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Author(s): Leon D. Epstein
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Leon D. Epstein

I

BRITAIN'S decision in 1955, reaffirmed by policy and action through 1958, to manufacture its own hydrogen bomb has raised important questions about the effectiveness of joint Anglo-American defense arrangements. That the British development of massive retaliatory weapons involved a costly and unnecessary duplication of the American program has been persuasively argued by Henry Kissinger. Like many others, Kissinger would have preferred Britain to have concentrated on the conventional and tactical nuclear means of waging limited war.[1] Indeed, from a joint Anglo-American point of view, Kissinger's argument is so persuasive that an altogether different point of view, much more exclusively national, is required to explain Britain's H-bomb development. This may be discerned in the way in which the policy was presented to the British public. Granting that such presentation does not necessarily reveal the actual motivations of policy-makers, nevertheless the public justifications for Britain's H-bomb illuminate the image which Englishmen have of their nation's status in world affairs, particularly in relation to the United States.

The essentially separate national concern to be observed in these justifications shows the sharp limits of the Anglo-American version of the "pluralistic security-community," to adopt the useful term coined by Karl Deutsch and his co-authors for a territory whose governmental units are not amalgamated but where integration has been achieved in a "sense of community."[2] Britain and the

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[1] Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York, 1957), chap. 9. Kissinger, believing that Western Europe must be prepared for tactical nuclear warfare, argued that British statesmen were right to insist on the need for British possession of nuclear weapons, but wrong to identify their policy with the all-out massive retaliation implied in an emphasis on the H-bomb's delivery by strategic air power. It is only with Britain's adoption of the latter position that this article is concerned.

[2] Karl W. Deutsch and others, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 5-6, 29-30.

United States, because of their long-standing peaceful intentions in relation to each other, do fall within Deutsch's definition of a pluralistic security-community, and, as Deutsch suggests, in a way that the NATO countries as a whole do not. Yet Britain's case for its own H-bomb may be seen to have implied less of the "mutual responsiveness" which Deutsch holds to be requisite for such a community.[3] In this frame of reference, an analysis of the public arguments for the British H-bomb may have a relevance broader than that of the particular subject, important though military strategy is, and so, it is hoped, add modestly to the understanding of the general problem of achieving meaningful security-communities.

Before examining the British arguments, it ought to be noted that several circumstances required Britain's policy-makers, much more than American, to justify elaborately and continuously their massive retaliatory strategy. To begin with, Britain's need for its own H-bomb did not follow automatically from the belief that the West generally should be protected by this weapon. It might well have been thought that the West was amply protected by the American bomb. And, more acutely in Britain than in the United States, expenditures on nuclear weapons would realistically appear as alternative to expenditures on conventional defense forces, as well as to expenditures for other national purposes. The British economy is, after all, tighter than the American, and the desire to limit governmental budgets is dictated by harsher circumstances than the often doctrinaire pressures for economy in the United States. Then there is the fact of a larger and more articulate domestic opposition to British nuclear policy than to American.[4] The opposition has

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

[4] The British Gallup polls have shown substantial, if unsteady, opposition to the manufacture and the testing of the H-bomb. In March 1955, when the government's decision to manufacture the bomb was announced, 32 per cent responded negatively to the plain question whether Britain should make the bomb (compared to 54 per cent pro and 14 per cent "don't know"). Two months later 53 per cent said that Britain should devote atomic energy solely to peaceful purposes rather than making the H-bomb, (while only 33 per cent chose the bomb, and 14 per cent didn't know). In April 1957, 44 per cent disapproved of Britain's decision to carry out H-bomb tests, 41 per cent approved; the remaining were "don't knows". And in September 1958, 30 per cent said they would approve if Britain gave up her hydrogen bombs, even if other countries did not do so, 57 per cent disapproved and 13 per cent were "don't knows." All of these results, as well as some to be cited subsequently, are from Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) Ltd., whose files were most helpfully made available to me in London.

endured and even grown since the initial decision of 1955, and its most publicized demonstration took place in the spring of 1958 when 5,000 marchers, supported by diverse clergymen and intellectuals, protested at the Aldermaston weapons research center. In addition to this organized Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, unilaterally it should be emphasized, there has been a similar and traditional internal, left-wing Labour party opposition to British manufacture and testing of the H-bomb. Never have Labour party leaders been committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament, but they have had to argue diligently, ingeniously, and sometimes ambiguously to keep their followers in line.[5] Interestingly, the Liberal party, unencumbered by any serious possibility of becoming responsible for governmental decisions, did demand, in 1958, that Britain cease manufacturing the bomb.[6] Finally, another factor producing a special setting for Britain's H-bomb decision is that British manufacture of the weapon made it virtually certain that many countries, rather than a few, would eventually seek the weapon. Whatever chance there might have been for nations generally to regard the H-bomb as possible only for super-powers was ended by the British decision.

