

The British Attitude to Deterrence

by the Rt. Hon. John Strachey, M.P.

Of course, there is no one universally, or even generally, held view in Britain on deterrence, nor on defense generally. But it is true that on one single aspect of defense there is wide agreement in Britain. That is as to the consequences of full-scale nuclear war. And that is natural; for, whoever else supposes

CARNEGIE PROGRAM: SCIENCE AND GOVERNMENT

As scientists and engineers become more and more deeply involved in non-scientific problems, there has been encouragement for a broader effort at the Institute in certain appropriate areas of the humanities and social sciences. A recent grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York has made a beginning possible.

Particular interest has been concentrated on the field of science and government where there seems to be some real value in joining the efforts of scientists and of scholars in other disciplines. During the current academic year a group of faculty and graduate students from all Divisions has come together to study the subject of arms control within the broad context of national policy and of international competition.

Local resources have been reinforced with the talents of a series of outside visitors from academic and from public life, and these visitors have each been asked to deliver a lecture to the Institute. At the midpoint in our year's program we were privileged to welcome the Rt. Hon. John Strachey, M.P., a distinguished visitor from the United Kingdom. The accompanying article, "The British Attitude to Deterrence," has been adapted from his talk at the Institute on January 25.

—David C. Elliot,
professor of history

that they can survive such an event, it is almost certainly impossible for the inhabitants of the U.K. to do so.

We are familiar with the Rand Corporation's calculations in, for example, their *Report on a Study of Non-military Defense* — calculations designed to show that if shelters were constructed on a sufficiently enormous scale, some people in some places would survive. No doubt they would. We are not appreciably reassured. For, as Dr. Herman Kahn, in his recent magnum opus *On Thermonuclear War*, has had to ask: "Would the survivors envy the dead?"

There is a more conclusive reason for supposing that, whatever number of individuals might survive a full-scale nuclear exchange, organized human society has become incompatible with nuclear war. For, what reason is there to suppose that if the world stays organized (or perhaps one should say unorganized) as it is, we face the prospect of only one nuclear war? Contrary, perhaps, to the common impression, most human societies have not been destroyed by single, particular, catastrophes. It has been the reiteration of natural disaster, or more often of war, that has undone them. And war has not failed to repeat itself. As Wordsworth wrote, in the context of his experiences of the French Revolution: "The earthquake is not satisfied at once." What chance would human society have of surviving the recurrent shocks of the nuclear earthquake?

I arrive, then, at the first proposition which I wish to put before you. War, in becoming nuclear, has become incompatible with the continuance of human civilization.

What are we to do about nuclear war? So far we have simply endeavored to deter other states from making nuclear war upon us. And during the first fifteen and a half years of the nuclear age we have been successful. Indeed, once upon a time, in the remote past — by which I mean four or five years ago — deterrence was thought to be a comparatively simple business. All that you had to do was to keep up an adequate stable of bombs and bombers; and then

“Many who have thought about this problem have come to the conclusion that reliable stability can only come through an international agency with an effective monopoly of force.”

you told the other chap not to be naughty, “or else . . .”

How different is our present situation! We are still, willy-nilly, adherents of the doctrine of deterrence; but how much more complex that doctrine has now become. For a number of things have happened.

First and foremost, of course, the other fellow has started to deter us. In a word, Russia has achieved nuclear parity; and that has changed a lot of things.

Second, a number of clever people have started analyzing the concept of deterrence, and they have concluded that it is in essence anything but simple. Just to start with, they have differentiated Type 1, Type 2, and Type 3 deterrence.

Now Type 1 deterrence, as I understand it, could be simply if crudely summed up by the saying: “If you vaporize me, I will vaporize you.”

Type 2 deterrence might be equally crudely expressed by the words: “If you vaporize my allies or generally start out to conquer the world by military means, I will vaporize you.”

Type 3 deterrence, on the other hand, might be expressed by the saying: “If you start nibbling me with conventional forces, I will start nibbling you right back.”

Moreover, your defense experts seem to have come to certain conclusions about how much of each of these types of deterrence we have in fact got. They appear to hold that the West retains a great deal of Type 1 deterrence, but hardly as securely as we ought. On the other hand, they believe that we have precious little Type 2 deterrence left. And finally they warn us that we have been extremely negligent in building up our Type 3 deterrence.

A sustained defense effort

These conclusions are the reverse of reassuring. They appear to point towards the need not only for a long, expensive, and sustained defense effort on the part of the West, but also towards an effort directed far more clear-sightedly and intelligently than has yet been done. That effort would be directed, as I under-

stand this advice, towards two points: first, to securing our Type 1 deterrence, by giving to our ultimate, strategic deterrent the highest possible degree of invulnerability; and second, to improving both the quantity and quality of our conventional forces. In my opinion there is nothing incompatible between a vigorous defense effort in these fields, and the measures of disarmament which I am going to propose.

