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‘The Arab Revolt. Views of an Indian Moslem [Muslim].’

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About this record

A secret memorandum containing an extract of a letter, received by Edward Ernest Long, former editor of the *Indian Daily Telegraph*, and written by an unnamed Indian Muslim. A copy of another letter, written by Long, dated 7 July 1916, precedes the main letter, in which Long describes the views of the Muslim as being ‘pro-Young Turk’, and a ‘fair exposition’ of the views of Indian Muslims. The letter from the Indian Muslim concerns Britain’s policy of non-intervention in the Holy Places of Islam, the Arab Revolt, and the bombardment of Jeddah in the Hedjaz [Hejaz/al-Hijāz] by a British naval vessel on 10 June 1916. The correspondent warns that the Arab revolt may hand the Turks a moral and military advantage, and cautions against British and Allied involvement in the Hejaz.

SECRET. Circulated by the Secretary of State for India.

THE ARAB REVOLT.

Views of an Indian Moslem.

LETTER FROM MR. E. E. LONG (formerly Editor of the *Indian Daily Telegraph*), dated 7th July 1916.

I send you herewith a copy of a letter I have received from an Indian Moslem residing in this country, whom I have known for a great many years. He is, needless to say, an ardent politician, and one who, while he professes to be very loyal to the rule of this country in India, is undoubtedly pro-Young Turk. I have pointed out to him that to be pro-Young Turk is to be pro-German, but this he will not admit. As the letter contains a very fair exposition of the views of the young Indian Moslem pro-Young Turk party, I thought it would be interesting to you, and that possibly you might pass it on to the Under Secretary of State.

EXTRACT LETTER FROM AN INDIAN MOSLEM.

You know I have always endeavoured to bring to the notice of the authorities any policy or steps on their part which may be likely to cause misunderstanding and unrest in the minds of Moslems. My best efforts were also directed to a rapprochement between the Moslem domains and Great Britain.

Before this unfortunate war between Turkey and Great Britain was declared I approached, through an M.P. friend, responsible people in the Government advising them to issue a declaration, in case the war between Turkey and England did break out, that Great Britain would do nothing, even under provocation from the Turks, to create any change in the Native guard at the Holy Places of Islam. I impressed my friend that it would be to the interest of the Turks to compel Great Britain to show some sort of design towards the Holy Places, either of a Protectorate or of a conquest, just to arouse the invincible fanaticism of the Moslem world.

I was very glad to see that the authorities did adopt the same course as was suggested by me, with the result that although a Holy War was declared by Turkish Ministers it did not arouse Moslem fanaticism, because the Holy Places and religious questions as to the Khalifat, &c., were wisely left absolutely and assuredly alone by Great Britain and its Allies.

Now sensational news has been spread broadcast concerning those very Holy Places. *The Times'* leading article announcing the news was well written in so much that it reproduced the declaration made by Great Britain and its Allies as to its inviolability of the Holy Places and their Port Jeddah, and that it plainly said that the incident was domestic and only temporal concerning none but the Moslems themselves.

But the next day news from Constantinople was published to the effect that a British man-of-war had bombarded the Hedjaz coast, and this news was never contradicted.

With your experience of India you know that for some time—a good long time in fact—Indian Moslems have felt suspicious of the policy of Great Britain towards the Holy Places. They have been led to believe that it was the object of Great Britain to have Arabia and the Holy Places of Islam under its Protectorate or under its influence. As you know one of the commands in the Holy Quran itself forbids the ruling of all non-Moslems in Kaaba, and it is essential that the Khalifa should be an independent Moslem ruler.

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Since this war broke out Mussulmans have been watching with anxious interest the attitude of Great Britain towards these Holy Places, and because so far British Statesmen were very wise indeed to give no occasion whatsoever for Mussulman to feel suspicious everything has run smoothly in that respect. The servants of Kaaba Society, which is solemnly pledged to see that the Holy Places do not get into the control or protectorate of any non-Moslem power, has expressed its thanks for the declaration made by Great Britain for itself and its Allies. The Mussulmans have expressed their gratitude for the wise step taken of announcing that pilgrimage to Hedjaz shall not be hindered and stopped by Great Britain. When this policy of leaving the Holy Places alone has proved so successful, I do not think the British statesmen will feel inclined to alter it.

