
KEEPING
THE
PEACE

Defending the West



WHAT ARE GOVERNMENTS FOR?

Surely the first duty we expect of any government is to defend our peace and freedom.

British governments for the past 40 years have believed that to do this we need strong armed forces.

But the yearly bill for those forces runs to some £18 billion. Do we really need to spend that kind of money on keeping almost a third of a million men under arms, when there are so many other worthwhile projects that deserve it? Europe hasn't had a war for 40 years, after all; and surely nobody wants one?

THE THREAT OF WAR

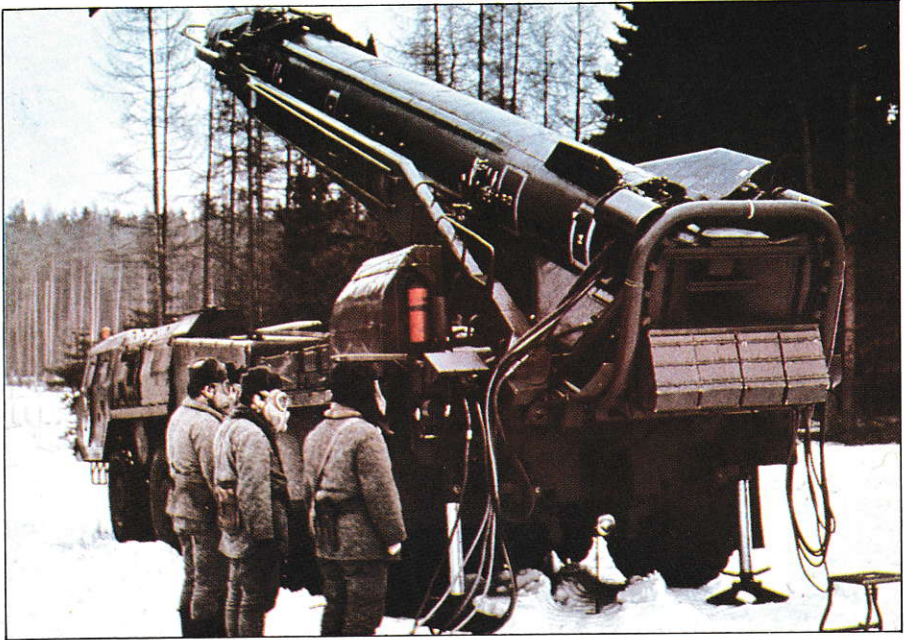
Nobody wants war. Yet the fact remains that most of us were born into a world of East-West confrontation and mistrust . . . a world in which the threat of war is a fact. For the Soviet Union and its allies, the Warsaw Pact, have built up forces very much stronger than those in the West. In Europe alone they have twice as many aircraft, nearly three times as many tanks, and more than three times as many guns. And their European nuclear forces outstrip ours by even greater margins.

This is military might on a scale far beyond what any nation needs for defence. So what *is* it for?

WHAT MAKES THE RUSSIANS TICK?

Down the centuries from Genghis Khan to Hitler, the Russians have suffered bitterly from war and invasion. Their army lost more men in the first six weeks of the Second World War than ours did in the entire six years.

Since then the Communist Party, which runs the Soviet Union, has made defence its first priority. That's why it spends 15-16% of the national wealth on arms (that's about three times the average of the Western countries), and justifies its massive build-up by claiming that we in the West are a threat to Soviet security.



Scud B, Russian short range ballistic missile, during a fuelling exercise, observed by Warsaw Pact personnel

But if the Russians say they are only defending themselves, what about the teaching of Marx and Lenin? They laid down that Communism must one day triumph throughout the world – preferably by peaceful means, but not ultimately ruling out force. Marxism-Leninism remains the guiding ideal behind all Soviet policy today, and we would be wise never to forget that.

For if the Russians fear war, that has never stopped them using war – just so long as they thought they could gain something out of it.

THE SOVIET TAKEOVER

The Soviet Union was the only European country to come out of the last war with other people's territory already in its pocket. The takeover began in a 1939 deal with Hitler, and continued during the war and after it – bringing 180,000 square miles of Europe and the homes of 90 million non-Russians under Soviet domination, and pushing the Soviet Union's military frontier a good 600 miles westward of its actual border.

And it's not only in wartime that the Soviets have used force. Their military might stamped out the Hungarian uprising in the 50s, put down the Czechs in the 60s, invaded Afghanistan in the 70s. And in the 80s it was the threat of Russian force that persuaded the Polish authorities to suppress the Solidarity movement. Every one of these actions was against an opposition too weak to defend itself – as were their earlier takeovers.

THE NATO SHIELD

As long ago as 1949, the year in which the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb and so became a nuclear power, Britain and nine other European countries joined together with the US and Canada to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Today NATO is a free Alliance of 16 countries which aims to prevent war by a shield of collective self-defence – making it clear that an attack on one member would be seen as an attack on all.

Soviet tanks



The Alliance works to keep the peace by a dual approach. One element of that approach is deterrence – keeping up forces which, though they do not need to be exactly equal those of the Warsaw Pact, will be strong enough to show that any attack on the West would be so risky as not to be worthwhile. And the second element is a constant push for agreements on balanced and verifiable arms reductions on both sides.

