

# Alternatives to the Western Deterrents

NICHOLAS WHARTON

In a previous article<sup>1</sup> I argued that the present Western nuclear deterrents are immoral because they involve their operators, if not the Western governments, in the intention to destroy normal cities. And if this is true, we must stop co-operating with the present deterrent policies and try to change them.

The most obvious alternative to these policies is unilateral nuclear disarmament; and some people believe that we should accept unilateral disarmament in any case because the deterrent will sooner or later break down into nuclear war. But many would say that the disastrous immediate consequences of unilateral disarmament would outweigh the remote risk of war which attaches to the nuclear deterrent. If unilateral disarmament is the only alternative to our present immoral defence policy then we should adopt it, no matter how dangerous it may be. But if unilateral action is dangerous, we should not advocate it until we are quite sure that there is no alternative to our present policy which is morally permissible and less dangerous. Many people, including Catholics, view the nuclear deterrent not as an active preparation for mass murder but simply as a means of avoiding the situation which would arise without it. If Russia alone had nuclear power, she could blackmail us into surrender; we must have nuclear power too, not because we want to attack Russia or because we envisage a Russian attack - there is indeed virtually no danger of war - but simply to prevent the possibility of convincing Russian blackmail. One may point out to Catholics who regard the deterrent in this way that however unlikely war is and however much we are keeping the present deterrent just to avoid the consequences of not having it, it does still require its operators to be on the alert to destroy normal cities at a moment's notice. But they will naturally reply by drawing the distinction between the possession of nuclear weapons and their present intended use. And they will not be convinced by the unilateralists until

<sup>1</sup>'Nuclear Deterrence by Bluff', *Blackfriars* (April 1962).

they have been shown that there is no mode of possessing nuclear weapons which will, by morally permissible means, prevent the blackmail situation from arising - that there is no alternative to our present immoral deterrent besides unilateral disarmament.

In my article I argued that there is such an alternative, conceivable at least. If we in ended to use our nuclear weapons against military targets only, this might still deter a Russian attack, because the Russians could not destroy all our retaliatory forces with a first strike, and might be unwilling to take the chance that we would not change our minds when we were attacked and destroy their cities with the surviving remnant of our nuclear weapons. In this way we could deter the Russians without involving the operators of our deterrent in immoral intentions. This military targets deterrent would be less credible to the Russians than the present deterrent but it might still deter them; and its adoption would be less likely to result in Communist blackmail and occupation than unilateral nuclear disarmament. And so long as there is this kind of alternative, it is not self-evident that we should advocate unilateral disarmament, even if the military targets deterrent is less likely to be adopted than unilateral disarmament.

In this article I am going to suppose that this military targets deterrent is morally permissible and militarily feasible, and see how this assumption affects our duty to try to change the present deterrent policy in America and Britain.<sup>2</sup> If we find that we should still advocate unilateral nuclear disarmament even on this assumption, then surely there is not much ground left for controversy.

i. *The United States.* It is fairly obvious that there is no real chance of getting either unilateral nuclear disarmament or a military targets deterrent adopted in America. British unilateral disarmament might not affect our security for we would still be protected by the American deterrent. But American unilateral disarmament would clearly result in the collapse of the whole system of Western defence. No one without the strongest moral objection to the deterrent could possibly advocate a policy with these results, and most Americans have no objection to the deterrent so long as it is militarily effective. Equally, the case for a military targets deterrent rests on specifically moral principles which most Americans do not accept. So even if they accepted that the present deterrent was immoral, American Catholics could hardly hope to do

<sup>2</sup>There is one other conceivable type of nuclear deterrent which would not involve its operators in immoral intentions: a stock of weapons without any operators at all. But the arguments which follow apply to this as well.

more than dissociate themselves from the policy and condemn it. And even if unilateral nuclear disarmament did come to stand some chance of adoption in America, and a better chance than a military targets deterrent, Catholics could not argue for it honestly without pointing out that it must be adopted because the risk of Communist occupation is better than intending to murder people; and to say this is to urge the moral principle underlying the case for a military targets deterrent, which might prevent Communist occupation.

ii. *Britain.* In one very important respect the possibility of a military targets deterrent seems to make no difference to the policy which Britain should follow and which Catholics should advocate. If the present American deterrent is immoral, then our government should not co-operate with it by allowing American nuclear bases in Britain, and it should not co-operate with any NATO or future European deterrent which is based on the same strategy. So long as America maintains the present type of deterrent and the NATO policy remains as it is, we should press the government to expel American nuclear bases and withdraw from NATO. If a military targets deterrent were feasible, and if by some remote chance America or NATO were to adopt a military targets deterrent, Britain could revise her policy. But the chance of some future change in American policy does not seem to remove either the government's immediate duty to stop co-operating in the present policy, or our duty to press the government to withdraw.

