



# UK Nuclear History Working Paper

Number: 3

**UK Civil Defence and  
Nuclear Weapons  
1960 – 1974**

**Robin Woolven**

## **UK CIVIL DEFENCE AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS 1960 - 1974**

**Robin Woolven**

### Executive Summary:

In 1960, a major Home Defence Review presented a range of views on the value of UK civil defence expenditure in the thermonuclear age. A minority view was that resources would be better spent on improving the effectiveness of the UK deterrent but the majority held that civil defence was an essential component of deterrent policy and all recognised that, in any case, it was politically impracticable to abandon home defence entirely as the UK public expected some level of protection against and mitigation of the effects of any future attack. The 1962 Cuban missile crisis reminded the country that miscalculation or mistake might well cause a nuclear war and civil defence was thought to provide an element of insurance.

Nevertheless financial stringency by successive Governments severely limited home defence expenditure but smaller, more effective, volunteer-manned Civil Defence Corps and Auxiliary Fire Services were retained. The 1964 Labour Government maintained the deterrent defence policy but reduced expenditure on home defence. However, the drastic economies which followed the 1967 devaluation of sterling included the relegation of the major components of UK civil defence to a mere care and maintenance basis. The Civil Defence Corps and Auxiliary Service were abandoned in 1968 and their equipment put in store in the hope that they could be revived in the warning period before a future war. Such elements as the Regional Seats of Government and the Warning and Monitoring Organisation (for nuclear fallout) were retained.

In 1971, the Home Defence Review agreed that home defence preparations could not be abandoned completely and they highlighted a range of serious deficiencies in the nation's home defence arrangements. The small increases in home defence expenditure they recommended, however, were not accepted by the Conservative Government who, by 1971, had identified internal security as the primary aim of home defence. They perceived the renewed Irish terrorist threat to the UK and deteriorating industrial relations as greater threats to the country, and home defence became focussed upon planning for civil emergencies.

## **UK CIVIL DEFENCE AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS 1960 -1974**

### **Introduction**

Part one of this narrative<sup>1</sup> covered the years 1953 to 1959, the period which saw the UK joining the two super powers by deploying its own thermonuclear weapons. This second part covers 1960 to 1974. This was a period which saw further rapid changes in the effectiveness of nuclear weapons, their delivery and in air defence systems. Over this period, the invulnerability of the new delivery systems was increased as both East and Western alliances moved from deploying aircraft delivered bombs and stand-off missiles to delivery by inter-continental land based and then submarine based ballistic missiles. Meanwhile the predicted effects of radioactive fallout following an H-bomb attack had vastly complicated UK home defence planning, not least by increasing the costs of what both political parties considered essential civil defence measures. UK Governments always wished to limit defence expenditure, and the result of successive Home Defence Reviews through the 1960s was a switch in focus from planning to save lives after a catastrophic H-bomb attack to the more modest, and thus less expensive, objective of ensuring basic national survival and governance.

After the comprehensive review of all aspects of Home Defence in 1960, the Conservative Government attempted to increase the efficiency of the smaller Civil Defence Corps but the incoming 1964 Labour Government was committed to giving priority to public expenditure of social and economic value. Thus, just five years after the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the drastic economies made following the 1967 devaluation of sterling resulted in the termination of almost all basic UK home defence measures, with civil defence placed on a care and maintenance basis. Elements of planning were continued but the non-viability of home defence arrangements was acknowledged following the election of the Conservative Government in 1970. Industrial disputes and internal terrorist attacks were seen as a more direct threat to the UK. The emphasis of UK civil protection consequently moved to government planning for internal civil emergencies.

### **The Strategic Background to UK Home Defence in the 1960s**

The UK's contribution to the Western deterrent was significantly upgraded once the UK *Grapple* thermonuclear tests were successfully completed on Christmas Island in 1957-1958. UK owned H-bombs were available to the Royal Air Force by 1961 for delivery by the force of Valiant, Vulcan and Victor bombers which had entered service in February 1955, May 1956 and November 1957 respectively. Western concern was expressed at Russian technological advances, demonstrated in November 1957 by the launch of the Sputnik satellite, and as interim measures US nuclear weapons and *Thor* Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles started to be deployed by the RAF in 1958. There were eventually some 60 RAF *Thor* missiles on 20 sites across Eastern England from Yorkshire to Suffolk. These were not withdrawn until August 1963. Continuing its upgrading of readiness for war, the RAF started its V-bomber Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) posture on 1 January 1962 by maintaining fully armed aircraft at 15 minutes readiness. When their high level delivery attack profiles were threatened by strengthened Russian air defences, low-level penetration and delivery techniques were developed, including the clearance of the Blue Steel stand off missile for low level release in 1964. QRA was maintained by the RAF strategic bomber force until midnight on 30 June 1969 when the Royal

---

<sup>1</sup> Robin Woolven, *UK Civil Defence and Nuclear Weapons 1953 -1959*, Southampton Paper No 2, MCIS, December 2006

Navy's Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) *Polaris* fleet assumed that national responsibility.

In parallel with these changes in the UK's contribution to NATO's strategic deterrent forces, the search for further financial and manpower economies continued to dominate UK defence decision making, particularly once National Service was ended in 1960 – a full 13 years before the US draft. The world held its breath during the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis when the UK nuclear strike forces were, at one stage of the crisis, brought to cockpit readiness and fears that war might break out by a simple mistake or misunderstanding highlighted. In September 1963 the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) installation opened at Fylingdales to provide early warning of missile attack for North America and Europe. This warning would have enabled the QRA force sufficient time (4 minutes) to become airborne and also to alert the UK Monitoring and Warning Organisation and the Royal Observer Corps, and thus the nation, to assume their wartime roles. At the time of (or soon after) the Cuban crisis, the RAF's nuclear deterrent reached its peak technical credibility as the Mark 2 Vulcan and Victor aircraft were cleared to deliver thermonuclear ordnance from low level.

The development of UK civil defence (CD) policy and the establishment of the volunteer-manned Civil Defence Corps during the 1950s started to be called into question, however, as the USSR became equipped with more powerful offensive nuclear weapons and less vulnerable delivery systems. In March 1958, the relevant Ministerial Committee learned that:

the Russians, either using bombers or ballistic missiles when available, [could mount] a comprehensive attack on this country. It would be aimed in all probability at nuclear bomber bases and offensive missile launching sites (a total of at least 40 to 50 targets) as a first priority. .... Even if there were no deliberate attacks on centres of population, the smallness of the UK and the possibility of weapons going astray, it is very likely that centres of population will be hit.... If, as is possible, ground burst weapons are used ... extensive areas of the country would be contaminated by fall-out as well.<sup>2</sup>

As a consequence, the problems of home defence were made more complex by UK rural areas with bomber bases becoming prime USSR targets and plans to move civilians from the cities into the country no longer appearing to be viable. In September 1958 the Defence Committee set the Civil Defence budget (Civil Departments) at £18.85 million annually<sup>3</sup> and a 1959 Paper, confirmed that:

No major change is contemplated in the structure or role of civil defence. During the coming year, the Civil Defence services will be giving special attention with dealing with radiological hazards. .. Essential communications will continue to be strengthened and a part of the development of the warning and monitoring system organisation... Although the prospective end of National Service has made it necessary to disband the Mobile Defence Corps, the Territorial Army is to be given more operational training in civil defence techniques....<sup>4</sup>

The 1958 and 1959 Defence White Papers were short on details of Civil or Home Defence developments, although the 1958 Paper had stated that the volunteer manpower problem was improving:

---

<sup>2</sup> CAB134/1476 *Form and Duration of A Future War* 19 March 1958

<sup>3</sup> CAB134/2040 CD(59)8, 4 December 1959

<sup>4</sup> Cmnd 662 *Progress of the Five-Year Defence Plan, 1959* paras 20-21

Civil Defence remains an integral part of the defence plan. ... It is the Government's policy to encourage the recruitment and training of the Industrial Civil Defence Service which contributes well over 200,000 volunteers towards the total of half a million men and women now enrolled in civil defence.<sup>5</sup>

The 1960 Defence White Paper highlighted the 'shaking out' of less effective volunteers, and in thus way camouflaged the lowering of expenditure on home defence by reporting that :

... Some 142,000 volunteers have been recruited for the Civil Defence Corps during the last three years. About 132,000 members have gone from the Corps over the same period, but this was largely the result of the removal from the registers of the inactive and untrained.<sup>6</sup>

As a consequence, by 1960 a further wide-ranging Home Defence Review appeared inevitable as its function in national defence started to change to one of planning for national survival following a catastrophic thermonuclear exchange.

### **The 1960 Home Defence Review**

Building on the precedent set by the 1955 Home Defence Review which followed the 1954 Strath Report on nuclear fall-out, the Review in 1960 was a much more thorough examination of the justifications for the range civil defence preparations. It acknowledged the difficulties not only of effectively protecting the public in a thermonuclear war given existing expenditure plans, but also of rallying public opinion and maintaining morale in a period of extreme tension. Further, differences of opinion were apparent within Whitehall on the value of civil defence, but all parties accepted that it was politically impossible to abandon it. The 1960 Review Committee therefore openly discussed the public morale problem and the possibility of the failure of the deterrent in its more general *Public Presentation of Home Defence Policy* paper, which is worth quoting at some length:

Since the primary objective of the services we have suggested is to ensure that the Government has the means to sustain public opinion in a time of crisis, the question arises of public presentation. Apart from increasingly perfunctory references in the annual Defence White Paper, there has for some years been no public statement in any comprehensive form of the Government's general attitude to home defence, and in the absence of authoritative guidance there has been an increasing tendency for Local Authorities and their Chief Officers to conclude that the Government have lost faith in there being any substantial number of survivors from nuclear attack and for public opinion to dismiss the possibility of taking useful measures to mitigate the effects of nuclear attack. This has made it increasingly difficult, quite apart from questions of finance, to keep the civil defence organisation alive, and the long-term effect on the possibility of rallying public opinion in a period of tension is likely to be even more serious. Unless a consistent effort is made to present the thesis that sensible plans can and are being made to reduce casualties and to preserve the structure of society in the (unlikely) event of the failure of the deterrent, there is much less likelihood that public opinion would stay firm in an extreme emergency when it would be essential for the success of the deterrent policy that the enemy should believe that public opinion should stand firmly behind the threat to use nuclear weapons if necessary. The majority opinion of the Committee is that unless a more positive attitude is adopted as a background to whichever of the alternative financial proposals is adopted, the danger of acceptance by the public of a 'peace at any costs' policy in a period of tension would be much increased.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cmnd 363 *Report on Defence Britain's Contribution to Peace and Security, 1958* para. 52

<sup>6</sup> Cmnd 952 *Report on Defence 1960* paras 49-50

It is necessary to convince not only the general public but also the agencies responsible for carrying out Government home defence policy, and those who give their time and energy to civil defence, that the Government believes in the value of the various measures with which they are concerned to be taken. Home defence policy, as described in its various aspects in this report, covers so many facets of the national life that it will be impossible to establish a convincing structure unless really authoritative support is given to the detailed plans for which different Ministers would be responsible. This is particularly true in such spheres as industry, where planning has been in suspense for some years, and it will be necessary to convince those concerned, both employers and employed, that what they are being asked to do can be related to wider Government policy. There can be no doubt that whichever of the financial schemes is adopted, the value to be obtained for the money spent, in relation to the overall aim of maintaining public confidence in emergency, will be much increased if no doubt is left as to the attitude of the Government. It is suggested that the opportunity should be taken of the next White Paper on Defence to restate the Government's conviction that home defence preparations are worthwhile, and to set out, in greater detail than has been the custom in recent years, the broad lines of what the Government has in mind. It will not be necessary for this to be represented as a considerable acceleration of planning, but the change in Government attitude would as a result undoubtedly be reflected at all levels concerned with home defence.

