

# V. The Brotherhood in Britain's great game

by Daniel Snieder

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*“Surely it is within the Central Asian regions of Russia and the Central Asian borders of Russia, that the real problems of the immediate future are going to develop.”*

—Chester Wilmot, 1952, *Soviet Empire*  
by Sir Olaf Caroe

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*“About the middle of the 19th century the shadow of Russia in Central Asia began to fall across the vision of a Britain which had just succeeded to the Sikhs in the Panjab and was occupied in the consolidation of territories which became known as the North-West Frontier. From that date the external policy of the British government in India was directed mainly to the stabilization of Middle Eastern frontiers and to safeguarding the continued existence of Persia and Afghanistan against the forces of Russian expansionism. As a result of that policy the Russian advance was halted, where it still stands, on the Oxus (river) and along the fringe of the Turkmen mountains.”*

—Sir Olaf, Caroe, 1953 from  
*Soviet Empire*

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With these words the British architect of the CENTO military pact, Sir Olaf Caroe, began his book, a call for the “liberation” of the Soviet Central Asian republics entitled: *Soviet Empire: The Turks of Central Asia and Stalinism*. The strategy Caroe put forward is the strategy being pursued today in Iran and Afghanistan—which is fast bringing the world to the brink of thermo-nuclear war.

The British strategy, as expressed by Caroe more than 25 years ago, was to launch an Islamic revival, a wave of fundamentalist irrationalism that would sweep into the Muslim regions of Soviet Central Asia and bring about a breakup of the “Soviet Empire” from within.

The doctrine of the “Islamic Card” aimed at the southern flank of the Soviet Union is a later development in a two-centuries-old British geopolitical doctrine. The roots of this doctrine are known in the lexicon of the British Empire and of Rudyard Kipling as The Great Game.

Caroe himself was the Governor-General of the Northwest Frontier province of the British raj, an expert in the control and handling of the Pathan tribes of that region (and Afghanistan), and a “Pakistan hand.” Caroe’s strategic doctrine rests, like that of all British Orientalists, in a mystic version of the power of Islamic backwardness, which he counterposes as a virile force compared to the decadence of the Hindus.

Before he wrote *Soviet Empire*, Caroe earlier wrote a book in 1951, which states more broadly the postwar conception of the Great Game. *The Wells of Power: The Oil Fields of Southwest Asia* proposes that control over Persian Gulf oil is the key to Anglo-American strategy and that the South Asian subcontinent of Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan be looked at only from this aim. Caroe concludes that India will not be controllable by the Anglo-Americans, but that Pakistan, which guards the outer edge of the Persian Gulf, must be built up as an Anglo-American bastion.

From this view emerged CENTO, the Central Treaty Organization which linked Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and

Great Britain, with the United States as an Observer. CENTO was aimed to the north, as NATO's arm on the southern borders of the Soviet Union. As the United States embarked on a Pakistan-centered policy, India developed closer relations with the Soviet Union. India also advanced its traditionally pro-Afghan policy, as Washington built a triangular alliance from the early 1960s onward with Pakistan and Peking.

### **The shift to an Islamic CENTO**

The present Iran-Afghanistan situation is aimed at the transformation of Caroe's obsolete CENTO into a new Islamic version of the same. This is the significance of the elimination of the Shah of Iran, who had his own ideas about regional pacts, and the overthrow and legal assassination of Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Bhutto was committed to a policy of economic cooperation with India, the Soviet Union, and others, as well as departure from CENTO and all such pacts.

Bhutto's overthrow in mid-1977 brought to power a military junta headed up by General Ziaul Haq, whose only distinguishing characteristic is that he is the nephew of the present head of the Muslim Brotherhood's South Asian and Pakistan affiliate, the Jamaat-e-Islami. Haq's declaration of an "Islamic Republic of Pakistan" is a military version of Iran, which has almost no popular base but is in power by virtue of its repressive powers.

President Daud of Afghanistan, who had come to power himself in a 1973 coup against the king, was in early 1978 moving to join General Zia in a renewed CENTO arrangement, including allying himself with Sadat's Egypt. In April of 1978 Daud was killed in a brief but bloody army coup led by young left-wing officers who had brought him to power in 1973, but were in fact loyal to the country's tiny but apparently well-organized pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party. This development undoubtedly threw a spanner into the Islamic works—it is interesting to note that the rise of activity against the Shah in Iran occurs after this time.

### **The roots of the Great Game**

A reading of Caroe's *Soviet Empire* in light of Khomeini's Iran today gives a glimpse into the years of preparation of the "Islamic Revolution" by its British sponsors. Caroe "predicts" the Islamic revival. The bulk of this book is a description of the Soviet absorption and industrialization of the Central Asian republics—in the tone of a diatribe against Stalinism and the destruction of the "free peoples of the steppe." Caroe asks if these

## **The Islamic card against the Soviets**

*In mid-April 1979 in Teheran an interview was broadcast with the Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, who was then the acknowledged No. 2 religious leader in Iran. The Soviet journalists who conducted the interview never reported this part of his interview:*

We hope that you will pay more respect to the religion of your 45 million Muslims and believe in more freedom for them.

The Soviet government should not allow the Afghanistan regime to continue its harsh treatment of Muslims, including the clergymen and intellectuals. It would be best for the Soviet Union to allow Afghans to live peacefully and follow their Islamic religion.

peoples are really lost forever to the Soviet machine, whether Soviet modernization has succeeded in "forcing the nomadic population off the steppe to be merged with the static sedentary population of the cities."

