CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

My breakout from unquestioning acceptance of nuclear deterrence began in the early 1970s, when I discovered that my military leaders required me to be prepared to conduct a suicide mission with a nuclear depth-bomb. This was deemed necessary because a conventional weapon had yet to be developed to counter the speed and depth advantage of a nuclear-powered submarine. For me, that requirement epitomised the irrationality of an arms race where the balance between effectiveness and potential cost in collateral damage became completely lost. The gross 'overkill' and associated military incompetence shocked me into a less trusting, more questioning frame of mind. Looking back from my current vantage point, it is easier to understand how such irresponsible, foolish thinking led to British military professionals being ordered to practise using such a nuclear device.

There is a fundamental paradox about nuclear deterrence. Why is it that professed 'realists', who pride themselves on understanding the often unpredictable aspects of human nature and the history of conflict, have such faith in the rationality of leaders of nuclear-armed states and their ability to control events? 'Realists' speak of nuclear arsenal management techniques that make deterrence safe and provide security. Yet their arguments require no less of a leap of faith in the triumph of hope over experience than nuclear disarmament – especially after India and Pakistan shook the foundations of the 'realist' thesis in 1998. From this clash between ideologically driven dogma and commonsense reality, it would seem that the future comes down to choosing between living in perpetuity with the dangers of nuclear weapons, or risk trying to achieve security without them. My carefully considered conclusion is that abolition is safer, with the added attraction of being both morally sound and lawful. Furthermore, it would relieve military professionals, including Commanding Officers

of Royal Navy Trident-armed submarines, of the dirty work of being poised to press the nuclear weapon launch button for their posturing political leaders, and restore funding to maintain conventional force levels.

Unlike the late Sir Michael Quinlan's unprovable assumption that nuclear weapons prevent major war, will history show that their one constructive purpose has been to frighten us into choosing less nihilistic ways to resolve conflict, more worthy of a species with the arrogance to name itself *homo sapiens*? The US, in denial over its atrocities in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, seized upon the bogus mantra of nuclear deterrence to play on people's fears, and justify sustaining the unaccountable, highly profitable scientific and military monster bequeathed by the Manhattan Project. Since then the guardians of nuclear deterrence have struggled to provide intellectual coherence as endless adjustments to the doctrine were made to accommodate the latest expansion of the nuclear arms race it had provoked. Uncritical repetition by political leaders, careerist 'experts' and mainstream media of simplistic soundbites gave it the intellectual and moral aura of a state religion, to the point where it echoes the fable of the emperor with no clothes.

The reality is that nuclear deterrence, highly vulnerable to failure because of its insoluble credibility problem, fosters international hostility and mistrust, and a paranoid, zero-sum approach to security. Threatening a greater evil than it sought to prevent, during the Cold War the dogma echoed the communist line that ends justified means. As nuclear arsenals grew, the explicit threat to the Soviet Union evolved into an implicit threat to the survival of the human race. Nuclear deterrence was imbued with a selective respectability that put the world at risk through state-sponsored nuclear terrorism, while the West pursued the chimera of total security for itself.

For British and French leaders, the traumas of Suez and their waning empires drove them to crave the counterfeit currency of power of nuclear deterrence to sustain their status and influence. In the case of France, this need was dire after the carnage of the First World War, followed by defeat and Nazi occupation less than a generation later. The French chose to develop, at massive cost, an indigenous nuclear weapon and delivery capability. The British, having decided they could not afford this, signed a Faustian bargain with the US by choosing dependence for submarine and warhead designs, missiles, nuclear weapon testing, and satellite targeting, intelligence and communications. Embarrassingly, the UK remains the only nuclear weapon state without its own space launch capability.

The pay-back involved uncritically supporting US demands that undermined British independence in foreign and domestic policy.

Examples include eviction of British citizens, its indigenous population, from Diego Garcia; allowing US interception of British communications on British territory; and being accomplices in illegal, counterproductive military punitive expeditions such as the 1986 US air strikes against Libya and the disastrous invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003.

The world was fortunate that the West's opponent was the Soviet Union – which, with a staggering 20 million dead from World War II, was well-motivated not to risk another total war – and not a mirror image of the US. Unlike NATO, the Soviets did re-evaluate the threat as years passed. By 1959 they had decided that the danger was no longer a deliberate attack by a US-led capitalist coalition, but inadvertent war. By definition, inadvertent war could not be deterred – but it might be avoided, given the right mix of policies.

In 1985, the clear-thinking and innovative new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev gained sufficient power to propose a feasible agenda for stepping back from the nuclear abyss. At Reykjavik in 1986 he called US President Ronald Reagan's bluff on the true intentions of the US military-industrial complex regarding its Strategic Defense Initiative, which had more to do with enhancing the insatiable vested interests of its military-industrial complex and exhausting the Soviet economy than strengthening US security. Tragically, Gorbachev was rebuffed by the pernicious US preference to maintain its disingenuous promise of extended nuclear deterrence, and associated control, over its allies. Then the 1991 coup attempt against Gorbachev marked the end of enlightened thinking from Russia's leaders. With its crumbling military forces and chaotic economy, Russia grasped at Western nuclear deterrence dogma to sustain its superpower status and assuage its sense of vulnerability as NATO expanded eastwards.

