

BRITAIN AND EAST-WEST DETENTE

1953-1963

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I remain responsible of course for the content herein.

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## INTRODUCTION

Both the study and the practice of international relations in the 1980s have reflected grave concern about the deterioration of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. The international political environment of the 1970s, widely characterised by reference to a 'detente' or lessening of tensions across Churchill's 'Iron Curtain', is said to have been replaced by a return to the 'cold war' of the 1950s. Some distinctions have been drawn between that environment and the 1980s by the addition of the adjectives 'new' or 'second' cold war, but the clear implication of recent terminology is that detente is dead.<sup>1</sup>

The epilogues are therefore being written on the East-West detente of the 1970s which, for some, was a dangerous illusion, allowing the Soviet Union to take the lead in the nuclear arms race and pose a more serious threat to the West than at any time since 1945. Others argue that the revival of cold war rhetoric and the acceleration of the nuclear arms race since the mid 1970s make a 'new' detente more necessary than ever; to moderate the adversary relationship between the superpowers and to lessen what many regard as the heightened possibility of nuclear war.

Thus it is apparent that detente is still an important but controversial concept in contemporary international relations. Even a cursory review of the literature and the pronouncements of statesmen on the subject, however, suggests that there is little agreement on what precisely detente means: the concept has certainly been used in a variety of ways with very different connotations.<sup>2</sup> Whatever their conception of detente, most scholars have analysed the phenomenon from a superpower perspective, though

1. For the notion of a 'new' or a 'second' cold war see, for example, N. Chomsky, Towards a New Cold War (London: Sinclair Brown, 1982); W.E. Griffith, The Superpowers and Regional Tensions (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1982); F. Halliday, The Making of the Second Cold War (London: Verso, 1983).
2. For the argument that an evaluation of the prospects of a 'new' detente requires the resolution of unresolved conceptual problems, see B.P. White "Towards a New Detente? Some Conceptual Problems" Unpublished paper presented to the annual conference of the International Studies Association, Atlanta Georgia, March, 1984.

some have taken a European view.<sup>3</sup>

In 1972, Josef Korbel published what remains the only sustained attempt to analyse detente from a West European perspective.<sup>4</sup> After comparing the substantive policies of West Germany, France and Britain, he suggests that "their motivations differ and to some extent their goals in regard to detente differ and indeed in some respects are in conflict with each other". For British policy-makers, Korbel argues, detente was "more a matter of style, of political atmosphere, of some mutual trust rather than of some momentous and overt policy". Indeed he concludes that British governments have not "at least by deeds, demonstrated any intensive interest in detente" and therefore Britain's policy of detente "requires no elaborate discussion".<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to Korbel's position, other scholars have taken the view that British detente policy is worthy of study because, it is alleged, British diplomacy made a significant contribution to the 'creation' and the development of an East-West detente.<sup>6</sup> Notably F.S. Northedge, in several publications since 1970, has argued that successive British governments in the 1950s and early 1960s played an important mediating role between the superpowers and their respective 'blocs', by searching for 'tension-easing

3. From a lengthy list of publications, see in particular, R.J. Barnet, The Giants (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977); C. Bell, The Diplomacy of Detente (London: Martin Robertson, 1977); W.C. Clemens, The Superpowers and Arms Control: From Cold War to Interdependence (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Co., 1973); M.D. Shulman, Beyond the Cold War (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1966); A. Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence (New York: Praeger, 1968); The Rivals (New York: Viking Press, 1971); G.R. Urban, Detente (London: Temple Smith, 1976); P. Windsor, Germany and the Management of Detente (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971).
4. J. Korbel, Detente in Europe (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972).
5. Ibid, pp. 36, 38, 60, 66.
6. See, in particular, C. Bell, Negotiation From Strength (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962); also C.J. Bartlett, A History of Postwar Britain 1945-74 (London: Macmillan, 1977) p.137; A. Cyr, British Foreign Policy and the Atlantic Area (London: Macmillan, 1979) pp. 21-22, 146-147. More recently, Lord Carrington has referred to Britain's "long and proud history of activity on this central question" of what he calls "developing a more sane and secure East-West relationship". 1983 Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture, reprinted in Survival, July/August, 1983, p.152.

agreements' with Moscow and by seeking points of possible contact between the United States and China. In his most recent publication, Northedge has argued that

"the East-West detente, thought of, and denigrated, by most Americans as exclusively a superpower affair, was, as a matter of history, invented and advocated by the British, only to be spurned in its early years by the United States indeed by NATO in general ... after the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, it was Britain who, above all her alliance partners, sought a rational negotiation of outstanding issues in the Cold War with the Soviet Union and her allies".<sup>7</sup>

The conflicting claims of Korbél and Northedge about the significance of British detente policy provide an appropriate starting point for this thesis which pursues two related themes. It offers an analysis of the origins and the development of detente as an historical process and it considers detente as a policy issue in British foreign policy between 1953 and 1963. More specifically, the thesis has three objectives:

- (a) to describe and evaluate a British role in an East-West detente process during this period
  - (b) to provide an explanation of British detente policy
- and
- (c) to establish a British conception of detente.

### Structure

The thesis begins with a conceptual analysis of detente. The absence of general agreement on the meaning of detente has already been noted, but there are specific reasons here for an initial attempt to clarify meaning. The thesis hinges conceptually around two different uses of the term detente; detente as process and detente as policy, and the relationship between them. It is necessary to establish what is meant by these two

7. F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, Britain and Soviet Communism (London: Macmillan, 1982) p.124; see also F.S. Northedge "Britain as a second-rank power", International Affairs, January, 1970, pp. 43-45; Descent From Power: British Foreign Policy 1945-73 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974) pp. 261-265, 330, 359; "The Coordination of Interests in British Foreign Policy" Unpublished paper presented to the annual conference of the British International Studies Association, University of Lancaster, December, 1980, pp. 21-23.

conceptions. The importance of this conceptual groundwork can be illustrated by the fact that the different claims made about British detente policy by Korbelt and Northedge can be explained in part by their different conceptions of detente.

Korbelt is reluctant to date the origins of a detente process or even to identify a process as such, preferring to define detente as a policy.<sup>8</sup> He does nevertheless suggest that a 'Western policy' of detente "started modestly in the late 1950s" but was essentially a phenomenon of the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>9</sup> His general evaluation of British detente policy reflects the historical period within which he locates detente. Northedge would not differ substantially with Korbelt's assessment of British policy during those years, but he locates the origins of a detente process much earlier in the 1950s and is thereby able to make much more positive claims about the significance of a British role during the early years of that process. The first chapter, then, is concerned to establish and develop the notions of detente as a process and detente as a policy. It also provides a broad context within which to locate a British conception of detente.

The clarification of detente as a concept begins with some comments on the derivation of the term, but these are cut short when it becomes clear that an extended etymological or linguistic investigation adds little to an understanding of modern political use. Further clarification is sought firstly by an account of the range of meaning and connotation associated with modern use and then by comparing detente with related concepts like peaceful coexistence, crisis management, deterrence and diplomacy. After considering the possible objections that detente has no meaning or that the variety of meaning renders the concept unusable as an analytical term, the rest of the chapter establishes the notions of detente as process and as policy.

After chapter one the thesis focuses on detente as policy using British policy to illustrate a particular conception of detente. Before pre-viewing each of the chapters on British policy in turn, it would be appropriate at this stage to comment on the choice of Britain and the particular historical period chosen for detailed study. As indicated above,

8. See J. Korbelt, "Detente and world order", Journal of International Law and Policy, 6 : 9, 1976, p.13.

9. J. Korbelt op.cit. (1972) p.31ff.

little has been written on detente from a European and even less from a British perspective. Given the claims made by Northedge and others about the significance of a British role, a study of British policy provides an opportunity of testing those claims and saying something new both about detente as a policy and as a process. If British diplomacy did make a distinctive contribution to the development of detente, then an important aspect of that process awaits detailed investigation. From a comparative policy analysis perspective, a study of British policy should provide new material that will contribute to an understanding of other states' policies towards detente.

At first sight, the period 1953 to 1963 looks distinctly unpromising to the extent that it precedes the period in which detente has been conventionally located. The relevance of this period is clearly dependent upon certain assumptions about the origins of a detente process. This period does, however, encompass those years that Northedge et al identify as the period in which British diplomacy was most effective in terms of its impact on the development of East-West relations. It begins with Churchill's initiatives, following the death of Stalin, designed to secure an early summit conference, and it ends appropriately with the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty, regarded by many as both a crucial achievement as far as the development of detente was concerned and the single most important contribution of British diplomacy to that process.

The years 1953 to 1963 also span three governments in Britain: those headed by Churchill, Eden and Macmillan. If a consistent set of attitudes and policies towards detente can be identified and found to be operative through three successive governments, that continuity would provide some grounds for arguing that a British conception of detente has been established. The problem here would be that all three governments were Conservative, of course, and it might be argued that only a Conservative rather than a British conception of detente has been identified.

That possibility provides one of the reasons for setting British policy after 1953 within an historical context that includes trying to identify the attitudes of Labour governments towards detente in the period before 1951. Chapter two of the thesis reviews the period 1947 to 1953 in part to identify bipartisan attitudes to detente. The main thrust of this chapter though is the argument that the evolution of British attitudes towards detente has to be set within a cold war context. The focus here is the development of divergent British and American attitudes to the cold war,

the nature of the Soviet/communist threat and, most significantly, appropriate responses to that threat.

It is argued that broad agreement on the outline of a containment strategy was gradually replaced by growing antagonism between London and Washington as the American doctrine of containment developed into confrontation. After 1949, divergent Anglo-American attitudes were reflected in differences over policy, with the British more concerned than the Americans to secure a normalisation of relations with the Soviet Union and her allies as soon as possible. Thereafter, the elements of a British detente policy can be discerned. While the first chapter, then, provides a general conceptual context, the second chapter provides a more specific historical context in which to locate an analysis of British detente policy in the 1953-63 period.

This period is divided for analytical purposes as well as convenience into three substantive chapters. Chapters three and four offer historical overviews of the periods 1953 to 1956 and 1957 to 1963 respectively. Chapter five looks at the negotiations leading up to the Partial Test Ban Treaty as a case study of British detente policy in action. Each chapter has a detailed narrative which seeks to highlight a British role in the detente process and to compare the contribution of British diplomacy with that of other relevant states. Analytical sections in each chapter complement the narrative by evaluating more explicitly the significance of British diplomacy, by developing an explanation of British policy constructed around the principal factors that underpinned policy, and by attempting to piece together the elements of a British conception of detente.

Chapter three spans the last two years of Churchill's government elected in October 1951 and Anthony Eden's relatively short tenure of office. The chapter is given coherence, however, by being organised around the British contribution to the development of East-West negotiations through 1954-55 and an analysis of the significance of those contacts to the detente process. The narrative begins with the hopes and expectations of a new international atmosphere following the death of Stalin and the election of a new administration in the United States. It traces the eventual culmination of those hopes in the Geneva summit of July 1955. This summit is regarded as a landmark in the detente process but also as marking the end of a distinct 'phase' of detente. The narrative concludes here with a brief assessment of the impact of the 'Spirit of Geneva'. From a British

perspective, the initiatives of Churchill in 1953 and the Khrushchev-Bulganin visit to Britain in April 1956, are taken as the beginning and the end of a period of active concern with the state of East-West relations. The contribution of British diplomacy to a lessening of tensions during this period is set within the context of the constraints operating upon British policy and, from the end of 1954, the significance of other states' contributions.

The second half of this chapter moves from a narrative account to a more explicit analysis of those factors which might serve as an explanation of policy. This starts with an attempt to explain policy in terms of governmental attitudes to detente, to the extent that a distinctive set of attitudes was apparent by 1956. In order to sharpen an appreciation of a British approach to detente, British and American attitudes to East-West negotiations and, more specifically, to what became known as 'summitry' are contrasted. A British conception of detente as normal diplomacy is tentatively discussed at this stage.

The analysis continues by identifying other factors which appear to have underpinned attitudes and policy towards detente. Domestic political imperatives, governmental fears of nuclear war, economic and broader political interests are considered in turn for their relevance to an explanation of policy. The object is to determine whether any or perhaps all of these factors can be regarded as determinants of a detente policy. The historical periods covered here and in the preceding chapter are considered as a whole in this context in order to reveal any factors of continuing significance.

The same organising structure is applied to the 1957-63 period in Chapter four. This period spans the two administrations led by Harold Macmillan though only the period up to the end of 1961 is covered in the narrative section of this chapter. This is partly for the sake of convenience, to make the chapter length manageable, but it can also be justified in analytical terms. A narrative account of this shortened period is quite sufficient to describe continuing British efforts to promote detente. Moreover, British detente policy during the last two years of Macmillan's government was almost exclusively concerned with the test ban negotiations, an account of which belongs more appropriately in the next chapter.

The narrative here is comparable to that offered in Chapter three, however, in that it also takes as an organising theme the British contribution to the development of East-West contacts which culminated in another four-power summit conference. In contrast to 1953-56 though, the narrative in this period begins with the downturn in inter-bloc relations consequent upon the events of 1956: and set against the limited progress made at Geneva, the Paris summit in 1960 was a disaster which did not advance the process of detente at all. In terms of that process, however, it is argued that the failure of the Paris summit was less significant than the development of direct contacts between the superpowers initiated by the Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit at Camp David in 1959. Thus the 'Spirit of Camp David' provides a point of comparison with the earlier 'Spirit of Geneva'.

From a British perspective, Camp David rather than Paris is taken to mark a turning point in the ability of British governments to play a central role in the detente process: thereafter British policy began to assume less importance in East-West relations. Nevertheless, the concern of this chapter is to describe and evaluate the persistent efforts of the Macmillan government to promote detente. The explanatory framework developed in Chapter three is applied to this period also in an attempt to account for the continuity of British policy through the 1950s and early 1960s. Taken together, Chapters three and four offer a general description and an explanation of the attempts by successive British governments to advance the process of detente between 1953 and 1963. They also establish the conceptual base of British policy and offer an evaluation of the significance of that policy.

Chapter five complements these overview chapters by moving from general description and explanation to a more specific issue-centred analysis. The assumption is that a case study will highlight certain aspects of a detente policy in action and further clarify an understanding of that policy. The case study chosen, the British role in the test ban negotiations, provides a good test of the significance of British policy during this period because the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 has been identified as both a major landmark in the detente process and a product to a greater or lesser extent of British diplomacy.

The structure of this chapter broadly follows that of preceding chapters though, as already implied, it is less concerned with explanation per se and more concerned with evaluating British policy. It begins with a



narrative account of the emergence of nuclear testing as an international issue and reviews, from a British perspective, the development of the Geneva negotiations between 1958 and 1963. It continues by evaluating more explicitly the contribution of British diplomacy to the eventual achievement of a treaty and concludes with an assessment of the importance of the Partial Test Ban Treaty to the detente process.

Having outlined the structure of the thesis by previewing each of the substantive chapters in turn, it is appropriate to move on to a discussion of sources and methodology. To the extent that any analytical approach is related to the sources used, the issues raised here are assumed to be inter-related. A discussion of methodology is therefore preceded by a discussion of sources.

### Sources

The primary sources used in this thesis are British and American documents containing inter alia speeches, letters, memoranda and reports that are deemed relevant to an explanation of British policy towards detente. These documents are supplemented by memoirs and biographical material. A variety of secondary sources are also employed but only those drawing heavily upon primary documents are used extensively.<sup>10</sup>

British government documents, and Cabinet documents in particular, that are released to the Public Record Office are the major omission from the list of primary sources cited. At an early stage in the preparation of the thesis a decision had to be taken about whether such documents relating to the 1953-63 period would be utilised as and when they became available under the Thirty Year Rule. The decision not to use them was taken for essentially two reasons.

Firstly, there was the practical problem of waiting until 1994 to get a complete set of released documents. It was felt that using those documents for only one or two of the relevant years would unbalance the thesis and might introduce discontinuities when one of the objectives of the study is to trace the continuity of governmental attitudes and policy. Secondly, and more importantly, an initial literature search revealed that there were enough primary sources of information already in the public domain to

10. For example, Elisabeth Barker's recent book The British between the Superpowers 1945-50 (London: Macmillan, 1983.)

construct both an effective description and an explanation of British detente policy during this period.

As a core body of reference work, extensive use is made of the chronological series of surveys and accompanying documents on international affairs covering the period 1949 to 1963 produced by the Royal Institute for International Affairs. This excellent series is invaluable for research on British policy during the period covered by this thesis. The surveys offer information and comment on policy which is derived largely from a digest of the press, journals, Command papers and Hansard. As such, they provide a useful framework for the narrative sections of the thesis though the interpretation of events has not always been accepted. The documents are also useful for narrative purposes but they are most helpful in the difficult area of identifying and exploring the attitudes of decision-makers.

Source material provided by the Chatham House series has been supplemented by United States government and congressional documents. Particular use is made of declassified documents released under the Freedom of Information Act and held on microfiche at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. More limited use is made of transcripts of interviews located at the John F. Kennedy Oral History Library in Boston, Massachusetts.

Access to American documents has to some extent compensated for problems of access in Britain. They do provide an important source of information about relevant British attitudes and policy which is difficult if not impossible to obtain elsewhere. Correspondence between British and American leaders during this period, for example, reveals differences of attitude towards detente and indeed differences of approach to East-West relations as a whole. This helps to construct by way of contrast a British conception of detente. Other American documents, which highlight the impact of British policy on Washington and offer an explanation of policy, make an important contribution to the evaluation and explanation of policy that is developed here.

#### Sources and methodology

The sources used in this study, in particular the documents on which the evaluation and explanation of British policy are based, have as a central focus the letters, speeches, diaries and the recollections through their memoirs of successive prime ministers and, to a lesser extent, foreign

secretaries. An interpretation of policy which relies on such sources to any great extent raises potential problems and certainly has methodological implications which need to be discussed at the outset.

In terms of the sources themselves, speeches and memoirs certainly have to be used with caution. Speeches have a political function and their content has to be evaluated in terms of the audience that is being addressed and the impact that is desired. If speeches are not a wholly reliable guide to attitudes, memoirs are not designed to give the analyst an objective interpretation of events but rather the version preferred by the author.

In methodological terms, an analysis derived from such sources reinforced by biographical studies tends to highlight the determining role of the top governmental leaders in policy-making. Given the weight of this type of source material here, there is a predisposition to interpret policy as a function essentially of the attitudes, behaviour and the interactions of prime ministers and foreign secretaries or, in an Anglo-American context, prime ministers and presidents, foreign secretaries and secretaries of state.

This sort of analytical focus is problematic to the extent that it exaggerates the importance of what James Barber has called the 'formal office holders' as policy-makers, and produces a partial and simplified view of the policy process.<sup>11</sup> Seen through the eyes and described in the words of British prime ministers, the making of British foreign policy appears, not surprisingly, to be dominated by the senior politicians if not by the chief executive himself. If it is the case that the role of certain policy-makers is overstated, the significance of other possible determinants of policy, the bureaucracy or the broader political environment, for example, is consequently understated.

But this is merely to spell out the logic of methodological choice. Any analytical approach is partial in that it is based implicitly or explicitly on a set of assumptions about the nature of the phenomenon to be analysed. In foreign policy analysis those assumptions reflect inter alia choices about the unit of analysis and the nature of the policy process. Methodological choices, however, are not 'free'. The selection of sources

11. See Who Makes British Foreign Policy? (Milton Keynes: Open Univ. Press, 1976) Chapters 2-4.

is one way - the preconceptions of the analyst would be another - in which choice is delimited.<sup>12</sup>

There is an important relationship though between the approach taken and the resulting explanation. As Oran Young puts it,

"everyone views the world in terms of some conceptual framework or approach to analysis [which constitutes] an interrelated set of concepts, variables and assumptions or premises [which] determines what a person regards as worth explaining and what factors he will look for in the search for explanation".<sup>13</sup>

If this is accepted, it is important to make explicit the approach taken and the assumptions which underpin it and to ask, in the context of this thesis, whether the approach is appropriate to an explanation of British policy with respect to detente.

### Approach

The approach adopted here can broadly be described as 'state-centric realist',<sup>14</sup> and the study fits into a mainstream of traditional studies of British foreign policy which utilise an historical-descriptive methodology. The narrative hinges around the activities of the top political leadership.

12. I have discussed at greater length elsewhere theoretical and methodological issues in foreign policy analysis, in general terms and with specific reference to the decision-making approach. See "Foreign policy and foreign policy analysis" in M. Clarke and B.P. White (eds.), An Introduction to Foreign Policy Analysis (Ormskirk: G.W. and A. Hesketh, 1981); "Decision-making analysis" in T. Taylor (ed.), Approaches and Theory in International Relations (London: Longman, 1978).
13. "The perils of Odysseus: on constructing theories in International Relations" in R. Tanter and R.H. Ullman (eds.), Theory and Policy in International Relations (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972) p.188.
14. This label was coined by Joseph Nye as a shorthand description of "the dominant paradigm that has informed the discipline of international politics since the 1940s and 1950s". According to Nye the paradigm is based on "three powerful simplifying assumptions: (1) significant relations between states (2) states act as coherent units (3) politico-military security concerns are the dominant objectives and motivations". See J.S. Nye "Transnational and transgovernmental relations" in G. Goodwin and A. Linklater (eds.), New Dimensions in World Politics (London: Croom Helm, 1975) p.36.

'Britain' as state acts through those leaders: 'policy' refers to what they do or attempt to do (and 'declaratory policy' to what they say they are going to do). Hence clues about a 'British' conception of detente are looked for in the statements of prime ministers and foreign secretaries.

If it is assumed that policy emanates from a coherent, unitary actor then the state can be effectively 'black-boxed' for analytical purposes and policy can be explained as output rather than process. If the policy-makers are also assumed to be purposeful or, in Graham Allison's phrase, 'rational actors' then an explanation of policy output can consist of reconstructing the calculations of the policy-makers.<sup>15</sup> Located within a framework of realist assumptions about the nature of international politics, these calculations can be framed primarily in terms of politico-military interests, or what Puchala and Fagan call 'security politics'.<sup>16</sup>

There is a particular problem though in applying 'rational actor' assumptions to British foreign policy given the pragmatic ethos that allegedly infuses policy. Many writers have argued that British policy should be explained as an ad hoc response or adaptation to changing circumstances rather than a rational pursuit of predetermined policy objectives.<sup>17</sup> Joseph Korb's case for effectively ignoring British policy

15. See Allison's account of the 'rational actor model' and its limitations as an approach to foreign policy analysis, in his seminal work Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1971).

16. D.J. Puchala and S.I. Fagan, "International politics in the 1970s: the search for a perspective", International Organisation, 28:2 Spring 1974, p.248.

17. This point is addressed directly in W.F. Hanreider and G.P. Auton, The Foreign Policies of West Germany, France and Britain (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1980), pp. 181-182. See also J. Frankel, British Foreign Policy 1945-1973 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975) p.96; J.B. Christoph, "Consensus and cleavage in British foreign policy" in H.S. Albinski and L.K. Pettit (eds.) European Political Processes (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968) pp. 15-17.

and focusing on the French and West German contributions to detente appears to rest on the argument that British governments have

"seen detente as a pragmatic proposition that should serve and be served through a variety of processes that seem to alleviate tensions and contribute to peace in Europe. In contrast to France's concept of detente based on analytical assumptions, London has shunned away from grandiose schemes, spectacular state visits and eloquent phrases. It has given preference to the ways of quiet diplomacy and practical steps of rapprochement."<sup>18</sup>

In more general terms, Geoffrey Goodwin locates British foreign policy in what he calls an 'empirical tradition'. Developing for an American audience the argument that policy-makers in Britain have traditionally been suspicious of 'large concerns or great schemes', Goodwin warns that

"generalizations about the ends of British diplomacy need to be treated with special caution ... we may easily fall into the trap of allowing hindsight to read a logic and coherence ... a 'grand design' into policies which in reality may have been little more than tentative gropings to meet bewilderingly complex situations."<sup>19</sup>

Any would-be analyst has to give careful consideration to this caveat because the logical extension of the empiricist case is that British foreign policy cannot be analysed, it can only be described. In the absence of overarching principles and objectives, it might be argued, there is simply nothing to analyse. Indeed, this perspective raises doubts about whether there is any policy even to describe if by 'policy' is meant the purposeful pursuit of objectives.<sup>20</sup> In the context of this

18. J. Korbel op.cit. (1972) p.61.

19. In a paper read to a Princeton University conference on Britain Today: Economics, Defence and Foreign Policy May 12-13, 1959 (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton Univ. publication, 1959) p.31.

20. Roy Jones develops the important distinction between what he calls policy as 'plan or design' and policy as 'practice' in Analysing Foreign Policy (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970) Chapters 2-3.

study, the search for a continuity of British attitudes and policy towards detente is fruitless if consistency in the pursuit of certain objectives rather than the most general historical trend is looked for. Similarly, from the empiricist perspective, it might be a pointless task trying to identify and establish a British conception of detente, if it is assumed that policy-makers in Britain do not have analytical 'conceptions' that relate to policy making.

Despite possible methodological objections along these lines, the proposed blend of narrative and analysis grounded upon 'state-centric realist' assumptions can be justified as an appropriate way of explaining British policy. The approach offers a sensible way of trying to establish whether objectives and principles can be identified; it makes effective use of available source material; and it seems particularly suitable for dealing with the specific issue of detente.

Without prejudging the conceptual discussion of detente in the first chapter, detente as an issue has been conventionally located at the interface between war and peace. Conceived in those terms, detente is a high policy issue that can be dealt with from a security politics perspective. Thus, the substance of detente can be used to justify an approach which magnifies the role of government leaders in policy-making. To the extent that detente consists of personalised diplomacy, the making of diplomatic initiatives, mediation, high level inter-bloc negotiations, summit meetings between heads of governments/state - the very word 'summit' connotes Olympian detachment - all these manifestations of detente point up the potential of an approach that highlights the attitudes and the behaviour of the political leadership. Ostensibly at least detente itself refers to an area of international relations that perhaps exaggerates the significance of leaders, a fact which helps to explain its appeal to them and the scepticism with which it is viewed by others.

If the nature and substance of detente as a policy issue may be used to justify the approach taken, the broader conceptualisation of detente developed here poses a different but related methodological difficulty which should be raised before turning to the substantive chapter itself. As noted in the chapter outline, two distinct meanings of detente are identified in this study, detente as policy and also detente as process. Without previewing the discussion in any detail, it is argued that the meaning of detente is contingent upon the level at which it is analysed. At the state level, detente can be analysed as a policy: at the inter-

national system level, however, it is more appropriately analysed as a process.

A potential level of analysis problem emerges here because one of the objectives of this study is to evaluate the contribution of British policy to the development of a process of East-West detente. A method of analysis which may explain British detente policy, however, will not necessarily explain the British contribution to a detente process. There is a danger of imputing to individuals and events a purpose and a prescience that is unwarranted. As discussed already, this is regarded as a particular problem with respect to British policy. Explaining a systemic process, moreover, may require an explanatory framework constructed upon assumptions which undermine the assumptions upon which the state level explanation is based.

There is no satisfactory way within the confines of this thesis of resolving a methodological dilemma which is central to the study of international relations. The main focus of the analysis offered here is directed at the state level and detente as policy is defined essentially by the views of the policy-makers. Given the level of analysis problem, however, the effectiveness of the evaluation of British policy at the systemic level must itself be carefully evaluated at the conclusion of this study.

This introductory chapter has identified the specific objectives that the thesis attempts to achieve. It has outlined the structure of the thesis and indicated the sources to be used. The approach taken to achieve the stated objectives has been justified in the context of possible methodological objections. A concluding chapter will return to these objectives to assess whether or not they have been achieved and to discuss the conclusions that may be drawn from the study. The historical narrative will be judged in terms of whether a distinctive British detente role has been established. The four sets of factors - domestic political imperatives, governmental fears of nuclear war, economic and broader political interests - will be reviewed in terms of the adequacy of the explanation of British policy that they provide. Governmental attitudes towards detente will be assessed in terms of whether they reveal an underlying conception of detente. This will include an attempt to locate those attitudes within a broader historical context. Other considerations to be discussed in the conclusion will centre on what may be learned about detente as a policy and as a process from a study of British policy.



Detente as a concept has been well established in the vocabulary of political science since the early 1970s. The growing use of the term, however, not only by scholars but also by policy-makers and journalists, has generated diversity of usage and connotation and therefore conceptual ambiguity. Hence this chapter attempts to clarify the meaning of detente by posing the following questions: what does detente mean? is it a useful concept? can it be effectively used as an analytical term?

The absence of clarity in this context has practical and political consequences. If any word is used in different ways, there will always be a danger of misunderstanding what any particular usage signifies. This has been a particular problem with detente. As Marshall Shulman notes, "the ambiguities of the word 'detente' which has come into wide usage have led to much confusion".<sup>2</sup> If a word, like detente, is used in political language, any confusion and misunderstanding may have more serious consequences. At the practitioner level, conceptual ambiguities may well compound political cleavages. As Graham Vernon comments with reference to the ideological rift between East and West, "differences between the United States and the Soviet Union are both real and deep enough that neither side needs the additional burden of terminological ambiguity".<sup>3</sup>

There is a relationship between meaning and expectations and particular concern has been expressed about the expectations raised by the use of detente in political debate. The late Senator Frank Church, for example, in his evidence to the Senate Hearings on detente, warned against the propensity of the Nixon Administration to oversell the idea of detente risking disillusionment when the expected benefits did not materialise.<sup>4</sup>

1. An earlier version of this chapter has been published as a review article. B.P. White, "The concept of detente", Review of International Studies, 7:3, July 1981.
2. M.D. Shulman, "Towards a western philosophy of coexistence", Foreign Affairs 51:1, October 1973, p.35.
3. G.D. Vernon, "Controlled conflict : Soviet perceptions of peaceful coexistence", Orbis, 23:2, Summer 1979, p.271.
4. See his testimony to the Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session on United States relations with Communist Countries, August-October, 1974. (Hereafter SFRC Hearings, 1974).

From an analyst's perspective, Philip Windsor makes essentially the same point about possible confusion with the concept of entente when he argues that detente is a misleading term if "it raises expectations of a developing relationship (between the superpowers) which will lead to a closer and closer understanding".<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless it is part of the task of the political analyst to clarify concepts and an appropriate starting point is to look at the derivation of the term. Detente is a corruption of the old French verb de(s)tendre which originally denoted the releasing - de(s)tente - of the strained string of the archer's bow (or crossbow, the abalest) and the consequent discharging of the arrow (or bolt). Thereafter it entered by analogy the lingua franca of traditional diplomatic language and signified either a policy of reducing tensions or a general lessening of international tensions. This general meaning was carried over into English around the turn of this century and, in translation, into other languages. The term re-emerged in the 1950s and became widespread in the 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

Some understanding of the derivation of this term is helpful to the extent that it clarifies a dictionary definition. Following its French origins, detente has been conventionally defined as "the easing of strained relations, especially in a political situation".<sup>7</sup> An extended etymological or linguistic investigation, however, would add little to an understanding of modern political use. As David Finley comments, detente is

"a vague abstraction, useful in the traditional parlance of diplomacy, which has been infused with sometimes overlapping but distinct meanings in the rhetoric and grammar of different parties. The diversity stems from the differing premises, differing purposes, and differing expectations of the parties."<sup>8</sup>

5. P. Windsor, Germany and the Management of Detente (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971) p.23.
6. See W.C. Clemens, "The impact of detente on Chinese and Soviet communism", Journal of International Affairs, 28:2, 1974, p.133ff; P. Seabury, "On detente", Survey, 19:2 (87), Spring 1973, pp. 62-100.
7. Oxford English Dictionary : A Supplement Vol.1 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972) p.782.
8. D.D. Finley, "Detente and Soviet-American trade : an approach to a political balance sheet", Studies in Comparative Communism, 8:1/2, Spring/Summer 1975, p.67.

Further clarification of this concept therefore requires an account of the range of meaning and connotation associated with modern use.

Before proceeding, however, and assuming (albeit implicitly) that use confers meaning, it is necessary to consider the objection that detente has no meaning. This charge can be levelled in various ways. It might be argued that detente does not denote any specific phenomenon other than 'wishful thinking' perhaps. George Ball puts this point bluntly.

"Over time the 'spirit of detente' has become such an overused phrase that the skin has worn off to disclose precisely nothing. Its constant flogging by political writers has made it as cheap and commercial as the 'spirit of Christmas'."<sup>9</sup>

Several analysts have suggested that detente simply refers to such intangibles as 'attitude', or 'mood'. The implication is that style is a substitute for substance or at best that detente is merely a synonym for traditional diplomacy. A variant on this theme is to suggest that detente is 'simply' a journalistic expression, a convenient but essentially meaningless shorthand. A more serious charge suggests that detente is an artificial construct, a product of academic analysis, mechanistic and simplistic but more importantly having no referent in actual political behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear that the meaning of detente does pose major problems. George Kennan, for example, has argued that 'no new word' is necessary to explain relations between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1970s, as attempts to forge a new relationship with Moscow go back to the reopening of the U.S. Embassy in 1933.<sup>11</sup> George Wallace, standing as a candidate in the American presidential election in 1976, became exasperated by what he referred to as "a high fallutin' word. Why don't they just say gettin' together?", he asked.<sup>12</sup> In that same election campaign, President Ford decided to drop the word detente from his political vocabulary because of its controversial nature.

9. G.W. Ball, Diplomacy for a Crowded World (London: Bodley Head, 1976) p.85.

10. I am grateful to Professor Peter Naylor for suggesting this possible objection.

11. SFRC Hearings, 1974.

12. Quoted in C. Bell, The Diplomacy of Detente (London: Martin Robertson, 1977) p.2.

It is significant that a number of analysts and policy-makers have preferred to substitute a variety of other words or phrases for detente, including 'constructive dialogue', 'adversary partnership', 'peaceful engagement', 'normalisation of relations', and 'era of negotiation'. Whether these are synonyms - though with differing connotations - intended to clarify the meaning of detente or a way of making the point that detente has no meaning, their pervasive use is a clear indication of problems both with the word detente and its meaning. Similarly, it can be argued that the use of metaphor in this context is a further indication of a genuine problem. Walter Clemens, for example, refers to detente as a "fragile flower - difficult to cultivate, complicated to nurture - easy to trample".<sup>13</sup> Coral Bell talks of detente as "at best a kind of loose-planking which any ill-calculating manoeuvre can dislodge, temporarily at least".<sup>14</sup> While metaphors can clarify the nature of some phenomena, in this context they merely serve to reinforce the impression of vagueness and ambiguity.

#### The uses of detente.

Despite the powerful allegations that the concept of detente is vague, abstract, misleading, confusing and ambiguous, the fact remains that the term is widely used by political analysts and policy-makers, albeit in different contexts and with different meanings intended. Some indication of the range of meaning and connotation must now be given if further clarification of this concept is to be sought. Pierre Hassner suggests that a broad distinction can be drawn between detente as a condition (or situation) and detente as a policy.<sup>15</sup> To that formulation will be added a third important use, detente as a process. Thus, at the risk of imposing a coherence on the literature and the pronouncements of statesmen that may be unwarranted, the 'overlapping but distinct' notions of detente as condition, as process and as policy will structure this section of the chapter.

13. W.C. Clemens, op.cit. p.136.

14. C. Bell, The Conventions of Crisis (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971) p.70.

15. P. Hassner, "Eurocommunism and detente", Survival, 19:6, November/December 1977, p.251.

(a) Detente as condition

Under the umbrella heading of condition, three different conceptions can be identified: detente as historical period; as prelude to entente; and detente as delusion. Detente as historical period is arguably the most pervasive formulation with detente regarded as the antithesis of cold war and an historical period subsequent to it.<sup>16</sup> The Cuban missile crisis is usually regarded as the key turning point and, rather crudely, the period after 1962 is labelled accordingly. Detente "is widely viewed as the end of the Cold War or at the very least, a substantially tempered phase of it".<sup>17</sup> This does not mean that cold war conflicts between East and West have been resolved, rather that conflict has become less 'salient',<sup>18</sup> one dimension only of a 'multilevelled'<sup>19</sup> relationship between the superpowers.

The idea of detente as a temporary phase is central to this conception and this has been reinforced by more recent references to the end of detente and the onset of a 'new' or 'second' cold war.<sup>20</sup> From this perspective, detente was the product of a temporary balance of forces built essentially upon a nuclear stalemate and buttressed by a series of tangible or intangible measures. Thus, the period of detente - broadly identified as the 1970s - can be characterised either by a specific set of agreements between East and West or less tangibly by a willingness to foster cooperative as well as conflictual relations. It can be defined as "a stabilised interstate system whose balanced configuration is the reference datum for the rest of international behaviour".<sup>21</sup> Coral Bell's analysis of detente as the

16. See, for example, P. Windsor, op.cit. chap.1; A. Fontaine, History of the Cold War (London: Secker & Warburg, 1970).

17. C. Gati, "East Central Europe: touchstone for detente", Journal of International Affairs, 28:2, 1974, p.158.

18. P. Hassner, op.cit. p.251.

19. M.D. Shulman, op.cit. p.36ff.

20. See, for example, N. Chomsky, Towards a New Cold War (London: Pantheon, 1982); F. Halliday, The Making of the Second Cold War (London: Verso, 1983).

21. D.D. Finley, op.cit. p.71.

product of a triangular relationship between Washington, Moscow and Peking fits neatly into this 'power' conception and she also stresses the ephemeral nature of detente as an historical phenomenon with a reminder that "all detentes in diplomatic history have proved perishable in due course".<sup>22</sup> These assumptions enable the prevailing balance of power to be used to explain a detente period and a changing structure of power to account for its passing.

A second use identifies detente as a prelude to entente. Though related to the first to the extent that detente is seen as a function of certain structural factors, this conception identifies trends which push relationships beyond the 'stage' of detente to much closer ties, variously labelled entente, rapprochement or even convergence.<sup>23</sup> Detente is conceived as a sort of 'half-way house' between cold war conflict and entente,

"a point on a logical spectrum of relations along which conflict either increases or decreases. If tensions mount, the parties may move towards cold and then hot war. If tensions diminish the parties move towards detente - from detente, they could move further towards rapprochement or even entente."<sup>24</sup>

What appears to distinguish this final stage from detente is the stability of the system. Richard Rosecrance, for example, concludes that nothing short of "a partial Soviet-American entente will provide the necessary structure in which present destabilising currents can be contained".<sup>25</sup>

Marshall Shulman draws a distinction between an "atmosphere of detente" and a "rapprochement or real stabilisation".<sup>26</sup>

22. C. Bell, op.cit. (1977) p.71.

23. D.D. Finley, op.cit. pp.68-70.

24. W.C. Clemens, op.cit. pp.134-135.

25. R. Rosecrance, "Detente or entente?", Foreign Affairs, April 1975, p.481.

26. M.D. Shulman, Beyond the Cold War (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1966) p.58.

The idea that detente, whether lasting or ephemeral as an historical phenomenon, is essentially a delusion, a charade devoid of any reality, provides a final important use under the general heading of detente as a condition. This usage houses those merely sceptical of the achievements of detente, together with a transnational lobby of critics, like the late Senator Jackson, Solzhenitsyn and Vice-Chairman Deng, who have accused Western leaders of appeasement towards the Soviet Union. Because of important differences between the Western concept of detente and the Russians' preferred term 'peaceful coexistence', it is argued that the Soviet Union has managed to increase its power at the expense of the West. Detente is a dangerous delusion which poses a grave threat to Western security because it refers to a situation in which one party gains unilateral advantages at the expense of the other, 'under cover' as it were of a relaxation of tensions.<sup>27</sup> References by the Reagan Administration to detente as a 'one-way street' exemplify this conception of detente.<sup>28</sup>

(b) Detente as process

These notions of detente as a specific condition can be contrasted with detente as a process. Henry Kissinger, testifying as secretary of state to the Senate Hearings on detente, insisted that detente is "a continuing process, not a final condition that has been or can be realised at any one specific point in time". This conception had already been voiced before those same Hearings by former secretary of state Dean Rusk. Detente, he argued in his testimony, "is not a condition in which all problems are solved, but a process by which all points in dispute are resolved, and potential crises are anticipated and avoided".<sup>29</sup> This conception can also be found in academic analyses. Dalton West, for example, describes detente as "a complex, necessary, long-term process of accommodation. The only measure of its success will be the gradual growth of mutual satisfaction".<sup>30</sup> For

27. See, for example, R. Conquest et al "Detente - an evaluation" Survey, 20: 2/3, Spring/Summer 1974, p.2.
28. See, for example, speech by President Reagan on 30th January 1981, quoted in N. Chomsky et al, Superpowers in Collision (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982) p.46.
29. SFRC Hearings, 1974.
30. D. West, "Detente in trouble - or is it?", New Zealand International Review January-February 1978, p.33.

Europeans, Joseph Korbel suggests, detente means a "slow, undefined process of alleviation of tensions".<sup>31</sup> Since the signing of the Helsinki Accords in August 1975, references have been made to a 'Helsinki Process'. All the participating states who signed the Final Act committed themselves to "broaden, deepen and make continuing and lasting the process of detente".<sup>32</sup> The CSCE review conferences at Belgrade (1977) and Madrid (1980) are seen as symbolising that continuing process. This conception of detente as a process is interesting because it draws attention away from specific agreements and treaties, except as landmarks or perhaps turning points, and to some extent from teleological concerns, and focuses attention on the processes of change over time and the underlying causes of that change. One important point that has been stressed in the literature is the impact of nuclear weapons on detente. Herbert Dinerstein, for example, differentiates between detentes in traditional diplomacy which were essentially temporary in nature and the more permanent necessity of detente in the nuclear age.<sup>33</sup> The simple imperative of avoiding nuclear war of itself ensures the recurrence of detente on the international agenda. Robin Edmonds also makes this important point:

" - the logic of strategic nuclear power is so inexorable that sooner or later the relationship between the two superpowers - however much they may pursue their rivalry in other less dangerous fields - must become positive."<sup>34</sup>

The idea of an unfolding historical process has, not surprisingly, tempted scholars to date the process, to say when detente 'started' and to identify who 'started' it. Starting dates have varied enormously between 1953 (the death of Stalin) and 1975 (the Helsinki Accords). A number of scholars choose the late 1960s largely because they conclude that the coming to power of the Nixon and the Brandt Administrations presaged important initiatives which linked together superpower and European detentes. The

31. J. Korbel, Detente in Europe (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972) p.36.

32. Preamble, 5th para. Quoted in F.A.M. Alting Von Geusau (ed), Uncertain Detente (Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthoff and Noordhoff, 1979) p.1.

33. SFRC Hearings, 1974.

34. R. Edmonds, Soviet Foreign Policy 1962-73 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975) p.5.



question of whether the first moves came from the West or the East also divides scholars. Theodore Draper, for example, implies the latter when he argues that there were in fact three separate detentes; between the Soviet Union and France from 1965, West Germany from 1970 and the United States from 1972.<sup>35</sup>

(c) Detente as policy

The idea of bilateral detentes between certain states takes us on to the third important use of this concept, detente as policy. Different states at different times during the period since 1945 have been described as pursuing a detente policy. British detente policy will be examined in detail in later chapters, but it would be useful at this stage to establish and illustrate the notion of detente as a policy by reviewing briefly the detente policies of the United States, the Soviet Union, France and West Germany.

Coral Bell argues that detente first emerged as an articulate 'Western aspiration' rather than a policy or a strategy at the time of Stalin's death in 1953, with Winston Churchill as the major spokesman.<sup>36</sup> The elements of a distinctive detente policy pursued by both superpowers, however, can also be traced back at least to the mid 1950s. Looking first at the United States, Averell Harriman, in his testimony to the Senate Hearings on detente, took issue with those who thought it was President Nixon who initiated the 'period of negotiation' with the Soviet Union. Harriman maintained that United States detente policy goes back to the Eisenhower period and the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955.<sup>37</sup> Certainly the slogans associated with a detente policy stretch back to Kennedy's 'Strategy of Peace', through Johnson's 'Peaceful Engagement' and 'Bridge-Building' to the Nixon-Kissinger 'Structure of Peace'. Key developments at the level of declaratory policy prior to the Nixon period were Kennedy's speech at the American University in Washington (June 1963), outlining his 'Strategy of Peace' and Johnson's October 1966 speech which called for a reconciliation with the Eastern bloc.<sup>38</sup> The major achievement was

35. T. Draper, "Detente", Commentary, June 1974, p.33.

36. C. Bell, op.cit. (1977) p.6ff.

37. SFRC Hearings, 1974.

38. C. Gati, op.cit. p.168.

clearly the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in August 1963. The full flowering of United States detente policy, however, took place during the Nixon presidency with the initiation of diplomatic relations with China and the signing of a major set of agreements with the Soviet Union in 1972-3.<sup>39</sup>

Soviet detente policy has been traced back even earlier in the 1950s. Adam Ulam, for example, argues that a policy of detente began with the August 1953 speech by the new Prime Minister Malenkov, who declared that "we stand as we have always stood for the peaceful coexistence of the two systems".<sup>40</sup> Other declaratory landmarks here would include Khrushchev's speech to the Twentieth CPSU Congress in 1956 and Brezhnev's 'Peace Programme' speech to the Twenty Fourth Party Congress in 1971. The major achievements of Soviet policy would include those common to the United States together with Moscow (Soviet-German) Treaty of 1970. Discussions of French detente policy have focused on the high level ministerial exchanges during 1965-66 which culminated in De Gaulle's visit to Moscow in 1966. This attempt to revive France's historic links with the Soviet Union was part of De Gaulle's 'Grand Design' and had been an important policy objective since his visit to Moscow in 1944. The French refusal to recognise East Germany, however, and later the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia at a time of domestic instability in France finally ended this phase of French policy.<sup>41</sup>

Much more significant in terms of achievements was the detente policy or Ostpolitik of West Germany. This policy represented a reversal of the assumption that the reunification of Germany must precede any detente.

39. In particular, the strategic arms limitation agreements (including SALT I) and the declaration of Basic Principles of Relations signed in Moscow in May 1972, and the Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War signed by Nixon and Brezhnev at the Washington summit in June 1973.

40. A.B. Ulam, "Detente under Soviet eyes", Foreign Policy, 24, Fall 1976, pp.149-150.

41. See, for example, C. Bell, op.cit. (1977) p.12ff; G.R. Urban (ed.), Detente (London: Temple Smith, 1976) p.203ff.

The Ostpolitik rested on the premise that reunification, if it was to be achieved at all, would be a consequence of detente. While the uncompromising Adenauer line towards the East enshrined in the Hallstein Doctrine (1955) was softened by the Erhardt and Kissinger governments, it was the Brandt government elected in October 1969 which carried through this policy. The formula of 'two states in one nation' was adopted and it was this which, as Theodore Draper puts it, "finally enabled West Germany to give up the substance while saving the shadow of reunification".<sup>42</sup>

Over the 1970-72 period, the Ostpolitik produced a number of treaties which in effect secured the territorial stabilisation of Europe with the implicit acceptance of 1945 borders, and provided a solution to the Berlin and the wider German problem. Germany now ceased to be the main focus of East-West tensions and became a residual issue in East-West relations.<sup>43</sup>

If this brief review serves to establish the notion of detente as a policy in both declaratory and substantive terms, there is some debate which might now be addressed about whether detente has constituted a policy instrument or a policy objective. One writer, for example, has asserted that detente must be considered as "an instrumental policy rather than a goal-state valuable in itself" and can only be evaluated in terms of the goals that detente is instrumental in achieving.<sup>44</sup> Certainly the instrumental nature of detente is much in evidence in the policies considered here. Both superpowers have clearly seen detente as a useful strategy for managing adversary power. For the United States, a detente policy promised different things at different times, including the resolution of, or at least a distraction from, other problems like Berlin and Vietnam, a means of exploiting the Sino-Soviet rift and not least, commercial opportunities in the Soviet Union and China. For the Soviet Union also, detente promised and delivered crucial economic and technological assistance from the West, as well as the legitimisation of the territorial and political status quo in Europe.

42. T. Draper, op.cit. p.35.

43. For detail, see J. Korbel, op.cit. p.141ff.

44. E. Weede, "Threats to detente: intuitive hopes and counter-intuitive realities", European Journal of Political Research, 5, 1977, p.408.

With respect to France, De Gaulle was preoccupied in the 1960s with the possible uses of a detente strategy. As Alfred Grosser comments,

"ever since De Gaulle's visit to Moscow in 1944, the aim of French policy [had] been to promote whenever there was an opportunity - constructive relations with the Soviet Union - not as an end in itself, but in order to strengthen the French hand in our dealings with the United States."<sup>45</sup>

Not only was detente regarded as a way of containing American (or 'Anglo-Saxon') influence in Europe and elsewhere, it was a potential vehicle for exercising restraint on the traditional enemy, Germany, and was therefore a central plank in the Gaullist plan to restore French power and grandeur. For West Germany, the Ospolitik delivered more tangible benefits. Most importantly from a German perspective, intra-German relations were much improved with freer travel and communication between the two Germanies. Also, the demise of the Hallstein Doctrine enabled the Federal Republic to broaden political contacts as well as trade and cultural relations. Perceptions in Bonn of the important benefits accruing from detente help, for example, to explain divergent NATO responses to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

There are problems though with the assertion that the meaning of detente in this context is restricted to detente as a policy instrument. It is not always clear in practice whether the intention has been to pursue detente as an objective or 'merely' as a means to a variety of other ends. Moreover, different states at different times appear to have pursued detente as an end in itself, most obviously when it was perceived that a detente was needed but did not exist. It would appear, for example, that by making diplomatic initiatives and playing a positive role in East-West negotiations in the 1950s and early 1960s, British policy-makers intended to play a significant role in the 'creation' of a detente. Harold Macmillan, in a letter to President Kennedy in January 1962 outlining a

45. Quoted in G.R. Urban (ed.) op.cit. p.265.

new disarmament initiative, claimed that the abortive Paris summit (of May, 1960) had been "the culminating point of a long and carefully prepared sequence of events all of which seemed to afford some expectation of a genuine detente".<sup>46</sup> Similarly, initiatives by other states, particularly at the declaratory level, have also been geared to creating or establishing the preconditions for a detente.

### Detente and related concepts

The last section has provided some clarification of the concept of detente by identifying and illustrating the most important ways in which detente has been used in recent years. Another way of trying to clarify the meaning of this concept would be to compare detente with related concepts - some of which have already been touched on in this discussion - like diplomacy, appeasement and peaceful coexistence.

#### (a) Detente, diplomacy and appeasement

Reference was made earlier to the possible objection that detente is merely a synonym for diplomacy or perhaps traditional diplomacy. If the cold war is taken to represent the absence of diplomatic activity across the East-West ideological divide, then detente can be related to the process of restoring diplomatic relations. Stanley Hoffman implicitly links detente to a notion of traditional or 'normal' diplomacy. Writing at the beginning of the 1970s, he looked forward to a period when

"instead of relations of total enmity or total friendship, both inimical to diplomacy, there would again be those fluctuating mixes of common and divergent interests characteristic of eighteenth and nineteenth century European diplomacy. Ideology would not disappear but its external effects would be neutralised: different political systems could coexist since beliefs

46. H. Macmillan, At the End of the Day (London: Macmillan, 1973) p.158.

would be disconnected from behaviour through voluntary or necessary restraint."<sup>47</sup>

The allegation that detente is synonymous with appeasement is another indication that the cold war represented in diplomatic terms an 'abnormal' period. Appeasement, denoting the attempt to conciliate by making concessions, was an integral part of traditional diplomatic practice, but it had acquired pejorative connotations in the 1930s. Thus, as Alexander George points out, what was still recent historical experience in the postwar period served to

"discredit more generally the traditional reliance on classical diplomacy, upon negotiation and reconciliation for adjusting conflicting interests and for reconciling change in the international system with the requirements for stability."<sup>48</sup>

Detente, diplomacy and appeasement are related concepts in terms of traditional diplomacy, but, from a cold war perspective, it can be argued that detente has a distinct meaning.<sup>49</sup>

(b) Detente and deterrence

The contrast between the cold war and earlier historical periods in terms of traditional diplomatic practice also provides a context for discussing the relationship between detente and deterrence. The issue here in conceptual terms, however, is not one of synonymity but of compatibility. Critics who equate detente with appeasement in a pejorative sense argue that detente is also undesirable because it undermines the structure of deterrence which is crucial to the

47. S. Hoffman, "Will the balance balance at home", Foreign Policy, 20, Summer 1972, p.61.
48. A.L. George, Presidential Decision Making in Foreign Policy (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1980) p.255. See also the discussion in J.H. Herz, "The relevancy and irrelevancy of appeasement", Social Research, 31, Autumn 1964, pp.296-320.
49. This argument is developed in G.A. Craig and A.L. George, Force and Statecraft (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983).

maintenance of peace in the nuclear age. From this perspective, detente and deterrence are incompatible strategies.

A related but less critical position stresses the primacy of deterrence over detente. President Carter, for example, in a speech in May 1980 designed to signal a new direction in United States foreign policy, declared that "detente with the Soviet Union remains our goal. But detente must be built upon a firm foundation of deterrence".<sup>50</sup> This view of detente as desirable but essentially subordinate to deterrence has its antecedents in the 'negotiation from strength' strategy associated with former U.S. secretary of state Dean Acheson in the late 1940s.

A third position stresses the complementarity of detente and deterrence in terms of the prevention of nuclear war. This view starts from the premise that deterrence is a negative, reactive strategy that may prevent nuclear war in certain circumstances but at a cost of freezing the sources of conflict. The argument is that deterrence must be balanced by detente, with the latter conceived as a positive strategy of incentives, so that some progress might be made in resolving or at least ameliorating the differences of interest that produce conflict.<sup>51</sup>

The Harmel Report of December 1967 on the future tasks of the NATO alliance, for example, adopted this 'stick and carrot' view that detente and deterrence are complementary and indeed mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory strategies and that both, in Robin Edmond's words, should be "part of a long-term process to promote better relations".<sup>52</sup> Helmut Schmidt recently called for a return to the 'Harmel approach', and warned the Reagan administration that an exclusively military strategy would fail unless the president understood the need for a wider political strategy in the context of East-West relations.<sup>53</sup>

50. Speech to the World Affairs Council in Philadelphia. Guardian, May 10th 1980.

51. See the discussion in E. Luard, "Conciliation and deterrence", World Politics, 19, January 1967, pp.167-189.

52. R. Edmonds, op.cit. p.67.

53. H. Schmidt, International Herald Tribune, December 5th 1983.

(c) Detente and peaceful coexistence

It is clear from the earlier discussion of detente as delusion that apparent similarities between the concepts of detente and peaceful coexistence obscure differences of use and connotation. A Soviet preference for using 'peaceful coexistence' rather than 'detente' in political language suggests the possibility of conceptual ambiguity here which has major implications with respect to perceptions and expectations about East-West relations. Although peaceful coexistence and detente have essentially the same meaning from a Soviet perspective, two questions need to be asked. What do Soviet leaders mean by peaceful coexistence? Is their concept consistent with a 'Western' concept of detente?

Peaceful coexistence emerged as a concept in the Soviet Union after the 1917 Revolution and referred to the tactical necessity of avoiding war, an imperative given the vulnerability of the new Soviet state. As Graham Vernon explains, "peaceful coexistence as a Soviet policy was developed by a leadership which perceived it needed time to prepare for an 'inevitable' war".<sup>54</sup>

In the nuclear age, however, this policy ceased to be a tactic devised to gain time and became a long-term strategy, a "fundamental principle of Soviet foreign policy" as Khrushchev put it in his speech to the Twentieth CPSU Congress in February 1956. Khrushchev's speech was the first clear statement of the new priority to be attached to peaceful coexistence in Soviet policy. This principle was linked explicitly to the rejection of the Leninist doctrine on the inevitability of war between states with different social systems. According to Khrushchev, war was no longer a 'fatalistic inevitability'.<sup>55</sup>

54. G.D. Vernon, op.cit. p.274. See also F. Griffiths, "Origins of peaceful coexistence: anhistorical note", Survey, 50, January 1964, pp. 195-201. This section draws extensively upon Graham Vernon's discussion.

55. Pravda, February 15th 1956. See also P. Marantz, "Prelude to detente: doctrinal change under Khrushchev", International Studies Quarterly, 19:4, December 1975, pp. 501-527.



In a later speech to the Supreme Soviet in October 1959, the Soviet leader declared that peaceful coexistence had become

"... an objective necessity, deriving from the present situation in the world, from the contemporary stage in the development of human society ... the question now at hand is not whether or not there should be peaceful coexistence. It exists and will continue to exist, unless we want the lunacy of a nuclear-missile war."<sup>56</sup>

As suggested earlier, critics of detente and Soviet policy have argued that peaceful coexistence does not have the same meaning as the Western concept of detente. Specifically, they reject the argument that peaceful coexistence has become a principle of Soviet policy rather than a tactical expedient. Peaceful coexistence does not mean 'ideological coexistence'; if anything, the 'class struggle' has intensified. For the Soviet Union, detente or peaceful coexistence is merely a tactical ploy to lessen the danger of a nuclear war. Thus, the 'new' policy simply represents a 'change of methods' to achieve the same revolutionary goals that were established in 1917.<sup>57</sup>

There is substance to this critique to the extent that Soviet leaders have never suggested that adopting a policy of peaceful coexistence signals the end of the ideological struggle or that the policy will not be used to advance the interests of the Soviet Union and/or international socialism. Indeed they have stated precisely the opposite on numerous occasions. Leonid Brezhnev, for example, in his speech to the Twenty Fifth CPSU Congress in February 1976, made it clear that

"... detente and peaceful coexistence refer to relations between states. This means above all that disputes and conflicts between countries must not be settled by means of war or by means of the use of force or the threat of force."

But, he continued,

"Detente does not in the slightest abolish, and it cannot abolish or alter, the laws of the class struggle. We don't conceal that we see in detente a

56. Izvestia, November 1st 1959.

57. See, for example, R. Conquest et.al. op.cit.

way to the creation of more advantageous conditions for peaceful socialist Communist construction."<sup>58</sup>

It can be argued that the Soviet Union has a coherent and a consistent conception of peaceful coexistence/detente which, ideologically, has to be understood in terms of the interrelationship between peaceful coexistence and 'proletarian internationalism'.<sup>59</sup> Whether this distinctive Soviet view is inconsistent with a Western concept of detente is, however, a moot point. Firstly, it assumes that there is an agreed 'Western' understanding of detente which might be used for comparative purposes. Secondly, this position is itself ideological to the extent that it assumes that Western states do not also use detente to advance their political-ideological interests. Finally, it assumes that there are no common interests other than the avoidance of nuclear war which might be advanced by detente.

#### Detente as an analytical term

The discussion so far in this chapter has established clearly different if overlapping uses of the term detente. Some additional clarification has been provided by comparing detente with other related concepts. Nevertheless, the problem remains that any overall agreement on meaning is limited to a simple dictionary definition and this only serves to paper over the variety of use and connotation. The absence of an agreed meaning, however, raises the important question of whether detente can be legitimately used as an analytical term.

The problem of establishing an agreed meaning of detente, as this discussion has illustrated, is exacerbated by the fact that the term has been suffused over time with ideological content. The 'politicisation' of detente is indicated by attempts to rescue the concept by the use of qualifying adjectives, as in references to 'real', 'genuine' or, more recently, 'hard-headed' detente:<sup>60</sup> but such devices merely sidestep the issue of the ideological use of this concept. References to detente as a 'political shibboleth' or a 'portmanteau slogan' are further illustrations

58. Izvestia, February 25th 1976.

59. This theme is developed in G.D. Vernon, op.cit.

60. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1973) p.158; R. Nixon, Real Peace (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984).

of this problem.<sup>61</sup>

Detente has acquired almost theological connotations with the capacity to excite passions either for or against it. At one extreme, detente is regarded as the only alternative to cold or even hot war; at the other extreme, it is regarded as little more than a euphemism for appeasement. In policy terms, one side's strategy is another side's stratagem. While United States and specifically Henry Kissinger's detente policy can be described as "a mode of management of adversary power",<sup>62</sup> Soviet detente policy can be viewed as "a stratagem of subterfuge propagated by a determined adversary to gain an advantage in a continuing contest for hegemony or power".<sup>63</sup>

From this perspective, detente is an "essentially contested concept".<sup>64</sup> As Barry Buzan has recently commented with reference to the concept of security,

"such concepts necessarily generate unsolvable debates about their meaning and application because --- they contain an ideological element which renders empirical evidence irrelevant as a means of resolving the dispute."<sup>65</sup>

In this sense there can be no agreement on the meaning of detente. And yet this cannot rule out the use of detente for analytical purposes. If this followed, many of the core concepts in social science would also be rendered unusable. It does, however, underline the point that the concept

61. T. Draper, "Appeasement and detente", Commentary, February 1976, p.34; Leopold Labedz, quoted in G.R. Urban (ed.) op.cit. p.283.

