

CIVIL DEFENCE & THE 1983 DRAFT REGULATIONS

THE MILITARY THREAT TO THE CIVIL POPULATION OF THE UK.

Until 1981 official advice (including that from the present Government) had been that the main threat, as far as civil defence was concerned, is nuclear: an attack "would be a massive one aimed at making the country attacked totally ineffective, militarily, politically and industrially. In particular, the means of nuclear retaliation would be primary targets." (Training Manual for Scientific Advisers, Home Office 1977).

Home Office Circular ES1/1981 altered this, and asked Local Authorities to prepare for **all** contingencies, ranging from conventional air bombardment, through 'limited' nuclear strikes, up to substantial nuclear attack.

The advice given in ES1/1981 has been used by official spokesman (and others) to argue that their civil defence preparations, however ineffective they might be in response to a major nuclear attack, would be of value in face of a conventional or 'limited' nuclear, war.

This line of argument is either ill-informed or disingenuous. For, as Mr Whitelaw himself told the House of Commons, "Soviet strategists hold that any war in Europe is likely to escalate into a nuclear exchange". (7 August 1980) As Lords Mountbatten and Carver have emphasised, the chances are slim that a nuclear war, once initiated, could ever be 'limited'.

Even if a war were to begin with some modest attack, civil defence would have to **assume** that a major nuclear attack would follow. An air raid on London, say, with high explosive bombs, would be the signal, not for the fire engines and ambulances to rush to the aid of the trapped and injured, but for the bureaucrats to dive into their bunkers.

It is unlikely that the Home Office itself takes seriously the advice given in ES1/1981, for at an operational level it is impractical. The civil defence responses appropriate to conventional and nuclear attacks are different, and often conflict. For example, if the Government really do believe that conventional attack **alone** on cities is a likely contingency, evacuation planning makes sense. In fact, the hint of evacuation (in place of stay-put) contained in an earlier draft of the Regulations, has now been dropped. SRDB is known to have completed recently a secret study of the feasibility of evacuation; this should be published so that the Government's position can be clarified.

It follows that the **test** of any civil defence policy must be its likely ability to respond to substantial nuclear attack. In the present military circumstances, its potential to cope with conventional or 'limited' nuclear, attack has little relevance. Circular ES1/1981, and Regulations derived from it, are utterly misconceived.

How large might a substantial nuclear attack be? About 200 Megatons used to be Home Office advice (Training Manual, op. cit.) and practice (their 'Standard Unclassified Attack' used for casualty estimation in the 1970s had 179 weapons totalling 193 Megatons). That estimate took no account of the deployment of Soviet SS20 missiles, nor does it allow for the increase in the number of important military targets in the UK.

The BMA Inquiry Into the Medical Effects of Nuclear War, after carefully reviewing the evidence, concluded that 'an attack might amount to 150 or 200 Megatons; with a total of three or four times this magnitude if cruise missiles were to be deployed in the United Kingdom'. (BMA Report, p. 25)

However, the Home Office now claims to perceive a **diminishing** threat to the UK, for in its response to the BMA report it described a 200 Megaton attack as being 'at the upper limit of foreseeable possibilities'. (Press statement, 3 March 1983)

THE OFFICIAL RESPONSE TO INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS OF THE FEASIBILITY OF CIVIL DEFENCE IN THE UK HAS BEEN TO UNDERSTATE, QUALITATIVELY AND QUANTITATIVELY, THE THREAT TO THE CIVIL POPULATION.

TECHNICAL GUIDANCE AND THE COMPETENCE OF THE HOME OFFICE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT BRANCH (SRDB)

There are now 12 scientists in SRDB working on civil defence. In October 1980 they were instructed by the then Minister of State, Mr. Leon Brittan, that, other than in very rare cases, they should make all information publicly available. Since then SRDB has published **one** report relating to civil defence (and that was delayed for a year while, we were told by a Home Office scientist, 'it was scrutinized for anything that might lay the Home Office open to criticism.')

SRDB were asked for casualty estimates by the BMA Inquiry, but produced only an **unofficial** paper, together with the disclaimer '..that it should not be taken as a definitive source of scientific data..' Other witnesses to the Inquiry pointed out serious discrepancies between SRDB's work and official US methodology, and also exposed inconsistencies within SRDB's evidence. The Home Office now says that its methods of casualty estimation are 'under review' (BMA Report, Chap. 3).

