

A Foregone Conclusion?

***The United States, Britain and the Trident
missile agreements, 1977 – 1982***

Suzanne Doyle

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Abstract

Only recently have declassified government documents on the United States sale of Trident nuclear missiles to the United Kingdom become available. As such, the Trident agreements of 1980 and 1982 have received little scholarly attention. This thesis provides the first focused study of the negotiations on the supply of Trident C4 and D5 missiles. It does this by drawing upon material from the British National Archives, the Jimmy Carter Library and the Ronald Reagan Library.

Specifically, the research focuses on the ways in which the interests of the United States influenced the Trident negotiations and British decision-making on the successor to Polaris. This approach eschews the Anglo-centric framework that dominates research on the US-UK nuclear relationship. This US-centred approach demonstrates the contingency of the Trident negotiations. Both the Reagan and Carter administrations were hard-headed in their discussions with the British over the supply of Trident, and only consented to do so when it suited Washington. Furthermore, both administrations drove a hard bargain over the terms of sale, and sought to derive the greatest possible benefit from the deal. US geostrategic interests, economic realities and domestic politics influenced the actions of White House officials throughout. The sale of Trident only brought modest benefits. As such, both US administrations viewed it as helpful to assist the British when it coalesced with their overall interests. However, if a Polaris replacement clashed with the priorities of the administration, they disregarded British interests. As such, the Trident agreements were not a 'foregone conclusion' due to the logic of Cold War 'deterrence', or long-standing US-UK nuclear co-operation, but negotiations heavily influenced by the context of the time. As such, the study reveals the ways in which the broader political concerns of the United States interacted with the US-UK nuclear relationship and nuclear decision-making.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile
ALCM	Air-Launched Cruise Missiles
ANF	Atlantic Nuclear Force
CM	Cruise Missile
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
DOD	Department of Defense
EEC	European Economic Community
ERW	Enhanced Radiation Warhead
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FY	Fiscal Year
GLCM	Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles
HLG	High-Level Group
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
ICBM	Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces
IRBM	Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile
JCL	Jimmy Carter Library
LRTNF	Long-Range Theatre Nuclear Forces
MBFR	Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions
MDA	Mutual Defence Agreement
MIRV	Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle
MLF	Multilateral Force
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MRBM	Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles
MRV	Multiple Re-entry Vehicle
N.D.	No Date
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NPG	Nuclear Planning Group

NSC	National Security Council
NSDD	National Security Decision Directive
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSA	Polaris Sales Agreement
R&D	Research and Development
RRL	Ronald Reagan Library
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SCC	Special Coordination Committee
SDI	Strategic Defence Initiative
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SLBM	Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile
SLCM	Submarine Launched Cruise Missile
SNP	Scottish Nationalist Party
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Talks
TNA	The National Archives
TNF	Theatre Nuclear Forces
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WWII	World War II

Introduction

“Unless you were quite senior in the government, you knew nothing about these things at all. You talk about Parliament being ignorant... We were all ignorant about it.”

- Lord Peter Carrington.¹

Over the course of a rather timid United Kingdom general election campaign, the events of 9 April 2015 stood out. On that day, Michael Fallon, the Conservative Defence Secretary, claimed that, in order to do a deal with the anti-Trident Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) and secure power in Westminster, Ed Miliband would “stab the United Kingdom in the back” over renewing the UK’s Trident nuclear weapons system just as he had “stabbed his own brother in the back” to lead the Labour party.² Notwithstanding the absurdity of comparing relations with a brother to one’s policy on nuclear weapons, the ensuing media circus highlighted the peculiarities of British elite thinking on the country’s nuclear force. David Cameron, leader of the Conservative party, pressed for an absolute Labour commitment to Trident, stating:

We need an answer from Labour. Are you really committed to the Trident deterrent? Are you really going to have four submarines and can you rule out any arrangement where the SNP put you into power knowing they want... less secure defences without a Trident replacement.³

Vernon Coaker, Labour’s Shadow Defence Secretary, replied to the Conservative accusations: “Labour is committed to maintain a minimum,

¹ Lord Carrington quoted in Peter Hennessy, *Cabinets and the Bomb* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), viii.

² Michael Fallon, “This unholy alliance would put Britain’s security in jeopardy,” *The Times*, 9 April 2015, accessed 29 May 2015,
<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/thunderer/article4405666.ece>.

³ David Cameron quoted in Patrick Wintour “Trident row: Cameron defends Fallon’s attack on Miliband,” *The Guardian*, 9 April 2015, accessed 29 May 2015,
<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/apr/09/trident-row-cameron-defends-fallons-attack-on-miliband>.

credible, independent nuclear deterrent, delivered through a continuous-at-sea deterrent.”⁴ This essential agreement across the two main political parties reflected the belief that Britain *must* possess nuclear weapons, and to do otherwise was to shed great power status and the international influence that accompanies that. But, of course, while politicians from both political parties spoke of the *independence* of Britain’s ‘deterrent’, the system is highly reliant upon the support of the United States.⁵

The UK’s nuclear force currently consists of four Vanguard-class submarines each capable of carrying up to 16 Trident D5 (II) ballistic nuclear missiles.⁶ The UK is dependent upon the US for the supply of these missiles. The US produces and services the missiles. The US provide the software used for targeting and firing the Trident missiles. Indeed, the UK does not actually own any individual missiles but leases them under the terms of the 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement (PSA). This arrangement is the latest chapter in the US-UK nuclear relationship. The PSA originally allowed Britain to acquire the Polaris Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) system in the 1960s. In 1980, the agreement was amended to allow the purchase of the Trident C4 (I) system, and was further amended in 1982 to authorise the purchase of the more advanced Trident D5 in place of the C4.⁷ This arrangement means that Britain’s ‘independent’ deterrent is a misnomer. The submarine-based replacement to Trident advocated by Britain’s main parties will also be technically dependent upon the US. In this way the future of Britain’s nuclear programme, just like its past, is intimately linked to the United States.

⁴ Vernon Coaker quoted in Nicholas Watt “Ed Miliband would ‘barter away’ Trident to win election, say Tories,” *The Guardian*, 9 April 2015, accessed 29 May 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/apr/09/ed-miliband-trident-election-labour-snp-nuclear>.

⁵ Michael Fallon, “This unholy alliance would put Britain’s security in jeopardy,” *The Times*, 9 April 2015; Vernon Coaker quoted in Nicholas Watt “Ed Miliband would ‘barter away’ Trident to win election, say Tories,” *The Guardian*, 9 April 2015.

⁶ A brief note on terminology. In this study, I will refer to the two different Trident missiles systems as the C4 and D5, rather than I and II. I have made this choice because the former are the most commonly used terms, they clearly distinguish the two missiles making it easier for the writer and reader, and they better demonstrate the marked differences between the two missiles.

⁷ Nick Ritchie, “The US-UK Special Relationship,” September 2009, Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee Publications & records, accessed 7 June 2015, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmfaff/114/114we12.htm>.

The role played by the US in sustaining Britain's nuclear programme is generally elided in popular political discourse because dependency is not a happy thing for a supposedly great power to admit. For over thirty years, the British government has poured money into its Trident SLBM system. Yet the story of how the British government came to an agreement with the US to purchase the Trident missiles has not received the attention it deserves. Most scholars suggest that the American decision to supply Trident was more or less foreordained; that notions of relational "specialness" (particularly in nuclear matters) means there is no real story to tell. For example, Kristan Stoddart asserts, "For well-established reasons Trident was always the most likely successor system."⁸ Similarly, Ian Clark observes, "The Atomic Energy Agreement established a pattern of nuclear exchanges that has essentially persisted ever since."⁹ This perspective contains more than a grain of truth, but it also leads sometimes to tendentious analysis that underplays the role played by agency and contingency – few things in history, if any, are inevitable. This thesis queries the notion that the process of supplying the UK with Trident was a 'foregone conclusion.' It does so through a detailed archival study of the UK's negotiations with the US over the Trident C4 and D5 agreements.

Only recently has it become possible to write an account of the Trident negotiations based upon archival material. As such, the Trident agreements have received relatively little scholarly attention. Much of the existing discussion of the Trident agreements is contained within general works on the US-UK relationship or British foreign policy, and discussion is limited to, at most, a few pages. Moreover, these works are largely reliant upon memoirs, interviews and public government documents.¹⁰ Within these accounts,

⁸ Kristan Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union: Britain, the USA, NATO and Nuclear Weapons, 1976-1983* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 230.

⁹ Ian Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship: Britain's Deterrent and America, 1957-1962* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 428. In 1958, the UK and US governments signed the Atomic Energy Agreement, also known as the Mutual Defence Agreement, which enabled the exchange of nuclear information and materials between the two countries. In 1959, this agreement was amended to authorise the transfer of nuclear technology.

¹⁰ See Alan Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century: Of friendship, conflict and the rise and decline of superpowers* (London: Routledge, 1995), 146-147, 150-152; John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations from the Cold War to Iraq* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 18-183; John Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence*

discussion of the US role is understandably limited to a sentence or two. When this research commenced, the longest study of the Trident agreements was a chapter by Kristan Stoddart on the Trident C4 decision. This study used some archival documents but was, again, mostly reliant upon memoirs, interviews and public documents, and the chapter did not discuss the Trident D5 agreement.¹¹

Recently, accounts that make use of some of the available British archival material have been published. Most of these accounts are only a few paragraphs in length.¹² However, in October 2014, Kristan Stoddart published *Facing Down the Soviet Union: Britain, the USA, NATO and Nuclear Weapons, 1976 – 1983*, which dedicates four chapters to Britain's decision to replace Polaris and the Trident agreements, as well as chapters on other elements of British nuclear policy during this time. These chapters provide a thorough and detailed, but largely narrative-led account, of British decision-making.¹³ The chapters make use of much of the available British archival material, as well as a few documents from the US archives. However, the primary focus of the chapters is the British government's decision to purchase the Trident C4 and then D5 system from the US, with much less discussion of the negotiations themselves. Moreover, there is little reflection on the influence of the United States domestic and international concerns upon the negotiations.¹⁴ In addition, in 2015 John Baylis and Stoddart published *The British Nuclear Experience*, which contains two chapters on 'The Polaris replacement debate' and 'The adoption of Trident.' However, the chapters do not draw upon American archival material and their focus is on British decision-making with

Relations 1939-1984 (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1984), 181-185; Ernest May and Gregory Treverton, "Defence Relationships: American Perspectives" in *The 'Special Relationship': Anglo-American Relations Since 1945*, ed. WM. Roger Louis and Hedley Bull. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 174-177; Peter Malone, *The British Nuclear Deterrent* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1984), 117; Geoffrey Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), 68-71; Hennessy, *Cabinets and the Bomb*, 323-324.

¹¹ See Kristan Stoddart, "The Special Nuclear Relationship and the 1980 Trident Decision," in *U.S.-UK Nuclear Cooperation after 50 Years*, ed. Jenifer Mackby and Paul Cornish (Washington DC: The CSIS Press, 2008), 89-97.

¹² See for example Richard Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher: The Difficult Relationship* (London: Random House, 2013), 56-58; Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 571-573.

¹³ Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 34-75, 112-202.

¹⁴ See Ibid., 132-143, 193-195.

much less discussion of the negotiations and the US perspective.¹⁵ Moreover, as will be discussed in the relevant chapters, much of the discussion on the American perspective within the existing literature provides mono-causal explanations to explain the role of the Reagan and Carter administrations, which are insufficiently nuanced and largely overlook the uncertainty the UK faced in their efforts to secure the Trident agreements. As such, there currently exists no discrete study of the Trident negotiations nor detailed analysis of the US role in these negotiations.

This thesis aims to fill this lacuna in the historiography by providing the first focused study of the Trident C4 and D5 negotiations, using material from both the British and US archives. In particular, my research focuses on the influence of the successive US administration's wider domestic and international interests in the negotiations. However, this study is not a story of whether the United Kingdom's nuclear force is independent or dependent, or Britain subservient or not subservient to the US. I believe the US-UK nuclear relationship is more complex than such binaries and that power is not a zero sum game. Nevertheless, the current neglect of the US role in the formulation of the Trident agreements is problematic and limits understanding. It implicitly suggests that the United States will provide nuclear assistance to Britain when requested to do so, on the terms that the British government wish, and as such presents the former, ironically, almost as a vassal state. However, the US provision of Trident was not indelibly written in the stars. Detailed analysis of the US-UK nuclear relationship demonstrates that the US has, as one would expect, never played a neutral role in its continuation. The US is the 'senior' partner in US-UK nuclear co-operation and therefore its aims and interests have heavily shaped the relationship. As such, through analysing the Trident negotiations, whilst being attentive to the influence of wider American concerns upon the US government's approach, I hope to deepen our understanding of the Trident agreements.

The central theme in this thesis is the role that the interests of the Reagan and Carter administration – which did not necessarily dovetail with

¹⁵ John Baylis and Kristan Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience: The Role of Beliefs, Culture, and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 133-151.

those of the counterpart UK governments – played in influencing and shaping the Trident negotiations and agreements. The second, interrelated, theme is the ways in which the UK's technical dependence on the US influenced British decision-making. From these points of departure, this study demonstrates the nuances and complexity of the Trident negotiations. It tells a tale of contingency, uncertainty, tough negotiations, and secret deals, where discussions were influenced by the dynamics of US geostrategic interests, economic realities, and domestic politics, and the eventual agreements formed part of a US-UK transactional defence relationship. Thus, the study reveals the ways in which the broader political concerns of the US interacted with nuclear decision-making.

Whilst the Trident agreements have yet to be the focus of close scholarly analysis, there is a substantial literature on the US-UK nuclear relationship, with the post-war period in particular having attracted considerable attention.¹⁶ Recent years have also seen the publication of many studies considering the relationship in the 1960s, and there is now a steady trickle of archival studies on the 1970s.¹⁷ There is also a considerable literature that

¹⁶ See Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations*; Ian Clark and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The British Origins of Nuclear Strategy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989); Barton Bernstein, "The Uneasy Alliance: Roosevelt, Churchill and the Atomic Bomb, 1940 – 1945," *The Western Political Quarterly* 29:2 (1976); Margaret Gowing, *Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy, 1945-52. Vol.1 Policy Making* (London: Macmillan, 1974); Matthew Jones, "Great Britain, the United States and Consultation over Use of the Atomic Bomb, 1950-1954," *The Historical Journal* 54:3 (2011); Andrew Pierre, *Nuclear Politics: the British Experience with an Independent Strategic Force, 1939 – 1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972); John Baylis, "The 1958 Anglo-American Mutual Defence Agreement: The Search for Nuclear Independence," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 31: 3 (2008), 456-457.

¹⁷ Works on the 1960s include: Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*; David Gill, *Britain and the Bomb: Nuclear Diplomacy, 1964-1970* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Kristan Stoddart, *Losing an Empire and Finding a Role: Britain, the USA, NATO and Nuclear Weapons, 1964-1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Donette Murray, *Kennedy, Macmillan and Nuclear Weapons* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000); Andrew Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO: Britain, America and the dynamics of alliance, 1962-68* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006); Richard Moore, *Nuclear Illusion, Nuclear Reality: Britain the United States and Nuclear Weapons, 1958-64* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Works on the 1970s & 1980s include: Kristan Stoddart, *The Sword and the Shield, Britain, the USA, NATO and Nuclear Weapons 1970-1976* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*; Helen Parr, "The British Decision to Upgrade Polaris, 1970-4," *Contemporary European History* 22:2 (2013); John Baylis and Kristan Stoddart, "Britain and the Chevaline Project: The Hidden Nuclear Programme, 1967-82," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 26:4 (2003); Thomas Robb, "Antelope, Poseidon or a Hybrid: The upgrading of the British Strategic Nuclear Deterrent," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 33:6 (2010).

analyses US-UK nuclear co-operation as part of the wider US-UK alliance.¹⁸ As well as helping to move understanding of the US-UK nuclear relationship chronologically forward, this thesis makes three contributions to the existing literature.

First, this study demonstrates the ways in which the broader political interests of the US influenced the Trident negotiations and thereby the concurrent renegotiation of the US-UK nuclear relationship. This insight builds upon the existing understanding of the nature of US-UK nuclear co-operation. Over the years, there has been some debate over the primary reason for the particular closeness of the US-UK relationship.¹⁹ In the mid-1960s, Raymond Dawson and Richard Rosecrance published an influential article, which argued 'sentiment', that is history, cultural affinity and tradition, explains the Anglo-American alliance after 1945.²⁰ They observed, "according to conventional alliance theory, world powers should not endow lesser states with the attributes of strategic independence."²¹ For this, and other reasons, they argued that a theory based on national interests "cannot explain the Anglo-American alliance."²² However, such claims of the centrality of sentiment do not stand up to close scrutiny. In matters of geostrategic salience – and the provision of nuclear weapons is clearly one of those – the concept lacks explanatory utility. As Rod Lyon highlights, "Nuclear weapons are not the sort of thing that A gives to B merely to make B feel special."²³ As this study demonstrates, shared mutual interests led to the Trident agreements. This finding reinforces the arguments of much of the existing literature on the US-UK nuclear relationship that also argues that mutual interests rather than

¹⁸ Robb, *A Strained Partnership*; Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*; Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*; Louis and Bull, *The 'Special Relationship'*; John Baylis, *Anglo-American Relations since 1939: the Enduring Alliance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Ritchie Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

¹⁹ For a history of this debate, see Alex Danchev, "On Specialness," *International Affairs* 72: 4 (1996).

²⁰ Raymond Dawson and Richard Rosecrance, "Theory and Reality in the Anglo-American Alliance," *World Politics* 19:1 (1966), 50-51.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

²² *Ibid.*, 21.

²³ Rod Lyon "The challenges confronting US extended nuclear assurance in Asia," *International Affairs* 89:4 (2013), 933.

sentiment are its defining feature.²⁴ The closeness or otherwise of the Anglo-American nuclear relationship at any given point of time rests principally on whether each nation's interests are aligned. Subsequently, historians like John Baylis and Andrew Priest have highlighted the frequent renegotiation of the relationship, in accordance with the dynamics of mutual interests.²⁵ This thesis builds upon these arguments by demonstrating that this process of renegotiation continued through the Trident discussions.

Some historians have adopted a 'rational' approach to defining the interests that draw the US and UK together.²⁶ These 'rational' interpretations of US-UK nuclear co-operation tend to stress the 'Soviet threat' and the logic of deterrence in explaining its maintenance.²⁷ However, the pervading Cold War environment did not predispose the US government to agree to the sale of Trident; values and politics also shaped interests. As Andrew Pierre observes there is, "no clear dividing line between the 'rational' requirements of national security policy and the political, economic, scientific and bureaucratic interests and pressures which help shape defence policy."²⁸ Moreover, it is clear that whilst sentiment alone is not the primary factor that undergirds the US-UK nuclear relationship, shared culture, norms and identities do play a role in drawing the two sides together. Subsequently, the thesis focuses upon the ways in which each administration's perceived international and domestic political concerns shaped their nuclear decision-making; an area often conceived as the epitome of rational decision-making due to the supposed underlying logic of deterrence. The study also emphasises the role of agency in the formulation of the Trident agreements, through analysis of the ways in which the Carter and Reagan administration's *perception* of their interests shaped the Trident negotiations.

²⁴ See Baylis, "Exchanging Nuclear Secrets"; Simpson, *The Independent Nuclear State*; Thomas Robb, *A strained partnership?*, 13; Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 4; Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*, 2.

²⁵ See Baylis, "Exchanging Nuclear Secrets," 34; Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 4-5; Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, 124-164.

²⁶ See Robb, *A Strained Partnership?*, 13; Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 4.

²⁷ See Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 4; Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 11.

²⁸ Pierre, *Nuclear Politics*, 3.

A second original contribution is the research's insights on the role of nuclear co-operation within the wider US-UK defence partnership. Nuclear co-operation is often seen as the "heart" of the US-UK relationship and as such a key factor in the maintenance of close relations in other areas.²⁹ However, the study suggests that the nuclear relationship does not exist on a separate and distinctive plane. Indeed, US policy-makers utilised the Trident negotiations as a means to influence wider British defence policy. Both the Reagan and Carter administrations expected British commitments in other key areas of shared defence policy in exchange for Trident. The Carter administration demanded that the UK government agree to their plans for the extension of the US base on the British-controlled island of Diego Garcia. Whilst the Reagan administration sought a British commitment to maintain naval deployment. In this way, the US viewed US-UK nuclear co-operation as inseparable from the wider defence relationship.

This study's final contribution is that it does not adopt an Anglo-centric viewpoint. Much of the existing literature on US-UK nuclear co-operation focuses upon British decision-making.³⁰ Few studies have drawn upon material deposited in the US archives or considered, in any great depth, the American perspective.³¹ However, recent literature on the wider US-UK relationship has demonstrated the utility of a focus upon the US viewpoint, and the insights offered by such an approach.³² This thesis brings the oft-neglected US perspective back into the study of US-UK nuclear co-operation. In particular, the study demonstrates the ways in which US relations with the Soviet Union and NATO influenced the US-UK nuclear relationship. This

²⁹ See for example Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations*, 216; Pierre, *Nuclear Politics*, 316; Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 160.

³⁰ See Pierre, *Nuclear Politics*; Clark and Wheeler, *The British Origins of Nuclear Strategy*; Gowing, *Independence and Deterrence*; Baylis, "The 1958 Anglo-American Mutual Defence Agreement," 456-457; Stoddart, *Losing an Empire*; Stoddart, *The Sword and the Shield*; Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*.

³¹ See Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*; Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*; Parr, "The British Decision to Upgrade Polaris"; Robb, "Antelope, Poseidon or a Hybrid"; Bernstein, "The Uneasy Alliance."

³² See Jeffrey Engel, *Cold War at 30,000 Feet: The Anglo-American Fight for Aviation Supremacy* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007); Robb, *A Strained Partnership?*; Andrew Scott, *Allies Apart: Heath, Nixon and the Anglo-American Relationship* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Niklas Rossbach, *Heath, Nixon and the Rebirth of the Special Relationship: Britain, the US and the EC, 1969-74* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

interconnection did not necessarily lead the US to support Britain's nuclear programme, due to a prevailing need to strengthen western deterrence, as some would presume. Throughout the Trident agreements, US consideration of NATO interests and US-USSR relations both benefited and hindered Britain's efforts to secure a replacement to Polaris. As such, this study concurs with many recent works in nuclear history, which highlight that nuclear decision-making does not take place in a political vacuum, directed only by the reductive logic of rational deterrence theory.³³

Necessarily, this study has clearly defined parameters. It considers the ways in which the interests of subsequent US administrations influenced and shaped British decision-making on the replacement of Polaris and the Trident negotiations. Constrained to an extent by time, space and resources, the thesis does not analyse in detail Britain's decision to opt for the Trident system. As discussed, the purchase of Trident from the British perspective has already been the subject of an archival study.³⁴ Moreover, given the historical trend in the scholarship of Anglo-American nuclear relations it can be expected that there will be many more studies of the British rationale in the coming years. Originally, I also wished to analyse in more detail the specific reasons of the respective US administrations for the supply of Trident. However, whilst this study does provide insight, such a detailed analysis proved impossible at the time. This is because the minutes of many of the meetings are still classified. Given my belief that shared interests rather than sentiment forms the core of US-UK nuclear co-operation, the study also does not focus upon the relationships between US and UK officials. In addition, as the themes of this thesis suggest, the political-level forms the focus of this study rather than the underlying institutional relationship. The institutional layer provides an under-current of continuation and support. However, without decisions at the political-level, co-operation cannot continue. Moreover, it is at the political-

³³ See Francis Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012); David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb* (London: Yale University Press, 1994); Leopoldo Nuti et al., *The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2015).

³⁴ Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*.

level where wider US interests influence the relationship and create contingency.

The study also purposefully avoids discussion of whether the Trident agreements prove or disprove the existence of a 'special relationship', or indeed what they say about the state of this supposed 'special relationship' during the era under consideration. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the use of the term brings a number of problems. It is a highly subjective term, having originated for political purposes, and is used more in Britain than in the US. Moreover, whilst the term is widely used within the literature on the US-UK relationship, there is no agreed definition. This leaves individual scholars to determine its meaning, and whether there particular area of focus is or is not part of a 'special relationship'. Secondly, use of the term invariably leads to comparison with other eras. However, as Thomas Robb argues such comparison obscures as much as it reveals:

Whether this era is less special in comparison to another is largely immaterial for understanding the relationship during its timeframe. Comparing the 'specialness' in one era with another provides only a superficial assessment of the period under question.³⁵

As such rather than focusing upon whether the Trident negotiations were 'special' or not, and whether they demonstrate an increase or decrease in the 'specialness' of the relationship, the thesis seeks to provide in-depth analysis of the nature of the US-UK nuclear co-operation at that point in time.

This thesis utilises source materials from the National Archives in London released under the thirty-year rule. The study also uses material from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley. This archival material forms the primary basis of the research's argument and analysis. Where relevant, these archival sources are supplemented by memoirs, published interviews and the collection of US documents found in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series produced by the US State Department's Office of the Historian. This

³⁵ Robb, *A Strained Partnership?*, 13.

study also draws upon secondary sources. In particular, the thesis utilises secondary literature on the domestic and foreign policy of the Carter and Reagan administrations. This allows the study to place the archival material in context, and consider the formulation of US policy on Trident in light of domestic and international events.

Despite attempts to utilise as wide range of sources as possible, my analysis and conclusions are inevitably provisional. As the Trident system is still in operation, a sizable amount of material is still classified. In addition, the limited budgets of the US archives means that a notable amount of the material on the Trident agreements remains unprocessed. This is a particular problem in the Ronald Reagan Library. However, by utilising archives on both sides of the Atlantic, it has proved possible to write a nuanced and coherent, if incomplete, account of the Trident negotiations.

There are certain, frustrating, gaps in the archival material. In particular, continued classification meant that it was largely impossible to pinpoint the exact viewpoint of individual members of the Reagan and Carter administrations towards assisting with the replacement of Polaris. Instead, the available material only allowed me to gain an overall impression of each administration's attitude. Interviews may have overcome this problem. However, given the absence of any detailed archival study when this research began, and that a reliance upon interview tends to reproduce the narrative of the political elites, the research resources were better employed elsewhere. With the knowledge accrued during this project, I would now conduct interviews in the future. Of course, some of these gaps in knowledge about the Trident agreements may never be filled. Nuclear diplomacy usually takes place in complete secrecy and often without the usual protocols of government. The Trident negotiations are a case in point. Only a small elite in each country knew about proceedings. Moreover, some of the discussions operated outside of normal recording procedures. As Robert Wade-Gery, a lead UK official in the Trident negotiations later recounted, "Nothing could ever be put down in writing. I used to have to write my own brief and clear it with the Prime

Minister and the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary, and then go off to Washington and talk.”³⁶

This thesis contains six chapters. Taken together, they explore US and UK discussions over the replacement to Polaris. The six chapters place these US-UK discussions within the context of the respective US administration’s aims and interests, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the timing and shape of the Trident agreements.

Chapter One, ‘Frequently Renegotiated’, analyses key events in the US-UK nuclear relationship from its beginnings during World War II (WWII) to the election of President Jimmy Carter in 1977. It demonstrates that the Trident agreements were not a ‘foregone conclusion’ due to long-standing US-UK nuclear co-operation. Since its beginnings, the relationship has fluctuated in its degree of closeness in accordance with the alignment of US-UK interests. As such, the chapter makes clear that the appropriate lesson to be drawn from the history of Anglo-American nuclear relations is that the Trident agreements were far from inevitable.

Chapter Two, ‘Securing the Options’, explores the initial uncertainty the British government faced over their options to replace Polaris. Upon Carter’s election, the new President endeavoured to achieve significant progress in arms-control, a move that, if successful, would have severely restricted US-UK nuclear co-operation. Carter’s hopes of achieving ‘deep cuts’ were quickly curtailed by the Soviet reaction. However, British officials continued to fear that Carter’s enduring commitment to the arms-control process might limit their options to replace Polaris. A combination of NATO internal politics and the beginning of Carter’s ‘hardening’ of policy towards the Soviet Union nullified the administration’s aim of nuclear reductions, and subsequently tempered British official’s concerns about their options for the successor to Polaris. As such, with the completion of the Duff-Mason report in December 1978, the likelihood of the British securing Carter’s agreement to supply the

³⁶ Transcript of interview with Robert Wade-Gery, Interview conducted by Malcolm McBain, 13 February 2000, British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, <https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/Wade-Gery.pdf>, 88.

recommended system, Trident C4, had increased. However, these developments only made a US agreement to the supply of Trident C4 more probable, and certainly not definite.

Chapter Three, 'SALT in the Wounds', explores the preliminary negotiations on the supply of Trident C4. In January 1979, Carter assured the British Prime Minister Jim Callaghan that he would consider the supply of Trident C4. However, despite this assurance, throughout the spring and summer of 1979, the British government continued to face uncertainty that the US would sell the system because of the problems such a deal could cause for arms-control negotiations and subsequently Carter's domestic position. In October 1979, the Carter administration gave the British government a firm assurance that they would supply Trident C4 with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) capability. However, alongside this promise, Carter requested the delay of a formal agreement until after the NATO 'dual-track' decision. Then in December 1979, Margaret Thatcher met Jimmy Carter to discuss the Polaris replacement; instead of Thatcher making a formal request for the Trident C4 system, as the British had originally planned, Carter told her that finalisation of the sale would have to wait until after the ratification of SALT II at a date as yet unknown.

Chapter Four, 'A Transactional Relationship', discusses the Carter administration's continued hesitation to finalise the Trident C4 sale after the withdrawal of SALT from Senate ratification, and the eventual negotiations on the terms of supply. In December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. In response, the Carter administration hardened their approach on the Soviet Union and, as part of this, withdrew SALT from Senate ratification. However, alongside this the Carter administration's political problems increased. Accordingly, so did the White House's concern about *any* potential criticism they could face from the sale of Trident C4. Then in March 1980, concern over the political damage the potential British reaction could cause if there was any further delay, largely motivated the Carter administration's decision to finalise the Trident sale. In this way, the Carter administration was consistently obstinate about supplying Trident to the UK, and only consented to do so at a time of their choosing. The Carter administration's hard-headed approach

continued throughout the Trident C4 negotiations. The Carter administration's overall foreign policy interests and aims influenced the terms they sought in return for Trident. US officials drove a hard bargain to derive the greatest possible benefit from the Trident C4 agreement, and indeed treated the US-UK nuclear relationship as transactional not special in nature.

Chapter Five, 'The Wait for a D5 Decision', explores the difficult period of unease the British faced upon Reagan's election as they waited for the administration to make a decision on whether to upgrade to the Trident D5 system. In August 1981, the British Government received a formal confirmation that the US would upgrade to the D5 and that the Reagan administration would be prepared to sell the system to the UK. The British government was fortunate that the Reagan administration made this strategic modernisation decision earlier than originally expected. However, even with this commitment, the British remained uncertain about the replacement to Polaris; the US guarantee to sell the D5 did not come with a reassurance that they would sell it at a reduced price. Moreover, the British could not begin negotiations on the price of D5, or make a decision on whether to upgrade, until Reagan announced his strategic modernisation programme in October 1981. Subsequently, throughout most of 1981, US actions (or in this case inaction) left British decision-making on the Polaris replacement at a standstill.

Chapter Six, 'Red Threat', discusses the ways in which the Thatcher government's uncertainty about the cost of the D5 system impeded their decision-making on whether to upgrade, and the eventual negotiations on the terms of supply. Even though a deal favourable to the British was in the interests of the US government, US officials still drove a hard bargain to derive the greatest possible benefit from the Trident D5 agreement. This meant that British concerns about the terms of sale were only resolved on the final day of formal negotiations in February 1982 – when the British offered a commitment on their naval deployments in return for a reduction of the research and development levy. Despite this, the eventual Trident D5 agreement was extremely favourable to the British. However, the Reagan administration offered to sell the D5 at a substantially reduced price because

it was in *their* interests. The sale strengthened western nuclear and conventional forces; a key area of concern for the Reagan administration. The favourable terms also helped negate some leftist criticism of the Trident D5 sale; another key priority for the Reagan administration given their concern over the Labour party's disarmament policy and the increase in anti-nuclear sentiment in Europe. As such, the eventual Trident D5 agreement was a reflection of the Reagan administration's foreign policy aims.

These six chapters reveal the influence that America's wider geostrategic interests, and its fractious domestic politics, played upon the Trident negotiations. The analysis reveals that the Trident agreements were not a foregone conclusion nor a 'renewal' of the US-UK nuclear relationship, but rather a continuation of the friendly, but not spousal, nature of US-UK nuclear relations, that has been renegotiated, according to the varying interests of both parties, throughout its existence.

Part One – Historical Overview

Chapter 1

Frequently Renegotiated: The US-UK Nuclear Relationship, 1940 – 1976

“The salad is heaped in a bowl permanently smeared with the garlic of suspicion.”

- British Embassy report, 29 January 1945.¹

I

In July 1980, the United Kingdom and United States governments signed the Trident C4 agreement, which agreed the sale of US Trident C4 missiles to the UK. Following President Ronald Reagan’s decision to replace the Trident C4 missile with the Trident D5 missile, in March 1982 the UK and US governments signed the Trident D5 agreement. The Trident agreements appeared to be an example of the unique nature of the US-UK nuclear relationship, and fostered its continuation. Indeed, the 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement, wherein the Kennedy administration agreed to supply Polaris missiles to the UK, was used as the basis for the terms of the Trident agreements. As such, some historians have stressed the history of US-UK nuclear relations, in particular the precedent of two earlier inter-governmental agreements agreed between the US and UK, the Mutual Defence Agreement, 1958 (MDA) and PSA, as a means to understanding the Trident agreements.² However, these arguments are insufficiently nuanced. Firstly, hindsight mires such analysis. Whilst the history of US-UK nuclear relations helped facilitate the Trident agreements, there was a great deal of uncertainty throughout the negotiations. As will be discussed, the negotiations for Trident were protracted and, throughout, the

¹ British Embassy report quoted in Margaret Gowing, “Nuclear Weapons and the ‘Special Relationship’,” in *The ‘Special Relationship’*, ed. Louis and Bull, 120.

² See for example David Sanders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy since 1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 190; Stoddart, “The Special Nuclear Relationship”, 33; Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*, 428; Brian Jamison, “Completing the Transatlantic Nuclear Bridge: A UK View,” in *US-UK Nuclear Cooperation*, 57.

British government was not certain of a final agreement, particularly on mutually agreeable terms. Indeed, ease was the main reason the US and UK governments used the PSA as the foundation for the Trident agreements. Secondly, invoking ‘specialness’ to explain harmonious Anglo-American nuclear relations does not accord with the historical reality.

This chapter provides context to the Trident agreements, but also demonstrates that they were not a ‘foregone conclusion’. As is widely agreed amongst historians in the field, the core of the US-UK nuclear relationship is mutual interests.³ Due to a broad commonality in strategic interests, particularly due to the Cold War environment, there was a good deal of continuity in the US-UK nuclear relationship. However, at the same time, there were also moments of acute tension and dispute. As this chapter demonstrates, this was due to changes in the aims and interests of both the US and UK, which have shaped the relationship since its beginnings and led to its frequent renegotiation. These interests reflected domestic, economic and political priorities, as much as international strategic factors.

The existing secondary literature on the US-UK nuclear relationship is the basis for this chapter’s analysis. Through analysing the secondary literature, the chapter demonstrates the ways in which this study on Trident builds upon previous research in the field. However, the sole use of secondary literature in this chapter does create some limitations in the analysis. As discussed, whilst there exists a considerable literature on the 1940s to mid-1960s, there is less work on the later period, particularly on Chevaline.⁴ This means, inevitably, that there are fewer detailed archival studies to utilise in examining the relationship from the mid-1960s, than the first decades of the relationship.

³ See for example Baylis, “Exchanging Nuclear Secrets”; Simpson, *The Independent Nuclear State*; Robb, *A strained partnership?*, 13; Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 4; Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*, 2.

⁴ An official history on Chevaline by Professor Matthew Jones is forthcoming.

II

The roots of US-UK nuclear co-operation lay in the race to build the first atomic bomb in WWII. However, these ‘roots’ were not firmly established. Whilst, some authors claim that the foundations of the US-UK ‘special relationship’ lay in collaboration between the wartime allies, at least with nuclear co-operation, these claims need to be qualified.⁵ Wartime collaboration did provide a precedent for later co-operation; however, the partnership was an “uneasy alliance.”⁶

In July 1940, after the German invasion of France had left Britain isolated in Europe, the British offered the United States, “with no strings attached,” full information of their research on weapons development.⁷ Part of this bold offer included information on atomic energy; an area currently of little interest to the US government. However, in the summer of 1941, US officials received a secret British report that argued it was possible to build a uranium bomb within two years. The prospect of obtaining such a powerful weapon before the end of the war altered US priorities.⁸

In October 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt suggested to the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, a joint and largely integrated project to pursue the atomic bomb. However, at this point, the British government was reluctant to collaborate with the US. As the US had yet to start their own formal project, the British had a head start in the atomic race. As such, senior scientific advisors urged the British government to pursue an independent project.⁹ Winston Churchill was similarly reluctant to form a formal partnership. His tardy reply to Roosevelt committed Britain to nothing beyond a vague assurance of a willingness to co-operate.¹⁰ However, unbeknown to the British, this reply to Roosevelt’s suggestion meant that they had allowed their only opportunity for a potentially equal partnership to slip away.

⁵ See Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 4; Baylis, *Anglo-American Relations since 1939*, 18.

⁶ Bernstein, “The Uneasy Alliance”, 202.

⁷ Ibid., 204.

⁸ Ibid., 205.

⁹ Alan Carr, “How it All Began: The Atomic Bomb and the British Mission,” in *US-UK Nuclear Cooperation*, 25.

¹⁰ Clark and Wheeler, *The British Origins of Nuclear Strategy*, 36.

Subsequently, the US poured their considerable resources into their own research and development project on the atomic bomb, named the 'Manhattan Project'. Meanwhile, the war was taking its toll on Britain, and their 'Tube Alloys' project was dogged by scarce resources, shortages of man power and the constant bombardment of air raids.¹¹ By mid-1942, the US project had overtaken its British counterpart.¹² Given the disparity in each side's resources, it was clear that the British project would not recover this lost ground. As such, Churchill attempted to establish the close partnership that he had previously snubbed. His attempts proved futile. Those involved with the US project now saw little reason for information exchange with the British. The expertise of their scientists as well as their superior resources meant that a US atomic bomb was quickly becoming a reality. US officials saw the potential for an atomic monopoly, and as such were reluctant to co-operate with the British. Subsequently, in December 1942 Roosevelt's Military Policy Committee placed restrictions upon the exchange of information on the atomic bomb. There could now only be an exchange of information in areas that the British were working on, and could therefore contribute to the US project.¹³

The British were unhappy with this exclusion from the project. Churchill lobbied Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins, the President's chief diplomatic advisor, for a return to unrestricted exchange of scientific information and unlimited co-operation. However, for seven months, Churchill's requests went unheeded, until the US decided that some co-operation would be useful to them.

In August 1943, Churchill and Roosevelt signed the Quebec Agreement, which agreed to pool US-UK efforts on the atomic bomb. The US decision to collaborate was for purely pragmatic reasons. The British 'Tube Alloys' project contained a number of highly skilled scientists due, in part, to the exodus of many intellectuals from continental Europe. These scientists would aid the progress of the 'Manhattan Project'. General Leslie Groves, the director of the US project, concluded, "it was better to risk giving Britain somewhat too much

¹¹ Andrew Brown, "Historic Barriers to Anglo-American Nuclear Cooperation," in *US-UK Nuclear Cooperation*, 37.

¹² Pierre, *Nuclear Politics*, 30-31.

¹³ Bernstein, "The Uneasy Alliance", 210.

information than to be too cautious and not build the bomb in time.”¹⁴ Moreover, the British would be the junior partner in co-operation. At Quebec, Roosevelt agreed to Churchill’s request for full interchange in scientific research and development, but only in common areas of research. In this way, Britain would supplement US efforts to build a bomb, and not threaten the likelihood they would hold a monopoly.¹⁵

Close analysis of wartime collaboration undermines the arguments of those who place emphasis on sentiment in the formulation of the US-UK relationship. For example, John Dickie argues that the strong personal bond between Churchill and Roosevelt was instrumental in the forging of a ‘special’ nuclear relationship.¹⁶ However, such viewpoints overlook the competing interests and power struggles that marked wartime nuclear collaboration. Indeed, the minister at the British embassy at the end of the war commented that because the US desired a post-war atomic monopoly, wartime co-operation was “smeared with the garlic of suspicion.”¹⁷ In this way, US-UK nuclear collaboration in WWII did not lay firm foundations for later US-UK nuclear co-operation but rather a relationship based upon mutual interests, in which contingency would be innate. Moreover, Britain’s position as a junior partner laid the foundations for Britain’s later technical dependency.

In 1944, Roosevelt and Churchill signed the Hyde Park agreement, where they agreed to the continuation of US-UK atomic collaboration in peacetime. Barton Bernstein argues that Roosevelt made this agreement to entrench the British programme within the US project rather than help Britain develop their own ‘independent’ nuclear programme. This would make Britain’s nuclear programme “not a threat to American autonomy but a supplement to American power.”¹⁸ Given that the US had ensured Britain’s participation in wartime collaboration was as a junior partner, Bernstein’s argument is

¹⁴ Ibid., 222.

¹⁵ Ibid., 219-223.

¹⁶ John Dickie, ‘*Special*’ No More: Anglo-American Relations: Rhetoric and Reality (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), 131-132.

¹⁷ British Embassy report quoted in Gowing, “Nuclear Weapons and the ‘Special Relationship’”, 120.

¹⁸ Bernstein, “The Uneasy Alliance”, 226.

convincing. However, historians will never know the truth of what Roosevelt envisioned as post-war atomic collaboration because it did not come to fruition.

Given the Hyde Park agreement and Britain's contribution to the 'Manhattan Project', the British government expected the post-war continuation of US-UK nuclear collaboration. However, almost immediately after the war's end, the exchange of information on atomic energy slowed. Then in 1946 Congress passed the Atomic Energy Act, more commonly known as the McMahon Act. This prohibited the exchange of atomic information from the US to any other country, including Britain.¹⁹

Some historians have argued that part of the reason for Britain's exclusion was that few US officials knew about US-UK wartime collaboration and only Vannevar Bush knew of Roosevelt's agreement to post-war atomic collaboration.²⁰ However, whilst analysis in this area strays into supposition, it seems doubtful that wider knowledge of US-UK wartime co-operation and the Hyde Park *aide-mémoire* would have changed the US government's policy towards US-UK atomic collaboration. As Matthew Jones notes, in the "post-war context of American policymaking" US-UK nuclear co-operation was unlikely to survive.²¹ The majority of US decision-makers saw a monopoly on the atomic bomb as a means to guarantee US strength and strategic advantage over the Soviet Union.²² Continued atomic exchange with the British did not fit with this vision of the post-war world. However, some nuclear co-operation did continue in areas of utility for the US. In particular, due to limited supplies, the US sought British assistance to obtain uranium. The US and UK continued to collaborate on advanced conventional weapons, including potential nuclear delivery systems, and advanced submarine designs. In addition, with the start of the Cold War, US strategic bombers returned to bases in the UK.²³ These

¹⁹ Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations*, 30.

²⁰ Ibid., 19; Peter Hennessy, *Muddling Through: Power, Politics and the Quality of Government in Post-war Britain* (London: Gollancz, 1996), 102; Sabine Lee, "In No Sense Vital and Actually Not Even Important? Reality and Perception of Britain's Contribution to the Development of Nuclear Weapons," *Contemporary British History* 20:2 (2006), 172.

²¹ Jones, "Great Britain, the United States and Consultation", 802.

²² Gerard DeGroot, *The Bomb: A History of Hell on Earth* (London: Pimlico, 2005), 122-123; Gowing, *Independence and Deterrence*, 110.

²³ Lee, "In No Sense Vital", 178.

areas of mutual interest kept open vital avenues of collaboration for the future ‘restoration’ of US-UK nuclear co-operation.

Indeed, some historians view the McMahon Act as an anomaly in the US-UK nuclear relationship. For example, Alan Carr argues, “The McMahon Act and the Fuchs affair, as it turns out, were only aberrations in an otherwise cordial and productive relationship.”²⁴ However, such thinking is problematic. Hindsight mars such arguments as they omit the fact that the McMahon Act led to a twelve-year hiatus in the US-UK nuclear relationship. Moreover, it neglects the continued conflict and co-operation that marked US-UK nuclear relations after the signing of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement. Instead, it is more accurate to see the McMahon Act as another stage in a US-UK nuclear relationship based upon mutual interests.

Following the breakdown in US-UK nuclear co-operation, in 1947 the British government began their own independent programme to produce nuclear weapons.²⁵ As Ian Clark and Nicholas Wheeler highlight, reflection upon US-UK relations best facilitates understanding of this decision because it “was in the context of this relationship that the early British decisions were taken.”²⁶ In the 1940s, British policy-makers still viewed their country as a ‘great power,’ and they did not wish to be reliant upon the US for its security. As such, the decision to make an atomic weapon emerged almost instinctively, as they believed the necessity of a British bomb as axiomatic.²⁷ In this way, the British decision was not merely a response to the end of US-UK collaboration; the desire for a British atomic bomb was pre-existent. Concurrently, British policy-makers believed that an atomic weapon would provide a level of influence over the US. This was crucial due to uncertainty over US commitments to Europe and related fears that America could return to a policy of isolationism. Through the development of their own nuclear capabilities, British decision-makers hoped that the US would take them more seriously as

²⁴ Carr, “How it All Began”, 32.

²⁵ For more detailed analysis of this decision see Clark and Wheeler, *The British Origins of Nuclear Strategy*; Gowing, *Independence and Deterrence*; Pierre, *Nuclear Politics*; Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations*.

²⁶ Clark and Wheeler, *The British Origins of Nuclear Strategy*, 2-3.

²⁷ Ibid., 43; Gowing, *Independence and Deterrence*, 184; Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations*, 32-33.

an ally and consult them on “crucial issues of war and peace.”²⁸ However, a desire to restore US-UK nuclear collaboration also motivated the decision.²⁹ US technical expertise would reduce British costs and aid progress. Furthermore, British decision-makers reasoned that the only way to restore US-UK nuclear co-operation was to achieve indigenous success and thereby convince the US that they had something to gain from collaboration with the British.³⁰ In this way, the British decision to build an atomic bomb centred on its relationship with the US.

However, despite British efforts, it would take ten years for the restoration of US-UK nuclear co-operation. This was despite the emerging demarcation between the East and West and the loss of the American atomic weapons monopoly with the first Soviet nuclear test in 1949. Part of the problem was the exposure of several spies from within the British mission to the ‘Manhattan Project’ who had passed information to the Soviets.³¹ However, the main issue was that US policy-makers did not believe that the restoration of collaboration was in their interests. Slowly, over the next ten years, US geostrategic interests and domestic politics shifted towards the restoration of US-UK nuclear co-operation.

III

In August 1953, shortly after the Presidential election of Dwight Eisenhower, the USSR announced that it had successfully tested “one of the types of the hydrogen bomb.”³² This Soviet test came less than a year after the United States first test of a thermonuclear device in November 1952. The Soviet Union’s Sloika, was not a ‘true’ hydrogen bomb, with a yield about 25 times smaller than that of the United States Mike test.³³ However, it’s ‘layer cake’

²⁸ Jones, “Great Britain, the United States and Consultation”, 814.

²⁹ Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations*, 33.

³⁰ Clark and Wheeler, *The British Origins of Nuclear Strategy*, 133.

³¹ Eric Ridge, “Completing the Transatlantic Nuclear Bridge: A U.S. View” in *US-UK Nuclear Cooperation*, 68.

³² Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb*, 307.

³³ Ibid, 307.

design was original, rather than the first Soviet atomic bomb that was based upon US designs. The US government was shocked at how quickly, and independently, the Soviet Union had advanced towards thermonuclear technology and the US monopoly over the H-bomb had been shattered.³⁴ This development, as well as Chinese intervention in the Korean War and continued escalation of the Cold War in Europe, led to an increase in Cold War tensions. The Eisenhower administration had a number of key considerations in determining how to respond to this growth in perceived threat. Firstly, the US government needed to strengthen its alliances in order to negate domestic fears that the country was fighting the Cold War alone. Secondly, the Eisenhower administration wished to strengthen the nation's defence without jeopardising US economic stability.³⁵ Thirdly, the President believed that the US could not afford to meet every threat to US national interests through conventional means. Finally, Eisenhower was determined to avoid another conflict like the Korean War, which had generated considerable US domestic opposition to sending troops to fight in a protracted conventional war.³⁶

In response to these considerations, the Eisenhower administration developed the 'New Look' strategy. This policy placed a reliance on nuclear weapons in US defence strategy, and emphasised the need for "secure, massive retaliatory forces."³⁷ Such a policy was now possible due to the technological breakthroughs that had built up the nuclear stockpile and given greater flexibility in the use of nuclear weapons.³⁸ 'New Look' enabled reductions in conventional forces and thereby created savings in the defence budget. The strategy also appeased public opposition to sending US troops abroad. 'New Look' also emphasised the need for the US to maintain and strengthen its alliances. Eisenhower believed that Western Europe should become "a third

³⁴ Ibid, 303-307; DeGroot, *The Bomb*, 181.

³⁵ Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower's New-Look National Security Policy, 1953-61* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 2.

³⁶ Jane Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response: NATO's Debate over Strategy in the 1960s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988), 12-13.

³⁷ Andreas Wenger, *Living with Peril: Eisenhower, Kennedy and Nuclear Weapons* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 44.

³⁸ Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 159.

great power bloc,” aligned with the US but capable of defending itself.³⁹ This would allow the US to gradually withdraw its conventional troops from Europe and thereby reduce the US defence burden. It would also allay US domestic fears that the US was fighting the Cold War alone.⁴⁰

In Europe, the ‘New Look’ seemed to offer a cheap and politically viable solution to the USSR’s conventional force superiority in Europe. As such, in March 1954, NATO also adopted a policy that placed emphasis on nuclear weapons in its defence strategy.⁴¹ Subsequently, the US began to place its nuclear weapons in NATO countries. Concurrently, in order to ease the economic burden on the US and at the same time strengthen NATO, the White House requested that Congress amend the McMahon Act to allow for the resumption of nuclear co-operation with its allies. The result was the 1954 Atomic Energy Act, which, while specifically forbidding disclosure of information concerning the design and fabrication of US weapons, did permit the US to share data with its NATO allies on the military characteristics and yields of US nuclear weapons. As such, the act enabled allies to carry US nuclear weapons on their own delivery systems. In light of these changes, and as part of efforts to restore trust in the US-UK relationship following the Suez crisis, in March 1957 Eisenhower and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan agreed for the basing of sixty US Thor missiles in Britain. Eisenhower also agreed with Macmillan that the US would provide the British Royal Air Force with nuclear weapons in time of war, and that for this purpose such weapons be stored under US custody in Britain.⁴²

These developments in US strategy and the subsequent “nuclearization of NATO” laid important foundations for the re-establishment of US-UK nuclear co-operation.⁴³ However, whilst Eisenhower and many in his administration saw the utility in an increased nuclear collaboration with Britain, there still existed Congressional opposition to the restart of US-UK

³⁹ Baylis, “The 1958 Anglo-American Mutual Defence Agreement”, 429.

⁴⁰ Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 8-9.

⁴¹ DeGroot, *The Bomb*, 190-191.

⁴² Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 46-48; Justin Bronk, “Britain’s ‘Independent’ V-Bomber Force and US Nuclear Weapons, 1957-1962,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37:6-7 (2014), 977-978.

⁴³ Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, 153.

nuclear co-operation.⁴⁴ However, further developments in US geostrategic interests and domestic politics soon reduced this opposition.

In October 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite. The Sputnik launch shattered the illusion of American technological superiority and the US public feared that the USSR would storm ahead in the nuclear arms-race. Sputnik provoked, as Jenifer Mackby and John Simpson highlight, "a transforming effect akin to that of September 11, 2001 on US public and Congressional opinion."⁴⁵

The public hysteria helped to erode Congressional opposition to nuclear co-operation. The US government needed to reassure the public that they were not fighting the Cold War alone and that the US was winning the nuclear arms-race. Co-operation with Britain would help with this. It was the only US ally with nuclear capability, having successfully tested its first atomic bomb in 1952. More recently, between 1957 and 1958, the British also successfully tested thermonuclear weapons.⁴⁶ As such, the British had demonstrated to the US public and congress alike their potential ability to contribute to the American project and thereby assist with a US 'victory' in the nuclear arms-race.⁴⁷

In this environment, Eisenhower sought to restore the nuclear relationship with Britain. Subsequently, in 1958 the UK and US governments signed the Mutual Defence Agreement, which enabled the exchange of nuclear information and materials. In 1959, this agreement was amended to authorise the transfer of nuclear technology.⁴⁸ The MDA created a unique nuclear partnership that enabled the unprecedented exchange of nuclear secrets. Moreover, it meant the 'restoration' of US-UK nuclear co-operation after a twelve-year hiatus, with Britain once again the junior partner.

Some historians have emphasised the role of Eisenhower in

⁴⁴ Baylis, "The 1958 Anglo-American Mutual Defence Agreement", 426.

⁴⁵ Jenifer Mackby and John Simpson, "The Special Nuclear Relationship: A Historical Chronology," in *U.S.-UK Nuclear Cooperation*, 10.

⁴⁶ DeGroot, *The Bomb*, 221-223.

⁴⁷ John Walker, *British Nuclear Weapons and the Test Ban 1954-1973: Britain, the United States, Weapons Policies and Nuclear Testing: Tensions and Contradictions* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 57; Baylis, "Exchanging Nuclear Secrets, 45.

⁴⁸ Baylis, "The 1958 Anglo-American Mutual Defence Agreement", 454.

consolidating US support for the MDA. For example, Baylis argues that Eisenhower's leadership was decisive in overcoming the domestic obstacles to increased nuclear co-operation.⁴⁹ However, only through the development in US geostrategic interests and domestic politics was Eisenhower able to convince Congress and the public of the need to restore US-UK nuclear co-operation. It is clear, that despite shared values and close personal relationships, the restoration of US-UK nuclear collaboration was due to shared mutual interests. Developments in international affairs, and the associated shift in the attitude of the US government and public, meant that the US saw utility in co-operation – it was in the nation's interest.

At the same time, the restoration of co-operation was extremely beneficial to the British government; the British could not keep pace with the technological advances in nuclear systems throughout the 1950s, and the costs of these new weapon systems.⁵⁰ However, British difficulties to keep up with the superpowers also revealed another underlying reason for the US to restore co-operation in the nuclear field. The move represented an American effort to save the British money so that they would increase their defence spending in other key strategic areas. As Sabine Lee observes, US-UK nuclear co-operation would ensure limited British expenditure on nuclear weapons "so that the British could deploy more useful forms of military power."⁵¹ Subsequently, John Baylis notes that the US sought "with some success, to link cooperation in the nuclear field with broader British support for US foreign policy objectives."⁵² As such, whilst for the British government the achievement of the MDA was a great success, as it would allow them to access advanced nuclear technology at a reduced cost, it is important to note the benefits for the US as well. US-UK nuclear co-operation strengthened the NATO alliance, maintained Britain's conventional force commitment and consolidated Britain's position as a junior partner that contributed to US national interests.

Some historians have suggested that the MDA laid the foundations for the rest of the US-UK nuclear relationship. For example, Brian Jamison argues,

⁴⁹ Baylis, "Exchanging Nuclear Secrets", 34.

⁵⁰ DeGroot, *The Bomb*, 227.

⁵¹ Lee, "In No Sense Vital", 178.

⁵² Baylis, "The 1958 Anglo-American Mutual Defence Agreement", 456-457.

“From July 1958 onward, Anglo-American nuclear defence policies became so intertwined by the development of the transformed nuclear relationship that they proved capable of withstanding the vicissitudes of the next 50 years of international history.”⁵³ John Baylis offers a more nuanced understanding of the MDA arguing it “established a framework for an Anglo-American nuclear partnership that remained in force throughout the Cold War period and continues in the late 1990s.”⁵⁴ However, even greater clarification is required. The MDA did not stop the pattern of conflict and co-operation that had existed in the US-UK nuclear relationship since its beginnings. Moreover, it did not guarantee US support for further nuclear co-operation. Following the MDA, fears remained among high-level US officials that nuclear co-operation could encourage proliferation and damage US-European relations. This pervading tension was a primary factor in the Skybolt crisis that threatened to bring the US-UK nuclear relationship to a shuddering stop within just three years of the MDA. As such, the MDA laid the groundwork for future nuclear co-operation, but its continuation relied on contemporary policy-makers believing that collaboration remained in the mutual interests of the US and UK.

IV

In 1960, the British government cancelled development of the country’s last indigenous missile, Blue Streak. Escalating costs and the missile’s vulnerability led to this cancellation; the British could not keep up with the technological advances of the Soviets, and the shift from bombers to missile delivery systems.⁵⁵ The solution was to use US technology to deliver British bombs. Indeed, the British government finally decided to cancel Blue Streak due to the US offer of such technology. In March 1960, Eisenhower offered Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister, a delivery system – the Skybolt missile

⁵³ Jamison, “Completing the Transatlantic Nuclear Bridge”, 57.

⁵⁴ Baylis, “Exchanging Nuclear Secrets”, 33.

⁵⁵ Donette Murray, “Macmillan and Nuclear Weapons: The Skybolt Affair,” in *Harold Macmillan: Aspects of a Political Life*, ed. Richard Aldous and Sabine Lee (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 218.

– currently under development for the United States Air Force.⁵⁶ The missile would extend the life of the British V-bomber forces. Before the cancellation of Blue Streak, the Macmillan government had made the ‘independent deterrent’ a high-profile policy. With the cancellation of the British missile, and the agreement to purchase Skybolt, the media machine of the British government went to work to stress the continued independence of its nuclear programme.⁵⁷ However, the acceptance of Skybolt meant that Britain entered a “new paradoxical phase” in its nuclear policy; British technical dependence upon the US would preserve Britain’s ‘independent deterrent’.⁵⁸

On the 9 November 1962, Robert McNamara, the US Defense Secretary, informed Peter Thorneycroft, the British Defence Secretary, about the cancellation of Skybolt due to high costs and test failures.⁵⁹ The US decision to cancel the highly complex and technically ambitious project sent shockwaves through the so-called ‘special relationship’ and caused accusations of betrayal in the corridors of Whitehall. The cancellation led to a veritable political eruption in London, and at the official level the greatest crisis between the US and Britain since the Suez affair in 1956.⁶⁰ British ministers claimed the cancellation was a “bolt out of the blue.”⁶¹ The Skybolt crisis was the first symptom of Britain’s new found technical dependence upon the US. However, the resulting Nassau agreement was a key example of the renegotiation of the nuclear relationship when it was in US interests.

The political eruption that occurred defied ‘rational’ logic; the Skybolt missile was technically flawed. By 1961, the USSR had acquired a significant nuclear capability and some believed (erroneously) that it had surpassed the US in terms of nuclear power.⁶² In this environment, the American’s decision to cancel the missile on simple calculations of ‘cost-efficiency’ made strategic sense. Despite having spent \$500 million on the Skybolt programme, the

⁵⁶ Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 134-135.

⁵⁷ DeGroot, *The Bomb*, 227.

⁵⁸ Murray, “Macmillan and Nuclear Weapons”, 219.

⁵⁹ Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*, 351.

⁶⁰ Pierre, *Nuclear Politics*, 224.

⁶¹ Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*, 339.

⁶² Joint Intelligence Committee assessment of ‘Sino Soviet Bloc War Potential, 1962 – 1966, 16 February 1962, CAB 158/45 in Hennessey, *Cabinets and the Bomb*, 141-142.

missile had failed all five of its flight tests. Cancellation of the project would save two to three billion dollars to spend on other defence systems.⁶³

Given the technical problems of Skybolt, the Kennedy administration was puzzled by the British reaction to the missile's cancellation. Indeed, President Kennedy commissioned a report to explain why the cancellation had led to such a breakdown in US-UK relations. The author of this report, Richard Neustadt, concluded that it was a failure of communication.⁶⁴ However, later released archival material makes clear that Washington regularly and fully informed London about Skybolt's progress. As such, Ian Clark argues, "there is little to support the notion that the threat of cancellation came 'out of the blue' to the British."⁶⁵ Subsequently, John Baylis suggested that British incredulity was a British ploy to bring about the eventual US supply of Polaris through obligation.⁶⁶ However, as Ken Young suggests, this is "too far-fetched an interpretation."⁶⁷ The US promise of Skybolt had always been conditional, and as such, the British could have no certainty on its supply, particularly after a change of administration. Instead, to understand the Skybolt crisis we must analyse the political context of the Macmillan and Kennedy governments at this time.

For the British government, Skybolt was a political loss rather than a military one. The cancellation undermined the fabricated image of an 'independent British deterrent' and with it Britain's inward projection of itself as a 'great power'. As Ken Young contends, "Skybolt was important to the British for what it represented, rather than for what it might have been able to do."⁶⁸ The cancellation threatened the domestic credibility of the Macmillan government. There were three major pillars in Macmillan's foreign policy: the 'independent deterrent'; the repair of US-UK relations following the Suez crisis; and to change public perception following the Cuban missile crisis that

⁶³ Murray, *Kennedy, Macmillan*, 66; Murray, "Macmillan and Nuclear Weapons", 223.

⁶⁴ Richard Neustadt, *Report to JFK: the Skybolt Crisis in Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 26-27.

⁶⁵ Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*, 351.

⁶⁶ Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations*, 101.

⁶⁷ Ken Young, "The Skybolt Crisis of 1962: Muddle or Mischief?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 27: 4 (2004), 629.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 631.

Britain was impotent on the world stage.⁶⁹ The cancellation of Skybolt undermined all three pillars. This was particularly damaging for the Macmillan government given their domestic woes; their economic policy was under fire, unemployment was at a post-war record high of 800,000 and Macmillan's axing of a third of his Cabinet had left the Prime Minister with a tarnished, desperate image.⁷⁰ In conjunction with Macmillan's other domestic problems, the cancellation of Skybolt threatened his government's very survival.

The British government also feared that the cancellation of Skybolt might be utilised by the Kennedy administration to force the British to give up its nuclear force. A catalyst for these suspicions was Robert McNamara's speech at Ann Arbor in June 1962. He stated that small national deterrents were "dangerous, expensive, prone to obsolescence and lacking in credibility."⁷¹ Whilst McNamara insisted that the French nuclear force was the target of his comments, it was unsurprising that London interpreted them as an attack on its own nuclear programme.⁷² Also of concern was a powerful lobby within the State Department, the so-called 'theologians', such as George Ball and Walt Rostow, who believed that Britain should not be a nuclear power and that the US should not provide the capability. They reasoned that such provision would encourage nuclear proliferation and threaten the stability of Soviet-US mutual deterrence. They also feared that it would lead to an increase in the Federal Republic of Germany's (FRG) calls for their own nuclear weapons. The 'theologians' also believed that the existence of a British 'deterrent' might weaken the resolve of NATO to strengthen its conventional forces, which was necessary for the US-favoured NATO 'Flexible Response' strategy, and this in turn would increase the risk of nuclear confrontation.⁷³

⁶⁹ Murray, *Kennedy, Macmillan and Nuclear Weapons*, 2; Pierre, *Nuclear Politics*, 225.

⁷⁰ Alastair Horne, "The Macmillan Years and Afterwards," in *The 'Special Relationship': Anglo-American Relations Since 1945*, ed. William Louis and Hedley Bull (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 94.

⁷¹ John Baylis, *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy, 1945 – 1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 301.

⁷² Pierre, *Nuclear Politics*, 208-209.

⁷³ Andrew Priest, "The President, the 'Theologians' and the Europeans: The Johnson Administration and NATO Nuclear Sharing," *The International History Review* 22:2 (2011), 260; Sanders, *Losing an Empire*, 174.

Instead the ‘theologians’ proposed a Multilateral Force (MLF); a naval force crewed by members of all NATO countries and carrying nuclear weapons.⁷⁴ Indeed, the ‘theologians’ were named as such due to their “quasi-religious devotion” to the MLF.⁷⁵ The Eisenhower administration had originally proposed the MLF as a means to reconcile West European demands for collective alliance control with the United States’ non-proliferation policy. A recurring issue throughout the Cold War was the credibility of the US nuclear umbrella to ‘protect’ Europe. These concerns were particularly acute by the mid-1950s. West European governments questioned whether the US would use nuclear weapons, and thereby sacrifice itself, if the Soviets advanced into Western Europe.⁷⁶ Rhetorically, the US made clear to the USSR that in such an event it would regard its own national security interests as being at stake along with its allies. However, such rhetoric did not ease European anxiety. As such, some US officials feared that at some point the FRG would demand national access to nuclear weapons. By 1960, these fears were more acute due to the development of Soviet Medium-range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) that threatened the FRG.⁷⁷ As such, the Eisenhower administration proposed the MLF.

Following Kennedy’s election, the administration placed emphasis on NATO increasing its conventional forces as part of ‘Flexible Response’. However, the State Department was still a strong advocate of the MLF and did not wish to see a British ‘independent deterrent’. Immediately following the cancellation of Skybolt, British officials feared that this thinking influenced the US response. On 9 December, Solly Zuckerman, chief scientific advisor to the Ministry of Defence (MOD), met with McNamara. During their conversation, McNamara outlined four possible alternatives to Skybolt: a British Skybolt programme, Minuteman, Hound Dog or Polaris. However, when Thorneycroft and McNamara met on 11 December, the US Defence Secretary presented a *fait accompli* on US cancellation of Skybolt, as well as only three alternatives:

⁷⁴ Dimbleby and Reynolds. *An Ocean Apart*, 235-236.

⁷⁵ Priest, “The President, the ‘Theologians’”, 260.

⁷⁶ Stoddart, *Losing an Empire*, 60.

⁷⁷ John Young, “Killing the MLF? The Wilson Government and Nuclear Sharing in Europe, 1946-66,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 14:2 (2003), 295.

British development of Skybolt; US supply of Hound dog; or that “the United Kingdom might participate in a seaborne MRBM force under multilateral manning and ownership.”⁷⁸ With the technical difficulties of the first two options, and any potential supply of Polaris tied up with ideas of MLF, British officials feared that State Department thinking on the UK nuclear force had won out. When Thorneycroft mentioned the possibility of Polaris, McNamara agreed to consider it but stressed there were “legal difficulties.”⁷⁹ In this way, the meeting ended with the future of the British ‘independent deterrent’ in limbo; the US had cancelled Skybolt and not yet offered the British government a satisfactory solution.

A week after McNamara informed the British of Skybolt’s cancellation, Harold Macmillan and John F. Kennedy met in Nassau in the Bahamas. Henry Brandon, a correspondent for *The Sunday Times* with close links to both Kennedy and Macmillan, later commented, “The British arrived at Nassau in the angriest frame of mind of any delegation at an Anglo-American summit since the war.”⁸⁰ At this summit, Kennedy agreed to supply the British with Polaris missiles, minus the warheads, as a replacement for Skybolt, and crucially for the British did not insist on the supply only as part of an MLF.

It is difficult to understand at first sight why Kennedy agreed to supply Polaris missiles without a concurrent agreement on an MLF. The Polaris agreement perturbed NATO allies, particularly France and the FRG, and the President faced pressure from within his own administration not to further enable Britain’s ‘independent deterrent’.⁸¹ As such, some scholars have viewed the Nassau agreement as a personal coup by Macmillan, arguing that he utilised his personal relationship with Kennedy and his political skill to persuade the President to supply Polaris and reverse his non-proliferation policies.⁸² However, the subsequent declassification of archival material has

⁷⁸ Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*, 358.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 359.

⁸⁰ Henry Brandon, *Special Relationships: a Foreign Correspondent’s Memoirs from Roosevelt to Reagan* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 164.

⁸¹ Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship*, 419.

