

# Etherton at Kashgar: Rhetoric and Reality in the History of the "Great Game"

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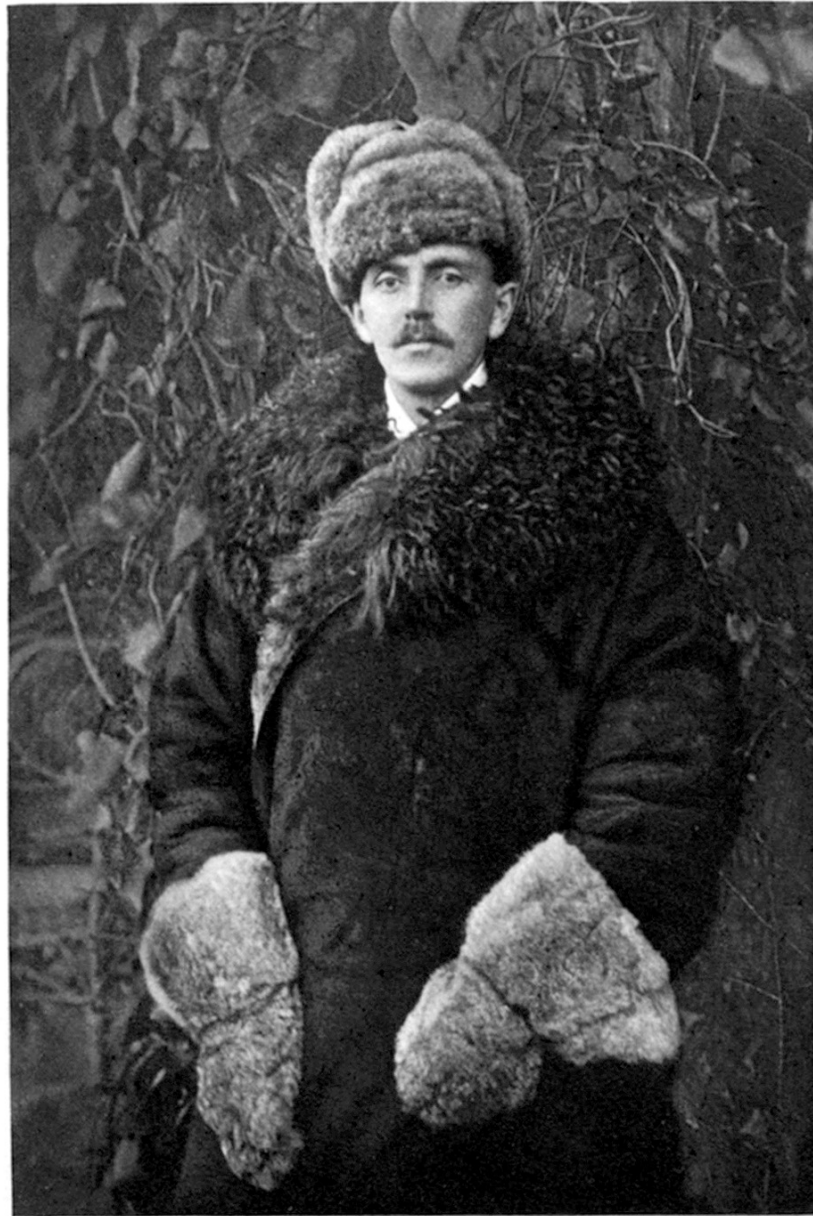
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P. T. Vernon.

The Soviet regime's intent to spread revolution in Asia in the years immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution is quite well known, as is the international response. However, there is much yet to be learned about events in Central Asia, where initially the new regime had but a toehold and local resistance was widespread and long-lasting. Soviet historiography understandably exaggerated British machinations to subvert the new regime there, a view that oddly enough mirrors the emphasis in Western sources which exaggerate the danger of Soviet expansion and the efforts of a few individuals to combat it. Dramatic as the story is, we still know far too little about the shadowy world of agent-provocateurs, intelligence and counter-intelligence, in part simply because evidence which has long been available has never been subject to critical scrutiny. I shall initiate here a re-examination of the British response to the establishment of a Soviet regime in Central Asia and the perceived threat it posed to British interests in Xinjiang (China) and to British India. More specifically, this is a re-assessment of the response by the British consul in Kashgar, Xinjiang, in 1918-1922, Percy T. Etherton (1879-1963), whose own account about those years has in fact hindered a critical assessment of that history. The focus on Etherton reveals a great deal about contemporary disagreements among British policy-makers, the mechanisms of intelligence gathering and the quality of information, and the ways in which source criticism must be applied to locate the truth behind rhetorical claims.

As Peter Hopkirk puts it, in Kashgar Etherton "fought a ruthless, almost personal war against [the Soviets]...So effective were his anti-

Bolshevik operations that a price was put on his head by the Soviet authorities in Tashkent.”<sup>1</sup> In this telling, Etherton is the hero of a dramatic chapter in the history of the “Great Game” rivalry for great power dominance in Central Asia. Yet the activities of Etherton and his successors as consuls in Kashgar await serious historical treatment.<sup>2</sup> While there were many consular duties, my focus will be on Etherton’s anti-Soviet activities, which indeed were extensive although arguably by no means as important as Hopkirk would have it. Moreover, Hopkirk is silent about the denouement of Etherton’s Kashgar career, a chapter in his story which helps explain why he produced such a flawed account of his Kashgar years.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *Setting the East Ablaze: Lenin’s Dream of an Empire in Asia* (New York, etc., 1984; reprint ed. 1995): 2-3. Since he writes for a popular audience, Hopkirk eschews footnotes. He did do research in some of the archival material which serves as the basis for this paper, but as in his other writing, he relies uncritically on published accounts by contemporaries. My work shares with his the limitations of using mainly British sources and thus cannot pretend to be the study we yet need for this topic. I have not yet consulted Robert Johnson, *Spying for Empire: The Great Game in Central and South-East Asia, 1757-1947* (London, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> The career of the first British consul in Kashgar, George Macartney, is treated in some detail by C. P. Skrine and Pamela Nightingale, *Macartney at Kashgar: New Light on British, Chinese and Russian Activities in Sinkiang, 1890-1918* (London, 1973). Macartney’s wife wrote a memoir of her years in Kashgar: Lady [Catherina] Macartney, *An English Lady in Chinese Turkestan* (London, 1931). Ella Sykes and Percy Sykes, *Through Deserts and Oases of Central Asia* (London, 1920), covers the brief period in which Percy Sykes relieved Macartney while the latter was on leave in 1916 but is really Ella Sykes’s travel account and says little about consular affairs. An overview of the consulate of Etherton’s successor, Clarmont Skrine is in John Stewart, *Envoy of the Raj: The Career of Sir Clarmont Skrine, Indian Political Service* (Maidenhead, 1989), chs. 12-13, and encompassed by Skrine’s own *Chinese Central Asia* (London, 1926), which, however, carefully avoids political questions. Diana Shipton, *The Antique Land* (London, 1950), is a memoir by the wife of Eric Shipton, the last British consul in Kashgar before the consulate closed in 1947. The crucial documents for writing the history of the consulate are in the India Office files of the British Library and the Public Record Office in London. My analysis is based on the first of these collections, which contains a quite complete, if rather disorganized and repetitious, array of documents about intelligence and counter-intelligence. The Kashgar consulate was under the supervision of the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of India.

### *Etherton's Career*

Etherton distinguished himself as a British officer, as a traveler in often remote parts of the globe and as a prolific author of books on travel and the geopolitics of East Asia. He fought for the British in South Africa in 1901, where he attracted the attention of Lord Kitchener, and then joined the Garhwal Rifles, a largely native regiment in northern India.<sup>3</sup> As a Lieutenant in 1909-1910, he took a leave in order to travel overland from India to the Trans-Siberian Railway, a journey which resulted in a book which he described modestly as "a plain record of a year's wandering in the lesser known parts of Central Asia for the purposes of sport and travel."<sup>4</sup> Significant segments of the book focus on big game hunting in the Central Asian mountains, a popular destination for British officers stationed in India. Since Etherton traversed in part terrain not previously followed by any Englishman, his book is also a useful record of descriptive geography, more attentive to its physical than its human side. His occasional excursions into history and ethnography were reinforced by an apparently limited amount of reading in the literature which was

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<sup>3</sup> My acquaintance with the bare facts of Etherton's biography relies in part on the short and not fully accurate obituary by his colleague on the Kashgar-Tashkent Mission and later on the Everest adventure, Stewart Blacker, "Colonel P. T. Etherton," *The Times* (London), April 2, 1963, Issue 55665, p. 15, col. A. I am not aware of any substantial biography, nor have I found any references to an archive of Etherton's papers.

<sup>4</sup> P. T. Etherton, *Across the Roof of the World: A Record of Sport and Travel through Kashmir, Gilgit, Hunza, the Pamirs, Chinese Turkistan, Mongolia and Siberia* (London, 1911; New York, 1911; reprint, Camden, S.C., 1994), p. xv. On his way to India to join the Kashgar mission with Etherton, F. M. Bailey wrote his mother about Etherton's being on board the *S. S. Egra*, bound for Bombay and noted that Etherton had written the book but confessed to not having read it. See: British Library India Office Library and Records (hereafter abbreviated BL IOLR) Mss EurF157/178, F. M. Bailey to Florence Bailey, February 21, 1918.

readily available at the time.<sup>5</sup> We come away with an admiration for Etherton's logistical planning and toughness. He crossed the mountains in winter, and he and his Indian orderly finished the trip frostbitten in the bitterly cold Siberian winter.

After distinguishing himself in World War I, Etherton returned to India, where he was a logical choice to be part of the Government of India's intelligence-gathering mission to Kashgar and Tashkent in the summer of 1918. Etherton's second book, *In the Heart of Asia* (1925), is more solidly grounded than the first in the literature on Inner Asia, but first and foremost is a vehicle for emphasizing the importance of his work in Kashgar and draws extensively on his consular reports.<sup>6</sup> With its geopolitical observations, the book helped launch a new phase in his career, that of author and commentator on East Asian affairs.<sup>7</sup> By the time he died at age 83, his bibliography included eight solely authored books on world affairs and travel and an equivalent number of

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<sup>5</sup> Etherton never tells us what he had read. It is clear that the section of his book on the history and ethnography of the Ili Valley, pp. 296ff., closely follows Henry Lansdell, *Russian Central Asia including Kuldja, Bokhara, Khiva and Merv*, Vol. I (Boston, 1885; reprint, 2005), pp. 201 ff. He may also have read Eugene Schuyler, *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja*, Vol. II (New York, 1877), where compare pp. 197-198 with Etherton's p. 299. In passing Etherton notes he took along on the journey a limited library, including Boswell's *Life of Johnson* and a book (unnamed) on the Russo-Japanese War. The latter anticipates the serious interest Etherton developed regarding the Japanese position in Asia.

<sup>6</sup> P. T. Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia* (London; Boston, 1926). There is an unpublished Russian translation in the Institute of the History of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (see L. N. Khariukov, *Anglo-russkoe sopernichestvo v Tsentral'noi Azii i ismailizm* (Moscow, 1995), p. 236n171). For details on the book and its sources, see below.

<sup>7</sup> Soon after he returned from Kashgar, Etherton gave a talk for the Central Asian Society which previews the kind of sweeping generalizations he would provide in several of his books and a number of articles in the 1920s. See P. T. Etherton, "Central Asia: Its Rise as a Political and Economic Factor," *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, 10/2 (1923): 88-103.



volumes as co-author or contributor.<sup>8</sup> His travels eventually would include the Balkans, the Caribbean and South America. He helped secure financing and organize the historic first flight over Mt. Everest in 1933. His military career resumed while he was chief staff officer to Admiral Sir Edward Evans between 1940 and 1946, in which capacity he played a role in Britain's wartime defence. In short, Etherton's career is that of an energetic and resourceful man. Judging from his photographs, he had movie-star looks, and both in image and his writings, he exudes self-confidence. While he might grate on some colleagues, he knew how to be diplomatic. All these qualities are evident in his Kashgar years.

When asked by the India Office whether Etherton should be given the regular consular appointment (to that point he was only "acting"), on April 5, 1920, his immediate predecessor George Macartney provided this assessment:

Without actually being brilliant, Etherton is a scholarly man and energetic. His judgment is sound and mature, and in

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<sup>8</sup> The books are, roughly in chronological order: *China, The Facts* (London, 1927); under title *The Crisis in China* (Boston, 1927; New York, 1970); (with H. H. Tiltman) *The Pacific: A Forecast* (London, 1928; Boston, 1928; New York, 1970); (with A. D. Allen) *Through Europe and the Balkans: the Record of a Motor Tour* (London, etc., 1928); *Adventures in Five Continents* (London, 1928); (with H. H. Tiltman) *Manchuria: The Cockpit of Asia* (London, 1932, 1934; New York, 1932); (with P. F. M. Fellowes, D. Douglas-Hamilton, L. V. Stewart Blacker) *First over Everest! The Houston-Mount Everest Expedition, 1933* (London, 1933; New York, 1934; [5<sup>th</sup> ed.] New York, 1934); (with H. H. Tiltman) *Japan: Mistress of the Pacific* (London, 1933; 1934); *The Last Strongholds* (London, 1934; repr. ed: *Glimpses of Tibet, Nepal and the Himalayan Mountains* [New Delhi, 1983]); (contribution to:) Stephen King-Hall, *The Book of Speed* (London, 1934, 1935); (with V. Barlow) *The Trail of the Conquerors* (London, 1936; German transl., *Auf den Spuren der Eroberer* [Berlin, 1937]); *All over the World* (London; New York, etc., 1946); *Across the Great Deserts* (London, 1948; New York, 1948 [2 eds.]); *Haunts of High Adventure: Sidelights and Cameos on Travels in Venezuela, Panama, Mexico, Cuba, and the West Indies* (London; New York, 1950); (with V. Barlow) *Tempestuous Isle: the Story of Lundy* (London, 1950; new ed., 1960); *On Either Side of the Equator* (London; New York, 1953; New York, 1954).

any society, he is capable of exercising a powerful influence. Always self-possessed, he seems to be just one of those men to remain calm in danger, and to be outwardly unruffled when irritated by intrigue, answering an opponent with arguments rather than threats. When he was with me in Kashgar, he made, I believe, an excellent impression on the Chinese and the Russians...<sup>9</sup>

### *The Challenges of Being British Consul in Kashgar*

Given the geographic isolation of Kashgar and its limited communications with the outside world, the British consul indeed had to be self-possessed and resourceful. This was the more necessary on account of the rather low priority the Government of India placed on the consulate. Although George Macartney had come to Kashgar in 1890 to represent British interests in the face of the already-established Russian presence, his government saw fit to appoint him officially as Consul only in 1908. He found himself in a situation not atypical for the distant representatives of far-flung empires in an earlier era, where guidance about policy often arrived with much delay, if at all, and human and financial resources had to be stretched to cover responsibilities for a vast territory. Looking back from the perspective of 1925, Etherton would interpret his responsibilities thus:

The Consular area committed to my charge was one of the largest in the world, comprising four hundred and sixty thousand square miles, equal in area to that of France and Spain combined, over which were scattered British subjects in more or less insignificant numbers. The predominant questions to study and keep a close and constant watch over were of a political nature, and these assumed such importance to India and the Empire during

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<sup>9</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/453, Kashgar Consulate, Reg. no. 2479, George Macartney to J. E. Shuckburgh, April 5, 1920. Macartney also pointed out that Etherton needed to learn more about the relevant legal enactments pertaining to British subjects in China and commented positively on his linguistic qualifications for the job.

the period in question that trade and commercial matters played but a minor part.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, trade and commercial matters were also important, even in the period from 1918 to 1922. The Consul had responsibility for the interests of British subjects in its region of China, that is the Indian merchants who in many cases had long been resident there. They controlled the trade across the passes from Kashmir, were actively involved in the trade with Russia, and played an important role in the financial life of the oasis towns in Western Xinjiang. There were continual tensions with the Chinese authorities about issues such as registration and extraterritoriality, and the consuls had to devote substantial time to negotiation and judicial functions. Since the Russians had been the first to gain privileges for their citizens who occupied similar roles in Xinjiang, the change in the Russian political status from 1917 until new agreements would be negotiated between the Soviet regime and China several years later created problems for the British as well. Etherton's monthly consular diaries contain ample evidence of the degree to which he was forced to pay attention to these matters.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>11</sup> The series of Kashgar consular diaries may be read in two files of the India Office collection, BL IOLR L/P&S/10/825, Kashgar Monthly Diaries 1912-20; L/P&S/10/976, Kashgar Diaries 1921-1930. These are printed copies of the diaries, each with their own pagination which will be used in citations below. The cover sheets (minute papers) generally precede each individual issue. In addition, on the complex problem of the rights of British subjects, see BL IOLR L/P&S/10/297, Chinese Turkestan. Effect on British Subjects After Abrogation of the Russo-Chinese Treaty of 1881; and BL IOLR L/P&S/10/949, Chinese Turkestan, Status of British Subjects. The number of legal cases involving British subjects seems to have been compounded by the notorious exactions of the Indian Shikarpuri money lenders, who had continual run-ins with the local Central Asians who had borrowed from them. Almost immediately upon arriving in Kashgar in August 1922, Skrine wrote complaining about the unduly liberal policy of his predecessors in registering all comers as British subjects and the problems this was creating with the Chinese. This

Etherton certainly prioritized political issues and in particular those pertaining to what he described in 1925 as the “ever-increasing Bolshevik menace.” To some degree though, this emphasis reads back into the situation a threat which in fact his own reports at the time did not necessarily support. About his anti-Bolshevik credentials there can be little doubt, but the 1925 book must be read in part as an exercise in self-justification not simply with his future career in mind but also because he was perhaps rightly upset with the equivocal policy of the British government regarding the new Soviet regime. The importance of the Kashgar consulate in this period can be assessed only if we take into account the confusion in government policy and in particular the reluctance of the government in London to engage in an active anti-Bolshevik policy.