The arms race

Can we possibly be content even with the most sensible and intelligent prosecution of the arms race? No doubt we can minimize the chances of the outbreak of nuclear war in any given year, and so reasonably hope much to postpone its onset. We may do this by maintaining and reinforcing our deterrent forces at each of the three levels. But is that enough? In the nuclear age, all that the world seems to be able to achieve by prosecuting the arms race is a stay of execution. Now, no doubt for people like us who live in the condemned cell, a stay of execution is a very important thing to procure. But the stay, when it has been obtained, must be used. It must be used in such a way that the world can be released from the condemned cell of fear; it must be used for nothing less than to rid the world of nuclear war, for nothing less will enable us to survive. To paraphrase a famous annotation: The experts have explained the arms race in various ways—the thing is to stop it.

Now, of course, we can stop the arms race on our own any day. We can do so by ceasing to make new arms and by scrapping our existing arms. That is what is proposed by some people: that is what is called “unilateral disarmament.” It has the immense appeal of simplicity. It is not my purpose to argue about this issue here. I want to say only this, that whatever else unilateral disarmament may or may not be, it is surrender. It may be said to be none the worse for that, but it is surrender in the precise sense that, if you have unilaterally disarmed, you

have got to do what anyone who has not so disarmed tells you. In other words, others can quite certainly impose their will upon you. You may suppose that these other people, or other states, will not, in practice, interfere with you. Or you may suppose that their instructions to you will be acceptable, or at any rate more acceptable than continuing to run the risks entailed in the arms race.

All right. I can understand people taking this view. But I do not understand people who pretend that unilateral disarmament is not surrender.

For that matter, those pacifists, or "unilateralists," as they are now often called, who have thought deeply about the matter are perfectly clear that unilateral disarmament is surrender: that it is, if necessary, the absolute surrender of all we have and are. The great pacifist tradition — and it is a great tradition — has been perfectly clear on this point. Recall, for instance, the tremendous declaration to King Charles II made by the original members of the Society of Friends. They wrote that they would never "fight or war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the Kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world." With respect, how trivial — indeed, how tawdry — the declarations of some present-day pacifists or unilateralists, even when they are great philosophers, sound in comparison with those unflinching words.

The dead end of hope

But what about those of us who cannot take the road of surrender? Is there anything for us to do except to persevere along the old, dusty, dispiriting road of multilateral disarmament negotiations — or, as you call it, "arms control"? That road has often seemed the very dead end of hope, the very alleyway of despair. Nevertheless, I believe that in principle that is what we must do. But, of course, if we are to have the slightest chance of making progress along the road of multilateral disarmament negotiations, we must seek to travel in a very different way and with a very different spirit than heretofore.

I will forbear to recall to you the desolating story of the disarmament negotiations since 1945. They have been an apparently aimless, empty, diplomatic quadrille in which first one side and then the other has come forward with proposals which they have known to be unacceptable to their opponents. The only interruption in this monotonous process has been when one side — usually the Russians — has achieved a political warfare coup by, in effect, accepting the other side's proposals, in the serene confidence that in that case these proposals will be immediately withdrawn.

How totally different would be serious disarmament negotiations in which both sides actually hoped for an agreement! We can judge of this from the proceedings of the nuclear test ban conference. Here

was — and is — a conference which has evidently and undeniably sought to grapple with the real technical problem of control, verification, and inspection: a conference in which both sides have been willing to contemplate, at any rate, the possibility of the conclusion of an agreement.

We are now, I suppose, approaching the moment of decision on this matter. I am far from denying the existence of real risks in the signing of a test ban treaty this year. But when I envisage the risks of *not* signing such a treaty, I cannot help feeling that they are by far the greater.

The initial test ban

Dr. Kahn has lent his authority to the view that we ought to accept a disarmament treaty even if there are "some moderate" risks of its undetected violation. He implies that something up to a 25 percent risk might even be acceptable. At any rate I register my conviction that the chances of our being vaporized during the next two decades turn more upon whether a test ban has been achieved in the proximate future than upon any other single factor.

Nevertheless, a test ban treaty is only a first step, and a very short one at that, along the road to disarmament. True, the first step along that road may be all important. On this subject we may almost say with Madame du Deffand, when she was told that St. Denis walked six miles carrying his head in his hand: "La distance n'y fait rien: il n'y a que le premier pas qui coute." But the first step of a test ban treaty will only count if it is followed, and not too tardily, by others.