⁸² See Alan Dobson, “Labour or Conservative: Does it Matter in Anglo-American Relations?”

undermined these interpretations. Despite the internal wrangling within the Kennedy administration over Britain's 'independent deterrent', three days before the Nassau conference the White House decided that they would offer Polaris. On 16 December, in a meeting between Kennedy and his key advisors, the President overruled the objections of the State Department. Kennedy felt that the cancellation of Skybolt left the US with some kind of obligation to supply a replacement. Subsequently, the participants decided that the US would "offer components of Polaris missiles to the British..." although "it would be a condition of this offer that the British would commit their eventual Polaris force to a multilateral or multinational force in NATO."⁸³ In addition, the UK would have to commit to strengthening their conventional forces. In Nassau, despite the decision to supply Polaris, Kennedy's first offer was for the US to continue the production of Skybolt solely for the British, with Britain paying fifty percent of the production costs. Given the recent public espousals of Skybolt's failings, Macmillan resolutely refused this offer. The President then offered Polaris but as part of the MLF. This again was unsatisfactory to Macmillan; he wanted something on the same terms of Skybolt, which Eisenhower had offered without strings. Eventually, Kennedy and Macmillan agreed upon the supply of Polaris, with the system "assigned to NATO."⁸⁴ The meaning of 'assignment' remained vague. Kennedy recognised the need to satisfy Macmillan's political need for an 'independent deterrent'.⁸⁵

In this way, it is clear to see that Kennedy's friendship with Macmillan did play a role in defining the terms of the Nassau agreement. However, it is important to note the convergence of interests that led to Kennedy being so forthcoming and indeed making a decision to supply Polaris before Nassau. The British government placed great emphasis on maintaining its nuclear force. At the same time, British development of a delivery system would come at a high financial cost, which in turn would damage NATO, Britain's

Contemporary History 25:4 (1990), 400; Nigel Ashton, "Managing Transition: Macmillan and the utility of Anglo-American Relations," in *Harold Macmillan: Aspects of a Political Life*, ed. Richard Aldous and Sabine Lee (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 248; Murray, *Kennedy, Macmillan*, 158.

⁸³ Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 44-45.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

conventional forces, and Kennedy's 'flexible response' strategy. This in turn would create more of a defence burden for the US. Moreover, the supply of Polaris followed (somewhat paradoxically) Kennedy's views on non-proliferation. Kennedy was sceptical about MLF, in part because he did not want the US to relinquish control over NATO's nuclear weapons.⁸⁶ The supply of Polaris, secured British technical dependence on the US, and thereby enabled the US to maintain a great deal of control over Britain's 'independent deterrent'. In addition, the presentation of Britain's new system as committed to NATO helped deal with West European concerns about the US nuclear umbrella. In this way, the role of sentiment played a role in the finer details of the Nassau agreement but not in the Polaris decision *per se*. Moreover, due to the convergence of mutual interests, the Skybolt 'crisis' was resolved relatively quickly and to the satisfaction of both parties. As such, Priest convincingly argues, "the entire episode should be seen as part of the Anglo-American negotiation in nuclear affairs that had been ongoing since 1946."⁸⁷

Given the generously demonstrative nature of the Nassau agreement, some historians have argued that it resolved US doubts about the British 'independent deterrent' and marked a new stage of intimacy in the US-UK nuclear relationship.⁸⁸ However, such arguments are problematic. They overlook the continued existence of doubts within the US government over the supply of Polaris and the subsequent debate over MLF. If, as Michael Middeke highlights, the MLF proposed in the Nassau agreement had ever materialised "an independent British deterrent would have ceased to exist."⁸⁹ Moreover, they overlook that alongside this apparent intimacy came firmer British technical dependence upon the US, which made the British nuclear force more vulnerable to fluctuations in US nuclear and non-proliferation strategy as well as intra-NATO politics.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁸ See Sanders, *Losing an Empire*, 173; Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*, 339.

⁸⁹ Michael Middeke, "Anglo-American Nuclear Weapons Cooperation after the Nassau Conference: The British Policy of Interdependence," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2:2 (2000), 93.

The Nassau communiqué was open to interpretation, as it did not specify what assignment to NATO would mean in practice. In particular, it did not rule out the commitment of Polaris to the MLF. Following the Nassau agreement, the State Department continued to lobby for the MLF over the next few years. Due to the ambiguity of the wording of the Nassau communiqué, the State Department did not see Kennedy's decision to supply the British with Polaris as a hindrance to their aims. Indeed, the wording of the communiqué reassured officials in the State Department that the US had not supplied Britain with an 'independent deterrent' for the coming decades, and that multilateralism would triumph.⁹⁰

The State Department was particularly hopeful because the events of Nassau had increased support for MLF within the Kennedy administration. Following the election of Kennedy, the administration had prioritised an increase in NATO's conventional forces and as such, it looked like the MLF would fall off the agenda. However, the Nassau agreement and the signing of the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation in January 1963 increased the policy's popularity within the administration. The Nassau agreement, and its public expression of an Anglo-American partnership at the expense of NATO, created tensions in the Western alliance. As such, some in Washington feared that the Franco-German entente could result in nuclear collaboration.⁹¹ The Kennedy administration saw the MLF as a possible solution to these tensions. Kennedy's interest in the policy faded in 1963 following a lukewarm reaction from his European allies. However, upon his assumption of the Presidency, Lyndon Johnson was unaware of Kennedy's retreat from MLF, and believed that he should honour Kennedy's public commitment to the policy. The State Department did not dissuade him from this view.⁹²

The MLF proposal was unpopular with the British government. Not only could it lead to the demise of Britain's 'independent deterrent', but the

⁹⁰ Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy*, 420.

⁹¹ Susanna Schrafstetter and Stephen Twigge, "Trick or Truth? The British ANF proposal, West Germany and US nonproliferation Policy 1964-68," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 11:2 (2000), 161; Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response*, 79.

⁹² Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 93.

British also feared, as did the French, that the proposal would lead to a nuclear-armed West Germany.⁹³ As such, Michael Middeke argues that, “the Macmillan government wanted the MLF to fail.”⁹⁴ Such views suggest acute conflict between the US and UK over the MLF. However, there was more nuance to British policy than these arguments suggest. As John Young notes, the British were in a bind regarding their response to MLF:

The British recognised that, if the MLF absorbed their national deterrent, it would reduce Britain’s level of importance in the Western alliance, but they were reluctant to offend Washington, especially after Kennedy agreed, at the Nassau summit, to supply them with Polaris missiles.⁹⁵

As such, the newly elected British Labour government, led by Harold Wilson, proposed the Atlantic Nuclear Force (ANF). Whilst the MLF would involve a ‘mixed-manned’ NATO force on Polaris-equipped ships, the ANF would consist of primarily national components, with British V-bombers and Polaris submarines, alongside contributions from the US and potentially France, as well as some mixed-manned components. Wilson’s proposal as such excluded Britain’s Polaris submarines from any ‘mixed-manned’ element, whilst also honoured Britain’s promise at Nassau to commit its nuclear force to NATO.⁹⁶

Some historians have claimed that the British dislike of MLF, alongside their alternative proposal of the ANF, led to the US finally rejecting the idea in December 1964.⁹⁷ However, such accounts overplay the role of the British government in changing US policy. The ANF did not kill the MLF. As John Young highlights, whilst the ANF did have a role in dissuading the US administration, as it offered an alternative, this only had the effect it did because the MLF lacked firm US support; Wilson “had been pushing at an open door in Washington.”⁹⁸ Moreover, as David Gill observes, “claims of the MLF’s death [in December 1964] are... exaggerated.”⁹⁹ At the December summit, Johnson

⁹³ Schrafstetter and Twigge, “Trick or Truth?”, 161.

⁹⁴ Middeke, “Anglo-American Nuclear Weapons”, 80.

⁹⁵ Young “Killing the MLF?”, 296.

⁹⁶ Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 93; Gill, *Britain and the Bomb*, 73.

⁹⁷ Schrafstetter and Twigge, “Trick or Truth?”, 161-163; Stoddart, *Losing an Empire*, 64-65; Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 94.

⁹⁸ Young “Killing the MLF?”, 305-307.

⁹⁹ Gill, *Britain and the Bomb*, 100.

decided to leave it to the British and FRG governments to discuss the ANF and other proposals. In addition, the FRG and US continued to discuss nuclear sharing solutions over the course of 1965-66.¹⁰⁰

These clarifications on the MLF highlight that, instead of the issue causing conflict in the US-UK nuclear relationship, both sides endeavored to find a resolution that suited their mutual interests. However, that the US did not pursue MLF and thereby render Britain's 'independent deterrent' as part of the new NATO force, was because in the end Washington did not view MLF as a priority. Wilson's memoirs stress the pressure George Ball, David Bruce and Richard Neustadt applied on him to agree to the MLF ahead of his meeting with Johnson at the December 1964 summit.¹⁰¹ However, that the Johnson administration did not react badly when Wilson expressed apprehension about the MLF was because many within the administration themselves held doubts.¹⁰² As Andrew Priest contends, "The NATO nuclear sharing issue undoubtedly caused tension in US-UK relations, but, outside of the State Department, many in Washington understood the British attitude of resistance including both Kennedy and Johnson."¹⁰³ In addition, the MLF was no longer a high priority for the US administration due to more pressing foreign policy issues such as Vietnam. The Johnson administration did not want to push a policy upon their allies that they were only moderately interested in, but nor would they be forced to act against their interests by Britain. As such, the MLF debate formed part of on-going negotiations over the configuration of the US-UK nuclear relationship. However, the MLF debate also highlighted the increasing importance of intra-NATO relations to the configuration of the US-UK nuclear relationship. As other major powers, in particular the FRG, grew in economic strength and diplomatic power the US increasingly had to balance the "continued prominence of Anglo-American understanding" with the demands of other US allies.¹⁰⁴ As such, the MLF debate reflected the changing configuration of the US-UK nuclear relationship alongside NATO politics.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 100, 210.

¹⁰¹ Young "Killing the MLF?", 305.

¹⁰² Ibid., 306-307.

¹⁰³ Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 157-158.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 8.

VII

In the mid-1960s, rapid advances in Soviet Anti-Ballistic-Missile (ABM) defence capability led the British government to question whether Polaris would be able to reach its targets in the USSR.¹⁰⁵ To meet any Soviet advances, the US began to develop the Poseidon missile, which would have MIRV capability. The US also began a programme, called Antelope, which considered improving the front-ends of the existing Polaris missiles.¹⁰⁶ Upon Labour's re-election in 1966, the British government began to consider how and if to update their Polaris missiles. One possible option was to purchase Poseidon. The Polaris Sales agreement kept open the possibility of Britain receiving "future development relating to the Polaris Weapons System, including all modifications made thereto."¹⁰⁷ Given this vague wording, there was some uncertainty over whether the sale of Poseidon would require a new Presidential Determination and Congressional approval. However, in June 1967 Harold Wilson announced that the British would not purchase Poseidon. Instead, utilising information supplied to them under the terms of the PSA on the US Antelope programme, the British government delayed a decision to improve Polaris by re-directing work at Aldermaston to a Super Antelope project, which investigated the possibility of designing a new warhead capable of improving the penetrability of Polaris. This programme would receive continued but limited support from the US.¹⁰⁸ Throughout Wilson's term in office, his government made no firm decision on Polaris improvement, and instead funded the Super Antelope project on a six-month rolling basis.¹⁰⁹

To understand the Wilson government's decision it is necessary to analyse the political context. When Wilson announced to Parliament that the

¹⁰⁵ Kristan Stoddart, "The Wilson Government and British Responses to Anti-Ballistic Missiles 1964-1970," *Contemporary British History* 23:1 (2009), 5.

¹⁰⁶ Parr, "The British Decision", 253.

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and Nuclear Weapons* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 38.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew Priest, "In American Hands: Britain, the United States and the Polaris Nuclear Project, 1962-1968," *Contemporary British History* 19:3 (2005), 367-366.

¹⁰⁹ Stoddart, *Losing an Empire*, 130.

government would not be purchasing Poseidon, he acknowledged the 1964 Labour manifesto commitment not to move to a new generation of nuclear weapons to replace Polaris.¹¹⁰ Subsequently, Kristan Stoddart argues that this commitment was “the main reason why the Super Antelope upgrade programme was initiated in 1967 and why British nuclear policy took the course it did in Wilson’s first government.”¹¹¹ However, this claim overlooks the complicated political environment that Wilson faced, and the *combination* of factors that led to his decision.

A public decision to purchase Poseidon would have created domestic difficulties for the Wilson government and potentially damaged their wider policy goals. In 1967, Britain’s economic troubles were acute. Concurrently, British defence policy was undergoing radical change following the 1966 defence review. Within this context, the potential cost of \$400 million for fitting British submarines with Poseidon, around the same amount as the entire Polaris programme, would have provoked dissent within the government as well as the British public.¹¹² In addition, a decision to purchase Poseidon would have also caused difficulties for Britain’s second attempt to join the European Economic Community (EEC). In January 1963, the French President Charles de Gaulle had rejected Britain’s first application to the EEC. This was partly because of perceptions of the British as a “Trojan Horse” for US influence.¹¹³ As such, in 1967, the British did not wish to further such conceptions. Indeed, Harold Wilson records in his memoir that he informed President de Gaulle of his “Nassau in reverse” to persuade him that Britain was reducing its dependence on the United States.¹¹⁴

However, it is important to note that Wilson’s decision also stemmed from strategic uncertainty. By the late 1960s, both the US and USSR were concerned about the nuclear arms-race, and indeed neither side saw benefit in its unfettered continuation. Subsequently, throughout the late 1960s and

¹¹⁰ Priest, “In American Hands”, 367.

¹¹¹ Kristan Stoddart, “The British Labour Government and the Development of Chevaline, 1974-79,” *Cold War History* 10:3 (2010), 290-291.

¹¹² Stoddart, *Losing an Empire*, 130; Priest, “In American Hands”, 367.

¹¹³ Helen Parr, “Saving the Community: The French Response to Britain’s Second EEC Application in 1967,” *Cold War History* 6:4 (2006), 426.

¹¹⁴ Freedman, *Britain and Nuclear Weapons*, 39.

1970s the two superpowers partook in bilateral negotiations to limit the scale of their nuclear build-ups through formal treaties. The new US priority of arms-control created uncertainty for the British government. In November 1969, the US and USSR commenced the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. It brought a future ban on ABM systems into consideration. Such a ban would reduce the need for improvements to Polaris. However, until the signing of SALT I in May 1972, it was unclear whether ABM systems would be restricted or whether the Soviet Union would continue to deploy them. This strategic uncertainty about the arms-control process led to hesitancy in the Wilson government over the Polaris improvement programme.¹¹⁵

The Wilson government's decision is interesting because it clearly demonstrated the influence of the surrounding political context on nuclear decision-making. Moreover, it displays that just as the US can decide 'renewal' of the US-UK nuclear relationship is not in their interests, the same applies for Britain. Subsequently, Wilson's decision (or perhaps more accurately indecision) led to a reduction in US-UK nuclear co-operation. Peter Jones, the chief designer of the Chevaline warhead, later recalled that US nuclear assistance, in the form of information about research, all but ended for a period in the late 1960s, mostly because of the Wilson government's decision not to improve Polaris: "the Nixon administration had reiterated that nuclear collaboration should be a two-way street and that if Britain was not going to the next generation beyond Polaris, the street was closed."¹¹⁶ Information from the latest US work only began to flow again once the British began work in the early 1970s on the Chevaline system.¹¹⁷

In May 1972, the ABM treaty was signed. The treaty allowed each superpower two ABM sites; one around their capital and one to defend an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) site. The signing of the treaty removed British uncertainty about future Soviet ABM deployments but meant that Polaris would be incapable of meeting the 'Moscow Criterion': a guiding principle in

¹¹⁵ Baylis and Stoddart, "Britain and the Chevaline Project", 129.

¹¹⁶ Peter Jones quoted in Baylis, "Exchanging Nuclear Secrets", 60.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

British nuclear strategy that the UK's nuclear force should be capable of attacking the Soviet capital.¹¹⁸ In 1973, Edward Heath, Harold Wilson's successor as Prime Minister, decided not to purchase the US Poseidon, either MIRVed or with its MIRV capability removed, but instead improve Polaris through the Super Antelope programme. In 1974, this programme was renamed Chevaline and its existence was finally revealed to the public in 1980.¹¹⁹ David Reynolds has argued that the Chevaline project "renewed the nuclear axis between Britain and America, especially in testing, data exchange and fissile materials."¹²⁰ Indeed, Chevaline did facilitate continued US-UK nuclear co-operation. As such, the British decision not to purchase Poseidon was not a break in the US-UK nuclear relationship. However, at the same time, Chevaline was not a 'renewal' of the relationship; the British decided not to closely tie themselves to the US by purchasing one of their systems, and instead took a more independent path.

Again, to understand the Heath government's decision it is necessary to comprehend the political context in which it was made. As with the Wilson government, a public decision to purchase Poseidon would have created domestic difficulties for the Heath government and potentially damage Heath's desire for Britain to become a leader within the EEC. Like the Wilson government, Heath was concerned about the price of Poseidon. Poseidon was more expensive than Super Antelope in the short term. This was problematic because Britain's economic difficulties had made expenditure cuts essential.¹²¹ In addition, Britain had finally been successful in its efforts to join the EEC. Given the two French vetoes and fears of the British as a US 'Trojan Horse,' 1973 was not the time for a purchase of Poseidon, which would again publicly highlight US-UK links.¹²² Moreover, Heath wished to create a more equal relationship between the US and EEC, and did not want another display of the unique UK-US connection to undermine this.¹²³ There was also a reluctance

¹¹⁸ Robb, "Antelope, Poseidon or a Hybrid", 801-802.

¹¹⁹ Parr, "The British Decision", 253-254.

¹²⁰ David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and the World Power in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Longman, 1991), 251.

¹²¹ Parr, "Saving the Community", 263, 266.

¹²² Baylis and Stoddart, "Britain and the Chevaline project", 135.

¹²³ Parr, "The British Decision", 264-265.

within the British government to once more illustrate British dependency upon the US and in the process reduce Britain's independent research.¹²⁴

However, to a greater extent than with Wilson's decision, developments in US geostrategic interests and domestic politics interplayed with the Heath government's decision – mainly because Heath considered more the purchase of Poseidon and made enquiries to the Nixon administration. This influence was not primarily, as Thomas Robb has suggested, because of "wider US-UK political differences."¹²⁵ Robb argues that "US-UK political differences emanating from the 'Year of Europe' were... prevalent in the final decision to opt for Super Antelope."¹²⁶ However, these claims are exaggerated. Robb partly bases this claim on the assertion that Kissinger cancelled for a short period US-UK discussions on upgrading Polaris in order to "force British policy to be more amenable to Kissinger's 'Year of Europe' programme."¹²⁷ Robb argues that the "cancellation of US-UK nuclear... co-operation... reminded British officials about the danger of increasing their reliance upon the United States for nuclear assistance."¹²⁸ Given other continued elements in the US-UK nuclear relationship, such as nuclear testing and information exchange, Kissinger's decision to, briefly, refuse to discuss Polaris improvement does not equate to the "cancellation" of US-UK nuclear co-operation. Moreover, recent archive research by Helen Parr has found that Anglo-American discussions on Polaris improvement continued and even increased as "diplomacy connected with the Year of Europe was beginning to get acrimonious."¹²⁹ However, these clarifications do not mean that difficulties in US-UK relations over the 'Year of Europe' did not play a role in Heath's decision. As Parr highlights the fact that Kissinger wanted to use "nuclear blackmail," if only briefly, to force British co-operation meant that it made sense for the British "not to stride into Kissinger's line of fire by repeated requests for nuclear hardware."¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Ibid., 271.

¹²⁵ Robb, "Antelope, Poseidon or a Hybrid", 797.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 799.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 811.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Parr, "The British Decision", 266-267.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 271.

The primary way that the US influenced British decision-making was inadvertent and because of US domestic politics. In November 1972, President Nixon supported the sale of Poseidon to Britain but there was a concern that given the SALT process, Congress would refuse. During negotiations on SALT I, the Soviets argued that British and French nuclear systems should be included as they reinforced the US nuclear arsenal in any major war between NATO and the Warsaw pact.¹³¹ The US refused these requests. However, the successful conclusion of SALT I had improved relations between the superpowers, and negotiations had now begun on SALT II, with plans to limit MIRV technology. Given Soviet sensitivity over the British nuclear force, the sale of Poseidon, particularly with an advanced capability such as MIRV, could hamper these relations and as such the beginning of SALT II discussions.¹³² As such, there was no guarantee of Congressional support for a Poseidon sale, particularly with MIRV. In addition, the British were also anxious that in future SALT negotiations the US would accept clauses limiting its freedom to exchange whole weapons systems or relevant technologies with its allies. Indeed, Senator McGovern expressed such sentiments in his 1972 Presidential campaign. Whilst Richard Nixon defeated McGovern, anxiety remained that the victor of the 1976 Presidential campaign may not be so amenable.¹³³ This uncertainty over the US ability to sell Poseidon played into British decision-making.

Following Nixon's decisive Presidential victory, in February 1973 Defense Secretary James Schlesinger told the British that he would not approve the sale of Poseidon with MIRV.¹³⁴ Instead, Schlesinger offered Option M: a de-MIRVed version of the Poseidon missile, which would include the Mark III re-entry system, and involve British manufacture of a new warhead.¹³⁵ However, in the summer of 1973 the Soviet Union announced that it would MIRV its ICBMs. This led US defence officials to inform their British counterparts that this had changed US thinking on the provision of MIRV technology.

¹³¹ Richard Weitz, "Britain's Dual Nature in US-Russian Nuclear Arms Control," in *US-UK Nuclear Cooperation*, 76-77.

¹³² Baylis and Stoddart, "Britain and the Chevaline project", 135.

¹³³ Freedman, *Britain and Nuclear Weapons*, 44; Robb, "Antelope, Poseidon or a Hybrid", 806.

¹³⁴ Robb, "Antelope, Poseidon or a Hybrid", 807.

¹³⁵ Clarification on Option M provided by Professor Matthew Jones.

As such, the British began to consider anew the possibility that the Nixon administration would sell the fully MIRVed Poseidon. This would avoid the technical risks of de-MIRVing Poseidon for the sale of Option M.¹³⁶ However, just as hope of this option emerged the Nixon administration became embroiled in the Watergate scandal. As such, the British determined that the President would be “mighty relieved” if the British did not request Poseidon due to his politically weak position and the certainty of “Congressional uproar” over such a supply.¹³⁷ Subsequently, on 30 October, British ministers decided to reject Option M and agreed to continue to pursue Super Antelope. Financial considerations were paramount to this decision, but concern that Watergate meant Nixon would be unable to secure Congressional agreement for the sale of the de-MIRVed Poseidon also played a role.¹³⁸

The Heath government’s decision to proceed with Chevaline highlights the contingency that is innate within US-UK nuclear co-operation. Due to the geostrategic interests and domestic politics of the US, the British could not guarantee the support of the US government in their efforts to improve Polaris. Whilst, also due to overriding geostrategic and domestic interests, the British government decided not to buy another US system. However, the Chevaline decision did make a British decision to seek US support more likely in the future. The cost of losing commonality with the US was astronomical, and, as will be discussed, this played a considerable role in the British decision to purchase Trident.

The Chevaline period was another example of the fluctuations in the degree of closeness in the nuclear relationship since its foundation, due to changes in the aims and interests of both the US and UK. As such, it is clear that the Trident agreements that came later were not a ‘foregone conclusion’. How could they be, when the decisions that preceded them had been so fraught with uncertainty?

¹³⁶ Robb, “Antelope, Poseidon or a Hybrid”, 806; Parr, “The British Decision”, 266.

¹³⁷ Parr, “The British Decision”, 266.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 269.

Part Two – The Carter administration and the Trident C4 agreement

Chapter 2

Securing the Options: The Carter administration and the US-UK nuclear relationship, January 1977 – December 1978

“The main limiting factors on US assistance... would be a SALT noncircumvention provision and the more indirect political effects of the SALT process.”

- Duff-Mason Report.¹

I

In December 1977, a British Cabinet committee met to discuss the replacement of the Polaris nuclear system. Polaris would remain operative until about 1993. However, a successor system could take up to 15 years to develop.² As such, in the coming years the British government needed to decide on a replacement for Polaris. The present Labour government, led by Prime Minister Jim Callaghan, could not make such a decision. Labour’s 1974 election manifesto stated unequivocally that the Party “renounced any intention of moving towards a new generation of strategic nuclear weapons.”³ Fortunately, for the Callaghan government a decision on the successor to Polaris was not necessary until the end of 1978 or early 1979, even if the British government opted for the most unlikely and time-consuming option, the development of a British ballistic missile.⁴ If the British government chose one of the other options for Polaris replacement, namely acquisition of a US missile system or Anglo-French co-operation, the shorter lead-times would mean they could further delay the policy decision.

¹ Duff-Mason Report, ‘Annex F: International Political Aspects of System Choice’, December 1978, DEFE 24/2122, The National Archives, Kew (TNA).

² Note of meeting, ‘Cabinet: Nuclear Defence Policy’, 1 December 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

³ Hunt to Callaghan, 2 December 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁴ Note of meeting, ‘Cabinet: Nuclear Defence Policy’, 1 December 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

However, to make a decision on the successor to Polaris in a few years' time, the British government obviously needed an in-depth evaluation of Britain's possible options beforehand. As such, in December 1977, Callaghan's Cabinet committee decided to commission a study that would assess Britain's nuclear future.⁵ Such a report contradicted the spirit of Labour's 1974 manifesto pledge, which "renounced any intention of moving towards a new generation of strategic nuclear weapons."⁶ Nevertheless, the committee decided to take this step in order to:

Enable the next government to reach decisions about whether a successor system should be developed, and if so, what system should be adopted... The object [sic] of the study would be to put the next Government in a position to take timely decisions, one way or the other.⁷

Justifying the decision, the Cabinet Committee stressed that they wished to enable the next government to make an informed decision on whether or not to replace Polaris. However, in reality, given the mind-set of British officials on the necessity of a British nuclear 'deterrent', it was highly unlikely that the commissioned report would not strongly suggest the replacement of Polaris, or that British ministers reading the report would decide not to do so.⁸ As such, in December 1977, the Labour Cabinet committee set in motion the replacement of the Polaris nuclear system.

In February 1978, the British government requested that Anthony Duff, Deputy under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, and Ronald Mason, Chief Scientific Adviser at the MOD, produce a "study of factors relating to further consideration of the future of the United Kingdom deterrent."⁹ The study would consider the "principal options" for the replacement of Polaris.¹⁰ In December

⁵ This Cabinet Committee consisted of Jim Callaghan, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Denis Healey, the Foreign Secretary David Owen and Defence Secretary Fred Mulley.

⁶ 'Britain Will Win with Labour', The Labour Party Manifesto, October 1974, accessed 12 January 2016, <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab74oct.htm>.

⁷ Note of meeting, 'Cabinet: Nuclear Defence Policy', 1 December 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁸ See Baylis and Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience*.

⁹ Hunt to Callaghan, 'Future of the British Deterrent', 7 December 1978, DEFE 19/275, TNA.

¹⁰ 'Terms of Reference for a study of factors relating to further consideration of the future of

1978, the so-called Duff-Mason report was completed. The report concluded that the US Trident C4 system would be the best replacement. Thus in January 1979, on the island of Guadeloupe, Jim Callaghan asked President Jimmy Carter if he would be willing to consider the supply of Trident C4 missiles to the British. Carter confirmed that he would. After consideration, the incoming Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher made clear to the Carter administration its wish to purchase Trident C4 missiles. The Carter administration agreed to supply the missiles on terms similar to the sale of Polaris. In July 1980, the Thatcher government publicly announced that the Trident C4 system would replace Polaris.

Given that archival material has only recently become available, there is currently no detailed analysis of the Carter administration's role in the formulation of the Trident C4 agreement. In overview accounts of the US-UK nuclear relationship, discussion of the Carter administration's role is understandably limited to a sentence or two.¹¹ Even the more detailed accounts on the Trident C4 agreement contain very little discussion on the Carter administration's role in its formulation.¹² This is understandable as even these more detailed accounts only comprise at most two chapters within books on the British nuclear programme, and their primary purpose is to provide a broad understanding of UK decision-making. Nevertheless, this omission of the US perspective limits our understanding of the Trident C4 agreement.

Moreover, much of the existing literature does not fully capture the attitude of the Carter administration towards the supply of Trident C4. For example, writing in 1984, Peter Malone asserted: "there was a striking unanimity among the President's senior advisors on the desirability of assisting Britain's

the United Kingdom nuclear deterrent', December 1978, DEFE 19/275, TNA.

¹¹ See Dobson, *Anglo-American relations*, 146-147; Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 181-182; May and Gregory Treverton, "Defence Relationships", 174-177; Malone, *The British Nuclear Deterrent*, 117.

¹² See Stoddart, "The Special Nuclear Relationship", 89-97; Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 34-75, 112-167; Baylis and Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience*, 134-150, 151-169.

nuclear efforts.”¹³ Newly released documents reveal a situation quite removed from ‘striking unanimity’.

Accounts that are more recent have also overlooked much of the uncertainty and variety of perspective on both sides of the Atlantic. This has been primarily due to historians’ reliance on Callaghan’s memoir as a key source before the declassification of British archive material on the subject after 30 years. In his memoir, Callaghan asserted that, at the Guadeloupe Summit in January 1979, he secured Jimmy Carter’s informal agreement to supply Trident C4 with MIRV.¹⁴ As such, much of the historiography has viewed the Carter administration as largely supportive of helping Britain to replace Polaris from the very start of negotiations.¹⁵ Even with the release of archival material, this narrative has been largely unquestioned. This is primarily because within recently released British documents there is an account of Callaghan’s conversation with Carter at Guadeloupe.¹⁶ This account supports Callaghan’s memoir that at Guadeloupe Carter expressed he could see “no objection at all” to the supply of Trident C4 with MIRV.¹⁷ As such, within the accounts that have utilised the newly available British archival material, President Carter is portrayed as unhesitant in his support for US supply of Trident C4.¹⁸ For example, in reference to the election of Margaret Thatcher, Kristan Stoddart asserts that:

With Carter already having provided assurances that they would fully support any decision the UK made on the choice of a successor system, it was for MISC 7, the key inner-Cabinet committee tasked by Mrs Thatcher, to take a successor decision.¹⁹

However, as will be discussed, detailed archival analysis suggests that at

¹³ Malone, *The British Nuclear Deterrent*, 117.

¹⁴ James Callaghan, *Time and Chance* (London: Collins, 1987), 556.

¹⁵ See Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 144; Stoddart, “The Special Nuclear Relationship”, 92; Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, 146.

¹⁶ ‘Prime Ministers Conversation with President Carter: 3:30 p.m. 5 January, at Guadeloupe’, 5 January 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See Baylis and Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience*, 149; Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 150.

¹⁹ Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 150.

Guadeloupe Carter only provided an assurance that he would *consider* the supply of Trident C4 to the British.

Nevertheless, even without assertions regarding the “true” substance of Carter and Callaghan’s conversation at Guadeloupe, much of the existing literature would still portray the supply of Trident C4 as a near certainty. In general accounts of the US-UK nuclear relationship, analysis of the US role is limited to discussion of Carter’s relationship with Callaghan, Carter’s inclination to assist the UK owing to prior successes in US-UK nuclear collaboration, and the ‘hardening’ of Carter’s foreign policy. They infer that the aforementioned contrived reasoning provides enough explanatory value to understand the US role in the Trident C4 agreement. For example, John Dumbrell, in referring to how Callaghan gained assurance on the supply of Trident at Guadeloupe, asserts that, “As well as his good personal relationship with Carter, Callaghan was able to exploit the growing anti-Sovietism in Washington, associated with the bureaucratic rise of National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.”²⁰ Conversely, within the more detailed archival accounts on the Trident C4 agreement there is even less analysis of why Carter agreed to supply Trident.²¹ Moreover, whilst these more detailed accounts briefly discuss the Carter administration’s request to delay the Trident agreement, there is no detailed analysis of the reasons for this.²²

The absence of a multi-faceted analysis of the Carter administration’s role limits understanding of the Trident C4 agreement. The following three chapters address this lacuna in the historiography, and will demonstrate that there was much greater complexity regarding to the Carter administration’s views on supplying Trident C4 than the present literature suggests. These chapters will examine preliminary discussions between the British government and the Carter

²⁰ Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 182; See also Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, 146.

²¹ Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 34-75, 112-167; Baylis and Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience*, 134-150, 151-169.

²² Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 132, 136, 137; Baylis and Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience*, 149.

administration about replacing Polaris and the subsequent Trident C4 negotiations. They also place these US-UK discussions within the context of the Carter administration's aims and interests, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the timing and shape of the Trident C4 agreement. Together, the three chapters highlight that the Carter administration clearly vacillated on whether to assist Britain with the replacement of Polaris.

Following Carter's election, British officials feared that their options for the Polaris successor might be limited by Carter's continued commitment to the arms-control process. These concerns were largely resolved through a combination of NATO internal politics and the beginning of Carter's 'hardening' towards the Soviet Union. By the completion of the Duff-Mason report in December 1978 the likelihood of the British securing Carter's agreement to supply the recommended system, Trident C4, had increased. This period of 'Securing the Options' will be discussed in this chapter.

II

Only a few weeks before the Callaghan government's decision to commission a report to study possible successor systems to Polaris, the British received a clear indication, albeit through an indirect channel, that President Carter supported the continuation of their nuclear programme. On 18 November 1977, Kingman Brewster, US ambassador to Britain, told Callaghan that, following the Prime Minister's earlier enquiries about the "administration's attitude towards the continued maintenance of an independent UK nuclear deterrent," he had spoken to Cyrus Vance, US Secretary of State, who in turn spoke to President Carter about the issue. In response, Carter had "directed that... Brewster should be instructed to re-emphasise to the Prime Minister the continuing self-interest of the United States in the maintenance of the United Kingdom's independent nuclear capacity."²³

²³ 'Mr Kingman Brewster's call on the Prime Minister', 18 November 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

The President's commitment to the maintenance of Britain's nuclear programme was crucial. Whilst the Polaris system was nominally independent, meaning that the British Prime Minister could decide to fire at will, Britain's nuclear programme was technically dependent on US support. The maintenance of the Polaris force, even after its conversion to Chevaline, depended upon the continued "availability of US assistance."²⁴ This support included technical advice, equipment support for the Polaris system, facilities for missile-firing trials, supply of nuclear materials for warheads, and underground nuclear test facilities. If, hypothetically, the US cut off support "there would... be extremely serious problems in maintaining the weapon system in serviceable condition."²⁵

US support would also be essential for Britain to replace the Polaris system. In their December 1977 meeting, the Cabinet committee on Nuclear Defence Policy concluded that they should "probably... rule out the idea of a wholly British ballistic missile on grounds both of capability and cost."²⁶ Subsequently, Duff and Mason were told not to consider a British ballistic missile system as an option.²⁷ This left Britain with, primarily, three remaining options, which were all, to a greater or lesser extent, reliant upon US co-operation. The first option was the acquisition of a system from the US, as had occurred with the purchase of Polaris missiles in 1963. This in practice would mean the purchase of Trident C4 missiles. However, this option was dependent upon "whether the Americans were prepared to make it available to us [Britain] and whether we could afford the cost."²⁸ Nevertheless, despite this uncertainty, in November 1977, the British Cabinet Secretary John Hunt advised Callaghan that this option would "probably be the cheapest and safest from the technical standpoint."²⁹ A second option would be to replace Polaris with cruise missiles. The British could

²⁴ Duff-Mason Report, 'Annex A: The present strategic force and its effective future life', December 1978, DEFE 24/2122, TNA.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Note of a Meeting, 'Cabinet: Nuclear Defence Policy', 1 December 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

²⁷ 'Terms of Reference for a study of factors relating to further consideration of the future of the United Kingdom nuclear deterrent', December 1978, DEFE 19/275, TNA.

²⁸ Note of a Meeting, 'Cabinet: Nuclear Defence Policy', 1 December 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

²⁹ Hunt to Callaghan, 'The timing of further consideration of the future of the deterrent', 28 November 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

purchase cruise missiles from the US, or develop their own. Again though, both options would be dependent upon the US. In order to purchase cruise missiles from the US, its government would obviously have to agree to such a sale, and be willing to provide the missiles at a price the British could afford. Moreover, there could be “political inhibitions” against Britain’s development of its own cruise missiles if the US agreed to restrictions on the missiles in the ongoing SALT talks.³⁰ Britain’s third option was to develop a successor to Polaris in co-operation with the French. However, again, the attitude of the US would determine if this was a possibility. Under the terms of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement, the British could not make “classified information, materials and equipment made available to the UK by the USA... available to third parties except with US agreement.”³¹ However, Britain’s weapon and propulsion technology was “so inextricably mixed with technology of US origin that some degree of transfer... to the French would be involved under any form of Anglo/French nuclear collaboration.”³² As such, the US attitude towards Anglo-French co-operation would be “crucial.”³³ In this way, the United States loomed large over all the viable Polaris-replacement options.

Carter’s expression of support for the maintenance of Britain’s nuclear programme did not guarantee that the US would do so on terms amenable to the UK. As John Hunt told Callaghan:

While it is encouraging that the United States have just given orally a clear affirmation of their support for the continued maintenance of the United Kingdom’s independent nuclear capability, this is not the same thing as a commitment to provide a specific next-generation weapons system in a particular timescale on acceptable terms.³⁴

The British government could not presently resolve this uncertainty about US assistance. The Callaghan government could not seek a guarantee from the US due

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Duff-Mason Report, ‘Annex A: The Present’s strategic force and its effective future life’, December 1978, DEFE 24/2122, TNA.

³² Duff-Mason Report, ‘Annex F: International Political Aspects of System Choice’, December 1978, DEFE 24/2122, TNA.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Hunt to Callaghan, ‘The timing of further consideration of the future of the deterrent’, 28 November 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

to the Labour party's manifesto commitment. At the same time, the Carter administration was also unable to give such a guarantee due to various factors, domestic and international. As Hunt told Callaghan, the White House "could hardly give firm assurances about their response to an undefined request years ahead when the administration and the international setting might have changed."³⁵

In the autumn of 1977, it was apparent to the British government that certain factors could undermine the Carter administration's support for Polaris replacement. In September 1977, Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State to Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, warned David Owen, British Foreign Secretary, that influential people within the Carter administration wanted Britain to cease being a nuclear power.³⁶ Moreover, Carter's arms-control efforts did not appear necessarily conducive to the supply of Trident to the British. Subsequently, David Owen remarked in October 1977, that he viewed it "unlikely" that the Carter administration would agree to supply Trident. But it is important to note that Owen's opposition to acquisition of the "sophisticated and expensive" system may have influenced this assessment.³⁷ This uncertainty on the US government's future support for Polaris replacement led Hunt, in November 1977, to advise Callaghan to commence study of the "fullest range of options" for the Polaris successor. The study was necessary given the "longer timescale for 'non-United States' options" and thus the government needed to avoid "closing off the other options without certainty that acceptable United States ones would materialise."³⁸ This led to the Callaghan government's decision to commission the Duff-Mason report.

Nevertheless, by November 1977 the likelihood that Carter would support Polaris

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ David Owen to James Callaghan, 29 September 1977, in David Owen, *Nuclear Papers* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 272.

³⁷ 'Summary Record of a Meeting on Military Nuclear Issues in the Secretary of State's Office at 10.15am on Monday 17 October, 1977' in Ibid., 101.

³⁸ Hunt to Callaghan, 'The timing of further consideration of the future of the deterrent', 28 November 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

replacement had increased. On entering the White House in January 1977, Carter's early nuclear policy aims were incompatible with the US supply of a next-generation weapons system to Britain. Carter had pledged to work towards the elimination of nuclear weapons both in his campaign autobiography *Why Not the Best?* and his inaugural address.³⁹ This bold vision on nuclear reductions was partly the result of Carter's own firmly embedded values and morality. As John Dumbrell observes, Carter's worldview reflected, "his personal temperament, his regional background, and his religious inheritance."⁴⁰ As a born-again Baptist, who still teaches Sunday school in his home town of Plains, Georgia, Carter's deep religious convictions instilled within him a deep desire to do what was 'right'. However, Carter's desire for arms-reductions also came from a more practical outlook. He believed that Nixon and Ford's approach to détente would not resolve the threat of the current arms-race. Carter called for "a new and genuine détente."⁴¹ By this, Carter meant that he did not want to see controversial issues left out of negotiations because Moscow did not want to discuss them. In addition, he thought that détente needed to be reciprocal, unlike the present situation where he perceived the US government had been "giving up too much and asking for too little."⁴²

Subsequently, during the Presidential campaign of 1976, Carter expressed strong criticism of the Vladivostok accord, which President Gerald Ford and Leonid Brezhnev, USSR General Secretary of the Communist Party, had agreed to in November 1974. At the summit, Ford and Brezhnev signed an *aide-mémoire*, a statement of intentions for a future SALT II treaty. This agreement set an equal limit that each side could deploy 2400 strategic launchers each, made up of ICBMs, SLBMs and long-range bombers. Although several substantial issues remained to

³⁹ Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best?* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1996), 155 and 164; Jimmy Carter, 'Inaugural Address,' 20 January 1977, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed 11 May 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=6575>.

⁴⁰ John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 19.

⁴¹ Olav Njølstad, "The collapse of superpower détente, 1975-1980," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume III the Endings*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143.

⁴² *Ibid.*

be resolved before the two sides signed the treaty, the Soviets believed that they had agreed the main terms of SALT II.⁴³ However, Carter claimed that the agreed limits would permit continuation of the nuclear arms-race. Carter saw that the ceilings, in the various categories of strategic delivery systems, had been set so high that the treaty would continue to allow the two superpowers to increase their number of launchers.⁴⁴ As such, President Carter wished to push the Soviets to agree to a lower level of strategic arms in SALT II.

Carter's promise to work towards nuclear reductions was not electioneering. Upon entering office, Carter wished to achieve quick and significant progress on arms-control. As Nancy Mitchell observes "Carter was not interested in arms control as therapy. He wanted deep cuts."⁴⁵ In a Special Coordination Committee meeting (SCC) on 3 February 1977, Carter requested "an analysis of an ultimate relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union which would include profound and mutual reductions in overall strategic nuclear capability." The President wanted "to go as low as possible while still retaining an adequate deterrent capability."⁴⁶ Carter also "suggested the possibility of including later France and the PRC in mutual program reductions."⁴⁷ It is reasonable to presume that Carter would also wish to see Britain involved in these cuts.

Reflecting Carter's ambitions for nuclear reductions in March 1977, Vance travelled to Moscow with revised SALT II proposals. The Carter administration sought 'deep cuts' in existing weapons systems and a ban on the testing and deployment of several future systems.⁴⁸ The proposals included sharp reductions

⁴³ Olav Njølstad, "Key of Keys? SALT II and the Breakdown of Détente," in *The Fall of Detente: Soviet-American Relations during the Carter Years*, ed. Odd Arne Westad (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 36-37.

⁴⁴ Dan Caldwell, *The Dynamics of Domestic Politics and Arms Control: The SALT II Treaty Ratification Debate* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 37.

⁴⁵ Nancy Mitchell, "The Cold War and Jimmy Carter," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 74.

⁴⁶ Document 149, Brzezinski to Carter, 3 February 1977, in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1969-1976*, SALT II, 1972-1980, Volume XXXIII.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mitchell, "The Cold War and Jimmy Carter", 74.

in aggregate strategic force levels, down from 2400 launchers on each side in the Vladivostok accord to something in the range of 1800-2000. Within this total, there would be two sub-ceilings of 550 MIRVed ICBMs, and 550-650 MIRVed SLBMs.⁴⁹ These proposals, as Odd Arne Westad observes, represented a “completely new approach to nuclear weapons, based on deep cuts.”⁵⁰ Carter believed that the proposal would create a more rational and stable deterrence as well as one that was less costly.⁵¹

The proposal though was not just Carter’s personal project. Other parts of the US government shared Carter’s desire for ‘deep cuts’. Defense Secretary Harold Brown was the strongest proponent within Carter’s Cabinet. Brown worried that the technological improvement and expansion of the Soviet nuclear arsenal threatened the US nuclear ‘deterrent’. As such, he wanted reductions in the USSR arsenal. Soviet acceptance of ‘deep cuts’ would have meant them scrapping over half their heavy missiles, a move that would have considerably reduced the first-strike capability of USSR strategic forces.⁵² Therefore, not surprisingly, the Pentagon also supported the proposal, as well as segments of the national security bureaucracy, and the conservative arms-control lobby. For the same reason, Senator Henry Jackson also supported the proposal. As a member of the Senate since 1953, and an active participant in various committees on national security and arms-control, Jackson’s opinion mattered. Much to the chagrin of Nixon and Kissinger, Jackson had been a vociferous and influential critic of the SALT I agreement and its supposedly unequal provisions.⁵³ His reputation as an expert on national defence made his endorsement of any SALT II agreement essential. Cyrus Vance saw that, “Jackson would be a major asset in a future ratification debate if he supported the treaty, and a formidable opponent if he

⁴⁹ Njølstad, “Key of Keys?”, 39.

⁵⁰ Odd Arne Westad, “The Fall of Détente and the Turning Tides of History,” in *The Fall of Détente*, 15.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Njølstad, “The collapse of superpower détente”, 144.

⁵³ See Anna Kasten Nelson, “Senator Henry Jackson and the Demise of Détente,” in *The Policy Makers: Shaping American Foreign Policy from 1947 to the Present*, ed. Anna Kasten Nelson (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 83 – 106.

opposed it.”⁵⁴

If the ‘deep cuts’ proposal had been successful, it is difficult to see how Carter, at least in the immediate future, could have helped Britain replace Polaris. In particular, it would have been difficult for the White House to agree to supply the Trident C4 system. On a political level, it would be problematic to agree to ‘deep cuts’ in strategic launchers, whilst at the same time providing Britain with an advanced next-generation system. In addition, Moscow would not have looked favourably on the supply to Britain of a Polaris replacement, after the US and USSR had agreed to such reductions. The United States had resisted USSR pressure for the inclusion of British and French nuclear forces in SALT I, and the Vladivostok accord. As such, the Soviets would have reacted strongly to the supply of a successor system to the British at the same time as an agreement on ‘deep cuts’, perhaps even withdrawing from the treaty. Such a Soviet reaction would have been politically costly to the President given the widespread political support in the US government for ‘deep cuts’ and Carter’s own electoral stake in the success of SALT. As such, it is reasonable to presume that had the ‘deep cuts’ proposal succeeded, Carter would have been, at the very least, very reluctant to assist with the Polaris successor.

From the outset though, the ‘deep cuts’ proposal was “doomed to fail.”⁵⁵ Indeed, two weeks after the President’s inauguration, Brezhnev wrote to Carter and informed him that he would reject any proposal that deviated from the 1974 accord.⁵⁶ The Soviet leadership liked the Vladivostok formula. It would not require the USSR to destroy many of its missiles. On the other hand, ‘deep cuts’ would force Moscow to give up many of its land based ICBMs, which were a central component in the Soviet nuclear arsenal, whilst leaving the US force, more reliant on bombers, largely untouched.⁵⁷ Subsequently, the Soviets flatly rejected the ‘deep cut’ proposals that Vance presented to them in March. Brezhnev balked at

⁵⁴ Cyrus Vance quoted in Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 39.

⁵⁵ Njølstad, “The collapse of superpower détente”, 143.

⁵⁶ Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 39.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 39; Mitchell, “The Cold War and Jimmy Carter”, 74.

discarding the hard-fought Vladivostok package. They saw the proposals as unfair and as the US reneging on the promises made at Vladivostok. Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, denounced the US proposal in a press conference as “a cheap and shoddy manoeuvre.”⁵⁸ Vance’s trip to Moscow was the Carter administration’s first high-level contact with the Soviet Union – and it was a disaster.

In light of the recriminations issued by both sides in the aftermath of Vance’s trip to Moscow, Carter’s enthusiastic initial push for nuclear reductions came to a shuddering stop. With Vance due to meet Gromyko in two months, the White House re-examined its position. Subsequently, in May, Vance put forward the administration’s ‘three-tier proposal’. The first tier would meet the Soviet’s desire to incorporate Vladivostok into any new agreement, albeit with a somewhat lower ceiling. The second tier would be an “Interim Agreement” for two or three years regulating those weapons systems not covered by the Vladivostok accord, including cruise missiles and new types of weapons. The third tier would be a “Declaration of Principles,” stating the long-term goals to which the superpowers would give their attention after the expiration of the SALT II treaty in 1985.⁵⁹ In May, Gromyko accepted the new approach. These proposals eventually became the SALT II treaty, a three-year protocol to SALT, and a set of principles to establish the foundations of SALT III.⁶⁰ The Carter administration had switched to an approach on SALT II that looked remarkably similar to their predecessors.

By May 1977, Carter’s hopes of achieving ‘real’ arms reductions, at least in this Presidential term, were largely in tatters. His initial vision of nuclear reductions was to go even more awry by the end of his Presidency. By 1980, the signing of the Trident C4 agreement with Britain, SALT was in limbo; the USSR and the US continued to develop even more destructive nuclear systems; and Carter had signed the controversial Presidential Directive-59, which was

⁵⁸ Caldwell, *The Dynamics of Domestic Politics*, 40.

⁵⁹ Caldwell, *The Dynamics of Domestic Politics*, 40; Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 41-42.

⁶⁰ Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 39.

designed to give the US the ability to utilise a range of nuclear options in war.⁶¹ The Carter administration embraced, as CIA director Stansfield Turner later noted, "A series of policies on nuclear weapons that laid the whole foundation for Reagan's expansion of nuclear weapons."⁶² In this way by 1980, the Carter administration's move towards confrontation had created a more conducive environment for the supply of a next-generation nuclear system to the British than had existed in early 1977.

In 1977, though, Carter's 'hardening' of attitude towards the Soviet Union was not apparent. Even with the failure of 'deep cuts', the Carter administration remained committed to the arms-control process. As they began to think about Polaris replacement in November 1977, John Hunt and Callaghan recognised the interrelation between US arms-control efforts and Polaris replacement. When Kennedy had agreed to supply Polaris to Britain in 1962 at Nassau, considerations of how the sale would influence arms-control negotiations were "scarcely a factor."⁶³ However in November 1977, with the development of détente as well as the Carter administration's commitment to nuclear reductions, Hunt informed Callaghan that arms-control negotiations "could have implications for each" of the Polaris successor options, and "could be especially significant for United States co-operation."⁶⁴ John Hunt foresaw that three areas of the SALT process could potentially influence Britain's Polaris successor options: a non-circumvention clause and restrictions on cruise missiles in SALT II, as well as possible future SALT III talks.

British officials were concerned about the effect the planned non-circumvention clause in the SALT II treaty could have on US-UK nuclear co-operation. In spring 1977, the Soviets told their US counterparts, that they wanted

⁶¹ See Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 219-230.

⁶² Stansfield Turner quoted in *Ibid.*, 219.

⁶³ Hunt to Callaghan, 'The timing of further consideration of the future of the deterrent', 28 November 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

SALT II to contain a provision whereby both sides would agree not to circumvent the treaty through a third state or in any other manner. The Soviets also wished for a non-transfer clause, which would mean “a commitment not to transfer strategic weapons or to assist in their development by third countries.”⁶⁵ The inclusion of a non-transfer clause would have placed severe restrictions on US-UK nuclear co-operation. A specific non-transfer provision could have prevented maintenance assistance for the Polaris system, nuclear test support for the Chevaline project, and any future MIRV transfers, such as the Trident C4.⁶⁶

Fortunately, for the British, from the outset it was extremely unlikely that the Carter administration would agree to Soviet demands for a non-transfer clause. Such a clause would have placed severe restrictions on defence co-operation within NATO.⁶⁷ However, in June 1977 the chief US SALT negotiator, Paul Warnke, told an SCC meeting that he believed the US needed to agree to some kind of non-circumvention provision if they wanted to secure the SALT II treaty. The SCC agreed.⁶⁸ After consultations with their NATO allies, the US proposed a “very general non-circumvention formulation,” which did not refer to the possibility of circumvention through third countries. In the summer of 1977, the Soviet Union rejected this general formulation and “reaffirmed their demands for specific commitments.”⁶⁹ The Carter administration now decided that they would propose their fallback clause, which would specify that the US and USSR agreed not to circumvent the provisions of the agreement “through any other state.”⁷⁰ NATO had already approved the US use of this fallback clause at an appropriate time in the future. Nevertheless, with the issue unresolved Carter’s European allies remained “nervous.”⁷¹ They feared that the Soviets could use any non-

⁶⁵ Document 171, ‘Summary of Conclusion of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting’, 20 June 1977, *FRUS 1969-1976, SALT II, 1972-1980*, Volume XXXIII.

⁶⁶ To SALT working group, ‘Background Paper on non-Circumvention/non-transfer’, 5 May 1977, RAC Project number NLC-132-85-9-2-0, Jimmy Carter Library (JCL).

⁶⁷ Hunt to Cartledge, ‘Military Nuclear Issues’, 25 October 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁶⁸ Document 171, ‘Summary of Conclusion of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting’, 20 June 1977, *FRUS 1969-1976, SALT II, 1972-1980*, Volume XXXIII.

⁶⁹ Hunt to Cartledge, ‘Military Nuclear Issues’, 25 October 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁷⁰ Vance and Warnke, ‘SALT Prospects’, 22 December 1977, NLC-15-114-3-13-2, JCL.

⁷¹ Agenda, ‘Meeting on SALT’, 17 November 1977, NLC-SAFE-39 D-39-116-15-2, JCL.

circumvention clause to argue that US defence co-operation with its NATO allies broke the spirit of the agreement. In particular, British officials were concerned about the impact of any non-circumvention clause on their efforts to replace Polaris. The Carter administration thought the planned clause "would permit new forms of assistance which might be agreed by the US and the UK in the future."⁷² However, Hunt saw that there was "no absolute legal assurance of this," particularly as the Soviet Union had not agreed to the clause, and they still wanted "a more restrictive formulation."⁷³ Moreover, British officials were concerned that *any* non-circumvention provision was "liable to give the Russians a peg on which they can hang claims, however unjustified, that the agreement is being infringed."⁷⁴

British officials were also concerned that the planned restrictions on cruise missiles in SALT could limit their options for the Polaris successor. In September 1978, David Owen and Callaghan privately discussed Britain's options for Polaris replacement whilst on a plane to Nigeria. During this conversation, Callaghan told Owen that he favoured a ballistic system but worried it would be too costly. If this proved to be the case, Callaghan favoured the option of targeting half a dozen cities in the USSR with cruise missiles.⁷⁵ However, British officials were concerned that such an option might be restricted under the SALT II treaty. At the beginning of negotiations, the Soviets requested a ban on all cruise missiles with a range of more than 600 km. They also argued that under the Vladivostok formula, the ceiling of 2400 delivery systems was to include cruise air-to-surface missiles, as well as ballistic missiles.⁷⁶ Whilst the Carter administration had resisted these demands, as part of its three-tier proposal in May 1977 they had suggested a temporary ban on certain types of cruise missiles. By November 1977, it seemed likely that the planned three-year protocol would ban the deployment of cruise

⁷² Hunt to Callaghan, 'The timing of further consideration of the future of the deterrent', 28 November 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Hunt to Cartledge, 'Military Nuclear Issues', 25 October 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁷⁵ Owen, *Nuclear Papers*, 41.

⁷⁶ Hunt to Cartledge, 'Military Nuclear Issues', 25 October 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

missiles with ranges beyond 600km, except missiles launched from heavy bombers. However, Hunt expected the USSR “to press for the ban to be perpetuated.”⁷⁷ Such an extension would limit Britain’s options for the successor to Polaris.

Even if the SALT agreement did not contain a highly restrictive non-circumvention provision, “the Americans would still be inhibited on political grounds, from making available to their Allies a capability which was prohibited under the agreement.”⁷⁸ If the US and USSR agreed to extend the restrictions on cruise missiles, the US would be, “effectively unable to help us [Britain] with successor systems based on either sea-launched or air-launched CMs [cruise missiles].”⁷⁹ Moreover, if certain cruise missiles were restricted under SALT, it could create “political inhibitions” against the development of a British system.⁸⁰ As such, throughout the winter of 1977, British officials lobbied the US to keep limitations on cruise missiles temporary, and thereby not close off one of Britain’s options for its Polaris successor.⁸¹

British officials were also concerned that the country’s strategic system could be included in a future SALT III treaty, about which the Carter administration was keen to commence negotiations after the signing of SALT II. The USSR had previously informed the US, that “non-central systems,” including the UK and French strategic systems, “must eventually be considered in SALT.”⁸² Non-central systems were a key point of contention throughout the SALT process. The US defined “strategic” nuclear systems by their technical capability. They wished to negotiate limits on ‘central systems,’ meaning those of the US and USSR, with intercontinental ranges; the systems that directly threatened the United

⁷⁷ Hunt to Callaghan, ‘The timing of further consideration of the future of the deterrent’, 28 November 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁷⁸ Hunt to Callaghan, ‘Military Nuclear Issues’, 25 October 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁷⁹ Hunt to Callaghan, ‘The timing of further consideration of the future of the deterrent’, 28 November 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ See Global Issues to Brzezinski, ‘Evening Report’, 7 November 1977, NLC-10-6-4-13-6, JCL.

⁸² Hunt to Callaghan, ‘The timing of further consideration of the future of the deterrent’, 28 November 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

States. On the other hand, the Soviets defined “strategic” systems, as those that threatened the Soviet Union, no matter where they were deployed. As such, the Soviet negotiators wished to see the inclusion in SALT of US inter-continental missiles, British and French systems, and US Theatre Nuclear Forces (TNF).⁸³ The US had resisted such pressure throughout SALT I, and early SALT II negotiations.

In 1977, British officials foresaw that Moscow would push for the inclusion of non-central systems when negotiations began on SALT III. Such inclusion would be problematic for the British nuclear programme. It could result in the reduction in size of the Polaris force, something that British officials saw “would make it ineffective in its national role.”⁸⁴ It could place restrictions on British and NATO short-range ballistic and cruise missiles. It could also restrict which system the British could acquire to replace Polaris. However, the US had always argued that the inclusion of British and French systems was not in their interests. Pitting Soviet nuclear forces against all Western allied forces, and Soviet superiority over any other power, would undercut the US ‘deterrent’ and raise allied doubts in the nuclear umbrella. Moreover, the NATO alliance had always strongly supported the United States long-standing rejection of Soviet pressure to include non-central systems. Subsequently, in November 1977, when discussions began on principles for SALT III, the White House believed that the Soviets would not accept their proposals unless the US agreed to deal with forward-based and allied systems in SALT III. Despite this, US officials believed they “should hold firm” on not including these areas.⁸⁵

However, British officials doubted that the US would continue to maintain such a robust line on the inclusion of British and French systems, given the USSR’s repeated demands about their inclusion and Carter’s desire to make ‘real’ progress on arms-control. Indeed, as discussed, in an SCC meeting in March, Carter had already expressed his desire to see the inclusion of French systems,

⁸³ Stephen Millet, “Forward-Based Nuclear Weapons and SALT I,” *Political Science Quarterly* 98:1 (1983), 79.

⁸⁴ Hunt to Cartledge, ‘Military Nuclear Issues’, 25 October 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁸⁵ Agenda, ‘Meeting on SALT’, 17 November 1977, NLC-SAFE-39 D-39-116-15-2, JCL.

and thus presumably the British too. As such, Hunt foresaw that by the time preliminary talks on SALT III began, which could be as early as summer 1978, the British would “need a more exact notion of which options, in terms of force size and characteristics, it is really important to keep open.”⁸⁶

John Hunt’s concern about the impact of the SALT process on Polaris replacement was part of the reason that he urged Callaghan, in November 1977, to order the commencement of studies on possible successor options. Hunt thought that such analysis was necessary so that the British could more effectively lobby the US not to close off their preferred options.⁸⁷ Hunt believed that the British could “legitimately assume that the United States will attach importance, in the resolution of these unsettled questions, to protecting our ‘successor’ interests.” However, he concurrently warned, “The line of keeping all options open indefinitely is... likely to be increasingly difficult; and the United States... will expect us... to narrow so far as possible the range of options which we ask them, at potential negotiating cost, to keep open.”⁸⁸ Nevertheless, by the time of completion of the Duff-Mason report in December 1978, circumstances, largely beyond Britain’s control, meant that the impact of SALT on Britain’s options for the successor to Polaris was limited.

⁸⁶ Hunt to Callaghan, ‘The timing of further consideration of the future of the deterrent’, 28 November 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

III



Cartoon of Jimmy Carter.⁸⁹

In the winter of 1977, many of Britain's NATO allies were also concerned about the proposed non-circumvention clause and restrictions on cruise missiles. They feared that such restrictions could prevent the US transfer of cruise missiles or other systems to Europe; transfers they foresaw as potentially necessary to counter-balance the Soviet modernisation of TNF.⁹⁰

In the 1960s, Washington deployed more than 7000 nuclear weapons across Europe. Through this, the US aimed to strengthen the FRG's belief in the US

⁸⁹Nicholas Garland, *Sunday Telegraph*, circa 1977, British Cartoon archive, accessed 17 May 2015, https://www.cartoons.ac.uk/browse/cartoon_item/anytext=neutron%20bomb?page=17.

⁹⁰ To SALT working group, 'Background Paper on non-Circumvention/non-transfer', 5 May 1977, NLC-132-85-9-2-0, JCL.

nuclear umbrella. Therefore, as William Burr argues, US nuclear deployments in Europe “acquired a symbolic value that made them difficult to change without stimulating adverse reactions from Bonn.”⁹¹ In the mid-1970s, the Pentagon developed plans to upgrade US TNF by removing thousands of vulnerable weapons and replacing them with more up-to-date versions. However, the modernisation would have resulted in quantitative nuclear reductions. As such, the plans stimulated allied, particularly German, fears that the United States was beginning a ‘decoupling’ process, whereby a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict in Central Europe might not trigger a US nuclear retaliation.⁹² Although German opposition stalled the Pentagon’s plans, US proposals to withdraw F-4 bombers piqued the interests of some Bonn defence officials in successor weapons systems, including cruise missiles.⁹³

This interest in cruise missiles emerged concurrently with apprehensions in Bonn and NATO over the prospective deployment of the Soviet SS-20, a new generation of more mobile and accurate Soviet Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBM). European governments, particularly in Bonn, feared this deployment would create an imbalance in TNF. There were no NATO missiles in Western Europe comparable to the SS-20. Moreover, the SS-20 raised questions about the US nuclear umbrella. The growing Soviet retaliatory capability, alongside approaching strategic parity, made any US nuclear use in Europe potentially suicidal. This raised questions amongst West European governments over whether the US would risk its annihilation because of, for example, a Soviet attack on Berlin, and concurrently whether the US would seek to decouple itself from NATO Europe. Subsequently, Defence ministers in NATO’s Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) viewed the deployment of the SS-20 as an unacceptable build-up, and that the increases in Soviet TNF were too large to be ‘defensive.’ In 1976, they

⁹¹ William Burr, “A Question of Confidence: Theater Nuclear Forces, US Policy toward Germany, and the Origins of the Euromissile Crisis, 1975-1976,” in *The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War*, ed. Leopoldo Nuti et al. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2015), 135.

⁹² Ibid., 126.

⁹³ Ibid., 135.

vowed to “improve the effectiveness of NATO’s theater nuclear forces.”⁹⁴

The election of Carter brought a temporary pause in transatlantic debate over TNF. The new administration thought their European allies should strengthen NATO conventional forces, rather than modernise NATO’s nuclear arsenal. However, the Carter administration’s pursuit of arms-control talks raised European, and particularly Bonn’s, concerns about the SS-20. Under the proposals of SALT II made to the USSR in June 1977, it looked likely that the SS-20s would remain off the table, whilst the Carter administration looked willing to make concessions to Moscow on restrictions on cruise missiles and non-circumvention. This left the SS-20 as part of a ‘grey area’, because they were not on the negotiating table at either the SALT II or Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) talks.⁹⁵ This created, as Kristina Spohr Readman observes, a:

central dilemma... that whilst the United States was seeking to limit the arms race and arrive at a stable nuclear balance with the USSR... the security of Western Europe... could not be guaranteed by any means other than an implied American superiority via TNFs.⁹⁶

The FRG Chancellor Helmut Schmidt’s personal dislike of the new President and his policies towards the Soviet Union heightened Bonn’s distrust of Carter’s attitude towards NATO nuclear forces. Carter’s moralist human rights agenda alongside his desire for arms-reductions led Schmidt to fear that “a maverick American president” could pursue unilateral disarmament at the FRG’s expense.⁹⁷ Other European leaders shared these fears, although not to the same extent. At the same time, the Europeans feared US-USSR strategic parity due to the questions it raised over the US nuclear umbrella. Therefore, the election of Carter heightened European unease about NATO nuclear policy. As Leopoldo Nuti argues:

⁹⁴ Stephanie Freeman, “The Making of an Accidental Crisis: The United States and the NATO Dual-Track Decision of 1979,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 25:2 (2014), 334.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 334.

⁹⁶ Kristina Spohr Readman, “Germany and the Politics of the Neutron Bomb, 1975-1979,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 21:2 (2010), 264.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 267.

On the one hand, the Western Europeans began to fear that the Carter administration might be too vacillating in its transatlantic policies and, perhaps, was even capable of reaching a compromise with the Soviets at their expense. On the other, the Europeans showed increasing uneasiness about the superpowers' strategic parity, the consequence of which might be the much feared decoupling between American security and their own.⁹⁸

Subsequently, during a June 1977 bilateral meeting over SALT II, FRG officials told their US counterparts that they did not want any restrictions on cruise missiles due to their potential to act as a counter to the SS-20s. However, the Carter administration replied that they saw no 'grey area' problem.⁹⁹ In October 1977 during consultations on SALT II, a number of European allies told US officials of their concerns about prolonged restrictions on cruise missiles. Again, US officials told their NATO allies that they did "not see a military need for CMs in the long range theatre nuclear role in Europe because in their view the targets in Western Russia and Eastern Europe... [were] adequately covered by existing systems."¹⁰⁰ The general response of the Europeans was that they needed "time to decide" whether cruise missiles would "have a useful role in Europe." Their "preliminary view" was that, as the existing theatre systems became "more vulnerable to Soviet defences, CMs could be a valuable replacement."¹⁰¹ Subsequently, Harold Brown informed Carter that whilst the discussions had allowed the US to clarify their position and this reassured the allies "to some degree," they remained "concerned - especially as they see SALT tending to deal with the US-USSR part of the nuclear problem at a time when the theater problem looms larger in their perceptions."¹⁰²

Helmut Schmidt was particularly troubled. On 28 October 1977, Schmidt

⁹⁸ Leopoldo Nuti, "The Origins of the 1979 dual-track decision – a survey," in *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev 1975 – 1985*, ed. Leopoldo Nuti (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 62.

⁹⁹ Kristina Spohr, "NATO's Nuclear Politics and the Schmidt-Carter Rift," in *The Euromissile Crisis*, 143.

¹⁰⁰ Hunt to Cartledge, 'Military Nuclear Issues', 25 October 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

¹⁰¹ Hunt to Cartledge, 'Military Nuclear Issues', 25 October 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

¹⁰² Brown to Carter, 'Significant Actions, Secretary and Secretary of Defense', 18 November 1977, NLC-8-4-5-22-0, JCL.

went public with his concerns over a TNF imbalance in Europe in a speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Schmidt told his audience, that the Soviet's superiority of TNF in Europe, alongside their achievement of strategic parity with the West, could make the US less likely to respond to Warsaw Pact aggression against NATO countries. This would lead to the US 'decoupling' from Western Europe, and thus enable the Soviets to use their SS-20s as political blackmail against NATO.¹⁰³

Relations between Western Europe and the US in general, and between Schmidt and Carter in particular, deteriorated further over the 'neutron bomb affair'. Conversely the incident also moved the US and Europeans closer to a resolution on the TNF issue. In June 1977, the US administration asked Congress to allocate funds for the production of the so-called neutron bomb, a reduced-blast Enhanced Radiation Warhead (ERW), planned as part of US TNF modernisation. This was a routine intra-governmental process, and did not mean that the Carter administration had decided to develop the weapon, let alone deploy it. The decision though leaked to the press, and on 6 June 1977, *The Washington Post* reported the funding of this shorter-range nuclear weapon, that could kill people whilst leaving buildings intact. This news provoked political outrage in the US and Europe.

In the FRG, Egon Bahr, the executive party secretary of the governing West German Social Democratic Party, condemned production of "an unethical weapon that would lower the nuclear threshold."¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the FRG had already been named as the ideal territory for ERW deployment due to geostrategic reasons. Quite understandably, the German public feared that the deployment of the neutron bomb would result in the loss of their lives, whilst their home survived. Whilst Schmidt supported deployment, he was in an awkward position. Bahr's outbursts as well as German public feeling meant the Chancellor had to adopt a

¹⁰³ Freeman, "The Making of an Accidental Crisis", 334.

¹⁰⁴ Spohr, "NATO's Nuclear Politics", 143.

position that would not damage him politically, whilst maintaining the FRG's firm position as a Western ally.

