

The United States-United Kingdom Relations (1961-1962)

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Throughout the last 40 years, Britain has been remarkably successful in balancing its European and American relationships. Impressively, through deft diplomacy, Britain has avoided choosing between its European and American orientations for half century.

Great Britain has fewer major options, it entertains no ambitious vision of Europe's future, and its relative decline has also reduced its capacity to play the traditional role of the European balancer. Its ambivalence regarding European unification and its attachment to a waning special relationship with America have made Great Britain increasingly irrelevant insofar as the major choices confronting

Europe's future are concerned. London has largely dealt itself out of the European game. Sir Roy Denman, a former British senior official in the European Commission, recalls in his memoirs that as early as the 1955 conference in Messina, which previewed the formation of a European Union, the official spokesman for Britain flatly asserted to the assembled would-be architects of Europe:

*The future treaty which you are discussing has no chance of being agreed; if it was agreed, it would have no chance of being applied. And if it was applied, it would be totally unacceptable to Britain au revoir et bonne chance.*¹

1. The Actors

A document from the State Department considered in 1961: "In the post-war period the Anglo-American Alliance has become the most intimate international Relationship which the United States maintains, and it is also unmatched on the British side by anything comparable..."²

Accompanying the Cold War the diplomatic practice has changed, with universal acclaim, and that is the procedure whereby foreign ministers, and even heads of states, participate personally and frequently in direct negotiations with one another. Certainly there are advantages to the so-called summit-meeting. Top decision-makers may benefit by getting to know one another personally, not because acquaintance necessarily leads to cordiality, but because it provides the

opportunity to size up one's counterpart in another government.³

Starting from this idea, this study is trying to stress the importance of the personal relation between John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Harold Macmillan on the United States (US)-United Kingdom(UK) Relations.

The British Prime Minister, **Harold Macmillan**⁴ had come to power in 1957, before de Gaulle and Kennedy, following the resignation of Anthony Eden⁵ compromised by the Suez Crisis. Macmillan had expected to remain in office for just six weeks, but once the general election had confirmed him considerably longer, he had set about organising the Conservative Party and the country after his views. Probably his greatest

objective in foreign policy was to restore close Anglo-American relations.

Harold Macmillan had decided very early in his premiership on the importance of restoring a close relationship with the United States. To a large extent, by 1962 he had managed to achieve this quite successfully.

Before 1960 the US perception for U.K. was that of an old ally, America's oldest friend.

As *The Times* commented: *the sincere regard which many Americans feel for Britain is largely instinctive and emotional ... For America, powerful allies are desirable: for Britain they are indispensable...*⁶

Increasingly, administrations found themselves struggling with a deeply rooted sense of obligation and sentimental attachment to Britain, which conflicted with current foreign policy directives.⁷

When at a meeting Eisenhower asked Macmillan for his personal assessment of the two candidates, Kennedy and Richard Nixon⁸, the prime minister had replied ironically that Nixon was 'beat', explaining that *one looked like a convicted criminal and the other looked like a rather engaging young undergraduate* was likely to become the next president of the United States⁹

Kennedy's intentions, as they are presented in his Inaugural Speech shows finally to be reality: "To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United, there is little we cannot do in a host of co-operative ventures. Divided, there is little we can do--for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder".¹⁰

2. American Objectives

The United States principal objectives before Macmillan visit to Washington, in April 1961¹¹ may be summarised in following points:

- a) Reassure Mr. Macmillan of the importance of Anglo-American alliance and to close relations at all levels. The ties US-UK are of central importance in building the strength and unity of the Free World in the Atlantic Community and elsewhere.
- b) The importance of both the U.S. and U.K. moving toward greater interdependence within NATO and helping to strengthen NATO defenses, with increased emphasis the importance of OECD as a forum for co-ordinating policies to attain economic growth.
- c) The long term importance for the US of the political and economic strength and unity of the Atlantic Community; the desirability of strengthening British bonds with the Continent; the value we attach to the integration movement of the Six as a step which tie Germany in closely with the West and reinforce the strength and unity of the Atlantic Community as a whole.
- d) The need for continuing to move as rapidly as possible to grant independence to the remaining colonies without undue risk to their future stability.
- e) No unilateral concessions to the Soviets for the sake of an agreement.
- f) No precipitate action, which might damage the US-UK relations in the campaign to seat Communist China in the UN.
- g) U.S. need for a realistic combination of military and political steps in Southeast Asia (Vietnam) to prevent irreparable erosion of the Western position.¹²

3. Kennedy's Grand Design

Thus American thinking on its European and international policies was greatly speeded up by the British decision to join the European Community. This found this way into

Kennedy's own Grand Design¹³ put forward in his famous Philadelphia speech of 4 July, 1962, in which he stressed the

importance of two pillar Atlantic partnership developing co-ordinated policies in all economic, political and diplomatic areas. Kennedy's view of Europe was very close to that of the British Prime Minister: It was in short the idea of interdependence under American guidance.

For the American President the British entry into Europe was something of forfeit: The British Government would guarantee by its own national interest the breakdown of the protectionist taxes: it would be willing to aid America's anti-Communist policy: for the pure costs of Britain's own expenses in such a policy

it would be a helpful ally in pressing for finance support from the Common Market. Britain would also counterbalance France's dominant position in the Communities, showing at the same time a comparable interest in containing the Germans through integration.