### *The Origins of the Kashgar Mission*

When Etherton was sent to Kashgar in 1918 World War I was still being fought. The initiative for the mission came from the British Government of India, which had serious concerns over German and Turkish efforts to penetrate the Middle East and Central Asia and the consequent threat to control critical resources and foment political

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statement was run by Etherton and the former Vice-Consul Fitzmaurice, who insisted that while it might have been true under Macartney, such was not the case once Etherton took over as consul. See Kashgar Monthly Diary for August 1922, p. 2, and the various minutes and other documents attached to the September 1922 Diary. Skrine had barely arrived when already J. A. Simpson of the India Office was wishing Etherton were back in Kashgar. Whether or not Skrine was really aiming the remark at Etherton is hard to say, but the record does suggest that Etherton was on top of the issues about British subject rights. I have drawn on the Kashgar consulate materials in my overview of the Xinjiang trade, “Continuity and Change in the Trade of Xinjiang into the 1920s,” in: *History and Society in Central and Inner Asia*, ed. M. Gervers et al. Toronto Studies in Central and Inner Asia, 8 (2007): 127-147.

disorder in India. So the decision was made to reinforce British intelligence gathering by dispatching two missions. One was a small force under General Wilfrid Malleon, posted to northeastern Iran, and the other was the mission to Kashgar. In the absence of clear instructions, Malleon promptly exceeded his mandate and engaged in military actions with anti-Soviet forces in Transcaspia.<sup>12</sup> What had started as part of the anti-German war effort morphed into an effort to contain the new Soviet regime only shortly before the November 1918 Armistice would undercut any rationale for British military intervention in Russia.<sup>13</sup> Given the unreliability of his allies and the small size of his force, within a matter of months Malleon was ordered to withdraw to Meshed and focus on what had been his primary mission all along, gathering intelligence. The importance of this activity was enhanced by the coup which brought to power in Afghanistan a regime that foolishly embarked on a war against the British in 1919 and actively tried to

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<sup>12</sup> For a hard-nosed re-assessment of the British Transcasian mission see Michael Sargent, *British Military Involvement in Transcaspia (1918-1919)* (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. Conflict Studies Research Centre. Caucasus Series. April 2004), online at <http://www.da.mod.uk/CSRC/documents/Caucasus/04%2802%29-MS.pdf>, accessed May 14, 2006. The unstated undercurrent of Sargent's well-substantiated criticism of the muddle in the intervention is obviously the current muddle of ill-conceived intervention in Iraq. Failures to coordinate policy and appreciate the implications of intelligence are evident in both examples. A substantial number of Malleon's intelligence reports and other materials pertaining to the mission may be found in BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, Central Asia. Correspondence (1917-1920). The decision that Malleon should withdraw followed a personal inspection mission by General Milne, the new commandant for British forces in Transcaspia, sent there from Constantinople in January 1919. His report is in BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fols. 207-209, Report no. G.M.-62 from Constantinople, February 1, 1919, enclosure no. 3 to Telegram no. 75081-M.O. from Secretary of War Office, London, to Commander-in-Chief, Delhi, February 8, 1919. Note: citations from this file and another important one containing Central Asian intelligence, L/P&S/10/836, use the continuous foliation added by the archivists, since the multiple paginations of the documents themselves do not allow one easily to identify the locations in the books.

<sup>13</sup> On this issue, see Richard H. Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921*, 3 vols. (Princeton, 1961-1972), esp. Vol. 2, *Britain and the Russian Civil War, November 1918-February 1920*, ch. 9.

court Soviet support.<sup>14</sup> Malleson later would boast of how thoroughly he infiltrated the Soviet-controlled areas of southern Central Asia, and indeed it seems that the quality of the intelligence he was able to telegraph quickly to the Government of India was first-rate.<sup>15</sup> Among other things, he intercepted Soviet radio messages which often contained critical information at a time when the rail and telegraph lines connecting Tashkent with Moscow had been cut by White forces in Siberia.

The mission to Kashgar, which left India in July 1918, included three officers: Frederick Bailey, L. Stewart Blacker, and Percy Etherton. All had to their credit service in the War and extended travel through difficult parts of Asia.<sup>16</sup> Etherton and Blacker had first-hand

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<sup>14</sup> See the summary in Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations*, Vol. 3, *The Anglo-Soviet Accord*, pp. 341-345. For greater detail on Afghan foreign affairs, see Ludwig W. Adamec, *Afghanistan, 1900-1993. A Diplomatic History* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, 1967), esp. chs. 6-7, and Idem, *Afghanistan's Foreign Affairs to the Mid-Twentieth Century. Relations With the USSR, Germany, and Britain* (Tucson, 1974), chs. 2-3. The most thorough treatment of early Afghan-Soviet relations, one which makes good use of a great deal of Soviet archival material, is S. B. Panin, *Sovetskaia Rossiia i Afganistan. 1919-1929* (Irkutsk, 1998). The frictions in that relationship were more substantial than the British seem to have realized at the time.

<sup>15</sup> See Malleson's talk to the Central Asian Society in London, January 24, 1922: "The British Military Mission in Turkistan, 1918-1920," *Journal of the Central Asian Society* 9/2 (1922), esp. p. 106. It is important to realize that Malleson's statements here to some extent are an apologia justifying his actions.

<sup>16</sup> In 1914 Blacker had traveled the standard route from Leh to Kashgar and then Tashkent, returning home through Russia. See his "From India to Russia in 1914," *The Geographical Journal*, 50/6 (1917): 393-418. Bailey had participated in the British invasion of Tibet in 1904 and later explored extraordinarily difficult terrain in the southeastern part of the country. See Arthur Swinson *Beyond the Frontiers: the biography of Colonel F. M. Bailey explorer and special agent* (London, 1971), esp. chs. 2, 4, 5 and 7. All received temporary promotions in rank for the duration of the mission. As Bailey wrote his mother, "They have made me a local Lieut. Colonel for the job but I shall go back to Major when I return to India" (BL IOLR Mss EurF 157/178, F. M. Bailey to Florence Bailey, April 23, 1918). He would later chide her for continuing to use "Lt. Col." in addressing his mail, since he had reverted to Major: "I was only Lt. Col. for the show & now it's over I revert. It was very useful being

experience with Russians.<sup>17</sup> Ostensibly their mission was to find out exactly what was going on in Soviet Tashkent and to try to cultivate good relations with the new Soviet regime there in order that it prevent Central Asian cotton from being shipped to the Germans. Even though there was communication between Tashkent and Kashgar, the British consulate had at best a very vague idea of what was happening on the other side of the border, and it seems to have been blissfully ignorant of Bolshevik ideology. Although apparently the original intention had been that Bailey would relieve the longtime consul at Kashgar, George Macartney, since the latter was retiring,

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Col. up there as the Russians paid much more attention to me..." (BL IOLR Mss EurF 157/180, F. M. Bailey to Florence Bailey, February 2, 1920). In contrast, Etherton, a Captain promoted to Major for the mission, not only managed to get himself an additional temporary promotion to Lt. Col. but continued to call himself by the latter rank even after it had lapsed. This was one of the many strikes his successor at Kashgar, Clarmont Skrine, held against him. See BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/9, Clarmont Skrine to Helen Skrine, April 4, 1923, p. 4: "By the way, if you have reason to address Etherton again in writing or verbally, don't forget that he's not a 'Colonel' but only a Major now. He merely wangled the Lt. Col. out of Gov't. as local rank, and when he loses this job he loses the rank with it. Do you know that he was really only a Captain when he wangled the 'Colonel' as above? He had already wangled a temporary majority for himself when he was appointed to the Kashgar Mission..." This is not just Skrine's animus. Bailey confirmed as much to his mother, who apparently had referred to Etherton in one of her letters: "I think Col. Etherton is only colonely [*sic*] while he holds the Kashgar appointment" (BL IOLR Mss EurF157/183, F. M. Bailey to Florence Bailey, Calcutta, March 14, 1923, fol. 1v). The file title notwithstanding, the transcript made from Etherton's military record in 1930 confirms that he retired on December 7, 1924, with the rank of Major (BL IOLR L/P&S/11/228, "Col. Etherton," Reg. no. P231/1923). I am grateful to the copyright holders, Ms. Helen Holland and Ms. Robin Moore, for permission to quote from the Skrine papers, and to the heirs of F. M. Bailey for permission to quote from the Bailey papers.

<sup>17</sup> Of the three, Etherton was the only one to claim Russian language ability at the start of the mission. In his assessment of Etherton's qualifications for the permanent position, Macartney wrote: "His linguistic attainments appear to be rather high. He reads and writes Hindustani and Hindi, and I believe he knows Pashtu. On arrival at Kashgar...June 1918, he began taking lessons in Russian and Turki, and probably he has already acquired a good working knowledge of those languages..." (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/453, Macartney to Shuckburgh, April 5, 1920). One has to wonder how well he could have learned Russian. His intelligence reports from Kashgar included translations from Russian, possibly made by him, but with ample opportunities to have obtained assistance in doing them.

Etherton stayed behind in Kashgar while Bailey, Blacker and Macartney went off to Tashkent.<sup>18</sup> At the moment it arrived there the British mission had no idea that Malleson's Transcaspian force had just engaged in military action against a Soviet one. So the mission's protestation of friendly intentions was met with understandable disbelief from the Soviet side. The upshot of this was that Macartney and Blacker quickly departed. For somewhat unclear reasons, Bailey stayed behind, managing to avoid Bolshevik arrest and survive on the run for more than a year, and finally escaped in late 1919. His exciting story is the stuff of legend but need not be repeated here.<sup>19</sup> For all

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<sup>18</sup> John Stewart notes that Bailey later told Clarmont Skrine that he, Bailey, had been the first choice to replace Macartney but turned down the job and suggested Etherton have it: having the job would postpone his home leave; also he wanted to get away from Etherton and Blacker. See Stewart, *Envoy of the Raj*, p. 221n46. In a letter to his mother at the time, Bailey merely noted that he had been offered the opportunity to stay on as consul once the mission was over, but had declined it. (BL IOLR Mss EurF 157/178, F. M. Bailey to Florence Bailey, June 15, 1918); later he repeated as much, adding that "I did not fancy it [the job--DW]" (BL IOLR Mss EurF 157/180, F. M. Bailey to Florence Bailey, Delhi, February 12, 1920, fol. 2).

<sup>19</sup> For fear of offending the Russians, the Foreign Office blocked publication of Bailey's own account in 1924; it appeared only in 1946 as F. M. Bailey, *Mission to Tashkent* (London, 1946; repr. Oxford; New York, 1992, 2002). See Swinson, *Beyond the Frontiers*, p. 200. Bailey sent the manuscript to Macartney to read, and the latter made a number of suggestions for improvements. See BL IOLR Mss EurD 658, George Macartney to F. M. Bailey, March 9, 1940. Hopkirk's stirring retelling of the Bailey mission is in *Setting the East Ablaze*, chs. 2-5; Swinson's more sober account is in *Beyond the Frontiers*, chs. 10-12. Blacker published his own description of his part in the mission, which amounted to very little, since he took ill while in Russia and only afterward spent some time chasing through the mountains a band of Afghan smugglers who proved not to be some threatening force of German agents. See L.V.S. Blacker, *On Secret Patrol in High Asia* (London, 1922), in which, ostensibly for diplomatic and military reasons, he does not even mention Bailey by name. For further detail, see below, n. 95.

The members of the mission to Kashgar and Tashkent apparently did not get along very well. On more than one occasion, Bailey complained about not receiving communications from Etherton, although apparently that was not for want of Etherton's trying. See, for example, BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 67, Etherton telegram no. 90 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, May 16, 1919; fol. 72v, Etherton telegram no. 132 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, July 7, 1919. However, whether Etherton went about things in the right way is another matter. On escaping to Persia, Bailey wrote a long letter home detailing his escapades. In it he noted: "I got a few letters in October and then



the hoopla around Bailey's adventures though, the realistic assessment is that the intelligence value of his mission was very small, since he was largely cut off from outside communication, and what messages he did manage to send were too dated to be of any use.<sup>20</sup> His presence certainly complicated Anglo-Soviet relations and caused no end of concern for British officials from London to Simla.

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the stupid Consul in Kashgar Etherton, when I asked for newspapers by post, sent letters as well. The result is that one packet was received at the address they were posted to [and] had to be burnt when the Bolsheviks were searching the house, and some were intercepted in the post by the Bolsheviks & read...." (BL IOLR Mss EurF 157/180, F. M. Bailey to Florence Bailey, Sarakhs, Persia, January 10, 1920, fol. 5v). Bailey apparently complained to Etherton in February 1920 after he had escaped, and the latter wrote back in self-justification as to how his agents had tried unsuccessfully to locate Bailey in Tashkent (BL IOLR Mss EurF 157/232, P. T. Etherton to F. M. Bailey, Kashgar, April 10, 1920). See also below, n. 20.

<sup>20</sup> See Swinson, *Beyond the Frontiers*, pp. 198-199; Sargent, *British Military Involvement*, p. 25. A couple of examples will illustrate the problems of communication. On September 28, 1918, before he knew of the trouble Bailey was in, Etherton sent a messenger to Tashkent who actually managed to deliver into Bailey's hands a bag of dispatches. The messenger left Tashkent October 24, two days after Bailey went into hiding, was searched several times on the road back to Kashgar and returned only on November 17, reporting Bailey had sent no messages back, probably because of the haste with which he had to hide. Etherton sent this information to India November 18, his courier reaching Gilgit December 6; that same day Gilgit wired the information to Simla. (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 231v, Etherton telegram no. 344 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, November 18, 1918). On December 28, Etherton finally received messages from Bailey dated October 19 and December 5 and a message with information from the American Consul in Tashkent, Tredwell, who had been in touch with Bailey (loc. cit., fol. 235, Etherton telegram to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, December 29, 1918). In his confidential Report on the Kashgar Mission, 1918-1920, Bailey wrote (p. 3): "All this time I was eagerly expecting messages sent off in August, September and October, but nothing came until on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1918 a man I had sent to Kashgar returned, but instead of bringing the long cypher message I expected, he brought a very short message in slang dated 17<sup>th</sup> November containing practically no news" (BL IOLR Mss EurF 157/275, Bailey Papers, General Correspondence and Reports re Tashkent Mission, 1918-1923).

My colleague Florian Schwarz has been examining the Bailey papers for information on Bailey's Bukharan contacts which were maintained at least through emigres after he escaped. Prof. Schwarz disagrees with my skepticism about the value of the mission although he notes that opportunities to take advantage of this Bukharan connection were squandered when Bailey's superiors backed away from a forward policy in Central Asia.

The Tashkent mission was, however, only one element in the strengthening of the Kashgar consulate's political capacity in a period of instability in Central Asia. The Government of India made a special budgetary allocation which went well beyond the costs of travel and support for the three officers and their staffs. Other measures included appointing a Vice-Consul, strengthening the consular guard, establishing a wireless receiver at the consulate, and providing funding for expanded intelligence gathering. All this was seen as a temporary arrangement, subject to review should the perception of political urgency change.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fols. 466-470, contains various documents regarding Etherton's request in June 1920 that budgetary reauthorization be given to continue the "Kashgar Mission" into the next year. The request received mixed comment in the India Office, some stressing the value of the Central Asian intelligence, but others, probably more out of fiscal concerns than anything else, wondering whether it was worth the cost. In his Kashgar Monthly Diary for February 1921 (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, p. 6), Etherton reported that his Hunza courier riders were unhappy that they were not being paid on time even though the demands on their services had grown substantially with the greater use of the consular mail after the closing of the Russian border in 1917 and the supplementing of the consular staff in 1918.

