

Vulcans over the African Volcano

B. R. Mann

SPREAD over almost half the back page of *The Times* there appeared on June 10th, 1960, a photograph of what at first sight looked like a butterfly on a rose. The headline and caption soon made one realise, however, that the butterfly was a British Vulcan bomber and the rose the snowy ridges of Mount Kilimanjaro, on the borders of Kenya and Tanganyika.

What is a nuclear bomber doing in East Africa?

The Times special correspondent appears to know all about it; he was privileged actually to make a flight in a Vulcan from the Finningley R.A.F. base via Cyprus and Libya to Nairobi, 9,960 miles to Kenya and back on time, he proudly reports.

He was hardly accorded this singular privilege merely to boost a technical record. Vulcan bombers are equipped to carry the *Blue Steel* "stand-off" nuclear bomb which can be released from up to 400 miles from target. The range of these bombs is being constantly increased; the bombers can be fitted with the American *Skybolt*; even more efficient machines are coming off the drawing boards: vertical take-off aircraft, supersonic bombers, a whole arsenal of means of delivering nuclear war-heads each one of which can deal death to millions of people at one blow.

The Vulcan flight to Kenya was publicised a bare three weeks after the Western powers had engineered the breakdown of the Summit Conference and while the British people were shocked at the rumour that British nuclear planes *might* engage in joint round-the-clock nuclear patrols with the United States Air Force. But, as the *Times* Defence Correspondent calmly explained four days later, Britain had a much better and less expensive way of its own of effecting the same thing, and, what is more, *had been practising it for some considerable time.*

Britain's method is to conceal the whereabouts of its nuclear bomber force by sending a part of it on random flights from one end of the empire to the other. Such flights "*are regularly carried out along the normal troopng routes to the Far East (using the R.A.F. staging point at Gan) and Africa. . . . In May a Valiant bomber flew non-stop from Norfolk to Singapore, having twice re-fuelled in the air en route . . . it seems likely that V bombers going overseas on training flights will normally carry their nuclear weapons with them. . . .* The Commonwealth offers

obvious opportunities for dispersal, *of which the R.A.F. already make use.*"

Out of sight, out of sound, at any time of day or night, R.A.F. planes may be flying their deadly cargo over the heads of countless millions of unsuspecting people.

For what purpose?

We have been led to believe that it is necessary for Britain to possess nuclear bombs for the sake of "defence", of "deterring" a "potential aggressor". With that beautiful play of words that come so easily to the lips of gentlemen trained in Eton or Harrow, the ordinary people of Britain are persuaded that it is their safety which is the unceasing concern of Tory nuclear strategy.

Yet when this strategy was first openly ventilated in the House of Commons on February 13th, 1957, Mr. Sandys, then Minister of Defence, raised a strange question:

"A difficult question to decide is how much of the effort should be devoted to the air defence of Britain".

Only two months later, in the White Paper on Defence published on April 5th, 1957, the point was put already in a much stronger form; it explained that the new strategy was based on the "frank recognition that there is at present no means of providing adequate protection for the people of this country against the consequences of an attack with nuclear weapons".

In point of fact, no thought of the defence of Britain can be discovered in the provisions of the White Papers or any other authoritative statements on military policy. The theory that the nuclear strategy was intended as a "deterrent" did not hold water even when it might still be assumed that the expression "potential aggressor" could, for example, refer to a power like Western Germany. But already the 1957 White Paper put any such thought out of the minds of the naive. It said:

"The time has now come to revise not merely the size *but the whole character* of the defence plan. The *communist threat remains*, but its nature has changed; and it is now evident that both on military and economic grounds it is necessary to make a fresh appreciation of the problem and to adopt a new attitude towards it. . . ."

In this oblique form the enemy against whom the

new strategy was directed was now officially named as communism, that is to say, since military strategy is a question of state, the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries.

Whatever Tory *propaganda* may say about the intentions of the Soviet Union, Mr. Macmillan cannot plead ignorance of the fact that communism does not have to be deterred from launching nuclear war upon the world, that its policy is peaceful co-existence. The obvious purpose of the deterrent theory is therefore to blunt the impact of the announcement and to disarm popular opposition, to condition the public mind to passive acceptance of the "new approach".

