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Having been invited by BASIC to give evidence to its Trident Commission, I face a dilemma: On the one hand, as someone who has campaigned for thirty years in favour of the British nuclear deterrent, I am familiar with the hostility consistently shown to Trident by such bodies as the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Ploughshares Fund and BASIC itself – whose Commission they are sponsoring. It is highly unlikely that a recommendation for the renewal of Trident could possibly be the result of any examination organised by such groups. I do not doubt their sincerity or integrity, but the intensity of their views on this subject is a matter of public record.

On the other hand, a few of the distinguished people sitting on the Commission have previously supported Trident – though it is worrying that the only Commission member from a think-tank campaigning on nuclear issues is the Research Director of BASIC itself. During a discussion about the whole situation with BASIC's Executive Director, Paul Ingram, I suggested that supporters of the deterrent might feel reassured if a full-time researcher in favour of Trident – such as Dr Lee Willett of RUSI – were also to be appointed. Unfortunately, no such step has yet been taken.

There can be only a limited range of outcomes from a Commission constituted in this way. Either opponents of Trident renewal will have their way, with its supporters acquiescing or writing a minority report; or the reverse will occur; or – as has probably been intended from the outset – there will emerge some 'compromise' position which accepts that a deterrent should continue for the time being, but (a) it should be something other than Trident, (b) it should be combined with that of another country, or (c) it should no longer operate on the basis of continuous deployment at sea (CASD). However, the issue of how best to protect the United Kingdom from existential threats, at any time between about 2030 and 2055, is far too important to be the subject of fudged solutions designed to bridge a gap between the otherwise irreconcilable views of different members of the Commission.

Given such reservations about the provenance and composition of this exercise, one faces the dilemma of whether to legitimise it by making a formal submission, or whether to leave oneself open to the charge of having been invited to contribute material for consideration but having failed to do so.

In the absence of a pro-Trident researcher on the Commission to balance the contribution made by BASIC, it is clear that there is no prospect of the Commission recommending that Trident should be renewed and that CASD should be retained.

Nevertheless, I have no objection to the Commission considering material previously written by me supporting the maintenance of the United Kingdom Trident force and explaining the continuing need for nuclear deterrence in general. Accordingly, the rest of this paper consists of these two essays, which remain relevant even though published in 2009 and in 2006.

ESSAY ONE: 'SOLDIERS AGAINST THE BOMB?'

[Response to an article by General Sir Hugh Beach, 2009]

These are very tough times for British defence planners. Years before the present economic crisis, the United Kingdom was fighting military campaigns on a peacetime Defence Budget. Increasingly this has led to inter-Service warfare for inadequate resources. Yet, the case for retaining our nuclear deterrent is common ground between Government and Opposition, and attempts to revive unilateralism have failed to generate significant support, regardless of the end of the Cold War. This is due to a mixture of military and political factors.

The military argument for retaining our independent deterrent can briefly be summarised[1] as follows:

a) *Future military threats and conflicts will be no more predictable than those which engulfed us throughout the Twentieth Century.* This is the overriding justification for preserving Armed Forces in peacetime as a national insurance policy. No-one knows which enemies might confront us during the next 30–50 years, but it is highly probable that at least some of them will be armed with mass-destruction weapons.

b) *It is not the weapons themselves which we have to fear, but the nature of the regimes which possess them.* Whereas democracies are generally reluctant to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear dictatorships (though they did against Japan in 1945), the reverse is not true. Think, for example, of a non-nuclear Britain in 1982 facing an Argentina in possession of a few tactical nuclear bombs and the means of delivering them.

c) *The United Kingdom traditionally has played a more important and decisive role in preserving freedom than other medium-sized states have been able or willing to do.* Democratic countries without nuclear weapons have little choice but to declare themselves neutral and hope for the best, or to rely upon the nuclear umbrella of powerful allies. The United Kingdom is a nuclear power already and is also much harder to defeat by conventional means because of our physical separation from the Continent.

d) *Our prominence as the principal ally of the United States, our strategic geographical position, and the fact that we are obviously the junior partner, might tempt an aggressor to risk attacking us separately.* Given the difficulty of overrunning the United Kingdom with conventional forces, in contrast to our more vulnerable allies, an aggressor could be tempted to use one or more mass-destruction weapons against us, on the assumption

that the United States would not reply on our behalf. *Even if that assumption were false, the attacker would find out his mistake when, and only when, it was too late for all concerned. An independently-controlled British nuclear deterrent massively reduces the prospect of such a fatal miscalculation.*

e) *No quantity of conventional forces can compensate for the military disadvantage which faces a non-nuclear country in a war against a nuclear-armed enemy.* The atomic bombing of Japan is especially instructive – not only because the Emperor was forced to surrender, but also in terms of the reverse scenario: imagine if Japan had developed atomic bombs in the summer of 1945 and the Allies had not. An invasion to end the war would have been out of the question.

