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LECTURE

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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THE ROLE OF

WOMEN AND FAMILIES FOR DEFENCE IN THE PROPAGANDA

WAR 1983-1991

The Cold War, 1980s.

Soviet Union historically has been gripped by a sense that possession of nuclear weapons emboldened their status internationally. This grew out of a period of geopolitical tension marked by competition and confrontation between the communist nations lead by the Soviet Union and western democracies including the United States.

It is true that the US and western allies fought with the Soviets against Nazi Germany.

However, relations were never truly friendly.

The Americans had long been wary of Joseph Stalin's tyrannical rule . The Soviets in turn resented the Americans refusal to give them a leading role in the international community.

They battled for global supremacy pitting capitalist US against communist Soviet Union.

Thus began an era of proxy wars from Korea to Vietnam...the Cuba deployment of missiles ...

In the 1970s the Soviets had old style thinking. Brezhnev, decided to deploy in 1976 upgraded nuclear weapons, the SS-20 missile with three warheads, easily mobile and could be deployed anywhere with a range of 2,300 kilometres reaching deep into Europe. They were far superior to their predecessors in terms of range, , precision and guidance, essentially all the characteristics of strategic weapons.

The Soviet deployment decision was against the advice of the Foreign Minister Kosygin who could see the destabilisation it would cause.

The Americans subsequently deployed Cruise and Pershing 11 missiles in the UK and in Germany

Indeed as Gorbachev, who later rescued the situation with the INF Agreement said in his memoirs, *‘ the decision to deploy SS-20 missiles in Eastern Europe had reflected the style of the Soviet leadership at the time, decision making fraught with grave consequences for the country. ‘*

He added, *‘I had arrived at the sad conclusion that this step, fateful both for our country and Europe and the rest of the world, had been taken without the necessary political and strategic analysis of its possible consequences.’*

Tellingly Gorbachev went on, *‘ I would go so far as to characterize it as an unforgivable adventure embarked by the previous Soviet leadership under pressure from the military-industrial complex.*

‘They might have assumed that, while we deployed our missiles, Western counter measures would be impeded by the peace movement. If, so, such a calculation was more than naïve’.

For all that the Soviet decision makers were very happy for the Soviet Committee to embrace not only CND but similar organisations, churches, and trade unions throughout Europe.

Invitations went out to CND and who accepted to visit them in Moscow. Joan Ruddock, Chairman , CND and her delegation including Lord Hugh Jenkins former chairman CND, was warmly received. Later the Soviet Peace committee sent a letter to them on 23 July 1982 , saying, *‘I would*

like to express satisfaction with the exchange of views on the pressing problems of peace and disarmament during the visit of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament delegation to the USSR in May....

'We think such visits to be of inestimable significance in our disturbed days, because they serve the cause of strengthening confidence and better understanding between nations. From this point of view we regard your visit to the USSR as timely and extremely useful.

;'We would like to express our readiness for strengthening and further developing cooperation between the Soviet Peace Committee and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Your proposals in this regard will be met by us with due attention and benevolently.'

Signed by O. Kharkhardin

They wrote again to Monsignor Bruce Kent, Secretary General, CND on 6th December 1983 inviting CND to work with the Soviet Union *'for the common struggle for a nuclear free Europe'*.

Indeed the head of the Soviet Peace Committee Yuri Zhukov travelled all over Europe seeking common cause with the peace activists in the churches, trade unions, anti-nuclear protesters, peace movements.,

No stone was left unturned.

The propaganda war and manipulation of public attitudes had started in earnest.

Mass demonstrations by the anti-nuclear protest movements raged all over Europe. I do not refer to them as 'peace movement' because their very actions only served the aggressor Soviet Union. Their hope had been to delay, weaken and divide Europe and withdraw the Cruise and Pershing missiles.

They purloined the word 'peace' as though the only road to a world delivered from the barbarity of war lay through their own political programme.

It was the Soviet Peace Committee who drew up the slogans used by CND and fellow protesters.

