

worldview

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ALL OR NOTHING AT ALL?

The West's increasing reliance upon thermo-nuclear weapons was emphasized last year in a historic British White Paper on defense. Stating that it is economically impossible for Britain to be strong in both nuclear and conventional armaments, this report announced that over the next few years the British government would radically reduce the size of its conventional armaments in order to develop more fully its atomic weapons. In this way, it concluded, Great Britain would make a "modest" contribution toward the security of the West.

When this policy was announced, some serious questions about its implications were raised. The London *Economist* wondered if it really covered "all the reasonable political and military risks," and decided it did not. The dilemma it seemed to pose—either atomic war or surrender—was too cruel. No area of maneuver was left for conventional response to a local aggression. Because, by making every decision one of all or nothing at all, a policy of total reliance upon total weapons actually increases the chances of "limited" out-rages.

Perhaps it was in answer to such problems that a new Defense White Paper was issued by the British government last month. The new document has received remarkably little public attention in this country, but it demands most serious public attention because it spells out, with horrifying explicitness, the implications of the 1957 report.

Mr. Duncan Sandys, the British Minister of Defense, says in the new Paper that Britain has a growing force of bombers which are now being equipped with megaton bombs and, in addition, will soon have intermediate range missiles. Conventional forces, at the same time, are continually being reduced. (All this by way of implementing the 1957 White Paper). And so, Mr. Sandys announces, if the Soviet Union were to launch an attack on any Western nation *with conventional forces only*, the West would hit back with its strategic nuclear weapons.

Thus, "logically," almost academically, the doctrine of ultimate deterrence is set forth and adopted by this nation's major ally. The Russian leaders have been warned: any "major attack" (whatever that may mean) against any "Western nation" (whatever that may include), even with conventional weapons, would mean thermo-nuclear reprisal against the Soviet Union. With such a fate in store for them, the White Paper seems to ask, would Russia's leaders ever dare to attack?

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Obviously, the most grave issues, both strategic and moral, are involved here. British critics of Mr. Sandys' document point out that, strategically, the doctrine of ultimate deterrence is dangerous bravado.

The Socialist *New Statesman*, in an editorial titled "The Logic of Annihilation" argues: "If Mr. Sandys' deterrent is employed, it will inevitably lead to the extermination of life on these islands . . . No British Prime Minister could possibly take such a decision. The strategy of the deterrent is a purely theoretical concept designed to meet a contingency which, the politicians believe, will never occur. But if it does, the deterrent will immediately be revealed for what it is: a bluff . . . And once the monumental bluff of the Great Deterrent were called, the West [lacking sufficient conventional forces] would have no alternatives but to accept a last-minute Munich settlement . . . Hence the political consequence of [this] defense policy is a foreign policy based on appeasement."

The Conservative *Spectator* makes a similar case: "The threat is empty: everybody, including Mr. Sandys, knows that H-bombs will not be launched from this country if a conventional war begins. But Mr. Khrushchev may not realize this . . . He may conceivably believe . . . that we really intend to hit back with strategic nuclear weapons if, say, war breaks out anywhere along

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the Curtain . . . If it should, [he] might feel that it would be wise to obliterate us before we decided whether or not to carry out the White Paper's policy."

Disturbing as the doctrine of ultimate deterrence is from the standpoint of strategy, however, it is infinitely more disturbing from the standpoint of any recognizable morality. Strategically, the doctrine is at least debatable; morally, it is self-evidently pernicious. As baldly stated in the British White Paper, it represents a public abandonment by a Western government of any pretense to ethical sensitivity in defense policy. Here is an official endorsement of power divorced from moral concern.

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Moralists have only begun to reconsider their traditional teaching on the "just war" in relation to nuclear weapons of mass-destruction. But it is doubtful that they could justify the actual use of these weapons under *any* circumstances—even as a last-resort reply to thermonuclear attack. Because, however irrelevant much of the tradi-

tional "just war" teaching may now be, one of its principles remains luminously clear, from the standpoint, even, of common sense. The principle is this: even a defensive action, to be morally justifiable, must hold more promise of good than of evil. But what promise, except universal suicide, does any war fought with massive nuclear weapons hold?

Agonizing problems are involved here, both for the moralist and the statesman. For both of them, the modern situation poses dilemmas that resist clear-cut answers. Given the fact of Soviet power, no responsible moralist can easily move from the summit of principle to the ground of practice and advocate that, here and now, the Western powers should unilaterally disarm. The practical consequences of this would likely be the world dominance of the Soviet Union. But no Western statesman, either, can responsibly embrace a strategy of naked power completely sundered from the moral imperatives of the civilized tradition. And this is what the doctrine of ultimate deterrence, now so casually but so ominously set forth in the 1958 British White Paper, seems to do.

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In the Magazines

With the opening of the annual season for debate on foreign aid come two articles of especial interest, one by Barbara Ward in *The New York Times Magazine* of February 23, the other by Oscar Gass in the February issue of *Commentary*. Both writers marshal the impressive evidence of figures and statistics to support their conviction that the U.S. record for foreign aid expenditures is far from what it should be, and that, unless there is immediate and total revision of our now short-sighted policy along the lines of some major, long-term effort, we shall fail to meet the demands of the present world crisis.

In her article, "The Great Challenge Is Not the Sputniks," Miss Ward sees the new situation as resulting from "the falling away of world trade in the wake of American business stagnation"—a situation further aggravated by Soviet initiative. ". . . The new conditions of 1958 might best be summed up by saying that, while the Russians have evolved a long-term economic strategy for the Asian fringe (and beyond it, for the underdeveloped areas everywhere) the Western powers appear to have no general policy of any sort."

Mr. Gass's report, "The United States and the Poorest Peoples," is a closer look at the mismanagement, delusion and apathy that lie behind Washing-

ton's lack of policy. As an economic consultant to several of the needy countries, the author is in a position to lay open the entire record—of their side as well as ours—and his view is a realistic one. "With the best will in the world," he writes, "a society like ours can effectively assist only countries with a national leadership which desires assistance and is prepared to bear the first responsibility for thinking, planning and organization. An underdeveloped country has to give its best to the task of its own development; then we can be helpful in a supporting role, and more in resources than personnel."

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Kenneth Thompson, writing on "Moral and Political Aspects of the Present Crisis" in the February 17 issue of *Christianity and Crisis*, explores our mood in the current phase of the Cold War, along with some of its causes and implications. He insists that we find some approach to policy which is neither "a severely military view of power" nor "a utopian moralism that offers few criteria for measuring the moral aspects of any problem," and he calls for a revival of "the art of diplomatic conversations."

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