

Wilson and the Bomb

The politics and economics of British nuclear diplomacy

1964-1970

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Declaration and Statements

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

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Summary

This thesis explores the British government's approach to international negotiations concerning nuclear weapons during Harold Wilson's first two terms of office (1964-1970). It focuses on three distinct but interrelated strands of British nuclear diplomacy: 'hardware solutions', the sharing of nuclear weapons between states in the form of a multilateral force; 'software solutions', non-physical measures of cooperation, such as consultative and planning arrangements, between alliance members; and a global non-proliferation treaty. In looking at how and why these interrelated policies evolved, this thesis considers party, domestic and international influences on decision-making within the government. It pays particular attention to political and economic events, building on existing diplomatic and strategic accounts of the period.

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Acknowledgments

Some of the material used in chapter one will appear in ‘The ambiguities of opposition: Economic decline, international cooperation, and domestic rivalry in the nuclear policies of the Labour Party, 1963-4’, *Contemporary British History* (Forthcoming, 2011). Elements of the material used in chapters two and three will appear in ‘Strength in numbers: The Labour Government and the size of the Polaris force’, *The Journal of Strategic Studies* (Forthcoming, 2010). Some of the material used in chapter five first appeared in ‘Ministers, markets and missiles: The British government, the European Economic Community and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 1964-68’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 21:3 (2010), 451-70. Finally, some of the material used in chapter five and the conclusion has appeared in ‘Nuclear deterrence and the tradition of non-use’, *International Affairs* 85:4 (2009), 831-37. I am grateful to each of these journals, and their publishers, for allowing me to share my research with a wider audience.

* * *

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My colleagues and friends in Aberystwyth, Bristol and London deserve considerable thanks. Their kindness and support was invaluable. Special mention must go to Thomas Robb. His camaraderie and advice made this thesis, and the many hours spent in our office, considerably better. I look forward to reading more of his work in the future. Most importantly, thank you to Gemma, Michael, Mum and Dad for their unconditional love and support. I dedicate this thesis to them, with love and gratitude.

DJG

Abbreviations

In the text

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile
ACDA	Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
ANF	Atlantic Nuclear Force
BAOR	British Army of the Rhine
CDS	Chief of Defence Staff
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CTBT	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
DEA	Department of Economic Affairs
DOPC	Defence and Oversea Policy Committee
EEC	European Economic Community
ENDC	Conference of the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament
Euratom	European Atomic Energy Agency
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FO	Foreign Office
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MLF	Multilateral (Nuclear) Force
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NNWS	Non-Nuclear Weapon State
NPG	Nuclear Planning Group, NATO
NPWG	Nuclear Planning Working Group, NATO
NPT	The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NWS	Nuclear Weapon State
OPD	Oversea Policy and Defence Committee
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PRC	People's Republic of China
PWG	Paris Working Group
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe, NATO
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SLBM	Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile
SPD	Social Democratic Party of West Germany
SSBN	Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear

UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

In the notes

BCP	Barbra Castle papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK
CAB	Cabinet papers, National Archives, Kew, London, UK
CF	Country File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US
DEFE	Defence papers, National Archives, Kew, London, UK
EG	Department of Energy papers, National Archives, Kew, London, UK
FO	Foreign Office papers, National Archives, Kew, London, UK
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office papers, National Archives, Kew, London, UK
FMB	Francis M. Bator file, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US
<i>FRUS</i>	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
GBP	George Brown papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK
GNWR	Patrick Gordon Walker papers, Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, UK
GRDS	General Records of the Department of State, National Archives, College Park, Maryland, US
GWB	George W. Ball file, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US
HC	House of Commons, Hansard, UK
HSCF	Head of State Correspondence file, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US
HL	House of Lords, Hansard, UK
HWP	Harold Wilson papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK
JCP	James Callaghan papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK
LBJL	Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US
LHA	Labour History Archive, Manchester, UK
MFP	Michael Foot papers, Labour History Archive, Manchester, UK
MGB	McGeorge Bundy File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US
NSF	National Security File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US
PREM	Prime Minister's Office papers, National Archives, Kew, London, UK
PRO	Public Records Office, Kew, London, UK
RICH	Ian Mikardo papers (Jo Richardson Papers) Labour Archive, Manchester, UK
RK	Richard Kromer File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US
RSM	Robert S. McNamara Files, National Archives, College Park, Maryland, US
SF	Subject File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US
SK	Spurgeon Keeny File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US
SHSC	Special Head of State Correspondence, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Texas, US

STWT	Michael Stewart papers, Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, UK
T	Treasury papers, National Archives, Kew, London, UK
USNA	National Archives, College Park, Maryland, US
WRF	Walt Rostow File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas, US

Introduction

Prime Minister Harold Wilson suffered many disappointments in his first two terms of office. The devaluation of the pound, the retreat from global defence commitments, and the failure to achieve membership of the European Economic Community overshadowed much of his premiership. Wilson's occasionally disingenuous explanations of these misfortunes, coupled with a raft of unfulfilled domestic promises, encouraged little sympathy for the plight of his government. Perhaps most damning of all was the scepticism in British politics that these two terms engendered.¹ These ignominies, however, should not obscure a considerable record of achievement in international negotiations concerning nuclear weapons. Indeed, under Wilson, British nuclear diplomacy enjoyed much success.