62. C. Bell, op.cit. (1977) p.1.

63. D.D. Finley, op.cit. p.75.

64. See W.B. Gallie in M. Black (ed.), The Importance of Language (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1962) pp.121-146; also T.D. Weldon, The Vocabulary of Politics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953) especially Chapter 2.

65. B. Buzan, People, States and Fear (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983) p.6.

must be carefully specified within an explicit analytical framework.

In pursuit of such a framework, it is appropriate at this stage to reflect on the existing uses of the concept rather more critically. While all the uses considered here highlight recognisable aspects of detente to a greater or lesser extent, from an analytical perspective the various notions of detente as a specific condition pose most problems. Detente as historical period is simple and attractive but most vulnerable to the charge of being an artificial construct (or journalistic shorthand). There are too many elements of 'detente' in periods labelled 'cold war' or 'new cold war' and vice-versa to make the cyclical account wholly convincing. Where this conception is located (usually implicitly) within a 'power' framework, the focus tends to be too restrictively military-strategic to account for the recurrence of detente at different times. This suggests that a broader framework which also highlights political and economic factors is needed. Detente as prelude to entente is also rather contrived but, more importantly, like detente as delusion, it is explicitly normative in orientation and therefore problematic for analytical purposes.

#### Detente as policy and process

If detente as condition is difficult to use effectively for analytical purposes, the existing uses of detente as policy and as process provide a basis for developing and applying this concept at two distinct levels of analysis; the international system and the state. At the system level, detente can be analysed in the broad context of a changing international system and conceived as a process of accommodation generated by dynamic structural changes in the system over time. At the state level, on the other hand, detente can be conceived as a policy issue and analysed from the perspective of individual states rather than the system as a whole. At this level of analysis, similarities and differences between detente policies will be highlighted and can be compared.<sup>66</sup>

66. This framework accords with a conventional analytical distinction in International Relations. For the implications of this distinction, see J. David Singer, "The level of analysis problem in International Relations", in K.W. Knorr and S. Verba (eds.), The International System: Theoretical Essays (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961) pp. 77-92.

This broad approach addresses the thorny problem of competing interpretations of detente by suggesting that the meaning of detente is contingent upon the level at which it is analysed. At the system level, the analytical task is to identify a process of accommodation and the relevant 'change' factors, and then to try and establish a causal relationship. At the state level, the task is to identify detente as a policy issue in the foreign policies of particular states. An account of detente as policy will highlight the perceptions of policy-makers, the 'uses' of detente, in domestic as well as foreign policy, and the policy objectives sought through detente. The explanation will focus on domestic factors and the international determinants of state behaviour. Critically, while detente as process will be defined by the approach adopted by the analyst, detente as policy will be defined essentially by the views of the relevant policy-makers.

This study is primarily concerned to investigate detente at the state level by analysing British detente policy during the 1953-63 period. But one of the objectives of the study, as stated in the introduction, is to identify a British role in an East-West detente process during this period and to offer some evaluation of that role. It is appropriate, therefore, to conclude this chapter by specifying the notion of detente as a process rather more explicitly.

There are broadly two ways of approaching this which may be interrelated in any particular analysis, but they are worth identifying separately at the outset. One approach would be to use an historical-descriptive methodology and seek to trace the outlines of a process of East-West accommodation over time. The other approach would be to focus more on the causes than the evidence of detente by locating a detente process within changing structures of international relations and resulting patterns of behaviour.

The first approach, it might be argued, would be predisposed to highlight the more 'visible' manifestations of a process of accommodation. Historically, 'phases' or periods of detente might be described and associated 'landmarks' or 'turning points' identified as signposts along the way. A recent study will serve to exemplify this type of approach. Richard Stevenson bases his analysis of detente on "four periods of easing tension in contemporary US-Soviet relations": the 'spirit of Geneva'

(1955); the 'spirit of Camp David' (1959); the 'Post-Missile Crisis detente' (1963-4) and the 'Moscow detente' (1972-5).<sup>67</sup>

The objective of this study is to reveal the "factors working for and against detente". To that end, Stevenson describes for each period what he calls the "setting, occurrence and aftermath" of detente. He concludes that

"certain basic factors making for conflict between the superpowers have continuously asserted themselves to impose limits on the extent to which a relaxation of tension can change the relationship."<sup>68</sup>

Thus, detente has "proved to be a limited process with limited potential". Nevertheless, detente is identified as a process in the sense that "the legacy of detente has been cumulative in US-Soviet relations". While progress has not been linear or cyclical, Stevenson argues that each period of detente has built upon the legacy of the previous period.

"Since the 1950s, significant agreements have been reached, US-Soviet dialogue has been re-established, and the process of negotiation has been firmly entrenched as the means to deal with conflicting issues."<sup>69</sup>

Though useful in descriptive terms, it can be argued that this sort of analysis is limited as an explanation of detente. The idea of recurring periods of detente since the 1950s and the notion of a cumulative process suggests that there is an underlying dynamic in the system that is not captured by an historical-descriptive analysis.

A major problem with Stevenson's analysis from this perspective is his conception of detente as essentially a product of an evolving US-Soviet relationship, a "type of maturation process" he calls it at one point,<sup>70</sup>

67. R.W. Stevenson, The Rise and Fall of Detente (London: Macmillan, 1985) p.xii.

68. Ibid. p.202.

69. Ibid. p.201.

70. Ibid. p.202.

rather than a result of broader changes in the international system over the last thirty years which themselves might be said to undermine the ability of the superpowers to control the system. If the cold war is identified in structural terms with a bipolar distribution of power and the primacy of ideological and military-strategic alignments, a detente process can be related to challenges to that structure of rigid bloc differentiation.

A structural analysis might be developed around four interrelated 'change' factors which have weakened East-West ideological and military alignments and gradually eroded a bipolar structure: the general impact of nuclear weapons and the specific impact of a nuclear stalemate; the growth of economic interdependence; the diversification and diffusion of power and changing interests and attitudes of international actors. The impact of these changes, it might be argued, has been to produce if not a recognisably multipolar system, at least a multilevelled international system with interactions at different levels of activity on a variety of issues, not wholly constrained by an East-West ideological structure or limited to security politics.<sup>71</sup>

The explanation of detente with reference to these changes, however, depends upon the approach and the perspective adopted by the analyst. From a superpower perspective, for example, detente might be explained as an attempt to manage a process of change, the pace of which was being set by their allies.<sup>72</sup> From the perspective of the allies, on the other hand, detente might be explained as a vehicle for exploiting these changes so as to create some freedom of manoeuvre within their respective hegemonial

71. A suggestive framework for such an analysis is provided by D.J. Puchala and S.I. Fagan, "International politics in the 1970s: the search for a perspective", International Organisation, 28:2, Spring 1974, pp.247-266. For a stimulating study which develops a broad structural analysis along these lines, see S. Brown, New Forces in World Politics (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1974).

72. In this context, see Henry Kissinger's account of his attempts to control the West German Ostpolitik between 1970 and 1972. H. Kissinger, White House Years (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1979) especially pp.408-412; see also R. Garthoff, Detente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations From Nixon to Reagan (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985).

systems.<sup>73</sup> As Richard Barnet observes, detente has "proved to be a time for subordinate nations on both sides of the ideological divide to rediscover their political past".<sup>74</sup>

It is not necessary in the context of this study to pursue further the various explanations of a detente process. The concern in this chapter has been to clarify the concept of detente and, more specifically, to establish the notions of detente as a process and a policy, thus providing an appropriate conceptual framework for an analysis of British detente policy in the 1953-63 period. The analysis begins in the next chapter by locating British policy after 1953 within an historical context.

73. See, for example, David Calleo's analysis in L. Freedman (ed.), The Troubled Alliance (London: Heinemann, 1983) p.7ff.

74. R.J. Barnet, The Alliance (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983) p.345.



The development of British detente policy after 1953 has its roots in the earlier postwar period and can most effectively be set in historical context by comparing British and American attitudes to the cold war, perceptions of the Soviet/communist threat and appropriate responses to that threat. If the postwar period up to 1953 is viewed from this perspective, what emerges is a significant divergence of attitudes on these central issues, particularly after 1949 when American attitudes perceptibly hardened.

By the end of 1946, different perceptions of Soviet intentions had been replaced by an apparent congruity of Anglo-American perspectives on East-West relations.<sup>1</sup> Certainly both governments now shared the view that the Soviet Union posed a direct threat to Western interests and were agreed on the pressing need to modify Soviet behaviour. The Attlee government fully supported the American response to this problem - the policy of containment which owed much to the ideas of George Kennan.<sup>2</sup> The short term containment of the Soviet Union while the economic and military strength of Western Europe was rebuilt, was regarded in London as in Washington as the only viable strategy for normalising relations with the Soviet Union in the longer term.

If containment was a negative way of modifying Soviet behaviour, more positive inducements could be employed at a later stage as part of an overall strategy. But containment itself was initially conceived as a strategy designed to facilitate a normalisation of relations as soon as possible. Significantly, cutting off diplomatic contacts and ceasing to negotiate with Moscow was not part of the original concept of containment.

1. The emergence of parallel British and American views with respect to the Soviet threat is conveniently summarised in R. Ovendale, "Britain, the U.S.A. and the European cold war, 1945-8", History, LXVII, 1982, pp. 217-236. See also A. Bullock, Ernest Bevin (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985) p.239.
2. See J.L. Gaddis, Strategies of Containment (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982) chapter 2, for a summary of the debate about the significance of Kennan's ideas. Gaddis argues the case for Kennan's authorship but draws an important distinction between the making and the implementation of the containment policy.

As Gaddis notes,

"Kennan took the position that modifying Soviet behaviour required both positive and negative reinforcement - this meant being prepared to engage in such negotiations as seemed likely to produce mutually acceptable results."<sup>3</sup>

The American policy of containment, however, moved away in important respects from the original concept over the 1947-49 period. These policy changes produced friction in Anglo-American relations and can be seen in hindsight to have revealed underlying differences of approach to international relations. It is necessary therefore to look at these changes in some detail. The rationale behind these policy changes was clearly set out in a new planning document drafted by a small ad hoc committee of State and Defense Department officials chaired by Paul Nitze, Kennan's successor as director of policy planning. Though it was not drafted by the National Security Council, this document became known as NSC-68 when it was produced in May 1950.<sup>4</sup>

NSC-68 makes the case that the assumptions which underpinned the containment policy had changed, and therefore, the policy itself must change. Most importantly, it was now assumed that the nature of the Soviet threat had changed. The Soviet Union, strengthened by recent developments, the imposition of a monolithic communist rule in Eastern Europe, the revolution in China, the successful testing of an atomic bomb, was perceived to be a much more formidable threat, particularly in military terms. Moreover, the source of the threat was assumed to have shifted from the Soviet Union per se to the international communist movement directed from Moscow.

Given these new assumptions, the object of containment, for the United States and also for the new North Atlantic alliance, must be to build, in

3. Ibid. p.71. More recently, Kennan has expressed his belief that the negotiation phase of the containment strategy would begin in 1948 after the success of the 'Marshall Plan approach'. Negotiation constituted the third stage of his 'private scenario' and followed the completion of the first two: the "dissipation of unreal dreams of collaboration on the western side" and the failure of "unreal hopes for political triumph on the Soviet side". G. Kennan, The Nuclear Delusion (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) pp.xii-xiii.

4. J.L. Gaddis, op.cit. p.90ff.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson's phrase, 'situations of strength' to match and counter the threat. Despite talk of eventual 'negotiation from strength', this object in practice excluded negotiation with the new implacable enemy, international communism. For the Americans, containment and the cold war had now come to mean political warfare between two monolithic power blocs: on the one hand, strengthening and increasing the cohesion of the Western bloc, and, on the other, taking positive steps to undermine the cohesion of the communist bloc.<sup>5</sup> Negotiations, which had been a major if not a central component of the original strategy of containment, became the victim of this new policy review document. Gaddis summarises the new American position.

"This approach was not intended to preclude eventual negotiations with the Russians, but it did seek to defer them until requisite levels of 'strength' had been reached. It left little room for efforts to alter the Soviet concept of international relations through positive as well as negative reinforcement. Rather, 'strength' came to be viewed almost as an end in itself, not as a means to a larger end; the process of containment became more important than the objective that process was supposed to attain."<sup>6</sup>

5. A clear statement of this position appears in an interdepartmental steering committee paper prepared for the forthcoming Churchill visit to Washington in January 1952. "Our fundamental objectives vis à vis the U.S.S.R. are to contain its aggressive expansionism within the present territorial limits which it controls or dominates, to encourage and create, if possible, a situation within the Soviet satellite countries of Eastern Europe which would lead to the relaxation of Soviet control and domination over them and to deter the Kremlin from acts which might result in general war. To achieve these objectives the U.S. Government has adopted two fundamental policies:
  1. To create military, political, economic and psychological unity among the free nations and particularly among N.A.T.O. countries.
  2. To exploit and promote weakness, disunity, and discontent behind the Iron Curtain through political warfare."

Steering group negotiating papers, TCT D-1/5a, January 6th 1952, Harry S. Truman Papers.

6. J.L. Gaddis, op.cit. pp.82-83.

American hostility to and fear of negotiation was based upon an entrenchment of cold war attitudes to the communist threat. The adopted image of "Hitler in the Kremlin masterminding global subversion" ruled out negotiations and normal diplomatic relations: a regime bent on world revolution would simply regard a willingness to negotiate as a sign of weakness.<sup>7</sup> By employing 'salami tactics', any concessions made would simply be the starting point for the next series of demands. Thus, as Adam Ulam puts it, "next to all-out war, the prospect of negotiating with the communists inspired the most fear in the bosom of American diplomats".<sup>8</sup> Only a change in the Soviet system and the renunciation of global ambitions could lead to negotiations. As things stood, in what was now perceived to be a zero-sum game, there was simply nothing to negotiate about.

The British reaction to these changes of attitude and policy in the United States was one of growing concern. The central point to be developed here is that the British could not wholly accept what had become a manichaeistic view of the world in Washington. Certainly the Attlee government played a major role in constructing a 'situation of strength' in Europe and elsewhere and this will be discussed later, but the underlying conception of containment and the cold war remained close to the original ideas of George Kennan. The cold war, from a British perspective, could not be an end in itself, the object remained the normalisation of relations: cutting off diplomatic contacts would fundamentally undermine that objective. Simply talking to the Soviet Union in the 'language of military power' would harden attitudes and serve to prevent a modification of Soviet behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

As suggested earlier, divergent attitudes in London and Washington reflected fundamental differences of approach. It can be argued that the British conception of the cold war and the Soviet threat was rooted in what might be called a traditional approach to diplomacy and international relations.<sup>10</sup> Conflicts were the natural product of differences of interest

7. R.J. Barnet, The Giants (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977) pp.29,86.

8. A. Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence (New York: Praeger, 1968) p.536.

9. R.J. Barnet, op.cit. p.67.

10. The British approach to international relations, with specific reference to the conception of detente, is discussed in later chapters and in some detail in the concluding chapter.

between states. Differences of interest could, and whenever possible should be resolved by a process of diplomatic accommodation. This necessitates communication, negotiation and the seeking of a modus vivendi with other states. Breaking off contacts and being unwilling to negotiate seriously is an aberration from the norm of diplomacy and should be avoided. The greater the threat posed by other states, the more necessary is the maintenance of diplomatic intercourse. As Northedge and Wells argue, this almost constitutes an "elementary rule - the more dangerous to peace a state is, the more important it is to be in diplomatic contact with it".<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, the nature of the regime being dealt with, however odious, is irrelevant. In the words of a former British ambassador to Moscow, "in intergovernmental relations, we cannot confine ourselves to dealing with states whose general policies we approve".<sup>12</sup> It is clear that there was a serious conflict between these normative principles and the approach enshrined in NSC-68.

The application of these principles to policy was evident in Churchill's 'spheres of influence' arrangement with Stalin in October 1944. A working relationship with Stalin and the prevention of the spread of communism to Western Europe and the Mediterranean were more important than the political arrangements within the Soviet 'sphere'.<sup>13</sup> American policy at this time, on the other hand, was proceeding on quite different premises consistent with Roosevelt's 'Grand Design'.

"Instead of a new balance of power system - and instead of secret agreements and spheres of influence, he [Roosevelt] hoped that new governments would emerge in the occupied states of Europe through procedures or policies that were consistent with the principle of national self-determination and independence."<sup>14</sup>

11. F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, Britain and Soviet Communism (London: Macmillan, 1982) p.127.
12. D. Wilson, "Anglo-Soviet relations: the effect of ideas on reality", International Affairs, 50:3, July 1974, p.391.
13. See Inverchapel Papers, F.O. 800/302. P.R.O. London; D. Carlton in W. Gutteridge, European Security, Nuclear Weapons and Public Confidence (London: Macmillan, 1982) p.178.
14. A.L. George in O.R. Holsti, R.M. Siverson, A.L. George (eds.), Change in the International System (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1980) p.243.

Even before the end of World War Two then, there were indications of implicit differences of approach and the potential for future conflict between London and Washington.

When the control of British foreign policy passed to the Attlee government, these underlying principles were maintained. While Ernest Bevin's prime concern as foreign secretary was, like Churchill, to bind the Americans to the fate of Britain and Western Europe, he was concerned to keep open the door to the East in the hope of a better political understanding.<sup>15</sup> As Elisabeth Barker puts it, Bevin saw the "alliance with the Americans not as a preparation for an inevitable war against Russia, but as an essential foundation for future efforts of detente".<sup>16</sup> Barker documents the skilful way in which Bevin, allegedly the coldest of cold warriors, firmly resisted internal pressures: from the Foreign Office in 1946 to mount an anti-communist crusade; from the Chiefs of Staff in 1948 to set up a political warfare machinery (the Information Research Department which was set up was not what the Chiefs had in mind); and again in 1949 from the Russia Committee of the Foreign Office for an interdepartmental committee with Ministry of Defence representation to be concerned with political warfare.<sup>17</sup>

For Bevin, the cold war was not about subverting communism but essentially about normalising relations with the East as soon as possible, though it must be said he became increasingly sceptical about that prospect the longer he was in office. He told the Cabinet in November, 1947 that

15. For a discussion of Bevin's continuing concern to strive for some form of accommodation with the Soviet Union, in the specific context of the Dunkirk Treaty, see J. Baylis, "Britain and the Dunkirk Treaty: the origins of NATO", Journal of Strategic Studies, 5, 1982, pp.236-247.

16. E. Barker, The British Between the Superpowers 1945-50 (London: Macmillan, 1983) p.185.

17. Ibid. pp.47, 103-109, 177.

"we have been scrupulously careful not to encourage subversive movements in Eastern Europe or anti-Russianism, or to lead the anti-communists to hope for support which we cannot give."<sup>18</sup>

The only significant blot on this record was British participation in the abortive CIA attempt to subvert Albania in 1949.<sup>19</sup>

It was in 1949, however, that differences of approach between London and Washington became overt policy clashes and the precipitating issue was China. For the Americans, the 'loss' of China reinforced the notion of a monolithic communist bloc with which negotiations were impossible. The British, for their part, infuriated the Americans not only by recognising the new Peking government in January 1950, but by insisting that negotiations should be held with Mao. Mao was another Tito, argued the British government, and should at least be talked to: the Chinese would not long remain under the tutelage of the Soviet Union. For the West to negotiate with Mao would put pressure on the Russians to ameliorate their hostility.<sup>20</sup> The significance of British policy here was that it was in line with the principle of keeping contacts open and it was an explicit rejection of the United States conception of a monolithic international communism.

With the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, and the possibility of open conflict between the superpowers, the dangers of the NSC-68 version of containment became evident to the British government. A new policy line of conciliation, consistent with traditional diplomacy, was now required. As Arthur Cyr puts it, "the directness of the confrontation between the superpowers encouraged efforts to pursue a mediating role".<sup>21</sup> While the British

18. Cabinet memorandum 129/22 CP(47) 313, 24.11.47. Quoted in E. Barker, *ibid.* p.109.

19. *Ibid.* pp.168,178,273. See also A. Verrier, Through the Looking Glass (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983). Verrier offers a very different assessment of Bevin as cold warrior, but with scarcely any documentation.

20. E. Barker, *op.cit.* pp.169-174. For a detailed analysis of the evolution of British policy towards China, see R. Boardman, Britain and the People's Republic of China 1949-74 (London: Macmillan, 1976).

21. A. Cyr, British Foreign Policy and the Atlantic Area (London: Macmillan, 1979) p.147.

loyally backed the American line on Korea (though they balked at references to 'centrally-directed communist imperialism') and immediately put British ships in Japanese waters at the disposal of the American naval commander, the need to defuse the crisis persuaded Bevin to risk American displeasure by attempting to mediate.<sup>22</sup>

In July 1950, Bevin suggested to the Soviet government that they put pressure on the North Koreans to withdraw north of the 38th parallel. This attempt to mediate was an embarrassing failure and military support for the war effort was increased thereafter.<sup>23</sup> But this initial failure did not signal the end of British attempts to mediate. The most significant diplomatic initiative was the November 1950 proposal to establish a demilitarized buffer zone in North Korea to separate the opposing forces.<sup>24</sup>

The immediate context was provided by the entry of Chinese 'volunteers' into Korea in the last week of October. With General MacArthur determined to exploit his victory at Inchon by conquering the whole of North Korea, an ambition which had at least the tacit support of his president, the dangers of escalation suddenly became apparent to a British government which had given its support to the crossing of the 38th parallel. The attention of the government now focused on trying to avoid a major war in the Far East.

The British proposal emerged from a Cabinet meeting on November 13th at which the Chiefs of Staff issued a clear warning that a continuation of the military campaign to unify Korea under UN auspices would risk a major war with China. They recommended the establishment of a demilitarized zone consisting of the whole of North Korea to the north of the 'neck' of Korea, and this plan was accepted by the Cabinet. Bevin supported the Chiefs not only because he wanted to prevent the Americans from provoking further Chinese intervention, but also because he wanted to allay Chinese fears of

22. See E. Barker, *op.cit.* p.203ff.

23. See A. Bullock, *op.cit.* p.795.

24. A detailed analysis of this initiative can be found in P.N. Farrar, "Britain's proposal for a buffer zone south of the Yalu in November 1950: was it a neglected opportunity to end the fighting in Korea?" Journal of Contemporary History, 18, 1983, pp. 327-351.



Western powers occupying large tracts of Asian territory.<sup>25</sup>

During the next few days the government endeavoured to attract support for the plan, from the Americans and from other governments. The British representative in Peking was also instructed to explain to the Chinese what the government was trying to do. Some progress was made on all fronts but it proved impossible to delay MacArthur's planned offensive.<sup>26</sup> The plan was eventually overtaken by events as MacArthur began his advance to the Yalu River only to be repelled by a massive Chinese counter-attack.

In the context of a much more dangerous military situation, British attention switched from the demilitarization plan to trying to forestall a precipitate American response. The immediate concern was that MacArthur might press for authority to launch air attacks on China. But this concern was soon replaced by the fear that Truman might authorise the use of atom bombs to resolve the Korean crisis. Hints that this was being contemplated were sufficient to send Attlee rushing to Washington at the beginning of December seeking assurances that atomic weapons would not be used.<sup>27</sup> Attlee's visit may not have been crucial in preventing a nuclear war in Asia, but it does dramatically illustrate the extent of British concerns about the direction of American policy and the state of East-West relations as a whole.

This concern was not restricted to the Labour government. By 1950, Bevin was beginning to despair about the possibility of a diplomatic solution to East-West problems. But the general election campaign at the beginning of that year brought Winston Churchill to the stump on this issue, sensing perhaps that Bevin was becoming too identified with the Acheson line.<sup>28</sup>

25. Ibid. pp. 330-335; E. Barker, *op.cit.* pp.218-219. But see also, A. Bullock, *op.cit.* p.820.

26. See P.N. Farrar, *op.cit.* pp.336-344.

27. This episode is discussed in detail in A. Bullock, *op.cit.* pp.820-824.

28. Bevin told the Cabinet at the beginning of May 1950 that negotiations with the Soviet Union were unlikely to succeed until the Western powers had built up a 'situation of strength' on the foundation of the Atlantic Pact. See E. Barker, *op.cit.* pp. 240-241.

In an important speech in Edinburgh on February 14th, Churchill appealed for an East-West summit.

"I cannot help coming back ... to this idea of another talk with Soviet Russia upon the highest level. The idea appeals to me of a supreme effort to bridge the gulf between the two worlds, so that each can live their life, if not in friendship, at least without the hatreds and manoeuvres of the cold war ... It is not easy to see how things could be worsened by a parley at the summit if such a thing were possible."<sup>29</sup>

Churchill picked up this theme in the first foreign policy debate of the new parliament on March 28th, arguing that time was not on the side of the West. It was all very well and necessary to build up 'situations of strength' and then 'negotiate from strength' at some unspecified time in the future, but, as Churchill put it, "time and patience - are not necessarily on our side".<sup>30</sup> It is interesting that this debate in Britain preceded the outbreak of the Korean War when the dangers of confrontation became apparent.

The debate also touched on an important theme that was to recur through the 1950s, NSC-68 developed the argument that the Russians were likely to risk going to war as soon as their military capabilities reached a point where they could reasonably expect to win. 1954 was identified as the 'year of maximum danger'.<sup>31</sup> The British were much less pessimistic about the potential for Soviet risk-taking in the future but much more pessimistic

29. Documents on International Affairs 1949-50 (London: RIIA/Oxford Univ. Press, 1953) p.56. This speech was a direct response to a press conference given by Dean Acheson on February 8th, in which he rejected the calls of some senators for a direct approach to Moscow and repeated his faith in the policy of building situations of strength. For the context of Churchill's speech and the response of the Truman administration, see Survey of International Affairs 1949-50 (London: RIIA/Oxford Univ. Press, 1953) pp.15-17.

30. C. Bell, Negotiation From Strength (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962) pp. 13-14.

31. See J.L. Gaddis, *op.cit.* pp.96-97.

about the present dangers of war. This appeared to reflect the view that war was more likely to be caused by miscalculation and misunderstanding than by design. Thus, communication and negotiation were necessary now rather than in the future to create the sort of political climate in which miscalculation and misunderstanding were less likely to occur. For the British, therefore, the Korean War underlined the urgency of the need for East-West negotiations.

The bipartisan nature of British concerns was confirmed after a Conservative government under Churchill was returned in October 1951. Churchill, perhaps stung by the 'warmonger' label that had been attached to him during the election campaign, immediately returned to the issue of negotiations with the Russians. In a major speech on November 9th at the Guildhall in London - to become a favoured venue for speeches about detente - he talked in characteristically Olympian terms about the need to keep the giants from colliding.<sup>32</sup>

The Americans, for their part, remained unmoved and 'uninfected' by what became known as the 'English disease'.<sup>33</sup> Calls for negotiations with the Russians were, after all, only to be expected from the man who had negotiated the 'spheres of influence' deal with Stalin. By the end of 1951, existing American antipathies to direct negotiations had been reinforced by Soviet attempts to set up 'peace movements' in Europe. This of itself served, in Coral Bell's words, to "endow the whole notion of diplomatic bargaining with a disreputable fellow-travelling air".<sup>34</sup> Soviet calls for peaceful coexistence were simply a ploy to divide the West and lull it into a false sense of security. Churchill was naively playing into Soviet hands and eroding the cohesion of the Western bloc. The 1952 presidential election campaign was to add further inhibitions to the idea of negotiation. Hitherto regarded as dangerous, negotiations were to acquire explicitly moral connotations, akin to doing deals with the devil.

32. C. Bell, *op.cit.* p.95.

33. This expression was first coined in the early 1950s as a description of Britain's search for accommodation with Moscow and Peking. See F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, *op.cit.* p.124.

34. C. Bell, *op.cit.* p.96.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence that the Truman administration recognised that the British position on the desirability of East-West negotiations posed a threat to American policy. The extensive preparations taken in Washington for Churchill's first visit as the new prime minister in January 1952, show how seriously this threat was taken. An inter-departmental steering group was set up to review all aspects of policy with the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> The object was to enable the administration to justify its policies and, if possible, to persuade the Churchill government to align its policies more effectively. The specific concern was to show that there were no grounds for supposing that negotiations, particularly in a summit format, would achieve any positive results: though care was taken to "avoid creating in the British mind any implication that we had abandoned the principle of negotiation with the Soviet Union".<sup>36</sup>

These preparatory papers reveal, from an American perspective, the gulf between British and American approaches to East-West relations and the extent of British fears about the longer term direction of American policy. Were the Americans looking forward to an "unlimited period of Cold War"? Were they building up their forces to a point where they "may desire to force a showdown"? Was it their objective "to bring about revolt in the USSR and the Satellites"?<sup>37</sup> The prepared responses to these hypothetical questions are also revealing. The administration was determined to "go ahead and build our strength so that we will be in a position to continue the cold war on terms increasingly advantageous to the West". But there was no intention "of forcing a showdown with the USSR at some future time".

The response to the last question clearly illustrates the different attitudes to political warfare. The administration was not unaware of the dangers of political warfare but was committed to it as a strategy. The British, on the other hand,

35. Steering group negotiating papers, December 1951, January 1952, Harry S. Truman Papers.

36. Ibid. TCT D-1/3c, December 28th 1951.

37. Ibid. TCT D-1/6, January 6th 1952. These were the questions that the prime minister was expected to raise.

"will tend to question the necessity or desirability of political warfare operations. They are inclined to accept the present status quo in Eastern Europe and do not desire to engage in activities which they consider not only will be calculated to increase East-West tension but which might even provoke the Kremlin to acts of aggression. The British, in short, appear to believe that the immediate dangers of provocation overbalance the long-range deterrent results of political warfare carried on within Moscow's own orbit."<sup>38</sup>

Stalin's March 1952 offer to open urgent negotiations on a German peace settlement provided another opportunity for Anglo-American differences to surface. There is some evidence that "Churchill thought the moment was right for a deal on reunification, but neither Adenauer nor the Americans would consider it".<sup>39</sup> Stalin's offer envisaged a unified, rearmed but neutral Germany and he followed it up with an invitation to Western businessmen to discuss trade in Moscow. Whether these Soviet moves were genuine bargaining bids or merely attempts to delay the military integration of the Federal Republic into the Western camp - or both - cannot be ascertained with any certainty.<sup>40</sup>

What is clear is that Churchill had no room for manoeuvre. The Western states had created West Germany and they would not seriously negotiate reunification despite the continuing rhetoric to the contrary. After the

38. Ibid. TCT D-1/5a, January 6th 1952. See footnote 5.

39. See R.J. Barnet, The Alliance (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983) p.138.

40. Though some scholars have argued that this was an important opportunity for detente that was missed by the West. Adam Ulam argues the case. "It is tempting to postulate that the West could have secured a united, non-communist - if neutralised - Germany." While "it is impossible to say with certainty that in 1952 the West could have traded West German rearmament for a Soviet surrender of East Germany ... the fear of a German army backed by the United States and on the borders of the Soviet empire was a real fear felt by the Soviet policy-makers ... and to conjure away his real fears Stalin was ready to pay highly". op.cit. pp.506,537.

Summer of 1950, the United States, if not the allies who continued to wrangle over the EDC project, was committed to the rearmament of West Germany in order to strengthen NATO's conventional defences. Not even lip service could now be paid to the idea of a neutral Germany.<sup>41</sup> Indeed the talk in the 1952 presidential campaign in the United States was of 'liberation' and 'rollback' consistent with the political warfare approach.

Richard Barnet provides a useful summary of the American position on East-West negotiation at the end of 1952.

"By the closing months of the Truman administration the Americans feared negotiation more than confrontation. An inconclusive negotiation with the Soviets would delay forward movement inside the alliance, but a successful negotiation leading to an East-West thaw could have more serious consequences. The danger Acheson saw was that a US-Soviet deal would encourage neutralism, imperil the unity of the West and dilute American influence in Europe."<sup>42</sup>

As the Eisenhower administration took office, the prospects for detente looked distinctly unfavourable.

Having summarised the American position, it is appropriate to review British policy. It has been argued that serious reservations about the direction of American policy began as early as 1949. Restraining the Americans became almost as important an objective as taking action to counter the Soviet threat. In structural terms, the rigidities of a bipolar confrontation between East and West not only imposed an inflexible structure on relationships between and within the rival blocs but also froze at least a semi-permanent state of confrontation, heightening the possibility of world war. Given traditional British attitudes outlined above, it was not surprising perhaps that British governments would attempt to play a mediating role both to retain flexibility and to offset the dangers of war.

What is significant in the broader context of this study is that the British did not appear to see this position as being 'for' detente as opposed to being 'for' cold war, or as being in any sense disloyal to the

41. See C. Bell, *op.cit.* pp.47-48; R.J. Barnet, *op.cit.* (1977) p.18.

42. R.J. Barnet, *op.cit.* (1983) p.138.

Americans and the other NATO allies. The contention here is that it was the Americans who came to adopt the position articulated in NSC-68 that detente was the antithesis of cold war and therefore automatically suspect. For the British, the pursuit of detente was not perverse or deviant, it was simply normal diplomacy, to be sought almost instinctively the more 'abnormal' the times became.

And yet it might be argued that this British posture was disingenuous. Surely Britain had made a major contribution to establishing the very cold war structures that made effective negotiation with the Soviet bloc extremely difficult?<sup>43</sup> Hadn't Churchill's 1946 'Iron Curtain' speech, for example, set the pace for the Americans in metaphorical bloc-building? Certainly the developments in Europe that so concerned George Kennan, the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany and the establishment of NATO, as well as the development that Kennan positively welcomed, Marshall Aid, owe a considerable debt to British diplomacy. As Northedge and Wells suggest, it does seem paradoxical that Britain, arguably the architect of detente in the early 1950s should have been a major architect of the cold war in the late 1940s.<sup>44</sup>

An explanation of British policy lies partly in basic attitudes to international relations already outlined here. It also lies in two other imperatives that governed British foreign policy after World War Two. The first of these was Britain's economic plight. Such were the economic problems that faced the Attlee government, particularly evident after the harsh Winter of 1946-7, that the burden of supporting the British zone in Germany had become intolerable. The agreement of December 1946, which fused together the British and the American zones can be seen with hindsight to have been the first move towards the establishment of a separate, independent state of West Germany in September 1949.<sup>45</sup>

43. For a case study which highlights Britain's contribution to the cold war, see A. Shlaim, "Britain, the Berlin blockade and the cold war", International Affairs, 60:1, Winter 1983/84, pp. 1-14.

44. F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, op.cit. p.128.

45. Ibid. pp.105, 109, 111-112; E. Barker, op.cit. pp.56, 62-67.

Similarly, the desperate need to ensure a massive influx of American dollars to fund industrial recovery and a welfare state in Britain is crucial to an explanation of Bevin's role in organising the European response to Marshall Aid through the mechanism of the OEEC. This role was also significant in terms of the second imperative, binding the United States to Britain and Western Europe. As early as 1946, much to the growing concern of the Labour Left, the Attlee government had decided that British security as well as economic recovery necessitated a close alliance with the Americans. As Barker explains,

"the British tended to see the Soviet threat more and more in terms of the problem of Anglo-American relations: if the British and the Americans stood together, the threat would recede; if they did not, it would become more and more formidable, in the first place to British interests but ultimately to the Western world as a whole."<sup>46</sup>

The Dunkirk Treaty with France in 1947, followed the next year by the Brussels Treaty with the Benelux countries, though nominally directed against Germany, laid firm foundations for the North Atlantic Treaty of April 1949.<sup>47</sup>

An independent West Germany, the OEEC and NATO were, nevertheless, the important structures that severed West from East in political, economic, and military terms. These were the developments in Europe that Kennan thought would be "certain to reinforce Soviet feelings of suspicion and insecurity, and, hence, to narrow opportunities for negotiations".<sup>48</sup>

However genuine were British attempts to create detente from Korea onwards, and however pressing and immediate were the imperatives that conditioned policy-making in the late 1940s, British policy prior to 1950 had done much to help the Americans to construct the very cold war structures that in turn necessitated the search for accommodation and detente.

46. E. Barker, *op.cit.* p.46.

47. *Ibid.* p.145; F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, *op.cit.* pp.120-121.

48. See J.L. Gaddis, *op.cit.* p.71.



This brief survey of British attitudes and policy towards East-West relations over the period 1947 to 1953 provides a useful historical context for analysing British detente policy after 1953. The comparison with American attitudes and policy reveals important differences of approach which can be explored in more detail in later chapters.

This chapter began by suggesting that in 1947 British and American governments appeared to share basic attitudes towards the Soviet threat. Containment was regarded as an appropriate short term strategy for modifying Soviet behaviour but the longer term objective was the normalisation of East-West relations. By 1949-50, however, the Truman administration had lost sight of that objective. Containment had in effect become an end in itself, with the construction of a 'situation of strength' now regarded as the only viable strategy to meet the heightened threat of a monolithic international communism. The cold war had become synonymous with 'political warfare' between ideologically opposed blocs. Normal relations including negotiations were effectively ruled out.

The more pragmatic British, however, could not wholly accept this overtly ideological approach to East-West relations. They continued to view containment as a short term strategy and the cold war as a temporary phase in relations. The longer term objective of policy continued through this period to be the normalisation of relations with the Soviet bloc. The British could neither accept the NSC-68 definition of the threat nor the prescribed response. They became concerned that if the West tried to counter the threat by 'strength' alone, the result would be to rigidify East-West divisions, produce confrontation and possibly war. To avoid this, the appropriate response to the threat, from a British perspective, was to combine 'strength' with diplomacy, a structure of deterrence with a process of accommodation.

Thus British and American attitudes began to diverge and this had become apparent in policy terms by 1950. While the Americans were only prepared to 'negotiate from strength' with the Soviet bloc, if at all, the British were beginning to push for a Western policy which combined 'strength' and 'negotiation'. For the Americans, cold war and detente had become antithetical approaches to East-West relations whereas for the British, they appeared to be different aspects of the same strategy designed to normalise relations across the East-West divide.

This provides an explanation for what seems to be the paradox that successive British governments in the immediate postwar period could be 'architects' first of cold war then of detente. In the late 1940s, the Attlee government was concerned to counter the Soviet threat by actively building structures that would deter possible aggression. After 1949, however, the Labour government followed by the Churchill government sought to augment 'strength' by seeking some degree of accommodation with the Soviet bloc. The more dangerous East-West relations become, the more urgently accommodation was sought and the more predisposed British governments were to assume a mediating role. If an embryonic British detente policy can be dated from 1950, the next chapter looks in detail at the development of that policy between 1953 and 1956.

Following his appeals for an East-West summit in 1950 and 1951, Winston Churchill took up the call for detente again in a major speech to the House of Commons in May 1953. In contrast to earlier failures to initiate a process of accommodation, some progress was made thereafter in the form of negotiations between East and West on a number of issues during 1954-55. A combination of domestic and international developments provided the opportunity for the prime minister to take the initiative.

At home, the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden was taken ill at the beginning of April and did not return to the Foreign Office until October 1953. Eden, like the Americans though for rather different reasons, was opposed to Churchill's idea of summit negotiations with the Russians and this had divided the two men since Churchill had made his views public in 1950. Eden's absence gave Churchill an increased degree of influence over the making of British foreign policy, particularly as the prime minister himself took over the Foreign Office.<sup>1</sup>

The international environment in 1953 had been transformed by changes of leadership in the United States and the Soviet Union and by the approaching end of the Korean War. In particular, the death of Stalin in March seemed to herald a new era and indeed the new President Eisenhower, despite resistance from the State Department, made a speech in April in which some conciliatory gestures were extended to the new Soviet leadership.<sup>2</sup> He asked for positive signs that the Soviet leaders recognised the opportunity for a new start in East-West relations.<sup>3</sup>

This cautious American response to Stalin's death was reinforced by the arrival in Washington of Dr. Adenauer. In a series of speeches across the United States, the West German Chancellor expressed scepticism about a change in Soviet policy. He, like the Americans, required convincing evidence of a new direction in Moscow. The Soviet Union did publish

1. See D. Carlton, Anthony Eden (London: Allen Lane, 1981) pp. 330-332.
2. J.L. Gaddis, Strategies of Containment (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982) pp. 160, 191.
3. The speech is contained in Documents on International Affairs 1953 (London: RIIA/Oxford Univ. Press, 1956) pp. 45-51. (Hereafter RIIA Documents)

Eisenhower's speech at the end of April but attached a lengthy critique noting that Secretary of State Dulles had shown himself to be less well disposed to the new Soviet leadership than the president.<sup>4</sup>

The impact of Eisenhower's speech had therefore been effectively neutralised by the end of April, and there was a distinct possibility that the hopes stimulated by Stalin's death would come to nothing. It was at this point that Churchill made his timely intervention. The Chatham House Survey describes the immediate impact.

"The position two months after Marshal Stalin's death was still essentially one of uncertainty ... when the vague feelings of hopeful expectation which had been aroused by that event were crystallized and boosted by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech to the House of Commons on 11th May."<sup>5</sup>

While the American and West German leaders were disposed to wait and see what emerged from Stalin's successors, Churchill thought the time was right to press for a "conference on the highest level [which] should take place between the leading Powers without long delay". From his description of the proposed summit, it is clear that the prime minister had in mind a revival of the 'Big Three' wartime pattern of conferences as established at Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam, with himself doubtless playing a leading role.

"This conference should not be overhung by a ponderous or rigid agenda, or led into mazes and jungles of technical details, zealously contested by hordes of experts and officials drawn up in vast, cumbrous array. The conference should be confined to the smallest number of Powers and persons possible."

4. Pravda, 25th April 1953; RIIA Documents 1953 pp. 51-57.

5. Survey of International Affairs 1953 (London: RIIA/Oxford Univ. Press, 1956) p.20. (Hereafter RIIA Survey)

Churchill was under no illusions that all problems could be solved immediately, but he was encouraged by recent Soviet restraint.

"Piecemeal solutions of individual problems should not be disdained or improvidently put aside", he argued. If some issues could be settled, Korea and Austria, for example, this could create a political atmosphere that would enable other issues to be resolved and would certainly lessen the possibility of world war. An important section of the speech explicitly recognised the reality of Soviet power and the legitimacy of Soviet interests particularly in the security sphere.

"We all desire that the Russian people should take the high place in world affairs which is their due without feeling anxiety about their own security. I do not believe that the immense problem of reconciling the security of Russia with the freedom and safety of Western Europe is insoluble."<sup>6</sup>

This public demand for a summit was greeted with 'enthusiastic approval' by almost the whole House of Commons and press reaction in Britain and Europe was broadly favourable.<sup>7</sup> In France, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly passed a resolution in favour of a meeting of the 'Big Four' and the Indian Prime Minister Nehru expressed wholehearted support.<sup>8</sup> Commonwealth prime ministers as a whole meeting in London on June 9th "reviewed the state of relations with the Soviet Union and agreed that no opportunity should be lost of composing or at least easing, the differences which at present divide the world".<sup>9</sup>

The Soviet response was contained in Pravda on May 24th. Though not uncritical, the article stressed

"the importance of the proposal made by the Prime Minister [which was] evidently based on the experience of direct contact among leading statesmen in the recent past. The lively favourable response

6. See RIIA Documents 1953 pp. 57-65

7. C. Bell, Negotiation From Strength (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962) pp. 101-102.

8. RIIA Survey 1953 p.21.

9. Final communiqué quoted in RIIA Documents 1953 pp. 71-72.

to this proposal in many countries throughout the world confirms its importance. Thus, the call ... for the settlement of at least some of the main problems, and thereby for a lessening of the sharpness of the position in the international sphere, is quite timely in the present situation."

Pravda quoted with approval Churchill's 'realistic approach' to the problem of reconciling Soviet and West European security and the need to tackle East-West problems in a piecemeal fashion. It also noted, however, the hostile response to Churchill's call in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

The formal response from Washington echoed the sentiments contained in Eisenhower's April speech: evidence of Soviet sincerity in terms of deeds rather than words must precede a summit conference.<sup>11</sup> The 'New Look' strategy adopted by the Eisenhower administration retained the idea in principle of negotiations with the Soviet Union and the president himself was more willing than Truman to attempt to resolve cold war differences, but inhibitions remained strong. Like his predecessor, Secretary of State Dulles was preoccupied with building 'strength' and predisposed, in Eisenhower's words, to "stress the risks more than the advantages of negotiation".<sup>12</sup> Dulles was particularly opposed to a summit until the position of West Germany in relation to Western Europe had been resolved.<sup>13</sup> Eisenhower was concerned that a summit would bolster the prestige of the new Soviet leaders and help to minimise the struggle for power between Stalin's successors.<sup>14</sup>

Churchill's speech and the positive reactions to it were, however, an embarrassment to the Americans and could not be lightly dismissed. It was all very well to question the prime minister's motives and to talk of appeasement and renewed fears of 'spheres of influence' deals with Stalin,

10. Ibid. pp. 66-71.

11. See statement by the US Department of State, *ibid.* pp. 65-66.

12. J.L. Gaddis, *op.cit.* p.160.

13. Dr. Adenauer also had specific reasons for opposing Churchill's call. As the Chatham House Survey puts it, "The Chancellor was plainly concerned lest a detente between east and west should lead to an accommodation at German expense, a reversion to the Potsdam agreement, and the resurrection of the Quadripartite Control Council." RIIA Survey 1953 pp. 22-23.

14. J.F. Gaddis, *op.cit.* p.191.

but not even Senator McCarthy could accuse Churchill of being soft on communism.<sup>15</sup> If, as the president was advised, "the Four Power Conference is something that is going to happen with or without Churchill's pushing", it was important for the administration to make some concessions in order to retain control of the situation, preserve the unity of the West and prevent Churchill from taking all the credit.<sup>16</sup>

Coral Bell argues that the Churchill initiative led to a modification of the American position because of a perception of potential damage to Anglo-American relations.

"The exchanges between the Commons and the Senate [following Churchill's speech] appear to have convinced Dulles, despite his distrust of the course of policy towards which Churchill was tending, that a serious deterioration of relations between Britain and America was possible, unless some concessions were made."<sup>17</sup>

The major concession came in the form of American agreement to a three power heads of government meeting to be held in Bermuda in July 1953.<sup>18</sup> Churchill assumed that this meeting would be a prelude to a four power summit thereafter.<sup>19</sup>

Towards the end of June, however, the prime minister suffered a stroke and was unable to sustain the momentum himself. This was significant because the Bermuda conference was cancelled and, with Eden still absent, Lord Salisbury was appointed acting foreign secretary. A Western heads of government meeting was replaced by a foreign ministers' meeting in Washington.

15. Indeed, as Coral Bell suggests, "perhaps the most important function of [Churchill's] speech was that it changed the political colour attributable to the idea of such negotiations". op.cit. p.100

16. Memorandum to the president from C.D. Jackson, Special Assistant for Psychological Warfare, Administrative File, Jackson, C.D., 1953(2), June 3 1953, D.D. Eisenhower Papers.

17. C. Bell, op.cit. p.103ff.

18. Churchill had hoped for an exclusive meeting between Eisenhower and himself to set up a meeting with the Soviet Union, but the Americans insisted on including the French. See D. Carlton, op.cit. p.332.

19. H.C. Deb. 5th Ser.Vol.515, Coll.2262, 21st May 1953.

Salisbury was instructed to press for a summit at that meeting, but he faced an obdurate Dulles. The agreed compromise was an invitation to the Soviet Union to participate in a four power foreign ministers conference which would be concerned essentially with the issue of German reunification.<sup>20</sup> Neither the level nor the agenda of such a conference was what Churchill had in mind but at least the possibility of a summit remained open.

By the Autumn, the prime minister had recovered sufficiently to be pressing again for a summit in the new year preceded by a Western summit in Bermuda. He returned to the theme at the Conservative Party Conference in Margate and the Guildhall again provided the venue for a major speech on detente on November 9th. By the end of that month, the Americans had agreed both to the Bermuda meeting and the four power meeting at foreign minister level early in 1954. The Russians, after an extended exchange of notes with the Western powers, had also agreed to a foreign ministers conference on Germany now scheduled to take place in Berlin in January 1954.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, by the end of 1953, Churchill had failed to achieve his objective of a heads of government summit, but he was at least keeping negotiations on the political agenda though he was having difficulty carrying along the other allies and his own Cabinet.<sup>22</sup> American agreement to negotiations

20. The focus on German reunification was clearly designed to exploit Soviet embarrassment caused by the Berlin riots in June. The Soviet government, with some justification, suspected that the Western powers were more concerned to strengthen the position of Dr. Adenauer than to achieve German reunification. See RIIA Survey 1953 pp. 29-32.
21. Churchill used the Bermuda meeting to make one last personal appeal to Eisenhower to turn the Berlin conference into a summit. But, much to the relief of Dulles and Eden, the president would not be moved. See the account by Churchill's private secretary John Colville, Footprints in Time (London: Collins, 1976) p.240.
22. Anthony Eden had returned to the Foreign Office at the beginning of October. According to David Carlton, "he was no less determined than before to thwart Churchill's plan ... now he could once again personally take charge of the resistance to Churchill". Winthrop Aldrich, the American ambassador in London, reported in November that "many members of the (British) Government and probably Eden himself are very much disturbed over Churchill's initiative and hope that some way may be found to avoid (the Berlin) meeting". D. Carlton, op.cit. pp.333-334.



albeit at foreign minister level was a clear indication that the administration, persistently prodded by Churchill, was becoming sensitive to being thought excessively rigid on East-West relations. In September, even Dulles seemed to catch a nasty dose of the 'English disease'. He sent Eisenhower an extraordinary memo which suggested the possibility of a "spectacular effort to relax world tension on a global basis" by negotiating the mutual withdrawal of Soviet and American forces from Europe and agreeing on conventional and nuclear arms limitations. The president responded favourably but nothing followed. Dulles had recovered sufficiently by December to be asking Eisenhower how he was going to get through the forthcoming Berlin conference with the least possible damage. In October, NSC-162/2

"acknowledged that the United States should keep open the possibility of negotiations with the Soviet Union, both to pursue whatever opportunities for settlement might arise and to convince allies of American good faith in seeking them."<sup>23</sup>

#### From Berlin to the Geneva summit

The delayed four power foreign ministers' meeting finally convened in Berlin at the end of January 1954. This conference, which represented the first attempt since 1949 to reach a negotiated agreement between East and West, considered schemes from Eden for the reunification of Germany by stages and from Molotov for a European security treaty. No progress was made on Germany but the conference did reach an agreement to include China in a five power conference on Korea and Indo-China, to begin in Geneva on April 26th. Hitherto, the Americans had been resistant to the idea of an international conference which included the Chinese but Eden played an important role at Berlin in helping to persuade Dulles to agree.<sup>24</sup>

If the Berlin conference confirmed an East-West stalemate in Europe, the cold war in Asia had reached another dangerous phase. The prospect of a French defeat in Indo-China had again highlighted the possibility of a general war. Dulles' 'massive retaliation' speech at the beginning of the

23. See J.L. Gaddis, op.cit. pp.160-161, 190-191 (emphasis added).

24. See D. Carlton, op.cit. pp.338-339; A. Eden, Full Circle (London: Cassell, 1960) pp.87-89.

year foreshadowed an attempt in April to get Congressional and allied support for military intervention in Indo-China. The British, however, took the view that this attempt to internationalise the war was not only dangerous but would prejudice the chances of the Geneva Conference before it had begun. The foreign secretary refused to back Dulles and skilfully guided the Conference over the next three months to a negotiated settlement of the Indo-China problem.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, in David Carlton's words,

"Indo-China provided a classic example of the British Government, and Eden in particular, successfully restraining the Americans from carrying out their anti-Communist containment strategy to its logical conclusion."<sup>26</sup>

It was against the background of heightened fears of war over Indo-China in the Spring of 1954 that Churchill returned to the issue of summit talks in a letter to President Eisenhower. Once again, however, the idea of a three power heads of government meeting was spurned.<sup>27</sup> In a follow up letter to the president and in speeches to the House on March 30th and April 5th,<sup>28</sup> the prime minister made it clear that his determination to promote detente, or 'an easement of relations' as he preferred to call it,<sup>29</sup>

25. There is some doubt about whether Dulles would ultimately have secured Congressional backing for a military intervention in Indo-China. For a detailed account of the relevant negotiations, with Congress and the allies, and the eventual Geneva settlement, which highlights Eden's contribution, see RIIA Survey 1954 pp. 21-73. For a more sceptical view of Eden's achievement in the light of subsequent communist gains in South East Asia, see D. Carlton, *op.cit.* pp.340-356.

26. D. Carlton, *op.cit.* p.339.

27. See Dulles' draft response for the president dated March 17th 1954, Box 3, Atomic Weapons and Proposal, 1953, 1954, 1955 (3), J.F. Dulles Papers 1953-59.

28. Box 6, DDE Diary, March 1954(1) Eisenhower Papers 1953-61 (Ann Whitman file); H.C. Deb.5th Series, Vol.525, coll.1836-9; Vol.526, coll 56-153.

29. This term had now become the regular Churchillian synonym for detente. The expression was used for the first time in his May 1953 speech. See J. Colville, *op.cit.* pp.238,240.

had been reinforced by recently published reports of the dramatic increase in destructive potential demonstrated by American hydrogen bomb tests.<sup>30</sup> For Churchill, the dangers of thermonuclear war had now become a 'brooding preoccupation' which necessitated renewed efforts at reaching an accommodation with the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup>

While Churchill was concerned about the effect of the Soviet Union acquiring hydrogen weapons in terms of increasing the threat to the West, he was also worried about the possibility of the Americans initiating a nuclear war.<sup>32</sup> The possibility of nuclear weapons being used in Indo-China was the immediate concern - Dulles having made another major speech on the 'massive retaliation' theme on March 19th - but basic Anglo-American differences on the subject had surfaced at the Bermuda meeting the previous December in the context of Korea. The Americans had taken the view that if the Korean truce broke down, they felt free to use atomic bombs, and Eisenhower was planning to declare this intention in a speech to the United Nations. The British were horrified and managed to persuade the president to water down the threat.<sup>33</sup>

30. Churchill was shocked by the revelations about the first American hydrogen bomb tests at the end of 1952, contained in the February 1954 speech by Sterling Cole, the Chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy. His concerns therefore predate the more widespread popular fears which followed the Bravo test series in March 1954.
31. C. Bell, op.cit. p.109.
32. Though certain sections of the April 5th speech foreshadowed the 'balance of terror' doctrine which Churchill was to enunciate explicitly in March 1955. For example, he talked about the 'new terror' bringing "a certain element of equality in annihilation". "Strange as it may seem", he argued, "it is to the universality of potential destruction that I feel we may look with hope and even confidence". Nevertheless the prime minister was stressing the role of nuclear weapons as a deterrent rather than as a usable instrument.
33. In his UN speech, Eisenhower talked about the United States "reserving the right to use the atomic bomb" rather than being "free to use the atomic bomb". For further details, see J. Colville, The Churchillians (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981) p.106.

With regard to Indo-China, Eden, as noted above, headed off Dulles's attempts to internationalise the war. Churchill, less involved with the specifics of the Indo-China war, devoted his attention to attempting to increase the flow of nuclear information from the United States which had been cut off by the MacMahon Act of 1946. Without information there could be no effective consultation about the use of nuclear weapons. In his April 5th speech, the prime minister made public for the first time the text of the 1943 Quebec Agreement under which Britain and the United States not only agreed to exchange nuclear information but also committed themselves not to use nuclear weapons against third parties without the other's consent.<sup>34</sup> The publication of the Agreement showed that Churchill was determined to put pressure on the Americans to liberalise the MacMahon Act at least as far as Britain was concerned.<sup>35</sup>

To pursue this objective as well as to discuss other pressing problems in Indo-China and elsewhere, Churchill and Eden flew to Washington at the end of June.<sup>36</sup> Talks went well on the exchange of nuclear information and, surprisingly, on an Indo-China settlement, but the significant development at this meeting as far as Churchill's continuing summit aspirations were concerned was Eisenhower's remarkable volte-face on this issue.<sup>37</sup> The prime minister again raised the topic but this time, to his undoubted astonishment, the president agreed to participate in a summit meeting.

34. For the text see Articles of Agreement governing Collaboration between the Authorities of the United States and the United Kingdom in the matter of Tube Alloys (Cmd. 9123, London: HMSO, 1954).

35. It also served the party political purpose of blaming the Attlee government for giving up those rights regarding nuclear information and the veto on American use of the bomb. See RIIA Survey 1954 p.122 fn.3.

36. See Churchill's account of his visit to the United States and his reasons for going. H.C. Deb. 5th Series, Vol.530, Coll.34-37, July 12th 1954.

37. A revised Atomic Energy Act was eventually passed by the US Congress in August 1954.

Later on in the visit Eisenhower, under pressure from Dulles, modified his position. He would not attend a summit and the United States would not play an active role, but if Churchill took the initiative to meet Malenkov "the United States would raise no objection nor do anything to damage the chances of success".<sup>38</sup>

Churchill left Washington elated and determined to take advantage of Eisenhower's more amenable mood by visiting Moscow at the first available opportunity for an exploratory meeting with Malenkov. Mindful that Eden and perhaps other members of the Cabinet would oppose or seek to delay such a visit, however, the prime minister tried to forestall domestic opposition by presenting the Cabinet with a fait accompli. On the voyage back from Washington, after furious rows with Eden, Churchill managed to browbeat the foreign secretary into agreeing in principle to the idea of a direct approach to Molotov. He then sent a draft telegram to Rab Butler, the acting prime minister, marked 'private and personal': Butler in turn sent it on to Moscow with only minor changes.<sup>39</sup>

On his return to London, however, Churchill faced a storm of protest. Lord Salisbury and at least one other member of the Cabinet were threatening to resign not on the issue of the proposed Moscow visit but, ironically, on the constitutional principle of a prime minister taking major decisions without consulting the Cabinet.<sup>40</sup> Eden had returned to Geneva but was

38. J. Colville, op.cit.(1976) p.242. See also J. Colville, op.cit.(1981) p.108; Churchill visit - June 1954(3), memo of conversation between Eisenhower and Churchill, June 26th 1954, Eisenhower Papers 1953-61. Churchill had floated the idea of a bilateral summit with Malenkov in October 1953 when Dulles was in London. The secretary of state had commented that such a meeting "would give the impression that Great Britain was shifting from ally to intermediary". See D. Carlton, op. cit. p.334.
39. D. Carlton, op.cit. pp.353-4; J. Colville, op.cit. (1976) p.242.
40. Churchill subsequently admitted to Colville that "he had deliberately planned not to consult the Cabinet. They would raise objections and cause delay. The stakes were so high, and the possible benefits so crucial to our survival, that he was prepared to adopt any methods to ensure a meeting with the Russians was arranged". J. Colville, op.cit. (1981) p.169.

sending telegrams insisting that there must be full Cabinet discussion about the visit. John Colville describes the tense situation.

"All was set for a bitter showdown, with Churchill offering the Cabinet the choice of acquiescence or else facing his own resignation on an issue which would split the Tory Party and the country."<sup>41</sup>

A domestic crisis was averted at the last minute by a shift in Soviet priorities. Molotov had expressed interest in Churchill's proposal at the beginning of July, but by the end of that month he was issuing invitations to thirty two states to meet and discuss the Soviet European security plan. He had clearly lost interest in the Churchill initiative.<sup>42</sup> Whether the prime minister would have pursued the matter if the Soviet leadership had retained interest is an open question: the political costs would undoubtedly have been high. Coral Bell implies that the domestic constraints were critical.

"It seems clear that between July and the end of the year the prime minister yielded to the pressure of other people's convictions that the time was not ripe for talks with the Russians."<sup>43</sup>

International developments in the second half of 1954, however, cannot easily be discounted. The refusal of the French Assembly in August to ratify the EDC Treaty was certainly significant. It had the catalytic effect of bringing the German rearmament issue to a climax and putting the question of negotiations with the Russians onto the 'back burner'. Until the end of 1954, Western attention as a whole focussed on the problem of bringing a rearmed West Germany into NATO within a framework that would satisfy allied and particularly French fears. The ingenious solution put forward by Eden, to extend the Brussels Treaty machinery to include West

41. J. Colville, op.cit. (1976) p.242.

42. The prime minister was contemptuous of Molotov and Eden. His comment to Colville was, "foreign secretaries of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your jobs". Ibid. pp. 242-3.

43. C. Bell, op.cit. p.112. See also F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, Britain and Soviet Communism (London: Macmillan, 1982) p.129.