The political argument is even more simply stated:

a) A large majority of the population consistently takes the view that it is safer for the United Kingdom to retain nuclear weapons whilst other countries have them, than it would be to renounce them unilaterally.

b) In the 1980s, two General Elections demonstrated the toxic effect of one-sided disarmament proposals on a party's prospects of gaining power.

c) It was, and remains, widely believed (i) that schemes for 'mutual understanding' and disarmament after World War I, played into the hands of dictators and helped pave the way for World War II; and (ii) that the nuclear stalemate of the Cold War enabled all-out conflict between the major powers to be avoided for fifty years, despite their mutual hostility and in contrast to those regional theatres where communists and their enemies could – and did – fight without fear of nuclear escalation.

d) The ending of East-West confrontation has not altered the balance of public opinion, because (i) it could easily re-emerge, and (ii) unpleasant regimes are on the point of acquiring nuclear weapons and some may already have done so.

Although a recent letter in the press,[2] attacking British insistence on 'a costly successor to Trident', has brought a flicker of hope to the deterrent's traditional opponents, the combination of military and political factors listed should, and probably will, continue to prevail.

The letter says little which is new, but has attracted attention primarily because of the pedigree of the people who signed it. All three are retired Generals – one of them, indeed, a former Chief of the Defence Staff. Their arguments will not, however, change the Government's mind, nor that of the party which may presently supersede it.

Leading 'by example'

Let us consider the components of the Generals' case. They aver that renewing our deterrent may undermine the objective of a world free from nuclear weapons to which a variety of senior politicians and statesmen, past and present, apparently subscribe. Renewal, it is claimed, may 'actively encourage others to believe that nuclear weapons [are] still, somehow, vital to the secure defence of self-respecting nations'. Yet, none of the people referred to – Douglas Hurd, Malcolm Rifkind, David Owen and George Robertson – has indicated any belief that Britain should abandon its strategic deterrent unless other nuclear powers simultaneously do the same. All of them are multilateralists who have strenuously opposed attempts inside and outside Parliament to do precisely what the Generals are recommending.

Certainly, there is an argument to be had about whether a nuclear-free world is attainable or desirable. Some multilateralists are convinced that striving for this is the only way to generate further pressure against nuclear proliferation. Others view a nuclear-free world as a dangerous chimera in the absence of a revolution in the minds of men which would allow general and complete disarmament to be implemented too. The former rightly fear the multiplication of nuclear-armed states; the latter rightly dread the creation of a world made safe, once again, for conventional warfare between the major powers.

Neither group deludes itself that a British decision to renew Trident will derail what would otherwise be a global agreement either to reduce nuclear stockpiles or to eliminate them entirely. Ours is a *minimum strategic deterrent* which has recently seen a reduction from a warhead total of 200 to one of only 160. This is not the first time we have taken such steps – without the least discernible reciprocation from any other country. The notion that our replacing four ageing submarines with four new ones, or a modest stockpile of warheads and missiles with a similar number of upgraded ones, would drive a non-nuclear state into the WMD business is utterly fanciful.

Nation-states operate according to hard-headed calculations of their own strategic interests. During the Cold War, the advocates of one-sided British nuclear disarmament were repeatedly challenged actually to *name* a single, specific nuclear or near-nuclear country which would abandon its quest for nuclear status in response to a gesture by the United Kingdom. Not one example was ever offered by the unilateralists, either then or subsequently. Yet, it is easy to envisage the reverse scenario, where a country fearing conventional conflict with the United Kingdom might redouble its efforts to obtain mass-destruction weapons, in the knowledge that without their own deterrent the British would be incapable of persisting with any campaign.

'Pseudo-independence' and 'unthinkable' scenarios

This leads to the second strand of the Generals' case: that the UK deterrent 'cannot be seen as independent of the United States in any meaningful sense', since the missiles are provided by, and shared with our American allies. According to this view, the United Kingdom should rely exclusively on the US nuclear umbrella, because although we have 'in theory, freedom of action over giving the order to fire, it is unthinkable that, because of the catastrophic consequences for guilty and innocent alike, these weapons would ever be launched, or seriously threatened, without the backing and support of the United States'.

