British Relations with the Soviet Government in the Era of Détente, 1964-75

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To my wife Elsie for her support and encouragement

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations used in the text

ANF	Atlantic Nuclear Force
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
COCOM	Co-ordinating Committee on Strategic trade with Communist states
DEA	Department of Economic Affairs
EEC	European Economic Community
EESD	Eastern European and Soviet Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office
EPC	European Political Cooperation
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, established in 14 October 1968 by amalgamation of the Foreign Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office
GDR	German Democratic Republic
KGB	Committee of State Security, USSR
MBFR	Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions
MI5	British domestic security service
MLF	Multilateral Force
MPT	Multilateral Preparatory Talks [to the CSCE]
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NTS	*Narodnyj Trudovoj Soyuz* - the Popular Labour Union
OPD	Overseas Policy and Defence Committee of the Cabinet
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks/Treaty
STD	Soviet Trade Delegation

Abbreviations used in the references

CAB	Cabinet office (TNA)
DBPO III,I	Bennett, G. and K. A. and Hamilton eds., *Documents on British Policy Overseas Series III, Volume I: Britain and the Soviet Union 1968-72* (London: The Stationary Office, 1997)
DBPO III,II	— *Volume II: The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe 1972-5* (London: The Stationary Office, 1997)
DBPO III,III	— *Volume III: Détente in Europe 1972-6, Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III* (London: Frank Case, 2001)
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (TNA)
FO	Foreign Office (TNA)
PREM	Prime minister's office (TNA)
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom
UKDEL	The British delegation at conferences (MPT, CSCE) and multilateral organisations (NATO)
UKMIS	The British mission to the United Nations in Geneva and New York

Abstract

In 1964-75, there was a fundamental change in the nature and geopolitical importance of the Anglo-Soviet relationship. On coming to office in October 1964, Harold Wilson continued the traditional post-war British role as a junior partner in the dialogue between the two superpowers. In the first four years of his premiership, he conducted an intense set of interactions with the Soviet leadership, positioning himself as an intermediary with the American president, Lyndon Johnson. Wilson had some limited success in exerting influence on the development of the East-West interactions. His intercession with Johnson helped to catalyse the American decision to abandon finally the concept of a multilateral nuclear force. This then opened the door for progress on a nuclear non-proliferation treaty. On Vietnam, Wilson persuaded the Soviet premier, Alexei Kosygin to transmit to Hanoi an American plan for de-escalating the conflict. This initiative was, however, undermined by poor communications with Johnson.

From 1968, this role as a subordinate partner in the American-Soviet interface lost its residual value. The two superpowers developed a direct dialogue with no scope for British mediation. And in Europe, both the French and German leaders had more to offer Moscow than their British counterparts. In response, the Labour government adopted a reactionary approach that avoided overt political initiatives towards the Soviets. This stance was further reinforced by the Conservative government of Edward Heath (1970-4). Sceptical of the possibilities of achieving a meaningful East-West détente, they ruptured the Anglo-Soviet relationship in 1971 by expelling 105 KGB agents from Britain. As a consequence, the British leaders had little direct role as the process of détente blossomed in 1970-3.

In place of a direct involvement in the superpower dialogue, British ministers and officials turned their attention to the multilateral Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The British role in the prolonged negotiations (1973-5) stimulated the Soviets to restore the bilateral political relationship. However, it soon became clear that the Soviet interest in the dialogue was restricted solely to the CSCE.

There was by now no pretence that Britain could exert an independent influence on the main geopolitical issues.

The high-level Anglo-Soviet political dialogue was accompanied by a continuous interaction on the 'bilateral' topics of trade, and cultural and scientific interactions. In general, these had little impact on the political exchanges. The political relationship could, however, be disturbed by issues surrounding individuals. Indeed, in 1969 the case of Gerald Brooke came close to rupturing the interface between the two governments.

Both political parties gave consistent support for the Atlantic Alliance and NATO as the centrepiece of British policy on East-West relations. But the Labour ministers showed more enthusiasm that their Conservative counterparts for sustaining a dialogue with the Soviets. The Foreign Office officials tended to be more sympathetic to the sceptical Conservative position.

Introduction

On Thursday 15 October 1964, there was a general election in Britain. On that dismal, wet evening, the leader of the Labour Party, Harold Wilson, ensconced himself in his suite in the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool to await the results. These were to make him the prime minister of the first Labour government for thirteen years. As he waited, word came through that Nikita Khrushchev had 'resigned' as the leader of the Soviet Union.[1] In fact he had been deposed the previous day in a bloodless coup engineered by the members of the Presidium of the Communist Party. This brought to a close his seven years of idiosyncratic, dramatic and often confrontational stewardship of the world's second nuclear superpower.[2] To replace Khrushchev, the members of the Presidium introduced a 'collective' leadership with power shared between Leonid Brezhnev as first (later general) secretary of the Communist Party and Alexei Kosygin as chairman of the council of ministers of the Soviet government. The nominal third member of the ruling elite was the head of state, Anastas Mikoyan (soon to be replaced by Nikolas Podgorny), but this role was largely symbolic and lacked real power. At least in the eyes of the Foreign Office officials, this new collective Soviet leadership promised a more stable approach to external relations. This would be based on orthodox Soviet ideology rather than the 'highly personal' approach of Khrushchev.[3]

Over the next eleven or so years, the Soviet and Western leaders gradually agreed and consolidated a process of détente as a central component of their relationship. Détente did not imply that either side had abandoned the intrinsic antagonism that had maintained the Cold War since 1948. Rather, they determined to order their relationship so that the competition could be conducted with a degree of interaction and cooperation.

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[1] Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 317-8.

[2] Accounts of Khrushchev's leadership of the Soviet Union are given in William Taubman, *Khrushchev* (London: Free Press, 2003) and Alexsandr Furesemko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: Norton, 2007). Khrushchev came to prominence with the overthrow of Malenkov in February 1955 and consolidated his power when he repulsed an attempted coup in June 1957. He formally combined the roles of leader of the Party and of the Soviet government in March 1958. The overthrow of Khrushchev on 13-4 October 1964 is described in Taubman, pp. 3-17.

[3] The National Archives, Kew UK [hereafter TNA], FO 371/182762, 'Soviet Policy on the eve of Mr Gromyko's visit to London, 16-20 March, 1965: Background Brief'.

This reduced the risk of a confrontation escalating into a nuclear holocaust, while providing each side with political and economic benefits. Détente reached its symbolic climax in Helsinki on 1 August 1975, when the leaders of 35 states signed the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). However, in reality, the process was already beginning to unravel as Congressional pressure limited the implementation of the super-power accord designed by Nixon and Brezhnev.[4]

This study examines how the British government conducted relations with its Soviet counterpart during this period of détente. It begins with the simultaneous assumption of power by Harold Wilson and the 'collective' Soviet leadership in October 1964, and concludes with the signing of CSCE Final Act in August 1975. During this period, there were two further changes in the ruling party in Britain. The general election of June 1970 brought an unexpected Conservative victory and Edward Heath became prime minister with Alec Douglas-Home as his foreign secretary. However, Heath's administration was brought to a premature end in February 1974, when he narrowly lost an election called to provide a mandate for his confrontation with the miners. Harold Wilson returned as prime minister at the head of a minority Labour government, which acquired a slender majority in a further election in October 1974. In contrast, the Soviet regime remained relatively unchanged, although Brezhnev gradually became the dominant leader.[5] This consolidation of power was clearly illustrated by the roles of the two leaders in the relations with Western governments. In the 1960s, Alexei Kosygin acted as the main interlocutor, but from 1971 onwards the general secretary gradually became the lead player. Throughout the period the long-serving Andrei Gromyko remained as the foreign minister.

The study covers all levels of interactions between the British and Soviet governments from prime-ministerial exchanges to the day-to-day hum of diplomatic contacts. It also

[4] A good overview of the détente process is given in Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan, revised Edition* (Washington DC: the Brookings Institute, 1994). Kissinger describes the limitations placed by Congress on his détente policy in Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1982), pp. 228-301 and 979-1031.

[5] Harry Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Détente* (London: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 129-30.

embraces the full spectrum of subjects that constituted the relationship. At one extreme were the major East-West tensions that structured the Cold War. On these topics, the British leaders were very far from independent actors being heavily constrained by the consensus Western position. At the other end of the spectrum were the localised bilateral issues of direct concern only to the two governments. The account shows how these diverse strands of the relationship coalesced to determine the overall British policy.

Although there are some important studies, the Anglo-Soviet relationship has been somewhat surprisingly neglected by scholars compared with other aspects of British foreign policy during this period. This perhaps reflects its rather enigmatic position within the country's external relations. At one level, the relationship with the Soviets was a key structuring element at the centre of British policy. In the post-war world, the Soviet Union was the only state that had the military power, and whose governing regime had the potential motivation, to pose a credible threat to British security. The overriding need to mitigate this threat determined much of the architecture of the country's external relations. It dictated that absolute priority must be given to British membership of an opposing military alliance based on American military power. And it also argued for establishing a closer relationship with the Soviet leadership as a means of managing the intrinsic tensions to give a more stable international community. These two strands of policy were characterised as containment and deterrence on the one hand and coexistence and détente on the other.

Yet despite its singular intrinsic importance, the interface with the Soviet leadership was heavily circumscribed by the wider East-West structure of the Cold War. By the mid-1960s, the two competing blocs had tacitly accepted the equilibrium in Europe, with neither side prepared to risk confrontation in pursuit of their policy goals. This resulted in a marked element of stasis in British policy-making towards the Soviet leadership: a feeling that the equilibrium established between the two contending blocs provided little room for British initiative. And indeed, for long periods, the East-West conflict was an unchanging structural reality of the country's external relations, rather than a subject for active policy-making. As a consequence, the attention of British ministers and diplomats

(and hence that of subsequent scholars) was heavily focused on more fluid issues demanding more urgent policy responses. These included the evolution of the relationship with the Americans; securing entry into the EEC; the subsequent search for enhanced political integration of the Community; and the withdrawal from 'East of Suez'. These were complimented by a succession of crises precipitated by regional conflicts often associated with Britain's imperial legacy.[6]

Nonetheless, as these relatively shorter-term, more dynamic foreign policy issues came and went, the slow evolution of the relationship with the Soviets remained a constant central theme of Britain's external relations. Ministers and officials had to shape both the direct interface with the Soviet regime and British attitudes within the inner-Western consultations of the Atlantic Alliance and later the EEC. This study seeks to provide an exposition of these interfaces as a contribution to the understanding of the overall development of Britain's foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s. As a response to the structural rigidities, the time-span has been deliberately elongated compared with that normally adopted for such detailed studies of foreign policy. The period of almost eleven years allows the development of British policy to be explored within the context of the gradual flowering of dètente, both between the two superpowers and within the context of Europe.

As well as the elucidation of the main elements of the Anglo-Soviet relationship, the study also aims to contribute to the understanding of the processes by which British foreign policy was conceived and executed. It seeks to establish the relative roles of individual civil servants and ministers, and the extent to which the two political parties put their individual stamp on the policy during their periods in office. It also examines the impact of the conflicting opinions expressed by the diplomats in the Moscow embassy and those located in London, and the cross-Whitehall disputes that arose on

[6] Prominent examples of these crises are the unilateral declaration of independence by the white population of Rhodesia in 1965; the Nigerian civil war of 1967-70; the Middle East wars of 1967 and 1973: and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. A good summary of the historiography of British foreign policy during this period is given in John W. Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy: A Case Study of British Diplomatic Practice 1963-76* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 2-3, notes 3 and 4.

economic and intelligence issues. This detailed assessment of an important bilateral relationship over a relatively prolonged period provides a valuable case study of the realities of policy creation and implementation.

Within this general context, the account seeks to probe a number of specific issues.

a) *British role in the overall East-West interactions during the Cold War*

The nature of British involvement in East-West interactions underwent a fundamental change during this period. Initially, Harold Wilson sought to maintain the traditional stance as a partner in the superpower dialogue, based on the 'special relationship' with the Americans. He had some initial traction in acting as an intermediary between the new Soviet leadership and the American president, Lyndon Johnson. Yet this intermediary role faded following the failure of the 1967 initiative to secure a Vietnam peace process. The détente with the Soviets developed by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger left no place for a British contribution. It marked the end of the long tradition of British leaders acting as junior partners in the American-Soviet dialogue: a tradition that stretched back to the tripartite war-time conferences.

With the direct super-power dialogue firmly established, in the 1970s the main focus of the Anglo-Soviet relationship became the developing multilateral interactions on European security. The British delegation was playing an increasingly prominent role in the collective Western strategy in the CSCE negotiations that stretched from November 1972 to July 1975. This in turn prompted the Soviets to use the bilateral Anglo-Soviet relationship as a means to influence the British attitudes within the negotiations. This gambit proved unsuccessful as both Conservative and Labour ministers rejected any bilateral deals that might undermine the unity of the Western position.

The study will examine how the British role in the East-West dialogue evolved from that of an independent actor (albeit an actor dependent on the relationship with the

Americans) to a mere participant in multilateral negotiations. It will also assess the significance of this change in calibrating the decline of Britain's role on the world stage.

b) The British stance toward détente

This period saw the full flowering of the East-West détente. Britain's three major allies - the United States, West Germany and France – all took important initiatives in their relations with the Soviet Union. In August 1970, Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* resulted in the signing of the German-Soviet treaty, acknowledging the post-war territorial status quo in Europe. President Nixon formally inaugurated a period of intensive American-Soviet interactions by his historic visit to Moscow in 1972. And de Gaulle and later Pompidou pursued an ostentatious relationship with the Soviet leaders designed to emphasise the relatively independent stance of the French government within the Atlantic Alliance. In contrast, after Wilson's initial initiatives faded, British ministers stood on the sidelines of this developing drama. Conservative ministers took the position as the 'Cassandra' of the Western alliance. Rather than seek opportunities for positive engagement, they preferred to emphasis the continuing threat posed by Soviet expansionist ambitions. This study assesses the origins and consequences of this idiosyncratic British stance.

c) Britain and the CSCE

Throughout this period, the Soviet government pushed for an 'all-Europe' conference that would provide legitimacy to their postwar gains. The Western response to these overtures was primarily handled within the North Atlantic Alliance, and later within the emerging political processes of the enlarged EEC. The study probes the developing British role in these processes and in the concomitant CSCE negotiations. It also assesses the balance of advantage in the Final Act of the CSCE. It will demonstrate that, whether by accident or design, the sceptical position on détente provided a firm platform for a British role within the CSCE. This role was sufficiently powerful to force the

Soviet government to take the initiative in restoring the bilateral relationship that had been ruptured by the expulsion of Soviet agents from Britain in 1971.

d) Economic relations

Like most Western European governments, British leaders were focused on the potential economic gains from developing trade with the Soviet Union. While this never amounted to more than two percent of the British exports, the prospects for large contracts provided a continuous incentive. Both the Soviet and British governments sought to link trade with political developments. The Soviets constantly implied that a closer political relationship would lead to commercial rewards, while the British sought to utilise the political dialogue to expedite Soviet contracts.

A second component of the economic interactions was centred on technology exchanges between British and Soviet institutions. These were established in 1967 by the Labour cabinet minister, Tony Benn, and continued by the subsequent Conservative administration. The British hoped that these would be a precursor to Soviet orders. In contrast, the Soviets used the exchanges as a means to access British technology, and provide a legitimate cover for KGB commercial espionage.

The study will assess the role of economic exchanges within the overall relationship. The record provides very little evidence that the search for an enhanced political relationship brought any concrete benefits in terms of Soviet contracts.

e) Intelligence activities

One of the constant elements in the relationship was espionage. Both the Soviet and British governments maintained active programmes, although the KGB operations mounted in Britain were on a far wider scale. No attempt is made to describe this espionage struggle in any detail. Rather attention will be focused on the two occasions in which espionage-related issues imperilled the overall bilateral relationship – the Soviet

imprisonment of Gerald Brooke from 1965-9, and the British decision to expel 105 Soviet agents in September 1971.

The saliency of the research questions set out above varied significantly as the Anglo-Soviet relationship evolved during the period under study. The account therefore adopts a mainly chronological approach, with the constituent parts of the thesis addressing those questions most germane to the period being considered. Then, in a final section, some general conclusions are drawn.

Historiography

Before turning to the main narrative, we complete this introduction with a brief note on sources and an assessment of the apposite literature.

The study is primarily based on original sources, essentially British government papers from the National Archive in Kew. These are supplemented by memoirs and oral histories of the participants, contemporary newspaper accounts, parliamentary exchanges and the texts issued by both the Atlantic Alliance and the Warsaw Pact. Documents in the Lyndon Johnson presidential library in Austin Texas have been used to probe Harold Wilson's relations with the Americans.

Gill Bennett and Keith Hamilton have edited a collection of British government documents relating both to Anglo-Soviet relations in 1969-76 and to British participation in the CSCE process. [7] They also provide a comprehensive overview of the key developments, which is complemented by insightful reviews of the material by Anne

[7] These form the first three volumes of series III of *Documents on British Policy Overseas*. G. Bennett and K. A. Hamilton, eds., *Britain and the Soviet Union 1968-72*, vol. I (London: The Stationary Office, 1997) [hereafter DBPO III,I]; Bennett, G. and K. A. Hamilton, eds. *The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe 1972-5*, vol. II (London: The Stationary Office, 1997) [hereafter DBPO III,II]; Bennett, G. and K. A. Hamilton, eds. *Détente in Europe 1972-6*, vol. III (London: Frank Case, 2001) [hereafter DBPO III,III].

Deighton and Michael Hopkins.[8] These documentary collections have been admirably edited and provide a valuable additional source for this research.

As noted above, the secondary literature addressing the Anglo-Soviet relationship over the full period 1964-75 is surprisingly limited. There are however some important accounts of the interactions over shorter timescales or focused on specific incidents. Significant attention has also been given to the two principle intra-Western issues that impacted the Anglo-Soviet relationship – the Anglo-American interface in 1964-8 and the coordination of the Alliance and EEC positions during the CSCE process. These studies provide a valuable context for this study.

Curtis Keeble has given a description of the Anglo-Soviet relationship throughout the existence of the Soviet Union (1917-1991).[9] As is to be expected of such a comprehensive work, his account deals only with the main highlights. Nonetheless, as a former ambassador in Moscow (1978-82), he advances some perceptive comments on the changing nature of the relationship in the period considered here. In particular he gives more sympathy to the structural constraints on Harold Wilson's diplomacy than other commentators.

In a similar overview account, Brian White has analysed British policy towards the détente process from the late 1950s to the demise of the Soviet system in the 1989.[10] Although based on secondary sources, this study provides some important insights. White considers the decline of British influence on East-West relations in the mid-1960s that is also a major focus for this study. He concludes that by 1968, the British government had become 'marginalised ... as far as East-West relations as a whole are concerned'.[11] The assessment made here generally confirms White's conclusion. In contrast, White is more superficial in his analysis of the more sceptical attitude to

[8] Anne Deighton, 'Ostpolitik or Westpolitik? British Foreign Policy, 1968-75', *International Affairs*, 74 (1998), 893-901; Michael F. Hopkins, 'Britain's Policy to the Soviet Union in the Era of Détente, 1968-76', *Contemporary British History*, 18 (2004), 132-42.
[9] Curtis Keeble, *Britain, the Soviet Union and Russia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 270-88.
[10] Brian White, *Britain, Détente and Changing East-West Relations* (London, Routledge, 1992).
[11] White, *Britain, Détente*, pp. 130-1.

détente introduced in 1970-4 by Alec Douglas-Home. And he does not consider the British contribution to the CSCE process in any great detail.

