

Briefing Note

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MULTILATERAL DISARMAMENT: THE PATH TO PEACE

The Prime Minister, in her address to the Conservative Party Conference at Brighton on 8th October 1982, reminded her audience of the dangers of accepting the beguiling arguments of those who advocate unilateral nuclear disarmament. She said:

"...despite...regular reminders of the ruthless actions of the Kremlin there are still those who seem to believe that disarmament by ourselves alone would so impress the Russians that they would obligingly follow suit.

"But peace, freedom and justice are only to be found where people are prepared to defend them. This Government will give the highest priority to our national defence, both conventional and nuclear.

"I want to see nuclear disarmament, I want to see conventional disarmament as well.....We seek agreement with the Soviet Union on arms control. We want to reduce the levels of both conventional and nuclear forces. But those reductions must be mutual, they must be balanced and they must be verifiable.

"I understand the feelings of the unilateralists. I understand the anxieties of parents with children growing up in the nuclear age. But the fundamental question for all of us is whether unilateral nuclear disarmament would make war less likely. I have to tell you that it would not. It would make war more likely....."

Western Peace Initiatives

Britain and the USA have long been active in pursuit of disarmament. Britain played a major part in the formulation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968. Our commitment to peace does not end there. The USA abided by the figures in the SALT I agreement, whereas the Soviet Union disregarded them by exceeding the ratified numbers of launchers by between 30 and 60.

Since 1973, NATO and the Warsaw Pact have been engaged in the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction negotiations in Vienna. It is not the fault of the West that progress has been slow; it is the Soviets who have refused to co-operate in establishing verifiable figures.

There have been a number of conferences on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) with the ground rules being set out in the Helsinki Final Act (1975). Despite Western initiatives Moscow has paid only lip-service to the agreement.

President Reagan has produced a set of very positive proposals which if accepted would result in a reduction of one-third in the number of strategic nuclear warheads. Furthermore, his 'zero option' involving the Pershing II and Cruise systems might result, if the Soviets respond, in the removal of all land-based missiles in Western Europe and the non-Soviet Warsaw Pact countries. Many have forgotten that the request for Cruise and Pershing II came from Chancellor Schmidt of West Germany in response to the Soviet deployment of SS20s.

The Labour Party

At the Labour Party Conference at Blackpool on 29th September 1982 a motion calling for Britain to disarm unilaterally was passed, with a two-thirds

majority, although a Marplan opinion poll (published in the 'Guardian' on 28th September 1982) found that 55% of Labour supporters indicated their desire for an independent deterrent. In contrast, under the French Socialist Government, the French nuclear capability is to be modernised and the French Neutron Bomb will not be scrapped.

The Church Minority

Although a group of clerics led by the Bishop of Salisbury, in a book 'The Church and the Bomb', said that Britain should abandon her nuclear deterrent, it must be pointed out that this is not Church of England policy and does not represent the view of the clergy nationwide. In an opinion poll conducted for the London Weekend Television programme, 'Credo' by ORC, 49% of the clergy polled did not want unilateral disarmament, compared with 40% who did.

Multilateralism

The case for multilateral disarmament is based on three main principles:

- Balanced forces prevent the Soviets from thinking that a quick thrust into Western Europe would be a fait accompli.
- Unilateral disarmament would not influence the Kremlin ideologues. To quote Major Molovidov, the Soviet negotiator at Geneva in 1980:
"The Soviet Union cannot undertake the unilateral destruction of its nuclear weapons and indeed has no right to do so as it is a weapon of the people of the world for peace and progress. Marxist-Leninists decisively reject the assertion of certain bourgeois theoreticians who consider nuclear missile war unjust from any point of view."
- The nuclear deterrent has maintained the peace in Europe for 37 years, without it a number of small disputes could have escalated into major conflicts.

Fallacies Answered

- Q. If Britain disarmed would not proliferation cease?
A. No, our actions would have no effect on countries such as Libya and Iraq. Moreover a disarmed Britain would be vulnerable to their blackmail.
- Q. Nuclear weapons are evil, so should we not abandon them?
A. Yes, they are - which is why we want to disarm multilaterally. The evil can only be removed if everyone gives up their weapons and not just one side.
- Q. Surely Trident is both costly and dangerous?
A. It will cost only 3% of our total defence budget; and a transfer of resources to conventional weapons would reduce our deterrent and make war more likely.
- Q. Don't nuclear weapons make war more likely?
A. No. Since 1945 nobody has died from the hostile use of these weapons, whereas 20 million have perished in non-nuclear conflicts throughout the world.
- Q. Ultimately is it not a case of red or dead?
No it is not; the third option is peace through deterrence and disarmament negotiations.

PJW/CDB