In this setting, arguments for British possession of the ultimate thermo-nuclear weapon have been both more involved and more diverse than the American. Several British publics have been addressed, and the assumptions of each have significantly differed. Here the general view that the West must possess nuclear deterrent power may be left out of account because it duplicates the American discussion and has little to do with the case for a British bomb.

[5] The troubles of the Labour leadership on this issue were already plain in the parliamentary party at the time of the Conservative government's decision to manufacture the bomb in 1955. Sixty-two Labour M.P.s abstained from voting in support of the official party position, expressed in a Labour amendment objecting only to the government's administration of the defense organization. This experience is discussed in my "Cohesion of British Parliamentary Parties," *American Political Science Review,* L (June, 1956), 360-77, at pp. 372-73. Later the issue was fought out and won by the leadership, at the 1957 and 1958 annual conferences of the mass party organization; these sessions provided the occasion for arguments to be discussed in this essay. Finally the Labour party settled, as indicated in its pre-election campaign pamphlet of November, 1958, on the advocacy of unilateral British suspension of nuclear tests but not on unilateral nuclear disarmament *(The Future Labour Offers You).*

[6] Report of Liberal party annual assembly, *Times* (of London), Sept. 19, 1958, p. 3.

There remain four sets of arguments used by British leaders to justify Britain's possession of its own H-bomb. These sets correspond roughly to four different British perspectives, held by different, though overlapping, publics. There is, first, the perspective in which the American connection is seen as permanent and continuous; a second view, held at times by those who really prefer the first assumption, in which an American break with Britain is feared; a third view based on the desirability of a British break with America, or at least of a drastic change in the terms of the American alliance; and a fourth perspective in which domestic issues are foremost. In this fourfold classification, military, economic, and political arguments are mingled, as they have been in fact. A distinction on those familiar lines is not useful here.

II

Assuming the continuity of the American connection, the simplest and most "pro-American" argument for British production of the H-bomb has been that Britain should share the responsibility for the really significant aspect of the West's policy of deterrence. This ignored the contrary view that the most economical division of defense labor among the Western Allies might preclude any non-American manufacture of the H-bomb. At any rate, no such division of labor appears to have been in mind when the defense White Paper of 1955 announced the British decision to produce thermonuclear weapons. This may be understood as a reflection of the then apparently growing and widespread Western reliance on the new massive deterrent. Certainly this was fairly taken to underlie American military policy, then hardly challenged. Britain's 1955 White Paper, while pledged to maintain "adequate conventional forces," announced an "increasing emphasis" on the deterrent and the view that "the use of nuclear weapons is the only means" by which the Soviet's massive preponderance in ground power could be countered.[7] If the H-bomb was thus to be *the* weapon of the future, only by manufacturing it could Englishmen feel that they were significantly contributing to their own, and the West's, defense. Usually, however, moral responsibility for sharing America's burden was linked to the capacity of Britain to exert influence in the American alliance and to stand as a major power in the world

[7] *Cmnd.* 9391, Feb. 1955, p. 6.

generally. This view was reflected in Hugh Gaitskell's remark, addressed to the critics of Britain's H-bomb at the 1958 Labour Conference, that unilateral nuclear disarmament only meant that Britain would "shelter behind the American bombs." [8]

Closely related to the argument on these lines, and also used in the Labour party in 1957 and 1958 against opponents of the British H-bomb, is the view that for Britain to give up the bomb it already possessed would be offensive to the United States as an ally. To be sure, this was not a justification for Britain making the bomb in the first place, but later apparently it might have seemed persuasive for that fraction of the British public who did not like the H-bomb but who believed that a rift in the American alliance was too high a price to pay for the moral superiority implicit in unilateral surrender of the bomb.[9]

A much more material justification for British manufacture of nuclear weapons, and one which also assumed a continued American relationship and wanted it to be still closer, is that only by its own manufacture of the H-bomb would Britain establish a sufficient degree of equality in the post-war alliance so as to be entrusted with American scientific secrets. Even without an unlikely official statement that Britain built the H-bomb in order to get the United States to amend the McMahon Act, it seems undeniable that this special prestige factor weighed heavily. Clearly the McMahon Act's curtailment of Anglo-American scientific exchange was a serious concern of Sir Winston Churchill, still Prime Minister at the time of the H-bomb decision in early 1955. This is amply supported by his numerous references to the Act during post-war defense debates. Churchill often reminded the country that his wartime coalition government had suspended Britain's own atomic program and sent leading scientists to the United States and Canada,

