

CURRENT PLANNING - AN AIDE MEMOIRE

Introduction

1. This paper is not a summary of home defence in all its aspects. The basic purpose of home defence is to achieve a state of national preparedness for the unusual situations that are likely to arise in war and in periods of increasing international tension preceding a war. A secondary aim is to achieve a measure of preparedness to meet the problems arising from peacetime emergencies, which are closely associated in character with some of those arising in war. It is no longer government policy to maintain an organised and specially equipped body to deal with the immediate effects of a nuclear attack and the emphasis now is on planning for the best use of all available resources.

Machinery of Government

2. Many central government plans are complete and others are in varying stages of completion. All, however, are constantly under review. Among the more important plans still not complete is that which provides for a system of government in war. The arrangements that were recommended down to the level of District have been adjusted to suit local government reorganisation but there is as yet no generally accepted scheme below District level. It is, however, regarded as important to have a dependable command structure at these lower levels, integrated with the whole regional organisation, and much thought continues to be directed towards this problem.

3. Plans for decentralisation in England and Wales, should central government not be able to continue to function from its peacetime locations, are on the same lines as hitherto - namely ten home defence regions, also modified to match local government reorganisation. Some time, however, might elapse in badly affected parts of the country before a full regional organisation could be in operation. In the early stages after attack, therefore, the highest effective level of internal government would be the County Wartime Headquarters.

Transition to War

4. As mentioned earlier in this paper, some importance is given in home defence planning to the question of transition from peace to war. Obviously this is a matter which could not be left until hostilities actually occurred. Additional local problems, some unprecedented, would certainly arise during a phase of increasing international tension leading to pre-war crisis and authorities would be required to raise their level of preparedness. Not the least difficult factor here is the possibility that a crisis might, even at a late stage, recede and in such circumstances it would be essential that any special preparatory measures could be run down without having disrupted the economy and other matters too far. Against this must be weighed the perhaps more likely alternative that events would develop to a point of no return when attack became inevitable. To defer essential measures at this juncture might later prove very costly in loss of life and material. This, too, is the moment when authorities would find the existence of adequate plans, drawn up and proven beforehand, most valuable. At the appropriate moment during a transition period emergency powers would be made available to enable authorities to implement all necessary aspects of war planning.

Prevention of Casualties

5. Survival of the nation is the long term objective of home defence and plans incorporate measures which would ensure the survival of as many people and resources as possible. It is clearly not economically possible to provide complete protection for the population from the effects of nuclear attack and measures that are contained in current plans do not attempt to do this. They do, however, aim at minimising casualties and one effective way of doing this is to give the people as much warning as possible so that they may seek the best available cover.

6. The United Kingdom Warning System is perhaps most advanced of all home defence plans and it is in fact an organisation which is fully operational today. Nevertheless it is frequently misunderstood by the public generally, mainly because it is so often misrepresented in the Press and other information media. The warning of attack (Red Warning) for instance, would not be the first and only indication that people and authorities would have of an immediate threat of war.

7. Casualties would also be reduced by the availability of a sensible and practicable scheme for public control in fallout conditions, particularly during the first 100 days. Much recent thought has been given to this matter and a circular will shortly be issued giving guidance to local authorities.

Fallout Shelter

8. Although a specially designed comprehensive shelter would undoubtedly afford additional protection against fallout for those whose homes did not have an adequate protective factor it is not at present considered a practicable proposition to provide communal shelters for this country, chiefly on the grounds of expense. Where suitable buildings exist, however, they would obviously be taken into use for this purpose should conditions make it necessary and this is a matter for local arrangement. The question of shelter is being reviewed and more guidance will be given.

The Attack Phase

9. It is generally accepted that nothing very constructive could be done while an attack was in progress. The duration of a nuclear attack on the UK cannot be measured in advance with any certainty. All that can be said is that after a lapse of time (currently believed to be about 48 hours) further nuclear attacks would be unlikely.