Germany and to pledge a permanent British military presence on the continent, was incorporated into the Paris agreements in October. The Federal Republic would be recognised as a sovereign state (as outlined in the 1952 Bonn agreements) and would simultaneously join NATO and a revised Brussels Treaty organisation to be renamed the Western European Union. German forces would be controlled politically by the WEU and operationally by SACEUR.<sup>44</sup>

It is interesting to note that it was the French, still hesitating to accept the prospect of German rearmament, who made the final call of 1954 for a summit conference with the Russians. Ironically, It was Churchill who made it clear to Prime Minister Mendes-France that ratification of the Paris agreements must precede any further East-West talks. The British and the Americans did, however, agree to the principle of negotiations in the future to help the prime minister get the WEU treaties through the French Assembly.<sup>45</sup>

By the spring of 1955, American (and more recent British) resistance to a summit had been eroded by a combination of developments. The French continued to push for East-West talks in order to secure ratification of the Paris agreements. In West Germany, the Paris agreements had been presented as the essential precondition for German reunification. Once the agreements had been ratified, Adenauer came under increasing domestic pressure to negotiate with Moscow to expedite the promised reunification.<sup>46</sup>

Other pressures to negotiate came from non-allied sources. The Soviet government had been trying without success since the Autumn of 1954 to persuade the Western powers to hold a summit. With the demise of Malenkov and the emergence of a new Soviet government headed by Bulganin and Khrushchev, the pressure was stepped up. Soviet agreement to an independent, neutralised Austria was the most significant of a series of conciliatory moves which made a major contribution to the more relaxed international atmosphere of 1955 and heightened the prospect of negotiations. As the Chatham House Survey comments:

44. For Eden's role, see D. Carlton, op.cit. pp.360-3; RIIA Survey 1954 pp. 137-148.

45. C. Bell, op.cit. p.120.

46. Ibid. pp. 120-21; RIIA Survey 1955/56 p.72.

"the conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty contributed more, perhaps, than anything else to the more favourable view of Russian intentions which was gaining ground in the summer of 1955; and it was also seen as practical evidence of international detente."<sup>47</sup>

The conference of Afro-Asian states held at Bandung, Indonesia in April provided another spur to East-West negotiations. These states were explicitly non-aligned and the success of this meeting which marked their emergence as significant actors on the international stage provided a dramatic challenge to both superpowers to negotiate across cold war frontiers.<sup>48</sup> It was the specific threat of nuclear war in Indo-China which had brought the non-aligned movement into being and it was the growth of widespread, popular fears of thermonuclear weapons in the Spring of 1955 which provided the final link in a chain of factors which were propelling events towards East-West talks at the highest level.<sup>49</sup>

The Americans rather found themselves carried along by these developments and by May 1955 it was difficult for the Eisenhower administration to resist the tide of events. It will be recalled that Dulles had argued that the Russians must show by deeds rather than words that they were seriously interested in better relations with the West. The signing of the Austrian State Treaty on May 15th was the sort of Soviet concession that not even Dulles could ignore.<sup>50</sup> The secretary of state had also opposed a summit while the position of West Germany was unresolved. On May 6th, the London and Paris agreements came into force and the Federal Republic was securely locked into the Atlantic alliance at the NATO Council meeting later that month.<sup>51</sup>

47. RIIA Survey 1955/56 p.126. For further details of Soviet policy in 1955, see *ibid.* chapter 2.

48. See *ibid.* chapter 5.

49. *Ibid.* pp. 73-75.

50. S. Brown, The Faces of Power (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968) p.92.

51. C. Bell, *op.cit.* pp. 123-124. Bell also notes other factors which modified Dulles' position on the desirability of a summit.



It is clear that by 1955 Britain was no longer alone in pressing for an East-West detente. Nevertheless, the government continued to play an important role in shaping the events leading up to the Geneva summit in July. As the year opened, the still unresolved status of Quemoy and the Matsus, the small islands between the Chinese mainland and Formosa, was the most direct threat to peace. As such, it was an issue that had to be resolved before serious East-West negotiations could begin.

The British government was less concerned with the legal niceties of whether Peking or the government of Chiang Kai-Shek had sovereignty over Formosa and the offshore islands,<sup>52</sup> than with the issue as a potential casus belli which might suck in the Americans and possibly the Russians.<sup>53</sup> Bellicose statements from Washington and Peking in January 1955 heightened fears of another Far Eastern imbroglio.<sup>54</sup> Patient British diplomacy over the following months gradually helped to bring about a reduction of tensions in the area and the end of sporadic fighting. The government used its good offices with Washington, Moscow and Peking to work towards a settlement.<sup>55</sup>

52. Though the government took up a position in February 1955 which did not please the Americans. Eden argued that the question of de jure sovereignty over Formosa was 'uncertain or undetermined'. On the other hand, Quemoy and the Matsus 'undoubtedly' formed "part of the territory of the People's Republic of China". Eden proposed the withdrawal of Nationalist troops from the offshore islands in return for a pledge from Peking not to use force against either Formosa or the islands. See RIIA Survey 1955/56 p.10; D. Carlton, op.cit. pp. 366-367. On Washington's displeasure, see letter from Eisenhower to Churchill, March 29th 1955, DDE Diaries - March 1955, Eisenhower Papers 1953-61.

53. As Eden later commented, "no great power could seriously want to fight about them (the offshore islands), yet they could be a cause of war, just the same". A. Eden, op.cit. p.309.

54. A conflict that might well have involved the use of nuclear weapons. In March 1954, Dulles had warned Eisenhower that "if we defend Quemoy and Matsus, we'll have to use atomic weapons". The president had agreed with this assessment. See J.L. Gaddis, op.cit. pp.169-170.

55. For a detailed account of British diplomacy on this issue, see RIIA Survey 1955/56 chapter 2; R. Boardman, Britain and the Peoples Republic of China 1949-74 (London: Macmillan, 1976) chapter 7.

Meanwhile there was a change of government in Britain. The long awaited retirement of Churchill in April 1955 could have been expected to foreshadow a change of British policy on the detente issue.<sup>56</sup> As noted earlier, Churchill's successor Anthony Eden had been as unenthusiastic on the question of summit negotiations as his opposite number in Washington. Eden's views, however, were beginning to change even before his accession to the premiership. Towards the end of March, as Eden himself recalls, he "began to consider afresh the possibility of a four power meeting" because of repeated and 'vehement' Soviet objections to the Paris agreements. The ratification of the agreements, he felt, "might represent a high point of Western political cohesion". On the 'negotiation from strength' principle, that was the point at which to prepare for discussions with Moscow.<sup>57</sup>

Eden also recalls that the French "independently ... had the same idea". A speech by the French Prime Minister M. Faure on March 25th expounding the theme was publicly welcomed by the British government. "We were ready to join in proposing negotiations with the Soviet government", Eden comments, A private French suggestion that meetings of officials should be held was taken up by the British government and preparatory meetings of British, French and American officials were held in London in April. In Paris the following month, the new Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan managed to persuade Dulles to put a two stage plan to the president: a four power heads of government summit sandwiched between two meetings, one preparatory and one follow up, at foreign minister level. By May 10th, Eisenhower had acquiesced and a joint invitation along the lines of the British plan was sent to the Russians.<sup>58</sup> Not surprisingly given the direction of Soviet policy, the invitation was accepted.

56. The retiring prime minister made his valedictory call for a summit on March 29th 1955. H.C. Deb. 5th Series, Vol. 539, Coll. 199.

57. The irony of Eden's conversion was not lost on Churchill. "How much more attractive a top level meeting seems when one has reached the top," he remarked to Moran. Quoted in D. Carlton, op.cit. p.372.

58. A. Eden, op.cit. pp.288-289.

The Geneva summit

While Dulles could maintain that the Russians were only prepared to attend a summit because of the weakness of their bargaining position and the success of the containment policy, it can be argued that by the time the four leaders assembled in Geneva, the Russians were in a much stronger position than they had been two years earlier. As Gaddis puts it, "negotiations had been put off past the point at which Moscow might have felt the need to make concessions out of weakness".<sup>59</sup>

There was certainly no evidence of a Soviet willingness to compromise at Geneva on the issue of Germany. The earlier interest in German reunification had now disappeared and the Russians sought nothing less than the disbanding of NATO and the exclusion of US troops from Europe. But then, as argued in the last chapter, the West had no serious interest in reunification either. The three Western occupying powers now recognised the Federal Republic as the only legitimate German state and regarded the Oder-Neisse line (the post-Yalta border between Poland and East Germany) as provisional only. The expectation appeared to be that

"the Russians would eventually be persuaded to allow the seventeen million Germans in their occupation zone to join the West Germans in NATO, with the further possibility that at some time in the future the Oder-Neisse territories might be added to this Western-orientated united Germany."<sup>60</sup>

The Soviet Union, however, was now pursuing a 'two Germanies' policy and would brook no compromise. Where Soviet policy was much more flexible was on the issues of security and disarmament. Prior to Geneva, an important set of proposals had been put to the UN Disarmament Sub-Committee meeting in London on May 10th. These proposals went 'surprisingly far' to meet earlier Western objections and were recognised as such by Western spokesmen.<sup>61</sup> The Soviet reply to the Western invitation to Geneva had stressed that disarmament would be the main priority there.

59. J.L. Gaddis, op.cit. p.191. This is another reference to the point made in the last chapter about allegedly missed opportunities for a German settlement and detente in the 1952-53 period. See Chapter 2, footnote 40.

60. F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, op.cit. p.54.

61. For details, see RIIA Survey 1955/56 pp. 151-152.

At Geneva, the Soviet government, though still waiting for a Western response to the May 10th proposals, nevertheless produced some important modifications to them which moved even closer to the Western position. The Western states, however, effectively ignored these proposals, content to press the case that German reunification was the key to European and global security. The singlemindedness with which this case was put owed far less to any intrinsic merit than to the success of Dr. Adenauer's pre-summit diplomacy. The West German Chancellor had visited the United States and Britain in June and had managed to secure western agreement to the primacy of the reunification issue in advance of the summit.<sup>62</sup>

None of the Western leaders pressed this issue more strongly at Geneva, almost to the exclusion of everything else, than the British prime minister. Eden made it clear to Eisenhower and Faure from the outset that he "considered German reunification by far the most important of the questions to be discussed at the conference". He insisted that the heads of government be allowed to revert to the matter at any time during the conference, agenda notwithstanding.<sup>63</sup> His commitment to reunification in fact tended to overshadow his more constructive contributions at Geneva.

Not content simply to offer again his proposals for German reunification, as presented to the Berlin Conference in January 1954, the prime minister put forward a revised 'Eden Plan' at Geneva which had two parts. The more general section proposed limitations of forces and armaments over a wide area of Central Europe subject to reciprocal inspection and control. The more controversial section outlined special measures of demilitarization and possibly neutralization in an area closest to the line of East-West confrontation. As developed at the October foreign ministers' meeting, the Plan specified zones of mutual inspection initially of one or two hundred miles on each side of the demarcation line.<sup>64</sup>

62. Ibid. pp. 154-158.

63. A. Eden, op.cit. pp.295-296,299.

64. Ibid. pp. 292-294,304; RIIA Documents 1955 pp. 19-20,41,43; C. Bell, op.cit. p.135.

The objectives of this Plan were to establish a military balance and to widen the area between opposed forces in Europe. But, most importantly, it sought "to establish a sense of security in Europe and begin the process of reducing tension there".<sup>65</sup> Shorn of its link to German reunification, the Plan was an important contribution to detente and it provided a positive response to the Soviet concern with security, disarmament and the lessening of international tensions. It was followed up after Geneva by some abortive attempts, largely at the Disarmament Sub-Committee meetings, to goad the Americans into making some response to Soviet proposals. It must be said, however, that British attitudes towards disarmament proposals during this period were ambivalent at best. The issue of control in particular was regarded by British spokesmen as an insuperable stumbling block to progress.<sup>66</sup>

The Eden Plan was also significant though in another detente-related sense. Despite the prime minister's best efforts to present the Plan in the context of, if not actually consequent upon, German reunification, it was strongly opposed by the Federal government and the Americans on the grounds that it implicitly accepted and sought to stabilise the existing territorial status quo in Central Europe and implicitly recognised the division of Germany. Because it was perceived to carry these political implications, the Eden Plan was never seriously considered at Geneva.<sup>67</sup>

The prime minister's continuing diplomacy at Geneva on the Quemoy and Matsus issue, on the other hand, had a much more positive outcome. Though hostilities in the Formosa Strait had ceased in May 1955, the continuing fear of war spurred on diplomatic efforts to conclude a settlement. The breakthrough finally came on July 11th when Washington proposed to Peking, through Britain, the commencement of Sino-American talks on the issue.<sup>68</sup>

65. Quoted in RIIA Survey 1955/56 p.156.

66. See *ibid*, pp.152-153, 157-167; RIIA Documents 1955 pp.76-77.

67. This must have annoyed and rather puzzled Eden because he thought that he had secured Adenauer's agreement at least to have the Plan considered at Geneva when they met in London on June 19th. See A. Eden, *op.cit.* pp. 293-294.

68. R. Boardman, *op.cit.* pp.128-129.

Eden took the opportunity of the Geneva summit to press the matter informally with Eisenhower and Khrushchev. According to his own account, he did everything he could "to persuade those present, and absent, of the peaceful intentions of the other side".<sup>69</sup>

Shortly after Geneva, the State Department announced that "as a result of communication between the United States and the People's Republic of China through the diplomatic channels of the United Kingdom" talks at ambassadorial level between the two countries would begin on August 1st in Geneva.<sup>70</sup> This was followed by an important speech by Chou En-Lai to the Chinese National Congress on July 30th in which he gave positive emphasis to the liberation of Formosa "by peaceful means".<sup>71</sup> Thus, British diplomacy was instrumental in helping to resolve a dangerous crisis and in setting up the first bilateral talks between the United States and the PRC.<sup>72</sup>

#### The 'Spirit of Geneva' and detente

The opening of Sino-American talks was not, however, an indication of a dramatic breakthrough in East-West relations as a whole in 1955, despite the hopes and expectations that had accompanied the leaders to the Geneva summit. Both sides took up fixed positions at Geneva and no progress in the form of substantive agreements was possible. The Chatham House Survey provides a useful summary of the deadlock.

69. A. Eden, op.cit. p.310.

70. Department of State Bulletin, XXXIII, 8th August 1955, pp. 219-221. Quoted in R. Boardman, op.cit. p.129.

71. See RIIA Documents 1955 p.461.

72. It is not the intention here to suggest that the crisis in the Formosa Strait was resolved solely by British diplomacy. The impact of the Bandung Conference, the diplomatic efforts of the Indian Government and probably Soviet pressure were also significant factors in producing a more conciliatory Chinese line.

"The west, it appeared, was not interested in disarmament, unless preceded by German reunification on terms agreeable to themselves. The Soviet Union, on the contrary, was not interested in German reunification except as a consequence of agreement on disarmament ... if the Soviet Union stalled on Germany, the west stalled on disarmament. Neither was prepared to take the calculated risks which would have been necessary for a breakthrough."<sup>73</sup>

That no progress was possible was made clear by the failure of the follow up Foreign Ministers Conference in October to reach any agreements. In his final statement to that Conference, Harold Macmillan asked his fellow ministers to recognise that

"instead of taking another step forward, at the best, we are locked again in a stalemate; at the worst we have taken a step backward ... we stand looking at each other across the Great Divide."<sup>74</sup>

The fixed positions taken up at the Geneva meetings were a reflection of the fixed positions taken up all along the line dividing East and West. The Paris agreements and the Warsaw Pact completed a neat, symmetrical pattern of division in Korea, Indo-China, Germany and Europe as a whole.<sup>75</sup> The geography of the cold war at least was now more sharply defined than ever.

But it would not be appropriate to regard the Geneva conferences as simply a continuation of the cold war by other means. As indicated in this narrative, the structures and the processes of international relations were already beginning to change from a fixed 'cold war' pattern by 1955. The fact that there was no dramatic breakthrough in East-West relations does not mean that there were no important outcomes related to the detente process.

73. RIIA Survey 1955/56 pp. 159-160.

74. Quoted in RIIA Documents 1955 pp. 74-75.

75. See RIIA Survey 1955/56 p.71.

The so-called 'Spirit of Geneva' was not a figment of collective imaginations. It was a handy metaphor but the new international atmosphere it was used to describe was real enough while it lasted. That a first summit since 1945 could be held at all without apparent rancour was a reflection of a new atmosphere which in turn was underpinned by tangible settlements - the ending of the wars in Korea and Indo-China, and the signing of the Austrian State Treaty. Geneva itself may not have produced any settlements but, as even the American president admitted, a start had been made,

"... the way was opened for some increase in intercourse between East and West ... these were small beginnings, but they could not have transpired in the atmosphere prevailing before Geneva."<sup>76</sup>

The most significant outcome of Geneva, however, which certainly went beyond 'atmospherics' was the general perception that as a result of the summit a world war involving nuclear weapons had become less likely.

"There ain't gonna be no war", said Macmillan as he left Geneva.<sup>77</sup>

"Geneva has given this simple message to the world: it has reduced the dangers of war", concluded Eden's report to the House of Commons.<sup>78</sup> These ringing declarations were not simply substitutes for tangible agreements or expressions of hope.

There was a sense in which the leaders meeting together for the first time at Geneva were also coming to grips for the first time with the realities of a thermonuclear world in which both sides of the ideological divide now had the means of inflicting unacceptable destruction on the other. The prime minister describes the 'lessons' learnt.

76. Quoted in S. Brown, op.cit. p.98.

77. Quoted in C. Bell, op.cit. p.130.

78. A. Eden, op.cit. p.311.



"Each country present learnt that no other country attending wanted war and each understood why. The Russians realized, as we did, that this situation had been created by the deterrent power of thermonuclear weapons."<sup>79</sup>

These lessons included not just the negative realization that thermonuclear weapons could not be rational instruments of policy; the notion of a nuclear stalemate. Perceptions of a diminished likelihood of war were also powerfully affected by the more positive assumption that if a modus vivendi could be established and maintained between East and West, mutual possession of nuclear weapons could actually keep the peace; the notion of a 'pax atomica'.<sup>80</sup>

These perceptions were reinforced by the fact that the summit also served to produce the first tentative beginnings of an East-West accommodation. The summit had precisely the effect that Dulles had feared. It did involve on both sides a tacit recognition of the territorial status quo in Europe, and to that extent Soviet control of Eastern Europe had ceased to be a casus belli. Coral Bell makes this point.

"War had become less likely, not because the two dominant powers had reached a negotiated accommodation, but because there had been an unspoken recognition of spheres of influence and the prospective penalties of disturbing them."<sup>81</sup>

The 'summitry' of 1955 can therefore be described as a landmark in the detente process. But, paradoxically, it also marked the end of a distinct 'phase' of detente: Geneva served to highlight the limitations as well as the potential of detente. The 'Spirit of Geneva' continued to affect the

79. Ibid. p.306.

80. It can of course be argued that these assumptions about the relationship between nuclear weapons and the possibility of war rested excessively on a rationalistic conception of politics.

81. C. Bell, op.cit. p.130. The non-intervention of the United States in the Hungarian revolt of October 1956 was a clear indication that any residual commitment to the liberation of Eastern Europe had disappeared.

general climate of international relations in 1956, but the process of accommodation had clearly gone as far as it could at that stage. Events in the second half of 1956, in Hungary in particular, focused attention again on the continuing relevance of military force in the nuclear age, and raised question marks about a reliance on simple 'balance of terror' notions to keep the peace. But it was not until the end of 1957 that significant attempts to promote detente were resumed.

### The British contribution to detente

This lull in the proceedings provides a convenient opportunity to stand back from the narrative and evaluate the British role in the detente process between 1953 and 1956. Certainly Britain can take most of the credit on the Western side for the diplomatic activity culminating in the Geneva conferences.<sup>82</sup> There was a striking continuity through the governments of Churchill and Eden in the British voice calling for a normalisation of relations with the Soviet bloc and for much of this period that voice belonged literally to Winston Churchill.

While the Americans were doing everything possible to avoid East-West negotiations, the French were preoccupied with Indo-China and the EDC project, and Adenauer with securing sovereignty for the Federal Republic, Churchill, very much a 'voice in the wilderness', contributed his international stature and his anti-communist credentials to the call for negotiations. It was Churchill who responded to popular hopes of reduced tensions that followed the death of Stalin, just when those hopes were beginning to crumble. His May 1953 speech, with its piecemeal approach, recognition of the legitimacy of Soviet interests and willingness to

82. Though in the event the Geneva summit was not what Churchill had in mind. It was scarcely a small, intimate meeting of a handful of leaders who could strike bargains outside the glare of the media. Adam Ulam describes the Geneva meetings as "inevitably ... exercises in public relations, the leaders addressing not so much each other as world public opinion and trying in an ostensibly friendly manner to undermine the policies of each other". Expansion and Coexistence (New York: Praeger, 1968) p.570. Significantly for the future of British detente policy, however, Geneva was Harold Macmillan's first summit and he found it a euphoric experience. It clearly affected his view of the utility of summits when he became prime minister. See A. Sampson, Macmillan: A Study in Ambiguity (Allen Lane: Penguin, 1967) p.103; C.J. Bartlett, A History of Postwar Britain (London: Longman, 1977) p.138.

reconcile Soviet and West European security, received a favourable response from many quarters including Moscow and could have provided a basis for East-West negotiations. It was Churchill again in 1954 who responded to and reinforced growing fears about the destructive power of hydrogen bombs and the dangers of their use, by renewing the call for an accommodation between East and West. His speeches on the 'balance of terror' theme also underpinned the pax atomica notion that so influenced the international atmosphere of 1955.<sup>83</sup>

Churchill can scarcely be blamed for the fact that a summit was not held until 1955. Indeed it would be difficult to suggest what else he could have done to promote detente, given the circumstances, and he consistently pursued this theme even after his retirement from active politics.<sup>84</sup> With his speeches and his threats to meet Malenkov, with or without the Americans, he repeatedly risked a rift with Washington over the detente issue despite the fact that the Anglo-American alliance had long been the cornerstone of his foreign and defence policies. He unashamedly used his wartime friendship with the president to press for a meeting with the Russians on every available opportunity. Eisenhower's April 1953 speech had shown that he was more prepared to entertain the idea of negotiations than Truman had been and Churchill worked hard to reinforce this predisposition. On at least one occasion prior to 1955, he almost persuaded the president to attend a summit.

But the summit was delayed and Churchill frustrated by American intransigence personified by John Foster Dulles. The prime minister was also constrained by the limits imposed upon Western diplomacy as a whole by the German reunification issue so skilfully promoted and sustained by Dr. Adenauer.<sup>85</sup> What was undoubtedly the most galling constraint for

83. See RIIA Survey 1954 pp.10, 118, 122-123.

84. See, for example, his acceptance speech on the award of the Charlemagne Prize in Aachen in 1956. RIIA Survey 1955/56 p.252.

85. Churchill's awareness of this constraint was made clear in his May 1953 speech. "Strong as is our desire to see a friendly settlement with Soviet Russia, or even an improved modus vivendi, we are resolved not in any way to fail in the obligations to which we have committed ourselves about West Germany." Quoted in RIIA Documents 1953 p.59.

Churchill, however, was the unwillingness of his Cabinet colleagues, and Anthony Eden in particular, to provide a united governmental front on this issue. This could not but weaken his position and detract from his efforts to press for a summit.

Nevertheless, if the question of the desirability of a summit bitterly divided Churchill and Eden (until the latter became prime minister), their common fears about the dangers of nuclear war linked the prime minister's efforts and the arguably more practical contributions of his foreign secretary to the promotion of a detente. To the extent that the 1955 detente was built upon the foundation of tangible agreements which resolved certain East-West conflicts that might have resulted in nuclear war, Anthony Eden made a significant contribution. As this account has shown, the settlements in Indo-China and the Formosa Strait owed much to his diplomatic skills. Moreover, his unique contribution to the signing of the London and Paris agreements was crucially important because those agreements resolved the status of West Germany which in turn stabilised the lines of division in Europe and undermined American arguments against the holding of a summit.

It may also be argued that, however unwittingly, the Eden Plan presented at Geneva, with its implicit acceptance of a divided Germany and the territorial status quo in Europe, was an important contribution to the process of East-West accommodation. The Plan certainly constituted a major link to the detente process in the second half of the 1950s because, as will be seen in the next chapter, it stimulated several arms control proposals that were collectively labelled 'disengagement' schemes.<sup>86</sup>

It can be argued, therefore, that Britain, through the activities of Churchill and Eden, played an important role in setting in chain the diplomacy of detente which eventually resulted in the Geneva conferences.

86. For a discussion of 'disengagement' and a convenient summary of the major disengagement proposals including the Eden plan, see Intelligence Report 7992, "Western European Pressures for Disengagement", prepared by the Office of Intelligence Research and Analysis for Western Europe, US Bureau of Intelligence and Research April 8th 1959.

It was appropriate that the Eden government should take advantage of the 'Spirit of Geneva' by receiving the Soviet leaders on their first state visit to a Western country. The prime minister had extended the invitation to his opposite number at Geneva and Bulganin and Khrushchev arrived in Britain in April 1956. The trip was broadly successful and a return visit was planned for the following year.<sup>87</sup>

While the visit by the Soviet leaders appeared to highlight a continuing British role in the detente process, it tended to mask certain developments which were detracting from the centrality of that role. It was suggested earlier that by 1955 Britain was no longer alone in pressing for an East-West detente and the apparent new direction in Soviet foreign policy was spelt out in some detail. Even among Western powers, however, the distinctiveness of the British contribution was gradually being blurred.

The French, for example, having finally rejected the EDC began to play an increasingly important role in the detente process and can take at least equal credit with the British for initiating the talks in the Spring of 1955 that produced the invitation to Moscow to attend the summit. At Geneva, Eden's own account of the proceedings suggests that the French were not as singleminded about the pursuit of German reunification as Eden himself and the Americans, and wished to make proposals on other issues.<sup>88</sup> The French may have made little headway at the summit but, by the Spring of 1956, they were taking the lead in complaining publicly about the sterility of Western policies towards the Soviet bloc. French frustration was focused on the 'sacred cow' of German reunification, the absence of agreement on which, they argued, could not continue to preclude the negotiation of other pressing issues and the seeking of better relations between the blocs.<sup>89</sup>

87. For Eden's account of the circumstances in which the invitation to Britain was extended and of the visit itself, see op.cit. p.307, chapter 8. The British ambassador in Moscow, Sir William Hayter, also claims credit for the visit. See The Kremlin and the Embassy (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966) p.134.

88. "The French Prime Minister ... told us that he had a number of positive proposals to make on security and disarmament as well as on Germany. He was anxious to develop these at an early stage." A. Eden, op.cit. p.296. Eden makes little of this, suggesting that the Western powers had 'slightly differing attitudes on tactics' but were 'in substantial agreement' on strategy.

89. For details, see RIIA Survey 1955/56 pp. 263-264.

French outspokenness, however, served to stiffen the resolve of the Federal government to prevent a 'weakening' of Western policy and to seek a reaffirmation of the primacy of the reunification issue. It was a growing concern over the direction of Western policy the previous year as Geneva loomed that had persuaded Adenauer to respond positively if cautiously to the Soviet invitation to visit Moscow "to consider the question of establishing diplomatic and trade relations".<sup>90</sup> His visit to Moscow in September 1955 marked the beginnings of bilateral diplomacy between Bonn and Moscow.<sup>91</sup> But the direct involvement of the Federal Republic in the process of East-West accommodation, like the developments in French policy, tended to detract from the British role in that process.

The policies of other states had a similar effect. However unwilling the Americans were to attend a summit, once at Geneva, they rather took control and Eisenhower, not surprisingly, was accepted as the leader of the Western delegation. The active if not positive role played by the Americans at Geneva contrasted with their relative quiescence at the Geneva conference the previous year. As a result, the need for British mediation and Eden's diplomatic skills now appeared to be less obvious. David Carlton suggests that the re-emergence of France further diminished the significance of the British role in structural terms.

"As long as the world thought of summitry in terms of the Big Three of the wartime conferences, Great Britain's decline was partially masked; but the emergence of a Big Four served to draw attention to the new realities of the international power structure."<sup>92</sup>

90. RIIA Documents 1955 p.245 ff.

91. Richard Barnet suggests that "Adenauer's visit to Moscow was one straw in the wind, signalling the start of a slow process of political settlement in Europe that would take a generation and more." R.J. Barnet, The Alliance (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983) p.173.

92. D. Carlton, *op.cit.* p.377.

British claims to a distinctive peacemaking role were also challenged by the emergence of the Bandung powers. Their willingness to mediate on East-West issues from a position on non-alignment served to highlight Britain's evident alignment. Their claims to offer a voice of reason and morality in international relations challenged scarcely veiled British aspirations to moral superiority.<sup>93</sup> The British voice, by contrast, was beginning to sound rather arrogant.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, the strident anticolonial stance now adopted collectively by the Bandung powers must have concentrated British (and French) minds on their colonial interests and helped to divert attention away from East-West issues.

If the direction of other state's policies was undermining the British contribution to detente, Eden and the policies of his government added further problems. At one level, Anthony Eden was clearly not Winston Churchill. Not only was Eden a late convert to summitry, but his handling of the Geneva summit suggests that he had a much narrower conception of what a summit could achieve.<sup>95</sup> It is difficult to resist the speculation that had Churchill been at Geneva, he would not have allowed himself to be as tied to the German reunification issue as Eden chose to be. It is equally tempting to believe that Churchill's international stature and his relationship with Eisenhower would enable him to have had a much greater impact on the summit than Eden was able to achieve.<sup>96</sup>

93. See, for example, President Soekarno's opening speech to the Bandung conference, quoted in RIIA Survey 1955/56 p.63.

94. Harold Macmillan actually suggested that Britain, because of her diplomatic skills and political stability could "establish for herself in the nuclear age, a position of authority as the chief source of moral inspiration for the whole free world". Spectator, 20th May 1955, quoted in A. Sampson, op.cit. p.102.

95. Significantly, David Carlton suggests that Eden's "principal purpose at Geneva was merely to contribute to the creation of a genial atmosphere that might serve in the eyes of the general public as an adequate substitute for concrete agreements". op.cit. p.377.

96. See *ibid.* pp.377-378.

The general foreign policy orientation of the Eden government certainly appeared to give a lower priority both to East-West relations and the Atlantic alliance. It was more conservative than the Churchill government in that it tended to adopt a more independent policy with the emphasis on the maintenance of traditional British interests. This accorded with the new mood in Paris and was one reason why relations between the two countries became much closer under Eden's premiership.<sup>97</sup> But, as already noted, a deliberate rapprochement with France only underlined Britain's declining status more starkly and further undermined a distinctive British detente role.

If 1955-56 can be identified as marking the end of a phase in the detente process, it also witnessed growing problems with British detente policy. The visit of Bulganin and Khrushchev in April 1956 can be seen with hindsight to mark the end of a period of active concern with the state of East-West relations. For the remainder of Eden's relatively short tenure of office, his government was preoccupied with colonial problems principally in the Middle East. Not until Eden was succeeded by Harold Macmillan following Suez did East-West relations again become a governmental priority. Before moving on to a consideration of British detente policy in the Macmillan period, it would be useful at this stage to reflect on British attitudes towards detente to the extent that they were apparent by 1956, and then to suggest at least tentatively the principal factors that underpinned that policy.

#### A British conception of detente

It was argued in the last chapter that divergent British and American approaches to 'cold war' and 'detente' reflected different attitudes to the idea of negotiations with the Soviet Union and 'international communism'. Kennan's precepts notwithstanding, the development of the containment policy after NSC-68 came to preclude negotiations until such time as a position of 'strength' had been attained: to negotiate prematurely would simply demonstrate weakness. The semblance of negotiations might be offered but only as a tactical ploy to expose the weakness of the other side. Under Dulles, existing inhibitions acquired explicitly moral connotations. It was as if the moral superiority of the West would somehow be undermined by

97. RIIA Survey 1955/56 pp.70-71.



contact with the communist states. The famous symbol of this attitude was Dulles' refusal to shake hands with Chou En-Lai at Geneva in 1954.<sup>98</sup>

Other indications of American attitudes also emerged during this period. After Stalin's death, for example, Eisenhower's April 1953 speech called for the new Soviet leaders to demonstrate "sincerity of purpose attested by deeds".<sup>99</sup> Twelve months later, when Chou En-Lai offered to negotiate directly on the Formosa issue, the American response was cool to say the least. As the Chatham House Survey puts it, "Dulles characteristically asked for tangible evidence of China's sincerity and good intentions."<sup>100</sup> That 'sincerity' and 'good intentions' should be a precondition for, as it were, 'conceding' negotiations suggests that negotiations were regarded by the Americans as some sort of special reward for good behaviour rather than as a normal part of international relations.<sup>101</sup>

American attitudes towards 'summitry' were, if anything, even more anti-pathetic. Personalised diplomacy between heads of government had long been regarded with particular suspicion. There were several reasons for this but the most deeply rooted were that it was a practice associated with the absolutist tradition of European power politics and therefore one that was incompatible with a constitutionally constrained presidency. The guiding assumption was that the United States had never gained advantage from summit conferences and therefore they were an inappropriate mechanism for the maintenance of American interests.<sup>102</sup>

98. See J.L. Gaddis, *op.cit.* p.189.

99. RIIA Documents 1953 p.48.

100. RIIA Survey 1955/56 p.13.

101. Adam Ulam makes the interesting point that American and Soviet conceptions of diplomacy were in conflict. "The American concept of diplomacy - before a negotiation succeeds both sides must demonstrate that they are 'sincere' - clashed with the Soviet one, in which negotiations are a means of assessing your opponent's intentions and strengths and, if necessary, of arriving at a bargain." *op.cit.* p.510.

102. An attitude captured by the aphorism, "we never lost a war or won a conference". See Coral Bell, *op.cit.* pp.15-16.

Dulles undoubtedly shared these attitudes but he was also concerned

"lest a summit meeting be nothing but a spectacle and promote a false euphoria. Under these circumstances we and our allies might not take the necessary steps to keep the free world together. If there is no evident menace from the Soviet bloc our will to maintain unity and strength may weaken ... [our allies] might feel that the danger was over and therefore they did not need to continue to spend large sums for defence."<sup>103</sup>

From this perspective, summit conferences were positively dangerous to security.

The greater British willingness to negotiate across the East-West divide in the first half of the 1950s appeared to reflect a different set of attitudes towards negotiations and, more broadly, diplomacy. Negotiations, particularly with states whose interests directly conflicted with those of Britain, were regarded as a normal part of international relations.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the basic premise appeared to be that negotiations were an integral part of the fabric and the dynamic of international relations.<sup>105</sup> It was not a questions of 'conceding' negotiations or setting preconditions but rather of using negotiations whenever possible as part of a regularized process of allaying tension and working towards an accommodation. This attitude, it can be argued, lies at the heart of the British conception of detente; it was simply regarded as normal diplomacy.

103. A.H. Berding, Dulles on Diplomacy (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1965) p.23. Dulles also argued that summit conferences gave totalitarian regimes like the Soviet Union special advantages over democratic states. See pp. 24-25.

104. It is worth recalling in this context that Churchill, in his February 1950 speech, called for a "supreme effort to bridge the gulf between the two worlds, so that each can live their own life, if not in friendship, at least without the hatreds of the Cold War". RIIA Documents 1949-50 p.56. In other words, what was critical from this perspective was not 'friendship' or ideological compatibility, but the seeking of a modus vivendi despite ideological differences.

105. Coral Bell argues that a fundamental difference of attitudes towards negotiations had become apparent as early as March 1950. While the Americans believed that agreements resulting from negotiations could only register acceptance of a situation created by power relationships (hence the notion of 'negotiation from strength'), the British believed that agreements themselves could change situations. From a British perspective, "negotiation is seen as actual bargaining about facts, rather than as merely registering recognition of facts". C. Bell, *op.cit.* p.16.

It is tempting to see British attitudes to summitry as merely an exercise in Churchillian nostalgia but they were an extension of basic attitudes to diplomacy. Personalised diplomacy was regarded as a natural supplement to regular diplomatic channels. Harold Macmillan's final speech to the Geneva foreign ministers meeting on November 16th 1955 seems to capture the essence of the British conception. The 'Geneva spirit', he said,

"was really a return to normal human relations. It meant a readiness to discuss and to negotiate. It meant a reversion to some of that flexibility without which the conduct of human affairs becomes almost intolerable. It meant 'give and take' in international life."<sup>106</sup>

From this perspective, summits were not to be regarded as exceptional occurrences but as regular affairs. Before Geneva, Macmillan had suggested that the summit should be designed "not to settle problems, but to inaugurate a long period of negotiations".<sup>107</sup> Even Anthony Eden, for so long opposed to a summit, made the same point at Geneva. He told Eisenhower and Faure that he "looked upon this conference of Heads of Government as the first of a series".<sup>108</sup> His reflections on the visit of Bulganin and Khrushchev the following year are particularly instructive in this context. He takes issue in his memoirs with those who would question the "place of personal contacts in modern diplomacy". Regular diplomatic channels might have sufficed in the "leisured eighteenth century", but

"this practice is not sufficient now ... when one has cantered many miles, it is good to take a jump from time to time. Direct international contacts are the fences of diplomatic life."<sup>109</sup>

106. RIIA Documents 1955 p.73.

107. Quoted in C.J. Bartlett, *op.cit.* p.138.

108. A. Eden, *op.cit.* p.291. David Carlton suggests that Eden's resistance to a summit prior to 1955 was less an objection in principle than an unwillingness again to play a supporting role to Churchill. See *op.cit.* p.331.

109. A. Eden, *op.cit.* p.362.

Detente and domestic political imperatives

If contrasting British and American attitudes to negotiations and summitry helps to clarify a British conception of detente, it is necessary to consider other factors which appear to be relevant to an explanation of British attitudes and policy towards detente. It might be argued that British policy can be explained in terms of domestic political factors.<sup>110</sup> Evidence is sketchy here but there is some linkage between calls for negotiations and potential electoral advantage. It will be recalled that Churchill's original call for a summit was made in the closing stages of the 1950 general election campaign. In the view of one observer, that campaign had "opened quietly, but came alive after February 14th when Churchill at Edinburgh urged a summit conference between ourselves, the Russians and the Americans".<sup>111</sup> Another later commented that Churchill's speech "... at one stroke made the British election world news and at the same time made foreign policy an issue at home".<sup>112</sup>

110. American perceptions are interesting in this context. A Department of State memorandum which sought specifically to explain the British refusal to become involved militarily in Indo-China has a more general relevance here. Three out of seven factors put forward relate to the domestic political environment in Britain, viz:

1. "The widespread public faith in possible results from direct negotiation with the Russians, which faith has been encouraged by Churchill",
2. "Narrow margin by which the Conservatives control the House of Commons",
- and 3. "The personal consideration that Eden is still only heir designate to the Prime Ministership and conceivably by a blunder or an enormously unpopular act could fail to make it."

DOS Memorandum dated May 5th 1954.

111. Lord Kilmuir, Political Adventure (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964) p.169.

112. H.G. Nicholas, The British General Election of 1950 (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1968) p.102.

It may well be that Churchill spotted the opportunity to make a decisive intervention in the campaign to the advantage of his Party.<sup>113</sup> The Labour government had a large majority and it was clear that something dramatic was required if the Conservatives were to have any hope of victory. Foreign affairs had played no significant part in the election campaign despite widespread concern about the implications of the recent American decision to proceed with the construction of a hydrogen bomb.

On February 10th, the Foreign Office had released the texts of an exchange of letters between the prime minister and a group of leading Quakers. They had appealed for a new British initiative for an atomic settlement including the possibility of a conference of great Power leaders. Attlee's reply had restricted itself to a justification of existing policy, concluding that "it would be presumptuous to suppose that personal contact ... would do anything but raise hopes unduly".<sup>114</sup> Four days later Churchill took up the theme at Edinburgh though, in the context of the election campaign, his appeal for a summit was derided by Bevin as a 'stunt' and by Morrison as 'soap-box diplomacy'.<sup>115</sup> Labour was returned on February 23rd with a much reduced majority but there is no evidence that Churchill's intervention either won or lost seats for the Conservatives.<sup>116</sup>

Churchill's November 1951 speech at the Guildhall should be viewed in the context of the general election the previous month.<sup>117</sup> During that campaign the Conservative opposition had been accused by the Labour government of adopting a belligerent foreign policy stance specifically with regard to the Iranian crisis. On the eve of the election, Churchill himself had been

113. At least one newspaper suggested that Churchill was trying to make "party capital out of peace" Manchester Guardian, February 15th 1950, quoted in *ibid.* p.160.

114. *Ibid.* p.102.

115. See C. Bell, *op.cit.* p.17.

116. H.G. Nicholas, *op.cit.* p.107. Nicholas notes that the overestimation of the electoral impact of the Edinburgh speech was one of the foreign press's 'most frequent' errors.

117. See The Times, 10th November 1951.

branded as a 'warmonger' and was sufficiently disturbed by the accusation to sue the Daily Mirror after the election.<sup>118</sup> Though the Conservatives were returned to office, it has been estimated that the 'warmonger' smear cost them as many as a hundred seats.<sup>119</sup>

Of the three general elections held in the first half of the 1950s, the general election of 1955 provides the clearest indication of a positive link between a detente policy and perceptions at least of electoral advantage. The timing of Eden's conversion to the idea of a summit, only two months before the election, suggests an element of opportunism. As Coral Bell puts it, "... with an election projected and the opinion polls showing a close contest likely, [Eden] had firmly adopted the summit idea".<sup>120</sup> Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, the permanent under secretary at the Foreign Office is said to have commented (rather cynically) to Macmillan that Eisenhower would probably not object strongly to Eden's conversion since "even the best friends must embarrass one another for electoral reasons".<sup>121</sup>

An East-West summit was a major issue in the 1955 election campaign, as negotiations with Moscow had to a greater or lesser extent been an issue since the previous election. Adopted initially by the left wing of the Labour Party in the early 1950s as an alternative to German rearmament, the call for negotiations and specifically for a high-level meeting became more insistent and emanated from the Party as a whole after 1953.<sup>122</sup> The 1955 Labour Manifesto recalled that the Party had moved a motion in the House in April 1954 which called for an immediate summit.

118. C. Bell, op.cit. p.95.

119. D.E. Butler, The British General Election of 1951 (London: Macmillan, 1952).

120. C. Bell, op.cit. p.114. Bell also argues that "the prospect of an election in May helped to convince those on the right wing of the Conservative Party who had previously been sceptical". p.112.

121. See D. Carlton, op.cit. p.372.

122. C. Bell, op.cit. pp.96-97.

"This was carried unanimously. Despite our steady pressure, those talks have not taken place. Labour believes that the first task of a British government is to end this delay."<sup>123</sup>

David Butler argues that the narrowness of the Conservative victory in 1951 made the government sensitive to Labour opinion on inter alia the issue of negotiations with Moscow.

"In the [1951] campaign it had been freely said that a Tory victory would jeopardise the preservation of peace, of full employment and of the welfare state. It was plain that the party's political survival depended on disproving these assertions."

Butler goes on to suggest that the very success of Churchill's 1953 speech and the 1954 Geneva Conference strengthened Opposition demands for an East-West summit. With the government then resisting a summit before the ratification of the Paris agreements, however, "... the last months before the election saw an increasing number of pleas and protests from the Labour Party".<sup>124</sup>

It must have been particularly galling for Eden to see Churchill portrayed in Labour election addresses as the far-sighted statesman who had demanded high-level talks, been opposed and then ignored by his party and eventually 'sacked'. There were clearly important electoral reasons for the government to push hard on the summit issue. In an electoral context, the Western invitation on May 10th and the informal acceptance by Molotov on May 15th effectively stole Labour's thunder.<sup>125</sup> As Butler puts it, "the announcement of the four power meeting strengthened the Conservatives on one of the issues

123. Quoted in D.E. Butler, The British General Election of 1955 (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1969) p.8. Butler calculates that seventy-one per cent of Labour candidates censured the government in their election addresses for delay in arranging a summit.

124. Ibid. pp. 6,8.

125. The Labour Party slogan "Big-Four Talks Now" had to be adapted in the closing stages of the campaign to the much less effective "Big-Four Talks - Send Attlee".

where Labour was planning its most vigorous assault".<sup>126</sup> The firm prospect of the Geneva summit can only have helped the government to increase its majority substantially on May 26th.

There are limits, however, to what might be called the domestic imperatives hypothesis. Electoral analysis, for example, may capture some of the peaks of interest in detente but it scarcely explains the continuity of attitudes and policy over time. The picture of the Labour party in opposition constantly goading the government to set up negotiations rather overstates the overall impact of a party rent by internal dissension and disunity during this period.<sup>127</sup> More specifically, it is easy to overstate the significance of the size of the Conservative majority in the House of Commons. Butler observes that the 1950-51 Labour government had demonstrated that it was perfectly possible to carry on the business of government with a much smaller majority.<sup>128</sup>

Indeed there were countervailing domestic pressures which were at least equally significant. Opposition from within the Cabinet has already been noted. There are indications also that the Foreign Office was ambivalent about the prospect of negotiations with Moscow during this period and may have shared some reservations with the State Department. The timing of the release by the Foreign Office of the correspondence between Attlee and the Quakers in February 1950 may not have been accidental, but, according to John Colville's accounts, the Foreign Office objected to the section of Churchill's May 1953 speech which dealt with the summit initiative, and disapproved of the prime minister's subsequent attempts to promote detente.<sup>129</sup>

Sir Duncan Wilson records that Foreign Office attitudes to summitry remained very cautious even after Khrushchev's 'secret speech' to the Twentieth CPSU Congress in February 1956. He maintains that senior Soviet experts in the

126. D.E. Butler, op.cit. p.164.

127. See H. Pelling, A Short History of the Labour Party (London: Macmillan, 1968) especially p.105; C.F. Brand, The British Labour Party (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1974) chapter 14.

128. D.E. Butler, op.cit. p.6.

129. J. Colville, op.cit. (1976) p.238; J. Colville, op.cit. (1981) pp.107, 165. "(The 1953 speech) stated his (Churchill's) own policy; it was not in accordance with Foreign Office thought, and would not have been approved by Eden."



## Foreign Office

"felt that summit meetings with Soviet leaders were at best a political necessity. At worst these could commit us to a lot of unnecessary discussions from which the public, in 'euphoric' mood, would expect results. And so unnecessary concessions might be made."<sup>130</sup>

Detente and governmental fears of nuclear war

If domestic political factors per se are inadequate to explain the continuity of British detente policy in the first half of the 1950s, it is worth pursuing the earlier suggestion that what linked the contributions of Churchill and Eden to the promotion of detente was their common fears about the dangers of nuclear war. To what extent did British detente policy reflect a particular British sense of vulnerability to and therefore fear of a nuclear war?<sup>131</sup> Churchill's November 1951 speech expressed perhaps for the first time a perception of vulnerability to nuclear attack in terms of the risks taken by a geographically small, highly populated island state in the cause of Western security.

130. D. Wilson, "Anglo-Soviet relations: the effect of ideas on reality", International Affairs, 50:3, July 1974, p.384. There is some reason, however, to question whether there was a monolithic 'Foreign Office view' on this issue during this period. As noted above, Sir William Hayter, the British ambassador in Moscow between 1953 and 1957, claims in his memoirs that the visit of Bulganin and Khrushchev to Britain in 1956 was his idea. Whether or not this is true, Hayter for one did not appear to share the views of the 'senior Soviet experts' about summitry as described by Wilson.
131. For another interesting American perspective here, the belief that "an almost psychotic fear of the destruction of the UK in a hydrogen war" motivated British policy-makers, ranked high on the list of factors put forward by the DOS memorandum alluded to above (see footnote 110). The American documents of 1951-52 used in the last chapter also make clear the American belief that British objections to a political warfare strategy were grounded on a fear of supporting any policy that might force a 'showdown' between the superpowers, or "provoke the Kremlin to acts of aggression"; that might, in short, increase the dangers of nuclear war. See Chapter 2, footnotes 35-38.

"It must not be forgotten that under the late Government we took peculiar risks in providing the principal atomic base for the United States in East Anglia, and that in consequence we placed ourselves in the very forefront of Soviet antagonism. We have therefore every need and every right to seek and to receive the fullest consideration from the Americans for our point of view and I feel sure this will not be denied us."<sup>132</sup>

It will be recalled that the genesis of an active British interest in East-West detente was located in the 1949-50 period. The successful testing of a Soviet atom bomb, the announcement of the American decision to develop an hydrogen bomb, the Revolution in China and the publication of NSC-68 over a nine month period combined to produce a strategic environment in which the possibility of a superpower nuclear confrontation had been dramatically increased. It was these developments which appeared to inject a note of urgency into Churchill's voice. Thereafter, a British interest in detente was activated whenever an East-West conventional war waged, as in Korea and Indo-China, or whenever a crisis threatened to involve the use of nuclear weapons, as over the Formosa Strait issue.<sup>133</sup>

The war in Korea was significant in this context because it stimulated British fears that the dangers of nuclear war were posed not only by Soviet but also by United States policy. As Elisabeth Barker puts it,

"the 'hot war' in Korea made British fears of a Russian onslaught on Western Europe even sharper than at the time of the Berlin Blockade in 1948. Yet at the same time the British were also afraid that the Americans might unleash a new world war against Communist China or the Soviet Union, or both together."<sup>134</sup>

132. RIIA Documents 1951 p.137.

133. Commenting on British policy in the early 1950s, Michael Donelan argues that there was "a sharper awareness in Britain than in any other NATO country of the perilous basis of western security". Paper presented to a Princeton University Conference on Britain Today: Economics, Defence and Foreign Policy . May 12-13 1959 (Princeton University publication) p.52.

134. E. Barker, The British Between the Superpowers 1945-50 (London: Macmillan, 1983) p.185.

It was clear henceforth that if nuclear war was to be averted it was as necessary to restrain an impetuous Washington as it was to deter a hostile Moscow.

Yet the possibility that nuclear war might result from a deliberate act of policy by one of the superpowers seemed somehow less threatening to the British at this time than the fear that a nuclear war could ensue without either superpower choosing to escalate the conflict, but into which other exposed states like Britain would be sucked. For the British, General MacArthur notwithstanding, the war in Korea seemed to highlight the lessons of 1914 rather than 1939.

An illustration of this fear is contained in another section of Churchill's 1951 speech. Describing the world scene as he saw it on his return to office, the prime minister talked about

"mighty forces, armed with fearful weapons ... baying at each other across a gulf which ... neither wishes and both fear to cross, but into which they may tumble and drag each other to their common ruin."<sup>135</sup>

Neither superpower may wish to cross the 'gulf' but nevertheless they may 'tumble' into it. Even allowing for Churchill's literary style, the language used here powerfully evokes a fear of war by mistake or miscalculation rather than by design.

A fear of nuclear war by design also, however, underpinned British detente policy after 1953. It can be argued that the strategic context provided by the 'New Look' of the Eisenhower administration provided as important a determinant of British policy as the opportunity provided by Stalin's death. The outlines of the new American strategic doctrine in which for the first time nuclear weapons were given a central place were taking shape in the latter months of 1953.<sup>136</sup>

135. RIIA Documents 1951 p.136.

136. See J.L. Gaddis, *op.cit.* p.146ff. The first full statement of the new strategy appeared in NSC-162/2 approved by the president in October 1953.

By the time Western leaders gathered at Bermuda in December 1953, administration officials were making "a concerted public effort to blur the distinction between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons that the previous administration had emphasized".<sup>137</sup> It was becoming clear that the United States government was now prepared to sanction the use of nuclear weapons in a wide variety of circumstances, but also was deliberately making it unclear precisely what provocations would produce a nuclear response. This posture served to reinforce British fears to the extent that it opened up the possibility of nuclear war either by design or by miscalculation. It was a species of what became known as 'brinkmanship' that could only increase the chances of nuclear war.

It was at Bermuda that Churchill and Eden came face to face with the implications of the new doctrine. According to Richard Barnet's account,

"Dulles told Eden that if the Chinese broke the armistice in Korea the United States would have to attack Chinese bases with its 'most effective' weapons. The foreign minister was horrified. Her Majesty's government would not support the use of atomic weapons."<sup>138</sup>

John Colville, sent by the prime minister to persuade the president to change the offending section in his UN speech relating to the use of atomic weapons, records Eisenhower's response:

"... whereas Winston considered the atom bomb to be something new and utterly terrible, he [Eisenhower] looked upon it as just the latest improvement in military weapons. There was no distinction between 'conventional' weapons and atomic weapons: all weapons in due course became 'conventional'."<sup>139</sup>

137. Ibid. p.149.

138. R.J. Barnet, op.cit. (1983) p.153.

139. J. Colville, op.cit. (1976) p.241.

For the British leaders, these chilling exchanges at Bermuda must have conditioned their responses to the dangers posed by international developments in 1954. With both superpowers having successfully tested hydrogen bombs, the consequences of blurring the distinction between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons were now infinitely more serious. Hence, it can be argued that strategic imperatives spurred British diplomatic efforts to contain and resolve East-West conflicts, particularly in Indo-China.

It is significant that prior to 1954 Anthony Eden had been supportive of the American position on Indo-China. In April 1954, however, he effectively resisted Dulles' efforts to construct an anti-communist coalition in South East Asia which would if necessary fight to hold the line against further communist encroachment. According to David Carlton, the choice for Eden was a difficult one:

"... should he play the noble internationalist and give first priority to the interests of the West as a whole or should he connive at a significant but final weakening of the anti-communist forces in the world because his own country would be infinitely more vulnerable in a world war than the United States and thus had narrow and short term interests that did not coincide with the overall cause of the West?"<sup>140</sup>

Whether or not the choice was quite as dramatic or the long term consequences for the West as significant as Carlton indicates, Eden certainly took up a position on this crucial issue that minimized the risks of a nuclear war.

It is important to remember, however, that by the Spring of 1954 domestic political pressures, reflecting an upsurge in popular fears of nuclear war triggered by revelations about hydrogen bomb tests, were also pushing the

140. D. Carlton, op.cit. p.339.

government in the same direction.<sup>141</sup> Eden's opposition to the internationalisation of the war in Indo-China before the Geneva Conference had even begun was strongly supported by press comment, public and parliamentary opinion.<sup>142</sup> The Labour resolution in the House calling for a summit to arrange a suspension of nuclear tests attracted such bipartisan support that it secured a promise from the prime minister to seek a summit in the near future.<sup>143</sup> In this context, a policy of promoting detente could both help to reduce the risks of nuclear war and serve as a response to domestic fears of same.<sup>144</sup>

### Detente, trade and economic interests

If a detente policy reflected to a greater or lesser extent fears of nuclear war and domestic political pressures, it also served broader political, economic and politico-economic interests. A commercial interest in maintaining and if possible expanding contacts across the Iron Curtain must be set in the context of Britain's economic plight after World War Two. By 1947, the combination of a harsh Winter which generated a fuel crisis, and an escalation in American prices which created a dollar crisis, had finally reduced the British economy to a parlous condition. In December 1947, Sir Henry Tizard, the chief scientific adviser to the Attlee government,

141. An indication of the extent and the focus of popular fears is provided by the 1954 Reith Lectures. Sir Oliver Franks, who had been ambassador in Washington between 1948 and 1952, addressed "the widespread fear that the United States will get us and others into a third world war". Franks was careful to argue that this fear was not 'completely baseless' but sought to allay popular concern by distinguishing between the 'bellicose rhetoric' and the 'moderate actions' of the United States government. See Britain and the Tide of World Affairs (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1955) p.30.

142. See RIIA Survey 1954 p.29.

143. R.A. Divine, Blowing in the Wind: The Nuclear Test Ban Debate 1954-60 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978) p.21.

144. Adam Ulam links both factors to the predisposition to seek summit meetings. "The British believed in conferences as a means of allaying international tension and of relieving the British public, increasingly fearful of American rashness and impatience." See op.cit. p.513.

wrote bleakly and bluntly: "we are a bankrupt nation".<sup>145</sup> There was a dire need for trade both to provide and to pay for the food and raw materials that were crucial to economic reconstruction and indeed survival.

As early as 1946, Bevin, against Foreign Office advice, made it clear that he "was perfectly ready to deal with (East European) communists, if only to keep open the door for British trade and other contacts".<sup>146</sup> At the beginning of 1947, he told the Cabinet that one of the reasons for concluding peace treaties with Yugoslavia and Romania was to reopen trade links with them.<sup>147</sup> As much as the Marshall Plan was welcomed and Marshall Aid critically needed, the British government, unlike the United States, had a commercial interest in seeing the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe included in whatever institutional arrangements were made in response to Marshall. Not only could these countries provide materials like timber (for building houses) and foodstuffs like grain and barley, but these much needed products could be purchased without using scarce dollars.<sup>148</sup>

By 1948, even the Foreign Office was convinced of the need for trade with Soviet bloc countries. At the end of that year, a one year trade agreement with Yugoslavia was followed by negotiations to secure a long term agreement. This in turn was followed by a broadly successful attempt to coordinate policy with the Americans to support Tito's efforts to maintain Yugoslavia's independence from Moscow.<sup>149</sup> A similar attempt to coordinate a response to the Chinese Revolution, on the other hand, ultimately failed. In a South East Asian context, however, long-standing business and commercial interests provided a powerful incentive to seek a modus vivendi

145. Quoted in E. Barker, op.cit. p.69.

146. Ibid. p.48.

147. CAB 128/9 CM(47)1, 2.1.47.

148. See E. Barker, op.cit. pp.84-90, 181-182. Even after the formation of Comecon in 1949, Bevin remained optimistic about future trade relations with the communist bloc.

149. In December 1949, the government signed a five year trade agreement with Yugoslavia.

with Mao despite American objections. As Bevin noted, "... it would be regrettable to cut ourselves off from a potentially vast market for British goods".<sup>150</sup> The government also had to consider the vulnerability of Hong Kong and British interests in Singapore and Malaya.<sup>151</sup>

After 1950, British opportunities for commercial relations with the Soviet bloc including China were constrained by the multilateral controls on trade policed by the Cocom machinery.<sup>152</sup> The perceived need to trade with the bloc continued nevertheless, though this requirement could now be exploited by the Soviet Union. In April 1952, a British delegation led by Lord Boyd-Orr attended a trade conference in Moscow (without an official invitation) and returned with some lucrative commercial contracts. Thereafter, the Soviet government tended to propose contracts for the supply of goods which were on the embargoed list. In August and September 1953, for example, substantial orders for British-made ships were placed but export licences were refused.<sup>153</sup>

Cocom lists notwithstanding, however, estimates provided for Hearings on East-West trade before a committee of the House of Representatives indicate that in 1953, Britain was the leading importer of goods from the European Soviet bloc and the fourth highest exporter after Finland, Hong Kong and

150. CAB 129/32 C.P. (49) 39, 4.3.49. For the argument that potential trade was the single most important factor in the decision to recognize Mao's government, see D.C. Wolf, "To secure a convenience: Britain recognizes China-1950", Journal of Contemporary History, 18, 1983, pp.299-326.

151. See E. Barker, *op.cit.* pp. 162-174.

152. After the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, the signatories together with the Japanese government set up the Consultative Group in Paris to oversee trade with the Soviet bloc. The day to day coordination of economic activity devolved upon the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls known as Cocom which dealt with trade with the East European Soviet bloc. A separate committee known as Chincom was established for China. These committees established a list of strategic goods which could not be exported. They also kept the export of non-strategic items under close scrutiny.

153. For further details, see F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, *op.cit.* pp. 224-226.



West Germany.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, the continuing loss of potential trade was so extensive that at the regular NATO talks on the embargo list in August 1954, British representatives pressed strongly for the list to be scaled down. As a result, the list was significantly reduced.

The visit of Khrushchev and Bulganin in 1956 was linked explicitly to British commercial interests. In his broadcast of April 27th, the prime minister Anthony Eden stressed the prospects of increased trade and commercial opportunities that would result from closer relations with the Soviet Union. "We will not be parted from our friends, nor will we abandon our vital interests, but we will seek agreements with all."<sup>155</sup> Khrushchev indeed offered Soviet purchases of British goods worth between £800 and £1000 million over the next five years, only one third of which was affected by the strategic controls.<sup>156</sup>

154. The 1953 figures in fact represented a decline by some forty six per cent on previous trade with the bloc, but the extent of British trade was clearly causing some disquiet in the United States. "The United Kingdom has been the subject of a great deal of discussion concerning their trade with the Soviet bloc." Hearings on East-West Trade, 83rd Congress, February 16th 1954, p.16. House Foreign Affairs Committee, Sub-Committee on Foreign Economic Policy.