SRDB HAS REPEATEDLY REFUSED TO MEET SANA AND OTHER INDEPENDENT SCIENTISTS TO DISCUSS THESE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF CIVIL DEFENCE.

SRDB is responsible for the technical advice on civil defence given to the public and to Local Authorities. The notorious pamphlet 'Protect and Survive' is an example of the former; it recommends makeshift fallout shelters that would collapse at rather low blast levels, such as would be reached in most populated areas of the UK during a 200 Megaton attack directed primarily at military targets. The claim, which Home Office Ministers and officials have made, that these measures 'would save millions of lives', is without scientific foundation.

SRDB advice of similar quality has been incorporated into Local Authority war emergency plans. They are responsible too for the technical content of training for Local Authority employees. The new Regulations are designed to compel Local Authorities to plan and to train on the basis of this unreliable information.

A CIVIL DEFENCE POLICY THAT IS BASED ON TECHNICAL ADVICE FROM SRDB CANNOT COMMAND THE CONFIDENCE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

PLANNING CIVIL DEFENCE FOR MAJOR NUCLEAR ATTACK

For many years, the central aim of planning has been to build an administrative structure that, at a local level, would stand some chance of surviving attack: 'Sub-regional government would...function from headquarters which are designed for minimum vulnerability and equipped with special communication facilities.....

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Civil Defence is concerned with war emergency planning, that is, passive measures to protect the population from the effects of hostile attack. Civil emergencies, such as floods or train crashes, are **not** part of civil defence.

Full public understanding of the likely consequences of war is essential to any consensus on civil defence policy.

Equally essential is competent technical assessment of the likely nature of an attack, of the consequent destruction and casualties, and of the efficacy of civil defence measures.

The Government, in its public statements, now seriously underplays the magnitude of the threat to the civil population of the UK.

Official scientific advice to individuals and local authorities which comes from the Home Office Scientific Research and Development Branch (SRDB), is inaccurate and inadequate.

The commitment made by Mr Whitelaw to an 'open' policy on Civil Defence ('The public has a right to knowledge of these matters', House of Commons, 7 August 1980) has been evaded, particularly by SRDB.

These deficiencies are now apparent to all shades of political opinion:

"... the impact of new regulations ... is at question so long as information made available by the Government to the public and for the use of local authorities is not improved ... In particular it is essential that more information be made available on evacuation, stay-put and shelter policy, and on the nature of the threat to be met and on the validity of the planning assumptions."

(Association of County Councils submission to Home Office, December 1982)

"The Government has the duty at least to institute a wide-ranging and fully public enquiry (into civil defence) ..."

(Mr. John Loveridge (Con.), House of Commons, 24 March 1983)

The new regulations seek to enforce compliance by local authorities with ill-considered plans and incompetent guidance that have little basis in the harsh realities of a nuclear world.

its intervention would aim at the conservation of resources, both manpower and materials, for longer-term survival - rather than immediate short-term aid..' (Greater London Region War Emergency Plan, Part I, para. 5.3, 1978)

It is clear that the humanitarian goal of bringing urgent aid to the trapped and injured at the periphery of an attack, which is the newfound justification by Ministers and officials for their civil defence plans, is in fact not of high priority. The humanitarian aspect was conspicuous by its total absence from Mr. Whitelaw's major statement on civil defence to the House of Commons on 7 August 1980.

It is open to question whether this administrative structure would survive a major attack. It is handicapped not only by the 'guidance' given by SRDB, but also by the Government's refusal to identify high-risk target areas. There is scepticism from all sides as to its probable effectiveness in a nuclear aftermath.

THE NEW REGULATIONS SEEK TO ENFORCE COMPLIANCE WITH AN ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF DUBIOUS UTILITY.

It has to be recognised that no passive civil defence measures can do much to mitigate the disaster of a nuclear attack. A major attack would destroy so many of the UK's resources that a viable population would probably be just a few millions. Shelters or evacuation, if they were able to save lives in the short-term, would do no more than postpone millions of deaths.

The effective way to reduce casualties is, as the Home Office admitted in its response to the BMA Report, to cut down the likely weight of a nuclear attack on the UK.

The removal of high-priority military targets from the land mass of the UK, where their vulnerability is itself strategically destabilizing, would be a far more productive approach than current Home Office paper plans and administrative structures.

THE NEW REGULATIONS ARE IRRELEVANT TO THE REAL PROBLEM THAT THE CIVIL POPULATION OF THE UK FACES FROM THE THREAT OF NUCLEAR WAR.

