

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

THE ROLES PLAYED BY THE BRITISH CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE IN
THE EVOLUTION OF BRITAIN'S NUCLEAR WEAPON PLANNING AND
POLICY-MAKING, 1945-55.

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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THE ROLES PLAYED BY THE BRITISH CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE IN
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by Nicholas J. Wheeler

This thesis provides the first analysis of the contribution made by the British Chiefs of Staff to Britain's development as a nuclear weapon state, 1945-55, and is based on recently released official records. The thesis seeks to make a contribution to the theoretical literature on defence policy-making and bureaucratic politics. Three research questions are addressed: (1) the merits of the conventional wisdom concerning Britain's defence policy-making process, which portrays the Chiefs of Staff Committee as prey to parochial service interests; (2) the value of the theoretical literature on inter-service rivalry and defence policy-making; and (3) the applicability of the bureaucratic politics model in analysing Britain's evolution as a nuclear weapon state. The thesis argues that the conventional wisdom is inadequate because it depends upon an implicit bureaucratic politics model. While recognising that organisational politics compounded inter-service rivalries, it is concluded that the underlying sources of inter-service rivalry were rooted in clashing strategic philosophies. At the same time, the intellectual baggage of bureaucratic politics leads to a focus on conflicts within the defence establishment. However, it is concluded that such an emphasis neglects the shared values and beliefs which shaped Britain's security policy in the first decade of the nuclear age.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Chiefs of Staff Committee	COSC
Chiefs of Staff	COS
Chief Staff Officer	CSO
Chief of the Air Staff	CAS
Chief of the Imperial General Staff	CIGS
Committee of Imperial Defence	CID
Cabinet Defence Committee	CDC
Defence Research Policy Committee	DRPC
First Sea Lord_(Chief of Naval Staff)	FSL
Hydrogen or (thermonuclear) Bomb	H-bomb
Joint Planning Staff	JPS
Joint Intelligence Committee	JIC
Long Term Defence Programme	LTDP
Strategic Air Command	SAC
Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff	VCNS
Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff	VCIGS
Vice-Chief of the Air Staff	VCAS

INTRODUCTION

The thesis examines the roles played by the British Chiefs of Staff Committee, (COSC) in the making of United Kingdom nuclear weapons policy and strategy in the first decade of the nuclear age. Although there have been many studies of British defence policy and nuclear strategy, there has been no systematic investigation of the contribution made by the British military elite to Britain's nuclear experience. The release of the official papers to the Public Records Office (PRO), however, provides an opportunity to examine the assumptions and values which guided policy makers and military planners in Britain's evolution as a nuclear weapon state.¹

¹ The research has made use of Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff, COS, service ministry and Atomic Energy (Ministry of Supply) records for the post-war decade. Where possible the material has been supplemented by interviews and where this is the case, this is noted in the text. Although the papers in the PRO are released under the so called 'thirty year rule', some of the key papers in the nuclear defence field have been retained by the Ministry of Defence. This study examines COS papers on threat assessment which were framed in the light of reports from the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). Given the absence of JIC records from the PRO, the evaluations made in this thesis about threat assessment are inevitably somewhat incomplete.

A further problem encountered in the study is the heavy dependence on Navy sources. This is especially the case with discussions of the 'Radical Review' in 1953 and the debates surrounding the Swinton Committee in 1954. The COS papers are sketchy on these issues and the analyst is dependent upon the Admiralty records and those Cabinet papers that are available.

The existing conventional wisdom portrays the COSC as an ineffectual transmission belt of strategic ideas to policy makers in the 1940s and 1950s. Britain's defence policy is seen as having been afflicted by pervasive inter-service rivalry. The COS system was reformed by the Government of Anthony Eden in 1955, with further reforms taking place under the Government of Harold Macmillan in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The very fact that a measure of reform took place in 1955 suggests that the COS system was seen by policy makers as in need of serious modification and improvement. Therefore, the thesis will examine the released material in the PRO in an effort to assess the merits of this conventional wisdom as it relates to the development of British nuclear weapons policy and strategy in the first decade of the nuclear age.

In researching this question, the thesis makes a distinction between the internal and external relations of the COS. The former refers to the ability of the COS to manage the conflicting roles which membership of the COSC generates. Each service chief was head of his own service, and had a responsibility to protect his service interests, but at the same time, the COS was a collective body charged with the task of providing the Government with coherent advice on the strategic issues of the day. In this context, the thesis offers a detailed study of the inter-service rivalries which

attended Britain's development as a nuclear weapons state, and evaluates the success with which the COS managed and resolved such rivalries.

The analysis also focuses on external relations, that is the relationship between the COS, policy makers and key civil servants. To what extent were ministers dependent upon the specialised advice of the COS in the making of nuclear weapons policy? Moreover, how far did the COS determine the nuclear strategy of the Attlee, Churchill and Eden Governments? In looking at these questions the thesis offers the first case study of political-military relations in the area of British strategic nuclear decision making. The division between internal and external relations, of course, is not a hard one since changes in the external relations of the COS might effect changes in their internal relations. In this connection, the literature on inter-service rivalry and political-military relations is reviewed in the next chapter.

In relating this case study of the British COS to the theoretical literature on strategic decision making and foreign policy analysis, the thesis seeks to examine the applicability of the bureaucratic politics model to understanding Britain's development as a nuclear weapons state. An analysis of the bureaucratic politics model is

provided in the next chapter, but while this approach has fertilised much thinking in the field of foreign policy analysis, the approach has not been without its critics. A key criticism has focused on the claim that the bureaucratic politics model has relevance to foreign policy decision making beyond that of the United States where the approach originated. Although a few British scholars have provided incisive critiques of the approach, there has been no systematic attempt to apply it to strategic decision making in the United Kingdom. Therefore, the thesis will identify the criticisms which have been made against the bureaucratic politics approach and consider these in relation to the case study material presented in the thesis.

ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter one examines the secondary source material on British nuclear strategy and the defence policy making process. The existing literature on the British COSC is discussed, as is the theoretical literature on inter-service rivalry and political-military relations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the more general literature on strategic decision making focusing on the bureaucratic politics model and its critics.

Chapter two examines the origins and historical development

of the COSC, and locates the COS system in the post war machinery of nuclear weapons policy-making and planning.

Chapter Three is the first of the case study chapters and covers the period 1945-47. It examines the roles played by the COS in threat assessment and the decision to build the British atomic bomb. In addition to this focus on external relations, the chapter examines the different perceptions of the individual COS in the period 1945-7 as to the role of the COSC in the making of British strategic policy.

Chapter Four examines the roles played by the COS in the development of British nuclear strategy in the period 1948-9. In the face of growing pressures on service budgets, controversy flared within the COS about the balance to be drawn between nuclear and conventional forces, with specific disagreement focusing on the question of whether Britain should make a military contribution to Western defence. Disagreements between the COS over the continental commitment, however, did not extend to the development of nuclear strategy. The chapter examines the role played by the COS in determining the size of the nuclear stockpile, delivery systems and targeting policy in the period 1948-9.

Chapter Five discusses the impact of the Soviet atomic breakthrough on British strategic planning and considers the

roles played by the COS in Britain's adjustment to the Soviet bomb test. The period 1949-51 was characterised by the Tizard-Portal debate about defence priorities and the future of the British nuclear deterrent. The contribution made by the COS to this debate will be assessed. In addition, the chapter analyses the growing concerns evidenced by the COS in 1950 as to the risks of dependence on the United States and examines British attempts to restrain United States actions in the Korean War.

Chapter Six analyses British perceptions of United States policy and planning in the aftermath of the Korean War, and discusses the origins of the 1952 Global Strategy Paper, (GSP) which was the response of the British COS to NSC-68 and the Lisbon force goals. The focus of the analysis then shifts to the contents of the GSP and the competing strategic perspectives within the COS as to the nature and length of future global war.

Chapter Seven examines attempts by ministers to exert positive political control over British inter-service rivalry and discusses the responses of the COS to such attempts. The chapter also investigates the continuing debates between the COS as to the nature and length of future global war. In addition, it discusses the Navy's criticisms of the RAF's nuclear strategy which ranged from

disagreements about the future size of the RAF's V-bomber force to an outright assault on the bases of British nuclear strategy.

Chapter Eight examines the contribution made by the COS to Britain's adjustment to the advent of the Hydrogen bomb. The period 1954-55 was characterised by continuing differences between the COS as to the balance to be drawn between nuclear and conventional forces in future security policy. The chapter concludes by examining the growing conflicts in 1955 between the services over future nuclear strategy.

Conclusion: By analysing the nature and significance of the reform of the COSC undertaken by the Eden Government in 1955, the conclusion seeks to address the key research questions discussed in the thesis. In addition, it seeks to make an overall assessment of the contribution made by the COS to the development of Britain's nuclear strategy.

CHAPTER ONE

THEMES FOR ANALYSIS

The Chiefs of Staff and the Origins of British Nuclear Strategy

The purpose of this section is to examine the existing literature on the origins of British nuclear strategy. Previous studies have tended to denigrate the role of strategy in the formation of British nuclear weapons policy. Since such assessments suggest that the role played by the COSC in the development of British nuclear strategy was marginal, it is clearly important to set out these arguments as a basis for further examination in the thesis.

The most important assessment of early British nuclear policy is provided by Margaret Gowing in her official histories. Gowing accepts that the kernel of a theory of nuclear deterrence emerged early in the thinking of the COS,¹ but does not credit the COSC with much significance in shaping atomic energy requirements nor, indeed, strategic policy generally. Gowing implies in her analysis that British strategic weapons policy was driven by a momentum

¹ M. Gowing, Independence and Deterrence, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 164.

which barely took account of specific strategic ideas. Moreover, she contends, relationship between strategic theory and practical requirements was imperfect at best and non-existent at worst. A similar judgement is echoed in A.J.R Groom's comments that '...it was not until Britain was well on the way to becoming an operational nuclear power in the military sense that British thought began to concern itself with strategy'.² At best this would date the beginnings of British nuclear strategy from the mid-1950s and no earlier.

This view is endorsed by Emmanuel Shinwell who, when speaking in the House of Commons about the period of nuclear decision making in the post-war Labour Government, argued that '...we did not believe that the atom bomb in itself would prove an effective deterrent...it was never regarded as a deterrent'.³ It should be pointed out that whilst Shinwell was Minister of Defence in 1950, he was not a member of the Cabinet Gen 75 Committee which oversaw the Labour Government's atomic policy in the immediate post-war period (see chapter three) He was not, therefore, in the best position to judge the nature of political and military thinking at the time.

² A.J.R. Groom, British Thinking about Nuclear Weapons (London: Pinter, 1974), p. 557.

³ House of Commons, vol. 537 col 1914, 1 March 1955.

Although Groom dates British thinking about nuclear strategy from the mid-1950s, he was writing in the early 1970s. His contribution is now recognised as the orthodox account of the origins of British nuclear strategy. He argues that the 1952 Global Strategy Paper, GSP, marked the first British attempt to articulate a strategy of nuclear deterrence which culminated in the 1957 Defence White Paper. In view of all this, a key question for analysis is the validity of the existing interpretations of the origins of British nuclear strategy. Is it the case that British officials did not concern themselves with strategic questions until the early 1950s, does the existing literature incorrectly marginalise the strategic origins of nuclear weapons policy, and the role of the COS in pressing these arguments on the Government?

Furthermore, implicit in the existing interpretations of strategy is a fairly critical assessment of the COSC. Although there has been no specific study of the roles played by the COS in the early British nuclear experience, the existing literature tends to portray the COSC as an ineffectual body, incapable of providing the Government with coherent strategic assessments and advice. The next section examines the basis of this 'conventional wisdom' and discusses the one academic analysis which attempted to take

issue with it.

The Chiefs of Staff and the Conventional Wisdom

Lawrence Martin in assessing British strategic decision making in the early 1960s argued that the chief failing of the system '...has been the tendency to decide by compromise rather than reason'.⁴ He argued that although the immediate post-war years saw an emphasis on strategic airpower, the allocation of funds to the services operated on a 'fair shares' basis rather than a coherent overall strategic design. Martin argued that the COSC was rarely able to arrive at a comprehensive view of national security policy, and suggests that political authorities did little to fill this vacuum or impose their preferences on the COSC. He argues that governments were content to make decisions on certain issues of great domestic political significance such as National Service, or the use of force in defence of imperial interests, while leaving the allocation of the available funds to the bargaining of the COSC. Martin concedes that the Churchill Government marked a break with this pattern. He points out that the personalities in the COS at this time, (especially the forward thinking Chief of the Air Staff, CAS, Sir John Slessor) devised a new strategy

⁴ L.W. Martin, 'The market for strategic ideas in Britain: the Sandys era', American Political Science Review, vol. 61, no. 1 (Spring 1962), pp. 23-42.

for Britain and the Atlantic Alliance. The merits of this interpretation of the 1952 Global Strategy Paper will be examined in chapter six. Nevertheless, Martin asserts that the general guidelines which the COS provided in the GSP did not extend to the balance to be struck between conventional and nuclear forces. He argues that these problems bedeviled British nuclear strategy through the 1950s. Chapters seven and eight evaluate this claim.

Martin seems to provide a measured interpretation of the problems which faced the COS in developing strategic planning in the early post-war period. But more colorful accounts exist which cast the COS in the role of 'villain' of the peace. As will be seen in chapter three, Montgomery's time as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, CIGS, in the late 1940s was not a happy one, and it left him with disdain for the COS system. Montgomery believed that the corporate approach to defence policy-making was tantamount to strategic policy by 'bargaining'. He believed that this was inimical to British security interests. In a Royal United Services Institute lecture in November 1956, he asserted that things were going from bad to worse in defence planning and that

the trend in service organisation is towards service self-sufficiency. If we are not careful, we shall have three independent and self-sufficient ministries of Defence. This is what will happen if each service gets all the forces,

all the weapons and all the equipment necessary to meet all the threats.⁵

Montgomery's comments provide an explicit indictment of the COS. In saying that narrow service requirements were driving the process of weapons acquisition, he suggests that the COS were not providing the government with an overall strategic framework which could be used for deciding allocations between the three services. Montgomery's comments were endorsed by retired Air Vice-Marshal Kingston McCloughry who, when writing in the late 1950s, still felt compelled to assert that

...strategic concepts at the moment are very much the separate strategies of the three services, which are balanced and coordinated according to the various influences which dominate our High Command and political direction at that time.⁶

From the writings of retired military figures, especially those of Montgomery and McCloughry, and the speeches made in the House of Commons in the 1950s criticising British defence planning and organisation, it is possible to adduce a conventional wisdom about Britain's defence policy-making

⁵ Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, 'The Panorama of Warfare in the Nuclear Age', Journal of the Royal United Services Institute, vol. 101, no. 604 (November 1956), p. 157.

⁶ E.J. Kingston-McCloughry, Global Strategy (New York: Praeger, 1957), p. 37.

process which casts the COS in a poor light. These criticisms of defence organisation do not specifically address nuclear strategy, but they do provide a set of criticisms about the COS which, it might be argued, extend into the nuclear weapons domain. Complementary to the question of the origins of British nuclear strategy is, therefore, a question regarding the validity of the conventional wisdom as it relates to the specific area of nuclear strategy.

It is important to recognise, however, that the conventional wisdom has been challenged by one scholar. William P. Snyder, in The Politics of British Defence Policy 1945-62,⁷ offered a fascinating study of British strategic decision making which took issue with existing assumptions about British inter-service rivalry. Snyder recognised that inter-service rivalry existed, but argued that it was confined to certain issues. Moreover, it was his claim that inter-service rivalry was not as pernicious as the critics maintained. Snyder's arguments place him outside the conventional wisdom. Since his work was written on the basis of secondary sources, it can be considered as a series of hypotheses which can be assessed in relation to the records in the public domain. Although Snyder does deal with

⁷ W.P. Snyder, The Politics of British Defence Policy, 1945-62 (Ohio State University Press, 1964).

some aspects of the external relations of the COS, his primary focus and most controversial assessments relate to the internal relations of the COS. These relations and the questions for analysis to which they give rise will be addressed in the next section.

The Internal Relations of the Chiefs of Staff

This section not only examines Snyder's arguments about the nature and significance of British inter-service rivalry, but also attempts to locate these in the context of the general literature on inter-service rivalry which has developed in the United States in recent years. Hopefully this study of the British COSC will offer not only an empirical investigation of Snyder's specific hypotheses about Britain, but also of the wider propositions raised by the literature on inter-service rivalry. The COSC contains within it a basic role conflict. It is crucial, therefore, to examine the sources of inter-service rivalry, for it is the pressures of service interests on which the COSC is supposed to provide authoritative arbitration.

Arnold Kanter in Defense Politics⁸ suggests that the basic cause of inter-service rivalry is to be found in the

⁸ A. Kanter, Defense Politics (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975).

interdependence which exists between the services. He suggests that organisations seek to minimise uncertainty by decreasing interaction with units over which they have little control. Furthermore, given an

...irreducible interdependence among the military services, each service's efforts to stabilise its own organisational environment contain the seeds of unappeasable jurisdictional claims and insatiable demands for additional resources. In the absence of countervailing pressures, the interaction of these efforts will produce interservice rivalries over roles and missions as well as budget shares.⁹

Phil Williams makes a similar point, but does not rely on Kanter's mechanistic assessment of the interaction between competing service units in the policy-making process. He argues that inter-service rivalry is an inescapable feature of most military establishments:

The different responsibilities of individual services lead almost inexorably to differing views of what is important in military planning. There is nothing contrived about this. On the contrary, it may be inherent in the existence of specialised organisations, each of which, almost invariably develops its own values, its own view of the world and its own assessment of its place in this world. The members of the organisation have a conformity of outlook which stems partly from shared experience...Competing organizations tend to be regarded as potential threats to well being and resources, while technological innovation is considered not on its merits but in

⁹ Kanter, op. cit., pp. 28-9.

terms of its impact on the organization.¹⁰

Williams points to a complex interaction between organisationally driven needs and the requirements of policy derived from assessments of the organisation's values and place in the world. Thus, Kanter is suggesting that inter-service rivalry is driven - in the absence of countervailing pressures - to an ever higher pitch by the dictates of organisational needs. And Williams is suggesting that differences are rooted in competing organisational perceptions and values as to the nature of the strategic world, a proposition which will be developed further in the section on bureaucratic politics.

Nevertheless, Williams is in no doubt that while interservice rivalry is a natural and perhaps inevitable feature of military decision making, it encourages a fragmented and disaggregated approach to national security policy which is unhelpful and potentially pernicious.¹¹ He points out the dangers of a situation in which each of the services prepares to fight its own war with little reference to the planning of its rivals and argues that this was particularly the case in the United States in the late

¹⁰ P. Williams, 'United States Defence Policy Making' in G.M. Dillon (ed) Defence Policy Making: A Comparative Analysis (Leicester University Press, 1988 forthcoming).

¹¹ Ibid.

1940s.¹²

Perry Smith and Vincent Davis in their studies of the American Navy and Air-force in the early post-war period, whilst agreeing with Kanter about the mechanisms of inter-service rivalry, emphasise the extent to which planning focused on maintaining key organisational essences in a hostile bureaucratic environment¹³. Smith argues that post war planners were preoccupied with Air-force independence from the United States Army. Davis focuses on the Navy's search for a strategic doctrine in the nuclear age in similarly bureaucratic terms. Kanter concludes:

They agree that the strategic environment, for example, the projected behaviour of potential foreign adversaries, had only a modest impact on the services' behaviour. Rather, the environmental stimuli toward which their strategic planning efforts were directed were overwhelmingly domestic in origin and were pre-dominantly defined in organisational terms.¹⁴

The argument of these American studies is that inter-service rivalry is driven by organisational dynamics. An evaluation of the threat posed by perceived enemies only has a minor impact on the formation of service interests. These

¹² Ibid.

¹³ P.M. Smith, The Air-force Plans For Peace, 1943-55 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970) and V. Davis, Post War Defence Policy and the U.S. Navy, 1943-1946 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976).

¹⁴ Kanter, op. cit., p. 100.

interpretations reflect an extreme position in the literature about inter-service rivalry, and one which draws heavily on a theory of bureaucratic politics to explain outcomes in foreign and defence policy-making.

There is no British equivalent to the studies of Smith and Davis. Snyder's work provides the one systematic treatment of these questions in the British context. He argued that the basic source of inter-service rivalry in Britain was the lack of resources which forced contending groups to compete for limited budget shares. In attacking the conventional wisdom for suggesting that inter-service rivalry accurately characterised British defence policy making, he asserted that the critics were right to see inter-service rivalry as an abnormality, since it only related to a few decisions with the majority not generating

...conflict among the interested departments. The norm is...logical methods of problem solving...which lead easily and quickly to solutions acceptable to all the participants.¹⁵

Following from his contention that most disputes were resolved within a framework of rational problem solving, he accepts that if analytic methods of conflict resolution cannot function, bargaining will be substituted as a means of settling disputes:

¹⁵ Snyder, op. cit., p. 160.

The tendency to resort to bargained solutions is increased when analytic techniques of problem solving are not of great utility, for example, when competing alternatives have incommensurable benefits. A second kind of problem that is often solved by bargaining is the control of new weapons systems or operational forces, "roles and missions" issues.¹⁶

The pattern of British inter-service rivalry in the period 1945-62 is claimed by Snyder to support his hypotheses. Like Martin, he argues that the COS were, in the period 1950-52, an 'unusually compatible group',¹⁷ and that the early 1950s was a time of rising defence budgets and the '...services had sufficient resources for most of their major programmes'.¹⁸ Consequently, it seems to be Snyder's contention that logical methods of problem solving dominated British planning in this period and that inter-service rivalry was under control. Set against this, he contends that by the mid 1950s, decision making by bargaining and compromise had come to dominate defence planning, and that inter-service rivalry was becoming a major concern to policy makers.

Snyder was at his most controversial, however, in his argument that inter-service rivalry was not as pernicious a

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

feature of the defence establishment as the critics maintained, and was especially to be welcomed in the case of the United Kingdom. Snyder recognised that bargaining between the services could lead to the avoidance of painful choices, but argued that inter-service rivalry improved the policy making process by injecting a degree of competition and diversity into it:

Competition and diversity improve the quality of policy in at least three ways. First the separate services provide alternative solutions to common problems. Responsible officials can thus select from among several different approaches to the problem. Second, separatism promotes criticism and discussion within the military establishment. Because the services are competing for the same limited resources, each has a strong incentive to criticise the other's proposals; since each commands the professional expertise and the necessary classified information, the services are also highly competent critics. Finally, the competition among the services is a stimulus to the development of new service roles and missions...inter-service rivalry is frequently deprecated because it is motivated by the desire to maintain service interests rather than the national interest. But motivation by service self-interest does not invalidate the benefits; indeed, service self-interest seems to insure that criticism is persistent and continuous, rather than perfunctory and contingent on specific issues.¹⁹

Snyder's claim is fascinating for he accepts that inter-service rivalry is an inescapable fact of strategic life, but argues that motivation by service interest can have beneficial effects on the policy making process. The idea

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 175-6.

that the services can play the role of competent critics is of direct relevance to this study of the COSC. After all, it is the COS who have access to the overall strategic picture and since each member of the COS has to fight for his service, it is here that one would expect to see the military most effectively discharging the role of competent critics. Snyder seems to be arguing that inter-service rivalry is both an inescapable and necessary feature of defence policy making. Thus, for Snyder, the advantages of service independence outweigh the disadvantages of such competition and proposed solutions to it such as the unification of the services are both undesirable and unnecessary.

This general judgement on the phenomenon of inter-service rivalry was complemented by the specific assertion that inter-service rivalry was to be encouraged in the British context. In this regard, Snyder dissented most vigorously from the British conventional wisdom that inter-service rivalry was both wasteful and pernicious. The basis for his radical claim was that secrecy in the British government meant that there was a lack of informed criticism and debate amongst the articulate public and this had made it '...doubly important that conflict and disagreement be an explicit part of the decision making process'.²⁰ British

²⁰ Ibid., p. 176.

inter-service rivalry was therefore seen by Snyder as making possible a form of what Alexander George later termed 'multiple advocacy'.²¹ This refers to the articulation of diverse and competing perspectives in the policy making process. George argues that 'multiple advocacy' is necessary to avoid the dangers of institutionalised conformity, that which Irving Janis has termed 'Groupthink'.²²

Snyder did not specifically discuss Britain's nuclear defence policy, however and the purpose of the following chapters is to examine the merits of the Snyder scheme in relation to the development of British nuclear strategy and policy-making in the period 1945-55. In providing a number of general propositions about inter-service rivalry, and some specific hypotheses about Britain's defence policy making, Snyder not only developed a critique of the British conventional wisdom, but an early and spirited defence of the beneficial effects of inter-service rivalry. This can be set against those more recent academic criticisms of service competition discussed earlier.

American writers on inter-service rivalry recognised,

²¹ See A.L. George, Presidential Decision Making in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice (Boulder, Colorado: West View Press, 1980).

²² See I. Janis, Victims of Groupthink. A Psychological Study of Foreign Policy Decisions and Fiascos (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1972).

however, that countervailing forces might exist to stem the imperatives of service competition. What they had in mind was the possibility that civilian policy makers might act in ways which generated unity amongst the services as the military sought to present a united front to civilian policy makers. Thus, these academics allowed for interaction between the internal and external relations of the services. Once again, however, Snyder's work predated these American studies in advancing some hypotheses as to the relationship between civilian and military officials. Moreover, based on his study of Britain, Snyder's arguments differed from those which were later advanced by American students of inter-service rivalry.

The External Relations of the Chiefs of Staff

The term external relations is used in the thesis to refer not only to the arguments about civilian control and inter-service rivalry which can be found in the literature on inter-service rivalry, but also to the role played by the military in shaping the content of national security policy. With this in mind, this section is divided into two parts: the first part examines the existing literature on civilian control and inter-service rivalry; and the second examines the literature on political-military relations as it relates to control of the strategic policy making process.

Kanter argues that the benefits which accrue to the services from being united in their external relations with policy makers have pre-disposed the American Joint Chiefs of Staff, (JCS) to constrain the more ruinous aspects of inter-service rivalry. He argues that the services' bargaining position vis-a-vis the President and Secretary of Defence is enhanced the more united they can appear to be on particular issues.²³ Unanimity amongst the JCS enhances negotiating advantages by '...increasing the opportunity to exploit the image of military professionalism'²⁴ and a common stand connotes a '...disinterested expertise unsullied by partisanship - either political or service'.²⁵ Kanter contrasts this with dissension amongst the services and argues that disagreement threatens this image and makes the claim to 'exclusive military expertise' that much more vulnerable.²⁶

Snyder made a similar claim in relation to Britain. He argued that '...if there are irreconcilable divisions...the military aspects of a problem may not be weighed so heavily

²³ Kanter, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

as the economic or political aspects.²⁷ Although this closely resembles Kanter's later argument, Snyder suggested that senior military officers are '...undoubtedly the most sensitive to criticisms of inter-service rivalry'²⁸ and that in the case of Britain, the COS have been conscious of their dual role as heads of the three services and providers of collective strategic advice to the government. The inference of this is that they will try and speak with a '...single voice, even if some of them feel that this is the second best alternative'.²⁹ Kanter seems to be suggesting that what might be termed the 'strain to agreement' in the American JCS is a function of enhanced negotiating leverage vis-a-vis civilian policy makers, but Snyder places greater emphasis on perceptions of role in enabling senior military officers to reach a common position. The validity of these competing analyses regarding the sources of consensus within the COSC in the period under study is considered in subsequent chapters.

Kanter's arguments point up the linkages between internal and external relations, since the stimulus for internal cooperation is the external challenge to the military's control of strategy and budgets. However, Kanter is well

²⁷ Snyder, op. cit., p. 162.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

aware that such external challenges do not necessarily generate cooperative behaviour and can work in reverse. Each service may seek to manipulate perceived executive support in bargaining with rivals. The most quoted example in the American literature is the Eisenhower Administration's policy statements on the doctrine of 'Massive Retaliation'. This denied legitimacy to force and budget requirements for protracted non-nuclear conflict. In this connection Glenn Snyder has commented:

Perhaps the most important effect of the decision was to provide Secretary Wilson and Admiral Radford with a formal justification for reducing these {Army and Navy} forces. The president...had now put his name to a policy obviously intended to stress air power and to justify Army and Navy cutbacks.³⁰

Eisenhower replaced Truman's year of maximum danger concept with the idea of the long haul and Kanter argues that as the basis for planning and defence budgets this meant that

...decisions regarding forces and budgets were insulated from changes in the level of international tension or Soviet military capabilities...traditional source of justifications for increases in forces and budgets was denied to the military services and bargaining advantages were redistributed in favour of the civilian leadership.³¹

Samuel Huntington argues that in the face of external

³⁰ Snyder quoted in Kanter, op. cit., p. 82.

³¹ Ibid., p. 82.

challenges, the propensity of the services to compromise depends upon its prediction of the consequences for itself if there is disagreement within the JCS. The more certain a service is that policy makers will support it on a particular issue, the less reluctant it will be to accept greater degrees of civilian control and interference.³² As Kanter points out, Huntington's proposition leads to a curious conclusion:

According to Huntington, unpredictable administration support - which might be thought to stimulate competition among the services - actually increases their incentives to achieve consensus...reliable administration support will enhance civilian control by provoking interservice rivalries.³³

In his study of Britain, Snyder suggested a variant of Huntington's later argument. He contended that inter-service rivalry was not necessarily, as the conventional wisdom portrayed, an indication of the need for leadership, but might actually be occasioned or at least exacerbated by the attempts of ministers to exert greater control. In support of this claim, he suggested that the occasion for the bitter conflicts of the late 1950s was the attempt of the Minister of Defence, Duncan Sandys to increase the power of the centre and downgrade the power of the service ministries and

³² S.P. Huntington, The Common Defense (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 157.

³³ Kanter, op. cit., p. 81.

COS. Snyder commented, '...interservice rivalry and conflict is the result of change and positive control and not necessarily an indication of the need for change or leadership'.³⁴

Snyder's claim about the relationship between civilian control and inter-service rivalry in the Sandys era implies that the three services were united against Sandys and that unequal bargaining advantages did not accrue to each service as a result of his attempt at positive control. With the exception of Snyder's arguments, there have been no studies of the relationship between civilian control and inter-service rivalry in the British context. Although the Sandys era is generally seen as the first major attempt by policy makers to initiate changes in strategic doctrine and to control the inter-service budgetary process, there were defence reviews in the early 1950s which sought to impose a greater degree of civilian control. Chapters seven and eight examine these cases in detail and evaluate them in relation to the hypotheses advanced by Snyder, Kanter and Huntington. As suggested at the outset of this section, there is another dimension to external relations and that relates to the extent of military influence and even domination of the strategic policy making process.

³⁴ Snyder op. cit., p. 164.

Warner Schilling argued that defence preparations have no meaning except in relationship to the state's foreign policy goals, but he recognised that these linkages can be difficult to establish and maintain. The creation in 1947 in the United States of the National Security Council (NSC) was designed to forge a closer linkage between defence and foreign policy. As Schilling pointed out, however, the existence of a forum where such linkages can be thrashed out is no guarantee that the problem will be settled to everyone's satisfaction. Civilian policy makers may be so unsure or divided concerning the threats which confront the state that they are unable to give the military planners any clear directive on the broader purposes of the state's security policies. Alternatively, top policy makers may be unwilling to give such guidance because of their desire to pursue policies of 'calculated ambiguity',³⁵ designed to maintain future freedom of choice. Such ambiguity tends to be resisted by the military for whom a '...rational defence policy requires their sharpest possible definition of foreign policy goals so that preparations can be made in the full knowledge of the ends to be served'.³⁶

³⁵ W. Schilling, 'The Politics of National Defence: Fiscal 1950' in W. Schilling, P. Hammond and G. Snyder (eds.) Strategy, Politics and Defence Budgets (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 12.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

The implication of Schilling's analysis is that in the absence of positive political control, military planners will make their own analysis of threats and impose their own set of strategic priorities upon the strategic planning process. L.D. O'Brien's study of the nuclear weapons policy making of the Truman Administration suggests that the military were able to dominate nuclear weapons policy and strategy because civilian leaders did not feel confident or able to address the issues which the advent of weapons of mass destruction heralded for strategy. 'Civilian policy makers', he says

...divorced themselves from fundamental questions of national strategic policy regarding the usefulness of nuclear weapons for either deterrence or defence. Thus, the military planners, themselves deeply divided in their doctrinal and institutional perspectives, were left very largely on their own to resolve these issues.³⁷

O'Brien's judgement can be contrasted with that of a British scholar who having surveyed four decades of British nuclear weapons policy making, believes that:

Development programmes for British nuclear weapons have always been initiated by the high policy decisions of political leaders...There is no overt evidence to suggest that nuclear decisions have ever escaped from political control by the Prime

³⁷ L.D. O'Brien, National Security and the New Warfare: Defense Policy, War Planning, and Nuclear Weapons, 1945-50 (Ph.D thesis, Ohio State University, 1981), pp. 2-3.

Minister of the day and selected members of his Cabinet...Any argument that those activities represent a case of sectoral policy or low politics is undermined by these initial, higher level political decisions and choices.³⁸

It is John Simpson's argument that the British political leadership have been able to control the military elite. The ability of the latter to offer expert information and advice has not resulted in strategic nuclear decisions being made from the 'bottom up' rather than the 'top down'. Thus, he ascribes a subordinate role to the COSC in the high level decisions on Britain's nuclear weapons programme, a proposition which will be examined in the thesis.

Set against this, however, Simpson considers that British political leaders have felt constrained when they have moved beyond high level issues to more instrumental questions. He argues that when it has come to details about Britain's nuclear posture, policy makers have found themselves because of a lack of detailed technical knowledge and understanding dependent upon officials. He cites the assessments of Soviet ABM potential in the 1960s, which inspired the Chevaline Project, as supporting this argument. However, it is not necessarily the case that such instrumental questions will place the military in a stronger position than policy

³⁸ J. Simpson, The Independent Nuclear State: Britain, the United States and the Military Atom (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 232.

makers. It is unlikely that the COS will be any more technically proficient in dealing with scientific information than policy makers. Having said that, technocrats in the service ministries and the scientific experts involved in the sub-committees which serve the COSC are in a better position to shape, not only the detailed implementation of British nuclear weapons policy, but also the perceptions of the senior military elite. In examining this dimension of external relations, attention will be placed to the interactions between policy makers, COS and bureaucrats in the determination of nuclear weapons policy in the period 1945-55.

Despite accepting that British policy makers have found themselves dependent on technical experts in some aspects of nuclear weapons policy, Simpson insists that this autonomy does not extend to the defining of the requirements of deterrence and targeting policy in the nuclear era. The contrast with O'Brien's claims about the Truman Administration could not be more stark in Simpson's assertion that nuclear strategy was

...made by the political leadership on the basis of the deterrent, rather than war-fighting, role of nuclear weapons. The use of this criterion is particularly marked in the period up to 1954, where it was politically visible attainments which were being aimed at rather than extensive military

capabilities: 'the art not the article'.³⁹

Simpson rules out the existence of military autonomy at the operational level of war-planning. But John Walker in his study of British nuclear non-proliferation policy, based in part on primary source material in the Public Records Office, suggests that '...it is clear that the British military regarded nuclear weapons not just as a weapon of last resort, but as an active and central part of defence policy'.⁴⁰

One can accept Walker's argument that the military were planning on the basis of nuclear war-fighting policies and still accept Simpson's core premise that the nuclear weapons policies of the Attlee, Churchill and Eden Governments were not hostage to the military planning staffs. In challenging Simpson's assertion that Britain did not adopt a nuclear war-fighting posture, Walker sets up two key questions for analysis in the thesis: what was the deterrent philosophy and nuclear targeting policy of the British Government in the period 1945-55; and what role did the military elite play in determining this?

³⁹ Simpson, op. cit., p. 233.

⁴⁰ J. Walker, 'British Attitudes to Nuclear Proliferation, 1952-82' (Ph.D thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1986), p. 60.

The foregoing discussion of internal and external relations provides a set of questions for examination in the thesis. However, aside from testing hypotheses derived from the literature on British and American inter-service rivalry, the thesis seeks to locate these studies in the wider context of the literature on bureaucratic politics. The final part of this chapter therefore traces the development of American ideas about strategic policy making through the work of Schilling and Huntington to the development of the bureaucratic politics approach in the 1970s. Having examined the bureaucratic politics model, the criticisms which have been advanced against the model will be discussed.

Strategic Decision Making: Rational Choice or Politics?

In Strategy, Politics and Defence Budgets, Schilling examined the debates surrounding the United States defence budget in Fiscal Year 1950. It was his contention that conflicts between groups and individuals about future strategic policy were disagreements about basic values. He argued that these differences could not be settled by appeal to rational debate because '...the available tools of analysis cannot yield determinate solutions to them'.⁴¹ Clashes of values are intense because they are so important

⁴¹ Schilling, op. cit., p. 226.

and they exist because the future is so uncertain and

...no one can demonstrate to the satisfaction of all concerned that his theories about how present and future weapons can be used to prevent and win wars are the predictions that reality could or will prove correct.⁴²

Schilling's comments identify the perennial problem for policy makers, namely that security policy has to be formulated and implemented in an environment which is largely unknowable and indeterminate. The future is uncertain and it is impossible to predict fully the emerging challenges or crises. There is no '...ready calculus through which probabilities of occurrence can be safely related to quantities of preparation'.⁴³ In the face of uncertainty regarding the future intentions of possible enemies, strategic planners may seek preparation in full against future contingencies. Huntington has depicted this type of thinking as 'strategic pluralism' which calls for a wide variety of military forces (or services) and weapons to meet a diversity of potential threats'.⁴⁴ He contrasts this with 'strategic monism' which places 'primary reliance on a

⁴² Ibid., p. 226.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 226.

⁴⁴ S.P. Huntington, The Soldier And The State (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 400 and pp. 418-427.

single strategic concept, weapon or service, or region'.⁴⁵

Huntington's monist/pluralist framework might be seen as locating inter-service rivalry in the context of competing perceptions of the requirements of security in an anarchic states system. It represents a linkage between service and national interests in the determination of strategic outcomes, something which is not emphasised in the British and American literature on inter-service rivalry. Having studied the American defence budget in fiscal year 1950, it was Schilling's claim that disagreements had to be resolved in the political arena. By locating the domain of choice in the policy making process, the relative importance of competing values could be decided by the bureaucratic power brought to bear on their behalf. As Schilling asserts, '...the distribution of power can decide matters that the distribution of fact and insight cannot'.⁴⁶ This argument that strategic policy is mediated through the political process does not, however, imply that the cut and thrust of politics is the overriding determinant of strategic policy. Schilling was at pains to reject such an interpretation:

The kind of defenses a budget provides will be primarily a reflection of the kind of ideas people have about the political-military world in which

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Schilling, op. cit., p. 15.

they are living...But the influence exercised on the content of the budget by the character of the political process, while definitely subordinate, is not insignificant.⁴⁷

Such a measured interpretation of the relationship between politics and values in the determination of outcomes was replaced in the late 1960s and 1970s with a wave of studies which had as a common theme the belief that the policy making process itself played a far greater role in the determination of strategic outcomes than had been given credit for in earlier studies of strategic decision making. The next section will consider these academic analyses and the criticisms which have been directed against such ideas.

The Bureaucratic Politics Approach and its Critics

The most prominent work in what might be termed the second wave of studies on the decision making process was Graham Allison's Essence of Decision.⁴⁸ He set out to show how the assumption of governmental behaviour as the product of rational strategic choice was a weak explanatory tool in the understanding of foreign and defence policy. He developed three models of the decision making process, the first of which was the 'classical' or rational actor model. This is

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁸ G.T. Allison, Essence of Decision: Explaining The Cuban Missile Crisis (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971).

an analogue to that much beloved figure of neo-classical economics, rational economic man. States are personified and assumed to have purposes and utilities which are maximised through the rigorous application of cost-benefit analysis.⁴⁹ Allison's argument was that although this model was widely employed by analysts and laymen, it did not capture the complexity of foreign and defence policy and therefore needed supplementing by other frames of reference .

Allison's other constructs, models 2 and 3, radically change the analytical focus from governmental choice to the decision making process and both these models assume a disaggregated governmental actor. Allison's model 2, the Organisational Process Model, has its roots in both the research conducted by economists into the theory of the firm and the insights gained from the administrative sciences as developed in analysis by Herbert Simon in particular. Government is conceived of as a 'conglomerate of semi-feudal loosely allied organisations each with a substantial life of its own'.⁵⁰ Policy is assumed to be the outputs or functions of organisations following 'standard operating procedures'.⁵¹ Allison argues that these actors have as core goals the protection and extension of 'organisational

49. Ibid.

50 Ibid., p. 67.

51 Ibid., p. 83.

essences', that is the maintenance of budgets, influence and prestige within the governmental machine.⁵²

Allison's model 3 has its roots in political science and is derived largely from the work of scholars such as Richard Neustadt, Roger Hilsman and Samuel Huntington. Allison tried to formalise these insights and apply them to foreign policy. Again, in contrast to Model 1,

...the Governmental or (Bureaucratic) politics model sees no unitary actor but rather many actors as players - players who focus not on a single strategic issue but on many diverse intra-national problems as well. Players choose in terms of no consistent set of strategic objectives, but rather according to various conceptions of national security, organisational, domestic and personal interests. Players make governmental decisions not by a single rational choice, but by the pulling and hauling that is politics.⁵³

As Lawrence Freedman argues, '...the central metaphor of the model is that of the game'.⁵⁴ Different players occupy different positions in the government. Diverse interests lead different players to have different stakes and these stakes will determine their position on any issue. Since the publication of Essence of Decision and in response to

⁵² Ibid., p. 67-100.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 144.

⁵⁴ L.D. Freedman, 'Logic, Politics and the Foreign Policy Process: A Critique of the Bureaucratic Politics Model', International Affairs, vol. 52, no. 3 (July 1976), p. 437.

criticisms about the individuality of models 2 and 3, Allison has merged them into a single governmental politics model. In a later work co-authored with Morton Halperin, however, he had lost none of his faith in the essential utility of approaches which challenged the rational actor model. As Allison and Halperin commented:

It is not that the actions of other nations do not matter, but rather they matter if and when they influence domestic struggles...threats to interests from rival organisations or competing political groups are far more important than threats from abroad.⁵⁵

Thus, the external situation is seen only as the occasion for decision, a stimulus that triggers the internal struggle, in which the policy preferences of the various players stem from largely internal sources. Set against this, Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing argue that the external situation is far more important and that perceptions of the external realm are as important a source of policy as internal pressures. This criticism of the bureaucratic politics school echoes Schilling's earlier arguments in Strategy, Politics and Defence Budgets. Moreover, the proposition that organisational politics and strategic preferences are inseparable forms the basis of Freedman and

⁵⁵ G.T. Allison and M. Halperin, 'Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and some Policy Implications', in R. Tanter and R.H. Ullman, (eds.), Theory and Policy in International Relations (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 43.

Ted Greenwood's critique of the bureaucratic politics model. The former has commented in relation to Allison and Halperin's advocacy of the bureaucratic politics model:

A central proposition to the whole argument is that those interests which reflect the organisational health and position of given actors are preeminent and quite distinct from national interests. A Homo Bureaucraticus is postulated—a being with a somewhat petty parochial perspective who knows on which side his bread is buttered.⁵⁶

Freedman argues that the perspective is that of a middle range bureaucratic in-fighter caught up in a game of survival. However, as he suggests, fascination with such ideas leads analysts to be drawn to those issues where there is much 'pulling and hauling' and where expectations of bargaining and competition will be confirmed and to the neglect of those issues where shared values and interests determine the decision making process. Freedman argues that Allison and Halperin can conceive of situations where the national interest can serve as a sufficient guide to policy on its own without invoking bureaucratic politics and on the basis of this argues that Allison's models are not distinct entities:

What is most important in this admission is that it demonstrates that Model 1 and 111 are not two

⁵⁶ Freedman, op. cit., p. 437.

distinct and incompatible paradigms, but two ends of a continuum. At one end all is rationality; at the other all is politics.⁵⁷

Thus, whereas organisational, domestic and personal interests may be determined by the position and character of bureaucratic players, this is not the case for conceptions of the national interest which are pre-determined and generally accepted. Freedman labels this the logic/politics dichotomy and asserts that herein lies the central flaw in the bureaucratic politics approach. To suggest that logic is in no way associated with politics, and politics as in no way connected with logic, is according to Freedman to make too narrow a definition of the very concept of politics:

...the fact that certain aspects of policy and policy making are non-contentious is liable to be as much the result of the resolution of past political struggles as the general acceptance of matters which are considered to be self-evident or based on timeless values and objectively determined truths.⁵⁸

Moreover, he argues that matters which are non-contentious may become issues of heated controversy in the future. Consequently, only by positing a set of eternal verities or iron laws of strategic life can one assert the non-political nature of rational discourse about the nation's strategy.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 441.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 445.

In addition '... not only is politics inherent in those areas where 'logic' appears to prevail, but there is also 'logic' informing the 'politics'.⁵⁹ Freedman argues that the idea of formal rationality, encapsulated in the Rational Actor model and the idea of the rational bureaucrat represents the logic\politics dichotomy at the bureaucratic level: '... distinguishing between following the dictates of the national interest or of personal and organisational interests'.⁶⁰ He argues, however, that it is at this point that the dichotomy breaks down since in the perceptions of actors, personal and organisational needs are likely '...to be harmoniously linked with those of the country'.⁶¹ Homo-bureaucraticus has to address him or herself to the whole set of shared assumptions, images and facts that determine the prevalent concept of the national interest.

Ted Greenwood in The Making of the Mirv⁶² suggested that the most interesting question which the literature on bureaucratic Politics had raised, was the relationship between bureaucratic position and strategic preference.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 446.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² T. Greenwood, The Making the MIRV: A Study of Defense Decision Making (Cambridge, Mass: Ballinger, 1975).

Greenwood emphasised that it was not possible to make a distinction between organisational and national interests. In defending policy positions, actors have to speak the language of the 'national interest' whatever their real motivations. He illustrated his argument with reference to the manner by which the United States Air Force has gone about defending the role of the manned bomber in the American strategic debate:

Air Force Officers, for example, simply cannot argue that they want a new manned strategic bomber because they prefer to fly planes than to sit in missile silos...because otherwise the Strategic Air Command's proportion of the defense budget would decline. Instead, they must argue that the nation needs manned bombers for its defense, that building a new bomber would be more cost-effective over the long run than continuing to repair the old ones...no matter how important parochial interests actually are in determining policy, internal and public justification must be made on the basis of the national interest.⁶³

Greenwood describes this process as 'strategic augmentation',⁶⁴ but like Freedman it is his contention that actors do not separate out their motivations into neat boxes. To believe otherwise is, according to Greenwood, to denigrate the '...importance of individuals in decision making positions, their strategic preferences and views of

⁶³ Ibid., p. 52.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

the world, and their responsibility to determine policy according to their perception of the national interest'.⁶⁵ Freedman argues that caught in the trap of the logic/politics dichotomy, the bureaucratic politics model is unable to link questions of substance to internal politics, but this highlights the key issue which he does not really address: what is the impact of bureaucratic structure on beliefs and perceptions?

The most prominent recent theoretical research in this area has been that of Steve Smith and Martin Hollis. It is their contention that the rational actor and bureaucratic politics model are both to be found wanting , since both are mechanical and '...have a wrong view of the nature of action'.⁶⁶ They suggest the concept of role as an improvement on both models, arguing that roles enable and constrain and that this captures the '...impact of structure on perceptions without losing the 'judgement and maneuverability which is inherent in bureaucratic organisations'.⁶⁷ Smith and Hollis contend that the concept of role is a major improvement on Allison's framework because it allows choice within roles, without losing the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ S. Smith and M. Hollis, 'Roles and Reasons in Foreign Policy Decision-Making', (Unpublished paper, University of East Anglia, 1987), p. 7.

⁶⁷ Ibid. (abstract).

notion of structure within which roles have to operate: They
comment:

...we certainly suppose that there is some general uncertainty amongst those who sit down to decide on foreign policy. Where it exists, the actors are in search of reasoned judgement in which personality has a legitimate part in shaping the collective decision.⁶⁸

Smith and Hollis see decision making as an interaction amongst sophisticated role players and they agree with Freedman that today's consensus can be steeped in yesterday's engagements, with officials taking perceptions, aims and powers which were shaped in previous maneuvers. Thus, '...the student ignorant of yesterday's events will not understand the reasons for today's reasoned judgments since these preferences may result from previous bureaucratic disputes'.⁶⁹ They introduce the notion of 'role distance' as a tool for capturing the detachment which they argue exists in the making of foreign policy:

Foreign Policy is made, in our view, by persons in various offices, who need to juggle with the imperatives of office, to display skill in negotiation and readiness to concede one point for the sake of another, to ride the horses of role-conflict and to interpret a changing situation with a mixture of impartiality and commitment. These are talents which while being broad requirements of office, demand that roles be

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

played with distance.⁷⁰

Smith and Hollis attempt to combine elements of an individual level of analysis with a concept of structure in which role is the linking concept. However, they recognise that the variable of personality does present a problem for their analysis, but purport to 'disarm' this troublesome issue by suggesting that it can be allowed '...some claim on the process of arriving at reasonable beliefs in the face of uncertainty..and by showing how bureaucratic positions require particular personalities'.⁷¹ Despite this, they do accept that even if preferences are formed in part by bureaucratic position, there is still the difficulty of dealing with changing role holders and the formation of individual preferences. Smith and Hollis draw heavily on case study material from the American hostage rescue mission in 1980, but acknowledge that even if National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski had swapped places with Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, it is highly unlikely that Brzezinski would have '...cooed like a dove'.⁷² And as Smith and Hollis identify, this raises the issue as to what makes '...Hawks Hawks'.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁷² Ibid., p. 9.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 10.

Academic research into the concept of role playing in foreign policy decision making is in its infancy. This study of the COSC will attempt to investigate the utility of Smith and Hollis's framework in understanding the roles played by the COS in the period under study. The COSC seems to provide a good laboratory for such an empirical investigation, since role conflicts are built into and grow out of the COS system. Each member of the COS is not a 'free agent', but does it follow that each is therefore little more than a puppet of organisationally determined positions?

It may well be that by putting the focus on the complex interactions between bureaucratic structure and individual perceptions, Freedman, Greenwood, Smith and Hollis have restored the qualifications and caveats which Schilling was so careful to maintain in his analysis of the American defence budget in Strategy, Politics and Defence Budgets. Before proceeding to examine the empirical evidence and how it relates to the theoretical issues and hypotheses raised in this first chapter, a summary of the key research questions and tools of analysis is offered:-

(1) The thesis will assess the merits of the conventional wisdom about Britain's defence policy-making process as it relates to the development of Britain's nuclear weapons policy in the period 1945-55. It will address the extent to which the conventional wisdom was right to identify the problem of inter-service rivalry as the root cause of Britain's strategic predicament?

(2) The thesis will seek to make a contribution to the general literature on inter-service rivalry. It will examine the linkages between civilian control and inter-service rivalry, the relationship between civilian and military authorities, and the beneficial effects - if any - of inter-service rivalry in the period under study.

(3) The thesis will examine the utility of the bureaucratic politics model in explaining British nuclear weapons policy and planning, 1945-55. It will seek to assess the merits of Freedman and Greenwood's critiques of the bureaucratic politics model applied in the British context. In addition, the thesis will consider how far Smith and Hollis's analytical framework provides an improvement on the bureaucratic politics model.

CHAPTER TWO

STRUCTURE AND PROCESS IN BRITISH STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING

Introduction

This analysis of structure and process in defence policy making is split into two sections. The first details the history of the COSC and its planning staffs and discusses the post-war position of the COS as outlined in the 1946 defence White Paper. To set the context for discussion in subsequent chapters of their role in post war nuclear weapons planning and policy, the second part of the analysis focuses on the structure of nuclear decision making in the period 1945-55.

Historical Background Of The COSC

The origins of the COSC rest in the Committee on Imperial Defence (CID) which was an outstanding example of the way in which British defence was provided for by inter-departmental committees.¹ The CID had its origins in the recommendation of the 1904 Esher report which concluded that the Defence

¹ M. Howard, The Central organisation of Defence (London: R.U.S.I, 1970), p. 5.

Committee of the Cabinet should have its own permanent staff '...to obtain and collate information from the Admiralty, War Office, India office, Colonial Office and other Departments of State'.²

Howard argues that the CID functioned only spasmodically before 1914, but suggests that despite being restricted to an 'advisory' role,³ it created a network of sub-committee's linking relevant Departments of State which was important in 1914 in managing the transition between peace and war. Despite being dissolved at the beginning of the First World War, its secretariat remained and under the influence of Sir Maurice Hankey, greatly expanded its activities. As Howard argued, '...Hankey became Secretary to the Cabinet itself, and his Secretariat developed into the Cabinet Office'.⁴ When the CID was revived in 1919, Hankey's control of its secretariat meant that the Cabinet Office and CID were virtually a single body throughout the inter-war period.

