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Polaris, East of Suez: British plans for a Nuclear Force in the Indo-Pacific, 1964-68.

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Abstract

This article investigates the little-known plans formulated by Harold Wilson's Labour government to deploy Polaris submarines in the Indo-Pacific region. The scheme was first proposed in 1965 as a response to several problems faced by British policymakers, including China's acquisition of a nuclear capability, Britain's wish to maintain a meaningful position 'East of Suez' at reduced cost, and German pressure for equal treatment within NATO on nuclear matters. Despite extensive high-level discussion, the plans were finally abandoned in mid-1968, as Labour moved more decisively to forsake the world role.

Key words

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The late 1960s were a time of retreat for Britain on the world stage. Balance of payments crises forced successive cuts in overseas expenditure on a beleaguered Labour government, and large-scale withdrawal from military bases ‘East of Suez’ was finally announced in July 1967. British weakness was further exposed by the humiliating devaluation of sterling four months later, and in January 1968 the timetable for the pull-back of forces from Malaysia, Singapore and the Persian Gulf was accelerated. By 1970 Britain seemed set on a future in the European Community, its defence efforts focused on NATO. Yet this retreat, however inevitable it seems in retrospect, was not achieved without a great deal of uncertainty. Some imperial problems, such as the efforts to establish Malaysia and settle the future of Rhodesia, were not easily resolved. While the Vietnam War raged, the United States and the Commonwealth countries of Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore did not relish the thought of a rapid British withdrawal from South East Asia. Moreover, British leaders, for whom the world role was often synonymous with national greatness, were unsure about the speed and pattern of their departure from long-held commitments. One little-studied aspect of the debate over how Britain could still project power in the Indo-Pacific region was over plans for the deployment of Polaris submarines once they became available in 1968. In retrospect this seems an outlandish scheme, informed more by Wilson’s much-derided assertion that

Britain's frontiers lay on the Himalayas rather than by a rational approach to apportioning scarce resources. Certainly the Prime Minister was the key figure in government who backed the idea of deploying Polaris East of Suez, and the desire to play a continuing world role, albeit at a reduced cost, was part of his thinking. But the scheme was also wrapped up in several genuine dilemmas of British defence and foreign policy, and the question of how Britain could best protect Western interests in a post-imperial world.¹

The Context

Through the Nassau agreement of December 1962, which underwrote the purchase of the Polaris missile system from the United States, the British government avowed that the weapon would be used 'for the purposes of international defence of the Western alliance' except where 'supreme national interests' dictated otherwise.² Although Labour was pledged by its election manifesto to 'internationalise' Polaris, and so to renounce the pretence of an independent deterrent, after Wilson assumed office it was decided to continue with the construction of the submarines. The working assumption was that the missiles were to be employed in accordance with the Nassau agreement and so eventually allocated for targeting purposes to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). Events in Asia were, however, conspiring to throw a degree of uncertainty into this picture, and to generate new ideas over deployment options which challenged the primacy of the NATO commitment.

On 16 October 1964, in the middle of the election campaign that brought Labour to power, the People's Republic of China (PRC) exploded its first nuclear device.

Although this event had little immediate impact on the strategic situation in Asia, as China had few weapons and effective means of delivery, in psychological and political terms it marked an important shift. Already having fought a border war with China in October-November 1962, where it received a sharp reminder of its own military inadequacies, India felt it was now especially vulnerable to Chinese nuclear intimidation. Moreover, Indian anxieties only increased as the PRC improved its own ties with Pakistan, which remained locked in its bitter dispute with India over Kashmir. As the former colonial power in the subcontinent, as well as head of the Commonwealth, the British wrestled with the intractable problems of balancing the interests of India and Pakistan. Following the Sino-Indian war, Britain had begun military aid to New Delhi and promised to ‘consult’ in the event of another attack, but this merely served to annoy Pakistan.³ Meanwhile, voices within India were pressing the government to embark on its own full-scale programme of nuclear development, sparking widespread concern over the dangers of nuclear proliferation in Asia. Indeed, by late 1964, with the impact of the recent Chinese nuclear test still reverberating around Asia, it had become a cardinal British interest, shared also by Lyndon Johnson’s administration in Washington, to deter India from developing its own atomic bomb, or turning to the Soviet Union for protection. One outcome of this set of circumstances was the emergence of the idea of a nuclear guarantee which might be offered to India and other non-nuclear powers in order to protect them from nuclear blackmail. Indian premier Lal Bahadur Shastri raised this with Wilson when visiting London in December 1964, arguing that a guarantee would help him resist domestic pressure to build a bomb. India, however, was a non-aligned country and a key element in Shastri’s scheme was that the guarantee must be a joint one

from both Superpowers. It also faced objections from Pakistan. British and American officials, furthermore, did not want to tie themselves to a commitment which might encourage India itself to behave in a more assertive manner.⁴

In March 1965 the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, raised with Michael Stewart, the Foreign Secretary, the question of whether a 'Commonwealth Nuclear Force' had been considered for the Far East.⁵ Though this conversation caught the Prime Minister's eye, Stewart was – and would remain - unenthusiastic, arguing that, 'a bilateral Anglo-American Force in the Pacific area would not in present circumstances be in British interests. Our nuclear capability in the area will always be minimal compared with what the United States can deploy there.'⁶ Ministers discussed ideas for a nuclear guarantee on 31 March 1965, when it was agreed that Britain could not act alone on the issue.⁷ The most the Americans were prepared to consider, however, was a UN resolution supporting those who faced nuclear aggression and the idea of both Superpowers taking part in an 'umbrella' was ruled out by the Soviets in discussions with the Indians: Moscow was not ready to work with Washington on such an overtly anti-Chinese project.⁸ By June 1965 it was apparent that the Americans too were proceeding very cautiously with ideas for nuclear guarantees, and India's own interest had soon all but evaporated, not least due to the distraction of all-out war with Pakistan in September 1965. Once the dust settled, India, concerned over further Chinese nuclear tests, returned to its pressure for a nuclear umbrella. But when the Indian foreign minister, Swaran Singh, met Wilson in June 1966, it was clear that India would still accept nothing less than a joint US-Soviet guarantee.⁹ In the wake of this meeting, Sir Solly Zuckerman, the

government's Chief Scientist Adviser, and an influential voice on the military nuclear scene, concluded that nothing could be done on the 'umbrella' front. Britain could not act alone and a US-Soviet agreement was impossible for the foreseeable future.¹⁰ Nevertheless, throughout this period, the Indian problem and related dangers of nuclear proliferation became a principal argument used by the Prime Minister when proposing a Polaris deployment East of Suez.