Significant attention has been given to the Anglo-Soviet relationship during Harold Wilson's premiership from 1964-70. Geraint Hughes's *Harold Wilson's Cold War* is the most comprehensive study, embracing both the political and economic dimensions of the relationship. It also provides an assessment of British defence policy.[12] In general, Hughes presents an unflattering picture of Wilson's stewardship, accusing him of lacking a 'firm conception of the nature of détente'. He accuses the prime minister of practising 'magpie diplomacy' – 'temporarily seizing on issues only to drop them once they had lost their allure'. Hughes further asserts that Wilson had only a 'superficial understanding of Cold War realities'; that he achieved few practical results from his extensive engagement with the Soviet leaders; and that he 'showed more interest in the trappings of Anglo-Soviet concordat ... than with the actual results of his efforts'. John Young reaches a similar conclusion in his analysis of the overall foreign policy of Wilson's governments. He argues that British ministers 'failed to develop a comprehensive and consistent outlook on détente'. Rather, Wilson 'concentrated on improving the atmosphere of Anglo-Soviet relations at summit meetings rather than on developing a sophisticated approach to the relaxation of tensions'.[13] This study takes a position that is more supportive of Wilson. It argues that the structural realities of Britain's changing role in the world placed severe constraints on what could be achieved from the bilateral Anglo-Soviet dialogue. It contends that within this constrained context, the prime minister achieved some traction in maintaining a British voice within the superpower dialogue.

There has been much less attention on Anglo-Soviet relations during the Heath government of 1970-74 and during the subsequent Labour administration. This account therefore constitutes the first full study of the interactions in this period. Hughes has

[12] Geraint Hughes, *Harold Wilson's Cold War: The Labour Government and East-West Politics, 1964-1970* (Woodbridge Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2009), quotes pp. 171-3.
[13] John W. Young, *International Policy*, ed. by Steven Fielding and John W. Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970, Volume 2* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 135-6 and 223-4, quotes p. 135.

however given an assessment of one of the most dramatic episodes - the expulsion of 105 intelligence agents in 1971.[14] Taking a wider perspective, Christopher Hill and Christopher Lord have considered the singular attitude to the relationship shown by the Conservative government.[15]

The assessment of the direct Anglo-Soviet relationship must be made in the light of the intra-Western issues that influenced the dialogue with the Kremlin. In 1964-8, the most prominent of these was the Anglo-American interaction. There has been much scholarly interest in Anglo-American relations in the era of Lyndon Johnson and Harold Wilson. Both Jonathan Colman and Sylvia Ellis have given full accounts of the relationship, while John Dumbrell and Kevin Boyle have provided shorter syntheses.[16] This issue is also considered in John Young's excellent study of British foreign policy during this period.[17] These analyses of the complex multi-dimensional interactions between London and Washington provide an essential background to the assessment of Wilson's diplomacy with the Soviet leaders during 1964-8.

After 1968, Anglo-American relations had less bearing on the dialogue with the Soviets as British ministers lost any direct involvement in the super-power dialogue. Rather the key intra-Western issue of interest to the Kremlin was the British role in the developing process of European détente culminating in the protracted CSCE negotiations. An overview of the whole CSCE process is given in the collection of essays edited by Wenger, Mastny and Nuenlist, and this ground is also covered by Thomas.[18] Accounts

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[14] Hughes, Geraint. '"Giving the Russians a Bloody Nose": Operation *Foot* and Soviet Espionage in the United Kingdom, 1964-71', *Cold War History*, 6 (2006), 229-49.
[15] Christopher Hill and Christopher Lord, 'The foreign policy of the Heath government' in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon ed., *The Heath Government, 1970-74: A Reappraisal* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 285-314.
[16] Jonathan Colman, *A 'Special Relationship'?: Harold Wilson, Lyndon B. Johnson and Anglo-American Relations 'at the Summit',1964-8* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America and the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); John Dumbrell, 'The Johnson Administration and the British Labour Government: Vietnam, the Pound and East of Suez', *Journal of American Studies*, 30 (1996), 211-31; Kevin Boyle, 'The Price of Peace: Vietnam, the Pound, and the Crisis of the American Empire', *Diplomatic History*, 27 (2003), 37-72.
[17] John W. Young, *International Policy*.
[18] Andreas Wenger, Vojtech Mastny and Christian Nuenlist, eds., *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965-75* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2008); Daniel C, Thomas,

of Western diplomacy during the CSCE, including the British role, are provided by Daniel Möckli and Angela Romano.[19] This scholarship provides important background to the assessment of the role of the CSCE in the Anglo-Soviet relationship.

On a wider canvas, the British interactions with the Soviets operated within the overall context of the developing East-West détente. This has attracted very considerable attention from scholars and there is a comprehensive and growing literature. No attempt will be made to summarise this scholarship here. Rather it will be deployed throughout this account to illuminate the context for specific aspects of Anglo-Soviet interactions. Readers interested in the historiography of East-West relations in this period are referred to the recently published reviews in volume II of *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* edited by Melvin Leffler and Odd Arne Westad.[20] This provides accounts of all aspects of the Cold War supported by comprehensive bibliographical essays - although interestingly there is not an article specifically devoted to Anglo-Soviet interactions.

One disappointing aspect of this historiography is the lack of detail accounts of the Soviet government's approach to its relations with Western countries during this period. This no doubt reflects the fact that the relevant Soviet archives are still to a large extent closed.[21] Recently, Jonathan Haslam has synthesised expertly the evidence that is available.[22] While this provide some insight on the Soviet approach to the Cold War, the paucity of sources means that this assessment remains, of necessity, incomplete and lacking in detail. This gap in the historiography has implications for this study. Some of the conclusions on the nature of the Anglo-Soviet relationship must be regarded as somewhat tentative. The judgements may need to be refined when further detail

The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[19] Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009); Angela Romano, *From Détente in Europe to European Détente; How the West Shaped the Helsinki CSCE* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009).

[20] Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Volume II, Crisis and Détente, The Cambridge History of the Cold War,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[21] Marie-Pierre Rey, 'The USSR and the Helsinki process, 1969-75: Optimism, doubt or defiance?' in Andreas Wenger, *European Security System*, p. 65.

[22] Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 214-94.

becomes available on the Soviet motivations and strategies in conducting the interactions with their British counterparts.

Structure

The account is structured into four parts. The first two of these consider the period of Labour government from October 1964 to June 1970. Part 1 assesses the intensive diplomacy conducted by Harold Wilson and Alexei Kosygin in 1964-8. This is followed in Part 2 by an assessment of the Anglo-Soviet political relationship in 1969-70, and consideration of the interactions on the 'bilateral' topics. In Part 3, attention is switched to the development of the relationship during the Conservative government of Edward Heath (1970-4). And the account concludes in Part 4 with consideration of the interactions in 1974-5, with Labour back in power and Harold Wilson again prime minister. Finally some brief overall conclusions are offered.

Part 1

During the first four years of his premiership, Harold Wilson orchestrated a sustained period of Anglo-Soviet diplomacy. He visited Moscow three times and hosted a visit by Alexei Kosygin to Britain. This was by far the most intense set of contacts between the British and Soviet leaders in the post-war period. This diplomacy hinged on Wilson's relationship with American president Lyndon Johnson. Essentially the British prime minister was seeking to play a role as an intermediary between the Soviet and American leaders, and hence preserve a British seat at the superpower table.

Wilson's triangular diplomacy between Moscow and Washington is assessed in the next three chapters that constitute the first part of this thesis. These cover the period from October 1964 to the British curtailment of the dialogue in autumn 1968 in protest at the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The account addresses one of the central questions of this study – the extent to which the bilateral Anglo-Soviet relationship made a significant contribution to the development of the East-West interactions of the Cold War.

The record reveals that there was a subtle but fundamental shift in the nature of the Anglo-Soviet relationship during this period. At first, Wilson achieved some traction as an intermediary between the Soviet and American leaders. This was most evident in his search for a route to achieve a settlement of the escalating conflict in Vietnam. During Kosygin's visit to Britain in February 1967, Wilson persuaded the Soviet premier to intercede with Hanoi on behalf of an American plan for a military de-escalation. Yet in a week of tangled diplomacy, the initiative came to nought. Wilson's intercessions with the Soviet premier were undermined by last minute switches in the American position, compounded by faulty communications between Washington and London. These blighted the already uncertain possibility that the inputs by Kosygin could have produced a change of attitudes among the North Vietnamese leadership.

As well his efforts to find a solution in Vietnam, Wilson also played a significant role in advancing the possibility of a treaty of nuclear non-proliferation. NATO was still considering the option of creating a multilateral nuclear force (MLF) that would have German participation. This was vehemently opposed by the Soviets who had a neuralgic, and understandable, hostility to a German finger moving closer to the nuclear button. For his own reasons, Wilson also had little enthusiasm for the MLF. During his discussions with Kosygin in February 1966, he clearly signalled his lack of support for the concept. And on his return to London, he made an input to Lyndon Johnson that played a role in its final demise. This in turn helped to energise the non-proliferation negotiations resulting in the signing of the treaty in July 1968. It was however a bitter-sweet moment for Wilson. After his intervention, he was subsequently frozen out of the high level Soviet-American dealings on the treaty.

High level Anglo-Soviet contacts continued in 1967-8, but they had lost their verve. It was increasingly clear that the British government could not exercise a meaningful influence on the major international events. On the continuing agony in Vietnam, Wilson no longer had even a partial role within the American diplomatic strategy, except as an occasional errand boy on behalf of Johnson. Neither could he exercise any influence on the new priority of the tensions in the Middle East in the aftermath of the six day war of June 1967. And on the central topic of the East-West divide in Europe, British leaders could only take initiatives in concert with their allies in the Atlantic Alliance. The Anglo-Soviet dialogue relapsed into a diplomatic torpor, confined to formulaic exchanges of incompatible positions.

This diminished British influence was acknowledged in mid 1968 by the development of a new policy towards the relationship with the Soviets. This determined that British leaders should no longer take the initiative in promoting a political dialogue. Rather they should await propitious opportunities in which they might still exert some influence on Soviet attitudes. This marked something of a symbolic turning point in British foreign policy. The post-war period had seen a continuous erosion of Britain's capacity to maintain its traditional role as an independent actor within the main geopolitical

controversies. Yet by deploying the privileged special relationship with the Americans, British leaders had clung to a role as a junior partner in the super-power dialogue. In later times, this role may have been more illusion than reality, but from 1967 even the illusions faded. British ministers no longer enjoyed a meaningful participation in American diplomacy towards their Cold War rivals. And their own strategies for a political engagement with the Soviet leaders were reduced, like those of Mr Micawber, to waiting for something to 'turn up'.

In probing these developments in Anglo-Soviet relations, light is also thrown on the policy-making process within the British government. Ministers were operating within the major structural rigidities of the Cold War. Yet despite these constraints, the role of individual agency in setting the diplomatic agenda is still evident. Harold Wilson was the main driving force in seeking to instil some sense of initiative into the relations with the Soviets. His two foreign secretaries, Michael Stewart and George Brown, played relatively subordinate roles. Wilson often seemed to be battling against the entrenched Foreign Office bureaucracy that would have preferred a less proactive policy.

In this account, Chapter 1 sets the context for Wilson's diplomacy. It considers both the attitudes of the Labour Party to relations with the Soviets and the ongoing British policy inherited by the new government. The following chapter deals with the intense Anglo-Soviet dialogue in 1966-7, while the third chapter examines the decline of the relationship during 1967-8. The account closes with some conclusions from the complete period.

Chapter 1

Searching for a relationship, 1964-65

On coming to office in October 1964, Harold Wilson was eager to engage with the new Soviet leaders. The new prime minister would be operating in the context of a well established British policy towards the Cold War. This was centred on the special relationship with the Americans, and full integration within the Atlantic Alliance and NATO. This dependence on American military might, coupled with the requirement to maintain Alliance coherence, placed severe structural constraints on British diplomatic freedom of manoeuvre. They left little scope for unilateral initiatives towards the Soviet government. Nonetheless, British prime ministers had traditionally sought to play an intermediary role between the two superpowers: a role that reflected, no matter how faintly, the interactions of the 'big three' during the Second World War. Despite the continuing attenuation of Britain's relative economic and military power, Wilson was keen to maintain this tradition.

Wilson's hopes of a meeting with Kosygin in 1965 were soon dashed by the tensions induced by the escalating American participation in the conflict in Vietnam. However contacts between the two governments were continued throughout the year and gradually identified two areas for an Anglo-Soviet political engagement. Firstly, Wilson was eager to establish himself as an intermediary between the Americans and the Soviets in examining possible routes to a negotiated settlement in Vietnam. His Soviet interlocutors were less enthusiastic, but were at least prepared to engage on the issue. In contrast, the Soviets showed a keen interest in the NATO plans to create a multilateral nuclear force with German participation. They were vehemently opposed to German access to nuclear weapons, and keen to use Wilson as a possible route to discourage this development. As an inducement, they held out the prospect that an abandonment of the NATO plans would allow the conclusion of a treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. These Anglo-Soviet contacts gradually led to an agreement that Wilson would visit Moscow in February 1966. This would make him the first senior Western head of

government to engage with the Soviet leaders who had displaced Khrushchev some sixteen months before.

This chapter describes these early interactions between London and Moscow. It begins with an assessment of the Labour Party attitudes towards the Cold War together with a brief description of the members of the new Government most concerned with the Anglo-Soviet relationship. This is followed by a fairly full summary of the ongoing policy 'script' that provided the context within which Wilson and his colleagues sought to engage with their Soviet counterparts. The chapter then concludes with an assessment of the Anglo-Soviet exchanges during 1965. In view of the close Soviet interest in this topic, this includes a description of the evolving Labour policy towards the British nuclear deterrent and the concept of nuclear sharing within the Alliance.

The Labour government

In the 1964 general election campaign, the Labour party did not offer a fundamentally different policy towards the Soviet Union from that of their Conservative predecessors. They supported the Atlantic Alliance and the 'special relationship' with the United States as the centrepieces of the country's security policy. Nonetheless, during their long period in opposition, the party had been beset by the ingrained split between its left and right wings. This dispute was primarily defined by domestic policy. The left wing vehemently opposed the leadership's acceptance of the mixed economy rather than pressing for further moves to state ownership and central planning. Yet the split also found expression in the foreign policy arena. As noted by Callaghan, 'foreign policy divided the party with as much acrimony as any domestic issue ever did'.[23] These party tensions set the context in which Harold Wilson formed his government, and they were to play a significant part in conditioning the approach to developing the Anglo-Soviet relationship.

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[23] John Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A History* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007), p. 191.

The dispute on foreign policy during the years of opposition had been rather incoherent. Led by the charismatic Aneurin Bevan, the left wing constantly criticised the operation of the Atlantic Alliance, but offered no alternative. They did not propose Britain's withdrawal, but rather railed against what they saw as the dominance of the Americans. In large part this stance derived from their entrenched socialist ideology. They believed that capitalism was fundamentally inimical to the creation of the egalitarian social system that they craved. The Cold War therefore placed them in an uncomfortable position. They were in alliance with the capitalist Americans and opposed to the 'socialist' Soviet Union. The left reacted to this enforced ideological contradiction with a stream of criticism of what they represented as the domination of Western policy by American right-wing reactionaries. They opposed the support of dictators in the third world; the escalation of the arms race; the neglect of global poverty; and the high military expenditure that suppressed social progress in Britain.[24]

These views of the left wing were further entrenched by what was seen as the economic and social progress in the Soviet Union. The state-owned and planned economy, for which they themselves yearned, was delivering impressive growth. This was crowned by such signals of technological progress as the launch of Sputnik and the space flight of Yuri Gagarin. And Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation policy held out the hope, in their rose-tinted view, of the development of a democratic socialism within the Soviet bloc. This provided further support for their search for a more balanced policy between the principle adversaries of the Cold War. As described by Vickers, 'the division between right and left of the party on foreign policy solidif[ied] into a division between Atlanticists and those suspicious of the USA'.[25]

In the later years in opposition, the splits in the Labour party were accentuated by the issue of Britain's continued ownership of nuclear weapons. Sustained by the highly active Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a large number of the Labour activists objected to British possession of nuclear bombs. While there was degree of overlap,

[24] Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy*, pp. 191-200; Peter Jones, *America and the British Labour Party: The 'Special Relationship' at Work* (London: Tauris, 1997), pp. 94-129.
[25] Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World, Volume 1: The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy 1900-51* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 186-7.

these 'nuclear pacifists' formed a rather different grouping than the traditional left wing. They enjoyed a broader measure of support, while in turn not all of the traditional left were unilateralists.[26] The dispute reached its dramatic climax at the 1960 Party conference when the leader, Hugh Gaitskell, made his famous 'fight and fight and fight again' speech against unilateral abolition of the deterrent.[27] Although the unilateralist sentiment subsequently declined in intensity, it remained a factor in determining Labour policy towards the maintenance of the British nuclear deterrent.

The leaders of the 1964 Labour government were sensitive to a section of party opinion that objected to a perceived American dominance of British policy towards the Cold War. This encouraged a search for dialogue with the Soviets, and militated against the uncritical acceptance of American initiatives. These tendencies were to be accentuated when Vietnam provided a *cause célebre* that galvanised the incipient anti-Americanism of the Labour left.

Harold Wilson forms a government

Harold Wilson had been a rising star of the Attlee government. When he was appointed President of the Board of Trade in 1947 at just 31, he was the youngest cabinet minister since 1806.[28] He did not have a deep socialist background. His parents had been 'typically, and impeccably, northern lower-middle-class' and his father was firmly committed to the Labour Party.[29] Yet there is no history in his early life of trades unionism, deep social concern, ideological fascination or close involvement in student politics. Rather he focussed on using his prodigious intellectual gifts to achieve glittering academic success at Oxford and to prosper as a wartime civil servant.[30]

[26] Jones, *America and the British Labour Party*, p. 107.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 115.
[28] Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 105.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[30] Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, pp. 3-91; Philip Zeigler, *Wilson: The Authorised Life of Lord Wilson of Rievaulx* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), pp. 1-40.

By a combination of luck and design, Wilson had positioned himself in the centre of the left–right split in the Labour Party. His resignation with Bevan in 1951 had been followed by a brief period as a leading member of the left-wing opposition to the predominantly right-wing leadership. But by 1954, he was making a 'careful crab-walk' back to the centre ground. While this distanced him from the left, it did not make him an accepted member of the right. Rather he was in a position to try to bridge the divide: 'a spokesman for bemused MPs of the middle ground, who did not share the atavistic passion of the two wings'.[31] This central position as 'a tribal Bevanite, a tactical centrist, and ideological revisionist' may not have been comfortable.[32] Yet combined with his obvious competence, it was to give Wilson the party leadership in February 1963.

One consequence of this central positioning was that no one was quite sure where Wilson stood on the controversies that divided the Party. To many he was seen as the arch-pragmatist with few if any fixed views. Someone prepared to switch and trim his policies as he sought maximum support, but without long-term convictions. The Labour MP John Freeman remarked 'if there was a word "aprincipled", as there is "amoral", it would describe Wilson perfectly'.[33] Or as expressed by John Young, he was a 'a political virtuoso, adept at wrong-footing the opposition yet also an arch pragmatist lacking in long-term outlook or ideological belief'.[34] Wilson's colleagues highlighted his capacity to find compromises between seemingly incompatible positions: a capacity that verged on the edge of deviousness. Richard Crossman described 'a really elegant ability to be imprecise, to steer a non-committal hedging course and to say things which aren't quite right in order to avoid any commitment'.[35]

Despite his previous association with the left, on taking office Wilson formed his cabinet primarily from the Gaitskellite right wing.[36] And he soon confirmed his adherence to the

[31] Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, pp. 182-91, quotes p. 182 and 189.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 218.
[33] Zeigler, *Wilson*, p. 43.
[34] John W. Young, *International Policy*, ed. by Steven Fielding and John W. Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970, Volume 2* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 4.
[35] Ziegler *Wilson*, p. 43-5, quote p. 43.
[36] Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Little, Brown, 2006), p. 31.

traditional foundations of British post-war foreign policy. He demonstrated his enthusiastic support for the 'special relationship' with the Americans: as noted by Marquand, he was 'an Atlanticist by instinct, and also by assumed necessity'.[37] Wilson was also committed to maintaining Britain's global role and the concomitant military deployments, despite the strain imposed on the country's parlous finances. In early speeches, the prime minister asserted that '[w]e are a world power, and a world influence, or we are nothing'; and, despite the need for cost effectiveness in government expenditure, 'we cannot afford to relinquish our world role – our role which for shorthand purposes is sometimes called our "East of Suez" role'.[38]

In this first period in office from 1964-70, Wilson had two main foreign secretaries. When his initial choice, Patrick Gordon Walker, failed to secure a seat in the Commons, Michael Stewart was appointed to the role in January 1965 and served until mid 1966. He was then replaced by George Brown. However, Stewart returned to the post in March 1968, when Wilson finally accepted one of Brown's numerous threats of resignation. While both men were from the right wing of the party, they were almost total opposites in background and temperament.