By the close of 1968, the Labour government had signed and ratified the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. A little over a year later, the Treaty came into force, marking an important step towards a world with fewer nuclear weapon states. Preceding this historic feat was another. In 1966, Britain became one of the founding members of the Nuclear Planning Group. The United States, Britain, West Germany, Italy, and three rotating members, would share decision-making on nuclear policy in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. These achievements had been realised with no diminution to Britain's own nuclear status. Under Wilson, the Labour government had successfully resisted international pressure to share British nuclear weapons with other governments. Each of these achievements had been fraught with difficulty. Changing domestic and international circumstances repeatedly affected the content and conduct of policy-making. Nevertheless, Wilson's keen exploitation of events at home and abroad ensured that the course of British nuclear diplomacy evolved in the direction he had envisaged.

This thesis is concerned with understanding how and why British nuclear diplomacy changed during Harold Wilson's time as Prime Minister between 1964 and 1970. It focuses on three distinct but interrelated strands of British nuclear diplomacy: 'hardware solutions', the sharing of nuclear weapons between states in the form of a multilateral nuclear force; 'software solutions', non-physical measures of nuclear weapons cooperation, such as consultative and planning arrangements, between alliance members;

¹ Peter Hennessy, *The Prime Minister, The office and its holders since 1945* (London: Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 2000), 288; Clive Ponting, *Breach of Promise: Labour in Power 1964-1970* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1989).

and a global non-proliferation treaty. This thesis suggests that British nuclear diplomacy was not one consistent policy. Change reflected competition and cooperation between the pursuit of hardware solutions, software solutions and a non-proliferation treaty, all of which vied against the broader and shifting objectives of the Labour government. To be sure, wider international and domestic considerations encouraged Wilson to exert a degree of flexibility in the pursuit of all of his diplomatic objectives *vis-à-vis* nuclear weapons.

Introducing a collection of his speeches published in 1964, Wilson describes his task as Prime Minister as that of conducting a mighty orchestra, attempting to harmonise and integrate domestic and international affairs.² George Brown, Wilson's third Foreign Secretary, reaches a similar conclusion in his own memoirs. 'The fact of the matter is that Foreign Affairs, whether for Britain or any other nation, are not just a catalogue of unconnected events', Brown explains, continuing, 'They are a kaleidoscope of inter-related pieces, all of which must somehow be juggled with, virtually at the same time and certainly in relation to each other.'³ British nuclear diplomacy was a series of compromises, an intricate blend of political, economic, and strategic considerations. Cabinet discussion, financial crises, and international tensions all influenced nuclear policy-making in the two Labour governments of this period. This thesis is an account of Wilson and the Labour government's attempts to balance these disparate, and at times competing, influences in the context of British nuclear diplomacy.

Historiography

Britain became an increasingly marginal economic and military actor on the world stage during Wilson's premiership. This decline stood in stark contrast to the dominance of the superpowers and the growing influence of the European Economic Community (EEC). Nevertheless, Britain still had an important, albeit lesser, international role. There is a rich and expanding body of historical literature considering British diplomacy and foreign policy at this time. John Young has produced a masterful account of Labour's international policy in the 1960s.⁴ There is also a plethora of more focused studies, considering events 'East of Suez', Britain's pursuit of membership of the EEC, the growth

² Harold Wilson, *Purpose in politics, Selected speeches by Rt Hon Harold Wilson* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), viii.

³ George Brown, *In My Way, The Political Memoirs of Lord George Brown* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), 158.

⁴ J. W. Young, *The Labour governments, 1964-1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

of *détente* and relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).⁵ All of these studies touch on the issue of nuclear weapons.

There is, of course, a considerable literature on British nuclear history itself. The post-war period in particular has attracted considerable attention.⁶ The research specifically considering British nuclear diplomacy in the 1960s continues to grow and develop. Historians interested in hardware solutions have focused on the Multilateral Force (MLF) and the Atlantic Nuclear Force (ANF), both of which attempted to reorganise NATO's nuclear arrangements. These hardware solutions dominated the content and conduct of British nuclear diplomacy in Wilson's first period of office. Some scholars have suggested that Wilson's concept of the ANF was a cynical attempt to extricate Britain from hardware solutions or, as it was also termed, 'nuclear sharing' commitments.⁷ Conversely, newer research suggests this was a serious diplomatic initiative by the new Labour government.⁸ There are elements of truth in both arguments.

⁵ Saki Dockrill, *Britain's retreat from East of Suez, The choice between Europe and the World?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2002); G.C. Peden, *Arms Economic and British strategy, From Dreadnoughts to Hydrogen bombs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Helen Parr, *Britain's policy towards the European community: Harold Wilson and Britain's world role, 1964-7* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006); Melissa Pine, *Harold Wilson and Europe: Pursuing Britain's membership of the European community* (London: Tauris, 2007); R. Gerald Hughes, *Britain, Germany and the Cold War: The Search for a European detente, 1949-1967* (London: Routledge, 2007); Geraint Hughes, *Harold Wilson's Cold War: The Labour Government and East-West Politics, 1964-1970* (Rochester: A Royal Historical Society Publication, Boydell Press, 2009); Terry Macintyre, *Anglo-German relations during the Labour government 1964-70: NATO strategy, detente and European integration* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Andrew Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson, NATO: Britain, America and the Dynamics of Alliance, 1962-68* (London: Routledge 2006).