As the budget extension was nearing its end, there was another exchange between Etherton and his superiors, in which they proposed "in view of anticipated increase in Bolshevik activity in Ferghana, Semirechia, Chinese Turkestan, and Pamirs in early summer, that Intelligence Organisation in this area should be strengthened by placing at your disposal for period of six months a King's Commissioned Indian Officer as Intelligence Officer." Etherton responded to the proposal for help with enthusiasm, indicating that it would be good if they could also send a couple of well-trained agents capable of operating incognito on the Russian side of the border. The particular agent the Government of India had in mind was one Capt. Samad Shah, none other than a cousin of the Aga Khan, who had worked in British intelligence and obviously was a very knowledgeable analyst. In his book, Etherton claims that Samad Shah was sent "as the result of my representations to the Government of India concerning certain matters in Russian and Chinese territory," even though in fact the initiative seems to have come from India (Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia*, p. 273). There probably were several agendas involved in choosing him, since an effort was made to have him bring along a message from the Aga Khan to his Ismaili followers in the Pamirs. See BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fols. 440-444. The quotation is from Government of India telegram to Kashgar no. 177-S, February 8, 1921, fol. 444. See also BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fols. 126-129v, October 2, 1919, the translation from Persian of Barakatullah's anti-British pamphlet reconciling Bolshevism and Islam, at the end of which (fols. 128v-129) was appended a short analysis of the arguments by Samad Shah. On his activity once in Kashgaria, see below, n. 25.

### *The Consulate's Intelligence and Communications Networks*

Etherton then was the key person in implementing this program, and it is clear he did much more to further its goals than Bailey ever did. Very importantly, he cultivated a network of agents which seems to have been more extensive than the one Macartney had tapped or Etherton's successor, Clarmont P. Skrine (who had to operate under budgetary constraints once the "special mission" ended) could afford. There was a network of British-subject communal elders (aksakals) scattered in the towns of Xinjiang, who were closely connected with the wealthy local merchants on both sides of the border.<sup>22</sup> Many of their Russian-subject counterparts were against the Soviet regime and equally willing to provide information. Members of the local Russian emigré community in Kashgar, all of them White opponents of the

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<sup>22</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 198v, Etherton no. 5 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, January 1, 1919, with a report from Ferghana from "Baud-ud-din, one of the three richest merchants in Kashgaria, who returned three days ago from Andijan." He appended to the same report a number of separate items, including news on Badakhshan from one Haji Ghulam Rasul, who left Faizabad (in Afghanistan), December 11 (fol. 199); a report from Sarikol sent by Mahomed Sharif, the British Aksakal at Tashkurghan and agents of the Kashgar Taoyin (ibidem); a report on troop strength at the forts in the Pamirs from "Nur Mahomed, a well-known Beg at Pamirski Post and on the Pamirs, who arrived at Kashgar, some of his property having been confiscated by the Bolsheviks" (fol. 199v). In a report dated February 1, Etherton again cited Nur Muhammad, who in turn had information from Sharif Beg and one other beg arrived from Murghabi (Pamirskii post). Ferghana news received on January 13 and sent on by Etherton on January 18 came from "Obaidullah, Akhun and several merchants from Tashkent" (loc. cit. fol. 194). In his report no. 75, April 21, 1919, Etherton's news from Ferghana came from "recent arrivals and secret service agents." He mentioned also one Yakub Akhun, who had left Tashkent March 26 and arrived at Kashgar April 14. For the Pamirs, his sources included Mahomed Sharif, British Aksakal at Tashkurghan, and Sayid Jalal Shah, Pir of the Aga Khan in Sarikol. An agent Toksa Bai (Toksa Alam, a Tajik Beg) had been sent by the Chinese back in the autumn to the Wakhan and Badakhshan to report on possible German or Turkish agents, but was arrested there and only recently had returned with a report that none had been found (loc. cit., fol. 154v, Etherton report no. 75 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, April 21, 1919). He, Sayid Jalal Shah, and the Russian commanding officer at Tashkurghan also reported on the garrisons in the Wakhan and Badakhshan.

Soviet regime, were valuable sources, since they maintained cross-border contacts. Some of the Russian garrisons on the Russian side of the border for some time were not securely controlled by the Bolsheviks and might readily be tapped for information.<sup>23</sup> For a time there was even a White Russian garrison which provided intelligence in Tashkurghan on the Chinese side south of Kashgar.<sup>24</sup> Etherton was able to cultivate Kyrgyz tribal leaders in the Pamirs for information on the status of the border garrisons, and for the Sarikol plateau and Wakhan corridor, his informants included Tajik Ismailis (followers of the Aga Khan).<sup>25</sup> A considerable amount of the information Etherton

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<sup>23</sup> One of those reporting to him on garrisons in the Murghab region had secured for Etherton a Bolshevik official strength report of April 1919 (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 155, Etherton report no. 75 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, April 21, 1919). On June 6, 1919, he reported receiving intelligence on the Pamir posts from a Russian officer who left Murghab May 24 (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 166v, Etherton telegram no. 105 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, June 6, 1919, received June 18). Etherton reported that he and the Russian Consulate in Kashgar (still in the hands of the Whites) had an agent in the commandant at Irkeshtam who had pretended to be a Bolshevik sympathizer. When a certain Popov was being sent as the consul-designate to Kashgar, the commandant at Irkeshtam had him arrested and sent back to Osh (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 82, Etherton telegram no. 207 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, October 1, 1919).

<sup>24</sup> In March 1919 (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 181v, Etherton telegram no. 57 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, March 11, 1919, received March 25), Etherton reported on garrison strength in the Pamirs as told him by a Cossack officer who had come to Kashgar. The Russian garrison at Tashkurghan turned over its fort to the Chinese in March 1921. In his monthly diary under March 29, Etherton noted the arrival of its commandant, Capt. Vilgorski, who "has co-operated very well with me for the past three years and has done much towards the success of the informal arrangements I have in force on the Russian Pamirs with regard to Bolshevik movements and propaganda" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, Kashgar Monthly Diary for March 1921, p. 5).

<sup>25</sup> It seems as though this network and more generally the surveillance in the Pamirs were still only in the planning stages as late as February 1920. The Government of India wrote to Etherton and its Political Agent in Gilgit indicating that the latest intelligence was that the Pamirs might become the main route for infiltration of Bolshevik agents and propaganda. The Government of India asked both its officials for advice on how to stop this (BL IOLR, L/P&S/10/741, fol. 20v, Telegram no. 142-S, February 5, 1920). Etherton responded they could be stopped only if British would man the forts, which were currently in the hands of anti-

collected came from north of the Tian Shan Mountains—from the Ili Valley, the provincial capital of Urumqi, and even the far northern areas along what is now the border between Xinjiang on the one hand and Kazakhstan, Russia and Mongolia on the other. His sources in these areas varied—agents sent on the long and difficult journey to Kashgar by White Cossack generals, a Belgian missionary whom he had met on his trip in 1909-1910, or some of the Europeans who worked in the Chinese civil administration.

Apart from tapping into the resources in the local communities of those sympathetic to British interests, Etherton would send his own agents on specific missions, where they could cross the border disguised as merchants. These might be Indian staff at the consulate or individuals recruited from the local community (rarely do we know details). He even managed to get one of his agents attached to a Chinese diplomatic mission sent off to Kabul in 1921.<sup>26</sup> He also would

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Bolshevik garrisons answering to the rather unstable opposition forces in Ferghana. "In Ferghana and on Russian Pamirs I might exploit elements friendly to us and arrange for that important area being more effectively controlled and guarded, but I would ask to be informed of policy of Government of India in this matter before elaborating any scheme" (loc. cit., fol. 25, Etherton telegram no. 62 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, February 9, 1920, received February 21). See also his long message to the Resident in Kashmir, outlining measures already in place to try to keep track of movements across the borders and prevent the spreading of anti-British propaganda (loc. cit., fols. 30v-31, Etherton no. 17 to Resident, Srinagar, Kashmir, January 8, 1920). The full organization of the Ismailis may have come even later, as Etherton reported in his Kashgar Monthly Diary for November 1921 (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, p. 1) that Samad Shah, who had contacts with all the Ismaili pirs in the region, "in conjunction with me is organizing an intelligence scheme to cover the Russian Pamirs and all the territory where Maulais are found." See also his note of progress in this endeavor in the January 1922 monthly diary (p. 2): "Heard from Captain Sumud [sic] Shah to-day. He has been visiting the followers of the Aga Khan throughout Sarikol and appears to be doing a lot of good to our cause. He is getting together a fine band of workers and between the two of us I think we shall be able to check the Bolshevik schemes through the Russian Pamirs."

<sup>26</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, Kashgar Monthly Diary for April 1922, p. 2.

receive missions sent by anti-Bolshevik leaders to solicit his support for their activities in Ferghana and managed to obtain information from staff attached to Bolshevik missions which were trying to negotiate entry into Kashgar.

The role of the local Chinese officialdom in this scheme is less clear. Both in his reports and later in his book, he would praise the cooperation of Chu, the Civil Administrator (Taoyin) of Kashgar, who indeed seems to have supported British interests. In his monthly diary for February 1921 Etherton gives "the Taoyin every credit for the admirable way in which he has kept Kashgaria clear of Bolshevism...the one man in Chinese Turkistan who has maintained a solid front," even though the Taoyin admitted to Etherton that he was powerless to control the anti-British Amban of Yakand.<sup>27</sup> However, later in his book, Etherton conveys the sense that he was the one who really set policy in the sensitive political issues and the Taoyin was little more than his right-hand man: "He worked with me loyally and well...I shall ever look back with gratitude for the manner in which he seconded me in many harassing and trying moments."<sup>28</sup> For the most part Etherton suggests that the flow of intelligence about possible political threats was a one-way street—that is from him to the Chinese—although occasionally we hear of agents of the Taoyin's.<sup>29</sup> Etherton frequently reported instances where on the receipt of

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<sup>27</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, fol. 314v, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>29</sup> For example, in the same February 1921 Diary where he praised Chu, when discussing Bolshevik agents in Kashgar, he went on to state that the Chinese were "hopelessly out of touch with the situation and in justice to this Consulate General, I ought to say that every scrap of information of any value has been furnished from here. Left alone it is certain the Chinese would not last a week in the face of the Bolshevik menace" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, p. 5). See also below, n. 92.

intelligence about possible agitators or other potential trouble, the Taoyin would carry out arrests. In one of the more intriguing examples of the methods used by the local authorities, he reported a case where a former Kashgaria resident of some importance, Qarim Puchak, was armed by the Bolsheviks to be sent back across the border to train a subversive force. "The scheme, however, met with little or no favour and has practically fizzled out," for "the Taoyin of Kashgar retain[ed] several members of his family who are residents of the Artush district near Kashgar, and attach[ed] his estates and property there as a guarantee for future good behaviour."<sup>30</sup> In a tacit admission of the limits of his influence, Etherton rightly lamented the "anti-British" stance of the Amban of Yarkand in harboring Afghans, who were seen as a threat to British interests, and the failure of the Chinese to keep the Bolsheviks from establishing a foothold in Ili in 1920.<sup>31</sup> Yet he seems to have underappreciated the degree to which the autonomous Governor Yang Zengxin in Urumqi defended the interests of his province.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fols. 488-489, Etherton no. 214, August 1, 1920, citing his earlier telegram no. 174 of June 1, 1920. One might assume that Etherton tipped off the Taoyin in this case, although he claims no direct credit.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fols. 410-411, Etherton no. 45 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, March 21, 1921, where he reports on the Amban of Yarkand's harboring of one Maqsud Gul, an Afghan agitator whom Macartney had persuaded the Chinese to expel back in 1917. See also BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, Kashgar Monthly Diary for February 1921.

<sup>32</sup> For a balanced assessment of Yang and more generally the political rivalries in Xinjiang between 1918-1934, see Lars-Erik Nyman, *Great Britain and Chinese, Russian and Japanese Interests in Sinkiang, 1918-1934* (Malmö, 1977), esp. pp. 19-25; for a more recent summary, see James A. Millward and Nabijan Tursun, "Political History and Strategies of Control, 1884-1978," in: S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (Armonk; London, 2004), pp. 68-71.

Apart from these networks which generally operated by direct personal communication or traditional means such as post or courier, there were some, rather limited means to employ modern technology.<sup>33</sup> A telegraph connected Kashgar with Urumqi and beyond to Beijing, although it was notoriously inefficient, with messages which should have arrived within hours often taking days or longer. As with the Chinese post, it could not guarantee that messages would not be copied or intercepted, although anything really sensitive sent via these means was put in cypher. It is not clear to what degree any incoming information came from the telegraph, although Etherton used it to copy many of his reports to the British ambassador in Beijing.<sup>34</sup> While there had also been a telegraph connecting Kashgar to Tashkent via Irkeshtam and the Ferghana Valley, it apparently ceased to operate with the outbreak of the Civil War which disrupted communications through Ferghana.<sup>35</sup> A proposal by the Taoyin to extend a telegraph line to the British station at Misgar, just across the Mintaka Pass in what is today northern Pakistan, never led to any result. In fact it was

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<sup>33</sup> There is a lot of valuable information on the functioning of the postal routes connecting Kashgar in BL IOLR L/P&S/11/233, a collection of materials compiled in connection with Chinese proposals in 1923 to extend their postal service and perhaps in the process eliminate the consular couriers.

<sup>34</sup> Etherton at one point indicated that the White Russian Consul in Chuguchak had telegraphed his counterpart in Kashgar, presumably via Urumqi, with a request that a telegram be transmitted from the White Russian commander at Semipalatinsk to his counterpart on the Ashkhabad front (Transcaspia) regarding possible collaboration against the Bolsheviks. Etherton indicated he could serve as the conduit for transmission of such telegraphic communication, but whether there was any followup on this is not indicated in other records in this file. See BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 203, Etherton telegram no. 15 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, January 24, 1919.

<sup>35</sup> In April 1919 Etherton noted "All postal and telegraphic communication with Kashgar, so far as Chinese subjects are concerned, has been interdicted by the Bolsheviks. The Chinese subjects in Ferghana, through their Aksakal at Andijan, have requested the Taoyin to give them immediate moral and material aid" (BL IOLR L/P&S/11/74, fol. 148v, Etherton report on Ferghana, April 1, 1919).



only at the very end of 1918 that the British line in India had been extended from Gilgit as far as Misgar, the latter being about 10 days' ride for the consulate's weekly courier. Part of the Government of India's effort to improve communications with Kashgar involved the sending of wireless apparatus and technicians to the consulate in late 1918; they remained there until shortly after Etherton left in 1922.<sup>36</sup> They could receive messages but not transmit. This way India could radio to Kashgar critical instructions, and other sources such as the regular Reuters news reports could be received. Furthermore, the wireless intercepted Soviet radio signals from Tashkent, which Etherton would summarize and occasionally translate. However, he could read only those sent in the clear (that is, not cyphered) and only those sent via short wave, since the receiver did not pick up long wave signals.<sup>37</sup> While the Marconi Company was in the process of building two-way radio stations across China in this period, the construction of the one in Urumqi was completed only well along in Etherton's consulate, and the station in Kashgar did not become fully operational until late in Skrine's tenure.

In sum then, the consulate tapped a good many sources of information. The human networks were unpredictable though, since often agents

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<sup>36</sup> In the discussion after his talk to the Central Asian Society in June 1919, Macartney had to clarify for one skeptical listener how cut off he was in Kashgar and Tashkent. He noted that the wireless officer being sent to Kashgar was "going up to establish it when I passed Gilgit on my way down to India." See George Macartney, "Bolshevism as I Saw It at Tashkent in 1918," *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, 7/2-3 (1920), p. 55.

<sup>37</sup> See his comment attached to his transmission of several intercepts, BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 51, Etherton no. 48 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, February 1, 1920. A further limitation at certain times of year was the weather. Etherton reported that between July 24 and August 28, 1920, there were constant thunderstorms, the result being no intercepts at all for August (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 477).

never returned or took so long en route that the information they brought was dated. Further, as with any such intelligence work, there is always the question of self-interest and accuracy on the part of those reporting. "News" in local society passed by word of mouth and often was merely unsubstantiated rumor. The anti-Bolshevik forces in Ferghana clearly had their own agendas and would manipulate the news however they perceived it might best encourage British support for their cause. Similarly, the merchant networks were most concerned with what might support their commercial interests and were certainly not impervious to infiltration. As one might expect, the more distant the source of information, the less likely it would be accurate or retain any value by the time it was sent on to India. There is good reason to think that Malleson's claim about the superior work of his services operating out of northeastern Iran is accurate.<sup>38</sup> He and his successors were certainly able to provide more detailed information faster than Etherton for Bukhara, Tashkent, and much of what might relate to Afghanistan. For events along the Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan, generally the Political Agent in Gilgit was

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<sup>38</sup> Recognition of this fact is in the comment by L. D. Wakely of the India Office: "Information regarding Bokhara is more readily available to the Military-Attaché at Meshed than to H.B.M. Consul General at Kashgar tho' valuable sidelights are occasionally known on this subject by the latter officer" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 367v). Wakely's comment is in a draft of a memo he sent to one of the under-secretaries in the Foreign Office summarizing India Office discussions about lines of communication for Central Asian intelligence and the expense thereof. Commenting specifically on an Etherton report of December 1, 1921, regarding possible Bolshevik support for the Emir of Afghanistan to take over Bukhara, one of the important under-secretaries in the India Office, D. T. Monteath, wrote: "Col. Etherton's despatch is very interesting but it is not in all respects confirmed by our information from other sources...The statements in para. 2 of this page [p. 2] are entirely at variance with what we have been able to deduce from very secret information which tho' meagre is reliable." The underlining was done by another commentator who added emphatically that it was also "intrinsically most improbable" that the Russians would accede to the loss of Central Asia (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/837, Register no. 518, P 2992/19).

better informed than was Kashgar.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the events in northern Xinjiang or Southern Siberia to which Etherton frequently alluded were reported more effectively by British representatives embedded with the White forces, so long as they controlled sections of the Trans-Siberian Railway.