Meanwhile the nuclear weapon programmes in Israel, India and Pakistan (like those of the five recognised nuclear-armed states plus South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Iraq and North Korea) demonstrated the incestuous links between nuclear energy and weapons, consequent failure of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and the massive costs and risks of relying on nuclear deterrence for security. Moreover, no consideration was given to the potentially catastrophic consequences of exposing nuclear power plants and associated highly radioactive waste to attack in conventional war or by extremists, let alone nuclear war; nor of the 'inalienable right' of non-nuclear states to nuclear energy in the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

In Israel's case, support came first from France, and then from the US and UK. Shut out of the Manhattan Project and US drive for nuclear supremacy, France depended upon Israeli technical assistance in the early 1950s. This gave Israel leverage in obtaining French

technical and engineering support. Then successive US administrations, appeasing a powerful Israeli lobby and convinced that a militarily dominant Israel served US strategic interests in the Middle East, allowed a ruthless and highly competent Israeli politico-scientific-military nexus to develop some 80 nuclear warheads. Israel persuaded the US and its allies to turn a blind eye to this, support its belligerent foreign and defence policies, and provide massive military aid.

In South Asia, Indian governments became convinced, in part by Britain's example, that nuclear deterrence held the key to guaranteed security and acceptance as a great power; and Pakistan followed India. Both were also motivated by perceived echoes of colonialism and racism, particularly from the UK and US. Apart from the hypocrisy of the UK/US 'do as we say, not as we do' line regarding possession of nuclear arsenals, over the years British and American governments and experts had insinuated that nuclear weapons were beyond the abilities and levels of political maturity of Indians or Pakistanis to build and operate responsibly. Then Western and Chinese greed and venality allowed export controls to be by-passed, as exemplified by the revelations of A.Q. Khan, one of the 'fathers' of Pakistan's nuclear programme. Now, India and Pakistan are locked into a nuclear arms race where nuclear deterrence doctrine is hopelessly impractical to implement – as General Lee Butler USAF (Ret) tried to explain to their governments.

After the Cold War ended, the massive effort expended by US pro-nuclear fundamentalists to find new roles for nuclear weapons betrayed their fear that nuclear deterrence dogma was in trouble. It should not be forgotten that the Clinton administration initiated the posture shift to threaten use of nuclear weapons in response to non-nuclear weapon of mass destruction attacks against US interests.

The 1996 Advisory Opinion on the legal status of the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the International Court of Justice constituted a historic breakthrough by implicitly confirming that nuclear deterrence is unlawful. This was the first time that any of the nuclear powers felt obliged to try to defend the legality of their nuclear policies in the world's most respected court of law. Despite clear warnings from the US, UK and France not to rule against nuclear deterrence, the Court adroitly affirmed the general illegality of the fundamental practice that constitutes nuclear deterrence. The three Western nuclear powers, having accepted the outlawing of chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, were reduced to vague assertions that the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons depends on circumstances; yet they must know that there is no scenario where use of even one nuclear warhead would be legal. In 1998, they revealed lack of confidence in their own arguments by lodging reservations on ratifying

the Geneva Conventions that they do not apply to nuclear weapons. The UK Government effectively gave up trying to defend the legality of its nuclear posture in 2017 by withdrawing its acceptance of compulsory ICJ jurisdiction for cases involving nuclear weapons. In so doing, it left the command team of the deployed Trident submarine in an unacceptable position of legal jeopardy.

The implications of the Court's legal challenge impinge on those involved in planning and deploying nuclear forces. To distinguish themselves from hired killers or terrorists, military professionals need to be seen to act within the law. They particularly, therefore, need to know that the Court confirmed that the Nuremberg Principles form a part of international humanitarian law, and that nuclear weapons, though not yet specifically prohibited, were now effectively in the same stigmatised category as chemical and biological weapons.

Then came President George W. Bush's administration. Initially, his public admission that nuclear deterrence was not credible against extremists was refreshingly candid. Confirmation followed in a statement from the 2002 US National Security Strategy: 'We know from history that deterrence can fail; and we know from experience that some enemies cannot be deterred.'

However, Bush's use of this acknowledgement to justify reviving ballistic missile defence, echoing Reagan's disingenuous line, was followed by the 'Bush doctrine', which postulated pre-emptive strikes against 'rogue' regimes suspected of acquiring weapons of mass destruction. The pro-nuclear advocates' strongest (but unprovable) claim, that nuclear deterrence prevents major war, had thereby been turned on its head by the Bush Administration's response: deliberate, pre-emptive war backed by ballistic missile defence. Unilateral US withdrawal in 2002 from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, while the US and Russia each persisted with about 2,000 strategic nuclear warheads on high-alert status, meant that the world was now at greater risk from the consequences of nuclear deterrence than during the Cold War.