It has been suggested to us that increased Government support of civil defence might be interpreted as carrying with it reduced belief in the effectiveness of the deterrent. We do not think that this is so. The possibility of nuclear war arising out of some miscalculation or mistake has been recognised in the Government's statements on defence, and the majority view of the Committee is that the making of effective home defence plans must have a profound effect on the degree of support of the public, particularly in a period of tension, to the deterrent policy. A more valid criticism is that statements of belief in the need for home defence preparations may lead to pressure for considerably greater expenditure. This possibility cannot be discounted, but we believe that it can be effectively met by a re-statement of the basic policy of the Government, namely primary reliance on the active deterrent which must limit the proportion of our resources that can be diverted to home defence plans by way of insurance.<sup>7</sup>

As ever, the economic constraints predominated in the Government's 1960 Review and recalling, in 2006, the atmosphere of that time Lord (David) Renton, then a Home Office junior minister, clearly remembered that "money was everything and the level of expenditure on CD was particularly critical".<sup>8</sup> After ten months of work by the Review Committee and its Sub-Committees the final report, dated 2 December 1960, appeared and reflected a range of views on the future of civil defence expenditure. It concluded that:

151. Some provision should be made for carrying on the government of this country in nuclear war, and that the provision of emergency headquarters for the central government and of a regional organisation should be completed.

152. There is a minority view that other forms of home defence preparations have no place in our defence policy, since we could not afford to undertake preparations on a scale that would influence the public's attitude to the deterrent policy in a period of tension, still less provide adequate protection against attack. Those who hold this view consider that our limited resources are best spent on maintaining an effective deterrent, but they nevertheless recognise that it would be politically impracticable to abandon home defence entirely at the present time. They consider that expenditure

---

<sup>7</sup> CAB134/2039

<sup>8</sup> Telephone conversation with Lord Renton (then aged 98), 28 September 2006

for this purpose should be severely restricted, and progressively reduced as this became politically possible.

153. The view of the majority of the Committee is that some home defence preparations are an integral part of the deterrent policy, primarily because of their potential value in steadying public opinion in support of this policy in a period of tension. Some of the Committee also think that the Government also has a duty to take measures to mitigate the consequences to the civil population in global war, and that home defence preparations are justified in order to increase the chances of survival if war were to come. In practice, measures which would be justified on this latter ground are largely the same as those which would be of value on the former ground, namely to steady public opinion in a period of tension.

154. The Committee have considered two possible programmes of expenditure in relation to the majority view. [Programme Y in which] expenditure is held broadly at the same level over the next five years under which some improvements could be made in home defence preparations but these would still suffer from serious limitations. ....

155. These difficulties would be reduced if some moderate increase in home defence expenditure could be allowed on the lines of Programme X [the moderate increase in expenditure]. This would permit significant improvements within a reasonable time. ....

158. A majority of the Committee consider that a coherent and publicly defensible policy for home defence is now needed, that the minimum programme of expenditure required to achieve this is that proposed under Programme X, and they recommend that this programme should be adopted.<sup>9</sup>

The Review emphasised the importance of the control system in wartime. The further study of this system in the light of this review eventually led to the sub-regional concept, in addition to sustaining and developing the earlier concept of regional seats of government. A decision was also subsequently taken to re-organise the Civil Defence Corps, which then numbered 360,000, starting in 1962. This involved introducing higher standards of training, and a bounty for the most highly qualified members of the Corps. As a result, the numbers of the Corps eventually declined to an active strength of 140,000.

National survival, rather than life-saving operations, was therefore the focus for the Review. Two months later, the 1961 Defence White Paper stated that:

The Government have reviewed Home Defence plans and have concluded that some additional expenditure is needed in order to secure a better balanced and realistic programme in which Government Departments, local authorities and the essential services, together with the Civil Defence Corps and the industrial civil defence organisations, can all play their part.<sup>10</sup>

This conclusion fell short of the Review Committee's suggestion that the next White Paper on Defence

'should restate the Government's conviction that home defence preparations were worthwhile, and to set out, in greater detail, the broad lines of what the Government has in mind'.

Subsequent Defence Statements in 1962 and 1963 however did emphasise the value of home defence, gave more details of progress with civil defence, and were more optimistic regarding the more complete arrangements and standards of efficiency that were being achieved. The 1962 Statement further stated that:

Over the next five to ten years it is clear that Civil Defence will play an important part in maintaining the general preparedness of the whole nation for any emergency. ..

---

<sup>9</sup> CAB134/2041 Home Defence Review, 1960 2 December 1960 [File still retained in Cabinet Office]

<sup>10</sup> Cmnd 1288 *Report on Defence 1961*. para 39

the Government had reviewed home defence plans and concluded that some additional expenditure was needed to secure a balanced programme over the next few years. These plans have to cover a wide field and are an integral part of our defence preparations. Departments are actively engaged in implementing a revised programme. Next year will be the second year, and the estimated home defence expenditure will be £19.37 million compared with £18.61 million for the current year. An examination of the organisations and functions of the Civil Defence Corps and the Auxiliary Fire Service has been carried out ... the strength of these Services on 31<sup>st</sup> December last [1961] was 395,000 compared with just under 380,000 on the corresponding date in 1960.<sup>11</sup>

The backbone of UK Home Defence was therefore a more efficient, better trained and re-organised Civil Defence Corps and Auxiliary Fire Service but the country, in the summer of 1962, still lacked that 'coherent and publicly defensible policy for home defence' identified by the 1960 Review. Meanwhile the world came to realise that war may well start by miscalculation or mistake as Russia established ballistic missile bases in Cuba.

### **UK Home Defence and the Cuban Missile Crisis**

In late October 1962, the Cuban missile crisis brought, in the view of many, the world the closest it has come to a nuclear exchange. However, the British government insisted that the public should not be alarmed by any increased readiness levels (15 minutes for the entire V bomber force, increased to 4 minutes cockpit readiness) at one point) of its nuclear deterrent forces. In 2001, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Michael Beetham recalled that:

... as soon as the missile crisis began to develop we got the message from the Government, from Macmillan, that no overt action was to be taken. So, anything that we did decide to do had to be done quietly. We couldn't, for instance, use the BBC to recall people from leave as we would have liked to have done. In fact, we were so successful that nothing ever seemed to appear in the Press, despite the fact that we had generated the entire V-Force to a very high state of readiness. We even put the crews in their cockpits at one stage but basically they were held at 15 minutes' notice. Ideally, once the bombs were on board, what we wanted to do was to move on to the next stage in our pre-planned alert procedures which would have dispersed the force. We were forbidden to do this, however, so the aircraft had to stay on their main bases....

Looking back, Cuba was certainly a very traumatic experience for those involved, both at station level and at the Headquarters. But, strangely enough, the rest of the nation seemed to be quite unaware that there was a crisis at all. When we went for a meal or took a break outside, the sun was shining and the media was obsessed with some football match! It all seemed quite unreal.

... I think that [the Cuban missile crisis] experience served to focus the minds of people who were then in the front-line. Until then they had gone through the motions of loading weapons on exercises but it suddenly became very apparent that they just might really have to use them.<sup>12</sup>

A former head of the RAF Air Historical Branch confirmed the Government's reluctance to alert the public to any increase in tension by relating in the same nuclear weapons seminar, that:

On the morning of Saturday 27th October, one day before the crisis ended, Macmillan called the Chief of the Air Staff, Tom [Sir Thomas] Pike, in to see him, and put to him the question: 'What is the readiness state of our forces?' I thought that Tom Pike's reply, (on record), was worthy of Peter Sellers. He said, 'Prime Minister, I have asked the

<sup>11</sup> Cmnd 1639 *Statement on Defence 1962 The Next Five Years* paras 46-50

<sup>12</sup> MRAF Sir Michael Beetham to the RAF Historical Society Seminar *The RAF and Nuclear Weapons*, RAF Museum, 2001. see *RAF Historical Society Journal* No 26 pp.46-47 (2001)

Chiefs of Staff to hold themselves at one hour's readiness for a meeting.' (*Laughter*) The PM said that he did not want any overt steps 'such as mobilisation', nor did he want Bomber Command to be alerted, but to be ready to take appropriate steps if necessary. He said that if the situation deteriorated he intended holding a Cabinet meeting the next afternoon (Sunday 28th). The CAS called Bing Cross [Air Marshal Sir Kenneth Cross, C-in-C Bomber Command] up to London that afternoon for a meeting at White's. Bing was asked what he had been doing (which incidentally he had been reporting to the VCAS, Kyle, all along). Bing reported on the Command's Readiness State and said there had been no recall of aircraft on detachment and no dispersal (which he would have been strongly against).

In the event there was no need for the Cabinet Meeting the next day because news came through on the radio at lunch-time that Khrushchev had backed down.

