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was taken over a year ago, a Gallup poll shortly before the outbreak of the Falklands crisis showed only 46 per cent holding even a *favorable opinion* of the United States.

Since then this less-than-high regard for the U.S. probably has been eroded further. During the South Atlantic war the British media were unsympathetic toward the U.S. pledge of "evenhandedness," and political leaders, such as David Steel of the Liberal party, warned that U.S.-British relations could be damaged by the impression that the United States was not wholeheartedly behind its ally in this clear-cut case of aggression. David Owen of the SDP urged the United States to pressure Argentina even while warning that the U.S. "must prove it can be an honest broker."

The Social Democrats, in alliance with the Liberals, now occupy the center niche in British politics. After a series of stunning by-election victories in its first year, the SDP's share of support among the electorate has dropped from over 30 per cent to barely 20, according to a recent poll. Although this decline is due in part to a surge of support for the current government during the Falklands affair, the future of the SDP is far from certain. Nevertheless, the SDP enjoys an influence out of all proportion to its size; on certain issues it is able to attract enough support from moderates in both the Labor and Conservative parties to exercise a decisive role in national debates.

The SDP is likely to use this influence to push Britain toward a more autonomous policy. Because the SDP strongly supports continued British membership in the Economic Community, it will encourage the current policy of cooperation with the Continent. And, as the E.C. develops more joint positions on economic and political issues—a development the SDP also seems to favor—Britain will find itself assuming an increasingly European rather than trans-Atlantic orientation.

The SDP will also affect British defense policy by providing an alternative for those dissatisfied with the policies of both the Conservative and the Labour parties. Now, those who were uncomfortable with Labour's advocacy of unilateral disarmament and had no choice but to give their support to the Thatcher government in matters of defense find their reservations about the acceptance of U.S. cruise missiles in Britain and about taking a hard line on arms control negotiations openly shared. The SDP, under the threat of pressure from its sizable leftward-leaning faction, is unlikely to take an enthusiastic view of cruise-missile and Pershing II deployments unless there has been substantial progress in U.S.-Soviet negotiations.

There is yet another way in which the SDP may affect Britain's defense posture. The Thatcher government has imposed severe cuts throughout the military forces to cover the \$13.5 billion cost of the Trident system which the U.S. encouraged it to buy. The SDP argues that Trident is both unnecessary and too expensive, and in this it has some valuable allies. The Falklands crisis alarmed many Conservative backbenchers about the state of the Navy, and they are likely to urge the government to revamp the Navy even if Trident must be canceled to meet the cost. The SDP, in league with these disgruntled Conservatives, may soon bring Britain's defense posture in line with the SDP's more modest assessment of its needs. Such a decision by Britain may well be seen in the United States as yet another instance in which an ally has refused to shoulder its share of NATO's nuclear burden.

There is little the United States can do to alter these trends in British politics. Nor is Britain unique in facing a potential domestic political realignment. The Socialists have come to power in both France and Greece, and the German and Italian coalition governments seem perpet-

ally under fire. Until the United States comes to understand the domestic concerns and priorities of its allies, U.S.-European relations are unlikely to improve.

Frances G. Burwell is Associate Editor of Foreign Service Journal.

EXCURSUS 2

Thomas Land on EXPLOITING THE QATTARA DEPRESSION

Environmentalists have triumphed in the long debate over the creation of the world's first hydrosolar power complex, intended to fill the Qattara Depression—the lowest point on the African continent—with water from the Mediterranean a hundred miles away. The canal across Egypt's Western Desert is to be built by conventional rather than nuclear means.

A four-year feasibility study conducted by Lahmeyer International, a West German consulting firm, which approved the project and prescribed nuclear means of excavating the canal, was presented to the Egyptian Government last year. However, the fate of the nuclear option was sealed recently when Egypt and Sweden signed a memorandum of agreement that provided for a new study to explore conventional means of excavation. The new study might require only eight months to complete, since its authors can make use of the very thorough investigations and calculations that went into the six-volume West German report. Initial stages of the project thus could get under way very soon.

The entire project could cost up to \$3 billion, take a decade to complete, and yield over 3 billion kwh of electricity. First proposed early in this century, the scheme would exploit the world's biggest dry basin by transforming it into a 7,500-square-mile lake with depths hundreds of feet below the level of the Mediterranean. The flow of sea water toward the depression would yield enough electric power to fuel several cities as well as a network of vast agricultural projects planned in the region. Eventually, the volume of the flow would be synchronized with the level of evaporation at the new lake, theoretically assuring a continued flow—and therefore power generation—forever.

Notably, the Lahmeyer investigations have dismissed the reservations expressed by the World Bank and shared in many quarters about the possible adverse effects on the environment brought about by the creation of a vast salt-water lake. The consultants attest that it would have no significant effect on the weather of the agriculturally vital Nile Valley located downwind.

During the past decade two hydropower complexes on the Nile have provided about two-thirds of Egypt's total electricity consumption. They have enabled the country to introduce electric power to three-quarters of the villages, thereby promoting education and modern medicine and increasing food production. Yet the current expansion of agricultural output still lags behind the accelerating growth of population, which produces an estimated 1.2 million new consumers annually. If it is to avert disaster, Egypt must begin creating now the conditions that will enable Egyptians to earn their keep in the future.

Hydropower has permitted Egypt to invest the bulk of its revenues from oil production—about 580,000 barrels a day—into the thriving agro-industries. Land reclamation is



an essential aspect of the country's long-term economic development plan, partly to feed a population projected at 60-70 million by the end of the century and partly to redress the loss of potentially fertile land to the expanding cities.

The age-old dream of Egypt's agricultural planners to break out of the confines of the fertile Nile Valley thus is coming to fruition under the relentless pressure of population growth. Desert reclamation is an expensive business, claiming an investment of up to \$4,300 an acre in Egypt. The country has reclaimed 900,000 acres over the past twenty years and plans to bring another 500,000 under the plow by the middle of this decade, 2.8 million by the end of the century. The Qattara development occupies a position of crucial importance in these plans, since the cost of energy is an essential component of the price of land reclamation. (Even then, it is expected to provide only 5 per cent of the nation's likely energy consumption by the year 2000.)

Principal areas already reclaimed in the Qattara zone include the Siwa Oasis and large parts of Tahrir Province. Sizable land-reclamation projects are also scheduled at the Bahariya and Farafa oases. The development plans of all these regions include the establishment of major new population centers in what are at present desert areas to be fueled from the Qattara complex. In addition, Egypt is building four major cities close to Cairo and five new towns within Greater Cairo.

The new study, which is to be undertaken by Sweco, a Swedish consulting group, not only will consider non-nuclear options for excavation but will review the work already carried out by teams from five countries recommending a dozen different schemes for power generation and eight different canal routes. The route currently under consideration begins at El Almein on the Mediterranean west of Alexandria, follows a southward path blasted by conventional methods across low hills, and crosses an optional minor reservoir before dropping into the giant depression.

Thomas Land, a frequent contributor to Worldview, writes from Europe on global affairs.