Britain and a New World Role:

The Nassau Agreement 1962 and its effect on International and Anglo-European Relations, and the Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship’

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Claire Paula Melland
Abstract

Britain and a New World Role: The Nassau Agreement 1962 and its effect on International and Anglo-European Relations, and the Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship’

This research focuses on the Nassau Agreement of 1962 and its effects on International relations. The Nassau Agreement can not be analysed however without looking at the Camp David Agreement of 1960 and the cancellation of Skybolt and the crisis that this created within British and American relations. While the Skybolt Crisis is used as a symbol of the failures of the Special Relationship the subsequent Nassau Agreement can be seen as an example of that Special Relationship in action. However the Special Relationship is just part of the complex and wide ranging story that also encompasses the Anglo-French relationship in the 1960s, the after effects of the Suez crisis, the changing nature of America’s nuclear strategy, Britain’s decline and a lack of communication between allies. The Nassau Agreement was also coloured by the context of 1962; the Cuban Missile crisis, the issues in Berlin, Communism and the Cold War. The consequences of the Nassau Agreement, the Multilateral Force, the long standing nuclear relationship between Britain and America and, to some, de Gaulle’s veto of the British application to the EEC all effect how the Agreement was judged by historians, politicians and commentators alike. It is also important to look at the characters involved in the Crisis and the Agreement such as Robert McNamara and David Orsmby Gore and the relationship between Harold Macmillan and Dwight Eisenhower until 1960 and John F Kennedy there after. It is only when all of these issues and consequences are examined together can the Nassau Agreement be truly understood.
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Introduction

On 19 December 1962 British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and American President John F Kennedy met at Nassau in the Bahamas for a pre-scheduled Anglo-American summit meeting. However, what had originally been planned as a meeting of allies had turned into one of the most significant moments for the Special Relationship and the future of Britain’s nuclear role. On 21 December 1962 a joint communiqué regarding their meeting at Nassau was issued in which, amongst the review of the state of East West relations after Cuba and other political issues, was a statement on Nuclear Defence Systems that ended British involvement with the Skybolt missile and began their relationship with Polaris.¹ The agreement bound Britain and America to a nuclear co-operation unlike any seen before and went much further than the Camp David Agreement Macmillan signed with Dwight Eisenhower in 1960 which gave Britain the Skybolt missile and therefore nuclear power. Unlike Skybolt, Polaris required a greater dependency on American technology and engineering; it was far more advanced, would require specialist American aided training and would end the Royal Air Forces involvement with Britain’s nuclear deterrent as it moved from air based to seaborne.² It also tied Britain to increasing conventional forces and, more importantly, tied Britain to the emerging American ideal of a NATO nuclear force.³ The Nassau Agreement was therefore a major moment in British history; however this is only part of a story that touches on so many aspects of political relations and domestic politics.

Many historians look at the Nassau Agreement in terms of one single aspect such as the Special Relationship while some look at the agreement and the meeting itself as an

¹ Nassau Communique, 21 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.
² Record of A Meeting held at Bali-Hai the Bahamas 19 December 1962 PREM 11/4229.
³ Nassau Communique, 21 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.
insular moment, disconnected from its wider context. However, very few look at the agreement in the context of all the issues that surrounded it, as well as the Agreement as an issue on its own. Many of the American biographies of Kennedy either bypass the Agreement or give it a fleeting mention. A prime example of this is Michael O’Brien’s comment that the Skybolt crisis was a ‘touchy issue’ which ‘did create a brief fuss.’ However, the more in-depth analysis found in autobiographies of some of the key figures in the Kennedy Administration seem to imply that this crisis was more than a ‘touchy issue’ and was an important part of the Kennedy’s term of office. Although, due to his untimely death, it is not possible to get Kennedy’s own reflections on Skybolt and Nassau, the commissioning of the Neustadt study into the problems and the mistakes in the lead-up to Nassau perhaps speaks for him.

The Skybolt crisis touches on a number of issues that the world faced in the early 1960s. It is an example of the breakdown of communication between allies, an example of the division between Britain and America in terms of power status and an example of how the fear of Communism and nuclear war shaped political thinking in the Cold War era. Europe and Britain were searching for new identities and roles in what was becoming a dark and dangerous age, especially for those that were not superpowers with the security of power and nuclear weaponry. It was the gap that had arisen between America’s nuclear strategy and European understanding that allowed the fear to surpass

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any confidence that Europe had of American security and so Skybolt and Nassau become more than just another missile or just another agreement. For Britain, Skybolt was the key to security and political status and for the Europeans it was a symbol of Britain being outside of Europe. The problems really arose not from Skybolt’s technical limitations but the changing of the American administration and with it the change of American defence strategy and thinking. This meant that simply re-negotiating the Skybolt agreement was impossible and the whole issue became politically loaded for both the Americas and the British.

The Special Relationship is contentious issue for historians, politicians and commentators alike. Skybolt is often cited as either a high point in the Special Relationship or an example of the myth of the Special Relationship as an equal and meaningful relationship and exposing the reality of British subservience. As Reynolds comments, ‘The Polaris deal…was at first glance a tribute to the Special Relationship…Yet on closer inspection, the agreement underlined Britain’s dependence - obliged to take whatever the USA offered.’ However it can also be argued that the Special Relationship stifled the expansion of British influence in Europe and led to the continuation of the psychological separation between Britain and mainland Europe. As the Skybolt crisis erupted just as negotiations were taking place, the link between the failure of Britain to enter the EEC and the Nassau Agreement have been forever cemented. As May and Treverton suggest

‘It is easy to argue that British interests, and probably American ones as well, would have been better served in the realm of defence as well as others had

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9 Note by the Vice Chief of Air Staff, Ministry of Defence, British Nuclear Study Group, Implications of An American Decision to Cancel Skybolt, 6 December 1962. FO 371/173340.
Britain opted earlier and more firmly into Europe. It is also easy to argue that the tug of the Special Relationship was one reason why it did not do so."\textsuperscript{11}

One of the key issues of Nassau was that unlike the original Skybolt agreement, Polaris missiles were sold subject to them being made available to a Multilateral Force (MLF) under NATO control.\textsuperscript{12} Many works by members of the Administration look at the Nassau Agreement and the MLF issue in quite some depth, as well as the issues of nuclear policy and European uncertainty surrounding American defence policies and the reasoning behind the Kennedy Administration’s advocacy of the flexible response policy.\textsuperscript{13} These texts counter the view that the Multilateral Force was a major part of the Kennedy Administration’s vision for the future of Europe. As Ball comments ‘Though, I was, of course, generally aware of the proposals for a multilateral force, I did not at first take them seriously.’\textsuperscript{14} These studies frequently lack an understanding of the British point of view and many of them underestimate the significance that the British attached to Skybolt.\textsuperscript{15}

Many studies of de Gaulle’s role also overlook the complexity of the British situation; they either judge de Gaulle as a dramatic and malicious leader who vetoed the EEC application out of child-like spite, or paint Macmillan as a man who chose to be America’s satellite rather than a European partner.\textsuperscript{16} Macmillan had staked the future of his government and his reputation as a Prime Minister on two issues, both of which looked in danger of collapsing beneath him. As Ward notes, ‘Macmillan’s attempt to satisfy such a daunting array of conflicting interests, domestic, Commonwealth,

\textsuperscript{12} Record of A Meeting held at Bali-Hai the Bahamas 19 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.
\textsuperscript{13} Schlesinger Jr, \textit{Report to JFK}, pp. 672-679; Ball, \textit{The Past Has Another Pattern}, pp. 266-270; Rusk, \textit{As I Saw It}, pp. 263-266
\textsuperscript{14} Ball, \textit{The Past Has Another Pattern}, p. 261.
\textsuperscript{15} Schlesinger Jr, \textit{A Thousand Days}, p. 662.
European, and American, was perhaps doomed from the beginning’. The widespread belief that Britain was in retreat, at least after the Suez crisis, had a significant effect on the British Cabinet. As Morgan comments ‘If one image of Britain in the early sixties was of economic stagnation and maladroit conduct, the other was of declining overseas stature, masked by still inflated military commitment across the globe.’

Dean Acheson’s West Point speech 5 December 1962 declared that ‘Britain had lost an Empire and not yet found a role.’ Although Acheson’s speech vocalised what was whispered or unspoken in the recesses of Westminster, it made failure at Nassau impossible; Macmillan had to come away with something to try and salvage some pride after being put under such a microscope. Paradoxically it also made success impossible; no matter what Macmillan got he was trading sovereignty and British power for whatever he could get from the Americans; where once it had been Britain who held the power, now she was bargaining for a small slice of it. As Brinkley comments, ‘Macmillan accepted Kennedy’s watered down offer, which became known as the Nassau Agreement, to save face and to camouflage yet another blow to British pride.’

It was therefore the issues of 1962 as a whole that created the Skybolt crisis, shaped the Nassau Agreement and set in motion consequences which included the EEC veto. It is only when one considers all that came before, all the differences and all the power struggles that it is truly possible to understand why the Nassau Agreement happened and why the consequences of it were so far reaching.

The early 1960s were a critical period for Britain, as a collection of consecutive political issues created an uncertainty within the British mindset. The Suez crisis of

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17 Ward, Stuart ‘Kennedy, Britain and the European Community’, p. 332.
1956 and Macmillan’s ‘Winds of Change’ speech on 3 February 1960 had already sown the seeds of doubt in the minds of many Britons that the UK was not the world leader it had once been. 1962 itself saw Robert McNamara’s ‘no cities’ speech and Dean Acheson’s West Point speech, both of which challenged Britain’s world role and Britain’s application to join the EEC. Duncan Sandys’ defence review in 1957 saw, for the first time, Britain having to cut back on its military spending, despite its claims to be a Great power, at a time when the Superpowers were vastly increasing theirs thanks to the arms race. It was also an important moment of reaffirmation of the Government’s commitment to nuclear weapons as an integral part of defence policy.

The Skybolt Crisis that led to the Nassau Agreement has had many interpretations, beginning with the reporting of the Agreement in the US and British press. The publication of Harold Macmillan’s memoirs was perhaps the first time the Agreement was emphasised by one of those involved, at least from the British point of view. Arthur Schlesinger’s A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, though technically not a memoir, does devote a great deal of time to the Skybolt issue though Schlesinger himself was not actively involved in the proceedings. The later American memoirs acknowledge the crisis over Skybolt, and the confusion that seems to haunt it still. An early memoir by Kennedy’s long-time friend and aides Kenneth O’Donnell and David Powers, suggests that it was a political mess created because McNamara, ‘no

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21 Draft of Defence: Outline of Future Policy, Presented by the Minister of Defence to Parliament, 1 April 1957, CAB 129/86.
22 Dominic Sandbrook, Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain From Suez to The Beatles (Abacus, 2005) pp. 239-240; Draft of Defence: Outline of Future Policy, Presented by the Minister of Defence to Parliament, 1 April 1957, CAB 129/86.
politician himself had failed to realize the political implications\(^{26}\) and that Kennedy saw a fellow politician in trouble and America had to ‘help him out of this mess that we’ve put him in.’\(^{27}\) Richard Neustadt’s report is one key piece of evidence in the puzzle over how the Skybolt crisis became so critical. The published version, with Neustadt’s own review of archive material that had been unavailable to him in 1963, offers a whole new dimension to the original report.\(^{28}\) Unfortunately for the British perspective, neither the Defence Secretary Peter Thorneycroft, nor the Ambassador to the United States, David Ormsby Gore, key figures in the Nassau meeting, kept a diary, or wrote an autobiography although they were both interviewed as part of the Neustadt report.\(^{29}\) The way in which the two supposed allies allowed miscommunication over a small issue to become a threatening crisis has opened the door to criticisms of the American administration’s cavalier attitude towards the British need for independence and a role in the World. For historians like Young and Ashton the whole issue of nuclear weapons was not their efficacy but the political leverage which came with their possession.\(^{30}\) This was the main attraction for the British Government and it was this that the Americans did not fully grasp. The Americans operated on a different level to their allies when it came to nuclear ideology. One of the key issues for Britain and the rest of Europe was the seemingly ever changing American nuclear policy. In the years between the Eisenhower Government and the Johnson Government, the American stance changed three times, however none of these changes were clearly explained.

\(^{27}\) Ibid, p. 347.
\(^{28}\) Neustadt, *Report to JFK*, pp. 124-137.
\(^{29}\) Ibid.
The Special Relationship is accepted by historians such as Howard as more than just a co-operative friendship between America and Britain in which both regarded the other as influential to future policy. For many historians, the outcome of Nassau appears to be a highlight of the Special Relationship.\(^{31}\) However, it can be argued that the Special Relationship, in the case of the Agreement at least, was one-sided affair. Britain seemed to be the only one who gained from it and the only one who regarded it so highly. The Special Relationship is seen by less positive commentators as a fallacy or at least, a relationship that was not as special as the British Government liked to claim.\(^{32}\) The outcome of the Nassau Agreement could then be seen as a victory for the British, based on the idea that British independence could be maintained through a policy of interdependence with America. Britain was not naive enough to believe that it could play a global role in a nuclear age without help from its superpower ally across the Atlantic. The relationship between America and Britain was built on much more than just a shared language. The relationship was fostered by a shared vision in many respects, but mainly by a shared respect and a fondness between the leaders of the two countries, especially between Roosevelt and Churchill and Eisenhower and Macmillan. It survived problems, such as disagreement over Suez and later over Vietnam, due to the fact that that the relationship served both parties in some way; Britain gained from the association with deals like the Nassau Agreement and the subsequent Trident deal.\(^{33}\) America’s gain was much more subtle. In Britain they had a true European ally, the French and the Germans were far too suspicious of the American ‘Trojan Horse’ and while their defensive plans lay in Europe, America needed a friend and Britain fitted the


bill perfectly. It was for this reason that America supported the British application into the EEC, and for many, it was also the reason why it failed.\textsuperscript{34}

The move to buy Britain’s nuclear weapons from America led to Macmillan moving away from the claim of independence to one of interdependence. This meant that Britain and the US were connected by mutual principles and aims and as such sharing of knowledge and technology could exist within this partnership without dominance or dependence. Britain believed that interdependence could be achieved without losing at least the pretence of independence.\textsuperscript{35} However, some historians see the Nassau Agreement as the death knell for any kind of independence for the British.\textsuperscript{36} The veto from De Gaulle is linked with the outcome of Nassau not only due to the unfortunate timing of the two events but what the agreement represented. Critics see the Nassau Agreement as the moment when Britain finally made the decision to align itself with the Americans. For many historians the Nassau Agreement ended any hope of acceptance into the EEC, as it showed that Britain was not ready and was not committed enough to Europe.\textsuperscript{37} However it can also be argued that the evidence suggests that de Gaulle had already made his decision to veto Britain’s entry. The Nassau Agreement either provided a convenient excuse or a prime example of the concerns de Gaulle had about the British Application.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{38} Ashton, \textit{Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War}, p148; Nunnerley, \textit{President Kennedy and Britain}, pp. 165-166.
For some, the Nassau Agreement was a highlight in the relationship between Macmillan and Kennedy, and is as telling of their unique personalities and friendship as it is about the relationship between Britain and America. Studies into the two personalities offer a great insight into the Agreement itself. Kennedy was elected in 1960 as a bright, young leader hoping to take a bright, young country to frontiers not as yet fully explored and to cement America’s status as the most powerful countries in the sixties. Kennedy was elected in an era of hope and belief. Macmillan came to power after the Suez Crisis, charged with pulling the once great power of the United Kingdom back up to the status which it felt that it deserved. These two powers seemed to be at odds with each other and their leaders seemed to be too different to connect in the same way in which Macmillan had been able to work with Eisenhower. The Nassau Agreement was, however, not purely shared by Macmillan and Kennedy; leading figures in the American Administration such as Rusk, McNamara and Ball all contributed to the outcome, and shed light on the American perceptions in their memoirs. Unfortunately, many of the key figures such as Kennedy, Ormsby Gore and Thorneycroft have not written memoirs, or in the case of Ormsby Gore had a biography written, but other figures involved less in the Agreement itself and more in the politics surrounding it, like Solly Zuckerman, Lord Home and Harold Watkinson, do offer some insight into the wider contexts. In terms of the EEC, biographies of de Gaulle are obviously an important element, as is the perspective of Edward Heath, Britain’s chief

negotiator in Brussels, also offers a view of what effect, if any Nassau had on events there during the discussions over Britain’s application.⁴²

The aim of this thesis is to bring together all of the elements that created the Skybolt crisis and the Nassau Agreement and all that were affected by the outcome in order to truly evaluate the significance of the Agreement in the political history of the international relations of Britain, America and France and the Special Relationship. Chapter one will deal with the issue of the political background and the historical context on the 1960s and how this impacted on the Skybolt crisis and the subsequent Nassau Agreement. Chapter two addresses the contentious issue of how the crisis developed and the Nassau meeting itself. Chapter Three attempts to analyse the French question, from de Gaulle’s position to the timing of his Veto and the effects Nassau had on the negotiations. The final chapter looks at the long lasting effects of Skybolt and Nassau with focus on the MLF and the effects Nassau had on the Special Relationship.

Chapter One: Background or Finding a New Role

To understand the effects which the Skybolt Crisis and the subsequent Nassau Agreement had, it is important to look at the two incidents more closely, from both sides of the Atlantic, and determine the causes of the crisis and the motives of those reaching the agreement. This is vital as the effects of the decision-making can not be judged without analysis of the circumstances and the reasoning behind them. The Nassau Agreement was born not just from the cancellation of Skybolt and the way in which this was handled, but also from the geo-political context in which it took place.

No incident is ever disconnected from the wider milieu of time and place, and the Nassau Agreement is one issue that was deeply coloured by the past and the present situation that both the American and British Governments found themselves in 1962. The Cold War was continuously erupting into small pockets of hot conflict and Britain and America were facing new challenges as well as new opportunities. It is important to understand the circumstances of 1962 and the factors that exacerbated a small issue and created a crisis which would shape the partnership between two allies and the future of British defence policy.

Suez had had a great impact on British pride in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It had been an embarrassing debacle that had, albeit briefly, alienated them from their closest ally and had shown the world their limitations; Britain’s lack of power was publically exposed and for the first time in a long time they were decisively humiliated. The crisis drew huge condemnation from the Americans and in the post Suez period much of the political attention was given to re-establishing the ties that had made the relationship between Britain and the USA so special. The British Government, now under the

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44 Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, p. 228.
leadership of Macmillan, was hoping it had not burned its political bridges. Suez was a turning point for British politics; the age of the Empire was passing and now Britain had to face an uncertain future in a superpower era. By 1956 Britain was in completely unfamiliar territory, damaged financially and psychologically by two World Wars and a victim of its pre-war strength. Britain was overstretched and underfunded, and unable to keep up its world wide commitments. By 1962, the ‘Winds of Change’ were stirring and rapid decolonization was underway. However this brought with a loss of international status: what was the British Empire without colonies to watch over? The Commonwealth seemed to be the future of the British Empire but that was not going to solve the problem of Britain’s status in the post war world.

A simplistic interpretation of the end of the Empire suggests that all power was handed over to the colonies, making them democratic and independent without any hardship or bloodshed. This is an oversimplification, the end of the Empire as seen by Acheson was really only the beginnings of an end. Suez was a symbolic moment; Britain had been decolonizing gradually since the end of the Second World War but had continued to act as a world power, Suez was the moment when the facade dropped and Britain had to face the political impact its new economical weakness had on her position. Britain had to find a new path; a new way of being politically influential in a changing world. The difficulty for many Britons in 1962 was that the role they had to play had yet to be cast. Britain had the will, the desire but not the means to continue its role as ruler of the waves and the peoples of many lands. Instead it would be as an elder

statesman, garnering the admiration for what had been achieved whilst standing back to let the younger nation of America lead the way.\textsuperscript{49}

International issues such as the experiences in the Congo in 1959 and the increasingly confrontational rhetoric emanating from the Kremlin, brought into focus Britain’s new reality. Going it alone regardless of what the American had to say was no longer a viable option. Losing the battle of wills against a former colonial nation was now a risk and losing face among the leaders of the powerful elite was a major concern. Britain was, for the first time, being called to order by a superpower in the way it had done to many a nation in the past.\textsuperscript{50}

Many historians differ in their assessment of Britain in the late 1950s and the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{51} It is hard to argue that Britain was not in the midst of a decline in the post war period, it was war weary not only from the after effects of the Second World War but also due to wars of independence in Aden and Kenya, the Communist uprising in Malaya and the realisation that vast Empire and sphere of influence that had underpinned its strength was now a major economical strain. Britain was a victim of its own influence after the war: while many countries with smaller imperial responsibilities struggled to regain their stature, Britain’s position was even more difficult. The end of the empire was not the relief that it should have been, and as Andrew Marr comments ‘The Truth was that Britain was a bystander in the new superpower world. We had little leverage left with the American’s; the Empire was hurriedly being dismantled, so where could Britain stand in the new World?’\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{52} Andrew Marr’s A History of Modern Britain, BBC 2.
However, it is important to note the subtle difference between losing power and declining power. Britain was still a strong force in the Cold War era and although its power was not at the level it had once been it did not crumble away entirely or immediately. Today, Britain is still a leading figure in many international organizations and is still politically a force to be reckoned with. However, in 1962 Britain did not know that its influence would still be felt in the next decade, let alone the next millennium. Two World Wars had dented its morale; it had nothing but the Commonwealth to attach itself to in order to show the world it was still important until Macmillan fully embraced the Special Relationship, pushed forward with nuclear independence and successfully joined the EEC and by the end of 1962 all three seemed to be teetering on the brink of collapse.53

For some historians Suez was a more important as a key turning point for the Special Relationship between the Britain and the USA as it defined the balance of power for both sides and demonstrated that Britain was the unequal partner in this pairing.54 It was the moment that Britain realised its place, as Piers Brendon comments the crucial mistake of Suez was not consulting the Americans and they in turn recognized ‘their Country’s satellite status’55, perhaps for the first time.

The decline of British power status cannot really be argued; its economic standing after the war, the loss of Empire, and the emergence of the Soviet Union and the United States as superpowers meant that Britain’s power had to shift to a new role of ally and a leader of nations not through empire but through skilful playing of the diplomatic game.56 Under Macmillan, the country moved forward entering into nuclear deals with America, forging closer bonds and starting the process of entering the EEC. Though the

54 Barnet, *Verdict of Peace*, p. 514.
rights and wrongs of these decisions can be, and later in this study will be, investigated the heart of the matter is that the country was moving towards a goal. As James asserts ‘Under Macmillan’s adroit guidance, Britain shed burdens but stayed a great power, theoretically capable of resisting nuclear intimidation by Soviet Union, so long as America delivered the appropriate gadgetry. On the surface at least, imperial decline had not gone hand in hand with a complete loss of standing in the world.’