155. Quoted in Wilson, op.cit. p.384. Though Wilson, consistent with his sceptical view of the benefits of detente, suggests that Eden's emphasis on potential commercial opportunities was simply a post hoc justification for summitry rather than the expression of a genuine and a persistent interest in trade.

156. F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, op.cit. p.226.

If there was a positive British commercial interest in keeping open contacts across the Iron Curtain, the costs of cold war and containment in broader economic terms were equally evident to successive British governments. As early as February 1946, Attlee set before the Cabinet in a very stark presentation the classic 'guns versus butter' dilemma of choosing between the conflicting demands of defending existing commitments and responsibilities, and funding economic recovery.<sup>157</sup> By 1950, with economic recovery well under way, defence spending following the outbreak of the Korean War escalated dramatically and fundamentally threatened domestic priorities. As Barker puts it,

"the British ... were compelled at the very moment of economic recovery and independence to take on new defence burdens which put recovery in danger and made them once again dependent on American money."<sup>158</sup>

Important though the commercial arguments for open contacts and thus the promotion of detente undoubtedly were, the quantity of trade with the Soviet bloc both actual and potential during these years suggests that they were not critical.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, in terms of establishing a British conception of detente, the political dimensions of economic relations with the Soviet bloc appear to have been much more significant.

The most important dimension in this context was the idea that trade and other contacts across the Iron Curtain could act as a political solvent to improve relations between the two blocs and reduce the possibility of war. As those relations worsened after the Berlin blockade and the defence chiefs in particular were pressing for a tougher response to the Soviet threat, the determination of Bevin and the Foreign Office to maintain diplomatic contacts with the Soviet bloc seemed to go beyond the commercial requirements of trade. Elisabeth Barker argues that certainly "Bevin himself did not only want to

157. CAB 129/7 CP(46) 65, 15.2.46.

158. E. Barker, op.cit. p.189. The government committed an extra £3,600 million to defence spending over the next three years.

159. Northedge and Wells develop the historical argument that after 1945 "Anglo-Soviet economic relations slumped back to the marginal level for both countries at which they had always been", despite the mutual interest in increasing them. Op.cit. p.222. The House of Representatives estimates indicate that trade in 1953, for example, represented only 2.1 per cent of total UK trade and 1.1 per cent of total UK exports.

keep up trade with the Russians and East Europeans. He wanted, too, to keep open the door for a better understanding with the Soviet leaders".<sup>160</sup>

This theme can be traced more explicitly through the ideas of Churchill. His May 1953 speech called for an end to the cold war and the development of a new approach to East-West relations. As he began to spell out his conception of a new approach over the next year or so, it became apparent that open contacts occupied a central place in his thoughts. At the Bermuda conference in December 1953, he argued that "there should be as many commercial, social and cultural contacts as could be arranged" though "we must be united and resolute in our strength".<sup>161</sup> In February 1954, the prime minister voiced his belief in trade as the 'great Mediator'.

"The more the two great divisions in the world mingle in the healthier and fertile activities of commerce, the greater is the counterpoise to purely military calculations. Friendly infiltration can do nothing but good."<sup>162</sup>

The following month Churchill expounded his ideas in greater detail in a private letter to Eisenhower. Concerned to put before the president "some of the wider considerations that have influenced my thought", he made it clear that he was "anxious to promote an easement of relations with Soviet Russia". Using again the phrase 'friendly infiltration', he hinted at the possible seduction of the 'Russian masses' by the "consumer goods ... and modern popular amenities and diversions which play so large a part in British and American life". He wrote of his

"hopes of a broadening of Russian life and relaxation of international tension which may lead to the re-establishment of a peaceful foundation for the tormented and burdened world".

160. E. Barker, op.cit. p.185.

161. J. Colville, op.cit. (1981) p.107.

162. Quoted in G. Goodwin in M. Leifer (ed.), Constraints and Adjustments in British Foreign Policy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972) pp. 43-44.

He appealed to the president for a reduction of the Cocom list of embargoed goods, and rehearsed the economic arguments - the 'well known arguments' as he called them - for British trade with the Soviet bloc. What is significant though is how Churchill underplays the commercial arguments in this letter in favour of stressing the broader political benefits of trade and other contacts in terms of their contribution to an 'easement of relations'. He concludes the letter by stating that

"as the proportions of our trade with Russia must in any case be on a minor scale for many years, I cannot rate the commercial aspect so highly as I do those I have mentioned above."<sup>163</sup>

Putting these ideas together, what emerges clearly is a conception of trade and other contacts as a means of easing political differences; and, more tentatively, capitalist infiltration through consumerism as a method of promoting change within Soviet society thereby ameliorating the Soviet threat, certainly as an alternative strategy less likely to provoke a military confrontation than political warfare.<sup>164</sup> It might be objected that

163. Letter from Churchill to Eisenhower dated March 24 1954. DDE Papers, Box 6, DDE Diary, March 1954 (1), Eisenhower Papers 1953-61.
164. Interestingly, a paper emanating probably from the State Department two months after Churchill's letter was sent dealt with 'Specific Problems with the UK'. In a section titled 'Estimate of Soviet Danger', it suggested that "it seems to be the view of the British Government that the danger from Russia is primarily a nationalist danger reminiscent of the days of the Czar; that it will soon run its course and that the best way to assure this is to develop good relations and to increase trade ... The British leaders do not accept the view that communism, in control of Russia, seeks world domination or that the danger cannot be met by the means which have conventionally applied against national threats". While understating perhaps British perceptions of the Soviet threat, this paper indicates that the British notion of open contacts as political solvent was understood in Washington, but rejected on the grounds that it rested on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the Soviet threat. Unattributed Paper dated 16th May 1954, White House memoranda Series, Box 8, General Foreign Policy Matters (2), J.F. Dulles Papers 1953-59.

economic relations in fact "made little or no contribution in themselves to creating a better political climate" either between Britain and the Soviet Union or between the blocs.<sup>165</sup> From the perspective of trying to explain British policy, all that needs to be established here is the belief that such a linkage existed.

The other significant political dimension of economic activity relevant to an explanation of British attitudes towards detente is the idea that trade and other contacts with the Soviet bloc constituted an important symbol of political independence from the United States. This idea has to be set within the context of a persistent governmental sensitivity to Britain's postwar economic plight and the consequent dependence upon the United States.<sup>166</sup> The suspicion that the United States was prepared to use 'dollar diplomacy' to exploit British dependence can be traced back at least to the tough negotiations which preceded and the conditions attached to the granting of a \$3.75 billion American loan following the sudden suspension of Lend-Lease in August 1945.<sup>167</sup> It was a major priority of the Attlee government to become economically independent of the United States as quickly as possible.<sup>168</sup>

165. F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, op.cit. p.210.

166. This sensitivity is discussed in detail in L.D. Epstein, Britain - Uneasy Ally (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1954) chapter 3.

167. It had become evident during the Second World War that the US government and Secretary of State Cordell Hull in particular saw the British Empire with its system of 'imperial preferences' within a 'sterling bloc' as a major impediment to the establishment after the war of a liberal world economic order. By restricting British dollar balances, Lend-Lease was used as an instrument for undermining the imperial system. Following the sudden suspension of Lend-Lease, the harsh conditions attached to the 1945 loan including the return to full convertibility of the pound by 1947, reinforced the suspicion in London that the object of 'dollar diplomacy' was the perpetuation of British dependence and, longer term, the destruction of the British Empire. R.J. Barnet, op.cit. (1983) pp. 25, 101-104; see also D.P. Calleo and B.M. Rowland, America and the World Political Economy (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1973); Epstein, op.cit. chapter 4.

168. See E. Barker, op.cit. pp.95-98.

Against this background, the overt politicisation of the Cocom and Chincom controls by the 1951 Battle Act, at a time when Britain still needed all the trade it could get, could not but reinforce British suspicions and sensitivities.<sup>169</sup> Thereafter, there was a tendency to see those controls as a political instrument through which the US government could dictate what and with whom Britain could trade. By 1953, significantly, Labour spokesmen like former President of the Board of Trade Harold Wilson, and indeed the wider Labour movement represented by the TUC, were putting pressure on the Churchill government to take action at least to secure a reduction of the embargoed list.<sup>170</sup>

### Detente, status and influence

The domestic and international politics of economic activity across the Iron Curtain merge perhaps inevitably into broader international political factors which underpinned a British interest in promoting detente. The constraints which faced successive British governments after 1945 have already been identified, but Barker provides a useful summary of the essential foreign policy problem at this point.

"Britain's power to influence world events or even to pursue an independent foreign policy ... was strictly limited. Skilful manoeuvring was required if the British were to retain some freedom of choice and the capacity to take initiatives."<sup>171</sup>

British attitudes and policy towards detente and East-West relations more generally can be seen as part of a sustained attempt to adapt to the realities of declining material power so as to remain an independent actor with global interests. In power terms, this could only be done by manipulating the symbols of power, by, as it were, substituting 'influence' for 'power'.<sup>172</sup> In structural terms, the requirement was to increase the scope for action and to exert leverage within an hegemonial system.

169. The Mutual Defence Assistance Control Act was approved in October 1951 and came into effect in January 1952. It made observance of the embargo a condition of the receipt of American military and financial assistance.

170. See F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, *op.cit.* pp.224-225.

171. E. Barker, *op.cit.* p.69.

172. The phrase is borrowed from J.E. Spence, "British foreign policy: tradition and change" in R.L. Borthwick and J.E. Spence (eds.), British Politics in Perspective (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1984) p.205.

Even before the end of World War Two, as Ritchie Ovendale has recently commented, "Britain's position at the conference tables of world diplomacy ... obscured the reality of Britain's diminished power".<sup>173</sup> By 1947, it was clear that the 'Big Three' concept was dead. Thereafter, the political task was to maintain as equal a relationship as possible with the remaining 'superpowers' despite the increasingly evident material disparities. In many ways, as illustrated at several points in this study already, the Anglo-American relationship proved to be more problematic than the relationship with the Soviet Union. No Western government worked harder than the Attlee government, spearheaded by Ernest Bevin, to create an hegemonial system with American leadership of an 'Atlantic community'. But the relationship with Washington was also suffused with elements of doubt, suspicion, fear and even jealousy.<sup>174</sup>

For all the anti-colonial rhetoric that poured out of Washington during these years, the suspicion persisted that the Americans wanted to undermine if not destroy the British Empire simply in order to take over those interests themselves, particularly in the Middle East and Asia. From a British perspective, however, the Empire was crucial initially to survival and, later, the Empire-Commonwealth was conceived as an important vehicle for the maintenance of Britain's role as a global power.<sup>175</sup>

The significance here of this American threat to British interests is that it sharpened an awareness of differences of interest and the need to defend those interests. This in turn meant that British governments could not automatically follow a United States definition of the acceptable parameters of action with regard to the Soviet bloc. Anglo-American differences of interest with reference to the recognition of China after the Revolution is

173. R. Ovendale (ed.), The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments 1945-51 (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1984) p.3.

174. As the 1954 Department of State memorandum referred to earlier puts it, the British government had "doubts as to our capacity for considered leadership and doubts as to our true purposes in the Far East". See footnote 110.

175. For a useful summary of the development of this conception, see D.K. Fieldhouse, "The Labour governments and the Empire-Commonwealth 1945-51" in R. Ovendale (ed.), op.cit. chap.5.

a good example. Not only did Britain have extensive economic interests in China, Hong Kong and elsewhere in South East Asia, but the Attlee government had to take account of Commonwealth views, in particular India whose leader Nehru strongly favoured recognition. As Geoffrey Goodwin puts it,

"Labour leaders were particularly attentive to the views of these Asian members of the Commonwealth ... and were apt to regard relations with India as symbolizing hopes placed in the Commonwealth."<sup>176</sup>

Britain had special interests in South East Asia not shared by the United States, and British recognition of China was a reflection of this.

In more general terms, a policy of promoting detente served a range of international political interests which need only to be outlined here because they will be discussed in detail in later chapters. For a state interested in manipulating the symbols of power, it promised to yield both status and prestige: it provided an opportunity for British governments to deploy the types of influence that Britain still possessed: it enabled British leaders to display on a 'global stage' qualities of independence, leadership and statesmanship. It was a policy that enabled British governments to exert some leverage on the United States and it offered a way of ameliorating the Soviet threat over time. Finally, it was a policy which fitted in well with the traditional orientation of British foreign policy.

176. G. Goodwin in M. Leifer (ed.), *op.cit.* p.42.



The last chapter considered a British role in the detente process between 1953 and 1956. The visit of Bulganin and Khrushchev was taken to mark the end of a discrete period of active British concern with the state of East-West relations. The historical narrative was interrupted at that point and the opportunity taken to comment on British attitudes to detente set in the context of broader attitudes to negotiations and 'summitry', and to identify a set of factors that appeared to underpin British policy. This chapter seeks to trace a continuity of attitudes and policy towards detente and picks up the narrative at the beginning of the Macmillan period. The analytical and explanatory framework developed in the last chapter is then applied to a survey of British detente policy from 1957 to 1963.

Macmillan's memoirs suggest that the new prime minister came into office in January 1957 with a commitment to play an active role in the detente process. Though he felt compelled to postpone an arranged visit to Moscow because of Soviet threats at the time of Suez and the Soviet intervention in Hungary, he nevertheless records his hopes that he

"might at some time attempt an improvement in the relations between the Eastern and Western blocs [though] it was clear that for such an adventure the time was not now propitious."<sup>1</sup>

An indication of where a detente policy fitted into Macmillan's priorities during the first months of his premiership emerges from an extended comment he makes on the events of May 1957 which included, significantly, the first successful British hydrogen bomb test.

"I now made up my mind that ... I must try, when the moment seemed ripe, to make an effort, however quixotic it might appear, to make at least some indent upon the Iron Curtain, partly in the hope of some genuine detente and partly to satisfy public opinion at home. Such an adventure could not be

1. H. Macmillan, Riding the Storm 1956-59 (London: Macmillan, 1971) p.289. An agreement had been reached between Bulganin and Eden the previous July that the latter would pay a return visit to Moscow in May 1957.

embarked upon hurriedly without preparation. Britain herself had to be sure of her nuclear capacity with her weapons tested and efficient. We must wait to see what would emerge in Russia. We must above all confirm our close alliance with the United States which had been partially but not completely reconstructed at Bermuda. We must if possible command, if not the approval, at least the sympathy of our European allies."<sup>2</sup>

These comments are worth quoting in full because they usefully summarise the foreign and defence priorities of the prime minister until the latter part of 1957. Conciliatory initiatives in the sphere of East-West relations were effectively ruled out for the time being by the need to re-establish good relations with NATO allies and the United States in particular, and to establish a credible nuclear deterrence strategy in the context of a new defence policy. These priorities in turn were set primarily by the Suez débacle which had thrown British politics and the NATO alliance into disarray. Such was the domestic crisis that Eden had resigned, ostensibly on grounds of ill-health, to be replaced by Macmillan who told the Queen on his appointment that he "could not answer for the new Government lasting more than six weeks".<sup>3</sup> Such was the state of the alliance that the principal objective of the NATO Council meeting in December 1956 was "to re-establish western solidarity and to ensure that the crisis in the Atlantic alliance brought about by the Anglo-French intervention in Egypt was not repeated".<sup>4</sup>

The constraints upon Macmillan's freedom of manoeuvre at this time can be illustrated by reference to the British contribution to the United Nations disarmament sub-committee negotiations and the prime minister's responses to a personal correspondence initiated by Bulganin. These issues were inter-related to the extent that the UN negotiations were a recurrent topic in the Bulganin-Macmillan correspondence.

2. Ibid. pp. 297-298.

3. Ibid. p.185.

4. The Times, 7th December 1956, quoted in RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.205.

### The United Nations disarmament negotiations

The UN disarmament sub-committee reconvened in London in March 1957 and the Soviet delegate Valerian Zorin took the initiative by tabling two sets of proposals; one for comprehensive and the other for partial measures of disarmament. The comprehensive plan envisaged a major reduction of armed forces and conventional weapons by stages which would be linked to a progressive reduction and final elimination of nuclear weapons. It also included a plan to establish a zone of limitation and inspection of armaments in Central Europe. The most significant section of the partial plan called for a self-policing ban on nuclear tests to be negotiated separately from other disarmament measures.<sup>5</sup>

The Western reaction to these proposals was contained in a set of British proposals which were put to the committee on May 6th. These called for nuclear tests to be registered in advance with the United Nations and for "limited international observation of such tests" to be accepted. They also suggested that a committee of technical experts should be set up to "consider possible methods of limiting nuclear test explosions and to investigate the requirements of effective supervision over an agreement to limit such explosions". Finally, it was proposed that a test ban should be preceded by a 'cut-off' in production of fissile material for military purposes which in turn should be part of a general disarmament agreement.<sup>6</sup>

Though the proposal to set up a conference of experts was an important contribution and did eventually lead to technical discussions in Geneva in 1958,<sup>7</sup> the overall response to the Zorin proposals was disappointing, reflecting hesitancy and some division among the NATO members of the committee. From a British perspective, Macmillan told Bulganin very clearly in his letter of June 14th that he was not convinced that a cessation agreement could be self-policing or be disassociated from other disarmament measures, all of which would need verification by an agreed system of control. Moreover, he argued, extensive measures of disarmament could not be

5. RIIA Survey 1956-58 pp. 315-316.

6. Ibid. pp. 317-318.

7. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

supported by the British government unless it could be "assured of parallel settlements in the political field", a reference to the German reunification issue.<sup>8</sup>

The proposals of May 6th and the apparent inflexibility of the British position on disarmament have to be seen in the context of the new defence policy which had been set out in the Defence White Paper published the previous month.<sup>9</sup> Disarmament remained among "the foremost objectives" of British policy but "pending international agreement, the only existing safeguard against major aggression is the power to threaten retaliation with nuclear weapons". While this necessitated a dependence upon American nuclear weapons, it was argued that Britain "must possess an appreciable element of nuclear deterrent power of her own". The combination of technological developments in the nuclear field which meant there could be no effective defence against nuclear attack and the limitations of economic resources were cited as reasons for a primary reliance in the future on a nuclear deterrence rather than a war-fighting strategy. It was announced that conventional forces would be substantially reduced thus restructuring the balance of the overall defence effort.<sup>10</sup>

Given that the development of a credible thermonuclear deterrent was now the priority in defence terms, the British government could not but stall in the disarmament negotiations.<sup>11</sup> In particular, it was necessary to head off the Soviet test ban proposal. As Macmillan himself comments, a test ban or even

8. RIIA Documents 1957 pp. 11-18.

9. Defence, Outline of Future Policy Cmnd. 124, April 1957.

10. RIIA Survey 1956-58 pp. 224-225.

11. The suspicion that the May 6th proposals were intended to be a delaying device is reinforced by Macmillan's panic reaction to the Stassen proposals at the beginning of June. The American delegate, apparently without authorisation from Washington and certainly without consulting the other Western delegates, tabled a memorandum which called for an early 'cut-off' in the production of fissile material for military purposes. The prime minister was horrified. "For us, this would be fatal. It would involve the abandonment of our nuclear ambitions." He immediately wrote an anguished letter to Eisenhower: Stassen was recalled and rebuked. See H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* pp. 300-306.

a postponement would have been "particularly serious from the British point of view, for our own tests were vital to the development of our own independent warheads".<sup>12</sup> Only days after the May 6th proposals were tabled, the first hydrogen bomb was successfully tested at Christmas Island. A series of tests followed which, Macmillan argues, "were absolutely essential if we were to become an effective nuclear power".<sup>13</sup>

#### The Macmillan-Bulganin correspondence

An extended correspondence between Macmillan and Bulganin was initiated by a long letter from the Soviet prime minister on April 20th.<sup>14</sup> Recalling the discussions he and Khrushchev had had with the Eden government during their visit to London twelve months before, Bulganin expressed the hope that Anglo-Soviet relations could again be improved by personal contacts. He reviewed the major areas of East-West discord, identifying disarmament as the most pressing problem. He reiterated the Zorin proposals stressing that a separate test ban agreement would at least be a gesture of goodwill that could facilitate agreement on broader areas of disarmament. Significantly, he also repeated the proposal for a demilitarized zone in Central Europe, a plan which he linked explicitly to Eden's proposals to the 1955 Geneva summit.<sup>15</sup>

Macmillan regarded this letter as the "beginning of a propaganda offensive which was subtle and seductive".<sup>16</sup> But, to the extent that he was already committed to playing an active role in the detente process, it must have provided a tempting opportunity to respond positively, particular problems with the timing of the Soviet disarmament proposals notwithstanding. The demands of alliance solidarity, however, effectively constrained the prime minister. He delayed a response for two months while he consulted with the allies. Copies of Bulganin's letter were sent to Eisenhower, Adenauer and the French prime minister Mollet for comment. In a covering letter to Adenauer whom he was about to visit in Bonn, Macmillan made it clear that he

12. Ibid. p.267.

13. Ibid. p.299.

14. The exchange of letters continued until Bulganin resigned in March 1958. Thereafter Macmillan communicated with Khrushchev.

15. See RIIA Documents 1957 pp. 2-11. For the Eden proposals, see Chapter Three, pages 76 - 77.

16. H. Macmillan, op.cit. p.296.

was not sure how to respond to Bulganin, but, he assured the chancellor, he would "not act on it without the closest consultation with my friends". The matter was discussed during the Bonn visit at the beginning of May, but Macmillan's priority on that trip was to secure West German agreement to the new British defence policy, in particular to the proposed cuts in BOAR.<sup>17</sup>

The still delicate state of Anglo-American relations made it very important that Macmillan's reply to Bulganin should not be out of line with American thinking. The Bermuda conference in March had been a success: Macmillan had secured an American commitment to the continued necessity for nuclear testing and an agreement to station Thor missiles in Britain.<sup>18</sup> But a mishandled response to Bulganin could easily have jeopardised the progress made towards the restoration of close relations. On May 15th, Macmillan received some 'helpful' suggestions from Washington about how a response might be worded and thereafter the prime minister set about drafting a reply.

Macmillan's response of June 14th, as indicated above, rejected the arguments for a separately negotiated test ban agreement and asked Bulganin to look again at the May 6th proposals as a way of proceeding by stages, with advance registration of tests as a first step. He was blunt on the need for a system of controls. "History shows that paper agreements prohibiting the use of specific weapons are not enough."<sup>19</sup> On the proposed demilitarized zone, the prime minister was dismissive, firmly resisting the temptation to take up the offered link to the Eden scheme.

17. Ibid. p.291ff.

18. Thor missiles were regarded as a useful short-term strategic acquisition and an important political symbol. As Macmillan puts it, they "would give us a rocket deterrent long before we could hope to produce one ourselves (and they would serve as) an outward proof of our restored relations". Ibid. pp. 245-246.

19. RIIA Documents 1957 p.13. Though, ironically, on the day that Macmillan's letter was sent, Zorin tabled a proposal for a moratorium on tests which accepted the principle at least of control. RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.318.

"I would recall that [the Eden] proposals were put forward as part of a comprehensive settlement which in accordance with the directive approved by the Heads of Government at the Summit Conference was intended to provide concurrently for the reunification of Germany in freedom and for the establishment of a security system to meet the legitimate defence requirements of the Soviet Union and the other European states."

Just in case Bulganin had not got the message, he continued,

"I must repeat ... that all Western proposals for European security are contingent on a reunified Germany with a freely elected all-German government free to choose its own foreign policy."<sup>20</sup>

Adenauer himself could not have made the point more forcefully.

Macmillan's later comments on this letter are nevertheless revealing:

"... in spite of the strong position which I felt bound to take, I tried to introduce a friendly note which might in due course lead to the detente I had already in mind."<sup>21</sup>

Whether or not this tone was successfully conveyed to Bulganin in this or a subsequent letter in September, it was not until the latter part of 1957 that Macmillan had the opportunity to play a more significant role in the detente process. The Geneva summit of 1955 was never far from his thoughts and in September, he began "to consider means by which a new effort could be made" towards another summit though he was under no illusions that progress would be speedy. "Clearly more preparations both personal and diplomatic would be required, and patience as well as a bold initiative would be necessary."<sup>22</sup>

20. RIIA Documents 1957 pp. 14-15.

21. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* p.305.

22. *Ibid.* p.312.

It must be said that the prospects of an improvement in East-West relations looked distinctly unpromising in September 1957. The disarmament negotiations had dragged on through the Summer in desultory fashion to be adjourned sine die on September 6th in a welter of mutual recrimination. Other exchanges on the Middle East and Germany had become similarly deadlocked.<sup>23</sup> In October, the launching of the Soviet Sputnik satellite seemed likely only to defer the possibility of serious East-West negotiations, to the extent that it fundamentally questioned the adequacy of NATO strategy and defences. Nevertheless, deadlock itself provided some sort of context for a new start even if the current climate was not good.

#### Towards an East-West summit

From a British perspective, the constraints which had frustrated Macmillan's detente aspirations were now beginning to look less pressing. Relations with NATO allies had improved enormously over the twelve months that had elapsed since the Suez crisis. A series of bilateral visits and multilateral statements of intent such as the Berlin declaration at the end of July which reconfirmed allied policy on German reunification, had done much to re-establish NATO solidarity.<sup>24</sup> Most significantly, the rupture in Anglo-American relations which followed Suez was completely healed during Macmillan's visit to Washington in October.

The "Declaration of Common Purpose" agreed during this visit served to restore the basis of a 'special' Anglo-American relationship in political and military terms as it provided the principles which, it was thought, would restore the effectiveness of NATO in the face of the Sputnik challenge.<sup>25</sup> What undoubtedly pleased the prime minister most was Eisenhower's agreement to request Congress to amend the MacMahon Act in order to allow the exchange of nuclear information between Washington and London.<sup>26</sup> Macmillan regarded this concession combined with the Thor agreement as effectively guaranteeing Britain's immediate future as a credible nuclear power. The agreed plan for

23. See RIIA Survey 1956-58 pp. 312-321.

24. Ibid. p.321.

25. For the text of the Declaration, see H. Macmillan, op.cit. Appendix 3.

26. The Atomic Energy Act was amended in July 1958 and an Atomic Bilateral Agreement signed the following month.



NATO was to extend the Thor agreement to other European NATO countries, thus plugging the apparent 'missile gap' at the level of intermediate range missiles. The NATO Secretary-General was persuaded to turn the forthcoming NATO Council into a heads of government meeting to facilitate general agreement to this plan.

The Washington meeting appears to have been crucial to Macmillan's perception of his freedom of manoeuvre. If the other NATO leaders could be persuaded to agree to the nuclear plan, the prime minister now felt sufficiently confident of the relationship with the United States, and of Britain's nuclear status, to be able to play a more active role in the detente process. He noted in his diary on November 11th:

"If we could get ourselves [NATO] into a better posture, there might be another meeting with the Russians ... I believe I could get the idea into the President's head that it should happen while we are both in command."<sup>27</sup>

At the December NATO Council meeting in Paris, Macmillan took the lead in proposing what would later be called a 'dual track' approach. He suggested that the meeting should consider two separate agendas, one military and one political. The object was to facilitate agreement on two issues: the stationing of American IRBMs in different European member countries, to be balanced by some political gesture to the Soviet Union. Though the prime minister suggests that "everything went through satisfactorily", the 'military' meetings could only deliver an agreement in principle to establish missile sites in Europe.<sup>28</sup> Some members refused to have nuclear weapons on their soil, others prevaricated and in the end only Turkey joined Britain in firmly committing itself to the installation of missile bases.<sup>29</sup>

The 'political' meetings, on the other hand, were much more satisfactory. A proposal to offer the Soviet Union a conference of foreign ministers surfaced at the NATO foreign ministers meeting and received the support of the French

27. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* p.330.

28. *Ibid.* p.337.

29. See RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.505; C. Bell, Negotiation from Strength (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962) p.189.

and the Canadians. The Americans did not like this proposal but, before it was put to the heads of government meeting later the same day, Macmillan himself intervened.

"I talked it over with Dulles behind the scenes and he behaved very reasonably. I told him that I thought this was necessary if we were to get acceptance of nuclear weapons by the NATO alliance."<sup>30</sup>

The final communiqué included the proposal: NATO "would welcome a meeting at foreign ministers' level to resolve the deadlock".<sup>31</sup>

The prime minister was pleased with the results of the Paris meeting, even though the military agreements were less binding than he might have hoped: "... beneath the somewhat uninspiring terms of the communiqué there was a real sense of renewed purpose and practical approach. I felt therefore satisfied."<sup>32</sup> Paris had provided sufficient evidence of alliance solidarity to provide a basis for further conciliatory action. Macmillan's next move was not long coming.

In a party political broadcast on January 4th 1958, he discussed at length the 'problems of peace'. Still pursuing the 'dual track' theme, he suggested that there were "two ways to preserve the peace" which were "not opposed but parallel indeed complementary". The first way was to maintain strong alliances but the second, he stressed in the broadcast, was "the way of negotiation, of conciliation". He reviewed Britain's recent history of active diplomacy on East-West issues up to the Paris meeting the previous month, all of which demonstrated that "we were ready and anxious to make a new effort to break the deadlock". The prime minister was prepared to be flexible.

30. Diary 17th December 1957, H. Macmillan, op.cit. p.337.

31. RIIA Documents 1957 p.408.

32. H. Macmillan, op.cit. pp.338-339.

"For my part, I don't mind whether we make it through the United Nations or at some smaller meeting ... the object would be to clear away the rubble of old controversies and disagreements and then perhaps to get the path ready for a meeting of heads of governments."<sup>33</sup>

This broadcast illustrated just how flexible Macmillan was prepared to be at the beginning of 1958 in order to get East-West talks going. He suggested that the process could be initiated by the signing of a 'solemn pact of non-aggression'. This specific proposal, the prime minister notes somewhat disingenuously in his memoirs, "was soon to cause something of a storm in Washington although it seemed to me harmless enough".<sup>34</sup> Further indications of a determination to push along the detente process emerged thereafter as the prime minister again faced the problem of how to respond to correspondence from Bulganin. This problem was complex logistically as well as tactically as Macmillan was on a Commonwealth tour between January 7th and February 14th.

Bulganin had written on December 11th proposing inter alia a moratorium on nuclear tests and a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe.<sup>35</sup> In another letter on January 8th he formally proposed a summit meeting to be held within the next two or three months to discuss a whole range of issues.<sup>36</sup> Macmillan's

33. Ibid. pp. 461-464.

34. H. Macmillan, op.cit. p.463. This offer would have represented a major concession to the Soviet Union which had first proposed a non-aggression pact at Berlin in January 1954, repeated the offer at Geneva in 1955 and again, most recently, in Bulganin's letter of December 11th 1957. Such a pact would implicitly recognise the stability of the territorial status quo in Central Europe and the division of Germany. These were the reasons why Eden's 'disengagement' plan was not seriously discussed at the Geneva summit. See Chapter Three, page 77.

35. The nuclear-free zone proposal had first been put to the United Nations General Assembly by the Polish foreign minister in October 1957. Subsequent versions of the proposal were known as the Rapacki Plan.

36. For details, see RIIA Documents 1957 pp. 34-62.

reply to the December letter on January 16th was significant in that he did not reject out of hand the nuclear-free zone idea as he had Bulganin's related 'disengagement' proposal in June 1957. While the Rapacki Plan was 'open to certain obvious objections', he said that the British government was "studying it with a view to seeing whether there are elements in it which could be made the basis of some alternative proposal".<sup>37</sup>

According to Macmillan's account, he had already written to Eisenhower "suggesting that we should try to work out a joint policy on disengagement based on the demilitarized zone which had been proposed by Eden at the Summit meeting in 1955 and had now been elaborated by the Poles in the Rapacki Plan."

What is interesting here is that the prime minister now appeared to have dropped references to the Eden scheme as part of a German settlement. A disengagement agreement had to be linked to an appropriate inspection scheme, but he now pushed the argument that "as Eden had so often urged, an experiment in a small zone might be later extended to cover a much wider field".<sup>38</sup>

Macmillan was unable to get a positive response from the president on this proposal, but what did emerge from Washington 'rather unexpectedly' was a letter from Eisenhower to Bulganin on January 12th which accepted in principle the idea of a summit conference. The important condition attached to this apparent concession, however, was that a preliminary meeting of foreign ministers would first have to make real progress in resolving outstanding issues such as European security and German reunification. The problem was that Bulganin had already made it clear that he was opposed to a foreign ministers meeting and he repeated the point in a letter to the president on February 1st. Doubtless aware of Dulles' known views, the Soviet government believed that a preliminary foreign ministers meeting would simply create further obstacles to convening a heads of government summit.

37. Ibid. p.64.

38. H. Macmillan, op.cit. p.464.

This was the context in which Macmillan set about constructing a direct response to the summit proposal contained in Bulganin's January letter. In a first draft sent from Singapore, the prime minister tried, as it were, to 'leapfrog' over the deadlock caused by the proposed foreign ministers meeting by boldly expressing his readiness to go to Moscow to discuss 'only two points'; the agenda and the procedure for further discussions. In a covering note to Selwyn Lloyd, the foreign secretary, Macmillan tried to sell this dramatic initiative by suggesting that "somebody will try to break the log-jam one day. Why shouldn't we get the credit?"<sup>39</sup>

The Cabinet rejected the Moscow plan, however, on the grounds that it would be unacceptable both to allies and the Conservative Party, and it disappeared from future drafts that travelled between Whitehall and wherever the prime minister happened to be on his tour. Macmillan appears not to have been surprised at the reaction of his colleagues. Indeed he implies that the plan was to some extent at least a ploy with the comment that "it has persuaded (the Cabinet) that we must, in the next reply to Bulganin, be a little more positive about the 'Summit meeting'".<sup>40</sup> More significantly perhaps in terms of continuing constraints, there was considerable pressure from Washington to give 'a very negative reply' to Bulganin. As Macmillan notes in his diary on January 31st: "... They are almost threatening. With so much at stake (e.g. financial support, MacMahon Act etc.) it is difficult to know quite how to handle the situation."<sup>41</sup>

Clearly the prime minister was not in a position to flaunt the views of colleagues and allies, however frustrating this might have been, and the eventual reply to Bulganin despatched on February 8th was, in his own words, an attempt to "reach a fair balance between all the different opinions".<sup>42</sup> It included no dramatic offers of visits to Moscow or non-aggression pacts.<sup>43</sup>

39. See *ibid*, p.466.

40. *Ibid*. p.398.

41. *Ibid*. p.402.

42. *Ibid*. p.467.

43. The offer of a non-aggression pact in the new year broadcast had become something of an embarrassment to the prime minister, "... this idea had been blown up to unintended dimensions", and it was quietly dropped. See *ibid*. p.465.

All that Macmillan was able to do was to press the case again for a foreign ministers meeting though, unlike the Americans, he was not prepared to insist on this if the same result could be achieved by 'confidential diplomatic exchanges', for example. What he did stress was that preparatory work should start forthwith.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless this letter was followed by some movement on both sides which raised hopes that a summit might be possible in the near future. Eisenhower wrote a rather frosty letter to Bulganin on February 17th but dropped the specific demand for a preparatory meeting at foreign minister level. The French and the West Germans began to take a less obdurate line. At the beginning of March, the Soviet government finally agreed to a foreign ministers meeting to deal with procedural though not substantive issues.<sup>45</sup> On March 17th, Macmillan tried again to keep the momentum going by writing to Eisenhower suggesting to him the use of ambassadors to get preparatory work started.<sup>46</sup> This idea in turn was built into a short three power statement which was sent to Khrushchev on March 29th.<sup>47</sup>

Two days later, however, in the wake of Bulganin's resignation, the Soviet government announced that it was unilaterally suspending all nuclear tests with immediate effect. This decision signalled the beginning of the end of any momentum towards a summit: positions on both sides were already hardening again and 'negotiations' thereafter became locked into procedural wrangling at ambassador level.<sup>48</sup> Attention began to focus on the narrower issue of test ban negotiations as a more promising alternative to a summit. At the end of April, Eisenhower wrote to Khrushchev formally proposing a technical conference to work out the details of an inspection system for a future test ban. The following month Khrushchev accepted this proposal, and a conference of experts was quickly organised to begin work in Geneva on July 1st.<sup>49</sup>

44. RIIA Documents 1957 pp. 65-66.

45. See RIIA Survey 1956-58 pp.552-553.

46. H. Macmillan, op.cit. pp. 477-478.

47. RIIA Documents 1958 pp. 7-8.

48. See RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.553ff.

49. RIIA Documents 1958 pp. 79,82.

With more British tests planned in the Autumn and the MacMahon Act still not amended, this new turn in East-West relations was something of an embarrassment for the British government.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, it was not until the summit issue was revived in a different form following the crisis in the Middle East in July 1958, that Macmillan again had some opportunity to play a more positive role. However, if Britain was effectively precluded from contributing to the first tentative stages of what became the test ban negotiations, direct albeit limited military involvement in the Middle East crisis also made it difficult to play a conciliatory role in that context.

### The Middle East crisis

Against a complex background of continuing regional instability exacerbated by a realignment of political forces both within and without the area, a coup in Iraq on July 14th had been followed by a co-ordinated Anglo-American military intervention in the Lebanon and Jordan.<sup>51</sup> It was assumed by the Western powers that the United Arab Republic<sup>52</sup> and possibly the Soviet Union were behind the Baghdad coup and that it was necessary to stabilise the situation in the region by armed force. On July 19th, Khrushchev called for an immediate summit meeting of the Geneva powers together with India. He proposed a meeting in Geneva on July 22nd but made it clear that the Soviet government was prepared to meet anywhere to prevent the Middle East becoming an area of open East-West conflict.<sup>53</sup>

The responses to this proposal were mixed. Nehru accepted immediately as did De Gaulle, in principle at least. The American response consisted of an essentially polemical but non-committal letter from the president which did everything but turn down the proposal outright.<sup>54</sup> Macmillan's reply on the other hand was very different in tone and substance. While rejecting the premise that "the world is on the verge of a military catastrophe" he agreed that it "would be useful if Heads of Government could find an early

50. For the prime minister's account of the continuing problem with regard to a nuclear test ban, see diary entry of May 31st. H. Macmillan, op. cit. pp. 489-90.

51. See RIIA Survey 1956-58 pp. 361-377.

52. Formed by the union of Egypt and Syria in February 1958.

53. RIIA Documents 1958 pp. 300-304.

54. See *ibid.* p.305 fn. 1.

opportunity to meet and discuss the Middle East". Instead of a summit in Geneva, however, he proposed that a summit-level meeting of the Security Council be convened. Noting that Article 28(2) of the UN Charter provided for such meetings, he added, "I would certainly be ready to go to New York for such a meeting if you would also go".<sup>55</sup>

The Security Council variant on Khrushchev's proposal was immediately accepted by the Soviet prime minister and he suggested July 28th as a suitable date. Macmillan seized on this agreement and, doubtless hoping to carry a wavering Eisenhower along, suggested that permanent representatives in New York should start preparations for such a meeting.<sup>56</sup> Eisenhower's reply to Khrushchev was in fact less than enthusiastic, asking whether such a meeting was 'generally desired', but it was the French who actually broke ranks at this point and declared themselves against the proposed Security Council meeting and for Khrushchev's original proposal.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile another letter from Khrushchev on July 28th signalled a change of approach in Moscow. Accusing the United States and Britain of trying to delay the special meeting of the Security Council, the Soviet government reverted to its original summit proposal outside the aegis of the UN thus lining itself up with the French position.<sup>58</sup> While this charge could justifiably be levelled against the United States, it scarcely had substance in the case of Britain and Macmillan had reason to be piqued. His reply to Khrushchev, however, unlike Eisenhower's, was again conciliatory. He stood by the Security Council proposal but stressed that this did not rule out informal meetings in New York or "preclude the holding of the Summit meeting for which we have been working for some time".<sup>59</sup>

55. Ibid. pp.305-306. Macmillan's account suggests that the UN summit plan was Dulles' idea: if this was the case, the proposal was certainly buried beneath the polemics of Eisenhower's letter and not clearly put. See diary July 22nd, H. Macmillan, op.cit. p.526.

56. RIIA Documents 1958 pp. 307-310.

57. See RIIA Survey 1956-58 pp. 384-385. For Macmillan's attempts to keep the French in line, see H. Macmillan, op.cit. pp. 526-527.

58. RIIA Documents 1958 pp. 310-315.

59. Ibid. p.316.



The outcome of these developments was, nevertheless, to rule out the possibility of a summit meeting in the Summer of 1958, Macmillan's efforts notwithstanding. Following a visit to Peking at the end of July, Khrushchev's position changed yet again. In a letter on August 5th, he announced that the Soviet representative at the UN had been instructed to demand the calling of an emergency session of the General Assembly "to find ways to eliminate the war danger".<sup>60</sup> With the agreement of all parties, the session began on August 8th and continued until an Arab resolution was accepted on August 21st which gave the Secretary-General the authority to resolve the problems in Lebanon and Jordan. The 'good offices' of the UN gradually brought the Middle East crisis to an end and enabled the British and American governments to withdraw their forces from the area before the end of 1958.<sup>61</sup>

If Macmillan's experience of conciliatory diplomacy in the context of the Middle East had been frustrating, it was not ultimately a failure: the crisis had been contained without a summit conference. He could even reflect that the military intervention had helped to restore some stability to the area, for the time being at least. But, the crisis in the Middle East together with an equally unpredictable crisis in the Far East in the Autumn of 1958, appeared to strengthen the prime minister's determination to work towards a general summit and thereby a detente.<sup>62</sup> In August, he recalls that

"my mind ... began to turn once more to the prospects of some relaxation between the formidable groupings of powers now ranged round Russia and America and facing each other, in every part of the world, with growing antagonism."<sup>63</sup>

60. Ibid. p.320.

61. See RIIA Survey 1956-58 pp. 390-399.

62. Though it is important to note that in the 1958 replay of the 1954-1955 Formosa Strait crisis, the British government followed the Washington line very closely. There was some attempt to conciliate, notably by Selwyn Lloyd at the United Nations in September, but his role did not compare with the active and effective mediation of his predecessor. For a comparison of the two crises from a British perspective, see R. Boardman, Britain and the People's Republic of China 1949-74 (London: Macmillan, 1976) pp. 129-135.

63. H. Macmillan, op.cit. p.557.

In a letter to Sir Patrick Reilly, the ambassador in Moscow, on August 14th, Macmillan asked whether the time was right for a 'new initiative' given the deadlock on the summit issue. What the prime minister had in mind was a visit to Moscow, the idea he had first floated unsuccessfully at the beginning of the year. There was no question of Macmillan understating the significance of such a visit, it would be 'a startling and almost sensational event'.<sup>64</sup> The idea was not discussed in detail, however, until the beginning of 1959 by which time a new East-West crisis centred on the status of Berlin was confirming the prime minister's worst fears of the consequences of not securing a relaxation of tensions.

### The Berlin crisis

In the context of worsening relations between the two Germanies, matters were suddenly brought to a head by Khrushchev on November 10th. In a Moscow speech, he declared that the time had come "to renounce the remnants of the occupation regime in Berlin and thereby make it possible to create a normal situation in the capital of the German Democratic Republic".<sup>65</sup> By implication he was calling for the withdrawal of allied forces from West Berlin. The Soviet position was formalised in notes to the allied governments on November 27th. The proposal was that Berlin should become a 'demilitarized free city' perhaps under UN supervision. More ominously, the note also stated that appropriate agreements should be negotiated during the next six months after which the Soviet government would hand over all remaining rights and functions in Berlin to the GDR.

There was no immediate consensus among the NATO allies about how to react to these proposals. The American response was sufficiently flexible to cause consternation in Bonn and West Berlin where the Khrushchev 'manoeuvre' was widely regarded as a 'trap'. Macmillan thought the situation 'grave' but the ultimatum "gave us at least some interval for thought". He suspected that Khrushchev was "really working for a Summit Conference without the Chinese. In (which) case it would certainly not be bad politics for me to take the lead in suggesting it".<sup>66</sup> The considered British line, firm but conciliatory, emerged from Selwyn Lloyd's speech in the Commons

64. Ibid. pp. 557-559.

65. See RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.584ff.

66. H. Macmillan, op.cit. pp. 573-574.

debate on December 4th.

"The fact ... that we intend to uphold our rights in Berlin and find the Soviet proposals unacceptable does not mean that we should fail to seek discussion with the Soviet Union on the German position as a whole ... We are ready to discuss the matter with the Russians in all its aspects."<sup>67</sup>

The possibility of discussion receded, however, as the Soviet and West German governments in their different ways stepped up the pressure on the Western allies. On December 11th, the Soviet government warned that "any attempt to force a way into Berlin" would be regarded as an attack on the GDR which in turn would mean war.<sup>68</sup> (Though, as Macmillan notes, the 'stick' was moderated by the 'carrot' of an offer on December 13th of a summit conference to all the NATO powers who were then preparing for a NATO Council meeting.<sup>69</sup>) The presence of the West German foreign minister at a meeting of Western foreign ministers in Berlin which preceded the NATO Council undoubtedly helped the hard-line Bonn view to predominate. The Berlin decision, that the Soviet plan should be rejected without qualification, was adopted by the NATO Council meeting in Paris on December 16th.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, the year ended with the Western allies united in their rejection of the Soviet proposals but without an agreed policy for dealing with the Soviet ultimatum which would expire at the end of May. The Paris declaration, in Macmillan's view, had merely 'papered over the cracks', and he spent the Christmas period brooding over the limited options available to the allies.<sup>71</sup>

67. H.C. Deb. Vol. 506, coll. 1375-6.

68. See RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.586.

69. H. Macmillan, op.cit. pp. 576-577.

70. RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.524. For the communiqués issued after the Berlin and Paris meetings, see RIIA Documents 1958 pp. 372-374.

71. H. Macmillan, op.cit. pp. 577-581.

On January 10th 1959, the Soviet government responded to the Western rejection of the Berlin proposals. A note to the three Western powers called for a peace conference of twenty eight states to draw up and sign a peace treaty with 'Germany': a draft treaty was appended to be signed by the two German states either separately or in some form of confederation. Though no mention was made of the time limit, this note appeared to represent an attempt to increase the pressure on the Western allies to negotiate or, at least, to come up with counter-proposals. While the Soviet government was determined to resolve the status of Berlin which was clearly anomolous in the context of a 'two Germanies' policy, it would 'readily consider appropriate proposals on this question'.<sup>72</sup> Macmillan certainly felt that the Soviet government was "keeping the door open for negotiations".<sup>73</sup>

But the critical question was whether the allies would or could move away from the agreed but essentially negative position taken up in Paris. The prospects were not good. Differences of approach, relating both to a response to possible Soviet action in Berlin following the expiry of the May deadline, and to the broader issue of what if anything was negotiable, were sufficiently in evidence to prevent a four power working group from meeting in Washington to prepare a response to the January 10th communication.<sup>74</sup> At the beginning of February, Dulles flew to Europe to try to secure some measure of agreement between the allies. Nothing emerged from that visit in terms of counter-proposals, though agreement was reached on a four power foreign ministers conference and a proposal to that effect to discuss "the problem of Germany in all its aspects and implications" was sent to Moscow on February 16th.<sup>75</sup>

72. The timing of a visit to the United States by Soviet vice-premier Mikoyan between January 4th and 20th, the first postwar visit by a senior Soviet minister, was significant in this context. Though ostensibly on a trade mission, Mikoyan injected some flexibility into the Soviet position on Berlin by actively seeking counter-proposals as a prelude to a summit conference. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 12-15.

73. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* p.581.

74. For detail, see RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 16-17.

75. *Ibid.* pp. 17-18.

Macmillan's visit to Moscow

It was against this background of allied inflexibility in the face of Soviet pressure that Macmillan finally brought his planned Moscow trip to fruition. He would have preferred to go first to Washington to discuss the idea but felt that this course of action would be too dangerous because of 'French jealousy and German suspicion'.<sup>76</sup> Having informed Dulles and received a 'not unsympathetic' response, and having received Soviet agreement to the visit on February 2nd, he decided to go ahead with the initiative.<sup>77</sup> His objective, he made clear in letters to Paris and Bonn and in person to the House on February 5th, was not

"to conduct a negotiation on behalf of the West.

Nevertheless we hope that our conversations with the Soviet leaders will give them a better knowledge of our point of view and make it easier for us to understand what is in their minds."<sup>78</sup>

An insight into Macmillan's perception of the developing crisis is provided by his talks with Dulles in London.<sup>79</sup> The pressure of time injected by the

76. See diary 18th January, H. Macmillan, op.cit. p.582.

77. Ibid. p.583. Dulles' papers suggest that Macmillan understates the degree of American disquiet. During his visit to London, the secretary of state refused to allow Macmillan to claim in his statement to the House that the projected trip "had been discussed in advance with me and approved by me ... since, as he knew, I had considerable reservations about the wisdom of the trip at this time". The prime minister agreed only to say that the allies had been 'informed' in advance. Memorandum of Private Conversations with Prime Minister Macmillan, 5th February 1959, General Correspondence and Memoranda Series, Box 1, Memos of Conversation - General - L Through M (2), J.F. Dulles Papers 1952-59.

78. H. Macmillan, op.cit. p.589.

79. See the account of these discussions in the diary entry of 4th February. Ibid. pp. 587-589.

Soviet deadline did not necessitate inappropriate concessions on Berlin, but he clearly felt that it was crucial to move realistically beyond the negative Paris position.<sup>80</sup> The prime minister took the opportunity to float various ideas with Dulles, including a proposal to 'thin out' troops in Central Europe, as possible ways of introducing some flexibility into the Western position. Macmillan was surprised that Dulles was at least prepared to discuss such ideas but it was becoming clear that, given Dulles' health and domestic political changes following the mid-term Congressional elections, the United States government was in no position to overrule Franco-German objections and give a lead in framing counter-proposals on Berlin.<sup>81</sup>

If Dulles' European tour served to reinforce Macmillan's determination to go to Moscow, the prime minister was only too well aware that such a trip would be a 'perilous undertaking'. Despite repeated assurances that the visit would simply be a 'reconnaissance' or, in Sir Patrick Reilly's rather misty phrase, a 'voyage of discovery', such an overt bid for the leadership of the West met a predictably suspicious and sceptical allied reaction. Before the British party set off for Moscow on February 21st, it was clear that they had nothing to take with them in terms of anything approaching an agreed negotiating position. Moreover, Khrushchev had already responded angrily to the offer of a foreign ministers conference without any accompanying counter-proposals on the German question.<sup>82</sup>

The fear that Macmillan had everything to lose and nothing to gain from the visit appeared to be confirmed once the party had arrived in Moscow. After an initial exchange of pleasantries, Khrushchev again dismissed the idea of a foreign ministers conference on Germany, calling for a more broadly-based summit meeting both in terms of agenda and membership. To the Soviet leader's evident displeasure, Macmillan could go no further than to restate the allied position though he did stress that all problems were 'negotiable'.

80. "This does not mean that we should abandon our position in Berlin or desist from a 'tough' point of view. But it means that while we must present a firm and united front to the Russians, we must not deceive ourselves."

81. Macmillan was 'shocked' by Dulles' appearance; it was apparent that he was now a very sick man. On his return to Washington on February 9th, the secretary of state returned to hospital with a recurrence of cancer.

82. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 p.18.

When 'diplomatic toothache' prevented Khrushchev from accompanying the British party to Kiev as planned, the suspicion grew that Macmillan on his extremely delicate mission was being deliberately snubbed. By the time the tour reached Leningrad, however, the atmosphere had completely changed. Before leaving that city on March 1st, the prime minister was given an advance copy of the Soviet reply to the Western note of February 16th which was published the following day. While it repeated the call for a summit meeting it accepted the idea of an interim conference of foreign ministers restricted to the occupying powers.

Against the odds, therefore, Macmillan was able to return from Moscow with a tangible achievement. He could and did argue to the other allied leaders that the March 2nd note "represented a real concession. Not only did it meet our request but in effect it superseded the ultimatum due to expire on 27th May". Khrushchev had made it clear to Macmillan in Moscow and again in a speech in Leipzig a few days later that the end of May had no particular significance. As long as real negotiations at some level were under way by then the Berlin deadline could be postponed.<sup>83</sup>

Macmillan appeared to have made a substantial breakthrough in terms of alleviating the Berlin crisis, but he still had the problem of persuading the allies to make a positive response to the new Soviet position. For the prime minister, this meant not only confirming agreement to and setting a date for a foreign ministers meeting but also securing agreement to a summit meeting. Having visited Moscow and talked at length to Khrushchev, Macmillan was now convinced that only a heads of government summit could deliver an agreement on Berlin and other outstanding issues.<sup>84</sup> But existing suspicions of Macmillan's motives could only make the prime minister's task more difficult. Moreover, particular suspicions of excessive British flexibility were now focused on the section of the Anglo-Soviet communiqué issued at the end of the Moscow visit which appeared, to German eyes at least, to concede some

83. See H. Macmillan, op.cit. pp. 605-625; RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 19-22.

84. This conviction was one of the prime minister's clearest impressions gained from his Moscow trip. "Mr. Khrushchev is absolute ruler of Russia and completely controls the situation ... no meeting will ever do business except a summit meeting." Diary 4th March, H. Macmillan, op.cit. pp. 633-634.

form of disengagement in Central Europe.<sup>85</sup>

As the ubiquitous Macmillan set out again on March 9th, this time to tour allied capitals starting in Paris and ending up in Washington, attitudes appeared to be hardening. Before he left London, a draft American response to Moscow had been received which proposed that the foreign ministers conference should begin on May 11th but, as Macmillan feared, it totally ignored the summit proposal.<sup>86</sup> The prime minister was forced to spend much of his time in Paris and particularly in Bonn defending the line he had taken in Moscow rather than emphasising the case for a summit. The argument that the 'Macmillan Plan' was based upon the Eden rather than the Rapacki variant and was therefore contingent upon some form of political settlement,<sup>87</sup> appeared to reassure De Gaulle and Adenauer, but Macmillan had to press on to Washington confident only of having secured Franco-German agreement to the May 11th starting date for the foreign ministers conference.<sup>88</sup> Clearly much hinged upon the Washington visit.

The prime minister had reason to be encouraged by the television broadcast that Eisenhower had made on March 16th. In an attempt perhaps to reassert American leadership of the alliance, the president had expressed his

85. The offending section read "(the prime ministers) agreed that further study could usefully be made of the possibilities of increasing security by some method of limitation of forces and weapons, both conventional and nuclear, in an agreed area of Europe, coupled with an appropriate system of inspection". See RIIA Documents 1959 pp. 11-12.

86. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* p.636.

87. In Bonn, according to Macmillan's diary, "we argued that 'limitation and inspection in an agreed area' was the only way to avoid 'disengagement' which we too thought was very dangerous". 12th March, *ibid.* p.639. For the details of the political and military components of the 'Macmillan Plan' to the extent that they were revealed, see RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 25-26.

88. To set the prime minister's difficulties with France and Germany in a broader context, it is worth recalling that relations were already strained by the long and frustrating negotiations over a wider European free trade area which had collapsed a few months earlier. On this issue, see E. Barker, Britain in a Divided Europe 1945-70 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) especially chapter 14.



readiness to attend a summit on Berlin in the Summer.<sup>89</sup> But it was not at all clear that Eisenhower had the commitment to a summit that Macmillan sought. He was certainly constrained by the rigid position taken up by the State Department and by Dulles' views which had become more intransigent the more seriously ill he became.<sup>90</sup>

It was evident at the Camp David talks on March 20th that the prime minister and the president had very different views about the necessity for or even the desirability of a summit, and they divided on how the reply to the Russians should be worded. According to Macmillan's account, the discussion "got quite heated - indeed I made an outburst just before dinner, and said I would have to send a separate note, and we must 'agree to differ'. President got quite animated".<sup>91</sup> By the following day a compromise had been reached. The British definition of the broad purposes of the foreign ministers meeting was accepted but, on the specific linkage between that meeting and a summit, the president could not be pushed beyond his public position of March 16th. Agreement to the latter was dependent upon progress at the former.<sup>92</sup> Macmillan was not happy with this 'somewhat ambivalent formula',<sup>93</sup> but at

89. "Assuming developments (at the level of foreign ministers) that justify a summer meeting at the summit, the United States would be ready to participate in this further effort." Times, 17 March 1959, quoted in RIIA Survey 1959-60 p.23 fn.2.

90. Macmillan recounts with great compassion the extraordinary situation he had to face in Washington, where at this critical juncture Dulles was actually dying in hospital but remained secretary of state and retained his great influence upon the president. See diary 20th March, H. Macmillan, op.cit. pp. 643-644. Dulles eventually resigned on April 15th and died on May 24th.

91. Ibid. p.645. See also N. Fisher, Harold Macmillan (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982) p.215.

92. See RIIA Documents 1959 p.32.

93. Indeed he expected soon to be "impaled ... on the horns of this dilemma ... it was clear to me that the Russians would avoid any real negotiation, but try to treat it as a mere preliminary to fix the procedure and date of the Summit meeting which they wanted. It was equally likely that the President would not agree to a Summit meeting unless some reasonable progress had been made by the Foreign Ministers". H. Macmillan, op.cit. p.656.

least the other allies did not dissent and a joint note following the agreed Camp David draft was sent to Moscow on March 26th. Soviet acceptance of the Western proposals was received four days later.

### The Geneva conference

Thus the foreign ministers conference began on May 11th with much dependent upon it in terms of securing a summit meeting thereafter, but with the Western allies agreed only on a showpiece 'package' deal which linked agreement on Berlin and a peace treaty to German reunification and European security. After both sides had ceremonially rejected each others 'packages', the conference got down to serious negotiations on Berlin. By the end of the first phase of the conference some progress had been made.<sup>94</sup> Both sides had tabled proposals for an interim settlement based on rather different conceptions of an all-German commission which would negotiate the terms of reunification and ultimately a peace treaty. They remained divided, however, on the degree of recognition of the GDR that would be acceptable, the duration of an interim agreement<sup>95</sup> and, most importantly for the Western side, the status of Western rights in Berlin after the expiry of the interim agreement. The Soviet refusal on June 19th to give acceptable guarantees on the last issue led the Western group to propose that the conference be recessed until July 13th.

Selwyn Lloyd's position at Geneva was complicated by continuing suspicions of British motives. The German chancellor, for example, was now openly accusing the prime minister of 'Chamberlainism'.<sup>96</sup> The British government desperately wanted some tangible sign of progress to present to the American

94. For details of proposals and counter-proposals, see RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 30-33; RIIA Documents 1959 pp. 34-59.

95. The Soviet Union had proposed eighteen months, the West two and a half years.

96. In a 'great campaign of vilification'. Diary 28th May, H. Macmillan, Pointing the Way 1959-61 (London: Macmillan, 1972) p.64. After a conversation with the chancellor in Washington, Eisenhower noted that "he seems to have developed almost a psychopathic fear of what he considers to be 'British weakness'". The president appears to have done his best to reassure Adenauer. See Memo of Conversation, May 27th 1959, DDE Diaries, Box 41, DDE Dictation, May 1959, D.D. Eisenhower Papers.

president, but it was important to be seen to be completely loyal to the allied position. If it was difficult to take a lead at Geneva the British nevertheless put the most optimistic interpretation on the limited progress made by the end of June. A Berlin agreement was within reach: an interim settlement of even eighteen months duration was worth pursuing because it alleviated the crisis; if negotiations broke down after that period the Western position in Berlin remained as before.

This was the line that Macmillan took in correspondence with Eisenhower from June 16th onwards in trying to persuade the president to go for the 'bold initiative' of a summit proposal. The 'fine print' of any agreement at Geneva was less important than breaking the deadlock and avoiding a possible drift to disaster by seizing the opportunity to go for a summit. The alternative, it was argued, was to give Khrushchev the excuse to take unilateral action on Berlin and Germany.<sup>97</sup> Macmillan failed to persuade the president, however, and the second phase of the Geneva conference which began on July 13th offered no assistance in terms of further progress.<sup>98</sup>

#### From Geneva to the Paris summit

At the beginning of August, it became clear why the prime minister's entreaties were having so little effect. The president had decided to take an initiative which he hoped would break the deadlock at Geneva but which would avoid committing him to a full-blown summit. Macmillan himself was given a clue as to the president's intentions in a letter he received on June 17th.<sup>99</sup> Soviet Vice-Premier Kozlov was due to visit the United States at the end of June to open a Soviet exhibition. The president told Macmillan that he would suggest to Khrushchev that if he were to replace Kozlov on that visit he (Eisenhower) would be prepared to meet him informally to discuss inter alia Berlin. The Soviet leader turned down this suggestion but Eisenhower was not daunted. During Kozlov's visit, he sent

97. See H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 66-77.

98. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 34-35.

99. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.70.

an invitation to Khrushchev to visit the United States making it clear that he would welcome a return visit to the Soviet Union.<sup>100</sup> The Soviet leader accepted this invitation and the proposed exchange of visits was announced to an astonished world on August 3rd.<sup>101</sup>

The British reaction to this extraordinary turn of events had a public and a private face. In public the government welcomed the president's initiative albeit less than enthusiastically as another indication of the improved atmosphere in East-West relations that had prevailed since the prime minister's visit to Moscow earlier in the year.<sup>102</sup> In private the government was furious at what Macmillan called "this foolish and incredibly naive piece of amateur diplomacy". Eisenhower's bungled initiative had succeeded only in cutting the ground from under the negotiators at Geneva ruling out the chances of an interim settlement on Berlin. More importantly, it made the possibility of a four power summit less rather than more likely. What

100. A simple description of these developments glosses over the degree of confusion and ineptitude in Washington demonstrated by the handling of this issue. Eisenhower, for the sake of consistency at least, had intended to make the invitation to Khrushchev conditional upon progress at Geneva sufficient to warrant calling a summit conference though it is unclear what would have constituted acceptable 'progress' at this stage. Under-Secretary of State Robert Murphy obviously misunderstood the president's intentions because he conveyed through Koslov an unconditional invitation to Khrushchev which was accepted. Confronted by this misunderstanding, Eisenhower was compelled to honour the invitation. For the president's account, see D.D. Eisenhower, The White House Years. Vol. II : Waging Peace 1959-61 (New York: Doubleday, 1965) pp. 405-408. For a discussion of this issue as a classic example of a foreign policy implementation problem, see M.H. Halperin, Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1974) pp. 239-241.

101. See RIIA Documents 1959 pp. 84-85.

102. See, for example, Selwyn Lloyd's final speech at Geneva on August 5th, RIIA Documents 1959 p.73.

appeared to disturb the prime minister most, however, was the fear that if Eisenhower and Khrushchev were seen to "fix up a deal over our heads and behind our backs" the British and Macmillan's personal role in the detente process would be fundamentally undermined. The priority now must be to "try to turn the situation somehow to our advantage".<sup>103</sup>

In the event the prime minister's fears appeared to be less than justified. To his relief, reactions elsewhere linked the Eisenhower initiative and the proposed exchange of visits to his Moscow initiative without much prompting from London. A message from the president on July 30th indicated that he saw the Khrushchev visit as preparing the way for a summit and expressed his intention to visit Europe for consultation as soon as possible.<sup>104</sup> In the longer term, however, British fears had some substance. Direct personal contacts between Soviet and American leaders were bound to limit the ability of third parties to influence the detente process: personal contacts of an exclusive nature were particularly ominous. From a Western perspective, the more assertive the role played by the American administration, the less important any British role could be. To that extent, the meeting at Camp David in September 1959 represented a significant weakening of the British position.

The results of the Khrushchev visit to the United States were nevertheless welcome. The two leaders agreed to continue negotiations about Berlin and to reach an agreement within a reasonable period of time without a specific time-limit hanging over the proceedings. Sufficient progress was made for Eisenhower to declare that many of his objections to a summit meeting had now been removed. By describing the status quo in Berlin as an 'abnormal situation', the president even implied that a more flexible negotiating position would be required in future.<sup>105</sup> All this was very satisfactory and directly in line with British objectives but a sudden switch of British governmental attention during the Khrushchev visit hinted that an alternative high-profile initiative was being sought.

103. For Macmillan's revealing comments in full, see diary entry of July 26th. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 78-80.

104. Ibid. p.80.

105. See extracts from the president's press conference on September 28th. RIIA Documents 1959 p.85 fn. 1.

On September 17th, Selwyn Lloyd presented a comprehensive disarmament plan to the United Nations General Assembly. This complex plan which appeared merely to 'stitch' together a number of previous proposals offered little that was new or practicable. If, as seems likely, the objective was to 'upstage' Khrushchev's proposals which were presented the following day, then the opposite was the result. Lloyd's plan made little impact either in the Assembly or outside, while the Khrushchev plan was well received.<sup>106</sup>

The Camp David meeting had resolved the question of whether or not a four power summit would take place but not when it would take place or what would be discussed. The issues of timing and agenda dominated Western discussions about the summit for the rest of the year. Eisenhower appeared to share the British view that it was important to exploit what was now called the 'Spirit of Camp David' by convening a summit at the earliest opportunity which could resolve the continuing problem of Berlin and create the basis for future understanding. On October 9th, the president proposed a summit meeting in December preceded by a meeting of the Western powers. This met with the agreement of all parties except De Gaulle who declared on October 21st that he would not be in favour of a summit until the Spring of 1960.

Macmillan was less disturbed by French delaying tactics than he was concerned at the growing view expressed in Paris and elsewhere that the summit should deal with general East-West problems and establish broad guidelines for future action rather than deal with specific problems. In his view, the summit "ought at least to reach agreement on Berlin".<sup>107</sup> But if the prime minister now looked to Eisenhower for Western leadership to capitalise on Camp David, he looked in vain. The president was not prepared to overrule De Gaulle and he acceded to the General's proposal for a 'Western summit' in Paris on December 19th which effectively did postpone a summit until the Spring of 1960.

106. This assessment follows RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 44-47. For Macmillan's very different evaluation of the merits of the two sets of proposals, see H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* pp. 90-92. The prime minister was sufficiently sensitive on this issue to send a rather tart letter of 'remonstrance' to the Archbishop of Canterbury who had given an 'ecstatic welcome' to Khrushchev's plan while ignoring the 'British initiative'.

107. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1972) p.94. For the scope and generality of French proposals, see The Times, October 22nd 1959.

The French not only got their way on delaying the summit but they combined successfully with the West Germans to blur the issue of Berlin as the centrepiece of the agenda. In Western discussions during November, the British were forced to make two concessions which virtually ruled out the possibility of an interim Berlin settlement.<sup>108</sup> It was agreed that Berlin would only be discussed in the context of another Western peace 'package'. This turned the clock back six months at least and seemed even less likely to lead to a Berlin agreement than it had at Geneva given the much shorter time-scale of a summit. Secondly, the recurring Macmillan Plan for a controlled arms zone in Central Europe was finally buried and with it any chance of flexibility in the Western negotiating position. The 'Western summit' in December, devoid of effective American leadership, simply delegated detailed preparation of the Western position to working groups. Macmillan could take solace only in having secured general acceptance of the notion that the forthcoming summit would be, in the words of the formal invitation to Khrushchev, the first in a series to be held "from time to time in each other's countries" with Paris as the first venue.<sup>109</sup>

The prime minister managed to remain relatively confident about the summit prospects in the early months of 1960, but the government could only watch from the sidelines as the other parties continued to use the intervening period before the May summit to strengthen their positions.<sup>110</sup> The Soviet government could not resist the temptation to maintain the pressure on the Western powers by reminders of the consequences of not settling the Berlin issue. The American position, besieged by growing West German fears of a Berlin 'sell-out' and further weakened by the onset of presidential election year, became more obdurate the closer the summit loomed.<sup>111</sup>

108. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 54-55.

109. Ibid. p.56; H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 101-105.

110. See H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 187-194.

111. RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 57-61.

If Macmillan could cling to the fact that the summit would at least take place even if little could realistically be expected of it in terms of positive results, that certainty was dashed by Khrushchev's dramatic announcement on May 5th that an American aircraft had been shot down over Soviet territory. The revelation that the aircraft was a U-2 engaged on a spying mission necessitated that the issue be handled with the utmost delicacy. The British appealed to the Americans to say nothing and Macmillan wrote to Khrushchev trying to concentrate his mind on the summit. But statement followed statement from Washington across the spectrum from denial to explicit admission and justification for the flight. Each new statement only served to compound the original error of timing. Khrushchev appeared at one stage to give Eisenhower the chance to extricate himself from the situation but the president 'with characteristic honesty' insisted on taking personal responsibility for the flight.<sup>112</sup>

The damage had effectively been done before the principals gathered in Paris on May 15th. Macmillan worked ceaselessly for three days to salvage the summit but to no avail. He tried to persuade Eisenhower to make a formal diplomatic apology. He put it to Khrushchev that the president had at least announced albeit belatedly that future espionage flights had been suspended. But it was a classic case of too little and too late. Macmillan had to be content with securing a three power communiqué which committed the Western parties to "negotiations at any suitable time in the future". The prime minister's account of the abortive summit makes it clear how he apportions blame for the result. Though Khrushchev overplayed his hand and 'lost a great opportunity', his response to the fact and particularly the handling of the U-2 affair was 'a simple human reaction'. On a personal level, his 'real sense of indignation' reflected his having been badly let down by Eisenhower. In terms of domestic Soviet politics, the flight had fundamentally undermined his detente policy.<sup>113</sup>

112. Ibid. pp. 61-66; H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 195-202.

113. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 202-216.



'Damage-limitation' after Paris

If the summit failure was an unmitigated disaster for Macmillan and a major setback in the detente process, the fear after Paris was that East-West relations would plummet to even greater depths. As the prime minister warned the House on his return to London,

"... there may be grave implications in what has happened ... We must be prepared for the international outlook to be more stern. We may have to face new threats and new dangers."<sup>114</sup>

An indication of the heightened potential for disaster had already been provided by the decision, approved by the president on the eve of the summit, to place all United States military forces on a world-wide alert.<sup>115</sup> Though the expected Soviet decision to sign a separate peace treaty with the GDR did not materialise and Soviet agreement to take part in the resumed arms control talks in Geneva provided some grounds for hoping that the damage done at Paris might only be temporary, a walkout by the Soviet delegation at the ten nation disarmament conference on June 27th was followed by a series of crises which made the last six months of 1960 as dangerous and unpredictable a period in East-West relations as any since 1956.<sup>116</sup>

On July 1st, an American RB-47 based at Brize Norton was shot down by Soviet fighters allegedly because it was flying over Soviet territorial waters. Though the Soviet claim was almost certainly fabricated, another aircraft incident only highlighted the sensitivity of relationships and it provoked a storm in the House of Commons and the British press where the whole question of American bases in Britain was debated.<sup>117</sup> Three days later, the mutiny of the force publique in the Congo presaged a series of developments that was to turn the former Belgian colony into a focus of East-West conflict. Meanwhile, the invocation of United States economic sanctions against Castro's Cuba was helping to spread cold war tensions to another new location and provocative West German statements on Berlin served as a reminder of continuing but still unresolved problems.<sup>118</sup>

114. H.C. Deb. Vol. 623, Coll. 1641-6; RIIA Documents 1960 p.41.

115. A decision taken it was said only to test military communications. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 p.66 and fn. 3.

116. Ibid. pp. 70,511.

117. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 237-238.

118. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 536-546.

These ominous developments spurred Macmillan into action. If he had had little choice since the Camp David initiative but to look to the United States for Western leadership, it was now clear that no lead could be expected from Washington in the last months of the Eisenhower presidency. In the absence of leadership from elsewhere, the prime minister had both the opportunity and a pressing context in which to make a more significant contribution to the detente process than had been possible over the previous twelve months.<sup>119</sup>

Once again action took two forms which, in policy terms, were regarded as complementary: bolstering the solidarity of the NATO alliance and keeping open contacts with the Soviet Union, and Khrushchev in particular.<sup>120</sup> Existing fissiparous tendencies within the alliance had been magnified by the Paris débacle. With American leadership evidently faltering, De Gaulle was stepping up his demands for a special status for France within NATO while moving closer politically and economically to West Germany. The result in the Summer of 1960 was a growing rift between France and Germany on the one hand and Britain and the United States on the other, at a time when the Soviet government was clearly in a mood to exploit such divisions.<sup>121</sup>

Macmillan helped to maintain some degree of allied unity by moving towards both the French and the West Germans. On May 25th he set up discussions with the French and the Americans on various mechanisms for closer tripartite policy coordination. The prime minister was prepared to help De Gaulle achieve some of his objectives within NATO though he was not prepared to stand by and see the French president develop the Franco-German relationship to the detriment of broader NATO interests. It was the object of Macmillan's visit to Bonn in August to overcome German suspicions of Anglo-American policies and maintain allied cohesion.<sup>122</sup>

119. Ibid. p.513.

120. Cf. the strategy outlined in Macmillan's broadcast on January 4th 1958.

121. RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 546-547.

122. Ibid. p.548; H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 241-248.

While the government had other politico-economic interests at stake in wishing to retard the progress of an incipient Franco-German entente, the more obviously statesmanlike qualities of the prime minister were again displayed by his leadership on East-West issues. On July 19th, he sent an 'open letter' to Khrushchev having (unusually) read it out to the House of Commons. In it, he reviewed recent incidents which had resulted in a worsening of East-West relations, notably the RB-47 affair and developments in the Congo, and expressed his 'deep concern' at the "new trend in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy". He noted the Soviet government's "desire for peaceful coexistence and detente in international relations" and offered his continued support for such a policy, but he warned that it was his "firm opinion that these objectives cannot be pursued without the exercise of patience and restraint".<sup>123</sup>

With the West in evident disarray, the prime minister was seen to be taking a lead in maintaining contacts with the Soviet Union.<sup>124</sup> In the weeks following, moreover, the 'patience and restraint' approach, combined with a repeated emphasis on the need to resolve differences by negotiation, contrasted with the provocative postures being adopted elsewhere.<sup>125</sup> Nowhere was British and Macmillan's personal leadership more valuable than at the United Nations in the Autumn of 1960. As the prime minister records, the policy of "neutrality and firm support of the United Nations" pursued by the new Foreign Secretary Lord Home had played a significant role in helping to stabilize the early phases of the dangerous Congo saga.<sup>126</sup> But Khrushchev's decision to address the General Assembly in September provided another opportunity for Macmillan himself to make a major contribution.

123. RIIA Documents 1960 p.51.

124. Macmillan himself notes that a number of heads of government including Eisenhower, De Gaulle and Adenauer, "sent personal telegrams of thanks and congratulations" following his letter to Khrushchev. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.241.

125. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 548-549.

126. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 259-269.

With the benefit of hindsight, the prime minister can be said to have had the advantage of addressing the Assembly after Eisenhower and Khrushchev had made their scheduled speeches. The American president made an essentially polemical speech on September 22nd which was less than inspirational in tone.<sup>127</sup> The following day, Khrushchev also misjudged the requirements of the occasion by turning a speech that was intended to unveil a new disarmament plan and call for the end of colonialism into a tirade against the United Nations' handling of the Congo crisis and a bitter personal attack on the Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. Both leaders further alienated neutralist opinion by spurning the efforts of non-aligned leaders to arrange a meeting between them.<sup>128</sup>

Thus it was left to Macmillan to rise above cold war rhetoric and make a speech which genuinely transcended the ideological divide.<sup>129</sup> He began by censuring the efforts of both superpowers to cajole the non-aligned into siding with one bloc or the other. The "persistent flood of propaganda ... ideological warfare ... the old and worn-out slogans and obsolete battle cries" were counterproductive and produced nothing but 'sterile debate'. Both East and West had become "obsessed by our own ideologies ... prisoners of our own arguments", locked into a cycle of mutually reinforcing 'fear and suspicion'. The ideological rift, he continued, was neither 'inevitable' nor 'irreconcilable' and, in a broader historical perspective, was less important than what would later be called the 'North-South' issue. Development was identified by the prime minister as the major international problem that could be tackled only when cold war tensions had been abated: "... the emergent and under-developed countries would be the beneficiaries of a political detente between the great rival forces of East and West."<sup>130</sup>

127. For the text and comment, see Guardian, September 23rd 1960.

128. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 551-557.

129. The prime minister was 'annoyed' by the Foreign Office spokesman who issued to the press a 'bitter reply' to Khrushchev's speech, H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 273-274.

130. See extracts from Macmillan's speech in RIIA Documents 1960 pp. 52-55.

Macmillan's detractors could argue that his speech contained nothing new in terms of concrete proposals and was couched in terms calculated to appeal to an Assembly whose ranks had recently been swollen by new Afro-Asian members. He certainly offered no simple panaceas. "The only way forward is by gradual approach, working step by step in practical ways to improve the situation." But, as the prime minister was aware, the tone and presentation of his speech were more important than its content on this occasion.<sup>131</sup>

The impact of the speech was heightened by Macmillan's evident willingness, in contrast to Eisenhower, to meet Khrushchev in New York. Little was achieved of a substantive nature in these discussions but at least the thread of contact was maintained and the possibility of future progress kept open. The Chatham House Survey summarises Macmillan's achievement:

"... it was largely due to his efforts in keeping the line to Moscow operating that the new administration elected on 8th November entered office with a fair prospect of achieving a breakthrough in the field of East-West relations, or at any rate with opportunities which a total breakdown of communications in New York would almost inevitably have dimmed."<sup>132</sup>

But if President Kennedy could assume power with East-West relations in a less parlous state than might have been the case in the absence of the British contribution in the second half of 1960, his activist style of presidency was bound to make it more difficult for Britain to play a significant detente role after January 1961. British policy during the Laos and Berlin crises illustrates this constraint among others but also the opportunities available to the Macmillan government during the Kennedy period.

131. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 275-279.

132. RIIA Survey 1959-60 p.562.

The Laos crisis

The new president's immediate inheritance was a deteriorating situation in Laos. In response to a Laotian government report that the country had been invaded by North Vietnamese troops, one of Eisenhower's last acts was to increase the readiness of American forces in the Pacific and to call for a SEATO Council meeting.<sup>133</sup> He warned Kennedy the day before his inauguration that the United States might have to fight to prevent Laos from going communist.<sup>134</sup>

With a civil war raging in Laos and the superpowers covertly supporting rival factions, the British government was already committed to playing a mediation role and preventing great power military intervention if it could possibly be avoided. Using the position of one of the co-chairmen of the 1954 Indo-China Conference, the government was trying to secure the re-establishment of the International Control Commission (ICC) to supervise a cease-fire.<sup>135</sup> In a note to the other chairman the Soviet Union on January 21st, the government suggested that the ICC should be accredited to the King of Laos rather than to any of the rival factions in order to facilitate agreement. The Soviet government was not against the recall of the ICC but thought that the urgency of the situation required the setting up of an international conference of all states with an interest in the area.<sup>136</sup>

133. See RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 325-326.

134. Lord Longford, Kennedy (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976) p.73.

135. International Commissions for Supervision and Control manned by representatives from India, Poland and Canada were set up by the 1954 Geneva Conference to operate in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The ICC in Laos had been adjourned sine die at the insistence of the Laotian government in 1958.

136. The idea of a fourteen nation conference had been formally proposed by Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia on January 1st. RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 327, 330-331.

In private, the British government was telling the Kennedy administration that Eisenhower had made a major error in supporting the unpopular right-wing government headed nominally by Prince Boun Oum. The government took the view that the best hope for a neutral Laos lay in supporting Prince Souvanna Phouma. American support for Oum and his CIA-sponsored military commander General Phoumi Nosavan, however, had driven Phouma into an alliance with the communist Pathet Lao and secured his recognition by the Soviet Union as a rival prime minister to Boun Oum.<sup>137</sup> With Phoumi's forces on the offensive, and Phouma having fled to Cambodia, the United States was loathe to support the recall of the ICC.<sup>138</sup>

But towards the end of February, the military situation in Laos began to change: Phoumi's advance was halted and the military initiative passed to the Pathet Lao. With the position of the Oum government deteriorating, the State Department announced that aid would be increased and the American advisory force doubled. On March 23rd, President Kennedy held an important press conference in which he expressed his support for what he called a 'truly neutral Laos' but issued a warning that "there must be a cessation of the present armed attacks by externally supported Communists". Vice-President Johnson explicitly located Laos in a containment context by warning that the United States was "not in a mood to meekly permit an independent nation to be gobbled up by an armed minority supported from the outside".<sup>139</sup>

With pressure mounting in the United States for a military intervention, the British government tried to expedite the setting up of an international conciliation machinery. Another note to the Soviet Union agreed to the idea

137. See D. Nunnerly, President Kennedy and Britain (London: Bodley Head, 1972) p.45; R.J. Barnet, Intervention and Revolution (London: Paladin, 1972) p.214.

138. American equivocation on this issue at the beginning of January 1961 had already produced a rift in Anglo-American relations. See RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 52, 326-327.

139. Ibid. pp. 331-333; RIIA Documents 1961 p.566.

of an international conference as long as it was preceded by a cease-fire verified by the ICC.<sup>140</sup> But, with the SEATO Council about to meet in Bangkok, Kennedy was trying to enlist allied support for a tougher line on Laos. To this end he managed to persuade Macmillan to interrupt his Caribbean tour and the two leaders met for the first time at Key West, Florida on March 26th.

At Key West, the extent of the pressure upon Kennedy to intervene in Laos became evident to Macmillan. He was relieved to find, however, that the president was less than impressed by the more grandiose military plans prepared by the Pentagon. Nevertheless Kennedy in turn pressed the prime minister 'very hard' to accept some form of modified military operation in Laos. Macmillan was clearly in a difficult position. He was against any military intervention for fear of sliding into an unlimited commitment. But he was also very keen to establish a close relationship with the new president and therefore did not wish totally to reject Kennedy's overtures.

The indications are that Macmillan attempted to stall at the Florida meeting. He agreed to cooperate in the planning stages of a limited military operation for the sake of political appearances, but he reserved to Cabinet the ultimate decision with regard to deployment. His main concern, however, was to get Kennedy to agree that "we must make every effort to persuade the Russians to accept the British proposal for a cease-fire and a conference" and indeed this emphasis was reflected in the communiqué issued after the meeting.<sup>141</sup>

But if Macmillan thought that he had successfully reinforced Kennedy's doubts about a major intervention in Laos, he was disturbed to learn the following day that Secretary of State Dean Rusk at the SEATO Council meeting was still proposing a full-scale military intervention. With certain SEATO members strongly supportive of the American line and Britain still in a difficult position, it was left to the French in effect to veto any precipitate military action. The final communiqué committed the

140. RIIA Documents 1961 pp. 564-565.

141. See H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1972) pp. 334-338; RIIA Documents 1961 pp. 566-567; RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 333-334.



organisation merely to "take whatever action may be appropriate in the circumstances".<sup>142</sup>

The situation nevertheless remained sufficiently ominous for Macmillan to be both relieved and encouraged by the arrival of a Soviet response to the British note of March 23rd which agreed to the appeal for a cease-fire and to the recall of the ICC as long as it did not impede the calling of an international conference.<sup>143</sup>

"If the Americans do not suddenly run amok, it looks as if negotiations can begin ... It will certainly be a great relief if this crisis can be overcome without military intervention."<sup>144</sup>

A crisis atmosphere continued, however, until the beginning of May. With the Pathet Lao controlling more and more of Laos in the absence of even a de facto cease-fire, there was continuing pressure from the United States and other SEATO members for intervention.<sup>145</sup> The same military situation in Laos was also causing the Soviet government to hesitate about pressing for a cease-fire. The problem from the British diplomatic perspective was to try to restrain their allies and also to stiffen the resolve of the Russians to seek a diplomatic solution.<sup>146</sup>

142. RIIA Documents 1961 p.567; RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 334-335. The Chatham House Survey takes the view that the British unambiguously committed themselves both at Key West and Bangkok to supplying armed forces for a collective intervention in Laos. It is argued here that the British posture was more subtle, stalling on military action and pressing as hard as possible for a diplomatic solution. At Bangkok, according to the prime minister's account, "(Lord) Home rightly expressed his fears lest the United States and their allies should be dragged into far deeper military involvement than they really intended". H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.344.

143. See RIIA Documents 1961 pp. 567-569.

144. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.345.

145. Macmillan was particularly concerned that the Bay of Pigs débacle would have the effect of compelling the Kennedy administration to insist on a military solution to the Laos problem. Ibid. p.353.

146. Sir Frank Roberts, the ambassador in Moscow, is said to have done some useful 'back-stage lobbying' of the Soviet government during April. See RIIA Survey 1961 p.335.

In this context, the joint Anglo-Soviet declaration of April 24th was a major achievement and an important step forward in resolving the crisis.<sup>147</sup> The two governments called for a cease-fire prior to the setting up of an international conference; proposed that the Indian government reconvene the ICC in Laos, and invited the foreign ministers of twelve other states to a conference on Laos to begin in Geneva on May 12th. This conciliation procedure was set in train after the May 2nd meeting of Phouma and Oum which inaugurated a de facto cease-fire. After some delay, the ICC verified the existence of the cease-fire and the Geneva conference began on May 16th.

The establishment of the conference was a clear indication that a settlement would be found in Laos by negotiation rather than by military intervention.<sup>148</sup> Certainly Macmillan now felt that the crisis was over and a major war had been averted, "I could feel at least some hope that no general flare-up would follow."<sup>149</sup> Though it took many months of negotiation at Geneva and in Laos itself, the delay caused primarily by the inability of the Laotian princes to reach agreement among themselves, a settlement neutralizing Laos was finally signed in July 1962.<sup>150</sup>

If the temporary resolution at least of the Laos problem illustrated the continuing ability of the British government to play an effective conciliatory role in East-West relations, British policy during the Berlin crisis of 1961 showed more clearly the limits on Britain's freedom of manoeuvre. As the Geneva conference on Laos began work, much to the relief of the Macmillan government, tensions with respect to Berlin were mounting.

147. See RIIA Documents 1961 pp. 572-574.

148. RIIA Survey 1962 pp. 357-358.

149. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1972) p.347.

150. For details, see RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 337-349; RIIA Survey 1962 pp. 353-375.

The Berlin crisis 1961

The issue had been reopened by Khrushchev following another downturn in relations with West Germany.<sup>151</sup> The Vienna meeting between Kennedy and Khrushchev in June, welcomed by the British government to the extent that it might contribute to a negotiated settlement of the Berlin problem, had merely hardened the positions of both sides.<sup>152</sup> Once again Khrushchev presented an ultimatum. Either the Western powers agreed to negotiate a German peace treaty to include provision for a demilitarized, free Berlin by the end of 1961, or the Soviet government would sign a separate treaty with the DDR, with whom the Western powers would then have to negotiate access rights to Berlin. For his part, Kennedy reaffirmed an absolute American commitment to defend Western rights and obligations in Berlin.<sup>153</sup>

As the crisis developed in the weeks following, punctuated by a series of potentially dangerous incidents in Berlin itself, the British government had little choice but to take a tough line vis a vis Soviet demands. Though Macmillan feared a 'drift to disaster over Berlin', he felt that negotiations could only proceed on the basis of Western unity:

"... it seemed essential, if there was to be any hope of persuading the Western Allies to propose a private negotiation on the Berlin issue, to range ourselves alongside them at least in public."<sup>154</sup>

An inflexible public posture was reinforced by two other factors. First, the government got dragged into the extended debate about Berlin between 'hawks' and 'doves' in the United States. The government was pilloried by the 'hawks' throughout the Summer of 1961 for the alleged 'softness' of British attitudes and policies on Berlin and Germany. This was resented in London but it had the effect of forcing the government onto the defensive.<sup>155</sup>

151. See the Soviet memorandum to the Federal Republic, February 17th 1961. RIIA Documents 1961 pp. 272-277.

152. RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 226-230.

153. See RIIA Documents 1961 pp. 277-286.

154. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.389.

155. Ibid. p.389; RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 232-233.

Furthermore, apparent solidarity with the intractable Franco-German line on negotiations over Berlin was necessitated by the requirement to maintain good relations with both governments in the light of the British application to join the EEC.<sup>156</sup>

Given these constraints, there was little scope for independent action in the form of the now familiar British initiative, dramatic or otherwise, designed to secure a negotiated settlement.<sup>157</sup> Western leadership to that end could only come from Washington. Nevertheless, the British government pressed the allies as hard as possible in private (and occasionally in public) to negotiate a solution to the Berlin problem.<sup>158</sup>

Some progress was made with the United States. Though it was American policy, following the Acheson recommendations,<sup>159</sup> to meet the Berlin challenge by reinforcing the military strength of NATO, it was clear by the end of July that the administration was at least prepared to 'negotiate from strength'.<sup>160</sup> When the Berlin problem was discussed by the foreign ministers in Paris at the beginning of August, Lord Home, according to the prime minister's account, "was able to play an important and mediating

156. The prime minister comments on this 'real difficulty' in his diary entry of August 25th. "British opinion demands (rightly I think) that we should take some steps now - before it is too late - towards an ultimate negotiation ... Yet, in view of European Community and Common Market, I do not want an open rupture with the French if it can be avoided." H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.394. It can also be argued that a preoccupation with the EEC application during the Summer of 1961 reinforced a predisposition to 'play down' the seriousness of the Berlin crisis.

157. Attempts by the Italian government to mediate during the crisis serve only in this context to underline Britain's changed circumstances. See RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 243-244, 254, 260-261.

158. See, for example, the letter sent by the prime minister to Kennedy on July 23rd. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.390.

159. The former secretary of state had been asked in April to head a task force which would give recommendations on Berlin. The first report of this group was submitted at the end of June. For further details, see RIIA Survey 1961 p.236.

160. Ibid. p.242.

role".<sup>161</sup> The central problem however, was that the Americans were preoccupied not for the first time with 'strength' rather than 'negotiation', while the West Germans and the French in particular were resolutely opposed to any negotiations "on the current Soviet terms, and under current Soviet pressure".<sup>162</sup>

The closure of the frontiers around West Berlin by the East German authorities on August 13th, followed by the construction of the Berlin Wall and Soviet attempts to interfere with Western access to Berlin, did little to establish allied unity and even less to create an environment in which negotiations were possible. By the end of August, nevertheless, these developments had strengthened an American willingness to negotiate with the Soviet government. A tangible result given serious Franco-German reservations was a series of talks between Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko which began on September 21st.<sup>163</sup>

By this stage in the crisis, the alliance had clearly polarized around Anglo-American agreement on the need to maintain diplomatic contacts and explore Soviet intentions versus Franco-German opposition to any conciliatory moves. A British proposal for a meeting in London, for example, to discuss further approaches to the Soviet government floundered in the face of determined resistance in Paris and Bonn.<sup>164</sup>

Some urgency was injected into the Anglo-American concern to build upon the Rusk-Gromyko talks by the prospect of the Twenty Second CPSU Congress in the middle of October.<sup>165</sup> It had been assumed for some time that Khrushchev

161. Though the "main problem left unresolved", noted the prime minister in his diary, was "when and how to open negotiations with the Soviet government". H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 391-392.

162. RIIA Survey 1961 p.245

163. The prime minister, now confident that Kennedy "was clearly moving towards my position" on negotiations, was happy to see bilateral talks, particularly if they were handled exclusively by the State Department 'doves'. See H. Macmillan, op.cit. p.399.

164. RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 267-268.

165. See H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.403.

would use the occasion to push the Berlin issue to a conclusion either by announcing the date or even proclaiming the signature of a peace treaty with the DDR.

In the event, Khrushchev's speech to the Congress was significant for the lifting of the time-limit and hence the lifting of the ultimatum on Berlin. The Rusk-Gromyko talks were cited by the Soviet leader as evidence that the Western powers were prepared to seek a solution to the Berlin and the wider German problem 'on a mutually acceptable basis'. It was no longer necessary to insist on the signing of a peace treaty by the end of the year.<sup>166</sup> Any belief in the West that the crisis was now over, however, was short-lived. Another series of incidents on the ground in Berlin during the last week of October, culminating in a confrontation of allied and Soviet tanks, persuaded Macmillan and Kennedy that it was necessary to step up the pressure on De Gaulle and Adenauer to agree to a negotiating position.<sup>167</sup>

Personal meetings between allied leaders during November made little progress though American pressure on the re-elected Adenauer did produce grudging acceptance of negotiations limited to the Berlin issue. Macmillan's failure to persuade De Gaulle to adopt a more flexible position during the latter's visit to Britain was followed by a rare public attempt to bring the French into line.<sup>168</sup> David Ormsby-Gore, the new ambassador in Washington, made an important speech to the National Press Club on November 30th in which he argued that the Rusk-Gromyko talks had shown that 'a fundamental basis for negotiation now existed'. The Soviet government had lifted the deadline and was apparently prepared to negotiate a separate agreement on Berlin without linking it to wider issues.<sup>169</sup>

166. RIIA Survey 1961 p.271

167. The prime minister and the president were now in regular communication by telephone. In a conversation on October 27th, they agreed that Kennedy would 'speak strongly' to Adenauer and Macmillan to De Gaulle in forthcoming meetings. It was also agreed that they (Kennedy and Macmillan) must meet together "at the first convenient opportunity". See H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1972) pp. 402, 405.

168. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1972) pp. 420-422.

169. See The Times, December 1st 1961.

But it was all to no avail. Continued French intransigence meant that there was no possibility of securing an agreed allied negotiating position on Berlin. Though the communiqué following the NATO Council meeting in Paris on December 15th "approved the resumption of diplomatic contacts" with the Soviet Union "in the hope that these contacts might serve to determine whether a basis for negotiation could be found", the British and the American governments were left with no choice but to go ahead with their planned approaches to the Soviet Union without French participation.<sup>170</sup> At their meeting in Bermuda, Macmillan and Kennedy decided to push ahead on this basis and talks between the American ambassador in Moscow, Llewellyn Thompson and Mr. Gromyko began on January 2nd 1962.<sup>171</sup>

Thus 1961 ended without allied unity but with the most dangerous phase of the recurrent Berlin crisis at an end. Continuing British attempts in concert with the Kennedy administration to resolve the Berlin problem by negotiation became intertwined in 1962 with the problem of securing a nuclear test ban treaty. As the British role in those negotiations is the subject of the next chapter, the narrative is interrupted at this point and an attempt made to evaluate the significance of British attempts to advance the process of detente during the Macmillan period.

#### The British contribution to detente

A narrative overview of British policy from 1957 to the end of 1961 is sufficient to provide a picture of a government committed to securing a normalisation of relations with the Soviet bloc. Over the Macmillan period as a whole, the centre-piece of attempts to ameliorate East-West tensions was the persistent and patient diplomacy between the end of 1957 and the Spring of 1960 which culminated in the Paris summit. Lord Kilmuir has paid an appropriate tribute in his memoirs to the prime minister's achievement.

170. RIIA Documents 1961 pp. 159-162.

171. See RIIA Survey 1962 p.5ff; H. Macmillan, At the end of the Day 1961-1963 (London: Macmillan, 1973) p.143ff.

"Up to the failure of the Summit Macmillan had held an initiative in foreign affairs which was quite remarkable. He had handled an uneasy Eisenhower carefully and skilfully along the road to Paris. He had persuaded the chronically suspicious Russians that there was a genuine desire on the part of the West for a rapprochement, or at least for a frank discussion of points of outstanding difference."<sup>172</sup>

In terms of continuity, this policy echoed similar efforts by the Churchill and Eden governments between 1953-1955, though Paris unlike Geneva did not produce even limited results. Of more practical and immediate significance, as in the earlier period, were British efforts to play a conciliatory or even a mediating role in East-West crises. The account of British policy during the Middle East, Berlin and Laotian crises serves to illustrate a continuing concern with this dimension of a detente policy and the positive role of British diplomacy in reducing the possibility of military conflict between East and West.

An evaluation of British policy requires some comparison with other states' efforts to promote detente. Again, as in the earlier period, it is clear from this narrative that no other major state pursued detente with the persistence and the determination shown by the Macmillan government. The period began, in Elizabeth Barker's words, with a "positive explosion of Soviet diplomacy in favour of every kind of summit meeting".<sup>173</sup> But this diplomatic offensive lasted only until the Summer of 1958. Thereafter any Soviet interest in detente was overshadowed by the use of coercive diplomacy with particular though not exclusive reference to Berlin and the German problem, as an alternative means of achieving policy objectives. It was only after the Cuban missile crisis that detente again became an important instrument of Soviet policy.<sup>174</sup>

172. Lord Kilmuir, Political Adventure (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964) p.317.

173. E. Barker, op.cit. p.136.

174. This general assessment should be qualified in the specific context of the test ban treaty negotiations. See Chapter Five.



The French and the West Germans maintained a serious interest in detente for an even shorter period coinciding with the first phase of British detente policy, from the end of 1957 to the Spring of 1958, though De Gaulle also favoured some form of summit meeting in the context of the Middle East crisis in the Summer. If Sputnik boosted Soviet detente diplomacy it also released what Coral Bell calls a 'pressure-wave of feeling' in Western Europe where, for some time, it had been felt that NATO under United States leadership was maintaining an excessively rigid posture which had merely frozen East-West conflict.<sup>175</sup>

After the Summer of 1958, however, a Franco-German interest in detente all but disappeared. With the onset of the Berlin crisis, the Adenauer government became ever more wedded to the idea that any agreements with the Soviet government could only be reached by sacrificing the interests of the Federal Republic. The French under De Gaulle, concerned to construct a close relationship with the Bonn government in pursuit of broader European objectives, were sensitive to West German fears of detente and generally took up an equally obdurate position on East-West negotiations.

American attitudes to detente during this period continued to be, from a British perspective, disturbingly hesitant and ambivalent, though this judgment is less applicable to the Kennedy period than it is to Eisenhower's second term of office. There has been a debate in recent years about Eisenhower's presidency which has some relevance here. Robert Divine, for example, argues that "reducing Cold War tensions and achieving detente with the Soviet Union" was the 'overriding aim' of Eisenhower's foreign policy. The "pursuit of peace was the dominant feature of his presidency".<sup>176</sup> John Gaddis, on the other hand, takes issue with such 'revisionist claims', He does not question Eisenhower's commitment to detente, nor does he deny that his administration "did begin moving in its final years towards a more

175. C. Bell, op.cit. p.162; see also the discussion in RIIA Survey 1956-58 pp. 474-475, 503ff.

176. R.A. Divine, Eisenhower and the Cold War (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981) pp. 105-106. Divine's thesis is based on a sharp but not wholly convincing distinction between the policies pursued by Eisenhower and those pursued by Dulles which allegedly gave American foreign policy a "schizophrenic appearance, with the Secretary of State waging a Cold War and the President searching for detente".

forthcoming attitude on negotiations ... than it had previously demonstrated". He does however take the president's handling of the U-2 incident and its disastrous consequences for the Paris summit to illustrate his general argument that

"Eisenhower was no more prone at the end of his term than he had been at the beginning to give negotiations priority over other approaches to containment ... if ending the Cold War had in fact been his first priority ... then the ease with which he allowed other considerations to distract him from the pursuit of negotiations did not fit well with that objective."

But if the 'pursuit of negotiations' with Moscow did not have the same priority for the Eisenhower administration that it had for the Macmillan government, as the account here confirms, the diplomatic contacts that were initiated, and the Camp David meeting in particular, were nevertheless crucial to the process of detente. In Gaddis's words again,

"they served to legitimise the idea that negotiations were an appropriate means of dealing with Moscow, and that they could be undertaken without risking the unravelling of alliances or the appearance of appeasement."<sup>177</sup>

This 'legitimation' of negotiations provided an important legacy that Eisenhower's successor could build upon. Kennedy spoke in his Inaugural Address about never negotiating out of fear but also of never fearing to negotiate and indeed the new president was predisposed to give detente a higher priority vis a vis other instruments of containment than his predecessor.<sup>178</sup> But the implementation of this particular 'flexible response' was constrained in operation by Kennedy's narrow base of domestic support and the inflexibility of European allies as well as by the coercive strategy and the sheer unpredictability of the Soviet government.<sup>179</sup>

177. J.L. Gaddis, Strategies of Containment (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982) pp. 195-197.

178. "Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate." Inaugural Address, January 20th 1961. Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy (Washington, D.C., 1962) p.1.

179. See J.L. Gaddis, op.cit. chapter 7.

Set within a context of other states' halting efforts to promote detente during this period, any progress made by British diplomacy to advance the process of detente takes on an added significance. Turning to the results of British policy, some limited progress was made in the twelve months that preceded Khrushchev's ultimatum on Berlin. Although the British government was not alone at this stage in favouring a positive response to Soviet calls for a summit, Macmillan took a lead in pressing successfully for a more flexible American line on negotiations with Moscow.<sup>180</sup> As noted in the narrative, the NATO Council meeting of December 1957 reached agreement on proposing a four power foreign ministers meeting and, in the new year, Eisenhower agreed in principle at least to the idea of an East-West summit.

With hindsight that NATO meeting in Paris heralded the start of a persistent British advocacy of a summit over the next two and a half years which, given the restored relationship between Britain and the United States, could scarcely be ignored by the Eisenhower administration. If the pressure on Washington slackened in the Spring of 1958 as attention was diverted to the test ban issue, it was soon resumed in the Summer in the context of the Middle East crisis. Macmillan's positive response to Khrushchev's call for an immediate summit effectively took the initiative away from Washington. The Americans had only been prepared to agree to a foreign ministers meeting which could be controlled by Dulles but, as Coral Bell argues, the secretary of state was "obliged to acquiesce by the tone of Macmillan's letter to Khrushchev and the necessity of avoiding the appearance of another rift with Britain".<sup>181</sup>

180. The view that NATO policy had become excessively rigid was not restricted to European members of the alliance. For example, former Canadian minister for external affairs Lester Pearson made an important speech in Minneapolis on November 3rd 1957. He urged the West to abandon its 'rigid unconditional-surrender type of diplomacy' and adopt a policy which 'patiently and persistently' sought 'a basis for negotiation and agreement'. New York Times, November 4th 1957, quoted in RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.504.

181. C. Bell, op.cit. p.176: "... it was made clear that Washington had only embarked on the course of policy presumed to be leading to a heads of government meeting as a result of encouragement from Ottawa and New Delhi and of pressure from London." (emphasis added) RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.514. See also Times, 24th July; Manchester Guardian, 23rd and 24th July and the Economist, 26th July 1958.

With the onset of the Berlin crisis at the end of 1958, British detente policy entered one of its most important but also most controversial phases. Over the next twelve months British diplomacy played a major role in resolving or at least relieving the tensions of the crisis and in so doing paved the way to the Paris summit. The controversy surrounds the extent to which the government, in order to inject flexibility into the Western negotiating position, was prepared or gave the appearance of being prepared to compromise some basic Western principles on Berlin and Germany.

The achievement of British diplomacy during this period was to develop and sustain a momentum that transcended the immediate crisis and carried the other states towards a summit meeting that none of them, certainly none of Britain's allies, wanted. To put it another way, British policy linked the chain of developments - Macmillan's visit to Moscow, the foreign ministers meeting in Geneva and the Camp David meeting - that culminated in Paris in May 1960.

From this perspective, Macmillan's visit to Moscow was crucial. At the heart of the Berlin crisis was Khrushchev's ultimatum. Until that was lifted, it was difficult to see how there could be a negotiated settlement of Berlin or broader East-West differences. Such blatant coercion, it might be argued, could only produce a united but negative Western response: meanwhile tensions mounted as the Soviet deadline approached. Mikoyan's visit to the United States in January 1959 may have eased tensions somewhat and may even have put the possibility of negotiations at some level back onto the agenda, but the time-limit remained operative.<sup>182</sup> It was Macmillan's dramatic initiative the next month that produced the lifting of the ultimatum by persuading Khrushchev to accept the idea of an interim foreign ministers meeting to discuss Berlin. Macmillan still had the difficult task of persuading his allies to agree to that meeting, but the Moscow visit had succeeded in getting in train a process of negotiation<sup>183</sup> and had effectively stabilised a very dangerous and unpredictable situation.

182. For a discussion of the significance of the Mikoyan visit, see RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 3. 12-13, 15.

183. See *ibid.* pp. 21-22; E. Barker, *op.cit.* p.140; N. Fisher, *op.cit.* p.214.

Having secured general agreement to the foreign ministers meeting, Macmillan wanted the allies to regard that meeting as a preliminary to a heads of government summit that would follow soon afterwards. Eisenhower made an important concession to this view on March 16th by agreeing publicly to this sequence of events against State Department advice, though he insisted on making his agreement to attend a summit conditional upon progress at the foreign ministers meeting.

Little was in fact achieved of a substantive nature at Geneva and a diplomatic stalemate soon prevailed, but the fact that high level talks were taking place seemed to make a further contribution to a reduction of tensions. More importantly in terms of the continuing impact of British policy, sufficient progress was made towards an interim Berlin settlement to enable Macmillan, in his correspondence with Eisenhower, to maintain the pressure on the president to follow through on his commitment to a summit. A presidential initiative was now required to break the deadlock at Geneva and enable further progress to be made. The unexpected response to this build-up of British pressure was the invitation to Camp David.<sup>184</sup>

The government could, therefore, take much of the credit for the Camp David meeting, not least because Macmillan's visit to Moscow had provided a recent precedent for a personal heads of government meeting. As the prime minister succinctly put it, "the British broke the ice".<sup>185</sup> It can certainly be argued that the February meeting encouraged Eisenhower to send and

184. Even Robert Divine admits that Eisenhower's volte-face owed much to British pressure, though he notes that the new Secretary and Under-Secretary of State, Christian Herter and Robert Murphy, were also trying to persuade the president to take the initiative. "The deadlock at Geneva convinced Eisenhower that a summit conference would be useless, but the British continued to push hard for the meeting. The President finally agreed to an intermediate step." op.cit. p.137.

185. Diary 6th August 1959. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.81.

Khrushchev to accept the invitation to the United States.<sup>186</sup> The meeting itself at Camp David was important because it restored the momentum of the negotiating process and it ensured that a four power summit would take place even if important issues of timing and agenda remained to be resolved.

If persistence and single-minded determination provide one key to explaining the success of British diplomacy in goading reluctant allies and a suspicious Soviet government towards a summit, another lies in the skilful but controversial tactics used to achieve that result. It can be argued that alleged British 'softness' on Berlin and the core German problem was in fact an integral part of a detente policy.

As described in the narrative, Macmillan's resistance to arms control schemes in Central Europe gradually weakened. The first signs of flexibility on this issue appeared in the first phase of a detente policy, in the latter part of 1957. This flexibility initially took the form of looking for ways of building upon certain elements of the Rapacki Plan, while rejecting the Plan as it stood.<sup>187</sup> By the beginning of 1959, however, the political and military components of a 'Macmillan Plan' were becoming apparent. Insofar as details were made public, the Plan appeared to centre on a zone of reduced and controlled armaments in Central Europe linked in some way to progress towards a staged German reunification via some form of confederation. On Berlin, a new international agreement was proposed which would maintain Western rights of access until a final German settlement had been agreed.<sup>188</sup>

Despite continuing protestations to the effect that the government was opposed to disengagement and remained committed to the reunification of Germany,<sup>189</sup> critics accused the government of being determined to get an

186. A letter from the Soviet leader to Macmillan on August 13th recalled that the prime minister in Moscow had suggested a meeting between the two leaders and maintained that Khrushchev was following Macmillan's advice by accepting Eisenhower's invitation to visit the United States. Ibid. pp. 83-84.

187. See F.S. Northedge, Descent From Power: British Foreign Policy 1945-73 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974) pp. 244-246.

188. RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 16, 23-26.

189. See, for example, footnote 87.

agreement with the Soviet Union at any price not excluding the sacrifice of allied rights in Berlin.<sup>190</sup> From the perspective of British detente diplomacy, there was a clear determination to reach agreements particularly an interim settlement on Berlin which was thought to be within reach in the Summer of 1959. But such criticisms miss the point of an apparent predisposition to make unnecessary concessions.

It can be argued that the details of the 'Macmillan Plan' remained deliberately vague because British policy was essentially declaratory in the sense that the objective was to put pressure on the allies to take up more flexible negotiating positions and to encourage the Russians to continue the negotiating process. In practice, British policy was solid on basic principles and remarkably loyal to the allies; there was no question of a 'sell-out'. There were clear limits beyond which the government would not go. For example, during his visit to Moscow, Macmillan neatly side-stepped Khrushchev's offer of a non-aggression pact, the very offer the prime minister had made thirteen months before. Macmillan's offer of January 1958 was thereby exposed as the piece of theatre it was intended to be, a calculated attempt to shock all concerned into adopting more conciliatory attitudes. The analysis here has indicated how successful these tactics were in helping to defuse the 1958-59 Berlin crisis and in setting up a four power summit following the Camp David meeting. The Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit, however, had important implications for future British influence on East-West relations.

#### Britain and detente after Camp David

It was suggested earlier, pace Gaddis, that the Camp David meeting in September 1959 served to 'legitimise' direct negotiations between the superpowers at heads of government level, and was therefore a crucial development in the detente process. It can also be argued that this meeting marked a turning point for Britain: thereafter, British diplomacy as a major influence on the direction of East-West relations began to assume less significance. Lord Kilmuir is accurate in his general assessment of

190. "As regards the proposal for an interim agreement (on Berlin), the British were reliably reported in the closing stages of the Geneva Foreign Ministers Conference to be pressing the Americans, in the interests of getting an agreement, not to insist that existing Western rights must remain valid after the conclusion of the interim period, a concession that would have rendered the Western interim proposal very damaging to the long term viability of Berlin." J.L. Richardson, Germany and the Atlantic Alliance (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966) p.315.

the impact of British diplomacy in the late 1950s, but less than accurate in seeing the failure of the Paris summit as the important turning point. It is clear from this account that Macmillan had in fact lost the initiative several months before Paris.

His government could do little to prevent the 'Spirit of Camp David' evaporating in the months preceding Paris. Eisenhower may have taken the initiative but he was not able or willing to overrule Franco-German obstructiveness. The British finally gave up the Macmillan Plan as a separate proposal in order to get a unified Western position at Paris, but the summit was delayed beyond the point where anything worthwhile in terms of substantive agreements was likely to result. The eventual débacle at Paris was indeed a personal disaster for Macmillan but there was nothing he could do to salvage the summit. He had already done all he possibly could in getting the principals to Paris.

In the longer term, to the extent that unremitting British pressure on Washington was responsible for the Camp David meeting, the government had been almost too successful. The more the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union got into the habit of consulting directly, the less they needed Britain's services as an intermediary. The Camp David meeting was followed by the Khrushchev-Kennedy summit at Vienna in June 1961.<sup>191</sup> Ironically, as Coral Bell points out, these meeting were precisely the sort of direct contacts between heads of government that Macmillan had been advocating though he of course envisaged three or four power meetings with Britain represented.<sup>192</sup>

191. Nigel Fisher suggests that there was some concern about this trend. "It is possible that the Prime Minister may have rather resented his exclusion from the Khrushchev encounter (at Vienna), since this indicated that he was no longer to act as an intermediary ... and Lord Home was concerned that Kennedy had arranged the meeting, before allowing enough time to 'play himself in' on major international issues." Op.cit. p.262.

192. C. Bell, op.cit. p.207. Bell adds to the irony by also noting that the Vienna summit (and Camp David?) was "in fact closer to (Churchill's) original 1953 prescription for a summit than those of Geneva and Paris, since it did amount to a private and businesslike confrontation of the effective leaders of the dominant powers".



The decline in British influence was dramatically highlighted during the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. Though the government had better information than the other allies through David Ormsby-Gore in Washington, and there were regular telephone conversations between the president and the prime minister, there was no scope for British mediation in the most dangerous crisis of the nuclear age.<sup>193</sup> The resolution of the Cuban crisis was quickly followed by the establishment of a 'hot-line' between Washington and Moscow which symbolised the exclusion of third parties, in crisis situations at least, from a superpower dialogue.<sup>194</sup>

The growth of direct superpower contacts was not the only factor that served as a constraint on British detente policy after Camp David. The decline of British influence on East-West relations contributed to a gradual reorientation of British policy towards Europe. The eventual decision to apply for membership of the EEC in August 1961 not only distracted attention from East-West issues, but also further weakened the ability of the government to promote detente to the extent that Britain was now dependent for entry on French and West German goodwill. Franco-German obstructiveness on detente issues could scarcely be challenged with as much vigour as had hitherto been the case.

193. Though, at the height of the crisis, Macmillan characteristically wanted to take the initiative by proposing a summit. According to Harold Evans, he wanted to "suggest immobilisation of the Thors in Britain in return for the immobilisation of the Cuban missiles during a standstill period of negotiation at a London summit". But the Americans made it clear that this was unacceptable and Harold Caccia, Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, strongly advised against any move "which might be construed as the British being the first to crack". H. Evans, Downing Street Diary: the Macmillan Years 1957-63 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981) pp. 225-226; see also RIIA Survey 1962 pp. 61-62.

194. E. Barker, op.cit. p.250.

Despite these constraints, however, the Macmillan government still managed to play a significant role in reviving and sustaining the detente process after the collapse of the Paris summit. Little needs to be added here to the narrative account of the statesmanlike performance of the prime minister and the effective 'damage-limitation' strategy pursued by the government in the second half of 1960.<sup>195</sup>

Continuing British efforts to promote detente extended into the Kennedy period. Interestingly, the 1961 crisis in Laos was analogous to the 1954 Indo-China crisis with the United States again trying to 'collectivise' a commitment to military intervention to stem the communist tide. This time the British stalled on the military option while mediating more overtly from the position of joint chairman with the Soviet government of the 1954 Geneva Conference. Mediation was difficult and delicate in this context, however, because it was necessary not only to head off a military intervention and set up a process of negotiation supported by both superpowers, but also to persuade the Kennedy administration to switch its support to the faction in Laos that had already been adopted by the Soviet Union.

British policy operated at two levels. In public, the government worked with the Soviet Union to reconvene the Geneva machinery. Once established, this served to relieve the pressures for external intervention and created an extended pause while the various factions in Laos actually negotiated a solution. But this eventual outcome was not achieved without patient diplomacy at Geneva and much private lobbying of both United States and Soviet governments. The latter task was perhaps the easier. Working closely with the Indian government, the object was to reinforce the apparent willingness of Moscow to back a compromise solution in Laos rather than allow the Pathet Lao to impose a solution by military force.

195. It is worth noting in passing, however, that British mediation during this period of heightened tensions clearly illustrates a conception of detente as a continuing process, not something to be abandoned because of setbacks.

The task of changing American policy began with some plain speaking by David Ormsby-Gore in Washington in February 1961 and continued throughout the year.<sup>196</sup> Much of the credit for the success of British policy has been given to the patient diplomacy of the Foreign Secretary Lord Home.<sup>197</sup> The government was undoubtedly helped by the fact that Kennedy unlike Dulles in the earlier Indo-China crisis was predisposed to accept a negotiated solution in Laos if, as the president told Walter Lippman at the beginning of the crisis, a 'visible humiliation' could be avoided.<sup>198</sup> The thrust of British policy therefore was to reinforce the views of the more conciliatory elements in the new administration. As David Nunnerly puts it, "... the British government, in urging restraint, strengthened Kennedy's hand in overcoming the wilder ideas of some members of his Administration".<sup>199</sup>

British policy played much the same sort of role with respect to the United States during the 1961 Berlin crisis though from a weaker position. The Chatham House Survey attempts to summarise the difference between British and American policy.

"American policy over Berlin ... was based essentially on the idea of parleying with the Soviet Union from behind ostentatiously strengthened defences ... Britain was in favour of the proposal to parley but was unable and unwilling to contribute anything to the strengthening of western defences."<sup>200</sup>

196. See D. Nunnerly, op.cit. pp.12-13,45. Ormsby-Gore was then minister of state at the Foreign Office.

197. Lord Kilmuir pays a fulsome tribute to the foreign secretary's role. "The quiet, indeed virtually secret, handling of the dangerous Laos crisis was perhaps his most brilliant single achievement. By following the traditional methods of diplomacy, by personal charm and persuasiveness, by skilful use of deep knowledge and experience, he gradually wooed the American government away from a major military intervention in Laos, whose consequences might have been appalling." op.cit. p.313.

198. Quoted in J.L. Gaddis, op.cit. p.212.

199. D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.13.

200. RIIA Survey 1961 p.86.

This accurately characterises the British position but only captures American policy towards the end of 1961 when the crisis on the ground in Berlin had become much more serious. Until then, and in particular between the failure of the Vienna summit at the beginning of June and the start of the Rusk-Gromyko talks in September, the balance of American policy was tilted very much towards the strengthening of defence rather than the 'idea of parleying'.<sup>201</sup> The reappearance of Dean Acheson heading presidential 'task forces' on NATO and Berlin helps to explain this orientation: the former secretary of state had of course been the architect of the 'negotiation from strength' strategy in the early 1950s.

In terms of continuing British concerns, it is worth recalling here that Churchill had warned Acheson more than a decade earlier that postponing negotiations until 'strength' had been achieved could be disastrous.<sup>202</sup> The British voice may have been weaker and less influential in 1961 than it had been in 1950, but at least it indicated an awareness (evident during the Laos as well as the Berlin crisis) that the Western position vis a vis the Soviet bloc had also become much weaker in the intervening period. The assumption almost of inherent Western technological superiority that had left Churchill so unimpressed had been shattered by Sputnik.<sup>203</sup> The 'balance of terror' was still delicate in an age of 'mutual deterrence'. The Macmillan government derived the same lesson as Churchill: 'negotiation' was at least as important as 'strength' given the possibility and the consequences of a breakdown of deterrence.

Hence, as the American posture on Berlin hardened in the Summer of 1961, the British government again sought to change the balance of American policy. Lord Home visited Washington on June 14th to try to influence the domestic American debate between 'hawks' and 'doves'. The prime minister made a statement on June 27th which referred to the 1959 allied proposals on Berlin "which had contained an element of conversations if not of

201. Ibid. p.232ff.

202. See Chapter Two, page 50.

203. See Coral Bell, op.cit. p.23.

negotiations between the two German governments".<sup>204</sup> The usual pressure on Washington to adopt a more forthcoming attitude to negotiations was accompanied in this context by 'lip-service' only to pressures in the opposite direction to reinforce the conventional strength of NATO.<sup>205</sup>

It can be argued that British policy helped a more conciliatory American view on Berlin to prevail. But a brief comparison with the impact of British policy in the earlier phase of the Berlin crisis is sufficient to indicate how limited British influence had become. Given the constraints already discussed, the government was forced to take a tougher and a less independent line on Berlin in 1961.<sup>206</sup> It was the Rusk-Gromyko talks rather than any British initiative which encouraged the Russians to lift the later ultimatum on Berlin. Ironically, it was the Americans in 1961 who were using talk of 'disengagement' to frighten the West Germans into adopting a more conciliatory posture on Berlin.<sup>207</sup>

#### A British conception of detente

Whatever view is taken of the significance of British detente policy during the Macmillan period, it is difficult not to be impressed by the persistence with which that policy was pursued despite constraints and setbacks. Did policy reflect a set of attitudes towards detente that might usefully be compared to attitudes identified in previous chapters?

General attitudes to negotiations and summitry discerned in the earlier period certainly find both expression and enactment in this period. East-West negotiations were still seen as part of a regularized process of allaying tensions: summit meetings or personal contacts between heads of government a natural supplement to diplomatic channels. What is interesting about the Macmillan period, however, is the development of these attitudes and the clearer picture of a British conception of detente which emerges.

204. RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 234-236. By the end of the year Macmillan was explicitly proposing the de facto recognition of the DDR. See, for example, his letter to Kennedy in November 1961, H. Macmillan, *op. cit.* (1972) p.408.

205. Though the combination of an economic crisis, the emergency in Kuwait and a general 'over-stretch' of British forces would have made such a policy less than practical for Britain anyway. See C.J. Bartlett, A History of Postwar Britain, 1945-75 (London: Longman, 1977) pp. 203-204.

206. See J.L. Richardson, *op.cit.* p.317.

207. RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 267-268.

The idea of regular summits which found expression with the Geneva summit in prospect developed into what might be called institutionalized summitry as an explicit policy objective during this period.<sup>208</sup> Summit meetings were regarded as essential for two reasons both of which would contribute to a reduction of tensions. Firstly, it was assumed that personal meetings between leaders would foster mutual understanding and build confidence. Before setting off for Moscow Macmillan told the House that

"... personal contacts do not in themselves solve international problems, but there are times when they make a contribution to their solution ... my principal purpose will be to try to dispel misconceptions and to establish some basis for better understanding."<sup>209</sup>

It was also assumed that only heads of government meetings could produce the major agreements that would register progress towards the resolution of outstanding East-West differences. As noted earlier, Macmillan returned from Moscow more convinced than ever that only Khrushchev had the power to deliver substantive agreements; no-one else in the Soviet governmental system could make the necessary concessions.<sup>210</sup> Agreement on at least one major issue would, it was thought, stimulate agreement on other issues in a 'step by step' process. Summit meetings were the key then to the 'piecemeal' approach that had been fundamental to a British conception of detente since Churchill. While agreement on Korea and Austria had served as symbols of progress for Churchill, a Berlin settlement and, later, a test ban treaty served the same function for Macmillan.<sup>211</sup>

208. By March 1959, Macmillan was said to be suggesting to Eisenhower a series of summit conferences at six monthly intervals. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 p.25.