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[8] Report of Labour party conference, *Times* (of London), Oct. 3, 1958, p. 12. Gaitskell and other Labour leaders had reason to present the case for the H-bomb to their party's voters, as well as their rank-and-file members at annual conferences, since the Gallup polls, referred to in note 4, regularly showed more Labour voters than Conservative in opposition to Britain's nuclear arms policy.

[9] The existence of such a fraction of the public is evidenced in the Gallup poll of April 1958. Of the 25 per cent who approved of Britain giving up her H-bomb without waiting for America or for Russia to move, almost one-fifth indicated that they would not approve if this meant opposing the wishes of America and the other NATO countries.

but that the postwar Labour Government found it necessary to accept the consequences of the American legislative decision to end the earlier collaboration. The direct consequence was the separate and expensive postwar atomic weapons development in Britain, and of course subsequently the knowledge and capacity to construct the H-bomb as well.

Before this last stage of separate British development, there had been no strong American move to amend the McMahon Act to allow exchange of nuclear information with Britain (or anyone else). Not only was this a material handicap in British research and defense, but the McMahon Act stood, in British eyes, as a national indignity. To have helped to develop atomic weapons and, then, to be denied some of the advantages of subsequent advances by the United States was a decisive coming-down-in-the-world for Britain. To get back up again required that the Americans confer the essential status by sharing nuclear knowledge. If it was not believed in 1955 that this result could be brought about by British manufacture of the H-bomb, then surely it has been widely accepted after the event. For at long last in 1958 the United States did amend the McMahon Act so as to allow disclosure of significant knowledge of atomic weapons, but only to a country which had itself achieved "substantial progress" in atomic weapons technology.[10] By the clearest legislative intent, Britain, now armed with its own H-bomb, was the only country qualified for scientific exchange. It is no wonder that the defense correspondent of the *Times* of London should have remarked that Britain's nuclear policy "has been expensive but undeniably successful in persuading the Americans to share their nuclear knowledge with us."[11]

Probably the desired change in the McMahon Act was symbolic of the larger general objective of improving Britain's bargaining power as an American ally. To be strong enough, or at least to seem strong enough, to influence American-dominated policy within the alliance was a steadily announced purpose of postwar British statesmanship, Labour and Conservative. Churchill referred explic-

[10] Public Law 85-479, 85th Congress, H.R. 12716, July 2, 1958.

[11] *Times* (of London), Oct. 15, 1958, p. 13. Now that this much status has been achieved it is conceivable that Britain could quietly put to one side its H-bomb development, depending on America in that respect, and concentrate on other defense weapons more securely than before the change in the McMahon Act.

itly to negotiations with Americans when he defended his government's decision to manufacture the H-bomb: "Personally, I cannot feel that we should have much influence over their policy or actions, wise or unwise, while we are largely dependent, as we are today, upon their protection. We, too, must possess substantial deterrent power of our own." [12] Harold Macmillan, defense minister at the time, made exactly the same point in asserting that the absence of a British contribution to "the main deterrent force" would be dangerous in its surrender of power to influence American policy.[13] The use of this argument, by many others as well as by Churchill and Macmillan, is enough to make it significant even if one doubted whether British leaders really believed that possession of their own H-bomb did strengthen their bargaining position, or whether, granted the genuineness of the belief of British leaders, they were in fact placed in a stronger position in dealing with the United States. The point would remain that an appreciable public must have been conceived as believing in the influence argument.

The belief did not necessarily involve the crude and not very credible assumption that British possession of the H-bomb enabled Britain to influence the United States by separately threatening to use the bomb. Britain's increased influence, derived from its nuclear power, was seen in a more subtle way. Evidently a British prime minister or foreign secretary was thought to be strengthened psychologically by knowing, as his American counterpart did, that his nation too had the ultimate weapon. This psychological strengthening rested on the idea that possession of the H-bomb enabled a British negotiator to feel that his country no longer depended exclusively on the United States to deter Russian aggression, particularly against Britain itself. Presumably, then, in bargaining with American officials, an Englishman would no longer be oppressed by the view that the United States, however hard its terms, had to be agreed with because American power furnished the crucial protection. That an Englishman should think this way may, of course, be true even though Americans would not readily imagine that anyone really minded being dependent on American power.