Timing was a major issue in the run up to the Skybolt crisis. Many smaller incidents that, had they happened separately, might not have had much of an impact, seemed to conspire to run concurrently and become elements of larger issue. The original Skybolt agreement was made in May 1960 to provide Britain with 144 missiles to be fitted to the Vulcan, Valiant and Victor RAF bombers. This would give Britain a mobile intercontinental ballistic missile force by extending the life of its V-force bombers. Britain’s own nuclear program, Blue Streak, was still the weapon of choice for British defence as late as 4 February 1959 but was deemed too expensive and too slow in its progress to be successful and was terminated in favour of Skybolt leaving the British deterrent dependent on the progress of the American Douglas Company and this ambitious missile system. Blue Streak was a relatively primitive missile, its development was a long and costly process and it was far behind the levels of technological sophistication of the missile programs being developed by both the Americans and the Russians leaving it vulnerable to attack and easily defended in attack. The missile was a static medium range ballistic missile in an age where static

58 Record of Meeting held at Camp David Maryland, between the Prime Minister and President Eisenhower, 29 March 1960, CAB 133/243.
59 Memorandum by the Secretary of Defence, Statement of Defence, 4 February 1959, CAB 129/96.
60 Harold Watkinson, SKYBOLT Memorandum of Understanding, 6 June 1960, CAB 21/4979.
61 Cabinet Conclusions, Meeting of the Cabinet, 13 April 1960, CAB 128/34.
missiles had been abandoned for mobile means of delivery.\textsuperscript{62} It was not abandoned altogether however and it became part of a British attempt to launch a satellite into space.\textsuperscript{63} This was later abandoned due to expense but Blue Streak was used in the phase one of the European Launcher Development Organisation during 1964 and 1965.\textsuperscript{64}

However Skybolt missile was just one of a number in development and other missiles, such as the Polaris, Hound Dog and Minuteman missiles were developed faster and were more successful in their testing. This rendered Skybolt surplus to American requirements and this, coupled with the spiralling cost of its development and domestic budgetary pressures, led to the Kennedy Administration cancelling the weapon in 1962. This came at a time when Britain was vulnerable and pushing forward with an application to join the EEC which was had not been welcomed as had been either expected or hoped.\textsuperscript{65}

On 5 December 1962, as part of a speech which Acheson made at the West Point Military Academy, one line caught the eye of British journalists and seemed to sum up the inner thinking of Britain’s closest ally and prove to many the subservient nature of the Special Relationship.\textsuperscript{66} Whilst it is true to say that Acheson’s assessment that ‘Britain had lost an Empire and not yet found a role’ was at best blunt and at worst insulting there was an element of truth in the statement that could not be denied, even if interpretations differ between historians.\textsuperscript{67} Economic decline continued to blight British attempts to keep up with the changing landscape of geo-politics since the Second World War. The cancellation of the British nuclear deterrent in 1960 had been due to financial

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} F.A. Bishop, Memorandum for the Cabinet, Blue Streak: Space Research, 19 July 1960, CAB 129/102.
\textsuperscript{64} Cabinet Conclusions, Meeting of the Cabinet, 21 July 1964 CAB 128/38.
\textsuperscript{65} Fisher, \textit{Harold Macmillan}, (Weinfield and Nicolson Ltd, 1982) p. 428
\textsuperscript{66} Pagedas, \textit{Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the French Problem} p. 244; Barnet, \textit{Verdict of Peace}, p. 514; Brinkley, ‘Dean Acheson and John Kennedy’, p. 289.
\textsuperscript{67} Christopher Coker ‘Foreign and Defence Policy’ in Jonathan Hollowell, \textit{Britain Since 1945}, p. 16; Brinkley, ‘Dean Acheson and The Special Relationship’ p. 608.
restraints and the restructuring of British defence spending in the Sandys White Paper of 1957 was also due to budgetary issues.  

Sandys White Paper marked a major turning point in the defence policy of the Macmillan government. Its proposals had a profound effect on everything from national service to regiment mergers, from reducing conventional forces to pushing the nuclear deterrent to the heart of the future of British defence strategy. This contrasted greatly with the American vision in 1960 of increasing conventional forces and using the nuclear option as a last resort. The Sandys report recommended not only the end of conscription but also vast reduction in the armed forces manpower from 690,000 to 375,000, reduction of Armed forces in the Rhine from 77,000 to 64,000 and defence spending to be cut from 10 per cent to 7 per cent by 1962.  

In economic terms, the nuclear deterrent could not co-exist with a large scale increase of conventional fighting methods, and to the British the option of the deterrent seemed the most cost effective option in the long term. America did experience the same problem, defence spending for Europe was unsustainably high, especially considering America’s geographical distance from the continent, and thus it was decided that Europe should pay more for the defence of its own land. America already had the burden of the cost of development, running and improvements of a nuclear arsenal to at least rival, if not outstrip that of the USSR.  

All of this created a need for the Americans to find a way to encourage European nations to invest a higher proportion of their defence budgets in conventional forces and

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68 Draft of Defence: Outline of Future Policy, Presented by the Minister of Defence to Parliament, CAB 129/86.
71 Future Policy Study 1960-70, CAB 134/1929; Sandbrook, Never Had It So Good, p. 240.
free the American budget to focus on the nuclear option. This led to an increased interest in the Multilateral Force ideal within some sections of the Kennedy administration. The budget constraints felt by the Americans also led to the Skybolt cancellation as the weapon was viewed as too expensive and lacked any real defensive merit.\(^{72}\)

Therefore Britain was not the only post war country to feel the economic strain, but by 1962 several others such as France and Germany had begun to see an improvement due in part to their membership of the European Economic Community.\(^{73}\) It is true to say that Britain had ‘never had it so good’, but what was its role to be in a nuclear age? Its attempts to produce a bomb ‘with the bloody union jack on top’\(^{74}\) had been costly and unproductive; progress had been made but in an escalating arms race the results were outdated almost before they were achieved. The missile race had also led to the creation of more sophisticated missile defence which could easily defend against the limited technological sophistication of the Blue Steak missile.\(^{75}\) The relationship with the USA became Britain’s only sure hope of keeping up in the nuclear field.\(^{76}\) This has been deemed by many historians as selling the dream of independence, as a definitive symbol of Britain’s decline. Interdependence, as it was sold to the general public was, to many, barely disguised dependence.\(^{77}\) However, it can also be seen as the opposite, a way of keeping a place at the nuclear table, by embracing limitations and finding a way


\(^{74}\) Ernest Bevin quoted in The Improbable Mr Atlee BBC 4, 9 October 2005, David Reynolds.

\(^{75}\) British Nuclear Deterrent Study Group, *Implications of An American decision to cancel Skybolt*, FO 371/173340.


around them rather than simply allowing the superpowers to dominate, keeping the special relationship strong and being able to have a say in world politics.\textsuperscript{78}

French and British reactions to the post war circumstances markedly different, and herein lies one of the main issues in Anglo-Franco relations there after. Britain reacted by forging ever-closer ties to its Atlantic ally, especially after Suez, with a few tentative allegiances with Europe, co-founding the Council of Europe on 5 May 1949 and supporting the European Coal and Steel Community; France chose to look closer to home for her allegiances, as a founder of a European Coal and Steel Community, a leading actor in the negotiations which led to the Treaty of Rome and a defence policy that led to it leaving NATO in 1966.\textsuperscript{79}

It might be argued that Britain stood at a crossroads in 1962 with the Special Relationship on one side and the EEC on the other. The two were not necessarily incompatible on paper or to Macmillan as Britain could, in theory, have the best of both worlds. This problem was not in the compatibility of the two commitments but how to get past the entrance negotiations: the Special Relationship could survive Britain’s entry into the EEC however entry to ‘the six’ seemed reliant on the Special Relationship coming to an end.\textsuperscript{80} In the eyes of De Gaulle, Europe could only function successfully and truly independently without American influence; to the Europeans, American involvement usually meant American control.\textsuperscript{81} These fears were not completely unfounded, American ideology was to lead especially in terms of nuclear issues, what

\textsuperscript{78} Clark, \textit{Nuclear Diplomacy and The Special Relationship}, p. 419.


\textsuperscript{80} H.G. Nicholas, \textit{The US and Britain}, (University of Chicago, 1975) p. 166.

\textsuperscript{81} Talks with President de Gaulle, Future Methods of consultation within the Western Alliance, Brief by the Foreign Office, 10 December 1962, CAB 133/245.
was deemed to be co-operation by the Americans often felt like polite dictatorship to other nations. 82

The issue with Acheson’s speech was therefore not how accurate it was or how ill advised his comments were or, indeed, if his comments were taken out of context. It is more significant that this outburst came during a period when the Macmillan Government was especially sensitive to criticism. 83 Macmillan was indeed governing a country that could not quite find its place in the Cold War era and it could no longer command the same unreserved power it had once held in its hands. America and Russia had created a new balance of power after the Second World War while Britain was still recovering from the psychological and economic effects of the war. Even in Europe the union of six nations in 1957 had pushed Britain’s status back further and the place it held as broker to the Americans was under threat from this new development, one which Britain had chosen not to be part of when Macmillan’s government decided against signing the Treaty of Rome in 1957. 84

Some believe that Britain simply attempted to ride on the coat tails of her more successful allies in a hope to keep some of its power. Howard Temperley states that:

‘Britain’s principal post-war preoccupation had been handling decline, which, at least in the eyes of Whitehall effectively ruled out the notion of its striking out in bold new directions...Britain’s rulers had accordingly sought to maintain close links with the United States in the hope of thereby being able to go on playing a leading role in the world’s affairs.’ 85

83 Brinkley, ‘Dean Acheson and the Special Relationship’, p. 608.
This is perhaps true, Britain did attempt to build great store in the ideology of the Special Relationship after the rough patch over Suez. At this moment it could be argued that Britain did strike out in a new direction, though perhaps in only a limited way. No matter what the rights or wrongs of the deal itself, the idea that a declining power could get something so significant from her ‘superior’ special partner shows that Britain’s decline can not be simply measured by what it lost or what it had to sacrifice but also what it was able to achieve despite all this. As John Dickie suggests ‘Acheson’s strictures failed to acknowledge how quickly Macmillan had eradicated the imperialist image of Britain in America resulting from Eden’s Suez adventure. If Mac had not established the sort of new role Britain was capable of playing, he could not have persuaded Kennedy to make the Nassau deal on Polaris missiles.’

The problems caused by the lack of nuclear kinship were illustrated by the Cuban missile Crisis of October 1962, where decisions were seemingly made unilaterally by America about the defence of the free world. The Cuban Missile Crisis was a major event of 1962, studied widely and with deep and wide reaching consequences for many. It was the moment nuclear weapons and the idea of nuclear war seemed to become real. For thirteen days, the future of the world was in doubt, a truly major event where diplomacy and political wrangling were literally a matter of life and death. However in terms of the political scene in November 1962 through to January 1963 its significance lies in the effect it had on the mindset of the American’s, the underlying issue of how nations could still be independent and could still be involved in their own defence in a nuclear age and the widening gap between American knowledge and

86 Dickie, Special No More, p. 131.
European understanding of rapidly changing nuclear thinking and strategy. Kennedy did indeed go eyeball to eyeball with Khrushchev but he forgot to discuss this with his allies in Europe except for a few consultations and a few conversations. If Khrushchev had not blinked, if nuclear war had not been avoided, Europe would have been a key target due to the issues in Berlin, for potentially both sides. This idea of ‘annihilation without consultation’ was one that was hard to stomach for most Europeans – something that the Americans did not seem to appreciate.

For the Americans Cuba was the threat of Armageddon and they had survived, kept their reputation in tact and had, in theory, saved western Europe from a nuclear war. The Americans emerged, at least on the surface, as victors. This perhaps led them to be distracted and blinded to the significance of what they deemed to be small issues to other powers they had to deal with in the aftermath. In terms of Skybolt, cancellation of the missile system would have seemed to the American eye a technical military decision; however they overlooked the significance it had to the British and they failed to see the intricate nature of nuclear politics from the viewpoint of a less nuclear aware ally.

Cuba scared the European nations in a way that the American Administration was not politically sensitive enough to pick up on. The change of nuclear thinking from 1960 to 1962 was dramatic and was viewed with suspicion in Western Europe. Eisenhower had been very vocal and forthright in his assessment that nuclear supremacy was the key to successful defence policy against the threat of the Soviet Bloc. The missile race and the controversy created when Russia launched Sputnik were all part of this massive

retaliation theory; only the threat of nuclear response to an act of aggression would deter Russian expansionism and the Communist threat. Kennedy’s move to the ideal of a flexible response seemed at odds with his inauguration pledge to ‘Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty’ and his statement later in the same speech that, ‘We dare not tempt them with weakness. For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed.’ ⁹³

The flexible response ideology which Kennedy and his Administration promoted was a move back towards the idea of using all methods possible before resorting to the nuclear option. Therefore, any act of aggression made by the USSR would be met proportionally, rather than immediately responding with a nuclear strike. Possibly the best example of this response in action was Cuba; when the missiles were found in Cuba, a blockade was the first response with only later building up the momentum towards a final option of a nuclear response. ⁹⁴ The core idea of flexible response was that the decision to utilize the nuclear missile was a last resort and not the only resort. ⁹⁵ However, on closer inspection, the flexible response was not an admission by the Americans that they were insufficiently armed, but a statement that their arms were sufficient to deal with a threat in a graduated way, answering an act of aggression but without having to go for the nuclear option straight away. Nuclear arms under the Kennedy Administration were a deterrent and a last chance saloon on the landscape of

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⁹³ John F Kennedy Inaugural Address
http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/003POF03Inaugural01201961.htm.
the new Frontier; to be used when all other options had failed, something that hopefully would never happen.\textsuperscript{96}

The Eisenhower idea of massive retaliation does seem, with the knowledge and foresight afforded through the distance of time, as a dangerous option. Nuclear war could and probably would annihilate most if not all of the world’s population. The idea that any act of aggression would be met by a nuclear response seems to be ludicrous, though the idea behind it was that no opposing leader would risk nuclear war, thus creating a ‘balance of terror’.\textsuperscript{97} However, this relied on the control of world leaders over their arsenals and authority to remain intact. Kennedy’s flexible response was deemed by some to be a lessening of the hawkish arrogance that made America what it was.\textsuperscript{98} However, it can be argued that this was in fact an evolution of the way in which America took control of their role as ‘leader’ and ‘defender’ of the Western World, a maturing of a young country, from a bullying attitude to a more fair and just response to those who choose to disagree with the might of American dollar imperialism.\textsuperscript{99} As Freedman comments:

\begin{quote}
‘The administration wanted Europe to recognise that the lesson learned was the need for flexible response. But Cuba had highlighted another tension in the alliance. While its management had impressed Europeans and strengthened Kennedy’s position as the leader of the alliance it had also revealed their dependence upon the United States.’\textsuperscript{100}
\end{quote}

The Americans believed that they had been in the same classroom as the Europeans during the lesson of Cuba, however by the very nature of the missile race and the

\textsuperscript{96} Freedman, \textit{Kennedy Wars}, p. 284.
\textsuperscript{97} Scott, \textit{The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Threat of Nuclear War}, p. 116; Weigley, \textit{The American Way of War}, p. 404.
\textsuperscript{98} Brinkley, ‘Dean Acheson and John Kennedy’, p. 315.
\textsuperscript{99} Schlesinger Jr, \textit{A Thousand Days}, p. 657.
\textsuperscript{100} Freedman, \textit{Kennedy Wars}, p. 276.
exclusion of the European leaders during the crisis itself, the Americans had been alone. The Europeans had learnt a very different lesson, and it is this lack of understanding and sense of patronising exclusion from the big decisions that helped to create fear and the desire for nuclear proliferation within the alliance.\(^{101}\)

The lack of communication between America and its allies has been offered as evidence of both the Special Relationship’s strength and an example of its fallacy. Telephone communication between Macmillan and Kennedy during this time and the close relationship between Kennedy and Macmillan and their respective countries are used to assert that the Special Relationship was not just an ideal but a reality. As Reynolds comments ‘The two leaders spoke frequently over the phone during the crisis and Ormsby Gore persuaded Kennedy to take certain significant decisions.’\(^ {102}\) Certainly this does seem to be more than any of the other political figures in Europe got during the peak of the crisis. Alistair Horne also states that ‘It was during the Cuban missile week that the ‘Special Relationship’ reached a new peak, with Kennedy telephoning Macmillan to inform him of blow by blow developments at regular intervals’. However it is Horne’s use of the word ‘inform’ and his following addition that ‘It is important, in the context, to note that Kennedy’s telephone calls were purely informative and in no way seeking advice or even endorsement,’\(^ {103}\) which really puts these telephone calls in their true context. It is not to say that the relationship was not special, that a deeper friendship and alliance did not exist between the two men, but it is not the equal and politically enhancing relationship that would be seen had Kennedy invited Macmillan to be sat at the table alongside him, had Macmillan had a real veto or

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\(^{102}\) Reynolds, \textit{Britannia Overruled}, p. 201.

\(^{103}\) Horne ‘The Macmillan Years and Afterwards’, p. 92.
a real voice at Ex-Comm where the real decisions were made.\textsuperscript{104} The relationship may be special but not as influential as Britain wanted or as deep as they projected to the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{105}

However Boyle suggests that:

In a more fundamental and subtle way Britain’s role was of vital importance in the outcome of events. On the vital issue of solidarity of British Support for the American position, the evidence from British sources suggests that the support for the British government was basically solid and that this was crucial for American success.\textsuperscript{106}

Cuba impacted greatly on the run up to the Nassau Agreement as it changed the ways in which Europe viewed its security. This was the closest the world had come to a nuclear conflict and whilst information was shared no European nation had any control over the negotiations or the actions America decided to take. The fact that Kennedy actively opposed the hawkish route of massive retaliation left many Europeans questioning the Americans and the reliance they had on American defence weapons as they felt America would be unlikely to risk a nuclear conflict for the sake of the Europe. Independent nuclear weapons seemed all the more essential in this changed environment.\textsuperscript{107} Cuba also affected the Nassau Agreement by distracting the American Administration during the run up and allowed other issues to seem insignificant by comparison. Skybolt was not insignificant to the British and any time that could have

\textsuperscript{104} Frank Costigliola, ‘Kennedy, the European Allies, and the Failure to Consult’, \textit{Political Science Quarterly}, Vol.110 No.1 (Spring 1995) p. 112.
\textsuperscript{105} Roger Ellis and Geoffrey Treasure \textit{Britain’s Prime Ministers, From Walpole to Thatcher}, (Shepheard-Walwyn, 2005) p. 246.
been spent developing an understanding of the political significance of the cancellation for the British was spent developing strategies for the resolution of Cuba.\footnote{Richard Reeves, \textit{Profile in Power}, (Papemac, 1994) p. 438; Clark, \textit{Nuclear Diplomacy}, p. 364.} 

In 1962 Europe, America and Britain all thought they knew best, that their ideas were the right way forward, that the others were foolish in their endeavours. The issue really seems to be what the true agenda was for the British, French and Americans in this period. Although both Britain and America had ‘grand designs’ for Europe, they had to sit comfortably in a wider international relations framework. The question is, was this really collaboration or domination?

For the British there were a number of key objectives that needed to be satisfied in order to create a foundation for Britain to revive, what many saw to be, her ailing status. In his journal, Schlesinger notes that Kennedy believed that

‘What matters is the strength of the currency. It is this, and its not nuclear weapons that makes France a factor. Britain has nuclear weapons, but the pound is weak, so every one pushes it around. Why are people so nice to Spain these days? Not because Spain has nuclear weapons, bit because of all those lovely gold reserves.’\footnote{Arthur Schelsinger Jr, \textit{Journals 1952-2000}, (Penguin Group, 2007), p. 186.}

With the EEC countries and American economies expanding at rates that Britain could not compete with, Britain was in a serious economic slump during the 1960s.\footnote{Sandbrook, \textit{Never Had It So Good}, (Penguin Group, 2007), p. 158-159.} The EEC seemed to be the place for Britain to grow economically however nuclear arms were seen to be the key to diplomatic success as well as a cost effective security measure. Ironically, nuclear ownership was coveted more for the security it offered as a diplomatic tool, allowing access to the top table of world politics, than the security it
offered as a defence weapon. The EEC application was also important in keeping close ties with the Americans as well as helping Britain economically. Macmillan was afraid that a United Europe offered America an alternative special ally and could move towards strengthening this tie at the expense of the much heralded Anglo-American Special Relationship.

After the Polaris deal many critics accused the British government of taking compromise too far, of becoming a satellite of the Americans, trading in her independence for a dependence on the USA. It can also be argued that Britain did not sell its independence to the highest bidder but instead, knowing its limitations this new nuclear age, gave a little of their autonomy in order to keep their status as a world power or at least the illusion of it. It is important to see nuclear ownership as more than merely a defence issue. Power lies in fear; the USSR was powerful during the 1960s and beyond, not for its economic standing or its political prowess as much as it was due to the fear that it could unleash its nuclear arsenal at any time. The USA, due to its commitment to defend the Western World from the Red Threat, held great power too. This power was in itself enough to provoke unease within the rest of the Western Alliance as it gave one nation power over many nations. Wanting to stake a claim to part of the nuclear mechanism, no matter how insubstantial this was, to many just a way of staking a claim to a voice in nuclear defence issues. The American Administration did not understand why the Europeans were not content in being under a US defence umbrella, contributing conventional forces to the attempt to stave off a nuclear shower. However, they were quick to defend their right to keep their control and were unwilling to allow others to make decisions on behalf of the United States. Although it is

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113 From The Foreign Office to Nassau, December 22 1962 PREM 11/4229.
understandable as to why this paradoxical ideal was perpetuated by the Kennedy administration, it does not detract from the fact that a little understanding of their fellow allies’ predicament could have helped matters in the long term.\textsuperscript{115}

The French and the British both seemed to want the same things for themselves in 1962; they both want to create a stronger Europe and have an independent deterrent to show the power which they still had in a changing world. However, the problem was that both Britain and France wanted to be the driving force in Europe and both had slightly differing ideas about the road to take. The French wanted a strong, French-led Europe that would not be subservient to the Americans.\textsuperscript{116} The British wanted to be broker between mainland Europe and the Americans, taking a strong leading role in the EEC whilst keeping the Special Relationship with the USA.\textsuperscript{117} These two objectives were obviously incompatible and some kind of compromise would have to be reached if the British were to gain entry into the EEC. However, both sides would have to back down and compromise and this seemed to be impossible as both were strong nations, both with great history and, perhaps more significantly, both with historical grudges. Britain’s geography has also meant that it has been constantly questioned about its European identity. It is an island set apart from the mainland continent, with no neighbours on its borders and with more in common with America in terms of language and culture. Even now, debate rages over Britain’s place in Europe, from the Euro to the Eurovision song contest.\textsuperscript{118}

Britain’s psyche after the Second World War also played a part, they saw themselves as the victors and thus as Hollowell comments “there was a tremendous psychological gulf between itself and Europe, whereas the relationship with the United States was one

\textsuperscript{115} Sandbrook, \textit{Never Had It So Good}, p. 241.
\textsuperscript{116} Mangold, \textit{The Almost Impossible Ally}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{117} Conclusions of meeting of the cabinet, 26 April 1961, CAB 128/35.
of comrades in arms.” Many historians believe that the gap between Britain and France in 1962 was far more than just the issue of geographical and psychological distance though. The issue was political distance. Britain had avoided the EEC until it became detrimental for them to be on the outside, then when they attempted to attach themselves, they were unwilling to take a back seat and instead wished to take over from the French as the leading force, completely overturning the idea of independence or the European state and instead moving closer to the American Trojan Horse. As Lacoutre states the Macmillan Government did not want to “exchange ‘more Europe’ for ‘less America’, since they wanted both the protection of Kennedy and the keys to Europe held by de Gaulle.” However, many other historians see de Gaulle’s assessment of Britain as an extra cockerel in the European hen house as the real key to this story. As Vaisse argues ‘General de Gaulle’s ideas about the place of Great Britain in Europe were remarkably consistent even if he had not clearly declared his rejection of Britain his reservations were from the outset, clear and firm.’

