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The Sandys White Paper of 1957 and the move to the British new look : an analysis of nuclear weapons, conventional forces and strategic planning 1955-57

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**THE SANDYS WHITE PAPER OF 1957 AND THE MOVE TO THE BRITISH
NEW LOOK: AN ANALYSIS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, CONVENTIONAL FORCES
AND STRATEGIC PLANNING 1955-57**

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ABSTRACT

THE SANDYS WHITE PAPER OF 1957 AND THE MOVE TO THE BRITISH NEW LOOK: AN ANALYSIS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, CONVENTIONAL FORCES AND STRATEGIC PLANNING 1955-57

This study seeks to analyse the significance of the 1957 Defence White Paper in the context of British strategic planning during the mid-1950s. Claims that the White Paper represented a culmination of trends already prevalent in British defence planning are assessed while continuities and discontinuities in strategic policies are identified. This is done by highlighting the main features of the document and then tracing their development in the 1955-57 period. A major theme throughout is the relationship between the growing declaratory emphasis on nuclear deterrence and the determination of the shape and size of conventional forces and capabilities. It is contended that the defence decision making process that was in place prior to January 1957 was incapable of generating a British New Look - that is a consistent set of declaratory and action policies which reflected a cutback in conventional forces accompanied by a greater reliance on the threat of nuclear retaliation. Prior to Duncan Sandys becoming Minister of Defence, the inability of that ministry to readily impose itself on the service departments meant that the latter's attachment to preparations for global war and the national service programme could not be overruled. It is also unclear whether during the 1955-56 period the basis for a truly independent deterrent was being established. An analysis of the negotiations surrounding the 1957 White Paper indicates that Sandys was able to overrule traditional service preferences. The result was a policy which rejected the imposition of a conventional strategy on a nuclear one in favour of a British New Look. Consequently, conventional forces were reduced, greater relative importance was placed on the nuclear deterrent, but once more the requirements of a unilateral independent deterrent did not receive priority.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BAOR	- British Army on the Rhine
CAS	- Chief of the Air Staff
CIGS	- Chief of the Imperial General Staff
DRPC	- Defence Research Policy Committee
IRBM	- Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile
JIC	- Joint Intelligence Committee
JPS	- Joint Planning Staff
LTDP	- Long Term Defence Programme
MOD	- Ministry of Defence
RAF	- Royal Air Force
SAC	- Strategic Air Command
SACEUR	- Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SACLANT	- Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic
SAGW	- Surface to Air Guided Weapons
TA	- Territorial Army
TAF	- Tactical Air Force
NATO	- North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
USAF	- United States Air Force
SEATO	- South East Asia Treaty Organisation
VCAS	- Vice-Chief of the Air Staff
VCIGS	- Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff
VCNS	- Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff

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I wish to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my father.

INTRODUCTION

Although Martin Edmonds and John Groom's claim in 1972 that '...British defence policy since 1945 is largely a virgin field in which there are no standard works'¹ is increasingly being invalidated, attention still needs to be focused on the 1957 Defence White Paper as an object of study in itself. Aside from the notable exception of Laurence Martin's article over 25 years ago,² it is significant that the paucity of material pertaining to this subject stands in marked contrast to the view expressed in much of the secondary literature that the mid-1950s was a period not without significance for British strategy, force posture and defence organisation.

Part of the explanation for this dearth of literature must be found in the consequences of the '30 year rule' which has prevented early access to the relevant documentation. With

¹ M. Edmonds and A.J.R. Groom, 'British Defence Policy since 1945', in R. Higham, (ed.), The Sources of British Military History (London, 1972), p. 568. Also see J. Baylis, (ed.), British Defence Policy in a Changing World (London, 1977), p. 16. Clark and Sabin admit that '... source material on nuclear history in Britain is far less abundant than in the United States, partly because of Britain's less central involvement in nuclear affairs, and partly because of the greater degree of governmental reticence and official secrecy in the United Kingdom'. P. Sabin and I. Clark, Sources for the Study of British Nuclear Weapons History (Nuclear History Project, 1987), p. 1.

² L.W. Martin, 'The Market for Strategic Ideas in Britain: The "Sandys Era" ' American Political Science Review, Vol. 56, No.1, (1962), pp. 23-41.

this issue now partially resolved,³ a more basic problem - a problem of analysis and interpretation - comes into sharper view. For, it is contended in this thesis that an appreciation of the significance of the White Paper of 1957 is made difficult by its two most outstanding and yet seemingly contradictory characteristics: on the one hand, the paper's apparent revolutionary import for force structure and strategic planning; and on the other, its reflection of trends and tendencies long present in British defence thinking and programming. In question then is the nature of this specific watershed. Its clarification becomes essential if the role of nuclear weapons in relation to British defence planning in the mid-1950s is to be understood.

It must be recognised that a focus on nuclear deterrence has implications not only on the level where foreign policy determines military objectives, but also on the more basic level of procurement and force structuring. Indeed, the term

³ Numbers of significant papers related to British nuclear weapons planning and defence policy are still withheld from public view. Nevertheless, the mass of documentation available pertaining to the 1955-57 period allows for a relatively coherent picture of strategic planning to emerge. This study makes use mainly of documents released to the Public Records Office (PRO) at Kew of which the Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff, Ministry of Defence and service papers are the most important. These are supplemented by documents to be found in a number of private collections in Britain and by papers from the National Archives in Washington and the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas. Correspondence has been exchanged and interviews conducted with a number of former policy-makers, both privately and in the framework of a conference held in July 1988 in the Department of War Studies, King's College London on the subject of the Sandys White Paper of 1957.

'New Look', both in its American and British expressions, referred not only to a policy of nuclear threats but also to a force posture which reflected a shift away from conventional arms and manpower to more economical nuclear weapons.⁴ It was on this latter level that competing service rivalries and varying strategic conceptions were most acute as it was here that declaratory intent had to be translated into actual capabilities. A recognition of this reality provides the legitimisation for both the conceptual and chronological starting points of the thesis. In mid-1955 the Eden administration initiated a series of cost-cutting exercises that continued until Macmillan and Sandys took office in January 1957. The tensions generated by these programmes laid open the varying strategic conceptions of the different services; the inability of the Ministry of Defence to impose its will on these bureaucracies highlighted the organisational weakness of that body relative to the service departments. It is against this background that the import of the 1957 White Paper must be assessed.

A central theme of this study is that the confusion surrounding the meaning and significance of the 1957 White Paper stems from a failure to separate out its basic component parts and the failure to establish the relationship between them. This thesis identifies the declaratory move to a greater reliance on nuclear weapons, the declaratory emphasis on the

⁴ See Chapter Two for a discussion of the meaning of the New Look in the United States.

independence of Britain's deterrent and the reduction of manpower through the termination of national service as the three central features of Duncan Sandys's 1957 Defence White Paper. It is argued that by highlighting the relationship between strategic nuclear doctrine, the procurement of conventional and nuclear capabilities and attitudes to preferred force levels during the 1955-57 period, it is easier to discern competing strategic conceptions and to determine the influence of the services, the Ministry of Defence and Sandys himself. Furthermore, by tracing the development of these policies in the years immediately prior to 1957, during the White Paper negotiations themselves and in the period immediately thereafter, it becomes possible to distinguish more clearly continuities and discontinuities in British strategic planning during the mid-1950s, and thus the significance of the White Paper itself.

OUTLINE OF STUDY

Chapter One examines the secondary literature as it relates directly and indirectly to the Defence White Paper of 1957. The chapter aims at clarifying the unresolved problems hinted at in the Introduction and concludes by setting up a series of research questions which form the basis of this study.

Chapter Two seeks to demonstrate that the case for continuity in British strategic planning during the mid-1950s is reinforced by an analysis of declaratory policy pertaining to

the employment of nuclear weapons in the framework of British alliance commitments during 1955-56. It also draws attention to the paradox that the few challenges that were made to the nuclear focus on this level of policy were made in the context where credibility was the strongest.

Chapter Three focuses on the subject of long term defence programming as well as the issue of conscription during 1955-56 and attempts to demonstrate that the declaratory shift to a nuclear weapons emphasis was not so readily matched by a comparable shift on the level of procurement and deployment. It is argued that: (1) against the imperatives of economic savings was matched service attachment to preferred forces and capabilities; (2) the inability of the Ministry of Defence to override disparate service aspirations pointed to the organisational weakness of central defence planning; and (3) this ultimately led to the triumph of a posture of multiple capabilities over a coherent strategy that reconciled nuclear weapons with manpower requirements and conventional armaments - that is, a British New Look.

Chapter Four attempts to understand the meaning attached by British policy-makers during 1955-56 to the concept of independent deterrence. It does this through an analysis of the manner by which medium bomber force requirements were determined, attitudes to the Blue Streak ballistic missile expressed, and the problem of vulnerability and credibility addressed. It is argued that in the years immediately prior to

1957 attention focused less on an independent British nuclear capability than on varying degrees of limited autonomy within the confines of the Anglo-American relationship.

Chapter Five discusses the issues of terminating national service, reducing global war preparations and emphasising nuclear deterrence in the context of the 1957 White Paper negotiations. The object is to illustrate how organisational change combined with a specific personality dynamic to facilitate the move to a British New Look force posture. It is argued that in the White Paper discussions, although Sandys was guided by a strategic vision which recognised the merits of a policy of nuclear deterrence, he was more directly impressed by the economic necessity of terminating national service. It is further contended that a New Look force posture followed more from the relative decline of conventional forces than from plans for an increase in the absolute power of Britain's nuclear deterrent.

Chapter Six focuses on the problem of independence and deterrence in the aftermath of the 1957 White Paper. It is argued that despite the importance attached to this concept in the White Paper, Sandys and Macmillan continued to be more interested in deterrence in alliance with the United States than in independent deterrent capabilities. It is further contended that while there is a continuity in policy between the immediate pre- and post- 1957 period, this is a continuity

manifested in deterrence in alliance with the Americans and not a reflection of a move to independent deterrence.

Chapter Seven examines the future of a posture of multiple capabilities in the immediate aftermath of the 1957 White Paper. It attempts to demonstrate that by terminating the national service programme Sandys effectively undermined the ability of the services to procure such a force posture. It is argued that this aspect of defence policy reveals a sharp discontinuity with the pre-1957 period under study and underlines Duncan Sandys's major contribution.

Chapter Eight will synthesise the broad themes of the thesis. It will seek to underline what can be considered the major continuities and discontinuities across the 1955-57 period, the measure of Sandys's achievements and the importance of the White Paper for later policy developments.

CHAPTER ONE

PERSPECTIVES ON THE SANDYS WHITE PAPER

(1) Themes in the Secondary Literature

A review of the secondary literature that concerns itself with the 1957 Defence White Paper reveals that analysts often implicitly and sometimes explicitly identify two major themes as significant. These are the issues of: (1) strategic continuity across the 1945-57 period and the mid-1950s in particular; and (2) the processes of policy formulation in the first four months of 1957 and their relation to the organisation for defence decision making.

(A) The Continuity of Policy

That the White Paper represented not some new strategic departure but rather a reaffirmation of existing trends has been the underlying theme of most approaches to the subject. For example, Sir John Slessor wrote almost immediately after the White Paper was published that it

...introduces no basic revolution in policy, but merely rationalizes and (probably for the first time) explains in admirably intelligible form tendencies which have long been obvious and policies most of which successive British governments have accepted and urged upon their Allies for some years.⁵

⁵ Sir John Slessor, 'British Defence Policy' Foreign Affairs, Vol.35, No.4, (1957), p. 551.

This viewpoint is reaffirmed in Laurence Martin's article when he states that '[i]t should already be clear that the new policy was no complete break with previous trends...'⁶ Phillip Darby in his study of British defence policy east of Suez agrees with this perspective and maintains that '...the White Paper can be seen as the logical outcome of the attempt to give some intellectual coherence to the strategic ideas of the previous three years...'⁷ In turn, A.J.R.Groom views British Defence White Papers during the mid-1950s as a steady progression towards the policies annunciated in April 1957.⁸ Concomitantly, in a more recent work, Peter Malone stresses that

Largely because of timing, the Sandys White Paper of 1957 is often seen as a reaction to Suez; this is not the case, as the trends in policy date at least back to 1952.⁹

Colin Gordon in his essay on Duncan Sandys and Britain's independent nuclear deterrent maintains that claims of major changes were an 'exaggeration',¹⁰ while Eric Grove in his book on British naval policy since 1945 lends weight to these assertions when he describes the Sandys 1957 exercise as

⁶ Martin, op.cit. , p. 27.

⁷ P. Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez (London, 1973), p. 95.

⁸ A.J.R. Groom, British Thinking About Nuclear Weapons (London, 1974), p. 207.

⁹ P. Malone, The British Nuclear Deterrent (London, 1984), p. 104.

¹⁰ C. Gordon, 'Duncan Sandys and the Independent Nuclear Deterrent' in I. Beckett and J. Gooch, (eds.), Politicians and Defence (Manchester, 1981), p. 142.

'...the culmination of the series of reviews begun by the Churchill administration over five years previously...'¹¹

This above perspective bases itself on the identification of similar sets of policies in the period prior to the Suez crisis and in that debacle's immediate aftermath. It also seeks to draw a line linking motivations and strategic conceptions from 1957 back until at least the 1952 Global Strategy Paper. More specifically, there is a recognition that the most salient motivations were a mixture of an attempt to secure economic savings through a reduction in the defence budget together with a growing appreciation of the implications of thermonuclear weapons for global war planning. Specifically, the following three issues can be gleaned from the secondary literature's focus on continuity - issues regarded as being central to the White Paper as well as being those in which continuity was manifested across the 1955-57 period: (1) large reductions in defence expenditure; (2) large reductions in conventional forces through the termination of national service; (3) increased reliance on nuclear deterrence and a stress on the independence of Britain's deterrent.

Continuity In the Search for Economies: Writing in the mid-1970s, the former Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, Sir Richard Powell, stated that

From 1951 on there was a running battle between military requirements as stated by Allied Commands

¹¹ E.J. Grove, Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy Since World War II (London, 1987), p. 197.

and national Chiefs of Staff and the ability and will of Governments and electorates.¹²

Indeed, the amount of national resources devoted to defence had been going down since 1953. As a percentage of GNP, defence expenditure dropped nearly three per cent in five years: from just under ten per cent of GNP in 1952 to seven per cent in 1957.¹³ Groom maintains that '[i]n government circles serious consideration of, and concern over, the burgeoning costs of a balanced defence establishment had been evident from 1955...'.¹⁴ Certainly, with regard to the mid-1950s, Anthony Eden is adamant that economic concerns were vital in the deliberations over defence.¹⁵ Against this background, Gordon states that 'Macmillan wanted Sandys at the Ministry of Defence because he had decided as Chancellor of the Exchequer that defence should be obtained more cheaply...'.¹⁶ Mountbatten's official biographer, Phillip Ziegler, emphasises that Sandys came to the Ministry of Defence with explicit instructions that '...the cost of defence must be cut to sustain Britain's tottering economy'.¹⁷

¹² Sir Richard Powell, 'The Evolution of British Defence Policy' in Perspectives on British Defence Policy (Southampton, 1978), p. 53.

¹³ A. Pierre, Nuclear Politics: The British Experience with an Independent Strategic Force 1939-70 (London, 1972), p. 343.

¹⁴ Groom, op.cit. , p. 181.

¹⁵ A. Eden, Full Circle: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden (London, 1960), pp. 370-73.

¹⁶ Gordon, op.cit. , p. 134.

¹⁷ P. Ziegler, Mountbatten (London, 1985), p. 550.

The theme of economic reductions is thus viewed both as a constant concern and an issue of growing importance in defence considerations.

Continuity in Manpower Reductions: The secondary literature pays much attention to the government's decision in 1957 to reduce the size of the armed forces. With national service to be terminated and armed forces manpower decreased from 690,000 to 375,000 men, there is general agreement that the White Paper signalled the dismantling of a defence force whose form could be traced back to the late 1940s when conscription was instituted. Yet, as Groom points out, attempts to end national service were not something new, for the stress on force reductions '...had existed even at the time of the Korean War, and successive White Papers in the mid-fifties had edged towards its more whole-hearted espousal'.¹⁸ Malone, for example, directs attention to the fact that Eden was by the end of his administration strongly in favour of reducing the armed forces from 700,000 men to 450,000 by 1960 (or 1961 at the latest).¹⁹ This perspective is also reaffirmed in the analyses of Martin,²⁰ Pierre,²¹ Darby²² and in Anthony Eden's

¹⁸ Groom, op.cit. , p. 207.

¹⁹ Malone, op.cit. , p. 91.

²⁰ Martin, op.cit. , p. 26.

²¹ Pierre, op.cit. , pp. 96, 99-100, 106-88.

²² Darby, op.cit. , pp. 38-40, 102-107.

autobiography.²³ The decision to terminate national service is therefore seen as the logical culmination of trends already present in British defence policy.

Continuity in the Emphasis on Nuclear Deterrence and the Independence of Britain's Deterrent: There is a general recognition in the secondary literature that the focus on nuclear deterrence stood out as the conceptual and strategic centrepiece of the 1957 White Paper. Martin points out that it was only this focus that made the cuts in manpower possible.²⁴ Richard Rosecrance has, in turn, stressed that '[t]he basic premise of the paper was that military planning had been fundamentally altered by recent scientific advances'²⁵ and that British policy would have to take this into account.

Yet, Rosecrance also maintains that it was not so much the novelty of the nuclear deterrence idea but the lack of compromise in which it was expressed that stood out in this instance,²⁶ while Groom emphasises that the 1957 White Paper reflected but the 'maturation' of the British deterrent.²⁷ Certainly the secondary literature on the evolution of British nuclear strategy supports the view of continuity in strategic

²³ Eden, op.cit. , pp. 373-74.

²⁴ Martin, op.cit. , p. 26.

²⁵ R.N. Rosecrance, Defence of the Realm: British Strategy in the Nuclear Epoch (New York, 1962), p. 242.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Groom, op.cit. , p. 209.

concepts as well as a progression towards a greater emphasis on the merits of a nuclear deterrent posture. Significant landmarks in this development are seen to include: (1) the 1947 decision to build the bomb; (2) the discussions which took place amongst the Chiefs of Staff Committee and Cabinet during this period which had reflected the recognition that one of the prime objects of British policy had to be the prevention of global war through the nuclear deterrence of aggression; (3) the 1948 deployment of a number of United States Strategic Air Command's (SAC) bombers in Britain; (4) the decisions in the 1940s and 1950s with regard to the development and deployment of delivery systems; (5) the 1952 and 1954 Global Strategy Papers; (6) the 1954 decision to build the H-bomb; (7) the White Papers between the years 1952 and 1957; (8) and finally the Sandys White Paper itself. Thus, the nuclear emphasis of the White Paper was in no senses unique but rather an explicit expression and an affirmation of tendencies and programmes long present in British strategic planning.²⁸

²⁸ The official history of the late 1940s and early 1950s is to be found in M. Gowing's two volumes Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy, 1945-52 (London, 1974). N. Wheeler's 1988 doctoral thesis traces the subject up to 1955. See N. Wheeler, The Roles Played by the British Chiefs of Staff Committee in the Development of British Nuclear Weapons Planning and Policy-Making 1945-55 (Doctoral Thesis submitted to the Department of Politics, University of Southampton, 1988). M. Venables deals more narrowly with the subject of massive retaliation doctrine and the RAF in the 1945-52 period. See M. Venables, The Place of Air Power in Post-War British Defence Planning, and its Influence on the Genesis and Development of the Theory of Nuclear Deterrence, 1945-52 (Doctoral Thesis submitted to the Department of War Studies, King's College, University of London, 1985).

The 1957 White Paper's statement that Britain '...must possess an appreciable element of nuclear deterrent power of her own'²⁹ also underlay an aspiration for nuclear 'independence'. Here the secondary literature is equivocal as to the actual meaning of this concept. In his 1962 article, Martin does not seek to interpret this paragraph. Groom is most explicit when he states that while the object of the British deterrent was to influence Washington, '... it was also...to be able to do without them'.³⁰ Pierre discusses quite extensively the objectives of the British nuclear deterrent but does not directly link this to the meaning attached by Sandys to the concept of independent deterrence. Such a linkage is significantly also missing from Malone's work. Clearly, what is required in terms of an understanding of a move to independent deterrence is not simply evidence of continuity but a clarification of concepts.

The theme of continuity is thus one which underlines virtually all approaches to the 1957 White Paper. However, at the same time, while there is agreement that existing trends in British defence policy provided the background to the Sandys defence programme, there is also concurrence that it was the Suez crisis of 1956 which provided the immediate impetus. Martin maintains that '...the Suez affair had induced wide agreement

²⁹ Defence: Outline of Future Policy, Cmd. 124, HMSO, 1957, para. 15.

³⁰ Groom, op.cit. , p. 209.

among military commentators at least upon the need for a close scrutiny of existing programmes'.³¹ Malone, in turn, stresses that '[i]n the post-invasion malaise, Macmillan was moved to offer the independent deterrent as a mark of continuing greatness'³²- a contention expressed earlier by Pierre.³³ The significance of the Suez crisis in influencing British perceptions about her political, military and economic power are attested to by Darby,³⁴ Groom,³⁵ and Rosecrance.³⁶ What needs to be noted at this point is not only the contradictions between the nuclear focus of the Sandys White Paper and the apparent conventional difficulties encountered in the Suez operation,³⁷ but also the implicit tensions between a focus, on the one hand, on continuity, and on the other, the implications of crisis for the drawing up of the White Paper. Before dealing with this issue in terms of the objectives of the thesis, it is necessary to briefly review the second major theme to be encountered in the secondary literature concerning the 1957 White Paper: the nature of the decision itself.

³¹ Martin, op.cit. , p. 27.

³² Malone, op.cit. , p. 30.

³³ Pierre, op.cit. , p. 96.

³⁴ Darby, op.cit. , p. 99.

³⁵ Groom, op.cit. , pp. 190-94.

³⁶ Rosecrance, op.cit. , pp. 222-23, 233-36.

³⁷ See for example R. Fullick and G. Powell, Suez: The Double War (London, 1979), pp. 30-44.

(B) The Decision Making Process

There appears a recognition amongst those writing on the period that the evolution towards and the drafting of the 1957 White Paper must also be placed in reference to the issues of personality and organisational structure. With regard to the former concern, Martin articulates a generally accepted opinion when he states that

Although the White Paper was discussed in a series of highly acrimonious meetings between the Minister and the Chiefs of Staff, it was very much the personal achievement of the Minister who, on good account, paid scant regard to protests and on occasion refused even to consider dissenting papers.³⁸

This focus on dissension is supported by Crowe³⁹ and echoed by Rosecrance when he states that '[t]he process of arriving at the 1957 White Paper, which embodied the new emphasis on the deterrent was one of acrimony and delay'⁴⁰ - not least of all due to the 'domineering' approach of the new Minister. Johnson, in his study of the Ministry of Defence, describes Sandys as tactless and overbearing,⁴¹ while Ziegler in his biography of Mountbatten, outlines the extreme tensions that developed as Sandys forcefully drove his plans through without

³⁸ Martin, op.cit. , p. 28.

³⁹ Admiral W.J. Crowe, The Policy Roots of the Royal Navy 1945-63 (Doctoral Thesis submitted to Princeton University, 1965), pp. 228-29.

⁴⁰ Rosecrance, op.cit. , p. 239.

⁴¹ F.A. Johnson, Defence By Ministry: The British Ministry of Defence 1944-74 (London, 1980), p. 55.

adequately consulting the Chiefs.⁴² Sandys's temperament is therefore regarded as a crucial factor in the final policy-outcome in April 1957.

Yet, there is also a recognition amongst those writing on the period that the issue of personality was only a factor in the context of a larger problem of the organisation for defence decision making, and that the Sandys appointment in January 1957 was but part of an attempt to attain a new power balance within the defence decision making process. Martin has underlined this break in methods of defence decision making in the pre-Suez and immediate post-January 1957 period by describing the former as 'Defence by Bargaining' and the latter as 'Defence by Doctrine'.⁴³ In the former

The chief failing [was]...the typical tendency of committees to decide by compromise rather than reason ...[and that] the allocation of money year by year seems to have proceeded more on the basis of "fair shares" than a coherent overall strategic plan.⁴⁴

In the latter

There was a marked change in the tone of policy-making...[and] the Minister came down heavily for a particular doctrine and imposed a number of very far reaching consequent changes...⁴⁵

⁴² Ziegler, op.cit. , pp. 548-66.

⁴³ Martin, op.cit. , pp. 23-29.

⁴⁴ Ibid. , p. 24.

⁴⁵ Ibid. , p. 29.

The juxtaposition of decision making processes in the pre-1957 and the Sandys era is a theme echoed both implicitly and explicitly in the writings of those authors who focus their attentions on the organisation of defence decision making (though not necessarily on the Sandys White Paper itself). For example, Martin Edmonds states that the 1946 White Paper Central Organisation of Defence⁴⁶ - that document which laid the organisational basis for defence decision making (with slight variations) until January 1957, and against which Macmillan and Sandys reacted - created a small and weak Ministry of Defence and failed to institute a system which embodied the principles of centralised command. Rather, it established a very diffuse and fragmented higher defence organisation and set the ground rules by which the services could

...separately and collectively prosecute their particular interests against attempts from the Ministry of Defence at the centre to introduce functional, joint and defence orientated policy and planning.⁴⁷

Despite attempts to strengthen the power of the Ministry (most notably in 1955), both Howard and Johnson underline the weakness of the Ministry of Defence relative to the services in the pre-Sandys period.⁴⁸ Both also acknowledge that the

⁴⁶ Central Organisation of Defence, Cmd. 6923, HMSO, 1946.

⁴⁷ M. Edmonds, (ed.), The Defence Equation: British Military Systems - Policy Planning and Performance Since 1945 (London, 1986), p. 61.

⁴⁸ According to Cmd. 6923 of 1946 the role of the Minister of Defence would be to deal with administration matters on which a common policy for the three services was desirable. Since the service ministers would not sit on the Cabinet, he

situation was made entirely different as a result of the 1957 changes when the Minister of Defence was given the prerogative to decide on all issues of organisation and disposition of the armed forces and when the services were effectively blocked from going over the Minister's head to higher authorities.⁴⁹ Powell, for example, quotes from a 1957 letter sent from Montgomery to Macmillan in which the former states unequivocally that

was the principle conduit of military information to that body. He also acted as vice-chairman of the Cabinet Defence Committee. Unfortunately for the Minister, his task was made difficult by the fact that constitutional departments of state for each of the services retained legal responsibilities to Parliament for their respective expenditures. In addition, they retained the right to determine their own requirements and weapons specifications. Execution of policy also remained firmly in their grasp. Finally, the Chiefs of Staff Committee which, theoretically, had the task of providing unbiased professional military advice also tended to reflect service positions, and by retaining the right of access to the Prime Minister, could override the Minister of Defence. See M. Howard, Central Organisation of Defence (London, 1970) pp. 5-13; and F. Johnson, op.cit., Chapter 2. An attempt was made in 1955 to address the problem of the strength of the competing services and the weakness of the central directing organs by increasing the size of the Ministry of Defence, by making the Minister responsible for a balanced armed forces under the strategic policy directed by the Defence Committee and by the appointment of a separate chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee who would be responsible for providing professional military advice to the government. It is, however, recognised in the secondary literature that these modifications do not detract from the far more reaching changes instituted by Macmillan in January 1957. Johnson is therefore adamant that 'Major service integration these [1955] modest changes definitely were not'. Johnson, op.cit., p. 47. This is a point supported by Wheeler (1988), op.cit., pp. 381-87.

⁴⁹ Arguably, another source of weakness in the Ministry of Defence during the 1940s and 1950s was the rapid turnover in Ministers which led to inconsistencies and inefficiencies. See Appendix.

Duncan Sandys has now the power, given him by you, to give orders; and being the man he is, he will see his orders carried out.⁵⁰

Consequently, this focus on organisational alterations and a specific personality dynamic characteristic of the Sandys period represents the second major theme in the available literature on the Sandys White Paper of 1957.

(2) Key Questions for Analysis

(A) Problems in the Secondary Literature

The object of this thesis is to review recently released documentation concerning defence policy in the years 1955-1957 in order to establish both the degree to which the 1957 White Paper was the inevitable expression of earlier trends and the measure of Duncan Sandys's contribution. The significance of the 1957 White Paper in the context of British strategic planning is analysed through an attempt to discern continuities and discontinuities in the content and process of British strategic planning across the 1955-57 period.

With these tasks in mind, there is a necessity to supplement the existing secondary literature because of: (1) obvious gaps in substance which are the inevitable products of the lack of primary sources; and (2) a degree of methodological confusion

⁵⁰ Powell, op.cit. , p. 58.

that exists in the approaches to the White Paper outlined above. In this context, the secondary literature reveals three specific shortcomings:

(1) There is a problem of the substance of policy continuity. That is - and this, as shall be noted, relates specifically to the question of independent deterrence - the White Paper may well reflect a continuity with previous policies, but not necessarily the type of continuity that is generally attributed to it. This reflects a lack of source material rather than a methodological problem.

(2) It may well be the case that the move to the White Paper is a reflection of policy continuities, but if it is accepted that the White Paper imposed major changes on defence policy, then the issue of discontinuities across the immediate pre- and immediate post- 1957 period must be assessed.

(3) The writings also do not distinguish very clearly between the various aspects of defence policy and how these relate to the problem of policy progression and continuities across the 1955-57 period. Little attempt is made to break-down the paper into the separate aspects of independent deterrence, the conventional-nuclear balance and the specific question of manpower. Consequently, not much thought is given to the possibility that continuity may be more manifest in some aspects of policy than in others. It might therefore be the case that the secondary literature overstates the argument of

an inevitable progression towards the policies announced in the 1957 White Paper and thus also the degree of continuity across the 1955-57 period.

Methodologically, a major difficulty here is a tendency within the secondary literature to approach the problem on two distinct levels: (1) on the level of general policy statements and inter-state behaviour (see Chapter Two); and (2) on the level of bureaucratic politics and organisational structure (see Chapter Three). In the writings previously discussed, authors often jump from one approach to another without adequately explaining their actions. The problem is a significant one because it is not unrelated to the question of continuity. For example, if one compares two key policy statements (albeit one internal and one external) such as that the 1952 Global Strategy Paper and the 1957 White Paper, then a definite progression and continuity is notable - both in terms of the nuclear focus and in the general appreciation that cuts in conventional forces would have to take place. On the other hand, if one places the 1957 White Paper in the context of bureaucratic bargaining during 1955-56 between the services and the Ministry of Defence on the issues of manpower requirements, war preparation priorities and necessary capabilities, the case that Britain was inexorably moving towards the policies announced in the 1957 White Paper is somewhat weakened - at least in terms of a policy progression that would inevitably realise itself in 1957.

Clearly, the two themes identified in this chapter as reflecting the existing approaches to the Sandys White Paper - the theme of continuity and the theme of the decision making process - need to be more fully integrated. Two writers whose work touches upon such an enterprise are Snyder and Wheeler, though both approaches reveal limitations when applied to an understanding of the significance of the 1957 White Paper.

Not only does Snyder negate the pervasiveness of bureaucratic politics in British strategic planning, but he questions its negative consequences and also argues that bureaucratic infighting is most strongly felt when attempts are made to impose discipline from above.⁵¹ Yet, it is clear from Martin's article that in terms of securing results 'Defence by Doctrine' was a far more effective method than 'Defence by Bargaining' - even though the conflicts seemed the most bitter when Sandys sought to downgrade the service's organisational standing.

A broader survey of British strategic planning, however, may support Snyder's point that inter-service rivalry was not ubiquitous. Indeed, general threat perceptions by Britain's defence decision-makers of the Soviet Union remained throughout the 1940s and 1950s constant and relatively uncontested.⁵² Nevertheless, a reading of the secondary

⁵¹ W.P. Snyder, The Politics of British Defence Policy, 1945-62 (Columbus, 1964), pp. 174-77.

⁵² See Wheeler (1988), op.cit. , pp. 67-110.

literature does not automatically lead to the deduction that at any time in the period under study bureaucratic politics was absent from the narrower - but for the purposes of this thesis, more relevant - discussions of procurement and programming. Here, Snyder's claim that the consequences of bureaucratic bargaining on strategic planning are not all that negative, must be set against the recognised problems of imposing a coherent strategic philosophy and force posture on the services during the pre - 1957 period.

Wheeler takes cognisance of these limitations in Snyder's approach. His attack on the bureaucratic politics model as it applies to British defence decision making during the first decade after the Second World War centres around the argument that policy-makers did not distinguish between organisational, personal and national interests. He is adamant that even if the rationales presented within the Chiefs of Staff Committee reflected parochialisms '...the arguments were presented and debated in terms of the "national interest" '.⁵³ While this might well be the case, it is essentially an epistemological problem and does not directly address the issues of concern to this thesis. For, it is not the actual mainspring of competing service visions (a problem that is possibly more easily resolvable on the level of cognitive psychology than political science), but the fact of their existence that is of

⁵³ Ibid. , p. 154.

importance in an analysis of why the policies announced in the Sandys White Paper came about when they did.

In this regard, researchers cannot but be impressed with the appearance of strong differing views amongst the various service departments, the relative consistency of views within each department and their durability across time. Also of interest is the fact that prior to 1957, the Ministry of Defence proved unable to impose itself on these perspectives. Of importance are not questions of epistemology, but the relationship of the disparate service visions to: (1) various types of decisions; and (2) the organisation for defence decision making. The aim now is not to set-up a rigorous theoretical framework, or to begin to impose a political science edifice on an essentially historical piece of work, but rather to outline the parameters of a heuristic tool that can help draw out the significance of the Sandys White Paper in the context of British strategic planning during the mid-1950s.

It is contended that a useful heuristic mechanism is that of Morton Halperin's concept of 'organisational essence' - a concept, that can help unravel service attitudes to different levels of policy planning and, in turn, aid in clarifying aspects of continuity and discontinuity in British strategic planning across the period under study.

(B) The Issue of 'Organisational Essence'

Where cognitive perceptions and organisational structure come together is in the defence of what Morton Halperin terms the 'organisational essence'. He maintains that

Organisations have considerable freedom in defining their missions and the capabilities they need to pursue these missions. The organisation's essence is the view held by the dominant group in the organisation of what the missions and capabilities should be.⁵⁴

An organisation's definition of its essence is important as it appears that participants in the decision making process tend to equate national security with the interests of their organisation. In this context: (1) an organisation will favour policies and strategies which its members believe will make their organisation more important; (2) an organisation will struggle hardest for those capabilities which it views as necessary to the essence of the organisation; and (3) it will resist attempts to take away from it those functions viewed as part of its essence. Given the implications of a New Look force posture for service conventional forces and roles, this point is not without significance. Specifically, the three most important 'essences' through which policies associated with a British New Look had to filter were those located in the Royal Air Force (RAF), Navy and Army during the 1940s and 1950s.

⁵⁴ M.H. Halperin, Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy (Washington, 1974), p. 28.

Similarly to the United States Air Force (USAF), the dominant view within the RAF was that its essence was reflected in the piloting of combat aircraft designed for the delivery of nuclear ordnance against targets in the Soviet Union. Indeed, more than either of the other two services, the RAF was concerned with a single strategic concept - strategic nuclear deterrence.⁵⁵ The central objective for the RAF remained the procurement of a force which would (together with SAC) deliver a nuclear blow to the Soviet Union at the onset of a global war. The very possession of such a capability would make such a war unlikely, and if it should, nevertheless, come about, the conflict would be a decidedly short affair. Not surprisingly, the RAF was the main beneficiary, and thus the main supporter, of a move to a British New Look. The focus on nuclear deterrence would increase its absolute power as measured in its ability to carry out its favoured task while, at the same time, increasing its strength relative to the other services.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See Venables for an analysis of the doctrinal roots of such a conception. Venables, op.cit. , pp. 40-74.

⁵⁶ Concomitantly, the RAF had to deal with threats to its 'essence' from the Navy which challenged the air force's sole possession of the nuclear deterrent by demanding an aircraft carrier nuclear strike role; from the Army whose demands that the RAF expand its airlift capability had the consequence of diverting scarce resources to relatively unattractive roles; and from the Ministry of Defence which sought savings in the RAFs cherished Fighter Command. See N. Wheeler, 'British Nuclear Weapons and Anglo American Relations 1945-54' International Affairs, Vol.62, No.1, (1985/86), pp. 83-85.

As with the United States Navy, the Royal Navy saw its 'essence' as the maintenance of combat ships whose primary mission was the control of the seas. According to Snyder

The fleet, important as a national symbol, is also a source of strength to the Admiralty: It unifies the navy and gives the Admiralty a single object of attention, a single criterion against which to judge programmes and projects.⁵⁷

Whether control of the seas would be an issue in a war characterised at the outset by a thermonuclear exchange was, of course, highly debatable. The Navy, therefore, had great difficulty in tailoring its traditional conception of its 'essence' to the exigencies of war in the thermonuclear era. Its wish for a strong balanced fleet made it imperative that the Admiralty reject any conception of global war that had no place for a 'broken-backed' phase - that is, for conventional operations following the nuclear exchange. In a statement in mid-1955, the Navy included in its prime tasks the deterrence of an enemy through the ability to wage successful war.⁵⁸ It regarded the adoption of a British New Look as a threat to its funding and ultimately to its world role. It defended its position through a stress on the virtues of a balanced fleet and on its ability to deliver nuclear ordnance - though in the period under study, the first objective remained the predominant one. The Navy, therefore, remained a major

⁵⁷ Snyder, op.cit. , p. 127.

⁵⁸ See exchange between Air Marshall Sir R.H.M. Saundby, 'The Royal Navy in the Atomic Age' pp. 149-57 and Rear Admiral, A.D. Torlesse, 'The Role of the Aircraft Carrier' pp. 72-82, Brassey's Annual, 1955 (London, 1956).

obstacle to an emphasis on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces.

The 'essence' of the Army in its broadest sense was a ground combat capability. In the context of Britain's European and colonial commitments such a capability could take conventional and non-conventional forms. Accordingly, the Army envisaged its tasks as: (1) making use of the increased firepower of nuclear weapons while avoiding destruction by the enemy's nuclear capability; (2) dealing with insurgency and other cold war and limited war tasks; and (3) playing a role in the recovery of the country following a nuclear bombardment.⁵⁹ While, the Army appeared to adapt relatively easily to the demands of conflict in the thermonuclear age. However, once the termination of national service became the linchpin between economic savings, cutbacks in conventional forces and increased reliance on nuclear deterrence, then the Army too represented a major obstacle to any new directions in strategic thinking.

Having defined the concept of 'organisational essence' and having noted its manifestation within the British defence decision making establishment, the object must now be to relate it to the central questions of this study. Here it is contended that three apparent attributes of the concept are of significance: (1) that while an organisation will sometimes

⁵⁹ DEFE 7/963, fol.12, undated-1955.

seek to harness developments and demonstrate their compatibility with its 'essence', an organisation's 'essence' is not always readily amenable to change; (2) that the ability of an organisation to enhance and protect its 'essence' is to a large degree a function of the power of that organisation relative to the central decision making organs; and (3) that an organisation's essence is not equally threatened by all types of decisions - that is, as discussions shift away from specific schemes to more general speculations, the need to defend the 'organisational essence' will diminish, though, of course, certainly not disappear. All three of these characteristics will help to explain why prior to 1957, the types of proposals announced in the Sandys White Paper had difficulty in reaching fruition. The third point relates to the level of analysis problem and, as shall be noted, serves to clarify the issues of continuity and discontinuity in British strategic planning during the mid-1950s.

To conclude, a summary of the major research questions are presented:

(1) During the years 1955-56, was the Eden administration succeeding in reducing defence expenditure, manpower and conventional capabilities ? If not, what can explain these difficulties ? How do these issues relate to the arguments of continuity in policy during the mid-1950s ?

(2) During the years 1955-56 was the Eden administration moving towards a greater reliance on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces ? Was it interested in procuring an independent deterrent force ? If not, what was it intent upon creating ?

(3) During 1957, what was Sandys's major objectives and what represented his major achievements ? What accounted for his success in forcing upon the services a British New Look force posture ?

(4) What were the immediate implications of Sandys's White Paper for nuclear deterrence and conventional capabilities ? Finally, what does this tell us about the problems of continuity and progression in British strategic planning during the 1955-57 period ?

CHAPTER TWO

THE CASE FOR CONTINUITY: THE MOVE TO MASSIVE RETALIATION AND BRITISH ALLIANCE COMMITMENTS 1955-56

Introduction

One approach in analysing to what extent the 1957 White Paper represented the culmination of ideas and trends already present in British strategic planning is to view the threat of nuclear weapons use in its relation to British alliance commitments during the Eden administration. It is important to appraise whether during the mid-1950s one can discern a growing emphasis on the threat of massive retaliation and the employment of nuclear weapons as means of deterrence and as tools of war fighting. In this context, the question must also be put of whether it is possible to distinguish any nuances in the structuring of nuclear threats in the various major theatres to which Britain was committed (i.e. The Middle East, Far East and Europe) and to explain their occurrence. Furthermore, it is necessary to begin to address the issue of the manner in which this nuclear emphasis was linked to conventional forces and how these issues informed upon relations between the services.

This chapter contends that if it is possible to note an increasing reliance on nuclear weapons as centrepieces in the various theatre strategies, then the arguments put forward in the secondary literature for continuity and progression during

the 1950s are strengthened. Conversely, to the extent that there are obstacles to such a development, then, arguably, there are grounds for caution. However, first it is necessary to turn to an analysis of the strategic and technological imperatives that underlay the shift to an emphasis on the nuclear deterrent.

(1) Imperatives for Massive Retaliation and a Reduction in Conventional Forces

A reading of the documents relating to strategy and British alliance commitments during 1955-56 points to an increasing emphasis on the threat of thermonuclear retaliation as a deterrent to global war and as a means for achieving a desired result should war occur. The motivations were not only economic but also technological and strategic. The explosion by the Americans of thermonuclear weapons in 1952, the belief that the Soviet Union had exploded one in 1953, and the decision by Britain in 1954 to build her own thermonuclear weapons,¹ led to a number of major studies being undertaken just before the Eden administration took office. In these, the desirability of relying on a strategy of massive retaliation and the irrelevance of planning for conventional operations in the post-thermonuclear exchange phase were both implicitly and

¹ CAB 128/27, CC 47 (54) 5, 7 July 1954. The decision to build the H-bomb was made by a special committee GEN 464 on 16 June 1954, but the full Cabinet did not give formal approval until the following month. Also see Pierre, op.cit., p. 90, Malone op.cit., p. 12.

explicitly recognised. Two arguments were regarded as central to all these studies: (1) that thermonuclear weapons made global war less likely; and (2) should it, nevertheless, occur, these very same weapons would cause such destruction as to make any conventional military operations impossible to conduct.²

According to Robert Rhodes James

In his discussions with Eisenhower, and reading papers submitted by the Ministry of Defence [Churchill] had come to the conclusion that the development of the H-bomb had changed everything. To [Sir John Colville] he said 'the difference between the hydrogen bomb and the atomic bomb is greater than that between the atomic bomb and the bow-and-arrow...'³

The 1954 Global Strategy Paper which was drawn up by the Joint Planning Staff (JPS) so as take account of these differences underlined the view that deterrence was now easier and more affordable for Britain.⁴ Whereas hundreds of kiloton weapons would have been required to deter the enemy, now only a few megaton weapons needed to be procured. What had previously only been an aspiration of the super-powers was now within the

² The concept of global war was defined as one without restrictions of any kind between the Soviet Union and her allies on the one side and the United States and her allies on the other. Limited War was defined as an armed conflict short of global war which would be limited geographically and, possibly also in the weapons used. The cold war was recognised as an ideological conflict (including manifestations of subversion, insurgency and civil war) which would continue as long as the Soviets sought world domination. DEFE 5/62, COS (55) 282, 14 November 1955.

³ R. Rhodes James, Anthony Eden (London, 1986), p. 382-83.

⁴ DEFE 4/70, JP (54) Note 11, 10 May 1954.

grasp of a middle ranking power such as the United Kingdom.

In addition, it was recognised that with attainable explosive power now 'multiplied a hundred fold'⁵ the Soviet leadership would be influenced in the direction of greater caution in foreign and military policies. Indeed, the Cabinet was informed that '[i]t was at least possible that the development of the hydrogen bomb would have the effect of reducing the risk of a major war'.⁶ Moreover, it was the Cabinet's view in mid-1954 that '...unless we possessed thermo-nuclear weapons, we should lose our influence and standing in world affairs'.⁷ In this context, major savings in conventional preparations for global war could be secured with attention being re-focused to more likely and immediate contingencies such as the maintenance of security in Britain's colonial possessions. As far as global war was concerned, the Assistant Directors of Plans were adamant that with

...mutual annihilation the price of global war, it would seem unnecessary to continue to aim at contributing towards the deterrent by means other than the production of the H-bomb, the provision of up to date methods of delivery, and development of the capability of instant retaliation.⁸

However, of equal significance for Britain's conventional preparations for global war were the implications of the

⁵ DEFE 4/69, Appendix to COS 34 (54) 1, 26 March 1954.

⁶ CAB 128/27, CC 48 (54) 2, 8 July 1954.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ DEFE 7/963, fol.22, 18 June 1955.

Soviet acquisition of the H-bomb. Vulnerability to Soviet H-bomb attacks carried with it ramifications for questions of the credibility of the British nuclear threat, American strategic guarantees, the meaning of nuclear superiority and, at root, national survival. One of the most significant studies of this period which both directly and indirectly tackled these concerns was the Strath Report on the effects of a thermonuclear attack on Britain presented to the Defence Committee in February 1955.⁹ The still classified report claimed that a Soviet attack using only ten H-bombs would leave 12 million dead, four million wounded and 13 million pinned to their homes for at least a week. Over half the country's industrial capacity would be destroyed. There would also be a grave dislocation of essential services and wide disruptions in social and economic processes. The study warned that the combined result of these consequences '...would be to set-up a "chain reaction" in the social and economic structure which cannot be precisely measured'.¹⁰ The difficulties of ensuring national life, let alone conducting military operations were reinforced in a paper presented by the Director General of Civil Defence, General Kirkland, to the

⁹ The Strath Report remains closed under Section 3(4) but its major findings can be gleaned from a memorandum presented to the Chiefs called 'An Appreciation Of The Likely Form and Duration Of A Future Major War - With Reference To The Problem of Stockpiling In The UK' in December 1957. DEFE 5/80, COS (57) 278, 18 December 1957; also see DEFE 7/965, Annex to fol.22, 18 June 1955.

¹⁰ DEFE 5/80, COS (57) 278, 18 December 1957.

Chiefs of Staff Committee on 24 November 1954.¹¹ Here it was demonstrated that so great were the potential consequences of a thermonuclear attack on Britain that even an assault consisting of only one H-bomb dropped on each of Britain's five major population centres would present extreme difficulties for Britain's civil defence forces. For, it was shown that on the basis of the optimistic assumptions that half the population had been evacuated and one quarter had taken to shelters, there would still have resulted 820,000 'accessible trapped living casualties' - a figure far beyond the capabilities of Britain's meagre civil defence forces. Moreover, each thermonuclear explosion would result in as many as 100,000 fires stretching in a ring exceeding 12 1/2 miles around the point of explosion (this compared to the worst night of the Blitz in 1941 when only 2100 fires were started) - again, far beyond Britain's existing or future fire-fighting capabilities. Policy-makers were, no doubt, left to ponder how in this context Britain could serve as a base in any future thermonuclear war.¹²

Consequently, it is clear that during the mid-1950s, British

¹¹ DEFE 5/55, COS (54) 359, 22 November 1954.

¹² The report on rescue requirements was accompanied by a number of other still classified studies in 1953 and 1954 on the implications of a thermonuclear attack on Britain. These included the 1953 Hall Committee study which analysed the civil economy in the initial phase of global war; the Padmore Committee which reported on the position of the seat of government during such a conflict; and the Maclean Working Party which investigated the position of the armed forces in the initial stages of global war. See DEFE 4/68, COS 17 (54) 1, 17 February 1954.

military policy-makers were receiving information that pointed to the increasing sagacity of relying on the hydrogen bomb to deter thermonuclear war and the irrelevance of conventional planning for such conflicts. The documents do not reveal any opposition amongst the Chiefs and service departments with regard to the findings of studies conducted into the effects of thermonuclear weapons; indeed, the Chiefs described the Kirkland report as 'useful background'.¹³

It is important to recognise that these domestic pressures were at this time being reinforced by policies and declarations from across the Atlantic - specifically in the form of the American New Look. The American New Look of 1954 was an attempt by the Eisenhower administration to meet the competing demands of containing Soviet expansionism while at the same time reducing defence expenditure. It sought to do this by achieving a balance between conventional and nuclear firepower such that the threat to use the latter would replace the need to place increasing emphasis on the former. This strategy was made possible by the growing belief within the United States during the early 1950s in the efficacy of nuclear weapons as instruments of deterrence; it was made necessary as a result of the economic burdens of the Korean War and the doctrinal confusions inherited from the Truman administration.¹⁴ Against this background, the Secretary of

¹³ DEFE 4/74, COS 125 (54) 1, 24 November 1954.

¹⁴ For overviews of the history of American strategy see for example L. Freedman, The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy (London, 1981), Chapters 4 and 5; F. Kaplan, The Wizards of

State, John Foster Dulles, told the Council on Foreign Relations in January 1954 that the United States's new policy would '...depend primarily upon a great capacity to retaliate instantly, by means and at places of our own choosing'.¹⁵ This was, however, later toned down and Dulles maintained that massive retaliation would not be employed in all situations and that in certain circumstances the United States would prefer to accept setbacks rather than risk turning a limited local conflict into a strategic nuclear one.¹⁶

From the start, however, the British tended to be most circumspect with regard to Dulles's pronouncements. Scepticism concerning the novelty of the American strategic formulation stemmed partly from a belief that British strategic thinking (specifically the 1952 Global Strategy Paper) had preceded and influenced the American policy. Indeed, British policy-makers could not forget that when in 1952 the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Sir John Slessor, had sought to convince Americans of the merits of shifting from a focus on conventional forces to nuclear firepower, he was felt by the Americans to be

Armageddon (New York, 1983); D.A. Rosenberg, 'The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy 1945-60' International Security, Vol 7. No.4, (1983), pp. 3-71.

¹⁵ FO 371/109112, J. F. Dulles, 'The Evolution of Foreign Policy', Department of State Bulletin, Vol 30 (25 January 1954), p.108; also see J. H. Kahan, Security in the Nuclear Age: Developing US Strategic Arms Policy (Washington, 1975), pp. 12-13.

¹⁶ See FO 371/119112, J.F.Dulles, 'Foreign Policy and National Security', Statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 19 March 1954, Dept. of State Bulletin, Vol 30 (1954), p. 465.

attempting more to renege on British commitments than to be adumbrating a new strategic vision.¹⁷

Moreover, according to the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Roger Makins, the American New Look was the result of the administration's desire for domestic political reasons to present what was essentially an orthodox extension of an existing policy as something new.¹⁸ It was the British Embassy in Washington's view that

The warning of 'retaliation with weapons and at places of our own choosing' is difficult to accept literally... Dulles's warning seems to be largely bluff. Perhaps it was made like the President's mention of 'massive instant retaliation' without much other serious purpose than to persuade doubters amongst the electorate that the Administration are finally showing signs of determination in foreign affairs and can express it in good straight American terms.¹⁹

British scepticism and criticism of this policy was also manifested in Parliament, the press, and in the general theoretical debate between Slessor and Buzzard over the concept of 'Graduated Deterrence'.²⁰

¹⁷ See for example Rosecrance, op.cit., p. 159; Malone op.cit., p. 86, G. H. Snyder, 'The New Look of 1953', in W.R. Schilling, P. Y. Hammond and G. H. Snyder, Strategy, Politics and Defence Budgets (New York, 1962), p. 389.

¹⁸ FO 371/109100, Makins to Foreign Office, 16 January 1954.

¹⁹ FO 371/109100, AU 1013/5, 28 January 1954.

²⁰ For a review of British parliamentary, press and professional reaction see Groom op.cit., pp. 55-92, 138-54. For the Slessor and Buzzard debate see Sir Anthony Buzzard, Sir John Slessor and R. Lowenthal, 'The H-bomb: Massive Retaliation or Graduated Deterrence - A Discussion' International Affairs, Vol. 32 No.2, (1956), pp. 148-65; and Sir Anthony Buzzard, 'Massive Retaliation and Graduated Deterrence' World Politics, Vol. XXX11, No.2, (1956),

Yet, it is crucial to recognise that these attacks did not in any way totally undermine British perceptions concerning the utility of thermonuclear weapons in deterring global war and for making impossible the conduct of conventional military preparations during such a conflict. It also still left open the possibility that general Soviet caution in the face of the threat of thermonuclear escalation would make reductions in non-global war preparations an option. Consequently, both the Planners and the Chiefs remained wary of ideas which attempted to replace threats of massive retaliation with concepts of graduated deterrence. It was the JPS's view that '[t]he threat of massive retaliation was the only effective deterrent to Global War now and in the future'.²¹ Moreover, the recognition that the New Look was something less than new and that it was not without all manner of limitations, was accompanied by an awareness that a pattern was being set whereby conventional firepower would ultimately be replaced by the cheaper nuclear variant. With this tendency in mind, the Foreign Office informed the Chiefs in March 1954 that as a result of the increasing availability of 'new' aircraft and 'new' weapons, the American government was coming round to the view '...that they offer a much better return for investment than conventional weapons and should be substituted for them

pp. 228-37.

²¹ DEFE 4/81, COS 104 (55) 2 discussion of JP (55) 147 (Final), 15 December 1955.

whenever practicable'.²² Significantly, it was stated that

The trend is unmistakable and we must assume that as time goes by more emphasis still will be laid in US military planning on airpower and modern weapons, both from a tactical and a strategic point of view.²³

This latter analysis reflects much of the impetus behind the British move to her own New Look which often appeared less an attempt to establish a coherent doctrine based on a strategic appreciation of thermonuclear weapons than the result of a desire to achieve economic savings where ever possible. In this regard, the British New Look had more in common with the American New New Look of 1956 than the New Look of 1954. By 1956, Dulles's threat of massive retaliation against a wide range of contingencies had been undermined by his own admissions, by the criticisms of the American strategic community,²⁴ and by the strategic reality of increasing American vulnerability to Soviet thermonuclear attack.²⁵ What began to concern Eisenhower was the economic consequences of moves to circumvent the dilemmas posed by a growing US vulnerability to Soviet attack and the seeming inevitability

²² DEFE 5/72, COS (54) 127, 20 April 1954.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For some of the criticisms by American commentators see P. H. Nitze, 'Atoms, Strategy and Policy' Foreign Affairs, Vol. 34. No.2, (1956), pp. 187-98; R. Osgood, Limited War (Chicago, 1957); H. A. Kissinger, Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy (New York, 1957).

²⁵ For a 1980s perspective on US vulnerability in the 1950s see R. K. Betts, 'A Nuclear Golden Age ? The Balance Before Parity' International Security, Vol.2, No.3, (1986/7), pp. 3-32.

of strategic stalemate. Attempts by the Air Force to stress pre-emptive attacks and procure the necessary additional resources would have resulted in escalating financial costs and would have culminated in the undermining of the fiscal basis of the US New Look. The President preferred to place emphasis on the criteria of 'adequacy' as a means for determining procurement. As Huntington has shown, the basis of this policy was Eisenhower's repudiation of any attempt '...to make the maintenance of American strategic superiority a continuing requirement of policy'.²⁶ Nuclear deterrence through the threat of massive retaliation remained central to American security efforts while fiscal restraint was ensured. As shall be noted, this was an approach that British policy-makers did not deride but rather sought to emulate.

To conclude, during the mid-1950s, the British defence decision making community was well aware, both from British and American sources, of the strategic and economic virtues of relying on nuclear threats. While they were cognisant of the arguments that problems of vulnerability led to problems of credibility and that massive retaliation was a strategy of extremely limited applicability, the documents do not reveal that there was major disagreement with the concept that global nuclear war was now more unlikely than ever or that Britain would suffer enormous damage should such a conflict occur. Nor did policy-makers appear to disagree with the idea that

²⁶ S. P. Huntington, The Common Defence: Strategic Programmes in National Politics (New York, 1961), p. 104.

reliance on nuclear weapons might lead to some (undefined) reductions in conventional forces. For, it must be realized that unlike discussions on procurement and programming (see Chapter Three), these deliberations touched only indirectly on service roles and capabilities and therefore did not directly contest service preferences - that is, service definitions of their 'organisational essences'. On the level discussed in this section - the level of theoretical appreciation of the implications of thermonuclear weapons - there is thus a notable trend towards a stress on nuclear deterrence as a centrepiece in strategic planning. In this respect, the case for strategic continuity across the 1955-57 period is strengthened. In turn, this focus should have carried with it implications both for conventional force planning and alliance commitments. It is to this latter area that attention is now turned with the object being to analyse plans for nuclear weapons use in the framework of alliance commitments and to assess in that context whether the case for continuity is either enhanced or weakened.

(1) Nuclear Weapons and Britain's Major Extra-European Alliances

(A) The Bagdad Pact 1955-56

A review of the documents associated with British strategic planning in relation to the Bagdad Pact during 1955-56 reveals that growing emphasis was placed on strategic and tactical

nuclear weapons for deterrence and war fighting purposes. The immediate object was not simply strategic, but also economic, with the requirements of an economically preferred force posture receiving precedence over questions of strategic credibility.

On 30 March 1955, the UK acceded to the Turco-Iraqi Pact. By the end of the year Pakistan and Persia had joined and it was Eden's hope '...that the Pact could grow into a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] of the Middle East'.²⁷ From the beginning of its membership. Britain sought to avoid large force commitments through a stress on the centrality of massive retaliation as a means of deterring and, if necessary, defeating a Soviet attack. This followed naturally from her understanding of the defence of the Middle East region during global war which recognised that

...the planned use of nuclear weapons has completely altered the picture of Middle East defence and, with full co-operation from the Middle East States together with Commonwealth assistance, we can expect to hold the enemy in this theatre.²⁸

In talks held in London at the end of 1955 between military representatives of the US, UK and Turkey, it was agreed that in the event of a Soviet attack on the Bagdad Pact area, the object of alliance strategy would be to establish defensive positions covering the passes over the Zagros Mountains and to

²⁷ Eden, op.cit. , p. 203.

²⁸ DEFE 4/75, COS 1 (55) 1 discussion of JP (54) 101 (RF), 5 January 1955.

rely on a strategic nuclear air offensive and a theatre nuclear bombing campaign to weaken the Soviet advance. It was admitted that although the defence plans were based on a nuclear force being available in the theatre at the outbreak of war, a British nuclear capability would not be stationed there until 1959 ! Nevertheless, it was stated that the Americans were studying the possibility of placing their own theatre nuclear force there until such time as the British nuclear force was ready for deployment.²⁹

It was the Joint Intelligence Committee's (JIC) view that in global war the Russians would be unwilling to undertake a major campaign in the Middle East until they had observed the results of the initial nuclear phase of the war and of their land campaign in Western Europe. However, at the outbreak of global war, the Russians would be able with their forces already in position south of the Caucasus to make a limited advance into eastern Turkey, in an attempt to capture the

²⁹ DEFE 4/80, COS 93 (55) 3 discussion of JP (55) 139 (Final), 10 November 1955. How far actual joint planning with the Americans had proceeded with regard to such contingencies is unclear. Following a series of bilateral agreements signed in 1955 - agreements which included the exchange of war planning information - Bomber Command had increasingly been privy to information on aspects of US strategic targeting. It is doubtful, however, whether there was agreement on combined targeting plans in the 1955-56. See L. Freedman, 'British Nuclear Targeting' in D. Ball and J. Richelson (eds.), Nuclear Strategic Targeting (Cornell, 1988) p. 115. Whatever the case, UK planning seems to have proceeded on the assumption that in a crisis there would be Anglo-American military co-operation at all levels.

Zagros passes as a start line for subsequent operations.³⁰ The Soviets would have at their disposal 24 divisions against the Bagdad Pact's total of between five and eight. In order to overcome this unfavourable ratio the Pact would have to

(a) make the most effective use of the expected Allied nuclear superiority...

(b) fight in a position of our own choice which will provide the greatest natural advantages in defence and which will also give us as much time as possible both for the occupation of the position and for the allied nuclear superiority to take effect.

(c) be prepared to sacrifice the defence of national territory in order that the requirements of (a) and (b) above may best be met.³¹

Against this background, the strategic air offensive targeted on metropolitan Russia would aim at: (1) eliminating or at least greatly reducing the possibility of reinforcement, support and resupply for the invading forces; (2) hampering and possibly eliminating centralised control of operations; (3) occupying the efforts of Soviet fighters and long range bomber forces so that only a limited air effort would be available for use by them in the Middle East; (4) reducing the airfields from which operations against the Middle East theatre could be mounted; (5) and causing devastation to the Soviet homeland which would sooner or later adversely influence Soviet operations. The strategic air offensive would be accompanied by attacks with theatre nuclear weapons on concentrations of enemy ground forces and lines of

³⁰ DEFE 4/80, COS 93 (55) 3 discussion of JP (55) 139 (Final), 10 November 1955.

³¹ DEFE 4/81, COS 107 (55) 3 discussion of JP (55) 155 (Final), 30 December 1955.

communication within the theatre.³² Thus, on 19 January 1956, the Chiefs agreed that the '...main effect of the strategic air offensive would be to isolate the Soviet land forces deployed against the Middle East and reduce the Soviet air threat to the theatre'.³³ Concomitantly, theatre nuclear targets would be (a) airfields; (b) mountain passes; (c) ports and concentrations of shipping in the Caspian and Black Seas which were supplying operations in the Middle East; (d) supply and troop concentrations; (e) centres of communications; (f) and marshalling yards and concentrations of railway stocks.³⁴

At their meeting in Teheran in April 1956, the Military Committee of the Bagdad Pact directed that an interim capabilities plan for the defence of the Bagdad Pact area in 1957 should be drawn up. The British submission reflected the strong nuclear emphasis of British operational planning. It was stated that

The successful delivery of a major proportion of the Allied strategic air effort contemplated in the event of war in 1957 would practically demolish the whole fabric of Soviet industry, and should deprive the Soviets of any considerable control over, or direction of, their Governmental, military or economic resources. Soviet forces in being, and such material resources as were not subjected to nuclear attack, would depend for their future support entirely upon their existing supplies.³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ DEFE 4/82, COS 10 (56) 1 discussion of JP (55) 156 (Final), 19 January 1956.

³⁴ Ibid. Also see DEFE 6/34, JP (56) 3, 4 January 1956.

³⁵ DEFE 4/88, COS 68 (56) 3 discussion of JP (56) 113 (Final), 12 July 1956.

As a result of this offensive, it was believed that the Soviets would quickly limit their use of nuclear weapons against Pact forces; no significant reserve ground units would reach the combat area, while the flow of military equipment to the combat area would also be slowed. Furthermore, Soviet air forces which were not initially in the forward areas could not then easily be re-deployed there in significant numbers. Soviet submarine sortie rates would be reduced, Soviet command capabilities would be drastically downgraded, and such devastation to the Soviet homeland would occur as to sooner or later undermine the morale of the Russian troops.