British desires to gain influence by possession of the H-bomb

[12] 537 *H. C. Deb.* 1905 (March 1, 1955).

[13] 537 *H. C. Deb.* 2182-83 (March 2, 1955).

were not confined to American relations. Although, as will be noted later, the broader purpose was often cherished by that part of the community wishing to change Britain's connection with the United States, it has also been presented by some in such a way as to be compatible with the American alliance. The general view has been that to amount to much in the world of nuclear power a nation must have the H-bomb, just as in another age what counted was a large navy. To be outside the "nuclear club" would show that Britain abandoned hope of being the kind of power capable of exerting influence in the world. Thus possession of the bomb became for Englishmen a test of the direction in which they wanted their country to go: toward the status of the superpowers, or toward that of Sweden and Switzerland. To use the language of a Labour Party spokesman, nuclear armament raised the question whether Great Britain had "the will and the nerve to preserve itself and its enormous influence for good in the world. . . ."[14]

Sometimes the conception of potential British influence has been accompanied by the belief, fostered especially by Conservative leaders, that Britain was entering a second Elizabethan age in which, without the population and resources of the largest powers, the nation could still summon the special skill and courage for a notable international role. This hope was held out by Prime Minister Macmillan when he said that Britain's present smallness relative to other powers, while unlike British imperial supremacy in the nineteenth century, did resemble the physical status of the nation in some other "of our most glorious days when we have had the greatest effect" in the world.[15] The smallness of Britain may thus once again be compensated for, but to do so required a will to greatness. One aspect of this, it is not far-fetched to say, was the decision to build

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[14] John Strachey, 508 *H. C. Deb.* 2036 (April 17, 1957).

[15] Speech of April 29, 1958, British Information Services text, p. 2. The conception of contemporary Britain entering a second Elizabethan age has frequently been alluded to by Macmillan and other ministers, relying on the parallelism of limited resources as well as the name of the Queen in each instance. Thus the prime minister said, on Nov. 21, 1958, that Englishmen must see, in the adjustment of the first Elizabethans to their inability to establish their country as a great continental power, a lesson for themselves as the recent losers of Kipling's "Dominion over palm and pine." Greatness now as then could be achieved in new directions. (Speech delivered at Southampton, text given in Conservative and Unionist Central Office press release No. 6582).

the H-bomb. It appeared to be the way for a small but technically advanced nation to gain or maintain great power status.

III

The second type of argument, while compatible with many of the views already noted and particularly with the general exercise-of-influence view, is nevertheless one which was presented primarily on the assumption that American policy might diverge enough from British interests so that those interests could be protected only by an independent British nuclear deterrent. No antagonism to the United States was necessarily involved. In fact, the American alliance may have been preferred. What was doubted was whether the United States was willing to maintain it so as to protect British interests. This doubt was often stated in a highly rational calculating sense, but its significance for the public ought to be understood against the background of British experience of two world wars in which the United States had not promptly joined the British cause.

Even so conspicuous a champion of Anglo-American cooperation as Sir Winston Churchill based part of his case for British manufacture of the H-bomb on the assumption, very narrowly defined to be sure, of an American divergence from British interests. Unless, he said, Britain makes its own nuclear contribution, "we cannot be sure that in an emergency the resources of other Powers would be planned exactly as we would wish, or that the targets which would threaten us most would be given what we consider the necessary priority, or the deserved priority, in the first few hours." [16] Britain, with its own nuclear weapons, would be more certain to attack those airfields or launching sites from which Britain itself could be destroyed. However, this view was seldom advanced after Churchill did so in 1955. For one thing, it was fairly said to belong to the atomic rather than the hydrogen age. The H-bomb destroys so widely that the selection of targets now seems less important. Secondly, the continued American control of nuclear warheads, to be used in American-furnished rockets from British sites, put the notion of independent British nuclear retaliatory power at least temporarily in abeyance so far as the most modern method of retaliation was concerned.

[16] 537 *H. C. Deb.* 1897 (March 1, 1955).