The basic problem which confronted the CID in the early inter-war period was the inter-service rivalries which existed between the Army, the Navy and the youngest of the

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

services, the RAF. During the First World War, and especially in the aftermath of the Dardenelles Campaign, the Admiralty and War Office had as Howard says fought '...a virtually separate war'.⁵ Moreover, with the birth of the RAF in 1918, and the necessity for functional cooperation between the RAF and the other services, not to mention the RAF's claims for a share of the nation's defence resources, the requirement for a unified defence policy had never been more pressing. In an effort to mitigate these inter-service rivalries, the COSC was set up in 1924 as a sub-committee of the CID which, in the words of the Salisbury Report, was to provide an '...individual and collective responsibility for advising on defence policy as a whole, the three constituting as it were a super-chief of a War Staff in commission'.⁶

Despite this, it was still possible in 1929 for Major-General F. Maurice to criticise the way in which the three services approached the formulation of military strategy. He contended that '...we should not think of strategy as concerning armies alone, nor of naval and air strategy as

⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁶ Report of the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence on National and Imperial Defence 1923, (Cmd 2029).

apart from, or unconnected with, military strategy',⁷ and advised British officers to '...think of war not in terms of naval, military, and airpower separately, but in terms of national power'.⁸

Howard argues that the COSC which often had Churchill in the chair, effectively directed military policy during the Second World War. Despite this, and in support of Maurice's claims, it has been suggested that services failed to work together in the Second World War and that this occasioned '...more than one defeat and unnecessary losses, even in successful operations'.⁹ Kingston-McCloughry was a critic of British operations in the Second World War as much as he was a critic of the defence policy making process in formulating peacetime military strategy:

Despite a variety of coordinating authorities, the strategy for the Second World War was fashioned from the three separate service strategies as individual approaches to the one problem and not as one whole.¹⁰

The COSC operated with the assistance of a Joint Planning

⁷ Quoted in J. Lider, British Military Thought After World War II (London: Gower, 1985), p. 327.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Quoted in Ibid.

Staff, JPS, which was there to serve the COS in discharging their responsibilities. The next section outlines the history and evolution of the JPS.

The Joint Planning Staff System

The JPS system originated in a decision by the COSC on the 14 March 1927. This combination of the three service Directors of Plans into a single strategic unit was to advise on combined planning between the services. On the 4 May 1936, the COS approved the terms of reference for the JPS as follows:

To examine and report on matters relevant to the three service chiefs as directed from time to time by the Chiefs of Staff and, in addition, with the latter's cognizance, to initiate the examination of, and to report on, current or probable future, strategical problems.¹¹

In 1938 the three Service Directors of Intelligence with a Foreign Office representative added were similarly consolidated into a separate entity, the Joint Intelligence Committee. In August 1940, Churchill who was both Prime Minister and Minister of Defence re-organised the Joint Planning system as follows:

The Joint Planning Committee will from Monday next work directly under the orders of the Minister of

¹¹ See AIR 8/1354, History of the Joint Planning Organisation, 21 April 1948.

Defence, and will become a part of the Minister of Defence's office - formerly the CID Secretariat...They will retain their present positions in and contacts with the three service departments. They will work out the details of such plans as are communicated to them by the Minister of Defence. They may initiate plans of their own after reference to General Ismay. They will of course be at the service of the Chiefs of Staff Committee for the elaboration of any matters sent to them.

Therefore, should doubts and differences exist, or in important cases, all plans will be reviewed by the Defence Committee of the War Cabinet which will consist of the Prime Minister, the Lord Privy Seal and Lord Beaverbrook, and the three service ministers; the three Chiefs of Staff with General Ismay being in attendance.¹²

The Prime Minister also strengthened the JPS by the addition of a section to deal with future planning. The JPS was to consist of the following:

- (1) The Strategical Planning Section
- (2) The Future Operational Planning Staff
- (3) The Executive Planning Staff.¹³

The Joint Planning System was carried over into the post-war period and the responsibilities of the Army, Navy and Air Force's Directors of Plans were defined in April 1948 as

- (1) Advising the Prime Minister, if required on future plans or operations.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

(2) Investigating problems on the instructions of the COS.¹⁴

The JPS and JIC were, however, able to bring to the notice of the COS any problems, which in the opinion of the service directors, required discussion or decision at a higher level. Lider contends in relation to the wartime activities of the JPS, that although defence policy was co-ordinated during the war, this was this was due to the executive power exercised by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence rather than because of the effectiveness of the Joint Planning system and the COSC. Although more sympathetic than McCloughry, he argues that the wartime pressures of rapid decision making disguised the main weakness of the military organisation which was the lack of close cooperation between the services and its concomitant—the absence of a unified defence policy.¹⁵

The COSC In The Second World War

Despite McCloughry's and Lider's comments to the contrary, it seems that when the COS had been faced with the challenge to national security from the Axis powers, it had managed, as Howard argues, to forge a consensus on strategic policy and operational planning. Before 1955 the COS system did not

¹⁴ ibid.

¹⁵ Lider, op. cit., p. 324.

have an official permanent chairman, but during the war, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, CIGS, Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke emerged as a strong chairman. Both the First Sea Lord, (FSL) Lord Cunningham of Hydenhope and the Chief of the Air Staff, (CAS) Lord Portal were prepared to defer to Brooke who was able to focus his attention on the business of running the COSC leaving his service responsibilities to the Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff, VCIGS, Nye. Moreover, an important incentive in enabling the COS to reach a common position on strategic policy was the desire to present a united front to an overbearing Churchill, supporting the argument of later writers on inter-service rivalry as to possible sources of consensus between the COS. And if the COS were divided, the system worked because matters were referred to Churchill who was able and willing to arbitrate inter-service rivalries.

By the middle of 1945, however, there is little doubt that the wartime defence machinery was coming under new strains. With the necessities for rapid decision making gone and with Brooke retired, the COSC returned to the pre-war practice of changing its chairman on a rotational basis. In addition, with the new Labour Government and its Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, the COS did not find themselves with such an autocratic overlord. Linder argues that the new post-war conditions, especially the advent of atomic weapons,

necessitated radical changes in Britain's defence machinery and he comments:

The shortage of resources, the rising costs of defence, the development and production of nuclear weapons...all combined to necessitate a close relationship between defence policy, foreign affairs...and the management of the manpower, industrial and material resources of the country.¹⁶

His contention is that the challenges which faced British policy makers in the atomic epoch required radical changes in the machinery of government. Yet as can be seen in the 1946 White Paper which addressed the central organisation for defence, in this area it was continuity and not discontinuity which characterised the Labour Government's approach to policy-making.

THE POST WAR MACHINERY OF DEFENCE PLANNING

The 1946 White Paper's assessment of post war British defence organisation was premised on the notion that the defence and strategic problems of the future were not fundamentally different from those which it had faced in the immediate past, and that the World War Two machinery was adequate for meeting such demands. It is Lider's contention that these assumptions were anachronistic.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 315.

The White Paper began by stating that the Prime Minister had the supreme responsibility for defence and that this would be exercised through a Cabinet Defence Committee (CDC) rather than through the existing Committee of Imperial Defence. The Prime Minister would chair this Committee, which would consist of the COS, Minister of Defence, the Lord President of the Council, the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the service ministers, the ministers of Labour and Supply and other leading figures who would be called on according to the issues being discussed.

If the authors of the 1946 White Paper were careful to stress the supreme responsibility of the Prime Minister for the formulation of defence policy, they were no less careful to emphasise the responsibility of the COS for its execution. The COSC remained responsible for preparing strategic evaluations and military plans. The Minister of Defence had general responsibility for apportioning financial resources among the services, but the COS had direct access to the CDC on all questions of strategy and plans and it was expressly stated that the Minister of Defence would not act as the speaker for the COS before the CDC. In the words of the White Paper:

On all technical questions of strategy and plans it is essential that the Cabinet and Defence Committee should be able to have

presented to them directly and personally the advice of the Chiefs of Staff as the professional military advisers of the Government. Their advice to the Defence Committee or the Cabinet will not therefore be presented only through the Minister of Defence...Before any major strategical plan is submitted to the Defence Committee [the Minister] will usually discuss it with the Chiefs of Staff, though not with a view to acting as their mouthpiece on the Defence Committee.¹⁷

The Minister of Defence was allotted the task of apportioning resources, including those for research, development and production, in accordance with the strategic priorities laid down by the CDC. The execution of policy was to be the sole responsibility of the service departments themselves, and hence the service ministers were accorded membership of the CDC. In addition, they were served by powerful departments of state, in contrast to the Minister of Defence, who was allotted one Chief Staff Officer as his military adviser and a small staff for liaison, co-ordination and advice. The Chief Staff Officer, CSO, was to be the link between the COSC and the Minister of Defence, but there was no question of the CSO initiating or deciding policy within the COSC. As Howard has suggested, the Minister of Defence '...appeared like one of the unhappier Merovingian Kings, without even a mayor of the Palace to

¹⁷ Central Organisation for Defence, (Cmd 6923, 1946).

pre-empt his non-existent powers'.¹⁸ Hobkirk has commented on the Minister's position as follows:

The situation was therefore that the Ministers in charge of the Service departments and the Chiefs of staff had direct access to the Defence Committee, the same body to which the minister of Defence was invited to submit proposals for sharing available financial resources amongst the services.¹⁹

The Minister of Defence had no powers of initiative in the field of strategic planning or of weapons procurement. The former was the responsibility of the COS and the latter was the purview of the service ministries.

British strategic decision making in the post war period, however, is not only a story of the interaction between political and military elites, but also revolves around the often secret but nonetheless crucial role played by the scientific elites. This is particularly the case in the field of British nuclear weapons decision making. The next section examines the structure of atomic and nuclear weapons decision making in Britain in the first ten years of the nuclear age.

¹⁸ Howard, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁹ M. Hobkirk, The Politics of Defence Budgeting (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 13.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICY MAKING

Since there was no Labour Minister '...who was knowledgeable about the subject'²⁰ of atomic weapons, Attlee retained the services of Sir John Anderson who had been in charge of atomic matters in the wartime Cabinet. Anderson headed a committee which was set up in September 1945 at Attlee's suggestion and which was to advise on the strategic implications of atomic weapons and in particular, on its international aspects. This Committee consisted of civil servants and scientists and representatives from the COSC. As Gowing argues, it was an active and influential Committee until the Autumn of 1946.

It had been decided by Attlee and his colleagues on the Gen 75 Committee in October 1945 (the Gen 75 Committee was an ad-hoc committee comprising the Prime Minister's inner ring of ministers involved in the atomic weapons project) that the nuclear programme should come under the responsibility

²⁰ S. Zuckerman, Star Wars in a Nuclear Armed World (London: William Kimber, 1986), p. 161.

of the Ministry of Supply.²¹ Sir John Cockcroft became the first Permanent under Secretary of State of the Ministry of Supply. According to Gowing, '...it became urgent to appoint within the Ministry a Controller of Atomic Energy' and in March 1946, Lord Portal, the retired CAS agreed to take up this post. The White Paper of October 1946 set up a Defence Research Policy Committee which in the words of Sir Solly Zuckerman was

...to decide priorities for research and development expenditure on proposals for new weapons systems that came from the services and to monitor the progress of those which were accepted. Sir Henry Tizard, one of the most experienced and worldly men of science in the country, was prevailed upon to become the Chairman ...in effect, he therefore became Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government as a whole.²²

Consequently, with Portal in the Ministry of Supply and Tizard in the DRPC, the bureaucratic lines were being drawn for conflict between these two organisations over the control of atomic energy. By the end of 1947, there was concern about the responsibilities of the COS in providing guidance on the development and production of atomic weapons, and about the role of the DRPC in advising on atomic weapons. This is discussed in chapter three, and in 1949, as discussed in chapter four, the Tizard-Portal

²¹ Gowing, op. cit., p. 27.

²² Zuckerman, op. cit., p. 163.

controversy became part of a wider debate about the priorities to be accorded atomic weapons in national security policy.

The decision making structure for atomic weapons was changed following the return of the Churchill Government to power in 1951. Lord Cherwell, Churchill's wartime confident and adviser, was made Paymaster General and became the Cabinet minister responsible for the project in 1952. Cherwell believed that the pace of the British atomic weapons programme was too slow and advocated that the detailed control of the programme be transferred from the Ministry of Supply to a new and independent corporation which would be similar to the United States Atomic Energy Commission (USAEC) and which would be funded by the Treasury and responsible to the Ministry of Defence. This idea generated considerable opposition, not least from Duncan Sandys who as Churchill's Minister of Supply opposed any attempts to take the administration and control of the atomic weapons project out of the hands of his ministry.

Despite this, in April 1953, the Cabinet was persuaded to accept the idea and a Committee was set up under Lord Waverly to plan the changeover and recommend a structure for the new organisation. This report and the subsequent British Atomic Energy Act of 1954 led to the creation of the

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) in July of that year which was financed by its own Parliamentary vote, but which was responsible to the Lord President of the Council rather than to the Minister of Defence. As is discussed in chapters seven and eight, these developments took place against the backdrop of decisions about the future of the British nuclear weapons programme and in particular, the political decision to move to megaton weapons.

Consequently, it is clear from this discussion that the post-war organisation for defence and nuclear weapons policy-making was a decentralised one. The result of adopting such a fragmented decision making structure was to generate conflicts of authority and power between competing interests. Although the detailed disputes between the Ministry of Supply, UKAEA and the Treasury with respect to the development of the British nuclear weapons programme have been little explored, they remain beyond the scope of this thesis. By contrast, the conflicts of interest between the service ministries, DRPC and COS as they sought to influence ministerial decisions in the making of British defence and nuclear weapons policy are discussed in the thesis.

CHAPTER THREE

ATOMIC DECISIONS AND THREAT ASSESSMENT, 1945-7

Introduction

British wartime perceptions of atomic weapons, and the influence which these exerted on immediate post-war atomic strategy provide the starting point for this investigation into the roles played by the COS in the development of British nuclear weapons policy. Although Britain was quick to endorse a strategy of nuclear deterrence, there were initial reservations from the new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee about the modalities of nuclear strategy. This reflected his concern that the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Office and especially the COS were all overstating the Soviet threat and proposing policies which would increase the risks of war with the Soviets. Attlee's challenge to the emerging Cold War consensus in the British defence elite came in relation to the future role of the Middle East bases in British strategy. The role played by the COS in this dispute will be discussed in the chapter. The most crucial event in this period, however, was the formal decision to build a British atomic bomb. The rationales for this decision will be examined and an

assessment made of the key players in determining this outcome. Having examined two issues which highlight the external relations of the COS in this period, attention will turn to the internal relations of the COS and the difficulties of assimilating atomic weapons into strategic planning.

Wartime Assumptions And Atomic Strategy

The decision to build the British bomb was taken in principle during the war after the Churchill Government received the report of the Maud Committee in 1941. This report had placed the development of an atomic energy programme in the context of the post war strategic environment. 'No nation', the Committee said would care to risk being caught without a weapon of such decisive possibilities'.¹ Thus the Maud Committee was articulating the belief that in a hostile atomically armed world, prudence dictated that states acquire nuclear weapons. Despite this general prognosis, British fears focused in 1941 on the possibility that Nazi Germany might develop the bomb first. As the war developed, however, attention began to focus on the possibility that the Soviet Union might

¹ M. Gowing, Britain and Atomic Energy, 1939-1945 (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 396.

acquire atomic weapons. Sir John Anderson² minuted Sir Winston Churchill to this effect in the Spring of 1943³, whilst Lord Cherwell, then Paymaster General, asked rhetorically, 'can England afford to neglect so potent an air arm while Russia develops it'.⁴ The concern over the Soviet Union was also evident in discussions which were held in Washington during mid-1943. According to the later account of General Groves, Churchill argued that Britain's interest in atomic energy was a result of her being

...vitally concerned with being able to maintain her future independence in the face of international blackmail that the Russians might eventually be able to employ.⁵

Thus, as early as 1943, the British Government seems to have been expressing the view that Britain could not afford to be defenceless in the face of possible Soviet atomic blackmail. Moreover, a doctrine of deterrence was enunciated not only as a means of defence against the Soviet Union, but also as an argument against American attempts to institute a post-war atomic monopoly and to prevent stockpiling of atomic

² Sir John Anderson had been in charge of atomic matters in the Wartime Cabinet.

³ PREM 3, 139/8A, 29 April 1943.

⁴ PREM 3, 139/8A, mid-1943.

⁵ L. R. Groves, Now It Can Be Told: The Story of the Manhattan Project (New York: Harper, 1962), p. 132.

weapons on British soil. British officials wrote from Washington in mid-1944 that, in the face of suggestions by Groves that no bombs be held in Britain because of their exposure to attack, they had argued

...that if the possibility of retaliation is to work as a deterrent, it is clear that we must have the means of immediate retaliation, and that if a crisis should arise in which it were actually necessary for us to take the initiative in using this weapon, it is clear that we must have some of these weapons under our own control to use without a moment's delay.⁶

Not only had the idea of atomic deterrence been born, but the need for an independent atomic deterrent was being proclaimed. Indeed, British officials began to assess likely post-war threats to security fully a year before the end of the war. By mid-1944, the COS were arguing that, although in the short term avoiding a recurrence of German militarism was Britain's major security priority, in the longer term the threat from the USSR would become more salient.⁷ Distancing themselves from the position adopted by the Foreign office, the COS had in the words of two commentators, come round to recognition of the view that after the defeat of Germany, the USSR would be the only

⁶ PREM 3 139/11A, Campbell to Anderson, 31 May 1944.

⁷ J. Baylis, 'British Wartime Thinking about a postwar European security group', Review of International Studies, vol. 10, no. 3, (July 1984), p. 248.

potential threat to Great Britain.⁸ Such fears, however, on the part of military planners were unrelated to concerns about atomic weaponry. At this stage the planners were not privy to the secrets of atomic weapons and were therefore in no position to make assessments about their strategic implications. After the war, however, the COS were brought into the small circle of officials entrusted with atomic secrets and wasted little time before articulating a rudimentary philosophy of nuclear deterrence.

Assessing the Soviet Threat And Nuclear Planning

The distinctive characteristic of the thinking of the COS about atomic strategy in 1945, and of the theory of deterrence which derived from it, was the emphasis upon Britain's unique vulnerability to atomic attack. The problem was not only the physical proximity of Britain to hostile land bases which could be used for launching atomic attacks, but also the inviting targets presented by the concentration of Britain's population and industry. This exposure suggested to the COS, as it had to the Maud Committee in 1941, that Britain must possess its own deterrent capability. The COS asserted in late 1945 that the '...best

⁸ C. Wiebes and B. Zeeman, 'Baylis on postwar planning', Review of International Studies, vol. 10, no. 3 (July 1984), p. 248.

method of defence against the new weapon is likely to be the deterrent effect that the possession of the means of retaliation would have on a potential aggressor'.⁹ In this, the COS were reflecting a Realist approach to national security policy: this assumes the worst in the relations between states and prescribes that states should rely on self-help for the provision of security.

Perceptions of British vulnerability were not confined to the military. The new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee was well aware of Britain's strategic predicament in the new age, but offered in 1945 a radically different prescription for Britain's future security. He reasoned that the advent of the atomic weapon had transformed the nature of international politics. In a hand written letter to President Truman on 25 September 1945, he expressed the view that the old idea of national sovereignty was obsolete. Britain, America and the Soviet Union should, he said, pioneer a new world order in which political realities took account of the new awesome physical reality of atomic weapons. He commented that before the advent of the atomic weapon,

...military experts still thought and planned on

⁹ PREM 8/116, Chief Staff Officer to Minister of Defence, 10 October 1945.

assumptions not entirely different from those of their predecessors... In many discussions on bombing in the days before the war it was demonstrated that the only answer to the bomber was the bomber. The war proved this to be correct. The obvious fact did not prevent bombing but resulted in the destruction of many great centres of civilisation. Similarly if mankind continues to make the atomic bomb without changing the political relationships of states sooner or later these bombs will be used for mutual annihilation...We have it seems to me if we are to rid ourselves of this menace to make very far reaching changes in the relationship between states. We have in fact in the light of this revolutionary development to make a fresh review of world policy and a new valuation of what are called national interests. We must bend our utmost energies to secure that better ordering of human affairs which so great a revolution at once renders necessary and should make possible.¹⁰

On 8 November 1945, Attlee presented a memorandum to the Cabinet in which he outlined his visionary scheme. He asserted that a state of armed deterrence would lead to war and that the only hope for the future lay in the realisation of international relationships in which war was ruled out as an instrument of state policy. Despite such rhetoric, when the issue of sharing atomic secrets with the Soviets was discussed, Attlee pressed the view with Bevin that to share technical knowlege with the Soviet Union, as a gesture of goodwill, would be counterproductive. Attlee was worried that Stalin would interpret such a gesture as a sign of weakness, and insisted that the establishment of better

¹⁰ PREM 8/116, Attlee to Truman, 25 September 1945.

relations should precede technical exchanges. Furthermore, in the next few years before the Soviets acquired atomic weapons, strenuous efforts should be made to build a world organisation based upon the abandonment of power politics. There were dissenters from the Prime Minister's point of view who argued that Soviet behaviour reflected a general mistrust of Western policy, and that an immediate offer to share atomic information would lead to an improvement of Anglo-Soviet relations which would be of mutual benefit:

Some Ministers thought it would be wiser to make an immediate offer to disclose this information to the Soviet Government...If it was our policy to build world peace on a moral foundation, rather than on a balance of power, we should be prepared to apply that principle at once in relation to the atomic bomb. There was a real risk that the Soviet Government would be unwilling to cooperate wholeheartedly in the establishment of an effective world organisation so long as the British and United States Governments insisted on keeping to themselves the secrets of manufacture of the atomic bomb.¹¹

The attitude of the COS had been stated uncompromisingly the previous month. Although prepared to accept that some type of international control might be the only alternative to mutual destruction, the COS were much exercised by the practicalities of such negotiations and especially with the risks of Soviet cheating. Drawing attention to the need for

¹¹ PREM 8/116, C.M. (45) 51st Conclusions, Minute 4, 8 November 1945, 2.

inspection, the COS remarked upon the remote areas of the USSR in which atomic weapons might be developed and of the dangers of the West giving up research and production whilst secret development took place in the USSR. There had to be insistence upon full rights of inspection but as the COS were aware, 'how this is to be achieved under the present Soviet system is the crux of the problem'.¹² Moreover, the military were adamant that there should be no delay in Britain's own bomb programme pending possible international negotiations since this '...might well prove fatal to the security of the British Commonwealth'.¹³

Attlee had articulated the view that in the nuclear age lasting security would depend upon the construction of new political relationships based on mutual security, but when it came to the issue of sharing atomic secrets with the Stalinist regime, he agreed with the COS that protecting national security took precedence over co-operation with the Soviet Union, with its attendant dangers and uncertainties. The Prime Minister also agreed with the COS that the United Kingdom should be the world's second nuclear weapons state, a proposition which sat somewhat uneasily with his general

¹² PREM 8/116, Chief Staff Officer to Minister of Defence, 10 October 1945.

¹³ Ibid.

thesis that the advent of the atomic weapon had revolutionised international politics.

A decision to establish an atomic research centre at Harwell was taken in September 1945, and in December it was agreed in the Gen 75 committee that Britain should build one atomic pile, with the option kept open for a second pile in the future. Production of Plutonium was favoured over U-235 because it promised greater military efficiency and yet did not prejudice the civil atomic energy programme. Moreover, although Attlee had struck the clarion call that traditional strategic thinking was obsolete in the atomic era, he himself pointed out that the number of piles would be determined by '...the output of bombs which the Government thought necessary'¹⁴. As Gowing points out, however, this was somewhat uncertain because the COS had not yet submitted a report on atomic bomb requirements.¹⁵

This report seems to have been sent to the Prime Minister on New Year's day 1946. The COS said it was necessary to develop a stockpile which was of the order of hundreds rather than scores. Furthermore, although '...no potential wars or enemies had been officially defined', the comments

¹⁴ CAB 130/2, Gen 75 8th Meeting, 18 December 1945.

¹⁵ Gowing, op. cit., p. 170.

about coping with an enemy with '...dispersed industries and population did not require many guesses' and left little doubt that atomic deterrence was being framed in relation to the Soviet Union.¹⁶

The first articulations of British nuclear strategy came in relation to the Middle East bases. As part of his radical questioning of imperial strategy, Attlee proposed withdrawal from these bases, but he was opposed in this by Bevin, the Foreign Office and COS.¹⁷ The Foreign Office had hoped in early 1946 that Britain and the Soviet Union might reach a diplomatic accommodation, but by the end of 1946, Foreign Office officials were distinctly skeptical of any lasting peace with the Soviet Union. For their part, the COS argued that the Middle East bases were essential for the launching of a strategic air offensive against the Soviet Union since they provided coverage of targets which could not be attacked from the United Kingdom.¹⁸ What was attractive about these overseas bases was that they brought within

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ For general treatment of this issue see A. Bullock, Ernest Bevin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 240-245; E. Barker, The British Between the Superpowers 1945-50 (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 48-52; R. Ovendale, The English Speaking Alliance: Britain, the United States, the Dominions and the Cold War 1945-51 (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), pp. 47-53.

¹⁸ See CAB 133/86, PMM (46), 20 April 1946.

reach the '...important Russian industrial and oil producing areas of Southern Russia and the Caucasus'.¹⁹ When this strategy was discussed with the Prime Minister in a COS meeting on the 12 July, the military argued that there '...was little or no obstacle in Europe to a Russian advance to the Western seaboard',²⁰ and therefore the Middle East bases were vital. As Chief of the Air Staff, (CAS) Lord Tedder pointed out, he and his colleagues

...envisaged attacks from the Middle East being directed against essential products such as oil without which Russia could not fight, and against which attacks could not be ignored. Even if Russian stocks of oil were dispersed, and therefore less vulnerable, transportation generally would become vulnerable.²¹

Attlee remained skeptical and was worried that such a posture on Britain's part would exacerbate Soviet mistrust of Britain and create a self-fulfilling prophecy of tension and fear which might lead to war. Although the results of a recent peace conference held in New York were described by one Foreign Office representative as a 'farce',²² the Prime Minister persisted in his belief that Britain might reach an

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ R. Smith and J. Zametica, *The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee Reconsidered, 1945-47*, International Affairs, vol. 61, no. 2 (Spring 1985), p. 247

²¹ CAB 21/2086, C.O.S. (46) 108th mtg, 12 July 1946.

²² Smith and Zametica, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

accommodation with the Soviet Union. On the 5 January 1947, he penned a memorandum to Bevin which was a direct challenge to the Foreign Office and COS line.²³ He argued that the atomic strategy of the COS was best seen as one of despair, that it was not a credible deterrent against Soviet attack, and that it would provoke rather than deter Moscow. Attlee accepted that there was uncertainty about the prospects of negotiations with the Soviet Union but wanted to know whether it was really agreed that the Soviets were intent on world domination, or whether changes in British strategic doctrine and posture would convince the Soviet leaders that the United Kingdom had no offensive intentions against them.

In responding to Attlee's questions about Soviet intentions, the Foreign Secretary pointed out that conciliatory moves by Britain would lead the Soviets to press even harder, and that it would be dangerous to give up positions of British strength for the illusory goal of accommodation. Bevin also pointed out that American support for Britain would be seriously undermined if these bases were given up. Consequently, the Prime Minister put himself well outside the mainstream position in the COS and Foreign Office which perceived Soviet enmity as rooted in an ideology committing

²³ See Bullock, *op. cit.*, p. 349 and Smith and Zametica, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

the USSR to world revolution.

Attlee's challenge in relation to the Middle East bases was seen by the defence elite as a suggestion that Britain was no longer a great power, and in this the Prime Minister found himself opposed on all fronts. On the 9 January 1947, Attlee met with Bevin and the Minister of Defence, A.V. Alexander to discuss the issue, and according to Lord Bullock, Bevin '...dictated a brief note to say that his general policy should be continued'.²⁴ The Prime Minister, however, was still not satisfied with the Middle East policy and sought a further meeting with the COS. This raises an intriguing question: why did Attlee seek the further advice of those whose plans he had labelled a strategy of despair? It seems as though he was determined to try and carry the COS with him on his vision of foreign and defence policy. If this was the case, however, it was ironic that the COS appear to have played the dominant role in ensuring that Attlee's challenge to the COS-Foreign Office line was firmly laid to rest. Smith and Zametica have struck this theme:

At a Staff conference on the 13 January...Attlee almost inexplicably endorsed the Chiefs of Staff strategy. It was a sudden and dramatic surrender to the views he had been opposing for so long. Typically, Attlee gave no reason during the conference for his volte-face. While he may have

²⁴ Bullock, op. cit., p. 354.

given further consideration to Bevin's submission, it is hard to believe that he would have changed his mind on the basis of that document alone. The weight of evidence suggests that a critical role was played by the Chiefs of Staff.²⁵

Indeed, the CIGS at this time, Field Marshal Montgomery claimed in his memoirs that he persuaded the CAS, Lord Tedder and the FSL, Lord Cunningham that the three of them should resign if Attlee did not desist in his Middle East plans, and that this was communicated to the Prime Minister.²⁶ By opposing Attlee in this way, the COS denied him the opportunity of divide and rule tactics within the committee. The judgement to be drawn from this is that when united the COSC was a formidable player in the determination of strategic policy.

As Bullock points out although the argument over the future of the Middle East bases was significant, the most important event in those crucial two weeks of January 1947 was the Attlee Government's decision to build the British bomb. He suggests that given Attlee's concern about the nuclear planning of the COS, it was perhaps odd that the Prime Minister did not raise any doubts when, on 8 January 1947 the decision was taken by the Gen 75 Committee to proceed

²⁵ Smith and Zametica, op. cit., p. 251.

²⁶ Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, The Memoirs of Field Marshal Montgomery (London: Collins Press, 1958), pp. 435-436.

with a British bomb. The issue which Bullock hints at but does not develop, is the extent to which the decision to build the bomb was taken without the active support of the Prime Minister. Moreover, if the COS played a critical role over the Middle East bases, what role did they play in determining the bomb decision?

The Decision To Build the British Atomic Bomb

There is an impressive consensus amongst the historians of British nuclear policy that the 1947 decision on the bomb was less a product of strategic reasoning than of a set of implicit assumptions: the need for a British bomb was taken to be so self-evident as to require no compelling strategic underpinnings. This view is asserted in Gowing's claim that the British decision "'emerged" from a body of general assumptions',²⁷ and in Rosecrance's judgement that 'there was absolutely no question at the end of the war that Britain would go ahead with an atomic bomb'.²⁸ If wartime perceptions and experiences were the underlying sources of the British bomb, the post-war programme becomes that much further distanced from any specific strategic rationale or

²⁷ Gowing, op. cit., p. 184.

²⁸ R. Rosecrance, Defence of the Realm (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 36.

assessment. It is certainly hard to maintain that it was closely related to the circumstances facing the country in the late 1940s. Gowing, for example, accepts the logical conclusion of this argument in her claim that 'it had not been a response to an immediate military threat but rather something fundamentalist and almost instinctive'.²⁹

So much was a British bomb assumed to be part of policy that in August 1946, the CAS placed with the Ministry of Supply a formal requisition for an atomic bomb. Furthermore, the Air-Staff had in July 1946 completed draft specifications for a long range bomber '...capable of carrying one 10,000 lb bomb to a target 2,000 nautical miles from a base'.³⁰ It was only in the latter part of the year that pressure for a formal decision on the atomic bomb began to develop and this came largely from other bureaucratic actors than the COS.

With William Penney's appointment to the armaments programme, research had reached the point where the actual design and development of the bomb would have to be undertaken and there emerged from below a request for political authority to embark on this. Portal's deputy in

²⁹ Gowing, Independence (Vol 1), p. 184.

³⁰ AIR 20/7111, Draft Air Staff Requirement for Long Range Bomber, 26 July 1946.

the Ministry of Supply, M. Perrin drew attention in a paper written in September 1946 to the anomaly that no '...definite policy had been laid down by HMG with regard to the development of the purely military applications of atomic energy or the manufacture of atomic bombs'.³¹

Perrin developed this theme in a set of notes he wrote in November. In these, he remarked upon the 'tacit assumption' that bombs would be made in the United Kingdom, that the COS were producing a paper on the size of the requirement and that the Ministry of Supply were budgeting on the basis of atomic weapons research. In the light of all this, Perrin observed, 'It is now advisable to get a definite ruling on the subject'.³² In the meantime, Penney had approached Portal with some details about how the ordnance part of the programme might be organised and carried out. The necessity to formalise the bureaucratic instruments of Penney's work thereby became the immediate trigger which produced the government's decision on January 8 1947.

In response to the request from Penney and the pressure from

³¹ AB16/1905, 'Military Applications of Atomic Energy', M.W. Perrin, 24 September 1946.

³² AB16/1905, Perrin to Portal, 12 November 1946.

Perrin, Portal wrote to the Prime Minister. 'I submit, that a decision is required about the development of atomic weapons in this country'.³³ He then went on to outline various courses of action, one of which included non-manufacture of atomic weapons, an option which Portal had no doubt the Government should reject. Thus, although the COS were full square behind Portal in all this, it was not the Committee which was taking the initiative in seeking a formal decision to make the atomic bomb.

Nevertheless, a powerful bureaucratic momentum had developed in favour of Britain's continuation in the atomic weapons field. Faced with this situation, the Government convened a special Cabinet Sub-Committee, Gen 163. The minutes of the Gen 163 Committee (including the COS) which made the decision to build the atomic bomb say little about the discussions which took place, but do report the views of the Foreign Secretary in support of Britain producing atomic weapons. His argument had little to do with the Soviet threat but had everything to do with relations with the United States. The background to this was the 1946 McMahon Act which terminated collaborative exchanges on atomic energy between Britain and the United States. Since Britain had been in the forefront of atomic weapons research, and

³³ AB16/1905, Portal to PM, 19 November 1946.

its scientists had participated in the Manhattan project, this was seen in London as a betrayal. It was not surprisingly, therefore, that Bevin stated 'We could not afford to acquiesce in an American monopoly of this new development'.³⁴ Years later, Attlee reflected to Kenneth Harris that the decision was taken because

If we had decided not to have it, we would have put ourselves entirely in the hands of the Americans. That would have been a risk a British government should not take. It's all very well to look back and to say otherwise, but at the time nobody could be sure that the Americans would not revert to isolationism-many Americans wanted it, many Americans feared it. There was no N.A.T.O. then.³⁵

Attlee's position on the Middle East bases and his concern about taking actions which might provoke the Soviet Union distanced him from the tougher assessments emanating from the Foreign Office and COS at this time. To suggest that he had serious doubts about the specific modalities of deterrence envisaged by the COS, however, is not to imply that Attlee opposed the laying of plans to produce the British bomb. Attlee, like Bevin, seems to have believed that British atomic weapons were essential if Britain was to have a measure of influence over the United States, at a

³⁴ CAB 130/16, Gen 163 1st mtg, 8 January 1947.

³⁵ See K. Harris, Attlee (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1982), p. 288.

time when American policy towards Europe was both uncertain and hesitant. The nightmare scenario was American isolationism. For Attlee and Bevin, the bomb was most important in preventing such an outcome, and in enabling Britain to influence the conduct of American strategic policy which was seen as vital to the security of the United Kingdom.

Whilst accepting Gowing's claim that the bomb decision was not taken in the context of concerns about the Soviet threat in the late 1940s, it is important to recognise that for military planners, it was not unrelated to perceptions of the future Soviet threat. A major assumption of the plans of the late 1940s was that war with the Soviet Union was not an imminent likelihood. The crucial planning date towards which operational planning was geared was the year of 1957. Consequently, the compelling consideration for the COS in January 1947 was the need to make provision for Britain's security in the late 1950s.

Since nuclear deterrence was seen by the COS as providing the only protection against a nuclear armed foe, and the only means of defeating the Soviet Union in war, it was vital that Britain develop nuclear capabilities as soon as possible. Although Gowing recognises that a theory of

deterrence emerged early in the calculations of the COS, it seems to be her implicit claim that the atomic weapons programme was driven by a dynamic which did not take account of the strategic ideas of the COS, a proposition which is called into question by this analysis of threat assessment and nuclear strategy.

Set against this, the strategic rationales proffered by the COS were not as attractive to policy makers as the political ones, especially the likely impact of a bomb programme on Britain's relations with the United States. One recent commentator has argued that '...when the Attlee Government decided to press ahead with the nuclear programme in 1947 it did so purely to justify Britain's status as a Great Power'.³⁶ However, without denying the importance of this aspect of Britain's nuclear programme, it is clear that the political rationale was related to Anglo-American relations. What can most clearly be seen in the decision to build the bomb is the interaction of political and military impulses. Although the evidence suggests that Bevin and Attlee favoured political rationales over the military ones proffered by the COS, there is no evidence that the Gen 163 Committee was hostage to the military or any other

³⁶ C. Coker, British Defence Policy in the 1990s (London: Brassey's, 1987), p. 28.

government agency. There is certainly no evidence to support Phil Braithwaite's unsubstantiated assertion that '...Attlee had yielded to a threat from his Chiefs of Staff that they would resign unless a British A-bomb was built against the Soviet threat'.³⁷

Nevertheless, what seems incontestable is that had Attlee tried to overturn the assumptions upon which the COS and Ministry of Supply were operating, he would have faced tremendous opposition from the military and scientific elite. The role which the COS would have played in such a situation must remain a historical unknown, but given its opposition to Attlee over the Middle East bases, it is very likely that the threat of resignation would have been employed. Despite this, it cannot be emphasised too strongly that although Attlee's role is a perplexing one, there is no historical evidence that he or his senior ministers attempted to overturn the momentum of the British atomic weapons programme.

Within the official circle of advisers to the Government, there was only one voice of dissent against the development of Britain's bomb programme. P.M.S. Blackett, wartime

³⁷ See P. Braithwaite's introduction to G. Kennan NATO, Nuclear War and the Soviet Threat (CND Publications, 1985), p. 32.

scientist and member of Anderson's Advisory Committee on Atomic Energy had first expressed opposition to a British bomb programme in November 1945. He argued that a decision to develop a British bomb would not be in the long term interests of national security, and contended that Britain should adopt a neutral posture between East and West. British development of atomic weapons would, he argued, reinforce Soviet suspicions of the United Kingdom and stimulate aggressive responses against Britain by that country. In believing that Britain could make a unilateral contribution to unravelling the growing spiral of hostility between East and West, Blackett was the first to argue that a posture of conventional deterrence would be robust enough in the face of future Soviet conventional and atomic capabilities.³⁸

The COS curtly dismissed Blackett's arguments and the Prime Minister did not believe that these ideas of Blackett's held the key to the creation of those new political relationships between East and West which would have assured lasting security. Blackett was not informed of the actual decision on 8 January 1947 to go ahead with the British bomb, but had some discussions with Attlee during February 1947 in which

³⁸ For a full analysis of Blackett's thesis, see his seminal Military and Political Consequences of Atomic Energy (London: Turnstile Press, 1948).

he reiterated his objections to British development of the bomb. Despite agreeing with Blackett that the Soviet threat should not be overstated, the Prime Minister was no more persuaded by his arguments against British nuclear weapons than were others in the Government. Having established the basis of an atomic programme, therefore, the next issue for Britain's military planners was to assimilate atomic weapons into an integrated force posture.

Strategic Planning And Economic Stringency

There is a general contention in the literature on British nuclear strategy that the bomb was seen as a cheap means of defence. If an atomic strategy of deterrence could provide security against the manpower of the Soviet Union while releasing servicemen for civilian employment, so much the better. American analysts, such as Huntington, stressed this economic aspect in British policy by suggesting that Britain's speedy espousal of a nuclear doctrine was simply a reflection of economic difficulty. Enough has been said above to challenge Huntington's proposition in relation to the origins of British nuclear strategy, but that is not to say that economic pressures were absent. The Defence Minister was pressing the COS to reach agreement on a framework for future strategic planning which would provide

for cuts in defence spending. The environment of strategic and technological uncertainty in which the COS found themselves provided compelling reasons for deferring major decisions on the balance to be struck between the three services, but although the CAS and FSL would have been content to let things run along, CIGS was determined that the COS should address the thorny questions associated with future defence planning. Thus, difficulties about planning for the future strategic situation were exacerbated by differences amongst the COS about the role which they should play in the initiation of national security policy.

In his authoritative study of Montgomery, Hamilton makes clear that personal relations between the three service chiefs were very bad. According to Montgomery's official biographer, CIGS believed that the COS should take the initiative in advising ministers on questions of strategic policy. In contrast, Tedder and Cunningham saw themselves playing what Sir Frank Simpson called a defensive role. The Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff, VCIGS, reflected that the CAS and FSL saw themselves as

...batting against national and international pressures, as filtered through the Cabinet and Minister of Defence; whereas Monty, by contrast, arrived fit and healthy, and ready for a good

innings.³⁹

According to Hamilton, Montgomery did not agree with the idea of a COS Committee. As Brigadier Poett, Director of Plans later observed, 'I'm sure if it hadn't been for Simbo {Simpson}, wheels wouldn't have gone round at all'.⁴⁰ Poett asserted that Montgomery did not believe in the committee system, '...He liked the command structure. He wanted a chap who'd say: This is how it's going to be!'.⁴¹ Hamilton also quotes from Sir George Mallaby, then Secretary of the JPS, who was in a good position to make an evaluation-albeit retrospective - of the workings of the COS Committee:

...there had been, despite the strong personalities of Brooke, Portal and Andrew Cunningham, 'a determination to achieve a unity of view' in the Chiefs of Staff Committee - if only successfully to counter the pressure of the Minister of Defence, Churchill...when Monty succeeded Brooke as CIGS in 1946, the achievement of unified aims and harmonious co-operation became impossible; and the main reason for this was that Monty was not in the habit of listening to anybody except his closest personal advisers. He was not interested in what Tedder thought and hardly disguised his contempt for the somewhat melancholy interventions of Cunningham. As for the Joint Planning Staff, they were a pack of fools whose reports should be completely

³⁹ N. Hamilton, Monty: The Field Marshal 1944-76 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), p. 646.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 643.

⁴¹ Ibid.

ignored...⁴²

Mallabay's comments, however, tend to caricature Montgomery's attitude to the JPS. It was not so much that he thought the Joint Planners were incompetent strategic planners, but that it was unreasonable to expect the Directors of Plans to '...resolve problems about which the Chiefs of Staff themselves were unable to agree'.⁴³ Montgomery compared his willingness to think about the strategic future with the attitude of Tedder and Cunningham whom, he asserted, were

...content to let things go along quietly and to deal only with problems put before them by the Secretariat in the Ministry of Defence, and then to refer such problems to the Joint Planning Staff for investigation and report.⁴⁴

Although Hamilton is right to point out that the reflections of Simpson, Poett and Mallaby tend to telescope events, '...particularly the breakdown of the COS Committee',⁴⁵ they do provide an insight into the personal and bureaucratic infighting which plagued the development of defence and strategic policy in the early years of the post war period.

⁴² Ibid., p. 645.

⁴³ Montgomery, Memoirs of a Field Marshal, p. 488.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 646.

Yet the record of the COS in relation to threat assessment and operational nuclear planning is more impressive than one would expect given the accounts of Hamilton, Mallaby, Poett and Montgomery.

In a paper submitted to the Cabinet Defence Committee on 1 January 1947, Alexander said that he was anxious to make sure the Services '...know where they are going and how they are to get there'.⁴⁶ In this, he was implicitly criticising the COS for its failure to furnish guidance to the government on the priorities between the services for the allocation of defence resources. On the one hand, such criticisms seem a little unfair, since only the previous August, the COSC had asked the JPS to undertake a major review of defence problems to be carried out by its future planning section. On the other hand, however, and as Montgomery believed, what prospect was there that the JPS would be able to go much further than reach the lowest common denominator between them?

Nevertheless, if there was resistance amongst the services to long term planning, Alexander was coming under increasing pressure from the Chancellor, Hugh Dalton, to make economies in the defence budget. On 18 February, he wrote to the COS

⁴⁶ CAB 131/4, D.O. (47) 4, 7 January 1947.

stressing the need for reductions. He pointed out that risks would have to be taken but not beyond certain limits of prudence. The Defence Minister expressed his position as follows:

...we must, I think, resist any tendency to embark upon the kind of policy which was pursued with such detriment to our fortunes between World War 1 and 11, namely, 'The Ten Year No War Rule'.⁴⁷

The Defence Minister agreed with the CIGS that the COS had to adopt some basic framework for its long term planning. He suggested a ten year planning framework and a financial ceiling of £600 million. In April, the Joint Planners review of Defence Problems appeared. Unfortunately, this paper has not yet been released but on the basis of this the COS drew up a set of agreed positions in an 'aide memoir' which was discussed at a meeting chaired by the Minister of Defence on 17 April. According to the minutes of the meeting, it was determined that

Planning should proceed on the assumption that the likelihood of war in the next 5 years would be small. The risk will increase gradually in the following 5 years and increase more steeply after 10 years. The risk of war at any time will be comparably lessened to the extent that we and our potential allies show strength.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ DEFE 5/3, C.O.S. (47) 33 0, 18 February 1947.

⁴⁸ DEFE 5/4, C.O.S. (47) 79 0, 17 April 1947.

Despite the difficulty of making the COS system work in an atmosphere of personal animosities, the COS developed the 'Ten Year', or as Eric Grove more correctly expresses it, the '5 + 5' planning assumption.⁴⁹ Certainly, there was no disagreement within the COSC or between the Defence Minister and COS that this planning was specifically focused on the expectation of war with the Soviet Union in the late 1950s. Despite this, while the COS were unanimous on the nature and timing of the Soviet threat, they had not addressed the thorny issue of the priorities between the three services in the allocation of resources. However, the latter was raised at a meeting of the Vice-Chiefs of Staff (VCOS) on the 23 April 1947.

Sir Rhoderick McGrigor, the Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff (VCNS) argued that it was important that the Joint Planners did not become involved, at too early a stage, in '...the assessment of priorities as between the three services'.⁵⁰ Despite this, the consensus of the VCOS was that the JPS should provide an indication of the relative importance of the principal tasks of the armed forces which would assist the service ministries in their estimates of the size and

⁴⁹ E. Grove, 'The Post War "Ten Year Rule"- Myth and Reality' in Journal of the Royal United Services Institute, vol. 129, no. 4 (December 1984), pp. 49-50.

⁵⁰ DEFE 4/3, C.O.S. 57th mtg, 23 April 1947.

shape of the armed forces. With the possible exception of McGrigor, the VCOS do not seem to have grasped the nettle of the problem which was how could the JPS be expected to make collective judgments about priorities when the COS had not provided them with any coherent guidance upon which to base such a study.

The record of this meeting suggests that the VCOS saw their role as more than just administrators for the COSC. The VCOS demonstrated an impressive grasp of the strategic arguments as they thought through some of the problems associated with the assimilation of weapons of mass destruction into strategy. Their discussions provide unambiguous evidence that the military were planning on the basis of initiating the use of atomic weapons at the outset of war. Major General Ward expressed agreement with the assumption of the COS that '...it was only by using immediately weapons of mass destruction that we could effectively stand up against an enemy and relieve this country of a considerable weight of air attack by such weapons'.⁵¹ He also contended that '...mass destruction weapons must be directed against the means to make war, and not the will to make war, although by attacking the former the latter will be affected'.⁵²

⁵¹ DEFE 4/3, C.O.S. (47) 79 (0), 23 April 1947.

⁵² Ibid.

The meeting of the Deputy COS also reveals the first articulations of dissent. Sir William Dickson, VCAS, took issue with the idea that Britain could credibly use weapons of mass destruction before the Soviets had done so:

...in the event of a potential enemy not employing weapons of mass destruction at the outset of a war, the political objections against our initiating their use might be so great that we should be prevented from taking the initiative by being the first to use them. Plans for the use of normal weapons must therefore be prepared as well. Further, he was not convinced that our only hope of survival was to employ weapons of mass destruction.⁵³

Dickson was not challenging Britain's future possession of atomic bombs, but he was questioning the proposed strategy of atomic first use. Moreover, since the implication of his position was the need for greater provision of conventional forces, his argument might be seen as curious for an airman to advance. After all, the advocates of strategic bombing were to argue that the advent of the atomic bomb had brought about the age of independent strategic airpower. Mark Venables, in his study of RAF strategy in the atomic age, uses the oral testimony of Air Commodore Cozins and Air Chief Marshal Earle as proof that the Air Staff '...quickly appreciated the practical military value to the RAF of

⁵³ Ibid.

atomic weapons'.⁵⁴ Consequently, Dickson's articulations could be seen as demonstrating the willingness of a senior military officer to criticise the thrust of atomic weapons policy, even when this seems to have been prejudicial to the doctrinal and institutional interests of the RAF. As such, it seems to provide an interesting example of the dangers of assuming that strategic preference is a direct function of bureaucratic position.

Given that these discussions within the Deputy COSC were taking place against a background of economic retrenchment, Dickson's aspirations for greater defence spending were unlikely to be realised. Sir Henry Tizard, the Chief Scientific Adviser drew the opposite conclusion to Dickson. He argued that if it was accepted that British survival could only be assured through the use of atomic weapons, then because there would be no national atomic weapons for at least five years,

...it might be said that there was no need to maintain armed forces equipped with normal weapons during the next five years, and it would be better to concentrate the resources of the country on economic reconstruction.⁵⁵

According to Gowing, Tizard's concern was that policy makers

⁵⁴ Venables, op. cit., p. 10.

⁵⁵ DEFE 4/3, C.O.S. (47) 57th mtg, 23 April 1947.

and the COS were ignoring the real risk to the Western powers, which he said was '...not war but economic collapse and disorder'.⁵⁶ He believed that the Soviet Union would do all in its power to induce Britain to maintain forces '...at a cost she could not afford'.⁵⁷ This analysis, however, held little appeal for the services, especially the Army and Navy upon whom the greatest burden of cuts would have fallen. The discussions of the Deputy COS were forwarded to the JPS which was instructed to prepare a further report for the COS on future defence planning. This report was approved by the COS and submitted to the Cabinet Defence Committee in June 1947. This document has still to be released, but its main features were reflected in a review of the world strategic situation prepared for a meeting of Commonwealth leaders some six months later. The COS stated in this that

...the Soviet conception of an inherent conflict between social democracy and totalitarian Communism, the official and unofficial pronouncements of the Soviet leaders, and the attitude of the Soviet press make it abundantly clear that the Soviet Union must be regarded as a potentially hostile power.⁵⁸

Gowing contends that when the COS submitted this paper before the Cabinet Defence Committee, Attlee and Bevin were

⁵⁶ Gowing, op. cit., p. 187.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ DEFE 5/6, C.O.S. (47) 227, November 1947.

unhappy with the assumption that the Soviet Union was the only foreseeable enemy. Whatever doubts senior ministers may have harbored about the anti-Soviet emphasis in the paper, however, such perceptions formed the basis for the military planning of the COS. In addition, despite Tizard's protestations about the COS being pre-occupied with the risks of war in the near future, it was the spectre of atomic war in the late 1950s which was the driving force behind future planning. The '5 + 5' planning assumption and the rationale behind it were confirmed in the following statement:

The Soviet armed forces, despite certain deficiencies, could embark on a land war at any time, and would, at least in the early stages have the advantage of numbers against any likely combination of opposing forces. In any major war, however, that started before 1955-60 at any rate, this initial advantage would be increasingly counterbalanced, as hostilities continued, by Russia's economic insufficiency. Moreover, the strategic air situation, is, at least at present, unfavorable to the Soviet Union...we consider it unlikely that the Soviet Union will possess, before 1957 at the earliest, a sufficient stock of bombs to produce a decisive result, by those means only, even against the United Kingdom alone...Failing the early development of biological or surprise weapons to a point which she believed would ensure her rapid victory, the Soviet Union's economic difficulties are likely to be decisive in making her wish to avoid a protracted major war at any rate until 1955-60.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Ibid.

The threat assessment of the COS was based on Soviet ideology which was seen as committing the Soviets to a revolutionary foreign policy, and the military possibilities open to such a revolutionary regime. The 5 + 5 assumption was to some extent an example of reductionist thinking in that it operated on the assumption that when the Soviets achieved a favorable correlation of military strength vis-a-vis the West, Moscow could be expected to launch a war against its enemies. Nevertheless, it was not so much that the COS were imputing Soviet intentions on the basis of the latter's military capabilities; they argued that the very nature of the Soviet regime meant that these intentions could not be benign.