The UK therefore planned to provide for the defence of the Bagdad Pact area four squadrons of Canberras, a reconnaissance squadron and a maritime force. During the early part of 1957, a composite force of Canberra, ground-attack squadrons and maritime reconnaissance aircraft would be made available. On the other hand, although the full resources of the United Kingdom Middle East Land Forces were theoretically available to support operations in the theatre, Bagdad Pact planners were informed that the peacetime deployment of those forces precluded any more than a small proportion of them being able to participate in the land defence of the Pact area. Consequently - and this was the crux of the matter - Britain's contribution to the Pact defence would mainly be in the realm of strategic and tactical nuclear delivery

capabilities.³⁶

It is important to recognise that this British nuclear emphasis stemmed as much from economic necessity as from strategic considerations. Indeed, throughout 1955 and 1956, the stress on strategic and theatre nuclear strikes derived strong impetus from the need to avoid spending money on conventional forces. In a February 1956 JPS paper entitled 'The Financial and Other Implications of Measures to Increase the Effectiveness of the Bagdad Pact' it was admitted that

The current availability and location of British forces in the Middle East theatre and the possibilities of reinforcement in conditions of global war are clearly out of line with Bagdad Pact planning as it is now proceeding, and could only be brought even partly into line by changes in our current policies and by expenditure on a scale which could not be accommodated with the current or future levels of the Defence Budget. In short, we have neither the men nor the money in current circumstances to make the Bagdad Pact effective militarily...³⁷

Consequently, Britain could not assign ground forces specifically for the defence of the Bagdad Pact area and Britain's representatives at the Pact were constantly warned by policy-makers back home to be wary of plans that might involve large force requirements.³⁸ This gave rise to much consternation amongst Britain's allies in the Pact. As a JPS paper put it in November 1956:

The fact that no estimate was given of the size of

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ DEFE 5/65, COS (56) 79, 21 February 1956.

³⁸ See for example DEFE 4/84, COS 24 (56), 28 February 1956.

the United Kingdom land contribution and also that no indication could be given of the time it would take for the forces to reach the scene of operations, caused much concern...It required a lot of talking to persuade the other planners that the United Kingdom was not trying to avoid helping in the land battle.³⁹

Yet, although it was recognised that '...it would be a blow to the other Bagdad Pact Countries...' if Britain refused to commit ground forces, this was a risk that seemed readily accepted.⁴⁰ It could not be forgotten that in the thermonuclear age global war was unlikely and military preparations were mainly for political purposes. Britain would thus not be deterred from focusing on the nuclear deterrent and avoiding conventional commitments. Certainly, the JPS was being unequivocal when it admitted that

The United Kingdom policy when setting up the military organisation of the Pact was that there should be the very minimum of expenditure in men and money consistent with maintaining the impetus of planning.⁴¹

From this discussion it is possible to derive a number of significant points: (1) between 1955 and 1957 there was a growing emphasis on nuclear firepower as opposed to conventional manpower - at least as far as global war was

³⁹ DEFE 4/92, COS 121 (56) 11 discussion of JP (56) 169 (Final), 21 November 1956.

⁴⁰ See DEFE 4/86, COS 46 (56) 1 discussion of JP (56) 86 (Final), 3 May 1956.

⁴¹ DEFE 4/87, COS 55 (56) 3 discussion of JP (56) 97 (Final), 31 May 1956.

concerned;⁴² (2) the economic motivations behind such moves were extremely strong; and (3) there does not appear to have been any major objections from the Chiefs or services to the nuclear emphasis. They willingly went along with this shift of focus to nuclear weapons, even though they must have recognised that from Britain's regional allies point of view, it was a strategy that was less than ideal and permeated with credibility problems: (1) it made the allies very dependent on British intentions and not British capabilities that were plainly visible on the ground (as conventional forces would be); (2) it also clearly subordinated Middle Eastern to European concerns in that British responses in the theatre were to be determined by Soviet actions outside it. Furthermore, the British could only have exacerbated allied fears when in July 1956, the Chiefs rejected a JPS suggestion that the Bagdad planners should determine the numbers and categories of those targets within the USSR, the destruction of which was essential to Pact operations. The Chiefs maintained that

The United Kingdom was not prepared to allow the

⁴² It was recognised that troops would still be needed to garrison Cyprus, Kenya, Iraq, Libya, Jordan and Aden, DEFE 4/87, COS 55 (56) 1, 31 May 1956; also see DEFE 5/64, COS (56) 4, 4 January 1956 and DEFE 5/64, COS (56) 56, 8 February 1956. The major threat to Britain's position in that region was perceived to be subversion. See DEFE 5/64, COS (56) 20, 13 January 1956. When it came to war that was short of global nuclear strategic war it was stated that

The most effective deterrent to such a war would be knowledge that the United Kingdom and the United States had combined military plans for immediate action against the aggression and the belief that they would be put into effect.

See DEFE 5/69, COS (56) 232, 15 June 1956. Again, how far advanced joint allied planning was at this stage is unclear.

medium bomber force to be committed in advance to attack definite targets in another theatre, since on the day, we might want to use it against targets which vitally affected the safety of the United Kingdom.⁴³

It seemed that Britain was basing a policy on a force, the regional component of which would not be in place until the end of the decade, and the strategic element of which could be redesignated when it was needed most.

Whatever the merits of shifting from a conventional to a nuclear focus, it cannot be denied that the above discussion highlights such a progression. Indeed, the case for continuity is strengthened. On the one hand there appears that during the period under study there was an increasing recognition that nuclear and thermonuclear weapons could achieve what conventional forces could not; on the other hand, economies were secured as potential conventional force deployments were substituted with promises of nuclear assistance.

However, it is important to recognise that these were specific types of economies - that is, economies in potential expenses. It is therefore contended here that the Chiefs and services readily went along with this emphasis because, similarly to the discussions on general theoretical speculations, actual service capabilities were not undermined. While it would have been preferable to have enhanced their capabilities through deploying men and machinery in the Bagdad Pact theatre, in the

⁴³ DEFE 4/88, COS 68 (56) 3 discussion of JP (56) 113 (Final), 12 July 1956.

then current economic climate, this seemed a most unlikely prospect. At the same time, British military planners were not being asked to give up what they already had. This then was a far less sensitive issue than the surrender of existing roles and capabilities - a process which would have inevitably informed much more strongly on their 'organisational essences' by weakening both their absolute and relative strengths. It was the absence of this threat (and indeed, as shall be noted, its concomitant existence in the context of forces deployed in the European theatre) that led to service unanimity in the readiness to acquiesce in the framework of the Bagdad Pact to a nuclear emphasis at the expense of conventional forces. This contention is reinforced by an analysis of nuclear weapons and Britain's membership of SEATO.

(B) THE SOUTH EAST ASIAN TREATY ORGANISATION (SEATO) 1955-56

Following the end of the Geneva conference of 1954 and the unwillingness of Dulles and the South Vietnamese to support the proposed settlement, Britain sought to create a regional defensive alliance that would underwrite the agreement and prevent what was regarded as communist aggression in that part of the world. On 6 September 1954, representatives of the US, UK, France, Pakistan, Thailand, the Phillipines, Australia and New Zealand signed the South East Asian Treaty Organisation Pact.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See Darby, op.cit. , pp. 61-65.

It should be noted that Britain defined her military tasks in the Far East as including: (1) the protection of British lives and interests in that region; (2) the maintenance (in conjunction with Australia and New Zealand) of the security of Malaysia and Singapore; (3) the maintenance of the British position in Hong Kong; (4) the provision of forces for anti-subversion roles throughout the region.⁴⁵ Central to Britain's conception of the defence of the region in global war was the need to deploy during peacetime the minimum amount of troops and to use nuclear weapons to make up for the loss of firepower. According to the Directors of Plans

The defence of South East Asia is now an Allied responsibility and any United Kingdom contribution can only be calculated in the light of the overall Allied strategic concept assuming the Allied use of nuclear weapons.⁴⁶

Furthermore, the JPS were adamant that

...[t]he use of nuclear air power must form the basis of our strategy [in the Far East]. Care should be taken therefore to avoid undue emphasis being placed on the land campaign.⁴⁷

It was accepted by the Chiefs that in the context of global war, the Far East would be a subordinate theatre and would not influence the outcome of the war. At the same time, they were also sanguine about the prospects of containing more limited

⁴⁵ DEFE 5/72, COS (56) 446, 21 December 1956.

⁴⁶ DEFE 4/82, 1 COS (56) 5 discussion of JP (55) Note 25 (Final), 3 January 1956.

⁴⁷ DEFE 4/87, COS 56 (56) 7 discussion of JP (56) 104 (Final), 5 June 1956.

actions in that theatre. They contended that in a limited war in the region (which they believed would most likely break out if China committed an act of aggression against SEATO or Hong Kong, or as a result of conflict between the US and China over the offshore islands or Formosa, or as a result of UN actions in Korea or elsewhere) nuclear weapons could be used without the risk of such a conflict escalating to the strategic level. There was concurrence amongst the Chiefs that nuclear weapons should be used in limited wars in the Far East. In March 1956, the Chiefs stated that they '...[did] not consider that the use of nuclear weapons in a limited war in the Far East will necessarily lead to global war'.⁴⁸ However, it was also claimed that if the Chinese attacked the off-shore islands, the war was unlikely to remain limited.⁴⁹

At the same time, manpower and conventional capabilities would still be needed to carry out cold war commitments. It was stressed that there still needed to be forces in Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong. ''

The forces we must retain for the above tasks will be made up of those required to meet the changing Internal Security commitments together with those additional forces needed to maintain the confidence of our SEATO allies and of local populations.⁵⁰

Where the threat to resort to massive retaliation could allow

⁴⁸ DEFE 4/85, COS 34 (56) 5 discussion of JP (56) 61 (Final), 15 March 1956.

⁴⁹ DEFE 4/83, COS 22 (56) 1 discussion of JP (56) 61 (Final), 21 February 1956.

⁵⁰ DEFE 4/89, COS 73 (56) 1 discussion of JP (56) 122 (Final), 27 July 1956.

for reductions in conventional forces was in relation to the contingencies of global and limited wars. Indeed, in the period immediately prior to the Suez crisis and the Sandys White Paper, the Chiefs sought to impress upon the other SEATO members that strategic nuclear bombardment made unnecessary the deployment of large numbers of British troops in the region. SEATO attempts to gain a British commitment to such deployments were strongly rejected.

Thus, for example, in a discussion of a draft of a United Kingdom position paper on the SEATO strategic concept for the defence of South East Asia, the JPS stated that they agreed that '...in order to be realistic Allied war aims must be related to military resources that are available...and that they should therefore be stated in minimum terms'.⁵¹ Consequently, two months later, the Chiefs were able to maintain that they '...consider that it would be unwise to authorise a statement even for planning purposes, of our force contribution...'⁵² British policy-makers were continually concerned that SEATO planners were intent upon exaggerating the threat to their region in order to demand that more British troops be deployed there.⁵³ Britain was also strongly opposed to any suggestion that there even be a study of the

⁵¹ DEFE 4/87, COS 56 (56) 7 discussion of JP (56) 104 (Final), 5 June 1956.

⁵² DEFE 5/71, COS (56) 324, 27 August 1956.

⁵³ DEFE 4/93, COS 127 (56) 1 discussion of JP (56) 159 (Final), 29 November 1956.

threat to the region in global war - a study that, too, could have reinforced the case for substantial British conventional force deployments.⁵⁴ Throughout the period under study, despite the objections of other SEATO members, the United Kingdom managed to prevent the development by that organisation of global war plans and thereby prevented Britain from having to bear the costs of providing large amounts of ground forces and conventional capabilities.⁵⁵ There does not appear in the available documents evidence of any objections by the services to this strategically questionable preference for non-planning.

To conclude, as with planning for the Bagdad Pact, what the services were only being asked to surrender potential forces and capabilities. Once again, little opposition surfaced concerning the move to a nuclear focus for there was nothing that was existent that needed to be defended. The Chiefs also must have recognised that SEATO demands for British conventional force deployments imposed unacceptable burdens on the embattled defence budget. In any event, from their perspective, in the context of reductions in British spending,

⁵⁴ Ibid. also see DEFE 5/72, COS (56) 427, 3 December 1956.

⁵⁵ DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 276, 18 July 1956. The Chiefs were informed by the UK SEATO planners that during the SEATO attempt to develop a strategic concept and produce an outline military plan and force requirements at the Third Military Staff Planners Conference (11-27 June 1956), the UK had encountered much opposition due to its tactics of procrastination. It was stressed that '...suspicion of the sincerity of the UK intention to fulfil her treaty obligations was evident'.

it was they and not SEATO who would determine what and how much should be procured.

Disputes between, on the one hand, the services and the Ministry of Defence and, on the other, between the services themselves, over roles, capabilities and strategy were duly submerged in the effort to present a united front. Consequently, a study of nuclear weapons and British strategic planning in the framework of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation reinforces the impression of progression towards the Sandys White Paper of 1957's focus on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces, and underlines the claim for continuity in strategic planning during the mid-1950s. Consequently, the next question becomes whether these findings can be supported by a focus on nuclear weapons and Britain's European commitments ?

(3) Nuclear Weapons and the European Commitment: 1955-56

(A) The Move Away From the Paris Agreements

In the light of the British emphasis on nuclear forces in exchange for conventional armies in the Bagdad Pact and SEATO regions, it is to be expected that a similar focus took hold in the West European theatre. A reading of the documents reveals that there were definitely pressures in this direction. The starting point was a move away from the Paris Agreements of 1954.

American interest in integrating Germany both militarily and politically into Western Europe during the mid-1950s had clashed with French concern over the long term implications of such a step for the intra-European balance of power. By 1954, discussions on the European Defence Community had broken down, but while Dulles intimated that he was prepared to proceed without the French, Britain questioned the viability of measures based upon such evident European disunity. In order to reassure France and thereby facilitate the entry of Germany into the Western European Union, the UK promised to maintain on the Continent the British forces which were then assigned to the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe [SACEUR] - that is, two armoured and two infantry divisions as well as the 2nd Tactical Airforce, or such other forces as the SACEUR regarded as having an equivalent fighting capacity.⁵⁶

That this ran counter to British strategic thinking as reflected in the nuclear emphasis of the Global Strategy Papers of 1952 and 1954, the promise of the 1954 White Paper to reduce manpower and the NATO decision to integrate into its plans the use of tactical nuclear weapons, is evidenced by the hesitation with which Britain approached this commitment. In discussions in the Cabinet on 10 March 1954, it was accepted that

An assurance that we would maintain the present fighting capacity of the United Kingdom forces on the Continent for the next few years did not commit

⁵⁶ Article VI, Paris Agreements, 23 October 1954 in Appendix 10, NATO Facts and Figures (Brussels, 1971).

us to maintain there any specified number of divisions and squadrons, and therefore left open the possibility of some reductions in numbers if in the course of time development of new weapons made it possible to maintain the present fighting capacity of our forces on the Continent with fewer men.⁵⁷

An escape clause was duly inserted into the Paris Agreement (the agreement that had formalised this commitment) which stipulated that in the event of an overseas emergency or too great a strain on Britain's external finances, British troops could be withdrawn from the Continent.⁵⁸

In the 1954 UK submission to the NATO Annual Review, Britain, though not yet seeking to renege on its commitment, sought to give SACEUR the impression that a large part of the forces designated for 'broken-backed' warfare in the post-nuclear exchange phase would not be forthcoming. This was attributed to financial limitations (the current defence review had set the UK defence budget for 1955/56, 1956/57 and 1957/58 at £1640 million) and recognition that a thermonuclear attack would interfere with the mobilization, training and transportation of divisions designated to reinforce the British Army on the Rhine (BAOR).

This tendency was further reflected in the JPS attitude to SACEUR's 1954 capability study. Thus, while there was agreement between British and NATO planners that global war

⁵⁷ CAB 128/27, CC 17 (54) 4, 10 March 1954.

⁵⁸ Article VI of the Paris Agreements, op.cit. See DEFE 5/53, COS (54) 203, 22 June 1954 and DEFE 4/69, COS 43 (54) 4, 12 April 1954.

would begin with a possibly decisive thermonuclear exchange which could be followed by a broken-backed phase, the Joint Planners stressed that '...in the face of the nuclear attack expected on this country, it is probable that our contribution to a second phase, if it occurs, would be negligible'.⁵⁹ Again, while NATO claimed that the role of allied land/air forces would be that of a deterrent and that their main tasks would be: (1) surviving initial surprise attack; (2) participating effectively in the battle for air/atomic superiority; and (3) arresting Soviet land forces in Europe, the JPS claimed that it considered (3) difficult to achieve because '...there is no more than a reasonable chance of preventing Soviet land advances in Europe'. Furthermore, it was pointed out that forces necessary for this requirement would involve major financial expenditures and that

To avoid such an increase in defence costs it would be necessary to take some major steps such as considerably reducing the reserve forces, or even slightly reducing the active forces.⁶⁰

This British perspective was strengthened in 1955 when in the context of the Long Term Defence Review (LTDP), the Chiefs approved a paper on factors influencing the allocation of reserves which stated that:

From the military viewpoint...it is wasteful to develop forces solely designed to operate and fight in [the post nuclear exchange phase]...The introduction of thermonuclear weapons has changed the requirements of our contribution to NATO. Their

⁵⁹ DEFE 4/72, COS 94 (54) 3 discussion of JP (54) 76 (Final), 2 September 1954.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

present size and equipment is dictated more by political than military reasons.⁶¹

Not surprisingly, the progress of the 1955 LTDP (see Chapter Three) led the Directors of Plans to express concern about the conflict between Britain's NATO commitments and economic savings and planning priorities which were based on the assumption that cuts would be least damaging in global war capabilities. For, it was stated that the most important global war forces '...were those committed to remain on the continent of Europe and those naval and air forces assigned to SACEUR, SACLANT [Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic] and Channel Command'.⁶² Political obligations entailed, at the very least, the maintenance of UK NATO forces at their present size and the JPS were apprehensive that

...[i]f for political reasons the major Global War forces were regarded as sacrosanct for the present, cuts would have to be applied to our Cold War forces and perhaps even to the Primary Deterrent, thus reversing the order of priorities agreed by the Chiefs of Staff...⁶³

Yet, it seemed that Britain, when faced with a choice between political promises and economic necessities, preferred to jettison the former. The JPS pointed out to the Chiefs that not only had the UK already lowered her planning goals for all three services below the force goals established in the 1953 Annual Review but that

⁶¹ DEFE 5/59, COS (55) 176, 27 July 1955.

⁶² DEFE 4/79, COS 73 (55) 2 discussion of JP (55) Note 18, 13 September 1955.

⁶³ Ibid.

Financial reasons impelled us to this course and are likely, in the near future to drive our planning goals lower still. When the time comes to report these further reductions to NATO we, as a Standing Group nation, shall be faced with the predicament whether to continue to exhort NATO as a whole to strive towards the original force goals whilst not doing so ourselves.⁶⁴

In a Cabinet Defence Committee meeting on 27 September 1955, it was agreed that the UK presentation to the 1955 NATO Annual Review should be governed by three considerations: (1) the existing pattern of NATO forces needs in relation to what the UK thought would happen in nuclear war; (2) the fact that existing NATO forces, if maintained at their present level, would result in a bill which no European country could afford to pay; and (3) that Britain's position in NATO as a leading world power required her to take the lead in bringing these issues into the open. It was therefore unequivocally stated that as Britain's level of defence expenditure could not continue to rise each year, it would be unwise to conceal from NATO authorities that substantial reductions in the size and possibly the effectiveness of Britain's forces would have to be made.⁶⁵ Shortly thereafter, the JPS informed the Chiefs that since British defence expenditure on its NATO forces would not be increased above the present levels necessary to adapt NATO forces to a future nuclear war, the costs of an early warning system, an 'atomic posture and capability' and an efficient air defence system would have to be offset by a

⁶⁴ DEFE 4/79, COS 73 (55) 3 discussion of JP (55) 91 (Final), 13 September 1955.

⁶⁵ CAB 131/16, DC (55) 40, 27 September 1955.

reduction in the overall size of BAOR.⁶⁶ The Chiefs had no difficulty in agreeing with this analysis. The First Sea Lord, Lord Mountbatten, stated that Britain should inject in to the 1955 Annual Review

...the thought that each NATO nation should be encouraged to carry out a reappraisal of its own long term military defence efforts and that these reappraisals should receive their due weight in reshaping NATO strategy.⁶⁷

Thus, by the end of 1955, it appeared that British military policy-makers were well on their way to shifting the focus from conventional to nuclear forces. In such a conception specific preparations for broken-backed warfare would be far less important. Conventional forces could be substantially cut-back and major financial savings secured. In these discussions, the various service departments seemed, more or less, acquiescent. This is doubly significant for, in contrast to the deliberations on SEATO and Bagdad Pact theatre forces, the forces to be reduced were existent and were not simply paper configurations. This certainly casts doubt on the earlier contention that in such situations service resistance would be more forthcoming.

Yet, it must be recognised that while the subject matter in these exchanges included forces already in place, the discussions were directed outwards and not towards the

⁶⁶ DEFE 4/81, COS 97 (55) 1 discussion of JP (55) 146 (Final), 25 November 1955.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

services themselves - that is, the object was at this stage not to impose a specific reduction in a service's manpower or capabilities, but to convince the NATO alliance of Britain's economic plight. Ultimately such a focus would lead to pressures for definite reductions, but this was still one step away. Consequently, Ministry of Defence -service disputes and intra-service conflicts were once more submerged. Arguably, it was this factor that helped account for the impression of general continuity and progression towards greater emphasis on nuclear weapons in the period under consideration - a contention reinforced by the 1956 discussions on the New Political Directive to NATO.

(B) The New Political Directive of 1956

Britain's attempt during 1956 to draw up a new political directive to NATO reflected the Eden administration's continued interest in securing financial savings through a reduction in global war capabilities. During the summer of that year the Prime Minister wrote to Eisenhower and informed him that it was Britain's view that NATO need not be capable of fighting a major land battle and that, at the most, it should seek to hold the invading Soviet forces until such time as the thermonuclear weapons would work their effects.⁶⁸ Concomitantly, the Chiefs and services pushed ahead with the 1956 Policy Review which, similarly to its 1955 predecessor,

⁶⁸ Eden, op.cit. , pp. 372-73.

sought financial savings in Britain's global war capabilities.⁶⁹ In turn, NATO was warned of Britain's plans for 'harder hitting' forces.⁷⁰ Viewed against this background, the New Political Directive was an attempt to legitimise measures that had been adopted for essentially economic reasons. Eden, himself, admitted that the 1956 strategic reappraisal was vital because the period of US aid was ending and there was a need to find a way of adding £400 million a year to the credit side of Britain's balance of payments.⁷¹

A JPS paper on NATO strategy and level of forces - presented to the Chiefs in June 1956 - served as the basis for the New Political Directive. The thrust of the document was that NATO should base its defence on thermonuclear weapons, adequate means of delivery and an effective early warning system. Conventional forces would be designated solely for purposes of resisting limited incursions and for identifying aggression. The size of each national contribution to the total land forces assigned to SACEUR would be determined by political factors: (a) an acceptable ratio between the West German

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ DEFE 7/773, Carey to Powell, 10 February 1956; also see Eden, op.cit., p. 371.

⁷¹ For an analysis of the specific problem of costs of UK forces in Germany see files DEFE 7/876 and DEFE 7/877; for a discussion of the problem of Germany's unwillingness in 1956 to pay support costs see PREM 11/1343. It should be noted that expenditure in Germany was thoroughly investigated by an Air Ministry committee in the summer of 1955. In May, a Cabinet committee was appointed to examine possible savings in Germany. In 1956, costs were running at £12.2 million for 2nd TAF and £56 million for BAOR.

forces and East German forces; (b) an acceptable ratio between the West German forces and those of the UK, US and France; and (c) the desirability of other NATO countries making suitable contributions.⁷² The obvious implication here was that BAOR could be substantially reduced. At the same time, the size and shape of SACEUR's tactical airforce would, too, be dictated by the economic, military and political factors mentioned above. Studies had been going on throughout 1956 on the implications for 2nd TAF of acquiring a nuclear capability, and early in February 1956 the Chiefs agreed that a single squadron of Canberra/Javelins with an atomic capability would be more effective than the whole of 2nd TAF. (Because of political and vulnerability problems, however, such a reduction would not be possible and five squadrons would ultimately be required.)⁷³ According to the Air Ministry, the 'New Look' 2nd TAF, even if considerably reduced in size, would meet Britain's obligations under the Paris agreements.⁷⁴ When it came to the Navy, the JPS maintained that the size and shape of the maritime forces would be governed by the following considerations: (1) the striking fleet armed with thermonuclear weapons must be retained as part of the primary deterrent; (2) maritime forces other than those needed to support the striking fleet would

⁷² DEFE 4/88, COS 63 (56) 2 JP (56) 120 (Final), 29 June 1956.

⁷³ DEFE 5/64, COS (56) 48, 3 February 1956.

⁷⁴ DEFE 5/68, COS (56) 229, 11 June 1956. The First Canberra squadrons would only be equipped with tactical nuclear weapons by 1960. See DEFE 4/88, COS 63 (56) 1, 29 June 1956.

not be required; (3) maritime headquarters other than those needed in support of the striking fleet would no longer be needed; (4) and the Rhine and Elbe squadrons would be disbanded.⁷⁵

With the object now being to convince other NATO countries of the viability of such a doctrine, Britain increasingly began to voice her disapproval of current NATO strategy with its continued emphasis on conventional capabilities. By her submission to the 1956 Annual Review, SACEUR was made well aware that Britain

...[did not] accept either the present NATO strategy as being the most suitable and effective in present circumstances, or the present pattern of defence planning.⁷⁶

On 18 June the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Roger Makins, informed Dulles about Britain's desire for the NATO Council to issue a new directive to the military authorities to review strategy⁷⁷ along the lines of a greater focus on the nuclear deterrent and a minimum of land and sea forces. Despite American objections that this would endanger the alliance and set off a chain reaction of reductions amongst other NATO partners,⁷⁸ Britain remained firm in her demand for

⁷⁵ DEFE 4/88, COS 63 (56) 2 discussion of JP (56) 120 (Final), 29 June 1956.

⁷⁶ DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 282, 24 July 1956.

⁷⁷ National Archives (NA), RG 59, 740.5/6-1856, Memorandum by Timmons, 18 June 1956.

⁷⁸ See for example NA, RG 59, 740.5/8-1456, 14 August 1956.

such a re-evaluation.⁷⁹ Thus, for example, the Chiefs rejected SACLAN'T's attempt in his 1956 paper on the 'Overall Strategic Concept For The Defence of the NATO Area' to include the possibility of the Russians launching a limited war against NATO, on the grounds that it '...introduced new thoughts into the current concept which was in any case due for complete review in the near future when the "New Look" for NATO is being evolved'.⁸⁰

Consequently, on 7 August 1956, the SACEUR, General Gruenther, was informed that Britain was undertaking a major reappraisal of her NATO commitment.⁸¹ On 19 October 1956, Britain tabled her draft political directive to the NATO council.⁸² Here it was agreed that the final submission to the Council for the revision of the overall strategic concept would be in March 1957; the revision of the measures to implement the overall strategic concept would be submitted in June 1957; by mid-April 1957, a directive would be issued to major NATO countries which would guide them in revising their long term studies, while a paper on the preparation of an overall long

⁷⁹ NA, RG 59, 740.5/7-1556, Memo of conversation between Dulles and Makins, 13 July 1956; also see letter from Eden to Eisenhower reaffirming this point in Eisenhower Library, Whitman Collection, International File, Eden to Eisenhower, 18 July 1956.

⁸⁰ DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 150 (Final), 23 September 1956.

⁸¹ AIR 8/2065, Ministry of Defence to BJSM Washington, 9 August 1956.

⁸² AIR 8/2065, BJSM Washington to Ministry of Defence, 18 October 1956.

range pattern of forces would be submitted to the NATO Council by December 1957.⁸³

In a draft of the new strategic concept, the Minister of Defence, Walter Monckton, immediately got to the root of the exercise when he stressed that it was vital to give guidance on the initial phase of global war since this would govern the length of the period in which it would be necessary to hold a front on the Continent against invading Soviet forces. He rejected the UK delegation to NATO's suggestion that this guidance emphasise that the force be large enough to hold a Soviet attack until the allied strategic nuclear offensive had worked its effect because this would still leave it to the military to decide how big the force should be and no reductions in conventional forces would ensue. Likewise, he rejected NATO's contention that the initial phase would last for thirty days and stated that it would not last for more than 'a few days'. The crux of the matter was that the military forces maintained by NATO should be the minimum necessary to: (1) keep confidence in the military effectiveness of NATO and to prevent external intimidation; (2) to deal with local infiltration and incursion; and (3) to enable Soviet and satellite aggression to be identified as such. If the Soviet government did commit an act of aggression, thermonuclear weapons would be used at once. In a limited war in Europe - defined as one not involving overt

⁸³ AIR 8/2065, Ministry of Defence to BJSM Washington, 9 August 1956.

Soviet participation - conventional forces would be armed with an atomic capability. Conventional forces could thus be substantially cut.⁸⁴

The reception of these ideas by Britain's allies was less than enthusiastic. The Chiefs were informed that both the French and the Americans would object most strongly to any change in force requirements.⁸⁵ In fact, at the beginning of October, while Admiral Radford told President Eisenhower that the British were '...simply adopting the New Look which we had already adopted',⁸⁶ Dulles maintained that '...we find unacceptable any proposal which implies the adoption of a NATO strategy of total reliance on nuclear retaliation'.⁸⁷ Thus, ironically, while the British were moving towards a New Look force posture (at least on the declaratory level), the Americans seemed to be moving away from it.

A recognition of this, no doubt, underlay the new Minister of Defence Anthony Head's warning to the Cabinet in November 1956 of NATO's lack of enthusiasm for Britain's desire to stress

⁸⁴ AIR 8/2065, Monckton to Dickson, 5 September 1956.

⁸⁵ AIR 8/2065, BJSM Washington to Ministry of Defence, 24 October 1956.

⁸⁶ Eisenhower Library, Whitman Collection, Eisenhower Diaries - Memo of Conference with the President, 2 October 1956; also see NA, RG 59, Recent UK Defence Developments: A Review for Ambassador Whitney, Chiefs of Mission Meeting, Paris, May 1957, pp. 11-13.

⁸⁷ Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers, Dulles to Eisenhower, 1 October 1956.

nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces. Consequently, Head asserted that the problem facing Britain was

...how large a reduction should we propose to our allies in the interests of our economic position, bearing in mind that if we go too far we may provoke a general reduction in military contributions to NATO, and indeed endanger the very stability of the alliance, as well as damaging the prospects of the closer relationship with Europe.⁸⁸

The Minister of Defence was of the opinion that the minimum order of battle that the UK should retain on the Continent (that is with financial reductions limited to 25% of the approximately £68 million in annual German mark costs) was a corps of two infantry divisions and an armoured brigade group (in addition to the Berlin brigade) while substantial cuts in 2nd TAF would only follow the deployment of Canberras with a nuclear capability.⁸⁹

The Cabinet, however, was adamant that economic pressures were such '...that we should seek to secure a rather greater reduction in the Deutschmark costs even to the extent of eliminating them entirely'.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, it was also

⁸⁸ CAB 129/84, CP (56) 269, 28 November 1956.

⁸⁹ Specifically with regard to air power, the SACEUR General Greunther, was informed: It is envisaged that 2nd TAF will in due course become a Canberra nuclear strike force... there will be no fighters in 2nd TAF'. Provisionally Head envisaged a reduction in the size of the all weather force in 2nd TAF from four squadrons of 64 planes to four squadrons of 48 planes towards the end of 1958 and a reduction of the ground attack aircraft to about nine squadrons of 126 fighters during 1958. AIR 8/2065, 21 November 1956.

⁹⁰ CAB 128/30 CM 97 (56) 3, 7 December 1956.

recognised that it was wrong to give the United States the impression that Britain was not intending to make a fully effective contribution to NATO. According to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Harold Macmillan, (who wanted to reduce German mark expenses by at least 50%)

We might overcome the difficulty of reconciling a reduction of this order with our commitments under the Paris Agreements to maintain four divisions and the Second Tactical Airforce in Europe, if we emphasised that there was a growing tendency for military reasons, to reduce the size of a standard division and that we could therefore, continue to honour our commitment ⁹¹ if we maintained four divisions of reduced size.

At the Ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council held in Paris during December 1956 the US pressed the British for strategic flexibility and not to place too much reliance on massive retaliation. Nevertheless, British policy-makers succeeded in securing an agreement that a new political directive assessing how best to configure forces in the light of new strategic developments be made.⁹² Here Head reinforced the point that the UK would have to reduce manpower in order to balance costs if its forces were ultimately to be armed with nuclear weapons and Macmillan emphasised that a balance would have to be found between ...the trip-wire and the World War II type of organisation'. Within the United Kingdom decisions had still to be reached on the actual size of the reductions. Force contributions would be discussed in NATO in

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² NA, RG 59, Department of State, Conference File, Lot 62, D181, CF825; DEFE 4/93, COS 133 (56) 7, 18 December 1956.

January 1957⁹³ and it was then that Britain hoped to gain acceptance of specific planned force reductions.

Thus, the trends present in 1955 were being reaffirmed and reinforced in 1956. British military policy-makers appeared intent upon convincing NATO of the irrelevance of broken-backed warfare preparations in the context of a thermonuclear war. The focus on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces noted in the SEATO and Bagdad Pact arenas was being replicated in NATO - not a surprising development since the credibility of nuclear response seemed strongest when related to contingencies in this theatre. The move to the 1957 White Paper seemed but a short step away.

Conclusion

It was argued earlier that the implications of the defence of 'organisational essence' are felt differently on the levels of declaratory and procurement policy. In the former, agreement will be more readily attainable, while in the latter - with the implications impacting more directly on roles and capabilities - service interests will manifest themselves more explicitly. In the discussions over SEATO and Bagdad Pact deployments, the lack of service opposition to the nuclear focus at the expense of conventional forces is explainable by the fact that the manpower and conventional capabilities that

⁹³ AIR 8/2065, BJSM Washington to Ministry of Defence, 28 December 1956.

were being surrendered to a nuclear focus were as yet not deployed and in position or, for that matter necessarily in existence. The discussions remained on the declaratory and theoretical levels, and while, from the service point of view, the results were not ideal, they were, nevertheless, one step removed from an assault on actual capabilities. Service opposition was therefore muted. In turn, continuity in policy in terms of a growing emphasis on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces across the 1955-57 period is demonstrated.

On the other hand, service agreement over a nuclear focus in the European theatre presents a problem for the central contention of this thesis. For while it is possible to explain such a stance on the basis of its relative strategic validity (the threat of nuclear response was more credible in this theatre than any where else), this does not touch upon the hypothesis that with the services' forces directly under assault, opposition would mount. Conversely, it serves to support the argument in much of the secondary literature for a continuity and a progression in British strategic planning, with a seemingly inexorable move to the policies announced in the 1957 White Paper.

Yet, it must be recognised that the discussions described above were mainly those directed outwards, towards Britain's NATO allies. Similarly, to the Bagdad Pact and SEATO discussions, the object from a British defence decision-

maker's point of view was first and foremost a unified front. Once more service defence of their 'organisational essences' was subordinated to the purposes of presenting an externally united line on the declaratory objectives of British power. The discussion of existing forces already deployed, can be seen as a necessary though not a sufficient condition for service interests to come strongly to the fore. Indeed, as discussions began to focus more directly on actual numbers of men and machines, unity did give way to dissension both between the services and the Ministry of Defence and amongst the services themselves. In the internal debate, this disagreement took the form of attacks on the implications of the nuclear focus for conventional forces (see next chapter) and this percolated upwards to attacks on the conception itself.

Thus, in an internal Air Ministry memorandum in June 1956 it was stated that

...there is little use in our trying to convince NATO of the validity of our strategic concept unless it is universally accepted in Whitehall. At the moment there seems little chance of this...⁹⁴

For example, on 29 June 1956, the First Sea Lord, Lord Mountbatten, told the Chiefs that the New Political Directive must be presented in such a manner so as: (1) not to prejudice the faith of Britain's allies; (2) although it should aim at some reduction of forces allocated to NATO it '...must

⁹⁴ AIR 8/2064, JP (56) 120, 21 June 1956.

safeguard at an acceptable level of activity all the main NATO commitments'; and (3) while it should be based on the improbability of global war occurring, it must also take account of the need to maintain forces should such a war occur.⁹⁵ Mountbatten, out of fear of the implications of the New Political Directive for force levels, was beginning to qualify declaratory pronouncements in such a way as to undermine its very meaning and to make the potential for force reductions and financial savings difficult to achieve.

In this task he was not alone. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), Sir Gerald Templer, agreed with Mountbatten and complained that

...the Chiefs of Staff were being pushed into a dangerous position by being forced for economic reasons into the hurried acceptance of a concept which they were not sure about.⁹⁶

Templer now appears to have moved from protection of his preferred force structure to an attack on the conceptions that allowed force reductions to take place. He stressed that

It was quite possible, however, that some form of aggression by proxy might take place, such as an attempted East German occupation of Berlin. In such circumstances he did not think that any Ministers would take the decision to embark on thermonuclear warfare. We now therefore had to consider for the first time the possibility of limited war in Europe in which we should need conventional forces from all three services.⁹⁷

The irony here was that service attacks on the nuclear

⁹⁵ AIR 8/2064, Mountbatten to Harding, 29 June 1956.

⁹⁶ DEFE 4/88, COS 63 (56) 2, 29 June 1956.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

deterrent focus were being mounted in the context in which the deterrent was most credible: in Europe. Conversely, these attacks are noticeable for their absence when it came to the Bagdad Pact and SEATO - areas where the credibility of nuclear weapons use was possibly less.

Indeed, throughout the period of discussions on the New Political Directive, the Army and the Navy sought to question the validity of the deterrent in the context of thermonuclear parity. According to the Navy

It is lack of money and more particularly of manpower that forces us to review and change our existing policy. It is not primarily the diminishing probability of global war that has forced the change on us. Global War as a probability has diminished precisely because of the effort we have put into defence.⁹⁸

Again, on 29 June 1956, Mountbatten circulated a draft of a meeting held within the Admiralty in which it was stated that it was common knowledge that

...the new concept originated from political and economic, rather than from strategical considerations. Indeed, no serious student of strategy would advocate a policy which, in any foreseeable world conditions, made no provision to meet a threat of 400 submarines, 18 Soviet cruisers and 1,200 Soviet Naval aircraft.⁹⁹

Not surprisingly, it was the Air Ministry's view that the War Office and the Admiralty were intent upon paying only 'lipservice to the deterrent'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ AIR 8/2064, Policy Review-Long Term Defence Policy - undated.

⁹⁹ AIR 8/2064, Mountbatten to Stirling, 29 June 1956.

¹⁰⁰ AIR 8/2064, Earle to Dickson, 3 July 1956.

Consequently, the contention that Britain was during this period irrevocably moving towards her version of the force posture announced by the American New Look of 1954, while not negated, is somewhat weakened. The problem is made even more apparent by shifting the level of analysis away from the theoretical and declaratory focus discussed in this chapter to a more explicit stress on budgeting and force programming. Here it will be argued that while declaratory policy was moving in the direction of the British New Look (as exemplified by the progress on the New Political Directive) procurement policy seemed still to be directed towards the purchasing of multiple capabilities. Since these two areas interacted with each other this problem was not unrelated to the issues of continuity and progression in defence planning, and thus, the measure of Duncan Sandys's contribution in 1957.

CHAPTER THREE

PROBLEMS FOR CONTINUITY: DEBATES ON LONG TERM DEFENCE PROGRAMMING AND NATIONAL SERVICE 1955-56

Introduction

It is argued in this chapter that the British move to her own New Look did not in the period immediately prior to 1957 proceed without friction or with a sense of inevitability. While a focus on those facets of planning most closely linked to declaratory policy reveals a move in the direction of greater reliance on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces, an analysis of long term defence programming during this period uncovers a picture that is far less clear. Since the British New Look has been defined in this thesis as referring not only to declaratory statements but also to the issue of force posture - specifically the nuclear-conventional force balance - the question of continuity in strategic planning during the mid-1950s is brought into question.

The interaction of economic imperatives with strategic preferences took place most strongly on the level of procurement discussions and not on the level of declaratory policy. It was in the context of decisions on budgeting and procurement (as related to manpower and capabilities) that the services' 'organisational essences' were most directly influenced. It was their defence of these 'essences' that

stood between, on the one hand, action and deployment policies, and on the other, declarations of intent. While the latter, of course, helped condition the size and shape of the armed forces, it was procurement decisions and defence programming plans that directly determined the outcome. It was on this latter level that inter-service tensions and service - Ministry of Defence disputes surfaced most strongly.

Specifically, programming debates and disputes revolved around: (1) actual numbers and roles of men and equipment and (2) strategic preferences and interpretations of war preparation priorities. It is contended that an analysis of the interaction of war preparation priorities, economic imperatives and strategic planning helps clarify the issue of what type of force posture the services actually preferred and for what type of contingencies the services were actually planning - general declaratory statements notwithstanding. This also sheds light on what, in the context of the pre-1957 organisational setting, was possible when it came to shifting service positions away from a reliance on multiple capabilities to a greater focus on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces. This, in turn, informs upon the question of what was strategically inevitable - at least by the year 1957 - and therefore, the measure of the task that faced Duncan Sandys during that year.

(1) Economic Imperatives, War Preparation Priorities and the
1955-56 Policy Reviews

That the move to the British New Look was strongly motivated by economic concerns is evidenced by the nature of the economic problems that confronted the government in the mid-1950s and the types of solutions that it favoured. For, the major thrust of economic reasoning at this juncture was that with a full-employment economy and inflationary pressures, an attempt was needed to decrease public expenditure and reduce domestic demand.¹

In dealing with these problems, Chancellor of the Exchequer, R.A. Butler, was adamant that defence would be one area in which major savings would be secured. In March 1954 he stressed that

Significant savings in defence expenditure would only be secured by reducing the size of the armed forces and this in turn would involve reductions of our overseas commitments.²

Central to this focus was the recognition of the importance of defence spending, both as a component of domestic expenditure (especially with its heavy requirements on the metal using industry) and as a contribution to overseas spending. It was also attractive in a political sense as reductions in defence expenditure did not carry the political odium of further

¹ For an analyses of Britain's post-war economy see A.J. Younger, Britain's Economic Growth 1920-1966 (London, 1966).

² CAB 128/27, CC (54) 14, 3 March 1954.

credit restrictions or increases in taxation.³ In addition, savings in this area, unlike restrictions of imports, would attack the problem of inflation directly.⁴

Of greatest concern was the influence of defence expenditure on British balance of payments. During 1955, Butler informed the Cabinet Defence Committee that while all government expenditure had to be met from Britain's own resources, external expenditure (of which defence was a major component) imposed an even greater strain as it required that increases in output would have to take the form of an expansion of exports. In referring to military spending, he came to the crux of the matter when he stated

I know that the object...is to strengthen our political standing and economic influence in the world. But there is a great danger that we may defeat our own object if we take on more than we can afford. There is no doubt that our economic difficulties this year have been watched with critical eyes abroad.⁵

It is important to recognise that this was not a reality denied by British military policy-makers. In a paper presented by the JPS to the Chiefs of Staff Committee in 1954 it was admitted that

Over expenditure on rearmament leading to a serious economic depression could destroy the will of Western Europe and other countries of the Free World

³ CAB 128/29, CC 19 (55) 6, 2 March 1955.

⁴ CAB 129/77, CP (55) 111, 31 August 1955.

⁵ CAB 129/78, CP (55) 184, 29 November 1955.

to resist Communism and this [could] present Soviet Russia with a bloodless victory.⁶

The crucial question, of course, was in what manner the reduction would take place. The appreciation by the Chiefs of the effects of the H-bomb set definite pointers for costing exercises. While the resulting priorities were not new, they were reinforced by the economic climate of the mid-1950s. Thus, during the mid-1950s costing exercises, the Chiefs agreed to the descending planning priorities of: (1) the prevention of global nuclear war through reliance on the threat of thermonuclear retaliation; (2) containment of communism (i.e. Britain's cold war commitments); (3) the strengthening of Britain's allies; and (4) only finally, conventional preparations for global nuclear war.⁷

This emphasis on nuclear weapons and reductions on conventional forces meant that the 1954 White Paper's attachment to broken-backed warfare was in the process of being undermined. The Chiefs' admission that it was a misperception to divide a future global war into distinct phases⁸ was reflected in the 1955 White Paper (which officially announced the decision to build the H-bomb) where the concept of broken-backed warfare was not mentioned. While it was stated that there was no guarantee that the initial

⁶ DEFE 4/70, COS 53 (54) 1 discussion of JP (54) Note 11, 10 May 1954.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ DEFE 4/70, COS 45 (54) 1 discussion of JP (54) Note 10, 22 April 1954.

stage of global war would be decisive, this was mentioned in the context of the statement that

...we must in our allocation of resources, assign even higher priority to the primary deterrent, that is to say to the production of nuclear weapons and the means of their delivery. Other elements of our defence effort must be adjusted to conform to these priorities and we must, in particular, eliminate those parts of our force which have become or are becoming obsolete in modern conditions.⁹

As a result of this focus, savings would be secured in broken-backed and limited war capabilities.¹⁰ However, both political and military leaderships were quick to note that a major motivation behind government pressures for reductions were economic savings to which strategic concerns would sometimes possibly be subordinated. Prior to the publication of the 1955 White Paper, the Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence, Sir Neville Brownjohn, stated that the document would

...certainly not be anything in the nature of a flat statement of our intention to reduce expenditure on defence. It will be a carefully reasoned document designed to show - perhaps a trifle disingenuously - that recent developments will enable us to get better value for less money.¹¹

The point here is that while the economic pressures were unequivocal, declaratory statements belied the fact that the strategic questions were not in any sense as yet totally resolved. Consequently, while agreeing with the planning priority list, the Chiefs and service heads sought to bring

⁹ Statement on Defence, 1955, Cmd. 9391, HMSO, para. 29.

¹⁰ See for example DEFE 5/57, COS 59 (55), 22 March 1957.

¹¹ DEFE 7/769, Brownjohn to Steele, 2 September 1954.

their own interpretations to bear on the translation of this list into procurement and action policies. It appears that from the service point of view, a certain discrepancy between declaratory and procurement/action policy was necessary because war preparation priorities had direct consequences for on their definitions of 'organisational essence'. Reductions in broken-backed warfare and cold and limited war capabilities, whatever the logic of the arguments behind such moves, struck at the heart of service capabilities and perceptions of their roles. They had therefore to be strongly resisted.

It was with these conflicting pressures in the background that the services entered the force programming exercise of 1955. It is to be expected that the problem of substance would, in turn, be exacerbated by problems of process as the extant organisational framework had always allowed the services to defend their 'organisational essences' very successfully. Indeed, as shall be noted, major reductions in manpower capabilities and expenditure were then consistently deferred and a British New Look force posture seemed anything but close.

(A) War Preparation Priorities and Defence Programming in 1955

Programme Objectives

By the summer of 1955, Minister of Defence, Selwyn Lloyd, was convinced that all-round cuts in defence expenditure would have to be made. A table of service cost projections revealed the following:¹²

Table One: Service Cost Projections - July 1955

	<u>1955/56</u>	<u>1956/7</u>	<u>1957/58</u>	<u>1958/59</u>	<u>1959/60</u>	<u>1960/61</u>
War Office	484	556	575	590	600	600
Air Ministry	530	569	640	680	685	680
Admiralty	347	377	394	432	434	407
Supply	148	160	170	180	190	200
Mod	18	20	20	20	20	20
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	1527	1682	1799	1902	1929	1907

[£ millions 1955]

The upward spiral of defence spending was certainly most unsettling and its potential for going above £1900 million was something Selwyn Lloyd desperately wished to avoid.¹³ Consequently, at a meeting between the Minister and the service heads on 4 May, it was agreed that the Ministry of Defence would arrange for its officials to undertake a review of the defence programme and its estimated cost over the next five to seven years. It was stressed that all means should be adopted in order to ensure 'fruitful economies' and major

¹² See DEFE 7/963, Misc/m (55) 69, 12 July 1955.

¹³ The focus of the programme was on the financial year 1958/59.

savings in expenditure and manpower should be secured.¹⁴ The financial objective would be set by the Chancellor of the Exchequer who had earlier insisted that £1525 million serve as the upper limit for defence spending in 1955¹⁵ and that spending in later years should not greatly exceed this total.¹⁶

From the beginning of the exercise, Selwyn Lloyd recognised the need to reorientate financial allocations to the various services and to base this reorientation on a set of assumptions that reflected the centrality of the nuclear deterrent and the need to reduce conventional forces and programmes. In a meeting between the Minister and the services on 12 July,¹⁷ Selwyn Lloyd stressed that reductions in costs would have to be made and that future programming would have to reflect the descending priorities of: (1) the 'primary' deterrent which he defined as comprising the medium bomber force and its weaponry, the ballistic rocket and '...such nuclear potential as the Navy possessed'; (2) preparations for cold war which the Minister defined as sufficient forces to meet Britain's overseas commitments, the air defences of the UK and the minimum civil defence programme necessary to sustain morale; (3) and finally - reflecting the view that

¹⁴ DEFE 7/963, Extract from SM 4 (55), 4 May 1955.

¹⁵ CAB 128/27, CC 73 (54) 1, 5 November 1954.

¹⁶ DEFE 7/963, Memo from Ministry of Defence to the Chiefs of Staff, 11 May 1955.

¹⁷ DEFE 7/963, Misc/m (55) 69, 12 July 1955.

global nuclear war was unlikely and the conduct of conventional operations in the post-thermonuclear exchange phase impossible - the Minister stated that a rigorous curtailment under the heading of preparations for global war must take place. Forces regarded as primarily designated for global war included BAOR, 2nd TAF, fighter defences for the UK, the Auxillary Air Force, the bulk of the reserve fleet, submarines, anti-submarine forces, minelayers and minesweepers.¹⁸

The Army and Navy's roles and capabilities would come under attack from two complementary sources: from the proposed overall reductions of defence expenditure and from the increase in the RAF's allocation. The Minister of Defence was clearly interested in creating a firmer match between, on the one hand, an evolving declaratory posture that placed growing emphasis on nuclear deterrence and, on the other hand, force structure. Consequently, at the beginning of August, Sir Richard Powell addressed a memorandum to Selwyn Lloyd which contained plans for major economic savings along these guidelines.¹⁹ A recognition that in thermonuclear war Britain could not deploy troops overseas legitimised an Army manpower ceiling of 350,000 and a reduction of national service from 24

¹⁸ DEFE 4/78, COS 56 (55), 12 July 1955.

¹⁹ DEFE 7/963, Memo from Powell to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 August 1955.

to 21 months.²⁰ The existence of the nuclear deterrent made it strategically possible to withdraw one of the four British divisions from Germany; base organisations would be reduced as would the training of reserves and any stockpiling of equipment designated for global war.²¹ In turn, the Navy was to be organised primarily for cold and limited war and reductions in fleet modernisation and conversion programmes would take place. It was Powell's contention that '...any inadequacies for global war which the application of this policy causes should be accepted'²² - a position readily endorsed by the Minister of Defence.²³

On 17 August, Selwyn Lloyd issued a directive on the LTDP to the services. Here he repeated Powell's earlier assertion that the fleet would have to be reduced in size and he called for an examination of the Navy

...with a view to deciding what vessels are necessary for cold and limited war roles and what vessels are retained in commission primarily for the global nuclear war.²⁴

²⁰ Navy manpower would be between 110-115,000 while that of the RAF would be between 235-240,000. Ibid.

²¹ For discussions of the various service plans for global war stockpiling see DEFE 7/963, War Office to Carey, 4 August 1955; DEFE 7/963, Kent to Carey, 5 August 1955; and DEFE 7/963, Carey to Powell, fol.61 - undated.

²² DEFE 7/963, Powell to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 August 1955.

²³ DEFE 7/965, Misc/m (55) 76, 2 August 1955.

²⁴ DEFE 7/964, Selwyn Lloyd to the Services, 17 August 1955.

He was adamant that global war capabilities such as minesweepers, coastal forces and submarines would have to be reduced, the reserve fleet (the basis of a broken-backed war capability) radically cut down, that a new medium carrier which was being built should be scrapped, and economies found in the stockpiling of reserves, afloat support, the administrative base and the seaward defence of European ports. Stress was also laid on manpower savings, especially within the Army which was going to be cut to 350,000 men with reductions coming from forces designated primarily for global war such as those in BAOR and the strategic reserve in the UK. Finally, the RAF was informed that it, too, would have to realise economies in global war preparations, not only in Coastal Command, but also through reductions in 2nd TAF, the RAF regiment, air-to-air guided missiles, the control and reporting system and any stockpiling for global war that might exist.²⁵ Selwyn Lloyd's projections for the next three years were:²⁶

<u>Table Two</u>			
<u>Ministry of Defence Projections - August 1955</u>			
	<u>1956/7</u>	<u>1957/8</u>	<u>1958/9</u>
Navy	345	340	335
Army	530	520	510
RAF	545	545	545
Supply	150	160	170
MOD	20	20	20

	1590	1585	1580
Reserve	20	20	[£ millions - 1955]

²⁵ Ibid. It should be pointed out that these numbers tended to vary slightly with each presentation.

²⁶ Ibid.

When compared with the earlier service projections it was evident that the services would have to make substantial cuts and that their perceptions of their roles and capabilities would have to be altered:

Table Three: Differences Between Ministry of Defence and Service Projections

	<u>1956/7</u>	<u>1957/8</u>	<u>1958/9</u>
Navy	32	54	97
Army	36	55	80
RAF	24	95	135
Supply	10	10	0

[£ millions - 1955]

At the beginning of the LTDP exercise, the Ministry of Defence appeared in a strong position. It had Cabinet support for major defence savings,²⁷ the Treasury's backing for specific financial targets and a set of strategic guidelines on which British force structure should be based. The problem was, however, that from the very outset, while the Ministry of Defence remained wedded to the idea of increasing reliance on the nuclear deterrent and reducing what was considered unnecessary conventional war preparations, it also tended to cloud the issue by often appearing less clear and consistent than was desirable for the purposes of coherent strategic planning. For example, although Sir Richard Powell was prepared to tolerate 'inadequacies for global war' which cuts

²⁷ See for example CAB 128/29, CM 30 (55) 5, 5 September 1955 and CAB 128/29, CM 32 (55) 1, 21 September 1955.

in the fleet might entail, he also added the unfortunate (from the point of view of congruous strategic programming) rider that

...so far as it is practicable without additional cost, the fleet should be so composed and organised to operate effectively in global war as in cold or limited war.²⁸

Powell, thereby, provided the Navy with room to manoeuvre as he was admitting that global war forces were not totally unnecessary. This was a trap into which the Minister of Defence also stepped when he claimed that

The Russians will be primarily deterred from launching war by the knowledge that there lies in the hands of the west the power of effective retaliation. They might also be deterred if they knew that our air defence system were so effective that their nuclear attack would be largely unsuccessful. The forces taking the first onslaught in Germany and the forces to maintain sea communications can also be regarded as secondary deterrents.²⁹

By admitting of the problem of secondary deterrents - that is, that there were conventional forces that reinforced the deterrent effects of the 'primary' nuclear deterrent - Selwyn Lloyd was providing the services with a rationale to demand conventional forces whose task it would be to aid the primary deterrent but which also had far reaching implications for issues of manpower and cost. Why Selwyn Lloyd and Powell did so stemmed possibly from their own doubts as to the wisdom

²⁸ DEFE 7/963, Powell to Selwyn Lloyd, 2 August 1955.

²⁹ DEFE 7/964, Selwyn Lloyd to services, 17 August 1955.

of reducing all conventional preparations for global war, and probably also the recognition that in the existing organisational framework, the services would mount a strong defence of their preferred roles and capabilities, and consequently, it would be best to moderate Ministry of Defence demands from the outset.

Whatever the case, the Minister was not being far out of step with the Chiefs whose general ambivalence with regard to strict strategic priorities reflected itself in the strategic guidance that the Chiefs provided for the LTDP. Thus, although they acknowledged that the rising costs of manpower and production would make it impossible in the future to maintain the existing pattern of forces, the Chiefs also stressed with some care that a balance was going to have to be struck between cuts in preparations for global war and cuts in preparations for cold and limited wars. Indeed, it was maintained that the agreed priorities of the deterrent, preparations for cold/limited wars and capabilities for global war should not be regarded as absolute or exclusive.³⁰ Not surprisingly, from the very beginning the services sought to take advantage of this prescriptive confusion - a confusion which they had, in a sense, helped create - to undermine attempts aimed at adopting a British New Look force posture.

³⁰ DEFE 4/78, COS 56 (55), 12 July 1955.

Service Reactions and War Preparation Priorities.

The 1955 LTDP had the effect of spurring the Navy to set up its own long term planning committee. To a degree, the 'Way Ahead' committee (formed in June 1955 with the object of an 'Enquiry into the Structure and Supporting Organisation of the Naval Service') seemed to go along with the Ministry of Defence's strategic conceptions. Grove maintains that as a result of these investigations, the Navy supported cutbacks in the reserve fleet. He states that

The general emphasis was on maintaining the front-line fleet as cheaply and efficiently as possible, at the price of mobilization potential.³¹

This was a major shift from the 1940s when reserve ships had been maintained at the expense of a non-existent home fleet. Yet, as Grove himself points out, this was only accepted in the context of 'the prevailing line of overriding priorities',³² a point which, in the light of the recently released documentation needs to be reaffirmed. For, it appears that the Navy never really accepted the totality of the Minister's strategic vision, his budget projections or his list of war preparation priorities.

Indeed, of all the services, the Navy found its conception of its own world role most at odds with the Minister's attempt to secure savings through greater reliance on the nuclear

³¹ E.J.Grove, op.cit. , p. 175.

³² Ibid.

deterrent. Already in early June, in answer to a question of whether it was agreed that the importance of the nuclear deterrent made the Navy's preparations for global war a third priority, the First Sea Lord, Lord Mountbatten, resorted to a reaffirmation of the existence of a broken-backed phase of global war. He stressed that

The Navy would then have a major part to play, against powerful Russian opposition in the period of resuscitation which would follow such [thermonuclear] exchanges and during which our power and speed of recovery might effect the final outcome.³³

The Navy, of course, could argue that they were being consistent with the Chiefs' conception of global war as expressed since the Global Strategy Paper of 1952 and the most recent White Paper which had cautioned that '...some provision, though on a lower priority must...be made for continuing operations after the initial phase'.³⁴ Mountbatten was not being out of step when he claimed that priorities

...[could] not be applied so absolutely as to make it necessary to eliminate entirely a lower priority category before any cuts at all were made in the higher categories; the need for balance must be kept in mind.³⁵

Joint service declaratory statements aside, the Navy did not mince its words about seeking a force structure that would have as one of its centrepieces a contribution to the

³³ DEFE 7/963, Misc/m (55) 69, 12 July 1955.

³⁴ CAB 129/73, CC (55) 29, 4 February 1955.

³⁵ DEFE 7/963, Misc/m (55) 69, 12 July 1955.

deterrent through the means of waging successful global war.

The Navy continued to claim that

A powerful striking force equipped with aircraft carrying nuclear weapons will be needed to play our part with our Allies in gaining command of the sea from the outset by destroying the enemy fleet, his mercantile shipping and his bases. If the UK becomes a major target for nuclear bombardment the carriers will be increasingly important because of their mobility.³⁶

The Navy's plans therefore required covering forces to protect shipping from Russian fleets and to guard the Baltic and Black sea exits; it would need anti-submarine forces to attack enemy submarines between Greenland and Scotland and it would need to have ships to protect convoys soon after the outbreak of war. Money would continue to be spent on forces designated primarily for global war such as submarines, minesweepers and minehunters (the latter two of which the Navy planned to order 70 beginning in 1957/8); and on forces which could be used in varied circumstances including global war such as a new medium carrier (to be laid down in 1958/9)³⁷ and guided weapons cruisers (to be started at the rate of one a year up to a total of 12.)

In addition, the Navy made it clear that it regarded one of the main implications of the advent of thermonuclear weapons

³⁶ DEFE 7/963, P.D. REF 49/119/1, 7 June 1955.

³⁷ Discussions on the future of heavy carriers had been going on throughout the mid-1950s with the Navy successfully defending the cold, limited and global war relevance of such a ship. See DEFE 13/66, extract from D (55) 3, fol.63, 15 March 1955 on the Defence Committees agreement on the need to build heavy carriers.

to be the increased cost of programmes. This derived from the need to invest more in logistic support as the UK was now threatened as a supply base, the necessity of improving mobilization practices, dispersing HQs and upgrading the readiness of the reserve fleet. Finally, the Navy also went on to reject major reductions in her manpower allotment. While naval manpower was in the process of coming down from 132,000 to 120,000, the Navy warned that this would give rise to problems due to the large size of ships coming into service and the importance of maintaining strong Home and Mediterranean fleets as well as ships in the Far East, the East Indies, the South Atlantic and in the American and the East Indies stations.³⁸ Thus, it was one thing to agree to statements in the White Paper that indicated that conventional preparations for global war were being downgraded, but another thing altogether to carry out reductions in force allocations in line with such a statement. It was clear that the Navy's conception of its 'organisational essence' was not changing as fast as its declaratory statements were implying.

Not surprisingly, by mid-September, the Navy had reported problems in complying with Selwyn Lloyd's directive. While the First Lord of the Admiralty, J.P.L.Thomas, admitted that the Minister's August directive was a 'useful guide', it was apparent that the Navy was not ready to envisage cutbacks of the magnitude preferred by Selwyn Lloyd. Thomas was adamant

³⁸ DEFE 7/963, fol.41a, 14 July 1955.

that although the Navy could go a 'long way' to meeting the Minister's financial goals, the implications for Britain's NATO contribution would be most damaging.³⁹ For, in this latter theatre, Britain's contribution in ships would have to be reduced from 539 to about 357.⁴⁰ It was stated that the implications of such a step could be gleaned from the fact that the UK's naval declaration to NATO represented half the number of ships committed by the alliance as a whole, excluding the United States. The Navy expressed doubts as to the ability of the alliance to absorb such a blow; it also questioned the wisdom of relying on the American Navy for the defence of Britain in a global war (a situation that was made more likely if the Minister's proposals were adopted) as the US Navy might well have different priorities from that of Britain. It was the Admiralty's view that

It will be for Her Majesty's Government to decide whether the vigour of the alliance would be too seriously threatened by such a reduction in our naval contribution.⁴¹

In addition, from the Navy's perspective, the implications of the Minister's proposed cuts for naval global war capabilities were equalled in severity by the implications for Britain's cold war capabilities and thus her world standing. At the end of September, the Admiralty pointed out that while it could reduce its budget for 1956/7 to £342 million (plus £12 million

³⁹ DEFE 7/964, Misc/m (55) 91, 14 September 1955.

⁴⁰ DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 45, 29 September 1955.

