

(PART OF)
AN UNIDENTIFIED HOME-OFFICE CIRCULAR
OF AUTUMN '84

PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this section is to assist local authority civil defence planners by describing some of the circumstances which might prevail in an approach to or during war. Not all the matters discussed are immediately relevant to local authority responsibilities, but they provide useful background information for the development of civil defence plans.
2. In the present international situation the risk of war in Europe is considered to be very low. The aim of the Government's foreign and defence policy is to ensure, by a policy of deterrence in concert with our NATO allies, that war does not occur. Deterrence has kept the peace in Europe for the last thirty-five years and continues to do so, but there can be no absolute and permanent guarantee that the United Kingdom will never be involved, directly or indirectly, in war. Civil defence in the United Kingdom is therefore designed to provide a basic framework of emergency planning, which could be developed rapidly into a fuller structure should the risk of war increase at any time in the future.
3. This framework of planning is needed to meet a range of possible threats, extending from conventional bombing to nuclear attack. It is therefore essential that civil defence arrangements should be flexible. They should be concerned not only with protection against the immediate consequences of attack, but also with contributing towards the social and economic welfare of the population in a time of tension and uncertainty which might precede war; and in assisting their survival and recovery after a war.
4. Civil defence planning needs to take into account:
 - a. the minimum warning period of attack;and the following possible eventualities:

- c. conventional attack including the possible use of chemical weapons;
- d. nuclear attack; and
- e. survival and recovery after nuclear attack.

The problems which each would present are considered below.

THE MINIMUM WARNING PERIOD

5. It is extremely unlikely that an attack on the United Kingdom would be made 'out of the blue'. It is expected that in most circumstances the threat of war would be preceded by a period of deteriorating international relations, possibly lasting for weeks or months. However, important plans should be capable of being implemented within a period of 7 days and their most vital elements within 48 hours because events could move so rapidly towards war that no longer warning period could be relied upon.

INTERNATIONAL TENSION

6. A long period of international tension would give more time to prepare for an attack but it would also bring its own problems. During this time appropriate steps would be taken by NATO Allies to reinforce Europe against attack. This could entail the movement of large numbers of men and equipment from the United Kingdom and North America, many of the latter staging through Britain. As well as using military transport facilities, reinforcement movement would also require the use of merchant ships, commercial aircraft, roads and railways. It would inevitably cause major disruption to the life of the country. Furthermore, the international crisis might be so severe as to precipitate a collapse of trade, leading to shortages of essential commodities. Civil defence planners could therefore find themselves implementing their plans against a background of general national emergency, severe internal disruption and shortages of supplies.

CONVENTIONAL ATTACK

7. If an enemy chose to attack the NATO Alliance it is assumed that his first objective would be to destroy or diminish the Alliance's capability to wage both

conventional and nuclear war. Although an initial nuclear attack cannot be ruled out, it is more probable that an enemy would seek to achieve this objective by the use of conventional arms in order to avoid the unpredictabilities and dangers inherent in the use of nuclear weapons. For the same reason NATO would try to contain such an attack with conventional weapons. Thus the UK must be prepared for a period of conventional war in Europe, but a war of this kind would probably last only a matter of weeks at most. It would not necessarily escalate into nuclear exchange, because efforts to bring it to an end might be successful at the conventional stage. The more effectively NATO could mobilise its civil and military resources to fight a conventional war the more time would be gained for measures to avert the possible escalation to nuclear weapons.

8. It is expected that the main threat to the UK would be from conventional air attacks. These are likely to be confined to targets of military significance and it is unlikely that an enemy would give high priority to industrial or civilian targets: for strategic reasons the enemy would need to concentrate on destroying the immediate effectiveness of NATO's conventional and nuclear forces. A conventional attack would therefore probably follow a pattern of many relatively small but widespread bombing raids against military bases and logistical targets such as civilian sea and air ports, strategically important railyards and fuel storage sites. There are many such potential targets in the UK and it is unlikely that all of them could be attacked. An enemy would concentrate on those considered to be of most value at the time.

9. It is also likely that naval and merchant shipping would be attacked at this time, especially that carrying troops and equipment for the reinforcement of Europe; and sea approaches and harbours could be disrupted by mines. A major invasion of the United Kingdom is not regarded as likely although small numbers of sabotage troops might be landed.

10. The pattern of attack described above does not preclude the possibility that some civilian areas could suffer severe damage; but 'blitz' attacks directed at major cities can probably be discounted. It is therefore assumed that civilian casualties in the UK as a whole during conventional war would be low as compared to the last war although they could be severe in some localities.

the reinforcement of Europe described in paragraph 6, could together lead to the possibility of a breakdown of essential supplies and services and a general atmosphere of strain and disruption.

