

UK Dependence on the US

While it tried to resolve its nuclear doctrine, the UK quickly opted for dependence upon the US, because the political and other costs of independence were considered prohibitive. Its successful H-Bomb test convinced the US to waive the strictures of the McMahon Act prohibiting UK collaboration, and replace it with the 1958 *Anglo-American Agreement for Co-operation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes*, which remains in force. Nonetheless, serious doctrinal differences with the US developed in 1961, when the Kennedy administration undertook a major reappraisal of strategy under the direction of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. This resulted in a significant expansion of nuclear forces and a new doctrine emphasising controlled nuclear responses and the need for larger conventional capabilities. McNamara condemned small nuclear forces as "dangerous, expensive, prone to obsolescence and lacking in credibility as a deterrent."ⁱ

The British were desperate to keep their place at the "top table". In December 1962—two months after the Cuban missile crisis—the US cancelled Skybolt, an air-launched ballistic missile on which the UK was relying for its delivery system. Macmillan had a crisis meeting with Kennedy, where the US agreed to provide the UK with the Polaris ballistic missile submarine system, which became operational in 1968. Massive US assistance was needed to design and build the UK variants of both the Polaris and Trident submarines.

UK Polaris was portrayed as an "independent nuclear deterrent", notwithstanding growing reliance on provision of US missiles, satellites (the UK does have two Skynet 4 military communication satellites) and intelligence for targeting and avoiding detection. The UK remains unique among the five recognised nuclear states in not having developed its own space launch programme. National contingency plans were produced for the use of the force which identified fifteen major cities to be attacked if, as a last resort, the UK was forced "to go it alone" in a conflict with the Soviet Union. A number of top military and political figures, however, questioned whether such a concept of deterrence made any sense when the UK risked total annihilation if the Polaris force was ever used in this way. The scale of British dependence on the US also made the threat of independent action questionable. Yet such dependence made the UK a prime target for nuclear attack by the Soviet Union.

This charade of "minimum deterrence" from a "second centre of decision-making" was perpetuated by Margaret Thatcher's decision in 1980 to replace Polaris with a UK variant of the US Trident system. The UK having agreed to purchase Trident I C-4 missiles, the Reagan administration quickly opted to replace them with the much more accurate and longer-range Trident II D-5, which made it a counter-force weapon, capable of destroying opposing nuclear weapon systems. In 1982, Thatcher accepted the D-5 version, which the UK effectively leases from the US Navy's missile pool at the King's Bay submarine base in Georgia.

Since 1962 the UK has relied on US nuclear warhead testing facilities at Nevada and the Royal Navy has used the US Eastern Test missile range off Florida after its Polaris force became operational between 1966-69. Following the 1993 US nuclear test moratorium, the UK was obliged to stop testing too.

Instead, the UK Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston has received extensive US assistance in sub-critical testing. The US permits regular UK exchanges through joint working groups on all aspects of nuclear weapon development with its three leading nuclear weapon-related research laboratories, Lawrence Livermore, Sandia and Los Alamos.

The fourth and last *Vanguard* class submarine of the UK Trident force became fully operational by the end of 2000. The UK warhead is believed to be closely modelled on one of the US Trident warheads, W76, which has a yield of about 100 kilotons. Documents released under the US Freedom of Information Act indicate that in the early 1980s, when the UK was designing its Trident warhead, the Joint Atomic Information Exchange Group enabled the US to pass to the UK "atomic information on the Mk-4 Re-entry Body and W76 warhead for the Trident Missile Systems".ⁱⁱ In 1987, the UK National Audit Office stated that most of the expenditure on the UK Trident warhead's development and production "is incurred in the US."ⁱⁱⁱ

There are only 16 Trident ballistic missile launch tubes in each UK submarine as opposed to 24 in the US *Ohio* class. Following a Strategic Defence Review by the new Blair administration in 1998, it was decided to limit the number of deployed warheads to three per missile. Also, the notice to fire was relaxed from "minutes" to "days". At the same time, the UK government withdrew the WE177 free-fall tactical nuclear bombs which I had been trained to operate. With Trident the sole remaining UK delivery system, there was a need for a "sub-strategic" capability to maintain a degree of flexible response. This was apparently achieved by an announcement that the UK Trident warhead had the option of a lower yield, and that some missiles in the single deployed submarine would have only one warhead (see Chapter 3).