10. There is bound to be activity during these 48 hours in areas which have suffered an attack and the amount will depend on the local circumstances and conditions. Whatever is possible to be done to succour those in distress, to mitigate the effects, etc., would be done, using facilities and manpower that happened to be available at hand. No large scale rescue effort, however, is contemplated and certainly no life-saving operations can be planned beforehand. In fact, other than very local activity, it would be unwise to attempt any survival measures until some sort of overall picture could be built up. It is important, therefore, to have plans to obtain information after an attack and where necessary to restore communications and control.

Medical Service

11. Meanwhile in damaged areas there would be the question of the immediate casualties and in this context we must think in terms of mass casualty care. This is another aspect in which current plans are not yet complete, but, with the reorganisation of the health service and certain other changes, it has been difficult to firm up ideas about the most suitable arrangements for war. However, studies on this particular subject are planned for the near future after which it will be possible to provide more up-to-date guidance.

12. Interim arrangements are based on the concept that the civilian casualty plan for war is an expansion of the peacetime services and is intended to cope with as many additional casualties as possible. Among its provisions it includes a scheme for the evacuation of certain hospitals and this, it is hoped, would conserve the maximum number of skilled medical staff and much vital equipment. As a prerequisite in medical plans for survival, conserving staff and equipment would be of high priority - more so indeed than ensuring the safety of the chronically sick or mentally abnormal patients.

13. Part of the casualty plan provides for the sorting of casualties into various categories so that early medical attention could be given to those who could profitably be treated. A difficulty might be to decide on the best location for the forward medical units where this sorting would be done.

Initial Measures for Survival

14. As the post attack situation clarified and the extent of the requirements became more accurately known priorities for survival would begin to be established. It is during this phase that other parts of home defence plans would be implemented, e.g., care of the homeless, emergency food supplies, water, power, measures for public health and perhaps most important of all, the maintenance of law and order.

Homeless

15. Care of the Homeless is regarded as of high importance and is one of the first problems that might confront a local authority after attack. The homeless, essentially, would comprise those who literally have lost their home or had been driven from them by fire and other causes and most probably few of them would be able to return to their homes for some considerable time. Inevitably though it is expected that their numbers will include those who have voluntarily left their homes in fear either before or after attack and these could well amount to as many as 30% of the whole.

16. A "stay put" policy, which is strongly advocated by the government, is sound enough but it may be very difficult to get the whole population to conform. There is, too, a strongly held viewpoint that voluntary and random movements away from the likely targets areas before attack would tend to reduce casualties. This, however, cannot be substantiated because those who move of their own accord could well move unwittingly into an area which later might be come highly dangerous from heavy fallout.

17. Whatever their composition and wherever they come from, the homeless must be looked after. They are survivors and their continued survival will depend on what is done for them. Food, water, shelter, warmth are the salient requirements and existing plans cater for these as fully as possible.

18. One part of the plan which may prove difficult in its implementation is billeting. It has a number of attendant problems, particularly in the actual physical execution of such a scheme. A danger to avoid in billeting in these circumstances would be a resultant imbalance of population distribution. Overcrowding after a nuclear attack would be inevitable and acceptable to a certain degree but if carried too far it would create added problems in food distribution and other essentials - not to mention the additional health hazards.

Food

19. Government plans for the conservation and distribution of food are currently being revised and here again more detailed guidance for local authorities was available in 1974. The basic problems, however, remain. The United Kingdom is far from self-sufficient in providing food for its population and in war not only would our stocks of food be at risk, but also our supplies from overseas almost certainly cut off for months - perhaps a year. Farm animals and crops would be affected in varying degrees and food processing severely hampered. Although these difficulties would occur throughout the land, they would not be experienced everywhere to the same extent. Some people would be more fortunate than others but it might be a long time before a nationwide system of distribution could be re-introduced. Transport problems alone would preclude this.

20. Perhaps the main difficulty in maintaining water supplies would stem from its dependence on electric power which is used almost universally to operate pumps. The Water Industry has drawn up comprehensive plans for the maintenance of supplies as far as it would be possible to do so and it is intended that these plans should enable the Industry to work closely with the regional and local home defence control organisation,

21. Recent research and tests have disclosed that radioactivity, although always dangerous, may not contaminate water supplies as severely as hitherto believed.

