

British Defence Policy

THE White Paper [on Defence] and the Government spokesmen seem to tell us two things above all. First, that the basis of British defence is in course of a revolutionary change-over to various types of nuclear weapons. Push-button warfare will soon be the only major warfare. Second, that the development of nuclear weapons has been so extensive that there is now, and perhaps no future, likelihood of anything worthy of the name defence. Defence gone! Only deterrence remains. In other words, the probability of survival in order to achieve some kind of retaliation is the only deterrent to an aggressor. . .

There has been a sharp reaction in public opinion in Britain. But there have also been sharp reactions alike in Soviet Russia and in the United States. In Russia radio warnings of the dangers to the small Western European nations have been made in the last day or so. There doesn't seem much one can say about this sort of thing. Quite obviously everyone is now caught up in a fear-ridden situation which seems to have no end.

In America the reaction to the Defence White Paper has been one of alarm, the American Pentagon—we're told by the usually reliable James Reston, Washington correspondent of the *New York Times*—has been surprised by what it calls the defeatist attitude of British defence. They knew about the progressive reduction in the national call-up, about the reduction in annual expenditure which should in this new financial year cut over £200,000,000 off the defence vote. They knew about the planned withdrawal of garrisons from a number of points abroad. What is disappointing to them is that we should be so logical about all this and not hope for the invention of an effective hydrogen defence. I've no idea whether what is called in the American despatch of to-

Extracts from recent commentaries on the international news, broadcast from Main National Stations of the NZBS

day "an effective hydrogen defence" is a scientific possibility, and I'm not at all sure whether the nuclear scientists entertain reasonably grounded hopes on this matter—I'd like to know. It does sound like the deterrent to deter all deterrents.

Today we had a fresh pledge from Mr Macmillan that his Government would work hard for comprehensive disarmament. Just a few days ago he was content to say that the previous plan of Sir Anthony Eden had been, because of technical advances, found to be now ineffective. Furthermore, the British Government is now pledged to try to find some effective way of limiting nuclear tests. This is of importance to New Zealanders for two reasons at least. First, because the Pacific is unfortunately the happy hunting ground for nuclear scientists; and, second, because a New Zealand Parliamentary Committee last year added its voice in favour of a restriction of these nuclear tests.

Frankly, I'd rather not rely on scientists any more. . . Better the known risks of diplomacy than the wisdoms of nuclear science.

No one should be in doubt any more about the overwhelming importance of foreign policy—about good international relationships, about the critical need for the nations and people of the Western world to grasp the fact—and wrestle with the implications of it—that the Asians, as General Romulo once put it, are, or at least on reasonable grounds believe themselves to be, "a community of the hurt." Of course, the Asian view has a degree of exaggeration—of course it has. But after all

the allowances have been made for this and that, we know that the Asian and the West do stand in embarrassingly self-conscious relationship to each other.

—GRAHAM MILLER,
April 6, 1957

WHY . . . the warlike attitude of Russia? . . . Does the Soviet Government genuinely fear military encirclement and aggression by the United States and the Western nations? I do not believe it. . . Then why are the Soviet leaders behaving like Hitler?

RUSSIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The answer, I believe, is to be found partly in the difficulty of controlling the captive nations, particularly Poland and Hungary, and in the now revealed impossibility of relying upon them in time of war. The rest of the answer is in the attitude of the people of Russia. What they are thinking we are not allowed to know. But both the debunking of the late Stalin and his present reinstatement, or rebunking, are significant. The present rebunking—Stalin was a good Marxist, they say, and a great fighter against imperialism—means I think that the loosening of the control over the people after Stalin died proved too dangerous. A dictatorship like that in Russia cannot allow people to meet and think and talk freely. So the Stalin tyranny is reimposed, and the repression of the satellite nations is being intensified under Bulganin and Co. But something more than mere repression is required. So what could be better than the traditional expedient of governments that fear their own people, to cry, "The country is in danger." . . .

Let us, with this thought in mind, return to the Middle East for a moment. Once it has become clear that the United States, with the United Nations in attendance, would oppose by a number of means short of war the military action of Britain and France against Nasser, such a policy could hardly succeed. There was then no real alterna-

tive to the withdrawal from the Canal. It follows now that unless the United States should reverse its policy of using only peaceful means, the only stick with which to beat President Nasser is the economic one. Yet this is a strong stick. There is not much doubt of the ability of the Western nations, if they are patient and work together, to reduce their economic co-operation with Egypt to a minimum. They may be able to reduce their dependence upon the Canal. Thus they could deprive Egypt of much of her trade and deprive the governing classes of their wealth and perhaps of their power. . .

On the other hand, Egypt can be offered a pretty good carrot instead of the stick, and the nations concerned are probably ready enough to do so. An agreement regarding the use of the Canal and its maintenance could certainly be worked out on terms satisfactory to both parties. The big question, however, is whether President Nasser, having inflamed his supporters and the whole Arab world, is able to make a commonsense agreement, even though highly profitable to Egypt. One suspects from his present actions that he may be in some doubt what to do next. The Canal is physically but not yet politically open. Nasser is behaving with marked discourtesy, to put it mildly, to the United Nations, especially in the Gaza Strip. . . Nasser continues his violent radio propaganda in the Arab countries but at the same time his present proposals for the working of the Canal are not beyond the bounds of reason and could provide a basis for discussion. His situation would seem to be at least as embarrassing and difficult as that of President Eisenhower.

There is no reason to suppose that Nasser wants to be a puppet of Russia, though he will certainly take all he can get in economic and military support. The Soviet Government, however, seems quite clear in its determination to make use of the Arab-Israel conflict for its own purposes, and has evidently chosen the pro-Arab and anti-Israel line.

—W. N. PHARAZYN.
March 30, 1957



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