

New Zealand After Nuclear War

THE BACKGROUND PAPERS

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460

BACKGROUND PAPER 1
1 (a) LIKELIHOOD OF NUCLEAR WAR,
1(b) STUDY ASSUMPTIONS

CONTENTS

- 1a. The Likelihood of Nuclear War; 1b Study Assumptions, by the Study Team
2. Impacts on New Zealand's climate and growing season, by A.B. Mullan and M.J. Salinger
3. Impacts on New Zealand's natural environment, by Bob Brockie
4. Meeting New Zealand's food needs, by Diane Hunt
5. Effects of electromagnetic pulse on power and communications, by Gerald Coates
6. Impacts on energy systems in New Zealand, by Jeanette Fitzsimons
7. Impacts on communications systems in New Zealand, by Judith Wright with contributions from John Tiffin and Harry Whale
8. Disruptions to transport systems in New Zealand, by Judith Wright
9. Radiation effects on the environment and people of New Zealand, by Peter Roberts
10. Impacts on health and the health care systems in New Zealand, by Phillipa Kitchen
11. Human responses to disaster - a review, by Neil Britton
12. The impact on New Zealand society, by Cathy Wylie
13. Impacts on New Zealand's urban systems, by David Haigh
14. Government agencies for control and recovery in New Zealand, by John Mitchell
15. Policy options and planning approaches for the New Zealand government, by a working party
16. Initial impacts on New Zealand's financial sector, by Peter Rankin with contributions from Paul Tompkinson
17. Initial disruptions to trade and employment in New Zealand, by Kevin Makin and Campbell Gillman
18. International migration to New Zealand, by Judith Wright
19. Implications for links with South Pacific countries, by Kevin Clark and David Small

BACKGROUND PAPER 15

POLICY OPTIONS AND PLANNING APPROACHES FOR GOVERNMENT

*This is one of a set of background papers, prepared in consultation with the Nuclear Impacts Study Team, for a study of the impacts on New Zealand of a major nuclear war. Along with other sources the papers comprised the basis of the book **New Zealand After Nuclear War**, by Wren Green, Tony Cairns and Judith Wright, published by the New Zealand Planning Council, 1987. The assumptions that the study was based on are explained in Background Paper 1, note particularly the assumption that New Zealand is not a target, and the variable assumption involving an electromagnetic pulse (EMP - for an explanation, see Background Paper 5).*

This paper was the outcome of the deliberations of a special working party set up by the Nuclear Impacts Study to consider the likely responses of government to the multiple crises it would face after nuclear war and the merits of developing procedures for crisis management well in advance of major disruptions.

The members of the working party were: Mr Bernard Galvin, Prof. Gary Hawke, Mrs Peggy Koopman-Boyden, Mr John Mitchell, Mr Dennis O'Reilly, Mr Malcolm Templeton, Dr Cathy Wylie.

INTRODUCTION

There is no precedent for the situation which New Zealand government and authorities would face in the event of a major nuclear war. A great deal of creative thinking is required about the sort of planning that might be feasible and effective. Responses shaped largely by history might, in the long term, be inappropriate and socially disruptive.

The major issue to consider is what the government is *likely* to do in the absence of planning in comparison with what the government *should* do to promote the continuation of a viable and equitable society. This paper does not presume to predict the former or to know the optimum answer to the latter. It aims instead to underline the importance of the reaction of policy-makers in post-nuclear war New Zealand and to raise planning issues that require further analysis and wider debate.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical precedents

Does New Zealand's history include appropriate precedents for the post-nuclear war conditions that would face policy-makers? In the case of World War II, New Zealand had an agreed war aim, the defeat of the enemy powers. Along with this, people were, by and large, prepared to make sacrifices, and accept the government-imposed limitations on their normal rights and liberties.

After nuclear war the situation would be very different. The nuclear protagonists

would, in all probability, have destroyed each other and wrecked other Northern Hemisphere countries in the process. New Zealanders would have no "enemy" to unite against. The tasks of adjusting to drastically altered circumstances and achieving a "restoration" of economic and social confidence would be immense. The external obstacles to attaining these objectives, such as trade losses, would be to a large extent beyond the control of any New Zealand government. No realistic timetable could be set, and achievements would be piecemeal and incremental. Controls would be progressively more difficult to enforce.

In World War II there were no long breaks in overseas trade or communication. Key imports continued to arrive, prices and wages were stable, New Zealand consumers were restrained, and the profit motive continued to drive the economy. The change-over from peace to war was assisted by mechanisms that the government had already introduced.