In his article in this edition of the *RUSI Journal*, of which he courteously gave me sight in advance, General Sir Hugh Beach asks 'what geopolitical niche can be discerned in which Britain could be exposed to nuclear blackmail without being able to count on American cover?' He even makes the bold claim that 'no such scenario has ever been described, nor have Britain's "vital interests" ever been defined'. Both the question and the claim overlook the fact that our deterrent is *a weapon of last resort*.

The role of our strategic nuclear force remains what it has always been: to deter any power armed with mass-destruction weapons from using them against us in the belief – true or false – that no-one would retaliate on our behalf. The *use* of our deterrent consists of the *preventative effect* it has on the behaviour of our enemies: the actual launching of a Trident missile would mark the failure of deterrence and would presuppose that a devastating attack had already been inflicted on our country. In other words, the prospect of 'catastrophic consequences', to which the Generals refer, *would already have been inflicted* upon the United Kingdom. Under such dreadful circumstances, the aggressor would know that the British had nothing left to lose and that is why he would be insane to attack us in the first place.

He would also know, as General Beach and his colleagues agree, that the United States would be physically incapable of preventing us from instantly retaliating (if, indeed, that is what the Prime Minister of the day had decided to write in the submarine commander's sealed letter) in the unlikely event of the failure of deterrence. The fact that over a period of months a US Government could, if it wished, slowly disable our retaliatory capability, is neither here nor there. This could not be done at the very short notice which would apply in any crisis where the UK needed to neutralise a blackmailer or deter a WMD attack.

As for particular scenarios, let us consider the entirely plausible one of a renewed threat from the East to Continental Europe. A number of outcomes are possible. An aggressor with strong conventional armies might advance with or without using tactical nuclear weapons. If this happened, NATO would respond militarily, possibly with but possibly without using tactical nuclear weapons in turn. If this all led to massive escalation, then Doomsday would indeed be upon us all. Yet, it is quite conceivable that, for fear of this very outcome, both sides might draw back from a nuclear exchange. Given her geographical vulnerability, even the one Continental power with an independent nuclear force – France – might decide to endure conventional occupation in preference to nuclear Armageddon.

Where would this leave the United Kingdom, if it had abandoned its own nuclear force? The answer is, rather like Japan in the summer of 1945. Physically separate from the Continent, the British would be extremely difficult to eliminate conventionally – but they could be blackmailed into surrender by the threatened, or actual, destruction of their cities, either singly or *en masse*. As for the American nuclear umbrella, would an aggressor which had managed to overrun the Continent be persuaded by a proxy threat of retaliation by the US on behalf of the UK when so much had already been given up without the nuclear button being pressed? Not necessarily. And that would lead to one of two terrible outcomes: either the UK would be attacked by mass-destruction weapons with impunity, or there would indeed be a US nuclear response with horrific consequences for all the belligerents as a result of the aggressor's miscalculation. An independently-controlled British deterrent would prevent any such attack and would force the aggressor to rely upon conventional military force alone.

'But the Cold War is over'

Of course it is – and this is what really underlies the thinking of the posse of Generals who have recently galloped into view. Because strategic nuclear deterrence is largely irrelevant to the current counter-insurgency campaigns which are stretching the British Army to the limit, and because we are fighting wars on a peace-time Defence Budget, some senior Army officers are suggesting that we must choose between fighting what is called *'the war'* of the present, rather than insuring against the possibility of *'a war'* of a different kind in the indefinite future.

This choice is unacceptable, and the underlying message – that the era of high-intensity state-on-state warfare is gone for good – is a dangerous fallacy. Every sane individual hopes that such warfare will never return; but to rely on this in the face of past experience would be foolhardy in the extreme. The lesson of warfare in the Twentieth Century, repeated time and again, was that when conflicts broke out they usually took their victims by surprise. Obvious examples are the failure to anticipate World War I, the follies of the 'Ten-Year Rule' from 1919 to 1933, and the entirely unanticipated attacks on Israel in 1973, the Falklands in 1982, Kuwait in 1990 and the United States in 2001. Conversely, and on a brighter note, the speed with which the Soviet Empire unravelled from 1989 left even its sternest critics largely nonplussed.

Our present counter-insurgency campaigns are very important indeed, but they cannot be compared with battles for the very survival of the United Kingdom homeland. Such

existential threats confronted us twice in the past hundred years: if international relations deteriorate, they could easily do so again.