⁶ Margaret Gowing, *Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy 1945-52, Volume 1: Policy Making* (Macmillan, 1974); Margaret Gowing, *Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy 1945-52, Volume 2: Policy Execution* (Macmillan, 1974); Ian Clark and Nicholas Wheeler, *The British Origins of Nuclear Strategy, 1945-1955* (Oxford University Press, 1989); Ian Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship: Britain's Deterrent and America, 1957-1962* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); John Baylis, *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy 1945-64* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995). Stephen Twigge and Len Scott, *Planning Armageddon: Britain, the United States and the Command of Western Nuclear Forces, 1945-64* (London: Harwood, 2000).

⁷ Andrew Pierre, *Nuclear Politics: The British Experience with an Independent Strategic Force 1939-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 283; Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and Nuclear Weapons* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 23; David Dumbleby and David Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart* (London: Hodder and Soughton, 1988), 246; Christopher Bluth, *Britain, Germany and Western Nuclear Strategy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 99; Jane Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 163. See, for instance, Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-1970, A personal record* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1971), 49-50; Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph 1989), 304-305; Solly Zuckerman, *Monkeys, Men and Missiles* (London: W.W. Norton, 1989), 374-5.

⁸ Susanna Schrafstetter and Stephen Twigge, 'Trick or truth? The British ANF Proposal, West Germany, and US Non-proliferation Policy', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 11:2, (2000), 161-84; John Young, 'Killing the MLF? The Wilson Government and Nuclear Sharing in Europe, 1964-66', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 14:2, (2003), 295-324; Jonathan Colman, *A Special Relationship?: Harold Wilson, Lyndon B. Johnson and Anglo-American Relations 'at the Summit', 1964-8*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 2, 26-40, 43-45; Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, 93-94; James Ellison, *The United States, Britain and the*

Although having intentions beyond merely scuppering the MLF, the ANF was only ever a more palatable variation of a still largely unpopular idea. When the opportunity presented itself, as argued in chapters two and three of this thesis, Wilson cautiously moved away from such proposals and patiently awaited the collapse of international negotiations on hardware solutions.

Tied into the failure of hardware solutions, and influencing British nuclear diplomacy throughout Wilson's two terms of office, were software solutions and the pursuit of a non-proliferation treaty. Historians concerned with the former suggest that the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) was a US invention, which Britain ultimately supported in an attempt to help ease tensions within NATO.⁹ Although accurate, the NPG also played a significant role in facilitating non-proliferation negotiations and the decline of nuclear sharing. Software solutions, as shown in chapter four, were therefore essential to explaining the evolution of British nuclear diplomacy and much of its success.

The Labour government's commitment to realising the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was steadfast and extended from 1964 to 1970. Despite this commitment, some historians suggest that Britain was of minimal significance to the intensive phase of negotiations.¹⁰ Others, however, argue that Britain's role in the non-proliferation negotiations was important, and directly influenced the US.¹¹ The final chapter of this thesis claims that Britain's influence varied throughout the negotiations. The Labour government was unable to influence the superpowers, and often unwilling to influence the actions of the non-nuclear weapon states.

Transatlantic Crisis, Rising to the Gaullist Challenge, 1963-1968 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 17-22.

⁹ Christopher Bluth, *Britain, Germany and Western Nuclear Strategy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 179-194; Andrew Priest, 'From Hardware to Software: The End of the MLF and the Rise of the Nuclear Planning Group' in Andreas Wenger, Christian Nuenlist and Anna Locher (eds.) *Transforming NATO in the Cold Wars: Challenges Beyond Deterrence in the 1960s* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 148-161; James Ellison, *The United States, Britain and the Transatlantic Crisis: Rising to the Gaullist Challenge, 1963-68* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2007), 110-113.

¹⁰ Susanna Schrafstetter and Stephen Twigge, *Avoiding Armageddon: Europe, the United States, and the struggle for Nuclear Nonproliferation, 1945-1970* (London: Praeger, 2004), 163-82; George H. Quester, *The politics of nuclear proliferation* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 152.

¹¹ J. P. G. Freeman, *Britain's nuclear arms control policy in the context of Anglo-American relations, 1957-68* (London: Macmillan Press, 1986), 195-250; Alun Chalfont, *The Shadow of my hand, A memoir* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), 98-118; Wilson, *Labour government*, 48-9; Hal Brands, 'Non-Proliferation and the Dynamics of the Middle Cold War: The Superpowers, the MLF, and the NPT', *Cold War History* 7:3 (2007), 389-423.

Contribution

This thesis makes four original contributions to the existing literature on British nuclear diplomacy between 1964 and 1970. First, the thesis explores hardware solutions, software solutions, and a non-proliferation treaty as interwoven, rather than separate, components of British nuclear diplomacy. Beyond integrating separate bodies of historical research, this focus helps to reveal the interconnected nature of events and encourages broader conclusions about nuclear policy-making within the Labour government. Under Wilson, British nuclear diplomacy was simultaneously characterised by success and irrelevance. The failure of hardware solutions and the realisation of the NPT meant that the Labour government achieved its key objectives. Yet, these successes were often more to do with superpower negotiations than the actions of Wilson or his government. Finally, an interwoven approach also facilitates a wider analysis of domestic and international influences on the Labour government, many of which had previously appeared unimportant or unrelated.