It is also important to remember that any judgement made on Britain’s behaviour during entry negotiations cannot be compared to the way in which the other members came into the Community. Britain was an outsider trying to gain entry to an already-established structure. Though it is to be expected that some sacrifices should be made on their part, it was also understandable that some concessions should be made by the EEC too. If Britain was not adding anything to Europe by joining, then why were they entertaining the application? As with any diplomatic decision, compromise is necessary and it seems unreasonable to judge the British too harshly for wanting to keep as much as they could get away with. As Porter states ‘The essential point is that in order to

119 Hollowell, ‘From Commonwealth to European Integration’, p. 60.
120 Lacouture, De Gaulle The Ruler, pp. 356-357.
121 Maurice Vaisse, ‘De Gaulle and the British Application to Join the Common Market’ in George Wilkes, Britain’s Failure to Enter the European Community, p. 51.
adjust to the EEC she had to uproot and replant, while her neighbours cultivated the fields they already had. ¹²²

The politics of Europe were further complicated by the position of Berlin. Germany was still regarded with great suspicion by many European states, German power and influence needed to be carefully monitored to allay neighbours’ fear of them becoming embroiled in a further war with a nation that had already been central to two world wars. Berlin was an issue for two important reasons; East Berlin was a communist sphere of influence and the regeneration of Germany as a state was an uncomfortable proposition to the rest of Europe after their involvement in two catastrophic world wars. Fear was a crucial element to the future of German politics; she had to prove herself trustworthy whilst occupied in part by the snarling Red Dog of the USSR. ¹²³ The Iron Curtain kept east from west, but the fear that the USSR would push this boundary and use conventional forces to occupy and overrun Europe to spread the Communist word. Many countries such as France had already had been occupied by German invaders twice in just over 30 years, the idea of yet another aggressor gaining access was understandably a source of fear. ¹²⁴ The erection of the Berlin Wall had helped to deal with some of the fears of the spread of Communism had held for the Europeans, it was after all a Soviet undertaking and gave some security against a conventional attack being launched by Russia on West Berlin, and therefore engaging mainland Europe in conflict, from East Berlin. Whilst these fears were allayed by the wall, the Berlin issue was still provoking fear and a need to arm against a possible conflict. Warfare had moved from the conventional to the nuclear and, while the USSR held a nuclear option and was involved in the ideological conflict that defined the age, European security was

always in doubt. Berlin would be a prime target, as an American satellite, for the Russians during any kind of conflict. But a nuclear war held the biggest threat of destruction especially for Europe which would probably not survive.\textsuperscript{125} Some historians see Berlin as one of the area that had the most potential to become hot during the Cold War, especially in terms of European politics. The mistrust of the German in European mind is most clearly illustrated by the reaction to Kennedy’s Multilateral Force idea, with objection being aimed at the inclusion of the German state and thus the idea that Germany might get its hands on nuclear weapons, no matter if it was in the name of NATO.\textsuperscript{126} Berlin became an issue in the Nassau Agreement as it posed a threat to the status quo and increased the arguments for national independent deterrents within European nations as fear of Communism and fear of Germany after two world wars seem to have combined in Berlin to create a fragile security situation. The security issue posed by Berlin was also one of the reasons for the Americans to call on the Europeans to increase conventional forces which paradoxically suffered due to the increase in spending on nuclear options.\textsuperscript{127}

There were other areas in Europe that were also prime targets for the Soviet Union as they housed American strategic missile bases. Nike-Hercules missiles were based in Turkey, Italy, Greece and West Germany from 1959 and Jupiter missiles were also based in Turkey and Italy.\textsuperscript{128} These had the paradoxical effect of providing a deterrent whilst endangering lives and creating a legitimate military target for the Russians to attack during a war. This seemed to encourage the desire for independent nuclear missiles rather than dissuade it; though the ownership of nuclear weapons did give some

\textsuperscript{125} Clay Large, \textit{Berlin}, p. 438.
\textsuperscript{126} Clark, \textit{Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship}, p. 407.
security it also created fear, it made it possible for nations to defend themselves against an attack but also encouraged enemies to increase arms. This cycle was encouraged by the Eisenhower Administration and their commitment to the idea of massive retaliation, which was only possible if one’s enemy believed that any act of aggression would be met by an overwhelming nuclear response.\(^{129}\) This was deemed slightly impractical and over zealous by the Kennedy Administration who, facing a huge budgetary deficit in defence expenditures abroad, subscribed to the flexible response approach, in which aggression would be met with a like for like response with the nuclear option kept for the most serious situation when all avenues of diplomacy and military intervention had been exhausted.\(^ {130}\)

However McNamara disagreed with European fear that Europe would become a target if America launched missiles from European bases claiming instead that ‘from Moscow’s perspective it would make no difference if the American nuclear weapons that hit Soviet targets were launched from a U.S. submarine or from U.S. forces in Germany. The probable response in either case would be retaliation against the United States.’\(^ {131}\) It would, therefore, be who launched the attack and not where the attack was launched that would influence the Soviet retaliation and they would, no doubt, wish to strike back at the ones engineering the attack.

It is hard to understand the mix of fear, suspicion, changing ideology and strategy in the early 1960s that created this unstable state of undeclared ideological warfare threatened by nuclear destruction. The Cold War was on the surface a conflict between the USSR and the USA but in reality was a world conflict in which the world had limited input. The USA’s sophisticated planning of nuclear strategy and the effectiveness of the weaponry itself were a not understood on the other side of the

\(^{130}\) Nunnerley, *President Kennedy and Britain*, p. 113.  
\(^{131}\) McNamara, *Blundering into Disaster*, p. 75.
Atlantic. It was easy for the Kennedy administration to believe that nuclear weapons were the last resort, that diplomatic and conventional fighting options were key to defusing situations as they had their finger on the trigger of the last resort. Europe was stuck in the middle of an argument between superpowers that could destroy it, with no access to a suitable defence and were spoon fed whatever theory the incumbent administration wished to follow without the privilege of knowledge and understanding of the complexities.  

Kennedy first spoke of his New Frontier in his speech accepting the Democratic Nomination for Presidential Candidature 15 July 1960, one of the key phrases that continue to be synonymous with him over 50 years later. The new Frontier was the US moving into a new era, a new age of youth and vigour, a propaganda slogan to encourage people to vote for charisma and hope over the age and experience of his rival Nixon. The New Frontier was real and, though not as romantic as the Kennedy campaign team portrayed in his election fight, it was just as dramatic. America was moving into a new frontier in its drive into space and its development of nuclear technology. It is now known that America was also moving into an era that would give the American people assassinations, war, social unrest and a taste of failure. Kennedy however was the symbol of hope in the 1960s, gone before the bubble began to burst and the mythologized into the Arthur of a Camelot that Middle America believed would have been if he had not been assassinated. However Noonan suggests that Kennedy was in fact ‘largely driven by fear, not hope. He was the age of anxiety.’ It is true to say that Kennedy’s presidency was full of anxiety, both domestically and abroad. He

135 Peggy Noonan, ‘John F Kennedy’, in James Taranto (eds), Presidential Leadership: Rating the Best and the Worst in the White House, p. 170.
was however a man killed in his prime and as Hellman notes ‘Crisis was the Kennedy method...it worked well for him.’\textsuperscript{136}

Harold Macmillan, on the face of it, was Kennedy’s opposite; the last Edwardian at 10 Downing Street, an old man who had seen wars and weathered many storms.

If Kennedy was the epitome of the youthful nation he represented, then Macmillan was the face of British poise and grandeur. As John Snow comments;

‘We had Harold Macmillan, with very droopy eyebrows and some strange sense that he was possibly over a hundred. I think...the thing about Kennedy was that he seemed to embody youth and vitality...he seemed to be the representation of the absolute model of the Twentieth Century.’\textsuperscript{137}

It is dramatic to say that he was close to seeing his career being destroyed by the failures of Skybolt and the EEC but such emphasis had been placed on the independence of Britain’s nuclear weapon, the need for it as a symbol and the need to work with Europe instead of against it in these economically uncertain times. When these seemed to crumble around him Macmillan could have easily fallen victim to his own propaganda: he had promised Britain that Skybolt and the EEC would push Britain forward to new highs and now both seemed to be moving further away from his grasp. Macmillan needed to get at least one of these two policies back on track and it was at this point that it became a choice: save the Special Relationship and the nuclear deterrent or move away from America take the chance that De Gaulle would allow Britain to embrace a new connection with Europe.\textsuperscript{138} It is not surprising, given De

\textsuperscript{136} Hellman, \textit{The Kennedy Obsession}, p. 135.
\textsuperscript{137} John Snow interviewed as part of JFK: The First Pop President, BBC Radio 2.
Gaulle’s cool attitude and his increasingly less subtle hints that Britain would not be granted entry into the EEC that Macmillan chose to pursue a resolution over Skybolt.\(^{139}\)

This is not to suggest that Macmillan was a desperate old man, outdone and outshone by a young American pretender. Macmillan was a victim of bad timing in December 1962. His policies collided in a way that many would not have foreseen. Had all these incidents not exploded into one big international relations bonfire then maybe the Nassau Agreement would not have taken on as much significance as it did.\(^{140}\)

The relationship between Kennedy and Macmillan is an interesting one, as all the signs seemed to point towards the relationship being strained and uneven due to the mix of age and youth, experience and political naivety. However a friendship or at least a strong working relationship did blossom between the two leaders despite, or perhaps because of, these differences.\(^{141}\) For many the Special Relationship enjoyed a brief renaissance under the partnership of Mac and Jack. Eisenhower and Macmillan shared a history of war and wartime politics, Macmillan and Kennedy shared a future of new possibilities.\(^{142}\)

Macmillan was on the surface the complete opposite to John F Kennedy though this is not completely true. As Hennessy comments ‘despite the Edwardian pose, he had always striven to create a forward looking image of himself –even to the extent of cramming himself awkwardly into one of the new minis in 1959.’\(^{143}\) It is quite easy to mistakenly dismiss Macmillan as an older and therefore out of date politician, outshone by the bright, Hollywood smile of the youthful Kennedy. As Morgan asserts, “The


\(^{141}\) Edwin O. Guthman and Jeffrey Shulman, Robert Kennedy In His Own Words: The Unpublished Recollections of the Kennedy Years, (Bantam, 1988) p. 31; Macmillan, At The End of the Day, pp. 147-148.

\(^{142}\) Dumbrell, A Special Relationship, p. 56.

\(^{143}\) Hennessy, Having It So Good, p. 260.
contrast between Kennedy’s vitality and the fading Edwardian grandeur of Macmillan’s publically contrived persona, becomes more and more marked.”

Equally Clarke also states that ‘Harold Macmillan...immediately began to look every one of his 65 years next to the 35 year old in the White House.’ Just as Kennedy has been judged by his youthful looks, Macmillan’s actions, upon which any judgement of him should rest, has been glossed over in favour of aesthetics. As Marr suggests ‘An old Etonian Macmillan had the reassuring manner of an aristocratic Edwardian Uncle but he was as shrewd at spin as any later leader.’

The relationship between Kennedy and Macmillan seems to have been genuinely warm and as such they seem to have created an atmosphere that would help perpetuate the alliance between America and Britain. As Howard remarks ‘Under Macmillan indeed the relationship enjoyed an Indian Summer, whose sunset rays were to gild the Presidency of John F Kennedy.’ However Sandbrook counters that ‘Contrary to the myth, Kennedy and Macmillan had an uneasy relationship not least because they disagreed about Britain’s role in the North Atlantic Alliance.’ Sandbrook goes further in his notes by claiming that the archives support the notion that Kennedy and Macmillan were not friends. However he offers no references in the archives to support this claim and correspondence between Macmillan and Kennedy found in the archives are not only polite and diplomatic but also friendly and include references to Christmas presents and well wishes. There is a difference in tone between correspondence to Eisenhower and correspondence to Kennedy. Macmillan tended to address letters and telegrams to Eisenhower ‘Dear Friend’ and sign them simply ‘Harold’.

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145 Clarke, The Shadow of A Nation, p. 210 Kennedy was in fact 42 at his inauguration.
146 Andrew Marr’s A Modern History of Britain, BBC 2.
147 Sandbrook, Never Had It So Good, p. 245.
148 Correspondence from the Prime Minister to President Kennedy, PREM 11/4593.
telegrams to Macmillan were equally personal. Correspondence between Macmillan and Kennedy were slightly more formal and did open with ‘Dear Friend’ and ended with his full name but were not unfriendly or stilted in language. Although Eisenhower and Macmillan relationship was closer, possibly due to their similar age and experience, this does not indicate that the relationship between Kennedy and Macmillan was not amiable.

Macmillan and Kennedy were also connected through marriage as Macmillan was married to Lady Dorothy Cavendish and Kennedy’s sister Kathleen was married to Lady Dorothy’s nephew William Cavendish. David Ormsby Gore was also related to both Macmillan and Kennedy as his sister Katharine Ormsby Gore married Macmillan’s son Maurice and he was cousin to William Cavendish. These family ties may have helped to enhance the relationships between Macmillan, Kennedy and Ormsby Gore; indeed Ormsby Gore shared a very close relationship with the whole Kennedy family and was a pall bearer at Robert Kennedy’s funeral in 1968.

However this also begs the question as to how close relationships like these especially that of Kennedy and Ormsby Gore could breed such a crisis of misunderstanding and miscommunication as the Skybolt Crisis. The Nassau Agreement was therefore a crucial test of trust in a Special Relationship in some degree of flux by 1962. In order to build a firmer relationship in the future, both sides would need to compromise and come away with something tangible for domestic consumption while avoiding a major crisis. As will be seen, the debates still rage over whether the Agreement laid bare the uneven nature of the Relationship and whether Britain sold her

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151 Correspondence from the Prime Minister to President Kennedy, PREM 11/4593.
153 Boyle, *The British Government’s View of the Cuban Missile Crisis* p. 23.
soul to Uncle Sam by accepting American weaponry at the expense of British
independence.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{155} Renwick, \textit{Fighting With Allies}, p. 267.
Chapter two – The Nassau Meeting

When Macmillan and Eisenhower met at Camp David in 1960 to agree the terms of the deal under which Britain could purchase Skybolt missiles, they opened the door to a historic nuclear partnership between Britain and the United States. No other country had such close relations in this field, possibly due to the war time relations which the two countries shared, before America decided to isolate itself as a nuclear power. The Nassau Agreement took this nuclear partnership a step further after the crisis that unfolded after the cancellation of Skybolt tested the limits of the relationship between Britain and America. This chapter will look at the Nassau Agreement in the context of Britain’s post-war defence policy and examine the particular circumstances which caused the Skybolt crisis. It will also look at the wider domestic issues facing the American Government that coloured the way in which they handled the Skybolt cancellation.

Britain had begun a concerted nuclear effort during Clement Attlee’s Labour government after the Second World War. Development of British nuclear technology was not at a pace that could equal that of the superpowers of Russia and America. The latter’s Atomic Energy Act (also known as the MacMahon Act), which was implemented in 1946, banned the release of atomic technology to all other countries. This included Britain, despite its close links with the USA during the wartime, and its development of nuclear technology by contributing information and personnel to the Manhattan Project team. The reversal of the MacMahon Act with the Mutual Defence Agreement of 1958 meant that America and Britain could share nuclear secrets once again. Britain saw this move as ‘interdependence’, a shared dependence on each

156 Record of Meeting held at Camp David ,29 March 1960, CAB 133/243.
other and a partnership between two close allies\textsuperscript{158}, although many critics saw this as a move towards Britain becoming completely dependent on the USA for any scrap of power they would throw its way.\textsuperscript{159}

British nuclear strategy was originally based on free-fall bombs deployed by the RAFs V-Bomber force of Valiant, Victor and Vulcan bomber aircraft. The Blue Streak Missile, which started development in 1955, was Britain’s means of overcoming improved Soviet anti-aircraft technology, but was cancelled in 1960 due to its rapidly escalating costs and the difficulties posed in locating sufficient sites in as small a country as Britain. Despite an £84 million pound investment by the British Government, Blue Streak was almost obsolete before its development was completed due to the rapid pace of nuclear development in Russia and America. British technology lagged dramatically behind the superpowers and Blue Streak was too vulnerable to provide any real merit as a deterrent.\textsuperscript{160}

The decision to transfer to the American Skybolt missile was made to ensure that Britain had a credible deterrent in the nuclear age. The Sandys Report of 1957 had put the emphasis of future defensive policy on the nuclear deterrent, as the most cost effective and credible defensive strategy while still honouring the many commitments the UK had in terms of international defence. National Service could end and conventional force spending could be reduced without harming the overall defence of the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{161} The Skybolt deal was brokered quite easily as Britain had the ace of Holy Loch up its negotiating sleeve. In an unwritten \textit{quid pro quo} Britain

\textsuperscript{158} Baylis, \textit{Ambiguity and Deterrence} p241-2; Peter Clarke, \textit{Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-2000}, (Allen Lane, 1996) p. 281; Barnett, \textit{The Verdict of Peace}, p. 512.


\textsuperscript{161} Draft of Defence: An Outline of Future Policy, Presented by the Minister of Defence to Parliament, 1 April 1957, CAB 129/86.
received the Skybolt missile and America got Polaris submarine bases in Scotland. This seemed to be a two-fold benefit to the British as they got the added security of an American base, however the fact that the Americans had a base in the UK also paradoxically added to their insecurity as it theoretically made them a target should the Cold War turn hot, which in turn only added to the argument that Britain needed her own nuclear deterrent to defend herself in this nuclear age. Although Thor missiles had been based in Britain in 1958 until 1963, these operated on a dual key system meaning that both America and Britain, in theory at least, would have to agree before they could be deployed giving at least the illusion of control though they were not seen as under the control of the British to critics. The missile bases in Holy Loch would be under American control and, as the missiles were submarine based, would be more actively deployed than the land based missiles. The Polaris missile was also an extremely advanced portable ballistic missile whereas the Thor missile was the first intermediate ballistic missile in America’s nuclear arsenal, more akin to the Jupiter missiles in Turkey that were removed as part of the resolution of the Cuban missile crisis and which were considered outdated. The connection between Skybolt and Holy Loch was also important when it came to Nassau as it gave the British the moral high ground and put pressure on the Americans to give some kind of recompense for the cancellation, especially as the Camp David agreement gave assurances of consultation should the Skybolt missile come under difficulties. It is also important to note that

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165 Bob Clarke, Four Minute Warning, Britain’s Cold War, (Tempus, 2005), p. 32. 
166 Boyle, ‘The British View of the Cuban Missile Crisis’, p. 34; Costigliola, ‘Kennedy, the European Allies and the Failure to Consult’, p. 118. 
due to the systems in place in America at that time, Presidential papers were not held by
the Whitehouse or the Pentagon but were the property of each President. None of the
Kennedy Administration had access to the papers concerning the original Camp David
Agreement until December as they had gone to Gettysburg Pennsylvania with
Eisenhower when he retired. 168

The rapport between Macmillan and Eisenhower has been credited as an important
element of the success of the Skybolt Agreement; this can be argued as due to the close
association the two leaders had shared in the past, their closeness in age and experiences
of war. 169 The other important element in the success of the Agreement is more
simplistic than that though: both parties wanted something the other could give them
without any real compromise. Britain wanted missiles for defence and for political
reasons; America was at that time a subscriber to the idea of massive retaliation and as
such could see the benefits of its allies being able to defend themselves with nuclear
weapons to stem the tide of Communism in Europe. America wanted a forward base in
Europe for its Polaris fleet; Britain wanted the extra link to add to the Special
Relationship. 170 The Skybolt agreement was controversial not only because of the
location of the base being so close to densely populated areas but also, there was no
requirement for the Americans to consult Britain should they decide to use the base in
an act of aggression. 171 Britain had in fact no control over the Polaris missiles. Unlike
the Thor missiles, the Polaris missiles were based in actively mobile submarines
increasing the danger of the base becoming a legitimate target. 172 The fact that Britain
had no control had left Macmillan humiliated and under criticism from a number of

168 Neustadt, Report to JFK, pp. 128-129.
169 Edward Geelhoed and Anthony Edmonds, Eisenhower, Macmillan and Allied Unity 1957-1961,
(Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p. xii.
170 Lamb, The Macmillan Years, p287.
172 Discussions between HMG and US Government on establishment of US base on Clyde for Polaris-
different groups from newspapers to anti nuclear campaigners.\textsuperscript{173} So severe was this condemnation that the British requested to reconsider the deal, but in a final demonstration of \textit{realpolitik}, Eisenhower refused to do so.\textsuperscript{174} It can be argued however that as Thor missiles were located on airbases and could be bombed as a first target in a pre-emptive strike where as a submarine could be anywhere not only giving them a no notice strike capability but also making them near impossible to locate thus rendering them less vulnerable to a first strike.\textsuperscript{175}

Britain had come to a crossroads in her nuclear strategy: Unable to afford to produce a nuclear weapon that could compete with the Americans or the Russians as they could not afford to partake in the missile race, yet determined to maintain her great power status, if only for domestic consumption. In the changing Cold War era, nuclear power was the only power. The Superpowers were so far ahead in the race for the most technologically-advanced weapons that only China had any chance of competing.\textsuperscript{176} But any finger that could be laid upon any credible nuclear deterrent came with a voice that would have to be listened to. The only way forward seemed to lie in joining forces to gain access to such a deterrent. Macmillan chose to buy American technology in order to buy himself a place at the top table again.\textsuperscript{177}

The cancellation of Skybolt was therefore a major blow and was, fundamentally a badly-handled affair, but when the circumstances of both sides are closely examined, it is hard envisage a satisfactory way that the cancellation could have been handled without upsetting one or both of the parties involved. The Skybolt crisis and the lead up


\textsuperscript{174} Sandbrook, \textit{Never Had It So Good}, p. 244.