Insofar as effective intelligence work requires that information be obtained in a timely fashion, the consulate operated under a severe handicap. Information might be a month old before it ever reached Kashgar, and then the fastest it could arrive at Delhi or Simla was ten to a dozen days. Really important items might be then telegraphed to London, arriving there in two or three days. However, more substantial reports submitted in writing took a lot longer and all too often elicited comments on the cover sheets in the India Office to the effect that the information was already dated or had been received from other sources.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The Government of India asked its Political Agent in Gilgit to clarify what passes were being watched by what forces (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 175v, Telegram no. 830-S, June 6, 1919). He responded (loc. cit., June 7, 1919): "Passes into Afghanistan from the Irahad to the Baroghil have been watched by men of political districts concerned as a precautionary measure to give notice of Afghan movements of troops and check attempts of Hakim of Wakan to spread unrest by agents and by letters. Twenty to thirty are on duty." There was also a temporary Indian guard force at the Paik post on the Chinese side of the passes.

<sup>40</sup> For example, D. T. Monteath noted with reference to the intelligence compendium in file no. P5325/1920, "The reports of events are of course much out of date, and the important reports have been received long ago" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 17, minute of July 30, 1920). Another example is his minute with reference to no. P3776/1920 (loc. cit., fol. 78). In a minute he wrote on December 9, 1921, regarding Etherton's telegram no. 185, dated November 21 (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 325), Monteath noted (fol. 324): "This telegram is, at its face value, rather disturbing; but an agent reporting at Kashgar on 21 Nov. after so extensive a tour, must have begun it a considerable time ago. This information, even if accurate when obtained, might be out of date when delivered; and this seems to be the case in regard to the reported relations of the Amir [of Afghanistan—DW] with the Begs of Ferghana." Etherton's agent had gone through the Pamirs and on as far as Balkh and Mazar-i Sharif, indeed a long trip. It should be stressed that such comments generally

### *Confusion in the British Government's Policies toward the Bolsheviks*

The purpose of Etherton's network then was twofold: to gather intelligence and to enable him to take steps which might counter possible political threats. While he seems to have formed a clear enough idea as to the nature of the threats—virtually all of them had some connection to Bolshevik schemes—the policy of his government was much less clear and certainly not always supportive.<sup>41</sup> This fact emerged quite early in his tenure. On February 20, 1919, he reported that Argash, one of the anti-Bolshevik leaders in the Ferghana Valley, had inquired about possible British support. Without making any commitment, Etherton asked what his response should be.<sup>42</sup>

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appear with reference to the printed intelligence summaries prepared in India and sent with considerable delay to London. Often that information indeed was stale, in contrast to the intelligence contained in telegrams forwarded earlier.

<sup>41</sup> For details about divisions within the highest echelons of the British government regarding policy toward the new Soviet regime, see Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921*.

<sup>42</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 197, Etherton telegram no. 35 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, February 20, 1919. This was not the first such query Etherton had sent. In fact earlier the same month the local Chinese authorities had asked him whether in the event of a Bolshevik attempt to enter Chinese territory he could provide any military support from the consular guard. The question arose apparently not from fear of a major incursion but from the expectation that Bolshevik forces defeated by the insurgents might try to flee across the border. Etherton, of course, could make no commitment. He commented to his superiors that he would be unwilling to deploy the small force at the consulate outside of Kashgar in any event, unless his government would see fit to reinforce it with some cavalry, which would be highly desirable in the circumstances (loc. cit., fol. 201v, Etherton telegram no. 21 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, February 10, 1919, received February 24). He elaborated on this with a slightly different emphasis in his long no. 36, February 20 (loc. cit., fol. 185v), where he reported the threat by the Bolshevik representative Shuster (Shestra), after he was refused entry into Xinjiang, that he would make trouble for the population in the Osh and Andjan districts: "Being apprehensive of some such eventuality the local Chinese authorities have approached me, as already reported to you, with a view to ascertaining what degree of help I could afford them should matters come to a head,

Etherton's message reached Misgar on March 7 and was telegraphed to the Government of India the same day. The Government of India forwarded a copy of Etherton's message and a request for guidance to London on March 18. On March 25, the Under-Secretary of State in the India Office, John Shuckburgh, annotated the file and sent it on to the Secretary of the Military Office for further comment. Shuckburgh, who was in fact well informed on Russian and Central Asian affairs, wrote:

The Consul-General at Kashgar (Maj. Etherton) appears to have acted with entire discretion. But I think it desirable that both he and the Government of India should be furnished with precise instructions from His Majesty's Government, as soon as possible, as to the attitude to be adopted towards anti-Bolshevist overtures from Ferghana or elsewhere. As to our general policy towards the Bolsheviks, I am still rather in the dark. Do we regard them as declared enemies, or as people with whom we may eventually be prepared to live in comparative amity? Is our immediate intention to make war on them, or somehow or other to settle with them peaceably? But whatever may be the answer to these questions, the fact of our withdrawal from Trans-Caspia stands, and with our withdrawal all possibility of bringing effective influence to bear upon Turkestan will necessarily disappear. In these circumstances let us make no promises. We shall not be able to fulfil them.<sup>43</sup>

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since they know only too well that their own military preparations are quite inadequate to meet the situation." By March 3, the Government of India reported to London and copied to the British Minister in Beijing the information that "Consul-General has been instructed by us not to enter into any engagements with Chinese authorities and not to commit consular guard to anything beyond their ordinary duties" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 193, Telegram no. 251-S).

<sup>43</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 251v. On March 31, after consultation with the Secretary of State for India, Erwin S. Montagu, Shuckburgh sent to the Under-Secretary of State in the Foreign Office Montagu's proposal that the Government of India "give categorical instructions to CG at Kashgar 'to give no promise of support or assistance to anti-Bolshevik elements in Ferghana or elsewhere in Russian territory.' It is an obvious corollary of the decision to withdraw General Malleson's forces from TransCaspia, that no fresh commitments should be incurred by His Majesty's Government in the region lying to the east of that area" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fols. 155v-156). On April 4, J. A. O. Tilley, acting for the Foreign

After a flurry of consultations, on April 10 the Secretary of State for India telegraphed the Viceroy in the Foreign and Political Department there that "instructions should be issued to Consul-General, Kashgar, not to give any promise of support or assistance to any political party or organisation in Ferghana or elsewhere in Russian territory." Ten days later, The Secretary of the Foreign and Political Department finally telegraphed this instruction to Etherton (that is, the message was probably radioed via Peshawar). Of course the response is noteworthy for its avoidance of communicating anything about the larger issue of the British government's official stance regarding the Bolshevik regime.<sup>44</sup>

The Government of India summarized some of its concerns to the India Office in London in a telegram of July 26, 1919:

Authorities concerned are all alive to importance of intercepting Bolshevik agents and literature. On our land frontiers both Gilgit and Kashgar are on the *qui vive*, and the latter is working for suppression of Bolshevik propaganda in close touch with local Chinese authorities. Resident, Kashmir, has been empowered to intercept any postal article entering Kashmir territory, except *viâ* British India. Meshed, which at present is our most active centre for watching Bolshevik activities in Central Asia, is doing its

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Secretary Lord Curzon, replied to Shuckburgh that Curzon concurred with Montagu but suggested that the words "any political party or organization" replace the "anti-Bolshevik elements" in the draft of the message to be sent to Etherton (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fols. 157v-158; BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 250; BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fols. 157v-158).

<sup>44</sup> As Ullman makes clear, while there were differences between Montagu, the Secretary of State for India and Curzon, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, with regard to the Bolshevik issue, the more serious differences were between Curzon and the Prime Minister David Lloyd George. Ullman concludes that the Foreign Office in fact had surprisingly little influence on British policy toward the Soviet regime in this period. See Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921*, Vol. 3, p. 457. To have hoped to get clarification from the Foreign Office regarding policy toward the Bolsheviks was probably quite unrealistic.

best to close the route through East Persia. But the come and go on our enorm[o]us land frontiers is too constant for us to hope for more than very partial success....<sup>45</sup>

The key to success would have to be effective intelligence about what was going on in Bolshevik centers, since that alone could help in devising countermeasures.

Over a year later, the India Office continued to express its frustration about the unwillingness of the Foreign Office to spell out government policy toward the Bolsheviks. In late January 1920, the Government of India had sent London a message on "anti-Bolshevik Measures in India," which included the creation early in February of a "Special Bureau of Information" for "counter-propaganda, the coordination of intelligence both internal and external, and the organisation of measures to keep Bolshevik emissaries and propaganda out of India."<sup>46</sup> A few days after that was announced, the Secretary of State for India wrote to Delhi quoting a speech given by Prime Minister David Lloyd George in which the latter in a sense declared for "masterly inactivity" with regard to the Soviet regime. The British government was not prepared to conclude peace with the Bolsheviks, nor did it see fit to try to bring them down by supporting military intervention. "The sole remaining course, therefore, is to try to bring

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<sup>45</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 139, Telegram no. 1089-S from Viceroy, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, Simla, to Secretary of State for India, London, July 26, 1919.

<sup>46</sup> The quotation is from BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 109v, Telegram no. 80F from Foreign Secretary, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, to Field Marshall Viscount Allenby, High Commissioner for Egypt, Cairo, February 21, 1920. The communication about creation of the new department is in loc. cit., fol. 109, Office Memorandum no. 59-F, from Deputy Secretary, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, to the Home Department. The documents I have examined leave unclear exactly what this new department ended up achieving.

Russia back to sanity by trade.”<sup>47</sup> The Secretary of State for India went on to say that in the opinion of the Foreign Office, “no efforts should be spared to check propagation of subversive doctrines throughout Central Asia by the agents of the Bolsheviks.” While that seems explicit enough, in fact what India was being told was that the Prime Minister and Foreign Office were at odds on the issue. As Ullman has pointed out, Lloyd George “was largely his own Foreign Secretary” and held at best “tolerant contempt” for Lord Curzon who held the appointment.<sup>48</sup>

A new round of concern over a lack of guidance on policy soon arose in a parliamentary challenge to Lord Curzon, asking him to comment on press reports of unrest on the Northwest Frontier of India which might somehow be connected with Soviet schemes. While the India Office officials indicated they had no indication of an imminent attack, they were uncertain as to whether it would be appropriate to inform the Indian population on the matter of possible Bolshevik intentions. Imminent attack aside, the Government of India remained convinced that every possible measure was needed to thwart Bolshevik efforts to foment revolution.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fols. 25v-26, Telegram from Secretary of State for India, London, to Viceroy, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, Delhi February 21, 1920, referring to Government of India, Telegram No. 116-S, January 28, 1920. For details of the debates within the British government over policy toward Russia in this period, see Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917-1921*, Vol. 2, ch. 8, and Vol. 3, ch. 1. He quotes (Vol. 3, p. 37) Lloyd George’s speech of February 10, which he delivered in Parliament following the Address from the Throne.

<sup>48</sup> Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations*, Vol. 3, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> BL IOLR P&S/10/836, fols. 500 ff., especially the minute papers for Register no. 5443, with comments beginning July 24, 1920, and the attached documents.



The Government's position finally did become clear (and in the process caught some of its farflung representatives such as Etherton by surprise) with the signing in March 1921 of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement, one stipulation of which was that the contracting parties would cease efforts at subversion and propaganda directed against the other side on territories beyond their borders.<sup>50</sup> The immediate impact of this at Kashgar was to tie Etherton's hands with regard to what he considered to be one of his important activities, to spread British propaganda and world news as widely as possible to counter the Bolshevik propaganda which was issuing from Tashkent. As early as November 1918, he had arranged to compile British propaganda material generated in China, Mesopotamia and London and send it to each of the British Aksakals with instructions about distribution "amongst the leading British, Russian and Chinese subjects, the Mullas and the Kirghiz headmen." Also he had an agreement with the Taoyin of Kashgar that the latter distribute a tri-monthly abstract of war news and post in public various news posters Etherton received from Shanghai.<sup>51</sup> The issue of whether his activity might be violating the

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<sup>50</sup> For the history of the negotiations leading up to the treaty, see Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations*, Vol. 3, ch. 10. Ullman publishes the text on pp. 474-478. The stipulation about cessation of propaganda was the first condition for fulfillment of the treaty (p. 474): "Each party refrains from hostile action or undertakings against the other and from conducting outside of its own borders any official propaganda direct or indirect against the institutions of the British Empire or the Russian Soviet Republic respectively, and more particularly that the Russian Soviet Government refrains from any attempt by military or diplomatic or any other form of action or propaganda to encourage any of the peoples of Asia in any form of hostile action against British interests or the British Empire, especially in India and in the Independent State of Afghanistan. The British Government gives a similar particular undertaking to the Russian Soviet Government in respect of the countries which formed part of the former Russian Empire and which have now become independent." A British memo containing a draft of this provision had been provided the Soviet negotiators as early as June 30, 1920 (ibidem, p. 399).

<sup>51</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 242, Etherton report no. 350 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, November 25 1918. He repeated much of this

new treaty is an undercurrent in subsequent communications between Etherton and his superiors in 1921 and 1922. Etherton would continue to advise the Chinese officials to do everything necessary to maintain stability and defend their borders, but he had to be much more careful about publicizing information which might be deemed anti-Soviet and in fact ceased distributing the news reports to the British subjects, Chinese officials and others.<sup>52</sup>

### *Etherton's Intelligence Activity*

Keeping in mind this framework of larger policy issues, let us examine more closely his intelligence activity. Throughout his tenure at Kashgar, Etherton sent a steady stream of communications, generally

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same passage in a message to the British Resident in Srinagar, Kashmir, early in 1920, adding that distribution also encompassed "Ferghana, Semirechia and the Russian Pamirs, through the cordial cooperation of various Russian officers and others" (loc. cit., fol. 30v, Etherton no. 17, January 8, 1920). A number of his other reports refer to his distribution of "counter-propaganda," although usually in very general terms.

<sup>52</sup> For example, Etherton reported under May 7, 1921 (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, Kashgar Monthly Diary, May 1921, pp. 2-3): "Taoyin called today, ostensibly for a walk in my gardens, but I gather really to let me know that he hoped we should continue to consult together with regard to the Bolshevik menace. I gave him to understand that I was quite ready to assist him as far as possible with advice as in the past, but that I could not, in view of the recent Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement, do so officially. He said he quite understood. I am not relaxing vigilance in any way with regard to Bolshevik designs against India and the East in general, but my enquiries and investigations have to be conducted with great circumspection in order to avoid being placed in a false position. I have, of course, ceased all propaganda and have even discontinued the news sheets which were regularly sent out from the Consulate and created widespread effect in our favour." Etherton provides some concrete sense of the impact of his news sheets in his Kashgar Monthly Diary for July 1921 (loc. cit., p. 1): "The District Magistrate of Maralbashi has certainly benefited by the news-sheets and propaganda sent out from here, and he and his subordinates have it all at their finger's end, and it is refreshing to hear them expatiate on the iniquities of Bolshevism, etc. Since the conclusion of the Trade Agreement with the Soviet I have, of course, ceased my anti-Bolshevik propaganda work throughout the province. I think I am fully justified in saying that it had an excellent effect and I look upon the time, labour, and energy involved as well spent."

summarizing the most recent reports from his agents in telegrams but then once or twice a month compiling long analyses of the information on various fronts. While most of his reports went to the Secretary of the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of India, he also on occasion would copy them to the Chief of the Indian General Staff, the British Minister in Beijing or the British political agents in Kashmir. The point, of course, was to alert these officials of issues which might be addressed by them directly. The telegraphed reports usually were then forwarded by telegraph to the India Office in London and were as well repeated in various printed compilations of intelligence about Soviet activities or Central Asia. Not surprisingly then the annotations on the minute papers in the India Office often indicate that the latest copy of one of Etherton's reports contained nothing of interest or information which had already been received.<sup>53</sup> One cannot always tell whether that meant his information was seen as inferior in quality or timeliness compared to that received from other sources, such as Malleson's operation in Meshed. Occasionally though the documents explicitly address the issue of possible greater accuracy and timeliness of reporting coming from places other than Kashgar. Certainly the repetition of multiple copies must have been extremely wasteful and time-consuming. At one point there was in fact an exchange of memos emphasizing that Etherton should only most sparingly telegraph copies of his reports to Beijing, given the substantial cost involved in using the Chinese telegraph service.<sup>54</sup> Despite some of these limitations, his reports were systematic and

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<sup>53</sup> For examples, see above n. 40.