Power

22. In terms of home defence planning, power means electricity, gas, coal and oil and in war these Industries would be under the overall control of the Department of Trade and Industry. The aims of plans which have been prepared are to minimise the effects of an attack on installations, etc, to maintain the service or to restore it if interrupted and to take control of post-attack surviving resources. Policy decisions after attack on the availability and supply of all forms of power would rest with the highest level in the Industry that communications permit. The priorities in the uses to which it is put would rest with the local authority.

23. It is noteworthy, in the context of the survival of a nation after nuclear attack, that perhaps the most valuable form of oil would be kerosene because it can be used for so many different purposes.

24. The plans for the participation of private industry in home defence have been allowed to lapse a good deal over a period of years. This is unfortunate because, since some 24 million of the population of this country are employed in Industry, they could, if properly organised and incorporated, make a substantial contribution. A revival of interest has recently begun in the Society of Industrial Services Officers and it is hoped that this will be encouraged and fostered and eventually enable the contribution from Industry to be re-established as an important branch of home defence.

Environmental Health

25. It has been said that the chief constituents of the background to survival and recovery in nuclear war are public health and law and order. In a sense perhaps this is true. The health of the public generally in these circumstances would certainly be more important than the health of any individual. Environmental health at the best of times is vulnerable and the effects of a nuclear attack are likely to make it more so. It is one thing to lay down rules and requirements for the maintenance of public hygiene, but another to enforce them - particularly when normal facilities may not be available to the people.

26. One's thoughts turn instinctively to the problems of disease and the frightening rapidity with which it spreads unless strictly controlled. As well as equipment and materials, this calls for a labour force. So indeed would the question of the disposal of the dead. There would be plenty of spare hands but they would need co-ordinating.

But these and similar matters should always be kept in their right perspective. Although the problem could certainly not be ignored, the disposal of the dead should never take priority over, for example, arrangements for the provision of emergency accommodation or food or medical treatment for the living - and, indeed, to be precise, for those who showed signs of being likely to go on living for a reasonable time. Priority for the most useful members is a policy that goes against the grain somewhat when considering the problems today but a serious long term view will quickly dispell doubts about its necessity and lend support to this as an unavoidable theme in planning.

Law and Order

27. A separate study could profitably be devoted to most of the items mentioned in this paper. None more so perhaps than law and order. The forces of law and order in home defence incorporate the police and the armed forces and they would operate jointly. The main difference between the two in a war emergency concept is that, whereas the police force would constitute a main component with the whole of its available strength committed to civilian home defence duties (with some exceptions not relevant to this paper), the role of the armed forces in support of the civil powers is secondary to their main role (military tasks in support of NATO). Such support to the civil powers would be provided by units who happened to be in the United Kingdom at the time. Their very nature and training fits them best for duties in support of the police.

28. The main problems of law and order as foreseen at present are:-

- a. To provide a force numerically adequate to deal with the additional tasks arising in war as well as the continuation of those normally undertaken in peace.
- b. To be able effectively to keep the law in the best possible democratic way consistent with post attack conditions. Some modifications of the penal code might well be called for in this respect.
- c. To be able to exercise justice in a practicable and equitable way.

Plans do exist to provide for these problems but for obvious reasons are classified.

Morale

29. Running throughout would be the question of morale. The morale of the civilian population as a whole would be difficult to assess accurately. It would be rather more than just the mood of the people at the time. Nevertheless Authorities and Departments would constantly have in mind the vital need to keep morale well sustained.

30. Some measures that would help to sustain morale in these circumstances are:-

- a. Information about what is going on, not only in the immediate neighbourhood but also in other districts and parts of the country.
- b. Information about future projects, plans, endeavours.
- c. Practical indications that measures are being taken for improving conditions.
- d. Outward and visible signs of progress and a return to normality.

Plans to provide these can be thought out now.