**Independent Nuclear Deterrent**

The RAF Nimrod dropped as it hit a pocket of turbulence, leaving Harry Donovan’s stomach a hundred yards behind. He turned his head towards Georgia Powell, strapped into the webbing seat to his left. He had met the wiry, petite dark haired woman only that morning. She looked a lot better than he felt.

“Where the heck do you think we’re heading?” he asked.

She shrugged.

They had taken off at 0800 from [RAF base in Hong Kong] and headed north-east. At least, Harry was fairly sure he had spotted Mount Fuji as they flew over Japan. That had been two hours ago.

The transport started to descend, and squinting out of the window Harry saw a chain of fog-covered islands below.

“If those are the Kuril Islands, we’re heading into Soviet territory.”

Georgia shrugged again. “We’ll find out when we get there. Worrying won’t make any difference.”

“Keep it to yourselves, hippies,” came the voice of Mike Quayle, a note of genuine malice mixed into the bantering tone. At the briefing that morning, Harry had inadvertently insulted the stocky, blond paratrooper, placing him by his accent as a scouser. He was, it turned out, from the Isle of Man and that, somehow, made a difference. Quayle in turn had run his eyes over the tall, skinny Harry with his dark hair all of half an inch longer than Quayle’s own buzz cut, and Georgia with her tied-back pony tail, and had introduced the two Royal Navy Engineers to the rest of the team as “the hippies”.

The briefing had been a joke, with more time spent on need-to-know and heavy handed reminders about the Official Secrets Act than on giving the fourteen-strong team any useful information. Their task was to recover HMS Buckingham a [type] class frigate which had strayed from its registered course. Where it was, why it was off course, and why its own crew could not bring it back were either not known, or more likely deemed to be above Harry’s pay grade.

It could be harmless enough. Perhaps an unusual problem with the ship’s engines, too tricky for its regulars to diagnose. Still, that did not explain why the team – the two engineers, the rest split evenly between paras and SBS – had been assembled with such urgency.