I'll give the last word to Bing. Summing up the activities of the week he said: 'From me downwards everything worked perfectly. From me upwards, nothing worked at all.'<sup>13</sup>

With the V Force armed and at 15 minute and then cockpit readiness (but officially 'un-alerted but ready to take appropriate steps if necessary'), the Government had felt it neither necessary nor advisable to alert or otherwise increase the readiness of the over 400,000 members of the UK Home Defence forces. The Civil Defence Officer for Norwich, close to or downwind of several RAF nuclear deterrent bases recently recalled that, although the media were reporting the developing Cuban crisis:

... the Home Office as usual told us to do nothing. My Town Clerk, who was [the local Civil Defence] Controller, told me to contact the Home Office for advice. We were told to do nothing as they were hoping the problem would go away! In those days we had a Regional Organisation with a Regional Director and they were told to keep their heads down as well. We were not allowed to give any information out to the public officially, but we did. We showed the *Protect and Survive* film to parish meetings and we produced our own booklet - and then had our knuckles well and truly rapped. You can guess the problems we faced from the bureaucratic establishment.<sup>14</sup>

Recalling the 1962 Cuba crisis in 2007, Lord Allen agreed that the growing international tension was 'treated by Home Office with complete indifference ... my memory may be unreliable but I have no recollection of the Home Office taking any action in response to the rising international crisis in October 1962 .... we had faith in Lord Harlech<sup>15</sup> at the time.'<sup>16</sup> Lord Allen was not surprised at local authority officials getting a brush-off from the Civil Defence Department, and he agreed that the Government's reaction to the Cuban crisis was the very British one of 'hoping that it would go away'. Fortunately, it did as the Russians 'blinked first' and backed down on 28<sup>th</sup> October and so the crisis subsided. However, lessons had been learned by UK civil and military defenders as well as other international players.

### **Home Defence Post-Cuba**

Following the scare of October 1962, the exceptionally long 1963 Defence White Paper detailed some increases in home defence expenditure by announcing that:

...it has been decided to accelerate certain aspects of the [civil defence] programme. Next year the estimated expenditure on home defence will be £23.01 million as

<sup>13</sup> Group Captain Ian Madelin, 11 April 2001 reported in *RAF Historical Society Journal* No 26 pp.48-51 (2001)

<sup>14</sup> Private communication 20 December 2006 with Mr Eric Ally OBE, Civil Defence Officer for Norwich in 1962

<sup>15</sup> Former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs 1957-61 and British Ambassador in Washington 1961-65.

<sup>16</sup> Telephone conversation with Lord (Philip) Allen of Abbeydale, Deputy Under Secretary, Home Office 1960-1962 on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2007

compared with £19.37 million for the current year. Matters which will be speeded up are the provision of buildings and communications for emergency controls, the stockpiling of radiac instruments and equipment and communications for the special system for passing warning messages rapidly over the telephone. Preparations in other civil defence plans are proceeding in accordance with the third year of the programme announced in 1961. It is expected by the end of the year 95% of the Royal Observer Corps posts and headquarters required for the warning and monitoring organisation and three-quarters of the special equipment for that organisation should be installed. Since civil defence plans have to cover a wide field, there have been regular consultation by Government Departments with local and other authorities and with certain industries. In the course of the year there have been special consultations with local authorities about the control arrangements at county and county borough level, and about dispersal planning, and with representatives of the building and civil engineering industries about emergency organisation.

Changes in the organisation of the Civil Defence Corps and the Auxiliary Fire Service, which were foreshadowed in the Statement on Defence 1962, were also discussed with local authorities and introduced last October. They include the introduction of active training obligations, the payment of annual bounties, and the formation of a Reserve, and are designed to improve efficiency.... there appears to be a growing realisation that the changes were necessary to ensure that the Civil Defence Corps and the Auxiliary Fire Service would remain effective in the changing circumstances, and would serve to improve their status and prestige.

The Government have always recognised the importance of informing the public of the effects of nuclear weapons and the steps that could be taken to mitigate these effects. Information and advice have been given to the public for some years by local authorities, Women's Voluntary Service and Civil Defence, and by the issue of official publications. A training handbook has now been issued to tell the civil defence, police and fire service the sort of advice which the public would be given about protective measures in the home if the Government decided that the time had come for physical preparations to be made. The booklet is on sale so that anyone can buy it. The advice in the booklet would be issued by television and other media if at any moment the Government decided that this was necessary.<sup>17</sup>

The final Defence White Paper of the Conservative administration was published in February 1964. The section on civil defence was another more thoughtful piece, again being at pains not to understate the likely effects of nuclear war, but justifying planning for their partial mitigation:

Until general disarmament has been achieved the possibility that nuclear weapons might be used against this country can never be totally excluded. The Government believes this possibility to be remote, but it cannot be ignored. In the face of it, the Government have a clear duty to make preparations to mitigate the consequences of nuclear attack for those who would survive. Within the framework of our defence policy, therefore, civil defence preparations have an essential part to play. These preparations involve almost every part of national life and embrace all measures necessary to the survival of the community following nuclear attack.

What could civil defence achieve? The Government have never sought to conceal that a nuclear attack could cause millions of casualties and unimaginable destruction. No one could assess exactly how great the toll would be: many factors would play their part; but, terrible though the disaster would be, it would be likely that millions would survive. Those survivors would stand in urgent need of the assistance which a civil defence organisation, planned and prepared in advance, could provide. This is the underlying principle of all civil defence preparations. These are not based on any attempt to minimise the effects of nuclear weapons. Civil Defence could do little to

---

<sup>17</sup> Cmnd 1936 *Statement on Defence 1963* including Memoranda to Accompany the Navy, Army and Air Estimates 1963-64. (Total civil defence expenditure by Civil Departments for 1963-64 was £23 million)

help those within the areas of complete devastation; but, outside those areas, it could reduce the suffering of large numbers of men, women and children, and help them to survive. Civil Defence is not and never can be a comprehensive insurance against nuclear attack. How effective it would be depends on the premium which we can afford having regard to other commitments and to our assessment of the likelihood of the disaster. But so long as nuclear attack remains a possibility, it is no more than prudent and humanitarian to take out such insurance as we can against its effects. Within the limits of our resources, civil defence preparations must be broadly based and realistically planned. The lines on which work should proceed if these objectives are to be attained were laid down in the revised programme of home defence expenditure announced in the report on defence for 1961. In addition to improving the efficiency of the voluntary civil defence and emergency fire services, particular attention has been given within this programme to two main objectives of the Government's plans. These are, first, the preparation of an emergency system of control which could provide a framework of administration following a nuclear attack, and secondly, arrangements for the maintenance and restoration of supplies and services essential to the survival of the nation.

For the emergency system of control, wartime regional seats of Government have been provided and equipped in England and Wales, and similar centres in Scotland. Work on improving these controls is going ahead. From the regional seats of government the emergency chain of control extends to local authorities. As explained in the report on defence for 1962, discussions have been held with local authorities about the arrangements for control within the regions. In the light of these discussions, changes are being made in the system of control below regional level, which will henceforth be based entirely on local authority areas. These changes would enable governmental and administrative resources of the country to be used more effectively throughout the period when the nation might be struggling to survive.

Closely linked with the emergency system of control are emergency organisations for essential supplies and services. The aim here is to achieve flexibility in our control arrangements so as to make the best use of surviving resources, and to concentrate expenditure on items of particular importance. Thus, in addition to the organisational plans which have been made, reserves of food, medical supplies and oil have been stockpiled and special measures taken for the continued operation of other essential services such as emergency ports and anchorages and for the safeguarding of water supplies. Substantial sums have also been extended on providing emergency communications and on the maintenance of broadcasting in war.

In our civil defence preparations, the police, fire and hospital services and the Civil Defence Corps and Industrial Civil Defence, their organisation, training and equipment [are] an important part of our peacetime preparations. Our plans also rely on the close co-operation of units of the Armed Forces, and in 1964 new arrangements will be made to train units of the Territorial Army in fire-fighting techniques. The provision of Royal Observer posts and headquarters required for the warning and monitoring organisation is nearing completion. The installation of equipment for the rapid transmission of warnings should be substantially completed in 1964.

The Government has also reviewed the problem of providing shelter against radioactive fall-out. Advice on improvisation of such shelter is contained in Civil Defence Handbook No 10. In addition, some communal shelter would be necessary for those living in certain types of dwelling with a low protective factor against fall-out, such as prefabricated houses and caravans. A detailed survey is required to determine the extent of the need, and to identify existing accommodation and to determine what each shelter would require in the way of adaption and provisioning. Before considering a wider survey, the Government intend first to carry out a pilot survey in selected areas of the country to find out the best methods of collecting and analysing the necessary data. Plans have been made for holding this pilot survey during 1964.

In 1964 work will be carried forward ... for this purpose £24.1 million has been provide in the coming financial year. In a constantly changing situation, the task of civil

defence can never be regarded as complete and plans must be kept continually under review. One general objective must be to complete physical preparations as our resources allow and to maintain and improve the state of readiness which has already been achieved. In this the Government will continue to rely on the co-operation and assistance of all those who would have an essential contribution to make to the survival of the nation.<sup>18</sup>

Whitehall meanwhile acknowledged that it should

‘restrict expenditure on deterrence to the minimum level consistent with credibility. The substitution of Polaris for Skybolt will add to the costs and, secondly, the timing of Polaris is later than Skybolt so this will exacerbate the financial problem towards the end of the decade.’<sup>19</sup> Of course in 1963, an essential part of the airborne deterrent was still an effective home defence system.

### **Labour in Office and the Demotion of Civil Defence**

A month after the sum of £24,1 million had been announced for civil defence, in October 1964, Harold Wilson’s Labour Government was elected to correct the alleged ‘13 wasted years’ of Conservative administration. The 1965 Home Defence Review highlighted, as a special feature, the new Government’s expressed intention of:

... giving high priority to public expenditure of social and economic value. As a consequence, it was necessary to give lower priority to expenditure, including defence expenditure, which did not have social and economic value.

With a number of Labour MPs active members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), there now appeared some discrepancy between their unilateralist views and the new Government’s active adherence to the UK’s defence policy of contributing to the Western deterrent. With Dennis Healey as Minister of Defence, the Royal Navy’s Polaris nuclear submarines programme went ahead and the RN took over responsibility from the RAF for the UK’s deterrent in July 1969. The UK thus continued to play its full part in Western defence. Also, as home defence (and thus civil defence) was regarded as an integral and essential component of effective deterrence. This led CND and other disarmers to make regular criticisms of the continuing annual provisions for home defence measures. Such measures as the recently completed Regional Seats of Government presented soft targets for these criticisms.

Understandably, the Home Office proposed lower cost options for home defence and suggested that the Review Committee

will probably not find it easy to agree on new measures involving expenditure – the Treasury is not represented on the committee.

Particular value attaches to suggestions which save lives or improve efficiency but which does not involve appreciable expenditure: for example improvement of the dispersal scheme, improvement of public control techniques, the training of central government and local authority staffs, operational research and planning to make use of existing resources.