Indeed, this thesis' second contribution comes from its interest in the British economy. Efforts to reduce defence expenditure and anxiety about economic performance certainly influenced the conduct and content of British nuclear diplomacy. The ANF, for example, had a serious economic purpose beyond merely scuppering the MLF. In the early months of taking office, the Labour government repeatedly discussed contributing its own nuclear weapons to the ANF in exchange for military concessions from the US. By exploring the economic dimensions of British nuclear diplomacy, it is possible to complement, and often improve on, existing diplomatic and strategic accounts of the period. Consequently, this thesis pays particular attention to the growing collection of work considering the British economy in this period, and seeks to integrate it into a study of the Labour government's handling of nuclear diplomacy.¹²

¹² Susan Strange, *Sterling problem and the six* (London: Chatham House, 1967); Susan Strange, *Sterling and British Policy* (Oxford, 1971); Alec Cairncross, and Barry Eichengreen, *Sterling in decline, The devaluation of 1931, 1949 and 1967* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); Alan Dobson, *The Politics of the Anglo-American Economic Special Relationship 1940–1987* (Brighton, UK: Wheatsheaf, 1988).

For more recent contributions see C. R. Schenk, 'Sterling, International Monetary Reform and Britain's Applications to Join the European Economic Community in the 1960s', *Contemporary European History* 11 (2002); Jim Tomlinson, 'The Decline of Empire and the Economic "Decline" of Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 14:3 (2003): 216–7; Kevin Boyle, 'The Price of Peace: Vietnam the pound, and the crisis of American empire', *Diplomatic History* 27:1 (2003), 37-72; Jim Tomlinson, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970: Volume 3, Economic Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Raj Roy, 'No secrets between "special friends": America's involvement in British economic policy, October 1964 – April 1965', *History*, 89:295 (2004), 399-423; Glen O'Hara, 'Dynamic, Exciting, Thrilling Change: The Wilson government's economic policy, 1964-1970', 79-98, in O'Hara, Glen and Helen Parr (eds.) *The Wilson*

The third contribution is a greater consideration of the relationship between the Labour government's desire for membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) and British nuclear diplomacy. This thesis therefore pays particular attention to the growing collection of work considering Britain's second application for membership of the EEC.¹³ Wilson's interest in membership was limited to the later stages of his time in office. Nevertheless, an interest in the EEC strengthens existing accounts of British nuclear history that have focused on the Cold War or US-UK relations. Wilson often adopted a secondary role in negotiations on the NPT and repeatedly left the running to the superpowers. This avoided unnecessary conflict with the countries of the EEC, who were resentful of the Treaty's discriminatory terms, which, in turn, helped to protect Britain's application for membership.

The final contribution comes from a closer examination of Wilson and his own attempts to balance competing interests within the government *vis-à-vis* British nuclear diplomacy. Although reaching familiar conclusions about his style of leadership, this thesis nevertheless provides a more detailed account of his handling of nuclear policy. He was a skilful, forceful and often devious politician. Wilson, for example, was instrumental in managing the government to support the continuation of Britain's nuclear weapons programme. He did so by cautiously gathering support beforehand, directly controlling the flow of information available to the Cabinet, and exploiting his small majority to encourage cooperation. Crucially, though, he was also a pragmatist. Wilson often modified the content and conduct of British nuclear diplomacy in response to a wide array of competing domestic and international interests.

Although focused on decision-making at the highest level, often in the context of international negotiations, this thesis does recognise the context of decision-making within the government. Discord in the Labour Party, Cabinet debate, and interdepartmental rivalries all form an important context to the development of British nuclear diplomacy.

Governments 1964-1970 reconsidered (London: Routledge: 2006); Scott Newton 'The two sterling crises of 1964 and the decision not to devalue', *Economic History Review* 62:1 (2009), 73–98.

¹³ Helen Parr, 'Gone native: The Foreign Office and Harold Wilson's policy towards the EEC, 1964-67', in Oliver J. Daddow (Ed.), *Harold Wilson and European integration: Britain's second application to join the EEC* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 75-94; Young, *The Labour governments*, 142-65; Helen Parr, 'A Question of Leadership: July 1966 and Harold Wilson's European Decision', *Contemporary British History* 19:4 (2005); Helen Parr, 'Britain, America, East of Suez and the EEC: Finding a role in British foreign policy, 1964-1967', 99-117, in O'Hara, Glen and Helen Parr (Eds.) *The Wilson Governments 1964-1970 reconsidered* (London: Routledge: 2006); Helen Parr, *Britain's policy towards the European community*; Pine, *Harold Wilson and Europe*; Toomey, Jane, *Harold Wilson's EEC application: Inside the Foreign Office* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007).

There is an abundance of memoirs and diaries from all levels of the Labour government.¹⁴ Added to these is a collection of biographies concerned with many of the key participants, particularly Wilson.¹⁵ Also useful are the selection of books concerned with British government, Cabinet and Whitehall more broadly in this period.¹⁶ It is curious why so few international historians consider the influences from within the government, particularly in comparison to more familiar ‘external’ stimuli. Politicians, civil servants, and institutions construct policy as an interpretation of, and reaction to, domestic and international events.