THE DUAL APPROACH: DETERRENCE

The NATO strategy of deterrence is based on *flexible response* – having a range of forces – conventional and nuclear – and being able to respond to any attack, in an appropriate way.

For the last 40 years, Western governments of every political colour have decided that nuclear weapons must be an essential part of deterrence. For if NATO took any one-sided decision to give up nuclear weapons, or even if we promised not to be the first to use them, what's to stop the Russians thinking they could overrun us with their much bigger conventional forces, backed up with their nuclear and chemical weapons as well?

In any case, so long as the Warsaw Pact has nuclear arms, so must NATO; for the best conventional weapons in the world would be useless against an opponent who can threaten us with a nuclear strike without any fear of nuclear retaliation.

NATO makes a promise which is very much more to the point anyway. It has said again and again that it will not use *any* weapon, nuclear or conventional, except in response to an attack.

The flags of NATO members



HMS Invincible, one of the British warships



NATO strategy is also based on *forward defence* – keeping forces well forward in Europe to meet any attack the moment it happened, and being ready to bring up rapid reinforcements. So forward defence is the reason why British, American and other allied servicemen and women are stationed in West Germany.

THE DUAL APPROACH: ARMS REDUCTION

Meanwhile the very existence of our forces is a spur to the Russians to take arms-reduction talks seriously; for as their record shows, these are hard-headed people who aren't going to bother to negotiate with weaklings.

Talks have been running, on and off, for over twenty years now. They're slow, they're undramatic; could we come up with some big gesture, perhaps? – give way on some issue to show the Soviet Union that we really do want progress?

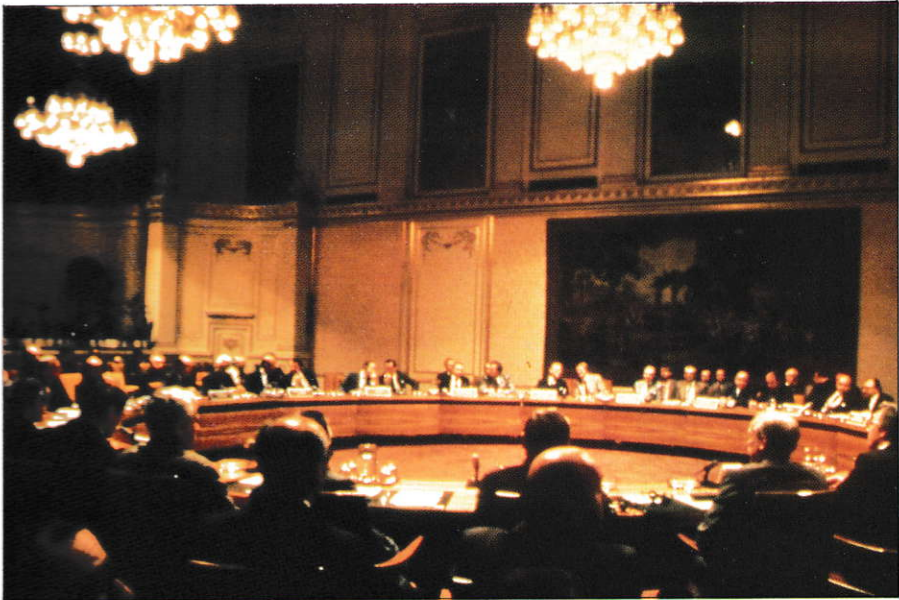
We got the answer to that straight from the horse's mouth. Mr Gorbachev's predecessor, Andropov, said in 1982, 'Let no-one expect of us unilateral (i.e. one-sided) disarmament. We are not naive people. We do not demand unilateral disarmament by the West. We are for equality.' In the Russian language, nothing is for nothing; every concession has its price, and *balanced* agreements are the name of the game.

In fact, over the years a healthy number of balanced arms-control agreements have been signed, and the world is a safer place as a result.

THE ARMS CONTROL TALKS

Since the US and the Soviet Union own 95% of the world's nuclear weapons, they are the two powers involved in the Nuclear & Space Talks in Geneva.

As well as supporting America in those talks, Britain takes a direct part in many others – for instance, the Geneva Conference on Disarmament, where we play a lead role in pushing for a global ban on chemical weapons, the Mutual & Balanced Force Reduction talks in



The conference table at Vienna

Vienna, and the Vienna Follow Up Meeting of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

And the West has tabled a set of proposals – for a 50% cut in American and Soviet intercontinental missiles and bombers, for an agreement on intermediate-range nuclear weapons, and a ban on chemical weapons – which really do seem to offer prospects of undiminished security at lower levels of forces.

KEEPING THE PROMISES

For a country to promise lower levels of forces is one thing; to prove that it's keeping that promise is quite another.

So unless any arms-reduction agreement can be verified to show that nobody's cheating – that weapons aren't just being stockpiled out of sight, for instance – we can't risk signing in the first place.

But the Soviet Union is a closed society which does not welcome visiting inspectors.