In addition:

There is a special exercise we might consider recommending to the Committee. The conventional view of any future emergency is that it might be a Cuba-type – that is starting from a humdrum Cold War state of affairs, there would be no more than a very

---

<sup>18</sup> Cmnd 2270 *Statement on Defence 1964* paras 247-254

<sup>19</sup> DEFE 7/2162 Cabinet Defence Committee, Submission on *The Future of the Deterrent* by AUS(A) (AM), 9 January 1963

short precautionary situation, but we might also consider how we might take advantage – if that is the right expression – of a Munich type situation, that is if a deterioration in the international situation which appears to make a nuclear attack less unlikely .... a deterioration of this sort might persuade the Government of the day that they ought to put in hand immediate steps to improve our preparedness. .... the Committee might recommend what these steps might be and perhaps to recommend a list of measures (covert and overt) that should be put in hand.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless while the Committee was taking evidence, the 1965 Defence White Paper provided £22.7 million in FY 1965-66 for expenditure by civil departments on home defence and the country was warned that 'The form of our civil defence preparations in the years ahead is being reviewed in the light of the general reconsideration of defence.' The White Paper reported that some elements of the preparations for wartime survival, such as Government control, monitoring of radioactivity and the warning system had been established, but such essential elements as hospital and casualty services, emergency feeding, shelter and evacuation all remained at the planning stage. In particular the paper reassured the nation that:

Arrangements have been made for an emergency system of control for the maintenance of law and order and for the marshalling of the available resources – food, water, medical supplies and raw materials.

An effective organisation for warning the public of an attack and for monitoring radioactivity has been established, including a communications system for the rapid transmission of warnings, and headquarters and posts for the Royal Observer Corps. Planning for the maintenance of essential supplies and services in an emergency continues. The system of control has been further developed and preparations are proceeding, including preparations by local authorities.

The full effect of the reorganisation of the Civil Defence Corps introduced in 1962 is now becoming apparent, and recruits who are prepared to accept the obligations which membership of the Corps now entails are coming in steadily. The Auxiliary Fire Service has been similarly reorganised.

To help the police maintain law and order, plans have been made for the formation of reserve units which would be sent to stricken areas after an attack. Regular training is given for this task and for all other wartime duties of the police.

Good progress has been made in stockpiling equipment to fight wartime fires. Planning for emergency fire-fighting continues. Arrangements were made during 1964 for selected Territorial Army units to receive training in a fire-fighting role.

Plans for expanded wartime hospital and casualty services have been further developed, and the allocation of medical manpower in wartime is under discussion with representatives of the medical profession.

Planning has continued for the procurement of, control and distribution of food, for emergency feeding and for agricultural production after an attack. In addition, stocks of food and emergency feeding equipment are being maintained.

Plans for the maintenance of other services include the stockpiling of equipment to enable water supplies lost by damage to installations or by contamination to be replaced. Preparations also cover the maintenance of communications and a broadcasting service in war, and the due functioning of transport.

A pilot survey of shelter against radioactive fall-out has been carried out and the results are being studied.

To enable the Government of the day to put dispersal arrangements if they considered it right to do so, the broad outline of a scheme was announced in 1962 for the movement of priority classes – mainly children and their mothers – away from the most densely

---

<sup>20</sup> HO322/613 Home Defence Review Committee, Home Office Minute *Expenditure on Civil Defence during 1966/77 to 1970/71*, 18 November 1964

populated parts of the country. The local authorities are engaged in working out the detailed plans. Fresh guidance has been given to them on plans to help the homeless.<sup>21</sup>

The 1965 Home Defence Review Committee first assessed the risk of a nuclear attack on the UK and, although accepting that a Cuba type miscalculation was possible, a deterrent policy was justified as:

... the risk of nuclear war between NATO and the Soviet Bloc has been very greatly reduced. This is a consequence of second strike capability on each side, and of each side's awareness of this. As is well known, each side has relatively invulnerable striking power, either in the form of missiles which can be fired from submarines, or missiles in underground silos. In view of this there is stability since an aggressor who struck first would nevertheless suffer unacceptable damage in return.

There is, it is said, always the possibility of accident or miscalculation. To take accident first, a number of rather fanciful suggestion suggestions are made from time to time, but it seems unnecessary to attach any weight to them. Miscalculation is more significant, since the Russian missiles in Cuba in 1962 was in itself a miscalculation of the gravest kind. However, all countries would be on their guard against this in future.

The 1965 Review Committee thus acknowledged the lower priority that was now being given to defence expenditure and they again presented both sides of the home defence argument before agreeing that civil defence should be maintained:

The risk of war is very slight but cannot be disregarded – and could be more serious if proliferation is not halted.

So, are civil defence measures justified? Resources should not be diverted to civil defence preparations as all should go to perfecting the deterrent and to manifesting our national resolution in support of the deterrent policy. Also the effects would be a catastrophic and disruption of national life such that civil defence preparations would be of little value.

The other side is that modest civil defence preparation programme would in fact save many lives – civil defence is a small insurance premium. The Government has decided that an effective programme of civil defence preparations should be maintained.

The recommended programme was the proposed Home Office low cost option of casualty prevention, to be achieved by exploiting the warning and control systems, getting a well informed public to act in a disciplined manner and, at no cost, planning dispersal (i.e. evacuation) of the population. The scale of measures and the their costs were:

WARNING getting inside would save 15% -20% of total casualties - Costs About £2 million a year on warning and post-attack services.

FALL-OUT DISCIPLINE In the worst case 50% could be saved by staying indoors for four days - under the most favourable conditions staying in for 48 hours. On average 10% - 20% of total casualties would be so saved. Costs - nil except on public information.

PROTECTIVE SHELTER with good fall-out discipline an additional 5% - 10% of casualties would be saved. Costs – nil except for planning.

DISPERSAL With 10 million dispersing from cities, another 20% would be saved. These are illustrative figures and the above measures would not prevent a nuclear attack being anything other than the worst catastrophe that has ever happened in our history. Costs – nil except for planning.

TOTAL COSTS of the above measures = £3 million p.a.

CONCLUSIONS Civil defence can do some things well, therefore concentrate on these things. Casualty prevention of greater value at little cost but the control system must be

---

<sup>21</sup> Cmnd 2592 *Statement on the Defence Estimates 1965*

maintained and developed. Life saving is of uncertain value but must continue for humanitarian reasons but more education of the civil defence world and the public is needed on the realities of the situation. For full benefit we need to be supported by an intelligent and informed public opinion. The civil defence programme will be strengthened not weakened if we discard non-essentials. The situation can rapidly change ... therefore try and cover the worst possibility which is not a fanciful assumption and about which something useful can be done...<sup>22</sup>

The outcome of the Review was announced to Parliament by the Home Secretary (Roy Jenkins) on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1966 who assured that he was (emphasis added):

... now able to state in general terms the outcome of the Government's review of home defence. We have concluded that, **despite the reduction in the risks of nuclear conflict, we cannot discontinue civil defence preparations.** There is always the possibility of war arising from misunderstanding or miscalculation; and we cannot be certain about the future spread of nuclear weapons.

Our studies confirm that, in the event – fortunately unlikely – of a nuclear conflict, sensible civil defence preparations could do much to save lives, to relieve suffering and to help the nation to survive as an organised entity. But there is a limit to what we can afford by way of insurance against this risk.

We have accordingly decided to restrict our preparations to those which would be likely to make a significant contribution to national survival. As a consequence, it should be possible to achieve appreciable savings. We estimate that expenditure in 1966-67 will amount to £19.7 million as against £22.7 million in 1965-66, and £24.1 million in 1964-65.

... [consultations on] the functions and size of the Civil Defence Corps to see how **substantially reduced numbers of the [CD] Corps** might best be organised to carry out essential tasks. Concentration of the available resources on a highly trained nucleus of volunteers seems the right approach. ...we shall also consult on implications for the Industrial CD Service ...we are also **consulting on proposals for shelter and dispersal.**

We are adjusting the emergency system of control to provide more flexibility of a greater measure of decentralisation at the regional level. We shall maintain and continue to improve the efficiency of the Warning and Monitoring Organisation, including the Royal Observer Corps. We shall support the emergency preparations of the police and fire services, including the Auxiliary fire Service, and the National Hospital Service Reserve. Some adjustments will be made to plans for stockpiling and for the due functioning of essential utilities and services, including broadcasting.

We have decided to establish a military Home Defence Force on which my hon. Friend the Minister of Defence will be giving further information later this afternoon. This force would provide the police with valuable support in the maintenance of law and order in an emergency.

Roy Jenkins was immediately followed by the Minister of Defence for the Army who explained the proposed Home Defence Force as part of the re-organisation of Army reserves:

... the Government have now completed their examination of the contribution that military units might best make to home defence in the event of an actual or apprehended nuclear attack on the UK.

To supplement the substantial numbers of regulars and reserves likely to be in the UK at the time, we have decided to establish a Home Defence Force. This will be a military force based on Territorial Army units and forming a self-contained part of the Army Volunteer Reserve organised separately from the independent and equipped force described in the White Paper. It will be under military command but its primary role will be to assist the police in the maintenance of law and order and to act

---

<sup>22</sup> CAB 134/2634 *Home Defence Review 1965*, Conclusions 25 May 1966

generally in support of the civil authorities in the event of a general war. The Force will have an establishment of 28,000 men with a peacetime recruiting ceiling of 22,500 representing 80% of the establishment. The annual cost of the force should not exceed £3 million.<sup>23</sup>

So, although 'appreciable savings' were to be achieved, the basic civil defence organisations of the CD Corps, the AFS, the Warning and Monitoring Organisation and wartime control facilities for the Regional Seats of Government were to be maintained and the home defence manpower problem, particularly in the maintenance of post-attack law and order, was to be moderated by the armed forces using the newly established Home Defence Force. Within days, the February 1966 Defence White Paper confirmed the formation of that Force by stating that:

We have decided to restrict our civil defence preparations to those which would be likely to contribute significantly to national survival. We have also decided to establish a Home Defence Force to supplement, in the event of nuclear attack, the substantial numbers of regulars and reserve forces which would normally be in this country.<sup>24</sup>

Some indication of the manpower situation had been provided for the Home Secretary in a more complete draft statement and a list of answers to possible supplementary questions that may have followed his statement to Parliament. The draft (emphasis added) briefed Roy Jenkins that, although:

The risk of a major war arising out of direct conflict between East and West can be almost entirely excluded as a result of the present state of nuclear deterrence; nevertheless **we must maintain our guard** as there is always a risk of war arising out of misunderstanding or miscalculation. the Chinese nuclear explosion must remind us that the present stability might rapidly be jeopardised by the proliferation of nuclear weapons. ... **we must maintain an effective civil defence policy** as a measure of insurance against an unlikely event .... with proper preparations much could be done to save lives, relieve suffering and help millions survive. .... but the country's economic circumstances are also very relevant – there is a limit to our resources. If an attack were to come there might be no more than a very short period during which overt preparations could be authorised; this limits the value of measures that cannot be maintained in a high state of readiness.