Wilson's interest in such schemes may also have been related to Britain's declining abilities to commit conventional forces to the defence of South East Asia. A British nuclear contribution in the area could offer some kind of a substitute, especially to nervous and critical allies such as Australia, New Zealand and the United States. London had first made a declaration of nuclear capability to the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in March 1957, even though the means to sustain were, in fact, lacking.¹¹ Over the next few years, plans were drawn up to fly out V-bombers with atomic weapons to the Far East in the emergency period that might precede Chinese aggression. A nuclear bomb store would also be built at RAF Tengah on Singapore, the runway extended to accommodate fully-loaded V-bombers, and the resident Canberra light bomber squadron given a nuclear capability. Keen not to be usurped by the Air Force, the Royal Navy also planned to deploy a fleet carrier with nuclear-capable aircraft to the region from 1960 onwards. 'The justification for our retaining nuclear weapons in the area is political,' one report explained in August 1961, 'If we no longer have such weapons ourselves we will largely forfeit our capacity to influence American policy and to restrain them if they wish to act foolishly.'¹² By the summer of 1962, the bomb store

at Tengah had been completed, and the Canberra force reequipped for a possible nuclear role. Yet British plans were in danger of being overtaken by the pressures of anti-colonial nationalism and rapid political change.

Radicalism in Singapore threatened to make retention of the RAF base impossible, so, rather than direct the colony to separate independence, the Macmillan government wanted to merge it with Malaya and the Borneo territories into a new Malaysian federation, centred on Kuala Lumpur. Friendly relations with the federal authorities underpinned by a defence agreement would, it was supposed, allow for continuing free use of the base facilities at Singapore. But when Malaysia was formed in September 1963 it proved anything but a source of regional stability. Indonesian hostility to the whole federal scheme was manifest in the policy of ‘confrontation’, an attempt to subvert the new state through guerrilla raids in Borneo, sporadic attacks on peninsula Malaysia and a barrage of propaganda alleging that the British were still the ‘puppet-masters’ behind the federation. Then, in August 1965, the communal political tensions in Malaysia were made manifest when Singapore quit the federation. These developments placed the future of RAF Tengah in doubt. With withdrawal from Singapore increasingly on the cards as defence cuts hit home and confrontation came to a close in 1966, the retention of a nuclear capability in the Far East into the 1970s would have to rely on the Royal Navy’s aircraft carriers.¹³ However, the defence review undertaken by the Wilson Government throughout 1965 was to culminate in the decision announced in the February 1966 Defence White Paper to cancel orders for a next generation of carriers. With the present carriers due to retire from the mid-1970s, and tenure of the Singapore base for

nuclear deployment uncertain, question marks would soon hand over Britain's ability to maintain its nuclear capability in the Far East.

Another important factor leading to plans for a Polaris force East of Suez was Labour's decision to maintain the world role. Soon after taking office key ministers met at Chequers to discuss defence, where the Treasury secured agreement to limit defence spending to a ceiling of £2 billion by 1969-70, despite the cuts this would entail. Meeting in order to determine how savings were to be found a Long-term Study Group of officials from several departments recommended giving priority to European defence, partly because it was so vital to Britain's own security. But ministers believed it possible to find reductions in the European setting, where stable deterrence was thought to exist, and believed Britain could play an important role East of Suez, where the East-West balance was more fluid.¹⁴ In December 1964 British thinking was outlined to the Americans during Wilson's first summit with President Johnson. The Defence Secretary, Denis Healey, explained why priority would be given to deployments outside the NATO area: 'The main reasons underlying this view were our moral obligations as senior member of the Commonwealth, our treaty obligations..., the positive contribution that we (almost alone between Suez and Singapore) could make to the preservation of stability in many parts of the world, and our judgment that the danger of a major war in Europe was very small.' Dean Rusk and the US Defense Secretary, Robert McNamara, were keen to support Healey's analysis. 'There were some parts of the world in which Britain could take a stand that was difficult for the United States', declared Rusk, 'and the American administration would look with the greatest concern on any plan for a deliberate

withdrawal of British influence from any part of the world...'¹⁵ For the Prime Minister, deploying Polaris east of Suez meshed easily with the aspiration to maintain influence on a world-wide stage, and so continue to win favour with the Americans, and counteract their suspicions that the British wanted to back out of their Far Eastern commitments.

By the mid-1960s, 'removing' Polaris from the European scene when it arrived in service was also a possible answer to the nuclear sharing problem which had come to bedevil the Western alliance. On arriving in office in October 1964, the Labour government, like its Conservative predecessor, had mounted strong objection to the US scheme to create a Multilateral Force (MLF), which might both contain West Germany's nuclear ambitions, and give NATO its own theatre nuclear capability. The British alternative, formerly proposed to the alliance in late 1964, was the Atlantic Nuclear Force (ANF), where some existing national nuclear weapons systems, such as Britain's V-bombers, alongside an American contribution, would be placed under a system of joint control, rather than the shared ownership and even manning of a wholly new force that lay at the heart of the MLF scheme. Although ANF had few enthusiastic supporters on the British side, it was recognised as a necessary expedient if the Americans were to drop MLF, and the Germans brought round to a proposal which offered them some tangible and attractive involvement in alliance nuclear affairs, but which fell short of a fully mixed-manned force.¹⁶

During 1965, however, the underlying rationale behind both the original MLF scheme and its ANF rival began to fall under serious doubt as nuclear questions were the

cause of domestic political controversy in West Germany. With an election due at the end of the year the Chancellor, Ludwig Erhard, decided not to press for the MLF at present, and attention began to turn to different approaches to nuclear sharing within the alliance. Impetus began to build within NATO during 1965 away from ‘hardware’ solutions, which dealt with the physical control of particular weapons systems, toward ‘software’ solutions, involving new mechanisms providing for formal nuclear planning arrangements and joint consultation over use (seen as increasingly necessary as the alliance moved gradually to adopt a flexible response strategy).¹⁷ In this context, Britain’s own ANF proposals began to fade from the scene, along with the idea of ‘internationalising’ Polaris as part of a shared NATO force, so allowing officials to consider more seriously wider deployment options, including East of Suez. The latter course also had the attraction, at least to some, of taking Polaris completely out of the West European nuclear equation, where its separate and conspicuous existence as a nationally-controlled independent nuclear force might still be the source of long-term resentment to the non-nuclear members of the alliance, above all West Germany.

