Oil Diplomacy

There may be nothing new in M. Shepilov's proposal to the Western Powers to join Russia in pursuing a policy of benevolent neutrality to west Asia. But the proposal is another reminder, if any were needed, of the superior diplomacy of the Soviet Union. Too often, it has been insinuated that Russia's seemingly sensible plans to ensure regional or global peace are mere diplomatic stunts and devices. Be it readily admitted that Russia's intentions are not so innocent as she professes them to be. But it should be equally readily accepted that neither are Western Powers angels. If both sides are fighting for world domination, if the "cold war" is a visible symptom of this eternal fight for power, Russia can, at least, claim, that, over and over again, she has proposed plans to foster regional and global co-existence, only to be rejected by the other side.

Consider, for instance, developments in west Asia in the last twelve months. M. Shepilov's proposal for a joint four-Power "hands off" policy to west Asia is a counter-proposal to the Eisenhower Doctrine. Washington's firm attitude to the Anglo-French aggression against Egypt has been widely welcomed. America's support to the United Nations to stop aggression in west Asia has been justly hailed. In many countries, the Eisenhower Doctrine has been eulogised. For a proper appreciation of the situation in west Asia, it is necessary to assess the developments which led to the joint Anglo-French aggression against Egypt. Sir Anthony Eden has paid for his folly by his political suicide. Britain's acts of aggression in Egypt cannot be condoned. France's combative hostility to Egypt stems from different motives, but these motives are no less foul.

Today when Britain and France stand condemned for their aggressive colonialism, it is necessary to understand the reasons which goaded Sir Anthony to commit the blunder of his life. America is as much interested in west Asian oil as Britain and France. Sir Anthony first made efforts to secure America's support to a policy which could perpetuate Western Powers' economic domination of west Asia so that oil supplies to West could be assured. He failed in his objective. And yet, at the instance of America, Britain became an active member of the Baghdad Pact. Britain's participation in the Baghdad Pact exacerbated her relations with west Asia. Even her withdrawal from the Suez Canal base could not smoothen her relations with Arab States. Even as Britain was losing her prestige in west Asia, she was dismayed by America's eager efforts to win Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Up to this point events fit in with conflicting interests of Britain and America in this region. Nor is it any secret that Washington has pursued a policy to west Asia, which has been aimed at retaliation of London's hostile attitude to America's policy to far-east Asia. America's west Asian policy has, both directly and indirectly, caused embarrassment to Britain.

This brings events to the point of American withdrawal of the former offer of aid for the Egyptian Aswan Dam. Aid was refused by America presumably because of President Nasser's pro-Russian policy. Supplies of Communist military equipment to Egypt provided America the excuse for withdrawing the offer of aid. These supplies of armaments by Communist countries to Arab States complicated the problem created by the
establishment of Israel as a sovereign State. Subsequent events are too recent, and well-known. Britain, France and America were agreed that Cairo's policy was a threat to peace in west Asia. Israel exploited this common Western policy to start an aggressive war against Egypt. In their turn, Britain and France pleaded the excuse of Israeli aggression to commit acts of aggression against Egypt. Under the Tripartite Agreement, Britain and France could have justified their armed intervention to ensure cease-fire in the fighting between Israel and Egypt. That they had ulterior motives, was revealed in their joint aggression against Egypt. But the outside world will not miss the implication of the fact that America did nothing then to discharge her obligations under the Tripartite Agreements.

Only when the Anglo-French aggression against Egypt proved a disastrous failure—America admittedly, followed a wise and courageous policy in checking the joint aggression—did America enunciate the Eisenhower Doctrine. This Doctrine is based on two assumptions both of which are wrong and invalid. One is that the ignominous Anglo-French, particularly British, retreat from west Asia has created a power-vacuum there. This is a distorted way of looking at west Asia. Even as Britain has quit the south-east Asia, her withdrawal from west Asia is an inevitable process in the abolition of colonialism; no less inevitable is the gradual retreat by France from Africa. But neither the British withdrawal from Asia nor the French retreat from Africa can, or should, create any power-vacuum in these regions. Resurgent nationalism is the obverse side of this process of retreat by the colonial Powers. Along with the withdrawal by colonial Powers, free stable and democratic nations are emerging gradually. No question of power-vacuum arises here. To introduce power politics, is to project the "cold war".

