

Moslem Federation

By Clarissa Lorenz

Mohammedan Unity

THE 200,000,000 Mohammedans inhabiting a single continuous area from India to the Sudan, and bound together in a sense by a common religion and culture, symbolize a giant whom neither the Axis powers nor Great Britain is anxious to arouse, lest the dilemma of the Sorcerer's Apprentice be reenacted. If the Mohammedans take sides, the side they take will probably win. But can this giant be kept asleep?

Before it becomes a force with which the world has to reckon there would need to be closer unity of the Mohammedan countries—India, Afghanistan, Sinkiang, Persia, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Transjordan, Palestine, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Hadra, Maut Yemen, Egypt, the English Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Algiers, Morocco, Spanish Morocco, Rio d'Oro, French West Africa, etc.—about half of them independent.

Mecca, as we recall from our schoolbooks, is the religious center. Since the reward of a soldier is eternal delight, a Moslem paradise of happy companionship with beautiful houris, they all move together, ready to sacrifice their lives when the green flag of the prophet is unfurled. In Cairo, largest Mohammedan city, the traditions of Arab culture are best preserved, although they did not originate there. While they speak various tongues, Arabic (something like the lingua franca) is the common language. And most of them use the same Arab character, for there is a pleasant custom in Arabic of leaving out the vowels so that each country can supply those belonging to its own dialect.



AT PRESENT there is no secular head to the Mohammedan world, like the Caliphs of Bagdad in the remote past, or the erstwhile Sultan of Turkey. But the impulse to blend these various languages, nations, sects and races has already found expression in such gestures as the youth movements of Egypt and Turkey. This unification, begun in Saudi Arabia, has spread over Egypt and Syria, and will ultimately reach the most distant corners of the Mohammedan world. Today Moslemism has perhaps not generated enough driving power to create a potent ally, but if the people knew that they could rely on the support of the great democracies it might easily supply the weight needed to tip the scales in the present crisis.

The British have to decide whether it is preferable to encourage Moslem unity, trusting the people not to cut the lifeline of the British Empire, or whether to oppose such a federation. The first alternative is beset by many complications. There is Suez, the weakest link in the chain connecting Great Britain to its eastern empire; there is Palestine and the question of the Jewish homeland, the Moslem population in India and Java, the French mandate of Syria and the British Fort of Aden. But if Great Britain opposes such a federation, she risks the danger of a German land attack on a weak and disunited people. Once Turkey is conquered by the Germans nothing can stop them from obtaining the coveted oil fields of Iraq and Persia.

As for the Mohammedans, they have more to fear from Italy, with her imperialistic policy, or from the Germans, with their Drang Nach Osten. They would themselves prefer that the keys to the gates of the Mediterranean be kept in two hands, Gibraltar and Ceuta, instead of being handed over to Spain.



IN ANY CASE, the question is an acute one, in view of the present German drive to the east. The democracies should at least attempt to win the Mohammedans over to their side. Britain's friendly policy, giving independence to Egypt, Iraq and Transjordan, has already established a good relationship. The victories in Libya opened the way for an uprising against Italy, and France is now powerless to oppose a sufficiently strong revolt in Algiers, Tunisia or Morocco. As for Spain, that country was hardly able in her more potent days to conquer the Riffs, and it is questionable whether in her present weakened state she could control them.

What is the American attitude toward a Moslem federation? Economically, our interests in that part of the world are relatively small. To be sure, the old fields of Behrein Island and partly those of Persia are American-owned, but for a considerable time they will be unable to produce oil by themselves. If any other important minerals were to be derived from these countries, they could always be obtained through the regular trading channels.

In accordance with the Wilson principle of self-determination of nations, however, our attitude toward the notion of a united Moslem can only be favorable. America would welcome the creation of a unit so strong and stable that it insured peace in that part of the world. This does not, of course, mean reviving the days of the prophet. We have enough leaders at the moment, an oversupply of fuehrers, but we trust that it would be essentially democratic, a peaceful culture.

Our greatest hope for permanent peace under the present circumstances is to establish large and fixed units based upon a common culture, replacing the number of small, shifting tribes unable to defend themselves against the consolidated power of militarized nations.