What, then, should be the next steps in multilateral nuclear disarmament after the test ban? I must say that the current suggestions do not seem to me very hopeful. I am afraid that we must accept the fact that the destruction of nuclear stocks, for example, is uninspectable and therefore impossible. The cutoff in production of fresh nuclear material is perhaps inspectable; but then it is not particularly important.

On the other hand, the current suggestions of the control of the means of delivery seem to me to point in the right direction.

Might I in this latter connection make a humble and limited suggestion? Much less vulnerable, and therefore characteristically second-strike nuclear weapons, such as the second generation of solid fuel rockets in general, and the Polaris-carrying submarine in particular, are now making their appearance. Why should we not take this opportunity to propose that both sides begin to scrap their older, highly vulnerable, and so essentially first-strike, nuclear weapons? For a start, why should we not propose that each side should scrap say 100 or 200 of their liquid-fuel highly vulnerable IRBM's or even ICBM's? The process would be extremely easy to inspect and verify. Inspectors from each side could verify that an equal

number of Russian and American weapons really had been simultaneously dropped into the middle of the Atlantic.

True, it will be said immediately that this is merely a proposal for the scrapping of obsolescent weapons as and when up-to-date weapons become available. So it is, in a way. But do not let us forget that the obsolescent, first-strike vulnerable weapons, though in my opinion almost useless as deterrents, are a highly provocative menace to the other side. For example, many of us in Britain felt that it really was trying the Russians' patience rather high to install those 60-odd Thor missiles in the U.K. There they are, right under the enemy's guns, sitting targets for any Russian first-strike, quite incapable of second-strike retaliatory action themselves, yet capable, if they were used first, of destroying a dozen or so great Russian cities. And, of course, the Russians have IRBM's of the same obsolescent but highly provocative kind.

Would it not make a profound difference to the whole character of the world situation — to the whole political climate of our time — if the West and the East each publicly destroyed even 100 or 200 of this type of weapon?

Scrapping first-strike weapons

But would Russia agree? None of us can tell. Let us assume for a moment that she would not. Deeply suspicious that this was one more Western plot to put her at a disadvantage, she might refuse. In this case, I think that we should seriously consider going further. Might we not seriously consider taking this particular step unilaterally? After all it is only *general* unilateral disarmament which involves our surrender and is therefore for most of us impossible.

Unilaterally to scrap one particular weapons system which has become largely useless as a deterrent — but which remains intensely menacing, and so provocative, to our opponents — far from involving our surrender, may well actually strengthen our genuinely deterrent, defensive strength. For that matter, if anyone tells me that even particular measures of unilateral disarmament are taboo, I can only answer him by saying that both the East and West have already undertaken several such measures as, for example, their respective and drastic scalings-down of their conventional forces.

I seriously suggest, then, that the West might consider announcing, in the event of a Russian refusal to agree to start scrapping essentially first-strike nuclear weapons, that we were going, nevertheless, to scrap a certain stated number of them and to invite Russian inspectors over to watch the process. We should announce, further, that this was the start of a general policy whereby we were going progressively to reduce toward zero our characteristically first-strike weapons, and to concentrate our efforts in the

nuclear field on the perfection of an adequate (though not necessarily very large) but highly invulnerable second-strike deterrent force. Undoubtedly this would involve, not the abolition of the Strategic Air Command and Bomber Command, but a change of emphasis in the effort devoted to these forces. They would become smaller but incomparably better protected.

If such a policy as this has anything to commend it, then of course the recent proposals on the part of the late Administration for the re-arming of NATO were misconceived. For part of those proposals involved studding Europe with land-based IRBM's which, when so sited, must surely become vulnerable, essentially first-strike, weapons. They must become, that is to say, provocations instead of deterrents. (This criterion does not, of course, apply to the proposal to loan five submarines to NATO; that is a different proposition altogether.)

This was what caused some of us at the recent meeting of NATO Parliamentarians in Paris to protest against the proposal to put highly vulnerable IRBM's close under the enemy's guns in Europe. For to do so would inevitably shift the whole emphasis of NATO's effort away from the provision of conventional-shield forces, which is its true, and sadly neglected, function. For these reasons the proposal seemed to us the very opposite of what should be done.

What can we lose?

I return to my suggestion: What should we lose by progressively diminishing — preferably, of course, multilaterally but, if not, even unilaterally — our vulnerable first-strike nuclear forces? Well, we should lose something, no doubt. We should in particular weaken our Type 2 deterrent power. But then, how much of that have we got left anyhow? On the other hand, we should lose nothing of our all-important Type 1 deterrent power. Indeed, we might hope notably to increase it by means of an emphasis upon adequate, highly invulnerable, and so characteristically second-strike, forces.