⁴¹ Ibid.

for pay inducements) and a manpower ceiling of 113,000 by 31 March 1958, the Minister's proposals would leave the Navy in a position

...insufficient to sustain [Britain's] interests world-wide ...Its training and operations could only be organised by concentrating [the fleet] at home and in the Mediterranean and withdrawing from other foreign stations. ...Thus, we should have to reconcile ourselves to witnessing the end of our history as a world-wide naval power with all that this would entail in loss of influence.⁴²

The basis of this pessimistic prognosis were calculations that showed that if the Minister's proposals were adopted, the Navy would soon be left with not more than 12 cruisers and above compared with 31 in 1955 and not more than 100 frigates and destroyers compared with 176 in 1955.⁴³ In November, Thomas told Selwyn Lloyd that with a budget of £347 million for 1958/9⁴⁴ the Far Eastern station would have to be abandoned and the planned fleet reduced to two fleet carriers, one light

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid. Of this, the active fleet would be reduced from 18 cruisers and above and 83 destroyers and frigates to six cruisers and above and 76 destroyers and frigates. The size of the reserve fleet which would be maintained and ready for service would be reduced from 13 cruisers and above and 96 destroyers and frigates to six cruisers and 24 destroyers and frigates.

⁴⁴ The figure of £347 million is calculated by subtracting approximately £22-23 million in pay inducements from Selwyn Lloyd's October figure of £370 million for the Navy. The Navy claimed that it had believed that the £370 million figure was net of inducements but the Minister of Defence had been explicit that it was not. See DEFE 7/965, Thomas to Selwyn Lloyd, 25 November 1955. The Navy stated that in order to carry out a 'full range of asks' in both global and limited war it would need £435 million in 1958/9 and £400 million in the years thereafter (excluding inducements). See DEFE 7/964, Macmillan to Carey, 11 October 1955.

fleet carrier, three or four cruisers plus 130 small ships. This, according to Thomas, would be the end of the world-wide Navy. He was unequivocal that

I should regard this as a catastrophe, not only as First Sea Lord but also in my capacity as a member of the Government, and all the more so because I believe that even in Europe our influence will dwindle once we cease to show ourselves bent on maintaining our world-wide interests.⁴⁵

Clearly, a reading of the documents relating to the Navy's reaction reveals little evidence that the Navy was interested in moving towards a force posture embodying 80,000 men and even further reductions in all classes of ships. Indeed, it remained attached to the concept of broken-backed warfare and extensive limited and cold war capabilities. The issue was then reduced to the Ministry of Defence's response to Navy recalcitrance and its ability to override that service. First, however, there was also the problem of the War Office.

The War Office's resistance to the move to a British New Look centred both on its attachment to a global war role as well as to its adherence to large manpower levels. Similarly to the Navy, the Army did not directly attack the growing declaratory emphasis on nuclear deterrence, but it drew the line at attempts to reduce its own conventional capabilities. It therefore helped prevent a New Look force posture from being adopted.

⁴⁵ DEFE 7/965, Thomas to Selwyn Lloyd, 25 November 1955; also see DEFE 7/965, Misc/m (55) 122, 9 November 1955; DEFE 7/965, Powell to Selwyn Lloyd, 25 November 1955.

During the 1955 LTDP discussions the Army presented its tasks as including operations during global war, counter-insurgency and civil defence.⁴⁶ Clearly, the Army was not willing to rely solely on the efficacy of nuclear weapons to deter and contain Soviet actions. Consequently, the Ministry of Defence was also informed that by 1963 the Army planned to build-up balanced war reserves sufficient to sustain three months fighting during global war. Here, first priority would go to the regular army followed by the two TA divisions allocated to NATO for global war purposes.⁴⁷ Even more significantly, similarly to the Navy, the War Office was of the opinion that the advent of thermonuclear weapons led to an increase in costs rather than savings. Indeed, in the near future only a slight decline in total manpower was expected (from 400,000 in April 1956 to 380,000 by 1963) as changes in tactics and organisation would put a premium on redundancy.⁴⁸

As the exercise progressed, the War Office continued to point to the dangerous strategic implications that would follow from the implementation of Selwyn Lloyd's LTDP guidelines.⁴⁹ It was strongly against any reductions in its forces in Germany and

⁴⁶ DEFE 7/963, fol.12 - undated.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of problems of mobilisation and deployment following a thermonuclear attack see for example CAB 131/16, DC (55) 38, 16 September 1955.

⁴⁸ DEFE 7/963, The Long Term Defence Programme, Paper by the War Office, 6 June 1955.

⁴⁹ DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 46, 29 September 1955.

stressed the political implications of such a step (although, most probably, also taking note of Selwyn Lloyd's statement that the Army should be prepared to 'give a good account of itself in global war').⁵⁰ If a division was to be disbanded, it should, according to the Army, come from the planned strategic reserve which would be reduced from two and a third to one and a third divisions. Concomitantly, the War Office continually stressed that it was making major concessions: by the end of September it had been agreed to disband two infantry regiments (two more were to be reduced to training roles only), as well as the coast artillery, four artillery units, one field engineer regiment and two battalions of foot guards. Moreover, the Army promised to reduce all fighting units by 50 men and all infantry units by a 100 men; HQs and administrative units would be reduced by five to ten per cent, field force HQs by two and a half per cent and vehicle holdings by ten per cent.⁵¹

Yet, despite these concessions, Treasury investigations in mid-October revealed that although the Minister of Defence had stated that the country could not afford to prepare the whole Army for global war, War Office production plans aimed at equipping thirteen and two thirds divisions for such a

⁵⁰ DEFE 7/964, LTDP: Memo by Minister of Defence, 17 August 1955.

⁵¹ DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 46, 29 September 1956. Earlier that year it had also been agreed that only the two TA divisions assigned to NATO would be equipped with supplies for global war; the other nine divisions would be assigned to civil defence duties only.

contingency⁵²- a claim rebutted by the Army⁵³ which maintained that it was only providing war reserves on this scale for ten to eleven divisions ! In fact, little savings could be secured in this area because the Army believed that the war reserves situation should be improved rather than cut down and the level of reserves already allocated was

...inadequate for anything but the earliest stages of a global war. These reserves would barely suffice to meet the needs of one limited war involving a maximum of three divisions. If such a limited war developed into a global conflict, the Army would be unable to fight for longer than a few days.⁵⁴

Furthermore, any reductions that were to take place in the manpower level would have to be accompanied by increased mobility in the form of additional numbers of landing craft, freighter aircraft and short-take off planes.⁵⁵ Indeed, the Army was not intent upon starving itself of capabilities or systems and while accepting a reduction in its size was not accepting a radical reorientation of its role. It thus supported the Navy in rejecting an imposition of a New Look force posture.

Theoretically and practically, the RAF had the most to gain from the growing emphasis on the nuclear deterrent as it was

⁵² DEFE 7/965, Misc/m (55) 111, 25 October 1955.

⁵³ DEFE 7/965, Misc/m (55) 121 - undated but probably 7/8 November. War reserves were to be supplied to the four divisions in Germany, the division in the Middle East, the two divisions in the Far East, the two TA divisions earmarked for NATO, the strategic reserve and the Arab Legion.

⁵⁴ DEFE 7/965, Hobbes to Powell, 9 November 1955.

⁵⁵ DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 46, 29 September 1955.

the RAF which would deliver the nuclear ordnance.⁵⁶ However, on another level, the RAF made the shift away from conventional to nuclear forces more difficult by its attachment to capabilities that were not directly part of the 'primary' deterrent, but were of considerable cost - such as Fighter Command, Second TAF and Coastal Command. Indirectly then, the Air Ministry too played a part in detracting from the nuclear emphasis Selwyn Lloyd was attempting to impose.

Consequently, the Air Ministry, expressed doubts about whether it could meet Selwyn Lloyd's August projections. It warned that the Minister's suggestions would have direct implications for the efficacy of the deterrent and Britain's world role.⁵⁷ The Air Ministry, therefore, considered a £600 million budget allocation for 1958/59 as the necessary minimum. With this amount it could procure 200 medium bombers, 488 fighter aircraft plus 126 day fighters and 64 all-weather fighters for 2nd TAF, together with a Canberra bomber force of 124. In addition, Coastal Command would be reduced by two thirds to five squadrons while the build-up of Transport Command would proceed. Finally, there would be no changes in the Middle East Air Force numbered at 120 aircraft or the Far East Air Force which numbered 130 .⁵⁸ It is apparent that while the RAF readily accepted the declaratory emphasis on nuclear weapons,

⁵⁶ See Chapter Five.

⁵⁷ DEFE 7/964, Misc/m (55) 91, 14 September 1955.

⁵⁸ DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 47, 30 September 1955 and DEFE 7/965, Misc/P (55) 53, 13 October 1955.

similarly to the Army and the Navy, it resisted the full logic of a reliance on the nuclear deterrent - at least as far as its own conventional forces were concerned.⁵⁹

Ministry of Defence Responses

An analysis of the Ministry of Defence's reactions to these service viewpoints reveals that the Ministry could do little to impose its views on the defence departments, that it buckled under service pressures and, in effect, that it began to serve as a conduit for service ideas to the Defence Committee and Cabinet. In this context, it proved very difficult to impose a set of strategic priorities that emphasised nuclear deterrence at the expense of conventional capabilities and thereby secured economic savings. While there was, of course, movement in this latter direction, it was often painfully slow and the goals set by the Ministry of Defence were never reached. That this was to be the case with the 1955 LTDP was adumbrated in Selwyn Lloyd's August directive which stressed that: (1) its object was to find 'most economy for the least risk'; and that (2) the fields in which risks would be taken 'will have to be decided by [service] ministers'.⁶⁰ This had the twin effects of down playing the strategic significance of the impetus behind the

⁵⁹ For more detailed discussion of the RAF during 1955-56 see Chapter Four. For discussions of the Supply Vote during this period see DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 120, 29 September 1955.

⁶⁰ DEFE 7/964, Selwyn Lloyd to services, 17 August 1955.

1955 re-evaluation of British defence programming (thereby making it more vulnerable to service hesitations and procrastination on the basis of strategic reasoning) and of abrogating Ministry of Defence responsibility for the taking of the necessary decisions. That the Minister of Defence was in October to so abruptly moderate his views was a reflection of either his realization that there was little he could do to enforce his will upon the services, or an admission that his opening position had been a mere bargaining gambit, put forward in the hope of securing more reductions while at the same time placating the Cabinet that something was being done.

Whatever the case, by October, Selwyn Lloyd was supporting an increase in the service allocations above his earlier projections. His conclusions about the service reports were first summarised in a mid-October draft to be presented to the Defence Committee.⁶¹ While he was prepared to accept the implications of his earlier proposed reductions in Army capabilities, he was now deeply concerned about the meaning of his proposed reductions for the Navy and RAF. He maintained that if a budget of £1580 million for 1958/9 was forced upon the services, then Britain would lose her position as a world power, and the effectiveness of her cold war strategy would be reduced. Moreover, Britain would not be able to honour her commitments under the Paris Treaty, NATO's existence would come into question and the morale of the public would be

⁶¹ DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 53, 13 October 1955.

undermined. He pointed to the possibility that without substantial British investment in the defence effort, the Americans might consider withdrawing from Europe altogether and would take with them £150 million worth of financial aid.⁶² Finally, Selwyn Lloyd painted a grim picture of the fleet forced to concentrate in the home waters with the subsequent loss of British international prestige.

Fortunately, the Minister had a remedy, the first part of which involved a budget of £370 million for the Navy in 1958/9. This, according to Selwyn Lloyd, was the minimum necessary in order to avoid the consequences mentioned above. With this new figure, the Minister believed it would be possible to build a 'modern navy for the 1960s' which could carry out cold and limited war functions though not necessarily global war ones.⁶³ However, the Navy was not at this stage ruling out a global war role. Indeed, in October it had only gone as far as to state that with a £363 million budget for 1958/9 '...the fleet in the long term would not approach the size that would be needed to enable us to play a full part in global war...'.⁶⁴ This was a far cry from a total

⁶² For an analysis of US aid programmes to Britain see DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 48, 9 September 1955.

⁶³ The Minister later demonstrated that this budget would mean an active fleet in 1958/9 of 16 cruisers and above (down from 18 in 1955) with a reserve fleet of nine cruisers and above and 83 destroyers (down from 13 and 96). DEFE 7/965, DC (55) draft-undated; also see DEFE 7/965, Admiralty to Selwyn Lloyd, 25 November 1955.

⁶⁴ DEFE 7/964, Admiralty to Selwyn Lloyd, 11 October 1955.

rejection of global war capabilities, for a corollary to 'full part' was 'some part'. Furthermore, if Selwyn Lloyd was implying that the fact that the number of ships to be allocated to NATO was going to be reduced was evidence in itself that the Navy was surrendering interest in a global war capability, he was being misleading or mistaken. For, Navy ideas regarding its role in global war stressed a long 'resuscitation' phase and was not dependent only on forces in being in Europe.

Selwyn Lloyd also adopted the Air Ministry £600 million plan for 1958/9. He now accepted the need for a 200 medium bomber force and he expressed the belief that '...the right course of action is probably to maintain the manned strength of fighter command at a reasonable level'⁶⁵ - that was not below 480. The Minister was therefore forced to upgrade his budget projections:⁶⁶

Table Four: Selwyn Lloyd's October Budget Projections

	<u>1956/7</u>	<u>1957/8</u>	<u>1958/9</u>	
Navy	350	360	370	
RAF	540	570	600	
Army	530	530	520	
Supply	170	175	180	
MOD	20	20	20	
	-----	-----	-----	
	1610	1655	1690	[£ millions 1955]

⁶⁵ DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 53, 13 October 1955.

⁶⁶ The 1958/9 figure rose to £1695 million. Manpower figures were: Navy-110,000; Army-350,000; RAF-230,000 and an unallocated reserve of 10,000.

The overall consequence of this retreat was that little was done to overcome the existing lack of coherence in strategic planning. At a meeting of service ministers on 3 October to discuss service programme reports, it was noticed that the intention to reduce RAF strength in Europe was out of step with the Army's commitment of four divisions to that theatre. Consequently, the War Office was concerned that the RAF would be reduced in size prior to the Army having received additional firepower - namely the Corporal missile. In turn, The RAF, while agreeing that this was a problem, felt that an even bigger issue was the planned reduction of the global war orientated Coastal Command and its effect on NATO. This was a concern reinforced by Mountbatten who indicated that cuts in that command were bound to exacerbate an already weakened anti-submarine capability since many of the ships to be removed from the NATO theatre had anti-submarine roles.⁶⁷ It was later stressed that the reduction in fighter cover that would follow from a reduction in front-line fighter aircraft would increase the difficulties of deploying the two TA divisions to Europe following the outbreak of global war. It would also make problematic the Navy's plans for commissioning the reserve fleet following the outbreak of global war as there might not be sufficient air cover.

Significant is the fact that in discussing these problems the Chiefs and their subordinates never explicitly rejected the

⁶⁷ DEFE 7/964, Misc/m (55) 99, 3 October 1955.

concept of broken-backed war or that preparations should be made for such a contingency.⁶⁸ Indeed, all they seemed to feel was necessary for resolving the incongruities was additional funding. The Chiefs thereby legitimised Selwyn Lloyd's upgraded October projections but gave no evidence how this would overcome the problems mentioned above, nor the even more profound divergencies on the conceptual level which underlay these difficulties.

The increasing intervention of the Treasury into the LTDP debate in late October reflected Selwyn Lloyd's failure to reduce service allocations to levels that the Defence Committee considered acceptable.⁶⁹ On 19 October, Butler circulated a memorandum at a Defence Committee meeting in which he demonstrated that the Minister of Defence's October proposals involved an increase in the defence estimates from 1955/56 to 1958/9 of £200 million (that is from £1495 million to £1695 million).⁷⁰ Butler was adamant that the 1958/9 figure be reduced to £1615 million.⁷¹

It is of interest to note that in the discussions between the Treasury and the services that took place during October, the

⁶⁸ DEFE 4/79, COS 80 (55) discussion of JP (55) Note 19 (Final), 6 October 1955.

⁶⁹ See DEFE 7/965, fol.52, 10 November 1955 for reference to DC (55) 48.

⁷⁰ CAB 131/16, DC (55) 48, 31 October 1955.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Ministry of Defence appeared to shift from being a critic of service programmes to being a defender of them. Thus, Butler's £1615 million goal was firmly resisted by the services and the Ministry of Defence. Sir Richard Powell, for one, stated that Butler's plans were dangerous and that '...the only assumption that could be made was that the [Minister of Defence's] programme represented what was necessary'.⁷² He went on to warn that reductions along the lines of Butler's projections would involve

...severe cuts in the front-line strength of the forces and changes in our foreign policy... In particular, we should have to make heavy reductions in the strength of our forces on the Continent.⁷³

That this latter problem seemed to run counter to Powell's own preferred priority list did not seem to concern him. Indeed, he now defended the October naval budget by pointing out that it was necessary so as to, inter alia, allow for the development of 16 fast escort ships whose endurance would enable them to serve as the nucleus for a cold war fleet and to be of good service within a battle fleet designed for global war!⁷⁴ In turn, Selwyn Lloyd claimed that the additional cuts would

...involve serious military risks and still further reduce the slender margin on which our ability to

⁷² DEFE 7/965, Misc/m (55) 110, 24 October 1955.

⁷³ DEFE 7/965, 10 November 1955.

⁷⁴ DEFE 7/965, Misc/m (55) 110, 24 October 1955.

meet our overseas commitments in the cold war, and our Treaty obligations in Europe, depend.⁷⁵

Later, in discussions with Butler on 29 November, the Minister of Defence expanded on these fears. Once again, he took the services' part arguing that while the following year's budget would match the Chancellor's figures, the 1958/9 projections could not be reduced. He stressed that the Chiefs could not advise on any further reductions for military reasons⁷⁶ and that the service ministers and the permanent secretaries had

...made it very clear to me that in their opinion the limit of prudent estimating economies had already been reached, if indeed, it had not been overstepped. I am bound to say that my advisors share this view.⁷⁷

In the face of stiff service opposition Selwyn Lloyd had come full circle.

By December 1955, the LTDP review had been suspended. This was the result of the arrival of a new Minister of Defence (Walter Monckton), the appointment of a new Chancellor (Harold Macmillan), the need towards the end of the year to examine the 1956/7 estimates⁷⁸ (with the inevitable divergence of

⁷⁵ DEFE 7/965, United Kingdom Defence Programme - Memorandum by the Minister of Defence, 25 November 1955.

⁷⁶ DEFE 7/965, fol.87, 29 November 1955.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ The 1956/7 budget allocations adjusted so as to exclude £50 million in aid from the US and £50 million in support costs from Germany reveals: Navy - £351.5 million; Army - £519 million; RAF - £527 million; Supply - £185 million and Ministry of Defence - £16.2 million. When the aid packages are added a total of £1598.7 million is reached. See CAB 129/79, CP (56) 32, 8 February 1956.

attention from the 1958/9 focus) and the failure of the participants to reach final agreement with the chances of agreement in the immediate future, remote. In July 1956, an assistant secretary at the Ministry of Defence, C.E.F. Gough, stated that

I have spoken to all the Service Departments. The position of all of them is that the last figures which had any official validity were those in DC(55)43 [i.e. presented by Selwyn Lloyd to the Defence Committee on 14 October]. It is true that these figures were not accepted by the Chancellor Nor on the other hand, was any other figure on any other basis for planning accepted by the Minister of Defence.⁷⁹

At a meeting with Butler on 6 December, Selwyn Lloyd had spoken of 'splitting the difference' between his figure of £1620 million for 1958/9 (that is, excluding inducements) with Butler's £1580 million figure (a figure also excluding inducements).⁸⁰ There is no evidence that such a split had the services' blessing and it is doubtful whether it would have been accepted by them. By the end of the year little had been settled concerning the 1957/8 and 1958/9 budgets.

(B) The 1956 Policy Review

Background to the Programme

While the 1956 White Paper appeared to reaffirm a war preparation priority list that placed a strengthening of the

⁷⁹ DEFE 7/966, Note by Chilvers, 18 July 1956.

⁸⁰ DEFE 7/966, fol.1, 6 December 1955.

deterrent as the most important objective,⁸¹ similarly to 1955, the services sought to use their organisational position to prevent the implications of such an ordering from undermining their favoured roles and capabilities. Thus, at the beginning of 1956, an assistant secretary in the Admiralty, J.M. Mackay, was adamant that it was difficult

...to maintain the distinction between a navy fitted and organised for cold and limited war and one fitted and organised for global war. Our view has always been that the flexibility of ships does ensure if you have a navy of any kind it will have an all-round function. We should of course like many more ships for global war...⁸²

While the Navy continued to challenge a strict interpretation of the priority scheme, the Army continued to construe it in a manner which made savings difficult to achieve. During the 1956 White Paper discussions, the War Office opposed Minister of Defence Walter Monckton's insistence on the inclusion of a sentence referring to the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons in limited war as this could serve as an excuse for reducing its manpower requirements⁸³ - an intention readily recognised by Monckton who stood by his sentence stating that its removal '...would weaken the deterrent [and]...would place a premium on big battalions'.⁸⁴ Moreover, it appears that the priority scheme which placed global war last was not

⁸¹ See Statement on Defence 1956, Cmd. 9691, HMSO, paras. 4-8.

⁸² DEFE 7/771, Mackay to Carey, 11 January 1956.

⁸³ DEFE 7/773, 2/010/55, 4 February 1956.

⁸⁴ DEFE 7/773, 6/1, Note by Monckton-undated.

automatically adopted. Indeed, in January the Foreign office complained that in the White Paper there was

...too much emphasis on global war...and too little on the 'cold war'. This comes out clearly in paragraph 8 where the first two roles assigned to UK forces are global war and only the third and fourth deal with the most immediate threat from the Sino-Soviet Bloc namely subversion in all its forms.⁸⁵

Consequently, while the 1956 White Paper presented a seemingly uniform strategic vision, this was not the case. Though, on the one hand, it reaffirmed the oft stated war preparation priorities, it also provided the leeway by which the services could prepare for global war and retain a large manpower and extensive capabilities. It was stated under the Navy section that the fleet would '...continue to make a substantial contribution to the naval strength of the Commonwealth, N.A.T.O and S.E.A.T.O in meeting the needs of global war'.⁸⁶ The Army, too, would have to 'be capable of giving a good account of itself in global war...'.⁸⁷ In such a context it is not surprising that Monckton was forced to report that despite all the cost cutting of 1955, defence expenditure would in 1956/7 rise above that of 1955/56 (that is from £1494.2 million to £1498 million).⁸⁸

⁸⁵ FO 371/123185, ZPS/5, Minute by Dean 6 January 1956; also see DEFE 7/773, Ward to Powell, 10 January 1956.

⁸⁶ Statement on Defence, 1956 , op.cit. , para. 23.

⁸⁷ Ibid. , para. 28.

⁸⁸ DEFE 7/771, 11 January 1956. One of the main problems in reaching the 1956/7 figures was underspending by the RAF. For discussions of the estimates see Hansard, HOC, Vol. 549, cols. 1374-1638, 1724-1883.

The Ministry of Defence should not have been surprised that the services should now attempt to exploit this lack of rigour in war preparation priorities. In a note from a deputy secretary in the Ministry of Defence, R.C. Chilvers, to Monckton in February 1956, Chilvers was adamant that there were

...a number of indications in the past few months that some elements at least in the Service Departments do not realize what the Strath report [i.e. the study of the consequences of a thermonuclear attack on Britain] implies.⁸⁹

Chilvers then proceeded to give examples of service preparations for global war which included: (1) the War Office had proposed to the Chiefs that plans should be made for the development of a new main base in the Middle East for use in global war; (2) the Principal Administrative Officers Committee were considering plans for maintaining and constructing a reserve of landing ships for use in North West Europe in global war; (3) the Admiralty had asked the Chiefs to consider arrangements for laying mines in Russian waters by aircraft based in the UK in the post nuclear-exchange phase. Chilvers went on to state

My point is that if the Service Departments are putting forward proposals - and these are merely things that happen to have figured in Chiefs of Staff's papers in the last month or two - that would be of very doubtful value even if we had taken the steps needed to secure the bare survival of this country through the initial phase of global war one is bound to suspect that their present programmes

⁸⁹ DEFE 7/966, Chilvers to Monckton, 24 February 1956.

may contain a good deal that is of lower priority than those survival measures.⁹⁰

This was a view reaffirmed by Monckton in March 1956 when he complained that

The Navy and Army are still assuming that they must plan for continued global war operations after some months, cf. the War Office study of the Middle East Base and the Naval enquiry about minelaying at D+12 months. Present planning for the defence of southern Europe is also revealing; the assumptions are that once the hydrogen bombs have been dropped the war will get back on to more or less conventional lines, and that...naval operations in the Mediterranean will be practicable...[t]his is not only nonsense, it is nonsense we cannot possibly pay for.⁹¹

For Monckton, the major assumption to be made about global war was that the UK would deliver a nuclear counter-offensive and attempt to survive the Soviet nuclear assault as best she could. Moreover, he was adamant that '[i]f there is a broken-backed phase the US will have to fight it for us...[t]here is no object in deceiving ourselves...'⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid. The influence of these problems on expanding the budget can clearly be seen in this example. Chilvers was demanding a large allocation (£70 million) for civil defence expenditure despite the general policy on home defence recommended by the Home Defence Committee which stated that the amount of spending on home defence '...must be influenced by the extent to which it is government policy to prepare for global war...' [DEFE 7/966, fol.28, Annex to JP (55) 165D] Chilvers knew that the government was officially intent on reducing global war expenditure but he found himself forced to state that '[s]o long as the service departments are proposing to spend money on such preparations...the civil expenditure without which they will be useless must be kept in step'. [DEFE 7/966, Chilvers to Monckton, 12 February 1956].

⁹¹ DEFE 7/966, fol.34, 8 March 1956.

⁹² Ibid.

The Minister also correctly perceived that service non-acceptance of these principles was only part of the problem; the other part had to do with definitions of limited war. He stated

In the absence of any definition of limited war and on the basis accepted by HMG, that nuclear weapons may be used in such a war, it is possible to argue that almost any military measure might be required for limited war purposes.⁹³

A limit would have to be placed on any excesses that arose out of this open-ended analysis. Monckton therefore made the assumption that: (a) in any limited war (other than certain anti-subversion scenarios) the UK could count on allied help; (b) if a limited war started in areas in which the UK had peace-time obligation (e.g. Malaya or in the Middle East) the UK should have enough forces and reinforcements to hold the ground until allied help arrived; and (c) war in other areas (Korea, Indochina or Greece) must not be planned for.

Against the background of these definitions, the Minister proceeded to give explicit guidelines for the securing of savings: (1) the Navy could begin by reducing its submarine fleet in both the Middle East and the Far East and the number of aircraft carriers could be reduced to two or three;⁹⁴ (2) the RAF would have to reduce Fighter Command while the planned V-bomber force could be reduced to 150; (3) finally, Monckton

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ It was Monckton's view that carriers were redundant in the Mediterranean. In the Middle East there was no sea based threat and war any where else would involve the US Navy. Ibid.

stated that the War Office was still planning to spend £25 million on the TA and while '...all this, of course, would be fought to the death...' expenditure in that area would have to be cut to £5 million. Complemented by the halting of overseas stockpiling for global war and the curtailing of stockpiles within the UK to that of only one week of intensive operations, substantial economies could be secured. Undoubtedly the intention to reduce forces and secure savings was there; the question remained, however, as to how successful the new Minister would be.

The Programme

Continued economic pressures during 1956 and the failure of earlier cost-cutting measures⁹⁵ led to renewed demands for a major re-evaluation of the defence budget. In a report presented to the Cabinet in January of that year, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Harold Macmillan, quoted his predecessor R.A. Butler that unless Britain was able to keep her demands within bounds

...we would be faced with irreparable damage to our economy...to sterling, and to the sterling area system, with all that this implies to our position as a centre of the Commonwealth and as a leading world power.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the difficulties associated with the 1956 £100 million exercise see for example CAB 128/30, CM 42 (56) 7, 14 June 1956; CAB 129/80, CP (56) 144, 13 June 1956 and DEFE 7/967, Note by Powell, 17 October 1956.

⁹⁶ CAB 129/79, CP (56) 7, 6 January 1956.

It was Macmillan's view that the government would have to take drastic measures which would demonstrate its willingness to be firm and to make a contribution in those areas in which it had control, including defence.⁹⁷ On 23 March, the Chancellor wrote to Sir Richard Powell that

In our hearts we all know that the only cure for [the economic situation] is not an increase in taxation but the reduction of Government expenditure. We also know that we get no defence from the defence expenditure... The only way that I can see by which we could restore our economy is by getting down on the defence problem.⁹⁸

Consequently, a ministerial committee - the Policy Review Committee - was set up in the summer of 1956 to oversee such reductions.⁹⁹ On 16 July, Macmillan told the committee that the defence budget should not exceed £1490 million for 1957/8, £1450 for 1958/59 and £1400 million in 1959/60. The Chancellor also stated that if manpower was reduced to 500,000, the total defence budget need not exceed £1465 million in 1957/8, £1415 million in 1958/9 and £1360 million in 1959/60.¹⁰⁰ These figures were, however, quickly jettisoned for the more modest objectives of £1525 million in 1957/58 and £1450 million in

⁹⁷ PREM 11/1324, CP (56) 12, 21 January 1956; also see PREM 11/1324, EP 1 (56), 11 January 1956; CAB 128/30, CM 3 (56) 8, 11 January 1956 and CAB 129/79, CP (56) 17, 21 January 1957.

⁹⁸ PREM 11/1326, Macmillan to Powell, 23 March 1956.

⁹⁹ According to T.C.G James (Interview, 15 December 1987) the Policy Review Committee consisted of Eden, Selwyn Lloyd, Monckton and Lord Salisbury. Butler attended most of its meetings, as did the service ministers and the Chiefs of Staff.

¹⁰⁰ AIR 19/855, Memo by L.Petch, 18 July 1956; also see DEFE 7/967, Memo by Powell, 25 April 1956.

1958/59. Manpower would be reduced to 600,000 by April 1959 and to 500,000 by April 1960.¹⁰¹ Yet, even these proved difficult to achieve.

What is of interest to note is that from the start, the Policy Review Committee, for the purposes of coherent planning and effective cost-cutting, reaffirmed the war preparation priorities of the 1955 LTDP. This was the thrust of a still classified paper called 'The Future of the UK in World Affairs' produced without the knowledge of the Chiefs at the instigation of the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook. The paper pointed to the need to secure savings especially in Europe where a stronger emphasis on nuclear deterrence could serve as the rationale for substantial reductions in conventional forces.¹⁰² Against this background, Monckton informed the Chiefs that each service should investigate the result of a decision that any planning based on the premise that the UK would serve as an operational base following the onset of thermonuclear war should be discarded.¹⁰³ On 3 August, Monckton wrote to the service ministers and told them that the new defence budget projections '...naturally imply sweeping changes in plans for the forces'.¹⁰⁴ Studies would include an

¹⁰¹ AIR 19/855, Dean to Birch, 23 July 1956.

¹⁰² This information comes from T.C.G.James (Interview, 15 December 1987)

¹⁰³ DEFE 4/87, COS 58 (56) 7, 12 July 1956.

¹⁰⁴ AIR 19/855, Monckton to Birch, 3 August 1956. Monckton divided a £1450 million budget projection for 1958/9 into: Admiralty - £325 million; War Office - £425 million; Air Ministry - £505 million; Supply - £182 million; MOD - £13

analysis of an adjustment of the Navy's size to the minimum necessary for situations short of global war; the abolition of war reserves that existed for purposes of global war; the elimination of expenditure on preparations for the reinforcement of overseas forces from the UK after the outbreak of global war and on forces designated for global war which would not be effective at the outbreak of war; and a reduction of forces on the Continent to the minimum size which it would be possible to negotiate with Britain's allies.¹⁰⁵

Service Reactions

The essence of the ensuing debate differed little - if at all - from the 1955 LTDP discussions. Priorities were first distorted, then global warfare capabilities legitimised (with attempts to retain all manner of cold/limited war capabilities held on to) and the progress towards economies made painfully slow. Thus, at the beginning of June the Chiefs stated that priorities could neither be absolute or mutually exclusive.

million. The Minister did not attempt to set out an allocation for 1957/58 but he warned that this would be at the maximum only £75 million more than for 1958/59. In the years following 1958/59, the Minister did not expect the total budget to exceed that of 1958/59, though the Army's proportion would decline.

¹⁰⁵ CAB 130/120, GEN 548/1st meeting, 9 August 1956. For an outline of the specific studies carried out during the 1956 Policy Review see Eden, op.cit., p. 372; and DEFE 5/69, COS 8 (56) 234, 14 June 1956.

Moreover, they doubted whether large savings could be realised in the fields of cold and limited war capabilities.¹⁰⁶

The services, again, readily took up this refrain. The Navy, despite having at the end of 1955 agreed that global war was unlikely until the Soviets could deliver an effective nuclear attack on the US,¹⁰⁷ refused to accept that all plans for such a contingency be aborted. While in July it was prepared to make cuts which included the Rhine and Elbe flotillas, 75 ships in the reserve fleet, a quarter of submarines in home waters and some minesweeping and coastal forces, it stressed that it could not lose the ability to expand to the minimum measures needed to control Britain's sea communications in global war. It emphasised that the Navy's preparations for global war had suffered from successive economy drives and that '...the aim of the [policy review] had therefore to a large extent been anticipated as far as the Navy is

¹⁰⁶ DEFE 5/68, COS (56) 219, 7 June 1956; also see DEFE 5/69, COS (56) 235, 16 June 1956.

¹⁰⁷ DEFE 6/34, The Nature Course and Duration of Global War, 9 January 1956. The Admiralty's study was planned around the year of 1970. Seven war games took place one of which was attended by Monckton and the Chiefs of Staff. The Minister was so impressed that he ordered that the Navy's strategic studies be reconstituted on an inter-service basis. See DEFE 4/82, COS 1 (56) 8, 3 January 1956 and DEFE 4/82, COS 9 (56) 5, 17 January 1956). Studies were also conducted into the role of central government in global war (See DEFE 6/35, JP (56) 92 (A) T of (C Section), 2 May 1956). A study was also undertaken by the JPS into the instructions to be given to commanders abroad on the action they should take in the event of contact with the central government being cut off during a global nuclear war for a period of up to six months (See DEFE 4/86, COS (56) 131, 1 May 1956). The contents of these studies are still closed under section 3(4).

concerned'.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the Navy was of the opinion that there would have to be additions to the operational fleet (including a new commando carrier, four destroyers and three frigates) if Britain was to meet her cold and limited war commitments. Total projections for 1958/59 were £380 million.

On 21 September, the Admiralty went on to state that Monckton's financial ceiling of £325 million '...represents a very drastic reduction in relation to any plan that has previously been presented'.¹⁰⁹ It referred to its own July projection of £380 million and stated that reductions from this of £55 million in 18 months would have dangerous implications. It was emphasised that global war '...would be of no concern to the navy under the hypothesis in the [3 August] directive...' - the clear implication being that it should be. The impact on NATO would be most grave, and for cold and limited war purposes, the South Atlantic and West Indies stations would have to be given up and the Home and Mediterranean fleets left very weak. This latter problem could only be offset by a withdrawal from the Far East.

These concerns were given their most explicit form in a letter from the First Lord, Lord Hailsham, to Monckton on 10 October. Hailsham explicitly rejected the assumption that only the

¹⁰⁸ DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 280, 25 July 1956.

¹⁰⁹ AIR 19/855, Defence Expenditure - Memo by Admiralty, 21 September 1956.

deterrent should be relied upon when it came to global war. In referring to Monckton's 3 August directive Hailsham stated

To begin with, we were asked to assume that apart from the deterrent no preparations should be made for war with Russia either now or in the future...this is not an assumption to which I could as at present advised make myself a party...I do not believe that it can be right that no provision should be made by the Navy against the contingency of a war with this power... For the present, however, I need only say that it is an assumption which neither the Chiefs of Staff nor Her Majesty's Government have accepted as a basis for planning. What they have agreed is the very different proposition that for the present, preparations for global war other than for the deterrent should take the lowest place in the order of priority.¹¹⁰

With £325 million the Navy would, according to the First Lord, '...sink to something a little above the present level of the French navy'. The active fleet would contain only three aircraft carriers, three to four cruisers, 24 destroyers, 37 frigates and 26 minesweepers as compared to the £380 million plan of four carriers, eight cruisers, 29 destroyers, 49 frigates and 39 submarines. Consequently, both Empire and Commonwealth would suffer and British influence in Africa, Asia and the West Indies would diminish. NATO would be undermined and global war would be brought closer.

The War Office's position during the 1956 Policy Review revealed little alteration from its stance during the 1955 LTDP discussions. It remained strongly attached to global war planning and unresponsive to suggestions for reducing British forces in Germany. The issue for the Army was not only one of

¹¹⁰ AIR 19/855, Hailsham to Monckton, 10 October 1956.

deterrence, but also one of war fighting. In February it had stated that with further cuts

Global war plans would also be affected in that the withdrawal of one UK division [from BAOR] in the near future would reduce the present fighting strength of the Northern Army Group by about 13%...as the assigned German contribution will not be effective for several years. On current plans, the ability to impose sufficient delay in front of the Rhine would be doubtful and the implementation of SACEUR's forward strategy might be further delayed.¹¹¹

Again, as in 1955, one of the major drains on financial resources remained the Army's attachment to a wide range or limited and cold war roles and the required manpower.¹¹² During the Policy Review discussions the Army took note of a JPS report on the nature, scope and duration of limited war presented to the Chiefs of Staff in June 1956 in which it was stated that since the use of tactical nuclear weapons in limited war could only be made by the government of the day, it was essential for Britain to retain the ability to fight limited wars either with nuclear weapons or with conventional weapons alone.¹¹³ Thus, as 1956 progressed, the Army seemed little interested in concepts which replaced conventional with nuclear power. The Army continued to demand both types of capabilities.

¹¹¹ DEFE 5/65, COS (56) 74, 14 February 1956.

¹¹² For a discussion of this point see next section on the national service debate.

¹¹³ DEFE 4/88, COS 63 (56) 3 discussion of JP (56) 115, (Final), 29 June 1956 ; also see DEFE 4/87, COS 54 (56) 4, 29 May 1956 and DEFE 6/36, JP (56) 115, 8 June 1956.

These protestations did not go unnoticed by the Air Ministry. According to R.C.Kent, an assistant secretary at the Ministry, the Army and Navy seemed to believe that cuts in their own programmes were due to excessive expenditure on the deterrent; in fact, only ten per cent of all defence expenditure went towards the deterrent.¹¹⁴ Moreover, he stressed that if there was going to be a serious attempt to reappraise British defence policy, then there was '...no reason in logic why sweeping reductions should not be made in the Navy'. Kent rejected the Navy's assertion that priorities as established by the Chiefs allowed for the provision of global warfare capabilities. He stated that only excessive preoccupation with global war could justify the inclusion of 26 submarines in the fleet (and 39 under the £380 million plan), the proposed construction of sophisticated vessels such as guided weapons cruisers and the retention of as many as 27 minesweepers in the active fleet planned for 1965/6 (backed by 169 in the operational reserve).

The Air Ministry's criticism of the Navy continued in to the new year when in January senior officials in the Air Ministry strongly criticised a paper prepared for the Defence Committee by Mountbatten on the Soviet submarine threat because it reflected

...a concerted effort [by the Admiralty] to oppose any suggestion that the United Kingdom should accept a strategy based on the deterrent which allows for

¹¹⁴ Air 19/855, Note by R.C.Kent, 17 October 1956.

no more than the initial nuclear exchange in a future global war¹¹⁵

The RAF attested to the tendency of the other two services to attach too great an importance to the 'broken-backed' phase of global war. However, similarly to 1955, the RAF clouded the issue by demanding the retention of its favoured conventional forces. The Air Ministry, too, expressed great unhappiness about Monckton's 3 August directive which included an RAF budget allocation for 1958/59 of £500 million. This, to the Air Ministry's consternation, would have meant that the planned V-bomber force would have to be reduced from 200 to 184, the Canberra force based in the UK to a 100, Fighter Command cut back from 480 to 350, 2nd TAF from 300 to 275 as well as some reductions the Middle East and Far East Air Force's. The new force would, in any event, cost £535 million in 1958/59¹¹⁶ and was not strategically acceptable. Consequently, it cautioned that compared to the financial savings required in 1958/59, '...the cuts in the front-line described above are disproportionately severe'.¹¹⁷

By the end of 1956 little in the way of final cost projections had been concluded and even less in the way of strategic priorities agreed upon amongst the services. Part of this problem was a result of the postponement of the review

¹¹⁵ AIR 8/2061, The Role of the Russian Submarine Fleet, 2 January 1957.

¹¹⁶ AIR 19/855, RAF Programme 1957/8 and 1958/9, 21 September 1956.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

exercise during the Suez crisis, but much was the result of the inability of the Ministry of Defence to impose restraint on competing service demands. The shock of Suez seemed, however, to galvanise the Ministry of Defence into action. Soon after the crisis had subsidised, the new Minister of Defence, Anthony Head, reconvened the Policy Review Committee (despite objections from the services)¹¹⁸ and sought to bring discussions to a conclusion. The services were then presented with an uncompromising directive:

It is proposed that our defence policy should be based on the principle of smaller forces equipped with up-to-date weapons. Our commitments and overheads should be adjusted to match these smaller forces. We should continue to make some contribution to the main deterrent to global war. But our contribution to NATO forces will be considerably reduced.¹¹⁹

The Minister claimed that reductions in the Middle East and Far East forces would have to take place and that it was less likely that the UK would require forces for participation in a limited war undertaken by Britain alone. Specifically, though national service would continue for the time being, the intake would be reduced. By 1961, naval manpower would be limited to 90,000, the Army to 200,000 and the RAF to 155,000. There would be a major reduction in naval forces declared to NATO and the curtailment of forces East of Suez. In turn, the Army's garrison in the Middle East would be limited to the

¹¹⁸ For Birch's fear of being presented with faits accomplis see AIR 19/855, Birch to Head, 3 December 1956; also see FO 371/123199, ZPS/94G, Brooke to Head, 5 December 1956.

¹¹⁹ AIR 19/855, Head to Birch, 20 December 1956.

needs of internal security, while a reduction in the long term garrison in the Far East would have to be considered. The planned medium bomber force would not rise above 184, 2nd TAF would be reduced to 200 and the light bomber force reduced to about 60. The capacity of Transport Command would be increased in order to make Britain's forces more mobile. The services were to present their plans on the size and shape of their forces by 11 January 1957 together with broad estimates of their costs for 1958/59, 1959/60 and 1960/61.¹²⁰

A reading of the directive reveals that the Ministry of Defence attempted here to circumvent bureaucratic bargaining and impose a solution on the services. While the quantity of cuts did not match those of the following year, the motivation was certainly present. Yet, how even such a dramatic directive would have altered the service's stance in the context of the existing decision-making dispensation remains uncertain. Organisational changes would first have to take place before intent could be translated into action.

Consequently, the difficulties encountered in the area of long term defence programming were mirrored in the subject of conscription and manpower requirements - a subject that had crucial significance in the context of attempts to shift the focus of British defence planning away from a posture of

¹²⁰ Ibid. Also see DEFE 6/39, JP (56) Note 14, 31 December 1956.

multiple capabilities towards greater reliance on the nuclear deterrent.

(2) The National Service Debate: 1955-56

If economic savings were the prime considerations behind the 1957 White Paper and nuclear deterrence its apparent centrepiece, then the promise of the termination of national service represented one of its most outstanding features. The economic benefits to be secured by a replacement of conventional forces with nuclear firepower rested on the assumption that conscription would be discontinued and expenditure on manpower reduced. The question then becomes whether the relevant documentation reveals that in the period immediately prior to 1957 the Chiefs and service departments were willing to translate a recognition of this relationship, into actual procurement and deployment decisions ? Specifically: (1) what was the basis of the services' rejection of a return to an all-volunteer force ?; did they accept (or even relate to) the view that a strategy based on the use of nuclear weapons allowed for a reduction in manpower ?; (2) what were the major motivations behind the government's wish to terminate national service ?; what was the balance between economic and political motivations and an appreciation of the implications of a strategy of employing nuclear weapons for conventional force levels ?; The object, of this section will be to attempt to reach some conclusions as to whether it would have been possible to terminate

national service in the context of defence decision making in the 1955-56 period.

(A) 1955: Government Motivations and Service Reactions

At the end of the Second World War, the scope of Britain's overseas commitments made a purely volunteer force an unrealistic option. In 1946 Prime Minister Atlee told the Commons that the purpose of national service would be: (1) to build-up a trained reserve which would be ready for operational use in an emergency; and (2) to supplement the regular forces. The primary purpose of the scheme was viewed to be training of reserves.¹²¹ In March 1947, the National Service Bill set service at 18 months. This was reduced to one year following internal Labour Party pressure but raised to 18 months again before the National Service Act came into force on 1 January 1949.¹²² In the midst of the Korean crisis it was raised to two years.¹²³ Attempts to increase the regular component of the armed forces had taken the form of pay increases in 1950 and 1954, but at the beginning of 1955 approximately 35% of the total armed forces (excluding women) were national service men with the Army's percentage of

¹²¹ See Atlee's statement in Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 430, cols. 39-43, 12 November 1946.

¹²² See Darby, op.cit. , pp. 36-40; Rosecrance, op.cit. , pp. 57-8.

¹²³ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 478, cols. 1507-8, 15 September 1950.

conscripts just under 50%.¹²⁴ Consequently, the issue of national service remained a constant problem for the government. As the effects of full-employment continued to be felt during the mid-1950s and as the implications of thermonuclear warfare began to receive more attention, anti-national service sentiment gained impetus both inside and outside Parliament. It also could not be forgotten that national service legislation would need to be renewed in March 1958.

In the period under consideration, both the Churchill and Eden administrations appeared more concerned about the political and economic consequences of terminating national service and less interested in either its relationship to nuclear weapons or its effects on limited and cold war capabilities. On 13 December 1954, the Minister of Defence, Harold Macmillan, told service ministers that there was every indication that national service would be a major factor in the next election '... and he wished to clear his mind as to the possibility of introducing any changes'.¹²⁵ As Macmillan later told the First

Lord, J.P.L.Thomas, 'I'm sure it would be a good thing to try and work out our line on that issue, before and not after political pressure begins'.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ See DEFE 13/53, fol.54, 24 November 1954 and DEFE 7/965, Misc/m (55) 106, 17 October 1955.

¹²⁵ DEFE 13/53, Manpower and National Service, 13 December 1954.

¹²⁶ DEFE 13/53, fol.26, 15 December 1954.

Thus, it was political considerations that led Macmillan in January 1955 to state that he now doubted the wisdom of the government at the present juncture proposing a reduction in national service '...even if it were not militarily impracticable'.¹²⁷ He felt that any reduction would lead to Labour Party counter-proposals for an even greater reduction which would endanger British national security. Again, at a meeting of the Defence Committee on 27 January 1955, it was agreed that a reduction in the period of national service could not be contemplated because: (1) the size and shape of the services (especially the Army) was determined by the requirements of the cold war no less than for 'general war'; (2) the last six months of national service was the most valuable because it was only then that the conscript became fully effective; (3) if any hint was given in the 1955 White Paper that the government was considering a reduction in the period of national service, it would become a matter of political manoeuvring.¹²⁸

The 1955 White Paper stated that the government had naturally considered whether the thermonuclear revolution had influenced the problem of manpower but had concluded that the need to station forces in various parts of the world and the policy of building up the strategic reserve meant that a manpower

¹²⁷ DEFE 13/53, Extract from SM/M (55) 1, 26 January 1955.

¹²⁸ CAB 131/15, DC 2 (55) 2, 27 January 1957.

reduction could not take place.¹²⁹ Here the government was being misleading because it was not motivated solely by strategic considerations as much as by the political ones of avoiding providing the Labour Party with a pretext for demanding further cuts and the need, as shall be noted, of taking into account service pressures.

In Parliament the government continued to refuse to admit that it was considering a reduction in the period of national service and a Labour Party motion in July 1955 to reduce conscription to 12 months was duly rejected. The House of Commons was informed that a '...reduction in the strength and efficiency of the active forces could clearly only be tolerated if the size of our commitments justified such a step'.¹³⁰ The Minister of Defence, Selwyn Lloyd, was unequivocal when he told the House of Commons that

To reduce the period of National Service now would affect our power to play our part in the world. It would discourage our Allies and would encourage our enemies and so far from reducing world tension, it might increase it.¹³¹

By the summer of 1955, the new Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, appeared more interested in balancing the need to avoid entering into a round of counter-proposals with the Labour Party over the future of national service with the attempt to

¹²⁹ Statement on Defence, 1956, op.cit. , paras. 67-69.

¹³⁰ DEFE 13/53, fol.82, 25 July 1955, and DEFE 13/53, Parker to Selwyn Lloyd, 21 July 1955.

¹³¹ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 540, col. 1101, 28 April 1955.

secure economic and political advantages of reducing conscription, than he was with balancing the reduction of conventional forces with an increase in nuclear firepower. However, with the 1955 election out of the way, the issue of Labour Party pressure presented less of an immediate obstacle. Consequently, on 2 August 1955, the services were informed that economic objectives and the goals of the LTDP made it imperative that service manpower be cut from approximately 835,000 in 1955 to 700,000 by April 1958. The Navy would be allocated 110-115,000, the RAF 235-240,000 and the Army 345-355,000.¹³² On 17 August, the Minister told the service heads that reductions would have to be made in the base organisations so as not to effect the front-line forces. The cuts would take place either through: (1) a scheme of selective service; (2) a reduction in the period of national service; (3) a reduction in the intake by allowing the age of call-up to rise; (4) a reduction in the period of whole-time service combined with a reduction of intake.¹³³

Eden's preference was for the cut to be achieved through a reduction in national service by six months¹³⁴ - a move he regarded as politically attractive (the government would be shown to be taking action while at the same time avoiding the

¹³² DEFE 7/963, 2 August 1955.

¹³³ DEFE 7/964, 17 August 1955. Figures tended to vary slightly. They were now referred to as: Navy - 100,000; Army - 350,000 and RAF - 230,000.

¹³⁴ DEFE 13/53, Carrington to Eden, 28 August 1955.

dangerous military implications that would follow from the complete termination of conscription) - and he urged the Ministry of Defence to gain service agreement as soon as possible. The Prime Minister was keen to announce in October changes that would begin to take effect in January 1956.¹³⁵ Clearly, the issue of nuclear weapons as replacements for conventional forces remained peripheral to these decisions and positions. The government continued to see the problem mainly in political terms - that is vis-a-vis the Labour Party. In turn, it presented its case to the services in economic terms, while the services based their replies on strategic reasoning, though a reasoning that seemed incompatible with a move away from a posture of multiple capabilities.

In a report of a Ministry of Defence working party on 'The Effect of a Straight Reduction in the Period of Full-Time National Service from 2 Years to 21 months' presented to the Minister of Defence in January 1955, no attempt was made to link the growing emphasis on nuclear deterrence to the possibility of reducing manpower requirements. Instead, the main point of the report was the danger of reducing fighting capacity. It stated that

So great a reduction would have serious repercussions on the Army Order of Battle and the ability of the Army to carry out its commitments world-wide. Some of the present commitments overseas would have to be liquidated and the strength of the strategic reserve ...greatly reduced.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ DEFE 7/979, Note by G.F.Carpenter, 25 August 1955.

¹³⁶ DEFE 13/53, SM/P (55) 2, 20 January 1955.

At a meeting of the service ministers on 24 January, Harold Parker, head of the working party, stated that if national service was reduced by three months it would be extremely difficult to maintain the Army in its overseas garrisons in a state of efficiency. The services might for a year or two be able to maintain forces of the same size in terms of number of men but '...they would be, to an increasing degree, paper forces'.¹³⁷

However, while according to the Air Ministry

...manpower figures [should] spring from a review of the Strategy and Defence policy adopted by the Government whereas both the overall figure of 700,000 and the allocation of 100,000 to the Royal Navy, 350,000 to the Army and 230,000 to the RAF were arbitrary figures...¹³⁸

the services agreed that an overall manpower figure of 700,000 was not unreasonable.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, they were adamant that numbers could not be reduced still further and that a two year national service programme must be retained.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the War Office stressed the '...very serious effects on the Army of a reduction in the period of full-time service',¹⁴¹ while the Navy was not prepared to state that it would be able to meet its commitments if its force was reduced to 110,000 by 31

¹³⁷ DEFE 13/53, fol.41, 24 January 1955.

¹³⁸ DEFE 7/979, Sheen to Newling, 24 August 1955.

¹³⁹ DEFE 7/963, Misc/m (55) 76, 2 August 1955.

¹⁴⁰ DEFE 13/53, Misc/P (55) 33, 2 August 1955.

¹⁴¹ DEFE 7/979, Spense to Newling, 24 August 1955.

March 1958.¹⁴² Both the Army and the RAF set out a list of priorities for reducing intake which expressed a preference for retaining conscription at two years while allowing the age of call-up to rise.¹⁴³

Once again, the Ministry of Defence deferred to service opinion. At the beginning of September, Selwyn Lloyd confirmed that he was of the view that a reduction of three months would not satisfy those who were demanding a six or 12 month reduction. The Minister was also concerned that a three month reduction would be regarded as a 'wangle'.¹⁴⁴ On 22 September 1955, Selwyn Lloyd informed the Cabinet that there were two methods for reducing armed forces manpower to 700,000 by March 1958: by maintaining the period of service at 24 months and allowing the age of call-up to rise; or by reducing the period of service to 21 months together with a rise in the age of call-up.¹⁴⁵ The Cabinet was told that the Defence Committee had agreed that in view of the possible effects on Britain's West European allies of a reduction in national service, the period of conscription would have to be retained at 24 months.¹⁴⁶ The Minister of Defence betrayed his main concern

¹⁴² DEFE 13/53, Misc/m (55) 87, 9 September 1955; also see DEFE 7/979, Searle to Newling, 24 August 1955.

¹⁴³ DEFE 13/53, Misc/M (55) 87, 9 September 1955; also see DEFE 13/53, Sm/P (55) 12, 3 September 1955.

¹⁴⁴ DEFE 7/979, fol.52a - undated.

¹⁴⁵ CAB 128/29, discussion of CP (55) 125 at CM 33 (55) 1, 22 September 1955.

¹⁴⁶ CAB 131/16, DC 9 (55) 1, 15 September 1955.

when he stated that '...if there were strong political advantages in following the second course [i.e. reducing service to 21 months] the military consequences though substantial would not be disastrous'.¹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, it was also the Minister's view that some form of reduction would have to take place because, as a result of the nature of thermonuclear war '...the earlier conception of national service as a means of building up a large pool of trained reservists is out of date'.¹⁴⁸ Yet, this seems to have been added only as an after-thought and the prime considerations continued to be economic and political. Even Eden was forced to stress the need for flexibility on this issue and admitted that

... the international skies though they might seem fairer at the moment might well darken again and therefore a reduction in the size of the armed forces must be carried out in such a way that the process could be reversed without major upheaval.¹⁴⁹

The complete termination of national service therefore did not at this stage seem possible. Consequently, on 22 September 1955, the Cabinet approved a motion that the reduction to a manpower level of 700,000 by the end of March 1958 be achieved by maintaining the period of national service at two years and allowing the age of call-up to rise.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ CAB 129/77, CP (55) 125, 19 September 1955.

¹⁴⁹ CAB 128/29, CM 33 (55) 1, 22 September 1955.

This was announced publicly at the Conservative Party conference at Bournemouth on 8 October 1955, when the Prime Minister was at pains to stress that the cut in manpower would not influence British commitments. It was also stated that consideration was being given to improving pay so as to increase the regular component of the armed forces. Moreover, the reduction in manpower would be gradual so as to avoid disorganisation. The decrease would be about 20,000 in the next six months and about 40,000 in each of the following financial years.¹⁵⁰ Concomitantly, throughout 1955, the government continued to reject any suggestion that it was intent upon ending conscription. For example, on 24 October, Selwyn Lloyd told the House of Commons that the national service programme would remain and that for the moment the country could not do without conscription.¹⁵¹ On 2 November, the House approved a White Paper on national service which reaffirmed Eden's promise to reduce service manpower to 700,000, but also stated that for purposes of the efficiency of the armed forces, national service would remain at two years. Rather, what would take place was a limited restructuring of the intake system by having fewer registrations at longer intervals during 1956 and 1957.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ DEFE 7/771, fol.1, Speech by Eden at Bournemouth, 8 October 1955.

¹⁵¹ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 545, col. 1031, 25 October 1955.

¹⁵² For Discussion of Cmd. 9608, White Paper on National Service see Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 545, cols. 1028-1161, 2 November 1957.

By the end of 1955, while from the Prime Minister's point of view a correct balance had, more or less, been struck between political benefits and military costs, from a service perspective, the national service programme remained very much intact. At the end of 1955, movement towards the ending of conscription, the reduction of Britain's manpower, and therefore her ability to participate in global war and to maintain extensive cold and limited war capabilities, seemed most uncertain. Rather the services used their strong bargaining position to prevent what they considered to be premature termination of the draft system.

(B) 1956: National Service and the Policy Review

The terms of the debate changed little in 1956 when the problem of national service fell under the scrutiny of the Policy Review Committee. Once again, political and economic motives clashed with a strategic conception that had little to do with relating conventional force levels to thermonuclear warfare.

Not surprisingly, the 1956 Defence White Paper paid much attention to the issue of increasing the regular component of the armed forces, but no mention was made of the possibility of terminating the programme.¹⁵³ In Parliament, the government

¹⁵³ CAB 129/79, CP (56) 30, 8 February 1956. The White Paper stated that two things were needed to improve the regular structure of the armed forces: (1) an increase in the number of recruits and (2) as many recruits as possible signing on for long engagements. An initial engagement of

continued to deny that it was intent upon reducing armed forces manpower below the 700,000 level. For example, on 8 February,¹⁵⁴ 30 May,¹⁵⁵ 6 June¹⁵⁶ and 13 July,¹⁵⁷ the Minister of Defence, Walter Monckton, rejected Labour Party demands for a termination of the national service scheme. In May 1956, Monckton told the House of Commons that the government was not considering reducing the period of national service beyond the reductions announced in 1955. He was adamant that

...we are already engaged in a substantial reduction of our armed forces...I donot think it would be right to make any further gesture or move until we have ascertained the effect of the changes...in recruitment and prolongation of engagements.¹⁵⁸

However, within the context of the Policy Review, much attention was given to the possibility of reducing the period of national service and ultimately returning to an all-regular force. At a meeting between Monckton and the Chiefs at the beginning of June, the Minister of Defence emphasised the link between reducing manpower and securing economic savings. It was estimated that over the next 10-15 years the average cost

three to five years was too short and it was hoped that men would be encouraged to accept initial engagements of six, 9 or twelve years. It was stressed that regular recruitment which had very largely been of men on short term engagements had fallen from its post-war peak of 100,000 in 1952-53 to about 62,000 in 1955-56.

¹⁵⁴ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 548, cols. 1668-70, 8 February 1956.

¹⁵⁵ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 553, cols. 224-26, 30 May 1956.

¹⁵⁶ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 553, cols. 1064-65, 6 June 1956.

¹⁵⁷ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 556, cols. 1209-11, 18 July 1956.

¹⁵⁸ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 553, col. 224, 30 May 1956.

per annum for each soldier would be approximately 3000. With the annual defence budget set at £1400 million, a manpower limit of 460,000 could be set.¹⁵⁹ Eden hastily adopted this position though he pushed for an even smaller force of 445,000 (Navy-90,000; Army-200,000; and the RAF-155,000) by April 1960 or April 1961 at the very latest.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, following pressures from the services, Monckton informed Eden that it was his ministry's estimate that only 300,000 regular other ranks could be recruited following the termination of conscription. He repeated a warning he had received from Powell that Britain's defence commitments could not be met with a force of less than 500,000. It was stressed that '[i]f these broad conclusions are accepted it is inescapable that we shall be compelled to retain some form of national service for some years to come'.¹⁶¹ Monckton pointed out that the 1955 White Paper on national service had been correct in rejecting a reduction in the period of conscription and he reinforced the service view that after 1958 the national service programme could not be completely terminated and some form of ballot for selective service would have to be instituted. The Minister told the Policy Review Committee that a ministerial committee should be set up to discuss a 500,000 man force.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ DEFE 5/68, COS (56) 219, 7 June 1956.

¹⁶⁰ Eden, op.cit. , p. 374.

¹⁶¹ DEFE 7/808, Powell to Monckton, 23 June 1956.

¹⁶² FO 371/123187, CPR (56) 17, 11 July 1956; also see DEFE 7/808, GEN 544/2, 14 July 1956.

Despite this argument, Eden remained firm and continued to maintain that the national service programme should end as soon as possible - not because of the exigencies of thermonuclear weapons but because '...he did not believe that the nation [would] continue to accept, after 1958, national service as it now [was] unless the international situation deteriorate[d]'. It was the Prime Minister's view that Britain would have to try and meet her commitments with less than 500,000 men and a greater effort would have to be made to get the number of regulars above 300,000.¹⁶³

Monckton was to come some way towards this position following Germany's mid-1956 decision to reduce its national service to one year. The Minister readily agreed with Powell that it was difficult to see, in the light of the German step, how it would be politically possible domestically to continue with two years of national service.¹⁶⁴ The government would be under great pressure from the Labour party to follow the German lead. It is important to note that only once having clarified this aspect of the problem, was it agreed that '...so far as the Rhine army is concerned, if our troops only need to be policemen, they can be less well trained'. This latter argument was clearly a secondary concern - if not a

¹⁶³ DEFE 7/808, Eden to Monckton, 7 July 1956.

¹⁶⁴ DEFE 7/808, Powell to Monckton, 1 October 1956.

rationalisation in the context of the discussion, a point that was even further clarified by the statement that it

... would be clearly wrong to say that no National Service at all would be preferable to 12 months National Service. With no National Service at all we could not approach the numbers needed.¹⁶⁵

Similarly to 1955, the services and the Chiefs of Staff bitterly opposed attempts to deprive them of forces, and as 1957 approached their opposition strengthened. The extent to which they were prepared to consider further reductions was sometimes only a function of their perception of the government's willingness to either reduce commitments, or more importantly, increase pay and benefits to regular personnel. Here possible reductions in the national service scheme served as a bait for improved regular employment conditions. Yet, even following the 1956 White Paper on Pay and Pensions which promised an increase of £67 million¹⁶⁶ in emoluments, the Chiefs warned that

...we consider that if National Service is abolished, the three Services could not meet our present commitments. Her Majesty's Government will therefore be faced with a decision either to increase the manpower available to the Forces or to reduce our commitments or, more likely, a combination of both.¹⁶⁷

Throughout 1956, the services remained attached to the view that if after 1958 national service was terminated, manpower

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 549, col. 1021, 28 February 1956.

