

Rules Waves, But Not Food Supply

Military Science—Economics

Briton Says U. S. Controls His Country's Bread

THE United States could disrupt Britain's essential food supplies, and probably stop a great share of her oil, "without manning a cruiser or mobilizing a gunboat."

This opinion is expressed in a long leading article in the English technical journal, *Engineering*, devoted to a consideration of the problem of cruiser and destroyer limitation. As the writer summarizes the principal sources of food supply to the British Isles, he states that well over 60 per cent. of all the wheat imported comes from Canada and the United States, and "is therefore undefendable by naval forces."

He draws an unlovely picture of what might happen in the event of hostilities between the two countries:

"The United States can stop their own exports by an executive order from the Government, and if they sent a few brigades of calvary across the Canadian border with orders to destroy the Canadian Pacific Railway, burn the farmsteads, and blow up the grain elevators, they would very seriously diminish, if not actually stop; Canadian supplies to this country. We should be no nearer securing the supply if we doubled our naval forces and maintained a cruiser fleet five times as powerful as the American."

Of the 3,600,000,000 pounds of sugar imported into the British Isles each year, 1,400,000,000 pounds come from Cuba alone, and 800,000,000 pounds more from Peru and the West Indies. The writer conjectures that:

"By a great naval exertion it might be possible to secure the 200,000,000 pounds raised in the British West Indies, but it is safer to assume that it is within the power of the United States to stop about 65 per cent. of our total sugar supplies by the ordinary procedure of economic control.

Argentine supplies would probably be stopped by the same process. We import annually some 950,000,000 pounds of chilled meat, 800,000,000 of which come from Argentine companies under American financial control. Ten squadrons of British cruisers would not secure such supplies if a joint committee of American bankers, lawyers, and Treasury experts decided that they were to be stopped."

The situation as regards oil is not so well known, the article states. About a quarter of the British supply is said to come from Persia, and would therefore be immune to any probable attack by American forces. But the remaining 75 per cent. a large part is believed to be under American control.

The writer concludes that the British government has therefore acted wisely in conceding the principle of American naval parity, and entrusting the welfare of British interests, so far as the United States is concerned, to the Foreign Office.

Japan as a possible menace to Britain's essential commerce is dismissed lightly, in spite of the formidable strength of the Japanese navy. It is conceded that the Japanese could destroy all British trade north of Shanghai; but it is pointed out that the whole Far Eastern trade, from Singapore onwards, represents only about 5 per cent. of the Empire's total, and need therefore not be considered as a major problem.

It is in the Atlantic trade lines that the "Achilles' heel" of England is to be found, the writer declares. The commerce-raiding possibilities of Continental naval powers or combinations of powers are the things against which the British navy may reasonably be asked to protect the homeland.

Surface cruisers are not regarded as seriously as commerce-destroying submarines by the writer. In spite of the spectacular successes of a few German raiders during the war, the disturbance to the total of British shipping was temporary and relatively slight. But submarines are another matter, and it is against the U-boat menace, in the opinion of the writer, that the British navy should direct its major preparedness. The convoy system used successfully during the war involves large numbers of light cruisers and destroyers, and he expresses some anxiety lest his Government should concede too much in the way of limiting these classes of ships during the present conference.

Science News-Letter, March 1, 1930

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all communications to Washington, D. C. Cable address: Scienserv, Washington.

Entered as second class matter October 1, 1926, at the postoffice at Baltimore, Md., under the act of March 3, 1879. Established in mimeographed form March 13, 1922. Title registered as trade-mark, U. S. Patent Office.

Subscription rate—\$5.00 a year postpaid. 15 cents a copy. Ten or more copies to same address, 5 cents a copy. Special reduced subscription rates are available to members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

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SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER, The Weekly Summary of Current Science. Published by Science Service, Inc., the Institution for the Popularization of Science organized under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Research Council and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Edited by Watson Davis.

Publication Office, 1918 Harford Ave., Baltimore, Md. Editorial and Executive Office, 21st and B Sts., N. W., Washington, D. C. Address