Although wide in scope, this thesis has clearly defined parameters. It considers the development of British nuclear diplomacy with respect to the governments of the United States and, to a lesser extent, the Federal Republic of Germany. This decision reflects the disproportionately high levels of influence that these countries had on the nuclear policies of the Labour government. Moreover, interest in US-UK nuclear relations appreciates the more frequent contact between the Labour Party and US officials, and the wealth of readily available archival documentation on both sides of the Atlantic. For the purposes of focus and brevity, it is necessary but regrettable that nuclear relations with other countries, including France, the Soviet Union and India, do not feature more prominently.

Furthermore, this thesis seeks to make its contribution by exploring the political and economic dimensions of British nuclear diplomacy. It is, of course, important to recognise the wider strategic and military backdrop to events. Events within NATO, Britain’s global military commitments, and the Cold War context are critical elements in the study of British nuclear diplomacy. Nonetheless, this thesis is not a strategic or

¹⁴ Tony Benn, *Out of the Wilderness, Diaries 1963-7* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Tony Benn, *Office without power, Diaries: 1968-72* (London: Hutchinson, 1988); Brown, *In my way*; James Callaghan, J., *Time & Chance* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd. 1988); Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1964-1970* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984); Chalfont, *The Shadow of my hand*; Healey, *The Time of My Life*; Roy Jenkins, *A life at the centre* (London: Macmillan, 1991); Michael Stewart, *Life and Labour: An autobiography* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980); Marcia Williams, *Inside Number 10* (New York, Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc. 1972); Wilson, *The Labour Government*; For a complete list, please consult the *Bibliography*.

¹⁵ Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: BCA and Harper Collins 1992); Austin Morgan, *Harold Wilson*, (London: Pluto Press 1992); Phillip Ziegler, *Wilson: The Authorised Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993. Also of relevance is the older but still useful, Paul Foot, *The Politics of Harold Wilson* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968).

¹⁶ Richard Crossman, *The Myths of Cabinet Government* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Richard Crossman, *Inside view: Three lectures on Prime Ministerial government* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972); Patrick Gordon Walker, *The Cabinet* (London: Jonathan Cape 1970); Simon James, *British Cabinet Government* (London: Routledge, 1999 second edition); Jon Davis, *Prime Ministers and Whitehall* (Continuum Press, 2009). The doyen of this particular field is, of course, Peter Hennessy: ‘The quality of cabinet government in Britain’, *Policy Studies* 6:2 (October 1985), 15-45; *Cabinet* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); *Whitehall* (London: Fontana Press, 1990); *Muddling Through: Power, Politics and the Quality of Government in Postwar Britain* (London: Victor Gollancz 1996); *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (London: Penguin Books 2003 revised edition).

military history and does not dwell on the mechanics, planning, or intelligence surrounding the use of nuclear weapons. This thesis instead contributes to British nuclear history by exploring the fields of politics and economics, utilising a raft of available but often overlooked sources.

Sources and methodology

This thesis seeks to contribute to the study of British political history, and, more specifically, nuclear diplomacy. It follows a well-trodden methodological path, comprising research, analysis and interpretation.¹⁷ This thesis critically examines, and then triangulates, archival materials and existing literature to develop a sophisticated analysis of the past. It utilises a wide array of state and private papers. The majority of source materials come from the National Archives in London, including Prime Ministerial, Cabinet, Treasury, Defence and Foreign Office documents released under ‘the thirty-year rule’.¹⁸ This thesis also draws from the Labour Party archive and a selection of private papers, venturing to a number of smaller archives housing these collections.¹⁹ As this thesis is concerned with British perceptions and policy-making, British documents are the principal focus of its research.

Nevertheless, additional material from the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library and the US National Archives in Maryland is extremely useful in revealing more about British perceptions and policies hitherto overlooked by, or absent from, the existing body of literature or British archives. The collection of US documents found in the Foreign Relations of the United States book series, published by the Office of the

¹⁷ Perhaps the single best study of the historical method is Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Two classic texts on the subject are still useful: G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, second edition); E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1987 second edition). A helpful guide to the broader challenges surrounding the study of history can be found in Richard J. Evans, *In defence of history* (London: Granta, 1997).

¹⁸ In 1967, the Wilson government established legislation to reduce the ‘fifty-year rule’ to thirty years, a policy that was implemented in 1972. The rule refers to the Public Record Office (PRO) in London, which houses a vast archive of national documents. At the beginning of each year, it publishes official papers that the government has kept secret for the past thirty years. Importantly, though, even after the New Year, some sensitive documents remain secret. Parliament’s decision to pass the Freedom of Information Act in 2000, which went live in 2005, has supplemented this rule by creating a statutory right for people to obtain internal documents held by public authorities. For a fascinating discussion on this topic, see Peter Hennessy and Chris Westcott, ‘The last right? Open government, Freedom of Information and the Right to Know’, *Strathclyde Analysis Papers* 12 (Department of Government, University of Strathclyde, 1992).

¹⁹ This thesis explores the private papers of Harold Wilson, James Callaghan, George Brown, Barbara Castle, Michael Stewart, and Patrick Gordon Walker.

Historian in the United States Department of State, is similarly useful.²⁰ This thesis also draws on, albeit second hand, research conducted in the West German archives.²¹ Although likely to have been of comparatively less value, it is still regrettable that former Soviet archives remain largely closed to the public at this time. In support of this wide array of archival documentation, this thesis draws on a wealth of secondary sources and several interviews. The triangulation of data helps to overcome archival omissions and is essential in producing a more nuanced contribution to the existing historiography.