Any faint hope that this "new approach" might contain an element at least of response to the growing popular desire for a relaxation of tension, some degree of disarmament or disengagement, not to mention peaceful coexistence, is dispelled by an attentive reading of the White Paper and the speeches with which it was introduced. Already Mr. Duncan Sandys hinted darkly at measures "which would be desirable *should the deterrent fail*". Mr. Macmillan in his summing up of the debate on April 17th said:

"... it is clear that not only must forces be made mobile by the provision of modern transport, but they must be armed and backed by *the most effective weapons available*. Therefore, whether we like it or not, *the decision on weapons governs the whole issue*. . . . The fundamental decision which the House must face, without vacillation, is whether or not the nuclear deterrent is to form *the basis* of British defence planning."

From the moment that the House, after a feeble show of opposition by the Labour Party, made that decision there could no longer be any doubt that what was being prepared was a total nuclear attack on the Soviet Union on the part of Britain, whatever any other power might be doing. Mr. Macmillan sometimes speaks with two voices, his military planners never.

In search of a base

Even if it had been more thinly disguised, such an idea would have struck the majority of the ordinary British people as too fantastically mad to be credible. The propaganda by which their eyes and ears are daily assaulted has accustomed them to think of Britain as a "third rate" power, a poor country which has lost, or is about to lose, her empire, the mainstay of her former greatness. Only madmen could conceive of competing in nuclear power with the United States, which boasts not only of possessing enough nuclear bombs to destroy the world several times over but instead of a small and vulnerable island has a whole continent for its base.

A moment's reflection will show, however, that the American boast is a little out of focus. The

fundamental point at issue is the almost inconceivable destructive power of the individual nuclear bomb. The atomic bombs which destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki are today classed as small stuff, "tactical" weapons in military parlance. The "strategic" bombs, including Britain's "poor man's" hydrogen bomb, are of such a destructive power that quite a small number of them would suffice to put a large area of the world out of action as a going concern in the first "nuclear strike". (Less than a dozen would do for Britain.)

The vulnerability of the British base was therefore the main problem which engaged the planners of the nuclear strike. In the speech already quoted above where Mr. Sandys raised the question of the measures "which would be desirable *should the deterrent fail*", he mused:

Should the Navy provide an element in the deterrent—in other words, was the use of carrier-borne aircraft contemplated as part of Britain's nuclear bombing effort? To what extent should naval forces be provided for roles which did not contribute directly to the deterrent? In particular, how much effort should be devoted to providing naval forces to protect Atlantic communications against the threat of Soviet submarines? How soon after the outbreak of full-scale nuclear war might one expect that shipping across the Atlantic could be resumed? After the initial attack, would the harbours of Britain and Western Europe still be usable? Had one to assume that when the first all-out phase was over, there would follow a second phase, sometimes described as "broken-back" war in which operations at sea would play a major part? . . . In addition, consideration had to be given as to what naval forces Britain needed for more limited operations and other duties in distant theatres where the Navy and its mobile air power had an important role to play.

Mr. Sandys did not "at this stage" purport to answer these suggestive questions. But he was certainly weighing up the possibilities of a situation conceived as a perfectly real prospect with a cool and calculating mind.

One should not allow the shock of such a ghastly prospect being considered at all to obscure the deliberate artlessness with which the mind of the hearer is directed away from Britain and Western Europe to the wide open seas, to distant theatres, to the Navy and its mobile air power. Nor should the casual reference to "more limited operations and other duties" be taken at its face value. Every single step subsequently taken to implement the nuclear strategy, including the flights of the Vulcans, has shown that Mr. Sandys' purpose was to prepare the way for a new conception of the material base for the nuclear strike, a base of world-wide dimensions.

East of Suez

With remarkable promptness suggestions for new bases were coming forward. On March 4th a Colonel Fitzgerald from Nairobi started a correspondence in *The Times* in which quite a number of more eminent persons, including Members of Parliament Geoffrey de Freitas, Hugh Frazer, Frederic Gough, joined. Correctly following Mr. Sandys' gaze they fixed their attention in the direction "East of Suez".