Some of the retired (and active) senior officers who have been criticising the deterrent may have disapproved of it even when the Cold War was at its most intense. General Beach, I recall, falls into this category and cannot, therefore, be accused of inconsistency. The suspicion remains, however, that others accept that an independently-controlled British nuclear force was of value in the latter half of the Twentieth Century, but believe that this no longer applies in the era of what I term Un-Islamic Extremism. This is short-sightedness with a vengeance; and it is probably fuelled, at least in part, by the mistaken belief that cancelling Trident would release large sums of Defence cash for use by our over-stretched land forces. As the three Generals put it in their letter in the press: 'Rather than perpetuating Trident, the case is much stronger for funding our Armed Forces with what they need to meet *the commitments actually laid upon them*.' *[Italics added]*

'It's all about politics' – a lesson from the 'Sixties ...

So far, Lord Bramall and the late Lord Carver are the only former Chiefs of the Defence Staff to have denounced the British deterrent. The Generals' letter describes it as 'virtually irrelevant except in the context of domestic politics'. It is profoundly to be hoped that other ex-Service chiefs will presently combine to articulate the case in favour its military value. In the meantime, though, we must make do with a revealing story from the archives about a previous occasion when the deterrent was being renewed.

It is set out in the minutes of the Chiefs of Staff meeting of 29 September 1964, just over a fortnight before the General Election which brought Harold Wilson to power. Lord Mountbatten, as CDS, informed his colleagues of a draft paper which had been prepared on the importance of retaining an independent nuclear force:

> This paper was intended for use, subject to the approval of the Chiefs of Staff, in the event of a new Government proposing to abolish this force … [H]e considered that [the Chiefs of Staff] were under a moral obligation to put the *military aspects* of the problem without delay to any Government which might consider abolishing our independent deterrent.

He proposed that each Service chief should personally sign a memorandum designed to dissuade an incoming Labour Government from adopting unilateralism:

> This should state that it was the traditional responsibility of the Chiefs of Staff of the Services to defend these Islands against all forms of attack … The paper should go on to say that now and in the foreseeable future the Chiefs of Staff saw no way of continuing to discharge this defence responsibility except by the possession of a nationally controlled nuclear deterrent force, of such a capability that it could inflict upon any aggressor such a degree of damage as to outweigh any possible benefit which he might obtain from his aggression. *The paper should conclude by asking that if the Government wished to do away with our deterrent force, they should formally absolve the Chiefs of Staff from further responsibility for the defence of the United Kingdom against attack. [Italics added]*

In the ensuing discussion, it was pointed out that the Labour Party was claiming that the British independent nuclear deterrent

> was neither British nor independent and that it did not deter. The paper should include the military facts refuting this argument. There were no strings in the Polaris agreement to our independent use of the weapon in emergency … The Chiefs of

> Staff paper should not be qualified by any reference to United States assistance. The first duty of the United States Government was to act in the best interests of their own country. It was always possible that an occasion could arise where support of United Kingdom policy was not compatible with these interests.[3]

In the event, it soon became clear that the new Government was looking for reasons not to implement its manifesto commitment to unilateralism, provided that, as a senior Ministry of Defence official told the Service chiefs on 17 November, 'some difference between the proposals now put forward and those approved under the previous administration' could be found.[4] The projected Polaris fleet was consequently reduced from five submarines to four; face was saved – and so was the deterrent.

This episode contradicts several recurrent myths: first, that the nuclear deterrent has traditionally been imposed by governments on reluctant military chiefs for political rather than military reasons; secondly, that there is anything new – or valid – in claims that our deterrent is not really independent; and, thirdly, that there is no military case for a separate United Kingdom nuclear force, given the existence of the American nuclear umbrella.

… And another from the 'Eighties

The perceived lessons of disarmament during the inter-war years and nuclear stalemate during the post-war era have, over time, become embedded in the popular psyche. With the original decision to develop a UK deterrent taken in strictest secrecy, there was little scope for protest until its second generation was due.

The organised anti-nuclear movement thus came into being in the late 1950s. In the early 1960s its 'first wave' split the Labour Party, as the V-bombers gave way to Polaris. In the early 1980s its 'second wave' worried NATO as Polaris gave way to Trident – and as five NATO states, including the United Kingdom, accepted Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces as part of a successful strategy to secure the removal of Soviet SS20s.