<sup>54</sup> Budgetary matters were never far from the minds of the administrators in the Government of India and their superiors in London. See, for example, Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations*, Vol. 3, pp. 329-330.

substantial, and certainly many of them were of great interest from London to Beijing.<sup>55</sup>

A typical example is his No. 265, dated October 20, 1920, on the general political situation in Russian and Chinese Central Asia.<sup>56</sup> He begins with the most important item, the arrival at the border post of Irkeshtam of a Bolshevik mission whose ostensible purpose was to negotiate a trade agreement and establishment of a Bolshevik representative in Kashgar. This was by no means the first such effort, but in this case the somewhat threatening tone of the mission resulted in the Taoyin's being instructed (apparently by the governor in Urumqi) to go meet the delegation at the frontier. Etherton provides information on the two chief members of the delegation, Tigar and Pechatnikov. The latter was the agent-designate for Kashgar and "an expert in Bolshevik propaganda" (fol. 455), as were several other members of the mission. The Taoyin had been in regular consultation with Etherton, who advised "referring all questions to higher authority" (fol. 456). Etherton's expectation seems to have been that the mission would ultimately give up, as had all the others and that "the serious

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<sup>55</sup> As he mentioned in his Kashgar Monthly Diary for July 1921 under July 12, he also contributed to longer-term compilations of information about Central Asia: "I am again occupied on a further revision of 'Who's Who in Central Asia' and 'Routes in Hsin-Chiang', for the Chief of the General Staff, whilst I am devoting much time to the preparation of a report showing the Chinese military strength throughout the province with details as to numbers, organization, supplies, distribution, etc., for the information of Government" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, p. 4). The route book, which was a standard reference work maintained by the General Staff in India, certainly bears ample evidence of Etherton's contributions and those of several other Kashgar consuls. See General Staff, India, *Routes in Sinkiang* [rev. ed.] (Simla, 1926). I have not seen the other works he cites. An earlier report on Chinese military strength is in BL IOLR L/P&S/11/175, Reg. no. P5466/1920, Chinese Turkestan: Chinese Military Strength and Administration in Hsin Kiang.

<sup>56</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, Register no. 8984, The Political Situation in Russian and Chinese Central Asia, fols. 455-465 (typescript copy); fols. 451r-453 (printed copy). Another printed copy is in BL IOLR L/P&S/18/C/202.

situation in Siberia and the reported defeat of the Bolsheviks by an Afghan Bokharan combination may contribute to keeping Kashgaria clear of Bolshevik influence." While Etherton's contribution to the Chinese rejection of the Bolshevik mission is made clear here, at the same time he is not making the kind claim he would in his book, where he credits himself with getting the Taoyin to go to Irkeshtam, noting it was the first time any Chinese official had stirred from his headquarters.<sup>57</sup> Apart from the Bolshevik mission, Kashgaria was quiet:

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<sup>57</sup> Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia*, p. 231. Here Etherton has pulled together the several instances of Bolshevik efforts to get an official foothold in Kashgaria, all of them turned back (in his telling) by virtue of his pushing the Chinese to beef up the border garrisons, not permit the delegations to enter, etc. It is interesting to compare with other sources Etherton's version of the effort by a mission headed by one Shestra (Chister, Shuster) which arrived apparently at the Torugart Pass "late in 1919" (not the usual route in those days, travel through Ferghana being blocked). Etherton claims he arranged that the Chinese should let the mission secretary proceed to Kashgar, once he had determined he was a Hungarian war prisoner. There Etherton had a chance to talk with him at length, presumably pumping him for information. "Shestra's representative was obviously impressed with all he saw at my Consulate, and the solidarity existing between me and the Chinese, and he returned to the frontier bearing the letter drafted by the Taoyin and myself, intimating that, pending formal recognition of the Bolsheviks, a mission could not be received" (ibidem, p. 229). In an intelligence report a few months before the Shestra mission, Etherton noted that Shestra's threats to enter Kashgaria by force (he had been rebuffed on an earlier occasion too) were hardly to be credited, since the Bolshevik position in Ferghana was so shaky. Nonetheless, the Taotai called on Etherton, asking his advice and was told "to show firm front" (loc. cit., fol. 193, Etherton no. 28, February 16, 1919).

One of Bailey's few intelligence reports, sent from Tashkent September 1, 1919, essentially confirms this account, but lacks the embroidery on Etherton's role: "Man named Shuster was sent by Government as Commercial Attache for Kashgar taking 1,000,000 roubles for political propaganda. He was turned back by Chinese at frontier, but his Secretary managed to reach Kashgar and reports he had secret friendly interview with Taotai who said that orders from Peking prevented him from receiving Bolshevik agent" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 39v, forwarded by Etherton with his report no. 40 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, dispatched January 24, 1920, two days after its very delayed receipt).

It is somewhat rare to have the Soviet side in such an incident, but we have a intercepted message from Bogoiavlenskii, Foreign Commissar, Turkistan, to Foreign Commissar, Moscow, Eastern Section, Voznesenskii,:

"Chister, who was appointed by us commercial agent to Kashgar, and is now on the Chinese frontier, telegraphs as follows:

My secretary was sent by my orders to Kashgar, where he has been since May 26<sup>th</sup> under arrangements made by the Taotai. The British Consul and Uspenski

"My counter-propaganda continues to exert a good effect and has been largely instrumental in keeping Kashgaria clear of Bolshevism." This is a frequently-repeated assertion in Etherton's reports and book.

Etherton then turns to military matters, indicating that the Bolsheviks had been unable in spring and summer to increase their forces in Ferghana due to commitments on the Persian front and in the Caucasus. The Bolsheviks occupied only a few key cities in Ferghana, the countryside being in the hands of the anti-Bolshevik forces—a regular refrain in Etherton's reports over much of this period. Although the Bolsheviks were trying to recruit Muslims, they had limited success both in Ferghana and in Semirech'e. In fact one such regiment deserted to the anti-Bolshevik forces "a circumstance for which our counter-propaganda from here is to some extent responsible, the Fatwa from the Sheikh-ul-Islam denouncing Bolshevism having been translated into Turki and distributed broadcast in Ferghana and Semirechia, and it has had a very considerable effect on

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[the White Russian consular secretary—DW] have protested against his release, and have suggested to the Taotai that he hand him over for arrest. The Taotai has hitherto refused, and has telegraphed for orders to General (? Ludu) at Urumchi. The British Consul is protesting energetically against my coming to Kashgar and I am, therefore, waiting here. Probably there will be a difference of opinion between the British Consul and the Taotai" (loc. cit., fol. 158v, Intercept no. 209 made at Jutogh, not far from Simla).

There is also a somewhat garbled intercept of a Soviet radio message to Moscow which gives a propaganda read on the mission, claiming that it had been admitted to Kashgar since Macartney had fled (loc. cit., fol. 166, Intercept no. 205, apparently made at Jutogh).

Etherton's initial telegraph (no. 264, October 10, 1921) on the arrival of the Bolshevik mission by Tigar and Pechatnikov at Irkeshtam had been copied to the British Embassy in Beijing, which took up the matter of the possible threat from Bolshevik negotiators with the Chinese foreign ministry. On October 15, Clive reported from the embassy that the Minister of Foreign Affairs "readily agreed at my request to instruct Kashgar authorities to be very cautious in dealing with Bolshevik Mission recently reported at Irkestan [*sic*] who are trying to force their way to Kashgar" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 482). It seems clear then that Etherton did at least have some influence on what the Taoyin did, both directly and indirectly.

Muhammadans, especially those in the service of the Bolsheviks.”<sup>58</sup> This is one of the rare cases where we actually learn detail about Etherton’s serious counter-propaganda campaign. He goes on to relate news of how one of the important anti-Bolshevik leaders in Ferghana tried to negotiate for support from the Afghans, but nothing came of the overture, when he failed to follow up on it. In other reports, Etherton frequently provided statistics of Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik troop dispositions, the former tending to show that the city garrisons were quite small, even though the claims of the anti-Bolshevik forces ran to the tens of thousands of supporters.<sup>59</sup>

Turning to Semirech’e, Etherton reported little change; he mainly repeats earlier information about leaders of anti-Bolshevik forces, the

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<sup>58</sup> The *fatwa* referred to here is apparently that contained in BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, Telegram no. T-7132, February 15, 1920, sent by the General Officer Commanding, Army of the Black Sea, Constantinople, to the Commander-in-Chief, Delhi. It is very likely that Government of India then included it in a packet of propaganda it posted to Etherton along with instructions that his policy should be one of “absolute non-intervention,” and that he should stick to propaganda. See loc. cit., fol. 58v, Telegram no. 439-S radioed from Foreign Secretary, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, to Etherton, April 14, 1920.

<sup>59</sup> For an example of the Bolshevik troop dispositions, see BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fols. 317-318, Etherton report no. 158 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, October 10, 1921. One of the astute annotators in the India Office, J. A. Simpson, noted how Etherton’s telegram no. 131, August 27, 1921, stating that a Bolshevik force of 700 had taken Gulcha and was moving on Irkeshtam, “sheds a somewhat ridiculous light on the statement in the telegram of 10 August that Sher Mahommed and his allies had forces numbering 84,000 of whom 34,000 were armed.” (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 354) Etherton’s no. 122 of August 10 is on fols. 364-365. Although Etherton seems to pull few punches in pointing out the discord amongst the Ferghana leaders, perhaps the India Office began to wonder whether Etherton did not make too much of them. Right after he left Kashgar, his Vice-Consul Fitzmaurice submitted the Kashgar Monthly Diary for May 1922 in which (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, p. 2) he termed the Ferghana begs “a contemptable lot of brigands.” That phrase caught the eye of J.A. Simpson, and another of the astute commentators in the India Office, J.E. Shukburgh, then noted that this assessment disagreed with Etherton’s that they were “very sincere and patriotic and have put up a significant resistance with practically no assistance & firearms.” Certainly there was ample evidence that their exactions from the local population at times were no less onerous than those of the Bolsheviks.

General Annenkov and the Cossack Ataman Dutov, who had taken refuge in Urumqi and Ili respectively.<sup>60</sup> On its side of the border, the Soviet regime was conscripting Tungan and Dungan minorities to send to the Caspian front. Again repeating material reported earlier, Etherton indicated the Soviets had succeeded in obtaining crucial supplies from northern Xinjiang. As a consequence of their commercial agreement with the Chinese, the latter would have a consul in Almaty. The Bolsheviks agreed that Russian subjects in Ili would be subject to Chinese law, a provision that played into the intentions of the Chinese to abolish extraterritoriality (and thus had implication for the future of British subjects).

These comments on Ili underscore Etherton's special interest in that area which was so open to Russian penetration, despite the fact that Kashgar's communications with it were intermittent, the most direct route lying across difficult mountain passes. One of his most detailed reports, sent directly to British Ambassador Jordan in Beijing, was a careful overview of the region's history and current situation.<sup>61</sup> In its early sections Etherton drew on his own book and experiences of 1911 (some of the material coming from Henry Lansdell's 1885 description), but for the most part the focus was on the events since the Bolshevik Revolution, including the details of Ataman Dutov's murder by a Bolshevik agent early in 1921. An appendix provided thumbnail

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<sup>60</sup> Allowing for the usual Soviet biases, one can obtain a lot of useful information on the Bolshevik takeover of Semirech'e from S. N. Pokrovskii, *Pobeda sovetskoi vlasti v Semirech'e* (Alma-Ata, 1961), which makes extensive use of archival material. The focus of the book is on the period up to the flight of Ataman Dutov and General Annenkov across the border into Xinjiang, which is mentioned only in passing (p. 334).

<sup>61</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, Etherton no. 21, October 25, 1921, fols. 297-315, copied also to the Secretary of the Foreign and Political Department and to the Chief of the General Staff of the Government of India.



sketches of all the other important White officers who had taken up residence there. Although this report on Ili, as Etherton's other reports, was confidential, he had no qualms about drawing heavily upon it for his 1925 book, in which he rearranged the material so that the Dutov murder became a fitting conclusion to a chapter, as a way of dramatizing Bolshevik perfidy.<sup>62</sup>

Regarding the southern frontiers in the Pamirs, Etherton reported on October 20 that the Bolsheviks still had not occupied the frontier forts, which were in the hands of anti-Bolshevik garrisons.<sup>63</sup> The Russian commandant at Tashkurghan (a White officer) provided him with the precise statistics on garrison sizes, composition and artillery for the half dozen key forts. As Etherton noted, none of the figures he provided marked any significant change.

Etherton reserved the largest amount of space in his report for two subjects that clearly were of lasting interest to him—Pan-Islamic movements and the role of the Japanese in East Asia. Of course the British were particularly concerned about possible pan-Islamic movements that could enlist Muslims in British colonies. Here, as in most of his other reports, Etherton presented a rather skeptical view about their having much appeal in Central Asia. After going into a sweeping overview of the history and distribution of Muslims from the Caucasus to Western China, he concluded: "I do not consider that the

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<sup>62</sup> Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia*, ch. 8.

<sup>63</sup> The story of the Central Asian frontier garrisons still needs to be written. The near silence in published documents concerning the period in question seems to be an admission of the lack of a Soviet presence on the border in the first years after 1917. See: *Pogranichnye voiska SSSR 1918-1928. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Moscow, 1973).

Pan-Islamic movement has as yet any inward vitality, and certainly so far as concerns Chinese Turkistan and the adjacent Russian provinces, it has not assumed a form that could be characterised as a menace" (fol. 464). Informative as Etherton's survey of Central Asian Muslims might have been (its sources still need to be established—probably works readily accessible to his superiors), it contributed very little to immediate needs of intelligence.

Turning to the Japanese, Etherton started by repeating information he had submitted three months earlier about there being only two Japanese agents left in Ili.<sup>64</sup> He noted that they had apparently met with Turkish Pan-Islamists there; this fact seems to have attracted attention in London, where one of the readers of the report marked that sentence with a triple line in the margin. The remainder of his comments are geopolitical speculation about Japanese intentions in Asia and the world and seem to have nothing to do with concrete intelligence received.

Etherton's report was in fact well received in London when it finally arrived there at the beginning of January. One of the under-

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<sup>64</sup> Etherton had communicated the information on the Japanese yet another time on August 1, 1920 (his no. 214). That report caught the attention of Victor Hillary, an under-secretary in the Foreign Office, who sent a minute back to the India Office on November 4 terming Etherton's information a "most interesting despatch" and suggesting: "It is in my opinion desirable that as close a watch as is feasible should be kept upon the whole system of Japanese agents throughout China. I am aware, of course, that in a large number of the more remote districts there are no British Consular Officers who can obtain and forward first-hand information on such a matter, but it may perhaps be practicable to enlist the co-operation of selected reliable British missionaries or British members of the Chinese Postal and Salt Administration Services to furnish, in confidence, either to yourself or to His Majesty's Consular Officers in China, periodical reports on this subject and I request that you will take such measures as seem to you suitable to obtain trustworthy information of this nature, and to forward it to me from time to time" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fols. 475-476).

secretaries in the India Office, J. A. Simpson, who regularly read the reports on Central Asia, noted that Etherton had no illusions about the real purpose of Bolshevik so-called trade missions; he also noted the effect of distributing the Sheikh-ul-Islam's fatwa. He caught a passing comment about Afghan hostility to their Amir and suggested it be checked and in fact found the survey of pan-Islamism to be of interest to the extent that he copied out Etherton's conclusion quoted above. Simpson was probably the one who marked the Japan-Constantinople connection suggested by the information from Ili. J.E. Shuckburgh, another of the key readers of the Central Asia reports, added a question: "I think it might be useful to have this valuable report printed? Do you agree?" And a third of the key under-secretaries, L. D. Wakely, responded: "I think it might be. Some of the other officers engaged in watching Bolshevik methods of propaganda would like copies." A distribution list for (we assume) the then printed version of the report specified two copies were to go to the Foreign Office, two to the Department of Military Intelligence, one to the Military Department and two to other key officials in the India Office who dealt with intelligence and military matters. The printing and distribution were completed by mid-February, nearly four months after Etherton had written his report in Kashgar.