For a detailed, annotated account of the links between the USSR and CND, read Paul Mercer's book 'Peace of the Dead'

Publicity was key. Misleading, inaccurate statements were the norm. 'Cruise is a First Strike weapon. '; Factually wrong.

Unilateral disarmament simply gave an advantage to the Soviets with no incentive to disarm.

THE CALL FOR ONE-SIDED NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT WOULD NEVER HAVE LEAD TO THE SUCCESSFUL DISARMAMENT INF AGREEMENT.

It was into this world that I stepped.

GREENHAM COMMON 1982

I witnessed the demonstration when 30,000 women linked hands around the nine mile perimeter of Greenham Common.

Extraordinary for its execution. Effective drama with vivid pictures of women pinning teddy bears and flowers into the fences.

Slogans, ;'I want my child to grow up, not be blown up,' hit the air.

60 buses shipped in the women. Others made their own way.

The organisation was not that of amateurs. It was extremely professional.

I wondered who is behind this? More than emotional keyed up women.

Later, I got to know Anatoli Danilitskiy , press attache at the Soviet Embassy. We met while debating at the Cambridge Union.

'Ah, I have seen you at Greenham Common! '

And later still, we became friends.....

I decided to visit Greenham myself. Freezing January day. 1983

There was a hard core camp of 30 women. All ages, all social backgrounds, from all over the country, but mostly educated middle class. The numbers swelled when major demonstrations were organised.

Well funded. Bank account with Lloyds. The Co-op delivered food. Camp was disciplined. Clear of litter...

I introduced myself as a journalist. No problem there. They were used to journalists and visitors from all over the world.

Sat by the fire. I returned the next day, by then rain had turned to snow. My moonboots melted in front of the fire.

I went to listen, not to argue.

I needed to know why?

Response was emotional as if the nuclear bomb had taken a life of its own.

‘We want to produce life, not kill it’.

‘ordinary Russians do not want war.

‘We are heading for a nuclear war’....,

‘Cruise is a First Strike weapon’....factually wrong.

It was a catalogue of misinformation, distortion, factually wrong....

Went home.

I wrote an article for Bow group magazine describing what I saw, and recommending a grass roots response.

The overwhelming sweep of the protest movements had admittedly left the government stunned. In any case their word was never accepted.

An active response from a grassroots organisation, with no Government funding was to be the only way forward. We had to be willing to take on their arguments wherever it might be, debates, our counter demonstrations and so on.

LAUNCH - FAMILIES FOR DEFENCE

I had active help from the Bow Group, the Centre for Policy Studies, Dr Julian Lewis at the Coalition for Peace Through Security, British Atlantic Committee, the Foreign Office funded Peace Through Nato, and others introducing me to women who would join me in this endeavour.

We did have Government moral support. Sir Peter Blaker, then Armed Forces minister did attend our first committee meeting at my parents house in Ovington Square, Knightsbridge.,

The core team, the Vice Chairmen, Virginia Bottomley, Ann Widdicombe, Dame Angela Rumbold, Angela Browning, Rosemary Brown...

And many others soon joined us.

On March 27, 1983 I launched Women for Defence at the Westminster Cathedral Conference Centre.

We kept the name simple to counter the Women of Greenham Common. Soon the men were included, we became Women and Families for Defence.

The launch stunned CND. Nobody had taken them on at grass level before.

But we were there for real. Fund raising began with a call for Pound for Peace which came in in sums large and small. But it must be admitted I spent an inordinate amount of time raising funds, writing letters and going to see people.

Our Launch was just before Easter.

We called upon supporters to lay red tulips on war memorials on Easter Sunday all over the country in memory of those who died to give us our freedom today..

This went viral. Flowers were indeed laid on war memorials literally all over the country, from Cornwall to Caithness, even the Channel Islands.. Mostly, peaceful and dignified ceremonies. But in Swansea, local CND tried to breakup the laying of the flowers, with scuffles and so on, all covered by television.....

The year 1983 was indeed intense. Public debates for all of us all over the country, universities, town halls, radio, television.