Yet, throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, opinion polls regularly showed two-thirds of the British public to be in favour of keeping nuclear weapons as long as other countries had them, and only a quarter in favour of unilateralism. Labour's insistence on aligning itself with the minority position in 1983 and 1987 is widely perceived as a major factor in both those heavy General Election defeats – and that explains why the party finally altered its policy in July 1991. The change was engineered by the then Shadow Foreign Secretary Gerald Kaufman, and, in March 2007, when Parliament voted by 409 to 161 to proceed with the next generation of the nuclear deterrent, Sir Gerald reminded MPs of his description of Labour's 1983 anti-nuclear manifesto as 'the longest suicide note in history', and the reasons for making the change:

> That shift of policy removed an insuperable barrier to the Labour Party's electoral credibility. Without it, many of my hon. Friends would not be in this House today, including some who may be contemplating voting against the Government this evening. Do those hon. Friends really believe that our shared objective of world nuclear disarmament can be achieved by unilateral disarmament by Britain? Do they really believe that if we gave up Trident, the eight other nuclear weapons powers would say, 'Good old Britain! They have done the right thing. We must follow suit.'? Pull the other one! ... Defeating the Government tonight … could so reduce our party's credibility as to contribute to a Labour defeat at the next election ... A cartoon in *The New Yorker* once showed an Army officer in a bunker saying to his assembled troops: 'Gentlemen, the time has arrived for us to make a futile gesture.' Futile gestures can be personally satisfying, but what do they get us? I will tell the House

> what they get us: 18 years in opposition. It is one thing to revisit the scene of the crime; it is quite another to revisit the scene of the suicide.[5]

Why is unilateral British nuclear disarmament electoral suicide for any would-be Government? Are so many British citizens simply deceiving themselves by opting, in a nuclear-armed world, to be able to threaten nuclear retaliation? Or is it that the common sense of ordinary people has lessons to teach to retired Generals as well as to ambitious politicians?

(Dr) JULIAN LEWIS MP
Shadow Defence Minister

References

1. The argument has been deployed more extensively in 'Nuclear Disarmament *versus* Peace in the 21st Century', *RUSI Journal*, vol.151, no.2, April 2006, pp.50–54. *(SEE: ESSAY TWO, BELOW)*

2. *The Times*, 16 January 2009.

3. DEFE 32/9: COS 58th Mtg/64 (2)(Confidential Annex)(SSF), 29 September 1964. The full military case for the deterrent, set out in the COS papers, can be examined in 'Britain's Need for a Nuclear Deterrent', (Part II: Historical Study – Deterrence in the Polaris Era), *Defence Studies*, vol.8, no.3, September 2008, pp.262–285.

4. DEFE 32/9: COS 68th Mtg/64 (3)(Confidential Annex)(SSF), 17 November 1964.

5. *Hansard*, 14 March 2007, cols.344–345.

ESSAY TWO: 'NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT VERSUS PEACE IN THE 21st CENTURY'

In the closing stages of the Second World War, a series of terrible blows rained down on the Japanese homeland. City after city was attacked and civilian casualties were measured in the tens of thousands. Still, the Japanese did not surrender – any more than had the Germans, under a similar weight of bombardment, until overrun by the Allied armies. When the atomic bombs were used against two more Japanese cities, however, the shock effect on the country's rulers was decisive, even though initially the numbers of casualties were no greater than those inflicted by the conventional attacks against Tokyo and elsewhere. The real change brought about by the atomic bomb was not the scale of the destruction it could inflict, but the *absolute certainty* that that destruction would be inflicted and could not be avoided.

By contrast, when the thousand-bomber raids had been launched against German and Japanese cities, a whole variety of possible outcomes might have resulted. At one end of the spectrum, the mass bomber formations might have achieved their aim, destroyed their target and returned to base with very few losses. At the other end of the spectrum, the bombers might have been intercepted and attacked, diverted from their target, which remained unscathed, and forced to suffer very heavy losses themselves, as happened on the infamous Nuremberg raid.

There was no way of knowing in advance how such encounters would work out – prior to the coming of the atomic bomb. Let us imagine that the Germans and the Japanese had known in advance that their potential victims, the democracies, would develop nuclear weapons before the end of the wars they were about to unleash. Is it likely that they would have proceeded to do so in the certain knowledge of total destruction? The theory that they would not had already been formulated before the atomic bomb was tested. In a report for the Chiefs of Staff in June 1945, Professor Sir Henry Tizard concluded that the only answer which he and other senior defence scientists could see to the atomic bomb was to be prepared to use it in retaliation:

A knowledge that we were prepared, in the last resort, to do this might well deter an aggressive nation. Duelling was a recognised method of settling quarrels between men of high social standing so long as the duellists stood twenty paces apart and fired at each other with pistols of a primitive type. If the rule had been that they should stand a yard apart with pistols at each other's hearts, we doubt whether it would long have remained a recognised method of settling affairs of honour. [CAB 80/94: Future Development in Weapons and Methods of War, 16 June 1945]

This argument was only the latest in a long line of similarly hard-headed but hopeful views. The motto: 'If you desire peace, be prepared for war' was essentially the same, as was the statement in the early days of aviation: 'When German bombers can destroy London and British bombers can destroy Berlin, Germany and Britain will never again go to war'. Alfred Nobel – of Peace Prize fame – was likewise convinced that his invention of dynamite would make war too destructive for countries to contemplate.

