

CHAPTER 17

Thinking the Unthinkable about the Unthinkable – The Use of Nuclear Weapons and the Propaganda Model

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In January 2017, Britain's leading liberal newspaper criticised a new, heavy-handed, system of press regulation, brought in under the Crime and Courts Act (2013). *The Guardian* argued: 'A press that is free to investigate and criticise is essential for good governance.'¹ Similarly, US Supreme Court Judge Lewis F. Powell Jr. once argued that, as no individual can obtain for themselves the information needed for the intelligent discharge of their political responsibilities, the press performs a crucial function in 'effecting the societal purpose of the First Amendment' of the US Constitution. The media does this by enabling the public to exert 'meaningful control over the political process.'²

This reflects both the self-image of the mainstream media and the image that it projects.

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In contrast, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky offer a Propaganda Model (PM) of the mainstream media, in which the 'free press' serves the societal purpose of 'protecting privilege from the threat of public understanding and participation.'³ This purpose is achieved through what Herman and Chomsky describe as 'brainwashing under freedom.'⁴ Herman and Chomsky accept that, in the US and UK, the state does not directly control the output of the media or academia or other channels of indoctrination. Thought control is not achieved through police action, torture, or terror. Chomsky explains:

A totalitarian state can be satisfied with lesser degrees of allegiance to required truths. It is sufficient that people obey; what they think is a secondary concern. But in a democratic political order, there is always the danger that independent thought might be translated into political action, so it is important to eliminate the threat at its root. Debate cannot be stilled, and indeed, in a properly functioning system of propaganda, it should not be, because it has a system-reinforcing character if constrained within proper bounds. What is essential is to set the bounds firmly. Controversy may rage as long as it adheres to the presuppositions that define the consensus of elites, and it should furthermore be encouraged within these bounds, thus helping to establish these doctrines as the very condition of thinkable thought while reinforcing the belief that freedom reigns.⁵

The PM suggests that media and the intellectual culture within the capitalist democracies are impacted in a multiplicity of ways by power..

For example, during the Vietnam War, the mainstream debate was between those liberals like Arthur Schlesinger who opposed the war, and those hawks like Joseph Alsop who predicted victory. Schlesinger believed the US was headed for defeat, adding: 'we all pray that Mr Alsop will be right.'⁶ Chomsky pointed out that Schlesinger's opposition to the war was tactical, not moral or legal. Alsop and Schlesinger would have been united in supporting the war, if it could be brought to a successful conclusion. Given that they were at opposite ends of 'responsible opinion,' Chomsky suggested that it was of great importance 'to note that each presents what can fairly be described as an apologia for American imperialism.'⁷ Both believed that the United States had the right to impose its will on others by force. In their debates, neither side questioned that presumption. Crucially, neither side stated that belief explicitly. It was assumed without argument. Questioning it became unthinkable.⁸

One possible test of the Propaganda Model is the ultimate national security issue: nuclear weapons. There has been fierce debate and controversy in Britain over many decades concerning Britain's possession and retention of nuclear weapons. The PM predicts that the very fierceness of the mainstream debate will have had a 'system-reinforcing character' because it kept itself within 'proper bounds.'

Chomsky has described the system of ideas that rules the propaganda machine as a 'state religion,' within which there are two basic principles. Principle 1: The Holy State⁹ is Good. Policymakers may make errors, they may act out of ignorance or stupidity, and occasionally a 'bad person' may gain power, but the policymaking establishment as a whole has noble intentions. Principle 2 follows from Principle 1: Any action taken by the Holy State, however violent, is defensive in nature.¹⁰

According to Principle 2, Britain's possession of nuclear weapons must be defensive in nature, and British nuclear weapons policy must be defensive in nature – whatever the evidence.

Chomsky once wrote: 'A useful rule of thumb is this: If you want to learn something about the propaganda system, have a close look at the critics and their tacit assumptions. These typically constitute the doctrines of the state religion.'¹¹ Mainstream critics practice what Chomsky calls 'feigned dissent,' appearing to be critical of established power, but in fact reinforcing it.¹²

Let's sample the outer edge of 'responsible opinion' in the recent nuclear weapons debate in Britain. In *The Guardian* in 2013, there was a harsh critique of the British nuclear weapons arsenal from perhaps the most anti-militarist of the paper's columnists of the time, Simon Jenkins. On 25 September 2013, Jenkins described the commitment to retaining British nuclear weapons as 'irrational, 'mad,' 'hare-brained,' 'hypocritical,' 'absurd,' and 'nonsense.' The former editor of *The Times* added that the British nuclear deterrent 'made no sense.' Jenkins explained the basis of his scorn: Britain's nuclear weapons 'bear no reference to any plausible threat to Britain that could possibly merit their use.'