A more sophisticated, though related, argument is that in the long-run Britain would need its own retaliatory nuclear capacity, warhead, rocket and all, because as America itself became vulnerable to Russian nuclear attacks the United States could not be counted on to attack, or threaten to attack, Russian bases in response to an exclusively European aggression by the Soviet Union. An American President was not expected for the sake of Europe to risk the almost certain nuclear destruction of his own country which would follow an American nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. If this view of American policy was in the background in 1955, before the vulnerability of the United States was widely apparent, by 1957 and 1958 the doubts about future American intentions were very much in the minds of Englishmen seriously concerned about the defense of Europe and their own country against Russian nuclear attack, or Russian nuclear blackmail.[17] The threats by the Soviet Union in the Suez crisis of 1956 served as a sharp reminder. And even when American and British policies would diverge less sharply than at Suez, it became reasonable to think that the shield provided by American massive retaliation was much less certain for the future than in the days when the United States could have destroyed much of Russia without being destroyed itself. In a new context, some of the old British concern about American withdrawal from European affairs reasserted itself, and the spectre of a resurgent American isolationism appeared especially when the United States was suspected of trying to negotiate a disarmament agreement with Russia over the heads of the Europeans concerned.

Britain's defense minister, Duncan Sandys, referred to this fear of American withdrawal in his parliamentary justification in 1957 of Britain's investment in nuclear weapons:

> So long as large American forces remain in Europe, and American bombers are based in Britain, it might conceivably be thought safe —I am not saying that it would—to leave to the United States the

[17] However, this point was made clearly at the time of the 1955 decision by Denis Healey, a highly informed and able Labour M.P.: "The really crucial argument for our having our own thermo-nuclear weapons and the means of delivering them is that it gives us this extra means of security against a thermonuclear attack which no Power not possessing these weapons can have." 537 *H. C. Deb.* 1934-35 (March 1, 1955).

> sole responsibility for providing the nuclear deterrent. But, when they have developed the 5,000-mile inter-continental ballistic missile rocket, can we really be sure that every American Administration will go on looking at things in quite the same way? [18]

Sandys here introduced, it is true, a somewhat different reason for a changed American policy, namely a new means of nuclear delivery that might obviate the need for the United States to maintain European retaliatory bases. However, the abandonment of such bases, it was appreciated, would signify a great deal more than a change in nuclear delivery sites. Since the bases have been so much the tangible sign of America's European involvement, any withdrawal would be taken as part of an American decision to use its deterrent power not only *from* the United States but solely *for* the defense of the United States.

Undoubtedly it is this possibility, that the United States would be reluctant to use its nuclear power except against a direct threat to the United States, which provided the argument appealing most sharply to the highly informed.[19] This elite included politicians in responsible positions in both major parties, defense correspondents for the quality press, and many articulate opinion-makers in official and quasi-official places where defense policy has been seriously discussed. Here, however, important questions have been raised about the circumstances in which Britain would use its own H-bomb in the defense of Europe. Officially the British Government announced in 1958 that strategic nuclear weapons would be used if Russia were to launch a major attack on the Western nations, even with conventional weapons only.[20] "Major attack" was subsequently defined as "the mobilization of large forces — say, 200 divisions — or an all-out attack on Europe, or the bombing of

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[18] 568 *H. C. Deb.* 1760-61 (April 16, 1957).

[19] For this statement, I can cite only private conversations with various British political and academic persons during the fall of 1958.

[20] Among other difficulties in the way of carrying out this threat, there may be added the apparent lack of support accorded the policy by the British public. When asked by the Gallup poll in February, 1958, 64 per cent replied "wrong" (22 per cent "right" and 14 per cent "don't know") to this statement: "The Government have said that if Russia attacked the West we would use the H-bomb, even if Russia used only conventional weapons. Do you think that the West would be right or wrong in being the first to use the H-bomb in such circumstances?"

London."[21] Still there remained an area in which an attack was more than minor but not clearly within this definition of major, and this area is "grey," that is, ambiguous as far as British retaliatory intentions are concerned. Not only was this uncertainty criticized, but the whole idea of using nuclear weapons against a conventional attack, even a major one, met with the objection that Britain's own vulnerability to nuclear attack was too great for its retaliatory policy to be taken seriously by the Russians, except for the case of an attack on Britain itself.

IV

In contrast to the views based on a fear of an American break with Britain are those arguments based on a dissatisfaction with the general terms of the post-war alliance with the United States. Here divergent interests between the two countries have not only been observed but encouraged. Two qualifications must be inserted with respect to this opposition to the American alliance. First, since it has often, though not always, been derived from left-wing ideology, its size has been exaggerated by the articulateness of its intellectual champions. Secondly, insofar as this opposition was affected, as it has been to a large degree, by pacifism, anti-power politics, or pro-Soviet sympathies, it was less readily persuaded of the value of the British H-bomb than by the cause of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Appealing on behalf of the H-bomb to this brand of opinion would seem difficult.