\textsuperscript{175} Clarke, \textit{Four Minute Warning}, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{176} Schlesinger, \textit{Journals}, p. 186.

to Nassau so baffled President Kennedy that he commissioned a report to see just how a small hiccup such as this, could explode into such a big issue.\textsuperscript{178} This report serves as an invaluable tool to any historian investigating the crisis, and Richard Neustadt’s re-evaluation of his original report, made after files at the national archives had been opened, add a new level of depth to this already insightful document.\textsuperscript{179}

There are two main interpretations as to how the Skybolt Crisis became such an incident between these two allies. The first is that this was all a simple case of miscommunication and misunderstandings that combined to make the seeds of a small incident grow into a huge issue. The second is that both sides tried to manipulate the cancellation of Skybolt to further their own agendas.\textsuperscript{180} The essence of the muddle theory is that though the two sides did talk to each other to an extent, true communication did not exist between them.\textsuperscript{181} The Cuban Missile Crisis emphasised the difficulties that faced transatlantic communication between America its allies. Some historians see the communication between Macmillan and Kennedy during this period as a prime example of the Special Relationship in action as there were regular updates from the US to the British during those crucial thirteen days in October.\textsuperscript{182} However many others argue that while communication existed it was, for the most part, one sided as the communication was not consultation as much as it was informing Britain of decisions already made.\textsuperscript{183} After the Cuban Missile Crisis a telephone hotline was installed to ensure that the two Superpowers could talk as quickly as possible to prevent such an incident reoccurring. The old adage ‘keep your friends close, but your enemies closer’ seems apt here as the same consideration was not given to increasing the flow of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{178} Guthman and Shulman, \textit{Robert Kennedy in His Own Words}, p. 308.
\bibitem{179} Neustadt, \textit{Report to JFK}, pp. 155-164.
\bibitem{182} Baylis, \textit{Ambiguity and Deterrence}, p. 318.
\end{thebibliography}
communication between America and her allies. After Cuba, the US failed to recognize
the acute nature of such issues from the point of view of their brothers in arms. Britain
had not seen the crisis in quite the same existential fashion as the US media had
presented it and to the British Government Cuba had only intensified their awareness of
the crucial influence of an independent nuclear deterrent.\textsuperscript{184}

The biggest muddle was that neither side really explained their domestic anxieties,
especially when the consequences of Cuba came to be felt.\textsuperscript{185} The issue for Britain was
that they had invested a great deal of credibility in their new found ‘interdependence’
with the Americans, and highly prized the idea of a Special Relationship. The British
were too dependent on the Skybolt missile system to give them the influence they
seemed to be losing with the dismantling of the Empire, which had begun with Ghana in
1957 and accelerated with the ‘Winds of Change’ speech of 3 February 1960. Defence
against the threat the of USSR, with their much talked-about missile capability was an
issue, especially after the fear provoked by the Cuban Crisis and Britain’s lack of
participation in their own destiny that was publically and humiliatingly highlighted by
this incident. America was both in its own eyes, and in reality, the leader of the free
world, and Kennedy’s inaugural promise was one that he felt he could keep. The
Europeans not only begrudged another nation holding their defence in their hands but
also resented such a promise which they were not sure the Americans could fulfil. The
fear that European cities and countries could be used as pawns in a game between
Soviet and US officials, as had already occurred with Berlin, or that any conflict
between the two Superpowers could leave European vulnerable to becoming collateral
damage, was very real in the minds of European leaders especially after Cuba.

Kennedy’s responsibility was to his own nation, so why should the leaders of European

\textsuperscript{184} Freedman, \textit{The Kennedy Wars}, p. 276.
\textsuperscript{185} Nunnerley, \textit{President Kennedy and Britain}, p. 140; Ashton, \textit{Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War}, p. 191.
nations believe that in a time of conflict and national threat that Kennedy would be willing to invite conflict into his own backyard in order to protect those allies that stood across the Atlantic?

The mischief model is based on the idea that both sides amplified the issues thrown up by the cancellation of Skybolt in order to promote their own agendas. This is common practice in any type of political negotiation, however in this case the argument is that the mischief was to create a crisis where there was none before in order to gain something that would not be achieved any other way. In the case of Skybolt such behaviour could play upon the closeness of the relationship so as to threaten the destruction of an allegiance that had lasted through two world wars and the Suez crisis. 186 Europeanists within the Kennedy Administration, such as George Ball, wanted to push Britain away from the Special Relationship and force her to forge closer ties with Europe by becoming part of the European Economic Community. 187 However this ideal was flawed by the very fact that the Americans chose to sponsor it: the idea behind the EEC was that it could exist without the influence of the United States and act as a unified and therefore stronger challenger to the Americanization of the free world. Though America was the Superpower of choice for the European nations to align themselves with, this did not mean that they wished to be part of an American dominated sphere of influence. America might lead the free world but it did not have the right to be an unquestionable leader. The idea of Britain joining the EEC was attractive to the Americans for the very reason that it was distasteful to the rest of Europe, or at least to dominant figure of the EEC at that time, de Gaulle. The British would be a ‘Trojan Horse’ for the Americans 188, subtly pushing American influence onto the Community. Britain worked closely with America due to their mutual language

and shared cultures; if Europe accepted Britannia it would also be accepting its Uncle Sam. 189

Nuclear proliferation was an unpopular and rather pointless new fad in the minds many of the Kennedy Administration. In Washington many believed that small nuclear forces lacked any real credibility in the face of the huge nuclear arsenal possessed by the Soviet Union which could only be countered, both diplomatically and practically, by the might of the American nuclear store. 190 For those nations that had duly elected governments, that ran their own finances, had proud histories and ideas for strong and dignified futures, simply allowing another nation to tell you that you are defended was not enough. Each leader knew the influence that came with a nuclear arsenal, no matter how sizable for, any bomb that could be effectively deployed, could be used to strengthen a negotiating position. Independent nations of independent means did not want to be dependent on any other nation in order to defend themselves.

The ‘muddle’ thesis emphasises that the story of the cancellation of Skybolt was very
different on both sides of the Atlantic. For the Americans, it was a cost saving exercise as the Hound Dog and the Minuteman missiles were both viable, tested weapons that could do all the same jobs as the less effective and unproven Skybolt missile. 191 The Skybolt missile had been the subject of uncertainty and budget cuts even in the Eisenhower era. 192 Robert McNamara had prolonged the life of the system with a budget increase when he took over the role of Secretary of Defence in 1961. Critics of the weapon, on both sides of the Atlantic, were sceptical that it would ever pass muster

189 Pagedas, Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the French Problem, p. 182.
190 Baylis, Ambiguity and Deterrence, p. 303.
191 Neustadt, Report to JFK, p. 36.
192 Clark, Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship, p. 434; Neustadt, Report to JFK, p. 29; Macmillan to President Eisenhower, 26 October 1960, CAB 21/4979; Record of Meeting, 12 December 1960, PREM 11/3261.
or even live long enough to get close to being fully operational. Skybolt was massively over budget and behind schedule in 1962 when McNamara chose to cancel it, and the real crisis arose from how McNamara chose to cancel this weapon. The cancellation of Skybolt was put down to budgetary constraints and an inability to justify the amounts of money being spent on it compared to the benefits it could bring American defence. However, due to an earlier unpopular budget cut made by McNamara, in which the American Air Force lost a battle over the development of the RS-70 bomber aircraft, there was a real threat that any possible plan to terminate the Skybolt program could be reversed or blocked in Congress by those left scarred by McNamara’s earlier victory. This meant that any plans to cancel Skybolt had to be kept secret until the last possible moment, which also meant not informing Britain in case the information passed from the Royal Air Force to the American Air Force. As Neustadt explains:

SKYBOLT should vanish in the course of budget season, disappearing from the January Budget with the current program cancelled as the budget went to congress. Then proponents of the program would face a fait accompli. They, not Defense, would have to make the case for change against the backdrop of a massive budget deficit combined with calls for tax cuts. The budgetary reasoning that prevented the American Administration from fully disclosing the unstable future of the Skybolt missile was, in part, the reason for the lack of communication between the allies earlier in the process according to Neustadt.

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194 Nunnerle, *President Kennedy and Britain*, p. 132.
195 Robert McNamara was particularly opposed to the bomber force and had already repeatedly stated he felt that the combination of SLBMs and ICBMs would render them useless. McNamara to Kennedy, 10 July 1961, National Security Files, Box 275, Dept/Agencies, Dept of Defense, Budget FY63. Kennedy Library cited in Clark, *Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship*, pp. 346-7.
198 Ibid p. 32.
Had they dealt with the issue before the drama of Cuba, perhaps they would not have so quickly dismissed the issue as purely military and shown a greater sensitivity that the issue was, for the British, a political time-bomb. As part of the Camp David Agreement, America was responsible for consulting Britain if the missile were to be cancelled. To the British the success of Skybolt was essential as the British Government had put all of its nuclear eggs in this one basket.\footnote{Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, p. 266.} It is important to remember that, allies are not completely equal, and the competing egos and agendas involved clearly meant that solidarity did not necessarily beget unwavering allegiance. No matter how close the two nations were, the realities of domestic politics meant that each administration frequently prioritised the reaction of their own electors, backbenchers and the press over that of their erstwhile partners. With Skybolt, Britain wanted a bite of the nuclear apple, even if it had not grown it herself; now America was withdrawing its apple without telling them and leaving them to look rather embarrassed as they frantically clawed at thin air.\footnote{The Times, 18 December 1962.} The subtlety of nuclear power politics for the British was not easily appreciated by the Kennedy Administration. They cancelled Skybolt based on sound budgetary and military reasoning but they failed to consider the international repercussions, to look beyond its use in the American Military and look to its commitments outside. They failed to look at the reasons behind why proliferation was so attractive to Britain at this time and take these into account. They failed their closest ally because they didn’t listen long enough to understand.\footnote{Nunnerley, *President Kennedy and Britain*, p. 140.}

McNamara’s press conference at the airport on his way to a meeting with Thorneycroft has been charged with pushing the issue of Skybolt’s possible cancellation into the public consciousness at a sensitive time, and also breached an agreement made between Kennedy and Macmillan that no public statements should be made about
Skybolt before McNamara and Thorneycroft met in London.\textsuperscript{202} It seems that this message was not passed on to the Secretary of Defense before he left for Britain, highlighting another communication breakdown.\textsuperscript{203} The statement put Britain in a difficult situation; not only had the project been cancelled without the consultation that was stipulated in the Camp David Agreement, but the failure was exposed not subtly by a member of the British Government but by an American announcement. This was a key moment in the story of the Skybolt crisis, as it made it public before the Government had a chance to decide how to react and without allowing the British the dignity of quiet negotiations. If the announcement had not come, then other avenues such as a joint study or a longer period of negotiation over an adequate replacement and a mutually beneficial deal could have been made without the hysteria that came partly due to the very public end of Skybolt. This fear was very real to the British in November 1962 and as such provisions were made with the Americans to keep the fate of Skybolt under wraps.\textsuperscript{204} Of course, it is merely speculation as to what would have occurred if things had happened differently in the run up to Nassau. It is not a certainty that the crisis would have been completely avoided. Those who subscribe to the idea that Britain created a crisis in order to maintain an illusion of nuclear power and political superiority no doubt would argue that Macmillan would have found some other way of simulating hysteria in order to push Kennedy into a deal that went against his better judgement over non-proliferation and independent deterrent forces. However what is important to note is that, even if it was exaggerated or escalated in the run up and at the Nassau meeting itself, the original catalyst of the crisis, the exposure of the

\textsuperscript{202} Neustadt, Report to JFK, p59; Statement by McNamara to Press on Arrival to London, 11 December 1962, PREM 11/3261.
\textsuperscript{203} Neustadt , Report to JFK, p61.
\textsuperscript{204} SKYBOLT – MEETING, 20 November 1962 ,CAB 21/4979;Telegram For Ambassador, Skybolt, 20 November 1962; Telegram From Ormsby Gore to Secretary of State  CAB 21/4979.
failures of Skybolt and Britain’s lack of involvement in its demise, was due to an American not a British government representative.²⁰⁵

McNamara’s foolish public statement was a major blow to the credibility of the British government’s claim to an independent nuclear force, which was seized upon by the Opposition in the Commons in the debate on the cancellation in December.²⁰⁶ During the meeting an easily avoidable misunderstanding occurred between the two: McNamara did not offer Polaris and Thorneycroft did not ask for it. This is hugely important, as had a frank discussion occurred at this stage, the storm in a tea cup which erupted in Parliament, the newspapers and in the public could have been avoided or at least calmed.²⁰⁷

Another key moment of poor communication came from the most unlikely of places. On the advice of the British Ambassador, Ormsby Gore, Macmillan did not try to contact Kennedy during the period between Thorneycroft’s meeting with McNamara and the Nassau meeting.²⁰⁸ This was vitally important, and the fact that Ormsby Gore himself did not talk to the President to clarify the standpoint of the British Government, allowed Kennedy to go on without fully grasping the issue. To the Americans this was simply a case of a military weapon not meeting a standard and being cancelled, with Britain being left to find an alternative which was deemed to be unnecessary due to the large defence umbrella they had from the Americans. Ormsby Gore was ‘blind as to what his own government was thinking and more importantly doing. He sought clarification but none was forthcoming.’²⁰⁹ However Ormsby Gore himself stated in

²⁰⁵ Ashton Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War, pp. 132-144; Nunnerley, President Kennedy and Britain, p. 142.
²⁰⁶ Hansard, 17 December 1962, vol. 669, cc.893-900. The Liberal leader, Jo Grimond actually asked Thorneycroft, ‘Does not this mark the absolute failure of the policy of the independent deterrent?’
²⁰⁷ Nunnerley, President Kennedy and Britain, p. 145.
²⁰⁸ Gore to Home, December 8 1962, PREM 11/4229, To the Prime Minister from De Zulueta, 12 December 1962; November 18 1962 PREM 11/3716.
²⁰⁹ Nunnerley, President Kennedy and Britain, p. 141.
correspondence to the Permanent Secretary of State for foreign Affairs Sir Harold Caccia that he had ‘no doubt that the President and McNamara have been fully aware of the political importance to us of Skybolt. Indeed, it could hardly be otherwise after what has been said to them directly by successive Ministers of Defence.’ The fact was that the President did not fully understand the British position, due to either ignorance of true nature of the situation in Britain, naivety or a lack of understanding of how it felt to not be a superpower in the Cold War era. This is illustrated by Neustadt when he states that he commissioned the report into the crisis because he wanted ‘an understanding of precisely what had happened on his side of Atlantic, at every government level from bottom to top, his own included, to occasion his surprise the previous December and his felt need to assist Macmillan.’

The British have been accused of causing mischief in order to create the Skybolt crisis and to encourage the American Administration to give Polaris missiles in place of the cancelled Skybolt rockets. This theory has some obvious truth to it, as America had something which Britain wanted, and the British government had to make a case to allow them to gain access to it. This was not a situation where a quid pro quo could be easily arranged, so playing on the sympathy and the history of the relationship between the two countries was an obvious way of gaining Polaris missiles at minimal cost. This cannot be judged too harshly as any negotiator would use any and all tools at their disposal. However, the idea that Britain could easily turn on the charm and gain whatever it wanted from the USA is insulting to both Macmillan and Kennedy; although steps were taken to overemphasise the unfavourable position into which a failure to resolve the Skybolt issue would put Macmillan, this does not mean that the British were

210 David Ormsby Gore to Sir H. Caccia, 18 November 1962, CAB 21/4979
211 Neustadt, Report to JFK, p. 3.
212 Rusk, As I Saw It, p. 266; Rusk Interview cited in Dimbleby and Reynolds, An Ocean Apart, p. 237.
able to hoodwink the American’s into a deal they would later regret. Polaris had been considered at Camp David, but had been dismissed in favour of Skybolt due to the multilateral strings that Polaris came with. In accepting Polaris in 1962, Britain accepted these terms and, although the MLF attachment could not be enforced due to logistical reasons and the vagueness of the Nassau Agreement, these conditions were accepted and did affect the reaction of the British press to Agreement. If the British had been truly Machiavellian in their tactics then surely the main concern would have been to rid Polaris of these ties. Instead, what the British overemphasised worked to convince Kennedy to offer Polaris because they seemed believable and honest consequences. In suggesting that Macmillan and his Government could be seriously endangered, that anti-American sentiment could grow in light of what could be perceived by the British public as the Americans going back on their word and failing to keep their promises to a supposed ‘special ally’, the British made a strong (if not entirely honest) case. More realistic was the implied threat that a Labour Government, less enthusiastic about both European co-operation and the transatlantic bond might come to power as a direct result of Macmillan’s public demise. Macmillan was not in a strong position in December 1962 due to by-election defeats, a disastrous cabinet reshuffle and an unwavering faith in the Special Relationship in the face of Skybolt, the stalled EEC negotiations, McNamara’s ‘no cities’ speech and Acheson’s West Point speech. Thus to walk away from Nassau empty handed would be disastrous for his political career at this stage.

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213 Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century, p. 131.
214 From the Foreign Office to Nassau: Press reaction details, PREM11/4229.
It is possible to reconcile the ‘muddle’ and the’ mischief’ theories by careful reading of the Nassau negotiations. Like many politicians who find themselves dealt the weaker hand, Macmillan made a strong push for Polaris, playing on sympathy but with a real threat to his plans and his career as the motivation to place all his eggs in one nuclear basket. The lack of communication may have worked in favour of the British, but at a time when attacks seemed to be coming from all sides, when the future role of Britain as a world power was called into question, and in the midst of an already difficult EEC application, it is hard to say that the British Government would not have chosen a different path. Had the lines of communication worked, perhaps the crisis would not have exploded as it eventually did. However the crisis did most damage to the credibility of the British government and so the idea that they created this crisis in order to obtain Polaris seems slightly at odds with reality.217 This is especially true when it is noted that McNamara had travelled to London in November 1962 with the expectation that the British would want and would, after careful negotiation, get the Polaris missile system to replace the cancelled Skybolt.218 The Nassau meeting was originally going to be a friendly meeting between the two leaders, however in the wake of the Skybolt crisis and the failure to come to some arrangement the meeting became about the resolution of this matter. However, for Harold Macmillan it was more than just a meeting, it came fast on the coat tails of a less than satisfactory meeting with de Gaulle at Rambouillet on 15 and 16 December in which the likelihood that Britain would gain entry into the EEC was extremely low and public opinion regarding the Special Relationship seemed to back its existence even if it was evident it was not as equal as it

218 Neustadt, Report to JFK, p. 69
had been claimed.\textsuperscript{219} Macmillan went to Nassau with a tarnished reputation; he was no longer the unflappable ‘Supermac’ of old, he was Mac the Knife, a man that was being to look tired and old in the shadow of the glamorous American leader. Macmillan had something to prove and everything to gain.\textsuperscript{220}

Kennedy came to Nassau on a plane accompanied by Ormsby Gore and it was only then that the full nature of the situation was fully explained to the President. The American leader came to Nassau with a new understanding of the situation he was facing with Macmillan but it all came too late for a quiet, subdued and lengthy resolution.\textsuperscript{221} Macmillan was now in a position where he had to return from Nassau with something to show to the British public, press and parliament. He had staked his future and his party on two issues; the independent nuclear deterrent and entry into the EEC, and now both looked unlikely to succeed. Macmillan had to push Kennedy to understand the full extent of what Macmillan would face if he did not succeed and what that would mean to the American administration. He had to have a success somewhere and as such he gave one of the most impassioned performances of his political career.\textsuperscript{222} While Bange states that ‘In the end Kennedy caved in and Macmillan was granted Polaris’\textsuperscript{223} it is unfair to claim that Kennedy was simply swept away by the emotion and the friendship he shared with Macmillan, and surrendered to his pleas. Kennedy found himself in a difficult position coming into Nassau: his Administration was divided with no clear strategy or aim. There were those within the State Department who wanted to

\textsuperscript{220} Reeves, \textit{Profile in Power}, p. 438.
\textsuperscript{221} Neustadt, \textit{Report to JFK}, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{222} Nunnerley, \textit{President Kennedy and Britain}, p. 154.
\textsuperscript{223} Bange, Grand Designs and the Diplomatic Breakdown, p. 203.
cut the British nuclear deterrent for good, \textit{\textsuperscript{224}} those such as Robert Schaetzel, the Deputy of European Regional Affairs at State, who feared this would cause the loss of a close and useful ally in Macmillan that could damage the plans for EEC membership and wanted to help Britain as much as possible.\textit{\textsuperscript{225}} Theories ranged not only between departments but also within departments. As Murray notes ‘Within the administration opinions varied, not so much about the sagacity of abandoning SKYBOLT, but about what was to happen to the British independent nuclear deterrent as a result.’\textit{\textsuperscript{226}} This did little to help an already fragile situation, as Rusk comments ‘British paranoia may also have been fostered by some in our own bureaucracy who wanted to use the cancellation to pressure the British to give up an independent deterrent.’\textit{\textsuperscript{227}}

The budgetary reasons for the cancellation of the Skybolt missile were clear cut and the reasoning for keeping it quiet and low key were politically sound in terms of American domestic politics. If this decision had not become tainted by wider politics, there would have been little controversy but it was the way in which this decision was perceived as a useful pawn in the wider political power game that caused the problem. Kennedy had to balance the sensible budgetary decision to cancel with the wider British dependence and to do this he had to choose a path to follow that would satisfy as many issues as possible. He, like Macmillan, had to find a way to keep as many people and political agendas happy as possible.\textit{\textsuperscript{228}} His decision to allow Britain to have the Polaris missile came after a number of other options were dismissed, and he offered it with terms which he felt minimized the effect it would have on wider issues.\textit{\textsuperscript{229}} The strings

\textsuperscript{224} Neustadt, \textit{Report to JFK}, pp. 41-42, cites a letter sent to McNamara from Rusk, though Neustadt questions whether the letter was actually written by Rusk as ‘The signature was Rusk’s; the tone was not’ p42.

\textsuperscript{225} Ibid, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{226} Murray, ‘Macmillan and Nuclear Weapons’, p. 224.

\textsuperscript{227} Rusk, \textit{As I Saw It}, p. 266.