The Proposal launched

The idea of a Polaris deployment East of Suez first emerged in the wake of Shastri’s visit to London in December 1964 and the discussion of nuclear guarantees to India. The Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office (FO), Sir Harold Caccia, prepared a paper for discussion with the Ministry of Defence on the role of the remaining British nuclear forces outside the NATO area. This was followed, in late January, by a fuller FO Planning Staff submission, arguing that Britain would need to maintain a nuclear

capability in the Far East if she was to join with the US in offering nuclear assurances to India, and also, in the absence of such guarantees, if India were to acquire nuclear weapons. In addition, the Planning Staff felt that a nuclear capability helped to deter overt Indonesian aggression against Malaysia, was a shield for Australia and New Zealand and enhanced Britain's standing in SEATO, while its removal could have an adverse effect on the security of Hong Kong. But it recognised that security of tenure of the Singapore base could not be assured in the long-term and that alternative means of deployment would therefore have to be studied.¹⁸ Thinking at this time, then, was very much focused on Britain's contribution to security in Asia, not only the need to provide reassurances to India but also to provide a broader defence against Chinese and Indonesian pressures.

The first short study of the practical issues raised by Polaris deployment east of Suez was compiled by the Navy Department in January 1965, when Healey had asked about the repercussions of cancelling the fifth Polaris submarine on this option. With five boats, the Chief of the Naval Staff made clear, it would be possible to deploy one submarine on continuous patrol in the Indian or Pacific Oceans using existing support facilities. But, they noted in a gloomy fashion, a four-boat force would not offer this provision 'without very expensive support facilities which at the present do not exist nor are planned.' In the latter case, a specially-equipped Polaris depot ship would be needed, costing £18-20 million and taking six years to build and deploy. The whole force would also need a suitable base from which to operate, such as Fremantle in Australia¹⁹ The high initial costs for a depot ship, a necessity once the government decided that the fifth

Polaris submarine would be cancelled at the end of January, meant that little further thought was given to the subject. However, the Navy Department drew up another study in June 1965 pointing out that a depot ship was already planned for use by other submarines East of Suez. Currently in the planning stage, it was due to be ordered in October 1968 and available from July 1972. If it were fitted out 'for but not with' Polaris handling facilities the additional costs could be kept down to only £0.5 million. Polaris submarines could then be deployed East of Suez with two year's notice at a cost of £4 million in actually fitting out the depot ship for them. This was clearly a much better financial prospect and after considering it, the Chiefs of Staff (COS) recommended that the option should be kept open as 'a wise insurance plan.' Healey agreed. As will become clear below, the fact that the scheme could be kept open at such low cost, was a major reason why it survived for as long as it did.²⁰

There the matter rested until later in the year, when work on the defence review focused on nuclear questions. The Cabinet Secretary, Burke Trend, who held a central position in co-ordinating the review and had ready access to Wilson, told the Prime Minister on 12 November 1965 that, if quadripartite co-operation were developed East of Suez between Britain, America, Australia and New Zealand it would naturally lead on to questions about Britain's nuclear capability and India's nuclear ambitions. Trend talked of Britain contributing to a 'nuclear force in the Indo-Pacific area.' He was apparently more open to the idea, as a way to secure British interests in an alliance context, than Stewart had been in March.²¹ Trend's arguments evidently had an effect because, on 26 November, with Stewart and Healey sitting alongside him, Wilson mooted the possibility

of sending Polaris East of Suez in a meeting with two visiting American policymakers, McNamara and Under-Secretary of State George Ball. Rather than focusing on Asian security, the Prime Minister argued that such a step would help give West Germany equality on nuclear issues in Europe. And at this point Healey seemed to support the proposal, stating that it was ‘a practical problem of what to do with the Polaris boats... for the benefit of the free world as a whole.’²² A few days after that Wilson told Stewart that the ‘Defence review should include an examination of the question whether the four Polaris submarines should be East or West of Suez, or divided between.’²³

In December there was another chance to discuss the issue with the Americans when Wilson visited Lyndon Johnson in Washington. After his arrival, the Prime Minister had a short private meeting with the President where he repeated Britain’s offer to commit Polaris to an ANF, then added ‘he did not think we needed as many missiles as we already have in the Atlantic area’; rather, ‘we ought to consider using the British Polaris as part of some international security arrangement east of Suez.’²⁴ After more officials joined them and the subject turned to nuclear sharing in Europe, Wilson again mentioned the notion of ‘transferring our Polaris to East of Suez as the way out’; and, when discussing the defence review, he noted that ‘we might switch the Polaris to East of Suez to help counter the Chinese threat.’²⁵ The following day, in a meeting with McNamara, Ball and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy - with no other British minister present - Wilson updated the Americans on the state of the Defence review and again mentioned the deployment of Polaris submarines ‘as part of a collective defence

arrangement in the Far East.’ According to the British record McNamara ‘expressed great interest’ and Wilson went on to explain its logic more fully:

As he saw it, the West was already adequately equipped with missiles and nuclear weapons to counter the Russian threat. The British Polaris submarines would only represent an insignificant part of the total nuclear capability available to NATO, and their role in the European context was accordingly more political than military. Now that China was becoming a nuclear Power he thought they could be more useful from a military point of view in the Indo-Pacific area.

Wilson also briefly told key Commonwealth leaders about his thinking at this point. He saw Canada’s Lester Pearson and argued that an East of Suez deployment could take ‘some of the heat out of German nuclear aspirations’; and the proposal was mentioned in Wilson’s reports about the Washington summit to Australia’s Robert Menzies and New Zealand’s Keith Holyoake.²⁶

Thus, in the closing months of 1965, the Polaris East of Suez proposal moved from being a low-profile option within the defence establishment to being a subject for discussion by the Prime Minister at international level. It fitted British aspirations to play a continuing military role in the Far East, guarantee Indian security and somehow internationalise the nuclear deterrent and remove it from the NATO context so that this did not offend German sensibilities. Moreover, the scheme seemed to have sympathy from the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary, the Secretary of the Cabinet, and the Chief Scientist. There were even signs of positive American interest, McNamara avowing: ‘the idea of deploying [the] Polaris submarines in the Far East was well worth

closer examination. The relationship of such a deployment to the defence of India, and the whole problem of India's nuclear intention seemed very important.'²⁷ Yet, despite Wilson's enthusiasm it was clear many details of the scheme had not been worked through. Even the Prime Minister thought its relationship to any nuclear guarantee for India was 'obscure'; it was also debateable whether the withdrawal of British missiles would help in the debate over nuclear sharing in NATO (significantly, the Prime Minister asked the Americans not to mention the proposal to the West Germans); and, as to internationalisation he could only say that this would be achieved 'in some way' as part of a broader, quadripartite arrangement. It would not take long for weaknesses in the scheme to be exposed. Indeed, viewed with hindsight, December 1965 stands out as the high point of the whole proposal.