Carter also "found himself in a catch-22"¹⁰⁵; if he refused to approve the new weapon, he would anger the US military and members of Congress, who viewed the ERW as an important 'deterrent' against Soviet conventional attack. In addition, given his cancellation of the B-1 bomber, such a decision would fuel the calls of his critics that he was weak *vis-à-vis* the Soviets. However, Carter had campaigned on the platform of nuclear reductions and human rights, so he did not now wish to be viewed as a public proponent of such a controversial weapon. It was for these reasons that in July 1977 Carter announced that he would wait to make a decision on the development of the neutron bomb.¹⁰⁶

On 23 November 1977, Carter informed Schmidt that the United States would only develop the neutron bomb if the governments of Western Europe, and particularly the FRG, first agreed to deploy the weapon on their soil. Schmidt completely disagreed with Carter's decision. He saw that the production decision lay solely with the US government, and that Carter could not offload this responsibility because of controversy. Other European leaders felt the same and were unwilling to make a public commitment on deployment before any production decision. In the face of these arguments, Carter continued to refuse to make a decision on development without European agreement to deploy.¹⁰⁷ Subsequently, over the winter of 1977, "a major transatlantic impasse was threatening to tear NATO apart."¹⁰⁸

By February 1978, Schmidt had finally managed to persuade the Carter administration to agree to a three-step compromise solution on the neutron bomb dilemma. This compromise was also a possible solution to the SS-20 problem and TNF imbalances. Carter would announce his decision to begin ERW production. NATO would then offer the Soviets an arms-control proposal whereby the US

¹⁰⁵ Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 50.

¹⁰⁶ Spohr, "NATO's Nuclear Politics", 143; Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 50.

¹⁰⁷ Freeman, "The Making of an Accidental Crisis", 335.

¹⁰⁸ Spohr, "NATO's Nuclear Politics", 14

would agree not to deploy ERW in return for the USSR stopping deployment of the SS-20. If these negotiations failed, NATO would make a decision on whether to deploy ERW.¹⁰⁹

In April 1978, just before the finalisation of the three-step plan in NATO, Carter announced that he would not authorise the production of the neutron bomb. Carter's announcement was a surprise to European leaders, as well as his own advisers. The decision brought criticism of Carter both at home and abroad, especially after news leaked that his advisers had wished him to develop the weapon. The Soviets crowed that they had forced Carter to change his mind. US Senators decried another perceived example of Carter's weakness in the face of the Soviet threat. Carter's U-turn left European leaders irritated and distrustful of the seemingly erratic President. In particular, the decision infuriated the German Chancellor. He had invested significant political capital in order to obtain agreement on the three-step solution that Carter shelved without consultation, as well as in standing up to influential members in his own political party who were opponents of the ERW. Schmidt believed Carter had submitted to the Soviet anti-ERW campaign waged by the Soviet Union and western pacifists, and in the process made NATO look impotent.¹¹⁰

In this context of European animosity towards Carter, the 'grey area' problem remained unresolved. The US administration could not afford another rupture in US-European relations. As Spohr Readman observes, "Now, more than before, NATO's success in ensuring a credible deterrence and defense posture became a *political* necessity to overcome the public image of an alliance in disarray."¹¹¹ However, in the immediate aftermath of the neutron bomb affair the Carter administration did not provide the leadership nor the solution to the 'grey area' problem that the Europeans wanted. In February 1978, in a NATO High-Level Group (HLG) meeting, the allies reached a vague consensus that

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 144; Freeman, "The Making of an Accidental Crisis", 335.

¹¹⁰ Freeman, "The Making of an Accidental Crisis", 336; Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 50-51; Spohr, "NATO's Nuclear Politics", 144-145

¹¹¹ Spohr, "NATO's Nuclear Politics", 146.

modernisation of Long-Range Theatre Nuclear Forces (LRTNF) should be prioritised over simultaneous improvements in battlefield weapons, such as conventional forces and the ERW. Then at a NATO NPG meeting in April 1978, the Allies agreed that there was a need to upgrade US TNF systems in Europe, with a range of more than 1000 km. Despite this apparent consensus, the Carter administration still vacillated on their commitment to the modernisation of LRTNF. In May 1978, at a NATO council meeting, Carter vaguely called for the general modernisation of nuclear weapons alongside the strengthening of NATO's conventional forces, and declared that his administration would not discuss the SS-20 problem.¹¹²

In the summer of 1978, faced with an unsatisfied NATO HLG who wished for an increase in NATO's LRTNF and transatlantic relations still reeling from the aftermath of the neutron bomb affair, the Carter administration finally committed to finding a resolution to the 'grey area' problem. Carter issued a directive, PRM-38, to the SCC to study possible LRTNF modernisation. After discussions on the results of the PRM-38 report, on 23 August the SCC agreed that the United States should pursue a "twin strategy" of LRTNF modernisation and arms-control.¹¹³ How these two strands were to be integrated remained undecided. Nevertheless, the Carter administration had taken a firm step towards a 'grey area' solution. Political motivations primarily motivated this move by the Carter administration. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Adviser, later recalled that he "was doubtful that a military response based on Europe was needed, but I was convinced by my staff, notably [David] Aaron and Jim Thomson, of the *political necessity* to deploy a European-based nuclear counter [emphasis added]."¹¹⁴

These developments in NATO internal politics eradicated many of the British government's concerns over the impact of SALT on their options to replace

¹¹² Ibid., 145 - 146.

¹¹³ Freeman, "The Making of an Accidental Crisis", 337.

¹¹⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser* (London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Limited, 1983), 307-308.

Polaris. By the summer of 1978, it was unlikely that, due to the moves towards modernisation of LRTNF, the Carter administration would agree to a further extension on the three-year restriction on cruise missiles. Concurrently, it was clear that the administration needed to address allied concerns that the non-circumvention clause could prevent the transfer of US systems to Europe. Subsequently, in March 1978, the White House decided that they would release an interpretive statement on the consequences of a non-circumvention clause for US co-operation with allies, at the same time as the signing of SALT II.¹¹⁵ In late March, FRG officials told the White House that, whilst they would prefer no non-circumvention provision, they agreed to the US 'fallback' clause alongside the release of an interpretive statement when the treaty was signed. "Having obtained FRG acquiescence," US officials then held talks with France, UK, and Belgium.¹¹⁶ The Belgian, French and UK governments also agreed to the fallback clause and the interpretative statement. On April 20, Gromyko also agreed to the fallback clause. At the same time, Vance resisted Gromyko's arguments that they must agree on what the language of the clause meant, arguing that "the language speaks for itself and that we [the US] will not circumvent the agreement."¹¹⁷ This left the way open for the US to release their interpretive statement at the same time as the signing of the treaty. These developments mostly resolved British concerns about the impact of a non-circumvention clause on Polaris replacement - although some latent concerns remained which will be explored in the next chapter. It is important to note though, that this resolution came because of shared allied concern over non-circumvention, with the worries of Bonn particularly influential on US officials' efforts to find a resolution, not because of a US desire to placate British concerns over Polaris replacement *per se*.

By the spring of 1978, the British could be increasingly confident that, alongside

¹¹⁵ Document 194, 'Summary of Conclusions of a Meeting of the Special Coordination Committee', 6 March 1978, *FRUS 1969-1976, SALT II, 1972-1980*, Volume XXXIII.

¹¹⁶ 'Next steps on non-circumvention', 28 March 1978, NLC-16-111-3-9-9, JCL.

¹¹⁷ Document 200, Secretary of State Vance to the Department of State, 'SALT: Chronology: 11/23/77 - 4/20/78', 20 April 1978, *FRUS 1969-1976, SALT II, 1972-1980*, Volume XXXIII.

the resolution of their concerns over the impact of SALT on the Polaris replacement, the Carter administration would not in the future make 'radical' arms-control proposals, which would reopen these issues. Alongside developments in NATO politics, the Carter administration's policy towards the Soviet Union had already hardened.¹¹⁸ This in-turn created a more conducive environment for Polaris replacement. As such, it was clear to the administration that their initial expectations of SALT were unrealistic. As British Diplomat Paul Lever reported in June 1978:

There is general agreement both inside and outside the administration that SALT had been oversold... It seems to be recognised that the problems of handling the Russians need to be tackled individually as they arise... and that the continuing SALT dialogue, important though it is, will henceforth be but one strand among many.¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, the British still faced some uncertainty about the prospects of definitely securing US assistance in the replacement of Polaris. As US officials made clear to the British during the March 1978 consultations over SALT, no restrictions on the transfer of a system under SALT did not mean that the US would definitely agree to such an exchange. In the March bilateral meeting, British officials enquired about how the terms of SALT could impact their options for the Polaris successor. To begin, the British asked if there were "any flat prohibitions" on what the US could do. State Department officials replied that they could not transfer a system prohibited in the agreement to a third state.¹²⁰ The British then spelt out several areas in which they specifically wanted to retain the right of transfer, including "anything related to a possible successor to Polaris." The US officials responded:

That specific requests in this area would have to be looked at case by case, that existing agreements would not be affected, and that we

¹¹⁸ See Freeman, "The Making of an Accidental Crisis", 340-341; Njølstad, "The Carter Legacy: Entering the Second Era of the Cold War" in Olav Njølstad, *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation* (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

¹¹⁹ Document 7, Paul Lever, 'Views in the United States on Security Policy Issues', 12 June 1978, in Owen, *Nuclear Papers*, 114.

¹²⁰ 'Consultations with Allies on SALT and Western Security', 2 March 1978, NLC-16-110-7-9-6, JCL.

would not be precluded from assisting in the modernization of this force, although policy considerations and the circumstances existing at the time would have to be taken into account.¹²¹

British officials then asked if the US would be “precluded from transferring Trident I [C4] missiles.”¹²² US officials replied:

That although not necessarily precluded, this would obviously be a major question entailing a wide range of policy considerations which could only be looked at in the circumstances of the time, and which would have to consider *inter alia*, the possible relationship to SALT, with or without an explicit non-circumvention provision.

In this way, US officials made clear that, as long as the agreement did not prohibit the system, SALT would not prevent the transfer of a Polaris successor system. However, US officials stressed that a request would be assessed on a *case by case* basis, dependent on the circumstances of the time. Concurrently, even though long-term restrictions on cruise missiles looked unlikely, this did not guarantee that the US would supply them to the British. Indeed, in October 1978, Brzezinski told Carter that in US-UK discussion on grey areas, US officials “ducked a response” to British enquires about whether they “could sell them long-range ALCMs [Air-Launched Cruise Missiles] or transfer their technology under the non-transfer clause in SALT.”¹²³

The political circumstances of the time were not necessarily conducive to US assistance on Polaris replacement. Whilst NATO politics helped to ensure that Britain’s options for the successor to Polaris remained open, NATO’s concern over grey areas also heightened the risk of the inclusion of British systems in SALT III. In October 1979, the US remained determined “about the need to resist Russian pressure for the inclusion of British weapons.”¹²⁴ The NATO alliance had always strongly supported the United States long-standing rejection of the Soviet pressure to include non-central systems. European allies had hitherto taken the

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Brzezinski to Carter, ‘NSC Weekly Report’, 6 October 1978, NLC-128-9-15-13-0, JCL.

¹²⁴ Wade-Gery to Hunt, ‘Polaris Replacement: Dr Aaron’s Visit’, 18 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

view that the inclusion of non-central systems "would limit the effectiveness of their contribution to the deterrent and defensive strategy of the Alliance."¹²⁵ However, for SALT III, the interests of the western alliance was less clear-cut. The successful completion of the SALT II agreement would result in the 'regulation' of the US and Soviet strategic balance. The successful completion of MBFR would result in the 'regulation' of the conventional balance in Europe. This left the question of "whether an attempt should be made to constrain the nuclear forces in Europe."¹²⁶ NATO was presently very concerned with this issue because of Soviet deployment of the SS-20 and the subsequent risk of a TNF imbalance. As such, British officials foresaw that there could be a "political requirement to extend arms control negotiations to non-central systems."¹²⁷

Such a decision to include non-central systems in SALT III could lead to the inclusion of British and French systems. Subsequently, when US consulted with their European allies over principles for SALT III in February 1978, FRG officials expressed their wishes for Soviet theatre systems, and thereby US TNF, to be included in SALT III. French officials stated that they did not want to see the inclusion of grey area systems "out of concern that their own forces might be dragged in."¹²⁸ The British were "torn on the subject." They wanted to keep their own forces out of SALT III, yet they also saw political benefit to addressing the TNF imbalance in Europe within the next SALT round.¹²⁹ Subsequently, in October 1979, David Aaron informed British officials that if US TNF were included in SALT III it would be difficult not to include British grey area weapons, because "the de minimis argument would be much weaker, since our [British] share of the grey area total would not in fact be insignificant."¹³⁰ If French fears were true, this could then result in British strategic systems "being dragged in."¹³¹ This

¹²⁵ Hunt to Cartledge, 'Military Nuclear Issues', 25 October 1977, PREM 16/1564, TNA.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Brzezinski to Carter, 'NSC Weekly Report #45', 2 February 1978, NLC-128-9-14-1-5, JCL.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Wade-Gery to Hunt, 'Polaris Replacement: Dr Aaron's Visit', 18 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹³¹ Ibid.

uncertainty over the possible inclusion of British systems in SALT III would take time to resolve and would be partly dependent upon how NATO decided to resolve the grey area problem.

Moreover, alongside his toughening of approach towards the Soviet Union, Carter continued to prevaricate on his foreign policy choices. Within the academic literature on Jimmy Carter, there is still much debate about why this vacillation took place, alongside the related arguments on Carter's diplomatic record.¹³² Some scholars, such as Betty Glad, stress the intra-government squabbles that dogged the administration as the most important factor.¹³³ The key rivalry was between Cyrus Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski. Vance wished to downplay the Soviet threat and thought that the US and USSR could co-operate in areas of shared interests, such as arms-control. Brzezinski took a more hawkish view towards the Soviets, and saw the USSR "as a megalomaniac state bent on world domination."¹³⁴ Eventually, Brzezinski won the struggle for influence, and this resulted in a hardening of US policy towards the Soviet Union. In the meantime, Carter struggled to reconcile the differences between two of his key advisers, and the result was confused foreign policy.

Other scholars, such as Odd Arne Westad, offer a more sympathetic view of Carter, and argue that the President was the victim of forces beyond his control.¹³⁵ Domestically, Carter faced the remarkable growth of the neoconservative movement, divisions within a Democratic party and embedded bureaucratic and corporate interests that fought many of his policies. Internationally, Carter faced difficulties in Iran and Nicaragua, over which he had little control, and a Soviet Union, who many in the US saw as utilising détente as a means to increase strength. Again, Carter's attempts to navigate this conflicted environment led to a confused foreign policy.

Other scholars, such as Scott Kaufman, observe that all Presidents face

¹³² For more information on this debate, see Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 3-4.

¹³³ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹³⁵ Westad, "The Fall of Détente."

external and internal constraints as well as governmental in-fighting, and as such view that blame for the confused foreign policy lies with Carter.¹³⁶ Certainly, Carter's lack of overall vision and strategy compounded the external and internal constraints he faced. Indeed, his approach to nuclear weapons was contradictory even during his election campaign. In June 1976, Carter told *The New York Times* that he opposed the idea "of a limited nuclear war," yet a month later, he said that he would launch a pre-emptive nuclear attack "if I was convinced that the existence or the security of our nation was threatened."¹³⁷ As such, Nancy Mitchell rightly argues that the real problem was not that "Carter was torn between Vance and Brzezinski, but... [that] he held both their views simultaneously... He believed in patient diplomacy *and* in the dramatic gesture; he saw beyond the Cold War *and* he was a firm Cold Warrior."¹³⁸

However, no matter which of the debated factors was the most important in creating Carter's foreign policy, it is clear that they all contributed, to a greater or lesser extent, to the same result: Carter's foreign policy was often confused and contradictory. This in turn influenced the British government's efforts to modernise Polaris. In the long-term, Carter's hesitation, created, as the next two chapters will discuss, uncertainty for the British government in their efforts to secure an agreement on the sale of the Trident C4 system.

IV

In December 1978, the Duff-Mason report was ready for ministerial consideration. In the report, Duff and Mason were sceptical about the feasibility of David Owen's preferred Polaris successor; cruise missiles. Instead, they favoured the Trident C4 system with MIRV. This system would meet the 'Moscow criterion': "the ability to deter the Soviet Union through maintaining an ability to threaten, and therefore potentially to kill, millions of people in the Soviet

¹³⁶ Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 4.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 16.

¹³⁸ Mitchell, "The Cold War and Jimmy Carter", 69.

capital.”¹³⁹ This criterion had been central to British nuclear doctrine since the deployment of Polaris.¹⁴⁰ In light of the lessons of Chevaline, Duff and Mason also thought that there were “great technical, operational and logistic advantages” to the Trident C4 as it was “a system in service with the US Navy.”¹⁴¹

Duff and Mason were relatively optimistic that the US would agree to assist with Britain’s efforts to replace Polaris. They thought that the continuation of “Anglo-American cooperation would involve least risk to the US commitment to the defence of Europe.”¹⁴² Such a consideration was particularly important to the Carter administration given the resurrection of doubts in the US nuclear umbrella amongst some Western governments. In addition, the Carter administration, through Kingman Brewster, had “re-emphasised, at the highest level, the continuing self-interest of the United States in the maintenance of the United Kingdom’s nuclear capacity.”¹⁴³ Duff and Mason also believed that it was unlikely that any succeeding US administration would adopt a different attitude to US-UK nuclear co-operation, or that Congress would dissent to US assistance. Duff and Mason also noted that many of Britain’s fears about the impact of a non-circumvention clause on the Polaris successor question had now been resolved. Indeed, they noted that Harold Brown, US Secretary of Defense, had specially said in a Senate ratification meeting that “the US was allowed under the interpretive statement to provide the Allies with modernised forces along the lines of the Cruise Missile and Trident submarines.”¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Duff and Mason stressed that, even without specific restrictions in the treaty, the SALT process could still influence Britain’s efforts to modernise Polaris. As the report highlighted the “nature of US assistance will be

¹³⁹ John Baylis, “British Nuclear Doctrine: The ‘Moscow Criterion’ and the Polaris Improvement Programme,” *Contemporary British History* 19:1 (2005), 53.

¹⁴⁰ See *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Duff-Mason Report, December 1978, DEFE 19/275, TNA.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Duff-Mason Report, ‘Annex F: International Political Aspects of System Choice’, December 1978, DEFE 24/2122, TNA.

constrained by the need to take account of the political implications for SALT.”¹⁴⁵ One of these areas could be SALT III. With the Carter administration still committed to the continuation of SALT, consideration of the political impact on future arms-talks would likely influence the Carter administration’s assistance with Polaris replacement. In these negotiations, Duff and Mason expected the US to continue to resist Soviet pressure for the inclusion of British and French systems. However, the US and Soviet Union had committed in the declaration of principles for SALT III to “seeking... significant and substantial reductions in strategic system numbers.”¹⁴⁶ As such, to resist Soviet pressure the US “may have to argue that the UK deployment is insignificant numerically compared with US and Soviet systems.”¹⁴⁷ Such an argument could “inhibit any significant strengthening of a future British deterrent in comparison with the present force.”¹⁴⁸

Duff and Mason emphasised that another area of political consideration for the Carter administration could be the supply of a MIRV system. Duff and Mason viewed it “difficult to judge whether the US would offer their MIRV capability.”¹⁴⁹ With MIRVed systems “subject to special constraints in SALT... this could seem still too sensitive an area.”¹⁵⁰ However, Duff and Mason highlighted that, MIRVs no longer represented the “technological lead possessed by the US” and the Soviets had begun to deploy their own MIRVed SS-20 “against European targets, including Britain.”¹⁵¹

If the US refused to sell Britain a MIRV system this would create difficulties for the replacement of Polaris. Duff and Mason deemed that Britain’s “fall back option” to the Trident C4 with Multiple Re-entry Vehicles (MRV) was “inferior and

¹⁴⁵ Duff-Mason Report, December 1978, DEFE 19/275, TNA.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Duff-Mason Report, ‘Annex F: International Political Aspects of System Choice’, December 1978, DEFE 24/2122, TNA.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

less certain.”¹⁵² The MIRV capability was integral to the design of the Trident C4. The removal of this capability and replacement with MRV “would entail a major re-design and re-testing programme, leading to a missile degraded in performance and unique to Britain.”¹⁵³ Such a re-design would increase the missile costs by “at least double those of Trident.”¹⁵⁴ As such, a US refusal would require the British to conduct “further study and exploration to say which would be best... between A4, C4 with MRV, and the French M4.”¹⁵⁵ The UK’s own development of a MIRV system was “virtually out of the question. The technical task would be formidable - exceeding even the complexity, cost and demands on scarce manpower resources of Chevaline.”¹⁵⁶ The report made clear that enquiries to the Carter administration over their willingness to supply Trident C4 with MIRV was essential to progress on Polaris replacement. As such, when a Cabinet committee discussed the report on 21 December 1978, Callaghan decided that he would utilise the opportunity of his upcoming summit with Carter on the island of Guadeloupe, to enquire about the President’s attitude to the supply of Trident C4 with MIRV.¹⁵⁷

On his way to Guadeloupe, Callaghan could be hopeful of a positive reply to his enquiry. Events over the last two years, due to shared allied concerns and a hardening of the White House’s approach to the Soviet Union, had led to the nullifying of the Carter administration’s aims in nuclear reductions. This, in turn, created an environment that looked more hospitable to a US-UK Polaris replacement deal. Moreover, the Carter administration had already expressed their support for US-UK nuclear co-operation, and demonstrated this in a concrete way: the administration had continued to support British warhead testing in

¹⁵² Duff-Mason Report, December 1978, DEFE 19/275, TNA.

¹⁵³ ‘Britain’s Strategic Nuclear Forces: The choice of a system to replace Polaris’, July 1980, DEFE 25/325, TNA.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Duff-Mason Report, December 1978, DEFE 19/275, TNA.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Note of meeting, ‘Cabinet: Nuclear Defence Policy’, 21 December 1977, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

Nevada. By the time of Margaret Thatcher's election in May 1979, British warhead testing of a successor system had already begun, with tests taking place in 1978 and 1979. All these nuclear tests required the President's consent.¹⁵⁸

Nevertheless, these developments, as the Duff-Mason report highlighted, only made a US agreement to the supply of Trident C4 with MIRV more probable, not definite. Even if the administration supported Polaris replacement, any deal would only be of modest advantage to the administration. In the first few years of their term in office, the administration prioritised arms-control and human rights, not the strengthening of nuclear forces. As such, they did not view the replacement of Polaris as a central component in their efforts to change the dynamic of the Cold War, nor would it build the administration's legacy, resolve relations with allies, or win votes. Subsequently, if modernisation in any way was going to hinder any such 'priority' policies, the British could not rely on the support of Carter. Two policy priority areas that clearly had the potential to intervene with Polaris replacement were the political implications of SALT, and concern over grey areas within NATO. As Leopoldo Nuti observes, European unease about TNF alongside the arms-control process led to the development of "a complex relationship between Soviet strategic choices, the SALT II negotiations and NATO internal debate."¹⁵⁹ Polaris replacement was entwined within these relationships. Moreover, Carter had a tendency to vacillate, as the neutron bomb fiasco had demonstrated, on potentially controversial nuclear issues. Put together, all of this meant that, despite knowing that the Carter administration supported Polaris replacement, the British could not be sure that the US would be willing to supply Trident C4 with MIRV.

¹⁵⁸ Facer to Cartledge, 'Nuclear Warhead Test Programme', 24 May 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁵⁹ Nuti, "The Origins of the 1979 dual-track decision", 62.

Chapter 3

SALT in the Wounds: The Preliminary Negotiations, 1979

“I regard it as modestly advantageous – with the emphasis on the adverb.”

- Harold Brown.¹

I

On 5-6 January 1979, Jimmy Carter, James Callaghan, Helmut Schmidt and French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing met on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. The four men assembled for top-secret, informal deliberations on global politics and in particular Western security issues. Despite the seriousness of the topics under discussion, the summit had a relaxed atmosphere. ‘Formal’ discussions took place round a small, white table in an open thatched hut with no set agenda, no position papers and no note-taker. Each leader came with only a modest number of staff, an advisor or two, to ensure maximum discretion and frankness during the deliberations. Outside of these discussions, the summit had a more sociable atmosphere. The leaders and their wives stayed in bungalow-style accommodation next to the beach. During their free time they jogged, sailed, played tennis, snorkelled, sunbathed, and scuba-dived.²

As Kristina Spohr notes, the summit was an “important moment in 1970s Cold-War politics.”³ It played a pivotal role in laying the foundations for NATO’s highly contentious ‘dual-track’ decision on TNF modernisation and arms-control efforts with the Soviet Union. The Guadeloupe summit is also known, by those interested in British nuclear history, as the location where important foundations were laid for the Trident C4 agreement. As discussed in

¹ Harold Brown quoted in Michael Quinlan, “Introduction,” in *Cabinets and the Bomb*, x.

² See Kristina Spohr, “Helmut Schmidt and the Shaping of Western Security in the Late 1970s: the Guadeloupe Summit of 1979,” *The International History Review* 37:1 (2015).

³ Ibid., 168.

the previous chapter, the Duff-Mason report made clear that the US Trident C4 with MIRV was the most desirable Polaris successor option. Subsequent to reading the report, Callaghan decided that the Guadeloupe summit provided an opportune moment to enquire about the President's attitude to assisting Britain with Polaris replacement.⁴

In Callaghan's memoir, he notes that Carter's response to these enquiries was very positive and forthcoming, with the President informally agreeing to transfer the Trident C4 system. Callaghan paints a picturesque, if slightly surreal, scene of the President taking an afternoon rest in his hut, only to be interrupted by the Prime Minister wishing to discuss Britain's nuclear 'deterrent'. After a general conversation about the surrounding nuclear context, Callaghan enquired about the possibility of acquiring the Trident C4 system. According to Callaghan's account, "The President said that he could see no objection to transferring this technology to the UK."⁵

Given that archival material has only recently become available, much of the historiography has been largely reliant on Callaghan's account as a basis for understanding the origins of the Trident C4 agreement.⁶ Furthermore, given that only the Prime Minister and the President took part in the conversation at Guadeloupe, some of this literature has overemphasised the role of personal relationships in securing US agreement to assist with Polaris replacement. Referring to Carter's compliance to Callaghan's enquiries, John Dumbrell reflects, "Memories of Jack and Mac in 1962 were stirred."⁷ Whilst Alan Dobson, also referring to the conversation at Guadeloupe, similarly states, "The nuclear special relationship was about to get a new lease of life... Callaghan got on well with Carter."⁸ These evaluations of the importance of the dynamic between Carter and Callaghan, and the similarities with Nassau, are collaborated by Foreign Secretary David Owen's account: "Jim used his friendship with Jimmy Carter over Trident in much the same way that Harold Macmillan had used his personal relationship with President Kennedy over

⁴ Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, 553.

⁵ Ibid., 556.

⁶ See Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 144; Stoddart, "The Special Nuclear Relationship", 92; Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, 146.

⁷ Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 144.

⁸ Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, 146.

Polaris.”⁹ Such accounts suggest that the Guadeloupe summit could be considered the ‘Trident Nassau’.

However, just as archival documents revealed that discussions in Nassau were not as friendly or congenial as once thought, the same is true of the Trident negotiations. As this chapter will discuss, despite Carter’s forthcoming attitude in Guadeloupe, the British faced uncertainty in their efforts to gain US assistance for Polaris replacement. This remained the case when Margaret Thatcher met with President Carter to discuss the matter in December 1979, shortly before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Within recently released British documents is an account of Callaghan’s conversation with Carter at Guadeloupe.¹⁰ It is reasonable to presume that the former Prime Minister used this account to inform his memoirs many years later. Callaghan describes the discussion with clarity. He portrays a President who responds positively to the Prime Minister’s enquires about Polaris replacement. Callaghan explains that after waking the President he explained that Britain had begun to consider their “next generation of nuclear weapons” and that he wanted to know what Carter’s reaction would be. Reflecting US acceptance of Britain and France as nuclear powers in contrast to some opposition during the Polaris negotiations, the President expressed his appreciation for Britain being in the nuclear field. He “hoped strongly” that Britain and France continued to be so, “He [Carter] did not wish the United States to be the only country that confronted the Soviet Union.”¹¹

Consequently, the President then asked which system the British preferred. Callaghan replied that as they had ruled out Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCM) for the time being, “at this stage” they were “basically attracted to a submarine launched missile.” Callaghan reflected that, for his “part if the cost could be properly apportioned what I thought would be best would be the Trident C4,” then enquired “did he [Carter] see any objection?” According to Callaghan’s account, Carter said, “that there was no objection at all.” The British Prime Minister pointed out that the system was MIRVed, which

⁹ David Owen, *Time to Declare* (London: Penguin, 1991), 403.

¹⁰ ‘Prime Ministers Conversation with President Carter: 3:30 p.m. 5 January, at Guadeloupe’, 5 January 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

the British did not presently have. To which Carter replied, and the record quotes, "Well, so is the SS-20 MIRVed."¹² It is reasonable to presume that Carter's positive response about the supply of a MIRV system would have been both a surprise and delight to the Prime Minister. Indeed, Callaghan's reminder to the President that Britain did not have such technology suggests this be the case.

A multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle, more commonly referred to as its acronym MIRV, is a ballistic missile with a payload that contains several warheads with each one able to strike separate pre-determined targets. Such a system would enhance Britain's first-strike proficiency, provide greater damage per missile payload, and reduce the effectiveness of anti-ballistic missile systems. For these reasons the authors of the Duff-Mason report felt that a MIRV system, such as the Trident C4, better fulfilled the 'Moscow criterion': UK policy-makers believed that Britain's nuclear 'deterrent' should be able to defeat ballistic missile defences around Moscow. However, as discussed in chapter one, the British development of Chevaline was motivated, in part, by concerns that the US would not agree to sell an alternative MIRV system: Poseidon. Indeed, the US feared that supplying such a system, which would vastly improve Britain's first strike capability, would undermine on-going SALT I negotiations. The Soviet Union had previously demanded that the British and French systems be included in the agreed limits, and that there should be a non-transfer clause, which Washington rejected. Given the on-going SALT II negotiations, during which US officials had again rejected Soviet arguments to include 'third-party systems' and a non-transfer clause, British officials had been concerned that the Carter administration would have similar reservations about the supply of Trident C4 with MIRV.

After a short exchange that resolved Callaghan's confusion over the myriad names of different Trident systems, Carter said "the United States had always got the greatest benefits out of co-operation with Britain, that if they

¹² Ibid.

could transfer some of their technology to us it helped them on unit costs in production.”¹³ With Britain’s struggling economy and thus subsequent declining defence budget, Callaghan seized this opportunity to talk about costs. He explained that estimates of \$10 billion were beyond British capacity, and given Carter’s belief that it was valuable to have Britain present in the nuclear field, Callaghan expressed his hope that the US would be willing to help Britain “very substantially financially.” Carter replied that he “thought they could, and said that when it came to production it would lower their unit cost of production if we [Britain] were in the field.”¹⁴ Again, Carter’s response delighted British officials. Both of Britain’s main concerns – the supply of a MIRV system and the prohibitive cost – had been calmed by the US response.

Finally, Callaghan suggested that he would like to send a couple of officials over to Washington to discuss systems and costs, to which Carter “agreed immediately.” Callaghan in his account hence surmises that Carter’s “whole attitude was extremely forthcoming and co-operative.”¹⁵ Certainly, this is what Callaghan’s record of the conversation suggests. Before Guadeloupe, British officials feared the White House would be unwilling to provide Trident C4 with MIRV at an affordable cost. Callaghan’s account of his conversation with the President at Guadeloupe suggests that these doubts were unnecessary.

In the most detailed study of the Trident C4 agreement to date, Kristan Stoddart accepts Callaghan’s archival account without question.¹⁶ However, despite the clarity of Callaghan’s account, questions remain about its accuracy. No US record has been declassified to verify the British account and Carter did not write in his personal diary about this private conversation with Callaghan.¹⁷ Nor did Carter mention the conversation in his personal notes to Cyrus Vance briefing him on the Summit.¹⁸ This absence of a US record is

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 69-70.

¹⁷ ‘The Daily Diary of President Jimmy Carter’, 5-7 January 1979, President’s Daily Diary, Box 12, Plains file, JCL. Carter made this diary available at his Presidential Library and only in a few cases deleted entries in order to protect his family or someone still in public life.

¹⁸ Carter to Vance, ‘Carter’s personal brief notes’, NLC-128-4-12-3-9, JCL.

particularly important because Callaghan and Carter's accounts of the conversation to their respective officials differed. Robert Wade-Gery, a lead British official during the Trident C4 negotiations, later recalled that there was:

Despair of officials on both sides because this was a rare example of a meeting which only Callaghan, in his pyjamas, and Carter, presumably also in his pyjamas, were present at. So none of us actually knew what had happened. Callaghan wrote down a few notes on a half sheet of paper when he got back to his cabin, and Carter similarly made some rough notes. These two sets of notes, which of course we compared, didn't really square with each other, so there was a good deal of uncertainty as to what had or hadn't been agreed.¹⁹

Subsequently, when Wade-Gery began working on Polaris replacement for the Cabinet Office in mid-1979 "the sort of foundation document for everything were these two rather inarticulate notes by the great men who weren't used to writing their own records."²⁰

Certainly, Callaghan's account of the President does not correlate with Carter's known personality and attitude. Callaghan portrays Carter as very compliant and agreeable yet this was entirely atypical of the President. Zbigniew Brzezinski later described the President as having a "somewhat reticent personality" and that "in personal relations he is... somewhat cold."²¹ The account also does not concur with the accounts of two lead officials in the Trident C4 negotiations regarding Carter's attitude towards Polaris replacement. US Deputy National Security Advisor David Aaron later recalled that Carter was "allergic to a lot of nuclear things" and viewed the idea of supplying missiles to Britain "rather sceptically."²² Similarly, Robert Wade-Gery, with whom Aaron privately scrutinised much of the detail of the Trident deal, later recalled:

The real problem with the Carter White House was the moral issue; was it really right for Carter, who was a man who believed in peace... to help even a close ally like Britain to acquire another generation of these terrible weapons, and was it compatible with the goal of non-proliferation and so on? Carter agonised over this a

¹⁹ Transcript of interview with Robert Wade-Gery, 86.

²⁰ Ibid, 87.

²¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 1.

²² Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, 5.

great deal. My task was to get his advisers to make up their minds that they ought to help us, and then to help them to persuade him.²³

Therefore, there are clear anomalies between Carter's purported later attitude towards Polaris replacement and Callaghan's account of the conversation with him at Guadeloupe.

These differences can be accounted for because Callaghan in fact only asked Carter if he would *consider* the supply of Trident C4. Following the Guadeloupe summit John Hunt wrote to Callaghan reflecting on the ramifications. He noted that any decision on Trident C4 would need Cabinet endorsement and "we are a long way from that yet." Callaghan scribbled alongside, "Yes we are. I put the question to him [Carter] to see what are our range of options."²⁴ Subsequently, Callaghan reported to key Cabinet ministers privy to discussions on Polaris replacement that: "Carter reaffirmed his support for the maintenance of an independent British deterrent... and said he was very ready to *consider* letting us have the Mirved [sic] C4 [emphasis added]."²⁵

Moreover, there is a distinct possibility that no-one briefed Carter on Polaris replacement before attending Guadeloupe. There is no briefing on the issue within the materials prepared for Carter prior to the summit.²⁶ Furthermore, shortly before Guadeloupe, Brzezinski received an incorrect brief from an official in Western Europe about Britain's attitudes, which recalled that:

I had lunch with John Weston of the UK Embassy, who does PM [Prime Minister] issues. He indicated that they have little sense of what Callaghan wishes to discuss at Guadeloupe... Weston does not expect the follow-on UK deterrent question to come up, even bilaterally, since UK thinking (at least at the Ministerial level) has hardly begun.²⁷

Of course, someone may have briefed Carter orally, with perhaps Brzezinski informing the President as a contingency, but there also exists a real possibility

²³ Transcript of interview with Robert Wade-Gery, 88.

²⁴ Hunt to Callaghan, 'Nuclear Matters: next steps', 7 January 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

²⁵ Callaghan to Healey, 'Nuclear Defence Policy', 17 January 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

²⁶ See 'Briefing Book: President's Visit to Guadeloupe Summit, 1/5 - 6/2', no date (n.d.), Box 116, Charles L. Schultze Briefing Book Files, Council of Economic Advisers, JCL.

²⁷ Western Europe to Brzezinski, 'Evening Report', 15 December 1978, NLC-10-17-3-17-1, JCL.

that Carter replied to Callaghan's enquiries without being informed in detail about any possible ramifications of a system transfer to the British.

Despite the uncertainty about what was said regards Polaris replacement in Guadeloupe, it is clear Carter leaned towards assisting the British, had a good working relationship with Callaghan, and was inclined to assist the UK owing to prior successes in US-UK nuclear collaboration. Many of the existing accounts on the Trident C4 agreement determine that these three factors provide enough explanatory value to understand the sale of Trident. However, a multi-faceted approach demonstrates that this does not explain the formulation of the agreement, especially its timing and shape. Even if the administration supported Polaris replacement, any deal would only be of modest advantage to the administration. Hence, if modernisation in any way was going to hinder the administration's 'priority' policies it would obviously be delayed, or shaped to try to limit such impact. The Carter administration faced a myriad of political dilemmas during 1979, including maintaining working US-Soviet relations, SALT II ratification, achieving NATO consensus on a 'dual-track' approach, the rise of the political right in the US, and Carter's declining public support. These problems created uncertainty for the British that the US would supply their preferred system Trident C4, and indeed whether any Polaris replacement agreement would be achievable with the presiding administration. Subsequently, nearly a year after the Guadeloupe summit, despite concerted British efforts, their quest to replace Polaris was at a standstill.

In December 1979, UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher met Jimmy Carter to discuss Polaris replacement; instead of Thatcher making a formal request for the Trident C4 system, as the British had originally planned, she was told that any deal would be delayed until after the ratification of SALT II, whenever that may be. Therefore, no matter what was said on the island of Guadeloupe, any agreement was contingent on further negotiations. Moreover, Britain still faced a significant amount of uncertainty about the prospects of securing the Trident system because of the surrounding political circumstances: in particular other discussions occurring on the island of Guadeloupe.

II



Solving Western security dilemmas in a thatched hut.²⁸

The Guadeloupe summit played a pivotal role in laying the foundations for what would become NATO's highly contentious 'dual-track' decision on TNF modernisation and arms-control efforts with the Soviet Union. This provided justification for a Polaris successor deal. Nevertheless, these developments also created a problematic environment for the announcement of any US-UK nuclear technology transfer.

Arriving in Guadeloupe, Carter faced the difficult dilemma of how to resolve European concerns over nuclear parity, and in particular Soviet development of SS-20s. Helmut Schmidt came to the summit intending to discuss the problems he saw with NATO strategy, and in particular its nuclear dimension. Schmidt had widely expressed his conviction that US-Soviet strategic parity diminished the credibility of the US nuclear deterrent and amplified the effects of developments in the European theatre such as the deployment of new Soviet systems like the SS-20s. Whilst Schmidt "sat in the

²⁸ Courtesy: Jimmy Carter Library.

driving seat”, pushing for the resolution of these problems, his fears were shared amongst his fellow European leaders.²⁹ The NATO High-Level Group was already considering the different options for LRTNF modernisation, after a meeting in February 1978 agreed new NATO weapons deployment necessary.

However, there were differences in opinion between the Europeans and Americans, and the summit provided an opportunity to resolve these. Carter had reconciled himself to the idea of deploying modernised LRTNF across Europe. On the other hand, the Europeans gave higher priority to arms-control. Callaghan supported arms-control negotiations with the Soviets, but was willing to go along with the US proposal. Giscard suggested a combined approach of deployment and negotiations, whilst Schmidt was reluctant to support the idea of deployment.³⁰ Clearly these differences needed to be resolved because they undermined confidence in NATO and the US nuclear umbrella. As Kristina Spohr observes, officials on both sides of the Atlantic understood, “anything that might undermine alliance cohesion in the face of a blustering Soviet Union had to be avoided at all costs.”³¹

The Carter administration needed to ensure the resolution of these concerns. Indeed, the administration was struggling to repair the damage done to US-European relations during the Nixon era and discontent was deepening. Many European governments felt the Carter administration lacked a solid, consistent and thought-out nuclear policy and subsequently had offered little lead on the security problems faced by the ‘West.’ In turn, the Carter administration saw the dilemmas over LRTNF as an important opportunity to eradicate these criticisms and strengthen US-European relations. On the eve of the meeting, Brzezinski spelt out to the President the importance of the summit in alleviating these concerns:

One of the major concerns of the other leaders present at Guadeloupe will be to obtain from you a sense of your strategic direction. In part, this is due to some anxiety that this Administration does not have any overall scheme, and that the US is no longer prepared to use its power to protect its interests or to

²⁹ Spohr, “Helmut Schmidt and the Shaping of Western Security”, 168.

³⁰ Nuti, “The origins of the 1979 dual-track decision”, 66.

³¹ Spohr, “Helmut Schmidt and the Shaping of Western Security”, 173.

impose its will on the flow of history. It is therefore quite critical you use the meeting in order to share with your colleagues your thinking.³²

The administration also wished to find a solution to the LRTNF question because of SALT. Facing a difficult ratification battle in the Senate, Carter was desperate to secure European backing for the treaty, which would garner support domestically. Likewise, any allied animosity about the treaty would provide ammunition to its US critics. Thus, Carter went to Guadeloupe with “a primary US objective” of obtaining the “strongest possible support for a SALT II agreement.”³³ To do this Carter needed to reassure his allies about “the implications of the non-circumvention provision for transfer of systems and technology, Protocol cruise missile limits, [and] the absence of limits on the SS-20.”³⁴ Looking forward the administration also needed to nullify European, and in particular Schmidt’s, fears that SALT II established precedents for SALT III that were contrary to their respective interests. Carter needed to offer “personal confirmation” that European concerns would be taken into account in any decision relating to the inclusion of theatre nuclear systems in SALT III.³⁵ Carter flew to Guadeloupe knowing that his domestic and foreign policy goals required him to strengthen US-European relations.

The afternoon’s discussions on the first day were entirely devoted to the inextricable SALT and LRTNF conundrum. The exchange lasted well over three hours and reconvened the following morning. Schmidt did not get the support he needed for his favoured arms-control and disarmament approach to deal with the SS-20 threat. However, under pressure from Callaghan and Schmidt, Carter conceded that the US needed to deal with the ‘grey area’ problem.³⁶ Accordingly, they reached a compromise: the four men agreed that NATO should deploy GLCM and Pershing IIs in Europe, and that Washington should propose to open arms-control negotiations with Moscow. The US

³² Brzezinski to Carter, 28 December 1978, Box 42, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

³³ Vance to Carter, ‘Guadeloupe Summit Meeting, January 5-6, 1979’, 20 December 1979, NLC-15-119-6-9-9, JCL.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ For a detailed analysis of these discussions, see Spohr, “Helmut Schmidt and the Shaping of Western Security.”

President, partly to gain allied approval of SALT II, emphasised his willingness to offer his European allies new US LRTNF and their desired arms-control talks, in the form of SALT III. Helmut Schmidt in return accepted that in order to secure arms-control talks, "he had to voice open support both for the SALT II agreement he so disliked and to come round to Washington's drive for enhanced LRTNF."³⁷ The 'big four' informally agreed on a 'dual-track' approach: modernising LRTNF in Europe, alongside arms-control talks.

After Guadeloupe, officials of the 'big four' began to intensify allied consultations as they tried to fine-tune the informal agreement and gain support from other NATO governments. In early February, David Aaron travelled to Europe for follow-up discussions. During these, it became clear that as well as the problems of getting other governments to agree to a 'dual-track' approach, there were still troublesome differences between the stakeholders in the Guadeloupe decision. Aaron reported on his return that Germany was ambivalent, France would acquire a cruise or ballistic missile outside of the NATO framework, and "the British were mainly interested in modernizing their own deterrent."³⁸

The 'dual-track' decision provided implicit justification for Carter to agree the provision of the Trident C4 system. The US was motivated primarily to support new LRTNF deployments for political rather than military reasons. The administration did not believe "a new LRTNF deployment was necessary to match the SS-20s or for deterrence against the Soviet Union. Rather, it was needed to reassure the NATO allies."³⁹ They hoped that LRTNF modernisation would restore Western confidence in US leadership of the alliance following the neutron bomb fiasco, and shore up confidence in the viability of NATO's spectrum of deterrence.⁴⁰ The administration believed that deploying new LRTNF would "maintain a perception of a firm US commitment to the defense

³⁷ Ibid., 185.

³⁸ Marilena Gala, "NATO Modernization at the time of Détente: A test of European Coming of Age?" *Historische Mitteilungen* 24 (2011), 115.

³⁹ Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 859.

⁴⁰ See Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 853, 859; Joachim Scholtyseck "The United States, Europe, and the Dual Track Decision," in *The Strained Alliance: U.S.-European Relations from Nixon to Carter*, ed. Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 350.

of Europe, forge Alliance unity, and strengthen deterrence by providing credible escalation options.”⁴¹ These political reasons for LRTNF modernisation concurrently provided a rationale for the modernisation of Polaris. Within this political thinking, it would have been difficult for the US to refuse Britain a nuclear weapons system that they would in turn commit to NATO.

The decision also provided an opportunity for the British to demonstrate their steadfast support for the US and NATO. Robert Wade-Gery later remarked that Polaris replacement:

Coincided, rather happily, with the American wish to deploy Cruise missiles around Europe, and the problem which that caused some European governments. I remember at least one European government, from memory I think it was the Belgian government, which had said it would take some Cruise missiles then reneged on the undertaking. The Thatcher government was asked, in its very early days, whether they would be prepared to make up the deficiency and take rather more than our share... Again, Mrs Thatcher was extremely good about that and said yes if that's what President Carter wants to do, that's what we're going to do and never mind if there are internal objections to it.⁴²

On the other hand, the ‘dual-track’ decision meant that any talk of Polaris replacement at this time would be too much for US-Soviet relations to bear. Discussion of LRTNF deployment inevitably further damaged the already strained state of superpower relations. Indeed, evidence from the Soviet archives suggests that the ‘dual-track’ decision was the “last drop tipping the scales” prompting Leonid Brezhnev to approve the invasion of Afghanistan.⁴³ A decision to deploy LRTNF would also heighten Soviet sensitivities about the British and French systems. The United States resisted Soviet Union pressure for the inclusion of British and French nuclear forces in the negotiations leading to the Interim Agreement of 1972. The Soviet Union pressed again for

⁴¹ Vance and Brown to Carter, ‘TNF Modernization -- US Diplomacy, Your Role and the Schmidt visit,’ 9 May 1979, Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) -- [4/78 - 4/79], Box 20, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

⁴² Transcript of interview with Robert Wade-Gery, 87.

⁴³ Aleksandr Antonovich Lyakhovskiy, “Inside the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and the Seizure of Kabul, December 1979,” *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* #51 (January 2007), 20, accessed 24 June 2015, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/inside-the-soviet-invasion-afghanistan-and-the-seizure-kabul-december-1979>.

their inclusion in the preliminary talks on SALT II, but the United States again refused. When Brezhnev met with Gerald Ford in Vladivostok, in November 1974, he agreed to defer consideration of those systems to a later round of negotiations. Soviet Defence Minister Marshal A. A. Grechko was furious, and according to one account, accused Brezhnev in a Politburo meeting of betraying the country. Brezhnev nonetheless signed the Vladivostok Accord, which provided a framework for SALT II but did not cover British and French systems. Therefore, David Holloway successfully argues that Brezhnev "may have felt that the SS-20 was needed not only to counterbalance British and French nuclear forces and U.S. forward-based systems but also to placate the military."⁴⁴ Modernisation of LRTNF would obviously concern the Soviets. However, given the background and some of the subsequent reasoning for developing SS-20s, any talk of replacing Polaris alongside this had the potential to cause serious disagreement.

In this way, LRTNF deployment was a politically risky move for the US. However, the administration saw greater ramifications if they sat idly by. Vance and Brown informed Carter:

The alternatives for the US, of standing aside and hoping the issue subsided... would not answer the military challenge posed by Soviet deployments but would also not resolve the political problem... Nor would they ease European doubts about US political will and commitment to European security; on the contrary, these doubts could even increase. The ultimate outcome could be a weakened NATO and a Western Europe more independent of the United States. More immediately, should it become known that the US was attempting to side-step the issue of new long-range TNF deployments, chances for SALT ratification would clearly be harmed.⁴⁵

Carter's reaction to Callaghan's enquiries about Trident C4 in Guadeloupe delighted and surprised British officials in equal measures. As John Hunt reminded the Prime Minister upon his return, "President Carter's reaction...

⁴⁴ David Holloway, "The Dynamics of the Euromissile Crisis 1977-1983," in *The Euromissile Crisis*, 13.

⁴⁵ Vance and Brown to Carter, 'TNF Modernization -- US Diplomacy, Your Role and the Schmidt visit', 9 May 1979, Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) -- [4/78 - 4/79], Box 20, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

was more positive than had been expected.”⁴⁶ British officials naturally wanted the conversation on-the-record. British representatives, including Callaghan himself, were concerned that Carter may not have informed his own people or made a record of the conversation.⁴⁷ Callaghan asked British officials to draft a letter from himself to Carter in order to confirm their conversation.⁴⁸ This letter needed to “mention the C4 specifically in case the President has not debriefed to his own people.”⁴⁹

By mid-February, however, Callaghan was reluctant to send such a letter.⁵⁰ He feared the possibility of a leak in Washington and the political damage this would cause him domestically.⁵¹ Seeing the assurances Carter had given in Guadeloupe as crucial to Britain’s hopes for Trident, John Hunt wrote to the Prime Minister urging him to reconsider. Hunt felt that the longer they delayed follow-up to the conversation in Guadeloupe, “the more difficult it may become to resurrect and make progress on the Trident question.”⁵² He also believed it:

Important that we should put down a firm marker such as this letter, with the Americans during the lifetime of this Government. If there were to be a change of Government, it would be difficult for your successor to follow-up effectively a personal conversation of yours with President Carter which may or may not have been adequately recorded on the American side. It would be a very considerable setback if the value of this exceptionally important conversation were to go by default in this way.⁵³

Hunt believed that Callaghan had gained important assurances from Carter, which needed immediate attention, lest the progress slip away; Hunt won the Prime Minister’s support. In late March, just before the beginning of an election campaign in Britain, British official Peter Jay delivered a letter to the White House detailing that it was “for the President’s eyes only.”⁵⁴ Callaghan began

⁴⁶ Hunt to Callaghan, ‘Nuclear Defence Policy’, 18 January 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

⁴⁷ Hunt, 29 January 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

⁴⁸ Hunt to Callaghan, ‘Nuclear Matters: next steps’, 7 January 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

⁴⁹ Hunt to Cartledge, ‘Future of British Nuclear Deterrent’, 15 January 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

⁵⁰ Hunt to Cartledge, 12 February 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

⁵¹ Hunt to Callaghan, ‘Polaris Replacement’, March 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Cartledge to Callaghan, ‘Your letter to President Carter about Trident’, 26 March 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

this letter by referring to the difficult situation he faced politically with a vote of confidence on his leadership imminent, and his concurrent desire to get their Guadeloupe conversation on the record. Callaghan then recapped their conversation in Guadeloupe. He reminded Carter that the British government had begun thinking about Polaris replacement, but their studies could not be furthered without technical and financial discussions with the US. Reflecting British officials desire to get Carter's assurances about Trident on the record, Callaghan finally detailed this part of the conversation:

I mentioned that if the Government decided to go on, the option which at present seemed to me most likely to meet British requirements was the Trident C4 MIRVed missile. You said you would be willing in principle to consider the possibility of making this available to Britain if it turned out to be what was wanted and that you hoped it would be possible to work out satisfactory financial terms. You kindly agreed that we could send over to Washington two people who could talk about this, and perhaps other possible system options at the same time.⁵⁵

Carter's reply indicated the closeness he felt to Callaghan, and even hinted at his preference for a Labour win: "I will refrain (with some difficulty) from commenting on the election context, except to say that we have confidence in the sound judgement of the British people."⁵⁶ However, even within this warm and friendly relationship, the President took a cautionary approach. Carter assured Callaghan that he was willing "to talk to your people as suggested" but he made no mention of Trident C4, and stressed that there should be no presumption about the outcome of the talks.⁵⁷ The US administration felt it necessary, in drafting this reply, for Carter to take a positive but non-committed stance to Polaris replacement. Even so, the Callaghan government deemed the President's agreement to preliminary talks so important they decided that if Thatcher won the election, she would be informed about Callaghan's exchanges with Carter.

The Callaghan government's surprise and delight at Carter's forthcoming response derived, in part, from the uncertainty they still felt that

⁵⁵ Callaghan to Carter, 27 March 1979, PREM 16/1978, TNA.

⁵⁶ Carter to Callaghan, 3 April 1979, Great Britain 6/77 - 12/80, Box 2, Plains file, JCL.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

the terms of the SALT II agreement would allow technology transfers. In early 1979, UK officials lobbied the Carter administration to drop “necessarily” out of the reference in the non-circumvention interpretive statement to systems numerically limited. They wished to ensure that the wording of the statement left no room for interpretation that US assistance with Polaris replacement broke the terms of the treaty. After US state officials refused British requests, Callaghan sent a personal letter of appeal to the President.⁵⁸ Carter refused this request, but once again offered the British Prime Minister reassurances that SALT II did not prevent transfers of systems: “I want to assure you that the agreement will not preclude established forms of cooperation and that requests for transfers of systems numerically limited in the agreement will be dealt with on a case by case basis.”⁵⁹ Despite the refusal to change the wording, Carter’s reply was a concerted effort to try to temper British worries. Brzezinski later told John Hunt that he did not see how the President could have given “a more forthcoming reply.”⁶⁰ Carter’s letter had “deliberately used the precise wording” that the British had in explaining their anxieties.⁶¹

FRG officials also requested a change of wording of the non-circumvention statement. The Carter administration refused this request as well.⁶² Despite US efforts to reassure, British and German officials remained uncertain that SALT II would protect their interests. This uncertainty partly arose from long-running grievances: namely that the Carter administration’s consultations with its allies on arms-talks had been inadequate. However, European governments also correctly viewed that, for as long as the administration saw SALT as its highest priority, they could not guarantee the protection of their interests. Given this environment, Carter’s agreement to preliminary talks was extremely important, yet this context also precluded its assistance with Polaris replacement until political circumstances allowed.

⁵⁸ USSR/Eastern Europe to Brzezinski, ‘Evening Report’, NLC-10-19-4-3-3, JCL; Bartholomew to Brzezinski, ‘VBB Item, UK and Non-circumvention,’ 24 April 1979, Meetings -- Vance/Brown/Brzezinski: 3/80 - 9/80, Box 34, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

⁵⁹ Carter to Callaghan, 27 April 1979, Meetings - Vance/Brown/Brzezinski: 3/80 - 9/80, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, Box 34, JCL.

⁶⁰ Hunt to Thatcher, ‘Talk with Dr Brzezinski’, 21 May 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² ‘Consultations with FRG on SALT II unfinished business with NATO’, 23 March 1979, NLC-16-115-3-31-0, JCL.

III

On 4 May 1979, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative party won the British general election. The warmth of recent years at the highest level of the US-UK relationship looked likely to end. Upon Thatcher's election, the US ambassador to the UK felt it necessary to reassure the President that she was:

A cooler, wiser, more pragmatic person today that [sic] the opposition leader you met... in May of 77 or even the dogmatic lady who visited you in Washington that fall.... While still given to strong feelings, doctrinaire oversimplification and a somewhat lecturing-hectoring style, she has learned from the tensions within her own party and from the pressures of campaign.⁶³

If friendship between the President and Prime Minister were of central importance to the US-UK nuclear relationship, the prospect of Britain securing US assistance now appeared gloomy. However, as previously noted, shared mutual interests have always been more important than the friendship of leaders in the continuation of the US-UK nuclear relationship. Here the administration did not believe that the change of government would lead to any serious disagreements. Brzezinski reported to Carter that:

Thatcher is... pro-US, pro-European, anti-Soviet, and distrustful of change in the Third world... The Thatcher government's broad approach to major international issues will differ from labor [sic] primarily in tone and style and in only one area -- Southern Africa.⁶⁴

On nuclear issues, the new Conservative government supported the principles of SALT II and MBFR but were "far less convinced than Labor [sic] that detente works to the West's advantage."⁶⁵ Brzezinski also believed the Thatcher government would show "active support" for NATO's TNF decision, "provided the UK was dealt with as an 'equal partner' in these enterprises (read close

⁶³ Brewster to Carter and Vance, 'Impressions of Mrs. Thatcher,' 6 May 1979, NLC-23-4-1-6-3, JCL.

⁶⁴ Brzezinski to Carter, 'Thoughts on Thatcher: Foreign Policy Implications of the Tory Triumph,' n.d., NLC-6-77-2-8-1, JCL.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

consultation with the U.S.)"⁶⁶ Overall, the Carter administration had reason to be optimistic about the continuation of a beneficial US-UK relationship, including in nuclear issues, even if the prospects of friendship between the President and Prime Minister were doubtful. Building on Callaghan's earlier exchanges, these continued mutual interests helped the new government secure, within just over a month of their election, the Carter administration's formal agreement to preliminary talks. However, just as with Callaghan's post-Guadeloupe exchanges with the President, the US continued to stress that they had made no decision to provide assistance, and it would be dependent on the political circumstances of the time.

On entering office, Margaret Thatcher had no detailed opinion on Polaris replacement. In May 1979, a US official informed David Aaron that, "Thatcher Government generally in favour but hasn't looked at specifics yet, Staffs thinking of GLCM's plus modernization of Polaris. Both would be UK systems. Uniformed side MOD not yet heard from so this could change."⁶⁷ This situation was short-lived. Thatcher had not even spent her first night in Downing Street before John Hunt began filling her in on progress to date. On 4 May, John Hunt wrote to Thatcher informing her that a decision had to be made forth-with on whether to send a party to the US for preliminary talks, and that their agreement on this was likely given Callaghan's secret exchanges with Carter: "I have Mr. Callaghan's agreement that I should tell you that he had already opened up this possibility with President Carter and that the latter had been very forthcoming, although nothing has yet been arranged."⁶⁸ Subsequent to Hunt's briefing, Thatcher requested a small Cabinet committee to be set-up. This committee, named MISC 7, would discuss the issue of Polaris replacement, as well as related nuclear issues. It consisted of Margaret Thatcher and the three Department Ministers concerned with the decision, the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. No other ministers would attend the meetings, although a select number of civil servants would do so when relevant.⁶⁹ As had occurred repeatedly in the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ McGiffert to Aaron, May 1979, NLC-16-122-3-6-0, JCL.

⁶⁸ Hunt to Thatcher, 'The Future of the Deterrent', 4 May 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

⁶⁹ For details on the setting up of this Cabinet Committee, see Ibid.

history of Britain's nuclear programme, decision-making would be limited to a small, elite circle.⁷⁰

The first MISC 7 meeting began with a discussion about the replacement to Polaris. They did not discuss whether to replace the Polaris missile system, but launched straight into what "system should be the successor." Thatcher informed the group that to make this decision, "they needed more information about the costs and other implications of the alternative options."⁷¹ As only the US could provide much of this information, Thatcher proposed that she send a request to Carter asking for a small team of UK officials to visit Washington for discussions. As the Prime Minister, Thatcher was the only member of the new government briefed on Carter's agreement with Callaghan for preliminary talks. She therefore spoke in vague terms that, "There were good reasons for thinking that President Carter would agree to such a visit."⁷² The meeting then turned to discussing system options. They "noted that Trident C4 came out clearly in the officials' study as the preferred solution. But this would be a very expensive option and we would need to look very carefully at the possibility of going for something cheaper." They therefore felt it was essential that their British team should head to Washington "without any implied Ministerial backing for the C4 so that all factors, including cost, could be taken into account when the decision was reached."⁷³ The US response, particularly on costings, would be central in this decision-making process. MISC 7 requested that a small delegation visit Washington to discuss options. This delegation would seek information "about the cost, availability and other aspects, including technical factors of e.g. Trident C4, SLCM [Submarine Launched Cruise Missile], and a modernised and re motored Polaris A3." Without this early consultation with the US, as Hunt told Thatcher, it would, "be difficult to make further progress with the detailed examination of successor options and their implications."⁷⁴ The British could not opt for their preferred system, Trident C4, until they knew that the US

⁷⁰ See Baylis and Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience*.

⁷¹ MISC 7(79) 1st Meeting, 'Cabinet Nuclear Defence Policy', 24 May 1979, CAB 130/1109, TNA.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Hunt to Thatcher, 'Future of the British Deterrent', 18 May 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

would agree to provide it on favourable terms.

Like the Callaghan government before them, the new residents of Downing Street were concerned that the non-circumvention clause of SALT II could preclude the transfer of technology to the UK and Europe. During a meeting in May with Brzezinski, Hunt informed him “frankly and on a personal basis” that whilst the Prime Minister “would do nothing to weaken” the President, and had hence publicly stated her hope for ratification, privately, she “remained to be convinced whether SALT II was a good agreement or not.”⁷⁵ The Thatcher government also faced continued unease amongst backbenchers about SALT II, particularly over the non-circumvention provision; US critics of SALT heightened the concerns of their British counterparts.

Subsequently during a private discussion, UK Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington asked Cyrus Vance whether “SALT II Treaty would inhibit the US in any way from helping the UK with the development of any replacement to our present deterrent.”⁷⁶ Vance replied, “with great emphasis,” that “in no eventuality would the terms of the SALT II agreement stand in the way of US aid to the UK over a Polaris replacement, though the provision of such aid would of course be a political decision.”⁷⁷ As in Carter’s April letter to Callaghan, Carrington had received reassurance that the SALT agreement did not preclude Polaris replacement. However, once again this reassurance came with the caveat that there could be no guarantee that the administration would provide such assistance, and that this decision would be dependent on the political context.

The reassurances provided by the Carter administration were largely successful at stemming the new government’s doubts that the SALT process would prevent US assistance. Thatcher expressed her belief, at the first MISC 7 meeting, that the assurances contained in the message of 27 April 1979 from Carter to Callaghan “was a very good one.”⁷⁸ Subsequently those present

⁷⁵ Hunt to Thatcher, ‘Talk with Dr Brzezinski’, 21 May 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

⁷⁶ Walden to Moberly, ‘SALT/Future of the UK Deterrent’, 22 May 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ MISC 7(79) 1st Meeting, ‘Cabinet Nuclear Defence Policy’, 24 May 1979, CAB 130/1109, TNA.

agreed that they would not pursue further the deletion of the word “necessarily” from the interpretive statement that the US intended to publish after the signing of the SALT II treaty, which would explain the parameters of the non-circumvention clause. The meeting also discussed Vance’s assurances to the Secretary of State. At this point Thatcher declared:

We should place complete trust in the readiness of the United States Government to let us have whatever help we might seek from them, subject only to the political considerations which they would need to take into account whether there was a SALT Treaty or not.⁷⁹

In contrast to Callaghan, Thatcher was seemingly prepared to accept the Carter administration’s reassurances on non-circumvention but remained well aware that there could be political hurdles ahead.

In late May, Thatcher sent a letter to Carter formally requesting preliminary talks. Thatcher began by stressing that whilst the British had conducted some preliminary studies of alternative options for a successor system, they could not get any further in their considerations without US input. The Prime Minister then asked to “renew” her predecessor’s request and to send “a small team of senior officials... to talk to some of your people, on a very confidential basis, about certain aspects, including technical implications, cost and likely availability, of systems we are considering.”⁸⁰ The last section of the letter contained what appears to be a rather innocuous sentence on SALT:

I understand of course that the decision to supply any of these systems would be a political one, though I assume from what Mr. Vance told us that there is nothing in the SALT II Treaty itself that would inhibit the United States from reaching a favourable decision with respect to any of the systems I have mentioned.⁸¹

However, John Hunt had advised that such a sentence be included in order that the British receive another “specific assurance” that nothing in the SALT II agreement would inhibit the US from providing any of the systems that they wished to discuss with the Americans. Clearly, despite the many reassurances

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Thatcher to Carter, ‘Personal Message to President Carter, White House, From Prime Minister Thatcher,’ 30 May 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

⁸¹ Ibid.

the administration had given the British, and Thatcher's earlier professions in the first MISC 7 meeting, there remained within Downing Street some latent uncertainty about the SALT II agreement.

In June 1979, Carter replied to Thatcher agreeing to hold preliminary talks. In his reply, Carter stressed the importance the US placed in the "viability and effectiveness of the British deterrent." Noting the British desire for more reassurances about non-circumvention, Carter also assured Thatcher that all the successor options she had mentioned remained, "open under the SALT II treaty." However, the President also emphasised that for both sides the talks were only of an exploratory nature: "we will both wish to consider the results of these talks and further exchanges before reaching any decisions."⁸² He would give no firm assurances of US willingness to assist.

Thatcher's request brought a flurry of activity in Washington. In order to prepare for the preliminary talks Brzezinski asked the Pentagon to produce two reports. The first was a succinct review of US-UK nuclear co-operation. This report provided a description of current US assistance to Britain and the projected status of the UK deterrent, and an assessment of US commitments resulting from the 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement and 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement that might affect the Polaris successor system. The second report would provide an analysis of the modernization alternatives cited in the Thatcher letter, and their relationship with issues, "including, *inter alia*: US-UK relations; relationship to our TNF modernization/arms control track; SALT implications; relationship to US-French nuclear cooperation and possible Anglo-French cooperation."⁸³ These papers would then be sent to a small working group, made up of David Aaron, Reginald Bartholomew from the State Department, and William Perry and Walter Slocombe from the Department of Defense. This group would then prepare an "issues and alternatives" paper and draft guidance for the preliminary talks by 18 July for Steering Group consideration and recommendations to the President.⁸⁴

⁸² Carter to Thatcher, 8 June 1979, Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) -- [4/78 - 4/79], Box 20, Subject File, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

⁸³ Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2010), xiv.

⁸⁴ Brzezinski to Vance and Brown, 8 June 1979, Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) -- [4/78 - 4/79], Box 20, Subject File, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

The scope of these commissioned reports demonstrate that the administration's decision on whether to assist with Polaris replacement would not be based solely on whether they wished to continue the 'special relationship,' or if they thought it important for Britain to have their own 'deterrent', but also the interrelation between Polaris replacement and the administration's wider foreign policy. The White House would be considering whether overall, at this time, a deal on Polaris replacement was advantageous. This was the first time the Carter White House had considered in-depth assisting the British. This would mean that any previous assurances given to the British, including those in Guadeloupe, had been given without due consideration to these inter-linking factors. This included the relationship between Polaris replacement and US-French co-operation.

In recent years, archival research has shown that the UK has not been the only recipient of US direct assistance for its nuclear programme: beginning with the Nixon administration, the US provided nuclear assistance to France.⁸⁵ This obviously undermines the notion of a 'special nuclear relationship', because the US provided assistance, albeit to a much lesser degree, elsewhere. Unfortunately, however understanding of the US-French nuclear relationship is still in its formative stages. Even less is known about the US-French partnership during the Carter years, due to extensive classification in the French and US archives.⁸⁶ However, Brzezinski's comments highlight that the administration did see its nuclear relationship with France as a key consideration in its decisions on the Polaris successor.

By the beginning of June 1979, the Carter administration had formally agreed to preliminary talks on Polaris replacement. This demonstrates that the White House was generally in favour of Britain modernising its nuclear weapons. At the same time, despite many reassurances, Downing Street was still slightly concerned that the US may be unable to assist them under the terms of the SALT II treaty. However, as the White House had repeatedly

⁸⁵ William Burr, "U.S. Secret Assistance to the French Nuclear Program, 1969-1975: From 'Fourth Country' to Strategic Partner," Wilson Center NPIHP Research Updates, accessed 30 October 2010, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/us-secret-assistance-to-the-french-nuclear-program-1969-1975-fourth-country-to-strategic>.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

mentioned in their post-Guadeloupe exchanges with the British, the real uncertainty Downing Street faced was whether political circumstances would allow the administration to make a positive decision to assist them.

IV



Signing SALT II

On 18 June 1979, at a summit held in Vienna, Carter and Brezhnev met for the first and only time to sign the SALT II accord. Despite the conclusion of negotiations between the two Cold War adversaries, the US President had not secured his prized SALT II agreement. The US Senate still needed to ratify the treaty. In the summer of 1979, the Senate hearings took place. Despite vociferous criticism from several quarters, it appeared that the Senate would ratify the treaty.⁸⁷ However, the Carter administration would face an uphill battle in maintaining this narrow majority, due to declining support for the SALT process and increased mistrust of Moscow. Until Carter's election in 1976, roughly three-quarters of US citizens favoured the conclusion of a SALT II treaty. However, by the summer of 1978 opinion polls showed backing for SALT was decreasing, with increased support for the US taking a tougher

⁸⁷ Caldwell, "US Domestic Politics and the Demise of Détente," in *The Fall of Détente*, 109. Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices* (New York Simon & Schuster, 1983), 356.

stance towards the Soviet Union.⁸⁸ This change was due in large part to the remarkable rise of conservatism in US society during the mid and late 1970s.