209. H.C. Deb. Vol.599 Coll. 578-9. February 5th 1959. For a critique of the assumption that cold war conflicts were the result of misunderstandings between leaders, see O. Harries, "Faith in the summit: some British attitudes", Foreign Affairs, October 1961, pp. 63-67.

210. See footnote 84.

211. Hence the prime minister's determination to get at least an interim settlement on Berlin at the Paris summit. "In my view we ought at least to reach agreement on Berlin. One success would lead to another; each meeting, one might hope, proving more productive than the last." H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1972) p.94.

David Nunnerly suggests that "Macmillan, like Churchill, believed ... summit meetings were in themselves considerable achievements."<sup>212</sup> There is some truth in this but Macmillan was less committed than either Churchill or Eden to the idea of a summit for its own sake.<sup>213</sup> He was certainly more convinced than either of his predecessors that such meetings required adequate preparation.<sup>214</sup> Indeed Macmillan's memoirs make it clear that he conceived of summit meetings as the pinnacle of a more or less continuous cycle of negotiations between East and West. Lower level meetings of ambassadors or perhaps foreign ministers would explore positions, identify common ground and prepare specific issues for agreement by heads of government. Periodic summits would follow and then the cycle would begin again.<sup>215</sup>

212. D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.32.

213. He certainly appeared to be more aware of the propaganda value of a summit which might be exploited by the other side. See, for example, the prime minister's sharp rebuke to Khrushchev in July 1958. "Your letter of June 11th makes it perfectly clear that you and we have totally different objectives in view. Yours is simply to convene a Summit Conference. Ours is to negotiate a settlement of the differences which divide us. We want a Summit Conference because we want an effective means of making progress in negotiations." Letter to Khrushchev, 1st July 1958, RIIA Documents 1958 p.49.

214. Perhaps the Geneva summit was a learning experience here, though whether lack of preparations was the problem at Geneva is questionable. Macmillan was scathing of the Soviet conception of a summit which emerged from his discussions in Moscow. "They still seemed to expect that practical work could be done in two or three days' discussion ... This seemed to be quite unrealistic and we were determined upon preparation through diplomatic channels or better still a meeting of the four Foreign Ministers." H. Macmillan, op. cit. (1971) p.623.

215. In his diary entry of 5th February 1959, Macmillan describes his "idea of a more or less continuous or permanent Conference - adjourning for long periods and reassembling for new work, with Ministers attending from time to time, and officials (Ambassadors etc.) working on committees and reporting to Ministers. Such a Conference, or Congress, would in itself 'relieve tensions'". H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) pp. 588-589. It is worth noting that this conception, which appears to borrow from nineteenth century European congresses, is very different from Churchill's concept of a summit which used World War Two conferences as a model.

There was nothing inevitable about this somewhat idealised process, however, and this was where Macmillan like Churchill before him spotted the opportunity for a distinctive British contribution. In the real world of international relations states were not always prepared to negotiate with each other. It was often necessary for one state to take an initiative which would, as it were, 'kick-start' the negotiating process.<sup>216</sup> Once that process was initiated, conciliatory diplomacy was still needed to keep the momentum going and reach agreements.<sup>217</sup>

To recapitulate, summit meetings were regarded as essential but they were clearly not the sole objective of British detente policy during this period. Indeed, as the Paris summit approached, both the prime minister and the foreign secretary began to worry about popular expectations of what a summit meeting could achieve. The danger of frustrated expectations became another reason for identifying Paris as the first of a series of summits located, conceptually at least, within a regularised cycle of negotiations at various levels.<sup>218</sup>

The prospect of Paris also elicited indications of an even broader conception of detente. Two important speeches by Selwyn Lloyd in August 1959 and February 1960 linked together the idea of regular summits, a

216. It will be recalled that Macmillan used a different metaphor when describing his proposed Moscow visit as an attempt to 'try to break the log-jam'. As a dramatic initiative, this visit can be directly compared to Churchill's thwarted intention to meet Malenkov in 1954.

217. There were occasions when the perceived importance of keeping the process going produced references to negotiations which implied a 'talks for talks' sake' justification. For example, at the end of October 1959, Macmillan informed the House that "we would like a summit meeting at the earliest practicable date, in order to keep up the momentum. The general situation has improved; we do not want it to slip back again. Tension has been lowered; we do not want it to increase again". 27th October 1959. H.C. Deb. Vol.612, Coll.78.

218. In his speech to the House on February 11th 1960, Selwyn Lloyd stressed that "... our view of the Summit has always been that we will not get out of a single Summit meeting some magic formula which will settle all problems. We have always regarded (Paris) as one of a series of meetings and I think we are much wiser not to build up world opinion to believe that something wonderful is to happen at the first Summit meeting". H.C. Deb. Vol.617, Coll.787; RIIA Documents 1960 p.2; see also H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 105, 114.



broader process of negotiations and, significantly, a more permanent system of open contact and exchange between East and West as the ultimate objective of detente. In both speeches he reviewed the British contribution to detente not simply in terms of helping to establish East-West negotiations but in promoting other sorts of contacts with the Soviet Union.

In his final speech to the foreign ministers conference in Geneva, Lloyd referred to action taken by the government in concert with the Soviet government which contributed to producing "the kind of atmosphere in which agreements are possible". He talked of "specific measures with regard to the expansion of mutual trade, the development of mutual contacts and the facilitation of communications". In the later speech to the House, he further specified "an increase in our cultural arrangements" and cited the ending of jamming of BBC broadcasts as "one by-product of better understanding". In this view, the development of political, economic and cultural contacts were all interrelated and part of a coherent strategy. The object of British detente policy, according to Lloyd, was nothing less than "evolving a system of regulating international affairs" which would "avoid a constant atmosphere of crisis".<sup>219</sup>

#### Detente and deterrence

An important insight into the British approach to detente is provided by the clarification of the relationship between detente and deterrence that emerged during the Macmillan period. An indication of British attitudes, it will be recalled, was apparent as early as 1950 with Churchill's objection to the 'negotiation from strength' principle. The argument was that American policy tended to be less balanced than this aphorism would suggest: 'strength' always seemed to have a higher priority than 'negotiation'.

By implication the British view was either that negotiation was more important than strength or that both were equally important though priorities might change over time. The account of British policy in the first half of the 1950s suggests that the second option characterised the British position. Persistent though British efforts to conciliate were,

219. The relevant extracts from Lloyd's speeches can be found in RIIA Documents 1959 pp. 69-74; RIIA Documents 1960 pp. 2-3. On this broader conception of detente, see also A. Sampson, Macmillan: A Study in Ambiguity (Allen Lane: Penguin, 1967) p.149.

the continuing perception of the Soviet threat was such that those efforts were located within and closely related to the institutionalised structure of deterrence that British policy had done much to create. Serious threats to that structure produced a British response designed to shore up the foundations. Only when the structure was perceived to be in good order was policy orientated towards the promotion of detente. A brief résumé of British policy in the second half of 1954 will serve to illustrate.

Between August 1954, when the French Assembly finally refused to ratify the EDC, and the ratification of the Paris agreements in May 1955, the continued existence of the North Atlantic alliance was in doubt. The problem of how to bring a rearmed West Germany into NATO within a framework that would allay the fears of the other allies produced an unambiguous British response. Eden worked hard and successfully to repair the damage: Churchill's attempts to get the major powers to a summit conference had to be temporarily shelved.

An indication of Churchill's position had already emerged from his discussions with Eisenhower at Bermuda in December 1953. According to John Colville's account, the prime minister advocated a policy which linked together simple notions of detente and deterrence and seemed to go to the heart of Churchill's conception of detente.

"Both at the Plenary Conferences and in private Churchill advocated what it amused him to call his policy of 'Double Dealing'. This he described as a policy of strength towards the Soviet Union combined with holding out the hand of friendship. He said that only by proving to our peoples that we should neglect no chance of easement, could we persuade them to accept the sacrifices necessary to maintain strong armed forces."<sup>220</sup>

Such was the continuity of the basic conceptions that underpinned British policy that exactly four years later Macmillan was expounding a similar theme. Having returned from the NATO Council meeting in Paris where he

220. J. Colville, Footprints in Time (London: Collins, 1976) p.240.

had successfully carried through what was referred to earlier in modern parlance as a 'dual track' policy, he summed up the British position to the House of Commons.

"Our policy ... is really two-fold, and I think in essence simple. It is a firm and powerful NATO, from the military point of view, but always ready to discuss and to negotiate on a practical basis to obtain practical results."

In his memoirs, the prime minister adds "in a single phrase it could be described as 'arm and parley'".<sup>221</sup>

It was in his party political broadcast at the beginning of 1958, however, that Macmillan gave the most explicit and detailed account of the relationship between detente and deterrence from a British perspective. Not only did they constitute the "only two ways to preserve the peace of the world" but they were regarded as "parallel, indeed complementary" approaches.<sup>222</sup> This consistent view of detente and deterrence as in effect two sides of the same coin was a major influence on British policy during the Macmillan period. A viable structure of deterrence in political as well as military terms was required to balance a policy of detente and vice-versa. If that structure was fundamentally undermined, as was the case with NATO in the twelve months after Suez, priority was given to strengthening the alliance. Once the effectiveness of NATO had been re-established to the satisfaction of the British government, priority was given to the promotion of detente. The six months after the Paris summit, with both deterrence and detente undermined, sees perhaps the clearest illustration of 'double dealing' or a 'two-fold' policy in action during this period.

#### British and American attitudes to detente

This British conception of detente as it developed during the Macmillan period appeared to have some impact upon American attitudes. The point was made earlier that East-West negotiations came to occupy a higher priority

221. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) p.340.

222. Ibid. p.463.

towards the end of Eisenhower's second term and during the Kennedy period. To the extent that this represented a fundamental reorientation of American policy, it was argued that British diplomacy played a significant role.

In conceptual terms, there was also some movement even if basic American attitudes remained resilient. Macmillan was surprised that Dulles 'seemed to like' the idea of a continuous series of East-West negotiations when it was put to him during his last visit to London in February 1959.<sup>223</sup> By October of that year, Eisenhower is said to have come round to "the British concept of a series of summit talks, interspersed with detailed negotiations at foreign ministers level".<sup>224</sup> Kennedy came into office opposed to summit diplomacy but within four months he was meeting Khrushchev.<sup>225</sup> Interestingly, on his return from Vienna, the president described his meeting in language reminiscent of that used by Macmillan to describe his visit to Moscow. For Kennedy also, the meeting was in effect a personal reconnaissance which, it was hoped, would facilitate greater mutual understanding and lessen the "chances of a dangerous misjudgment" on both sides.<sup>226</sup>

But Vienna was an aberration. Thereafter, the Kennedy administration displayed a clear preference for developing direct contacts with Moscow along conventional diplomatic channels. For the time being, resistance to personalised diplomacy was strengthened by what was for Kennedy an unhappy experience and doubtless by the views of a Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, who had published a powerful restatement of the standard American position on summitry in 1960.<sup>227</sup> Kennedy did not again succumb

223. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) pp. 588-589.

224. RIIA Survey 1959-60 p.51; see also H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.114 "...President Eisenhower had actually said that it would be a good plan to think in terms of a Summit meeting every year."

225. RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 213, 226-227.

226. See RIIA Documents 1961 especially p.283.

227. See D. Rusk, "The president", Foreign Affairs, 38:3, April 1960, pp. 353-369.

to the temptation of a personal meeting with his opposite number: the occasional special envoy, usually Averell Harriman, was employed when it was thought necessary to supplement or transcend regular channels.

As for the wider British conception of detente; the link between East-West negotiations and a more permanent system of contact and exchange, the almost symbiotic relationship between detente and deterrence: this appeared to have little direct impact on the development of American thinking during this period.

### Detente and domestic political imperatives

Having established the conceptual base of British detente policy, the remaining sections of this chapter consider other factors which underpinned policy during this period. Following the structure of the last chapter, this starts with an explanation of policy in terms of domestic political considerations. It will be argued that domestic factors were more important as an explanation of detente, certainly in the period up to the general election in October 1959, than they were in the first half of the 1950s.

The significance of the domestic context derives essentially from the sensitivity of the prime minister's political antennae. As he recounts in his memoirs in characteristically dramatic terms, Macmillan suddenly became aware of the salience of the nuclear issue in the Spring of 1957, and he relates his determination to push for a detente directly to the need "to satisfy public opinion at home".<sup>228</sup>

"It is difficult now to realise the genuine anxiety about nuclear arms, amounting almost to hysteria, which had started to develop and was to continue for several years in certain sections in Britain. Processions, demonstrations and deputations began to pursue me in and out of season, and were to continue almost to the end of my Premiership ... Much of the fear was based upon the obvious danger which confronted the world, and with this I was deeply in

228. See footnote 2. To his credit, Macmillan makes no attempt in his memoirs to suggest that he was motivated only by the loftiest of considerations. The reader is left to try to disentangle the motives of Macmillan the politician and Macmillan the statesman.

sympathy ... At this time, as young boys and girls began to organise marches from Aldermaston, I began to realise how profound and how widespread was the concern and how easily it could be exploited."<sup>229</sup>

Not only were these fears being exploited by the Russians in Macmillan's view, but more importantly in electoral terms, they were being exploited by a Labour Party strengthened by the return of Aneurin Bevan to the fold.<sup>230</sup> The new shadow foreign secretary, armed with the nuclear issue, was clearly regarded as a potent threat.<sup>231</sup> Interestingly, Bevan himself was regarded as a special threat because he represented a Radical rather than a Socialist tradition which Macmillan saw as still occupying the important middle ground of British politics.<sup>232</sup>

229. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) p.297

230. The rift between Gaitskell and Bevan had been healed at the end of 1956 when the party leader invited Bevan to be his shadow foreign secretary. C.F. Brand, The British Labour Party (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press 1974) p.283.

231. After a 'flaring row' in the House following the announcement of a second thermonuclear test, Macmillan commented in his diary on June 4th 1957. "This is the first time that Bevan has really declared himself ... It's clear to me that he thinks the H-bomb can be an electoral winner for the Socialists and worked up into a sort of Peace Ballot Campaign. I fear that he is right." H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) p.298.

232. On June 5th the prime minister sent a minute to Charles Hill, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who was in charge of 'publicity'. This set out his view that "all this propaganda about the bomb" combined with Suez "has drawn away from us that wavering vote with vague Liberal and nonconformist traditions which plays such an important role because it is still the no-man's land between the great entrenched Parties on either side". Bevan was located within this Radical tradition. Ibid. pp. 298-299.

It was the Labour Party, however, rather than any broad left of centre coalition built around unilateralism that had become the identifiable threat by the end of 1957. Macmillan's confident expectation in June that Bevan would "go violently anti-bomb ... and out-manoeuvre Gaitskell" proved to be unfounded. At the Labour Party conference in September, Bevan renounced unilateralism and stood side by side with his leader symbolising reconciliation and presenting a picture of a party enjoying greater solidarity than at any time perhaps since the war.<sup>233</sup>

In the context of the policy of detente that Macmillan was soon to initiate, Bevan's speech at Brighton is worthy of note. The object of keeping nuclear weapons, he argued, was not only to avoid sending a British foreign secretary (in the famous phrase) "naked into the conference chamber" but to enable him to play a mediating role once he was there. "We want to have the opportunity of interposing between the two giants, modifying, moderating and mitigating influence."<sup>234</sup>

Though Bevan saw East-West negotiations as the best way of getting rid of nuclear weapons, his views on an appropriate British role in those negotiations were uncomfortably close to Macmillan's own thoughts. It is significant that the prime minister should choose a party political broadcast less than four months later to present a detailed rationale for a policy of detente combined with a continued policy of deterrence. This public justification of a balanced policy can be seen as a response both to an increasingly vocal section of largely unilateralist opinion in the country<sup>235</sup> and to a unified Labour leadership that now appeared capable of exploiting any indication that the government was not doing all it could to

233. C.F. Brand, *op.cit.* p.283.

234. Quoted in S. Zuckerman, Nuclear Illusion and Reality (London: Collins, 1982) p.139.

235. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was formed the next month. The prime minister's attempts to set up a summit meeting in the early months of 1958 are annotated in his memoirs with references to the climate of domestic opinion. See, for example, H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1971) pp. 402, 469-470.

promote East-West negotiations.<sup>236</sup>

The twin threats posed by public opinion and the Labour Party provided an even more pressing context for government policy in the twelve months that began with Khrushchev's ultimatum on Berlin and ended with the 1959 general election. Berlin was after all the classic example of an East-West crisis that could trigger a nuclear war and it reinforced popular fears of nuclear weapons.<sup>237</sup>

Macmillan's visit to Moscow and the 'Macmillan Plan' need to be set within a domestic political context for explanatory purposes. A series of lectures given by Hugh Gaitskell at Harvard in the Autumn of 1957, combined with some ideas on Germany developed by Denis Healey, became the basis of a 'Gaitskell Plan' for disengagement in Central Europe following agreement on a reunified but neutralised Germany. With some modifications this became official Labour Party and TUC policy in April 1958.<sup>238</sup> These and related ideas sparked a debate in Britain which posed a direct challenge to the

236. It was now assumed in Washington not for the first time that British pressure for a summit reflected in turn Labour Party pressure on the government. "Of course", commented Dulles to Eisenhower, "Macmillan is being hard-pressed by the Labour Party to move quickly in this field." Letter to the president, February 21st 1958, D.D. Eisenhower Papers. The Chatham House Survey notes that two months later, former secretary of state Dean Acheson came out with "a violent diatribe against 'the opposition parties in Europe' - particularly the British Labour Party - which (he alleged) were pushing their governments towards a summit against their own responsible judgments". RIIA Survey 1956-1958 p.566.

237. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 p.6.

238. For developments in Labour Party policy including the Gaitskell Plan, see Intelligence Report 7992. "Western European Pressures for Disengagement", prepared by the Office of Intelligence Research and Analysis for Western Europe, U.S. Bureau of Intelligence and Research April 8th 1959, pp. 4-5.



government to come up with concrete proposals of its own.<sup>239</sup> After the Berlin crisis had begun pressure mounted on the government to do something to lessen the possibility of nuclear war in Europe.

On January 20th 1959, Macmillan was criticised in the House for a policy statement on Berlin which followed the inflexible line agreed at the NATO Council meeting the previous month. The prime minister was urged to take the lead in offering positive proposals to the Soviet government.<sup>240</sup> On the same day, Macmillan sent a telegram to the State Department informing Dulles of his plan to visit Moscow. The Moscow decision had already been taken but opposition pressure can only have reinforced Macmillan's determination to go and seems likely to have influenced the content of the proposals he took with him.<sup>241</sup>

A high profile detente policy in 1959, starting with the Moscow trip, a natural 'media event', can clearly be explained in part at least in terms of the expectation of electoral advantage. It promised to neutralise the opposition threat on the nuclear issue and it had an obvious popular appeal.

239. The relevant literature associated with this debate includes H. Gaitskell, The Challenge of Coexistence (Harvard: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958); D. Healey, A Neutral Belt in Europe (Fabian Society, 1958); George Kennan's 1957 Reith Lectures published as Russia, the Atom and the West (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958). A useful overview written at the time is provided by M. Howard, Disengagement in Europe (London: Penguin Special, 1958).

240. H.C. Deb. Vol. 598 Coll. 33-37; RIIA Survey 1959-60 p.17 fn.5.

241. This is implied at least by the prime minister's account. "The House of Commons had now returned, and Parliamentary questions about Berlin and Russia were pouring in. Gaitskell and Bevan were naturally both pressing me hard, being apparently converts to the idea of 'disengagement' and German neutrality." H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) pp. 582-583. If the 'Macmillan Plan' was essentially declaratory, as suggested earlier, it can be said to have been directed towards the opposition benches as well as the other powers.

Macmillan could look the part of a statesman of world stature and the Conservative Party could claim the mantle of the 'party of peace'. Like previous Conservative administrations in the 1950s, the Macmillan government was very concerned about the prospect of an election and particularly sensitive to the charge of bellicosity.<sup>242</sup> The electoral potential of getting the major powers to a summit meeting, preferably before October 8th, was not lost on the leadership.<sup>243</sup>

But if perceptions of electoral advantage help to explain a policy of detente in 1959, whether in fact that policy helped the Conservatives almost to double their majority in October is less clear. Despite the prime minister's apparent belief that elections are usually won on foreign policy issues,<sup>244</sup> analysis of the 1959 election suggests that while the detente policy did the party no harm at the polls, providing what Nigel Fisher has called a 'helpful prelude', no aspect of foreign or defence policy was crucial.<sup>245</sup> Butler and Rose argue that the swing back to the Conservatives began in the Summer of 1958 and was clinched by the economic upturn and the hot Summer of 1959.<sup>246</sup>

Nevertheless it can be argued that electoral and domestic political pressures as a whole were significant determinants of a detente policy in the first half of Macmillan's period of office. After October 1959, however, domestic considerations appear to be less central to an explanation of policy.

242. As Bartlett comments, "despite their retention of office for thirteen years, the Tories rarely felt secure". C.J. Bartlett, *op.cit.* p.185.

243. See, for example, H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1972) pp. 80,92; RIIA Survey 1959-60 p.51.

244. A view expressed to a surprised Harold Evans in March 1962. *Op.cit.* p.190.

245. N. Fisher, *op.cit.* p.220. In the language of the party manifesto 'Prosperity and Peace', the former rather than the latter was crucial.

246. D.E. Butler and R. Rose, The British General Election of 1959 (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1970) p.198; for other relevant parts of the analysis, see pp. 32, 64-65, 71.

The Labour Party was certainly a less threatening force to contend with having lost a third successive election. The landslide defeat in 1959 signalled another bout of internal feuding which undermined the solidarity of the Party and the precarious unity of the leadership. One important result of the recriminations was that the Scarborough Conference in 1960 voted in favour of unilateral nuclear disarmament.<sup>247</sup>

This 'capture' of the Labour Party by CND albeit short-lived may have compounded that Party's problems, but as a demonstration of the strength of unilateralist sentiment in the country, it served as a reminder to the government that the popular mood could not be ignored. Elements of that mood constituted a domestic consensus that was reflected in the government's continuing attempts to promote detente. Conciliatory diplomacy during the Berlin crisis in 1961, for example, drew support from popular attitudes insofar as they were articulated through the Press and in opinion polls.<sup>248</sup>

Such was the extent of that consensus that it is difficult to identify any significant domestic opposition to a detente policy. Macmillan, unlike Churchill, appears to have encountered little opposition from within the Cabinet or the Conservative Party.<sup>249</sup> Had there been any serious opposition, it can be assumed that it would have been overcome by the prime minister's commitment to detente and his 'presidential' style of government.<sup>250</sup> Until 1960, Macmillan in effect acted as his own foreign

247. The vote was reversed at the Blackpool Conference the following year. C.F. Brand, *op.cit.* pp.291-292.

248. For some discussion of these attitudes, see RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 233, 275; J.L. Richardson, *op.cit.* pp.316,318-319.

249. Cabinet rejection of the prime minister's initial plan to go to Moscow is a rare example. See H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1971) pp. 466-467.

250. See D.C. Watt, Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place 1900-1975 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984) p.141. For a useful recent summary of the 'Cabinet' versus 'Prime Ministerial Government' debate, see James Barber, "The power of the prime minister", in R.L. Borthwick and J.E. Spence (eds.), British Politics in Perspective (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1984) pp. 73-101.

secretary, with Selwyn Lloyd as his deputy. Lord Home had more independence as foreign secretary but his views on inter alia detente were very close to those of the prime minister.<sup>251</sup>

According to Anthony Sampson, that domestic consensus did not extend to the professional diplomats in the Foreign Office to the extent that they were opposed to summitry. After the collapse of the Paris summit "the critics of 'summit diplomacy' - including a large part of the Foreign Office - were full of 'I told you so'".<sup>252</sup> There were certainly diplomats who were sceptical of summitry, Gladwyn Jebb the ambassador in Paris at the time of the summit is a good example.<sup>253</sup> But, as in the earlier period, there is little evidence to suggest that the Foreign Office as a whole was opposed to detente during this period. Indeed the broader 'philosophy' of detente as articulated through Selwyn Lloyd in particular would indicate that the Office took a broadly supportive view of government policy.

To sum up, perceptions of the nuclear issue and its electoral consequences were such that government efforts to promote detente in the 1957-59 period can be explained partly at least in domestic political terms. If a sweeping victory at the polls and the consequent weakness of the Labour Party made domestic factors less imperative after 1959, there remained a broad domestic consensus that supported a continued policy of detente. A constant element within that consensus was a widespread fear of nuclear war. The next section considers how far this fear was shared by government and the extent to which this fear rather than domestic factors per se underpinned government policy.

251. A. Sampson, *op.cit.* p.141.

252. *Ibid.* p.151.

253. See Lord Gladwyn, Memoirs (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972) pp. 276-277, 321-322.

### Detente and governmental fears of nuclear war

It is apparent from the available documents that the Macmillan government shared the same preoccupations about the dangers of nuclear weapons that had stirred earlier Conservative administrations to play a conciliatory role in East-West relations: the pervasive fear of nuclear war initiated either by accident or design and the particular vulnerability of Britain to nuclear attack. By the later 1950s, however, it appeared to be the fear of nuclear war as a consequence of miscalculation that was perceived to be the greater danger.

There was undoubtedly some ambivalence about the impact of nuclear weapons on international relations. The government did make statements from time to time to the effect that nuclear weapons were an effective deterrent, that in fact it was the existence of nuclear weapons that would prevent a major war breaking out.<sup>254</sup> But this sort of comment seemed designed primarily to allay very obvious public anxieties. In private, the danger of the actual use of nuclear weapons appeared to be the paramount concern of the government and the prime minister in particular.

In the first defence white paper published by the Macmillan government, it was admitted 'frankly' and publicly that there was "no means of providing adequate protection for the people of this country against the consequences of an attack with nuclear weapons". Therefore "the overriding consideration of all military planning must be to prevent war rather than prepare for it".<sup>255</sup> The military implications of this deterrence doctrine were the need to strengthen the deterrent both in terms of the NATO alliance and the independent British deterrent, but the political implications were equally important. It was necessary to work for a detente to avoid crises in which

254. A good example is Macmillan's controversial comment to the Press from Gleneagles golf course at the height of the 1961 Berlin crisis. "There would be much more danger of war if weapons were not so destructive. Fifty years ago we could have had a war. Now it is not much fun for anybody." 26th August 1961. Quoted in RIIA Survey 1961 p.248 fn.2.

255. Defence, Outline of Future Policy, April 4th 1957. Quoted in RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.225.

nuclear weapons might be used.

Actions taken to bolster a credible deterrent posture, however, exacerbated fears about vulnerability, the public acknowledgment of which the Soviet government was not slow to exploit. Scarcely veiled hints about British vulnerability to nuclear attack, particularly if American missiles were to be based in the UK, became a regular theme of Bulganin's correspondence with Macmillan.<sup>256</sup> The prime minister's response to the first letter from his opposite number made his own concerns apparent.

"The first and most important question that faces us all is how to dispel the threat of war: you and I have lived through two world wars. We have seen their terrors. We must wish to preserve our children and grandchildren from a third and perhaps final tragedy."<sup>257</sup>

Fundamental changes in the strategic environment that emerged at the end of 1957 did little to lessen British fears. The launching of Sputnik may have heralded an era of 'mutual deterrence' but no enhanced sense of security was detectable in Britain. On the contrary, these changes were interpreted as more threatening to the extent that they demonstrated the strength and increased the confidence of the Soviet Union, promised to accelerate the nuclear arms race, and seemed likely to increase the vulnerability of Europe as a whole in the event of a nuclear war. Given also the predictable American interpretation of these changes in narrow military terms, the new environment reinforced the need to seek a modus vivendi between the two blocs.<sup>258</sup>

256. For example, Bulganin's letters of April 20th and December 11th 1957. RIIA Documents 1957 pp. 7-8, 37-38. See also Khrushchev's warning that Soviet missiles would henceforth be aimed at the UK, following the February 1958 agreement to establish Thor missile bases in Britain. RIIA Survey 1956-58 p.506.

257. Letter to Bulganin, June 14th 1957. RIIA Documents 1957 pp. 11-12.

258. See RIIA Survey 1956-58 pp. 350, 474.

Perhaps the most worrying consequences of these changes were the succession of East-West crises over the next few years that began in the Middle East in the Summer of 1958. As in the earlier period, crises and the heightened risk of nuclear war associated with them triggered an active British detente role.<sup>259</sup> The forebodings expressed by the prime minister during the 1958-59 Berlin crisis can be taken to illustrate the significance of nuclear fears as a determinant of policy.

Macmillan describes the Berlin situation as he saw it in the middle of January 1959 when the decision to go to Moscow was taken. It was a "situation which might so easily drift from month to month with inter-changes of diplomatic notes ... until a final disaster".<sup>260</sup> The fear was that the Pentagon's 'contingency plans', which would presumably become operative in the event of a Soviet attempt to block Western access to Berlin, would lead to conventional fighting which in turn could 'so easily' escalate into a nuclear war. Ambiguous statements from the White House about whether or not nuclear weapons would be used in the Berlin context only increased those fears.<sup>261</sup>

Macmillan was so concerned that he now began to see an analogy between the developing crisis over Berlin and the build up to the First World War.

259. It can be argued that the government chose not to play an active conciliatory role in the 1958 Formosa Strait crisis because, in contrast to the 1954-55 crisis, of assurances that nuclear weapons would not be used. As Macmillan noted in his diary on September 21st, "the President has told Selwyn Lloyd that he is against the use of even tactical atomic weapons in a limited operation". H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) p.555. See also RIIA Survey 1956-58 pp. 570-571.

260. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) p.582 (emphasis added).

261. See R.A. Divine, op.cit. pp. 134-136. On January 28th at a White House meeting on Berlin, General Nathan Twining, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, expressed his readiness 'to fight a general nuclear war'. Macmillan was 'relieved' but scarcely reassured by Dulles who, on his visit to London in February, gave him the 'impression' that Eisenhower had 'overruled the soldiers' and that the military plans for Berlin had been scaled down. See diary 4th February, H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) p.587.

"Above all", he noted in his diary on February 4th, "we must not slip into the 1914 position - mobilisation sliding into war".<sup>262</sup> His first major speech in Moscow confirmed that it was memories of 1914 rather than 1939 that filled his thoughts.

"It is not that we fear acts of calculated aggression ... At the same time it is impossible to hide from ourselves the dangers of a war by miscalculation or by muddle."<sup>263</sup>

So gripped was the prime minister by the 1914 analogy that he made regular references to it either directly or indirectly over the next eighteen months, and applied it to other contexts, notably the tense East-West situation that followed the breakdown of the Paris summit. In his letter of July 19th 1960, he warned Khrushchev that

"if the present trend of events in the world continues, we may all of us one day, either by miscalculation or by mischance, find ourselves caught up in a situation from which we cannot escape."<sup>264</sup>

His diary entry of August 4th was even more explicit.

"Ever since the breakdown of the Summit in Paris I have felt uneasy about the Summer of 1960. It has a terrible similarity to 1914. Now Congo may play the role of Serbia."<sup>265</sup>

The prime minister's Cabinet colleagues may not have been quite as preoccupied with the First World War analogy but there are indications that they shared his general concern about the possibility of nuclear war. "We must have no

262. Ibid. p.588. For an extended discussion of the impact of the First World War on Macmillan's thought, see G. Hutchinson, The Last Edwardian at No. 10 (London: Quartet Books, 1980).

263. Ibid. p.597. See also the prime minister's letter to Selwyn Lloyd on June 26th 1959, which suggests that he was becoming almost phobic about 1914. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 74-75.

264. RIIA Documents 1960 p.51.

265. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 264-265. See also the prime minister's discussion with Harold Evans on July 30th. H. Evans, op.cit. p.115.



more brinkmanship", declared Selwyn Lloyd at the end of his speech to the House in February 1960.<sup>266</sup> Lord Home, his successor at the Foreign Office, offered a post hoc analysis of the Laos crisis which suggested a shared governmental preoccupation with the spectre of East-West crises escalating into a nuclear war.<sup>267</sup>

Closely allied to this concern was a continuing awareness of the vulnerability of Britain to nuclear attack. As recounted in the narrative, Macmillan found Eisenhower still resistant to the idea of a summit when he visited Washington in March 1959. According to Robert Divine's account, the prime minister "pleaded with the President, expressing his belief that as few as eight nuclear missiles could wipe out England".<sup>268</sup> The shooting down of the Brize Norton-based RB-47 in July 1960 was a dramatic reminder to the government as well as the wider British public that the UK would be a prime target for Soviet missiles in the event of a nuclear war.<sup>269</sup>

To conclude, governmental perceptions of the dangers of nuclear war reinforced by popular fears offer a potent explanation of a detente policy during the Macmillan period. Concern about British vulnerability in a dangerous nuclear environment was a constant factor which helps to explain the continuity of policy over the period as a whole. If nuclear war was most likely to result from miscalculation on either side of the East-West divide, it was crucially important to work towards improving communications and contacts between the two sides in order to reduce the possibilities of misunderstanding to a minimum.

266. RIIA Documents 1960 p.3.

267. See his speech to the Royal Central Asian Society, December 5th 1962, quoted in RIIA Survey 1961 p.325 fn. 1. The same fears about a miscalculation leading to conventional conflict escalating in turn to nuclear war found general expression in Britain with respect to the 1961 Berlin crisis. For examples, see *ibid.* pp. 226, 233.

268. R.A. Divine, *op.cit.* p.136.

269. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp. 521-522.

Detente, trade and economic interests

A policy of detente during this period not only reflected fears of nuclear war and domestic political pressures but also, to the extent that these factors can be separated for explanatory purposes, it served broader political and economic interests. The British economy may have been much healthier than it had been in the more immediate postwar period, but there remained a strong commercial interest in expanding contacts across the Iron Curtain.

The idea of expanding Anglo-Soviet trade was another theme of the Macmillan-Bulganin correspondence in 1957-8. In Bulganin's first letter, he repeated the April 1956 offer of substantial Soviet purchases of British goods over the next five years. Macmillan confirmed a British interest in expanding trade though, in his reply, he complained that the Soviet government was not doing enough to promote trade by giving British firms access to the Soviet market. The Soviet prime minister retorted by arguing that it was the Cocom controls rather than any problem of access that was preventing expansion.<sup>270</sup>

The significance of the Cocom controls in restraining trade was denied by Macmillan in his letter of September 2nd but, nevertheless, the British government continued to work towards getting the list of embargoed goods reduced.<sup>271</sup> Twelve months later, on August 14th 1958, Britain together with most of the other NATO countries announced a major relaxation of trade restrictions both with respect to the Soviet bloc and China. In the prime minister's words,

"the extensive list ... which had hitherto proved a serious obstacle to commerce was substantially modified. Only a few items remained, and those could really be defended on technical grounds as of vital military importance."<sup>272</sup>

270. See RIIA Documents 1957 pp. 10, 16-17, 28. For the Cocom and Chincom system of controls, see Chapter Three, footnote 152.

271. RIIA Documents 1957 p.32.

272. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1971) p.559. The United States made 'parallel reductions' with respect to the Soviet bloc as a whole but maintained virtually a complete embargo on trade with China, North Korea and North Vietnam.

The government had already taken unilateral action on trade with China. In May 1957, the separate and more restrictive Chincom regulations had been abandoned and replaced by the Cocom list which the government now operated with respect to China also. Significantly, in a letter of Eisenhower justifying the British action, Macmillan used commercial criteria, stressing that "the commercial interests of our two countries are not at all alike. We live by exports - and by exports alone".<sup>273</sup>

The prime minister made the same point two years later in a very frank television broadcast during his Moscow trip. "We are a nation which lives by trade", he told Soviet viewers, "there you have a key to understanding our approach to affairs. A nation living by trade needs peace ... because only then can trade flow freely backward and forward".<sup>274</sup> The communiqué issued after the prime minister's visit "noted with satisfaction that the long-term trend of trade between the two countries was upward and that there was scope for increasing this trade". It was agreed that a UK trade mission would visit the Soviet Union to "investigate the scope for further trade".<sup>275</sup> The result was a five year trade agreement signed in Moscow on May 24th 1959.<sup>276</sup>

273. Ibid. pp. 317-318. US documents suggest that British policy prior to 1957 had contributed to a de facto collapse of the Chincom controls. From December 1955 onwards, the government made extensive use of 'exception procedures' with respect to trade with China, and other countries had followed suit. See, for example, a memorandum prepared for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs by the Deputy Director of Intelligence, C.J.C.S. 901 China 21st June 1956, Department of Defense memorandum.

274. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1971) p.629.

275. RIIA Documents 1959 p.13.

276. See Cmnd.771; H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1972) p.64.

The commercial arguments for the expansion of East-West trade were clearly important from a British perspective, but again the case can be made that they were not critical. The healthier condition of the British economy, the limited potential for increasing trade across the Iron Curtain, and the conception of detente articulated by British spokesmen during this period all suggest that the assumed political benefits of trade and other East-West contacts were much more significant.

It had been recognised on both sides during the Bulganin-Khrushchev visit in 1956 that there were mutual advantages to be derived from a broadly-based programme of exchanges. This philosophy underpinned an "intensification of contacts, commercial and cultural" during the 1957-63 period.<sup>277</sup> Bulganin's first letter to Macmillan reiterated the essence of this view. The expansion of trade would not only benefit both economies but "would at the same time provide a firm foundation for the improvement of their political relations".<sup>278</sup> Macmillan's reply made clear his view that 'cultural exchanges' were as important as the expansion of trade though he complained of barriers on the Soviet side to "the unrestricted exchange of persons and information which is the necessary basis for mutual understanding".<sup>279</sup>

An instrumental view of trade and more open contacts generally with the Soviet bloc is illustrated in various ways during this period. In April 1958, for example, frustrated that hopes of a summit had been diverted by the unilateral suspension of Soviet nuclear tests, Macmillan's thoughts turned to trade as an alternative vehicle for making progress towards a detente: "... I had already begun to think of some method of making a forward movement. If we could not make much progress on disarmament, what about trade?"<sup>280</sup>

277. D. Wilson, "Anglo-Soviet relations: the effect of ideas upon reality", International Affairs, 50:3, July 1974 p.386.

278. RIIA Documents 1957 p.10.

279. Ibid. p.17. Nevertheless it was agreed during Macmillan's Moscow visit that the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council would visit Moscow in the near future. This resulted in the signing of the first of a series of annual agreements on cultural exchanges in December 1959. See Cmnd.917.

280. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) p.483.

The following year the prime minister responded to American anxieties about the proposed Anglo-Soviet trade talks not only by repeating commercial arguments but also by revealing his faith in the political benefits of a little capitalist infiltration.<sup>281</sup> The same beliefs appear to explain the development of contacts with certain East European countries from 1960 onwards.<sup>282</sup> In this context, trade and other contacts promised to strengthen the independence of those countries thereby weakening the Soviet bloc. As in the early 1950s, detente as open contacts can be interpreted as an alternative lower-risk strategy to political warfare, designed in the longer term both to ameliorate the communist threat and to achieve a modus vivendi between the blocs.

As in the earlier period, this strategy was not only conceived as a political solvent in inter-bloc relations but also as a symbol of political independence in the context of Anglo-American relations. Reinforced by the recurrent protests of domestic commercial interests, the shipping lobby in particular, there remained what might be called a residual sensitivity to the use of trade controls to serve American political interests.<sup>283</sup> This

281. "We know that the Russians are trying to increase the consumer goods which they make available to their people. I hope that we can provide them with some of the plant and machinery they need for this purpose. On the whole the more they do this, the better it will be, for if the people become more comfortable and their living standards rise they may become in the long run more amenable." Extract from letter to Eisenhower, May 12th 1959. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.62. This letter can be compared to the letter sent by Churchill to Eisenhower on March 24th 1954. See Chapter Three, pages 107-108, footnote 163.
282. For example, a three year trade agreement was signed with Romania in 1960 and a cultural agreement with Hungary in 1962. See E. Barker, op.cit. p.263.
283. See, for example, the protests at the beginning of 1958 that were reflected in a debate on East-West trade in the House of Commons, The Times, 10th January 1958; F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, Britain and Soviet Communism (London: Macmillan, 1982) p.227.

surfaced in 1957 with respect to the Chincom controls and the following year with Cocom.<sup>284</sup> Perhaps the most explicit illustration of continuing sensitivities in this context though is provided by American efforts through 1962 to encourage the European allies to support their decision to embargo all trade with Cuba. In the face of considerable pressure from the Kennedy administration matched by countervailing pressures from the British trading community, the government remained resolutely opposed to any new measures of restriction on Cuban trade.<sup>285</sup>

#### Detente, status and influence

A perception of threat to British economic interests serves as a convenient point of departure for an appreciation finally of the broader political interests served by persistent efforts to promote East-West detente. Serious differences of interest with the United States both political and economic had been dramatically highlighted by the Suez crisis. Despite Macmillan's successful attempt to heal this major rift in Anglo-American relations, the 1956 crisis sharpened an awareness of those differences and the continuing need to be vigilant in the protection of distinctive British interests.

The Middle East was not the only area where those differences surfaced. Conciliatory British diplomacy during the Laos crisis, for example, reflected a perception of British interests in South East Asia which complicated a

284. An interesting indication of the prime minister's sensitivities on this issue is contained in a note he sent to Selwyn Lloyd in April 1958. "What is happening ... about Russian trade? When do you think it will be safe to take a strong line with the Americans? I suppose not until the Amendment Bill for the MacMahon Act is through ... My view is that the President and Dulles are really on our side; it is Congress that they fear. However, our experience over bringing the China list into line with the Russian was that the pressure groups were more or less inactive." H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1971) p.482.

285. For details, see RIIA Survey 1962 pp. 44-45, 50-52.

simple application of cold war images. The more pragmatic British response to changes in that area was to support governments which were judged not to constitute a threat to British interests rather than the acceptability or otherwise of their apparent ideological stance. For the United States on the other hand, until the Kennedy administration began to modify attitudes somewhat, an unambiguous commitment to anti-communism was required to elicit support.<sup>286</sup>

As a traumatic illustration of Britain's 'descent from power', Suez provided an important stimulus to a detente policy in other ways. By underlining material weakness and the difficulty of defending interests by traditional politico-military methods, Suez hastened the search for alternative ways of maintaining global influence. A constructive, high profile role in moderating East-West tensions promised not only to divert attention from material decline but also to provide a claim to moral leadership which Suez again had undermined.

The perceived linkage between a detente policy and British status and prestige became most explicit when a leading role in the detente process was challenged by the United States. Macmillan's concern, as he faced the prospect of an Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit at Camp David, was that direct superpower contacts might diminish the status that had accrued from a mediating role and reveal Britain as a 'second-rate power'.<sup>287</sup>

286. The Chatham House Survey develops this point. The British government was not "over-concerned with the containment of communism as such in that area, but rather with the protection of her economic interests, notably in Malaya, and of course eventually in Australia and New Zealand. Consequently her primary concern had been for friendly and stable governments in South East Asia". RIIA Survey 1961 p.323.

287. See diary 26th July 1959, H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) p.80. As implied in earlier sections of this chapter, British claims to a special status just below the superpowers but above the other European allies were further challenged by the growing status of West Germany and France under De Gaulle after 1958. On this challenge, see E. Barker, op.cit. pp. 119,143; RIIA Survey 1961 p.51.

Twelve months later, Macmillan told Harold Evans that his letter to Khrushchev on July 19th 1960 had been written "to get back the initiative for our country and for myself".<sup>288</sup> This interesting admission reveals a concern with the impact of the Paris débacle on Britain's international standing and the prime minister's own reputation. From this perspective, the 'damage-limitation' strategy pursued in the second half of 1960 can be interpreted as an attempt to minimise the damage done to collective and individual reputations. Indeed the prime minister's preoccupation with the presentational aspects of his speech to the United Nations in September of that year suggests that he saw the UN as the perfect forum in which to rectify any damage done.<sup>289</sup> Through his masterful speech, qualities of independence, leadership and statesmanship befitting the representative of a major global actor, could be displayed to the widest audience possible.

But it has to be said in conclusion that New York was a poor substitute for Paris and the series of three or four power summit meetings that Macmillan had worked so hard to achieve. Institutionalized summitry, the prime minister surely hoped, would have offered regular opportunities for such dazzling displays and would certainly have secured a more permanent vehicle for maintaining great power status and wielding global influence.

288. In a conversation on July 30th 1960. H. Evans, op.cit. p.118.

289. See H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1972) pp. 275-279.



The last two chapters have analysed British detente policy over the 1953-63 period as a whole. This chapter complements these overview chapters by developing a detailed case study of British detente policy in action. With the object of throwing further light on the nature and the impact of British policy, this chapter describes and evaluates the significance of the British contribution to the negotiations between 1958 and 1963 which culminated in the signing of a Partial Test Ban Treaty in August 1963.<sup>1</sup> In the context of this thesis, the test ban issue rather suggests itself as a case study to the extent that it has been argued elsewhere that British diplomacy, and prime minister Harold Macmillan in particular, played a crucial role in the test ban negotiations.

Harold Evans, for example, argues that the treaty

"was an event which will surely merit a place in the history books - and rank as a true Macmillan achievement. It was he - with his sense of history - who read the signs aright in Russia and saw the opportunities: who coaxed and prodded the Americans: who argued the case with Khrushchev: and finally took the initiative which led to the Kennedy-Macmillan approach. He had persisted, moreover, despite the collapse of the Paris summit."<sup>2</sup>

Anthony Sampson suggests that "Macmillan had succeeded, through the years of distrust in keeping the lines open, and keeping the object in sight; and he had argued the case passionately and effectively".<sup>3</sup> Nigel Fisher goes so far as to conclude that "without his (Macmillan's) earlier initiatives, the 1963 Test Ban Treaty might never have been signed".<sup>4</sup> To the claims of this trio of biographers can be added the testimony of Lord Hailsham, the minister who represented Britain at the final negotiations in Moscow:

1. Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water (opened for signature August 5th 1963, entered into force October 10th 1963).
2. H. Evans, Downing Street Diary: The Macmillan Years 1957-63 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981) p.285.
3. A. Sampson, Macmillan: A Study in Ambiguity (Allen Lane: Penguin, 1967) p.235.
4. N. Fisher, Harold Macmillan (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982) p.292.

"... it is clear that, if nothing else stood to his credit, Harold Macmillan's influence in bringing about the negotiation of the partial test ban treaty would entitle him to be treated as one of the great benefactors of his generation ... the main credit goes to Harold Macmillan. He it was who saw that the time was ripe, and the parties were willing, and I do not myself believe that, if Britain had been absent from that table, a viable agreement would at that time have been negotiated, since Russian relationships with the United States were far less relaxed then than now."<sup>5</sup>

Sir Michael Wright, who was the chief British negotiator at the Geneva negotiations until 1962, claims that the British contribution to the test ban negotiations consisted of important initiatives at critical stages together with more sustained pressure 'behind the scenes' over the whole period of the negotiations. He argues that the significance of British diplomacy was heightened by the fluctuating postures adopted by both superpowers towards the issue. As he puts it,

"British policy showed none of the vacillations of Moscow or the hesitation of Washington; and the single-minded purpose behind it was of significant influence in the shaping of the Western attitude and the course of the negotiations."<sup>6</sup>

From a non-British perspective, Glenn Seaborg, the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission under President Kennedy and a close observer of the negotiations, was clearly impressed by the influence of Britain on the United States.

5. Lord Hailsham, The Door Wherein I Went (London: Collins, 1975) p.217.

6. M. Wright, Disarm and Verify (New York: Praeger, 1964) p.135.

"In matters of testing and test ban negotiations, from the Eisenhower period forward the British consistently endeavoured, often with success, to exercise a moderating influence on US policy ... Considering their relative unimportance as a military force, particularly in nuclear weapons, it is remarkable to consider how much influence the British had over US arms and arms control policies during this period."<sup>7</sup>

These illustrative comments from participants and commentators give a clear indication of the potential of the test ban issue as a case study of British policy. They also provide a focus for an evaluation of the British role. Two major questions structure the analysis here. How significant was the British contribution to the negotiation and final achievement of a test ban treaty? How important was that treaty to the process of detente? The analysis begins, however, with a brief account of the emergence of nuclear testing as an international issue.

#### The test ban issue: from Bravo to Geneva

Nuclear testing became a significant international issue in March 1954 after a United States thermonuclear test at Bikini Atoll codenamed Bravo produced unexpectedly widespread radioactive fallout, affecting in particular the crew of a Japanese fishing boat. A sudden awareness of the health hazards associated with nuclear testing in the atmosphere led to an immediate public outcry and the beginnings of an international opposition to the continuation of testing.<sup>8</sup>

The Soviet Union proposed a nuclear test ban as a separate arms control measure in the Spring of 1956, but the United States and Britain remained resolutely opposed to separate negotiations to ban tests.<sup>9</sup> The British

7. G.T. Seaborg, Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Test Ban (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) p.113,114.
8. For the development of popular concern on this issue see, in particular, R.A. Divine, Blowing on the Wind: The Nuclear Test Ban Debate 1954-60 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978).
9. See C. Jonsson, Soviet Bargaining Behaviour: The Nuclear Test Ban Case (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1979) p.25.

position on this issue stemmed from the decision announced in February 1955 to develop an hydrogen bomb, a decision which required the continuation of testing to develop appropriate warheads. In January 1957, the government announced a planned series of tests to be held during the course of that year. The British concern at this time was that mounting international pressure might weaken American opposition to a test ban. This concern led the prime minister Harold Macmillan to fly to Bermuda in March 1957 to discuss the problem with President Eisenhower. At that meeting he received the reassurances he sought, the final communiqué stating their agreement that "continued nuclear testing is required, certainly for the present".<sup>10</sup>

Despite a continuing commitment to nuclear testing, the British government was nevertheless involved in the chain of events which resulted in the opening of test ban negotiations at Geneva in October 1958.<sup>11</sup> As described in the last chapter, the test ban issue was first debated between the Western powers and the Soviet Union at the UN disarmament sub-committee meetings which began in March 1957. The Zorin proposals introduced at the first session included a separately negotiated test ban. The British counter proposals of May 6th included the idea of setting up a committee of technical experts to study the possibility of devising an effective control system. It can be argued that these British proposals as a whole were intended to be a delaying device designed specifically to head off the test ban proposal until a credible British deterrent had been developed. But, from the perspective of the later Geneva negotiations, as Jacobson and Stein note, "the important thing was that the idea of technical talks was introduced and gained currency".<sup>12</sup>

10. Quoted in R.A. Divine, op.cit. p.114.

11. Geneva Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapon Tests.

12. United Nations, Disarmament Commission. Subcommittee 1. Relevant Documents and Summary Records, 1957 (UN Document DC/SC 1/56) p.1; H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, Diplomats, Scientists and Politicians: The United States and the Nuclear Test Ban Negotiations (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966) p.18.

In April 1958, the unilateral suspension of Soviet nuclear tests presaged a change in American policy on the test ban issue. President Eisenhower, in a letter to the Soviet leader Khrushchev, proposed a technical conference to work out the details of an inspection system for a future test ban. The Soviet leader accepted this proposal and a conference of scientific experts met in Geneva between July 1st and August 21st, 1958.<sup>13</sup> Agreement on methods of detecting nuclear tests was reached without too much difficulty, but problems emerged with regard to the size of the proposed inspection system. The Soviet delegation suggested a relatively small network of 110 control stations, while the Americans countered with a much more extensive system of 650 stations. After several sessions it became clear that neither proposal could provide the basis of an agreement. At this point, one of the two British representatives, Sir William Penney, introduced a compromise proposal; a network of 170 land stations supplemented by as many as 10 shipboard posts. This proposal was eventually accepted and built into the final report of the conference. The important conclusion of that conference was that "a workable and effective control system" to detect violations of an agreement to suspend nuclear tests was "technically feasible". This opened the way for test ban negotiations to take place.<sup>14</sup>

Before the final report of the conference was officially released, Eisenhower issued a statement calling on the three nuclear powers to negotiate a permanent end to nuclear testing. Moreover, as a sign of good faith, he offered to suspend US tests for one year from the date when negotiations began on the condition that the Soviet Union did not resume testing in the meantime. Macmillan objected strongly to Eisenhower's initiative and the suspension of tests in particular. A letter to the president on August 21st pointed out that Britain was planning a new series

13. The Conference of Experts to Study the Possibility of Detecting Violations of a Possible Agreement on Suspension of Nuclear Tests.

14. R.A. Divine, op.cit. pp.225-228; H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. chapter 3. The proposed control system became known as the 'Geneva System'.

of tests in the Autumn of 1958 and argued that "it would be a mistake to concede suspension without securing Russian acceptance". Eisenhower would not be moved, however, and the British finally went along with the proposal, issuing a statement essentially similar to the American version.<sup>15</sup>

### The test ban negotiations 1958-63

Much apparent progress was made in the early stages of the Geneva conference. The Soviet Union agreed that the basic provisions of the Geneva System could be included in the text of a treaty and by the time the first Geneva session was concluded in December, agreement had been reached on four articles of a test ban treaty. When the second session began in January 1959, however, the Americans informed the Russians that they now had new seismic information derived from their Hardtack series of tests which convinced them that the Conference of Experts had "greatly over-estimated the ability of seismic instrumentation to detect underground tests and to distinguish them from earthquakes". As Seaborg adds, "the new information cast a pall over the Geneva Conference".<sup>16</sup>

15. See RIIA Documents 1958 pp. 102-105. It should be noted that British sources on this period, apparently following Michael Wright's account, are misleading to the extent that they imply that the call for test ban negotiations following the Experts' report, and the commitment to suspend testing, were British initiatives. The allegation is that the Americans and Dulles in particular were still unwilling to negotiate a test ban agreement separate from other disarmament measures, and had to be persuaded to negotiate and to suspend testing. See M. Wright, op.cit. p.130; D. Nunnerly, President Kennedy and Britain (London: Bodley Head, 1972) p.92; A. Sampson, op.cit. p.227. American sources, on the other hand, argue convincingly from primary sources that the Eisenhower administration had effectively decoupled a test ban from other disarmament measures as early as April 1958. This was not a problem therefore after the Experts reported. Eisenhower and Dulles had already won the internal battle on this issue and they took the initiatives. Macmillan merely deferred to the American position, though not without protest. See in particular R.A. Divine, op.cit. pp.206-212, 227-231; also H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. pp.85-94; G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. p.14; H. Macmillan, Riding the Storm 1956-61 (London: Macmillan, 1971) pp.560-563; D.D. Eisenhower, Waging Peace 1956-61 (New York: Garden City, 1965) p.477.

16. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. p.17.

The main implication of the new data, certainly as far as the Americans were concerned, was that many more than the 170-180 control stations outlined in the Geneva System were now required for effective verification, and that many of these stations would need to be on Soviet soil. The result was that the conference became deadlocked on the inspection issue. The Americans were now insisting that all suspicious explosions must be inspected while the Soviet Union was demanding a veto on voting by the proposed Control Commission, which in practice meant a veto on all on-site inspection on Soviet territory.

This deadlock provided the context for an intervention which, Jacobson and Stein suggest, was "the first of a series of British initiatives designed to keep the negotiations alive and to stimulate progress in them".<sup>17</sup> A Soviet representative at Geneva had suggested to David Ormsby-Gore, the British minister responsible for the negotiations, that it would be easier for the Soviet Union to accept a treaty under which it would be subject to on-site inspection if a finite annual quota of such inspections could be established.<sup>18</sup> When Macmillan visited Moscow towards the end of February 1959, he picked up this suggestion and floated the idea of what Wright calls "a small annual deterrent quota of veto-free inspections".<sup>19</sup> Khrushchev showed interest in this compromise solution and the prime minister enthusiastically put the proposition to President Eisenhower when he and Selwyn Lloyd visited Washington in March. The president was unwilling to pursue the quota idea at this stage (though it became official US policy by the end of the year), but the two leaders agreed the outlines of a more flexible negotiating posture.

17. H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. p.167.

18. See Ormsby-Gore's account, Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapon Tests, Verbatim Records, Geneva, 1958-62 (GEN/DNT/PV.) 293 p.10.

19. Wright argues that the Moscow initiative was taken despite 'considerable resistance' to the idea in Washington. See M. Wright, op.cit. p.137; also D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.93. For an account which suggests that the matter was not discussed with the United States, see T.E. Murray, Nuclear Policy for War and Peace (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1960) p.104.

On April 13th, they sent similar letters to the Soviet leader proposing a phased agreement starting with a ban on atmospheric tests up to an altitude of 50 kilometres which would not, initially at least, require on-site inspection. Khrushchev rejected the idea of an atmospheric ban but took up Macmillan's quota proposal and built it into a formal submission to the conference. The Western response was equivocal, however, and the negotiations focused for the rest of that year on the technical problems involved in detecting and identifying nuclear explosions. The size of the annual quota of inspections was to become a recurring stumbling block in the negotiations until 1963, but the Macmillan initiative had at least broken the deadlock and restored some momentum to the negotiations.<sup>21</sup>

It is worth noting here that this initiative demonstrated at an early stage of the negotiations, different British and American attitudes to scientific/technical questions and also the greater British determination (certainly until the Kennedy period) to secure a treaty. While the Americans had already become immersed in the welter of scientific, mainly seismological, data that poured forth from early 1959 onwards, and this almost paralysed decision-making, the British government was less concerned with the findings of seismological research and more concerned with the political requirement of securing a treaty. To this extent they were closer to the Russians than to the Americans: the size of the annual quota of inspections was essentially a political rather than a scientific decision.

The Americans, on the other hand, found it extremely difficult to separate science from politics.<sup>22</sup> This in part at least reflected different views

20. H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. pp.167-183; R.A. Divine, op.cit. pp. 251-258; G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp.17-19.

21. See RIIA Survey 1959-60 pp.33-34.

22. Michael Wright offers a British perspective on the complex relationship between science and politics in this context. See op. cit. especially chapter 12. He also recalls elsewhere that "it was purely a political decision of how many inspections it was necessary to have as a random check. We felt that possibly the very knowledge that there would be some checks - even a relatively small number - was sufficient. We were prepared to take that chance, but the Americans were not." Quoted in D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.106.



of science and the value of seismological research in particular. British scientists demonstrated, particularly in the two technical working groups set up at Geneva in 1959, that they were far more sceptical about the significance of new seismological data than their American colleagues. As the Keesings Report puts it, British scientists were concerned to emphasize "that seismology could not yet be regarded as an exact science and that improvements in technique were necessary before definitive conclusions could be reached".<sup>23</sup> Without implying that the British adopted a cavalier approach to scientific findings relevant to the test ban issue, a more sceptical response appears to have reinforced a clearer focus on political priorities. Wright provides a useful summary of the British approach.

"The underlying and consistent theme on the British side was that the West should be at least as forthcoming in political negotiation as the scientific and technical assessment of the risks involved warranted, since the contrary risks of the continuation of the arms race and of the spread of nuclear weapons were so great."<sup>24</sup>

Twelve months after Macmillan's trip to Moscow, the Geneva negotiations had again reached a 'critical state'. In February 1960, the United States tabled a new treaty proposal which is described by Jacobson and Stein.

"In essence, it provided for a phased treaty, testing nuclear weapons would be prohibited in those environments where in the American view control was feasible, and the prohibition would be extended as control could be extended."<sup>25</sup>

This time the Soviet Union accepted the idea of a phased treaty as long as it was accompanied by a moratorium covering those tests which were not banned. But the reaction in the United States to the Soviet counter proposal was hostile, largely because it would involve a continuation of the unpoliced moratorium.

23. Keesings Research Report, Disarmament: Negotiations and Treaties 1946-71 (New York: Charles Scribner's and sons, 1972) p.184.

24. M. Wright, op.cit. p.139.

25. H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. p.236.

In Britain, the prime minister regarded the Soviet proposal as 'an extremely favourable action', and viewed the American reaction with growing concern.<sup>26</sup> "We must now bring tremendous pressure on the Americans to agree", Macmillan noted in his diary on March 20th.<sup>27</sup> Thus he readily accepted an invitation from the president to visit the United States to discuss the problem. The impact of Macmillan's visit was to strengthen the hand of those inside and outside the administration who were pressing for a positive response to the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup> The result of his meetings with the president was a joint declaration on March 29th which embodied at least a conditionally favourable response to the Soviet plan. A British intervention had again contributed to restoring momentum to the test ban negotiations. This time, however, the momentum promised a much more positive outcome. Seaborg describes the situation.

"While some differences remained, the two sides seemed at this point to be drawing together, and an agreement appeared in the offing. The momentum seemed so strong that those who were opposed to a test ban came forward in haste to make their positions known."

