

The Union defence arrangements, therefore, may be described as aiming at—(a) Maintaining a quickly mobilizable citizen army capable of dealing with any war emergency that need be contemplated within our borders and with any danger which need to-day be apprehended on any land border; (b) discharging the responsibilities we have assumed for our coast defence and that of the Naval Base; and (c) affording military training to as many young citizens as our finances permit, so that we may have as large a trained reserve as possible in the case of a major war emergency.

With regard to general organization for war, the policy of the Union Government has been to keep its military organization, so far as its resources permit, in harmony with that adopted by the British Government, and this policy will be continued.

In this connection, I wish, however, to point out that under our law no citizen can be compelled to render personal war service outside South Africa.

Union's Part in Empire Defence.

The extent of our immediate or ultimate participation would therefore depend on—(a) Our national interest in the war being so great that, when the emergency arises, special legislation amending the law in this respect will be acceptable to the country, or (b) on the popular interest being great enough to ensure, as in the last war, a great number of volunteers. It may be taken as certain that, if the circumstances were such that the Union desired to participate in such a war, public opinion would be such that there would be no difficulty in obtaining for external service, by volunteering, an infantry brigade, and that further effort would be forthcoming if the situation developed. From this you will see that we are not in a position to enter into any undertaking without parliamentary sanction.

On the understanding that nothing will be agreed to which would prejudice the freedom of the Union's decision as to its participation in any particular eventuality, our military advisers have been instructed to discuss all the necessary detail of organization, &c., with the War Office and Air Ministry officials.

While it may be contended that our present expenditure on naval and coast defence works is inadequate in view of our geographical position and the protection we enjoy, the responsibilities we have already assumed must be borne in mind and the fact that these will probably involve heavy capital expenditure in the near future.

Generally speaking, it is submitted that in the present stage of our development the policy which will best serve the interests of the Union as well as of the British Commonwealth is, while discharging the responsibilities we have already assumed in the matter of coast defence, to devote our available financial resources to the training and development of our air and land forces. It is our air and land forces which from the South African standpoint are most important to us to-day. And, in case of a war in which the Union is participating, it is with these that we shall be able to render most effective assistance.

Air Force.

This brings me to the Air arm. Our policy is to maintain an Air Force in South Africa primarily for internal security, ready to act instantly as a striking force and to hold and restrict any serious disturbance of the peace during the period that the citizen forces of the country are being mobilized and brought into action. It is concentrated at Pretoria, and its mobility is ensured by aerodromes and landing grounds throughout South Africa. One squadron can operate at any point in the Union within one day. In accordance with the decision of a previous Imperial Conference, it is organized and trained on the same lines as the Royal Air Force, thus ensuring easy co-operation with the rest of the Air Forces of the Empire. In connection with the demonstration flights from Cairo to Cape Town, to which reference was made in the Committee on Imperial Air Communications, our advisers have worked out with the Air Ministry most of the details of the flights and have arranged that the Royal Air Force machines which will fly from Cairo next year will combine with our Air Force in the programme of active citizen training at our annual camps at Potchefstroom and Cape Town in the beginning of April next.

This small measure of co-operation represents a beginning of the closer air co-operation to which we are looking forward. The South African Government are extremely grateful for the invaluable assistance received from the Royal Air Force, who have unstintingly placed the results of their researches and the labours of their training and organization staffs at our disposal.

Coastal Defence.

Finally I come to a question which we feel is of especial interest to us. I have already mentioned the responsibilities we have undertaken in regard to our coastal defence and the fact that we may in this connection be faced with heavy capital expenditure in the near future. We realize and accept the views held that, where expenditure does not matter, the ideal method of coastal defence is a combination of aircraft and fixed defences. It does not appear possible, without weakening either branch to the point of ineffectiveness, to bring about this ideal combination in South Africa and at the same time keep the expenditure within our resources.

When reviewing the policy of South African coastal defence, there are, however, some very important local considerations which may be of great advantage to our South African defence system as a whole. We feel that the present strength of our Air Force is a very bare insurance cover. The employment therefore of aircraft on coastal defence would enormously enhance the strength of our Air Force, as such coastal aircraft could be utilized equally well for military operations inland in any purely local emergency.