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REVIEW BY IAN TALBOT, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

In "Transnationalism and Insurrection," the authors ask us to consider the place of Indian, Persian, and Algerian-Tunisian transnational anti-colonial movements in Germany's 'programme for insurrection' across the British, French and Russian Empires during the First World War. The collaboration of these groups with Berlin was institutionalized in independence committees that were jointly directed by the German Foreign Office and the Supreme Army Command. Whilst the so-called 'Hindu-German' plot or conspiracy (a series of plans to initiate a revolt in India between 1914 and 1917) has been written about, relatively little is known about the wartime co-operation between Germany, and Persian and, Algerian-Tunisian revolutionary nationalists.¹ This article at the outset points out the importance, with respect to Germany's revolutionary strategy for Persia and North Africa, of Seyyed Hassan Taqizadah, and Sheik Salih al-Sharif al-Tunisi, respectively. The latter was highly regarded as a propagandist both by Ottoman and German officials

The article represents a 'global turn' to understanding both the anti-colonial struggle, and the First World War. The breadth of the scholarship enables the injection of an important comparative dimension to the study of the independence committees which previously have been treated in isolation.² This approach strengthens the awareness of the transnational interactions of anti-colonial activists. The authors point out that much less is known about these interactions than their relationships with such German officials as Max von Oppenheim, the archaeologist and director for the Information Service for the East propaganda organization. The exploration of the collaboration of the three independence committees also enhances the discussion of the extent to which they were able to act autonomously from German control.

Members of the Persian and Indian Committees especially collaborated in the establishment of intelligence networks (64) and the distribution of propaganda (77). Apart from the leader of the Young Tunisia Party, Ali Bach Hamba, North African activists did not greatly assist the work of revolutionary groups in other theatres (77). However, working more closely with Ottoman officials than did the others (64), they "were among the most radical in their determined mobilization of Islam as a strategic weapon of war" (64).

Another strength of the article is the recognition that previous 'top-down' approaches to understanding the German programme ignore the fact that anti-colonial networks possessed their own political goals that diverged from Berlin's. This

¹ For an overview of Berlin's support for revolution in British India, see, Thomas Fraser, "Germany and Indian Revolution, 1914-1918," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12: 2 (1977): 255-272, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200947701200203>.

² James McDougall, *History, and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 28-59; See also Thomas Fraser, "Germany and Indian Revolution, 1914-1918," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12:2 (1977): 255-272, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200947701200203>.

is developed in the article with respect to propaganda surrounding *jihad* (72-3). Al-Tunisi's story reveals his complaints that Indian activists were "pursuing their own nationalist revolutionary goals, rather than following the supposed common goals of the jihad campaign" (72).

The authors also demonstrate that whilst German officials provided funding and institutional support, they relied on the pre-existing connections and experience of revolutionary exiles to extend the reach of their attempts to instigate revolt in the territories of their war-time adversaries (62). The political figures who played key roles in the committees established by the German Foreign Office in 1914 had been active in exile networks that had arisen in the aftermath of Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. During the pre-war decade, "India Houses" served as meeting places for revolutionary students in London, Paris, and New York.³ Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, one of the most important leaders of the Indian Independence Committee in Berlin, had spent time at the India House base of revolutionary activity in Highgate London. By 1914 militant Indian nationalists had spread to the Pacific coast of North America where 'East Indians' faced growing racial exclusion. Tokyo University had also become a revolutionary hub.⁴

The article reveals that Germany connected with the Ghadr movement, which comprised of a mixture of Indian intellectual revolutionary exiles and Punjabi farmers and labourers who had been radicalized by the 1907-8 anti-Asian riots in British Colombia and Oregon, which was based in North America, but which possessed global connections through its propaganda and support in the Diaspora. The Ghadr Party was dedicated to the violent overthrow of British rule in India. During the First World War, Berlin, Istanbul, San Francisco, and Kabul were to emerge as important revolutionary hubs. Although Afghanistan was neutral, Kabul became the centre of German and Turkish intrigues. Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh established a provisional Indian Government in Kabul in 1915 following the Indo-German-Turkish mission.⁵ The article might also have included Batavia, Bangkok, Shanghai, and even briefly Hilo in Hawai'i, as they all featured in German wartime conspiracies to ship arms to India.⁶

Turkey's entry into the First World on the side of the Central Powers intensified German efforts both to exploit pan-Islamic revolutionary activity and to sway Muslim troops against their colonial masters. The article touches on both of these areas, but its empirical base could have been further developed. More could have been made, for example of Maulana Obaidallah Sindhi's role in the Silk Letters conspiracy. Obaidallah, a Punjabi Sikh convert to Islam, had been active in Pan-Islamic causes since the Balkan wars. Some of the Indian students he encouraged in February 1915 to 'abscond' to the tribal areas where they spent time in the long-established colonies of so-called 'Hindustani fanatics' eventually found their way to the University of the Toilers of the East, set up in Tashkent by Russia's new Bolshevik leaders.⁷

³ Harald Fischer-Tine, "Indian Nationalism and the "World Forces": Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War," *Journal of Global History* 2:3 (2007): 325-344, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022807002318>.