¹⁶⁷ DEFE 5/68, COS (56) 219, 7 June 1956.

would have to be increased either by: (1) some form of selective national service or (2) 'civilianisation' of the tail or (3) the use of mercenaries and colonial manpower. Doubt was cast upon the claim that 445,000 men could be recruited. Monckton was constantly informed that the UK must retain national service, that the government could not go on with the present policy of raising the age of intake, that the period of conscription must not be cut down, and that there would have to be some form of selective draft.¹⁶⁸

Under Secretary of State for Air Christopher Soames, now took a broad view of the make-up of the deterrent and stated that a decision to terminate national service would mean that Britain would not be able to fulfil her limited war commitments and would no longer be able to sit at the 'big table'. In turn, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Viscount Hailsham, claimed that if conscription was ended

It would be quite clear that we were unable to fulfil our commitments and the present unhappy decline in confidence between the N.A.T.O. nations would be given further impetus: indeed it was difficult to see how N.A.T.O. could survive.¹⁶⁹

Concomitantly, the Secretary of State for War, Anthony Head, warned that any decision to terminate national service would have to be accompanied by a public declaration that the international situation might make it necessary to defer the termination of the programme. Measures would therefore have to

¹⁶⁸ DEFE 7/808, Future of National Service, 4 October 1956.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

be taken to allow for the possibility of increasing the national service intake should that be necessary. Attention focused more on the possibility of limiting the national service intake through a selective scheme than on terminating it completely. Monckton was forced to agree that

In view of the need to consult N.A.T.O and the difficult implications of a decision to end national service, it [is] unlikely that anything definite could be said during the debates on the Defence Estimates next spring, although there would be pressure for a statement of government policy.¹⁷⁰

Service objections towards the termination of national service were also reinforced at this time by discrepancies that were becoming apparent between the Hull Commission's report on long term Army manpower requirements in the event that national service was discontinued and figures presented by the Central Statistics Office on the size of an all-regular force which might be recruited following the abolition of conscription. According to Sir Gerald Templer's official biographer, the commission came up with an Army figure of 200,000 (excluding Ghurkas and locally enlisted personal) and following pressure by Head, reduced this to 185,000. The gap between this figure and the Central Statistics Office maximum projection of Army recruitment of 165,000 could not be breached and deadlock remained until Head was replaced by Sandys in 1957.¹⁷¹ It was,

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ J.Cloake, Templer: Tiger of Malaya (London, 1985), pp. 358-9; also see DEFE 7/808, Wilson to Newling, 29 November 1956.

no doubt, these difficulties that led it to be stated in an internal memorandum within the Ministry of Defence that although national service would ultimately be terminated

It is clear that Ministers cannot be advised that it is safe now to take a decision not to renew the present call-up legislation after it expires on 31 December 1958.¹⁷²

While at the same time it was also admitted that the termination of conscription would not necessarily be disastrous, Anthony Head's 20 December directive made no mention of the possibility of discontinuing the national service programme. Once again, it is possible to note the service tendency to agree on broad statements, but their failure to translate these into actual procurement decisions. The closer the decision was to influencing their 'essence', the more they resisted.

Conclusion

An analysis of long-term programming during 1955-56 together with a review of the evolving national service debate lends support to the contention that the organisational structure and decision making process extant prior to January 1957 could not generate the types of changes that reflected the exigencies of war in the thermonuclear era - at least as viewed through the prism of British economic power in the mid-1950s.

¹⁷² DEFE 7/808, Newling to Powell, 30 November 1956.

It was suggested at the beginning of this thesis that conflict would increase the more discussions impinged upon procurement and deployment issues - this despite any agreements reached on the level of declaratory policy. The 1955 LTDP discussions, the 1956 Policy Review deliberations and the debate over the future of national service indicates that this proposition has merit. Agreement on broad strategic conceptions and war preparation priorities did not readily translate into agreement on the implications of these ideas for force posture.

Specifically with regard to the issues of war preparation priorities, economic savings and varying service conceptions, it would have been possible - to paraphrase Warner Schilling¹⁷³ - for a policy-maker to have gone to sleep in mid-1955, risen in mid-1956, and resumed the debate without much sense of loss or disorientation. The slow progress towards economic reductions that occurred during 1955 was mirrored in the 1956 discussions. The problems encountered in imposing strategic conceptions on disparate service inclinations during the 1955 LTDP was repeated during the 1956 Policy Review. The frustrations expressed by the Minister of Defence and his associates in 1955 were restated with added vigour during 1956. The arguments put forward by the Navy in 1955 for

¹⁷³ W.R. Schilling, 'US Strategic Nuclear Concepts in the 1970s' International Security, Vol.6, No.2, (1981), pp. 48-79.

broken-backed forces resurfaced in the 1956 discussions, as did the Army's demands for global war forces.

Consequently, in 1955-56, there is a definite sense of continuity, but it is not a continuity that seems to be consistently progressing towards the type of policies announced in the Sandys White Paper of 1957 - and certainly not at the speed that would have made their expression inevitable in the first few months of 1957. No where is this clearer than in connection with the question of national service. While the 1957 decision to terminate conscription was the culmination of a trend in thinking that had been present prior to 1957, this was not the only trend, nor necessarily the dominant one amongst the services. Service pressures to maintain at least some form of national service - the very basis of a posture of multiple capabilities - were undeniably strong. In the context of differences between declaratory and action/procurement policies, it was easier for the service departments to agree to the principle of termination than an actual date for such a policy to commence. The problem was exacerbated because arguments to end the draft were framed mainly in political and economic terms. Thus, when the services sought to justify the retention of the programme on the basis of a strategic conception that paid little regard to the implications of thermonuclear weapons for conventional forces, this tended to go unchallenged. Furthermore, the nature of the decision making process enabled the services to resist even the economic and political arguments put forward

against continuing conscription. Again, the continuity of 1955-56 is underlined and the break between the years 1955-56 on the one hand, and 1957 on the other, is revealed.

It also seems evident that the changes to the decision making process introduced in 1955¹⁷⁴ had little impact on attempts to impose coherent strategic plans on disparate service conceptions and aspirations. Not much seems to have altered with regard to conflict between the services and the Ministry of Defence and amongst the service departments themselves. The organisational context continued to allow service 'organisational essence' to take priority over national unified strategic planning and any impression that Britain was moving irrevocably in this direction on the level of procurement is clearly false.

Of course it can be argued that the period under discussion is so narrow that little change is to be expected. But this does not counter the rebuttal that the 1957 White Paper discussions took place immediately thereafter and then there were major changes. Indeed, had the policy-maker who had fallen asleep in mid-1955 woken in mid-1957 he would have noted substantial changes in both the substance of policy, the process of decision making and the climate of opinion.

¹⁷⁴ See Chapter One, Footnote 48.

Thus, the picture presented in Chapter Two by an analysis of nuclear weapons and British alliance commitments belies a more complex reality - a reality that helps qualify the thesis that the move to the Sandys White Paper of 1957 was an inevitable progression. One can, of course, postulate that the developments described here would have culminated in the 1957 policies, but the weight of evidence suggested by an analysis of long term programming in 1955 and 1956 and the issue of national service in terms of the substance of the discussions and momentum of progress tends to indicate that this was unlikely to be the case by 1957.

At the beginning of this thesis, the New Look was defined as having two distinct components: one to do with the balance of nuclear to conventional power and the other associated with the purposes of the deterrent power itself. Having noted the difficulties encountered during 1955-56 with regard to re-orientating force posture away from a stance of multiple capabilities, logically the next question becomes whether such difficulties were also accompanied by problems in the area of defining the objectives of Britain's deterrent. Specifically, did the 1957 stress on the independence of Britain's deterrent force have firm foundations in the evolution of policies during 1955 and 1956 or were the complexities and inconsistencies that manifested themselves in the conventional-nuclear balance discussions also present in this framework ?

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NUCLEAR DETERRENT 1955-56: MOVING TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE ?

Introduction

The focus in the secondary literature on the aspects of continuity during the mid-1950s in British strategic planning concerns itself not only with the question of the reductions in conventional forces and the balance between nuclear and conventional arms but also with the purposes of British nuclear deterrent power. Specifically, it is claimed in much of the writings on the 1957 White Paper that the emphasis of the document on the independence of Britain's deterrent was the culmination of processes and tendencies already prevalent in British strategic planning.¹

While Groom refers to the British tendency for conceiving of nuclear weapons separately from their delivery systems,² it was nevertheless clear to the Eden administration that deterrence was inextricably linked to the credibility of the delivery force. The problem was to determine the size and shape of that force during a period of economic stringency. Decisions had to be taken soon because in 1955, eight years after the RAF had issued the operational requirements for four-engined jet bombers, the first Valiants began entering

¹ See Chapter One.

² Groom, op.cit. , pp. 36-7.

service and the expectation was that the more capable Vulcans would be operational in 1957, and the Victor squadrons combat ready in 1958.³ Furthermore, this force would have to be integrated with the Blue Streak ballistic missile project, the roots of which could be traced to a 1954 agreement with the Americans and whose existence was confirmed in the 1956 White Paper. Thus, the period 1955-56 is a very good one to begin testing the validity of the hypothesis that there is a continuity in the purposes of British nuclear strategic planning during the mid-1950s and that this continuity is reflected in a consistent move towards an independent deterrent force posture.

The first problem to address is that of the difference between declaratory and procurement/action policy. For, while there was a growing declaratory emphasis on the importance of Britain's nuclear force in the context of her strategic planning, during the period of the Eden administration the planned deterrent force was drastically cut-back with strategic considerations apparently subordinated to economic ones. This in itself does not necessarily indicate that Britain was uninterested in acquiring a truly independent deterrent, provided that during the period in question procurement policy was determined primarily by: (1) an

³ For General discussions of the V-bomber force see S. Menaul, Countdown: Britain's Strategic Nuclear Force (Robert Hale, London, 1980); A. Brookes, V-Force: The History of Britain's Airborne Deterrent (London, 1982) and L. Freedman, 'British Nuclear Targeting', in D. Ball and J. Richelson, op.cit.

explicit doctrine of finite deterrence which would have encompassed a recognition of the deterrent value of even a small limited force; or (2) an attempt was made to match projected force levels to some level of sufficiency be that defined as a measure of countervalue damage, or to a capability for destroying a Soviet target set that was specifically threatening to Britain. The question then is whether the documents reveal that during 1955-56 procurement decisions were primarily being determined by any of these guidelines? Moreover, is it possible to be more specific as to what was meant by 'independence' ? Finally, how did these latter issues reflect themselves in the ongoing debates amongst the services and between the services and the Ministry of Defence ?

(1) The V-bomber Debate

(A) Competing Criteria for Determining Force Size

An analysis of the documents reveals that strategic and doctrinal guidelines for determining specific bomber force levels were not always explicit and were often ambiguous and contradictory. In a JPS paper presented to Selwyn Lloyd on 22 July 1955, it was stated that the allied bomber force

...must be sufficiently large to continue to convince the Russians that aggression would result in the devastation of their country. At the moment the whole deterrent is provided by United States Strategic Air Command. Our contribution should not absorb an undue share of the Defence Vote but it must be big enough for the United Kingdom to have a say in Allied strategic policy. The important thing

is that allied research should always keep our means of delivery ahead of the enemy and his means of defence and that our selection of the means of delivery should be governed by it being the most effective and economical available.⁴

What can be noted is the presence of three competing criteria for determining force levels: (1) political criteria: the relationship between force size and political influence (the need to influence the United States and also to become a 'respected member of the H-club');⁵ (2) military criteria: the relationship of force size to operational requirements and; (3) budgetary criteria: the need to secure financial savings. The potential for contradictory policies arose from the attempt to limit spending while at the same time maintaining an undefined level of military and political sufficiency.

At one stage the Chiefs attempted to resolve this dilemma by claiming that if reductions were to be made in the planned force level, then cuts should be made in quantity not quality.⁶ This solved little (numbers were not specified) and was questionable economically (it was debatable whether cuts in units deployed would secure greater savings than cuts in research and development) as well as militarily (if the growing Soviet defence systems were to be breached then numbers, too, were important). In addition, if Britain wished

⁴ DEFE 4/78, COS 60 (55) 2 discussion of JP (55) 67 (Final), 22 July 1955.

⁵ DEFE 4/78, COS 56 (55) 1 discussion of JP (55) 67 (Final), 12 July 1955.

⁶ DEFE 4/78, COS 60 (55) 2, 22 July 1955.

to maintain influence over the United States in the making of strategic policy and the taking of political decisions then, relative to SAC, Bomber Command force levels could not be allowed to drop assuming, - as British decision-makers seemed to assume - that the British nuclear force did, in fact, influence the Americans.

As Soviet air defence systems proliferated and as SAC's offensive power increased, Bomber Command would have to increase its own order of battle if it was to retain its quantitative position relative to SAC. This was going to be even more true if the goal was to move Britain's force from being simply a part of the allied deterrent to a more independent posture. Of course, had there been a consensus that a finite deterrent would suffice, then the dilemmas of economic stringency and political/military sufficiency could have been satisfactorily resolved. However, an analysis of the documents reveals that the custodians and strongest supporters of independent British nuclear deterrence, the RAF, accepted no such idea. When the CIGS, Sir Gerald Templer, maintained that the diminishing likelihood of a major nuclear war rested not on 'allied nuclear superiority' but on what he described as the growing Russian appreciation of the effects of nuclear war, the Secretary of State for Air, Lord D'Isle remained firm that '...the west should be superior in the means of delivery...' of nuclear weapons.⁷

⁷ DEFE 7/968, Misc/m (55) 69, 12 July 1955.

The increased destructive power of thermonuclear weapons could have legitimised a reduction in V-bomber procurement. According to a study by Malone, in 1954 the British government determined that the advent of the megaton warhead allowed for a cutback in V-bomber procurement to 180 units.⁸ However, the documents reveal that in November 1954, the Cabinet approved a Defence Committee report which included a recommendation for the purchase of 330 medium bombers with the object of building-up a front-line force of 240 bombers by 1958/59 at a total cost of £160 million.⁹ As late as the end of April 1955, the Minister of Defence informed the Defence Committee that Air Ministry plans called for the purchase of 327 aircraft in order to build-up a front-line strength of 240 by 1958/59. He stated that orders for 95 Valiants, 65 Vulcans and 49 Victors had already been placed. To complete the build-up, the output of Vulcans and Victors would have to be increased from a combined figure of four a month (which would have resulted in a force of 144 by 1958) to that of nine a month.¹⁰

If, as Malone claims, thermonuclear weapons led British policy-makers to believe that the United Kingdom's strategic and political goals could be achieved by a smaller bomber force, then surely by April 1955 this view should have been

⁸ Malone, op.cit. , p. 88.

⁹ CAB 128/27, CC 73 (54) 1, 5 November 1954.

¹⁰ CAB 131/16, DC (55) 7, 28 April 1955.

reflected in inter-departmental discussions ? After all, Eden claims in his autobiography that the decision to produce the H-bomb had been taken in 1954¹¹ and Pierre has shown that this decision was based on research going back to 1952.¹² Nevertheless, in the summer of 1955, Selwyn Lloyd remained attached to the figure of 240 bombers. He told the Defence Committee in April 1955 that in order to maintain the flow of production, further orders for V-bombers would have to be placed within the next two months. He stressed that if the full Air Ministry plan was to be put into operation, 123 aircraft remained to be ordered. While he admitted that the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Supply did not wish to commit themselves to ordering 240 units, this was only because of the prospect that more advanced versions of the aircraft might be developed. The Minister was convinced of the need to make a contribution to the deterrent as quickly as technical and production considerations permitted. Even more significantly, he stated

It is possible to argue that the enormous striking potential of these aircraft armed with nuclear weapons is such that the effect of reducing the front-line below 240, either on the deterrent or on the power to influence American policy, would not be vital. In neither sphere, however, can we afford to take any chances...[The medium bomber force] is by far the most important feature of our deterrent strength. It would be inconsistent and illogical as well as, in my view unwise, not to build it up as soon as possible to the maximum practicable size.¹³

¹¹ Eden, op.cit. , p. 368.

¹² Pierre, op.cit. , p. 90.

¹³ CAB 131/16, DC (55) 7, 28 April 1955.

Selwyn Lloyd was adamant that it would not be possible to reduce the proposed force below 240 units. He informed the Defence Committee that numbers and efficiency would both count in the American assessment of the British contribution. It would also have to be borne in mind that both the Americans and SACEUR were, as a result of negotiations on the provision of US aid to the RAF, aware of the Air Ministry's plan to provide for a front-line strength of 240 medium bombers.¹⁴ Any attempt to reduce this figure was bound to cause acute political embarrassment. Finally, since perceptions of force strength were regarded as such a crucial factor in determining potential political influence, it could not, according to Selwyn Lloyd, be forgotten that '...in the case of long range bombers...our position by comparison with Russia and the United States is much better than [in] fighter aircraft'.¹⁵

On the basis of purely military criteria, a reduction in the planned force size was shown to be even more difficult. While a substantial British nuclear threat to the Soviet homeland was still dependant on the future deployment of operational bomber squadrons, planning would have to proceed and take account of the growing number of Russian targets whose destruction was necessary for the survival of Britain (though not necessarily of such great concern to the United States).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ CAB 131/16, DC (55) 19, 8 July 1955.

In April 1955, Selwyn Lloyd told the Defence Committee that the first objective of the British medium bomber force was the destruction of Soviet air bases from which attacks on Britain could be launched. The second objective would be the retardation of any Russian land offensive in Europe. Finally, the target list would also include attacks on other nuclear forces within the Soviet Union, though this role was regarded as clearly subordinate to the destruction of Soviet air bases. Strikes against cities would be carried out in conjunction with SAC.¹⁶ It is important to recognise that this goal of attacking specific targets in the context of a joint allied mission represented only a limited degree of independence - what might be termed 'independence in concert'.

With this set of objectives in mind, the decision as to the final size of the force would have to take cognisance of the 1954 Swinton Committee's estimate that in four or five years time Britain could be faced by a possible 850 bombers operating from 40 permanent airfields with the option of using 150 others.¹⁷ Since detailed target plans are unavailable, it is difficult to assess how many of these 190 airfields were

¹⁶ CAB 131/16, DC (55) 7, 28 April 1955. From mid-1955, as a result of the 1955 bilateral Agreements between the US and UK which included an exchange of information on defence planning, Britain was becoming aware of US targeting plans. Brookes maintains that this led to combined targeting plans (Brookes op.cit., pp. 80-81) though Freedman says this was not immediate (Freedman op.cit., p.115). The available documents tend to support the latter view. No mention is made of combined targeting plans until 1957. (See Chapter Six).

¹⁷ CAB 129/71, C 54 (329), 3 November 1954.

targeted and what percentage were assigned to Britain's Canberra light bomber force stationed in Germany. Certainly the Canberras must have been included in any planned strike against these airfields as the RAF believed that only 50% of its front-line medium bombers would get through to their targets.¹⁸

The point here is that if the RAF was seriously considering a pre-emptive strike on the airfields, they could not have with equanimity allowed their forces to be substantially reduced. It is not surprising that the Secretary of State for Air constantly urged the Defence Committee to state categorically that it accepted the figure of 240 aircraft as the final size of the planned medium bomber force. This was according to his logic the minimal basis for a posture of 'independence in concert'. The Committee remained hesitant about committing itself so unequivocally. In May 1955, the Defence Committee agreed that for purposes of personnel and organisational planning, a final strength of 240 units could be assumed - though it reserved the right to alter this decision at a later date.¹⁹

Consequently, the reductions that took place in 1955-56 in the planned medium bomber force were not based primarily on the RAF's strategic reasoning. Rather, the reductions that occurred

¹⁸ DEFE 5/69, COS (56) 269, 11 July 1956.

¹⁹ CAB 131/16, DC 2 (55) 1, 2 May 1955.

resulted more from costing exercises to which military and political criteria were clearly subordinated. While this does not prove that Britain was uninterested in moving towards a posture of 'independence in concert' in 1955-56, it does show up the ambivalence with which Britain's actual policy was proceeding. For, it was one thing to allow economic considerations to play a part in determining force levels, but another thing to do so at the expense of those very military and political considerations which provided the independent deterrent with its rationale.

(B) 1955-56: From 240 to 180 Medium Bombers

That economic considerations were paramount in the decision to move from a planned force of 240 to one of 200 is indicated by the fact that proposals for such a reduction took place not in the immediate wake of American and Soviet demonstrations of thermonuclear power, nor even in the aftermath of Britain's decision to build the H-bomb, but rather in the context of the 1955 LTDP.

The Air Ministry entered into the LTDP negotiation intent upon maintaining its planned expansion of the medium bomber force to 240 aircraft.²⁰ The Ministry of Defence, however, insisted that the defence budget should not rise above £1600 million and it was stressed that the RAF projected allocation of

²⁰ DEFE 7/963, fol.41a, 14 July 1955.

almost £570 million for 1956/57 be reduced. This would have involved a reduction of Bomber Command front-line force levels by 25% to 180 aircraft. In a memorandum from Powell to Selwyn Lloyd, the figure of 180 medium bombers was mentioned as a final force level, but no explanation was given as to how this would relate to military and political objectives. On the contrary, what was stressed was the contribution that such a cut would make to the objective of realizing savings early on in the LTDP exercise.²¹ Again, in a memorandum from the Minister of Defence to the services on 2 August, Selwyn Lloyd reaffirmed that the major objective of the policy review would be economic savings and one of the means would be a reduction in the planned front-line medium bomber force to 180 aircraft.²² In a directive from the Minister to the services on 17 August, it was stated that economies made necessary a reduction in the medium bomber force to a level of 176. It was the Minister's view that a fundamental re-examination must take place not only of the front-line strength of the force but also the planned apportionment between the Valiants, Victors, Vulcans and a new supersonic bomber - with the object, no doubt, being the sacrifice of sophistication and capability for financial savings.²³

²¹ DEFE 7/963, Misc/m (55) 76, 2 August 1955.

²² DEFE 7/963, fol.56a, 2 August 1955.

²³ DEFE 7/964, fol.1, 17 August 1955.

At a meeting between Selwyn Lloyd and the service ministers four weeks previously, discussion had focused on the size of the medium bomber force. The CAS, Sir William Dickson, in the face of hostility from the War Office and ambivalence from the Ministry of Defence, defended the figure of 240 bombers by linking this number to the political requirement of influencing US strategic bombing policy and the military requirement of attacking those Soviet targets which during the initial stage of global war were beyond the power of SAC. He was adamant that Britain's proposed contribution of 240 bombers was 'the minimum necessary'.²⁴ In reply, the Secretary of State for War, Anthony Head, stated that he doubted whether any Russian decision to start a major war would be influenced one way or another by the size of the British deterrent and he questioned whether the deterrent should receive priority above conventional capabilities. Selwyn Lloyd remained silent on this issue but expressed his commitment to the centrality of nuclear deterrence within British strategic planning and the need to give it priority within the context of research and development expenditure.²⁵

This debate reflects most distinctly the type of discussions which took place throughout 1955 and 1956 on this issue. The fact that it was Head who based his attack on the 240 figure on strategic considerations and not Selwyn Lloyd tends to

²⁴ DEFE 7/963, Misc/m (55) 69, 12 July 1955.

²⁵ Ibid.

support the assertion that the Minister of Defence was not primarily motivated by these concerns. He could still have used these arguments to legitimise his actions, but evidence of this cannot be found in the papers available on the LTDP discussions. Head's motives were obvious as he was struggling to contain attempts to reduce Army capabilities. His arguments do not suggest that he was opposed to an emphasis on nuclear deterrence, but they do tend to reveal his lack of sympathy for the requirements of an independent deterrent as defined by the RAF. It is possible to accept the argument that a Soviet decision to go to war would not be influenced by the size of the British contribution to the allied deterrent, while at the same time recognising that absolute size was important in influencing American policy and for carrying out independent counterforce strikes against the targets that most threatened the UK. These issues provided the *raison d'être* of the British nuclear force during this period - issues which Head failed to address.

When Selwyn Lloyd sought an RAF ceiling of £545 million for 1956/57 and 1957/58,²⁶ the Air Ministry found itself forced to state that such a limit would involve reductions which would have 'catastrophic implications for the RAF'.²⁷ However, by the end of September 1955, the Air Ministry was convinced that in the face of Ministry of Defence pressures, it would have to

²⁶ DEFE 7/963, Misc/m (55) 76, 2 August 1955.

²⁷ DEFE 7/964, Misc/m (55) 91, 14 September 1955.

make concessions. It did this by presenting two alternative projections for 1958/59: one of £527 million and one of £600 million. The starting point for choosing between them was - according to the Air Ministry - the recognition that the growth of Soviet nuclear strike power and the increasing importance of decisive action in the opening hours of a future war made it imperative to strengthen the allied deterrent. The crucial issue was that Britain was the only power capable of adding to the strike potential of SAC which, given the increasing number of potential Soviet targets, would in point of time be inadequate by itself.²⁸ It was claimed that the V-bomber force was the 'cardinal element'²⁹ of the British deterrent and the Air Ministry would be prepared to accept 200 bombers - a force that could be purchased with the £600 million budget. A budget of £527 million, which would only allow for the procurement of 176 aircraft, was simply out of the question.

The fact that the Air Ministry was willing to compromise on 200 bombers, can of course, be used as evidence of the spurious manner in which the Air Ministry calculated minimal requirements (if 240 was the minimum, how could 200 be acceptable ?). On the other hand, it also attests to the severe economic constraints within which the Air Ministry was functioning and the Ministry's realisation that compromise was

²⁸ DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 47, 30 September 1955.

²⁹ Ibid.

necessary if a far worse situation was to be avoided.

Concomitantly, Selwyn Lloyd's agreement to the RAF's 200 figure must have reflected economic concerns and the political judgement that in the context of the joint allied deterrent a reduction of 40 bombers meant little. However, if this was the central assumption, how can it be reconciled with the supposed desire to move in the direction of a totally independent deterrent force ? The short answer is that it cannot. For, outside the Air Ministry, the defence establishment seems to have preferred to equate deterrence with the mere existence of nuclear weapons, thus ignoring the counterforce assumptions of the Air Ministry. Concomitantly, while in the available documents there does not appear to be an explicit formulation of the concept of finite deterrence, there nevertheless was a tendency outside the RAF not to take the issue of force requirements too seriously, especially since it had to be placed alongside the necessity of securing financial savings and the unavoidable fact of the existence of the large American deterrent.

The Ministry of Defence thus naturally gravitated towards a posture which can be termed 'deterrence in alliance'. Here, the counterforce requirements of a stance of 'independence in concert' were subordinated to a more economical policy whereby Britain's nuclear deterrent was firmly embedded in the context of US strategic nuclear power acting as a deterrent and an instrument of war fighting. What was important was not so much

the actual numbers of British aircraft but that enough existed for the Americans to take note. It was this economically attractive alternative that during the period under study stood as the counterpoise to the RAFs preferred vision of (albeit limited) independence.

By the end of 1955, the Air Ministry had managed to get the Defence Committee to state that it

...was highly desirable that the planned front-line strength of the medium bomber force should not be reduced below 200 aircraft in view of [this force's] exceptional importance in the eyes of other countries.³⁰

While the possibility of securing some savings was not ruled out, it seemed unlikely that further reductions in the force would take place. This certainly seemed the case in view of the nuclear focus of the 1956 White Paper. There it was stressed that it was essential for Britain to contribute to the allied deterrent '...commensurate with our standing as a World Power'.³¹ In late February 1956, the new Minister of Defence, Walter Monckton, reaffirmed this emphasis when he explained to the House of Commons that while the budget projections for the RAF were only £517 million (£23 million less than the previous year) it would be wrong to infer that there had been any lowering of priority of the RAF.³² Monckton was supported by the Secretary of State for Air, Nigel Birch,

³⁰ CAB 131/16, DC 13 (55) 1, 4 November 1955.

³¹ Statement on Defence, 1956, op.cit. , para. 8(1).

³² Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 549, col. 1022, 28 February 1956.

who told the House that '[t]he V-bombers are the spearhead both of the deterrent and of defence. Therefore they are more important than anything else'.³³ The size of the force was of significance as well and he stressed that

Our V-bombers are not only our contribution to the deterrent but also our best hope of defence if war should come, simply because our best hope of defence would be to knock out the bases from which we could be attacked. Therefore, it is a fact that the V-bombers must have the first claim upon our resources.³⁴

Experience in 1955, however, had led the Air Ministry to view with some suspicion these declaratory pronouncements. The lesson that had been learned was that while the government was prepared to make favourable statements with regard to the deterrent and the need to strengthen the medium bomber force, it was also interested in reducing planned force projections in a manner which, according to the Air Ministry, ran counter to British political and military interests. Consequently, it is possible to note that in the discussions that led up to the 1956 White Paper, the Air Ministry sought to strengthen the idea that the numbers in the force were of extreme importance and should not be reduced arbitrarily. Thus, the Air Ministry sought an alteration in an early draft of the White Paper which stated that

[Britain] must make a contribution to the allied deterrent which is consistent with our standing as a world power
to

³³ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 549, col. 1728, 5 March 1956.

³⁴ Ibid.

[Britain] must make a contribution to the allied deterrent sufficient in quality and size to maintain our standing as a world power.³⁵

Even more specifically, the Air Ministry informed the Ministry of Defence that

We feel that it is important that we should spell out 'quality and size' because these contribute so much to the say we have in Allied Councils.³⁶

The Air Ministry's concerns were not without foundation. By the summer of 1956, a new attack had begun on the planned size of the medium bomber force. A figure of 200 aircraft, which in 1955 Selwyn Lloyd had stated was the minimum that should be procured, was now regarded as excessive. Once again, economic realities and not the requirements of counterforce missions in conjunction with the United States, primarily determined policy.

In February 1956, Walter Monckton expressed his intention of proceeding with the costing exercises which had been suspended in December 1955.³⁷ One of the major objectives of this new exercise as an attempt to reduce the size of Britain's contribution to the deterrent. On 8 March 1956, Monckton stated that

The Air Ministry's arguments have, as we know, been designed to justify a figure which has already been decided upon for other reasons...A decision to reduce the V-bomber force to 150 would save a useful

³⁵ AIR 19/848, Penny to Dickson, 13 January 1956.

³⁶ AIR 19/848, Broadbent to Hanna, 13 January 1956.

³⁷ DEFE 5/64, COS (56) 44, 2 February 1956.

sum and would one suspects make little difference to its deterrent value.³⁸

Here Monckton appeared to be rejecting the Air Ministry's attempts to secure the expensive capabilities necessary for a posture of 'independence in concert'. Rather, he preferred to express confidence in a much smaller force one, given the thrust of the Minister's arguments, which was still viewed as primarily existing in the context of the allied deterrent, but which clearly would not match even the limited requirements of a posture of 'independence in concert'.

Significantly, the Chiefs, under pressure from the Ministry of Defence and the Defence Committee to find savings, and also under pressure from their own services to prevent reductions in conventional forces and capabilities, resigned themselves to finding cuts in the medium bomber force.³⁹ Consequently, a number of studies were undertaken by the Air Ministry which included reports on the military and financial effects of reducing the size of the planned medium bomber force. Specifically, there were considerations of alternative levels of front-line strengths - 180, 150, and 120 bombers respectively.⁴⁰ By mid-July, the reports were ready for consideration by the Chiefs.

³⁸ DEFE 7/966, fol.34, 8 March 1956.

³⁹ DEFE 5/65, COS (56) 219, 7 June 1956.

⁴⁰ DEFE 5/69, COS (56) 234, 14 June 1956.

The centrepiece of the Air Ministry's argument was a strong rejection of any attempt to reduce the medium bomber force. The Air Ministry cited military and political considerations - considerations which the government had only a few months previously regarded as demanding a minimum force of 200 bombers. It pointed to the fact that NATO had already been informed that the ultimate size of the medium bomber force would be 200 instead of 240 aircraft and it was hinted that an announcement of any further reductions would cause major political problems.

To propose any further reduction, either in quality or quantity at this critical time would show beyond doubt that our defence policy is based not on new military thinking but on economic expediency.⁴¹

Consequently, it was stressed that the deterrent should be built up without delay and it was also claimed that such a force would allow for economies in conventional weapons and manpower. It was also pointed out that the slow build-up of the V-bomber force was well known, had attracted criticism at home and abroad, and had seriously hindered joint planning with the United States which was not prepared to discuss the allocation of targets with the UK 'until we had a worthwhile operational force'. The report was adamant that

[The Americans would not] give us nuclear bombs although they have large stocks now and will almost certainly have more than their own forces could drop in the vital initial phase of global war. This lack of co-ordination seriously weakens the overall value of the deterrent and thus the defence of this country and reduces our influence in N.A.T.O. affairs...The Americans would undoubtedly regard 200

⁴¹ DEFE 5/69, COS (56) 269, 11 July 1956.

V-bombers as a worthwhile contribution to the deterrent but a smaller force would lose military significance disproportionately.⁴²

The Chiefs were informed that not only would it be dangerous militarily to phase back the production of V-bombers, but also that it would lessen Britain's chances of getting NATO to place more reliance on nuclear forces and thereby allow the United Kingdom to withdraw substantial numbers of troops from Germany. The military and political costs would be out of all proportion to the financial savings to be secured.⁴³

Most of these considerations were again reaffirmed in a letter from Dickson to Monckton in July 1956. For the reasons mentioned in the Air Ministry studies, Dickson was certain that a force of about 200 bombers was '...as near the mark as anyone can hope to get 'and that a force of below 200

...might well be the last straw in our current difficulties over US Aid...from a wider standpoint it would certainly increase American suspicions that the mainspring of our new strategy is not military thinking but economic expediency.⁴⁴

He stressed that the growth of the Soviet air force would diminish the effective striking power of SAC. This would have the result of increasing the value of the British contribution to the deterrent. In addition, Dickson pointed out that the more NATO continued to base its strategy on the 'tripwire

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ AIR 19/855, Dickson to Monckton - undated but during July.

concept', the more important the perception that the deterrent was effective. He concluded that these were military considerations of the greatest importance and that they pointed to an increase rather than a decrease in the size of the planned V-bomber force.⁴⁵

Throughout the summer of 1956 the Air Ministry defended a 200 bomber force in the face of a concerted effort by the Ministry of Defence to secure savings at the expense of the nuclear deterrent. Little effort was made, however, to challenge the assumptions upon which the Air Ministry based its arguments with discussions again tending to focus mainly on economic considerations. In July 1956 the Air Council complained that the Ministry of Supply did not appear to be fully aware of the military and political implications of slowing down the build-up of the bomber force and that delay in the production of the V-bombers would only postpone costs.⁴⁶ Air Ministry studies compared the financial gains of reducing the V-bomber force with the strategic implications which, the Air Ministry believed, would result from such measures. It was demonstrated that a reduction in the planned procurement would mainly effect the Victors and Vulcans, particularly the most developed versions of these types which would constitute the most valuable element of the force. In addition, any attempt to delay the build-up of the bombers by curtailing the planned

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ AIR 19/855, Conclusions of Air Council Meeting, 15 (56), 5 July 1956.

rate of production would increase unit costs and reduce the effective life of the deterrent. Specifically, a reduction to 120 bombers would involve cancelling orders already planned for about 25 Victors and Vulcans with the result being that savings would be reduced due to redundancy charges.⁴⁷

The most significant finding of the financial analyses was that if the planned procurement of V-bombers was reduced to 184 then the total savings over the period stretching from 1957/58 to 1962/63 would be £22.5 million. Finally, if 120 aircraft were purchased, the total would be over £127 million.⁴⁸ According to the Air Ministry, if the planned force was reduced to 184, savings would be marginal. In addition, when this savings was placed alongside another study which sought to demonstrate the difference in forces to be declared to NATO between 1955 and 1959 under the varying assumptions of 248 and 200 units, the problem was seen to be even more significant. For, if only 200 bombers were built instead of the original 248 promised to NATO, then in 1956 there would be 52 aircraft less than originally planned in the force; in 1957 there would be 80 bombers less; in 1958, 56 bombers less and in 1959, 40 planes less.⁴⁹ Clearly, with a 184 unit force, the situation would be far worse.

⁴⁷ AIR 19/855, Dickson to Monckton - undated.

⁴⁸ AIR 19/855, Penny to Dickson, 16 July 1956.

⁴⁹ AIR 19/855, Howell to Dickson, 9 July 1956.

The Ministry of Defence and the Chiefs of Staff Committee duly took note of these reports.⁵⁰ The Chiefs informed the Ministry of Defence that they had considered the findings of the Air Ministry but

...find ourselves unable to comment upon the size of the force proposed by the Air Ministry until we are in possession of more information on future defence policy and expenditure. It would be invidious to pass judgement upon a single element of one of our services in isolation⁵¹

They maintained that it would be preferable for a manpower ceiling, and if necessary, a financial ceiling for defence to be laid down prior to any statement on their part concerning the size of the medium bomber force. This assertion was most probably motivated not by a desire to achieve financial savings as much as because the Chiefs could not agree on any major reductions in the bomber force. They could not agree because: (1) the Air Ministry was strongly opposed to any cuts; (2) the study on the size of the deterrent was one of the first studies to be completed under the 1956 Policy Review and the Chiefs clearly did not wish to set a precedent for making cuts in other areas. They were prepared to state that a financial ceiling should proceed discussions on reductions because they wished to influence the final figure and, ultimately, the programmes and capabilities to be cut or retained.

⁵⁰ DEFE 6/37, JP (56) 131, 13 July 1956.

⁵¹ DEFE 5/70, COS (56) 276, 18 July 1956.

Walter Monckton was, however, not so hesitant. On 3 August, he wrote to Nigel Birch and told him that because of the Ministry of Defence's attempt to limit spending for 1958/59 to £1450 million and the RAF share for that year to £505 million '...sweeping changes in the plans for the forces would have to take place'.⁵² This would have to include a retardation of the build-up of the bomber force. Monckton certainly had not been impressed by the Air Ministry's reasoning. He chose, once again, not to address the strategic uses as outlined by the Air Ministry and preferred instead to concentrate on economic concerns. He did not seek to challenge the Air Ministry's arguments but focused instead on the broader issues of reducing the defence budget.

The alarm with which the Air Ministry greeted Monckton's directive was manifested in a memorandum by the VCAS in which the implications of the Minister's reasoning were analysed. It was demonstrated that a costing exercise based on 184 bombers together with a deceleration of the rate of build-up would have to be based on £530 million for 1958/59 and that it remained to be considered '...how we should illustrate the effects of a further reduction to the £505 million that the

⁵² AIR 19/855, Monckton to Birch, 3 August 1956.

Minister of Defence would allocate to us in 1958/9'.⁵³ Since it was claimed that reductions in Fighter Command, Transport Command and 2nd TAF could not be tolerated, the exercise would have to be based on a V-bomber force of 152 units and a Victor/Vulcan production rate of five a month. This, of course, did not imply that the Air Ministry would have accepted such a procurement target or that it preferred cuts in the numbers of the planned V-bombers to cuts in other areas; rather, the Air Ministry seems to have thought that by choosing V-bombers to illustrate the financial implications of the Minister's directive, the Ministry of Defence would be deterred by the apparent implications from proceeding with these ideas.

However, if the Air Ministry thought it could scare the Ministry of Defence by stressing the dangers that were being created for Britain's nuclear force, it had badly underestimated the Ministry's resolve. In the last quarter of 1956, there seemed little interest outside the Air Ministry in building up the medium bomber force to 200 aircraft. In a memorandum to Walter Monckton from the Minister of Supply, Reginald Maudling, the latter stated that

The main deterrent to global war is the American nuclear capacity and any addition we can make to this cannot be more than marginal. Clearly, if we

⁵³ AIR 19/855, Memo by VCAS, 8 August 1955. Within the Air Ministry it was also stated that it would be wrong to consider a 184 force after having stressed that a larger amount represented the only acceptable minimum. It was felt that to do so would give support to the view '...that it was only necessary to apply pressure to the Air Ministry to bring about reductions'. AIR 19/855, AC 20 (56), 13 September 1956.

are to continue to develop megaton weapons, we must have some means of their delivery, but at the present moment we appear to be pursuing a greater number of alternatives than can be justified by our financial and technical resources.⁵⁴

Maudling suggested that research and development should only continue on one improved version of the V-bomber (either the Vulcan or the Victor). Though he did not state anything specific about the ultimate size of the V-bomber force, Maudling gave the strong impression that he would be prepared to support Monckton's call for a reduction in the planned force size.

When the Air Ministry presented its £505 million costing exercise in September, it had managed, by including cuts in Fighter Command, to plan on the basis of a medium bomber force of 184 aircraft. Nevertheless, it was categorically stated that while the exercise followed the lines laid down by Monckton's directive '...it should not be supposed that they are acceptable militarily or easy to justify politically'.⁵⁵ The plan was to budget for £529 million in 1957/8 and £509 million in 1958/9. The Air Ministry stressed that there was a large uncertainty about these figures. It assumed a Victor/Vulcan production rate of five a month with research and development leading to a phase two version of both types. However, it was claimed that by 1959 only limited financial

⁵⁴ Air 19/855, Maudling to Monckton quoted in letter from Broadbent to Birch, 21 November 1956.

⁵⁵ AIR 19/855, The RAF Programme 1957/8 and 1958/9, Annex B to AC (56) 79 - undated.

savings could be secured by any further reductions in the medium bomber force '...which are remotely consistent with the deterrent policy which we have presented to the Americans and Canadians as the basis for a reappraisal of NATO strategy'.⁵⁶ The Air Ministry stated that the deterrent would have to be strengthened if cuts in conventional forces were going to be made. Moreover, if reductions in the number of planned bombers were carried out it was '...bound to reflect on the sincerity of our intentions'.⁵⁷

Of equal concern at this stage was the attempt by the Minister of Defence to cut down on the improved versions of the Victors and Vulcans. In a meeting of the Air Council on 13 September, it was agreed that the elimination of one type of Mark 2 V-bomber would make it impossible to build-up a 'worthwhile' force by the end of 1959.⁵⁸ On 26 September, Nigel Birch told Monckton that for purposes of deterrence it was essential to continue research and development into both the Mark 2 versions of the V-bombers. He stated that unless research continued in all these areas, the rate of build-up of the force would be 'intolerably slow' and there was no certainty that if one Mark 2 was chosen and another given up, that the right one would be developed.⁵⁹ These protests met with some

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ AIR 19/855, Conclusions of Air Council Meeting 20 (56), 13 September 1956.

⁵⁹ AIR 19/855, Birch to Monckton, 26 September 1956.

success and at a meeting between officials of the Air Ministry, Ministry of Supply and Ministry of Defence in September, Maudling agreed that since little savings could be secured in 1958/9 by cancelling one of the Mark 2s, the development of both should proceed.⁶⁰ The Air Ministry had won one small battle.

But in the context of the wider and certainly far more important debate over the ultimate size of the V-bomber force, the Air Ministry was not so fortunate. At the end of October 1956, and in the wake of the Suez crisis, the new Minister of Defence, Anthony Head, began to investigate the issue of the planned build-up of the medium bomber force. The Air Ministry became increasingly concerned with what it regarded as the new Minister's lack of understanding about the requirements of nuclear deterrence. Following a meeting between Head and Air Ministry officials, it was stated that Head

... by the way he put his questions, did not obtain a clear picture of the utilisation of the bomber force...[h]e appeared to rundown kiloton [weapons] and he argued that only a small number of Megaton bombs would be needed.⁶¹

It was pointed out to the Minister that for purposes of deterrence bombers were more important than bombs. Yet Head remained unimpressed and '...raised the question of the number of megaton bombs that could be dropped in war without risk of

⁶⁰ AIR 19/855, Misc/m (56) 129 - undated.

⁶¹ AIR 19/855, Melville to Dickson, 29 October 1956.

world destruction'.⁶² Clearly, the new Minister of Defence was not overly sympathetic to the Air Ministry's desire to build-up the medium bomber force to 200 aircraft. On 20 December, shortly before his replacement by Duncan Sandys, Head wrote to Nigel Birch and informed him that in view of the major change that would be brought about in the size and shape of Britain's armed forces, the planned medium bomber force would be built up to 184 aircraft only.⁶³ No mention was made of the strategic or political consequences of such a move or of the strategic and political motivations (if there were any) behind such a step.

In fact, on 18 December, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Harold Macmillan, demanded that the V-force be reduced to 100 bombers only (the number which was presently on order) - a demand that had been rejected not because of any strategic reasoning but because it would effect the morale of the armed forces. Moreover, such a reduction would make it more difficult for the RAF to accept that there would be no more expenditure on a number of projects including, significantly, a supersonic bomber⁶⁴ - an aircraft that would have been the long-term future mainstay of any nuclear capable bomber force.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ AIR 19/855, Head to Birch, 20 December 1956.

⁶⁴ CAB 130/122, GEN 564/1st meeting, 18 December 1956 and GEN 564/2nd meeting, 19 December 1956.

Throughout 1955-56, the Air Ministry - despite confusions and contradictions - often seemed to be the only party interested in defining procurement levels in terms of independent deterrent criteria. While its definition of its 'organisational essence' did not imply that 'independence in concert' was preferable to 'deterrence in alliance', the larger amount of bombers involved in the former strategy was certainly more attractive. The RAF's failure to achieve its procurement targets reflected the fact that these forces were as yet only planned and so far non-existent - a reality that enabled the economically motivated Ministry of Defence to triumph. Of course, it is possible to argue that, at root, the Ministry of Defence, was motivated by a vision of what might be termed 'unilateral independence' - through the attainment of a capability to independently destroy what it considered a sufficient amount of Soviet countervalue targets. However, the available documents indicate unequivocally that the debate focused primarily not on 'unilateral independence' but the two options 'independence in concert' and 'deterrence in alliance'. The available documents do not indicate that the option of actions outside the confines of the Anglo-US relationship was seriously considered. The point is that as economic forces triumphed, so faded hopes of attaining a limited independent counterforce capability. The objective of deterrence in alliance seemed firmly in place and the move to a truly independent deterrent illusory.

(2) The Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM): 1955-56

The government announced its decision to proceed with the development of a long range ballistic missile in the 1955 White Paper.⁶⁵ The White Paper stated that while the prime means of delivering nuclear weapons remained the medium bomber, it admitted that one day manned bombers could be replaced by ballistic missiles and that Britain was

'...therefore working on the development of such a rocket as an addition to our deterrent strength'.⁶⁶ The 1956 White Paper contained similar assurances and the Minister of Defence, Walter Monckton, emphasised the importance of such developments when he stated in the Commons that

It seems fundamental that eventually it will be very difficult for any manned aircraft to penetrate enemy defences, and the real weapon is likely to be a ballistic missile. If we are to develop a warhead of any kind, there is no sense in doing that unless we have the means to deliver it...⁶⁷

Yet, despite these statements, during the period under study not only did the issue of the IRBM remain essentially

⁶⁵ In the United Kingdom work had begun on missiles in 1947, but this had been mainly on the surface-to-air type. Difficulties had been anticipated in directing a long range missile to its target and refining the atomic bomb down to warhead size. In May 1954, the then Minister of Supply, Duncan Sandys, had reached an agreement with the Americans on joint missile development. When British development of Blue Streak began in 1956, it was recognised to be based on the Atlas missile. See Groom op.cit. , pp. 124-26. Blue Streak was designed to have a range of 2000 nautical miles and it was planned to have 15-20 available by 1965. Development and production costs were projected to be £70 million but the US was going to pay 15% of the project.

⁶⁶ Statement on Defence, 1955 op.cit. , para. 74.

⁶⁷ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 549, col. 1226, 29 February 1956.

peripheral to the debate on the size and role of the deterrent (not surprising since the IRBM was still in its early stages of development) but the Air Ministry tended to be most ambivalent about this future centrepiece of Britain's independent deterrent force. For, the RAFs 'organisational essence' was not necessarily coterminous with the procurement of this unmanned system and therefore, arguably with the future independence of Britain's deterrent. While the actual marginality of the issue during 1955-56 ensured that it did not unduly inform upon the more central debate on the medium bomber force, an analysis of its content serves to cast doubt on the contention of a consistent move towards an independent deterrent and underlines the discontinuities in both the Air Ministry and Ministry of Defence's stance across the 1955-57 period.

Indeed, at a meeting of the Air Council in mid-September, it was agreed that the development of Blue Streak would involve a 'tremendous scientific effort' which would be of no value in any other field; and while there was no call to reduce the Blue Streak programme, the view was expressed that the stand-off bomb was a better weapon.⁶⁸ On 26 September, Nigel Birch wrote to the Minister of Defence and informed him that the planned supersonic bomber was not an alternative to the IRBM. On the contrary, they were complementary weapons. He was adamant that

⁶⁸ AIR 19/855, 21 (56), 19 September 1956.

If [Blue Steel] fails and if O.R.330 [supersonic bomber] is not developed, we will find ourselves with no effective deterrent power until Blue Streak is successively developed and deployed operationally.⁶⁹

Again, at a later meeting at the end of September, it was concluded that if presented with a choice between the O.R.330 and the ballistic missile, the Air Ministry would prefer the bomber.⁷⁰ The Air Ministry seemed more interested in relying on the Americans for the provision of missiles, but while hope was expressed that in exchange for giving the United States the right to station missiles in the UK, they would provide Britain with an IRBM system, the Air Ministry did not choose to address the argument that only a totally produced British system could form the basis of a truly independent British deterrent.⁷¹

What is evident is that in the year immediately prior to the 1957 White Paper, the Air Ministry did not lobby hard for this aspect of the future independent British deterrent. Indeed, in 1956 the Ministry of Defence found itself considering the option of giving up the development of the missile altogether. This was certainly one possibility presented by the Defence Research Policy Committee (DRPC) when it was asked to draw up

⁶⁹ AIR 19/855, Draft Letter from Birch to Monckton, 26 September 1956.

⁷⁰ AIR 19/855, Misc/m (56) 129, - undated but during September.

⁷¹ Ibid. Talks with the Americans over the deployment of US IRBMs in Britain had been going on throughout the year. For a discussion of this point see Chapter Six.

a report on the future of Blue Streak. Here it is possible to note that it was the head of that body, Sir Frederick Brundrett, and not the Air Ministry, that proved to be the strongest supporter of the Blue Streak project. In July 1956, Brundrett reported that

It is clear...that unless we change our present policy of maintaining continuously in being an effective contribution of our own to the strategic deterrent, we must retain in the programme the Medium Range Ballistic Missile.⁷²

The report referred to the increasing vulnerability of the V-bomber force and claimed that '... only the IRBM holds out the hope of remaining invulnerable by 1970'.⁷³ It warned that if the UK dropped out of IRBM research it would mean the end of ballistic missile research in Britain. Brundrett also considered the possibility of acquiring a missile force from the United States but claimed that the range of the American Jupiter would be too small for British purposes. While the range of the Thor would just suffice, it would still not be enough to cover all the targets that the UK would be interested in covering. Furthermore, while a British warhead could be fitted to an American missile, the weight of the British warhead would reduce the range of the weapon. Finally, even if financial difficulties could be overcome, the Americans could not supply the UK with complete missiles until the McMahon Act was altered. In short, the report emphasised that as long as Britain remained committed to contributing to

⁷² DEFE 5/69, COS (56) 265, 10 July 1956.

⁷³ Ibid.

the deterrent, investment in the development of the IRBM must be continued. Two weeks later Brundrett reaffirmed these ideas when he told the Chiefs that a discontinuance of the IRBM programme and total reliance on the United States would be 'catastrophic'.⁷⁴

Yet, the former CAS, and now Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Sir William Dickson, viewed these claims with some circumspection and preferred rather to reflect Air Ministry concerns that the IRBM would come at the expense of the supersonic bomber. At a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 25 September, which focused on the research and development programme, Dickson cast doubt on the wisdom of investing heavily on the Blue Streak project since it was quite possible that Britain might get IRBMs from the United States without having to pay for them.⁷⁵ Moreover, the support of the Minister of Supply, Reginald Maudling, for this position was also secured. Maudling concurred with the Air Ministry's views when he stated that while he supported continued work on Blue Streak, he, too, preferred to underline the merits of the supersonic bomber. He underlined the limitations of IRBMs when he demonstrated that: (1) a IRBM could not be accurate enough with anything other than a megaton warhead and it therefore could not be used in a

⁷⁴ DEFE 4/88, COS 71 (56) 8 discussion of COS (56) 265, 24 July 1956.

⁷⁵ DEFE 4/90, COS 95 (56) 1 discussion of DRP/P (56) 42, 25 September 1956.

limited war; (2) reconnaissance of the results of a ballistic missile attack would have to be carried out by manned aircraft; (3) ballistic missiles could not be used to attack enemy fleets.⁷⁶ These views had also been expressed to Monckton when Maudling had written to him two weeks earlier that

We are some five years behind the American development of ballistic missiles and it seems probable that they will ask leave to station some of their ballistic missiles in this country. In these circumstances, for us to go ahead with such missiles appears to be an unjustifiable duplication of effort.⁷⁷

Yet, in December 1956, Anthony Head appeared to have paid more attention to the urging of Sir Frederick Brundrett than to that of Dickson or Maudling. Thus, Head's December directive stated that research and development on the supersonic bomber would be discontinued while that on Blue Streak would remain in place.⁷⁸ The Ministry of Defence was here certainly faced with a problem, because, on the one hand, it seems to have recognised that in the long term the deterrent would have to be based on the IRBM, while on the other hand, it had to deal with an Air Ministry and Ministry of Supply which had a number of reservations about a project which interfered with its acquisition of manned bombers. Arguably, in the 1955-56 period, the Air Ministry's attachment to the concept of independent British deterrence was, at least to an extent,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ AIR 19/855, Maudling to Monckton, 10 September 1956.

⁷⁸ AIR 19/855, Head to Birch, 20 December 1956.

limited by its definition of its 'organisational essence'. At the same time, however, it is not clear whether the Ministry of Defence's attachment to continued IRBM research was primarily motivated by a commitment to procure a capability for 'unilateral independence' or simply because of some broad notion that missiles would in the future form the basis of a delivery capability - whether or not that capability would form part of a truly independent force. Once more, there appears in the 1955-56 period to have been less of an irrevocable move to acquire an independent deterrent capability than a confusion of motivations.

(3) Defending the Deterrent ? 1955-56

While deterrence should not be defined solely by narrow technical criteria, it can be argued that strategic stability is very much a function of (1) attacker to target ratios and (2) the extent to which a country's second strike force exceeds the minimum considered necessary. These points were central to Albert Wohlstetter's argument that deterrence is not automatic, that it is essentially a very delicate process and that the delivery of a second strike could only be assumed through measures aimed at decreasing the vulnerability of delivery vehicles.⁷⁹ Although Wohlstetter's article, 'The Delicate Balance of Terror' was only published in 1959, as Gray has demonstrated, there had been an interest throughout

⁷⁹ A. Wohlstetter, 'The Delicate Balance of Terror' Foreign Affairs, Vol 37. No.2, (1959), pp. 211-34.

the middle half of 1950s in the requirements of a stable strategic balance.⁸⁰

In the United Kingdom this concern manifested itself on two levels. Firstly, there was a recognition that thermonuclear weapons made the air defence of Britain more difficult; secondly, there was a growing concern regarding the necessity of defending the V-bomber bases so as to ensure a credible second strike force. Strengthening the deterrent was then crucially bound-up with defending the deterrent. A central question is what was the effect of these concerns on the procurement of fighters and surface-to-air guided weapons (SAGW) during 1955-56 ? This is significant as it can be argued that if Britain was intent upon acquiring a 'unilateral independent deterrent capability' (which would have required British countervalue attacks in a second strike mode), then it is reasonable to assume that the means to protect the deterrent would have received growing attention and additional resources.

The 1955 White Paper mentioned the dilemmas facing the UK when it came to the question of air defence. It stressed the difficulties inherent in a defence against thermonuclear weapons (even if only a few enemy bombers got through, damage would be massive), but it also stated that attempts were being

⁸⁰ See C. Gray, Strategic Studies and Public Policy: The American Experience (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982), Chapter 5.

made to improve these defences through an increase in the proportion of the force's all-weather fighters and high priority research into guided-missile technology.⁸¹ Subsequently, on 4 August 1955, the Chiefs, discussed a report by the Air Defence Committee on the development of the UK air defence system from 1960 until 1970. Its starting point was the recognition of the impossibility of preventing serious damage to Britain, but also of the necessity of protecting Britain's ability to retaliate. The major threat was perceived to derive from low level attacks by manned bombers carrying megaton or kiloton weapons. Due to the difficulties that the Russians were expected to face in the development of a ballistic missile, such a weapon was not expected to be in service until 1965. The Air Defence Committee admitted that

We cannot at present envisage a defence against the ballistic rocket, although there are some indications that such a defence may eventually be possible. A direct defence of the base against the flying threat is, nevertheless, essential, in order to give our counter offensive every chance of success and to force the enemy to adopt increasingly expensive and technically advanced methods of nuclear delivery. We believe that it is within our power to build such a level of defence.⁸²

For this purpose, the Air Ministry regarded the projected allocation of 576 fighters as the minimum necessary.⁸³ This was to be complemented by the deployment of the Stage 1 SAGW which, it claimed would provide 'a worthwhile deterrent to the

⁸¹ Statement on Defence, op.cit. , paras. 44, 74.

⁸² DEFE 5/60, COS (55) 185, 4 August 1955.

⁸³ DEFE 7/964, Misc/P (55) 47, 30 September 1955. As a result of the 1954 defence review the projected build-up of fighters had been reduced from 792 to 576.

interim threat' and its later replacement by the more capable Stage 2.⁸⁴

The Ministry of Defence, however, was not overly receptive to these ambitions. At the beginning of August 1955, Selwyn Lloyd maintained that in the context of cost-cutting, he was prepared to take risks in the field of fighter defences. Indeed, he informed service ministers that these defences would have to be reduced by 15% ⁸⁵ Thus from August, the Air Ministry found its force limit reduced to 488 - ⁸⁶ (a drop of nearly 100 on the previous year's plans and over 300 from the 1953 plans) and continued attacks on its SAGW budget. Selwyn Lloyd preferred to maintain that Britain's '...real defence was the existence of the medium bomber force armed with nuclear weapons'.⁸⁷ He therefore did not address the issue of enhancing the deterrent raised by the Air Ministry. The Minister demonstrated that for him, deterrence was anything but delicate and the mere existence of a nuclear armed medium bomber force was enough to deter the Soviets. Air defences

⁸⁴ There were four stages of SAGW under development: Stages 1, 1 1/2, 1 3/4 and 2 - with each successive stage representing a more capable weapon system. In 1954 the Chiefs had agreed that Stage 1 would be produced for training purposes only. This decision had been influenced by the cost of the system relative to its efficacy against a nuclear attack supported by extensive electronic counter-measures. DEFE 5/60, COS (55) 192, 9 August 1955.

⁸⁵ DEFE 7/963, fol.56a, 2 August 1955.

⁸⁶ DEFE 7/963, Misc/m (55) 76, 2 August 1955; also see DEFE 7/965, Misc/P (55) 53, 13 October 1955.

⁸⁷ DEFE 7/965, Misc/m (55) 128 - undated.

could thus be reduced, notwithstanding Dickson's constant assertion that British air defences '...added to the deterrent...by protecting our own medium bomber force from surprise attack'.⁸⁸

1956 saw little change in the terms of the debate with major gaps between declaratory and action policy and between the Air Ministry's and the Ministry of Defence's position. On the one hand, not only did the 1956 White Paper promise improvements in air defences, but a document on long term programming drawn-up in February, was unequivocal that

An effective Fighter Command is an indispensable factor in our national policy of deterrence...It follows that the more effective the allied air defences are known to be, the greater the degree of uncertainty for the potential aggressor and the more effective is our deterrent policy. Thus, if our national deterrent policy is going to be effective, it must include in its composition an efficient air defence system because: (1) without it, allied nuclear strikes could not be launched in time (2) it puts the problem of success or failure squarely to the aggressor.⁸⁹

The government seemed to be taking these ideas to heart when the Policy Review Committee told the Air Defence Committee to focus its attention on the defence of the V-bomber bases. Nevertheless, from the Air Ministry's perspective, strategic considerations were still being subordinated to economic ones as the Air Defence Committee was instructed to limit its investigations to force levels of 400, 350 and 300 fighter

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ DEFE 5/65, Annex 2 to COS (56) 74, 14 February 1956.

respectively.⁹⁰ The Air Ministry's completed report on the defence of the V-bomber bases thus carried with it strong justifications for both the SAGW and fighter aircraft components of the air defence system. Its centrepiece was the contention that since early warning would only allow a third of the V-bombers to be scrambled, it was essential

...to provide a degree of defence that will allow the highest proportion of V-bombers to take off on time. Without any defence system the enemy could attack our airfields at will with much less sophisticated, and therefore cheaper, aircraft and weapons...[British air defences] not only uses up [enemy] resources which would be diverted to other purposes, but also adds appreciably to the deterrent by making the enemy uncertain whether he can stop our 'V' bombers taking off on their missions.⁹¹

The report indicated that from 1958 the UK would be threatened by short-range ballistic missiles and from 1960 by the medium-range types. While there existed no defence against these weapons, the report stressed that manned bombers would still represent the main threat, and against it a defence was possible.⁹² The proper long-term defence against manned bombers, consisted of SAGW in combination with long-range fighters. The minimum number of fighters necessary was put at three to four for every bomber that had to be attacked (though

⁹⁰ DEFE 7/965, Misc/m (55) 48 - undated.

⁹¹ DEFE 5/69, COS (56) 262, 10 July 1956.

⁹² Ibid. The report stated that until 1960 the main bomber threat to the UK would remain the subsonic bomber. It was estimated that the number of bombers that could be used against the UK were 250 light and 275 medium bombers. From 1960, the Soviets would have a new bomber with a speed better than Mach 1.5. By 1965 this would be the main threat to Britain. The manned bomber threat would be intensified with the introduction of propelled guided bombs.

this could be reduced to one fighter should that aircraft be armed with air-to-air missiles). Consequently, it was the Air Ministry's contention that 450 fighters would be needed to inflict a 'deterrent level of casualties'. Significantly, it was also added that as the number of fighters was reduced below 450, the defensive value of the air defence system would deteriorate more rapidly than the direct ratio of the numbers would indicate. This was because the system became less flexible and the danger of saturation at any point increased.⁹³

Unfortunately for the Air Ministry, Minister of Defence Monckton, similarly to his predecessor, Selwyn Lloyd, seemed unimpressed with this line of argument for protecting the basis of a successful second strike. Much to the chagrin of the RAF, fears of a 'defence gap' were relegated because air defence continued to be viewed as neither totally viable or cost-effective. Thus, in his 3 August directive, Monckton demanded an RAF budget for 1958\59 of £505 million and that there be 'a large reduction in the front line strength of Fighter Command'.⁹⁴ The Minister called for the cancellation the Thin Winged Javelin fighter, even though he admitted this would lead to a gap between the time when the existing Thick Wing Javelin became inadequate and when new aircraft capable of dealing with the estimated Soviet threat came in to service. Concomitantly, he instructed the DRPC to limit

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ AIR 19/855, Monckton to Birch, 3 August 1956.

research and development expenditure in 1958/59 to £175 million. This would have included cuts in the development of SAGW after Stage 1 1/2, the planned supersonic fighter (the O.R.329), and the Saunders Roe (P.177). Here, Minister of Supply Reginald Maudling, while still interested in the continued development of the O.R.329 and the P.177, strongly supported Monckton in his efforts to cut air defence expenditure.⁹⁵ He stressed that Britain was

... continuing to spend too much on marginal improvements to an air defence which in fact can never be more than fractionally effective... So long as we continue to devote so much of our effort to military purposes in general and within that main compass, ... to defensive weapons in particular we will in my submission be continuing to waste our precious material.⁹⁶

Not surprisingly, the Air Ministry viewed these pronouncements with growing concern. In an examination of the implications of the Minister's 3 August directive, it demonstrated that with a budget ceiling of £505 million, front-line fighters would have to be cut from 480 to 350. It was resolute that it would not be able with £505 million to produce even a 'defensive facade' capable of inspiring doubt in the minds of the Soviets about their capacity to neutralise a substantial proportion of the bombers before they could take off. Nor would it force them to go to the expense of developing sophisticated weapons before they contemplated an assault on British bases or upon

⁹⁵ CAB 131/17, DC (56) 14, 28 May 1956. Maudling, however preferred to continue development of the supersonic fighter.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

American bases located in Britain.⁹⁷ The Air Ministry emphasised that the elimination of the O.R.329 meant that the Javelin would never be replaced in the all weather force by a British fighter. Moreover, if manned fighter development ended with the Javelin, the P.1 or the P.177, the air defence of the UK and overseas theatres would have to depend mainly on SAGW. Concomitantly, SAGW should not be abandoned after Stage 1 - an option that was regarded as 'disastrous' because of that stage's limited range and low resistance to electronic counter-measures.⁹⁸

The Air Ministry's attachment to the O.R.329 and SAGW stages beyond Stage 1, continued throughout the latter part of 1956, but to little avail. It was agreed that Dickson would try to secure agreement to reinstate the O.R.329 into the budget.⁹⁹ In turn, Birch informed Monckton that manned aircraft were a vital ingredient of air defence and if money could not be found by an increase in the defence budget, it should come at the expense of other defence projects.¹⁰⁰ He stated that it was totally unacceptable to reduce air defence forces to 300 aircraft (which would be the result of a £505 million budget allocation for 1958/59). He stressed that the Air Defence Committee had demonstrated that in order to defend the V-

⁹⁷ AIR 19/855, Annex B to AC (56) 79 - undated.

