

Conflict At Canal Zone

the country is least interested—on the question of reorganising the United Nations Organisation, for example. Pandit Nehru was forthright in his demand that the UNO should be brought into closer consonance with the spirit of the Charter by giving it a wider appeal and bringing it into closer touch with reality. This means, to begin with, the admission of China into it.

Bitter experience has driven the lesson home to us what a danger communalism can be to the stability and future growth of a country where the population is as heterogeneous as it is in this country. It is not possible for us to forget that the pattern of our culture has developed historically on the basis of acceptance of differences. The stand which India has taken by remaining alert and stamping out all manifestations of communalism and by refusing to countenance it in any shape or form, Pandit Nehru believes, has helped the people of Pakistan to get rid of their war fever. He was happy to note that that high fever was now subsiding. Others may not share his belief, but even so, does communalism still remain the greatest danger facing the country? If it does, then as President of the open session of the Congress, Pandit Nehru should have been more explicit. For his crusade is not against religious bigotry which remains hidden in the secret crevices of the hearts of the bigoted but is against the lurking political clanger. Had he been more specific about the roots of communalism today, he would have helped better its eventual elimination. In the absence of any such light, the emphasis on communalism adds to the confusion instead of making things any clearer.

If by any chance Pandit Nehru was thinking of the grave peril in which Pakistan may fall because its erstwhile champion of the Delhi Pact is no more, even then he should have been more specific. The Delhi Pact, at the time was forged, may have represented the highest measure of sanity and agreement that was possible in the circumstances. It has been tried and found wanting. If the violent end of its architect in Pakistan pressages an upsurge of a fanaticism that can bode no good for the stability and the well-being of Pakistan herself, the country would have welcomed a more determined lead from him.

Only a future historian will have all the evidence and data to conclude whether the two characteristic developments of the second half of the twentieth century were distinct political trends, or were merely different, but related, aspects of one and the same political trend. To a contemporary historian the "cold war" between Communist Russia and the Western Powers represents the traditional bid by rival powers for world domination. It is significant that each bloc accuses the other of imperialist designs. Communist Russia is suspect in the East. But it is admitted that Communist expansionism is not a case of military conquest, but a spreading impact of ideology. That is how the second political development of the second half of the twentieth century—the emergence of the East—becomes related, and is refracted, in the fight between the major Powers for world supremacy.

Whether or not the two political developments are reflections of one fundamental revolution of this period, it is not without significance that the clash of interests between the Western Powers and the East occurs precisely at points which are of strategic importance in the fight for world domination between the Western Powers and Communist Russia. In Asia the metropolitan Powers have transferred political power. But there is the undercurrent of economic hostility between them and their former colonies and dependencies. Imperialism has retreated from Asia, but there is a suspicion that it may come back in another garb. Except in Indo-China there is no direct clash or conflict. But the uneasy relation between India and America is reflective of Asia's suspicion of the Western Powers.

In the Far East the situation has taken a different twist. There the conflict is more direct. Red China remains outside the comity of nations. Japan has been won over to the camp of the Western Powers through the bribe of a peace treaty. There is a war in Korea. Although the United Nations is at war against the Communists in Korea, the Far East regards America as the foreign Power interfering in her internal affairs. In the Middle East it is Britain which is resented as the dominating foreign Power. There is a lull in Asia; the Far East remains in turmoil; but the world's

attention is at the moment focussed on a flare-up in the Middle East,

It all stems from the divergent claims and interests. To the Western Powers, Korea, Japan, the Suez Canal zone and the Nile Valley are strategic outposts; the Middle Eastern oil and Asian raw materials are sinews of war. To Asia, the Far East and the Middle East, the withdrawal of the British army from India is interpreted as freedom from foreign political domination; the revolution in China is hailed as the end of that country's semi-colonial status; the conversion of Japan into an American bastion is resented; America is hated as the foreign Power which bolsters up reactionary Chiangs and Rhee's at the cost of war and bloodshed; Britain is resented as a dominating foreign Power which exploits Persian oil; the existence of her troops at the Suez Canal zone and the joint control over the Sudan are regarded as galling reminders of Egypt's non-sovereign political status. Throughout this region, the Western Powers' eager hunt for air and naval bases is opposed as a device to involve these areas, against their will, in the "cold war" be-



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tween the Western powers and Communist Russia.