Why the Tizard scenario of peace through the threat of mutual destruction stood the test of time better than the earlier arguments was because of the factor of certainty (or 'assuredness') which atomic weapons for the first time guaranteed. Earlier explosives, like dynamite, and earlier means of delivery, like manned bombers, still left the outcome of the encounter in doubt. Even where both sides were similarly armed, there remained enough of a chance that one of them would suffer total defeat whilst the other enjoyed total victory to make the gamble of waging war seem worthwhile. There was, in short, too much uncertainty as to what the outcome would be.

The Ethical Paradox

The dawning of the atomic age was thus accompanied by what seemed to be an extreme ethical paradox: peace could apparently best be maintained by the possession of, and the threat to use, weapons which could obliterate tens of thousands of people in an instant. Simply because nuclear weapons, *if used,* would cause hideous destruction and loss of life, it has often been argued that there is something immoral in their very possession. Yet no weapon is moral or immoral in itself. Ethics enter the equation only when one considers the motivation for possessing weapons and the uses to which they are put.

If the consequence of possessing a lethal weapon is that nobody uses lethal weapons, whilst the consequence of not possessing a lethal weapon is that someone else uses his lethal weapons against you, which is the more moral thing to do: to possess the weapons and avoid anyone being attacked, or to renounce them and lay yourself open to aggression? The central problem which has to be faced by those who argue that the mere possession of, or the threat to use, nuclear weapons in retaliation is morally unacceptable, is the extreme level of destructiveness which conventional warfare had reached before the atomic bomb was invented. If it is the case that possessing a deadly weapon or being willing to threaten to use it in retaliation will avert a conflict in which millions would otherwise die, can it seriously be claimed that the more ethical policy is to renounce the weapon and let the millions meet their

fate? Even if one argues that the threat to retaliate is itself immoral, is it as immoral as the failure to forestall so many preventable casualties?

This is, in reality, a variation on the argument against absolute pacifism which the late Leonard Cheshire illustrated when such issues were being debated twenty years ago. He set out the scenario of a security guard who is the only person in a position to prevent a terrorist from opening fire on a queue of passengers in an airport lounge. According to most people's values, not only is it morally correct for him to shoot the armed terrorist, it would be profoundly unethical for him to decline to do so. This is without prejudice to the fact that the security guard might well be right to feel that it was a tragedy that he had had to take anyone's life at all. Moral choices are, as often as not, choices to determine the lesser of two evils. In the case of possessing and threatening to use a horrifying weapon, or renouncing it with the result that such weapons are actually used against one's own society, only the purest pacifist can be in any doubt as to which course to follow.

Predictability

Many who oppose Britain's retention and replacement of nuclear weapons in the twenty-first century also advocated unilateral nuclear disarmament, despite the level of the Soviet threat, during the Cold War. There are, however, significant numbers who believe that what was necessary then no longer applies now. This brings us to the central problem of *predictability.*

From time to time wars break out in circumstances which were anticipated; but, more often than not, they arise totally unexpectedly. The Yom Kippur War in 1973 took even hypersensitive Israel by surprise. The Falklands War, nine years later, took Britain by surprise. The invasion of Kuwait in 1990 took everyone by surprise. And the attacks of 11 September 2001 took the world's only superpower by surprise. There was nothing new in any of this – as a detour into the archives strikingly illustrates: from 1919 until 1932 British foreign and defence policy was hamstrung by a prediction that the country would not be engaged in a war with another major power for at least a decade. This had a dangerously adverse effect on necessary rearmament when the international scene darkened. Arguing against the continuation of this so-called 'Ten Year Rule' in January 1931, when Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, Sir Maurice Hankey, observed:

As a nation we have been prone in the past to assume that the international outlook is in accordance with our desires rather than with the facts of the situation…We are also apt to forget how suddenly war breaks out. In 1870, a fortnight before the event, we were not in the least expecting the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. The same was true in 1914. A fortnight after the murder of the Austrian Archduke, a debate took place in the House of Commons on foreign affairs. The European situation was hardly referred to at all. More attention was given to the preparations for the next Peace Conference!…There was no statement made on the subject of the European crisis in Parliament until July 27…We really had, at the outside, not more than ten days' warning. [CAB 21/2093: The Basis of Service Estimates, 9 January 1931]

The onset of armed conflicts is inherently unpredictable. This is why it makes sense to keep in being an army, a navy and an air force during long periods of peace. The same applies *a fortiori* to the nuclear deterrent. Investment in armed forces in apparently peaceful times is analogous to the payment of premiums on insurance policies. No one knows when the accident or disaster may happen against which one is insuring; if one did, one could probably avoid it and save oneself the cost of the premiums.