Few, if any, of these factors would apply in New Zealand after nuclear war. It would be misleading and dangerous, therefore, to use the World War II model as an appropriate guide to planning options for recovering from nuclear war. However, some aspects of the administrative experience gained during World War II may be relevant and useful.

Another experience which may be relevant is New Zealand's response to natural disasters. From time to time New Zealand experiences earthquakes, storms, floods and droughts. But their effects, with the exception of the 1918 influenza epidemic which killed almost 7,000 people, have been relatively transitory, geographically localized, killed few people, or have been limited to particular sections of the economy. They have not endangered the fabric of the nation itself. The same cannot be said of nuclear war.

Another crucial element of natural disasters, which would not be present after nuclear war, is that outside help has always been available, and even during the world wars New Zealand was not alone.

Existing legislation for emergency conditions

In the event of a national emergency or crisis government may choose to invoke existing legislation, or take other action it considers appropriate. The Civil Defence Act is not necessarily the best possible legislation for dealing with the initial period of crisis management after nuclear war, but it could be used.

The Civil Defence Act 1983 has provision for proclaiming a national emergency, although the orientation is towards coping with natural disasters, not war. At a national level, government oversight of civil defence resides with a Cabinet Sub-Committee of Civil Defence, chaired by a Minister. National administration and logistics are organised through the Secretary for Civil Defence (also Secretary for Internal Affairs) and the Director of Civil Defence. A National Civil Defence Committee comprising the Secretary, Director and permanent heads of at least 15 state agencies meets once a year.

The Civil Defence Act confers wide powers, giving authorised personnel rights of entry, rights to requisition resources, order evacuation, close roads, regulate traffic, remove vehicles, bury the dead and other activities. Clause 79 (Emergency Regulations) details the powers that could be conferred "for the purpose of securing the public safety" during national or civil defence

emergencies. It reads:

"79 (2) ...regulations made under this section may provide for or confer upon any person holding any office under this Act or any Department, organisation, local authority, regional or united council, territorial authority, constable, or traffic officer functions, duties, or powers to provide for:

- (a) The compulsory evacuation of areas of population:
- (b) The control and provision of transport:
- (c) Emergency health measures:
- (d) The prohibition and regulation of entry into specified areas (whether public places or otherwise):
- (e) The control and distribution of food, fuel, and other essential supplies:
- (f) The provision of temporary accommodation:
- (g) The restoration of essential community services."

NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT: TO PLAN OR NOT TO PLAN?

New Zealand governments tend to adopt a pragmatic approach to problems, and to take action to deal with them as and when they arise, rather than plan ahead against eventualities that may or may not occur. It may be noted, by way of example, that the New Zealand "War Book" (the detailed procedures for coping with the outbreak of what became World War II) was not completed until August 1939, although Britain and other Commonwealth countries had produced their versions several years earlier. No comparable document has been produced for dealing with the problems New Zealand may face in any future conventional or nuclear war.

It may be assumed that no New Zealand government will be prepared to devote significant funds or resources to guarding against a contingency that it perceives as being:

- a) extremely remote; or
- b) beyond planning, in that any feasible precautionary measures are likely to prove futile.

The likelihood of nuclear war has been covered in Background Paper 1. The important issue for government is to distinguish between the *probability of the event* and the *consequences of the event* if it occurs. Planning for low probability events can be justified if the consequences are highly disruptive. For example, New Zealand building codes require high capital investment to minimize the potential damage of an earthquake of a severity which is likely to occur only infrequently.

Given the unprecedented situations that would follow nuclear war, the demands that would be placed on government for rapid responses and the present lack of planning, the Working Party considered that it would be appropriate to engage in a systematic planning exercise. The documented failure of decision-makers to cope well with intense crisis reinforces this conclusion (George, 1986). The time to decide on procedures for crisis management is well in advance of the anticipated event.

"Systematic planning exercise" is a difficult concept to define precisely until

the full scope of the likely nuclear impacts have been described. A few core elements can be recognized however. Unlike the production of the "War Book", any planning should be carried out publicly. This would ensure the necessary public understanding, co-operation and acceptance essential to its success. A public better informed on the implications for New Zealand of nuclear war would be an important objective. The objectives would be more wide-ranging than the production of instruction manuals. They should include continually updated strategies for dealing with the immediate crisis after nuclear war and approaches for responding to the longer-term problems that would follow, in the light of changing circumstances, information and technology.

It is important to recognise that the pressures facing a government after nuclear war would be broader than attempting to restore conditions to a semblance of the pre-war *status quo*. An event without precedent, such as nuclear war, may necessitate a fundamental questioning and change in the relationships between government and the people.

