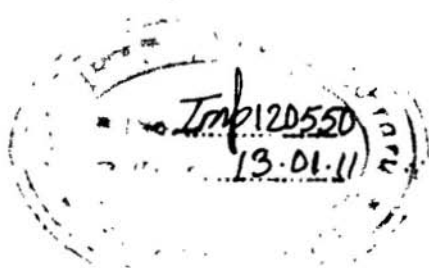


WITH REFERENCE TO
SIR JAMES STEPHEN'S VIEWS
ON
OUR INDIAN FRONTIER POLICY



IN *The Times* of this morning appears a letter from Sir James Stephen on the subject of our frontier troubles in India. That gentleman's name has deserved weight on Indian subjects, but in the present matter his views seem likely to lead the public astray.

In discussing the present position of affairs, Sir James forth seven questions on the subject. These are as follows:—

- 1st. Whether the conduct pursued for some years past towards the Ameer of Cabul has or has not been judicious?
- 2nd. Whether he has or has not grossly insulted a British Agent?
- 3rd. Whether, in dealing with an Asiatic Ruler like Shere Ali, the common rules of European international law have any application whatever?
- 4th. Whether, in any circumstances, anything can be gained by an Affghan war?
- 5th. Is it true that our present position is exceedingly weak?

6th. Is it true that it is possible to make it as strong as it is at present weak, by occupying military positions north of the pass through the mountains, and by establishing satisfactory relations with the mountain tribes?

7th. Is it true that, whatever may have been the case in former days, the advance of Russia, and the probability of a Russian-Affghan alliance, make the strengthening of our frontier (if it requires strengthening, and if it can be strengthened) a matter of pressing importance?

The first four questions Sir James declines to discuss. With regard to the remaining three questions, which are doubtless evolved from the fourth, Sir James accepts without discussion the opinions of those who would answer the 5th and 6th questions in the affirmative, and confines the arguments in his letter to the 7th question alone.

There can be no doubt as to the cogency of the question set forth, but it appears to me that, to arrive at any fair judgment as to the policy now being enforced, we are bound to consider, as far as may be, all the questions which so plainly bear on the subject.

I should wish, therefore, to say a few words on the different questions. Firstly. Has the conduct pursued for some years past towards the Ameer of Cabul been judicious or no? It is true that Government has, as far

as possible, withheld from the public the facts connected with this question, but enough is known to enable us to deal with it in outline.

The question is not, I think, fairly put. There can be no doubt that our conduct towards the Ameer during the last two years has been essentially different to the conduct pursued towards him for many years previously. And the question really resolves itself into this: Was our conduct towards the Ameer in former years so injudicious as to justify the entire change of policy which has been adopted under the present Viceroy? What was the former policy of the series of able statesmen who ruled India previous to 1876? They had to deal with a sulky, suspicious, Asiatic potentate, bearing us no great goodwill, owing to our former doings in Affghanistan. It was clearly desirable that the Ameer, if possible, should be won to our interests, and attempts were made, in an inoffensive way, to enter into more friendly relations with him. Our offers of friendship were not accepted in the spirit in which they were made. The Ameer preferred to be left to rule his own people in his own way. He wished no strangers in his country and no friendships with outsiders. But, equally as he kept aloof from an English alliance, he kept aloof from an alliance with Russia.

Such was the state of affairs, and, knowing the cha-

racter of the chief we had to deal with, and of the people over whom he exercised a doubtful sway, it was considered well to confine our action to extreme watchfulness, patiently waiting for the time when our forbearance would lead to confidence and trust in us. Throughout those years there was, doubtless, an influential party, headed I believe by Sir Bartle Frere and Sir Henry Rawlinson, urging a 'spirited policy,' rather than one of 'masterly inactivity.' The efforts of this party were restrained by the experienced statesmen and politicians who, during these years directed the Government of India. Unfortunately the party had the ear of, at least, some members of the present Ministry. And on Lord Mayo's arrival as Viceroy rumours were at once current in India that a change of policy was determined on, and that we were no longer to wait watching the turn of events. There can be, I believe, no doubt that Lord Mayo came out primed with the same views which have lately prevailed. But that lamented nobleman was an able statesman, gifted with extraordinary bodily and mental vigour, and before taking action he set to work thoroughly to realise the whole bearings of the subject. The result was his entire adhesion to the policy of his experienced predecessors. The able statesman who succeeded Lord Mayo followed in the same line. So much for our policy up to 1876. Nothing had arisen since that of injudiciousness, and

