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FACTORS RELATING TO FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM NUCLEAR DETERRENT

PART I: THE POLITICO-MILITARY REQUIREMENT

1. Paragraph 3 of the Terms of Reference for the study directs that a section on the politico-military requirement should set out the case for and against a UK nuclear deterrent in the context of the wider strategic problems which the country is likely to face in the future. It should take full account of the national security and international political and military aspects, but should not deal with domestic political considerations. Paragraph 1 of the Terms of Reference provides that the study should not make recommendations but should put forward balanced arguments on which Ministerial decisions could be taken.

2. In this section, we look first at the general concept of deterrence, and at any aspects which may raise particular difficulties for medium nuclear powers, then briefly at the possible politico-strategic setting in the timescale of any UK successor system, and finally at the politico-military requirement itself.

I. THE CONCEPT OF DETERRENCE

3. For deterrence to be achieved a potential aggressor has to perceive that:

a. there is some level of damage which his opponent might inflict in the course of a conflict which would be unacceptably high in relation to the benefits from aggression;

b. his opponent has the capability to inflict this unacceptable damage, and the potential aggressor cannot count on being able to neutralise this capability;

c. it is credible that his opponent might use his capability if put to the test.

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PART I

POLITICO
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ARGUMENT.

The potential aggressor can make an objective assessment of the capabilities of his opponent (although he may tend to err on the side of caution and exaggerate their likely effects). While he can seek to influence his opponent's resolve by threatening him with the dire consequences which would follow from resolute action, he can never be certain how his opponent would act if the issue were to be put to test. Equally his opponent cannot be certain how the potential aggressor will perceive the balance between the gains from aggression and the level of damage threatened. Both sides operate under conditions of uncertainty.

DETERRENT STRATEGY

4. As United States nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union has given way to strategic parity, Western thinking about the deterrent contribution of strategic nuclear weapons has had to be modified. It is now generally recognised that it is not credible that Western strategic nuclear forces would be used in response to Warsaw Pact aggression involving a markedly lower level of force, since such use would be deterred by the threat of strategic nuclear retaliation by the Soviet Union. Strategic nuclear forces therefore cannot in themselves directly deter Warsaw Pact aggression at substantially lower levels. Their full deterrent potential against such aggression on any scale can only be realised if they form part of a chain of closely linked military capabilities, each of which must be strong enough to face an aggressor with a decision that he would need to pitch his action, initially or later, at a scale or level so severe as to risk progressively involving higher levels of Western capability right up to the strategic nuclear level.

5. Thus the essence of NATO's defence strategy is to respond to an aggressor on a scale which would deny him any rapid or easy victory, while posing a risk that the conflict will escalate to a level at which the consequences would outweigh any possible gains from aggression. The credibility of this concept depends

on the Soviet Union being convinced that NATO would be prepared to go to the next stage. To induce this conviction, NATO needs not only to demonstrate that it has the necessary measure of resolve but also to possess a continuous chain of capabilities for response linking front line conventional forces with strategic nuclear forces; and the elements in the NATO triad of conventional, theatre nuclear, and strategic forces must not be decoupled.

6. The UK's national nuclear capabilities, both strategic and other, are assigned to NATO as part of the theatre nuclear forces which, depending upon the nature and scale of Warsaw Pact aggression, would be used in selective or large scale strikes in an area extending into Soviet territory. Behind these, the United States provides strategic nuclear forces targetted against enemy political controls, industrial, economic, and other resources (thereby including population centres), and against military forces. The ultimate deterrent has always been the threat of massive retaliation with simultaneous attacks against the full range of targets. But since growing Soviet capability made this threat seem increasingly incredible in response to anything less than an attack on United States cities, in recent years United States policy has placed increased emphasis on the need for flexibility in the targetting of strategic forces: and options for selective strikes on military and industrial targets have been developed as possible alternatives to the ultimate option of massive and widespread strikes on the Soviet industrial and economic base.