Caroe's answer is that the spirit will win out over materialism. Like the followers of Mohammed, he says, "their Turkish successors may free themselves from the Russian proletarian chains, marching under a new banner." Caroe continues: "And in these days it may even come to pass that this will be decided on what is now known as the cold war front." Central Asian Islam, he states, will be "reanimated" by the "encounter with Communism" and will be "roused to a new height of spiritual reaction."

In the romantic language of a Lawrence of Arabia Caroe proclaims: "A new urban proletariat descended from the virile free-born pastoralists has been created, and the fresh mixture may supply the very element required to leaven the lump, the spark to set the whole fabric alight."

At this point Caroe draws his "prediction" to a close with a remarkable declaration of homage to the model for his revival—the antirationalist Islamic ideologue Ghazali:

Such a spiritual renaissance might spring from within the body of the faith, as it has done before. One of the greatest and most original thinkers and

theologians that Islam has produced was Al-Ghazali.... In the throes of this conversion [to Islam] Al-Ghazali broke down both physically and mentally, and went into retreat.

When he emerged, he thought that a purely philosophical structure had no base.... Even ultimate truths could not be founded on intellectual certainty, but only proved by the direct knowledge with which God floods the heart of the believer.... Only a great emotional experience could break the fetters of tradition and give the force needed to turn the current of the age.... Many said that indirectly Al-Ghazali's thought had an influence on the West, and flowed through Thomas Aquinas to affect Pascal....

In this age of spiritual hunger, it may be that in the line of Al-Ghazali another inspired *mujaddid* (renewer) will arise, and point the way to all believers.... There is good reason of recent showing for the belief that the older inspirations of the Central Asian peoples have not yet failed; there are also grounds for supposing that the impact of the new has not been wholly destructive, but by a process of catalysis may even bring about some renewal of life.... It is for the free world to forecast the delivery and nurse it when it comes.

Read against the existence of Khomeini in Iran this can hardly be understood as mere insight on the part of Caroe.

### **The Afghanistan Lynchpin**

The pinpoint control of the Great Game by the British Secret Intelligence Services needs only the further illustration, in brief, of the preview of the present situation in Afghanistan which occurred earlier in this century.

In 1919, the Afghan Amir (king), a paid puppet of the British, was assassinated and his younger brother took the throne. The new ruler, Amir Amanullah, was strongly anti-British and embued through advisers with ideas of reform and modernization of his backward country. Amanullah first went to war against Britain, raising the Pathan tribes in a revolt which, although short, resulted in a British concession of full independence to Afghanistan. Amanullah was one of the first recipients, along with Kemal Ataturk of Turkey, of the hand of friendship from Lenin and Soviet Russia. In 1921 Russia signed a friendship treaty with Afghanistan.

The British response to these developments had begun immediately after the Russian Revolution, with an

ill-fated attempt to set up independent Islamic republics out of Russian Central Asia in the midst of the chaos of the Russian Civil War. A British colonel attempted to run an armed force into Russia from Meshed in Iran, in support of the proclaimed Bukhara Republic. With the aid of Pan-Islamic Turkish renegade Enver Pasha, tribal chiefs and their followers attempted a resistance which failed, and the British were forced to give up that effort at breaking up Russia.

In Afghanistan the period of the 1920s was a Great Game for influence in the court of Amanullah, with the Soviets gradually gaining as the Amir sought to emulate Ataturk in introducing reforms of law, getting rid of backward Islamic practices (like the woman's *purdah*), and introducing a modern army. These measures were met with British intrigues in the form of bought-and-paid-for mullahs, who engaged in spreading slanders of Amir as un-Islamic. Phony photos of his wife, who had appeared once in Western dress, were circulated, showing her naked surrounded by Western men. The British operations were run out of the territory that Caroe ran, the Northwest Frontier, and included the purchase of Pathan tribes to oppose Amanullah.

In 1928-29 a "rebellion" was launched, first involving a bandit named Bacho Sacco, who had been released from a British prison in the Northwest province and sent back into Afghanistan to lead a gang of tribes against Amanullah. Meanwhile, Amanullah's relative and former chief of the Afghan Army, Nadir Shah, had slipped back from exile in France where the British Ambassador ran him, into India. After Amanullah had been unable to defeat the tribes, he abdicated, leaving a vacuum temporarily filled by the bandit Sacco. Nadir Shah shortly after entered Afghanistan with a force of Pathan tribesmen from the Indian side of the border and took the capital, proclaiming himself king.

The ruling family, Nadir and his son, Zadir Shah, ruled to 1973 when Zahir was overthrown by Daud, his brother-in-law who proclaimed a republic ending the monarchy in name but not in fact. The April 1978 Revolution ended it in fact. It is not surprising that the communist-led new regime immediately identified itself with Amanullah and his tradition, and proceeded to introduce similar reforms, only going much further than the king was ever able.

The tribal rebellion now against the Afghan regime comes from the bands in Pakistan, the same areas of the old Northwest Frontier province, and is led by the sons of the men and the mullahs who were in the pay of the British the last time around. The Game is the same, it has not changed from the British side in the least. The same, perhaps, cannot be said for the Russian side.