It almost goes without saying that British dependence will inevitably increase if the decision is taken to replace the current four *Vanguard* class Trident-equipped submarines, as once again the UK will have to accept whatever system the US develops.

In exchange for all this US generosity, under the Mutual Defence Agreement it would appear that the only UK contributions are provision of some plutonium for the US (in exchange for US highly enriched uranium for UK submarine propulsion reactors); investment of £100 million in the US National Ignition Facility as part of ensuring the safety and reliability of UK nuclear weapons; and some relatively minor research by the UK Atomic Weapons Establishment.

The UK Pay-back

However, when the track record of US defence involvement in the UK and its dependent territories, plus UK support for US operations, is examined, a clear trend emerges to explain how the UK has paid its share. To illustrate this, the following case studies have been chosen:

- 1) Diego Garcia
- 2) Menwith Hill
- 3) The 1986 US strike on Libya
- 4) The 2003 US-UK invasion and occupation of Iraq
- 5) UK acceptance of US ballistic missile defence plans

Diego Garcia. A British colony lying midway between Africa and Asia in the Indian Ocean, Diego Garcia is one of 64 coral islands forming the Chagos Archipelago, which once had an indigenous population of at least 2,000 until the US decided it needed a base there. During the 1960s, in exchange for acquiring the Polaris system at a reduced cost, Harold Wilson's Labour government secretly conspired with two US administrations to evict 1,200 of the islanders from Diego Garcia.^{iv}

To justify their removal, the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) invented the fiction that the islanders were merely transient contract workers who could be "returned" to Mauritius, 1,000 miles away. In fact, many islanders traced their ancestry back five generations. Recently discovered files in Washington and London confirm that the cover-up was approved by Wilson and at least three cabinet ministers.^v The islanders were dumped on the dockside in Mauritius, where they faced poverty and discrimination. More than a decade later, each person received less than £3,000 compensation from the British government.

The behaviour of the Blair government has been equally reprehensible. In 2000, the islanders won a historic victory in the High Court, which ruled that their expulsion more than 30 years before had been illegal. Within hours of the judgment, the FCO announced that it would not be possible for them to return to Diego Garcia because of "our treaty commitments to the USA".^{vi} In a follow-up High Court case in 2003, the islanders were denied compensation. Then in June 2004, the Government invoked the Royal Prerogative in order to crush the 2000 judgment. A decree was issued that the islanders were banned forever from returning home, or to any of the other islands.

Article 7 of the statute of the International Criminal Court describes the "deportation or forcible transfer of population... by expulsion or other coercive acts" as a crime against humanity.^{vii} Meanwhile, US storage of tactical nuclear weapons in Diego Garcia on UK territory is the one remaining obstruction to achieving a nuclear weapon-free Southern Hemisphere.

Menwith Hill. In 1966, the UK government allowed the US National Security Agency (NSA) to take control of 250 acres of farmland at Menwith Hill on the Yorkshire Moors west of Harrogate. Under cover of a confidential agreement with the Ministry of Defence, NSA built there the largest electronic spy base in the world. Like the 34 other US bases in Britain, it is disingenuously presented as a Royal Air Force station. In what is a major node of the US ECHELON global communications interception system, 1,200 US personnel operate antennas within 23 large radomes targeting all international satellite telephone, fax and email traffic to and from Europe.^{viii} The base is also capable of intercepting microwave communications via US electronic spy satellites.

Probably all unencrypted British communications are covered by what is almost certainly an illegal system, constituting an outrageous invasion of privacy and commercial confidentiality.^{ix}

In March 2003, a leaked email revealed that NSA had been involved in spying on the United Nations Security Council Missions. It asked for support for the operation from its British partner, the Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ) with the apparent expectation that this would be given as a matter of course.^x This was during the US-UK attempt to obtain Security Council approval for their invasion of Iraq, which was not forthcoming. A subsequent allegation by former Cabinet Minister Clare Short that the UK had spied on the UN Secretary General was not denied by the Government.^{xi}

The 1986 US Strike on Libya. In April 1986, President Ronald Reagan ordered air strikes against the "rogue" state of Libya, whose maverick leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi had allegedly been the principal financier of international terrorism against US and Israeli citizens. Carrier-borne US Navy strike aircraft were launched from only a few hundred miles off the Libyan coast; but the USAF decided to use 24 F-111 tactical bombers. However, no southern European allies would let them operate from bases in their countries. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher enthusiastically authorised US bases in the UK to be used, but then the French and Spanish governments refused to allow the F-111s to overfly their territories. This meant that they had to remain over the sea, and enter the Mediterranean via the Straits of Gibraltar using multiple in-flight refuelling involving 28 tanker aircraft.