Soviet Strategic Philosophy

7. There is no sure evidence that the Soviet Union has any counterpart to this approach, with its emphasis on avoiding the use of nuclear weapons if possible and, should this prove impossible, on their limited and selective use; and it cannot be assumed that any limitations imposed by NATO on the use of nuclear weapons would be matched by a similar Soviet concern for restraint. Indeed Soviet strategic philosophy places the emphasis

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on pre-emption, survival, and war-winning strategies using whatever weapons are necessary. The difficulty in interpreting this philosophy is that, with its emphasis on Soviet invincibility, it has obvious domestic political attractions; and there is a clear Soviet interest in adopting this declaratory policy to deter even limited nuclear escalation by NATO. Soviet behaviour in a crisis could be a good deal more circumspect, provided that the Soviet leadership maintains its present general orientation.

Deterrence by Medium Powers

8. It may be asked whether these general principles of deterrence, developed in the context of super-power rivalry, would apply to a medium power attempting to deter a super-power. We believe the two cases are certainly dissimilar in one important respect: a super-power aggressor confronting a medium power could never afford to ignore the consequences of the confrontation for its more important rivalry with its potential super-power opponent. This concern would apply regardless of whether the medium power was allied with the opposing super-power. Where the two were allied, the potential aggressor would obviously need to consider also the risk that the opposing super-power would bring its nuclear armoury to bear in support of its ally; and where there was no alliance or an alliance was breaking down, there would be the risk that nuclear threats would act as a catalyst to create or restore a nuclear-backed alliance. Even where the potential aggressor could safely conclude that the immediate consequences of a conflict would be limited to the amount of damage which the medium power could itself inflict, the acceptability of this damage would need to be assessed in terms of its effects on the super-power relationship; and even comparatively modest levels of damage might be unacceptable in these terms when the capabilities of two super-powers were closely matched.

9. We have considered how far a medium power can hope to deter a super-power, in terms of each of the requirements for deterrence

identified in paragraph 3 above. As to posing a threat of unacceptable damage, the concept remains valid that the likely damage will be weighed against the likely gains from aggression in the particular circumstances. As the gains from eliminating the United Kingdom would clearly be less than those from eliminating the United States, it follows that the United Kingdom can expect to deter aggression by the Soviet Union by posing a smaller deterrent threat than that posed by the United States. The scale of damage which would need to be threatened is discussed in Part II of the study, on criteria for deterrence. The implications of the second requirement - for an effective capability which an aggressor cannot count on neutralising - are also discussed in Parts II and III of the study; at this stage, the only point to note is that this requirement need not be assumed to present insuperable problems for a medium power.

10. Finally, we need to consider the credibility of a British deterrent threat against the Soviet Union. This might be looked at in two ways. First, would the British Government in desperate circumstances use its nuclear capability, if necessary independently of the United States? And, secondly, would Soviet leaders believe that the Government might do so? It must be emphasised that, for deterrence, the essential question is the second. ?

11. The purpose of our military capability, whether as part of NATO's or otherwise, is to deter any military attack on our interests, from minor conventional inroads right up to nuclear strikes against the United Kingdom; and, if deterrence fails, to resist such attack. With our strategic nuclear force we seek to deter the highest levels of aggression by posing the threat of unacceptable damage in the Soviet Union itself. If this threat failed to deter and if the Soviet Union had mounted massive nuclear strikes against our cities, the use of our strategic nuclear force would not ward off further damage, and indeed there might be little of value left undamaged. In these circumstances the actual use of our strategic nuclear force in retaliation against the Soviet Union would represent a reaction of rage and revenge. If this

ultimate stage were reached, there can be no certainty that a Government would take a deliberate decision to launch this act involving the killing of large numbers of enemy civilians but serving no rational purpose for their own country.

12. But what is essential, as indicated in paragraph 10 above, is that the Soviet Government should believe that there is a real possibility of a British Government ordering such retaliation. Provided that our strategic nuclear force was perceived to have the capability for swift retaliation and for causing unacceptable damage, we judge that they could not rule out this possibility. Ultimate deterrence is perceived to work, because no nuclear weapons state (NWS) can feel confident enough to act on a judgement that an adversary, seeing the painful destruction of all that he most valued, would withhold retaliation on account of some cool calculation of ethics and utility. In such a scenario, there is no more reason to doubt the UK's response than that of the USA or USSR.

