

Britain: dangerously unhinged

Officially, the British bore the humiliation of their Prime Minister at Guadeloupe with the characteristic "stiff upper lip." British coverage of the summit focused on the balmy sunshine, Callaghan's snappy clothes, the allegedly positive response with which, the British press claimed, the other leaders greeted Callaghan's announcement of the Harrier jet sale to China, and the assertion that nothing of substance was transpiring at the meeting.

But elsewhere, there are signs that the British are becoming dangerously unhinged. The British mood is typified by Guardian columnist Christopher Makins, who called for an independent British nuclear capability, and by the leaking of 1948 Cabinet documents which reveal that at that time Winston Churchill urged a preemptive nuclear strike against the Soviet Union. The unstable British temper was quickly detected by the Soviets. Churchill's "insane call" is "unfortunately, not part of history," warned Radio Moscow. And it noted that Britain's policy of superpower confrontation could "plunge the world into unheard of catastrophe." Some examples of British thinking:

The Guardian, Jan. 6:

Britain intends to go ahead with the sale of Harrier jump jets to Communist China, provided the deal can be made part of a much larger trade package. . . . Although the Americans have reservations about the sale of Harriers to China . . . there is no sign that Mr. Callaghan, President Giscard d'Estaing, or Chancellor Helmut Schmidt believe that the kind of trade deals now being discussed would have seriously damaging effects on Europe's diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. . . . The weather is making its own contribution to the rather determined air of relaxation which the participants have adopted. Mr. Callaghan has his own status symbol in the form of HMS Scylla, Britain's "guard ship" in the Caribbean. . . .

Christopher Makins, The Guardian, Jan. 4:

The numerous blanks which have long been tolerated in NATO doctrine on the use of theatre nuclear forces (TNF) increasingly need to be filled in. . . . The alliance should procure new, modern, survivable nuclear forces to provide a more reliable capability than now exists to destroy important, especially military, targets (notably in the western Soviet Union) with forces other than American strategic systems. . . . These new systems should be provided . . . as a means of retaining some capability of this kind in Western European hands and thus providing some reinsurance to Europeans generally . . . by new British systems. Given that France is still deeply in the grip of Gaullist strategic thought, only Britain has the experience and capacity to provide this reinsurance. . . .

Indeed understandable British reticence on the European Monetary System makes a nuclear initiative all the more attractive. . . .

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