

THE DITCHLEY FOUNDATIONANGLO-AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON THE NUCLEAR DETERRENT.STATEMENT BY THE PROVOST OF DITCHLEY.

N.B. This is a personal summary of the conference and does not commit any participant or the conference as a whole.

This conference, held at Ditchley Park from the 27th to 30th September, 1963, was called by the Ditchley Foundation to consider the problem of the Nuclear Deterrent in the context of Transatlantic relations.

The conference opened with accounts of the American and British approaches to the question of nuclear and non-nuclear arms, and their place in the alliance, given respectively by Mr. Robert Schaetzel of the United States Department of State and Professor Michael Howard, Director of the Department of Strategic Studies at King's College, London.

Discussion following these papers made it clear that there was no certain or simple answer to the question "What does Britain want in the nuclear field?" British opinion on the nuclear deterrent is divided, on party and to some extent on cross-party lines. Moreover the question of balance between nuclear and non-nuclear arms has become entangled with that of the balance between a primarily European or Atlantic defence policy and one of involvement in the security of distant parts of the world, especially in the Indian Ocean. It could be said that the majority of British people want Britain to remain a "world power", even if a second-rank one; and the pursuit of an independent nuclear deterrent has followed from this wish on two grounds. First, it is claimed that possession of the deterrent gains for Britain "a seat at the nuclear table" and enhances her influence with the United States, and in a different sense with Russia. Secondly, the policy of the independent

deterrent has been seen as a means whereby Britain contributes to Atlantic defence and insures the security of her European base without jeopardising her ability to find manpower (in the absence of conscription) for her role as a world power, in the sense of commitments in Asia, the Caribbean and elsewhere.

Some of the implied assumptions were questioned at the conference. Several American members doubted whether possession of the independent deterrent did enhance Britain's influence with the United States. It was observed that Britain's policy tended to encourage a wish for national nuclear armament on the part of other countries. Such possible proliferation was one aspect of the broad problem which the proposal of a multilateral mixed-manned force had been designed to meet. The other aspect was the imbalance in the Western alliance between one great nuclear power and a large number of allies who had no ownership or control of nuclear armament though they were inevitably involved in its potential use on behalf of the alliance as a whole.

The existence of the problem being acknowledged, it was agreed that some constructive solution must be sought. While the multilateral force was advocated with great conviction by a number of American speakers, British opinion at the conference was generally sceptical and inclined to ask whether alternative solutions had been exhausted. It was agreed that this was not the forum for technical or detailed evaluations, but attention was drawn to certain strategic and political difficulties which seemed to hamper the credibility of the force, as at present proposed, as a genuine addition to the nuclear armoury of the West. On the other hand, it was urged that the problem must be considered dynamically, not statically, and that, looking to the long-term future, now was the time to launch a system which, however imperfect and experimental at the start, could develop

into a genuine supranational instrument of defence and perhaps a means to the unity of Europe. Accordingly it was the general sense of the conference that Britain would be wise to continue to participate constructively in the negotiations for the MLF in the hope either of finding it eventually acceptable or of framing alternative or supplementary solutions to the problem of imbalance in the alliance.

On European affairs a spirited debate grew out of a discussion of the repercussions from the partial test ban treaty, which it was generally acknowledged had not materially changed the facts of nuclear power. Some participants saw in an uncritical pursuit of "détente" for its own sake a danger both to allied solidarity and to allied interests, since Soviet Russia had in no way modified her objective of ultimately destroying capitalism throughout the world and would take advantage of any relaxation of vigilance or unity or defensive pressure in the West to make gains towards that end. It was agreed, however, that such considerations were a matter of emphasis rather than principle, and that in a new era of East-West relationships both vigilant strength and readiness to seize opportunities of peaceful progress were necessary. Lines of negotiation with the Soviet Union should be kept open, and a succession of further mutually advantageous agreements was capable of being secured, even if these proved to be mostly minor and technical in character. The prospect of nuclear disarmament was not considered realistic until there had been fundamental changes in Russia and in the world scene.

The conference went on to discuss the use of battlefield nuclear weapons and the associated problem of "escalation". If there were "firebreaks" along the line from non-nuclear arms to the ultimate deterrent, the most plausible one appeared to be at the bottom end, between non-nuclear weapons and the least

of nuclear warheads. But the effectiveness of a firebreak at this or any other point depended on its acceptance by both sides, and the policy of "controlled escalation" was obviously beset with dangers and difficulties. Deterrence was therefore a function of the whole array of allied armament, from the rifle to the inter-continental nuclear missile, and the central object was to deter war, rather than to deter certain kinds of war or contain wars within certain bounds.

Such reflections were background to discussions of the question of partnership in the control of nuclear arms and of supranational authority as the ideal or logical solution of the ultimate future. Accepting, in the words of one participant, that in world power "the calculus of national interest no longer applies", how do we move forward from national interests? The dilemma was recognised, that the nuclear deterrent on the one hand means so much to every country in terms of life and death of millions that sovereignty over policy towards it is immensely precious, while on the other hand its nature requires central, single and swift control such as only one man exercising one sovereignty can give. The opinion was expressed, however, that at least as between Britain and the United States the nationality of the ultimate controller mattered far less than confidence in the grounds and policies on which he acted, the advice by which he was guided and the facts of which he was aware. This threw the question of partnership - a word which did not necessarily imply equality - back to the level of mutual consultation and information at all levels, including that of non-nuclear forces, the strength of which might make the nuclear armament problem less agonising. We should, said one member, bend our minds to the dual problem of central planning and standby machinery for a crisis. The working of the Berlin Task Force was cited as a fruitful example, but

American members emphasized that their allies had been reluctant to take up many American offers to discuss the problem of consultation and control. It had to be admitted that if a solution on such lines might satisfy Britain and presently non-nuclear powers, it would not satisfy or divert General de Gaulle. Nevertheless the sense of the conference was that the road of advance lay through progressive and perhaps more institutionalised mitigation of national independence of decision in planning and conduct of policy - military, scientific, diplomatic and political. Uncertainties of the future were not a valid excuse for inaction: the need was to use a period of uncertainty to mould the environment of the problems in such a way as to advance progress towards ideal long-term solutions.

H. V. Hodson.