Armies are now obsolete

Stephen King Hall
A prominent Commander in the British Navy proposes an official study of passive resistance as the only effective method of defense in the nuclear age.

ARMIES ARE NOW OBSOLETE

SIR STEPHEN KING-HALL
IT SEEMS WHOLLY WRONG to assume without any investigation that what may broadly be called military power is the only way in which defence can be made effective.

Nor should we be impressed or unduly influenced by the fact that from the earliest known times to the present day, physical force and weapons from the spear to the atom bomb have been the outward and visible signs of defence.

Victors' Position

TODAY it is generally recognized that a victorious war cannot be expected to pay a cash dividend. On the contrary the plain fact emerging from two world wars is that after a short period of material suffering the vanquished emerge in a stronger economic position than that of the victors. The victors find themselves in the absurd position, for reasons which appear to be directly in their own interests, of having to finance the recovery of the vanquished and the more complete the physical losses of the enemy the more up-to-date is the new economy which rises from the ashes of defeat. (The late Earl Lloyd George told us that he had come to the conclusion that it was a great mistake to win a total military victory.)

An interesting and recent example on a small scale of this phenomenon is to be seen in the experience of the Kikuyu tribe in Kenya. The other tribes are saying with a deal of reason: "Look at the money and effort which are being expended on social services, rehabilitation, etc., for the Kikuyu. Is it necessary to stage a Mau Mau rebellion in order to receive all these good things?"

An honest answer would be: "Not necessarily, but it might be helpful."

There is another relatively new factor in history which must be taken into account.

We seem to have reached a stage in military evolution in which resistance, both passive and active, of a civilian population which refuses to acknowledge defeat even though its professional forces have been defeated or because it had no conventional forces to be defeated is a new factor in war.
Gandhi's passive resistance campaign in India, the German passive resistance which defeated the French in the Ruhr in the 1920's; the Sinn Fein nationally supported terrorist campaign; the Israel victory over the British mandatory administration; the Algerian struggle; the EOKA movement in Cyprus; the resistance movement against the Nazis, all belong to the new development.

It seems to be of significance that all these "civilian" resistances were part of ideological struggles and illustrated the truth of the saying that one can do most things with bayonets except sit on them.

Tentative conclusions are as follows:

1. We aim to defend an idea.

2. There are some grounds for believing that an idea can prevail even when the opponents of the idea are physically superior and able to occupy the territory of those defending the idea.

3. In the modern world a military victory cannot produce an economic dividend. Still less can there be any profit in a military victory obtained by nuclear weapons.

Defense by Extermination

AS MENTIONED ABOVE it is generally taken for granted that the basis of defence against aggression must be military force. We have however reached an unprecedented state of affairs in the evolution of destructive force through the invention of nuclear weapons.

They possess two characteristics which are novel.

The first is that their destructive capacity is so enormous that there is no practical physical means of defence against these weapons. This fact has been self-evident so far as the UK is concerned for several years but is now officially accepted.

The second novel characteristic of these weapons is that each time one of them is tested there is an addition to the pollution of the earth's surface and atmosphere.

Although the whole subject of fall-out and the strontium risk is a matter of scientific controversy there is agreement that if tests were carried out over a long
period on a large scale the human race would probably exterminate itself in preparing to defend itself.

The peculiar character of the nuclear weapon has given a very real meaning to the hallowed principle that all nations maintain defence forces for protection against aggression. In the pre-nuclear age it was always said that the purpose of armed forces was to prevent war and there was some truth in the statement but the use of the word "deterrent" and the idea it expresses is a product of the nuclear age. It is insufficiently appreciated that our defence strategy is now based on the belief or hope that an idea will be effective and the idea can be summarized as follows:

"Nuclear war would be mutual suicide. It is not rational to be suicidal. You—the aggressor—can destroy us but your own destruction will be practically coincidental."

The facts lead to the conclusion that the time-honored theory that defence against physical aggression must take the form of physical means has worn very thin and needs to be regarded with much suspicion.

Moreover experience has shown that aggression by the Communist States can also be political and since 1945 this form of aggression has been the most dangerous and insidious. Para. 27 of the White Paper on Defence writes about British responsibilities under the Bagdad Pact to prevent Communist encroachment and infiltration and goes on in the same paragraph to refer to bomber squadrons based in Cyprus capable of delivering nuclear weapons. The value of nuclear bombardments as a means of preventing (say) a Communist coup d'état in Persia is not clear to this writer.

**Total Destruction**

THERE IS A THEORETICAL or philosophic reason for doubting whether military force is any longer assuredly the best way to counter military aggression of a nuclear type. It is an established principle that to every form of attack there must exist a means of defence. We have now reached a stage in the development of the attack which enables total destruction to be achieved and as it is physically impossible to put the whole of a modern social system 100 feet
underground and turn the United Kingdom into a nation of troglodytes it might seem at first glance that the principle has broken down.