Michael Stewart was from the middle-class Fabian tradition. The son of an author and lecturer, he graduated from Oxford in 1929 with a first in PPE (philosophy, politics and economics), and having been president of the Oxford Union. He spent his early career as a school teacher and in war-time service in the Army, before entering Parliament in 1945.[39] As foreign secretary, he acquired a reputation as being competent, but also dull and orthodox: a safe pair of hands rather than an innovator. He was however a skilled and effective public speaker.[40] Henry Kissinger described him as a 'decent, solid man, not brilliant or farsighted, but of the sturdy quality to which Britain owes so much of its greatness'.[41] Some of the officials with whom he had worked closely held him in rather

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[37] David Marquand, *Britain Since 1918: The Strange Career of British Democracy* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008), p. 203.
[38] David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century 2nd edn* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2000), p. 213.
[39] Michael Stewart, *Life and Labour: An Autobiography* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980), pp. 13-83.
[40] Young, *International Policy*, p. 6.
[41] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1979), p. 92.

higher regard than his general reputation. Nico Henderson characterised him as 'one of the most under-estimated' foreign secretaries. This verdict was echoed by Hugh Jones who described him as a 'very able man' who was 'underestimated'.[42]

George Brown was anything but dull and a safe pair of hands. He had been brought up in relative poverty in one of London's poorer districts and left school at 15 in order to contribute to the family income. He became a full-time official in the Transport and General Worker's Union and, like Stewart and Wilson, entered parliament in 1945. He was a committed member of the right wing, becoming their 'hatchet man' in the 'endless theological disputes' with the left. He had been Wilson's main challenger for the leadership in 1963. The two men subsequently had a tempestuous relationship fuelled by Brown's resentment that Wilson had 'robbed' him of the opportunity to be the party leader.[43]

Brown could be charismatic, insightful, forceful and brilliant. But he was also an alcoholic. Worse, he became outspoken and obstreperous when 'alcohol and emotion combined', to lethal effect.[44] These characteristics were fully on display during his time as foreign secretary. He could be decisive in defining policy and in face-to-face negotiations. Yet his personal behaviour was often outrageous - bullying his staff, abusing diplomats and their wives, and publicly denigrating the 'pinstriped' diplomatic service. At least in part, this may have reflected an inferiority complex about his humble background when confronted with the Oxbridge-educated diplomatic elite.[45] These excesses were lampooned by *Private Eye*, who published a spoof lexicon of adjectives for British diplomats to use when seeking to explain Brown's behaviour to the foreign press – 'tired, overwrought, expansive, overworked, colourful and emotional'. It was in

[42] Nicholas Henderson, *The Private Office: A Personal View of Five Foreign Secretaries and of Government from the Inside* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), p.109; John W. Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy: A Case Study of British Practice 1963-1976* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 23.
[43] Peter Paterson, *Tired and Emotional: The Life of Lord George-Brown* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), quote p. 5.
[44] Paterson, *Tired and Emotional*, quote p. 8, and on Brown's drinking pp. 38-9.
[45] Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy*, pp. 23-24.

respect of George Brown that 'tired and emotional' became a euphemism for being drunk.[46]

However, as with many aspects of foreign policy, Harold Wilson took the lead in defining the interface with the Soviet leaders. To a large extent this was dependent on the Anglo-American relationship, in which Wilson also played the leading role based on his intense dialogue with Lyndon Johnson. In their different ways, the two foreign secretaries made important contributions to developing relations with the Soviets, but they were essentially supporting characters in a drama starring Wilson.

Wilson and his new government did not, of course, create policy towards their Soviet counterparts *de novo*. They inherited a well developed 'script' that set out the established British positions on the East-West relationship and the ongoing dialogue with the Soviet government.[47] Before examining the early manoeuvres to establish contact with the new Soviet leadership, it is worthwhile reviewing the issues and ongoing stances that defined British policy towards the Cold War: the issues and policies that were now the responsibility of the new ministerial team.

British policy towards the Soviet government

In the early 1960s, the Cold War was firmly entrenched as the major element structuring international relations. The world was dominated by the two superpowers, each deploying a formidable nuclear arsenal and locked into a world-wide struggle for supremacy. After the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, a period of relative détente had been established. Both sides sought to avoid direct confrontations and showed increasing interest in reaching a modus vivendi with each other. This was most clearly signalled by the signing of the partial nuclear test ban treaty in July 1963. Yet the struggle still continued.

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[46] Paterson, *Tired and Emotional*, p. 8.
[47] The National Archives, Kew London (hereafter TNA), FO 371/177680, 'The Secretary of State's Visit to Moscow', July 1964; FO 371/177681, 'Relations with the Soviet Union', Smith to Greenhill, 19 October 1964.

In Europe, the forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact faced each other across a divided Germany. The prospect of a 'hot war' was increasingly remote, with even the long-standing confrontation over Berlin in a quiescent phase as both sides accepted an unsatisfactory status quo. But there was as yet little prospect of a further diplomatic accommodation that would lower the barriers and dissipate the tensions between the two blocs. In the third world, the struggle to gain allies among the non-aligned postcolonial states continued unabated. This held the constant risks of local confrontations escalating into full-blown conflicts. The Chinese regime of Mao Zedong maintained its belligerent rhetoric in support of worldwide communist revolution, and in October 1964 emphasised its latent threat by exploding its first atomic device. The split between the two giants of the communist world was becoming more entrenched, and the 'collective' Soviet leadership of Brezhnev and Kosygin was to be no more successful than Khrushchev in healing the breach. The Sino-Soviet split remained a further potential source of global instability.[48]

British policy toward the Soviet government was rooted in a set of assumptions that had structured the Western approach to the Cold War since 1948. These held that the Soviet regime followed an ideology which was fundamentally hostile to Western interests and must be 'contained'. Led by the indomitable Ernest Bevin, the British government had been a joint architect of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and remained firmly committed to a strategy of common defence. However, British leaders had also been long-standing advocates of complementing this military posture with a political dialogue that would at least ameliorate some of the Cold War's tensions: a détente to set alongside the deterrence.

In his last administration, Winston Churchill had stridently advocated a summit meeting with the Soviet regime. Although his efforts proved fruitless, a meeting of the Grand Alliance allies was held in Geneva in October 1955, and the Soviet leaders, Nikolai

[48] A good over-view of the Cold War in this period is given in the reviews in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Volume II, Crisis and Détente, The Cambridge History of the Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev, visited Britain the following year. Harold Macmillan continued this policy of seeking a political accommodation. In February 1959, following Khrushchev's ultimatum on Berlin, the prime minister took the initiative to travel to the Soviet Union to negotiate directly with the Soviet leader. He was roughly treated by Khrushchev, but nonetheless persuaded him to lift the six-month deadline for Western withdrawal from the divided city. Macmillan's continuing efforts to promote regular meetings between the Soviet and Western leaders were dashed when Khrushchev used the U-2 incident to abort the summit meeting in Paris in May 1960.[49] Later, in the period of relative détente following the Cuban crisis, Macmillan played an important role in facilitating agreement on the treaty prohibiting atmospheric nuclear tests in August 1963.[50]

This British promotion and direct involvement in superpower détente depended on a privileged 'special relationship' with the American leaders. This was established during the war-time cooperation and confirmed in the post-war period as the two governments worked closely together in the developing confrontation with the Soviets. Britain's unique status as the only other country with an operational nuclear deterrent also provided a ready access to the discussions over nuclear arms control. This had been exploited by Macmillan to ensure British participation in the negotiation of the partial test ban treaty.[51]

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[49] Uri Bar-Noi, *The Cold War and Soviet Mistrust of Churchill's Pursuit of Détente, 1951-4* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); John P. S. Gearson, *Harold Macmillan and the Berlin Wall Crisis, 1958-62* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998); Curtis Keeble, *Britain, the Soviet Union and Russia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 250-70; Klaus Larres, *Churchill's Cold War: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); John W. Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign: Britain and The Cold War 1951-5* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[50] Nigel J. Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 193-219.
[51] For assessments of the special relationship see Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War*; C. J. Bartlett, *'The Special Relationship: A Political History of Anglo-American Relationships since 1945* (London: Longman, 1992); J. Baylis, ed., *Anglo-American Relations since 1939: The Enduring Alliance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); John Dickie, *'Special' No More: Anglo-American Relations: Rhetoric and Reality* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994); Alan. P. Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century: Of Friendship, Conflict and the Rise and Decline of Superpowers* (London: Routledge, 1995); J. Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations in the Cold War and After* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2001); Ritchie Ovendale *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke UK: Macmillan, 1998).

When Labour returned to power in 1964, the centrepiece of the policy debate within the British diplomatic community was the long-standing question of the role of ideology: the extent to which the Marxist-Leninist creed was a driving force behind Soviet foreign policy. Were the Soviet leaders still motivated by an ideological drive to overthrow the democratic, capitalist system and complete the Marxist revolution? Or were they following the traditional state interest of the Russian empire in constantly seeking to advance its sphere of influence, with ideology more of a cloak to rationalise conventional state ambitions?

The current assessment of Soviet intentions towards the West was captured in a paper written by Duncan Wilson, an assistant under-secretary in the Foreign Office. This view was warmly commended by the permanent under-secretary, Paul Gore-Booth, to Michael Stewart.[52] It addressed the 'essential question' of whether the Soviet leaders were 'aiming consciously and consistently at communist world domination', or whether they were 'in effect conducting a normal "nationalist" policy' having 'put aside their proselytising aims'.

The erudite analysis concluded that both attitudes co-existed within the Soviet regime. '[T]he tactical compromises with the West' had blunted 'the edge of their keenness for revolution'. As a result, their foreign policy had a large defensive element, 'partially, perhaps primarily, designed to safeguard the re-shaping of society within the U.S.S.R.'. Yet the Soviet leaders had not 'renounced their belief in the world-wide triumph of communism'. Rather they had 'postpon[ed] their time-table' and sought to mitigate 'the cold-war atmosphere'. Interestingly, Wilson's conclusion accords with the view of some later scholars with access to Soviet archives. For example, Savranskaya and Taubman described the dual nature of Soviet foreign policy. The ideological commitment to world revolution acted both to legitimise Soviet domestic rule and provided a 'framework for interpreting and advancing national interests themselves'.[53] Similarly, Pleshakov and

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[52] TNA, FO 371/182766, Gore-Booth to Stewart, 10 November 1965 and enclosed paper, A. D. Wilson, 'Soviet Intentions', 17 July 1964.
[53] Svetlana Savranskaya and William Taubman, 'Soviet foreign policy' in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume II*, pp. 134-57, quote p. 140.

Zubok argue that 'great power expansionism and communist ideology had to some extent merged'. This gave rise to a 'revolutionary-imperial paradigm'.[54]

This analysis had much in common with ideas developed by George Kennan in his famous 1947 'X' article in *Foreign Affairs*.[55] Duncan Wilson concluded that there were no grounds to 'lessen the need to keep up our guard and to ensure against the practical consequences of the doctrinaire strain in Soviet thinking'. In other words, Soviet Russia should be treated as a potential long-term aggressor who could only be constrained by Western deterrence. But he also argued that there was an 'empirical strain' among the Soviet elite. This element would realise, gradually, from the experience of 'life itself', that the 'dream of total communist triumph' was an illusion. The British government should strive to promote these pragmatic developments by fostering contacts with the Soviet elite.

Duncan Wilson encapsulated the elements of a policy towards the Soviet Union that were to be retained throughout the period of this study. Firstly there would be an unwavering commitment to the Atlantic Alliance and NATO as the centre of the West's deterrence. Yet this would be complemented by a determination to expand the range of contacts between the two countries. It was an un-stated assumption that when opportunities arose there would be a continuing engagement with the Soviet leadership to search for a further widening and deepening of détente. However, there would also be an effort to utilise trading links and cultural and scientific exchanges to engage directly with the managerial and scientific elite of the Soviet nomenklatura. It was hoped that over time these contacts would inculcate Western ideas that would accelerate the evolution of the 'empirical strain'. This in turn would lead to the development of a Soviet domestic policy that was more compatible with the democratic capitalist system than the present rigid communist approach.

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[54] Constantine Pleshakov, 'Studying Soviet Strategies and Decisionmaking in the Cold War Years' in Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (Abingdon, UK: Frank Cass, 2000), pp. 232-41, quote p. 237; Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. x.
[55] Assessments of Kennan's article are given in Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pp. 454-55, and Dana H. Allin, *Cold War Illusions: America, Europe and Soviet Power, 1969-1989* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 9-11.

Policy on international and bilateral issues in 1964

Duncan Wilson's overview provided the conceptual background to the briefs prepared for the incoming government. These were developed by Howard Smith, the head of the Northern department of the Foreign Office, which was directly responsibly for supporting the Anglo-Soviet relationship.[56] As was customary, these briefs distinguished between two inter-related sets of topics. Firstly there were the major 'international' issues arising from the structural conflict between the Soviet bloc and the Atlantic Alliance. On these topics, British policy needed to be closely co-ordinated with that of its allies. In addition, there were a set of smaller scale 'bilateral' topics of direct concern only to the two governments.

It is worthwhile examining this complex set of topics in some detail as they set the agenda for the Anglo-Soviet interactions throughout the period being considered in this study. They also determined much of the language and syntax of the interactions. On the international issues, the two contending blocs had developed detailed and often incompatible positions. Rehearsing and seeking movement in these fixed positions was a staple of the Anglo-Soviet diplomacy.

International topics

The international topics focussed primarily on the East-West conflict in Europe and coalesced around three interrelated issues – disarmament, the future of Germany, and approaches to diffusing the military confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

[56] TNA, FO 371/177681, 'Relations with the Soviet Union', Smith to Greenhill, 19/10/64.

Disarmament issues were negotiated in a standing eighteen-power United Nations conference in Geneva.[57] The conference was addressing a complex set of issues, concerned primarily with approaches to curb the nuclear arms race. They included an extension of the 1963 test ban treaty to encompass underground nuclear tests; the development of an agreement to reduce or freeze the number of nuclear delivery vehicles; and the search for a treaty to prevent the further proliferation of nuclear weapons. But the negotiations were deadlocked. Proposals advanced either by the Soviet or Western negotiators were invariably seen by the opposing side as conferring an unacceptable unilateral advantage. The Foreign Office assessment did not hold out much hope of a break in this deadlock. It did however recognise that '[b]oth sides have an interest in keeping the dialogue going in Geneva since this is in itself an element in the reduction of tension'.[58]

The post-war status of Germany had been left shrouded in ambiguity as the agreements reached in the immediate post-war period were overtaken by the onset of the Cold War. At Potsdam, Truman and Attlee had tacitly accepted Stalin's unilateral move to cede large elements of pre-war Germany territory to Poland by establishing the German-Polish frontier on the Oder-Neisse line. However the formal recognition of this ceding of territory was left to the peace conference, which of course never took place. The three leaders had also agreed at Potsdam that, despite the division into separate zones, the occupying powers would treat Germany as a single 'administrative and economic unit'.[59] Yet, the post-war antagonism between the war-time allies had led to the establishment of two German states. Although the Soviets eventually conceded recognition of the Federal Republic, Western governments did not formally acknowledge the legitimacy the East German state. Finally, Berlin had developed into the most potent symbol of the Cold War. The Soviet failure to force a Western withdrawal had led to the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 and the establishment of an uneasy equilibrium.

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[57] TNA, FO 371/177680, 'The Secretary of State's Visit to Moscow, Brief 15 a-f', July 1964.
[58] TNA, FO 371/177681, 'Relations with the Soviet Union', Smith to Greenhill, 19/10/64.
[59] Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945-51* (London: William Heinemann, 1983), pp.19-30; for an assessment of the early discussion of the Polish/German frontier at Yalta: David Reynolds, *Summits: Six Meetings that Shaped the Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane – Penguin, 2007), p. 126.

In 1964, the Soviet and Western blocs held mutually incompatible positions on the German question. The Soviet goal was to gain recognition of the legitimacy of East Germany as a separate state, which had the Oder-Neisse line as its Eastern border, and which encompassed Berlin. In contrast, the Atlantic Alliance acknowledged the Federal government as the sole legitimate government of Germany. They also backed Bonn's aspiration to reunify Germany based on the self-determination of the German people, in effect a goal to absorb East Germany into the Federal Republic. They would not therefore recognise East Germany as a separate state, nor acknowledge the Oder-Neisse line as its legitimate border. The Atlantic Alliance was also committed to the 'freedom and viability of West Berlin'.[60] The Foreign Office officials concluded that 'we shall have to live with the present situation in Berlin and Germany for a good many years'.[61]

The German question also dominated East-West discussions of plans to diffuse the tensions between NATO and the Warsaw pact, and again the officials saw little prospect of progress. The Alliance position was summarised in a totally impractical Western Peace Plan of 1959. This was aimed more at reassuring the Federal German government of Western support for their reunification goals, than at engineering an incremental step in European détente. It contended that mutual reduction of the forces in central Europe would be realised only when Germany had been reunified on the basis of free elections. The Soviets had countered with a proposal for a non-aggression pact between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This had in turn been rejected by the Western governments, as it would confer tacit recognition of the legitimacy of East Germany.[62]

Overall the new Government was offered little hope of meaningful initiatives to mitigate the Cold War stalemate in Europe. The best opportunities appeared to lie in the area of disarmament, either via a treaty to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, or one

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[60] TNA, FO 371/177680, 'The Secretary of State's Visit to Moscow, Brief 17, Germany and Berlin', July 1964. For a insightful description of the evolution of British policy towards the German question see R. Gerald Hughes, *Britain, Germany and the Cold War: The Search for a European Détente, 1964-1967* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007).
[61] TNA, FO 371/177681, 'Relations with the Soviet Union', Smith to Greenhill, 19/10/64.
[62] TNA, FO 371/177680, 'The Secretary of State's Visit to Moscow, Brief 12, European Security', July 1964; FO 371/177681, 'Relations with the Soviet Union', Smith to Greenhill, 19/10/64.

that extended the nuclear test ban to include underground tests. However in both cases, there were significant obstacles to be overcome. The Soviet leaders would not consider a non proliferation treaty until NATO abandoned its plans for nuclear sharing, while a stand-off over on-site inspections blocked progress on banning underground testing.

Rather surprisingly, the briefing gave little prominence to the potential conflicts that could arise in the developing world. To some extent, this reflected the Sino-Soviet split, which had destroyed the illusion of a monolithic Communist block bent on spreading its ideology. The briefing acknowledged that Soviet policy towards the non-aligned countries was now complicated by 'Chinese competition'. Nonetheless, it was recognised that 'the Russians must continue to struggle for influence in these countries, and their influence continues to be hostile to our interests'.[63] South East Asia was identified as an area of particular tension due to communist guerrilla activity in Indochina and the Indonesian-inspired insurgency against Malaysia.