Nevertheless the attempt has been made, particularly by Labour leaders seeking to convince their left-wing supporters. Significantly the argument, like others noted in different contexts, used the image of British greatness — sufficient in this case to allow independence from the United States. Precisely this view, it has been claimed by a prominent Labour M. P., Richard Crossman, was put forth very persuasively (but evidently in private) by Clement Attlee in 1955 when he sought the support of his Labour Party followers for the British decision to manufacture the bomb. Recollecting two years afterward, Crossman said in the Commons that many Labour M. P.'s had believed Attlee "when he said that we could get rid of American bases in Norfolk if we had British bombers to take

[21] Definition of White Paper's language (*Cmnd.* 363, Feb. 1958, p. 2) is by Prime Minister Macmillan, 583 *H. C. Deb.* 408-09 (Feb. 26, 1958). He added that he meant the bombing of London with conventional bombs.

their places, equipped with hydrogen bombs."[22] Personally Crossman was disillusioned on this score by 1957, largely because Britain seemed more dependent than ever, given the prospect of American rocket bases, but the line of argument, slightly modified, was now used openly at the Labour Party conference to dissuade the rank-and-file delegates from voting for unilateral nuclear disarmament. There the point was made by a former Labour war minister, John Strachey, that Britain's abandonment of the H-bomb would make the nation "the wholly dependent satellite of the United States" and "a future Labour Foreign Secretary unable even to consider policies which were not approved by the State Department in Washington."[23]

This viewpoint was also presented to the same Labour conference by Aneurin Bevan in the major effort, successful as it turned out, to obtain conference approval of the leadership's H-bomb policy. Bevan's role was especially notable because he himself, from 1951 to 1955, had been the most important spokesman for the left-wing critique of the American alliance. Now, re-integrated in the party leadership and billed, at least temporarily, as Labour's prospective foreign secretary, Bevan was addressing his old left-wing following. It was natural that he should do so in the language which, in the past, they had in common. What the old Bevanites might consider a right-wing policy must be shown to serve left-wing purposes. Thus Bevan protested that the unilateral disarmament resolution would send a British negotiator "naked into the conference chamber."[24] Bevan's case was that a Labour Government still armed with the H-bomb could press for all-round nuclear disarmament more effectively than if it had already renounced the weapon. This, in the worn popular phrase, is known as "Britain giving a lead to the world," which in a different way is what the unilateral disarmers wanted Britain to do by the example of solitary renunciation of the H-bomb. It is open to question how seriously Bevan and other Labour leaders actually took their own claim that a future Labour Government's possession of the bomb would make world-wide nuclear disarmament more likely, but assuredly they must have expected their followers to take it seriously. Simi-

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[22] 568 *H. C. Deb.* 1977 (April 17, 1957).

[23] *56th Annual Report of the Labour Party* (1957), p. 177.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 181.

larly situated in this respect is the argument now and then advanced in Labour circles that the once much desired "third force" role of a socialist Britain could better be served by British possession of nuclear weapons, enabling the nation to stand independently of both Russia and the United States and to exert a moderating influence.

V

It is worthwhile considering separately a set of arguments concerned primarily with domestic matters although, of course, no one would rest the case for the British H-bomb purely on such considerations. This holds particularly for the justification based simply on the momentum of British scientific research in the defense field. In this view, it was easier to decide affirmatively than negatively when Britain, as a result of its independent postwar research, reached the point, in 1955, of having the knowledge and capacity to manufacture the bomb. Those responsible for Britain's defense would then have had to take the evidently more radical course if they decided against the final step in the independent British nuclear effort. To leave the nation without its own H-bomb, when the know-how already existed, would have seemed an unnecessary risk to take with British security. Surely defense planners anywhere, in a similar circumstance, would be likely to recommend manufacture. The one obstacle might be cost. But, while certainly substantial, the cost of the H-bomb did not appear prohibitive. It has been officially estimated at about ten per cent of the British defense budget, and that percentage includes the nuclear bombs plus the means of their delivery.[25]

Still this ten per cent figure, even if it did not *require* a reduction in conventional military preparedness, was large enough so that many Englishmen would look on nuclear defense as partly an alternative to larger expenditures, present or future, on other military items. Arguments for the H-bomb certainly took this into account. To some extent, the nuclear alternative was even presented as advantageous in itself. There was an idea, rarely stated it is true,