Jenkins argued that nuclear weapons were 'an irrelevance' in the face of the enemies that Britain was likely to be facing on the battlefield – 'Enemies immune to nuclear weapons and heavy armour, enemies who hurl grenades and wield Kalashnikovs made in 1947.' This was a tactical critique rather than a principled one.¹³ Jenkins would have supported the retention of nuclear weapons if they had been 'relevant' in defeating the enemies Britain faced.

A few years earlier, the London *Independent* had staked out its position as the most critical voice in the British mainstream media on British nuclear weapons. On 2 May 2005, an editorial argued that, during the Cold War, 'nuclear weapons acted as a deterrent to aggression by other states,' but the collapse of the Soviet Union had now 'made the deterrence argument obsolete.'

A few days later, on 6 May 2005, one of the *Independent's* most left-wing columnists, Johann Hari, continued the disarmament campaign, suggesting that 'Britain is extremely unlikely to ever use our nuclear warheads.' The crucial question he posed was: if the al-Qa'eda terror network ever gained possession of nuclear weapons, 'what good would our deterrent be? Who would we nuke in response?' Deterrence is about nuclear retaliation against a nuclear weapon state. In the absence of a state actor, it loses meaning, according to Hari.

A few months later, on 6 November 2005, the *Independent's* understanding of nuclear policy was spelled out in a briefing entitled 'Nukes – do they still protect us?' Cole Moreton wrote: 'Trident is a deterrent... so that anyone who threatens this country knows they will suffer greatly in return.'

In these and other mainstream criticisms of the British nuclear arsenal, we find a coherent set of ideas:

- Nuclear weapons are for 'deterrence.'
- Deterrence is about retaliation.
- Nuclear retaliation is only rational or credible if it is against a hostile nuclear weapon state - to ward off invasion or nuclear attack by that state.

When we go back to the fierce debates about British nuclear weapons in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and through much of the 1980s, we discover that mainstream critics back then also accepted these assumptions as the basis for the discussion. Among them were former military leaders such as Field Marshal Lord Carver, who saw 'no military logic' in nuclear weapons.¹⁴ If we move from military figures to philosophers, we find a similarly disciplined discussion in *Dangers of Deterrence: Philosophers on Nuclear Strategy*, published in 1983. Editors Nigel Black and Kay Pole, for example, contribute 'A Sceptical Look at the Nuclear Debate' that does not look, sceptically or otherwise, at the underpinning assumptions of the debate around nuclear weapons. In this they are typical of much of the mainstream critique of nuclear weapons at the time. Black and Pole write:

Deterrence rests on three expectations: that the enemy will behave rationally, that the threat which daunts him now will continue to be the most daunting he could face, and that he will not find technical means by which he could counter-deter that threat. Now taking these in reverse order, there are reasons to believe that the USSR is actually finding ways to deter the launching of medium-range weapons at her from Western Europe...¹⁵

In other words, deterrence is about enemies who are nuclear weapon states. Elsewhere in the book, there are a few glancing references to challenging material (see below), but, taken as a whole, this volume reinforces the idea that deterrence is solely concerned with 'threatening nuclear weapon states with nuclear retaliation in order to prevent a nuclear attack on oneself.'

We can restate the ideas about deterrence uncovered above in the following way:

- 1) The British government possesses nuclear weapons solely in order to defend the territory of Britain from nuclear attack.

- 2) The British government possesses nuclear weapons solely in order to threaten that it can and will retaliate after a nuclear attack on the territory of the UK. In other words, British nuclear weapons are focused on hostile nuclear weapon states.
- 3) This credible threat of retaliation makes it much less likely that a hostile nuclear weapon state will launch a nuclear attack on the UK.
There is an underlying assumption here:
- 4) Britain has not actually used its nuclear weapons. They have lain idle as rainy-day insurance against a worst-case superpower crisis.