Which means that to achieve proper arms-control verification we must chip away at an age-old barrier of suspicion and mistrust. And this is a particular reason why the negotiation of arms reductions is such a patient and painstaking business.

BRITAIN AND NATO

It's fair to say that NATO would be dramatically, perhaps even fatally, weakened without the British contribution. Our armed forces, all volunteers, are mostly committed to the Alliance, and so is 95% of the annual defence budget we spend on them. They have four main roles:

- nuclear*, including our own strategic deterrent (Polaris),
- defence of the UK*, a vital NATO base in the event of war,
- land and air forces* based in Europe, and
- naval forces* to protect NATO supply-lines through the Eastern Atlantic and the English Channel.

And that's not counting specialist forces to help defend NATO's flanks, such as Royal Marines trained in Arctic warfare.

THE BRITISH INDEPENDENT DETERRENT

In a 1985 Gallup poll, two out of three people said we should update the British independent deterrent, the Polaris submarine system. For the Polaris boats are nearly 20 years old now (older than some of the sailors serving in them!), and will be nearing the end of their useful lives in the 1990s.

The special value of a submarine-launched deterrent is that the Russians don't know where it is. An aggressor planning an attack on NATO might calculate on pinpointing and destroying enough of our land-based weapons to prevent us from using them to retaliate with any force. But he also knows that even a single Polaris submarine, submerged somewhere in the deep ocean, could then deliver destruction to his homeland on such a scale as to be hopelessly unacceptable.



British marines on a NATO exercise in the Arctic

THE TRIDENT SYSTEM

So the updating of the British deterrent calls for a replacement which can go on being undetectable for decades to come, in the face of greatly improved Soviet detection systems. To do this it needs longer-range missiles, to give it wider sea-room and deeper water in which to operate. They must be more sophisticated missiles, too, to overcome Russian advances in anti-missile defence systems which did not even exist when Polaris entered service.

The Trident D5 is the minimum deterrent to meet these needs. It's available, and at only an average of 3% of our defence budget it's sensible value for money.



An artist's impression of HMS Vanguard, a Trident missile submarine

Like Polaris it will be committed to NATO, yet any decision to use it would rest entirely with the British Government. Which all helps to complicate the calculations of a possible aggressor, since he would have to reckon with the reactions not only of the White House, but of Downing Street as well – an extra uncertainty which has always been a powerful plus-point for the British independent deterrent.

CRUISE MISSILES IN BRITAIN

Britain contributes to NATO also by providing bases in this country for US nuclear and conventional forces.

In 1977 the Soviet Union started a heavy build-up of modern SS-20 missile systems, each equipped with three nuclear warheads capable of striking at targets throughout Western Europe.

To modernise its own intermediate nuclear forces in response to this new threat, NATO decided in 1979 to station ground-launched cruise missiles and Pershing IIs in Europe. The Russians threatened that if we did this, they would walk out of arms talks.

NATO refused to be blackmailed, and went ahead with deployment – this included the arrival of cruise missiles at Greenham Common, in Berkshire. The Russians duly walked out at Geneva.

But then with cruise and Pershing as an established fact in their new European bases, the Soviet's delegation came back to continue talking . . . proving once again that although they will try to pressurise us not to modernise our forces as they do theirs, they will respect military strength and will negotiate with those who hold it.

WHY ARE THE AMERICANS HERE?

In fact American weapons had been based in Britain for a good many years before cruise missiles arrived.

The US forces in Europe (some half a million, when you include the families who came with them) are the clearest proof of America's

American airmen off duty in Britain



commitment to Europe's defence – just as the forces of the European Allies serve to defend North America as well as their own territory.

Any operational use of US bases in Britain is a matter of joint decision between the British and American governments. And as the Prime Minister said not long ago, 'No nuclear weapon would be fired or launched from British territory without the agreement of the British Prime Minister.'

WILL THE SOVIET UNION CHANGE?

Mr Gorbachev comes as a big change – affable, smiling, much younger and more outgoing than his predecessor in the Kremlin. But we will do well to remember that while its leaders come and go, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union remains in charge; Gorbachev may have softened some of his speeches but his pronouncements show no real change in their commitment to the Party's ideals.

And those are the ideals of Marx and Lenin; they preach the global victory of the Communist system, and do not ultimately rule out the use of force to achieve it.

But there are signs that in a world of nuclear weapons, the Russians have gradually abandoned any notion of world domination or inevitable war. And certainly it is NATO's dual approach, of armed deterrence and peaceful negotiation, which has played the major part in that decision.

We must go on being ready to welcome any hopeful signs of change; but we must be aware that any lowering of our guard will prevent change, not encourage it.

For it's a contradiction, yes, but it's true . . . that if the Russians are to be persuaded to talk disarmament and peace, it will be only to an Alliance armed and prepared for war.

The May Day Parade, Red Square, Moscow



Want to know more?

We'll be glad to tell you.

Just write to:

Ministry of Defence
ACPR (Central), Room 0370
Main Building
Whitehall
London SW1A 2HB

Or telephone 01-218 2125/3538

Please mention this leaflet when you write or call.