[25] The ten per cent estimate is from *Cmnd.* 363, Feb. 1958, p. 6, where the exact language is "less than one-tenth of the Defence Estimates for 1958-59." However, twelve per cent is spoken of more frequently in unofficial statements. The total British defense expenditure for 1958-59, as listed in budget estimates, was 1,435 million pounds, in a total national budget of 5,439 million pounds.

that the H-bomb was especially well suited to a small nation like Britain because the weapon, if assumed to be nearly all-sufficient as a deterrent against aggression, would permit adequate self-defense at manageable cost. In addition, it was held that for Britain the H-bomb was more appropriate than the A-bomb. The latest weapon tended more nearly to equalize, it was thought, the plight of small and large nations. While Britain as a small, densely populated country was at an immense disadvantage in any A-bomb exchange with Russia, the H-bomb promised so great a disaster to any country that Britain would not be in a much worse position than a larger country in making nuclear threats. This brand of optimism, or inverted pessimism, has not been widespread, and it is reasonable to assume that most Englishmen believed, with good cause, that they remained more vulnerable than a population spread over a large land mass. Englishmen do not seem to be readily convinced that the H-bomb is the great equalizer in the classic manner attributed to the Colt revolver.

Much more strongly advanced in behalf of a British H-bomb has been a straight economy argument. Its weight in actual governmental decision-making may be even greater than is indicated in explicit statements, and the view has been held among critics of the Government's defense program that manufacture and possession of the H-bomb served chiefly to justify, unwisely in their minds, the cuts which have been made in conventional forces. Unquestionably the British Government was anxious to reduce the total defense burden assumed at the beginning of the 1951 rearmament program. Reductions in the pace of that program were announced as early as 1952, and in the 1954 defense White Paper it was flatly stated that Britain "may not be able to afford both new weapons and conventional forces of the present size." [26] In this context, one can understand that the subsequent decision of 1955 to equip Britain with the H-bomb should be viewed as a choice between alternative types of defense expenditure.

Furthermore, it seems to have been a choice conditioned by the belief that the H-bomb would provide the most defense for the least cost. By 1956 the prospective reduction of the large item of army personnel could be announced, and in 1957 and 1958 such reductions were well under way. This policy is associated particularly

[26] *Cmnd.* 9075, Feb. 1954, p. 6.

with Duncan Sandys, defense minister from early 1957, but no one doubts that his policy was also that of the top Conservative cabinet leadership. Sandys, subject to criticism from military service champions on his own party's back benches, made it plain that he regarded nuclear weapons as Britain's answer to the otherwise insoluble problem of having enough force to deter a full-scale attack even by conventional weapons. The reason he found the problem insoluble by other means is that he believed the cost of large conventional forces to be more than the nation, or the West generally, would be willing to pay either in manpower, money, or resources.

It ought to be noted that Sandys' reasoning is consistent with the view that, with or without the H-bomb, Britain would have only small conventional forces, reduced in the way now undertaken. What possession of the H-bomb did was to rationalize this reduced military establishment on the ground that nuclear deterrence, so long as it was Britain's own, provided an adequate substitute for larger conventional capabilities. In this way, nuclear weapons seem to have been the answer of Western democracy to the assumed unwillingness of the general public to support large-scale peacetime military preparations, particularly in the form of a large and efficient army.[27] The British Government thus responded to presumed popular opinion much as did the American administration.

That this reliance on nuclear weapons should be true of Britain may be more surprising than the similar American reliance because Britain was traditionally willing to fight small-scale wars and to maintain the conventional forces necessary for this purpose. Unlike the United States, Britain had not been dedicated to the all-or-nothing warfare which nuclear exchange carries to the ultimate degree. However, the British could still claim that they maintained forces adequate to genuinely small conflicts on the nineteenth century colonial scale, but that conventional forces of a size to match the Russian standard were never possible for Britain and certainly were not in the 1950's. On this point, Britain's case for keeping its

[27] In February, 1958, 45 per cent of a British Gallup poll said that it was right for the government to reduce Britain's conventional forces — Army, Navy and Air Force. 39 per cent said it was wrong, and 16 per cent didn't know. When presented with an alternative between conventional weapons and atomic weapons and missiles, in December 1957, only eight per cent chose the conventional weapons (as against 52 per cent preferring the atomic alternative, 22 per cent wanting neither and 18 per cent "don't knows").

army small was more compelling purely on economic grounds than the American, but the consequences of depending on nuclear weapons were assuredly more troubling for Britain given the nation's direct concern with European aggression.

