

Britain's position in this regard is particularly weak. There are no immediate threats to this country, but yet some still argue that we need to retain the bomb. If we, in a peaceful Europe, need nuclear weapons, then how much more do other countries around the world need them, if they have hostile neighbours on their borders ?

Paul Robinson identifies two roles for nuclear weapon – against Russia and against others. The “Russia” role is often seen as belonging in the past, whereas new potential threats may appear around the globe. A key factor is the relationship between these two issues – the relationship with Russia and regional conflicts.

During the Cold War all regional conflicts were viewed through the prism of the East/West conflict. When consideration was given to the role of nuclear weapons in conflicts around the globe, one concern was that a conflict between Russia and the US could develop into nuclear war. Today the importance of this coupling between regional conflict and the nuclear stand-off between the US and Russia has been reduced. The common perception is that it has disappeared, but this is not entirely true. Russia has an interest in many parts of the world, particularly around its frontiers. It often adopts a different approach to that of the US.

Many of the conflicts and tensions which exist today are legacies of the Cold War. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and US support for groups opposing the invasion created the climate out of which the Taliban and Al Qaeda grew. US and Soviet competition and interference in the Middle East played a part in developing the volatile situation which exists today. The disputes in Korea and Taiwan are consequences of the Cold War as well as of regional factors.

The proliferation of WMD has become the new concern. But it is misleading to consider this as a new issue which has replaced the Cold War. Most of the spread of nuclear technology took place within the timeframe and conditions of the Cold War. *Israel, India and Pakistan developed nuclear weapons in the 1970s.* Proliferation is not a new problem it was taking place side-by-side with the East/West conflict.