4. Kennedy-Macmillan Relations

„There are certain disadvantages to *diplomacy at the top* if negotiations take place at a very high level, it is impossible to conduct them in complete confidence. There are bound to be information's leaks" ¹⁴. There are official briefings of the press like in the Nassau case analysed in the final part.

Kennedy had set out early in 1961 to establish personal contacts not only with his chief adversary but also with his chief partners in the Atlantic Alliance. The western leader whom he saw first, liked best and saw most often-four times in 1961 alone, seven times altogether- was British Prime Minister. They did not always see eye to eye.

Since the beginning of Kennedy's administration the contacts between them were analysing the *continuance of Anglo-United States Understandings concerning consultations before the use of nuclear weapons, and the use of bases in United Kingdom*. Macmillan wrote to Kennedy in January 1961:

...These Understandings have their origin in war-time collaboration for production of the atomic bomb and for the liberation of Europe. They have been developed by successive United States Administrations, and now form an essential part of the whole network of Anglo-United States joint defense arrangements, which underlie Britain's defence policy and planning. We therefore attach great importance to them. I hope very much that you and your Administration will accept these arrangements and Understandings ... ¹⁵

In the April 1961 meeting- Macmillan's visit to Washington- Kennedy underlined that *strategic doctrine and political directive do not need change but rather some interpretation*. ¹⁶ Also, *it is important to*

maintain effective nuclear deterrent in NATO forces.

Kennedy knew his government could not go along with Great Britain's recognition of Red China.¹⁷ From time to time, the President had to discourage the Prime Minister's temptation to plain the role of peacemaker between East and West. And at least once Macmillan was briefly but violently angry- when he thought Kennedy's offer of American Hawk missiles to Israel had displaced a British sale. But no differences of opinion or age prevented the two leaders from getting along famously. Each recognised in the other a keen understanding of history and politics both international and domestic. Kennedy regarded Macmillan as a reliable ally, co-operative on issues that were difficult for him back home – such as the 1962 nuclear test resumptions. He enjoyed the British amiable conversation and the style, his often-eloquent letters, their frequent talks by transatlantic phone and his delightful sense of humour. He enjoyed retelling Macmillan's version of how Eisenhower *wouldn't let Nixon on the property*. A fondness developed between them, which went beyond the necessities of alliance. A Washington luncheon in the spring of 1962, for example, was devoted mostly to a relaxed discussion of books and politics. Told after the Nassau agreement described below that he was *soft* on Macmillan, Kennedy replied: *If you were in that kind of trouble, you would want a friend*.¹⁸

Their relationship was, perhaps, unparalleled in modern times and facilitated a virtually unbroken period of smooth and untroubled relations. Macmillan was in no doubt about the dept of the relationship. Writing to Jacqueline Kennedy some years after the President's death, he recalled: *He*

seemed to trust me, and (as you well know) for those of us who have had to play the so-called game of politics-national and international-this is something very rare but very precious...¹⁹

As Kennedy once remarked: *I feel at home with Macmillan because I can share my loneliness with him. The others are all foreigners to me...*²⁰

The two leaders were bound together by a powerful sense of isolation fuelled by the knowledge that they were ultimately responsible for the well being of their respective countries. Kennedy according to Carl Kaysen, 'liked and admired' Macmillan while regarding him as *a successful politician with whose general political attitudes he was sympathetic and with whom he could talk easily, informally and directly. No other European figures, nor indeed foreign politician, he believed, filled a similar position.*²¹

Kennedy and Macmillan have been meeting on seven occasions and it was often the case that they disagreed on matters of policy and strategy although they were always close. As Macmillan wrote to Kennedy *it is of the greatest value to me to have the opportunity for private talk, which these meetings provide.*²²

Within the administration a debate raged about the relative advantages of having a special relationship with England. While certain policy documents like the April 1961 NSC Memorandum²³ clearly identified official policy moving away from preserving these

special links and trying to preserve a policy of non-favouritism.

Kennedy opposed the official policy, and recognised that the easy intimacy he had with Macmillan reinforced and strengthened their ability to work together on issues of common interest such as the nuclear test ban treaty, NATO, Britain's Common Market aspirations and Berlin.

In addition Sorensen recalls, Kennedy found Britain *more reliable than any of our other major allies*²⁴ More often than not, the extraordinarily solid relationship shared in a frank open and more often than not, friendly way.

A letter from Kennedy after de Gaulle's rejection of Britain's bid to enter the European Economic Community reveals the depth of the relationship:

"You will know without my saying so that we are with you in feeling and in purpose in this time of de Gaulle's great effort to test the chances for his dream world. Neither of us must forget for a moment that reality is what rules and the central reality is that he is wrong and Europe knows he is wrong... We are doing everything we can at this end, as our people will be telling yours. And if this is an unmentionable special relationship, so much the better..."²⁵

Finally, the two countries had a powerful tie in the form of total collaboration between their intelligence services. This was a unique element in the Anglo-American relationship, which remained closed to all other countries, including France.

5. British Application for the Common Market: Kennedy, Macmillan-de Gaulle Opposition

It appears that a coherent and detailed American position on the prospective British application was only finalised and backed up between May and August 1961, only after Kennedy's visit in Paris.