What we see here then is quite typical of Etherton's intelligence reports—a mixture of information that simply repeats that which might have been sent weeks or months earlier, some new reports including ones with great precision even if the data did not necessarily represent any change over earlier information, some claims of the successes of his propaganda or interventions with the Chinese authorities, and a certain amount of rambling geo-political speculation drawn on much

older material which at some point he had read and his current ideas about the future of East Asia.<sup>65</sup>

### *How Serious Was the Bolshevik Threat?*

While there is a constant thread in his reports about possible infiltration of Bolshevik agents and propaganda and his strenuous and largely successful efforts to prevent that from happening, it is also worth emphasizing how often Etherton rather bluntly dismisses any real Bolshevik threat at least so long as the regime was struggling for its very existence and was committing atrocities and requisitioning brutally from the local population.<sup>66</sup> In his talk to the Central Asian Society in London on his return in 1923, he stated: "It cannot be said that the movement [for the emancipation of the East] made much progress, for scarcely any of the Central Asian nationalities wished to be emancipated by this particular means, and the propaganda fell mostly on stony ground."<sup>67</sup> True, in his intelligence reports at times his

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<sup>65</sup> One senses that the India Office officials who sifted through all the intelligence reports on Central Asia may occasionally have tired of these sweeping generalizations, especially when they referred back to Etherton's travels in northern Inner Asia in 1909-1910. In a minute attached to the Kashgar Monthly Diary for August 1921, D. T. Monteath noted it contained "Col. Etherton's *obiter dictu* regarding Mongolia's future" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, fol. 289), and in the margin next to some sweeping comments by Etherton about relations between the Chinese government in Beijing and the Governor in Urumqi, someone placed a large question mark. Etherton continued to flog his views about Mongols in sweeping terms in his "Mongolia and Muhammadan-Buddhist Confederation" (BL IOLR L/P&S/11/215, Reg. no. P2422/22, Etherton report no. 50, 1922), which he sent in response to a question raised in an intelligence report from Port Arthur in July of 1921.

<sup>66</sup> For a still useful scholarly treatment of the challenges faced by the Bolsheviks in Central Asia, see Alexander G. Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan 1917-1927* (New York, 1957), esp. chs. 1, 6.

<sup>67</sup> P. T. Etherton, "Central Asia: Its Rise as a Political and Economic Factor," *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, 10/2 (1923), p. 90. In the first instance he attributed this failure to the conservative nature of Islam amongst the people of Central Asia.

statements seem to contradict one another, possibly a reflection of constantly changing circumstances, but possibly also an indication that even if the situation was not in actuality threatening, he needed to maintain the sense that it was by periodically waving red flags of alarm.<sup>68</sup> There can be no question but that he tried continually to emphasize how important was the work he was doing in Kashgar; this in turn justified requests for maintaining the special budgetary allocations for secret service work.

Here are some examples of his dismissal of Bolshevik threats. In June of 1919, he telegraphed "Position of Bolsheviks in Ferghana daily becomes more precarious. They lack food-stuffs, oil, ammunition, money and all kinds of supplies, and this is telling on them...." In the Pamirs where the same situation prevailed, a leading Kirghiz beg of the Murghab region assured Etherton that "Kirghiz on Russian Pamirs are decidedly pro-British, and that no credit is given to Bolshevik reports and proclamations concerning us."<sup>69</sup> In a telegram of November 1920, Etherton wrote: "Bolsheviks hold on province

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<sup>68</sup> For the alarmist viewpoint, see for example a telegram about a suspected Bolshevik agent Yusuf Akhun, concerning whose case see below. He refers to his Kashgar Monthly Diary for December 1918, in which he reported on a Bolshevik organization in Kashgar, and then states: "I suggest that entry into India should be refused to all doubtful persons from Chinese Turkistan unprovided with credentials from me. Strenuous efforts for revolution in India are being made by Bolsheviks with the help of Afghans. Ferghana swarms with their agents whose aim is India and China. I have had several suspects put under surveillance and some have been deported. Chinese realise the danger but are terrified of arresting any one for fear of rousing Bolsheviks and their sympathisers, coupled with consciousness that their preparations are utterly inadequate to resist any *coup*" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 119v, Etherton telegram no. 168 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, August 22, 1919, received September 2).

<sup>69</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 135v, Etherton telegram no. 118 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, June 24, 1919, received July 6. Early the next year, the Political Agent in Gilgit confirmed the fact that the population in the Pamirs was pro-British and anti-Bolshevik (loc. cit., fol. 24, Telegram no. 10-C to Foreign Secretary, Government of India and to Resident in Sialkot, Kashmir).

[Ferghana] is weakening, and recent events in Bokhara and Afghan intervention have increased feeling against them, whilst detailed account of Bolshevik massacres of Moslems in Baku, which I sent out, has still further aroused that animosity.”<sup>70</sup> Discussing the Soviet propaganda schools in Tashkent, he asserted in March 1921: “I certainly think the potential activities of these propagandists are assessed at far beyond their true value. The schools were first opened in the autumn of 1919, but so far as Southern Chinese Turkistan, Ferghana, Semirechia, and the Pamirs are concerned the efforts of these trained agents have been a negligible quantity, and they have met with practically no response.”<sup>71</sup> He took some credit for this result and went on to note for Chinese Turkestan: “As in Ferghana the Qazis and Mullahs in Kashgaria have been active in exhorting the people to oppose Bolshevism and to maintain law and order by every means in their power.” This report echoed one from the end of the previous year in which he noted the reaction of the local population to the Chinese breakup in Kashgar of a supposed secret Bolshevik organization which

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<sup>70</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 473, Etherton telegram no. 271 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, November 1, 1920, reporting news obtained by an agent who spent over a month in the camp of anti-Bolshevik leader Sher Mohammed.

<sup>71</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 405, Etherton report no. 45 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, March 21, 1921. Etherton reiterated this view in an almost identical paragraph on the schools in a letter he sent directly to Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, August 26, 1921 (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 333v). Contrast his alarmist assessment of the schools and the propaganda danger a year earlier: BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 30v, Etherton telegram no. 17 to Resident in Srinagar, Kashmir, January 8, 1920, and his mention of Tashkent-trained agents being dispatched for India (loc. cit., fol. 14v Etherton telegram no. 114 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, April 20, 1920, received May 6). One might wonder whether the agents destined for Kashgaria were “a negligible quantity” because they were less competent, reflecting Bolshevik priorities in a situation where there were limited human resources for such missions. In a message concerning Bolshevik and Pan-Islamic propaganda in Central Asia, Malleson noted of one Petrov that “while good enough to send to Kashgar, Bokhara or Khiva, he is not good enough for India or Persia” (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 191v, Malleson telegram no. M.D.-0160 to Government of India, May 14, 1919).

Etherton had fingered: "Leading Mullahs, Qazis and merchants have expressed to Taoyin their approbation of Chinese action. Bolsheviks have no sympathizers in Chinese Turkestan and any propaganda on their part will be a failure."<sup>72</sup>

In August 1921, he wrote directly to the Foreign Minister Lord Curzon a long summary report on Central Asia.<sup>73</sup> To a considerable degree it is a catalogue of Bolshevik failures, for few of which Etherton even tried to claim credit: Despite having several thousand Muslim troops in Ferghana, the Bolsheviks "are not using them for offensive operations, and to all intents and purposes, they may be regarded as non-existent" (fol. 333); an attempt in autumn 1920 to recruit Kyrgyz "proved to be so unpopular that it had to be abandoned"; it is "unlikely" that plans to try to stabilize Bolshevik currency in Turkestan "can be complied with"; in Ferghana "the resistance of the begs and the vast majority of the Mahommedan element continues, and repeated overtures by the Bolsheviks have met with consistent rejection" (fol. 333v); in Semirech'e, "the population remains disaffected" but lacks leadership and supplies to revolt."

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<sup>72</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 271, Etherton telegram no. 380 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, December 29, 1918. In June of the following year, Etherton confidently stated "There are no Bolshevik organisations in Kashgaria, and since they were broken up no attempt has been made to revive them" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 166v, Etherton telegram no. 103 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, June 5, 1919, received June 18).

<sup>73</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fols. 333-336, this copy being a printed version of the letter. The letter is, with few emendations, identical with Etherton's no. 120, sent from Kashgar on August 8, 1921. Among the differences between the two is a statement in the August 8 intelligence report that efforts to create a "Young Kashgarian" party had failed due to the conservatism of the local population about any kind of reform (fol. 348).

In noting that the Bolshevik hold on the Pamirs was "precarious" because of the occupation of key routes by Sher Mohammed, one of the key anti-Bolshevik leaders in the Ferghana region, Etherton added: "Without giving any indication of ulterior motives, I had suggested to Sher Mahomed last autumn that he should exercise control over the Russian Pamirs, as I considered this the only means of checking the Bolshevik designs on India through the Pamirs, apart from my propaganda at that time amongst the people there, and the informal arrangements I had concluded with Russian officers and others in the area in question." (fol. 334). There is no evidence that his advice in fact had any effect on Sher Mohammed's actions, since the latter undoubtedly did what was in his best interest without any prompting—the Pamirs, after all, provided a refuge if Bolshevik military operations in the valleys proved too threatening. He did intercept "several Bolshevik detachments sent from Tashkent in connection with the schemes against adjacent countries, and the hope of the Soviet that great things would eventuate from their campaign directed through the Pamirs seems unlikely of fulfilment."<sup>74</sup> Among the garrisons in the Pamirs which Etherton enumerated for Curzon, the Tajik and Shignani troops "are really anti-Bolshevik at heart, a proportion from amongst these tribes serving only to avoid reprisals and the confiscation of land and property which a negative or hostile attitude on their part might provoke."

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<sup>74</sup> The news of anti-Bolshevik successes in the Pamirs made its way into a London Times report dated Simla, August 8. Its source is clearly Etherton's telegram of July 22, 1921, presumably leaked to the press in Simla. Its publication, along with Etherton's messages of this period raised vigorous discussion in London as to whether what he had advised back in the previous year was somehow in violation of the subsequent trade agreement stipulations about ceasing hostile propaganda and agitation. At least one of the commentators in the India Office criticized the timidity of the Foreign Office's position regarding its stance about the Bolsheviks. For the documents, see BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fols. 379ff.



In Kashgaria there was "an abortive attempt to foment revolution" which the local authorities foiled by arresting suspects and seizing arms, all on Etherton's suggestion.<sup>75</sup> He then stressed he was being careful not to violate the terms of the trade agreement regarding propaganda while at the same time not "relaxing the customary vigilance, and in conjunction with the Chinese...taking such steps as may from time to time be deemed desirable in our joint interests." Surprisingly perhaps, he adds: "I have not detected any anti-British propaganda since the conclusion of the agreement....This shows that, so far as Chinese territory is concerned, the Bolsheviks have ceased their anti-British pronouncements, for the time being at any rate" (fols. 334-334v). He concludes this long and interesting letter, which ranges back and forth over material he had reported from well over a year earlier, by elaborating his views on why pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism could not be exploited to unify Central Asians against British interests.<sup>76</sup>

The greatest causes for alarm on the part of Etherton and his superiors in India were not so much what the Bolsheviks were doing on their

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<sup>75</sup> Was the only such incident the one he reported in December 1918? See above, n. 73. Etherton's predecessor, George Macartney noted to a London audience in June 1919 that the first Bolshevik proclamations urging Muslims to rise up in China and India, issued at the end of 1917, led to the Chinese taking precautions, "but in reality none were needed; so flat did the crude Bolshevik manifesto fall in Kashgaria that it failed to disturb the country even with a ripple of unrest." See Macartney "Bolshevism," p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> The threat from Pan-Islamic movements was continually on the minds of officials in the Indian Government, who tended to blame the government in London for adopting policies which in fact heightened Pan-Islamic feeling against Britain. See Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations*, Vol. 3, pp. 328-329. Clearly what Etherton had to say on the subject, which on the face of it seems sensible enough, was read with great interest.

own territory or what they were fitfully trying to do in Kashgaria, but rather their support for agitators who might be trying raise revolution in British India.<sup>77</sup> The greater the desperation of the Bolsheviks' position in Central Asia, the greater their effort seems to have been to intensify the campaign of anti-British intrigue. What comes out of his reports though is often vague and insubstantial—statements about huge quantities of propaganda being prepared, very little of which makes it beyond the border. In at least one instance, the large batch of propaganda never made it out of Osh, since the White General Mukhanov operating in the Ferghana valley captured it and burned it, something for which Etherton could hardly claim credit even though he tried to do so.<sup>78</sup> Etherton reported somewhat casually in April 1920 that "A friendly Russian with whom I am in touch has seized a further consignment of Bolshevik propaganda on Russian Pamirs destined for India and Afghanistan and has destroyed it."<sup>79</sup> This brought a response radioed to Etherton about two weeks after receipt of the news: "Please telegraph any further information you may have about Bolshevik propaganda in Pamirs. What language was it in and how was it sent? By what route was it proposed to forward it, and against whom was it

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<sup>77</sup> Although the book is very "Soviet" in its emphasis (the author died in 1987, leaving the unpublished manuscript), one can obtain a decent overview of this important subject from G. L. Dmitriev, *Indian Revolutionaries in Central Asia* (London, 2002).

<sup>78</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 94v, Etherton report no. 247 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, November 21, 1919: "With the temporary defeat of the counter-revolutionaries the Bolsheviks redoubled their propaganda efforts and despatched a number of agents from Tashkend, who had been in special training there. So far, the effect produced by these agents has been insignificant as the result of my counter-propaganda. During the temporary occupation of Osh by the counter-revolutionaries, Mukhanoff secured several large boxes of propaganda recently arrived from Tashkend, and printed in Persian, Turki and Chinese, all of which he destroyed by burning."

<sup>79</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 4, Etherton telegram no. 116 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, April 3, 1920, received April 16.

specifically directed? Who were the agents who brought it and what was their nationality?"<sup>80</sup>

The presence of Mahendra Pratab in an Afghan delegation that was trying to obtain permission to pass through Kashgar on the way to Beijing was one of the more prominent and concrete instances of such concerns. The British had a warrant out for the arrest of this Indian nationalist leader, but as Etherton explained, when he actually had the temerity to cross the border to Tashkurghan, Etherton's Vice-Consul who happened to be there did not dare do anything, since the Afghan delegation was well armed and the Chinese feared an incident. So Pratab was simply turned back.<sup>81</sup> In his book, Etherton used a somewhat embroidered version of this tale as the concluding example of efforts to infiltrate Kashgaria by both Bolsheviks and Afghans. The

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<sup>80</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 8, Telegram no. 521-S from Foreign Secretary, Government of India, to Etherton, April 29, 1920. Etherton apparently already had anticipated the request, since he had sent a bunch of translations on April 1, noting in his cover letter that he did not "consider it necessary to forward to you copies in every case, since they are mostly in the same strain and contain no new features" (loc. cit., fol. 12v, Etherton no. 113 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, April 1, 1920). On numerous other occasions he sent such translations.

<sup>81</sup> Etherton first reported Pratab's arrival at the border and in Tashkurghan in a telegram dated June 7, 1920, which was forwarded to the Department of Military Intelligence in London in a secret cyphered telegram on June 23 (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fols. 419-420). The full Etherton report is in BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, no. 214, August 1, 1920, fols. 491-493. He provided very precise information on the members of the mission and seems to be somewhat apologetic for having advised the Taoyin to turn it back before he, Etherton, knew Pratab was one of the members, thus missing a possible opportunity to apprehend him. Pratab's movements were obviously a continuing source of British concern. See, for example, the telegram from the Political Agent in Gilgit sent March 23, 1921 reporting "it is rumored that he will enter Chinese territory with a Chinese representative before the end of March" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/836, fol. 430). Rumors about Mahendra Pratab were abundant. On February 22, 1922, Etherton wrote: "Mahendra Pertab reported to be in Peking with Afghan representative. Can you confirm?" On the cover minute to this file, D.T. Monteath wrote: "Is it worth while asking the G. of I. to telegraph to disabuse Col. Etherton's mind of any impression that M. P. can be in the East at present?" The response to this in another annotation was: "I think we might. He is certainly in Germany" (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/837, Register no. 959, P 2995/19).

refusal to let them pass, he noted, "was anathema to the Soviet, and they broadcasted a notice, published in Turki and Russian, that Kashgar must be taken from the Chinese and the British Consul and his officers put to death."<sup>82</sup>

Of course prominent figures such as Mahendra Pratab were known quantities whose credentials as perceived threats to British India were without question. What about the various other anonymous or obscure individuals whom Etherton fingered and the local Chinese authorities arrested? Such incidents were at best infrequent. More importantly, can we be sure such "agents" were what he claimed? One example which is lavishly documented raises serious doubts. On June 27, 1919, he telegraphed the Resident in Kashgar to warn him that two Chinese subjects "believed to be in touch with the Bolsheviks and on behalf of the latter...journeying to India to gain touch with Indian revolutionary party" could be expected to pass through Leh. He had had them shadowed to Yarkand but had been unable to get them arrested. "Evidence is insufficient, the Chinese authorities being unwilling to apprehend any suspect who is not actually guilty of a breach of law."<sup>83</sup> He then provided physical descriptions of the two, Yusuf Akhun, son of Musa Bai of Kashgar, and his brother Ibrahim. When asked for "amplification" of his initial report, he wrote "In spring of this year Yusuf was in Tashkend, and he is known to have been in collusion with

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<sup>82</sup> Etherton. *In the Heart of Asia*, p. 239.

<sup>83</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 139v, Etherton telegram no. 120 to Resident, Kashmir, June 27, 1919, enclosed with his no. 125 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India.

