

Of course, while you were in NATO, a strong build up of American forces was going on under President Reagan. I just wondered if the particular problem of the nuclear dilemma was a major issue in that period?

[TAYLOR] The form that the nuclear dilemma took while I was there that was most debatable, centered on the question of first use, and of course that is still an unresolved problem. The SACEUR throughout the period I was in NATO was Bernard Rogers and he many, many times said in public that with the forces he had and the mission that had been given to him, if there were a war, ammunition stocks and reserves and so on would be run down to the point where in fairly short order he would be obliged to turn to Allied governments and request authority to use nuclear weapons.

He was accustomed to make a number of other observations that set that in context. For instance, he often said also that he did not himself believe that there was a very high risk of a war breaking out, that he really did not think that the major threat arose from a direct threat of war, that it was much more likely that, if imbalances between East and West were allowed to grow, the result would more likely be that Soviet diplomacy, backed by Soviet military preponderance, to which there would no longer be a satisfactory Western response, would leave the West open to blackmail and pressure of various kinds; and that that was really a more serious risk than war itself. That was also an argument for maintaining a military balance. It was also an argument for lessening the relative dependence of the Alliance on nuclear weapons, and increasing the relative dependence of the Alliance on conventional weapons. We are still there, really. That debate is still going on. General Rogers is now departing from his position, but I would think that is a debate which his successor will take up, and I doubt if on that point he will see much differently; that is, that the key words are, I think, stability and balance. You can maintain a balance at different levels, and we must try to maintain it at the lowest level we can arrange, but if it has to be maintained at a relatively high level, for reasons not of our seeking, then really you have to find the resources to do that. It does not mean that you have to maintain forces on a one for one basis. No one in NATO has ever argued that and NATO never has maintained forces on that basis. It simply means that you have to maintain some adequate combination of nuclear and conventional forces to constitute a credible deterrent. Our problems would arise if we allowed our forces to become weakened to the point where they no longer constituted that credible deterrent. That is what military commanders like General Rogers would urge on the political leadership of the Alliance, and that is still our problem. This is why we have to contribute to the maintenance of our share of a credible deterrent, in circumstances where you hope you will be able to negotiate a balance of forces over time at lower levels and with a mix of forces that is relatively less reliant on the nuclear component of the deterrent, therefore relatively more on conventional forces; but that you do not put yourself into the poor house in that way, because conventional forces are expensive forces. This is sad but true, that one of the advantages we have had from having relied on nuclear weapons is that it has been a relatively cheaper form of defence. If we had to maintain forces anything like the size of Soviet forces on the basis of, say, full-time volunteers, pay them at the going wage rates in Western economies and equip them accordingly, we would all be in the poor house. That kind of force structure is probably beyond our means. But those arguments were beginning to weigh on people. I think that there was a gradual realization in the public debate that went on while I was in NATO that, to use a North American expression: "There's no free lunch", that if you are going to depend less on nuclear deterrence, then you have got to depend more on conventional deterrence, and if we want to get away, progressively, from reliance on the nuclear weapons that produce the first-use doctrine in the first place, then that is really the road down which you have to go. We are not at the stage yet where anyone, I think, can feel safe - any military advisor anyway - in advising Western governments to abandon the doctrine of first use.