The Proposal stalls

After returning from Washington, Wilson asked for a paper to be drawn up by the FO for the Overseas Policy and Defence Committee (OPD), the key Cabinet committee in the international field. An initial discussion was held by civil servants on OPD's subsidiary Official Committee on 7 January 1966 where it was argued that Polaris submarines 'would make a larger proportionate contribution to Western forces East of Suez than they could ever do in the European theatre' and that it might be possible to 'bargain' this for a reduction in British conventional forces in the region. The last was an attractive option because conventional forces were expensive to maintain, required an array of bases and facilities and were likely to stir up nationalist resentment locally. But there were many negatives: the submarines would be out of range of their targets while travelling to the

Indian Ocean; there 'were many other complicated factors' such as setting up a communications network, providing relief crews at long distance and siting a depot ship in the area; and there were already indications that German pressure might be turning the Americans against Wilson's proposal.²⁸ This final point was especially important for reducing the momentum of the scheme, just as it seemed about to pick up more speed.

As we have seen, during 1965 it had seemed that West Germany would let MLF fade away, allowing 'nuclear sharing' to be solved by a process of consultation rather than joint control. But, with the German elections out of the way, Erhard arrived in Washington, only a few days after Wilson, and revived the 'hardware' solution. The Germans were happy to look at Britain's ANF proposal, but only if it were altered to provide an element of mixed-manning in which Germans could participate. Erhard and Johnson sent a copy of a German memorandum to Wilson, the President urging that it should be studied seriously. As it transpired nothing came of these German efforts. Wilson cleverly responded that he would look at their ideas, but said he also hoped progress could continue on a system of nuclear consultation (McNamara and Healey had, in fact, only just recently held meetings with their NATO partners on a new Nuclear Committee to discuss procedures for joint planning). With an election called for March 1966, the Prime Minister also had an excuse for further delay. In that same month NATO was shaken by the French decision to withdraw, and the overriding attention of the US administration was drawn to coping with this crisis and reinvigorating the alliance and its underlying structures. At another meeting with Johnson in September 1966, Erhard finally killed off the hardware option by conceding that no progress was possible on that

front, and meanwhile NATO moved ahead with the discussions that were to lead to the formation of the Nuclear Planning Group.²⁹ Even though the British were now free once more to consider wider deployment options, the German memorandum of December 1965 had come at a difficult point for Wilson, and had complicated his efforts to push forward his favoured scheme, just as important decisions were looming on the defence review. By the time Erhard finally abandoned the hardware solution, moreover, stronger objections to the East of Suez scheme had emerged in Whitehall.

The key issue in the debates that led to the February 1966 White Paper on defence was how to meet Britain's future commitments in the Far East while staying within the new spending ceilings. For Burke Trend, as he informed Wilson, a Polaris submarine deployment in the Far East 'might enable us to make, without any additional expenditure, a contribution' to allied defence efforts in the region, and so allay some of the concerns felt by the United States, Australia and New Zealand, that with Indonesian confrontation winding down, Britain would pull back its military forces from the area altogether. Indeed, Trend's logic was that, in the event of a decision to cut back on aircraft carriers (as occurred) an initiative to send out the submarines would put 'a better complexion' on the situation. Trend wanted to keep studying the Polaris, East of Suez option, despite Erhard's latest move on nuclear sharing. 'The Americans were clearly attracted by this idea when you first put it to them...' he reminded Wilson.³⁰ Therefore, for Trend, as it seems also for Zuckerman, the option was a way of maintaining a high British profile in the Far East at low cost, an ideal option - it might seem - for a country desperate to reduce defence costs without losing its global influence.³¹

Sympathy for the option was also still evident from the COS when they discussed a memorandum about it on 20 January. Focusing on military rather than political issues, the paper argued that, using Britain as a base, once all the Polaris submarines were available in 1969 it should be possible to keep one East of Suez for half the year in an 'emergency'. Keeping one out on a sustained basis would require a depot ship or the use of a naval base, such as the American one at Guam. Nevertheless, the targeting options presented by an Indian Ocean deployment seemed more attractive than previously recognized: from a standard patrol area off the southern tip of India, a firing position in the Bay of Bengal could be reached in four days which would place Beijing within range. Furthermore, a firing position in the Arabian Sea, also within four days of travel, would allow the missiles to reach various urban targets in the Soviet Union, including Moscow, as well as many of the medium range ballistic missile sites that featured in SACEUR's target plans for British forces.³² In considering the report the COS were sceptical about using Guam, whose use would demand dollar expenditure, but a permanent deployment supported by a depot ship was a different matter. True, the costs of keeping the option open had gone up over the past six months, with estimates of depot ship design now put at £3-5 million, with a decision to proceed on this being needed in May 1966. But the Chiefs again advised Healey to keep the option open.³³

Nonetheless, despite such support and his own sympathy for the proposal, Trend advised Wilson on 21 January 1966 that there were strong arguments against an immediate decision by the OPD. This was largely because of the problems within NATO.

While it might be possible to target the Soviet Union from East of Suez, Britain's European allies were unlikely to see such a deployment as fulfilling a NATO role; as long as the nuclear sharing issue remained unresolved with Germany, withdrawal of British forces from the Atlantic was inadvisable.³⁴ By now it was felt that, for reasons of logistics and effectiveness the Polaris force should not be split between two theatres, which meant the choice was between the Atlantic or East of Suez. At the OPD meeting on 23 January, Michael Stewart, the Foreign Secretary, echoed Trend by arguing that, given the state of discussions on nuclear sharing, Polaris had to remain in the Atlantic, at least in the immediate term. Nevertheless, Stewart, who had long been sceptical about an East of Suez deployment, did not rule out the option for the future, should 'unexpected developments in Europe' mean a deployment there was unnecessary, while the attitudes of Britain's allies would be crucial to any decision. This allowed Wilson to conclude the discussion with a compromise: no decisions should yet be taken, but the option would be left open and further discussions held with the Americans by Stewart and Healey on a forthcoming visit to Washington. But it is significant that Healey too, for reasons that are unclear, now struck a sceptical tone, pointing to the additional costs involved in sending and supplying the submarines East of Suez.³⁵ Equally important, opinion in Washington was had also moved against the proposal.

