

is, at any rate, a gap in the transmission of sensibilities. Yesterday's world—the world of Cozzens and Wouk or of Hemingway and Wolfe—seems as lost and as fabled as a Currier and Ives print. These four post-modern writers find their roots in more cosmopolitan and esoteric sources than their immediate predecessors. Gaddis seems to owe more to Hieronymus Bosch than to Joyce; Styron and Griffin may have read John of the Cross more closely than Faulkner. And Purdy could have got his inspiration from the 'symbolic action' in a Mack Sennet film or from the comic strips, rather than from Melville's *Confidence Man*.

At any rate, it is a new and frightening world we live in, and these novelists help us to see it accurately, to find ourselves in it. Instead of escape, they offer confrontation.

Nuclear Deterrence by Bluff

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Probably very few people accept the 'political' arguments against British participation in the nuclear deterrent system; the arguments that British unilateral nuclear disarmament will encourage an Afro-Asian movement leading to multilateral disarmament, and that, whether or not the present Western deterrent is immoral, Britain is entitled to withdraw from it and expel its bases in order to cut down her risks in the event of war actually breaking out. But the traditional teaching of the Church on war and murder suggests to many Catholics that the deterrent system involves immoral risks and intentions, and must therefore be rejected on these grounds whatever the consequences may be. Now that this traditional teaching on war and murder is being clearly set out, fewer and fewer people will be able to hold that it is inapplicable to modern conditions. Yet, given this teaching, the current arguments from risks and intentions are still not strong enough to convince the majority who support nuclear deterrence. As the Revd. A. Kenny

pointed out recently,¹ even Mr Stein's symposium has not quite succeeded in refuting the 'theory of deterrence by bluff': it is not self-evident that the risks involved in nuclear deterrence are too heavy to take; and because it is very difficult to show that Western governments themselves have an immoral intention to use the deterrent weapons immorally in certain circumstances, it would have been better if the symposiasts had pointed to the fact that, if the operators of the deterrent must be ready to act on governmental orders to launch the weapons against normal cities at a moment's notice, then it is psychologically impossible for them, at least, not to have immoral intentions. Fr Kenny obviously had to make these points rather briefly in his review, and in what follows I want to consider the arguments from risks and intentions in rather more detail, although in fact I shall sometimes only be able to raise questions without attempting to answer them.

Risks

If we keep the nuclear deterrent then there is a risk that one side will make an indiscriminate first strike with nuclear weapons and a risk that the other side will be driven to indiscriminate nuclear retaliation, even against its own interests and prior intentions. In either case there will be enormous destruction. If on the other hand we give up the nuclear deterrent then there is a risk of Communist occupation. Because not all people would be prepared to accept Communist rule even if the government were, there would be a risk of reprisals and destruction. If we consider only the possible consequences of the two policies, there is no doubt that the possible consequences of a deterrent policy are worse. For the deterrent policy risks destruction on a far greater scale; and unlike unilateral nuclear disarmament it risks indiscriminate slaughter *by us*.

But even though the possible consequences of the deterrent policy are much worse, are the possible consequences of abandoning the deterrent so light in comparison that we should abandon the deterrent even if the possible consequences of keeping it are in fact very unlikely to come about? And if it seems practically certain that the possible consequences of abandoning the deterrent would in fact follow immediately from this step, whereas it is very unlikely indeed that keeping the deterrent will have its possible consequences, would not this entitle us to keep the deterrent even though its possible consequences, because

¹'Catholics against the Bomb', Review of Walter Stein (ed.) *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience* (London 1961) BLACKFRIARS, December, 1961.

they include evil done by us as well as evil suffered by us, are much worse?

I am not sure how to answer these questions. But I do want to show that the last one in particular is extremely relevant; that there is good reason to think that it is very unlikely indeed that keeping the deterrent will in fact have the possible consequences mentioned above.

Those who think that there is a strong risk of the deterrent system breaking down, and so leading these consequences, usually point briefly to the following dangers, which I will consider in turn:

1. nuclear war by accident;
2. rationally calculated surprise attacks;
3. the spread of nuclear weapons to smaller powers; and
4. the general tendency of statesmen to act irrationally in international crises, and the general tendency of arms races to lead to war.

1. I have never seen any convincing evidence of the danger of nuclear war by accident. The only evidence produced by people who think there is such a danger is the possibility of false alarms. They are afraid that when a false alarm is given we are 'half-way' to war. This is simply to ignore the elaborate safety measures which we know exist.

2. If one side's retaliatory forces could be completely destroyed by a surprise attack, there would obviously be an advantage in such an attack. And as one military writer puts it, since early 1959 'the alarming view spread rapidly that the thermonuclear striking power of the United States might become decidedly inferior to Russia's and that the "unbreakability" of the Soviet-American strategic deadlock was seriously in doubt'.² One should note in the first place that America is now spending a great deal of money on making her retaliatory forces invulnerable. And in the second place, some defence writers challenge the whole idea that there could be a danger of a rationally calculated surprise attack. Thus Professor Blackett writes: 'No convincing evidence is produced by such writers [Wohlstetter, Knorr, Morgenstern and Brodie] to suppose that it would be technically possible for Russia to achieve the near 100 per cent effective first strike without which a surprise nuclear attack would be neither "sane", to use Mr Wohlstetter's phrase, nor "attractive", to use that of Mr Knorr.'³

3. It was estimated in 1959 that within five years twenty countries other

²Knorr, in Klaus Knorr (ed.), *Nato and American Security* (Princetown 1959), p. 279.

