



their destruction was the highest priority in politics. Nor was he presenting a moral case against super-destructive war. Instead, he argued that nuclear weapons were quite simply unnecessary to the defence of the United Kingdom. This was so first because they did not deter a Soviet attack on us, and second because there were no other circumstances, the Falklands war for instance, in which they might conceivably be used: 'the proposition that possession of nuclear weapons deters attack upon, or blackmail of, the United Kingdom, cannot be sustained'.

What applied to a British nuclear weaponry, applied too, to the location on British soil of American weapons. This, he told his audience, was because if it was worth the USA having the UK as a weapons base, it was worth their denying such a base to the Soviet Union, and so they would defend us against attack anyway. But such an argument was hypothetical, because the Soviet Union did not have expansionist aims in Western Europe, and would not wish to engage in the kind of war which would be necessary to pursue them.

The extraordinary importance of this speech lies both in what Powell did say and in what he did not say. He did not argue that the possession of nuclear weapons by the UK, or the existence of American weapons on our soil, endangered peace in general or the safety of this country in particular. It was an argument of minimum force: he did not speak of the dangers of nuclear weapons, but rather simply denied their usefulness. In that sense it was a very conservative case and a very conservative tactic. Nuclear weapons were excluded from the agenda much as the ambitious scheme of a reformer might be dismissed by a canny conservative or a wily civil servant: 'quite unnecessary, and not appropriate to our needs'. It's as if, while unilateralists campaigned on the streets and, when they can get a hearing, in the media,

POWELL THE UNILATERALIST

At the end of October, Enoch Powell delivered the Brunei discourse to the Great Western Branch of the Faculty of Building in Bristol. Not on the face of it a very exciting occasion. But what he said had very little to do with either Brunei or building. The man who had resigned from the secretaryship of the Conservative Party's India Committee

when Churchill did not attack Attlee's grant of independence, the patriot who had denounced the break up of the empire, seemed also to be a unilateralist and to be calling for a nuclear free United Kingdom. But what had he actually said?

Powell said nothing about the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. He did not argue that the threat they made to the existence of the planet was so grave that

with fundamental points about morality and survival, Powell was preparing to ease out nuclear weapons in committee.

All this is quite consistent with Powell's previous policies in several ways. First, despite his imperialism, he has normally been a patriot rather than a nationalist. He defended the empire rather than, in the 1950s, he defended the welfare state: since it was there, it had better be properly run. But he has always been suspicious of grandiose ambitions beyond the borders of Britain, to such an extent that when he has not been called an imperialist, he has been stigmatised as a little Englander.

Second, his rhetorical statements of principle have generally been derived from some more pragmatic assessment of national self interest. So the question he asked of nuclear weapons was, in effect, 'what's in it for us', and the answer with which he comes up is 'nothing'. So the question of whether they are dangerous does not arise, any more than it does in the case of a massive public investment in free fireworks. They are unnecessary and so, by implication, a waste of money.

But what Powell does say is also consistent with his previous patriotic populism. The issue of nuclear weapons, he argued, was about to become a major item on the political agenda. There are signs 'that the nation at large means to take the question up and not set it down again until it has satisfied itself with the outcome'. Up until now things have been debated 'on the sidelines, by and amongst minorities'. But now it is moving to the centre of things. So why did he speak when he did? Because 'those whose business it is to articulate national questions' must express in terms of precise policy what the people feel 'more by instinct and hunch'.

There is a familiar sound here, and we can all guess upon whom this new responsibility to speak for England rests. In 1968 Powell argued that he was articulating the fears of the people over race, and in 1970 over Common Market entry. Does he see himself as the expression of unspectacular pragmatic unilateralism, heading off the radical and moral arguments of CND/END with the quieter, mundane populism of 'it ain't necessary, there's nothing in it for us'? And what if he's right about the direction of the argument. Would internationalist and ethical unilateralists be prepared to work with nationalist conservatives if the result were a nuclear free Britain? Better Powell than dead?

The answer must be 'yes', but how likely is it? Powell as the voice of the people gets rather more attention when he is being the hammer of the blacks than when he is criti-

cising nuclear weaponry. His arguments have been noted rather than publicised by the daily press, and if he hasn't actually been censored — as EP Thompson was — he hasn't been much helped either. Compare the treatment of Powell on weapons, with almost anyone in the SDP on almost anything.

But it's important to point out that Powell's arguments are good ones, and that they bring unspectacular logic to nuclear politics. They force the nuclear hawks to justify themselves as the condition of having any nuclear weapons at all, and use the powerful tactic of common sense against the enclosed and paranoid strategies of the nuclear establishment.

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