Since Carter's election, public attitudes on arms-control had evolved. During his election campaign, Carter had argued against Nixon and Kissinger's policy of linking progress in arms-control with Soviet restraint in other areas. Carter deplored such an approach, partly because he thought it would not work, and partly because he thought arms-control was too important to be held hostage by the resolution of other issues. After his election, Carter received support for this approach. There was no public or congressional outcry when Carter made clear, in his first few weeks in office, that there would be no linkages between progress in SALT and other issues such as human rights or Soviet behaviour in the 'third world'. However, the deterioration in US-Soviet relations in the late 1970s led many to believe that détente and SALT I had not achieved a more stable and peaceful international environment.

Concurrently there was a widespread perception of a deteriorating military balance and eroding US global position. With the strategic arms-control regime appearing to work to the benefit of the USSR there was reduced public support for arms-control. Subsequently, there was a "renaissance of linkage."⁸⁹ Increasingly members of the public agreed with the ideas of conservative-minded internationalists who argued that the SALT negotiations be used as means to moderate and challenge Soviet behaviour in other policy areas. Many conservatives also made their support of SALT dependent upon the Carter administration proving that the treaty increased the relative military strength of the US.

These developments made it much more difficult for the Carter administration to sell the SALT II treaty at home. As Olav Njølstad observes, the rise of conservatism put Carter in a "Catch 22 situation."⁹⁰ On the one hand, to win Congressional and public support for SALT he needed to be 'tough' with the Soviets; on the other, such an approach could provoke a reaction from the USSR that would make the population even more distrustful of Moscow as a

⁸⁸ Njølstad, "Key of Keys?", 50.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 52.

reliable partner on arms-control. Such was the domestic environment, that any perceived aggression from the Soviet Union had the potential to terminate Senate ratification of SALT II. Whilst the swing to the right reaffirmed the need for the US government to assist Britain with Polaris replacement; amongst the US public, there was increasing support for increased spending on defence, more expressions of support for NATO, and clear signs that the public was becoming more distrustful of the Soviet Union.⁹¹ This move to the right also created problems for securing SALT ratification, which in turn would create deep uncertainty for Polaris replacement.

Following the signing of the SALT II agreement, US officials began to publicly espouse their interpretation of the non-circumvention clause. In a statement to NATO on 29 June 1979, Cyrus Vance stated that, "the non-circumvention provisions will not affect existing patterns of collaboration and cooperation with its Allies, nor will it preclude cooperation in modernization."⁹² Concurrently, on 27 June, the British government issued a statement expressing their support for the SALT II agreement and their hope that the Senate would ratify the treaty. The statement also expressed the government's belief that the agreement "would not interfere with continued nuclear and conventional cooperation between the US and its allies, and that the essential security interests of the Alliance are safeguarded."⁹³ The US allies publicly declaring their support for the White House interpretation was vital to securing ratification in Congress. The effect the clause could have on the transfer of arms and technology to allies concerned some Senators. The Soviets rejected the US interpretation. They argued that any transfer was a clear breach of article XII of the treaty, providing that "each Party undertakes not to circumvent the provisions of this Treaty, through any other state or states, or in any other manner."⁹⁴ Given the wording of the clause, these arguments would clearly gain a sympathetic audience in some quarters.

Subsequently, during the second MISC 7 meeting, participants discussed

⁹¹ See Caldwell, "US Domestic Politics", 101-102.

⁹² Francis Anthony Boyle, *World Politics and International Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 212.

⁹³ Briefing Paper, 'Visit of U.K. Defense Secretary Pym', July 1979, NLC-15-15-8-44-3, JCL.

⁹⁴ Boyle, *World Politics*, 212.

whether the text of the SALT II agreement could “sustain” the interpretation of non-circumvention that had been the basis of previous US assurances to Britain. In response, an unnamed attendee highlighted there would always be doubts about such assurances because, “the availability of American technology would depend in the last resort on a future United States political decision.”⁹⁵ Whilst long-running concerns about the non-circumvention clause had now largely been resolved, this did not mean that the US would definitely assist with Polaris replacement. The British no longer needed to worry about whether the US would have to address Soviet concerns about nuclear assistance to NATO allies, in order to keep them at the negotiating table. The administration's priority was now ensuring ratification at home. Subsequently, with the Carter administration still to make the political decision of whether to assist with Polaris replacement, the British now had to worry about whether the inevitable Soviet reaction would affect decision-making in the White House.

The British had this political contingency impressed upon them when, in late July, Harold Brown met with his British equivalent Francis Pym. With the US yet to complete their review on Polaris replacement and no Presidential approval given on co-operation, Brzezinski briefed Brown to be “generally positive regarding the British desire for cooperation in their strategic modernization programs but to make no specific promises until our review had been completed and your [the President's] approval has been obtained.”⁹⁶ Subsequently, given that the British were unable to progress without US input, when the two men met both stressed that their respective governments' had made no policy decision on Polaris replacement. Pym opened the discussion on the matter by referring to the forthcoming visit to Washington of a small group of UK experts to investigate the options. He stressed that the British government had not taken a decision on their preferred option, but that they had “not ruled out the possibility” that their “national strategic deterrent” and their “contribution to the Long Range Theatre Nuclear Force might be most

⁹⁵ MISC 7(79) 2nd Meeting, ‘Nuclear Defence Policy’, 10 July 1979, CAB 130/1109, TNA.

⁹⁶ Brzezinski to Carter, ‘Daily Report’, 12 July 1979, NLC-SAFE-3C-20-31-2-0, JCL.

economically made by the same system.”⁹⁷ Brown replied that the administration was “ready to welcome the group of experts and would provide them with full details about all... [British] options, in order to explore their characteristics and costs” and that all the systems being considered by the British “could be transferred without infringing SALT II treaty.”⁹⁸ However, Brown also stressed that, “the US Government still had to make the policy decision.” He also highlighted the importance that TNF deployment and the maintenance of conventional forces would play in decision-making:

Strategic and long range theatre systems served different political functions, and that was why the TNF question was the more urgent. But he [Brown] would like to encourage us [the British] to consider both systems together in terms of their military functions, since it would be wrong to spend too much on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces.⁹⁹

White House concerns about the possible reaction of the Soviet Union impeding SALT ratification, LRTNF deployment and the maintenance of British spending on conventional forces emerged during the visit of British officials to Washington for preliminary talks in mid-August 1979. A small team of officials from the Pentagon, State Department and the White House led by David Aaron, received the British delegation. Robert Wade-Gery led the British party, accompanied by Ron Mason, the Chief Scientific Advisor to the Ministry of Defence, and Michael Quinlan also from the MOD, and Patrick Moberly from the Foreign Office. The British team wished to discuss the four system options for a successor system to Polaris under consideration by the UK government: a submarine force carrying the Trident C4 ballistic missile; a modernised version of the Polaris A3 missile (known as A4); SLCMs; and ALCMs.¹⁰⁰ Guided by MISC 7’s worries concerning cost, the team professed that they arrived in Washington “without either commitment of policy or order of likely preference” on these systems, instead they sought information from the US so that the British government could make a policy decision.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Facer to Cartledge, 20 July 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Hunt to Thatcher, ‘Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Force’, 14 September 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

The British found their counter-parts very co-operative, with US officials expressing support for Polaris replacement from-the-off. At the beginning of the discussions, David Aaron emphasised “the importance which the US Government attached to the British deterrent and made clear that they have taken a firm decision to co-operate with us on its future.”¹⁰² Throughout the discussions, the US team implied that this co-operation:

Should be on the same basis as now; ie [sic] we [Britain] would have full independence as regards operational control while remaining dependent on the Americans for some key elements of logistic support. The Americans seemed content that (as we [Britain] would wish) a regime comparable to the present Polaris Sales Agreement would continue, although they may want to revise some of the details.¹⁰³

However, the US team again stressed that, “no decisions had been taken beyond the main point of principle, and that the talks accordingly could carry no policy commitment on their side, any more than on ours.”¹⁰⁴ Overall, the British were pleased with the helpfulness of their US colleagues and John Hunt summarised to the MISC 7 committee that, “They were helpfully received and given much technical and financial information. No major surprises emerged in either the technical or the resource fields.”¹⁰⁵

In talking through the different options, the US team did not explicitly attempt to direct the British towards a certain one, expressing that “there was at present no particular US policy preference among the four options.”¹⁰⁶ However, the British team felt that some signs of a US preference were tacit. The US representatives expressed the belief that, in military terms, the C4 missile would be the most effective, whilst ALCMs would “be a poor choice” because of Britain’s “vulnerable geography.” US officials also suggested that, although “not strongly put”, the cruise missile option “might give logistic savings through a degree of commonality with a CM theatre force (which they

¹⁰² Wade-Gery to Cartledge, ‘Successor to Polaris’, 24 August 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁰³ Hunt to Thatcher, ‘Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Force’, 14 September 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

are for other reasons eager to see us acquire.)"¹⁰⁷ Although the US clearly thought that some of the systems would be of greater strategic utility, the choice would remain at the British government's discretion. The White House saw no over-riding need, for the sake of 'deterrence', to direct Britain's choice.

However, the US team did highlight two points the British needed to satisfy before the Carter administration could make a firm policy decision to transfer a system. Firstly, as the discussions progressed the British "leaned even more strongly toward the Trident I (C-4) as their preferred modernization option."¹⁰⁸ Subsequently, David Aaron emphasised that the administration had made no decision yet on whether they would be willing to transfer MIRV.¹⁰⁹ Such a "major step" required "careful thought."¹¹⁰ Aaron's caution is in marked contrast to the apparent assurances Carter gave Callaghan at Guadeloupe about the provision of a MIRV system.

In-depth consideration of the issue had clearly made it apparent to the administration that the provision of a MIRV system could provoke a Soviet reaction that could seriously disrupt securing SALT ratification, and hamper Carter's hopes for deep cuts in SALT III. The key provision of the final SALT II agreement was an aggregate ceiling for strategic launchers of 2250 for each side, with a 1320 MIRV sub-limit consisting of no more than 820 MIRVed ICBMs and no more than 120 strategic bombers equipped with cruise missiles. During the negotiations, the Soviets had argued that the national nuclear forces of Britain and France, as well as forward-based nuclear forces in Western Europe, should be included in the limits on central strategic systems. They argued all these systems were capable of destroying targets on Soviet soil, and subsequently their non-inclusion would tilt the overall strategic balance towards the West.¹¹¹ Moscow refused to consider 'deep cuts' in isolation from these other issues. Whilst, the Carter administration resisted these demands for the inclusion of British and French systems the Soviet's would inevitably raise the problem again during SALT III negotiations. The

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ 'The Situation Room to the President: Daily Report,' 17 August 1979, NLC-1-12-1-20-4, JCL.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Hunt to Thatcher, 'Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Force', 14 September 1979, PREM 19/14. TNA.

¹¹¹ Njølstad, "Key of Keys?", 40.

Soviet's had also feared that the US would circumvent the qualitative restrictions in the SALT II treaty by secretly transferring forbidden weapons systems or military technologies to its NATO allies. To alleviate these concerns the final treaty included a non-circumvention clause. Subsequently the supply of Trident C4 with MIRV to the British could disrupt US-Soviet arms-control efforts.

Despite privately knowing that it was highly probable that the US would agree to sell Britain a new missile system in the near future, the Soviets would likely publicly argue that the supply of a MIRV system at least went against the spirit of the non-circumvention treaty. Consequently there was the possibility that the Soviets would react in such a way that would heighten feelings in the Senate that Moscow could not be trusted, undermining support to ratify the SALT II treaty. In addition, the supply of a MIRV system, given the sharp increase in British capability it would provide, would only intensify feelings in Moscow that British and French systems should be included in SALT III. Reflecting the dilemmas the Carter administration faced in the supply of MIRV, the British team believed that their reservations arose from the "possible impact of a sharp increase in UK strategic warhead numbers upon the Soviet attitude, especially on deep cuts within SALT III."¹¹² The US administration needed to make a political decision on whether the supply of a MIRV system to the British would be more politically detrimental than beneficial.

Secondly, US officials indicated concern that the "resource burden of a successor system" might imperil UK conventional contributions to NATO.¹¹³ This reflected the Carter administration's belief that the Europeans were not living up to their defence obligations. They felt that a key problem in the Atlantic alliance was that the Europeans wanted the US to take the initiative on defence matters in order to minimise their domestic political losses. When Carter met with Giscard, Schmidt and Callaghan on the island of Guadeloupe, he urged the Europeans take more responsibility for their own defence.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Hunt to Thatcher, 'Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Force', 14 September 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Joe Renouard and D. Nathan Vigil, "The Quest for Leadership in a Time of Peace," in *The Strained Alliance*, 313.

Even with the new Thatcher government, elected on a platform of higher defence spending, the administration was not seeing the spending increases they wanted:

A close look at the Thatcher Government's maiden budget reveals that all the noise about an extra 100 million pounds for defence is more than a little misleading: in fact, none of the extra funds will be for new programs or additional equipment and will be used to cover increases for existing items. Still, better than nothing. And it is true that defence is virtually the only government activity which has been allocated any kind of increase.¹¹⁵

Knowing the economic difficulties that Britain faced, the US was concerned that the cost of Polaris replacement would leave them unable to make the conventional contributions to NATO they, and Congress, valued so highly. As such, US officials made clear that the White House would require some kind of reassurance on British conventional force spending. Moreover, US officials indicated their inclination to utilise Polaris replacement as a means to gain UK assistance in other areas. During the meeting, US officials talked in "general terms about the possibility of extending into other fields the close Anglo-American co-operation so successfully practised over strategic nuclear weapons."¹¹⁶ John Hunt later remarked "It is not clear whether this is the first hint of a political price-tag." It was.¹¹⁷

The meeting ended with the two sides discussing their plans going forward. Given the lessons of Nassau, an important element would be how to present the decision to allies. The US contingent was particularly concerned with the reaction of the French.¹¹⁸ Subsequently, at the meeting both teams agreed that the "eventual decision on a successor to Polaris should be carefully presented to the other Allies."¹¹⁹ US officials also requested that they would like a further round of discussion on the same basis in October, before the British Cabinet discussed the decision. This was, in the words of Aaron, "So that we can get a better sense of what they might want and they can get a better

¹¹⁵ Europe to Brzezinski, 'Evening Report', 26 June 1979, NLC-10-21-6-3-8, JCL.

¹¹⁶ Hunt to Thatcher, 'Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Force', 14 September 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ 'The Situation Room to the President: Daily Report,' 17 August 1979, NLC-1-12-1-20-4, JCL.

idea of what we are willing to provide, especially MIRV.”¹²⁰

Following the preliminary talks, John Hunt wrote a briefing for Thatcher that displays the British reaction to the talks. Despite British officials viewing a MIRV system as essential to filling their deterrent criteria, their reaction to Aaron’s non-committal on its provision was measured:

It would in the Steering Group’s view be wrong to interpret this message as a preliminary to intended refusal. But it puts us on notice that if we want MIRVs we must make a good case to help the Administration meet domestic or Soviet criticism. This can certainly be done, and contingent preparation is in hand.¹²¹

Likewise, Hunt also felt that they could mollify US concerns that Polaris replacement might reduce British spending on conventional forces: “It is not possible to assuage this concern in detail, since the size of the Defence Budget in the relevant years cannot be known now. But we can make a good case in present circumstances that no major distortion need be feared.”¹²² Furthermore, Hunt was concerned about the surrounding political circumstances, and advised Thatcher that a decision on Polaris replacement should take place earlier than originally planned. The public position of the British government was that they needed to make a decision within the next year and a half. Hunt now advised that there was “much merit” in shortening the timetable as it would mean a decision:

Before the US Presidential primaries are under way and also before the SALT process has moved to a point where the Administration focus more on their relations with the USSR over SALT III than on those with Congress and their allies over SALT II.¹²³

Hunt clearly did not foresee the problems SALT ratification could cause for British plans, but was concerned that Carter’s desire for ‘deep cuts’ in SALT III would preclude US assistance, as the President’s attention once more shifted to US-Soviet relations.

MISC 7 met again in September to discuss, amongst other matters, the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Hunt to Thatcher, ‘Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Force’, 14 September 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

outcomes of the August preliminary talks. The Committee agreed that there "were strong grounds for the shortened timetable now proposed."¹²⁴ Demonstrating awareness of the political contingency of the deal on the US side, MISC 7 now wished that:

If possible agreement should be reached with the Americans before the end of the year, before President Carter's Administration became too pre-occupied with the 1980 elections, and if possible before the date (now slipping) on which the SALT II Treaty might be ratified by the Senate.¹²⁵

Drawing lessons from the previous government's concerns that the Carter administration had ignored their interests during SALT II negotiations, and that this could be repeated with SALT III, the Thatcher government now felt it necessary to secure the deal.

With the decision now being fast-tracked, the planned timetable necessitated a report on the remaining options, based on information gained in the preliminary talks, by the end of October. This report would form the basis of a MISC 7 decision on which system to adopt. Thereafter, the British would inform the President of the decision in November, with follow-up discussions by the Prime Minister during her proposed visit to Washington in December.¹²⁶

The meeting's participants also discussed Aaron's statement that the administration had made no decision on MIRV. In reflection of the view that a MIRV system was necessary to maintain the 'Moscow criterion', ministers expressed that if they decided in favour of the Trident C4 system it would "Be important to secure access to American technology on multiple independently-targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRV), which it would be very expensive to develop on our own; failing that, we might have to be content with a C4 carrying only multiple re-entry vehicles (MRV) or with the A4 option."¹²⁷ In addition, as one of her summary points, the Prime Minister stated that, "If we decided in favour of the C4 option it would be necessary to press hard for

¹²⁴ Minutes, MISC 7(79) 3rd Meeting, 'Cabinet Nuclear Defence Policy', 19 September 1979, CAB 130/1109, TNA.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

access to MIRV technology.”¹²⁸ The committee also saw the development of SLBM’s as a way of stemming US pressure to make other commitments to NATO nuclear defence: “If we decided in favour of five new submarines in place of our present four, the fifth might usefully be presented as a replacement for our Vulcan bombers; this should make it easier to resist American pressure to replace the Vulcans with our own GLCM.”¹²⁹ Overall, it is clear that, at this point, the British were relatively optimistic of securing US assistance for Polaris replacement. They felt they had a good chance of obtaining a necessary early agreement with the White House and that they would be able to temper the administration’s desire for further defence contributions. The only real doubt they faced was whether the US would be willing to supply a MIRV system.

Soon the British received assurances that stemmed their worry over US supply of MIRV. On 28 September, Cyrus Vance told Carrington, “He would recommend very strongly to the President that the Americans should make available to the UK the Trident C4 system, including the associated MIRVED technology.”¹³⁰ Carrington was “struck by the firmness of Mr Vance’s assurances, though he recognises of course that the final decision will depend on the President.”¹³¹ By the end of September, British hopes for Polaris replacement, from their perspective, were looking relatively optimistic.

V

Unfortunately for the British, at the same time that their concerns about the US being willing to supply Trident C4 decreased, Carter’s political situation became even more problematic. At the end of August, US intelligence agencies ‘discovered’ a Soviet ground force brigade of some 2,600 men and weapons in Cuba. In fact, there had been small Soviet military units stationed on Cuba since well before the 1962 missile crisis. The unit clearly posed no threat to the United States. The Kennedy administration had agreed to its presence in 1962,

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Walden to Alexander, 28 September 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹³¹ Ibid.

and the brigade performed training rather than combat functions. However, due to a combination of bureaucratic inefficiency and political sensitivity to the right, the 'discovery' created a domestic furore in the United States.¹³² The belief that the Soviets had recently introduced new military units into Cuba reaffirmed pre-existing doubts that Moscow could not be trusted. This significantly damaged the prospects of Senate ratification for SALT II. It prompted some senators to shift from support to opposition of the treaty, as they argued the presence of the brigade demonstrated Soviet deceitfulness and the difficulty of verifying their compliance with agreements.¹³³ In addition, as Vance later reflected, the "political storm" also delayed Senate consideration of the treaty "long enough for it to be overtaken and shelved as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan."¹³⁴

The controversy also had a negative impact on the Soviet leadership's views of the Carter administration. Faced with a President who was suddenly expressing strong objections to a small, longstanding, and non-threatening military brigade in an allied country, Soviet leaders were naturally puzzled, suspicious and angry. Soviet Ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin reportedly told Vance that if US intelligence was so incompetent that it had failed to spot the brigade in seventeen years, or so inefficient that it had failed to inform government leaders, that was not a problem for Moscow.¹³⁵ The Soviets refused to remove the brigade from Cuba, and Carter had to settle for a promise that it would not be turned into a combat unit. Further disenchanted and mistrustful of Washington, the incident raised Soviet suspicions about the desire, and ability, of the Carter administration to resume détente.¹³⁶ This consequently increased the risk that the Soviets would act in a way Senators would perceive as 'mistrustful', and hence endanger SALT ratification.

The President attempted to put an end to the issue on 1 October. In a televised address to the nation, he declared that the Soviet brigade in Cuba "was a matter of serious concern to the United States, but posed no direct

¹³² See Westad, "The fall of Détente", 23; Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 745, 828 - 848; Freeman, "The Making of an Accidental Crisis", 345-346.

¹³³ Freeman, "The Making of an Accidental Crisis", 346.

¹³⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 358.

¹³⁵ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 839.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 848.

threat.”¹³⁷ Deeply worried that he might lose SALT, Carter concluded the address by highlighting that the real danger was the threat of nuclear destruction and urged its ratification.¹³⁸ However, by this point the incident had already damaged the standing of the Carter administration and, as Raymond Garthoff argues, “seriously damaged-perhaps critically” ratification hopes for the SALT II treaty.¹³⁹

On the same day Carter unilaterally settled the issue of the Cuba brigade, Brezhnev issued a warning against NATO’s proposal to deploy new LRTNF. On 6 October, he expanded his warning and issued a proposal to discuss arms-control, conditioned on NATO not making a decision to deploy new missiles.¹⁴⁰ The Soviet Union had begun its campaign to mobilise public opinion in Europe against the NATO proposals.

This could be fatal to the process of achieving alliance consensus on the ‘dual-track’ approach by December. The key actors in NATO felt it necessary that the alliance demonstrate cohesion through a collective decision. This would provide NATO with a much-needed boost of confidence. The ‘West’ felt vulnerable: dogged by international energy and financial challenges beyond their control, and facing a seemingly ascendant Soviet Union posing a strategic challenge to NATO through conventional and nuclear rearmament in Europe.¹⁴¹ Any public disagreement would only embolden the Soviets. Consensus was also necessary in order to ensure West German support. As Jim Thomson, a National Security Council (NSC) staffer primarily responsible for defence and arms-control matters related to Europe, told David Aaron in February 1979, “FRG leadership feels a special need to urge an Alliance approach to TNF arms control, at the very least to secure domestic support for TNF modernization.”¹⁴²

Trying to gain such a consensus on a ‘dual-track’ approach had been a

¹³⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 351.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 350-351.

¹³⁹ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 829.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 745.

¹⁴¹ Kristina Spohr Readman, “Conflict and Cooperation in Intra-Alliance Nuclear Politics: Western Europe, the United States, and the Genesis of NATO’s Dual-Track Decision, 1977-1979,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13:2 (2011), 40-43.

¹⁴² Thomson to Aaron, ‘Mini-SCC mtg on TNF 15 Feb 1979 - Rationale and Strategy for the Arms Control Bilaterals’, 15 February 1979, NLC-132-119-11-2-9, JCL.

difficult task for NATO officials over the course of 1979. The Danish, Dutch, Belgian and Norwegian governments had been deeply hesitant about their states participation in future deployments of LRTNF, and subsequently more committed to "arms control above all else."¹⁴³ In addition, these NATO governments, alongside Italy and the FRG, were reluctant to support a decision that was likely to be extremely unpopular with large sections of their electorate. As Vance and Brown told Carter in May 1979, it would "not be easy" to achieve consensus because nuclear issues provoked strong reactions amongst European publics, there was a popular interest in protecting détente, and because Soviet propaganda campaigns against deployments would find resonance in many countries.¹⁴⁴ Getting full NATO agreement on the 'dual-track' approach was "a tightrope walk for the alliance."¹⁴⁵

By October 1979, there had been a lot of progress towards gaining such a consensus. The senior working level of NATO had agreed on both the LRTNF deployment plan and the arms-control approach. Italy's new coalition government had privately agreed to vote in favour of NATO's decision and accept LRTNF deployments on Italian soil. This assured Chancellor Schmidt that there would be another non-nuclear continental European state deploying the missiles, and it quelled his anxieties about the reaction of the West German public. Italy's promise was important because deployment in Belgium and the Netherlands remained tentative, due to certain reservations and political uncertainty, especially in the Netherlands.¹⁴⁶ Despite this progress, political uneasiness remained as the alliance moved towards a formal and public decision.

Gaining full agreement on a 'dual-track' approach was a key priority for the Carter administration. Throughout the Euromissile crisis, Soviet leaders and peace campaigners claimed the Carter administration pushed the decision to modernise LRTNF on its European partners.¹⁴⁷ However, recent studies of

¹⁴³ Spohr Readman, "Conflict and Cooperation", 76.

¹⁴⁴ Vance and Brown to Carter, "TNF Modernization -- US Diplomacy, Your Role and the Schmidt visit", 9 May 1979, Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) -- [4/78 - 4/79], Box 20, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

¹⁴⁵ Spohr Readman, "Conflict and Cooperation", 40.

¹⁴⁶ Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 859.

¹⁴⁷ Spohr Readman, "Conflict and Cooperation", 39.

the ‘dual-track’ decision have demonstrated that both European and US officials played key roles in the formulation of the ‘dual-track’ decision, and seeking full NATO consensus.¹⁴⁸ ‘Dual-track’ was the first time NATO as a whole took a nuclear procurement decision.¹⁴⁹ This was a reflection of the importance now placed on inter-allied solidarity in nuclear decision-making. However, the US administration had an essential role in leading NATO towards this consensus, and derived many benefits from doing so. As Vance and Brown had told Carter in May 1979:

The Europeans will not come independently to a consensus within the Alliance, nor should we expect them to: the US bears the ultimate responsibility for the nuclear affairs of the Alliance and reaps substantial benefits (political leverage, non-proliferation, internal European stability, etc.)¹⁵⁰

As such, the administration was deeply interested in allied reaction to Brezhnev’s October pronouncements. They were relieved to find that Brezhnev’s efforts to undermine NATO consensus on LRTNF largely failed. Overall, NATO governments saw the speech as a “skillful piece of propaganda” and discounted Brezhnev’s denial that the USSR had built up its TNF.¹⁵¹ However, many NATO governments remained concerned that “significant political forces in Western Europe” might be responsive to Moscow’s suggestion that arms-control talks proceed without agreement among NATO to modernise LRTNF. This in turn created a worry that there would be an

¹⁴⁸ Early studies of the dual-track decision tend to give the United States the lead role in intra-alliance discussions in 1977-1979 on LRTNF. These studies include Raymond Garthoff, “The NATO Decision on Theater Nuclear Forces,” *Political Science Quarterly* 98:2 (1983); James Thomson, “The LRTNF Decision: Evolution of U.S. Theater Nuclear Policy, 1975-9,” *International Affairs* 60:4 (1984). The opening of some key government and private papers has enabled scholars to re-examine the decision. Recent scholarship has coalesced around the idea that the West European, particularly the West Germans, were the driving force behind the decision. See Spohr Readman, “Conflict and Cooperation”, 42-43; Renouard and Vigil, “The Quest for Leadership”, 311-312; Scholtyseck “The United States, Europe, and the Dual-Track Decision”, 333-352. However, the most nuanced and persuasive accounts demonstrate that both US and European officials played indispensable roles. See Nuti, “The Origins of the 1979 Dual Track Decision”, 60-6; Freeman, “The Making of an Accidental Crisis”, 331, who, utilising recently released US archival material, argues that European governments did not force the arms-control component of ‘dual-track’ on Carter.

¹⁴⁹ Spohr Readman, “Conflict and Cooperation”, 40.

¹⁵⁰ Vance and Brown to Carter, ‘TNF Modernization -- US Diplomacy, Your Role and the Schmidt visit’, 9 May 1979, Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous) -- [4/78 - 4/79], Box 20, Subject File, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

¹⁵¹ Special Analysis, ‘West European Division, Office of Political Analysis: Further West European Reactions to Brezhnev’s speech’, 11 October 1979, NLC-7-47-6-4-3, JCL.

intensification of public debate in the Netherlands, which could then spill over into West Germany, Belgium, and Italy. Such developments would threaten, “To upset the delicate process of building an Alliance consensus on Theater Nuclear Force modernization by December.”¹⁵²

Brezhnev’s speech marked the beginning of a concerted Soviet propaganda campaign. For much of 1979 the Soviets had exercised restraint in criticising the proposed LRTNF modernisation track. As Stephanie Freeman argues, this is “likely attributable to a desire not to jeopardise the long-awaited signing of the SALT II treaty.”¹⁵³ It also seems plausible that Soviet willingness to speak out increased following the ‘crisis’ over the combat brigade in Cuba and subsequent signs from Congress that SALT II would not be ratified. Whatever the cause, in October 1979 the Soviets began a concerted propaganda campaign against NATO LRTNF deployments. Soviet media broadcasts asserted TNF modernisation would be a circumvention of SALT II, a hardening of their previous line that it would complicate SALT III.¹⁵⁴ As part of these arguments, Soviet officials also became increasingly vocal that they saw their LRTNF as a counter-balance to British and French systems:

In discussions with Shulman and Barry, Soviet minister-Counsellor Bessmertnykh has gone out of his way to assert that TNF modernization would violate principle of equal security central to SALT II. He says that Soviets have made a close study of the numbers of weapons capable of reaching Soviet Union including UK and French strategic forces, US FBS [Forward-Based Systems] and US central systems. It is clear from their calculations that a balance exists between these forces and Soviet/Warsaw pact forces capable of reaching the US and Europe. An effort to add 600 new launchers to the Western side of the equation would amount to a circumvention of SALT II.¹⁵⁵

At this delicate time, any public talk of Polaris replacement could seriously upset the Soviets and reaffirm the message of their propaganda efforts. Talk of modernising Polaris in addition to LRTNF would invariably stir further anti-nuclear feeling with the public. Distinctions between ‘strategic’

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Freeman, “The Making of an Accidental Crisis”, 345.

¹⁵⁴ Sec State to American Embassy Moscow, ‘TNF and SALT II’, October 1979, NLC-16-118-4-9-1, JCL.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

and ‘tactical’ weapons, and the need to modernise both, could very easily appear academic and nonsensical in public debates. As such, any rumours of a Trident deal would heighten many NATO governments concerns about domestic reaction to ‘dual-track’.

The Carter administration could not guarantee at this point that the British would not attempt to achieve a deal on Polaris replacement at the same time as the ‘dual-track’ agreement. Britain was a firm supporter of LRTNF modernisation, and UK-FRG co-operation had been crucial in shaping and achieving the agreement. However, despite the contradictions with LRTNF deployment, the British remained determined to push forward with Polaris replacement. In response to the Brezhnev speech Francis Pym told US officials “NATO must not allow the Brezhnev initiative to halt Alliance weapons development.”¹⁵⁶ At the same time, Pym “reaffirmed that Britain will upgrade its own strategic deterrent.”¹⁵⁷ Indeed, as previously noted, at the end of September MISC 7 decided they wanted to push for a decision by December.

The raised doubts about prospects for SALT ratification and on-going efforts to achieve a NATO decision on ‘dual-track’ affected US thinking on Polaris replacement. In early October, Brzezinski, Brown, and Vance met for one of their regular luncheons. They decided to recommend to the President that the US should “Indicate to the British that we would respond affirmatively to a request for assistance in modernising their Polaris force - - including the C-4 Trident I missile system which the British clearly want.”¹⁵⁸ However, they also suggested the British be told to delay any formal request “until after an alliance decision on TNF and SALT ratification.”¹⁵⁹ The three feared that “Otherwise, some of our Allies would have an excuse for not participating in TNF and the Soviets might have further incentive to scuttle SALT.”¹⁶⁰ In this way, the US pre-empted any formal decision by the British. The three men were aware that the British “were now approaching a decision point.”¹⁶¹ Given

¹⁵⁶ Special Analysis, ‘West European Division, Office of Political Analysis: Further West European Reactions to Brezhnev’s speech’, 11 October 1979, NLC-7-47-6-4-3, JCL.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Brzezinski to Carter, ‘Daily Report’, 15 October 1979, NLC-1-12-7-10-9, JCL.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

the uncertainty over SALT and TNF and the administration's support for Polaris replacement, the US officials decided they could not afford the political ramifications of an imminent request, and so felt it necessary to pre-empt any British Cabinet discussion with a definite offer. The decision clearly displays the manner in which SALT, TNF modernisation, and Polaris replacement were interconnected. Trident was not a priority in this hierarchy. The exchange also suggests limited presidential involvement in the decision. This again brings into sharp focus the place that presidential favour has in the US-UK nuclear relationship.

The President agreed to the recommendation and sent a letter to Thatcher informing her of the administration's decision. The opening sentence stressed the priority the administration placed in TNF modernisation, "As we go forward in the North Atlantic Alliance towards a decision on Theater Nuclear Forces, I want to share with you my views on the decisions which you and I will make concerning cooperation in the future modernization of the British nuclear deterrent."¹⁶² Carter then went on to "assure" the Prime Minister that his response, "to the question of modernizing your strategic forces -- including the option of the C-4 Missile system -- will be affirmative and fully in keeping with our traditional relationship of close cooperation in the strategic nuclear field."¹⁶³ The 'special relationship' was apparently alive and well.

The President, however, then turned to the "delicate question of timing."¹⁶⁴ The President laid out the administration's concerns about the decision being confused with TNF modernisation and SALT ratification:

I believe it is extremely important to avoid providing any pretext which either the Soviets or some of our more reluctant friends could seize upon to damage the prospects of an Alliance consensus on long-range theater nuclear deployments by the end of the year. I believe that too early an exposure of our plans regarding the British deterrent would provide an excuse for some of our friends

¹⁶² Carter to Thatcher, 15 October 1979, Great Britain 6/77 - 12/80, Box 2, Plains file, JCL.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

not to assume their fair share of both LRTNF deployments and of the responsibility for the corresponding decisions.¹⁶⁵

The President then dampeden Thatcher's hopes of finalising an agreement during her visit to Washington in December by suggesting they discuss the issue, "including the timing of any British request and American response," during this meeting. Concerned by the political damage that a leak would cause, the President finally proposed that in order to limit the chance of "inadvertent disclosure" both sides "keep to a minimum discussions between our respective officials, civilian and military."¹⁶⁶

On 17 October, David Aaron, during his visit to London, delivered the President's letter directly into the hands of John Hunt, lest anyone intercept it.¹⁶⁷ Upon reading it, both John Hunt and Robert Wade-Gery expressed to David Aaron "considerable gratitude for the affirmative approach." They also told Aaron that they understood the administration's desire for delay in the decision-making process, and would work to accommodate this.¹⁶⁸ This expressed gratitude mostly reflected the private feelings of those British officials aware of the letter and its contents. For the most part the British were pleased with the decision made by the US and supported its rationale. Officials were relieved that the US would supply MIRV. John Hunt told Thatcher that it was "very good news that the President is willing to let us have whichever Polaris replacement we want, including a MIRV'd C4."¹⁶⁹ Similarly, Hunt told Thatcher that the President's fears about timing in relation to the alliance's 'dual-track' decision were "reasonable" and that the British "should clearly do what we can to meet them." Indeed, Hunt felt that the President's decision over timings changed little because the British government "would probably not be ready for an announcement about Polaris replacement until early January anyway."¹⁷⁰

That the administration's desire to delay was not problematic was reliant on the TNF decision and SALT ratification going ahead in December as

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Hunt to Thatcher, 'Nuclear Defence Matters', 19 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁶⁸ Aaron to Brzezinski, 'Letter to Thatcher', 19 October 1979, NLC-16-128-2-12-8, JCL.

¹⁶⁹ Hunt to Thatcher, 'Nuclear Defence Matters', 19 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

planned. Hunt told Thatcher, "If the TNF decision were to start slipping things could be much more awkward." He then went on to say:

Although the President's message does not say so, Dr. Aaron made clear that Mr. Carter is also concerned about timing in relation to Senate ratification of SALT II. This is now expected (fairly confidently, despite Cuba) in mid-December. Here too there will be no problem if the timetable sticks. But it has slipped already and could well slip further.¹⁷¹

A timely agreement on the replacement of Polaris was now dependent upon events beyond British control. The Carter administration was pleased that their pre-emptive move had secured British co-operation but were aware of the difficulties they may have created for British plans on modernisation. Aaron remarked to Brzezinski:

In sum, I believe the President's letter had a good effect and they will cooperate with us to avoid having this issue come to a peak with the Allies or the Soviets in the next few months, however, the British have substantial difficulties should the formal decision slip beyond February.¹⁷²

The British reacted calmly because they continued to believe that they could still gain Carter's formal agreement in his December meeting with Thatcher, ready for a public announcement in January. British officials were concerned with the letter's suggestion that Thatcher and Carter discuss "the timing of the British request" during their meeting on 17 December.¹⁷³ This implied that at a later date they should make the formal request. Such delay, as they had discussed in the September MISC 7 meeting, would be problematic for the British and as such they had decided to push forward the timetable. As John Hunt explained to David Aaron after his delivery of the President's letter, they had planned for Cabinet to decide on Polaris replacement in early November. This decision would be relayed to the US, "but without [the British] requesting a response."¹⁷⁴ Thatcher would then make a formal request during her December meeting with the President.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Aaron to Brzezinski, 'Letter to Thatcher', 19 October 1979, NLC-16-128-2-12-8, JCL.

¹⁷³ Hunt to Thatcher, 'Nuclear Defence Matters', 19 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁷⁴ Aaron to Brzezinski, 'Letter to Thatcher', 19 October 1979, NLC-16-128-2-12-8, JCL.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Upon hearing this, Aaron urged British officials to delay their decision due to the possibility of a leak expressing, “concern that a decision taken in early November would not keep until mid-December.” Aaron went on to state that whilst the US could “not prescribe the British decision process... [he] urged that they consider delaying their own decision as long as possible.”¹⁷⁶ He also reconfirmed that Carter wished too “discuss the timing of a formal request” and the administration’s response during his meeting with Thatcher in December. Aaron’s reply, whilst trying to delay the decision and confirming that Carter wished to discuss the timing of the issue, importantly did not rule out that issues of substance might be dealt with during the December meeting. By Thatcher and Carter’s meeting on 17 December, ‘dual-track’ would probably have been agreed, and SALT II may have been, or near to, ratified. Wade-Gery subsequently made a non-committal response that the British would consider adapting their timetable, stating that he “understood that they should not count on making a request at the Thatcher/Carter meeting but he said that the Prime Minister might need to take at least an initial decision amongst her *inner cabinet* prior to her visit to Washington.”¹⁷⁷

The Carter administration’s concern about any possible inadvertent disclosure also meant that Aaron urged British officials to make changes to Thatcher’s planned speech on European security in Luxembourg. Originally, it was planned that Thatcher would say the British would take the “necessary decisions” on Polaris replacement “by the end of the year.”¹⁷⁸ In response to the President’s letter, the British modified the text to read “within the next few months.”¹⁷⁹ David Aaron “urged them to water this sentence down further.”¹⁸⁰ During this discussion, Aaron attempted to utilise the pre-emptive offer by the President to influence Britain’s timetable for a decision and communications about Polaris replacement. Aaron’s efforts were representative of the administration’s desire, set out in the President’s letter to Thatcher, to limit the possibility of ‘inadvertent disclosure.’ Such a leak would be politically

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

damaging to the President and would undermine any benefits gained from the agreement. These concerns drove much of the administration's responses to the question of Polaris replacement in the coming months.

Even after the President's letter and Aaron's comments, the British still pushed for Carter's formal agreement to provide their choice of successor system by the end of the year. Thatcher's reply to Carter "warmly" welcomed the President's "affirmative approach to the modernisation of the British strategic deterrent."¹⁸¹ Thatcher expressed her gratitude that any of the systems the British were considering would be made available, including the C4 missile system with MIRV capability.¹⁸² Thatcher also thanked the President for his "frank explanation" of his concerns about the "delicate issue of timing involved in the interaction" between Polaris replacement and NATO's 'dual-track' decision. She told Carter that she understood the point, and would be "glad to co-operate... in seeking to avert the dangers you identify."¹⁸³ Aaron's pleas seemingly had some effect, with Thatcher telling Carter that no British request would be made to him before their meeting in December and that they would discuss the timing then. However, Hunt had drafted the letter to "deliberately" indicate that the Prime Minister would want to "deal with substance as well as timing" in her December meeting with the President. He believed that "Our clear impression from Dr. Aaron is that the White House will not in practice jib at that."¹⁸⁴ Subsequently Thatcher's letter went on to state:

To avoid any misunderstanding, and in the same spirit of frankness, I should make clear that at that meeting I shall need to discuss the substance of the strategic modernisation issue, as well as procedure and timing. I am confident that we shall then be able to settle both the substantive question and the problem of the timing of any announcement. The latter will clearly depend on how other matters, including LFTNF decision taking, have progressed in the interval.¹⁸⁵

On the other hand, the British were extremely obliging in response to

¹⁸¹ Thatcher to Carter, October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Hunt to Thatcher, 'Nuclear Defence Matters', 19 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁸⁵ Thatcher to Carter, October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

US concerns over secrecy. They had similar concerns, although not to the same degree. Thatcher would face some political trouble if it became apparent there would be no imminent decision, whilst Carter would face severe difficulties if it became apparent that there was to be a decision in the near future. Thus, Thatcher informed Carter that knowledge of the President's message would remain "confined to a very narrow circle indeed," telling only Carrington and Francis Pym. She assured the President that no one would see the documents outside No. 10 Downing Street and the Cabinet Office. Thatcher also suggested that they keep communications on the subject confined to the direct White House/Cabinet Office link.¹⁸⁶

The need for secrecy was a key area of discussion during the second round of preliminary talks, which took place on 18 October. It even influenced the scope of discussion. As there were people present at the talks who did not know about the President's October letter to the Prime Minister agreeing to supply whichever system the British chose, no mention was made of it.¹⁸⁷ Subsequently, much of the second round of preliminary discussion focused on the need to manage disclosure of the agreement to avoid problems in two areas: allied relations and US domestic politics.

A key concern for the US administration was how and when the French government should be informed. Aaron told the meeting's participants that, "the Americans would want to explain the position to the French before any announcement."¹⁸⁸ After reading a report on the meeting, Thatcher asked for an explanation of why Aaron had said this. Robert Armstrong's explanation provides a good insight into US thinking at the time and the administration's desire to avoid any political controversy over the Polaris deal with key allies:

The Americans seem understandably anxious that their decision to help us over the replacement of Polaris should not be divisive of the Western Allies including France. In the French case they have not of course forgotten the violent reaction of General de Gaulle's government to the news of the Macmillan-Kennedy 1962 Nassau

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Hunt to Thatcher, 'Nuclear Defence Matters', 19 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁸⁸ Wade-Gery to Hunt, 'Polaris Replacement: Dr Aaron's Visit', 18 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

Agreement under which we got Polaris. They accept that today's circumstances are very different, and that nothing similar need be anticipated this time. The Gaullists will try to make the most of the decision, to the disadvantage of the Americans as well of us. This will add to the French President's domestic problems. He is likely to take a more balanced and sympathetic view; but the French government might well be annoyed, both with the Americans and with ourselves, if they first heard about the decision from the newspapers, and we should do well to avoid that.¹⁸⁹

The administration was clearly concerned that division amongst allies over the decision could undermine the advantages they derived from assisting in Polaris replacement and subsequently appearing to reinforce the US nuclear umbrella.

On the domestic front, Congressional approval of a Polaris replacement deal would be required. The level of approval depended on which system the British opted for, and Aaron assured the British that even if some aspects required formal approval, he believed it would be "fairly automatic." However, Aaron also made it clear "that on such a sensitive subject, it would be essential to consult the Senate leadership and the key Senate committees."¹⁹⁰ In addition, part of the administration's fear of the effect of an announcement was because they expected vigorous debate in Parliament and in Congress as to why the British needed a ballistic force when theatre nuclear forces were being improved:

If Mrs. Thatcher and her ministers do endorse the Trident plan next week, its public debate is likely to be vigorous both in Parliament... and in the US Congress. The government is bound to be challenged as to why Britain still needs an 'independent' nuclear deterrent, why the Polaris system cannot be modernized and above all, why the deterrent force should not consist of much cheaper nuclear-armed cruise missiles of the kind we are in any case proposing to have based in this country -- owned and operated by the Americans -- as part of the collective plan to modernize NATO's so-called theater nuclear weapons.¹⁹¹

The US clearly did not want such vigorous debate to start early, before NATO had even agreed on LRTNF deployment, due to 'inadvertent disclosure'.

¹⁸⁹ Armstrong to Whitmore, 'Nuclear Defence Matters', 2 November 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁹⁰ Wade-Gery to Hunt, 'Polaris Replacement: Dr Aaron's Visit', 18 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁹¹ The Situation Room to Aaron, 1 November 1979, NLC-1-13-1-3-2, JCL.

Overall, US officials were once again co-operative. Wade-Gery reflected on the meeting: "The general atmosphere was good, despite occasional sticky patches... On balance, a useful and reassuring meeting."¹⁹² These 'sticky patches' occurred when the US turned to what they might receive in return; British conventional force contributions and US-UK co-operation in other areas.

On conventional force contributions, Aaron told the meeting that it would be extremely important "vis-à-vis Congress for the United States government to be able to say that we had reconfirmed our intention to fulfil the agreed NATO programme of annual Defence Budget increments."¹⁹³ Robert Wade-Gery later told John Hunt that Aaron "seemed if anything even more worried than in August about the danger that the cost of replacing Polaris would erode our conventional defence effort."¹⁹⁴ Aaron's concern about conventional forces was reflective of the administration's desire to ensure European contributions to their own defence. In addition, without such a commitment by the British, NATO support of Polaris replacement would be in doubt. As Carrington later told Thatcher:

The views of our other European Allies are ambivalent. In private, at least they approve of our decision to maintain an effective nuclear deterrent. But they would have second thoughts if this could be done only at the price of reducing our conventional contribution to NATO. This would be particularly serious if the Germans felt than an extra boat would in any way increase the risk of further thinning out in British Forces Germany [sic] or that these forces would be starved of adequate equipment.¹⁹⁵

NATO support of Polaris replacement was crucial to the Carter administration, without it their justification to Congress and the public that it contributed to European defence would be clearly undermined. As such, Aaron was "clearly pleased" with British assurances that the Polaris successor system would continue to be assigned to SACEUR on the same basis as the Polaris system.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Wade-Gery to Hunt, 'Polaris Replacement: Dr Aaron's Visit', 18 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁹³ Ibid; this refers to the UK's commitment to the NATO three percent target for annual real spending increases.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Carrington to Thatcher, 'The Strategic Deterrent', 29 November 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

¹⁹⁶ Wade-Gery to Hunt, 'Polaris Replacement: Dr Aaron's Visit', 18 October 1979, PREM 19/14,

The second ‘sticky’ area, US-UK co-operation in other areas, saw the administration seemingly utilising the discussions as an opportunity to vent about any disagreement in US-UK relations over recent years. Aaron, according to Wade-Gery:

Produced a curious ragbag of pleas for a more forthcoming British attitude as regards joint action in various defence fields (eg [sic] the air defence of the United States bases here); and as regards a number of political problems, eg [sic] security co-operation in the Caribbean and restraint over East-West technology transfers. He deplored the harm done to the West’s security interests by our providing credits for Cuba or making cuts in the BBC external services. And he urged us not to exclude the idea of acquiring some ground-launched cruise missiles of our own in the context of the Theatre Nuclear Force modernisation programme.¹⁹⁷

Aaron was “careful to make clear that in none of these cases” was the US trying to place conditions on their help with Polaris replacement.¹⁹⁸

Nonetheless, the outburst provoked greater concern amongst British officials that the US would place a political price tag on any agreement. Following the talks, Robert Wade-Gery commented to John Hunt, “The Americans no doubt feel that they should do what they can to exploit the strong position in bilateral relations which our nuclear military dependence gives them.”¹⁹⁹ In particular, Carrington in his considerations on whether Britain should have a four or five-boat nuclear force, expressed concern about British dependence giving the US ability to exert political advantage:

Either option will entail dependence on the Americans over the next thirty or so years - a period in which relations between Europe and the US are bound to change in ways which we cannot now foresee. Our dependence will give the Americans scope to exert political leverage on us. They may feel that the more significant the system they now give us, both in quality and in warhead numbers, the more we should do for them in return. There are signs that the Americans too are aware that the larger our nuclear force, the more problems it will present for them in the SALT process and the

TNA.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

heavier the price they will have to pay for its continued exclusion.²⁰⁰

Britain's dependence on the US meant that the Carter administration was already exerting considerable influence on their internal decision-making process. As discussed, secrecy about the deal was of crucial importance to the administration. On the US side, only Brzezinski, Brown, Vance, Aaron, Bartholomew and the US ambassador to Britain, knew about the President's October letter. The British were willing accomplices in this, as leaks would cause problems for them as well. However, they took their efforts to minimise disclosure even further because of US wishes.²⁰¹ British gratitude, in part, drove this. John Hunt told Margaret Thatcher that, "given the extremely forthcoming nature of the second paragraph to the President's letter, we should clearly fall in with his wish to confine knowledge of the present correspondence to a very tight circle indeed."²⁰² Subsequently, and worryingly for British democracy, two of the five ministers on the MISC7 were not privy to all developments on Polaris replacement. Following her promises to the President of keeping the information to a "tight circle," Thatcher could not reveal details of the President's October letter, or even its existence to the Home Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer; two of the five government ministers in attendance.²⁰³ Due to national security precautions meaning that wider and transparent debate was not deemed possible, this committee was meant to be the forum where an informed decision on a successor system was made. Instead, the US desire for absolute secrecy made it impossible to discuss the issue in an open fashion even amongst the 'elite circle'. In addition, the British also delayed the third MISC 7 discussion, wherein they planned to make a decision on which system to opt for, from November to early December. This formed part of officials' efforts to respond to US requests for delay, and, as Wade-Gery told David Aaron, "stage manage

²⁰⁰ Carrington to Thatcher, 'The Strategic Deterrent', 29 November 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

²⁰¹ Hunt to Thatcher, 'Nuclear Defence Matters', 19 October 1979, PREM 19/14, TNA.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'Future of the Strategic Deterrent (MISC 7)', 4 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

the internal British decision progress until that time so as not to create any problems for TNF and SALT.”²⁰⁴

The main purpose of David Aaron’s trip to Europe in October was further TNF negotiations with NATO governments. He returned more optimistic about the prospect of a NATO consensus on a ‘dual-track’ approach by December. Reporting on Aaron’s trip, Brzezinski told Carter: “We are much closer to a firm consensus on our proposed TNF program than anyone would have anticipated only a few weeks ago.”²⁰⁵ Britain, Italy and the FRG had “all taken firm internal government decisions to support the NATO program.”²⁰⁶ Although, whilst both the Italian and FRG government firmly supported the decision, they wished to avoid “firm public commitments to the NATO TNF program for as long as possible in order to avoid provoking public opposition.”²⁰⁷ Prospects of Belgium support were promising, with the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Defence Minister all supporting Belgium participation, and preparing for a vote on the issue in Parliament. However, doubts remained about Dutch support, and the administration worried that their absence “could unravel the support of other countries.”²⁰⁸ Overall, though, prospects looked promising for the resolution of one hurdle to Polaris replacement.

VI

No sooner had the controversy about the Soviet brigade in Cuba died down than the Carter administration faced another, even more damaging, foreign policy crisis. On 4 November 1979, Iranian militants stormed the US embassy in Tehran, taking sixty-six Americans hostage. The subsequent crisis dominated Carter’s foreign policy agenda until the end of his term, and seriously damaged his already eroding domestic position. The plight of the hostages dominated US new cycles. ABC initiated a new nightly programme,

²⁰⁴ Aaron to Brzezinski, ‘Letter to Thatcher’, 19 October 1979, NLC-16-128-2-12-8, JCL.

²⁰⁵ Brzezinski to Carter, ‘NSC Weekly Report’, 28 October 1979, NLC-33-18-12-11-1, JCL.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

Nightline, to review developments on a daily basis.²⁰⁹ These updates reported very little in the way of progress: the hostages were still captive 444 days later. The Carter administration appeared impotent. As Nancy Mitchell argues, Carter's inability to secure the hostages release made it "impossible to free himself from the aura of weakness that had come to define him."²¹⁰ By the winter of 1979, the administration's apparent mishandling of foreign affairs was undermining Carter's presidency and threatening his re-election hopes in the coming year. Even his flagship foreign policy looked set to fail. The Senate had not ratified the SALT II agreement, with most observers believing that it needed further amendments to pass.²¹¹ This would be a further blow for Carter: he had invested great political capital in the agreement. Carter desperately needed some kind of foreign policy success.

In mid-November 1979, Harold Brown and Charles Duncan, Jr., US Secretary of Energy, wrote to the President recommending the extension of the MDA for another five years.²¹² The matter required Carter's quick approval. British officials were anxious that the US government proceed promptly since key provisions of the existing agreement expired at the end of the year, and Congress still needed to approve the amendment.²¹³ In seeking the President's approval, Harold and Brown stressed the "substantial and material contributions" the arrangement made to "mutual defence and security."²¹⁴ As well as that, "The United Kingdom's nuclear forces are virtually all committed to NATO." These benefits came, "without adverse effect on our defence programs."²¹⁵ On 28 November, Carter approved Brown and Duncan's recommendation, expressing his belief that the proposed amendment "will permit cooperation which will further improve our mutual defence posture

²⁰⁹ Caldwell, "US Domestic Politics", 110.

²¹⁰ Mitchell, "The Cold War and Jimmy Carter", 70.

²¹¹ Westad, "The fall of Détente", 23

²¹² Brzezinski to Carter, 21 November 1979, ND 18 1/1/79 - 12/31/79, Box ND-48, Subject File, White House Central File, JCL.

²¹³ Marcum and Huberman to Brzezinski, 'US-UK Agreement for Cooperation', 16 November 1979, Great Britain 10 - 12/79, Box 16, Office File, National Security Affairs (NSA): Brzezinski Material, JCL.

²¹⁴ Duncan and Brown to Carter, 2 November 1979, Great Britain 10 - 12/79, Box 16, Office File, NSA Brzezinski Material, JCL.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

and be in support of NATO.”²¹⁶ Carter reaffirmed this in his subsequent letter to Congress, recommending the renewal of the agreement: “In light of our previous close cooperation and the fact that the United Kingdom has committed its nuclear forces to NATO, I have concluded that it is in our security interest to continue to assist them in maintaining a credible nuclear force.”²¹⁷ The discussion, surrounding the extension of the MDA, demonstrates the importance the US placed in Britain’s contribution to NATO. It was the central tenet of their justification for the relationship. US assistance to the UK promoted mutual defence, which was in the interests of the US during the Cold War. However, assistance also helped negate many of the economic and political problems that mutual defence created for the US. The relationship increased confidence in the US nuclear umbrella by providing ‘a second centre of decision-making.’ This in turn helped limit the financial contribution that the US had to make to European defence. Assistance also helped domestically by negating the image that it was just the US spending and contributing to the Cold War. It achieved all this relatively cheaply, and indeed perhaps even benefited the US economically: the US had already developed these systems. However, despite the benefits the US derived from the relationship and thus their support for it, as it was not a priority policy, and as it inevitably would be politicised, the British could not guarantee that US support meant the relationship’s continuation.

A few weeks after the administration’s demonstration of support for the US-UK nuclear relationship, they made it apparent to the British that Polaris replacement was not a priority and therefore, due to their political difficulties, they were delaying an announcement indefinitely. In a private conversation with Robert Wade-Gery, it became apparent to David Aaron that the British had not listened to the administration’s previous warnings about a delay. The planned timeline that Wade-Gery outlined was very similar to the one Aaron had objected too in October: The key ministers would meet the

²¹⁶ Carter to Duncan and Brown, ‘Proposed Amendment to the US-UK Agreement for Cooperation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defense Purposes’, 28 November 1979, Great Britain 10 - 12/79, Box 16, Office File, NSA Brzezinski Material, JCL.

²¹⁷ Carter to Congress, 28 November 1979, ND-18 1/1/79 - 12/31/79, Box ND-48, Subject File, White House Central File, JCL.

following week, and would probably choose Trident C4 as their preferred system, Cabinet would then be informed, and this would leave Thatcher “as her message in October foreshadowed” free to seek Carter’s agreement on 17 December.²¹⁸ With the administration now in an even more difficult political situation, Aaron now had to get the message through: their worries about the ramifications of a Trident deal meant there would be no announcement on a Polaris successor until after SALT II ratification, whenever that may be.

To convey this point, Aaron at first took a cautious approach. Aaron reminded Wade-Gery that, given the “major problems” in timing due to the ‘dual-track’ decision and “above all” SALT II ratification, it might be necessary to postpone the release date of the Trident agreement. Aaron hence hoped that Thatcher would not come to Washington “with a formal request in her pocket... it would be dangerous if the Prime Minister arrived on the crest of a wave of public expectation that the decision was about to be made.”²¹⁹ From his reply, it is clear that Wade-Gery did not appreciate this attempt to persuade the British to delay their decision-making. He detailed the pressures the Prime Minister was under to reach a formal agreement stating:

The government had been elected on a platform which included the replacement of Polaris. That was eight months ago. Mrs Thatcher was now about to pay her first visit to Washington as Prime Minister. It would be ludicrous to suggest either to her Cabinet colleagues or to the President that we still could not make up our minds what we wanted.²²⁰

Concurrently, Wade-Gery tried to convince Aaron that they should make an announcement in the next couple of months. Commenting on the press guidance for the December meeting Wade-Gery told Aaron that such “fend-off language... would only serve for a limited period.” He believed that Thatcher would come under increasingly strong pressure to announce a Polaris replacement deal once Parliament reassembled after the Christmas break, and he speculated that, “there would no doubt be similar problems at

²¹⁸ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, ‘Polaris Replacement: Dr Aaron’s call’, 30 November 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

the United States end.”²²¹ Aaron’s cautious approach clearly had not worked.

Aaron subsequently resorted to a frank discussion about the administration’s political problems relating to Polaris replacement. Aaron agreed that there would be strong pressures from Congress when it reassembled early in January; given the speculation in the press and Thatcher’s election promises, members of Congress knew that a US-UK deal was in the offing. There was a distinct possibility that the Senate anti-SALT lobby would make trouble if they got wind of any temporising or apparent weakness by the administration in helping allies.²²² However, Aaron explained that the administration saw that “the dangers on the other side would be even greater.” Wade-Gery recounted in his briefing:

It became clear that the real American worry centres on SALT II. It was the ‘mainspring’ of Mr Carter’s Presidency; without it the Presidency would ‘be destroyed.’ It was clear that the Senate would attach to ratification some riders which the Russians would much dislike. If the Americans had at that stage just announced a Polaris-replacement deal with us, the Russians might well attach a counter-rider insisting that the British deal be abandoned. The President could not survive if SALT II was lost because (as it seemed) he had made the wrong deal with us at the wrong moment.²²³

Adding to British worries, Aaron then, “refused to be drawn on just how long a period delay he saw as likely or possible. But he was quite clear that ‘timing is going to be our one big problem.’”²²⁴ With events of the last few weeks making the President’s domestic position even more problematic, the administration was clearly even more determined to delay the Trident deal.

The conversation then turned to US worries about the reaction of allies. At this point, the extent of the administration’s paranoia about the political ramifications of a Trident deal became even more apparent. Wade-Gery informed David Aaron that the British had the previous week indicated to President Giscard “in general terms” that they intended to replace Polaris through continued collaboration with the US. In response, Giscard “appeared

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Cooper to Whitmore, 10 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

²²³ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, ‘Polaris Replacement: Dr Aaron’s call’, 30 November 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

²²⁴ Ibid.

to welcome" the replacement, and understood the continued collaboration with the US. However, the mild response of President Giscard did not lessen Aaron's worries about the reaction of their European allies. Aaron noted that the EEC could be "entering a period of crisis... until the budget problem was settled." Accordingly:

The Americans would need to walk all the more warily. They would not want to be accused of trying to widen a split within the Community by a move which could be represented as a dramatic resuscitation of the Special Relationship between Washington and London.²²⁵

At the end of the meeting, Aaron felt it necessary to reaffirm the indefinite delay of any Trident deal. Aaron "repeated the President's problem about timing with great emphasis. SALT II was vital to this. Everything else had to take second place."²²⁶ As such, Aaron left Wade-Gery in no doubt that their priority of SALT meant the administration desired an indefinite delay on the Trident deal. The conversation was a severe blow to British officials' hopes of being able to make a formal request in December ready for a public announcement in January.

David Aaron's strong words provoked concern amongst British officials, who even after Carter's October letter had held on to the hope that they would be able to make substantial progress during Thatcher's meeting with Carter, ready for an announcement shortly thereafter. The administration's definite wish to postpone an announcement "to an unsettled date possibly some months in the future" created serious problems for the British.²²⁷ Thatcher faced "strong pressure for an announceable decision by end [sic] January."²²⁸ Informing Thatcher of the news that the US were clearly even more determined to wait until after the ratification of SALT II for a formal agreement on a Polaris replacement, Robert Armstrong expressed his dissatisfaction and concern:

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ 'Prime Minister's Visit to Washington 17 December 1979: Future of the United Kingdom Nuclear Deterrent', 12 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

²²⁸ Ibid.

From our point of view this is disappointing and unsatisfactory. We want a definite decision and agreement as soon as possible, so that the Polaris replacement programme can gather momentum; and we want to get the President firmly and formally committed sooner rather than later; the longer we leave it, the closer we get to the United States election, and the greater is likely to become his reluctance to commit himself.²²⁹

Armstrong also worried that the delay offered "the Russians time to try to wreck the agreement" and exposed the Prime Minister to domestic pressures. Armstrong hence urged Thatcher to seek MISC 7 agreement "that you should do all you can to change his mind... [and] agree that you should urge the President to accept the earliest possible announcement - preferably soon after the House of Commons resumes after the Christmas recess."²³⁰ Thatcher however, as Armstrong told her, faced an impossible task:

However good the argument, we cannot expect that it will persuade the President to the sort of timing we want. He clearly regards the ratification of SALT II as crucial to his re-election; and he certainly will not do anything that he believes or is advised will put that at risk. So I fear that we shall have to settle for as firm a private commitment as you can get.²³¹

Even so, the political difficulties the delay would cause the Thatcher government meant she had no choice but to "apply pressure... Given the state of opinion here, you can hardly leave Washington without making clear what we want; or without pressing for a very early answer."²³²

Also deeply concerned by the news from Washington, a week before Thatcher's trip, Francis Pym gave her "a piece of paper."²³³ In this, he detailed the problems that delaying an agreement until after ratification could create:

Ratification could well take until late February (optimistically) April (more likely)... Meanwhile, subject increasingly high interest and high profile in UK... Inescapable risk of leakage as more people come to know, question or guess about decision either taken or apparently not taken. This will increase after Prime Minister's visit to Washington. Risk of confused position - wide open to critical exploitation (next target for Russian propaganda, SALT opponents,

²²⁹ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'Future of the Strategic Deterrent (MISC 7)', 4 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'Replacement of Polaris', 4 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Cooper to Whitmore, 10 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

anti-nuclear lobby etc [sic])... Perhaps all right until early in New Year but increasingly difficult, after Parliament resumes in January.²³⁴

Aaron's frank comments had clearly unleashed an anxiety in the British that the relatively mild talk about delay in October had not. They saw that Carter's desire for delay, and his declining public support, created great uncertainty in their hopes for Polaris replacement.

In December 1979, MISC 7 agreed that the best system to replace Polaris was Trident C4 MIRV, if they could purchase the missiles from the US.²³⁵ Thatcher of course knew that they could. In response to US concerns about leaks, Robert Armstrong advised Thatcher not to tell the Cabinet what MISC 7 had decided on until after her visit to Washington, or even just before they were ready to make an announcement.²³⁶ Thatcher accepted his advice. Subsequently, in a meeting on 13 December, the Prime Minister informed her Cabinet:

She would have a preliminary discussion with President Carter on the replacement of the British strategic nuclear deterrent force, for which on economic grounds alone American assistance would be necessary. The President was unlikely to want to take firm decisions on the matter at this stage, and it might be several months before agreement was reached.²³⁷

US concerns were not only causing the British anxiety, they were seriously influencing Britain's internal democratic processes.

On 15 December, NATO approved a 'dual-track' approach; deploying Pershing II and cruise missiles while simultaneously seeking to negotiate reductions in Theatre Nuclear Forces with the Soviet Union. In his "piece of paper" to Thatcher, Francis Pym had expressed his belief that it made sense to wait until after this decision was made to make an announcement on Polaris replacement, and that this presented, "no great problem... barring unforeseen snags, in Brussels this week."²³⁸ However, this viewpoint neglected US worries

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 245. The full record of the December MISC 7 (79) 4th Meeting remains classified.

²³⁶ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'Future of the Strategic Deterrent (MISC 7)', 4 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

²³⁷ 'Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet', 13 December 1979, CAB 128/66, TNA.

²³⁸ Cooper to Whitmore, 10 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

about the Soviet and European reaction to 'dual-track'. The decision sparked the beginning of the Euromissile crisis. The planned missile deployment was a contentious issue across Europe. There was widespread public resistance to the stationing of new missiles on Western European soil as the deployment demonstrated US willingness to contemplate limited nuclear wars, and sparked fears that this aggressive step would escalate tensions. The Soviet response to the announcement was not helpful for placating European public opinion. The Soviets publicly stated that new NATO deployments would upset the present equilibrium, and that their own deployments of the SS-20 and Backfire were aimed at redressing a previous unbalance caused by the presence in Europe of US forward-based missiles. Moreover, the Soviets had:

Strongly indicated... that they do not view the European Theater Nuclear balance in terms of US and Soviet systems alone. Their references to NATO systems include as a minimum, French IRBM's and SLBM's as well as British SLBM's and strategic aircraft.²³⁹

Hence, with the 'dual-track' announcement, US concerns about a Polaris replacement announcement preventing the development of a NATO consensus evaporated. However, given public reaction, fears that NATO governments might face political trouble that would undermine their commitment to LRTNF deployment heightened. Moreover, given the Soviet reaction, the administration's concerns that they might act in a way that would undermine SALT ratification was also increased.

Despite the small chance of success, the situation dictated that Thatcher had to try to persuade the President in their meeting to proceed with announcing a Polaris successor deal. Subsequently, British officials planned Thatcher's strategy. She would try to obtain during the meeting "his clear-cut consent to your specific request, which can be publicly announced thereafter within a matter of weeks rather than months."²⁴⁰ If the President was not obliging on this, and if Thatcher judged it appropriate, she would push that the "matter should not be allowed to slip beyond February or (if necessary) March

²³⁹ Brement and Larrabee to Brzezinski and Aaron, 'Soviet Response to Affirmative TNF Decision at December Ministerial', 6 December 1979, NLC-23-48-5-2-7, JCL.

²⁴⁰ 'Prime Minister's Visit to Washington 17 December 1979; Future of the United Kingdom Nuclear Deterrent', 12 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

at the latest?" If this also proved impossible Thatcher would "reserve the right to return to the charge in early 1980, in the light of how slowly SALT ratification moves and how quickly domestic pressure for a decision builds up in Britain."²⁴¹ In the meeting itself the strategy had little effect on Carter's attitude towards finalising an agreement.

Thatcher and Carter met to discuss Polaris replacement on 17 December; coincidentally, the Nassau meeting had taken place from 18 - 21 December 1962. Unfortunately, for those who like neat coincidences the Thatcher and Carter meeting would not be a repeat of the Nassau conference. In 1995, Alan Dobson argued, "In December 1979 she [Thatcher] had a most successful trip to Washington, and she soon clinched a deal on the sale of Trident."²⁴² However, access to the archival material reveals that Thatcher's trip was not very successful. In the face of UK pressure and arguments, the US held firm; any request would have to wait until after the ratification of SALT II. The President started by affirming his commitment to give a positive response to any request for a successor to Polaris the Prime Minister put to him. However, he:

Hoped... that no such request would be put to him until SALT II had been ratified by the Congress. He feared lest, if a request was made and answered before then, that would give rise to new Soviet demands or conditions for the conclusion of SALT II... He understood that the delay could create timing problems for the British Government; the United States Government could, he thought, alleviate those. In the meantime he hoped that no proposals would be put to the British Cabinet. He would wish to be in a position to say, if asked, that no request had been received from the British Government.²⁴³

The Prime Minister replied by expressing gratitude to the President for his "positive commitment", and that she understood his wish to delay a formal request. She then enquired about "whether in the meantime contingency planning would proceed on the drafting of the exchange of letters that would be required."²⁴⁴ Brzezinski replied:

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, 147.