If we did withdraw from the Western deterrent system, it would still in fact continue to protect us. And there may seem to be an element of hypocrisy in a policy which advocates withdrawal while recognizing that our security would be undiminished. Some supporters of the CND condemn the American deterrent, but argue that we should expel American bases because this will give us extra security in the event of war without any loss to our present security. And there is a good deal of justice in the reply that if we count on the protection of the American deterrent we should bear our share of the risks. But the Catholic argument for withdrawing from the present Western deterrent system does not rely on the fact that it would continue to give us protection, and the argument would still hold even if one believed that our withdrawal would lead to the collapse of NATO and make a Russian attack more likely. Any protection we continue to receive is protection we are unable to escape.

British unilateral nuclear disarmament in the usual sense means not

only the expulsion of American nuclear bases and withdrawal from NATO, but the abandonment of the British 'independent' nuclear deterrent. The present British 'independent' deterrent is immoral for the same reason as the American deterrent, and it must be abandoned. But we are assuming that a military targets deterrent is in general feasible and morally permissible. Would there be any case, after withdrawal from the Western nuclear defence system, for adopting an independent British deterrent of the military targets variety? Could a military targets deterrent rescue us from reliance on the immoral American deterrent? But there is no point in trying to obtain a morally legitimate form of protection if you are unable to remove the immoral protection which you are already receiving.

Some people argue that the American deterrent will not continue to deter a Russian attack on Europe, and national deterrents are needed as well. Should we not press for a British military targets deterrent to complete our security? But the complementary function of national deterrents is to deter by the threat of catalysing general nuclear war: British nuclear weapons would not be able to inflict a great deal of damage on Russia in reply to a Russian attack on Britain, but they could inflict enough damage to upset the balance of power between Russia and America and induce one of these powers to make a pre-emptive attack on the other. But this pre-emptive attack would be an attack on normal cities, and so the complementary function of national deterrents is immoral.

There is one more remote possibility. If the American deterrent does not protect us, shouldn't we construct an independent military targets deterrent which is so powerful that it could deter a Russian attack on its own account without relying on the threat of catalysing a general war? But the financial and technical expense would be prodigious; and most expert opinion does not believe that even the present complementary British deterrent is worth the cost, considering how little chance there is that Russia will risk that America would not retaliate to an attack on Europe.<sup>3</sup>

The expulsion of American nuclear bases, withdrawal from NATO and abandonment of any independent British deterrent or 'independent contribution' to the Western deterrent is in fact the policy of the CND. And I cannot see how one can avoid the conclusion that this is the policy which Catholics in Britain should support. For they must support some

<sup>3</sup>There is a good discussion by Denis Healey, 'Interdependence', *The Political Quarterly* (February, 1961).

alternative to the present defence policy; and for the foreseeable future this will be the only permissible alternative for Britain, even if we assume that in general an effective deterrent could be constructed which did not involve its operators in immoral intentions. If the present Western nuclear deterrent system is immoral, Britain has an immediate obligation to expel American nuclear bases and to withdraw from NATO; she cannot remain in the system just because it could possibly be made legitimate. And an independent British deterrent would almost certainly be superfluous whether it involved immoral intentions or not.

## ‘Socialization’ in *Mater et Magistra*

GERARD PURNELL

The term ‘socialization’ in *Mater et Magistra* has given rise to some misunderstanding and the uses of the word can be profitably examined so that the particular sense it has in the encyclical may be better appreciated.

In general, one can distinguish several uses of the word: (1) its broader sense in *Mater et Magistra*; (2) a limited, economic sense used by French writers to signify the way in which property and the firm are no longer isolated but are interdependent; (3) it can be used in a positive sense as implying something morally desirable, the idea of an institution being made responsible to society so that it fulfils a task of service to the community; (4) it can be used in a variety of different ways connected with public ownership; (5) it can be used in an unfavourable sense particularly by Americans e.g. ‘socialization of agriculture’, used as another term for collectivization, or ‘socialized medicine’; (6) in sociology the term ‘socialization’ describes the way in which a child acquires habits and is ‘conditioned’ through its upbringing.

The suggestion that John XXIII in this section of the encyclical has in some way approved the welfare state should be dismissed (whether