"Kennedy fully understood the economic difficulties British entry would bring to the United States. But this was in his mind overcome by the political benefits. If Britain joined the Market, London could offset the eccentricities of policy in Paris and Bonn;

moreover, from becoming a high tariff inward-looking white man's club. Above all without British membership, the Market could become a basis for a true political federation of Europe."²⁶

Kennedy was quick, when presenting his view on the telephone to Macmillan, to coin his own advantages into a special role for Britain and his Prime Minister: Kennedy repeated *how anxious the Americans were for us to get into the Six*. This would firstly mean

better tariffs bargaining, and secondly, politically they hoped that if we were in the Six we should be able to steer them, and influence them, whatever might be the political personalities. In this connection he expressed some anxieties about the Germany that would come after Adenauer.²⁷

The Kennedy-de Gaulle talks in Paris²⁸ offered to Kennedy the opportunity to initiate closer co-operation and consultation, proposing special liaison representative for a tripartite framework. When de Gaulle suggested in turn that *a new organisation should be created to deal with the utilisation of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world by the three powers*. Kennedy had to retreat on his Three special liaison officers. After exchanging mutual guarantees for NATO, de Gaulle and not Kennedy- raised the Common Market topic. He assumed that the UK still found it difficult to join the EEC because it was *leery and political co-operation* it could only have *either Commonwealth preferences or Common Market, but not both!* To which Kennedy repeated the already Well-Known political coherence by a British accession. This ruled out he said *a limited association*.

6. The Bilateral Relations in the Cuban Missile Crisis

I am lost in admiration for the superb manner in which you handled the momentous events of the critical week we have just lived through. I know what a mass of conflicting advice you received and I can only say that looking back on it all you acted at each stage with perfect judgement. I mean it quite sincerely when I say that America and all of the free world must feel a deep sense of gratitude that you are President of the United States at this moment in history.³²

The British role in October 1962, both in NATO and in the Commonwealth, was helpful for Washington. But, the French position was more robust within NATO. While de Gaulle was a growing diplomatic problem for Anglo-Saxon within the alliance, he nevertheless provided unambiguous support for Kennedy in the Cuban Crisis. The British did provide a lead to the Italian government, which made two interventions with Moscow, one along the

*Later he and Macmillan would agree that the degree of help given to President de Gaulle should be adjusted to the amount of co-operation he showed generally.*²⁹

Nevertheless, there was advisers like Kennedy's assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy who weren't so committed to the British. Bundy thinks that *Kennedy has every right to sustain the special relationship with the UK as long as the fundamental basis of that relationship is co-operative common effort, and not special preference. After all, we would like a special relationship with the French too, if only it could involve some real co-operation.*³⁰ After a few days Macmillan's visit to Washington (in April 27-29, 1962) reached the issues of UK-EEC negotiations, Britain and Western defence and NATO strategy. Macmillan stressed the need to take care of interests of Commonwealth and EFTA countries³¹. Kennedy pointed out that that UK could not take care of everyone in its wake as it joined the Common Market, and that US was prepared make many sacrifices but could not go all the way.

lines of Home's statement to Loginov on 27 October, and the other telling the Soviets they saw no future in the Cuba-Turkey deal. Perhaps most important within NATO, the Turks adopted an uncompromising stance on trading the Jupiter's, which owed nothing to anybody, certainly not to the British.

British-American disagreements over shipping and trade with Cuba affected the relations. British solidarity over Cuba was a necessary, if insufficient condition for the supply of Polaris.

Close analysis of the relations during the crisis reveals different phases. Before the discovery of the missiles, Macmillan pursued a robustly independent approach to trade with Cuba in the face of increasing US pressure, including Kennedy's pleas that Britain should support an ally in difficulty. Macmillan however was prepared to stand alone within NATO on the ground of principle and

economic interest. When Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba were discovered Kennedy decided to act Without seeking counsel from Macmillan or other European allies. If London had supported Washington's policy toward Cuba before October 1962, Kennedy might as well have sought British views on the new situation. Kennedy informed Macmillan of the missiles on Sunday 22 October, over a day before his televised Speech. As with other key NATO allies, there was the opportunity to

register dissent, so that there was a form of consultation. In reality Kennedy had already decided upon a course of action which, as Ormsby-Gore explained, was the minimum the American public required.

Macmillan's role during the Cuban crisis was to provide support for Kennedy and the United States, even though the British government's legal advisers were convinced the quarantine was illegal.³³

7. Skybolt Crisis and Nassau Negotiations

Anglo-American relations during the controversial Skybolt crisis were publicly in disarray like never before. The Kennedy administration, only initially backed Skybolt. An unsigned memorandum to Kennedy illustrates the doubts articulated about the wisdom of continuing with Skybolt after first test: "Although we have a moral commitment to the British on this, will equipping more bombers with still more missiles be necessary when this doubtful weapon only replaces similar shorter-range Hound Dog missiles..."³⁴

No doubt Macmillan feeling were offended by the fact that Kennedy had not called him after the decision to cancel Skybolt. The storm, when it broke, threatened a rift in Anglo-American relations. It caused a major political crisis for Macmillan's already shaky government. McNamara³⁵ had alerted Thorneycroft³⁶ and Ormsby Gore³⁷ in November but postponed until mid-December his trip to London to break the news definitely. Then he frankly stated at the London airport that Skybolt was on his way out, and refused to present an alternative they would keep alive a separate British deterrent. This led to an angry outburst but by the British government's failure to face up to the problem during the preceding month, and even the previous fourteen months which had witnessed recurring doubts about Skybolt. He had expected them to propose an alternative, probably Polaris which they could negotiate. But the British under pressure from their own air force and defence contractors, preferred to

take their stand on Skybolt, hoping that delay would pressure Kennedy into keeping it.