Having identified the political and military challenge against British security, the COS focused on British capabilities necessary to meet the Soviet challenge. Here, it was the recurring theme of Britain's vulnerability to atomic attack which was highlighted. The COS was united on the role which the first use of atomic weapons could play in reducing the country's exposure to Soviet atomic attack. Dickson's suggestion that the United Kingdom might be self-deterred from using such weapons had not diminished the faith of the COS in what might be termed defensive atomic deterrence:

The advent of mass destruction weapons and long range weapons has produced a situation in which methods of attack are far ahead of those of defence, and enormous damage will be done to the dense and concentrated population and industries of the United Kingdom unless attacks by such weapons can be prevented. The very existence of the United Kingdom will therefore depend upon its ability to hit back hard at the outset and to withstand and counter by itself the initial onslaught.⁶⁰

During the first two post-war years, the essential bases of the British atomic energy programme had been laid. These requirements had been set against a general strategy of deterrence which established the strategic framework for policy. There was general agreement on the nature and timing of the Soviet threat, and on the need for British nuclear capabilities to meet this challenge. However, there was less consensus on the balance to be struck between conventional and nuclear forces in strategic planning, an issue which touched on the roles and missions of the services in the nuclear age.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Conclusion

Attlee's hand written memoranda to Truman in late 1945 demonstrates a British Prime Minister writing the language of post-Clausewitzian strategic discourse, but when it came to practical strategy, Attlee's vision succumbed to the worst case thinking of the COS. Maintaining the dreams of a new world order, Attlee nonetheless seems to have accepted the Realist prognosis that national atomic deterrence was the best of all worlds because it was the only possible world. Had post-war Anglo-Soviet relations been bathed in sweetness and light, the classical approach to security politics embodied in the assessments of the COS might not have found such fertile ground, but deteriorating relations between East and West appeared to confirm the wisdom of such strategic assessments.

Attlee had been concerned that British nuclear planning could, by stimulating Soviet counter-responses against Britain, create a self-fulfilling prophecy of hostility and mistrust. He had sought from his advisers some outline of steps Britain could take which might reverse the increasing spiral of cold war hostility, but does not seem to have seen any inconsistency between such aspirations and the decision to develop the British bomb. After all, there were

critics like P.M.S. Blackett who argued that British development of the bomb would be inimical to the nation's long term security. Blackett favoured a neutralist posture, but he recognised that this would have to be a concerned neutralism which had as its primary objective, that which Attlee had so passionately written about in 1945 - the search for global control of the atom.

The British decision to develop the atomic bomb can be seen as supporting Simpson's contention that development decisions on Britain's bomb programme have been taken by the political elite. There is no evidence to suggest that the military pressed the atomic bomb decision on reluctant senior policy makers. The Prime Minister favoured the bomb decision for reasons of alliance politics, and was distinctly skeptical of the modalities of nuclear strategy pressed by the COS. Nonetheless, after the failure of his challenge over the Middle East bases, Attlee did not try again to overturn the nuclear planning of the COS which was premised on using atomic weapons as agents of war as much as instruments of deterrence. Although in theory the COS made a distinction between deterring war and conducting a war that had already broken out, the arguments in relation to the role of the Middle East bases drifted back and forth between the deterrent advantages, on the one hand, and the

operational advantages in blunting a Soviet offensive, on the other. It was ironic that Attlee whose original prognosis had been that mankind was living in a post-Clausewitzian world should have presided over the development of an atomic strategy rooted in the Clausewitzian paradigm.

However, it is difficult to reconcile this assessment of the external relations of the COS with the accounts of Montgomery, Mallaby and Hamilton which reinforce the conventional wisdom that the COSC was an ineffectual actor in the defence policy making process. Undoubtedly, the personality clashes between Montgomery, on the one hand, and Tedder and Cunningham on the other, militated against the COS developing a co-operative and unanimous approach to many of the problems which faced them in the post war world. The critics, however, focus on the clashes where inter-service politics and personal animosities dominated. What is neglected by the conventional wisdom is the foundation of shared beliefs and values which enabled the COS - divided on so many other issues - to agree on the principles which should guide Britain's nuclear strategy.

Critics of the COS system are on stronger ground with regard to the advice - or rather lack of it - that the COS

provided ministers on the balance of resources between the three services. This failure of the COS to decide on the roles and missions of the services in the post-war period might be seen as supporting the conventional wisdom.

Nonetheless, it was not only chronic personal relations which prevented the COS from dealing with these issues. Technical uncertainties about the future possibilities of weapons of mass destruction also played a part. Most important, however, Montgomery, Tedder and Cunningham held different views as to the appropriate role of the COSC as an innovator of strategic policy.

Montgomery believed that the responsibility of the COS was to initiate policy and play an active role in ensuring that ministers accepted the recommendations of the COS. In this, Montgomery believed that the COS should play the role of advocate, and he claims in his memoirs that he played the dominant role in orchestrating the challenge of the COS against Attlee over the Middle East bases. Montgomery's conviction that the COS should innovate policy conflicted with Cunningham and Tedder's view that the COS should play an advisory and somewhat passive role, except if questioned over essentials, such as Attlee's challenge over the Middle East bases. Montgomery perceived that the FSL's and the CAS's penchant for compromise solutions was a recipe for

continual compromise and fudging over vexed issues such as the future roles of the three services. He reflected in 1958:

Some of the problems were too serious for a compromise solution. The Minister needed to know the right answer from the larger national angle; compromise solutions might be dangerous. And he would get that right answer only from an independent military adviser of great experience.⁶¹

Montgomery had great difficulty in adjusting from the battlefield - where the command system is an imperative - to the complexities of formulating politico-strategic policy in a domestic and international environment characterised by competing financial, political and military considerations, with all the attendant uncertainties that brought. He believed that the corporate approach to defence policy as enshrined in the COSC was a brake on the development of a coherent and unified defence policy, and led to policy making in the strategic arena being reduced to little more than muddling through. Montgomery, however, wanted a 'supremo' because he espoused to use Huntington's terminology, a philosophy of 'strategic monism'. CIGS had a passionate conviction that British security depended upon the speedy adoption of a British military commitment to the

⁶¹ Montgomery, Memoirs of a Field Marshal, p. 489-490.

continent, and was frustrated that others in the defence policy making process were not similarly convinced.

The debate over Britain's future role in European defence grew in part out of the problems of the future roles of the three services and the problems of the balance to be struck between nuclear deterrence and conventional defence in national security policy. The COS had procrastinated on this issue in 1945-7, but with growing ministerial pressures on the services to make cuts in the defence budget, a struggle erupted during late 1947 and early 1948 within the COSC over the issues of resource allocation and the continental commitment. The competing arguments advanced within the COSC, and the significance of such rivalries in the development of Britain's nuclear strategy in the late 1940s, will be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

OPERATIONALISING ATOMIC STRATEGY, 1948-9

Introduction

This period commences with the responses of the COS to attempts by the Cabinet and Minister of Defence to impose budgetary discipline on the services. Although part of the focus of the chapter will therefore be on the external relations of the COS, attempts by policy makers to impose economic discipline on the COS generated considerable internal disagreement amongst the COS as to the right balance to be struck between the three services in future defence planning. In particular, attention focused on the role of the Army, with the COS bitterly divided over the role, if any, that British forces should play in the physical defence of Western Europe. Of course, the appropriate balance between conventional and nuclear forces depended upon an assessment of the value of atomic weapons in realising the objectives of deterrence and defence in the post war world. The effectiveness with which the COS made such assessments will be analysed in relation to three overlapping issue areas: (1) the size of the atomic weapons stockpile; (2) targeting policy and future delivery vehicles; (3) collaboration with the Americans, war planning



and threat assessment. A key question for analysis is the extent to which the fight over the role of the Army was a manifestation of broken consensus within the Committee on atomic weapons policy and strategy?

Atomic Deterrence And Conventional Defence: Priorities In Resource Allocation

As Britain's economic situation deteriorated in late 1947, Alexander became ever more conscious of the need for cuts in the defence budget. On the 23 August he wrote to the COS complaining that existing military requirements would cost over twice the £600 million ceiling which he had set in January. He pointed out that since then, the country's economic situation had 'greatly worsened'.¹ Alexander with the support of the Cabinet reasserted the £600 million limit 'for an indefinite period'² and said that resources should be concentrated on the 'forces that give us the best chance of survival' and '...the best visible show of strength and therefore...the greatest deterrent value'.³ The Minister of Defence proceeded to give the 5 + 5 planning assumption its

¹ Grove is right to point out that '...in the midst of the convertibility crisis', this was something of an understatement. See E. Grove, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

² Ibid., p. 50.

³ Ibid.

most restrictive definition:

It must be accepted that the risk of a major war is ruled out during the next five years, and that the risk will increase gradually during the following five years. The risk will vary directly with our visible offensive strength. If attacked we must fight with what we have.⁴

Alexander was using the 5 + 5 planning assumption as a budgetary device and in this he seems to have been attracted to Tizard's view that the immediate danger was not direct Soviet aggression but economic collapse. With the support of the Cabinet, the Defence Minister attempted to impose priorities on the COS. He said that force goals for the next five years '...would bear no relation to any state of preparedness for war'.⁵ Efforts were to be concentrated on the maintenance of minimum forces in being, '...while at the same time endeavouring to provide for essentials and to maintain the best possible show of deterrent strength'.⁶ The implications of these priorities for the services can be seen in a speech he made to the House of Commons on 27 October. Concluding a debate on the priorities for the development of the Armed Forces, he said,

⁴ DEFE 5/5, C.O.S. (47) 178 0, 23 August 1947.

⁵ CAB 131/4, D.O. (47) 68, 15 September 1947.

⁶ Ibid.

In the light of the circumstances with which we are faced, my own view is that the first priority, which must not be interfered with, is defence research. The second, in the light of the present developing situation, must be to maintain the structure of the Royal Air Force, and its initial striking power. The third priority is for the maintenance of our sea communications, and therefore, for the most efficient Navy we can get in the circumstances, and then we will do the best we can for the Army.⁷

Not surprisingly, such a vision of the future held no appeal to the Army. According to the memoirs of Montgomery, he spent the period between August 1947 and February 1948 protesting about the burden of cuts which would be borne by the Army. In reflecting on this time, Montgomery said that he had argued that 'We were moving towards a situation in which we would be unable to produce an effective fighting force of any appreciable size, should events demand it'.⁸ He believed that the cold war was 'hotting up'⁹ and that in such circumstances it was unsound to run down the Army. He saw the Navy and the RAF as 'hot war'¹⁰ services but argued that if Britain won the cold war, there would be no hot war. As discussed in the previous chapter, he was becoming ever more frustrated with the workings of the COS Committee even

⁷ Quoted in Montgomery, Memoirs of a Field Marshal, p. 481.

⁸ Ibid., p. 482.

⁹ Ibid., p. 481.

¹⁰ Ibid.

before Alexander's speech. According to Hamilton, on the 2 September 1947, he read out a statement in the COSC attacking the very concept of corporatism in the defence planning process:

We are quite unable to agree on basic fundamental issues; every recommendation we make is a compromise on essentials. As Chiefs of Staff we have failed to produce a balanced national defence force. We have shelved the fundamental questions of the roles of the three services, of their inter-relationship, and finally of their size so as to produce a balanced Defence Organisation: because no service will give way and we have no one to give a final decision. A continuation of this casual treatment of the Defence questions is utterly amateur; it is in fact a complete 'nonsense'. If we continue in this way we shall end in disaster.¹¹

Hamilton argues that this outburst did no good, '...Tedder and Cunningham merely assuming that Montgomery wanted to attack Tedder's chairmanship',¹² but it does seem to have stung the CAS into producing a memorandum addressing the drift and vacillation in strategic planning which the CIGS was so bitter about. Despite Montgomery's claim that Tedder was utterly 'useless',¹³ as a chairman and '...never gives a definite opinion on any matter',¹⁴ it was Tedder who in December 1947 proffered an explicit strategic rationale for

¹¹ Quoted in Hamilton, op. cit., p. 688.

¹² Ibid., p. 688.

¹³ Ibid., p. 677.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Alexander's proposed allocation of resources.

Tedder developed a topology of the threats which in his view would face the United Kingdom in the future, and on the basis of this appraisal argued that the utmost priority should be given to the development of an air-striking force. He argued that future defence policy must be based on the fact that '...at some point in the near future this country will be liable to attack with weapons of mass destruction, e.g. atomic and B.W. weapons'.¹⁵

Tedder suggested that because of the 'extreme difficulty'¹⁶ if not 'impossibility'¹⁷ of providing effective passive defence against it, '...the chance of survival of this country in the event of a full scale atomic war are small indeed'.¹⁸ He argued that in the face of such chronic exposure, British policy must be to prevent war: 'it appears that prevention is the only cure for atomic warfare'.¹⁹ There was nothing particularly original in this prognosis: the bedrock assumption from which British atomic strategy had evolved was the spectre of vulnerability to

¹⁵ DEFE 5/6, C.O.S. (47) 254 (0), 8 December 1947.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Soviet atomic attack. In appealing to what was common ground within the COS Committee, however, he may have hoped to persuade his colleagues in the COSC that his arguments were based on good strategy and were not those of an airman trying to demonstrate the superiority of airpower over other forms of warfare.

He argued that because the Soviet Union was a land power, possessing enormous reserves of manpower, Britain could not hope to compete with the Soviets in terms of armies and continental campaigns. Moreover, the CAS asserted that the Soviets would not be deterred by land-forces of the strength which Britain could maintain in peacetime. Similarly, maritime power which had been so effective in blockading Germany, would, he argued, fail to deter the new enemy as unlike Germany, the Soviet Union was not dependent upon seaborne supply: only an air striking force equipped with atomic bombs 'will command respect'.²⁰

Tedder predicted that the ultimate shape of British forces could not be accurately forecast, since it would take five to ten years to re-equip, train and organise the forces for the possible war of the future. He declared, however, that in assessing the threats to security it was necessary to have a set of priorities and allocate resources accordingly.

²⁰ Ibid.

He concluded with a somber warning to his colleagues:

We know from much recent experience that weakness acts as an enticement to aggression. On the other hand to attempt to maintain large forces in peacetime and thereby further strain the national economy might well destroy the U.K. as a world force as effectively as would the loss of a war. Moreover, in view of the sweeping changes in the techniques of warfare which our scientists forecast for the near future, extensive build up and equipment of armed forces to use past and current technique would almost result in our ultimately possessing forces which were out of date...More than ever before do we run the risk of being weak everywhere through trying to cover every possible threat. If we are to be strong enough to meet the vital threats we will have to accept certain risks.²¹

Tedder's memorandum was circulated within the COS Committee at a time when the COS were preparing a report for the Minister of Defence on the size and shape of the armed forces. The government's military advisers introduced this paper by stating that the defence paper which the Cabinet had approved in June 1947 continued to form the basis of their appreciations. Despite Montgomery's outbursts against the workings of the COS machine, the Committee displayed an impressive consensus on the wider questions of strategic policy, and this was particularly the case with threat assessment.

The COS set out their latest views on the 5 + 5 assumption

²¹ Ibid.

and argued that to be 'dogmatic regarding the risk of war is unjustifiable and dangerous'.²² Despite this, it was argued that 'because of the economic factor...the risk of war until about 1952 must be accepted when planning our defence forces'.²³ The idea that the risk of war would increase through the 1950s was reaffirmed and it was argued that 'our forces must be strong enough to deter war, and give us a reasonable chance of defending ourselves by 1957'.²⁴ Although it was accepted that there was a risk of having to fight a conventional war in the near future, the official position of the COS was that preparations should not be made to fight such a war:

Between 1952 and 1957, a possibility of attacks by weapons of mass destruction exists, but for a variety of reasons, we think the chances are slight. After 1957, this form of attack is a distinct possibility. Furthermore, for the next 5-10 years the threat of use of these weapons is the only effective backing to our foreign policy or deterrent to a would be war-monger. Nevertheless, from 1957 onwards we must be fully prepared for the possibility of atomic warfare on a scale which might well prove fatal to us.²⁵

The COS agreed that there must be no diversion of available resources away from the development of modernised forces,

22 DEFE 5/6, C.O.S. (47) 263 (0), 11 December 1947.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

organised and equipped to provide:-

(1) Offensive striking forces, suitably based and ready at once to implement the threat to deliver mass-destruction weapons against selected targets.

(11) Active and Passive defence forces, for the security of the U.K., mainly against air attack.

(111) Combined Sea and air forces, mainly anti-submarine and anti-air to safeguard sea communications.

(IV) Forces for the defence of Overseas bases.²⁶

Despite Montgomery's comments in September, the COS were in this assessment trying - albeit tentatively - to take some steps towards establishing priorities between the services. Although the COS had seemingly adopted a common position, it is hard to resist the judgement that the RAF and Navy had carved out its share of the defence budget and the Army had to be content with the lot of home defence and protection of overseas bases. Little wonder that Montgomery was so bitter in his memoirs about the burden of cuts to be borne by the Army and what he saw as the failures of the COS system.

Perhaps in an effort to keep Montgomery quiet, the COS proposed a revised defence budget of £662 million in contrast to the £600 million limit which Alexander had established in January. It may well be that the COS feared that in the absence of agreement amongst the military,

²⁶ Ibid.

civilian policy makers might choose to make even more arbitrary cuts in defence spending. Whatever the explanation for 'official' agreement amongst the COS, such a revised defence budget was unacceptable to ministers and the matter was discussed between Attlee, Alexander and the COS at a meeting on the 16 December 1947. These discussions focused on the future role of the Army and it was therefore somewhat unfortunate that Montgomery should have been on a tour of Africa, since Simpson, VCIGS, found himself alone in defending the *raison d'être* of the Army in the post war world.

The wider context for these discussions was growing controversy within British and West European governments about the contribution which the United Kingdom might make to Western Union, and in particular, whether British involvement on the continent might take the form of a permanent military presence. A British continental commitment was something which Montgomery had been in favour of since April 1946 and it led in early 1948 to a divisive dispute within the COSC.

The Maritime/Air Strategy Versus Continentalism In Defence Planning

At the end of 1947, the Prime Minister asked the COS for an assessment of the risks of attack against the United Kingdom from an aggressor encamped on the West European coast. Both Cunningham and Dickson argued that provided seaborne and airborne defences were maintained, the danger of invasion could be discounted. The FSL believed that it was unlikely that Britain would fight a purely 'conventional',²⁷ war against the USSR, but in the event of this occurring, '...he saw no threat of an invasion of this country'.²⁸ Cunningham argued that in the event of a conventional war, the United Kingdom would be able to gain sufficient time to build up its armed forces and for reinforcements to arrive from the United States and the Commonwealth. Moreover, he inferred that since '...we should not be in a position to prevent a powerful enemy securing the Western Coast of Europe at an early stage',²⁹ planning should continue to be based on the more likely occurrence of 'unconventional',³⁰ war (war fought with the use of weapons of mass destruction) and on the assumption that in the case of a conventional war, the

²⁷ DEFE 4/9, C.O.S. (47) 158, 16 December 1947.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

United Kingdom would make do with what it had.

Given that such arguments advanced the RAF's and Navy's organisational interests at the expense of the Army's, it is easy to interpret this as collusion between the Navy and RAF against the Army. Despite this, such articulations had an intrinsic logic to them and were rooted in strategic assessments which the CIGS had not dissented from when discussed within the COS during 1947. Moreover, that such arguments could command a wider appeal can be seen in Attlee's ruthless amplification of them:

...as it was not envisaged we should send an army to hold off the enemy in Europe, and since there was little risk of this country being invaded the necessity for maintaining a substantial army equipped with modern weapons and equipment appeared arguable'.³¹

In the face of this strategic consensus between Prime Minister, RAF and Navy, Simpson accepted that if the army were relieved of its responsibilities for anti-aircraft defence and for repelling sea-borne and airborne invasion, some saving in manpower and equipment could be effected, but he argued that land forces required for the remaining tasks would still require modern weapons and equipment - albeit on lower scales than under current plans.³²

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Although Attlee had endorsed the view that no army would be made available to defend Western Europe, he was less sure about the scope of future British assistance. Bevin was pressing on the Cabinet the need for Britain to play a greater role in the building up of West European defences against the threat of invasion from the East. The Foreign Secretary had not stated this assistance in military terms, but in persuading Attlee and his ministerial colleagues, not to mention Tedder and Cunningham, of the wisdom of such policies, he had in Montgomery a vocal and persistent ally. On returning from his African tour, CIGS seems to have used Bevin's manoeuvrings to try and articulate a role for British land forces in Germany which he had harbored since his earliest days at the War Office. Moreover, he saw this as holding not only the key to British security in the post war world, but also to placing the Army's position on a sound footing in the British defence establishment.³³

On 30 January 1948, Montgomery submitted a memorandum to Tedder and Cunningham which argued that in any future war, the only enemy envisaged was the Soviet Union. He asserted that the first objective of the 'East' was the German 'soul'

³³ For a discussion of the various facets of this, see Hamilton, *op. cit.*, pp. 698-705 and for Montgomery's own reflections see Montgomery, Memoirs of a Field Marshal, pp. 498-505.

which was a necessary step towards World domination and concluded:

We must agree that, if attacked, the nations of the Western European Union will hold the attack as far to the East as possible. We must make it very clear that Britain will play her full part in this strategy and will support the battle with the fullest possible weight of our land, air and naval power. Unless this basic point in our strategy is agreed, and is accepted whole-heartedly by Britain, the Western Union can have no hope of survival, and Britain would then be in the gravest danger.³⁴

Not surprisingly, battle was well and truly joined in the COSC where the RAF and Navy service chiefs vigorously attacked such an idea. Tedder argued that it would be wrong to determine our policy on Western Union before discussions had taken place with the Americans, a point which was agreed by Cunningham. Furthermore, the CAS suggested that it was unwise to decide our strategic policy until more was known about the effects of weapons of mass destruction, of which he said an assessment would be available shortly.³⁵ Cunningham did not challenge Montgomery's assumption that the Soviets were an active enemy, but he believed that the COS should not be oblivious to the dangers of a revived Germany. He feared that a definition of the Soviet threat which required the integration of Germany into Western

³⁴ DEFE 4/10, C.O.S. (48) 26 (0), 2 February 1948.

³⁵ DEFE 4/10, C.O.S. (48) 26 (0), 2 February 1948.

Union carried with it danger for the future:

He did not believe that Germany would ever be a contented nation even when she had regained her old boundaries and once again built her military power...Germany should, if possible, be associated with the Western powers, but by the time she was a military force of consequence she would pursue her own policy of domination, allying herself with those of greatest benefits to her aims.³⁶

Atomic strategy had evolved as a response to the perceived Soviet threat, but Cunningham was arguing that the USSR was not the only potential enemy. Given that he had not apparently dissented from the prevalent COS-Foreign Office line which located Soviet external policy as rooted in an ideological dynamic which was expansionist, his comments of January 1948 were somewhat inconsistent with previous assessments by the Committee. It is hard to disentangle how far he was using the spectre of a revived Germany to undermine CIGS position, as against a conviction on his part that there must be no repetition of the 1920s when the COS had focused on the USSR as the enemy to the exclusion of the emerging German threat.

Furthermore, the FSL questioned the logistics of deploying men and material on the continent. He doubted if economically, Britain could afford such an effort and questioned the benefits of pouring men and materials into a

³⁶ Ibid.

battle where Soviet land forces would be able to tie up vast numbers of allied forces. He concluded his arguments with an appeal to British strategic experience:

It had been our traditional policy in the past to avoid Continental Commitments. Twice in the past we had given a guarantee to assist a Continental nation to the limit of our power by the provision of land forces. On both occasions we had suffered severely, first at Mons and more recently at Dunkirk.³⁷

Montgomery believed that the arguments of the CAS and FSL illustrated the narrow vision and ineffectiveness of Tedder, and the 'Boer war'³⁸ mentality of Cunningham. Moreover, for Montgomery, it exemplified his view that the COSC had become a debating society instead of a tool of military planning. He remained adamant that a continental commitment was vital to the winning of the war against the Soviet Union, but was careful to argue that this was a supplement to the allied air offensive and not a substitute for it:

...it would be disastrous to the Commonwealth and the United States to allow the Russians to overrun Europe. The only way to prevent this was to be prepared, with the assistance of the other West European nations, to fight them in the air and on the sea and ground. Air or sea action alone would not prevent them overrunning Europe. If they did so he was very doubtful of any number of atomic bombs defeating them. The whole of Russia and

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Quoted in Hamilton, op. cit., p. 705.

Europe would need to be attacked. The way to prevent them overrunning Europe was to contain them behind the most suitable line, and for us and the Americans to assist the European nations to do so. For this reason, it was essential that Germany should march with the West.³⁹

This was the soldier's response to Tedder's claim that land forces were at best secondary, and at worst peripheral, to the defence of the United Kingdom in the atomic age. The CIGS propounded the view that a capability for waging conventional war and holding the Russians on the Rhine was an essential complement to the launching of an atomic air offensive against the Soviet Union. To allow the Soviets to control the continent would, he claimed, lead to the collapse of British and Western security: there could be no repeat of Operation Overlord in the atomic age.

The official papers record that this COS meeting ended in disagreement, but Montgomery records in his memoirs that the meeting broke up in disorder.⁴⁰ Given the contentious nature of the issues at stake, there is little reason to discount this claim. The one thing the COS could agree on was that the differences between them would have to be settled by ministers. Accordingly, the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Minister of Defence met with the COS

³⁹ DEFE 4/10, Confidential Annex to C.O.S. (48) 16th mtg, 2 February 1948.

⁴⁰ Montgomery, Memoirs of a Field Marshal, p. 500.

two days later to discuss these questions.

The Prime Minister initiated the meeting by asking for a submission from the COS. Tedder pointed out that in view of the financial position of Britain '...it would prove both financially and economically impossible to place an army on the continent on the outbreak of war'.⁴¹ Cunningham stated that any commitment to engage in land operations was bound to detract from 'our air and sea power'.⁴² In his defence, Montgomery made clear that he envisaged only defensive action with land forces on the continent; there was no question of launching a counter-offensive against the East. Further, he accepted that 'our main weapon for winning the war must be overwhelming air power'.⁴³ In this context, however, he stressed that the United Kingdom would need bases on the continent in order to develop the air offensive. He said that he was convinced that Western Europe '...had enough manpower to keep the enemy out, provided their forces were properly organised, trained and led'.⁴⁴

The Prime Minister said he was disturbed by this new

⁴¹ DEFE 4/10, C.O.S. (48) 26 (0), 4 February 1948.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

suggestion that Britain might send land forces to the continent. Attlee had understood that strategic policy was to develop a counter-offensive from the Middle East and was worried that the resources would not be available to sustain operations in both Europe and the Middle East.⁴⁵ The Foreign Secretary suggested that the problem of Western Union was not only a military one and wanted to arrange for a range of links, political and economic which would form the cement of Western defence. Unlike Attlee, Bevin had no objection to British forces fighting on the continent, but argued that this should be conditional upon American forces being based in Europe, a commitment which, as Bevin said, the United States had not yet faced up to. Alexander said that the CIGS had made a good case for sending British land forces to the continent, but he believed '...the estimate of forces required might prove optimistic and having regard to the present economic outlook, he feared that we might not even be able to maintain our present cadres'.⁴⁶

Ministers settled on a compromise formula. Britain would support the concept of Western Union but no decision could be taken on the nature and extent of that commitment until more was known about the intentions of the United States and further study had been made of the financial costs involved

⁴⁵ Ovendale, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

in sending an army to the continent. Politicians had not resolved the dispute within the COS, merely chosen to await events and seek further information as the basis for a future decision. Despite this, Montgomery with the support of Bevin had succeeded in placing the issue of a British military contribution to Western Union on the strategic agenda.

Montgomery had been careful to point out that conventional defence and deterrence on the continent were not a substitute for an atomic war-fighting strategy. Rather, his argument was that the atomic strategy would only work if Western Europe was held. In other words, disagreement between the chiefs on the sending of an army to the continent did not merge into wider disagreement on the fundamentals of atomic strategy.

Against this, however, Sir John Slessor intimated to Liddell Hart in 1948 that Montgomery believed that Britain should rely on the Americans in the strategic nuclear role and that resources should be channeled into conventional deterrent and war-fighting capabilities.⁴⁷ As to such a conviction on the part of Montgomery, Slessor's closeness to the in-house debate suggests that this should not be dismissed out of hand, despite the lack of evidence for it in the official

⁴⁷ LH 1/644, Slessor to Liddell Hart, 22 January 1948.

records. If so it represented an early expression of the view that provision of the national nuclear deterrent could make unpalatable inroads into conventional defence spending.

British dependence upon the United States in strategic atomic weapons inevitably conditioned London's perception of the contribution which a national atomic force could make to British security in the future. In particular, the key question was whether the United States could be relied upon to safeguard London's strategic interests in the event of Britain not developing an independent atomic deterrent. Although this debate did not fully crystallise until after the Soviet atomic weapons test in August 1949, it ran like an undercurrent through the debates about nuclear stockpile size, targeting policy and atomic delivery systems in 1948.

Targeting Policy And Delivery Systems

According to Gowing, it was recognised towards the end of 1947 that the atomic programme must now be related to '...specific and quantitative requirements from the Chiefs of Staff rather than to a general belief in deterrence'.⁴⁸ In the light of this, the COS set up a committee under Portal to 'review the scale of atomic energy production in

⁴⁸ Gowing, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

relation to the requirements of defence'.⁴⁹

This Committee began its work by considering the characteristics of atomic weapons, present and future, the effects of atomic weapons against varying targets and the likelihood that other countries might acquire atomic weapons. This report was then sent to an inter-service sub-committee which estimated the strategic requirements for the number and type of atomic weapons that the United Kingdom should plan to produce. According to Gowing:

The Chiefs of Staff directed the sub-committee to assume (1) that defence policies were those the Chiefs of Staff had defined in 1947; (2) Russia and her satellites should be taken as potential enemies; (3) the United States stockpile of atomic weapons would be used in the common effort, but Britain could not count on being allowed to carry United States bombs in British aircraft; (4) in view of the vulnerability of the United Kingdom to air attack, it would be wise to depend more on the accumulation in peacetime of a stock of atomic weapons than on subsequent production in war.⁵⁰

Although the COSC was bitterly divided over the role of the Army in European defence, the continuing consensus between on atomic matters can be seen in the guidance given to the sub-committee by the COS. The latter concluded that 600 atomic bombs would be required to '...attack simultaneously

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 215.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

those targets whose destruction would have the most rapid and decisive effects on Russia's ability to wage war'.⁵¹

The next question was what proportion of this total could be met from the United States stockpile of bombs? This was sized at 400 atomic bombs,⁵² leaving a British production target of 200 bombs by 1957. Gowing argues that the COS believed that no figure could be too large. Deterrence and defence in the atomic age flowed not only from possession of the bomb, but also from the size of the stockpile: more was definitely better in the age of the atom.

Simpson argues that the production figures of the COS were premised on the assumption that there was no need to build up an independent military capability for deterring the USSR, but indicates that the production goal was related to the need to be able to destroy 'specific targets in the USSR'.⁵³ Although the inter-service sub-committee's report represented continuity of strategic thinking in the requirements for attacks against Soviet war making capacity, there is evidence to suggest that the strategy of attacking

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 215-216.

⁵² Simpson argues that the figure of 400 American bombs suggests that some liaison may already have been taking place with the Americans since the US Joint Chiefs had decided to adopt a production goal of 400 mark 111 bombs by 1953. See Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁵³ Ibid.

Soviet oil installations persisted in planning during 1948, but was joined and in time replaced by an emphasis on counter-force targets. The earliest evidence of this strand in British targeting plans can be seen in the debates over the navy's possible future participation in the strategic air offensive.

The Case For A Carrier Borne Atomic Fleet

The identification of suitable targets in the USSR seems to have generated a dispute as to the efficacy of future land based and carrier borne aircraft in conducting strategic air attacks against the USSR. At a time when the inter-service sub-committee was evaluating the most lucrative Soviet target set, the idea of using carrier borne aircraft in the future strategic air offensive was investigated by the JPS. Although the Naval Staff was content to investigate such ideas, the JPS study appears to have been one which was conducted 'in anticipation of instructions',⁵⁴ and there is no evidence that it was actively initiated by the Admiralty.

The case for a carrier-borne bomber capability was presented in terms of bringing under threat those regions of the USSR which could not be reached from bases in the United Kingdom or in the Middle East. Continuing the theme of reducing

⁵⁴ DEFE 4/11, J.P. (48) 7, 11 March 1948.

Britain's vulnerability to atomic attack, it was argued that a major rationale for such a capability was to be in a position to destroy Soviet atomic establishments:

It is not yet known where the Russians are developing atomic plants. These plants will have to depend for their operation on facilities provided by main industrial areas. It is safe to assume that they will be sited as far from our likely strategic bomber bases as possible. It is probable therefore that a proportion of the Russian atomic plants will be located in the industrial areas beyond the reach of aircraft operating from...(existing) bases. Moreover, apart from atomic plants it is evident that these areas will contain a number of important potential targets such as power plants, communications and centres of population.

Until we can assess the most profitable type of targets for air attack, we must assume that it would be a grave disadvantage to us if any substantial developed part of the U.S.S.R. were beyond the range of our attack.⁵⁵

Despite these advantages, the JPS detailed a number of constraints which called into question the efficacy of such carrier-borne atomic operations. These included the difficulties of working carriers in bad weather conditions and the vulnerability of such systems to sea and air attacks from the enemy, especially if the carriers were to operate in areas close to hostile shores. Moreover, the JPS were aware of some critical technical obstacles:

Even with weapons of mass destruction it is not

⁵⁵ Ibid.

certain that this weight of attack would justify the effort involved, taking into account wastage due to enemy action or other operational difficulties. To be really effective, it would be necessary to step up the number of aircraft that could be launched from a carrier. We doubt, therefore, whether there is any real advantage to be gained from modifying carriers to take the type of bomber at present being developed for the R.A.F.

The development of special types of naval aircraft, with folding wings, would, however, appear to be a profitable line for research, though it could probably only be achieved either by reducing the weight of the atomic bomb or by using other weapons of mass destruction. It should, however, enable 8-12 aircraft to be embarked per carrier and thus increase the weight of attack.⁵⁶

The JPS provided a comprehensive assessment of the future possibilities of using carriers to augment the strategic air offensive. Although the Joint Planners were quite pessimistic about the technical feasibility of using aircraft carriers in this way, the deterrent advantages which would flow from such a capability were stressed:

The operation of bomber aircraft from carriers would force the enemy to tie up additional air and naval forces in a defensive role. It can also be argued that the knowledge that we could and would launch a strategic bomber offensive from carriers in an unknown location would increase the deterrent effect of our strategic air force.⁵⁷

In the light of these observations, the JPS recommended that

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

the DRPC should assess the likelihood that by 1957 a heavy bomber could be developed with a range of 1,800 miles and folding wings, which would be capable of operating from an aircraft carrier. It was to have comparable performance to the B.35/46 aircraft and be capable of carrying an atomic bomb of weight 8,000 pounds and have an all up weight of 80,000 pounds. The Admiralty were invited to consider the option of converting their existing fleet carriers to operate up to 12 of these aircraft. The JPS recommended that the COS should 'take note of this paper and confirm our conclusions'.⁵⁸

This report was discussed a week later at a meeting of the VCOS with Tizard in attendance. Sir James Robb, the VCAS argued that there was no reason to believe that the heavy bombers of the future would not have their range extended and argued that past experience with aircraft supported this. He clearly believed that a carrier borne strategic force was not required since land based air would be able to reach all targets in the future.⁵⁹ Rear Admiral Oliver acknowledged the technical constraints inherent in the case for carrier borne atomic bombers. The feasibility of building an aircraft with a bomb load of 8,000 Ibs, and an all up weight of 80,000 Ibs was uncertain and he suggested

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ DEFE 4/11, C.O.S. (48) 41st mtg, 18 March 1948.

that although conversion of existing carriers seemed a better option than new construction, it was unlikely that existing carriers could be made to launch aircraft weighing over 80,000 lbs. Oliver said that a carrier borne atomic fleet would add a new element to the deterrent, and argued that the air and submarine threat had been exaggerated in the report of the JPS.⁶⁰ However, the Navy was less than enthusiastic about employing carriers in this role:

The Admiralty considered the main purpose of carriers was to establish control of the sea. They were, however, willing to consider the use of aircraft carriers as mobile airfields if it was worth while.⁶¹

Oliver's lukewarm support for the carrier borne atomic fleet could have reflected the existence of an intra-service debate within the Admiralty as to the appropriate role of aircraft carriers in future war. The navy seems to have been pre-occupied in the late 1940s with the direct defence of shipping against air and submarine attack and does not seem to have been focusing its ambitions for the carrier on the role which such ships could play in a future strategic bombing offensive.⁶² An alternative, if more Machiavellian

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² For a discussion of the role of the carrier in Naval policy in the late 1940s, see E.J. Grove, From Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy since World War II (Bodley Head: London, 1987) pp. 39-57.

interpretation, however, is that the Navy was trying to disguise its attempts to wrest from the RAF its prospective monopoly of the atomic weapons stockpile. Although there is no direct evidence that the Admiralty had a desire to secure a share in the future delivery of the country's atomic bombs, the following comments by the JPS can hardly have been expected to please the Air Staff.

If it proves necessary for carriers to be employed in this way, the Navy would have to assume the additional role of assisting the R.A.F. to launch the strategic air offensive.⁶³

At any rate it was in such a spirit that the Air Staff seem to have responded. Its counter-offensive stressed that it was unlikely that any sea-launched aircraft would have the 10,000 lb capacity required to carry an atomic bomb. The RAF were assuming that an atomic bomb weight below 10,000 was not feasible (as a result of advice tendered by the DRPC) and that the Admiralty was minimising the number of overseas bases from which shore based aircraft would be able to operate.⁶⁴ The Air Force's response to the suggestion of using carriers in the strategic air offensive perhaps illustrates the way in which obsession with its cherished roles and missions led the RAF to caricature the Navy's position by attributing motivations to it which do not seem

⁶³ DEFE 4/11, J.P. (48) 7, 11 March 1948.

⁶⁴ AIR 8/1792, ACAS (P), 18 March 1948.

to have been warranted.⁶⁵

If the Air Staff caricatured the Admiralty's position, there was no attempt in the COS to mitigate such misperceptions on the part of the RAF. The COS received the relevant papers from the JPS and Vice-Chiefs, but even had they wished to do so, Tedder, Cunningham and Montgomery had little opportunity to involve themselves in the debate about future nuclear delivery vehicles since the COS had to cope in 1948 with a succession of crises on the European continent.

Beginning in February, with the Communist take over in

⁶⁵ By the end of 1948, the RAF seem to have been aware that the thinking on these questions in the United States Navy was more sophisticated than robbing the American Air Force of its atomic roles and missions. The Air Ministry's Director of Plans had discussed the role of the carriers in the future strategic air offensive with vice-Admiral Radford at a cocktail party in November 1948 and in the words of DP, Radford's position was that

...he did not want the Navy to take part in the Bomber offensive unless it was really needed to help...with a carrier able to operate atom carrying aircraft and supported by other carriers it would be possible to force the enemy air forces to battle on a worthwhile scale, so making a valuable contribution in the overall air battle. See (AIR 8/1792 Note of conversation between Vice-chief of Naval Operations and Director of Plans, Air Ministry).

Whether such knowledge helped mitigate the RAF's opposition to the proposals for carrier borne planes is difficult to know, the question became academic in May 1949 anyway when for technical reasons the First Sea Lord cancelled any further work on the project.

Prague, and culminating in July with the severest test of Western resolve, the Berlin crisis, the COS were tested to the full. Apart from exacerbating the already bad personal relationships within the Committee,⁶⁶ the deteriorating international situation generated tremendous friction between the Minister of Defence and COS over the state of Britain's preparedness to fight in the event of hostilities.⁶⁷ At the beginning of 1948 there had been little expectation of war in the near future, and the military had advised that in the unlikely event of conflict occurring, Britain would fight with what it had. Nevertheless, since 1946, the COS had also asserted that the only way of avoiding defeat by the USSR was to attack that country with atomic weapons. With the increasing risk of war in 1948, and the knowledge that Britain was not expected to possess atomic weapons for a number of years, atomic strategy depended for its implementation upon the United States and its stockpile of atomic bombs: this was not a reflection of strategic choice but the reality of Britain's position in 1948.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the role of the COS in the Berlin crisis and Montgomery's departure from the scene see Hamilton, *op. cit.*, pp. 706-721.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Collaborative Planning And Threat Assessment

By April 1948, the Americans were prepared to discuss joint war-planning with Canadian and especially British planners. The result of these discussions was the adoption of plan SPEEDWAY which was to cover the contingency of war breaking out between April 1948 and the end of 1950. SPEEDWAY confirmed the extent of British dependence on the United States:

Plan SPEEDWAY depends on the success of the Strategic Air Offensive, using atomic weapons, during the first six months. The strategic air offensive will be undertaken by some 400 U.S. bombers operating from the U.K., the Egypt-Aden area and Okinawa.

The plan for the air offensive will be made by the U.S. Chiefs of Staff, who alone know what atom bombs are available. We have insufficient information properly to assess the effect of this plan.⁶⁸

Furthermore, the plan makes clear that Bomber Command would have been employed in the tactical role:

The British bomber force (160) will have too short a range to deliver an effective air offensive into Russia. Its primary task will be to assist in the defence of the Middle East and the UK, but it is at present quite inadequate in preventing the enemy to build up in Western Europe and at the same time slowing the Russian advance in the Middle East.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ DEFE 4/29, C.O.S. (48) April 1948.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

It is clear that it was in these strategic terms, over and above the political goal of tying the United States to a commitment to European defence, that the stationing of American B-29s in Britain was welcomed by the COS and Cabinet. The provision of suitable bases for SAC, either in the United Kingdom or the Middle East being a necessary quid pro quo was provision of the strategic bomber offensive upon which, as the COS had repeatedly pointed out, British survival rested.

According to Dukes, it was the Committee on Germany, a special Cabinet sub-committee comprising Attlee, Bevin, Alexander, Herbert Morrison (the Leader of the House) and the COS which took the decision to allow the Americans to station American bombers in Britain.⁷⁰ There is no evidence to suggest that there was any dissent within the COS Committee or the ministerial sub-committee in July 1948 over this decision to base United States planes on British soil. Despite this, if officials were united in the belief that such a strategic link was vital to national security, CAS was uncomfortable with the division of labour which plan SPEEDWAY entailed.

⁷⁰ S. Dukes, US Defence Bases in the United Kingdom: A Matter for Joint Decision? (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) pp. 30-31.

For the RAF, and especially Bomber Command with its nostalgia for the independent and equal role which it had played vis-a-vis the USAAF during World War 11, it was very unsatisfactory to be excluded from an operational role which could be performed by the Americans alone. This appears to have led the RAF to seek to acquire atomic B-29 bombers from the United States. Although the B-29s (renamed Washingtons) were never to have an operational atomic role, this had certainly been the initial aspiration, as it would have given Britain some atomic delivery capability long before the V-bombers came into service. This much was admitted by the CAS:

The original idea in proposing the introduction of a B-29 element into Bomber Command was that we should then have an aircraft capable of carrying the A-bomb with a radius of action of 1300 miles which would bring us within effective range of most strategic targets. Politically, this was thought to be desirable as we could then play a part in long range strategic bombing which, for the moment, is a commitment that only the USAF can undertake...⁷¹

Tedder seems to have been particularly concerned with the American refusal to discuss the strategic employment of the atomic bomb, and may have hoped that acquisition by the RAF of planes capable of delivering atomic bombs would make the

⁷¹ See Air 8/1796, Notes of the Chief of the Air Staff, 18 November 1947.

Americans more willing to reveal their targeting plans. At a COS meeting on the 29th January 1949, he emphasised the extent to which strategic plans were based on the use of a weapon about which the COS knew very little:

...apart from the exchange of information on the production of the weapon, the Chiefs of Staff had very urgent requirements for technical information as a basis for future planning. A rather unsatisfactory position had arisen in that, while joint Anglo/U.S. planning talks on the conduct of any future war were going on, the most important factor of all - the strategic employment of the atomic bomb - was barred from discussion. If we were to co-ordinate plans we must know the number of bombs and how they would be used.⁷²

Underlying these concerns was the belief that British and American strategic interests might diverge in terms of the targets selected for attack. The British had a powerful precedent for such fears. During the Second World War, the USAAF had not attacked the V-1 and V-2 sites in Germany, which were a key threat to the United Kingdom but regarded by the American Air Force as secondary to the central mission of destroying urban areas in Germany.⁷³ The COS wanted a British nuclear force to attack targets which directly threatened the United Kingdom but also sought to participate in combined Anglo-American nuclear planning in

⁷² DEFE 4/19, C.O.S. (49) 13th mtg, 27 January 1949.

⁷³ A.J. Pierre, Nuclear Politics (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 93.

the hope that they could influence United States target selection and persuade the Americans to support them in the development of a British nuclear force. Despite British aspirations, the American nuclear door remained firmly bolted. Nonetheless, in the absence of direct military linkages with the United States, British defence planners were developing further their ideas about atomic planning and strategy.

During 1949, JPS ideas on atomic targeting developed in a novel direction as the idea of targeting political control centres was first canvassed in the defence establishment. The idea was seen in both a positive and negative light. As regards the latter, it was recognised that the vulnerability of British cities would invite the enemy to attack centres of political, administrative and economic control. But it was also discussed in the more positive sense as offering the basis for an offensive strategy against the Soviet Union. Accepting the notion that expansion was endemic in the nature of the Soviet regime itself, one planning paper recommended that since lasting security was impossible between ideological foes, the only prescription was the complete removal of the Soviet regime and one possible means of accomplishing this goal would be by targeting key aspects of Soviet state power:

...the complete removal of the Soviet regime will

be an essential requirement for achieving allied war aims...We consider that effective air attacks upon the towns, in which are centres of control-political, administrative and police - is the best method of creating conditions in which the Communist Party and the administrators could not control and the secret police could not suppress. When control is disrupted the armed forces will not be able to fight effectively.⁷⁴

The JPS reaffirmed the established view that a land and maritime strategy would be indecisive in achieving allied war aims. Strategic airpower was endorsed by the inter-service planning team as the '...only military means capable of achieving British strategic objectives'.⁷⁵ They were agreed that these objectives could not be achieved by the use of deliberate terror as this would only alienate those whose support the allies would require in any rebuilding of the Soviet Union. Rather, attacks would be discriminating and directed against what was seen as the 'achilles heel' of the Soviet state - its centralised nature and the tight control of the party over the people.

It was acknowledged that such an offensive would not, at least in the early stages, contribute much to the direct task of denying the Soviet Union its tactical objectives in Western Europe. Despite this, the JPS were in no doubt that air attacks upon the centres of control would degrade the

⁷⁴ DEFE 4/22, J.P. (49) 59, 20 July 1949.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

command hierarchy and lead to a general paralysis of the Soviet war machine:

Whilst creating these conditions of loss of control the attacks would have the additional advantage of disrupting the Soviet war economy and the communication network, thereby assisting us in the defence of our vital areas and sea communications.⁷⁶

The Joint Planners were in no doubt that the use of weapons of mass destruction would be essential to achieve these objectives. The shock value and economy of force they promised held out the prospect of maximising the blow in a manner that had simply not been possible in World War Two. It was accepted that the Soviet Union would also possess such weapons and there was no illusion about the consequences of their use against the United Kingdom:

A fairly small number of weapons of mass destruction could cause such damage against a highly concentrated target such as the United Kingdom that the area might become useless as an offensive air base and the country might never recover.⁷⁷

The JPS, however, maintained that British self-restraint in the use of these weapons could prove destructive of national interests since if the Soviets overrun the airbases from which the allied air offensive would be conducted, there

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

would be no way of escaping defeat. For this very reason, the Soviets, it was argued, would do everything possible to prevent the early use of atomic weapons. The JPS commented:

She might therefore think it would be to her advantage to reserve the use of weapons until she had reduced the danger of retaliation by occupying the allied air bases in Western Europe and the Middle East.⁷⁸

It was asserted that by 1957, the Western powers would have a 'marked numerical and technical lead'⁷⁹ in weapons of mass destruction. Since it was only through atomic weapons that allied war aims could be realised, the JPS concluded with the somber assessment that

...there is an unanswerable military case for the use of weapons of mass destruction against Russia from the outset in order to achieve our strategic aims...It must be appreciated however that the use of weapons of mass destruction will entail the risk of the United Kingdom and other Western European countries suffering fatal damage.⁸⁰

This study was important for it attempted for the first time to relate the use of atomic weapons to political objectives. Despite the caveats about the consequences for Britain of the use of atomic weapons, it helped inculcate the notion

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

that atomic war could - in Clausewitzian terms - be a rational purposeful activity. Although the extent to which such thinking impinged on actual British atomic war plans remains impossible to gauge in the present state of our knowledge of early British nuclear targeting, these British ideas of deliberate and selective strikes against the Soviet regime can be contrasted with the faith of some United States Strategic Air Command (SAC) leaders in the 'Sunday Punch'.⁸¹

Although this JPS targeting scheme was based on the perceived need for an offensive military strategy against the Soviet Union, it is important to realise that in contrast to the prevalent view in Washington, British defence planners did not perceive the bomb as a war-winning weapon.⁸² Atomic weapons were for the British military a

⁸¹ Bernard Brodie, having had access to the plans of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) came to the judgement that 'planners simply expected the Soviet Union to collapse as a result of the bombing campaign...people kept talking about the Sunday Punch'. Quoted in F. Kaplan, The Wizards of Armageddon (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 46.

⁸² Gowing, op. cit., pp. 315-16.

means of avoiding total defeat: agents of deterrence in a hostile and uncertain world rather than instruments of compellence.

This JPS study resurrected 1957 as the target date to which strategic planning should be directed. In March 1948, in their feasibility study of carrier borne aircraft participating in the strategic air offensive, the target date had also been the late 1950s, but what had been emphasised then was not the targeting of Soviet political control centres but of the enemy's atomic plants. This strand of counter military targeting was reasserted by Sir John Slessor in an influential article written in May 1949. He called for a bomber force and targeting strategy tailored to the specific needs of the United Kingdom and was particularly concerned about the threat from Soviet submarines.⁸³ Action against submarine pens and production facilities would be of vital interest in protecting sea communications. Slessor's advocacy of a counter force strategy can be set against Venables claim that the RAF persisted with an indiscriminate counter-city philosophy:

He comments,

...Britain's strategic forces continued to plan to attack cities, obliged by the balance of geography and military capabilities to rely on a deterrent

⁸³ Quoted in R. Rosecrance, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

threat through punishment rather than denial.⁸⁴

Venables provides no supporting evidence for this claim with regard to the late 1940s, and whatever the operational status of the JPS study of July 1949, it cautions one against Venables's claim. Although discussions of national atomic targeting in the late 1940s had a futuristic quality to them, the evidence suggests that the COS had not yet had to make a definitive judgement on Britain's future atomic targeting policy. In the interim period, however, the COS focused its efforts on trying to persuade the United States to discuss details of its atomic war planning with the British, but appear to have met with little success in this endeavour.

Conclusion

The Cabinet's attempts to impose budgetary discipline on the COS in 1947-48 were the first real attempt by policy makers to influence the COS in their assimilation of atomic weapons into national defence planning. This external challenge forced the COS to consider the roles of the three services and generated a major dispute within the COSC concerning the role of the Army and continental defence. Thus, this first case study of the relationship between civilian control and

⁸⁴ Venables, op. cit., p.224.

inter-service rivalry might be argued to support Snyder's proposition that inter-service rivalry is not necessarily an indication of the need for leadership, but can be occasioned by policy makers attempting to impose their preferences on the services.

The positions adopted by the Army, Navy and Air Force could be seen as supporting the postulates of the bureaucratic politics model. Each service sought to protect its 'organisational health' and in the late 1940s, this generated an alliance between the Navy and Air Force against the Army. Even if it is contended, however, that the rationales presented within the COSC were self-serving and a function of parochial service interests, it is important to recognise that the arguments were presented and debated in terms of the 'national interest'. Montgomery could not justify a British continental commitment on the grounds that it was a means of maintaining a large Army. Rather, he had to fight for his case in the COS and persuade the CAS and FSL that such a strategy would enhance British security in the nuclear age. This case study, therefore, supports Freedman's claim that the bureaucratic politics model makes a false dichotomy between logic and politics.

However, Both Freedman and Greenwood are at pains to argue that actors do not distinguish between organisational,

personal and national interests. And it might be argued that what can be seen in the debate over the role of the Army is the espousal of competing positions by men whose responsibility it was to determine policy according to their perception of the 'national interest'. The various positions taken in the debate may seem to reflect the requirements of service positions, but whilst bureaucratic interests and personal needs coloured the arguments; the motor of competing ideas in the COSC was different perceptions of the requirements of national security in the nuclear age reflecting basic clashes of strategic philosophy. In his vehement opposition to the arguments of Tedder and Cunningham, Montgomery was giving vent not only to personal frustration with his colleagues, but also to his conviction that a firm decision on a continental commitment was both a political and strategic imperative.