²⁴³ 'Note of a Meeting in the Oval Office, The White House, Washington DC, on Monday 17th December, 1979,' 19 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

This would be negotiable, provided that discussion was confined to the same restricted group of people as had been involved hitherto. It would not, however, be possible for technical discussions to proceed without extending the circle of those involved, which the President did not wish to do.²⁴⁵

In response to a question from Lord Carrington, Carter said that, if Congress failed to ratify SALT II, "There would then be no obstacle to his agreeing to a request from the United Kingdom Government to a successor to Polaris."²⁴⁶ The meeting confirmed to the British that SALT had halted their efforts to secure a Polaris replacement. It was clear that until Carter had his prized treaty ratified, or reason to give up on the process entirely, there would be no Trident agreement.

As well as halting negotiations at the political level, the President's decision to delay also stalled the technical relationship. As discussed in Thatcher and Carter's meeting, technical discussions could not continue without extending the circle of people in the know, which the President's concerns over secrecy precluded. A British memo subsequently commented, "Currently planning is stalled... though 'technical' relations with the US are extremely good... There is an urgent need for detailed technical discussion. We are faced with planning blight."²⁴⁷ Scholars often highlight the continuing technical relationship that underpins US-UK nuclear co-operation. This relationship is central in its continuation and maintenance. However, as the debacle over the timing of the Trident decision demonstrates, one should not conflate technical exchanges with political decision-making. As events of 1979 demonstrate, the technical relationship cannot go ahead without political decision-making; whilst these technical relationships underpin and maintain co-operation, they do not carry it forward on their own.

Despite Carter's supposed promises at Guadeloupe, throughout 1979 the British continued to face uncertainty about the future of their Polaris replacement programme. Even after their long-running concerns over the

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ 'Successor to Polaris: Timescale', December 1979, PREM19/159, TNA.

non-circumvention clause had been resolved, they faced worries over whether the political circumstances would allow for a deal, and then whether the US would supply a MIRV system. When the President finally promised to supply Trident C4, it came with the caveat that any final agreement would be postponed to an indeterminate date in the future. Whilst the administration supported Polaris replacement, they had matters that were more pressing. The administration saw that assisting the British was only “modestly advantageous.”²⁴⁸ US-UK nuclear co-operation brought benefits to NATO, helped the administration domestically and was financially advantageous. However, to derive these benefits an agreement had to occur at the right time. An ill-timed deal would be problematic for the administration, and had the potential to undermine Carter’s priority: SALT.

For the Carter administration, 1979 was not the time for any Trident agreement, and they subsequently delayed the announcement until after ratification of SALT II. This caused deep frustration and concern amongst the British as the ratification of SALT became an increasingly unlikely prospect. Moreover, the next US election was less than a year away. In December 1979, British officials thus feared that, despite their efforts securing the Carter administration’s informal agreement, there would be no formal deal with the incumbents. In this case, they would have to agree a deal with the next administration, and of course, this was no foregone conclusion. For the Trident agreement to be finalised the British needed the Carter administration to change its priorities immediately.

²⁴⁸ Harold Brown quoted in Quinlan, “Introduction”, x.

Chapter 4

A Transactional Relationship: The Trident C4 agreement, December 1979 – July 1980

“It is essential that we establish priorities among our demands on the British, since we have been asking much of them in recent months.”

- US briefing paper.¹

I

On 24 December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The Politburo authorised the invasion in order to shore up the shaky communist government, then confronting a resolute Islamist uprising, and because it feared the threat of revolutionary fervour spilling over the borders from Iran. As Nancy Mitchell persuasively observes, faced with the loss of a neighbouring ally, the Kremlin sent troops to Afghanistan “with a sense of deep foreboding... The Soviets were propelled by weakness, not adventurism.”² The US however did not view it as a weak move, but rather a determined execution of a coherent strategy to gain access to the Persian Gulf and encircle Western oil supplies. It was the death knell to the illusion of détente. Facing an election in which he was not even guaranteed the nomination of his own party, the increasingly withering assaults of the rising conservative movement, and haunted by his failure to resolve the Iranian hostage crisis, Carter needed to show strength in the face of Soviet aggression. Carter subsequently made every effort to punish the Soviets, including a grain embargo, recalling the US ambassador, boycotting the Moscow Olympics, appealing to the United Nations and NATO for support, expanding defence spending, and

¹ ‘Mini-SCC Meeting on the Allies and Afghanistan’, 31 January 1980, NLC-15-1-5-28-9, JCL.

² Mitchell, “The Cold War and Jimmy Carter”, 85.

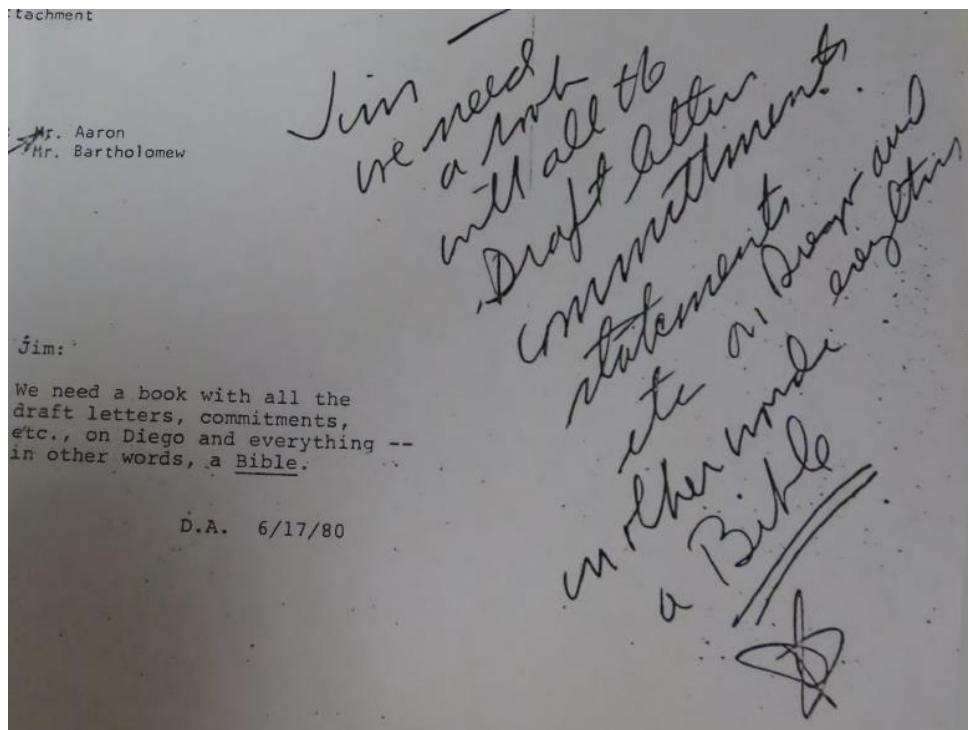
withdrawing SALT II from Senate consideration.³

The invasion of Afghanistan also raised British hopes of securing a Trident agreement. With the ratification of SALT II now delayed indefinitely, Downing Street officials began to probe their White House counterparts on whether the British government could now make a request for Trident C4. However, as this chapter will discuss, despite the indefinite delay of SALT ratification, the Carter administration was still hesitant to begin formal negotiations to supply Trident C4 to the UK. In the aftermath of the invasion, Carter's political problems increased, heightening White House concern about potential criticism from the sale of Trident C4. With Carter's potential second presidential term on the line, the Trident C4 agreement was not a priority. Indeed, the Carter administration's eventual decision to move ahead with the Trident deal was motivated, in part, due to concern about the political damage of the potential British reaction if there was further delay. In this way, the Carter administration was consistently stubborn about supplying Trident to the UK, and only consented to do so when the situation indisputably suited Washington.

The Carter administration's obstinate negotiating tactics continued throughout the Trident C4 negotiations. The Carter administration's overall foreign policy interests and aims influenced the terms they sought in return for Trident. Carter officials were unabashed in their efforts to derive the greatest possible benefit from the Trident C4 agreement. In particular, the Carter administration utilised the deal in order to gain some of the assistance they desired from Britain in their escalation of the Cold War against the Soviets. In this way, it is clear that the Carter administration viewed the Trident sale as part of the wider US-UK defence partnership.

³ Renouard and Vigil, "The Quest for Leadership", 328.

II



Handwritten note by David Aaron.⁴

Carter's need to respond to his growing domestic critics largely dictated his response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As a result, the invasion was the catalyst for a hardening of Carter's foreign policy. To win re-election Carter needed to show himself as strong and capable, and as such, he toughened his approach to the Soviets in the aftermath of the invasion. Moreover, he largely abandoned what was left of his human rights and nuclear non-proliferation policies. This in-turn created, in some ways, a more conducive environment for the administration to supply Britain with Trident C4. With the downturn in US-Soviet relations, the Carter administration was less concerned about the impact of the Trident deal on future arms-control negotiations.⁵ The invasion of

⁴ Aaron to Thomson, 17 June 1980, US/UK Strategic Cooperation (5/80-6/80), Box 22, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

⁵ Schneiter to Cutler group, 'Response to question by senator', 12 February 1980, NLC-43-90-1-86, JCL.

Afghanistan made the US rationale for any Trident deal clearer. The invasion heightened the Carter administration's need for robust allies that would contribute to the 'fight' against communism. Central to US efforts to counter the perceived Soviet threat would be the political and military support of NATO. British acquisition of Trident, alongside improvements in conventional forces, would be a key contribution to this. In this way, the invasion of Afghanistan resulted in the resolution of some of the issues preventing the finalisation of the Trident deal and clarified the Carter administration's reasoning for the sale. However, at the same time, Carter's political environment became even more hostile, and this in turn, complicated the Trident negotiations.

Domestically, Carter's efforts to increase his political standing failed. This is not surprising given Carter's other problems: unemployment and inflation was rising, and the Iranian hostage crisis continued. An opinion poll in March 1980 put Edward Kennedy three points ahead in the race to secure the democratic nomination for the up-coming election. Even if the President won the nomination, the Republican front-runner, Ronald Reagan, was ahead of Carter in the opinion polls.⁶

Internationally, the Carter administration's response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was widely criticised. The administration faced international resistance to their calls for a Soviet grain embargo and boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games. Argentina, who annually produced a large grain surplus, refused to stop selling to the USSR. After the administration's criticism of the country's human rights, the White House's attempts to persuade the Argentinian government met with derision: one Argentina official remarked, "Just how does the Carter administration expect to get support from us, [when] it practically ostracized us during its first three years of office?"⁷ In addition, key allies, such as the UK and France sent athletes to compete in the Moscow Olympics. Indeed, the administration only convinced the US team not to attend after it threatened legal

⁶ See Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 206.

⁷ Ibid., 213.

action.⁸

In particular, the Carter administration's response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan increased transatlantic tensions. Whilst all West European governments saw the invasion of Afghanistan as a serious Cold War crisis to which the West needed to respond, there were crucial differences with the Carter administration on *how* to do so. Since the 1950s, European leaders had seen the reduction in East-West tensions as crucial, caught as they were in the middle of the military divide. As John Young notes, the "Europeans did not relish a return to the Cold War."⁹ West European leaders viewed détente as central to creating a more stable East-West relationship, and as a means to undermine the Soviet bloc from within, by fostering awareness of the benefits of market economics, democracy and openness.¹⁰ The differences between the US and their European allies over Afghanistan also increased existing tensions over Carter's response to the Iranian hostage crisis.¹¹ Whilst the US' European allies condemned Iran's hostage taking, they were reluctant to adopt the sanctions the US proposed. The FRG and Italy refused. Even the UK was reluctant to support the sanctions.¹²

Likewise, the United States' allies responded to Carter's request for support on Afghanistan according to their own interests and views. Thatcher supported the White House's hardening of policy towards the Soviet Union. As such, she was, in Carter's words, "always helpful."¹³ In contrast, France, which wished to maintain détente, was the least forthcoming. Meanwhile, the FRG's response "fell somewhere between the policies of France and Britain."¹⁴ The FRG's mixed response to Carter's demands does not convey Helmut Schmidt's level of animosity towards the administration's response to Afghanistan. Both Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing judged Carter's response an overreaction, and concluded

⁸ See Nicholas Sarantakes, *Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁹ John Young, "Western Europe and the end of the Cold War, 1979-1989," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 291.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Renouard and Vigil, "The Quest for Leadership", 326-328.

¹² Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 205.

¹³ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith* (London: Collins, 1982), 486.

¹⁴ Renouard and Vigil, "The Quest for Leadership", 330.

that it was primarily an attempt to shore up his political standing at home. Indeed, evidence suggests that France and the FRG provided high technology shipments to the USSR after the US refused.¹⁵ The differences over Afghanistan deepened the existing rift in relations between Carter and Helmut Schmidt, who had disagreed repeatedly since the President's election in 1977.¹⁶ This rift concerned the Carter administration. The US needed to maintain good relations with the FRG due to its importance as an ally, and Schmidt's central role in preserving NATO consensus on the 'dual-track' decision. Moreover, given Carter's already difficult domestic political position, the international response to his policy on Afghanistan was problematic. Any further hints of disputes in transatlantic relations could destroy his greatly eroded public standing on foreign policy. This would be detrimental to Carter's hopes for re-election.

With SALT II withdrawn from Senate ratification, Downing Street officials began to question their White House counterparts on whether the British government could now make a request for Trident C4. In his December meeting with Thatcher, Carter had assured the British that if Congress failed to ratify SALT II, "There would then be no obstacle to his agreeing to a request from the United Kingdom Government to a successor to Polaris."¹⁷ However, despite the potentially indefinite delay to SALT ratification, the Carter administration continued to hesitate on finalising the Trident C4 agreement. On 15 January 1980, Robert Armstrong, John Hunt's replacement as Cabinet Secretary, met with Zbigniew Brzezinski. The British official wanted to secure US agreement to move ahead with finalising the Trident deal. As such, he reminded Brzezinski of the problems further delay could cause the British. With the decision to defer Congressional consideration of SALT II, it could now be a year or more before Congress made a ratification decision. Armstrong told Brzezinski the British "could not possibly

¹⁵ Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 211.

¹⁶ See Spohr, "NATO's Nuclear Politics and the Schmidt-Carter Rift", 139-157.

¹⁷ 'Note of a Meeting in the Oval Office, The White House, Washington DC, on Monday 17th December, 1979', 19 December 1979, PREM 19/159, TNA.

wait that long for a decision.”¹⁸ Such a wait would cause delays for the Polaris replacement programme “which could have unacceptable consequences in the early 1990s” when the present British submarines came to the “end of their useful life.”¹⁹ Moreover, there was “considerable interest” in the subject in Britain, as such an “extended delay could raise questions both about the British Government’s intentions and... the United States Government’s commitment.”²⁰

Brzezinski’s reply to Armstrong was amicable but hesitant. He explained that since the Soviet invasion, he had yet to discuss the Trident C4 deal with the President. Nevertheless, Brzezinski “was at pains to repeat” Carter’s continued commitment to the supply of Trident, and that it would be “unthinkable” for the British to wait a year or more until SALT ratification. However, Brzezinski emphasised that both sides now faced the “tactical” question “of finding [the] right moment (or ‘window’) for the announcement.”²¹ Brzezinski saw two main factors that they needed to take into consideration. Firstly, the next key event for ‘dual-track’ was the delayed Belgium decision on involvement, due to take place in June. Brzezinski was concerned that the Trident decision “should be announced at a time when it would be least likely to have adverse effects on the Belgian decision.”²² In addition, the Soviets were still observing SALT II. Consequently, Brzezinski was “Anxious to make the announcement at a time when it would be least likely to change that situation, or to cause the Russians to try to impose new conditions for their own confirmation of SALT II.”²³ In response, Armstrong agreed to inform Brzezinski of British considerations on these “tactical consideration at an early date”; thereafter either himself or Wade-Gery would visit Washington to discuss matters further. As Armstrong made clear though, the British would “want... to pursue this without prolonged delay.”²⁴

With no clear answer from Brzezinski, on 8 February, whilst in Paris,

¹⁸ Armstrong to Whitmore, ‘Polaris Successor’, 21 January 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Robert Wade-Gery questioned David Aaron about Britain's request for Trident. During this talk, it became clear that the administration's hesitation over any announcement went further than 'technical' considerations; they were also still deeply concerned about the political ramifications. Indeed, the widespread criticism of Carter's response to the invasion of Afghanistan had seemingly heightened these concerns. Aaron explained that he had discussed the issue with the President, Cyrus Vance, Harold Brown and Brzezinski. The President's commitment to the British "remained total." All of the members of the meeting had accepted that "as things had worked out there could no longer be any link" between the timing of the British request and SALT II ratification. However, the President and his team still "did not think the present moment was the right one" for a British request, due to the "Afghanistan crisis in its present stage."²⁵ Aaron went on to explain:

The Administration were [sic] already being accused, domestically and internationally, of over-reacting to the crisis. If they now announced a decision to help us over Polaris replacement, that would be seen as a further and extreme example of over-reaction. It might also be divisive of the Alliance, which was quite badly enough divided as it was.²⁶

In response, Wade-Gery refuted the administration's concerns. The British government believed "The present juncture seemed almost ideal for an announcement of what many would see as a welcome sign of resolution."²⁷ They believed that the invasion would make it harder for critics both domestically and within the alliance, or the Soviet Union to attack the decision convincingly. The British had also heard "nothing to suggest that the Alliance would be divided on the issue."²⁸ Wade-Gery then, in the same manner as Armstrong, highlighted the problems the delay was causing the British government. Due to these problems, Wade-Gery explained, the British "felt strongly" that both the US and UK governments "should now be actively seeking to identify the 'window' to which

²⁵ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, 'Polaris Replacement', 11 February 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Dr Brzezinski had referred.”²⁹ In the face of Wade-Gery’s earnest arguments, Aaron only replied whether a fixed date for a British request was “more important than an early one.”³⁰ Wade-Gery replied that the British answer “Could only be yes. An early date was very important... But a fixed date would be an enormous help.” Aaron subsequently promised, “To do his best to get the President to agree to a fixed date... as soon as possible.”³¹

On 14 February, Brzezinski, Brown and Vance discussed the timing of a Trident request during one of their regular working luncheons. Before this meeting, Jim Thomson and Robert Blackwell, assistant secretary for maritime affairs, wrote to the three men advising that the administration should “move swiftly to consummate the US/UK Trident deal... [and] should shoot to finish it in a month.”³² They thought the US should ‘move swiftly’ because whilst the Trident deal was “bound to hurt in Belgium,” if the decision was announced now “the political ramifications would damp-down considerably by June.”³³ Moreover, Thomson and Blackwell believed that continued delay could cause the British to engage in judicious indiscretion. They explained that whilst the British were willing “to put up with the prospect of a few months delay” when the administration believed SALT II ratification would be finalised by March, with SALT II now “delayed indefinitely,” the British were becoming increasingly “concerned that election year politics will soon obviate any possibility of a decision this year.”³⁴ Subsequently, Blackwell and Thomson warned, “We cannot count on continued silence: leaks - including ones damaging to us can be expected if the US continue to put the UK off.”³⁵

Brzezinski, Brown and Vance ignored Blackwell and Thomson’s advice. Instead, they decided to “wait for response from Gromyko; then consult with

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Thomson and Blackwell to Brzezinski, 13 February 1980, Meetings--Vance/Brown/Brzezinski: 1/80-2/80, Box 34, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Schmidt and Giscard: Aaron to be in touch with Komer.”³⁶ The minutes of the Brzezinski, Brown and Vance meeting remain classified, so it is unclear why the three men decided to ignore Blackwell and Thomson’s advice, or indeed, what this rather cryptic decision meant. However, because of the decision Aaron did not contact the British about whether the President would provide a fixed date, as he had promised. This failure to respond occurred despite Armstrong and Wade-Gery making clear the problems of “continued delay,” and that the British government found their present situation “seriously worrying.”³⁷ Instead, when British officials had not heard from David Aaron by 28 February, they sent him a “reminder.”³⁸ In his reply, Aaron gave no indication that the President had decided on a fixed date for a Trident deal, but did propose that Wade-Gery visit Washington in mid-March.³⁹ Whilst this was “a slower timetable” than the British wanted, they had no real choice but to agree to Aaron’s proposal.⁴⁰

As Wade-Gery’s planned trip to Washington approached, the Carter administration had yet to decide on when the Trident deal should be finalised. On 17 March 1980, the SCC met to discuss the issue. During this meeting, most of the participants agreed with Vance that the administration should give the British a fixed date for the exchange of letters. They also decided that June would be the best date, in order to avoid the Trident deal “complicating the Belgian TNF decision.”⁴¹ However, Brzezinski disagreed, believing it “would be preferable to delay until 1981.”⁴² He thought that the Soviet reaction to the British decision “could create political complications” for Carter in the run-up to the election. Consequently, Brzezinski suggested that the president should ask Thatcher whether “In view of these problems she would be willing to wait until 1981,” and if she was not, then the administration “would be prepared to go ahead in June.”⁴³

³⁶ Brzezinski to Aaron and Les Denend, ‘V-B-B Decisions’, 14 February 1980, Meetings--Vance/Brown/Brzezinski: 1/80-2/80, Box 34, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

³⁷ Armstrong to Thatcher, ‘Polaris Successor’, 3 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Brzezinski to Carter, ‘Daily Report’, 18 March 1980, NLC-SAFE 17 D-26 32-11-7, JCL.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

In response, Vance and Brown argued that “The British could not count on a 1981 commitment and... even asking the British to wait would create serious concerns in Britain about our commitment, leading to leaks that would be harmful politically and could endanger SALT.”⁴⁴ The President subsequently agreed with Vance and Brown. Finally, the Carter administration had decided to move ahead with the Trident deal. Ironically, the argument that swayed the White House was the harm the British reaction could do politically to the administration if there was further delay. It is also important to note, that it was the ‘hawkish’ Brzezinski who wished to further delay the deal; a position that raises questions over the importance the Carter administration vested in the Trident C4 agreement as a means to ‘deter’ the Soviet Union and ‘fight’ the Cold War.

Following the White House’s decision, late on 23 March, David Aaron confirmed that he would be willing to talk to Wade-Gery about Polaris replacement on 25 March. On the first day of discussions, Aaron outlined the President’s decision that the Trident deal should be finalised in June. As Aaron explained, the White House had decided upon June due to three political considerations. These factors once again displayed the administration’s overt concern about the possible reaction to a Trident deal. Firstly, the administration believed that June was “a reasonable time after the invasion of Afghanistan, so as to minimise charges of Presidential over-reaction.”⁴⁵ Secondly, a June date would come after both the United States and Soviet governments completed, earlier in the month, a round of dismantling under the SALT I agreement. As such, a June date would give the Soviets no “excuse for dodging this obligation.”⁴⁶ Thirdly, finalisation in June would come after the deferred Belgian decision on TNF modernisation. The Belgium decision had been due to take place in May, it now looked likely to take place in late June. Subsequently Wade-Gery enquired, “Whether it would really be vital to wait for

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, ‘Polaris Replacement’, 27 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the Belgians even if they only decided in late June.”⁴⁷ Aaron replied that the President would “Insist.”⁴⁸ Once again, the ‘dual-track’ decision superseded the Trident deal in the Carter administration’s priorities, as well as a number of new political considerations following the invasion of Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, the British had finally secured a US commitment on an approximate date for the finalisation of the Trident agreement. However, Aaron made it clear to Wade-Gery that the President’s agreement to provide such a fixed date came reluctantly. As Aaron explained, the “President had committed himself to the Prime Minister and would honour his commitment. But [he] foresaw ‘plenty on the downside politically’ in doing so.”⁴⁹ At the same time, Aaron “Made it pretty clear that the Americans’ main motive for co-operating over our Polaris replacement was their fear that that we [Britain] would have otherwise have insisted on doing it on our own” thereby leading to a reduction in Britain’s conventional forces.⁵⁰ It was as such clear that White House agreement to finalise the Trident deal, and even to supply the system in the first place, had not come very willingly. Aaron’s words, suggest that like Brzezinski, the President did not see the supply of Trident to the British as a priority in the Cold War. As such, Wade-Gery later reflected to MISC 7 about the reasons for the Carter administration’s hesitation: “Their essential fear is probably that a new Nassau Agreement will be criticised (domestically and internationally) both as damaging to arms-control and as encouraging Britain to stay in a nuclear league which is too big for her.”⁵¹

Even though the White House had now decided to finalise the Trident agreement, Aaron informed Wade-Gery that the President’s concern about any negative reaction implied that the agreement should remain confidential “for as long as possible.”⁵² He foresaw that:

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Wade-Gery and Hastie-Smith to MISC 7, ‘Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent: The Present Position, Note by the Secretaries’, 29 May 1980, CAB 130/1129, TNA.

⁵² Wade-Gery to Armstrong, ‘Polaris Replacement’, 27 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

When the news broke, it would create a major international rumpus. The Russians would certainly make a big issue out of it. But the really worrying factor would be the reaction of America's allies, and particularly Chancellor Schmidt, who would accuse the President of doing further wilful damage to detente [sic].⁵³

In this way, Aaron made it clear that the widespread criticism of Carter's response to the invasion of Afghanistan had sharpened the administration's concerns about the political ramifications of the Trident C4 deal. Indeed, as previously discussed, whilst before the invasion the White House had been mainly worried about the French reaction, this concern now focused on Helmut Schmidt. Moreover, Carter's desire to delay the announcement is a clear display of his jitteriness and vacillation at this time. The White House had decided upon June in the belief that it provided the 'window of opportunity' for the announcement. Nevertheless, Carter still wished to delay the announcement. However, as Wade-Gery highlighted in his reply, such a delay between the agreement and the announcement would be problematic. Any interval between exchange and publication would put Carter and Thatcher in an "impossible situation.... If they wanted to avoid leaks they would have to tell direct lies in answer to questions about where the matter stood."⁵⁴ At breakfast the next day, Aaron told Wade-Gery that in his conversation with the President earlier that morning, Carter had "accepted the need for publication to take place 'within a few days' of the Exchange."⁵⁵ This meant that over a year after Callaghan's conversation with Carter in Guadeloupe, the British had secured confirmation that the US was prepared to supply Trident C4, and, crucially, that they would complete the deal before the end of their term in office. However, given the extent of the Carter White House's concern over the possible political ramifications of the deal, it would be reasonable to question Carter's sincerity if he had not already promised to supply the missile system.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

During their two days of discussion, Wade-Gery and Aaron also deliberated on the terms of the Trident exchange. As a result, British officials' concern about the price of Trident superseded their worries about when the deal would be finalised. As Wade-Gery reported to Downing Street the Trident agreement looked likely to be "more expensive, financially and politically, than we [the British] had hoped."⁵⁶

Aaron informed Wade-Gery that the Carter administration was not prepared to accept the Polaris Sales agreement as the terms of sale for Trident. The administration planned to charge the British a Research and Development (R&D) levy on a pro-rata basis, rather than the 5 percent charge in the PSA. The Carter administration believed that a five percent levy was "inequitable... and likely to raise the issue of a sweetheart deal on the Hill."⁵⁷ Moreover, the increased R&D charge was in line with US law. Since 1976, US law required that the government charge a pro-rata share of R&D costs. However, the President had the discretion to waive some of this amount, if he believed it was in the US interest to do so. Over the course of the discussions, Aaron made clear that to secure such a reduction the British would have to re-draft the exchange of letters between Carter and Thatcher, which would formalise the deal, to include a promise that the British would spend the money saved, thanks to US co-operation, on strengthening their conventional forces. More controversially, the British would also have to agree to a "number of suggestions for defence co-operation" that Ambassador Robert Komer, US Under-Secretary of Defence for policy, had been seeking MOD agreement too. Aaron made clear that the administration would give the British a reduction in the R&D levy "To the extent that we [The British] do what Ambassador Komer wants."⁵⁸ If the British could "meet enough," of Komer's requests the R&D bill would be \$100 million, if they could "meet none of them," it would be \$400 million, and if the British could "go some of the way", it would be between the two figures. Aaron also stressed that British assistance with the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Agenda Paper, 'Meeting of the PD-46 Steering Committee, Strategic Nuclear Cooperation with Britain and France', Circa 29 May 1980, Meetings - Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski 5/80 - 6/80, Box 23, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

⁵⁸ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, 'Polaris Replacement', 27 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

'Komer projects' would "score Brownie points twice over."⁵⁹ As well as securing a reduction on the R&D levy, it would also "make the Americans less exigent as regards... [Britain's] conventional forces."⁶⁰

Komer wanted three main things; first, the British provision of personnel for Rapier defences on US bases in the UK; second, United States GLCMs in the United Kingdom to be based in one location or the British to bear the extra costs of spreading the missiles; and a third request that is currently redacted within the British archives, but which I believe was agreement to the US plans for Diego Garcia.⁶¹

My research in the British archives and, particularly, the Jimmy Carter library reveals, in greater detail than previously known, the link between the Trident C4 agreement and the Thatcher government granting the US greater access to the island of Diego Garcia.⁶² For example, David Aaron scribbled a note to Jim Thomson, towards the end of the Trident negotiations, which stated: "Jim: We need a book with all the draft letters, commitments, etc., on Diego and everything – in other words, a Bible."⁶³

Since the early 1970s, the UK-controlled Diego Garcia had become an island of great strategic importance to the US due to its military base there. Between 1968 and 1973, the United States and Britain exiled all 1500 – 2000 residents from the island in order to create a US military base.⁶⁴ In 1973, the US began to maintain a larger military presence in the northwest Indian Ocean due to the importance of oil tanker lanes from the Persian Gulf and the increasing

⁵⁹ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'Polaris Replacement', 3 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

⁶⁰ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, 'Polaris Replacement', 27 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

⁶¹ Ibid; Armstrong to Thatcher, 'Polaris Replacement', 3 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA; My Freedom of Information request to release material in PREM 19/159 and CAB 130/1129, pertaining to Diego Garcia, was rejected in June 2015.

⁶² The link between Diego and Trident is mentioned briefly in Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 140-142. This was the first time archival evidence has substantiated claims of a link. However, through utilising the available material in the UK and US archives I am able to provide much greater detail on the link.

⁶³ Aaron to Thomson, 17 June 1980, US/UK Strategic Cooperation (5/80-6/80), Box 22, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

⁶⁴ David Vine, *Island of Shame: the Secret History of the US Base on Diego Garcia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

naval and air presence of the Soviet Union.⁶⁵ The US military base on Diego Garcia was vital to support these deployments.

Upon assuming office, the Carter administration began a review of US policy in the Persian Gulf. The administration viewed countering the “projection of Soviet power and influence into the region” as a “first priority strategic task.”⁶⁶ The administration also believed that the region’s power and leverage over the US was increasing due to “the effects of the Arab-Israel war of 1973, the oil embargo, increased oil prices... [the] greater importance of oil production by the Gulf states” and “the increased political and economic influence of the Gulf states on the regional and international issues.”⁶⁷ In addition, the Carter White House feared that “revolutionary Arab nationalism” would undermine the relative stability that had existed in the Gulf since British withdrawal.⁶⁸

In response, the Carter White House planned to increase the presence of their forces in the Middle East. To do this, the administration wanted their European allies to “take up the slack on the NATO front” so that the US could allocate greater resources “to the security of the Persian Gulf in the event of a simultaneous crisis there.”⁶⁹ Diego Garcia was the only US military facility capable of supporting these extra US deployments.⁷⁰ The development of Diego would also improve US access along the Atlantic route to Southwest Asia; this would ensure that the US could also support operations in this region, which was another area of concern for the Carter administration.⁷¹ Subsequently, by December 1979 several discussions had taken place between the US and UK governments over the

⁶⁵ Oakley and Plowden to Scowcroft, ‘SRG Meeting on the Persian Gulf’, 3 January 1977, NLC-25-72-6-1-8, JCL.

⁶⁶ Brzezinski to Carter, ‘The Skeleton of a Strategy for the Middle East’, 30 January 1980, NLC-25-99-18-7-0, JCL.

⁶⁷ Oakley and Plowden to Scowcroft, ‘SRG Meeting on the Persian Gulf’, 3 January 1977, NLC-25-72-6-1-8, JCL.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Presidential Directive, ‘Persian Gulf Security Framework’, n.d., Meetings - - Muskie/Brown Brzezinski: 10/80 – 1/81, Box 24, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

⁷⁰ Oakley and Plowden to Scowcroft, ‘SRG Meeting on the Persian Gulf’, 3 January 1977, NLC-25-72-6-1-8, JCL.

⁷¹ Briefing Paper, ‘Backup Paper for the SCC meeting on Southwest Asia’, 27 December 1979, NLC-31-214-13-1-5, JCL.

issue of the US being granted greater access to Diego. However, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan accelerated the United States programme of enhancing its military capability in the Indian Ocean and Gulf area, including improvements to Diego Garcia.⁷²

In January 1980, US officials informed their British counterparts that they wanted "maximum flexibility over the long haul in the use of the facilities" on Diego Garcia.⁷³ There were two parts to the administration's planned developments. Firstly, the construction in 1980-81 of additional facilities which would support the 2000 US military personnel and current levels of operation on the island. Secondly, a more extensive development of facilities between 1982 and 1985, which would support about 3000 US military personnel and mean that the US used nearly all the island's 7000 acres, rather than the 3000 they currently occupied.⁷⁴

It was in the interests of the Thatcher government for the US to expand its facilities on Diego Garcia. The US proposals were essential for the rapid deployment of US forces to the area "in defence of general Western interests particularly, oil supplies from the Gulf."⁷⁵ With the Thatcher government's concern about perceived Soviet expansionism, it was logical that they would wish to assist the US in their efforts to temper the 'threat'.

Nevertheless, the proposed developments could cause political difficulties for the Thatcher government. The 1982-1985 developments would "alter the character of Diego Garcia."⁷⁶ The British would no longer be able to maintain their current line that the island was a US naval support facility.⁷⁷ The extensive

⁷² 'Diego Garcia and US Defence Policy in the United States', 13 June 1980, FCO 31/2754, TNA; 'Diego Garcia and US Defence Policy in the Indian Ocean', 4 July 1980, FCO 31/2754, TNA.

⁷³ Stewart and Welch to Brzezinski, 'VBB Item - Diego Garcia', 22 January 1980, Meetings--Vance/Brown/Brzezinski: 1/80 - 2/80, Box 34, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL; Brzezinski to Carter, 'NSC Weekly Report', 25 January 1980, NLC-128-10-3-4-1, JCL.

⁷⁴ Stewart and Welch to Brzezinski, 'VBB Item - Diego Garcia', 22 January 1980, Meetings--Vance/Brown/Brzezinski: 1/80 - 2/80, Box 34, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL; 'Diego Garcia and US Defence Policy in the United States', 13 June 1980, FCO 31/2754, TNA.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

development of the island would make apparent the importance of Diego Garcia as a US strategic base for its operations in the Gulf and Indian Ocean. In light of the United States and Britain's clearing of Diego Garcia's native population, as well as what some would see as Britain giving up its 'ownership,' the further development of the island would likely bring criticism in Parliament from right and left. Furthermore, Britain's agreement to the US request for greater access would likely bring "intense criticism from some of the Indian Ocean Littoral States notably India and Sri Lanka."⁷⁸

Subsequently, on 26 January, the British government accepted "the general course of action" for expansion on the island during 1981-84, but informed their US counterparts that further discussion would be required "to get firmer agreement on the FY [Fiscal Year] 81-84 upgrade and more information on the larger plan and freer US use."⁷⁹ Subsequently the blueprint for implementation of the President's State of the Union message stated:

We have begun discussions with the British on expansion of our facilities... The British are generally inclined to be helpful but we will have to work further with them in the next two or three months so we can revise the FY 81-84 Diego Garcia plan now before Congress.⁸⁰

Next to the last sentence, Carter wrote, "expedite."⁸¹ The Carter administration utilised the Trident agreement as a means to secure British agreement to their plans for Diego Garcia. As will be further discussed, by the end of May, there remained "two major substantive issues" in the Trident negotiations: "the financial terms of the sale (the R&D costs) and Diego Garcia."⁸² As such, it appears beyond reasonable doubt that Komer's third request was British agreement to the US plans for Diego Garcia.

In justifying the administration's demands, Aaron stressed that Komer's

⁷⁸ Watkins, 'Diego Garcia', 13 June 1980, FCO 31/2754, TNA.

⁷⁹ Hunter to Aaron, 'SCC Meeting Iran/Afghanistan', 5 February 1980, NLC-33-14-17-1-1, JCL.

⁸⁰ Vance to Carter, 'Blueprint for the Implementation of Your State of the Union Message', 29 January 1980, NLC-15-123-9-2-8, JCL.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² 'Agenda Paper: Meeting of the PD-46 Steering Committee, Strategic Nuclear Cooperation with Britain and France', 29 May 1980, Meetings - Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski 5/80 - 6/80, Box 23, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

three requests would be important for Congressional approval of the Trident deal.⁸³ However, my research in the US archives suggests that this was not the whole truth. Komer's three requests correspond with a list of key priorities for British policy that the administration drew up in the wake of Afghanistan. The Thatcher government "strongly approve[ed]" of the Carter administration's position on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, in January 1980 US officials reflected they were asking a lot of their key ally in response:

It is essential that we establish priorities among our demands on the British, since we have been asking much of them in recent months. In the defense field, we have asked for GLCM basing in the UK, future basing for B-52s and U-2s, enhanced transit and staging arrangements in the UK for U.S. forces, and an expansion of our facilities on Diego Garcia and less restricted access to them. While we have been responsive to the British in strategic nuclear cooperation we clearly have disappointed them on transatlantic defense trade (e.g. advanced Harrier development and Rapier SAMs [Surface-to-Air Missiles]).⁸⁴

The key priorities that US officials determined were remarkably similar to the ones that they now sought to obtain through the Trident negotiations:

Our top priorities with the British should include: -- Enhancing military cooperation against the USSR, outside the NATO area. The British can assist us... by allowing us to enhance our facilities on Diego Garcia and giving us freer access to those facilities.... We will not get far by asking the British to increase their defense spending or commit more forces to NATO, since they are more than meeting the spending target and are cutting public expenditure. However, the British can help by continuing to modernize their forces and by providing more or enhanced facilities for U.S. forces committed to NATO, such as GLCM and aircraft.⁸⁵

Therefore, it is clear that the Carter administration viewed US-UK nuclear co-operation as part of a wider transactional defence relationship. In this way, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan both eased and complicated Britain's efforts to secure a Trident deal.

⁸³ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, 'Polaris Replacement', 27 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

⁸⁴ Briefing paper, 'Mini-SCC Meeting on the Allies and Afghanistan', 31 January 1980, NLC-15-1-5-28-9, JCL.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Finally, Aaron and Wade-Gery's discussion turned to the administration's paranoia about informing their NATO allies of the Trident agreement and their accompanying concern to prevent any leaks. In light of the current difficulties in the US-FRG relationship, the White House was particularly concerned about the reaction of Helmut Schmidt. They thought that whilst, "there would be no question of the Chancellor (or anyone else) being offered a veto... he [Schmidt] would need 'lots of stroking.'"⁸⁶ The British were sceptical that Schmidt would react in such a way. An unnamed official in a scribbled note to Margaret Thatcher observed: "I wonder whether they are not over doing Chancellor Schmidt's likely reaction: he has always been in favour of the Polaris deterrent."⁸⁷ Despite Schmidt's supposed support of Polaris, given the current difficulties in the US-FRG relationship the White House was clearly jittery about his potential reaction. As such, the president believed that before the exchange the US and UK should send a personal emissary to Schmidt to inform him of the Trident decision. The administration was "much less worried" about the reaction of President Giscard, but agreed with the British position that it would "be essential to treat him no less well than the Chancellor."⁸⁸ Concurrently, Aaron stressed that the White House still insisted that all communications on the subject should be between the White House and 10 Downing Street and the Cabinet Office, with no additions to be made to this privileged circle.⁸⁹

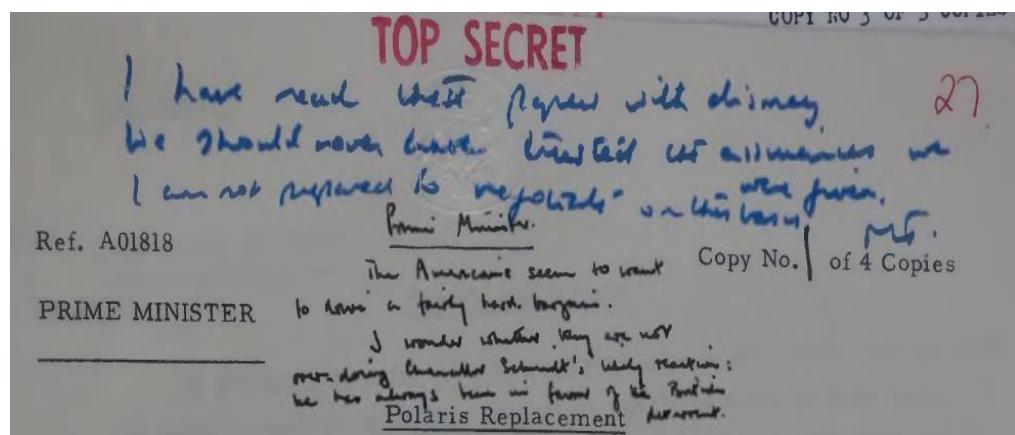
⁸⁶ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, 'Polaris Replacement', 27 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

⁸⁷ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'Polaris Replacement', 28 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

⁸⁸ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, 'Polaris Replacement', 27 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

⁸⁹ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'Polaris Replacement', 28 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

III



Handwritten note by Margaret Thatcher ⁹⁰

British officials were deeply unhappy with the stance that the Carter administration had taken on the price of Trident. Thatcher was clearly disgruntled when she read the brief of Wade-Gery's meeting with Aaron, writing over the top "I have read these papers with dismay. We should never have trusted the assurances we were given. I am not prepared to negotiate on this basis."⁹¹ In notably repellent language, Wade-Gery remarked in his report, "We have long suspected that Ambassador Komer was the nigger in this particular American woodpile."⁹² The approach of the Carter administration towards Britain's R&D payment was not congenial nor particularly in keeping with the supposed 'special relationship.' Aaron had made clear that the Carter administration was prepared to act in a blatant manner in order to extract certain commitments. As Armstrong outlined to Thatcher, in his report on the Aaron-Wade-Gery talks, the US sought a transactional deal: "The United States Government is... looking to us for favours; but they are favours from which we shall benefit in terms of a reduction of the Trident price tag."⁹³ Indeed, Armstrong described the requests of the Carter

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Wade-Gery to Armstrong, 'Polaris Replacement', 27 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

⁹³ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'Polaris Replacement', 28 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

administration to Thatcher as “Komer’s shopping list.”⁹⁴

Some of Komer’s requests would bring difficulties for the British government. The British provision of personnel for Rapier defences on US bases in the UK was the easiest for the British to agree on. In Armstrong’s view the issue was already “basically settled.”⁹⁵ The Carter administration had agreed to buy the Rapier system from Britain in order to defend US air bases in the UK. The purchase was also in response to British concerns that transatlantic defence trade had become a one-way street.⁹⁶ The British had already agreed to provide personnel for the Rapier defences, and to meet the costs of this, “on the understanding that they [the US] will offset that cost somewhere else (e.g. In the Trident programme).”⁹⁷ As such, all that the Thatcher government needed to agree with the Carter administration was the extent of the reduction the administration would give on the costs of Trident in return.

Armstrong thought that agreement on Komer’s second item, the number of bases for GLCMs in the United Kingdom, would be more problematic. The British government had agreed to base 160 US GLCMs in the UK as part of the ‘dual-track’ decision. The Carter administration wished to base all the missiles in one location, as it would cost more to have them deployed over several bases. However, Francis Pym believed it was likely to be “politically impossible to put all the missiles in one base.”⁹⁸ The Carter administration was now prepared to utilise the Trident negotiations as a means to secure the Thatcher government’s agreement that the UK would bear the extra costs if they insisted on spreading the missiles over more than one site. This position of the US suggests that they did not particularly care about the political problems the Thatcher government could face due to growing public concern over the basing of cruise missiles in Britain.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Briefing paper, ‘Mini-SCC Meeting on the Allies and Afghanistan’, 31 January 1980, NLC-15-1-5-28-9, JCL.

⁹⁷ Armstrong to Thatcher, ‘Polaris Replacement’, 3 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ For more information on this public concern see Kristan Stoddart, “Creating the ‘Seamless Robe of Deterrence’,” in *The Euromissile Crisis*; Maria Elenora Guasconi, “Public Opinion and the Euromissile Crisis,” in *The Euromissile Crisis*.

Unfortunately, Armstrong's reaction to the third item on the US 'shopping list' is currently classified. However, if the demand was greater access to Diego Garcia, as the author believes, the Thatcher government's agreement would lead to criticism from Parliament and states surrounding the island. Moreover, if news of a Trident-Diego deal became public knowledge, it would be extremely controversial given the obvious distastefulness of such an exchange, and with the Chagos islanders challenging the UK's sovereignty of the island.

The Carter administration planned to justify the Trident sale to Congress by arguing that its supply meant the British government would not divert spending from conventional forces. However, such a justification also held the potential to create difficulties for the Thatcher government. Thatcher, Pym and Carrington believed that to support their argument, the Carter administration would need "tangible evidence of UK expenditure on conventional weapons systems."¹⁰⁰ However, such tangible evidence could prove difficult to supply. Britain's defence budget was overstretched. The situation was, in the words of Carrington, one of "unrelieved gloom."¹⁰¹ The budget pressures meant it was likely the British would have to cut their forces in the Eastern Atlantic and/or the FRG. This, as David Gilmore, head of the defence department at the Foreign Office, told John Weston, also in the defence department, was "about the worst possible background against which to make decisions on a Polaris successor."¹⁰² The budget problems would "make it harder than ever... to argue convincingly that, in spite of Trident C4, we [Britain] shall be able to continue to sustain our capabilities across the full spectrum."¹⁰³ As such, British officials were even more keen "to get the Polaris successor tied up very soon," before any news of the British problems reached Washington.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, as problematic as some of Komer's demands were, the British government's primary complaint was that the administration was

¹⁰⁰ 'Meeting of Ministers, 14 April 1980', 15 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹⁰¹ Gilmore to Weston, 5 March 1980, FCO 46/2287, TNA.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ 'Polaris follow on', 5 March 1980, FCO 46/2287, TNA.

prepared to make them in the first place. On 14 April, Thatcher, Pym and Carrington met to discuss the outcome of the Aaron-Wade-Gery discussions. Thatcher told Pym and Carrington that she was “unhappy” about Carter’s demands. She thought, “It was as much in the interests of the American Government as of HMG [Her Majesty’s Government] that we should have the Trident.”¹⁰⁵ Moreover, Thatcher felt betrayed: “President Carter had given her no hint during their talks in Washington before Christmas that he wished to attach conditions of the kind now envisaged to the sale.”¹⁰⁶ Thatcher, Pym and Carrington understood the administration’s need to impose some conditions on the sale of Trident. They thought Congress might “make difficulties” if the Carter administration had not extracted a *quid pro quo* from the British, “particularly in the context of present problems on other fronts.”¹⁰⁷ However, more cynically, ministers also thought, “Ambassador Komer had a personal interest in securing concessions from HMG in the areas proposed for discussion by the Americans.”¹⁰⁸ Consequently, Thatcher told Frank Cooper, Permanent Under Secretary at the MOD, that in his discussions with Komer he “should drive a very hard bargain.” Her ideal outcome of the negotiations, “however it was dressed up,” was that British government only paid the “net cost” of Trident C4.¹⁰⁹ The British now needed to wait until mid-April when Komer would visit London for negotiations to see how successful such a strategy would be, as well as what Komer would constitute ‘enough’ to secure reductions in the R&D levy.

On 16 April, Frank Cooper and Robert Wade-Gery met with Robert Komer. Immediately, Komer endeavoured to drive a very hard bargain, and was even more forthright than Aaron a few weeks earlier. Initially, Komer stated that the Carter administration believed their co-operation on the Polaris successor would save the British “perhaps \$4 billion ie [sic] the cost of developing... MIRV

¹⁰⁵ ‘Meeting of Ministers, 14 April 1980’, 15 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

capability.”¹¹⁰ The administration wanted three commitments from the British in return; the first was a “satisfactory sentence” in Thatcher’s formal letter to Carter requesting Trident C4, that the saving would be spent on “strengthening” Britain’s conventional forces; the second demand is currently redacted from the archive document, but I believe Komer requested greater access to Diego Garcia; and the third demand was “hard offset” in return for a reduction in the R&D levy.

Komer’s demand for “hard offset” dominated much of the subsequent discussion. If the US applied the pro-rata principle strictly to the purchase of Trident C4, the British would have to pay an R&D levy of about \$400 million. In comparison, if the British were charged five percent, as they were for Polaris, the cost would be about \$100 million. For Komer there could be no compromise: “the United States Government could reduce this \$400 million charge only to the extent that they were compensated elsewhere in hard cash.”¹¹¹ Komer thought that British provision of personnel for the US Rapier defences in Britain would generate “about \$200 million of such compensation.” Komer believed there were “no other candidates for ‘hard offset’” and that the problems over the number of GLCM bases could be resolved through other means.¹¹² As such, under Komer’s plan the British would have to pay a R&D levy of \$200 million in cash. In reply, Cooper and Wade-Gery queried Komer’s assertion that only ‘hard offset’ could secure a reduction. The British understood that the President could approve a reduction in the R&D charge if he saw this to be in the wider interests of the US. Komer was extremely dismissive of such a suggestion. He stressed that whilst the US government did have the power to waive the R&D charges, “they only did so, for projects which were strategically imperative for the Alliance. A British replacement for Polaris did not come into this category. Indeed they were those in Washington who regarded it as positively undesirable.”¹¹³ Once again, a representative of the Carter administration adopted an attitude that was not

¹¹⁰ Wade-Gery, ‘Polaris Replacement: Komer Negotiations’, 17 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

particularly in keeping with a supposed ‘special relationship,’ nor indeed one that displayed much belief in the utility of a British ‘deterrent’ in the Cold War.¹¹⁴

In light of Komer’s uncompromising position, the British were resolute in their reply to the US demands. Indeed, their arguments focused on the damage the US approach could do to NATO, which, as discussed, was an area of particular concern to the White House at that moment. Cooper and Wade-Gery stressed that Thatcher had been “appalled” by the terms that Aaron had laid out for the supply of Trident a month earlier. Indeed, Thatcher felt betrayed, she had been approaching Polaris replacement:

[A]nd other issues on the basis that maximum co-operation was the order of the day where the major security requirements of the Alliance were involved. Hence her robust political support on so many key issues; her willingness in the TNF context to accept an extra 16 GLCMs at almost no notice.¹¹⁵

The Prime Minister had believed “that the President’s approach was the same... But none of this was compatible with the sort of haggling now being suggested by Mr Aaron and Mr Komer.”¹¹⁶ In this way, Cooper and Wade-Gery made clear the damage the Carter administration’s position could have on the US-UK alliance and future British support for US and NATO policy.

Cooper and Wade-Gery also argued that the administration’s demands could adversely damage NATO and thus US interests. The British government saw the demands as inequitable. If the British “had to think in ‘offset’ terms,” Cooper and Wade-Gery believed Komer’s classified demand “was by itself more than enough to counter-balance the \$400 million R&D charge for Trident missiles, which should accordingly be waived in full.” In addition, Cooper and Wade-Gery highlighted that the British purchase of Trident would give about \$2 billion worth of work to US industry, “at a time when the procurement balance was already far too heavily weighted in the Americans’ favour.” They also stressed that the

¹¹⁴ For earlier examples of this, see David Aaron’s discussion with Wade-Gery over the supply of Trident C4 in March 1980, Wade-Gery to Armstrong, ‘Polaris Replacement’, 27 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹¹⁵ Wade-Gery, ‘Polaris Replacement: Komer Negotiations’, 17 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

supposed \$4 billion they would save “was not extra money. It was money from within future defence budgets which could have been spent either... on MIRV development, with considerable emasculation of our [Britain’s] Conventional forces... or... on maintaining and strengthening those conventional forces.”¹¹⁷ Due to the Carter administration’s agreement to supply Trident, the money would now be spent on conventional forces, “and the whole Alliance would gain.” However, as Cooper and Wade-Gery stressed, if the Carter administration “now started loading the bill for Trident,” Britain and therefore NATO’s “conventional strength... would suffer.”¹¹⁸

The robust British arguments “clearly took Mr Komer considerably aback.”¹¹⁹ In light of the British rebuff of the US demands Komer promised to report the British arguments to the White House and see that Downing Street received a “considered reply.” However, Komer believed the British attitude “would call the whole deal into question.”¹²⁰ The decision to charge Britain \$400 million for R&D in hard offset “had been the President’s personally.” As such, the British “would be most unwise to press for it to be waived totally... if we were difficult over R&D, we might find less co-operation over special nuclear materials.”¹²¹ Komer also suggested, in his “final comeback,” that the British attitude “might... cause the June date for the crucial exchange of letters to slip to the other side of the election.”¹²² Again, the British were resolute in their response, stating that such a delay would “likely... be most unsatisfactory, for both parties.” Moreover, they highlighted that it “would be equally unsatisfactory all around if there were to be slippage” on Komer’s classified demand “to which he had publicly attached very great importance.”¹²³ The meeting as such ended with no real progress on the terms of the Trident agreement, but evidently increased bad feeling between the Carter administration and the Thatcher government.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

Throughout the discussions, Komer “was at pains to suggest” that the White House and Department of State were “less sympathetic” to the British cause than himself. Cooper and Wade-Gery did not believe this. As such, Cooper and Wade-Gery thought it best to circumvent Komer in their follow-up and instead send a personal message to David Aaron. This message would contain two possible compromises that the British hoped would resolve, “What is after all a relatively minor disagreement about R and D... we are arguing about £150-200 million in total, out of a 10 year programme costing around £5 billion.”¹²⁴ In the first, the British would pay \$100 million for R&D, rather than their present offer of nothing, and the US would still owe the British the costs for Rapier manning, which the British government would arrange compensation for in another context. The second offer would be that the British would pay nothing for R&D, but in return would agree to waive their \$187 million claim for Rapier manning, “this is a fairly bogus 20 year figure anyway, which probably deserves substantial discounting.”¹²⁵ Thatcher subsequently agreed to this approach.¹²⁶ However, Britain’s efforts to extract such terms would fail.

Discussions on the terms of exchange continued throughout May. On 5 May, after their meeting at the White House, Brzezinski “drew... Carrington aside” to discuss the Trident agreement.¹²⁷ Brzezinski told Carrington that he hoped they could settle the Trident issue by the end of June. However, Brzezinski stressed that “the deal would... have to be a package, including something on research and development costs.”¹²⁸ Wade-Gery and Cooper’s robust arguments had had seemingly little effect on White House thinking. In reply, Carrington “refrained from comment, except to express the hope that early progress could be made.”¹²⁹

Through a series of exchanges, by the end of May the two sides had reached

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Alexander, ‘Polaris Replacement: Komer Negotiations’, 21 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹²⁷ Waldent to Whitmore, ‘Polaris’, 7 May 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

a “basic agreement on the structure of the exchange.”¹³⁰ This included that “the framework of the Polaris Sales Agreement” would form the basis of the technical and financial details of the Trident agreement.¹³¹ The two sides also reached agreement on the wording of Britain’s commitment to conventional forces in Thatcher’s formal letter of request for Trident C4. Originally, the Carter administration had wished for Thatcher’s letter to include a commitment “to use the savings created by the co-operation of the United States Government... to expand its efforts to upgrade the United Kingdom’s conventional forces.”¹³² British officials told their US counterparts that this wording was not acceptable to them because it suggested that Britain could increase its conventional defence spending. In response, US officials told the British that they “would strongly prefer to keep the language they originally proposed.”¹³³ Their reasons were political, and an attempt to placate perceived US opposition to the agreement. US officials explained that they did not intend for Britain to make “a binding commitment about the size and allocation of defence funds far into the future.” Instead, the sentence was:

A political statement of importance to them and to their public, which would demonstrate forcefully to the Congress, and to any potential critics, one of the reasons why it is in the interests of the United States to co-operate in the modernisation of the British nuclear force.¹³⁴

The White House though would be “reluctantly prepared to agree” to a British commitment “to *take advantage* of the savings created by the co-operation of the United States... in order to expand its efforts to upgrade its conventional forces [emphasis added].”¹³⁵ However, because of the continued use of ‘expand,’ British

¹³⁰ ‘Agenda Paper: Meeting of the PD-46 Steering Committee, Strategic Nuclear Cooperation with Britain and France’, 29 May 1980, Meetings - Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski 5/80 - 6/80, Box 23, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

¹³¹ Wade-Gery and Hastie-Smith to MISC 7, ‘Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent: The Present Position, Note by the Secretaries’, 29 May 1980, CAB 130/1129, TNA.

¹³² Armstrong to Thatcher, ‘Polaris Successor System’, 12 May 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

officials still found this new formulation “unacceptable.”¹³⁶ In mid-May, Armstrong wrote to Brzezinski, to inform him that the Carter administration’s alternative wording could be made “bearable” by substituting “economies made possible” for “savings created” and “reinforce” for “expand.”¹³⁷ The Carter White House agreed to this changed wording. Despite the compromise, US officials felt they had been “successful in obtaining a reasonably strong statement from the Prime Minister concerning British conventional force improvements.”¹³⁸ Nevertheless, the sentence extracted no real commitment from the British on conventional force spending. However, the protracted discussions over such a sentence demonstrated the level of the administration’s unease over possible US public and Congressional reaction to the deal.

By the end of May, there remained “two major substantive issues...: the financial terms of the sale (the R&D costs) and Diego Garcia.”¹³⁹ Subsequently, on 29 May, Edmund Muskie, Vance’s replacement as Secretary of State following his resignation, Harold Brown and Zbigniew Brzezinski met to decide upon Brown’s strategy in his upcoming meeting with Thatcher.

With regards the R&D issue, despite British protestations and Thatcher’s expressed ‘annoyance’, Carter still wanted the British to pay the full pro-rata share, or “offset part of those expenses by military cooperation of direct financial benefit” to the US.¹⁴⁰ As discussed, the White House proposed that the British provide personnel for the US Rapier system in the UK, at an approximate value to the US of \$190 million over 20 years, and “pay cash to make up the remainder of the \$400 million.”¹⁴¹ From the start of negotiations, White House officials had told the British that a five percent charge was “inequitable... and likely to raise the

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ ‘Agenda Paper: Meeting of the PD-46 Steering Committee, Strategic Nuclear Cooperation with Britain and France’, 29 May 1980, Meetings - Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski 5/80 - 6/80, Box 23, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

issue of a sweetheart deal on the Hill.”¹⁴² As discussed, the British had ignored these arguments.¹⁴³ Originally, British officials argued that the US should waive the entire \$400 million, “in view of all they [the British] are doing for us and the fact that our R&D costs are already sunk.”¹⁴⁴ When US officials rejected this, the British government then “indicated willingness either to pay a 5 percent surcharge... along the lines of the PSA or to pick up the costs of manning RAPIER.”¹⁴⁵ Again, the White House rejected the British proposal.¹⁴⁶ Throughout these negotiations, US officials had “stood firm... awaiting a more forthcoming British proposal to put to the President “because they felt they had the major leverage (Trident).”¹⁴⁷

With regards to the issue of Diego Garcia, US officials had informed the British that “the President” wanted “consultations on Diego Garcia wrapped up” before the exchange of letters.¹⁴⁸ Presumably, given British classification of one of the US demands, Aaron and Komer informed Downing Street officials of this in their meetings in March and April. The Carter White House wanted the British to agree to their plans for expansion of US facilities in 1980-1981, and 1982-1985. However, British officials had “temporized” over these requests, and told US officials that with a “comprehensive review of Diego policy underway” the 13 June was their “earliest possible reply.”¹⁴⁹ Such a wait concerned US officials: “If the June 13 reply is not satisfactory, we could find ourselves in an eleventh-hour negotiation over Diego issues prior to the briefing of the Allied leaders at Venice.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ See Wade-Gery to Armstrong, ‘Polaris Replacement’, 27 March 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Agenda Paper: Meeting of the PD-46 Steering Committee, Strategic Nuclear Cooperation with Britain and France’, 29 May 1980, Meetings - Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski 5/80 - 6/80, Box 23, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ See Wade-Gery, ‘Polaris Replacement: Komer Negotiations’, 17 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA. Unfortunately, the author could find no record of the British letter sent to David Aaron where this offer to pay the 5 percent surcharge or the costs of manning RAPIER was made.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Agenda Paper: Meeting of the PD-46 Steering Committee, Strategic Nuclear Cooperation with Britain and France’, 29 May 1980, Meetings - Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski 5/80 - 6/80, Box 23, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

We need a British reply now.”¹⁵⁰

In addition, the British were again attempting to “link Diego to the financial issue,” much to the chagrin of US officials.¹⁵¹ In a conversation with Aaron in May, Armstrong had “returned to their [Britain’s] original position that all R&D costs should be waived, on the grounds that Diego Garcia is enough to warrant a waiver.”¹⁵² US officials had rejected these attempts “to link Diego to the R&D issue on the grounds that our [US] activities there are in their [British] interest and that we are not asking them to pay the more than \$1B cost of expansion.”¹⁵³ However, despite this refusal US officials feared:

The British may reckon that they have the major leverage now (Diego) because of the political flap surrounding US use of Diego in the hostage rescue attempt and because of a calculation that the President cannot politically afford a row with our closest Ally over a defense issue. They may feel that by standing firm on Diego they can force a last-minute concession from us on the R&D issue¹⁵⁴

This is indeed what the British strategy may have been. In May 1980, Wade-Gery remarked to Thatcher that it was in their interests to decide upon the R&D levy before the Trident announcement because, “We cannot avoid playing the Diego Garcia card pretty soon. To get full value for it we need first to reach agreement on the R and D levy.”¹⁵⁵ Unfortunately, greater clarity on British strategy will have to wait until further declassification of material.

Despite these concerns over who held the ‘major leverage’ in negotiations, Jim Thomson advised Muskie, Brown and Brzezinski, that Brown should “give the British no daylight” on the R&D levy in his meeting with Thatcher. Instead Brown should “stand firm” on the current US position of the full \$400 million, whilst he awaited “a more forthcoming UK proposal.”¹⁵⁶ The proposal that the US would

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Wade-Gery to Thatcher, ‘MISC 7: Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent: The Present Position’, 30 May 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹⁵⁶ Thomson to Brzezinski, ‘UK and French Nuclear Programme – MBB Item’, 29 May 1980, Meetings - Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski 5/80 - 6/80, Box 23, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL;

accept as a compromise was a British offer to pay a five percent surcharge and provide personnel for the Rapier system. Aaron had already suggested this to the British as a “reasonable compromise” in May, although he made it clear “that he had no authority to offer” such a proposal.¹⁵⁷ Thomson also advised that Brown should “stand firm on the President’s insistence that the Diego consultations must be wrapped up before the Trident letter exchange.”¹⁵⁸ Muskie, Brown and Brzezinski adhered to Thomson’s advice; Brown in his upcoming meeting with Thatcher would “insist on a solution to the Diego Garcia problem, and... has the flexibility to negotiate the R&D issue on the basis of a 5% surcharge plus the costs of manning the Rapier system force.”¹⁵⁹

On 2 June 1980, MISC 7 met for their first meeting since December. In another questionable display of ‘democratic’ decision-making, the meeting finally brought William Whitelaw, Home Secretary, and Geoffrey Howe, Chancellor of the Exchequer, into the “circle of those in the know,” despite on-going discussions since March on the terms of sale of Trident.¹⁶⁰ MISC 7 agreed to Aaron’s suggested compromise on the R&D levy; that the British would pay a five percent surcharge and provide personnel for the Rapier system. This “could be accommodated within the Defence Budget.”¹⁶¹ With both sides now finally prepared to compromise on the R&D it looked likely that at least one of the remaining ‘major substantive issues’ could be resolved in Thatcher and Brown’s meeting.

On the afternoon of 2 June, Harold Brown met with Margaret Thatcher.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Agenda Paper: Meeting of the PD-46 Steering Committee, Strategic Nuclear Cooperation with Britain and France’, 29 May 1980, Meetings - Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski 5/80 - 6/80, Box 23, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

¹⁵⁸ Wade-Gery to Thatcher, ‘MISC 7: Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent: The Present Position’, 30 May 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹⁵⁹ Thomson to Brzezinski, ‘UK and French Nuclear Programme – MBB Item’, 29 May 1980, Meetings - Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski 5/80 - 6/80, Box 23, Subject File, Brzezinski Collection, JCL.

¹⁶⁰ Brzezinski to Aaron and Les Denand, ‘MBB Lunch 5/29/80’, NLC-17-141-3-1-3, JCL.

¹⁶¹ Armstrong to Thatcher, ‘Polaris Replacement’, 3 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA; Lankester to Armstrong, ‘Polaris Replacement’, 10 April 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹⁶² Wade-Gery to Thatcher and MISC 7, ‘Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent: The Present Position’, 30 May 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA; ‘Limited Circulation Annex A MISC 7 (80) 1st meeting minutes Monday 2 June 1980’, 3 June 1980, CAB 130/1129, TNA.

They first discussed the disputed R&D levy, with Thatcher, once more, repeating the British government's desire to purchase the Trident C4 missile on the same terms as Polaris, i.e. a five percent levy. In reply, Brown repeated the Carter administration's position from the outset that they "could not agree to this arrangement" as it had been severely criticised in Congress. However, Brown then proposed that they would accept payment of a five percent levy and the British provision of personnel for US Rapier systems based in the UK. With MISC 7's earlier agreement to such an arrangement, Thatcher was free to inform Brown that this compromise "would be acceptable to the British Government."¹⁶² Finally, the US and UK governments had agreed on the R&D levy.

The Trident deal was still not finalised though. Following the agreement on the R&D levy, Brown told Thatcher:

That it would be necessary for the two Governments to reach agreement on the United States plans for extending their facilities in Diego Garcia in 1982-85, and on any changes in the arrangements for joint decisions about the use of Diego Garcia which the British Government might require, before the Exchange of Letters on Polaris replacement could take place.¹⁶³

In this way, Brown made clear that the White House was standing firm on their demand that the British had to agree to their plans on Diego Garcia before any formal agreement of the Trident deal. Despite British protestations, the Carter administration still clearly viewed US-UK nuclear co-operation in transactional terms and indeed their conduct suggests that they saw relatively little benefit in the supply of Trident C4 itself, bar the financial assistance with the missile's development costs.

On 4 June, David Aaron and Robert Wade-Gery met in Paris to discuss the matters outstanding on the agreement.¹⁶⁴ During this discussion, the administration's

¹⁶² 'Top Secret Annex to Record of Conversation between the Prime Minister and the United States Secretary of Defence', 3 June 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Wade-Gery to Thatcher, 'Anglo-American Negotiations on Polaris Replacement', 13 June 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

continued concern about the political difficulties the deal could cause became apparent. The White House expected to be criticised over the Trident C4 deal “on the grounds... that it damages détente and... it will divert British defence expenditure away from conventional forces.”¹⁶⁵ In particular, the administration was concerned that Helmut Schmidt would be “unsympathetic” and could utilise the US-UK deal “as a reason for going back on his commitment to TNF modernisation.”¹⁶⁶ This concern reflected the Carter administration’s fear that Schmidt’s continuing talks with Moscow on LRTNF was an attempt to renege on his commitment to deploy GLCMs as part of the ‘dual-track’ decision.¹⁶⁷ With this in mind, the White House now wished to publish the exchange of letters on 3 July, as Schmidt would be in Moscow on the currently proposed date of 1 July. The White House thought that if the Trident announcement took place at the same time as Schmidt’s trip to Moscow, this would put the Chancellor in a difficult position with the Soviets. Wade-Gery expected Thatcher would agree to this new date for the announcement.¹⁶⁸ However, Aaron then demonstrated the White House’s angst over Schmidt’s reaction, as he told Wade-Gery that they were unable to decide whether it “would be worse to tell... Schmidt just before he went to Moscow, or just after. They were inclined to tell him just after, as the lesser evil.”¹⁶⁹ Wade-Gery replied that the British favoured telling Schmidt before his visit to Moscow as “he would feel that we had been holding out on him if we waited till after.”¹⁷⁰ Aaron “seemed to agree” but said he would need to consult the President.¹⁷¹

On 10-11 June, US and UK officials met at the White House once more to discuss the Trident C4 deal. The meeting largely finalised the outstanding issues, ready for a public announcement of the agreement. The two sides agreed that the

¹⁶⁵ Cabinet Office briefing, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with President Carter - June 1980’, 20 June 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 214.