\textsuperscript{229} Record of A Meeting held at Bali-Hai the Bahamas, 19 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.
attached would aid the fight for increased European involvement in defence as well as
defusing claims that Britain was getting special treatment and complete nuclear
independence handed to them. The offer to extend the deal to include France would
hopefully dispel the idea that the Special Relationship would pose a problem to the EEC
whilst giving the British a feasible alternative to the Skybolt missile and keeping them
onside.\(^{230}\)

It is true to claim that the situation facing Macmillan domestically affected both
leaders; Macmillan pushed harder and Kennedy was more open to finding a suitable
agreement but he did not give the British something for nothing nor did he give
anything he did not feel he was morally obliged to give.\(^{231}\) Although separate parts of
the American Administration lobbied to get Kennedy to push for the end of Britain’s
nuclear deterrent and the Special Relationship it was clear to Kennedy that
diplomatically and politically this was not the time to do. The press furore over the
handling of the Skybolt cancellation in both Britain and America, coupled with the
anger and frustration expressed by British ministers all indicated that if this issue was
used to end the Special Relationship it would create a great deal of animosity between
America and Britain and as such could cause great problems for the American
government. The American public held Britain in high regard as both an ally and a
nation. A survey of American public opinion in 1965 saw Britain as their closest and
most reliable ally and placed it as the fourth most influential power.\(^{232}\)

In a press interview 12 December 1962 Kennedy re-affirmed that the decision to
cancel Skybolt was made due to budget considerations and its effectiveness as a weapon
in the American arsenal. The important thing to consider is that this was meant to assure
the British Government and the American public that it was not feasible for the

\(^{230}\) Nassau Communiqué, 22 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.
\(^{231}\) Ball, The Past Has Another Pattern, p. 267.
\(^{232}\) Gallup poll cited in Sandbrook, Never Had It So Good, p. 227.
Administration to continue to pour money into the programme when balanced against
the technological advantages provided by the missiles themselves. As part of the
statement Kennedy, stated that the complexities of the Skybolt missiles could mean that
it could be ‘the kind of engineering that has been beyond us.’

In a radio and television interview called ‘After Two Years: A Conversation with the President’, Broadcast nationally on three different television networks on 17 December just days before Nassau, Kennedy yet again passed judgement on Skybolt questioning its viability, reliability and its military value thus making any possible agreement continuation for or by the British seem impossible. These statements came from a nation with elusively advanced technological intelligence about a weapon system that they were trying to encourage Britain to takeover just a week later at the Nassau conference. This seems to be another incident where thought was not fully given to the British; the missile was almost damned as unrealistically complicated yet the Americans saw a British takeover as a viable option. Rather than reassure the British that the cancellation was not a ploy to remove Britain from the nuclear business, it may have served to re-enforce the idea.

The Nassau Conference itself was a dramatic and fraught meeting between the two allies. Britain came to the meeting frustrated and in need of a speedy conclusion, America came to the meeting with no solid policy though ending the Special Relationship, ending Britain’s nuclear deterrent, gaining a commitment to increased conventional forces in Europe and encouraging a solution that would not hinder the

233 News Conference 46, President John F. Kennedy, 12 December 1962 4:00pm EDT,
http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Press+Conferences/003POF05
Pressconference46_12121962.htm.

234 After Two Years – A Conversation with the President, 17 December 1962,
http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Press+Conferences/003POF05
Pressconference46_12121962.htm.

235 Recording of a Meeting held at Bali-hai the Bahamas, 19 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.

236 Neustadt, Report to JFK, p. 87.
application to the EEC, were all mooted by various sections of the Kennedy Administration. This put America in a greatly advantageous position as although compromise would have to be made on their anti-proliferation stance, the concessions such as increasing conventional forces would be extremely helpful in their quest to reduce defence spending. As the agreement to provide Skybolt had been made during the Eisenhower Administration it could be argued that an agreement for nuclear weapons made at Nassau would not create a new nuclear state but merely aid its continuance.

Kennedy decided that a joint offer of development would be made, however this was far too little and too late. As Kennedy had himself dismissed the missile as inadequate on television prior to the meeting, any agreement by the British to carry on with it would seem ridiculous to the cabinet, the Press and the public alike: as Macmillan stated, in his typically cynical idiom, “The virginity of the lady has been questioned.”

Other possible options were put forward and quickly dismissed by Macmillan, some for practical and obvious reasons, some due to the pressing situation he found himself in. Kennedy offered the Skybolt missile in two different ways: firstly that the Americans and British jointly fund the operation, and secondly that the British take over the programme entirely by themselves. This may have been attractive on the surface, the British would get to keep the Skybolt missile as a symbol of power and the Special Relationship but it would be wildly expensive and after all the public speculation over the reliability of this weapon it would lack credibility both politically and defensively, and therefore would be rendered useless. The offer of Hound Dog missiles was unworkable as they would not fit on the existing V-Bomber force. Creating a new bomber force to accommodate these missiles would not only be far too expensive but

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would also render the V-Bomber fleet obsolete when Skybolt would have prolonged the life of the force by decades.  

Another interesting option was put forward by Kennedy that only a handful of historians have picked up on: a joint study was proposed in order to look at all the options after Skybolt. This option would allow for a more detailed analysis of the various missiles on offer from the Americans and the advantages and disadvantages both militarily and economically. This was dismissed out of hand by Macmillan and perhaps, had the issue not become so big, sensitive and controversial this would be the most logical move for both sides as a more satisfactory outcome could be negotiated over a longer period of time. However Macmillan was backed into a corner: he could not go back to Westminster empty-handed when he had put so much emphasis on the independent nuclear deterrent as one of the lynchpins of his Government’s future policy. He could also not risk the possibility that either the Americans would back out of the deal at a later date or that the British cabinet would abandon the idea of an independent deterrent altogether after such an in depth analysis took place.

A further debate centres on the fact that Rusk, as American Secretary of State, should have attended the Nassau meeting instead of Ball. Both men had differing political views; Ball was a staunch Europeanist and close follower of Jean Monnet and this must have had an influence on his role at Nassau and advice to President Kennedy. However, although he was respected by Kennedy, Ball was not a part of the inner grouping in Kennedy’s Camelot and did not enjoy the close relationship which many of the rest of the ‘Best and Brightest’ enjoyed with the young President.
McNamara, Rusk and Schlesinger, and his influence would have been limited to that of a respected colleague rather than that of friend. As such it can be argued that Rusk, or any other member of the administration closer to the President could have influenced Kennedy in a manner that Ball could not. However, there is an argument that the Nassau Agreement was reached despite of the opinions of the rest of the Kennedy Administration. As Neustadt notes; ‘It was a case of King and King and it infuriated the Court.’ It is difficult to see, therefore, that the presence of Rusk would have had such a great effect on proceedings.

McNamara has been seen by many as ‘the villain’ of the Skybolt crisis. His Ann Arbor speech was seen as an attack on his allies, his press statement before his meeting with Thorneycroft was seen as politically insensitive at best and his decision to allow the testing of Skybolt to continue after the Nassau Agreement was misguided. The fact that Rusk chose to attend a pre-arranged diplomatic luncheon that prevented his attendance at the Nassau meeting, has been interpreted by some as major misjudgement. This move has been criticised as it, as Halberstam argues, ‘allowed McNamara to play too large and clumsy a role.’ Though Rusk defends his non attendance by stating ‘I had a pretty good idea how the Nassau conference would turn out. I was content with the agreement reached.’ Suggesting that there would have been little difference in the outcome had Rusk attended.

McNamara was one of the few in the Kennedy Administration who believed from the earliest stages that Skybolt could only be replaced by Polaris for the British and, 

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243 DiLeo, ‘George Ball and the Europeanists, p. 270.
244 Neustadt, Report to JFK, p. 99.
247 Halberstam, The Best and The Brightest, p. 310.
248 Rusk, As I Saw It, p. 267.
although many miscommunications and changes of strategy caused problems these, were not solely down to the Defense Secretary.\textsuperscript{249} Miscommunication was rife between all members of the Administration and their British counterparts, the blame can not be placed purely at McNamara’s door. This is not to say that he was not involved in some major miscalculations or mistakes, merely that he was one of many involved.\textsuperscript{250} His speech at Ann Arbor was not outside the remit of the Kennedy Administrations stance on nuclear proliferation and as such it is hard to see how McNamara can be blamed for speaking out on this issue. His tone, wording and timing can be criticized but again he was not alone in his mistakes, Acheson’s speech came at a similar time and was as damning, if not more so, than McNamara’s. The issue seems to be therefore that British ears were sensitive to any kind of American negativity and due in part to Macmillan’s precarious standing what could have passed by unheard was latched onto by unsympathetic press and politicians. Britain was not united on the issue of nuclear statesmanship and this was exacerbated by the fact the America was not so convinced either. While America was pushing forward her frontiers Britain was evaluating where and what her frontiers were.\textsuperscript{251} It is interesting to note then that in his Telegram to the Queen after the Nassau Meeting, Macmillan noted ‘McNamara played a notable role. He showed moral strength and intellectual integrity of a high order.’\textsuperscript{252}

The strings attached to Polaris were not new ones; Polaris had been considered and dismissed by Macmillan at the Camp David meeting with Eisenhower due to the insistence that any Polaris Missiles obtained by Britain would be committed to a NATO force.\textsuperscript{253} The idea of a multilateral force was forged for two reasons: the first was to

\textsuperscript{249} Clark, \textit{Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship}, p. 358.
\textsuperscript{250} Nunnerley, \textit{President Kennedy and Britain}, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{251} Brinkley, ‘Dean Acheson and John Kennedy’, p. 289; Baylis, Ambiguity and Deterrence, p. 303.
\textsuperscript{252} Macmillan Telegram to The Queen, 21 December 1962, PREM 11/4437.
\textsuperscript{253} Record of Meeting held at Camp David, 29 March 1960, CAB 133/243; Theodore Sorenson, \textit{Kennedy}, (Hodder and Stoughton, 1974) p. 567.
create a force in which all European nations could contribute but which could be
controlled by the Americans through NATO. The second was the Polaris was a more
sophisticated weapon than Skybolt and as such the natural assumption would be that
through independent development a missile system of Polaris standards could not be
achieved by any of the European Nations. Britain had a shared past with America in the
development of the early nuclear program and as such had a slight advantage despite the
MacMahon Act. Britain, with its close ties to America and their shared ideals, was a
safer bet than any of the other more autonomous nations like France. Indeed, a plea to
aid France in their bid to develop nuclear weapons was ignored.\textsuperscript{254} The strings of the
multilateral force were not tied tightly in the Nassau Agreement itself for one simple
reason: it was just an idea. The Multilateral Force that elements of the Kennedy
Administration had come up with lacked definition, support in Europe or a clear plan.
To enable the plan to move forward a vague commitment was made but this could be
and was out-maneuvered. The vagueness that would allow it to succeed was the very
thing that helped to sink it.\textsuperscript{255} The Kennedy administration’s new thinking in the
nuclear field had scared and confused the rest of the world. After almost a decade of
Eisenhower and his insistence that massive retaliation was the only way to defend
democratic liberty, the change in tone offered by Kennedy and his “best and brightest”
was new and unfamiliar and, most importantly, the Kennedy Government failed to
recognize or address this, instead they assumed that the rest of the world would simply
bow down to their greater knowledge. It is ironic therefore that the very fact that the
Kennedy Administration was so publically and proudly opposed to nuclear proliferation
that this only served to push towards developing their own nuclear option.\textsuperscript{256}

\textsuperscript{254} Letter From President Kennedy to Prime Minister Macmillan, 8 May 1961, quoted in Stuart Ward,
‘Kennedy, Britain and the European Community’, p. 324.
\textsuperscript{255} Nunnerley, President Kennedy and Britain, p. 160; Ball, The Past Has Another Pattern, p. 268.
\textsuperscript{256} Schlesinger Jr, Report to JFK, p. 657.
The test firing of Skybolt that came just after the Nassau Agreement was an unfortunate occurrence as the likelihood that this test would be successful after so many failures was extremely remote and although it was successful the missile had not overcome the huge technical and financial difficulties it would face in order to become a fully functional and reliable weapon. However, it should not be assumed that one successful firing of the weapon meant that it was a credible and workable weapon, that all the technical issues had been resolved or that it was no longer redundant in light of other missiles moving into development. This test firing was its only success after five unsuccessful tests and it came at the worst time.\textsuperscript{257} The fact that this test went ahead was a gross miscalculation as it seemed to run in contrast with the Americans firm stance that it had been all but cancelled before McNamara and Thorneycroft had met in November. It hinted at the idea that there was still hope for the missile and that the technical grounds cited for its cancellation had been at best exaggerated, at worst contrived in order to kill off the British independent nuclear deterrent.\textsuperscript{258}

The negotiations were tense and highly stressful for all parties involved.\textsuperscript{259} The key issue for Macmillan was that any agreement which he brought back to parliament was one that gave Britain control of her own defence. Kennedy’s anti-proliferation stance needed to be bent to allow such a concession. The Americans had been very public in their distaste for small independent missile systems, and had refused to aid France in their attempts construct a ‘Force de Frappe’.\textsuperscript{260} By attaching NATO strings, Kennedy could claim that Polaris was being provided as part of a European defence strategy, not a completely independent deterrent. The clause that stated that Britain could use the

\textsuperscript{257} Statement by McNamara to the Press on Arrival to London, 11 December 1962, PREM 11/3716; To the Prime Minister from David Ormsby Gore, 28 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.

\textsuperscript{258} Dallek, \textit{An Unfinished Life}, pp. 609-610; To The Prime Minister from David Ormsby Gore, 28 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.


\textsuperscript{260} Note of Conversation at Luncheon at the State Department, 28 April 1962, PREM 11/3712.
weapon for their own purposes in times of ‘supreme national interests’ gave the British enough control to be placated without giving them full ownership or control. However, it has also been argued that Macmillan’s skilful negotiation enabled this clause to be inserted despite the reluctance of the American Administration. The vagueness of the statement enabled it to be open to interpretation and as such the British could claim to have more power over the missile than was possibly intended. When this is coupled with the vagueness of the Multilateral Force commitment, a commitment that would never be enforced, the British managed to get complete power over the missile under the noses of the Americans. To many the clause was a last ditch attempt to keep the illusion of independence alive despite the fact that the spell had been broken. The clause was the American Administration’s public permission to use Polaris in the event of a national emergency and as this was the only time that any rational government would deploy missiles, especially when remembering the vagueness of the clause and the fact that a national emergency could be interpreted differently by different governments. This clause fundamentally gave Britain the same kind of cover offered by the American Polaris submarines based in Holy Loch. The intelligence behind the technology and the construction of the missile remained mainly American.

On the surface, the Nassau Agreement seemed to be a complete failure for Kennedy, as it not only ran contrary to his non-proliferation stance and his ideas about nuclear weapons, but also ended his Grand Design for Europe and soured his already precarious relationship with President de Gaulle. It was also a failure in terms of extending the Special Relationship or at least the illusion of it to sceptics in Europe such as de Gaulle but also within his own Administration. The pentagon at least had raised hopes of using

261 Nassau Communiqué, 21 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.
the Skybolt crisis to end this harmful attachment to allow greater Anglo-European and European-American relations in the future especially in terms of defence and security.\textsuperscript{265} However it can also be seen as a success in terms of attaching the Multilateral Force strings and achieving something in the face of such a strong political crisis between his government and one of his closest allies. No matter how exaggerated the difficulty that the Skybolt cancellation would have had on the British Government, the cancellation definitely had had a damaging effect especially coupled with the way that the disclosure was handled by Kennedy and his Administration.\textsuperscript{266} American public opinion was highly in favour of close ties with the British and any perceived mistreatment would not have helped Kennedy’s popularity at home.\textsuperscript{267} The Multilateral Force attachment may not have been successful in the long term and may not have been a popular idea in the Kennedy camp or across Europe but the attachment of the conditions to the Polaris deal, in some ways, acted to pull the United Kingdom into the American fight for an increased European contribution to European defence. Ultimately the vagueness that allowed the Multilateral Force idea to get past the British delegation at Nassau and its lack of support helped to kill the scheme, however it was a step forward in terms of actively trying to solve the problem of European defence.\textsuperscript{268} However the fact that the Multilateral Force was not a popular or even a fully-formed idea before it was attached to the Polaris deal and the fact that it was never implemented seems to suggest that it was tagged on at the last minute. It seemed a desperate attempt to quash the rumours of special treatment for the British and to try and force the British to increase their European defence commitment through a more subtle way that could,

\textsuperscript{265} Lamb, \textit{The Macmillan Years}, p. 297.
\textsuperscript{266} Costigliola, ‘Kennedy, the European Allies and the Failure to Consult’, pp. 118-119.
\textsuperscript{267} Sandbrook, \textit{Never Had It So Good}, p. 227.
potentially be rolled out across Europe.\textsuperscript{269} After Nassau, the hope of many in the
Kennedy Administration was that Britain would join the EEC and use their position
within the community to convince other nations to accept the MLF proposal or produce
an alternative and develop it into a fully operational idea.

Chapter Three – the VETO and the EEC Application

Britain’s role in the European Community is, to this day, a contentious issue for British political parties. Misconceptions and myths over European regulations perpetuated by anti-European political groups and newspapers have created a negative image of the European Union (as it is now known). The most contentious issue of the loss of autonomy of the duly-elected British Government has remained a consistent problem in terms of public opinion since the time when Europe first came together.270

This chapter intends to analyse Britain’s application and the subsequent French veto through the prism of defence policy and the recasting of Britain’s geo-political role, and to investigate, if, as is often assumed, the outcome of the Nassau meeting directly influenced de Gaulle’s announcement in January 1963.

The EEC application and its failure is a complicated issue as it, like Nassau, suffers from the interaction of the domestic politics of a number of nations, the differing hopes of these nations and the problem of having to compromise (without being seen to compromise) on core ideals. In the autumn of 1962 Britain was standing at a crossroads with no certainty of which path would lead them to success and which would lead to a dead end.

Britain’s nuclear weapon programme, and the desire to own an independent nuclear deterrent, predated the European Economic Community by several years.271 The EEC application and the independent nuclear deterrent were quite separate matters at the time when Macmillan decided to table the ideas; the Skybolt deal had been made in March 1960 and the EEC application in August 1961. The convergence came when the Skybolt crisis erupted at the same time that the EEC negotiations were running into difficulties over issues like agriculture, the Commonwealth and, to some extent, the fact that Britain

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270 Hollowell, ‘From Commonwealth to European Integration’, p. 60.
was trying to infiltrate an established organization without accommodating itself to fit in.\textsuperscript{272} Much like a square peg trying to ram itself into a round hole, Britain would not recognise that it was in the weaker position, and so could not expect demands to be met without some kind of compromise.\textsuperscript{273}

The decision for Britain to join the European Economic Community in 1960 was not a truly popular one. Britain’s geographical distance from the mainland continent was symbolic of its cultural and political distance. American television programs, products and music impressed the British psyche with a sense of affinity. The Atlantic divide may have been wider in miles than the distance across the English Channel, but to the average man in the street it is likely that he felt a much closer bond with his American cousins than the Europeans.\textsuperscript{274} The British decision to seek to join the EEC was made several years after its original establishment and after the organization had overcome many of its initial trials and tribulations. There is much criticism of the fact that Britain didn’t join the EEC when it was created, however this overlooks the fact that when the EEC was first devised Britain was in a stronger economic position than its European counterparts and being part of a co-operative was not in its best interests.\textsuperscript{275} However, by 1962, the six countries of the EEC were enjoying an economic and political boom. Between 1957 and 1961 the EEC enjoyed a productivity increase of 19 per cent and a 27 per cent increase in gross national product.\textsuperscript{276} Conversely Britain was suffering the economic hangover of the ‘never had it so good’ years, with an uncertain economic future.\textsuperscript{277} The British had only managed a 14 per cent increase in the same period,
lagging behind not only the Europeans but also the Americas who had seen their productivity rise by 18 per cent. 278

Macmillan and de Gaulle met on two occasions before the Nassau meeting, firstly at Champs in June 1962 and then at Rambouillet just days before Macmillan left for the Bahamas in December. These meetings offer prime examples of all the arguments offered as to why De Gaulle vetoed British entry into the EEC. It soon becomes apparent that it was not so much a question of why de Gaulle decided to veto, but why he did so at that point? The meeting between de Gaulle and Macmillan at Champs 2 and 3 June 1962 was a polite affair but fears had begun to set in that de Gaulle wanted negotiations to drag in order to increase the chances of Britain’s application being killed off naturally. 279 Macmillan feared the possibility that de Gaulle would ‘‘smile and smile and smile’’ but betray us after all?’ 280 He used the opportunity to try to convince de Gaulle of Britain’s European credentials. The idea, therefore, that France had concerns that Britain’s relationship with the USA, ‘Special’ or otherwise, was in play before the Skybolt crisis even began. As Maurice Vaisse comments; ‘From the outset, de Gaulle was consistently opposed to British entry into the Common Market. His opposition was implacable and was not affected by the many arguments put by Macmillan.’ 281 Offers of nuclear trusteeship or hinting at the idea of the possibility of nuclear sharing as a quid pro quo for gaining entry to Europe 282 may have held some interest to de Gaulle, but he must have been aware that Britain was not in a position to offer these options without American consent. Britain was essentially offering to put a good word in with the

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278 Dedman, The Origins and Development of the European Union, p. 112.
282 French Co-operation, Minister of Defence to Prime Minster, 12 April 1962, PREM 11/3712; Charles Williams, The Last Great Frenchman, p. 420.
President, and could not share information or make any promises about the future of the European deterrent.  

This not only showed the British to be reliant on the US, but also, when the Skybolt crisis erupted, they chose to claw back any kind of deal they could rather than coming to de Gaulle to see what nuclear phoenix could possibly be constructed from the ashes.