And, finally, what might we not gain? Would it really be advantageous, or even possible, for Russia, in the long run, to abstain from following our example? If the West really was undeniably, publicly and inspectably, scrapping its characteristically first-strike weapons, would not Russia inevitably follow suit sooner or later? She might do so, quite frankly, partly because she would see that this was correct military policy; but she would certainly also have to consider the sheer pressure of world opinion. And if once both of the great alliances had begun to scrap at least their characteristically first-strike nuclear weapons, should we not have taken a second — and this time not so short — step upon the toilsome road of mutual disarmament?

But when all is said and done, is disarmament enough? Can we really feel, that is to say, that any measures of partial disarmament, such as those suggested above, are enough? Specifically, are they enough to constitute that "major change in the present world situation" without which, as Dr. Herman Kahn writes in the recent arms control issue of *Daedalus*, "we may expect to get into a war anyway"? To be sure, total, universal, and general disarmament of all weapons by all states would certainly constitute such a major change. But then can any of us really imagine a world consisting in totally disarmed, but completely sovereign, states? Frankly, I cannot.

Whither, then, are we driven in the search for hope? I must admit — though no doubt at the cost of losing the sympathy of all practical men — that I, for one, am driven in the direction of the long term search for some sort of world instrument of authority. And I take comfort in the fact that I am not alone in being driven in this direction. I quote Dr. Herman Kahn again in this context because, whatever else he has been accused of, he has seldom been accused of being a visionary or sentimentalist. And, again, in *Daedalus*, he has written that "many who have thought about this problem have come to the conclusion that reliable stability can only come through an international agency with an effective monopoly of force."

A world authority

Nevertheless, "an international agency with an effective monopoly of force" is a very difficult thing to say anything convincing about. The trouble is, of course, that any advocacy of such a world authority seems, both to the man in the street and to the man in authority, wholly Utopian. The concept seems to have little connection with anything that is going on in the real world about us.

Perhaps I may be permitted to quote some paragraphs on this subject which I recently wrote in a pamphlet called *The Pursuit of Peace*. This pamphlet was directed to my own fellow countrymen, and in particular to those who share my political opinions. So this may perhaps convey to you better and more frankly than would words of mine consciously directed towards an American audience, what are at any rate some British attitudes on this whole subject:

If we want the concept of a world authority to have an impact upon events we must address our minds to the issue of how, conceivably, the existing holders of ultimate nuclear power might be induced to pool that power in order to create and maintain a peaceful world. Those holders of ultimate nuclear power are, in 1960 (but not necessarily for an indefinite period), Russia and America.

In the autumn of 1960 the very idea of there being any possibility of America and Russia, with or without their allies, combin-

ing for any purpose whatever, may seem hardly worth considering.

Be that as it may, one thing is certain. Unless there does dawn upon the Russian and American Governments and their allies (who are often even more intransigent than *they are themselves*) that through, and in spite of, and beyond all their searing conflicts (which will not be appeased for many years yet) some sort of ultimate common purpose exists between them, there is no hope for the world.

What could such a common purpose be? As a matter of fact it is not difficult to answer that question. At this stage in the world's development the Soviet and American Governments can have one, and only one, common purpose, namely to stay alive. It is a simple, but not an unimportant, purpose.

What are the chances that the instinct for survival will, in time, assert itself in those who control the destinies of Russia, America, and secondarily, but quite importantly, in their major allies? It would be foolish to ignore the obstacles that stand in the way of survival. There is first the ideological obstacle. Russia, overtly, and America only less overtly, have, as societies, much more clear-cut, definite and precise ideologies than the older nations of Western Europe. And they preach their respective credos with some passion to the rest of us. The Russian Government tells us daily that the world *must* and will be organized upon the basis of communism: the American Government that it *must* and will be organized upon the basis of free enterprise.

Who can have failed to notice one curious fact about the preaching and counter-preaching, the crusading and counter-crusading, to which the world is still being subjected by the great protagonists? The volume, and even the vehemence, of their exhortations do not diminish, but their interest does. Slowly but surely both of their gospels are *becoming a bore*. *The sap of life is draining out of them*. Nor is the reason far to seek. When we compare either the communist gospel with the actuality of Soviet society, or the gospel of free enterprise with the actuality of American society, we find a profound discrepancy between promise and performance. It is not that either Russian or American society is unsuccessful. On the contrary, as human institutions go, they are both successful above the average. It is rather that they are beginning to exhibit (quite unaccountably if we take either of their ideologies at face value) one telltale characteristic: namely similarity.