"I cannot think why the British Government bothers about having military bases in Cyprus, Libya, etc., when these bases might be so easily transferred to Kenya. . . . Kenya, being midway, so to speak for any future military operations which are likely to occur in the future in the east. Not only does Kenya stand out as a military base, but also as a naval base as well, where there is the best deep-sea harbour on the east coast of Africa. . . . I cannot think of any other place east of Suez which compares more favourably as a base than Kenya," the Colonel wrote.

Summing up the correspondence, *The Times* wrote editorially on March 13th, 1957:

" . . . there is already a marginal strategic case to be made for a base in Kenya. Events elsewhere might make it compelling."

The article recalled that the idea was first propounded after the war when Palestine was about to be evacuated and an early withdrawal from the Canal zone seemed likely, and that it had the support of Field Marshal Montgomery. But the paper did not share the illusions of the Colonel that it would be so easy. The first determined attempt to establish a base in Kenya in 1952, when the cruiser *Kenya* steamed into Mombasa harbour and disgorged the troops for "Operation Jack Scott" had foundered on the resistance of the Kikuyu. The result was a sanguinary colonial war, in which eleven thousand Africans lost their lives. One in every four adult Kikuyu men were either killed or thrown into the concentration camps, which had originally been intended as barracks for the British base. The end of that war had only just come in sight with the hanging of the resistance leader Dedan Kimathi.

In weighing up the pros and cons, however, the article made some telling remarks which gave further shape to the new strategic concept. "The trend now is to rely on home-based, air transported units for the strategic reserve. The transport aircraft need staging points to alight on, although the increasing range of modern types makes this consideration progressively less important . . . a training base somewhere in a hot climate remains necessary to the Army. . . . To the Navy, Mombasa is a tempting haven on the Indian Ocean. But they still have the use of Simonstown and Aden. Moreover, Britain's juridical status in Mombasa can be chal-

lenged. The claims of Kenya have therefore to be weighed carefully against those of Cyprus, which is admittedly on the wrong side of the Middle East barrier, and Aden, which is now in the frontline."

Evidently, the Indian Ocean is here considered to be on the right side of the Middle East barrier. Most of us will need to have their atlas handy to grasp the full significance of this.

The Indian Ocean is that large sheet of water which extends along the whole length of the Asian continent, from the Arabian Peninsula to Australia, due south of all points in the countries of socialism, and on all sides fringed by countries of the Commonwealth and Empire.

From Kriegsverein to Nuclear Club

In presenting the Naval Estimates on April 26th, 1957, Mr. Soames, Parliamentary Secretary, Admiralty, stressed that the modern aircraft carrier provided a unique instrument for carrying out the Government's aim of being able to deploy aircraft power to meet emergencies anywhere in the Commonwealth. The Government visualised the Navy "as a number of carrier task forces, each consisting of one carrier armed with the most modern aircraft weapons that can be procured, a cruiser, and a number of destroyers and frigates for protection both from the air and from the sea". No other organisation could be so self-sufficient, mobile and versatile, and its mobility had "the added merit that the Navy did not need to remain permanently poised in any potential trouble centre—an ever present irritation to local susceptibilities".

This recurrent theme of caution was dictated by the post-Suez crisis and the circumstances under which the Macmillan Government had come into being. At no time have the Commonwealth bonds been so close to breaking point as after the abortive Suez aggression. India, already alienated by the war against Kenya, had taken the neutralist line and played a leading role at the Bandung Conference of Asian and African nations. Few would have been surprised if after Suez she had broken with the Commonwealth altogether. Ceylon gave Britain notice to quit the bases in Trincomalee and Katunayake. An incautious remark of Mr. Duncan Sandys which suggested that nuclear weapons might be stored in Malaya prompted energetic official protests even from that quarter. The first Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference called by Mr. Macmillan did not promise to be a great success, and it was not even pretended afterwards that it had been.

The *Daily Telegraph* complained in an editorial: "Much is uncertain and ill-defined in the Commonwealth of 1957. . . . It is no longer a single defence community whose solidarity could be counted on in case of war. . . . The British desire to

disperse nuclear forces and potential in Commonwealth bases can be satisfied only by frankly recognising a new fact: that an inner circle of defence arrangements is being formed within the broader circle of Commonwealth associations, a nuclear club within the political club" (22.6.57).

