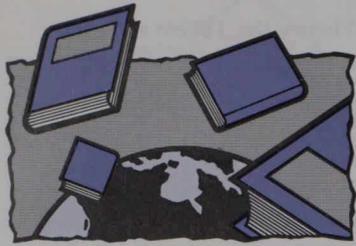


REVIEWS



Hungary and Suez 1956: A View from New Delhi

Escott Reid

Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1987, 160 pgs. \$12.95 paper/\$24.95 cloth

■ This crisp little book is a compact and easily readable account of Escott Reid's time of testing, in the hot turmoil of two acute international crises, which in their longest days did seem to be tearing apart the flawed fabric of the post-war world. It recalls what we novitiates saw first some forty years ago in the old East Block: brilliant flashes of a strong but resilient intellect, a deeply sensitive analytical power, a tireless dedication to causes firmly espoused, an unshakable sense of duty. These sterling qualities still shine brightly in the book, even when its arguments, as always well-marshalled, are not fully persuasive.

The book is not one more attempt to put the record straight for, as Reid points out in the prologue, every view of those crises suffers from some distortion deriving from difference of viewpoint. Even if the entire cast of international actors, intimately involved in Hungary and Suez, could be assembled on some supernatural stage, it would take them beyond eternity to agree on what happened thirty years ago during the protracted time the crisis endured. Reid has sensibly centred his account on his own attempts, in New Delhi, to persuade Prime Minister Nehru to denounce the Soviet violent suppression of the Hungarian revolt with the same vehemence as he was denouncing the Anglo-French attacks on Egypt.

Reid shared the belief of most Western observers that India displayed a double standard in its reaction to the two crises, which both involved permanent members of the UN Security Council. India's lapse lay in the failure of Nehru to speak forthrightly against the USSR and in the perfunctory performance of the Indian delegation at the UN General Assembly, during its emergency special session on Hungary. Reid painstakingly explains why he saw it as his duty to try to correct these Indian aberrations, without receiving much help from his Department and Minister because, in Reid's view, they were so preoccupied with Suez. His secondary theme concerns a set of might-have-beens – what would have happened if he had been more solidly supported in his demarches in New Delhi.

Reid develops his main theme with the masterly debating and drafting skills, which long ago won him wide acclaim even from detractors. He supports his opinions and judgments with citations which on the whole are authoritative and illuminating. His solid work should have special appeal for historians, students of political science and scholars generally, but it has relevant lessons as well for foreign policy watchers and practitioners today, who continue to wrestle with similar issues of worldwide significance. This book's value and appeal are enhanced just because it is neither aridly academic nor pompously self-important. The people we meet in it, including the author, are warm-blooded, emotional and ever conscious of their doubts, faults and fears.

The book raises questions beyond the range of the might-have-beens mentioned, but many of them are left unanswered. On the main theme, Reid seems to be partly satisfied that by mid-November 1956 he had helped to bring Nehru closer to the positions Reid had been pressing. He does not explain

very convincingly, however, why Nehru preferred to vacillate and procrastinate, for it is hard to believe Nehru was really taken in by Bulganin's propaganda any more than he would have been swayed by more vigorous advocacy by the United States. Since their bitter experiences of Korea in 1950-53 – compounded by Dulles's obstinacy on Vietnam, his brinkmanship and defence pact proclivities in 1954 – the uncommitted Asian and African states had been putting distance between themselves and the United States which culminated in their formalizing of non-alignment at the Bandung summit of 1955. Reid does not make much of this growing evidence of Asian-African determination to keep clear of East-West clashes, yet it is a key factor bearing on both his main theme and his might-have-beens.

As for the distortions in this view from New Delhi, are they valid or merely inserted to underline Reid's recurring complaint that he was not kept sufficiently abreast of major developments in New York and Ottawa? For example, how could he, with his past experience in the Department of External Affairs and the UN, have failed to grasp that the Canadian Government's intense preoccupation with Suez was born of dire political necessity, in both national and international contexts. Or, that once Canada had embarked on a course of constructive endeavour at the UN, we had to move to the middle ground on some Assembly votes and to enter into complicated voting deals with the African-Asian members, above all with India? With such constraints, could Canada afford the risk of putting additional pressures on them concerning Hungary? They knew and we knew, in any event, that the UN had very limited scope for effective action on Hungary, especially with the Western powers in angry disarray.

These and other questions left hanging – for example, how did the reprimand he received come

about? – give the book an air of unresolved mystery. It is one more reason why once taken up this book will not be put down until it is read fully and in all probability more than once. – *Geoffrey Murray*

Mr. Murray spent ten years of his foreign service career on UN affairs, both in New York and Ottawa.

The Siege

Conor Cruise O'Brien

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986, 798 pgs. US \$12.95 paper

■ Conor Cruise O'Brien was initiated into the Arab-Israeli conflict while seated between Israel and Iraq in the United Nations, as a representative of Ireland, nearly thirty years ago. As diplomat, editor and writer, O'Brien has immersed himself in the subject ever since, producing now a highly readable, expansive yet critical account of "the saga" of Israel and Zionism.

He calls it aptly, "The Siege." The Jews, like the Irish Catholics in the past, have been a stigmatized people. They have been persecuted and oppressed for centuries, a besieged people in Europe and now, beneath the Zionist emblem in a Jewish National Home, they are under siege in the Middle East.

With a subject that has produced more than enough books peddling either the pro-Israeli or the pro-Palestinian line, O'Brien has managed to write a fairly balanced assessment of a tragic situation. It neither flatters the Israelis nor indicts them, and it does detail most of the wrongs done the hapless Palestinians. Just as important, he reminds us all that this terrible predicament of Israel "is not the creation of Israelis only, but is also the creation of all the rest of us – those who attacked and destroyed the Jews in Europe and those in Europe and America who just quietly closed the doors."

After a fairly exhaustive examination of the Zionist background,