The Soviet and British governments had a specific role with respect to Indochina as the co-chairmen of the mechanisms put in place to implement the 1954 Geneva agreement. This had been augmented in 1961 by a further agreement to deal with the specific situation in Laos. In 1964, British attention was, in fact, more focussed on Laos than Vietnam. In his visit to Moscow in July 1964, the Conservative foreign secretary, Rab Butler, had sought unsuccessfully to persuade the Soviet leaders to join him in a joint initiative to promote negotiations between the warring parties.[64] Interestingly in the light of future events, Butler was advised against making a similar proposal with respect to Vietnam or Cambodia. His officials warned that this would be 'quite unacceptable to the U.S., Thai, and South Viet-Namese Governments'.[65]

Malaysia was of more direct interest to the British government. Some 50,000 British troops were deployed to resist an insurgency in Borneo supported by the Sukarno regime in Indonesia. The Soviet Union was supplying arms to Indonesia and had increased its

[63] TNA, FO 371/177681, 'Relations with the Soviet Union', Smith to Greenhill, 19/10/64.
[64] TNA, FO 371/177680, 'The Secretary of State's Visit to Moscow, Brief 18a, b and d, Laos', July 1964; Trevelyan to Foreign Office, 'Secretary of State's Visit to the Soviet Union', 10 August 1964.
[65] *Ibid.*, 'The Secretary of State's Visit to Moscow, Brief 18c, Viet-Nam and Cambodia', July 1964.

propaganda support, as it competed with the Chinese for influence. But it had stopped short of direct military involvement.[66]

Bilateral issues

As noted above, in addition to the seemingly intractable structural East-West issues that defined the Cold War conflict, there were also a number of smaller 'bilateral' topics. These gave British ministers more freedom of manoeuvre with their Soviet counterparts.

The major thrust of this element of policy was to promote a wider set of contacts with the Soviet elite through trade, technical and scientific co-operation and cultural exchanges. It was hoped that this would foster a less antagonistic view of the West. In addition, the government sought economic advantage through increased exports to the Soviet Union. While showing some growth, the volume of goods sold to the Soviets was low, comprising only 1% of total British exports. There was also a substantial trade imbalance, with Britain's imports from the Soviet Union running at almost double the level of its exports. The previous Conservative government had been fully committed to expanding the volume of trade and closing the imbalance. [67] This ambition was to be enthusiastically embraced by the incoming administration.

Espionage was one bilateral issue missing from the ministerial briefing. Both countries undertook espionage activities against each other. Occasionally these flared into the open when spies were caught or 'diplomats' expelled, and, of course, they were also stimulated a flourishing genre within the mass entertainment industry. However they did not feature in the briefings of those about to assume responsibility for contacts with the Soviet Union. In all probability these covert activities were covered in separate briefings that are not yet in the public domain. Nonetheless, the existence of extensive espionage activities does not seem to have been an explicit factor in determining the bilateral

[66] *Ibid.*, 'The Secretary of State's Visit to Moscow, Brief 19, The Soviet Attitude Towards Malaysia', July 1964.

[67] TNA, FO 371/177679 'The Foreign Secretary's Visit to Moscow, Anglo/Soviet Trade, Brief by the Board of Trade', 13 July 1964.

policy. Rather it appears to have been treated as an inevitable part of the context in which relations would be conducted.

Overall this briefing by officials gave a dispiriting assessment of the possibilities of the new British leaders taking significant initiatives with the Soviet government. As expressed by the British ambassador, Humphrey Trevelyan, 'relations with the Government of the Soviet Union are likely to depend more on the policies which we pursue jointly in NATO with our principle Allies than on the way we handle bilateral Anglo-Soviet questions'.[68] Soviet attention was more likely to be motivated by 'cajolery' or flattery to induce splits in the Alliance than any realistic assessment of Britain's intrinsic importance. Bilateral initiatives would be confined to fostering trade, and cultural and scientific contacts, in the somewhat forlorn hope that this would ameliorate internal Soviet attitudes. It was no surprise that Howard Smith concluded his briefing with the assessment that any progress would be 'limited to marginal aspects of major questions, and to minor questions'.[69]

It was now the turn of the government of Harold Wilson to wrestle with the intractability of relations with their Soviet counterparts. This was a subject of supreme importance to the future security of the State, but on which the scope for initiatives by British statesmen was severely curtailed.

Initial manoeuvring, 1964-5

During his first fourteen months in office, Harold Wilson's hopes for a summit meeting with Alexei Kosygin were frustrated by the increasing tensions over the escalating war in Vietnam. Nonetheless, a series of communications and reciprocal visits by the foreign ministers gradually established the basis for a meeting in early 1966. These

[68] TNA, FO 371/177681, 'United Kingdom Policy towards the Soviet Union', Trevelyn to Gordon-Walker, 19 November 1964.
[69] TNA, FO 371/177681, 'Relations with the Soviet Union', Smith to Greenhill, 19/10/64.

communications also defined the two key issues that would dominate the Anglo-Soviet exchanges – Vietnam and the NATO plans for nuclear sharing.

Compared with his contemporaries, Wilson had an unusually deep experience of interactions with the Soviet leadership. He had first visited the Soviet Union in 1947 to negotiate the purchase of wheat.[70] Wilson continued his contacts while in opposition. His role as a consultant to a timber company gave him the opportunity to travel frequently to the Soviet Union. During these trips, he used Mikoyan's good offices to set up meetings with Soviet leaders, often upstaging the incumbent Conservative ministers. In 1954 he was the first British politician to meet Malenkov, following his brief succession to Stalin, and in 1956 he also met with Khrushchev.[71] As leader of the opposition, Wilson had made two further trips to the Soviet Union holding in-depth discussions with Khrushchev on both occasions.[72] This wide experience no doubt established a conviction in the future Labour prime minister that he had an exceptional capacity to deal with the Soviet leadership.

As soon as Wilson became prime minister, the Soviets sent out signals that they were interested in continuing the dialogue established while he was in opposition. The foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, stressed to the British ambassador that 'now they [Wilson and Gordon-Walker] were in power, the Soviet Government would be very interested in their policy'. If the British government wanted to develop Anglo-Soviet relations, 'it would be possible to work in that direction'.[73]

Wilson was eager to respond to these overtures and issued an invitation for the Soviet leaders to come to London. Interestingly this telegram was sent from Washington during the final day of Wilson's visit to Lyndon Johnson in December 1964. This suggests that he had cleared his lines with the president.[74] The Soviet response revealed that Alexei

[70] Zeigler, *Wilson*, pp. 56-9.
[71] Pimlott, *Wilson*, p. 180-1, 188 and 198.
[72] TNA, PREM 11/4894, 'Note of a Conversation between Mr Harold Wilson, Mr Patrick Gordon Walker, Mr Khrushchev and Mr Gromyko', 10 June 1963; Telegram 1070, 1071, 1072 and 1073, Moscow to Foreign Office, 4 June 1964.
[73] TNA, FO 371/177681, 'Record of Conversation', Trevelyan and Gromyko, 26 October 1964.
[74] TNA, PREM 13/598, Telegram 4042, Washington to Foreign Office, 9 December 1964.

Kosygin rather than Brezhnev or Mikoyan would be the main interlocutor in relations outside the Soviet bloc. And, following much intricate diplomacy, it was finally agreed that Kosygin would visit Britain in 1965, followed by a subsequent trip by Wilson to the Soviet Union. [75]

Events in Vietnam destroyed the possibility of the two prime ministers meeting. On 7 and 8 February 1965, American planes undertook bombing raids of the North. Either by coincidence or, as some commentators have concluded, by design, Kosygin was at the time making a high-profile visit to Hanoi.[76] The British government had been consulted about the bombing and gave public support to the American action.[77] This made it extremely unlikely that the Soviet premier would make an early visit to Britain and this was soon confirmed. Officials in the Foreign Office were not disappointed with this decision. Howard Smith commented that it was in the interests of both parties if a meeting was delayed 'until we can both see our way more clearly through the Vietnamese problem'.[78]

It was however agreed that Gromyko would visit Britain in March 1965, providing the first high-level contacts between the new British and Soviet governments. One of the main subjects that would be raised by the Soviet foreign minister was the proposal to establish a NATO multilateral nuclear force. And this would develop as the main Soviet interest in pursuing the Anglo-Soviet dialogue. It is therefore worthwhile reviewing the policy of the Labour government in this area.

'Renegotiating' the Nassau agreement

The development of intercontinental ballistic missiles had caused President Kennedy to modify the doctrine by which American forces would respond to a Soviet military attack

[75] *Ibid.*, gives a record of the exchanges between London and Moscow.
[76] John Dumbrell, *President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Communism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 96-101.
[77] Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War* (London: Praeger, 2004), pp. 47-8.
[78] TNA, FO 371/182763, Smith to Greenhill, 19 March 1965.

on Europe. Rather than an instant recourse to a nuclear strike, there would be an initial reaction with conventional forces.[79] This 'flexible response' required firm central control on the use of nuclear weapons, and hence argued against Western European countries developing an independent nuclear capability.[80] To provide an incentive for European states to forego this option, Kennedy proposed that they be given a role within the Alliance's overall nuclear strategy. This would be achieved by creating a multilateral nuclear force (MLF).[81] In its final manifestation, this would consist of a fleet of surface ships carrying nuclear weapons, with mixed crews from Alliance countries, and operating under NATO control. The concept soon acquired a far wider symbolism than simply a component of the Alliance nuclear deterrent. Since the Marshall Plan, the American administrations had hoped that Western Europe would form an integrated federal structure that could act as an equal partner with the United States.[82] A group of 'zealots' in the State Department was soon pushing the MLF as a symbol of this future vision. Their enthusiasm survived de Gaulle's insistence on developing his own nuclear capability. It was seen as a route to tie the West Germans into the Atlantic alliance and avoid 'Franco/German co-operation in nuclear weapons systems in a narrow Gaullist spirit'.[83]

Macmillan's government was drawn deeply into the MLF debate at the Nassau conference. The British prime minister was seeking to acquire American submarine-based Polaris missiles as a delivery vehicle for British nuclear warheads. The Americans had tried hard to persuade him to accept the MLF as a substitute for an independent deterrent. And Macmillan only secured Polaris at the expense of, among other caveats, a commitment to use his 'best endeavours' to bring about the developments of the MLF.[84]

[79] For an account of the development of American defence strategy under Kennedy see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Mariner Books ed., 2002 [original 1965]), pp. 306-19; Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 283-302.
[80] Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 849.
[81] Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, pp. 842-88.
[82] Jeffrey Glen Giauque, *Grand Designs & Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganisation of Western Europe, 1955-63* (Chappel Hill, NC: North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 5 and pp. 98-125.
[83] Andrew Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO: Britain, America and the Dynamics of Alliance, 1962-8* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2006), p. 70.
[84] Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, pp. 23-53; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, pp. 856-66; Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War*, pp. 152-92; 'Joint Statement Following Discussions With Prime

Fearful of destabilising the Nassau agreement, the Conservative government had participated in the Alliance work on the multilateral force, even though they had no enthusiasm for the project. [85]

Given the unilateralist sentiment that had so recently split the party, the Nassau agreement presented a difficult conundrum to the Labour opposition. Should they stand by the agreement and hence accept a continuing commitment to nuclear weapons? Or should they reject Polaris and accept the growing obsolescence of Britain's nuclear capability? Harold Wilson displayed all his political artfulness in handling this difficult situation. He indicated that he would indeed reject Polaris and his election manifesto fiercely attacked the project: 'it will not be independent and it will not be British and it will not deter'. Yet he was careful to keep a potential escape clause by promising only to 're-negotiate' the Nassau agreement.

On coming to office in October 1964, Wilson sprang a major surprise by deciding to continue building four nuclear submarines to hold Polaris missiles. He masked the volte-face in an ingenious proposal that NATO should form an Atlantic Nuclear Force (ANF). This would consist of two components. Firstly, the four Polaris submarines and British nuclear V-bombers would be assigned to NATO. They would be combined with American submarines to form a NATO controlled nuclear force. This would be complemented by an MLF formed by the Americans with other alliance members, but with no British contribution.[86]

The ANF proposal highlighted differences of opinion within the American administration on nuclear sharing. Lyndon Johnson learnt that Kennedy had been ambivalent on the MLF, and that there were also deep disagreements among his own staff. This caused him to adopt a more equivocal stance. In view of the German interest in the concept, Johnson was reluctant to abandon the option, but neither was he prepared

Minister Macmillan – the Nassau Agreement, December 21, 1962', The American Presidency Project <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9063&st=&st1=> [accessed 26 January 2011].

[85] Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, pp. 62-79 and 94-101; J. J. Widén and Jonathan Colman, 'Lyndon Johnson, Alec Douglas-Home, Europe and the NATO multilateral force, 1963-64', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 5 (2007), 179-99.

[86] Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO*, pp. 87-92 (quote from manifesto p. 88), and pp. 101-112.

to throw his full presidential weight behind it. He encouraged Wilson to discuss both the MLF and ANF with Chancellor Erhard and seek an agreed solution.[87] With neither leader keen to take up the suggestion, the MLF hung in limbo throughout 1965. It was still a component of Alliance policy. It was still supported by the German government, egged on by the 'theologians' in the State Department. But it had little prospect of being implemented.

A summit is postponed

In preparing for the visit of Gromyko, British officials concluded that the Soviet leaders would have already lost any expectation that the socialist Labour government would abandon elements of the traditional British position. They noted that the Soviets would be 'disillusioned' by 'Her Majesty's Government's support for the United States in Vietnam and by their proposals for the formation of an Atlantic Nuclear Force'. They speculated that Gromyko would arrive in a 'suspicious and difficult mood'.[88] The Soviet foreign minister played up to this prediction, declaring that:

> the new leadership in the United Kingdom had disappointed them [the Soviet government]. They had hoped for a sharp turn for the better in our relationships. Indeed they had hoped for radical change. In one country there was a government guided by Socialist ideas and principles and in the other a Socialist government. The way was clear for close relationships but those relationships had not yet developed.[89]

The discussions with Gromyko ranged over the main multilateral East-West disputes - the future of Germany, European security, and arms control and disarmament. Yet the exchanges were formulaic. Both sides realised that the centre of decision-making on

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[87] Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 62-3.
[88] TNA, FO 371/182762, 'Mr Gromyko's Visit to London, 16-20 March, 1965, Steering Brief'.
[89] TNA, FO 371/182763, 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr A. Gromyko, Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union ... 18 March 1965'.

these major questions lay elsewhere. [90] Gromyko did, however, lay great stress on Soviet opposition to NATO's plans for nuclear sharing. He reiterated that the Soviet government was 'categorically opposed to all plans for NATO nuclear forces'. He saw little difference between the MLF and ANF as both 'would worsen the situation and would give the Germans indirect access to nuclear weapons'. And he repeated the Soviet view that there could be no progress on a non-proliferation treaty while NATO continued with its plans for nuclear sharing. In response, foreign secretary Michael Stewart sought to convince his counterpart that the ANF was different from the MLF and contained safeguards against nuclear proliferation. He argued that it should be regarded as a device that would prevent non-nuclear NATO powers, including West Germany, from acquiring their own weapons. Not unexpectedly this view was rejected by Gromyko, leaving an impasse between the two sides.[91]

Another major subject of discussion was Vietnam. This was moving to the forefront of East-West relations as Lyndon Johnson escalated the American commitment. The British approach was to seek a joint mediating role with their Soviet counterparts based on their co-chairmanship of the 1954 Geneva agreements. Wilson could also hope to exploit his relations with Lyndon Johnson to give weight to his interventions. The first steps had been taken on 20 February 1965. The British ambassador in Moscow, Humphrey Trevelyan, had passed a British proposal to the Soviets. This suggested that the two governments should send a joint message to the other members of the Geneva Conference and the Control Commission Powers. The message would request that these governments should give the co-chairmen 'a statement of their views on the situation in Viet-Nam and, in particular, on the circumstances in which they consider that a peaceful conclusion could be reached'.[92] The hope was that this process would lead to some form

[90] TNA, FO 371/182762, 'Record of a Conversation between the Foreign Secretary and Mr Gromyko ... 16 March 1965'; FO 371/182763, 'Record of a Conversation between the Foreign Secretary and the Soviet Foreign Minister ... 19 March 1965'; 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr A. A. Gromyko, Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union ... 18 March 1965', quotes from paragraph 5.
[91] TNA, FO 371/182763, quotes are from paragraph 5 of, 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr A. A. Gromyko, Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union ... 18 Mach 1965'; Stewart's arguments are from TNA, FO 371/182762, 'Record of a Conversation between the Foreign Secretary and Mr Gromyko ... 16 March 1965'.
[92] TNA, FO 371/182762, 'Mr Gromyko's Visit to London, 16-20 March, 1965, Brief 13A, 'Viet- Nam'.

of peace conference. Reluctant American agreement to this approach had been achieved, although the predominant view in Washington was to intensify the military pressure.[93]

Gromyko's meeting with the foreign secretary was preceded by receipt of the formal Soviet rejection of this British proposal. The Soviet foreign minister subjected Stewart to a vigorous denunciation of American involvement in Vietnam, a line that was to become wearingly familiar to British ministers and diplomats in the coming years. The United States 'had invaded the territory of another country'. There was therefore 'no foundation for their excuses that their actions were justified by the actions of the other-side' and they 'could not lay down preliminary conditions to end his [the United States] aggression'.[94] Later in the visit, Harold Wilson sought to revive the proposal. He argued that 'in the very nature of things the co-chairmen were unlikely themselves to agree'. However, in this role they should 'put on a different hat', lay aside their differences, and seek some elements of common ground between the protagonists. But he was rebuffed as Gromyko again called for an end to American aggression and observed that '[t]he one-sided attitude of Her Majesty's Government restricted the possibility of action by the co-chairmen'.[95]

After Gromyko's visit, the pattern of Anglo-Soviet political relations had been set. The British leaders would loyally adhere to the position of the Western Alliance with little or no deviation from their Conservative predecessors. Yet two issues were developing that would provide the main focus of the continuing dialogue. Wilson would continue to promote the possibility of Anglo-Soviet mediation of the Vietnam conflict, and the Soviet leadership would return constantly to their intense opposition to any form of nuclear sharing in NATO.

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[93] Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War*, pp. 55-7.
[94] TNA, FO 371/182762, 'Record of a Conversation between the Foreign Secretary and Mr Gromyko ... 16 March 1965'.
[95] TNA, FO 371/182763, 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr A. Gromyko, Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union ... 18 March 1965'.

Despite the difficulties caused by Vietnam, Wilson and Kosygin maintained a dialogue throughout 1965 via a series of notes. Gradually Kosygin adopted a more conciliatory tone and revealed that the Soviet priority was concern over nuclear sharing.