The Government have in general decided to restrict future preparations to measures which could make a significant contribution to national survival and to those which would be valuable in an emergency and require little or no expenditure in peacetime. There are two main points:

- a. The warning and monitoring organisation (in which the Royal Observer Corps plays so valuable a role) will be maintained at a high level of effectiveness and further improvements are planned.
- b. A substantial stock of Radiac instruments has been decentralised and is now in local authority stores for prompt distribution if necessary.

We shall continue to develop the emergency **system of control**, to direct life saving operations and provided a framework of civil administration to marshal and co-ordinate the use of resources for the community. No change in County and County Borough control and sub-controls manned mainly from local resources – together with representatives of government departments and public utilities.

---

<sup>23</sup> Home Secretary's Statement to the House of Commons 2 February 1966 Hansard Vol. 723 Cols. 1089-1101

<sup>24</sup> Cmnd 2901 Statement on the Defence Estimates 1966 The Defence Review January 1966 para 12

We shall continue **to plan for regional government** in an emergency but introducing some changes in the interests of greater flexibility and security of communications. Regional Seats of Government are to be established as soon as possible after attack.

Local authorities look primarily to the **Civil Defence Corps** to aid them in the discharge of their functions during the life saving operations. Therefore concentrate available resources on a nucleus of highly trained volunteers – we are consulting local authorities to see how the Corps might, with substantially reduced numbers, be best organised to carry out essential tasks.

We shall also support the police and fires services including **maintaining the AFS**.

The NHS Reserve will be retained.

Shelter – providing blast-proof shelters is impractical and the best protection against radiation is best achieved by staying in their homes and acting on advice given to them. Some form of communal shelter is desirable for those in lightly constructed dwellings. We inherited a **dispersal plan for the movement of priority classes** – mainly for mothers and children – from cities to reception areas – this would take at least a week to complete. We think a scheme in readiness could be carried out more quickly so we are inviting local authorities and transport utilities to join us in working out a plan.<sup>25</sup>

The 'Notes for Supplementary Questions' in the Home Secretary's brief stated that 'The Civil Defence Corps is part of our insurance - local authorities have made great efforts to carry out reorganisations which started in 1962'. The numbers in the Civil Defence Corps in England, Wales and Scotland in January 1966 totalled 210,700 of which only 60,900 were 'Class A' volunteers (who had served for three years and had completed advanced training). A further 6,100 'Class B' volunteers (who had served for three years but had completed only initial training) while 77,200 volunteers were under training and the remaining 66,500 volunteers (who did not meet the service and training requirements) were regarded as forming the Civil Defence Reserve Corps. There were, in addition, some 129,300 members of the Industrial Civil Defence Corps.<sup>26</sup>

Further cuts were found necessary and, on 14 December 1966, the Home Secretary told the House of Commons that the Civil Defence Corps was to be 'substantially reduced in numbers'. He then explained their dramatically reduced future role:

The future role of the Corps will be to help the local authorities to man the control system, which is the system of government in an emergency; and to provide a limited number of specialists to help to organise the first aid and welfare resources of the community. We are greatly indebted to members of the Corps. Their new role will be of great importance, and there will be a continuing need to attract people of high calibre, with qualities of leadership.

The local authorities have expressed their general willingness to co-operate in re-organisation and we shall be issuing comprehensive guidelines ...after consultations with them and the voluntary organisations. Local authority employees and the voluntary organisations will be asked to play a bigger part. After a period of adjustment, the active strength of the Corps is likely to be 75,000 to 80,000, compared with about 122,000 at present.

As I said on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, there is a limit to what we can afford by way of insurance against the risk of nuclear war. Expenditure has been reduced to about £19.7 million during the current years a further saving of £1 million needs to be made in 1967-68.

---

<sup>25</sup> CAB 134/2634 Cabinet CD Committee Memorandum, 21 January 1966

<sup>26</sup> CAB 134/2634 Cabinet CD Committee Memorandum, 21 January 1966

The Government believe that by carrying out the measures they have indicated they will retain on the most economical basis a pattern of civil defence preparations which, if there were a nuclear attack on this country, would enable many millions of lives to be saved.<sup>27</sup>

The reduction in numbers meant a major reorganisation of the national and local CD organisations through 1967 but, before the reorganisation could be completed, the axe finally fell on civil defence. Drastic economies in Government expenditure had to be made following the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1967 14.3% devaluation of the pound from \$2.80 to \$2.40. Further, the bank rate was raised to 8% and, at the Cabinet Meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1968, the Prime Minister (Harold Wilson) ‘.... proposed that civil defence should now in effect be put on a ‘care and maintenance’ basis so as to achieve a saving of some two-thirds of the present expenditure by 1969-70.<sup>28</sup> At a subsequent Cabinet Meeting, the Home Secretary (James Callaghan):

... said that he accepted the proposal to put civil defence on a care and maintenance basis with a consequent saving of £14 million in 1968-69 and £20 million in 1969-70. The Secretary of State for Defence pointed out that the proposal would inevitably lead to the abolition of the home defence force, contrary to the undertaking which had been given in the debates on the Reserve Forces Bill, and would consequently attract criticism. Nevertheless he accepted the proposal. The maintenance of civil defence in this country on the existing scale was not a significant element in the deterrence of nuclear aggression.<sup>29</sup>

So civil defence was no longer a significant element of the UK deterrent. Criticism there certainly was when, on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1968, the Prime Minister told the House of Commons that ‘We have decided to reduce Home Defence – Civil Defence – to a care and maintenance basis with a saving of about £14 million in 1968-69 and £20 million in subsequent years’ The Civil Defence Corps and the Auxiliary Fire Service and would be formally disbanded on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1968 although stocks of emergency equipment was retained in store. As it was assumed that any major breakdown between East and West would be preceded by a some weeks of a deteriorating international relations, some civil defence planning was to continue ‘at a level needed to enable more active preparations to be resumed, if necessary, without too much loss of ground.’ Also some components of the organisation, including the UK Warning and Monitoring Organisation and the Royal Observer Corps, were to be retained as was the Easingwold Training School, although the other two Schools and the Civil Defence Staff College at Sunningdale were closed. Home Office Civil Defence staff were withdrawn from the Regions but a central planning staff was retained in the Home Office. The training of volunteers for the Industrial Civil Defence Service ceased but the Ambulance Reserve was retained, but only as ‘a planning concept’.<sup>30</sup> This abrupt change of public protection policy, although brought about by financial imperatives, was perceived as a blow to the principles of voluntary action which had served the UK for more than 30 years. Mass protest demonstrations across the country and an unofficial march and stand-down parade at the Cenotaph in Whitehall was staged by hundreds of members of the Civil Defence Corps. But these protests failed to change Government policy. Similarly an Opposition motion to permit the Civil Defence Services to continue on a purely

---

<sup>27</sup> CAB 134/2893 *Home Defence Review Committee – Presentation of Government Policy*, 14 Dec. 1966

<sup>28</sup> CAB128/43 Part 1 Cabinet Conclusions 1(68), 4 Jan 1968

<sup>29</sup> CAB128/43 Cabinet Conclusions, CC3(68), *Home Defence*

<sup>30</sup> Frank Raine-Allen ‘The 1968 Stand-Down’ in *A Brief History of Civil Defence* Ed. Tim Essex-Lopresti, Civil Defence Association, 2005

voluntary basis was rejected by the Government who maintained that, since some money would continue to be spent on planning and centralised training courses at Easingwold for government officials and the emergency services, civil defence had not been abandoned as planning was to continue, but at a much lower level. Some level of central government planning for post attack survival thus continued through 1969, for example the manning level of each Regional Seat of Government was set at 246 for each RSG and, locally, the Home Office looked at the earmarking of church premises as post-attack Rest Centres. Of 3,600 bids, only 105 (all Church of England premises) were cleared.<sup>31</sup>

In July 1969, the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Burke Trend, expressed official concern at the state of UK home defences in a minute to the Prime Minister and copied to his senior Ministers. Trend reported the findings of the review by officials covering the 18 months since the relegation to 'care and maintenance' of most home defence organisations. This significant paper is worth quoting at length (emphasis added) as the report:

... discloses that **there are serious deficiencies in our present arrangements for home defence**. .... Briefly the most significant are that arrangements for the maintenance of fuel and power supplies – without which none of the other schemes can operate - have been planned but not implemented; the machinery for the maintenance of law and order and the prevention of sabotage is inadequate; and plans for the maintenance of food supplies have been run down, while stockpiles, as the result of disposals, are unbalanced and insufficient.

When the basic decision were taken in January, 1968, Ministers were advised that 'it would not be the intention to maintain in a state of immediate operational readiness even those preparations retained on a care and maintenance basis; and it would be understood that months of intensive effort would be required to restore the country to the same level of capacity to face an immediate crisis that it now possesses'. But this decision to 'freeze' home defence preparations was, of course, taken at a point at which those preparations were far from complete and also at different stages towards completion; the cut-off was therefore arbitrary in its impact; And, although in some sectors, the state of affairs was reasonably satisfactory, in certain important fields there could now be no question of reactivating arrangements which had been placed in suspended animation, since there is very little to reactivate.

It could not be argued with any conviction that the Czechoslovak crisis of August, 1968, has substantially increased the threat to this country (although it has, of course, underlined the unpredictability of Soviet policy); and Ministers have not taken this view in other contexts. Nor could it be maintained that the risk of an attack on this country is such as to justify, in our present economic situation, the premium needed to insure against it on the scale which was accepted up to January, 1968. Nevertheless, the deficiencies in our home defence arrangements are such as, on the one hand, to provoke serious doubts whether we could put up an effective organisation for maintaining essential supplies and services in an emergency (even on a makeshift basis and even if we were given considerably more warning than the intelligence authorities expect) and, on the other hand, to raise the **question whether Ministers are fully alive to the consequences of the decision of January, 1968**. Apart from domestic considerations, the lack of adequate provision of maintenance of law and order and protection against sabotage might seriously affect our ability to fulfil our commitments to our allies in NATO to reinforce and maintain our forces in North West Europe; and we are likely to incur criticism in NATO if our home defence arrangements seem to be inadequate – as in due course must become apparent to various NATO committees concerned with civil defence and emergency preparations.

