

IMPERIAL DEFENCE

By W. N. EWER

CLAUSEWITZ'S famous dictum that "war is a continuation of policy" is none the less true because it is trite. The problems of strategy and diplomacy are inextricably connected, for they are posed by precisely the same economic and political conditions. The work of a Foreign Office is necessarily linked with the work of the Defence Ministries. The same causes which created the Triple Entente created simultaneously the Committee of Imperial Defence and the Rosyth Dockyard.

So far as the British Empire is concerned the strategical and diplomatic problems of the moment are essentially defensive. Great Britain has in the past been a predatory and expansionist power. She will be so again if strength and opportunity serve. But for the moment she must concentrate on the retention and digestion of her existing possessions. She is unlikely in the near future to attempt aggression—which must not be confused with a tactical offensive—or annexation—unless for the purpose of consolidating defensive positions in a given area. Syria and Persia may be suggested as areas in which such a thing is possible.

The defence of the Empire falls immediately into two categories—defence against external enemies and defence against internal revolt. Of the two the former has become relatively less, the latter relatively more, important than before 1914.

Now the problems of defence against external enemies are determined by two sets of data—the things to be defended and the potential enemies against whom they are to be defended.

Of these the first may be classified as :—

- (1) Great Britain and Ireland.
- (2) The overseas territories.
- (3) Essential lines of communication and trade routes.

Among potential enemies we do not need to include the whole of the sixty odd independent states of the world. There are among them many—indeed a great majority—with whom war is inconceivable (unless as a minor incident in a general conflagration). War with Czecho-slovakia or Paraguay is a physical impos-

sibility. War with Denmark or Bulgaria is a political impossibility : for there are no discoverable causes of serious conflict.

Eliminating all these cases we find as potential enemies a baker's dozen of States of varying strength.

In Europe : France, Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union.

In Asia : Turkey, the Hedjaz, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet, Siam, China, Japan.

In America : the United States.

Now of these, two may be eliminated again. A German war is, for the moment, out of the question for obvious reasons. An American war is equally excluded, for equally obvious reasons. In the one case, Germany is physically incapable of waging war against Great Britain ; in the other, Great Britain is economically incapable of waging war against the United States. Neither eventuality needs to be seriously considered by the military and naval experts.

Of the remaining eleven, France is in a category by itself. It is the only power which, from its geographical position, is capable of striking immediately at the centre of the Empire. A military invasion is probably as impossible as ever. But London is within easy striking distance of the French air squadrons ; every port and every trade route is within easy range of the French submarines. The experience of 1914-1918 is sufficient warning of the potentialities of an Anglo-French war. The prospect involves for both parties so tremendous a risk, such certainty of mutual destruction, that unless under the greatest provocation they dare not hazard it.

Therefore — apart from any other motive — the strategic position makes a continuation of the Anglo-French entente essential. That entente has been seriously strained on occasion since the war. The very fact that it has survived those strains is eloquent of the forces compelling its continuance.

Therefore, though the Imperial General Staff and its affiliated military, naval, and air organisations are compelled—because of the supreme importance of the one in a thousand chance if it were to come off—to study the problems of a French war, to prepare London's air-defences and the like, this is not really a vital

strategic problem of the moment. France may be counted—as in the years before 1914—as an ally, or at the least a benevolent neutral, in any struggle.

We are narrowing the field. We have only left Italy, the Soviet Union and a group of Asiatic countries from Turkey to Japan. The problem is becoming an Eastern one—Eastern and Mediterranean.

Italy we should also be able to exclude were it not for the curiously incalculable character of the existing Italian government. For Italy, dependent upon sea-borne traffic for her fuel and her food, has in the past made it a definite rule of her policy that she cannot afford to quarrel with the nation whose sea-power is still supreme among European states. To blockade Italy would indeed be less easy to-day than in the pre-submarine era. But it should not be impossible. And—except for making Mediterranean traffic difficult by submarine activity off Gibraltar and Port Said—Italy could not retort effectively. Still, there are possibilities in Mussolini's dramatic diplomacy. War with Italy cannot be entirely excluded. But it would only be a serious menace to the Empire if it were associated with trouble in the East; then, indeed, Italian hostility in the Mediterranean would be a danger to be dreaded.