These four assumptions have been accepted by and embedded in the mainstream critique of British nuclear weapons. They make up the public idea of 'deterrence.' They are fundamental assumptions held by all parties to the mainstream debate about nuclear weapons in Britain. In this case, 'feigned dissent' involves making criticisms which still take these assumptions as the starting point for discussion, without ever even stating them explicitly, let alone testing them against the evidence.

When the critics hold the same unspoken bedrock judgements, they become the boundaries of thinkable thought.

When tested against the evidence, three of the four assumptions about deterrence are contradicted by the available facts.

This essay connects two kinds of 'unthinkable.' One is the kind of 'unthinkable' predicted by the Propaganda Model.

For the general public in Britain, the idea of using nuclear weapons is so deeply unacceptable, so taboo, that it is 'unthinkable' in a different way. Of course, two nuclear weapons were dropped by the United States on Japan in August 1945, killing somewhere in the region of 100,000 civilians, but the popular perception in Western societies is that, since Nagasaki, nuclear weapons have not been used.

This is a myth.

For some uncomfortable reality, we can turn to Daniel Ellsberg, once a high-level US military analyst, who in 1969 leaked the 'Pentagon Papers,' the top secret internal history of the Vietnam War. Ellsberg wrote in 1981:

The notion common to nearly all Americans that 'no nuclear weapons have been used since Nagasaki' is mistaken. It is not the case that U.S. nuclear weapons have simply piled up over the years – we have over 30,000 of them now, after dismantling many thousands of obsolete ones – unused and unusable, save for the single function of deterring their use against us by the Soviets. Again and again, generally in secret from the American public, U.S. nuclear weapons have been used, for quite different purposes: in the precise way that a gun is used when you point it at someone's head in a direct confrontation, whether or not the trigger is pulled.¹⁶

Ellsberg detailed a number of US nuclear threats, writing that ‘in the thirty-six years since Hiroshima, every president from Truman to Reagan, with the possible exception of Ford, has felt compelled to consider or direct serious preparations for possible imminent US initiation of tactical or strategic nuclear warfare, in the midst of an ongoing, intense, non-nuclear conflict or crisis.’¹⁷ These included US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’ secret offer to French Prime Minister Bidault of three tactical nuclear weapons in 1954 to relieve the French troops besieged by the Indochinese resistance at Dienbienphu, and US President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s secret directive to the US Joint Chiefs of Staff during the 1958 ‘Lebanon Crisis’ to prepare to use nuclear weapons, if necessary, to prevent an Iraqi move into the oilfields of Kuwait.¹⁸

There is now a considerable literature documenting US threats to use nuclear weapons, or consideration of nuclear use as a live policy option, in a range of crises. The literature around ‘nuclear diplomacy’ is not restricted to those critical of the nuclear arms race.¹⁹ The website of the Office of the Historian of the US State Department contains this paragraph in its ‘Milestones in History’ series:

Atomic diplomacy refers to attempts to use the threat of nuclear warfare to achieve diplomatic goals. After the first successful test of the atomic bomb in 1945, officials immediately considered the potential non-military benefits that could be derived from the American nuclear monopoly. In the years that followed, there were several occasions in which government officials used or considered atomic diplomacy.²⁰

Some of these ‘occasions’ are then spelled out involving actual US nuclear threats or serious presidential consideration of what is referred to as ‘nuclear coercion.’ The examples given are: the Berlin Blockade of 1948–49 (when B-29 atomic bombers were deployed threateningly); the Korean War (there were several ‘occasions,’ including the deployment of nuclear B-29s); and the Vietnam War (when ‘President Nixon briefly considered using the threat of the bomb to help bring about an end to the war in Vietnam’).

So the use of nuclear weapons as a means of coercion, the threatened use of nuclear weapons, has not been ‘unthinkable’ for the US government.

It may be worth mentioning that all the examples mentioned by the State Department historians involved threatening non-nuclear weapon states: USSR in 1948–49; North Korea and China in 1950, 1951 and 1953; and North Vietnam in 1969. The Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb in August 1949, three months after it abandoned the Berlin blockade. China’s first nuclear test was in October 1964, over a decade after the Korean War incidents. North Korea did not achieve nuclear weapon status until 2006. North Vietnam never developed or acquired a nuclear weapon.