Although McNamara was committed to cancellation, he could not reveal this when he was visited by the new British Minister of Defence. Instead he informed him that the weapon had already failed four successive test and, in term of cost-effectiveness, was becoming an increasingly poor investment. In November during phone conversation between the two men, McNamara tried and failed, to grasp what Thorneycroft and his team were expecting. Not surprisingly, the next meeting concluded without anything having been resolved. The resolution of the crisis was left Kennedy and Macmillan, who were scheduled to meet in Nassau in the Bahamas for late December.

Some political scientist suggested that there was no agreed US position before the Nassau Conference.³⁸ However we have strong evidence to indicate that Polaris must be considered as a solution to the Skybolt problem at a meeting on the 16 December.³⁹

The two leaders talked briefly and with essential agreement on the next steps for the Congo, India, test-ban negotiations and conventional forces. But the nuclear issue prolonged their session. Kennedy adamantly refused to retain the full Skybolt cost in the budget, ignoring the suggestions that he keep it alive until Britain's Common Market negotiations were settled. His public commitment to abandon it and his plans for the tax-cut budget made that impossible.

Kennedy proposed an agreement to build the Skybolt with 50-50 cost for the British,

that was rejected. He pressed harder, saying that *if the United States gave Polaris missiles to Britain it would be difficult in logic not to say that if in future any country developed a nuclear bomb the United States would give them a missile system adding that to give the Polaris missiles to Britain would be a new step and so regarded in Europe.*

Macmillan expressed his belief that there was not a great difference in the two weapons systems, saying that *Polaris for Skybolt was not a new step in principle, since the weapons were basically the same, that is ballistic missiles. One was fired from an aeroplane, the other from a submarine.*

He did not think that the French would make an issue out of Skybolt being swapped for another missile. Kennedy however, was unconvinced. His government he said was most concerned with how de Gaulle would react to any arrangement involving Polaris. The original Skybolt deal had been made in 1960 when France was not a nuclear power. Since then, they had acquired this capability and deeply resented the amending of the prohibitive McMahon Act, which facilitated Anglo-American nuclear co-operation but not aid to France. Theoretically, France could now be given assistance. In these new circumstances, the offer of Polaris to Britain would be seen as further proof of America's willingness to discriminate against her NATO ally.

Macmillan wanted Polaris on the same terms as the Skybolt agreement – a no-sting-attached deal, and pressed harder. He told his audience at Nassau:

“We were really between two worlds, the world of independence which was now ceasing to exist and the world of interdependence which we had not quite reached, though we were moving towards it. The nearer we got to it the more surrender of sovereignty there would have to be in practice, but until our design for independence was completed, we must be able in the last resort to control our own forces.” The next day it had become clear that Kennedy was not prepared to risk a serious rift in the Anglo-American relations over a missile system. Kennedy knew

he had a moral obligation to provide an alternative to Skybolt. A political crisis in England could upset plans for its accession to the Common Market or even the agreement – made simultaneously in the 1960 with the Skybolt agreement – to provide a Polaris submarine base for the US in Scotland.

The controversial elements of the Nassau Agreement are to be found in the Paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 of the document. Paragraph 6 referred to the pooling of national nuclear forces under the single NATO command. This would form the basis for the multinational force and would comprise mainly British and American Elements. If General de Gaulle could be persuaded to become more NATO friendly, it was envisaged that France might also contribute something to this force. Paragraph 7 committed both Britain and United States to work towards the creation of a multilateral nuclear force that would incorporate a mixed-manned element. Paragraph, however, 8 did not make clear which of these two forces, multilateral or multinational the British Polaris force would be assigned to. The agreement did not explicitly commit Britain to a multilateral course, stating only that they have agreed that “the purpose of their two Governments must be the development of a multilateral NATO multilateral nuclear force in the closest consultations with other NATO allies”.⁴⁰

After numerous drafts had been prepared and rejected, a formula was eventually agreed upon. To satisfy both British demands for independence and American demands for a multilateral force component, Kennedy and Macmillan agreed that the United States would sell Britain Polaris missiles, which would be assigned to a NATO multilateral force. To preserve the independence of the British national nuclear force, Macmillan secured an escape clause. With the agreement reached in principle, numerous aids and bureaucrats set about producing an official communiqué. A *Statement on Nuclear Defence Systems* was jointly drafted as part of the general communiqué. With agreement reached, the president's mind turned once again to France. Almost as an afterthought, it was

agreed that the same offer be made to France in order to entice General de Gaulle to commit himself to some degree to the NATO framework which he had been shunning. After hasty discussion it was decided to send this by way of a personal letter, to be followed up by discussions with Ambassador Bohlen.⁴¹

Macmillan returned home exhausted but jubilant. Not only had he managed to walk away from Nassau with Polaris, having acquired it at a knockdown price of less than 2 % of Britain's national defence budget, but he had effectively saved almost 800 millions dollars worth of research and development cost already carried out by the United States government.