The Soviet premier's first communication was received in June 1965. This maintained that the agreement of reciprocal visits by the two leaders was still valid. Yet it averred that in the light of 'present British policy', the Soviet government had no confidence that a visit to Britain 'would make a considerable contribution to the development of our relations'. It asked for suggestions on how a scenario for a successful visit by Kosygin could be developed.[96] In October, a second note was received. It reiterated Soviet disappointment with British support for the American 'aggression' in Vietnam, which 'cannot but make a certain mark on Soviet-British relations'. But it also dwelled on the ongoing negotiations in Geneva on a non-proliferation treaty. Here the British delegation was opposing an American attempt to insert a clause that would give a future integrated European state the right to own an MLF. This British stance was in accord with the Soviet desire to prevent any future German access to nuclear weapons. Despite the continuing negative tone, the note was relatively more hopeful on the possibility of a future meeting.[97]

The developing dialogue with Kosygin revealed an increasing tension between Wilson, who was keen to secure a summit meeting, and the Foreign Office diplomats, who took a more cautious approach. The draft reply prepared by the officials to Kosygin's first note was rejected by Wilson as being 'too negative'.[98] By September, the prime minister was pressing the case that he should propose to visit Moscow, arguing that the time might now be right for discussions on Vietnam and disarmament. But the officials resisted, citing the lack of movement in Soviet positions. Undeterred, Wilson insisted on a weekly review of the possibility of arranging a visit as '[m]y "feel" is rather against the

[96] TNA, FO 371/182764, Wright to Bridges, 6 July 1965.
[97] TNA, FO 371/182765., 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and the Soviet Charge d'Affaires, Mr Vasev ... October 4, 1965'.
[98] TNA, PREM 13/598, 'Draft Letter to Hon. TE Bridges from O. W. Wright', undated, but prior to 16 July 1965.

logical evidence'. After two of these reviews, both equally negative, Wilson relented, but still demanded that the subject of a visit should be assessed again in six weeks.[99]

The decisive breakthrough came in November 1965. The Soviet ambassador, Alexei Soldatov, brought a third note from Kosygin. This placed even more emphasis on nuclear sharing. It indicated that the Soviet leaders had detected a more flexible attitude in recent British statements and hinted that British leaders could play a key role in securing a non-dissemination treaty. This message was reinforced via a personal input from Brezhnev. The general secretary had asked the ambassador to stress the importance that he placed on avoiding situations that could lead to nuclear war. Brezhnev had noted that while Vietnam was a very important problem that 'causes many difficulties', the 'main hotbed of a possible thermonuclear war lies in the centre of Europe'. He had then gone on to emphasise the traditional Soviet concern that nuclear sharing in NATO would lead to a nuclear-armed revanchist Germany. The Kosygin note held out the prospect of an exchange of visits between Kosygin and Wilson 'at a more appropriate time'. It was subsequently agreed that the prime minister would visit Moscow in February 1966.[100]

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Wilson probably had a mixture of motives in so doggedly pursuing a meeting with the Soviet leaders against the conservative stance of the officials in the Foreign Office. At the most basic level, he was continuing the tradition of Churchill and Macmillan in seeking to play a role in mitigating East-West tensions. International relations had long since been dominated by the two nuclear superpowers. Nonetheless, even in 1965, a British prime minister would expect to be a significant figure on the world stage with a circumscribed but still legitimate role to play. The traditions of two centuries of global power had a powerful hold, reinforced in Wilson's case by a strong belief in his ability

[99] TNA, FO 371/182764, MacLehose to Stewart, 6 September 1965; Stewart to Wilson, 9 September 1965; TNA, FO 371/182765, Sutherland to Rennie, 21 September 1965, contains the quotation; Stewart to Wilson, 1 October 1965, with note by Sutherland.
[100] TNA, FO 371/18266, Wright to MacLehouse, 4 November 1965. Agreement for the Wilson's visit was reached following discussion by Michael Stewart in Moscow 29 November – 3 December 1969 and was announced in *Pravda on 23 December 1965* - TNA, FO 371/182769.

to negotiate with the Soviet leaders. And the fact that the meeting was taking place at all would enhance his image as a global statesman to his domestic audience.

Yet the search for a meeting with the Soviet leadership also had more overt political advantages. The incipient anti-Americanism of the Labour left had been channelled into mounting opposition to the American escalation of the conflict in Vietnam. As the violence mounted, this left-wing sentiment had found a resonance among some mainstream party opinion and sections of the general public. Wilson was however committed to maintaining a strong relationship with Lyndon Johnson, not the least because of the requirement for American support for a beleaguered sterling. This gave the prime minister little option but to offer steadfast support to Johnson's policy in Vietnam, placing him in the firing line of the left wing criticism. The best route to offset this attack was to be active, and be seen to be active, in pursuing a peaceful solution to the conflict. An initial element in this strategy had been the February note to the Soviet leaders suggesting a joint initiative as co-chairmen of the Geneva implementation mechanisms. It had been followed by a fact-finding trip by Patrick Gordon-Walker to South-East Asia; a high profile proposal for a mission by Commonwealth leaders; and the dispatch of a junior government minister, Harold Davies, to Hanoi. None of these had been effective in their ostensible purpose, but they did serve to demonstrate Wilson's continuing efforts to seek a solution to the conflict.[101] A high profile engagement with the Soviet leadership provided another opportunity to burnish the prime minister's peace-making credentials.

As was so often the case with Wilson, it is difficult to untangle the mixture of motives that lay behind his pursuit of a dialogue with the Soviet leaders. And it is probably counterproductive to try: the diverse strands were all constituent parts determining his approach. A desire to exercise the statesmanship required of a British prime minister was combined with a 'Walter Mitty'-like personal attraction to acting on the world stage. The genuine desire to help resolve international problems was conflated with the opportunity to quell the discontent among his rebellious left wing. In any event, Wilson

[101] Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War*, pp. 45-145; Rhiannon Vickers, 'Harold Wilson, the British Labour Party, and the War in Vietnam', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 10 (2008), 41-70.

would now be the first senior Western leader to meet the Soviet leadership that had disposed of Khrushchev.

Chapter 2

Harold Wilson's triangular diplomacy, January 1966 - February 1967

On the 22 February 1966, Harold Wilson landed in a snowbound Moscow to the full pomp and ceremony of an official Soviet welcome. It was the start of an intense period of Anglo-Soviet diplomacy. The British prime minister made a further trip to Moscow in July 1966 and hosted a reciprocal visit by Kosygin to Britain in February 1967.

The Anglo-Soviet exchanges were dominated by two major issues in the East-West conflict - Vietnam and the NATO plans for nuclear sharing. Wilson's approach in addressing these issues with the Soviets was to position himself as an intermediary with the American president Lyndon Johnson. To this end, he maintained a close relationship with Johnson providing detailed feedback on his discussions. Wilson's interventions were not without success. During Kosygin's visit to Britain, he involved the Soviet premier in progressing an American initiative to secure a military de-escalation in Vietnam. His efforts were however subverted by American vacillation and poor communications. On nuclear sharing, Wilson made an intervention with Washington that contributed to the final rejection of the MLF concept. This in turn opened the door for the agreement of a nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

This chapter reviews the triangular interactions between Wilson and his American and Soviet counterparts. These allow an assessment of the extent to which a British prime minister could still exert influence within the super-power interactions, despite Britain's reduced economic and military capacity. And they also provide evidence of the effectiveness of Wilson's personal interventions in creating initiatives with the Soviets, despite the structural constraints of the Cold War.

The account begins by examining Wilson's relations with Lyndon Johnson and the tentative Soviet-American contacts on Vietnam during 1965. This serves as background

to consideration of Wilson's first visit to Moscow in February 1966. Consideration is then given to Wilson's intercession with Johnson on the MLF. And the chapter concludes with an assessment of the continuing exchanges on Vietnam during both Wilson's second trip to Moscow in July 1996 and Kosygin's visit to Britain in February 1967.

Harold Wilson, Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War

The British prime minister faced significant constraints in managing his relationship with his American counterpart, in large measure due to endemic weakness of the British economy.[102] Poor export performance resulted in balance of payments deficits that put continual pressure on the sterling exchange rate. The welfare spending plans of the incoming government fuelled a run on the pound in November 1964. This could only be halted by massive international loans underwritten by the United States government. Similar sterling crises in 1965 and 1966 also required international support orchestrated by the Johnson administration.

The American government had its own economic incentives to preserve the sterling exchange rate. There was a real fear that devaluation would transfer pressure onto the dollar. But wider political calculations also entered into the decision to provide the support. In essence there was a 'deal'. The Johnson administration valued the continued worldwide deployment of British forces in addition to the contribution to NATO. This provided a tangible signal of British commitment to 'defend the free world' and help in the containment of Communist expansion. If these forces were to be withdrawn as an

[102] This account of the Wilson-Johnson relationship is taken from: Kevin Boyle, 'The Price of Peace: Vietnam, the Pound, and the Crisis of the American Empire', *Diplomatic History*, 27 (2003), 37-72; Jonathan Colman, *A 'Special Relationship'?: Harold Wilson, Lyndon B. Johnson and Anglo-American Relations 'at the Summit', 1964-68* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); John Dumbrell, 'The Johnson Administration and the British Labour Government: Vietnam, the Pound and East of Suez', *Journal of American Studies*, 30 (1996), 211-31; John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations in the Cold War and After* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2001); Sylvia E. Ellis, *Britain, America and the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); John W. Young, *International Policy*, ed. by Steven Fielding and John W. Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970, Volume 2* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

economy measure, then the United States would stand alone as the 'world's policeman'. The essence of the 'deal' was that Britain would maintain its commitments both to NATO and across the world, while undertaking the economic policies necessary to sustain the exchange rate. In return, the American government would provide short-term financial support for the pound. It is unlikely that this deal was ever made explicitly, but the two sides had a clear understanding of their obligations to each other. And it was not a trivial undertaking for the Labour government. Maintenance of such an extensive military role, while supporting sterling, could only be secured by increased austerity in domestic policy. This choice of guns over butter did not find favour with many in the Labour party, while the restrictions on domestic consumption could only harm the Government's chances of re-election.

Vietnam proved a particularly difficult issue for Wilson in the context of this complex overall relationship with the American administration. The prime minister had deftly deflected American pressure for a direct British involvement in the war, stoutly resisting even a symbolic British presence. While reluctantly accepting this position, Johnson nonetheless expected Wilson to provide public support for his actions. The extent to which Wilson felt coerced into offering this backing is not clear. Given the realities of the Cold War in 1964, it seems likely that he generally agreed with the American stand to resist communist expansion. It is, however, clear that he felt an obligation to continue this support even when it imposed severe political difficulties at home. In essence, whether explicitly or implicitly, British endorsement for American policy in Vietnam was part of the deal. While it was not spelled out, Wilson could have been under no illusions that a break with Johnson on Vietnam would jeopardise continued American support of the pound.

However Wilson faced considerable opposition within his own party, and among the public at large, over his backing for Johnson's actions. He pursued a three-pronged approach to manage this situation. Firstly he sought to maximise the perception of his intimacy with Johnson, presenting himself as having a capacity to influence American actions by quiet backstage diplomacy. This was complemented by continuous, highly

publicised efforts to promote peace initiatives. And finally on selected occasions, he would dissociate himself from specific American actions, when these proved too inflammatory for British domestic opinion. This was exemplified by the British stand in March 1965 against air attacks that utilised non-lethal gas.[103] These tactics caused irritation in the Johnson administration, not least with the president himself. Yet Wilson's unwavering support on Vietnam was valuable to Johnson, and was to become increasingly more so as world opinion moved against him. Although there were times of severe tension between the two governments, a working accommodation developed. In return for his support, the president would allow Wilson to avoid a British troop deployment, pursue his peace initiatives and even make occasional criticisms of American action.

American-Soviet interactions on Vietnam

Direct American involvement in Vietnam had been escalating throughout 1965. After the initiation of the bombing of the North in February, raids had continued throughout the year. The decision was also taken that American ground forces would participate directly in the fighting with the numbers increasing from 35,000 to 125,000. In parallel with this military escalation, Johnson also sought to involve the Soviets in the search for a negotiated solution to the conflict.

The Americans took the view that, in the right circumstances, the Soviet leadership might be prepared to act as 'middleman' with the North Vietnamese.[104] Recent evidence indicates that there was some substance to these hopes. The escalating war had placed Brezhnev and his colleagues on the horns of a difficult dilemma. Firstly, their standing in the communist world, and their direct influence in South East Asia, would be undermined if support for North Vietnam were left to their ideological rivals in Beijing. And, as recalled by the long-serving Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly

[103] Ellis, *Britain, America and the Vietnam War*, pp. 69-73.
[104] John Dumbrell, *President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Communism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 103.

Dobrynin, 'the powerful factor of ideology – "international solidarity with the socialist republic of Vietnam" – was deeply ingrained in the minds of the Kremlin leaders'. Yet at the same time they recognised that Vietnam was not vital to the national interest. They did not want the conflict to destroy their hopes of promoting a gradual détente with the West: an accommodation that could reduce the risk of a nuclear conflict and secure recognition of the status quo in Europe. In the words of Brezhnev, they did not wish 'to sink in the swamps of Vietnam'.[105]

In response to these conflicting objectives, the Soviet leaders adopted a nuanced policy. They demonstrated their communist credentials by providing high levels of economic support and military supplies to the North Vietnamese. Yet they also encouraged the concept of a negotiated settlement, even if they were extremely reluctant to act as a direct intermediary between Washington and Hanoi. In fact, despite their increasing supplies of aid, throughout the early years of the war the Soviet leadership had relatively little leverage on Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues. Gaiduk has noted how the North Vietnamese leaders skilfully exploited the Sino-Soviet rivalry, 'to play both ends against the middle'. They contended that only the North Vietnamese could determine the correct strategy. And they were 'unwilling to share with Moscow its [the North Vietnamese government's] war plans or its views on possible means of settling the conflict'. As summarised by Gaiduk, 'from the Soviet point of view the North Vietnamese were proving to be independent and unmanageable'.[106]

During 1965, Johnson launched three unsuccessful initiatives to start negotiations, each time seeking Soviet involvement. In May, he asked his ambassador in Moscow to pass on a message to Hanoi. This stated that there would be a one-week pause in the bombing of the North. If this led to reduced communist military activity in the South, then there might be progress to negotiations. The Soviet deputy foreign minister refused to accept the note, saying that he was 'not a postman'. The note was delivered by other means, but

[105] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1995), pp. 133-45, quotes from p. 140 and 143; Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), pp. 17-19.
[106] Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, pp. 68-9.

the six-day pause brought no response and bombing was resumed. In June, Johnson sent the veteran American diplomat Averell Harriman to Moscow to meet with Kosygin. The Soviet premier indicated that his government would accept a solution based on a divided Vietnam and urged the Americans to issue counter-proposals to Hanoi's 'four points'.[107] Again the initiative came to nothing. The final attempt was made at the end of 1965. This was partially in response to Soviet hints that if there was a further bombing pause, then there would be 'quiet but strong Soviet diplomatic support in pushing Hanoi toward the conference table'. The bombing was stopped on 24 December and the pause lasted for 37 days. This was accompanied by an American diplomatic offensive. The secretary of state, Dean Rusk, issued a fourteen-point plan for a settlement. This was sent to American ambassadors in 113 capitals, with American envoys despatched around the world to support the plan. During the pause, the Soviet government sent a five-man delegation to Hanoi headed by Alexander Shelepin, secretary of the central committee of the party. Yet again there was no movement from Hanoi, leaving Johnson and his allies resentful of a perceived lack of Soviet support. [108]

Wilson in Moscow

It was just three weeks after this latest failure to start peace negotiations, that Harold Wilson made his long anticipated visit to Moscow. The prime minister was eager to clear his lines on Vietnam with Johnson and the week before the visit he wrote to the president to spell out his tactics. Wilson's tone was realistic. He started from a recognition that the Soviet leaders had consistently refused to become involved in any negotiations, but rather had urged direct contacts with the North Vietnamese. Both American and British leaders had sought these direct interactions but with no success. Nonetheless, Wilson committed himself to make another attempt. During his visit, he

[107] The North Vietnamese called for the withdrawal of US forces, no foreign alliances before re-unification, recognition of the NLF, and re-unification based on Vietnamese self determination - Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, p. 107.
[108] This account is based on Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, pp. 103-9, quotes p. 105 and p. 108; Ellis, *Britain, America and the Vietnam War*, pp. 94-5 and 148-51; Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, pp. 42-56 and 81-4.

would try to arrange a meeting with a senior North Vietnamese figure or, failing that, the resident representative of that country in Moscow. In this meeting he would 'probe' for 'possible ambiguities or loopholes ... in their own proposals' and transmit any message back to Johnson. He had little hope of any positive results, but such a meeting 'might help to get some of the realities of the situation through the barrier Hanoi has erected against the outside world'.[109]

During his stay in the Soviet capital, Wilson was received with the style appropriate to a visitor of importance to the Soviet government, arousing 'interested comments' among the Moscow diplomatic corps. Although he also met with Brezhnev, Kosygin was the main interlocutor. And, as anticipated, the discussions focused on the two topics that had dominated the lead-up to the meeting – Vietnam and NATO nuclear sharing. Wilson was remarkably frank (almost to the point of indiscretion) in his inputs, no doubt seeking to prompt some movement from the Soviet side. Yet in general the Soviet leaders maintained a rigid position with little hint of negotiating flexibility. As noted by the British ambassador, Geoffrey Harrison, 'the differences between their approach and the Prime Minister's found sharp expression'.[110]

Wilson urged Kosygin to take a role with him in seeking a peace settlement in Vietnam. Stressing his intimacy with Johnson, he noted the dangers of the conflict escalating. The president was under domestic pressure to pursue 'utterly dangerous courses not only against North Viet-Nam but even against China'. But Wilson 'was absolutely satisfied of President Johnson's sincerity in wanting to secure peace'. As 'the United States would never crack over this issue: [and] nor would North Viet-Nam', the only way forward was a political solution. Exaggerating his influence with Johnson, he claimed that '[w]e had put pressure on our Allies' to seek such a solution, and he expressed the hope 'that the Soviet Union would do the same'.[111]

[109] TNA, PREM 13/1216, telegram 1712, Foreign Office to Washington, 14 February 1966.
[110] TNA, FO 371/188923, 'The Prime Minister's Visit to the Soviet Union', 2 March 1966
[111] TNA, PREM, 13/1216, 'Record of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR ... 22 February 1966'.

Kosygin confirmed the Soviet rejection of any initiative based around the 1954 Geneva process. He repeated the 'usual condemnation of American aggression and of British support for it', and demanded that America should 'withdraw and let the Viet-Namese people make their own settlement'. But in his report of the meetings, the British ambassador highlighted some remarks by Kosygin that 'were less stereotyped'. He had indicated that the North Vietnamese position summarised in the 'four points' could be the basis for a negotiation rather than an ultimatum. The Soviet leaders had not excluded the possibility of an eventual political settlement. Kosygin also confirmed that the Soviet leadership had to move 'with extreme caution because of the Chinese'.[112] But despite these weak signals of future flexibility, the Soviets were adamant that no mention of a possible political solution to the Vietnam War could be included in the communiqué. Reference was limited to the simple statement that 'the two sides set out with great frankness their respective points of view on the situation in Viet-Nam'.[113]

As he had indicated to Johnson, Wilson had also set up a contact with a North Vietnamese representative while he was in Moscow. In the event, this was restricted to a meeting between the junior Foreign Office minister, Lord Chalfont, and the chargé d'affaires from the North Vietnamese embassy, Le Chang. Not surprisingly, these were unproductive with the Vietnamese envoy simply recapitulating his government's well-known intransigent public stance. Even though Le Chang requested that the contacts be kept secret, Chalfont insisted on briefing the press, an action that no doubt reflected Wilson's domestic political interests.[114]

When the discussion in Moscow turned to NATO plans for nuclear sharing, Wilson made great efforts to reassure his Soviet interlocutors that the NATO proposals could not lead to a nuclear-armed, revanchist West Germany. He avowed that 'no Government of which he was a member would ever agree to put nuclear weapons in the hands of the Germans'. And the British government was equally opposed 'to the development of any

[112] TNA, FO 371/188923, 'The Prime Minister's Visit to the Soviet Union', 2 March 1966
[113] TNA, PREM, 13/1216, 'Visit of the Prime Minister to the Soviet Union, 21-24 February, 1966: Communiqué'.
[114] TNA, PREM, 13/1216 'Record of a Meeting between the Minister of State and the North Viet-Namese Charge d'Affairs ... 23 February 1966'.