This is the broader political canvas against which the developments in the Middle East are to be assessed. There is a close parallel between the sequence of events in the Far East, as well as in the Middle East, which is significant. In the Far East, America was interested in securing bases for the defence of the Pacific. She is a Pacific Power, but not Britain. That was why Britain was reluctant to follow American policy in the Far East. But America compelled Britain as well as the United Nations to go her way in the Far East. That is why there is a war in Korea. America is not, but Britain is a Mediterranean Power. That is why America is unwilling to follow the British policy in the Middle East. But the logic of events in the Far East is being related in the Middle East. Britain has not yet succeeded in committing the United Nations. That is because there is no aggression or threat of aggression by any of the Middle Eastern Powers. But she has succeeded in involving America, France and Turkey in the Middle East.

Though the Four-Power proposal for establishing a Middle Eastern Command arises from strategic considerations, it implies and reflects the diplomatic and strategic revolution of our times. It underlies the violent shift in the balance of world powers. It is symbolic of the decline of Britain as a major military Power. Equally it reflects the growing military strength and responsibility of America, and is a recognition by the Western Powers of Turkey's military potential. The Middle East Command is not to be integrated with the North Atlantic Treaty organisation. It is proposed as a regional pact, like the mutual defence arrangement between America and Japan, or between America, Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines, whereby Egypt is expected to join as a founder-member Britain, America, France and Turkey to jointly underwrite the defence of the Middle East. This Command is to be in charge of the strategic defence bridge between Europe and the Middle East, as well as between Asia and Africa.

Cairo has rejected the offer. This is partly because the proposed Middle Eastern Command is a reminder to Egypt of the decades of Turkish rule and Britain's occupation. To some extent Cairo's refusal springs from Egypt's neutral

foreign policy. She is reluctant to join the Middle Eastern Command as it might mean involvement in the "cold war" between the rival power blocs. To Cairo the Anglo-American Powers are suspect for their diabolic designs. Britain favours Ankara to Cairo. This is regarded by Cairo as a typical British device to divide and rule; Both Britain and America are pro-Israel. This is resented by Egypt and the Cairo-dominated Arab League as a slur on Arabs.

Domestic political developments partly explain the stinging Egyptian attitude towards Britain. That the Middle Eastern Command would be proposed was known to Cairo. It abrogated the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 to emphasize its hostility towards Britain. Can it be that Nahas Pasha acted before the four-Power proposal was formally offered in order to force the issue in the Sudan? There are inspired whispers that Cairo would have been unwilling to enter into defence arrangements for the Suez Canal zone with friendly Powers. It has been suggested that, with tact and diplomacy, London could have persuaded Cairo to invite Britain, along with other friendly Powers, to help the defence of the strategic area. Britain did not make that gesture. On the contrary, she was adamant in the Sudan. Britain has, though belatedly, been forced to make that

gesture. Now that the offer has been made, Egypt may naturally demand sovereignty over the Sudan as the price for collaboration in the defence of the Canal zone. If that be so, Cairo would be behaving, just like Bonn or Tokyo.

Is Cairo or Teheran the true voice of the Middle East? Perhaps both embody the resurgent spirit of nationalism. Teheran will not tolerate British domination of Persian oil, but is not reluctant to enter into a reasonable arrangement with Britain. Cairo will not tolerate the garrisoning of the Suez Canal zone by British troops, but she does not deny that she alone cannot defend this vital strategic area. What both Cairo and Teheran resent are the British designs to exploit their economic or military needs and weaknesses for perpetuating domination. Britain could have entered into an honourable working partnership with Persia for improving her oil resources. She could have remained at the Suez Canal zone with the willing consent and friendship of Egypt. Her dealings with Egypt and Persia, as well as her Middle Eastern policy as a whole, indicate that Britain may have lost her genius for compromise. She and her allies, the Western Powers, are paying the penalty for her Jack of statesmanship in not anticipating, as well as encouraging, the nationalist upsurge in the Middle East.



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