The British press saw him returning home without Skybolt. In its place was the promise of a weapon that would not be available for at least another couple of years⁴². As if this was not bad enough Britain was going to have to build a fleet of submarines in which to carry the missiles as well as warheads to arm them. The cost, they argued, would be massive. The

final contentious point was that, upon completion, this Polaris force would be assigned to NATO. The deal, the press claimed, was a *sell-out*, the escape clause *paper-thin*.⁴³ It seemed that *almost everyone in Britain had some objection to the agreement*.⁴⁴ A telegram from the American Embassy in London captured the mood:

"Nearly all comment agrees that Nassau marked fateful turning point in Anglo-American Relations, less by way of initiating absolutely new line than by confirming one already in progress. The France that France was offered same terms as UK within framework of projected European deterrent concept underlined ending unique Anglo-American Relationship in nuclear field, and probably in others. Retention of British independence over nuclear weapons is regarded as largely fictional...what Macmillan secured, comment implied, is tarnished Christmas bauble without more than tinsel meaning and effect..."⁴⁵

8. Brussels and Nassau, the Same Concept?

In 1962 the negotiation in Brussels run into difficulties. Macmillan's increasingly weakened domestic position combined with Commonwealth states and restrictive CAP system on the size of the Six, led the negotiations to slow down to nearly stopping. There was a real danger at the begging of the December that the Positions would increasingly harden up, thus leaving the French isolated and making a solution impossible. Request for help were picked up by the American delegation Brussels and in turn promoted in Washington⁴⁶. But how should this *need for US leadership in the Brussels negotiations* be realised?

Hallstein⁴⁷ was in favour of using the USA as a *tunnel of communication between the Commission and the British*. A week later Dean Rusk confronted the Luxembourger who was going to chair the negotiation in January 1963, with the treat that the USA *intended to take full advantage of trade expansion Act between US and the EEC* slowing the negotiations right down if no advance was

accomplished in Brussels.⁴⁸ But when the EEC negotiations stopped for the Christmas break Tuthill⁴⁹ report a *favourable outlook* and claimed it was not yet time for a major US intervention.. He warned however about the possible impact of Skybolt and Polaris and put a lot of blame for the slow negotiation on the too rigid British position. For the time being he role of United States should remain that of a *sympathetic observer*.

Nassau was seen in retrospect as a huge mistake. *It was a case of King to King and it infuriated the court*.⁵⁰ If Macmillan wanted to save the illusion of an independent nuclear nation, and he needed to do so both for domestic and European reason, he had to secure his unrestricted use for Britain national interests. He exclaimed that:

"a (multinational) group such as the United Kingdom had suggested was the alternative . He had taken his country a long way on the European road and if France accepted, Britain would join the Common Market. It has been said that he was going against a thousand years

of history by doing this. He would be going against it far more if he were to abandon Britain's independent (nuclear) power"⁵¹.

In other words, Macmillan was in fact arguing that he needed Polaris to carry his public opinion in London into Europe- or at

least this was why he was claiming to Kennedy that he needed Polaris now. But, taking into account de Gaulle rejection at Rambouillet meeting, we could say that Macmillan was bluffing.

Conclusions

The Nassau Agreement recognises that the security of the West is indivisible, and so must be our defence. But it also recognises that this is an alliance of proud and sovereign nations and works best when we do not forget it. It recognises further that the nuclear defence of the West is not a matter for the present power alone. "We remain too near the Nassau decisions, and too far from their final realisation, to know their final place in history. But I believe that, for the first time the door is open for the nuclear defence of the Alliance to become a source of confidence, instead of a cause of contention..."⁵²

Kennedy had two weighty problems to contend with. First was the pressure from an element within the administration that wanted him to use this opportunity to extract the United States from the restrictive constraints of this special relationship. A number of them were also concerned that a policy concept – the multilateral nuclear force – should not be fatally undermined by any arrangement that Nassau might produce. Second, Kennedy was deeply concerned with the impact a Polaris deal might have on America's other NATO allies, particularly France and Germany. On 13 December, *The Times* commented: "If Britain is without a role in deterrent nuclear strength, she may be driven closer to the French who could not doubt profit greatly from British know-how..."⁵³

Nevertheless, Kennedy did not want to be blamed for the collapse of Macmillan's Conservative government or for a situation where the British leader might be forced to adopt an anti-American platform in order to stay in power.⁵⁴

The president and his staff could live with the idea of making Polaris available to the British because of concessions he felt Macmillan had offered in return. First,

Macmillan had agreed to work hard for the creation of a multilateral force, toward which British had hinted shown barely concealed hostility. The second concession Macmillan offered was a commitment to put the British V-bomber into NATO, which together with a similar American contribution would be the basis of a NATO multinational force. Third, the Prime Minister had accepted the need to increase the strength of Britain's non-nuclear forces.

On the other hand, like Kennedy said, 'For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed'⁵⁵ – maybe Nassau was the proof for US respect for his closer ally.

There is little doubt that the Nassau Agreement represented the apogee of Anglo-American defence relations in the post-war era.⁵⁶ Kennedy decision to sell Polaris missiles to Britain was singularly responsible for maintaining the British independent nuclear deterrent well into the 1970's. Moreover the offer of this same deal to the French signalled a willingness to change the US-French nuclear policy and the acceptance that both, Britain and France will continue indefinitely to be nuclear powers. These decisions were nothing short of momentous. In order to get a fuller understanding of the importance of the Conference, one must examine the negotiations in some detail.