To follow this argument to its logical conclusion, and drawing on Smith's and Hollis's discussion of roles outlined in chapter one, can one imagine Montgomery changing role positions with Tedder or Cunningham and advancing a similar case to the one presented by the CAS or FSL? This is what would be predicted by a crude bureaucratic politics framework. In such a hypothetical world, Montgomery would have had to operate in an entirely different role, but to imagine that his conviction about the need for a British

continental commitment was solely a product of his role as CIGS is surely to denigrate the factor of personality. The relationship between individual personality and bureaucratic structure is a question which will recur in subsequent chapters.

It was ironic that it was Montgomery's challenge against the orthodoxy which occasioned the COS to play the role of competent strategic critics. Since as a passionate believer in the Commander-in-Chief system, he rejected the idea that the COS should play this role. His argument, it will be recalled, was that the articulation of competing strategic perspectives was a recipe for drift and confusion in defence planning, and it is clear that when acting as strategic critics, the COS were in no position to act as arbiters.

Nonetheless, if it is accepted that inter-service rivalry is at root a product of competing strategic beliefs, it is clear that the received wisdom about Britain's defence policy-making which depicts the COSC as an ineffectual actor, should be revised to take into account the real sources of inter-service rivalry and the consequent limitations which this placed on the role of the COSC. Differences of strategic value as Schilling pointed out do not permit of analytical solution and can only be settled in the political arena. Therefore, because ministers proved

unable to make a firm decision on the issue does not denigrate the role of the COS as strategic critics, but it makes the point that if the existence of competing strategic positions is not to lead to drift in the defence policy-making process, strong ministerial direction is essential.

Although the COS were bitterly divided over the Army's role in continental defence, they remained unanimous on the necessity for national atomic weapons and dependence on the United States. And while ministers did attempt to impose economic discipline on the COS, there was no similar attempt by policy makers to involve themselves in the details of nuclear strategy in this period. This was the task of the inter-service sub-committees which worked on the basis of the general strategic assumptions outlined by the COS. Policy makers had presided over the major strategic decision to develop the British bomb, but the actual size of the stockpile, the appropriate delivery vehicle and the targeting plans remained in the hands of the nation's nuclear planners and their scientific advisers.

Of course, as with disagreements over the future role of the Army, there were arguments between the services over the most appropriate means for implementing Britain's strategic policy. The argument between the RAF and Navy over the role of carrier borne aircraft in the future strategic offensive

is a further example of this. Clearly, this debate was about means and not ends, since there was no disagreement amongst the RAF and Navy that Britain's security depended upon the launching of a strategic air offensive against the Soviet Union. However, If the technical arguments were advanced within narrowly defined strategic parameters, this case study provides support for the proposition that inter-service competition is most severe in relation to roles and missions questions. And in connection with nuclear strategy, while there is no evidence that in the late 1940s the Navy was challenging the RAF's prospective monopoly of the atomic weapons stockpile, such arguments did foreshadow future problems in defence planning, particularly the respective roles of land based and sea based aircraft in the delivery of the country's atomic and thermonuclear bombs.

Nevertheless, inter-service rivalry over the delivery of Britain's nuclear stockpile was in the distant future, and the COS could have surveyed the strategic scene with some confidence in July 1949. The American atomic guarantee was in place and if the United States was not very forthcoming in the atomic weapons arena, it was hoped that once Britain had earned its atomic spurs, so to speak, the Americans would be more receptive to British requests for collaboration. This relatively comfortable strategic prognosis was shattered, however, by the Soviet atomic

explosion in August 1949 which overturned several key assumptions upon which the assessments of the COS had been based.

Nuclear planning had been premised on Britain possessing atomic weapons before the Soviet Union. With the Soviet atomic breakthrough, however, vulnerability to atomic attack was no longer a distant fear but the reality of Britain's immediate predicament. The Soviet atomic test was to sharpen the issue as to the priorities to be accorded atomic and conventional weapons in meeting national security needs in the nuclear age. Attempts to meet immediate national needs in reducing Britain's exposure to Soviet atomic attack were to be complemented by attempts to achieve greater atomic weapons collaboration with the United States. The influence of these twin endeavours on the internal and external relations of the COS forms the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

MANAGING NATIONAL AND ALLIANCE NEEDS:

THE SOVIET ATOMIC BOMB AND THE KOREAN WAR

Introduction

If the period 1948-49 was characterised by severe strains in the internal relations of the COS, the period 1949-51 was marked by major shifts in the external setting of British foreign and defence policy which impacted on the planning of the COS. The Soviet atomic test fuelled an internal debate as to the priority to be accorded atomic and guided weapons in which the chief protagonists were Tizard and the Controller of Atomic Energy, Lord Portal. Tizard challenged the idea of an independent British deterrent and the role played by ministers and COS in settling this dispute about the future of British nuclear strategy will be assessed. A further issue where a changing external situation generated an internal British debate, was in relation to dependence on the United States. The intervention of the United States in the Korean war and the possibility that atomic weapons might be used in that conflict, brought home to the British both the dangers of reliance on American strategic power, and the need to influence the conduct of United States strategic policy. The success with which Britain adapted to this

changed strategic situation, and the role played by the COS in facilitating such adjustment forms the focus of this chapter.

Priorities In Atomic Weapons Research And The Case For Guided Weapons

The atomic planning of the COS had centred on a requirement for 200 atomic bombs by 1957, and although there had been arguments about the effectiveness of this strategy in repelling the Red Army in Western Europe, Montgomery's demands had been expressed as supplements to the existing strategy rather than as a frontal assault on them. In early 1948, however, Tedder, Montgomery and Cunningham had been informed that 200 bombs could not be produced by that date given the production facilities under construction at that time.¹

The COS, with costs very much in mind, advocated that a third pile and a low-separation plant be developed for increasing the supply of fissile material and increasing the

¹ Simpson argues that several methods for increasing the output of fissile material to meet this target were available: one was to build an additional reactor at Windscale, a second was to construct a high enrichment gaseous diffusion plant for operation from 1955 onwards. Another alternative was to do both but this would only enable the target figure to be reached by 1958. See Simpson, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

supply of Uranium to the existing Windscale piles.² The proposals were approved by a special ministerial Gen Committee during February 1949.³ However, the Prime Minister then issued a new directive giving this expanded atomic programme the same overriding priority that had been accorded the earlier one. As a consequence, the priority which should be accorded the atomic weapons programme became a source of dispute and contention during the following months.

The chief player in seeking such a change of priorities was Tizard. He was concerned that if a greater proportion of the country's resources were devoted to the expanded programme, other vital projects such as aircraft, radar and guided missiles would be starved of assistance and suffer as a result. Tizard called for a rational defence assessment leading to a reordering of priorities. Yet another Gen committee was convened to look into his arguments. The Prime Minister and the Ministers of Defence and Supply agreed that the matter should be put before the COS and that the latter should review the whole defence field, atomic and non-atomic and advise where the nation's effort should be directed.

² Gowing, *op. cit.*, p. 67-68.

³ According to Gowing, the Committee held only one meeting. Those present were the Prime Minister, Lord President, Minister of Defence, Minister of Supply, Chiefs of Staff, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury (for the Chancellor), Lord Portal, Mr Roger Makins, Mr Michael Perrin.

The COS considered the question of priority on the 25 May and Tizard, who had been invited to attend the Committee, urged that the requirement for atomic research should not be met at the expense of non-atomic projects. He argued that the current unsatisfactory position had arisen because of weaknesses in the existing machinery of government and expressed it as follows:

...it would be of small value to produce atomic weapons if the necessary means of delivering them accurately on target at the required range was not available...The fact that the decision to accord the highest priority to atomic weapons had been taken by ministers without the full implications involved being presented to them revealed a serious flaw in the existing machinery. He had never claimed that the Defence Research Policy Committee should have direct responsibility for the research establishment at Harwell. The Defence Research Policy Committee, however, was responsible for ensuring that the research effort available in the non-atomic field was employed in conformity with the strategy laid down by the Chiefs of Staff.⁴

Tizard concluded that the DRPC should be authorised to comment and advise on the policy for research at Harwell, which under present arrangement they were not empowered to do. Portal, who had also been invited to attend the meeting, resisted such a move and presented two main arguments in favour not only of maintaining super priority for the atomic

⁴ DEFE 4/22, C.O.S. (49) 77th mtg, 25 May, 1949.

weapons programme but also for keeping atomic energy separate from the rest of the defence policy making machinery. Firstly, he said that although it was the task of ministers to dictate priorities, '...it was clear that if the necessary priority was not given it would not be possible to be ready in time'.⁵ Furthermore, he argued that having atomic energy separate from the ordinary defence machinery eased cooperation with the Americans. Portal commented:

Although the exchange of information with the Americans still left much to be desired, we now had a good understanding with them on security; and it was certain that the United States authorities would have been far less forthcoming had it not been for the fact that there was a special organisation for atomic energy in the United Kingdom.⁶

Portal concluded his presentation with the statement that he did not think it was feasible for the DRPC to lay down the lines of atomic research, which should remain in the province and expertise of Portal and the Ministry of Supply.

The COSC sought a compromise between these two positions. Its agent in this was the new CIGS, Sir William Slim who argued that the Prime Minister's directive should be

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

broadened to cover those 'essential closely related projects in the non-atomic field'.⁷ Slim agreed with Tizard that '...it would be useless to produce atomic weapons in considerable quantities if the right aircraft to deliver them were not provided'⁸ and on this basis he contended that the '...Prime Minister's ruling could therefore be taken to apply to the means of delivering atomic weapons - aircraft, bomb sights and so on'.⁹

The Chief Staff Officer to the Ministry of Defence, Sir William Elliot, said that he did not think the Prime Minister had meant his directive to be interpreted in the way suggested by Slim. He proposed that the COS produce a report for submission to ministers by the beginning of June stating the priority which should be accorded defence research projects - atomic and non-atomic. Elliot argued that questions of defence reorganisation were already under consideration and the Minister of Supply had been invited to report to the Prime Minister. Despite this, he suggested that the Atomic Energy (Defence Research) Committee should evaluate the current and future demands of the atomic energy programme on '...high-priority non-atomic projects',¹⁰ and

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

that having done this the DRPC should comment on their effects on the completion of these projects. Although the COSC then canvassed a range of options and ideas, no firm decisions seem to have resulted on the question of priority.

Despite this, Tizard had clearly alarmed the COS and brought home to them the fact that atomic weapons research could make unpalatable inroads on other important activities.¹¹ This was something they had hitherto been reluctant to acknowledge. The COS seem to have agreed that the best way to proceed in the resolution of these difficult and contentious questions was a broadening of the Prime Minister's directive as suggested by Slim. Unfortunately, this attempt at compromise was to please neither Tizard nor Portal.

Tizard developed his arguments in a minute to the COS on the 30 July. In this, he stressed the predominant part the United States was playing in the atomic energy field and argued for a division of labour under which the United Kingdom should invest its resources in other fields of research and development which were '...just as vital to us'.¹² Tizard asserted that it would be wrong to accord an

¹¹ Gowing, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

¹² DEFE 4/23, C.O.S. (49) 117th mtg, 10 August 1949.

overwhelming priority to atomic energy, the

...atomic weapon and the means of delivering it. He asserted that priority given to research on defence against air attack and sea communications for instance should be at least as high as that given to Atomic weapons and to the long-range strategic bomber force.¹³

Given such comments, it was not surprising that he found an ally in the new FSL, Lord Fraser of North Cape who submitted a paper supportive of Tizard's position for discussion at a meeting of the COSC on the 10 August. He argued that it would be wrong to accord an overwhelming priority to atomic energy. Tizard returned to his arguments that equal priority be given to other projects which were just as vital to national security, especially guided weapons, and that it was important that Britain not duplicate the research and development activities of the United States.

The COS agreed after discussion that while the research and development work going on at Harwell was of '...vital consequence to the nation...it was wrong to accord any particular project or series of projects a priority which might appear to be overriding'.¹⁴ On these grounds, the COS agreed that the existing directive on atomic energy should be replaced by a new one which affirmed that atomic weapons

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

research was to remain in a special category of its own, but should be broadened to include the means of delivering the bomb. More significantly, these projects were only to be pursued if they did not gravely endanger others which might be equally vital to British security.¹⁵ Although the COS had sided with Tizard over the need to balance research between atomic and non-atomic projects, they agreed with Portal that,

...care should be taken in drafting the revised directive to avoid creating the impression among those concerned with any aspect of the Atomic Energy Programme that His Majesty's Government were less interested in securing immediate results than they had been in the past.¹⁶

It was against this background that information was received on the 19 September 1949 that the Soviet Union had exploded its first atomic weapon. This event had two immediate effects on the debate over priorities. To Tizard, it was seen as vindicating his belief that the United Kingdom should be investing in defensive weapons, especially guided weapons. For those like Portal, however, it confirmed the need for the atomic bomb to be given the utmost priority since if the Soviet Union had it, deterrence and defence would depend upon maintaining an overwhelming allied superiority. The advocates of this position were to base

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

their arguments on the premise that in the light of the Soviet atomic test, the US would be more favorably disposed to Anglo-US atomic cooperation and that therefore the United Kingdom should not relax its efforts at such a critical time.¹⁷ Thus, each side interpreted the Soviet Union's new found atomic strength as strengthening its own position in the internal debate.

Tizard was supported in his assessment of the implications of the Soviet atomic test by the new Defence Minister, Emmanuel Shinwell who argued that the Soviet explosion had

¹⁷ British and American negotiations opened on the 20th September. John Simpson argues that the American objective in these negotiations was to concentrate atomic weapons production and stockpiling in the United States. He comments, 'The American objectives in the discussions was to facilitate the planned expansion of their nuclear production programme by preventing any shortage of uranium ore, and to apply the idea of a division of labour in defence activities to nuclear weaponry'. See Simpson, op. cit., p. 81.

The United Kingdom hoped that the negotiations would lead to additional American information being made available, but the planners were aware that the United States would want Britain to pay a high price if the American Joint committee on Atomic Energy (JCAE) was to consider amending the McMahon act. Sir Roger Makins, the British ambassador, suggested that America would want Britain, in return for a measure of collaboration, to store the "finished" product in the United States. The Chiefs of Staff were adamant that they would resist any American attempt to make atomic collaboration dependent on storing finished atomic weapons in the United States.

For a detailed discussion of these negotiations see Gowing, op. cit., pp. 273-308.

increased the urgency for Britain to increase its research and development in the area of guided weapons. He emphasised in a submission to the Cabinet Defence Committee in December 1949 that guided weapons seemed to offer the only prospect of successful defence against atomic attack. Tizard pressed the point further and said that in the view of the DRPC, '...it was impossible to exaggerate their importance to this country'.¹⁸ He believed it was vital that Britain obtain access to American information on guided weapons and he considered that the recent American offer to send a special United Kingdom representative to the United States was a step in the right direction.

The COS agreed with Tizard that the unexpected Soviet breakthrough lent urgency to upgrading defensive weapons. Moreover, they also concurred with him in the view that Britain should negotiate with the United States for an integrated atomic weapons programme. This was something which the COS had not even been prepared to contemplate at the beginning of 1949. Ministers and COS, however, acknowledged that with the Soviet atomic test, the likelihood of war before 1957 could not be ruled out. This made the establishment of an effective division of labour between the two states in the development of atomic weapons

¹⁸ CAB 131/8, D.O. (49) 23rd mtg, 7 December 1949.

for use in joint war plans, all the more urgent.¹⁹ However,

19 The American stance was to argue that production of fissile material should be concentrated in North America, no additional plants should be built in Britain; and a demand that nuclear components of atomic weapons should only be stored in Britain if they formed part of common war plans. The United States wanted 90% of all Uranium ore and would head an integrated research, development and production programme. As Simpson had argued, the only way the Americans could obtain sufficient Uranium for their programme was if Britain suspended work on the third reactor at Windscale. In return, the United Kingdom would have participated in the joint programme and stored her own atomic weapons on national soil.

The adjournment of negotiations gave the British time to take stock of their position. They were prepared to agree to any proposal which would supply Britain with U-235 for weapons production and accepted that the Americans would fabricate the nuclear cores and initiators for the bulk of the British weapons; but were adamant that at least some of these had to be stored in the United Kingdom. British officials were determined to safeguard their long term security by building prototype plants for U-235 and initiator production and for the casting and machining of fissile material. The talks reopened in November and the Americans now indicated that they wanted an integrated Anglo-American programme, along lines similar to those in 1943-45. The Americans argued that a small British production programme would not make the most efficient use of the available materials. The British considered the revised proposals and decided that they would only agree to send their best atomic people to the United States if Britain could still continue with the creation of a national atomic programme. They agreed that plutonium from the Windscale reactors could be fabricated into atomic weapons, which would then be stored in the United States. However, two further elements were vital to this package. One was acceptance that about '20 bombs'

the prospects for such a joint programme in the atomic weapons field were effectively terminated with the arrest in February 1950 of Klaus Fuchs, the Harwell atomic spy.

In the shadow of the Fuchs' case, the COS reassessed the question as to whether or not Britain should continue to develop national atomic weapons. With the prospects of collaboration fading, and the United States already working on the development of thermonuclear weapons, the COS wondered,

...was there any chance of Britain being able, in time and on her own, to make a contribution to the Anglo-American pool of bombs such as would enable her to exercise any influence on a war or its conduct? Would she just be making a relatively insignificant number of powerful but obsolete bombs?²⁰

Tizard, for one, had become convinced that Britain should not be making atomic weapons at all. He had not dissented from the assessment of strategic requirements in 1948, but

would be stockpiled in the United Kingdom: the second was that the national stockpile had to be sacrosanct against any later attempt by either Congress or a new United States President to renegotiate the arrangements. See Simpson, op. cit., pp. 82-84.

²⁰ Gowing, op. cit., p. 229.

during 1949 his concerns about the machinery for allocating resources between atomic and non-atomic projects merged into a wider concern with the direction of Western atomic strategy. Tizard's challenge had begun with the search for a rational defence policy and by late 1949 he had widened this to a full blooded assault on the existing atomic strategy.

According to Gowing, he disagreed with the COS that the only way Britain could win a war was through the employment of atomic weapons. He doubted, as Montgomery had done, that strategic air power could, on its own, defeat the Soviet Union. At the end of 1949, he asserted that the assumption that Europe would be dominated by Soviet troops in a matter of weeks or months, was an intolerable basis for planning British defence policy. Tizard wanted '...much more serious planning for land battles and the aim must be to hold Russia on land, not further West than the Rhine'.²¹

Tizard certainly saw an important role being played by a strategic air offensive, but he was sure that it must always be an American responsibility. Britain should concentrate on land forces and the defence of the United Kingdom. Tizard accepted that research into atomic weapons should continue to take place at Harwell, reasoning that this would be

²¹ Ibid., p. 232.

sufficient to maintain scientific prestige in American atomic circles and keep open the American atomic door. Gowing encapsulates well the essence of Tizard's position:

The primary objective, he emphasised, was not to win the next war but to prevent it. The real issue was not the race between the scientific and technological resources of different powers but a test of the ability of democratic nations to work together and plan to spend their resources wisely. It was foolish for Britain to do things which America could do much better. The Americans' large and increasing stock of atomic bombs, said Tizard might well cause the Soviet rulers to hesitate to provoke open conflict. "But how, I ask, do we add to that deterrent effect by letting it be known that we have none but hope to make a few later on" - when moreover the few would be obsolete.²²

Not surprisingly, Portal vigorously defended the atomic weapons programme. He argued that a decision to abandon work on the manufacture of atomic weapons would save very little money, since most of the work at Harwell would have to continue and one pile and the low-separation plant would have to be kept on for civil purposes. He suggested that if the government's commitment to the atomic programme was seen as fading, Britain's top atomic scientists such as Sir William Penney, might be persuaded to go to the United States to continue their work. Furthermore, Portal emphasised that the initiation of collaboration with the Americans would depend upon the success of the British

²² Ibid.

atomic weapons programme.²³

In the light of these conflicting prescriptions for future atomic weapons strategy, the COS met on the 22 February 1950 to discuss the relative rate of progress achieved by the United Kingdom, United States and the USSR in the development of atomic weapons. They reaffirmed the view that it was vital to speed up work on certain defensive projects, especially guided weapons, but were adamant that Britain continue to develop atomic weapons. The COS commented that Britain had an 'inalienable right' to develop the bomb and that '...we ought not to surrender our sovereign right and technical ability to make atomic weapons'.²⁴ They also accepted Portal's assertion that abandonment of the atomic weapons programme would undermine any chances of agreement with the Americans on atomic weapons production:

If we wanted an agreement with the Americans on atomic energy - and the Chiefs of Staff were in no doubt that in present world circumstances we certainly ought to pool resources with the Americans in this vital field - then the last thing we ought to do was to give the Americans the impression that we were losing interest in so vital a part of our atomic energy programme as the development of the atomic weapon. It was only the fact that we had something to contribute that had enabled us to secure the present measure of collaboration with the Americans - once they saw that we would have less and less to contribute,

²³ Ibid., p. 231.

²⁴ DEFE 4/30, C.O.S. (50) 31st mtg, 25 April 1950.

all chance of getting a worthwhile agreement would disappear.²⁵

The COS stressed that this last factor was decisive and that it would be 'quite wrong'²⁶ to recommend to Ministers that Britain opt out of the atomic weapons business. It seems that the role of national atomic weapons in meeting the requirements of alliance relations had by 1950 become the dominant rationale for the United Kingdom's continued pursuit of atomic independence.

Although Tizard failed to carry the COS with him over his vision of the nature of Western interdependence in defence planning, he was determined to push home the necessity for some downgrading of the priority allocated to the atomic weapons programme in order to provide a boost to the guided missiles programme. Eager to reduce the country's vulnerability to future Soviet atomic attack, the COS accepted the argument pressed by Shinwell and Tizard that in view of the 1957 target date for an adequate number of bombers and atomic bombs, British hopes of survival in the near term might rest upon guided weapons. The COS recommended to ministers in April 1950 that the highest priority should be given to the guided weapons programme:

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

In this changed strategic situation we have been reviewing our general strategy and defence policy and have reexamined the case, on strategic grounds for continuing to give the highest priority to the development of our own atomic weapons programme in the light of the present state and the rate of progress of development of other projects which would be vital to the security of this country on the outbreak of war.

Where, and to the extent in which the claims of these projects for scientific and other effort, complete with those of the atomic weapons programme, we recommend that the former should have priority over the latter.²⁷

Despite this, the COS affirmed that none of this represented any faltering in their commitment to national atomic weapons. Two months earlier, the COS had emphasised that Britain's atomic weapons programme was the means to greater atomic collaboration with the United States, but while accepting that the production over the next few years would be limited, they reaffirmed that '...there were also strong military reasons...in favour of Britain having a small stockpile of her own'.²⁸

Guided weapons were seized on by the COS as an important and imminent means of alleviating Britain's exposure to Soviet atomic attack, but they could also be seen as complementary to a future offensive posture premised on damage limiting

²⁷ CAB 131/9, D.O. (50) 35, 28 April 1950.

²⁸ Gowing, op. cit., p. 231.

attacks against Soviet atomic assets. Although the COS had been exposed to the speculations of the JPS with regard to future targeting, the Soviet atomic breakthrough confirmed to the COS that the priority for Britain was a damage limitation capability:

The bomber force must from the outset be prepared to launch a strategic air offensive on the atomic plants and bases of the enemy, as this may be the only way of ensuring that the country remains sufficiently undamaged to continue prosecution of the war.²⁹

While the COS had what they saw as compelling military reasons for not endorsing Tizard's arguments, they continued to try to balance these against the political rationales for defence collaboration with the United States. It was stressed that the continued production of atomic weapons was essential if the Americans were ever to accept such a collaborative deal. What was now under discussion was the possible transfer of a stock of American bombs to Britain to be used to fulfill national targeting policy:

...in making this recommendation we are relying on the hope that we shall eventually reach agreement with the Americans for the pooling of our respective atomic weapons programme and for the placing of a stock of American atomic bombs in this country... Without such an agreement the case for continuing our own atomic weapons programme

²⁹ DEFE 4/25, C.O.S. (49) 28 September 1949.

would, of course, be even stronger.³⁰

For Portal and the Minister of Supply, Strauss, however, this attempt at compromise by the COS was unacceptable. The Cabinet Defence Committee (CDC) met on the 25 May to consider the recommendations of the COS and a memorandum from the Minister of Supply which listed the grave consequences for the atomic energy programme if the revised priorities were accepted. This argued that no formal change in priorities should be made until the negotiations with the Americans over atomic energy had been brought to the end of their present phase. Seeing the attack which was building against his position, Tizard went on the offensive against Portal and Strauss. He stressed that there was a misunderstanding in Strauss's argument that any change in priorities would wreck the atomic energy programme. His intention was to allow a transfer of research scientists to other fields by slowing down the production of fissile material and atomic weapons. Most importantly, Tizard challenged the proposition which Portal and Strauss had been advancing, namely that any slowing down in the atomic energy programme would weaken the chances of achieving an agreement with the United States. He suggested that American respect derived '...not from any ability we might have to produce quantities of fissile materials or weapons but from the

³⁰ CAB 131/9, D.O. (50) 35, 28 April 1950.

progress our scientists were making in the research field'.³¹

The Prime Minister was interested in Tizard's assertion and considered that it was

...essential to know...Whether Sir Henry Tizard's idea of slowing down the production of fissile material would in fact seriously affect the rest of the atomic energy programme and our ability to secure a satisfactory agreement with the Americans.³²

Attlee also considered that the possibilities of obtaining American help in developing guided weapons should be further explored. Portal responded to the Prime Minister's intervention with a reaffirmation of the view that Washington would respect British capabilities in this, the most sensitive and special of fields. He commented:

Whereas it might be possible to secure an exchange of information with the Americans in other fields and so advance the stage of development of projects such as the guided weapon, there was an entirely different position to consider in the atomic field. There was a legal bar to the exchange of atomic information on the American side, and our only hope of getting it removed was to maintain a programme of our own which commanded American respect and stimulated American desire for an agreement.³³

31 CAB 131/8, D.O. (50), 25 May 1950.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

Portal and Strauss were supported by Bevin who said that he would not be party to any slowing down of the British atomic energy programme. The Foreign Secretary argued that the United Kingdom's future industrial greatness would depend on this resource. More revealingly, however, he reaffirmed his view that '...it would not be a good thing for the world if the United Kingdom were to surrender to the United States the monopoly of so great a source of power'.³⁴

From the minutes of this meeting it is clear that the COS and the Minister of Defence did not participate in these debates: the key players were Tizard, Portal, Strauss, Bevin and the Prime Minister. The CDC, however, concluded its deliberations with an invitation to Shinwell and Strauss to give '...further thought to this matter in the light of the points made in the above discussion'.³⁵

Both subsequently produced papers which were submitted for consideration at a meeting of the CDC on the 11 July. Strauss's memorandum provided a detailed examination of what savings could be made if it was decided to reduce the atomic energy programme in line with the recommendations of the COS. He interpreted atomic research to include the '...design and production of a small number of atomic

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

bombs', and stressed that even if only this had priority there would still be requirement for '...plutonium from one of the Windscale piles, as without this no atomic bomb could be made and much of the development programmes at Harwell would be hampered'.³⁶

Furthermore, the Minister of Supply argued that reduction in the scale of atomic weapon production would not result in a release of scientists from the atomic to non-atomic areas of defence research - one of the main objects of the proposed adjustment in priorities. His arguments were based on narrow technical considerations rather than strategic or political assessments of the national interest. He did, however, enter this latter arena by asserting like Portal that any slowing down of the atomic weapons programme would seriously impair the chances of reaching an agreement with the United States. Strauss argued that if Britain reduced its atomic weapons programme, it would reinforce the position of those in the United States who had always been hostile to the building of atomic energy production facilities in the United Kingdom. Like the COS, he assumed that the case for continuing with a full blooded atomic weapons programme would be reinforced by the absence of an acceptable agreement with the United States:

³⁶ CAB 131/9, D.O. (50) 53, 5 July 1950.

I presume, however, we would be unwilling to make a drastic reduction in our scale of weapon production unless we secured a firm commitment from the Americans for the use, in an emergency, of their stock of atomic bombs.³⁷

The Minister of Defence saw Strauss's memorandum before compiling his own submission. For Shinwell, the overwhelming consideration was not the possibilities of doing a deal with the Americans in the atomic weapons field, but rather the urgent necessity to find some means of protection against the emerging Soviet atomic threat. He emphasised in his analysis that

It would be quite impossible to deter the enemy from air attacks with atomic weapons upon this country by means of conventional defence with fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft guns. The only hope of inflicting upon the enemy a sufficiently high casualty rate before he reaches his target is guided weapons, and particularly the land to air weapon...I am convinced that in view of the paramount strategic objective of defending the United Kingdom from atomic air attack, we ought to give the maximum boost to the guided weapons programme, and, if necessary, accept the disadvantage of reducing the atomic energy programme.³⁸

These issues were thrashed out on 11 July in the CDC. The outcome was a classic compromise in which guided weapons were to be accelerated to the maximum possible extent but there was to be no reduction in the priority accorded to the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ CAB 131/9, D.O. (50) 52, 5 July 1950.

atomic weapons programme. Gowing argues that in the end '...guided weapons and the atomic project received joint overriding priority'.³⁹ Since Portal had maintained intact the priority for his atomic weapons programme against the vigorous advocacy of Tizard, Gowing's claim that he 'had in effect won'⁴⁰ seems a reasonable one.

The COS do not appear to have played the dominant role in the mediation of the competing strategic claims advanced by Tizard and Portal. Nevertheless, the COS were hardly neutral arbiters in this dispute, since Portal's arguments not only reinforced the judgments of the COS about the links between British atomic prowess and the prospects of reaching a deal with the United States, but also to some extent formed the basis of that assessment. This seems to be what Gowing has in mind in her comments on Portal that '...in his own former citadel, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, he was imperious and triumphant'.⁴¹

The COS hoped that they would achieve a collaborative deal with the United States, but such a deal had to include a stockpile of American bombs, under British control, in the United Kingdom. Anything less than this was unacceptable to

³⁹ Gowing, op. cit., p. 233.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

the COS and would necessitate the continuation of the existing British atomic weapons programme. Tizard's vision of alliance politics held little appeal for the COS and it certainly did not attract Portal or Strauss. Furthermore, with Bevin deeply suspicious of American intentions and determined that London would not acquiesce to an American monopoly of atomic weapons, there was a powerful bureaucratic coalition which was determined to resist the ideas and prescriptions of Tizard.

The COS were aware of the xenophobia with which the British atomic weapons programme was viewed in the United States. In the event that the Americans refused to collaborate with Britain, it was believed that both guided weapons and atomic weapons offered the best hedge against a dangerous and uncertain future. The Soviet atomic breakthrough lent urgency to rational allied atomic planning, something which the COS had been seeking since the beginning of the atomic age, but in the remaining months of the Attlee government, the COS was to remain frustrated in this design. Furthermore, during 1950, policy makers and especially the COS were to become ever more conscious of the price that dependence upon United States strategic power entailed. It was, therefore, paradoxical that in the aftermath of the Soviet atomic test, such dependence was more urgent than ever.

Dependence and Deterrence

Tizard's willingness to give up the development of national atomic weapons and rely solely on SAC to strike strategic targets in the Soviet Union was anathema to the COS as a prescription, but as can be seen in a report by the JPS on Combined Anglo-American planning, was an all too accurate description of Britain's strategic position in 1950:

During the period of this plan the British strategic air forces will be too weak and will have too short a radius of action to deliver an effective air offensive into the Soviet Union. The air offensive will be carried out by the United States air force, using atomic and conventional bombs.⁴²

Dependence upon the Americans had been recognised by the COS as early as 1946. In 1950, however, the critical new appreciation in Anglo-American planning was Soviet acquisition of atomic capabilities. The basing of American B29's in the British Isles had been predicated on the assumption of the COS that Britain would deploy a national atomic strike force before the USSR, and would thus possess atomic superiority over the Soviet Union.⁴³ However, the

⁴² DEFE 4/29, C.O.S. (50) 44th mtg, 17 March 1950.

⁴³ P. Malone, The British Nuclear Deterrent (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 89.

Soviet atomic breakthrough meant that by hosting American bases on its soil, Britain made itself a target for future Soviet atomic attack.

Intelligence estimates indicated that the Soviet Union '...will have no more than ten atomic bombs by the beginning of 1950 and a maximum of thirty by the end of 1950',⁴⁴ but the JIC reported in March 1950 that looking into the future, unless the United Kingdom countered Soviet air attacks, the use of weapons of mass destruction might bring about a 'critical condition' and this could occur '...very shortly after the outbreak of war'.⁴⁵ 'Critical condition' was defined by the planners as a situation in which London would no longer be the centre of administration and the port of London and other major ports would have their '...capacity greatly restricted', and extensive damage would have been inflicted upon British '...main industrial areas and systems of communications'.⁴⁶

Consequently, although the COS had secured their objective of enlisting American atomic support in the event of war, the spectre of future Soviet atomic strength boded ill for British survival if an atomic war started during 1950. This

⁴⁴ DEFE 5/20, C.O.S. (50), 29 March 1950.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

stimulated a debate in both political and military circles about the advantages and disadvantages of SAC's presence in the United Kingdom. The CDC discussed these questions throughout March 1950, the same month that the COS received its reports from the JPS and JIC. It was agreed that from the military point of view there was great merit in having an American physical presence in the United Kingdom. The COS had worked since 1946 to secure integration between the two states' strategic forces, and despite the risks of being the primary target for Soviet atomic attack, officials were convinced that Britain was strategically well placed as an advanced air base and that the United Kingdom had to '...accept such a role'.⁴⁷

Bevin was in no doubt that an American physical presence was vital to British strategic policy, but cautioned his colleagues on two points. He was concerned about how

...we would secure our right to bring the arrangements to a close, ie call upon the Americans to withdraw their air forces, should we ever want to do so...and how we would secure our own position if the Americans ever wanted to conduct active operations from United Kingdom airfields before the United Kingdom was at war.⁴⁸

Such concerns were not restricted to politicians: even as

⁴⁷ See DEFE 7/516, Memorandum by Minister of State for Defence Committee, Western Organisations Department, Foreign Office, 1 January 1950.

⁴⁸ Dukes, op. cit., p. 46.

ardent a supporter of military liaison with the Americans as the new CAS, Sir John Slessor was concerned about such questions. At a meeting of the COS on the 27 July, he expressed his concern at the ambiguities under which United States bombers were based in the United Kingdom and said that '...we could not risk a situation in which the Americans had decided to use the A-bomb while we were arguing about whether it should be used'.⁴⁹ Slessor's comments reflected the frustration of British officials at their ignorance of United States atomic planning, a situation made more acute by the knowledge that, in the early 1950s, Britain depended upon the United States destroying those atomic plants and bases from which Soviet bombers would have launched weapons of mass destruction against the United Kingdom.

Slessor's prescription for this ill was a stronger US military representation in London, empowered by the American JCS to discuss atomic war-planning policy with the British COS. Tedder, who on relinquishing the post of CAS had moved to the British Joint Services Mission in Washington, was present at this meeting of the COS and expressed skepticism at such schemes, considering that unofficial exchanges of information between British and American service personnel were about as much as could be expected in the near future.

⁴⁹ DEFE 4/34, C.O.S. (50) 117, 27 July 1950.

Slessor was not particularly happy with this attitude, but Tedder's arguments seem to have been accepted by ministers. They decreed that matters concerning the use of American bombers from British bases, were best left as they stood, since the issue could only arise in practice if British and American policies diverged to such an extent that the basing of American bombers on British soil might have to be reconsidered. Such a relaxed assessment was short lived, however, as the very fears which so exercised Slessor looked like becoming a reality in late 1950 as the United States appeared ready to use atomic weapons in the Korean War.

The Korean War And The Threat To Use The Bomb

President Truman's statement at a press conference on 30 November 1950 that the United States was considering the use of atomic weapons in the Korean war vindicated the concerns of Slessor and created anxieties amongst British officials about the risks of global war. In view of the impending dangers and with pressure from all sides of the House of Commons, Attlee flew to Washington on 3 December. He was accompanied by CIGS and various Foreign Office Far Eastern experts.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ According to Dukes, the American delegation was composed of the 'President, Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, Secretary of the Treasury Snyder, Secretary of Defence Marshall, Secretary of Commerce Sawyer, General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the JCS, Chairman of the National

In private talks with the President, Attlee elicited a promise from Truman that the bomb would not be used without 'prior consultation' with the United Kingdom and Canadian governments. Pressure from United States Secretary of State, Dean Acheson prevented such an undertaking being written into the final communique, which simply said that the President would keep the Prime Minister informed of developments which might lead to the use of the atomic bomb, but the British believed that they had received an undertaking on consultation which '...was clear, even though it depended on no written agreement'.⁵¹ If ministers were prepared - albeit reluctantly - to accept such an ambiguous understanding, the COS believed that the President had done little to allay their anxieties. Slessor reiterated that it was a matter of '...vital importance and extreme urgency that the United States should agree to immediate joint study of the strategic use of the bomb, and to a disclosure to Britain of plans for its use'.⁵²

Security Resources Board Stuart Symmington and W. Averell Harriman. On the Prime Minister's team were the British Ambassador, Sir Oliver Franks, Sir William Slim, Marshal of the RAF Lord Tedder, Sir Roger Makins, R.H. Scott of the Foreign Office and Sir Edward Plowden, Chief of the Economic Planning Staff'. Quoted in Dukes, op. cit., p. 65.

⁵¹ See Gowing, op. cit., pp. 313-15 and Ibid., pp. 64-8.

⁵² Quoted in Gowing, op. cit., p. 315.

It was not that the CAS believed that Britain should 'run away from the consequences of atomic war should it become inevitable',⁵³ but he did believe that the COS should be involved in any deliberations which might lead to the fateful decision to use atomic weapons. Nevertheless, the COS were convinced that the Korean conflict was not a situation which the use of atomic weapons was warranted, and a few days before Slim had flown with Attlee to Washington, the COS had recorded their objections to the use of atomic weapons against Korean and Chinese targets.

It was not the morality of laying down atomic weapons which pre-occupied the COS, nor was it resistance to the idea of using atomic weapons against an Asian enemy so soon after Hiroshima and Nagasaki; rather it was that they could find no suitable targets for the atomic bomb in Korea. They commented that 'Militarily and psychologically the use of the bomb on targets in Korea, when considered in relation to its killing and destructive effect under likely conditions in Korea, will not prove decisive'.⁵⁴

The overriding objection, however, to the initiation of atomic strikes in the Far East was that the use of the atomic weapon against Chinese targets '...would bring in

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ DEFE 4/38 COS (50) 191st Meeting 1 December 1950.

Russia and a 3rd World War could hardly be avoided'.⁵⁵ The COS emphasised that once the threshold of atomic war had been crossed, it '...would have the effect of lowering the deterrent value of the bomb to stop major war'.⁵⁶

Although there was in London understandable concern about the risks of precipitous American atomic action in Korea, it seems that the United States Joint Strategic Survey Committee tasked with examining this option - were, like the British COS, unable to find targets that were worth the atomic bomb and which justified the risks of escalation inherent in this course of action. The survey concluded that the employment of atomic weapons would be inappropriate except '...under the most compelling military circumstances',⁵⁷ and General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, reacted strongly to the suggestion that the Americans were planning to use nuclear weapons in Korea: 'I've never heard anything so preposterous in all my life'.⁵⁸ Thus, British concerns about the use of the bomb in Korea appear somewhat exaggerated, but the risk of such an outcome seemed to underline the need for Britain

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 G. Herken, The Winning Weapon (New York: Knopf, 1980), p. 332.

58 Ibid., p. 333.

to exert a measure of influence over the conduct of United States strategy.

This was particularly the case as regards assessments of the Soviet threat, for it was the belief that Moscow was behind the North Korean and Chinese interventions in the Korean peninsula which seems to have persuaded the United States to consider escalating the war to the Chinese mainland. The assumption that Moscow was the puppeteer pulling the Chinese and Korean strings was not one which found favour with the COS. Evidence for this can be seen in Slim's report to Slessor and Fraser on his return from Washington. CIGS explained that he had tried to persuade the Americans that China was not completely subservient to Russia and that her action in Korea had not taken place under '...direct orders from Moscow'.⁵⁹ He had argued that although China was morally supported by Russia, it '...was possibly acting in Korea in her own interests, and that with careful handling it might still be possible to draw her out of the Russian camp'.⁶⁰

Moreover, Slim explained that since the Americans believed that 'war was inevitable', there was a risk that '...We might as a result be dragged unnecessarily into World War

⁵⁹ DEFE 4/38, C.O.S. (50) 206th mtg, 14 December 1950.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

III'.⁶¹ In further discussion, Slim summarised the American ideas on escalating the war in Korea and the counter-arguments which he and his delegation had deployed against such views:

The United States stated that they did not want a war with China. They had felt, however, that should we be forced to evacuate Korea, we should immediately embark on a "limited war" with China—such a war taking the form of a sea blockade, bombing and the encouragement of subversive elements in the country to throw out the Communist government. We on the other hand, felt there could be no such thing as a "limited war" against China, and that if the action suggested by the United States were to be taken it would almost inevitably lead to World War.⁶²

Slim seems to have played a dominant role in presenting British strategic views to the Americans, indicating that the COS perceived its role as wider than advising the British Government on strategic issues. The COS recognised the importance of gaining access to key American decision making structures. Moreover, the fact that the Prime Minister took CIGS with him to Washington indicates that the military's role was both recognised and valued by the Cabinet.

Despite disagreement with the Americans on the extent to

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

which the Korean war marked the beginnings of Stalin's timetable for world domination, it was somewhat ironic that Washington's increased perception of the Soviet threat should have led Truman to announce in September 1950 substantial increases in the American ground forces stationed in Western Europe. This commitment was particularly welcome in London as it demonstrated that the United States was not allowing its involvement in the Korean War to distract its attention from the defence of Western Europe.

Despite fierce opposition to Montgomery in 1948, policy makers and COS had come to accept that the United Kingdom's participation in the defence of Germany would be vital, both in reassuring French security concerns in relation to possible West German rearmament, and in showing the United States that Europe was serious about its defence and therefore worthy of American support. On 23 March 1950, ministers endorsed a recommendation by the COS that planning should proceed on the basis of sending reinforcements to Europe in the event of a Soviet attack. Montgomery's argument had been based on the military necessity for a European conventional deterrent posture, but Slim was realistic enough to appreciate that the two extra divisions Britain was planning to send to the continent would not do much to hold the Soviet Union on the Rhine. Nevertheless,

'...the simple point was that it would help remove existing suspicion and encourage the French to press on with their own preparations for defence'.⁶³

Nonetheless, it is important to realise, however, that although Bevin and the Cabinet may have welcomed Truman's commitment to send troops to defend Western Europe, there was no question of conventional forces being seen in London as a substitute for the deterrent value of American atomic weapons. In January 1950, the Foreign Office had pointed out that the '...presence of American troops in Germany...is not one which will necessarily last and in times of emergency might very well have to be abandoned'.⁶⁴ Although Truman's decision in September marginally reduced the risk of the conventional anchor not holding in Europe, it certainly did not obviate the danger that the Soviets might overrun Western Europe in times of war. The COS reasoned that, although the Soviet atomic breakthrough made Britain the primary target for atomic attack, the Soviets would be deterred from war against Britain if Moscow was assured that the United States could still retaliate against the Soviet homeland with atomic weapons. The COS expressed this argument most cogently in November 1951, but there is no reason to doubt that this was the reassuring collective

⁶³ Barker, op. cit., p. 196-7.

⁶⁴ DEFE 7/516, Foreign Office, 4 January 1950.

position in December 1950:

A successful surprise attack...on the American airfields in this country would by no means destroy the whole of the United States potential for strategic attack and would immediately initiate atomic bombing of the U.S.S.R. from other American and allied air bases outside the United Kingdom - no doubt the Russians are well aware of this fact.⁶⁵

The Attlee Government's rearmament programme, which began in earnest in late 1950, emerged, therefore, from a complex political and military calculus related to the twin requirements of insuring against the outbreak of global war as a result of a widening of the Korean situation and reassuring France, West Germany and especially the United States that Britain would play its role in the evolving structure of West European security. Aside from the reasons adduced above, rearmament must have been welcome to the services desperately trying to modernise their equipment to face the new challenges of the post-war period. The COS recommended that measures be taken which would assure the survival of the United Kingdom base in the event of global war. And since guided weapons were equal priority with atomic weapons, it was not surprising that the COS proposed boosting expenditure on these defensive weapons.

It should not be thought, however, that the emphasis on

⁶⁵ DEFE 5/34, C.O.S. (51), 13 November 1951.

defensive measures indicated any weakening in the enthusiasm of the COS for offensive atomic warfare. Rather, defence of the home base contributed to the protection of those American atomic bombers upon which Britain depended for both deterrence and war-fighting purposes. Moreover, fighter defences not only provided a point defence of the American atomic bases in the East of the country, they also acted as a shield for Britain's major population centres.

Malone argues that the rationale for emphasis on defence was that in the aftermath of the Soviet atomic breakthrough and Korean War, British planners had to accept that '...if independent deterrence could not be procured in time...then resources should be, and were, shifted to independent defence'.⁶⁶ Apart from overstating British perceptions of the Soviet threat in 1950 and overdrawing the conflict between American atomic deterrence and British area defence, Malone misses the division of labour between the two states entailed by such activities. This theme of Britain and the United States pursuing complementary tasks in the containment of Soviet strategic power was to be further developed in the 1950s as British nuclear planners continued to emphasise the contribution which a national atomic force could make to meeting both national and alliance needs.

⁶⁶ Malone, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

Nevertheless, an effective division of labour would be most effective if both states were operating on similar strategic assessments and, additionally, if there was an adequate flow of information. The situation in both these areas was, from the British point of view, far from ideal during the early Korean War and, although there would be greater liaison between United States and United Kingdom war planners during 1951-2, the differences in strategic philosophy between the two states were to be further accentuated by United States policy and planning in the aftermath of the Korean War.

Conclusion

The period 1949-50 was not characterised by the intense internal conflicts which had marked the debates of the COSC in 1947-8. Although the change in personnel made for a smoother working of the COS machine, external events ensured that there was no repeat of the divisive arguments over the continental commitment. Policy makers and COS reluctantly acknowledged the political necessity for Britain to play a full role in the emerging structure of West European security. The evolution of British attitudes in relation to the continental commitment seems to support Freedman's contention that today's consensus can be steeped in

yesterday's engagements. However, it was not that Fraser, Slessor and Slim had logically resolved the clash of strategic values which had divided the COS in 1948. Rather, ministers had come by 1950 to accept the political arguments in support of a continental commitment and had the institutional power to effect such a sea-change in Britain's security policy.

Although the Soviet atomic breakthrough overturned the key assumptions upon which the COS had based their strategic planning, and stimulated an intense debate within the defence establishment about the priority to be accorded atomic weapons, the COS was united in its submissions to ministers. The key players in the debate over future priorities were Tizard and Portal. The arguments presented by the Chairman of the DRPC and the Controller of Atomic Energy could be seen as supporting the proposition that bureaucratic position determines policy preference. According to this interpretation, it was a fight between the DRPC and the Ministry of Supply as to which should have jurisdiction over the atomic energy programme. Gowing suggests that Portal was driven by bureaucratic pressures. While accepting that the political and military arguments mattered to him, she contends that the atomic energy project had '...developed its own momentum and its very existence had almost become the reason for its existence', with

Portal '...determined to defend it to the limits of its considerable capacity'.⁶⁷

As argued in the previous chapter, however, the key point is that even if actors are motivated by purely bureaucratic requirements, the competing arguments have to be presented as different conceptions of the national interest. Thus, if at one level the debate about priority was a dispute between competing bureaucratic positions, at another it was a debate about the appropriate strategy to be pursued in the light of the Soviet atomic breakthrough. Moreover, if the above argument supports that which Greenwood termed 'strategic augmentation', it seems that as with the case of the COS and the continental commitment, this approach does not - as Greenwood himself recognises - capture the role of beliefs and the responsibility of decision makers to determine policy according to their perception of the national interest. In relation to this case study, Gowing's discussion of Portal's motives points up the difficulties of separating out different sources of policy motivation. On the one hand, she considers that Portal's arguments were not just tools of bureaucratic manoeuvre, but on the other hand, she wants to argue that the driving force behind Portal's policies was organisational aggrandisement.

⁶⁷ Gowing, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-234.

If the above arguments provide further confirmation for the general proposition that the bureaucratic politics model makes too mechanistic a link between position and preference, the settlement of the dispute might be argued to lend some support to Allison's framework. The Tizard-Portal dispute had its resolution not in a single strategic decision taken by ministers, but by a compromise between clashing bureaucratic and strategic interests. The COSC was an important actor in this debate, with ministers constantly referring issues to their military advisers for advice and recommendations, but there is no evidence to suggest that the COS played the dominant role in the settlement of the dispute.

In the last chapter, it was suggested that the COS played the role of competent critics in the debate over the continental commitment - exposing competing strategic viewpoints to ministers for political resolution. In contrast, the Tizard-Portal dispute did not give rise to similar conflicts amongst the COS, but they were not able to use consensus in their internal relations as a platform for playing the role of arbiters. Part of the explanation for this was that the COS were not neutral players. Instead, they were policy advocates pressing the case with Portal that Britain's pursuit of operational nuclear independence should not be compromised.

Having said that, the COS were prepared to support Tizard and Shinwell in the argument that guided weapons might offer an immediate means of mitigating Britain's vulnerability to Soviet atomic attack. The recommendations of the COS in 1950 reflected their continuing pre-occupation with Britain's exposure to nuclear attack and the conviction that a strategy of damage limitation was the only means of British survival in the nuclear age. Thus, while supporting Tizard on guided weapons, the COS were completely opposed to his prescription that Britain might develop the 'art and not the article'. Set against this, the COS were prepared in the aftermath of the Soviet atomic breakthrough to contemplate a greater degree of atomic integration with the United States. However, atomic integration with the United States depended on the Americans agreeing to provide Britain with atomic weapons under London's control and this was something which Washington could not accept. It was not only the COS who stipulated this requirement, however. Ministers, especially Bevin, were unanimous that Britain's security should not be dependent upon American goodwill.

Portal and Tizard articulated different strategies for Britain's security in the nuclear age. However, what determined Portal's success was not some 'higher claim to

rationality',⁶⁸ but the distribution of bargaining power within the Government which ensured that Tizard's arguments in relation to Britain opting out of the atomic game did not become government policy. Freedman argues that it is because power resources are not distributed equally, that competition takes the form of a clash of interests rather than distinct strategic philosophies, a proposition which reinforces Schilling's contention that political power can decide matters '...which the distribution of facts and insight cannot'.⁶⁹ Portal's arguments were located in the context of the 'national interest' as defined by the COS and Cabinet, which in turn reflected the dominant values and assumptions of the leading players in the government. Tizard's task was to try and change the prevailing definition of the 'national interest' but he lacked the political power to effect such a fundamental change within the British defence establishment.

If military and political leaders rejected the idea of a division of labour with the Americans in which Britain played a non-atomic role, it was believed in London that there could be no credible defence of Britain and Western Europe without the American nuclear commitment. Having orchestrated such a commitment, British planners realised in

⁶⁸ Freedman, op. cit., p.446.

⁶⁹ Schilling, op. cit., p. 12.

the aftermath of the Soviet atomic test that dependence carried with it novel vulnerabilities and dangers. It was the military rather than the politicians, however, who agitated about the risks of dependence on United States strategic power. Slessor was almost obsessed with the risks Britain was running in placing its survival in the hands of the United States, and led the efforts in the COS to achieve strategic co-ordination with the Americans.

In adjusting to the Soviet atomic breakthrough, the British avoided taking refuge in simplistic stereotyping of the Soviet threat as was the prevalent tendency in Washington. Despite being very conscious of the dangers which would befall Britain in the event of global war, the COS were measured in their assessments of the Sino-Soviet challenge in the Korean War and had little sympathy for the 'Munich' analogies which were prevalent in the United States. British concern in the Korean War centred on the risks of nuclear escalation and the danger that Korea might distract Washington's attention from European security issues.

The critics of Britain's defence policy-making in the 1950s depicted the COSC as prey to parochial service interests, but as can be further seen in this chapter, such an assessment neglected the underlying beliefs and values which shaped Britain's nuclear defence policy in the late 1940s.

In responding to a changing external situation in 1949-50, the COSC worked well in presenting ministers with coherent assessments of the strategic situation. The COS provided ministers with policy analysis which sought to address British pre-occupations and vulnerabilities and articulated a strategic philosophy which was distinct from that being advanced within the United States at this time.

If all this casts the conventional wisdom about the COSC in an unfavorable light, it is important to remember that this chapter has focused on issues which made for a relatively easy consensus within the COSC. The challenges which faced the COS in this period did not touch the vexed issues of future roles and missions and budgetary allocations between the services which had been so decisive in the period 1947-8. The years 1951-2 were to see a major debate within alliance counsels about future NATO strategy and this was to give rise to the 1952 Global Strategy Paper (GSP) which challenged contemporary American strategic ideas. Nevertheless, while embodying substantial elements of strategic consensus within the British defence elite, this document was also an attempt to deal with the future balance between nuclear and conventional forces in defence planning, and by so doing was to trigger renewed inter-service rivalry in the defence establishment. It is to these issues that the analysis now turns.