13. We have also considered how far a UK strategic nuclear force could act, with other UK capabilities, to deter other levels of aggression, on the lines discussed in paragraph 4 above. While we retain a contribution to NATO's theatre nuclear forces on present lines, we have a capability for limited nuclear action reaching into the Soviet Union, while holding back our strategic nuclear force. Would the Soviet Union believe we would be willing to envisage the limited use of our theatre nuclear capabilities independently of any US and/or French use, and thus to pose a risk of escalation to the strategic nuclear level involving unacceptable damage to the Soviet Union (and, of course, in the process also to the United Kingdom)?

14. We do not believe it possible to engender in a potential adversary certainty that the process of escalationwill inexorably occur at every point unless he backs off. But, for deterrence, the risk of escalation, provided it is not so small that it can be discounted, will suffice. Were deterrence to fail and escalation to begin,it might be that doubts about our resolve would grow as

the final level of conflict was approached, since the stakes would be becoming very high. But the stakes would also be high for the aggressor, and the prospect of unacceptable damage would continue to have its effect unless there was near certainty that it would not be suffered. We believe that, provided there were not wide gaps in our spectrum of capability such as would encourage an adversary to think he might have a chance of defeating us at lower levels of capability without eventually triggering our highest one, he could not safely assume that at some point our resolve would fail and leave him in sure possession of a gain worth the price and the risk. Uncertainty lies at the heart of nuclear deterrence: and this applies to medium nuclear powers no less than to super-powers.

15. Although, as we pointed out in paragraph 10, the key issue for deterrence is how an adversary believes we would behave, we have had to adopt a rather theoretical approach since we cannot be sure how the Soviet Union views our deterrent posture. We can, however, turn the problem round. In assessing the Soviet deterrent, we observe Soviet capabilities and make suppositions about how they might be used, drawing on our knowledge of Soviet history and present Soviet military doctrine and posture. If the Soviet Government looked at our capability in this way, they might conclude that our past history suggested we would be resolute in a crisis, they would note our effort to maintain and keep up to date our strategic nuclear force, and they would observe that we also maintained other nuclear forces under our own control. If we for our part were considering a deterrent threat in these terms, it seems unlikely that we would discount its credibility; and there is no obvious reason why the Soviet Union should conclude otherwise.

II. THE POLITICO-STRATEGIC BACKGROUND

16. We have considered how political and strategic relationships may develop in the next 30-40 years. There is no way of predicting with any certainty what changes may occur, and we can therefore only look at aspects of these relationships of major importance for our strategic deterrent and consider what plausible assumptions

might be made. Our conclusions are set out briefly in the Annex. They can be summarised as follows:

a. In this timescale UK deterrent planning need not be geared to any nuclear threat beyond that posed by the Soviet Union.

b. We should base our policies on the assumption that much the same adversary relationship will continue with the Soviet Union as we have today.

c. The interdependence between the United States and Western Europe is such that the close institutional links, including that in the North Atlantic Alliance, are very unlikely to be broken; but it cannot be safely assumed that the threat by the United States to use its nuclear weapons in defence of European interests will be credible to the Soviet Union in all circumstances.

d. We see the principal risk to continued transatlantic co-operation arising from possible developments within Western European states and within the European Community as an institution. If such developments appeared to threaten European and transatlantic solidarity, they could lead to strong pressures for new departures in West German policy, including the acquisition of an independent nuclear capability.

III. THE POLITICO-MILITARY REQUIREMENT

17. As we deploy other nuclear capabilities under our own control, a decision not to proceed with a further strategic force would not necessarily mean that we ceased to be a NWS. But in practice we judge it likely that we should be led progressively to abandon our nuclear weapon programmes, and to deploy any theatre nuclear capabilities with American warheads provided under "dual key" arrangements. This is because a UK theatre nuclear capability would be of reduced credibility if it was not underpinned by a strategic nuclear force (see paragraph 23 below); it is doubtful whether there would be a viable programme of work for our nuclear weapons research and manufacturing facilities without a strategic

programme; and political benefits from giving up our strategic capability would be lost if we did not cease to be a NWS (see paragraph 35 below). Accordingly where it is relevant to the discussion which follows, we have assumed for the purposes of this paper that if we decided not to proceed with a further strategic force, we would also eventually cease to be a NWS.

18. The decision taken on a successor strategic system might also have implications for our plans for the present Polaris force. These would need further study, but we do not believe they should affect the basic issue.