---

<sup>31</sup> CAB134/2874 Home Defence Committee CD Planning Sub-Committee, 6 May and 17 October 1969

In these circumstances the Home Defence Committee felt that they should not delay in bringing to the attention of the Ministers concerned and that they should seek a ruling whether Ministers are content to accept it (in the knowledge that it will, of course, continue to deteriorate progressively) or whether they consider that some modification of policy is required. The Committee were forced to the conclusion that even with some degree of redistribution of expenditure it would not be possible to achieve an effective home defence organisation within the present financial ceiling of £8 million per year (as against £24 million before the 'care and maintenance' decision was taken). On the other hand, a preliminary examination of the problem suggests that the basic essentials of such an organisation could be brought into being for an additional expenditure of £5 or £6 million, i.e. a total of £14 million a year.

If Ministers so wish, the Committee could examine in greater detail, but without commitment at this stage, the possibility of producing more effective arrangements within a financial ceiling of this order. But, on the assumption – which the Committee certainly endorsed – that it would not be possible to abandon home defence preparations completely, their chief concern was to ensure that Ministers realised how inadequate those preparations now are and had the opportunity to consider, in the context of the current review of public expenditure, whether it would be possible to spend a little more on making them minimally effective.<sup>32</sup>

Predictably, most Ministers welcomed the idea of further reviewing home defence. The Minister of Defence, Dennis Healey found Trend's Minute 'disturbing' and, supporting a further review, he wrote that he:

... had become increasingly concerned that our arrangements for reinforcing the continent in a time of tension and should be secure and free from the risk of sabotage ... my Department is engaged on an examination of those points in the transport and communications systems which are critical ... [further]. We are to carry out a review of the military manpower resources which would be available to assist the Home Office in discharging their law and order obligations during a time of tension...<sup>33</sup>

Other Ministers realised the shortcomings and vulnerabilities in their departmental responsibilities. As John Stonehouse (Minister of Posts & Telecommunications) wrote:

Roy Mason [Minister of Power] has pointed out in his minute of 21 July that power supplies are essential. This is certainly true in the case of Post Office Telecommunications. Most of our vital installations outside likely target areas) have standby plant with fuel for only 14 days. We should therefore be dependent on arrangements made by the Ministry of Power.<sup>34</sup>

However the Chancellor of the Exchequer, now Roy Jenkins as he and James Callaghan had changed places after the devaluation crisis, equally predictably wrote:

If it were the case that we and our colleagues had been insufficiently aware of the consequences of the decisions we took last year concerning civil defence, or if there had been significant changes in circumstances meanwhile, I would agree that we ought to reconsider those decisions. But there appears to be no real evidence in support of either of those suppositions.

For my part, and given the already serious problem on which we are engaged of holding public expenditure generally within acceptable limits, I cannot see any case for spending more on civil defence at this time. On the contrary, it may be doubted whether the additional expenditure envisaged would provide any sufficient additional insurance against the currently foreseeable risk of attack, and it would certainly be readily

---

<sup>32</sup> T227/3212 Treasury copy of Cabinet Secretary's Minute to the Prime Minister, 9 July 1969

<sup>33</sup> T227/3212 Minute Defence Secretary to the Prime Minister, 16 July 1969

<sup>34</sup> T227/3212 Minister of Posts & Telecommunications to the Prime Minister, 28 July 1969

explicable as such to Parliament or public opinion. I hope therefore that you would agree that we should do no more than take note of this report.<sup>35</sup>

Regardless of the range of ministerial support for more spending on basic home defence, the Chancellor's view prevailed and no significant additions were made to that budget as the Wilson Government dealt with the more urgent internal security matters in Northern Ireland where thousands more troops were deployed to deal with rioting and the erection of 'peace lines' to protect the communities. It is, however, debateable whether an increase of the home defence budget to a mere £14 million would have achieved much of an improvement for, as the PUS at the Home Office privately informed the Second Under Secretary at the Treasury:

- (1) It was not true that Ministers had not previously had their attention drawn to the consequences of cutting back civil defence expenditure to its current level and
- (2) The Home Office did not accept that additional expenditure of £5 or £6 million would in fact achieve an effective home defence organisation.<sup>36</sup>

It is here appropriate to mention the central role of the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Burke Trend, in nuclear matters, as Edward Heath later wrote:

Trend served under four prime ministers, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, Harold Wilson, and Edward Heath, and proved himself a civil servant who ably gave an independent, balanced brief to his political masters regardless of their party colour. In particular he accepted responsibility for keeping them informed and advised on all nuclear matters, both civil and military, and maintained contacts on their behalf at the highest level with other governments involved.<sup>37</sup>

As Cabinet Secretary, Trend was obviously concerned at the condition of the UK home defence arrangements following the January 1968 civil defence decisions and, although his July 1969 proposals for more home defence expenditure failed to convince Harold and his Ministers, Trend did not let the matter drop as he ensured that the acknowledged home defence shortcomings were reconsidered a year later when the new Conservative Government took office.

#### **'Care and Maintenance' Further Questioned and the Change of Government**

Some £10 million was, of course, continuing to be spent on civil defence planning, maintaining equipment in stores and higher training facilities. The February 1969 Defence White Paper had already confirmed the situation:

In the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1968 it was stated that the Government had decided that civil defence should be put on a care and maintenance basis. This has now been done. Training and planning will continue at the minimum level that will permit more active preparations to be resumed if this should prove necessary. Total annual public expenditure was reduced to about £10 million in 1968-69 and is expected to fall in subsequent years to between £7m and £8m.<sup>38</sup>

But this level of expenditure produced very little locally, other than planning as post 1968, only four local authorities were allowed to retain their full-time Civil Defence Officers - and that officer's position in Birmingham was only viable once his duties were extended to include road safety.<sup>39</sup> There was a feeling among the many former

---

<sup>35</sup> T227/3212 Minute, Chancellor to the Prime Minister, July 1969

<sup>36</sup> T227/3212 Sir Philip Allen to Sir Samuel Goldman referring to their conversation over lunch, 14 July 1969

<sup>37</sup> Edward Heath *Trend, Burke Frederick St John, Baron Trend (1914-1987)*. Oxford DNB, OUP, 2004

<sup>38</sup> Cmnd 3927 *Statement on Defence Estimates 1969* Home Defence

<sup>39</sup> Private information from the Birmingham Civil Defence Officer of that time.

CD volunteers that the new policy provided 'not much care and too little maintenance', but across the country, the HQ Control structure remained as did some planning staffs and the Civil Defence College at Easingwold, York. Emphasis was put on 'Home Defence' but little effective protection was provided as policy was based a major reactivation of civil defenders being undertaken when a likely war had been detected.

In 1970 the Local Authority Associations decided to hold a series of national studies on how best local authorities could meet their obligations in the event of a war emergency and, in 1972, the Government paper *Home Defence 1972-76* recommended that an immediate start should be made on establishing Emergency Planning Teams, and the remaining vestigial civil defence planning elements were renamed 'Home Defence'.

The level of exchequer grants available was marginally increased (within the agreed financial ceilings) and, although no national civil defence force was to be created, County Emergency Planning Teams were formed and encouraged to combine war planning with that for major peacetime emergencies, both natural and man-made. Most counties and each London Borough appointed an officer with the new title of 'Emergency Planning Officer' and the renamed Emergency Planning College at Easingwold now held major exercises based on possible civil emergencies – the one facing the newly established Greater London Council until the construction of the Thames Barrier was flooding of its riparian boroughs and its underground railway system.

In June 1970, to the surprise of many, the General Election returned a Conservative administration led by Edward Heath and, five months after his appointment as Home Secretary, Reginald Maudling wrote to his Ministerial colleagues expressing his own doubts about the viability of home defence under the existing funding arrangements. He cautiously proposed 'a fresh critical examination of the whole programme', explaining that:

1. Gross expenditure on Home Defence is currently running at some £8 million a year<sup>40</sup> and existing plans assume that it will remain at about that level for the next five years.
2. Prior to January 1968, when the previous administration decide to put home defence on a 'care and maintenance' basis, expenditure was of the order of £24 million a year. Major savings were achieved by the disbandment of the Civil Defence Corps (£6 million), TAVR (£3 million) and Auxiliary Fire Service (£1 million). The impact of other savings tended to be arbitrary because, in general, home defence preparations were not only far from complete but at different stages of completion. The £8 million a year now devoted to home defence is spent primarily on preserving capital assets such as buildings and equipment, and on maintaining a minimum amount of knowledge and special skills. It does not allow the existing systems to be maintained at a consistent state of readiness or to be improved; and there must be doubt about the viability of the present arrangements and whether we are getting real value for the expenditure involved.
3. I think that we should now carry out a fresh critical examination of the whole programme.
4. ... I do not think that additional expenditure on home defence should be a high priority and I certainly do not think that there is a case to return to pre 1960 levels of

---

<sup>40</sup> The Annex to the Home Secretary's *Note* shows that, for 1970/71, direct exchequer expenditure was £4.9 million and local authority expenditure £1.9 million therefore the total for home defence was £6.8 million

expenditure, or anything like it. But, equally it may be said that, if our overall programme is to be small, it is wrong to spend a high proportion on some of the elements proposed – for example the food and medical stockpile.