¹⁶⁸ Wade-Gery, 5 June 1980, PREM 19/159, TNA.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

British provision of personnel for Rapier would be included in a separate letter from Harold Brown to Francis Pym, which would be delivered at the same time as the President's letter. US officials would then draw on this letter in order to answer Congressional criticism that the R&D charge was too low.

The two sides had previously agreed that detailed technical and financial negotiations would follow publication of the exchange of letters. However, in the previous week's discussions, Wade-Gery had requested some "general reassurances relating to charges."¹⁷² This was because the British government "needed to be able to deal with potential parliamentary and public criticism that we had put ourselves over a barrel by agreeing to purchase something without knowing its approximate price."¹⁷³ In response, "the Americans were pretty forthcoming."¹⁷⁴ The US officials confirmed British "calculations about the broad order of likely dollar costs" and that the PSA would "except in the special case of the R&D deal... be taken as the general pattern."¹⁷⁵ Of course, US assurances provided the British with no absolute guarantee on the terms of the Trident C4 sale. As such, the British foresaw that settling details after "agreeing in principle" on terms could "in theory leave us [Britain] vulnerable to American attempts to load the price against us." However, "in practice" the British saw that their "main safeguard" was "American awareness that the more we [Britain] have to spend on Trident I [C4] the less we shall be able to contribute to the Alliance's conventional defence effort."¹⁷⁶ As such, after receiving these US assurances, UK Treasury officials agreed that the British government had secured everything it "could reasonably want under this head, in advance of the detailed negotiations."¹⁷⁷

Wade-Gery now thought that the only remaining difficulty was the timetable of the announcement. The White House wished for a short delay to the

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Wade-Gery and Hastie-Smith to MISC 7, 'Anglo-American Negotiations on Polaris Replacement', 12 June 1980, CAB 130/1129, TNA.

¹⁷⁵ Wade-Gery and Hastie-Smith to MISC 7, 'Future of the United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent: The Present Position, Note by the Secretaries', 29 May 1980, CAB 130/1129, TNA.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

Trident announcement due to the “great importance” they attached to Helmut Schmidt and Valéry Giscard d’Estaing being briefed “some days ahead of the publication day.”¹⁷⁸ The US were “wholly unwilling” for Schmidt to be briefed before his visit to Moscow from 30 June - 1 July. Whilst they would have been willing to make the announcement the following week, this was impossible because of Giscard’s visit to West Germany from 7-12 July: the US were “understandably reluctant to choose a publication date which would seem to symbolise the division between the Washington-London and Bonn-Paris axes.”¹⁷⁹ As such, the White House now wished the announcement to take place on 17 July. Wade-Gery deemed that US reasons for this later date were “fortuitous but convincing,” and that “it was pretty clear during my negotiations that the Americans do genuinely want to get this issue settled and are not just stringing us along.”¹⁸⁰ Nonetheless, the new date was “tiresomely later than we [the British] had hoped.”¹⁸¹ With the upcoming election, the British wanted the Trident deal finalised. As Wade-Gery reported to Thatcher, in light of the Carter administrations repeated vacillations on the Polaris successor, the British could not “wholly discount the danger that some major twist in world events could panic them into seeking even further delay.”¹⁸² Such a delay would be problematic. Congress would have to ratify any Trident deal. The administration did not expect any problems in gaining Congressional agreement, however, by law the US administration had to notify Congress of the President’s agreement to supply Trident fifty days before the deal could become effective. With estimates that Congress would rise on 11 October 1980 before the elections, any Trident deal had to be finalised by late July.¹⁸³ Despite this risk, as Wade-Gery told Thatcher, there was “not in practice... much alternative” to the British accepting the new

¹⁷⁸ Wade-Gery and Hastie-Smith to MISC 7, ‘Anglo-American Negotiations on Polaris Replacement’, 12 June 1980, CAB 130/1129, TNA.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Wade-Gery to Thatcher, ‘Anglo-American Negotiations on Polaris Replacement’, 13 June 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹⁸³ ‘MIGPT: Polaris Replacement,’ 15 July 1980, DEFE 25/325, TNA.

date.¹⁸⁴

With the conclusion of the 10-11 June talks, much of the Trident deal had been finalised. However, "the double link with the Diego Garcia negotiations" remained unresolved.¹⁸⁵ As Brown outlined to Thatcher on 2 June, without resolution on this issue there would be no Trident announcement. On 2 June, presumably after her meeting with Brown, Thatcher agreed to the Carter administration's plans for the 1980-1981 phase of development on Diego Garcia.¹⁸⁶ This left British agreement to the US development plans for 1982-1985 outstanding. On their way to Venice in June 1980, Thatcher and Carrington provided UK negotiators with "revised instructions."¹⁸⁷ Based on these instructions, Wade-Gery expected US and UK officials on 13 June to "reach satisfactory agreement... on new rules for usage of the island."¹⁸⁸ Provided Thatcher, Pym and Carrington approved this agreement, UK officials would then "be in a position to tell the Americans that the Diego Garcia deal is approved - which we shall of course only do if we are also ready to say snap on the Polaris replacement deal... Negotiations will then be complete."¹⁸⁹ Thatcher did approve the terms of the Trident C4 agreement and the result of the discussions with the US on Diego Garcia.¹⁹⁰ Subsequently, British officials informed the Carter administration that their government "accepted all US proposals for FY82-85 expansion and greater flexibility in using island" and that Thatcher would give her "formal agreement to President at Venice."¹⁹¹ Carter's notes from the Venice summit noted, "US proposal on announcement of nuclear agreement is okay."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁴ Wade-Gery to Thatcher, 'Anglo-American Negotiations on Polaris Replacement', 13 June 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ 'Diego Garcia and US Defence Policy in the United States', 13 June 1980, FCO 31/2754, TNA.

¹⁸⁷ Wade-Gery to Thatcher, 'Anglo-American Negotiations on Polaris Replacement', 13 June 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Whitmore to Wright, 'Anglo-American Negotiations on Polaris Replacement', 17 June 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹⁹¹ Briefing Paper, 'Notes for Meeting with the Vice President', circa 26 June 1980, NLC-133-1-2-22-6, JCL.

¹⁹² Carter, 'Conversation with Prime Minister Thatcher during Venice Economic Summit Monday', 23 June 1980, Summit meetings 7/78-6/80, Box 4, Foreign Affairs File, JCL.

As a US official reflected the “Diego-Trident package [was] now in place.”¹⁹³

The US and UK government would deny in public any such notion of a ‘Diego-Trident package’. The two governments planned to respond to any question on whether there was a link between the two with, “there was no linkage except that both the Trident arrangement and the Diego Garcia arrangement were examples of fruitful security cooperation.”¹⁹⁴ Subsequently, in her biography Margaret Thatcher denied any link between Trident and Diego Garcia: “I also agreed with the objective of extending and increasing US use of the base at Diego Garcia; but this made sense on its own merits and had nothing to do with the Trident decision.”¹⁹⁵ In this way, the British government would not reveal the full costs of the Trident C4 agreement to the public. Indeed, the British government’s continued classification of much of the information on the Diego-Trident link suggests that today’s government is also reluctant for the public to know the full price of the Trident system. Nevertheless, with this ‘exchange’ the Carter administration and the Thatcher government had finally reached agreement on the Trident C4 sale, ready for a public announcement on 17 July.

IV

On the evening of 14 July, David Aaron informed Robert Armstrong that news of the Trident decision had leaked and *The New York Times* planned an article for the following day. David Aaron pressed for the announcement to be brought “forward... by 48 hours.”¹⁹⁶ Thatcher agreed to the request. Subsequently, on 15 July 1980, Francis Pym announced the Trident C4 agreement in the House of Commons.¹⁹⁷ At the same time, the British published the formal exchange of

¹⁹³ Briefing Paper, ‘Notes for Meeting with the Vice President’, circa 26 June 1980, NLC-133-1-2-22-6, JCL.

¹⁹⁴ Howe, ‘Polaris successor: Q&A material, Note of points raised in discussion with US officials 10 June 1980’, 17 June 1980, DEFE 24/2124, TNA.

¹⁹⁵ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 246.

¹⁹⁶ Armstrong to Thatcher, ‘Cabinet: Parliamentary Affairs’, 16 July 1980, PREM19/417, TNA.

¹⁹⁷ House of Commons Debate, Strategic Nuclear Deterrent, 15 July 1982, Vol 988 cc1235-51, accessed 16 May 2015, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1980/jul/15/strategic-nuclear-deterrent>.

letters, alongside an open government document explaining the rationale behind the adoption of Trident C4. Thatcher's letter to Carter stated that they would assign the Trident system to NATO, like Polaris, "except where the United Kingdom Government may decide that supreme national interests are at stake."¹⁹⁸ This clause meant, under the provisions of the 1962 Nassau agreement and 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement, that Britain could use the system independently if necessary. As agreed, Thatcher's letter to Carter included a commitment that the United Kingdom would use the savings from US supply of Trident C4 "to reinforce its efforts to upgrade its conventional forces."¹⁹⁹ Carter's reply stressed the importance of US-UK nuclear co-operation with NATO through the assignment of the Polaris successor and enabling Britain to "reinforce... efforts to upgrade the United Kingdom's conventional forces."²⁰⁰

In the end, there was no story on Trident in *The New York Times* on 15 July. The British later learnt that the correspondent, thinking the announcement would be on 17 July, decided to publish on 16 July. This development did not quell British frustration that the Carter administration had panicked. As Armstrong later remarked to Thatcher "We have never received a satisfactory explanation from the Americans as to why they panicked."²⁰¹ The US reaction frustrated the British even more in light of White House's repeated hesitation and vacillation. An unnamed British official's scribbled note reveals the level of frustration: "This doesn't increase my respect for D. Aaron. He was stampeded by a story. It would have been possible not to comment and to say that an announcement would be made at the appropriate time, rather than to advance everything by 48 hrs."²⁰²

This frustration with the Carter White House was particularly marked because of the difficulties the advancement of the announcement created for the British government. The decision ensured that involvement in decision-making

¹⁹⁸ Thatcher to Carter, 10 July 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Carter to Thatcher, 14 July 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

²⁰¹ Handwritten note, Armstrong to Thatcher, 21 July 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

²⁰² Gilmore to Private Secretary, 'Cabinet, 17 July: Decision on Polaris Successor', 26 July 1980, FCO 46/2288, TNA.

remained restricted to a small group of ministers rather than opened up to Cabinet debate. Thatcher had planned to tell her Cabinet of the Trident C4 decision on the morning of 17 July. This of course was a questionable practice, as it presumed Cabinet agreement. Nonetheless, it was better than what did take place. The decision to make the announcement two days earlier resulted in the Cabinet being informed of the Trident agreement by letter.²⁰³ Such procedure meant, "The Cabinet could not fail to recognise that their consent had been taken for granted if they are only asked to give it on the day on which a clearly pre-arranged announcement is made in both London and Washington."²⁰⁴ This left many members of Cabinet disgruntled, including the future Defence Secretary John Nott.²⁰⁵

British officials were particularly annoyed with the advancement of the decision, and the resultant political difficulties, because it soon became apparent that the leak came from the Carter administration. British enquiries revealed that the Carter administration "chose to brief senior Congressional leaders six days before you [Thatcher] were due to tell Cabinet and did so without consulting us."²⁰⁶ Subsequently, Armstrong commented to Thatcher: "We have successfully and scrupulously complied with this requirement of secrecy, and so until this week have the Americans: it is ironic that this leak, at the eleventh hour, should have come on the American side, and apparently at a political level."²⁰⁷ The British had adhered to the Carter administration's desire to keep information about the Trident C4 deal to a very small circle for as long as possible, and in the process undermined their own 'democratic' procedures. The Carter White House seemingly did not think the same rule of discretion should apply to themselves.

In the end, the Carter administration's concern over the reaction to the Trident agreement was largely unnecessary. Parliament's response to the announcement was "mixed but more muted" than the US embassy in London had

²⁰³ Wright, 'British Strategic Nuclear Force', 15 July 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

²⁰⁴ Wade-Gery to Coles, 'Trident: Procedure', 22 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

²⁰⁵ John Nott, *Here Today Gone Tomorrow* (London: Politico's, 2002), 216.

²⁰⁶ Handwritten note, Armstrong to Thatcher, 21 July 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

²⁰⁷ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'Cabinet: Parliamentary Affairs', 16 July 1980, PREM 19/417, TNA.

expected. William Rodgers, Labour's Shadow Defence Secretary, "challenged the decision on procedural and cost grounds, emphasising that Parliament had been denied the opportunity to debate the decision, however, there was no official Labour opposition."²⁰⁸ Congress also did not criticise the agreement and the ratification process proceeded without difficulty. Indeed, the chair of the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs wrote to Nicholas Henderson, British ambassador to the US, to welcome the "considerable progress" that US-UK endeavours were making in the "enhancement of NATO's nuclear capability."²⁰⁹ Even the Soviet reaction was relatively muted, rather than "one of injured outrage" as had been the case with the 'dual-track' announcement. British officials believed this was because "the [Soviet] leadership had for several months considered it a foregone conclusion and a decision taken with firm resolve. It was therefore unlike the Soviet reaction to the planned Theatre Nuclear Forces modernisation."²¹⁰ Most notably, after all the Carter administration's angst, Helmut Schmidt approved of the Trident C4 agreement. Schmidt wrote to Thatcher to welcome the contribution Britain's acquisition of Trident would make "towards maintaining the balance of forces." He also expressed his appreciation that a solution had been found that "On the one hand meets the technological requirements of the coming century and, on the other, keeps within an economic scope that will prevent any weakening of the conventional forces of the United Kingdom and hence of the alliance."²¹¹

Following the exchange of letters, detailed financial and technical discussions took place on the terms of the Trident C4 sale. The Thatcher government had already agreed to the US suggestion before the exchange that they would use the PSA as the basis of the Trident C4 agreement. It soon became clear that the US wished for this to be as easy a process as possible. In July, US officials, after

²⁰⁸ The situation room to Brzezinski, 16 July 1980, NLC-1-16-3-12-7, JCL.

²⁰⁹ Zablocki to Henderson, 7 August 1980, DEFE 24/2125, TNA.

²¹⁰ 'Trident: Soviet reaction', 7 August 1980, DEFE 24/2125, TNA.

²¹¹ Schmidt to Thatcher, 23 July 1980, DEFE 24/2125, TNA.

consulting with lawyers, concluded that they could adapt the PSA “easily by an exchange of diplomatic notes.”²¹² The British thought that the new Trident agreement would in fact be a “major reinterpretation of the existing Polaris Sales agreement.”²¹³ Nevertheless, they agreed to the US plan, as it was extremely advantageous to them. British officials saw that “it is much in our interest to agree the American proposal that the Polaris Sales Agreement, which has stood the test of time and is highly favourable from our point of view, should apply to Trident with minimal change.”²¹⁴ Moreover, the US plan would also better allow the British government to present the purchase of Trident as the ‘modernisation’ of the Polaris system rather than the reality: the UK purchase of a new system, which would heighten its nuclear capability. British officials saw that there were “strong pressures to minimise the amendments required to the existing Agreement so as to emphasise wherever possible the continuity of US/UK collaboration.”²¹⁵ Subsequently, on 30 September 1980 Nicholas Henderson and Warren Christopher, US Deputy Secretary of State, exchanged letters, which agreed on the sale of Trident to occur under the terms of the PSA.²¹⁶

The financial terms of the Trident C4 agreement were harsher than the Polaris Sales agreement due to an increased R&D levy. The PSA included a five percent R&D charge. If Britain had acquired the same deal for Trident C4, they would have paid roughly \$199 million.²¹⁷ After pro-longed negotiation, the Carter administration secured British agreement to pay a five percent surcharge and provide personnel for US Rapier missile systems based in Britain.²¹⁸ David Aaron thus speculated, “For obvious reasons, the British are likely to play this aspect of

²¹² Defence Policy Cluster to Brzezinski, 21 July 1980, NLC-10-30-6-7-4, JCL

²¹³ Janvrin to Parry, ‘Trident: Amendment to the Polaris Sales Agreement’, 20 August 1980, FCO 46/2289, TNA.

²¹⁴ ‘Trident: Amendment to Polaris Sales Agreement’, 19 September 1980, DEFE 25/325, TNA.

²¹⁵ Janvrin to Parry, ‘Trident: Amendment to the Polaris Sales Agreement’, 20 August 1980, FCO 46/2289, TNA.

²¹⁶ Henderson to Muskie, 30 September 1980, DEFE 25/325, TNA; Christopher to Henderson, 30 September 1980, DEFE 25/325, TNA.

²¹⁷ Aaron to Brewster, 15 July 1980, NLC-17-89-5-25-4, JCL.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

the deal down in London. We will be giving it more play in Washington.”²¹⁹ In addition, the White House placed a political price tag on the Trident deal by demanding a commitment on conventional force spending, and, more substantially, by utilising their leverage on Trident to ensure British agreement to their plans for Diego Garcia.

Despite the commitments the US drew from the British, it would be a mistake to think that the US derived greater benefit from the deal. The agreement was a reciprocal one and benefited both sides. The British saw their own nuclear system as essential.²²⁰ A deal with the US was by far the cheapest way of modernising these nuclear weapons. After the disagreements over the R&D levy, the British only paid about an extra \$200 million on what they would have done had they been charged five percent. In the larger scheme of the huge costs of the Trident system, this was a relatively small sum. In addition, US development of Diego Garcia, despite its political controversy, was in the overall strategic interests of the British. Concurrently, UK officials felt they had gained “a very good deal from the US (although we have to be careful not to stress this too much in public in case it causes embarrassment for the US administration in Congress).”²²¹ British officials were also bound to look favourably upon the deal because they had finally secured Carter’s definite agreement to supply Trident C4 with MIRV. Up until this point, there was no guarantee that the Carter White House would sign the agreement. Hesitation and delay had marred negotiations on the Trident C4 due to the Carter administration’s fears that its supply could hinder their ‘priority’ policies. With Carter’s faltering domestic position, British officials were aware that another problematic world event could panic the administration into seeking further delay until after the upcoming US election. The signing of the agreement finally removed this risk.

Nevertheless, some uncertainty remained. In December 1978, a primary reason for the Duff-Mason report’s recommendation that the British should

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Quinlan, ‘Fitting Trident into the Programme’, 18 July 1980, DEFE 24/2125, TNA.

²²¹ Head of DS 17 to Head of DS 12 and D Sales 4, 29 July 1980, DEFE 24/2125, TNA.

purchase Trident C4 was the lessons of Chevaline and the need to maintain commonality. However, by the conclusion of the Trident C4 agreement there were questions over how long the system would remain in US service. In May 1980, Walter Slocombe, of the US Department of Defense (DOD), told the British that the Trident D5 was in the pre-engineering development stage. This new missile would have greater accuracy and a longer range than the C4. The US government did not plan to take a further decision on the D5 until 1983. If “they then decided to go full steam ahead”, the Trident D5 would enter operation in 1989. This would mean that by the mid-1990s all the US Ohio boats would be fully equipped with D5, leaving Trident C4 only in the ex-Poseidon boats, which would be thirty years old in 1997. This was the “worst case” for C4 life.²²² As such, the C4 could go out of US operation shortly after it entered British service. The Trident C4 agreement did hold open the possibility of the British purchase of Trident D5.²²³ Nevertheless, this did not mean that any future US government would allow for its provision on the same terms as the C4, or even that they would agree to supply the far more advanced D5. As British officials later reflected, as they negotiated on the Trident D5, the attitude of the Carter administration towards the replacement of Polaris highlighted the level of contingency that is innate in US-UK nuclear co-operation:

The present Administration is particularly well disposed to the concept of helping us prolong the life of the British deterrent. It would be unwise to assume that future US Administrations will necessarily take quite so positive an attitude. We have heard since he left office, even more clearly than we did at the time, that the 1980 agreement was concluded only after serious doubts on the part of President Carter himself had, with considerable difficulty, been overcome.²²⁴

In addition, the British could not guarantee that the US would make a decision on the development of Trident D5 before their procurement of C4 had advanced too

²²² Quinlan to Head of DS 17, ‘US SLBM plans’, 12 May 1980, DEFE 24/2124, TNA.

²²³ ‘Britain’s Strategic Nuclear Forces: The choice of a system to replace Polaris’, July 1980, DEFE 25/325, TNA.

²²⁴ Fretwell to Gilmore, ‘Processing UK Trident missiles with the US’, 3 December 1981, FCO 46/2752, TNA.

far for a change of system. In July 1980, Francis Pym subsequently remarked, "The US Government... is not expected to decide for another two or three years whether to proceed with Trident II [D5]. Our own choice now could be made dependent on uncertain possibilities like this."²²⁵ Moreover, the US would not necessarily consider British interests as they developed the D5. Indeed, when the British government asked the US Navy to brief them on the D5, the Navy was reluctant to do so as they did not want their final choice on configuration influenced by the 'Chevaline imperative'.²²⁶ In this way, despite the finalisation of the Trident C4 agreement some uncertainty remained over what would happen next.

²²⁵ Pym, 'The future United Kingdom Strategic Nuclear Deterrent Force', July 1980, DEFE 25/325, TNA.

²²⁶ Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 158.

Part Three - The Reagan administration and the Trident D5 agreement.

Chapter 5

The Wait for a D5 Decision: The Reagan administration and the US-UK nuclear relationship, January - September 1981

“If you were going to approach the Russians with a dove of peace in one hand, you had to have a sword in the other.”

- Ronald Reagan.¹

I

On 4 November 1980, Ronald Reagan won the US presidential election. His victory over Carter delighted Margaret Thatcher. Upon hearing the news at three o'clock in the morning, Thatcher immediately sent an effusive message of congratulations.² Despite their frosty beginning, Thatcher and Carter did come to hold one another in a certain respectful regard.³ However, Thatcher's overall assessment of his presidency was negative. Thatcher later recalled that Carter was “inclined to drift,” he was “over-influenced by the doctrines... gaining ground in the Democratic Party that the threat from communism had been exaggerated,” and “in general he had no large vision of America's future.”⁴ Thatcher believed that the new President lacked no such vision; moreover it was one that aligned with her own. Thatcher was a long-time admirer of Reagan's ideas, and the two had established the beginnings of a firm friendship in meetings before the President's election. Thatcher and Reagan first met in April 1975, following Thatcher's election as leader of the Conservative party, and as the former California governor prepared to run for the Republican presidential nomination in 1976. Reagan's meeting with Thatcher, planned for forty-five minutes, went on for an hour and a half.⁵ Reagan later recalled, “I liked her [Thatcher] immediately – she was warm, feminine, gracious, and intelligent – and it was evident from our first words that we were soul mates

¹ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 294.

² Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 32.

³ See Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 68-69; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 486.

⁴ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 68-69.

⁵ Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, 314.

when it came to reducing government and expanding economic freedom.”⁶ This friendship deepened during their years as head of governments, and indeed Nancy Reagan invited Thatcher to speak at her husband’s funeral in 1994, and accompany her on the Air Force jet to California for the interment.⁷

Subsequently, some historians view the close rapport between Thatcher and Reagan as the cause of a flourishing US-UK relationship, including nuclear co-operation; the Trident D5 agreement of March 1982 is seen as an example of this.⁸ However, whilst the rapport between Reagan and Thatcher did undoubtedly ease diplomatic exchanges during this time, their friendship is largely incidental to understanding the US-UK nuclear relationship. Assessments that view the Reagan-Thatcher relationship as central to the Trident D5 deal seemingly overlook the Trident C4 agreement reached between the Thatcher government and Carter administration, albeit not on such favourable terms. Moreover, it was the shared outlook and subsequent convergence of interests between the Thatcher and Reagan governments that strengthened the US-UK relationship during this time, and, as the following two chapters will discuss, enabled the British to procure Trident D5 at a substantially reduced price. As Geoffrey Smith writes, Thatcher and Reagan were “two highly ideological politicians who found themselves sharing the same broad philosophy.”⁹ As Richard Allen told Reagan, during preparations for Thatcher’s visit to Washington in February 1981:

Your reunion with... Thatcher... will dramatise something rare in the exchanges between U.S. and West European leaders these past few years: a meeting of minds which encompasses not only philosophical affinities, similar economic outlooks, and a common allegiance to the idea of revitalized defense efforts, but also a tough, pragmatic determination to do something about them.¹⁰

However, the Reagan-Thatcher relationship was, in part, public relations. The pair consciously promoted their deep rapport throughout their time in office.

⁶ Reagan, *An American Life*, 204.

⁷ Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, I.

⁸ See Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, 24 and 68-69; Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 183; Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 56-58.

⁹ Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, 3.

¹⁰ Allen to Reagan, ‘Your meeting with Prime Minister Thatcher’, 24 February 1981, United Kingdom - General (February 1901-July 1981), Box CF219, Edwin Meese Files, Ronald Reagan Library (RRL).

In reality, the Thatcher and Reagan friendship was often less congenial than the media portrayed, and when US-UK interests did not converge, such as over the sanctions the US imposed on the Soviet Union at the end of 1981, the relationship became strained.¹¹ Richard Aldous subsequently surmises, "Their presentation masked the reality of a complex, even fractious alliance."¹²

However, defence policy formed a key area of shared outlook between the Reagan and Thatcher governments. Throughout the election campaign, Reagan had explicitly cautioned against the continuation of SALT II, détente and the strategic efficacy of cordial relations with the Soviet Union.¹³ Instead, Reagan argued that the US needed to strengthen its conventional forces and modernise US strategic weapons in order to counter the growing threat of the Soviet Union, and to obtain Soviet adherence to arms-control.¹⁴ As Reagan later remarked "It was obvious that if we were ever going to get anywhere with the Russians in persuading them to reduce armaments, we had to bargain with them from strength, not weakness."¹⁵ As had been demonstrated by Thatcher's support of Carter's hardening of policy towards the Soviet Union following the invasion of Afghanistan, Thatcher was supportive of such confrontational approaches to Cold War disagreements. Although budget restraints limited the Thatcher government's ability to strengthen the UK's armed forces, they nonetheless prioritised Polaris replacement. Reagan's concurrent belief in the need to strengthen Western forces provided the administration with an implicit rationale to support the Thatcher government's endeavours. Accordingly, during Thatcher's first visit to the Reagan White House in February 1981, US officials reaffirmed their support for British nuclear testing "particularly in support of their Trident program."¹⁶ However, a convergence

¹¹ See Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*; Paul Sharp, *Thatcher's Diplomacy: The Revival of British Foreign Policy* (London: MacMillan Press, 1997), 112-113.

¹² Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 2.

¹³ Ivo H. Daalder, *The Nature and Practice of Flexible Response: NATO strategy and theater nuclear forces since 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 22.

¹⁴ Chester J. Pach, Jr., "Sticking to His Guns: Reagan and National Security," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and its Legacies*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 85.

¹⁵ Reagan, *An American Life*, 294.

¹⁶ Bremer to Richard Allen, 'Briefing Materials for the Visit of UK Prime Minister Thatcher', 25 February 1981, Briefing Book Re: Visit of British Prime Minister Thatcher 02/25/1981 - 02/28/1981 (3 of3), Box 91434, National Security Council (NSC) Files: VIP visits, RRL.

of interests and support for respective policies does not equate to harmony. This was the case with the Reagan administration's endeavours to strengthen US nuclear and conventional forces, and the Thatcher government's efforts to replace Polaris.

In the summer of 1980, the Thatcher government believed they had made their final decision on Polaris replacement; however, this was not the case. In October 1981 as part of his aim to strengthen US strategic forces, Reagan announced that the larger and more accurate Trident D5 missile would replace the Trident C4 by 1989.¹⁷ This decision forced the British government to reassess their plans for Polaris replacement. Moreover, it required them to make a difficult decision about whether to settle for the C4 or upgrade to the D5. Underlying the British government's reassessment, the lessons of Chevaline was a key consideration: if the US switched to Trident D5 whilst the UK kept with C4, it would entail a loss of commonality with the US when they phased the C4 out of service, in all likelihood only a few years after British deployment of the new system. The Chevaline project had starkly demonstrated the huge additional expenditure that would result from such a loss of commonality. However, there were also drawbacks to choosing the D5 missile. Whilst the D5 offered better range, accuracy and warheads than the C4, this more advanced system came with an increased price tag. With the D5 still in the early stages of research, the extent of these extra costs was unpredictable. Furthermore, the D5's capabilities were entirely disproportionate to Britain's defence requirements. Subsequently, the proposed acquisition of such a costly weapon would fuel the arguments of those opposed to C4. Nonetheless, following deliberations British ministers eventually opted for the D5 system. In March 1982, following the Reagan administration's agreement to sell the system on extremely favourable terms, the British government signed the Trident D5 agreement with the United States.

Given that archival material has only recently become available, there is currently no detailed analysis of the Reagan administration's role in the

¹⁷ Reagan to Thatcher, 1 October 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

formulation of the Trident D5 agreement. This omission significantly limits understanding of the agreement. Within much of the historiography, analysis of the US role is limited to discussion of the aggressive stance of the Reagan administration towards the Soviet Union and the Reagan-Thatcher friendship.¹⁸ These analyses focus predominantly on the final D5 agreement, and infer, from aforementioned contrived reasoning, an explanation for the favourable terms. Additionally, some accounts ignore the US perspective almost entirely.¹⁹ Such approaches implicitly suggest that the United States will provide nuclear assistance to Britain when requested to do so, on the terms the British government desire.

Subsequently much of the existing literature portrays the US supply of Trident D5, at a substantially reduced price, as a near certainty. For example, Richard Aldous, referring to the Reagan administration's adoption of the D5 system states: "Certainly this was not a repeat of the situation in 1962 when a similar change of technology - from Skybolt to Polaris - almost left the British without a nuclear weapons system. Now there was no question of Britain not being offered the new weapons."²⁰ Whilst Geoffrey Smith emphasises the role of the Reagan and Thatcher friendship in the conclusion of the Trident D5 agreement:

The atmosphere of the discussions between the American and British teams was very different from the hard bargaining that characterises most international deals... There was a special reason for that. The American team... knew that the President expected them to reach an amicable settlement.²¹

In a similar vein, John Dumbrell asserts that Thatcher was able to negotiate a deal for the D5 on more generous terms than the C4 by, "exploiting Reagan's good opinion of her."²² In addition, some scholars, by focusing primarily on the favourable terms of the final D5 deal rather than the *process* of its negotiation,

¹⁸ Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, 150-152; Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 183; Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 56-58; Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, 68-71.

¹⁹ This approach is particularly evident in Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 168-202, which whilst being the first detailed archival study of the Trident D5 agreement provides very little analysis of the US role. See also Sharp, *Thatcher's Diplomacy*, 127-128; Baylis and Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience*, 163-169.

²⁰ Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 57.

²¹ Smith, *Reagan and Thatcher*, 69.

²² Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship*, 183.

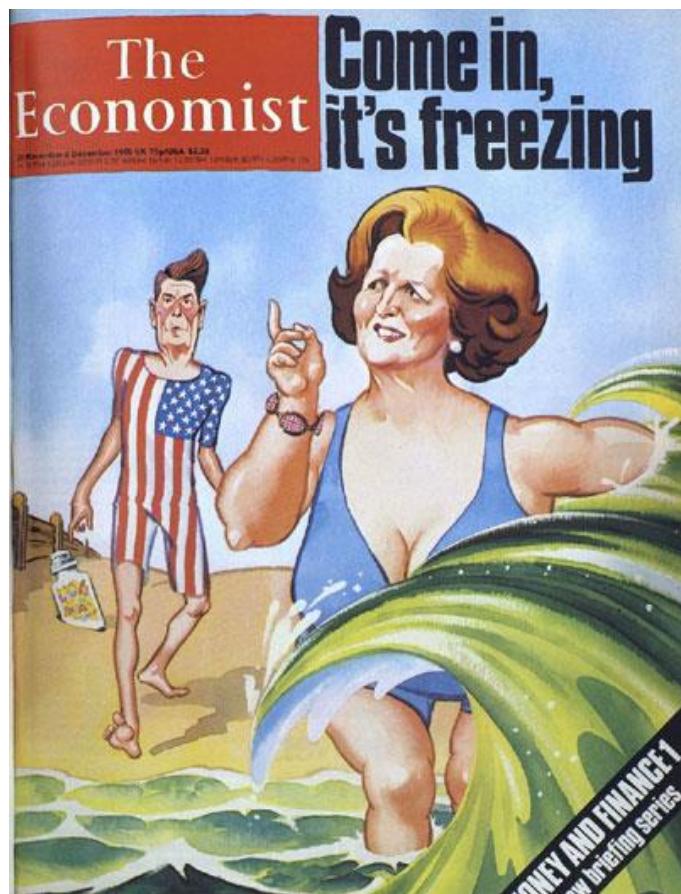
have viewed the agreement as representing a ‘renewal’ of the US-UK ‘special’ relationship. Again, Richard Aldous states, “The offer to share the new D-5 system reinforced the ‘special nature’ of the defence relationship between Britain and the United States in nuclear technology, and by extension that between the president and the prime minister.”²³

However, as the following two chapters will demonstrate, the Trident D5 agreement was not a foregone conclusion, nor did it represent the ‘renewal’ of the US-UK nuclear relationship. The following two chapters examine preliminary discussions between the Thatcher government and the Reagan administration about a possible British D5 upgrade and the subsequent Trident D5 negotiations. The two chapters place these US-UK discussions within the context of the Reagan administration’s aims and interests, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the timing and shape of the Trident D5 agreement. Together the two chapters highlight how the D5 agreement was not a foregone conclusion, but rather a continuation of the close but not foreordained nature of US-UK nuclear co-operation, one that had been renegotiated, according to the varying interests of both parties continually over its existence.

Upon Reagan’s election, the British faced a difficult period of unease as they waited for the administration to make a decision on whether to upgrade to the Trident D5 system. The British government was fortunate that the Reagan administration made a decision on their strategic modernisation programme earlier than expected. Subsequently, in September 1981 the British government received a formal confirmation that the US would upgrade to the D5 and that it would be available to them. However, this guarantee to sell Trident D5 did not come with a reassurance that they would sell it at a reduced price. The British could not begin discussion on the price of D5, or make a decision on whether to upgrade, until Reagan announced his strategic modernisation programme in October 1981. Subsequently, throughout most of 1981 British decision-making on Polaris replacement was at a standstill. This ‘Wait for a D5 Decision’ will be discussed in this chapter.

²³ Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 57.

II



The Reagan administration's primary aim in its policy towards the Soviet Union was to "blunt and contain Soviet imperialism."²⁴ To do this the administration believed that the United States needed to engage in strenuous military, political and economic competition with the USSR. Subsequently, from 1981-1983, the Reagan administration adopted a highly confrontational policy towards the Soviet Union.²⁵ The administration's fundamental assumptions about the Soviets shaped not only the Reagan administration's basic posture towards the USSR, it largely determined their strategies and policy goals. As Richard Allen, Reagan's National Security Advisor, told the

²⁴ Allen to Reagan, 'National Security Council Meeting September 15 1981 - 4:00 - 5:00 PM', 14 September 1981, NSC00021 15 Sept 1981, Box 3, NSC: Meeting Files, RRL.

²⁵ Beth Fischer, *The Reagan reversal: Foreign policy and the end of the Cold War* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 3.

President, “East-West relations will form the basis of our entire foreign policy.”²⁶ In this vein, unlike much of the Carter administration, supplying Trident to the British would be conducive to the overall foreign policy and defence aims of the Reagan administration.

The election of Ronald Reagan brought a hardening in US foreign policy towards the Soviet Union. In some ways, Reagan’s campaign rhetoric resembled Carter’s after he had hardened his approach towards the Soviet Union following its invasion of Afghanistan. However, Reagan had repeatedly warned about the communist threat to US security for many years, and long before Carter’s reappraisal. He believed, in contrast to many US policy-makers before him, that the Soviet Union could not be contained. Reagan believed that due to their adherence to a communist ideology, the Kremlin sought to overthrow democratic governments throughout the world and to replace them with communist systems. Only when the Soviets moved away from a communist system would the USSR’s threat to the United States be neutralised.²⁷ Reagan maintained that it was imperative for the West to overcome communism, before communists overthrew the West: “The West won’t contain communism, it will transcend communism... it will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written,” Reagan asserted during a 1981 commencement address.²⁸

The increase in Soviet military strength in the preceding decade supported the Reagan administration’s hypothesis. By the early 1970s, the Soviets had achieved strategic parity with the United States. The Soviet Union now had numerical advantages in land-based ICBMs and SLBMs. Reagan deplored what he perceived to be the loss of US strategic superiority; he considered it the ultimate guarantor of national security. Increased Soviet conventional forces, particularly naval strength, also alarmed him. He warned that these new conventional capabilities supported a Soviet “drive for dominance in the Middle East, the Indian Ocean, Africa and the South Atlantic”

²⁶ Allen to Reagan, ‘National Security Council Meeting September 15 1981 - 4:00 - 5:00 PM’, 14 September 1981, NSC00021 15 Sept 1981, Box 3, NSC: Meeting Files, RRL.

²⁷ Fischer, *The Reagan reversal*, 18.

²⁸ Reagan, ‘Commencement Address at Notre Dame’, 17 May 1981, *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*, RRL, accessed 28 January 2015, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/51781a.html>.

and threatened the “political independence of our allies and access for them, and us, to raw materials and the freedom of the seas.”²⁹ Moscow repeatedly rejected Reagan’s “questionable charge” that the Soviets had military superiority.³⁰ Indeed, the size of the Soviet military efforts and the purpose of this vast expansion of military capabilities divided US intelligence professionals.³¹ Nevertheless, Reagan asserted that the Soviet Union had been engaging in “the greatest military build-up in the history of man” and that it was “plainly... offensive in nature.”³²

The new president believed that whilst the Soviet’s had been building up their capabilities, the West had shown weakening resolve. Reagan maintained that Jimmy Carter had “sacrifice[d] our technological lead” by cancelling some advanced weapons, such as the neutron bomb and cutting the funding, and delaying the deployment of others, such as the MX missile and the Trident submarine. He was particularly critical of Carter’s decision in 1977 to halt production of the B1 bomber.³³ Reagan’s criticisms of Carter were unsurprising: every presidential candidate distances themselves from their opponent. However, Reagan also condemned the détente policies of his Republican predecessors, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford.³⁴ Reagan believed that the Soviets were using détente to lull the United States into self-restraint, whilst the Soviets forged ahead. In particular, Reagan asserted that the policies of the late 1960s and 1970s, in particular the SALT negotiations, had enabled the Soviet Union to gain military superiority over the US, most crucially in the area of nuclear arms.³⁵ Reagan believed that US nuclear superiority provided the strongest guarantee of security. He feared that Soviet leaders thought they could emerge victorious from an all-out nuclear exchange.³⁶ As such, instead of the policies of détente and Mutually Assured Destruction, Reagan argued

²⁹ Pach, “Sticking to His Guns”, 87.

³⁰ Beth Fischer, “US Foreign Policy under Reagan and Bush,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 270.

³¹ Pach, “Sticking to His Guns”, 87.

³² Fischer, “US Foreign Policy”, 270.

³³ Pach, “Sticking to His Guns”, 87.

³⁴ Raymond Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1994), 9.

³⁵ Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and his quest to abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2005), 27.

³⁶ Pach, “Sticking to His Guns”, 88.

that the United States should aggressively compete against the Soviet Union, particularly in the overall military balance.³⁷

The Reagan administration saw the restoration of a “satisfactory military balance” with the Soviet Union as an imperative.³⁸ Demonstrating this importance, in March 1981, the White House proposed the largest military budget in US history. Defence expenditure would consume more than 30 percent of the federal budget between 1981 and 1985.³⁹ This money would be spent redressing the ‘imbalance’ in nuclear forces through a comprehensive modernisation programme, and modernising conventional forces “in order to respond to Soviet actions throughout the world without necessarily having to resort to nuclear weapons.”⁴⁰ This priority of the Reagan administration meant that it looked likely they would take the decision to replace the Trident C4 with the D5. Moreover, at face value, the supply of Trident D5 to the British would aid the administration’s efforts to respond to the Soviet ‘threat’. British acquisition of the advanced system would bolster the West’s strategic nuclear strength, whilst the savings that the British made by purchasing the US system could be used on the UK’s conventional forces.

In addition, the Reagan administration’s approach to arms-control also suggested that the supply of Trident D5 to the British would be readily forthcoming, in contrast to the early Carter administration. In 1981, the Reagan White House viewed arms-control issues as a low priority. Throughout his election campaign, Reagan said he would reject the SALT II treaty, arguing that it only bolstered the military imbalance. Instead, he planned to restore US defences in order to negotiate from a position of strength, and then seek deep reductions in nuclear arsenals.⁴¹ Reagan believed that in the meantime US arms-control policy should seek to enhance “national security by limiting Soviet systems most threatening to the US.”⁴² Such an approach made

³⁷ Lettow, *Ronald Reagan*, 27.

³⁸ Allen to Reagan, ‘National Security Council Meeting September 15 1981 - 4:00 - 5:00 PM’, 14 September 1981, NSC00021 15 Sept 1981, Box 3, NSC: Meeting Files, RRL.

³⁹ Fischer, “US Foreign Policy”, 270.

⁴⁰ Allen to Reagan, ‘National Security Council Meeting September 15 1981 - 4:00 - 5:00 PM’, 14 September 1981, NSC00021 15 Sept 1981, Box 3, NSC: Meeting Files, RRL.

⁴¹ Pach, “Sticking to His Guns”, 89; Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in The Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 111.

⁴² Allen to Reagan, ‘National Security Council Meeting September 15 1981 - 4:00 - 5:00 PM’, 14

agreements with the Soviets in the near future unlikely: indeed, in September 1981, Allen told Reagan “Do not expect near term agreements.”⁴³ Subsequently, from 1981-1983, the Reagan administration’s approach to arms-control stymied progress. Instead of SALT II, in November 1981, the administration proposed the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START). The purported purpose of the talks was to reduce the overall number of strategic weapons in the superpowers’ arsenals. However, Reagan refused to begin negotiations until June 1982. Moreover, the administration proposed a cap on land-based warheads that would have required the Soviets to destroy more than half of their arsenal, whilst allowing the US to increase its numbers. As Moscow relied primarily on land-based missiles for its ‘deterrent’, reducing them by half would have weakened its position vis-à-vis the West.⁴⁴ Given the administration’s confrontational rhetoric and military build-up, the one-sided proposal appeared disingenuous. Understandably, the Soviets rejected the proposal, calling it a “propaganda ploy.”⁴⁵ With such an approach on arms-control, the Reagan administration was unlikely to be concerned about the affect the supply of the D5 to the British on US-Soviet arms-control efforts.

The administration also viewed strengthening the Western alliance as essential to countering the Soviet threat. As Secretary of State Alexander Haig told Reagan, in April 1981, “Rebuilding Alliance solidarity is a precondition for redressing the East-West military imbalance and for constraining Soviet international behavior.”⁴⁶ However, as Haig went on to tell Reagan, repairing the alliance would be “no easy task.”⁴⁷ Indeed, following Reagan’s election the difficulties that had beset US-West European relations during the Carter years only continued. These differences mainly arose for two reasons: firstly, many of Reagan’s NATO allies could not subscribe to Reagan’s approach due to the financial and political constraints they faced, and secondly, many NATO

September 1981, NSC00021 15 Sept 1981, Box 3, NSC: Meeting Files, RRL.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Fischer, “US Foreign Policy”, 271; Fischer, *The Reagan reversal*, 27-28.

⁴⁵ Fischer, *The Reagan reversal*, 2.

⁴⁶ Haig to Reagan, ‘The Atlantic Alliance, 29 April 1981’, NSC 00008 4/30/81, Box 91282, NSC: Meeting Files, RRL.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

governments simply did not agree with the tactics that the Reagan administration was proposing.

In the early 1980s, many West European governments faced economic and political difficulties that hindered their ability to strengthen defence forces in the way the Reagan administration wished. In most European countries the problems that had beset the global economy during the 1970s continued, with unemployment remaining high, alongside low, or non-existent, economic growth. This contrasted with the renewed growth of the US economy. As Piers Ludlow notes, "It may have been 'morning in America,' but on the other side of the Atlantic, dawn showed no sign of breaking."⁴⁸ Consequently, the US attempt to impede Western European companies from supplying components to the gas pipeline running from the Soviet Union to West Europe, met with considerable opposition from European governments. This outcry was partly because of the resultant painful economic costs of the White House's policy, as much as not agreeing with such crude means for demonstrating Western disapproval of Soviet actions in Poland. European countries needed to increase their foreign trade outlets, not reduce them. With Western European countries having built more substantial commercial ties with Eastern Europe than the United States, the FRG, France and Britain had far more to lose from using economic sanctions as a blunt tool in levering pressure on the Soviet Union.⁴⁹

Many NATO allies also faced difficult political circumstances, with left-wing politics resurgent across Western Europe. As Haig told Reagan: "American and European politics are largely out of phase, with environmentalism, anti-nuclear sentiment, and a hunger for disarmament on the rise in many Allied countries."⁵⁰ Following the NATO 'dual-track' decision of December 1979, the peace movement had grown rapidly, with mass demonstrations across Europe. Whilst these protests were left-wing in nature,

⁴⁸ N. Piers Ludlow, "The Unnoticed Apogee of Atlanticism? U.S.-Western European Relations during the Early Reagan Era," in *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s*, ed. Kiran Klaus Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 17.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 20-24.

⁵⁰ Haig to Reagan, 'The Atlantic Alliance, 29 April 1981', NSC 00008 4/30/81, Box 91282, NSC: Meeting Files, RRL.

those involved could not be dismissed as “apologists for Communism.”⁵¹ Participants were predominantly middle-class liberals, genuinely concerned about the possibility of nuclear war. As David Holloway rightly observes, “Very large numbers of people found it hard to believe that the addition of new nuclear-armed missiles would lessen the danger of war in a continent where many thousands of nuclear weapons were already deployed.”⁵² In these testing circumstances, European leaders found it difficult to respond favourably to the administration’s urgings that their governments should adopt a hard-line stance in the Cold War. The policies that the Reagan administration proposed would be extremely financially and politically costly to their European allies. Given the economic situation within Europe, it would be difficult for NATO governments to afford, let alone justify, a sustained military build-up. Moreover, given the anti-nuclear sentiment that existed, NATO rearmament would come at a high political price. As Haig told Reagan, European leaders had to take into account their political and economic situations “not only to maintain support for U.S. and Alliance policies but also to survive and to keep their parties from collapsing.”⁵³

However, at the heart of tensions in transatlantic relations during the early Reagan years were differences in tactics. These divergences did not emerge because West European leaders did not perceive a rise in East-West tensions during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Helmut Schmidt had initially pushed for a NATO response to the threat of Soviet SS-20s, a move supported by his fellow European leaders. Moreover, all Western European governments saw the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and events in Poland during the winter of 1981, as serious Cold War crises to which the West needed to respond. The divergences arose in deciding *how* to respond, in large part due to differing political outlooks. In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration was adopting a forceful and confrontational stance towards the Soviet Union, even as this fuelled increases in East-West tensions. As previously discussed, the remarkable rise of the conservative right in the US, alongside increased US-

⁵¹ John Young, “Western Europe”, 297-298.

⁵² Holloway, “The Dynamics of the Euromissile Crisis”, 19.

⁵³ Haig to Reagan, ‘The Atlantic Alliance, 29 April 1981’, NSC 00008 4/30/81, Box 91282, NSC: Meeting Files, RRL.

USSR tensions over Soviet adventurism in the 'third world', meant that Reagan's move away from détente was widely supported in his homeland. Within Europe, there had been less of a backlash against détente. Willy Brandt's policy of *Ostpolitik* had brought successes through normalising relations between the FRG and Eastern Europe, whilst the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was still held in high prestige. In addition, many Europeans viewed the disarmament component of the 'dual-track' decision as immensely important, especially given the mass protests against LRTNF deployment. Subsequently, unlike Reagan, European leaders were under pressure to continue direct dialogue with the Soviets.⁵⁴

Different political outlooks between the US and its key NATO allies aggravated these divergences in Cold War tactics: The US and Britain moved to the right, well before Germany. At the same time, France swung to the left, with the Presidential election of François Mitterrand, leader of the *Parti Socialiste*, in May 1981. The replacement of the centrist Valery Giscard d'Estaing, described by Schmidt as the "most pro-American French leader since World War II," with a socialist-led coalition, that included some Communist ministers in Cabinet, was "bound to complicate transatlantic relations."⁵⁵ Indeed, Hubert Védrine, Mitterrand's diplomatic advisor in the 1980s, later recalled, "The attitude and the policy of François Mitterrand towards the United States can be summarised as 'Friend, Allied, not aligned.'"⁵⁶ In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration subsequently faced a NATO alliance that was, overall, unlikely to adopt a hard-line approach to the Soviet Union and build up their defence forces as the White House wished.

The Thatcher government was a key exception to this lack of support from European capitals for Reagan's military build-up and confrontational approach to the Soviet Union. Margaret Thatcher was vehemently anti-Soviet, and desired a strong US-UK relationship. Subsequently, in briefing the President for Thatcher's State visit to Washington in February 1981,

⁵⁴ Ludlow, "The Unnoticed Apogee of Atlanticism?", 19-25.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁶ Translated from French. Hubert Védrine, *Les Mondes Le François Mitterrand: A L'Elysée, 1981 - 1995* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 163.

Alexander Haig described Britain as the United States' "most reliable ally."⁵⁷ However, as Haig also acknowledged, whilst Thatcher was strongly committed to improving alliance defence, Britain's economic troubles and Thatcher's subsequent political difficulties limited her ability to do so.⁵⁸

Margaret Thatcher had been elected in 1979 promising a fresh start for Britain's troubled economy. The UK during the late 1970s had seen double-digit inflation, which provoked social unrest. This culminated in the infamous 'winter of discontent' and the downfall of the Callaghan government. Thatcher promised radical changes to the British economy and the end of the Keynesian consensus. The principle aim of Thatcher's economic policy was to bring inflation under control, even if this meant a rise in unemployment. In Thatcher's view, the end would justify the means. However, as Geoffrey Howe conceded, "There was a danger that unemployment could be 'unpalatable' and [it] was likely to cause 'social strain'."⁵⁹ This happened. By the time of Reagan's election, many were judging the economic policies of the Thatcher government a disaster. Unemployment had soared to ten percent of the workforce, workers in the public sector were threatening to strike and the problems of inflation persisted.⁶⁰

By January 1981, Thatcher's political popularity had eroded. Whilst Thatcher enjoyed a substantial parliamentary majority, her political future looked uncertain due to the failure of her neoliberal monetarist policy. Critics, both inside and outside the Conservative party, were calling for a U-turn on economic policy. With the next election due by May 1984, Political commentators predicted that if there was no reversal in the economic downturn by late 1982 or 1983, Thatcher's leadership of the Conservatives would be challenged. Consequently, when Thatcher visited Reagan in February 1981, it generated strong media interest, not only because of her perceived closeness to the new President, but also the political difficulties that her belief in free-market economics had wrought. *The Economist* published a

⁵⁷ Haig to Reagan, 'Visit of Prime Minister Thatcher', February 1981, Briefing Book Re Visit of British Prime Minister Thatcher 25 - 28 February 1981, Box 91434, NSC: VIP Visits, RRL.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 36.

⁶⁰ Allen to Reagan, 'Your meeting with Prime Minister Thatcher', 24 February 1981, United Kingdom - General (February 1981-July 1981), Box CF219, Edwin Meese Files. RRL.

front-page depicting caricatures of Thatcher and Reagan at the seaside, with an unflinching Prime Minister beckoning an uncertain looking President into the water, with the line “Come in, it’s freezing.”⁶¹

Throughout the spring of 1981, Thatcher’s problems only deepened, and in the summer, arguments over Thatcher’s economic direction came to a vehement, and violent, head. In March 1981, Thatcher and Geoffrey Howe identified the budget deficit as the key factor preventing economic growth. Having failed to cut public spending, Howe took what he saw as the only option to get the deficit under control: tax rises. The result, as Richard Aldous succinctly writes, “Was a primal scream of national outrage.”⁶² Howe’s policy broke post-1930s economic thinking on what to do at a time of recession and high unemployment. 364 leading economists sent a letter to *The Times* denouncing government policy. Over the summer, a series of riots erupted across Britain, and the subsequent frightening images of violence, looting, and burning dominated the news. Racial tensions and insensitive policing helped fan the flames. However, with unemployment verging on twelve percent, and with a heavy concentration of this outside the prosperous ‘home counties’ of Southeast England, Britain was dangerously divided. Thatcher, with Britain close behind, seemed to be heading towards serious crisis.⁶³

Thatcher’s political situation deeply concerned the Reagan administration. At the end of July, the US ambassador to Britain, John Louis, compiled a detailed report on Britain’s political troubles. Demonstrating the importance the administration placed on the viability of Britain as an ally, Richard Allen believed the report “important enough to bring to the President’s personal attention.”⁶⁴ Louis’s report must have made alarming reading for the President: Thatcher’s weakened position made both her ability to support US policy and her re-election hopes increasingly precarious. According to Louis, the Thatcher government had “visibly lost its grip on the rudder in recent weeks,” and the centre swing-vote, which had won the May

⁶¹ Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 36.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶³ See Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 50-52; Graham Stewart, *Bang! A History of Britain in the 1980s* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), 56-61, 85-99.

⁶⁴ Allen to Louis, 17 August 1981, United Kingdom Vol.1 1/20/81 - 8//81 (4 of 6), Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

1979 election for Thatcher, was “deserting the Tories.”⁶⁵ Thatcher’s precarious political situation would inevitably affect her government’s ability to offer its usual unwavering support for US policy. Louis subsequently warned that the administration, “Must prepare... for a period in which we shall have difficulty counting fully on our usually staunchest ally, even as Thatcher will be clutching our coattails.”⁶⁶

Moreover, Thatcher’s political woes worried the White House because it meant that a Labour victory or a Labour led coalition in the next election looked increasingly likely – a result that would not be conducive to the administration’s interests. Following its 1979 election defeat, Labour became embroiled in a bitter left-right struggle over policies and control of the party itself. Following Callaghan’s resignation as Labour leader in 1980, the left wing Michael Foot won the leadership election, after winning the support of some centre-ground Labour MPs who concluded that he would be the best compromise candidate. Foot though was not successful at promoting party unity and the battle for control of the party continued. In January 1981, Labour held a special conference to decide new rules for electing the party leader. In a victory for the ‘radical’ left, the conference voted for a system whereby MPs and party members would have 30 percent of the Electoral College each, with the remaining 40 percent assigned to trade unions. The decision was the final straw for many moderates in the party. Due to the issue of some trade union leaders’ voting, without consulting their membership, former Cabinet minister, Shirley Williams, declared that the decision meant “four trade unions barons in a smoke filled room” would elect the next Labour Prime Minister.⁶⁷ The next day, David Owen, Shirley Williams, Roy Jenkins and William Rodgers relinquished their Labour membership, and in March 1981 started a new party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

These developments had serious ramifications for the direction of Labour’s defence policies. The party had yet to decide its foreign and defence manifesto commitments for the next election. However, many within the party,

⁶⁵ Louis to Haig, ‘Britain Drifts’, 31 July 1981, United Kingdom Vol.1 1/20/81 - 8/31/81 (4 of 6), Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Stewart, *Bang!*, 114.

especially on the left, had strong reservations about the UK purchase of Trident, opposed US cruise missiles based in Britain, and favoured cuts in defence spending, arguing that the country could not afford the Thatcher government's plans.⁶⁸ With many on the centre-left of the Labour party now defecting to the SDP and the 'radical' left in ascendance, it seemed likely that a Labour government would adopt defence policies that were antithetical of the Reagan administration's aims.

The Reagan administration was deeply concerned that the election of Labour would seriously undermine their efforts to strengthen NATO. As Richard Allen told the Vice President George Bush, in February 1981, "The policies being expounded [by Labour] are clearly at odds with US interest in an important British contribution to Alliance security.... We are concerned that a Labour mandate in 1984 could well pose significant problems in US-UK relations."⁶⁹ Similarly, Alexander Haig told Reagan, "The policies being expounded by the [Labour] left, which is ascendant, would seriously detract from the UK's role in NATO."⁷⁰ The chances of a Labour party securing a Parliamentary majority with such an ideological programme as the one the administration feared were doubtful; such policies would be "hard for some in the party to swallow, let alone the wider public."⁷¹ However, even as a minority the Labour party presented a threat to the Reagan administration's foreign policy interests, "capable of touching off a European slide down the anti-nuclear chute."⁷²

Subsequently, due to the foreign policy aims of the early Reagan administration, the Thatcher government faced favourable circumstances in their efforts to secure assistance from the White House for Polaris replacement, even if that meant, due to changes in the US strategic nuclear programme, a new agreement. In addition, faced with reluctant allies in

⁶⁸ Allen to Bush, 'Your Meeting with the Earl of Cromer', 18 February 1981, United Kingdom Vol.1 1/20/81 - 8/31/81 (6 of 6), Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Haig to Reagan, 'Visit of Prime Minister Thatcher', February 1981, Briefing Book Re Visit of British Prime Minister Thatcher February 25 - 28. 1981, Box 91434, NSC: VIP Visits, RRL.

⁷¹ Louis to Haig, 'Britain Drifts', 31 July 1981, United Kingdom Vol.1 1/20/81 - 8/31/81 (4 of 6), Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

⁷² Ibid.

Europe and a troublesome opposition in Britain, the Reagan administration had a deep interest in aiding the Thatcher government's efforts to strengthen Britain's defence forces by offering assistance with their economic troubles. However, despite this convergence of interests in early 1981, the British government still faced considerable uncertainty in its efforts to finalise Polaris replacement, as they waited for the US to make a decision on their strategic nuclear programme.

III

On 11 March 1981, Caspar Weinberger, Reagan's Secretary of Defense, reassured his British counterpart, John Nott, that the administration would "make available to the UK whatever Trident missile option" they selected as a follow-on to Trident C4.⁷³ Weinberger's commitment was, as David Gilmore, a senior civil servant within the Foreign Office, remarked "surprisingly forthcoming."⁷⁴ The assurance came after Nott mentioned, during a meeting on other matters, the difficulties that would arise for the UK if they continued procurement of Trident C4 whilst the US moved to the adoption of D5.⁷⁵ Without prompting, Weinberger offered his reassurance. As one British official remarked, Weinberger, "was answering a question which our side had not actually asked him."⁷⁶

The history of US uncertainty over the supply of MIRV systems to the British made Weinberger's forthcoming assurance even more remarkable. The follow-on to Trident C4 was the D5 missile system. The Trident D5 was "not just a modernised C4" but "a completely new missile."⁷⁷ Alongside the MX missile, the D5 was at the forefront of US ICBM technology. It could be MIRVed to 14 re-entry vehicles per missiles; the limit permitted by the provisions

⁷³ Wade to Weinberger, 'US/UK Cooperation on Trident - Information Memorandum', 20 March 1981, Briefing Book for the Visit by the Sec Def to UK 4/4/81 - 4/6/81 Germany 4/7/81 - 4/8/81 Rome Italy 4/9/81 - 4/10/81 (1), Box 91320, Sven Kraemer Files, RRL.

⁷⁴ Gilmore to Acland, 'The Trident Programme', 26 May 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Moberly to Weston, 'British Nuclear Deterrent', 10 April 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

⁷⁷ Defence Department, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 24 September 1981, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

negotiated in SALT II.⁷⁸ Consequently, the D5 system would provide the British with far greater operational capability than the C4.⁷⁹ Weinberger's forthcoming attitude about the provision of such an advanced MIRV system was in marked contrast to the Carter administration's reservations over the provision of C4, and doubts that the US would supply Poseidon in the 1970s. This contrast is not surprising given the administration's attitude towards arms-control: Reagan had campaigned on the need to strengthen the West's nuclear forces and defer strategic arms-control negotiations. However, as remarkable as Weinberger's assurance was, the British government remained uncertain about the future of Polaris replacement.

Weinberger's assurance was no guarantee that the administration would supply the D5 to the British on the same terms as C4. As Gilmore remarked to Antony Acland, a senior British diplomat:

Weinberger's remarks to Mr Nott were no guarantee that the US government as a whole would agree to a simple amendment of the Trident I Agreement in the way suggested. We certainly should not bank on American readiness to supply us with Trident II/D-5 on exactly the same terms as Trident I.⁸⁰

Moreover, Weinberger's commitment was not a firm guarantee that the Reagan administration would be willing to supply D5. As an unnamed official reminded Nott, whilst Weinberger's comments provided "as clear an indication" as the British "could reasonably wish for of DOD's full support," a firm commitment could only come from Reagan himself.⁸¹ It soon became clear that little thought had been given to the possibility of a British Trident D5 outside of the Pentagon. In early 1981, Ron Mason had "come close to giving the impression" to State Department officials that if the US were greatly to accelerate the D5 programme, the British government might want to procure this system rather than the C4. This, alongside Nott's conversation with Weinberger, provoked confusion amongst US State Department officials about the British government's policy on Trident. Subsequently, two officials from

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Nott to Thatcher, 'Trident', 15 July 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

⁸⁰ Gilmore to Acland, 'The Trident Programme', 26 May 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

⁸¹ CSA to John Nott, 'Trident: C.4 and D.5 Missile', 27 May 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

the State Department, Robert Blackwill and Jim Dobbins, made enquiries to John Weston, a senior Foreign Office official, in order to ascertain whether these “intimations... were a reflection simply of MOD thinking... or whether there lay behind this a more formed position on the part of HMG?”⁸² The officials needed to know because if their “were any disposition to alter the preferred British course, the State Department would wish to put a memorandum to Haig soon.”⁸³ As forthcoming as Weinberger’s assurance was, it was not a formal guarantee that the administration would supply D5 to the British.

Uncertainty about how central a role the DOD would have in obtaining the President’s agreement to supply D5, and any subsequent Trident negotiations, further undermined the solidity of Weinberger’s assurance. The National Security Council, under the directorship of David Aaron, Brzezinski’s deputy, had led the Trident C4 negotiations. Indeed, Brzezinski and Aaron played central roles throughout the preliminary discussions on Polaris replacement, and in the formulation of the eventual C4 agreement. In 1981, it seemed unlikely that the NSC would have the same influence in any Trident D5 agreement. Upon entering office, the Reagan administration created a new position, the White House Counsellor, who would oversee both foreign and domestic policy. Due to having a small staff, budget, and no real operational capabilities, the NSC derived almost all their bureaucratic power from a close working relationship with the President. With Richard Allen having little standing with the President anyway, the creation of this new role severely reduced the influence of the National Security Adviser.⁸⁴

Concurrently, Alexander Haig was making a strong effort “to become the ‘vicar’ of foreign policy and indeed to control the entire conduct of American international relations.”⁸⁵ On 6 January 1981, during his first real discussion with the President-elect, Haig set forth views that there needed to be a single manager of foreign policy, co-ordinating the different elements and

⁸² Weston to Moberly, ‘British Nuclear Deterrent the D-5 Option’, 20 March 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Lettow, *Ronald Reagan*, 46.

⁸⁵ Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, 15.

serving as the administration's spokesman. Haig noted in his memoir that Reagan "nodded after each point and agreed."⁸⁶ Haig subsequently believed that he had been given exclusive responsibility for foreign policy. On the day of Reagan's inauguration, Haig submitted to the President, through his Counsellor Edwin Meese, the draft of a proposed directive National Security Decision Directive (NSDD)-1. This directive assigned responsibilities in the field of national security. Haig, after consulting with Weinberger, Allen, and the Director of Central Intelligence William Casey, had worked out the respective responsibilities of each, and a structure for foreign policy decision-making that confirmed his dominant role. White House officials did not pass the directive onto the President for approval. Meese, and his associates in the White House Staff, believed that Haig was making a "powerplay" by attempting to push a new President into making a premature decision that would give too much authority to senior Cabinet officials at the expense of the President and White House Staff.⁸⁷ NSSD-1 was not issued until a year later, and then in a considerably modified form.

In the meantime, the State Department vied to exert their lead over US foreign policy and the US-UK nuclear relationship with it. Under the previous administration, there had been a single channel of communication on matters relating to US/UK nuclear co-operation through the NSC at the White House. However, as Blackwill reminded Weston, during their meeting in March 1981, "responsibility for these matters had now been transferred to the State Department."⁸⁸ Blackwill saw Weinberger's March assurances that the administration would supply D5 as an intrusion on this, and subsequently expressed his belief that there was "a case for tightening the lines of communication. It would help the Americans to avoid misperceptions or misunderstandings if there could be one single source of information for the subject matter in question."⁸⁹ Of course, he and his colleagues believed that this single line of communication should be with the State Department.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁸ Weston to Moberly, 'British Nuclear Deterrent the D-5 Option', 20 March 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Therefore, despite Weinberger's extremely forthcoming assurance, the British could not view it as a guarantee that the D5 system would be made available to them. With the NSC side-lined, and the State Department wrestling for control of US-UK nuclear co-operation, it looked likely that Haig's, presently unknown, opinion would be decisive in whether the British would be offered D5.

In the spring of 1981, in order to negate the problems that a change of missile system could cause for the Polaris replacement programme, the British government needed to make a decision in the near future on whether to stay with Trident C4 or switch to Trident D5. If the British were to keep the programme on schedule, they needed to make a decision on the hull design of the submarine by July. Such a decision would be difficult without knowing whether the submarines would be fitted with the C4 or D5 system, as the latter would require a larger hull. In addition, the British had already committed money on long-lead items for C4, if there was later a switch to D5, this would be wasted expenditure.⁹⁰ To make a decision between C4 or D5 the British government first needed to know if the Reagan administration was willing to supply the Trident D5 and, if so, on what terms. As Nott told Thatcher in mid-July: "We cannot take it formally for granted that the US would accede to a UK request for D.5, nor that the terms (eg [sic] on R&D levy) would be the same as for C.4. These matters would be for Presidential decision."⁹¹

To negate the problems that US indecision caused the Polaris replacement programme, particularly the risk of nugatory spending on the C4 system, MOD officials in procurement thought the best way forward was for the British to extract a "commitment to supply the UK with whatever system the US chooses for its own forces."⁹² However, senior Civil Servants, David Gilmore and Robert Hastie-Smith, disagreed strongly with the idea, believing it "out of the question."⁹³ A firm commitment, as the MOD had in mind, could

⁹⁰ Gilmore to Acland, 'The Trident Programme', 26 May 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA; Nott to Thatcher, 'Trident', 15 July 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Gilmore to Acland, 'The Trident Programme', 26 May 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

⁹³ Ibid.

only be obtained from the President. With Reagan yet to make a firm decision on whether the US would replace the C4 with the D5 missile system, even if the British obtained a firm commitment, it would mean putting the whole problem to UK ministers “on a purely hypothetical basis” since they would “not know which way the Americans would jump.”⁹⁴

For the British to get a firm commitment from the Reagan administration on supply of the D5 system, they first needed the White House to take a decision on their strategic modernisation programme. In the spring of 1981, it seemed unlikely that the administration would make a decision in the near future, and indeed, there was a possibility that it could take a year or two. As Gilmore told Acland in May 1981, there was “no chance” of the Reagan administration reaching a decision by July, and cautioned that this “may not happen until next year or even later.”⁹⁵

The administration’s dilemma over MX missile deployment was the main reason for the delay. In 1979, the Carter administration announced that they would build a mobile system that shuttled MX missiles among many possible launch sites. The Carter administration had not come to this decision lightly or quickly. However, even in the restricted form that they eventually endorsed, this basing system was highly controversial, as it required considerable tracts of land in Utah and Nevada. In 1980, Reagan had unequivocally campaigned against the plan, in part to placate the Republican constituents who, by merit of their proximity to the MX bases, were at risk from the Soviet attack and would suffer the economic and social disruptions that base construction would bring. However, as James Lebovic observes, “By rejecting the Carter alternative, the Reagan administration had painted itself into a corner.”⁹⁶ The Reagan administration wanted to respond quickly to the Soviet ‘threat’. Reagan saw the MX, a missile that could carry ten independently targeted warheads, as essential to closing ‘the window of vulnerability’: the fear that when the Soviets fully deployed their new MIRVed

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ James Lebovic, *Flawed Logics: Strategic nuclear arms control from Truman to Obama* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 134; Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 137.

systems (SS-18s and SS-19s), they would be able to carry out a disarming first strike against US land-based missiles. The effectiveness of the MX in closing the alleged window depended on basing it so it would be less vulnerable than the Minuteman missiles, located in fixed silos, which the MX would replace. The underlying logic of the Carter proposal was simple: if the US could not compete with the number of Soviet missiles, it could create decoy silos that would absorb Soviet missiles. The Reagan administration, having rejected such a basing system due to the strong political opposition in Republican states, now faced limited options. Tasked with finding the solution, Weinberger considered several other possibilities, including one with the unfortunate acronym DUMB (Deep Underground Missile Basing). With pressure mounting for a decision, Weinberger eventually decided on limited deployment of MX missiles in existing fixed silos and further studies of alternative basing systems. Reagan approved Weinberger's plan on 28 September 1981.⁹⁷ However in the summer of 1981, Britain, with its technical dependence on the US, needed the Reagan administration to make a timely decision on strategic modernisation. Without this, and in spite of the MOD and Pentagon's eagerness for a British D5 upgrade, Polaris replacement was at a standstill.