⁹⁸ AIR 19/855, AC (56) 85, 17 September 1956.

⁹⁹ AIR 19/855, Dean to Birch, 25 September 1956.

¹⁰⁰ AIR 19/855, Birch to Monckton, 26 September 1956.

bomber bases, a minimum of 450 fighters were necessary. The fighter were reduced below this number the aircraft would have to be equipped with more sophisticated weapons, and the SAGW system would have to be developed still further. In these circumstances, a front-line force of 300 was not possible before 1963. Birch reinforced his arguments with the words:

It is hard to envisage any programme of discussion with our allies which could lead to early acceptance by them of reductions in our front line on the scale and with the rapidity which it has been necessary to assume.¹⁰¹

For the Air Ministry this line of argument was little influenced by the Suez crisis, and at the beginning of November, Assistant Under Secretary of State, R. Melville wrote that a reduction in fighter strength to 300 '...would throw out the defence so obviously and dangerously that the Russians would conclude that they could launch attacks on our deterrent bases with a good prospect of success'.¹⁰² However, Minister of Defence Anthony Head had to take a broader view of the post-Suez strategic and economic environment - one that emphasised economic considerations as well - and in his December directive he maintained that the existing manned fighter defences would have to be halved.¹⁰³ Head would also

¹⁰¹ AIR 19/855, The RAF Programme 1957/8 and 1958/9, 26 September 1956.

¹⁰² AIR 19/855, Melville to Chilvers, 2 November 1956.

¹⁰³ AIR 19/855, Head to Birch, 20 December 1956.

not support the O.R.329 and SAGW beyond Stage 1 3/4.¹⁰⁴ The Air Ministry's position looked bleak indeed as its arguments for defending the deterrent - and thus Britain's independent second strike capability - were brushed aside.

Conclusion

One of the main problems in assessing the issue of continuity in terms of nuclear deterrent policies across the 1955-57 period is the definition that British policy-makers attributed to the word 'independence'. Not only was Sandys and his predecessors in 1955-56 ambiguous in the meaning they gave this term, but analyses in the secondary literature, too, do not attempt to tackle this point in a consistent manner. A definition is necessary, however, for otherwise it is difficult to determine in what there was or was not continuity.

Three competing definitions were put forward in this chapter: (1) 'unilateral independence' whereby Britain would seek to deter the Soviet Union independently of the United States through the maintenance of a capability to deliver unacceptable damage to the USSR (logically in a second strike mode). This is generally considered to be the meaning attributed by British policy-makers (at least implicitly) to 'independent deterrence'; (2) 'independence in concert'

¹⁰⁴ For these points see AIR 19/855, AUS (A) to CAS, 29 October 1956.

whereby Britain would maintain the capability to pre-emptively destroy Soviet counterforce targets which were regarded as specifically threatening to the UK in the context of a joint allied attack. The Swinton Report of 1954 had identified just under 200 of these targets. It appears that during the 1955-56 period, this was the RAF's favoured position; (3) 'deterrence in alliance' which was the most ambiguous concept - one in which Britain would retain a nuclear capability mainly for political reasons (to influence the US and reinforce her world power status) and in which she would rely mainly on SAC both for first strike counterforce and second strike countervalue attacks. This tended to be the most economical posture as it was of all the three the most unrelated to a specific military task. This appears to have been the preferred option of those policy-makers outside the Air Ministry.

While options were neither articulated so explicitly in these terms, nor were totally exclusive (option three could include option one) they did, nevertheless, reflect different proclivities amongst decision-makers. Specifically, during 1955-56, the debate focused mainly on the options of 'independence in concert' and 'deterrence in alliance' and not on the competing attractions of true independence - that is 'unilateral independence'. The predominance of economic concerns, the perceived omniscience of American strategic power and the tendency to reach decisions in a framework that often resulted procrastination or, ultimately, imposition,

meant that option three - 'deterrence in alliance'- ended up being the one which was adopted.

This has direct implications for the content of continuity across the years 1955-57. For an analysis of the documents of the 1955-56 period reveals that Britain was not matching her declaratory move towards greater emphasis on the nuclear deterrent with a priority list that placed 'unilateral independence' above action in conjunction with the United States; nor was she even pursuing procurement policies which could have provided her with the forces the RAF considered necessary for a posture of 'independence in concert'.

Throughout the 1955-56 period, the size of the medium bomber force was treated by policy-makers outside the Air Ministry as a dependent variable with economy representing the determining factor. It seems to have been implicit in the arguments of those who favoured reductions that, in the context of the joint Anglo-American deterrent, these reductions counted for little. The fact that with every reduction the limited counterforce capability that the RAF favoured seemed more and more out of reach reveals that during 1955-56 'independence in concert' was not a posture which had much support outside that department.

The Air Ministry did not help the case for its, at least, limited definition of independence, when during 1955-56 it proved ambivalent about a British IRBM because of that

weapon's threat to the preferred manned bombers. Arguably, this was an example of a service's 'organisational essence' winning out over coherent strategic thinking, as there was little disagreement that missiles would form the basis of a future deterrent, independent or otherwise. On the other hand, the Air Ministry's attachment to extensive air defences was a reflection of this same 'organisational essence' impulse, but now acting as a driving force behind moves for enhancing Britain's ability to deliver an independent second strike. Yet, although this was an expensive option which could not be totally effective - factors not denied by the Air Ministry - if the government was so keen on moving towards a truly independent capability, then the defence of the bomber bases should have received far greater attention than it in fact attained. For even marginal improvements were of significance for so central a capability. To repeat an earlier assertion, the government's attitude only makes sense if the British deterrent was primarily viewed as existing and acting in the context of the Anglo-American relationship - declaratory pronouncements aside.

Thus, if there is to be a case for continuity across the 1955-57 period, it must be a continuity that was reflected not in a continuous move to 'unilateral independence' but towards some position that lay between 'independence in concert' and 'deterrence in alliance'.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SANDYS WHITE PAPER OF 1957

Introduction

Between January and April 1957, the new Minister of Defence, Duncan Sandys, brought about a revolution in British force posture. Despite the fact that there was nothing essentially new in his proposals, the inability of earlier occupants of Sandys's post to override service preferences, highlights the scale of his achievement. For, in the final analysis, not only did Sandys provide British defence policy with a sharper declaratory focus, but more significantly, he provided the services with little option other than for a substantial withdrawal from a posture of multiple capabilities. His achievement was a British New Look which reflected greatly reduced reliance on manpower and a strong emphasis on the nuclear deterrent.

This Chapter deals primarily with the White Paper discussions. It relates to both the style and substance of these negotiations and it attempts (together with the following two chapters) to demonstrate that there is a spectrum along which one can place the features of the paper in terms of their continuity and discontinuity within the framework of British strategic planning in the mid-1950s. The object is to highlight how and why an alteration in force posture was

brought about. Two questions form the basis of this section: (1) what was the significance of Duncan Sandys's specific policy making powers and his decision making style in determining the outcome of the 1957 White Paper negotiations ? How did this relate to the services' definition of their 'organisational essences' and how did it influence the processes of bureaucratic bargaining which had so plagued earlier policy formulation ?; (2) in terms of substantive issues, is it possible to identify any single area as the primary motivating factor behind Sandys's approach ? Was there an overall strategic conception behind the Minister's cost-cutting policies and how was a strategically consistent balance between a declaratory stress on nuclear deterrence and a reduction in conventional global war preparations arrived at ?

(1) DUNCAN SANDYS AT THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

In his autobiography, Macmillan (1971) states that at the time of the formation of his administration he had come to the conclusion that a complete review of British defence policy was essential. It would have as its object the achievement of major economic savings - a task made necessary in the wake of Britain's economic vulnerabilities demonstrated during the Suez crisis. In the pursuit of such an objective the Prime Minister was unequivocal that '...the first question was one

of machinery'.¹

In his earlier role as Minister of Defence and later Chancellor of the Exchequer, Macmillan had witnessed the difficulties that the Ministry of Defence had encountered in imposing direction and discipline on service preferences. As noted, the 1955 and 1956 policy reviews had been long running difficult affairs whose results were often ambiguous and whose implications were often less than decisive. A recognition of these problems had led the Minister of Defence, Anthony Head, to state just three weeks before his resignation in January 1957 that

...he was convinced that it was impracticable to achieve inter-Service agreement on a long-term programme. Attempts to do so in the past had merely resulted in short-term compromises which in the end had led to wasteful expenditure...In his view the outlines of a long-term defence programme and the allocation of resources between the Services should first be agreed by Minister of Defence with his senior colleagues...²

While the new Prime Minister did not have the time to completely overhaul the Ministry of Defence's position relative to the services, he was '...determined, by all the influence that I could bring to bear, to make the Minister of Defence's position as strong as it must be...'³ The services were thus informed that Macmillan '...proposed to bring some

¹ H. Macmillan, Riding the Storm (London, 1971), p. 244.

² CAB 130/122, GEN 564/1st Meeting, 18 December 1956.

³ Macmillan, op.cit , p. 245.

reality to the task given the Minister of Defence under Section 1 of the Minister of Defence Act, 1946'.⁴ On 18 January 1957, Macmillan issued a directive to the Chiefs and service heads outlining the responsibilities of the new Minister of Defence. It is clear from a reading of the document that the weight of influence in decision making was being pushed decisively in the direction of the Ministry of Defence. It was stressed that the first goal of the Minister would be to draw up a new defence policy aimed at securing substantial reductions in both expenditure and manpower. He would then have to prepare a plan which would reshape the armed forces in line with the new policy. The directive was furthermore explicit that the Minister of Defence would have authority to make decisions on all matters of policy influencing the shape, organisation, size and deployment of the armed forces. This would also apply to the issues of their supply, equipment and pay as well as to research and development. Equally as significant was the point that if a service minister wished to make a proposal to the Prime Minister, the Defence Committee or the Cabinet on any of the matters mentioned above, he would have to make it through the Minister of Defence himself.⁵

In his unpublished autobiography, Sandys maintained that he was behind the drawing up of this directive. Indeed, Sandys

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ CAB 131/18, D (57) 2, 18 January 1957.

writes that '[b]efore accepting this very responsible post, I obtained [Macmillan's] assurance that he recognised that defense was an indivisible problem and that, the Minister, must have effective overall control of the services'.⁶ Sandys stressed that he outlined the major points to Macmillan who then drafted them. According to one of Sandys's closest confidants during this period, Colonel K. G. Post, Sandys made plain that he would not accept the job without additional powers.⁷ This does not seem out of step with the then Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Sir William Dickson's assessment that '...it was the nature of Duncan Sandys to endeavour to gain the fullest power over the service ministers and ministries'.⁸

In the House of Commons on 24 January, Macmillan, in the face of criticism that his changes did not go far enough, expressed confidence that he would succeed in achieving major economies. He emphasised that he did not wish at this stage to enact legislation similar to Cmd. 6923 of 1946, but that this might result in due course. MPs were told by Macmillan that '...it seemed...that the first thing to do in the order of priority was to issue this directive and get the working arrangement

⁶ The Unpublished Memoirs of Duncan Sandys, 17/A/1, Private copy of Lady Duncan Sandys.

⁷ Interview with Colonel K.G.Post, 1 March 1988.

⁸ Unpublished Memoirs of Sir William Dickson, NA/99, Mountbatten Papers, University of Southampton.

between colleagues to do first things first'.⁹ The essence of this arrangement was, according to Macmillan, reached with service agreement and had met with little opposition from the latter departments despite '...some grumbling in high places'.¹⁰

Macmillan indeed sought to smooth the way for his directive and for Sandys's subsequent efforts by gaining the acceptance of the new service heads (First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Selkirk, Secretary of State for War, John Hare, and Secretary of State for Air, George Ward) for the principles of the new organisational dispensation. However, it can also be argued that the lack of opposition to the Prime Minister's directive stemmed less from agreement with its intentions than with the fact that Macmillan drew it up very quickly, tied acceptance of the directive to the new promotions and took advantage of the new service heads' lack of experience. This all helped lead to some misperceptions as to the implications of the new directive for policy making. Thus, in a discussion chaired by Ward within the Air Ministry on 21 January, it was stated that the new arrangements were not very different from existing practices and, in any event, that while the Minister of Defence '... was said to have "powers of decision" it was not clear when and how he would use them'.¹¹

⁹ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 563, col. 398, 24 January 1957.

¹⁰ Macmillan (1971), op.cit. , p. 244.

¹¹ AIR 2/14712, Dean to Boyle, 21 January 1957.

There should however, have been little uncertainty amongst the services with regard to Duncan Sandys's leadership style and the manner in which he would interpret his new role. Since the end of the war he had been head of both the Ministry of Supply (1951-54) and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (1954-57) and had acquired a reputation for being 'exacting'.¹² According to Sir Nigel Fisher, who served as his Under Secretary of State for Colonies during the first half of the 1960s

He was essentially a 'doer' rather than a thinker, more concerned to resolve practical problems than to evolve themes or philosophies. He ruled his department with a rod of iron and those who imagine that Britain is run by its civil servants can never have worked for Duncan Sandys. When he was Secretary of State policy always came from the top, never from officials.¹³

Sir Richard Powell, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence during this period, gives support to this view. He states that during the first four months of 1957 'I was very critical of him, but he was the sort of man who went ahead anyway'. Most significantly, he also maintains that although the ideas inherent in the 1957 White Paper would ultimately have taken form at some stage 'If it had not been Sandys - if it had been Anthony Head - I doubt whether Head could have

¹² 'Lord Duncan Sandys', J. Enoch Powell, Independent, 27 February 1987.

¹³ 'Minister Who Ruled With a Rod of Iron', Sir Nigel Fisher, The Observer, 29 November 1957.

carried it out'.¹⁴

The services were therefore not unaware of the dangers Sandys posed to their position. Dickson claimed that Sandys's arrival at the Ministry of Defence aroused the strongest feelings of suspicion and resentment.¹⁵ Mountbatten, for one, had been told by the former First Sea Lord, Sir Rhoderick Mcgrigor, on 14 January that

I am somewhat horrified at the news of Duncan Sandys becoming Minister of Defence...We suffered a lot from Sandys in my time - during the radical review he was one of the worst enemies of the navy.¹⁶

Mcgrigor also expressed pessimism about the ability of anyone to change the Minister's mind. He was supported in this assessment by the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff (VCNS), Sir William Davis, who maintained that Sandys appointment as Minister of Defence was viewed with great misgivings.¹⁷ In his unpublished autobiography Davis stresses that '...I found on many issues [Sandys] was quite impervious to reason or argument'.¹⁸

¹⁴ Interview with Sir Richard Powell, 18 June 1987; also Correspondence with Sir Richard Powell, 2 June 1987.

¹⁵ Dickson Memoirs, op.cit.

¹⁶ Mountbatten Papers, I 286, Mcgrigor to Mountbatten, 14 January 1957.

¹⁷ Unpublished Memoirs of Sir William Davis, Private copy of Dr.S. Forgan, p. 787.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 792.

Indeed, during his years at the Ministry of Defence, Sandys retained a domineering attitude towards his military advisors. This began almost immediately upon his taking up the position of Minister of Defence. He recounts in his autobiography:

Within a few hours of my arrival [Dickson] came to see me. After a friendly chat, he said quite casually: "You may care to look at this paper, which the Chiefs have decided to submit to the Cabinet Defence Committee". I thought I had misheard him, and replied that I assumed he meant that the Chiefs of Staff were submitting the paper to me for my consideration...[b]ut Dickson confirmed that he meant exactly what he said, and that in fact the paper had already been sent across to No.10 Downing Street. I pointed out as tactfully as I could, that the Cabinet Defence Committee, as the name implied was comprised exclusively of minister's and that the Chiefs of Staff were invited to attend in a purely advisory capacity...¹⁹

Here, both Sandys's style and the manner by which he intended to use his new powers was made apparent. Thus, throughout 1957, Sandys was consistent in seeking to subordinate the Chiefs and services to his demands. When, for example, the time came for explaining Britain's new defence policy to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, Sandys first refused to let the Chiefs take part, and when overruled by Macmillan, sought to minimise their contribution.²⁰ His manner of wording his directives was also blunt and his tolerance for independent statements and actions without his authority extremely limited.²¹ His attitude to the military was clearly reflected

¹⁹ Unpublished Memoirs of Duncan Sandys, op.cit. , pp. 17/A/1-17/A/2.

²⁰ Ziegler, op.cit. , p. 549.

²¹ See for example AIR 2/14712, Sandys to Aubrey Jones, 8 March 1957 and WO 7/680, Sandys to Hare, 14 March 1957.

in an exchange of correspondence on defence matters with Chancellor Audenauer of West Germany in December 1957 when Sandys stated

...it was not enough to leave these matters to the military. Highly important political questions were involved. The military authorities were bound to produce answers which would involve too much effort being made on military defence; They could do no less.²²

Sandys' proclivity for quick results with the minimum of fuss and opposition tended to indicate that he was less concerned with the strategic coherence of his plans than that they should be quickly implemented. Sir William Davis was adamant about this point. In his memoirs he stressed that Sandys had little appreciation of strategic problems and was out to secure rapid economic savings. He states that the new Minister of Defence had '...little underlying realisation of the strategical needs of the Country...' ²³ and that he did not '... have any strategical concept beyond the factor that in his opinion the atomic weapon was all important!' ²⁴

Another cause of stress was that Sandys preferred to rely for advice on his closest advisors rather than on the Chiefs of Staff and the service heads. Paramount amongst these was the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, Sir Richard Powell, who it appears was important in both influencing

²² PREM 11/1839, NA (17) (DEL) 5, 15 December 1957.

²³ Unpublished Memoirs of Sir William Davis, op.cit. , p. 787.

²⁴ Ibid. , p. 789.

Sandys's ideas and negotiating them with the Chiefs and service departments. Also perceived to be influential was the Minister's personal friend and confidant, Colonel K. G. Post who accompanied Sandys from the Housing Ministry to the Ministry of Defence. Post held an unofficial position as an assistant to the Minister and, consequently, his actual role is difficult to gauge.²⁵ Likewise, while both Powell and Post maintain that the Scientific Advisor, Sir Frederick Brundrett, too, played a significant part, this is difficult to glean from the available papers. It must, nevertheless, be said that the Labour Party's shadow Defence Minister, George Brown, was convinced that Brundrett and not Sandys was the prime author of the paper. He thus informed the American Embassy in April that aside from the head of the DRPC, only Mountbatten was consulted in preparation of the document. US Ambassador Whitney then wrote to Dulles that the reason for this was that

...Sandys being extremely sensitive to criticism of previous Defence Minister's for leaning too heavily on professional military advice, went to [the] other extreme, relying largely on [the] advice of [a] scientist.²⁶

In fact, the papers reveal that Sandys did most of the work himself, relying mainly on the expertise of Sir Richard Powell. Powell's claim that he was the greatest influence on

²⁵ Post maintains that 'I used to sit up all night with Sandys as he wrote the Paper'. He, however, plays down his own role in drafting the actual clauses of the White Paper. Interview-1 March 1988.

²⁶ NA, RG 59, 741.5/4-1757, Whitney to Dulles, No.5702, 17 April 1957.

the Minister²⁷ is borne out by the documents. Indeed, Ambassador Whitney later went on to minimise Brundrett's role when he told Dulles that George Brown's claim was erroneous and that, other than Sandys, the major contributor was Powell.²⁸

Yet, it was not so much Sandys's preference for relying on those closest around him for advice that caused the tensions, as much as his unwillingness to give the Chiefs and service heads what they considered a fair hearing. The Chiefs and service heads were also convinced that the Minister of Defence was using his new powers to block their access to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. In a letter from the Private Secretary at the Air Ministry, Ewen Broadbent, to George Ward in March 1957, a demand was made that the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook give his views on what action the services should take to get their opinions across to the Cabinet.²⁹ The result was a meeting between Macmillan and the Chiefs,³⁰ but the Prime Minister appears not to have deserted Sandys and the tensions remained unresolved.

²⁷ Interview, op.cit.

²⁸ NA, RG 59, 741.5/4-2557, Whitney to Dulles, No.5809, 25 April 1957.

²⁹ AIR 2/14712, Broadbent to Ward, 13 March 1957; also see AIR 2/14712, Ward too Sandys, 12 March 1957.

³⁰ Dickson Memoirs, op.cit.

Also of no little consequence was the issue of personality clashes which dominated this period and reinforced the dispute over substance. Macmillan had, to the best of his ability, reduced pressures from the service ministries by gaining service agreement to Sandys's powers and also by choosing the new candidates carefully.³¹ The documents certainly support the view that the service heads were relatively placid compared to the Chiefs whom Macmillan was not able to change at the beginning of his tenure. However, on the Chiefs of Staff Committee, there appears to have been a mix of characters which were either too weak to deal with Sandys or too strong to allow for a spirit of co-operation to dominate.

In the first place, Sir William Dickson, Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, was not a man who thrived on controversy. According to an official air historian, T.C.G.James, Dickson was a 'clever gentle personality'³² who, to his great unhappiness, got caught between a ruthless Minister of Defence and strong and forceful Chiefs of Staff. In a letter to Mountbatten in 1975, Dickson lamented that '[t]he years 1957-8 were not very happy ones and I wonder that you did [not] get a Whitehall ulcer like me'.³³ What Dickson did manage to do was to calm down the growing tensions between

³¹ See Ziegler, op.cit., p. 550; also see Mountbatten Papers, I 327, Hailsham to Mountbatten, 13 January 1957.

³² Interview with T.C.G.James, 15 December 1987.

³³ Mountbatten Paper, NA/99, Dickson to Mountbatten, 17 June 1975.

the two sides and desperately try to forge compromises where ever he could.

The main opponent to Sandys on the Chiefs of Staff Committee was the CIGS, Sir Gerald Templer. The War Office, of course, bore the brunt of Sandys's 1957 cost-cutting exercises, but this in itself does not explain what Mountbatten described as a pathological hatred that Templer had for Sandys.³⁴ Dickson maintained that 'Gerald Templer, a man also of strong personality...regarded Sandys and all his works as menace to our security'.³⁵ While Mountbatten maintained that he had to convince Sandys that Templer was the main obstacle to the new plans,³⁶ Post stresses that Sandys was well aware that his main enemy on the Chiefs of Staff Committee was Gerald Templer.³⁷ Sandys, himself, recounts in his autobiography that 22 years later Templer would still not speak to him.³⁸

The other two Chiefs, Sir Dermot Boyle and Lord Mountbatten, fell somewhere in the middle ground between Sandys and Templer. This is not surprising when it comes to the CAS as it

³⁴ Mountbatten Papers, NA/99, Mountbatten to Dickson, 1 March 1957.

³⁵ Dickson Memoirs, op.cit.

³⁶ Mountbatten to Dickson, NA/99, Mountbatten Papers, 1 March 1976.

³⁷ Interview with Post, 1 March 1988.

³⁸ Unpublished Memoirs of Duncan Sandys, op.cit. , 17/A/5.

was his service that ostensibly benefited most from the increased emphasis on nuclear deterrence. Powell maintains that Boyle, too, was a strong personality but '...he did not carry his feelings like Templer'.³⁹ While, differences between Boyle and Sandys did exist, there was little of the personal antagonism that so characterised the Sandys - Templer relationship.

The issue of Mountbatten is more complex. Powell '... can't recall him standing up against Sandys'.⁴⁰ Post maintains that the reason for this was that Sandys had told Mountbatten that he would become Chief of the Defence Staff following Dickson's retirement.⁴¹ In the mid 1970s Dickson admitted that Mountbatten was well aware that he was the favoured candidate to become Chief of the Defence Staff, but did not think that this influenced Mountbatten's attitude. The papers do tend to support the claim that Mountbatten sided with Dickson and Sandys over the question of organisation for defence decision making, though with regard to the Navy vote there were differences. Whatever the case, the First Sea Lord was viewed with great suspicion by the other Chiefs and service heads.

Clearly, both the substance of Sandys's proposals and the manner in which he sought to accomplish them caused anger and

³⁹ Interview with Powell, 18 June 1957.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Interview with Post, 1 March 1988.

resentment throughout the defence establishment. Powell maintains that all the Permanent Under Secretaries, as well as himself, were bitterly unhappy during the first four months of 1957. He claims that 'everyone came to pour out there hearts to me',⁴² but this did little to curtail Sandys's efforts to cutback both expenditure and capabilities. A strong Minister of Defence, coupled with increased centralised powers meant that the service proclivity towards procrastination and their attachment to a wide range of roles and capabilities was seriously under threat.

(2) The Sandys February Directive

Throughout the period under study, it appears that Sandys's primary concern was not strategy as much as economy. The Suez crisis had interrupted the improvement that was taking place in Britain's financial position. During the first half of 1956 sterling had been strong and reserves had steadily increased. The nationalisation of the Suez Canal at the end of July had led to considerable pressure on the reserves, and following the Anglo-French intervention the situation became acute. During the crisis Macmillan reportedly presented the Cabinet with the alternatives of devaluation or cease-fire and in November the reserves fell by £100 million to stand at the end

⁴² Interview with Powell, 18 July 1987.

of the month at their lowest level since 1952.⁴³ On 4 November, in order to restore home demand the duty on petrol and diesel oil had been increased, a large drawing made on the UK quota with the International Monetary Fund, and further 'second line' reserves mobilised. While the drain on the reserves was halted, the economic survey for 1957 warned that the year would be dominated by balance of payments problems, that the current surplus was quite inadequate to enable the country to meet all its overseas commitments, that even if the terms of trade should improve exports would still have to be increased, and that a considerable proportion of Britain's domestic product would have to be exported if the balance of payments situation was not to be worsened. A major potential for exports was the metal producing industries which - as throughout the 1950s - was deprived of manpower and was having to devote a large part of its product of domestic military uses.⁴⁴ It was clear that this sector would have to be supplied with labour if Britain's balance of payments situation was to improve and her economy made more sound.

Consequently, at a meeting of the Cabinet on 21 January, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Peter Thorneycroft, forecast a budget deficit of over £500 million. He warned that Britain had mobilised nearly all the support for sterling which she

⁴³ For a discussion of the economic problems in the wake of the Suez crisis see A. Horne, Macmillan, 1891-1956 (London, 1988), pp. 442-43.

⁴⁴ For the economic survey produced at the beginning of 1957 see CAB 129/86, C (57) 65, 12 March 1957.

could command and had very little left to meet future crises. Savings would immediately have to be sought in the fields of defence, civil and public spending. The defence budget for 1957-58 was now projected at £1550 million and it would have to be cut by a substantial amount at once. Sandys readily agreed with the view that the nation could not afford such a level of defence production and that it was crucial to reduce the burden it imposed on materials and skilled manpower. It was at this meeting that the new Minister of Defence promised substantial cuts in defence expenditure.⁴⁵

Although discussions on organisational and naval matters had taken place between Sandys, the Chiefs and the service heads in early February, it was not until the latter part of that month that the services and the Chiefs began to receive detailed accounts of where the Minister was headed. On 20 February, Powell told the Permanent Under Secretaries of the defence departments that Sandys would attempt to terminate national service and set the total manpower ceiling at 380,000.⁴⁶ Again, following a special Cabinet meeting at Chequers on 23-24 February at which Sandys sought Cabinet approval for his defence plans, the services were issued with a directive in which it was apparent that the first goal would be the termination of national service - an objective to which

⁴⁵ CAB 128/31, CC 2 (57) 3, 21 January 1957; also see CAB 128/31, CC 5 (57) 2, 31 January 1957 and CAB 128/31, CC 8 (57) 2, 2 February 1957.

⁴⁶ AIR 19/856, Extract from Minutes of Meeting of Permanent Secretaries, 20 February 1957.

all else would be subordinate. This would have direct economic implications in itself, as well as serving to undercut the basis on which conventional capabilities were constructed. Sandys was, as usual, direct:

In reviewing our defence plans, my starting point has been the Government's declared intention to end National Service as soon as practicable. For the purposes of this review, I have assumed that there would be no call-up later than 1960 and that consequently the last national serviceman would leave the forces in 1962.⁴⁷

The target was to reduce spending from the total of £1600 million in the defence estimates of 1956/57 to an annual figure of around £1300 million. Although Sandys admitted that the costs of his reduced programme had not yet been established, he warned that if drastic economies were not instituted, defence spending would shortly rise to £2000 million. 380,000 troops would have to suffice, this despite the fact that - as the Minister admitted - '...[it] would appreciably affect our ability to exert military power in distant parts of the world and would inevitably reduce our influence in NATO, SEATO and the Bagdad Alliance'.⁴⁸

If the services were concerned about this statement, they could only have been more worried when Powell told them that the 380,000 figure must be regarded as a maximum and that

⁴⁷ AIR 2/14712, Review of Defence Plans by Minister of Defence, 22 February 1957. Although this directive is dated 22 February, Sir Richard Powell is adamant that it was not sent to the services and Chiefs until after the meeting at Chequers on 24 February or possibly after the Defence Committee meeting on 27 February.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

350,000 could be achieved.⁴⁹ This latter total was not, however, pushed by Sandys who remained confident that a 380,000 figure would enable Britain to accomplish what he termed her principal military tasks: (1) to have the minimum forces needed to defend and maintain order in British colonies and other areas which the UK had to protect; (2) to play a role in preventing world war by creating a British element of nuclear deterrent power and by contributing sufficient land, air and sea forces to maintain the solidity of the NATO alliances and the involvement of the Americans in Europe; and (3) to play a modest part with other Commonwealth countries and allies in SEATO and the Bagdad Pact.⁵⁰

There were two points of major significance that came out of the mid-February discussions - points that would lay the basis for later confusion and conflict. The first was the focus on reductions in manpower. The key words here were 'minimum forces necessary', 'sufficient...forces' and 'a modest part', together with the admission that British influence would inevitably be reduced.⁵¹ Of course, the statement that Britain's conventional contribution to NATO was aimed at political rather than military objectives was not new, but in the context of the termination of national service (and thus cutbacks in the size of BAOR) it did have new meaning.

⁴⁹ AIR 19/856, Powell to Lang, 27 February 1957.

⁵⁰ AIR 2/14712, 22 February 1957.

⁵¹ Ibid.

The second factor was the statement made in Sandys's directive that Britain would play a part in preventing war 'by creating a British element of nuclear deterrent power...'⁵² Here, there is no mention of the word independent or any suggestion that the force be used in an independent manner. This whole area was left unexplored. Thus, the manner in which the directive was drafted makes it hard to draw away from the impression that the focus of the intended White Paper was not the independence of Britain's deterrent or even deterrence itself, but the securing of economy through the reduction of manpower.

This was definitely the thrust of the presentation given by Powell to the Permanent Under Secretaries of the service departments on 28 February.⁵³ A reading of this presentation indicates that the proposed order of battle did not in itself mean that Britain was to rely more heavily on the nuclear deterrent other than in a relative sense - that is, there was no clear linkage between specific force reductions and numbers of nuclear weapons and the timing of their deployment. While a balancing of the one with the other would be too simplistic a formula to measure the strategic coherence of Sandys's plans, the point is that the two issues did seem, very loosely connected.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ AIR 19/856, Extract From a Meeting of the Permanent Secretaries, 28 February 1957.

There is little evidence that at the beginning of the White Paper negotiations there was an interest in the Ministry of Defence for increasing the absolute power of Britain's deterrent force. On 28 February, for example, Powell spoke of the need for a '...moderate size [V-bomber] force (number undecided)...'⁵⁴ but made no mention of the requirements of independent deterrence. Again, while he stated that the V-bombers would ultimately be replaced by ballistic missiles, he stressed that Britain would continue only a modest research programme into her own Blue Streak missile, while Thor missiles would be supplied and controlled by the United States. Moreover, despite attempts by the Air Ministry in 1955 and 1956 to stress the link between defence of the V-bomber bases and the credibility to the British deterrent, the Permanent Secretary warned that air defence forces would be reduced from 480 to 280 aircraft.⁵⁵ The services were thus made well aware that the focus of the forthcoming White Paper would be a reduction in manpower and that their task would be to make use of the reduced force to attain the old objectives.

From the start, Sandys focused his efforts on securing savings mainly in the area of Navy and Army force levels and capabilities. Thus, with the total Naval manpower to be reduced from 111,000 to 80,000 '[t]he considerably reduced

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ 2nd TAF would also be reduced from 466 to 104 by 1961. See AIR 2/14712, Review of Defence Plans-Note by Minister of Defence, 22 February 1957.

fleet resulting from the above reductions in manpower would be composed basically of 3 carrier task groups one of which would be kept east of Suez'. In addition, the naval dockyards at Chatham, Sheerness and Hong Kong would be closed and there would be large reductions in the station at Malta. Savings would also arise from cutbacks in Army global war and cold war capabilities. BAOR would be reduced from the present 76,000 to first 50,000 and then 44,000 by 1961. In the Middle East, reduced forces (comprising one infantry brigade in Cyprus, two battalions in the Arabian Peninsula, and two battalions in Kenya) would be sufficient for local garrison duties, but would not be able to provide a strategic reserve for support of the Bagdad Pact. In the Far East, the remaining battalion in Korea would be withdrawn and the three Gurkha brigade groups in Malaya would be reduced to two, though they would still be assisted by two British battalions. The colonial garrisons in Malta, Gibraltar and Hong Kong would be cutback, while those in Bermuda and the Caribbean region would be withdrawn. Garrison troops in the UK would be cutback from 189,000 to 65,000 while the TA would be trained for home defence duties only (the two divisions earmarked for NATO would be re-orientated for civil defence duties). To make up for the weakness overseas, the strategic reserve would be built-up to 24,000 men and would be aided by a larger air transport force.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Sandys therefore sought to create a force posture that had eluded his predecessors. He replaced bargaining with an imposition of a manpower ceiling that left the services with little room to manoeuvre. Global war conventional capabilities of all three services were finally going to be substantially curtailed whether they were RAF or Army forces in Germany, troops designated to be sent to the Continent following the outbreak of war, or the size of the reserve fleet - a fleet that was central to the naval plans for a broken-backed phase of fighting. The Minister of Defence was confident that he would begin to produce worthwhile savings by the next year. Before the Defence Committee on 27 February, Macmillan reaffirmed that the main objective of the new defence policy was the reduction of the regular forces to 380,000 by the earliest practical date and that the economic objective was an annual defence budget of £1450 million, not taking into account any contribution from the United States or Germany.⁵⁷

It is hardly surprising that the service departments and the Chiefs resisted these ideas most strongly. At the beginning of 1957, they were still coming to terms with the implications of Anthony Head's proposals of December 1956.⁵⁸ When in January and February Sandys began formulating his ideas, the services were still engrossed in defending their positions against a force posture based on 450,000 men. In a sense, in the first

⁵⁷ CAB 131/18, D 2 (57) 1, 27 February 1957.

⁵⁸ See Chapter Three.

weeks of 1957, Sandys and the services were planning past each other. The services's attitude to Head's idea helped condition their immediate responses to Sandys's proposals. Similarly to the Minister of Defence - but obviously for different reasons - the services were most concerned with conventional forces and not nuclear deterrence issues.

As Sandys's tenure at the Ministry of Defence got under way, the Chiefs sought to undercut his position by presenting his proposals in the worst possible light. This was essential for, as Sir Dermot Boyle told his colleagues, '[i]t was inevitable that with the reductions imposed on the services [as proposed by Head] we could no longer be able to meet our strategic requirements'.⁵⁹ For the Chiefs and services, a naval force of four aircraft carriers, an Army of 200,000 men, a RAF of 184 V-bombers and a Fighter Command numbering only 320 planes, was the basis of a barely satisfactory force posture.⁶⁰

It was stressed that with a force based on 450,000: (1) it would not be possible for the United Kingdom to engage without allies in a limited war which required large-scale balanced forces; (2) if world-wide internal security tasks remained at their present level, Britain's ability to make a rapid

⁵⁹ DEFE 4/94, COS 1 (57) 3, discussion of JP (56) 14, 1 January 1957; For Eden's demand that the services draw up a 450,000 force plan see AIR 19/856, Eden to Birch, 2 January 1957.

⁶⁰ For the 450,000 order of battle see DEFE 4/95, COS 8 (57) 4 discussion of JP (57) 8 (Final), 21 January 1957.

contribution to land forces in a limited war would be curtailed; (3) reductions in the British contribution to NATO and the potential UK contribution to SEATO and the Bagdad Pact would have the inevitable result of weakening Britain's allies; and (4) the reduction of fighter forces (even with the introduction of SAGW) would influence an enemy's assessment of the dangers involved in attacking the UK.⁶¹

Towards the end of January, the Chiefs wished Sandys to be informed that the figure of 450,000 was not based on any study of strategic requirements.⁶² He was told that the Chiefs believed that while there might be economic reasons for reducing the order of battle

...in our opinion there are no military or strategic grounds which justify considerable reductions from the resources at present devoted to United Kingdom defence...The reduction of our forces to the size we have considered in this paper (approximately half what they were in 1954) will involve this country in considerable risk...⁶³

At the beginning of the Sandys exercise, the Chiefs were still very much attached to concepts of conventional preparations for global war. For example, in commenting on the 450,000 plan, Mountbatten stated that he recognised that global war preparations was a subject of dispute '...but he felt it necessary to emphasise the importance which in the United

⁶¹ DEFE 5/73, COS (57) 34, 5 February 1957.

⁶² DEFE 4/95, COS 8 (57) 4, 21 January 1957.

⁶³ DEFE 5/73, COS (57) 34, 5 February 1957.

States was attached to SACLANT and his mission'.⁶⁴ Yet, when Dickson informed Sandys of the Chiefs' view, the Minister remained unmoved. He told Dickson that while he was prepared to hear the ideas of the Chiefs, he was not prepared to accept even Head's figures as force level objectives.⁶⁵ In fact, despite the care and time the Chiefs allocated to the Head plan during the first weeks of 1957, Sandys totally ignored these studies and presented his February directive on the basis of minimal consultation, let alone negotiation, with the Chiefs and service heads. The lines of the debate were being drawn.⁶⁶

(3) The Question of Manpower and Service Responses

It was from the start apparent to the Chiefs and service departments that Sandys's main line of attack would be the issue of manpower. The danger had been underlined in a report by a special committee of Cabinet Ministers on future policy with regard to national service presented to the Cabinet on 15 January.⁶⁷ Here it was emphatically stated that the national service programme should not be regarded as a permanent feature in British defence planning and that the forthcoming

⁶⁴ DEFE 4/95, COS 8 (57) 4, 21 January 1957.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ For Sandys's early presentation of his ideas to the House of Commons see Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 564, cols. 1302-15, 13 February 1957.

⁶⁷ CAB 129/85, C (57) 1, 15 January 1957.

White Paper should stress that the necessary measures were being taken to build-up an all-regular force. By the end of January, the decision to substantially reduce BOAR had been taken by Macmillan and Sandys⁶⁸ and it was well known that the Minister of Defence had large manpower cuts in mind. Service resistance to these measures was not slow in building up. In reply to a letter from Powell on the question of the War Office agreeing to a clause in the White Paper stating that an (unspecified) rundown in manpower would not involve large amounts of redundancies, War Office Permanent Under Secretary, Sir Edward Playfair, reacted angrily that 'I am afraid I can see no prospect of our agreeing to any statement to the effect that the army rundown will not involve heavy axing'.⁶⁹

Sandys's demand that the defence departments produce an order of battle based on approximately 375-380,000⁷⁰ (Army-165,000, Navy-80,000 and RAF-130,000) was met with the response by the Chiefs that this would only be in the form of a manpower exercise and that the strategic implications would not be considered nor the order of battle approved by the service ministers.⁷¹ Attached to their report was the statement that

⁶⁸ DEFE 7/680, Chilvers to Way, 25 January 1957.

⁶⁹ AIR 2/2117, Playfair to Powell, 21 January 1957.

⁷⁰ The number 375,000 was used interchangeably with the 380,000 figure. There does not seem to have been any debate on this point.

⁷¹ DEFE 4/95, COS 16 (57) 3, 21 February 1957.

the Chiefs '...must express our serious concern on the effect which [the reductions] would have on the NATO, Bagdad Pact and the SEATO'. Concern was also expressed about the implications of a termination of national service on Britain's European allies.⁷² Tables presented in the report demonstrated that with such an order of battle, Britain would only be able to field three aircraft carriers, four cruisers, 17 destroyers, 33 frigates and 31 submarines. Her NATO contribution (when compared with the Head plan) would suffer cuts of one light fleet carrier, one cruiser and seven submarines. The Army's total manpower (again compared with the levels suggested by the Head plan) would be cut by 35,000 - a reduction of nearly 20%. Finally, while the RAF would not suffer anything more beyond what Anthony Head had contemplated, Sir Dermot Boyle warned that '...savings would be wholly disproportionate to the loss in our nuclear capability which would result'.⁷³ The point was that as far as the Chiefs were concerned, there could be no strategic justification for Sandys's proposed level of forces.

Of all the services, it was the War Office that resisted Sandys's manpower plans most strongly. It rejected the Minister's attempts to terminate national service, increase the manpower rundown to over 40,000 a year, curtail the Army's limited war tasks and its global war role. The War Office

⁷² DEFE 5/74, COS (57) 47, 22 February 1957.

⁷³ DEFE 4/95, COS 16 (57) 3, 21 February 1957.

maintained that it could not release its soldiers at a rate greater than 40-45,000 a year because while there were planned withdrawals from Korea, Jordan and Bermuda, together with the reduction of BAOR to 50,000 by April 1958, so far the only firm political decision related to withdrawal from Jordan. The issue of British forces in Korea was still under negotiation, Bermuda was likely to remain a commitment, and it was as yet unclear whether the BAOR reductions would be acceptable to Britain's NATO allies.⁷⁴ Concomitantly, the War Office warned that any further reductions were impossible because of the difficulty in civilianising the tail, in moving and positioning troops, and the need to take account of '...the catastrophic effects on the personnel of such a holocaust'.⁷⁵

The War Office also rejected out of hand the claim that with a figure of 165,000 men the United Kingdom could contribute 50,000 troops to BAOR in 1961 - 43,000 being the more likely number.⁷⁶ The VCIGS, Sir William Oliver, also maintained that he was opposed to an early draft to the White Paper which he had seen because it made no mention of the Army's role in limited war '...nor does it refer to their ultimate task of playing a part in global war should the deterrent fail'.⁷⁷ The

⁷⁴ WO 32/17171, Notes on Accelerating Reductions to an All-Regular Army, 14 March 1957.

⁷⁵ WO 32/17171, fol.146 - undated but most probably from mid-March.

⁷⁶ AIR 19/849, War Office Comments on the White Paper, 20 March 1957.

⁷⁷ WO 32/17171, fol.18a - undated.

War Office's fall-back position was a demand for vagueness. On 29 March, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for War, Fitzroy Maclean, wrote to John Hare that he believed the single most important amendment to the White Paper would be the omission of precise figures or percentages. Instead the paper should simply say 'about half the present figures'. He believed that there were excellent security grounds for refusing to give the exact total and even better political grounds for not doing so.

For the Government to commit itself publicly to an exact figure is to give a quite unnecessary hostage to fortune, to the Opposition and to critics in our own ranks. It should also prove a most tiresome millstone round the Government's neck... inhibiting us from doing things which on their own merits might be worthwhile.⁷⁸

Sandys was not to prove at all co-operative on this point and the White Paper was explicit that the force objective was 375,000 men by 1962.⁷⁹

By the middle of March, Sandys and Powell were busy presenting the Chiefs and service heads with draft after draft (ultimately 13 major drafts) of the White Paper. At this stage, service and Chiefs of Staff opposition to the Minister's plans focused almost exclusively on the manpower issue. On 13 March, a draft White Paper circulated to the

⁷⁸ WO 32/17171, Maclean to Hare, 29 March 1957.

⁷⁹ Cmd. 124, para. 46. It is interesting to note that at this time the British were informing the Americans that Sandys had agreed that should recruitment figures not reach the desired totals, conscription would be extended. NA, RG 59, 741.5/1-2558, Whitney to Dulles, No.4376, 25 January 1957.

Chiefs and service departments included the following paragraph on the issue of an all-regular force:

B.17(b) The total strength of the three Services is today about 700,000. On the basis of the revised plan, the government believe that Britain should in due course be able to discharge her essential defence responsibilities with forces of not much more than half their present size.

(c) That assumes that they could be recruited on an all-regular basis and that the heavy overheads of National Service would be eliminated.⁸⁰

The Chiefs were quick to express alarm about the form of this draft as it related to manpower. Sir William Oliver, stated that the paper seemed to be based entirely on economic and not military factors and should not be issued because it implied that the Chiefs agreed with the suggested force level. In this he was supported by the Vice Chief of the Air Staff (VCAS), Sir Ronald Ivelaw Chapman, who said that it should be stressed that any figures below 450,000 were only examined by the Chiefs on instructions. He suggested that the relevant paragraphs be amended to read that the government believed that the United Kingdom could not afford to sustain responsibilities which involved having forces of much more than half the present figure. Mountbatten added that it should be emphasised that the Chiefs, as the responsible military advisors, could not say that the proposal to cut the forces to about half the present figure was strategically sound.⁸¹ A draft minute summarising these view was forwarded on to both Sandys and Macmillan.

⁸⁰ AIR 19/849, Draft B of the 1957 White Paper, 12 March 1957.

⁸¹ ADM 205/114, COS (57) 21, 14 March 1957.

This report was an angry and bitter document which denounced the very basis of Sandys's proposals. It stressed that as far as the Chiefs were concerned, 450,000 was the lowest figure acceptable on military grounds. It was stated that

We wish to bring to the notice of Her Majesty's Government that we are profoundly concerned at some of the effects which the White Paper in its present form may have. The effects on the morale of our Services will be very serious indeed and in particular, the Paper will be a very severe shock to the long service element on which the future of the Services depends; and very damaging to recruiting which is the basis of the new plan. We can only suggest that hopeful words are included to mitigate the uninterrupted list of reductions and economies.⁸²

The Chiefs went on to point to their particular concern with the second sentence of paragraph 17(b) which could be taken to imply that there were strategic reasons to support the government's proposed reductions. As this was not the case, they suggested the following change be written in to the relevant paragraphs:

The total strength of the three services today is about 700,000. The revised plan aims to reduce such forces to not much more than half their present size. Though such a force would not be able to discharge all Britain's defence responsibilities today yet the basis of the revised plan is that our commitments can be progressively reduced.⁸³

The Chiefs, of course, were more intent upon scaring the Minister's with the prospect of reduced commitments than actually reducing them. Sandys, however, had admitted (and accepted) the problem of meeting British commitments with his

⁸² AIR 8/2157, COS (57) 63, 15 March 1957.

⁸³ Ibid.

planned reduced forces when he had stated in his February directive that Britain's ability to exert military influence would inevitably be lessened.⁸⁴ Thus, while a draft of the White Paper issued on 15 March reflected the Chiefs' suggestions,⁸⁵ it was soon ignored by the Minister of Defence.

Consequently, at a meeting of the Cabinet on 18 March, a meeting from which the Chiefs were excluded, it was agreed that a less radical statement than the one suggested by the Chiefs be inserted. Here the nuclear factor seems to have been consciously stressed as a legitimising tool and there was concurrence that the sentence should read

...that the object of our defence policy remained, as it had always been, the maintenance of compact and efficient fighting Services, but that the method by which we should best attain this objective required radical reappraisal in the light of current strategic considerations.⁸⁶

The Cabinet then proceeded to defer publication of the White Paper until 5 April, and ordered a further draft.

The fact that the Chiefs' advice had been so thoroughly ignored, reinforced the already strong tensions between the Minister of Defence and the Chiefs. The situation was made worse because the Chiefs felt that Sandys had deliberately excluded them from the Cabinet meeting of 18 March. There was

⁸⁴ AIR 2/14712, Review of Defence Plans - Note by Minister of Defence, 22 February 1957.

⁸⁵ ADM 205/114, See extract from C(57)69 in The Defence White Paper - undated.

⁸⁶ CAB 128/31, CC 21 (57) 2, 18 March 1957.

deep concern that the Chiefs of Staff Committee's constitutional position as set out in Cmd. 6923 was being pushed aside by an overzealous Minister of Defence. Indeed, Mountbatten was informed by the Navy's Director of Plans, Captain E.P.G. Lewin, that Cmd. 6923 had not been cancelled by Macmillan's directive of 18 January and that paragraph 31 which referred to the right of the Chiefs of Staff to be present at Defence Committee or Cabinet meetings when strategy or military plans were discussed was still valid.⁸⁷ Yet, this was not Sandys's view, and the Chiefs were well aware of this. The fear now was that with Sandys dominating the decision making process, the government would not countenance any form of selective national service and Sandys would begin to push the Chiefs into stating what commitments they thought could best be surrendered.⁸⁸

Consequently, on 21 March, the Directors of Plans sought to pre-empt such a manoeuvre on the part of Sandys by drafting a paragraph which stated that

...without National Service the resultant Forces will be little more than half the size of their present strength of about 700,000. The effects to our world-wide position and to our contributions to our Alliances will be minimised by the measures indicated above.⁸⁹

The measures mentioned here referred to scientific and technical developments - that is the use of nuclear weapons

⁸⁷ ADM 205/114, Lewin to Mountbatten, 19 March 1957.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ ADM 205/114, Annex to COS 23 (57) 2, 22 March 1957.

tactically and presumably strategically. This paragraph would thereby: (1) stress the dangers of the cuts proposed by Sandys; (2) avoid giving the impression that the Chiefs were implicated in Sandys's manpower decision; and (3) avoid specifying commitments that would have to be surrendered.

Also on 21 March, Dickson met with Sandys and expressed the Chiefs dissatisfaction both with the substance of Sandys's proposals and the manner in which the Minister was going about his task. Dickson explained to the Minister that the Chiefs regarded themselves constitutionally as the expert military advisors to the government - the clear implication being that they were not being treated as such. The Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee then painted a grim picture of the world situation and demonstrated that Sandys's proposed manpower cuts were extremely dangerous. He pointed to the growing Soviet and Chinese military potential and the increasing threat to all of Britain's alliances. Dickson also warned that the UK would have to take cognisance of growing threats to purely British interests. Finally, he once more reaffirmed the Chief's attachment to a 450,000 force armed with 'modern weapons'.⁹⁰

True to form, Sandys quickly dismissed Dickson's complaints. He told him that British defence requirements could be divided into two parts: the first was the defence of purely British

⁹⁰ ADM 205/114, Dickson to the Chiefs, 21 March 1957.

interests; the second was the contribution that the UK had to make to her defensive alliances. Sandys believed that the 380,000 force would be adequate for the first category; with regard to the second requirement, the Minister maintained that Britain's final force contribution would have to be determined in negotiation with her allies and that '...while military considerations come into this...the decision must be made on political and economic grounds'.⁹¹ Sandys went on to state that he regarded a 375,000 force as being 'fair' and effective when compared with the military and economic potential of Britain's allies. Dickson was left with the clear impression that despite his objections, Sandys intended to proceed on the basis of a 380,000 force.

Dickson informed the Chiefs of Sandys's position and told them that if they wished to make a corporate stand on a 450,000 force, they had better agree on the amount of reductions that would take place in each service. Yet, disagreements immediately became exposed with Dickson and Mountbatten willing to seek a compromise with Sandys, and Templer continuing to reject any suggestion of reductions below the figures of the Head plan. In a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 23 March, Dickson led the search for a middle ground and claimed that the focus should not be on manpower but on 'effective strength'. He demonstrated that the difference between Head's and Sandys's plans was actually

⁹¹ Ibid.

30,000 as 40,000 of the 450,000 force were men assigned to dealing with national service administration. In turn, Mountbatten, after having stressed the need for the Chiefs to dissociate themselves from the Minister's manpower proposals,⁹² stated that if Sandys wished to press on regardless, the Chiefs would have to co-operate and give the Minister their full support in achieving the best possible force deployments with the available troops. Sir Gerald Templer, however, reaffirmed his attachment to the 450,000 force and claimed that most of the reductions that would take place would occur in fighting units. The CIGS demanded that the Chiefs not give in to Sandys and he warned

[The Chiefs] position as military advisors to Her Majesty's Government was clearly laid down in the White Paper "Organisation For Defence". No alteration to their position had been made and it was most important that this should be clearly understood.⁹³

On 27 March, Sandys made an effort to convince the Chiefs of the merits of his proposed order of battle - though it was evident from the outset that this was not a search for compromise on his part but a reaction to the criticisms that he had been ignoring the Chiefs. The basis for discussion was provided by the fifth proof of the White Paper which stated that the government believed that Britain could discharge her responsibilities with an all-regular force. No mention was

⁹² ADM 205/114, COS 23 (57) 2, 22 March 1957.

⁹³ Ibid.

made of the fact that the Chiefs did not agree with this proposal.⁹⁴ Sandys informed the Chiefs of his confidence in an all-regular force of 375,000 being able to defend British colonies and protected areas, take part in limited overseas operations (i.e. in support of the Bagdad Pact or SEATO allies) and to '... make a fair contribution to the joint effort of NATO'. As far as Sandys was concerned, if NATO was to be strengthened conventionally, then the other partners must begin to carry a greater burden. He maintained that he did not think the conventional effort that Britain was now making would in any way determine whether a third world war would start or not. Then the Minister went on to state that although the resulting NATO force

...would not be regarded as enough for safety, in his view they were sufficient to deter Soviets Russia starting a nuclear war, since she could attain her ends in other ways e.g. by subversion in the Middle East and South East Asia. However, a great probable danger was the potential commercial threat from Russia since with her form of government she could easily undertake a trade war.⁹⁵

The Minister's ideas were certainly somewhat confused. On one level he seemed unclear as to what he considered was actually deterring the Soviets from starting a global war: was it allied conventional or nuclear forces? Nor, did he attempt to separate out the British and American nuclear contributions. On another level, he appeared to equate Soviet goals in the Middle East and the Far East with those in Europe, and he seemed to blur the Chiefs' careful distinctions between cold,

⁹⁴ ADM 205/114, C (57) 79, 26 March 1957.

⁹⁵ ADM 205/114, COS 5 (57) 1, 27 March 1957.

limited and global war. Here it must be recognised that what undoubtedly drove Sandys was not so much an explicit strategic formula as much as the issue of financial savings - thus his concern about a trade war. Consequently, while he patiently listened to the Chiefs' views, he was not prepared to change his approach. For him, the problem was now one of wording and presentation, not strategic rationales. He could only assure the Chiefs that it was not his intention to implicate them in the decision to terminate national service and reduce the armed forces to 375,000. The wording of the White Paper could therefore be adjusted, but the Chiefs' threats had otherwise fallen on deaf ears. Furthermore, the battle over the wording was not yet over and the Chiefs soon found that Sandys was still attempting to create the impression in the White Paper that there was general acceptance that Britain's commitments could be sustained with a 375,000 force.

A final decision on the White Paper was to be taken by the Cabinet on the evening of 28 March. That day the Chiefs pressed a draft of paragraphs 50-53 which stressed that economic considerations were paramount in the determination of the 375,000 force figure. Dickson then reported to the Chiefs on his earlier discussion with Sandys on these paragraphs. He told them that the Minister had been informed that the Chiefs would only accept the White Paper if: (1) the words '...that if appreciably larger forces were retained the course of keeping them supplied with increasingly expensive modern equipment, without which they could not be fully efficient,

would place an excessive burden on the economy' were replaced with the sentence that '...since the need for economic stability has a priority transcending all but vital military commitments...'; (2) the complete removal of the sentence '...after taking account of the importance of economic stability as an essential basis for military power...'; and (3) the replacement of the sentence 'Britain should plan to maintain armed force of between 360,000 and 400,000' with 'Britain must plan to maintain armed forces of about 375,000'.⁹⁶ The object here was to stress to the strongest extent possible the economic foundations (as opposed to the strategic ones) of the new policy and to maximise the size of the armed forces.

No doubt, for the very same reason, at 12 mid-day, Sandys told Dickson that the draft was unacceptable. The Minister's main point was a refusal to countenance the sentence '...since the need for economic stability has priority transcending all but vital military commitments'. While Sandys can be criticised possibly for a lack of clear strategic conceptions, he cannot be faulted on his realisation that it would be wrong to create the impression that he was being motivated primarily by economic criteria (and thus further open to the criticism that he was ignoring strategic requirements). Indeed, although he agreed to specify a force objective of 375,000 as opposed to one of between 360-400,000 (so as to placate fears that he

⁹⁶ ADM 205/114, COS 24 (57) 5, 28 March 1957.

would not use such a statement to legitimise a 360,000 force), he attempted to ground these cuts in strategic reasoning. On the one hand, in the White Paper he would go no further than to state that

Provided the three services are reshaped and redistributed on the lines indicated above and the commitments are curtailed in the manner proposed, the Government believes that Britain could discharge her responsibilities with forces much smaller than at present.⁹⁷

On the other hand, Sandys sought to move away from giving the impression that economic considerations came at the expense of military ones. Thus, the Chief's statement on the predominance of economic factors was ultimately replaced with the sentence

Britain's influence in the world depends first and foremost on the health of her internal economy and the success of her export trade. Without these, military power cannot in the long run be supported. It is therefore in the true interests of defence that the claims of military expenditure should be considered in conjunction with the need to maintain the country's financial and economic strength.⁹⁸

The Chiefs were furious that even their compromise position on the presentation had been ignored. At 3.30pm, 45 minutes before the Cabinet meeting was about to begin, they met to discuss the matter. Mountbatten stressed how seriously he viewed the efforts '...to avoid the point the COS were making'.⁹⁹ At that meeting, Dickson did not relate the cuts to

⁹⁷ This virtually corresponded to the words that were to appear in Cmd. 124, para. 40.

⁹⁸ Ibid. , para. 6.

⁹⁹ ADM 205/114, COS 25 (57) 1, 28 March 1957 in the White Paper, op.cit.

any increased emphasis on the strategic deterrent or tactical nuclear weapons but stated that

...a reduction in the total strength of the forces to 375,000 could not be justified on strictly military grounds. The threat of communism had in no way diminished, and since the planned reduction in British forces would not in the event be counter-balanced by any comparable increase in the forces of the other countries in the Western Alliances, the total forces available for the defence of the free world would be reduced. Though no precise estimate could be given of the forces required for sound military planning, the further reduction now proposed...would result in a disproportionate loss of fighting units. The Chiefs of Staff therefore considered that it should be made clear in the White Paper that the decision to reduce the forces eventually to 375,000 was dictated primarily by economic needs.¹⁰⁰

Though the available documents do not describe any tensions at the Cabinet meeting, these must have been strong, because the Prime Minister, once having admitted that the question of manpower was the most important feature of the White Paper, stated that he, himself, would draft the relevant paragraphs, taking account of the concerns of the Chiefs of Staff.¹⁰¹ To the satisfaction of the Chiefs, the problem seemed to be taken out of Sandys's hands. Consequently, a proof of the White Paper issued on 30 March stated in paragraph 46 that '...in the light of the need to maintain a balanced distribution of the national manpower, regular forces [of 375,000] constitute the objective which [the government] should seek ultimately to

¹⁰⁰ ADM 205/114, The Defence White Paper, op.cit.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.; also see CAB 128/31, CC 26 (57) 1, 28 March 1957.

attain'.¹⁰² At a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 1 April, it was concluded that while this paragraph was far from satisfactory, it was open to different interpretations, and if the Chiefs were asked '...if they agreed with the paragraph they should be at liberty to say they did not'.¹⁰³

Yet, by the 11am Cabinet meeting on the following day, it appears that Sandys had once again altered the relevant paragraph which now stated that the regular strength of the Army would by 1962 be between 350,000 and 400,000 men. Moreover, no mention was made of the relationship of economic to military criteria in determining this force level. The Chiefs reacted angrily, but once more to no avail.¹⁰⁴ At 5pm on 3 April, it was discovered that in the latest version of paragraph 46 - a version which Sandys had no intention of circulating for agreement and of which there was only one copy in his private office - that the sentence 'In the light of the need to maintain a balanced distribution of national resources...' had been omitted. It seemed that the Minister of Defence was continuing to circumvent the Chiefs' demand that they be distanced from the manpower proposals. At 5.30pm. Mountbatten made an urgent phone call to Dickson and demanded that the matter be investigated. Sandys, whose plans were now uncovered, agreed to alter the wording so as to imply that

¹⁰² CAB 129/86, C (57) 84, 1 April 1957.

¹⁰³ ADM 205/114, The Defence White Paper, op.cit.

¹⁰⁴ ADM 205/114, CM 28 (57) 2, 2 April 1957 in 1957 White Paper, op.cit.

economic as much as strategic motivations lay behind the decision to cut manpower and terminate the national service programme. This was reflected in the final draft of paragraph 46 which appeared in Cmd. 124.¹⁰⁵

Thus, as a result of these cuts, the Army would be reduced to 165,000 by 1962 of which 50,000 men would be in Germany, 12,000 in the Middle East (Cyprus, East Africa and the Persian Gulf), 14,000 in the Far East (Malaya, Hong Kong and Singapore), 8,500 in transit and 80,500 in the UK (of which 27,500 would be designated for the mobile strategic reserves). Over the 1957-62 period, these changes could be summarised as follows:¹⁰⁶

Table Five: UK Army Force Deployment Projections - 1957-62

<u>Location</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1962</u>	<u>Absolute Reduction</u>	<u>%</u>
UK	208	80	128	61
Other	173	85	88	51
Total	381	165	216	57

[in thousands]

In conclusion of this section, five important factors can be gleaned from the debate on manpower levels during the 1957 White Paper discussions: (1) the issue was recognised by both Sandys and the Chiefs as being more fundamental than anything else in that it impinged both directly and indirectly on roles and capabilities; (2) similarly, to the 1955-56 discussions on

¹⁰⁵ See Cmd. 124, op.cit. , para. 46.

¹⁰⁶ NA, RG 59, Recent UK Developments a Review for Ambassador Whitney, op.cit.

national service, little reference was made either by the Ministry of Defence or the Chiefs of Staff to massive retaliation strategy or tactical nuclear deployments as a means for cutting back on manpower requirements. That nuclear weapons would replace conventional forces was always an idea more implicit than explicit. Here, there was also no attempt to distinguish the British nuclear deterrent from that of the Americans;¹⁰⁷ (3) Sandys's approach was crucial to the outcome of the debate as he ignored and overrode service objections and refused to get embroiled in interminable negotiations; (4) the first stage of the debate dealt with the actual reductions of manpower. The word debate is most probably inappropriate as Sandys pushed ahead relatively independent of any outside suggestions; (5) during the second stage - which involved the wording of the White Paper and the implications of responsibility - Sandys appeared more amenable to pressure, but his style could only have caused tensions which further poisoned relationships. By the first week of April, Sandys had achieved his goals as far as manpower was concerned and was in a good position to undercut service roles and capabilities. Concomitantly, he had to come to terms with the issue of the Britain's nuclear deterrent power.

