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U. S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE.

Long Course 1912-13.

Thesis

"POLICY: - Its Relation to War and Preparation for War."

Lieut. Commander D. W. Knox, U. S. Navy.

(November 30, 1912.)

Copy No. 3

POLICY: - Its Relation to War and Preparation for War.

GENERAL.

The true policies of a state spring from its interests and necessities; some are permanent, and others are transitory, depending in each case upon the exigencies of the governing conditions.

While ostensibly asserting themselves as a growth from conditions, they can, as a rule, be foreseen, defined and interpreted by statesmen, from whom a government and its people have a right to expect non-partisan, clear, and far-sighted vision.

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GENERAL.

The true policies of a state spring from its interests and necessities; some are permanent, and others temporary, depending in each case upon the endurance of the governing conditions.

While eventually asserting themselves as a growth from conditions, they can, as a rule, be foreseen, defined and interpreted by statesmen, from whom a government and its people have a right to expect non-partisan, clear, and far-sighted vision.

Policies should be decided upon and expressed only after exact and scientific analysis of internal and external affairs, and after mature deliberation on all factors, past, present, and future. It is fatal to a nation's best interests if politicians or statesmen are permitted to play football with her policies; rarely can they be changed to suit momentary circumstances without harmful consequences far exceeding any gain.

It is obvious that, so long as the conditions last which make a policy desirable, it should be pursued continuously and without vacillation - otherwise it cannot be carried out effectively. It follows then that a continuous and highly centralized form of government is the best in so far as the maintenance of policies is concerned. In other forms of government partisanship should be eliminated from this question, and the people should be kept continuously enlightened regarding the policies of their state together with the fundamental reasons for them. While statesmen can and should lead in such matters, their framing and execution of policy should be balanced by mature public opinion, which should always be the court of last resort. Sufficient and suitable education of the masses for them to require broad statesman-

ship from these in high office is essential in democracies, if proper external policies are to be moulded and adhered to.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL POLICY.

The end and aim of the state is to "promote the general welfare" of its people. Internal policies, therefore should take precedence over external ones, and the latter are created primarily for the purpose of assisting internal conditions.

Nevertheless, since internal affairs are managed solely by the state in accordance with its own will, and on the contrary external matters are unavoidably influenced by and conflict with the interests of other states, it is the external policies which are the most difficult to formulate and to sustain. Unfortunately, therefore, the mass of the people are more apt to take a keen interest in what touches them personally and immediately, than in something which will concern their government primarily, and themselves but indirectly and remotely and only at some future time. Except in great national crises, narrow internal affairs and policies will dominate the minds of the people, and, in these governments controlled directly by the electorate, unfortunately the minds of the statesmen also. Spencer Wilkinsen, a foreigner, said "It is evident that neither Mr. Lincoln nor any of his ministers had been accustomed before the month of March 1861, to any political occupation other than ascertaining and reproducing such an average of the opinions of their party as would secure them support at the polls, without the sacrifice of their convictions."

MILITARY POLICY.

The primary duty of a nation is to secure its own

existence. Since few if any countries are so isolated as not to have interests which conflict with those of other sovereign states, and, inasmuch as there is no international arbiter which any nation is bound to respect, it follows that one of the most elementary of national duties is that of preparation for war.

The preponderant power of the United States on this continent, together with its geographical isolation from the great nations of Europe and Asia, has unfortunately prevented proper recognition by the populace of this elementary duty; and therefore, owing to our democratic form of government, our legislators and statesmen have not given the question of military policy, and military preparation, as much attention, study, and support as the true national interests demand.

The preamble of our Constitution sets forth that, among other reasons, it was ordained and established to "ensure domestic tranquility" and to "provide for the common defense". The necessity for these underlies all government and must dominate military policy.

All authorities agree that war is an act of government a political chapter in the life of a nation - which being true leads to the inevitable conclusion that it is the duty of the Government of a nation to keep prepared for such wars as may be probable or necessary. This fact should be clearly recognized, that it is the Government as a whole, and not solely those minor branches the Army and the Navy, whose duty it is to ensure military policies and military preparation adequate to the requirements of the broad national policies and of the life of the country.

PEACE STRATEGY.

If, then, a government be properly organized and administered, its various branches will so co-ordinate their duties during peace, that the state will be able, through readiness for war, to support policy and influence the drift of events; and, if war should come, will not be at a disadvantage with regard to military preparation.

All departments will keep themselves informed of the internal and external policies. The foreign affairs department will specially study the policies and interests of other nations and carefully watch the development of every conflicting relation with its own nation; it will keep all other branches and departments constantly informed whenever a hostile outcome becomes at all probable.

From this point the other Branches and Departments must each contribute their respective share to a profound study of the case in all its aspects, and co-ordinated preparation must go hand in hand with policy. Resources and forces, both with respect to quantity and to quality, must be organized, distributed and prepared to the best advantage. Preparation must back up policy, and policy must adapt itself for the time being to preparation, postponing war if unprepared, and hastening it if the prospective enemy is worse prepared.

The more critical the situation becomes the closer must be the relation and co-operation between the civilian and the military branches of the government. The military advisers must inform themselves thoroughly of the necessities of the case; must keep up to date regarding the internal and external policies to which the impending war may relate; and be ready to give information on all military matters, and to point out necessary preparations which normally would escape

the civilian mind.

It is in these preliminary stages that the Strategy of the war will be gradually evolved. Such strategy must flow from and be governed absolutely by the national policies - external and internal - modified only when unavoidable, by the interests and policies of other states. It is fundamentally wrong to permit any other influences to enter into the war strategy ; otherwise the war will lack true directive force; it may be successful from a purely military standpoint without accomplishing the political object for which it was begun i.e., it will be an unsuccessful war; but more likely will it fail from both the military and the political aspects through scattered illogical effort and lack of unity of purpose. Captain F. K. Hill says, "It is thus seen that the strategic objective of a war must rightly comprehend a knowledge of the policies which preceded war, and contemplate the treaty which is to conclude the war"and again, "It is necessary for the military commander to study and broadly comprehend the policies of governments so that their plans will fit the ends to be attained."

POLICY DURING WAR.

From a purely military aspect the greatest benefit to be derived from co-ordination before war is the ability to strike the first blow.

War once begun, the greatest results from it will be obtained through co-ordination of all branches of the government towards a resolute prosecution of it, and a concentration of purpose and effort, in accordance with the national policies. This can most effectively be done by concentrating all strategic initiative in the hands of a great statesman, who at the same time controls the policies of the state. It is as a rule difficult, however, to

find a man able and forceful enough to handle such a combined function. Pitt and Bismarck are conspicuous examples of such men, and Napoleon combined these functions efficiently with ever greater functions.

Hill says, "A war will be properly carried on when the statesmen who control the steps preceding and subsequent to war, work with and sustain the military branches in harmonious plans during war, which plans are drawn to further the policies which caused the war". Bismarck says, "The task of the commanders of the Army is to annihilate the hostile forces; the object of war is to conquer peace under conditions which are conformable to the policy pursued by the state. To fix and limit the objects to be attained by the war, and to advise the monarch in respect to them, is and remains during the war just as before it, a political function, and the manner in which these questions are solved cannot be without influence on the method of conducting war. x x x The question of war or peace always belongs, even in war, to the responsible political minister, and cannot be decided by the technical military leaders. But the minister concerned can only give the king expert advice, if he possesses a knowledge of the actual position at any moment and of the views of those who conduct the war."

Thus it is seen that the relations during war between the responsible military leader and the responsible political minister should be exceedingly close.