The future of any scheme to deploy Polaris East of Suez was always going to depend on American attitudes, particularly given British reliance on the US for submarine navigation and communications in the Indo-Pacific, and also because, to allow such a deployment, re-negotiation of the Nassau Agreement would probably have been

required. The apparently positive response of McNamara to Wilson in late 1965 soon gave way to doubt. Strong opposition emerged from Walt Rostow, head of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, who told President Johnson that a formal arrangement that allocated important Chinese targets to a British Polaris force would mean 'something close to a British veto over our China policy. It is highly unlikely that domestic politics will allow any government in London to go to war against mainland China; and we could count on the UK influence consistently to make difficult any firm stand vis-à-vis mainland China.' Rostow also saw the proposal as running counter to American support for British membership of the European Community, which he hoped would encourage the Europeans to play a more active East of Suez role. 'An Anglo-Saxon Asian defence club, built on what appeared to be a special London-Washington relation [sic], would discourage rather than encourage other Europeans to move towards responsibility in Asia. It would also complicate eventual UK entry into Europe and deny the British and ourselves the correct strategy of having British entry into Europe serve as a way of leading Europe as a whole to assume increased responsibilities East of Suez and on the world scene.'³⁶ Preparing for the Stewart-Healey visit at the end of January 1966, the State and Defense Departments suspected the Polaris proposal arose from a desire to release British conventional forces in the Far East from what were described as 'the difficult and unpopular tasks of a non-strategic nature.' Rusk and McNamara were therefore more reserved when the topic came up during the visit, being 'more inclined to give priority to the continued assignment of the Polaris submarines to NATO.'³⁷ For the Americans, deploying Polaris East of Suez was now seen as a strategic irrelevance, diverting attention from the more urgent problems of nuclear issues in NATO, and a none

too subtle cloak intended to cover British desires to cut their conventional forces in South East Asia.

The Proposal survives

The OPD discussion of January 1966 and the lukewarm American attitude meant that, barely a month after its debut on the world stage, the East of Suez option faded into the background even in London. Yet no one felt the need to deliver it the coup de grace and, despite the doubts of Stewart, Healey and the Americans it was still under active discussion within the British government two years' later. Why was this? One important reason was that the cost of keeping the option open was low. As seen above, the paper that went before the COS in January suggested that a Polaris-capable depot ship could cost an extra £5 million and that a decision on proceeding with this might be necessary in May. The OPD Official Committee felt the figure too high and suggested that the new depot ship should be built without Polaris facilities. If a decision on these lines had been made at that time, then the whole East of Suez scheme could have disappeared. But, further studies showed that the two designs for a depot ship – that is, one with or without Polaris facilities – were not as incompatible as had been assumed. Once again, it was estimated that a Polaris option could be kept open for only £0.5 million on top of the conventional vessel. It would not be necessary to invest more heavily until the ship was put out to tender, perhaps as late as 1968. The COS again felt it better to keep options open and, without referring the issue to ministers, decided to design a depot ship that *might* be able to cope with Polaris submarines.³⁸ In practical terms, the East of Suez project remained a going concern.

The other factor that kept the proposal alive was the persistent support it received from the Prime Minister, despite a distinct thinning out of allies on the matter. In July 1966 his interest was reactivated by a minute from Healey requesting approval for detailed target planning for Polaris to begin with SACEUR. While agreeing, Wilson also asked that the East of Suez option be given fresh examination.³⁹ The following month, when the OPD discussed Indian nuclear ambitions, he argued that deployment East of Suez ‘could help to provide a guarantee to India’ while also allowing ‘substantial economies on our other forces in the Far East.’⁴⁰ The Prime Minister also tried to ensure fuller ministerial support this time around. On 11 August 1966, George Brown replaced the sceptical Stewart as Foreign Secretary. It was always clear that the two would differ over East of Suez commitments since Brown, who was ardently committed to membership of the European Community, had also long been critical of the world role. But now Wilson told his new Foreign Secretary that, if they could agree on nuclear policy, ‘and if the Polaris submarines could be based soon in the Far East, “you can have what you want in Europe”.’⁴¹ Clearly determined not to forsake the option without yet more study, he also raised the issue at a meeting of ministers on 22 October.⁴²

Wilson now decided to re-fashion the government’s decision-making on nuclear matters by creating a Ministerial Committee on Nuclear Policy. It was to the second meeting of this new Committee, rather than the OPD, that the option was referred in January 1967. The minutes are withheld but the relevant memorandum confirms the balance of arguments was against him. They are worth rehearsing because they show just

what an uphill struggle Wilson faced on the logistical, economic and political levels in keeping the option alive. Logistically, only one submarine could be kept on patrol at any time East of Suez, in contrast to three operating from a UK base. The long supply line would also mean purchasing more missiles, gear and spares from the US; and there would be the extra costs for flying out crews and spares from the UK. Economically, although it might be cheap to keep the option open, the total additional cost of an actual East of Suez deployment, as opposed to a NATO one, was reckoned to be £15 million over ten years. Politically there was a host of problems. The Nassau agreement, which bound Britain to commit the Polaris missiles to NATO, would probably have to be renegotiated and European allies, including West Germany, could be offended by a British decision to deploy the submarines elsewhere. It was unlikely that a Polaris force would make Britain's allies East of Suez more open to cuts in her conventional forces (which were of much more practical use than strategic nuclear weapons), and there were problems with predicting the future Asian scene. Despite the hopes of using Polaris to reassure India about Chinese nuclear blackmail, even the Indians, sensitive about their non-aligned status, might be critical of such a force. Labour's commitment to 'internationalizing' the deterrent was another problem because, while this was easy to achieve through NATO, there was no similarly strong organization covering the Indo-Pacific, where an entirely new four-power defence agreement, with a nuclear component, would probably be required.⁴³

Trend put a more positive slant on the position in a minute to Wilson on 6 January 1967. A Polaris force might contribute to a quadripartite military arrangement in South-

east Asia, it could provide a nuclear umbrella to India and, by removing the British strategic deterrent from the European theatre, it might ease German nuclear aspirations for equal treatment within NATO. But Trend also had to acknowledge that conventional military strength, not nuclear, was probably the only currency that would register with Britain's allies in South East Asia; that India only wanted a nuclear guarantee that also involved the Soviet Union; and that, while the German desire to control nuclear weapons was less acute, 'the moment when we are embarking on a new attempt to enter the EEC is hardly the moment at which to embark on a policy which would result in France's becoming the only nuclear power in Europe....' (In January, Wilson and Brown began a series of visits to Community capitals to test the possibility of a membership bid.) Taking into account the £15 million extra expenditure the scheme might cost over a decade, Trend thought there were 'sufficiently formidable' arguments against any definite decision for its adoption, but he still considered the option should be kept open.⁴⁴ At the Nuclear Policy Committee meeting, ministers simply agreed to consider the issue again later in the year.⁴⁵