The decisions taken at Nassau had been put forward for many reasons:

- Primo* To prevent an independent West German nuclear force.
- Secundo* To minimise this country's preferential treatment of Great Britain.
- Tertio* To meet charges of an American nuclear monopoly- yet, retaining

an American veto, the MLF⁵⁷ concept produced fresh attacks upon the monopoly.

Quattro To strengthen Western Strategic defence forces –yet no one denied that the real purpose of MLF was political and that it could increase those forces by no more than 1,2 percent.

Macmillan's ambition to see the special relationship restored was successful. So much so that, in December 1962, Kennedy overruled the advice of a greater portion of his government and executed the most public U-term in the American foreign policy possibly seen in this century.

Although Macmillan's critics later described the deal over Polaris as a betrayal, the Nassau Agreement confirmed Britain's pretention's to be a nuclear power well into the 1970s. One of the side effects of the conference was the elevation of the Multilateral Nuclear Force proposal causing bitter debate and acrimony to pervade the alliance for the remainder of the Kennedy presidency.

Even though a vast majority of the Kennedy Administration believed the British determination to preserve the independent nuclear deterrent at all cost was an act of folly, this did not prevent the administration from supporting this decision at a crucial time for Britain. Under Kennedy and Macmillan the special relation was revived. After Kennedy's death, the new opportunity afforded to the Anglo-American alliance slipped away. This was more than simply the loss of a bright, charismatic president who had befriended an angling skilful politician; after the Kennedy presidency the emotional commitment to, nd desire for a special relationship was lost amidst the changing personalities and circumstances. It has never truly disappeared but lingers on no doubt to be recaptured again, if and when the need arises.

Macmillan implied, during the course of the conversations, that a deep split in the Anglo-American alliance was a likely consequence of an unresolved crisis. If let down by the United States, Macmillan might find himself having to adopt an Anti-

American position in order to retain in power in Britain. He also hinted at the possibility of Anglo-French nuclear collaboration if Kennedy was not prepared to fulfil his obligation to provide Britain with a viable alternative weapon. this was an unwelcome scenario for the Americans which would have disastrous consequences. Any Anglo-French collaboration would certainly have enormous consequences for NATO and an unimaginable effect on Germany –a worry that Kennedy administration was increasingly struggling to address. In order to play this hand it was necessary to Macmillan to refrain from telling the Americans about his depressing meeting at Rambouillet with de Gaulle⁵⁸. He knew that the General almost certainly meant to keep Britain out of Europe and possibly felt that if Kennedy and his pro-European staff were aware of this it would unlikely that they would consider an Anglo-French collaboration a possibility nor would they agree to a deal that almost certainly would provide de Gaulle with an excuse to keep Britain out of Europe. Macmillan was fairly sure that his European policy had failed, at least for the moment. All that was left was the independent deterrent and the special relationship. It seems, unlikely. However that he would had followed Through with any of these threats. He had made the restoration of the Special relationship the cornerstone of foreign policies since coming to power in 1957. Moreover he was aware that short of any unlikely Anglo-French collaborative venture, the United States was the only ally Britain could turn for technological and scientific assistance.

Nassau-a Genuine Offer to the French

The decision to make a similar offer to the French was perhaps even more controversial than the British Polaris agreement. The debate about whether or not to aid the French nuclear programme had been raging within the administration but eventually had been won by those who were opposed to the idea. Kennedy himself had said in the course of the Nassau negotiations that although the United States was helping France with very marginal nuclear problems⁵⁹, this was *minuscule* and at

the very outer circle of the nuclear world, while his government had no plans to increase or extend this assistance.⁶⁰ A letter was sent outlining the offer of Polaris missiles on the same terms as the British agreement to France. Upon further consideration, the drafter realised that this was insulting given the fact that France's nuclear programme was not sufficiently advanced to make use of these terms. Polaris missiles were of no use to de Gaulle unless something is done to help France to a point where the weapon could be utilised. Panicking, *same* was changed to *similar* in the letter to be sent to de Gaulle. Unfortunately it was too late to change the letter sent to Adenauer⁶¹, explaining the decisions taken, and probably the French read both letters. The Offer to France could be regarded as a *damage limitation exercise*- if de Gaulle could be contained, the fallout might not be so severe as to cause any major problems. This view however is less likely, mainly because Kennedy and his staff appeared to be quite optimistic not only to the possibility of France accepting or at least opting to begin negotiations based on the offer, but that Nassau was the catalyst that would stimulate and inspire a new era in the US-European Relations.

For Americans the English are cousins **Briton cousins**-of course Europeans, strange and complicated people with which they have a

common culture, history language and a predisposition to the European unification and to those French people who believe they are the center of the world. For Americans the British are the less foreign from the foreigners. And the British care a lot about the status of privileged ally.⁶²

After this close view of the crisis of the 1961-1963 period on the US-UK-France Relations we could draw the following conclusions: the numerous contacts (meetings, telephones and diplomatic consultations) and the undisguised attitude of the Macmillan and Kennedy ended into a close relationship based on trust and friendship that reflected in the new special relationship of the two countries. On the other hand, the cold superior attitude of France President and his opposition to close contact at the high level with Kennedy⁶³ led to a cold personal relation with Anglo-Saxons which affected the diplomatic relations.

