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DEFENSE OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND OFFICE OF SECURITY REVIEW

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Interview with Lt. Gen. Sir Frederick Morgan
Jun 21, 2017

by

Alfred Goldberg

October 18, 1962

Q. To what extent did the experience of World War II influence the strategic thinking of the British military after World War II?

A. The strategic problem was an entirely new one. It was anti-Russian.

We had known for a year or two before the end of the war how the balance was moving. Towards the end of the war a party of us at SHAEF were thinking of twisting the German Army around against Russia.

Q. What was the attitude of the individual services towards the strategic bombardment experience of World War II? How did the atomic bomb affect British strategic thinking after World War II?

A. Air bombardment was largely a matter of propaganda during the war, for there was no time to analyze and evaluate then. Since then there have been surveys and discussions. We were horrified by the results of air bombardment of Germany. We had trouble trying to get Bert Harris to come take a look at it. He reckoned that he had destroyed 65 German cities. Germany was getting every night in 1944-45 what London got during the whole war. ~~We~~^{He} thought that air bombardment was everything. There were still reminders of the struggle between Ike and the bomber barons. We were all prepared to accept the heavy bomber as a natural precursor to any form of offensive action. We had learned that one does not win wars by sitting around. Offensive action is an unavoidable ingredient of victorious warfare. A dampener was the early reporting of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We suffered severely from the journalistic handling of these episodes. The whole picture was very much overdrawn. Again, after a few years came the development of the thermonuclear weapons and by then we had run out of superlatives.

- Q. In the years since World War II have the British military services generally been able to agree on a single strategic concept to guide their planning and programming.
- A. I should imagine not. One of our problems was changing gear down from being a leading power. That was one of the main problems that we had to face, together with the actual physical reduction of forces and the search for economy. We had the brush fires during these years and then came Suez, which was the most important expose of our position. It was mostly a political failure, but you really cannot separate the military and the political.
- Q. To what extent have the services been influenced by financial considerations in their strategic planning and thinking? In their programming?
- A. I am quite certain that they always have. It used to horrify me when a chap in uniform would stand up and say that we cannot afford this or that. I considered this almost treasonable because cost was none of his business. The right answer to any problem, from a certain viewpoint, was one that cost nothing. The answer cannot fail to be that the services have been greatly influenced by cost considerations in their strategic planning and thinking. The strategic planners themselves have been affected because they knew they would be cut down, and that knowledge could not help affecting their thinking while drawing up their plans.
- Q. What are the basic British reasons for creating and maintaining a nuclear deterrent force? Has it been a valid one?
- A. This is a political business to start with. How far can we trust and assume that the U.S. will be on our side in perpetuity, and how long

can we go on expecting the U.S. to fight for us regardless of the kind of government we have here. Also, there is the feeling that the two points of view must always be different to some extent--we do have different points of view on a lot of important matters. Could we always trust a combined program to cover our interests. Then there is always the good old question of the nuclear club. We paid our entrance fee by acquiring a few dozen bombs. This is the same feeling that is motivating De Gaulle and, for that matter, Mao Tse Tung on the other side.

The British nuclear deterrent has been valid in the past, but whether it still is I don't know. It is of second or third rate utility compared with your submarines. Here I am thinking only in terms of the airborne weapon, not missiles.

- Q. Is it desirable and feasible for the European Community to develop an integrated nuclear deterrent force? Is it desirable for the U.K. to help create it and be a part of it?
- A. As of today definitely no. Look at what happened to the European Defence Community. It does not have a European force. A united Europe just doesn't exist for us to think of as a community. I am not in favor of the United Kingdom becoming a part of the European nuclear forces. How can one get a real European force--you have the problem of the individual soldier whose loyalty is to his country, not to some federation or grouping of countries.
- Q. How great a role has the nuclear arms problem played in frustrating development of a powerful NATO military capability?

- A. I wonder if it did, but it must have. The European countries were so used to hiding behind us and the United States that the more free ride they could get the better it seemed to them. But don't minimize the French effort either. As of today the French have the best army in Europe.
- Q. Has there been serious doubt among military leaders in the U.K. and in the other NATO countries as to the willingness of the United States to use its nuclear deterrent for the defense of Western Europe?
- A. I would say no. The apprehension is the other way if anything, of the U.S. lightheartedly dropping bombs over Europe. As long as your troops remain in Europe I think that is a great stabilizing influence.
- Q. What effect did Suez have on the White Paper of April 4, 1957, on defence?
- A. I don't know that it did. I don't know how much Suez was written off as a military failure and how much political. The great thing about the Sandys plan was its emphasis on economy of manpower. The paper itself was entirely falsely based. We have had the experience of putting air-power in first and we found that it just didn't work. It comes back to the same thing--you cannot win a war without taking the offensive and you must make it stick by occupying territory. Whatever the preliminaries, in the end it is the Army, -the infantry-, that must go in and win the battle. For my part, I don't think that the White Paper was based on true strategic considerations--it was based on economy and manpower considerations.
- Q. Is it desirable to maintain larger conventional war forces than the U.S. and NATO have maintained heretofore? Should more emphasis be placed on

tactical air even at the expense of the nuclear strategic deterrent?

- A. As things stand today, I am in favor of larger conventional forces. Without this buildup the West must be prepared to take the responsibility of being the first to use nuclear weapons. With inferior conventional forces we could be forced to escalate by using tactical nuclear weapons. There are still doubts regarding the efficacy of nuclear weapons as mankillers in the open field. ~~We should increase conventional forces we could be forced to escalate by using tactical nuclear weapons. There are still doubts regarding the efficacy of nuclear weapons as mankillers in the open field.~~ We should increase conventional war forces, both U.S. and NATO, as is being done, because of our reluctance to invite the use of nuclear weapons. As for increasing tactical air forces at the expense of the strategic deterrent, I don't know that it would be necessary. Normally speaking, one would not do it, but the nuclear business is of such a nature that you reach a saturation point. We are cutting down already.

(In a discussion of the OVERLORD operation of 1944, General Morgan pointed out that one of the American motivations for the invasion was the need to provide an adequate mission for the large U.S. Army that had been built up. The invasion of western Europe was necessary to the U.S. Army.