Yet all the time support for the project was ebbing away. In June 1967 David Bruce, the US Ambassador in London, was told by Frank Cooper, a senior official in the Ministry of Defence, that despite the Prime Minister's persistence in 'hanging on' to the idea, stationing Polaris East of Suez was regarded as a 'non-starter' in both his own ministry and the FO.⁴⁶ This seems to have been an accurate reflection of the situation. Indeed, on 23 May, as part of a wide-ranging report to the Cabinet on defence expenditure, the centre-piece of which was the decision to withdraw from mainland bases

in South East Asia, Healey made a number of negative points about an East of Suez deployment: there was no evidence that Britain's allies in the region wanted this; it would require renegotiation of the Nassau agreement, which could give Washington 'opportunities for raising wider issues to our disadvantage'; and withdrawal of the Polaris fleet from NATO 'might damage not only our military relations with our European allies, but also our prospects of negotiating entry to the Common Market on acceptable terms.'⁴⁷ Healey clearly wanted to foreclose the option.⁴⁸ The Prime Minister, however, was not yet prepared to concede defeat. On 24 July he even told Brown that a decision on whether to base Polaris East of Suez should be taken in October.⁴⁹ But events continued to move against such schemes. In August 1967, Healey informed ministers on the Nuclear Policy Committee that terms for assigning the Polaris force to SACEUR for targeting purposes were ready to be implemented. This 'would not prevent... redeployment East of Suez from 1972 onwards, if that course were later to commend itself', but to several Whitehall officials, Burke Trend included, it now seemed unrealistic, at least in the short term, to propose deployment East of Suez.⁵⁰ By now Wilson's only firm support seems to have come from the COS who, at a meeting of 22 August were again keen to keep the option open, a line they had consistently taken through the saga.⁵¹

The Proposal abandoned

The scheme for sending Polaris East of Suez was overwhelmed by the economic shocks of late 1967. The November decisions over devaluation forced a fresh look at defence spending, as the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, Roy Jenkins, pressed for further cuts. The issue of sending Polaris East of Suez was not touched on in the series of Cabinet

meetings between 4 and 15 January 1968, where it was agreed to quit both South East Asia and the Persian Gulf by March 1971. There were, in fact, two decisions that suggested that the Polaris East of Suez scheme could survive. First, amid all the emphasis on retreat, ministers did agree to retain a ‘capability’ for sending forces East of Suez.⁵² And secondly, the British held onto the Polaris programme: Jenkins had argued, in a Nuclear Policy Committee meeting in early January, for its cancellation, but Wilson and other ministers successfully fought for its retention.⁵³ However, a further effect of the decisions over withdrawal was that, with no continuing conventional naval presence based in the Indian Ocean, the estimated costs of a Polaris deployment in the area had increased markedly.⁵⁴ Of particular importance was the decision, taken by the Navy in March, to cancel the depot ship planned for the Indian Ocean. A staff study had shown that, with defence services now focused on the European theatre, it was possible to make do with existing depot ships.⁵⁵ This threw back into the melting pot the whole issue of how to support Polaris submarines if they were sent East of Suez.

The Navy Department began to study ways around the dilemma but it was clear that any Indian Ocean deployment for Polaris must be now put back many years and involve much-increased costs. The options for dealing with the situation were hardly attractive, including as they did the building of an expensive purpose-built vessel.⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, the Navy decided the East of Suez proposal was ‘one of the sacrifices which we are likely to offer up in any further exercise to save money.’⁵⁷ And in June the key ministers – Healey, Stewart (back at the FO after Brown had resigned from the government), Jenkins and Commonwealth Secretary George Thomson – wrote to Wilson

arguing that it was no longer necessary to make provision for a Polaris deployment East of Suez. All earlier assumptions about retaining forces in the Indian Ocean, Healey argued, had 'been invalidated' by the January 1968 defence cuts. If a Polaris force were to be deployed it would be a stand-alone project with additional costs now estimated at £35 million in capital and £5 million a year in running costs. Perhaps as a sop to Wilson, it was conceded that the deployment option could always be revived in future, with about five years' notice, including building a depot ship.⁵⁸ On 28 June Healey reported the decision to the OPD, in the midst of a broad update on the defence review. Significantly it was Wilson who, in summing up the ensuing discussion, said the Committee 'agreed that no provision should be made to keep open the option to deploy Polaris submarines East of Suez.'⁵⁹

Conclusion

In its early stages the proposal for deploying Polaris East of Suez had high level support from Wilson, Healey, Trend and Zuckerman. Even the Americans at first seemed receptive to the idea in December 1965. The arguments mustered for the proposal at that time may even be seen as answering a number of challenges to British policy. War in Europe was unlikely, whereas Asia was unstable, and Britain had a long-standing presence in the Indian Ocean that gave it significance in American eyes. The Vietnam War made this more obvious because the last thing Americans wanted was to pick up the threads of Western security in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. Sending Polaris East of Suez offered a way for Britain to maintain a high profile presence in the Indian Ocean at relatively low cost, while reducing conventional forces in the region. Wilson, who

persisted with the scheme even after he decided on application for European Community membership, was not the last British premier to seek a European and a world role simultaneously.

But on close analysis, the idea never made great sense. At the FO Stewart seems to have quickly dismissed it, even if some of his officials had a role in it. Healey also soon turned against it for reasons that are unclear, though it is possible to speculate that this was wrapped up in his desire to escape all entanglements East of Suez, as well as his role in establishing the Nuclear Planning Group within NATO in 1966, where Polaris was a potent symbol of British commitment to the nuclear arrangements of the Western alliance. The days of Empire were over and Britain lacked the resources necessary to project its military power globally. Rather than getting involved in an uncertain Asian future, policy under Labour became focused on escaping from Far East commitments, hence the determination to reduce conventional forces in the region, which might get dragged into local disputes like the Malaysian-Indonesian confrontation.⁶⁰ Wilson, of course, carefully avoided any involvement in Vietnam. American interest in Wilson's scheme soon evaporated when Washington considered the undesirability of sharing American decision-making on the Far East with Britain and preferred Polaris to remain dedicated to NATO. During 1966-67 the costs of keeping the option open remained low and this simple fact, regularly repeated by the COS, did much to aid its survival. The issue of nuclear sharing with Germany also receded because Erhard abandoned a 'hardware' solution in favour of improved consultation within NATO. But by then

Polaris was in the process of being allocated to SACEUR for targeting purposes, a process that would have been difficult to reverse.

Besides the technical problems of such a long-range deployment and the financial costs involved of maintaining just one submarine on constant patrol East of Suez, none of Britain's allies in the Far East showed any interest in a Polaris deployment. Even India, despite its desire for a nuclear 'umbrella' was likely to oppose the scheme because of having a non-aligned, anti-imperial foreign policy. Besides, as Rusk told Wilson in 1965 the real danger, in military terms, was neither nuclear war nor even conventional conflict, but 'wars of national liberation', such as Vietnam.⁶¹ Although this argument did not feature prominently in the British discussions about an East of Suez deployment, Polaris missiles were a blunt, not to say useless, weapon in such circumstances.