If the use of nuclear weapons is generally ‘unthinkable,’ the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states must be even more ‘unthinkable’ for the public.

When we turn to the British record, we find that the British government has used its nuclear weapons repeatedly in just the ways described.

For example, Iraq has been threatened with British nuclear weapons on at least four occasions.

In 1961, Britain manufactured a crisis in the Persian Gulf to send the message that it intended to remain a power in the region despite its military withdrawal. As part of a huge military deployment aimed at threatening Iraq, nuclear-capable Scimitar aircraft were sent to the Gulf on board a British aircraft carrier,²¹ and strategic nuclear bombers were placed on alert in Malta.²² British intelligence insider Anthony Verrier later described the incident as an ‘act of deterrence, in which the nuclear weapons system played a central, concealed role... directed against [Egyptian president Gamal Abdel] Nasser and, by extension, Russian ambitions in Arabia.’²³

Thirty years later, nuclear weapons formed part of the US and British military intervention against Iraq. On 10 August 1990, just eight days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and months before British forces deployed in strength for the assault in January, a British tabloid newspaper, the *Daily Star*, reported: ‘Whitehall sources made it clear that the multinational forces would be ready to hit back with every means at their disposal... [including] using tactical nuclear weapons against [Iraqi] troops and tanks on the battlefield.’ On 30 September 1990, the *Observer* reported (on its front page) a warning from a senior British army officer with 7th Armoured Brigade: if there were Iraqi chemical attacks, British forces would ‘retaliate with battlefield nuclear forces.’ On 26 October 1990, the *Daily Mail* reported: ‘One senior minister said, “If we were prepared to use tactical nuclear weapons against the Russians, I can’t see why we shouldn’t be prepared to use them against Iraq.”’ On 13 November 1990, the senior *Guardian* journalist, Hugo Young, wrote that he had heard a minister say that the war against Iraq might have to be ended with ‘tactical nukes.’

British nuclear threats were not restricted to anonymous leaks. On 15 January 1991, the British Prime Minister, John Major told the House of Commons that he did not ‘envisage needing to use the sanction’ of nuclear weapons against Iraq.²⁴ Major did not rule out the use of British nuclear weapons as unthinkable against a non-nuclear weapon state. His choice of words indicated that it was a live policy option. *The Guardian* carried this report of a statement by the British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, on 4 February 1991: ‘Mr. Hurd said that if Iraq responded to an allied land assault by using chemical weapons, President Saddam [Hussein] would be certain to provoke a massive response – language the U.S. and Britain employ to leave open the option of using chemical or nuclear weapons.’

Those confrontations took place under Conservative governments.

In February 1998, in the context of a crisis over UN weapons inspections, a Labour Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, told the House of Commons that if the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein were to use chemical or biological weapons in retaliation for a US-UK assault, ‘he should be in no doubt that, if he were to do

so, there would be a proportionate response.²⁵ In other words, Cook threatened that Britain or the US would use weapons of mass destruction, either nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

In the run-up to the 2003 attack on Iraq, there were more nuclear threats from the Labour administration. British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon told the House of Commons Defence Select Committee, on 20 March 2002, that states like Iraq 'can be absolutely confident that in the right conditions we would be willing to use our nuclear weapons.'²⁶ On 24 March 2002, Hoon appeared on ITV's *Jonathan Dimbleby* show and insisted that the government 'reserved the right' to use nuclear weapons if Britain or British troops were threatened by chemical or biological weapons.²⁷ When asked about these nuclear threats in a House of Commons debate on 29 April 2002, Hoon said: 'ultimately, and in conditions of extreme self-defence, nuclear weapons would have to be used.'²⁸ Hoon refused to clarify what he meant by these words.

Iraq is not the only country to have been menaced by British nuclear weapons. Until 1969, the British strategic nuclear force was composed of 'V-bombers' (Valiant, Vulcan and Victor aircraft). In the 1950s and 1960s, V-bombers made hundreds of flights not just around the British Isles but around the British Empire. They were not restricted to defending the home territory from Soviet invasion. For example, in 1962, V-bombers attended independence ceremonies in Uganda and Jamaica.²⁹ Three Victors were sent to Jamaica again in 1966 (by a Labour government this time). They were there for 'more than decorative purposes,' according to Andrew Brookes, historian of the V-bomber force and himself a former Vulcan pilot.³⁰

According to Brookes, the strategic nuclear Vulcans at RAF Waddington were committed in 1963 to 'dealing with conventional trouble in the Middle East,' while their sister Victors in Cottesmore and Honington 'looked after the Far East.'³¹

The deployment of V-bombers to the Middle East or to East Asia amounted to nuclear intimidation, whether or not they carried nuclear weapons on any particular mission, because they were strategic nuclear bombers. There is a parallel with the deployment of US nuclear B-29s during the Berlin Blockade or the Korean War.