11. The main civil defence tasks during conventional war would probably be to maintain the distribution of food, fuel and essential supplies to the civil population, to assist with fire-fighting, rescue and other emergency tasks in damaged areas, to provide food and shelter to those made homeless, and to provide information to the public and Government on casualties. During this period the work of civil defence organisers would also be concerned with preparations against the possibility of nuclear attack, and this could impose an additional and sometimes conflicting burden.

Chemical weapons

12. The use of chemical agents against targets in the United Kingdom cannot entirely be ruled out. These agents could be delivered by bombs, missiles or spray, and their effects would be to kill or incapacitate when inhaled or in contact with the skin. Deliberate attacks on civilian population areas are not likely, but chemical agents may drift and contaminate areas up to several miles down-wind of the intended targets. Whilst the Government believes that the best way of dealing with this threat is to obtain a comprehensive international ban on such weapons, it is examining ways of detecting and monitoring the presence of chemical agents and of warning the population who may be in danger. It is also considering what protective measures can be taken and what advice given to the population on precautions that can be taken in the home.

NUCLEAR ATTACK

13. The size and scale of nuclear operations against the UK and the targets attacked would depend on the political and strategic intentions of an enemy at the time and the number of weapons available for targeting against the United Kingdom as distinct from other countries. The theoretical possibilities range from a single 'demonstration' weapon to a massive attack aimed at completely

attack confined to military installations. The numbers killed or injured could amount to many millions and much of our industrial capacity, services and communications could be destroyed, possibly beyond reconstruction in some areas. Areas of intense radiation could persist for months in the immediate vicinity of explosions, and the centres of badly damaged cities could remain uninhabitable for a long time because of the difficulties of clearing streets and damaged buildings.

17. Despite the potentially devastating effects of nuclear attack, there could be many millions of people left alive. Their immediate problems would be immense and would increase if supplies ran out and living conditions and morale deteriorated. But if effective planning had been undertaken in peacetime to provide them with essential supplies and assistance as soon as radiation levels allowed safe movement, the chances of their continued survival could be greatly increased.

The long-term

18. "No clear assumptions can be made about the survival or recovery of the country in the longer-term, following a major nuclear attack. The world has no experiences of such an instant and profound catastrophe afflicting a whole society, still less a society so dependent upon a complex technological infrastructure. The suggestion that the use of nuclear weapons might have long-term physical effects is not an argument against saving lives in the immediate aftermath of a nuclear attack. Civil defence should concentrate its activities where they will be most effective: in providing protection against the immediate effects of conventional and nuclear weapons; ensuring the maximum use of the precautions which would save large numbers of people from the effects of radiation; in planning to meet the shortages and disruption that would follow war; in planning for the restoration of essential supplies and services; and in setting the groundwork and organisation that would help to promote recovery. Given effective advance planning, the chances of achieving these objectives in the unlikely event of war would be greatly increased.

arrangements, the weather conditions, and the extent to which people had followed Government advice about protective measures.

Targets for nuclear attack

14. Where the main aim of a nuclear attack was to destroy our capability to wage war, we could expect it to concentrate on militarily significant targets; but there are very many places in the country that would have some military significance in time of war and an enemy would have to be selective in nuclear as well as conventional attack. No clear assumptions can be made as to whether centres of industry, population or administration would also be targets. None of these can be ruled out but they are thought to be less probable. It is assumed that ground-burst weapons of between 150-500 kt would be used against military targets, while air-bursts of up to 5 mt might be used to destroy city areas - if such a strategy were chosen by an enemy. In some instances more than one weapon might be used to ensure destruction of a target.

Effects of nuclear attack

15. The loss of life in a nuclear attack would be very high. The immediate physical damage to the country from the blast and heat of a nuclear attack and the numbers killed would vary with the scale and nature of the attack and the targets chosen. There could be damage and disruption to all forms of communications equipment from the blast or from nuclear electromagnetic pulse (NEMP). In an attack confined to military installations some damage to civilian areas would be inevitable but considerable areas of the country could escape major physical damage; nevertheless everywhere there could be a danger from radioactive fallout, depending on wind and weather conditions. Radioactivity could persist at dangerous levels for up to two weeks and much longer in badly-affected areas. Public services such as gas, electricity and water could cease. The prospects of survival for households in areas affected by radiation would depend very much on whether they took the protective measures advised and on whether there had been effective planning to enable essential services and supplies to be restored as soon as the radiation danger had passed.