The operation on 15-16 April was an embarrassing failure. Although the targets in Tripoli and Benghazi were allegedly military, bombs were dropped on civilian areas including the French embassy in Tripoli, killing and injuring scores of people, and one aircraft was lost with its crew. Gaddafi's home was hit, killing his adopted infant daughter, but he was not there and was unhurt. In a clear attempt to assassinate him, pilots had been shown reconnaissance photographs indicating where Gaddafi and his family were to be found.^{xii}

This episode was a propaganda gift for Gaddafi. Worldwide TV coverage produced an outburst of anti-American feeling, with the British implicated as willing accomplices in facilitating terror attacks like those which Gaddafi had allegedly sponsored.

The 2003 US-UK Invasion and Occupation of Iraq. The main elements of how the US, with the sole support of the UK (plus minor special forces involvement by Australia), invaded and occupied Iraq in 2003 are well-known. The shifting justifications as it became clear that Iraq had posed no immediate threat from weapons of mass destruction, to the current fallback position simply that Saddam Hussein's cruel regime had to be replaced, have also been fully aired. However, it is now accepted that the Bush administration had decided to invade and occupy Iraq soon after the terror attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001.^{xiii}

What has not been discussed is the revelation by Sir Christopher Meyer, British Ambassador to Washington at the time, of what transpired between Tony Blair and Bush during Blair's visit soon after "9/11".^{xiv} Apparently, Blair secretly

agreed then to support Bush in removing Saddam Hussein from power as soon as the Taliban had been overthrown in Afghanistan. While it is accepted that Blair probably needed no convincing, there is little doubt that Bush gave him no choice. Indeed, in a secret leaked Downing Street memorandum published in the UK Times on 1 May 2005, this was confirmed by the following statement: "The US saw the UK... as essential, with basing in Diego Garcia and Cyprus critical..."^{xv} Thus Blair knew he had to make the best case that he could for supporting the US plan, while deceiving Parliament and the British people about his true intentions. He was warned that a pre-emptive invasion would be illegal, and that the UN Security Council would therefore not support it. An attempt to strong-arm Security Council members would backfire, leaving the US with just the UK and Australia as coalition partners. The European Union would be split; Israel would be emboldened to take an even harder line against the Palestinians; the threat of international terror attacks on the UK would grow, and a global economic crisis could result from rocketing oil prices. All these consequences have come to pass. Where are the benefits to British interests?

UK Acceptance of US Ballistic Missile Defence Plans. On 17 October 2004, the *Independent on Sunday* revealed that Blair had secretly agreed in May to allow the US to site anti-ballistic missile interceptor missiles on British territory, almost certainly at RAF Fylingdales in north Yorkshire.^{xvi} The UK Government had already given approval for the air defence radar at Fylingdales to be upgraded as part of the US sensor system for its plans for ballistic missile defence (BMD); and it is suspected that Menwith Hill will also have an early warning role. Sixteen interceptor missiles were positioned in Alaska and California in 2004. The intended location of the remaining 24 is a closely guarded secret, but the Pentagon wants to site some in Europe. Apparently Blair will argue that the system will provide an extra line of defence against nuclear attack, and will cost the British taxpayer nothing.

Critics, who include leading Liberal Democrats and many Labour MPs, have already expressed deep frustration that the Government has blocked any debate about UK acquiescence to US BMD plans.^{xvii} Now they are outraged that this deal—which will involve the most significant new US military presence in the UK since the hugely controversial installation of cruise missiles in 1983—will mean abandoning Britain's commitment to a meaningful non-proliferation and disarmament process. Moreover, they are correct in not believing that it will be cost-free. While Government spokesmen have claimed that BMD is part of British non-proliferation efforts, a Ministry of Defence discussion paper states that missile defence is required in part because "the UK needs to maintain the ability (together with her Allies) to *intervene in regional crises*." (emphasis added)^{xviii}

President Putin recently announced that Russia would soon deploy a new ballistic missile, possibly with hypersonic manoeuvrable warheads, specifically designed to evade missile defences.^{xix} Inevitably, China sees BMD as a shield behind which the US could conduct a first strike against its small nuclear forces, and will redouble its efforts to expand its arsenal, with knock-on effects in India and Pakistan. Meanwhile, a rampant US military-industrial complex is forging ahead with plans to place both sensors and weapons in outer space as part of

the Pentagon's strategy of "full spectrum dominance". A revived arms race looms, provoked by an aggressive, proliferating US using double standards and contemptuous of international law, with the UK as uncritical accomplice.

