

THE SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS

The Strategy of the Nuclear Deterrent in Relation to the Aims of Allied Defence Policy

The United States and the Soviet Union now confront one another with the prospect of mutual devastation by thermonuclear and nuclear weapons. It is this prospect, and not the mere existence of weapons of such destructive power, which is one of the most important deterrents of war. With the capability of the Soviet Union to retaliate in kind growing both in terms of weapons and the means of delivering them, this deterrent works both ways; it is now a case of mutual deterrence.

2. It is also true that at present the United States enjoys superiority in numbers and types of weapons as well as in the means of delivering them, and even though the Soviet Union has built up deterrents of its own, it cannot be sure that if it were to make a surprise atomic attack upon the United States or any of its allies, it could prevent an immediate nuclear retaliation on a far larger scale. This, mainly in the form of the Strategic Air Command of the United States Air Force, is the deterrent power on the allied side.

3. Because of the scale of devastation that may be expected from thermonuclear or nuclear attacks, it is almost certain that a general war would be fought only against an actual or apparent threat to a nation's vital interests or those of its allies. As a corollary, it is probable that any nation would hesitate to start a war, even when further political or non-warlike action is not open to it for the pursuit of its aims, unless it apprehended a direct threat to its own security.

4. Thus if the strategy of the nuclear deterrent works, it is because it strikes fear and uncertainty in the calculations of a potential aggressor about the possible outcome and consequences of his aggression. Because of this fear, it provides a kind of psychological fence to reinforce other deterrents against the use of general war as an instrument of policy. The strategy of the nuclear deterrent, as its name implies, is a strategy for preventing a general war, not for fighting one. If the deterrent fails to prevent general war, the ensuing damage from nuclear and thermonuclear weapons is bound to be catastrophic.

5. While the prospect of devastation from thermonuclear or nuclear war may act in this way as a deterrent of general war, it may fail to act as a deterrent against the threat of other kinds of hostile action if the consequences apprehended do not include thermonuclear or nuclear devastation. On the other hand, the threat of the use of nuclear retaliation, where vital allied interests are not affected, runs the risk of precipitating war, since such a threat might be interpreted as an actual or an apparent threat to a country's vital interests. The use of such threats by one of the members of NATO, therefore, is a matter of lively concern to the other allies.

6. The United States, which possesses the principal nuclear retaliatory power on the side of the Western Powers, has so far reserved the right to determine by the authority of its President when and in what circumstances it may use or threaten to use its power of nuclear retaliation. This is of particular concern to Canada because of her special geographical location in relation both to the United States and the USSR.

7. The emphasis in considering the possible use of atomic weapons by the West is upon retaliation, for the Western Powers will not deliberately start a major war, which by its very nature cannot serve the aims proclaimed in the North Atlantic Treaty "to live in peace with all peoples and governments and to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples". But the allies have made it clear that they are maintaining preparations for instant nuclear retaliation against the event of Soviet all-out attack.