To take another example, V-bombers from Bomber Command were sent out to Singapore in December 1963, after the 'Confrontation' with Indonesia had begun. Brookes, the RAF historian, reports that the bombers were retained in the country beyond their normal term, 'positioned to be seen as ready to eliminate Indonesia Air Force capabilities if they launched air attacks.'³² Brookes does not say whether this 'elimination' was to be conventional or nuclear in nature. British Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee later commented of the nuclear-capable Victors: 'Their potential was well known to Indonesia and their presence did not go unnoticed.' Lee added: 'the knowledge of RAF strength and competence created a wholesome respect among Indonesia's leaders, and the deterrent effect of RAF air defence fighters, light bombers and V-bombers on detachment from Bomber Command was absolute.'³³

We now know that when the first V-bombers went out to RAF Tengah in Singapore at the end of 1963, there was a storage unit there for 48 Red Beard nuclear bombs, and the squadron soon began low-altitude nuclear bombing exercises, no doubt signalling British intentions to Indonesia.³⁴

So we see that the British state has repeatedly used nuclear weapons (under both Labour and Conservative administrations) ‘in the precise way that a gun is used when you point it at someone’s head in a direct confrontation, whether or not the trigger is pulled.’

From the threats against Iraq, a non-nuclear weapon state in 1961, 1991, 1998 and 2003; from the strategic nuclear bomber deployments right across the British Empire; from the V-bomber commitments to the Middle East and East Asia (all entirely non-nuclear weapon states in 1963); and from the intimidation of Indonesia in the mid-1960s, we learn the true meaning of ‘deterrence.’

The true meaning of ‘deterrence’ is: creating a ‘wholesome respect’ among the natives in far-off lands that Britain wishes to dominate; preventing non-nuclear weapon states from using weapons or launching attacks that might even up the military odds; if necessary, finishing off a non-nuclear weapon state too tough to defeat by conventional means.

There is a remarkable consistency across the decades in the attitude that it is entirely acceptable to use British nuclear weapons to intimidate and coerce other states, particularly non-nuclear weapon states.

How is it that this material, all readily available as part of the public record, does not form part of the discussion around nuclear weapons? Somehow, these facts, and their implications, have not been expressed in the mainstream debate about nuclear weapons. In fact, they cannot be expressed, and they cannot be thought about. This history is ‘unthinkable.’

If we return to the four underlying assumptions of what ‘deterrence’ means, we discover from this self-censored history that:

- 1) British nuclear weapons have not been solely focused on defending the territory of the UK. From the very beginning, they have not been just about defence, or just about the UK. From the 1950s, British nuclear weapons have been used to intimidate countries around the world.
- 2) British nuclear weapons have not just been a response to, and aimed at, nuclear weapon states. British nuclear weapons have often been used to menace non-nuclear weapon states. In other words, British nuclear weapons have not just been about nuclear retaliation, they have also been about nuclear intimidation and coercion.
- 3) It is not true that Britain has not used its nuclear weapons, and that they have lain idle as rainy-day insurance against a superpower crisis. Britain *has* used its nuclear weapons. It has often used them to threaten other countries during direct confrontations.

This has been part of British nuclear policy since the beginning.³⁵ All of this is a matter of public record, and yet these important facts and statements did not enter or influence the fierce debates about British nuclear weapons possession in the 1950s, 1960s and 1980s, or in the period since the replacement of the Trident nuclear weapons system came onto the agenda. The evidence of British nuclear threats against non-nuclear weapon states did not disturb the very narrow notion of ‘deterrence’ that was debated so passionately.

