

Effective destroyer of dangerous myths

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IN 1957 the Tory government issued a Defence white paper of stunning directness. "There are no means," it stated, "of protecting the population against the consequences of a nuclear attack."

This, of course, was at a time when the world nuclear arsenals were at a much lower level. Things have changed dramatically since. Nuclear bombs have been developed into highly accurate nuclear missiles; enough warheads have been acquired by the two big powers to destroy Europe many times over; and the notion that nuclear war is survivable has grown.

This last idea has been promoted in a number of forms. For instance, if there is a nuclear war, it will be very limited and is unlikely to injure you. Or, if you take the proper precautions (e.g. the much ridiculed "Protect and Survive") you will have a good chance of survival. Or (most dishonestly) a large number of people may be killed and injured but the social fabric of the country will survive, and isn't it worth it in "defence" of our way of life?

This excellent book sets out the effects of nuclear attack on Britain. In the process it debunks many current myths about "civil defence" of the type promoted by the present government.

Using computer programmes especially developed for the book, the authors (two of whom are members of Scientists Against Nuclear Arms) predict in detail effects, including casualties, for different types of nuclear attack on Britain.

The scientific approach, with all its assumptions and methods, is fully explained. Indeed, this aspect takes up most of the book, along with detailed lists and maps of findings; which may make the book more useful for reference to the non-specialist.

It is assumed that the Soviet Union would attack Britain in the event of nuclear war. There are many reasons for this — not least the 102 US bases on this island; or the presence of Cruise missiles with war-fighting capability; or the strategic im-

portance of Britain; or . . . the list is almost endless. Britain abounds with nuclear targets, with nuclear bases at the top of the list.

There are lengthy descriptions of the types and numbers of available Soviet nuclear weapons and their capabilities.

The possible targets for these weapons, whether military, industrial or civilian, are laid out, and thus possible patterns of nuclear attack are constructed.

The estimation of casualties reveals some interesting facts. They are based on the same

tary industries and other heavy industry. Such an attack would kill at least 37 million. Many more would be seriously injured.

It was a similar model to this that formed the basis for CND's "Hard Luck" exercise in 1982, as a level of attack to be realistically expected.

Soviet military strategy includes no space for a "limited" nuclear war or a "warning shot."

Soviet leaders regard the US counterforce strategy, involving the deployment of very accurate warfighting missiles, as an attempt to legitimise nuclear war by making limited nuclear war thinkable and acceptable.

Thus Britain would almost certainly be faced by a massive nuclear onslaught at least at the level of the "Hard Luck" exercise.

As well as initial or short-term casualties, it is debatable whether survivors would remain so for very long. Certainly the social fabric would be smashed. Most housing would be destroyed or damaged. There would be a lack of all fuel. Radioactive fallout, including long-lived isotopes released from nuclear power stations, would cover much of the country.

As well as early fall-out casualties, many cancers and much genetic damage would be caused. There would be little transport and almost no clean water. Food would be very short and mostly contaminated. Even if a large part of the population were put in deer shelters, as some think possible given enough expenditure, what sort of Britain would they emerge to?

Yet at present virtually all the British population would have only "Protect and Survive" measures—which, with luck, might help for a short time those on the periphery of explosions—on about two million people.

Present "civil defence" regulations and arrangements have little to do with either defence or protection. Indeed, most of the arrangements have more to do with internal suppression and security.

It is this myth—that nuclear war can ever be acceptable or survivable in a meaningful sense—that this book is so effective in destroying.

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reviews

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Basil Blackwell £4.95

assumptions as the US Office of Technology Assessment makes in its calculations—and casualties turn out to be 2½ times higher than British government calculations on the same levels of attack.

The Home Office model omits all burns casualties caused directly by nuclear weapons; while the effects of blast damage on buildings, which would admit fall-out, are ignored. Most amazingly, British government figures for blast casualties are based on data from the effects of conventional explosions in World War Two!

The author's calculations make sickening reading. Even a nuclear attack aimed solely at nuclear bases and major command centres would kill more than six million people, in what is known in military jargon as "collateral damage." An attack on all major bases, communication centres, ports, airfields and some nuclear power stations would kill more than 20 million.

But, as the authors show from Soviet military writings, it is "unlikely" that "any" attack would not also include as targets large oil and gas refineries, all nuclear power stations, most ports, the City of London, the electricity grid, most major mili-