The Community of interest, culture, and civilisation is the most important cornerstone for an Alliance, adding the distance and the lack of frontier conflicts. The Anglo-Saxon relations passed through difficult times in the two major crises of 1962, but the friendship between the two leaders saved the Special Relationship. This close relation undoubtedly strengthened the Anglo-American Alliance and seriously deteriorated the relations with France.

NOTES:

¹ Sir Roy Denman, *Memoirs*, Palgrave, 1967.

² *The Policies Affecting the Anglo-American Alliance*, revised document of SU Embassy in London to State Departmental, 6 Jan 1961, Central Decimal Files 1961-1963.

³ William C. Olsen, Fred A. Sondermann, *The Theory and Practice of International relations*, Second Edition, Prentice-Hall Inc, 1966, p. 257.

⁴ Macmillan, Harold, Prime Minister of The United Kingdom 1957-1963, and First Lord of the treasury.

⁵ Eden, Sir Anthony, British Foreign Affairs Minister until April 1955; Prime Minister April 1955- January 1957.

⁶ The Times, 2 August 1963.

⁷ Ian Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 46.

⁸ Nixon, Richard, Vice president of the US in the Eisenhower Administration.

⁹ Donette Murray Kennedy, *Macmillan and nuclear weapons*, Macmillan Press, London, 2000, p. 23 Macmillan diary: *it looks as if Kennedy is going to this Presidential election. He seems definitely to be gaining ground... on the whole, I feel that Kennedy and Johnson will be more friendly than Nixon...-that is, the Republicans without Eisenhower...* HMD, d. 39, 20 October 1960.

¹⁰ John F. Kennedy, *Inaugural Address*, January 1961.

¹¹ *Macmillan Visit to Washington, April 4-9, 1961*, to meet with the new US President was regarded by the Department of State, (Paper Prepared in the Department of State, MVK B-III-52, Washington, March 21, 1961, *FRUS XIII*, Doc 380, p. 1033), was due to obtain US support for:

- a) A British role vis-à-vis the Continent which would not necessitate an amalgamation of British political personality with the Continent; would retain for the UK a distinctive a world-wide role; and would permit a continuation of the Anglo-American relationship and Commonwealth ties.
- b) A co-operative economic program intended to expand the rate of Western economic growth.
- c) British interests in its remaining colonial territories.
- d) The admittance of the Communist China in the UN, suspension of the nuclear tests and disarmament

¹² Paper Prepared in the Department of State, MVK B-III-52, Washington, March 21, 1961, *FRUS XIII*, Doc 380, p. 1034.

¹³ Joseph Kraft, *The Grand Design, From Common Market to Atlantic Partnership*, New York, Harper, 1962, The ideas behind this grand design were a far cry from Kennedy's programmatic list of foreign politic issues as he had described it in his article *A Democrat Looks At Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, vol.36, 1957, p. 44-57. As a young senator Kennedy had express then his apprehension over Britain on nuclear power, Germany's rising position in the Western Camp and the EEC as a European club of rich nations.

¹⁴ William C. Olsen, Fred A. Sondermann, *Loc. cit.*, p. 25.7

¹⁵ Message from prime Minister Macmillan to President Kennedy, January 26, 1961, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Volume XIII, West Europe and Canada, United States Government Printing Office Washington, 1994, p. 1030.

¹⁶ Circular telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in France, *FRUS*, Volume XIII, p. 1037.

¹⁷ Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy-Special counsel to the last President*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1965, p. 558.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 559

¹⁹ Alistair Horne, *Macmillan 1957-1986*, Vol II, of the *Official Biography*, Macmillan, London, 1989, p. 304.

²⁰ Alistair Horne, *IBIDEM*, p. 305.

²¹ Donette Murray. *IBIDEM*, p. 28 correspondence between Carl Kaysen and Murray.

²² Donette Murray. *IBIDEM*, p. 29, *Macmillan to Kennedy*, 29 April 1962, JFKL, folder 7.

²³ Policy Directive : NATO and the Atlantic Nations, Washington, 20 April 1961, Document No.100, *Vol .XIII, FRUS*.

²⁴ Theodore C Sorensen, *Oral History* p 101, JFKL.

²⁵ Kennedy to Macmillan, POF, box 127, Countries, UK general1/63 JFKL *Apud* Oliver Bange *The EEC Crisis of 1963. Kennedy, Macmillan, de Gaulle and Adenauer in conflict*, London, Macmillan Press LTD 2000, p. 37.

²⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *A thousand days, John Fitzgerald Kennedy in he White House*, London, 1965, p. 720.

²⁷ Phone call of Macmillan to White House, 6 April 1961, 2.45 PM *Apud* Oliver Bange *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

²⁸ Kennedy visit Paris in 31 Mai- 2 July 1961-on his way to Vienna –was regarded as a public relation affair by the White House *Documents Diplomatiques Francais*, 1962 tome II, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale 1997, doc 200

²⁹ 9 July 1961 *Apud* Oliver Bange, *Op.cit.*, p. 39.