THE CASE FOR AND AGAINST A BRITISH STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCE

19. The case for and against a British strategic nuclear force can best be discussed in terms of the four interrelated purposes which it might be held to serve:

a. a numerical contribution to the assigned nuclear forces of NATO;

b. the contribution of a second centre of nuclear decision-making to Alliance deterrence of the Soviet Union;

c. a capability for the independent defence of national interests;

d. political status and influence.

These are discussed in turn below, and we then touch on the question of costs. In accordance with our Terms of Reference, we do not attempt to weigh the pro and con arguments against each other or to reach any conclusions.

A numerical contribution to NATO's assigned nuclear forces

20. Our contribution to NATO's deep-strike theatre nuclear capability, which currently consists of [Vulcan and Buccaneer] strike aircraft and the Polaris force, represents a significant proportion of NATO's assigned forces. The loss of this contribution to the

coverage of SACEUR's deep-strike targets would be unwelcome to the NATO military authorities. It is however important not to exaggerate the significance of our strategic force in terms of this purpose since it is a clear, if necessarily implicit, assumption in our planning that the Polaris force would not be released for use in its NATO role short of a general war involving the United States strategic forces. We assume that any successor system would be assigned to NATO on the same basis. Moreover, our assigned nuclear forces represent a very small proportion of the total nuclear forces of the Alliance, including those United States strategic forces which are not assigned. We assume that the size of any successor system is unlikely materially to alter this proportion.

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The contribution of a second centre of decision making

21. The significance of our contribution to NATO's nuclear armoury does not, however, arise from the additional military capability it provides. The distinctive nature of our contribution is that our assigned nuclear forces are under our own separate national control, and thus entail a second centre of nuclear decision-making within the Alliance. If it could be assumed that the United States nuclear guarantee to Europe was immutable and would always remain credible to the Soviet Union, this would not be of such importance. But doubts about the United States nuclear guarantee are harboured in Europe more or less actively at all times. The value to the Alliance of Britain's role as a separate centre of nuclear decision-making is not that our European Allies see the British nuclear force as a second, separate, guarantee of their security; it can never be large enough for that. The real value is two-fold. First, it would complicate Soviet calculations about the consequences of aggression against NATO and the risk of nuclear escalation. Secondly, it means that not all nuclear decisions which would affect the supreme interests of members of the Alliance are exclusively in the hands of the United States President (a situation which would be much less acceptable to European members). Because

of France's equivocal attitude to NATO, the French nuclear forces would not be regarded as a totally reliable substitute for this contribution which British nuclear forces make to NATO.

22. There are two broad situations for which, for our European Allies as well as for ourselves, the British nuclear forces and separate decision-making role constitute something of a hedge. The first is a general long-run decline in the strength of the ties linking the United States with Europe and in the credibility of the United States nuclear guarantee. It is not of course envisaged that a British nuclear force could possibly replace on its own the deterrent role of United States forces. But it might, together with the French strategic force, provide the nucleus of an alternative European deterrent. Although it is difficult to see how such an arrangement would be brought about, the possibility (which has been talked about before at times of strain in United States/European relations) at least leaves the Germans with an option other than the acquisition of a nuclear capability of their own. This would reduce the risk that Germany might seek to develop an independent nuclear weapons capability, which would carry grave dangers for world peace.

23. The second scenario involves United States hesitation, in a crisis or war, about the use of her nuclear weapons in support of NATO forces. This hesitation might arise over crossing the nuclear threshold at all, over using nuclear weapons beyond the immediate battlefield, or over attacking targets within the Soviet Union itself. It cannot be assumed (given our much greater vulnerability than the United States to nuclear attack) that a British Government would be readier than the United States President to engage in nuclear escalation that might provoke Soviet retaliation against our territory, even in circumstances in which British forces (like United States forces) might be facing defeat in combat. The idea that British nuclear forces might be used to "recouple" the United States nuclear deterrent thus needs to be treated with caution. At the same time,

neither super-power could altogether exclude the possibility that a British Government might take action to make good a weakness of United States resolve, either through actually carrying out a limited strike at the next level of escalation, or through indicating a possible intention to use our independent capability. The immediate aims in either case would be to stop the Soviet Union short of a decisive success, and to restore deterrence by raising the conflict to a level from which the US could less readily stand aside. The ability to execute limited strikes would be likely to be sufficient for the immediate purpose. But, to give credibility to the threat of independent action, a UK strategic retaliatory capability held in reserve as a deterrent to any escalatory response by the Soviet Union would also be necessary.

