

CIVIL DEFENCE AND THE SUPERPOWERS

THE THREAT TO SCOTLAND

There are three aspects of of the nuclear threat : its Nature, its Extent and its Probability. A fourth question is the role of Local Authorities in Coping with the threat.

Nature of Nuclear Effects

The most widely-known effects of nuclear attack are the pictures from Hiroshima of very bad radiation burns and the images of a flattened city. But there are actually no less than 12 dangerous features of nuclear explosions, and each one has, directly or indirectly, one or more potentially fatal effects.

There is Blast, which pulverises, hurls, strikes, buries, crushes, cuts and drowns. There is Flash, which blinds. There is Heat, which burns. There is Early Radiation which cuses sickness, dehydration, cancer and stillbirths. And we have Fire, which consumes or burns badly, Firestorm, which consumes, burns, injures and suffocates, and also Fallout Radiation, which, like later Gradual Fallout, has the same four effects as the immediate radiation. The general Destruction causes deaths from thirst, starvation, cold, primitive medicine, poisoning and unanswered emergencies. The Social Chaos results in epidemics, violent and destructive crime, executions, riots and sensible suicides. For over ten years now, we have known also about the Electromagnetic Pulse which causes accidents through damage to electronic communications and other machines, lays you more open to further attack and causes futher chaos and damage deaths. The latest discovery is the risk that enough Smoke will cause a Nuclear Winter and therefore deaths from cold, starvation, storms, blindness, cancers and even human extinction.

This is the way that a being from another world might report the Nuclear Winter back to the home planet :

' Blasts of flashing, flaming poison. Giant dust-clouds grew.

Cities turned to furnaces, and deadly gases brewed.

Blinding smoke, in columns, from the grass and forests rose.

The weaving wind shut out the sun, and half the planet froze.

Across the coasts the storm winds howled above the frozen dead.

The smoke swirled in the seedless night, and through the South was spread.

The very filters of the air were slowly shattering.

The sun returned : the glaring light killed every living thing. '

Extent of the Threat

We are talking here about probabilities at most, and more likely possibilities or in plain words, almost pure guesses. NO ONE KNOWS : the variable factors are too many, and the ranges of possible variation too huge.

Let us take (some of) the possible effects of ONE BOMB ONLY (a fairly unlikely variation). Let us say the bomb's explosive power is the same as a million tons of T.N.T., it explodes at ground level, it lands on a city like Birmingham and we are interested in the immediate effects. One estimate is that 527,000 people will be dead, and 869,000 people will be seriously injured. BUT NO ONE KNOWS.

Let us also examine what kinds of TARGETS might have been selected, and how many. (We can note that many bombs might land off-target, but still land somewhere on us.) Predictions of the targets by supposed experts vary

amazingly. The famous civil-defence exercise ' Operation Square Leg ' missed out Stornoway Airport, which is bound to be a key target.

Many people still assume that nuclear weapons are targetted mostly on cities, but in fact, for decades now, many more bombs have been aimed at military and pseudo-military sites.

This means that American staging-posts for a war in Europe, like Stornoway or Macrihanish Airports are likely targets, and American forward stores too, like Glen Douglas where half the bombs are kept for the whole U.S.Navy in this part of the world. (By 1982 they admitted they had actually lost count.) British bases for nuclear-weapons systems, like Faslane, make obvious targets, and so do American bases for the same purpose, such as Holy Loch.

A lot of sites directly related to weapons are on the West Coast, but the bases for command, control, communications and ' intelligence' are to be found in the North, like the Forss radio post, or several in the East of Scotland. There are also lesser nuclear systems sited now or in a war at places like Lossiemouth.

But there are now so many nuclear weapons in the world that the military planners have to search out new and less obvious targets. An American has described the search : ' I remember most vividly my job with the Air Targets Division of the Air Force where I worked as an intelligence analyst..... My responsibility was to ' nominate ' as targets buildings identified as Communist Party headquarters located in various Soviet cities. While I worked at selecting and justifying political targets, fellow analysts in other offices were busy identifying other types of strategic targets - petroleum depots, airfields or industrial centres. ' So probably Russians do likewise.