CHAPTER SIX

STRATEGIC IDEAS, DEFENCE POLICY AND THE GSP

Introduction

The 1952 GSP has been hailed as the most important document of post-war British nuclear defence policy. This chapter will analyse both the origins and contents of the GSP. Emerging as the British response to NSC-68 and the Lisbon force goals, the GSP was not attractive to the Truman Administration since it challenged the policy planning of that Administration. Three specific questions will be addressed: (1) the merits of the conventional wisdom pertaining to the GSP; (2) the nature of political-military relations and the relationship between civilian control and inter-service rivalry in the negotiations leading up to the GSP; and (3) the utility of the bureaucratic politics model in explaining outcomes in the GSP.

Anglo-American Strategic Perspectives And Liaison

Although NSC-68 was written before the Korean War and was never issued publicly, the British government was aware of the ideas which were attracting considerable support amongst American policy makers. NSC-68 was the product of the State

Department's Policy Planning Staff and contended that the Soviet Union posed a permanent, rather than transitory military threat to the security of the United States and its allies. This assessment represented a victory by Dean Acheson and Paul Nitze, the key authors of NSC-68, over George Kennan; for it was a victory for a military, rather than political, definition of the Soviet threat.¹ In addition, Williams argues that '...Kennan's attempts to differentiate between vital and peripheral interests were superceded by an indiscriminate globalism in which commitments were regarded as interdependent.'²

NSC-68 expressed the view that the risks of war were very high in the immediate future and called for a continued build up of both nuclear and conventional forces. Nitze and Acheson were concerned that the Soviet atomic breakthrough had not only rendered incredible an American capability to retaliate with atomic weapons if the Soviet Union attacked Western Europe, but also heralded the vulnerability of the American homeland to Soviet atomic attack. NSC-68 introduced

¹ For an extensive discussion of the origins of NSC-68 see P. Hammond, 'NSC-68: prologue to Rearmament' in Schilling, Hammond and Snyder (eds.), Strategy, Politics and Defence Budgets (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 267-378.

² P. Williams, 'United States Defence Policy Making' in G.M. Dillon (ed.) Defence Policy Making: A Comparative Analysis (Leicester University Press, 1988 forthcoming).

the notion of 1954 as the year of maximum danger, this date being selected because it was argued that when the Soviets had 200 bombs which could be used against the United States, such temptations would prove irresistible to a Soviet leadership intent on global hegemony. Acheson and Nitze concluded that a capability should be developed which would enable the United States to deny the Soviet Union its military objectives without the use of American atomic weapons. Thus, it was no coincidence that the North Korean attack in June 1950 which was seen as vindicating NSC-68 in its assessments of future Soviet behaviour, also acted as a catalyst for the decision of September 1950 to increase American troop levels in Western Europe.

Administration officials argued the case of NSC-68 against those 'isolationists' in the United States who wished to avoid 'entangling alliances', not to mention those in the Air Force who believed that the instrument of atomic airpower was the decisive weapon of the new age. They contended that the Soviets had to be deterred at all levels, from conventional to atomic, and that the effectiveness of retaliatory airpower could be exaggerated. The Administration won and allied acceptance of this led to the adoption of a NATO forward strategy and then to the ambitious Lisbon force goals in February 1952. These goals committed the NATO alliance to provide 96 divisions for the

defence of Europe by 1954.³

Although the British Government accepted these force goals, the COS regarded the risk assessment underpinning the American position as alarmist. In November 1951, they submitted a report on the risks of war with the Soviet Union in the period 1951-54 which concluded that Moscow would not attempt to exploit its conventional strength against Western interests whilst it was unable to retaliate with atomic weapons against the United States and was confronted with such United States superiority in atomic weapons.⁴ Thus, the COS based its threat assessment on the vulnerability of the Soviet homeland to United States atomic attack, at a time when NSC-68 was drawing the conclusion that vulnerability was an American as much as a Soviet problem. In addition, the dangers of war were seen by the British COS as not so much direct Soviet aggression, but miscalculation and inadvertent escalation in a peripheral conflict such as Korea. This British conception of security as being dependent upon the dynamics of United States-Soviet competition was not attractive to the architects of NSC-68, pre-occupied as they were with the innate aggressiveness of the Soviet regime.

³ For a summary of these arguments see L.D. Freedman, Evolution of Nuclear Strategy (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 72-5.

⁴ DEFE 4/49, C.O.S. (51) 701, November 1951.

NSC-68 was one response to America's problem of perceived vulnerability, but another alternative was to forswear atomic warfare against Soviet cities in the hope that the other side would exercise similar restraint. A young strategist from Yale University, Bernard Brodie was arguing this theme for the benefit of the United States Air Force. General Hoyt Vandenberg had invited Brodie to examine the nation's war plans, and Brodie was so staggered by the lack of discrimination in the plans that he challenged what he saw as the 'Sunday Punch' mentality of SAC and its commander, General Curtis Le May.⁵

Brodie was not the only one thinking in this direction. Robert Oppenheimer, one of the fathers of the atomic bomb, was involved in the fall of 1951 with Project VISTA which sought to exploit the possibilities of developing small tactical atomic weapons which could be used on the battlefield. Atomic attacks against troop concentrations and staging posts, 20-25 miles behind enemy lines were seen by VISTA's authors as providing an attractive target system for small yield atomic weapons.⁶ Despite accepting the erosion

⁵ F. Kaplan, The Wizards of Armageddon (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 46.

⁶ David C. Elliot, 'Project VISTA and Nuclear Weapons in Europe' International Security, vol. 11, no. 1 (Summer 1986), p. 163-83.

of United States strategic striking power, VISTA was not wholly negative in its implications for British nuclear strategy. Counter-air operations were at the heart of British war-planning, and many of the enemy airfields which VISTA identified in Eastern Europe and the Western districts of the Soviet Union would have figured prominently on British target lists. The COS would not have been informed of the details of Project VISTA, but there was awareness within the British defence establishment that the United States was experimenting with tactical atomic weapons and this seems to have been a stimulus for the DRPC to investigate future nuclear weapon development.

The DRPC's sub-committee on the Strategic Aspects of Atomic Energy produced a study which according to Gowing asked 'What uses were there for atomic weapons other than blasting and burning cities'?⁷ That the DRPC produced such a study indicates how far it was out of touch with the main thrust of argument within the COSC. As previously discussed, this focused on the aspiration to conduct independent counter-force strikes against Soviet atomic plants and bases. Nevertheless, having identified a counter-military rationale for the atomic bomb, the development of a weapon which had a low yield, but high powers of penetration, would be suited to the conduct of those counter-force operations against

⁷ Gowing, op. cit., p. 437.

Soviet airbases. Moreover, tactical atomic weapons were attractive not only for attacking Soviet airbases: the Army and Navy both seem to have adduced additional rationales for the development of such weapons.

The British Army seems to have been in favour of developing such weapons since they were seen as providing the means of countering Soviet conventional strength without massive increases in Western conventional forces. Although the Lisbon force goals were not agreed until February 1952, it was recognised in late 1951 that massive expenditure on ground forces in Western Europe might well be beyond the means of the Western economies. The British Army must have been encouraged by General Omar Bradley's statement in 1949 that the atomic weapon, in its tactical aspects, 'may well contribute towards a stable equilibrium of forces since it tends to strengthen a defensive army'.⁸

For different reasons, the Navy also favoured the development of tactical atomic weapons. The Admiralty's great concern in 1951 was the emergence of Soviet Sverdlov cruisers which heralded a growing Soviet maritime challenge. The best counter was the Navy's existing carrier force, but the Naval Staff realised that it was unlikely that any of their existing aircraft could inflict damage on the

⁸ Quoted in Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

Sverdlovs with conventional bombs and rockets.⁹ In contrast to discussions about developing a carrier borne atomic fleet in 1948, the Navy was in 1951 attracted to developing a naval strike fighter which could carry the small atomic weapon, and it was this which was to lead to the issuing of a requirement for the NA39 (Buccaneer) in June 1952.¹⁰ This plane would have a range of over 400 miles and would be capable of attacking land targets as well as Soviet cruisers.

Although the Army and Navy adduced different strategic rationales for the role which small atomic weapons could play in meeting the Soviet challenge on land and at sea, they had no difficulty in emphasising those aspects of the adversary's capabilities and posture which played up the requirement to conduct cherished roles and missions. Perhaps surprisingly, the RAF does not appear to have opposed these attempts by the Army and Navy to lay claim to a share in the future delivery of the nation's atomic weapons. Does this mean that the technological innovation of small atomic weapons was one of those rare cases when the services had an opportunity to enhance their abilities to perform existing roles and missions without infringing on their rivals' bureaucratic territory?

⁹ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 97-8.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

Part of the answer is that although the military were able to agree on a joint requirement for research and development into tactical weapons, British tactical bombs were only a theoretical prospect in 1951. While the United States was discussing its atomic requirements in terms of future nuclear abundance, British military planners were operating on the assumption of atomic scarcity. Thus, the prospect of future conflict over the control of such weapons must have been recognised in 1951, but custody of the future nuclear stockpile was not a burning issue at a time when Britain had no operational atomic weapons. Furthermore, Crowe argues that the '...RAF was already looking ahead to the day of small atomic weapons and was trying to develop support for such a project'.¹¹ He contends that the Navy's request for such a weapon added weight to the airmen's case, and claims that '...the two services merged their request into a "joint" requirement for a small tactical A-bomb'.¹² Crowe does not mention the Army in this, and it could well be that the Army was eclipsed by the RAF and Navy in pressing this case upon the Government. If this was the case in late 1951, the Army's hesitation was to be replaced by greater enthusiasm in the coming years.

¹¹ W.J. Crowe, The Policy Roots of the Royal Navy 1946-63 (Dissertation presented to Princeton University, 1965), p. 127.

¹² Ibid.

Despite investing significance in the development of tactical atomic weapons for reasons of both strategy and inter-service politics, the COS did not consider these weapons as a substitute for the American deterrent threat against the Soviet homeland. Oppenheimer was attracted to tactical atomic weapons because they held out the prospect of making war both rational and calculable in a way in which the terror bombing of cities did not, but it was the vulnerability of Soviet cities to American atomic attack which was perceived in London as the key deterrent to Soviet aggression in Western Europe. Therefore, what was important to British security was assurance that United States nuclear war plans were being framed on the basis of counter-city strikes against the Soviet Union and that such missions could be executed effectively in wartime.

During 1952, there were increasing interchanges between British and American officials with an increased flow of information taking place between the British COS and the American JCS. The Prime Minister visited Washington in January 1952 and was given a secret briefing by the American Strategic Air Command. Apparently, Churchill was told as much as Secretary of State, Acheson, and the Pentagon briefing is said to have 'profoundly impressed'¹³ the Prime

¹³ Rosecrance, op. cit., p. 158.

Minister and made him a '...total convert to atomic airpower'.¹⁴ One suggestion is that Churchill was debriefed by the COS on his return to London, but although the Prime Ministerial channel may have been useful, other sources of information were vitally important.

It was the unofficial liaison between the British and American Air Force Chiefs which seems to have been pivotal in opening up the information flow between the two countries. Moreover, it seems that this actually included information about United States targeting plans. Slessor seems to have persuaded Vandenberg that it was in the interests of both the United States and Britain that the COS be afforded information on American war plans such that they could make informed judgments on the efficacy of United States strategy.¹⁵ The COS had sought access to American nuclear war plans since the beginning of the post war period, and without exaggerating the significance of the exchanges which took place in 1952, it seems that they were on the verge of realising greater strategic nuclear co-operation with the United States.

In the aftermath of the Soviet atomic test, damage

¹⁴ L.R. Norman, 'The New Look Strategy', quoted in B.H. Liddell Hart, Deterrent or Defence (Stevens and Sons Ltd, 1960), p. 20.

¹⁵ Interview, Spring 1987.

limitation was an urgent priority for British planners, and what Slessor sought from Vandenberg was assurances that counter-air operations were included in SAC's missions. In December 1949, Soviet atomic plants and bases had been included by the JCS in plan OFFTACKLE, but as Pringle and Arkin point out, the United States JCS '...picked out targets they thought ought to be in the war plan and told Le May what sort of damage should be done to them. The rest was up to Le May...'¹⁶ Pringle and Arkin assert that Le May '...never discussed with the President or even the Air Force Chief of Staff what we were going to do with the force we had or what we should do with it, or anything of that sort'.¹⁷ According to Kaplan, Vandenberg was no great enthusiast for strategic bombing, having spent the Second World War providing support to Bradley's troops as they advanced across Europe,¹⁸ but seems to have assured Slessor during 1952 that pulverising Soviet cities and eliminating the Red Air Force at its bases would be the priority missions of the United States strategic bomber force. Despite Pringle and Arkin's comments about Vandenberg's apparent ignorance of Le May's war planning, it seems from declassified papers that SAC's targets would, as Vandenberg

¹⁶ P. Pringle and W. Arkin, SIOP: Nuclear War from the inside (London: Sphere, 1983), p. 28.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁸ Kaplan, op. cit., p. 38.

indicated to Slessor, have centred on DELTA and BRAVO targets, that is a blunting mission against Soviet airbases and atomic plants and strikes against Soviet urban and industrial areas.¹⁹

There is no doubt that from the Prime Minister down, the growing interchanges between British and American officials confirmed London's faith in the overwhelming deterrent value of United States atomic weapons. Nonetheless, knowledge of the devastation which an American atomic offensive could wreak on the Soviet Union, did not make for easier agreement between the COS on the correct balance to be struck between conventional and atomic forces in future defence planning as can be seen in their discussions of strategic priorities in 1951.

Dissension Over Strategic Priorities

It was recognised by British officials that there was an explicit trade-off between conventional and atomic forces, with supporters of the 'atomic revolution' arguing that Britain could afford to reduce provision for conventional forces and rely on the deterrent of atomic airpower. There was, however, considerable resistance amongst the Army and Navy to the idea that Britain could depend for its security

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

solely on the threat of atomic retaliation. The great bulk of Britain's forces were conventional and '...it would have taken extraordinary courage and confidence, even rashness, for the leadership to discard them without a clearer picture of what the future held'.²⁰

This lack of high level consensus on future strategic needs reflected the underlying inability of the COS to decide on whether planning should be based on a short or long war, and on the priority to be given to deterrence of Soviet attack by threats of punishment against the Russian heartland, as against denying the Soviet Union its military objectives in the event that war should break out. This debate had afflicted United States strategic planning in the late 1940s, with the argument becoming politicised into a struggle between SAC and the United States Navy. The latter argued that there was no evidence that SAC's attack against Soviet cities would lead to war termination in a few weeks as postulated by SAC, and naval planning was based on the assumption that an '...initial nuclear exchange would be followed by a long period of conventional war in Europe and elsewhere, interspersed with occasional use of nuclear weapons'.²¹ Such ideas had been investigated in 1950 by the inter-service Harmon Committee which concluded that even if

²⁰ Crowe, op. cit., p. 146.

²¹ Simpson, op. cit., p. 52.

all the bombs in war-plan Trojan were

...to explode on target, they would only achieve a 30-40 per cent reduction in industrial capacity, and the Russians would still have sufficient troop mobility to invade 'selected areas' of Western Europe, the Middle East and Far East.²²

By 1951, the Navy had secured its position in the United States defence debate by staking its claim to play a role in strategic nuclear operations. Nevertheless, United States carrier strike plans focused on counter-force targets such as naval bases and submarine pens leaving the mission of urban attacks to SAC. It was the United States Army which found itself in the early 1950s challenging SAC's strategy and asserting that priority should be given to tactical atomic weapons which could be used against Soviet armed forces in the event of war. The evolution of British nuclear strategy was to reflect some of these arguments, and in early 1952 they had their specific manifestation in relation to the priority to be accorded the defence of sea communications.

Tizard challenged the idea which was gaining currency in the RAF that the development of strategic atomic airpower had reduced the importance of protecting naval sea routes. His concern was that the government might be led astray by the

²² Quoted in Pringle and Arkin, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

claimants of atomic airpower to the detriment of other concerns which remained vital to national security. The Chief Scientific Adviser contended that sea communications were more important than ever and '...an attack by the Russians on our sea communications was of equal danger to us as an attack against this country by atom bombs'.²³ Tizard was concerned that the Soviets might exploit their naval preponderance in an effort to 'neutralise' the United Kingdom and his implicit concern was that Britain would be self-deterred from using atom bombs in such a situation.²⁴ Like Dickson a few years earlier, Tizard was putting on record his concern that unless the Soviets launched an atomic attack against the United Kingdom, it might be very difficult for Britain to initiate nuclear warfare against the Soviet Union. Tizard's scenario was related to an era of British operational nuclear capabilities, but he sought from the COS a recommendation that measures be taken now which would alleviate the immediate threat to sea communications.

Sir Arthur Sanders, Vice-Chief of the Air Staff, said that the main reason why more steps were not being taken to meet the Soviet naval threat was the '...very big capital outlay required at a time when capital expenditure was being cut to

²³ DEFE 4/52, C.O.S. (52) 29th mtg, 19 February 1952.

²⁴ Ibid.

the bone'.²⁵ He contended that the only way to cope with the Soviet naval threat was to attack at source against enemy naval forces, an argument which harked back to the fierce debates between the RAF and Navy in the late 1930s. The Air Staff's argument was not that sea communications were unimportant, but that future strategic bombers were a more effective weapons system for meeting the Soviet naval challenge than the development of large balanced naval forces which lay at the heart of the Admiralty case. Tizard's concern was that the RAF was becoming obsessed with the possibilities of deterrence through the threat of pulverising Soviet cities, as Cherwell, Harris and the Air Staff had been with regard to conventional bombing against Germany during the later stages of the Second World War. The arguments of Saunders in February, however, suggested that the RAF's role in the protection of sea communications was one of attack at source and deterrence by denial - and this was something that the Chief Scientific Adviser could support.

Consequently, it is hard to resist the judgement that the RAF was using the DRPC's detailed assessments to exemplify the contribution which it could make to the mission of sea denial. Thus, it fell to the First Sea Lord to try and refute what he saw as these extravagant claims. McGrigor

²⁵ Ibid.

emphasised the importance of surface naval forces in meeting the Soviet naval threat. He said that the real danger was the mine '...rather than the submarine',²⁶ and he doubted '...whether it was practicable to attack the mine at source...the problem of attack at source was a very complex one'.²⁷ The Naval chief was seeking from his fellow colleagues a real endorsement of the critical role which large balanced naval forces would play in future war.

In particular, although the First Sea Lord accepted that war with the Soviet Union would be an atomic one, he sought agreement from Slim and Slessor that global war would not necessarily be a short intense affair but one which might last many months and even years. In this, his position must have been strengthened by a report in March of the inter-service Air Defence Sub-Committee which proffered the view that atomic war would be protracted and that the maintenance of sea communications was essential to British survival. The service planners reasoned that in the aftermath of atomic attacks against population and industrial centres, the United Kingdom could continue as a functioning political society, provided that the ports were kept open. The Committee assessed that were the '...Birmingham industrial complex and the industrial centre of the country to be

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

completely laid waste the United Kingdom would not be put out of the war as long as the Ports were intact and American industry sending supplies through them'.²⁸

Thus, in the early part of 1952, the debate in the COSC was about the balance to be drawn between conventional and atomic forces, and the character of future global war. Tizard's fear that Britain might be self-deterred from using atomic weapons in the event of Soviet naval transgressions, below the threshold of all out war was not of concern to the COS, but it was the fear that the Soviet Union might exploit asymmetries below the nuclear level which had inspired NSC-68. Thus, it was ironic that the COS placed their faith in the credibility of nuclear threats at a time when the Truman Administration was becoming skeptical about the value of the United States retaliatory capability in an era of Soviet atomic capabilities.

Consequently, the strategic logic of the COS pointed in the direction of nuclear deterrent capabilities as against conventional war-fighting capabilities, and such rationales were greatly reinforced by the need for economy in defence spending. There was great pressure on the COS and service ministers from the Chancellor, Rab Butler, to reduce defence spending below the levels set out in the Korean War

²⁸ DEFE 8/27, AD (52) 5th mtg, 20 March 1952.

rearmament programme. Within a month of taking office, Butler had submitted a report to the Cabinet setting out the need for drastic measures to be taken with the defence programme. Defence spending, it was argued, would have to be sacrificed to release resources for elsewhere in the economy. By 25 January, 1952, Butler was insisting that the '...total burden of production for defence and exports was greater than the economy could bear'.²⁹ In that same month, the COS asked the JPS to review Global Strategy, but although the JPS suggested that preparations for Cold War should have priority over atomic war-fighting, the resulting service allocations continued to reflect the competing visions of strategy between the COS.

Ministers were looking for something more radical than this and the Defence Minister, Lord Alexander of Tunis who had been chosen by Churchill because he was a close personal friend and could be relied upon to take a '...relatively docile and apolitical line'³⁰ seems to have explained to Slessor, Slim and McGrigor in early March that a new strategic planning document was required which could meet the new economic circumstances in which the United Kingdom found itself.

²⁹ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 81.

³⁰ Ibid.

Thus, the immediate pressure for the 1952 review of strategy was economic, and in fact it would not be an exaggeration to say that economics was feeding into strategy in a more direct way than had been the case in the late 1940s - a trend which was to continue to afflict British nuclear strategy in the 1950s. However, the basic problem was not new: the COS were being asked to formulate a strategy for the long haul which would assimilate atomic weapons into national strategic planning without imposing too much strain on the British economy. This was a tall order in the face of an uncertain strategic future, made all the more difficult by the complicating factor of attempting to preserve alliance cohesion at a time the United States was seeking further increases in defence spending on the part of its European allies. In short, Britain was being asked to make contributions to a deterrent strategy with which the COS did not agree on strategic grounds and which it could not meet on economic grounds. Such a situation demanded some change in Anglo-American planning and strategy. and it was this which the COS attempted to provide in their GSP.

The Global Strategy Paper

On the matter of originality, Grove having reviewed some of the archival material in the Public Records Office, argues that the GSP was '...perhaps one of the most remarkable attempts of its kind to re-think national strategy as far as possible from first principles'.³¹ In these comments, he dissents little from the accepted view that the GSP was an original statement of British strategic doctrine, innovated by Slessor, Slim and McGrigor in an atmosphere of creative problem solving. Andrew Pierre has argued that the paper should '...rank as a classic among military documents',³² and Richard Rosecrance contends that it represented an '...important innovation in military thought'.³³ Although a little more cautious, writing in 1958, Slessor had this to say about the assessment he had participated in:

Slim, McGrigor and I were not in full agreement in the Spring of 1952; but we shut ourselves up and left the day-to-day work to our Vice-Chiefs until we were able to agree and submit to the Cabinet a comprehensive recommendation on British Global Strategy, of a kind which I think should precede every White Paper.³⁴

³¹ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 82.

³² Pierre, op. cit., p. 87.

³³ Rosecrance, op. cit., p. 171.

³⁴ LH 1/644, Slessor to Liddell Hart, 28 May 1958.

Slessor was the dominant figure and intellect within the COSC and seems to have taken the initiative in persuading Slim and McGrigor that, in line with Alexander's request for a new Global Strategy document, the COS should spend time away from their everyday duties discussing British strategic policy in the nuclear age. On Friday 14 April, it was agreed within the COS that deliberations should take place at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich between Monday 28 April and Friday 2 May. Grove has speculated that McGrigor offered the Naval College because he reasoned that it would be difficult against such a naval background to write off the future of the Royal Navy.³⁵

Although the actual contents of the GSP remain closed, and Gowing claims to have found no references to the actual discussions at Greenwich, there is sufficient evidence from other papers and sources to sketch out the ideas behind the GSP and the arguments which seem to have taken place between the COS as they attempted to thrash out the nation's nuclear strategy during their meeting at Greenwich. Two key factors underpinned the GSP; the urgent need for economy in defence spending, and confidence in the United States atomic deterrent. Reflecting on the GSP in October 1952, the COS acknowledged the extent to which their paper was based on

³⁵ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 82.

the deterrent value of the United States Strategic Air Offensive. Gowing claims that the COS asserted that the '...primary deterrent must be Russian knowledge that any aggression would involve immediate and crushing atomic retaliation',³⁶ and talks about the 'vague assumption',³⁷ amongst the COS that the United States had built up large stocks of atomic weapons which could be dropped on key Soviet targets. Nevertheless, Churchill's visit to Washington in January 1952 had opened up the enticing prospect of greater strategic co-ordination and it seems from the growing liaison between Slessor and Vandenberg that nuclear planning in the GSP was based on more informed criteria than is given credit for in Gowing's account. One source has suggested that Slessor was able to write to Vandenberg in September 1952 expressing his appreciation at the combined planning then taking place between SAC and the RAF and claiming that this operational co-ordination had an important impact on the formulation of the GSP.³⁸

During their discussions at Greenwich, the COS seem to have agreed upon three objectives of Global Strategy:

(a) To provide forces required to protect our World-Wide interests in the Cold War.

³⁶ Gowing, op. cit., p. 441.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

³⁸ Interview, Spring 1987.

(b) To build up with our allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (N.A.T.O.), forces of a strength and composition likely to provide a reliable deterrent against aggression.

(c) To make reasonable preparations for a hot war should it break out.³⁹

Although the COS made atomic airpower the centerpiece of the GSP, they accepted that atomic weapons were not a cure for all British strategic ills. The emphasis on protecting world-wide interests reflected the belief that the Cold War would be a prolonged affair in which, in conjunction with the overarching deterrent of American strategic air power, the Army and Navy would have to play a major role in the deterrence of, and defence against military challenges. The COS recognised that the Army bore the brunt of this and that manpower savings could not be made in these forces, but it was also accepted that the Navy had an important role to play in supporting the network of British interests and commitments across the globe. The Navy's claim to Cold War responsibilities must have been strengthened by a Foreign Office paper presented to the Cabinet at the same time as the GSP in which the theme of British responsibilities in the global arena was emphasised.⁴⁰

Although Pierre claims like Gowing that the GSP was premised on meeting Soviet aggression '...not only at the local point

³⁹ CAB 131/12, D. (52) 41, 29 September 1952.

⁴⁰ CAB 129/53, C (52) 202, 18 June 1952.

of conflict...but by nuclear retaliation at the Russian homeland',⁴¹ such an assessment fails to differentiate between nuclear threats in Europe and overseas conflicts. It was not assumed in the GSP that the United States SAC could deter future conflicts on the Korean model, although it was believed that Soviet strategic inferiority might act as a deterrent to direct intervention by the Soviet Union in such conflicts. It was not only that the COS were skeptical about the idea of deterring local conflicts which had indigenous roots by threatening to destroy Soviet targets, but that such a strategy courted the risk of global nuclear war in which the United Kingdom might well be destroyed. Thus, the COS recognised that in defence of its local interests, Britain required a capability which was both proportional to the issues at stake and relevant to the actual military and political situation on the ground.

Nuclear deterrence was purported to be the most effective deterrent to direct Soviet aggression in Western Europe, but there was recognition in the GSP that greater provision of conventional forces was necessary to repel minor challenges and provide some defence against Soviet forces in the event of an attack against Western Europe. The COS set their reasoning out in late 1952 when they said that provided the deterrents of

⁴¹ Pierre, op. cit., p. 87.

...atomic airpower...and adequate forces on the ground in Europe were properly built up and maintained, the likelihood of war would be much diminished and we could in consequence ease our economic position by accepting a smaller and slower build-up of forces, equipment, and reserves for war.⁴²

Writing in 1954, Slessor made explicit the strategic rationale for British conventional provision on the continent of Europe which presumably influenced his thinking in the GSP. If the nuclear deterrent were to fail, '...our armies and Tactical Air Forces would have the essential role of a holding and delaying force to blunt the enemy offensive and give time for air power to take effect'.⁴³ He believed that strategic attacks against the Soviet Union would destroy the Soviet means to prosecute the war in Europe, but accepted that in the initial stages of war, NATO would need forces to prevent the Soviets overrunning Western Europe.

Montgomery could have felt well pleased that four years after he had pushed for the continental commitment, the COS had accepted that Britain's defence depended upon the cohesion of NATO's defence in West Germany. It is important to realise that apart from the strategic reasons adduced by the COS in the GSP, there were good political reasons

⁴² CAB 131/12, D (52) 41, 29 September 1952.

⁴³ J.S. Slessor, Strategy for the West (London: Cassell, 1954), p. 74.

related to Franco-German relations, and especially to sustaining the United States commitment to Western defence which drove Britain reluctantly to accept the realities of continental defence. Set against this, the GSP was a basic challenge to conventional deterrence on the scale agreed at Lisbon: this was not only a reflection of the economic position, but also illustrated the British belief that provision for conventional war-fighting capabilities would lower the threshold to war. Once again, Slessor seems to have been dominant in articulating these concerns within the defence establishment, but there is little reason to doubt that he was not supported in this by Slim and McGrigor.

Slessor outlined his strategic philosophy in July 1952 in addressing a report from the NATO Standing Group which both reaffirmed the importance of meeting the Lisbon goals and affirmed the importance of developing a tactical atomic defence for future European defence. Slessor prepared a response to this Standing Group report and circulated it to Slim and McGrigor. In this, he asserted that the United States could not go on '...superimposing the new atomic strategy on the old conventional strategy'.⁴⁴ He pointed out that Washington could not afford to continue to build up '...vast conventional forces in U.S and in Europe and at the

⁴⁴ DEFE 4/55, Minute by the Chief of the Air Staff 1468, 5 July 1952.

same time expand and modernise the Strategic Air Command and the tactical atomic force'.⁴⁵ Thus, Slessor clearly welcomed the prospect of a tactical atomic defence believing that such weapons would make possible a reduction in the Lisbon force goals. However, the Air Chief's real objection to the Lisbon strategy was that it increased the risks of conventional war in Europe. He was convinced that atomic weapons held out the prospect of infinitely greater deterrent value than any size of conventional forces:

It is no good saying we can't be certain of this or that. We can never be certain of anything in war. The things about which we can be most nearly certain are that...we cannot possibly hope to compete on level terms with Russia (let alone Russia plus China) on a basis of manpower.

We can hope, not only to defeat them in war, but to prevent them going to war, by maintaining and increasing our superiority in that strategic field where science and technology and the production of complex equipment are the determining factors, not manpower.

But we shan't do that if we expand our resources in preparing for a 1955 version of the 1914-18 war.⁴⁶

It will be recalled that the COS had assessed that the Soviet Union would do everything it could to confine a war fought in Europe to the use of conventional weapons, with the assumption being that the Soviets were planning to use conventional arms to destroy the Anglo-American nuclear

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

bases in the United Kingdom. The logic of this, it was believed, was that if the conflict then entered a nuclear phase, the Soviet Union would suffer less damage than in a war fought with nuclear weapons from the outset. The COS had reaffirmed this proposition in November 1951:

We have always been doubtful whether the Russians would initiate atomic warfare. We have always thought that they would hope to place us in a position of having to take the initiative and that we might be restrained from doing so by pressure of public opinion. This would obviously suit the Russians very well.⁴⁷

Thus, this Soviet strategy when taken with the American drive to build up conventional forces in Europe, and the concerns in Washington about its vulnerability to Soviet nuclear attack, suggested to the COS the increased risk of a war being fought in Europe with conventional weapons only. After fighting two world wars in Europe, the British military were uncomfortable with a Soviet-American strategy which sought to confine war to the conventional level. As Groom argues, to '...threaten nuclear war was not to have to wage it',⁴⁸ but he might have added that for the COS, the threat of nuclear retaliation was perceived as deterring nuclear and conventional war. In the event that deterrence failed, however, British plans in the GSP were based on

⁴⁷ DEFE 5/34, C.O.S. (51) 669 mtg, 13 November 1951.

⁴⁸ Groom, op. cit., p. 63.

waging nuclear war and this reflected the continuing conviction of the COS that the survival of the United Kingdom depended upon damage limiting first strikes.

Although Gowing claims that Churchill was in late 1951 somewhat skeptical about the need for Britain to develop an operational nuclear force,⁴⁹ the COS had been united since 1945 in the conviction that Britain had to possess both the nuclear 'art and the article'. The rationales adduced for the British nuclear force were not new and reaffirmed the view that '...it was not possible to rely on the Americans to deal adequately with targets not of direct strategic interest to the United States'.⁵⁰ This seems to have been a reference to those Soviet airbases in Eastern Europe and the Western districts of the Soviet Union which might not have figured so highly on United States targeting priorities but were vital to Britain's survival. Although national target coverage was seen as vital in the GSP, it is interesting to note that plan Fairfax of November 1952 which projected ahead to 1957, and which was written by the JPS in the light of the GSP, indicated that British planning was proceeding on the basis of Anglo-American nuclear attacks against Soviet military bases:

⁴⁹ Gowing, op. cit., pp. 406-7.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 441.

Attacks on the air bases of the Russian long-range air force and on their submarine and mine laying bases is the first line of defence of the United Kingdom and will be one of the main tasks of the medium bombers of the United Kingdom Bomber Command. The Americans are aware of the importance we attach to these operations and it is expected that substantial assistance will be forthcoming from the American Strategic Air Command.⁵¹

Furthermore, the Cabinet Defence Committee was informed by the COS in January 1953 that discussions had taken place with the American Air Chief and joint planning is now proceeding for '...immediate atomic counter-bombardment of the enemy's long-range bomber bases on the outbreak of war'.⁵²

In other words, in 1952 the military justification for a British atomic force was not the protection it was supposed to afford against Soviet nuclear blackmail, but the role which it could play with the United States in limiting damage to the United Kingdom in future atomic war. However, the proposition that Britain's nuclear strategy in the early 1950s was located in the context of Anglo-American relations has been challenged by Malone. He argues that the role adduced for a British nuclear force in the GSP did not '...strictly speaking, require British weapons

⁵¹ DEFE 6/22, J.P. (52) 108 (Final), 27 November 1952.

⁵² CAB 131/12, D. (53) 5, 29 January 1953.

manufacture',⁵³ and considers that the ultimate justification for the development of the V-bomber force was the belief that Britain might find itself fighting alone and had to provide for its own nuclear future '...in the certain knowledge that the United States, Soviet Union and Britain herself were developing a most revolutionary weapon: the hydrogen bomb'.⁵⁴

Whatever the superficial attractions of Malone's thesis, it seems to distort the strategic picture as it appeared to the COS when they formulated the GSP. A nuclear force was not argued for in 1952 because it was feared that Britain might have independently to deter the Soviet Union. The GSP presumed the efficacy of the United States guarantee and was premised on deterrence and defence in concert with Washington. The V-bombers were a means of avoiding ultimate defeat in a future nuclear war, but the proposed counter-force mission was located within the broader context of SAC's mission against Soviet urban and industrial areas—the essential deterrent to war itself. Thus, operational planning in the GSP was based on a nuclear division of labour between SAC and the RAF which, it might be said, enabled the United Kingdom to enjoy the benefits of nuclear deterrence and defence on the cheap.

⁵³ Malone, op. cit., p. 87.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

The COS took atomic weapons experts to Greenwich and, on the basis of their advice, recommended that a further 90kg of Plutonium be produced to make up for slippage in the programme and ensure that the supply of fissile material would be adequate for military requirements.⁵⁵ British nuclear scientists were aware that the United States was working on the H-bomb, but Gowing argues that the advice of Penney and Cherwell was that this development was beyond British technical resources. Gowing claims that it was agreed at Greenwich that the United Kingdom should make its contribution to the Anglo-American atomic stockpile by developing small bombs.⁵⁶

Churchill's Government accepted the recommendation of the COS that there be a doubling of Plutonium production and decisions were taken in late 1952 and early 1953 to build new production reactors. Any tendency there may have been in official circles to believe that Britain could have the art rather than article was swamped by a general feeling that real British nuclear capabilities were not far in the future and that everything should be done to hasten the date by which Britain could legitimately claim its place as the third member of the nuclear weapons club.

⁵⁵ See CAB 131/12, D. (52) 51, 6 December 1952.

⁵⁶ Gowing, *op. cit.*, p. 442.

Even before the COS had gone to Greenwich, the Government had agreed that the production of the Medium Bomber Force should be accorded the very highest priority, and ministers reaffirmed this priority in the aftermath of Global Strategy. Against this interpretation of coherence in British nuclear war planning, it has been claimed that atomic weapons requirements were only loosely related to military strategy. Portal's successor as Controller of Atomic Energy in the Ministry of Supply, General Morgan wrote that production requirements had never been:

...keyed in any definite way to any plan of strategy or tactics. This is in a way understandable since we know that the atomic bomb...has been regarded as a political far more than as a military weapon.⁵⁷

Such a proposition is supported by Simpson who contends that the British nuclear weapons programme was sustained by the drive to produce nuclear weapons, as against the production of a specific number of weapons related to targeting requirements. Despite such comments, the figure for the size of the RAF's V-bomber force seems to have been agreed in the GSP at 240 nuclear bombers by 1958,⁵⁸ a figure which several

⁵⁷ Gowing, Independence (Vol 2), p. 475.

⁵⁸ The figure of 240 bombers by 1958 seems to have been closely related to Britain's stockpile goal of 200 bombs by 1958. For further elaboration, see the discussion in chapter seven of the

sources have confirmed as being that which was considered necessary to execute a damage limiting strategy in the late 1950s. Moreover, despite Simpson's claim that the political leadership regarded nuclear bombs as '...diplomatic instruments, rather than war-fighting weapons',⁵⁹ there is no evidence that Churchill or his senior ministers dissented from the military arguments presented by the COS for a British nuclear force in the GSP.

In challenging the contention that the British nuclear force was seen primarily as a diplomatic instrument, one is not understating the political rationales for the British nuclear force. Gowing argues that Churchill's visit to Washington in January 1952 had convinced the Prime Minister that until Britain had demonstrated its technological prowess in the atomic weapons field, there would be no prospect of further collaboration with the Americans in that area. Cherwell was emphatic that on grounds of prestige, Britain could not afford to abdicate itself from a nuclear role,⁶⁰ but this was given its specific content in relation to the United States in the GSP. According to Gowing, the COS expressed it as follows:

debates surrounding the size of the V-bomber force in 1953.

⁵⁹ Simpson, op. cit., p. 91.

⁶⁰ Gowing, Independence (vol 1), pp. 407-8.

We feel that to have no share in what is recognised as the main deterrent in the cold war and the only allied offensive in a World War would seriously weaken British influence on United States policy and planning in the cold war and in war would mean that the United Kingdom would have no claim to any share in the policy and planning of the offensive.⁶¹

Influencing American global strategy was seen as inseparable from the objective of gaining access to American nuclear war-planning, and in the event that deterrence failed, a measure of control over the conduct of strategic nuclear war itself. Although such aspirations were closer to fulfillment in 1952 than they had been in the late 1940s when planning was at best futuristic, there was nothing new in the almost mechanistic belief of the COS that access to key American nuclear decision making structures depended upon a national atomic weapons capability.

Consequently, the GSP embodied considerable elements of continuity in British strategic nuclear ideas and this suggests that the arguments of Grove, Pierre and Rosecrance as to the originality of the 1952 study are greatly exaggerated. This contention that the GSP was in a distinct tradition of strategic theorising is not, however, to make the opposite error and dismiss the 'Greenwich exercise' as having little import in the origins of British nuclear

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 441.

strategy. Such a mistake is made by Venables who contends that the GSP '...did not spring de novo from an intensive weekend meeting of the Chiefs of Staff at the Greenwich Naval College, as has been fancifully suggested'.⁶² His argument is that the way in which military bureaucracies work militates against the idea that the GSP was '...anything other than a culmination of a long period of strategic policy and planning development'.⁶³ Although the paper was not an innovation in British strategic nuclear thought, Venables understates the value of the GSP and fails to recognise that it was an attempt to set out British strategic ideas in the nuclear age. It is doubtful if such a paper would have emerged from the normal bureaucratic process, since the GSP went through several drafts between May and June when it was finally presented to the Cabinet Defence Committee. Moreover, one can agree with Slessor that the Greenwich discussions provided not only escape from the pressures of service administration and management, but perhaps an opportunity for the nation's service chiefs to think more objectively about nuclear strategy than was possible in the confines of the normal COS system. Nonetheless, this should not be exaggerated since the GSP also provided further evidence of the growing disagreements

⁶² Venables, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁶³ Ibid.

amongst the services as to the nature and length of future global war.

Strategy And The Budget

Churchill wanted a global appreciation of the British strategic predicament and this is what - with some success - the COS provided. Nevertheless, if the COS could agree that nuclear weapons were the centerpiece of defence planning, they did not provide ministers with the cuts in conventional forces which had been hoped for by policy makers. Once again, it was the question as to whether future planning should be based on the short or long war concept which created divisions amongst the services. Pierre's claim that the central thesis of the GSP was that nuclear weapons had '...revolutionised the character of war'⁶⁴ has to be set against the divergent claims of the Air and Naval Chiefs subsumed in the GSP.

A few weeks after the discussions at Greenwich, Slessor outlined in an internal Air Staff memo, the arguments which had underpinned the GSP:

...the basis of the Chiefs of Staff Global Strategy Review is that the financial restrictions which will be imposed upon us in the coming years will be so severe that a complete re-shaping of

⁶⁴ Pierre, op. cit., p. 87.

the Armed Forces as at present planned must be considered. We have adopted a new strategic concept which puts more reliance on the Bomber offensive and assumes that the war will be a short one.⁶⁵

Slessor's argument cast doubt on the relevance of preparing for a long and drawn out conventional naval battle in the aftermath of an atomic exchange, and it was this which McGrigor could not accept. Echoing the arguments of the United States Navy, McGrigor contended that even after a period of great intensity in which both sides had done their worst against the military, logistic and industrial bases of the enemy, an indefinite period would follow of '...broken-backed' hostilities...in which both sides would seek to recuperate from the wounds they had sustained and to recover strength for a further intensive effort'.⁶⁶ The FSL argued that 'broken backed' war would be most intensive at sea and succeeded in getting Slessor and Slim to agree that

...enemy activity is likely to be less reduced at sea than elsewhere. U-boats will continue to operate, and there will be many mines laid in the first phase still to be swept besides those which may be laid thereafter'.⁶⁷

The argument of the Air-Defence sub-committee in March 1952 that the key to British survival in atomic war would be the

⁶⁵ Air 19/737, C.A.S. 1118, 28 May 1952.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 84.

⁶⁷ CAB 131/12, Report of the Committee on the Defence Programme, 24 September 1952.

ability to import foodstuffs and raw materials into British ports led to recommendations in the GSP for increases in mine countermeasure vessels to sweep the approaches to smaller ports which might be indispensable to national survival in the event that the Soviets destroyed several of the major ports. Concern about the exposure of Britain's ports to Soviet atomic attack was a prime stimulus to the testing of the first British bomb in the hull of HMS Plym in the Monte Bello Islands in October 1952. Information was wanted as to the likely effects if the Soviets did explode atomic weapons in British ports.

Nevertheless, the concept of 'broken-backed' war sat unhappily with the general tone of the GSP and in particular with the views held by Slessor. Thus, it is to McGrigor's credit that the idea was incorporated in the Global Strategy Paper. Moreover, as will become apparent in subsequent chapters, the long war strategy was to remain at the heart of the Admiralty's case in the next few years. One explanation for the acceptance of the idea of 'broken-backed' war in the GSP is that Slessor and Slim accepted provision for long war forces as a necessary part of good nuclear contingency planning. Against this, there is little doubt that, inculcated with the vision of strategic airpower, Slessor for one had little or no sympathy for the long war strategy. Reflecting years later on the idea of

'broken-backed' war, the retired Air Chief admitted that bureaucratic politics had been central in its incorporation into the GSP:

It was essential that we had all three Chiefs of Staff behind us and the broken-backed war thing I never believed in, and neither did Bill Slim. But we had to put it in for the sake of little Rhoddy McGrigor because otherwise if there was no broken-backed war then there was no case for keeping a large Navy.⁶⁸

Slessor and Slim's willingness to accept the idea of 'broken-backed' war must have been eased by the fact that there was little financial provision for this phase in the GSP. The FSL accepted that the Royal Navy should not aim for quantitative improvements in ASW, anti-air and anti-surface roles but it should aim for qualitative ones. Grove points out that the Navy was prepared to cut the planned programme of new frigates for 1956 by 40%, the total of modernised frigates by 15% and the total of front line aircraft by 25%.⁶⁹ Moreover, whilst McGrigor may have done an 'excellent job',⁷⁰ in getting 'Broken-backed' war on the agenda of Global Strategy, he also put his name to a statement which recommended that

⁶⁸ A Seldon, Churchill's Indian Summer: the Conservative Government 1951-55 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), p. 335.

⁶⁹ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 85.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

...preparation for war should be primarily directed to the requirements of the first few intense weeks, little provision being made for more long term requirements.⁷¹

The GSP promised significant defence savings on the £4,700,000,000 rearmament programme initiated by Attlee, but it should not be thought that only the Navy bore cuts. Both the other services accepted a reduced programme and the COS recognised that it would not be until 1958, eight years after the rearmament programme had begun, that 're-equipment and modernisation would have reached a reasonably satisfactory level'.⁷² Reaching this compromise, however, had been difficult enough and the COS were unanimous that,

The reductions which we recommend in the build-up and equipment of the forces can be undertaken only be incurring real and serious risks. These risks are only justifiable in the face of the threat of economic disaster.⁷³

Despite there being differences of approach between Slessor, Slim and McGrigor as to the balance to be struck between conventional and nuclear forces, the CAS led a delegation to Washington at the end of July in an effort to persuade the Americans that the British GSP did not reflect failure in meeting the Lisbon force goals, but was a sound strategic

⁷¹ CAB 131/12, D (52) 41, 29 September 1952.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

concept upon which to base the future strategy of the Atlantic Alliance.

The Truman administration's team from the State Department was headed by Nitze of NSC-68 fame and, from the Pentagon, there was General Bradley, Admiral Fechteler, General Twining and General Hull. Although the Americans claimed that they were not wedded to the longer term goals set at Lisbon, they asserted the view that greater conventional defence preparations had to be made in the period 1952-54, believing that the British had underestimated the risks of war in 1954 and had exaggerated the deterrent power of the American SAC. The Chairman of the American JCS, Bradley, said that it would not be until 1956 that nuclear weapons would have the great effect on alliance strategy outlined in the British GSP. It should not be thought, however, that United States officials were unanimous in this, since General Twining pointed out to British officials that the Air Force was more confident in the deterrent value of the United States Strategic Air Offensive.⁷⁴

State Department and Pentagon officials emphasised the dangers of American self-deterrence in the face of growing Soviet atomic capabilities. It was contended that in 1949,

⁷⁴ DEFE 7/677, Sir O. Franks No. 822 to Foreign Office, 3rd August 1952.

the Soviets had only

...just got the atom bomb. By 1954 they would have a stockpile which they could use either in an effective attack without warning against the industrial capacity of the United States, or as a threat to European capitals'.⁷⁵

The British Ambassador, Sir Oliver Franks, took issue with the notion that the Soviets would attempt coercive atomic diplomacy against Europe or exploit their new found atomic prowess in attacks against the United States. Franks rehearsed the well known British view that the Soviet Union would be cautious in its foreign policy behaviour whilst it was living in the shadow of United States atomic superiority. Moreover, he argued that the Soviets were doing '...quite well without going to war',⁷⁶ and considered that the United States was engaging in exaggerated assessments of the risk of war in the next few years.

United States planners contended that British assumptions were heroic, asserting that the threat from the Soviet Union would increase as its conventional equipment became steadily more and more obsolete. Nevertheless, it was the future prospect of Soviet conventional weakness and the perception of growing Soviet atomic strength which concerned

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Washington. The State Department and Pentagon prescription for this threat was for the West to develop a stronger deterrent since the alternative was that '....we would get our forces locked up in a series of Koreas because we would not be strong enough to take more radical action because of the risk of this leading to war, for which we would not be prepared'.⁷⁷

The fact that the British and American delegations concluded their discussions as far apart as ever brought home to Slessor the degree to which the GSP was a tender plant which would require considerable nurturing before it was accepted as NATO strategy. Moreover, the COS recognised that further reductions in force levels below those set out in the GSP might have a damaging effect on alliance cohesion and the United States commitment to Western Europe. However, this was exactly what Butler was pushing for in late 1952.⁷⁸ When, in October 1952, the COS defended the financial allocations in the GSP, they emphasised the dangers that further cuts in defence spending might have on alliance cohesion:

Three years ago we faced the stark reality that this island could not possibly be defended in isolation. To-day our very existence depends on

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ See Grove, Vanguard to Trident, pp. 89-90.

the unity and strength of N.A.T.O. and on American support - the two are irretrievably entwined...It is no exaggeration to say that default on the scale involved under the Chancellor's proposals might well shake the whole N.A.T.O. structure: it might even result in the United States falling back on a Taft-Hoover policy of isolation behind a vast Navy and Atomic Air Force.⁷⁹

In pushing this argument, the COS were not only seeking to protect their budgets against cost-cutting ministers. Most importantly, they were reminding the Cabinet of both the historical novelty and potentially transient nature of Washington's commitment to Britain and Western Europe.

It was a paradox of the early British nuclear experience that national security was perceived as dependent upon sustaining the interests and energies of the United States in the defence of Britain and Western Europe, but the perspective which British planners brought to strategy in the nuclear age was both distinct from, and in conflict with, that which dominated United States policy-making.

⁷⁹ CAB 131/12, D (52) 45, 31st October 1952.

Conclusion

In embodying substantial elements of continuity in strategic thinking, the GSP was not an innovative document. Given the argument in chapter three that a theory of nuclear deterrence emerged early in the thinking of the COS, the GSP can be seen as in a distinct tradition of British strategic theorising. Set against this, the conference at Greenwich was significant in Britain's post-war strategic experience, because it acted as a catalyst for decisions on the British nuclear weapons programme which were to take the country further down the road of nuclear statehood.

Despite Malone's comments to the contrary, British nuclear strategy in 1952 was premised on deterrence in concert with the United States. Targeting integration with the Americans had been pursued since the late 1940s, and by 1952 the British were on the verge of realising greater strategic co-ordination with the United States. Although the British nuclear force was seen as a means of obtaining greater influence over United States defence policy and strategy, the GSP made clear that this was specifically sought in the field of strategic nuclear targeting and over the conduct of nuclear war itself.

Moreover, and in contrast to the claim of General Morgan, British nuclear weapons were seen by the COS as having both deterrent and war-fighting value. Morgan's statement betrayed an ignorance of the military planning taking place in the COSC which was premised on the assumption that atomic weapons were indispensable to British survival in a nuclear war. Of course, the COS were not oblivious to the political advantages which might accrue to Britain through possession of nuclear weapons, but had tended to discuss these apart from the military aspects. Therefore, one of the values of the GSP was that the COS articulated both the political and military rationales for an independent nuclear force and thereby clarified the assumptions which were guiding its strategic thinking in the nuclear age. Discussions of nuclear strategy in the late 1940s had a certain futuristic element to them, but Britain was close to real nuclear capabilities in 1952 and this gave an immediacy to strategic assessments which had not been present in the earlier period.

The recommendations of the COS to ministers on the future size and shape of the British nuclear weapons programme reveal the COS system working well. There is no evidence to suggest that Slessor, Slim and McGrigor disagreed over the requirement for deterrence in concert, a damage limiting targeting strategy, or the proposed nuclear force of 240 V-

bombers by 1958. In addition, there is no evidence to suggest that the Churchill Government opposed the recommendations of the COS with regard to the future development of the British nuclear weapons programme and strategy. Conservative ministers, like their Labour predecessors, might have been more attracted to political rationales for the British nuclear force, but that is not to say that the COS were determining against ministerial wishes the pace of Britain's nuclear weapons programme. Rather, the evidence suggests that the COS and Cabinet were unanimous that Britain should be a nuclear weapon state and that nothing should be allowed to delay Britain's entry into the nuclear weapons club.

If ministers were content with the role played by the COS in shaping Britain's strategic nuclear future, they were much less happy with what they saw as the failure of the COS to meet the urgent demands of economy in defence spending. Ministerial pressure on the COS to reduce defence spending had triggered the 'Greenwich exercise', and again one can agree with Snyder that interference by policy makers can lead to renewed inter-service rivalry. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but since the COS obscured their differences in the GSP, the paper was less effective than it might have been, in crystallising the differences between the COS on the question of the character of future war.

While the GSP promised some reductions in defence spending, especially in naval votes, it is hard to resist the conclusion that the COS ducked the issue. Strategy and finance pushed in the direction of basing defence policy on the short war concept, but at McGrigor's insistence the idea of broken-backed was included in the paper. There is nothing to suggest that the COS adopted such a compromise because they were attracted to the benefits of 'strategic pluralism'. Rather, accepting Slessor's testimony, the COS agreed to the inclusion of the long war concept because they wished to demonstrate unity within the COSC.