European nuclear grouping'.[115] Rather indiscreetly, he also hinted at less than solid support for the West German ambitions. He observed that the Federal German government was 'not really seriously committed to the idea of reunification – it had become to some extent a political slogan'. He re-emphasised that the plans for nuclear sharing being considered within NATO did not constitute a proliferation of nuclear weapons. On the contrary, they were designed to contain any German nuclear ambitions. He stressed that both the West and the Soviet Union had a common interest 'in inoculating Germany against a revival of militarism', and this view was shared by President Johnson.[116]

On the specific issue of the multilateral force (MLF), Wilson informed the Soviet leaders that 'the MLF proposal in its original form was now dead'. NATO had not made any decision, but was 'moving towards a solution based on consultation rather than on "hardware"'. Emphasising the many different attitudes within the American administration, he advised that the best Soviet approach would be to 'let the healthier influences have their effect'. He also put forward the view that West German politicians did not really want nuclear weapons. The MLF proposal had been thought up by American leaders to satisfy a German demand for a nuclear capability that did not in fact exist. There was now a risk that the proposal was itself creating this demand. Wilson emphasised his commitment to a non-proliferation treaty and that the British government would not give priority to NATO nuclear sharing over achieving such a treaty. The only response from the Soviet leaders was to repeat their well-established positions objecting to any form of German access to nuclear weapons.[117]

Wilson also tried hard to develop some momentum on nuclear restraint, seeking to build on the achievement of Kennedy and Macmillan in agreeing the partial test ban treaty. Yet again his hosts were unresponsive. They rejected his appeal to permit verification inspections as a route to extending the test ban treaty to include underground nuclear

[115] TNA, PREM, 13/1216, 'Record of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR ... 22 February 1966'.
[116] TNA, PREM, 13/1216, 'Record of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR ...at 10 a.m. ... 23 February 1966'.
[117] *Ibid.*

tests.[118] And Kosygin was equally unresponsive to Wilson's proposal for a tripartite Soviet, American and British meeting to give new impetus to the Geneva negotiations on both underground nuclear tests and non-proliferation.

The meetings also contained the, by now, ritual exchanges on the future of Germany and European security. The Soviet leaders indulged in their favourite hobby of attempted Alliance-splitting, given a new piquancy by the increasingly strident anti–American line being propounded by de Gaulle. In his opening statement, Kosygin, 'speaking very frankly' expressed Soviet surprise at the unconditional British support for American views. He went on to assert that 'United States aims and interests and those of Western Europe were more often than not divergent'.[119] Later in the meetings, Wilson defended the American presence in Europe as important to stabilising European security. This produced the retort from Kosygin that de Gaulle 'was able to follow an independent policy against the wishes of the United States. There was no reason why Britain should not do likewise.'[120]

Wilson was quick to report back to Johnson. In a long note he sketched out the major lines of the discussion. His tone was by turns sycophantic and bumptious – placing himself in the role of a trusted intermediary between Johnson and the Soviet leaders. Employing the Duke of Wellington's phrase, he described the encounters as 'hard pounding' and reported 'absolutely no progress' on Vietnam. He confirmed that he had spoken 'from a position four-square within the Western Alliance'. He reported that he had spent time in 'educating' his interlocutors both on the pluralistic political culture in the West, and on the lack of naivety among Western governments about the danger of a revanchist Germany. Playing to Johnson's vanity, Wilson recounted that he had told the Soviet leaders that while there were lots of Americans with different views, 'when it came to the decision making process there was one American, the President'. Finally, he concluded that the Soviet leaders were seeking an active dialogue with their Western

[118] *Ibid.*
[119] TNA, PREM, 13/1216, Record of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR ... 22 February 1966'.
[120] TNA, PREM, 13/1216, Record of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR ... at 10 a.m. ... 23 February 1966'.

counterparts. While Vietnam inhibited a 'too public' dialogue with the American administration, 'they may be ready to keep it going through us'. In this case, Johnson could be reassured that 'they [the Soviets] will be negotiating with us as your loyal allies'.[121]

Johnson's reply was friendly. The tone indicates that, unlike many of his communications to Wilson, this had been written personally, rather than by his staff. He thanked Wilson for his 'splendid account of your talks in Moscow'. He also acknowledged that the contact with the North Vietnamese embassy in Moscow could be of value, as 'the more channels we have open the better'. And he welcomed the fact that Wilson had lectured the Soviet leaders about Germany, noting that he wished that 'the Russians would get it through their heads that we are just as interested as they in keeping Germany from going off the deep end'. He finished the note with a rousing cadenza. The readiness of Wilson to 'keep in close touch on the many problems which confront us' was 'a great comfort to me, and a good thing for our countries, the Alliance, and the world'. Even allowing for the rhetorical conventions of communications between heads of government, there is little doubt that in early 1966, Harold Wilson retained some degree of mutual understanding with Lyndon Johnson.[122]

Overall, Wilson conducted a brisk, business-like set of discussions with the Soviet leaders. He had a very limited hand of cards, being constrained by Alliance positions and American and North Vietnamese rigidity over the conflict in Vietnam. He tried hard to obtain some traction on a Vietnam peace initiative, and to unlock the constraints on the extension of the test ban treaty and the development of a non-proliferation accord. Despite the absence of concrete results, this set of meetings did establish Wilson as a 'player' in the East-West dialogue. And this was about all to which he could reasonable aspire as the prime minister of a Britain of fading international significance.

[121] TNA, FO 371/188922, telegram 2237, Foreign Office to Washington, 28 February 1966.
[122] TNA, PREM 13/1216, Johnson to Wilson, 3 March 1966.

Sinking the MLF

Wilson's discussions in Moscow had confirmed once again that the still-extant NATO plans for nuclear sharing were inhibiting the development of a nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Shortly after the prime minister's return from the Soviet capital, de Gaulle unilaterally withdrew French troops from NATO command. The ensuing crisis in the Atlantic Alliance provided Wilson with an opportunity to deliver what proved to be the *coup de grâce* to the MLF.

As described in chapter 1, the MLF or 'hardware' concept of nuclear sharing was only being kept afloat by the State Department zealots. In the immediate aftermath of de Gaulle's action, Wilson sent two personal notes to Lyndon Johnson. In these the prime minister argued that the Atlantic Alliance should consider an initiative to foster European détente. He also argued that the MLF concept was standing in the way of détente and must be abandoned if there was to be any hope of a future reunification of Germany. He proposed that 'Germany should be encouraged to look for the ultimate satisfaction of her own interests in peaceful reunification and to adapt her short term polices in NATO accordingly [i.e. abandon the MLF]'. The British prime minister argued in favour of the 'software' solution to nuclear sharing currently being debated within NATO. This would be based on 'a permanent body or restricted membership within NATO, with consultative functions over the whole Western strategic deterrent and some executive function over the American and British strategic nuclear forces assigned to NATO'.[123]

Wilson's notes arrived in Washington in the midst of disagreements between members of the State Department and the White House staff on how best to respond to de Gaulle's challenge. While it would be going too far to term the prime minister's input decisive, it

[123] TNA, PREM 13/1043, Telegram 3050, Foreign Office to Washington, 21 March 1966, and Wilson to Johnson, 29 March 1966.

certainly helped to sharpen the debate within the Administration both on nuclear sharing in NATO and on détente. One of Johnson's national security staff, Francis Bator, was prompted to give the president a reflective note presenting an 'alternative to hardware'.[124] This was followed by what Bator called 'a remarkably sensible' memorandum from secretary of state, Dean Rusk, that, for the first time, put forward a State Department proposal that embraced a software option.[125] The case for détente was taken up by Walt Rostow, who had recently been appointed as Johnson's national security advisor. He argued that NATO should be given '"a new forward look" by emphasising its potential in pursuit of détente'. He stressed that this element might 'determine how positively European parliaments and public opinion react to the new NATO package as a whole'.[126]

Following these internal inputs, Johnson requested proposals that would allow the Atlantic Alliance to become directly involved in the promotion of détente. These should be constructive 'political, diplomatic, and economic initiatives addressed to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union'. As expressed by Ellison, from this point 'the promotion of European détente would be a major theme in US foreign policy'.[127] In December 1966, the alliance formally abandoned the MLF concept and replaced it with the 'software' option based on consultation on nuclear strategy.

The abandonment of the MLF opened the way for progress in negotiations on the non-proliferation treaty. In October 1966, Gromyko and Rusk agreed a compromise approach. The Soviet negotiators dropped their objection to nuclear consultation within NATO. They also accepted a form of 'European' clause covering the scenario that a future politically integrated Europe would enjoy a 'nuclear status in direct succession from Britain and France'. The treaty was finally signed on 1 July 1968. And, as

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[124] Lyndon Johnson Presidential Library, Austin TX, White House Central File, Confidential File, Papers of Francis Bator, Subject File NATO, Box 28, Bator to Johnson, 4 April 1966,
[125] *Foreign Relations of the United States*, vol. XIII, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office,1995), document 155, Rusk to Johnson, 12 April 1966.
[126] James Ellison, *The United States, Britain and the Transatlantic Crisis: Rising to the Gaullist Challenge, 1963-8* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 50-1.
[127] *Ibid.*

concluded by Dumbrell, this had been made possible by the 'American abandonment of the MLF', for which Harold Wilson's intervention deserves some credit.[128]

One unexpected consequence of Wilson's initiative was that he became excluded from the major negotiations over the non-proliferation treaty. Increasingly this was handled as a bilateral issue between the two super powers. As he was preparing for his next visit to Moscow in July 1966, the Prime Minister received a stark message via the American ambassador. This warned him not to raise the issues of a non-proliferation treaty or a comprehensive test ban treaty, as the Johnson administration was preparing initiatives in these areas.[129] And his report back to Johnson confirmed that these issues were hardly mentioned during his discussions with Kosygin.[130] During the subsequent visit of the Soviet premier to London in February 1967, Wilson expressed his frustration over his diminished role. He acknowledged that 'the Americans and the Russians [are] at last making real progress on non-proliferation'. But he then ruefully remarked that '[i]t was rather as if we were on the outside with our noses pressed to the window watching celebrations inside with the organization of which we had been very much concerned'. But Kosygin, in the words of the minute taker, 'seemed reluctant to be drawn beyond the comment that he was glad that we were glad'.[131] This was a marked contrast to the earlier period when the MLF concept had been still alive and the issue had been one of the dominant strands of Anglo-Soviet exchanges.

Return to Moscow July 1966

Wilson made a second visit to Moscow in July 1966, connected with a major British trade fair. It appears that both sides were eager for a further prime ministerial meeting. Wilson had approached the Soviet ambassador to seek a meeting with Kosygin, only to

[128] Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, pp. 68-74, quotes on p. 71 and 73.
[129] TNA, FO 371/188924, telegram 6947, Foreign Office to Washington, 15 July 1966.
[130] *Ibid.*, telegram 7035, Foreign Office to Washington, 19 July 1966.
[131] TNA, PREM 13/1715, 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr Kosygin at a Formal Dinner ... 7 February, 1967'.

find that the ambassador already had an invitation from the Soviet premier for him to visit Moscow.[132] The discussions would centre on Vietnam.

As for his earlier visit, Wilson sought to clear his lines with Johnson. However the relationship was now somewhat fraught. The prime minister was experiencing increased levels of criticism from his backbenchers over his support for American actions in Vietnam. When in late May he was informed that Johnson was considering the bombing of oil facilities in Hanoi and Haipong, Wilson had replied that backbench pressure was such that he could not support this move. And when the raids took place on 28-29 June, he duly issued a statement dissociating the British government from the actions. Although this statement had been carefully orchestrated with Washington, and confirmed the British government's continued support for the war, it nonetheless caused considerable friction with the president. [133] It was also perhaps no coincidence that the Soviet invitation to visit Moscow came within a week of this statement.

In his note to Johnson, Wilson set out his objectives for the visit in terms intended to mollify the president. He also sought to maintain the option of eventual British mediation with the Soviets, even if the immediate prospects were not encouraging. Wilson assured Johnson that he would try to 'persuade the Russians that neither they nor anyone else should base their calculations on a misconception of your own courage and convictions'. And hence it would be 'profoundly to their interests to work more vigorously for a negotiated settlement.' He also would reaffirm his support for Johnson's overall Vietnam policy, despite the dissociation over the bombing. Thus he would try to convince them 'that if they think they can drive a wedge between you and me, they are sadly mistaken', and that the 'value to them of the British connection with the Vietnam situation lies essentially in our firm belief in the inviolability of the Atlantic relationship'. Playing to an American sensitivity, he also planned to intercede on behalf of American prisoners in Vietnam. But he held out little hope of positive Soviet moves

[132] TNA, FO 371/188923, telegrams 1662 and 1663, Foreign Office to Moscow, 5 July 1966.
[133] Colman, *A 'Special Relationship?'*, pp. 102-110; Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War*, pp. 160-79.

to promote negotiations, 'because of the diplomatic straight jacket in which their rivalry with the Chinese within the communist world compresses them'.[134]

The discussions with Kosygin yielded no breakthrough in the deadlock on Vietnam that had characterised the February exchanges. The Soviet premier totally rejected any joint approach to negotiations. He argued that, as the Soviet and British governments had totally opposite views on the conflict, to talk 'of finding a common view, of using the Co-Chairmanship and so on was quite unrealistic'.[135] Kosygin painted a picture of potential escalation. China was offering firm support to North Vietnam and the only reason that Chinese volunteers were not fighting 'was because the North Vietnamese had not asked for them'. But the restraint would not last forever. Warsaw Pact countries would also send volunteers if asked, and they would be prepared to fight alongside those from China. He offered no constructive suggestions to resolve the conflict save American withdrawal. Kosygin was also somewhat reluctant to have his views reported directly to Johnson as 'it would look as if he was using Mr Wilson as a go-between in a three-cornered negotiation with Mr Johnson'. But Wilson could convey a 'certain impression of Soviet government views'.[136]

Referring to the visit of de Gaulle just three weeks earlier, Kosygin again used the contrast with the French attitude to try to induce a more independent British line. He argued that, as Britain always supported American policy, the American government no longer needed to take account of their views. In contrast, due to the independent line taken by the French president, 'the Americans had to take account of French thought'. Wilson defended his position, stoutly arguing that the Johnson administration took no notice of the French, but that the British government still exercised some influence.[137]

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[134] TNA, FO 371/188924, telegram 6947, Foreign Office to Washington, 15 July 1966.
[135] TNA, FO 371/188925, 'Record of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR ... 18 July 1966.
[136] TNA, FO 371/188925, 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr Kosygin at 5.00pm ... 18 July 1966'.
[137] *Ibid.*

In his report to Johnson, Wilson stressed the inflexibility of the Soviet position, including the 'totally unhelpful and indeed contemptuous line' taken over the captured airmen. He continued his ingratiating references to Johnson's strength of purpose, relaying how he had stressed to Kosygin 'how dangerously I thought he was misjudging both you yourself personally and the temper and resolution of the American people'. He also stressed how steadfastly he had supported American policy. While acknowledging a 'pretty negative balance sheet at present', Wilson speculated that the relationship that he had established would prove valuable in the future. He felt even surer after this visit that the time would come when Kosygin 'will want to make an opening: and when it does, we may both be glad that some of the way has been paved in this fashion'.[138]

By July 1966, Wilson had some justification in his belief that he had created a valuable conduit to the Soviet leaders on the Vietnam War. He had completed many hours of frank discussions during his two visits. This had given him as full an appreciation as anyone of the Soviet position. This included the difficulties with the Chinese regime on which Kosygin had been particularly frank. The record indicates that he had more than held his own in these exchanges. And while there is no direct evidence, to borrow a phrase from a later British leader, it seems likely that he had established himself as someone with whom they could do business.

On the American side, despite his dissociation from the June bombing, Wilson had maintained his relationship with Johnson. This was further consolidated during a visit to Washington just over a week after returning from Moscow. The meetings with the president went well. Despite the disparaging rhetoric prior to the visit, Wilson confirmed once again that in a face-to-face meeting he could successfully engage with Johnson. In reporting the meeting, British ambassador, Patrick Dean, noted that his American interlocutors were commenting on 'how well the Prime Minister must have handled the President to have obtained such a satisfactory result'.[139] However this relationship would be found wanting when Wilson became intimately involved with an American Vietnam

[138] TNA, FO 371/188924, telegram 7035, Foreign Office to Washington, 19 July 1966.
[139] Colman, *A 'Special Relationship?'*, pp. 115-7, quote p. 116; Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War*, pp. 182-9

peace initiative that coincided with the visit of Alexei Kosygin to Britain in the following year.

Tangled diplomacy

In the second half of 1966, the Johnson administration resumed their overtures to the North Vietnamese leaders. These were structured around a potential mutual de-escalation of the conflict. In this, an American cessation of the bombing of the North would be matched by the termination of North Vietnamese infiltration of men and supplies into the South. These moves would be a prelude to negotiations between the protagonists. On this occasion, the Soviet government seemed more prepared to press its North Vietnamese clients to consider such an approach. British leaders were closely involved in these manoeuvres, yet they were never taken fully into the confidence of the Johnson administration. This resulted in confusion and embarrassment that must have diminished the standing of the British leaders in Soviet eyes.

As this episode has been the subject of extensive study with several detailed accounts now available, this assessment will be relatively brief.[140] It begins with a description of the development of the de-escalation initiative in late 1966 and early 1967, before considering the complex and confused diplomacy during Kosygin's stay in Britain.

Early manoeuvring

The origins of the American de-escalation plan lay with Averell Harriman. In August 1966, Johnson appointed the veteran diplomat to be 'his ambassador for peace' with a

[140] Boyle, 'The Price of Peace'; Colman, *A Special Relationship*, pp. 122-32; John Dumbrell and Sylvia Ellis, 'British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives, 1966-7: Marigolds, Sunflowers, and "Kosygin Week"', *Diplomatic History*, 27 (2003), pp. 113-49; Geraint Hughes, A 'Missed Opportunity' for Peace? Harold Wilson, British Diplomacy, and the *Sunflower* Initiative to End the Vietnam War, February 1967', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 14 (2003), pp. 106-26; Yoshihiko Mizumoto, ' Harold Wilson's Efforts at a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War, 1965-67', *eJournal of International History* (March, 2005) pp. 1-43.

mission to pursue peaceful solutions to the conflict. His assistant, Chester Cooper, drafted a proposal that became known as the Phase A/Phase B approach. In this, the American government would cease the bombing of North Vietnam as Phase A, if they received assurances that the North Vietnamese would subsequently stop infiltrating troops and supplies into the South. This would then constitute Phase B. The North Vietnamese leaders would not be required to acknowledge publicly their prior commitment to Phase B. Rather the bombing halt would be presented as a unilateral American move. When the bombing and infiltration had stopped, negotiations could begin.[141] This approach was made public at the United Nations on 22 September 1966. The American representative stated that a cessation of bombing would be ordered 'the moment we are assured privately or otherwise, that this step will be answered promptly by a corresponding and appropriate de-escalation on the other side'.[142]

There was a strengthening view within the Johnson administration that the Soviet leaders might be prepared to intercede with the North Vietnamese government to promote a disengagement. Gromyko had fed a 'stream of hints and suggestions to the effect that some kind of mediation via Moscow might be feasible'. When the Soviet foreign minister met Johnson in October 1966, the President stressed his commitment to finding a peaceful solution and hinted at a mediation role for the Soviet government. Gromyko asserted that, while the Soviet Union 'did not engage in negotiation', he 'did not deny that they had some influence among their own friends'.[143]

The Labour government was eager to play a role in promoting the Phase A/Phase B plan with the Soviets.[144] George Brown was now the foreign secretary and was scheduled to visit Moscow in November 1966. Somewhat reluctantly, the Johnson administration agreed that he should raise the plan during the visit.[145] The almost verbatim record of the discussions in Moscow illustrates the positive side of Brown's reputation. He conducted the negotiations with a directness and firmness that is impressive even at this distance.

[141] Boyle, 'Price of Peace', pp. 49-52.
[142] Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, p. 119.
[143] *Ibid.*, pp. 117-8.
[144] Dumbrell and Ellis, 'Vietnam Peace Initiatives', p. 122.
[145] Boyle, 'Price of Peace', pp. 52-55.