We raised 13,000 signatures in a Petition calling for a Negotiated Peace, and tried to deliver it to the Soviet Embassy. This was refused. Dismissed as 'Litter'. So we posted it instead to the Kremlin.

We took a camper van and headed to the Christian CND Peace Pentecost Festival at Upper Heyford.

An extremely wet and muddy weekend with the inevitable debates, including one I had with Bruce Kent on the radio.

We held a 'Vigil for Peace with Freedom' in Trafalgar Square on October 22nd, to block CND from using it. They had to head for Hyde Park.

But the 9-hour Vigil was moving with statements from many Eastern European dissidents who suffered from their loss of freedom. Josef Josten, the Czech dissident who had been jailed for challenging the communists said, 'You can never appreciate the meaning of freedom, until you have lost it.'

We handed over publicly at the American Embassy a Letter to Paul Nitze, head of the US INF Negotiating Team expressing our support and appreciation for the American defence of our security and freedom.

We led a delegation to Greenham Common to counter the major CND demonstration in December, and handed in a message of support to the US Base Commander. This was not easy. There were just twelve of us. The aim was not to be a counter force to CND. But having been badly hustled and jostled, we were then trapped inside the base for two hours.

We headed to Geneva and the Soviet Mission where we met with Vladimir Lomeiko, the smooth, elegant speaking spokesman for the Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. We were there two hours presenting our case. It ended with us being given copies of 'Whence the Threat to Peace' with vivid illustrations of the US the aggressor. In fact we already had copies picked up from CND stalls....

We published our own literature, produced badges, stickers for WFFD branches which sprang up all over the country.

By 1984 we were in full flood of activity./

We were concerned about the local government campaigns for Nuclear Free Zones, and challenged them.

We set up a committee dealing with Peace Studies in Schools, a case of political indoctrination if ever there was one.

The Church We challenged the many eminent churchmen drawn into nuclear debate., The Bishop of Salisbury chaired a report for the Board for Social Responsibility, The Church and the Bomb advocating one-sided nuclear disarmament.

A fierce debate in the General Synod ensued . In 1983 it was voted down as members favoured deterrence.

But the debate still raged among churchmen at all levels. I debated at the Cambridge Union Canon Paul Oestreicher, an active supporter of CND.

We finally made our point. Through The Apostolic Delegate Cardinal Bruno Heim, we made an appointment to meet The Pope John Paul II, in Rome in a Wednesday audience in the Vatican. . As a Pole from Krakow he knew all about terror and the loss of freedom. He was very clear about standing up for freedom. Nuclear deterrence held no fears for him.

I headed to Moscow on behalf of the Sunday Express to write a column about the Reagan Gorbachev Summit in May 29 to June 4, 1988. It was an important step in their relations, albeit light on substance but heavy on their evident good relationship. A deal was in the air but not quite yet.

I attended a two hour press conference in the Kremlin. As the journalists filed in Gorbachev shouted to his apparatchiks hogging the front rows. 'Move to the back! This is for the press!'

For me, I made a point of not staying in the hotel for the press, but through contacts, lodged each night at the home of different dissidents in various bleak apartments on the edge of Moscow.

They were nervous, and I had to keep a low profile. I would be given addresses written in Russian to hand to cars I flagged down for a lift. No fears of danger then, and good roubles for the drivers.

One meeting was important. I called into see the then Head of the Soviet Peace Committee Genrich Borovik at his splendid offices in a huge 19th Century building. The Foreign Office in London described him as 'poisonous'.

No trouble in getting in. I was ushered up a marble staircase, and into a vast oak panelled room, marble floor. At the end, sat Genrich Borovik, who had received any number of the CND delegations as I mentioned above.

On his desk lay a tiny cup of valuable black coffee. A treat indeed.

'Ah! So we meet at last!' He said. He clearly knew all about me.

He was completely unabashed about his CND relationships. Proud of all that the Soviet Peace Committee had achieved in Europe and indeed in the US.

We were not going to agree, but useful to hear him out.