5. In this setting, the Chairman of the Official Committee on Home Defence is ready to set in train an overall review to examine the effectiveness of our existing home affairs measures and to prepare proposals for expenditure in the period 1971-75. This review would involve a strategic reassessment of the whole compendium of measures, including those which do not involve a great deal of expenditure (such as evacuation policy). I think it would be helpful if officials presented their financial proposals in terms of costed options within a bracket of expenditure not exceeding, at the maximum, say £15 million; and should indicate a suggested order of priorities.
6. Sir David Renton wants us to set up a large trained uniformed volunteer force, recruited by local authorities. My own provisional view is that the creation of such a force would not be justified, given the limited funds likely to be available for civil defence measures as a whole. But this possibility should be included in the officials' review; and anyway it would be imprudent to make any public statement about the volunteer force in isolation. Any Parliamentary statement at this stage would be limited to saying that the Government was carrying out a thorough review of Home Defence measures and expenditure, and will make a further statement when this has been completed. In the interim, to avoid misunderstanding and raising false hopes we should (when dealing with Parliamentary Questions and Ministerial correspondence) continue to make it clear that the Government is in no way committed to the revival of the Civil Defence Corps or the formation of a similar voluntary force.<sup>41</sup>

Only a week after Maudling's Note, Sir Burke Trend, as Chairman of the Official Committee on Home Defence and doubtless pleased that the Home Office had initiated the latest round of questioning, promptly established the formal 1971 Home Defence Review. The Committee's findings, which confirmed the generally acknowledged doubts on the viability of home defence at existing expenditure levels, supported Maudling's proposal for a small increase in funding. In submitting its final draft report (emphasis added) in late May 1971, the Official Committee first stated the revised aims of home defence:

Aim The accepted definition of the overall aim of home defence has been used throughout, namely:- Those defensive measures in the United Kingdom:

- a. **To secure the UK against any internal threat.**
- b. To mitigate so far as is practicable the effects of any direct attack on the UK including the use of conventional, nuclear, biological or chemical weapons.
- c. To provide alternative machinery of government, both central and regional, which would stand a reasonable chance of surviving nuclear attack in order to direct national recovery.
- d. To enhance the basis for national recovery, post attack.

Present State The examination has confirmed the doubts expressed ... about the viability of present home defence arrangements. Current home defence expenditure of about £9 M a year is devoted principally to the maintenance of the separate parts of the system at the levels at which they had accidentally reached in January 1968. It would be impossible to bring the separate parts of the system to a reasonable state of readiness in a 3 to 4 weeks warning period. There would be serious deficiencies in Government control accommodation and communications. If the programme remains on the present 'care and maintenance' basis, **the Government could not fulfil the four aims of home defence; in particular virtually nothing could be done to mitigate the effects of nuclear war on the public or to enhance the basis for national recovery.**

---

<sup>41</sup> HO322/798 Ministerial Committee on Home Defence, Chairman's Note to members, 3 November 1970

[We have considered] the effectiveness of home defence measures costing not more than £15 million p.a. for the next 5 years. ... presently £9M annually. [We accept the recent JIC report that] ... no additional provision for internal security measures would be justified in a programme covering the next five years ... [and we have] confirmed the original assumptions of the minimal risk to the public of biological and chemical attack. Accordingly the programme has no specific provision for protection against BW and CW.

Regarding the £9M budget ... savings on the end of shelter demolition [would total] £0.33M, on the storage of respirators £0.16M and of obsolete vehicles £0.4 M [thus total saving would be only] £0.89M

If the budget was reduced to £7M then we would have to abolish the Warning and Monitoring Organisation (£2.2M), the present moderate stockpile of 400,000 tons (£1.7M), ending all local authority planning would save £0.6M ... [but] this would destroy the credibility of our home defence arrangements at home and abroad and effectively prevent the recovery for a decade.

The £15M budget would achieve over five years ... the improvement in [post attack] Regional and Local Government and the ability to mitigate the effects of nuclear weapons and to enhance recovery prospects (e.g. with food and fuel)  
**EXCLUSIONS** In 1968 the CD Corps and the AFS were disbanded at a current saving of about £10M. The local authorities do not support a smaller or cheaper budget (say £5M p.a.) ... and officials do not consider such a body as cost effective. Local authorities have adequate manpower but voluntary societies have a role to play.

**Summary The Review has confirmed the non-viability of the present home defence arrangements.** The [probable] changes in policy of the programme at £15M p.a. [should include]:

Regional Government – by the end of 1977, the whole network of Sub regional Control buildings and communications in England and Wales will be complete.

Broadcasting and Post Office TV broadcasting should continue up to the moment of impact. The wartime broadcasting arrangements and wartime telegraph system (EMSS) [to remain] at their present state of readiness.

Warning and Monitoring Organisation Compressed air sirens will replace electric driven ones.

Local Government County Planning teams will be set up but this will not be complete by 1977 - but substantial progress will have been made.

Training Continuing at Easingwold, not training instructors but as 'staff college' training in control and communications.

Police and Fire The reserve of fire service vehicles will be maintained until 1977 – but they will not be replaced.

Public Advice No intensive publicity will be issued in peacetime. Public protection will be based on families keeping together. Planning for dispersal of the 8 million of the most vulnerable groups (the old, mothers and children) will cease.

A new booklet will be printed by 1974 for rapid and free distribution and by 1975, a TV film based on the booklet will be ready.

Protection against fallout No policy is in existence for the provision of fallout protection for those away from home. By 1977 local authorities will have completed a survey of shelter [in buildings] There will be continuing but controlled expenditure in 1977/82 on the development of fallout protection programme.<sup>42</sup>

The elevation of the internal security thread to the primary aim of home defence was understandable as that was the major concern in 1970. Only a month after the Conservative Government was elected, in July 1970, the strike by 42,000 dockers

---

<sup>42</sup> CAB 322/799 Official Committee on Home Defence, Final draft report, 26 May 1971

had led to the proclamation of a State of Emergency under the Emergency Powers Act, 1920. Further, in September, there was a local authority workers' strike and one by 99,000 coal miners in October. Another State of Emergency was proclaimed in mid-December 1970 as a result of electricity workers' action. Further, a major strike in the early months of 1971 by 180,000 Post Office Workers demonstrated the continued deterioration of industrial relations and additional strikes by miners and dockers in 1972 confirmed this view. In November 1973 strikes in the Coal and Electricity industries coincided with the Middle East oil crisis so drastic action, including the imposition of national speed limits and preparations for petrol rationing, brought home these crises to the public. Industrial threats aside, the internal security problems in Northern Ireland, and the possibility of similar rioting extending to the UK mainland with the IRA bombing campaign, were daily presented to the public by the media, so security was perceived as the national priority.

Nevertheless, with severe financial limitations on Government expenditure continuing, the Cabinet rejected the call for even a small increase in the home defence budget and Reginald Maudling told Parliament of the decision on 5 August 1971.<sup>43</sup> So yet another reallocation of existing funding was carried out and, in a letter to the Local Authority Associations, the Home Office told them of:

... the decision not to increase total public expenditure on home defence measures .. [and] a package deal to local Authority Associations. But regarding public protection and shelter – we are unable to find sufficient savings to finance local authority expenditure in this area ...

County Emergency Planning Teams with supporting clerical and secretarial staff [are] to be an integral part of the Clerk's or Chief Executive Officer's department ...

Subject to satisfactory progress being made on home defence plans, it will be at the discretion of Counties and the Greater London Council to determine arrangements for undertaking the preparation of plans for handling peacetime emergencies, accidents and natural disasters.

Accommodation. Prior to 1968 the Home Office approved 75% grants for costs ... since 1968 we advise that wartime needs be considered when building new accommodation. ... The new communications system is coming in to all wartime HQs and Sub Regional Controls.

Training It is estimated that 20,000 officers and members will need about 6 hours of training annually. Central training will be at Easingwold where 'staff college' style training will take place.

Grants for the Demolition of last war air raid shelters will be terminated on 31 March 1973 [other than those approved for special areas]

Shelters are not now to be supported unless it can be adapted for occupancy of one week.

Voluntary Organisations It will be clear from the Home Secretary's announcement that, although local authorities are not required to re-establish a national volunteer force for civil defence, nevertheless the Government wishes the maximum use to be made of genuine voluntary effort in support of statutory organisations.

In view of the uneven pattern of voluntary response, the Government is convinced that it must be for the local authorities to decide how best the voluntary contributions can be incorporated into schemes of local self help. ... no grant aid will be available ... [as there are] ... ample opportunities for persons who wish to participate in more formal voluntary organisations under Government sponsorship e.g. the T&AVR, Royal Observer Corps and Special Constabulary... the less formal organisations include the Boy Scouts, Red Cross and WRVS.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Home Secretary's statement to Parliament 5 August 1971 Hansard cols. 369/370

<sup>44</sup> CAB 322/817 Home Defence Review – follow up action, 5 August 1971

A Home Office Circular to local authorities in March 1972 stressed:

... the importance of local authority measures in periods of increased political tension and all out nuclear exchange cannot be over emphasised - [arrangements are] to be substantially improved ... Scientific advice [by specially appointed Scientific Advisers will be] provided at County and some at District level.<sup>45</sup>

The creation of local County Emergency Planning Teams was, of course, an extension of the traditional practice of planning to make best use of all available resources in civil emergencies. Civil Defence personnel and emergency equipment had been deployed to such emergencies as the major train crash sites at Harrow and Wealdstone (1952) and Lewisham (1957), to the East Coast and the Lynmouth floods (both in 1953) and to the 1966 Aberfan pit (mud slide) disaster. But maintaining equipment absorbed scarce resource and a Home Office Memo of March 1972 summarised the extent of fire service equipment being maintained at considerable cost on a very limited budget:

... costs [are] to be reduced from £¾M to ½ M by 1975 – the stockpile of 1,200 self propelled pumps, 2,000 portable pumps 450 lorries, 1,000 miles of hose, piping and fittings, 3,000 assorted dams and tanks of capacity 2,500 to 20,000 gallons.... There is no large scale operational role for the fire service during nuclear strikes and heavy fallout. When fallout conditions have passed, their roles in addition to fire fighting tasks on surviving properties, are to assist in decontamination and in the provision of drinking water.<sup>46</sup>

In June 1972, the Cabinet Secretary again reminded the Prime Minister of the home defence situation with a concise report (emphasis added) on the latest review:

#### PRIME MINISTER

In July of last year the Ministerial Committee considered our civil preparations for war. They agreed that there should be no increase in expenditure on home defence; but they commissioned a further examination of the manner in which the existing expenditure might be re-allocated within the present ceiling in order to ensure that it was directed primarily to dealing with civil emergencies and also provided greater scope for voluntary organisations.

This review has now been completed; and I attach its report. Normally I should now circulate this to the Ministerial Committee in discharge of their instruction last summer; and I should seek their endorsement of its conclusions. If this endorsement was given, the necessary departmental action would then follow. But I am reluctant to do so for two main reasons:-

(a) Although the report represents the best that can be done within the limit of the existing ceiling on expenditure related to home defence, it is stretching credibility to suppose that the very limited preparations which that ceiling permits would be significant in a situation of nuclear war. The fact is that, under the compulsion of successive reviews on public expenditure, we have allowed civil defence measures to be downgraded to a point at which they no longer make sense in relation to the particular kind of emergency for which they are supposed to cater. If we are to take that emergency seriously, we ought to be doing a good deal more by way of civil defence than we are at present permitted to do.

