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SIR ANTHONY PARSONS

DEFENCE

"THE TRUTH GAME"

I watched John Pilger's programme "The Truth Game" last night. No doubt the experts will be preparing a proper critique, but I thought I would set down a few personal impressions and note a few points while they are still fresh in my mind.

My overall impression was that the programme was thin, self-evidently partial and prejudiced, and had difficulty sustaining its theme. I cannot think that it will have made much impression on objective and intelligent viewers, who would be the audience most likely to watch the programme and whose attention and confidence we would wish to retain. Nonetheless, it did raise a number of points which we should be prepared either to answer or exploit.

a. Trident - a first strike weapon

While Trident II has the accuracy to bust Soviet ICBM silos our Tridents will not have sufficient warheads to target all Soviet ICBMs, leaving aside their SS.20. Any first strike would, therefore, leave us open to retaliation from these systems and the Soviet SLBMs. It would be suicide. Trident mounted in submarines, and invulnerable to preemption, is ideally, and intended as, a retaliatory weapon.

b. Limited Nuclear War

It was claimed that the purpose of Cruise missiles, and the intention of the US Government, was to conduct a limited nuclear war confined to Europe which could be "won" given numerical and technical superiority of US nuclear weapons. This is certainly the most damaging allegation which was made in the programme, and which is current in the nuclear debate. It is true to this extent, that if NATO was forced to use nuclear weapons its initial use would be limited numerically, and confined geographically, with the purpose of confronting the other side with our willingness to cross the nuclear threshold rather than submit to conventional defeat, and so with the evidence of their miscalculation. It is a paradox that this concept should have become the object

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of so much suspicion, while the alternative of massive retaliation with strategic nuclear weapons seems somehow to have acquired renewed respectability.

c. Cruise and Pershing can strike Russia, but the SS.20 can only strike Western Europe

CND Chairperson Ruddock made much of the fact that the SS.20, which is mobile and has three warheads compared to the one on Cruise and Pershing, is a defensive weapon which cannot threaten the United States, and to which Pershing and Cruise are, therefore, an inappropriate counter. This view discounts the fundamental commitment of NATO countries that an attack on one should be seen as an attack on all, ignores the presence in West Europe of some 180,000 US troops, and misrepresents the purpose of Cruise and Pershing deployments to bind the US more surely and more evidently to the defence of Western Europe. It also seems to suggest that it is understandable and respectable for the Soviet Union to target 370 multiple warhead ballistic nuclear weapons on Western Europe, to which there is no appropriate counter.

d. Hardened Silos at Greenham Common

Ms Ruddock also made much of the construction at Greenham Common of hardened silos, which proved to her satisfaction that Cruise missiles would be kept permanently armed and ready to fire from their permanent bases. There is, of course, no question of Cruise missiles being "permanently armed". As to their storage in hardened silos, would she prefer that nuclear warheads and their missiles were stored in tents?

e. Queen's Order II

Pilger asserted that the implementation of "Queen's Order II" would suspend democracy in the United Kingdom. His inference was that this would be a necessary condition to be established before a Government could proceed to wage a nuclear war, and that the need for such measures was uniquely the product of the nuclear age. Queen's Order II does not do what Pilger says it does, but in any event, the need for

Government to assume emergency powers in a time of crisis or war has been accepted in the past, and would be expected by the general public in a future crisis.

f. A Nuclear Warning Shot

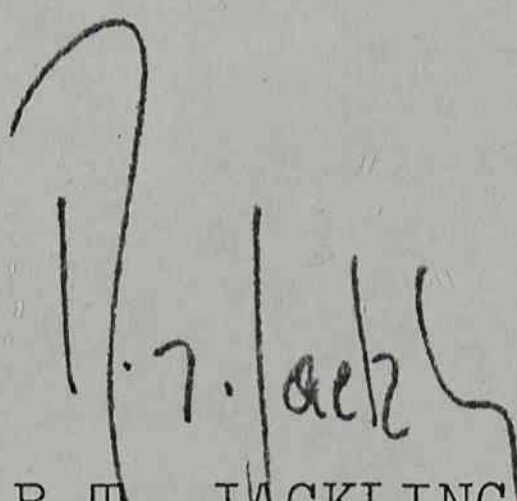
The view was attributed to General Haig that NATO might "fire a nuclear warning shot across the bows of the Soviet Union" in a time of crisis. The way this comment was presented recalled to me the Naval Officer who argued quite seriously that the use of nuclear weapons at sea would be so much less objectionable than the use of nuclear weapons on land that Ministers might authorise it "before war had broken out"! Of course, the concept which Haig characteristically failed to articulate was the one referred to in (b) above.

g. 1960s Military Manual

Pilger made much of a section in a 20-year old military manual which set out to describe how a nuclear land battle might be conducted, and included the statement "large numbers of nuclear weapons will be used". Put in its proper context there was nothing remarkable about the statement which made clear that if a nuclear battle should develop in Europe, nuclear weapons would be used.

h. Soviet Intentions

Pilger made play of Admiral La Roque's statement that it would be "suicide for the Soviet Union to make a frontal attack in Europe". It would be suicide not because of the weight of NATO's conventional forces, but because those forces are backed by a formidable nuclear capability.


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