But then the news from Constantinople that British men-of-war had bombarded and approached Hedjaz coast ought to have been at once contradicted.

By the comments of English papers on the subject of this "Revolt of the Arabs" I gather that even the educated people here have failed to realise the true aspect of the incident, and I do not blame them for it. It requires intimate knowledge of the sentiments and feelings as well as of the religious metaphysical currents in the minds of Moslems to understand such important problems concerning their religion. You are in a far better position to understand them as you have been for such a long time in touch with Moslems.

Now Moslems having been commanded by the Holy Quran not to revolt against the established authority of their co-religionists cannot look down but with contempt on any efforts on the part of the Arabs to revolt against the Turks. The Moslem masses, uneducated as they are and favourably attached to Islam as they are themselves they will never believe that the Arabs have arisen against the Khalifa of their own accord. And if they have risen they deserve every punishment as did those Moslems, even in early Moslem Arabian Turkey who rose against their Khalifa. The general Moslem public will never have any sympathy with the revolt. As far as the educated Moslems are concerned they know the Arabs, their character and their want of military organisation too well to take the rebellion to be serious unless some non-Moslem power is inclined to abuse the fanaticism of the whole Moslem world by helping the Arabs and using them as its own tool for its own purpose of creating a division among Moslems or breaking their temporal power.

I do not think any sane non-Moslem Government would consider it even worth while to do so on the present occasion.

The Mussulmans themselves would much sooner see the whole edifice of the Holy Kaaba to be razed to the ground than its being protected by any non-Moslem. As far as a non-Moslem prince with any sinister ambitions against the Holy Places is concerned she (England) can see if she is not blinded completely, that she can hurt neither the military, nor the ecclesiastical power and influence of Turkey and the Khalifa by helping the Arab revolt in Mecca. In this war Turkey has not gained much from that portion of the Hedjaz being under her control. Obviously they have not got many recruits from either Mecca or Jeddah because Great Britain and its Allies were wise enough to announce that they would not interfere with the Holy Places and Jeddah and with any religious affairs of Moslems, and the Turks could not gain any advantage from their Sovereign being the Khalifa of the Moslem world.

Now, if the revolt of the Arabs is really serious the Turks will gain a great moral advantage and also, perhaps, military advantage. Beside the fact that the whole Moslem world will get into a condition of great excitement, and will, as a matter of course, begin to feel suspicious of non-Moslem designs against the temporal and spiritual domains of Islam, the Moslems within the Ottoman Empire will then take this war to be a really religious Holy War, threatening the control of the Holy Places. It is absurd to think that once the question of the Holy Places of Islam is involved the war will continue to remain only temporal. Mecca and Jeddah are isolated places, and even if they were allowed by Turkish military experts to drift from

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their hands for the time being, that would not hurt the military situation. The Turks would, on the contrary, get great unreal support because every Turk will be forced to believe that not only his temporal domains, but also the spiritual domains of his Sovereign depend upon how he fought in this war. Even the Arabs themselves who do not belong to the clan of Mecca would feel it their religious duty to keep the Holy Places in a position which would keep them free from non-Moslem interference.

In short, every statesman who can fully appreciate the psychology of the situation will see that the revolt, instead of weakening the power of the Turks, will solidify it both materially and morally.

The only wise course for Great Britain and its Allies will be to persist in its wisely declared policy of leaving the Holy Places of Islam and religious questions alone—strictly and vigorously, in spite of temptations and even provocations. To take any part in the troubles in Hedjaz, nay, even to show sympathy with the rebellious people in Mecca or Jeddah, will be playing into the hands of Germans. If you can, warn British statesmen against it.

'The Arab Revolt. Views of an Indian Moslem [Muslim].' [2v] (4/4)

