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## THE PROBLEM OF NATIONALISM

*(This paper was prepared in the Foreign Office and takes into account certain comments made by the Colonial and Commonwealth Relations Offices at the official level.)*

### A.—Aim

The general aim of this paper is to suggest means by which we can safeguard our position as a world Power, particularly in the economic and strategic fields, against the dangers inherent in the present upsurge of nationalism. On the economic side we have to maintain specific British interests on which our existence as a trading country depends. In the field of strategy we have to ensure our own and Commonwealth security within the larger framework of our obligations as a leader of the free world.

2. In more detail the aims of this paper are:—

- (i) To assess the significance and strength of present-day nationalism;
- (ii) To note certain manifestations of nationalism in action;
- (iii) To calculate the risks to British interests;
- (iv) To suggest possible measures to maintain our position and hence
- (v) To propose recommendations for policy.

### B.—Nationalism—Significance and Strength

3. Great Britain emerged from the last war victorious and still a great Power, but much diminished in strength and thus less able to assert herself in world affairs or safeguard her world-wide interests. On the one hand our economic weakness has led to a marked decline in our power to influence the activities and policies of other Governments and, to a lesser extent, in our prestige in world affairs. On the other, the creation of new States and the widespread diffusion of the ideals of a world democracy as expressed, e.g., in the United Nations Charter, and including the condemnation of the use or threat of force, have severely limited the ability of the great Powers to enforce their points of view.

4. This has affected our relations with all countries, particularly the backward and "new" nations in Asia and Africa, including the peoples of our own Colonial territories. The practical results are broadly to increase the pressure—

- (i) in our own (and other countries') dependent territories for a speeding up of the process of granting sovereign independence;
- (ii) in independent countries for the elimination of real or imaginary British interference in their internal affairs and the enforcement of real or imaginary claims against the United Kingdom.

The forces by which this pressure is exerted may be loosely termed the forces of nationalism.

5. For the purposes of this paper nationalism is defined as the emotional force of a people or group of peoples primarily in backward or "new" countries seeking to assert their national aspirations. These can often, but by no means invariably, be fulfilled only at the expense of the older Western Powers.

6. Nationalism is dynamic. It can be a great constructive force for good where it is based on sober pride and patriotism and springs from a legitimate aspiration to self-government and a place in the comity of nations. Intelligent and satisfied nationalism makes for the establishment of strong and effective Government, and is an essential factor for the stability of any modern State. Indeed, it provides the basis for our Colonial policy, which aims at guiding the Colonial peoples to self-government within the Commonwealth. A State drawing national inspiration from this sort of "healthy" nationalism offers possibilities of genuine and trustworthy co-operation in international affairs and the best prospect of resistance to communism.

7. But nationalism may also be destructive where it runs, or is driven, out of control. Exploited or dissatisfied nationalism produces a state of mind in which any sense of grievance, injustice or inferiority is magnified out of all proportion. This can lead to a state of unbalance amounting in the worst cases to hysteria. This state of mind is highly infectious.

8. "Unhealthy" nationalism may lead States already independent to disregard of the normal rights and obligations owed by one sovereign State to another, or to its fellow sovereign States collectively. At this stage the only remedy lies in collective international counter-action.

9. There is nothing new in nationalism. The present state of affairs is a logical stage in the continuing historical process by which the nations of the world have been formed, and in which Britain has played a leading rôle, e.g., in Greece, Latin America, the Commonwealth, &c. This process cannot be stopped.

10. Some of the factors contributing to the present extreme nature of the problem of nationalism have already been noted. Others are:—

- (i) The general impetus given to Nationalist independence movements by the events of the war and the subsequent withdrawal of the Western Powers from territories such as India, Syria or Indonesia.
- (ii) The belief that political power is the only means by which dependent territories can obtain greater material prosperity and freedom from the economic and social disabilities imposed by racial differentiation.
- (iii) The emergence as the world's greatest and richest power of the United States, whose own origins were in successful revolution against Great Britain, and whose attitude towards "colonialism" is, to say the least of it, equivocal.
- (iv) Misinterpretation of the British policy of encouraging healthy nationalism and promoting the independence of dependent territories as a sign of the decline of the former greatest world Power and mercantile Empire which can now, it is supposed, be attacked with impunity.
- (v) The moral and sometimes physical support lent by international communism in encouraging revolt against the Western Powers.