By contrast, French President Jacques Chirac had been able to take a position much more supportive of majority world opinion, because France's independent nuclear stance makes it much less vulnerable to US pressure (see later in this chapter). While in no way wishing to condone French nuclear policy, this point highlights the growing credibility problem for the British government in claiming that its "independent nuclear deterrent" is an essential guarantor of an independent foreign policy.

ⁱ Baylis (1995), pp300-301.

ⁱⁱ Annual Historical Summary (U), Joint Atomic Information Exchange Group, HQ, Defense Nuclear Agency, 1 October 1982-30 September 1983.

ⁱⁱⁱ Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General [National Audit Office], Control and Management of the Trident Programme, July 1987, HC27, para 3.27.

^{iv} Under an Exchange of Notes between the UK and US concerning the Availability for Defence Purposes of the British Indian Ocean Territory of 30 December 1966 (Cmnd 3231), the whole territory is to remain available to meet the possible defence needs of the two countries for an initial period of 50 years from 1966, and thereafter for a further period of 20 years unless either party has given prior notice to terminate it. A further Exchange of Notes concluded in 1976 (Cmnd 6413) regulates the establishment and functioning of the US in Diego Garcia and related matters. See also *The Sunday Times*, 25 January 1976, cited in Duncan Campbell, *The Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier: American Military Power in Britain* (Michael Joseph Publications, London, 1984), p110.

^v John Pilger, 'Paradise cleansed', *The Guardian*, 2 October 2004.

^{vi} 'Memorandum submitted by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office on British Indian Ocean Territories (BIOT) (31 July 2000)' appended to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee First Special Report, 19 December 2000. See www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmfaff/78/7803.htm

^{vii} John Pilger, 'Paradise cleansed', *The Guardian*, 2 October 2004.

^{viii} See European Parliamentary Temporary Committee on the Echelon Interception System, 'Report on the existence of a global system for the interception of private and commercial communications' (ECHELON interception system) (2001/2098(INI)), 11 July 2001. For more details on the ECHELON system, see Nicky Hager, *Secret Power: New Zealand's Role in the International Spy Network* (Nelson NZ: Craig Potton Publishing, 1996).

^{ix} See website of the Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases www.caab.org.uk : click on 'The American Bases', then go to 'QPSW briefing: US bases on British territory' for a June 2004 analysis by David Gee.

^x Email from NSA to GCHQ requesting help with UN spying mission, in 'US plan to bug Security Council: the text', *The Observer*, 2 March 2003.

^{xi} Transcript of Clare Short interview, *BBC News online*, 26 February 2004.

^{xii} Stephen Shalom, *The United States and Libya, Part 2: The Qaddafi Era*, Z Magazine, June 1990 (see www.zmag.org/zmag/articles/ShalomLyb2.html).

^{xiii} 'Bush obsessed with Iraq', *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 2004. See also Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

^{xiv} David Rose, 'Bush, Blair's secret pact for Iraq war', *The Observer*, 4 April 2004.

^{xv} For the memo text see <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,19809-1593637,00.html>

^{xvi} Francis Elliott and Severin Carrell, 'Star Wars deal places US missiles on UK soil', *Independent on Sunday*, 17 October 2004.

^{xvii} Nicola Butler, 'What Price British Influence? Tony Blair and the Decision to Back Missile Defence', *Disarmament Diplomacy*, August/September 2003, pp16-23 (see www.acronym.org.uk/dd/index.htm).

^{xviii} 'Missile Defence: a Public Discussion Paper', Ministry of Defence, December 2002, www.mod.uk/linked_files/issues/missiledefence/missiledef.pdf .

^{xix} Steven Lee Myers, 'Putin Says New Missile Systems Will Give Russia a Nuclear Edge', *New York Times*, 18 November 2004.