Nevertheless "the anticipation was that final agreement might be reached at the forthcoming Big Four summit meeting in Paris, planned to start on May 16th".<sup>29</sup>

26. Ibid. p.244; see also R.A. Divine, op.cit. p.300.

27. H. Macmillan, Pointing the Way 1959-61 (London: Macmillan, 1972) p.185.

28. Jacobson and Stein argue that the trip was 'rather redundant' because the internal US debate had already been favourably resolved. See op.cit. p.246. But see R.A. Divine, op.cit. pp. 300-302; D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.93.

29. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp.23-24. See also M. Wright, op.cit. p.137. For a more sceptical view, see H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. pp. 259-261.

This 'hopeful atmosphere' was shattered by the collapse of the Paris summit following the shooting down of the American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft. The negotiations continued in Geneva but nothing of substance was achieved. For the remainder of 1960, British efforts on the test ban issue, as on other aspects of East-West relations, were directed at 'damage-limitation'. As pressures grew in the United States to resume testing, British influence was exerted to dissuade Washington from resuming. In August 1960, for example, John McCone, the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, reported to Eisenhower on a meeting he had had in London at which David Ormsby-Gore had tried to extract a commitment that American testing would not be resumed at least until after the presidential elections.<sup>30</sup>

Michael Wright summarises the British contribution to the test ban negotiations up to the end of 1960.

"If it had not been for [Macmillan's] active interventions, the test ban negotiations would almost certainly have broken down early in 1959, and again in the Spring of 1960, and testing by the West might have been resumed late in 1960."<sup>31</sup>

If little of substance other than the avoidance of breakdown had been achieved, this needs to be set within the context of the negotiating postures of the superpowers and the record of the Eisenhower administration in particular.

Determined British efforts to push the negotiations towards a successful conclusion during this period were in effect neutralised by the absence of a similar commitment in the United States. As Schlesinger puts it, "... while the British earnestly sought agreement, the American government remained divided within itself on the desirability of a treaty".<sup>32</sup> The

30. Box 51, Staff Note, August 1960 (2) Memorandum August 23rd 1960, D.D. Eisenhower Papers.

31. M. Wright, op.cit. p.136. Nunnerly quotes an American source who claims that Macmillan "kept the talks going through the last dreary years of the Eisenhower Administration, when it was feared that the Americans might lose interest in a treaty". D. Nunnerley, op.cit. p.94.

32. A.M. Schlesinger, A Thousand Days (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) p.451.

influence of a powerful lobby in the United States which opposed a treaty was maximised by the setting up of a cumbersome machinery in Washington called the Committee of Principals which was given responsibility for policy decisions. Though this structure was designed to give equal weight to different agency views and interests, it was often deadlocked by opposed views.<sup>33</sup> Only strong executive leadership could have cut through this slow moving, bureaucratic structure and this, in stark contrast to the situation in Britain, was absent.

"No one was really able or willing to resolve the inter-agency disputes and to give that positive direction to United States policy which President Kennedy supplied in full measure as soon as he took office."<sup>34</sup>

As a direct consequence of this decision-making structure in Washington, the American delegation at Geneva was far less effective than it might have been. According to Wright it was

"left for lengthy periods temporarily incapable of negotiating, like a yacht with no wind in the sails. It is no exaggeration to say that for months on end instructions were doled out to them from Washington much as a Victorian workhouse master might dole out the gruel."<sup>35</sup>

33. For the deficiencies in this process of 'consensus-building', see H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, *op.cit.* especially pp. 470-73; also M. Wright, *op.cit.* p.120; G.T. Seaborg, *op.cit.* pp. 37-38.

34. M. Wright, *op.cit.* p.121. While Wright attributes ultimate responsibility to the president, American commentators are more disposed to let Eisenhower 'off the hook'. See for example, G.T. Seaborg, *op.cit.* p.10; A.M. Schlesinger, *op.cit.* p.452. Robert Divine, however, supports Wright's verdict. "... in the long run the the failure to negotiate a test ban treaty was due primarily to (Eisenhower's) lack of leadership. For two years, he had permitted a difference of opinion between his diplomatic and scientific advisers and his military and national security experts to paralyse the negotiations at Geneva. One may well question the sincerity of the Soviet advocacy of a comprehensive test ban treaty, but American indecision meant that Russian intentions were never fully probed." R.A. Divine, *op.cit.* p.314.

35. M. Wright, *op.cit.* p.120.

Schlesinger confirms that the result was a delegation which "played a weak and inglorious role in the negotiations".<sup>36</sup> Naturally this in turn handicapped the British delegation's efforts to establish common positions and negotiate effectively with the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup>

From a British perspective, the frustrations inherent in this situation can only have been exacerbated by the fact that Soviet delegates were much more willing to negotiate seriously during the Eisenhower period (certainly until May 1960) or at least, in Schlesinger's words, to display "a modest willingness to grapple with the issues" than was the case after Kennedy assumed office.<sup>38</sup> But, as the British representative puts it,

"... Soviet sincerity in (1958-60) was never put to as searching a test by the Americans as it ought to have been ... Had the energy and drive brought to bear on the problems of a test ban and disarmament in 1961 and later been available during the two preceding years, the issues would almost certainly have been clarified earlier, and there might have been more progress earlier."<sup>39</sup>

When set in the context of the postures adopted by the other negotiating parties, the British contribution to the end of the Eisenhower period emerges as a less modest achievement than helping to prevent the breakdown of talks would suggest.

With the arrival of President Kennedy in the White House in January 1961, however, the prospect of a test ban treaty looked much brighter. The resumption of the Geneva conference was postponed until March so that the new administration could undertake a thorough review of policy.

Significantly, new appointees like John McCloy, Jerome Wiesner and Glenn Seaborg were chosen who strongly favoured a test ban, and a technical group

36. A.M. Schlesinger, *op.cit.* p.452. See also G.T. Seaborg, *op.cit.* pp.93-94.

37. Wright gives specific examples of the resulting problems that arose during the course of negotiations. See *op.cit.* pp.120-121.

38. A.M. Schlesinger, *op.cit.* p.451.

39. M. Wright, *op.cit.* p.125; see also H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, *op.cit.* p.494.

was immediately set up under McCloy to investigate how the United States might move closer to the Soviet position by making concessions on, for example, the inspection quota issue.<sup>40</sup> The new president himself, who had made the need for a test ban agreement a 'principal personal theme' while in the Senate, took a close interest in the issue from the start.<sup>41</sup>

During this preparatory period, there was close liaison with the British. Before the Fisk Panel reported to the Committee of Principals, a British delegation led by Ormsby-Gore and Wright visited Washington in February to coordinate the US and British positions in preparation for the resumption of the Geneva talks. According to David Nunnerly's account, the visitors

"found to their surprise the extent to which the Americans gave favourable consideration to long-held British positions. Indeed the modifications to the American position which the British had urged for two years were now more or less accepted."<sup>42</sup>

The involvement of Ormsby-Gore now became of particular importance for British influence as a whole because he was a close personal friend of the new president. Arthur Schlesinger claims that it was Ormsby-Gore's commitment to detente which "had steadily reinforced Kennedy's scepticism about the cliches of the cold war", and it was he who had "renewed Kennedy's interest in the (test ban issue) in 1959 and (had given) him a detailed memorandum on the British and Russian positions and the American non-position".<sup>43</sup> Ormsby-Gore was able to provide a convenient and valuable communication link between Macmillan and Kennedy, particularly after he became ambassador in Washington later that year.<sup>44</sup>

40. Ad Hoc Panel on the Technical Capabilities and Implications of the Geneva System. The group was known as the Fisk Panel after its Chairman James B. Fisk.

41. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp.30-37; see also RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 216-217.

42. D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.94; M. Wright, op.cit. p.127.

43. A.M. Schlesinger, op.cit. pp. 424,453.

44. See D. Nunnerly, op.cit. chapter 4; McGeorge Bundy, recorded interview by David Nunnerly, 30th January 1970, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

When the Geneva conference reconvened, it soon became clear that the problem now lay not with the Americans but with an intransigent Soviet Union. In April, a complete draft treaty was tabled for the first time by both Western delegations which included some important concessions to the Soviet position. This draft was summarily rejected by the leader of the Soviet delegation Tsarapkin. Despite the careful preparation, it was becoming evident that the first stage of the negotiations under Kennedy was floundering.<sup>45</sup> But the British could at least take heart from the fact that the United States was now adopting a much more positive attitude. A visiting American journalist noted the impact on the British delegation when he visited Geneva in the Summer of 1961. "In contrast to a year ago, British diplomats here are delighted with our burst of initiative, and are no longer chafing at the faltering ways of their formidable partner."<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the injection of "spirit and pace" into the negotiations by the Kennedy administration, the new Soviet intransigence raised again the question of whether the United States would resume testing. As early as February 1961, with the possibility of an early agreement with the Soviet Union disappearing, pressures within the United States began to grow. The British response, as in 1960, was to endeavour to dissuade the Americans from pursuing that course of action. This helped to reinforce Kennedy's own predisposition not to resume testing, until the Soviet Union resumed testing in September 1961. Then, after a rather desperate attempt by the two Western leaders to get the Soviet Union to agree to an atmospheric ban with no inspection, the president ordered the resumption of underground testing.<sup>47</sup>

45. For details, see G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp. 55-59; RIIA Survey 1961 pp. 220-227.

46. D. Lang, An Inquiry into Enoughness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) p.51.

47. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp.61-88. Seaborg notes that "the president was doubtless under heavy pressure from the British" at this time and he records an occasion when Michael Wright spent a luncheon 'pleading' with a visiting American senator that the United States should not resume testing.

Having failed to prevent the resumption of underground testing, British attention turned to atmospheric tests. If the Americans could be dissuaded from testing in the atmosphere, this still left open the possibility of negotiating at least a partial test ban. By September 1961, however, the United States was already beginning to make contingency preparations for atmospheric tests. As part of these preparations, it was decided that Christmas Island in the Pacific was needed as a test site. As this island was a British possession, the question of its use provided an excellent opportunity for the British government to influence American decision-making.

Macmillan began the process of trying to stall an American decision to go ahead with atmospheric testing by proposing on October 26th that Britain and the United States jointly announce a six-month moratorium on atmospheric testing. Kennedy eventually turned down this proposal but "it presaged further interventions by the British prime minister".<sup>48</sup> From a bargaining perspective, the British position was complicated at this stage by a request at the beginning of November to use the Nevada site to conduct an underground test. McGeorge Bundy, the special assistant on national security affairs, spotted the opportunity for a simple trade-off, but the president rather missed the point. In a letter to Macmillan, he readily acceded to the request for the use of Nevada on the assumption that the British would allow the Americans to use Christmas Island. Macmillan's reply on November 16th must have rather shocked the president. Seaborg describes the impact.

"Any hopes we may have had that Christmas Island would fall into our laps ... were quickly dispelled ... it was evident that Macmillan meant to use our need for Christmas Island as leverage in an attempt to dissuade us from atmospheric testing."<sup>49</sup>

Macmillan managed to put off a decision about Christmas Island until his meeting with Kennedy at Bermuda in December.<sup>50</sup>

48. Ibid. p.113.

49. Ibid. p.118.

50. By asking for further information about the purposes the American test series would serve.



By the time the Anglo-American summit convened, the American government had got itself into a difficult situation. Though the decision had now been taken to resume atmospheric testing in the Spring of 1962, the Americans felt that they still needed British support to go ahead. As Schlesinger explains, not only was Christmas Island regarded as the 'ideal site' for testing, it was thought to be "politically difficult for the United States to resume (atmospheric testing) without British concurrence".<sup>51</sup> The scene was set for an interesting confrontation.

Macmillan started off the talks in Bermuda by declaring that the failure to secure a test ban treaty the previous year had been "an historic opportunity to make progress towards a detente" which had been missed. He made it clear where he felt the blame lay: "... It was all the fault of the American 'big-hole' obsession and the consequent insistence on a wantonly large number of on-site inspections."<sup>52</sup> Referring to the desperate need to break the cycle of the arms race and to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the prime minister developed the theme that a major new disarmament effort must be made.<sup>53</sup> The president, on the other hand, argued that recent Soviet behaviour had demonstrated that they were not interested in agreements, therefore preparations for atmospheric testing must go ahead. Thus, while "the British wanted assurance that there would be one more try for an agreement - - - the Americans wanted to get down to cases about Christmas Island".<sup>54</sup>

51. A.M. Schlesinger, op.cit. p.489. See also H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. p.344.

52. A.M. Schlesinger, op.cit. p.452. The 'big-hole' obsession is a reference to a possible method of evading detection of underground tests which emerged from American seismic research in 1959. The argument, associated with Professor Albert Latter, was "that it might be possible to muffle underground nuclear tests by conducting them in large subterranean cavities or holes which would make them difficult if not impossible to detect". M. Wright, op.cit. p.125.

53. As Schlesinger comments, "... the nightmare of nuclear holocaust stirred more than ever underneath Macmillan's Edwardian flippancies". Op.cit. p.489.

54. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. p.129; D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.98.

It soon became clear that the Americans could not be deflected from the decision to resume atmospheric testing, though Kennedy did agree to postpone an announcement to that effect for as long as possible. Macmillan then rather surprised the Americans again by saying that a decision on Christmas Island would need Cabinet consent. All he would offer at Bermuda was a "private agreement ... subject to Cabinet concurrence". The meeting left the matter unresolved, though Kennedy had 'apparently succeeded' in obtaining the use of Christmas Island.<sup>55</sup>

Macmillan was determined to secure a worthwhile quid pro quo from Kennedy for the use of the Island even if he now knew that he could not stop atmospheric testing. A long letter to Kennedy at the beginning of January 1962 set out the price of Christmas Island in scarcely veiled terms.

"Amplifying the thoughts he had advanced in Bermuda, he proposed that the three leaders ... convert the impending eighteen power disarmament meeting [ENDC], scheduled for Geneva in March, into a final try for general disarmament, a test ban treaty and an agreement not to transfer nuclear weapons or information to non-nuclear powers."

Significantly, the letter was ambiguous on the use of Christmas Island, presumably this was intentional. As Schlesinger explains, it was not clear

"whether the use of Christmas Island was conditioned on our agreement to a disarmament conference at the summit, or whether the resumption of American atmospheric testing was conditioned on the conference's failure."<sup>56</sup>

55. Nunnerly claims that the postponement of a decision on Christmas Island was merely a 'technicality'. Op.cit. p.98; see also H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. p.345.

56. A.M. Schlesinger, op.cit. p.493. For the broader development of Macmillan's thoughts at this time, which included trying to revive the East-West summit idea, see H. Macmillan, At the End of the Day 1961-63 (London: Macmillan, 1973) p.151ff.

Despite some anger in the State Department at these blatant tactics, Secretary of State Rusk took the view that the response to Macmillan 'should not be perfunctory' and the president became committed to a dual track approach: continuing preparations for testing coupled with the launching of another arms control initiative.<sup>57</sup> By February 8th, formal agreement had been reached on the use of Christmas Island but Macmillan had achieved his limited objective. The joint Anglo-American statement issued was

"consistent with the position taken by the British at Bermuda - that any agreement on Christmas Island must be coupled with a further major effort to reach an arms control agreement with the USSR."<sup>58</sup>

The preparatory sessions in the United States prior to the ENDC talks in March offer a further illustration of the moderating influence of British diplomacy on the negotiating position of the United States. William Foster, the Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, reported to the March 6th meeting of the Committee of Principals, with the president in attendance, that there had been disagreements with the British who were inclined toward major compromises with the Soviet Union's point of view. He noted, for example, that the British wished to emphasize national means of verification in the forthcoming negotiations. They no longer supported the proposed US annual quota of 12-20 on-site inspections, proposing instead a 3-4 quota which was close to what the Soviet Union had previously offered. After much debate, the president took the view that the United States might move towards this position by proposing a lesser annual quota of inspections.<sup>59</sup>

57. This approach enabled the Kennedy administration both to respond to domestic pressures for testing and to head off pressure from Macmillan for another summit. See RIIA Survey 1962 pp. 12-13.

58. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. p.134. Kennedy announced the decision to resume atmospheric testing in a television broadcast on March 2nd. The following day, Khrushchev agreed to the ENDC talks with representation at foreign minister level. He, like Macmillan, wanted a heads of state summit but with all eighteen states represented. The British prime minister was opposed to a summit on this scale; Kennedy remained opposed to the principle. See H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. pp. 345-50; RIIA Survey 1962 pp. 14-16.

59. See G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp. 141-142. The Americans eventually (in 1963) reduced their demands to a quota of seven inspections. This position was justified in terms of a downgrading of the expected advantages to be derived from 'cheating' and, more importantly, improvements in the ability to detect and identify underground tests without on-site inspection.

Transferring the negotiations to the new ENDC forum, however, brought no immediate breakthroughs and with an impasse in Geneva yet again, the US atmospheric test series began in April 1962.<sup>60</sup> As the year proceeded, however, the arguments for national means of verification and against the requirement for compulsory on-site inspection were strengthened by two developments. First, the eight neutral states represented at the ENDC presented a joint memorandum on April 16th which stressed the importance of national means of verification and provided for the possibility of on-site inspection by invitation only. As Seaborg notes, "within the Kennedy administration, it was recognised that the Western position at the disarmament conference had been weakened by the eight nation proposal".<sup>61</sup> Secondly, some preliminary findings of the US Defense Department's seismic research programme, Project Vela, were published at the beginning of July. These findings were controversial but broadly they suggested that improved methods of detection and verification were technically possible without international control stations and on-site inspection. The political impact of these developments was to undermine the US position on on-site inspection.

The result was an intensive review of the whole US position which took place at the end of July. Once again, a well-timed letter from the British prime minister to the president sought to influence the direction of US policy. Macmillan stressed again the urgent need for a test ban and the British view that a test ban could be fully effective with fewer controls. The letter also indicated that the US would have to renegotiate the use of Christmas Island should it be needed for a further series of tests.<sup>62</sup>

60. In a speech to the House of Commons, Macmillan declared that, "we have done everything we possibly could. We worked as hard as we could. We made proposal after proposal. We are discouraged but not defeated". Quoted in D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.100.

61. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp. 161-162. The neutral states were Brazil, Burma, Ethiopia, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Sweden and the United Arab Republic.

62. Ibid. p.167. "The British thus retained their small amount of leverage over US policy."

Following the review, two alternative treaty drafts were jointly presented by the Western delegations at Geneva on August 27th, one comprehensive and one limited. The Americans conceded that fewer control posts were acceptable but 'some' on-site inspection was still a requirement. Interestingly, the comprehensive draft left blank the size of the inspection quotas for future negotiation. Though Kennedy and Macmillan both expressed a 'strong preference' for the comprehensive treaty, they announced that they would be willing to accept the limited treaty because it would cause "a downward turn in the arms race ... make it easier to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons ... and free mankind from the dangers and fears of radioactive fallout".<sup>63</sup> The Soviet Union, however, rejected both treaty proposals.<sup>64</sup> Thereafter, with the exception of an agreement to freeze nuclear testing from January 1st 1963, nothing of substance was achieved at Geneva until the following Spring when the final breakthrough was made.

In March 1963, the situation again looked unpropitious. The ENDC was deadlocked and the president was being asked to approve a new series of atmospheric tests.<sup>65</sup> The Soviet government had agreed in principle to on-site inspection but refused to discuss the technical details. Kennedy was coming under great pressure from Congress not to accept a treaty without adequate verification. It was at this point that Macmillan made arguably his most decisive intervention in the test ban negotiations. As Seaborg explicitly concedes, "much of the credit for the next, and ultimately decisive step, must be given to the British".<sup>66</sup>

63. Quoted in *ibid.* p.168.

64. It is worth noting that the limited treaty draft was essentially the same as that adopted twelve months later.

65. Though the use of Christmas Island had been ruled out for 'political' reasons. G.T. Seaborg, *op.cit.* p.192.

66. *Ibid.* p.208. See also RIIA Survey 1963 pp. 12-13.

The prime minister records in his diary that when news of the stalemate in Geneva reached him on March 8th, he lunched with foreign secretary Lord Home and minister of state Joseph Godber to discuss a plan to break the deadlock. He was "very anxious that we should take some initiative".<sup>67</sup> Macmillan then consulted Ormsby-Gore to find out what sort of initiative would be most acceptable to the Americans. The ambassador counselled against proposing another summit meeting and the use of normal diplomatic channels. He suggested instead the sending of two special emissaries, one from Washington and one from London.<sup>68</sup>

On March 16th, Macmillan sent Kennedy another one of his long letters which, he later claimed with some modesty, "helped to start the ball rolling".<sup>69</sup> Having suggested various ways to bring the negotiations to a 'satisfactory conclusion' the letter concluded with the ambassador's idea, suggesting that Kennedy might "send some personal message to Khrushchev ... or perhaps some emissary such as Averell (Harriman), or even your brother Bobby".<sup>70</sup> In his reply Kennedy suggested they send a joint letter to Khrushchev and eventually on April 24th, a letter was passed to the Soviet leader which indicated a readiness "to send in due course very senior representatives who would be empowered to speak for us and talk in Moscow directly with you".<sup>71</sup>

67. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1973) p.464. Seaborg claims that the prime minister was "determined to make an effort (to break the impasse) preferably with the United States but if necessary without us". Op.cit. p.208.

68. See N. Fisher, op.cit. p.329.

69. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1973) p.464. There is some debate about the extent of British responsibility for what turned out to be the critical final initiative. Schlesinger and Sorensen give at least equal credit to Kennedy. Other sources, however, which focus on the resistance within the Kennedy administration to a new initiative, argue convincingly that the initiative emanated from London. Kennedy overruled those who advised against the initiative and Macmillan ignored the advice of his ambassador in Moscow. See, in particular, H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. p.447; D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.106; Lord Longford, Kennedy (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976) p.147.

70. Quoted in G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. p.209.

71. Idem; N. Fisher, op.cit. p.330. Macmillan records in his diary at this time that "... for me the tension was very great. I was desperately anxious to achieve a modicum of success, and I felt instinctively that at least some agreement was within our grasp". H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1973) p.465.

Khrushchev's reply on May 8th was belligerent in tone and content, but he did agree to receive the emissaries. The Americans and Kennedy in particular were downcast but, encouraged by Ormsby-Gore to ignore the rhetoric and take up the offer, a reply was sent suggesting that the emissaries go to Moscow at the end of June or the beginning of July.<sup>72</sup> Khrushchev's reply fixed the date for July 15th. Macmillan and Ormsby-Gore between them had succeeded in setting up the Moscow talks.<sup>73</sup>

Kennedy's visit to Macmillan's Birch Grove house in Sussex at the end of June 1963 provided an opportunity for both leaders to approve the choice of emissaries. Macmillan was delighted with the choice of Averell Harriman. He felt that "for a task of this kind he had every quality - infinite patience, tact, courage and complete independence from political or even administrative pressure".<sup>74</sup> Harriman was probably the most experienced diplomat the Americans could have sent to Moscow, having dealt closely with the Soviet Union at the highest levels for twenty years.

Macmillan had wanted Ormsby-Gore to be the British representative. But the ambassador felt that he was too closely associated with the American administration and suggested sending instead someone of Cabinet rank "who could not be considered an American stooge".<sup>75</sup> The Americans, however, were less than enthusiastic about the prime minister's second choice, Lord Hailsham, the Minister of Science and Technology. Having talked to Hailsham at Birch Grove, Kennedy felt that he was rather too keen to play the role of mediator between the Russians and the Americans. Arthur Schlesinger has also written disparagingly of Hailsham in this context.

72. A.M. Schlesinger, *op.cit.* p.899. Seaborg speculates that Khrushchev's belligerence and Kennedy's pessimism were largely directed at their respective domestic critics who opposed a test ban agreement. *Op.cit.* pp. 210-211.

73. The prime minister records his appreciation of Ormsby-Gore's role in his diary entry of 20th May 1963. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1973) p.469.

74. *Ibid.* p.470.

75. Quoted in A.M. Schlesinger, *op.cit.* p.905; see also N. Fisher, *op.cit.* p.331.

Though "an accomplished if impetuous lawyer" Hailsham "was ill prepared on the technicalities of the problem and was consumed by a desire to get a treaty at almost any cost".<sup>76</sup>

American reservations about Hailsham are significant in a broader context. There was a continuing suspicion that the British government and Macmillan in particular might concede too much to the Russians in their determination to secure a treaty. It was known, for example, that the British were keen to reduce the inspection quota still further. Before his visit to Britain, the president had been briefed by David Bruce, the US ambassador in London, who advised him that "the desire to negotiate a test ban agreement has become practically an obsession with prime minister Macmillan". This judgement was set in the context of the recent Profumo scandal which was said to have 'seriously weakened' the Conservative government and the 'personal position' of Macmillan. The briefing went on to suggest the possibility that the prime minister

"will press the US for additional concessions in the hope that agreement with the USSR can be achieved while he is still in office. Even if Mr. Macmillan now believes he must hand over the leadership of the Party, he would still wish to achieve an agreement as a valedictory to his term of office."<sup>77</sup>

American suspicions about Britain were paralleled by British concerns about a weakening of the American resolve to secure a treaty. The government would have been aware of the growing opposition to a treaty within the

76. Idem. Seaborg suggests that "Hailsham's official position made his selection logical but in other respects he was not especially well qualified for a tough diplomatic negotiation". Op.cit. p.220. The lawyer's defence turns around the fact that his ministerial positions (held since 1959) had led him to acquire a considerable knowledge of atomic physics and nuclear weapons since the Atomic Energy Authority came under his purview. Moreover, when to his surprise he was given the Moscow brief, he undertook 'an intensive course of preparation', studying all the relevant materials. Finally, he suggests that his experience as a barrister made him 'not necessarily a bad diplomat'. Lord Hailsham, op.cit. pp. 185-217.
77. Briefing Book, President's European Trip, June 1963 pp. 9.10,34. Significantly, the prime minister notes in his diary on July 12th. "The situation is dramatic and vital for me. If there is any chance of our agreement and a summit meeting afterwards, I will fight on in home politics. If not, I shall feel inclined to throw in my hand." H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1973) p. 481.



United States, stemming most forcefully at that time from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the AEC.<sup>78</sup> The Hailsham issue illustrated mutual suspicions and tensions which lay just below the surface of an apparently cordial meeting at Birch Grove which has been described by Nigel Fisher as having the "character of a country-house party".<sup>79</sup>

American apprehensions about Hailsham were resolved just before the opening of the Moscow talks. On July 12th, Macmillan lunched with Harriman and Hailsham in London after the two emissaries had met for the first time. In a private discussion with Harriman after lunch, the prime minister "agreed to instruct Hailsham to support the US position on any points of disagreement".<sup>80</sup> Thus Harriman was accepted as the undisputed leader of the Western delegation. Having played a major role in setting up the Moscow talks, Macmillan was prepared to let the Americans run them. This may well have reflected his confidence that Harriman, fully supported by the president, would deliver a treaty. It may also have been an indication of his opinion of Hailsham. According to Fisher, while he thought that Hailsham's "energy and imagination would appeal to Khrushchev ... he is said to have told a journalist that Hailsham 'might amuse' the Soviet leader".<sup>81</sup> More probably the prime minister felt that he had no alternative but to defer to American control.

The first meeting of the Moscow talks ended any lingering possibility that remained of securing a comprehensive test ban treaty. Khrushchev himself made it clear that he was prepared to increase the number of black boxes that would be permitted, but he was no longer prepared to accept any on-site inspections.<sup>82</sup> He did, however, table two draft treaties, one for a limited test ban and one for an East-West non-aggression pact. In return, Harriman gave Khrushchev a copy of the limited test ban treaty draft the West had introduced at Geneva on August 27th 1962.<sup>83</sup>

78. See G.T. Seaborg, *op.cit.* pp. 220-225.

79. N. Fisher, *op.cit.* p.331; see also D. Nunnerly, *op.cit.* pp.215-216.

80. G.T. Seaborg, *op.cit.* p.236.

81. N. Fisher, *op.cit.* p.331. See also A.M. Schlesinger, *op.cit.* p.905.

82. H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, *op.cit.* pp. 454-455. 'Black boxes' were unmanned automatic seismic stations. Khrushchev was thus retracting the concession he had made in his letter to Kennedy of December 19th 1962.

83. RIIA Survey 1963 pp. 18-19.

Soviet insistence on discussing a non-aggression pact was an important issue which had to be resolved before substantive discussion of the limited test ban drafts could proceed. The British delegation were not averse to discussing this issue, but Harriman's instructions were quite explicit. Such an agreement could not be discussed because it involved other allies, and the French and the Germans were known to be opposed. When Harriman made this position clear to the Russians, there was a strong adverse reaction. Indeed, Harriman was afraid that "the Soviets might even withhold agreement on the test ban in order to have their way".<sup>84</sup>

Though Hailsham is said to have taken the view that the Soviet Union would not insist on linking a non-aggression pact to a test ban treaty, he came up with a compromise solution. He suggested that reference would be made to the desirability of a non-aggression pact in the final communiqué after the talks, which the Western parties would then commend to their allies for sympathetic consideration. The Americans in the person of the president agreed to this compromise and it was put to the Russians. At first Gromyko said that this was not sufficient to meet his requirements, but he finally relented.<sup>85</sup>

Having disposed of this issue, the discussions then turned to the fine print of the test ban treaty drafts. The Soviet Union agreed to much of the language of the Anglo-American draft but took issue with two of the provisions, those relating to peaceful nuclear explosions and withdrawal from the treaty. An American offer to give up the right to continue peaceful nuclear explosions in return for the retention of a procedure for withdrawal from the treaty was accepted by the Russians, but hard bargaining ensued on the precise wording of the withdrawal clause. At one point, Harriman threatened to terminate the discussions if agreement could not be reached on an acceptable clause.<sup>86</sup>

84. See G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. p.243.

85. See N. Fisher, op.cit. p.332; RIIA Survey 1963 p.20.

86. For the details, see H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. pp. 456-458; G.J. Seaborg, op.cit. pp. 244-247.

As these rather semantic arguments dragged on, Hailsham became concerned that there was a possibility of losing the whole treaty. He sent a telegram to the prime minister complaining of excessive American rigidity. Macmillan in turn expressed his concern to the president through Ormsby-Gore. Meanwhile, irrespective of Hailsham's intervention, a compromise on wording had been agreed in Moscow, and the treaty was initialled on July 25th.<sup>87</sup> Though Macmillan and Khrushchev wanted the treaty to be formally signed at a summit meeting, Kennedy was resistant to the idea and the treaty was signed in Moscow by the three foreign secretaries on August 5th.

#### The British contribution to the Partial Test Ban Treaty

Having presented a broadly chronological account of the test ban negotiations in an attempt to highlight the British role, it is appropriate at this stage to offer a more explicit evaluation of the British contribution to the achievement of a treaty. In this section, therefore, the contributions of the major parties to the negotiations are compared and set within the situational context in which the treaty was eventually signed. The object here is to consider whether the claims made at the beginning of this chapter stand up to a close examination of the events.

It was argued earlier that the claim, of Sir Michael Wright in particular, that Britain took the lead in setting up the Geneva test ban negotiations in the Autumn of 1958 cannot be substantiated by available sources. The continuing British commitment to nuclear testing in the context of developing a credible nuclear deterrent meant that the government was ambivalent at best towards the test ban issue. This ambivalence was not resolved until the Geneva negotiations were actually under way. There was a British contribution to the events leading up to those negotiations, but the government scarcely deserves the credit for making them possible.

With the negotiations in progress, however, a series of British initiatives between 1959 and 1963 played an important role in keeping them going, eventually to a successful conclusion in the form of a partial treaty. Moreover, the American negotiators, as the Chatham House Survey notes,

87. See D. Nunnerly, *op.cit.* p.197.

"often paid private tribute to the ingenuity of their British colleagues in avoiding a direct confrontation of incompatible American and Soviet proposals, or in devising expedients by which the negotiations could be extracted from the impasse into which such a confrontation had led them."<sup>88</sup>

The initiatives were arguably less significant, however, if more dramatic, than the sustained pressure on both superpowers, and the Americans in particular, over an extended period. The 1959 quota initiative served to break one deadlock but, as David Nunnerly argues, "ultimately, it was to have no practical effect on the outcome of the negotiations".<sup>89</sup> The 1960 initiative, however promising, was stymied by the collapse of the Paris summit.

It can be argued that consistent pressure exerted largely 'behind the scenes' was the most important aspect of the British contribution. As one British negotiator, presumably Michael Wright, puts it, "the initiative was in forcing the issue in private with the other two. We looked at Britain as being in a position of being able to bring the two sides together".<sup>90</sup> What the Macmillan government managed to do remarkably successfully in this context was to influence domestic political processes in the United States, and to a lesser degree, the Soviet Union. As noted in the narrative, there were powerful lobbies in Washington and Moscow who were actively opposed to the signing of any sort of test ban treaty, however limited. This meant that the respective leaders, however well disposed to a treaty, had very little room for manoeuvre.<sup>91</sup> The well-timed visit or more often a letter from the prime minister were only the most obvious manifestations of a sustained attempt to reinforce the often embattled positions of those who

88. RIIA Survey 1961 p.259.

89. D, Nunnerly, *op.cit.* p.93.

90. Quoted in *ibid*, p.109.

91. President Kennedy certainly recognised this problem. In a conversation with the journalist Norman Cousins, he observed that "one of the ironic things about this entire situation is that Mr. Khrushchev and I occupy approximately the same political positions inside our governments. He would like to prevent a nuclear war but is under severe pressure from his hard-line crowd, which interprets every move in that direction as appeasement. I've got similar problems". N. Cousins, The Improbable Triumvirate (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1972) p.114.

were fighting for a test ban agreement. This often included bolstering the personal predispositions of the other leaders, whether it was Eisenhower, Khrushchev, or Kennedy in particular.

As far as influencing the Americans was concerned, the British government shamelessly exploited a 'special relationship' with the Americans. Though this is a contentious phrase it is an appropriate one in this context. As David Nunnerly described it, it

"did not mean that there were channels of communication of a different order to those open to all governments in diplomatic negotiations. It simply represented ... a willingness to use the channels available more frequently, more thoroughly and often at a higher level than is usual in diplomacy."<sup>92</sup>

Leadership links, personal friendships, ministers, diplomats and scientists on the ground in Geneva were all used to maximise British influence. The fact that open disagreements were usually avoided and the semblance at least of a unified Western negotiating position maintained at Geneva only served to increase the effectiveness of the British voice.<sup>93</sup>

Former secretary of state Henry Kissinger has described how the special relationship worked during the Nixon period, but his description is no less appropriate to the period covered here. He writes of

"a pattern of consultation so matter-of-factly intimate that it became psychologically impossible to ignore British views. [The British and the Americans] evolved a habit of meetings so regular that autonomous American action somehow came to seem to violate club rules."

He notes in particular "the degree to which diplomatic subtlety overcame substantive disagreements".<sup>94</sup>

92. D. Nunnerly, *op.cit.* p.13.

93. On one of his visits to Geneva, Daniel Lang noticed that the public and the private faces of British diplomacy were not always identical. "The British, while studiously siding with the Americans at the conference table itself, seek in many ways to exert a moderating influence on the two mighty opponents." D. Lang, *op.cit.* p.42.

94. H. Kissinger, White House Years (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979) pp. 40,90.

The value of an 'insider' like David Ormsby-Gore for such 'intimate consultation' was crucial. As noted earlier, the complexities of American decision-making on this issue were such that an input had to be made, preferably by someone who knew how the system worked, at an early stage of the domestic deliberations. Once the policy process had disgorged a result, and it was adopted as policy, it was extremely difficult to get it changed. According to one American official, "Ormsby-Gore had a knack of getting in the British views at the early stages so we took them into account before we came to a final conclusion".<sup>95</sup>

It must be said of course that the absence of any lobby in Britain which was opposed to a test ban treaty put the government in a highly advantageous position vis a vis its negotiating partners at Geneva. As Lord Zuckerman has noted, "there was no sophisticated debate about the test ban in the United Kingdom" which compared to the one which raged in the United States.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the domestic political imperatives in this context were such as to raise again the problem of disentangling the motives of Macmillan the statesman and Macmillan the politician.

The test ban issue became the focus of the anti-nuclear group in Britain which became increasingly active between 1954 and 1958. In February 1957, the National Committee for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests was set up to coordinate the activities of more than one hundred local groups. The following year, the Committee was renamed the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.<sup>97</sup> In the Spring of 1957, the prospect of the first British hydrogen bomb test, allied to reports from scientists about links between

95. Quoted in D. Nunnerly, *op.cit.* p.47.

96. Zuckerman explains the absence of an informed debate in Britain in terms of the gulf between academic and defence scientists and engineers, the fact that British scientists were generally uninterested in the test ban issue, and the fact that more information was available in the United States. Lord Zuckerman himself, like a succession of opposite numbers in the United States - James Killian, George Kistiakowsky and Jerome Wiesner - was very much in favour of a test ban: "... from the moment I was appointed Chief Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Defence, I became infected by Harold Macmillan's commitment to a cessation of all nuclear tests." Lord Zuckerman, Nuclear Illusion and Reality (London: Collins, 1982) pp. 114-115.

97. See J. Minnion and P. Bolsover, The CND Story (London: Allison and Busby, 1983) pp. 12-13.

radioactive fallout and leukemia produced, according to an American source, "near hysteria in Great Britain. Pacifists staged parades and demonstrations that attracted mass support; petitions demanding an end to testing and even a total ban on nuclear weapons began to appear."<sup>98</sup>

Even allowing for some exaggeration in this description, nuclear testing had become an important issue in Britain.

As noted in the last chapter, it was at this point that Macmillan suddenly became aware of the significance of nuclear weapons as a domestic political issue. He was particularly sensitive to the potential dangers of nuclear testing in domestic political terms. Fallout, he told a colleague, would be a 'grappling point' in politics for some time to come.

"After all, it presents many of the features useful to the agitator ... it had an appeal for the mother, the prospective mother, the grandmother and all the rest, and every kind of exaggeration or mis-statement is possible."<sup>99</sup>

The prime minister's concern, it will be recalled, was that these fears would be exploited not only by the Soviet government but also by the Labour Party.<sup>100</sup>

By 1958, according to Michael Wright,

"the pressure of public opinion against nuclear testing had become a serious factor; no British government could afford to appear to drag its feet, even if it had wanted to do so."<sup>101</sup>

By 1962-3, with the fortunes of the Macmillan government in decline, and so much of the prime minister's own credibility invested in the test ban issue, the potential domestic political costs of not securing a treaty of some sort were clearly high.

98. R.A. Divine, *op.cit.* p.124.

99. H. Macmillan, *op.cit.* (1971) p.297.

100. See Chapter Four, pages 181-182.

101. M. Wright, *op.cit.* p.135.

An interesting illustration of the government's sensitivity to domestic public opinion in this context is provided by the skilful management of the Christmas Island issue. As described in the narrative, the government was endeavouring towards the end of 1961 to prevent or at least delay the American resumption of atmospheric testing by stalling on their request to use Christmas Island for that purpose. After the Bermuda summit in December 1961, it was clear that the Americans would resume testing in the near future though Kennedy had been persuaded to postpone an announcement to that effect for as long as possible. It was also apparent that the British government could not but agree to the use of Christmas Island.

From the government's perspective, the problem now was not only to keep the test ban negotiations going but also to package the failure to stop American testing and the Christmas Island agreement in such a way as to minimise the domestic political damage. As Nigel Fisher puts it,

"... ministers were anxious that when the announcement of these [atmospheric tests] was made, it should be accompanied by a new disarmament initiative which would make its reception more amenable to British public opinion."<sup>102</sup>

The proposal to convert the impending ENDC talks into a fresh attempt to secure a test ban was a way of solving both problems. That initiative was announced to the House of Commons at the same time as the Christmas Island agreement, and public opinion in Britain had been fully prepared by the time Kennedy formally announced the resumption of atmospheric testing.<sup>103</sup>

If perceptions of the mood of public opinion in Britain help to explain the government's determination to get a test ban treaty signed, the absence of any widespread popular support for a test ban in the United States provides a starting point for an evaluation of the American contribution to the treaty. Clearly, that absence of support, combined with an informed and powerful lobby opposed to a treaty, put Eisenhower and Kennedy in a very different domestic political situation to Macmillan.

102. N. Fisher, op.cit. p.290.

103. The president was persuaded to postpone the announcement for twenty four hours. This conveniently meant that the announcement was made on a Saturday when the Commons was recessed for the weekend. See H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. p.348; RIIA Survey 1962 p.16.



The account offered here has stressed the deficiencies of Eisenhower and his administration's role in securing a treaty. Jacobson and Stein provide a useful summary of the essential problems.

"Because the Eisenhower Administration was deeply divided concerning the wisdom of a nuclear test ban, and because President Eisenhower did not take decisive steps to end this division, until 1961 American policy toward the nuclear test ban negotiations was characterised by ambiguity and vacillation. The United States often appeared not to know whether or not it wanted a test ban or what the minimum conditions were that it would accept."<sup>104</sup>

On the credit side, Eisenhower's initiative in halting nuclear tests and his role in setting up the Geneva negotiations in 1958 should also be noted. Moreover, it was his administration's April 1959 proposal for a test ban limited to the atmosphere that eventually became the basis for the partial treaty in 1963.<sup>105</sup> It should also be remembered that it was the Eisenhower administration that first grappled with the intricacies of the test ban issue. Jacobson and Stein develop this argument.

"Decision-makers were faced for the first time with the novel and complex scientific issues involved in the test ban and with the difficult task of finding the proper men and devising organisational patterns and procedures through which scientific advice could be integrated in the governmental process. By the time the Kennedy Administration took office a number of career diplomats and other governmental officials had acquired basic background in these problems and some lessons could be drawn from earlier experience."<sup>106</sup>

In more general terms, as argued in the last chapter, Eisenhower can be said

104. H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, *op.cit.* pp. 490-491.

105. See, in particular, R.A. Divine, *op.cit.* pp. 228-231, 318.

106. H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, *op.cit.* p.490.

to have legitimised the idea of negotiations with the Soviet Union.<sup>107</sup> Despite the evident inadequacies of the Eisenhower contribution to the test ban negotiations, he bequeathed a not insignificant legacy to his successor in this context.

The Kennedy administration brought a much higher level of commitment to the search for a treaty, however, and can claim much of the credit for the eventual outcome. A considerable amount of the drive and determination that was injected came from the president himself and his role has been contrasted favourably with that of his predecessor. Glenn Seaborg, for example, offers this testimony to Kennedy's achievement.

"I believe that the achievement of the treaty can be traced in large part to the deep commitment of President Kennedy, to his persistence in pursuing the goal despite numerous discouragements, to his skilled leadership of the forces involved within his administration, and to his sensitive and patient diplomacy in dealing both with the Soviet Union ... and with the United States Senate."<sup>108</sup>

It is clear that Kennedy was more prepared than Eisenhower to give time and attention to the issue and to master the technical intricacies involved.<sup>109</sup> He was more convinced than Eisenhower ever was of the desirability of a test ban treaty and was therefore more prepared to take risks to achieve that goal. Most significantly perhaps, he was prepared to use the influence of his office to advance the chances of success. He chose new personnel who were committed to a test ban to head the relevant agencies in Washington and he appointed a more effective chief negotiator in Geneva, Arthur Dean. He altered the balance of institutional power by establishing the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in September 1961 and bringing it into the

107. See J.L. Gaddis, Strategies of Containment (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982) p.196.

108. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp. xiii-xiv. For the president's role in orchestrating the ratification process, see chapter 20 in particular.

109. See J.B. Wiesner, Where Science and Politics Meet (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) p.11.

decision-making process.<sup>110</sup> In a wide-ranging study of the policy process, Ronald Terchek stresses the president's personal control of policy-making on the test ban issue. By 1963, he argues, Kennedy had effectively

"bypassed [the] cumbersome decision-making process and [he] controlled the number of participants and the flow of information. By isolating several agencies from the immediate decisions relative to the July negotiations, particularly the military services and some of the laboratories, he increased his personal control over the policy-making process."<sup>111</sup>

Kennedy's speech at the American University in Washington in June 1963 is an excellent example of the president's skill in managing the policy process and the wider domestic and international political environment.<sup>112</sup> The timing of the speech was critical. On May 27th, Senators Dodd and Humphrey, the former a strong opponent of a test ban treaty, had introduced a resolution in the Senate which called for a partial test ban treaty. It was signed by thirty two other senators. This was a long way short of the necessary two thirds of the Senate required to ratify a treaty but at least, as Cousins comments, "for the first time, President Kennedy could feel some momentum behind him on the test ban fight".<sup>113</sup> On June 8th, Khrushchev finally agreed the dates for the Moscow talks. A major speech by the president at this time could not only build on a degree of domestic support but also affect the political atmosphere in which the talks were held.

The speech on June 10th was a classic demonstration of the power of presidential initiative. Prepared without consulting the bureaucracy, - for fear presumably of having the message watered down - it gave a clear

110. See H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. pp. 473-475.

111. R.J. Terchek, The Making of the Test Ban Treaty (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970) p.46.

112. For the text, see RIIA Documents 1963 pp. 14-20.

113. N. Cousins, op.cit. p.123.

signal to the Russians that Kennedy genuinely wanted a test ban treaty.<sup>114</sup> The speech was an impressive tour de force later described by Sorensen (who helped to write it) as "the first presidential speech in eighteen years to succeed in reaching beyond the Cold War".<sup>115</sup> Kennedy called for a fresh start at Geneva, publicly announced the forthcoming Moscow talks and declared a unilateral United States ban on atmospheric tests.

The positive Soviet response to Kennedy's initiative ensured that the speech was a major turning point in the test ban negotiations. Khrushchev immediately told Harold Wilson, then on a trip to Moscow, what he was later to tell Averell Harriman, that it was the greatest speech by an American president since Roosevelt. Khrushchev's reply came in a speech on July 2nd in East Berlin. In what was generally an uncompromising speech, he accepted for the first time that the Soviet Union would agree to a partial test ban without an unpoliced moratorium on underground testing.<sup>116</sup>

Reference to Khrushchev's positive response to Kennedy's speech is a useful reminder that it takes two sides to negotiate. However significant American or British efforts were, they would have achieved nothing ultimately without Soviet cooperation. The Soviet role in the achievement of a test ban treaty, therefore, cannot be ignored. While there is far less information available about the Soviet policy process, available analyses suggest that Khrushchev's domestic freedom of action was at least as constrained as Kennedy's.<sup>117</sup> Within those constraints, there are clear indications of the positive role played by the Soviet Union and the importance of Khrushchev's personal involvement.

114. Kennedy had apparently been alerted to the efficacy of such a public gesture by Norman Cousins. He had been in Moscow in April and, at Kennedy's request, had been trying to convince Khrushchev that the president really wanted a treaty. See H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, *op.cit.* p.449.

115. T. Sorensen, Kennedy (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) p.730.

116. H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, *op.cit.* p.453.

117. See, for example, C. Jonsson, *op.cit.*; L.P. Bloomfield, W.C. Clemens and F. Griffiths, Khrushchev and the Arms Race: Soviet Interests in Arms Control and Disarmament 1954-64 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966).

It is unlikely to have been a coincidence, for example, that the initial Soviet moratorium on testing was announced at the end of March 1958, only days after Khrushchev had become prime minister thereby taking overall control in the Soviet Union. However cynical that suspension of testing was, the Soviet Union having completed and the United States about to start a test series, the moratorium and the accompanying letters to Eisenhower and Macmillan urging them to follow suit, stimulated the American president to reciprocate. Eisenhower's invitation to a conference of experts was eventually accepted by Khrushchev and the chain of events leading to substantive negotiations at Geneva had been set in train.

Thereafter, it can be assumed that Khrushchev's contributions to the negotiations reflected in part at least his standing with the more conservative elements of the political hierarchy in Moscow. Until the middle of 1960, as noted earlier, the Soviet contribution as a whole compared favourably with that of the United States. Daniel Lang summarises the prevailing feeling in Geneva.

"At that point, nearly everyone connected with the talks realised it was the Russians who were pushing the conference forward, providing ideas, granting concessions, and displaying a certain restraint in making propaganda capital of an opponent's singularly wavering conduct."<sup>118</sup>

After the U-2 incident and the collapse of the Paris summit, however, the Soviet contribution became increasingly negative until the September 1961 atmospheric test series had been completed early in 1962. Only then was Khrushchev able to play a more positive role again. He was noticeably enthusiastic in his response to the Kennedy-Macmillan proposal for a new initiative on the test ban issue in the context of the forthcoming ENDC negotiations. In a letter to Kennedy on February 11th, he argued that the new talks were so important that heads of state should participate from the outset, though he eventually agreed to allow foreign ministers to open the conference. There was no immediate breakthrough, however, and the resumption of atmospheric testing by the United States deferred any further progress.

118. D. Lang, *op.cit.* p.51.

It took the experience of the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962 to impress upon both Khrushchev and Kennedy the need to make common cause. Seaborg describes the impact.

"That brush with calamity seemed to forge a bond between them. They appeared now to understand each other better, to buttress each other's efforts, to avoid making the other look bad. They began to consult each other more frequently, to work together on problems of common interest."<sup>119</sup>

If the two leaders were now committed to a test ban treaty, Harold Macmillan perceived the significance of the Cuban crisis as a potential turning point. He wrote to Khrushchev at the height of the crisis, suggesting that the resolution of the Cuban situation would open the way for a test ban agreement. "I therefore ask you to take the action necessary to make all this possible. This is an opportunity which we should seize."<sup>120</sup>

Khrushchev responded positively to Macmillan's invitation. He made a major speech to the December 12th session of the Supreme Soviet in which he called for the Western powers "to remove the last barriers to an agreement on ending nuclear tests for all time to come".<sup>121</sup> He then wrote a long letter to Kennedy in which he accepted the principle of on-site inspection and appealed for a joint effort to reach agreement. Kennedy's response was encouraging. By the end of 1962, an exchange of correspondence between the leaders and an agreement to hold private talks in the new year had generated popular as well as governmental expectations that a test ban treaty would be signed in the near future.<sup>122</sup>

119. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. p.300.

120. Quoted in D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.91.

121. Quoted in S. Brown, The Faces of Power (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968) p.269.

122. As Jacobson and Stein comment, "at last, the differences between the two sides appeared to be susceptible to negotiations". Op.cit. p.432; see also RIIA Survey 1963 pp. 4-5.

In less than two months, however, that optimism had evaporated. Shortly after the ENDC reconvened on February 12th, deadlock again prevailed. What appears to have happened is that perceptions of a heightened possibility of a test ban agreement following the successful resolution of the missile crisis mobilised those forces in Washington and Moscow who were opposed to an agreement to step up their efforts. While it was important in the longer term that Khrushchev and Kennedy now appeared to share a common conviction of the desirability of a treaty, this was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for getting a treaty signed and, in the American context, ratified. Both leaders still had to carry their domestic oppositions.<sup>123</sup>

Khrushchev's task was arguably the more difficult because he had backed down over the Cuban missiles and this must have affected his domestic standing.<sup>124</sup> The issue of what the Americans had or had not told the Russians about the number of on-site inspections they would be prepared to accept, gives an interesting insight into Khrushchev's position.<sup>125</sup> The Soviet leader believed that the Americans would accept three inspections a year and he made

123. It is not the intention here to understate the longer term consequences of the missile crisis. Kennedy's handling of the crisis must have increased his confidence and it did increase his standing immeasurably both at home and abroad. Having proved that he could face out Khrushchev, he could now more easily negotiate with him. For Khrushchev, the failure to achieve his objectives by military means in Cuba, must have increased the importance of other measures. If he could prove that a 'peace' policy worked, by securing inter alia a test ban treaty, he could still institute the domestic reforms to which he was committed. Moreover, the public attacks on China which began in the Winter of 1962 suggest that Khrushchev was more prepared after Cuba to risk the alienation of China by moving towards detente.

124. Seaborg suggests that after Cuba Khrushchev "experienced a period of weakness. Conservative elements led by Frol Kozlov began to exercise dominance in policy decisions". He argues that the death of Kozlov in late April 1963 opened the way for Khrushchev to press harder for a test ban. See op.cit. p.299. This was also the time that Khrushchev received the joint Kennedy-Macmillan letter.

125. The misunderstanding arose from two sets of conversations at the end of October 1962. Arthur Dean is alleged to have told Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov in New York that the United States would accept between two and four inspections a year. Jerome Wiesner is alleged to have referred to a 'few annual inspections' in a conversation with a Soviet scientist Federov in Washington D.C. For further details, see H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. pp. 426, 430-432; G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp. 179-181.

what he thought was the critical concession by accepting that number in his December 19th letter to Kennedy. But, as he told Norman Cousins in the April 12th interview in Moscow, he had had a lot of trouble persuading the Council of Ministers to accept this concession. When the Americans rejected this number as inadequate, Khrushchev felt that he had been made to 'look foolish' and could not go back to the Council to increase the number of inspections.<sup>126</sup> Thus it may be surmised that Khrushchev, from a position of relative weakness, had used up what domestic political capital he had left after Cuba and could go no further to meet the Americans. He told Cousins therefore that the next move was up to Kennedy.

The president for his part, however, was finding it increasingly difficult to make any moves as his administration's policy on the test ban issue came under increasing fire. Leading senators and congressmen made it clear in speeches and letters that the concessions already made to the Russians were causing concern and that further concessions would be resisted. By the end of February, it was clear that the administration would face major problems getting a comprehensive treaty ratified.<sup>127</sup> Expressions of congressional opposition occasioned a major effort by the administration at the beginning of March to justify its test ban policy.<sup>128</sup>

The extent of the domestic opposition which surfaced in Washington and Moscow in the early weeks of 1963 and the resulting impasse in Geneva has been spelt out in some detail here because it provides the immediate context for the Macmillan initiative of March 16th. It can be argued that neither Kennedy nor Khrushchev could make any further moves to break the deadlock and sustain the momentum generated by the successful resolution of the missile crisis.<sup>129</sup> Hence the British initiative, which triggered the

126. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp. 180, 208.

127. See, for example, the letter sent to the president by Senator Pastore, the chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. Ibid. p.195.

128. See H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, op.cit. pp. 444-446.

129. Macmillan was particularly concerned about the effect of the domestic opposition in the United States on the policy of the administration. By March 8th, he was considering "what action I might take if the Americans (as I fear) are stubborn or frightened of the internal or political pressures". Quoted in Lord Longford, op.cit. p.147.



eventual talks in Moscow four months later, was crucially important and perfectly timed. The use of personal emissaries maximised the ability of the Western leaders to influence the outcome of the talks. The Moscow location enabled Khrushchev personally to oversee the proceedings.<sup>130</sup> As Lord Longford comments, "once ... Khrushchev had accepted the Western negotiators, a treaty was always more probable than otherwise".<sup>131</sup> An appreciation of the context and the impact of the March 1963 initiative strengthens the argument that this was indeed the most significant of the 'public initiatives' taken by the Macmillan government.

Having said that, there were other developments between March and July that made a major contribution to the eventual outcome. However important the setting up of the Moscow talks, the achievement of even a partial treaty was not a foregone conclusion. Reference has already been made to the Dodd-Humphrey resolution, Kennedy's American University speech and Khrushchev's response in East Berlin.

The agreement to set up a direct communications link, a so-called 'hot-line' between Moscow and Washington should also be mentioned in terms of establishing the situational context in which the treaty was eventually signed. The Cuban crisis had demonstrated the necessity of the closest possible contact between leaders during a crisis if disaster was to be averted. It served to convince a sceptical United States government that a hot-line was desirable and Arthur Dean made a formal proposal to that effect in December 1962. Interestingly, the Soviet government did not accept the proposal until April 1963, a further indication perhaps of the domestic constraints operating in Moscow in the early weeks of that year. Thereafter, technical talks ensued and a memorandum of understanding was signed on June 20th. The timing of the agreement was important because, in Seaborg's words, it was "a straw in the wind, a sign that agreement was possible between the two sides and part of the mounting trend towards reasonable accommodation of differences".<sup>132</sup>

130. Averell Harriman later noted the importance of the location. It "meant that we would have direct contact with Chairman Khrushchev, the man of final authority". W.A. Harriman, America and Russia in a Changing World (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971) p.91.

131. Lord Longford, op.cit. p.149.

132. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. p.207.

Turning to the Moscow talks themselves, the British role appears in retrospect to have been less crucial than Lord Hailsham's testimony would suggest. The successful outcome of the talks owed more to the context in which they were held and the evident determination of the two major parties to secure an agreement.<sup>133</sup> On the Soviet side, this determination was indicated from the outset by the designation of Foreign Minister Gromyko as the chief negotiator and by Khrushchev's personal involvement in the first day's discussions.<sup>134</sup> The Soviet leader managed to establish a relaxed atmosphere in the days ahead and at the same time to convince Averell Harriman that he genuinely wanted an agreement.

The importance of Harriman's own presence in Moscow for the success of the mission cannot be overstated. As recently as April 1963, he had been sent to Moscow to negotiate the future of Laos. At the end of those talks, Khrushchev had told him that "I and my colleagues regard you, Mr. Harriman, with highest esteem. Your work as Ambassador left a deep and favourable impression here".<sup>135</sup> Given his standing in Moscow, sending Harriman to negotiate a test ban agreement was a clear signal to the Soviet leadership of the president's commitment to a treaty. As someone from the Moscow embassy in Washington remarked to Arthur Schlesinger, "when I heard that Harriman was going, I knew you were serious".<sup>136</sup>

Harriman was ably assisted by an excellent negotiating team in Moscow. According to the testimony of Duncan Wilson, who was a member of Hailsham's delegation, the entire American team was 'formidably effective'. The British were

"stunned by the power of Governor Harriman's team. Fisher and McNaughton proved to be skilful treaty draftsmen. Carl Kaysen, by virtue of his position in the White House brought to the conversations something which the UK delegation could not match. Bill Tyler's knowledge of the whole range of European and Soviet affairs was invaluable."

133. For a detailed account of the Moscow negotiations, see *ibid.* chapter 18.

134. There had been speculation that the Soviet team would be led by a deputy foreign minister.

135. W.A. Harriman, *op.cit.* p.x.

136. *Ibid.* p.IX.

Of Harriman, Wilson said:

"His conduct at the negotiations was impressive. His restraint concealed a capacity for toughness and even anger. With his knowledge of the Russian, the Chinese, the European, the American, and the strictly nuclear elements in the problem at hand, Harriman was the great man of the meeting."<sup>137</sup>

By implication at least, the role of the small British delegation in Moscow was secondary to the efforts of the major parties. Lord Hailsham has argued, without offering any detail that the British presence in Moscow acted as a 'catalyst' but, with the possible exception of helping to clear away the non-aggression pact issue, there is little to substantiate this.<sup>138</sup> There were differences over a couple of the clauses of the treaty, but they were resolved without apparent British help. Perhaps Hailsham's directness was his most important contribution to the outcome. His attitude was clear at an early stage of the discussions. As he himself later described it:

"I was satisfied that both sides were fully determined to go on testing underground and, having reached this conclusion fairly early on, I went all out for a partial ban."<sup>139</sup>

But if the important British contribution to the achievement of a test ban treaty had already been made before the Moscow talks began, this does not detract from the overall significance of that contribution. The claims made at the beginning of this chapter have in general terms been substantiated here, though the importance of a British input at the beginning and at the end of the long negotiating process has been disputed. Of the public initiatives, the intervention in March 1963 was ultimately the most important in terms of crucially affecting the outcome.

137. Copy of testimony in Harriman's personal files. Quoted in G.T. Seaborg, *op.cit.* pp. 252-253.

138. Lord Hailsham, *op.cit.* p.219.

139. *Ibid.* p.218.

That intervention apart, what was most important and certainly most remarkable was the ability of the Macmillan government over an extended period to influence the domestic policy processes of its negotiating partners. Much of the credit for this must go to the single minded determination of the prime minister. Macmillan's central role in the negotiation of the treaty was later recognised by President Kennedy. In a letter to the prime minister he gave this tribute:

"This morning, as I signed the instrument of ratification of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, I could not but reflect on the extent to which your steadfastness of commitment and determined perseverance made this treaty possible ... History will eventually record your indispensable role in bringing about the limitation of nuclear testing; but I cannot let this moment pass without expressing to you my own keen appreciation of your signal contribution to world peace."<sup>140</sup>

However 'indispensable' the contribution of Macmillan and his government though, and perhaps no third party could have done more, the argument that there would have been no test ban treaty without Britain cannot be sustained. The treaty would not have been signed if the situational context had not been favourable or, most significantly, if it had not served the interests of the United States and the Soviet Union as perceived by their respective leaders. Hence the attempt has been made here to locate an evaluation of the British role within a broad context.