- (vi) The exploitation of nationalism, by those who stand to gain personally—particularly in the commercial sphere—by the expulsion of British interests.
- (vii) General suspicion of foreign economic and financial influence.
- (viii) Reaction to the intrusion of the West and Western ideas on the traditional way of life of indigenous societies;

and in the Middle East particularly,

- (ix) The resentment felt in the oil-producing countries at the exploitation of their main and highly valuable source of wealth by Western Powers.
- (x) The success of the reactionary land-owning class in diverting the discontent of the new urban middle class and *intelligentsia* into anti-Western xenophobic channels.

11. The task of this paper is to discover how Britain can guide the forces of nationalism in areas where we can still exert some control over events into channels of fruitful co-operation. This means adopting policies to meet existing or anticipated Nationalist aspirations which will at the same time safeguard our own vital interests and those of the free world.

### C.—Manifestations of Nationalism

12. While the general trend is clear and simple, the resulting manifestations are widely different. Considering purely the practical problem of risks to British interests, the principal actions which have been or may be taken to our detriment by Nationalist leaders or Governments appear to include any of the following:—

- (i) Insistence on managing their own affairs without the means or ability to do so, including the dismissal of British advisers.
- (ii) Expropriation of British assets.
- (iii) Unilateral denunciation of treaties with the United Kingdom.
- (iv) Claims on British possessions.
- (v) Ganging up against the United Kingdom (and the Western Powers) in the United Nations.

13. Such actions are not mutually exclusive; they may and do occur individually, in series, or in parallel. Nor is there any clear pattern of evolution through which countries or peoples arrive at a stage of nationalism in which these actions occur.

14. Once the forces of nationalism have been allowed to get out of control, it is impossible to foresee what action may not follow. The immediate motives are usually a compound of—

- (i) opposition to paternal restraint, or kicking over the traces;
- (ii) internal discontent and the need to find a scapegoat or distraction;
- (iii) opportunism and desire to cut a figure in international affairs.

15. The timing may be closely related to (ii) above or to a manifestation of weakness by the paternal Power, sometimes both. Given that the ground is prepared, timing may be more directly related to personalities, *e.g.*, to the peculiar brand of patriotism, fanaticism or unscrupulousness with which a Nationalist leader or group of leaders may be imbued.

#### D.—Risks to British Interests

16. The risks to British interests may be divided into—

- (i) politico-economic;
- (ii) politico-strategic;
- (iii) purely political.

17. Obviously, no clear-cut line can be drawn between these variations. The following are examples corresponding to the above categories:—

- (i) Persia: seizure of oil and refinery.  
Argentina: British-owned public utilities driven out of business and sold up.
- (ii) Egypt: denunciation of treaty.  
Spain: claim to Gibraltar.
- (iii) Guatemala: claim to British Honduras.  
Argentina: setting up of Antarctic bases on British territory.

18. These are examples of the steady attempted sapping at our position as a world Power by less developed nations. While some actions hurt us more in the economic and others in the strategic field, the net result is to undermine us politically.

19. Each attempt cuts at our prestige, which is a factor common to our relations with all countries, *e.g.*, the loss of Persian oil directly affects our balance of payments, and hence contributes to world uneasiness as to our financial and economic position: but the general effect is to encourage world-wide speculation as to our ability and readiness to maintain our position as a world Power.

20. As long as this process continues, there is always the danger that a particular blow may set off a chain reaction with incalculable results, affecting not only Great Britain but other Western Powers and thus the stability and strength of the free world.

#### E.—Measures to Maintain our Position

21. Our own difficulties in dealing with nationalism are aggravated because we are compelled, for strategic and other reasons, to maintain solidarity with nations which have a less liberal outlook than ourselves. This can be a cause of embarrassment to us in our Colonial territories and before world opinion.