He pressed hard for a Soviet intercession with Hanoi on behalf of the de-escalation plan.[146] But Gromyko was unmoved, rejecting any concept of a Phase A/Phase B approach. He asserted that 'any attempt to establish preliminary conditions before ending the bombing could not lead to positive results'. And he expressed the hope 'that there would be no misunderstanding in Mr Brown's mind' on this issue.[147]

Brown was in reality operating under a handicap. Unknown to him, the Americans were pursuing a parallel approach to Hanoi via a Polish diplomat, an exercise known as project MARIGOLD. The Soviet leaders knew about MARIGOLD and that Hanoi was in the process of rejecting the Phase A/Phase B plan that Brown was so vigorously promoting. The foreign secretary's ignorance of this second track must have undermined the credibility of the British leaders as trusted confidants of the American administration. In the event MARIGOLD came to nothing as it 'foundered amid mutual recriminations' in December 1966.[148]

Despite these setbacks, early in 1967 the momentum towards a potential Vietnam peace process began to build again. This was initiated by the Soviet leaders themselves, perhaps the first time that they had taken a direct initiative. They indicated to the Johnson administration that if a proposal was passed to the North Vietnamese, then 'they believed that such a proposal would lead to serious talks'. In project SUNFLOWER, a contact was established between the American chargé d'affaires in Moscow, John Guthrie, and Le Chang in the North Vietnamese embassy. On the 28 January, Hanoi reinforced this positive message. Foreign minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh, indicated that peace talks could begin if American bombing was stopped unconditionally.[149]

On 2 February, after much internal discussion, the Johnson administration dispatched a formal proposal via the Le Chang channel. The Americans would initiate the de-escalation process by a cessation of the bombing if they received a 'private' assurance

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[146] TNA, FO 371/188928, 'Record of a Meeting ... 10.30 a.m. 23 November 1966'.
[147] TNA, FO 371/188928 'Record of a Meeting ... 5 p.m., 23 November 1966'.
[148] Dumbrell and Ellis, 'Vietnam Peace Initiatives', p. 123.
[149] Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism* p. 120.

that the North Vietnamese would respond with 'subsequent steps'. The Phase A/Phase B sequence was made crystal clear. Based on North Vietnamese assurances, the Americans would initiate the de-escalation by terminating their bombing of the North. This would be followed by the North Vietnamese 'steps'. This sequence was to become of critical importance in the subsequent diplomacy. [150]

Without any deliberate planning by either the Soviets or the Americans, Wilson and Brown were now in the centre of this peace initiative. In November 1966, Kosygin had accepted the long-standing invitation to visit Britain, and the visit was agreed for the week beginning 6 February 1967.[151] There is no indication that the acceptance was triggered by the situation in Vietnam.[152] Yet Kosygin's visit would begin just four days after the American Phase A/Phase B offer had been passed to Le Chang. Furthermore, a short bombing halt in connection with the Tet festival was scheduled to begin on the second day of the visit. An extension of this halt offered an obvious start point for the de-escalation process. Wilson and Brown were eager to exploit this fortunate coincidence of timings to carve out a role in the peace process.

Prior to the visit, both Wilson and Kosygin sought to establish the positions of their potential sponsors. The British prime minister had been informed about the MARIGOLD initiative which had so compromised Brown during his visit to Moscow. He was determined not to be placed in the same position; he would 'not go into bat' again without being fully informed of American actions.[153] It was agreed that Chester Cooper, who had first conceived the de-escalation plan, would be in London throughout the Kosygin visit to ensure a smooth interface with Washington. Cooper was supported by the American ambassador, David Bruce, a man of great standing within the American government, and with untrammelled access to both the White House and State Department. This time there were to be no excuses for not keeping the British leaders fully informed of emerging developments.

[150] Dumbrell and Ellis, 'Vietnam Peace Initiatives', p. 129.
[151] TNA, FO 371/188926, telegram 2511, Foreign Office to Moscow, 4 November 1966.
[152] TNA, PREM 13/1216, telegram 1959, Moscow to Foreign Office, 29 October 1966.
[153] Dumbrell and Ellis, 'Vietnam Peace Initiatives', p. 125.

Kosygin had also made his preparations. In the week before his departure for London, the Soviet ambassador had two meetings the North Vietnamese premier, Pham Van Dong. The premier took an uncompromising line. The military effort would take priority over the 'diplomatic struggle'. The North Vietnamese would go to the conference table only after an unconditional cessation of the bombing (with no reciprocal reduction of military activity in the South). Yet despite this intransigence, there was some movement in the North Vietnamese position. At least they had recognised the possibility of negotiations, and, probably for the first time, 'authorized the Soviet Union to sound out the U.S. position'. As noted by Gaiduk, Kosygin 'had been provided with room for manoeuvre'.[154]

Kosygin's visit

The tone of Wilson's interactions with Kosygin on Vietnam comes through from the near-verbatim accounts. It is one of two leaders representing very different positions, but working together to find an approach to a difficult, almost intractable, problem. There was little of the ritualistic point scoring that characterised their previous exchanges. While it should not be exaggerated, it does seem that the two men had established some element of personal chemistry.[155]

On the first day of the visit, Monday 6 February 1967, they assured each other that there were good prospects for reaching an agreement on de-escalation in Vietnam. They could not negotiate but 'they should assist the two sides to get together'. Kosygin stressed that he was in contact with Hanoi. Indeed he had been in contact since his arrival in London and was expressing the position of the North Vietnamese government 'more or less'. But despite this optimism, fundamental differences remained, reflecting the stances of their sponsors. Wilson was pressing for a signal that North Vietnam would de-escalate its

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[154] Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, pp. 99-102.
[155] TNA, PREM 13/1715 contains records of all the informal discussions between Kosygin and Wilson.

activities following a halt to the bombing. Kosygin held the Pham Van Dong line that the American government should stop the bombing unconditionally, based solely on the promise of subsequent negotiations.[156]

Overnight, guidance was received from Washington. This confirmed that a cessation of bombing in 'exchange for merely talks' was unacceptable. It also indicated that a message confirming the Phase A/Phase B proposals would be sent to the North Vietnamese leaders. This would state that 'if they agreed to an assured stoppage of infiltration into South Viet Nam, we will stop the bombing of North Viet Nam and stop further augmentation of US forces in South Viet Nam'. This made more precise the Phase A/Phase B formulation in Johnson's message of 2 February. The 'equitable and reciprocal reduction of hostile action' required from the North Vietnamese as Phase B was a cessation of the infiltration of its forces into the South.[157]

The next day, Tuesday 7 February, Wilson pressed this formulation of Phase A/Phase B on Kosygin. The Soviet leader did not express much optimism, maintaining that a unilateral cessation of bombing, followed by negotiations, was the only realistic option. But he conceded that if 'the North Vietnamese decide on another approach, as a result of studying the American proposals, this would of course be acceptable'. The discussion continued the following day. As Cooper reported to Washington, Wilson stressed 'in the simplest terms possible' that the Phase A/Phase B plan required a North Vietnamese commitment to stop the movement of its forces to the South.[158]

Also on 8 February, after extensive discussion in Washington, the Johnson letter to the North Vietnamese leaders was dispatched. It marked a reversal of the Phase A/Phase B approach. The Johnson letter to Hanoi of the 2 February had required a 'private understanding with the DRV that additional *subsequent* steps would be taken' in return for a bombing halt. This formulation was the basis of Wilson's discussions with Kosygin. But the new communication required that Johnson be 'assured that infiltration

[156] TNA, PREM 13/1715, 'Record of a Conversation ... at an informal Dinner ... 6 February 1967'.
[157] Dumbrell and Ellis, 'Vietnam Peace Initiatives', p. 131.
[158] *Ibid.*, pp. 131-4.

into South Viet-Nam by land and by sea *has stopped'* [emphasis added] before he would authorise a stop to the bombing. This was essentially a Phase B/Phase A plan with the process initiated by the unilateral action of the North Vietnamese government, rather than their American counterparts. This decision by Johnson to harden his demands opened up a significant difference between the proposition being pressed by Wilson in London and that being communicated by Johnson to Hanoi. There was to be a prolonged delay before Wilson was informed of this sudden change of plan.[159]

Meanwhile in London, Kosygin requested a written version of the Phase A/Phase B formulation. This 'would be a very important document', the 'sooner he got it the better'. The Soviet premier promised to 'transmit [to the North Vietnamese leaders] whatever was given him in writing'. The urgency of producing this written proposal was exacerbated as Kosygin was due to leave for a visit to Scotland.[160] Cooper dispatched to Washington the final formulation that would be given to Kosygin. The key sentence confirmed the Phase A/Phase B sequence in stating that 'the United States will stop the bombing as soon as they are assured that the infiltration from NVN to SVN *will* stop' [emphasis added]. Having received no response by 19:00 Cooper somewhat uneasily agreed that Wilson could pass the letter to Kosygin before he departed for Scotland.[161]

Two hours later, the response from Washington finally arrived. It was a severe shock to the British leaders and precipitated much anger with the Americans. It presented the reverse Phase B/Phase A proposition that, unknown to them or their on-site American advisors, had been transmitted to Hanoi some two days earlier. Cooper argued over the telephone with Walt Rostow but to no avail.[162] Wilson was reduced to sending a private secretary to intercept Kosygin as he boarded the overnight train to Scotland and thrust the new formulation into his hand.[163]

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[159] *Ibid.*, p. 134.
[160] TNA, PREM 13/1715, 'Record of a Conversation ... after the Morning Plenary Session, 10 February 1967'.
[161] Dumbrell and Ellis, 'Vietnam Peace Initiatives', p. 137.
[162] *Ibid.*, p.138.
[163] Ben Pimlott., *Harold Wilson* (London: HarperColins, 1992), p. 462.

The period before Kosygin's return from Scotland on late Sunday afternoon was spent in furious transatlantic communication as Wilson sought to find a way out of his dilemma. As he explained in a telegram to Johnson, his only options were to tell Kosygin, 'either that I am not in your confidence or that there was an unforeseen change in Washington that as a loyal satellite I must follow'.[164] There was however little sign of friction when Wilson and Kosygin met again at Chequers. Wilson explained the 'misunderstandings that had arisen during the week'. And he expressed his regret that 'the hopes that the two sides might get together and desert the battlefields for the conference room before the end of the New Year [Tet] truce had not materialised'. The two leaders then turned to a discussion of the communiqué that would be issued on Kosygin's departure the following day.[165]

Yet there was to be one last twist in this tangled tale. Cooper brokered a new deal with Washington that could be put to Kosygin. The Tet bombing truce would be extended to 10:00 London time on Monday 13 February, to give an opportunity for the North Vietnamese leaders to agree to halt southward troop movements. The proposal was put to Kosygin at 01:00 on Monday morning at his London hotel. He correctly identified it as an American ultimatum, 'answer in seven hours or the bombs will fall'. Nonetheless, Wilson pressed the Soviet leader to transmit the message to Hanoi, 'with his full backing'. He also offered to intercede with Johnson to gain a 'few more hours', eventually succeeding in extending the deadline to 16:00. Kosygin agreed to transmit the message to Hanoi and was as good as his word. No reply was received and the bombing resumed.[166]

These events pose the questions of whether the confusions during Kosygin's visit squandered a real opportunity to begin a process that would bring peace to Vietnam. This was certainly Wilson's view.[167] The evidence is, however, too sparse to draw a definitive conclusion. On the whole scholars judge that it is unlikely that the Wilson-

[164] Dumbrell and Ellis, 'Vietnam Peace Initiatives', pp. 141.
[165] TNA, PREM 13/1715, 'Record of a Conversation at Chequers at 6.00 P.M., 12 February 1967'.
[166] NA, PREM 13/1715, 'Record of a Conversation in Claridges at 01.00 a.m., 15 February 1967'; Boyle, 'Price of Peace', pp. 68-9.
[167] Ellis, *Britain, America and the Vietnam War*, pp. 238-40.

Kosygin interactions could have been a catalyst for ending the conflict. They cite the belligerence of the North Vietnamese who still believed in a military solution; the dissipation of Soviet influence in Hanoi by the rivalry with the Chinese; and above all the lack of a coherent strategy and clear leadership by Johnson. [168]

Nonetheless, as argued by Boyle, it is possible that, handled with skill, the interactions could have led to the opening of some form of negotiations.[169] Kosygin was clearly interested in a negotiated solution. Dobrynin records his disappointment that he could not repeat his success of the previous year, when he had negotiated a de-escalation of the India-Pakistan dispute.[170] And Hanoi was at least interested in the possibility of negotiations. During a seminar in 1997, a North Vietnamese official argued that if Johnson had stuck to the original Phase A/ Phase B formula then the initiative 'could have succeeded'. On hearing the evidence at the seminar, the American defence secretary in 1967, Robert McNamara, concluded that Wilson and Kosygin were 'very, very close to a breakthrough' until Johnson changed the terms.[171] Yet, as noted by Hughes, even at best the initiative would only have resulted in a military de-escalation and the opening of negotiations. The two sides were still far apart on their basic objectives and there is no evidence that a peace deal would have been possible in 1967.[172]

Coordination of activity between London and Washington during Kosygin's visit was inept and the fault clearly lay with the Johnson administration. It is no credit to the president that he allowed a close ally to be left in such an ambiguous position in dealing with Kosygin. Moreover, Johnson needlessly squandered a potentially valuable diplomatic asset. Although the North Vietnamese were very far from Soviet puppets, as the largest supplier of economic and military assistance, the Soviet leaders were not

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[168] Boyle, 'Price of Peace'; Dumbrell and Ellis, 'Vietnam Peace Initiatives'; Hughes, 'Missed Opportunity'; Mizumoto, 'Wilson's efforts'.
[169] Boyle, 'Price of Peace'.
[170] Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, p. 156.
[171] Boyle, 'Price of Peace', quotes p. 69.
[172] Hughes, 'Missed Opportunity'.

without influence in Hanoi. It could only have been to Johnson's advantage to have the direct engagement of the Soviet premier in the search for a negotiated solution.

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During this period of Anglo-Soviet diplomacy, Harold Wilson had gone some way to carve out a British role in addressing the structural East-West tensions. He had created a dialogue with Kosygin and used this to insert himself into American diplomacy on both Vietnam and nuclear issues. Wilson's involvement was not always welcomed by the Americans, and his interventions with Kosygin were never an integral component of the American strategy. Rather, Johnson and his advisors tolerated the prime minister's initiatives as an unavoidable fact that might bring some advantage. Nonetheless, Wilson had engineered a serious engagement with both superpowers on the main geopolitical issues of the day.

Contacts between the British and Soviet leaders continued in the eighteen months following Kosygin's visit. However Wilson gradually lost his purchase on the main East-West issues. The exchanges became formulaic, and by mid-1968 even the British recognised that they had little strategic value. This decline in the Anglo-Soviet relationship will be assessed in the next chapter before some conclusions are drawn on the overall pattern of Wilson's diplomacy.

Chapter 3

'They know our address', February 1967 - December 1968

Although most commentators have focused on the attempts to mediate on the Vietnam conflict, Kosygin's visit to London in February 1967 was also distinguished by his obvious determination to foster a closer Anglo-Soviet relationship. Throughout the visit, the Soviet premier sought to establish a sense of progress by creating new initiatives. He proposed the development of agreements on long-term trade patterns and technological cooperation; was amenable to a British proposal for an Anglo-Soviet Consultative Committee to give direction to scientific and cultural exchanges; accepted a basis for the settlement of the financial claims still outstanding from the Second World War; and proposed the development of an Anglo-Soviet treaty of friendship.[173] This proactive approach surprised his British hosts. One assessment described Kosygin's 'rather striking behaviour ... where he seemed to be taking genuine personal initiatives and exercising a personal authority'.[174]

It seems clear that Kosygin had been determined to use these bilateral projects to create a context and atmosphere for an enhanced Anglo-Soviet political interaction. This was part of the general Soviet strategy to encourage relationships with Western European governments as a route to undermining the Atlantic Alliance and promoting their conception of European détente.[175] On his return to Moscow, the Soviet premier seems to have reinforced his initiative by instructing his subordinate ministries to take a more cooperative approach to the bilateral interactions.[176] The British ambassador, Geoffrey Harrison, reported that he 'was struck by the sense that the "spirit of Kosygin" seems to have permeated the administration'.[177] And this 'spirit' had some impact in accelerating the progress of the bilateral initiatives established during the visit. The minister of

[173] A full account of Kosygin's visit is given in TNA, PREM 13/1840.
[174] TNA, PREM 13/2405, Day to Palliser, 21 November 1967.
[175] Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe: 1945-1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 292-3
[176] TNA, FCO 28/371, Telegram 322, Moscow to Foreign Office, 3 March 1967.
[177] TNA, FCO 28/371, Telegram 347, Moscow to Foreign Office, 7 March 1967.

technology, Tony Benn, and his Soviet counterpart, Vladimir Kirillin, agreed a wide ranging program of technology exchanges.[178] After much intricate diplomacy, agreement was also reached to convene the Anglo-Soviet Consultative Committee.[179] And in a brilliant piece of negotiation, the head of Northern Department, Howard Smith, finally reached a settlement of the financial claims resulting from the Second World War.[180]

Yet despite the positive atmosphere established by Kosygin's visit, over the next eighteen months, the Anglo-Soviet political relationship slowly descended into a state of torpor. Contacts were maintained between the political leaders, yet there were no significant developments to add life and direction to the exchanges. This degeneration reflected the essential lack of British leverage on East-West relations. When Wilson's interventions on Vietnam and nuclear sharing lost traction, he had little to offer that was of interest to his Soviet counterparts. As the political dialogue floundered, so the senior Soviet leaders had less interest in promoting the bilateral initiatives. The 'spirit of Kosygin' dispersed and the interactions on trade, technology and cultural exchanges reverted back to the normal lumbering bureaucratic processes.

In mid-1968, this developing stasis in the political dialogue prompted the definition of a new approach towards the relationship with the Soviet government. This accepted that the British leaders could make little direct contribution to resolving the major East-West issues. In future, no attempt would be made to disguise this reality by trying to force proposals onto a reluctant Soviet partner. Rather, British ministers would adopt an opportunistic stance, intervening only when the circumstances seemed propitious. The Soviet leaders could be expected to take the initiative if they saw a role for British intervention: as expressed in the policy paper, 'they know our address'.

Following the definition of this policy, the Anglo-Soviet relationship was ruptured in August 1968 by the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In response, the British leaders acted in concert with their allies in symbolically suspending political interactions and confirming

[178] See chapter 5
[179] For details of the Anglo-Soviet contacts see TNA, FCO 28/348-55.
[180] For details of these negotiations see TNA, FCO 28/421-7.

their determination to defend Western Europe against any Soviet military aggression. Yet the Western allies also recognised that Czechoslovakia lay within the Soviet sphere of influence that had been tacitly accepted since the 1940s. There was little that could be done to help the Czech reformers and the door was left firmly ajar for a resumption of the developing momentum toward European détente.

This chapter reviews the evolution of the political relationship in the two years following Kosygin's visit to Britain. It begins with an assessment of the failure to agree on an Anglo-Soviet treaty of friendship. This was perhaps the most potent symbol of Kosygin's determination to foster a closer Anglo-Soviet relationship. Yet it also served to highlight the fundamental political divide between the two governments. The account then examines the interactions over the Arab-Israeli Six Day war and the continuing dialogue on Vietnam. It concludes with an assessment of the British reaction to the invasion of Czechoslovakia and then draws some overall conclusions on Anglo-Soviet diplomacy during the first four years of Harold Wilson's period in office.

The Anglo-Soviet treaty of friendship

During his visit to Britain in February 1967, Kosygin proposed the development of a treaty of friendship between the two countries. He first broached this subject informally with Wilson over dinner, and then followed this with a public announcement. During an address to both Houses of Parliament, the Soviet premier asserted that 'we consider it possible for a treaty of friendship, peaceful co-operation and non-aggression to be concluded between the Soviet Union and Great Britain'. This would be a 'contribution to the development of international co-operation, to the relaxation of tension, to the strengthening of the peace and security of people'.[181]

[181] TNA, FCO 28/374, 'Draft reply to Parliamentary question', 15 February 1967; James Ellison, *The United States, Britain and the Transatlantic Crisis: Rising to the Gaullist Challenge, 1963-8* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 129.