If the monetary crisis of November 1967 had not broken and Britain had persisted with the scheme it would have made even less sense. While China may have seemed a threat in the mid-1960s, by 1971 a Sino-American rapprochement was underway. Indonesia also ceased to be a source of danger after 1966, when a pro-American military regime consolidated its hold on power and called off the confrontation with Malaysia. Another important long-term trend was the change in the whole basis of British influence in the world. Britain, Trend argued in 1964, had maintained 'a degree of power and influence throughout the world which has been greater than our relative military and economic strength actually justify; and the mere fact of our military presence in several of the key areas of the world has made some contribution, however unquantifiable it may

be, to this achievement.’⁶² But by early 1968, this calculation had changed dramatically. After the devaluation, it was a non-military strategy of promoting commercial influence, aid policy, educational programmes, and cultural exchange that British ministers saw as the means by which to operate. To this Trend now saw ‘no realistic alternative’.⁶³ It was a strategy in which a Polaris deployment East of Suez, which the Cabinet Secretary had supported for some time, could have no logical place.

¹ Saki Dockrill, Britain's Retreat from East of Suez (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), mentions Polaris East of Suez at 136, 198 and 217. See also John W. Young, The Labour Governments, 1964-70, Volume 2: International Policy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), chapter 2; Matthew Jones, 'A Decision Delayed: Britain's withdrawal from South East Asia reconsidered', English Historical Review, 67/472 (2002), 569-95. We are grateful to the Journal's anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

² See John Baylis, Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy, 1945-1964 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 325.

³ [Kew, United Kingdom, The National Archives] PREM [Records of the Prime Minister's Office] 13/390, Ayub Khan to Wilson, 13 November 1964, 'Background Note', 23 February, and Trend to Wilson, 30 March 1965.

⁴ PREM13/973, Wright to Hockaday, 4 December 1964, record of meeting, 20 January 1965, and see Healey to Wilson, 3 May 1965.

⁵ [Kew, United Kingdom, The National Archives] FO [Records of the Foreign Office] 371/181355, IAD1013/26, record of Rusk-Stewart meeting, 22 March 1965.

⁶ PREM13/973, Stewart to Wilson, 11 March 1965; PREM13/225, Stewart to Wilson, 26 March 1965.

⁷ [Kew, United Kingdom, The National Archives] CAB [Records of the Cabinet Office] 148/18, OPD(65)19th, 31 March 1965.

⁸ PREM13/973, 'Secret Background Note' for parliamentary question of 27 July 1965.

⁹ PREM13/966, Mackilligin to Palliser, 2 June, and record of Wilson-Singh meeting, 3 June 1966.

¹⁰ PREM13/973, Zuckerman to Wilson, 26 July 1966; see also Susanna Schrafstetter, 'Preventing the "Smiling Buddha": British-Indian Nuclear Relations and the Commonwealth Nuclear Force, 1964-68,' Journal of Strategic Studies, 25/3 (September 2002), especially 95-101.

¹¹ Matthew Jones, 'Up the Garden Path? Britain's Nuclear History in the Far East, 1954-1962,' International History Review, 25/2 (2003) 306-33.

¹² CAB134/1938, FP(B)(61)7 Revise, 'The Far East', 28 August 1961.

¹³ CAB133/246, PM(W)(62)20, 'Strategic Nuclear Deterrence Against China', 17 April 1962.

¹⁴ CAB130/213, MISC 17/1st to 4th, 21-22 November, and papers 1 to 3, 13 and 18 November 1964.

¹⁵ PREM13/104, records of meetings, 7 December 1964.

¹⁶ For background: Andrew Priest, Kennedy, Johnson and NATO: Britain, America, and the Dynamics of Alliance, 1962-68 (London: Routledge, 2006); Donette Murray, Kennedy, Macmillan and Nuclear Weapons (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999); Susanna Schrafstetter and Stephen Twigge, 'Trick or Truth? The British ANF proposal, West Germany and US non-proliferation policy', Diplomacy and Statecraft, 11/2 (July 2000); and John W. Young, 'Killing the MLF? The Wilson Government and Nuclear Sharing in Europe', in Erik Goldstein and B.J.C. McKercher, eds., Power and Stability: British foreign policy, 1865-1965 (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

¹⁷ Young, 'Killing the MLF?' 306-14.

¹⁸ CAB 21/6050, Caccia to Mottershead, enclosed paper 'Nuclear Forces Outside NATO', 30 December 1964, and Planning Staff paper, 'Nuclear Matters East of Suez including the Problem of Safeguards for India', 27 January 1965; see also [Kew, United Kingdom, The National Archives] DO [Records of the Commonwealth Relations Office] 182/158, SC(65)5, 28 January 1965.

¹⁹ DEFE 13/350, Chief of Naval Staff to Secretary of State and attached Navy Department note, No 171/65, 'Polaris Submarines: Deployment East of Suez', 13 January 1965.

²⁰ At this stage the issue was very low key: the COS did not even discuss the question face-to-face, but dealt with it on the basis of written comments. [Kew, United Kingdom, The National Archives] DEFE [Records of the Ministry of Defence] 4/187, COS 36th/65, 13 July, and paper COS1969, with annexes, 1 July 1965.

²¹ PREM13/216, Trend minutes to Wilson, 12, 23 and 24 November 1965. These minutes helped prepare for a discussion at the OPD: CAB148/18, OPD(65)52nd, 24 November.

²² PREM13/681, record of meeting, 26 November 1965.

²³ PREM13/799, Wright to Bridges, 30 November 1965.