An exploration of such changes is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead three different models are presented of how government, by itself, might respond, and the possible consequences. The objectives are three-fold. First, to emphasise that how government responds would be an important, perhaps a central element in post-nuclear war recovery. Second, that the range of possible outcomes is diverse. Third, that government responses would be affected by many other developments over which it may have little control. These are not therefore intended to be predictive models.

An initial response is outlined below which is common to all models. It covers the first immediate reactions government might take on learning a major nuclear war has occurred.

It assumes that nuclear war takes place soon with little effective preparation even if it followed a period of rising international tension.

Initial response of government on "Day One"

1. Cabinet meets immediately.
2. It either proclaims a national emergency under existing legislation or summons Parliament to pass emergency legislation (or both).
3. The Prime Minister uses television and radio to give assurances of the continuity of government, undertakes to follow a policy of openness in regard to information, appeals for calm and respect for law and order, and requests co-operation of local authorities and industry.

(The assurance from government might not be possible if communication systems were disrupted by an EMP. The lack of information would seriously compound the other problems following an EMP - widespread failure of the electricity grid, destruction of computer systems, likely paralysis of financial institutions. People would attempt to check the accuracy of any public assurances; distrust and rumour may influence their reactions.)

4. Government would be under pressure for prompt decisions on the deployment of police and military personnel, control of international travel, implementation of rationing of petrol, food and other essential supplies, support of currency and transactions, control of

prices, assessment of national vulnerabilities and the implementation of a "stock-take" of strategic resources and equipment.

Given the present lack of preparedness these decisions would be difficult to resolve, let alone implement, and probably impossible if there was widespread overloading or prolonged collapse of communications.

Model 1: panic and breakdown

Perceiving widespread social breakdown as imminent the government resorts to giving extensive powers to the military and police under special legislation. This action and the method of its implementation is perceived as coercive and against people's self-interest. It thus accelerates the process of social breakdown it was intended to prevent.

There is widespread public unwillingness to accept the repressive measures on rationing, directed employment and restrictions on movement. This leads to further social disruption and unrest, undermining the remaining authority of government.

With government credibility gone and widespread social breakdown, a coup is attempted. Regions splinter into small selfish factions dominated by local interests and self-preservation. The engineering and maintenance staff required to keep communications, electricity and gas supplies operating lose their effectiveness as management and co-ordination breaks down. Without these inputs large cities become ungovernable.

Model 2: a centralised repressive response

In this model it is assumed that there is no major social breakdown in the short-term after nuclear war. There is no EMP effect and energy systems are not affected in the initial period. In the drive to sustain an economy which is forced to be largely self-contained, government moves swiftly to take control of the financial sector, suspends normal legal process, sets up a command economy, and conscripts large numbers of people into para-military roles to oversee and implement rationing and directed employment. Control is exercised from the centre with no allowance for regional autonomy. Social unrest is met with further repressive measures which are felt necessary.

The steady decline in health and increasing failure of machinery and essential services over the first 2 years increases the authoritarian response. Rigidity and central control, coupled with the steady erosion of democratic systems, are the dominant features of New Zealand society a few years after nuclear war.

Model 3: a flexible regional response

As in Model 2 there are no major disruptions in the initial post-war phase. However the uncertainty, fear and disruptions felt in city and country are not met by repressive authoritarianism. Despite the importance of "maintaining the familiar", people and government recognise that a period of profound change and adaptation lies ahead. New systems must be responsive to local needs and should avoid premature stagnation.

As a response to shortages of transport fuels, problems of distribution and allocation, plus energy and employment imbalances between the North and South Islands caused by decline in exports, government decides to devolve many responsibilities and decision-making powers to a number of regional bodies. Thus central government recognises its inability to respond effectively to the divergent demands of the whole country. Nevertheless it retains responsibility for some essential co-ordinating functions, those of communication, the national electricity grid and some financial management.

Regions are forced by circumstance to respond to local needs for education, social welfare, resource allocation, employment and health. Existing organisations and agencies adapt or new ones develop with new leadership. Conservation of scarce resources through recycling and greater efficiency is a high priority. There are serious disputes between regions over resource rights, equitable distribution of imports and exports and the previous boundaries of various state and local authority jurisdictions. Some experimental approaches fail. Nonetheless, the responses to the massive changes forced upon the country are flexible, responsive to local needs, emphasising self-reliance and resilience. Central government is preoccupied with co-ordination and re-establishing overseas links in a vastly changed world.

