

Britain and the U.S.: another Suez showdown?

by Christopher White

Only a year ago it was unthinkable, according to some, that the United States would not back up Britain's military invasion of the Malvinas Islands. The integrity of the free world, the values of the alliance, the principles of self-determination were at stake. How quickly things change. Now, it is the British who are vociferous in their opposition to President Reagan's pre-emptive action against the Soviet and Cuban base Grenada. The British, who so hypocritically put their special relationship with the Russians ahead of their alliance with the United States, declaim against the President's forceful action as an attack on their Queen, who, they say, is the head of state of the Caribbean Island.

Behind all their fuss about the President's action what is really going on? British headlines speak of an "Anglo-U.S. Rift on Invasion," an "Ill-Judged Adventure," and how "Reagan Defied Thatcher Plea, Parliament Angered at U.K. Failure to Restrain U.S." "The Worst Crisis Since Suez," says the London *Guardian*, referring to the time Eisenhower brought down the government of Anthony Eden over the joint British-French adventure in the Middle East.

Have matters gone that far this time? Not quite, as the British would say, but it does rather look as if things might be moving in that direction.

Let's review a few facts which readily show that the special relationship between Washington and London is at about its lowest ebb since the Suez crisis. On the surface of things Her Majesty's government was not officially informed of what the United States was going to do until after the United States had done it. Consultations were held over the

weekend, with Prime Minister Maggie Thatcher advising against military action, for reasons she has yet to specify. Meanwhile Britain worked through members of the Caribbean community over the weekend to try to deflect action into the impotent route of procedures such as sanctions, while simultaneously working with the Cubans and Soviets to bolster the Austin government, which had been imposed by a Soviet-organized coup and assassination.

The Austin government appealed to Britain and Cuba for assistance to defend its "independence and sovereignty" from "imminent foreign invasion." The Cubans responded by sending in troop reinforcements which arrived the morning of Oct. 24; the British by organizing a diplomatic operation against the United States. But by the morning of Oct. 24 British Foreign Secretary Howe was still defending the Austin government. "Whatever we do we must remember that Grenada is an independent nation and that comes first," he said. The Foreign Secretary was publicly following the line of the government imposed by the Soviet organized coup.

Perhaps for this reason the British government was not officially informed in advance. Perhaps also because the British have not been over-enthusiastic about their assignment in Lebanon with the multi-national peace-keeping force, but have sought ways to disengage.

The majority in Britain's leading circles share the views associated with Peter Lord Carrington, who has modeled himself on the limp example of his predecessors Neville Chamberlain, Lord Halifax, and Neville Henderson, the men who thought there would be "peace in our time," if only



Britain's Sir Anthony Eden was forced to resign as prime minister after U.S. President Eisenhower intervened to stop Britain's attempt to re-take the Suez Canal from Egypt.

enough was given to Adolf Hitler. From the standpoint of the United States a Suez-style cleanup of the British government this time around would be designed to chop the faction around Lord Carrington down to size, perhaps to give Thatcher a second term as prime minister freed from the encumbrance of unhealthy influences in the Foreign Office.

The circles around Ronald Reagan, as has become increasingly clear since the Shiite massacre of U.S. Marines in Beirut, disagree with Carrington's assessment that the Soviets can be negotiated with as Hitler was "negotiated with" between 1936 and September 1939. Carrington's thesis on the Soviets was laid out most recently in a speech before the August conference of the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) reprinted in the *NATO Review*. He argues, against the White House, that Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) should remain the basis for alliance strategy while arms-control negotiations are pursued with the Soviets. He, slyly, would insert himself between the two superpowers, weakening the United States, while ignoring what the Russians are actually doing around the world. His approach, as befits the controller of Henry Kissinger, is thus not exactly straightforward. In fact he is as much of a two-faced liar as was Alexander Haig, who was fired from the U.S. State Department for exactly that reason.

Carrington, and the forces he represents in Europe, determined that the best position for his Lordship to carry out his role would be as secretary-general of NATO, replacing the outgoing Dutchman Joseph Luns. Failing that, it has been proposed in the United States by Kissinger associates like

Joseph Sisco, and in Europe, that Carrington be appointed a special plenipotentiary negotiator for the Middle East.

In early October it was reported that Carrington's appointment to the first position was assured, only the Belgians and the Spanish were said to oppose it, and an announcement was days away. Yet the announcement has still not been made. Unaccounted for by the European promoters of the scheme, who undoubtedly know and do not care that Carrington's tenure at NATO would hand the reins of power in Europe and the Middle East to the Russians, is the question where the White House stands. Recent treatment of the Foreign Office and Thatcher government shows clearly enough. Carrington's influence, seen in Margaret Thatcher's recent Winston Churchill Foundation speech in Washington, and in her ill-advised handling of the Lebanon and Grenada crises, is not appreciated in Washington.

It is becoming increasingly obvious in light of the contrast between Britain's behavior now, and Britain's behavior during the Malvinas crisis, that the result of the degraded subservience of British policy to the Russians has been to undercut U.S. influence everywhere. This is seen in one way in regard to the British majority view of the Soviets, and the consequence of that, as in the Middle East. It is seen in another way, for example, in Latin America, where British policy has been designed to make it impossible for the United States to repair the damage that was done by its dumb support for British violation of international law, including the Monroe doctrine, during the Malvinas War.

Thus, the misguided Thatcher now opposes U.S. efforts to for example, resume arms supplies to Argentina, and is therefore trying to drive Argentina toward the Soviet Union. Siding with the Swiss the British are endeavoring to force the weight of the collapsing international monetary crisis to fall on the United States, as shown in their handling of the Brazilian crisis. They have threatened to expand conflict in Central America, by pulling their troops out of Belize, and they have demanded that the United States cut its budget, which actually means the defense budget. None of these are behind-the-scenes rumblings, but have all been brought up in discussions between President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher. It would perhaps not be stretching things too far to say that such public disagreements, building up over the weeks, contributed significantly to American loss of confidence in the efficacy of the so-called special relationship, and the humiliation to Britain that was administered.

If the White House has decided to leave Carrington among the ranks of the euphemistically self-employed, then the present British majority will have some tough decisions to make. That is they will have to decide whose side they are on, for Carrington's third way perch will have been sawed off. Would they then follow the recent recommendations of Anthony Wedgwood Benn and Enoch Powell, advocates of a British break with the United States, and learn how to say "non-aligned" in Russian, or would they rejoin the mainstream of Western civilization, abandoning geopolitical pipedreams about the East in the process?