Perhaps the COS feared that if they failed to demonstrate unity of purpose, they would leave the way open for policy makers to impose their own priorities upon them. This would not only challenge their role as strategic advisers, but might be even more damaging to service positions than a formula which contained enough ambiguity to enable the COS to reconcile their competing positions. Although as was recognised by the Secretary of State for Air, Lord De L'Isle of Dudley, the RAF stood to gain from ministers rigorously applying Global Strategy logic,⁸⁰ Slessor seems to have believed that it was the role of the COS to provide both disinterested and united military advice to the Government.

⁸⁰ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 87.

If this perception of the role of the COS did condition the outlook of Slessor, Slim and McGrigor in 1952, it may explain the attempt of the COS to submit an 'official' position in the GSP. Nonetheless, it was not so much that the COS submerged their differences in an attempt to be an effective policy advocate, the hypothesis advanced by Kanter in his study of American inter-service rivalry, but that the COS obscured the divergences between them in order to preserve an image of military professionalism. This confirms Snyder's hypothesis that the British services are particularly sensitive to criticisms of inter-service rivalry and seek to present a common position in their external relations.

If the tendency of the COS is to gravitate towards an 'official position', this undermines their role as strategic critics. Since if the argument is to be made that the COS system acted as an incubator of competing strategic ideas, and not as an arbiter of inter-service rivalry, those who were responsible for policy making in the government should have been exposed to the clashing positions. Thus, what happened was that ministers were presented with a collectively agreed position, at the expense of being offered competing strategic views and being asked to provide political resolution of the issues at stake.

Consequently, and in contrast to Slessor's recollections in 1963, the analysis points to bureaucratic politics rather than analytic problem solving determining the outcomes with regard to the long/short war debate in the GSP. There was no single strategic decision. Rather, policy emerged in Allison's terminology from the 'pulling and hauling which is politics'. Such an argument, however, illustrates once again the flawed notion that there can be a dichotomy between politics and logic.

In discussing the utility of the bureaucratic politics model as a tool for explaining outcomes in the GSP, it is important to recognise that the COS had to present their respective positions in terms of competing definitions of the 'national interest'. However cynical and self-serving the rationales presented by Slessor, Slim and McGrigor, the arguments were presented and debated in strategic terms. If this case study of the GSP might be argued to support Greenwood's argument that actors employ 'strategic augmentation' to achieve their objectives, it also offers further refutation of the argument that a distinction can be made between service and national interests. At the same time, it further supports Freedman's assertion that the bureaucratic politics model makes a false dichotomy between politics and logic.

Although the idea of 'strategic augmentation' is superficially attractive as a thesis, both Greenwood and Freedman are at pains to argue that policy makers do not separate out personal, organisational and national interests. And acceptance of the latter proposition seems to provide a better framework for understanding the nature and dynamics of inter-service rivalry in the early 1950s. Inter-service politics coloured the debates between Slessor and McGrigor, but it would be inaccurate to denigrate the underlying differences of opinion between them as simply the reflection of bureaucratic position.

McGrigor did not fight for the long war strategy simply because of the exigencies of bureaucratic politics. Instead, his values, beliefs and experiences led him to believe that the airmen's claims were exaggerated and that the instrument of sea-power was not outdated in the nuclear age. Similarly, Slessor's support for the short war concept was not simply a means of advancing the RAF's fortunes at the expense of the Army and Navy, but surely reflected his convictions as to the requirements of security in the nuclear age. McGrigor's and Slessor's socialisation into the norms, values and experiences of their chosen services undoubtedly shaped their strategic outlook, but that is not to negate the individual beliefs of Slessor and McGrigor, and their

responsibility as members of the COSC to determine strategy according to their perceptions of the 'national interest'. In locating the sources of inter-service rivalry in competing personal and organisational beliefs, this case study of the GSP confirms Schilling's contention that in an international environment characterised by uncertainty and indeterminacy, differences of strategic value will flourish.

Writing in the early 1960s, Lawrence Martin said that the COSC had produced a comprehensive assessment of national security policy in the 1952 GSP. He argued that this represented a break with the activities of the COSC in the years 1945-51. However, the evidence presented in chapters three, four, and five suggests that Martin, along with those other commentators whose contributions have made up the conventional wisdom, denigrated the role played by the COSC in setting out the parameters of British nuclear strategy in the late 1940s. Having said this, and without negating the value of the GSP in setting out most explicitly the bases of British nuclear strategy, Martin was correct to point out that the consensus in the GSP did not extend to the future character of global nuclear war.

The split in the GSP was between the RAF's advocacy of the short war concept, and the emphasis placed by the Army and

especially the Navy upon the need for greater provision of conventional forces to fight a long war. However, it is the contention of this chapter that in failing to recognise the underlying sources of British inter-service rivalry in the early 1950s, the conventional wisdom adopted an implicit bureaucratic politics model which identified Britain's strategic problems as stemming solely from clashes of parochial service interests. However, by locating inter-service rivalry in the context of competing strategic values, this analysis emphasises the difficulties which confronted defence planners in formulating a coherent strategic policy in the nuclear age. It was not surprising, therefore, that the basic question of service roles and missions which had dogged post-war strategic planning, was to continue to afflict defence policy planning in 1953-4.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RADICAL REVIEW, MASS DESTRUCTION AND NUCLEAR WAR-FIGHTING

Introduction

The Conservative Government's Radical Review of defence policy in 1953-4 was an attempt by ministers to exert positive control over inter-service rivalry. It sought to deny legitimacy to Army, and especially Navy, preparations for a long nuclear war. This chapter will examine the responses of the COS to the Radical Review, and will assess the different bargaining advantages which accrued to the services from this change in strategic policy. As well as ministerial assaults on the compromises enshrined in the GSP, the COS were confronted with a more fundamental articulation of dissent against British nuclear strategy. The Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral Sir Anthony Buzzard criticised in 1953-4 the bases of nuclear strategy and provided a radically different appreciation of Britain's strategic requirements in the nuclear age. This chapter will discuss Buzzard's critique and consider the extent to which he influenced the evolution of the Whitehall strategic debate in 1953-4.

The June Directive: Its Origins and Resultant Responses

A ministerial sub-committee to conduct the Radical Review was set up in January 1953. It was chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook, and investigated ways in which the defence budget might be further reduced. The COS were not invited to the deliberations of this ministerial body, but its first report did not move far away from the GSP. McGrigor could take heart in the sub-committee's affirmation of the view that a short war was not an absolute certainty and that the '...the first aim of the rearmament programmes should be to ensure national survival in the initial attack and to safeguard sea communications in the succeeding phase'.¹

The recosted defence programme totalled £1,830 million for 1955-56, but such a package was still seen as unacceptable by the sub-committee. Churchill convened another meeting on 18 June with Butler, Alexander, the Minister of Supply, Duncan Sandys, Cherwell and the three service ministers. Butler once again stressed the necessity for cuts in the defence budget, but it was Churchill's son-in-law, Sandys, who set the meeting alight. He rigorously pushed for the short war strategy and gained the support of Churchill and Butler for the view that only those forces that were

¹ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 91.

relevant to the first six weeks of war should be maintained.² The following day, the COS were asked by Alexander to find savings of £308 million on the 1955-56 defence programme and the basis for these reductions would be

...that the period of the first six weeks should be considered as the time during which the United Kingdom might rely on the United States Strategic Air Force to break the Russian will to fight; our survival forces would be those to ensure the survival of the United Kingdom during that period.³

This so called 'June Directive' challenged the idea of 'broken-backed' war which had been incorporated in the GSP, and was a statement by policy makers of the belief that SAC was not only a tool of deterrence, but also the basis of Western defence in the event that war occurred. The COS had not been asked to comment on the strategic implications of the 19 June directive. Indeed, the Cabinet sub-committee had initiated this major change in strategic doctrine itself. The 'June Directive' seems to have been the first occasion in the nuclear age when senior ministers had changed strategic doctrine without prior consultation with their military advisers, but given the different positions on 'broken-backed' war amongst the services, McGrigor, and the new Army and Air Chiefs, Sir John Harding and Sir William

² Ibid.

³ See DEFE 4/63, C.O.S. (53) 76th mtg, 22 June 1953.

Dickson, would have found it difficult to present a unanimous position to ministers.

The cleavages within the COSC were still unclear to interested outside observers, however, such as retired Admirals and Air Marshals. This can best be discerned in private correspondence between McGrigor and retired Admiral, Sir Reginald Earle-Drax, who penned a letter to McGrigor on the 12 June 1953. The background to his letter was an article written by Drax (RUSI, February 1953) which had produced a response from an Air Chief Marshal that it was a great pity to imply that the three services were not in full agreement on future strategy '...at a time when the three chiefs of staff were never more united in their views or more unanimous in the advice they give to the government'.⁴ This led Drax to seek from McGrigor an authoritative statement of the differences between the services. McGrigor's response provides a fascinating insight into his perceptions of the role conflicts which confronted the COS in discharging their responsibilities. The FSL indicated that while there were differences, these were not so great as to make compromise and consensus impossible:

⁴ ADM 205/102, Quoted in a letter from Drax to McGrigor, 12 June 1953.

As you know, in the Chiefs of Staff Committee we reach agreement on these matters. Outside there is a great deal of uninstructed and misinformed propaganda for airpower on the old familiar Trenchard-Seversky lines...Unfortunately the extremists now play a lot on the atom bomb...Naturally, among the extremists and enthusiasts are members of the services, but it would be quite wrong to say the views of the Royal Air Force were the views of the Royal Air Force extremists.

The real underlying difficulty, of course, is shortage of money. The Chancellor, as ever, cannot provide what each of the services considers is necessary and the more peaceful the outlook becomes the less money are the services likely to have to meet what they consider their minimum requirements. It follows then that with the best will in the world there must be tremendous competition between the services for what money is available, and naturally, inside each service the problem of what is really essential takes on the local colour

We, in the Chiefs of Staff, try to rise above these inter-service considerations but, as you can imagine, it is difficult not be somewhat biased towards one's own service, of which one is also the head.⁵

Having written such thoughts, it must have come as something of a shock the next day for McGrigor to find himself faced with ministerial endorsement of the ideas of the 'air extremists'. The Navy's proposed long war strategy was directly threatened by the June Directive, but even accepting the terms of the short war concept, McGrigor suggested in a meeting of the COS on the 22 June, that the Navy had a vital role to play in the first six weeks of

⁵ ADM 205/102, Letter from the First Sea Lord to Admiral Reginald-Earle-Drax, 18th June 1953.

nuclear war. He contended that it was imperative that sea lines of communication be protected and asserted that '...balanced naval forces for the survival phase are, therefore, a prime requirement'.⁶ Two days later, McGrigor returned to this theme of naval nuclear war-fighting arguing that it was critical that enemy submarines be attacked from the beginning of war.⁷

Nevertheless, McGrigor was not prepared to give up the concept of 'broken-backed' war and sought support from Dickson and Harding in challenging the 'June Directive'. The FSL wrote to his colleagues on 10 July reaffirming the importance of a conventional phase of operations in the aftermath of a nuclear exchange. In addition, he pointed out that the COS had not been consulted on the 'June Directive' and asked Harding and Dickson whether they really supported the short war strategy. McGrigor expressed his position as follows:

...I cannot believe that the Chiefs of Staff have agreed to this completely new concept. I certainly have not. I only regret that I did not notice this paragraph sooner...I suggest that the period of the first 6 weeks should be considered as the time during which the major atomic attacks on both sides will be delivered. Our "survival" forces would be those required to ensure survival of the United Kingdom during that period, in order that she may play her part in the ensuing phase of

⁶ DEFE 4/63, C.O.S. (53) 76th mtg, 22 June 1953.

⁷ DEFE 4/63, C.O.S. (53) 78th mtg, 24 June 1953.

"broken back" war which will lead to final victory.⁸

Thus, McGrigor continued to think in terms of a post-nuclear phase of operations which would be critical to Western victory. He could still conceive of a situation in which despite the industrial centres of the United Kingdom being laid waste, the country could still function - primarily through the instrument of sea-power - as a participant in the operations leading to the final defeat of the Soviet Union.

There was one member of McGrigor's staff, however, who was appalled at the 'June Directive' and who believed that Western nuclear strategy was failing to come to terms with the new age of warfare. He set himself the herculean task of altering the whole basis of the Radical Review and of Anglo-American nuclear strategy. From his position as Director of Naval Intelligence, Buzzard wrote a paper on the 6 July which illustrated both his foresight and depth of vision which was to mark his contribution to nuclear strategy. He pressed the case - which United States naval officials had advanced against SAC in the late 1940s - challenging the notion that SAC could destroy the Soviet means, let alone the will, to resist within the first few weeks of war. He

⁸ ADM 205/89, Memorandum No 1689 by McGrigor to Harding and Dickson, 10 July 1953.

also pointed out that a 'no-cities' strategy was both ethically and strategically superior to that of counter-city nuclear strikes. In this, Buzzard was not echoing the mainstream thinking of the United States Navy which, as discussed in the last chapter, was prepared to support SAC's counter city mission providing that it could use its aircraft carriers in the counter-force strike role. Nevertheless, Buzzard was writing at a time when Brodie and others at the Rand Corporation were arguing for changes in United States nuclear strategy. Buzzard's earliest thesis on nuclear strategy deserves a full exposition because it seems to have been one of the first discussions in the United Kingdom about limiting a nuclear war so that it served definable political and military objectives.

The Director of Naval Intelligence claimed in his paper that all recent studies by the JIC indicated that it would be about six months, rather than six weeks, before any attack on Soviet industries would deprive the Red Army of logistic support and supplies.⁹ Moreover, he saw as illusory the idea that United States atomic attacks against Soviet civil and political targets '...in the hope of cracking civilian morale and administration'¹⁰ could succeed in this purpose. Buzzard's anxiety was not only that what he labelled the

⁹ ADM 205/89, DNI (8529), 6 July 1953.

¹⁰ Ibid.

'mass destruction' strategy was unlikely to work, but that it provided no incentive for Soviet nuclear restraint and therefore invited reciprocal counter attacks against the United Kingdom.

Buzzard was particularly concerned that the West should not initiate the use of atomic weapons against Soviet civilian targets, recognising that Western nuclear superiority would be a wasting asset and that, whatever the relative considerations, '...in a few year's time the absolute Russian mass destruction potential will be such that this policy, if pursued, must ultimately become suicidal for this country'.¹¹ Furthermore, he contended that a strategy of threatening 'mass destruction' was not only astrategic but politically destabilising because it was out of all proportion to the issues at stake between East and West:

To resolve our political differences by a war of such a nature can hardly be the ideal solution...Such methods make the avoidance of war much more difficult since the need to get in the first blow becomes increasingly urgent and the localisation of any outbreak of hostilities becomes increasingly more difficult.¹²

Thus, Buzzard was cognisant of the risks of atomic pre-emption and was aware of the instabilities which this might

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

generate in a crisis. Moreover, like Brodie and others in the United States, Buzzard suggested that deterrence did not end when war broke out: rather, tailoring force to the political objectives at stake would be a cardinal requirement for future nuclear strategy and deterrence in war could operate to curtail hostilities. Having pointed out the dangers and weaknesses in existing strategy, Buzzard formulated an alternative of his own.

This involved atomic attacks against Soviet military targets which he contended would provide the Soviets with incentives to refrain from atomic and chemical strikes against British ports and cities, whilst keeping sufficient atomic weapons in reserve to deal with Russian industries and centres of administration if '...they attack our civil targets, or to bring them to heel if all else fails'.¹³ Here Buzzard was once again echoing Brodie in calling for limitation in nuclear war and a 'city hostage strategy' which would provide bargaining levers for bringing the Soviets to terms after

...they have seen the efficiency of our attacks on their military targets, after their airforce has been battered and their atomic bombs expended, and after they have failed in the most vital land campaigns and thus remain exposed to our air attack.¹⁴

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

Buzzard concluded with the judgement that the key objective was survival of the United Kingdom through 6-12 months of nuclear war, a strategy which, he contended, was '...satisfactory both as a deterrent and for war-winning purposes politically and militarily'.¹⁵ Buzzard believed that his strategy would minimise the instabilities inherent in the existing situation and would therefore be a better deterrent, but if deterrence were to fail, the emphasis on damage limitation would prevent total disaster. Buzzard's ideas were certainly a 'tour de force', but his ideas were heretical to the COS, and although McGrigor must have welcomed Buzzard's criticism of the short war strategy, he was totally opposed to his scathing critique of deterrence, through the threat of nuclear punishment, which, after all, formed the basis of the GSP and the 'June Directive'.

As for Buzzard, he was frustrated with what he saw as McGrigor's lack of vision, but attempted to persuade the FSL of his case in a letter on the 23 July. This letter reveals that Buzzard was thinking ahead to a situation of equality in nuclear striking power and he pointed out to McGrigor that, when both sides could knock the other out in a short nuclear exchange, which by 1965 might be as little as six days, there would be no '...case for the Navy at all (or

¹⁵ Ibid.

indeed any hope for the United Kingdom)'.¹⁶ Thus, Buzzard was asserting that in an age of mutual nuclear vulnerability, it could never pay Britain to undertake nuclear strikes against Soviet cities, since to do so would be to invite the virtual annihilation of the United Kingdom. Buzzard did not believe that one could fashion a credible threat out of an incredible strategy.¹⁷

Despite the visionary nature of Buzzard's ideas, they appear to reveal his lack of awareness of actual operational targeting plans. After all, he prescribed that Britain and the United States adopt a counter-force strategy, but that had been the basis of British nuclear war planning since the late 1940s. It is hard to believe that as a member of the JIC, he was unaware of the liaison taking place between SAC and the RAF which had been incorporated into war plan Fairfax and the submissions of the COS to the Cabinet in January 1953, all of which attested to the counter-force rationale for the RAF's V-bombers. Perhaps Buzzard was aware that Anglo-American counter-force planning was taking place, but sought to play up his argument by focusing on the threat of nuclear retaliation against Soviet cities which underpinned both SAC's strategy and the 'June Directive'.

¹⁶ ADM 205/89, DNI (8543), 23 July 1953.

¹⁷ Ibid.

If Buzzard's ideas were heretical to the COS, they attracted scant support from his colleagues in the Naval Staff. And this despite the fact that the need to defend the Navy was becoming more pressing. Churchill had been laid low by a stroke in June and the Chancellor, Butler was leading the Government in the Prime Minister's absence. Moreover, the Minister of Supply, Sandys, who had played a pivotal role in the origins of the 'June Directive', started to mount a further attack on the Navy. In this, he was supported by the Cabinet Secretary, Brook and the Secretary of State for Air, De L'Isle.

At a meeting of the Radical Review sub-committee on the 17 July, Sandys reaffirmed the need to abide by the 19 June Directive and, according to Grove, '...specifically singled out carriers and cruisers for scrutiny, asserted that land based aircraft were more cost-effective answers to the ASW problem and opposed cuts in the RAF's proposed force of medium bombers'.¹⁸ Thus, the Admiralty found itself under threat from the Radical Review sub-committee and responded to assaults on its organisational essences by counter-attacking against the RAF's proposed nuclear force plans and the short war idea. Buzzard's complete failure to change the terms of the Whitehall strategic debate can be seen in the way in which the inter-service rivalry of 1953-4 was

¹⁸ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 93.

conducted within the framework of a strategy of Western nuclear retaliation.

The Character Of Future War

Despite supporting the efficacy of deterrence through the threat of nuclear retaliation against Soviet cities, McGrigor and Harding were hopeful that the size of Britain's future nuclear force could be reduced below the figure of 240 V-bombers. It was hoped that reductions in the RAF vote might relieve some of the pressure on Army and especially Navy spending. On the same day that Sandys opposed cuts in the RAF's proposed V-bomber force, the COS discussed the future size of Britain's nuclear force. The rationale presented by CIGS and the FSL for reductions in the proposed size of the nuclear force was that greater reliance could be placed on the United States SAC to hit those priority British targets, a claim which was refuted by the CAS.

McGrigor claimed that the size of the force being proposed by the RAF was larger than that envisaged in the GSP, but if the figure in the GSP was based on the 'strength considered necessary to attack the number of targets envisaged',¹⁹ there is no evidence that the RAF was proposing a larger force of bombers to meet a greatly expanded number of Soviet

¹⁹ Interview, Summer 1987.

targets. In response to the claims of McGrigor, Dickson retorted that the current figure for the size of the V-force was 'similar'²⁰ to that which had been proposed in the GSP, a statement which is symptomatic of the ambiguity which characterised the debates within the COSC on the size of the V-bomber force.

McGrigor stressed the importance of Britain having a greater say in the United States strategic air plan, a comment which suggests that the existing liaison between the RAF and SAC was of a fairly general kind, but it was Harding who made the best case against the RAF position. He considered that the report was not entirely convincing and asked Dickson whether some of the priority targets would not '...be included in the United States Strategic Air Plan...There was an obvious need to know more about the plan before valid recommendations could be made regarding the minimum size of the force required'.²¹

The CIGS also wanted to know how closely the size of the bomber force was related to the supply of atom bombs. Dickson said that the size of the bomber force had been related to '...previously agreed production figures for atom

²⁰ DEFE 4/64, C.O.S. (53) 24th mtg, 17 July 1953.

²¹ Ibid.

bombs',²² which it will be recalled revolved around producing 200 atomic bombs by 1958. In response to Harding's claim that more information was needed on United States war-planning before decisions could be taken on the size of the force, Dickson emphasised the importance of British counter-force missions but once again this was located in the context of SAC's countervalue mission.

The CAS said that the V-bomber force was required to blunt the enemy's atomic offensive. At the same time there was no question of the force being justified '...on the grounds that it would be required to assist in a war winning counter offensive',²³ that was something '...we could not afford, and would have to be left to the Americans'.²⁴ Thus, the United States nuclear offensive was perceived as the essential war-winning capability, but the RAF's V-bombers would reduce the Soviet atomic threat to the United Kingdom to what was termed 'manageable proportions',²⁵ a phrase which unfortunately was given no further amplification during discussions between the COS.

In addition, Dickson asserted that if the force was to be

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

reduced below 240, it would no longer have '...worthwhile hitting power'.²⁶ Nevertheless, the CAS did not want to base the argument for the RAF's V-bombers on some mathematical calculus of a British counter-force mission against Soviet air bases, because '...it was not only a question of sheer weight of numbers and hitting one's way through';²⁷ rather it was superior British '...techniques, design, invention and experience',²⁸ that would enable Bomber Command to make its real contribution to allied security. In arguing that the figure of 240 was the minimum necessary for the exercise of the RAF's counter-force mission, and then suggesting that the RAF's contribution to the conduct of strategic nuclear operations was out of all proportion to the actual size of the British Bomber force, Dickson betrayed the ambiguities which lay at the heart of justifications for the size of the British nuclear force in the early 1950s.

Although there were differences over the size of the V-bomber force, there was no disagreement within the COS, nor it seems opposition from the Cabinet to what might be termed the 'twin pronged' strategy - combining as it did, plans for RAF counter-force missions in conjunction with United States

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

strikes against Soviet population, industrial and political centres. Such unanimity on the requirements of Anglo-American nuclear targeting, if not on the proposed size of the V-bomber force, has to be set against the growing conflict within the defence establishment as to the provision of long or short war forces.

McGrigor acknowledged in a letter to Drax in September 1953 that because the Air Marshals had got the ear of ministers, and the '...Army is fairly stretched all over the world',²⁹ it was the Admiralty which was bearing the burden of defence cuts in the Radical Review. The FSL pointed out the rationale for the short war concept, and asked rhetorically whether '...the atom bomb and its terrible destructive power'³⁰ had effected a strategic revolution such that '...the U.S. Strategic Air Force can win the war in the first few weeks and therefore, all our old theories of strategy have gone West'.³¹ Although McGrigor did not believe in the 'six weeks' strategy, he must have been somewhat taken aback by Drax's reply which articulated as virulent a condemnation of the 'mass destruction' policy as Buzzard had done.

²⁹ ADM 205/102, No. 2032/91 McGrigor to Drax, 11 September 1953.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

The Admiral attacked what he saw as the RAF's perpetuation of the 'Trenchard fallacies'³² and 'murder bombing'³³ into the atomic age. He said that the short war concept was a recurring strategic illusion and that '...similar arguments were first used when gunpowder was first invented. They came up again when Nobel invented dynamite'.³⁴ Despite the use of more emotive language, Drax's prescriptions differed little from those of Buzzard, insisting upon atomic attacks from the outset against military and not civilian targets. However, he did present a scenario to illustrate why the 'mass destruction' strategy would not lead to war termination in the first six weeks of conflict.

Postulating an atomic war in which both sides '...achieved their best hopes, Moscow and Leningrad might be completely destroyed, also New York and San Francisco, with some 10,000,000 casualties on each side',³⁵ but he contended that the war would not end there since

Each side, in preparation for such eventualities, probably has aerodromes located thousands of miles apart, with bomb proof underground hangers and bombers in there equipped with atom bombs...While

³² ADM 205/102, Drax to McGrigor, 15 September 1953.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

both sides may prefer to continue their attack either from aircraft carriers or guided missiles launched from submarines...but anyway the war would continue more fiercely in the hope of reversing the earlier disasters.³⁶

A major plank of McGrigor's defence had been the concept of 'broken-backed' war, but the visionary Admiral was suggesting that the key point was not so much that conventional operations would continue after the first intense atomic exchange, but that atomic operations themselves would continue throughout the duration of conflict, and that provision had to be made to survive the outcome of protracted atomic war. Drax's arguments were undoubtedly coloured by the actual experience of World War 11 strategic bombing, and his depiction of RAF war plans was inaccurate to say the least, but what lay at the root of his and Buzzard's approach to atomic strategy was an enduring pessimism about the prospects of a stable truce in a world of atomic weapons. These 'long war nuclear war-fighters' believed that the deterrent value of atomic weapons was a transient factor in the relationship between states. Drax asserted that a fleet of strategic bombers could not guarantee lasting security, and in a passage which goes to the core of arguments about stable deterrence in the nuclear age, the old Admiral expressed his position as follows:

³⁶ Ibid.

...the argument that a powerful RAF can prevent war seems to me unsound. It only perpetuates an unstable truce under conditions where there is no curtailment of those fundamental forces which give rise to wars.³⁷

Given such a gloomy prognosis, the emphasis on nuclear war-fighting capabilities was not surprising, since the key issue for Drax and Buzzard was the limitation of war if deterrence failed. Without endorsing the 'strategic fatalism' of Drax and Buzzard, the COS in an updated study of the dangers of war did accept, in October 1953, that as both sides developed more and more nuclear weapons so would grow '...the temptation to strike the first blow'.³⁸ In February 1954, McGrigor emphasised the tremendous importance of getting in the first blow and pointed out that '...our offensive against the enemy airforce must commence at the very outset of hostilities'.³⁹ If the COS believed that growing numbers of nuclear weapons would increase the risks of nuclear pre-emption, they might have considered that British strategic planning was predicated on the assumption that the United Kingdom would be the first to use nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union. This is not to suggest that the United Kingdom would have initiated military

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ DEFE 5/49, C.O.S. (53) 519, 21 October 1953.

³⁹ DEFE 4/68, Confidential annex to C.O.S (54) 17th mtg, 17 February 1954.

hostilities, but in response to a conventional attack against Europe and an air bombardment of the United Kingdom, contingency planning was based on the undertaking of an atomic blunting mission against Soviet nuclear bases.

Despite considering that the risks of nuclear pre-emption might be increasing, the COS also suggested in their October submission that as each side reached the point where war might result in '...the annihilation of both',⁴⁰ each side would do everything it could to avoid crises and conflicts. Having considered both arguments, the COS were not prepared to state which one had the more validity, but if the COS seem to have been somewhat hesitant about the stability of nuclear deterrence, the Prime Minister made clear his position in a speech to the House of Commons in November 1953. Churchill suggested that the '..annihilating character of these agencies may bring an utterly unforeseeable security to mankind'.⁴¹

The Prime Minister was clearly becoming more and more attracted to basing defence policy on nuclear deterrence and the short war concept, and it was beginning to be recognised in the Navy that its survival would depend '...upon riding

⁴⁰ DEFE 5/49, C.O.S. (53) 519, 21 October 1953.

⁴¹ Quoted in Groom, op. cit., p. 95.

in on this wave'.⁴² The Navy could well look on the RAF with envious eyes as they held sway at court, but the Army was also carving out a nuclear role for itself on the continent of Europe. Both the British and American Army were aware that there was a danger that emphasising the role of tactical atomic weapons in European defence might be an invitation for ministers to attempt cuts in ground forces. However, as General Sir Richard Gale, Commander of the Allied Northern Group in West Germany pointed out after a British Army exercise in February 1953, which had put some of the ideas associated with tactical atomic defence to the test,

...a ground force must still be organised, equipped, and trained to fight a conventional ground battle with as one of its main objects the manoeuvring of its enemy into a position in which the enemy will become a target for annihilating atomic attack.⁴³

General Gale revealed that in case of war, tactical atomic weapons '...may be available' and that the forces under his command were being trained for such an eventuality'.⁴⁴ After the explosion of the first low yield bomb in the Nevada desert in April 1953, allied officers, according to

⁴² ADM 205/94, Newall to Maclean, 21 January 1954.

⁴³ Groom, op. cit., p. 67.

⁴⁴ R.E. Osgood, NATO: The Entangling Alliance (University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 107.

Osgood began receiving special instructions in Germany on the use of such weapons. In October 1953, the same month as the United States 'New Look'⁴⁵ atomic artillery pieces began arriving in Europe, to be followed by other systems in 1954. Consequently, the British Army's position was secure because its forces in Germany had to be evaluated in the wider political context of NATO and European security, it had a key role to play in protecting cold war commitments, and it staked a claim to a tactical nuclear role in Europe.

It is not surprising, therefore, that McGrigor was becoming increasingly attracted by the idea of naval forces playing a role in the future atomic offensive. Drax was clearly thinking in terms of a guided missile future for the Navy's submarines and such ideas were being discussed within Naval circles. These possibilities were, however, in the distant future and the Admiralty's more immediate atomic ambitions centered on modernising its strike carriers and developing the NA39 (Buccaneer) in the tactical strike role.

Even such limited ambitions, however, attracted the wrath of many in the government. In November 1953, Sandys took the lead in attacking the Navy's aviation plans when these were discussed in the ministerial sub-committee. He argued that

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the American 'New Look' see G. Snyder 'The 'New Look' of 1953' in W. Schilling, P. Hammond and G. Snyder, *op. cit.*, p. 379-525.

Admiralty plans were a wasteful duplication of American naval capabilities and that attack at source against enemy naval bases could most effectively be carried out by the RAF's atomic bombers.⁴⁶ Furthermore, he disarmed naval criticism by arguing that '...carriers were desirable and should be provided if money were unlimited',⁴⁷ but asserted that with a budget ceiling of £1,650 million there was no money available for such luxuries. De L'Isle supported Sandys and emphasised that '...the share of the Defence Budget allocated to the Royal Air Force must certainly increase'.⁴⁸

That Sandys, De L'Isle and the RAF had the ear of the Prime Minister can be seen in the latter's statement to the Cabinet Defence Committee in late November when Churchill agreed with the Navy's critics that whilst Soviet '...mining and submarine bases should have a high priority in war...these could be attacked more effectively and much less expensively from land bases'.⁴⁹ Churchill said that the aircraft carrier was extremely vulnerable and that although existing carriers in commission should certainly not be

⁴⁶ ADM1/24695, R.D.P./M (53) 8, 10 November 1953.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ ADM 205/94, DP (M) 53 6, 27 November 1953.

scrapped, '...there should be a full enquiry into their future uses before a great deal more money was spent on the production of expensive naval aircraft and the modernisation of fleet carriers.⁵⁰ At the beginning of December, the Admiralty was asked by the Defence Minister, on the authority of the Defence Policy Committee, to consider what would be the effect on its aircraft production programme and carrier modernization programme of limiting the latter to the protection of convoys, leaving the task of attacking Soviet surface raiders and naval bases to the United States Navy and the RAF's planned force of 240 V-bombers.⁵¹

The attempts of the Radical Review sub-committee to define the choice between the prospective capabilities of the RAF and the Fleet Air Arm in zero sum terms harked back to the fierce debates between the Navy and RAF in the inter-war period. Thus, by late 1953, the Admiralty's 'organisational essences' were under major threat from the Churchill Government. McGrigor's relaxed and conciliatory attitude of the previous June had been replaced by anxiety that the RAF was exploiting the support of ministers in the Radical Review sub-committee for all it was worth. It was against this background that he had sought, in October 1953, to rally his colleagues on the COSC against the policies of the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ ADM 205/93, RDP/P53 (30), December 1954.

Radical Review sub-committee.

The COSC In The Role of Advocate

McGrigor and the Naval Staff sought to use the COS Committee to put the brakes on the Radical Review sub-committee. At a meeting of the COSC on the 27 October 1953, the FSL emphasised his concern that as a result of the June Directive, the priorities laid down in the GSP had been departed from. He contended that the idea of 'survival' in the first six weeks should be challenged by the COS as not in keeping with the recommendations of the COS to ministers in the GSP.⁵² McGrigor managed to elicit the following statement from Harding and Dickson:

It was essential to ensure that H.M. ministers were in no doubt of the strategic views of the Chiefs of Staff on the scope and trend of the Radical Review. It should be made clear to ministers that the Chiefs of Staff now re-affirmed the priorities laid down in Global Strategy...and were consequently most uneasy over the divergency of views on the value of these priorities now being aired in the ministerial sub-committee.⁵³

Despite McGrigor's concerns that the RAF was manipulating the support of the Radical Review sub-committee to further its own interests in the policy making process, it does seem

⁵² DEFE 4/66, C.O.S. (53) Mtg, 27 October 1953.

⁵³ Ibid.

from Dickson's willingness to agree to this statement that the CAS was trying to reduce the pressures for conflict within the COSC. Such collective endorsement certainly gave heart to the FSL and with the Prime Minister's attacks in November on the role of the Fleet Air Arm, McGrigor appealed to Harding and Dickson that the time had come for the COS to reassert their role as the nation's foremost strategic advisers. At a COS meeting on the 23 November, Sir Guy Grantham, VCNS, speaking on behalf of the First Sea Lord commented:

The time had now come for the Chiefs of Staff, acting as a corporate body, to point out the implications of the differences between the priorities laid down for the Radical Review and those agreed for Global Strategy and to emphasise their collective responsibility for and constitutional position regarding the formulation of defence policy and the priorities on which it is based. In particular the Chiefs of Staff should examine and comment on the proposals contained in the memorandum by the Minister of Supply before they were accepted.⁵⁴

Clearly, the Navy's hope was that the collective advocacy of the COSC would head off the worst of Sandys' attack on the Fleet Air Arm and reaffirm the importance of planning on the basis of protracted atomic war. In response to this strong appeal for collective responsibility, Dickson suggested that it was not the role of the COSC to advocate policies which challenged the broad thrust of policy emanating from

⁵⁴ DEFE 4/66, C.O.S. (53), 23 November 1953.

ministers. Given the need for economy in defence spending, he emphasised the inevitability of ministerial decisions on the allocation of resources between the services. Of course, it was easier for Dickson to push this line in the COSC than McGrigor and Harding, since greater ministerial control of defence policy-making benefited the RAF.

McGrigor's hopes in late 1953 that Harding and Dickson would rally against the Radical Review were disappointed. General principles of agreement between the COS were just that and they never translated into a determined attempt at collective advocacy against the direction of the Radical Review. Having failed to elicit the type of support which would have enabled the COS to confront ministers as a united body, the Admiralty counter-attacked against its enemies in the Radical Review sub-committee. Given the similarity of the situation to that which had confronted the United States Navy in the late 1940s, it was not surprising that there were echoes of the B29/carrier controversies. Moreover, whilst the debates in late 1953 and early 1954 were conducted within the framework of the 'mass destruction policy', Buzzard was to make a further attempt to change the terms of the Whitehall strategic debate and the Navy's defence against the Radical Review.

The Royal Navy's Nuclear Ambitions

The Admiralty responded to ministerial assaults against its position by arguing that if the political rationale for 240 V-bombers was the ability to influence United States nuclear planning, this applied with equal force to the Navy which '...must continue to make a contribution to offensive naval warfare and this cannot be done without fleet carriers'.⁵⁵ The Admiralty argued that because Britain was a major naval power, allied naval plans had been heavily influenced by British strategic ideas with United Kingdom officers' holding key commands. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that if the government implemented its proposed carrier plans, it would mean that '...we would cease to be able to influence American Naval planning in NATO.'⁵⁶

As the Naval Staff saw it, the opponents of the Fleet Air Arm were prepared to sacrifice the political benefits of a British maritime contribution for the sake of a bigger nuclear bomber force which would only duplicate the functions of the United States SAC. Although at one level, the Navy's arguments were bureaucratic weapons to be used in the fight for the protection of its interests, in arguing that British naval nuclear capabilities would bring

⁵⁵ ADM 205/94, D.P.M. (54) 2 Brief R, 28 January 1954.

⁵⁶ ADM 205/93, RDP/P (53) 32, 9 December 1953.

political influence over the United States, the Navy was reaffirming the basic belief of Whitehall that national nuclear capabilities were the key to getting inside the making of United States nuclear strategy.

These rationales for the development of a tactical atomic naval strike capability were complementary to the RAF's rationales for the V-bomber force, but the Navy also challenged the claim that the V-bombers would be more effective than carrier based air in penetrating to those Soviet naval bases in the Murmansk/Archangel region of the USSR. In early 1954, the Navy even went so far as to talk about the V-bombers as a 'colossal gamble', and they were privately supported in this by Sir Frederick Brundrett, the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, who considered that evolving Soviet air defences would face the V-bombers with a severe penetration problem.⁵⁷

Given his critique of the 'mass destruction' policy and the fact that he had something of a 'bee in his bonnet',⁵⁸ about nuclear strategy, it is perhaps not surprising that Buzzard should, in January 1954, have weighed in with a further

⁵⁷ See ADM 205/94, 'Vulnerability of "V" Bombers' Brief Z, 28 January 1954.

⁵⁸ See J. Baylis, 'Sir Anthony Buzzard: The concept of Graduated Deterrence' in J. Baylis and J. Garnett (eds.) Makers of Modern Nuclear Strategy (Leicester University Press, forthcoming 1988).

assault against the 'June Directive', claiming that recent changes in United States strategic policy meant that it was '...much less likely - if not most unlikely - that either side will attack towns and cities with weapons of mass destruction at least in the early stages'.⁵⁹ Buzzard's claim suggested that for all the talk of 'massive retaliation', the action policy of the Eisenhower Administration was moving in the direction of an explicit doctrine of counter-force targeting and limited nuclear war. Moreover, he was quick to point out that a prolonged nuclear war, in which SAC would be conducting classic counter-force missions, was one which held great promise for the Navy and its strike carriers, but not for the RAF and its V-bombers.

Buzzard argued that in a situation where Soviet nuclear bombers would be confined to targeting military bases in the United Kingdom, '....there is increased danger of the R.A.F. medium bomber force being seriously impaired before it achieves anything. This tends to improve the case for the Seaborne Air Base vis-a-vis the Shore Air Base'.⁶⁰ Thus, he recognised the premium that would be placed on survivable striking forces in a long nuclear war. This argument had been hinted at by the JPS in their studies of carrier borne air in the late 1940s, but Buzzard was the first to give it

⁵⁹ ADM 205/94, DNI 8642, 21 January 1954.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

explicit articulation in the British debate. Moreover, Buzzard took on the claim that a bomber force was needed to influence United States targeting plans since '...the requirement for strategic bombers is lessened because the U.S. Air Force is now concentrating its main effort on enemy airfields, and because there is much less need for us to have a say in U.S. Strategic Air Force policy'.⁶¹

In addition, since SAC would be attacking enemy airbases, the need for Britain to undertake such attacks would be lessened and '...less deep penetration against more tactical airfields and targets becomes the primary British role'.⁶² He argued that this improved the case for the smaller aircraft and for carriers which '....possess the flexibility for operations around the flank, and ability to support and use the Scandinavian airfields denied to us and the U.S. in peace'.⁶³ Buzzard was not arguing that Britain should cease to develop a nuclear deterrent, but he was against duplicating SAC in nuclear attacks against Soviet airbases in the Soviet Union. British nuclear striking power would be more effective in the tactical strike role, and in this, equipped with the small tactical bomb under development at

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Aldermaston, the NA39 would have a crucial role to play.⁶⁴

As in his submission of July 1953, Buzzard's arguments do not seem to have had much immediate influence on the Whitehall nuclear debate. The notion that SAC was planning to assist the RAF in its counter-air operations whilst also targeting Soviet cities was known to the COS in 1951-2 and was incorporated into war plan Fairfax. However, if Eisenhower's war planners were really thinking in terms of limiting global war solely to military targets, this would surely have occasioned great debate in the COS, since it undercut the premises of the GSP and 'June Directive' far more effectively than Buzzard's own diatribe against the 'mass destruction' policy could possibly have done.

Moreover, although there is no doubt that United States Navy operations focused on carrier based atomic strikes against Soviet maritime targets, (the very mission which Buzzard was proposing for the United Kingdom's strike carriers and suggesting that the duplication claim might be as easily laid at the Navy's doorstep as at the RAF's), there is no evidence that SAC was planning anything less than the total destruction of the Soviet Union, which would have involved destroying the Red Air Force's bases.

⁶⁴ For a full discussion of the various nuclear weapon programmes underway at Aldermaston, see Simpson, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-4.

Buzzard's paper was written by a man in a hurry to change the thinking of Whitehall and who was fired with the conviction that the existing strategy was both immoral and inimical to the nation's security in the nuclear age. Moreover, if the paper carried an element of 'wishful thinking' about Anglo-American planning, this is perhaps no more than one would expect from one whose general philosophy sat very unhappily with the mainstream thinking in Whitehall at this time. It was ironic that Buzzard wrote his scathing critique of the Radical Review and RAF strategy at a time when the challenge against the Navy was abating, but there is nothing to suggest that his assessments were influential in this. A much more significant factor was that a key figure in the Radical Review sub-committee, Sandys, was unable to prosecute his campaign against the Navy's carrier plans because of illness. In addition, the Navy seems to have persuaded the Minister of Defence, Alexander, that it would still need modernised strike aircraft to fulfill the roles of convoy and fleet protection, and according to Grove, he even went so far as to concede the Admiralty's argument that British carriers should have a capability for dealing with Soviet surface raiders.⁶⁵ In this, the Admiralty played on the flexibility of the NA39 arguing that '...all that is saved by omitting from the

⁶⁵ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 106.

Naval tasks offensive action against enemy targets at source and offensive minelaying are relatively minor adaptations to some of these aircraft'.⁶⁶

In addition, it was not only the Minister of Defence who seems to have been won over to the Navy's case. At a private luncheon on the 22 December between Dickson and McGrigor, the CAS and FSL seem to have sketched out the basis for a deal on the future roles of land and sea-based air. In June 1953, McGrigor had written about the difficulties in the COS of rising above the 'local colour, but Dickson's willingness to concede that the Navy's strike plans were in the national interest seems to bear testimony to the ability of the CAS to rise above narrow inter-service considerations. Dickson went so far as to point out that he did not support the views of his Secretary of State, De L'Isle, who was '...determined to attack, and as far as possible abolish naval aircraft and carriers, in order to reduce the amount of money which had to be spent on the country's defences.⁶⁷

The CAS recognised the need for a professional assessment of the problems facing the Navy and RAF in the conduct of maritime operations. He conceded that the RAF's planned

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See ADM 205/93, First Sea Lord to Thomas, No. 2829, 23 December 1953.

bombers would not necessarily be the best instruments for attacking targets in the most Northern part of the Soviet Union. In addition, Dickson accepted the logic of the Navy's case that a contribution of two fleet carriers to the striking fleet was a small price to pay for having a say in the conduct of United States maritime policy.⁶⁸ Moreover, he acknowledged that from the point of view of the '...deterrent it was most undesirable that we abandon our fleet carriers'.⁶⁹ Despite the language used by Dickson, this seems to have been a recognition of the valuable role which floating airfields could play in denying the Soviet Union its naval objectives, and was not necessarily an endorsement of the value of carriers in the deterrence of Soviet aggression. This was an issue which was to recur in the hydrogen bomb debates of 1954/55.

Although these exchanges of view between Dickson and McGrigor demonstrated the ability of professional military men to rise above the 'local colour', an important element in their discussions was the joint aspiration to reduce the size of the Army. Thus, it was not the COS as a collective body which was rising above service considerations. Rather, the 'December compromise' was a recurrence of the collusion between the Navy and RAF which had characterised inter-

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

service relations in the late 1940s. Moreover, the articulations of Dickson and McGrigor with regard to the role of the Army suggest that the commitment to the continent was still one which the COS accepted with the greatest reluctance. Dickson and McGrigor's opposition to the continental commitment could not be clearer:

Looking into the future, we agreed that surely the country must aim at having a good effective Air Force, which might entail even bigger costs as aircraft got more expensive, an effective Navy which one would hope might continue at the present level of estimates and a greatly decreased Army which it must be our aim to reduce as soon as other arrangements could be made on the continent of Europe. In any case we should reckon on cutting the Army down in about three or four years time.⁷⁰

Although opposition to the Army provided the cement of alliance between Dickson and McGrigor, the CAS was conciliatory over the issue of the Fleet Air Arm and seems to have tried to 'call his hawks off the Navy'.⁷¹ Nonetheless, Dickson's tacit support for McGrigor should not be exaggerated, it was a private exchange of views which does not appear to have influenced the actual evolution of the Radical Review. Even so, the RAF was in a strong position in the policy-making process and had Dickson been as antagonistic to the Navy as Sandys and De L'Isle were,

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Interview, Summer 1987.

the Navy's position might have been an even more vulnerable one.

Whatever the actual contribution of Dickson's tacit support to the Navy's reprieve in early 1954, the Secretary of State for the Navy, (First Lord) J.P. Thomas, was aware of the exchanges of view between Dickson and McGrigor and this may have encouraged him in making his direct appeal to the Prime Minister in February 1954. Thomas wrote to Churchill on the 22 February and developed all the Navy's arguments in favour of the strike carriers, but emphasised the NATO Commands question which he knew the Prime Minister was very sensitive about.⁷² The First Lord concluded his presentation with the assessment that implementation of the anti-carrier policies would not only damage the Navy's self-respect but also provide political opportunities for the opposition.⁷³

This combination of pressures seems to have generated a settlement by which the Navy was allowed to budget and plan on the basis of a future fleet carrier capability. This was a satisfactory outcome from the point of view of the Admiralty. P.S. Newall, who as Head of M Branch⁷⁴ helped

⁷² Grove, Vanguard to Trident, pp. 103-4.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ M Branch was the civilian secretariat in the Admiralty which was there to provide strategic advice to the First Sea Lord, First Lord and officers of the Naval Staff.

mastermind the Navy's defence in the Radical Review, reflected in April 1954 that the

Radical Review...was fought mainly on the basis that if the RAF were to be allowed to keep up with the American Joneses then the principle applied also to the Navy and probably with greater force since our carriers exist and it would be folly not to spend the few million to use them.⁷⁵

The reference to the few million seems to have referred to the cost of modernising the Navy's existing strike carriers to take the NA39. Despite this, it is important to note that the deal which was patched up in January and February 1954 was no more than a truce. Although the Navy was allowed to plan on the basis that it would soon acquire an atomic strike capability for its carriers, the Ministry of Supply was holding up the placing of orders for the main delivery system, the NA39. Ministers seem to have decided that a final decision on the development of the NA39 should be deferred until the COS had reported on nuclear planning and strategy in the coming age of the H-bomb.

⁷⁵ ADM 205/96, Paper by Newall, 30 April 1954.

Conclusion

The increased inter-service competition in 1953 might be argued to lend further support to Snyder's proposition that inter-service rivalry is not necessarily an indication of the need for leadership, since it was the attempt by the Radical Review sub-committee to exert greater control over defence planning which occasioned the battles between the RAF and Navy. At one level, the problem of inter-service rivalry was, as McGrigor recognised, a budgetary one. Policy makers were desperately trying to get defence expenditure under control, and this led to the Radical Review sub-committee deciding on a set of strategic priorities which threatened the 'organisational essences' of the Admiralty.

The ministerial directive of June 1953, premised as it was on the strategy of nuclear retaliation in the GSP sought to base future planning on the short war concept. The COS had attempted to obscure their differences over the character of nuclear war in the GSP, but ministers in the Radical Review sub-committee had decided that the short war concept should be the basis for future service planning. Finance was a significant part of the driving force behind the Radical Review, and the Chancellor, Butler, undoubtedly supported the short war strategy for the savings it promised in

defence spending. Nonetheless, it was also a vision of the strategic future which seems to have motivated the key players in the Radical Review sub-committee. Churchill was coming to believe in atomic deterrence as the foundation stone of lasting security, and the ailing Prime Minister certainly supported the greater reliance on atomic weapons embodied in the 'June Directive'. However, the key figures in masterminding the Radical Review appear to have been the Cabinet Secretary, Brook, and the Minister of Supply, Sandys.⁷⁶ The essence of their argument seems to have been the one which Slessor had advanced in the GSP: nuclear weapons and the short war concept promised real security at manageable cost. In this, they espoused a philosophy of 'strategic monism' based on nuclear deterrence.

The 'June Directive' was an attempt by policy makers to impose their preferred strategic doctrine on the services and COS, but does this case study of ministerial control support Kanter and Huntington's argument as to the relationship between civilian control and inter-service rivalry? Kanter's contention that in the face of external challenges, the COS will seek to present a common front to ministers, has to be set against the failure of the COS to challenge the evolution of the Radical Review. The 'June Directive' was a challenge to the COS in that the nation's

⁷⁶ Interview, Summer 1987.

senior military advisers were not consulted on this change in strategic doctrine. Different bargaining advantages accrued to each of the services from this change in doctrine, and this militated against the COS effectively opposing the course of the Radical Review.

It was Huntington's argument that in the face of ministerial impositions, the possibility of compromise between the services depended upon the prediction by each of the consequences for itself of increased civilian control. In the case of the 'June Directive', the Navy was the prime sufferer, and the RAF and to a lesser extent the Army, the beneficiaries. Although it was easy for Dickson to support the Radical Review, since a short war strategy could not but benefit the RAF, he also seems to have recognised that ministerial impositions were inevitable in a climate of financial stringency. The CAS considered that the role of the COSC was to advise and not advocate.

However, it does not seem to have been Dickson's view that the COS were most useful in the role of strategic critics-exposing competing positions to ministers for political arbitration - since he agreed with Harding and McGrigor in October 1953, that the GSP formed the soundest basis for future defence planning. Since the Radical Review had grown out of frustration with the ambiguities and compromises

enshrined in the GSP, Dickson and to a lesser extent, Harding, seem to have seen merit in appearing to support the collective strategy of the COS as outlined in the GSP. Nonetheless, Dickson's enthusiasm for balanced forces and 'strategic pluralism' was token and certainly did not extend to joining the FSL in challenging the evolution of the Radical Review.

That McGrigor felt compelled to appeal to Harding and Dickson, to join with him in challenging the Radical Review sub-committee's ideas, bears testimony to the extent to which different bargaining advantages accrued to the RAF and Navy from the 'June Directive'. The efforts of the FSL to use the COSC as an advocate for the Navy's case reflected an attempt similar to Montgomery's in 1947 to manipulate the collective authority of the nation's strategic advisers to force changes in government thinking. In contrast to the Field Marshal, however, the FSL wanted the COSC to press the case for long war nuclear planning, a posture of 'strategic pluralism' as against Montgomery's continentalist vision which was a form of 'strategic monism'. Thus, against the background of resource constraints, the question as to whether the COS should be advisers or advocates, was really another issue upon which to play out the inter-service dispute about the character of future nuclear war and the balance to be drawn between conventional and nuclear forces.

McGrigor sought to use the COSC as an instrument to limit damage to the Navy's interests in the Radical Review, and one should not be surprised if Harding and Dickson were unwilling to support him in this.

The Radical Review sub-committee sought to define the struggle between the prospective capabilities of the RAF and Fleet Air Arm in zero sum terms, but both Dickson and McGrigor were anxious in late 1953 to reduce inter-service rivalry between the Navy and RAF. In the face of severe budgetary pressure, it was difficult for the FSL and CAS to rise above the 'local colour'. Each was conscious of the need to satisfy domestic constituencies and could not afford to be seen as selling out in the COSC. Thus, the scope for what Smith and Hollis term 'reasoned judgement' was limited and did not extend to reaching agreement in the COSC on the future size of the V-bomber force, or the vexed issue as to the character of future nuclear war.