A MECHANISM FOR POLICY AND PLANNING

The working party concluded that the situation after nuclear war would make unprecedented demands on government for which existing decision-making procedures may prove to be inadequate. Government's ability to act in the best interests of the country at a time of national crisis would thus be seriously impaired unless plans had been prepared for putting in place a flexible regional response.

In opting for a systematic planning approach to address this shortcoming it was clear that the issues would involve a wide number of government departments, agencies, and private sector organisations. The planning responsibility does not lie clearly with one particular department. Therefore the working party recommends the establishment of a separate entity called the Nuclear Impacts Planning Unit. The functions would include the development of policy advice and contingency planning, monitoring and updating information on the potential effects of nuclear war on New Zealand, and keeping the public fully informed on the work and findings of the unit. The planning process developed by the unit would intimately involve the public at all levels since public involvement and co-operation would be essential to its success. The development of policies for crisis management should include strategies for decision-making at regional and local government levels in the event of a collapse of central government or serious loss of communications.

The unit, with a small permanent staff, should be established within an existing government department. Public accountability could be encouraged by making it responsible to a Cabinet Committee or, more desirably, on a bi-partisan basis to a Select Committee of Parliament.

Possible functions and tasks are summarised below.

Functions of the unit and special purpose groups:

1. To provide advice for policy formulation and contingency planning.

2. To keep the public informed by preparing reports and publicising the work of the unit.
3. To monitor and update information of possible effects of nuclear war. Much of this work could be undertaken by special advisory or study groups set up and co-ordinated by unit staff. Study groups would examine impacts on areas such as: New Zealand's climate and agriculture; health, including the availability and substitutability of medical supplies; general social and community responses; employment patterns; the economy, including the consequences of a breakdown in the world monetary system; energy systems, communications and transport; electromagnetic pulse effects and "hardening" options; alternative systems and "back-ups"; technological vulnerability and the potential for indigenous technologies in strategic areas; migration; alternative central and regional government structures for New Zealand; strategies for stockpiling key resources and equipment.

Some tasks for the unit to consider:

1. Identify existing organisations capable of nationwide action, including state, business and voluntary agencies; carefully define their roles; and develop plans to co-ordinate their actions - with each other and with local organisations and leaders.
2. Identify networks of citizens with special expertise and community standing, capable of providing leadership if nationwide communications are disrupted. Included should be people with relevant professional qualifications, elders of ethnic or tribal groups, leaders of trade unions, business organisations, women's and youth groups, local body mayors and chairpersons, church leaders, etc.
3. Investigate the feasibility of legislation to enable authority and leadership to be exercised on a regional and local basis if central government is too preoccupied with national policy and decision-making, external tasks, and/or is silenced by a communications blackout.
4. Develop consultation and planning co-ordination with Australia and with Pacific Island countries which are likely to face similar problems in the event of nuclear war. Barter arrangements and other issues related to trading in essential commodities, policies for refugees and co-ordinated planning for external pressures are issues which would benefit from joint planning. Such consultation should not be confined to the inter-governmental level but should involve academic and other research institutions, private interest groups and other organisations.

CONCLUSIONS

The working party concluded that:

1. Current contingency plans for disasters, as they exist at present, are organised towards recovery and restoration following natural or human-made physical disaster. They are unlikely to be appropriate for responding to disasters such as nuclear war which would cause major disruptions to all aspects of New Zealand's society and economy.

2. No alternative structures for decision-making exist for regional or local government in the event of central government being unable to cope or to communicate effectively.
3. A planning organisation to undertake research and advisory activities on nuclear war issues would be advisable.
4. It is essential that planning be carried out publicly and that the planning process involve the public, since public involvement and co-operation would be essential to its success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The working party recommended:

1. That a Planning Unit be established to research, monitor and advise on issues related to nuclear war impacts on all sectors of New Zealand society and New Zealand's international relations.
2. That the Planning Unit be overseen by a Cabinet Committee and/or a bipartisan Select Committee of Parliament.
3. That the Planning Unit be housed in an existing government department.
4. That the Planning Unit have its own permanent staff.
5. That the Planning Unit convene Special Purpose Groups, serviced by full-time staff and others as required, to research special sector impacts in depth and develops appropriate leadership and organisational networks.
6. That among the issues researched, alternative systems be explored for devolving decision-making and power bases to regional and local administrations, to reinforce or substitute for a central government under pressure or unable to communicate.

REFERENCE

George, A.L., 1986. "The impact of crisis-induced stress on decision making," pp. 529-552 in *The Medical Implications of Nuclear War*, F. Solomon and R.Q. Marston (eds). National Academy Press, Washington, D.C.