But it seems to have been forgotten that the principle does not say that the answer to an attack must be of the same order of things as the attack.

If the answer to a nuclear attack creating total destruction is merely to enlarge the area of destruction nothing of value has been achieved.

If however having reached the ne plus ultra of physical attack we are imaginative enough to realise that we have not simultaneously reached the frontiers of human thought we should have no difficulty in moving forward beyond the physical into the psychological.

**The Drift to Disaster**

THE OBJECT of the new strategy of defence is to change the minds of the men in the Kremlin.

To those that will at once raise the cry that this is asking the impossible the reply must be:

1. They are human beings who have for one reason or another changed their minds on several occasions since 1945.

   2. Through the policy of the nuclear deterrent we hope—and some people believe—we are already operating on their minds and influencing their thoughts. If we are not, the deterrent idea has failed.

If our strategy should be to change the minds of the men in the Kremlin how is this to be achieved technically? There seem to us to be two broad lines of approach: the direct and indirect.

The direct approach consists in doing things which might make an immediate impact on the minds of the rulers; the indirect approach is composed of policies designed to influence the minds of the masses in the Communist-controlled countries.

At this moment we are disposed to think that as part of our psychological campaign for defense there are strong arguments for considering whether the UK should not announce unilaterally that it will not carry out any further tests and that the forthcoming test will be abandoned.

Something dramatic and easily understood by man-
kind needs to be done to break the deadlock and arrest the drift of disaster.

Do the chiefs of staff really believe that an announcement of this nature would leave the UK more defenceless against nuclear attack than it is at present?

Having taken this step we should use it as the starting point for a tremendous and world-wide educational campaign explaining the horrors of nuclear war, the dangers of tests, etc., and say: "Now you can see why Her Majesty’s Government has taken a lead and perhaps risks in this matter."

I picture a sum of £100,000,000 being spent on this propaganda which ought to be an all-party effort. I refuse absolutely to admit that given imagination, energy and funds the great educational campaign should not penetrate beyond the iron curtain.

In this connection and beginning with the satellite States a really great effort (£50,000,000) should be made to increase contacts with the masses in those countries. Every effort should be made to organise exchange visits between young people on a very large scale. We should put as much effort and money for this kind of thing as we do into a nuclear-bomb test.

**Conventional Forces**

NO DOUBT these ideas will be very startling to many people but we beg and entreat them to remember that we are faced today with the old problem of defence in a completely novel setting.

It is almost as novel as if we woke up some day to find that this world of ours was liable to aggression from another planet. Our present problem is of this novel nature.

The Manchester Guardian wrote on April 15 that “Dependence on the ultimate deterrent is inevitable.” It went on to say that the alternative was “conventional forces on a massive scale” or “a fully pacifist policy.” A point worth thinking about is that if we succeed in producing some form of standstill in development of nuclear weapons and do not succeed in making progress with disarmament in conventional weapons are we likely to be able to persuade the people of the West to
stand the racket of "conventional forces on a massive scale"? We doubt it.

What about a fully pacifist policy?

The truth is that this possibility has never been thoroughly examined from a strictly political-strategical angle. The "pacifist" policy has usually been defended from a moral point of view.

I am thinking of a policy which it would be more accurate to call "defence by passive resistance."

I am not saying it would work. I am saying that no one has thoroughly studied its possibilities in the light of the novel and unprecedented defence problem which now faces the UK, Western Europe, and to a lesser extent the USA.

In order to find out some more about this I have reached the conclusion that a Royal Commission should be established with the task of expressing an opinion upon the problem of whether our way of life could be defended by passive resistance and if so what the plan should be. If a Royal Commission is not considered to be the best instrument then a special committee of the Imperial Defence College should be put on the job.

We have said quite bluntly in the White Paper that we cannot afford our present expenditure on defence. We have made heavy cuts in our conventional forces and transferred our faith to nuclear weapons with all the imponderables and unknowns which go with them.

I remarked to a well-known MP: "Suppose Great Britain only had three air-borne divisions, a few tactical aircraft and a very small navy what would happen apart from the obvious and immense gain to our economy?"

He replied: "My first reflection is that our influence in the world would at once decline"—he paused and added—"at least I suppose it would."

Is this certain? Gandhi’s influence rose with the rise of passive resistance; so did that of the African bus boycotters.

Has it or can it be proved that a United Kingdom with an intelligent and sophisticated population educated to regard a national plan of passive resistance as the defence policy of the country would lose influence? I think there is a case for a very thorough investigation of this matter.
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