

CLEARANCE REQUEST FOR PUBLIC RELEASE OF DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE INFORMATION

(See Instructions on back.)

(This form is to be used in requesting review and clearance of DoD information proposed for public release in accordance with DoDD 5230.09.)

TO: (See Note) Chief, Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review, 1155 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301-1155

Note: Regular mail address shown above. For drop-off/next day delivery, use:
Room 2A534, 1155 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301-1155

1. DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION

a. TYPE Oral History	b. TITLE SLESSOR, John - 12121962
c. PAGE COUNT 7	d. SUBJECT AREA British Nuclear Program

2. AUTHOR/SPEAKER

a. NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) Slessor, John	b. RANK	c. TITLE
d. OFFICE	e. AGENCY	

3. PRESENTATION/PUBLICATION DATA (Date, Place, Event)
December 12, 1962, Oral History Interview

REVIEWED BY DOD 13

DEFENSE OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND OFFICE OF SECURITY REVIEW

NO CLASSIFIED INFORMATION FOUND

Jun 21, 2017

4. POINT OF CONTACT

a. NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) Carpenter, Ryan	b. TELEPHONE NO. (Include Area Code) 703-697-3306
--	--

5. PRIOR COORDINATION

a. NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial)	b. OFFICE/AGENCY	c. TELEPHONE NO. (Include Area Code)

6. REMARKS

7. RECOMMENDATION OF SUBMITTING OFFICE/AGENCY

a. THE ATTACHED MATERIAL HAS DEPARTMENT/OFFICE/AGENCY APPROVAL FOR PUBLIC RELEASE (qualifications, if any, are indicated in Remarks section) AND CLEARANCE FOR OPEN PUBLICATION IS RECOMMENDED UNDER PROVISIONS OF DODD 5230.09. I AM A GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE (civilian or military), AND NOT A CONTRACTOR, AUTHORIZED TO MAKE THIS RECOMMENDATION FOR RELEASE ON BEHALF OF:

Dr. Erin Mahan, OSD Chief Historian

b. CLEARANCE IS REQUESTED BY 20170601 (YYYYMMDD).

c. NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) Carpenter, Ryan	d. TITLE Historian
e. OFFICE OSD Historical	f. AGENCY WHS

g. SIGNATURE
CARPENTER.RYAN.PAUL.139779370
9

Digitally signed by CARPENTER.RYAN.PAUL.1397793709
DN: c=US, o=U.S. Government, ou=DoD, ou=PKI, ou=WHS,
cn=CARPENTER.RYAN.PAUL.1397793709
Date: 2017.05.11 09:39:58 -04'00'

h. DATE SIGNED (YYYYMMDD)
20170511

DEFENSE OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND OFFICE OF SECURITY REVIEW

NO CLASSIFIED INFORMATION FOUND

Interview with Jun 21, 2017

Marshal of the R.A.F. Sir John Slessor

by Alfred Goldberg

December 12, 1962

- Q. What was the effect of World War II experiences --especially the strategic bombardment experience-- and the atomic bomb on British strategic thinking after the war?
- A. The whole of World War II became out of date with the coming of the atomic bomb, the jet, and the missile. There are not really many strategic lessons of World War II or before; really not any before MIKESHOT. I am thinking of the conception of prolonged global war, which seems to be completely out of date. As long as you were talking even about the Hiroshima bomb it was possible to think of prolonged war. Even if all nuclear weapons were abolished we wouldn't have long wars, because it would not be long before nuclears were reintroduced. This concept was recognized in the Commonwealth Prime Ministers agreed pronouncement on disarmament.
- Q. In the years since World War II have the British military services generally agreed on a single strategic concept to guide their planning and programming?
- A. I don't think they have been able to agree during the last ten years. That's why there has been a good deal of confusion of thought. I put it down largely to the fault of the Chiefs of Staff. They have never really got together as they did in my day: We got together and we did not start with general agreement. We went off by ourselves for two or three weeks and sat around all night if necessary

to reach agreement. Then we presented it to the Government. Since then the COS have not succeeded in doing this and they have had decisions imposed on them from the top. Bill Slim and I and the Chief of the Naval Staff used to hammer it out ourselves with the aid of a small staff.

One fundamental issue since the war has been the extent to which we should depend on the so-called independent deterrent. I think that the running down of the Army in the Sandys era was a great mistake. I don't think we have really been clear on what kind of war we are deterring. Use of this word "deterrent" has been confusing. It means different things to different people. Does any kind of independent strategy make sense? I am something of a fanatic on the Atlantic Community. I am opposed to an independent nuclear deterrent for us or anybody else. This awful word credibility! Dependence purely on the U. S. strategic deterrent (SAC) is not credible without the other part of NATO --in "Shield" forces of SHAPE. How much more incredible is it that France or the United Kingdom would use nuclear weapons against Russia if they didn't have the support of the United States. I have never had the slightest fear that Russia had the slightest intention of starting a war, as long as the nuclear deterrents exist.