³'Critique of some Contemporary Defence Thinking', *Encounter*, April 1961, p. 14.

than those which already had nuclear weapons would be able to make them.⁴ The spread of weapons to powers which are supposed to be 'less responsible' than Russia and America is taken to increase the risk of nuclear war: nuclear weapons might be used in local wars, for example in South America or the Middle East, and these wars might turn into world wars; or when China gets nuclear weapons she may put into practice her doctrine that war between Communism and Capitalism is inevitable. But if the mutual nuclear deterrence of Russia and America works now, there is no reason why either side should be driven into a world-war it judges against its interests merely because nuclear weapons are being used in local wars. And even if the Chinese have proclaimed that war is inevitable, there is no reason to suppose that they themselves want to start a war which would undo the economic development for which they have worked so hard.

4. But it is the general argument which is heard most: no one would rationally choose a large-scale war, but there have been these wars throughout history; there has never been a long interval of peace—and once an arms race has started it has always ended in war; so we cannot imagine that the present situation can continue indefinitely without war, simply because no one in his senses could choose war. But the consequences of nuclear war are worse than the consequences of all previous warfare. So that, although of course statesmen tend to be irrational, there has never before been such pressure to be rational in the respect of avoiding war.

If one can argue that the risk of the deterrent system breaking down is very remote indeed this of course is not to say that there is much real chance of peacefully dismantling it. Mr Hedley Bull in his book *The Control of the Arms Race* (London 1961) has shown very convincingly how people are driven to deceive themselves about the chances of multilateral disarmament and world government. Perhaps the only hope of this kind is that one side will develop anti-missile missiles long before the other and so force the other side into unilateral disarmament. But if the risk of the deterrent system breaking down into nuclear war is also very remote, then unilateralist arguments must certainly take this into account.

Intentions

We must answer two questions: (1) Does the present Western

⁴Howard Simons in *Daedalus* (Proc. American Academy of Arts and Sciences), 88 (1959), pp. 385 ff.

nuclear deterrent involve an immoral intention to destroy non-combatants? (2) Must any nuclear deterrent system involve such an intention?

In order to answer these questions we must make two distinctions: We must distinguish between a positive intention to do something wrong and the lack of a definite intention not to do it. And we must distinguish between the state of mind of the government and the state of mind of the subordinates of the government who stand ready to obey orders to operate the nuclear weapons which make up the deterrent.

1. (a) It is very difficult to show that the Western governments have here and now a positive intention to use nuclear weapons to kill non-combatants. It is true that they have repeatedly threatened to destroy normal cities at least in the event of a Russian nuclear attack. ('No one now believes or even pretends to believe the earlier doctrine that *any* Russian attack would at once be met by a nuclear bombardment of Russia'.)⁵ And it is true that the current feeling is that killing non-combatants can be justified when it produces the right results. But the possibility that these threats and feelings do not add up to a positive intention is not just an academic one. For in fact there is a great deal of doubt whether massive nuclear retaliation could ever have the results which the governments probably hold would justify it. It would simply lead to a counter-retaliation; and it seems most likely that, faced with the prospect of starting a whole series of nuclear exchanges, the Western governments have not yet definitely decided what they will do in the event of a Russian nuclear attack. The very unlikelihood of a Russian nuclear attack would make it easier for them to suspend the decision until the event. And if the decision has been suspended then there can be no immoral positive intention here and now.

On the other hand there is no reason at all to suppose that the Western governments have definitely resolved not to use nuclear weapons to slaughter innocent people in any circumstances. And not to have resolved not to do this is immoral. But to convict Western governments of this kind of immorality is not to condemn the whole deterrent system. For, it could be argued, a nuclear deterrent could be maintained without the government having this attitude.

(b) What are the intentions of the operators of the deterrent? We know that American bombers armed with hydrogen bombs are kept in the air at all times, and that intercontinental nuclear missiles are kept in a constant state of readiness, almost certainly aimed at normal Russian cities. The men standing by these bombers and missiles must be ready

⁵Observer editorial, 27 November, 1960.

at a moment's notice to launch them at these targets. It seems psychologically impossible to be ready to do something at a moment's notice without having a positive intention to do it. And the fact that the present Western deterrent requires the operators to intend to destroy normal Russian cities is enough to condemn it.

2. If it is the immoral intentions of the operators which condemns the present Western deterrent, could there be a deterrent system which did not involve these intentions? There are two possibilities. Either there must be no operators standing ready to launch the deterrent weapons, or the operators must only intend to launch the weapons against legitimate targets.

In the first case, the stock of weapons without operators would deter aggression because potential aggressors would not be prepared to risk that there were no operators or that the weapons would not in fact be used after an attack. In the second case potential aggressors would not be prepared to risk that the weapons would only be used against the targets which the operators intended.

It seems that so far as intentions go we can condemn the present Western deterrent but not all conceivable deterrent systems. Where would we stand if, as well as this, arguments from risk were insufficient to condemn nuclear deterrence in general? It might be thought that even if some deterrent system other than the present one could be theoretically justified on both counts, we should still advocate unilateral disarmament, because it would be so very improbable that the government would ever abandon its present policy to adopt an alternative whose sole justification is a fine point of morality, and because unilateral disarmament is a lesser evil than the present deterrent policy. But this seems false. As the present deterrent policy is evil, then the government must abandon it, and the citizens must not formally co-operate with it and press the government to abandon it. As there is a justifiable deterrent policy, then the government must adopt it, and the citizens must press it to adopt it. But the citizens are doing no wrong if their efforts are unsuccessful, provided that they are not co-operating in the present deterrent policy; and they are not obliged to press for another policy simply because it stands more chance of being adopted.

So that if the arguments from risk are inconclusive, anyone who wanted to make a complete case against all nuclear deterrence and for unilateral nuclear disarmament would have to show that deterrents involving no immoral intentions are evil on other grounds.

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