IV

By August 1981, the British government desperately needed a firm decision from the Reagan administration on whether or not they would upgrade their Trident system to D5, and then, if this was the case, a commitment that the British could purchase this advanced system rather than the C4. The British had already paid \$120 million towards the C4 system. A further instalment was due on 1 September 1981, of which about \$60 million was specific to C4.⁹⁸ US officials were insistent on the British paying this money, telling them that:

Failure to commit sums for the advance procurement of key materials and components would lead to discontinuation of essential production in the US and the need to requalify manufacturers and components at our [British] expense, which

⁹⁷ Pach, "Sticking to His Guns", 95; Lebovic, *Flawed Logics*, 133-135.

⁹⁸ Cooper to Nott, 'UK Strategic Nuclear Force', 19 August 1981, DEFE 24/2126, TNA.

would be very considerable.⁹⁹

However, if the British paid the next instalment on 1 September and then decided to upgrade to the D5 system, this would lead to \$180 million of wasted expenditure on C4; a particularly painful figure given the government's economic woes.

After receiving hints from the Pentagon, Nott was hopeful that Britain's uncertainty about the availability of the D5 could be resolved in the near future. As previously discussed, in the spring it seemed the White House might not make a decision on D5 until late 1982 or even 1983. By August, the pressure the administration faced over MX basing meant the administration was considering an earlier decision. Indeed, seemingly demonstrating the esteem the new administration held for the Thatcher government, Nott had received indications from the Pentagon that "A UK push in this direction would not be ill received."¹⁰⁰ Nott subsequently suggested to Thatcher that it would be useful for her to, politely, push for a decision when she next saw Reagan in Ottawa: "It would not be necessary or appropriate to say firmly now that we wanted D.5, still less to get into questions of terms. We need simply to register the point that we are much interested in their decision on the future of D.5, and hope it will be taken soon."¹⁰¹ Shortly after Nott's message to Thatcher, the Pentagon sent further indications to British officials that the administration was edging towards a nuclear modernisation decision. At a meeting on 20 July, Frank Carlucci, Deputy Secretary of Defense, told Acland that he and Weinberger "were pretty well convinced of the case in favour of the D-5 missile. A final decision had not yet been made, but that was the way things were heading."¹⁰² Seemingly, it would require only a small 'push' from the British for the US to make a decision.

It soon became apparent, though, that there had been limited thinking on a possible British Trident D5 outside of the Pentagon, and subsequently British attempts to push for a decision on D5 were not initially as successful as

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Nott to Thatcher, Trident, 15 July 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Henderson to Gilmore and Weston, 'Trident', 20 July 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

Nott had hoped. Thatcher did not have the opportunity to speak with Reagan about Trident during their time in Ottawa, instead she asked Robert Armstrong “to have a word” with Edwin Meese.¹⁰³ On 21 July, Armstrong did so, informing Meese that the British had “considerable interest” in the administration’s decision on whether to go for D5, as they would then have to decide whether to do the same.¹⁰⁴ Armstrong also explained that, as current British spending on C4 would be nugatory if they chose to adopt D5, his government “had an interest in the... decision being taken soon.”¹⁰⁵ Clearly unprepared to speak on the topic, in response Meese “took note of these points and promised to be in touch in due course.”¹⁰⁶

Armstrong’s enquiries did, though, prompt Weinberger to seek the President’s permission to talk to the British in more detail about the D5 issue. On 21 July, Weinberger wrote to Reagan recommending he “approve a more extensive dialogue with the United Kingdom on US nuclear weapon designs.”¹⁰⁷ The provisions of Executive Order 10956 required the President’s approval, as dialogue would “entail communication of certain restricted data.”¹⁰⁸ Seeing such discussions as important to enhancing the British nuclear deterrent, Richard Allen urged the President to give his approval: “The British Government has recently displayed a more active interest in its nuclear forces, and closer cooperation on weapon designs will enhance the British nuclear deterrent. It is in the interest of both the US and the UK for this cooperation to be encouraged.”¹⁰⁹ On 8 August 1981, Reagan gave Weinberger the required permission.¹¹⁰ The approval of Weinberger’s request, as well as Allen’s effusive backing, indicates widespread administration support of Britain’s nuclear programme. However, the exchanges raised questions about the

¹⁰³ Armstrong to Wade-Gery, ‘Trident’, 24 July 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Allen to Reagan, ‘Statutory Determination on Weapon Design Information’, 6 August 1981, United Kingdom Vol.1 1/20/81 - 8/13/81 (4 of 6), Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Reagan to Weinberger, ‘Statutory Determination on Weapon Design Information’, 8 August 1981, United Kingdom Vol.1 1/20/81 - 8/13/81 (4 of 6), Box 20, NSC: Country File, RRL.

assurance Weinberger provided to Nott in March – most significantly, that the President had not authorised this offer.

Over the course of the next month, the British secured the firm presidential agreement on supply of D5 that they needed. The Pentagon played a pivotal role in securing this commitment for the British, due to their wish to see both a British Trident D5 and to limit the impact the affair was having on Britain's defence budget. In mid-August, Frank Carlucci told a British official that in their upcoming meeting, Weinberger may be in a position to tell John Nott, "The final D-5 decision and will certainly want to discuss this and the budgetary implications for us [the British] in the short and the longer term."¹¹¹ Subsequently, Frank Cooper urged John Nott to use his meeting with Weinberger to push for a solution. Weinberger had already been told about British concerns over "building up nugatory expenditure on C4," and in response had "expressed a general willingness" to help the British with their "short term cash proposals."¹¹² With the next tranche of money for C4 due in two weeks, the British now needed to push Weinberger to provide such assistance. The administration's uncertainty about their nuclear forces could create severe financial difficulties for the British. Therefore, Cooper suggested that Nott put to Weinberger the, "radical proposal that until the US make up their own mind on the D5 programme, they themselves should bear the cost of any C4 specific advance procurement that may be necessary for our purposes."¹¹³ Due to the indications already given by Pentagon officials, Cooper believed that the administration "may be open to persuasion that it is in their own interests to bear these costs."¹¹⁴ If the administration was unprepared to assist to this extent, Cooper told Nott:

It will be even more critical, to search out the US policy and timing on D5. The crucial issue will be to assess the probability of the US taking an early decision to procure D5, and the arguments for our following them, are sufficiently strong to justify ceasing further

¹¹¹ FCO London to MOD UK, 'Visit of US Defense Secretary', 13 August 1981, DEFE 24/2126, TNA.

¹¹² Cooper to Nott, 'UK Strategic Nuclear Force', 19 August 1981, DEFE 24/2126, TNA.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

commitments on C4.¹¹⁵

On 21 August 1981, John Nott met Caspar Weinberger. In this meeting, Nott successfully obtained a resolution to Britain's short-term expenditure problems, and prompted Weinberger to secure a presidential commitment on the supply of D5. Weinberger told Nott that he expected President Reagan to make an announcement on the US strategic nuclear decisions in early September. Following recent discussions with the President, he believed "that a decision in favour of the Trident D5 system, as opposed to C4, was about 98% certain with an in Service date of 1989 or sooner if possible."¹¹⁶ In reply, Nott expressed his personal belief that there was "an overwhelming case" for the UK to also adopt the D5, and whilst he had not yet discussed it with Cabinet, he "did not anticipate any disagreement."¹¹⁷ Nott went on to explain that the "main immediate problem" was the threat of "nugatory expenditure on C4," due to the further tranche of money for C4 due on 1 September.¹¹⁸ If the British subsequently chose to adopt the D5, "this large sum of money would be completely wasted," something they "could not afford."¹¹⁹ Weinberger replied that he had not been aware of the September payment, and that he wanted to help resolve this budgetary difficulty. Weinberger was again extremely forthcoming, suggesting, "One possibility... would be for... Reagan to send a confidential letter to the Prime Minister before 1 September confirming that an announcement about D5 would be made shortly and that, in these changed circumstances the United States, would be ready to supply the UK with D5 missiles on broadly the same general terms as had been agreed by his predecessor for the provision of C4."¹²⁰ Weinberger was "virtually positive Mr Reagan would go for this."¹²¹ John Nott replied that such a letter would be

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Nott to Thatcher, 24 August 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹¹⁷ Beaumont, 'Record of the Secretary of State's Meeting with the US Defense Secretary on Friday 21 August – Nuclear Matters', 24 August 1981, DEFE 24/2126, TNA.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Gilmore, 'Mr Weinberger's Meeting with Mr Nott', 21 August, FCO 46/2751, TNA; Beaumont, 'Record of the Secretary of State's Meeting with the US Defense Secretary on Friday 21 August – Nuclear Matters', 24 August 1981, DEFE 24/2126, TNA.

¹²⁰ Gilmore, 'Mr Weinberger's Meeting with Mr Nott', 21 August, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

¹²¹ Beaumont, 'Record of the Secretary of State's Meeting with the US Defense Secretary on Friday 21 August – Nuclear Matters', 24 August 1981, DEFE 24/2126, TNA.

“most helpful.”¹²² It would provide the presidential agreement on provision of D5 that the British needed, and “might be an adequate basis on which the MOD could take the risk of cancelling the planned expenditure of \$150 million on C4 by 1 September.”¹²³

Aware of the tight deadline Britain faced, Weinberger subsequently secured a final decision on D5 and a commitment to supply the system to the British from the President.¹²⁴ On 24 August, Weinberger wrote to Margaret Thatcher informing her of the President’s decision.¹²⁵ The President’s commitment to supply D5 resolved some of the problems the British faced about the future of their Trident programme. The assurance enabled British ministers to examine the case for a D5 upgrade, without it being a purely hypothetical situation. In addition, the commitment removed the risk of further nugatory expenditure with Thatcher now able to agree to stall the next instalment for C4 due on 1 September.¹²⁶

Weinberger’s action again demonstrated the Defense Secretary’s support of the UK’s nuclear programme, alongside his concern to lessen the strain on Britain’s defence budget. The events also demonstrate Reagan’s firm support of the UK’s nuclear programme. His agreement was clearly swift, if not immediate; only four days after his meeting with Nott, on 24 August, Weinberger was able to write to Margaret Thatcher to inform her of the decision.¹²⁷ Weinberger wrote this letter at Reagan’s personal behest; he informed Nott, “I am sending a letter which the President specifically asked me to send to the Prime Minister.”¹²⁸ It is reasonable to assume that Reagan decided Weinberger should write the letter because this would be quicker to send and authorise than one from himself. In addition, the President and Weinberger were prepared to risk possible leaks to tell the British their decision to upgrade to D5 missiles, despite the fact it would be some weeks before a public announcement. The contrast with the paranoia and hesitancy

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Gilmore, ‘Mr Weinberger’s Meeting with Mr Nott’, 21 August, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

¹²⁴ Thomas to Gilmore, ‘The Trident D-5 Decision’, 25 August 1981, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

¹²⁵ Weinberger to Thatcher, 24 August 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹²⁶ Pattison to Norbury, 26 August 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹²⁷ Weinberger to Thatcher, 24 August 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹²⁸ Weinberger to Nott, 25 August 1981, DEFE 24/2126, TNA.

of the Carter administration is stark. However, Weinberger and Reagan's proactive approach was not only due to their support of Britain's nuclear 'deterrent'; a key consideration was concern about the implications of delay for Britain's finances. This concern is clear in the opening line of Weinberger's letter to Thatcher; "I understand that an early decision by the U.S. on the D-5 missile for our Trident submarines would greatly assist the budgetary planning for Her Majesty's Government."¹²⁹ However, despite the administration's concern over Britain's finances, Weinberger's letter to Thatcher did not mention that the administration would be prepared to sell D5 on broadly the same terms as agreed for C4, despite the Secretary of Defense's suggestion to Nott during their August meeting that he would also seek such a commitment from the President.¹³⁰ This meant that whilst the British could now be certain that the US were going to adopt D5, and that it would be made available to them, they still faced uncertainty on the terms that D5 would be supplied.

V

Only a few days after Nott's very helpful discussion with Weinberger, clear indications emerged that whilst the administration, and particularly Pentagon officials, were inclined to reduce British costs for Trident, they wanted certain commitments from the British in return. Whilst Thatcher, like Reagan, believed in 'strong defence', unlike the President, her government could not afford to invest heavily in both conventional and nuclear forces. In January 1981, Thatcher appointed John Nott as Minister of Defence. Nott immediately set out to bring Britain's "Defence programme in line with economic resources."¹³¹ Subsequently, on 25 June 1981, the Thatcher government announced extensive cost cutting and restructuring of Britain's military forces, which would reduce the Army, Navy and Civilian Defence work force, and reshape the Royal Navy. The Thatcher government did not view these changes

¹²⁹ Weinberger to Thatcher, 24 August 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Gilmore to Acland, 'Trident Public Attitudes', 5 February 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

as cutting Britain's defence spending but rather, faced with increased costs, the necessary reallocating of spending to key strategic areas. As Richard Vinen notes, "the defence review was largely about the relative allocation of defence spending rather than its overall size."¹³² The Trident programme was one of the key strategic areas for which the Thatcher government wished to find funding. The overall objective of the cuts, as Nott told Parliament a month later, was to cover the cost of buying Trident missiles as a replacement to the Polaris system.¹³³

Despite it being a means to raise funds for Trident, news of the British defence review provoked US concern. Whilst the British saw the defence review and subsequent 'cuts' as necessary to fund the Trident programme, the administration did not view Polaris replacement as the only key strategic area for the UK's defence budget. Reagan officials believed that in order to meet the global challenge of the Soviet Union, the Western alliance needed to build both strategic *and* conventional capabilities. In particular, Weinberger saw that, in order to limit Soviet incursions, nuclear strength was no substitute for conventional forces in vital regions, such as the Persian Gulf.¹³⁴ As previously discussed, in order to restore the conventional and nuclear balance with the Soviet Union, the Reagan administration adopted a federal budget wherein defence expenditure would consume more than thirty percent. At the same time, they slashed spending in all other government sectors, and cut taxes.¹³⁵ These cuts were part of the administration's efforts to tackle high inflation, interest rates and unemployment by changing the "whole approach to fiscal and economic questions that had dominated Washington thinking for more than a generation."¹³⁶ Subsequently, despite the large increase to their own defence budget, the White House did not want the US to have to spend even more on defence because of their allies withdrawing from key strategic areas.

¹³² Richard Vinen, "Thatcherism and the Cold War," in *Making Thatcher's Britain*, ed. Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 202.

¹³³ London to Defense, 7 July 1981, NATO-Countries-UK April 1981 - August 1981, Box 90100, Sven Kraemer Files, RRL.

¹³⁴ Pach, "Sticking to His Guns", 90.

¹³⁵ Beth A. Fischer, "Reagan and the Soviets: Winning the Cold War?" in *The Reagan Presidency*, 117; Fareed Zakaria, "The Reagan Strategy of Containment," *Political Science Quarterly* 105:3 (1990), 380.

¹³⁶ Pach, "Sticking to His Guns", 90.

Moreover, such withdrawals would be politically costly, raising as they would feelings that the United States was fighting the Cold War alone. Subsequently, the administration saw ensuring Britain's continued commitment to strengthening both their nuclear and conventional defence as a strategic, political and economic imperative.

Subsequently, having heard about possible serious cuts to conventional forces and, in particular, the British Navy, Weinberger was "anxious to get the full story from John Nott."¹³⁷ Following completion of his review, Nott informed Weinberger that the UK would increase its defence budget in full implementation of the NATO three percent aim, for the next four years. The UK would proceed with its Trident programme, improve its air defence and ground force capabilities for the defence of the UK home base, and keep their Army in Germany at 55,000. The main changes would be in the British Naval role in the Eastern Atlantic and the Channel; Here the British would "keep only two of the new Anti-Submarine Warfare carriers in service, instead of the three, and... reduce the number of destroyers and frigates committed to NATO from at least 59 to about 50."¹³⁸

In reply, Weinberger expressed concern about some of the proposals. However, he also understood the budget constraints the British faced. Subsequently, keen to ensure that Britain developed both their nuclear and conventional forces, Weinberger suggested several ideas that might ease Britain's financial pressures, and therefore limit the need for conventional cuts. These included, "greater US support for the Trident program, the possibility of purchasing one of their ASW [Anti-Submarine Warfare] carriers, and even the tentative idea of purchasing a long-term lease on Diego Garcia."¹³⁹ Weinberger saw that this last option could also be useful protecting US interests in the event of a Labour victory.¹⁴⁰ Weinberger and Nott agreed that a US-UK working group should be set up to discuss these ideas, and other areas where the US could ease the UK's defence budget issues. Weinberger's

¹³⁷ Weinberger to Reagan, 'Meetings with John Nott on British Defense Review', 22 June 1981, United Kingdom Vol. 1 1/20/81 - 8/81 (4 of 6), Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

forthcoming nature on assisting with the defence review stemmed from his concern that British cuts could damage the administration's efforts to strengthen the Atlantic alliance, and the political ramifications of this both at home and abroad. As he later told Reagan:

We would like to work with the British so that they can better keep their NATO commitment in the Atlantic. In particular, we must prevent the British Naval cuts from becoming an excuse for other Allies for defense cuts and from creating problems for us on the Hill.¹⁴¹

On 25-26 August, the first working group on US/UK Defence Co-operation met. With regards to Trident, the group discussed "a number of areas" where the US could offer the British "substantial savings."¹⁴² These included, "US basing/ support for British SSBNs [Ballistic Missile Submarines], reductions in the Trident R&D levy and the free transfer to the UK of surplus Polaris hardware."¹⁴³ The administration though were looking for certain commitments in return for these savings on Britain's nuclear programme. The US wanted British commitments on deployment outside of the NATO area. As US officials explained to their British counter-parts, the administration was concerned that Britain's planned reductions in surface fleet strength could lead to reduced activity, and this was an issue of political significance to Congress. Subsequently, US officials expressed "that to the extent that the UK was relieved of financial burdens (whether on Trident or elsewhere), they hoped the relief would be applied to remedying the gaps they foresaw might open in our naval capability in consequence of our defence review."¹⁴⁴

However, DOD officials went further than just trying to find savings on Trident and elsewhere in order to be helpful to the British, and thereby limit the cuts in the UK's naval capability. Over the course of the meeting, US officials attempted to use potential savings on Trident as a lever to shape Britain's wider defence policy. Reporting on the talks, B. Watkins, a civil servant at the Foreign office, told Gilmore that:

Throughout both days, the Americans came back again and again,

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Watkins to Gilmore, 'US/UK Defence Co-operation', 27 August 1981, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

using every conceivable peg for doing so, to their main concerns. The first of these was greater availability in time and ships of the stand by squadron. They recognised the important manpower and financial implications for us of this, but made clear that in their view these should be offset by savings on the Trident programme or elsewhere as a result of American assistance. Secondly they said bluntly that they did not agree with the strategy implicit in the recent White Paper with its emphasis on maritime air and SSN's [fleet submarines].¹⁴⁵

The leader of the British delegation fought back against these attempts and "made quite clear that the objective of the exercise was to try to identify ways in which, through co-operation, money could be saved... The UK was not going to change its defence programme or its strategy simply because American ideas differed from our own."¹⁴⁶ The leader of the US delegation, Dov Zakheim, accepted these points. However, Watkins still surmised that:

There is no doubt that what the Americans are engaged in is an attempt to introduce alterations into the defence programme... in exchange for financial savings in the Trident programme and elsewhere... and to ensure a continued RN [Royal Navy] presence in areas important to the US.¹⁴⁷

Like the C4 agreement, any reductions in price for Trident D5 would clearly come with a political price tag, and it seemed likely at this point that the US demand would be some kind of British commitment to maintain naval deployment in areas of key strategic importance to the US.

The US/UK Defence Co-operation working group provided British officials with a good indication of the Pentagon's views on the supply of D5: they would be willing to offer a reduced price for Trident D5 in order to secure some conventional commitments from the British. However, with the State Department still vying to ensure that they led any Trident negotiations, it seemed increasingly unlikely that Weinberger would play the lead role in deciding the terms of supply. The State Department had been excluded from Weinberger's August efforts to gain presidential approval on offering the D5

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

system to the British. State officials only found out about the letter and the “Presidential decisions it embodied after its despatch.”¹⁴⁸ This lack of consultation “enraged” the State Department.¹⁴⁹ They believed they were in charge of US-UK nuclear co-operation on the American side. Subsequently, Bud McFarlane, Counsellor to the Department of State, instructed Blackwill to meet with Wade-Gery, in order to ensure that any Trident D5 negotiations were not a repeat of this “deplorable lack of coordination.”¹⁵⁰ Blackwill informed Wade-Gery that the State Department, rather than the NSC as last time would lead any Trident negotiations. In an attempt to ensure that the Reagan administration adhered to the State Department’s plan, Blackwill told Wade-Gery that a letter from the Prime Minister to the President, requesting negotiations, “would be procedurally unsatisfactory-at the Washington end: the White House would send it to the Pentagon, whence State would have to retrieve it.”¹⁵¹ As such, Blackwill requested that Wade-Gery send any British request for D5 to McFarlane. In response, Wade-Gery, wishing “to avoid taking sides in the Washington turf fight,” told Blackwill, Thatcher would wish to report the British decision on which system to adopt herself. Following further discussion, Blackwill eventually accepted, “as a tolerable pis-aller,” Wade-Gery’s suggestion that at the same time as the Prime Minister’s message went to the President, Robert Armstrong would send McFarlane a message drawing attention to it and saying that he “looked forward to hearing from him about the modalities.”¹⁵²

The State Department’s concerted efforts to lead the Trident D5 negotiations meant that British officials could be less certain about receiving a reduced price for D5, than if the DOD led. Reagan’s Cabinet members and top White House staff were of no single persuasion on international policy. The administration was composed of conservative ideologues, including Caspar Weinberger, Assistant Secretary for Defense for International Security Policy Richard Perle, and Richard Allen, and pragmatists like Chief of Staff James A.

¹⁴⁸ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, ‘Trident Negotiations’, 16 September 1981, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Baker III and Alexander Haig.¹⁵³ These divisions, as Samuel Wells notes, proved “a complicating factor for US allies.”¹⁵⁴ The debate over Britain’s D5 upgrade is a good example of this.

Alexander Haig and many of his fellow officials in the State Department believed in waging “a vigorous competition focused on containing and countering direct or indirect Soviet expansion beyond the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, but not to carry the challenge to Soviet rule in the Soviet Union or the bloc.”¹⁵⁵ This continued the approach taken by Nixon and Kissinger, and largely, although less consistently, by Carter and Brzezinski. Whilst, US-UK nuclear co-operation conformed with this containment approach, it did not, as the various up and downs during the Nixon and Carter years demonstrated, necessarily pre-ordain its continuation. On the other hand, leading officials in the Pentagon and the NSC staff, wished to mount a more direct challenge to the Soviet leaders. As well as containing Soviet expansionism, they wished to ‘roll back’ communism, by pressing “political and economic competition into Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself even more vigorously.”¹⁵⁶ As Garthoff observes, those advocating such an approach:

Had little, or even negative, interest in negotiation; they believed the Soviet Union should be isolated, rather than brought into a network of interdependent ties with the West. And they were less interested in negotiating arms control, even negotiating from strength; they wished to put pressure on the Soviet Union through an intensified arms competition and retain and exercise American freedom to expand its military capabilities and options, with the aim of reasserting American primacy.¹⁵⁷

Assisting the British with upgrading to the more advanced D5 system clearly fitted with this more aggressive approach to the Soviet Union; within such thinking it did not matter that provision of the D5 system would likely undermine any ongoing arms-control negotiations with the Soviet Union.

At the same time, the State Department did not appear as congenial to British interests on the D5 upgrade as Weinberger and his fellow officials at

¹⁵³ Samuel Wells, Jr. “Reagan, Euromissiles, and Europe,” in *The Reagan Presidency*, 134.

¹⁵⁴ Wells, Jr. “Reagan, Euromissiles, and Europe”, 134.

¹⁵⁵ Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, 31.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

the Pentagon. At the end of his talk with Wade-Gery, Blackwill “Made two characteristically barbed comments.” Firstly, that the administration had made no decision that the D5 “would be made available to Britain on specifically favourable terms.” Secondly, that public reaction to the C4 agreement had been “more muted than expected.” The Thatcher and Reagan governments “might not be so lucky next time. Anglo-American strategic nuclear cooperation had plenty of enemies, not least in the US. The larger the weapon system that was involved, the stronger the criticism was likely to become.”¹⁵⁸

Within these circumstances of uncertainty about the costs of D5, British ministers needed to decide whether to switch to the more expensive and advanced D5 system, or stick with the C4 and lose, eventually over the lifetime of the missile system, commonality with the US.¹⁵⁹ The decision affected the viability of Britain’s future nuclear ‘deterrent’, the country’s long-term budget, and could potentially trigger problematic domestic and foreign policy ramifications.

John Nott believed that Britain should adopt the D5 system due to the possibility of cost-savings, relaying Britain’s short-term defence expenditure problems, and maintaining commonality. In September 1981, Nott outlined his arguments to Thatcher. He estimated that the D5 would cost no more than £500 million extra than the C4 over 15 years, and that “given the major advantages of commonality,” the D5 “could prove even cheaper in the end.”¹⁶⁰ However, in recent months, the strain on Britain’s nuclear budget had increased further. As Nott told Thatcher, the D5 decision had been made more complicated “by the discovery,” several months before, that the British had “little choice but to ‘re-motor’ the existing Polaris rocket motors” following test-firing failures.¹⁶¹ This meant that the already stretched defence budget needed to stretch further. To help accommodate the extra cost of the D5, and to fit the cost of re-motoring Polaris within the existing defence budget, Nott

¹⁵⁸ Wade-Gery to Armstrong, ‘Trident Negotiations’, 16 September 1981, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

¹⁵⁹ Howe to Thatcher, ‘Trident’, 1 September 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹⁶⁰ Nott to Thatcher, ‘UK Strategic Nuclear Force’, 14 September 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

suggested that they “slip the date for the deployment of Trident by one or two years.”¹⁶² With Chevaline and the re-motoring of the existing Polaris missiles, Nott assessed that the British could “retain a viable strategic deterrent over a short extension of this kind.”¹⁶³ The D5 provided this option, as the British would not be at the end of the US production line. Summarising his arguments, Nott asserted, “It looks as if the choice of D5 is pretty overwhelming.”¹⁶⁴ Nott’s unequivocal support of a D5 switch was representative of, as Weston reflected to Gilmore, the “considerable head of steam... building up in the Ministry of Defence in favour of changing to the D5 missile.”¹⁶⁵

Nott’s arguments primarily addressed “cost, commonality and operational capability.”¹⁶⁶ However, the decision British ministers faced was more complicated than this. Subsequently, outside of the MOD many British officials held reservations about a switch to the D5 system. In September 1981, Geoffrey Howe wrote to Thatcher and Nott, telling them that whilst he was “not opposed in principle to D5,” he was concerned about the costs. His concern centred on the “significantly larger initial capital expenditure” that choosing the larger D5 missiles and submarine would cause. He believed that the resulting expenditure would exceed the £5000 million (at summer 1980 prices) that had been the upper limit of the range envisaged when ministers had taken the decision to opt for the C4 two years before. Moreover, Howe saw that as the D5 had yet to be developed, “estimates of its cost must be uncertain and may escalate significantly.”¹⁶⁷ Despite these concerns, because of the lessons of Chevaline, Howe still believed the D5 would be the best choice: “Despite all these points, my instinct is that a move to D5 would be right: to be stuck with a system no longer in service with the Americans could in the end prove very expensive - as the Chevaline experience shows.”¹⁶⁸

Understandably, following the recent US-UK working group meeting, some British officials were also concerned about what ‘political price tag’ the

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Weston to Gilmore, ‘UK Strategic Nuclear Forces’, 16 September 1981, FCO 46/2753, TNA.

¹⁶⁶ Weston to Gilmore, ‘Trident’, 16 July 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

¹⁶⁷ Howe to Thatcher, ‘Trident’, 1 September 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

administration might impose in return for reducing the costs of D5. In early September, whilst on a brief stopover in Washington, David Gilmore met with Robin Renwick, a British diplomat. During their discussion, Gilmore stressed that “We [the British] should not be deluded into thinking that the helpful attitude of Weinberger and the Pentagon on Trident... is a demonstration of pure and undiluted generosity.”¹⁶⁹ Renwick “very much agreed with this” and believed the British “could expect some form of bill from the Americans before long.”¹⁷⁰ Indeed, such was Renwick’s concern about possible US demands, he later wrote to Gilmore, “to strongly endorse” his comments in Washington. In this letter, Renwick stressed that whilst Weinberger had expressed willingness to find ways to help the British with the Trident programme and their conventional defence efforts:

It is no use imagining that we are going to get anything in this area for nothing... One is bound to be sceptical as to whether it will be easy for Weinberger to propose to the President additional measures to help us e.g. in relation to naval support and the Trident programme, which would entail some... additional costs for the Americans, if he is not at the same time able to indicate that some account has been taken of the anxieties they have been expressing in the bilateral consultations about conventional naval capabilities.¹⁷¹

Gilmore subsequently forwarded this warning to other British officials, along with his own stark counsel: “As I think you agree, we clearly need to be extremely cautious lest at the end of the day we find the Americans making some pretty excessive demands of us as a quid pro quo.”¹⁷²

Some British officials were also concerned that switching to the D5 could create political difficulties for the British. The existing defence budget had to accommodate all costs for the Trident programme.¹⁷³ Any increase in the costs of Trident would therefore likely impact Britain’s conventional forces, as the justification for the Defence Review demonstrated. Subsequently, Foreign office officials warned that a switch to D5 “must be

¹⁶⁹ Gilmore to Stewart, ‘Defence Collaborations with the Americans: Trident et al’, 18 September 1981, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Howe to Thatcher, ‘Trident’, 1 September 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

expected to stir new doubts in the Alliance and elsewhere about the opportunity cost of Trident in relation to our other defence responsibilities.”¹⁷⁴

In addition, some British officials were concerned about the domestic ramifications of a switch to D5. The government argued that Britain’s need to maintain a ‘credible nuclear deterrent’ justified the huge expense of Britain’s nuclear programme. Some British officials worried that reopening the Trident issue and the delayed deployment of the D5 system, alongside the decision to re-motor the Polaris missiles, and “lingering uncertainties about the viability of Chevaline,” risked “undermining the public credibility of the government’s position.”¹⁷⁵ Whilst alleviating Britain’s short-term budget problems, a switch to D5 could make “the whole future of the UK deterrent more vulnerable to Party political assault by the Opposition over the next few years.”¹⁷⁶

By September 1981, the British had secured confirmation that the Reagan administration would switch their submarine missile system to the Trident D5, and that this advanced system would be available to them. However, even with this D5 commitment British uncertainty about the future of Polaris replacement remained. Despite aligned interests, the Reagan administration had not given the Thatcher government assurance that they would provide the system at a reduced price. Instead, there were clear indications that the administration would want some form of *quid pro quo* in return for a reduction. Moreover, the State Department, who was heavily lobbying to lead the Trident negotiations, was at the same time sending mixed signals about their support for a British upgrade to Trident D5. Clearly, any D5 deal would be contingent on further negotiation.

For the moment, British officials could only speculate about what price they would have to pay, financially and politically, for D5. With no decision yet made on MX basing, Reagan delayed his announcement on strategic modernisation until early October. Until this announcement, and the risk of

¹⁷⁴ Defence Department, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 24 September 1981, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

premature leaks removed, the British could not have the follow-up detailed discussions with the US they required to gain information about their options, nor could ministers meet to discuss it.¹⁷⁷ For the time being, the UK's dependency on US missile systems paralysed Polaris replacement, causing difficulties and uncertainty for the British government.

¹⁷⁷ Nott to Thatcher, 'UK Strategic Nuclear Force', 14 September 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

Chapter 6

Red Threat: The Reagan administration and the United Kingdom's D5 upgrade, October 1981 – March 1982

“We wanted the Trident deal to be struck. It was one more arrow in the quiver. Britain was the lynchpin to NATO and more important than any other single power.”

- Richard Perle.¹

I

On 2 October 1981, President Reagan publicly declared his plans to modernise the US nuclear triad, subject to Congressional authorisation and financing. Reagan announced they would base the new MX missile in existing silos, which would be hardened. The President resurrected the B-1 bomber, cancelled by Carter, and announced plans to build at least one hundred.² Reagan also announced that the US would build at least one Trident submarine every year, and the larger and more accurate Trident D5 would replace the submarine's Trident C4 missiles by 1989.³

The Reagan administration's strategic modernisation decision forced the British government to reassess their plans for Polaris replacement. The Thatcher government now had to decide whether to stick with Trident C4 or upgrade to the D5 system. As previously discussed, Reagan's belief in the need for the West to strengthen its nuclear and conventional capability provided an implicit rationale for the administration's sale of Trident D5 to the British. Reagan believed modernising the United States nuclear triad was essential to counter the threat of the Soviet Union. In his letter informing Thatcher of his announcement, Reagan restated his belief that arms reductions and peace could only be achieved by increasing the strength of the West:

This comprehensive program will correct deficiencies that have

¹ Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, 573.

² Garthoff, *The Great Transition*, 3.

³ Reagan to Thatcher, 1 October 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

resulted from the rapid expansion of Soviet military power... It is important to recognize that without such a program there would be no incentive for the Soviets seriously to negotiate meaningful and substantial arms reductions, a course to which my Government remains fully committed.⁴

Due to a shared belief in the need to counter the supposed threat of the Soviet Union, the Thatcher government supported Reagan's modernisation programme.

In March 1982, the Reagan administration agreed to sell the D5 system to Britain on favourable terms, and subsequently the US and UK signed the Trident D5 agreement. However, despite the convergence of US-UK defence policy interests and the Reagan-Thatcher friendship, the US supply of Trident D5, at a substantially reduced price, was not a foregone conclusion. As this chapter will discuss, whilst the British wait for the Reagan administration to take a decision on the D5 and offer the system was now over, the uncertainty British policy-makers felt about the future of their Polaris replacement programme continued. Due to Britain's technical dependence on the US for its nuclear missiles, the Thatcher government "pretty much had to take or leave whatever the United States offered."⁵ This dependence left the Thatcher government with two less-than-ideal options. If the British chose to stay with the C4, they risked spending huge sums on maintaining the system as the US switched to Trident D5. The astronomical costs of the Chevaline programme, as well as the recent need to re-motor Polaris missiles, had provided British ministers with stark evidence of the potential costs of losing commonality with the US. However, the Reagan administration's offer of the D5 missile also came with drawbacks. When making their offer, the administration had not offered a reassurance that the D5 sale would be on the same terms as the C4 agreement, or even that they would sell D5 at a reduced price. As a more advanced system, the full price tag of the D5 system was beyond the UK's budget, and these costs could escalate further as the missile was still in development. Furthermore, the D5's capabilities were out of proportion to Britain's defence requirements. As such, British acquisition of the D5 missile

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 57.

would likely increase public opposition to the Trident programme. The Reagan administration's decision to upgrade to D5, left British ministers in a catch-22 situation. Reflective of this, in November 1981 when MISC 7 met to deliberate whether Britain should adopt Trident D5, ministers' concerns about costs and the concurrent political ramifications meant they were unable to make a decision. Only in January 1982, buoyed by their overriding belief that Britain should retain an 'independent strategic deterrent', did MISC 7 decide to adopt D5. However, this decision was subject to the proviso that they would take a final decision after negotiations with the US had determined the broad terms of sale for the D5 system.

The final price of the D5 was contingent on complex negotiations. The Reagan administration's overall foreign policy interests and aims influenced the terms they sought in return for Trident. The British received a favourable deal due to the convergence of US-UK interests. The administration's eventual offer to sell Trident D5 at a reduced price was in their interests: the sale aided the administration's efforts to strengthen western nuclear and conventional forces in order to counter the perceived threat of the Soviet Union. In addition, the substantial reduction, and thereby the maintenance of Britain's conventional forces, helped alleviate opposition in NATO to the sale, and negated some of the anti-nuclear left's criticism of the deal. However, even within this conducive environment, US officials still drove a hard bargain with the British, in order to extract the greatest benefit possible. In this way, the D5 deal was not a foregone conclusion, but a negotiation in which genuine stakes were involved.



Police arrest a protester during a demonstration against the installation of US Pershing missiles in Ramstein, West Germany.

In contrast with the Carter administration, the Reagan White House was not concerned about the Soviet reaction to a Trident deal. As previously discussed, the early Reagan administration viewed arms-control as a low priority, often seeming completely uninterested. Reagan had ran against Ford (in the 1976 primaries) and Carter (in the 1980 presidential election) emphasising the dangerous nuclear concessions that had been granted to the Soviets through détente. Following on from NATO's 'dual-track' decision, on 23 September 1981, the US and Soviet Union finally reached agreement to begin formal talks on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF). Subsequently, in November 1981, Reagan proposed the so-called 'zero option'. This proposal called for the elimination of all intermediate-range nuclear forces in Europe. Such a scheme would mean the removal of all Soviet SS-20s, in return for US agreement not to deploy their cruise missiles and Pershing IIs. As the US missiles were still on the production line, no one, least of all the Reagan administration, was surprised when the Soviets rejected the inequitable offer, calling it a

“propaganda ploy.”⁶ Reagan had proposed the ‘zero option’ more as a means to ensure NATO deployment of LRTNF than as a serious attempt to secure reductions in INFs in Europe. The Reagan administration saw Western countries’ hesitation on LRTNF deployment as detrimental to NATO’s credibility and the arms-control process. As he proposed the ‘zero option’ to Reagan, Weinberger argued, that, if the Soviets rejected the policy after the US was seen to give it a “good try,” the Europeans would be “in a position where they would really have no alternative to modernisation.”⁷ This argument won Reagan’s support for the proposal.⁸

Subsequently, the Reagan administration was not concerned about the impact of a Trident D5 sale on the INF talks. When the INF negotiations began, the “cornerstone of the Soviet position” was “the demand that British and French nuclear forces be ‘taken into account.’”⁹ Like the Carter White House, the Reagan administration was determined to keep British and French systems out of arms negotiations. Both administrations saw that it was not in US interests to trade off their own systems against their allies. Both governments believed that putting Soviet Union nuclear forces against all Western allied forces, and Soviet superiority over any other power, would undercut the US ‘deterrent’. They also feared that the inclusion of British and French systems could lead to non-nuclear allies developing their own capabilities due to doubts in the nuclear umbrella. However, unlike the Carter administration, concerns about the Soviet reaction played no part in their consideration of whether to supply D5 to the British. This is despite D5 being a more advanced system, which lessened US negotiators ability to argue that British forces were insignificant. A 4-boat D5 system with 16 tubes per submarine would be capable of delivering as many as 896 warheads, though it was not intended to deploy more than 480; for comparison, four C4 boats could deliver 512 warheads, and the Polaris/Chevaline force 128.¹⁰ Not

⁶ Fischer, *The Reagan reversal*, 28.

⁷ Marilena Gala, “The Euromissile Crisis and the Centrality of the ‘Zero Option,’” in *The Euromissile Crisis*, 161.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

⁹ ‘Exclusion of British and French Nuclear Forces from INF negotiations’, n.d., British/French Nuclear Forces 1983 - 1984 (1), RAC Box 2, Ronald Lehman Files, RRL.

¹⁰ Armstrong to Thatcher, ‘The United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent MISC 7 (81)’, 11 January

surprisingly, in November 1983, following the administration's refusal to include British and French delivery systems, the INF talks were suspended.

However, it is important to note that the Reagan administration's lack of concern about the effect of a D5 sale on US-Soviet relations was primarily due to their conception of US interests and how to 'win' the Cold War, rather than support for Britain's nuclear programme *per se*. The events of Reykjavik five years later viscerally demonstrate this hierarchy. On 11 October 1986, Reagan met Mikhail Gorbachev, then Soviet leader, for the Reykjavik summit. Gorbachev opened negotiations with a bold proposal: offering fifty percent cuts in nuclear arsenals and the elimination of US and Soviet intermediate-range missiles in Europe, while permitting British and French missiles to remain.¹¹ As the talks continued, the proposals grew even bolder. Reagan and Gorbachev eventually agreed to get rid of all their strategic nuclear weapons. The only sticking point was Gorbachev's insistence that the US confine the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) to a laboratory research programme, and Reagan's refusal. Much to the disappointment of Soviet and US officials, the talks collapsed.¹² This near move by Reagan to abandon all US strategic nuclear weapons angered Thatcher. Michael Jopling, a Cabinet minister who was with her when she was briefed about the summit, "never saw her more incandescent."¹³ Reagan had come close to abandoning the system of nuclear 'deterrence,' a system Thatcher firmly believed "had kept the peace for forty years."¹⁴ Moreover though, if Reagan and Gorbachev had agreed to eliminate all strategic nuclear weapons, this would "have effectively killed off the Trident missile" forcing Britain to acquire a non-US system if they were to keep an independent nuclear programme.¹⁵ In 1981 though, the Reagan administration's approach to arms-control meant they were likely to assist the British Polaris replacement programme, more-so than the Carter administration prior to the invasion of Afghanistan. However, Reagan's rhetoric on nuclear weapons heightened political tensions in Europe, and

¹¹ 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹² Cannon, *President Reagan*, 687.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 685-691.

¹⁴ Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 221.

¹⁵ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 471.

¹⁵ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, 471; Aldous, *Reagan & Thatcher*, 221.

thereby made the environment for a British D5 announcement more problematic.

Reagan's declarations during his election campaign that he would defer arms-control and strengthen the West's nuclear forces, invoked fear amongst European leaders that his presidency would heighten political sensitivity about nuclear weapons in Western Europe. After Reagan's election, his administration confirmed their insensitivity to the political tensions that dominated Europe. In September 1981, the President warned in a speech that the US was ready to pursue a nuclear arms-race. Then in November, Reagan made a statement that nuclear war in Europe need not lead to a strategic exchange. Such comments heightened European fears that their security took second place in the eyes of the Reagan administration.¹⁶ With the impending deployment of INF missiles in Western Europe, Reagan's remarks fuelled the anti-nuclear demonstrations of October and November 1981.¹⁷ Many of these protests were of unprecedented size and intensity. For example in Britain, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) organised an antinuclear rally in London's Hyde Park that attracted 250,000 people.¹⁸ Subsequently, West European officials expressed their dismay to the White House about their insensitive comments, and asked for assistance in winning public support for the planned INF deployment on their territory.¹⁹

By stoking anti-nuclear sentiment, the Reagan administration heightened the risk of an adverse reaction in Britain to a switch to Trident D5. Amongst the British public, their government's agreement to base INF missiles in the country was extremely controversial. According to opinion polls a majority of the country, ranging from 48 percent to 61 percent, opposed deployment.²⁰ Much of the opposition to the government's nuclear policy focused on the decision to station US cruise missiles in the UK rather than the acquisition of Trident C4. The public saw the cruise missiles as "a new and substantial addition to Western nuclear capability"²¹; whilst they viewed

¹⁶ Young, "Western Europe", 293.

¹⁷ Wells, Jr. "Reagan, Euromissiles, and Europe", 136.

¹⁸ See Guasconi, "Public Opinion and the Euromissile Crisis", 276.

¹⁹ Wells, Jr. "Reagan, Euromissiles, and Europe", 136.

²⁰ See Guasconi, "Public Opinion and the Euromissile Crisis", 273.

²¹ Gilmore to Acland, 'Trident Public Attitudes', 5 February 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

Trident as a “continuation of the existing British four-boat deterrent force.”²² However, with the greater capability of the D5, opposition to it amongst the British public was more likely, particularly due to the rise in anti-nuclear sentiment. Moreover, if the Thatcher government did not secure a substantially reduced price for the D5, it would be difficult for them to present the upgrade as a necessary cost-saving choice. Instead, opponents to Trident could more forcefully argue that the government took the decision in order to increase the country’s nuclear capability. If the British public viewed the acquisition of D5 as an increase in capability rather than the ‘modernisation’ of Polaris, this would fuel opposition to Trident modernisation and cruise missile deployment, as well as boost support for Labour’s disarmament policies. The domestic political situation of the autumn of 1981 made it crucial that the Thatcher government secured a reduced price for Trident D5. At the same time, the administration’s wider foreign policy aims and concurrent concerns about the growth of anti-nuclear sentiment in Britain made the offer of a reduced price for D5 more likely. However, despite this conducive environment, in the aftermath of Reagan’s announcement of the modernisation of the US nuclear triad, US officials provided the British with very little reassurance about the cost of the D5 system.

III

With Reagan’s public announcement on the upgrade to Trident D5 missiles, British ministers could now consider whether to follow suit. With some ministers away from London, MISC 7 were not able to meet until several weeks after Reagan’s announcement.²³ In the interim, British concerns about the potential costs of the D5 system further increased.

On 5-6 October, the US/UK Defence Co-operation working group met for the second time. In these talks, participants discussed the potential R&D charge the US would ask Britain to pay for D5. As with the Trident C4, the overall price of the D5 system was comprised of different charges. As well as

²² Ibid.

²³ Wade-Gery to Renwick, ‘Trident’, 22 September 1981, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

the basic missile costs, the British would have to pay a charge for facilities and overheads, as well as a payment towards US research and development costs. Since 1976, US regulations stipulated that the R&D charge should be on a pro-rata basis. Strict application of the pro-rata principle to a D5 purchase would result in a charge to the British of about \$900 million. However, the President could approve a reduction in the R&D charge if he saw this to be in the wider interests of the US. In 1980, the Carter administration agreed to maintain the levy for Trident C4 at the same level as Polaris, a five percent surcharge, in exchange for British agreement to operate US Rapier systems based in the UK. Subsequently, when estimating the costs of the D5 missile, British officials had “assumed that the 5% charge would be applicable.”²⁴ This would mean R&D charges for the D5 of about \$150 million. Some British officials were hopeful that the UK could secure an even lower rate, due to discussions between Nott and Weinberger, at the first US/UK Defence Co-operation working group, that the administration might reduce or waive the R&D charge in order to transfer resources to the Royal Navy surface fleet and reduce the “direct cost of Trident to the UK.”²⁵

The second US/UK Defence Co-operation working group raised doubts about these hopes, and the accuracy of British calculations based on a five percent R&D charge for D5. In the meeting, it became clear that the DOD officials present had not calculated a pro-rata R&D charge, with the figure of \$900 million “a surprise to senior officials.”²⁶ However, they made clear that this oversight was not because they were using a five percent charge as the base for their calculations. DOD officials emphasised that they had yet to decide the R&D levy for D5 and the pro-rata rule would be the starting point for their calculations. The administration viewed the five percent charge for Trident C4 “as a significant concession.”²⁷ The members of the DOD subsequently emphasised that whilst the final R&D charge could be well below \$900 million, “It would be higher than a simple 5% charge.”²⁸ With no firm

²⁴ Gainsborough, ‘Draft Trident R&D Levy: Background’, 14 October 1981, FCO 46/2752, TNA.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

decision yet taken by the administration on the R&D levy, DOD officials “undertook to seek direction from Mr Weinberger.”²⁹

The talks provoked mixed reactions amongst British officials. Given repeated indications from DOD officials that they would offer reductions on the price of D5 if the UK government responded to their concerns about reductions in conventional forces, some British officials remained optimistic about the prospect of obtaining a reduced price for D5. For example, Robin Renwick told Wade-Gery, “Weinberger is likely to try to be helpful over Trident costs, particularly if we are able to make some moves to meet US concerns... in other areas; and there is no reason we should not seek to take advantage of this.”³⁰ However, the second working group discussions provoked concern amongst other British officials. Pentagon officials had been the most forthcoming US department on provision of Trident D5. However, the hard-headed manner of the DOD officials during the second working group raised questions about how accommodating they would be to the British on the price of D5, particularly if the British were unable to meet their ‘concerns’ in other areas. Subsequently, John Weston remarked:

The latest round of UK/US defence cooperation talks in Washington do not leave one with the impression that officials in America are falling over themselves to supply us with D5, Mr Weinberger’s message to the Prime Minister on behalf of President Reagan notwithstanding.³¹

In this way, the second US-UK working group increased uncertainty amongst British officials about how forthcoming the Reagan administration would be on the D5 terms of sale. The talks raised questions about the reliability of MOD calculations of the cost of D5, based upon the terms of the C4 agreement. Moreover, the talks reemphasised to British officials how the price of the D5 would be contingent on further negotiation. Subsequently, British officials were unhappy that the working group had discussed the potential R&D levy for Trident D5. Such discussions pre-empted negotiations that would take place if ministers decided to pursue the D5 option. As had been

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Renwick to Wade-Gery, ‘Trident’, 9 October 1981, FCO 46/2752, TNA.

³¹ Weston to Private Secretary, 9 October 1981, FCO 46/2753, TNA.

demonstrated in both the Polaris and Trident C4 negotiations, skilful British diplomacy would be central to securing reductions. As such, the British did not want the administration to decide on a figure privately. Subsequently, shortly after the second working group, British officials made it clear to Weinberger's office that they were "not asking for an immediate reply on the question of R&D costs."³²

Subsequently, in October 1981, Robert Armstrong told Thomas Trenchard, Minister of State for Defence Procurement, not to discuss the possible price of D5 in his discussions with Frank Carlucci. Armstrong believed such discussion would be:

Premature and possibly counter-productive for our relations with the Americans on this subject.... if we do go for D5, we shall need to conduct with the Americans a negotiation which will be no less delicate than its predecessor in 1979-80... fence rushing and wire-crossing should clearly be avoided.³³

Despite these clear instructions, Trenchard did make enquiries about the potential cost of Trident D5. So much so, that an unnamed but clearly frustrated reader, scribbled on a record of the meeting: "So much for the comment the subject just 'came up.' It looks as if they talked about little else."³⁴ In response to Trenchard's enquiries about whether the administration had thought more about what help it might provide Britain on the costs of Trident given the pressures on the defence budget, Carlucci provided a vague but promising response.³⁵ He "thought it was a little premature to comment in detail." However, Carlucci went on to say the question the administration faced was how the United States recouped its non-recurring costs. They were aware that the "amounts at issue... were... very large." As such, "the Administration would look at the question as sympathetically as possible. They did not wish to see any trade-off of conventional forces against Trident."³⁶ Carlucci, had

³² Renwick to Wade-Gery, 'Trident', 9 October 1981, FCO 46/2752, TNA.

³³ Armstrong to Alexander, 'Trident Negotiations', 23 September 1981, PREM 19/417, TNA.

³⁴ Unnamed author, Handwritten Note, 'Note of a Meeting held on the office of the United States Deputy Secretary for Defense in the Pentagon at 11.45 on Thursday 15th October 1981', 20 October 1981, FCO 46/2752, TNA.

³⁵ Balmer, 'Note of a Meeting held on the office of the United States Deputy Secretary for Defense in the Pentagon at 11.45 on Thursday 15th October 1981', 20 October 1981, FCO 46/2752, TNA.

³⁶ Ibid.

again confirmed, that at least the Pentagon was disposed to reduce the price of Trident, in order to protect Britain's conventional forces, but he offered no indication of what this reduction might be or what commitments the administration expected the British to make in return.

On 24 November 1981, MISC 7 met to make a decision on whether the successor to Polaris should be the Trident D5 rather than C4. As they considered their choice, ministers still did not know on what terms the US would supply the D5 system, whether the US would offer them a reduction in the R&D charge, or what commitments the US would expect from the British in return.

Nonetheless, John Nott remained seemingly impervious to any doubt about D5 acquisition. To begin the meeting, Nott expressed his belief that Reagan's decision to cease deployment of Trident C4 as early as 1998, "meant that it would no longer be sensible for the United Kingdom to acquire the C4, since it would become unique to the United Kingdom almost from the outset of its deployment on British boats in 1994."³⁷ Instead, Nott recommended that the British procure a Trident D5 4-boat force. He estimated that this would cost £7500 million at current exchange rates. This was equivalent to £5900 million on the same exchange rate basis as used in the 1980 announcement that the government would acquire the C4 missile at a cost of about £5000 million.³⁸ Due to this increase in costs, Nott "had examined again all the alternative options for maintaining a national strategic deterrent."³⁹ He had concluded that the Trident system remained the "best choice... and indeed the only credible strategic deterrent," and that the D5 system should be chosen as it "would be cheaper than C4 up to 1987-88, and would probably be cheaper over its entire life because of the logistic penalties of running a C4 system unique to the United Kingdom."⁴⁰

³⁷ 'Most Confidential Record to MISC 7 (81) 1st meeting', 24 November 1981, CAB 130/1222, TNA.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

As Nott's memorandum to MISC 7 on his D5 proposal acknowledged, until the British undertook "detailed discussions... with the US authorities" it would be "impossible to predict with precise accuracy what a UK D5 system would cost."⁴¹ However, Nott was optimistic. He believed that the Reagan administration would be willing to provide D5 at a reduced price, and even that the British could secure a R&D levy of less than five percent:

The attitude of this US Administration, and in particular their willingness to help us overcome some of the difficulties thrown up by the recent defence programme review, suggests that the re-negotiation of the Polaris Sales Agreement which will be necessary with a switch to D5 might result in the US being willing to take special steps to minimise the cost of the programme to us. Mr Weinberger has made several encouraging remarks in this respect. This could result in their agreement either to waive completely or at least to reduce such US Government charges to us as the R&D levy, which is currently estimated at some £80M, although we must not discount the possibility of an adverse reaction by the Congressional Committees to this.⁴²

However, Nott's optimistic assessment overlooked many of the difficulties the British government faced in their choice between D5 and C4. As Robert Armstrong highlighted to Thatcher, Nott's proposal glossed over the "very great uncertainties in the costings of a D5 force."⁴³ Even if the British were able to secure reductions from the administration, they still faced the risk of a huge escalation in eventual costs. The estimates of the C4 programme had already increased in real terms by 20 percent since MISC 7 had taken the decision to purchase the missile.⁴⁴ These increases had occurred despite the missile being at an advanced stage of development. With the D5 system still in the early stages of development, the ultimate costs were unknown, but there clearly was a distinct potential for cost escalation far beyond Nott's estimates.⁴⁵ Given the increase in the costs of Trident to "increasingly formidable proportions," MOD financial staff and even the Chiefs of Staff were

⁴¹ Nott to MISC 7 (81)1, 'United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent', 17 November 1981, CAB 130/1160, TNA.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'The United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent MISC 7 (81) 1', 23 November 1981, PREM 19/694, TNA.

⁴⁴ Weston to Acland, 'C4/D5', 2 October 1981, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

⁴⁵ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'The United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent MISC 7 (81) 1', 23 November 1981, PREM 19/694, TNA.

“increasingly restive about the potential impact of Trident for other parts of the defence programme.”⁴⁶

The increased costs of the D5 system, compared to the C4, would also likely have problematic political ramifications for the Thatcher government. At this moment in time, the cost of Britain’s nuclear programme was particularly contentious after Francis Pym, Nott’s predecessor, revealed the existence of the secret Chevaline programme with an estimated cost of about £1000 million to Parliament on 24 January 1980.⁴⁷ The increased capability and costs of D5 would likely embolden the opposition Labour party and a growing antinuclear movement to aggressively campaign against a perceived expensive modernisation of Britain’s nuclear forces, beyond Britain’s need, while the country’s post-war welfare state faced severe cuts. As Gilmore had reflected in July:

The Trident decision has already been criticised on the grounds that it provides us a capability far in excess of our requirements. A change of horses now for the D5 will fuel this criticism; and there will undoubtedly be suggestions that the UK is aiming at a counterforce capability.⁴⁸

A decision to upgrade to D5 could also fuel opposition from those on the right, traditionally supportive of Britain’s nuclear programme, who might argue that the increased costs of D5 would “cause further detriment to the UK’s conventional forces.”⁴⁹

Furthermore, sticking with the C4 would also create political problems. US-UK renegotiation of the C4 agreement was now necessary as a result of the cost increases of the system, due to Reagan’s strategic modernisation decision and exchange rate movements. The subsequent public announcement would draw attention to the system’s higher price than originally stated. Whilst, the inevitable chattering defence analysts would make the tricky public presentation of a new C4 deal more difficult by highlighting the costs were likely to increase further due to the loss of commonality with the US. Once

⁴⁶ Weston to Acland, ‘C4/D5’, 2 October 1981, FCO 46/2751, TNA.

⁴⁷ Mr Francis Pym, 24 January 1980, *Hansard*, vol.977, cols. 681-683.

⁴⁸ From Gilmore, ‘Trident’, 16 July 1981, FCO 46/2750, TNA.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

again, all this would contribute to anti-Trident sentiment in sections of the British public.

Subsequently, all ministers present at the MISC 7 meeting, bar John Nott, expressed uncertainty about the D5 due to fears about the financial and political costs. Francis Pym, Lord President of the Council, “worried that the proposed switch from C4 to the even more powerful D5 missile would adversely affect both public opinion today and the attitude of whatever Government emerges from the next elections.”⁵⁰ Lord Carrington, Foreign Secretary, “shared these worries, and was also concerned at the greater difficulty of keeping a D5 force out of future arms-control negotiations.”⁵¹ As such, Carrington favoured staying with C4 for the moment, and switching to the D5 later. Geoffrey Howe, Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported adoption of the D5 but preferred only 12 missiles tubes per boat, despite the small saving. Thatcher, reflecting Armstrong’s earlier comments, “felt that the costs of D5 were uncertain and likely to escalate well beyond the present estimate.”⁵² Finally, and most dramatically, William Whitelaw, Home Secretary, “accepted the case for D5 against the other alternatives, but felt that the choice with which Ministers were faced raised a still more fundamental question: whether the United Kingdom could afford to continue to maintain an independent strategic nuclear deterrent.”⁵³

Ministers saw themselves in a catch-22, constrained by economic, political and strategic factors on all sides. Despite worries about the costs of D5, the C4 option appeared even less attractive. The lessons of Chevaline permeated the discussion: an unnamed discussant highlighted that “experience had shown that there was a much lower risk of cost escalation in buying a weapon system from the American production line than in developing it nationally.”⁵⁴ However, Ministers also saw the D5 option as highly contentious and problematic. The D5 system, even by the MOD’s

⁵⁰ Armstrong to Thatcher, ‘The United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent MISC 7 (81)’, 11 January 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ ‘Most Confidential Record to MISC 7 (81) 1st meeting’, 24 November 1981, CAB 130/1222, TNA.

present estimates, would cost over £800 million a year by the end of the decade, and “[Britain] could not... afford to carry indefinitely a burden of defence expenditure proportionately higher than her European allies.”⁵⁵ This high financial price tag provided “a deterrent greatly in excess of Britain's needs,” at the same time as creating political difficulties.⁵⁶ A British Trident D5 system, with its increased capability, would likely make the Soviet Union's arguments that the UK's forces be included in arms-control negotiations more vehement. Given US, British and French opposition to the inclusion of the UK and French nuclear forces, the Soviet Union would then be more likely to refuse to participate. This could have difficult ramifications for anti-TNF sentiment within Europe: “Opinion in continental Europe might well develop even further in favour of moving towards the removal of theatre nuclear weapons from the area, and public morale would suffer if Soviet opposition made it clear that this could not be achieved.”⁵⁷ In addition, the Thatcher government would take these economic and political risks, with no guarantee of Trident's long-term future: “There was no support for the Trident programme among any of the Opposition parties. For electoral reasons... the programme's continuity was uncertain.”⁵⁸ Nevertheless, ministers believed Britain's nuclear ‘deterrent’ essential: “Europe's increasing need to rely for her security on American willingness to use strategic nuclear weapons only served to underline the importance of the national deterrents possessed by both Britain and France.”⁵⁹

After this extensive discussion about the problematic choice British ministers faced, the meeting ran out of time, and with no clear solution to the predicament, the discussion finished on a cliff hanger: “Despite the enormous difficulties involved it might become necessary to consider the possibility of Britain ceasing to be a nuclear power.”⁶⁰ With no time to consider this dramatic statement, Thatcher wrapped up the meeting: Due to “insufficient time on this occasion for Ministers to take any decision”, Thatcher suggested,

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

"A whole day should be devoted to collective ministerial consideration."⁶¹ The uncertainty about the costs of the D5 system had impeded MISC 7's decision-making. This hesitation by MISC 7 over the future of Britain's nuclear programme, and indeed its future as a nuclear power, was remarkable. In May 1979, when MISC 7 first met to discuss the successor to Polaris there had been no discussion on whether the system should be replaced.⁶² This reflected the British elites' belief in the necessity of an independent deterrent since the end of the Second World War.⁶³

In order to solve their dilemma over the future of the Trident programme, the British government needed the Reagan administration to offer a very favourable price for the D5. A substantial reduction in price would help mitigate the associated political risks MISC 7 ministers foresaw in opting for the expensive system. As an unnamed minister highlighted during the MISC 7 discussion:

"If arrangements were made with the Americans similar to those covering the present agreement to purchase C4 missiles, Britain would be protected from escalation in development costs, since the research and development levy payable would not be more than a fixed percentage of the production costs of the missiles bought."⁶⁴

Currently though, ministers had no guarantee that the Reagan administration would offer a deal similar to the C4. Moreover, such a deal, due to the increased price of D5, would still leave Britain paying a higher price than they originally planned in July 1980. British ministers needed Nott's hope - that the administration might be persuaded to waive the R&D levy altogether - to become reality. For the moment, with a lack of any assurance from the US about the price of D5, British ministers remained uncertain about the costs, thus delaying the Polaris replacement programme. Underpinning the problem was Britain's dependence on the US for the provision of their nuclear capability; they had to take or leave whatever the United States offered, and this uncertainty could make decision-making, as in this case, very difficult.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² MISC 7(79) 1st Meeting, 'Cabinet Nuclear Defence Policy', 24 May 1979 TNA, CAB 130/1109.

⁶³ See Baylis and Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience*.

⁶⁴ 'Most Confidential Record to MISC 7 (81) 1st meeting', 24 November 1981, CAB 130/1222, TNA.

In the interim before the next MISC 7 meeting, British officials received confusing signals about the Reagan administration's support for a British Trident D5. On 3 December, David Gilmore met Richard Burt, a senior official in the US State Department. Their discussion left British officials concerned about the State Department's support for British D5. Burt informed Gilmore that:

There was a strong feeling at senior official level in the State Department (including MacFarlane [sic]) that D5 would be the wrong decision for the UK... State Department officials were concerned that decisions might be taken, not only here but in Washington, without adequate consideration of the consequences.⁶⁵

Burt stressed that this thinking "was based on the premise that it was strongly in the US interest that the UK should maintain its independent nuclear capability as a major contribution to overall deterrence and Alliance stability." However, officials within the State Department were concerned:

That a decision in favour of D5 at this juncture would be a perilous hostage to future fortune... The State Department did not believe that a decision now to go for D5 would survive any likely successor to the present Government in the United Kingdom. In their view to stick with C4 was the right answer, both for this and other reasons.⁶⁶

In response to Gilmore's subsequent enquiry about whether Alexander Haig shared these views, Burt replied Haig's "views were similar to those of his officials." However, Haig, according to Burt, "Would probably be reluctant to take issue strongly with Mr Weinberger if, in the face of a decision in favour of D5 by British Ministers, the Department of Defence insisted that the US Government should acquiesce."⁶⁷

Burt made clear throughout the discussion that the State Department saw it in US interests for the UK to maintain a nuclear capability. Nevertheless, his words provoked alarm for British officials. As Gilmore told Antony Acland, this was "the clearest indication... so far of a divergence of views within the US

⁶⁵ Gilmore to Acland, 'Trident', 7 December 1981, FCO 46/2752, TNA.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Administration about a Polaris successor.⁶⁸ Such divides mattered. The State Department wished to lead the negotiations, and if they did not think the D5 was the best option for the British they might not consider it necessary to provide the system at a substantially reduced cost. Furthermore, Robert McFarlane, named by Burt as an opponent to a British D5, looked likely to become National Security Advisor, a possibly influential position during negotiations, due to an ongoing scandal that had embroiled Richard Allen.⁶⁹

Subsequently, British officials made enquiries about Burt's claims. Shortly after Burt's meeting with Gilmore, Robert Hastie-Smith discussed the claims about the State Department's attitudes with Richard Perle of the Pentagon. Reassuringly, Perle told Hastie-Smith that, "He was doubtful whether the State Department were well informed in regard to the precise UK position."⁷⁰ Perle assumed that three considerations were central to the State Department's thinking that the British should stick with C4; firstly, that the C4 would be cheaper than D5 and therefore have less of an impact on Britain's conventional force levels; secondly, with the C4 decision already announced, it would create less difficulty for the forthcoming START talks; and finally, the availability of the C4 meant that the Thatcher government could get further ahead with the Polaris replacement programme than with D5, and this would make it more difficult for a successor government to cancel the programme.

Perle then reaffirmed the Pentagon's support for a British Trident D5. Unlike the State Department, the DOD thought that:

The avoidance of uniqueness was an argument of overwhelming strength in favour of the UK deciding to follow the American decision to go for D5 earlier, and that in the long run thus was likely to turn out to be not merely the cheapest but the only practicable option for the UK.⁷¹

Perle also offered reassurance that Weinberger was "now persuaded that if the UK decided to go for D5... [Britain] should be expected to pay an R&D levy no larger in total terms than we had already agreed to pay in respect of C4."

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Hastie-Smith to Wade-Gery, 'The Polaris Successor', 10 December 1981, FCO 46/2752, TNA.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Though concurrently Perle stressed that this reduction “would be forthcoming more readily if the DOD could demonstrate that part of the sum saved by the UK... was being devoted to the improvement of our conventional forces.”⁷²

In mid-December, Alexander Haig, himself, reassured the British. When Terrence Lewin, the Chief of Defence Staff, met with Alexander Haig in Brussels, he took the opportunity to enquire about the Secretary’s thoughts on a British D5. In response, Haig was, “quite clear that he supported the UK having a strategic nuclear deterrent and specifically that it should be D5.”⁷³ Subsequently, with this clear demonstration of support from Haig, and in light of the concern Burt’s comments had provoked, a clearly rankled Frank Cooper, permanent under-secretary at the MOD, displayed his frustration with some members of the administration in his report on Lewin’s Intel:

This tends to confirm a view I have held for some time that there is a good deal of bureaucratic in-fighting in Washington and that Mac Farlane [sic] is not one of our more helpful allies. Rick Burt has always seemed to me to be more of a trendy strategic journalist than a serious politician. Moreover - all of this seems to show a regrettable tendency - long apparent- in the US Embassy here — to second guess the British political future.⁷⁴

However, John Weston urged his fellow officials not to dismiss Burt’s comment in light of the contradictory intelligence. Weston had managed to get hold of a US paper on Britain’s options from the Pentagon. This paper suggested that the Reagan administration did not share the MOD’s views that the original plan to procure the C4 missiles was “a dead letter.” Instead, the paper continued, “to present the procurement of new C4 missiles as an option enjoying equal status with the others.”⁷⁵ The paper laid out that the acquisition of C4 missiles would increase the UK’s short terms outlays “sharply,” because of the need to start buying the missiles four years earlier than originally planned. However, the assumed forty percent per annum increase in the C4 system was not “over the lifetime of the system,” but from the point when the US phased out the C4 force. John Nott based his arguments on US withdrawal

⁷² Hastie-Smith to PS/S of S, ‘Trident Costs’, 10 December 1981, DEFE 24/2123, TNA.