(b) The instinct which led us last year to try to relate our home defence measures more directly to civil emergencies was clearly right; and everything which has happened since then, particularly as regards the development of industrial relations, has reinforced the validity of this hypothesis. This is particularly true as regards the stockpiling of commodities; and although the Treasury have consistently rejected attempts by individuals such as Sir George Bolton [a Director of the Bank of England] to promote the

<sup>45</sup> CAB 322/817 HO Circular ES1/1972 "Home Defence 1972-76", 23 March 1972

<sup>46</sup> CAB 322/817 Home Defence Review – Memo by the Home Department, March 1972

concept of a more systematic stockpiling system, the arguments in favour of that policy remain, in my view, very compelling. And those arguments do not derive only from our own concern to protect ourselves so far as we can against the physical consequences of an interruption of supplies; they extend also into the field of our aid policies and our relations with the developing countries which will clearly have to be reconsidered in the light of the UNCTAD conference.

For all these reasons **I should like to make a fresh start in this context I should like to make our preparations for nuclear war the tail and our preparations for civil emergencies the dog; and I should like now to move openly to an orthodox position in which the dog would wag the tail.** Mr Hunt<sup>47</sup> is about to embark on the comprehensive review of the "pressure points" of our economy, which you insisted must form one element in our new organisation for dealing with all kinds of civil emergency. I believe that it would be valuable if this review included, on the basis of a specific instruction from yourself, a realistic examination of the extent to which Departments might insure themselves better against the consequences of rail strikes, dock strikes, power strikes, etc. by stockpiling in advance the commodities and supplies where we are most vulnerable. This would, of course, cost money; but perhaps we need not be too concerned about that until we know how much money and how far we might recoup ourselves by periodically turning the stocks over, through commercial channels, in the normal way. **And in return for our outlay we should at least be better placed than we are now to face emergencies whether they arise in peace or in the shadow of approaching war.**

Would you agree that we might put work in hand on this basis with your authority? If so, you might like to make your intention known at the next meeting of the Ministerial Group on Industrial Policy when most of the Ministers concerned would be present. At the same time I would propose to let the attached report go forward to the Ministerial Committee on Home Defence in order not to delay any work which can usefully be put in hand within the existing ceiling of expenditure. But I would also propose to circulate it under cover of a brief note indicating that you had commissioned the wider inquiry which I have suggested and that any further activity in the field of home defence will have to find its place within this broader context.

1st June, 1972

Burke Trend

[MANUSCRIPT ANNOTATION: *Agreed. I would prefer to send a minute. PI draft. E H 2/6*]  
48

Edward Heath's minute of 23 June to his Home Secretary<sup>49</sup> announced the new home defence arrangements:

When the Home Defence Review was considered by Ministers last year, it was agreed that there should be no increase in expenditure on home defence and that the existing expenditure might be reallocated in order to ensure that it was directed primarily to deal with civil emergencies and also to provide greater scope for voluntary organisations. I understand that we have now done all that we can to ensure the best possible use of the existing funds; but I am concerned that our present civil defence measures hardly make sense in relation to the particular kind of emergency which they were originally designed to meet.

Meanwhile, we have embarked upon a comprehensive review of our contingency planning for civil emergencies; and I believe that this is relevant to the level of our home defence preparations. I have therefore given instructions that this review, under Cabinet Office chairmanship, should include a realistic examination of the extent to which Departments might insure better against the consequences of industrial action by stockpiling commodities and supplies where we are most vulnerable. We could then consider whether the extra cost would be justified by putting us in a stronger position

---

<sup>47</sup> Sir John Hunt, Deputy Secretary then Cabinet Secretary 1973-1979

<sup>48</sup> PREM15/790 Minute Ref: A01925, 1 June 1972

<sup>49</sup> Reginald Maudling until 17 July, then Robert Carr

than at present to face emergencies, whether they arise in peace or in the shadow of approaching war.<sup>50</sup>

Three days later, as their Chairman, Trend minuted his Official Committee on Home Defence informing them of the new Review they would be undertaking:

... Ministers called for further re-examination of the manner in which reallocation of expenditure within the present ceiling in order to concentrate on means of dealing with civil emergencies and giving scope to voluntary organisations.

The Prime Minister has now commissioned a review under Cabinet Office chairmanship and in relation to civil contingency planning, of the extent [by which] departments might insure themselves better against the consequences of industrial action by stockpiling in advance the commodities and supplies in which we are most vulnerable. Such a policy would reinforce our ability to face emergencies, and any further improvement in home defence preparations would have to find its place within the broader context.<sup>51</sup>

Edward Heath thus agreed to again review contingency planning for civil emergencies, now under Cabinet Office Chairmanship.<sup>52</sup> The objectives of *Home Defence Planning Assumptions* were described in a 1972 Home Office circular to local authorities as taking the defensive measures necessary in the UK for:

- a. securing the UK against any internal threat.
- b. to mitigate as far as possible the effects of any direct attack on the UK involving the use of conventional, nuclear, biological or chemical weapons.
- c. to provide alternative machinery of government at all levels to increase the prospect of, and to direct, national survival.
- d. to enhance the basis for national recovery in the post-attack period.<sup>53</sup>

These defensive measures were, of course, taken directly from the aims of home security as defined by the Official Committee in their 1971 Review (above). Remembering the context of internal security of the early 1970s, the primary aim was rightly concerned with internal threats, as the recently revived Irish bombing campaign had extended to the UK mainland. To the Heath Government, the Irish question was but an annoying irritant when compared with the problems produced by the further decline of UK industrial relations in the mid 1970s. In February 1974 a strike by 250,000 coal miners caused over 5,500 days to be lost and another State of Emergency had to be proclaimed. Edward Heath's 'who governs Britain' February 1974 General Election resulted in Labour returning with just four more seats than the Conservatives. Harold Wilson's second administration increased its majority in the October 1974 General Election but they failed to solve the nation's industrial relations problems, a failure which, after the 'winter of discontent' cost them dear at the 1979 election when Mrs Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative Party gained a majority of 70 seats over James Callaghan's Labour Party.

Subsequent home defence developments are outside the period covered by this paper. However the end of the Cold War in 1989-1990 must be mentioned as UK citizens had again been urged to look to the protection of their families by stocking food and water in a family refuge by the 1979 Thatcher Government. They issued their revised *Protect and Survive* booklets when new US weapons, cruise missiles and rockets, were introduced into the UK in response to the many SS-20 and other new Russian weapons being deployed in Europe. But the level of public participation and public interest never again reached that achieved in the period

---

<sup>50</sup> CAB 322/817 Official Committee on Home Defence, 23 June 1972

<sup>51</sup> CAB 322/817 Official Committee on Home Defence, Note by Chairman, 26 June 1972

<sup>52</sup> PREM15/790 Prime Minister's Personal Minute 23 June 1972

<sup>53</sup> HO Circular ES3/73 quoted in Duncan Campbell *War Plan UK* p.94, Hutchinson, 1982

1953 to 1967. It took the end of the Cold War and the nation's experience of floods, fuel crises and foot and mouth disease in the late 1990s - followed by the emergence of new major terrorist threats from Islamic extremists – that caused the Cabinet Office to again take the lead in contingency planning. Finally it was the emergence of the growing international terrorist threat in 2001 that caused the 1948 Civil Defence Act to be replaced by the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act which made public bodies and utilities plan for resilience and continuity in the event of major emergencies.

### **Conclusion**

It has been shown that, until 1968, home defence remained an essential element of deterrent defence policy as the 1960 Home Defence Review Committee had concluded that 'home defence preparations are an integral part of the deterrent policy, primarily because of their potential value in steadying public opinion ... in a period of tension'. But they also felt it necessary to mention the alternative view expressed in Whitehall (particularly in the Ministry of Defence) that 'that our limited resources are best spent on maintaining an effective deterrent'. However, in 1960, even opponents of civil defence expenditure 'recognised that it would be politically impracticable to abandon home defence entirely'.

Through the 1960s, successive administrations attempted to minimise home defence expenditure, initially by reducing the size of the Civil Defence Corps then, after the 1965 Home Defence Review, by concentrating on survival measures and thus abandoning attempts at post-attack life saving as the likely casualties from a thermonuclear exchange would have been catastrophic. The experience of the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis meant that, as the Labour Government agreed in 1966 'despite the reduction in the risks of nuclear conflict, we cannot discontinue civil defence preparations. There is always the possibility of war arising from misunderstanding or miscalculation; and we cannot be certain about the future spread of nuclear weapons... sensible civil defence preparations could do much to save lives, to relieve suffering and to help the nation to survive as an organised entity.' As ever, there was a limit to what could be afforded by way of insurance against this risk and there followed cuts in civil defence expenditure to achieve 'considerable savings'. However, despite general protests, and following the 14% devaluation of sterling in November 1967, the essential and massive public expenditure economies included the reduction of home defence to a care and maintenance basis. Even in 1969, and with the CD Corps and AFS disbanded, Whitehall agreed that it was not possible to abandon home defence preparations completely.

The election of the 1970 Conservative administration soon led to a further review of home defence. But the growing concern at emerging new threats to internal security led the list of aims for future home defence. New terrorist campaigns and industrial relations problems, particularly challenges from the increasingly powerful trades unions, threatened the government's ability to control events in a crisis. Under Whitehall's direction, local authorities established Emergency Planning Departments to plan for and deal with civil emergencies by using the large quantities of emergency equipment formerly held by the civil defence services and now maintained, at considerable cost, in store. The 1971 Home Defence Review, which 'confirmed the non-viability of the present home defence arrangements', proposed a small increase in home

defence funding but this rejected so a further reallocation of the budget was made and the monies saved directed to improving the Government Control organisation, particularly the establishment of Sub Regional Control centres for post-attack control. Overseen by Sir Burke Trend, the Cabinet Secretary, the Cabinet Office was given the lead in further reviews so that 'in return for our outlay we should at least be better placed than we are now to face emergencies whether they arise in peace or in the shadow of approaching war'.

By 1974, any 'shadow of approaching war' was swamped by the practical problems of dealing with industrial relations disputes which, in February 1974 precipitated a General Election. This was narrowly won by the Labour Party and a second election, in October 1974, again returned Harold Wilson's Labour Party with a workable majority. But industrial relations problems continued to dominate and the 1979 General Election brought in Mrs Thatcher's Conservative administration and there was a return to concern about public protection following the introduction of new nuclear weapons in Europe. The end of the Cold War in 1989 -1990 saw the decline of interest in home defence but it was revived by the rise of international terrorism at the opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as events at home and abroad brought new legislation which replaced the outdated 1948 Civil Defence Act.