When we consider the idyllic picture of the Commonwealth and the mythical bonds which allegedly hold it together that is commonly presented to the public it would seem strange that such an outrageous suggestion as the use of Commonwealth territories for the purpose of nuclear warfare by one of its members should even be made. Yet the attitude of the *Daily Telegraph* has a basis in the original purpose of the institution.

When at Queen Victoria's first jubilee in 1887 all the Prime Ministers of what were then the self-governing colonies were assembled in London they were invited to the first conference of this kind. Lord Salisbury, the Queen's Prime Minister, explained that the purpose was "to form neither a general union nor a *Zollverein*" (customs union) "but a *Kriegsverein*" (war alliance), "a combination for purposes of self-defence".

If the choice of the Bismarckian phrases was congenial to the times of unashamed empire building, the term "nuclear club" might be regarded as an apt modernisation of the English translation. At all events, Mr. Macmillan must be regarded as the heir of the Salisbury tradition of the expansion of England, the Commonwealth and the Empire. For he was first inflicted on the British people as Prime Minister not as the result of a general election but through the medium of that august institution, the Privy Council, which has a membership of several hundred but a *quorum* of only three, and the man who carried the day against the wishes even of his own party was none other than the present Marquess of Salisbury.

Commonwealth base for nuclear strike

The problem of turning the Commonwealth into a base for the nuclear strike would have daunted any man of less expansionist ambition than Mr. Macmillan possesses. He had, into the bargain, two close associates of the same persuasion whom he appointed to key positions over the heads of men whom his party thought more deserving of high office. Mr. Duncan Sandys became Minister of Defence, Lord Home Minister for Commonwealth relations. In themselves these appointments show the intimate relationship between the new strategy and the reliance on the Commonwealth as its base.

All through 1957 the "danger" of peaceful co-existence was becoming more and more acute. "Disengagement" was in the air, and the year 1958 opened with the exchange of friendly letters between

Mr. Khrushchov and President Eisenhower which portended a rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the U.S.S.R.

Simultaneously, and it appears somewhat precipitately, Mr. Macmillan announced his plans for touring the Commonwealth members of the Indian ocean area.

Towards the end of the trip, on February 5th, he made a speech in Melbourne which in retrospect is seen to have had more than ordinary significance. The *Manchester Guardian* headed its report of it "Going it alone". In it Mr. Macmillan said:

"I believe it is in the interests of the whole free world that Britain should have the authority that comes with being a first-class nuclear power. But we do not wish to make all the various types of nuclear weapons which are being and will be evolved. We do not wish to compete with the United States in developing an endless succession of ever more elaborate weapons. . . ."

British forces, he said, might become engaged in operations—either police [sic.] operations such as in Kenya, or a limited war such as in Korea—in which for a time at any rate they might be engaged alone. The naval forces east of Suez would be a task force consisting of a carrier and supporting forces based on Singapore "capable, if need arises, of acting alone". This did not exclude a major war in south-east Asia in which Britain would be acting with S.E.A.T.O. countries.

Apparently fortified by the success of his journey, he already felt in the position to utter this open challenge to the United States, in case President Eisenhower should wish to go "too far" in his negotiations with the Soviet Union, and at the same time to claim the Indian Ocean as a British lake, with all the strategic advantages of the inner position.

Mr. Macmillan rounded his speech off with a remark which betrayed the drift of his talks in India. The Commonwealth's task, he said, was to counter not only military aggression but political and economic penetration and to prevent uncommitted countries from going over to the Communist camp. There was a part to play by Commonwealth countries which had decided not to join military groupings. *India, above all, could exert powerful influence over uncommitted countries.*

This speech may well be said to mark a turning point in the affairs of the Commonwealth. From this time onwards Britain's hold on the Commonwealth countries slowly but steadily increased.

Lord Salisbury used the threat of German expansion and gunboat diplomacy to weld the self-governing colonies into the *Kriegsverein*; Mr. Macmillan is using the fear of Communism and the diplomacy of the aircraft carrier to keep the Commonwealth together and expand the nuclear club.

But the temper of feeling against the menace of nuclear war is such that he has to walk very warily. To what extent even the leading statesmen of some of the Commonwealth countries are aware of all the implications of the Macmillan-Sandys-Home strategy can only be surmised.