We are left, as the real questions of the day, with the Asiatic States. And not one of them (save Siam, powerlessly compressed between British and French territory) can be ruled out of the class of possible enemies. The central problem of Imperial defence against external enemies becomes visible as primarily an Asiatic problem. And be it noted that it is precisely in Asia (including Egypt and the Sudan) that the twin problem—of defence against internal revolt—is a serious one. In the self-governing Dominions that problem is non-existent. In the tropical African colonies it does not yet seriously exist, though it may come into very real being within the next few decades. The other Crown Colonies are too small and scattered to be of considerable moment.

Asia—and Australia, which neighbours it very closely—are the crux of the whole question. The protection and retention of that band of Imperial territory which stretches with a few breaks

from the Libyan Desert to the great Barrier Reef is the first and immediate task both of British strategy and of British diplomacy.

Of the Asiatic states which neighbour that territory, four—the Hedjaz, Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet—are important by reason of geographical situation rather than of their military strength. They may be fields of operation. They may operate as allies or instruments either for the British Empire or against it. They take their place, and a by no means insignificant place, in the strategic complex. But they are subordinate, not principal, factors. The principal factors are the four remaining states—the Soviet Union, Turkey, China and Japan. Of these, two are strong military powers, one may rapidly become so ; the fourth is a first-class naval power.

Military defence must be provided against Turkey in Iraq, against the Soviet Union both in Iraq and on the Indian North-West Frontier, against China on the Burmese North-East Frontier. Naval defence against Japan must be provided for Australia, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies (for whose protection—owing to the close inter-connection of the Dutch and British capitalist interests and the naval weakness of Holland—this country tacitly accepts responsibility). In addition there are the lines of communication to be safeguarded and preparations made for counter-attacks.

Here then, stripped of all unessential and less essential things, are the central key-matters of the problem. The British Empire is organised primarily for war, not in Europe, not in America or Africa, but in Southern Asia.

The distribution of its armed forces is in close accordance with the requirements of this purpose.

Take the Army first. There are some 90,000 British troops outside the British Isles. Of these—apart from those who are temporarily and for purely historical reasons on the Rhine—all but a single battalion and a few garrison artillery units are in Southern Asia or on its lines of communication.

India with its 60,000 is of course the main centre of concentration. The rest are in the strategic points to East and West from Gibraltar to Hong Kong : Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Aden, Ceylon, the Straits, China.

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The distribution of the Air Force tells the same story. There are $27\frac{1}{2}$ squadrons at home, $18\frac{1}{2}$ abroad. Of those abroad, 6 are in India, 8 in Iraq, 4 in Egypt and Palestine, the half-squadron in Aden.

The Fleet : one cruiser squadron in the West Indies on the Panama Canal route to Australia ; one in S. Africa on the Cape route ; one in Indian, one in Chinese waters ; and in the Mediterranean a battle squadron, two cruiser squadrons and four destroyer flotillas.

The naval concentration, it will be noticed, is less definitely Eastern than the military. But even this is temporary. So soon as the new bases—Trincomali, Singapore, Port Darwin—are ready, we shall see a big shifting of naval strength to the East.

Indeed, just as Rosyth was the outward and visible sign of the politico-military situation before the war, so Singapore is the outward and visible sign of the new situation. Germany was the certain naval enemy then. Japan (leaving aside for the moment the incalculable Mussolini) is the most probable naval enemy now. And the East—from India to Tasmania and New Zealand—is nakedly open to Japanese attack unless an adequate base exists from which the opposing fleet can work. Singapore, one may note, is the obvious site for such a base. Hong Kong is untenable against land attack unless Kowloon be guarded by elaborate fortifications and a large field army. Singapore is easily defended and supplied, and in as perfect a geographical situation as can be imagined. A battle squadron and two or three cruiser squadrons there, with Trincomali and Port Darwin as subsidiary bases, is the preparation for the possibility of a Japanese war.