Nonetheless, the tacit exchanges of view between the FSL and CAS over the Navy's future nuclear role demonstrated the exercise of strategic logic by men whose responsibility it was to determine policy according to their perception of the national interest. Dickson's willingness to see a future nuclear role for the Navy complementary to that of the RAF, was a contrary view to the one taken by the Radical Review

sub-committee, and his own Secretary of State, De L'Isle.

The 'December compromise' raises the difficult question of the relationship between bureaucratic structure and personality in the determination of strategic outcomes. Dickson's willingness when VCAS to advance a position which was not necessarily in the bureaucratic interests of the RAF was remarked upon in chapter three. Consequently, was it the personality of Dickson which was important to understanding his conciliatory attitude on the question of the NA39, as against the attitudes of Sandys or De L'Isle? Alternatively, was it Dickson's membership of the COSC which led him to accept - albeit in private - the thrust of McGrigor's strategic arguments? Put differently, would any individual in the position of CAS in late 1953 have been forced by virtue of his membership of the COSC to adopt the position taken by Dickson in relation to the Navy's future nuclear role?

Dickson was constrained from publicly supporting McGrigor over the future of the Fleet Air Arm as this would have been seen by the battling Air Marshals, not to mention De L'Isle, as disloyal. On the other hand, Dickson did privately support McGrigor over the Fleet Air Arm, and this it seems out of strategic convictions and not service expediency. Smith and Hollis circumvent the problem of the relationship

between personality and bureaucratic structure by claiming that certain bureaucratic positions require 'particular personalities'. Thus, in the context of the Radical Review debates, it could well be that it required a conciliator like Dickson to play the role of CAS.

Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to exaggerate the significance of the 'December Compromise'. It does not seem to have been pivotal in the settlement of January/February 1954. The tacit exchange of views between Dickson and McGrigor might be argued to show the CAS as playing his role with distance, but given that this did not involve the CIGS, it cannot be seen as an example of the COSC rising above the local colour. Quite the reverse, since McGrigor and Dickson expressed an aspiration to cut the Army's size in the future. Finally, given that it was no more than an exchange of views, its significance in helping the Navy's case over the NA39 was at best minimal, and at worst, insignificant. The deferring of the NA39 decision depended upon persuading the Defence Minister, Alexander, and the Prime Minister, that its proposed nuclear role was complementary to that of the RAF and should be further considered in the light of the advent of the H-bomb.

This analysis of the Radical Review seems to support the conventional wisdom that the COSC was something of an

ineffectual actor in shaping strategic outcomes in 1953-4, centre-stage being held by the Radical Review sub-committee and the service ministries. Nonetheless, as discussed in previous chapters, the conventional wisdom not only mistook the symptoms of British inter-service rivalry for the sources, but also focused on conflict and disagreement, to the exclusion of the underlying consensus which existed in the British strategic debate. What is striking about the Whitehall debate in 1953-4 is that, with the exception of Buzzard's radical critique of British nuclear strategy, discussion amongst British officialdom was conducted within the framework of the strategy of nuclear retaliation. The Director of Naval Intelligence presented a critique of the 'mass destruction' policy, but this was rejected by all participants in the 'in-house' strategic debate, including his colleagues in the Naval Staff.

The Radical Review sub-committee and COS offered one definition of nuclear strategy, Buzzard and Drax proffered another. However, was it the case that the 'mass destruction' strategy was objectively pre-determined by compelling systemic constraints?⁷⁷ The 'national interest'

⁷⁷ For a discussion of system level forces in the international system which argues that systemic factors are dominant in shaping international outcomes, see K. Waltz, 'Reductionist and Systemic Theories' in R. Keohane (ed.), Neorealism and its critics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 315.

was defined by ministers and COS to require a deterrent posture based on American counter-city nuclear retaliation. Buzzard's attempt to alter the bases of nuclear strategy failed because, as with Tizard in 1949, changing the definition of the 'national interest' depends upon '...political position rather than any higher claim to 'rationality'.⁷⁸ Thus, Buzzard was fired with a strategic vision but was frustrated by his lack of political power in effecting fundamental changes in Britain's nuclear strategy. On the other hand, it was because Sandys was Minister of Supply, and especially the Prime Minister's son-in-law, that he seems to have been able to dominate the Radical Review sub-committee and play such a key role in the development of Britain's nuclear strategy in 1953-4.

Although Buzzard attempted to change the existing definition of the 'national interest', his colleagues in the Naval Staff accepted the framework of the 'mass destruction' policy. They defended the Navy's claim to a future nuclear strike mission on the grounds that if the RAF's nuclear bomber force was justified in the context of the Anglo-American nuclear relationship, the same rationale could be applied to the Navy's carriers. Thus, while the Admiralty did marshal a battery of strategic arguments which emphasised the Soviet naval threat, the Naval Staff placed

⁷⁸ Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

most emphasis on the American connection. This rationale extended beyond the narrow confines of service interest and was in conformity with the bases of British nuclear strategy. Having failed to marshal the power of the COSC on its side, the Navy seems to have displayed an acute appreciation of the most effective techniques for pressing its case in the hostile bureaucratic climate of 1953-4, an awareness which was to be further shown in the debates surrounding the H-bomb review and the Long Term Defence Programme, LTDP, in 1954-5.

The Radical Review did not end in early 1954, since with the deferring of a decision on the NA39, the competing forces still had everything to fight for. Both the RAF and Navy were to argue that the advent of the H-bomb strengthened its case in the defence establishment, but the debates which were to take place in 1954-5 about the character of nuclear war and the size and shape of the British nuclear force, foreshadowed growing fissures in nuclear strategy which was to afflict defence policy-making in the late 1950s.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DEFENCE POLICY AND PLANNING IN THE H-BOMB ERA

Introduction

Conventional wisdom amongst analysts of British nuclear defence policy is that the 1952 GSP was the most influential strategic planning paper of the post-war period. Yet it is now apparent that a successor study, undertaken by the COS in July 1954 into the impact of H-bombs on future defence and strategic policy may have been equally important. At the same time, the period 1954-55 also saw continuation of inter-service rivalry over roles and missions and further attempts by ministers to inject long term financial stability into the defence programme. The first part of the chapter will therefore examine the origins and contents of this study: the second will examine the further challenge which developed against the Navy in 1954, and the roles played by the COS in this. The final section focuses on the Eden Government's Long Term Defence Programme, LTDP, and the continuing discussion between ministers, service ministries and COS as to the character of future nuclear war and the size of the British nuclear force.

The H-Bomb Review

A special ministerial sub-committee on defence policy in the Hydrogen bomb era, Gen 464, was set up in April 1954, chaired by the Prime Minister. The Churchill Government reasoned that the advent of the H-bomb made additional cuts in defence spending possible, and tasked a new Defence Expenditure Committee, chaired by the Lord President of the Council, Lord Salisbury with assessing the scope for further reductions in defence expenditure. In contrast to the Radical Review sub-committee, the service ministers were not asked to attend, but like the COS were told they would be called upon if required. Although ministers seem to have decided that defence spending could be reduced in the new age of hydrogen bombs, it was agreed that the COS alone should produce a new review of defence policy and global strategy for the guidance of the Salisbury committee.

The Naval Staff, and in particular, the Head of M Branch saw this review as an opportunity for the COSC to restore its position as the top strategic adviser to the government. The Navy was still hopeful that the COS might find common ground on the need for a posture of 'strategic pluralism', and Newall was drawn to comment that 'If the Chiefs of Staff are on this occasion to recapture their position as

strategic advisers to the Cabinet something approaching thermo-nuclear heat will have to be put onto the Global Strategy Review'.¹

The JPS were charged by the COS with the task of preparing a new GSP. This study was based on planning papers of the JIC which were been discussed by the COS during March and April 1954. The JPS presented an outline of their report to the COS at the end of April and in the light of comments made by McGrigor, Harding and Dickson, submitted a final paper to the COS on the 10 May. With minor amendments, this was endorsed by the COSC on 12 May 1954. Thus, there was no equivalent of the 'Greenwich exercise' in 1954. The 1954 Hydrogen Bomb Review emerged from the normal process of defence policy making with the COS receiving a final study from the JPS which presented a number of specific options for future planning and strategy.

The centerpiece of the new GSP was the advent of the H-bomb. The H-bomb served to intensify those acute fears of exposure which had been present since 1945, but the 1954 White Paper emphasised the Government's increasing reliance on a strategy of nuclear deterrence and the COS were in no doubt in their H-bomb review that the Western powers had to

¹ ADM 205/96, D.P. (54) 4, 30 April 1954.

exploit this leading edge of nuclear technology in the struggle with the Communist powers. It was asserted that with the advent of the H-bomb, the size of stockpile required to deter and defeat '...any enemy is comparatively small and can be obtained quickly and reasonably economically'.² The belief of the atomic age that more was definitely better had been supplanted by the notion that a few megaton bombs provided the same deterrent and war-fighting value as several hundred atomic weapons. Britain, it was argued, could be expected to possess a few hydrogen bombs by the late 1950s provided the necessary effort was made.³

This premise of Western technical superiority was not one which was accepted by that long standing critic of British nuclear strategy, Blackett. He was superbly confident that with the H-bomb, a nuclear revolution had taken place, but in contrast to those retired Airmen like Slessor, he argued that since the cities of East and West were both exposed to nuclear destruction, the threat to retaliate against Soviet cities in the event of a Soviet attack was incredible and would be revealed as the 'great bluff'. Blackett's core

² DEFE 4/70, J.P. (54) Note 11, 10 May 1954.

³ No formal decision, however, had yet been taken on development of a British H-bomb capability.

thesis that, for all practical purposes, mutual vulnerability should form the basis of current planning was not one which found favour with British planners. Whilst he was operating on the assumption that both superpowers were vulnerable to nuclear attack, the COS continued to assume that the United States would not be vulnerable to Soviet hydrogen bomb attack until the late 1950s. Additionally, the COS reasoned that the Soviets would not attack the West until they could destroy both the North American and peripheral air bases (including those in the United Kingdom) in a coordinated first strike.

It had been suggested in the 1954 White Paper that as the '...deterrent continues to grow, it should have an increasing effect upon the Cold War by making less likely such adventures on the part of the Communists as their aggression in Korea'.⁴ The 1952 GSP had considered that Western nuclear superiority might encourage Soviet restraint in peripheral conflicts. However, it had contained provision for conventional defence of overseas commitments, and there was no suggestion in the 1952 GSP that Western nuclear deterrence be employed in the defence of such overseas interests. In addressing these issues in the 1954 GSP, the British were confronted with a real world

⁴ Statement Relating to Defence (Cmd 9075, 1954), p. 5.

situation which raised this issue to the forefront of the thinking of the COS.

British policy makers were confronted in 1954 with requests from Admiral Radford, Chairman of the United States JCS, to agree to participate in air strikes against the Viet Minh armies which were besieging the French position at Dien Bien Phu. The Eisenhower Administration was not united on the merits of this strategy and Radford sought the support of the British in pressing his case in the counsels of Washington policy-making. The JPS were asked by the COS to consider possible options in the Indochina crisis and they advised in April 1954 that the only action which might compel the Chinese to desist from supporting the Viet Minh was atomic strikes against Chinese targets, but the COS were absolutely opposed to such a course of action. They believed that Britain and the United States should only engage in a process of nuclear escalation if the United Kingdom was prepared to face the risks of global nuclear war with the Soviet Union.⁵

This belief, however, did not lead the COS to question the efficacy of relying on strategic threats in Europe. The 1954 GSP was written against the background of the Eisenhower

⁵ DEFE 4/70, C.O.S. (54) 42nd mtg, 10 April 1954.

'New Look' which sought to base Western defence policy on the use of all available nuclear weapons. The COS were aware that as a result of the 'New Look', the United States wanted to declare a distinction between tactical and strategic weapons thereby making available small atomic weapons for the use of NATO fighting forces in the field. The COS agreed that such tactical atomic weapons might redress the '...numerical superiority which the Soviet land forces will always enjoy',⁶ but it was argued that their use carried the risk that it would lead to '...unlimited nuclear war once the moral and political restrictions on the use of any nuclear weapon has been removed'.⁷

In the face of American proposals, British planners could not but dissent, given the compelling need in their own strategic vision for avoidance of any notion of 'limitation' in war which might affect the overall efficiency of the nuclear offensive. Planning assumed a knock out blow in which all weapons would be used promptly. It was recognised that limitations might apply for a time in terms of the scope and intensity of war, but it was agreed that this was '...highly speculative', and no account should be '...taken

⁶ DEFE 4/70, J.P. (54) Note 11, 22 April 1954.

⁷ Ibid.

of these possibilities' in defence planning'.⁸

In assessing future nuclear strategy, the JPS provided the COSC with a comprehensive assessment of the probable impact of the H-bomb on future planning and policy. Nonetheless, given that the JPS had worked closely with the COS in preparing their study, it was not surprising that the document was located in the strategic orthodoxy of the COS in that it sustained general assumptions of British strategic thought in the atomic age into the H-bomb era. However, a critical question which the JPS did not address was the enduring problem of the balance to be drawn between long and short war nuclear provision. The inter-service planning team did, however, adduce three broad alternatives for future policy:

(1) To keep within our economic capabilities the balance of expenditure as between prevention of war and preparations for a global nuclear war in accordance with existing priorities.

(2) To devote the greater part of the U.K. defence resources to the prevention of war and to sacrifice partly or wholly certain preparations to meet a global nuclear war.

(3) To leave certain defence activities to the U.S., to other members of the Commonwealth, to our Allies bearing in mind the danger of reducing our influence in world affairs.⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

The first alternative generated a requirement for balanced forces and was at the heart of the Admiralty's case. The second option was in the tradition of the 'June Directive'. The third option had hitherto been ruled out in the nuclear weapons field, but the JPS study did raise the question as to whether Britain should develop a national H-bomb capability. The British had developed an atomic weapons capability for two reasons: independent target coverage and the requirement to influence United States strategic planning. Did the same political and military rationales apply in an age of H-bombs?

The Decision To Build The H-Bomb

Britain had rejected the option of international control of the bomb in the late 1940s, believing that verification capabilities were inadequate, and that the United Kingdom could not afford to divest itself of atomic weapons, perceived as they were as offering the only security against Soviet conventional and atomic capabilities. If in the early days of the nuclear age, the pursuit of international control had been subordinated to the drive for operational atomic weapons, the British Cabinet had to decide in April 1954 whether halting the Soviet H-bomb testing programme had

priority over Britain's own development of the H-bomb, since the United States was seeking British support for a moratorium on H-bomb testing.

In the aftermath of the 'Lucky Dragon' incident, in which Japanese fisherman had been accidentally exposed to the effects of the United States Bikini tests in the Pacific, there was growing public concern at the biological and genetic effects of nuclear testing. At the end of March 1954, a group of Labour MP's tabled a motion in the House of Commons calling for a cessation of nuclear testing. The interest of United States officials in a testing moratorium was not so much stimulated by concern about the public health risks inherent in nuclear testing, but by the desire to freeze the Soviet thermonuclear programme in a position of inferiority vis-a-vis the United States.

The United States considered that, once the 'Castle' test series had been completed it would have all the experimental data it needed to make operational thermonuclear weapons, but it was recognised in both Britain and the United States that the Soviets had only exploded an 'intermediate' thermonuclear weapon in August 1953, and would therefore be placed in an inferior position by the United States proposals. Consequently, the British had to decide whether

the benefits of mitigating their vulnerability to Soviet H-bomb attack were worth the cost of opting out of the development of a national H-bomb capability.

Churchill's special H-bomb committee, including the COS, discussed the moratorium on the 13 April.¹⁰ Ministers were interested in the possibility of acquiring information from the United States about the effects of hydrogen weapons, which might assist the British in developing H-bombs without testing, but it was recognised that even with Eisenhower's 1954 amendment to the 1946 McMahon act, which now made possible sharing of information on weight, size, yield, and effects of nuclear weapons, it would not be possible for Britain to obtain design information from the United States which would obviate the need for a programme of megaton tests. A British H-bomb programme presented a further problem, however, since it would interfere with atomic bomb production before any stockpile of the latter had been achieved.

The argument about the balance to be struck between future tactical and strategic nuclear capabilities had dominated the great debate in the United States about the wisdom of developing the 'super', but the British decision to build

¹⁰ CAB 130/101, GEN 465, 3rd mtg, 13 April 1954.

the H-bomb does not appear to have stimulated such intense argument amongst the key players in the Government. Pierre claims that '...strategic doctrine as it had been evolving in Britain supported the H-bomb as the apex of an independent nuclear deterrent',¹¹ while Simpson argues that the only '...conceivable method of dissuading a thermonuclear armed Soviet Union from aggressive action was seen to be the possession of a similar countervailing military capability'.¹² Despite this, a study of the actual papers makes clear that it was not the spectre of a Soviet annihilatory capability which influenced the decision to build a H-bomb, but rather fears about the future behaviour of the United States in the global system.

The actual decision to build British thermonuclear weapons was taken by Churchill's H-bomb committee on the 16 June 1954, but the full Cabinet did discuss the decision on 7, 8, and 26 July 1954. The Prime Minister argued that '...we could not expect to maintain our influence as a world power unless we possessed the most up-to-date nuclear weapons'.¹³ Pierre argues that Churchill entertained the notion that whatever the United States and Soviet Union possessed,

11. Pierre, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

12 Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

13 CAB 128/27, C.C. 48 (54), 7 July 1954.

Britain must have also, but although world power status was important, as in the GSP, it was relations with the United States which loomed large in the deliberations. In discussion of future weapon development on 12 May, the COS had emphasised that a British H-bomb was vital because '...it would be dangerous if the United States were to retain their present monopoly since we would be denied any right to influence her policy in the use of this weapon'.¹⁴ Thus, the Cabinet and its military advisers were as adamant in 1954 as Bevin and Attlee had been in 1947, that the United Kingdom could not afford to acquiesce in a United States monopoly of nuclear weapons.

It was believed that British demonstration of a H-bomb capability would enable the United Kingdom to exert a restraining influence on United States policy. The Lord President of the Council, Lord Salisbury argued that the greatest risk was that Washington might '...plunge the world into war, either through a misguided intervention in Asia or in order to forestall an attack by Russia'.¹⁵ He argued that the Americans would '...feel more respect for our views if we continued to play an effective part in building up the

¹⁴ DEFE 4/70, Discussion by the C.O.S. of a note by the First Sea Lord, 12 May 1954.

¹⁵ CAB 128/27, C.C. 48 (54), 8 July 1954.

strength necessary to deter aggression than if we left it entirely to them to match and counter Russia's thermonuclear strength'.¹⁶ Although the Soviet H-bomb threat is mentioned in Salisbury's comments, it is clear that the concern in 1954 was not so much Soviet aggression, as adventurist action by the United States.

Pierre records that the only voice of opposition to development of a British thermonuclear weapon came from Nigel Birch¹⁷ who was concerned that a British H-bomb might complicate disarmament efforts and encourage nuclear proliferation amongst nations. It emerges from the official Cabinet papers that this issue was actively considered, particularly in relation to the question as to whether a British decision not to build the H-bomb would make it easier for Britain to prevent West Germany developing such weapons. The Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, stated that '...our power to control the production of thermonuclear weapons in Western Europe would not...be weakened by the fact that we ourselves were making these weapons'.¹⁸ As

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ At this time Nigel Birch was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Defence.

¹⁸ J. Walker, 'British Attitudes to Nuclear Proliferation, 1952-82' (Ph.D thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1986), p. 69.

Walker argues, the outcome of this discussion '...indicates that for the British "vertical" and "horizontal" proliferation were...separate'.¹⁹ The Cabinet argued that Britain was already a nuclear weapons state and it was '...unreasonable that we should deny ourselves the advantage of possessing the most up-to-date types'.²⁰ Consequently, Birch's argument fell on deaf ears within the Cabinet which was unanimous that the United Kingdom had to press on with H-bomb production.

Although in July 1954 the Cabinet and COS seem to have argued that there was no sharp distinction in kind between atomic and thermonuclear weapons, the Prime Minister said in December 1954 to the House of Commons that '...advance of the hydrogen bomb has fundamentally altered the entire problem of defence, and considerations founded even upon the atom bomb have become obsolescent, almost old fashioned'.²¹ Moreover, while the COS were prepared to assert the continuities of strategic thought in an age of H-bombs, there were officials within the defence establishment who drew radically different conclusions to that of the COS from the advent of H-bombs and ballistic rockets.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ House of Commons, Vol 535 col 176, 1 December 1954.

British Deterrence Needs In The H-Bomb Era

The Air-Defence sub-committee discussed the military implications of H-bombs and ballistic rockets, but the best exposition of the future strategic situation, and of its implications for British nuclear strategy, was made by a scientist from the Ministry of Supply, Dr Cockburn. In a paper to the committee on the 14 July 1954, he argued that the existing strategic situation, with both sides possessing airborne delivery systems against which there was some possibility of defence, meant '...there was no escape from a competitive arms race'.²² Cockburn asserted, however, that with the advent of the ballistic rocket, strategic stability could be attained because the offensive power of the nuclear rocket would be paramount.

In the light of Cockburn's paper, the Air Defence sub-committee drew the conclusion that the quest for nuclear superiority was an illusion in a situation of mutual nuclear vulnerability, and advocated that the West develop a finite or minimum deterrent posture since '...once nuclear weapons are available to the USA and Russia in what are thought to be sufficient numbers for annihilation of the other,

²² DEFE 8/48, A.D. (WP2) 54 16, 14 July 1954 and A.D. (WP2) 54 8, 23 July 1954.

further superiority in numbers has no meaning'.²³ In the face of Britain's absolute exposure to H-bombs, the Air Defence sub-committee proffered an optimistic prognosis as to the prospects for stability in a H-bomb world.

Set against this, Cockburn contended that stability at the core could lead to instability in the periphery. Cockburn took the view that H-bomb stability might lead to an increase in local wars, but against the position taken by the COS, asserted that tactical atomic weapons could be employed in such conflicts without this leading to global escalation. However, like the COS, Cockburn and the Air Defence sub-committee did not believe that this argument could be applied to Europe, and thus opposed the American position that tactical atomic weapons could be employed in the 'core' area without it escalating to global war.

The most challenging conclusion which was reached by the Air Defence sub-committee, however, was that the future nuclear stalemate between East and West would gradually eradicate the foundations of the American nuclear guarantee to Britain and Europe. The Air Defence sub-committee argued that when '...New York is vulnerable to retaliation, the USA will not use her strategic weapon in defence of London', and

²³ Ibid.

therefore, the United Kingdom '...must have its own retaliatory offensive weapon and, further, that development of this must not be prejudiced by expenditure on purely defensive weapons.²⁴ The inference from this argument was that this emerging stalemate would generate a requirement for unilateral British deterrence of the Soviet Union, rather than deterrence in concert with the United States, the planning assumption since 1946.

Although Pierre argues that the pursuit of an independent nuclear deterrent was the motive force behind the British decision to build the H-bomb, with the exception of Cockburn and the Air Defence sub-committee's fascinating discussion of future nuclear strategy, there is no evidence that either the COS or Cabinet were drawing the conclusion that, when United States cities were vulnerable to Soviet nuclear attack, American willingness to come to the defence of Europe would be more problematic. Cockburn and the Air Defence sub-committee questioned the basic assumption of the strategic planning of the COS, but the closest the COS came to discussing this question in their 1954 H-bomb review, submitted to the Salisbury Committee at the end of July, was in their comments that '...the measure of military power in the future will be the ability to wage war with the most up-

²⁴ Ibid.

to-date nuclear weapons'.²⁵

As for ministers, questions about Britain's future deterrent needs were overshadowed by the drive for economies in defence expenditure. It had been expected by ministers that the COS would in their H-bomb review arrive at a strategic appreciation which would reduce defence spending, but this depended upon the COS accepting the short war theory sponsored by the RAF and its ministerial supporters. However, when it came to discussing the character of future nuclear war, the COS yet again ducked the issue. Whatever the belief of the CAS in 'strategic monism', he put his name to a statement which said that '...The results of the First phase are bound to limit considerably the capabilities of the contestants and the scale of their operations, but the war is likely to go on'.²⁶ Expressing the character of future nuclear war in this way ensured that the translation of this general statement into specific patterns of resource allocation between the services was as unclear as ever.

This compromise between the COS was unsatisfactory to ministers who wanted a clear delineation of priorities which would lead to reduced defence spending. Having given the COS

²⁵ CAB 129/69, C (54) 250, July 1954.

²⁶ Ibid.

a chance to come up with new priorities in defence planning, those ministers who had pushed for the 'June Directive' argued the case for yet further cuts in the Fleet Air Arm and service preparations for protracted global war. Churchill agreed and set up yet another ministerial sub-committee to examine what further cuts were possible in defence spending in the light of the H-bomb review. The new ministerial sub-committee was chaired by the Commonwealth Secretary, Lord Swinton, who as Secretary of State for Air in the 1930s, had been vigorous in asserting the RAF's priority in the rearmament programme. Then came Minister of Supply, Sandys, restored to health and his anti-carrier campaign. Finally, there was Birch, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Defence, who had spent the previous months pressing the case of the Air Staff that the V-bombers could provide the vital offensive air capability for all three services. The COS and service ministers were to advise Swinton and his colleagues as required. Alexander, who was still Minister of Defence, was to be in the words of the Prime Minister, '...associated with the inquiry'.²⁷

²⁷ CAB 129/71, C (54) 329, 3 November 1954.

The Swinton Committee And RAF-Navy Inter-Service Rivalry

The Swinton Committee heralded a vigorous assault on what was perceived as the Navy's emerging ambition to usurp the RAF's nuclear bombing role, but the size of that bombing role was even more open to criticism from the Navy in 1954. During their review of H-bomb strategy, McGrigor and Harding seem to have sought from Dickson a willingness to compromise on the size of the V bomber force. The Head of M Branch, Newall, declared in an internal paper to the First Lord, Thomas, that it had been expected by the COS in the drafting of the review that there would be cuts in the proposed size of the medium bomber force. Newall suggested that Dickson had been prepared to compromise, but that the Secretary of State for Air, De L'Isle, and his allies in the Government had been the sticking point.²⁸

The Navy's case in 1954 was based on the assessment that since H-bombs had considerably increased the striking power of the United States SAC, the United Kingdom '...would be foolish to continue with the same plan [size of the nuclear bomber force] that we had before the H bomb era...'²⁹ There was, however, an additional consideration which was seized

²⁸ ADM 205/98, D.P. (54) 10, 5 July 1954.

²⁹ Ibid.

on by the Naval Staff. This was the disjunction between a proposed force of 240 V-bombers and the size of the projected nuclear stockpile, which Newall claimed to be no more than '...20 smallish H-type weapons'.³⁰ Unfortunately, there are no other available papers which discuss the figure for the British nuclear stockpile in 1958, although Newall did make reference in his study to a figure of 100 small bombs by 1957. However, it is not clear why in this internal naval paper, he did not make the point that small atomic weapons could have been carried by the RAF's V-bombers. But since both the Army and Navy were both staking out a claim to have custody of the small tactical atomic weapon, Newall may have been calculating that the RAF would be left with 20 smallish type H-bombs to strike those priority air bases in the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, it was not the RAF but the Navy which once again found itself in a weak position in 1954. Newall, along with the Director of Naval Air Warfare, Captain E.D.G. Lewin and the Navy's Director of Plans, Captain H.C.D. Maclean found themselves in the Summer of 1954 writing papers for the FSL and First Lord which defended the Navy's right to develop a tactical atomic strike capability. The Navy made submissions to the Swinton Committee on the relative

³⁰ Ibid.

vulnerability of aircraft carriers and fixed RAF bases to Soviet pre-emptive strikes. The Naval Staff argued that '...A "Pearl Harbour" against allied bomber airfields may well leave the carriers as the only British surviving sources of nuclear attack'.³¹

The Swinton Committee, however, did not take these assessments seriously, and there was frustration amongst the Naval Staff at what was perceived as the motivated bias of Swinton and his colleagues. If anything, however, Swinton's obvious opposition spurred the Navy even further. The Director of Naval Air Warfare commented that whilst the British nuclear force would contribute to the '...overall bomber threat', there was no need for national target coverage because the '...bomber force has no independent role which will not, in war, adequately be covered by the United States Strategic Air Force'.³² Not surprisingly, given the composition of the committee, the final Swinton report rejected the Navy's strategic analysis and recommended that the V-bomber force be built up to 240 by 1958. The Navy's argument was premised on the acceptability of relying on the United States to destroy those 'survival'

³¹ ADM205/97, Admiralty Comments on D.R. (54) 4th mtg, 14 August 1954.

³² ADM 205/98, Note by Maclean, 14 September 1954.

targets in the Soviet Union, but the Swinton report continued to emphasise that deterrence in concert with the United States did not obviate the requirement for independent target coverage:

The Soviet long range Air Force to-day occupies forty permanent bases, but we know of at least 150 other airfields in European Russia and the Satellites from which these aircraft, and the new Russian jet bombers which are now coming into the force, can operate in war. These bases will doubtless figure amongst the targets to be attacked by the American Strategic Air Force. But we cannot be sure what priority the Americans will accord them in relation to other targets on their list of bombing objectives. Since the very survival of Britain would depend upon the promptness and thoroughness of the counter-attack against these Russian air bases, it is essential that we should ourselves possess and control a bomber force capable of performing this task.³³

This recommendation was supported by the Cabinet and COS with McGrigor taking a different line to his colleagues in the Naval Staff, and accepting the argument that Britain could not divest itself of a weapon which might offer the only means of British survival in nuclear war. McGrigor's reluctance to take up cudgels against the RAF in late 1954 perhaps reflected his appreciation that to counter-attack too strongly against the RAF would be counter-productive in the eyes of ministers unsympathetic to the Navy's case.

³³ CAB 129/71, C (54) 329, 3 November 1954.

Despite this, it is important to realise that as well as endorsing the Air Staff's figure of 240 bombers, the Swinton Committee proposed that future carrier plans be confined to trade protection and this, if implemented, would have sounded the death knell of the NA39. It was this outcome which McGrigor was desperately trying to prevent against the anti-Naval forces in the Government.

Somewhat patronisingly, the Swinton Committee argued it was natural that the Navy would wish to have its share in airpower which '...was growing in importance',³⁴ but contended that with the increasing range of shore based aircraft, the expenditure of what was estimated at £70 million a year on the Fleet Air Arm '...appears to impose a burden disproportionate to the results'.³⁵ As Grove points out, the Swinton Committee used the Navy's old argument of broken-backed war against it. It was argued that the two light fleet carriers which the Admiralty had been planning to use in the trade protection role were insufficient for this task and that the Navy's two heavy strike carriers should be '...manned and equipped for the escort role only'.³⁶ In this role, the anti-Admiralty forces were only

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 112.

too happy to concede that carrier borne aircraft were more effective than shore based ones. Grove thus implies that Swinton and Sandys apparent acceptance of the concept of protracted war, which they had vigorously opposed in the Radical Review, was a cynical manipulation of this argument for political purposes.

Despite being a key forum in strategic decision making, the Swinton Committee did not have the support of the Defence Minister, Alexander. He had accepted the 'June Directive' because of the need for ministerial arbitration between the services in an environment of financial stringency, but was concerned that the proposals contained in the Swinton report so altered the balance of status and honour between the three services as to have detrimental consequences to their morale and efficiency. Alexander was not only opposed to Swinton on these grounds, but was also furious at Churchill for having set up the committee in the first place. He believed this demonstrated a lack of confidence in his abilities as Minister of Defence. Thus, as in the Radical Review, the Navy found themselves with a supporter in the Government for their carrier case and one who was prepared to challenge Swinton's recommendation for going all out for a force of 240 V-bombers by 1958. Unfortunately, he then proceeded to resign on the ostensible grounds that his

advice over the Navy's carriers had been rejected.³⁷

Alexander's dislike of the Swinton report, however, was muted compared to that of the Naval Staff, which was annoyed that Swinton had ignored the counter arguments that had been put by the Navy in defence of its future carrier strike role. Although the Admiralty had been careful in these papers not to emphasise the future potential of the NA39 in the strategic role, they did offer cogent rationales for naval nuclear war-fighting forces. Nonetheless, the arguments which came out of the Navy in 1954 belie the claim that the Admiralty was solely thinking in terms of 'broken-backed' war. The Naval Staff were increasingly coming to think in terms of nuclear operations continuing throughout the duration of war, a strategy which Drax had argued for in 1953.

The Navy's role in protracted atomic war was prominent in a paper written by the Naval Staff in October 1954.³⁸ The paper postulated that, even after an initial blitz against the United Kingdom, the country would not surrender.

³⁷ The Defence Minister was uncomfortable with the bureaucratic in-fighting of Whitehall, and the carrier debate of late 1954 seems to have provided the occasion rather than the cause of Alexander's resignation.

³⁸ ADM 205/102, R51/1232/1, 1 October 1954.

Reinforcement by sea would thus be an imperative of British survival. In the initial phase of nuclear war, Soviet naval forces were postulated to be at sea, and it was argued that Soviet submarines and cruisers would engage in hostilities throughout a nuclear war. One of the main arguments of the RAF and the Radical Review sub-committee - although it will be recalled not of the CAS - was the claim that the V-bombers would be more effective in attacking naval bases in the Murmansk/Archangel region of the Soviet Union. The Navy's retort to this argument was that since a 'bolt from the blue' was not expected, the Soviet Navy would have time to disperse to sea during a crisis and this placed a premium on the Navy's strike capabilities to hunt Soviet submarines and deal with the Sverdlov cruisers. Thus, on the assumption of political warning time, the Navy could claim a mission of sea denial from the outset of war.

This strategy was an optimal one for a service fighting for its survival in a hostile bureaucratic environment, since it enabled the Navy to ride in on the nuclear wave, without succumbing to the short war mentality of the RAF and its supporters. By October 1954, the First Lord, Thomas, was sufficiently worried about the Navy's future to write to Admiral the Earl Mountbatten, Commander in Chief of the Mediterranean fleet, (and Thomas's favorite to succeed

McGrigor as FSL) expressing his concern that '...fierce RAF propaganda, overstatement and exaggerated claims inadequately countered, to say nothing of wild and faulty strategical notions...have been accepted wholesaley by those who ought to know better'.³⁹ Thomas considered that '...Roddie McGrigor has done his best', but that '...without the essential political support...things seemed to be going from bad to worse'.⁴⁰

Thomas's letter of October 1954 was, however, unduly pessimistic in the light of the support which McGrigor found for the Navy's case, when the Swinton report was debated before the full Cabinet on the 6 November 1954. Given the FSL's apparent support for the Air Staff's figure of 240 V-bombers by 1958, it was not surprising that he did not base the Navy's case on the more hawkish arguments of the Naval Staff. Rather, McGrigor argued that a naval strike capability should be seen in the context of Anglo-American naval planning, an appeal which was likely to carry greater weight with cost-cutting ministers than strictly strategic rationales. McGrigor commented:

³⁹ H266 BA, Thomas to Mountbatten, 27 October 1954.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The Allied Striking Fleet...must contain carriers capable of dealing with Russian cruisers. The United States Government had asked us to contribute three heavy carriers to it; and, although we were proposing to contribute only two, it was essential that these should be equipped for this role'.⁴¹

The new Minister of Supply, Selwyn Lloyd, came to the Navy's defence by arguing that Swinton's proposed reductions in the naval air programme would cause major dislocations in the aircraft industry.⁴² Alexander's opposition to Swinton and his resignation the previous month over the carrier question also helped McGrigor's case. Moreover, the new Defence Minister, Harold Macmillan, proposed that the future use of the heavy carriers should be examined in greater detail in consultation with the Admiralty. Churchill, who had become virulently anti-Navy and anti-carrier by late 1954, disliked this and said that '...he was not convinced that the large and increasing resources which would be absorbed by the Fleet Air Arm were justified by the contribution which it would make to our defences'.⁴³ Despite this, the Prime Minister was too weak to force through cuts in the Navy's proposed carrier programme. The Cabinet endorsed the suggestion of Macmillan and, as Grove argues, the Fleet Air

⁴¹ CAB 127/27, C.C. 73 (54), 6 November 1954.

⁴² Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 114.

⁴³ CAB 127/27, C.C. 73 (54), 6 November 1954.

Arm's '...future was no longer in doubt, at least as regards 1955-56'.⁴⁴

The Navy's success in maintaining its right to develop a carrier borne atomic capability did not stem from winning the strategic argument in November 1954. It was not that ministers were persuaded of the Navy's strategic case in an age of H-bombs. Rather, economic and political factors favoured the Navy's position in late 1954. The Chancellor, Butler, was pleased with the efforts the Navy had made to reduce spending on its minesweeper programme, which had been an important concession to the dominant ministerial view that extensive preparations for protracted nuclear war were not possible in the existing financial climate.⁴⁵ The limited financial savings promised by implementation of Swinton's recommendations, something like £2.5 million per year or 0.125% of the defence budget was an important factor, as was the reduced influence of the anti-Navy factor in the Government. Sandys had been neutralised with his transfer to Housing and Lloyd and the new Minister of Defence, Macmillan, were supportive of the Navy's case. Macmillan was sensitive to the domestic political costs of forcing through cuts in the Navy's carrier programme,

⁴⁴ Grove, Vanguard to Trident, p. 114.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

recognising the '...futility of forcing a major defence crisis to get marginal savings, especially with a change of leadership and an election in prospect'.⁴⁶ Consequently, a somewhat fortuitous combination of factors ensured that the anti-Naval forces in the Government were unable to drive through Swinton's programme of cuts in the Navy's carrier programme. The Admiralty's improved position in the policy making process was confirmed in a paper by Macmillan in January 1955 in which he commented:

The relative roles of land and carrier based aircraft in the kind of Atlantic battle which might take place in the early stages of a war will continue to be fiercely debated. I do not feel able to resolve the problem. Meanwhile, apart from strategic theory, I think we have a practical question to answer. Will the financial savings which would result from reducing the aircraft complement of the heavy carriers be sufficient to justify a course of action which must be damaging both to the efficiency and to the prestige of the fleet? I have no doubt about the answer. I therefore recommend that present N.A.T.O. assignment of the heavy carriers should continue and that they should be provided with their full complement of aircraft.⁴⁷

Macmillan's comments are fascinating because they confirm Schilling's proposition that there is no objective set of laws by which policy makers can resolve competing strategic arguments. In the absence of strategic consensus, the

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 115.

⁴⁷ CAB 131/15, D. (55) 1, 7 January 1955.

Minister of Defence was arbitrating the issue on grounds on which he felt safe - politics and economics.

Consequently, the implication of the preceding analysis is that the COSC played a minimal role in Swinton's deliberations over the Navy's carrier plans. As in the Radical Review, the Naval Staff hoped that the COSC might play the role of advocate against ministerial impositions. However, the COS did not oppose Swinton any more effectively in 1954 than they had the Radical Review sub-committee in 1953. On the 14 September 1954, the Head of M Branch, Newall, had written to McGrigor asking him if it was possible that the '...the Chiefs of Staff could make an effective contribution, corporately'⁴⁸ in support of the Navy's case, and the new VCNS, William Davis, had stressed that the emasculation of the Navy's atomic arm did not meet the needs of '...Global Strategy upon which the COS are unanimous'.⁴⁹ He asserted that Swinton's attempts to take away the Navy's strike aircraft were '...somewhat equivalent to taking away the Army's artillery or the Air Force's big bombs'.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ ADM 205/98, Newall to McGrigor, 14 September 1954.

⁴⁹ See ADM 205/98, Paper by Davis, 17 September 1954.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that the COS played the role of advocate against the Swinton Committee's proposals in relation to the Navy, there is equally none to suggest that there was chronic inter-service rivalry between the COS over this issue. Dickson had privately agreed with McGrigor in December 1953 that the Navy should develop the NA39, and in March 1955, the COS approved a DRPC report on naval strike aircraft which recommended that '...work on the NA39 should proceed as rapidly as possible, recognising that this aircraft cannot be ready before 1960'.⁵¹

The argument for the NA39 had been presented in terms of a capability to destroy Soviet surface ships and land targets, but this latter factor was played down in Admiralty submissions for fear of exacerbating the concerns of those in the Government and RAF who believed the Navy wanted to usurp the RAF's strategic strike role. Nevertheless, at the same time as the future of the Navy's tactical strike was being discussed in the Swinton Committee, the Naval Staff peered into the future and staked the Admiralty's claim to be the carriers of Britain's strategic nuclear weapons in the future - a position which, if accepted as the basis of future naval strategy, was the equivalent of throwing down the gauntlet to the RAF:

⁵¹ CAB 131/15, D. (55) 12, 9 March 1955.

Ultimately the nuclear offensive will be mounted by ballistic rockets. As an interim measure these weapons are likely to be ship launched - possibly from submarines - until longer ranged rockets can be developed. During this stage the Navy will be able to provide a mobile and self-sufficient contribution to the offensive (and the deterrent) which can be made independent of support from the United Kingdom.⁵²

McGrigor's success in securing the right to develop a tactical atomic strike capability provided the foundations for greater Admiralty ambitions in the nuclear field. Moreover, if McGrigor's nuclear horizons were limited to the NA39, the Navy in the figure of the new FSL, Lord Mountbatten,⁵³ had a man with the highest political connections whose aspiration was to base the Navy's position in the defence establishment on its claim to a strategic nuclear role. That this was Mountbatten's intention can be seen in a letter dated 6 November 1954, which he wrote to the VCNS, Davis, and in which he made clear his anxiety to get a policy settled on the long term future of the Navy. 'Once we can obtain government approval to the fact that we are the mobile large scale rocket carriers of the future

⁵² ADM 205/102, R51/1232//1, 1 October 1954.

⁵³ Mountbatten replaced McGrigor as FSL on the 18 April 1955, but had been officially invited to be the new FSL on the 21 October 1954.

then everything else will fall into place'.⁵⁴

Such nuclear ambitions for the Navy challenged the existing consensus of the COS in the nuclear age that Britain's nuclear delivery system should be land-based and housed in RAF bombers. The remainder of this chapter discusses the bases of British nuclear strategy in 1955 and the growing divisions between the services which continued to afflict nuclear weapons planning and policy.

The Long Term Defence Programme And Nuclear Strategy In 1955

Churchill's retirement as Prime Minister in April 1955 and the succession of Eden to the premiership heralded changes in Britain's defence organisation. Macmillan, who according to Howard, had spent his six months in office complaining about his lack of power over the service ministers and COS,⁵⁵ was replaced by Selwyn Lloyd as Minister of Defence. Macmillan's frustration was shared by Eden who considered that the CDC had failed to '...provide the general guidance on long term strategy which was required'.⁵⁶ According to Dickson's reminiscences, Eden was concerned that the

⁵⁴ H266 BA, Mountbatten to Davis, 6 November 1954.

⁵⁵ Howard, op. cit., p. 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

existing organisation for defence was not likely to achieve a '...balanced and appropriate defence policy in future years'.⁵⁷ The new Prime Minister recognised that the basic problem was the power of the service ministries vis-a-vis the Minister of Defence and sought greater centralisation of power in the Ministry of Defence. In addition, Eden believed that he and his senior ministers should not have to concern themselves '...with all the detail concerning the content and cost of the service programmes', and a strengthened Ministry would therefore ease the burden on the Cabinet Defence Committee'.⁵⁸

Eden's reforms inevitably raised the question as to the future of the COSC which under the existing system was responsible for presenting strategic advice to the Cabinet Defence Committee. The reform, which Eden initiated in 1955, was to create a fourth member of the COSC who would act as its permanent chairman, with Dickson chosen as the first incumbent of the new post. Since this reform did not come into effect until the end of 1955, the actual workings of the new system are beyond the scope of the thesis. However,

⁵⁷ NA99 BA, The Reminiscences of Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir William Dickson, 1978.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

reform of the COSC in 1955 suggests that the existing system was seen by policy makers as having failed in its task of providing the Government with coherent strategic advice. Since this question goes to the heart of the thesis, the significance of the 1955 reform will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

Despite ministerial attempts in the Radical Review and H-bomb review to base future planning on the short war strategy, both the Army and Navy continued to operate on the basis of a long nuclear war. The Admiralty refused to accept that H-bombs had made long war planning obsolete, and contended against their air colleagues that global nuclear war might last '...months or even years...with each side striving to bring the fighting to a close to its own advantage'.⁵⁹ The Navy argued that intelligence estimates pointed to the Soviets planning on the basis of protracted nuclear war, and that the task of the allied navies would be to stop the Soviet Navy from isolating the European continent and thus preventing what was labelled as its 'resuscitation'.⁶⁰

It should not be thought, however, that the Navy was alone

⁵⁹ DEFE 4/78, J.P. (55) 61 (Final), 8 July 1955.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

in pressing the long war strategy in July 1955, although there is little doubt that it was most vigorous in the prosecution of this case. The War Office, under the military leadership of Templer, was also thinking in terms of protracted nuclear war. The Army was arguing that its forces were required for cold war operations, fighting the land battle in Europe and defending the Middle East and Far East, and contributing to final victory in global war. Templer's biographer comments:

Gerald expressed the War Office view that such a war would be nuclear...Such a war would start with an intensive and terrible phase of nuclear bombardment...if both sides still had any effective forces with the will to fight, even though central control had broken down, there might well be a strange situation of uncoordinated fighting going on...A third world war, if it came, would not be over in days, weeks or even months.⁶¹

Thus, defence expenditure continued to rise as the Army and Navy continued to make conventional provision for surviving global nuclear war. It was recognised in the Government that this situation could not continue indefinitely, since Britain was likely to end up trying to do everything and would end up being weak everywhere. In April 1955, the Eden Government initiated a major review of defence policy under

⁶¹ J. Cloake, Templer. Tiger of Malaya: The Life of Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer (London: Harrup, 1985), p. 335.

the new Minister of Defence, Selwyn Lloyd.

Lloyd began the Long Term Defence Programme, LTDP, by asking the COS for recommendations as to where further economies could be made in the defence budget. Once again, the COS were being asked to provide a coherent defence policy which would meet the needs of security and economy in the H-bomb age. The COS advised on 12 July 1955, that if cuts had to be made, then '...forces, equipment, and stockpiling designed primarily for use in global war'⁶² was the only area where reductions might be contemplated. The sub-committee on the LTDP discussed this recommendation, but despite having agreed to the statement in the COSC, the FSL, Mountbatten reaffirmed that the Navy would have a vital role to play in the 'resuscitation' phase of global nuclear war.

The Army and Navy thus continued to espouse the need for a balanced force structure in the H-bomb age, something which was unacceptable to the 'strategic monists' in the Government who continued to believe that the short war strategy was a strategic and economic necessity. The most outspoken proponent of this view in 1955 was the Secretary of State for Air, De L'Isle who wrote to Lloyd on 14 July 1955, pointing out that it was ludicrous that money was

⁶² See CAB 131/16, DC (55) 43, 14 October 1955.

being spent on the '...means to bring food in over the beaches after bombardment by "H" bombs while cutting back on the air defence system of Great Britain to the point of absurdity'.⁶³ Furthermore, he provided a compelling critique of the arguments of the Army and Navy in their efforts to provide for the widest spectrum of future contingencies:

We used to talk about the alternatives of hot and cold war. Now we have tepid and limited wars as well. So a justification can readily be found for each item of service expenditure, actual or contingent, under one of these heads'.⁶⁴

De L'Isle concluded with the judgement that such hedging of bets might enable the services to avoid overt conflict, but it '...will certainly not make agreement on principle or practice easier, especially if we weaken in our declared intention of putting the deterrent first'.⁶⁵

Although De L'Isle wanted to define the competition between the services in terms of nuclear versus conventional roles and missions, it is not evident that this was the interpretation of the COS. During late July, Lloyd had tried to define the scope of future service responsibilities and

⁶³ DEFE 7/963, Secretary of State for Air to Minister of Defence, 14 July 1955.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

had said that the Navy and Army should be configured primarily for cold and warm wars, and should make no additional preparations for conducting protracted global thermonuclear war. Nonetheless, this left open the role of the Army and Navy in tactical atomic war, and it was this issue on which there seems to have been a significant shift of position in the COSC. The key shift which had taken place by July 1955 was recognition that the use of tactical atomic weapons, in a theater outside of Europe, need not result in global thermonuclear war. That Cockburn and the Air-Defence sub-committee's thesis had become the accepted strategic wisdom can be seen in the endorsement by the COS of a JPS paper of the 8 July 1955, which stated:

We can envisage, therefore, a limited war involving the use of tactical atomic weapons taking place in the Far East or perhaps in the Middle East, but it would not be possible for a limited war to take place in Europe without developing into global war.⁶⁶

Further confirmation of this can be seen in Templer's assertion that the COS '...definitely envisaged a limited war e.g. in S.E. Asia in which nuclear weapons would be used in the tactical role'.⁶⁷ Such notions were important to Navy and Army planners, since it enabled both to stake a

⁶⁶ DEFE 4/78, J.P. (55) 61 (Final), 8 July 1955.

⁶⁷ DEFE 7/963, MISC/P (55), 27 July 1955.

further claim to a share in the custody of the small tactical bomb was which under development and expected to be available for deployment in 1956/57. De L'Isle's opposition to planning for cold and limited wars was based on his belief that conventional provision was anachronistic in the H-bomb age, but it also seems to have reflected his concern that provision for the strategic nuclear deterrent might be undermined by development of a tactical atomic strike capability on land and at sea.

Nevertheless, the shift of position in the COSC over the use of atomic weapons out of area, did not mean that the COS had accepted the American position that such weapons could be used in Europe without conflict escalating to global nuclear war. If anything, the COS were in 1955 to be even more explicit in their rejection of the idea of a European war confined to small nuclear weapons. In response to further pressures from the Eisenhower Administration to draw distinctions between tactical weapons and H-bombs, a consensus existed between political and military officials that no such distinction was tenable or desirable. Foreign Secretary, and Minister of Defence, Lloyd, pointed out to the Cabinet that

The Chiefs of Staff...have considered the American proposition. In their view, there is no point in the gradation of nuclear weapons at which any such

dividing line can be drawn...Even if it were possible scientifically and militarily...[an] attempt to divide them into those which are small and therefore morally justifiable and those which are large and therefore immoral would inevitably reduce their deterrent value as a whole.⁶⁸

Similar reservations were to reveal themselves, in a related context, when the indefatigable Admiral Buzzard, still anxiously attempting to change the basis of British strategy, began his campaign for a posture of graduated deterrence. In doing so, he was once again rejecting the military and ethical fundamentals of existing policy. Graduated deterrence, as its name implies, was predicated on the tenability of distinctions between categories of nuclear weapons and hence on the possibility of limiting even a nuclear war.

Buzzard's thesis was taken sufficiently seriously by the COS for it to be submitted to the JPS for further examination. The COS accepted the submission of the JPS which contended that preparing to limit nuclear war, in the belief that this would serve to enhance the credibility of the deterrent, would in fact have the opposite effect of eroding the deterrent to war itself.⁶⁹ The COS said that Buzzard's

⁶⁸ CAB 129/74, C. (55) 95, 5 April 1955.

⁶⁹ DEFE 5/63, C.O.S. (55) 341, 16 December 1955.

thesis was '...born of some confusion of thought'.⁷⁰ What separated Buzzard from the COS, however, was not lucidity of strategic thought, but different perceptions of the nature of deterrence, and more fundamentally, a divergent view of the very nature of war itself: for Buzzard, acts of thermonuclear violence surpassed the boundaries of war as a rational activity.

Buzzard's thesis of graduated deterrence was based on the conviction that deterrence might collapse, and that it was a moral and strategic imperative to make preparation for such an eventuality. Set against this, the COS believed that deterrence was robust, but that implementation of Buzzard's strategy would erode this stability. After all, the shift of position in the COSC over the controllability of peripheral wars surely derived from a growing appreciation of the prospective stability at the core of the superpower strategic relationship in the H-bomb age. However, as far as Britain was concerned, this stability might have to be purchased at a price. Cockburn, as described above, had suggested that the mutual deterrence between East and West would lead to an increased requirement for independent British deterrence. This added a further complicating factor to considerations of the size of the British nuclear

⁷⁰ Ibid.

force, which was to be reflected, in the ambivalent rationales presented during 1955.

The Size And Shape Of The British Nuclear Force

The prospect that Britain might require independent capabilities was underlined by the COS in June 1955. In response to the revived question of Britain accepting a H-bomb moratorium, the COS had agreed with the advice of Chief Scientific Adviser, Brundrett, and Foreign Office representatives, that

It was strategically unacceptable to rely entirely on the United States to provide the deterrent. Moreover with the rapidly increasing yield of nuclear weapons it would become progressively more difficult for the United States to come to our aid if we alone were threatened in view of the consequences to her of such action.⁷¹

British nuclear strategy in the late 1940s had centred on the acquisition of an operational nuclear force by the late 1950s. The clear inference from the prospective vulnerability of the American homeland was that this would have to be sustained into the ballistic rocket era of the 1960s. Three principal options presented themselves for aconsideration: continuing development of the IRBM Blue Streak; furtherance of the supersonic bomber; and technical

⁷¹ DEFE 8/52, C.O.S. (S) (55) 5th mtg, 15 June 1955.

enhancement of the V-bombers.