We can therefore assume that as well as the arguably illegal, and certainly immoral targetting of people in the cities and towns of Scotland, key factories and big road and rail junctions are on the plan, - as well, perhaps, as dirty targets like the Chapelcross nuclear power station and bomb factory. Last but not least the government and civil-defence bunkers themselves will bring down nuclear devastation and slaughter, all the earlier if officials proceed to occupy them in a period of high tension.

Probability of a Nuclear Attack

Again this is IMPOSSIBLE TO CALCULATE. There are five main possible causes, and more than one would probably have to, but certainly could, work together.

A nuclear war could develop from a world Trouble-Spot, chronic or newly developed. There are even wars going on at any time in the world, supported by nuclear-weapons nations.

There is a real, though often underestimated, danger of Accidents or Erratic Human Behaviour or Misinterpretations of military intelligence. Between 1945 and 1978, the U.S. alone had an average of one nuclear accident every year, - major accidents that is, with up to 250 minor ones. In the attack-early-warning system, there were 250 false alarms during the first half of 1983 alone. In the mid-seventies, 5000 people a year were removed from access to U.S. nuclear-weapons programmes because of drink, drugs or mental illness.

Nuclear weapons have been used as a Threat or Bluff a number of times, and any Miscalculation in these activities could lead to nuclear war.

An attempted nuclear First-Strike may not appear likely, but there will be moments when developments like Star Wars (S.D.I.) will make it tempting

Much more likely is First-Use of nuclear weapons, Escalating to all-out war.

Coping with the Threat

Local Authorities could react in three broadly different ways. They could (a) estimate that the probability of nuclear war was low, and therefore make minimal preparations for the likeliest size of attack. They could decide (b) that the probability was high, and so (try to) make extensive preparations for the likeliest form of attack. Or they could (c) concentrate on helping to reduce the probability of nuclear attack, by encouraging political support for nuclear disarmament (or for nuclear deterrence, if they trusted that notion).

Since 1983, and especially since 1986, the British Government has tried increasingly to take away the choice of Local Authorities in this matter, as in so many others. The Government has been trying to enforce the (a) approach, saying that nuclear war is fairly unlikely, but possible; and that cheap and useless preparations must be made, in the fond hope that the attack will be very limited.

For various reasons, very few people - in Britain especially - support the (b) approach. But most Local Authorities would prefer the (c) approach, favouring nuclear disarmament. How could they respond honestly in the face of Government bullying ?

The Steering Committee of the Nuclear-Free Zones Authorities has decided on ' critical compliance ' with the law and Regulations. They try to make sure that elected councillors keep control of Civil Defence, that staff are fully consulted about whether they want roles in civil-defence plans, that the electors are told what is going on, that they keep arguing with the Government about its stupid assumptions about Civil Defence, and that they will try to find out the

realities of nuclear attacks on their local Regions and Districts.

These ' realities ' will be impossible to decide for certain, as my earlier remarks imply. But it is certain that the up-to-date studies the NFZs have commissioned ought to predict levels of destruction, chaos, injury and death which are far in excess of Government estimates, and far beyond our means to prepare for, or handle.

Since the military always try to plan for the worst possible future, we too should be entitled to assume the worst, which would be something like a Nuclear Winter. But even short of that, we would be justified in assuming total chaos in the country during the pre-attack period, unmitigated pain and misery during and soon after the holocaust, and freakish, limited survivals and a crawling recovery, taking decades, generations or centuries.

The Government accepts that more than 10 nuclear weapons could fall on Scotland. My own rough-and-ready calculation is that it could be as many as 300. The Nuclear-Free Zones Authorities are trying to build into their predictions a realistic range of variable factors : different weights of attack, different wind directions, different states of shelter protection, plus local variations. One part of the Strathclyde Region Study predicts that home fallout shelters could, in certain quite unlikely circumstances, reduce early deaths from 69% to 57%, or early injuries from 22% to 15%. The lowest possible early-death figure given for Strathclyde is 23% , and the highest is 69%. For Glasgow alone, the early deaths range from 224,800 to 610,000.

No one could really imagine how life and civil-defence benefits would feel for survivors in such conditions. To protect our sanity in the face of these nightmares, our 'critical compliance' must encompass wild public ridicule of ' civil defence '.