Returning to *Dangers of Deterrence*, mentioned above, Jeff McMahan (then a member of CND) made a relevant contribution entitled ‘Nuclear Blackmail’ (today it might be called ‘Nuclear Extortion’ to avoid a racist undertone). McMahan ruled out the risk of nuclear coercion of a non-nuclear weapon state in peacetime as ‘largely unreal.’ ‘Even in times of open military conflict,’ he went on, ‘nuclear threats against non-nuclear countries may not be a serious option for nuclear-armed countries.’ McMahan’s ‘most realistic scenario’ would be one in which a nuclear weapon state begins an aggressive war against a non-nuclear weapon state and got ‘bogged down.’ The aggressor may then, ‘in desperation, resort to nuclear threats in an attempt to cut [her or] his losses and gain a favourable settlement.’³⁶ Quite similar to the October–November 1990 threats against Iraq.

One curious aspect of McMahan’s abstract and theoretical discussion of this topic is that, when writing his chapter, he was aware of Daniel Ellsberg’s list of actual nuclear threats. McMahan does not refer to Ellsberg’s list anywhere in the main body of the essay, but he does in three footnotes. One sentence refers vaguely to ‘the various nuclear threats which successive US governments have made since 1945.’ The reference (footnote 4) is to Ellsberg’s list of historical cases.³⁷ McMahan does not discuss any of the history Ellsberg sets out, but he does consider two cases not listed by Ellsberg: the Hiroshima–Nagasaki bombings, and US nuclear threats against the USSR (a nuclear weapon state) during the Arab–Israeli War of 1973.

This is an excellent demonstration of the way the propaganda system works, according to the Propaganda Model. McMahan consciously suppressed shocking information critical to the topic he had decided to address – nuclear coercion of non-nuclear weapon states. He did so, we can presume, not because he was ordered to do so by the state or some other authority, but because of an internalised sense of the ‘right’ way to discuss this topic. This is a case of voluntary self-censorship rather than authoritarian censorship – ‘brainwashing under freedom.’ McMahan suppressed the information (Ellsberg’s list of US nuclear threats) not by pretending it did not exist, but by treating it as something unworthy, or barely worthy, of attention. This is part of a larger pattern in the mainstream media and academia. Chomsky explains that:

the enormous amount of material that is produced in the media and books makes it possible for a really assiduous and committed researcher to gain a fair picture of the real world by cutting through the mass of misrepresentation and fraud to the nuggets hidden within.³⁸

Herman and Chomsky expand:

That a careful reader, looking for a fact can sometimes find it, with diligence and a skeptical eye, tells us nothing about whether that fact received the attention and context it deserved, whether it was intelligible to most readers, or whether it was effectively distorted or suppressed.³⁹

You may have noticed that in the section on the 1991 nuclear threats against Iraq, there were quotes from a number of British newspapers. Herman and Chomsky comment:

That the media provide some information about an issue... proves absolutely nothing about the adequacy or accuracy of media coverage. The media do in fact suppress a great deal of information, but even more important is the way they present a particular fact – its placement, tone, and frequency of repetition – and the framework of analysis in which it is placed.⁴⁰

Let's take each of these four propaganda devices in turn, in relation to McMahan's chapter: placement, tone, frequency of repetition, and framework of analysis.

Placement: McMahan, in this case, knew of Daniel Ellsberg's list of US nuclear threats and its relevance to his topic, but decided not to give any details of the list, and placed his direct references to Ellsberg's list (which tended to contradict his argument) in the least-visible section of his essay, the footnotes.

Tone and frequency of repetition: there are, in total, three (plain, factual) sentences directly mentioning Ellsberg's list - in three separate footnotes. In the main text, there are two indirect references to Ellsberg's list, separated by 23 pages. We have already noted the first (two-sentence) reference to the list, which is brief and offhand. The other (even more indirect) reference to Ellsberg's list comes in the final paragraph, which poses a number of questions that need to be investigated regarding 'those [unspecified] nuclear threats which have been made.'⁴¹ The tone is flat, academic, and questioning, unexcited.

Framework of analysis: The overall picture within which these references appear is fairly summed up by the final words of the chapter: 'the claim that the possibility of nuclear blackmail poses a serious threat to non-nuclear countries should be treated with scepticism.'⁴²

When we examine the newspaper reports (some of them front-page stories) about the British nuclear threats against Iraq in 1990–1, the most common features are: lack of repetition of the disturbing reports (almost immediately, it's as if they never surfaced) and a consistent framework of analysis for reporting both Iraq and nuclear weapons in which British nuclear threats against a

non-nuclear weapon state are inconceivable and unthinkable. So the facts are sometimes reported, sometimes prominently, but they disappear as soon as they appear.