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- ²⁴ [Austin, Texas, Lyndon B. Johnson Library] NSF [National Security File], Memoranda to the President, box 5, vol. 17, Bundy memorandum on Wilson-Johnson conversation, 16 December 1965.
- ²⁵ NSF, Country File, UK, box 215, UK Defence Review 1/27/66, Bator notes on Wilson-Johnson meeting, 16 December 1965.
- ²⁶ PREM13/799, record of Wilson-Pearson meeting, 19 December, and CRO to Canberra, 24 December 1965.
- ²⁷ PREM13/686, record of meeting, 17 December 1965.
- ²⁸ CAB148/68, OPD(O)2nd, 7 January; CAB148/69, OPD(O)(66)2, 4 January 1966.
- ²⁹ Young, 'Killing the MLF?' 315-17.
- ³⁰ PREM13/800, Trend to Wilson, 21 January 1966.
- ³¹ PREM13/799, Zuckerman to Wilson, 7 January 1966.
- ³² DEFE4/195, COS 1088/19/1/66, Annex A, undated.
- ³³ DEFE4/195, COS 4th/66, confidential annex, 20 January 1966, COS1088, 19 January, and see COS 5th/66, 24 January, for final approval of the paper, which became DEFE5/165, COS11/66, 24 January.
- ³⁴ PREM13/1316, Trend to Wilson, 'UK Nuclear Policy', 21 January 1966. The Foreign Office was particularly concerned that Polaris remain in the Atlantic as it gave Britain the chance to influence any nuclear sharing arrangements in line with its own interest, see FO 953/2256, SC(65)37, 'United Kingdom Nuclear Policy', 23 December 1965.
- ³⁵ CAB148/25, OPD(66)8th, 23 January 1966; CAB 148/27, OPD(66)18, 21 January 1966. The Americans were given an aide-memoire explaining that the idea of deploying Polaris East of Suez had been examined in London but that, since 'to suggest any change in our plans now might hamper the development of proposals for the control of nuclear forces in Europe', it was not intended to take this further 'for the present.' See: NSF, Country File, UK, box 215, 'The UK Defence Review', 25 January 1966.
- ³⁶ NSF, Country File, UK, box 209, UK Memoranda, vol. VIII, Rostow memorandum, 20 January 1966, and Valenti memorandum, 24 January.
- ³⁷ NSF, Country File, UK, box 215, Joint State-Defense Scope Paper, 27 January 1966; CAB164/713, Laskey note, 25 July 1966.
- ³⁸ CAB148/68, OPD(O)(66)12th, 20 May; DEFE4/200, COS 27th/66, 24 May 1966.
- ³⁹ CAB164/713, Healey to Wilson, 1 July 1966, Palliser minute with Wilson's handwritten comment, 3 July 1966, Palliser minute, 19 July 1966, and Rogers to Trend, 25 July 1966.
- ⁴⁰ This meeting agreed that officials should again study the case for sending Polaris East of Suez: CAB148/25, OPD(66)34th, 5 August 1966.
- ⁴¹ FO800/961, 'Nuclear Policy', 13 September 1966.
- ⁴² CAB130/301, MISC 129(66)1st, 22 October 1966. A few days later the OPD officials reviewed the implications of sending Polaris East of Suez, but the position had not advanced much. The need to finalize NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements and the absence of proper basing facilities East of Suez meant that Polaris submarines must remain in the Atlantic until at least 1972: CAB148/69, OPD(O)(66)20th, 24 October; CAB148/69, OPD(O)(66)38, 20 October 1966.
- ⁴³ CAB134/3120, PN(66)4, 14 December 1966. Basing was another problem. A base in Australia might be constructed, but the Australians (who had not been asked their opinion) might be reluctant to accept a nuclear deployment. An Indian Ocean (rather than a Pacific) deployment was felt more acceptable to the Americans, who would not welcome a British share in a Pacific force.
- ⁴⁴ PREM13/1316, Trend to Wilson, 6 January 1967.
- ⁴⁵ The Minutes of the 9 January meeting have been retained, but its outcome is summarised in DEFE24/504, Annex A to COS 82/67, 17 August 1967. Wilson raised the issue again at an OPD meeting in May: CAB148/30, OPD(O)(67)19th, confidential annex, 12 May 1967.
- ⁴⁶ LBJL, White House Confidential File, CO 305 UK 1967-68, box 12, London 10310, 12 June 1967.
- ⁴⁷ CAB129/130, C(67)81, 23 May 1967.
- ⁴⁸ PREM13/1965, Maclehorse to Palliser, 22 May, Trend to Wilson, 24 May, Nairne to Maclehorse, 9 June, and Palliser to Maclehorse, 12 June 1967.
- ⁴⁹ CAB148/81, OPD(O)(67)16, annexed minute by Wilson, 24 July 1967.
- ⁵⁰ CAB164/713, Healey to Wilson, 3 August 1967, and Trend minute, 3 August 1967; Peter Hennessy, Cabinets and the Bomb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 213-17.
- ⁵¹ At the meeting the Chiefs approved a paper from the Navy Department that updated their January 1966 study of the East of Suez proposal. DEFE4/220, COS 63rd/67, confidential annex, 15 August, paper

COS1689, 9 August, COS64th/67, confidential annex, 22 August, and paper COS1721, 18 August 1967. The COS took the same view in October when, as in previous discussions, their decision partly rested on the low cost of keeping the East of Suez option open. Abandoning it immediately and trying to revive it later would be much more expensive than keeping it on the drawing board: DEFE4/222, COS 72nd/67, 12 October, and see 73rd/67, 13 October 1967.

⁵² CAB128/43, CC1, 4, 5, 6 and 7 (68), 4, 12 and 15 January 1968. The East of Suez option was discussed at the Nuclear Policy Committee in December. For economic reasons, the Treasury and Department of Economic Affairs wanted to abandon Polaris altogether. But, other departments, including Defence and the FO, wanted to retain both Polaris and the East of Suez option: CAB134/3120, PN(67)6, 1 December, and PN(67)4th meeting, 5 December 1967; and see CAB148/81, OPD(O)(67)18, 4 December 1967; Hennessy, Cabinets, 220-39. Ministers again decided to keep the option open. The decision does not form part of the minutes of PN(67)4th but is referred to in DEFE24/504, 'Polaris East of Suez', covering note dated 25 April 1968.

⁵³ Tony Benn, Office Without Power: Diaries, 1968-72 (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 5-6.

⁵⁴ CAB164/713, Healey to Wilson, 5 June; DEFE24/504, COS 38/68, Annex A, 13 June 1968.

⁵⁵ ADM324/7, Acquaint 7/68, 15 March 1968.

⁵⁶ ADM324/7, Bradbury to DG Ships, 18 March; DEFE24/504, 'Polaris East of Suez', covering note dated 25 April 1968.

⁵⁷ DEFE24/504, Jaffray minute, 21 May 1968.

⁵⁸ PREM13/2493, letters by Healey, Stewart, Jenkins and Thomson to Wilson, 5, 14, 19 and 21 June, and see Trend to Wilson (24 June 1968).

⁵⁹ CAB148/35, OPD(68)12th, 28 June 1968.

⁶⁰ See, for example, PREM13/315, Healey to Wilson, 4 August 1965.

⁶¹ PREM13/214, record of meeting, 14 May 1965.

⁶² PREM13/18, Trend to Wilson, 19 November 1964.

⁶³ PREM13/2636, Trend to Wilson, 26 February 1968.