Brundrett was a passionate supporter of Blue Streak, believing that the arguments in favour of a British ballistic rocket were 'unanswerable'.⁷² The programme had been initiated in 1953, with design information from the United States. Brundrett also believed that a supersonic bomber would serve as a stop gap between the end of the operational life of the V-bombers, expected in the early 1960s, and the introduction of ballistic missile technology. Not surprisingly, the supersonic bomber had its strongest support from the Air Staff.

Despite projecting ahead to the likely shape of the deterrent in the early 1960s, the Air Staff's more immediate pre-occupation was to ensure that the V-bombers remained the centre-piece of the nation's deterrent and that the target figure for the size of the force was adhered to. In April 1955, the Cabinet Defence Committee had confirmed its approval for the building up of the V-bomber force to the figure of 240 by 1958.⁷³ Ministers had justified this figure on the grounds that anything smaller would entail taking

⁷² See DEFE 4/74, Confidential Annex to C.O.S. (54) 128th mtg, 1 December 1954.

⁷³ CAB 131/16, D.C. (55) 7, 28 April 1955.

risks with the nation's security. This echoed the comments of Churchill to the House of Commons in March 1955:

Unless we make a contribution of our own...we can not be sure that in an emergency the resources of other powers would be planned exactly as we would wish, or that the targets which threaten us most would be given what we consider the necessary priority.⁷⁴

Despite this, the future size of the RAF's nuclear force was still the subject of great debate. At the same time as the COS were reaffirming their belief in an independent nuclear deterrent, there was growing disquiet within the Army and Navy as to the inroads which the strategic nuclear force might make on defence expenditure.

Given that it had been the Navy which had spearheaded criticisms of the V-force in 1953-4, it was somewhat surprising that it should have been the Army which was most vigorous in 1955 in opposing the target figure of 240. In discussions of the size of the V-bomber force in the sub-committee on the LTDP on 12 July 1955, Dickson provided the standard RAF defence that, politically, perceptions of force strength were critical to Anglo-American planning and, militarily, such numbers were vital to the effectiveness of the allied offensive. In response to this, Templer asserted

⁷⁴ House of Commons, Vol 537 col 1897, 1 March 1955.

that the risk of war was not a function of Western nuclear superiority, but '...depended rather on the growing Russian realisation of the implications of nuclear war'.⁷⁵ The CIGS seems to have been arguing for a minimum deterrent posture. However, this did not necessarily mean a reduction in Britain's bomber force, since the issue which surely had to be addressed was the amount of damage required for effective deterrence. Nevertheless, implicit in his argument was the contention that Britain could make do with a reduced force.

This was explicitly stated by Secretary of State for War, Anthony Head, who argued that the V-bomber force should be reduced to allow greater provision for conventional operations. Moreover, Head doubted whether Soviet risk-taking would be affected by the British contribution to the allied bomber force. These ideas were bitterly opposed by De L'Isle who seems to have had little doubt about Templer's intentions and who retorted with the view that it was '...vital to the effectiveness of the deterrent that the West should be superior in the means of delivery of nuclear weapons'.⁷⁶

The Army's argument against the V-bomber force did not

⁷⁵ DEFE 7/963, MISC/M (55) 69, 12 July 1955.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

challenge the basic rationales which had been advanced by the RAF in 1953-4. Head and Templer were basing their challenge on the assumption that Britain's nuclear force was not, independently, of significant deterrent value, but the V-bomber force had not been justified in these terms. To that extent, the Army and RAF protagonists in this debate were talking past each other since they were starting from different assumptions. Set against this, both accepted the essential notion of deterrence in concert: for Dickson, the 'twin pronged' strategy was still the basis of nuclear planning, whereas for Templer and Head the concert minimised the need for independent British operations. It can be seen, therefore, that for all the tentative questioning of the American nuclear guarantee by those like Cockburn and Brundrett, the mainstream dialogue in July 1955 remained firmly located in an alliance context.

In August 1955, however, a more radical appreciation was proffered by the new Minister of Supply, Reginald Maudling, in a letter to Lloyd. Maudling struck a strong chord of agreement with the arguments of the Army:

We must recognise that any provision we make to add to the United States striking power is in practice more a political than a military provision. It is sometimes described as the entrance fee to the club. I doubt myself whether there is much wisdom in paying an entry fee so high so that you cannot afford to patronise the

bar when you get there.⁷⁷

Maudling was not challenging reliance on a strategy of American nuclear retaliation, but he was questioning the wisdom of Britain's development of an independent nuclear deterrent. For Maudling, the key consideration was the opportunity cost of the British nuclear force. Although global nuclear war was the gravest danger facing the British state, it was not the most likely. In the H-bomb age, low-level challenges on the periphery were the most probable occurrences, and there, in contrast to the prevention of nuclear war, Britain could make a distinctive contribution. Thus, like Tizard years earlier, Maudling was arguing for a division of labour between Britain and the United States in meeting the Soviet strategic challenge in the nuclear age.

Maudling's paper was circulated but appears to have found no support. Although there is no reason to doubt that the COS were totally unsympathetic to such heresy, its most vehement critic was De L'Isle: 'I had thought', he objected, 'that the plea that we rest solely upon the power of the United States Strategic Air Command had already been considered and rejected'.⁷⁸ Indeed, De L'Isle was insistent that the

⁷⁷ Air 19/660, Maudling to Lloyd, 30 August 1955.

⁷⁸ DEFE 7/964, De L'Isle to Lloyd, 8 September 1955.

emerging balance between United States and Soviet nuclear forces was such as to make Britain's contribution to the combined assault that much more vital. It was contended by the Air Staff, that of the 950 SAC aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons, only 650 would be available. In these circumstances, the RAF maintained that independent target coverage was an even greater necessity. The British force would deliver '...150 nuclear sorties in the first wave...and by its quality provides an insurance against shortcomings in the performance of U.S. aircraft'.⁷⁹

Hitherto, different visions of future war had coexisted with consensus on the necessity for an independent nuclear force. However, Maudling's paper was the first criticism from a senior member of the Cabinet against Britain's development of an independent nuclear force. In addition, whilst there had been disagreements on the scale of that force, there had been no direct opposition from the services to the pursuit of operational nuclear independence. Nonetheless, the Army's comments of July 1955 were portents of increasing controversy over the nature and requirement of a British nuclear force.

⁷⁹ Air 8/2044, Air Staff comments on Maudling's paper of 30 August 1955, 9 September 1955.

The Minister of Defence, Lloyd, was pressuring the services to live within the Chancellor's proposed ceiling of £1,580 million for 1955/56. However, the extent to which this was generating problems for the services can be seen in the unprecedented step of the COS in September 1955 asking the JPS to undertake an examination of the disagreements between the services. The COS seem to have wanted the JPS to play the role of strategic critics exposing to the COS the underlying conflicts and disagreements between the services. Not surprisingly, the JPS recorded the continuing inability of the services to agree on the nature and length of future nuclear war:

The Royal Air Force have based their cuts on the assumption that a global war would be short and decisive, whereas the Royal Navy and the Army assume a subsequent phase, in which some form of major fighting would continue.⁸⁰

However, the JPS also attested that the consensus within the military on the need for an independent nuclear deterrent was becoming a fragile one:

The Air Ministry view is that if this country is to retain her stature as a world power she must have a nuclear bomber force of sufficient size to act as a deterrent in its own right and to take a significant share in planning and executing global war operations. It is the Admiralty view, without denying the importance of airpower, that in peace

⁸⁰ DEFE 4/79, J.P. (55) Note 19, (Final), 4 October 1955.

and Cold War the Navy represents the most readily available method, in visible and mobile form, of forwarding H.M.G.'s foreign and colonial policy in all parts of the world. The Admiralty and War Office also consider that, so long as an effective deterrent is wielded by the U.S.A., the limited U.K. resources are better employed in providing forces to meet her own ends in cold and limited wars by reducing the size of the bomber force.⁸¹

In fact, the Air Staff construed the Admiralty view to be even less sympathetic towards the independent deterrent. In a paper of late September, A. Earle, ACAS, asserted that the Navy was '...likely to question the whole concept of United Kingdom contribution to the main deterrent...' and to urge that '...its provision should be left to the United States'.⁸² If this was an accurate portrayal of the Navy's position, it was the first time that one service had advocated that Britain should bow out of the strategic nuclear weapons business and make its contribution solely in the conventional role.

However, as discussed earlier in the chapter, the Navy's objection was less to the principle of the independent deterrent and more to the RAF as its exclusive carrier. Although Lloyd had said in July 1955 that the Navy could not

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See Air 8/2044, Earle to Dickson, Air Ministry File No 11/18, 30 September 1955.

at present make a contribution to the strategic nuclear deterrent, Mountbatten had expressed the view that '...if the Americans succeeded in developing a thermo-nuclear weapon for delivery from the submarine, and were prepared and able to give us full details, we could not possibly afford not to take advantage of their offer'.⁸³

Although at the end of 1955, it remained somewhat unclear how far the Navy was committed to an independent nuclear force, the FSL presented a forthright articulation of the view that if Britain was to stay in the nuclear weapons business, its future deterrent force should be sea based. Consequently, it was perhaps somewhat fortunate for Mountbatten and the Navy that the Air Staff did not take too seriously their claims to be the future carriers of the deterrent. The RAF could not countenance the idea that carrier borne strike planes, or nuclear powered submarines could possibly challenge the manned bomber, and later the land based ballistic rocket, Blue Streak, as the mainstay of Britain's striking force.

In the face of continuing disagreement over the character of future nuclear war, and emerging conflict over the provision of Britain's future nuclear deterrent, the JPS were unable

⁸³ DEFE 7/963, MISC/P (55), 27 July 1955.

to rise above inter-service rivalries and offer a set of prescriptions for future strategy. The extent of their failure can be seen in the fact that they recommended a small increase in the defence budget of about £40 million which it was hoped would alleviate the immediate pressure on resources between the services. Once again, the COS proved no more capable arbiters, and were content to let the situation ride, passing on the recommendation of the JPS to the Minister of Defence. Lloyd was under pressure from De L'Isle and the Air Staff to make a firm decision on strategic priorities, but he vacillated on the issue and one can agree with Rosecrance that the cuts which were made in defence spending in 1955 '...were among the most balanced of the period before Suez'.⁸⁴ One consequence of Lloyd's regime of 'equal misery' was that by November 1955, the Cabinet had reversed its earlier decision not to reduce the size of the V-bomber force, and had reluctantly agreed to cut back the planned force of medium bombers from 240 to 200.⁸⁵

Given the diversity of views expressed during the previous

⁸⁴ Rosecrance, op. cit., p. 190.

⁸⁵ For a detailed discussion of the cut-back in the V-bomber force in November 1955, see M. Navias, 'Strengthening the Deterrent: The British Bomber Force Debate, 1955-6' in Journal of Strategic Studies, (Forthcoming August 1988).

months, it is not surprising to record that there was no firm strategic consensus to support this number. There is no evidence to support Malone's contention that the British had been swayed by the argument that, given the enormous explosive power of the H-bomb, Britain could make do with a smaller V-bomber force.⁸⁶ Rather, the compelling consideration seems to have been financial and not strategic. Thus, at the end of the first decade of the nuclear age, important issues about Britain's future deterrent posture remained to be resolved, but the necessity to decide these against the backdrop of increasingly pervasive economic constraints was foreshadowed in the Eden Government's bomber force decisions of 1955.

Conclusion

The 1954 H-bomb review, and the 1955 LTDP, were dominated by the perennial search for an affordable security policy, to meet the Soviet strategic challenge in the H-bomb age. Ministers hoped that with the advent of the H-bomb, those reductions in defence expenditure which had been foreshadowed by the GSP, and the Radical Review, would be forthcoming. However, in submissions on the character of future nuclear war, the COS presented ministers with a

⁸⁶ See Malone, *op. cit.*, p. 88 and Ibid.

classic compromise between contending service interests. Like the 1952 GSP, this was sufficiently ambiguous to enable the COS to reconcile their competitive interests.

Of course, it could be argued that such a submission by the COS was the basis for rational defence and strategic policy in the nuclear age. 'Strategic pluralism' was one response to the demands of contingency planning in the uncertainties of the H-bomb era. However, as in the 1952 GSP, insistence upon long war provision was the price of service agreement in the COSC. The only difference in the H-bomb review and the LTDP was that the Navy was not alone in advancing the case for long war nuclear planning. The parallel with the 1952 GSP is instructive. The COS sought to present ministers with a united front, but not because they wanted to play the role of advocate - there was no strategic consensus upon which to base policy advocacy. Rather, the COS considered that it was their responsibility to present the Cabinet with collective advice. Thus, this case study of the H-bomb review and the LTDP seems to confirm Snyder's argument that the COS were sensitive to the need to preserve an image of military professionalism.

However, if the COS sought to maintain an image of military professionalism, their failure to come up with reductions in

defence expenditure led to yet further ministerial impositions in the form of the Swinton Committee and the LTDP. The latter actually led to changes in the machinery of defence policy making. Thus, the irony was that in seeking to maintain unity within the COSC, the COS rendered the existing system impotent and ineffectual in the eyes of ministers. Although the COS had made an important contribution to policy debate in the late 1940s by playing the role of strategic critics, this option was denied to them in the H-bomb review because policy makers were agreed on a posture of 'strategic monism' The COSC was rendered ineffectual as an advocate against the 'strategic monists' in the Cabinet because, as in the Radical Review, different bargaining advantages accrued to the services from attempts at ministerial control. Once again, it was the RAF which was the prime beneficiary and the Navy which was the most threatened by the domination of the Government by the 'strategic monists'.

Crowe argues that the advent of the H-bomb '...threatened the Navy's most cherished concepts, threw its strategical thinking into disarray, and threatened its very survival.'⁸⁷ Vice-Admiral Gretton commented that,

⁸⁷ Crowe, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

Many Naval officers often wondered...whether their airmen's colleagues were not right and whether the Admiralty's views were really reconcilable with reality...They played on, however, out of loyalty to their own service and also because of an instinct which they could not support with sound logic that armies and Navies were not outdated...⁸⁸

Despite Gretton's comments, the Admiralty did not exhibit defeatism in the policy planning process. In fact, the opposite was the case, with the Naval Staff arguing that the advent of the H-bomb actually strengthened the case which they had presented in the Radical Review. Moreover, whilst the Navy's search for a strategic doctrine in 1954-5, can be explained in bureaucratic terms, it was the changing strategic environment which forced the Navy to adapt its strategic concepts to the nuclear age. The Navy's argument progressed beyond the idea of 'broken-backed' war contained in the GSP, to encompass the idea of nuclear operations continuing throughout the duration of war. Furthermore, the strategic analysis which emerged from the Naval Staff belies the claim that they were playing along out of loyalty to service. Rather, the Admiralty marshalled a powerful case against what they saw as the strategic fallacies of the RAF's argument, presenting an alternative strategic philosophy to that which dominated government thinking.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Ibid.

In the Radical Review, the Navy had sought to present its case in terms of furthering the requirements of nuclear strategy as defined by the COS. However, in discussions surrounding the H-bomb review and the LTDP, the Navy sought to alter the terms of strategic debate within the Government and COSC. The Naval Staff argued that greater reliance could be placed on the United States SAC, but this was an argument which was countered by the RAF. The latter claimed that if the Soviet Union had H-bombs, the requirements of damage limitation were likely to become even greater. Nonetheless, in challenging the strategic orthodoxy, the Naval Staff did not persuade the COSC, which accepted the RAF's argument that the British nuclear force might then be a vital addition to the allied striking capability. This can be seen in their endorsement of the Swinton Report and their rejection of Maudling's suggestion that Britain might opt out of the strategic nuclear weapons business.

As with Dickson's support for McGrigor over the NA39, McGrigor seems to have supported the recommendations of Dickson in relation to the size of the V-bomber force in late 1954. He may have calculated that to attack too strongly against the RAF might be counter-productive and play into the hands of the Navy's enemies. But it bears serious consideration that in the light of the arguments of

Dickson in late 1953, McGrigor believed that the Navy's claim to a tactical atomic strike role was not incompatible with the RAF's case for its medium bomber force. The basis of nuclear strategy in the GSP had been the requirement for British damage limitation and the unreliability of depending on the Americans for the nuclear air offensive. Swinton sustained these strategic rationales into the H-bomb age, and it is perhaps not surprising to record that McGrigor's allegiance was therefore to the collective strategy of the COS as against the articulations of his Naval Staff.

His successor, however, adopted a different philosophy towards the British nuclear force. Despite the arguments of his Naval Staff in 1955, Mountbatten seems to have accepted the case for an operational nuclear force. However, he harbored the aspiration that this be a seaborne deterrent force. This position had first been articulated by Buzzard and Drax in 1953-4, but had been further developed in the spate of Naval papers written against the RAF's V-bomber force in late 1954. Consequently, in the mid-1950s, the question of future provision of the nuclear deterrent cast an ominous shadow over relations between the RAF and Navy.

Although inter-service rivalry was a persistent feature of the British strategic landscape in 1954-5, it is important

to realise that amidst disagreements about the character of future global war, and conflicts over future nuclear roles and missions, the COSC maintained an impressive consensus on the underlying principles of nuclear strategy. The core assumption of the GSP and Radical Review, upon which there had been no disagreement within the COSC, was sustained into the H-bomb age. Buzzard's attempts in 1955 to persuade the COS that graduated deterrence was superior on ethical and strategic grounds to the 'mass destruction' policy, was rejected by the COSC which continued to place its faith in deterrence through the threat of nuclear punishment.

If Britain was not prepared to rely on the United States in the strategic strike role, British officialdom was equally convinced that the United Kingdom had to develop the H-bomb. Although there was a military rationale for British development of the H-bomb, both the Cabinet and COS justified the decision in the context of the Anglo-American nuclear relationship. In January 1947, the COS had been pre-occupied with providing for national defence against the catastrophic contingency of Soviet atomic attacks in the late 1950s. However, in July 1954, a H-bomb capability was seen in the context of sustaining the framework of nuclear concert with the United States. Moreover, and as in the case of the decision to develop the

atomic bomb, the British H-bomb decision provides further confirmation of Simpson's thesis that top level decisions on Britain's nuclear weapons programme did not escape the political control of the Cabinet.

If the rationales for a British H-bomb were in a distinct tradition of British nuclear strategy, there were thinkers in the Government who reasoned that the future nuclear stand-off between East and West would generate a requirement for British unilateral deterrence of the Soviet Union. Walker argues that '...Targeting requirements for the medium bomber force do not appear to have been altered by the decision to manufacture thermonuclear bombs in Britain'.⁸⁹ Although the Swinton Report did sustain counter-force targeting into the H-bomb age, it was not clear that Soviet airbases would be the priority targets in the context of unilateral deterrence of the Soviet Union.

Churchill's speech to the House of Commons in March 1955 emphasised the counter-force rationales for the V-bombers, but he also indicated that there were important administrative and industrial targets which any self-respecting deterrent policy would have to be able to hold hostage for Soviet restraint. In retrospect, the JPS

⁸⁹ Walker, op. cit., p. 80.

targeting study of July 1949 had perhaps provided a prescient discussion of British nuclear targeting with its emphasis on posing a threat to the Soviet regime itself. However, the JPS study was premised on deterrence in concert, but it was that assumption which was being questioned by the likes of Cockburn and Brundrett in 1955. Nevertheless, the mainstream discussions in 1955 over the size of the British nuclear force continued to be based on deterrence in concert, and there is no evidence to suggest that the COS or Cabinet were anxious at the end of 1955 about basing future nuclear strategy on the 'twin pronged' strategy.

If one focuses on the failure of the COSC to provide the Churchill and Eden Governments with major cuts in conventional defence expenditure in 1954-5, it is hard to reject the conventional wisdom that the COSC was little more than a debating shop in the policy planning process, quite unable to check the power of the service ministries. The COSC did not have a strategic mandate against which to play the role of policy advocate, and it was certainly no more capable of arbitration in 1954-5 than it had been in earlier times. Certainly, inter-service rivalry in 1954-5 did not make for easy co-ordination of procurement, provision and planning between the service ministries. However, accepting

the argument that inter-service rivalry was at root a product of competing strategic values, what can be seen in 1954-5 is a serious debate about the appropriate strategy to be pursued in the light of the advent of the H-bomb. And since strategic planning took place in an environment of uncertainty and indeterminacy, it was not surprising that the COS proved ineffectual as arbiters.

In adopting in the 1950s an implicit model of (in later terminology) bureaucratic politics, the conventional wisdom was caught in the trap of the logic/politics dichotomy which rendered it unable to fuse internal politics and strategic beliefs. Yet, it has been the contention of the thesis that what is required is a conception of inter-service rivalry which gets beyond the idea of rational bureaucrats playing the role of rational statesman - 'strategic augmentation' - and recognises the role of beliefs and values in determining outcomes. At the same time, the intellectual baggage of bureaucratic politics led the conventional wisdom to depend upon too narrow a definition of politics. For in neglecting the foundation of shared values which formed the backdrop to the 'in-house' strategic debate in 1953-4, the conventional wisdom betrayed a fascination with organisational conflicts to the exclusion of that commonality of beliefs and values which underpinned Britain's nuclear strategy, and created

the parameters within which the conflicts and disagreements of 1954-5 were played out.

CONCLUSIONS

The concluding chapter of the thesis will address the three key research questions which were discussed in the introduction to the study: (1) the merits of the conventional wisdom concerning Britain's defence policy-making process in the period 1945-55; (2) the relevance of the theoretical literature on inter-service rivalry and defence policy-making and (3) the utility of the bureaucratic politics model in explaining British strategic decision making. In examining these questions, and in an attempt to draw up a balance sheet of the contribution made by the COSC to Britain's development as a nuclear weapon state, an analysis will be made of the nature and significance of the reform of the COSC in 1955.

The Reform Of The COSC In 1955

As discussed in the last chapter, Churchill's retirement from the premiership in April 1955 was the occasion for a major reform in the central organisation of British defence policy making. The Eden Government's hope that a strengthened Ministry of Defence would be able to provide a better co-ordinated approach to Britain's defence problems was not only an implicit criticism of the COS for failing to

provide inter-service co-ordination in defence planning, but also raised the question as to the future role and status of the COSC.

Eden did not want to do away with the COSC, combining as it did power with responsibility in the professional field, but he did want to link it more closely with the Minister of Defence than was perceived to have been the case with the existing system. The reform, which was initiated in 1955, was for a fourth member of the COSC to be appointed who would act as its permanent chairman. Dickson was chosen as the first incumbent of this new post. Reflecting in 1976 on the rationales behind the 1955 reform, he commented that

...the Chairman would share with the other three Chiefs of Staff the collective and individual responsibility of giving advice to the Defence Committee. But he would also act as Chief of Staff to the Minister of Defence.

The advantage of this arrangement was that the chairman could keep the Minister of Defence informed of the thinking of the Chiefs of Staff and would also be in a position to ensure that the Chiefs of Staff Committee carried out the studies necessary for the formulation of the defence policy.¹

Those writers who criticised the COS for failing to provide a coherent strategic policy for the Government argued that the basic problem was the failure to decide resource

¹ Dickson, Reminiscences, 1978.

allocation on any other basis than that of bargaining between the services. As can be seen from previous chapters, however, this problem did not first occur in the middle 1950s, but can be seen in the continual failures of the COS in the late 1940s and early 1950s to reach consensus on the roles and missions of the services in the post-war period. The failure of the COSC to resolve contending service interests and the very fact of reform of the COSC in 1955, seems to confirm the merits of the conventional wisdom. However, this begs the question as to why if the COSC was not working well in the first decade of the post-war period, change did not take place until 1955?

Montgomery was certainly pressing for reform of the COSC in the late 1940s. It will be recalled that he rejected the corporate approach to defence planning as a recipe for endless compromise, procrastination and bankruptcy in the nation's strategic planning. Nevertheless, there was little enthusiasm in the Attlee or Churchill Government for reforms of the defence policy making process. The Churchill Government, acting through the Radical Review and the Swinton Committee, sought to use the power of key Cabinet sub-committees to bring about changes in strategic doctrine and patterns of allocation between the services.

However, although these ministerial attempts were underpinned by a vision of strategic policy which sought to base future planning on the short war nuclear strategy, resistance from the service ministries and COS ensured that the actual pattern of resource allocation between the services continued to reflect the philosophy of 'fair shares' for all. Although the 'June Directive' and the Swinton Committee sought to deny legitimacy to force and budget requirements for protracted nuclear war, and did provide bargaining advantages to the RAF within the COSC, there was considerable annoyance in the Air Staff that whilst the other services paid lip service to primary emphasis on the nuclear deterrent, they did not accept this when it came to specific patterns of resource allocation.

Nevertheless, by July 1955, the Cabinet had reached the point where it could no longer accept the existing defence policy making process. Thus, the reason for reform in 1955 was not that the existing defence planning process had been working well, but that by April 1955 the pressure for change had become irresistible. The key problem was economic. The growing complication of weapons technology and competing claims in an ever diminishing defence budget required that the spending of the service ministries be brought under control. The urgent need for reform was even accepted within

the COSC. Dickson and Mountbatten were visionary enough to realise that the COSC needed modification if it was to face the demanding problems which a changing technological and strategic environment was creating for British defence decision making.

Even so, there was not unanimity within the COSC on the proposed reform. Given Montgomery's outright opposition to the idea of a COSC, it was ironic that it should be Templer who emerged as the principal defender of the old order. He was 'implacably'² opposed to the proposed reform believing that it would weaken fundamentally the role of the COSC as strategic advisers to the Cabinet. Although Templer's biographer offers a sympathetic interpretation of his position, there is no doubt that the CIGS resented civilian interference and had great nostalgia for the COSC. Templer's biographer commented that Eden's reforms

...left Gerald somewhat disappointed and frustrated...He saw this step as the first along a road which would eventually lead to the complete subjection of the service ministries to the Ministry of Defence, and to an integration of the services which he distrusted and believed impracticable.³

² Ibid.

³ Cloake, op. cit., p. 340.

Nonetheless, this was certainly not the intention of Dickson who supported the reform as a means of strengthening the COSC. Reflecting in 1976 on the advantages and disadvantages of reform, the retired Air Chief offered a most flattering view of the role which the COSC had played in the defence policy making process of the 1950s:

The British Chiefs of Staff Organisation was unique. Each Chief of Staff expressed the professional advice which if taken he had the responsibility for executing. On his judgement alone depended the extent to which the strongly held convictions and recommendations of his own service staff needed change or support in the light of the political factors and the views put forward by the other two chiefs. When agreement was reached the advice of the Chiefs of Staff showed the strength of collective responsibility, and it gave the Government clear collective military advice unadulterated by political expediency. It was a precious asset for any Government, and it had proved its value in the war, and had worked reasonably well in the eventful period after it.⁴

If Dickson's reflections are seen as unduly flattering given the continual failure of the COS to reach agreement on resource allocation and role assignment, how likely was it that the 1955 reform would facilitate that co-ordination of defence policy making which had been sought by British policy makers in the post-war period? If one sets Dickson's claims about the ability of the COS to mediate inter-service rivalries against the real experience of the COSC in the

⁴ Dickson, Reminiscences, 1978.

period under study, it would seem that the differences between the services were not resolvable, as Dickson wanted to argue, through analytic problem solving within the COSC. However, this brings one back to the critical question as to the sources of competition in the internal relations of the COS in the period 1945-55. What can be said, in the light of the case study material presented in chapters 2-8, about the sources and significance of British inter-service rivalry? Since it is only after addressing this question that an assessment can be made of the likely effect of the 1955 reform on the mitigation of future inter-service rivalry in Britain.

Inter-Service Rivalry And Bureaucratic Politics Revisited

Kanter's argument that inter-service rivalry grows inevitably out of interdependence amongst the services and Snyder's claim that it is resource constraints which generate such disputes might be seen as supported in the thesis. McGrigor's personal letters to Drax in 1953 provide ample evidence that the FSL saw his problems with the RAF in terms of the Radical Review sub-committee's squeeze on defence spending. Nonetheless, it is the argument of the thesis that inter-service rivalry is at root more than clashes of bureaucratic interest. Rather, although inter-

service rivalry is coloured by bureaucratic needs, the origins of inter-service rivalry lie in the existence of specialised organisations which develop competing beliefs as to the nature of the strategic environment. Individuals who rise to high positions in the services will through a process of socialisation develop a set of values and beliefs about the world - an organisational ethos - which shape their outlook. To ignore this underlying source of policy motivation, as is the tendency in some of the American literature on inter-service rivalry, is to downplay the role of beliefs and perceptions in the determination of strategic outcomes.

Thus, the bargaining between the Navy and RAF in 1953-5 was at one level, a struggle for primacy in the defence policy making process, but fundamentally it was a serious debate about the appropriate security policy to be pursued in the nuclear age. The arguments over the Continental Commitment, the Navy's carrier plans and the size of the medium bomber force attest to the competing strategic ideas which were being argued for between the services and within the COSC. On the basis of evidence presented in the thesis, one can agree with Freedman that proponents of bureaucratic Politics '...are caught in a trap which renders them unable to link

questions of substance to those of internal politics'.⁵

Although Greenwood presents a model of 'strategic augmentation' which does attempt to link external preferences to internal politics, this model depends upon the assumption that decision makers separate out their personal/organisational needs from their strategic beliefs. It might be claimed that the Navy's search for a new strategic doctrine in the H-bomb age supports the model of 'strategic augmentation', but is it really tenable to claim that the FSL and Naval Staff argued their position in the full awareness that they did not really believe in their case: does there not have to be a personal as well as an official sincerity? Certainly, there is nothing in the private papers of the Naval Staff which suggest any inconsistency. Despite the advent of the H-bomb, the Navy exhibited an impressive self-confidence in arguing their case. Of course, that is not to say that they were not engaging in 'wishful thinking', but it is to argue that the evidence leads one to suggest that McGrigor and the Naval Staff did not play along solely out of loyalty to their service, but developed and pressed a strategic case which they sincerely believed was most appropriate to Britain's security needs in the nuclear age.

⁵ Freedman, op. cit., p. 448.

If the bureaucratic politics framework provides a flawed conceptualisation of the nature of inter-service rivalry in the period under study, a logic/politics dichotomy can also be seen as implicit in Snyder's study of British inter-service rivalry. Snyder's claim that the defence policy-making process in the mid-1950s was characterised by a shift from logic to politics in the settlement of contentious issues is simply unsustainable in the light of the discussions in the previous chapters. To take the issue which most divided the COS in this period, it was not the case that in the early 1950s, the debate as to the character of future nuclear war was settled through the exercise of rational discussion and problem solving within the COSC, but that by the middle 1950s, the issue had become so contentious that bargaining had to be substituted for it. The actual situation was clearly different. The COS were no more able to resolve the differences between them on this vexed issue in the early 1950s than they were by the middle 1950s.

It was Dickson's claim that the value of the COSC was that it facilitated the adjustment of service positions in the light of the collective deliberations of the COS. Dickson's reflection might be seen as lending credence to Smith's and

Hollis's contention that decision makers can play their roles with distance. The retired CAS implied in his recollections that the COS were not puppets of their service positions, and that there was some scope for what Smith and Hollis term 'reasoned judgement'. The implication of Dickson's argument is that in the face of competing claims, the COS can play the role of arbiters, but the evidence from the thesis is that the COS were ineffective in this role.

However, that is not to say that the COS were simply puppets of their organisational roles, as would be predicted by the bureaucratic politics model. The alternative to being puppets was what might be termed 'Chiefness'. This refers to the extent to which membership of the COSC led actors to adopt perceptions of interest and norms of behaviour which grew out of their socialisation within the COSC. The notion of 'Chiefness' grows out of Smith's and Hollis's work on roles, but does it have any utility in understanding the roles played by the COS in the period under study?

The best evidence for 'Chiefness' seems to be the period of the Radical Review, when Dickson appears to have risen above the 'local colour' on the future roles of land and sea-based air. He accepted McGrigor's strategic arguments and adopted a view which was at variance with those of his Secretary of

State, De L'Isle. Thus, this might be seen as an example of the CAS playing his role with relative detachment from his service. A further example might be McGrigor's support of Swinton's recommendations on the size of the V-bomber force. The FSL supported the RAF's case at a time when his own Naval Staff were all for taking up cudgels against the Air Force. It could be that McGrigor supported the collective view of the COSC that Britain's strategic deterrent should comprise 240 V-bombers, as against the views of his own service staff that the RAF's plans were untenable in the H-bomb era. However, it might have been that McGrigor, like his successor, Mountbatten, had nuclear aspirations beyond the NA39, but recognised that the Navy's case for a strategic nuclear deterrent role should not be pressed in the hostile bureaucratic environment of 1954.

For all this, there is a basic problem with the 'Chiefness' argument. To take the most interesting case, Dickson's tacit exchange of views with McGrigor might have reassured the FSL, but it had little or no effect on the course of the Radical Review, and the future of the NA39. Discussions between the FSL and CAS did not end in 'bitter collisions',⁶ but then neither did they lead to effective policy advocacy by the CAS on behalf of the Navy. One explanation for this

⁶ Interview, Summer 1987.

is that with Sandys, De L'Isle, and the RAF focusing their energies against the Navy, Dickson was constrained by his role as CAS from publicly pressing the Navy's case. Smith and Hollis have struck well the theme of role constraints:

The actors' interpretation of their roles responds to their reading of the situation, which, like their judgement on how to act, is influenced by the need to justify themselves on return to home base.⁷

Thus, as can be seen from the 'December compromise' of 1953, such role constraints make it difficult for the COS to translate private 'reasoned judgement' into external policy advocacy. Smith and Hollis recognise that roles constrain as well as enable, but it seems from this case study of Dickson's behaviour, that they constrain more than they enable.

There is a further problem with the idea of 'Chiefness' and that relates to whether it is derived from membership of the COSC, or from the personality traits of those who sit on the COSC. That it is Dickson's behaviour which provides the central claim for 'Chiefness' is significant, since it was Dickson who, as VCAS in April 1947, expressed a position which was at variance with the doctrinal and organisational

⁷ Smith and Hollis, op. cit., p. 20.

interests of the RAF. Thus, one is back to the issue which Smith and Hollis raise as to whether some bureaucratic positions require particular personalities? This seems to be especially the case with membership of the COSC, which confronts senior military men who have risen through the ranks of their chosen service, with the daunting responsibility of fashioning on a corporate basis national security policy. If Montgomery's personality mitigated against the workings of the COSC in the late 1940s, Dickson seems to have been by nature a conciliator who was prepared to compromise with his colleagues within the COSC.

Although the evidence is speculative, and the conceptual arguments to which it gives rise, inordinately complex, 'Chiefness' seems to be an improvement on the bureaucratic politics model which makes the COS little more than puppets of service positions. Nevertheless, it has to be said that in relation to the issue which was most divisive within the COSC - the character of future nuclear war - the COS proved unable to exercise 'reasoned judgement' within the COSC.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly, however, that in accepting the view of the conventional wisdom that the COS were ineffective as arbiters of inter-service rivalry, the thesis does so for fundamentally different reasons to those

of the conventional wisdom. The thesis rejects a narrow bureaucratic politics model which makes inter-service rivalry solely the product of parochial service interests, and reasserts the value of Schilling's study of strategic decision making which identified the roots of inter-service competition in competing strategic beliefs and values. Thus, accepting that the concept of role is an improvement on the bureaucratic politics model in that it seems to allow for a concept of 'Chiefness', the evidence from this study of British inter-service rivalry is that 'Chiefness' did not extend to the resolution of the most contentious questions within the COSC. This supports Schilling's claim that such differences are not resolvable through analytic problem solving, but have to be settled in the political arena, if they are to be settled at all.

Therefore, accepting the argument that the COS failed as arbiters of inter-service rivalry, how successful were the COS at playing the role of strategic critics - exposing competing positions to ministers for political arbitration? It was Snyder's claim that the benefit of inter-service rivalry was that responsible officials could select from alternative strategies, but he also contended that the COS sought to avoid open conflict between themselves, a proposition which sits somewhat uneasily with the claim that

inter-service rivalry is beneficial because the COS play the role of strategic critics. The COSC might be seen as having value as an incubator of competing strategic ideas, but the only time in the period 1945-55 when the COS actually sought ministerial arbitration of differences between them was the dispute over the continental commitment in the late 1940s. Given that the COS were ineffectual as arbiters, why did they resist playing the role of competent strategic critics?

Having studied American inter-service rivalry, it was Kanter's contention that one pressure which mitigated against explicit conflict in the American JCS was the desire to prevent policy makers interfering in the decision making of the JCS. However, Kanter's analysis does not seem to fit the behaviour of the British COS. Instead, Snyder's argument that the COS were particularly sensitive to criticisms of inter-service rivalry, seems better to explain their reluctance to play the role of strategic critics. This can be seen in the submissions of the COS in the 1952 GSP and the 1954 H-bomb review. In both these cases, the COS submerged their differences in an attempt to preserve an image of collective unity.

It may well be that relations were so bad between the COS in the late 1940s that there was less unease about submitting a

divided position to ministers. However, in the early 1950s, it can be agreed with Snyder and Martin that the COS were a fairly amiable group and this may have fostered a sense of collective responsibility in the COS to provide the government with a set of agreed recommendations. In addition, the COS were charged under their constitution with submitting collective advice to the government, and it was therefore incumbent upon the COS to speak with one voice even if this was seen as a second best alternative. Such a perception of their role perhaps reveals the inability of the COS to realise that they were most ineffective as arbiters of inter-service rivalry, and probably of most use to the Cabinet in the role of strategic critics.

As against this, if the COS were divided on strategic issues, it required that policy makers be prepared to arbitrate inter-service rivalry. Attempts were made by Sandys and the Radical Review sub-committee to arbitrate inter-service rivalry in the early 1950s, and by Prime Minister, Eden, and Minister of Defence, Lloyd, in the LTDP. Ministers had a vision of the strategic future, but proved incapable of curbing inter-service rivalry, so that they could translate their 'strategic monism' into real changes in the pattern of resource allocation between the services.

However, in a situation where policy makers were not wedded to a particular set of strategic values, competing military arguments seem to have been decided on political or economic grounds. Thus, by 1954, and despite the suggestions of the FSL and CAS in their 'December compromise', a British military commitment to West European security was accepted by policy makers as essential to national security. However, it seems to have been the changing political landscape of European security which was decisive in leading policy makers to accept such a revolution in British foreign and defence policy. It certainly did not imply that the clashes of strategic value between Tedder, Montgomery and Cunningham in 1948 had been resolved by analytic methods of problem solving.

A further example of political decision making in the face of inter-service disagreements might be Macmillan's arguments in relation to the Navy's case for the NA39. Although there seems to have been a consensus within the COSC that the Navy should be allowed to develop a tactical atomic strike capability, this did not extend to the COS playing the role of advocates against the Swinton Committee. As Minister of Defence in late 1954, Macmillan did not support the Navy's case on grounds of strategic theory. Rather, he supported the Navy on the basis of political and

economic factors. While this case study supports Snyder's claim that in the face of divided military advice, politicians will not weigh the military factors so much as other influences on decision making, it does beg the question as to what criteria one can expect politicians to decide on. Writing in 1963, Slessor captured the essence of the problem which confronted policy makers when faced with a divided COSC:

...two or three men of the longest and widest military experience available have been unable to agree on the issue at stake - and the quality that now has to be brought into play is not military experience but statesmanship. Cabinets have often to make very difficult decisions between conflicting interests of which their members have no personal experience - that is what they are there for.⁸

Consequently, having examined the success with which the COS played the roles of arbiters and critics in the defence policy making process, and having argued that inter-service rivalry had its origins in competing views about the strategic world, what can be said of the reform of the COSC in 1955 as a means for either mitigating inter-service rivalry in the defence establishment, or facilitating ministers in playing the role of arbiters more effectively?

⁸ LH 1/644, Slessor to Liddell Hart, 28 May 1958.

Paradoxically, it seems that the reform of 1955 was more likely to exacerbate than mitigate differences between the COS. The introduction of a permanent chairman to the COSC was seen by Dickson as enabling the COS to present more effectively their views to ministers, and to facilitate ministers in pressing their views on the COS. However, if the purpose of this reform was to reduce inter-service rivalry, it was ironic that the new system seems to have made it easier for the COS to play the role of strategic critics. It is interesting to compare the 1955 reform with the Chief of the Defence Staff system which was introduced in 1958. The 1958 reform was seen as a development of the earlier change, but the two systems seem to have made possible very different outcomes. The Chief of the Defence Staff did establish the chairman of the COSC as the key military adviser to the government, but this led to the criticism that the price of curbing inter-service rivalry was the imposition of a single individual's view at the price of the corporate view of the COSC. In contrast the 1955 reform seems to have both legitimised and made it easier for the COS to play the role of competent strategic critics.

Consequently, the 1955 reform did underline the need for political resolution of the issues at stake. The key

question which hung over Eden's reforms was the extent to which, in the future, ministers would not only be able to reach agreement on Britain's strategic doctrine, but also translate this into specific patterns of resource allocation between the services. Nevertheless, if it was hoped in defence circles that the reforms of 1955 would lead to further strengthening of the Ministry of Defence and the development of a unified defence and strategic policy, there was to be much disappointment on this score. Despite the Sandys review of defence policy in 1957, Brook (who was still Cabinet Secretary in 1957) argued in an internal report on future defence organisation that the basic problem of British defence planning remained the problem of deciding between competing requirements and demands:

...most of our recent troubles have been due to the fact that defence programmes and expenditure have not been systematically related to an agreed strategic appreciation of our military tasks...we have not clearly decided whether we are trying to prevent a major war or to put ourselves in a position to fight one - or, if we must to some extent do both of these things, what risks we shall take on the second in order to improve our chance of success on the first. We have therefore lacked a sure foundation on which to base a definition of the respective roles of the services and a determination of the proper balance between land, sea and air.⁹

⁹ Ismay 111/4/115/3, Paper by Brook on 'The Central Organisation for Defence', December 1957.

Brook's paper did point up the negative aspects of inter-service rivalry. This thesis supports his argument that the defence establishment failed to produce a coherent strategic appreciation of the character of future nuclear war which could form the basis of role assignment and resource allocation between the services. Instead, the service ministries tended to base their procurement, planning and provision on the basis of competing views about the nature and length of future global war. In describing Britain's strategic problems, however, and unlike the external commentators at this time, Brook did not lay the blame on the nation's senior military planners. Instead, he suggested that it was 'unreasonable'¹⁰ to expect the COSC to find the 'solutions' to strategic problems, which like Schilling, he saw as being issues of '...immense intellectual difficulty'.¹¹ Brook recognised that the COSC had value as a forum for competing ideas - despite the resistance of the COS to play this role - but seems to have accepted that it was ineffective as an arbiter of competing strategic values. That, as Brook and Slessor both recognised, was the task of ministers and not their military advisers.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

In the early 1960s, Snyder went further than positing the general argument that inter-service rivalry had beneficial features for defence policy making, suggesting that it was particularly desirable in the British context. Although Snyder was right to suggest the dangers of institutionalised conformity, he failed to realise that the basic principles of British nuclear strategy embodied that very conformity of outlook and values. What then of the role played by the COS in determining that strategic consensus?

The Military And The Shaping Of British Nuclear Strategy

What of the relationship between the British political and military elite? If as O'Brien claims, American civilian leaders in the Truman administration did not involve themselves in questions of nuclear strategy, the same cannot be said of British political leaders. The Attlee, Churchill and Eden administrations were all cognisant of the nuclear strategy of the COS. However, this judgement begs the more critical question as to the extent to which the military establishment was decisive in leading the government to adopt a strategy of nuclear deterrence?

Given that Attlee's initial response to the bomb was little short of apocalyptic, and that he articulated a devastating

critique of what he saw as the 'myopic' vision of the COS, was it the case that the Labour Party's defence policy was hijacked by the military elite? Although Bevin and the Foreign Office were not prepared to go as far as the COS, in early 1946, in defining the Soviet Union as an enemy, it was Attlee who by 1947 was challenging what had by then come to be the COS-Foreign Office line. Consequently, whilst the COS appear to have played the role of advocate against Attlee over the future of the Middle East bases, it was not a situation where civilian policy makers were lined up against their military advisers. Rather it was an example of the limits of Prime Ministerial power in the determination of strategic questions vis-a-vis the COS and Cabinet.

Nevertheless, the same cannot be said for the decision in January 1947 to develop the British bomb. Attlee's twin concerns of maintaining a British atomic weapons programme, whilst seeking diplomatic accommodation with the USSR, might be seen as incompatible objectives, but Attlee apparently did not recognise any inconsistency in his position. There is enough ambiguity in Attlee's attitudes in early 1947 to keep historians guessing about his real motives and values, but what can be said with greater certainty is that there is no historical evidence that he dissented from the January decision, or challenged further in the late 1940s, the

nuclear war-fighting plans which were being framed within the COSC.

One can further agree with Simpson that in the decisions on the size of the V-bomber force, the expansion of the nuclear weapons programme in 1952-3, and the decision to develop the H-bomb, there is no evidence to indicate that the COSC usurped the function of the British people's elected representatives. It is clear from the thesis that strategic factors were central to Britain's development as a nuclear weapons state. By the early 1950s, the COS had developed a set of ideas about British nuclear strategy which seem to belie the implicit claim of Gowing and Simpson that the COSC was something of a passive actor in the shaping of British nuclear weapons policy.

Moreover, while agreeing with Simpson that the military elite did not hijack Britain's nuclear weapons policy, this study of the official papers supports Walker's contention that Britain's nuclear deterrent and targeting philosophy was based on a war-fighting posture. The espousal by the COS of a counter-force strategy was unique because it operated as an adjunct to the American nuclear threat against Soviet cities. Earliest articulations of nuclear strategy had focused on the dangers of Soviet nuclear blackmail against

the United Kingdom, but the counter-force strategy was located by the COS in an Anglo-American context. However, whilst the COS were the first to formulate a strategy of military denial which might assure survival in a nuclear war, this was not seen as constituting by itself a sufficient deterrent against Soviet aggression. Effective deterrence was seen as residing in the American Strategic Air Command and its stockpile of nuclear weapons.

Although Britain's targeting policy was a nuclear war-fighting one, there is no evidence that the military formulated its plans without the support of ministers. As a general proposition, the ability of military planners to manipulate expert advice and information to further their own interests should not be understated, but there is no evidence that such subterfuge took place in the development of Britain's targeting policy. After all, the COS made many submissions to the Cabinet in the late 1940s and early 1950s reiterating the urgent need for a strategy of offensive damage limitation. It was the country's exposure to prospective Soviet nuclear attack which enabled policy makers and their military advisers to form a consensus around a damage limiting strategy aimed at reducing Britain's vulnerability to Soviet nuclear attack.

Although the thesis documents the development of Britain's military thinking in relation to the perceived Soviet threat, it is clear that any assessment of the contribution of the COS to Britain's nuclear strategy has to take into account the political rationales for the British bomb. Although the military claimed that national nuclear weapons were indispensable to future global status, this was seen in terms of access to, and influence upon, American strategic ideas and policy. It was an article of faith within the COSC that British influence in Washington depended upon Britain's development of nuclear weapons, a belief which found ready support in the Foreign Office and Cabinet. There was always the fear in the COS and Cabinet that Britain might one day find itself alone against the Soviet Union. This put a premium on sustaining the Anglo-American alliance, but also led to the complete rejection of suggestions of those like Tizard, and later Maudling, that Britain bow out of the nuclear weapons business and depend upon the Americans for nuclear protection.

Tizard and Maudling challenged the resource allocation consequences attendant upon provision of a British nuclear deterrent, but it was Buzzard who offered a scathing critique of the deterrent philosophy which underpinned Britain's nuclear strategy. He wanted the West to develop an

overt nuclear war-fighting posture which would have made war both more rational and calculable, but which was also designed to spare population centres from attack in the event that deterrence broke down. Despite disagreeing on the character of future global war, the COS were unanimous that such limitations might lead to an erosion of deterrence and the encouragement of that very outcome that they were seeking to prevent.

It was Snyder's argument that inter-service rivalry facilitated dissent in the British policy making process, but inter-service rivalry in the early 1950s was conducted against the backdrop of shared assumptions about Britain's security requirements in the nuclear age. As for the Soviet threat, the services emphasised those aspects of the adversary threat which most concerned them and strengthened their claims in the inter-service debates. However, it was not so much the perceived Soviet military threat, as the Anglo-American nuclear relationship which was the benchmark against which the services defended their cherished roles and missions. At one level, this was an effective technique of inter-service rivalry, but it is clear from this study that Britain's nuclear strategy cannot be understood outside of the Anglo-American nuclear relationship. At the same time, it confirms Freedman's contention that 'The matters

that serve as common reference points establish the limits and the possibilities for the advancement of specific interests'.¹²

The extent to which the British strategic debate was conducted against the backdrop of shared assumptions can be seen in the fact that the only dissent against the strategy of 'mass destruction' came from Buzzard. His prognosis was totally rejected by the service ministries which, amidst the conflicts of the Radical Review, were unanimous that Britain's security depended upon the strategy of nuclear retaliation. But even Buzzard's assault was against the mechanics of nuclear strategy and not the ends. There was no disagreement between Buzzard and the defence elite that the Soviet Union was the enemy, or that atomic weapons were the only means of meeting the Soviet threat. The differences between Buzzard and the COS reflected fundamentally different ideas about the nature of war in the nuclear age, but the areas of consensus between Buzzard and the COS indicate the extent to which conflicts within the defence policy-making process were about the means and not ends of strategic policy.

Nevertheless, had Tizard, Maudling, and especially Buzzard,

¹² Freedman, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

had the responsibility for shaping British nuclear strategy, Britain's nuclear experience could have been a very different one. Moreover, if Blackett or those on the left wing of the Labour Party, had obtained access to the corridors of political power, Britain's security policy might have been radically altered. The COS considered that their nuclear strategy was based on self-evident truths about Britain's strategic predicament, but was there anything objectively determined about Britain's nuclear strategy in the period 1945-55?

To believe that there was, is to assert the Realist philosophy that there are objective strategic laws which are both given and knowable, and which decision makers ignore at their peril. According to this determinist view, any set of advisers with the responsibility of managing Britain's strategic situation in the post-war period would have had to accept the reality of Britain as a nuclear weapon state. In contrast, 'subjectivists' claim that there is always scope for choice in all human actions. Freedman seems to be a 'subjectivist' with his claim that the logic/politics dichotomy is flawed as an analytical concept. The evidence presented in the thesis supports his claim that logic informs politics, but in relation to Britain's adoption of a nuclear strategy, what of the claim that politics can inform

logic? Accepting the logic of Freedman's argument, had a different set of players with very different values come to dominate the British defence policy-making process, they would have been able to effect real change in strategic policy.

Thus, it was not that the COS were guardians of some eternal set of national interests, but that they had the institutional base to help define the nation's nuclear weapons strategy according to their own strategic vision. It was the abiding legacy of 1930s appeasement, the experience of airpower deterrence in the 1930s and the actual aerial bombing of British cities in the Second World War that shaped the attitudes and values of the COS. The COSC was comprised of men whose experiences of war were shaped by fighting in two world wars, and who were determined that in an age of nuclear weapons, such traumatic events must not occur again. Of course, the collapse of nuclear deterrence would have led to catastrophe on an unimaginable scale, but the military and political elite adopted the optimistic view that lasting peace was possible in the nuclear age.

Consequently, what emerges from this thesis are the shared assumptions and values which shaped Britain's nuclear

strategy, and which created the framework within which the inter-service rivalries of the period were played out. However, if inter-service rivalry did not touch the fundamentals of nuclear strategy, conflicts over the character of future nuclear war had their roots in the clash of strategic values. And while the conventional wisdom was correct in pointing to the costs of inter-service rivalry, it has been argued that a more sophisticated analysis of British inter-service rivalry leads to a different assessment of the roles, limitations and effectiveness of the COSC in the defence policy-making process. Moreover, it has been argued in the thesis that the conventional wisdom is flawed because it depends upon an implicit bureaucratic politics model. The latter is inadequate as an explanatory tool not because it is culture bound - although this might be a significant factor in some political contexts - but because of fundamental weaknesses integral to the model itself.

APPENDIX 1

TABLE OF THE COS, 1945-55

CHIEFS OF THE NAVAL STAFF (FIRST SEA LORD

Sir Andrew Cunningham (Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope).	1943-6.
Admiral Sir John Cunningham	1946-8.
Bruce, Lord Fraser of North Cape	1948-51.
Sir Rhoderick McGrigor	1951-5.
Louis, Earl Mountbatten	1955-9.

CHIEFS OF THE IMPERIAL GENERAL STAFF

Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke	1944-46.
Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery	1946-48.
Field Marshal Sir William Slim	1948-52.
Field Marshal Sir John Harding	1952-55.
Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer	1955-57.

CHIEFS OF THE AIR STAFF

Lord Tedder	1946-50
Sir John Slessor	1950-2
Sir William Dickson	1952-56.

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