

## 'Wriggling' from The Guardian (9 June 1961)

**Caption:** On 9 June 1961, the British daily newspaper The Guardian comments on the address given to the Assembly of Western European Union (WEU) by Harold Watkinson, British Minister of Defence, concerning the United Kingdom's defence policy and the use of nuclear weapons. The journalist particularly focuses on the complex question of nuclear disarmament.

**Source:** Young, Wayland. "Wriggling" from The Guardian. London: Guardian Newspapers. 09.06.1961, p.24.

**Copyright:** (c) Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd

**URL:** [http://www.cvce.eu/obj/wriggling\\_from\\_the\\_guardian\\_9\\_june\\_1961-en-70b20ef9-22cd-4f7e-a92c-ob1fbb8e94cf.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/wriggling_from_the_guardian_9_june_1961-en-70b20ef9-22cd-4f7e-a92c-ob1fbb8e94cf.html)

**Last updated:** 13/10/2016



# Wriggling

by Wayland Young

**P** EOPLE who see the disarmament problem as a mass of Governments and peoples wriggling and wriggling to escape the dictates of necessity—the necessity being the new one in the history of mankind of general and comprehensive disarmament—will have found striking confirmation of the picture in the Minister of Defence's speech to Western European Union last week. Even the unilateralists will hardly be able to complain of the alacrity with which he is breaking up NATO.

His declaration of policy neatly combined the incredible with the disruptive. It is not conceivable that the Russians should believe he will do what he says he will do, namely counter a conventional attack with H-bombs, thereby provoking the retaliation which would put an end to civilised life in this country. They can hardly have believed it even back in the Sandys age, even when we were in the first flush of having H-bombs. Still less now. That is the incredible part.

The disruptive part is that he has in effect declared Britain's defence policy to be a catalytic first strike, to use the jargon. If we drop H-bombs on Russia, they will use half a dozen of theirs to take us out, and the remainder to destroy America's thermonuclear capacity and prevent America retaliating on our behalf. Mr Watkinson does not seem to have noticed that the pistol he wishes to hold to the Russians' head has three barrels; a relatively small one pointing at Russia, a relatively large one pointing at America, and a relatively enormous one pointing at us ourselves. What are the Americans supposed to do? Applaud our courage?

**M** EANWHILE, America continues to build up her conventional forces, in order to appear able to counter a conventional aggression without recourse to nuclear weapons. This country, as Mr Watkinson proclaims, is not interested in that but continues to rely on the long deflated and hardly ever much inflated doctrine of massive retaliation.

Meanwhile Russia, from whom the conventional aggression in Europe is expected, continues to reduce her conventional forces and to rely more and more on nuclear retaliation. Russia and Britain are pursuing rather similar policies, but whereas we can believe the Russians' threats they cannot believe ours, first because we are small and tightly packed while they are large and emptyish, and secondly because we only have bombers while they have rockets. Britain's ally America is pursuing a contradictory policy. One of the things about wriggling to avoid necessity is that everybody wriggles in different directions.

One sort of wriggle is in defence policy, another is in disarmament policy itself. The latest wriggle which is being advanced in some circles in America is the cut-off. If

the test ban is unobtainable, so runs the argument, let us look around for another single measure which may fare better. The cut-off is shorthand for the cessation under inspection and control of the production of weapons grade fissile material.

In favour of it is that it would not deprive either side of very much military power, since the stocks of nuclear weapons are already so large. The current estimate is that, assuming no delivery difficulties, the joint stocks of America and Russia could already exterminate the human race, and that with presently available delivery systems they could achieve one-eighth DOE. DOE stands for "death of earth," or "death on earth," and the estimate is that if both powers threw everything in all directions, they could kill off one-eighth of the life on earth. Since this is so much, the argument goes, one could not reasonably ask for more, so let's have a cut-off.

**A** LL this is true, but there are four things against this particular measure (there are usually about four things against any partial measure of disarmament):

1. It does not cope with the Nth Power problem. France has repeatedly announced that she will not be a party to any arms control agreement which does not make a beginning on the reduction of stocks as part of general disarmament. Other Nth Powers will feel the same.

2. It does not cope with the danger of technological breakthrough. It is conceivable that the fission-free fusion bomb, or TNT/H bomb will be developed in a few years; this is an H-bomb with a conventional high explosive detonator instead of an atomic one. Cut-off of fissile material will not prevent this.

3. The Russians object on general grounds to the inspection of anything with a military capability except as a part of a comprehensive disarmament programme. Secrecy is their form of invulnerability.

4. Any Power could quite properly object to the stationing of inspectors at nuclear plants because it was manufacturing radiological weapons there, which would be a permitted form of armament. It is an ineffective form of armament compared with nuclear weapons, but that is not the point; the point is that it would be a valid excuse for keeping the inspectors out, and no one would then know whether it was radiological or fission weapons which were being manufactured.

A third sort of wriggle appears sometimes in negotiation. An instance is the recent Russian claim in the test ban talks that the number of on-site inspections should be decided by political considerations and not technical ones. This merely confirms the perennial Western fear that the Russians are insincere about inspection.

The disarmament policy which is much the most proof against fears and objections is the extreme one of all: multilateral, agreed, inspected, comprehensive disarmament. No sober statesman likes to do something which has never been done before; and it is natural to wriggle when the writing on the wall begins to point that way. But it is not wise.