Overview

This thesis contains five chapters, divided thematically and ordered broadly chronologically. Each chapter focuses on one particular strand of British nuclear diplomacy, whether hardware solutions, software solutions, or a non-proliferation agreement. As this thesis is, *inter alia*, an attempt to combine these previously disparate policy strands, it recognises the need for some overlap in order to avoid a restrictively narrow analysis. Each chapter seeks to explore how and why British nuclear diplomacy evolved under Wilson's leadership.

Chapter one, 'The ambiguities of opposition', explores the twenty-month period between Wilson becoming Leader of the Opposition in February 1963 and the General Election of October 1964. It considers how Wilson balanced his own approach to nuclear diplomacy with the demands of the Labour Party and broader domestic and international constraints. Nuclear weapons had been a tremendously divisive issue within the Labour Party. As Leader of the Opposition, Wilson sought to satisfy the needs of the party, which often came at the expense of a more conciliatory negotiating position with Washington. He was, at this time, more concerned with party unity, rather than transatlantic commitments on which he had little influence. Wilson could address international issues when he took office; if he failed to win the next election it would not be his problem. Thus, in discussions with foreign officials, he vigorously contested any future commitments to nuclear sharing, and cast doubt on Britain's future as a nuclear power.

International pressures, specifically the fear of an exclusive nuclear alliance between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and US, and thus West German access to nuclear weapons, eventually led Wilson to produce some subtle caveats to his negotiating position

²⁰ *FRUS*, however, often provides edited versions of documents which can disadvantage the historian: Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 146-162.

²¹ Macintyre, *Anglo-German relations*; Schrafstetter and Twigge, *Avoiding Armageddon*.

with Washington. Yet, to his domestic audience, he repeatedly downplayed his own diplomatic prudence. In contrast to his private approach to nuclear diplomacy, Wilson's public position was far more ambivalent and intentionally ambiguous. Claims that he could not make a final decision on the future of the Polaris programme, and consequently nuclear sharing, until he was in power provided a convenient way in which to criticise the Conservative government and keep the Labour Party united, without necessarily committing to cancellation. Wilson's criticisms of the Polaris programme also complemented the Labour Party's broader efforts to highlight the Conservative government's perceived mishandling of the national economy.

The second and third chapters, 'Constructing the Atlantic Nuclear Force' and 'The recurring death of nuclear sharing', both consider hardware solutions between 1964 and 1967. Building on the issues explored in the preceding chapter, Wilson oversaw the creation of the ANF as a more palatable replacement to the widely unpopular MLF. Although its principal objective was to address the MLF problem, the ANF became a serious proposal that sought to improve broader international nuclear relations and facilitate measures of non-proliferation. Moreover, much of the government initially perceived the ANF as an effective method with which to secure future military and economic concessions from NATO and the United States. Specifically, in return for a commitment of Polaris submarines or V-bombers, Wilson sought the release of a substantial number of conventional forces presently committed to Western Europe. These potential concessions were especially valuable given the precarious situation of the pound, a significant balance of payments deficit, and a commitment to greater defence rationalisation. Moreover, from a domestic and party perspective, the ANF served as a valuable instrument for Wilson to justify the preservation of the Polaris programme without harming party unity or undermining his slim parliamentary majority.

Nevertheless, the ANF was only ever a more acceptable version of a still widely unpopular idea. Once Wilson had secured approval from the Cabinet and US President Lyndon Johnson to pursue this proposal, progress swiftly dissipated. Throughout 1965, the government subtly extricated itself from its commitment to hardware solutions, and instead pursued software solutions and a non-proliferation treaty. Broader international and domestic concerns, however, tempered Wilson's resistance to nuclear sharing. US support for the pound, growing tensions with the FRG on the costs of military cooperation in Europe, and fears of a MLF revival meant that formal support for the ANF remained prudent. The government's stance on nuclear sharing was thus characterised by public

support for the ANF, but procrastination and equivocation in private. Consequently, the ANF proposal, effectively lifeless within the government itself, lingered on the international landscape for several more years.

Chapter four, 'Cooperation as consultation', looks in more detail at the emergence of software solutions in British nuclear diplomacy between 1965 and 1967. Despite initial reservations, the Labour government largely welcomed US proposals for greater consultation between the allies in the form of the Nuclear Planning Working Group (NPWG), later supplanted by the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG). The proposal complemented the dual objectives of removing hardware solutions from the international political landscape and progressing non-proliferation negotiations. Responsibility for the success of this software solution, however, rested largely with the superpowers. In a series of private negotiations designed to improve the ailing non-proliferation negotiations, a compromise emerged. The Soviet Union tacitly agreed to relinquish its objections to software solutions, specifically the NPG. In exchange, the US agreed to forego any further commitment to hardware solutions, such as the MLF and ANF. The US subsequently used the offer of a permanent seat on the NPG to convince the FRG to forego its increasingly unrealistic ambitions for a hardware solution.

Due to its exclusion from these private negotiations, the Labour government played a secondary role in overcoming the international difficulties surrounding the possession and control of nuclear weapons. Wilson remained unwilling to denounce the ANF formally. This stance reflected his unease about upsetting his US creditors, and lingering fears about the possibility of a future NATO nuclear force that could exclude British participation. Persisting difficulties over the costs of British forces stationed in West Germany, and a growing interest in membership of the EEC, only strengthened Wilson's reluctance to press the issue. It was therefore private superpower negotiations and France's withdrawal from NATO's integrated command structure that helped to facilitate closer collaboration in matters of nuclear cooperation within the alliance. Thus, between 1965 and 1967, Britain enjoyed significant progress in both nuclear consultation and non-proliferation largely because of the actions of other states.