With the benefit of hindsight, the Second World War is often regarded as a disaster predetermined by mistakes made at the end of the First World War. Yet in the decade of the

1920s, there was so little sign of an obvious enemy that each of Britain's three Armed Services prepared its hypothetical contingency plans against an entirely different potential enemy. In those days, the choice of possible enemy would seriously affect the nature of the defence policy designed to meet the threat. Fortunately, the British strategic nuclear deterrent is less dependent than conventional armed forces upon the correct identification of the enemy in advance. Any country which emerges as a potential aggressor with mass-destruction weapons, in the next three or four decades, will be vulnerable to retaliation from Trident or its successor – and this is the sort of time-scale which we have to consider.

Each generation of the strategic nuclear deterrent functions for a period of thirty years or more. The actual replacement of the Trident system, if it occurs, will not even begin for at least another fifteen years. No one can possibly foretell what dangers will face us between the years 2020 and 2050, just as the threats facing us today would have seemed bizarre to politicians and military planners at the height of the Cold War. During periods of peace, democratic states naturally tend to scale down their conventional fighting services, but they try to do so in a way which is reversible should the international scene deteriorate. This option does not apply to the nuclear deterrent, which has always been set at the minimum level regarded as essential for credibility. There can be no more assurance that a nuclear or major chemical or biological threat will not arise in the next half-century than that major land, sea or air threats will not have to be faced. If it is right to insure against the latter, it is essential to insure against the former.

New Threats

Apart from those who have always opposed British nuclear weapons, irrespective of the level of threat, some politicians, some churchmen and commentators, and even some military figures who used to support it, have now changed their minds. This is primarily because the Cold War is over, America appears to be the dominant world power and the principal threats today emanate from rogue regimes and stateless terrorist groups. Let us consider each of these in turn.

First, the ending of the Cold War removes the danger of nuclear confrontation with Russia for as long as that country continues to tread, however hesitantly, the democratic path. Indeed, it is striking to note that many prophets of nuclear doom during the 1970s and 1980s have been all but silenced by the change in East-West relations, even though enough nuclear weapons remain in US and Russian hands to destroy the world's main population centres with many warheads to spare. This illustrates the fact that it is not the weapons themselves which we have to fear but the nature of the governments that possess them. As soon as Russia turned away from totalitarianism, the main concern about her nuclear arsenal shifted from those devices under the control of the Kremlin to those which might leach out from Russian stockpiles and fall into the hands of other regimes which remained more hostile.

One concept which advocates of nuclear disarmament have traditionally ignored is the propensity for dictatorships to go to war with dictatorships, and for democracies and dictatorships to clash, whilst few – if any – examples exist of liberal democracies attacking each other. This suggests that it is quite right to have fewer qualms about the possession of deadly weapons by democracies, though regarding their possession by dictatorships as wholly unacceptable. There is no comparison between the two, and it is a constant failing of the disarmament lobby to try to ascribe values of reasonableness, tolerance, goodwill and peaceful intent to states under the control of despots, fanatics and dictators.

Secondly, the current period of America's solo superpower status in no way diminishes the case for an independent British deterrent. Nuclear weapons, by their very nature, have

devastating potential even in very small numbers. Quite apart from the prospect of unpredictable major threats in the longer term, the current enmity towards Britain by near-nuclear regimes like Iran suggests that unilateralism would be fraught with danger. It used to be pointed out that the British Polaris fleet had done nothing to deter Argentina from invading the Falkland Islands. Certainly, there was never a prospect of democratic Britain threatening to use its ultimate weapon except in response to a mortal threat against the cities of the United Kingdom. What would have been the case, though, if the Argentine junta had possessed even a few atomic weapons or other mass-destruction devices? Without a nuclear force of her own, would Britain then have dared to respond to the occupation militarily, despite her superiority in conventional forces?

Time and again, the United Kingdom and the United States have stood side by side in international conflicts. If this pattern continues, the prospect could arise of a nuclear-armed enemy regarding it as safer to threaten or attack the smaller of the two allies. The danger would then arise of a possible miscalculation by an aggressor thinking that the US would not respond in kind to an attack with mass-destruction weapons on British cities. If this were a miscalculation, the attacker would discover it only when it was too late for all concerned, instead of having been deterred at the outset by the knowledge that Britain could respond in kind on her own behalf.