#### The Partial Test Ban Treaty and detente

Having evaluated the British contribution to the test ban treaty, this chapter concludes with a brief assessment of the treaty as a turning point in the detente process. Some indication of British perceptions of the significance of the treaty can be gleaned from the reflections of Lord Hailsham and his prime minister. While Hailsham regretted that the treaty was not, as he had hoped "immediately followed by a detente between East and West", he nevertheless believed that it was "the biggest step forward in international relations since the beginning of the cold war."<sup>141</sup>

140. Quoted in N. Fisher, op.cit. p.333.

141. Lord Hailsham, op.cit. p.219.

Macmillan himself had no doubts about the importance of the treaty. He made his views clear in a newspaper interview given shortly before the Moscow talks took place. He maintained that there had been an East-West detente since 1959 "not in treaties or documents, but in tone". If a test ban treaty could now be secured, he was convinced that "one actual agreement would symbolise the detente which everyone knows has taken place but which it is difficult for any of us to grasp".<sup>142</sup>

After the treaty had been signed, the prime minister expressed his satisfaction to an emotional House of Commons. "The House will, I know, understand my own feelings at seeing at last the results of efforts made over many years, and of hopes long deferred."<sup>143</sup> His thoughts were, as ever, confided to his diary. "So was realised at least one of the great purposes which I had set myself." He was confident that

"once the rivalry of tests between the great nuclear powers was brought to an end some progress would be made in the limitation of the ever-increasing number and complexity of nuclear weapons."

The treaty was regarded as the key turning point in the nuclear age, because it represented the necessary 'solid achievement' in East-West negotiations that would secure and advance the detente process.<sup>144</sup>

Macmillan was not alone in explicitly linking the achievement of a test ban treaty to an East-West detente. Kennedy and increasingly Khrushchev, particularly after the Cuban missile crisis, shared his sense of urgency about the need to establish a political climate in which the arms race could be controlled and other states prevented from acquiring nuclear

142. Daily Express, 12th June 1963. Quoted in A. Sampson, op.cit. pp. 232-233.

143. Quoted in D. Nunnerly, op.cit. p.108.

144. H. Macmillan, op.cit. (1973) p.484. As the Chatham House Survey notes, the prime minister wanted the test ban treaty to be followed by a non-proliferation treaty and an agreement on a series of summits. See RIIA Survey 1963 p.18.

weapons. In March 1961, for example, Kennedy told a Congressional luncheon that much more was at stake in Geneva than merely a test ban. An agreement

"might enable us to move toward agreement on other East-West issues, such as Berlin and Laos. Conversely, failure to reach a test ban agreement could make agreement on Berlin and Laos more difficult."<sup>145</sup>

The president's later statements on this issue focussed on the nuclear proliferation problem. By August 1962, according to Seaborg's account, Kennedy was beginning to feel

"a dread sense of urgency about a test ban, related primarily to the proliferation problem. This feeling that time was running out was to become a persistent theme in his public utterances and a prime motivator in his diplomatic initiatives in the months ahead."<sup>146</sup>

Adam Ulam concludes his evaluation of the treaty from a Soviet perspective by suggesting that it was important for Khrushchev primarily in terms of the need to prevent China and West Germany from acquiring nuclear weapons. "It is clear that the Soviets were hopeful that the treaty would and could be expanded into a rigorous non-proliferation agreement."<sup>147</sup>

It can be argued with hindsight that these hopes and expectations associated with the treaty have scarcely been realised. The failure to achieve a comprehensive ban was clearly important and naturally limited the impact of the treaty on the nuclear arms race.<sup>148</sup> As Robert Divine

145. Quoted in G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. p.48.

146. Ibid. p.171. Though, as Seaborg comments elsewhere, "the connection between a test ban treaty and preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons was not an obvious one". See also Kennedy's comments in March 1963, quoted in RIIA Survey 1963 p.5.

147. A. Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence (New York: Praeger, 1968) p.665.

148. For a useful summary of progress towards a comprehensive test ban treaty since 1963, see G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. pp. 293-301.

succinctly puts it, "nuclear tests did not end in 1963; they simply went underground".<sup>149</sup> Many more tests have been conducted since 1963 than in the period from 1945 to 1963.<sup>150</sup> For the nuclear signatories including Britain, underground testing has been adequate to develop the warheads of numerous delivery systems since the treaty was signed.<sup>151</sup> It is difficult to dissent from Seaborg's conclusion:

"... While the absence of atmospheric testing may have impeded the acquisition of some weapons knowledge, it cannot be claimed that, overall, the Limited Test Ban Treaty has had the effect of slowing down the arms race between the superpowers."<sup>152</sup>

As for the nuclear proliferation problem, it was recognised that a comprehensive test ban would be far more effective in preventing proliferation. Nevertheless, it was hoped that states signing the treaty would be constrained by the technical difficulties and the costs of underground testing. The predictable refusal of France and China to sign the partial treaty, however, quickly dispelled such optimism and it was soon realised that the proliferation problem had to be approached more directly. After several years of negotiation, a non-proliferation treaty was eventually opened for signature in July 1968 but, to date, the states most likely to 'go nuclear' have either not signed or not ratified the treaty.<sup>153</sup>

But if the contribution of the test ban treaty per se to arms control has been less than impressive, its broader impact can be judged to be far more significant. From an environmental perspective, the treaty served as an

149. R.A. Divine, op.cit. p.317.

150. Nearly twice as many in fact. There were 488 nuclear tests between 1945 and 1963, and 887 between 1963 and the end of 1982, roughly equivalent time periods. Sources: SIPRI Yearbook of World Armaments and Disarmament, 1981; SIPRI. The Arms Race and Arms Control 1963 (London: Taylor and Francis, Ltd., 1983).

151. Indeed the treaty was not ratified in the United States "until its proponents had shown that this technology could be advanced by the underground testing that the agreement left uncontrolled". J.H. Barton, The Politics of Peace (Stanford, California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1981) p.100.

152. G.T. Seaborg, op.cit. p.288.

153. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons entered into force in March 1970. By 1982, 118 states had signed the treaty. The non-adherents include India, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil and Pakistan.

invaluable 'clean air act', greatly reducing the radioactive fallout hazard.<sup>154</sup> It "... ended the era of extensive atmospheric testing. Since that agreement, the world has been spared the danger of further fallout except for sporadic testing by France and China".<sup>155</sup>

From a detente perspective, the test ban treaty was the first example in the nuclear age of a detailed and complex arms control negotiation resulting in a positive outcome. As such, it provided a breakthrough, demonstrating that successful arms control negotiations between East and West were possible. It provided an important learning experience, the confidence to make further progress in other areas and it generated the necessary impetus for a series of arms control agreements in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>156</sup> There is a close interrelationship, it can be argued, between detente and arms control. As Walter Clemens puts it,

"The very act of entering arms control negotiations can symbolise a larger desire to contain conflict and move towards cooperative relations with the other side ... Arms control and relaxation of tensions can feed off each other; one without the other is unlikely."<sup>157</sup>

To the extent that the test ban treaty stimulated further arms control negotiations then, it made an important contribution to detente.

154. Jerome Wiesner gives the dimensions of the fallout problem. He estimates that between 1945 and 1963 "the accumulated tonnage of nuclear explosions had been doubling every three years. Contamination of the atmosphere by fission products and by the secondary products of irradiation ... was approaching a level that alarmed many biologists". J.B. Wiesner, op.cit. p.279.

155. R.A. Divine, op.cit. p.313.

156. As Calvocoressi comments, the treaty "raised the question of what to try next. It gave a fillip to the partial approach and therefore to the search for parts ripe for tackling". P. Calvocoressi, World Politics since 1945 (London: Longman, 1982) p.33.

157. W.C. Clemens, The Superpowers and Arms Control: From Cold War to Interdependence (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co., 1973) p.93.



The structural link with the process of East-West detente derives from the extent to which the treaty "hastened the dilution of bipolarity".<sup>158</sup> Though both superpowers were clearly alarmed at the threat to their control of international relations posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons to allied states, and this provided a powerful incentive on both sides to negotiate a test ban treaty, paradoxically, the signing of the treaty only served at one level to hasten the diffusion of power in the international system, demonstrating as it did that neither bloc was monolithic. The treaty helped to seal the rift between Moscow and Peking, and it further alienated France from the Western allies. Despite obvious limitations and the rather inflated expectations associated with it, the conclusion must be that the partial test ban treaty was a powerful symbol of detente. With reference to the British contribution to the achievement of that treaty, it can therefore be argued that the Macmillan government had made a significant contribution to the detente process. These specific conclusions derived from this case study, however, need to be set in the context of the broader conclusions that might be drawn from this study of British detente policy. These are discussed in a concluding chapter.

158. H.K. Jacobson and E. Stein, *op.cit.* pp.500-501.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to assess the findings of the thesis as a whole. The central issue to be dealt with here is the extent to which the objectives established at the outset have been achieved and the conclusions that may be drawn from this study. Taking the period 1953-63 as the focus of the analysis, three objectives were specified in the introduction:

- (a) to describe and evaluate a British role in an East-West detente process during this period
- (b) to provide an explanation of British detente policy  
and
- (c) to establish a British conception of detente.

A consideration of each of these objectives in turn provides a convenient structure for this chapter.

### The significance of British detente policy

The assessment in this section addresses two separate issues which can be posed as questions. Has a British role in promoting detente during this period been identified? Has the significance of British detente policy in terms of East-West relations been effectively evaluated? With reference to the first question, it can be argued that a British role has been established through the extensive narrative components of the thesis which provide a detailed picture of the development of British policy towards detente from 1953 to 1963. With respect to the contribution of that policy to an East-West detente process, however, tentative conclusions only can be drawn from this study because of the state level orientation of the analysis. A proper evaluation of the impact of British policy would require another study specifically directed towards an analysis of detente at the level of the international system.

One of the important themes that runs through this study, however, is the persistent and determined way in which successive British governments actively promoted East-West detente during the 1950s and early 1960s. By setting that policy within an historical context that reviewed Labour policy prior to 1951, a case has been made not only for the continuity of that policy but also for detente as a policy that transcended the party interests of individual governments. The persistence of that policy is

highlighted in the narrative by contrasting British policy with the halting efforts of other states to promote detente. It can certainly be argued that no other major state matched the commitment to detente that was displayed by British governments during this period. But if the substance of a British detente policy has been described in some detail here, the evaluation of what that policy achieved is more problematical. Given the level of analysis problem outlined in the introduction, great care must be taken in making judgments, particularly of a cause-effect nature, about the impact of British policy on the detente process. Given also the focus of this account of detente, it would be easy to exaggerate the significance of British policy by simply falling into the trap of ethnocentrism.

If there is a danger of overstating the importance of the British role, however, there is also a danger of understating it. Assuming that the notion of detente as process is accepted, this account of British policy warrants the conclusion that Britain's role as a catalyst in a process of East-West detente has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. If that process is identified by reference to 'landmarks' or 'turning points' such as the Geneva summit in 1955 or the partial test ban treaty in 1963, then linkages have been established in this study between British policy and those key developments. If, on the other hand, that process is identified as a slow, evolving process of constructing contacts across the East-West ideological divide, the case for the catalytic role of British diplomacy in building and sustaining the momentum of such a process is even stronger.

It cannot be argued on the basis of this study, pace Northedge, that British diplomacy 'created' detente. But the conception of a detente process that began in the early 1950s allied to this account of British detente policy does pose problems for those, like Joseph Korb, who in effect ignore British policy or those, like Elisabeth Barker, who judge it to have been a failure. Korb ignores the earlier manifestations of a detente process and is thereby led to argue erroneously that British governments demonstrated no significant interest in detente. Barker discusses British detente policy in the earlier period, but treats the period as self-contained rather than seeing policy as part of a wider process over a longer time period. The British, she argues, "tended to fall between two stools" because they weakened the solidarity of the Western alliance but were not able to "achieve a breakthrough in relations

with the Soviet Union".<sup>1</sup>

What can be argued from a process perspective is that British attempts to mediate between the superpowers became less important when direct contacts between the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union became a feature of that process. This does not mean that Britain became redundant after the Camp David summit in 1959: the test ban negotiations illustrate very clearly the continuing value of British mediation even at the end of the period covered here. In the longer term though, Camp David did appear to signal the decline of British influence on East-West relations. Indeed, there is some substance to the provocative Northedge view that by 1963 the "test ban agreement ... had the effect of fostering in Britain hallucinations of world power no longer justified by realities".<sup>2</sup>

In terms of an evaluation of British policy over the whole period covered by this study, however, there is support for Northedge's general contention that scholars have focussed excessively on the negative side of the British record, the alleged failure of summitry and the evident failure of the Paris summit in particular, to the neglect of the positive contribution of British diplomacy to a detente process.<sup>3</sup> From an intra-bloc perspective, moreover, the British use of detente to create leverage and flexibility in an hegemonial system dominated by the United States would appear to provide a model for French and West German detente policy in the 1960s, analyses of which have received much more scholarly attention. The British record on the detente issue during this period is worthy of detailed study, Korbel notwithstanding.

#### An explanation of British detente policy

It will be recalled from the introductory comments that the aim of this thesis was not only to describe and evaluate but also to construct an explanation of British detente policy. To that end, four sets of factors were identified as possible components of an explanation. Given that the particular task was to explain the continuity of British policy during the 1950s and early 1960s, the intention was also to investigate whether policy was underpinned by a consistent set of attitudes which might be said to

1. E. Barker, Britain in a Divided Europe 1945-70 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) p.144; see also C.J. Bartlett, A History of Postwar Britain 1945-74 (London: Longman, 1977) p.137.
2. F.S. Northedge, Descent from Power (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974) p.292.
3. See, for example, A. Shlaim, "Britain's quest for a world role", International Relations, May 1975, pp. 838-856.

constitute a British conception of detente. This section assesses each of the four components that were identified; underlying attitudes are considered separately in a final section.

(a) Detente as response to domestic political imperatives

To what extent can British detente policy be explained as a response to domestic political imperatives? It can be argued on the basis of this study that while some domestic factors help to explain policy at certain times, other factors were of continuing importance over the period as a whole. Four interrelated factors of variable significance can be identified: the proximity of general elections; the electoral threat posed by the Labour Party; the effectiveness of the anti-nuclear movement and the dependence of British defence policy on a strategy of nuclear deterrence.

The evidence presented here indicates that policy-makers were aware of the potential electoral advantage to be derived from a successful policy of detente. To be more precise, policy-makers were aware of the electoral damage that might be done by not pursuing or at least not appearing to pursue a detente policy. From a rational policy-maker perspective, the chances of electoral damage were increased the closer an election loomed, the stronger the Labour Party was, the more the anti-nuclear lobby was organised into a politically effective force and the more British defence policy was explicitly harnessed to a doctrine of nuclear deterrence. From this perspective, it can be argued that domestic factors are most relevant to an explanation of a detente policy in the period from the Spring of 1957 to the general election of October 1959. The significance of all four variables makes it not inappropriate to refer to them as imperatives during this period.

The fact that this was a period leading up to a general election is important given the potency of other variables. The Labour Party was enjoying a period of temporary unity that was quite exceptional if viewed over the thirteen years in opposition as a whole. Anti-nuclear sentiment in the country was entering a significant phase politically as local protest groups became organised on a national basis, coordinated by the National Committee for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests established in February 1957. Twelve months later this Committee became the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Finally, the first successful British hydrogen bomb test in May 1957 was preceded

by Duncan Sandys' Defence White Paper which openly committed the country to a nuclear deterrence strategy. The stimulus that these developments gave to a policy of detente and the specific objective of a test ban treaty is well documented in Macmillan's memoirs and elsewhere.

In terms of explaining the continuity of British detente policy over the period as a whole, however, this study would suggest that the combination of popular fears of nuclear weapons and the governmental reaction to those fears were the most significant domestic factors. A public mood of fear and apprehension was created initially by the 1954 reports of the destructive power of hydrogen weapons which in turn heightened a concern about the vulnerability of Britain in the event of a nuclear war. This mood and those fears formed a permanent domestic backdrop throughout this period and they elicited an immediate and a continuing response from government. The sensitivity of successive Conservative governments to the domestic political implications of the nuclear issue requires some explanation. In part it simply reflected the fact regularly noted by commentators that the Conservatives never felt secure, despite being in office for thirteen consecutive years and despite increasing their majority exponentially at every election after 1951 until 1964. More importantly perhaps, it reflected perceptions of a salient issue that could easily be exploited and used against a party that remained sensitive to the 'warmonger' smear long after the 1951 election.

If a detente policy was a necessary reaction to popular fears, there are also indications that it served a more positive managerial function. By persuading the public of the essential reasonableness of the government's position, a high profile detente policy might help to carry public opinion along with prudent measures of defence. Churchill's December 1953 justification of his 'double dealing' policy alludes to this function of detente: "... only by proving to our peoples that we should neglect no chance of easement, could we persuade them to accept the sacrifices necessary to maintain strong armed forces."<sup>4</sup> Significantly, Macmillan makes exactly the same point five years later in a letter written to

4. Quoted in Chapter Four, page 178.

Adenauer to justify his forthcoming visit to Moscow: "... if we expect them (the public) to accept measures of military preparedness", we "must demonstrate our readiness to talk."<sup>5</sup>

The sensitivity of successive governments to popular fears of nuclear war can be explained partly in terms of domestic politics, but the evidence here suggests that it can also be explained in terms of the anxieties of policy-makers themselves. Indeed, fears and anxieties were shared to such an extent that popular and governmental fears of nuclear war must be regarded as related if not mutually reinforcing factors which make an important contribution to an explanation of British detente policy.

(b) Detente as response to governmental fears of nuclear war

The documents used in this study are particularly revealing of the preoccupations of British policy-makers throughout this period with the danger of nuclear war. Governmental perceptions of the threat posed to Britain by an increasingly dangerous strategic environment appear to provide a potent explanation for the continuity of British efforts to promote East-West detente.

While policy-makers were assiduous in their public rhetoric about the benefits of mutual deterrence, if only to reassure a nervous public, this obscured a fundamental ambivalence about nuclear weapons. The private statements of policy-makers are replete with references to the dangers of deterrence breaking down, of the horrors of nuclear weapons actually being used. Churchill's 'balance of terror' notion, though used to underpin the rather comforting conception of a pax atomica, can be viewed as rare public expression of this ambivalence.

The documents suggest that governmental and prime ministerial fears in particular were grounded perceptually on a very precise reading of history. It was the lessons of 1914 that needed to be learned if nuclear war was to be averted. For the survivors of the Edwardian generation that was decimated on the fields of Flanders, World War One rather than World War Two was the traumatic experience that haunted

5. H. Macmillan, Riding the Storm (London: Macmillan, 1971) p.586.

British policy-makers during this period. If, for the Americans, the dominant image of Stalin and his successors was of "Hitler in the Kremlin masterminding global revolution", the British saw the ghost of Kaiser Wilhelm II mobilising the German troops in 1914. If the authors of NSC-68 calculated the day on which the Soviet Union would feel confident enough of victory to launch a pre-emptive nuclear attack, British policy-makers were more concerned about miscalculations on either side of the Iron Curtain which might result in the nuclear war that neither side wanted.

It is misleading in fact to imply that British fears of nuclear war were focussed solely on the Soviet Union. An important conclusion to be drawn from this study is that British policy-makers appear to have had little or no confidence in the ability of either of the superpowers to avoid perpetrating what Macmillan called the 'final disaster'. Indeed, it was the Americans in the first half of the 1950s who posed the greater threat of precipitate action. The war in Korea, the conventional war that could so easily have 'gone nuclear', was a clear warning to British policy-makers that Washington was just as capable as Moscow of initiating a nuclear war.

The development of American strategic policy after Korea did little to reassure the British. The balance of nuclear power may have favoured the West, but the 'New Look' strategy adopted by the Eisenhower administration confirmed British fears of a less than cautious American approach to the use of nuclear weapons just at a time when the hydrogen bomb with its vast destructive power was replacing the atom bomb on both sides. The Churchill government was no less alarmed by the 'brinkmanship' practised by Dulles in crises than Macmillan was by the variant practised later by Khrushchev. The Soviet leader's ultimata during the recurrent Berlin crisis were no more worrying to the British government than American contingency plans to the extent that both superpowers were perceived to be heightening the unpredictability of the crisis and increasing the chances that it would culminate in a nuclear exchange.

From a British perspective, the post-Sputnik strategic environment was more threatening because both superpowers now had the confidence to engage in 'missile rattling' which greatly increased the possibility of a fatal miscalculation. Moreover, technological advances which for the first time exposed the territories of both superpowers to nuclear attack served also to heighten the awareness of the vulnerability of Britain in the event of a nuclear war.



It can be concluded that perceptions of an increasingly dangerous nuclear environment do provide a powerful explanation of British detente policy. In particular, this factor explains the persistent efforts throughout this period to mediate in East-West crises which threatened to involve the use of nuclear weapons. More specific fears of nuclear proliferation help to explain British mediation in the test ban negotiations. While the Americans tended to be preoccupied with the possibility of the Soviet Union cheating on any agreement, the British were more concerned about the risks associated with the continuation of the nuclear arms race and the spread of nuclear weapons. If neither of the superpowers could be trusted to avoid using nuclear weapons in a crisis, the prospect of other states acquiring nuclear weapons only multiplied the chances of their use. Hence the Macmillan government was determined to secure a test ban treaty to be followed as soon as possible thereafter by a non-proliferation agreement.

It is worth noting by way of a postscript here that the statements of British policy-makers on this theme convey a sense that time was running out, a sense that the balance of military power was changing and, most significantly, a conviction that nuclear war could happen if the chances of miscalculation were not minimized by restoring and then expanding East-West communication at the highest levels. The avoidance of nuclear war required the balancing of a structure of mutual deterrence with a process of detente. Normal diplomacy had to be resumed as soon as possible if East-West conflict was to be managed rather than brought to a cataclysmic solution.

(c) Detente as response to commercial and economic interests

In contrast to the factors discussed in the preceding sections, economic interests are less easily related to an explanation of a detente policy. The conceptual problem that emerges from the relevant substantive sections of the thesis centres on what is meant by 'economic interests'. A solution to this problem would be to delineate this category of explanation more rigorously by making a clearer distinction between, on the one hand, economic and commercial interests and, on the other, what may be called politico-economic interests. In terms of an economic explanation more narrowly conceived, detente may be explained positively as a response to British commercial interests in East-West trade or negatively in terms of the economic costs associated with the absence of

detente. With respect to politico-economic interests, a detente policy may be explained in terms of the expected political benefits that would accrue from East-West economic activity.

There are grounds for arguing that British policy can be explained in terms of commercial interests. For a state which, as Macmillan put it, lived by trade and exports, a detente policy clearly served British commercial interests to the extent that such a policy helped to shape an international environment that was congenial to expanding economic activity. Continuing efforts to remove what were considered to be unnecessary restraints on East-West trade illustrate a governmental concern about the loss of potential trade. It can also be argued that the broader economic costs of a tense bipolar confrontation necessitating high levels of defence expenditure were equally apparent to British governments during this period. The radical reorientation of British defence policy that was promised by the 1957 White Paper was premised on the notion that defence spending was taking such a high proportion of GNP that it threatened domestic economic priorities.

Economic and commercial interests were undoubtedly a major component of the policy-making environment injecting both demands and constraints into the policy process, but the conclusion to be drawn from this study is that those interests are more appropriately considered as contextual factors rather than as providing a significant explanation of a detente policy during the 1953-63 period. If the objective is to explain the continuity of British policy, the limitations of commercial/economic explanation become apparent.

The analysis here suggests that the need for East-West trade was most pressing in the immediate postwar period. Given the parlous economic condition of Britain at that time, policy-makers could not be too particular about the ideological stance of any state that was prepared to do business: trade was crucial to survival and economic reconstruction. As the condition of the British economy began to improve through the 1950s, however, the need to trade across the Iron Curtain became less pressing. Trade from this source also became less significant when it became evident that the quantity of actual and potential trade involved was not such that commercial arguments alone justified a continuation of the effort to remove the barriers to trade.

The evidence presented here suggests that British policy-makers were much more concerned with the political rather than the commercial benefits to be derived from East-West trade, hence their motives in this context should be explained primarily in political rather than economic terms. An instrumental view of trade and other East-West contacts as a political solvent that might improve relations between the blocs and thus reduce the possibility of war can be traced through the statements of policy-makers, from Bevin to Selwyn Lloyd and from Churchill to Macmillan. This view, it can be argued, is central to a British conception of detente and will be discussed in that section. The other important political dimension of economic activity, the idea that Britain should cultivate commercial and other contacts with the Soviet bloc in order to demonstrate political independence, is more appropriately considered in a category of political explanations of detente.

(d) Detente as response to international political interests

Detente as a policy response to domestic political demands has already been considered but the relationship between detente and broader international political interests remains to be assessed. This relationship can be sharply focussed by posing a question. Given the evidence of Britain's material decline relative to other states in the postwar period, to what extent can a detente policy be explained as a vehicle for maintaining great power status and wielding global influence?

There are clear indications in this study that successive British governments were not unaware of the potential benefits of actively pursuing detente in terms of the status and prestige that might accrue to Britain. The promotion of East-West detente certainly provided opportunities for policy-makers to deploy those types of influence that Britain still possessed so as to demonstrate leadership and occasionally statemanship on a global stage. In that sense, detente can be regarded as a convenient policy instrument. Conciliatory initiatives and persistent attempts to mediate on East-West issues not only helped to divert attention from material decline but, significantly, maintained the appearance at least of Britain as a great power. From this perspective, there is a direct link across this period between Churchill's aspirations to revive the wartime notion of a 'Big Three' by sponsoring East-West negotiations, and the situation ten years

later with Britain, apparently secure as one of the 'Big Three', signing the partial test ban treaty having played a significant role in the test ban negotiations.

As Britain's decline became more evident, particularly after Suez, and the search for alternative ways of maintaining global influence more pressing, the identification of detente as an appropriate instrument became more explicit. Macmillan's determination to take a dramatic initiative by visiting Moscow and, thereafter, to retain for Britain and himself a leading role in East-West negotiations, offers the clearest evidence of the perceived importance of a detente policy in terms of maintaining Britain's position in the international hierarchy. The fact that mounting evidence of material decline in the second half of the 1950s coincided with explicit challenges to that position, from De Gaulle's France in particular, only reinforces this point.

There was an important linkage, it can be argued, between a 'descent from power' and British efforts to institutionalise summitry. A regular cycle of summit meetings, with Britain as one of three or even a handful of states represented, would have maintained the appearance at least of Britain wielding global influence, material circumstances notwithstanding. Regular summits would also of course have provided a perfect forum for statesmanlike performances by British prime ministers in the glare of the world's media. This serves as a useful reminder of the attraction in Downing Street of any policy which promised to enhance the reputation of the prime minister. This 'personal kudos' factor cannot be omitted from any list of political explanations of detente, particularly in the context of prime ministers like Churchill and Macmillan who shared an undoubted flair for self publicity. Both these leaders were certainly predisposed to regard their personal and Britain's international standing as very closely linked.

But if detente as a policy instrument can be explained in terms of the need to manipulate the symbols of power, detente as a policy objective also served Britain's global interests. Another important conclusion to be drawn from this study is that policy-makers were aware as early as 1949 that the perpetuation of a bipolar confrontation was inimical to Britain's global interests to the extent that it imposed an inflexible structure on relationships within as well as between the rival blocs. Such a structure was bound to limit Britain's freedom of action and increase dependence upon

the hegemonial leadership of the United States. However important a close Anglo-American relationship was to Britain's international influence, major differences of interest and perspective, as evidenced in the Middle East and the Far East, required British policy-makers to work towards creating a more flexible international structure in which Britain's remaining global interests could more easily be protected. Most evidently in terms of Anglo-American relations, it may be argued, detente was both a policy instrument and a policy objective, a vehicle for demonstrating independence and a continuing attempt throughout this period to broaden the scope for independent action.

Drawing this section to a general conclusion, a coherent explanation of British detente policy has been provided. The focus of that explanation, moreover, has been broadly consistent with the 'security politics' orientation of the approach adopted. Given that the objective was to explain the continuity of British policy over the 1953-63 period, explanations which hinge around domestic political imperatives or economic interests narrowly defined, have been found, on inspection, to be less powerful than politico-military security types of explanation.

To be specific, a determination to sustain Britain's position in the international hierarchy and to protect Britain's global interests allied to growing fears that confrontation politics across the East-West divide might culminate sooner rather than later in a nuclear war can be identified as the most important factors which motivated British policy-makers to pursue a detente policy during this period. Having said that, however, these central factors of continuing significance were reinforced by other elements of the explanatory framework. Governmental fears of nuclear war, for example, were clearly reinforced by a sensitivity to a growing popular concern which had potentially adverse electoral consequences. The need to protect political interests was highlighted to a significant extent by a perception of threat to economic interests. Indeed, global political and economic interests in this context were often indistinguishable.

#### A British conception of detente

This final section of the conclusion deals inter alia with the third objective that was specified in the introduction. It considers the proposition that the explanatory factors discussed in the last section were underpinned by a consistent set of attitudes towards detente and, therefore,

that an explanation of British detente policy is incomplete without some understanding of the sources and the impact of those attitudes. The historical antecedents of attitudes towards detente are explored here by locating them within traditional British attitudes to international relations. With reference to the pragmatic ethos discussed in the introduction, this section also considers whether attitudes towards detente can be said to constitute a British conception of detente. Finally, and in more general terms, a brief assessment is made of the contribution that this study makes both to an understanding of British foreign policy and detente.

It will be recalled that the attempt to discover a distinctive British approach to detente began by contrasting British and American approaches to the cold war in the late 1940s. While the publication of NSC-68 indicated that the Americans were beginning to see the cold war as an end in itself, it soon became apparent that British policy-makers were committed to containing East-West conflict not by confrontation or 'political warfare' but by a policy of military strength combined with diplomatic accommodation. From a British perspective, containment of the Soviet Union was essentially a means to an end, the object being the normalisation of East-West relations. To that end, having established the North Atlantic alliance to contain the Soviet threat, it was necessary to initiate a process of negotiations with Moscow as soon as possible.

Thus, on the basis of a relatively brief analysis of British attitudes and policy prior to 1953, it was suggested that while the Americans regarded 'cold war' and 'detente' as antithetical approaches to East-West relations, the British regarded them as complementary, with detente apparently regarded as 'normal diplomacy'. This view of detente, it was also suggested, was grounded upon a traditional approach to diplomacy and international relations. Implicit within this formulation of course was the idea that policy-makers had a consistent view of 'normal' international relations. The detailed study of British policy in the 1953-63 period provided an opportunity to identify more precisely what policy-makers understood by detente which might be used to see whether their view of detente can be related to traditional attitudes which might in turn define a British conception of 'normal' international relations.

At first sight, British policy towards detente in the 1953-55 period seemed to reflect a simple preoccupation with summitry: normal diplomacy appeared to be synonymous with summit diplomacy. In November 1955, for example,

Harold Macmillan explicitly related the 'Spirit of Geneva' to what he called "a return to normal human relations", by which he meant that it represented flexibility, 'give and take', a readiness to discuss and negotiate. By implication, more 'Genevas' would bring about a normalisation of relations between East and West.

Summit meetings were indeed thought to offer the best chance of resolving major conflicts of interest and achieving a modus vivendi, but there were also indications during this period that there was more to a British view of detente than summitry or even a wider process of East-West negotiations. Significantly, Churchill's idea of a new approach to East-West relations consisted not only of restoring and expanding politico-diplomatic contacts but also of developing as many commercial, social and cultural contacts as possible across his Iron Curtain. This suggested that the notion of 'open contacts' might be as useful as 'normal diplomacy' in terms of capturing the essence of a British view of detente.

This was confirmed by the more detailed analysis of the approach adopted by the Macmillan government: normal diplomacy, moreover, had now acquired more specification. Though Macmillan pressed hard to institutionalize summit meetings, it was clear that normal diplomacy meant more than 'mere' summitry. This was partly a result of a learning experience following the Geneva experience, but partly a clearer articulation of the place of summit meetings within a regularised cycle of negotiations. The Macmillan government assumed rightly or wrongly on the basis of Geneva that summit meetings would be more effective in terms of producing practical results if preparatory work was undertaken by lower level meetings. Hence, detente as normal diplomacy connoted permanent East-West diplomatic contacts interspersed by meetings of ministers and regular if less frequent meetings of heads of government/state.

It was also clear from the statements of British policy-makers in the late 1950s that they did not envisage that normalised diplomacy would of itself normalise East-West relations. The Macmillan government shared the Churchill view that it was necessary to buttress political contacts by developing contacts across the spectrum of non-governmental relations. This confirmation of a consistent British view of detente during the period covered by this study in terms of normal diplomacy and open contacts provides a basis for locating attitudes towards detente within traditional British attitudes to international relations. The next part of this

chapter explores the origins of attitudes to detente in traditional attitudes to diplomacy, defence and what might be called 'globalism'.

### Detente and traditional diplomacy

British attitudes towards detente, it can be argued, have their origins within traditional attitudes to diplomacy. Persistent efforts to mediate between the superpowers in the 1950s and early 1960s, like the policy of appeasement in the 1930s, illustrate what Lord Strang has called the 'conciliatory quality' in British diplomacy.<sup>6</sup> Historically, this distinctive quality was a product of two major factors: long experience of playing a leading role in the European diplomatic system and assumptions dating from the last century about how to maintain Britain's global position in the face of growing challenges to that position.

The idea of detente as normal diplomacy suggests a link with an historically familiar European system where conciliation was the important norm of diplomacy. Macmillan's description of a return to 'normal human relations' positively evokes that system which, in contrast to the inflexible bipolar system of the postwar period, was characterised by flexible, shifting alliances, shared interests in maintaining the system and the absence of ideologically-orientated confrontation politics. In the context of that system, normal diplomacy meant a willingness to bargain, to make concessions, to compromise in order to maintain a modus vivendi with the other members of the system. There was no shortage of conflicts of interest between states but they could normally (though not always) be resolved by an institutionalized process of communication, dialogue and negotiation.

6. "It is a policy that usually prefers compromise to victory; that seeks by mutual concession to reach durable understandings." Lord Strang, Britain in World Affairs (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1961) pp.359-360. For an interesting discussion of the links between the appeasement policy and a British diplomatic tradition, see Paul Kennedy, "The Pattern of 'Appeasement' in British Foreign Policy", paper presented to the annual conference of the British International Studies Association, University of Birmingham, December 1975. This paper was later published as "The tradition of appeasement in British foreign policy 1865-1939", British Journal of International Studies, 2:3, 1976, pp. 195-215.



Recent comments by former foreign secretary Lord Carrington also allude implicitly at least to that system and help to establish the origins of a British approach to detente in traditional European diplomacy. Speaking about the new cold war, Carrington chides those in the West who would reduce East-West diplomacy to "nothing but nuclear accountancy ... our own (Western) tradition must be for the peaceful resolution of potential conflict through energetic and forceful dialogue". By implication, simply to "face the Russians down in a silent war of nerves, broken only by bursts of megaphone diplomacy" is abnormal diplomacy, the very antithesis of a European diplomatic tradition.<sup>7</sup>

From this perspective, differences between British and American approaches to detente during the period covered by this study can be explained either by the United States' lack of experience in, or a rejection of, the techniques and the objectives of European diplomacy. Northedge suggests the former and exemplifies a fundamental difference of approach by reference to the idea of peaceful coexistence "which for European Powers is the normal rule and raison d'etre of diplomacy" but which for Americans has generally had "the overtones of cohabitation with the devil".<sup>8</sup>

If British attitudes learnt over more than two centuries of experience in the pragmatic European school of diplomacy reappear in attitudes towards detente, it can be argued that attitudes to detente also reflected traditional assumptions related more specifically to the maintenance of Britain's global interests. In particular it had long been assumed, certainly since the middle of the nineteenth century, that the preservation of peace was central to the protection of global politico-economic interests. It was this premise that Harold Nicolson had in mind when he argued in his classic work on British diplomacy that British policy-makers have traditionally had a 'civilian' or a 'commercial' as opposed to what he called a 'warrior' conception of diplomacy.<sup>9</sup>

7. 1983 Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture, reprinted in Survival, July/August 1983, p.151. See also a lecture given later the same year by David Owen calling for "A New Realism in East-West Relations", reprinted in the Journal of the Royal United Services Institute, 129:1, March 1984, pp.3-8.

8. F.S. Northedge and A. Wells, Britain and Soviet Communism (London: Macmillan, 1982) p.237. The ideological explanation is developed in P. Calvocoressi, "Nuclear weapons in the service of man", Review of International Studies, 10:2, April 1984, pp. 89-101.

9. H. Nicolson, Diplomacy (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1939) pp. 52-54.

Unlike the other major European states, Britain had an Empire of global dimensions which provided special reasons for pursuing a conciliatory foreign policy. As the so-called 'workshop of the world' in the last century, Britain was at the centre of a global system of trade and finance. The new liberal orthodoxy argued that this position of pre-eminence could best be maintained and, indeed, exploited by pursuing a policy of 'free trade'. This policy had important commercial advantages but it also made the British imperial economy highly vulnerable to any disruption of trade and to war in particular. Hence, to the extent that global economic interests required a policy of free trade, that policy in turn required the preservation of peace by conciliatory diplomacy.

As Britain's economic position relative to other states began nevertheless to decline in the second half of the nineteenth century, the preservation of peace became even more vital. Similarly, other challenges to Britain's global position, which revealed an increasing gap between material power and world-wide commitments, served to reinforce a predisposition to seek compromise solutions to and peaceful settlements of disputes with other states. As Paul Kennedy puts it:

"This did not mean that British governments would choose peace at any price but - unlike the militaristic elites of certain other countries - they did know that war was bad for business and that the essence of diplomacy was to secure British interests without recourse to a large-scale conflict."<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note, however, in terms of trying to identify the historical antecedents of British attitudes towards detente that it was never assumed, even by the most radical Liberals, that peace could be maintained solely by conciliatory diplomacy. In crude political terms which oversimplify party political positions, 'liberal' and 'conservative' approaches to problems of war and peace can be identified in nineteenth century Britain.<sup>11</sup> Briefly, the liberal approach stressed the need for a

10. P. Kennedy, The Realities behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy 1865-1980 (London: Fontana, 1981) p.27. The arguments outlined here are developed in the first chapter of this book.

11. See *ibid.* pp.70-72.

foreign policy that was pragmatic, conciliatory and reasonable but, suspicious of government to government diplomacy, tended towards the view that peace could best be maintained by expanding non-governmental contacts across nations. The classic liberal belief in a natural harmony of interests which underpinned this view, however, was rejected by conservatives who, though not opposed in principle to conciliatory diplomacy, tended towards the older realpolitik position which held that conflict rather than harmony was the natural state of affairs. They believed that the necessary defence of national interests required firmness and resolution as well as conciliation and reasonableness. From this perspective indeed, war could only be avoided by combining diplomacy and defence, conciliation and strength.

Significantly, this study suggests that elements of both traditions of thought reappear within British attitudes towards detente. The notion of detente as open contacts can certainly be traced back to nineteenth century Liberal ideas associated in particular with Richard Cobden. There was, as Geoffrey Goodwin has commented, a "deep streak of Cobdenism in much of British thinking" in the postwar period.<sup>12</sup> Cobden argued that a free interchange of goods and services would not only benefit the British economy but that free trade and "as much connection as possible between the nations of the world" would give all people a commercial stake in maintaining peace. The 'people' in turn would then put pressure upon governments to desist from pursuing policies that resulted in war.<sup>13</sup>

Conservative governments in the 1950s scarcely accepted Cobden's radical philosophy in its entirety, but Churchill's belief in trade as the 'great Mediator', for example, echoed Cobden's view that "commerce is the great panacea". The common assumption was that the extension of trade would act as a solvent of political differences and serve as an alternative to war. The 'can we do business' approach to new Soviet leaders in the postwar period provides a rather different illustration of the continuing impact of a commercial ethos in British diplomacy. Sir William Hayter, for example,

12. G. Goodwin in M. Leifer (ed.) Constraints and Adjustments in British Foreign Policy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972) p.43.

13. For Cobden's views in more detail, see D. Read, Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Partnership (London: 1968); P. Cain, "Capitalism, internationalism and imperialism in the thoughts of Richard Cobden", British Journal of International Studies, 5:3, October 1979.

the former ambassador in Moscow, recalls the initial concerns about Malenkov, "but as we got to know him in 1953 and 1954 we all concluded that though tough and secretive he was a man with whom business could be done".<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Mrs. Thatcher came to the same conclusion and used the same commercial expression after her first meeting in London with the then 'heir apparent' Gorbachev in December 1984.

#### Detente and defence

If elements of liberal thinking about the relationship between commerce and peace reappear in British attitudes towards detente, those attitudes also reveal evidence of the more conservative realpolitik tradition, particularly with respect to the assumed linkage between the avoidance of war and a balanced relationship between diplomacy and defence. Collective security in a North Atlantic context may have replaced a 'balance of power' role in Europe, but the assumption persisted that conciliatory diplomacy, however desirable for all the reasons touched on here, would only be effective if wedded to a credible structure of defence or, in a nuclear context, deterrence. The unfortunate experience with an 'unbalanced' policy of appeasement in the 1930s, it can be argued, served to reinforce this perspective.

As noted in this study, notions of balance and complementarity pervade descriptions of a proper relationship between the political and military components of British foreign policy. Churchill's 'double dealing' and Macmillan's 'two-fold' or 'arm and parley' can be related to similar aphorisms expressed before and since the 1950s by policy-makers and commentators alike. Northedge, for example, reminds us that there was nothing inconsistent about advocating collective defence within NATO and detente with the Soviet Union. It was, he suggests,

14. W. Hayter, The Kremlin and the Embassy (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966) p.107.

"the continuation of a long standing British principle of foreign policy, which Lord Templewood, the Sir Samuel Hoare of the 1930s, called the 'double line' - a strong defence posture combined with the energetic search for accommodation."<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, Northedge argues elsewhere, with the exception of the (first) Thatcher government,

"British policy towards the Soviet Union since 1945 has followed a consistent course of armed vigilance against aggression, coupled with a search for detente and all manner of agreements to ease international tension, as and when opportunities for making these presented themselves."<sup>16</sup>

It is significant that Lord Carrington, the foreign secretary in that Thatcher government until April 1982, has since distanced himself from what might be called the 'Iron Lady' approach to East-West relations and placed himself squarely in the 'double dealing' tradition.

"When he [Churchill] declared himself in favour of an East-West Summit one week, and Western rearmament the next, he was wrongly accused of inconsistency - - - Churchill was ahead of his time: the sweet and sour approach to Moscow was not yet recognised as the tactical necessity it is today."<sup>17</sup>

15. F.S. Northedge, "The Coordination of Interests in British Foreign Policy", unpublished paper presented to the annual conference of the British International Studies Association, University of Lancaster, December 1980, p.21. Michael Donelan has also commented on the British belief that "both strength and diplomacy (are) continuously necessary in a world of endless disharmony, in a world in which the best possible solution is the best possible bargain". Paper presented to a Princeton University Conference on Britain Today: Economics, Defence and Foreign Policy May 12-13 1959 (Princeton Univ. Publication) p.54. See also J.E. Dougherty, British Perspectives on a Changing Global Balance (London: Sage, 1975) p.51.
16. F.S. Northedge, op.cit. (1982) p.133.
17. Lord Carrington, op.cit. pp. 152-153.

Detente and globalism

The origins of British attitudes to detente can be located finally in the traditional assumption that Britain has a global role to play in international relations. This assumption again can be traced back at least as far as the nineteenth century when British imperial power reached its apogee. The most recent historical experience prior to the period dealt with here, in World War Two, confirmed the assumption that Britain still had a central role to play in the international system, as one of the 'Big Three'. In Joseph Frankel's words, "Britain's wartime record ensured for her a position perpetuating her traditional claim to be represented at the exclusive top-level councils dealing with global politics."<sup>18</sup> Continuing global aspirations after the war were perhaps most clearly articulated in Churchill's 'Three Circles' doctrine which placed Britain unashamedly at the hub of world politics and became the most pervasive image of what constituted an appropriate role for Britain in the postwar world.<sup>19</sup>

Historically, Britain's claim to play a global role had rested principally on a combination of global interests and capabilities. But, as implied earlier, Britain's material resources alone had never been sufficient to sustain an Empire of global dimensions.<sup>20</sup> It had long been necessary to augment military strength by forging alliances, and to supplement material power by less tangible elements of power like skilful, flexible diplomacy and claims to moral authority. As Britain's global capabilities declined relative to other states and, in the postwar period, global interests contracted sharply, it became necessary to rely more and more upon collective defence and the symbols of power to sustain the persistent image of global status.

18. J. Frankel, British Foreign Policy 1945-73 (London: RIIA/Oxford University Press, 1975) p.151.

19. Speech to the Conservative Party Conference, Llandudno, October 9th 1948.

20. Michael Howard argues that the underlying weaknesses of the imperial structure in economic and military terms were finally exposed by the Boer War. See The Continental Commitment (London: Pelican, 1974) pp. 11-13.

British attitudes towards detente and indeed to East-West relations as a whole in the 1950s can be explained in terms of the continuing assumption that Britain could and should play an effective global role, material circumstances notwithstanding. Whether Britain was seen as a mediator, a 'bridge', an 'honest broker' or, in more traditional terms, a 'balancer' of power, what Northedge calls 'first-rank status' was taken for granted.<sup>21</sup>

Of the range of metaphors used to explain and justify continuing British efforts to influence the direction of East-West relations during this period, perhaps Macmillan's notion that Britain could play 'Greece' to the United State's 'Rome' captures the essence of this sort of imagery. While 'Rome' had the material power to act decisively in world politics, she lacked subtlety and was hampered by her naivety and lack of experience. 'Greece's' role was to complement this raw power by providing the experience, the wisdom and the practical diplomatic skills which would guide the brash, rather vulgar newcomer through the intricacies of international relations.<sup>22</sup> It is significant that this basic conception, shorn over time of its more arrogant and pretentious elements, that Britain has a distinctive if not a unique role to play in East-West relations has persisted to the present day. The comments of Lord Carrington can again be used to exemplify this point. He argues that

"Britain has an important role to play in developing a more sane and secure East-West relationship - not as a bridge, or an intermediary, not to spot the chance to split the difference - but to contribute our knowledge, experience and mixture of firmness and flexibility to the efforts of our partners in Europe and America."<sup>23</sup>

21. F.S. Northedge, "Britain as a second-rank power" International Affairs, January 1970, p.43. See also A. Schlaim, op.cit.

22. According to Anthony Sampson, Macmillan invented this metaphor during the Second World War, see Macmillan: A Study in Ambiguity (London: Penguin, 1967) p.61. See also D.C. Watt, Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place 1900-1975 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984) p.135.

23. Lord Carrington, op.cit. p.152.

Detente and pragmatism

The previous sections have attempted to locate attitudes to detente within a traditional British approach to international relations, identifying particular historical antecedents in attitudes to diplomacy, the relationship between diplomacy and defence, and a global perspective. The object of this exercise, it will be recalled, was to consider the proposition that an explanation of British detente policy is incomplete without an understanding of relevant traditional attitudes. In this context, the contention must be that this proposition has been sustained. The continuity of British attitudes to detente through the period considered in this study cannot be explained without some reference to the persistence of certain traditional attitudes to international relations.

Another justification for this historical detour is to be better able to assess the third and final objective established at the beginning of this study. Once again the issue can be focused by posing a question. Can British attitudes and policy towards detente also be explained in terms of a tradition of pragmatism in policy-making, or has a British conception of detente been established here which challenges the pragmatic ethos which is said to infuse British foreign policy?

To answer this question, rather more needs to be said about the meaning of pragmatism than the brief comments offered in the introduction. A dictionary definition of pragmatism would suggest that it means dealing with affairs in terms of their practical significance. In the context of British foreign policy, however, the word has a variety of connotations which seem to go beyond simply a practical approach to affairs.

Unfortunately, pragmatism is rarely discussed and when it is, usually by commentators rather than policy-makers, it tends to be explained in negative terms. The problem is compounded by the fact that the absence of discussion about pragmatism is itself taken to be part of its meaning. This led Andrew Shonfield to relate pragmatism to what he called the 'cult of the implicit'.<sup>24</sup>

24. A. Shonfield, 'The pragmatic illusion', Encounter, June 1967, p.11.



Nevertheless, a pragmatic tradition in British foreign policy is generally taken to mean a non-analytical and a non-ideological approach to international relations. Foreign policy issues are dealt with piecemeal, case by case, with little reference to general principles or broad objectives. Frankel, for example, suggests that

"owing to the pragmatic, non-ideological nature of British foreign policy in the past, we are unable to trace such clear patterns of tradition and principle as we can for other countries whose politicians are more articulate."<sup>25</sup>

For Frankel and other commentators, however, pragmatism also denotes flexibility, a resistance to 'grand designs', an unwillingness to engage in policy planning, a preoccupation with immediate 'interests' rather than desired future outcomes, reacting to international events rather than taking the initiative.<sup>26</sup>

If this is taken as a broad characterisation of pragmatism, British detente policy does provide evidence of a pragmatic approach to policy-making. A piecemeal, flexible approach to resolving the range of East-West problems is evident in the approach adopted by successive British governments through the 1950s and early 1960s. The British contribution to the test ban treaty negotiations clearly illustrates a pragmatic approach based, in Korbelt's words quoted in the introduction, on "the ways of quiet diplomacy and practical steps of rapprochement". The British approach to detente, certainly by contrast to the American approach of this period, was non-ideological and, as suggested earlier, consistent with a tradition of pragmatic European diplomacy. And finally, there was an element of what might be called pragmatic opportunism about the persistent efforts of British political leaders to take a lead in the detente process.

25. J. Frankel, *op.cit.* p.3.

26. *Ibid.* pp.96, 112-117. See also, D. Vital, The Making of British Foreign Policy (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968) pp. 98-103, 109-111; W.F. Hanrieder and G.P. Auton, The Foreign Policies of West Germany, France and Britain (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1980) pp.181-182; M. Palliser, Britain and British Diplomacy in a World of Change (London: David Davies Institute, 1976); A. Schlaim, *op.cit.* p.838.

But it can also be argued on the basis of this study that the continuity of British detente policy with its roots in traditional attitudes to international relations is more difficult to explain in pragmatic terms. The article on Anglo-Soviet relations by Sir Duncan Wilson, which has been used in different parts of this study, provides a convenient illustration of the problem of trying to explain the substance of British detente policy in purely pragmatic terms.<sup>27</sup> Wilson begins by reiterating the standard line on pragmatism. "The conduct of foreign affairs is largely a question of reacting to various day-to-day stimuli ... As is well-known, the British diplomat's motto is ad hoc." Consistent with this premise, he goes on to reject the argument that British contacts with the Soviet government after 1956 were "based on any broad philosophy of 'bridge-building'".

Wilson then encounters problems, however, in trying to explain what he calls the "intensification of contacts, commercial and cultural" between Britain and the Soviet Union between 1957 and 1964. He tries to explain these contacts firstly by suggesting that they were minor and therefore of little significance. He then argues that they can be explained in terms of the domestic political necessity of producing for a sceptical British public some positive results from the visits of Khrushchev and Bulganin to London, and Macmillan to Moscow. He also suggests that there was an element of faute de mieux about these contacts before admitting finally that the intensification of Anglo-Soviet contacts was based in part at least on what he calls an 'implicit philosophy of contact':

"... official policy began to be determined not only by the pressure of events, but also to some small extent by the development of its own philosophy. A constant element in this philosophy was that the utmost caution is needed in dealing with the Soviet government. A less explicit but growing element, however, was the idea that changes were taking place in the internal structure of the Soviet Union, and that further changes might result from increasing contacts with the outside world."<sup>28</sup>

27. D. Wilson, "Anglo-Soviet relations: The effect of ideas on reality", International Affairs, 50 : 3, July 1974.

28. Ibid. pp.380, 385-387.

The conclusion to be drawn from this study is that whilst pragmatic, opportunist elements can be identified within British detente policy, they are indicative of what Frankel calls a pragmatic 'national style' of policy-making.<sup>29</sup> But this characteristic style should not be allowed to obscure an approach which, as even Duncan Wilson admits, has analytical and philosophical components which cannot be explained in terms of pragmatism. Attitudes towards detente can be related to traditional British attitudes to international relations which constitute if not a coherent ideology at least a normative set of principles which in turn define a preferred international order.

British detente policy may reflect different and not wholly compatible traditions of thought about international relations, but this study suggests that commentators tend to exaggerate the difficulty of tracing "patterns of tradition and principle". British policy-makers may be less prepared than their counterparts in Europe and the United States to articulate the analytical assumptions upon which their behaviour is based, but the statements of policy-makers cited in this study, which convey an essentially consistent British view of detente, suggest that this criticism is overstated.<sup>30</sup> The British approach to foreign policy may, as Michael Palliser argues, be reactive rather than initiatory, but the activist, catalytic role of British diplomacy in the detente process during this period is scarcely compatible with a pragmatic approach if pragmatism is defined in these terms.<sup>31</sup> If it is accepted that pragmatism characterises a style of policy-making rather than providing a satisfactory explanation of the substance of foreign policy, it can be argued that a coherent British conception of detente has been established here which can legitimately be used for explanatory purposes.

29. J. Frankel, *op.cit.* p.23.

30. It would be difficult, for example, to find a more clearly articulated conception of detente than that offered by Macmillan in his September 1960 speech to the UN General Assembly. It certainly stands comparison with Kennedy's American University speech in June 1963.

31. M. Palliser, *op.cit.* pp.2,6.

British foreign policy and detente

It is appropriate to try and summarise the contribution that this study makes both to an understanding of British foreign policy and to a clarification of the concept of detente. The study began by contrasting the views of Korbelt and Northedge on the significance or otherwise of British detente policy: some comments must now be addressed to their very different assessments.

It is clear that Korbelt's position has proved to be the more problematic. There is support in this study for his emphasis on the pragmatic efforts of British diplomacy to effect an East-West rapprochement. But in terms of his evaluation of the British contribution to detente, the conclusion must be that Korbelt confuses style with substance. He misses the essential continuity of British policy and his comparative analysis understates the impact of that policy on the detente process. By assuming that the substance of British policy can be explained and evaluated in pragmatic terms, he ignores the analytical and philosophical bases of that policy. This omission necessarily weakens his attempt to contrast British and French detente policy in analytical terms.<sup>32</sup> British policy-makers may have "shunned away from grandiose schemes" but it is not clear why De Gaulle's June 1966 visit to Moscow should be regarded as a 'spectacular state visit' and not Macmillan's visit seven years earlier. It is even less clear why De Gaulle's trip should be regarded implicitly at least as a more significant contribution to the detente process. The alleged absence of 'eloquent phrases' about detente by British policy-makers has already been commented upon.

Northedge's much more positive assessment of British detente policy, on the other hand, has received substantial support in this study. In particular, his claims that British governments in the 1950s and early 1960s played an important mediation role between the superpowers and that Britain made a more significant contribution to detente in this period than any of the other Western allies are confirmed here. The problem with Northedge's position is his assertion that Britain created or 'invented' detente, as he puts it. If Korbelt can be said to confuse style and substance, Northedge, by apparently ignoring the level of analysis problem,

32. See Introduction, page 14.

is vulnerable to the criticism that he confuses policy and process. To repeat an earlier argument, a considered evaluation of the impact of British policy on the detente process requires an analysis of detente at a different level of analysis before cause-effect judgments of this type can be made. The tentative conclusion drawn from this study is that Britain acted as a catalyst in a process of change.

Turning to the broader contribution of this study, it provides support for the argument advanced elsewhere with respect to other issues, nuclear weapons policy for example, that the substance of British foreign policy since 1945 owes much to the continuing impact of traditional attitudes to international relations shaped by historical experience. British policy towards detente provides useful insights into what may be called a British 'view of the world' and an appropriate role for Britain in that world.

As argued above, British attitudes towards detente and indeed to East-West relations as a whole during this period reflect the assumption that Britain should continue to play a significant global role. But, significantly, a detailed study of British detente policy during this period helps to rebut the common criticism that attitudes were based on images of the past which had become illusory.<sup>33</sup> While there was some evident yearning for the past and even, as Frankel notes, a preoccupation with a return to some condition of 'normalcy' in which Britain would continue for the foreseeable future to play a major global role, nostalgia was tempered by realism.<sup>34</sup>

33. Dean Acheson, for example, in a less often quoted section of his famous critique of British foreign policy, suggested that "Great Britain, attempting to work alone and to be a broker between the United States and Russia has seemed to conduct a policy as weak as its power". Speech at West Point, December 1962.

34. J. Frankel, *op.cit.* p.91.

Persistent efforts to promote detente show British policy-makers substituting declining material assets with less tangible elements or symbols of power in order to sustain global influence, a process of adaptation which had been a feature of British foreign policy for more than half a century. It can therefore be argued that British detente policy illustrates not only the continuity of British policy but also, paradoxically, a continuing ability to adapt to change. To the extent that British diplomacy successfully influenced the direction of East-West relations during this period, that policy underlines the importance of 'influence' as opposed to 'power' narrowly defined, in international relations.

The British 'view of the world' that is revealed by this study is less concise than the conception of a global role - though this conception itself must be regarded as part of that 'world view' - because, as argued above, it contains not wholly compatible elements of liberal and conservative traditions of thought about international relations. But if no ideological 'grand design' is evident, the 'normal' or preferred international order that emerges highlights a continuing preference for peace rather than war; for conciliatory diplomacy rather than the use of force particularly in situations where the consequences of using force are unpredictable; for a flexible international system with contacts as open and diverse as possible to facilitate the advancement and/or the protection of politico-economic interests.

In the context of studies of British foreign policy which emphasize the impact of a realpolitik tradition and seek to explain policy in terms of power politics, a study of detente policy serves as a useful reminder of the continuing impact of a liberal tradition. But, it has to be remembered, this conception of detente has its roots in conservative as well as liberal thought. If detached from a broader 'mix' of traditions, this view of detente might appear to betray an excessive optimism with respect to the power of reason, dialogue and negotiation to resolve international conflict. A British conception of detente has to be firmly located within the notion of a balanced relationship between diplomacy and defence.

Relating this British conception of detente to the problems of conceptualisation that were discussed in the first chapter, this study offers clarification and a particular perspective. To the extent that it

has demonstrated the utility of the concept, it has provided a response to those who would question whether detente can be used as an analytical term. From a British perspective, detente is not 'wishful thinking' as George Ball would have it, nor is it an artificial construct divorced from the real world of international relations. Detente is not simply an 'attitude' or a 'mood' if these terms connote an atmosphere, an approach to or a style of policy-making, rather than a substantive phenomenon. Though closely related to traditional diplomacy, detente is not merely a synonym for it.

In essence, a British perspective has reinforced the argument that detente can be effectively analysed as a policy and as a process. It highlights the limitations of the various formulations of detente as a 'condition' or 'situation'. For British policy-makers, a detente between East and West in terms of keeping the door open to the East was, arguably, a policy aspiration in the late 1940s. Detente or an 'easement of relations', to use Churchill's phrase, was certainly a recurrent policy issue through the 1950s and early 1960s. There are indications, though this is an hypothesis to be tested elsewhere, that Britain has pursued a consistent policy towards detente based on a coherent and a consistent conception of detente throughout the postwar period.

If it is accepted that successive British governments have regarded East-West detente as an important and a continuing process of change in international relations since the early 1950s, this poses problems for those who would locate detente within a specific postwar period such as the 1970s. From a British perspective indeed, to regard detente as a temporary period or phase in contemporary international relations seems arbitrary: to regard detente as a prelude to entente appears both mechanistic and deterministic; and regarding detente as synonymous with appeasement in a pejorative sense is revealed as an overtly ideological use of the term.

In policy analysis terms, this study of Britain policy provides useful material for comparative analyses with the detente policies pursued by other states. It suggests various hypotheses that might be tested elsewhere. What does a British conception of detente have in common with, and how does it differ from, the approach adopted by other states? What are the differences and the similarities in terms of the 'uses' of detente? This study would suggest, for example, that British and French detente policies

have more in common with each other in terms of 'high policy' objectives than either have with West German policy.

The British contribution to an East-West detente process provides an important perspective from which to develop a better understanding of that process. Seen as a continuing process over a longer time frame, a number of questions emerge. To what extent did British policy provide a model for other states similarly locked into a bipolar international structure? Did British policy-makers have a grasp of the impact of nuclear weapons on international relations that their allies - though arguably not the Soviet Union - took much longer to acquire? From a British perspective, the continuing search for detente appears as an essential part of contemporary international relations rather than an 'optional extra'. Even more fundamentally perhaps, 'detente' like 'cold war' might reflect the special conditions of the nuclear age but from this perspective they can both be located and explained within a pattern of 'normal' international relations conceived as a mix of conflict and cooperation.



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