- Q. What were the basic motivations for the creation and maintenance of a British nuclear deterrent force?
- A. I think that our nuclear deterrent is totally different in concept and origins from the French force de frappe. Bomber Command has been a major element in British defence policy for years. It had

its origins in 1916. Even before World War II it was a major thing. After the fall of France the Joint Planners and the Chiefs of Staff said that we must continue the development of the bomber forces. Our achievement was great. After the war it never occurred to anybody that we shouldn't have a bomber command. The coming of the jet made the wartime planes obsolete. We carried on with an interim force for a few years and then developed the V-bombers and our own atomic weapons. There was no conscious resolve to create an independent nuclear deterrent. The Chiefs of Staff just took it for granted that we should develop the air striking force. This is all quite different from the French situation. They have no bomber tradition. This is a conscious political decision by the French. When Churchill came back into office in 1951 he found that the program for a nuclear force was in progress and that it had received a great boost from the Korean War --as did everything else. I had quite a time convincing him that it could be done. I had a difficult time in 1950 because everyone was saying that the Americans didn't consult us. I told them to wait until we had our own force. We have made a terrific mental adjustment here in the United Kingdom. It has been terribly hard. I don't want to throw Bomber Command away. I want to make it the core of a NATO strike force, not a NATO deterrent force.

- Q. Is it desirable and feasible for NATO or the European Community to develop and maintain a nuclear deterrent force?
- A. I think that the trouble is that the people in office now have not faced up to what this European nuclear striking force is intended for.

They think of it as a deterrent. If this is in the sense of a strategic force to strike at Russia this doesn't make sense. SAC is quite big enough for this. What is badly wanted is a strike force for intervention in the battle --for interdiction and against airfields, communications, etc. Polaris and IRBM's can't do this very well. You want a bomber force for this. For an interim period, the V-bomber force is very good for this purpose. I want it to stay well back, not be jammed up onto the Continent. I am not unduly concerned about Skybolt as far as the RAF is concerned. I think that we can get at the kinds of targets that SHAPE is concerned about. It is not a question of hitting 2000 miles into Russia, but rather into the satellites where there is not an as highly organized opposition. We have these V-bombers and can use them. They have extremely good ECM and are superior to fighter-bombers for this job. If we didn't already have this expert force I wouldn't suggest building one for this purpose. This force should be used by SACEUR, perhaps with an Air C-in-C under him. I want a covering force to deal with the pause, backed up by a smothering force with only battlefield nuclears. And behind that the long-range force stationed outside Germany.

Q. Has the nuclear arms problem played an important part in frustrating development of a powerful NATO conventional war capability?

A. I think that it was inevitable. A lot of the countries feel that when it comes to the rub, the American strategic force will be the deciding factor. Why spend so much money? I think that this was part of the cause for the rundown of the British Army. One of the troubles is the business of hard currency. American industry really

makes it very difficult for us to ease our economic problems by having a share in the production of equipment for NATO. Take the F-104 for instance. When it was a matter of equipping German naval air, even though the Germans showed interest in our Buccaneer we didn't have a hope. Lockheed put the pressure on. Instead of our getting a share of the contracts for NATO reequipment, we have lost out. The Americans say that the NATO countries must help themselves, but you get all of the contracts for reequipment. I don't say we are not partly to blame --we are bad salesmen but when you give a present of 100 F-104's to start with, how can we compete in the race for rearmament of NATO countries.

- Q. In weighing the factors that influence strategic thinking and policy, what weight would you give to technology in the post World War II period?
- A. Surely tremendous weight. It is almost impossible to overstate its influence. When you move into the satellite field, the whole thing is governed by it. I used to have arguments with Sir Henry Tizard. I used to tell him to stop telling me how to do my job, to stop trying to decide strategic matters. But I always attached extreme importance to the scientists in their own field. We in the RAF were among the first to use scientists properly. It is silly of M.P.'s to raise a howl when they find that something has cost a great deal of money and apparently nothing is coming of it. That is bound to happen in scientific research.

Q. What was the attitude of the military services towards the creation of the Ministry of Defence? Toward the Defence Staff?

A. I don't think that Ismay and Jacob ever visualized that the thing would go as far as it did. Something more than the small wartime secretariat is needed, but I think that it has been carried too far and is too big. I have always been opposed to a Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff as this defeats the object of the committee. It is merely another example of Parkinson's law --building up a big organization.

Q. To what extent have financial considerations come to affect the strategic thinking of the planners?

A. I think this is inevitable. A planner or a chief of staff who does not take into account practical realities of life is stupid. Finletter was angry with me after Lisbon in 1952 because I agreed only to a certain number of planes for NATO. I knew it was economically silly to ask for more, or even that amount. It is the duty of the chief of staff to state the minimum requirements and to warn of the consequences.

Q. Are you in favor of the buildup of larger conventional forces by the United States and NATO? Could the West match Russian conventional power?

A. Yes. I have always said we wanted thirty divisions. There is not the slightest doubt that it is possible. There is, however, a distinction between the possible and the practical. I have argued this with Dean Acheson. The practical problem for us is foreign currency -- £00 million a year across in exchange.

- Q. Do you think that the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe would lead to all-out use of nuclear weapons?
- A. I find it awfully hard to believe that it wouldn't. Anything more than limitedbattlefield weapons would cause a blow-up. Once you talk about attacking airfields etc. it is bound to blow up.