24. The value of a British capability as described would of course be felt - for example in reinforcing Allied confidence and creating Soviet doubts - well before the circumstances suggested became actual. Indeed the aim is to prevent them from becoming so.

25. Moreover, we know that the value of our role as a second centre of nuclear decision-making is recognised by our major Allies, and by the NATO military authorities. The present United States Administration have confirmed their continuing self-interest in the maintenance of the United Kingdom's nuclear capacity, and SACEUR has strongly endorsed this view. There has also been support from German and French Ministers for the maintenance of a British deterrent.

26. On the other hand, it might be argued that in certain circumstances second centres of decision-making might act to weaken rather than strengthen Alliance deterrence. The deterrent posture of the Alliance as a whole rests on the credibility of the US nuclear guarantee; but two members, the UK and France, have also taken out an extra insurance policy against the weakening of this credibility. France's public stance already in effect declares that her policy rests on misgivings about

US resolve, not just about the possible perception of that resolve by others. If the USSR came to believe that the UK assessment was the same as the French, this might reinforce any doubts of her own about the credibility of the US position. The significance of this consideration would be enhanced if we were contemplating, in the procurement of any successor system, moving significantly away from the present close US/UK co-operation.

27. It should also be noted that a second centre of decision-making complicates Soviet calculations about the consequences of aggression only if it is credible that, in the Alliance context, we might act differently from the United States (see paragraphs 10-15 above). Moreover, the conclusions drawn from both of the scenarios in paragraphs 22-3 might be questioned. The case for a long-term hedge against the weakening of the US nuclear guarantee primarily arises from doubt that one nation would risk its existence for another. But, on this argument, a British or Anglo-French guarantee to Europe would be no more credible than one from the United States. The credibility of the concept in paragraph 22 therefore ultimately rests on scenarios for a federal or quasi-federal Europe in which national deterrents were pooled and expanded to provide deterrence for the new political entity as a whole. It is open to question what price we should pay to leave open a long-term option on these lines, particularly as it might be argued that, should the option ever be exercised, it might provoke the Soviet aggression it was intended to deter. As to the scenario in paragraph 23, the Soviet Union might judge that, if the US decided to stand aside, it would bring pressure to bear to ensure that the UK did not itself take independent action. Such a judgement might seem to the Soviet Union not unreasonable given our close ties with the US. If they felt confident enough to rely on it, they might discount the risk of recoupling and its deterrent effect would thus be lost.

A capability for the independent defence of national interests

28. It is suggested above that the concept of our role as a second centre of decision-making rests upon our capability for the independent use of our strategic nuclear forces. This independent nuclear capability also serves our national defence needs more directly in that it seeks to provide an insurance against the break-up of the North Atlantic Alliance. Our strategic capability might be important in any conflict between the Warsaw Pact and NATO in encouraging the Soviet Union to minimise its direct attacks on United Kingdom territory in order to reduce the risk ofescalation involving United Kingdom nuclear weapons. Beyond this it provides options for national defence should collective security arrangements fail. The ability to pose an ultimate threat of unacceptable damage would assist us to counter politico-military pressure, to quarantine ourselves from the spread of Soviet influence in Europe, or to deter aggression itself. Without it, the United Kingdom has no means of its own of deterring nuclear attack or large-scale conventional aggression by a nuclear power, and of countering nuclear blackmail.

29. The contrary view is that the circumstances outlined in the preceding paragraph are so unlikely to occur that they do not in themselves justify a strategic capability. In our discussion of the politico-strategic background we suggested that the North Atlantic Alliance was very unlikely to break up. Given reliance on the US nuclear guarantee, there would be no obvious need to retain options for national nuclear defence. The validity of the protection afforded by a strategic nuclear capability can also be questioned on the argument that nuclear weapons are relevant to the deterrence of military aggression only; that, were Soviet influence to have spread in Europe, the USSR might be able to achieve almost any objectives against us (short of occupation) without the use of force; and that, even if force were required, the Soviet Union could afford to rely on its overwhelming conventional strength only. To achieve an effective national defence in these circumstances, we should need to pose

a threat of nuclear escalation. The credibility of this concept in the solely national context is discussed in paragraphs 10-15 above.

