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"Minister", said Osbaldiston, "I really think it's time we got a Cabinet decision on the A-." He gave the codename of the missile.

"On the A-?", Gilbey repeated thoughtfully, in the manner of one hearing a new, original and probably unsound idea.

"We've got as much agreement as we shall ever get."

"We oughtn't to rush things, you know," Gilbey said reprovingly. "Do you think we ought to rush things?"

"We got to a conclusion on paper eighteen months ago.

"Paper, my dear chap? I'm a great believer in taking people with you, on this kind of thing."

"Minister," said Osbaldiston, "that is precisely what we've been trying to do."

"Do you think we ought to weary in well-doing? Do you really, Sir Douglas?"

The "Sir Douglas" was a sign of gentle reproof. Normally Gilbey would have called Osbaldiston by his Christian name alone. I caught a side-glance from my colleague, as from one who was being beaten over the head with very soft pillows.

"Minister," said Osbaldiston, "if you think it's wise to prove just how much agreement there is, we could easily run together an inter-departmental meeting, at your level. Or at mine. Or Ministers and officials together."

"Do you know," Gilbey said, "I'm not a great believer in meetings or committees. They don't seem to result in action, don't you know."

For once, Douglas Osbaldiston was at a loss. Then he said, "There's another method. You and the three service ministers could go and talk it over with the Prime Minister. We could brief you very quickly."

(And I had no doubt Osbaldiston was thinking, we could also see to it that the Prime Minister was briefed.)

"No, I think that would be worrying him to much. These people have a lot on their plate, you know. No, I don't think I should like to do that."

Gilbey gave a sweet, kind, obscurely triumphant smile and said: "I tell you what I will do."

"Minister?"

"I'll have another good look at the papers! You let me have them over the week-end, there's a good chap. And you might let me have a précis on one sheet of paper."