⁷³ Cooper to Armstrong, ‘Polaris Succession’, 18 December 1981, FCO 46/2752, TNA.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Weston to Legge, ‘The Polaris Successor’, 7 January 1982, DEFE 24/2123, TNA.

of Trident C4 by 1998. Yet, the US paper highlighted that this phase-out was “tentatively planned” for the mid to late 1990s and the actual date that it would occur was unknown.⁷⁶ Moreover, Weston highlighted, in a manner clearly frustrated with Nott’s and the MOD’s attempts to ‘steam-roll’ a D5 decision on the British that:

Given the history of delays in the Trident II [D5] development so far, we would obviously be rash to exclude the possibility of some ten years commonality with the US C4 system, assuming an in-service date of 1992 for the first UK boats (this assumption is at least as realistic as some of the others underlying the debate).⁷⁷

Due to the US paper’s focus on the short-term budgetary impact of a C4 decision, rather than the necessity to maintain commonality, Weston viewed the State Department’s apparent belief that the C4 remained a legitimate option as understandable.⁷⁸ Weston saw, “no inconsistency in Haig’s closest advisors taking the view on C4” which Burt put to David Gilmore.⁷⁹ In addition, Weston asserted that there was no “FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office] consensus that one should ‘dismiss the possibility’ that Haig holds similar views (if only because we have been told specifically that he does).”⁸⁰

On 12 January, MISC 7 met again to decide on the successor to Polaris. This time the ministers met for an entire day owing to the uncertainties expressed during the last meeting about whether or not the British could afford to continue with its nuclear programme. To help with decision-making, the regular MISC 7 membership was reinforced by: Lord Hallisham, the Lord Chancellor; Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for Industry; and Cecil Parkinson, the Paymaster General.⁸¹ Since the previous meeting, the Reagan administration had given the British mixed messages about their attitude towards the supply of D5 at a reduced price. Nevertheless, despite this continued uncertainty, Armstrong told Thatcher, before the January meeting,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Armstrong to Thatcher, ‘The United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent MISC 7 (81)’, 11 January 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

that he did not think ministers would decide to give up Britain's nuclear weapons: "The political as well as the military implications of coming out are so tremendous that your colleagues are likely to conclude that we should stay in."⁸²

Armstrong was right, the British elites' belief in the necessity of a bomb with a Union flag on it, again won out. Once the formal MISC 7 discussion began, there was general agreement that Britain should continue to maintain an independent nuclear 'deterrent'.⁸³ Ministers then agreed that the Trident D5 should be the successor to Polaris, due to the "lessons of the Chevaline project."⁸⁴ However, many of the MISC 7 ministers were still concerned about the potential costs of the D5. As such, they decided that its procurement should be "subject to three provisos." These provisos were: that negotiations should be undertaken with the US to "determine the broad terms on which the new system could be procured"; then Cabinet would take a final decision; and that the choice between a four or three boat force be "left open for the time being."⁸⁵ This last proviso was because ministers saw it as "a matter for concern that the likely cost of the Trident project had already risen sharply in real terms since its inception in 1980 and that the price might well rise further in the future because of American decisions over which Britain would have no control."⁸⁶

Subsequently, on 21 January Thatcher outlined MISC 7's decision to Cabinet. In a marked difference to the lack of information provided to Cabinet following the C4 decision, due in part to the Carter administration's paranoia about leaks, Thatcher told Cabinet that the Secretary of State for Defence would be prepared to arrange a full briefing for any member of the Cabinet who wished.⁸⁷ However, like all British nuclear policy-making before it, the

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ 'Most Confidential Record to MISC 7 (82) 1st Meeting', 12 January 1982, CAB 130/1182, TNA.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Armstrong to Thatcher, 3 March 1982, PREM 19/695, TNA.

⁸⁶ 'Most Confidential Record to MISC 7 (82) 1st Meeting', 12 January 1982, CAB 130/1182, TNA.

⁸⁷ 'Cabinet Most Confidential Records to CC (82) 2nd Conclusions', 21 January 1982, CAB 128/75/1, TNA; Charles Moore, in his official biography on Margaret Thatcher is incorrect in stating a brief for ministers on D5 did not take place, although he is correct in pointing out that Michael Quinlan, who was in the Treasury at the time, did not undertake it. See Moore

decision remained the preserve of a small British elite, who were determined to maintain Britain's nuclear force in spite of their fears that the cost, both financially and politically, was beyond Britain's means.

On 21 January 1982, Thatcher sent a request to Reagan for a British team to visit Washington in order to discuss the terms of sale for the Trident D5 missile. On January 26, Reagan sent his agreement to the talks.⁸⁸ However, the Reagan administration had yet to agree who would lead the negotiations on their side. On 27 January 1982, Weinberger wrote to William Clark to lobby the DOD to take the lead on negotiations in order to maintain the link with the US/UK working group. As Weinberger told Clark, officials from the MOD and DOD had led the group, with some participation from the State Department. The group had "discussed potential savings that might be realized from British acquisition of Trident II [D5] and a concomitant reduction of research and development and other charges that would be assessed to the UK as a consequence of the Trident II purchase."⁸⁹ Weinberger was concerned that if the State Department led the Trident negotiations, "The work and purpose of the... Group, which has already identified significant savings that could be applied to UK programs... [would] be diluted as a result of a completely separate set of negotiations on Trident, outside the DoD/MoD framework." As such, Weinberger urged Clark to agree that the "DoD should retain the lead on the Trident negotiation... so as to realize as fully as possible the defense benefits that will accrue to both the US and the UK as a result of the British purchase."⁹⁰ The DOD told British officials that they were lobbying for negotiations between the MOD and the Pentagon, in order to secure the best terms for the UK.⁹¹ However, as his letter to Clark makes clear, Weinberger also desired that his officials take the lead in order to secure the conventional commitments they desired from the British.

Margaret Thatcher, 573.

⁸⁸ Thatcher to Reagan, 1 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

⁸⁹ Weinberger to Clark, 'UK Trident II Purchase', 27 January 1982, UK (01/25/1982 - 02/11/1982 [Too late to file], Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'MISC 7: Negotiations with the Americans', 11 January 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

Officials in Downing Street were not so keen on Weinberger's proposals. Armstrong foresaw that such a setup "would run the risk of mixing us up in internal Administration politics and perhaps alienating the State Department, whose support we shall need as well as the Pentagon's." Armstrong thus advised Thatcher, "In order to avoid this danger, I think it would be best that we should propose to the Americans to follow the pattern of the earlier negotiations to acquire the Trident C4 missile."⁹²

Clark decided on such a compromise. The Reagan team would have a similar make-up to the Carter's C4 team with representatives from the DOD, State Department, and the National Security Council. Robert McFarlane, now Clark's Deputy at the National Security Council but previously former Counsellor of the State Department, and an official that Burt had named as an opponent of a British D5 upgrade, would lead the negotiations. The set-up concurred with British wishes and helped them navigate the divisions within the Reagan administration. However, Clark's decision also created greater unpredictability about what terms the US would offer the British on D5, due to uncertainty on the views of officials outside of the Pentagon.

⁹² Armstrong to Thatcher, 'MISC 7: Negotiations with the Americans', 11 January 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.



Mock-up film poster designed for *The Socialist Worker*.

In early February, the final Chevaline tests took place. The tests were "wholly successful."⁹³ With the negotiations for Trident D5 about to commence, this was an opportune time for the successful completion of the Chevaline development programme. The successful tests eased the British government's concerns about the future viability of Britain's nuclear programme, and short-term budgetary issues. Engineering problems during the submarine trials of the system in November 1980 had raised doubts about the future of the

⁹³ Armstrong to Thatcher, 3 March 1982, PREM 19/695, TNA.

Chevaline programme.⁹⁴ As such when MISC 7 met in January, there were still “worries about the viability of Chevaline” and therefore whether Britain would be able to maintain a credible deterrent until the introduction of Trident.⁹⁵ The successful completion of these final tests, eradicated such concerns. The British could now delay deployment of the Trident programme, an option provided by the D5 but not the C4 missile, and thereby ease Britain’s short-term budgetary problems created by the need to re-motor Polaris missiles.

In addition, the successful development of Chevaline provided a visceral reminder to the Reagan administration of Britain’s commitment and contribution to shared defence, as well as technical abilities. Chevaline was a remarkable technical achievement. As a British official who attended the final launch informed Armstrong, the system was “probably in technical terms the most difficult weapon system development ever undertaken by the UK.” Subsequently “There is no doubt that the US people associated with the programme - both service and civilian, including some of their senior engineers - have been immensely impressed with our technical achievement.”⁹⁶ Nevertheless, this achievement had come at a high price, with the programme an enormous drain on Britain’s defence budget. Despite the eventual ‘success’ of Chevaline, the programme’s completion as negotiations for Trident D5 began, was a timely reminder to both British and US officials that they did not want a repeat of such an independent and costly programme.

As they planned for the Trident D5 negotiations, MOD officials were optimistic that the British government could secure a reduced price for Trident D5, even hoping that they “may be able to achieve an even better deal” than the already “advantageous” Polaris Sales Agreement.⁹⁷ Their optimism arose from the Reagan administration’s indications that they wished Britain to remain “In the strategic deterrent business in view of the general political benefits to the West, and to the US in particular.”⁹⁸ As well as the concerns of officials in the

⁹⁴ East to Armstrong, ‘Chevaline’, 17 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

⁹⁵ Armstrong to Thatcher, 3 March 1982, PREM 19/695, TNA.

⁹⁶ East to Armstrong, ‘Chevaline’, 17 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

⁹⁷ ‘Trident Negotiating Strategy: Modalities and Aims’, 5 January 1982, DEFE 24/2123, TNA.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Pentagon that, "Following the UK's recent defence review... expenditure on a UK strategic deterrent should not lead to further reductions in our conventional forces."⁹⁹ Indeed, the Reagan administration's desire to improve the West's nuclear and conventional forces provided a conducive environment for the British to secure a reduced price for Trident D5. It was not in the administration's interests to levy too high a charge for D5, this would divert funds from conventional forces, and in the worst-case scenario cause a Chevaline programme mark II. Moreover, too high a charge would strengthen anti-Trident sentiment in Britain, and could increase support for the Labour party's disarmament policies.

Nevertheless, this conducive environment for the British did not mean that the Reagan team did not engage in hard bargaining, and US officials planned their strategy carefully from the outset. The Reagan administration would not simply give the British a discount on D5 without something in return. On 6 February 1982, Haig and Carlucci wrote to Reagan to inform him about the agreed United States opening negotiation strategy. The strategy they outlined was very similar to the line proposed to the British during the US-UK defence co-operation working group meetings. US negotiators would seek a reciprocal deal, where in return for providing the British with a cut-price missile system; they would ask the British to make commitments in geo-strategic areas of concern. The R&D charge would again form the primary area of negotiation. Carlucci and Haig told Reagan that they believed it to be in the US interests to waive some of this charge, as was the President's prerogative.¹⁰⁰ The Reagan team intended to firstly offer an arrangement similar to the C4 agreement, where the US would forego 25 percent of the R&D, be paid about 25 percent in cash, and receive 50 percent in the form of offsets. Haig and Carlucci told Reagan that, "The effect of this would be to approximately double both what the UK will pay for R&D, and what we will forgive."¹⁰¹ In this way, like the Carter White House before them, the Reagan

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Haig and Carlucci to Reagan, 'Discussions with the British Concerning Purchase of the Trident D-5', 6 February 1982, UK (01/25/1982 - 02/11/1982 [Too late to file], Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

team, despite their greater support for Britain's Polaris replacement, still planned to utilise British technical dependence to extract a series of *quid pro quos*, or 'offsets', in exchange for reducing British costs. Indeed, one of the five sections that the Department of Defense wrote for a paper preparing for the negotiations was devoted entirely to "Quids."¹⁰² The 'offsets' that the US negotiators sought would:

Fall in two important areas in which the British are cutting forces and we would otherwise have to take up the slack: Maintaining surface naval forces in the North Atlantic, and peacetime presence in the Indian Ocean. If the British agree to do more than they had planned in these two areas, it will save the U.S. Government money and bolster Western defenses.¹⁰³

Haig and Carlucci's strategy clearly displays that the Reagan administration saw it in US interests to reduce British costs in order to ensure the UK's commitment to Western conventional and strategic defence. However, they also saw the need to balance this requirement against the utilisation of US-UK nuclear co-operation to extract British commitments that would address their areas of concern with regards present UK defence planning. In this way, US officials would, once again, take a hard-nosed approach to negotiations on Trident in order to shape Britain's defence strategy to their benefit as much as possible, without conversely damaging the wider benefits that the US derived from the nuclear relationship; namely British contributions to NATO and Western defence.

On the 8-9 February 1982, the first round of the Trident D5 negotiations took place. Robert McFarlane and Robert Wade-Gery led the talks, with representatives from the MOD, FCO, State Department and DOD.¹⁰⁴ Unlike the C4 negotiations, the D5 talks did not devote much time to revealing the decision to their NATO allies. Subsequently, Robert Wade-Gery noted, "By

¹⁰² Miller to Blair and Dobbins, 'Inter-Agency Paper on U.K. D-5', 29 January 1982, Trident II D5, 1980-182, RAC Box 5, Dennis Blair Files, RRL; Unfortunately, the DOD paper preparing for the negotiations is still classified.

¹⁰³ Haig and Carlucci to Reagan, 'Discussions with the British Concerning Purchase of the Trident D-5', 6 February 1982, UK (01/25/1982 - 02/11/1982 [Too late to file], Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

¹⁰⁴ Clark to Reagan, 'Letter to Prime Minister Thatcher Offering to Sell Trident II (D-5) Missile System', n.d. Trident II D-5 1980 - 1982 (8 OF 11), RAC Box 5, Dennis Blair Files, RRL.

contrast with 1980 the Americans seem reasonably relaxed over the whole issue of presenting the new deal to our various allies.”¹⁰⁵ However, like the C4 negotiations, US officials drove a hard bargain, and did not give the British reductions on the R&D charge freely or easily. Indeed, Wade-Gery, who was a central figure in both Trident negotiations, later recalled that the Reagan administration was more preoccupied with the *quid pro quos* than the Carter White House:

What struck us at the time... was how totally different it was from negotiating with the Carter White House. We went out, remembering... the previous negotiation, fully prepared with a whole raft of arguments about the moral issue and how it was perfectly all right to let Britain have this missile. We found the Reagan White House wholly uninterested in the moral argument. They brushed all that aside and said, “Don’t give us all that crap. Don’t worry about that. What are you going to pay for these, and what are you going to do in return? How’s your policy going to be different, because, you know, if we’re doing this for you, we want to be paid cash and in kind.” It was a good old-fashioned haggle about how much we would pay and what we would do in return.¹⁰⁶

The British opened discussion’s by making it clear that the administration’s strategic modernisation decision had left them with a difficult dilemma. The British government now faced a choice between “two unattractive alternatives”; the C4 that “would have all the penalties of uniqueness”; or the D5, which would be “better and costlier” than they needed, and “would involve the financial risks of an untried system, and... increase the dollar content of the overall programme.”¹⁰⁷ The British then reminded the Reagan administration that their wider concerns over the UK’s defence spending and domestic instability were interrelated to the terms of any D5 agreement: “If we were to switch to D.5... we would need to minimise the cost of doing so, in order to avoid damaging our conventional defence effort and stirring up domestic controversy.”¹⁰⁸ However, despite these warnings from the British on the extent that the price of D5 would affect wider US concerns,

¹⁰⁵ Wade-Gery to Coles, ‘Trident’, 12 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹⁰⁶ Transcript of interview with Robert Wade-Gery, 91-92.

¹⁰⁷ Wade-Gery to Coles, ‘Trident’, 12 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

the first round of talks did not go as well as British officials had hoped, with the Reagan team taking a harder line on the R&D levy than they expected.

Reflective of the administration's concern not to increase anti-nuclear sentiment in Britain, US negotiators were, from the off, forthcoming on the British request for 'offsets'. British officials wished for counter-trade as a form of defence offset, in order to compensate, to some extent, the UK arms industry for the purchase of the US missile system. Following the C4 agreement, members of the British industry had criticised the government's failure to obtain any offset from the United States, and expressed fears that given the cost of Trident orders for 'conventional' defence equipment would decrease.¹⁰⁹ British officials foresaw that the purchase of Trident D5 would magnify these criticisms, due to the increased cost of the system and a higher proportion of expenditure in the United States.¹¹⁰ John Nott had previously informed US officials "It would be politically impossible for him to decide in favor of costly US systems, even when they are the most cost effective, unless he can point to significant US purchases of British systems."¹¹¹ US officials were "receptive" to the British idea that if they purchased D5, UK "firms should be given a fair crack of the whip as regards sub-contracts from within the whole United States Trident programme."¹¹² Furthermore, in demonstration of their wish to help dampen criticism to the purchase of D5, US officials suggested that they might be able, "To spend part of the proceeds of our payments under the overheads charge... on setting up a liaison office in London for the purpose of educating relevant British firms in the requirements of this highly complex market."¹¹³

US negotiators were also forthcoming on two of the surcharges the British were liable to pay. With regards overheads, US officials said, as the British expected, that they could waive the minimum charge, which they

¹⁰⁹ Armstrong to Thatcher, 'The United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent MISC 7 (81) 1', 23 November 1981, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ 'Department of State Briefing Paper, Two-Way Street in Defense Procurement', 17 February 1981, Briefing Book Re: Visit of British Prime Minister Thatcher 02/25/1981 - 02/28/1981 (3 of 3), Box 91434, NSC: VIP Visits, RRL.

¹¹² Wade-Gery to Coles, 'Trident', 12 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹¹³ Ibid.

estimated to be at 1982 prices, \$106 million. On the facilities charge, the US negotiators said they were “Prepared to contemplate waiving the facilities charge, which they put at \$51 million.”¹¹⁴ The British viewed these concessions as “satisfactory.”¹¹⁵

However, Robert Wade-Gery reported to the British government that the US thinking on the third surcharge, R&D, was, “less forthcoming than we had hoped.”¹¹⁶ The US officials told their British counterparts, that they started from their legal obligation to calculate the levy on a pro-rata basis. Calculated at 1981 prices, this would amount to \$685 million. About half that amount the Reagan team regarded as “eligible to be offset against costs incurred by us [the British] on their behalf in other areas.”¹¹⁷ Reagan officials had calculated that the US did gain almost that amount under the 1980 agreement to pay personnel costs for US Rapier systems in Britain, a commitment that would still stand.¹¹⁸ However, the Rapier deal still left \$342 million unpaid. US officials said they would be willing to waive \$120 million, with the British paying \$222 million.¹¹⁹ On hearing this offer, British officials:

Made clear that this basis for R&D calculations would be wholly unacceptable in London. Under the deal struck publicly in July 1980, we undertook to pay their Rapier manning costs; and we were abiding by that. In return, they undertook to fix the Trident R&D levy not at a pro rata level but on a 5 per cent basis (as with Polaris). On their own figures, 5 per cent for D.5 would currently come to \$128 million (or \$116 million for C.4). This was therefore our starting figure; and it was this which we were now asking them to waive, in order to help minimise the cost of a switch to D.5.¹²⁰

Discussions on the R&D levy dominated the second day of discussion, and by the day’s end, there were “outlines of a possible settlement.”¹²¹ Subsequently, Wade-Gery reported to London that he believed the British could persuade the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ ‘Contingency Q’s and A’s on Press Announcement of British Purchase of Trident II Missile’, n.d., Trident II D-5 1980 - 1982 (8 OF 11), RAC Box 5, Dennis Blair Files, RRL.

¹¹⁹ Wade-Gery to Coles, ‘Trident’, 12 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

administration for a five percent levy on the lines agreed for Polaris and C4. However, he also highlighted that US negotiators had made it clear that for such a reduction the British would have to make conventional commitments, due to the need to consider Congressional reaction. US officials explained that this was because the administration would have to seek the agreement of Congress for any Trident deal, which did not charge a pro-rata levy. Therefore, if the administration offered the British a reduction on the R&D levy, “their basic approach to Congress” would need to be that money the British were “not forced to pay for R&D will be money available for... [their] conventional defence effort.”¹²² In particular, US officials told their British counterparts that “It would lend force to this argument if they could point to specific British deployment decisions in conventional sectors of importance to United States opinion which... [Britain] might have made public in the period shortly before a D-5 deal was announced.”¹²³ Kristan Stoddart subsequently emphasises that this need to appease congress was why the R&D levy was the “big sticking point.”¹²⁴

However, whilst US negotiators stressed to British officials that these ‘quids’ were to appease Congress, my research in the US archives suggests that this was not the whole truth; the Reagan White House also sought these ‘quids’ in order to gain, at least some, assistance with their *own* areas of interest, namely naval deployment. As previously discussed, when Haig and Carlucci informed Reagan of their planned strategy they told the President that they wished for offsets in “important areas” where, otherwise, the US would “have to take up the slack.”¹²⁵ Subsequently, after the first round of talks, Stoessel and Carlucci told Reagan that they believed their relatively tough approach meant the British would now consider the *quid pro quos* that the US desired:

We offered the British an arrangement for the purchase of the missiles similar to that agreed two years ago for the TRIDENT (C-4) missile. Predictably, they told us the price we offered was higher than they wished to pay. However, they agreed to propose to us

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*, 192.

¹²⁵ Haig and Carlucci to Reagan, ‘Discussions with the British Concerning Purchase of the Trident D-5’, 6 February 1982, UK (01/25/1982 - 02/11/1982 [Too late to file], Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

additional offsets (i.e., increases in their own defense posture in areas where we would otherwise have to assume responsibility ourselves) which could make up at least some of the difference.¹²⁶

In pushing for these offsets, US negotiators took advantage of Britain's weak hand in the negotiations, as they had "no real option except to go for D.5."¹²⁷ These tactics were not because the administration did not see a favourable deal to the British as in their interests. Rather they also saw the negotiations as an opportunity to get as much assistance as possible in their areas of concern. The US side saw negotiation as a key part of any final agreement, and indeed, as previously discussed, this renegotiation has always been a central element in the US-UK nuclear relationship. As Haig and Carlucci told Reagan before negotiations began, they expected US and UK officials to hammer out a reciprocal deal through compromise: "We do not anticipate that we will be able to complete the negotiations at next week's session. We will make our first offer, the British will make theirs, followed by some clarifying discussions."¹²⁸ As such, the Reagan team planned to push the British on the R&D levy as much as possible, in order to extract reasonable commitments from the British. Subsequently, the US officials were happy with the first round of negotiations. They were "optimistic" that in the next round, two weeks away, "that we [the US] can bridge the differences between us."¹²⁹

Overall, after the first round of negotiations, Robert Wade-Gery was also hopeful that the British government would secure the deal they needed. He believed the US officials gave, "The impression of being under instructions to reach an amicable settlement, provided that this did not leave the President too exposed to Congressional attack."¹³⁰ Nevertheless, due to "the Americans negotiating toughly, particularly on the R&D levy," Robert Wade-Gery

¹²⁶ Stoessel and Carlucci to Reagan, 'Negotiations with the United Kingdom on Possible Purchase of Trident D-5 Missile', 11 February 1982, UK (01/25/1982 - 02/11/1982 [Too late to file], Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

¹²⁷ Wade-Gery to Coles, 'Trident', 12 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹²⁸ Haig and Carlucci to Reagan, 'Discussions with the British Concerning Purchase of the Trident D-5', 6 February 1982, UK (01/25/1982 - 02/11/1982 [Too late to file], Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

¹²⁹ Stoessel and Carlucci to Reagan, 'Negotiations with the United Kingdom on Possible Purchase of Trident D-5 Missile', 11 February 1982, UK (01/25/1982 - 02/11/1982 [Too late to file], Box 20, NSC: Country Files, RRL.

¹³⁰ Wade-Gery to Coles, 'Trident', 12 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

suggested that in the next round the British be prepared to up the ante by telling US officials that the:

Prime Minister is personally very disturbed by their current suggestions on and [sic] R and D levy. A message on this subject from her to the President may yet be necessary to clinch the final deal; and the implicit threat of it may serve to concentrate the minds of the President's advisers.¹³¹

Indeed, Thatcher was disturbed, and agreed to this course of action.¹³²

In the interim between the two rounds of discussion of D5, MOD officials began “considering urgently what limited adjustments to the conventional defence programme” the British could offer to secure reductions on the R&D levy. The British needed to create something out of relatively little, as Wade-Gery told Coles: “They would need to be compatible with British interests; and of course self-balancing, since our available resources are already fully committed.”¹³³ In the next round of talks, the British planned to show the US negotiators a list of these possible adjustments and make clear that their ability to announce some or all of these changes was dependent on how much the US helped with Trident surcharges. The British would use this approach to “confirm waiver of the D-5 facilities charge; to accept that consideration of the level of R and D levy should start from the basis of a 5 per cent levy...; to move downwards from there; and to end up with a fixed rather than a percentage figure.”¹³⁴ The British expected to succeed in at least the first two of these aims, and if the US officials were unwilling or unable to give the final two, the British would limit the extent of their conventional adjustments. Such a strategy, Robert Wade-Gery believed would enable the British “To establish the real limits of what they think they can get through Congress.”¹³⁵

On 24-25 February 1982, the second round of negotiations took place. By the end of the first day, the two sides had agreed everything except the elusive

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² To Wade-Gery, ‘Trident’, 15 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹³³ Wade-Gery to Coles, ‘Trident’, 12 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid; To Wade-Gery, ‘Trident’, 15 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

R&D figure.¹³⁶ During the course of the day, US negotiators were again, in most areas, inclined to be helpful and negate any political problems that a Trident D5 deal would cause the Thatcher government. Throughout discussions on surcharges, US officials were conscious of the need to give the British a presentable deal that would provoke as little political trouble as possible. On the overheads charge, which for legal reasons had to remain a percentage on the same basis as in the Polaris and C4 agreements, US officials were "Content to follow precedent and not mention this in the published exchanges."¹³⁷ Once again, the US and UK government would not reveal the full price of Britain's nuclear programme to the public. US officials also confirmed the waiver of the facilities charge. Moreover, US officials also agreed that the R&D levy would be a fixed sum rather than a sliding percentage. This vital concession would protect the British from possible escalation in the costs of the D5 system, with the US instead absorbing all cost increases. This would greatly assist with presenting the new Trident agreement to the public, and would help ensure the future viability of Britain's nuclear and conventional forces by minimising the risk of escalation in costs.

The reductions given by the Reagan administration on these surcharges demonstrated their clear support for Britain's nuclear and conventional forces, as well as an attempt to suppress domestic opposition in Britain, and in NATO, to the deal. In this way, the Reagan White House bolstered the Thatcher Conservative government. Nevertheless, the US negotiators continued to play hardball over the extent of the fixed R&D levy. In response to the British list of possible adjustments to their conventional defence programme, US officials expressed their dissatisfaction; they "rightly perceived" that most of these 'additional' deployments were, "No more than we [the British] could have been assumed to be planning to do anyway."¹³⁸ US negotiators then began to press "strongly for some additional commitments in areas that would respond to current congressional preoccupations."¹³⁹ With the British seemingly 'on the back foot,' US officials now laid out their desire for Britain to retain HMS

¹³⁶ Wade-Gery to Nott, 25 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Invincible and delay its military departure from Belize.¹⁴⁰ Whilst these specific 'quids' had not been mentioned before in the negotiations, they were of the type that Carlucci and Haig had told Reagan they aimed to secure, before negotiations began.

In response to the US request to retain *Invincible*, Robert Wade-Gery told the US officials that they expected the Australian government to announce their plans to purchase the aircraft carrier the next day; there was "no way" the British "could now dishonour that offer."¹⁴¹ US officials "regretfully accepted this."¹⁴² Wade-Gery then revealed the possibility of a British decision to reprieve HMS *Fearless* and HMS *Intrepid*. This, US officials replied "was the sort of thing they were looking for."¹⁴³ US officials explained they would wish for a private message, from Nott to Weinberger, on how long the British planned to retain the ships in service, and "how much of their time they might be expected to spend on out of Area deployment," followed by a public announcement on the retaining of the ships before the Trident exchange of letters.¹⁴⁴ They would not publish Nott's message, but show it "to certain key persons in Congress, as evidence of UK efforts towards enhancement of conventional forces."¹⁴⁵

The Reagan administration's efforts to ensure that Britain retained Navy vessels was not only to appease Congress, but it was also in response to the administration's and US Navy's concerns about reductions in the United Kingdom's surface strength. As previously discussed, Weinberger had spoken to Nott about these concerns during their meeting in August.¹⁴⁶ By requesting that Britain retain its naval vessels, the administration sought to use the Trident negotiations as a means to influence British policy in this area. The US request that the British maintain a regular naval presence in the Caribbean also formed part of these efforts. The requests were another example of long-

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Weinberger to Nott, 25 August 1981, DEFE 24/2126, TNA.

standing attempts by US administrations' to stem Britain's retreat 'East of Suez'. A Department of State briefing paper from February 1982 stated:

We should encourage British interests in restoring their capabilities to act East of Suez, including the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean... The UK's record over the past decade is one of consistent retrenchment East of Suez, and there is no assurance that new resources budgeted in that direction would not be cut in the future.¹⁴⁷

The Trident negotiations provided the administration with a conducive environment for such 'encouragement'.

On Belize, US officials asked that the British retain all, or at least some, of their existing combat forces in the South-American state for a further five years.¹⁴⁸ Wade-Gery gave the proposal short shrift, telling the US team "They should not... be under any mis-apprehension about our room for manoeuvre. A decision to station British combat forces for a prolonged period in a third world country would be a major departure in policy. I saw little chance of this being acceptable."¹⁴⁹ However, in his attempts to reach a compromise, Wade-Gery raised "two less far-reaching possibilities."¹⁵⁰ The first was the expansion of the training programme that the British planned to provide to the Belize defence forces after the withdrawal of British combat forces. The second was a short extension, by a matter of a few months, in the length of time that British combat forces would remain in Belize. Unknown to the US officials, the British were already considering this second possibility. As Wade-Gery later reported, "The Americans are aware of our plans to withdraw in June, but they gave no indication that they knew of Price's [Prime Minister of Belize] request for a three-month extension."¹⁵¹ These suggestions produced a mixed response from the Americans; McFarlane replied that there might be "promise" in the first option, but "he gave no sign" that the second option would be of interest.¹⁵² US negotiators then, "Pressed for an assurance that a regular

¹⁴⁷ Department of State Briefing Paper, 'UK NATO initiative', 17 February 1981, Briefing Book Re: Visit of British Prime Minister Thatcher 02/25/1981 - 02/28/1981 92 of 2, Box 91434, NSC: VIP Visits, RRL.

¹⁴⁸ Wade-Gery to Nott, 25 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

British naval presence (e.g. one frigate) would be maintained in the Caribbean for the next five years.”¹⁵³ In response, Wade-Gery, explained, “That ship deployments are not normally planned in such detail so far ahead, but undertook to have the point considered as sympathetically as possible.”¹⁵⁴

The Reagan administration’s efforts to ensure a British commitment to Belize and the Caribbean was also not only to appease Congress; the administration was concerned about the future stability of Belize, as well as the ‘threat’ of communism spreading throughout this part of South America. As part of the Thatcher government’s efforts to end the financial burden of its remaining colonies, they had decided to grant Belize independence by the end of 1981.¹⁵⁵ The British consequently planned to withdraw all combat forces.¹⁵⁶ The British had taken this decision despite Guatemala’s claim to Belize, and this concerned the Reagan administration. US officials feared that “failure to settle the dispute now could lead to tensions between Guatemala and Belize, invite Cuban intervention and contribute to regional destabilisation.”¹⁵⁷ They therefore believed “It... essential that the UK do everything possible to reach an agreement with Guatemala and retain a garrison in Belize after Independence.”¹⁵⁸ In addition, the Reagan administration’s anxiety that the British maintain a military presence also stemmed from their efforts to suppress a perceived communist threat in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and their concurrent fear of contagion across Latin America.¹⁵⁹ Subsequently, the administration utilised the negotiations as the means to encourage Britain’s retention of forces on Belize.

With no firm agreement on ‘additional’ British deployments, the first day of the second round of negotiations ended with the final amount of the

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Department of State Briefing Paper, ‘UK NATO initiative’, 17 February 1981, Briefing Book Re: Visit of British Prime Minister Thatcher 02/25/1981 - 02/28/1981 92 of 2, Box 91434, NSC: VIP Visits, RRL.

¹⁵⁶ ‘UK Presence in Belize’, 28 February 1982, Trident II D-5: 02/24/1982 Meeting with UK (1 of 3), RAC Box 5, Dennis Blair Files, RRL.

¹⁵⁷ Bremer to Allen, ‘Briefing Materials for the Visit of UK Prime Minister Thatcher’, 25 February 1981, Briefing Book Re: Visit of British Prime Minister Thatcher 02/25/1981 - 02/28/1981 (2 of 3), Box 91434, NSC: VIP Visits, RRL.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Stephen Randall and Graeme Mount, *The Caribbean Basin: an International History* (London: Routledge, 1998), 145.

R&D levy still unresolved. The issue would “be hammered out in hard bargaining” the next day in light of Britain’s final position on deployment. As such, after the day’s discussions Wade-Gery sent an urgent telegraph to John Nott. Wade-Gery told Nott that “In order to negotiate the lowest possible R&D figure tomorrow,” he needed to say “as much as possible” in response to the specific requests made by the US officials. Wade-Gery subsequently asked John Nott if he could say they agreed to the desired US procedure on retention of *Fearless* and *Intrepid*, and if they could offer any private reassurances about how long they would retain them. Wade-Gery also enquired if there was anything they could offer the Americans on Belize that could “be at least dressed up as an addition to current plans.”¹⁶⁰ Finally, Wade-Gery enquired about the likely level of British naval presence in the Caribbean over the next five years. Wade-Gery acknowledged the flurry of activity that his telegram would provoke, but he saw a response as essential to the British achieving a good deal on the D5: “I well realize how difficult this will be and that short-notice consultation between Ministers may be needed... but anything that can be done while the iron is hot here will clearly be reflected in the deal we strike.”¹⁶¹

The following day, the two sides reached an agreement. The final deal was extremely favourable to the British, more so than the Trident C4 agreement. Britain would have to pay an overheads charge on the same percentage basis as the C4 agreement, something Wade-Gery acknowledged “was practically unavoidable under US law.”¹⁶² However, the US would use part of this payment to set up a project liaison office that would advise British companies on how to tender for contracts. The administration waived the facilities charge, estimated at \$51 million, which was part of the C4 deal. US officials were also “reasonably forthcoming” in response to British concerns about offsets.¹⁶³ In addition to “helpful language” in the main exchange letters, the US negotiators also offered a further side letter from Weinberger, which

¹⁶⁰ Wade-Gery to Nott, 25 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Wade-Gery to Coles, ‘Trident’, 26 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

whilst not for publication, "would not be confidential and could be freely drawn on in public e.g. in briefing British industrialists."¹⁶⁴ The two documents would make clear that competitive British firms were eligible for sub-contracts across the whole Trident programme. The Reagan administration also agreed to change some of the Buy American Act provisions, and set up a liaison office in London in order to advise British industry on how they could compete for sub-contracts for the D5 programme as a whole, including the US programme.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, this deal would negate the arguments of some potential opponents to Trident D5 who would argue that the system was too costly and would take valuable jobs away from British manufacturing. Moreover, with the possibility of lucrative contracts for British industry, the Reagan administration's offer made the deal much harder for any future Labour government to cancel. The Reagan administration also agreed to Britain paying a fixed R&D levy equivalent to \$116 million in fiscal 1982 dollars. This fixed amount insulated Britain from any escalation in the development costs of the D5. Moreover, the sum of \$116 million was an extraordinary concession from the administration. The charge was limited to what the old five percent formula would have cost the British if they had stayed with the C4, and was below the \$128 million that the same formula would have charged if applied to a D5 deal. Wade-Gery subsequently saw these concessions as "a significant improvement on the terms of the C4 agreement."¹⁶⁶

The British negotiators achieved this deal without, in the end, much extra commitment on their side. The "lever" that secured the concession on the R&D levy was the decision to reprieve the naval assault ships *Fearless* and *Intrepid*, as well as the offer of a private letter from Nott to Weinberger, that administration officials could show to members of Congress. This letter would make clear the British "intention of retaining the ships until the end of the decade and deploying them at intervals outside the NATO area."¹⁶⁷ British

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Nott to MISC 7 (82), 'United Kingdom Strategic Deterrent: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Defence, 2 March 1982', CAB 130/1182, TNA.

¹⁶⁶ Wade-Gery to Coles, 'Trident', 26 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

officials did not tell their US counterparts that they had already taken the decision to retain these vessels on other grounds.¹⁶⁸ Although Wade-Gery later contradicted this assertion:

I remember one of the things we were bullied into undertaking in return, was to keep in commission a couple of landing craft which the Americans thought would enhance NATO's capability and which the Ministry of Defence thought we ought to decommission because they were expensive. They were kept in commission and turned out to be extremely useful in the Falkland's War which came along later. So it was an ill wind, as they say. But we were very reluctant to keep these in commission.¹⁶⁹

Clarity on whether the British had already made a firm decision to retain the ships or if they were pushed towards this by the need to secure reductions on Trident will hopefully come with further archival releases and historical research. Nevertheless, in the end the exchange was fortuitous for the British. The retention of *Fearless* and *Intrepid* was vital to the British in the Falklands War. Britain's 'victory' greatly assisted Thatcher's electoral landslide in 1983, and thereby the future of the Trident programme.

UK and US officials agreed that the link between the retention of *Fearless* and *Intrepid* and the sale of Trident D5 would not be discussed in public. As with the C4 agreement and the secret Diego Garcia deal, the transactional elements of the relationship would remain secret. In the public exchange of letters the waiver of all charges in excess of \$116 million was justified by the United Kingdom agreeing to man the Rapier air defence of United States Air Force bases in the UK, as well as an understanding, "that the United Kingdom will employ additional savings represented by the remainder of the United States waiver to reinforce its efforts to upgrade its conventional forces."¹⁷⁰

The British also secured the reduction on the R&D levy without much commitment on the administration's other areas of concern. The British made "no promises" in response to US officials expressing they were "particularly

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Transcript of interview with Robert Wade-Gery, 91-92.

¹⁷⁰ Weinberger to Nott, 11 March 1982, WH Office of the Press Secretary: Press Releases and Briefings 1981-89, Box 24, White House Staff Members & Office Files, RRL.

keen on annual deployments to the Indian Ocean, and would welcome anything... [the British] could say on that."¹⁷¹ Similarly, with regards Britain's military posture in Belize and naval presence in the Caribbean, "It was clear that the Americans would much value anything... [the British] were willing to say under either head." However, again, British negotiators, by describing their training plans in more detail, "were able to avoid offering specific commitments."¹⁷² However, the British did provide a vague commitment to deployment in Nott's letter to Weinberger. In this letter, Nott stressed that the retention of *Fearless* and *Intrepid* would help Britain "Preserve our existing methods for early amphibious reinforcement of North Norway and other key NATO areas, and also our ability to operate with these ships and Royal Marines outside the NATO area including the Indian Ocean and Caribbean."¹⁷³ Conversely, despite the British government's efforts to resist the Reagan administration's request on Belize, the increase in bellicose statements from the Guatemalan government, in response to the Falkland's crisis, led the Thatcher government to decide to maintain the Belize garrison for a further three months.¹⁷⁴ In the end, the Thatcher government retained a substantial force in Belize throughout the 1980s.¹⁷⁵

British negotiators were adept at using their limited resources – alongside the Reagan administration's concerns about their defence budget and the political instability of the Thatcher government – to secure this favourable deal. British officials also saw Thatcher's personal relationship with the President as central to securing the eventual deal:

Your personal concern over the outcome was known to the American negotiators throughout; they made clear that they were keeping the President carefully informed; and we have little doubt that he wanted - and that they knew he wanted - his eventual agreement with you to be satisfactory from your point of view.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Wade-Gery to Coles, 'Trident', 26 February 1982, PREM 19/694, TNA.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Nott to Weinberger, 5 March 1982, Trident II D-5, 1980 - 1982 (5 OF 11), RAC Box 5, Dennis Blair Files, RRL.

¹⁷⁴ Franklin, 'Belize', 14 June 1982, DEFE 25/417, TNA.

¹⁷⁵ Randall and Mount, *The Caribbean Basin*, 145.

¹⁷⁶ Armstrong to Thatcher, 3 March 1982, PREM 19/695, TNA.

However, the skill of British negotiators or the Thatcher-Reagan relationship does not fully explain the eventual deal. The US officials were also clearly good negotiators, and they had a clear strategy from the outset to secure a series of 'quids' from the British in their areas of concern. Whether or not the British planned to retain *Fearless* and *Intrepid*, that they did so meant the Reagan administration largely achieved their aims. However, given their concurrent concern with building the conventional and nuclear forces of the West, as well as their fear of the growth of the anti-nuclear left in Britain and the Labour party, the administration was never going to extort the Thatcher government in exchange for reductions. Moreover, the contribution the Reagan administration wished for was far more important politically than financially. As Richard Perle later remarked, given the Reagan administration's waiver of the Trident R&D costs in exchange for the British promise to keep more of its surface ships "One could say that we [the US] ended up subsidizing the Royal Navy."¹⁷⁷

The deal demonstrated the financial price the Reagan administration was willing to pay for the political and military support of a *Conservative* Britain. The deal was an inducement from the administration to bolster Britain's nuclear and conventional forces, secure the forces long-term future, and attempt to limit the commitment's effect on Britain's wider economic situation, thus stemming one aspect of the left's criticism of the deal. Once again, a US administration had viewed the US-UK nuclear relationship as a tool to secure the wider defence interests of the US and the Western alliance. Moreover, the Reagan administration utilised the relationship as a means to further their ideological aim to counter the perceived 'red threat' of the Soviet Union and a vocal left in Europe. The Thatcher government and Reagan administration had now reached an agreement, ready for ministerial approval and public announcement.

¹⁷⁷ Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, 573.

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On 4 March, MISC 7 met to discuss the outcome of the negotiations. The ministers agreed that the “terms negotiated with the Americans were advantageous and would be particularly helpful in presenting a purchase of the D5 missile to industry and to the government’s supporters.”¹⁷⁸ MISC 7 subsequently agreed that a ‘recommendation’ be put to Cabinet that Britain purchase the Trident D5 system, and build four submarines, each with 16 missile tubes, with a view to the first boat entering service in 1994.¹⁷⁹

Thatcher decided to inform the Cabinet orally about the D5 decision the week before the public announcement on 11 March, with a formal Cabinet decision then made on the day.¹⁸⁰ The fear of leaks largely dictated this timetable. The timetable also presumed Cabinet agreement. Nevertheless, this procedure was still far more democratic than the one followed for the Trident C4 agreement. Unlike in 1980, the Cabinet had already received briefings on the D5 choice following their earlier discussion of the subject on 21 January.¹⁸¹ Moreover, in July 1980, the original plan was to inform Cabinet of the decision on the day of the announcement. However, after a leak in Washington, the Carter and Thatcher governments decided to announce the Trident C4 decision two days earlier, with the Cabinet informed by correspondence. As discussed, this left many members of Cabinet disgruntled. This time Downing Street was careful not to show such lack of concern for Cabinet opinion. The more helpful attitude of the Reagan administration partly made this possible. They were not as paranoid about leaks as the Carter administration, and did not insist on the Thatcher government keeping news of the C4 discussions to an extremely small elite circle up until the last minute. Moreover, the Reagan administration gave permission for senior British officials to brief Cabinet about how much the US and UK knew about Soviet capabilities in the briefing

¹⁷⁸ ‘Limited Circulation Annex MISC 7 (82) 2nd Meeting Minutes’, 4 March 1982, CAB 130/1182, TNA.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Armstrong to Thatcher, ‘Cabinet: Trident’, 3 March 1982, PREM 19/695, TNA.

¹⁸¹ ‘Cabinet Most Confidential Records to CC(82) 8th Conclusions’, 4 March 1981, CAB 128/75/3, TNA.

they received on the D5 choice.¹⁸² On 4 March, the Cabinet agreed, "Trident 2 [D5] missiles for a four-boat British force should be acquired from the United States on the terms suggested."¹⁸³

On 11 March 1982, John Nott announced the Trident D5 decision in the House of Commons.¹⁸⁴ At the same time, the British published the formal exchange of letters, alongside an open government document explaining the rationale behind the adoption of D5. The exchange of letters was virtually identical to the 1980 C4 agreement and again contained the 'supreme national interests' clause, which meant under the provisions of the 1962 Nassau agreement and 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement that Britain could use the system independently if necessary.¹⁸⁵ Like the C4 agreement, Thatcher's letter to Reagan also included a commitment that the United Kingdom would use the savings from US supply of Trident D5, "to reinforce the United Kingdom Government's continuing efforts to upgrade their conventional forces."¹⁸⁶ Once again, the US reply argued that US-UK nuclear co-operation was important to NATO; Reagan's letter stressed the improvement of Britain's nuclear and conventional forces, which were of "the highest priority for NATO's security," that US-UK nuclear co-operation enabled.¹⁸⁷

In the ensuing debate following Nott's parliamentary announcement, the Shadow Defence Secretary, John Silken, gave the expected Labour reply to the Trident D5 decision:

Labour will cancel the Trident project. We shall do so for three basic reasons. First, this programme escalates the arms race, particularly in the light of the Geneva talks and the United Nations special session on disarmament... Secondly, the project breaks the spirit if not the letter of the non-proliferation treaty... Thirdly, despite all that the Secretary of State says, the expense will have an effect upon our conventional forces which will destroy the security

¹⁸² Nott, *Here Today Gone Tomorrow*, 217.

¹⁸³ 'Cabinet Most Confidential Records to CC (82) 8th Conclusions', 4 March 1981, CAB 128/75/3, TNA.

¹⁸⁴ House of Commons Debate, Trident Missile Programme, 11 March 1982, Vol 19 cc975-86, accessed 02 April 2015,

<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1982/mar/11/trident-missile-programme>.

¹⁸⁵ Thatcher to Reagan, 11 March 1982, WH Office of the Press Secretary: Press Releases and Briefings, 1981-89, Box 24, White House Staff Members & Office Files, RRL.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Reagan to Thatcher, 11 March 1982, WH Office of the Press Secretary: Press Releases and Briefings, 1981-89, Box 24, White House Staff Members & Office Files, RRL.

of these islands.¹⁸⁸

Subsequently, on 29 March, the Conservative government defeated an opposition censure motion in Parliament criticising the decision to spend 13 billion dollars on the Trident D5 missile system. The government convincingly defeated the motion by 301 to 215 in the House of Commons.¹⁸⁹ However, the Thatcher government and the Reagan administration still faced the risk that a Labour victory in the 1983 election could result in the cancellation of the Trident programme. Modest economic recovery meant the Conservatives ratings had been continuously improving since their low in the autumn of 1981, nevertheless, a Conservative majority in the next election still looked uncertain. Opinion polls at this time put Labour, the SDP and the Conservatives all but tied.¹⁹⁰ On 2 April 1982, news came through to London that the Argentinians had seized the Falkland Islands. The Thatcher government's 'victory' in the ensuing Falklands war, helped in no small part by the retention of HMS *Fearless* and *Intrepid*, boosted the Conservative's electoral fortunes. In October 1981, a Gallup poll had put Thatcher's approval rating at 24 percent, up until then, the lowest ever recorded for a Prime Minister. The Falklands "transformed" Thatcher into the Conservative's "electoral asset."¹⁹¹ In the British general election of June 1983, the Conservative party swept to a landslide victory, and thus secured the future of the Trident D5 programme.

¹⁸⁸ House of Commons Debate, 'Trident Missile Programme', 11 March 1982, Vol 19 cc975-86, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1982/mar/11/trident-missile-programme>, accessed 02 April 2015.

¹⁸⁹ 'Am-Trident-Lead (R-186)', 29 March 1982, Trident II D-5 1980 - 1982 (10 OF 11), RAC Box 5, Dennis Blair Files, RRL.

¹⁹⁰ Stewart, *Bang!*, 169.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 169-170.

Conclusion

"The US has never sought to exploit our procurement relationship in this area as a means to influence UK foreign policy."

- UK Government White Paper, 2006¹

For over thirty years, the British government has poured money into its Trident SLBM system. Yet the story of the US-UK negotiations on the British purchase of Trident has remained largely obscured. Only recently has it become possible to write a detailed account of the Trident agreements based upon archival material. This thesis provides the first discrete study of the Trident C4 and D5 negotiations. This account is inevitably incomplete and provisional; it is a starting point, not the final word. Due to the continued operation of the Trident system and the limited budgets of the US archives, a notable amount of archival material remains classified. Nevertheless, by using available material from the British and American archives this thesis provides both a coherent account of the complex Trident negotiations and the essentials of an interesting story.

The US provision of Trident was not inevitable. Close analysis of the history of US-UK nuclear co-operation, as chapter one demonstrated, reveals the relationship at its core is one that is driven by a hard-headed calculation of interests, not unstinting devotion. Moreover, analysis of the relationship since its beginnings highlights the frequent renegotiation that has taken place. The US is clearly the 'senior' partner in US-UK nuclear co-operation and therefore its interests, whether strategic, political or economic, heavily shaped, and will continue to, this renegotiation. Given this history of the US-UK nuclear relationship, the premise of this thesis is that the American role in the formulation

¹ UK Government White Paper, "The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent", December 2006, accessed on 8 June 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/27378/DefenseWhitePaper2006_Cm6994.pdf.

of the Trident agreements warrants close attention. As such, the overarching theme is the role that self-interest in the Reagan and Carter administration played in influencing and shaping the Trident negotiations and agreements. The second, interrelated, story is the ways in which the UK's technical dependence on the US has influenced British decision-making; leading to a narrowing of options and the seeking – as was the case with Chevaline – of some measure of autonomy. This focus reveals a complex story behind the Trident agreements. It is a tale of contingency, uncertainty, tough negotiations, and secret deals, which reveals that the Trident agreements formed part of a US-UK transactional defence relationship influenced by the dynamics of US geostrategic interests and domestic politics.

Thus far, this study has treated the two US administrations separately. A conclusion is a timely place to draw some tentative comparisons and broader reflections. Both the Carter and Reagan administrations were consistently rational and unemotional about supplying Trident to the UK, and only consented to do so when the situation suited Washington. Nevertheless, British officials encountered more uncertainty in their negotiations with the Carter administration over Trident C4, than in their discussions with the Reagan administration over the supply of Trident D5. This was because there existed greater convergence between the supply of Trident and the Reagan administration's foreign policy interests than was present with the Carter White House. Indeed, upon his election, Carter wished to reach agreement with the Soviets on significant nuclear reductions. If successful, this new approach to the US-Soviet arms-race would have restricted US-UK nuclear co-operation. However, only a couple of months after Carter's election the Soviets resolutely rejected his 'deep cuts' proposal. Despite this, the British government remained concerned that Carter's continued commitment to the arms-control process could limit their options for the successor to Polaris. Thankfully, for the British government, a combination of shared NATO concerns over the SALT process and a hardening of the White House's approach to the Soviet Union nullified the Carter administration's aim of nuclear reductions. Soviet adventurism in the Horn of

Africa and its decision to invade Afghanistan re-ignited the Cold War, but these decisions clearly redounded to Britain's nuclear advantage. It created a more hospitable environment for a US-UK Polaris replacement deal. However, these developments only made US agreement to the supply of Trident C4 more likely, not a foregone conclusion.

At the Guadeloupe summit in January 1979, Jim Callaghan secured Carter's agreement to consider the supply of Trident C4 with MIRV to the UK. However, despite Carter's forthcoming response, throughout 1979 and early 1980 the British government remained uncertain that an eventual Trident agreement would come to fruition. In contrast to Carter's assurances in Guadeloupe, in August 1979, US officials told the British that they had yet to make a decision on whether to transfer MIRV. Then in October 1979, the President promised to supply Trident C4 with MIRV - but at the same time, requested the delay of a formal agreement until after the announcement of a NATO 'dual-track' decision. However, the Carter administration continued to delay the finalisation of the Trident sale after NATO reached agreement on 'dual-track' in December 1979. On 4 November 1979, Iranian militants took sixty-six Americans hostage. The Carter administration's failure to secure their release damaged the President's already eroded domestic position. Carter's desperate need for a foreign policy success increased the administration's sensitivity to the potential political impact of a Trident deal on SALT ratification. As such, in December 1979, Carter informed Thatcher that finalisation of the Trident sale would have to wait until after the indeterminate ratification of SALT II. Nevertheless, the Carter administration remained reluctant to finalise the Trident sale after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent withdrawal of SALT II from Senate consideration. This was because in the aftermath of the invasion, Carter's political problems increased. Accordingly so did the White House's paranoia about potential criticism of the Trident sale. With Carter's potential second presidential term on the line, the Trident C4 agreement was not a priority. Indeed, when in late March 1980, the Carter administration decided to finalise the Trident deal it was largely

due to the political damage the potential British reaction could cause if there was further delay.

As such, it is clear that whilst the Carter administration supported, to an extent, the replacement of Polaris, they did not see the supply of Trident C4 as a priority. This was particularly the case in their first few years in office when the administration largely placed priority on arms-control and human rights, not strengthening the nuclear forces of an ailing ally. As such, the administration did not believe that the replacement of Polaris would assist their efforts to change the dynamic of the Cold War, build the administration's legacy, or win vital votes at home. However, the Carter administration's misgivings continued even after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which was the final catalyst in the 'hardening' of Carter's foreign policy. This lingering hesitation demonstrates that the Carter White House did not believe that the supply of Trident C4 missiles was necessary in itself to bolster western nuclear 'deterrence'. Instead, the Carter administration mainly saw benefit in the wider gains of the Trident C4 supply: the deal bolstered NATO, in particular by protecting British spending on conventional forces; reinforced Carter's image domestically by providing another demonstration of 'strength' in the face of Soviet 'aggression'; and was financially advantageous as it contributed extra money to a missile programme the US was developing anyway. However, to derive these benefits an agreement had to occur at the right time. An ill-timed deal would be extremely problematic for the administration, and had the potential to damage Carter's already fragile hopes for re-election. Subsequently, Carter's domestic problems marred preliminary negotiations on the Trident C4.

The convergence of US-UK defence policy interests meant that the Reagan administration was more amenable to supplying Trident D5 than the Carter administration had been with Trident C4. Nevertheless, in the first year of the Reagan White House, British policy-makers still felt uncertain about the future of the Polaris replacement. In 1981, Britain's technical dependency on the US left its Polaris replacement programme in limbo as its government waited for the new Reagan administration to decide on whether to upgrade to the Trident D5 system. By September 1981, the British had secured confirmation that the Reagan

administration would switch their submarine missile system to the Trident D5, and that this advanced system would be available to them. The British government was fortunate that the Reagan administration made their strategic modernisation decision earlier than originally expected, due mainly to the controversy over MX basing. Once Reagan had decided that the D5 missile would replace the C4 by 1989, he did not hesitate to agree that the British could purchase it.

This swift agreement was a clear demonstration of Reagan's support for the UK nuclear programme. However, this decisiveness also chimed with the administration's wider foreign policy goals as well as belief in the utility of Britain's nuclear force. A key consideration in the president's swift offer of the Trident D5 was the risk of British nugatory spending on the C4, as well as a belief within the US government, particularly the Pentagon, of the need for Britain to maintain commonality with the US. Protracted delay on agreeing to supply the D5, or indeed refusing to supply it, would have increased British expenditure on its nuclear programme at the expense of its conventional forces. This was not in the interests of the Reagan administration. Reagan officials believed that in order to meet the global challenge of the Soviet Union, the Western alliance needed to build both nuclear *and* conventional capabilities. Moreover, alongside the Reagan administration's aggressive approach to the Soviet Union they concurrently viewed arms-control as a low priority; within such thinking it did not matter that provision of the D5 system would likely undermine any ongoing arms-control negotiations with the Soviet Union. Concern over the impact of a Trident sale on arms-control efforts had been a major reason for the Carter administration's vacillation. With different priorities in their approach to the Cold War, the Reagan administration did not face such political constraints. As such, the greater convergence between US-UK nuclear co-operation and the Reagan administration's foreign policy interests facilitated the supply of Trident D5 more than Carter's sale of Trident C4.

By the time the Trident C4 negotiations took place, Carter's move toward a foreign policy confrontation with Moscow meant that there was greater

convergence between US defence interests and the logic for a Trident sale than in the early days of the administration. Likewise, throughout the Trident D5 negotiations, supply of the system at a reduced price aligned strongly with US defence interests. Nevertheless, during both the C4 and D5 negotiations, US officials drove a hard bargain in order to derive the greatest possible benefit from the negotiation, and did not give the British reductions on the R&D charge freely or easily. Both the final C4 and D5 deals were contingent on complex negotiations. Moreover, the aims and interests of the Carter and Reagan administrations influenced the terms of both Trident sales.

The Carter administration was particularly forthright in its attempts to secure a substantive *quid pro quo* for the supply of Trident C4. The Carter White House demanded a British commitment to use the ‘savings’ from US-UK nuclear co-operation on their conventional forces, the payment of the full pro-rata R&D levy or provide offsets, and agreement to their plans to extend US facilities on Diego Garcia. After protracted negotiations, the British agreed to a watered down commitment on conventional force spending, to pay a five percent R&D levy in addition to operating US Rapier systems in Britain, and the US plans for Diego Garcia. In real terms, these demands were not onerous for the British, particularly in light of the savings the purchase of Trident afforded compared to the other options for the replacement of Polaris. Like the Reagan administration, it was not in the Carter administration’s interest for the British to spend an amount on their nuclear programme that would be detrimental to the rest of their defence budget. Instead, the Carter administration sought commitments that would benefit their wider foreign and domestic policy aims but not financially harm the British. Nevertheless, whilst both sides saw the eventual deal as beneficial, the process of coming to an agreement was not congenial nor particularly in keeping with a supposed ‘special relationship’. In particular, US officials openly discussed utilising Trident as ‘leverage’ in order to secure British agreement to their plans for Diego Garcia. In this way, the Carter White House treated the US-UK nuclear relationship as coolly transactional in nature.

Whilst the Reagan administration was more subtle in its effort to secure

commitments from London, it also endeavoured to derive certain benefits from the Trident sale. As a more advanced system, the full price tag of the D5 system was beyond the UK's means. However, the administration's offer of the missile did not come with a reassurance that they would provide it on similar terms to the Trident C4. Instead, the Reagan administration told the British that they would expect a *quid pro quo* in return for a reduction in the price. British acquisition of the D5 system at a higher cost than the C4 would likely have problematic political ramifications for the Thatcher government. The increased capability and costs of D5 could provoke increased public opposition to the Trident programme. In addition, British officials were concerned about if the increased costs could be absorbed within the already strained defence budget. Subsequently, in November 1981, when MISC 7 met to deliberate on whether to adopt Trident D5, minister's concerns about costs and the political ramifications meant they did not agree on a decision. Only in January 1982, buoyed by their overriding belief that Britain should retain an 'independent strategic deterrent', did MISC 7 decide to adopt D5, subject to negotiations on price with the Reagan administration.

The Reagan White House continued to drive a hard bargain up until the final day of the Trident negotiations as they pushed for British commitments, primarily on naval deployments, in return for a reduction in the price of the D5. In the end, the British received an extremely favourable deal, more so than in the Trident C4 agreements. This deal included a fixed R&D levy equivalent to \$116 million, which was an extraordinary concession by the administration. The British secured this deal by promising to reprieve the naval assault ships *Fearless* and *Intrepid*. As such, the British eventually secured a reduction in the R&D levy without much extra commitment in real terms on their part; they had already decided to reverse their decision to decommission the two ships. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the remarkable terms of the Trident D5 agreement also benefitted the Reagan administration. Indeed, the British received an extremely favourable deal because of the convergence of US-UK interests. The sale aided US efforts to strengthen western nuclear and conventional forces, in order to counter the 'threat' of the Soviet Union, and the favourable terms helped negate some

leftist criticism of the Trident D5 sale, and thus bolstered the ailing Thatcher government. The deal demonstrated the financial price the Reagan administration was willing to pay for the political and military support of a *Conservative* Britain. In this way, the party political preferences of the US government once again influenced the US-UK relationship.²

It is clear that the Reagan administration viewed the US-UK nuclear relationship as a tool to secure the wider defence interests of the US and the Western alliance. Richard Perle later remarked that the Reagan administration saw the Trident D5 agreement as "one more arrow in the quiver."³ However, the Reagan administration wanted this 'quiver' to take a certain form. As such, at the same time as wishing to strike a favourable deal with the British, the Reagan administration concurrently saw the negotiations as an opportunity to get as much assistance as possible in their particular areas of concern. Like the Carter administration before, Reagan officials bargained hard in order to exploit the greatest advantage possible and viewed US-UK nuclear co-operation unemotionally as part of a wider defence relationship.

This thesis has presented a multi-faceted account of the Trident agreements, which demonstrates their nuances and complexity. There is currently little archival research on the US-UK nuclear relationship in the late 1970s – early 1980s.⁴ As such, by providing the first discrete study of the Trident negotiations, this thesis helps to move understanding of the US-UK nuclear relationship chronologically forward. However, by eschewing the Anglo-centric framework that too often dominates studies of the US-UK nuclear relationship, the thesis also elucidates the inter-connection between US-UK nuclear co-operation and other elements of American foreign policy.

Britain, as the junior partner, gained the most from the Trident

² See Dobson, "Labour or Conservative."

³ Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, 573.

⁴ Works on the 1970s – 1980s include: Stoddart, *The Sword and the Shield*; Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union*; Parr, "The British Decision"; Baylis and Stoddart, "Britain and the Chevaline Project"; Robb, "Antelope, Poseidon or a Hybrid."

agreements. Nevertheless, Britain's technical dependency created a clear asymmetry within the US-UK relationship that accorded the Carter and Reagan administrations significant leverage, which they used to derive certain commitments. This resulted in political price tags being placed on the Trident agreements that were in turn hidden from the public. In this way, the actions of the Carter and Reagan administrations undermined the British government's assertion in a 2006 White Paper that the US has never used Britain's technical dependency "to influence UK Foreign Policy."⁵ Nevertheless, from the perspective of the British government, it is understandable that they would wish to hide these terms. To be seen to be coveting deals on weapons of mass destruction from a position of weakness would not have helped the public presentation of the Trident agreements. In addition, public knowledge that the US had such political leverage over the British would undermine the government's calls that the purchase of Trident ensured the continuation of Britain's *'independent deterrent'*. Moreover, public knowledge of these price tags would have highlighted, that for the US, the supply of Trident missiles was not to ensure the continuation of Britain's nuclear 'deterrent' *per se*, and thereby undermined the British government's argument of its necessity.

Both administrations viewed the continuation of the US-UK nuclear relationship as of benefit to the wider defence interests of the US and the Western alliance. However, they differed on the extent they thought the supply of Trident, in itself, was of benefit. Reagan clearly saw utility in assisting with the replacement of Britain's strategic system and the subsequent strengthening of NATO's nuclear forces. In contrast, Carter prevaricated on this issue and the available evidence suggests that, whilst he supported the maintenance of the UK's nuclear capability, he was less sure about the supply of Trident C4 with MIRV due to its increased capability compared to Polaris. Carter indicated his support for Britain's nuclear programme in a number of ways: he endorsed the maintenance

⁵ UK Government White Paper, "The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent."

of the UK's nuclear capability through Kingman Brewster; authorised British warhead testing for the successor system; and was forthcoming in response to Callaghan's enquiries at the Guadeloupe summit over whether he would consider the supply of Trident C4. However, at the same time, the actions of the Carter administration indicated a reluctance to supply Trident C4: the administration hesitated over the supply of MIRV; overtly worried about the criticism they would face over the sale's damage to arms-control; and informed the British that their primary motive for the Trident sale was to prevent cuts in Britain's conventional forces. In particular, the Carter administration's willingness to delay the agreement raises questions over the utility they saw in Britain's nuclear 'deterrent'. It is difficult to assess, given that many of the relevant documents at the Carter library remain classified, whether the administration's hesitation to supply Trident was due only to Carter's concern over the political ramifications of supplying an advanced system, or whether the supply itself of an advanced nuclear capability also troubled him. Nevertheless, it is clear that Carter saw less utility in the supply of Trident than Reagan due to the inherent problems it could cause for an arms-control process in which he was vested.

Carter's hesitant attitude towards Trident is representative of the dilemma he faced in tackling the problems of strategic parity at an international and European level. At the NATO level, the supply of Trident ensured the continuation of a 'second-centre of decision-making' on nuclear use, which was helpful in stemming Western European fears over US 'de-coupling' from Europe due to strategic parity. However, the Carter administration also believed that the supply of Trident C4 could damage their arms-control efforts at the international level. This dilemma helps to explain Carter's complex and hesitant attitude towards the supply of Trident. Reagan faced no such dilemma due to his belief that strengthening nuclear and conventional forces, not arms-control, was the solution to strategic parity. In this way, the Carter and Reagan administration differed over the utility they saw in Britain's nuclear force, due to their diverging views over strategy in the Cold War.

However, both the Carter and Reagan administrations believed that the

Trident agreements were important to maintain NATO's conventional forces. Behind this lay the belief that the British government would decide to replace Polaris with or without US help. As discussed, it was not in US interests for the British to arm unilaterally. The huge costs involved would be detrimental to Britain's wider defence contributions, which were politically important to the US. In contrast, through the supply of Trident, both the Reagan and Carter administrations were able to bolster NATO, in a relatively cheap way, by ensuring the maintenance of Britain's conventional *and* nuclear forces. However, as well as the benefits to NATO, both administrations also viewed US-UK nuclear co-operation as important due to its place in the wider defence relationship. As part of this, both US administrations used their political advantage over the British to derive certain commitments relating to their wider interests. In this way, the US harnessed the Trident agreements to reinforce the existing security architecture of the Cold War. As such, the US supply of Trident was not about ensuring that Britain stayed in the nuclear game *per se* but rather it concerned the modernisation of Britain's nuclear *and* conventional forces to strengthen NATO as part of a transactional US-UK defence relationship.

However, it is important to clarify that, even though the Trident agreements were to the benefit of the US and helped to reinforce a security architecture that was very much in their interests, this did not mean that the Trident agreements were a foregone conclusion. As discussed, the British felt uncertain about the possible results of the Trident negotiations throughout their discussions with the Carter and Reagan administrations. In a distinct change since the Skybolt crisis and the resulting Polaris sale, this uncertainty was, overall, not the result of a reluctance to supply a nuclear system to the British. Instead, much of the uncertainty was because the Trident agreements would only be of modest advantage to the US. In the conduct of the Carter and Reagan administrations, it is evident that the British could have the system they wanted, as long as it did not interfere with the main policy priorities of the US government. Overall, both administration's attitude towards the US-UK nuclear relationship was one of support, or at least acquiescence. However, both administrations felt no

compunction about criticising London when they felt the British government was diverting money to its nuclear programme at the expense of other vital areas of defence, or if they felt the sale of Trident could undermine their other interests. This was particularly shown by the attitude of the Carter administration.

On the other hand, if co-operation was particularly helpful to US interests then the respective administration was more forthcoming; this was particularly the case with the Reagan administration. In this way, it is clear that both administrations viewed it as helpful to assist the British with replacing Polaris, when it coalesced with their overall aims and interests. However, if a Polaris replacement clashed with the priorities of the administration, they brushed aside the interests of the British. In this way, Britain's demonstrable position as the junior partner in US-UK nuclear co-operation implied that contingency was innate throughout the British government's endeavours to replace Polaris. As such, the Trident agreements were not a foregone conclusion, owing to long-standing nuclear co-operation or the reductive logic of 'deterrence' in the Cold War era. Instead, the Trident agreements were a continuation of the close but not preordained nature of US-UK defence co-operation, one that has been renegotiated, according to the varying political, strategic and economic interests of both parties continually over its existence.

The previously opaque story of the Trident negotiations contained within this thesis also makes an important contribution to current debates on Trident renewal. It demonstrates that there is an entrenched belief amongst the British political elite that an 'independent deterrent' is necessary for Britain's security. Accordingly, owing to Britain's inferiority in nuclear R&D, this creates a dependency on the US to supply the system. Combined, these two aspects of British nuclear policy led to far greater US influence over British defence policy, through the Trident agreements, than the historiography has previously acknowledged. Specifically, the thesis highlights two particularly problematic areas of influence.

Firstly, Britain's technical dependence and the need to maintain 'commonality' with the US restricted its choice of system. Therefore, Britain opted to purchase Trident D5; a system that far exceeded the nation's needs. The suitability of this system is particularly questionable given that the US supply of Trident was not to ensure the continuation of Britain's nuclear 'deterrent' *per se* but rather the wider defence benefits that the US gained from US-UK nuclear co-operation. The result of the agreement between the Thatcher and Reagan governments was the unnecessary escalation of British nuclear capability, which in-turn arguably undermined global non-proliferation efforts.

The second problematic area is the political leverage the US held over Britain's defence policy on the issue of technical dependency. Unquestionably, both the Reagan and Carter administrations used the sale of Trident to influence British defence policy. This was particularly problematic given the marked democratic deficit evident in British nuclear decision-making. In the name of 'national security', the British government obscured the deals that complimented the Trident agreements. Indeed, decision-making on whether to accept the terms of the US was limited to a very small elite circle, with Cabinet only ever asked to rubber-stamp the Trident decisions. Moreover, as demonstrated by the continued redaction of much of the material within the British archives, the UK government remain reluctant to open their past nuclear decision-making to the process of accountability; this is reputedly a hallmark of democracy.

This US 'influence' in British nuclear decision-making is important to note when considering the future of US-UK nuclear co-operation. The Trident agreements reinforced British reliance upon the US. Therefore, the superior geostrategic and domestic interests of the United States will invariably condition the British government's policy on the renewal of Trident. As such, this study provides a stark warning to policy-makers, and the interested public alike: the US will expect substantial influence for any assistance with Britain's attempts to replace Trident. Moreover, given the British governments conception's of 'national security', democratic accountability will once more be bypassed as any

Conclusion

'influence' the US has in the Trident renewal decision will remain clouded in secrecy for the next thirty years or more.

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