¹⁰⁷ According to Ambassador Whitney, the fact that Sandys was cutting British troops in Europe before tactical nuclear weapons were in place meant that the Minister of Defence's policy rested on an implicit assumption that the Soviets would not attempt for the next few years to extend power by direct military means and that a '...major factor is reliance on [the] US nuclear deterrent...' NA, RG 59, 741.5/3-357, Whitney to Dulles, No.4619, 3 March 1957.

(4) The Nuclear Deterrent and the 1957 White Paper Negotiations

While as noted in Chapter One, much of the focus of the secondary literature has tended to be on the aspects of nuclear policy in the 1957 White Paper, it has so far been argued in this chapter that manpower issues dominated discussions and it is there that the more revolutionary aspects of Cmd. 124 are to be found. Indeed, an analysis of the documentation concerning the nuclear deterrent in the context of the White Paper negotiations reinforces this assertion. Not only were discussions on nuclear weapons pushed to the side in the face of the far more pressing discussions on conventional force issues, but Sandys's approach to the subject demonstrated both his conceptual confusions and his (at least in 1957) very qualified attitude towards a British independent deterrent.

At the Defence Committee meeting of 27 February, Macmillan underlined the relative importance of conventional force issues as opposed to nuclear ones. Only following a lengthy discussion of manpower did the Prime Minister turn to the issue of the nuclear deterrent and then only to state that Britain would not use them other than in the context of a global war and in conjunction with the United States. In addition, Britain would not use tactical nuclear weapons except in wars in which the United States was engaged or was

giving full support.¹⁰⁸ The Prime Minister thus clearly rejected the independent British use of nuclear weapons.

At the same time, he clouded the issue by stating that '[w]e should, however, have within our control sufficient weapons to provide a deterrent influence independent of the United States'. The Prime Minister did not specify over whom this influence would be achieved or how the influence would be exercised though he did say that '[o]ur objective should be to remain a nuclear power and for this purpose we would need the capacity to make both atomic and hydrogen weapons and means of delivery'. Yet, when it came to actual force requirements he maintained that the number of kiloton and megaton bombs which we should produce '... would depend on further assessment of the costs involved' - an indication that economic and not strategic considerations would determine the size of the force.

It is reasonable to assume that had Sandys's focus been on strengthening the nuclear deterrent at the expense of expenditure on conventional force capabilities and conventional force levels, (as opposed to allowing the importance of the deterrent to rise relative to conventional force levels merely as a result of cutbacks in the latter) then the Air Ministry would have greeted these ideas with satisfaction. Yet, the Air Ministry's attitude throughout the

¹⁰⁸ CAB 131/18, D 2 (57) 1, 27 February 1957.

1957 White Paper discussions was one of apprehension mixed with opposition. The problem was that for the Air Ministry, Sandys was not only intent upon abolishing manned aircraft, but he also appeared to be weakening and not strengthening Britain's nuclear deterrent. If Sandys was keen on basing a new defence policy on the British deterrent he did not seem to be in a rush to bring these ideas to the notice of the services. Thus, at the beginning of March, Assistant Under Secretary of State for Air, R.H.Melville, complained to Powell that the Air Ministry was being asked to prepare a memorandum on the air estimates, but it had no idea what the Minister intended to say about the RAF's role in the White Paper.¹⁰⁹ In fact, when the first major draft of the White Paper was presented to the Chiefs and services on 12 March, while the manpower sections were there in detail, the paragraphs on the nuclear deterrent were as yet not ready.¹¹⁰

It appeared to the Air Ministry that Sandys was not intent upon shifting the focus from conventional forces to nuclear weapons, but merely concerned with securing economic savings through a reduction of the former. Assistant Private Secretary K.C. Macdonald, wrote to Ward on 12 March expressing extreme displeasure with regard to Sandys's plans. According to Macdonald the effect on the UK would be 'panic', on the services 'bad' and on the world 'shattering'. The only certain

¹⁰⁹ AIR 19/849, Melville to Powell, 1 March 1957.

¹¹⁰ AIR 19/849, Draft B, 12 March 1957.

result of Sandys's ideas was that Britain would ultimately become a second class military, economic and political power. This perceived lack of interest on the part of the Minister of Defence in the nuclear deterrent was resulting in the defence of the UK being placed 'wholly in American hands'. It seemed to be Macdonald's view that Sandys was only implicitly relating nuclear weapons to conventional force levels. Consequently, there had to be a greater stress on nuclear weapons and this had to be tied to a time-scale of manpower rundown. The Assistant Secretary's warning was unequivocal:

A plan, better phased in manpower rundown and related in time-scale to new weapons would create [a] feeling of confidence. But even such a plan would require [a] most explicit demonstration that H.M.G. meant business, both in going ahead with new weapons, and improving conditions of Service people.¹¹¹

These fears were reaffirmed by Air Ministry Permanent Under Secretary Maurice Dean who told Ward on 14 March that nowhere in the present draft of the White Paper was there any mention of overall policy, priorities or strategy.¹¹² As a result of this confusion the RAF was bound to suffer. Although the nuclear deterrent sections of the White Paper were still not ready, Assistant Chief of the Air Staff A.Earle was adamant that

¹¹¹ AIR 19/849, Macdonald to Ward, 12 March 1957.

¹¹² AIR 19/849, Dean to Ward, 14 March 1957. It is interesting to note that at this point Dean legitimised a British deterrent by stating that: 'Furthermore, the possession of nuclear strategic weapons and the means of delivering them may be the only means of preserving our superiority over the Germans'.

It is difficult to know what general recommendation to make until we see the rest of the paper, but enough is already available to show that much of it is pretty puerile stuff which I thought would serve the government badly with public opinion...¹¹³

In the second half of March, the Air Ministry found itself encouraging the Minister of Defence to further strengthen the nuclear focus of the White Paper. On 16 March, following a meeting between Ward and the Air Council, Ward's Private Secretary, Ewen Broadbent, wrote to the Ministry of Defence that paragraph B.17(a) of the 12 March Draft which stated that '...the reshaping and re-distribution of the armed forces , on the lines indicated above, will greatly reduce the military manpower required' was misleading because '...it is not reshaping or re-distribution but new policies and new scientific developments which will permit the major reductions in manpower to be made'.¹¹⁴ Concomitantly, the Ministry of Defence was also informed that Sandys must strengthen his paragraph on the deterrent because the one the Air Ministry had seen gave the impression that Britain was almost wholly dependent upon the United States and '...it plays down the British element of the deterrent'.¹¹⁵ This point was reaffirmed in discussions in March between Ward and Sandys, where once again, it was the Secretary of State for Air, and not the

¹¹³ AIR 8/2157, Earle to Boyle, 14 March 1957.

¹¹⁴ AIR 19/849, Broadbent to Forward, 16 March 1957.

¹¹⁵ AIR 19/849, Broadbent to Forward, 15 March 1957. This draft could not be found at the PRO.

Minister of Defence that appeared to underline the stress on Britain's deterrent and the independence of that deterrent. On 18 March, Ward wrote to Sandys that

You agreed at our meeting last Friday that we should strengthen [the nuclear deterrent paragraphs]. This has already been done to some extent but I still feel that in view of the importance of the deterrent as brought out in [the White Paper] and as also emphasised in all the recent talks with NATO, it is important not to play it down too much. I suggest therefore that we should delete the words "an element of" and make the sentence read "possess a nuclear deterrent of her own."¹¹⁶

Arguably, the demand that Sandys should not 'play down too much' the focus on the deterrent does not seem to square with a view that his primary concern during the White Paper negotiations was to focus on nuclear deterrence and to emphasise Britain's independent deterrent capabilities. Of course, the Air Ministry could just have been overreacting to an aspect of policy that touched directly on its 'organisational essence'. Yet, at the same time, it should be recognised that Sandys was most concerned with getting his ideas on manpower accepted, and it was there that the main battle took place. For him, it was enough that the importance of the deterrent would rise relatively as the manpower basis of multiple capabilities was taken away. He had, however, no major disagreements with what the Air Ministry was saying and was therefore willing to accede to variations in declaratory intent. Thus, at least to an extent, the Air Ministry, by

¹¹⁶ AIR 19/849, Ward to Sandys, 18 March 1957.

encouraging Sandys, helped strengthen the declaratory emphasis on independent nuclear deterrence.

The results of this Air Ministry pressure can be noted in a comparison of a number of key paragraphs circulated before and after discussions and correspondence between Ward and Sandys in mid-March:

(1) In a draft circulated for Cabinet discussion on 15 March, Sandys and Powell had written

(7)b Now and in the foreseeable future, the free world is almost wholly dependent for its protection upon the nuclear power of the United States.¹¹⁷

By 26 March, this had been replaced with the words

The free world is to-day mainly dependent for its protection upon the nuclear capacity of the United States.¹¹⁸

The replacement of 'foreseeable future' with 'to-day' can be seen as a shift away from the impression that the United States would always provide such a capability and that Britain would always reside under the US deterrent umbrella.

(2) A draft circulated on 15 March stated that Britain should 'possess an element of nuclear deterrent power of her own'. By 26 March this had been replaced with the stronger sentence 'It is generally agreed that she should possess an appreciable

¹¹⁷ CAB 129/86, C (57) 69, 15 March 1957.

¹¹⁸ CAB 129/86, C (57) 79, 26 March 1957; also see Cmd 124, para. 15.

element of nuclear deterrent power of her own'.¹¹⁹ Here Sandys had gone some way towards meeting Ward's criticisms, but not all the way. While no documents are available indicating that Sandys explicitly rejected Ward's demands that the White Paper include the sentence that Britain must 'possess a nuclear deterrent of her own'¹²⁰ this did not appear in Cmd. 124. Such a sentence would have greatly underlined the independence of Britain's deterrent for the word 'element' tended to indicate that Britain's deterrent was but part of a greater whole - in this case the allied deterrent. Why Sandys opposed the inclusion of this sentence is unclear but perhaps he rejected such an explicit statement of independence because it was not in line with his or Macmillan's thinking as expressed at the 27 February Defence Committee meeting. This would support the contention that during the White Paper negotiations, the Air Ministry was far more concerned about laying declaratory stress on nuclear deterrence and unilateral independence than Sandys.

(3) Air Ministry pressure was also responsible for expanding the 15 March draft sentence that 'the means of delivery for these weapons is provided by the V-class' to that of

The means of delivering these weapons is provided by medium bombers of the V-class whose performance in speed and altitude is equal to that of any bomber aircraft now in service in any other country.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ AIR 19/849, Ward to Sandys, 18 March 1957.

¹²¹ CAB 129/86, C (57) 79, 26 March 1957.

Here the credibility of Britain's nuclear contribution was definitely reinforced.

(4) Finally, although it is difficult to assess from where the impetus derived, the following sentence appeared in the 26 March draft and not that of 15 March:

...in assessing the value of military effort, it must be remembered that, apart from the United States, Britain alone makes a contribution to the nuclear deterrent power upon which the peace of the world so largely rests.¹²²

Again the aspect of independence received a boost (seemingly as a consequence of Air Ministry prodding) with the result that at an Air Council meeting on 27 March, Ward could state that the latest proof was a 'considerable improvement'.¹²³

Ward, however, did not give up in his attempt to lay added emphasis on the independence of Britain's nuclear force. He was still very concerned about the manner in which Sandys was presenting the Thor and Blue Streak missile issues in the White Paper.¹²⁴ In a meeting with Powell only two days before the White Paper was published, Ward told him that language must not be used in the White Paper which implied that Britain would look solely to the United States for ballistic rockets.¹²⁵ Powell appears to have agreed to this Air Ministry

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ AIR 19/849, AC (57) 8, 27 March 1957.

¹²⁴ See next chapter.

¹²⁵ AIR 19/849, Ward to Boyle, 2 April 1957.

suggestion and he convinced Sandys to broaden the sentence dealing with missiles to read that 'agreement in principle for the supply of some missiles of the ballistic type had been reached with the United States'.¹²⁶ The key word here was 'some' which implied that not all weapons of this type would be got from the United States. The Air Ministry could thus be assured that the Blue Streak project was still secure.

Two basic issues can be gleaned from the debate on the nuclear deterrent in the context of the White Paper discussions: (1) there seems to have been a difference between what the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence were saying in the privacy of the Defence Committee and what was being said on the declaratory level of policy; (2) there was a strong attempt by the Air Ministry to shift the focus of the declaratory expressions towards a greater emphasis on independent nuclear deterrence (independently of how that independence was actually defined).

It must be recognised that Sandys approached the White Paper with the prime intention of setting out the basis for securing savings through manpower reductions. Of course he accepted that there must be a shift in stress from conventional to nuclear forces but he did not consciously attempt to unite the two major aspects of his policy into a consistent whole. From the papers available at the PRO it appears that the focus on

¹²⁶ See Cmd. 124, op.cit. , para. 16.

nuclear deterrence was more implicit than explicit in Sandys's thinking and he seemed uninterested during the White Paper negotiations in outlining a coherent and systematic policy of British nuclear deterrence linked to other levels of British defence policy. Arguably, given his style and approach to defence planning he would have reduced manpower anyway - nuclear weapons notwithstanding.

It was because of this tendency that the Air Ministry, theoretically the greatest beneficiary of Sandys's nuclear focus, expressed deep concern over the wording of the White Paper. The wording of paragraphs and their inclusion was viewed as a matter of great significance as it was believed that declaratory expressions could ultimately help influence procurement and action policies. Here, the Air Ministry thought it was strengthening the nuclear deterrent and the independent deterrent focus of the White Paper, while in fact, it was merely broadening the gap between declaratory and action policy (see Chapter Seven). That Sandys was prepared to accede, at least partly, to Air Ministry pressures, is testament to his desire to avoid extra battles with the service departments which were peripheral to the more pressing issues of economic savings and manpower reductions. The Navy, too, was to feel the brunt of these concerns.

(5) The Role Of The Navy And The 1957 White Paper

As noted, during the White Paper negotiations of 1957, the services attempted to contain Sandys through influencing the wording and inclusion of paragraphs in the White Paper. Thus, there was a long but losing battle fought by the Navy over the inclusion of paragraph 13 which stated that '...the overriding consideration in all military planning must be to prevent war rather than to prepare for it'.¹²⁷ Yet, Sandys was less interested in the wording of sentences as he was in curtailing the resources which made large and expensive forces possible. Here the debate with regard to the future of the Navy demonstrates how Sandys began to use reductions in manpower to undercut the basis for preferred service capabilities. The first stage was during the White Paper discussions and dealt with general guidelines and manpower levels. The second phase consisted of the discussions in the post - White Paper period during which time Sandys sought to impose his interpretation of the White Paper.¹²⁸

On assuming office in January, the new First Lord, Lord Selkirk, wrote to Sandys what in retrospect can only be regarded as a very optimistic brief.¹²⁹ The thrust of Selkirk's

¹²⁷ Cmd 124, op.cit., para. 13; This point was made at the conference on the Sandys White Paper by Mr. T. C. G. James. No record of this discussion was found in the PRO.

¹²⁸ See next chapter.

¹²⁹ AIR 19/856, Selkirk to Sandys, 14 January 1957.

arguments was that Head's call for a 90,000 strong Navy (the so-called 90 Plan) - which the Navy had accepted - was itself problematic. NATO would be endangered; and the ports of Hong Kong, Sheerness and Portland would be closed as well as the naval establishment at Ceylon. In addition, the number of cruisers would be reduced from nine to six; the number of destroyers from 29 to 24; the number of frigates from 51 to 48; fast minelayers from two to one; ocean minesweepers from nine to two; coastal minesweepers from 35 to 25; inshore minesweepers from 15 to 12 and submarines from 42 to 35. The East Indies station would be abolished as would the American and West Indies squadrons. Finally (and from the point of global war capabilities, most significantly) the supplementary and extended reserve fleets would be abolished by 1960/61.

The First Lord went on to warn that such an unbalance was legitimate only because the Ministry of Defence's directive made the assumption that conventional preparations for global war were of a low priority. Selkirk stressed that this was not a view held by the Navy and he was adamant that '...the only circumstance in which there will be no survival are if we plan on the basis that there can be none'.¹³⁰ The difficulties presented to the Navy by the 90 plan was of little concern to Sandys and the Minister rapidly replaced Head's 90,000 Navy with his own plans for a 80,000 force. The Navy, to say the least, was distressed. Certainly, the 80 Plan had even more

¹³⁰ Ibid.

. far reaching implication than the 90 Plan. The most salient difference according to the JPS between the two force levels was that under the former, Britain would be able to maintain a 'worthwhile' squadron in the Far East, four carrier task groups (which the Navy felt would provide a workable rotation) and a level of forces in the Mediterranean '...which would have justified retention of the present UK share of the NATO force structure in that theatre'.¹³¹

The Navy, however, was even at this early stage, not totally overwhelmed by Sandys's strategy. In discussions between the Minister of Defence and the Chiefs of Staff on 19 February, the Chiefs had withstood an onslaught by the Minister as he attempted to rid the Navy of all its aircraft carriers. Mountbatten united the Chiefs of Staff Committee behind the statement that

We conclude there is a need to retain the Fleet Air Arm because it provides a means of applying air power in areas where other means cannot be efficiently or economically used. We consider that, in the strategic circumstances with which we are faced, the carrier is the most flexible and valuable unit of the Fleet and that, if economies in naval forces have to be made, these ships should be the last to be reduced.¹³²

Two points are of significance here. Firstly, that the Chiefs legitimised the need for carriers in terms of cold and limited war roles and not as a global war capability. This possibly stemmed from the recognition that Sandys, unlike his

¹³¹ ADM 205/114, JPS to Mountbatten, 21 March 1957.

¹³² DEFE 4/95, COS 14 (57) 1, 19 February 1957.

predecessors, would not diverge from the set of war preparation priorities which placed global war at the tail-end, nor would he succumb to the attractions of a Strike Fleet role - a role after all, to which he had never been particularly partial.¹³³ Secondly, Mountbatten was quick to attribute the success in retaining the carriers to the 'unprecedented' unity of the Chiefs.¹³⁴ It is unfortunately not possible to tease out from the available papers how the First Sea Lord secured the other Chiefs' agreement to this statement, but it is reasonable to assume - given the early stage of the White Paper negotiations - that the Chiefs wished to present a united front and avoid establishing a precedent that Sandys could easily achieve reductions at the expense of service capabilities. Whatever the case, Mountbatten, while relieved, still felt insecure about the future of these ships and wrote to Selkirk instructing him to invite the Minister to sea with a British carrier squadron the following September so that the case for the carriers would be reinforced.¹³⁵ Why Sandys agreed with this position on the carriers is also unclear though, presumably, he was not keen on engaging the Chiefs on another front when the question of national service stood before them. Possibly, he was won over by the cold and limited war arguments put forward by Mountbatten for these

¹³³ Grove op.cit. , pp. 91-93, 98, 102, 105, 107, 110-14.

¹³⁴ Mountbatten Papers, I 276, Mountbatten to Edwards, 27 February 1957.

¹³⁵ Mountbatten Papers, I 276, Mountbatten to Edwards, 9 March 1957.

ships and, in any event, he could always leave an attack on these forces for later once the manpower issue was satisfactorily resolved.

Indeed, in early March Mountbatten was warned that '[t]he omens are not...very favourable as the Minister is said to be taking a very great interest in every line of the [White Paper]'.¹³⁶ On 12 March, the White Paper Draft B bore out this pessimistic forecast. Following the statement that the Navy would be based on three carrier groups (one of which would be east of Suez) it was stressed that the number of large ships 'will be restricted to the minimum'. It was also stated that while there could be no doubt about the value of sea power in localised emergencies, the role of naval forces in total war was uncertain.¹³⁷

The Navy was prepared to accept the roles and functions assigned by Sandys to the Navy but, pending additional investigations, was not prepared to state that it could play a significant part in limited wars and the cold war with the

¹³⁶ ADM 205/114, fol.1, 7 March 1957.

¹³⁷ AIR 19/849, White Paper Draft B, 12 March 1957. Manpower would be cut from 115,000 to 75,000 by 1962. The three carrier groups were to be supported by three Tiger Class cruisers (which were under construction), 120 front-line planes and some large destroyers with guided missiles. All except one battleship was to be abolished and a large amount of reserve vessels were to be scrapped. Finally eight large Daring class destroyers capable of escort duty were to be supplanted by four 6000 ton destroyers (armed with Sea Slug) then under construction.

forces allocated to her.¹³⁸ The Navy was adamant that Sandys's plan could lead to the disintegration of NATO and it demanded that the draft be made less specific, both in terms of the number of men to be recruited and the number of ships in the fleet.¹³⁹ The Navy also faced problems in relation to how the nuclear deterrent was being presented in the White Paper and the way that this related to their concept of broken-backed warfare. Prior to Macmillan's meeting with Eisenhower in March,¹⁴⁰ Dickson circulated a draft paper to be used at the conference which stressed the centrality of the British contribution to the deterrent in the context of the Anglo-American relationship. Consequently, the Navy Director of Plans, E.D.G. Lewin informed Mountbatten that

If you agree with the proposition which [Dickson] makes you will be underlying the importance of [the] deterrent in a much more forthright manner than you have ever done before. If you consider that there is a chance of the President suggesting to the Prime-minister that we should drop out of the deterrent market, it would, from the long term Naval point of view be very damaging if you were on the record as supporting our share of the deterrent as "the most appropriate and effective" contribution which we could make with our limited resources.¹⁴¹

Clearly, the Navy's commitment to the nuclear focus of the 1957 White Paper was less than unreserved.

¹³⁸ ADM 205/114, Defence White Paper, Draft B, 14 March 1957.

¹³⁹ ADM 205/114, Extract from Board Meeting, 14 March 1957.

¹⁴⁰ See next Chapter.

¹⁴¹ ADM 205/114, JPS to Mountbatten, 21 March 1957.

Lewin pressed this point home on 1 April when he wrote to the Navy's Parliamentary Secretary, A.C.J. Soames, that as a result of the large number of drafts of the White Paper, the connotations of the word 'deterrent' had become confused. He pointed out that in paragraph 1 it was stated that Britain must make a fair contribution to the allied deterrent to global war and to discharge her responsibilities in many parts of the world. Lewin maintained that here it was not clear whether what was meant was nuclear deterrence or nuclear forces plus conventional forces.¹⁴² If it was only nuclear deterrence then the statement, according to Lewin, was indefensible, since conventional forces which contributed to the prevention of global war could also be used in conventional operations during global war. Lewin was here supporting a broken-backed capability. Equally as significant, it can be argued that if Sandys's focus was on the nuclear deterrent, then surely this should have been clear to all by the beginning of April. Indeed, it is possible to claim that Sandys must have made the nuclear deterrent focus clear by now, but the Navy refused to accept it and pleaded ignorance as to the meaning of the White Paper - ignorance that would have allowed them to later make claims for conventional global war preparations. Lewin admitted that in paragraph 20 it was stated that the possession of nuclear power was not itself a capable deterrent. However, he maintained that this paragraph came so far after paragraph 1 that the common usage of

¹⁴² ADM 205/114, Lewin to Soames, 1 April 1957.

'deterrent' - namely 'nuclear deterrent' - was likely to be assumed to be that put forward at the beginning of the paper. Lewin also objected to paragraph 24 in which it was said that naval forces did not contribute directly to the deterrent. He maintained that if the deterrent was defined broadly (that is to include non-nuclear forces) then it was unacceptable because the Navy did contribute (referring here, of course, to the Navy's contribution to NATO's striking fleet) - the implication here being that if it was defined narrowly (including only nuclear power) then it was acceptable. This reinforces the argument that during the White Paper negotiations the Navy was concerned not about contributing to the nuclear deterrent to global war but to conventional preparations should that war be fought. At the same time, the Navy certainly did not wish to foreclose its options. Consequently, the sentence stating '...naval forces do not for the most part contribute directly to the deterrent...' was dropped by the time the White Paper was published, though it was continued to be stressed that '...the role of naval forces in total war is somewhat uncertain'.¹⁴³

While the Navy, no doubt, felt that it had secured a victory because a threat to its global war preparations had been removed, it is not clear whether Sandys attached similar meaning to the removal of this paragraph. It is unlikely that he did, given his antipathy towards conventional global war

¹⁴³ Cmd. 124, op.cit., para. 24; also see ADM 205/114, Abraham to Soames, 2 April 1957.

preparations. Possibly, he took the narrow interpretation of the deterrent as his starting point and saw the deletion of the sentence merely as a recognition that the Navy had little to contribute to the nuclear deterrent.¹⁴⁴

This measure of ambiguity made it easier for the Admiralty to go along with the White Paper - and allowed Sandys to press on with his manpower objectives. Amongst the Board of Admiralty there was still uncertainty and much displeasure about the wording of the paragraphs defining the intentions of the government as to the final size of the forces,¹⁴⁵ but there was cause for optimism as well. Thus, on 3 April, naval commanders were informed that with regard to the Navy's role in nuclear war

The relevant paragraph in the White Paper tries to face this problem frankly for the first time and comes to the conclusion precisely because the course of nuclear war can never be predicted, that the country must maintain such Naval Forces as, in co-operation with the NATO Navies will constitute a vital piece both of the overall deterrent and our preparations for total war.¹⁴⁶

The Admiralty was firm in its belief that a '...costly programme of re-equipping the Navy with up-to-date weapons lies ahead'. The key words in the 3 April letter were 'overall deterrent' (which demonstrated that the Navy was giving deterrence the 'broad interpretation') and the explicit

¹⁴⁴ See next chapter for discussion of this subject.

¹⁴⁵ ADM 205/114, Minutes from Admiralty Board, 28 March 1957.

¹⁴⁶ ADM 205/114, Admiralty: General Message Home and Abroad, 3 April 1957.

statement of 'preparations for total war'. The Navy was in no way giving up its commitment to broken-backed warfare - a fact that the Air Ministry had long recognised: only two weeks previously, Assistant Chief of the Air Staff, A.Earle, had written to Boyle that the Navy was perpetuating what Earle regarded as the old fallacy that following the thermonuclear exchange phase, a battle would have to be conducted against the Soviet submarine fleet.¹⁴⁷

Clearly, there was still much confusion and incoherence and it seemed inevitable that another crisis would arise later when the implications of Sandys's manpower proposals began to inform themselves more directly on ambiguous declaratory policy. Yet, this was still in the (albeit near) future. Ziegler is therefore not totally correct in his interpretation that the statement of the Navy's role in global war being somewhat uncertain '...was a phrase that struck a chill into every sailor';¹⁴⁸ on the contrary, the Navy often seemed intent upon seeing its glass as half full.

This is not to say that there was no recognition of the future implications of the manpower and proposed financial cuts for the strategic vision the Navy felt it had secured. It was certainly the manpower and financial issues - not the declaratory policy - that worried Mountbatten. Thus, he wrote

¹⁴⁷ AIR 8/2157, Earle to Boyle, 14 March 1957.

¹⁴⁸ Ziegler op.cit. , p. 582.

to the Commander in Chief - Mediterranean, Ralph Edwards, that '[i]t is difficult to tell you what a frightful time we are going through here. Far worse than anything when you were at the Admiralty'.¹⁴⁹ While Mountbatten had helped secure the Navy's aircraft carriers, he was not unaware of the problems that were soon to follow. Consequently, following Sandys's attempts to get Navy manpower to take over Army forces in Malta and Gibraltar (a task that would have further cut in to the depleted Naval forces and antagonised the Army), Mountbatten told Edwards:

The Admiralty are not volunteering to take over this commitment and are not trying to do the army out of a nice job, but the way things are run nowadays, the Chiefs of Staff may well be ordered to make this change.¹⁵⁰

In conclusion then, at the beginning of April 1957, not everything had been resolved on the declaratory level with regard to the future of the Navy. Here Sandys had perhaps deliberately fudged the issue, allowing the Navy to believe that it had assured itself a role in cold, limited and even global war contingencies. However, on the level of manpower, Sandys had been much more explicit and far less willing to compromise. The Minister of Defence, no doubt, recognised that it was on the level of deployment and not declaratory policy that future force posture would ultimately be determined.

¹⁴⁹ Mountbatten Papers, I 276, Mountbatten to Edwards, 26 March 1957.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Agreement over ambiguous statements was soon to give way to further conflicts over budgets, orders of battle and tasks. So as to avoid such developments, throughout 1957 Sandys attempted to strengthen his bureaucratic position.

(6) The White Paper and the Future of Defence Organisation

The difficulties generated between the Chiefs and the service heads on the one hand, and the Minister of Defence on the other, during the first four months of 1957 were given added impetus by the fear that Sandys wished to make the new bureaucratic arrangements even more heavily weighted in his favour and permanent in their application. It is fair to say that the threat of future service integration raised almost as much opposition as Sandys's manpower reductions. Again, the Chiefs and services were able to buy time, but not for long.

Following Macmillan's directive of 18 January, Sandys met with first Dickson and then the rest of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 22 January in order to explain his position. Dickson told Sandys that in his present role as Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee he was unable to unify the other Chiefs and overcome service parochialisms. Sandys expressed complete dissatisfaction with such an arrangement¹⁵¹ and went on to convince the Chiefs to accept Macmillan's proposals for a period of six months. Dickson and Mountbatten supported this

¹⁵¹ Unpublished Memoirs of Duncan Sandys, op.cit. , 17/A/1-17/A/4.

suggestion but Boyle and Templer went along only with strong objections - concerned, no doubt, with the weakening of their bureaucratic position. While no mention was made in Sandys's directive on 22 February of any further organisational changes, Macmillan told the Defence Committee five days later that further study would be given to the organisation of the services with a view to ensuring greater efficiency and economy in the administration of common functions.¹⁵² For Sandys, it was evident that the only way in which coherent and consistent policies were to be pushed through was by a permanent reduction in service power and a more efficient combination of the departments. The services were thus alarmed to read in the draft circulated on 12 March that

...the decision to reduce the armed forces to half their present size...raises the question whether the continuance of the three entirely separate Services is still justified. The desirability of merging the Navy and the Air Force, or of amalgamating all three Services into a unified defence force must now be seriously considered.¹⁵³

The Minister was soon informed that any statement on the integration of the services in the White Paper was unacceptable. The reasons were that it would be highly damaging to recruitment; the superimposition of this type of examination at a time when the services were going through a period of major readjustment was intolerable; and that it would provide the Labour Party opposition with a ready means

¹⁵² CAB 131/18, D 2 (57) 1, 27 February 1957.

¹⁵³ AIR 19/849, Draft B, 12 March 1957.

of attacking the government through the constant questioning of progress.¹⁵⁴ Concomitantly, Permanent Under Secretary Maurice Dean warned Ward that it '...seems particularly dangerous to suggest results within a year'.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, the services objected to talk of even limited functional unification.¹⁵⁶ Sandys agreed to drop the relevant paragraph in the White Paper, but reserved the right to mention the problem in his speech in the House of Commons and therefore his intention of seeing his ideas through.

The White Paper, itself, nevertheless adumbrated further organisational changes when it stated that economies in administrative overheads were being sought and attempts were going to be made to eliminate the duplication of common tasks.¹⁵⁷ The situation was further clarified in Sandys's speech in the Commons on 16 April. The services had seen a draft of the speech and had pressed the Minister '...to make clear by some appropriate amendment that the amalgamation of some or all of the services is not contemplated'.¹⁵⁸ Sandys paid little regard to these suggestions and stated unequivocally that the reduction in the size of the armed forces '...naturally raises in people's minds the question

¹⁵⁴ AIR 19/849, Dean to Powell, 14 March 1957.

¹⁵⁵ AIR 19/849, Broadbent to Ward, 14 March 1957.

¹⁵⁶ AIR 8/2156, Earle to Boyle, 26 March 1957.

¹⁵⁷ Cmd. 124, op.cit. , para. 44.

¹⁵⁸ AIR 8/2157, Ward to Sandys, 16 April 1957.

whether three separate Service Departments continue to be needed...'.¹⁵⁹ Boyle, for one, was reportedly extremely angry, but was told that the

VCAS is convinced that (short of [Ward] resigning) nothing anyone in the Air Ministry could have said would have had the smallest effect on Mr. Sandys' determination to speak as he had originally planned.¹⁶⁰

Shortly after the publication of the White Paper, Macmillan wrote to Sandys and told him to begin pushing ahead with the issue of service integration. While the separate traditions of the services would be retained, there would be functional integration of headquarters, administration and policy control.¹⁶¹ Both Sandys and Macmillan agreed that they '...could best make progress by working out an outline plan for the creation of a single department of defence organisation united on a functional basis'.¹⁶² It was Sandys's view that given service resistance to a degradation of their powers, it would be best to proceed functionally.¹⁶³ A Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Norman Brook on defence integration was set-up and Sandys pressed for a quick

¹⁵⁹ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 568, col. 1773, 16 April 1957.

¹⁶⁰ AIR 8/2157, Dean to Boyle, 16 April 1957. Boyle's anger was also due to Sandys's failure to comply with Air Ministry demands that his statement on the role of the RAF be strengthened.

¹⁶¹ PREM 11/1779, Macmillan to Sandys, 16 May 1957.

¹⁶² PREM 11/1779, Macmillan to Brook - undated.

¹⁶³ PREM 11/1779, Brook to Sandys, 14 May 1957.

study with the results to be announced in the 1958 White Paper.¹⁶⁴

This was explained to the Chiefs and service heads on 23 May¹⁶⁵ and aside from Dickson and Mountbatten, it was bitterly opposed by those present.¹⁶⁶ Sandys agreed to the demand that he include in his speech in the Commons the statement that 'the separate traditions and esprit de corps of the services must be preserved', but added that he would only be prepared to make such a statement if he could announce at the same time that the government was examining higher defence structures.¹⁶⁷ Sandys's unquestioned intention was to make explicit his goal of unifying the services under a strong Ministry of Defence - exactly the opposite of what the services were attempting to do through their stress on 'separate traditions'. Selkirk, for example, summed up many of the department's fears when in a letter to Sandys on 26 May he stated that

The integrated Ministry of Defence envisaged in the Prime-minister's minute might or might not be literally all-embracing; but I should have thought that it would involve a real danger of imposing on the Services an amorphous and impersonal overlordship which would make it hard for them to preserve their sense of separate identity.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ AIR 8/2156, Dean to Ward, 21 May 1957.

¹⁶⁵ PREM 11/1779, Brook to Macmillan, 23 May 1957.

¹⁶⁶ PREM 11/1779, Jones to Sandys, 29 May 1957.

¹⁶⁷ AIR 2/14712, Broadbent to Ward, 22 May 1957.

¹⁶⁸ AIR 2/14712, Selkirk to Sandys, 26 May 1957.

This view was supported by both Ward and Hare. Hare warned against undertaking any radical organisational changes in the context of the alterations in force posture announced by the White Paper. He was unequivocal that '[i]f we try to cross a turbulent stream and to take the horses to pieces half way we shall drown'.¹⁶⁹ The Air Ministry preferred to focus on their own Hudleston Report on future defence organisation which had as its centrepiece the statement that there was '...an overwhelming case for retaining separate services'.¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, Sandys had support from the Directors of Plans who, on 8 May, submitted a paper on defence organisation in which they recommended that there was a requirement for a common defence budget from which there would flow greater efficiency and economy and that '...a defence organisation centralised in the ministry of defence should be established and that the Admiralty, the War Office and the Air Ministry as independent departments of state should cease to exist'.¹⁷¹

Deadlock ensued and in June Sir Norman Brook attempted to mediate between the parties in this new crisis by writing to Macmillan that the cause of the problem was that the department had only accepted his 18 January directive as a temporary arrangement. If some further changes had to be made

¹⁶⁹ PREM 11/1779, Hare to Macmillan, 4 June 1957.

¹⁷⁰ AIR 8/2156, Report of a Working Party on Future Organisation of the Defence Services, 19 May 1957; also see AIR 8/2156, Conclusions of Air Council Meeting, 22 May 1957.

¹⁷¹ DEFE 4/65, JP (57) Note 4, 8 May 1957.

to defence organisation '...it was doubtful whether this ought to take the form of strengthening the authority of the Minister of Defence still further at the expense of the Service Ministers'.¹⁷² Tensions between Sandys and the Chiefs of Staff Committee reached new heights and Brook was forced to tell the Prime Minister that

...I hope you will be able to see [the Chiefs] alone, without the Minister of Defence. They would, I am sure appreciate this: they will speak to you more frankly: and I think you will find it easier to carry them along if you see them alone.¹⁷³

Macmillan met the Chiefs on 20 June and soon thereafter wrote to Sandys that he would make a statement later that month stressing that the identity of the three services would be retained.¹⁷⁴ This did not undercut the Prime Minister nor the Minister of Defence's desire to weaken the services relative to the Ministry of Defence. From what it is possible to discern from the documents, Macmillan's statement tended to calm service apprehensions and the issue faded into the background to be revised one more in the June 1958 White Paper on 'Central Organisation For Defence'.¹⁷⁵ Discussions of far more significance during the second half of 1957 centred on the future role of the Navy, the deployment of the reduced Army and the make-up of Britain's nuclear deterrent force. All

¹⁷² PREM 11/1779, Brook to Macmillan, 25 June 1957.

¹⁷³ PREM 11/1779, Brook to Macmillan, 3 June 1957.

¹⁷⁴ PREM 11/1779, Macmillan to Sandys, 2 July 1957; also see Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 574, col. 223, 23 July 1957.

¹⁷⁵ Central Organisation For Defence, Cmd. 476, HMSO, 1958.

parties, however, were well aware that Sandys had set in motion a review whose ultimate result would be the reorganisation of Britain's decision making process. Sandys, as usual ignored service complaints and sought to create a permanent organisational set-up that would give him, and those that followed on in his position, greater influence over defence decision making. It was only in this manner that the goals of the 1957 White Paper could be secured.

Conclusion

By terminating national service, Sandys had altered the balance between nuclear and conventional firepower and not only on the declaratory level. The proposed force structure embodied in the paragraphs of the 1957 White Paper reflected a strategic coherence that was lacking in defence policies prior to 1957. The paper represented a shift away from an attachment to multiple capabilities to a greater emphasis on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces. In this sense it was internally consistent. Consequently, it can be argued that the 1957 White Paper was truly the British New Look.

It must be recognised that the shift away from conventional forces was primarily a result of a conscious effort by Sandys to reduce manpower and secure savings. Indeed, he often appears to have approached the problem independently of an overall strategic conception with the conventional and the

nuclear components of strategy not related other than in an implicit manner. Thus, the achievement of a strategically consistent balance between a declaratory stress on nuclear deterrence and a cutback in conventional global war preparations was as much a result of economic as strategic reasoning.

The British New Look can be seen to consist of two distinct features: (1) the balance between conventional and nuclear forces; and (2) a focus on the deterrent itself. When placed in the context of British strategic planning during the 1955-57 period, it is possible to note that on the level of declaratory policy there is a shift in degree to greater emphasis on the deterrent half of the conventional-deterrent balance and a shift in degree to greater emphasis on the national aspects of the deterrent. The documents concerning the 1957 White Paper negotiations reveal that there is a continuity between the immediate pre-1957 period and 1957 but this continuity seems to be reflected in continued ambiguity as to the actual (as opposed to declaratory) purposes of the deterrent and not in a steady move to a 'unilateral independent' nuclear force. On the level of manpower, Sandys's breakthrough was much more revolutionary in nature. Although there had long been a desire to reduce manpower and terminate nationals service, only Sandys managed to do this and achieve it in short shift. Here, the basis for discontinuities in policies were laid. These two assertions will be investigated in greater depth in the next two chapters.

Finally, it should be noted, that Sandys's success in undermining the basis of multiple capabilities and radically altering British force posture was the product of both Macmillan's 18 January directive and his own decision making style. Sandys ignored service hesitations and when he compromised it was over wording and not over substance. The pleas of the Chiefs not to reduce forces below 450,000 went unheeded, and where there was ambiguity - such as with regard to the future of the Navy and future organisation for defence decision making - these were but temporary respites in Sandys's attempts to impose both economic and strategic discipline upon the various service departments. As Liddell Hart told the Minister of Defence, his task was to tackle 'vested interests in vanished dreams',¹⁷⁶ and this Sandys succeeded in doing where others before him had faltered.

¹⁷⁶ Liddell Hart Library, Liddell Hart Papers, 1/621, Liddell Hart to Sandys 1/621, 14 February 1957.

CHAPTER SIX

INDEPENDENT DETERRENCE AND THE QUESTION OF CONTINUITY

Introduction

Arguments in the secondary literature for the case of strategic continuity in the pre- and immediate post- 1957 periods rest on the assumption of Britain's inexorable move towards an independent deterrent force posture.¹ In Chapter Four, however, it was argued that while the RAF was motivated primarily by the more limited vision of an independent British counterforce capability acting under the umbrella of joint allied missions (what can be termed 'independence in concert'), when it came to determining V-bomber procurement, the Eden administration seemed more concerned with economic objectives than with the requirements of even this very qualified definition of independence. Here the government's approach reflected a readiness to rely less on an independent strategic posture - what this thesis terms 'unilateral independence' - and more on SAC's deterrent and operational power. Consequently, debate centred implicitly and explicitly on the degree to which concert should be pursued and not the principle of concert itself.

¹ See Chapter One

Against this background, if government statements in 1957 on British independent deterrence are taken at face value, then - declaratory continuity aside - 1957 seems a greater strategic turning point than has generally been acknowledged. Yet, the previous chapter has argued that during the 1957 White Paper discussions, Sandys and Macmillan expressed attachment to the concept of operations in concert with the United States. In this sense, little had changed over the 1955-7 period. Thus, the case for discontinuity in the period under study must fall back on a demonstration that somewhere outside the White Paper discussions, or sometime between the publication of Cmd. 124 and the end of the year, a move away from a primary focus of basing nuclear strategy on operations in alliance towards that of a unilateral operational stance took place. If this is revealed, then 1957 can certainly be regarded as a watershed in British nuclear strategic planning. If it cannot, then the case for continuity is reaffirmed, but a continuity based on concepts of joint allied planning rather than a consistent move to a unilateral deterrent posture.

(1) The Context Of Atlantic Co-operation: The Basis For Independence Or Interdependence ?

The Suez debacle highlighted most acutely the problems of independent British military and political action and brought to the fore debates as to the role of Britain in her relation to both the United States and Western Europe. It appears that for Prime Minister Macmillan, while the requirements of

domestic politics and international prestige called for a declaratory emphasis on Britain's independent role, the exigencies of Britain's economic and military vulnerabilities pointed to the need for greater co-operation with the United States.²

The documents reveal that this was not a view unique to the new Prime Minister. On 1 January, the British Ambassador in Washington, Sir Harold Caccia, wrote to Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd that

I assume it to be our object to re-establish our relations [with the US] on their previous footing and to recover all of our special position. While the Communist threat remains, nothing else makes sense, in dealing with a country whose power is likely to increase in relation to our own.³

Churchill and Eisenhower were at this time also exchanging letters expressing their concerns about the need to improve co-operation and their - in Churchill's words - 'unfaltering conviction, that the theme of the Anglo-American alliance is more important to day that at any time since the war'.⁴ The recognition that there was a need for Anglo-American co-ordination as opposed to independent action was thus widespread. Consequently, prior to Sandys's visit to Washington in January, he was informed by Selwyn Lloyd not to

² For an overview of the Anglo-American relationship see John Baylis, Anglo-American Defence Relations 1939-84: The Special Relationship (London, 1984).

³ PREM 11/2189, Caccia to Lloyd, AU 1051/53, 1 January 1957.

⁴ Baylis op.cit. , pp. 88-89

appear too anxious in securing American goodwill, but also to be careful so as not to appear overly resentful with regard to past American actions.⁵ The image of independence was to be fostered, but the goal was to be the provision of American Thor missiles, the further amendment of the McMahon Act and an improved appreciation by the United States of Britain's global position.

It is evident that the climate was not one in which Britain was seeking to stress its independence from Washington. By the end of January relations had improved so dramatically that on the 29th of that month Macmillan was able to inform the Cabinet that he had been invited by President Eisenhower to meet in Bermuda and that '...the invitation was a welcome sign that the United States government were now prepared to resume friendly relations with this country...'⁶. It was Sir Harold Caccia's view that the meeting would provide the impetus needed to reinvigorate the alliance,⁷ and indeed, Macmillan wrote back to the Cabinet from the conference that Eisenhower appeared to be 'genuinely anxious' to restore the traditional relationship between the United States and Britain.⁸ In his opening statement to the conference Macmillan stressed that no

⁵ FO 371/126707, Logan to Forward, 23 January 1957.

⁶ CAB 128/31, CC 4 (57) 8, 29 January 1957; also see CAB 128/31, CC 10 (57) 3, 11 February 1957.

⁷ FO 371/126684, Caccia to Foreign Office, No. 309, 11 February 1957.

⁸ CAB 128/31, CC 22 (57) 3, 22 March 1957.

single country alone could defeat communism, while Eisenhower in his statement maintained that the object now '...was to strengthen to the greatest extent the closest co-operation between the two countries'.⁹

The steady improvement of relations during 1957 meant that following the Soviet launch of Sputnik in October,¹⁰ the United States and Britain could push ahead with further co-operation in the fields of weapons systems and nuclear energy.¹¹ Prior to Macmillan's meeting with Eisenhower in October 1957, Powell told the Chiefs that future Anglo-American relations would be based on: (1) closer consultation and co-ordinated action in military, political and economic fields; (2) the sharing of information on the availability of nuclear and other modern weapons; and (3) improvements in other efforts such as balanced collective forces.¹² Macmillan, in turn, informed the Cabinet that his objective in the forthcoming discussions would be to broaden the repeal of the McMahon Act so that the technical resources of both countries might be organised to '...effect a genuine policy of collective defence and that the

⁹ PREM 11/1838, BC (P) 1st, 21 March 1957

¹⁰ For US attempts to get Britain to launch her own satellite the following year see NA, RG 59, 741.56301/9-2558, Discussion between Murphy and Powell, 25 September 1958. For UK rejection and its expression of the need to examine '...just how such a venture would relate to basic decisions now being taken regarding the future of an independent UK ballistic missile' see NA, RG 59, 741.56301/10-1558, US Assistance for UK Satellite Launching, 15 October 1958.

¹¹ Macmillan, op.cit., p. 334.

¹² DEFE 4/101, COS 81 (57), 21 October 1957.

demands on our economy might be reduced'.¹³ Clearly, by the end of the year, co-operation and not independence remained the key word.

In any event, if the procurement of a force posture so as to enable large scale independent military action was the main objective of British policy-makers, then there was little sense in cutting back on conventional forces. For many, the lessons of Suez did not point to cuts in manpower and conventional capabilities and an increased focus on the deterrent. For example, even as strong a supporter of the deterrent as Sir John Slessor was of the opinion that '...the aftermath of Egypt is going to mean that it will not be easy to reduce our real fighting strength probably for years to come'.¹⁴ Yet, these ideas could not be squared with Macmillan and Sandys's thinking which in the post-Suez environment was strongly influenced by the perceived necessity of tackling economic issues (a tendency exemplified in the White Paper discussions) and questions of prestige.

While economic concerns militated against too strong a conventional force focus, nuclear weapons touched at the heart of questions of status. Thus, for Caccia, for whom the United Kingdom's international prestige seems to have been a major goal, Britain's acceptance as a great power now rested to a

¹³ CAB 128/31, CC 74 (57) 2, 21 October 1957.

¹⁴ Liddell Hart Library, Julian Amery Papers, Slessor to Hoare Belisha, 8 December 1956.

large extent on having a military nuclear programme.¹⁵ The Ambassador also seems to have recognised that prestige necessitated a greater co-operation with the most powerful country in the world - a co-operation that would be enhanced once Britain demonstrated her ability to produce a wide-range of nuclear weapons including the H-bomb. Clearly, he was confusing objectives of nuclear independence and interdependence. Indeed, the prestige argument took Caccia a step further to argue that nuclear weapons were necessary because Britain might find herself standing alone against the Soviet Union:

Apart from these considerations our recent experience over Suez also brings out [the] danger involved if we are ever to leave our nuclear protection to the United States alone and the price to the United States were a risk of Soviet retaliation against them.¹⁶

Yet, it is significant to note that, despite Caccia's expressed concerns, in the wake of the Suez crisis the perceived need for acquiring a 'standing alone' capability was not regarded as important as the need to address economic and political vulnerabilities through greater co-ordination and co-operation with Washington. This point was clearly brought out at an oral history conference on the 1957 White Paper held at King's College London, in July 1988 where participants were unequivocal in minimising the significance

¹⁵ FO 371/126682, Caccia to Foreign Office, No. 3, 1 January 1957.

¹⁶ Ibid.

of British isolation from the United States in the face of Soviet nuclear threats:

Question: How seriously was the risk of nuclear blackmail taken in the aftermath of the Suez crisis ?

Sir Richard Powell: (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence) Not in my recollection.

Sir Richard Way: (Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Defence) No.

Powell: No, we felt that Russian policy was essentially a defensive policy, and not a blackmailing or offensive policy.

Question: Did Bulganin's nuclear threat leave any impression at all ?

Way: I would have thought that Suez made no difference at all.

Powell: I don't think so.¹⁷

Thus, while the 'standing alone hypothesis' was stressed on the declaratory level as a rationale for a British independent nuclear capability,¹⁸ it was not regarded as a major objective nor, as noted in the previous chapter, overemphasised on the operational level where combined planning remained the primary goal. Macmillan, of course, clouded the issue when on 27 February he had told the Defence Committee that Britain should seek to attain 'independent deterrent influence'. However,

¹⁷ Conference held in the Department of War Studies, King's College London on The Sandys White Paper of 1957, 1 July 1988.

¹⁸ See Sandys's speech in the House of Commons during the 1957 White Paper Defence debate in Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 568, cols. 1758 - 1878, 16 April 1957 and cols. 1930 - 2059, 17 April 1957.

when rooted in the context of discussions in 1957, what the Prime Minister was expressing was his interest in 'influencing' the Soviet Union to desist from attacks on the UK and 'influencing' the Americans to co-operate more fully with Britain's strategic planning. The former type of influence addressed issues of prestige (in that Britain could be seen as a world power intent upon independently deterring the Soviet Union) without the necessity of relating declaratory policy very closely to actual intent (the Soviets could never be certain whether Britain would use her nuclear weapons independently of the Americans); while the latter form of influence sought to make certain that in the event of western resolve actually being tested, America's fate would be closely bound-up with that of Britain's.

In the wake of the Suez crisis Macmillan seems to have been most interested in using the deterrent as an incentive for further American co-operation through which, in the final analysis, both deterrence and joint operational planning would be strengthened. It was all well and good to speak of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent capabilities, but in a time of real crisis, American deterrent and war fighting capabilities would be what was needed. Here, the existence of a British independent nuclear force was not insignificant as it could not be ignored by American policy-makers who would have to find some way of integrating it into American strategic planning. This definition of independence was indirectly but clearly recognised by the Directors of Plans in

October 1957 when they maintained that what Britain was seeking was an Anglo-American global understanding similar to that which had existed during the Second World War. In this regard it was important to recognise that Britain's importance in American eyes derived from her nuclear weapons rather than her conventional forces which were being run down in line with the policies announced in the White Paper.¹⁹

It was this understanding of Britain's intentions that allowed the US to view statements on independence with some equanimity. For example, in May 1957, a British representative at the Western European Union, stated that Eisenhower felt that the White Paper '...represents an effort to bring our military establishment into line with the military facts of today'.²⁰ Privately, the Americans recognised that there was a wide gap between declaratory and action policy, that there was a realisation in London that '...the UK [was] no longer able to [be] an independent military power [and that]...this means, though not so stated, acceptance [of a] supplementary role in collective defence under US leadership'.²¹ Consequently, following the October Washington summit, Macmillan reported that he and Eisenhower had concluded that no country could face the communist menace alone and that the

¹⁹ DEFE 6/48, JP (57), Note 12, 21 October 1957.

²⁰ ADM 205/114, Meade to Foreign Office, No. 29, 6 May 1957; also see FO 371/126684, Caccia to Foreign Office, No. 1846, 14 September 1957.

²¹ NA, RG 59, 741.5/4-957, No. 5488, Whitney to Dulles, 9 April 1957.

'"Declaration of Common Purpose" agreed to with the Americans...was in effect a declaration of inter-dependence'.²²

The Suez crisis therefore informed upon a major reassessment of Britain's strategic policy, but this was expressed differently on the levels of declaratory and action policy. For reasons of international prestige, party politics and the more specific need of seeking to address any future Anglo-American split, Britain's independence was stressed, an independence which for strong economic reasons had to be framed in nuclear deterrent terms rather than those of conventional power. However, on the level of actual foreign policy, the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Foreign Secretary, were unequivocal in their search for greater American co-operation. This reflected their view that in the new strategic environment of the post Suez world - an environment in which the limitations of British power were more than ever apparent - Britain's defence interests would best be served by rapprochement with the Americans and co-ordination with that country's military and political might. By so doing, economic imperatives could be addressed while the inevitable negative military consequences of financial cutbacks would be ameliorated. Independence would of course have to be subordinated, declaratory intent notwithstanding. When viewed against the backdrop of pre-1957 attempts to

²² CAB 128/31, CC 76 (57) 2, 28 October 1957; also see Eisenhower Library, Telephone calls of John Foster Dulles, Smith to Dulles, 24 October 1957.

integrate nuclear planning with the United States, and the omniscience of the theme of the 'special relationship' in the decade following the end of World War Two, qualitatively little had changed.

(2) Problems of Independence on the Level of Control, Procurement and Targeting

It is important to recognise that British intentions were very much obscured by ambiguities which derived from the clash of declaratory and action policies and the disjuncture between various declaratory statements themselves. For example, not only did Macmillan's private admission that Britain would never use nuclear weapons independently of the United States jar with the implications of paragraph 15 of the White Paper²³, but, in a sense, so did the Declaration of Common Purpose of October 1957 which had emphasised co-operation at the expense of independence. Thirty years later, at the Sandys White Paper Conference, policy-makers involved in planning during 1957 still expressed some confusion as to what Britain's objectives were in terms of the balance between independence from and co-operation with the United States. Yet, the argument that during 1957 Britain was primarily interested in strategic co-ordination with the United States rather than 'unilateral independence' can be challenged, at least with the claim that the ambivalences outweighed any clear push for a coherent

²³ See previous chapter.

strategy - in this case a strategy based on co-ordination with the Americans. Consequently, it becomes necessary to generate evidence for the contention of this thesis from another level of policy - this time from the operational level. The central question now becomes whether the manner by which Britain addressed the issues of targeting, control and procurement of her nuclear forces can support a argument that independent deterrence was subordinated to the attractions of alliance planning ?

(A) Targeting and Independence

The first point to note is that in the 1957 papers it is possible to see an increasing interest in the concept of countervalue attacks - an interest that is not apparent in the documents available for the years 1955-56. Thus, in May 1957, the Air Ministry - in comparing the merits of the Mark 1 and Mark 2 V-bombers - included in its assumptions a potential set of targets in the Soviet Union consisting of 98 major centres of administration and industry with a population exceeding 100,000 within a radius of 2100 nautical miles of the East Anglia air force bases.²⁴

²⁴ AIR 2/14699, Memo by R.C. Kent, 23 May 1957. Participants at the Kings Conference on the Sandys White Paper were adamant that 98 countervalue targets was in excess of anything that Britain was independently targeting at this time. The amount of Soviet cities targeted by the nuclear force remains classified but taking a figure of approximately 100 Mark 2 V-bombers (the number decided upon in 1957 to be procured) and using the RAFs own reliability figures of approximately 70% and an expected penetration rate of 50%, the figure of 35 targets is reached. As Soviet air defences improved the penetration rate would inevitably decrease and

This focus on countervalue objectives seems also to have been reflected in a paper delivered to the Defence Committee by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook , on the subject of expanding Britain's capacity for the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. In it he stated a requirement for '... about [a] 100 megaton weapons for strategic use...'²⁵ (While 'strategic use' was not defined in Brook 's paper, it is possible, in the light of the meaning attached to the word during the Second World War, to interpret it as counter-city targeting. In any event, megaton weapons seemed especially suited to this task). Finally, in October 1957, the Air Ministry seems to have taken the next step when they presented a paper on the 'Strategic Target Policy of Bomber Command' in which - according to Mountbatten - the impression was given

even this number of targets would be difficult to attack. At the Sandys White Paper Conference, it was pointed out that Britain's original countercity target set (number undisclosed) was reduced. It was implied that this took place prior to the end of 1959. Sir Richard Way mentioned the new figure of 10 targets and Sir Richard Powell concurred.

²⁵ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 14, 27 July 1957. In this paper Brook admitted that no precise estimate could be made as to Britain's ultimate requirement of fissile material '...partly because we do not yet know the amount or type (plutonium or U.235) of material which will be needed for each weapon and partly because we have not finally determined the total of nuclear weapons which will be needed to implement our defence policy'. This, however, did not prevent Brook from demanding the construction of a new diffusion plant because '[t]he effective measure of our authority as a world power, is, however, our stock of fissile material. At present we are still only a potential nuclear power. We shall not retain our influence in world affairs unless we go forward and turn potentiality into reality'. Here Brook was agreeing with Caccia's reasoning for seeking an independent nuclear capability.

that in the event of the UK being forced to take unilateral retaliatory action against the Soviet Union '...we could quickly break the Russian will to continue war'.²⁶

Concomitantly, during 1957 it is possible to note a steady progression from a focus on counterforce attacks to an emphasis on a independent countervalue capability. The declaratory stress in the 1957 White Paper on an independent deterrent stance was by the end of the year apparently accompanied by such an operational posture. This certainly helps support an interpretation that the declaratory focus on independence was more than simply a cloak for the less exciting and prestigious goals of deterrence in alliance and independence in concert. Likewise, it serves to undercut one of the central contentions of this thesis that is that over the 1955-57 period continuity in policy is reflected in continuity in the British attachment to the concept of joint allied planning.

Of course, the existence of plans for 'unilateral retaliatory action' is not in itself surprising. It is to be expected that planning for all sorts of contingencies existed and that unilateral independent action based on countervalue attacks was one of them. The question is whether this was thought the most likely contingency to which all else must be

²⁶ DEFE 4/100, COS 78 (57) 3 discussion of COS (57) 208 (closed) and COS 1546/8/10/57, 15 October 1957.

subordinated, and whether plans for such a possibility were determining the procurement and structuring of Britain's nuclear force ?

Participants in the King's conference on the Sandys White Paper seemed agreed that a national targeting plan was in existence at this time, though exactly when one began to be laid out was unspecified. According to Sir Richard Way, this consisted of ten cities of which he mentioned Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev. The point is, however, that there was concurrence with T.C.G. James's claim that the national targeting plan was a '...plan of last resort'. Indeed, according to James, '[w]e never had exaggerated ideas of what the deterrent could do to Russia. I don't think there is ever any question of the UK deterrent being capable of the total devastation of the Soviet Union'.²⁷ Despite the fact that there was as yet not the means to implement such a policy, it is possible that an independent national targeting plan had been in existence for some years before 1957 (thereby negating any claim that 1957 represented a turning point in this respect), but it appears that at no time was this considered the most likely contingency and the prime objective to which end British policy should be aimed and nuclear force procurement based. Indeed, in the October discussion of the paper 'Strategic Target Policy for Bomber Command', Mountbatten objected to the inclusion in this paper of the 'highly

²⁷ Kings Conference on the Sandys White Paper, op.cit.

improbable' course of unilateral action and the impression that Britain could deliver a decisive blow against the Soviet Union. The CAS, Sir Dermot Boyle, remained adamant that Bomber Command's force should not be underestimated and even acting unilaterally, would be able to inflict severe damage to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, he admitted that this blow would not necessarily be decisive and he was anxious to continue planning with the Americans.²⁸ Thus, evidently, not only did the Navy object to independent action, but the Air Ministry appeared ready to subordinate such a contingency to the vital goal of co-ordination with the United States.

Indeed, in terms of targeting and war planning, joint operations remained the first priority. One of the first tasks Sandys undertook - even before he began work on the White Paper - was to ratify an agreement with the Americans on joint targeting. It was made clear at the King's Conference on the White Paper that throughout 1957 Britain was working towards a joint targeting plan with the Americans.²⁹ Within the context of this planning, British independence was defined by her retention of a specific target set which would be attacked by

²⁸ DEFE 4/100, COS 78 (57) 3, Discussion of COS (57) 208, 15 October 1957.

²⁹ Ibid. Work was certainly slow and in August the Air Council reported that they were as yet unsure how many strikes the UK would have to make against Soviet targets as they were still waiting for progress in talks with the Americans. AIR 2/14699, Air Council Paper on V-Bomber Force, 16 August 1957.

British aircraft in the first wave of joint allied strikes on the Soviet Union.³⁰

Again, parallel to this interest in 'independence in concert', remained the subordinate sub-theme of a capability for unilateral independent action based on countervalue strikes. Its increasing prominence in 1957 is explained less by the interpretations of the implications of the Suez crisis than by the Air Ministry's recognition of the potential availability of megaton weapons, its growing appreciation of the decrease in accuracy that would follow from the ultimate replacement of gravity bombs with the Blue Steel stand-off missile, and fear of improving Soviet anti-aircraft defences.³¹ The two latter points underlined the difficulties of implementing a limited counterforce strike against even those targets judged to be most threatening to Britain, while the former opened up the possibility for highly destructive counter-city targeting.³²

Furthermore, it appears that this imperative to shift from counterforce to countervalue targeting began to inform upon not only the contingency plan related to the unlikely event of unilateral retaliatory response but also to the more likely eventuality of joint allied nuclear assaults. Sir Richard Powell was adamant that during this period targeting was

³⁰ King's Conference on the Sandys White Paper, op.cit.

³¹ See AIR 2/14699, Memo by R.C.Kent, 23 May 1957.

³² See Chapter Five.

related to city and not military sites.³³ Nevertheless, given that British aircraft would make up the first wave of a joint allied assault, it is not unreasonable to assume that targeting here was suppressive in nature and included those types of targets most threatening to the United Kingdom. After all, Bomber Command could add little to SAC's capability for destroying urban-industrial areas and the problems of different targeting priorities between British and American planners remained independently of the size of Britain's nuclear deterrent, accuracy of her weapon systems, or the growth of Soviet air defences.

In returning to the theme of continuity and discontinuity across the 1955-57 period, it is possible to note that there are elements of both these tendencies in relation to British nuclear strategic planning. On the level of targeting, 1957 definitely saw a major shift towards countervalue objectives. On the other hand, on the more significant level of the purposes of that deterrent force in terms of the priorities accorded various strategic plans, it appears that continuity was the most persistent theme with deterrence in alliance and independence in concert remaining predominant over plans for unilateral retaliatory action. Here, the influence of Duncan Sandys is more acutely felt as the Minister of Defence, together with the Prime Minister, strongly emphasised the American nuclear strategic connection at the expense of other

³³ Conference on Sandys White Paper, op.cit.

strategic options. It was, after all, in the wider context of British strategic planning that targeting had to be grounded and Sandys and Macmillan were adamant that Britain's defence in the post-Suez world should be inextricably bound-up with the United States's nuclear capability. This attitude is further revealed in the progress of negotiations over the deployment of American Thor Ballistic Missiles in Britain.