Another assumption behind the Eisenhower Doctrine is that the Communist influence is growing in west Asia. Here, as elsewhere, the Soviet Union exploits the prevailing disturbances, she does not create these troubles. Even on the assumption of growing, spheres of Soviet influence in west Asia, the Eisenhower Doctrine ignores the earlier offer of M. Bulganin for a general arms embargo on west Asia. In April last, M. Bulganin made such a proposal to the Western Powers. It was not even considered by them. M. Shepilov has now repeated this proposal. But it is evident that M. Shepilov's proposal will not have a better response than that of M. Bulganin. M. Shepilov has enunciated six principles on which the relations between the four Powers and "the Middle and Near East" should be based. These principles are in conformity with the Charter, and embody the essential features of ranch Shila. If the Western Powers do not accept these principles as a basis for discussion for formulating the policy of the four Powers to west Asia, Moscow will be justified In its suspicions that the Western Powers are not willing to implement the principle of competitive co-existence in Asia. In the event, suspicions will deepen that America is more interested in the free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf area than in ensuring regional or global peace.

Threat from the East

WILL- Maulana Bhasani be able to maintain his pace and force Karachi to toe the foreign policy line laid down by the Awami League, of which he is the President, at the cultural conference held with so much eclat at Kagmari in Tangail sub-division of Mymensingh district, East Bengal? Mr. Suhrawardy, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, has been following a foreign policy diametrically opposed to the one professed by the Awami League from which he draws his strength and to which he owes his position in the Government. How do the followers of Bhasani and the members of the Awami League put up with this flagrant violation of the party's creed? There is no simple answer to it. For however quizzical the situation may look to an outsider it must not be forgotten that Mr Suhrawardy is the head of a coalition Government in which his own party is in a minority; and not all members of the Awami League swear by Bhasani's foreign politics, though on many other issues, they enthusiastically support their leader.

By the rank and file of the East Bengal Muslims, the Awami League is held as a deliverer from the domination of the Punjabi, the U P and the Bihari refugee, and from the exploitation of the East by West Pakistan in general. The Awami League has spear pointed this attack against the West and has won many initial victories. Pakistan's First Five Year Plan, it will be recalled, had to be abandoned because of the persistent opposition to it put up by among others, the special conference of economists of East Pakistan, which had been called to approve the Draft-Plan. The East Pakistan Cabinet run by the Awami League has been outright in its unreserved condemnation of the economic policies pursued by Karachi in the last 10 years which, it says, has enriched the West and impoverished the East.

But it must not be supposed that the members of the Awami League, whether in the Government or outside, are equally keen about the foreign policy professed by their party, except that none of them are prepared to make the same issue of Kashmir as the people and parties in West Pakistan. This underlies Mr Suhrawardy's counsel to tone down the Kashmir and anti-Nehru agitation in Pakistan. On the question of Kashmir, the East Bengal Muslim has mental reservations which arise as much from distance and ignorance as from the fact that the agitation is led largely by non-Bengali Muslims. It is Mullahs from Lahore who are prominent in meetings and demonstrations held in East Pakistan to ventilate grievances against Kashmir, and for this very reason, such meetings and demonstrations in East Pakistan fail to draw any crowds at all. But on other questions of foreign policy, the Bengali-Muslim who is otherwise an ardent supporter of Bhasani and the Awami League, is hardly ever excited. On the contrary, India is big and because of her large resources she is a threat to Pakistan and the threat grows in dimensions as reports flow In of the progress India has been making, particularly in the sphere of economic development. It appears logical to him that Pakistan, poor, weak and backward, must turn to a powerful ally for her safety and sheer survival. And if Mr Suhrawardy attends the Baghdad Pact Conference in Middle East or gets American arms aid, the