³⁰ Memorandum- McG.B initials for- Mc George Bundy to Kennedy, Washington, April 24, 1962, *FRUS*, volume XIII p 1068; Bundy said: *The question of British membership in Europe is now urgent. The nuclear question is less pressing from our point of view, simply because the time does not look right for a solution. Certainly there is nothing for us in any possible British notion that the UK might pay its entrance fee to the Common Market by providing nuclear assistance to the French.*

³¹ *Ibidem*, Briefing of the Joint Chief of Stafon Macmillan's talks p. 1071.

³² Letter David Ormsby-Gore to JFK, 30 October 1962,in L.V. Scott, *Macmillan, Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis: Political, Military and Intelligence Aspects*, Palgrave, London, 1999, p. 179.

³³ *Ibidem*, *Unflappable Mac*, p. 185.

³⁴ *Memorandum*, December 1960, Record of meeting between Gates and Watkinson, 12 Dec 1960.

³⁵ McNamara, Robert S, Secretary of Defence, January 1961-1964.

³⁶ Thorneycroft, George Edward Peter, British Minister of Defence from 1962-1963.

³⁷ Ormsby Gore, Sir William David, British Ambassador to the United States from October 1961.

³⁸ Andrew J. Pierre, *Nuclear Politics: The British experience with an Independent Strategic Force, 1939-1970*, Oxford University Press: London, 1970, p. 234.

³⁹ John Baylis, *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy*, Oxford University Press: New York, 1995, p. 153.

⁴⁰ Record of Meeting –Nassau Talks, PREM11/4229 PRO in Donnette Muray, p. 102.

⁴¹ The idea to extend the Polaris offer to France is certainly a curious one. Some month later Kennedy mentioned that the idea had come from Macmillan., Bohlen, Charles E, Ambassador to France from September 1962.

⁴² The British Prime Minister had insisted on the Polaris A-3 missile, the most advanced version that was not in production. Although, in effect, Britain had to face a deterrent Gap, the British suggestion that the US could load Britain a couple of Polaris submarines until the British force was ready was not pursued at Nassau.

⁴³ David Nunnerley, *President Kennedy and Britain*, Bodley Head, London, 1972, p. 161.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p 160, Macmillan recorded in his *Diary: no one will find it profitable to take a fair or balanced view.*, HMD, 23 December 1962, d.48.

⁴⁵ London to Secretary of State, 22 December 1962, *FRUS volume XIII, 1961-1963*, p. 1118.

⁴⁶ Oliver Bange, *Op. Cit.*, p. 47.

⁴⁷ Hallstein Walter, President of The Commission of European Economic Community.

⁴⁸ Oliver Bange, *Apud*, George Ball Memorandum for the President entitled *United Kingdom –Common Market negotiations*, 10 Dec 1962 NSF/170.

⁴⁹ Thutill, John, UK Representative to the European Communities from October 1962.

⁵⁰ Richard E. Neustadt, *Alliance Politics*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1970, p. 110.

⁵¹ Record of a plenary session on 19 December 1962 after c9.50 am, Macmillan reply to Ball's outline of a multilateral concept which foresaw mixed manning of ships carrying the nuclear deterrent and allowed for a national withdrawals. Oliver Bange *Apud* PRO: PREM 11/4229.

⁵² President Kennedy's State of the Union Address, 14 January 1963.

⁵³ Donnette Murray, *Op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁵⁴ According to Schlesinger this might happen, *instead of pleading that his government would fall, Macmillan seemed to be saying that his Party would accept an anti-Americanism to remain in Power...*, *A Thousand Days*, London, 1965, p. 737.

⁵⁵ John F. Kennedy *INAUGURAL ADDRESS, JANUARY 20, 1961*.

⁵⁶ Henry Brandon, *Special relationships: A Foreign Correspondent 's Memoirs from Roosevelt to Reagan*, Atheneum, New York, 1998.

⁵⁷ Multilateral Force, an American project.

⁵⁸ Rambouillet meeting de Gaulle –Macmillan, 15-16 December 1962 on the role of nuclear national forces, see Part I. *Documents Diplomatiques Francais*, 1962 tome II, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale 1997, doc 200.

⁵⁹ A US position prepared in April 1962 stated: "we do not agree to the US and UK providing nuclear assistance to the French national program Such action would in the long term stimulate a German aspiration for a comparable treatment; it would tent to fragment the nuclear deterrent and would almost certainly not divert de Gaulle from his basic policies or national nuclear effort... We believe that the nuclear problem of the Alliance must be met through a multilateral, rather than bilateral, approach. Initial French participation in a multilateral approach from achieving one of its basic purposes: weakening and diverting German pressures from the nuclear program" *position Paper for Macmillan Visit* 21 April 1962, State Department, *FRUS*, Vol. XIII, p. 1102.

⁶⁰ *FRUS, Vol. XIII, Memorandum of conversation, Nassa*, pp. 1102-1105.

⁶¹ The letter to Adenauer was send off hurriedly. It contained a premature reference to the offer to de Gaulle as "the same arrangement" as that for the British. When reflection in Nassau showed that *the same* amounted to an insult to the French because their lack of nuclear technology to build warheads and missiles would render it useless- the term was changed to *a similar arrangement* in the letter to de Gaulle on 21 December 1962. There can be little doubt that the Elysee read both letters and the lapsus thus contributed to de Gaulle rejection.

⁶² Bernard Guetta, *Geopolitics, State reason*, Ed. Aion, Buc 2000, p. 100.

⁶³ Only one Meeting and one Phone call in three years.