(B) THE PROBLEMS OF THOR AND BLUE STREAK

The issues of US missile deployment in Britain and the future of Britain's indigenous surface to surface missile force were inextricably bound-up with the purposes of Britain's nuclear deterrent power. The debate as it unfolded in 1957 revealed the underlying tensions within the defence establishment over the degree of independence to be pursued and the role of nuclear weapons in the context of Anglo-American relations.

Prior to Sandys's visit to Washington in January 1957, the Secretary of State for Air, George Ward, wrote the Minister a letter in which he expressed the basic dilemmas underlying the question of UK missile deployment. Ward was of the opinion that Sandys should aim at getting further American help in developing Blue Streak (in furtherance of the Sandys-Wilson agreement of 1953) but must insist on retaining both technical and operational independence. Technical independence would, of course, be compromised by the fact that it was technical assistance which was being requested from the Americans in the

first place - though it was implied that this 'independence' could begin once the transfer was complete.³⁴ On the question of operational independence, Ward had addressed the central question of an independent British nuclear deterrent because without operational independence, 'unilateral independence' as well as the more limited 'independence in concert' was severely compromised.

When it came to the possibility of US Thor deployments in Britain (discussions had been going on since the previous year), Ward told Sandys that if the Americans offered him these missiles, they should be accepted but '... so far as any quid pro quo is invited, this should be limited to our agreement to making this country available as a base for their deployment'.³⁵ Ward was concerned that Britain should steer well away from agreements that would curtail the British right to use these weapons independently - though whether he was referring to 'independence in concert' or 'unilateral independence' or both is unclear.

Sandys, however, viewed the situation in a different light. It seems that for him, operational independence was far less important an issue than that of solidifying Anglo-American co-operation. He was not prepared to risk the chance of securing such an agreement over the issue of total independent

³⁴ AIR 2/14712, Ward to Sandys, 25 January 1957.

³⁵ Ibid.

British control - an issue that would have been at odds with the McMahon Act's requirement that American nuclear weapons remain under American control.

It was thus agreed between Wilson and Sandys in January that in view of the importance of deploying a ballistic missile deterrent at the earliest possible date, a crash programme would take place which would involve the establishment in the United Kingdom of one experimental squadron of five missiles. If this was agreed to by higher authorities, these missiles would be deployed at an American air base in the United Kingdom by July 1958. The squadron would be both fully paid for and manned by the United States. Thereafter, four regular sites would be deployed as rapidly as possible (and the experimental station disbanded). The first two of these bases would be built by the United States and manned by the Americans and be ready by 1959. The United Kingdom would also construct two such sites to be manned by British personnel.³⁶ The warheads would, at both types of bases, be held by the United States (though in the latter two sites British personnel would control the missiles) and a joint decision would be needed if the weapons were to be used. Thus, the United States effectively exercised a veto over independent British control of the missiles. While questions of command and control had yet to be finalised (the agreement still had to be ratified) the trend seemed to be away from total British

³⁶ AIR 2/14712, Wilson to Sandys, 1 February 1957.

independence in these two areas.

The subordination of total independent British control of Thor to joint administration in the Sandys-Wilson discussions of January 1957 was implicitly reaffirmed at the Bermuda conference of March 1957.³⁷ Indeed, Macmillan's interpretation of the agreement reflected his concern not for independence but for co-operation. On 24 March, when asked for his views on the significance of the agreement to deploy US missiles in Britain, he replied that

It is important for two reasons. First, on...the technical side it gives us the advantage of protection which we could not get by other means - the deterrent. Second, because it is a symbol of co-operation, because it allows us to turn some of our research development and production to other valuable defence projects instead of trying merely to duplicate and run along parallel with what the United States has already done. So that I think it is important in itself to harmonize our work together, and this is one of the first results of such harmonization.³⁸

The emphasis here was on co-operation and economy not independence. Ward's advice seemed to have been roundly ignored.

³⁷ See Library of Congress, Declassified Documents 1986, Microfiche No.000728, Bermuda Meeting, March 21-23. For US perspectives on lagging British missile developments see NA, RG 59, 741.5612, Summary of discussions amongst Service Representatives and Embassy officials on UK Guided missile developments in the UK, 14 February 1957.

³⁸ PREM 11/1837, Final Communique from the Bermuda Conference, 25 March 1957.

Not surprisingly, the Air Ministry expressed ambivalence about accepting the Thors. On one level, they supported the plan to acquire the missiles because it was agreed that they would contribute significantly to the western deterrent and give the RAF experience with the use of missiles. On the other hand, the Air Ministry was uncertain about the question of the manufacture of British warheads and their relation to the question of the independent use of these missiles, and they were also concerned about the implications of this Thor deployment on the Blue Streak programme. The Air Ministry went on to question whether the Thor agreement would have a positive influence on the independence of the British deterrent.³⁹ Also, in view of the fact that the Thors would ultimately cost Britain £12 million, require a manpower of 3000 men and that '[The missiles] would be useless to the Americans if sited in the United States...',⁴⁰ it was the opinion of Permanent Under Secretary of State for Air Maurice Dean, that Britain should attempt to drive a hard bargain with the Americans over Thor deployments.⁴¹ What would constitute a hard bargain was left unstated, although clearly - given Air Ministry reservations over the Thor deployment issue - it included not just economic factors but also issues of independent command and control. Certainly, there were those

³⁹ AIR 2/14712, 3 May 1957.

⁴⁰ AIR 19/856, 12 March 1957. According to T.C.G. James, the RAF was also concerned that the Thor Missiles were as yet not a fully tested weapon system. Interview, 30 June 1958.

⁴¹ AIR 2/14712, Dean to Powell, 12 March 1957.

in the Air Ministry who argued that Thor not be procured at any price.⁴²

The problem, of course, reflected the different conceptions of the Air Ministry, on the one hand, and Sandys and Macmillan on the other, over the significance of the deterrent in the context of Anglo-American relations. For, while Sandys and the Prime Minister sought the twin goals of solidifying the relationship through strengthening Britain's deterrent and strengthening the deterrent so as to solidify the relationship, the Air Ministry seemed to take the declaratory emphasis on independent deterrence at face value. Whether Britain ultimately sought to pursue a policy of 'unilateral independence' or 'independence in concert', the Air Ministry seems to have recognised that at root rested the issues of independent command, control and targeting. Sandys did not share this concern to the same extent and in a meeting at the end of May of a special cabinet sub-committee on the British nuclear deterrent - GEN 570 - the Minister of Defence did not appear overly concerned about altering the terms of the draft agreement. He stressed that the maintenance of the American veto over the use of the missiles, even if they were fitted with British warheads, was not of great importance since it was doubtful '...that we should in fact think it profitable to develop British warheads for Americans missiles which by that time would be regarded as obsolescent'.⁴³ In short, the

⁴² AIR 2/14712, Memo by Broadbent, 12 March 1957.

⁴³ CAB 130/122, GEN 570/2nd meeting, minute 2, 30 May

Minister was willing to live with a situation which ran counter to the principles of total independence. His lack of concern reflected the fact that such a capability was never his primary objective.

Nevertheless, Sandys had, in his correspondence with the Americans, pushed the point of independent British control of the missiles once the United Kingdom had replaced American warheads for Thor with ones of her own manufacture. The Minister of Defence maintained that Dulles and Wilson had accepted such a British proposal and this had been written up in a letter, a draft of which had been sent to Wilson. Unfortunately, this letter had not been acknowledged. The sub-committee then agreed that

Since it was doubtful whether the Americans could now be persuaded categorically to agree that we could use any missiles supplied by them, whether of the present or of later types, except by joint agreement [it is concluded] that this issue not be raised in the context of the main Agreement and that we should let the matter rest on the non-repudiation of the letter which had been sent.⁴⁴

Surely, if Sandys's main objective was the creation of a truly independent deterrent, then a matter as important as independent command and control could not be left hanging in the air on the basis of a non-repudiation of a letter ? Only if the Minister was more interested in the principle of the agreement itself can this be satisfactorily explained.

1957.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Thus, although discussions also focused on the advisability of seeking some form of control over the American Thor squadrons (specifically the control of electrical power), Sandys continued to be more concerned with the appearance of independence than its actual substance. Sandys agreed that if the position was challenged in Parliament, the answer would be that since the UK did not intend to develop her own warheads for the missile, the question of totally independent use was 'academic'.⁴⁵ On 21 June, the Minister of Defence replied to an American version of the Thor treaty (sent to Sandys by Wilson on 18 April) by listing a number of disagreements - specifically with regard to the principles of independent use, even though Macmillan had rejected this option in his Defence Committee presentation of 27 February.⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, by the end of the year Sandys had agreed that the transfer of the missiles could take place under the provision of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty which stated that an attack on one signatory would be regarded as an attack on all. He thus implicitly subordinated national to alliance concerns. According to Botti

...the United States seemed to get an assurance that the British would agree to launch the IRBMs in the event the Soviets attacked targets in the United States but not Britain. But the language was ambiguous enough that the British could claim they were not automatically bound to launch the IRBMs and

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ NA, RG 59, Department of State to Foreign Office, No. 2216, 18 September 1957. The actual objections remains classified and the only record of this letter was found in the American documents.

so risk a Soviet counterstrike at targets in Britain.⁴⁷

This ambiguity mirrored the ambiguity in the related issue of whether Britain could, if she so wished, use the missiles independently of the United States - a problem, which as noted, Sandys, too, did not wish to tackle head on. Botti maintains that during 1957 Britain was keen '...on a degree of independence with respect to targeting',⁴⁸ but by failing to clearly relate independent control to independent targeting, Botti underestimates the actual inequality of the draft agreement from Britain's point of view. He does not link this British interest in independent targeting to Sandys's willingness to accept the joint decision-mechanism. For by doing so, Sandys was in effect accepting that all targeting decisions would ultimately require American consent. Without totally independent control it was irrelevant what target plans British planners agreed to amongst themselves, for the Americans would, in the end, have to give their consent before

⁴⁷ T.J Botti, The Long Wait: The Forging of the Anglo-American Nuclear Alliance, 1945-58 (Connecticut, 1987), p. 209.

⁴⁸ Ibid. , p. 194.

these targets could be attacked.⁴⁹ At the most, what was being secured was a capability for 'independence in concert' and not 'unilateral independence'.

What is equally as significant is that the Defence Committee agreed at the end of December that

...in practice there might be little time for consultation between the two Governments. On the other hand, it would be undesirable that the nuclear retaliatory forces should be launched automatically, irrespective of the nature and scale of the aggression against a member of the North Atlantic Alliance.⁵⁰

On one level, the Defence Committee was implicitly undermining the policy of massive retaliation - a policy which had served as the rationale both for British conventional cutbacks and the NATO New Political Directive. They also underlined the inequality of the Thor agreement because, given the agreed command and control arrangements, it would in a crisis situation be theoretically possible for the Americans to use the missiles without consent, but impossible for the British. For in two Thor bases, the Americans controlled both missiles and warheads, while in the other two they controlled the warheads; thus, in a situation of no consultation, the

⁴⁹ Botti also does not clearly distinguish between 'independence in concert' and 'unilateral independence'. Thus, he can view Sandys's attempts to attain agreement on independent counterforce targeting as an example of Britain seeking an independent nuclear deterrent force (p.194) when Sandys was most likely only seeking a much more limited objective of 'independence in concert'. Moreover, if Sandys was attempting to bolster British 'unilateral independence' then his interest would have been not in independent counterforce but independent countervalue targeting.

⁵⁰ CAB 131/18, DC 14 (57) 3, 31 December 1957.

Americans could combine warheads with missiles but the British could not.

The Defence Committee was therefore virtually admitting that the Thor agreement was not furthering the cause of the British independent deterrent, broadly or narrowly defined. By the end of the year little had been done to address Secretary of State for Air, George Ward's claim in April that 'Thor cannot be used without US consent. Therefore whether or not we make our own warhead, we shall have no power of independent action with this missile'.⁵¹

The implications of the subordination of independent British action with the Thor missiles for independent British deterrence could have been offset with a greater emphasis on Blue Streak deployment. The Blue Streak missile - at least after research and development assistance from the United States had been secured - would be an entirely British missile with command and control completely under UK auspices. The question then to be addressed is what attention did this project receive as negotiations over Thor deployment progressed ?

The first point to recognise is that the missile agreement in its relation to the Blue Streak programme was regarded somewhat differently in the Ministry of Defence and the Air

⁵¹ AIR 19/849, Ward to Boyle, 2 April 1957.

Ministry. In the latter department, the Thors were seen as complements to the Blue Streak program and as a means to fill the deterrent gap until such time as Blue Streak could be deployed. On the other hand, Sandys seemed to be using the Thors to play down the importance attached to the Blue Streak programme. Indeed, already during the 1957 White Paper discussions, the Air Ministry seems to have felt that the Minister of Defence was intent upon slowing down the Blue Streak programme. Thus, in March 1957, Maurice Dean, wrote to George Ward and informed him that the abandonment of Blue Streak would result in the deterrent becoming dependent on obsolete V-bombers, obsolescent Thor missiles and such weapons as the United States chose to supply Britain. Clearly, this would have dangerous implications for the future independence of Britain's independent deterrent and Dean expressed uncertainty as to whether the full implications of this were appreciated by the Cabinet.⁵²

Certainly, the Cabinet expressed insensitivity to Air Ministry concerns. On 28 March, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Peter Thorneycroft, said that in view of the recent agreement with the United States about the supply of ballistic rockets, it would be important to avoid giving the impression in the forthcoming defence debates that Britain was intent upon manufacturing her own version of the weapon.⁵³ A month earlier,

⁵² AIR 19/856, Dean to Ward, 4 March 1957.

⁵³ CAB 128/31, CC 26 (57) 1, 28 March 1957.

Macmillan had told the Defence Committee that based on the assumption that the United States offer of Thor missiles would be accepted

... we need not plan to produce ourselves a medium range rocket, but we should continue a modest programme of research so that we could still make a contribution to the United States development programme.⁵⁴

This ambivalence about the future of Blue Streak received further expression with Sandys's proposal to cut the proposed research and development budget for 1958/9 by £20 million to £190 million. Such a reduction would have made a shift in the focus on the Blue Streak programme difficult to avoid. On 3 April, Ward wrote to Sandys reminding him that one of the main arguments for the change in defence policy outlined in the White Paper was the continued existence of a British contribution to the deterrent. To have any value this contribution would have to be independent and operationally effective. Consequently, until control was secured over Thor (and the weapon actually tested) it would be wrong to give up Blue Streak - what Sandys appeared to Ward to be doing.⁵⁵ He also stated emphatically that '...if we wish to retain power of independent action when the V-bombers run out, we must retain Blue Streak'.⁵⁶ The Air Ministry had certainly overcome its earlier hesitations about the Blue Streak project a

⁵⁴ CAB 131/18, DC 2 (57) 1, 27 February 1957.

⁵⁵ AIR 19/849, Ward to Sandys, 3 April 1957.

⁵⁶ AIR 19/849, Ward to Boyle, 2 April 1957.

situation made possible, no doubt, by the earlier decision to terminate the development of the supersonic bomber.⁵⁷

The Air Ministry also found strong support for their position from the Minister of Supply, Aubrey Jones. On 15 March, he wrote to Sandys reaffirming the Air Ministry's position that a cut of £20 million in the Supply budget would undermine the Blue Streak programme. He referred to Macmillan 's speech to the Defence Committee on 27 February in which the Prime Minister had stated that Britain would make a modest contribution to the American development programme, and Jones strongly implied that Sandys was not doing enough in this regard.⁵⁸ Ironically, however, Jones then went on to identify himself more closely with Sandys than with the Air Ministry when he stated that

If it is essential to our diplomatic influence to be able to threaten total war with the nuclear deterrent is it not also essential to our diplomatic influence to be able to threaten localised war through possession of up-to-date tactical weapons ? Is not our ability to threaten localised war nullified if we become reliant on the USA for the newest tactical weapons ? And may not an ability to threaten successful localised war be as important to us if not indeed more important than an ability to threaten total war - the latter being an ability which is extremely problematic whether in fact we would have the resolution to push home ?⁵⁹

In one breath Jones was condemning Sandys for endangering the Blue Streak project while at the same time admitting that

⁵⁷ See AIR 19/849, Air Ministry (unsigned) to Powell, 15 March 1957.

⁵⁸ AIR 19/849, Jones to Sandys, 15 March 1957.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

aside from influencing the United States, an independent nuclear deterrent had limited meaning. If it was highly unlikely that Britain could credibly threaten global war, an independent deterrent was indeed, defined by its ability to influence the United States. Yet, if this was the main objective, then Sandys's approach was the more efficient as he was, through the Thor agreement, locking British and American forces together, while Jones was concerned only with (hopefully) influencing the Americans through the possession of an 'independent' British force which would never be used independently.⁶⁰

Furthermore, Jones seems to have been out of step with Sandys's and Macmillan's thinking over the use of tactical nuclear weapons. The Prime Minister's statement to the Defence Committee on 27 February that these weapons would not be used independently of the United States was reaffirmed at a Defence Committee meeting at the end of July.⁶¹ If the question was just one of having the ability to independently threaten though not necessarily carry out the threat, then Jones would have had a point. But from his statement quoted above, he

⁶⁰ In July, Jones told the American Councillor for Economic Affairs in the London Embassy that Thor deployment would not result in a decrease in research and development costs in Blue Streak because '...having made the basic decision to be independent of the United States in respect to the nuclear deterrent, Britain would have to have the independent means of delivery without reliance on the United States'. NA, RG 59, 741.5612/7-1157, Tank to Whitney, 11 July 1957.

⁶¹ CAB 131/18, DC 6 (57) 3, 31 July 1957.

seems to have been concerned with the credibility of strategic nuclear threats, so he logically should have been interested in those at the tactical level as well. Whatever may have been his actual view, the point is that confusion over the nature of deterrence and the purposes of Britain's deterrent force made for weak opposition to the Minister of Defence's cost-cutting measures.

In conclusion, when it came to missiles, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence saw them as instruments through which Britain could attain a firmer link between the British and American deterrents. The decision by Sandys and Macmillan to deploy Thor missiles in the UK cannot be seen as an attempt to procure quickly a unilateral independent deterrent force as the draft agreements with regard to command and control militated against independent action - action which Macmillan had, in any event ruled out. At the same time, the Minister of Defence seemed reluctant to maintain the research and development budget at previously envisaged levels despite strong objections by both the Air Ministry and Ministry of Supply that such steps would retard the pace of Blue Streak development, the basis for the future of British independent deterrence. Sandys thus once again evinced less concern about the future of an independent deterrent than has generally been ascribed to him. On the other hand, Macmillan could also rightfully claim that UK influence over the US had increased. For while the British had no control over the American bomber bases in East Anglia, there would now at least be joint

consultation over the use of Thor.⁶² This, nevertheless, did not in itself equal an independent British deterrent capability either in concert or unilaterally. As Richard Crossman put it in the Commons on 17 April

Whether or not we have these weapons makes very little difference to our military dependence on the United States of America. The government's attitude to 'Thor' proves that up to the hilt. There is no question of getting rid of the Americans. On the contrary, they are here 'for keeps' and we are to become a rocket base instead of a bomber base as now.⁶³

The possibilities for British independent deterrence - at least in the near term - therefore rested on the capabilities and size of her V-bomber force.

(C) The V-Bomber Force Debate During 1957

Similarly to the pre-1957 V-bomber force debate, economic concerns played a major role in determining the size of the planned V-bomber force - a tendency that was made possible by a greater willingness of those outside the RAF to, at least implicitly, and often explicitly, rely on the deterrent power of SAC. Although, the sub-theme of 'unilateral independence' began to inform more strongly on RAF arguments for their preferred force size, unilateral action continued to be regarded by Sandys and Macmillan as a remote possibility and reductions in the planned force were, in the final analysis,

⁶² Macmillan, op.cit. , p. 245.

⁶³ Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 568, cols. 1984-85, 17 April 1957.

demanding on financial grounds and legitimised by the fact that Britain would most likely only act in conjunction with the United States. The theme of nuclear strategic concert continued to remain a firm foundation on which procurement policy was based.

Again, similarly to the pre-1957 discussions, the Air Ministry's interest in a specific number of medium bombers (now 184) was not abetted by their inability to clearly relate numbers to tasks. With the Air Ministry unable to present a clear definition of independent deterrence and its requirements, it opened itself up to demands that the size of the planned V-bomber force be downgraded. Thus, in discussions in January over joint nuclear strategic planning with the Americans, Templer and Mountbatten only agreed to accept the American proposals provided that such co-ordination did not serve to push up UK bomber force numbers. Mountbatten argued strongly that it be made very clear to Washington that agreement to their proposals did not commit Britain to a specific size of the bomber force.⁶⁴

The Army and Navy thereby sought to prevent the expansion of the planned V-bombers beyond the 184 announced by Head in December 1956, while at the same time holding out the possibility that the force would be reduced still further.

⁶⁴ DEFE 4/94, COS 3 (57) 7 discussion of COS (56) 451 (closed), 8 January 1957.

Similarly to the pre-1957 period, they continued to accept the declaratory focus on nuclear deterrence but not the implications of that focus for their conventional forces. This rejection did not subside as 1957 progressed. In July the First Lord, Lord Selkirk, wrote Sandys a letter on the Admiralty's view on the size of the V-bomber force in which he stated that while the Admiralty supported the broad principle of contributing to the deterrent, neither the Admiralty nor the Chiefs of Staff had ever agreed that a sensible defence policy could be maintained with forces of 375,000 men. Moreover, the possibility of basing a sound policy on this manpower was not influenced by the size of the bomber force except to the degree that the bombers and the conventional forces become competitors for financial resources. For Selkirk, the nuclear deterrent did not legitimise smaller forces and, indeed, the smaller the order of battle, the more necessary became their equipment. If the V-bombers and their nuclear ordnance absorbed an excessive proportion of defence resources it would be more difficult to develop a policy designed to protect Britain's alliances and world-wide interests.⁶⁵ The Navy thus rejected any link between a reliance

⁶⁵ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 18, 29 July 1957. The Navy was thus clearly subordinating its interest in a nuclear capability to the maintenance of conventional forces. Indeed, when asked whether during this period Mountbatten was arguing for nuclear capabilities for the Navy, Sir Richard Powell maintained 'I don't think he was at that time demanding a nuclear role'. (King's Conference on the Sandys White Paper, *op.cit.*) The Admiralty's preference to frame its requirements in conventional terms most probably reflected the necessity of defending, in the face of Sandys's onslaughts, what already was in the Navy's possession. Furthermore Sir William Davis is explicit in his memoirs that at the beginning of 1957 '...all ideas of reorientating the Navy in part to a Nuclear Role were

on nuclear weapons - whether used independently or in concert with the United States - and conventional force levels. This was a position, once more supported by the Army when in October 1957, Sir Gerald Templer was adamant that with costs of forces steadily mounting it might be necessary to give up the deterrent.⁶⁶

As for Sandys and Macmillan, from the beginning of 1957, they seemed ambivalent about the future size of the V-bomber force. On 27 February, Macmillan told the Defence Committee that on present plans, by 1960 there would be 184 V-bombers of which 120 would be Mark 2s. If existing orders were completed and no more were placed, there would ultimately be a front-line strength of 176 of which only 40 would be Mark 2s. He preferred to maintain that the final number was still under consideration.⁶⁷ From this discussion it was apparent that primarily economic and not strategic requirements would determine the final force size. This was reaffirmed in a letter from Powell to Dean in which the latter was told that for costing purposes '... assume whatever pattern not exceeding a front-line of 184 medium bombers you would regard as sensible...'⁶⁸ - not exactly a very strategically rigorous method of addressing the issue of bomber strength.

set aside.' The Unpublished Memoirs of Sir William Davis, op.cit. , p. 790.

⁶⁶ DEFE 4/101, COS 81 (57), 21 October 1957.

⁶⁷ CAB 131/18 DC 2 (57) 1, 27 February 1957.

⁶⁸ AIR 19/856, Powell to Dean, 27 February 1957.

Yet, while often unclear as to the purposes of their nuclear deterrent force, the Air Ministry, in the face of Army, Navy and Ministry of Defence objections, clung tenaciously to the 184 figure (of which 120 would be Mark 2s which could deliver Blue Steel). On 7 February, the Air Council had accepted the so-called provisional Plan L which embodied the 184 force - this despite the fact that only a few months previously they had claimed that a figure of 200 aircraft represented the minimum that made strategic sense. Their acceptance, no doubt, was made easier by an awareness in the Air Ministry that Sandys was seeking cuts, and that despite the declaratory emphasis on deterrence in the 1957 White Paper, the bomber force might suffer a worse fate. In the face of a possible further assault, it was the Air Ministry's plan to attempt the fastest build-up manageable. This would mean accepting a larger proportion of the less capable Mark 1s but '... on present plans [this] would appear the better alternative - a very slow build-up may well invite a reduction in the size of the force'.⁶⁹ This was a surprising strategy since the Air Ministry itself admitted that without Blue Steel (which would be carried by the Mark 2s) the V-bombers would be extremely vulnerable to Soviet air defences. Consequently, it was stated at the same time that if the Minister of Defence succeeded in cutting the V-bomber force below 184 '...it would be better to

⁶⁹ AIR 8/2155, Provisional Plan L: Brief for the CAS, 7 February 1957.

procure more Mark 2s in order to get better quality in the reduced force'.⁷⁰

In a paper presented to Sandys by the Air Ministry on the size and composition of the medium bomber force on 15 May, the efficacy of the Mark 2s were stressed and the impotence of Britain's V-bomber force underlined if this type were abandoned. It was demonstrated that: (1) from 1957 to 1961 when the V-bombers would carry free-falling bombs only, the superior performance of the Mark 2s would make the force less vulnerable to enemy defences and enable it to penetrate and attack a larger selection of key targets; (2) between 1960/1 and 1963/4, Russian targets would be defended by SAGW and successful delivery would require Blue Steel; (3) after 1963/4 the Soviet SAGW would improve in quality and the maintenance of the deterrent would depend on the improved air-to-surface missile, the OR.1149. Both Blue Steel and the OR.1149 could be carried on Mark 1s but only with the penalty of reduced operational effectiveness. Consequently the Air Ministry believed that

...the force should contain at least 120 B.2 aircraft in order to make it an effective deterrent in the eyes of the enemy, since this would depend upon his assessment of our ability to penetrate deeply into his territory and render vulnerable a large proportion of the his areas.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ AIR 2/14699, Misc/m (57) 71, 15 May 1957.

The Air Ministry appears to have been arguing for its preferred number of Mark 2s on the basis of a 'unilateral independence' stance and not 'independence in concert'. Sandys, at first, seemed to agree with this focus. He concurred that the relevant issue was the question of the Mark 2s and that

...in order to exercise any serious deterrent influence upon the Kremlin we should need to have not less than 15 squadrons (i.e. a front-line of 120) equipped with aircraft capable of launching propelled bombs (i.e. Vulcans and Victors of the Mark 2 type).⁷²

Yet, his acceptance of the Air Ministry figures was couched in terms that expressed his ambivalence towards the concept of 'unilateral independence' and adumbrated his later willingness to tolerate further reductions to the force. Thus while agreeing with a total of 120 Mark 2s, his support of it was guarded. Indeed, he added the rider that '...it is generally accepted that financial reductions make some appreciable reductions [in the planned V-bomber force] inevitable'⁷³ and that

Since the possession of a British element of nuclear deterrent is a central feature of our defence policy, and since it is one of the main justifications we have advanced for the reduction in our contribution of conventional forces to N.A.T.O., I am sure we should not hesitate to order the extra 95 Mark 2 aircraft which, at relatively small cost, would so appreciably increase our military power and influence.⁷⁴

⁷² CAB 130/122, Strategic Bomber Force Memo by Minister of Defence, 27 May 1957.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid. The 95 aircraft (53 Vulcans and 42 Victors) together with the existing orders for a front-line of six Mark 2 squadrons (based on orders of 49 Mark 2 Vulcans and 29 Mark

Strategic reasoning was matched here by political justifications and economic considerations. For the Air Ministry, the strategic rationale of independent deterrence was the sufficient condition for determining the force size; for Sandys it was just one factor (irrespective of whether it was to be taken at face value or not). His position was thus inherently more flexible - a flexibility demonstrated by his readiness to bow to the Thorneycroft's demands for securing more savings through reductions in the V-bomber force - even if this clashed with what the RAF felt was the minimum necessary for a unilateral deterrent stance.

In reply to Sandys's request for 95 extra Mark 2s, the Chancellor of the Exchequer presented a paper on 29 May entitled 'The Deterrent and the Defence Budget' in which he refused to commit himself to such a procurement for fear that it might overstrain the economy.⁷⁵ Thorneycroft did not reject the request outright but wanted to see how Sandys's other plans for savings unfolded. In a meeting with Sandys on 30 May, Thorneycroft said that before he committed himself to any final bomber force size he wished to see what the total RAF expenditure would be. All he was now prepared to say was that the total medium bomber force should be between 120 and 184 of which 80 would be Mark 2s.⁷⁶

2 Victors) would result in a total front-line of 120 Mark 2s.

⁷⁵ CAB 130/122, GEN 570/1st meeting, 29 May 1957.

⁷⁶ CAB 130/122, GEN 570/2nd meeting, 30 May 1957.

Thorneycroft made no attempt to relate these figures to strategic requirements or, more specifically, to Sandys's statements concerning the necessary numbers needed to '... exercise any serious deterrent influence upon the Kremlin...' Even more significantly, the minutes of the meeting do not reveal that Sandys was interested in referring to his earlier arguments. In his discussions with Thorneycroft he preferred to express most concern with regard to the fact that continual procrastination over the final size of the V-bomber force would harm the ongoing talks with the Americans over co-ordinated strategic strike plans. Thus, for the Minister of Defence, what was significant was the implications of uncertainty for Anglo-American strategic co-ordination and not the issue or requirements for independently deterring the Soviet Union. Once Thorneycroft managed to convince him that relations with the Americans and NATO would not be adversely influenced by the postponement of the procurement decision for a few months, Sandys was willing to accept - at least until July when force costings were to be ready - planning on the basis of a front-line force of only 80 Mark 2s.⁷⁷

Sandys's later willingness to countenance a total of 144 medium bombers was most probably a result of Thorneycroft's arguments (arguments with which he did not strongly disagree), his conception of strategic concert with the United States

⁷⁷ Ibid.

which meant that sufficient Soviet targets were in any event covered by the combined force, and the fact that even with these reduced numbers Britain could independently attack enough countervalue targets necessary to deter the Soviet Union.⁷⁸

While at the end of July, Sandys told the Defence Committee that he still regarded 184 medium bombers as the minimum procurement target,⁷⁹ on 2 August he told the committee that '...there could be no arithmetical proof that this was the right figure'.⁸⁰ It was then agreed that further orders for V-bombers would be limited to the number of aircraft required to bring the front-line strength to 144. When reservations were expressed about the reductions, these were framed not in strategic terms but in political ones. It was stated that

...the recent White Paper has emphasised that our future defence policy would be based on the deterrent and there might be unfortunate repercussions if we announced that reductions were to be made in our provision for the deterrent.⁸¹

Furthermore, the Defence Committee went on to reaffirm these

⁷⁸ This latter point was made by T.C.G.James at the King's Conference on the Sandys White Paper. While the estimates made in the previous section on the number of possible countervalue targets in the Soviet Union indicate that this was the case, the available documents do not reveal this argument being used to legitimise reduced forces. This is true of the documents in the 1955-56 period as well.

⁷⁹ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 15, 26 July 1957.

⁸⁰ CAB 131/18, DC 7 (57) 2, 2 August 1957.

⁸¹ Ibid.

considerations and attachment to 'deterrence in alliance'. They therefore pointed out that the difference between a force consisting of 96 and a 120 V-bombers would be £54 million over a five year period and that in view of the fact that

...our investment programmes as a whole were already imposing a severe strain on the economy and since we should never, in practice expect to challenge the Soviet Union alone, some reduction in the total cost of the V-bomber force should be accepted. An appropriate compromise would be to provide for a total front-line strength of 144 V-bombers.⁸²

Here the V-bomber force was once more reduced in size on the basis of economic considerations, but this time accompanied with an explicit rejection of any plans for unilateral nuclear strategic actions. A comparison of the 1955-56 period with that of 1957 reveals no inconsistency on this score.⁸³

(D) The Problem Of Air Defences

Throughout 1957, the Air Ministry - similarly to the 1955-56

⁸² Ibid. Another squadron of Mark 2s was soon added bringing the total to 104 aircraft. Thus when completed, the force would be made up of three squadrons of 24 Victor Mark 1s, two squadrons of 16 Vulcan Mark 1s, five squadrons of 40 Victor Mark 2s and eight squadrons of 64 Vulcan Mark 2s. AIR 2/14699, Memo by R.C.Kent, 23 May 1957.

⁸³ Between August and the end of the year, the Air Ministry expressed great concern about deploying the V-bomber force as soon as possible. See AIR 2/14699, Notes on an informal meeting chaired by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, 9 September 1957. It is difficult to discern at this stage what was motivating the Air Ministry most strongly: the need to deter the Russians as effectively and as quickly as possible, or the more immediate and concrete objective of creating fait accomplis which would make it difficult for Sandys to make further cuts.

period - continued to reaffirm the point that the defence of the V-bomber bases was an integral part of the deterrent. The link between survivability and credibility was recognised in the White Paper. In paragraph 17 it was stated that

Since peace so largely depends upon the deterrent fear of nuclear retaliation, it is essential that a would be aggressor should not be allowed to think he could readily knock out the bomber bases in Britain before their aircraft could take off from them. The defence of the bomber airfields is therefore an essential part of the deterrent and is a feasible task.⁸⁴

The object of this section is to answer the question of whether the 1957 debate differed in any significant manner from that conducted in 1956 ? Specifically, in view of the greater declaratory focus on nuclear deterrence and independent British nuclear deterrence, was there now a greater sensitivity on the part of those outside the RAF to the necessity of air defences for the V-bomber bases ? In other words, was Sandys interested in taking his own declaratory statements about defending the V-bomber bases seriously, or did his reservations about the efficacy of such defences and the need to secure financial savings in the RAF budget militate against such a step ? Finally, is it possible to deduce anything about Sandys's attitudes towards independent deterrence in general from his approach to air defences ?

⁸⁴ Cmd. 124, op.cit. , para. 17.

The 1957 White Paper admitted that the size of Fighter Command would be reduced,⁸⁵ but it stressed that the remaining force would be adequate for the defence of the V-bomber bases. This was a claim bitterly contested by the Air Ministry. On 1 March, the Air Defence Commander, Sir Thomas Pike, wrote a letter to Dermot Boyle in which he pointed out that acceptance of Plan L would involve a reduction in front-line Fighter Command from 780 aircraft (including the auxiliaries) to 280 aircraft by June 1959. He agreed that, partly for reasons of economy and partly for reasons concerning the future deployment of SAGW, this was acceptable, but he expressed concern that the rundown in fighters and the build-up of the SAGW system would not be co-ordinated. A special committee set up by Boyle on SAGW deployment had predicted that an adequate defence consisting of 300 SAGWs armed with atomic warheads would only be ready by 1961/2. However, Pike considered the deployment date optimistic and he warned that

...I do not think that anyone could pretend that we should have a worthwhile defence/deterrent in 1959

⁸⁵ Fighter Command was planned to be rundown from 28 squadrons of 488 aircraft at 1 April 1958 to 21 squadrons of 296 aircraft by April 1960, and to a final figure of 292 by April 1961. The P.1 was planned to come into service in 1960 and to reach 164 units by April 1962 and progressively replace the Hunter. The remainder of Fighter Command would consist of 112 Javelins. No more Javelins would be ordered and by 1962 they would begin to waste. By April 1963 it was planned to have 13 SAGW stations with 672 launchers and 825 missiles. Stage 1 Bloodhound and Thunderbird would be deployed by the end of 1959; Stage 1 1/2 Green Flax would be deployed by the end of 1962. Sandys had cancelled the OR.329 and the P.177 even though the Air Ministry was against completely terminating these projects. See AIR 2/14712, Ward to Sandys, 3 April 1957.

with only 280 fighters and one very doubtful SAGW station.⁸⁶

The crux of the matter was that from the end of 1958 until the nuclear SAGW was in place, a defence gap would open up.

Unfortunately for the Air Ministry, Sandys did not appear to have related to this criticism at all. Arguably, for him, the defence gap was irrelevant as the combined Anglo-American nuclear force was credible enough to deter war and was insensitive to fluctuations in the level of defences surrounding the British V-bomber bases. Also, arguably, had Sandys been primarily interested in the British nuclear force as an independent deterrent, he would have been more sensitive to the Air Ministry's complaints: if Britain was to unilaterally deter the Soviet Union by herself, then a defence-gap would have far reaching consequences for deterrence credibility, not to mention the implications if Britain found herself forced to attack in a second strike mode. Thus, Sandys told Ward that there would be no war within the next five years because the Soviet Union would not have ballistic missiles to attack the United States. According to the Minister of Defence, the Air Ministry's case was further weakened by the fact that fighter aircraft could not obtain 100% immunity against a thermonuclear attack delivered by bombers and was useless against a missile attack.⁸⁷ Ward

⁸⁶ AIR 8/2155, Pike to Boyle, 1 March 1957.

⁸⁷ AIR 19/856, 12 March 1957.

strongly disagreed with Sandys's arguments but the Minister of Defence was dismissive of Ward's 'verbal demarche'.⁸⁸

Sandys therefore pressed forward with his search for economies and was not overly attentive to the problems of vulnerability. Pike was informed by the Vice Chief of the Air Staff (VCAS), Sir Ivelaw Chapman, that while Pike's concerns were not without foundation and that the level of fighter defences included in Plan L were not without risk, he would just have to accept it as the Air Ministry was having difficulty in convincing Sandys to accept even this attenuated force. Ivelaw Chapman complained that the Minister of Defence was avoiding the fact that war was unlikely because of the deterrent but that this situation could only continue so long as the deterrent was relatively invulnerable.⁸⁹ Yet, Ivelaw Chapman's argument would only have carried weight with Sandys if the Minister was intent upon viewing deterrence in purely British terms. For, to repeat, in the context of Anglo-American deterrence, the combined nuclear force was not vulnerable enough to undermine allied threats of nuclear response.

Consequently, from the Air Ministry's point of view, the second half on 1957 posed more problems than the first. On 26 July, Sandys presented the service department's budget

⁸⁸ AIR 2/14712, Memo by Broadbent, 12 March 1957.

⁸⁹ AIR 8/2157, Ivelaw Chapman to Pike, 11 March 1957.

allocations to the Defence Committee. He envisaged major cutbacks in the RAFs allocation:⁹⁰

Table Six: Sandys's RAF Budget Projections - July 1957

<u>RAF Allocation</u>	<u>Year</u>
506	1957/8
468	1958/9
496	1959/60
487	1960/1
464	1961/2
470	1962/3

[£ millions - 1957]

In his search for saving, Sandys cut the V-bomber force to 144 thereby making the task of air defence even more difficult as the target presented to the attacking forces was now considerably smaller. The Air Ministry was then forced to defend the number of planned V-bomber bases against attempts by Sandys to secure savings in this area. On 16 August, the Minister of Defence was informed that for a front-line of 144 medium bombers, the minimum dispersal scale that was acceptable to the Air Council consisted of six main bases from each of which eight aircraft would operate in war; 24 dispersal bases at which four aircraft would be based and a main base for the two photo-reconnaissance squadrons, 50% of which would be dispersed to two bomber dispersal airfields. It was stressed that '...smaller forces means more compact targets and suggestions that we can do with less are without foundation'.⁹¹

⁹⁰ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 13, 26 July 1957.

⁹¹ AIR 2/14699, 16 August 1957.

As the year progressed, Sandys became more open to suggestions that dispersal was a significant issue - but this apparently only because he and Macmillan were interested in totally abolishing Fighter Command - an issue that, caused major tensions between Sandys and CAS Sir Dermot Boyle.⁹² On 31 December, Macmillan told the Defence Committee that it was his and Sandys's view that the expenditure involved in providing for fighter aircraft was no longer justified, that the only defence was nuclear counter-attack, and that it would be wiser to use the £100 million a year which was then devoted to fighters to provide more bombers or to build-up other deterrent forces.⁹³ Macmillan, however, argued that fighters could still make it more difficult for a bomber force to carry out their attack, and until this role had been take over by the SAGW, fighters should be retained. This, of course did not indicate that Macmillan or Sandys had been won over by the Air Ministry's reasoning. Indeed, Macmillan preferred to express most concern about the 'psychological' impact on Britain's

⁹² According to Boyle 'I was totally opposed to Sandys's sudden policy of no more manned fighting aircraft and I left him in no doubt about my views at that time...History has also proved that his policy was wrong. Perhaps the most useful lesson to learn from this episode is the amount of damage which such quick ... decisions by those in high places can cause to the national institutions involved'. (Boyle to Freedman, 18 May 1988)

⁹³ With regard to other 'deterrent forces', the 1957 papers indicate the existence of an interest in the possibility of anti-ballistic missile systems. In his paper on fissile material for nuclear weapons presented to the Defence Committee on 27 July, Norman Brooke stated that 'Though it is not possible to be so definite about the prospects of deploying a defence system against ballistic missiles, we believe that a substantial measure of defence could be achieved by 1967'. See CAB 131/18, DC (57) 14, 27 July 1957.

allies and her own domestic opinion of abandoning fighter defences.⁹⁴ To this Sandys added his view that in the light of the expected diplomatic problems arising out of the abolition of Fighter Command, he would accept that its total abolition was out of the question. Yet, he added, that this decision would have to be reviewed at a later date⁹⁵ and thus the option of terminating Fighter Command was left open and the issue of the potential defence gap left unresolved.

Consequently, the 1957 White Paper's focus on Britain's nuclear deterrent did not reflect itself in concern for the defence of that deterrent. While arguably the contribution of fighters to the defence of the air bases was marginal (an argument that the Air Ministry did not totally accept), if the deterrent was so central to Britain's defence policy then surely, in terms of Britain's total defence posture, this was more than a marginal issue ? For, if Britain had wished to deter the Soviet Union independently of the United States then every additional amount of defence for her small V-bomber force must have been of great importance. The lack of concern that Sandys and Macmillan exhibited on this issue helps negate

⁹⁴ CAB 128/31, CC 86 (57) 5, 31 December 1957.

⁹⁵ CAB 131/18, DC 14 (57) 3, 31 December 1957. On the other hand, Thorneycroft remained adamant that fighter defences would only provide marginal security and that any attempt to provide against all potential threats would lead to economic disaster. The Chancellor also suggested that the P.1 be abandoned and that Fighter Command be equipped with Javelins which were then being produced. This would save between £200 million to £240 million over the next five years including £11 million over the next financial year. This was rejected by the Defence Committee.

the claim that there was a major revolution in British attitudes to the nuclear deterrent in the pre- and post-January 1957 periods and supports the contention that Britain's prime policy objective was nuclear concert with the United States.

Conclusion

It was argued in Chapter Six that the reduction in manpower was the central focus of Sandys's efforts and plans and, indeed, as shall be noted in the next chapter, this had the greatest impact on actual planning. In contrast, as noted in this chapter, Sandys was not much interested in moving away from the major goal of nuclear strategic concert with the United States - a goal that was already present in the pre-1957 discussions on the structure and purposes of Britain's nuclear power.

This fact was clouded at the time by the difference between declaratory and action policy. For example, on 16 April, Sandys informed the House of Commons that

So long as large American forces remain in Europe, and American bombers are based in Britain, it might conceivably be thought safe - I am not saying that it would - to leave the United States the sole responsibility for providing the nuclear deterrent. But, when they have developed the 5000 mile inter-continental ballistic rocket, can we really be sure that every American Administration will go on looking at things in quite the same way ?[%]

[%] Hansard, HOC. , Debates, Vol. 568, cols. 1760-1, 16 April 1957.

Yet, if Sandys was really concerned with developing a unilateral means of deterring and waging war against the Soviet Union, this is not reflected in his approach to the questions of command and control of Thor, the future of Blue Streak, the number of V-bombers to be procured, or the defences of the RAF bases. Here his willingness to subordinate issues of control to the goal of US missile deployment and strategic co-ordination, his readiness to reduce research and development funding and his strong (and consistent) sensitivity to economic considerations, point to Sandys and Macmillan's inclination to continue to place trust in SAC's deterrent power. This, of course, is not to say that plans did not exist for independent action against the Soviets, but this was, as noted, a plan of last resort, subordinated to nuclear concert - a situation evidenced by explicit statements to that effect and by Macmillan and Sandys's concern throughout 1957 to improve the Anglo-American relationship.

The major difference between Sandys and Macmillan on the one hand, and the Air Ministry on the other, was the latter department's desire to translate declaratory intent into procurement and action policy. While the Air Ministry and the RAF often expressed confused notions of independence, they were certain that it required as much independent control as attainable, as large a force as possible, a future force that was technologically advanced (i.e. Blue Streak) and credible, and the retention of manned fighters. Conversely, when Sandys and Macmillan (who, too, were often and perhaps, deliberately

ambiguous) made statements on the independence of Britain's deterrent, they were concerned not with the most unlikely contingency of unilateral action but the more immediate goal of 'independent deterrent influence' - specifically the possession of a nuclear force as an incentive to the United States to include Britain in her strategic plans and her deterrent orbit.

The Americans were certainly given this impression. In November, a senior (though unnamed) official in the British Ministry of Defence informed American officials at their Embassy in London

...UK nuclear weapons production was largely for political reasons, both in terms [of a] desire to give [the] UK increased stature as a nuclear power and in [the] hope [that] UK possession [of] these weapons would give [her] greater leverage in dealing with [the] US.⁹⁷

In this sense there was little discontinuity with the pre-1957 period.

⁹⁷ NA, RG 59, 741.5/11, No. 2972, 9 November 1957.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE 1957 WHITE PAPER AND THE QUESTION OF DISCONTINUITY

Introduction

This chapter will seek to highlight the major implications of the White Paper for force planning in the immediate aftermath of that paper's promulgation so as to demonstrate the degree of discontinuity in policy-outcomes with the immediate pre-1957 period. The problem will be approached through a discussion of defence spending and an analysis of Army and Navy force planning during 1957.

As argued in Chapters Five and Six, the significance of the 1957 White Paper in the context of British strategic planning has more to do with the implications of Sandys's cutbacks in manpower and spending for multiple capabilities than with the declaratory focus on nuclear deterrence. That the White Paper reflected a major alteration in the balance between nuclear and conventional forces is self-evident; but as the documents of the 1957 White Paper negotiations and those more specifically related to the deterrent reveal, this resulted more from the focus of the Minister of Defence on the expenses of conventional capabilities than from an increase in the planned absolute power of Britain's nuclear deterrent force. The question then becomes whether the continuity across the 1955-7 period in nuclear strategic thinking is accompanied by

a discontinuity in the nature of conventional force planning ? The point here is not whether there is a difference in motivations in the pre- and post- January 1957 periods (where there clearly is not), but whether there is an actual discontinuity on the level of policy results.

(1) Sandys And Defence Expenditure In The Immediate Post-White Paper Period

The case for the revolutionary import of Sandys's first Defence White Paper must rest on an appreciation of the Minister's success in using his new powers and force of personality to undermine the manpower basis for a posture of multiple capabilities. By so doing, the Minister circumvented the necessity of further engaging in a drawn out debate over strategic conceptions - a debate which if past experience was anything to go by, would have left the services unconvinced. With their manpower slashed, the options open to the Army and, to a lesser extent the Navy, were considerably reduced, and the scope for negotiation likewise narrowed. Sandys was thus in a good position to proceed in his search for major economic savings in the forthcoming defence budget. He was also well placed to lay the basis for changes not only in deployments but also in conceptions.

In the wake of the 1957 White Paper, the general dispute between Sandys and the services revolved around the Minister of Defence's decision to reduce defence expenditure over the

next few years to approximately £1450 million per annum. The point here is that the contours of the debate remained similar to the 1955-56 period, but the quantity of material, manpower and money over which disputes raged had been dramatically reduced from the start. This derived from the fact that manpower had been cut by half, the White Paper had explicitly and publicly promised major economic savings and Sandys, was by the end of the White Paper negotiations, very much in control of the decision making process. Both the style of decision making and the resources over which negotiations took place had altered radically. Sandys was therefore in a good position to continue the pre-1957 attacks on forces that could be regarded as unrelated to the deterrent, believed to be excessive for limited and cold war purposes, or designated for what was viewed as the most unlikely contingency of global war - but this time, given his powers and personality, with the prospect of greater success than any of his predecessors.

In terms of objectives, Sandys and the Prime Minister reaffirmed the foci of the 1955 LTDP and the 1956 Policy Review. At a meeting of the Defence Committee on 31 July, Macmillan drove home the point of securing major economic savings and set out the guidelines along which these would be achieved. Both he and Sandys were firmly committed to planning priorities which involved, firstly, the deterrent and secondly, the maintenance of adequate conventional forces to meet Britain's cold war security objectives. The Prime Minister stressed that the lowest priority would be given to

waging global war with conventional forces. Indeed, he stated that

It was for consideration whether any effort should be devoted to this third category and whether we should not also discard any attempt to prepare to wage independently a major war with conventional weapons.¹

Clearly, little had altered from the pre-1957 period in terms of war preparations and priority lists. However, in terms of substance, there were major differences. As noted, discussions on the White Paper had not been closely linked to any in depth study of costs.² When in the summer of 1957 such costings were ready, there was much cause for service discomfort. Preliminary estimates revealed the following:³

Table Seven: Sandys's Budget Defence Projections - July 1957

	<u>1958/9</u>	<u>1959/60</u>	<u>1960/1</u>	<u>1961/2</u>	<u>1962/3</u>
Admiralty	339	342	326	310	299
War Office	459	437	430	403	390
RAF	468	496	487	464	470
Supply	197	194	195	195	195
MOD	19	19	19	19	19
Fissile	15	16	38	42	33
Material & Weapons	-----				
	1497	1504	1495	1433	1406

[£ millions 1957]

If these projections are compared with those presented to Eden at the beginning of the 1955 LTDP, it is clear that savings of

¹ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 6, 31 July 1957.

² Indeed, according to the then Minister of Supply, Aubrey Jones, 'No thought was given to the industrial and technological consequences of the White Paper, it being considered that a reduction in Government spending was in itself a good thing'. A. Jones to L. Freedman, 10 June 1988.

³ CAB 131/18, D (57) 13, 26 July 1957.

the order of approximately £500 million per annum were contemplated. This was certainly no insubstantial amount and attests to the far reaching consequences of Sandys's proposals. Moreover, the Minister of Defence indicated that he was seeking further reductions during the next three years totalling almost £150 million. The annual defence budget would not be allowed to rise above £1450 million and Sandys warned: 'If we are to carry through a defence policy on the general lines set out in the recent White Paper, I believe we must accept expenditure of this order'.⁴

While the resources over which conflict took place were greatly reduced, the services continued to resist the Ministry of Defence's planning priority lists and continued to strongly defend their 'organisational essences'. At a series of Defence Committee meetings held at the end of July, the services stressed that it was unrealistic to expect their expenditure in the next financial year to be reduced to £1450 million. Indeed, they maintained that the reductions needed to stabilise expenditure at a figure of £1450 million could be as much as £85 million.⁵

Significantly, similarly to the pre-1957 debate, the Army and Navy defended their opposition to budget cuts with reference to global war forces. The Navy maintained that since the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ CAB 131/18, DC 6 (57) 3, 31 July 1957.

effectiveness of the deterrent depended '..to a large extent on our maintaining the vital link with the USA...' Britain would need to demonstrate to the Americans and to the other NATO countries that she was determined to keep open the sea routes across the Atlantic. In addition, the Navy was loath to minimise its cold and limited war role. It stated that if sufficient forces were not deployed in the Far East and the South Atlantic, '...our position as the centre of the commonwealth would not be sustained'.⁶ In turn, the Army supported the Navy's perspective in that it claimed that its financial allocation was far from sufficient, that it could not obtain by recruitment the necessary manpower, and it stressed the dangerous implications of reducing the forces allocated to NATO to 44,000.

Here too, global war rationales came in to play and continuity with the pre-1957 period reaffirmed. However, the difference was that, try as they might, the services were now functioning in a new organisational environment in which they were considerably weaker and had to contend with a very strong and single-minded Minister of Defence. If changes to Sandys's plans were to come about, they would have to come about through convincing the Minister and not through undermining his authority.

⁶ Ibid.

In the summer of 1957, Sandys remained unresponsive to service objections. While he admitted that the reductions were not without strategic risks, he was adamant that a total of £1450 million was as much as the country could afford to spend in the next year. Following pressures from Sandys, Thorneycroft and Macmillan, the Defence Committee agreed on 2 August that in view of the unlikelihood of substantial financial aid being obtained from the United States or Germany, and the fact that the 1958/59 projection represented an increase on the 1957/58 allocation, £1450 million could stand as the provisional projection for the next year's budget, service objections notwithstanding.⁷ Sandys underlined the point that his defence budget projection was aimed at aiding the economy and he stressed that the defence plan would release for productive work in industry approximately 300,000 men who would otherwise be conscripted.⁸ Any attempt to cut back on these releases and thereby increase defence expenditure both directly or indirectly would hamper Britain's economic progress. Sandys, with the support of both the Chancellor and the Prime Minister, was not prepared to tolerate such a development. Consequently, by the end of the year, Sandys had managed to hold the defence projection for 1958/9 to approximately £1490 million, with the rise above £1450 million mainly due to rises

⁷ CAB 131/18, DC 7 (57) 2, 2 August 1957.

⁸ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 13, 26 July 1957.

in prices and wages and only partly connected to increased manpower and capabilities.⁹

Table Eight: Sandys's Defence Budget Projections - December 1957

	<u>1957/8 Annual Forecast</u>	<u>1958/9 Sketch Estimates</u>
Admiralty	341	343.4
War Office	445	444.9
Air Ministry	506	480.7
Supply	205	205
MOD	17	18
	-----	-----
	1514	1492

[£ millions - 1957]

Sandys success in virtually holding his economic line was in no small part due to the support he received from the Treasury. Throughout this period, Thorneycroft joined Sandys and Macmillan in demanding major cuts in service capabilities. However, at times, Sandys appears to have attempted to deflect criticism away from himself by giving the impression that he stood between Thorneycroft and further reductions in the defence allocations. On 26 July, he warned that reductions below £1450 million would mean either: (1) abandonment of the British contribution to the nuclear deterrent; (2) a reduction of the planned size of Transport Command; (3) postponement of the supply to the services of tactical nuclear weapons; and (4) the indefinite postponement of measures to improve service conditions.¹⁰

⁹ CAB 129/90, C (57) 297, 30 December 1957.

¹⁰ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 13, 26 July 1957.

Yet, these were essentially false issues: the abandonment of the deterrent was unthinkable given the government's declaratory focus on that part of defence planning in the 1957 White Paper, while cuts in Transport Command, reductions in the planned increases in service benefits and the slowing down of tactical nuclear weapons deployments were unlikely since they helped legitimise the manpower reductions. Certainly, the Minister must have recognised that the debate was not between £1450 million and estimates below, but £1450 million and estimates above, especially since it was his stated objective to reduce defence expenditure from nine per cent of GNP in 1956/7 to seven and one ninth per cent in 1958/9 and to six and one seventh per cent in 1962/3.¹¹ Consequently, when towards the end of 1957 the Treasury began to step up pressures for further savings in defence expenditures,¹² especially in the area of reductions in Fighter Command, research and development and in promised inducements, Sandys was not unsympathetic. For example, in the especially sensitive area of pay and inducements, Sandys first told the Chancellor that £39 million was the minimum necessary to reach the right level of recruitment, but then he later was prepared to agree to £35 million.¹³ Although this was undoubtedly part of the normal bargaining process, it is evident that given the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See for example CAB 129/90, C (57) 298, 31 December 1957.

¹³ CAB 129/90, C (57) 297, 30 December 1957.

choice between further economic savings and placating service wishes, Sandys chose the former.

The questions that now must be addressed are, in view of this success in constraining defence spending, what were the specific alterations in conventional force programming and planning, forced by Sandys and Macmillan upon the armed services and Britain's allies during 1957, and how do these issues relate to the issue of discontinuity across the pre- and post- January 1957 periods?

(2) The White Paper and Army and Navy Planning during 1957

The main result of the 1957 White Paper as far as the Army was concerned was to help make its arguments concerning preparations for global war virtually irrelevant and what it regarded as necessary cold and limited war forces very much out of reach. The termination of national service meant that reductions in the size of the BAOR, overseas garrisons, the size and role of the territorial army and stockpiles for global war contingencies, were inevitable. This did not mean that the Army surrendered willingly to Sandys or that it in any way shared his strategic concepts, but now with its financial and manpower base undermined and its power relative to the Ministry of Defence weakened, the Army's position was very different to that it had enjoyed in the period immediately prior to January 1957.

Throughout 1957, the CIGS, Sir Gerald Templer, refused to agree with Sandys's conception that Britain's conventional preparations for global war would have to be reduced. In a discussion by the Chiefs of a JPS paper on 'NATO's Overall Strategic Concept' on 8 February, Templer maintained that there were three alternative assumptions on which to base defence policy: (1) that the deterrent would not fail, in which case the role of the shield was only to contribute to the deterrent; (2) the view (which Templer maintained was held by some Americans) that the deterrent would fail and that the war would continue for a long period after the initial nuclear exchange and; (3) a course between (1) and (2) in which either by some miscalculation or by some rational choice, a conventional war would start and gradually develop into a global war. In the latter case, the shield forces would not only contribute to the deterrent, but would also hold the enemy armies until the thermonuclear offensive attained its objective. The CIGS was of the opinion that this mixed role was the correct one - the direct implication being that reductions in BAOR were unacceptable.

Templer received support in his broad interpretation of the NATO New Political Directive from Mountbatten who maintained that it was dangerous to attempt to define too narrowly the course of global war (and thus the size of the shield forces). For, if this was uncovered by the Soviets, they could come to the conclusion that their armies need only have to carry on the war for a little longer in order to win. The value of the

deterrent, according to the First Sea Lord, would thereby be undermined. Consequently, Britain should plan to continue the struggle until the Soviet Union was defeated.¹⁴

Even more significantly, the Chiefs despondently concluded that

Whatever was finally agreed as the NATO strategic concept, it would not materially affect the size of the United Kingdom contribution which was dictated largely by economic considerations.¹⁵

This was surely testament to Sandys's growing control over defence decision making and the continued, if relatively ineffectual, resistance of the services to this development. Indeed, throughout 1957, the implications of the White Paper for Army global war preparations remained a major source of consternation. For, according to Sandys's 165,000 army manpower plan, BAOR would, by April 1958, be rundown by 13,500 men to an army including one corps HQ, four divisional HQs and eight brigade groups; and by April 1959, decreased to an army of 50,000 men including one corps HQ, three divisional HQs and six brigade groups.¹⁶ By 1961, BAOR would be reduced to no more than 44,000.¹⁷ This must be viewed in the context of a paper presented to the Cabinet by the Secretary of State for War, John Hare, in July 1957, on the future organisation of the Army in the light of the changes announced by Sandys in

¹⁴ DEFE 4/95, COS 11 (57) 3, 8 February 1957.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ DEFE 5/75, COS (57) 103, 8 May 1957.

¹⁷ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 13, 26 July 1957.

the 1957 White Paper.¹⁸ In it, the Secretary said that the decision to limit the Army to 165,000 men by the end of 1962 would involve reducing major fighting units from 176 to 125; these reductions would be carried out in two phases, with the majority of reductions being completed by the end of 1959. Special problems were presented by the requirements of reducing the number of regiments in the infantry which then totalled 64 (each with one battalion). In the first phase, these would be cut down to 52 battalions through the amalgamation of 24 existing regiments into pairs to form 12 new regiments. During the second phase another six regiments would be amalgamated into three new regiments. Sandys stated that these proposed reductions represented the maximum that was practical. Clearly, the consequences for the Army was certain to be great and the ability of the Army to carry out their tasks was bound to be problematic.

Consequently, in a paper by the JPS on the role of the armed forces in global war presented to the Chiefs of Staff Committee in October 1957, it was made explicit that these forces were not sufficient and that

As stated [in the White Paper] reliance must be based primarily on regular forces in being at the outset of global war. In the Army, the limited manpower available in peace has to be organised primarily to fulfil a cold war role. This results in units being at lower strength than is necessary to fulfil limited and global war tasks.¹⁹

¹⁸ CAB 128/31, CC 49 (57) 4, 4 July 1957.

¹⁹ DEFE 4/100, COS 79 (57) 4 (Final) discussion of JP (57) 88 (Final), 17 October 1957.

The JPS paper also maintained that as a consequence of this, the Army had a greater requirement than the other services for reservists to enable it to perform global war tasks. Manpower was what was needed and there seemed little interest in the near term deployment of tactical nuclear weapons as replacements for this manpower. Yet, Sandys would not re-divert the two territorial army divisions originally designated to support BAOR away from their new (and far more cheaper role) of civil defence, nor re-introduce conscription, the scheme that provided Britain with a growing pool of reservists. Furthermore, in the light of the economic goals Sandys had set himself, it seemed highly unlikely that he would increase global war supplies, much of which was now planned to be destroyed.

It is interesting to note that in the summer of 1957, debate between the Army and the Ministry of Defence over global war capabilities often centred around the issue of warning time for global war. This was crucial as the longer the warning period, the more reservists the Army could theoretically call-up and the more men and stocks it could legitimise for global war purposes. On 11 July, the Chiefs discussed a report by the JPS containing draft terms of reference for a joint service study on reserves of UK manpower in global war. It was the Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff (VCIQS), Sir William Oliver's view that the assumptions of the report were too inflexible. This was so because, while in 1955, the Defence Committee had agreed that a deterioration in the international

situation could be detected six months before the outbreak of war, the warning period was now to be limited to a week only. This certainly bore the hallmark of Sandys's efforts, for the amount of troops that could be legitimised by a week's warning was far less than deriving from a six month period. Oliver complained that '...if only a 7 day warning period were to be assumed, then the number of reserves allowed might be restricted to the number that could be called up in 7 days'.²⁰ Here he seemed less interested in addressing the issue of the validity of the seven day warning estimate, then with the implications of that estimate for the Army's 'organisational essence' (i.e. in this instance, conventional preparations for global war).

Not that the Ministry of Defence itself seemed seriously concerned about the relationship between intelligence estimates and warning - the relationship that in theory defined what warning period was possible. Rather, what interested the Ministry was economic savings. Certainly, in rejecting Oliver's complaint, Sir Richard Powell referred not to any problem of strategic warning, but to Duncan Sandys's recent letter to the Secretary of State for War that the government would not maintain large stocks for use by units called-up for global war.²¹ Again, when Powell agreed to

²⁰ DEFE 4/98, COS (57) 6 discussion of JP (57) 73 (Final), 11 July 1957.

²¹ DEFE 4/99, COS 68 (57) 4 discussion of JP(57)Note 8, 29 August 1957.

compromise on a warning of four weeks (so that the home defence forces could be mobilised, BAOR brought up to strength and the strategic reserve made ready) this seems to have been divorced from any real consideration of problems of warning and more a result of the processes of bureaucratic bargaining.