Bolsheviks. He was identified with local Bolshevik organisation reported in Kashgar Diary for last December.”<sup>84</sup>

When Yusuf showed up in Leh with a group of Kashgarian merchants (his brother never made the trip), the Resident duly interrogated him but turned up nothing suspicious. The Kashgaris indicated they were going on to Amritsar and then Bombay; so he passed this information along to the Punjabi police.<sup>85</sup> The authorities in Kashmir did determine that when they left Srinagar by motor car for Rawalpindi the suspects had with them a substantial amount of gold, silver and ruble notes. The Punjabi police decided to detain them in Rawalpindi and confiscated the ruble notes. The suspects also had correspondence with commercial agents in Amritsar and planned to stay there with a certain Imamdin, who apparently was a subject of interest to the Indian police. Further, this suggested some connection between the Yusuf group and a party, “probably Russian Tatars,” that the Calcutta secret service had indicated would be arriving in Bombay and then traveling to Amritsar.<sup>86</sup> The exact outcome of the affair is somewhat unclear—maybe in the end Yusuf and his companions were “remitted” to the tender mercies of Chinese justice. As of February 1920, the

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<sup>84</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 119v, Etherton telegram no. 168 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, August 22, 1919, received September 2. This was in response to telegram no. 1208-S to him from the Foreign Secretary, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, August 21, 1919, which was also repeated to the Resident, Kashmir (loc. cit., fols. 113v-114).

<sup>85</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 116v, Memo no. 425-C from Resident, Kashmir, to Foreign Secretary, Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, August 22, 1919.

<sup>86</sup> Much of this detail is from the extended summary of the case provided by P. M. Stewart, a Special Officer, to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India entitled “The Kashgari Bolsheviks” (BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 123-123v, Memo no. 7120-C, Simla, September 3, 1919).

Chinese authorities were wondering where Yusuf was and whether his rubles had been sent back. The Indian government responded that he was detained temporarily in Rawalpindi due to snow and his rubles were on deposit there.<sup>87</sup> In short, no hard evidence was to be had, it is not clear that the suspects were ever arrested and formally charged, and at most the rubles they were carrying were confiscated but then apparently to be returned with them to China.

Was this not simply a well-endowed commercial mission? The whole incident reminds us of Kipling's *Kim* where we never can be sure how much substance there is to the shadowy Russian agents who lurk in the background of the story. Etherton did use the suspicions he raised in his initial message about Yusuf to propose that no one should be allowed to cross from Kashgaria into India without an identification document provided by him.<sup>88</sup> In support of this idea, he cited both the Yusuf case and sweepingly alarmist indications of a Ferghana that "swarms with their agents whose aim is India and China."

#### *How Important Was Etherton's Battle against Bolshevism?*

Overall, it is difficult to share Peter Hopkirk's enthusiasm regarding the importance of Etherton's secret service political activity. The record seems in fact to be rather mixed when one takes into account the rather narrowly focused goals of his superiors and their ability to

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<sup>87</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 38, Etherton telegram no. 69 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, February 20, 1920, received March 1; with response in Government of India no. 428, March 19, 1920. Here the reference is to Yusuf Khan, but apparently it is the same Yusuf as in the other documents.

<sup>88</sup> BL IOLR L/F&P/10/741, fol. 119v, Etherton telegram no. 168, August 22, 1919, quoted above, n. 68.

obtain information more rapidly and perhaps more accurately from other sources. Much of what he reported was simply irrelevant if his government could not even make up its mind about what policy to adopt toward the Soviet regime. With the conclusion of the Trade Agreement in 1921, much of what Etherton had been trying to do on the propaganda front was also forbidden. One must ask too, how really serious was the Bolshevik threat to set the East ablaze? That there was an intent to do so is undeniable.<sup>89</sup> However, the heat of their propaganda rarely seems to have resulted in flame. They were so hard pressed in Central Asia to survive that they were hardly in a position to carry out such a program. Etherton himself would conclude his book with the prognostication (which proved very wrong) that the Bolshevik regime would soon collapse.<sup>90</sup> Their self-destructive policies in their dealings with the local population reinforced its indifference to the Bolshevik's message, so that one has to be somewhat skeptical about how necessary and effective Etherton's propaganda efforts were. Where the Bolsheviks were having so hard a time convincing Muslims to come over to their side and could not trust those who did enroll in their army to do their duties, a *fatwa* from the Sheikh-ul-Islam was hardly needed to get the Qazis and Mullahs to preach against the Soviet regime.<sup>91</sup> It is true that some of the Bolshevik propaganda—for example, the claim that Britain had desecrated the Muslim Holy Places—needed to be refuted, as Etherton diligently did. But a

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<sup>89</sup> See, for example, the documents in Xenia Joukoff Eudin and Robert C. North, eds., *Soviet Russia and the East 1920-1927. A Documentary Survey* (Stanford, 1957).

<sup>90</sup> Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia*, pp. 296-297. We can hardly fault him for his mistake. Think of all the experts who were taken by surprise when the Soviet Union finally did collapse in 1991.

<sup>91</sup> On the early relations between the Soviet regime and Muslims in Central Asia, see Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca. The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport; London, 2001), ch. 2.

population that in the first instance was politically indifferent and, secondly, probably more inclined in any event to side with the British, hardly needed his guidance.

The same may be suggested about the local Chinese officialdom. Etherton's messages to Beijing occasionally may have resulted in the Chinese government's warning its far-flung minions to tighten border security, as did his direct representations to the Taoyin in Kashgar. But were the Chinese quite so spineless and ill-informed as Etherton would have us believe? There is evidence that at least some of their officials in border districts on their own initiative were engaging in intrigues to secure the allegiance of the local population on the other side of the border.<sup>92</sup> Only a few months after Etherton had departed, his successor Skrine reported:

The Chinese authorities have at last woken up to the dangers of shutting their eyes to the brisk trade which has been going on via the Sungek-Uzgend route with Bolshevik Ferghana. The Chinese frontier official at Sungek was replaced early in the month, and several merchants who have been illicitly trading with Andijan have been imprisoned and their goods confiscated. As these measures have been taken by the Titai [that is, Ma Titai, the "despotic" military commander of the Kashgar district—DW] and not by the Taoyin, they obviously emanate from the Governor at Urumchi; whenever the latter requires any action to be taken in Kashgaria which he cannot trust the Taoyin with, he invariably acts through

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<sup>92</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/741, fol. 154v, Etherton report no. 75 to Foreign and Political Department, Government of India, April 21, 1919: "Diwana Shah Ishakaga Beg has written to the Kirghiz of the Aktash district on the Russian Pamirs (about 45 miles west by south of Tahskurghan) recommending them to come under Chinese protection. This has probably been done at the instigation of the Chinese authorities in Sarikol who are constantly intriguing with the Kirghiz across the frontier against the Russians." In the same report he goes on to mention an agent, the Tajik Toksa Bai, who had been sent by the Chinese authorities to the Wakhan and Badakhshan in the previous autumn apparently on their own initiative.



the Titai. The governor has excellent reasons for keeping the Russian frontier of Kashgaria effectively closed.<sup>93</sup>

While we need to recognize that the Chinese could have just recently toughened their policies (perhaps in part due to Etherton's prodding), Skrine's blunt assessment in one of his tirades against Etherton in 1923 rings true:

The Chinese won't have any traders or commissions or consuls or anybody from the Russian side in the place [southern Xinjiang—DW]. The frontier is certainly carefully guarded...The same applies to the Bokhara frontier...I help the Chinese with information and advice, but I don't claim any credit for their policy of exclusion of Bolsheviks and Pan-Turanians; that is mainly due to the extreme jealousy of the Chinese about their frontiers. They won't let anybody in they can possibly help letting in. Etherton, of course, claimed credit for everything they did in this line; whenever a Bolo [Bolshevik—DW] agent was turned back, E. wired to India and Peking saying that he had 'induced' or 'advised' them to do it. All balderdash, for there was nobody to tell Gov[ernment] that it wasn't E.—hence his reputation...<sup>94</sup>

Indeed, without exception, Etherton's claims to effectiveness are those he made himself, frequent enough in his reports from Kashgar but then given an exaggerated twist when he published his account of

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<sup>93</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976. My quote is from Skrine's draft copy of the diary in BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/40, Diary for November 1922, p. [8].

<sup>94</sup> BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/9, Clarmont Skrine to Helen Skrine, March 14, 1923, pp. 1-2. Curiously, in contrast to his various assertions in some of his intelligence reports and in his book about Chinese inability to face up to foreign threats on their own, Etherton told the Central Asian Society in January 1923 that "the basic principle of Chinese policy in Turkistan is freedom from foreign interference" (Etherton, "Central Asia," p. 90). In his comments at the end of Etherton's talk Sir John Jordan, who had recently been the British Ambassador in Beijing, took the speaker to task for not making enough of the standoff between Russia and China, one in which the Chinese, with their "great staying power and tenacity" were more than able to hold their own (pp. 100-101).

those years in 1925. He alarmist verbiage might well be subjected to the same kind of deflation that he undertook in describing the centerpiece of Stewart Blacker's book on his experiences on the Kashgar mission back in 1918. Blacker devoted a major section of his tale to his pursuit through the rugged Pamirs of a group of infiltrators who were assumed to be enemy agents.<sup>95</sup> Although he finally cornered them in Yarkand, he never revealed exactly who they were and leaves the reader with the impression of his having accomplished a great service in performance of his duty. Here is Etherton's version of the events, cleverly written to display his own great perspicacity and, while praising Blacker, put him in his place:

At Tashkurghan they had news of *soi-disant* German and Turkish agents who were reported to have crossed the frontier into Chinese territory and to be making for Yarkand. The number of these agents and their followers was given as two hundred, but when I received the news I felt at the time it was the usual Sarikoli exaggeration, especially in view of the reports regarding the arrival of the original mission in Kashgar, when our numbers ran into many thousands and we were credited with cavalry, artillery, giant birds that vomited shot and shell and every kind of warlike appliance. However, Major Blacker wisely

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<sup>95</sup> Blacker, *On Secret Patrol in High Asia*. Curiously, Blacker never once mentions Bailey by name, ostensibly because of concerns about the political sensitivity of Bailey's time in Soviet Central Asia, even though by the time the book appeared Bailey had already lectured in London on his experiences. Possibly the silence reflects as much as anything the fact he and Bailey apparently did not get along. Swinson, *Beyond the Frontiers*, notes (p. 137): "Bailey did not take to him [Blacker], and indeed regarded him as a complete liability." Bailey's talk before the Central Asian Society in London in November 1920 was published as [F. M. Bailey], "In Russian Turkestan under the Bolsheviks," *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, 8/1 (1921): 49-69. In a letter to his mother from Bhutan on June 23, 1922, Bailey wrote: "You sent me the enclosed cutting, but the back of it was a review of Blacker's book on Turkestan. He was under me, but I had to kick him once for being useless and other reasons. You only sent one half the review. I wish it had all been there. I have not seen the book but he absolutely ignores me, and Sir G. Macartney has written to the "Times" about it with reference to the review but I don't think they put his letter in..." (BL IOLR Mss EurF 157/182). Macartney sent Bailey a copy of *The Times* review and his own letter to *The Times* on May 24, 1922 (BL IOLR Mss EurD 658).

set off in pursuit, in the course of which he crossed sixteen passes, none of which was less than fifteen thousand feet in height, and finally ran down the party, consisting of nine Afghan subjects intent on opium smuggling, in a serai in Yarkand...<sup>96</sup>

### *The Denouement of Etherton's Kashgar Career*

In order to understand why Etherton filled his book with so much evidence of his own perspicacity and diligence, it is necessary to examine why he never returned to Kashgar. When he took leave from the post in 1922 he had every intention of returning. Certainly at the time he left there is no indication that his superiors had any reason to be dissatisfied with his performance.

The man who exposed Etherton was his successor Clarmont P. Skrine, who, ironically, has always lived in Etherton's shadow. Skrine had no sooner arrived in Kashgar, ostensibly for only a year until Etherton returned, when he discovered that the financial accounts in the consulate were in total chaos. A stickler for proper procedure and accounting, Skrine tried to make some sense out of the records. As he dug further into them though, he became convinced that Etherton had cooked the books to cover up the use of government funds for

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<sup>96</sup> Etherton, *In the Heart of Asia*, p. 116. Etherton wrote Bailey from Kashgar on Feb. 3, 1922: "I return under separate cover your R.G.S. journal containing the lecture by Blacker. It is inaccurate in many respects and gives one the impression that they were chasing German agents whereas they were seven opium smugglers, all Badakshis and they had one old Russian rifle between the lot. However, I suppose the other yarn made better reading" (BL IOLR Mss EurF 157/232). The lecture referred to is: L. V. S. Blacker, "Travels in Turkistan 1918-1920," *The Geographical Journal*, 58/3 (1921): 178-197. In his review of Blacker's book (*Journal of the Central Asian Society*, 9/4 [1922]: 247-248), T. H. Holdich seems to accept the idea that these were Afghan propagandists working for the Bolsheviks, but he notes the oddity that Blacker "leaves us to conjecture where those Afghans came from and what was their real purpose."

personal purchases and to engage in speculation on the differences in exchange rates in order to line his pockets. Within a month of arriving in Kashgar, before submitting his official complaint, Skrine sought his father's advice. He sent home a scathing indictment of Etherton, not only for the latter's financial dealings, but regarding other matters in which he had besmirched the image of Britain, which as a servant of the Crown he was sworn to uphold. This initial diatribe on Skrine's part was merely the opening salvo of a continuing litany of complaint about Etherton, all of which may raise questions about Skrine's objectivity. There is class prejudice here, a clash of egos, and an exaggerated sense of holding the higher moral ground, even if it all seems to have been motivated by a genuine passion about the service ethos of the officials of the British Crown. There is no reason to think that Skrine was trying to prevent Etherton from returning to Kashgar in order to keep the consular post for himself—he fully had expected to go home after a year (he himself was overdue for leave), and while he admitted he enjoyed being in Xinjiang, he became impatient when the appointment of a successor was postponed.<sup>97</sup>

While he was careful not to put all his accusations into official reports, Skrine seems to have been quite open and honest in his letters home. Thus he expressed his disgust at evidence (supported by interrogation of the consular staff) that Etherton engaged in sexual dalliance with the local prostitutes in the official residence in Kashgar, in the process both offending the local population and making the consul a laughing stock. For what it is worth, the somewhat priggish Skrine produced a club-room anecdote to confirm this aspect of Etherton's character:

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<sup>97</sup> See, for example, BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/9, Clarmont Skrine to Helen Skrine, Kashgar, April 19, 1923, p. 2.

...I haven't heard much good of him from anyone who knows anything about him except Fitzmaurice, who idolises him. Ask Col. Charles Smith, who was P[olitical] A[gent] Gilgit when he and Bailey and Blacker passed through in '18; ask Bailey and Blacker themselves! You'll hear something. Apropos, "Smith of Asia" is very amusing about him. You ought to hear him taking off Etherton. "I s'y, Smith," said he at Gilgit in '18, "D'yer know anything abaht the wimmin at Kashgar? I've been told they're top-ole." Smith told him that as far as he knew that was correct. "By Jove," says E. with a sly look and a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Kashgar, "Wot a lovely time I'm going to 'ave!" And a month later, while the final death-struggles of the world-war were taking place before Chateau Thierry and Amiens, E. was having his lovely time—one which went on for three and a half years at the expense of the poor old impoverished British Empire.<sup>98</sup>

Of course as Skrine (and any reader of Kipling) has to have known, Victorian morals were not always observed by Government of India officials, and, for the most part, those in power never cared to

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<sup>98</sup> BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/39, Clarmont Skrine to Frank Skrine, August 23, 1922. Elsewhere in the letter, Skrine laid out the specifics of the sexual scandals, in part, however, attributing the situation to the lax morals of the local society: "What did Etherton do directly he found himself alone here? He started bringing prostitutes into the Consulate, and he kept it up the whole time he was here, until our name stank. And the Swedish missionary ladies, as one of them hinted to D. [Doris, Skrine's wife—DW], were ashamed to be classed as Europeans and 'Sahibs' with him! If he had contracted a temporary marriage with a girl, according to the local custom, and had kept her the whole time, it wouldn't have been so bad...But he had different bazar women in every week or so, employing an old so-called 'mullah' who is a pensioner of the Consulate as a pimp..." He included a shorter version of this statement in a personal letter to Evelyn B. Howell, who was sympathetically receiving Skrine's material about Etherton in the Government of India offices in Delhi. See the excerpt of Skrine's letter to Howell, January 1, 1923, in BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/39. See also his letter to his father, BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/9, Clarmont Skrine to Frank Skrine, May 10, 1923, p. 3, where he further elaborates that Etherton was being misled into thinking the ladies being brought to the consulate were daughters of the Kashgar elite. The trafficking in women declined when the mullahs "began tying E's lady-loves on to the backs of donkeys, face to tail, and whipping them through the town." Should we believe this? Hard to say, but clearly Skrine did.

discipline people for the personal lives.<sup>99</sup> A handsome bachelor was probably going to have some fun in Kashgar, even if in the process it would be difficult to keep the details from local gossip-mongers. As Skrine would soon learn, there were worse things one might do to offend local sensibilities, such as the conversion campaign which Swedish missionaries stupidly prosecuted during the month of Ramadan.<sup>100</sup>

Skrine's occasional critical comments in his reports regarding Etherton's policies and his active prosecution of the case about financial malfeasance received a mixed response from some of the commentators in the India Office. The most picturesque of these was a marginal annotation made in London on a printed copy of Skrine's Kashgar Monthly Diary for June 1923: "Why again drag in Col. Etherton? Mr. Skrine should have been born in Corsica."<sup>101</sup> In the very extended official file of the investigation into the allegations about Etherton's wrongdoing, Under-Secretary of State in the India Office Political Department, L. D. Wakely, noted: "Consideration of the case...is hampered by the fact that Mr. Skrine writes with an obvious adverse bias, in the spirit of a detective rather than of an impartial enquirer and so throws an atmosphere of suspicion over everything." He then asterisked the word "detective" and noted, "I should rather

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<sup>99</sup> See, for example, David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj* (New York, 2005), pp. 152, 284-289.