the Ameer of Cabul reigned in ~~solitary~~ solitude with neither British nor Russian envoys about him. But with 1876 and the accession of Lord Lytton to the Vice-royalty came a change. And the party in the Cabinet who were determined to push their forward views, found no difficulty in getting the Government in India to carry them out. Though it was known that it would be a bitter blow to the Ameer, Quetta was occupied by our troops, and on the top of that most strenuous demands were made on the Ameer that he should receive not a temporary envoy, but permanent Residents in his territory. It will not be denied, I imagine, that such was the object of Sir Lewis Pelly's mission, and that the demands were most strongly put. Eventually the demands were rejected, and the feelings of dislike to, and suspicion of us, became active instead of dormant. When we had thus instilled into the mind of the Ameer that we had determined to push forward to such positions as would compromise his independence, what wonder if he received a temporary Russian envoy to advise him as to how the action of England might be restrained. Then came our action of demanding that our envoy also should be received at Cabul. What the demands of that envoy would be the Ameer knew too well from Sir Lewis Pelly's mission. The demand was not promptly answered. Our envoy was despatched to the frontier, and, as ~~every one~~ who knew how matters stood

anticipated, was refused leave to proceed to Cabul. These are the details; as far as even the Indian public have been allowed to ascertain them. Let the public judge of the judiciousness of the policy which has brought things to their present state.

2nd. Has or has not the Ameer of Cabul grossly insulted a British Agent? Sir James says this subject requires no discussion. This is true—the details published by *The Times* show that absolutely no insult was offered to our Agent, that, on the contrary, the Ameer's officer was perfectly courteous and civil to Major Cavagnari, and it is ridiculous to assert that the mere refusal to allow the British envoy, accompanied by his large escort, to proceed to Cabul, was a gross insult to a British Agent; especially as the same answer had been given for years before, whenever the British Government expressed a wish to send an envoy.

3rdly. In dealing with an Asiatic ruler like Shere Ali, are the common rules of European international law to have any application whatever? Few will be prepared to say that our action could be guided by the same rules when dealing with a civilised European power and when dealing with an uncivilised despotic ruler like the Chief of Affghanistan. Fewer still, I trust, will say that, right or wrong, we are entitled to act towards an independent State as may appear for the moment best to suit our British interests. Cir-

cumstances might arise the gravity of which would demand that we should, when dealing with an Asiatic power, ignore all international law. But unless the danger is grave and immediate, I doubt if the people of England would stand that the blood of their own countrymen and the unoffending inhabitants of a neighbouring country should be poured forth like water to serve a remote policy, which is at the best a doubtful one; and I think Sir James's question must be answered to the effect that international law is applicable, though not to the same extent.

4thly. In any circumstances can anything be gained by an Affghan war? This question, as Sir James says, resolves itself into the remaining questions, and is too vague to deal with generally.

5thly. Is it true that our present position is exceedingly weak? Sir James, without discussion, accepts the answer, 'Yes.' But it seems to me by no means clear that it is so. Our frontier forces are stationed at the extreme points where supplies are readily attainable. They can act either on our own frontier or in India in case of internal troubles. In case of sudden emergency they are now in a position to at once avail themselves of all the carriage which a populous and highly cultivated country possesses. If our forces be removed from the basis of supplies by sea and carriage, the difficulties

of taking the field will be very great. Supposing sufficient additional taxation be laid on unfortunate India to admit of carriage being kept up for these advanced forces, it is very doubtful if the barren country beyond our present frontier could produce forage for the cattle. Food and supplies of all kinds would have to be sent up from India. If the wild Affghans of the border tribes were opposed to us, every convoy of provisions would have to fight its way up, and in case of the troops being required in what is now British India, it would be a most hazardous march down through the passes. On the other hand, with the troops where they are, the advanced columns commanding the passes into India, and the reserve forces stationed behind the Indus, we are in a position to act both in front and rear. It will be acknowledged that wild mountaineers without discipline would be easier dealt with in the plains of India than in the rugged country of Affghanistan. And it must be remembered that even a disciplined and organised force, after a march of several hundred miles through a rugged and difficult country would debouch on the plains with their artillery, horses, and commissariat cattle diminished in numbers and fagged after an arduous march, to meet troops fresh and thoroughly provided with every necessary. Moreover the Trans-Indus country might to a great extent, be swept of supplies, and the difficulties of the invading army

would be very great. I dare not enter into further detail as to so essentially a military question as the strength of our frontier, but I think I have said enough to show that there are at least two sides to the question.