An example of the length to which the concealment of its true purposes can be carried by the use of the obscure military slang in which words take on the meaning of their opposite were the negotiations over the Cyprus base. During the whole course of these protracted talks the word "nuclear" was not whispered once. Was the British side trusting that by now everyone concerned would have forgotten that the 1957 White Paper provided for bomber squadrons based on Cyprus capable of delivering nuclear weapons?

Africa the key link

This kind of deception has been tried very hard in Kenya, but without conspicuous success. Mr. Blundell, hailed as "Blundell of Kenya" only a short eighteen months ago, receded into the limbo of forgotten things once he made the establishment of a British base—no mention of nuclear purposes—part of his programme. Press attempts are now being made to resurrect him, and all mention of the base is being studiously avoided. Lord Mountbatten, just arrived in Kenya, made a point of assuring his first press conference that he had come "with no nuclear bases up my sleeve".

African opinion has been thoroughly alarmed at the underhand way in which, in spite of such gratuitous assurances, the military build-up in Kenya has been progressing during the past year, particularly the use of Nairobi's civil airport for the Vulcan flights. Kenya's experiences of the British military have been too searing ever to be forgotten, from the time when Colonel Meinertzhagen gratified his bloodlust there to the days of Captain Griffiths.

There is no chance of African resistance to foreign military bases on the soil of their continent ever being broken, either in Kenya or in other parts of Africa. On this point feeling in Nigeria, for instance, is so strong that during the last constitutional negotiations in May the British side was forced to disclaim all intentions of establishing a base there. Not even the proposed "Defence agreement", which involved such innocent sounding arrangements as the "mutual (!) granting of staging points" could be got through before independence. And after independence it will have to be published, discussed and laid before the Nigerian Parliament. Mr. Macmillan himself does not rate the chances of it passing this public scrutiny very high, if one may judge by his appointment of Mr. Antony Head as British High Commissioner in the Federation of Nigeria, together with the award of a Viscounty.

But this appointment is a shrewd move. The former Defence Minister is an opponent of the nuclear strategy, and as such found no place in Macmillan's cabinet. In his letter of appointment Mr. Macmillan offered him the plums of future office as an inducement if he acquitted himself well of his delicate task. "This post in Lagos is one to which I attach cardinal importance for the future," the letter says. ". . . I feel that with your wisdom and experience the United Kingdom High Commission in Lagos could exert a decisive and favourable influence. . . ."

It is a measure of the vital importance of Africa to the nuclear strategy. For it is all very well to talk of mobility and dispersal, of permanently airborne bombers, of re-fuelling them in flight, of aircraft carriers perambulating the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean—still there remains the problem of the material base on solid ground from which alone any war machine can be fed. The huge continental mass of Africa, on the west of the Indian Ocean, containing all the raw materials of nuclear war, is the indispensable base for the nuclear strike across the Indian Ocean and its land-link with the Atlantic.

How clearly these considerations are in the minds of the nuclear strategists was shown on the occasion of an African Regional Road Congress held in Salisbury, Rhodesia, at the end of May 1957. Sir Ernest Guest, former Rhodesian Defence Minister, was the chairman, and it discussed the construction of a strategic highway stretching from Cape Town to Kenya, a distance of 3,500 miles, as the first step in realising the long debated plans for the "defence" of Africa south of the Sahara, at a cost of £28 million. The *Daily Telegraph* of June 5th, 1957, reported that "it was explained to member countries as a tourist project".

The disguise was, however, more than usually thin. The *Telegraph* correspondent went on: "There is no doubt it corresponds with the strategic concept of linking the two largest White communities in Africa. Also it is in line with the staff talks which Sir Roy Welensky, Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, had recently in London and in South Africa. . . . 'South Africa's Pan-African defence schemes,' says the *Rhodesian Northern News*, 'are based on the belief that North-Eastern Africa, marked by a line Morocco to Kenya, would be one of the main battle grounds and that Southern Africa must be a base for the West. This would involve a radar screen across the Equator and undertakings for mutual aid, supplies of arms and technicians and a unified command'."

According to *The Times*, too, the "strategic, industrial and commercial value of a trunk-road from Cape Town to Nairobi was emphasised by delegates and observers" at the Salisbury conference.