22. In principle, however, the following methods are open to us to deal with Nationalist behaviour. They need not be considered mutually exclusive:—

- (i) Use of force, either for prolonging occupation or for intervention:—

- (a) *Occupation*.—This applies only to territories where we are already established, either by right of conquest or by treaty. Provided we have the necessary forces, we can in theory always maintain our position. But it is hardly conceivable that in the circumstances of the world to-day we could use force, *e.g.*, to retain a large colony under our administration against the wishes of a majority of its people. Supposing we did so, we should have to bear in mind such factors as: the danger of prolonging occupation by force to the point where it may cast doubt on our real desire to lead dependent peoples to independence; the resources open to our opponents, *e.g.*, appeals to outside assistance, particularly international organisations; and the drain that may result on our own resources.
- (b) *Intervention* (and thence possibly occupation). In special circumstances, it may be possible to justify intervention to prevent the establishment of a Communist régime. Use of force to protect vital British interests or property is often a practical impossibility, but it also has practical limits set by world opinion and international

law. The strongest ground on which intervention is likely to be necessary and justifiable is to save British lives.

- (ii) Threat of force. This is a dangerous method which should only be adopted after the most careful consideration. A bluff which can be called may cost more than throwing in the hand right away. In the case of the United Kingdom, where doubts exist in many countries as to our readiness and ability to use force, the results could be very serious indeed.
- (iii) By trying, where we are losing our influence in the political field, to increase it in the cultural, social and economic fields. This can be done in a general way by spreading Western education and by inculcating the virtues of responsible democracy.
- (iv) By guiding the energies and abilities of nationalist leaders towards co-operation with British interests in the economic field, although economic development can never in fact be a substitute for political development. This method is of particular value in our Colonial territories. It is also applicable to the oil-producing countries of the Middle East, where we should encourage the use of revenues accruing from oil for the development and welfare of the countries concerned with the help of British technical skill, thus, at the same time, providing an increase of opportunities for the educated and the semi-educated.

Other general lines of approach might be:—

- (a) To enlist local governmental support for development schemes to which the United Kingdom might contribute aid. Success here will depend first on our ability to give, *i.e.*, to pay for or find technicians, advisers, material, &c. and secondly, on the willingness of the other country to receive. Without material aid, however, we are unlikely to be successful in many cases, particularly in view of the vastly greater benefits to be obtained from the United

States. Moreover, this course has the disadvantage that infant industries often demand and obtain protection against foreign competition and that we thus risk losing markets for our consumer goods.

- (b) To encourage local participation in British commercial enterprises in foreign countries. This would not only help to satisfy local ambitions, but might to some extent safeguard our own interests by ensuring that the risk-capital involved and higher business posts available are shared with natives of the country concerned. In general this suggests the creation of a vested interest which would be bound to us politically and/or economically.
- (c) To promote co-operation through international solutions: *e.g.*, association in advisory commissions under the authority of a world international organisation, industrial consortia, waterways and land development boards, &c.
- (v) By encouraging generally economic development with a view to raising living standards and reducing poverty and discontent. The benefits which would accrue directly to the countries concerned and indirectly to our relations with them could be hastened if the United States were convinced of the desirability of greater investment through point-four programmes, International Bank loans and other means, public or private. On our side more attention should be paid to the problems of nationalism when deciding on priorities for exports of United Kingdom capital goods.

23. The above measures are listed roughly in the order in which they might be applicable to the various stages of political development reached in territories or states where risks of nationalist action must be faced. But the guiding principles as far as we are concerned must always be:—

- (i) To anticipate and, as far as possible, to forestall by adaptation of existing policies nationalist demands which may threaten our vital interests.

To induce greater maturity of thought in nationalist peoples and leaders, without which any form of co-operation may prove temporary and illusory.