The PM's predictions of media performance are borne out by the behaviour of recent mainstream critics of nuclear weapons, and by the way in which the long history of British nuclear threats has been edited out of history in the long, often intense debate about nuclear weapons. Mainstream criticisms of British nuclear weapons have colluded with the suppression of important relevant history and have created a narrow, irrelevant definition of 'nuclear deterrence.' By focusing on abstract questions raised by possible future retaliation, the mainstream critics have helped to divert attention from the concrete reality of actual, often recent, nuclear intimidation by the British state.

Notes and Bibliography

- ¹ 'The Guardian view on section 40: muzzling journalism,' *Guardian*, 10 January 2017.
- ² Justice Powell, dissenting opinion, No. 73-1265 *Saxbe v. Washington Post Co.*, 417 U.S. 843 (1974).
- ³ Noam Chomsky (1989), *Necessary Illusions*, London, Pluto, p. 14.
- ⁴ Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman (1979), *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, Montréal, Black Rose Books, pp. 66–83.
- ⁵ Chomsky (1989), *Necessary Illusions*, 48.
- ⁶ Arthur Schlesinger (1967), *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy 1941–1966*, Boston, MA, Houghton Mifflin Company, p. 57. Cited in Noam Chomsky (1969), *American Power and the New Mandarins*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, p. 240.
- ⁷ Noam Chomsky (1970), letter, *Listener*, 15 January, 88.
- ⁸ Schlesinger's response to Chomsky demonstrated his inability to escape the limits of the thinkable, as Chomsky observed in a subsequent letter. *Listener*, 29 January 1970, 150; *Listener*, 19 February 1970, 252.
- ⁹ Generally, someone's Holy State is the nation-state to which they belong as a citizen. Sometimes it is a foreign nation-state, such as the Soviet Union for Communists in times past, or Israel for what are called 'supporters of Israel.' Chomsky wrote in 1983: 'To a remarkable extent, articulate opinion and attitudes in the U.S. have been dominated by people who describe themselves as "supporters of Israel", a term that I will also adopt, though with much reluctance, since I think they should more properly be called "supporters of the moral degeneration and ultimate destruction of Israel", and not Israel alone.' Noam Chomsky (rev.ed.1999 [1983]), *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*, London, Pluto Press, p. 40.

- ¹⁰ “The aggressive and militant actions of every state are invariably justified on grounds of “defense”. Thus Hitler’s aggression in Eastern Europe was justified as defense against “a dagger pointed at the heart of Germany” (Czechoslovakia), against the violence and aggressiveness of the Poles, against the encirclement of the imperialist powers that sought to strangle Germany; and his invasion of the Low Countries and France was also “defensive”, a response to the hostile acts of France and England, bent on Germany’s destruction. If we had records, we would probably discover that Attila the Hun was acting in self-defense. Since state actions are always justified in terms of defense, we learn nothing when we hear that certain specific actions are so justified except that we are listening to the spokesperson for some state; but that we already knew.’ Noam Chomsky (1987), *On Power and Ideology: The Managua Lectures*, Boston MA, South End Press, p. 99.
- ¹¹ Noam Chomsky (1988), *The Chomsky Reader*, James Peck (ed.), London, Serpents Tail, p. 126.
- ¹² Noam Chomsky (1988), *Language and Politics*, C.P. Otero (ed.), Montréal: Black Rose Books, p. 376.
- ¹³ Jenkins had a secondary criticism: ‘Meanwhile their possession by Britain is a blatant invitation to nuclear proliferation, making opposition to an Iranian bomb hypocritical.’ This is also a tactical rather than a principled critique.
- ¹⁴ Field Marshal Lord Carver was a member of the Canberra Commission, set up by the Australian government in 1995, which also included US General Lee Butler, responsible until 1994 for all US strategic nuclear forces. A later US equivalent was the Nuclear Security Project, formed in 2007 by former US Secretary of State George P. Shultz, former US Secretary of Defence William J. Perry, former US Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and former US Senator Sam Nunn. Both initiatives called for a world without nuclear weapons, on the basis of thoroughly establishment political assumptions.
- ¹⁵ Nigel Black and Kay Pole (1983), ‘Introduction: A Sceptical Look at the Nuclear Debate,’ in *Dangers of Deterrence: Philosophers on Nuclear Strategy*, ed. Nigel Black and Kay Pole, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 8.
- ¹⁶ Daniel Ellsberg (1981), ‘Introduction,’ in E.P. Thompson and Dan Smith, (eds.), *Protest and Survive* (New York: Monthly Review Press).
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Ellsberg cites these references for the Dienbienphu claim: Prime Minister Bidault in the film *Hearts and Minds*, and in Roscoe Drummond and Gaston Coblentz (1960), *Duel at the Brink*, New York, Doubleday, pp. 121–22; Richard Nixon (1978), *RN*, New York: Grosset & Dunlap, pp. 150–55. For Lebanon, Ellsberg cites Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan (1978), *Force Without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution, p. 238, p. 256.