He then, paused. Swung round in his chair and said,

'I am writing a book about Kim Philby (the MI6 spy who fled to Moscow after many years of utter treachery). I happen to know he worked for your father's diplomatic news letter. (True). Could I call in to see your father when I am next in London?'

Sadly I quailed. Nervous of being manipulated myself. So I put him off the idea. A real pity. My father would have enjoyed debating with him. Genrich Borovik was very polished, a former diplomat who had served in America.

I headed to Washington to meet President Ronald Reagan in the Oval Office in the White House. It was important for Women and Families for Defence to have his support. Indeed this followed a meeting with Margaret Thatcher in No. 10. She was the catalyst between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. At the end of the meeting the President said to me, 'Please give my very warm regards to Mrs Thatcher'. It was the moment when a personal note came into our conversation. I told him

about the propaganda war we had been challenging in the UK and showed examples of disinformation about US missiles.

We put in nine very solid years of campaigning. In that time, we attended and held fringe meetings at all the party conferences, Conservative, Labour and Liberal. The Labour fringe meetings were the noisiest. In Brighton, I had a jug of cold water poured over my head. Lord Longford, a one time minister in Clement Attlee's government, stood up and tried to defend me, explaining that he was a witness to the signing of Britain joining NATO. He too, was howled down.

In Blackpool, delegates were so incensed at my presence, they had me thrown out of the Winter Gardens, the conference centre. The fringe meeting was likewise very rowdy indeed.

The day came in 1991 when I was invited to Upper Heyford by the Defence secretary George Younger to watch the removal of the Cruise missiles to the US. One of the effects of the successful conclusion of the INF agreement, entirely due to the will of both Reagan and Gorbachev. No thanks at all to the anti-nuclear protest movement or their masters in Moscow.

As I stood on the tarmac watching the missiles being loaded into the vast Galaxy aircraft, I thought 'how small they were! Barely 9' long...'

We staged a major NATO Anniversary concert in Central Hall Westminster.

The response from politicians was varied. Throughout the campaign the Conservatives were supportive. Many old Labour people were strong patriots.

But the CND was vociferous in their antipathy to our campaign. They never let up their dislike of me. One year, I found a CND badge placed on top of a small Christmas tree, I had in my hall at home in Islington. The star was gone.

The public however, representing the silent majority were appreciative of all we did.,

Our campaign's impact was clearly considerable. It certainly halted CND in their stride. For wherever they were, we were there too. We interrupted their TV coverage reducing it by 30 seconds with reports on

our response. We had air time, radio, television, town halls, universities and so on.

The lessons drawn from those days bear an uncomfortable reference with today.

Russia has always been ruthless. Gorbachev was never forgiven for agreeing to the INF Agreement and later ousted.

When Putin sees a weakness or hesitation by NATO he presses forward even harder. There was nothing to deter him from invading Ukraine. Just supposing Ukraine had kept their nuclear weapons and joined NATO? Would this have happened?

Right now he is brutal in suppressing dissent over the war. Dissident Navalny was killed recently in a Siberian jail.

The moral of the story. Nuclear weapons exist. They cannot be disinvented. Today They are infinitely more destructive than Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The danger lies not in the weapons, which are inanimate but in the human beings who control them.

They are here. They do serve a silent role as an ultimate deterrent against an adversary who will hesitate to attack for fear of a nuclear retaliation. This has served a purpose since 80 years in keep a peace, but sadly we still live in a deeply dangerous world.

The onus is on world leaders to secure the reduction of all nuclear weapons and not repeat Trump who cancelled the INF nuclear agreements with Russia in 2018. Russia followed suit the next day.

Trump also broke the JCPOA agreement with Iran....

But deals need both sides to make them happen. Gorbachev forfeited his role as President. He made no apology for this.

In his Address to the Soviet Citizens on 25th December 1991 he said

'We live in a new world.

'An end has been put to the Cold War, the arms race and the insane militarization of our country, which crippled our economy, distorted our

thinking and undermined our morals. The threat of a world war is no more.'

He said this in the context of the existence of the nuclear deterrent,