What is interesting about these meetings is what happened in the interval between Champs and Rambouillet; de Gaulle had enjoyed something of a boost to his position with favourable results in domestic elections and the end of the Algerian conflict, whilst Macmillan had begun to falter after the disastrous cabinet reshuffle in July and embarrassing by-election results. While it is important to note that de Gaulle was not always a popular figure within French Politics and that he lacked the full support of the other political parties within the Fifth Republic, he had gained clear public support from the resolution of the Algerian conflict and the need for consistency after the Cuban Missile Crisis. As a result, by the Rambouillet meeting, de Gaulle was less subtle in his expression of misgivings about British readiness for entry. Macmillan was in the grips of the Skybolt crisis and clearly stated his intention to get some form of deterrent from the Americans at Nassau: de Gaulle cannot have been in any doubt that the Prime Ministers need to come away from Nassau with something to satisfy the British public as well as the Cabinet at Westminster. Macmillan could have used this opportunity to put forward an idea for Anglo-French co-operation, away from American influence in order to secure a future for the European Community with a British contribution. This controversial idea was put forward as a sweetener to help convince de Gaulle to allow British entry. A nuclear deal between Britain and France could help the French move

283 Stanley Henig, *The Uniting of Europe: From Consolidation to Enlargement*, (Routledge, 1997) p. 55.
286 Lacouture, *De Gaulle The Ruler*, p. 357.
forward with the development of their “Force de Frappe” and help persuade de Gaulle to put aside his misgivings by appealing to his nationalist tendencies.\textsuperscript{288} This would have meant severing ties with America and ending the Special Relationship in favour of France and the EEC. Severing ties with the Americas would have been a dramatic and controversial step by the British government and as Crooks comments Thornycroft never entertained this idea as

‘he judged that Britain could not rely on her principal European Allies not merely to collaborate effectively but actually to succeed, in the technically challenging and extremely costly task of developing a credible nuclear capability and subsequently keeping it up to date.’\textsuperscript{289}

In reality any nuclear sharing or alliance within Europe would have been beset by so many economic and technological issues that it would never have moved past the planning stage without some agreement with the United States for American assistance. This option may not have been very popular in Washington, but the chances of an already disillusioned public accepting this and not turning against Macmillan and, perhaps most importantly, the chance of this idea succeeding with de Gaulle made this option untenable for Macmillan. As Neustadt comments, ‘nuclear secrets were not theirs to sell.’\textsuperscript{290} Indeed Rusk was quick to make it clear that any kind of nuclear co-operation with France would not be tolerated as ‘the United States were determined not to help the French in the nuclear field, either directly or indirectly through the United Kingdom.’\textsuperscript{291}

The appeal to the French can also be questioned as de Gaulle was very public in his desire for a ‘Force de Frappe’ that was completely independent.\textsuperscript{292} He had already

\textsuperscript{288} Minister of Defence to Prime Minister, UK-France Co-operation on Nuclear Matters, 12 April 1962, PREM 11/3712; Henig, \textit{The Uniting of Europe from Consolidation to Enlargement}, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{289} Stanley Crooks, Peter Thornycroft, (George Mann, 2007) p. 223.
\textsuperscript{290} Neustadt, \textit{Report to JFK}, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{291} Note of Conversation at Luncheon at the State Department, 28 April 1962, PREM 11/3712.
\textsuperscript{292} Temperley, \textit{Britain and America Since Independence}, p. 187; Reynolds, \textit{Britannia Overruled}, p. 203.
questioned Britain’s commitment, the Commonwealth issue had still not been satisfactorily dealt with in negotiations and acceptance of Britain’s membership would mean that de Gaulle would have to concede some of his power with the Community.293

The fact that de Gaulle chose to veto the British application at the same time as he announced his dismissal of the American offer of Polaris missiles and the Multilateral Force ties that came along with it, as well as the dramatic press conference speech that ended it all,294 signifies that the Nassau Agreement and the Veto are in fact intrinsically linked.295 This is not to say that these two issues were not otherwise intertwined, indeed, the two issues seem to have run a parallel course during the months between October 1962 and January 1963, both pressing Macmillan into an uncomfortable corner.296 The Nassau Agreement cannot be clearly analysed without consideration being given to the EEC application, as their paths crossed during the Skybolt crisis and the veto itself.

Many historians claim that the Nassau Agreement was the final nail in the applications coffin,297 whilst others argue that the application was never going to be accepted and De Gaulle used Nassau as a opportunistic excuse for his veto,298 and still others suggest that the two concepts of the Special Relationship and European integration were so polarized that the two could not continue together and that Britain had to make a clear choice between Europe and America.299

The European Community was established as a third way, a middle ground between the superpowers that allowed Europe to have a voice powerful enough to engage with and not merely be overruled by the USA. They could not yet claim to be a third

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293 Henig, *The Uniting of Europe from Consolidation to Enlargement*, p. 58.
299 Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, p. 281.
superpower, but they were strong enough to stand up against the superpowers, not merely choose which side to support. By 1960, the European Community had prospered and it posed a threat to the special relationship between Britain and America, as it was a stronger and more economically stable ally for the Americans.\(^\text{300}\) Britain was on the outside of this union of nations and as such was of no help to the Americans in terms of dealing with or influencing the EEC politically. Defence was one of the key issues of dispute between America and Europe. America had a sizable investment of conventional forces in Europe for the defence of western European nations, especially in Berlin. The Americans were calling for an increase in spending by the Europeans for their own defence ruled by the Americans,\(^\text{301}\) a call that would be either ignored or construed as an abandonment of Europe as part of the changing notion of nuclear ideology that occurred when the Kennedy Administration came to the White House.\(^\text{302}\) Europe had its own plan for its own future, and wanted to be a power in its own right. Europe had been devastated by the two world wars and had struggled to regain a strong voice in the Superpower age. By unifying, their collective voice was able to stand up economically and politically against the Soviet Union and the Americans.\(^\text{303}\) It is only through detailed analysis of the negotiations prior to the explosion of the Skybolt crisis and the positions of both Macmillan and de Gaulle during this time that a true picture of the impact of Nassau on wider international relations can be clearly shown. It is also important to note the position of the American Government and the impact the new Administration and their ‘Grand Design’ for Europe had on the British and their reasons for joining the EEC and how this was perceived by Europe, especially in the light of recent changes in American defence strategy.

\(^{300}\) Hollowell, ‘From Commonwealth to European Integration’, p. 108.
\(^{301}\) Freedman, *The Kennedy Wars*, p. 280.
\(^{302}\) Baylis, *Ambiguity and Deterrence*, p. 294.
The idea that Nassau was the beginning of the end for the Britain’s EEC application comes from the language used by de Gaulle in his press conference in January which announced the veto to the world. The link was clearly highlighted and therefore many historians have come to conclude that, had the Nassau Agreement come to a different conclusion, the application would have stood a better chance at succeeding. The Nassau Agreement was, in many respects, clear evidence of a Special Relationship between America and the United Kingdom. An earlier French attempt to get help for their own “Force de Frappe” had been spurned, and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s ‘No Cities’ speech, and the reiteration of his strong anti-proliferation in a later speech in Rome, seemed to be at odds with the practice of the Administration in which he sat. The UK seemed to be the exception that proved the rule for the Americans. However, it should not be forgotten that the original Skybolt agreement had been reached during the previous Eisenhower administration and had come as part of unwritten exchange for the Polaris missile bases in Scotland. The Kennedy Administration was anti-proliferation in theory, but, faced with the crisis that erupted over Skybolt, whether contrived or not, it is understandable that Britain was keen to preserve its interests in nuclear armament albeit within the framework of a NATO Multilateral Force commitment.

The argument that Britain need not have pushed for the Polaris missile and that she thus compromised its ideals of independence and clung to the Special Relationship, cannot be easily dismissed. At a time when the British were trying to persuade the European Community that they were not a satellite for American policy and, when they

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305 Ovendale, Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century, p. 131.


307 Rusk, As I Saw It, p. 266.
were pushing towards integration within an organization whose key aim was to operate as a strong unit away from American control and influence, using the idea of a Special Relationship to gain what other nations had not been able to gain from the US was a great misjudgement by Macmillan. Although the Skybolt deal had been reached and was, at the time of the initial application, safely in progress, it is perhaps the way in which Britain chose to react to the cancellation that most upset the European cause. The crisis seemed to be more than just a technological problem; it was also the first time since Suez that the Special Relationship seemed to be failing. Britain was treated like any other ally when America cancelled Skybolt, and the Macmillan Government reacted with passion and with what many critics perceived as being contrived hurt and distress. It seems only logical that this would be viewed as a step away from a cohesive Europe and a public display of the dependence on the Americans that Macmillan had tried to camouflage under the guise of interdependence.  

Nassau was, to some, the straw that broke the camel’s back as far as Britain’s suspected lack of true commitment to the EEC. The way in which the British had approached the negotiations, the existence of some kind perceived ‘special tie’ with the Americans and the lack of any true connection with the continent pointed towards the British application being pushed forward as a kind of subtle coup. Britain needed to place itself as a leading nation within the EEC to preserve its role as a great leader and its Special Relationship with America. The institution worked well, but Britain wanted not only to become a member but also to re-define the organization, keeping Commonwealth ties and having other special dispensations. British membership was not just a case of expanding the EEC, but of reshaping the whole idea to fit a new member, 

309 Greenwood, Britain and European Co-operation, p. 90.  
and a member who could, for the first time, directly challenge France for the leadership and change the course which the French implied the EEC to take in world politics.\textsuperscript{311} The key issue was that Britain was the first new applicant to the established six nations. They came with a different agenda and a different outlook and brought new problems and new issues that needed to be addressed. Equally, Britain was perhaps unrealistic in its aims to join and change the nature and the shape of the organization whilst making as few concessions as possible.\textsuperscript{312} Britain wanted all of the benefits without paying the costs, the biggest of which was abandoning the Special Relationship in favour of a more unified and stronger European commitment; a collection of nations to challenge the Superpowers, not merely accepting whatever directive was to come from Washington.\textsuperscript{313}

In many ways, the aims of the EEC were more worthy of the term independent than the aims of the British Government. The British Government seemed to link power with American approval and was as such reduced to being, to many critics including de Gaulle himself, merely a representative for US policy ideas for Europe.\textsuperscript{314} While the EEC wanted to challenge, the British wanted to co-exist within a ‘partnership’ in which she played the subservient role. The issue for many historians, and perhaps de Gaulle himself, was, therefore, whether Britain was truly European or merely an American puppet, joining only to exert American influence and gain economically from the fruits of the labours of the founder six.\textsuperscript{315} Britain’s aim was to find a role in a new era but as a consequence it can be argued that Britain sold true power for the illusion that came with


\textsuperscript{312} Cabinet Conclusions of a meeting of the Cabinet, 26 April, CAB 128/35.


\textsuperscript{314} Sir Pierson Dixon, From Paris to the Foreign Office, French Press Reactions to the Brussels Negotiations and the Nassau Agreements, FO 371/173340.

\textsuperscript{315} Barnett, \textit{The Verdict of Peace}, pp. 514-5.
close association with America, following the lead of the Americans rather than being the one leading.  

There is a strong argument that, from the French perspective, the Nassau Agreement embodied all the issues of interdependence, the Special Relationship and the political distance between Britain and Europe. There are a number of incidents and a great deal of evidence that seems to support the idea that de Gaulle vetoed the British entry with at least some justification beyond his fear of Britain ousting the French as leaders of the collective. However, the link between Nassau and the veto was not a tit-for-tat retaliation on the part of de Gaulle, as the conclusion of Nassau was merely the most obvious and all-encompassing example of the bond between Britain and Americas. It cannot be assumed that de Gaulle was waiting for the outcome of Nassau to decide whether Britain should be allowed into the EEC. The evidence of the Rambouillet and Champs meetings together with comments which de Gaulle made his ambassadors and his cabinet all point to the fact that he had made up his mind long before Nassau. It was rather that Nassau was a shining example of the Special Relationship in action, and as such it could be held up in front of the worlds’ press as the example of exactly why Britain was not ready for membership. To say that the Nassau Agreement was solely responsible is to assume that, had the outcome differed, de Gaulle would have allowed the negotiations at least to continue. To some this is evidence that de Gaulle was searching for a way to block the entry, to others this was merely the result of Britain’s inability to make concessions quickly when necessary, and so elongating the

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negotiations and allowing de Gaulle to strengthen his position. Many historians believe that, had the Brussels negotiations concluded prior to Nassau and prior to de Gaulle’s domestic victories, as Henig comments, ‘it is conceivable that de Gaulle would have to accept British Membership.’ Some believe that the negotiations were slowed by de Gaulle himself in an attempt to gain a better domestic platform from which to oppose the British entry. As Nunnerley comments, ‘The negotiations broke down not because they were on the point of failure, but because, on the contrary they were on the point of succeeding.’

There is some debate as to Nassau’s role, though there are those who maintain that the threat to de Gaulle’s power in the EEC was the key to the veto. However, there are those who see the Nassau agreement as a convenient example of the behaviour and ideals that meant that Britain was not ready to join the EEC. Unlike the earlier argument that Nassau was the final nail this argument centres on the idea that the decision had been made and that Nassau simply came at the right time for de Gaulle. The issues he had with the entry were plainly reinforced by the agreement, maybe even in the fact that the meeting ever even happened: Britain had gained the original Skybolt agreement due to its close relationship with America, and its willingness to house nuclear bases and weapons, and the Polaris Agreement had been reached despite the Administration’s firm anti-proliferation stance that had ruled out any other nation from gaining nuclear technology from the Americans. Macmillan may have spoken eloquently about the value of European cohesion and his desire to join the Community but his unwillingness to cut even the smallest of ties to the US spoke volumes. Though the existence Special

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320 Young, Britain and European Unity, p. 79.
321 Stanley Henig, The Uniting of Europe, from Discord to Concord, (Routledge, 1997) p. 50.
323 Schlesinger Jr, A Thousand Days, p. 653; Prime Minister to the Minister of Defence, September 18 1960, PREM 11/3261; Recording of Meeting held at Bali-hai the Bahamas, December 19 1962, PREM 11/4229.
Relationship may be debated amongst most historians, there was an easy compatibility between Britain and America which did not exist between the British and the Europeans. Whatever the reasoning or the name attached to it, the relationship between Britain and America worked mainly due to the fact that they seemed to follow similar ideals. The defence of Europe was being heavily shouldered by the Americans and the British, and any increase in European commitments would benefit both countries. Strengthening NATO was also a mutually beneficial policy. Anti-proliferation amongst the rest of Europe was a great gain for the British, as it allowed them to be defensively powerful and remain the essential partner for the Americans in terms of nuclear defence. The difference between Britain and Europe was the kind of power which they wanted to be in the nuclear age; Europe wanted to be a strong autonomous unity of nations, Britain, it seemed, had no option but to hang on the coat tails of the Americans, in danger simply of becoming an extension of the American Administration.

Many historians ascribe the failure of the application to the incompatibility of the ideas of the Special Relationship and the EEC. The two could co-exist, but Macmillan was in a position in late 1962 where the two ideas were in conflict and as such were put under the microscope as they never had been before. The minutiae of the two ideas were put on public display and the obvious clashes of interest became startlingly obvious. The most plausible explanation therefore is that in late 1962 Nassau merely highlighted the problem of the two issues’ incompatibility. It was, therefore, the British Government actively choosing the path of least resistance when these two issues

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clashed which became so apparent as to lead to their failure.\textsuperscript{328} In other words, Macmillan did not so much chose Europe over America, as chose to back the horse that was most likely to lead him to a quick success and the most likely to live to race another day. The European negotiations had not gained much ground, and de Gaulle had sent various signals that the application would not be successful. The Skybolt issue had the chains of Holy Loch and the promise to consult if any problems should occur and after the Kennedy Administration’s failure to do just that, it seems quite logical therefore that Macmillan made the choice to set aside any fears that a deal on Polaris could deal the final blow to the EEC application in order to secure the continuation of one of his grand designs for the future of Britain as a political power.\textsuperscript{329} However Macmillan’s failures and the failures of the British application as a whole should also not be ignored. The slow and cautious way in which Macmillan wanted to gain entry into the EEC to keep wavering public opinion and the support of his own government, also aided its failure.\textsuperscript{330} Although a speedy acceptance of membership, with issues being resolved afterwards would have helped side step de Gaulle’s obvious distaste for British membership, it would not have been popular for Macmillan at home.\textsuperscript{331} However allowing the negotiations to move along at such a slow pace allowed de Gaulle time to gain domestic standing and also allowed him to build a case against the British application and use Nassau as the example.\textsuperscript{332}

It is important to address the issue of de Gaulle and the debate over his reasoning for the veto. Some historians see the veto as purely a means for de Gaulle to keep his hands on the reins of power in the EEC. As is often quoted, there is a strong argument that de Gaulle felt that there was not the room to accommodate ‘deux coqs’ in the EEC hen

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\item \textsuperscript{328} Young, \textit{Britain and European Unity}, p. 77.
\item \textsuperscript{329} Young, \textit{Britain in the World}, p. 190; Dimbleby and Reynolds, \textit{An Ocean Apart}, p. 242.
\item \textsuperscript{330} Young, \textit{This Blessed Plot}, p. 137.
\item \textsuperscript{332} Young, \textit{Britain and European Unity}, p. 79.
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house.\textsuperscript{333} As Dimbleby and Reynolds state, ‘De Gaulle’s motives were no mystery. He did not want a rival power usurping France’s leadership of the EEC.’\textsuperscript{334} De Gaulle was often found to be a difficult ally due to his unwavering patriotism and his nationalistic ideology. Though France had no substantive claim to world power, he fought for France to be considered such through a deep sense of independence and pride. This made him stubborn and unlikely to compromise his country’s advantages for short-term solutions. When his push for autonomy in politics, defence and in nuclear armament in 1962 is assessed, de Gaulle was the most successful in keeping his interests truly nationalistic.\textsuperscript{335} Britain looked for help from the Americans, sold independence for a slice of interdependence in order to have the most immediate realisation of nuclear armament, paying the heavy price of forever linking their deterrent with the Americans. France’s ‘Force de Frappe’ may not have had the immediate results that Britain had by making the Skybolt deal but it did remain truly independent.\textsuperscript{336}

Whatever conclusion is reached over de Gaulle’s success or failure during his time in office, he did manage to achieve a position for himself and France in world politics mainly through the EEC. He had the power, both as the unofficial leader of the Community and with a strong domestic backing, to stand up against the Americans and the British and to put a stop to Anglo-American dominance in Europe.\textsuperscript{337} Britain could not simply demand entry into the Community, backed by the United States and expect to change the shape of it overnight. Britain was not the powerhouse in Europe it had once been, and as such fell victim to de Gaulle’s guile. De Gaulle had a clear agenda for the six and, in 1962 at least, deemed that British entry would do more harm than

\textsuperscript{333} Macmillan, \textit{At The End of The Day}, p. 365.
\textsuperscript{334} Dimbleby and Reynolds, \textit{An Ocean Apart}, p. 242.
\textsuperscript{335} Oliver Bange, ‘Grand Designs and the Diplomatic Breakdown’ in Wilkes \textit{Britain’s Failure to Enter the European Union}, p. 207.
\textsuperscript{336} Temperley, \textit{Britain and America}, p. 187; Pagedas, \textit{Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the French Problem}, pp. 197-198.
\textsuperscript{337} Ward, ‘Kennedy, Britain and the European Community’ p. 322.
good.\textsuperscript{338} It can be argued that the backlash against de Gaulle over his veto was merely a way of Britain avoiding addressing the key issue that Dean Acheson had brought to the fore in his West Point Speech. Britain had not yet found a role and the decision to keep them out of the EEC meant that Britain’s role was not yet as part of Europe. It could be argued that Britain had tried to fit itself into a role in Europe because it was so desperate to find one in the wake of decolonization. The decision to enter Europe was not the decision of a strong nation who sought to expand its horizons, but of a nation in decline and seeking ways to regain what had been lost after two world wars, Suez and an economic downturn. As Dimbleby and Reynolds comment ‘Britain remained in suspense, contracting as a world power yet excluded from the EEC, in limbo “between Europe and the open sea”\textsuperscript{339}

The more obvious issue regarding the veto is not why but why then? De Gaulle chose a very public and dramatic press conference, just weeks after the Nassau meeting to veto the entry and embarrass Macmillan (and, to some extent, Kennedy at the same time).\textsuperscript{340} Many figures in the British and French governments had already come to the conclusion that the bid was at best going to be extremely hard fought, at worst completely impossible in the face of de Gaulle’s resistance, the effects of Nassau and the problems in the negotiation process. The press conference could be seen as more damning then the veto itself; it was a humiliating reminder that Britain was now the kind of nation that was rejected, the kind of nation that had to be part of a Special Relationship or community to keep the sense of power it once had.\textsuperscript{341} Britain was not able to keep up with the growth of the United States and the EEC, and by 1963 this realization had hit hard upon the morale of the nation. De Gaulle’s veto – timed,

\textsuperscript{339} Dimbleby and Reynolds, An Ocean Apart, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{340} Time Magazine, 25 January 1963.
\textsuperscript{341} Young, Britain and European Unity, p. 77; Fisher, Macmillan, p. 457; Hennessey, The Prime Minister, p. 267.
broadcast and worded as it was - damaged Macmillan and helped to sour the end of his premiership. 342 Nassau could not be seen as a true success because of the crisis that led up to it and the strings attached to the resulting missile system, but the veto rubbed salt in to the already wounded British pride. The veto could have come later, negotiations had not finished and other member states were happy to discuss ways for Britain to enter. The timing and execution seem to be de Gaulle’s opportunity to strike a blow in a battle between himself and the Anglo-American Special Relationship. His new-found security in office put him in a strong position, and it can be argued that the drama created by the press conference was merely an opportunity to put the Anglo-Saxons in their place which he was unable to resist. 343

It is possibly as a result of his approach that many historians offer de Gaulle as the villain of the piece. 344 This is despite the fact that his arguments of the risk of Britain bringing American influence into the Community, of Britain’s lack of European identity and its willingness to look first across the Atlantic before considering looking across the Channel were valid points. 345 Instead, de Gaulle is presented as a power-hungry man, unwilling to allow Britain to take some of that power away. 346 It is much more flattering to Britain to accept this view as it relies on de Gaulle fearing Britain and its status.

However, even if de Gaulle’s motives may be questioned it is the case that the British Government were more inclined, as Suez proved, to look towards America and had been so inclined for decades, they had turned down the opportunity to be part of the European Community at its inception, they had tried to gain entry by opposing it with EFTA rather than changing to fit in and they had now tied themselves to America.

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342 Ellis and Treasure, Britain’s Prime Ministers, p. 248.
345 Lacouture, De Gaulle The Ruler, p. 357.
346 Hollowell, ‘From Commonwealth to European Integration’, p. 73; Greenwood, Britain and European Co-operation, p. 86; Peter Mangold, An Almost Impossible Ally, p. 154.
through the Nassau Agreement. However, in the context each decision made would have most likely been the decision any leader would have made. America was stronger than Europe, Britain had more in common with it than with Europe, and the Economic Community was not a sensible option for Britain in 1957. When entering a negotiation it is common practice to give as little as possible, while gaining as much as possible and the Nassau Agreement was possibly the only sensible option available to a government in the position such as that of the British Government was in December 1962.

The veto therefore needs to be viewed as the multifaceted equivalent of the Skybolt crisis and no one single explanation is likely to be valid. The veto was not just a reaction to one moment, ideal or politician; it was, much like the Skybolt crisis, a mix of issues which coincided, leaving no one person or action to blame. As Ball notes; ‘The puckishness of history prevented events from occurring with the right timing or in the right sequence.’