Chapter five, 'Non-proliferation diplomacy', explores the later stages of the British government's pursuit of a nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Following re-election in March 1966, growing economic and political pressures encouraged Wilson to pursue membership of the EEC. By 1967, a desire for entry into the EEC had become a major influence on the content and conduct of British nuclear non-proliferation policy. Wilson intentionally

embraced a secondary role in the negotiation process, leaving the running to the superpowers, in order to avoid conflict with the countries of EEC and thereby protect Britain's application for membership. Although failing to achieve membership in 1967, a commitment to future entry continued to influence non-proliferation policy in the following years. Indeed, alongside giving renewed impetus to the NPT, a desire for future entry into the EEC helps to explain the British government's decision to become the first nuclear weapon state to ratify the Treaty.

This chapter also challenges the pervading assumption that the decision to sign and later ratify the Treaty was uncontested within the British government. Instead, some ministers harboured serious reservations about the consequences of the Treaty on Britain's nascent relations with the EEC. Tensions between these foreign policy objectives surfaced in sporadic arguments between ministers at the highest levels of government. Despite his own increasingly precarious political situation, Wilson successfully managed the passage of the Treaty through his own government. The NPT codified the death of nuclear sharing and, more importantly, Britain's legal existence as one of only a small number of nuclear weapon states. Taken together, these five chapters reveal how and why British nuclear diplomacy evolved under Wilson's leadership, as he struggled to balance his own objectives against wider domestic and international forces.

The student has requested that this electronic version of the thesis does not include the main body of the work - i.e. the chapters and conclusion. The other sections of the thesis are available as a research resource.

Appendix

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

The States concluding this Treaty, hereinafter referred to as the “Parties to the Treaty”,

Considering the devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples,

Believing that the proliferation of nuclear weapons would seriously enhance the danger of nuclear war,

In conformity with resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly calling for the conclusion of an agreement on the prevention of wider dissemination of nuclear weapons,

Undertaking to co-operate in facilitating the application of International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards on peaceful nuclear activities,

Expressing their support for research, development and other efforts to further the application, within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards system, of the principle of safeguarding effectively the flow of source and special fissionable materials by use of instruments and other techniques at certain strategic points,

Affirming the principle that the benefits of peaceful applications of nuclear technology, including any technological by-products which may be derived by nuclear-weapon States from the development of nuclear explosive devices, should be available for peaceful purposes to all Parties to the Treaty, whether nuclear-weapon or non-nuclear-weapon States,

Convinced that, in furtherance of this principle, all Parties to the Treaty are entitled to participate in the fullest possible exchange of scientific information for, and to contribute alone or in co-operation with other States to, the further development of the applications of atomic energy for peaceful purposes,

Declaring their intention to achieve at the earliest possible date the cessation of the nuclear arms race and to undertake effective measures in the direction of nuclear disarmament,

Urging the co-operation of all States in the attainment of this objective,

Recalling the determination expressed by the Parties to the 1963 Treaty banning nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water in its Preamble to seek to achieve the discontinuance of all test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time and to continue negotiations to this end,

Desiring to further the easing of international tension and the strengthening of trust between States in order to facilitate the cessation of the manufacture of nuclear weapons, the liquidation of all their existing stockpiles, and the elimination from national arsenals of nuclear weapons and the means of their delivery pursuant to a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control,

Recalling that, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, States must refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations, and that the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security are to be promoted with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources,

Have agreed as follows:

ARTICLE I

Each nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly; and not in any way to assist, encourage, or induce any non-nuclear-weapon State to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, or control over such weapons or explosive devices.

ARTICLE II

Each non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to receive the transfer from any transferor whatsoever of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or of control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly; not to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices; and not to seek or receive any assistance in the manufacture of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

ARTICLE III

1. Each Non-nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes to accept safeguards, as set forth in an agreement to be negotiated and concluded with the International Atomic Energy Agency in accordance with the Statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Agency's safeguards system, for the exclusive purpose of verification of the fulfilment of its obligations assumed under this Treaty with a view to preventing diversion of nuclear energy from peaceful uses to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Procedures for the safeguards required by this Article shall be followed with respect to source or special fissionable material whether it is being produced, processed or used in any principal nuclear facility or is outside any such facility. The safeguards required by this Article shall be applied on all source or special fissionable material in all peaceful nuclear activities within the territory of such State, under its jurisdiction, or carried out under its control anywhere.

2. Each State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to provide: (a) source or special fissionable material, or (b) equipment or material especially designed or prepared for the processing, use or production of special fissionable material, to any non-nuclear-weapon State for peaceful purposes, unless the source or special fissionable material shall be subject to the safeguards required by this Article.

3. The safeguards required by this Article shall be implemented in a manner designed to comply with Article IV of this Treaty, and to avoid hampering the economic or technological development of the Parties or international co-operation in the field of peaceful nuclear activities, including the international exchange of nuclear material and equipment for the processing, use or production of nuclear material for peaceful purposes in accordance with the provisions of this Article and the principle of safeguarding set forth in the Preamble of the Treaty.

