



Exchanges in the House of Lords Chamber

Thursday, 19th March 1998: Column 811
International Peace Police: Proposal
3.16 p.m.

Lord Jenkins of Putney asked Her Majesty's Government: Whether they will examine the possibility that the time is ripe for the establishment of an international peace police under the jurisdiction of the United Nations with duties to include the verification and enforcement of the conventions banning chemical and biological weapons and the observance of agreements relating to nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

Thursday, 19th March 1998: Column 811

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean): My Lords, the Government see no need for a police force of that nature under the jurisdiction of the United Nations. The verification of compliance with existing treaties and conventions on weapons of mass destruction should be carried out in accordance with the provisions contained in the relevant treaty or convention.

Lord Jenkins of Putney: My Lords, will my noble friend bear in mind what the situation would be in any country--for example, this one--if there were no police force to ensure that the law is observed as a matter of course, and nothing between the population as a whole and the military? So long as the present position remains, and enforcement is exclusively the task of the military, is not the danger always present--as has been seen recently in the Gulf--of a war developing, possibly even ending in a third world war? What are the methods to which she referred just now which are currently in place?

30 Apr 1998 : Column 383
"Shield Council" Defence Proposal
3.14 p.m.

Lord Jenkins of Putney asked Her Majesty's Government: What is their position on the proposals for the elimination of war between sovereign states set down in the Army Quarterly Defense Journal, Vol. 127, No. 1.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean): My Lords, we do not support the proposal for a so-called "shield" organisation; a supranational council with a standing military force and

nuclear weapons. Such an organisation would not be effective, accountable or politically acceptable. The UK is working to improve the ability of the international community to prevent and manage conflict. The United Nations is central to this effort. Collective defence through NATO will remain the cornerstone of the United Kingdom's national security.

Lord Jenkins of Putney: My Lords, is my noble friend aware that I believe the support given to this document by a former president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, is unconditional, as is the support given by a former president of the Soviet Union, Mr. Gorbachev? I do not know what the position is as regards a former premier of France, M. Rocard, who has also added his name. But as regards my noble friend Lord Callaghan, the fourth very distinguished international person to have put his name to the document, his support is qualified and he made that very clear in a foreword which he supplied to the article printed in the Army Quarterly Defense Journal, which of itself is a document supported by distinguished military people. In those circumstances, although I do not expect the Minister to say that the Government support this, does she feel able to say, as my noble friend Lord Callaghan said, that the document is well worth consideration and discussion?

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: My Lords, my noble friend has been very encouraging in trying to tempt me into saying that we would consider the document. But I must be clear both to my noble friend and the House that the Government do not believe that the document could command that degree of interest or consideration. It involves the creation of another nuclear power and would be in breach of our nuclear proliferation treaties. The so-called "Shield Council" would be independent of states and the UN Security Council. Its members would have to forswear their national allegiances. Her Majesty's Government are most concerned about the accountability of such a council in those circumstances.

30 Apr 1998 : Column 384

Lord Monkswell: My Lords, while the Government may have reservations about individual aspects of this article's contribution to the consideration of international armed forces, nevertheless will they recognise that articles such as these do make a contribution to the developing debate about how we can obtain international security around the globe? Bearing in mind the current perception by a number of nations that international peacekeeping efforts appear to be dominated by the United States, does the Minister agree that every effort to ensure that international peacekeeping efforts are perceived and realised to be on behalf of the international community as a whole should be welcomed?

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: My Lords, I would be very concerned indeed if anything I said in your Lordships' House in any way detracted from the two answers that I have already given about the attitude of Her Majesty's Government to this particular document. As my noble friend raises other issues as well, I say to the House that Her Majesty's Government believe that the United Nations matters. For all its problems it is an indispensable institution. It is the only one we have at the moment which is capable of giving any real legitimacy to decisions taken by the international community. The Government rest on that position.

Lord Jenkins of Putney: My Lords--

Noble Lords: Next Question!

Lord Jenkins of Putney: My Lords, there is plenty of time left. May I briefly say--

Noble Lords: No!

Lord Jenkins of Putney: My Lords, may I briefly ask my noble friend to say that at least she agrees that this matter should be taken further? I hope that noble Lords will agree that this afternoon's discussion is only a preliminary stage. I hope that in future my noble friend Lord Callaghan of Cardiff will participate. Is my noble friend the Minister aware that I shall make it my business to ensure that an opportunity to do so is afforded to him?

30 Apr 1998 : Column 385

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: My Lords, my noble friend Lord Callaghan will know how much he relishes that opportunity--or not. I hope that I have been clear and unequivocal on this point. I cannot encourage my noble friend to believe that Her Majesty's Government will consider the document further. None the less, the Government are, of course, always willing to listen to my noble friend's interesting point of view and I am sure that we shall have the opportunity to do so on this matter in future.

Lord Callaghan of Cardiff : My Lords, is my noble friend on the Front Bench aware that having listened first to my noble friend Lord Jenkins and then to her replies, I am not sure yet which side I am on? However, I shall certainly go away and see what it was I signed. I shall then be very happy to take part in any discussions that may ensue.