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347 Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, p. 222.
Chapter Four – After Effects of Nassau

The Nassau Agreement went on to affect politics from the 1960s to the present day as the debate still continues as to the validity and necessity of ownership of nuclear weapons as it did in 1962. After the Nassau Agreement was signed, one major consequence was that the fate of nuclear relationship between Britain and America was sealed and the two nations were tied for at least the lifetime of the Polaris deterrent. In fact, the relationship continued from Polaris through to Trident in 1982 and to this day with the debates over wide-spread acceptance of the next generation of nuclear deterrent already beginning to be heard. The deal in the Bahamas has led to over forty years of technical dependence on America for the British deterrent allowing the debate over the legitimacy of the true independence of the deterrent to rage on in parliament and the newspapers. This however is merely the most obvious effect, not the only effect the Nassau Treaty had on future politics and relationships.

The aftermath of the Nassau Agreement can be described as three part; firstly, there was the reaction to the deal and the concessions that Britain had to make in order to reach an agreement; secondly, there was the connection made with the EEC veto and the reaction and criticisms attached to that, as already discussed, and thirdly was the Multilateral Force and how the Agreement had attached Britain to this controversial and under-developed idea.

Nassau was the final agreement between Kennedy and Macmillan; Macmillan retired in October 1963 on medical grounds, while Kennedy was assassinated just over a month

348 The Daily Mail, 23 September 2009.
When the relationship between Lyndon Johnson and both Alec Douglas Home and later Harold Wilson did not live up to the mantle of the ‘Mac and Jack’ years, Nassau either became heralded as the last high point in the Indian summer of the Special Relationship or the document that marked the end of Britain as a great power and the beginning of her new role as a satellite of American foreign policy with Britain’s weapon being dependent on the US rather than Britain allowing its land to be used as a base for American owned missiles.

The Nassau Agreement had a surprising impact on the elections held in October 1964. More contentious domestic issues such as the economic downturn Britain suffered after Macmillan’s resignation were crucial but the debate over the need for a nuclear deterrent hung over the elections even though as Epstein comments:

‘[Conservative] Party disagreement over entering the European Economic Community was at least temporarily in abeyance after de Gaulle’s veto. No great Imperial question remained to divide the Conservatives and the Labour or Liberal parties. Membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was firmly bipartisan (or tripartisan). Moreover, British power was now so limited, in relation to the rest of the world, as to provide little basis for Englishmen to think that their nation could make important international decisions...In short, every likelihood existed for electoral attention to be fixed almost entirely on domestic affairs.’

Labour were more anti-American, in rhetoric at least, than the Conservatives and they were also more inclined towards an anti-nuclear position and had been great critics of

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351 Dibley and Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart*, p. 244.
354 From Foreign Office to Nassau, 22 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.
the Nassau Agreement and the issue of nuclear deterrence as a whole. 356 This is not to say that the British public elected a Labour Government purely because they did not agree with the Nassau Agreement, but the ideology of decline that was stirred by the debate over Nassau, the choice that had been made between closer links with Europe and keeping the link with America, the choice over independence and dependence (or interdependence) were all questions which were made public by the Skybolt crisis and they must have had at least a small effect on the decision of the British electorate.

Macmillan had set his cap on two policies: nuclear independence and entry into the European Economic Community, and achieved neither in the truest sense. His popularity and that of his party had suffered from economic problems and political scandal, and Macmillan had made himself seem less capable with the ill-advised cabinet reshuffle of July 1962.357

The public, press and historical reactions to Nassau and the interpretation of the independence of the deterrent that Macmillan gained varies greatly.358 As discussed earlier, the move from independence to interdependence was not a smooth transition, and it was seen to be a rushed policy, cobbled together as a smoke screen, to hide the sharp truth of dependence on America.359 Macmillan had spoken of the need for an independent nuclear deterrent, and had fought against the criticism of buying it from the Americans by holding high the assertion that ultimate power over its use came as part of the price, and so Britain could be assured of its safety the developing nuclear age.360 At Nassau, he managed to secure what to many critics was merely an illusion of power, but to others was a major coup on the part of the British. This was the inclusion on the

357 Fisher, Macmillan, p. 279
358 From The Foreign Office to Nassau, 22 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.
clause which stated that Britain could use the weapon outside of its NATO commitment when ‘supreme national interests are at stake.’

Historians such as Dimbleby and Reynolds see the Nassau agreement as a high point in the Special Relationship as although Skybolt caused a huge crisis it was able to recover and an agreement was able to be reached that gave Britain access to US technology no other ally could boast. By contrast, May and Treverton argue that the Special Relationship only served to reinforce ‘each others delusions’ Bange sees the Nassau Agreement as ‘an appalling mistake’ asserting that Kennedy ‘caved in and Macmillan was granted Polaris’ and he questions whether or not ‘Kennedy supported a real nuclear deal at Nassau or simply handed the British a free deterrent. Kennedy had called the British nuclear deterrent ‘a piece of military foolishness’, however Schlesinger notes that ‘for Kennedy it was a reasonable adjustment to a difficult problem.’

Prime Minister David Cameron questions why the Special Relationship is analysed at all as:

No other international alliance seems to come under the intense scrutiny reserved for the one between Britain and the United States. There is a seemingly endless British preoccupation with the health of the special relationship. Its temperature is continually taken to see if it's in good shape, its pulse checked to see if it will survive.

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366 ibid, p203.
It is surely the unequal balance of power that lies at the heart of the Special Relationship which causes this on-going uncertainty and critical scrutiny, and it was the Nassau Agreement when that power arrangement was first acknowledged by all parties.

Though the Multilateral Force issue was directly part of the agreement, others aspects were linked by timing or historical analysis. As discussed previously, many historians and politicians link the Nassau Agreement with the veto of Britain’s entry into the EEC. Those who subscribe to this point of view can also link it with the Franco-German treaty and de Gaulle’s decision to remove France from NATO.\textsuperscript{370} France and Germany’s decision to sign the Élysée Treaty on 22 January 1963 saw the beginning of a strong co-operation in defence policy between the two nations but was also a way for France to retaliate against the Nassau Agreement and the Special Relationship from which it was formed.\textsuperscript{371} De Gaulle wanted a strong Europe that could stand up against the might of American power. Germany, divided as it was in Berlin, was a major issue in terms of both defence politics for the British and the Americans. Great efforts had been made to keep Germany included in the defence of the West, while still keeping it at a safe arm’s length. The Multilateral Force idea had been borne from the debate over how best to involve Europe in her own defence without alienating or arming the Germans.\textsuperscript{372} Fear still ran from the fact that Germany had played a major role in two world wars as well as the fact that Soviet occupation of East Germany meant that defence had to be finely balanced so as not to appear as aggressive towards the Russians.\textsuperscript{373} France’s subsequent decision to leave NATO in 1966 has been linked to the Nassau Agreement, as it was a decision based on American dominance in European and international politics and as it came as part of a series of decisions - the veto of

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\item \textsuperscript{371} Henig, \textit{The Uniting of Europe: From Consolidation to Enlargement}, p. 55.
\item \textsuperscript{372} Lamb, \textit{The Macmillan Years}, p. 311.
\item \textsuperscript{373} Holt, ‘Lord Home and Anglo-American Relations’, p. 712.
\end{itemize}
Britain and the Franco-German treaty – that came to pass after Nassau and America’s commitment to the British nuclear deterrent.\textsuperscript{374} However France had long questioned its role in NATO and had been critical of NATO’s tactics and uses in Europe.\textsuperscript{375}

The Multilateral Force issue is immensely complex not just in terms of the idea itself and its feasibility as an active, internationally interlinked concept, but the reasoning behind its conception and its inclusion in the Nassau Agreement despite its lack of support on either side of the Atlantic adds a new dimension to any analysis of the Agreement\textsuperscript{376} The idea came from the debate over how to increase defence spending amongst the European states in conventional forces. This was a vital issue for the United States, which had found its defence budgets overstretched by their commitments in Europe while the European nations themselves seemed to contribute very little in terms of conventional manpower on the continent, instead choosing to divert their budgets to the development of a nuclear arsenal.\textsuperscript{377} The Americans were financially overstretched by the fact that they were funding the whole gamut of defensive options, from conventional to nuclear.\textsuperscript{378} To the Kennedy Administration, the fact that the nuclear option existed did not mean that the conventional option was no longer viable. America had the funds and the vast expertise to expand in the area of nuclear weaponry to make huge technological advances well before the Soviets. During the Kennedy administration defence spending increased by 13 percent,\textsuperscript{379} at a cost of $17 billion dollars and this was, according to Sorenson ‘the largest swiftest build up in this

\textsuperscript{374} Freedman, \textit{The Kennedy Wars}, p. 277.
\textsuperscript{375} Conclusion of Meeting of the Cabinet, 31 January 1961, CAB 128/35; Mangold, \textit{The Almost Impossible Ally}, pp. 110-111.
\textsuperscript{377} Future Policy Study 1960-70, Part IV: Conclusions and Recommendations, 24 February 1960, CAB 134/1929; Defence: Outline of Future Policy, Presented by the Minister of Defence to Parliament, 1 April 1957, CAB 129/86.
\textsuperscript{378} \textit{Time Magazine}, 28 December 1962.
country’s peace time history. Although the Kennedy ideal was to have every option available to avoid nuclear conflict, the deterrent nature of a nuclear weapon would only be viable if they were credible weapons; America had to keep pushing forward and not allow Soviets to become technologically superior. During his time in office intercontinental missiles were doubled and Polaris missiles were increased by 50 percent. It seemed logical to many Americans that in a collaborative partnership with Europe, the nuclear option would be left in the hands of the Americans allowing essential funds to be diverted back into conventional weaponry and manpower on the continent. This would allow the United States to pull some of their defence spending away from this area and allow the nuclear safety of the Allies to be safeguarded well into the future. But, just as the Americans wanted to pull European fingers out of the nuclear pie, Europe had become less confident of Uncle Sam’s commitment to them and wanted to push forward with their own nuclear arsenal. As suggested earlier, the Skybolt crisis influenced this idea in two ways; firstly it gave the Americans the chance to pull the British into being part of the solution and it also caused the Americans to rush to formulate some kind of plan and to tack it somewhat inefficiently to the Nassau Agreement in the vain hope it would ease some of the criticism that had been levelled at them in regards to European commitment.

The Multilateral force was not a new idea. During the original Camp David meeting between Eisenhower and Macmillan, the Polaris missile was made available to the

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British with ties to NATO as part of a proposed European force. The British chose the Skybolt missile in part due to the restrictions placed on Polaris. It is logical therefore that the NATO ties remained on Polaris when the missile was put forward as an option at Nassau. The doctrine of Multilateral Force was a version of NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Norstad’s proposal, to establish NATO as a fourth nuclear force with Washington retaining power of veto. When the idea was originally put forward in 1961, it received a cool reception and took over a year before the push really began. As Freedman suggests, ‘It took considerable arm twisting by McNamara before the Joint Chiefs of Staff were prepared to say that the scheme had any military utility.’

European defence was a major problem for the American Administration as they had to balance the level of commitment they were willing to make in the face of domestic budget issues. The Americans were angered by the fact that Europe did not contribute to their own defence to the levels necessary and relied on the American defence umbrella to defend them. During 1962, the US economy had slowed down, unemployment had hit five and a half percent and there was a significant drop in the stock market - enough to bring back memories of the Great Crash of the 1920s and start an uncomfortable blame culture for the Kennedy Administration, with many fingers pointing firmly at the President as a scapegoat. By the beginning of 1963, Kennedy had decided to push forward with a groundbreaking ten billion dollar tax cut bill. Budget cuts would naturally follow with such an ambitious tax cut plan. By cancelling the Skybolt

389 Record of Meeting held at Bali-Hai, Nassau, 19 December 1962, PREM 11/4229; Foreign Office to NATO delegation, Nuclear Deterrent Policy, December 31 1962, CAB 21/4979.
392 Reeves, Profile in Power, p. 441.
393 Sorenson, Kennedy, p. 421.
missile program the American government would save approximately two and a half billion dollars. The Skybolt missile was over budget, over schedule, overly complex and offered no special advantages. The Minutemen, Hound Dog and Polaris missiles covered all that Skybolt could provide and were all proven, tried and tested. Investment in Skybolt would therefore be a waste of Government money and even the Camp David Agreement with Britain would not be enough to justify the expenditure.

European defence was expensive business for the Americans and, according to Dallek, Kennedy “urged his budget director to rename foreign aid ‘International Security. Appropriations to ‘strengthen the security of the free world’ or to combat communism would find greater receptivity than anything that seemed like a giveaway to dependent developing nations asking for American help.” This contradicted United States’ policy on anti proliferation and meant that much needed conventional forces in Germany especially were funded by the USA rather than its European allies. In 1950, 6.6 percent of Britain’s gross national product was spent on defence while the Americans allocated 5.1 percent of theirs. In 1953, British defence spending was at 28.5 percent of total government expenditure. The Defence White Paper called for cuts in conventional forces and the end of conscription due to the fact that Britain was no longer able to keep her top three place in terms of defence spending and implementation; after the Second World War Britain was no longer able to afford the luxury of paying to defend the rest of the world. The Kennedy administration felt this left the USA with an unfair burden both militarily and more importantly financially.

395 Neustadt, Report to JFK, p. 36.
401 Draft of Defence: Outline of Future Policy, Presented by the Minister of Defence to Parliament, 1 April 1957, CAB 129/86.
The Multilateral Force was one push for the expansion of European conventional forces.\textsuperscript{402}

Nuclear proliferation was a two tier issue for the Americans. Firstly it led to the danger that too many nations would have a nuclear arsenal and therefore the odds of a nuclear conflict would increase, especially when many nations still subscribed to the notion of massive retaliation.\textsuperscript{403} Secondly, the development of nuclear programmes diverted much needed defence budgets away from conventional defence spending, making Europe vulnerable to the Red Army on the ground and leaving no alternative but the nuclear option in the event of a conflict between the East and West.\textsuperscript{404}

By creating a fourth force in NATO, the USA made available the nuclear option without giving the keys to the kingdom away to several independent nations. The illusion of inclusion in the nuclear club should be enough, as far as the Americans were concerned, to placate Europe and encourage them to invest in other conventional defence options.\textsuperscript{405} The NATO force, as it would be built from American technology, would be more advanced and available far quicker than any individual nation could on its own. Nuclear weaponry had moved forward at lightning speeds, and the cost to keep up was untenable to all but the superpower nations.\textsuperscript{406}

This idea seemed to be extremely logical but failed to take into account the nature of international politics. Although Europe appeared to be in concord with the idea of reliance on America as in terms of conventional defence of Europe, faith in the American commitment to European defence had wavered after Cuba.\textsuperscript{407} Having faced a

\textsuperscript{402} Sorenson, \textit{Kennedy}, p. 568.
\textsuperscript{403} Schlesinger Jr, \textit{A Thousand Days}, p. 656.
\textsuperscript{404} Sandbrook, \textit{Never Had it So Good}, p. 240.
\textsuperscript{405} Kaplan, ‘The MLF Debate’, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{406} Draft of Defence: Outline of Future Policy, Presented by the Minister of Defence to Parliament, 1 April 1957, CAB 129/86.
possible Armageddon over which they had no say and very little influence had encouraged European nations to look not to America but to themselves for defence. The only way in which to guarantee the defence or the security of a nation was to provide the security yourself, and this is precisely what Europe wanted to do. America could offer the shelter of their nuclear arsenal but would they really risk their own security for a conflict across the Atlantic? Or would they use Europe as a buffer against Soviet aggression? This was not a risk European nations were willing to take.408

However, contrary to popular opinion, the fact that the Multilateral Force was an incomplete and ambiguous idea was not due to American incompetence but due to a lack of support within the American Administration, least of all from Kennedy himself.409 The policy was merely an idea to appease European ideas of independent nuclear weapon systems and a way of increasing defence spending within Europe by European countries.410

The main thrust of a Multilateral Force was that there would be a submarine force, armed with Polaris missiles, manned by teams of mixed nationality crew from NATO countries under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe.411 This would allow each of these nations to feel part of the nuclear club, without having a full membership. This force would be controlled by NATO but the ultimate power lay with the Americans. For the Americans, it enabled a kind of controlled independence for the Europeans without allowing nuclear proliferation and along with it proliferation of power.412 The main appeal to the Americans was of course the main criticism from Europe; nuclear defence would be beholden to the Americans and their nuclear

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408 Memorandum by The Prime Minister, Our Foreign and Defence Policy for the Future, CAB 134/1929.
410 Rusk, As I Saw It, pp. 263-264.
411 Ibid, p. 263.
resources. A number of other issues regarding the implementation of the mixed manned crew, from language barriers to how the system would work in terms of command and manpower contribution and the protocol for withdrawing troops in times of domestic dispute, all contributed to the infeasibility of the programme.  

One of the key areas of dispute was how to handle Germany in terms of defence. The Multilateral Force idea appealed to the Americans as it gave Germany a controlled inclusion in defence issues without putting them in any position of real power. Inclusion in the MLF scheme would provide Germany with a status symbol, a form of succession into the nuclear club, link them with the US deterrent and provide equality with the United Kingdom while relieving the pressures of an independent nuclear deterrent. Despite the war having been over for over fifteen years, fear of Germany was still a political factor.

Berlin was a difficult issue for the Americans; any relationship with West Berlin had to be handled with care, as any collaboration or defensive partnership created would have to be finely balanced between defending the people of West Berlin and the principles of the West while being cautious as not to stir up conflict with the USSR and risk a potentially catastrophic conflict that could escalate far beyond the German borders. This was also an issue for many European nations and while the Americans aimed to include Germany in the MLF force in order to keep a tight control over any nuclear possession many European nations saw danger in including Germany as it could goad the USSR as the missiles in Cuba had goaded the Americans.

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415 Lamb, The Macmillan Years, p. 300.
416 Ball, The Past Has Another Pattern, p 274; Dean Rusk, As I Saw It, p. 265.
417 Sorenson, Kennedy, p. 568.
The problem was not just that the Multilateral Force was a misguided idea but that it was the only idea put forward.\textsuperscript{418} America and Europe both saw issues arising in terms of the future defence of the West, but they did not communicate properly.\textsuperscript{419} America left Europe feeling vulnerable, as the complexities and technology that the Americans had developed and were not passed on to the less advanced Europeans. The fears the Europeans had due to the changes of U.S. behaviour and ideology were not listened to or acknowledged, and this just intensified the fears when the Americans dismissed them out of hand without fully explaining the situation to the European leaders. Kennedy’s America had pushed forward to a new frontier in the 1960s, however the rest of the allied forces were merely trying to navigate a path in the old frontier.\textsuperscript{420}

Nassau signalled the end of two European Grand Designs from the British and the American governments that challenged the Gaullist design which led to the veto of British entry.\textsuperscript{421} The existence of the two designs and the fact that they both centred on the idea of America maintaining a strong influence either directly or through the British does support the argument that Britain was merely a satellite for American policy. Some historians, such as Bange, credit the fact that the Americans and the British stood against the development of an independent Europe that some credit as the reasoning behind the veto.\textsuperscript{422} The British acceptance of the MLF clause led to the conclusion that the nuclear deterrent gained at Nassau was not independent, and so publically showed Britain’s dependence upon the Americans. Although Skybolt had been criticised, the fact that ultimate control of its use lay in British hands was a way to justify the purchase

\textsuperscript{418} Rusk, \textit{As I Saw It}, p. 263.
\textsuperscript{419} Ibid p. 262.
\textsuperscript{420} Schlesinger Jr, \textit{A Thousand Days}, p. 656.
\textsuperscript{421} Ball, \textit{The Past Has Another Pattern}, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{422} Bange, ‘Grand Designs and The Diplomatic Breakdown’, p. 202; Ball, \textit{The Past has Another Pattern}, p. 222.
of technology.\textsuperscript{423} Polaris went a step further, not only by the fact that it involved more dependence on American engineering but also with the MLF ties.\textsuperscript{424} However, there is an argument that the British signed up to the agreement because of the ambiguous nature of the clause, as this allowed not the illusion of independence but the illusion of interdependence and co-operation.\textsuperscript{425} Though many in the British government did not see the merit or the feasibility to the MLF programme, by allowing the incorporation of the British deterrent in this plan the Americans were appeased enough to allow the clause that allowed the British to use the deterrent as it wished when national interests were at great risk.\textsuperscript{426} The MLF clause was unlikely to pass into action as it lacked support in the American Administration, on the continent and would be a logistical nightmare as it would involve multinational forces to work cohesively while each member of military personnel would ultimately answer to their own national armed forces.\textsuperscript{427}

It is important to note however that in some respects the clause was a moot issue as legislation that governed the sale of weapons by the Americans were strict and included two clauses that affected the use of the weapons. As noted in the draft directive from the Ministry of Defence American weapons must be subject to these conditions of sale which included,

‘(a) That the equipment must be used in Legitimate self defence.

(b) That we should not undertake any act of aggression against any other State.’ \textsuperscript{428}

This meant that in real terms neither the Skybolt nor the Polaris missiles could be classed as truly independent.

As discussed earlier, the American Administration had left many in Europe insecure of their safety in the 1960s after the change from Massive Retaliation, the events in Cuba and the confusion over anti-proliferation. The decision was therefore made for President Kennedy to tour Europe in the summer of 1963 and this included the famous ‘ich bin ein Berliner’ speech which he made in West Berlin in June of that year.\(^\text{429}\) The speech was intended to remind West Berlin that it was not alone and to boost morale within the city. The public response was clear and supportive and Kennedy remains a popular figure in Europe, though how much of this can be attributed to the tour and how much can be attributed to the fact that Kennedy was assassinated months after the tour concluded in Ireland is unclear.\(^\text{430}\) However, in the face of the Franco-German treaty, a tug of war had begun over who was best placed to aid Germany in defence issues in the 1960s. American influence could not be as easily pushed aside, and despite the treaty public and government opinion was more heavily weighted towards the American side.\(^\text{431}\) The French collaboration would have led to a greater German involvement in defence issues and a greater say in nuclear issues, however the French were far behind the Americans in terms of development and technology, and any attempt France that made to be true competitor was unrealistic.\(^\text{432}\) French power could be harnessed through the European Community, but only when the whole institution came together under French leadership could a real third power exist. The problem was that, despite misgivings, the American defence umbrella was a far more attractive option, especially

\(^\text{431}\) Williams, \textit{Adenauer}, p. 520.
\(^\text{432}\) Lothas Kettenacker, \textit{Germany Since 1945},(Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 64.
in these difficult Cold War times where the missile race and the space race had pushed the rest of the world to the sidelines in the battle of supremacy between the superpowers.  

