a problem of detail to be solved by forethought and expenditure. It would be easy to provide and distribute them throughout India until the contingency contemplated should arise, but the expense would be considerable and the waste of good material great, as the finding of full peace employment for such large numbers of Englishmen would be hardly practicable. Whatever the ultimate cost of an Indian militia adequate to India's necessities, whether it add 10 per cent. or more to her present military budget, the price paid for insurance would be small.