

~~MR. COLES~~ *11/10 6.00*

DEFENCE AND DISARMAMENT DEBATE

Thank you for giving me a sight of the draft of the Prime Minister's opening speech for this debate. Sir A Parsons and I agree that this is the basis for a most effective speech. I have only a few minor comments at this stage.

It seems to me that it would be appropriate if somewhere near the beginning of the speech the Prime Minister were to acknowledge the complexity of the issues of deterrence, nuclear weapons and disarmament. There is a tendency for government statements to employ the language of the strategic analyst, which it is not easy for the uninitiated to understand, or to sympathise with. (An example is the first paragraph on page 3 which talks of the need for "responses" at certain "levels".) You may like to consider something along the following lines:

"The existence of nuclear weapons, and our reliance upon them to deter aggression, raise issues of daunting importance and complexity. These issues engage our emotions as well as our minds. There is a strong temptation to seek simple solutions, or in other ways to opt out of the circumstances which nuclear weapons have created. It is a temptation that we must resist. We in the Government, and we in this House, owe it to the people of this country to be clear-headed, about the problems and dangers we confront, and practical and persistent in our pursuit of arms control agreements which will enhance the security of both NATO and Warsaw Pact countries and reduce the risk of conflict."

Two thoughts occur to me about the section on the Soviet Threat. First, it might be effective to structure this section so as to contrast Soviet statements in recent years with the actions which have accompanied them. Some of the material is in the section already, but a small number of additional references could help point up the contrast between words and deeds, and enable the Prime Minister to emphasise that "HMG will not be misled by propaganda, nor cowed by threats (eg 'launch on warning'), nor I

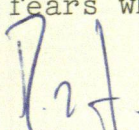
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believe will the British people". Second, the language of the section needs to be internally consistent (eg references in the first para on page 3 to the need for NATO to maintain a rough balance of forces with the Soviet Union, and the assertion at the bottom of the page that the Warsaw Pact enjoys a "huge" superiority in practically every aspect of military capability) and the figures quoted on page 4 should not seem inconsistent with those to be published in The Statement on Defence Estimates 1983. I think any treatment of the Soviet Threat is more effective if it is expressed in measured terms. The facts are powerful enough as an argument in support of the Government's case, but no purpose is served by promoting the impression that the military balance has developed so far in the Soviet's favour that the position cannot be recovered, and that the risk of war has greatly increased and become more immediate.

It occurs to me that the paragraph at the top of page 2 could cite the recent Falklands conflict as another example of the dangers which can result from the misapprehensions of a potential adversary.

Recollecting one of the Prime Minister's comments on SDE.83, it occurs to me that the paragraph at the bottom of page 4 should discuss NATO's approach to INF in terms of the need to "update" its capability, in the face of the steps which the Soviet Union have taken to update theirs. This seems to me a more honest and defensible position to take, than to characterise the problem purely in terms of intermediate range missiles.

I think the account of HMG's attitude to disarmament is extremely effective, and presents a case which the Opposition cannot answer. I wonder whether its rhetorical effect might not be enhanced if it were concluded with a paragraph which brings together all the proposals referred to, and in simple terms describes how the world would look if they were implemented. This would underline that taken together the Government's policies on disarmament and arms control are working towards radical change, and a transformation of the international situation in a way which would allay most of the fears which animate the ordinary supporters of CND et al.


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27 April 1983