Political Status and influence

30. The essential point to be made about the effect on our status is that this cannot be judged in the abstract. While it might be argued that if we were now contemplating becoming a nuclear power this would add little to our status, it cannot be assumed that abandonment of our capability would have a similarly limited effect. We were the first state to perceive the implications of atomic power, and the third state to become an effective nuclear power. If we were to turn our back on this history and abandon our role as an NWS, this would be regarded internationally as a momentous step in British history.

31. Our possession of nuclear weapons gives us a standing in world affairs which we would not otherwise have. It gives the United Kingdom a special place in the Alliance as the only NWS besides the United States which contributes nuclear forces to the military organisation. Through our close association and shared expertise and interests with the United States in this vital area, we have access to and the opportunity to influence American thinking on defence and arms control policy, and this association also helps to forge links on a wider range of international topics. Moreover, our status as a NWS has enabled us to play a leading role in all the major multilateral arms control negotiations since the war. The abandonment of our nuclear weapon status would immediately deprive us of the ability to play this role.

32. Finally, our status as a nuclear power is important for our relationship to other medium powers, since we have lagged behind them in other indicators of prestige. This stands to be especially significant in relation to West Germany (which we must assume can never become a NWS) and to France (which is certain to remain one). Abandoning our nuclear capability would

leave France as the only NWS in Western Europe. This would reduce our influence over the evolution of defence relations within Europe and between European members of the Alliance and the United States. Any movement towards an increasing European role in nuclear affairs would have to be centred on France's nuclear capability; and we should have little control over it.

33. But it may be argued that our status as a NWS has little effect on our current and future influence on politico-military matters, given the relative insignificance of our nuclear capability in comparison with that of the super-powers. Major arms control questions are now centred on SALT, in which we play no direct part. While we are participating in negotiations on a CTBT, this must inevitably be very much as a junior partner, since we are entirely dependent on the US for test facilities and in the final analysis must be governed by their decisions. As to the general correlation between international status and a nuclear capability, the examples of Japan and West Germany suggest that economic indicators are nowadays more important for influence than strategic ones, and that our efforts and resources might better be concentrated on the former.

34. A positive decision to continue the British nuclear deterrent, in a new generation to come into operation in the 1990s, may also be seen as conflicting with the Government's commitment to work for the reduction of nuclear weapons in parallel with reciprocal reductions in conventional forces and, in the context of general and complete disarmament, for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. As a Western nuclear deterrent against the Soviet Union is provided by the United States it may be difficult to justify such a decision in terms of a clear military requirement for Alliance purposes. However convincing the justification on security grounds, there would still be many NWS who would see this decision as inconsistent with our declared arms control objectives; and this could damage our credibility in disarmament negotiations.

35. Our efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons could also be prejudiced. Looking ahead to the 1990s, there is a real danger that several more countries may decide to manufacture such weapons. The prospects of persuading them not to do so may be enhanced if they can be convinced that the existing NWS are genuinely trying to fulfil their obligations under Article VI of the NPT ("to pursue negotiations on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament ...."). While our work in the field of non-proliferation has been substantial, the regime we have helped to construct and maintain is, correctly and inevitably, regarded by the NNWS as discriminatory and any influence we might exercise is limited accordingly. While it would be naive to assume that decisions by states on whether to become nuclear powers will ultimately be governed by anything other than their perception of their national security interests, a decision by the United Kingdom to abandon its own weapons could have a striking impact on such perceptions, since it could cast doubt on many of the prevailing assumptions about the benefits of being a NWS.

Costs

36. The costs of options for a successor system are discussed in Part III of the study. The implications will be difficult to judge, since we cannot predict the level of the defence budget in the long term and how it may be affected by any requirement for a successor sytem. It will, however, be important to look at the costs in relation to the possible total defence budget over the life of the system and to the costs of other defence capabilities. As to the opportunity cost if defence funds were to be spent on a successor system rather than on our conventional capabilities, we would be buying a capability which, in terms of the European military structure, was unique. Devoting the money to our conventional forces could lead to their significant augmentation; but the additional forces could conceivably have been provided by our Allies, and would present problems to the Soviet Union of degree rather than kind.