- ¹⁹ For an early mainstream study, see Blechman and Kaplan, *Force Without War*. Three book-length works are: Joseph Gerson (1986), ed., *The Deadly Connection: Nuclear War and U.S. Intervention* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers); Michio Kaku and Daniel Axelrod (1987), *To Win A Nuclear War: The Pentagon's Secret War Plans* (Boston, MA: South End Press); and Joseph Gerson (2007), *Empire and the Bomb: How the U.S. Uses Nuclear Weapons to Dominate the World* (London: Pluto Press).
- ²⁰ 'Atomic Diplomacy,' Office of the Historian, U.S. State Department, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/atomic>, accessed 3 July 2017.
- ²¹ Adel Darwish and Gregory Alexander (1991), *Unholy Babylon: The Secret History of Saddam's War*, London, Gollancz, 1991, p. 33.
- ²² Andrew Brookes (1982), *Force V: The History of Britain's Airborne Deterrent*, London, Jane's, p. 141.
- ²³ Anthony Verrier (1983), *Through the Looking Glass: British Foreign Policy in an Age of Illusions*, London, Jonathan Cape, p. 171. 'Russian ambitions in Arabia' is code for the forces of independent Arab nationalism generally, including in Iraq.
- ²⁴ HC Deb (1990–91) 183 col. 726.
- ²⁵ HC Deb (1997–98) 306 col. 905.
- ²⁶ 'UK "prepared to use nuclear weapons"', BBC News online, 20 March 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/1883258.stm, accessed 5 July 2017.
- ²⁷ Richard Norton-Taylor (2002), 'Bush's nuke bandwagon,' *Guardian*, 27 March.
- ²⁸ HC Deb (2001–02) 384 col. 665.
- ²⁹ UK Ministry of Defence (1963), *Statement on Defence 1963*, London, HMSO, para. 59.
- ³⁰ Brookes, *Force V*, 140.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, 140.
- ³² *Ibid*, 138.
- ³³ David Lee (1984), *Eastward: A History of the RAF in the Far East, 1945–70*, London, HMSO, p. 213.
- ³⁴ Tom Rhodes (2000), 'Britain Kept Secret Nuclear Weapons In Singapore & Cyprus,' *Sunday Times*, 31 December.
- ³⁵ For a brief discussion of the relevant nuclear doctrine, see Milan Rai (1995, rev. ed.), *Tactical Trident: The Riskind Doctrine and the Third World* (London: Drava Papers).
- ³⁶ Jeff McMahan (1983), 'Nuclear Blackmail,' in *Dangers of Deterrence: Philosophers on Nuclear Strategy*, Nigel Black and Kay Pole (eds.), London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 94–97 *passim*.
- ³⁷ Strictly speaking, the footnote is connected to the very next sentence, which waters the statement down to: 'U.S. governments have *apparently* made use of nuclear threats on several occasions' (emphasis added). McMahan (1983), 'Nuclear Blackmail,' 87.

- ³⁸ Noam Chomsky (1982), *Towards a New Cold War: Essays on the Current Crisis and How We Got There*, London, Sinclair Browne), p. 14.
- ³⁹ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988), 'Propaganda Mill: The Media Churn Out the "Official Line"', *The Progressive*, June 1988, 15.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 15.
- ⁴¹ McMahan, 'Nuclear Blackmail,' 110.
- ⁴² *Ibid*, 110.