Yet, this was a short term problem in that in the future there would be fewer reserves to call-up given the termination of national service. Sandys and Powell, however, sought to retain control even in the near-term and to secure as much savings as possible. They could subordinate questions of warning for global war to the objectives of economic savings because not only was global war the least likely contingency, but in such a conflict massive retaliation and not British reserves would be the mainstay of the allied response. British strategy was clearly moving away from a posture of multiple capabilities in a manner which was almost unthinkable in the 1955-56 period. In this sense, the revolutionary implications of the 1957 White Paper were underlined.

While the most discernable impact of Sandys's cuts can be noted in British global war preparations in the European theatre, contingency plans for cold and limited war in extra-European theatres were also influenced. Indeed, immediately following the promulgation of the White Paper, Templer, in reply to a question from Sandys as to '...whether it is safe to say that we could have carried out the Suez operation with

an all-regular force of 375,000', replied in the negative.²² In addition, it was the Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox Boyd, who pointed to the difficulties

...of reconciling the United Kingdom responsibilities in the Colonies, - the ultimate sanction for which rested on the armed forces with the general reduction in those forces which would follow from the policy announced in the Defence White Paper. This problem would become increasingly serious as those reductions were progressively implemented.²³

Macmillan admitted the difficulties of equipping and deploying the armed forces for these tasks, but he was adamant that costs of defence had to be reduced and the only recourse was to 'skill and ingenuity'. It was the Prime Minister's view that once the new order of battle was completed, consideration would be given to how these troops could best be used in order to reinforce the colonial territories during an emergency and to discharge Britain's overseas commitments during peacetime.²⁴ In other words, Britain would just have to do with her limited forces and rely on the build-up of the central reserve and the increase in her strategic airlift capability to 32 Britannias.²⁵ Unlike in the immediate pre-1957 period, there would be no compromising on this point.

²² DEFE 4/96, COS 28 (57) 1, 5 April 1957. The CIGS maintained that while there might be enough fighting troops for such an operation, the administrative back-up would not be sufficient.

²³ CAB 130/122, GEN 370/3rd Meeting, 30 May 1957.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ DEFE 5/73, COS (57) 33, 5 February 1957.

Not surprisingly, as 1957 progressed, the Army continued to maintain that commitments could not be met with 165,000 men and that it might not be possible to recruit even this number. Sandys, himself, admitted this latter point in a memorandum to the Cabinet on 1 November. Here he stated that over the next five years the services required an average recruit intake of male other ranks of 36,000 a year (the numbers needed to build-up an all-regular force of 375,000 by 1962). 27,000 adult males a year were required until the end of 1962 and 22,500 a year thereafter. The Minister was of the opinion that

If recruitment runs at an average annual rate of between these two figures [that is between 27,000 and 22,500], the total regular strength required can still be achieved, though two or three years later than planned. Should this occur it will have to be decided...whether it is acceptable for the forces to be temporarily under strength. If not, some form of selective national service will have to be introduced to bridge the remaining gap.²⁶

Political problems aside, given the effort made by Sandys during the White Paper discussions for securing the termination of national service, it is doubtful whether he was really taking seriously his own suggestion that selective national service be introduced.²⁷ Neither was he prepared to

²⁶ CAB 129/90, C (57) 257, 1 November 1957. In December Sandys expected that recruitment figures would be 20-30,000 short of force goals by 1962. NA, RG 59, 741.5/12-1157, Whitney to Dulles, No. 363, 11 December 1957.

²⁷ Indeed, Ambassador Whitney informed Dulles that '[s]everal senior officials [in] MOD and [the] intelligence community have confidentially stated their doubts that [the] Conservative Government would be willing [to] extend conscription or institute some form [of] selective service prior [to the] general election ...' Ibid.

increase pay and inducements to the level the services regarded as sufficient, nor would he rely totally on independent British nuclear power to make up for the conventional force gap. Rather, Sandys and Macmillan were attracted to another formula which, even if it offended service sensibilities and decreased the room for British independent manoeuvre, had political, economic and military attractions in itself. For Sandys and Macmillan, the concept of 'balanced collective forces' (a concept outlined in paragraph 11 of the White Paper which stated that '[t]he trend is towards the creation of integrated allied forces. Therefore, provided each member nation plays its fair part in the joint effort, it is not necessarily desirable that each should seek to contribute national forces which are by themselves self-sufficient and balanced in all respects')²⁸ served a double purpose as it, on the one hand, legitimised troop reductions and, on the other hand, complemented nuclear deterrence as a rationale (even though a less dramatic one) for British conventional cutbacks.

Consequently, on the eve of the Prime Minister's visit to Washington in October 1957, Macmillan stated his intention of securing 'balanced collective forces' with the Americans in the context of the improved nuclear collaboration between the two countries. Aside from retaining her own contribution to the nuclear deterrent and the forces necessary to maintain

²⁸ Cmd. 124, op.cit. , para. 11.

stability in the colonies, it would not be necessary for the United Kingdom to retain forces which merely duplicated American efforts. The implication was that preparations for limited and global war contingencies would be carried out in partnership, and the allied forces designated to these eventualities would be of a complementary nature.²⁹ The Americans (and also Britain's other NATO allies) would be told that forces should be balanced collectively on the basis of a British contribution of between 350,000 and 375,000 men and a defence budget of approximately £1400 million. It was admitted in a paper presented by Sandys to Macmillan before the Prime Minister's departure that

The inevitable result of this policy would be a deliberate unbalancing of the British forces [as they] would certainly not be balanced within themselves. Such a policy would be a recognition of the fact that we are no longer in a position to defend ourselves except in partnership with allies.³⁰

For Sandys what was new here was simply his own willingness to recognise realities brought about by developments in international politics and technology; for the services, on the other hand, the discontinuity in policy reflected itself in Sandys's willingness to greatly exacerbate and legitimise Britain's conventional weakness for purposes of economic savings, and his success so far in doing so. What must have further angered the services was Sandys's seeming readiness to subordinate his own strategic logic to reductions in the

²⁹ DEFE 4/101, COS 81 (57), 21 October 1957.

³⁰ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 26, 12 November 1957.

defence budget. For, with his emphasis on the concept of 'balanced collective forces' Sandys was, in a sense, admitting that the reductions in British conventional forces would be made up not only with a focus on nuclear weapons but with the forces of allied nations. Therefore, by legitimising British force cuts to NATO allies, at least partly on the basis of balanced conventional forces, Sandys was implicitly acknowledging the weakness of his major strategic legitimisation for the economies forced on the services during the White Paper negotiations.

Dickson, for one, expressed his unease about abandoning nationally balanced forces and warned that Britain's inferiority relative to the United States placed her in a difficult situation in any talks on balanced collective forces.³¹ In turn, Sir Gerald Templer cautioned that Sandys's economic cuts would inevitably lead to the ending of nationally balanced forces and he personally would prefer to abandon the deterrent.³² Mountbatten opined that the greater the reduction in Britain's forces, the more necessary it was for them to be fully versatile and therefore balanced. Sandys and Macmillan's approach would, according to the First Sea Lord, lead '...to a dangerous lack of balance in the British forces'.³³

³¹ DEFE 4/101, COS 81 (57), 21 October 1957.

³² Ibid.

³³ DEFE 4/101, COS 88 (57) discussion of D (57) 26, 14 November 1957.

The services, to be sure, strongly questioned the strategic validity of a concept which was so evidently governed by economic considerations. Indeed, the economic rationales underlying this concept were never far from the surface. For example, on 11 November, Powell told the Chiefs that if the three allied commander's minimum forces demands could not be matched by force availabilities, then a new directive would have to be given to NATO which set out requirements on the basis of a much smaller order of battle. On the other hand, an effort should be made to achieve balanced collective forces.³⁴ The Permanent Secretary thereby gave the impression that the objective of savings would have to be obtained one way or the other, irrespective of strategic considerations.

In discussions in the Defence Committee during November, it was agreed that the policy of balanced collective forces, if pushed to its logical conclusion would imply that Britain was no longer in a position to defend herself. Consequently, it was stated that the policy would not be pursued to the extent that it would destroy the adaptability of British forces to discharge commitments which were essentially her responsibility. It would therefore remain an objective to deploy forces capable of independent action in any operation short of global war. Balanced forces would be established east of Suez, though west of the Canal '...an appropriate

³⁴ DEFE 4/101, COS 88 (57), 14 November 1957.

contribution to collectively balanced forces...'³⁵ would be made. Nevertheless, these concessions on the part of Sandys were only superficial as they were not accompanied by any promises to provide more troops or to increase expenditure. Moreover, Sandys also got the services to agree that the question of balanced forces east of Suez would still have to be reviewed in the light of any future agreement on the collective forces required to support SEATO. There would also be no question of the principle of balanced collective forces not applying to NATO and global war contingencies.

Where there was continuity, however, was in the area of extra-European global and limited war preparations. Here Sandys's shift away from conventional to nuclear forces was not out of place for, as noted in Chapter Two, even prior to 1957, economic considerations had precluded major deployments to back up the Bagdad Pact and SEATO alliances. In this context, Sandys's manpower cuts served to reinforce Britain's nuclear focus. For example, on 27 February, Sandys told the Defence Committee that the new long term plan made it impossible to provide a strategic reserve of land forces based in Cyprus.

He suggested that at this stage we should merely announce that we would make available to support the Bagdad Pact countries such forces as were stationed in the area at the time, without entering into any commitments about the number or nature of the forces involved.³⁶

³⁵ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 10, 18 November 1957.

³⁶ CAB 131/18, DC 2 (57) 3, 27 February 1957.

Sandys told the committee that the United Kingdom would continue to have forces in the Arabian Peninsula, in Kenya and also certain naval forces in the Persian Gulf. However, it would be most undesirable to refer specifically to even these forces and Britain should not enter into force commitments which would lead to difficulties such as those being experienced in NATO.³⁷

When it came to SEATO, again much emphasis was placed on nuclear weapons with the object being to steer away from a stress on conventional forces. Here the Chiefs and the Minister of Defence were not out of step - not surprisingly since it was recognised that there was little chance of British forces being deployed there in the very constricted financial environment of 1957. Thus, the Chiefs continued to point out that the strategic concept associated with SEATO defence involved the use of nuclear weapons. It was their view that since conventional forces would not be deployed to defend this theatre in global war, three squadrons of medium bombers armed with nuclear weapons would be based at the Tenagh airfield in Malaya.³⁸ Clearly in these areas - where there was not much related conventional force deployments - the 1957 White Paper served to underline rather than dramatically revolutionise policies.

³⁷ See next section.

³⁸ DEFE 4/102, COS 98 (57) 2, 31 December 1957.

With regard to specific naval capabilities, the consequences of the White Paper's focus on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces were far reaching. It is evident from recently released documents that despite a moderation of Sandys's position between April and December 1957, the Minister of Defence's interpretation of the White Paper led to attacks on the Navy's global, limited and cold war capabilities. Mountbatten's threatened resignation in June, his intense lobbying within and without the defence decision-making establishment, and his courting of Sandys³⁹ went some of the way towards shifting the Minister's earlier position, but not far enough to undermine all the consequences of the White Paper for the Navy's preferred capabilities and roles.

As argued in the previous chapter, during 1957 the Navy focused its efforts on defending its conventional capabilities designated for a range of contingencies. This is not surprising given the extent of Sandys's planned economic reductions for naval capabilities. Indeed, a comparison of Sandys's naval projections in July 1957 and those presented to Eden in July 1955 reveal major cutbacks which could only have had profound implications for force planning:⁴⁰

³⁹ Ziegler, op.cit. , pp. 551-53.

⁴⁰ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 13, 26 July 1957. Ziegler maintains that Mountbatten threatened resignation if the Navy vote was cut from £319 million to £290 million. Ziegler does not state what year this projection was related to but it can be assumed that it referred to 1958/9 - though this does not coincide with the figures above.

Table Nine: 1955 and 1957 Naval Budget Projections

	1957/8	1958/9	1959/60	1960/61	1961/2	1962/3
July 1955	395	432	434	407	403	405
July 1957	316	339	342	336	310	299

It is of interest to note that the debate between April and December 1957 took place in terms not only of the strategic validity of the White Paper but also in terms of differing interpretations of this document. This underlines the analysis put forward in Chapter Six that, in many instances, Cmd. 124 merely papered over differences in strategic conceptions and merely postponed further disagreements. Consequently, on the basis of the July 1957 projections and a manpower ceiling of 80,000 (to be reached by 1964) it was the First Lord Selkirk's view that

...the Navy that emerges from this plan does not conform with the policy laid down in the Defence White Paper and it is totally inadequate to carry out the role assigned to it in that document.⁴¹

Selkirk's interpretation of the paper was that while defence resources would be readjusted so as to place emphasis on the deterrent, forces would also have to be deployed for cold war purposes. A lack of ships for these missions could lead to small crises escalating into general conflagrations. Under Sandys's plan, the Navy would only have three carrier task groups (each with one carrier, one cruiser, four destroyers

⁴¹ Air 19/856, Selkirk to Sandys, 21 June 1957.

and four frigates) of which two would be in the Home and Mediterranean waters, two frigates in the Far East and two to three in the Persian Gulf.⁴² Selkirk decried the fact that there would be no base in Singapore and was adamant that these small forces could not safeguard Britain's interests on a world-wide basis - especially in the West Indies, South Atlantic and the Far East. He warned that the withdrawal of Britain's small naval forces in these latter areas would weaken regional deterrence - a role the Navy, Selkirk maintained, had been playing '...long before the phrase became fashionable', and that Britain's military alliances would suffer serious setbacks while American isolationism would be reinforced.⁴³ Once more, general agreement on the need to emphasise the nuclear deterrent was not accompanied by a willingness to reduce preferred forces and capabilities.

Concomitantly, it was Selkirk's view that the Navy's limited war position was also being threatened. Here the First Lord totally rejected Macmillan's and Sandys view that Britain should not plan on fighting a limited war alone. He asked whether Britain was seeking to fight the next limited war 'to the last American sailor' and warned that with the impending cuts, Britain would never be able to mount an operation such

⁴² CAB 131/18, DC (57) 13, 26 July 1957.

⁴³ AIR 19/856, Selkirk to Sandys, 21 June 1957; For a review of the naval construction programmes see CAB 131/18, DC (57) 20, 29 July 1957.

as Suez.⁴⁴ Selkirk concluded by returning to the problem of reductions in cold war contingency planning and attacked the very basis of Sandys's proposals - the exchange of nuclear for conventional forces. He maintained that Britain could not rest her naval policy on the 80 Plan because: (1) vast quantities of hydrogen bombs in the UK could not make her influence felt overseas; (2) the Commonwealth was built on sea-power and the 80 Plan, by undermining naval manpower, would undermine the Commonwealth; and (3) the strength of NATO would be seriously impaired and '..without Nato our hydrogen deterrent becomes a hollow straw, a mere bluff which the most gullible communist could not fail to see through'. Selkirk went on:

In my view, therefore, we should be seen, in the eyes of the Commonwealth, of NATO, and especially America, and the world at large, to be abdicating our position as a naval world power. This is not a question of pride or sentiment. Our friends will be discouraged; our enemies will take heart. Thus the balance of cold war may be expected to swing against us and the outcome may be very serious.⁴⁵

The Navy was thus not prepared to surrender easily to Sandys's attacks on what it considered to be its central tasks. Whether it would be as successful as it had been in the 1955-56 period remained doubtful in the light of the new organisational context, Sandys's strength of personality, his financial goals

⁴⁴ Here Selkirk was strongly supporting Mountbatten's position when the latter had told Sandys in April that during Operation Musketeer Britain had used three aircraft carriers and two helicopter carriers but would now only have two operational carriers plus a commando carrier. See DEFE 4/96, COS 28 (57) 1, 5 April 1957.

⁴⁵ AIR 19/856, Selkirk to Sandys, 21 June 1957.

and the thrust of the White Paper which had been accepted as government policy.

Mountbatten's lobbying, however, soon brought strong support for his and Selkirk's attempts to alter Sandys's position. For example, on 22 August, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, the Earl of Home, presented a report to the Defence Committee on the 'Implications for the Commonwealth of Proposed Naval Reductions' in which Sandys was taken to task for endangering Britain's position in the Far East and South Atlantic. It was the Secretary of State's view that everything must be done to avoid the impression being created that Britain was starting a process of general withdrawal from South East Asia. The independence of Malaya would be endangered and Australia and New Zealand isolated, with the latter two countries being pushed towards greater co-operation with the United States. The most significant factor in Britain's power in these areas was the British naval contribution and the Secretary doubted whether the Australian and New Zealand governments would regard the presence of a carrier group east of Suez as adequate compensation for reductions in the ships based in Singapore to as few as two frigates. It was crucial that the base at Singapore be retained with a substantial naval presence because for Auckland and Canberra, the base still represented a '...visible, vital and essential link with the UK'. Concomitantly, Sandys's reductions would adversely influence Britain's security in the South Atlantic by prejudicing her

ability to defend the sea routes around Southern Africa. In short, while Sandys's plans may have realised substantial economies, the implications for foreign policy and military objectives were entirely detrimental.⁴⁶

To reaffirm this position, in September the Admiralty, with the Chief's backing, presented a paper (the so-called 'Autumn Naval Rethink') on the Navy's role in global war, cold war and especially limited war and its need for carriers - a case, according to Mountbatten that was so convincing that he was certain Sandys would give the Navy extra men and money.⁴⁷ These ideas were reflected in a report presented to the Defence Committee by Selkirk on 15 November. It is significant that the Navy's position had altered little from June. When it came to cold and limited war capabilities, the report repeated the Navy's earlier assertion that the 1957 White Paper had recognised the need for forces to meet both these requirements; however, now manpower and financial cuts made it impossible to do so. It was stressed that under Sandys's reductions, the Navy was being pressed to a point where vital interests were being liquidated. The Admiralty proposed that Sandys agree that the absolute minimum forces necessary for cold war duties include - in addition to the carrier task group east of Suez - 16 frigates of which six would be in the

⁴⁶ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 21, 22 August 1957.

⁴⁷ Ziegler, op.cit. , p. 553 and Grove, op.cit. , p. 210.

Far East, six in the Persian Gulf, four in the South Atlantic and two in the American and West Indies Stations.⁴⁸

In the face of this constant and unrelenting pressure, the Minister of Defence moved some way to the Navy's position. In mid-November, Sandys presented his own paper to the Defence Committee on the role of the Navy.⁴⁹ In it he agreed that because the Navy could recruit more than 80,000 men, the Navy manpower limit could be allowed to rise to 88,000. Yet, the Minister was explicit that this could only take place if it would cost no more than £5 million a year beginning in 1962, that it would not involve an increase in the naval modernisation and construction programme, and that the primary justification for this increase would be to help the Army in internal security and limited war operations.⁵⁰ Sandys also agreed to a fourth carrier (to be held in reserve), but on the proviso that it make no extra demands on money or manpower. At the same time, he told the Admiralty to cutback on aircraft production, a reduction which would involve cancelling as many Scimitars as possible, a slow down of the planned production of Sea Vixen and that if the NA 39 was to be produced, the RAF would first have to accept it as a successor to the Canberra. In other words, what the Minister was giving with the one hand

⁴⁸ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 29, 15 November 1957.

⁴⁹ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 28, 14 November 1957.

⁵⁰ For Sandys's attempt to get the Navy to replace the Army in Gibraltar and Malta see PREM 11/1998, Macmillan to Denny, 12 November 1957; PREM 11/1998, Macmillan to Sandys, 12 November 1957.

he was taking with the other. His compromises were certainly not unconditional ones and a return to the pre-1957 force posture seemed out of the question.

Yet, it cannot be ignored that as a result of Sandys's discussions with Mountbatten at the latter's home in Broadlands in November⁵¹ or, even more probably, as a result of the Minister of Defence's talks with Commonwealth leaders during his Far Eastern tour in 1957,⁵² Sandys seemed willing to provide a more balanced fleet east of Suez. Figures presented in his November paper revealed a projected force for this area consisting of one aircraft carrier, one commando carrier, one cruiser, 20 destroyers and frigates (including three or four maintained on station in the Persian Gulf and one in Hong Kong), five submarines and six minesweepers.⁵³

⁵¹ Ziegler traces the concessions on money and manpower to the Broadlands meeting in November. Discussions there resulted in the Navy giving up a number of shore air stations for the extra carrier and agreement to convert the light fleet carrier, Bulwark, into a commando carrier. Sandys' demand that carriers in European waters be equipped only with anti-submarine aircraft (a far cheaper option than all-purpose planes) was accepted by Mountbatten as part of a deal whereby the Navy was allowed to recruit an extra 8,000 men. Also see Grove op.cit., pp. 210-12. It is important to recognise that this trading took place not as a result of the services overwhelming Sandys's powers but on the level of personal cajoling by Mountbatten. This is a point stressed by Ziegler when he writes of the Broadlands meeting: '...no other First Sea Lord would have had the style, the status, or for that matter, the country house to entertain the Minister of Defence on equal terms'. Ziegler op.cit., p. 553. This is testament both to Mountbatten's diplomatic skills and the change in the nature of the decision making process.

⁵² See DEFE 4/102, COS 93 (57)8, 3 December 1957.

⁵³ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 28, 14 November 1957.

That Sandys was convinced not by the military as much by the political arguments for strengthening the east of Suez forces is evidenced by the fact that the CAS, Sir Dermot Boyle, was quick to criticise Sandys's new proposals as being determined by political and not military criteria, and Mountbatten's admission of this reality. However, the First Sea Lord did not agree with Boyle when the latter said that if cuts should be made, they should come first from this task force.⁵⁴ How committed Sandys was to this force posture is unclear, but what is certain is that he was intent upon securing as much savings as was politically possible. Consequently, if he had felt that further reductions were possible in this theatre, he would doubtlessly have pushed forward. The Minister was not shy to challenge the Navy's 'organisational essence' as was demonstrated during this period with regard to preparations for global war.

For, even in the wake of the 1957 White Paper, the Navy remained attached to the concept of conventional preparations for global war. In July, the First Lord had hinted at the need for global war forces when he stated that Sandys's planned cuts would lead to Britain losing all standing in NATO (an essentially political justification for these forces) and that NATO would become a 'hollow deterrent' (the military

⁵⁴ DEFE 4/102, COS 93 (57) 8 discussion of JP (57) Note 14, 3 December 1957. At this point Mountbatten got the Chiefs to agree that while 375,000 was usually talked about as the force objective, the number was around 380,000.

justification for global war forces).⁵⁵ The statement in the White Paper that 'Britain must make her contribution to NATO on a reduced scale'⁵⁶ was thereby in practice strongly opposed. Firstly, the Minister's attempt to cut forces based on a war preparation priority list (which placed global war preparations at the bottom) was strongly resisted on the basis that the Navy order of battle could not be broken-up into these specialised functions. Secondly, Sandys's claims that global war was unlikely was rejected with the statement that 'NATO policy to which Her Majesty's Government is committed, is that global war is possible, and that the alliance must be prepared to fight it'.⁵⁷

In this regard Selkirk received strong support from Mountbatten. Indeed, throughout 1957, the First Sea Lord remained adamant that the White Paper would be incompatible with the promises of the Navy to NATO. It was, according to Mountbatten, impossible to estimate for how long after the nuclear exchange Soviet submarines would endanger shipping and, consequently, there would be a need to provide for global war anti-submarine forces.⁵⁸ Here Selkirk was more specific and maintained that the growing strength of the Russian fleet meant that it could function for six months to a year after a

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Cmd. 124, op.cit. , para. 24.

⁵⁷ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 29, 15 November 1957.

⁵⁸ DEFE 4/96, COS 24 (57) 1, 28 March 1957.

nuclear exchange whatever the outcome. The First Lord stated that

In global war itself, it has been possible to claim with some plausibility that a Navy provided for peace and the cold war would put up an adequate showing in the unpredictable circumstances of global war. I have in fact made such a claim in my Explanatory Memorandum this year [but in view of the increase in Soviet naval strength] I would no longer be able to do so.⁵⁹

On top of these anti-submarine requirements, Mountbatten and Selkirk continued to press for a major convoy role for the Royal Navy. Mountbatten stressed that in the event of global war occurring, SACLANT would need to get supplies into Western Europe, and the only way this could be done would be to fight a 'monster convoy' through the Atlantic.⁶⁰ In turn, Selkirk reaffirmed the Navy's focus on anti-submarine missions, but also stated that with the forces projected in the White Paper, the Atlantic could not be kept open - a situation he termed militarily disastrous.

Following the termination of the White Paper negotiations, Sandys continued to maintain that while Britain must make a contribution to NATO in the Atlantic and Mediterranean but on a 'somewhat reduced scale'. The object was to be effective (especially in the anti-submarine role) but not to provide a balanced fleet. Most significantly, he rejected Admiralty attempts to maintain a reserve fleet capable of forming the basis of a global war capability and he maintained that the

⁵⁹ AIR 19/856, Selkirk to Sandys, 21 June 1957.

⁶⁰ DEFE 4/100, COS 72 (57) 2, 23 September 1957.

Navy '...should adhere to the principle that the reserve fleet should comprise only sufficient ships to provide a working stock to keep the active fleet up to strength allowing for accidents and refits'.⁶¹ Without a large reserve fleet there would be little opportunity for the Navy to expand its base for global war in the aftermath of a thermonuclear exchange. This certainly represented a distinct discontinuity with the pre-1957 period.⁶²

Indeed, a comparison of naval force deployments in the Home and Mediterranean stations in 1956 and that projected by Sandys in November 1957 reveals that even with Sandys's revised forecasts, the number of cruisers were reduced from four to two (plus one in reserve), the number of cruisers from five to two, the number of destroyers and frigates from 57 to 24, the number of submarines from 38 to 23, and the number of minesweepers from 25 to 12.⁶³ Sandys's willingness to compromise and make at least some concessions over cold and limited war capabilities east of Suez was not matched by a readiness to give the Navy the broken-backed forces it desired. Thus, while Sandys continued to reiterate on the declaratory level that Britain would make an effective contribution to the naval efforts of the western alliance,

⁶¹ CAB 131/18, DC (57) 28, 14 November, 1957.

⁶² Major surface combatants listed as in reserve were reduced from 178 in 1956-57 to 98 by 1958-59. See Grove, op.cit. , pp. 409-10.

⁶³ CAB 131/18, DC 10 (57) 2, 18 November 1957.

this belied the major reductions that were taking place in the Navy's order of battle - reductions that the Navy during 1957 never tired of pointing out would undermine its ability to conduct operations in the post-thermonuclear exchange phase of global war. While this was not a new refrain, the scope of Sandys's cutbacks lent weight to the Navy's fears and underlined the major changes that had taken place.

(3) Allied Responses to British Conventional Force Reductions

The far reaching nature of the changes in force structure sought by Sandys and Macmillan is underlined not only by the reactions of the Chiefs and service heads but also by that of Britain's allies in NATO. Throughout the period of the White Paper negotiations and in the months thereafter, Britain's representatives in these two organisations reported of the unease that the news of Sandys's plans was causing. For example, Sir Frank Roberts at the UK Permanent Delegation in Paris wrote to the Foreign Office in March that the statement in the White Paper which maintained that 375,000 regulars would be sufficient to effectively replace the present strength of 700,000 troops, would have a 'shattering' effect on NATO. He went on that '...the mention of the figure of 375,000 will also at once revive questions about our capacity and intention to maintain even 50,000 men plus the reduced 2nd TAF on the Continent'.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ AIR 8/2157, Roberts to Foreign Office, No.108, 27 March 1957. It should be noted that 2nd TAF was also to be reduced from 33 squadrons of 466 aircraft to 18 squadrons of 216

Service objections were mirrored by allied responses, but Sandys remained relatively undeterred by either. For the Minister of Defence what was of greater concern was the issue of BOAR's cost.⁶⁵ Indeed, the Minister of Defence made little attempt to dispel fears that

...the impression is bound to be created that, whatever the opinion of our allies, consultation is a formality and we have again taken a unilateral decision part of which will involve unlimited further cuts in B.A.O.R.⁶⁶

Yet, for Macmillan and Sandys, the issue was one of packaging and not one of concessions or alterations in policy. While Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd reported that Britain's proposals to reduce her troops on the Continent had been received without enthusiasm⁶⁷ and that both the French and German governments had been disturbed by the reductions planned in BAOR, it was Macmillan's view that the British case would '...need to be developed with skill and firmness; and in the meantime we should do nothing to imply that we had doubt

planes by March 1958. This would then be cutback to 10 squadrons of 102 fighters by 1961. Light bombers were to be reduced from 17 squadrons of 170 aircraft to five squadrons of 80 aircraft by March 1958. These were then to be cut to four squadrons of 64 aircraft by March 1960.

⁶⁵ See for example CAB 131/18, DC 2 (57) 2, 27 February 1957.

⁶⁶ AIR 8/2157, Steele to Foreign Office, No.263, 31 March 1957.

⁶⁷ PREM 11/1842, CC 14 (57) 1, 28 February 1957.

that it would be accepted'.⁶⁸ Consequently, when French Foreign Minister Mollet informed the British that France attached great importance to 'la presence humaine', that modern weapons were no substitute for men, and that in certain circumstance a strategy of massive retaliation lacked credibility,⁶⁹ he was told that Britain recognised that there was a balance of risks involved but the pressures on her economy were very great.⁷⁰ In turn, when Chancellor Audenauer complained that reductions in BAOR would lead to a chain reaction of reductions in other NATO countries, he was told by Ambassador Sir Christopher Steele that in the event of a major Soviet aggression, nuclear retaliation would follow within hours and that the combat efficiency of Britain's remaining conventional forces would, in any event, be greater in the future than at present.⁷¹

The Americans, too, were left in no doubt that Britain would not alter its course because of allied pressures. In January 1957, when Ambassador Caccia told US officials that tactical nuclear weapons would increase the firepower of Britain's remaining forces, he did not suggest there would be a linkage in timing between reductions and tactical nuclear weapons

⁶⁸ CAB 128/31, CC 12 (57) 1, 28 February 1957.

⁶⁹ PREM 11/1847, Jebb to Macmillan, 18 February 1957; also see NA, RG 59, 741.5/4-2457, 24 April 1957.

⁷⁰ PREM 11/1847, Foreign Office to Paris, No.422, 21 February 1957; also see AIR 2/14712, Record of Discussion between Bourges Manoury and Sandys, 14 February 1957.

⁷¹ PREM 11/1829A, Bonn to Foreign Office, No.382, 6 May 1957; also see NA, RG 59, 741.5/5-1357, Embassy London to Department of State, Embtel. 6144, 10 May 1957.

deployment.⁷² Again, that same month, in correspondence between Sandys and Dulles, the Minister of Defence maintained that while he hoped that Britain's troop cuts would not adversely influence NATO, they would, he stressed, be carried out irrespective of NATO demands.⁷³ Even when President Eisenhower told Macmillan at the Bermuda conference in March that Britain's new policy reminded him of the US New Look '... an idea which, however, had been considerably effected since its formulation a few years ago by political consideration around the world',⁷⁴ Macmillan remained unimpressed and unwilling to alter the direction of policy laid out by Sandys in the White Paper.

Consequently, by the time of the NATO heads of government meeting in Paris in December 1957, the British had managed to gain NATO acceptance of a reduction in BAOR of 31,500 men to approximately 63-64,000 to be reached by 1 April 1958. In the Autumn of 1957, they had emphasised their inability to meet the costs of British troops in Germany after March 1958 and their continued interest in reducing BAOR by another 13,500.⁷⁵

⁷² NA, RG 59, 741.5/1-1157, 11 January 1957.

⁷³ Eisenhower Library, Dulles Papers, 1952-59, General Correspondence and Memorandum Series, Memos of Conversations-Gen S (1) 30 January 1957.

⁷⁴ Eisenhower Library, Office of the Staff Secretary, International Trips, Box 2, The Bermuda Conference 21-23 March 1957.

⁷⁵ NATO was not yet informed of Britain's interest in reducing her forces in Germany to below 50,000. Throughout this period Powell appears to have remained convinced that NATO should not be made aware of the full scope of Britain's ultimate force cuts and should be told that '...the changes

While in October the British were prepared to concede that 5000 men of the strategic reserve be left on the continent, this was only dependent on future German aid, and the other 8000 men of the second 13,500 'slice' remained non-negotiable.⁷⁶

In Paris, Macmillan stressed the UK responsibilities outside NATO and made a plea for the concept of balanced collective forces within the organisation. He called for the pooling of resources and the designation of specific tasks to various members.⁷⁷ With the emphasis on Britain's nuclear contribution, there was no attempt to moderate her position on force reductions. Indeed, in a meeting with Dulles and the Secretary General of NATO, Sandys emphasised '...the importance as he saw it of planning massive retaliatory action if there were any armed attack in Europe', and he criticised Eisenhower's speech at the conference for undercutting this impression

produced by the White Paper were such that we were not able yet to forecast up to 1962 and are still working out the details'. DEFE 4/97, COS 35 (57) 1, 10 May 1957, The Permanent Secretary was, obviously concerned that knowledge of these cuts would create further opposition to Sandys's plans.

⁷⁶ NA, RG 59, 741.5/10-2257, Elbrick to Dulles, 22 October 1957.

⁷⁷ Foreign Relations of the United States, Vol.IV, 1955-57, No.75, US Delegation at the NATO heads of Government Meeting to the Department of State, 17 December 1957.

through the statement that Soviet aggression would be met with 'all appropriate force'.⁷⁸

Although the Americans had been informed by a senior British official 'close to Sandys' that the Minister's '...thinking had changed in recent months so that Sandys no longer relied so heavily or almost exclusively upon [the] concept of massive retaliation to deter war',⁷⁹ the statements of the Minister at the conference did not indicate a major shift. Rather, Sandys and Macmillan remained intent upon pushing a strategic concept that allowed for large reductions in British troop deployments and which essentially signified a major change in British strategic planning. While not everyone at the conference was impressed with the strategic logic of the British arguments, few could have left believing the British would alter their position.

Conclusion

Following the NATO discussions on force requirements in December 1957, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Peter Thorneycroft, wrote to Macmillan that

The sooner and plainer we say that the bigger bill contemplated for NATO can't be paid the better. It is doubtful if Europe is the right place to spend

⁷⁸ Eisenhower Library, John Foster Dulles Papers 1952-59, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation-General-S(1), Memorandum of Conversation with The Right Honourable Duncan Sandys, 17 December 1957.

⁷⁹ NA, RG 59, 741.5/11-957, London to Secretary of State No.2972, 9 November 1957.

the money and in any event the money is not there to
spend⁸⁰

In truth, Sandys had been making this point plain to the services and Britain's allies since the beginning of the year. The year 1957 saw the position of the Army and the Navy substantially altered in the name of economic savings. The termination of national service and the reductions in defence expenditure pushed forward by Sandys could not but have informed upon the services limited war, cold war, and most significantly, global war capabilities. Consequently, unlike on the level of nuclear capabilities, on the level of conventional forces it is possible to note a measure of discontinuity between the pre- and post- 1957 periods - a discontinuity that flowed, to a great extent, from the termination of national service and the reduction of manpower. It was a discontinuity that manifested itself not in terms of motivations (where there was little change from the pre-1957 stress on the need to secure savings through reductions in conventional forces), but on the level of policy-outcomes where conventional force planning had to take into account the Sandys' manpower and financial reductions.

In the immediate aftermath of the 1957 White Paper, Sandys held firmly to his vision that savings would have to be secured in the defence budget at the expense of conventional forces. Despite making some concessions to the Navy's cold and

⁸⁰ PREM 11/1828, Thorneycroft to Macmillan, 13 December 1957.

limited war capabilities, Sandys did not deviate substantially from his objectives. Thus, in the latter half of 1957, the Minister of Defence reinforced his earlier attempt to reduce Britain's conventional capabilities even if this meant overriding the Chiefs, service heads and Britain's allies. When the services managed to contain Sandys's efforts, they did so not through blocking or overwhelming the Minister of Defence, but through cajoling and personal intercession - as demonstrated most ably by Mountbatten. This change of approach, too, serves to underline the discontinuity in procedure between the pre- and immediate post-January 1957 periods and its ultimate translation into changes of substance.

In his task Sandys continued to receive firm support from Macmillan and, increasingly, from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. With the momentum for reductions already set during the White Paper negotiations, the services could do little to deflect the Minister from his objectives of financial savings. Sandys was therefore able to adhere to a set of war preparation priorities in a far stricter manner than any of his predecessors. It is therefore not surprising that Britain's NATO contribution - a contribution which on the level of military planning was designated for global war contingencies - suffered appreciably.

It is of interest to note how little heed was paid to allied reactions as BAOR was reduced. Few voices were raised in

support of Sandys's plans in allied councils, but the Minister of Defence and the Prime Minister paid scant attention. With the concept of balanced forces used to support a focus on massive retaliation, Sandys felt confident enough not to deviate substantially from his set-out position. While the White Paper had emphasised greater co-operation amongst allies, Britain's actions during 1957 then did not reflect too serious an insistence on this intention. On the other hand, the reductions in troop strength meant that the United Kingdom was increasingly dependent on allied forces - a reality which Sandys readily recognised. That a chain reaction of force reductions which could have led to the unravelling of the alliance did not take place was fortuitous, but clearly British policy-makers would have to take more care in the future. Arguably, the shock of the Suez setback made the taking of such chances acceptable, but this surely was not the basis for sound policy formulation in the context of the NATO alliance.

Finally, it should be noted that since Britain saw its deterrent acting primarily within the context of the Anglo-American partnership and, since it was during this period prepared to cutback on V-bomber procurement targets and slow down research and development on Blue Streak, the real shift in the balance between conventional and nuclear forces on the level of procurement policy took place more as a result of reductions in conventional forces than as a result of increased spending on nuclear capabilities. This, in turn,

once more reflects the major economic impetus behind the British New Look and the increasing subordination of strategic formulations in the determination of force planning. The consequences of this economic focus in the hands of a strong Minister of Defence for conventional force levels were not insignificant while the implications for foreign policy were inevitably to be felt. In this regard, the 1957 White Paper stands as a watershed in post-war British defence policy.

CONCLUSION

The object of this thesis has been to analyse the significance of the 1957 Defence White Paper in the context of British strategic planning. An attempt has been made to reach some conclusions as to the nature of Duncan Sandys's contribution, the degree to which the White Paper represented the culmination of tendencies long present in British defence policy, and the measure of continuity and discontinuity in policy across the 1955-57 period. It has been argued that the import of the document is most usefully assessed on the level of long term force planning and on the broader plane of the purposes of Britain's strategic nuclear power. The balance between nuclear and conventional forces and the focus on the independence of Britain's deterrent were, after all, the centrepieces of this document and it is their meaning that must be analysed in terms of the themes outlined in the first chapter of this thesis: that of continuity in strategic policy and the issue of organisational structure and decision making.

The British New Look - similarly to its American predecessor - was a policy characterised not only by the threat of massive nuclear response, but also by the search for economies through the replacement of conventional with nuclear firepower. Two points are of note here. The first is that the documents reveal that analogous to the American variant of the New Look, economic motivations were central to British thinking -

certainly throughout the 1955-57 period. Indeed, this economic theme represents a major continuity across the period under study. The second point is that the documents covering the 1955-57 period lend support to the view expressed in the writings of Pierre, Groom, Malone, and Wheeler that a growing appreciation of the strategic implications of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons informed upon a willingness to consider the replacement of conventional with nuclear forces. Ministers of Defence, Chiefs of Staff and service heads were throughout these years agreed that nuclear weapons had altered the character of war and that this would have to be taken into account in contingency and force planning. Thus, continuity in economic motivations was mirrored by a continuity on the level of broad strategic concepts.

Continuity, however, should not solely be assessed on the level of motives and generalities, but also on the more relevant level of force programming and resulting policy-outcomes. Certainly, the more significant level is that of programming and results and not intentions and theoretical speculations. For it is on the latter level of policy where ideas are actualized and general theoretical formulae are translated into procurement decisions. Because this process involves direct costs in terms of forces and capabilities (as opposed to theoretical speculation where the costs are more indirect and long term) it is the more interesting and important level - certainly as far as the question of policy continuities are concerned.

It is on this level that the problem of decision making becomes intertwined with the question of continuity. In Chapter One, Halperin's concept of 'organisational essence' was introduced as a loose heuristic tool for explaining service reactions to attempts to replace conventional with nuclear forces. Specifically, it was argued in this thesis that when there was a shift away from discussions of broad generalities to that of actual force structures, service definitions of their respective roles made difficult the translation of agreement on the necessity for economic savings and an appreciation of the destructive effects of thermonuclear weapons into major force reductions.

The progress of the 1955 Long Term Defence Review and the 1956 Policy Review revealed that on a broad level, definitions of 'organisational essence' militated against acceptance of large cuts in budgets and manpower. On a more specific level, the Army and Navy's attachment to global war forces made the adoption of a coherent strategic posture which reflected a match between, on the one hand force deployments and capability procurement, and on the other, an appreciation of the possible consequences of thermonuclear war, difficult to achieve. Recognition of the horrors of thermonuclear war did not go hand in hand with a willingness to recognise that long war strategies were of little value. With the Army's view of its role as including the provision for a large scale ground war in Western Europe, the Navy's perception of its task as

including support of a large battle fleet and reserves for operations during and after a thermonuclear exchange, and the RAF's attachment to a substantial 2nd TAF, economic savings through force and capability reductions remained difficult to secure. While Wheeler would certainly argue that this still begs the issue in that the determinant of service positions remains unaddressed, (that is, was it simply bureaucratic political positions or strategic visions that determined the service positions ?) it is the outcome and not the motivation which is of significance here.

The tediousness and repetitiveness of the cost-cutting exercises of 1955-56 highlighted the slow pace of progress of these programmes and demonstrated that while the direction of planning pointed towards the Sandys White Paper, the speed at which decisions were being made and cuts secured did not suggest its irrevocable expression in 1957. The former Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, Sir Richard Powell, for one, is adamant about this point. Indeed, the services appeared incapable of generating a force posture of the type outlined in Sandys's first Defence White Paper. Snyder's hypothesis that bureaucratic politics will be most intense when an arbiter is imposed might still be valid, but it does not undermine the contention that in the absence of such a central force, policy-outcomes will be most strongly influenced to the detriment of efficient and coherent strategic planning.

At the same time, it was not so much service attitudes that militated against the evolution of British defence policy to the point reflected in the 1957 White Paper as much as it was the organisational setting which allowed these forces to come into play. After all, it does not appear that during the negotiations surrounding the 1957 White Paper or following its publication, that service definition or defence of their 'organisational essence' altered radically. For example, in 1958, while Sandys remained optimistic over recruitment figures¹, the Army continued to voice its opposition to the total termination of national service and reliance on only 165,000 men.² The RAF continued to express its interest in manned bombers and in the need for fighter aircraft beyond the P.1 - demands totally at variance with the 1957 White Paper.³

Sandys's achievement, then, is that through force of personality and changes in the decision making structure for which he was certainly in part the author, the balance of power between the Chiefs of Staff/services and the Ministry of Defence was altered, and the ability of the services to defend their 'organisational essences' greatly neutralised. It was these changes which helped generate the 1957 revolution in the nuclear-conventional force balance. Furthermore, the

¹ NA, RG 59, 741.5/6-458, No. 7013, Whitney to Dulles, 4 June 1958.

² See Anthony Head's speech in the House of Commons in Hansard, HOC. , Vol. 951, cols. 988 ff. , 28 July 1958.

³ NA, RG 59, 741.5/5-858, No.6424, Embassy in London to Dulles, 8 May 1958.

exploitation by Sandys of these alterations together with the triumph of style over substance during the 1957 White Paper negotiations - specifically the Minister's willingness to often elevate economic considerations above the exigencies of his own strategic logic - casts doubt on the wisdom of Martin's choice of the term 'defence by doctrine' to describe the period. For, while the outcome of the 1957 deliberations was certainly a more coherent force posture than previously existent, the motivations behind such a move were not that doctrinally clear. A better description than 'defence by doctrine' would be 'defence by imposition' - a term that more lucidly highlights the style of the Minister as a determinant of specific policy-outcomes and reveals the nature of the dialectical framework in which policy was formulated.

From the start, Sandys had recognised that as far as strengthening the central direction of defence planning, the organisational changes heralded in 1955 represented a false new dawn. The January 1957 directive and the 1958 White Paper on defence organisation had at their centres the object of subordinating service predilections to national objectives - defined, that is, by the Ministry of Defence. According to the First Secretary at the American Embassy in London, Howard Meyers, the 1958 White Paper on defence organisation led both Templer and Boyle to threaten resignation (together with at least one of the service heads).⁴ This tension reflected the

⁴ NA, RG 59, 741.517-258, No. 33, Meyers to Whitney, 2 July 1958.

service recognition of Sandys's success in 1957 in overriding their wishes and their fear of the implications for their force programmes if his dominance was instituted as a permanent feature of defence decision making. The fact that inter-service rivalry further increased during 1958 reaffirms the point of the cathartic nature of Sandys's first year in the Ministry of Defence and underlines the revolutionary implications of his policy in terms of force planning.

The discontinuity between the pre-1957 and 1957 force plans is most clearly reflected in a comparison of the force projections at the end of 1956 and at the end of 1957. While, of course, following the end of the Korean rearmament programme there was a decline in manpower and capabilities, the decline in 1957 was extremely sharp. The difference between cost projections for the end of the decade made in 1955 and those in 1957 is also marked.⁵ Moreover, the shift of pronouncements to a stress on balanced collective forces underlines the significance of these changes for the manner in which British power was now to be deployed.

Consequently, while it may be claimed that the British stress on a strategy of massive retaliation in 1957 reflected the culmination of trends present since at least the Global Strategy Paper of 1952, a review of the 1955-57 documents

⁵ While Selwyn Lloyd's 1955 projections pointed to an end of the decade level of defence spending averaging around £2000 million, actual spending for 1959/60 stood at approximately £1475.7 million. See Pierre *op.cit.*, p. 344.

reveals that they were, in fact, a culmination of only declaratory trends. Whether Britain could have espoused such a strategy so strongly and explicitly in the context of the retention of large conventional forces and funding is questionable as the inconsistencies between declaratory and procurement policy would have been apparent for all to see. The 1957 White Paper was a public document - which the 1952 Global Strategy Paper was not - and therefore it had to pay far more attention to consistency - at least in terms of the relationship of forces to economy.

Viewed from this angle, the force posture drawn up in 1957 represented more of a revolution than a culmination. This is a perspective that is clouded not only by a tendency to compare declaratory policies across the 1950s, but also by the then government's proclivity to stress policy continuity with the earlier period. Both Sandys and Macmillan were always at pains to emphasise that Britain continued to attach great importance to ground forces in Europe and that she still retained her ability to meet all obligations. Obviously - and especially in the light of criticisms from the opposition, government back-benchers and Britain's allies - Sandys did not wish to bolster the perceptions of decline in power that were prevalent in the wake of the Suez crisis.

The effect of the Suez crisis on British strategic planning in 1957 was both direct and indirect. Not only did it bring to power Macmillan whose desire for military cost-cutting was

well known, and Sandys, whose penchant for military economies was even more notorious, but it created the environment which made the translation of declaratory into action policy a reality. Thus, although it was a mixture of organisational and personality changes that accounted for the success of the Minister of Defence in shifting the balance between conventional and nuclear forces, that this shift was initiated when it was, is not unrelated to the flux in perceptions concerning the basis and purposes of British power that had accompanied the debacle at Suez. Moreover, the failure in October 1956 did not leave service reputations untarnished with the result that the new Prime Minister was presented with a somewhat weakened target. Again, as has been argued in the secondary literature, while a reduction in conventional forces would have inevitably come about at some point in time, the timing speed and finality with which the termination in conscription and other cutbacks were announced is strong circumstantial evidence that they were connected with the shock of Suez. If Suez and the perceived shifting strategic environment were not sufficient conditions for change then they was certainly necessary ones.

The lessons drawn from the crisis by Macmillan and Sandys reflected their concern for broad economic and political considerations above narrow military ones. Thus, service concerns for the procurement of capabilities and manpower necessary for Britain to sustain and improve independent military action was subordinated to the objectives of economic

savings and the Anglo-American partnership. On one level, this took the form of a stress on balanced collective forces - a means both for redressing and legitimising reductions in British conventional forces. On another level, it took the form of a stress on Britain's independent nuclear contribution. The impression was given that what would be lost in terms of conventional independence would be made-up with nuclear independence. Ostensibly, Suez served to reinforce a tendency long prevalent in British defence thinking - that the American guarantee could not in crisis be relied upon and that in an age of nuclear parity Britain would need her own capability to unilaterally deter her greatest enemy, the Soviet Union. This is the position adopted by writers such as Pierre, Groom, and Malone.

The problem with this perspective on continuity is that it involves a definition of independence that is wanting. Indeed, it has been argued in this thesis that while the Sandys White Paper does reflect a continuity as to the purposes of British nuclear power, it is not a continuity reflecting a move to a truly independent force posture. From the available documentation it appears that the parameters of the mainstream debate in 1955-56 did not include a great emphasis on the requirement for unilateral independence. The major question was whether to achieve a counterforce capability in the context of combined allied missions or to rely for even this limited objective on SAC. Defence Committee discussions in 1957 reflect that the Minister of Defence located his position

within the confines of this debate and not according to a criteria of unilateral independence - even though on the level of contingency planning unilateral countervalue attacks were receiving growing attention. Thus, while the documents reveal the concept of independence to have been an essentially contested concept, they also point to a continuity in terms of interdependence in planning, with Sandys coming down primarily on the side that stressed greater integration rather than limited counterforce or unilateral countervalue targeting.

Despite growing questions concerning the credibility of American nuclear guarantees, Britain's policy-makers were intent upon viewing nuclear weapons chiefly in the context of those guarantees. The 1958 White Paper (which the Americans described as a progress report on the 1957 White Paper)⁶ was unequivocal when it stated that war in Europe could be prevented almost indefinitely. It was stated that '[t]here is thus no military reason why a world conflagration should not be prevented for another generation or more through the balancing fears of mutual annihilation'.⁷ While it was also stated that western 'overall superiority' would increase because of the deployment of land based missiles in Europe - thereby indirectly emphasising the British contribution - this was admitted to be so only because the Soviets could not then or in the future be confident of destroying all US strategic

⁶ NA, RG 59, 741.5/2-1958, No. 2775, Shullaw to Department of State, 13 February 1958.

⁷ Report on Defence, 1958, Cmd. 363, HMSO, para. 5.

air bases on the American continent. Thus, while those who wished Britain to be rid of her deterrent capabilities did not address the question of American credibility, neither did those who sought to integrate the British nuclear deterrent with that of the United States. Both sides of the debate held implicit optimistic assumptions with regard to US intentions, very pessimistic assumptions regarding Britain's ability to survive such a nuclear conflict, or perhaps, placed great trust in their declaratory statements that global war was a most unlikely contingency. In this sense too, there is continuity over the 1955-57 period.

It is important to recognise that throughout the period under study, while British policy-makers certainly entertained fears over the credibility of American promises, a world without the American deterrent looked bleaker still. Consequently, although officials in the RAF were attracted to the posture of 'independence in concert' and the even more radical posture of 'unilateral independence', officials in the Ministry of Defence saw the British nuclear force as an incentive for the Americans to co-operate more fully and thereby to bend US strategic plans more in line with British interests. This was, in the final analysis, certainly the concern of Ministers of Defence Selwyn Lloyd, Monckton and Macmillan, and it was certainly the view of Sandys. It explains why they were all ready to allow for the reduction of V-bomber force numbers and why Sandys was willing to compromise on the issues of command and control of the Thors. Here the difference between Sandys

and his predecessors was on the emphasis in declaratory policy not the substance of their procurement or action decisions, or their motivations.

To explain this discrepancy between declaratory and action policy, between the rhetorical stress on independence and the private search for interdependence, one is forced to return to issues of crisis and its implications for prestige and politics. The economic and political benefits of terminating national service were accompanied by the perceived domestic political necessity of reaffirming Britain's continued world power status - even if this meant an actual gap between Britain's commitments and her capabilities. Through his cost-cutting measures and termination of conscription Sandys achieved financial savings and public support; through his emphasis on Britain's independent status he placated those who saw Suez as a failure of military capabilities and political will rather than a true reflection of Britain's reduced power. Arguably, the admission of financial and political weakness and the translation of that admission into a new economic force posture would have been difficult to achieve without the declaratory umbrella of national vigour and resilience embodied in the focus on independent deterrence - even if this belied a real gap between national commitments and national resources. Thus, while it can be claimed that from the Global Strategy Paper until the end of 1956 there was an inherent contradiction between a growing declaratory stress on nuclear deterrence and actual reliance on multiple capabilities, by

the end of 1957 this inconsistency was represented by a continued declaratory focus on independent world power status and procurement and deployment policies which reflected irrevocable retraction.

It seems evident from Wheeler's study of the first decade of British nuclear strategy, that the importance of purely strategic criteria in the development of British defence policy was by the mid-1950s in decline. It was in decline because pressing economic imperatives were beginning to push strategic considerations to the side. That study is supported by the findings of this thesis to the extent that it is demonstrated here that in the first year of Duncan Sandys' leadership in the Ministry of Defence, nuclear strategic thinking was very much a secondary consideration in a larger formula that sought major financial savings. The strongest evidence of this is found in the Minister's almost single-minded focus on manpower reductions and the concern expressed in the Air Ministry over Sandys's approach to the deterrent. Andrew Pierre is therefore wrong when he states that the 1957 White Paper's significance for post-war defence policy '...lies in the practical conclusions for the military services and the economy which were drawn from its strategic assumptions',⁸ for it was the practical conclusions for the military services which were drawn from its economic assumptions which are of note. In question then is Sandys's

⁸ Pierre, op.cit. , p. 96.

role as a strategic thinker. For his apparent willingness to subordinate all to economic requirements and his style of achieving quick results with the minimum of discussion points to a technocratic mind rather than that of a broad strategic conceptualiser. Therefore, it can be argued that the decline in the importance of strategic considerations was exacerbated by placing defence policy in the hands of someone who was 'a doer rather than a thinker', more sensitive to immediate economic and political factors than to requirements of British nuclear deterrent strategy.

However, to claim that Sandys was less than responsive to the requirements of an independent nuclear strategy is not to say that he neither understood nor cared for sound strategic formulae. Indeed, his actions point to a far broader conception of strategy - a strategy which recognised the importance of a firm economic base and made a realistic assessment of Britain's position relative to her main ally and her main enemy. The conclusion was therefore reached that economically and militarily Britain's security interests were best served through conventional integration with NATO and nuclear integration with the United States. This was not the abdication of strategic thinking but its manifestation in a period of growing economic and political constraints.

That Sandys was prepared to place trust in American guarantees in a period of increasing American vulnerability to Soviet nuclear attack is therefore not necessarily an indication of

the poverty of his strategic thought as much as it is the poverty of Britain's resources. Strategic choices, after all, are not always made between the good and bad, but often between the bad and the far worse. On the one hand, the Minister could have attempted to procure nuclear capabilities primarily on the basis of a totally independent counterforce capability but this would, in the face of the increasing Soviet target set have ultimately cost substantial amounts. Alternatively, he could have assigned the force first and foremost to countervalue targets on the basis of a unilateral British strike against the Soviet Union, but it seemed hardly realistic for Britain to wage unilateral nuclear war - though there was no harm in making declaratory statements to this effect or developing contingency plans for such a scenario.

On the one hand, he could have continued to rely on the Americans - a reliance which had so far paid off in terms of successful deterrence - and to influence the use of SAC as much as possible through the possession of a nuclear capability. His tendency towards the latter option therefore was not strategically unreasonable. Yet, the problem with this analysis is that the papers do not indicate the Minister privately arguing in such explicit terms. The impression then still remains that Sandys was overly beholden to economic factors and more interested in quick results than in strategy. The strategic analysis outlined above was more implicit than explicit and in that sense not subject to a reasoned cost-benefit analysis. Indeed, the Minister may have reached

strategically prudent choices for essentially a-strategic reasons. Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain from the perspective of motivations the quality of Sandys's strategic thought. The perspective of results, however, helps provide a more positive interpretation.

For another approach towards assessing Sandys's contribution to British strategic planning is to look at the legacy of the 1957 White Paper for British strategic planning in the late 1950s and early 1960s - especially in terms of the conventional-nuclear force balance and the purposes of Britain's nuclear deterrent power. With regard to the former, Sandys's imprint appeared soon to be undermined. While the 1957 White Paper had afforded a savings of £100 million on the 1956 defence projections, and while the 1958 White Paper announced a slight reduction in expenditure,⁹ by 1959 increased expenditure had caused a rise of £20 million in planned defence spending.¹⁰ Indeed, while Sandys could cut defence spending, he could do little to reduce costs - and with commitments held constant, the gap between capabilities and demands had to be closed. Intimations of a growing shift

⁹ Cmd. 363, op.cit., para. 78. The defence estimates for 1957-58 were £1483 million, but with aid from the United States and Germany savings of £63 million could further be secured. To this had to be added Admiralty and Ministry of Supply supplementary estimates of £42 million. The defence estimates for 1958-59 amounted to £1465 million, but when taking into account receipts for local costs, the total was £1418 million.

¹⁰ Progress of the 5 Year Defence Plan: 1959, Cmd 662, HMSO, para. 48.

towards conventional forces could already be noted in the 1959 White Paper in which no mention was made of Britain's deterrent doctrine and in the 1960 White Paper (Sandys was now no longer Minister of Defence) where it was stated that nuclear power

...is only one component of the deterrent. Because of the need to meet local emergencies which could develop into a major conflict, conventionally armed forces are a necessary complement to nuclear armaments.¹¹

Not surprisingly, the size of the Army was soon increased to 180,000 and in 1960 the new Minister of Defence, Harold Watkinson, stated that BAOR would not be reduced below 50,000 men and the 2nd TAF would not be cutback any more. The 1962 White Paper took the declaratory shift even further when it stated that

We must continue to make it clear to potential aggressors, however, that we should strike back with all the means that we judge appropriate, conventional or nuclear. If we had nothing but nuclear forces, this would not be credible. A balance must be maintained, therefore, between conventional and nuclear strength.¹²

Three points can be gleaned from these developments. The first is that the revolutionary nature of Sandys's conventional force plans are underlined, because service resistance again manifested itself most strongly in this area. Secondly, the significance of Sandys's personality is reinforced because once the Minister was out of the way (or on his way out) the

¹¹ Report on Defence 1960, Cmd. 952. , HMSO, para. 3.

¹² Statement on Defence 1962: The Next Five Years, Cmd. 1639, HMSO, para. 8.

old forces could once more begin to reassert themselves. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, despite these latter forces, the 1957 White Paper's revolutionary import remained in place because as Groom puts it

The decision that had been taken was in many ways irrevocable, for only a crisis of great magnitude could give any government the political courage to reverse national priorities and demand the support of the nation in the sacrifices that the rebuilding of Britain's conventional forces would entail.¹³

In other words, despite the loosening of Sandys's hold on budgeting and manpower levels, the cuts he had initiated in 1957 were so far reaching - especially that of manpower reductions - that a return to the pre-1957 force posture was simply out of the question. Indeed, the next major revolution in British defence policy came in the 1960s when commitments were radically cut rather than capabilities increased.

With regard to the question of the independence of Britain's deterrent, British actions in the early 1960s are more easily explainable by Sandys and Macmillan's private thoughts than by their declaratory rhetoric. The decision to give up the Blue Streak project in 1960 and to rely on the American Skybolt missile represented a willingness to integrate more fully with American strategic nuclear power. This does not seem so surprising when viewed against the background of Macmillan's statements to the Defence Committee in February 1957 that Britain would in no circumstances use nuclear weapons independently of the United States. Thus, a line can be drawn

¹³ Groom, op.cit. , p. 249.

linking these discussions to the 1958 Agreement for Co-operation on the uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes which facilitated the purchase of US systems, the 1960 Skybolt decision and the 1962 procurement of Polaris. If, as argued, Sandys and Macmillan's strategy was to secure greater US strategic co-operation and to place Britain's nuclear future firmly in alliance terms, then the decade following the 1957 White Paper saw the fruition of their schemes.

The first year of Duncan Sandys at the Ministry of Defence was therefore in some ways a turning point and in some ways a period characterised by a reaffirmation of existing trends. Viewed as a totality, it resulted in an integration of the various aspects of policy which made up strategy in a more systematic manner than had previously been achieved. Organisational and personality changes combined to take advantage of weakened service positions. This led to the adoption of a more coherent strategy - defined in terms of the relationship between conventional and nuclear forces - and the most credible deterrent posture that was economically feasible, politically effective and strategically realistic.

Appendix

Table of Policy-makers: (Senior Officials 1955-57)

Prime Ministers

Anthony Eden 1955-1957

Harold Macmillan 1957-1963

Chancellors of the Exchequer

R.A.B. Butler 1951-1955

Harold Macmillan 1955-1956

Peter Thorneycroft 1957-1958

Foreign Office

Harold Macmillan (April) 1955-(December) 1955

Selwyn Lloyd 1955-1960

Ministers of Defence

Selwyn Lloyd (April) 1955-(December) 1955

Walter Monckton 1955-1956

Anthony Head 1956 -1957

Duncan Sandys 1957-1959

Chiefs of Staff Committee

Chairman

Sir William Dickson 1956-1959

Admiralty

Louis, Earl Mountbatten 1955-1959

Chiefs of the Air Staff

Sir William Dickson 1952-1956

Sir Dermot Boyle 1956-1959

Chief of the Imperial General Staff

Sir Gerald Templer 1955-1957

Service Heads

First Lords of the Admiralty

Viscount Cilcennin 1951-1956

Viscount Hailsham 1956-1957

Earl of Selkirk 1957-1959

Air Ministry

Lord De L'Isle and Dudley 1951-1955

Nigel Birch 1955-1957

George Ward 1957-1960

War Office

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John Hare 1956-1958

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2.3 Interviews/Correspondence

Private Interviews were conducted with:

Colonel K.G. Post (in 1957 a personal advisor to the Minister of Defence) - 1 March 1988.

Sir Richard Powell (in 1957 the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence) - 18 June 1987.

Mr. T.C.G. James (in 1957 an Assistant Secretary in the Air Ministry and later an official air historian) - 15 December 1987.

In the context of an oral history seminar conducted on 1 July 1988 in the Department of War Studies on the subject of the 1957 Defence White Paper, the following additional people were interviewed:

The Rt. Hon. Julian Amery (in 1957 a Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the War Office).

Sir Arthur Drew (in 1957 a Under Secretary at the Ministry of Defence).

The Earl of Selkirk (in 1957 First Lord of the Admiralty).

Sir Richard Way (in 1957 a deputy Secretary at the Ministry of Defence).

Correspondence was exchanged with:

Sir Dermot Boyle (former Chief of the Air Staff), 28 May 1987.

Sir Patrick Dean (in 1957 an Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Office), 19 February 1988.

Sir Nigel Fisher (a former Under Secretary of State for Colonies who served under Sandys in the early 1960s), 23 February 1988.

Air Chief Marshall Sir David Lee (in 1957 Secretary to the COSC) 20 March 1988.

Sir Richard Powell, 2 June 1988.

Sir Edward Playfair (in 1957 a Permanent Under-Secretary of State in the War Office), 27 May 1987.

General Sir Dudley Ward (in 1957 Commander in Chief of the British Army on the Rhine), 22 February 1988.

In preparation for the oral History conference correspondence was also exchanged between Professor L. Freedman and:

Sir Dermot Boyle, (in 1957 Chief of the Air Staff) 10 June 1988.

Rt. Hon. Aubrey Jones (in 1957 Minister of Supply), 18 May 1988.

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