Naturally, the differences between them are still great. But the significant fact is that they are beginning to diminish. Apparently, huge, industrial, vigorous, highly organized, communities such as these come to bear certain resemblances to each other, however you organize their productive and social life. It is a sobering and in some respects depres-

sing conclusion. But it does carry within it one supreme gleam of hope. After all, what vital interest of the United States does Russia in fact need to menace? Or where do American purposes and aspirations in fact threaten the well being, let alone the existence of Russia? True, there are plenty of causes of dispute, from Berlin, to Cuba, to Formosa. But they are mostly in fact secondary, peripheral, and therefore *capable*, at least, of settlement. They are capable of settlement if once the Russian and American Governments come to realize that they both have a vested interest in settlements as such. For, like all dominant powers, they are in essence *conservative* powers. This may be a hard saying for governments representing, respectively, the oldest and the newest revolutionary traditions in the world. But it is a fact.

No doubt this is an attitude which will prove extremely irritating to some Americans. Nevertheless, I thought it better that you should know that that is how some of us feel in Britain.

Naturally, I realize that we are still at an immense distance from that monopoly of effective power which, as it seems to me, can alone be expected to pacify the world. Nevertheless, the world is passing through certain phases which will be familiar to economists from their studies of the structure of modern industry.

In the past, the world of power politics might be compared to the world of capitalist firms in their competitive phase. It was a world of many contestants—a free-for-all. And then there emerged in power politics, as in industry, a world of oligopoly, a world in which power was shared by a relatively small number of contestants: oligopolists who made arrangements, alliances, truces, wars, between themselves.

But already the world appears to have passed beyond the stage of oligopoly into the stage of a duopoly of power. The supremacy of the two super states, Russia and America, may, it is true, not last forever, but it exists today. And would not the economists tell us that most experience suggests that the stage of duopoly precedes that of monopoly?

But here, of course, the world of economics provides a poor analogy to the world of power politics, for duopoly is accustomed to pass into monopoly by means of the conquest of one of the two survivors by the other: and that is just what the world in the nuclear age cannot stand.

How then can we imagine Kahn's "monopoly of effective force" coming into being? Perhaps we cannot yet imagine what the process might be like. We can only see its necessity for survival. At present we have got no further than the stage of Russia and America recognizing each other's existence, of recognizing each other in the simple sense that they face the fact that their respective social systems and ways of life are there, and are there for keeps. But I sug-

gest that we *have* about reached this stage. We have reached the stage when each of the super powers recognizes the other as a permanent feature of the international landscape.

I would remind you how recent and still, no doubt, incomplete even this elementary form of mutual recognition is. Russia, until very recently, refused to recognize America in this sense: she loudly proclaimed, and originally at any rate believed, that America and Western capitalism generally were inherently so self-contradictory that they must destroy themselves in the near future.

Conversely, the United States pretty well up to the end of what we may call the Dulles epoch, failed fully to recognize the existence of Russia as, I repeat, a permanent feature of the international landscape. In some American quarters at any rate there was the concept of the "roll-back" or the "crusade." And behind this concept lay a presupposition that the socialist structure of the Russian economy, and of Russian society generally, was inherently impermanent, if not impossible.

For that matter, both sides still accuse each other of harboring these attitudes, and of attempting to push reality into conformity with them by means of attempting to subvert their opponent's social systems. And no doubt there exist in both countries lunatic fringes—and still quite wide and noisy fringes—which have not achieved mutual recognition in this sense. Nevertheless, I am inclined to think that the bargain of co-existence—for such it is—has just about been tacitly struck. And even that elementary bargain is extremely important.

I recall to you in this connection the seventh chapter of *Through the Looking Glass*, in which Alice encounters the Unicorn.

"What is this?" the Unicorn asks. He is told that it is a child.

"I always thought they were fabulous monsters!" says the Unicorn. "Is it alive?"

Alice could not help her lips curling up into a smile as she began: "Do you know, I always thought Unicorns were fabulous monsters, too?"

... "Well, now that we *have* seen each other," said the Unicorn, "if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you. Is that a bargain?"

Observe the terms of the bargain: Alice was not asked to believe in what the Unicorn *said*, nor vice versa. No, the bargain was simply that each was to believe in the fact of the existence of the other. It is that elementary bargain which we of the rest of the world would ask you two super powers to make. For, upon that basis alone can we even begin to think of going forward towards the next stage, which could be nothing less than a bargain designed to secure the minimal degree of cooperation necessary to keep some sort of law and order in the world. Without that, what hope is there for any of us?