<sup>100</sup> See the extended account of the incident in BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976, Kashgar Monthly Diary for March-April 1923, pp. 5-6.

<sup>101</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/10/976. The comment may be something of an over-reaction to the point Skrine was making, but it shows the degree to which his obsession with Etherton had come to seem excessive.

have said a prosecuting counsel.”<sup>102</sup> Yet Skrine also had his defenders, notably Evelyn B. Howell, at the time the Deputy Secretary to the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of India, who wrote Skrine upon conclusion of the investigation:

We have told the Secretary of State that it is not proposed to reappoint Etherton to Kashgar. This decision has been taken solely on the ground of his dealings in exchange. The other points in the count are being separately dealt with. It is a sordid and disgusting business of a kind which tends very much to inflame one’s anger and warp one’s judgment. A man who does not play the game at the outposts is a traitor to our order.<sup>103</sup>

Etherton, a “traitor to our order,” is a far cry from Etherton the hero of the lonely struggle against Bolshevism in Kashgar.

Apart from issues of morality, what exactly did he do wrong? The investigation centered on the consular accounts, which were formally audited in India to determine the accuracy of Skrine’s claims.<sup>104</sup> He had made a number of accusations, one of the most important ones, alluded to by Howell, concerning the way that Etherton had been

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<sup>102</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/11/228, minute paper of October 27, 1923. This file is entitled in the India Office inventories: “Colonel Etherton: Unethical practices as Consul-General at Kashgar; not to be recommended for Political employment elsewhere. 29 May 1900-20 Aug. 1930.” At one time a copy of apparently the same file had been in the Foreign Office archive of the Public Record Office. Lars-Erik Nyman noted: “The documents from the disciplinary proceedings are all properly indexed, but they are removed from the files. The rumors [of Etherton’s being disciplined for ‘an illicit currency deal’—p. 64] have been collected from a very reliable anonymous source” (Nyman, *Great Britain*, p. 147n7). Did Nyman begin his work prior to Skrine’s death and consult with him? He does give credit to Pamela Nightingale, Skrine’s collaborator on the book about Macartney. Should we read anything sinister into the disappearance of the documents from the Foreign Office archives?

<sup>103</sup> BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/39, excerpt copy of letter from E. B. Howell to Clarmont Skrine, dated Curzon House, Delhi, March 20, 1923.

<sup>104</sup> A printed version of the audit is in BL IOLR L/P&S/11/228, *Preliminary Report of an Examination of the Original Accounts Records of the British Consulate-General at Kashgar for the period 1918 to 1922* (Delhi, 1924).

manipulating exchange rates in China to make a personal profit on the cashing of consular letters of credit in rupees in exchange for Chinese currency. The audit confirmed Skrine's accusations regarding a consistent patterns of erasures and apparent fudging of figures and indeed raised serious questions about deliberate falsification of the records by Etherton. Apart from the exchange rate issue, among the questions were ones concerning purchases of items he may have turned to his personal use, a consistent habit of drawing on consulate funds for his personal use and only after long intervals reimbursing the consular account, even while he was depositing funds in his own bank account in India, and at least one blatant instance of his claiming to have converted funds at one rate, when in fact the rate had been different. One portion of the records that raised particular questions was the extraordinary expenditure charged to Secret Service operations in 1921-22, for which there was no full accounting.<sup>105</sup> A second audit was much more cautious in its conclusions, but still found several instances that documented Etherton had wrongly used government funds.

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<sup>105</sup> Note that Wakely, in his minute paper of October 27, 1923 (BL IOLR L/P&S/11/228) felt that Skrine's claims about misuse of Secret Service funds were "mere suspicion." In the draft of a response to questions the Government of India had raised about his accusations (pp. 6-7), Skrine indicated clearly the basis for his suspicions, which included interrogating agents as to how much they were being paid and determining that much of Etherton's intelligence had been obtained gratis. See BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/39. Etherton's own justifications for the special allocations can be seen in, e.g., his request of May 13, 1920, that he be allowed to spend 4700 rupees to reward his agents: "Various persons here and elsewhere in Chinese and Russian territory have rendered good service in connection with Bolshevik propaganda and have cooperated with me in my counter propaganda and in our interests generally. In order to enable me to retain my influence over these persons and for the good effect it will have I propose to make them monetary and other gifts..." (BL IOLR L/P&S/11/175, Reg. no. P5814/1920). Only 3000 R was approved in this case. On a separate occasion he requested permission to present gifts of saddlery to the Chinese commandant of Kashgar and several frontier officials and asked that six sets of regulation gear be sent. The response was that regulation equipment could not be sent but an equivalent would be and 600 rupees charged to the consular budget (loc. cit., Reg. no. P5909/1920).



Whatever the degree of Skrine's bias, the upshot was that an independent examination of the record determined Etherton had been guilty of misconduct. Financial malfeasance was in fact practically the only thing that inevitably would result in sanctions for those in the Indian Civil Service.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, the Government of India felt it would be difficult to make a court case against him, and presumably they were not anxious that the matter develop into a public scandal that would damage the image of the Indian Civil Service. Thus they considered but backed away from the idea of a formal inquiry (which would have had to take place in Kashgar and India, with Etherton present) and a possible Court Martial. Etherton was told to reimburse the government for a not inconsiderable sum of some 1000 rupees; he did so, "in settlement of the amount alleged to be due from me," in other words without admitting any guilt.<sup>107</sup> He was informed that he could remain in the military service (his original appointment before Kashgar) but that he could not expect further employment in the Indian Political Service. So he was barred from resuming his position in Kashgar. The India Office debated whether to commend Etherton, since it had "no reason to doubt that [he] did good work at Kashgar," but decided "the circumstances will not be held to render it appropriate." Understandably, as the same minute paper reported, "The absence of any such commendation is, as Col. Etherton has respectfully mentioned in conversation, a point on which he feels very sore."<sup>108</sup> Etherton resigned from active military service a month

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<sup>106</sup> Gilmour, *Lives*, p. 149.

<sup>107</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/11/228, Reg. no. P231/1923, Etherton letter of November 1, 1924.

<sup>108</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/11/228, Reg. no. P231/1923, Minute paper of November 6, 1924, initialed by L. D. Wakely.

later.<sup>109</sup> The consequences for him re-surfaced in 1930, when an inquiry came to the India Office as to whether Etherton's record would merit his appointment as Governor of Western Australia. Understandably, the answer was a definite "No."<sup>110</sup>

In his defense in 1924 and foreshadowing the theme of his book, Etherton provided the following self-justification, which was not quite to the point of some of the accusations and ultimately not accepted as valid:

I would respectfully submit that with regard to the monetary transactions and financial expenditure on behalf of the Government, despite the inevitable difficulties arising from their being carried out in four different currencies, it was my consistent endeavour to economise in every direction. This I submit is proved by the large sums which were saved the Government throughout the years 1918, 1919, 1920, and 1921 when I was confronted with Bolshevik, Afghan, and enemy propaganda, intrigue, missions and agents of every kind whose aim was directly against India and the borderland, and who, although I was given a free hand with regard to expenditure, were successfully combatted with a minimum outlay, when large amounts could have been expended had one been so inclined.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/11/228, Reg. no. P231/1923, the review of his service record obtained from the Military Department, compiled August 8, 1930, indicates he retired December 7, 1924. The file makes the perhaps significant remark: "We have only one of his Confidential Reports in 1924 in which his C. O. and superior officers say they do not know him." Cf. Skrine's comment in a letter home: "Etherton has no friends in the F. and P. [Foreign and Political Department], only some enemies such as Col. Terence Keyes, whose opinion of him is unprintable; nor has he any real friends even at Army Headquarters, though he may have some acquaintances" (BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/9, Clarmont Skrine to Frank Skrine, May 10, 1923, p. 1). A quick glance through Keyes's letters to his family in BL IOLR Mss EurF 131/44 did not turn up any comments on Etherton.

<sup>110</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/11/228, Reg. no. P231/1923, Letter of Sir M. Seton to E. H. Marsh, August 20, 1930.

<sup>111</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/11/228, Reg. no. P231/1923, P. T. Etherton to L. D. Wakely, June 14, 1924.

To read between the lines, what he seems to be saying without admitting guilt is, forgive me any small transgressions, for I was laboring in a good cause, and, even if you say I pocketed some money due the government, I saved it even more. The publication of his book a year after this letter, with its full repertoire of claims about his single-handedly defending British interests in Central Asia by his anti-Bolshevik activities in Kashgar may be seen as a further effort to justify his actions and ensure his place in history.

### *Etherton's Book as Political Discourse and Self-serving Propaganda*

Etherton surely knew of the regulations governing conduct by all officers in Indian Government Service, namely that "all communications to the Press or public of official matters, are strictly forbidden, unless made with the prior consent of the Government of India in the Foreign and Political Department."<sup>112</sup> In fact soon after his return from Kashgar he had requested permission to give an "interview" to *The Times* on Russian Central Asia and Bolshevism and even provided a text to be vetted. Permission was denied, since this

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<sup>112</sup> See: *Manual of Instructions to Officers of Political Department*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Simla, 1924). The copy of this book which I am using from the University of Washington Library has various printed updates pasted throughout, generally undated. One here is significant in its specificity, that the rules apply "with special force to all Political Officers. At no time, either during active service or after retirement, may they, without the express permission of Government, publish any book or make any contribution to the Press on a subject connected with the official duties performed by them or divulge information acquired in the performance of those duties....Steps have already been taken by the Foreign Office to make it clear to officers of the Indian Political Department appointed to Consular posts under the Foreign Office that they are subject to the same restrictions in this respect as are members of the regular Consular Service." And a further addendum indicated that "Former members of the Indian Political Service or of those Services which are now incorporated in the Indian Political Service, remain subject to the Indian Official Secrets Acts as regards all confidential information obtained by them while members of the Service." One is tempted to read these in part as a response to Etherton's publication of his book, although there is no direct evidence here that the two are connected.

was considered to be against departmental regulations.<sup>113</sup> By retiring from the service, in a situation where the regulations apparently had not yet been updated to apply to retirees, he was legally able to publish his book, but not without raising the hackles of those who later reviewed the investigation file about his conduct in Kashgar. In response to a question raised about his having incurred official displeasure possibly for having published without sanctions, one of the annotators wrote: "There was no correspondence with Col. Etherton about the publication of his books; he published them without consulting either the F[oreign] O[ffice] or us. He had already retired from the C.A. He should have consulted as a matter of propriety; we can hardly say he was under any definite obligation to do so."<sup>114</sup>

Indeed, had he still been in the service, surely he would have been censured and perhaps even worse, for major parts of the book draw very explicitly on his official intelligence reports, many of them classified as confidential or secret. That he did so was more than a matter of ego (with which he was well endowed) and rescuing his career and tarnished reputation.<sup>115</sup> Apart from his not having received a commendation for his political service at Kashgar, where he may genuinely have believed that he had kept Bolshevism at bay, he held emphatic and hard-line political views about Bolshevism. He was

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<sup>113</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S11/218, Reg. no. P3369/1922.

<sup>114</sup> BL IOLR L/P&S/11/228.

<sup>115</sup> Etherton's ego raised Skrine's hackles; one can easily see why from the excerpt of a letter to Skrine from Etherton after the latter's return to London, which contains a catalogue of the important individuals who received him there (BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/39). This appears to be a copy Skrine forwarded to his mother in a letter of November 1922 from Yarkand. See BL IOLR Mss EurF 154/8 (the letter is missing the opening page; it is located just before the letter of November 12, 1922, from Kargalik).

undoubtedly angry at a government which had shown on too many occasions that it was “soft” on the Soviet regime. On numerous occasions he underscored a belief that even a modicum of British support might bring down the Soviet regime in Central Asia, and he confidently predicted that even without that, the regime would probably soon collapse. His book then has a place in the political discourse of the time and the arguments that had divided the upper echelons of British government ever since the Bolshevik Revolution.

One might admire Etherton for crafting a compelling tale, carefully rearranging evidence to provide dramatic climaxes, and inflating his sources with generally not so subtle hyperbole. His ability to produce the book in a relatively short period of time is understandable when we see how he used his sources. Apart from cannibalizing his official reports, he paraphrases or quotes a number of sections from his first book on his travels in 1910-1911. He also draws upon some of the obvious older accounts about Central Asia, without, however, telling the reader that he is presenting material more than a quarter century old and perhaps in need of updating. Thus we find paraphrases of material from Przhevalskii (1879), Kuropatkin (1882), Lansdell (1885), and Hedin (1899).<sup>116</sup> This of itself might not be bad, since, after all, it shows he did a certain amount of reading for context, but a close comparison of select passages reveals distortions and perhaps some deliberate invention. An excellent example is where in his ethnographic

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<sup>116</sup> Of these, in 1911 apparently he used only the Lansdell, for part of his description of the Ili Valley. The books are: N. Prejevalsky, *From Kulja across the Tian Shan to Lob-Nor*. Transl. by E. Delmar Morgan (London, 1879); A. N. Kuropatkin, *Kashgaria: (Eastern or Chinese Turkistan) Historical and Geographical Sketch of the Country; Its Military Strength, Industries, and Trade* (Calcutta, 1882); Henry Lansdell, *Russian Central Asia Including Kuldja, Bokhara, Khiva and Merv*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1885); Sven Hedin, *Through Asia*, 2 vols. (New York; London, 1899). Etherton undoubtedly consulted other sources, for which I have not attempted an exhaustive search.

overview of Xinjiang he discusses the Dulani, a small group that he actually did visit, and the Lopliks, the people of the Lop Nor region, which he did not, even though in passing he conveys the impression that some of what he relates on the latter is his first-hand observations.<sup>117</sup> Where his sources often are neutral in judgment, Etherton chooses to use the same information to show primitiveness. He adds anecdotes about sexual license which his sources apparently do not contain and even seem to contradict.

Unfortunately this cavalier treatment of sources and exaggeration is not confined to his contextualization but is evident in his re-telling of the official tale of his mission in Kashgar, as examples cited earlier demonstrate. And in itself the official, documented record contains more than a little exaggeration and inflation of a small number of examples to create an impression of an unrelenting assault by the Bolsheviks on Xinjiang. In its tone, as well as its polemical nature then, *In the Heart of Asia* (1925) is vastly different from his first book on his travels in 1910-1911. This is not an account of sport and an exciting journey. He is writing of a world in crisis, of the confrontation between good and evil. The book is a rhetorical excursus by an author with an axe to grind. Unfortunately, this fact seems to have been missed by readers through the decades, be they Soviet historians intent on denouncing Etherton and the evil machinations of the British Empire or authors such as Hopkirk who are nostalgic for the days

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<sup>117</sup> The passages in question are in: *In the Heart of Asia*, pp. 145, and 90-94. Even if Etherton did not reciprocate in his comments about Blacker, the latter gave Etherton's book a laudatory review, his only criticism being: "One cannot help regretting that Colonel Etherton does not put forward some definite practical plan for staying the Bolshevik tide in Asia." See the review in: *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, 13/2 (1926): 175-176.

when British heroes fought the Russian menace.<sup>118</sup> The activities not only of Etherton but all those heroes and their opponents (who are even less well served) need close scrutiny if we are to understand the events in Central Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> An example of the Soviet use of Etherton is A. Kh. Babakhodzhaev, *Proval agressivnoi politiki angliiskogo imperializma v Srednei Azii v 1917-1920 gg.* (Tashkent, 1956), pp. 68-71, 126.

<sup>119</sup> Skrine's own account of his term in Kashgar, the antithesis of Etherton's in its being deliberately a-political, also requires "de-construction." See my "The Making of *Chinese Central Asia*," *Central Asian Survey*, 2007 (in press).

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