1 The trial of strength

The purpose of this book is to trace the probable course in the next ten years of the trial of strength, which has already lasted for more than decades, between the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the United States and its allies, on the other. It makes no prophecy. Quite unforeseen events may undo the most confident forecasts, as did the Iranian Revolution and the eruption of Islamic fervour in 1979. But it will suggest the probable evolution of the policies and armaments of both sides, in the light of available information, and examine the consequences of the present correlation of power in the world.

Any credible speculation of the future must begin by taking account of the lessons of the past. What has the experience of the first 30 years of the strategic contest between the North Atlantic Alliance and its Communist Russian rival to teach us? It has been the Soviet side throughout which has been the pace-setter, with the domination of the world by its brand of Socialism as its constant objective, with changing tactics and with rapidly growing military strength. Yet it has been proved that, on the other side, a system of collective defence can be kept up and adapted by a group of unregimented and far from bellicose peoples for the best part of a generation, even without the stimulus of imminent attack. This is encouraging; but there are already many signs that the task of reinforcing the common defensive effort with civil morale is likely to become more difficult with the passage of time, if only because of the ever-rising cost of modern weapons — disarmament by inflation — and the persistent hankering for compromise, if not appeasement, which revulsion against nuclear arms evokes. It is, of course, the *sine qua non* of a successful strategy of defence that there should be a reliable reservoir of political will upon which the government can draw. I devote a later chapter of this book to that crucial subject. It is important to remember that the striking success of the North Atlantic Alliance, so quickly constructed in 1949 after the
Basic Issues

Communist conquest of Czechoslovakia and the Berlin blockade, in arresting the further encroachment of Stalin's military and political power in Europe, happened before men and women now in their thirties were born. It takes a greater historical sense than most of them, and even more younger people, possess to realise the significance of the peace — which, their elders would say is thanks to NATO — that they have known all their lives. That is one reason why defence and foreign affairs occupy so small a place today in the minds of the majority, a fact which is of great advantage to those who, for political motives, want to weaken the North Atlantic Alliance.

If a growing minority has been aroused in Britain during the 1970s to the need to reinforce the defensive capacity of NATO, it is largely thanks to the influence of television, not in recalling past history, but in giving day-to-day news about actual developments in the Soviet Union, its threatening military superiority in Europe, its strategic expansion in other continents and its repressive internal regime. It is evident that if the Atlantic Alliance is to remain effective during a fourth decade, a far more serious effort is needed than has hitherto been forthcoming in the Allied countries, and in particular those of Northern Europe, whose Socialist parties are particularly susceptible to the Soviet propaganda of peaceful co-existence, to educate those who can lead and inform their fellow citizens in the strategic realities confronting the nation and its allies. No-one wants the wholesale indoctrination and inculcation of class hatred to which every citizen in Soviet Russia and its satellite states is subjected from infancy. But it cannot be said that the political leaders of the West have, since the early days of the Atlantic Alliance, given their peoples a very clear picture of the basic issues involved, which are obscured rather than enlightened by arcane references to such abstractions as 'deterrence' or 'détente' and the wishful thinking which habitually accompanies the latter.

DISSIMILAR ANTAGONISTS

What are the basic issues? The contest between the two power groups which we are studying is not the rivalry of similar entities, like the nation-states or alliances of states between which in the course of European history there have often been wars or threats