6th. Is it true that it is possible to make our frontier as strong as it is at present weak, by occupying military positions north of the passes through the mountains, and by establishing satisfactory relations with the mountain tribes? To this question Sir James also accepts, without argument, an affirmative answer. To the question thus broadly put, it is no doubt easy to answer 'Yes,' but the question must be amplified. Doubtless if men and money be no object, we can make our frontier much stronger than it is, by occupying commanding positions in advance of our present stations. But as England cannot spare the men, and will not, I am sure, give the money, and as India cannot spare the money, and ought not to supply a larger proportion of our troops than it does at present, the question resolves itself into this, can we, without increasing our present army in India, obtain the stronger frontier that is sought for? If we had only to deal with external foes this might be answered in the affirmative, but in the arguments on the subject it seems strangely overlooked that we may require all our forces to control the enormous alien population of India. Thus, though stronger in one way, we shall be much weaker in another,

and to my mind on a much more dangerous point. As to the subsidiary part of the question, regarding the establishment of relations with the mountain tribes, I think no one who knows our frontier would for a moment trust to any arrangements we might make proving reliable. We may bribe these savages into behaving well for a time, but we must watch them, and have the means to control them if necessary, and I assert confidently, while these frontier tribes remain the wild savages they are, 'no way of establishing satisfactory relations can be devised.'

7thly. The last question, and that to which Sir James has devoted the body of his letter, is, 'Under present circumstances, is the strength of our frontier a matter of pressing importance?' To this Sir James answers that conceding that our present frontier is very weak, conceding that our frontier may be made very strong, and understanding that satisfactory relations can be established with the frontier tribes, our frontier should be advanced; but, as I have shown above, it is by no means clear that these necessary conditions do exist, nor are other points fairly weighed in the arguments brought forward. Before we determine on the propriety of advancing our frontier, we must consider other questions than those put by Sir James, or at least put the questions in other forms. We have to consider whether any strength we may gain in the case of Russia and Affghanistan by moving our troops

forward, is not more than counterbalanced by the weakness we create in the case of India itself. In asking this question I assume that these advanced posts are to be garrisoned by our army at its present strength, not by additional troops, European and Native, raised for the purpose.' In the latter case I have nothing further to say except that England must pay for these additional troops, as additional taxation in India would be a far greater danger than now menaces us from Russia.

Again, even supposing for the sake of argument that it would be better for us to hold some commanding posts in Afghanistan, have we a decent excuse for forcibly seizing these posts? The owner of the positions which we covet may not be the most civil and kindly of neighbours, but what has Shere Ali done? For twenty years he has consistently declined to receive us as visitors, temporary or permanent. Aggravated by our persistent attempts to force ourselves upon him as residents in his country he has admitted a temporary visit from a rival to his affections. Is this sufficient to justify our declaring war upon him and annexing part of his territory. It is strange too, that though Sir James declares our advance of pressing importance, his arguments go to show that the danger on our frontier is by no means imminent or pressing. It is shown that at present Russia is in no position to attack us in India. But it is ~~quite~~ ^{quite} certain that how in the distant future

Russia may gradually advance, occupying State after State in Central Asia, and raising and organising large forces from these States in the way we gradually overran India. But there appears to me a strange oversight in all this. As we advanced in India, we conquered and annexed rich and highly-cultivated countries, with a large surplus population, only too glad to enter into a well-paid service. Is such the case in Central Asia? Will the annexations of Russia produce large bodies of men, not required at their homes, anxious and willing to submit themselves to the monotony and drill of a regular soldier's life. Will they produce wealth to give these men much higher pay than they could realise in civil employment? If not, then, even if the men are forthcoming, Russia must provide for all the expenses of this large army. Russia is not in a position to do so, and the parallel between the two countries falls through. Again, even supposing it to be true that in the long run England and Russia must meet in Asia, and independent Afghanistan must be swallowed up, was it, or is it, good policy wantonly to commence the attack on Afghan independence? Surely not. We know that the one desire of Shere Ali has been to be let alone. If we had waited till his independence was threatened by Russia in its advance, which people say is irrepressible, would the Affghans not have turned to us as their friends and protectors? whereas now they are forced by ourselves

to set us down as their enemies. And if now, without just cause, we kill a few thousand of them and despoil their country, will they not treasure up their vengeance against us as few but Affghans can? I say, then, that our present policy is more than injudicious. I say that a war with Affghanistan will be grossly unjust; I say that unless extra troops paid by England are raised for the garrisons of advanced posts, an advanced frontier will weaken us when we take into consideration both external and internal India. I say that no lasting, satisfactory arrangement can be made with the border tribes, and that any attack on Affghanistan will render the whole Mahomedan population beyond the frontier our bitter enemies for years to come. And I would only add, that if the expenses already undergone, and still further to be undergone, by the present wretched policy, are to be laid on impoverished India, it will not only be a crying disgrace to England, but will do much to make our native subjects suspect and dislike us as much as the Affghans will at the close of a bloody war.

J. SCARLETT CAMPBELL.

1, Queen's Gate Place, *October 16, 1878*