NATO's acceptance of the new US nuclear strategy meant it could not harmonise its posture with the 2000 NPT Review final document, in which thirteen practical steps leading to a nuclear weapon-free world were agreed by consensus. NATO's current strategic concept, published ten years later, again ignored these contradictions with the 2010 NPT Review final document, which broadly reiterated those thirteen steps. Thus, as demonstrated on 7 July 2017 in the UN General Assembly when 122 states adopted a specific Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, NATO stands condemned as the primary impediment to genuine nuclear disarmament. It has no answer to the argument that, because it places so much political value

in its nuclear forces, it is providing a justification for proliferators. Instead, its current enforcer, the Trump Administration, makes clear in their 2018 Nuclear Posture Review that, effectively ignoring nuclear deterrence, they are planning for first use of low-yield nuclear weapons to deal with even non-nuclear 'rogue' regimes and strategic cyber attacks.

NATO claims to uphold democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Yet nuclear deterrence is about threatening the most indiscriminate violence possible, unrestrained by morality or the law. It is therefore a policy of gross irresponsibility and the antithesis of democracy. By contrast, almost thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the overwhelming majority of states understand that nuclear disarmament is a security-building process, where nuclear weapons are a liability and a security problem.

The most pressing priority, therefore, is to denuclearise the security strategies of the Western allies which, if they redirect some of the cost of modernising their nuclear arsenals to restoring credible conventional forces, will be strong enough in political, economic and military terms to do this before the non-proliferation regime unravels further. This will enable nuclear forces to be verifiably stood down, and Russia and China to be reassured enough for negotiations to begin on a Nuclear Weapons Convention, an enforceable comprehensive global treaty providing a plan to go to zero nuclear weapons. This book has offered some specific ideas for debate as part of a major review of NATO nuclear policy, which could be adapted for application to the US bilateral alliances with Japan, South Korea and Australia.

To consolidate the paradigm shift of rejecting nuclear deterrence and reassuring Russia and its former allies remaining in its sphere of influence, consideration should be given in the longer term to NATO merging with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Most of the current tensions between NATO and the European Union would fall away, with NATO transformed into a common safety net for all states 'from Vancouver to Vladivostok' – perhaps to be renamed the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, North Asia and North America (OSCENANA)?

Extension of such co-operative security thinking to the rest of the world community, pioneered by Olof Palme and championed by Mikhail Gorbachev, will be vital to achieve a durable nuclear weapon-free world. New Zealand showed how to break free from obeisance to nuclear deterrence, and achieve real security through building confidence and trust with its neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region. It has evolved a strategy combining minimal non-provocative defence with peacekeeping, and strengthening international law and

multilateral institutions under UN auspices. It has also applied its track record in nuclear disarmament through new coalitions that bridge the old Cold War negotiating blocs in the UN.

Probably no further significant progress will be made until one of the recognised nuclear weapon states breaks out. The US is the main obstacle; but Britain is by far the best-placed candidate for anti-nuclear 'breakout'. Tony Blair had the opportunity to heal the wounds over Iraq and reassert Britain's independence by simply deciding not to replace the four *Vanguard* class Trident-armed submarines. Instead, he passed on to his successors a divisive decision to maintain the status quo despite the need for deep defence budget cuts, prompting US officials to suggest that the UK must choose between being 'a nuclear power and nothing else, or a real military partner'. Making a virtue from necessity, a perhaps unlikely new world leadership role awaits the UK here by exploiting its special relationship with the US as truly a 'force for good'.

New Zealand's visionary Prime Minister, the late David Lange, argued powerfully in his famed 1985 Oxford Union debate that the true strength of the West, in the form of its democratic institutions, 'is threatened, not defended, by nuclear weapons. The appalling character of those weapons has robbed us of our right to determine our destiny, and subordinates our humanity to their manic logic.' He added that rejecting nuclear deterrence does not mean surrendering to evil, but instead asserts the moral force of humanity over evil.

Finding our way back from the nuclear abyss, on the edge of which nuclear deterrence has held us hypnotised and terrorised for over seventy years, will not be easy. As with all earlier major advances in human rights and justice, the engine for shifting the mindset has to come from among civil society. Within this, as epitomised by General Lee Butler USAF (Ret), there is a crucial role for former military leaders with experience of nuclear weapons, giving them unrivalled authority to speak truth to power. For Britain to become the first recognised nuclear weapon state to reject nuclear deterrence, these nuclear veterans will be needed to help explain this shameful abuse of the Royal Navy and misappropriation of British taxpayers' money.

It was Mahatma Gandhi, as he launched the final push towards evicting the British from India in 1938, who said: 'A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.' The American anthropologist Margaret Mead's more famous adaptation of this added: 'Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.'Determination on the part of a small group of individuals fuelled the campaign to abolish slavery. As with nuclear deterrence, three of the leading proponents of slavery were the power elites of the US, UK and France, who tried to sustain their immoral

and unlawful assertion that slavery was a 'necessary evil' for which there was 'no alternative'. They failed, because courageous ordinary British, American and French citizens – some of whom had been involved in the slave trade – mobilised unstoppable public and political support for their campaign to replace slavery with more humane, lawful and effective ways to create wealth. The analogy holds for nuclear deterrence, which can and must be discarded for more humane, lawful and safer security strategies if civilisation and the Earth's ecosystems are to survive.