4. Non-nuclear-weapon States Party to the Treaty shall conclude agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency to meet the requirements of this Article either individually or together with other States in accordance with the Statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Negotiation of such agreements shall commence within 180 days from the original entry into force of this Treaty. For States depositing their instruments of ratification or accession after the 180-day period, negotiation of such agreements shall commence not later than the date of such deposit. Such agreements shall enter into force not later than eighteen months after the date of initiation of negotiations.

ARTICLE IV

1. Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of this Treaty.

2. All the Parties to the Treaty undertake to facilitate, and have the right to participate in, the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Parties to the Treaty in a position to do so shall also cooperate in contributing alone or together with other States or international organizations to the further development of the applications of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, especially in the territories of non-nuclear-weapon States Party to the Treaty, with due consideration for the needs of the developing areas of the world.

ARTICLE V

Each Party to the Treaty undertakes to take appropriate measures to ensure that, in accordance with this Treaty, under appropriate international observation and through appropriate international procedures, potential benefits from any peaceful applications of nuclear explosions will be made available to non-nuclear-weapon States Party to the Treaty on a non-discriminatory basis and that the charge to such Parties for the explosive devices used will be as low as possible and exclude any charge for research and development. Non nuclearweapon States Party to the Treaty shall be able to obtain such benefits, pursuant to a special international agreement or agreements, through an appropriate international body with adequate

representation of non-nuclear-weapon States. Negotiations on this subject shall commence as soon as possible after the Treaty enters into force. Non-nuclear-weapon States Party to the Treaty so desiring may also obtain such benefits pursuant to bilateral agreements.

ARTICLE VI

Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

ARTICLE VII

Nothing in this Treaty affects the right of any group of States to conclude regional treaties in order to assure the total absence of nuclear weapons in their respective territories.

ARTICLE VIII

1. Any Party to the Treaty may propose amendments to this Treaty. The text of any proposed amendment shall be submitted to the Depositary Governments which shall circulate it to all Parties to the Treaty. Thereupon, if requested to do so by one-third or more of the Parties to the Treaty, the Depositary Governments shall convene a conference, to which they shall invite all the Parties to the Treaty, to consider such an amendment.

2. Any amendment to this Treaty must be approved by a majority of the votes of all the Parties to the Treaty, including the votes of all nuclear-weapon States Party to the Treaty and all other Parties which, on the date the amendment is circulated, are members of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The amendment shall enter into force for each Party that deposits its instrument of ratification of the amendment upon the deposit of such instruments of ratification by a majority of all the Parties, including the instruments of ratification of all nuclear-weapon States Party to the Treaty and all other Parties which, on the date the amendment is circulated, are members of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Thereafter, it shall enter into force for any other Party upon the deposit of its instrument of ratification of the amendment.

3. Five years after the entry into force of this Treaty, a conference of Parties to the Treaty shall be held in Geneva, Switzerland, in order to review the operation of this Treaty with a view to assuring that the purposes of the Preamble and the provisions of the Treaty are being realised. At intervals of five years thereafter, a majority of the Parties to the Treaty may obtain, by submitting a proposal to this effect to the Depositary Governments, the convening of further conferences with the same objective of reviewing the operation of the Treaty.

ARTICLE IX

1. This Treaty shall be open to all States for signature. Any State which does not sign the Treaty before its entry into force in accordance with paragraph 3 of this Article may accede to it at any time.

2. This Treaty shall be subject to ratification by signatory States. Instruments of ratification and instruments of accession shall be deposited with the Governments of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America, which are hereby designated the Depositary Governments.

3. This Treaty shall enter into force after its ratification by the States, the Governments of which are designated Depositories of the Treaty, and forty other States signatory to this Treaty and the deposit of their instruments of ratification. For the purposes of this Treaty, a nuclearweapon State is one which has manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device prior to 1 January, 1967.

4. For States whose instruments of ratification or accession are deposited subsequent to the entry into force of this Treaty, it shall enter into force on the date of the deposit of their instruments of ratification or accession.

5. The Depositary Governments shall promptly inform all signatory and acceding States of the date of each signature, the date of deposit of each instrument of ratification or of accession, the date of the entry into force of this Treaty, and the date of receipt of any requests for convening a conference or other notices.

6. This Treaty shall be registered by the Depositary Governments pursuant to Article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations.

ARTICLE X

1. Each Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty, have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country. It shall give notice of such withdrawal to all other Parties to the Treaty and to the United Nations Security Council three months in advance. Such notice shall include a statement of the extraordinary events it regards as having jeopardized its supreme interests.

2. Twenty-five years after the entry into force of the Treaty, a conference shall be convened to decide whether the Treaty shall continue in force indefinitely, or shall be extended for an additional fixed period or periods. This decision shall be taken by a majority of the Parties to the Treaty.

ARTICLE XI

This Treaty, the English, Russian, French, Spanish and Chinese texts of which are equally authentic, shall be deposited in the archives of the Depositary Governments. Duly certified copies of this Treaty shall be transmitted by the Depositary Governments to the Governments of the signatory and acceding States.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the undersigned, duly authorised, have signed this Treaty.

DONE in triplicate, at the cities of London, Moscow and Washington, the first day of July, one thousand nine hundred and sixty-eight.

* * *

The above text reproduces the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as originally provided by the Depositary Governments on 22 April 1970.

It appears on the IAEA website. Last accessed 15 July 2010.

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