The Multilateral Force idea was eventually cancelled by President Johnson in 1964 without much ceremony or fuss.

Nassau also tied Britain and America to a nuclear partnership that far excelled any that had gone before. Skybolt had seen Britain gain a deterrent that could fit on to warheads and into an already functional and wholly British bomber force. Polaris missiles required a whole new level of co-operation between America and Britain as submarines etc had to be either procured from American companies or developed from American intelligence.

This nuclear partnership carried on from Polaris to Trident and to the next generation of Trident being debated. However, the issues of how independent the deterrent is, how viable a British deterrent is and the role of nuclear weapons have never left either. Terrorism, the 9/11 bombings, the Iraq War and Iran and Koreas move towards nuclear power have led to the debate over nuclear weapons being as hostile, contentious and current as ever.

The War on Terror has replaced the Cold War, fears of terrorist attacks have replaced the fear of Communist infiltration and Weapons of Mass Destruction have replaced the missiles of Cuba. Although the lexicon has changed the semantics are the same.

There are a number of interpretations as to the effect of Nassau on the Special Relationship between America and Britain. Historians such as Reynolds see the resolution of the Skybolt crisis at Nassau as a testament to the relationship and the

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437 The Telegraph, 28 July 2010.
importance it had on both sides of the Atlantic. Britain was the only ally America could count upon to work with them rather than against them. De Gaulle’s overtly nationalistic stance made him a difficult ally as he was constantly searching for the path that led him to French power and this, he viewed, could only be achieved independently of America not through a close, and as such arguably a subservient partnership. Macmillan was quick to grasp the idea that true independence could no longer be achieved and that power could come from a policy of interdependence. The Cold War had created two superpowers and it was a case of picking a side and praying that Armageddon would never come. As Reynolds observes it became a case of public support followed by back stage efforts to moderate the Americans: ‘The motto, in effect, was ‘never say ‘NO’ say ‘yes but’.”

Historians such as Barnet take the stance that the Special Relationship was in fact merely an illusion created by the British in a vain flight of fancy that they were still as relevant as they believed themselves to be. The Special Relationship was a myth created to hide the fact that Britain’s status was ebbing away and was no longer a world leader.

Relationships between Kennedy and Ormsby Gore did assure that a British voice was at least heard in the Whitehouse, however this stemmed from the pre-presidential friendship the two enjoyed and not from the fact that he was British Ambassador. If someone else had inhabited the role during the Kennedy era, there is little evidence to suggest that such a close bond and such a sympathetic ear would have been offered. This is not to say that the British were not held in high regard, it merely opens to

438 Reynolds, ‘Rethinking Anglo-American Relations’, p. 98.
439 Rusk, As I Saw It, p. 262; Dean Rusk quoted in Nunnerley, President Kennedy and Britain, p. 158.
440 Freeman, The Kennedy Wars, p. 278.
441 Reynolds, ‘Rethinking Anglo-American Relations’, p. 98.
interpretation how much the friendship aided the Special Relationship and how much is was reliant upon it.\textsuperscript{443}

The relationship between Kennedy and Macmillan may not have equalled that of Macmillan and Eisenhower but it was a high point in the relations between American President and a British Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{444} The relationship between Johnson and Wilson did not seem to have the same ease and it was perhaps not until Thatcher and Regan that the relations hit a similar high.\textsuperscript{445}

Much like Tony Blair was heavily criticised during his tenure as Prime Minister, Macmillan was criticised for the way in which the Special Relationship seemed to imply not equal partnership but a great dependence, not allegiance but subservience, not great power but political impotence. The debate about how much the Special Relationship is indeed a relationship and not a dictatorship still rages. Indeed the Prime Minister David Cameron has stated “I believe in the special relationship. I think Britain is, of course, the junior partner, but I think it is an important and long-standing relationship and I hope that we bring things to that relationship.”\textsuperscript{446} Nassau was a significant moment in the Special Relationship and as it gave Britain something that no other ally could claim in Polaris while it simultaneously tied them to a scheme that questioned the independence of Britain and the true nature of the Special Relationship.

\textsuperscript{443} Scott, \textit{The Cuban Missile Crisis}, p. 119; Guthman and Shulman, \textit{Robert Kennedy}, pp. 29-30.
\textsuperscript{444} Reynolds, ‘Rethinking Anglo-American Relations’, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{446} \textit{The Guardian}, 16 July 2010.
Conclusion

At first sight, the Nassau Agreement of 1962 appears to be just another milestone in the history of the Special Relationship. It is only when it is taken in the context of wider political issues that the real impact of the agreement is truly revealed. The agreement resulted from a crisis of confidence and communication, highlighting chinks in the armour of unity within the Western Alliance, and it also underscored the fragility of a union of powers who wanted to be at the top table of world politics but did not want to be subordinate to the superpowers; especially in this new nuclear age.\textsuperscript{447} Nassau was a product of its time; its significance grew due to its timing and its impact on wider politics. It has links to so many political issues that it cannot be easily judged without delving into the politics of 1962 for Europe, Britain and America. Cuba, Berlin, security issues within Europe, British entry into the EEC, the Special Relationship, the legitimacy of the independent deterrent, changing American nuclear policy, lack of communication between allies and Britain’s search for a new role all either affected or were affected by the Nassau Agreement.

The key issue of the Special Relationship is quantifying it as a definable association between allies that was unique and cooperative with each side gaining something of substance from each other which they could not get elsewhere. It is hard to define the Special Relationship between Britain and America in these terms. It is quite easy to amass arguments for why this relationship was not special, not in the best interest of both parties and unequal in terms of how much significance was placed on it by each government.\textsuperscript{448} However it cannot be argued that some kind of relationship did not exist between America and Britain even if the legitimacy of it is questionable. America and Britain, through a shared language and culture have forged an allegiance that has

\begin{footnotes}
\item[447] Nunnerley, \textit{President Kennedy and Britain}, p. 127.
\item[448] Barnett, \textit{The Verdict of Peace}, pp. 514-515.
\end{footnotes}
provoked criticism and gained plaudits in equal measure. The relationship may be unequal at times but no political connection can be truly equal; there will always be times where one side has to concede something in order to gain something in the long term. The Nassau Agreement was in many ways a high point in the Special Relationship as Britain did manage to come away from Nassau with the more technologically advanced Polaris missile from an administration that had publically damned independent nuclear deterrents and a good proportion of whom had wanted to use the opportunity to push Britain out of the nuclear business for good. However the mishandling of the Skybolt crisis and the links it had with the establishment of American bases in Holy Loch seem to indicate that the Americans felt a moral obligation to offer Britain a suitable solution to a crisis they brought upon them. This is not to say that the Americans walked away from Nassau empty handed, indeed they managed to add multilateral strings to the Polaris deal not attached to the original Skybolt deal. Although these were vague and did not, in the long term, come into being, they were a public admission of interdependence to some, even of dependence to others.449

The issue of European integration is key to the analysis of the Nassau Agreement. In December 1962, while de Gaulle was enjoying a high point in his political career, the unflappable Macmillan was facing a crisis in his premiership. He had staked his credibility on two issues, entry into the EEC and the independent nuclear deterrent, and these two issues seemed to be incompatible at best and at worst completely unachievable. Kennedy was also enjoying a high point in his political career having gone eyeball to eyeball with the Russians over Cuba and achieving, what the public

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saw, as an overwhelming victory for the United States.\textsuperscript{450} It is in the contrast of opinion and aspiration between these three figures that the complicated context of the Nassau Agreement was created. Kennedy’s push for a flexible nuclear policy contrasted sharply with nuclear thinking in Europe.\textsuperscript{451} The Europeans were still labouring under the idea that nuclear weapons were the only credible defence against Communist expansionism or attack.\textsuperscript{452} While the Kennedy administration had moved on with their nuclear thinking they forgot to bring the rest of the allies up to speed. Instead of leading them, the USA now seemed to be leaving the Europeans to fend for themselves. Although this was not the case, this is how it appeared to the Europeans, especially after Robert McNamara’s unwise anti-proliferation speech at Ann Arbor and the administration’s failure to truly consult with Europe during the Cuban Missile Crisis not merely inform them of decisions that had already been made. The transition between Eisenhower’s Massive Retaliation policy and Kennedy’s emphasis on conventional force build-up was not fully understood and caused great mistrust and fear amongst the Europeans, who did not feel that the American defence umbrella was as reliable against the Soviet nuclear threat as it once had been.\textsuperscript{453}

With the misunderstanding of the behaviour of American officials during the run-up to the Nassau Agreement, it becomes easy to see why a simple deal between allies started to have a wider impact; the big decision to rely on American technology had already been made, this deal was simply how to move on now that the Skybolt missile was no longer a tenable option. American silence over the decision to cancel Skybolt in 1962 was almost certainly due to budgetary issues within the Administration but it was interpreted by many in Britain as a heavy-handed attempt to push it out of the nuclear

\textsuperscript{451} Schlesinger Jr, \textit{A Thousand Days}, p. 656.
\textsuperscript{453} Freedman, \textit{The Kennedy Wars}, p. 276.
That is not to say that elements of the Administration would not have liked to see the Skybolt issue being used to do just that, but it was quite clear that this would cause more difficulties for the Americans. Although the idea of independent deterrents were seen as a military nonsense and a waste of defence spending by the Americans the risk of alienating Britain and pushing it towards an unhelpful alliance with France and Germany that would not only encourage nuclear proliferation but could also put nuclear weapons within the reach of Germany and out of the control of the USA, was not one the Americans wished to take.\footnote{Baylis, Anglo-American Defence Relations, p. 102.}

Britain’s EEC application seems, at first glance, to be a completely separate issue. The famous veto of January 1963 used the outcome of the Nassau talks to give de Gaulle concrete evidence of Britain’s strong allegiance to the USA. Allowing them entry would potentially allow an American Trojan horse into the European Community, a possibility that was in sharp contrast to the French vision of a unified Europe away from American control.\footnote{Sorenson, Kennedy, p. 567.} The Nassau Agreement itself may not have been the fundamental reason for British failure to enter the EEC, but it did serve as a perfect opportunity publically to exemplify the relationship and its dangers to de Gaulle’s vision of Europe.\footnote{Dimbleby and Reynolds, An Ocean Apart, p. 242.} The Special Relationship did seem at odds with the EEC in these early stages as, like Britain, it was trying to forge a role in world politics that could aid or stand up against the Americans. Britain and France had the same idea of how to become a world power through leadership of the EEC however there could be only one and Britain had come in very late in the game. It is understandable then that de Gaulle did not want this newcomer to try and not only take over, but change the direction of the EEC, steering it away from the French ideal.

\footnote{Baylis, Anglo-American Defence Relations, p. 102.}
\footnote{Sorenson, Kennedy, p. 567.}
\footnote{Dimbleby and Reynolds, An Ocean Apart, p. 242.}
\footnote{Hollowell, ‘Britain and European Integration’, p. 73.}
It is only when all these considerations are put together that it becomes clear that this Agreement was more than just a simple arms deal. Kennedy’s Grand Design for Europe took a major blow when the Agreement was signed and Britain’s EEC membership was turned down just a month later. However, had Macmillan pulled out of the deal and decided to go it alone on the nuclear stage there is no guarantee that de Gaulle would have then allowed Britain into the EEC. In fact, evidence from meetings between de Gaulle and Macmillan leading up to Nassau seem to give the impression that de Gaulle was not completely convinced of Britain’s readiness as a truly European nation. Equally, if Kennedy had decided not to allow Britain to buy Polaris it could have endangered the political career of his British counterpart, triggered widespread anti-Americanism in Britain and perhaps even the installation of a Labour government less sympathetic to the Americans. This would have also risked Kennedy’s standing within America as the British and the relationship America shared with them was popular amongst the American public. Kennedy had faced criticism before heading to Nassau over his handling of the Skybolt affair and the treatment of the British. There is evidence that the proposal of a joint study was raised and quickly dismissed at the Nassau meeting which could have given both the British and the Americans time to formulate a better deal, however it is hard to imagine a deal that would have satisfied both parties any more than the Nassau Agreement.458

Both sides walked away with gains and losses: Britain got Polaris but had to agree to contribute to a proposed Multilateral Force, an increase in conventional forces in Europe and a loss of credibility on the issue of independence. The Americans had to watch their Grand Design for Europe crumble, and allow nuclear proliferation. As an agreement between a British and an American leader, Nassau has its place in

458 Recording of a meeting held at Bali-hai, the Bahamas, 19 December 1962, PREM 11/4229.
determining whether they were just ordinary allies or if they did enjoy a Special
Relationship and gives an opportunity to compare not only the status of the two powers
but also compare the differences in objectives and ideology between allies who claimed
to share that Special Relationship.

The Eisenhower Administration’s reliance on the theory of massive retaliation was
borne from the idea that the only way to prevent any kind of aggression from an enemy
is to retaliate using a force disproportionate to the size of the attack. This meant that the
onus was on the nuclear option and as such, allowed the conventional parts of defence
to be reduced and, at least for smaller nations such as Britain, allow funds to be diverted
from the conventional to the nuclear. The Kennedy Administration however felt that
true defence needed more than one option. The dangers of massive retaliation were
obvious and a more graduated response would allow for a calmer atmosphere in which
diplomacy could be employed to diffuse potential issues and small pockets of
aggression could be contained rather than result in Armageddon. The arguments
between the Hawks and the Doves during the Cuban missile crisis were really
arguments between advocates of Massive Retaliation and Flexible Response
respectively. A nuclear response to Cuba would have obviously led to a very different
outcome but the choice to promote to the flexible response, though heralded by many
historians as key to solving the crisis, was instrumental to creating a feeling of ill ease
and confusion within Europe as to their own safety. Europe had set its defence measures
against the Massive Retaliation system and the American nuclear defence umbrella.
This turn around left many Europeans feeling that they were less safe under the
leadership of Kennedy. After being told that conventional forces were outdated to now
have the Americans push to increase them led to a growing fear that America would not
defend Europe. After Eisenhower’s promise to respond so swiftly and so harshly, it is easy to see why Kennedy’s more measured stance was interpreted this way.

The US administration under Kennedy had initially opted for a flexible response policy where nuclear retaliation would be the last option behind conventional forces. The allies still subscribed to the Eisenhower policy of massive retaliation, and the change was seen by many not as a progression of nuclear thinking but of a decline of American power in nuclear issues. The later move towards Mutually Assured Destruction, a theory more publically associated with McNamara, was a more balanced ideal where the very idea that the opposition had nuclear weapons and would use them in the event of attack or in defence from an attack. The fact that any use of nuclear weapons would effectively result in the destruction of both the attacker and the defender left both sides secure enough to feel that they were not disproportionally threatened whilst still keeping enough fear of nuclear weapons to reduce the need to use them. This theory was also a step forward as it acknowledged, in a way that the Massive Retaliation theory did not, that the Soviets had weaponry to a standard that could destroy America and her allies and that they were as willing to use them in defence as well as in attack. This theory was created by, and helped to maintain, the arms race, as it recognised the development progress that the Soviets had made due to the missile race while validating the need to spend vast amounts on developing weaponry in order to keep this status quo defence. In the Superpower era, as McNamara comments ‘Mutual assured destruction – the vulnerability of each superpower to the awesome destructive power of nuclear weapons – is not a policy at all. It is a grim fact of life.’

460 McNamara, Blundering into Disaster, pp. 95-96.
The cancellation of Skybolt was thus a geo-political issue not merely a domestic or defensive one, as the symbol of being in command of nuclear weapons was the real issue for the British. Owning nuclear weapons was seemingly essential to having any real role on the world stage, overtaking the idea that the size of its empire dictated the amount of influence a country had. The cancellation of Skybolt was critically important to the survival of the British Government because it cast doubts on its importance in the world, as vulnerability and great power do not go together in world politics. The political significance of the ownership of nuclear weaponry for Britain did not seem to register with the Americans; although they held great stock in the role which nuclear capability had for their own power status, they failed to see that giving assurances that they would come to the aid of their allies was not enough, especially for a proud nation such as Britain. Another interpretation of the meeting at Nassau is that Britain was far more Machiavellian than was at first thought, and that they were masters of their own fate in a way that other interpretations had chosen to ignore. Many figures in the American administration seem to have subscribed to this opinion at least fleetingly.

This has been explained in two ways. Firstly, the British Government’s actions were a deliberate dramatisation of the situation, exaggerating the problem to create a drama out of Nassau as a last ditch attempt to gain a better deal from the demise of Skybolt. Alternatively, it could be explained as another symptom of the lack of communication and understanding between Britain and America. Finally, there are many who believe that the meeting was a true reflection of the seriousness of the issue to an increasingly

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462 Baylis, Anglo-American Defence Relation, p. 102; Greenwood Britain and the Cold War, p. 159.
463 Rusk, As I Saw It, p. 267.
464 Dimbleby and Reynolds, Oceans Apart, p. 237; Greenwood, Britain and the Cold War, p. 159; Young, ‘The Skybolt Crisis’ p. 615; Ashton, Kennedy, Macmillan and The Cold War, p. 173.
unstable British Government. Dean Acheson’s West Point Speech had publicly stated that Britain ‘had lost an Empire and not yet found a role’, Robert McNamara had ridiculed independent deterrents in his Ann Arbor speech, the EEC application did not seem to be going well and Macmillan’s ‘Super-Mac’ image had been replaced by the more negative ‘Mac the knife’, after a brutal cabinet reshuffle in the summer. The claim that Britain had ‘never had it so good’ seemed to fading under increased economic uncertainty and Macmillan himself looked increasingly old and outdated, especially next to the young and vibrant President Kennedy.466

The Nassau Agreement is unusual in that it cannot be easily definable as a success or a failure for either Kennedy or Macmillan, as it seeps so deeply into so many issues that it is hard to find a simple criteria against which to judge it. The Skybolt crisis was such a complicated issue that it seems difficult to find an easy solution that could have been any better. Had Kennedy given the Polaris system without the MLF strings he would have come under immense criticism for gifting Britain such a sophisticated weapon, against the administration’s anti-proliferation stance and at a crucial time in the negotiations for British entry into the EEC. Had Macmillan returned with either the 50/50 joint development offer or no weapon at all, there is no guarantee this would have led to de Gaulle allowing the negotiations to continue and Macmillan’s political future would certainly have been on dangerous ground, especially after Acheson’s West Point speech and the emphasis Macmillan had put on the importance of the deterrent for the future of Britain in world politics. The joint study could have created a better solution but the fragile position the Skybolt crisis left Macmillan politically vulnerable and endangered the Anglo-American relationship, be it special or otherwise, meant that this option was not viable. The Skybolt crisis was so volatile it needed a solution and the

Nassau Agreement gave each side something they could claim as a victory while not conceding too much. The issues of the EEC application and de Gaulle’s attitude to the application and the reliance on nuclear independence for Britain, the need to keep the cancellation secret for budgetary reasons and the need to encourage European conventional force build-up, all conspired to create an impossible situation where no one could really walk away from Nassau as true victors. Instead the agreement was one of damage limitation; each needed to gain something that could justify the massive concessions they had to make. America put aside its anti-proliferation stance, in part due to the moral obligation of the Camp David Agreement and the Holy Loch issue, but also to attach the multilateral strings, which would at least bind Britain into a discussion about the way Europe was defended and the need to increase European involvement. Britain compromised on the level of independence of the deterrent in order to gain a far superior weapon system and the political clout that came with the ownership of such a weapon.467

The world is now in an era in which the war on Communism has been replaced by the war on Terror, where nuclear fears lie not in Moscow but in Korea and Iran and where the Special Relationship has come under renewed criticism in light of the War in Iraq and Afghanistan. With every soldiers death the question of the validity of the British role in the world and the dependence on America is raised as it was in 1962. Defence spending and cuts are criticised with every repatriation of the fallen and this can be traced back to Sandys defence recommendations which foresaw not a war of soldiers but a war of nuclear weapons. Sandys White Paper forever changed the structure of the armed forces and though conventional forces were not replaced by nuclear weapons the conventional forces still suffer from the diversion of spending to

467 Clark, Nuclear Diplomacy and the Special Relationship, p. 435.
the nuclear option. This is, of course, a very simplistic view of the complex nature of
defence planning and the politics of defence spending. Any move to remove the nuclear
deterrent now the British own it would be seen as politically divisive given the fear of
terrorism, which, much like the fear of Communism, makes any move away from a
defensive option a sign of decline.

The Skybolt Crisis was more than just a missile crisis; it was a crisis that drew on
every element of 1962 from British decline to Britain’s role in Europe, from anti-
proliferation to the relationship with America, from Berlin to Cuba. This, like Suez, was
a moment when Britain was held under the microscope. However, unlike Suez, Britain
was able to come away from the Crisis with a stronger relationship with the Americans
and a nuclear role that would last far past the lifetime of the signatories.

The Nassau Agreement had a hugely significant impact on international relations in
1962 and beyond. The failure of the EEC application may not have been a direct result
of Nassau but it was a result of the way in which America, Britain and France viewed
each other and how they worked together. Kennedy, Macmillan and de Gaulle all
wanted to lead Europe, or at least influence its leadership, but all for very different
reasons. Nationalistic needs to place their respective countries in positions of power in
an uncertain age meant that both de Gaulle and Macmillan wanted the same role in
Europe. In the end de Gaulle kept Britain out of Europe until 1973 allowing French
influence to remain the most powerful until this time. Nuclear weapons gave Britain
their role until they were able to secure entry into the EEC and become one of the
leading nations of what is now known as the European Union. However, Britain’s
decision to stay out of the European Currency can be seen as a sign of that Britain is not
ready to fully immerse themselves in Europe and become a truly European nation.
Keeping a unique British identity is still a highly charged issue and arguments about Britain’s European involvement can be heard in hairdressers and pubs across the land.

Nassau was the moment where Britain could have lost everything. The Special Relationship, nuclear independence and European integration all rested on the outcome of the meeting between Macmillan and Kennedy. For all the muddles and the confusion, the lack of communication and the Machiavellian deception the Agreement was a sound political conclusion to an extremely difficult problem. Although Nassau can be attributed as at least part of the reason for the failure of the EEC application, other factors did play a huge role in determining de Gaulle’s decision. Macmillan faced political ruin and the loss of three intrinsically important issues when he went to Nassau and came away with at least a deal that seemed to satisfy each. De Gaulle’s veto may have been inevitable or it may have been a reaction to Nassau, but there was no physical issue that arose from the Nassau Agreement that made European integration impossible, it was interpretation of the agreement and what it represented to de Gaulle that made Britain an unpopular choice for de Gaulle. The Special Relationship and the independence of the deterrent Britain purchased may have been illusions but these illusions have survived to this day and although debate rages on, the fact of the matter is that Nassau helped to cement the nuclear standing of the British and the Special Relationship into the next millennium.
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