#### F.—Recommendations for Policy

24. In framing our policies we should accept the following basic conclusions:—

- (i) Progress towards sovereign independence is both inevitable and desirable. We are bound to swim with the stream but we can hope to exert influence on the speed at which the current runs, both in general and in specific cases.
- (ii) Since on the one hand nationalism almost invariably contains an actual or potential element of xenophobia, while on the other Great Britain has wider interests in the world than any other nation, we are bound to be the worst sufferers from nationalist activities.
- (iii) Conversely, it is for us to give a lead in dealing with the problem of nationalism. In our highly vulnerable position our aim must be to minimise loss to ourselves and to establish new and fruitful relationships at all stages.
- (iv) While the trend of nationalism is clear, there is no common thread or pattern of nationalist action; hence there is no common pattern of counteraction.
- (v) Encouragement of healthy nationalism both in dependent territories and sovereign states is a traditional British policy, continuation of which is essential to our efforts to safeguard our position as a world Power and to the maintenance of a firm front against Communist infiltration. In pursuing this policy we must pay close attention to the possible repercussions of our actions on the interests of other Western Powers, and hence on our relations with these Powers.
- (vi) We can always hope to deal with satisfied nationalism as, *e.g.*, in India. On the other hand, while it should be our policy to meet nationalist aspirations to the best of our ability, and within the limits imposed by the need to safeguard our own vital interests, we must take care to avoid giving any impression of weakness.

(vii) In adopting attitudes towards nationalist behaviour we shall have to take into account United States opinion, world (*e.g.*, United Nations) opinion, and our own public opinion, probably in that order; although in our Colonial territories our first concern must be to keep Colonial and British opinion in sympathy. We must in any case take care that our behaviour to the people of the countries concerned is free from a detectable assumption of superiority.

(viii) In the present state of world affairs no country or territory is likely to be satisfied for any length of period with any solution that appears to fall short of full sovereignty, not excluding control by an international body or group of nations. But nationalist leaders must be brought to realise that, while full sovereignty is a legitimate and natural aim, it is not the same thing as complete independence or self-sufficiency, the pursuit of which in present world conditions is likely to endanger world peace.

(ix) We are dealing with both Governments and peoples: Governments cannot, even if they wish to, hold out for long against public opinion.

25. If these conclusions are accepted as correct, our policy should be:—

- (i) To keep this general problem under constant review, with special reference to those areas in which our strategic or economic interests are being or might be threatened by nationalist agitation. Attention should be devoted to analysing carefully and with a long-term view actual or potential nationalist aspirations in particular cases, and to considering the best means of drawing the forces of nationalism on to our side: whether, for example, an implied threat of force can still be used: which, if any, of the measures or combination of measures outlined in Section E can be used effectively to ensure the continued co-operation of the country concerned: whether overt or covert measures can be taken to prevent nationalism getting out of control, *e.g.*, by creating a class with a vested interest in co-operation.

- (ii) So to educate the United States Government and public in our ideas of colonial and national development (particularly by emphasising the contribution made by it to combating the spread of communism) that we can rely on obtaining a sympathetic hearing for our interests and requirements and obtain an assurance of their co-operation *vis-à-vis* the country concerned with the United Nations and world opinion. The United States should also be encouraged to provide funds and stimulate investment for economic development and welfare projects in countries where nationalism is, or threatens to become dangerous. The combination of the two great English-speaking Powers could be effective in many instances in checking the more dangerous manifestations of nationalism. Generally speaking, we cannot hope to deal effectively with nationalism where we can be played off against the United States. On the other hand, wherever United States influence is introduced, our own is likely to decline, with consequent danger to the maintenance of our own interests.
- (iii) To try to enlist the support and sympathy in our problems of other members of the Commonwealth, particularly India, Pakistan and Ceylon. At the same time we must not for some time to come expect the non-Anglo-Saxon members of the

Commonwealth to show any eagerness to protect British interests or to support our policies.

- (iv) To seek by consultation with the other Western Powers an agreed policy as far as possible both in regard to nationalism in general and for dealing with specific manifestations, while bearing in mind that any overt or apparent association of this kind would tend to arouse suspicion of our motives.
- (v) To attempt to direct the emotions and aspirations of nationalist leaders towards the creation of the sort of healthy nationalism which is of advantage to the peoples of the countries concerned and with which we can hope to deal: by showing sympathy for their desires for social reforms: by pointing out that self-sufficiency and complete independence are unattainable, even for established and wealthy States, and that pursuit of these aims is likely to endanger world peace: by interesting them in social welfare and economic development projects: and by inculcating in them a sense of responsibility by every means and at every opportunity, *e.g.*, through Her Majesty's Representatives abroad, by co-operation in the United Nations, through consultation on international commissions, &c.

*Foreign Office,  
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