37. On the other hand, the high cost of any successor system is likely to be seen as a major argument for not proceeding with it. If it involved an augmentation of the defence budget, this could be produced only at the expense of other public expenditure programmes. If it had to be found from defence funds, this would have to be at the expense of conventional forces, and it could be argued that, from the Alliance point of view, these had higher priority than the maintenance of the British nuclear deterrent as a means of ensuring a continuing United States commitment to the defence of Europe. Finally, we cannot be certain that assumptions made now about (for example) likely Anti-Ballistic Missile and other defences and the future Anti-Submarine Warfare threat will in the event hold good (see the discussion in Part III of the study). We should therefore be entering into commitments in a high-risk area in which, having once embarked on a new project, it might well prove difficult to change our plans or cut our losses should strategic requirements change rapidly.

ANNEX

THE POLITICO-STRATEGIC BACKGROUND

1. This Annex considers possible politico-strategic developments looking to the 1990s and beyond which might affect the case for and against, and the character of, our strategic deterrent.

The States to be deterred

2. Our existing strategic nuclear force has the unique purpose of deterring the Soviet Union. We have considered whether we should allow for any future requirement to deter other NWS. In the case of existing NWS, we believe that there will be insufficient interaction between British and Chinese interests to make it necessary to consider in the context of this paper a major Chinese military threat to our interests; and that if our Commonwealth partners needed the support of a nuclear power against a future expansionist China, they would have to look to the United States rather than to us. It is possible that there will be a significant increase in the number of NWS, given the spread of nuclear technology and of sophisticated military equipment. But we think it unlikely that any of the States which might plausibly become NWS would be likely to judge it advantageous to pose a direct nuclear threat against the United Kingdom itself; or that we would become engaged in defence of our assets outside Europe in a dispute of such intensity that it might escalate to a nuclear level It is possible to conceive of regional conflicts outside Europe(eg the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent) in which the opponents might threaten the use of nuclear weapons and in which Western interests could be sufficiently engaged to justify political intervention backed by a nuclear sanction. But we have long since relinquished the role of world policeman to the United States, and while we would be expected to give political backing to the United States in such a crisis, a British nuclear contribution would not be required.

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3. We believe that this general conclusion, that the Soviet Union is the only state which may pose a nuclear threat to the United Kingdom, would remain valid in the light of any progress towards a higher degree of unity within the European Community and an increasing interventionist role for the Community in world affairs.

Relations with the Soviet Union

4. There are two major factors which might influence the Soviet Union towards maintaining, and even possibly extending, a relationship with the West on the lines of the present phase of detente. First, the scale of the problems involved in effectively governing the Soviet Union itself and maintaining control in Eastern Europe are such that the primary Soviet interest in Europe may be to maintain stability. Secondly, the threat from China could encourage co-operation to safeguard the Soviet Union's Western flank. On the other hand, these factors have not in the past had a noticeable moderating effect on Soviet behaviour. And it is clear that the Soviet Union will have the economic basis for continued growth in military power and could have the confidence to attempt to exploit this power. In view of these conflicting possibilities, we believe that we should base our calculations on much the same adversary relationship as we have with the Soviet Union today.

Relations within NATO

5. We believe that the interdependence between the United States and Western Europe in economic and other terms is such that the close institutional links, including that in the North Atlantic Alliance, are very unlikely to be broken. On this assumption, a British strategic force would not need to make a more significant numerical contribution to the nuclear force levels of the Alliance than at present. But we do not believe that it can safely be assumed that the threat by the United States to use its nuclear weapons in defence of European interests

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will be credible to the Soviet Union in all circumstances when such support may be needed.

6. We see the principal risk to this assumption of continued transatlantic co-operation arising from possible developments within Western European States and within the European Community as an institution. For example, it is possible to postulate scenarios of major political change within European States (particularly Italy and possibly France) and, at the other extreme, of a dramatic movement towards European integration, which could prove incompatible with a defence arrangement on existing lines. While there may be increased defence collaboration and co-operation, we have assumed this will stop short of integration of defence forces under a single command; and it would, therefore, be appropriate to maintain any further deterrent under sole national control. But the possibility of major political change could have more far-reaching consequences if it appeared to threaten European and transatlantic solidarity. It could lead to strong pressures for new departures in West German policy, including the acquisition of an independent nuclear capability.