

“COMMON FOUNDATION” OF WESTERN POLICY

IS THE TRIPARTATE DECLARATION STILL VALID?

By Walter Zander

Whilst the merits of the Baghdad Pact are hotly contested, Government and Opposition in Great Britain agree, and the United States confirm, that the Tripartite Declaration is the one common foundation of Western policy in the Middle East. Clarity about its content is therefore imperative.

The Declaration, issued in May 1950 by Britain, France and America, proclaims two aims: firstly, to keep the supply of arms in the area at a low level and, secondly, to prevent a new outbreak of hostilities between Israel and the Arab States by immediate joint action of the Western Powers “*both within and without the United Nations.*”

Overtaken by events: At the time of its enunciation the achievement of both aims was probably within the power of the three governments. The authority and special position of the Western countries in the Middle East was generally recognised and strong forces were available on the spot to deal immediately with every emergency. Since then the situation has changed profoundly.

The rationing of arms, introduced by the West, is no longer effective since the Soviet bloc has opened a free supply, although this is limited at present to one side only. The monopoly of the West in the supply of arms - the very foundation of its control - no longer exists. This part of the Declaration, therefore, has been overtaken by events which were not foreseen by its authors.

A new situation has arisen which requires a new appraisal, and Israel's request for arms must be dealt with in the light of these changes.

Changed world conditions: As for the prevention of hostilities the Declaration distinguishes between actions within and without the United Nations. For the former the rules of procedure are laid down in the Charter. But difficulties arise concerning the latter. Does the Declaration mean diplomatic and economic actions only, or does it envisage unilateral military intervention by the Western Powers in case of emergency?

It can be assumed that the question was left open purposely to adjust the action to changing circumstances ; and circumstances have changed indeed. A British Army no longer stands at Suez. Farouk is replaced by a revolutionary government. Abdullah is dead and the British position in Jordan shaken. Abadan is evacuated. Cyprus - then an idyll of peace - is the scene of bitter strife. France has suffered grievous injury in Indochina and is deeply engaged in

Northern Africa. The Korean War - not yet begun when the Declaration was issued - has led to international stalemate. In Africa and Asia mighty national forces struggle for freedom from the remnants of Western rule and the Arab-Asian peoples have secured powerful influence in the United Nations.

What kind of intervention? All these changes will have to be considered when a decision on military intervention is made. It may be that the decision is different according to which of the two sides begins the fight. If as a remote possibility Israel refused to wait till the Arabs completed their build-up and embarked in desperation on a preventive war, as some parties in the Knesset were inclined to suggest, military action by the West might be possible without the risk of a major conflagration, although in this case diplomatic and economic measures might be regarded as sufficient to stop the fighting.

What, however, is the situation if the fight is started by the Arabs? It is probably safe to assume that in this case Israel can count on diplomatic and economic support by the Western Powers, including the supply of arms, and the value of such support should not be underrated. But a military intervention by the West is a different matter. Its repercussions would be incalculable, quite apart from the problem of deciding where the forces necessary for immediate action were to be found.

A “temporary measure”: Is Iraq likely to remain inactive in this case, or would she join her brother Arabs and thus bring down the Baghdad Pact? What would be the effect on Pakistan and on North Africa? Moreover, Russia has formally announced that the despatch of troops into the Middle East would concern her interests and, if undertaken without the consent of the Security Council, “*would be a gross violation of the United Nations Charter.*” It is almost certain that as a result of her veto the Security Council would refuse to sanction such unilateral military intervention by the Western Powers.

Under these conditions, can the Tripartite Declaration be considered an effective guarantee?

In fact, the Declaration was never more than an attempt to preserve the status quo. It is a temporary measure to avoid a further deterioration but it is not a policy, and a mistake about this would be a dangerous self-deception.

A new and more constructive approach to the problem of the Middle East has to be found both by the West and by Israel.