We turn to the defence problems of the Asiatic continental frontiers.

The problem of India's North-Western frontier defences is one which has been worked out a hundred times. But if you need evidence that it is being again anxiously studied, note the new Khyber railway, the building of aerodromes near the frontier, the strenuous experimenting with cross-country motor transport, to which the Maharaja of Bardwan makes not over-discreet reference in the published report of the very discreet, formal discussion on Defence in the Imperial Conference. And if you need evidence

that the problem of the North-Eastern or Chinese frontier is now being taken seriously, note the recent tour of the Commander-in-Chief and the sudden interest taken in the tribes of that tangled area of jungle and mountain which abuts on Szechwan and the upper waters of the Yang-tse.

But perhaps of all these troop, ship and 'plane distributions the most interesting is the concentration of air squadrons in Iraq. The official explanation that an air-garrison is cheaper than troops will scarcely hold good. Else why not substitute 'planes for troops in Egypt as well? The fact of course is that for strategic purposes the Middle East and its garrisons are one. In the event of trouble, troops from Egypt could be in Iraq in a few days, troops from Gibraltar and Malta in Egypt, from home in Gibraltar and Malta. But it is deemed advisable that the army should be concentrated in Egypt, in the centre of the lines of communication, and the air force concentrated in Iraq. Why?

The answer is to be sought in the final problem of attack. Of the four important potential enemies three—Japan, China, Turkey—are exposed to damaging attack from the sea. The fourth—the Soviet Union—is (unless big risks be taken in sending a fleet through the Straits) immune from sea attack in any vital spot.

But—from Mosul to Batoum is only 500 miles; from Mosul to Baku little more. The Transcaucasian oil-fields—perhaps the most vital economic centre in all Russia—are as open to attack from the Mosul air-bases as was London to attack from the German air-bases during the Great War.

That is the real significance of the air-force concentration and of the preparation of air-force bases in Iraq: that, also, is the real significance of our determination to keep Mosul at any cost.

The British strategy for a Russian war is based upon the plan of holding the Indian frontier defensively, while hammering Baku and Batoum by air from Mosul.

Singapore for naval action against China or Japan; Mosul for air action against Russia. Egypt as central military station for the whole Middle East.

Everything is being got ready. The strategic indications reinforce the diplomatic. Great Britain is making all preparation for the great war in Southern Asia.

GREAT BRITAIN AND CHINA

A Study in Revolutionary Development

By RALPH FOX

THE appearance of the Labour Research Department's booklet on British imperialism in China is an important occasion.¹ The book tells the story of as strange an adventure in the annals of piratical imperialism as has yet been unfolded, and it is for the first time. There have been no end of books on China, but this is the first to give in detail the whole story of one of the most astonishing facts in history ; the wanton destruction of a huge empire by a concert of Great Powers and its division and subjection for the profit of capitalist imperialism. True, China has been conquered before, but the invaders have either receded or been assimilated. This is the first time they have deliberately remained outside the life of the Chinese people and interfered in Chinese affairs simply and solely for the purpose of making money.

The book is short, and necessarily suffers a little from compression, but nevertheless it succeeds in giving an excellent picture of this conquest and the leading part played in it by Great Britain. It gives, moreover, a very clear picture of the forces at work behind the great national movement of liberation which is to-day challenging the whole system of slavery represented by capitalist imperialism. The strength and the implications of the Chinese revolution are for the first time explained in full to English people, for the book goes much deeper and contains far more detail than the recently published pamphlet of Colonel Malone.

The adventure, as every schoolboy knows now, began, so far as Great Britain is concerned, with opium. The East India Company had for long carried on an opium trade with China, which various Chinese governments tried without success to control. In 1839, and again in 1856, attempts to stop the opium trade at Canton

¹ *British Imperialism in China*. (Labour Research Department. Imperialism Series, No. III.)