"Sir Charles Markham, a member of the Council of the East African Road Federation, said that the strategic value of a heavy duty road could not be ignored. 'What is more, loyalty plus ten per cent is a very good way of getting people to pay for the road'" (May 29th). "The importance of a road link across the Middle of Africa to give access to west coast ports in case of emergency was emphasised at the last session of the African regional road conference" (June 1st).

There was just one factor that the planners left out of account. It never occurred to them that there might be a revolution in the heart of Africa. The Congo "crisis" is in reality the crisis of the nuclear strategy.

Towards the nuclear strike

What will the outcome of that crisis be? It would be an error to underestimate the determination of Mr. Macmillan's nuclear strategists or the resourcefulness of the Macmillan-Sandys-Home trio which is at the helm of British affairs.

In the short three years since the publication of the 1957 White Paper methodical, relentless progress has been made with the execution of the "Five-Year Defence Plan", as it was described in 1959. The Army, Navy and Air Force have been streamlined for their job as purveyors of nuclear death.

Since the modernised aircraft carrier *Victorious* rejoined the Navy amid a blaze of publicity by press, radio, TV and film as "the latest thing in aircraft carriers", all the Navy's carriers have been modernised to the same pattern, except *Bulwark*, which has been converted into a commando carrier. The carrier task force of which it forms part is deployed "east of Suez"—at present off the coast of Kenya.

According to the White Papers, the "strategic" (i.e. nuclear) bomber force has been built up and the performance of the bombers is said to be unsurpassed as regards speed and altitude, the precision of the navigational aids and bomb-aiming equipment.

In addition to the growing stock of kiloton bombs, the production of British megaton weapons has been proceeding steadily. Important technical advances have been made in the design of nuclear warheads permitting a significant increase in the rate of production. The *Blue Steel* stand-off bombs have proved so efficient that the vulnerable, stationary *Blue Streak* has been given up (without any tears, except from Mr. Gaitskell).

Tiger class cruisers, advanced conventional submarines, the first nuclear submarine *Dreadnought* and the first guided missile destroyer *Devonshire*, armed with *Seaslug* and *Seacat* ship-to-air guided missiles, are under construction, and a production

order for *N.A.39 strike aircraft* has been placed. And by 1964 or 1965 the Anglo-American *Skybolt*, which can be launched from the air at a distance of more than a thousand miles from target, should be available (a military authority speaking over the B.B.C. recently described it as "a fascinating project"). This nuclear missile can be delivered by the *Vulcans*, the take-off performance of which is being improved; they will be able to fly further and at greater heights, and measures will be taken to make it operationally easier to deploy them overseas.

In 1959-60 nearly £6 million were spent on accommodation for troops overseas, and in 1960-61 this is to be stepped up to £10 million, the major projects being the expanding bases around the Indian Ocean, in Kenya, Malaya and Aden, and on the way there, in Gibraltar, Libya and Cyprus. British Army units, warships and bombing planes can travel in easy stages by the western or northern routes, or via the islands directly across that British Lake. In the language of the latest White Paper:

"Against the continuing Communist military threat the defence of the free world rests on a complex of collective security alliances. Great Britain plays her part in N.A.T.O., C.E.N.T.O. and S.E.A.T.O., and in addition provides a military presence to help preserve stability in politically sensitive areas for which she has a particular responsibility."

In Mr. Macmillan's silver tongue this becomes: "When I left for Paris I was fortified by the knowledge that I had behind me the whole weight of the free and independent Commonwealth" (address to women Conservatives in the Albert Hall on June 2nd). He was referring to his part in the breakdown of the Summit Conference.

Mr. Macmillan cannot have it both ways forever. The "wind of change" has a way of being unpredictable. In June he still felt sufficiently confident to tell an audience of Norwegian students: "like skilful helmsmen we can make use of the wind". That was before the events in Congo.

Now the wind of change is blowing from a new direction, from the "heart of the Commonwealth and the free world" itself. The forces of peace, democracy and progress to socialism in Britain won the first decisive victory against the nuclear strategy at the historic Trades Union Congress in Douglas. But this is only the beginning.

Much will depend on the speed with which the British people become aware that their fate rests at the moment in the hands of coolly calculating gangsters in bowler hats, who prefer death to peaceful coexistence with communism, but rather than quietly commit suicide are calmly and methodically preparing to plunge humanity into the nuclear catastrophe.