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## DEFENSE OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND OFFICE OF SECURITY REVIEW

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Interview With Jun 21, 2017

The Rt. Hon. John Strachey

by Alfred Goldberg

November 7, 1962

- Q. To what extent did the experience of World War II, especially strategic bombardment, shape the strategic thinking of the British military services after World War II? What was the influence of the atomic bomb on British strategic thinking after World War II?
- A. I really don't know. There would have been influence but for the entry into the nuclear age. My own view would be close to Jack Slessor's dictum that all principles of pre-nuclear age war were outdated with the nuclear age. We did lay down the V-bomber program for nuclear weapons as a result of the atomic bomb. If it hadn't been for the development of nuclear weapons any sensible man would have concluded that area bombing was a pretty complete failure. If you could get precision bombing, even without nuclear weapons, I would have thought it a powerful weapon of war. But all of that World War II experience seemed to have gone by the board.
- Q. Was there a division of opinion within the Labor Government between 1945 and 1950 on whether to go ahead with the development of nuclear weapons and the delivery means for them? What were the basic motivations for the creation of a British nuclear deterrent force? Did you agree with them? Is there a valid reason for the continued maintenance of this force by the United Kingdom?
- A. There was complete agreement on the atomic bomb. It was never discussed. It was not a cabinet secret and we simply assumed that it was going on. I had no direct cabinet connection with it, but I had no doubt that a

British nuclear weapon was being prepared. The development of the bomb was never challenged or discussed. None of the leftwing members of the cabinet - Aneurin Bevan or any of the others - dreamt of questioning it. It was no issue at all. The motivation for having the bomb was that if you were going to have a defence force in the nuclear age you had to have nuclear forces. There was no NATO in those early years or it was in its early stages and without much strength.

Opposition to the British nuclear deterrent forces began as pacifist agitation against the bomb. I didn't change my mind about the desirability of the deterrent force until the failure of Blue Streak. Up till then I was in favor of it. Now I don't think the game was worth the candle for a medium-sized power like Britain. Those in power say it is a valuable contribution to the American deterrent, but it no longer seems likely. The French and Germans use the triggering-off argument as a justification for the development of nuclear deterrent forces. But that is not valid.

- Q. In the years since World War II have the British military services generally had a single strategic concept to guide their planning and programming?
- A. I would have thought not. There was not much challenge within the services to the nuclear deterrent force. The Master of Royal Ordnance challenged the concept but this was at the time of his retirement. There have been service rivalries. The R.A.F. has been determined to have

bombers and it hasn't had much difficulty getting them. Curiously, the Navy didn't want to be in on the deterrent. They don't seem to want the Polaris. Probably because submarines don't have quarter<sup>decks</sup>~~backs~~. If we are going to have a United Kingdom deterrent, it should be Polaris submarines or some kind of water-based rocket vessels. The Army is frightfully nuclear because they feel weak in manpower and in other kinds of weapons. The doctrine of the Rhine Army is to use tactical nuclear weapons as soon as the Russians cross the frontier.

- Q. How much of a role has the nuclear arms problem played in frustrating development of NATO military capability?
- A. It has played a very great, a major, role. The tactical nuclear weapons doctrine was a most disastrous one. There is no substitute for conventional forces in the nuclear age. The Germans and French have done better than the British in building such forces. De Gaulle, of course, has always been keen on the Army. The Algerian business has had a great effect on the French Army and on NATO.
- Q. With reference to European Union, would political and military integration not have to follow economic integration? Under these circumstances, is the development of an integrated nuclear deterrent by a European Union feasible and desirable?
- A. A United States of Europe is a most glamorous prospect. For old Europe to become a superstate again - both economically and politically - is truly a glamorous idea. I am in favour of it having strong conventional forces, but not a nuclear strategic deterrent. I should want a complete Atlantic deterrent that would include the United States.