These considerations clearly bear on the third issue: that of rogue regimes. Several of them are already nuclear powers or on the verge of becoming so. The notion that they will abandon such a course indefinitely in response to unilateral British nuclear disarmament is totally unrealistic. Those who subscribe to it continually make the error of projecting civilized values onto extremist governments which actually hold them in contempt.

Turning, fourthly, to the current emergence of non-state terrorist groups, it is absolutely correct that strategic nuclear weapons are of no relevance whatsoever. Neither are aircraft carriers, main battle tanks, guided-missile destroyers or any other heavy-weight military equipment. The presence of a serious terrorist threat is clearly an argument in favour of expanded counter-insurgency forces and security and intelligence services. It is no argument at all for the abolition of those military capabilities which are designed to meet other types of threat which this country has faced in the past and may well face again in the future.

Utopian NPT Obligations

Does proliferation make Britain's continued possession of nuclear weapons unethical? There might be a case for arguing this if it could be shown that there were a causal link between our continued possession of a strategic nuclear deterrent and the decision of one or more identifiable countries to acquire nuclear weapons. During the Cold War era, the proliferation argument was often used by one-sided nuclear disarmers in their campaign against Polaris, Trident and the deployment of cruise missiles. Yet, whenever asked to *name* a specific nuclear or near-nuclear country which would be likely to abandon its nuclear ambitions if we unilaterally renounced ours, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and its fellow travellers were notably unforthcoming. Countries make the decision whether or not to seek to acquire mass-destruction weapons according to hard-headed calculations of their own strategic interests. A quixotic renunciation by democratic Britain is not very likely to encourage any undemocratic state to follow suit. On the contrary, it is more likely to encourage any such state which views Britain as a potential enemy to redouble its efforts to join the WMD club, given that we would no longer have the means to threaten retaliation against nuclear, biological or chemical aggression.

What does the Non-Proliferation Treaty actually commit the United Kingdom to do? Article VI of the NPT is often referred to, but seldom quoted in full. This is what it states:

Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

There are thus three obligations, only the first of which is time-limited. This is to end 'the nuclear arms race' at 'an early date'. Given that the United Kingdom – and, for that matter, France and China – have never engaged in a nuclear arms race, their policy of each having a minimum strategic nuclear deterrent does not fall foul of this provision. None of these countries has ever sought to match the nuclear stockpiles of Russia or the United States. Each has been content to possess a much smaller nuclear capability, provided that it is adequate to threaten an unacceptable level of retaliation if attacked. The same would apply to any replacement system for Trident.

It is true that Article VI aspires to both 'nuclear disarmament' and 'a Treaty on general and complete disarmament' as well – but this is nothing more than a double aspiration for the indefinite future. What it amounts to is nothing less than a world completely disarmed of all weapons of every description 'under strict and effective international control'. This utopia would require several things to happen: the creation of a World Government; the establishment of foolproof methods of preventing clandestine rearmament; and, above all, a revolution in the minds of men so that warfare became redundant.

Conclusion

During the inter-war years, the process of disarmament was taken to new heights of complexity, but it achieved only this: the peace-loving democracies disarmed each other and themselves, while the rogues, the villains, the bandits, the dictators and the tyrants re-armed in secret, threatened democracy and destroyed the peace of the world. After the final defeat of the Nazis, the democratic states faced a new challenge and a variation on an old dilemma. The challenge was that of confrontation with Soviet communism; the dilemma was whether to try to defuse it by disarmament or to contain it by deterrence.

The fact that the Third World War did not break out is not, of itself, conclusive proof that containment by deterrence was successful. It is of the nature of deterrence that, whenever it works, its opponents can always argue that the war would not have happened in any case. Yet the fact that there were so many small but deadly wars fought between client states of the superpowers (but not between the superpowers themselves) strongly suggests that the mutual threat of nuclear annihilation had something to do with the restraint exercised by the superpowers themselves.

The purpose of the British nuclear deterrent remains what it has always been: to minimize the prospect of the United Kingdom being attacked by mass-destruction weapons. It is not a panacea and it is not designed to forestall every type of threat. Nevertheless, the threat which it is designed to counter is so overwhelming that no other form of military capability could manage to avert it. The possession of the deterrent may be unpleasant, but it is an unpleasant necessity, the purpose of which lies not in its actual use but in its nature as the ultimate 'stalemate weapon' – and, in the nuclear age, stalemate is the most reliable source of security available to us all.