⁴ Arun Coomer Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905-1922, in the Background of International Developments* (Patna: Bharati Bhawan, 1971).

⁵ For further details see, India Office Records, British Library "German schemes for Raising revolt in India," 17/8/1915, L/P&S/11/103/1916.

⁶ Ian Talbot, *A History of Modern South Asia: Politics, States, Diasporas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016): 117.

⁷ For the British intelligence account of the Silk Letter Conspiracy see, India Office Records, British Library, L/P&S/12/1760 Col 3/163. On Obaidallah, see Muhammad Haijan Shaikh, *Maulana Ubaid Ullah Sindhi: A Revolutionary Scholar* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1986). Also see, Khizar Humayun Ansari, *The Emergence of Socialist Thought Among North Indian Muslims (1917-1949)* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

The Ghadarites intensified efforts to cause an army mutiny as a prelude to a general rising of the Indian population. The article refers to the celebrated revolt of the Indian 5th Light Infantry in Singapore on 15 February 1915. There were other unsuccessful attempts to suborn Punjabi troops in Burma, Malaya, Bombay and Madras. The article partially addresses reasons for these failures in its discussion of propaganda directed to both Indian frontline troops and prisoners of war.

The diverse attitudes of the Independence Committees to *jihad* is given considerable scope in the middle sections of the article. The authors argue that the trend became more “pronounced” in 1915 (75). There is an implication that the diverging messages may have undermined their impact. When discussing the attempts to transform Indian prisoners of war into would be propagandists for insurrection, the article cites recent research on the considerable physical punishments and moral pressures to which prisoners were exposed (73).⁸

Added to this analysis could be a discussion of the characteristics of the Indian Muslim troops towards whom the propaganda was directed as well as the Indian Government’s drastically increased wartime power of surveillance and detention. The Indian troops were drawn from the so-called ‘martial castes.’ The British had constructed notions of loyalty not only to the regiment, but to the cultural values of these communities, which placed great importance on *izzat* (honour) and kinship ties. British officers retained close ties with the main recruiting areas, and with the local martial caste military contractors. The soldiers regarded the officers as members of their extended family. The colonial administration also skewed patronage in favour of heavily recruited regions and communities.⁹ Fearing that the troops would be suborned, it attached to the headquarters staff in Mesopotamia, Malik Umar Hayat Khan Tiwana, a major representative of the martial castes. He visited troops, and wrote pamphlets to combat the ‘menace’ of Pan-Islamic ideals. He also heard soldiers’ grievances connected with property or matrimonial disputes back home. These were a significant cause of unrest.¹⁰

The 1915 Defence of India Act increased the government’s power of repression. Ghadarites who returned to Punjab to raise an insurrection were ruthlessly repressed. America’s entry into the war led to the Ghadr headquarters in San Francisco being raided. Its occupants were arrested, and tried for conspiracy. Surveillance extended to close censorship of Punjabi soldiers’ letters home. The letters now form an important colonial archive, held in the India Office Records at the British Library,¹¹ for understanding the minds of the servicemen and some of the reasons for the failure of the wartime strategy of the German authorities and the Independence Committees.¹²

Overall, this article forms an important contribution to the growing historiography of the First World War as a global conflict.¹³ The authors provide persuasive insights into the interactions between Asian and African revolutionary nationalists through the institutional framework of the Independence Committees. The wartime collaboration did not

⁸ Richard Fogarty, “Out of North Africa: Contested Visions of French Muslim Soldiers During World War I” in Richard Fogarty and Andrew Tait Jarboe, eds., *Empires in World War I: Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in a Global Conflict* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014): 136-158. Chapter DOI <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755623921.ch-005>.

⁹ See Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1894-1947* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005); M.S. Leigh, *The Punjab, and the War* (Lahore: Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1922).

¹⁰ Talbot, *Khizr Tiwana, the Punjab Unionist Party and the Partition of India* (Richmond: Curzon Press 1996): 39-40.

¹¹ See India Office Records, British Library, “Reports of the Censor of Indian Mails in France,” 1914-1918, L/Mil/5/825-828.

¹² David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers’ Letters 1914-1918* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1999).

¹³ See for example, Roger D. Long and Talbot, eds., *India and World War I: A Centennial Assessment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018); Ashutosh Kumar, Claude Markovits, *Indian Soldiers in the First World War: Re-visiting a Global Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).

always see alignment between them, but as the article reveals, it provided opportunities for transnational struggle against the British, French, and Russian Empires.

Ian Talbot is Professor of Modern South Asian History at the University of Southampton. His research interests lie in the fields of colonial Punjab history, the Partition of India and post-independence Pakistan history. His publications include: (with Gurharpal Singh) *The Partition of India* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); *Pakistan: A Modern History* (Hurst 2009) and *Pakistan: A New History* (Hurst, 2012); *A History of Modern South Asia: Politics, States, Diasporas* (Yale University Press, 2015); (with Tahir Kamran), *Colonial Lahore: A History of the City and Beyond* (Hurst 2016); *Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947* (Manohar, 2020); *The History of British Diplomacy in Pakistan* (Routledge, 2021).