One further domestic consideration involved in Britain's H-bomb policy deserves special note. Politically, the Conservative government's decision to reduce conventional forces, as nuclear weapons were developed, put the Conservatives in the happy position of announcing that military conscription would end in 1960. By that time, the planned size of the services would be small enough so that voluntary recruitment, it was hoped, would suffice. The announced end of the disliked "call-up" deprived the Labour opposition of one of its political weapons. Although it had been a Labour Government that imposed postwar conscription, antagonism to conscription among Labour's rank and file was continuous and the party, returned to the status of Parliamentary opposition, pressed for the eventual abolition of conscription in the period preceding the Conservative Government's statement of intentions in 1957.[28] That statement, significantly, was accompanied by Prime Minister Macmillan's blunt explanation that, without general disarmament, "the end of conscription must depend upon the acceptance of nuclear weapons."[29] While not the same as saying that the British Government adopted the H-bomb in order to get rid of conscription, even among other reasons, it is still a clear enough sign of the Government's willingness to persuade one kind of public that the bomb enabled Britain to abandon an unpopular policy. Specifically too it was a way of telling the Labour party that if it retreated from its support of the H-bomb it would have to favor the call-up as long as the party wanted a respectable defense establishment.

VI

The presentation of the British public discussion of the H-bomb supports the view that the justifications for British manufacture and possession of the H-bomb have been decidedly national in charac-

[28] Thus in 1956 the official Labour opposition presented a parliamentary motion regretting that the defense White Paper "makes no provision for an immediate cut in the period of National Service nor for any specific plan for its eventual abolition . . ." 549 *H. C. Deb.* 1036 (Feb. 28, 1956).

[29] 568 *H. C. Deb.* 2040 (April 17, 1957).

ter, however much these justifications differ in other ways. As indicated earlier, and especially in light of America's own highly national postwar nuclear policy, it is not surprising that the British case should have rested on a conception of Britain's separate need as opposed to the assumption of a collective Anglo-American or NATO need. Britain responded to the same threat as did the United States, and, it may be assumed, to protect the same basic values. But, in this important realm of weapons strategy, the response was not based on the desire to increase the *collective* Anglo-American capacity to resist or deter Russian aggression. The result, has been to decrease that capacity In duplicating, though probably not fully or effectively, the American H-bomb development, Britain, like the United States, used the development as a basis for justifying its reduction in capacity to wage limited war. Thus both nations, separately seeking the same strength, arrived at the same weakness. To put the matter wishfully, the two nations collectively would have been better off if Britain could have been assured that American H-bombs remained available in the British interest.

The absence of such assurance, or rather of the feeling of assurance, is understandable in the circumstances. How much the behavior fell short of the "mutual responsiveness" Deutsch considers essential in a "pluralistic security-community" is revealed by matching the British arguments analyzed here with what Deutsch found to typify a sense of community:

> . . . a matter of mutual sympathy and loyalties; of "we-feeling," trust, and consideration; of at least partial identification in terms of self-images and interests; of ability to predict each other's behavior and ability to act in accordance with that prediction. In short, it was a matter of perpetual attention, communication, perception of needs, and responsiveness.[30]

As displayed in the various British justifications for a separate H-bomb development, "we-feeling" and trust were clearly incomplete. Identification of the British national image and the British national interest with the American was decidedly limited, and so was confidence in the ability to predict American behavior in the most vital area of strategic policy. Perhaps these limitations are not perma-

[30] Deutsch and others, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

nent features of a developing Anglo-American security-community,[31] but they were conspicuous and significant in the years 1955-1958 when Britain became committed to the national policy of massive nuclear retaliation.

[31] It should be noted that in 1958 a growing informed British criticism of the government's defense policy took shape. It was reflected in parliamentary defense debates in which backbench Conservatives as well as Labour M.P.s criticized the reliance on nuclear deterrence at the expense of conventional forces, 592 *H. C. Deb.* 954-1075 (July 28, 1958). Some of this criticism derived from strong military service opposition to the cabinet's defense policy as represented by Duncan Sandys. See also the slashing critique by G. F. Hudson, "Was Sandys Really Necessary?", *Twentieth Century,* CLXIII (May, 1958), 406-15. The case against Sandys resembled the slightly earlier review of American military policy by Henry Kissinger, and some of the British critics explicitly acknowledged the impetus which Kissinger's work, cited in note 1, gave to their own strategic thinking. None of these critics are to be confused with the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which of course stood for the West's abandonment of the H-bomb entirely and which was too pacifist by inclination to urge the substitution of an increased capacity to wage limited war even by conventional means.