This concept posed an obvious political dilemma for Wilson. On the one hand, he was keen to develop his relationship with the Soviets, and a treaty of friendship would be a potent signal of this intimacy. Yet the unity of the Atlantic Alliance was the bedrock of British policy toward the Cold War. The Alliance was still recovering from the blow to its political and military cohesion delivered by de Gaulle's withdrawal from NATO. And it was still in the process of developing an agreed response to the Soviet overtures on détente via the Harmel study.[182] How could the British government develop a bilateral treaty of friendship with their Soviet counterparts without further undermining the unity of the Alliance? This risk was further reinforced by Kosygin's private remarks promoting the idea of the treaty. In an echo of the Gaullist rhetoric, the Soviet premier averred that the easing of tensions in Europe could 'most effectively be developed on a bilateral basis between countries rather than on a "pact to pact" or "bloc to bloc" basis'.[183]

Despite adverse comments from both British officials and the American ambassador, Wilson agreed that a commitment to negotiate a 'Treaty of Friendship and Peaceful Co-operation' would be included in the communiqué.[184] Following Kosygin's departure, the Foreign Office officials were faced with the difficult task of drafting a text that could be put to the Soviets without arousing concerns within the Alliance. They were spurred by the prime minister's continued interest. Their solution to the dilemma was a text that avoided any reference to the major controversies of European security and concentrated solely on relatively minor bilateral issues.[185] Despite this anodyne formulation, the concept of a treaty still attracted criticism from representatives of Britain's allies in the North Atlantic Council (NAC).[186]

In the event, the Anglo-Soviet treaty made no further progress. The British draft was presented in Moscow in April 1967, by a senior Foreign Office official, Dennis

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[182] See chapter 4

[183] TNA, FCO 28/374, Palliser to MacLehouse, 9 February 1967.

[184] TNA/FCO 28/374, Gore-Booth to Brown, 9 February 1967; FCO 28/381, Bruce to Brown, 11 February 1967.

[185] TNA, FCO 28/377, MacLehouse to Palliser, 18 March 1967; FCO 28/378, OPD(67) 25, 4 April 1967.

[186] See correspondence in TNA FCO 28/375-7.

Greenhill. [187] However, Gromyko did not put forward a response when the foreign secretary, George Brown, visited the Soviet capital a few weeks later, and the Soviets continued to prevaricate for the rest of 1967.[188] Finally in early 1968, a Soviet counter-draft was tabled. This seemed designed to kill the concept, by reiterating Warsaw Pact positions on European security that the British government could not accept. [189]

While this episode illustrates the limited freedom of action available to the British political leaders, it perhaps also demonstrates a lack of tactical adroitness by the Soviets. The British commitment to the Atlantic Alliance meant that there was little prospect of concluding a substantive agreement. Nonetheless, it is surprising that the Soviet leaders did not continue their enthusiasm for the project. Continuing Anglo-Soviet negotiations would have provided a potent propaganda symbol of the developing détente, and a potential route to disturbing the unity of the Alliance. These potential advantages were recognised by the officials in the Soviet foreign ministry. A recently released Soviet document reveals that they sought to resurrect the concept of a treaty during the preparations for Harold Wilson's visit to Moscow in January 1968. The Soviet officials acknowledged that the 'British will never agree on more or less significant concessions ... lest they offend their allies and make their [prospect of] EEC membership even more problematic'. However, they considered that negotiations on a treaty would still be of value as they 'would breed suspicions among Britain's NATO partners and will destabilize, to a certain extent, this inter-imperialist structure'. This suggestion from the foreign ministry was however squashed by the central committee of the Party, and the treaty did not feature in Wilson's discussions.[190]

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[187] TNA, FCO 28/378, telegram 733, Foreign Office to Moscow, 12 April 1967; telegram 3635, Foreign Office to Washington, 17 April 1967.
[188] TNA, FCO 28/406, 'Meeting ... after Dinner, Wednesday 24 May, 1967'.
[189] TNA, CAB 133/372, 'Brief on Treaty of Friendship' and 'Meeting ... at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, 23 January 1968'; DBPO III,I, document 4, Day to Palliser, 1 February 1968, pp. 23-5; TNA, FCO 28/380, telegram 310, Moscow to Foreign Office, 10 February 1968.
[190] Andrei Torin, 'British Prime Minister Harold Wilson in the Soviet Union, January 1968', *International Affairs: A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy & International Relations*, 56 (2010), 193-200.

Strained relations over the Middle East

As the next stage in the promotion of the Anglo-Soviet dialogue, George Brown visited Moscow in May 1967, just three months after Kosygin's visit to Britain. Brown's trip was overshadowed by the gathering crisis in the Middle East. This produced some firm exchanges while Brown was in the Soviet capital, and subsequently a confrontation between Brown and Kosygin at the United Nations. Yet these interactions, and the other elements of Brown's discussions in Moscow, served only to illustrate the marginal nature of the British impact on international issues.

For ten years, the Soviet Union had been supplying military and economic aid to Egypt and Syria and hence priming a further military confrontation between the Arab states and Israel. This tinderbox flared in May 1967. Reacting to an Israeli raid across the border of Jordan, the Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, mobilised his army. He also demanded that the United Nations withdraw the peace-keeping force that had been positioned in the Sinai since the war of 1956. When the secretary general, U Thant, acquiesced, there was no barrier to Egyptian aggression against Israel. In response, the Israeli prime minister, Levi Eshkol, announced that his government would regard any Egyptian interference with its shipping in the Straits of Tiran as an act of war. [191]

On the day after the Israeli ultimatum, George Brown arrived in Moscow and discussed the Middle East crisis with Kosygin. Brown opened up by saying that 'it must surely be in the interests of everyone to try to diffuse the situation'. For this reason, the British government had encouraged a meeting of the United Nation's Security Council. From his responses, it became clear that Kosygin was being held on a very tight leash by his Politburo colleagues. The Soviet premier laid the blame for the crisis on the Israelis and urged 'those who were behind Israel to take measures to stop her policy of aggression'. Yet he avoided debate with Brown, constantly referring to a recent statement which represented 'the considered and collective view of the Soviet government'. He hoped

[191] John W. Young, *International Policy*, ed. by Steven Fielding and John W. Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970, Volume 2* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2003), pp. 102-8.

that in talking to the press, Brown would make no 'suggestion that he [Kosygin] had said anything that differed in any way from this statement'. Finally the Soviet premier asked Brown to convey to Wilson that the Soviet government 'would do all they could to prevent conflict in the area'.[192]

The remainder of the visit was mainly devoted to discussions with Gromyko on the range of East-West issues, but there was little substantive progress. Brown made a valiant attempt to resurrect the concept of an Anglo-Soviet initiative on Vietnam. His Soviet counterpart was however completely intransigent, condemning American aggression as the root cause of the conflict. Gromyko averred that he 'could see no new conditions' for establishing contacts with the North Vietnamese government, and that the situation was not 'propitious' for recalling the Geneva conference.[193]

Some two weeks later, the Israeli forces attacked their Arab neighbours and over the next six days achieved a stunning victory, capturing Sinai, the Gaza strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. It was not only a defeat for the Arab states, but a severe jolt to Soviet prestige. The Soviet leaders had armed their Arab clients, but they had been powerless to prevent a crushing defeat at the hands of the American-backed Israelis.

There then followed an explosive confrontation between George Brown and Kosygin at a special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations called to discuss the Middle East crisis. Although the British position was officially one of neutrality, the close alliance with the United States made it inevitable that ministers would be seen as backing Israel. Kosygin took a line of unequivocal support for the Arabs. He argued that the United Nations should adopt resolutions requiring Israel to withdraw unilaterally from Arab territories. In response, Brown noted that Kosygin had 'taken a one-sided stance'. He asserted that this was an 'unhelpful contribution', and challenged Kosygin on how he thought 'progress could be made'. Brown pointed out that, in his own speech, he had proposed practical steps towards a solution. In fact the foreign secretary had

[192] TNA, FCO 28/406, 'Record of a Meeting ... 12 noon on Wednesday 24, May, 1967'.
[193] TNA, FCO 28/406, 'Record of a Meeting ... 10.15 a.m., Wednesday, 24 May, 1967'.

made a statesman-like proposal under which both sides would be called on to compromise. In this, Arab recognition of the legitimacy of the State of Israel would be rewarded by the return of Arab land including, much to the annoyance of the Israeli government, East Jerusalem.[194] But Kosygin was adamant. Israel must withdraw without pre-conditions. The session became so heated that officials from both sides were asked to withdraw. There was no meeting of minds and Brown closed the discussions by offering to send the Soviet leader a paper setting out practical steps to a solution. This he duly did, with a covering letter saying that 'it is the understanding that if you do not like the note, you would tear it up'.[195] The meeting of the General Assembly was not a success for the Soviet government with the resolution that it sponsored failing to receive a majority.

The confrontation with Kosygin probably owed as much to Brown's pugnacious style as the obvious differences over the resolution of the crisis. Later in the year, Brown's position was the basis for some skilful British diplomatic manoeuvres that resulted in the Security Council passing resolution 242. This called for Israel to surrender conquered territory in exchange for Arab agreement to conclude a peace treaty. Resolution 242 became the basis for all future efforts to find a settlement in the Middle East.[196] The British contribution to securing its passage was recognised by Brezhnev when he met Harold Wilson in January 1968.[197]

While Kosygin was in the United States, he held a brief summit meeting with Lyndon Johnson at Glassboro. Little concrete was achieved.[198] Nonetheless, this was the first face-to-face meeting between an American president and a Soviet leader since the confrontation between Khrushchev and Kennedy in 1961. It ushered in the period of

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[194] John W. Young, *The Labour Governments*, p. 106.
[195] TNA, FCO 28/371, 'Meeting ... 5.45 p.m., 22 June 1967'; 'Meeting .... 6.15 p.m., 22 June 1967'; Brown to Kosygin, 22 June 1967.
[196] John W. Young, *The Labour Governments*, pp. 102-7.
[197] TNA, CAB, 133/372, 'Meeting with Mr Brezhnev', 10.00, 23 January 1968.
[198] TNA, FCO 28/356, telegram 2167, Washington to Foreign Office, 25 June 1967; Johnson to Wilson, 26 June 1967; Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1995), pp. 162-7.

direct superpower diplomacy, although this was only to flourish in the presidency of Richard Nixon.

Sutherland, an official in Northern Department, drew the self-evident conclusion that after Glassboro both sides 'were [now] less likely to feel the need for intermediaries such as the British (or French)'.[199] Unknown to the British diplomats, Kosygin, perhaps stung by Brown's bellicosity the day before, was taking a similar line. He berated Johnson for involving 'second rate countries, which carried no weight in the world' in the Vietnam peace process.[200] Soviet anger with Brown may also have been behind an article in the *Sunday Telegraph.* A 'Soviet spokesman' had been asked why Kosygin was visiting Paris and not London during his return trip from Glassboro. The spokesman is reported as replying 'why would we want to spend time with the servant after spending hours with the master'?[201]

Nonetheless, despite this Soviet truculence, the Anglo-Soviet political dialogue was maintained when Harold Wilson made a further visit to Moscow early in 1968. This was to be followed in May 1968 by a visit by Michael Stewart to the Soviet capital. With the Middle East situation locked in stalemate, attention switched back to Vietnam.

Playing their parts on Vietnam

The early months of 1968 saw dramatic developments in that war-torn country. The communist Tet offensive launched on 31 January 1968 greatly weakened Lyndon Johnson's domestic position. The television pictures of the Vietcong in the centre of Saigon, and American forces under pressure throughout Vietnam, undermined the claim that America was winning the war. On 31 March, Johnson made his famous television address announcing that he would not seek a second term as president. Rather he would

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[199] TNA, FCO 28/357, Sutherland to Hayman, 7 July 1967.
[200] John Dumbrell, *President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Communism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 125.
[201] TNA, FCO 28/371, *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 July 1967.

devote his final months in office to pursuing a peaceful solution to the conflict. The British leaders played a supporting role to the American peace initiative, but in truth they were even further from centre-stage than they had been in 1967. They were consigned to a role as bit-part actors in a script written in Washington. They had little influence on the approach taken and no confidence that their interventions would make a significant difference. It was but a faint echo of the earlier prominent, if unsuccessful, British initiatives.

Harold Wilson visited Moscow in January 1968, but his discussions with Kosygin were desultory and far removed from the excitement of the previous year. On Vietnam, it became clear that there was no scope for any form of joint intervention. The Soviet premier suggested, somewhat mischievously, that the two governments should issue a joint statement in support of the North Vietnamese position. This would condemn American aggression and argue that negations would follow an end to the bombing. In response, Wilson reiterated the American stance that it would be prepared to stop the bombing when it was evident that this would lead to 'constructive discussions'. There were equally inconclusive exchanges with Brezhnev and Kosygin on the Middle East and European security. The meetings also covered the 'bilateral' topics, although, in marked contrast to the London meeting, there were no new proposals. Overall the discussions were conducted in good humour, and probably reflected Harrison's earlier judgement that the Soviet leaders regarded their British counterparts as 'as sensible men whose views are worth listening to'. But there was little or no scope for the British prime minister to apply leverage on the major international issues of the day.[202]

Some two months later, Lyndon Johnson briefed Wilson on his major TV address on Vietnam planned for the following day. The president did not, however, share with Wilson his decision not to stand for re-election. The speech would announce a unilateral restriction of American bombing of the North. If there was a positive response from

[202] TNA, CAB 133/372 Prime Minster's Visit to Moscow, January 1968. On his return from Moscow, Wilson made a visit to Washington on 7-8 February 1968 to meet Lyndon Johnson. At the president's request, Wilson sent a letter to Kosygin confirming Johnson's determination to 'fight to the bitter end in Vietnam unless talks began leading to a political settlement'. Kosygin's reply held out no hope that the Soviet premier would act as an intermediary with Hanoi (DBPO III,I, p. 31).

Hanoi, then Averell Harriman was instantly available to begin negotiations. Johnson directed Wilson's attention to a passage directed at the British and Soviet governments in their roles as co-chairmen of the Geneva implementation mechanisms and as members of the Security Council. It called on them 'to exert their influence so that movement towards peace may result from this act of de-escalation on our part'. The president told Wilson that the purpose of this passage was 'to put pressure on the Soviets where it rightly belongs'.[203] The next day, Johnson gave a similar message to the Soviet government via their ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin. In this he stressed the potential role that the Soviets could play in securing a peaceful conclusion to the conflict, a clear hint that the Soviets should intercede with Hanoi on behalf of his peace initiative.[204]

Following Johnson's speech, Wilson acted out the part scripted by the president. He sent a note to Kosygin pointing out that the American announcement was an 'important move that our two countries should consider most carefully'.[205] The next day, Michael Stewart, who had taken over from Brown as foreign secretary, wrote to Gromyko suggesting an early meeting.[206] But the situation developed without Anglo-Soviet intervention. The North Vietnamese responded to Johnson's input by signalling their willingness for talks, and, after much arguing on the location and format, the negotiations began in Paris on 10 May 1968. Gromyko had not responded to Stewart's earlier letter. Yet almost simultaneously with the opening of the Paris talks, he invited Stewart to Moscow and the meeting was held on 23 May 1968.[207] Any hope that Gromyko's invitation might indicate a development of the Soviet position was soon dashed. The Soviet foreign minister stuck to the well-rehearsed Soviet line. He demanded a cessation of American bombing; resisted Stewart's suggestion that the North Vietnamese forces should give 'some indication of restraint'; and took the view that any reconstitution of the Geneva conference was 'unrealistic at this stage'.

[203] DBPO III,I, pp. 31-3.
[204] Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 170-4.
[205] DBPO III,I, document no. 7, telegram 885, Foreign Office to Moscow, 1 April 1968, footnote 3, p. 34.
[206] DBPO III,I, document no. 7, telegram 885, Foreign Office to Moscow, 1 April 1968, pp. 33-5.
[207] DBPO III,I, pp. 35-6.

The two foreign ministers also discussed the Middle East and Germany but there was little common ground. In assessing the value of the meeting, Stewart was 'not dissatisfied with what we have achieved' as Gromyko 'will be in no doubt as to where we stand on Vietnam, the Middle East and Germany'. Harrison concurred in this judgement. The meeting had been worthwhile not because of immediate results but because it 'kept the dialogue going'.[208]

Stewart's visit marked the end of the high-level political dialogue with the Soviet leaders initiated with Wilson's trip to Moscow some two years previously. It had started with high hopes of the British government playing an important role in East-West relations and ended with the ritualistic exchange of well-rehearsed entrenched positions. This deterioration in the relationship stimulated British ministers and officials to reassess their objectives and tactics when interacting with the Soviet leaders.

In search of a new policy

The review of the fundamentals of British policy began after George Brown's unproductive visit to Moscow in May 1967. Officials in both Moscow and London noted the limited potential for British leaders to play a role in resolving the major issues that divided East and West. In particular, the opportunity to act as a conduit between Moscow and London had been significantly curtailed. The officials recommended a new approach in which ministers would no longer seek initiatives with the Soviet leaders. Rather they would wait on the sidelines for opportunities to emerge that required British engagement. This was something of a rejection of the approach taken by Wilson (and before him Churchill and Macmillan) in seeking to retain a direct voice in the superpower dialogue. Rather it advocated that British leaders accept their subordinate position, as essentially just one more of the Western European allies.

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[208] DBPO III,I, document 8, telegram 833, Moscow to Foreign Office, 23 May 1968, pp. 36-8; document 9, Harrison to Hayman, 29 May 1965, pp. 38-40.

This analysis was initiated in July 1967 when the ambassador in Moscow, Geoffrey Harrison, offered his own summary of the relationship. He argued that the Soviets only valued the Anglo-Soviet dialogue as a means of 'talking through to the West in general and the United States in particular' (emphasis in the original). This value had declined. On Vietnam, the Soviet government had concluded, 'however reluctantly ... there is nothing to say'. And in any event, the Glassboro meeting may have opened a direct route to communicate with the Johnson administration. In the case of the Middle East, the British and Soviet governments were on opposite sides, and it helped their standing with their Arab clients if Soviet leaders 'exaggerated rather than minimised this division'. The ambassador recommended that the British government should adopt a dignified reserve, 'not only to preserve our self respect but to preserve our status as a genuine *interlocuteur valable* in the longer run'.[209]

Harrison's line was accepted by officials in London. The permanent under-secretary, Paul Gore-Booth, agreed that British leaders should not take initiatives with their Soviet counterparts 'until the United Kingdom has a role again'. And he added 'I do not think we should over-rate our chances or set too high a value on the prospect'.[210] In a review of Anglo-Soviet relations for the foreign secretary, George Brown, Howard Smith concluded that 'relations with the Russians are not very active or profitable at present and the opportunity for constructive talks do not seem particularly bright'.[211]

By mid-1968, these conclusions had solidified into a firm policy agreed at the Overseas Policy and Defence committee of the Cabinet (OPD). This argued that British ministers should adopt a more reactive approach in their relations with the Soviets. They should 'be alert for any opportunities for engaging the Russians in discussions and negotiations on international questions when the moment seems right'. But they 'should also be careful not to appear to be running after' the Soviet leaders. The paper went on to assert

[209] TNA, FCO 28/341, Harrison to Gore-Booth, 26 July 1967.
[210] TNA, FCO 28/371, Gore-Booth to Harrison, 2 August 1967.
[211] TNA, FCO 28/371, Hayman to Hood and PUS, 15 September 1967.

that the Soviets 'know well enough by now that that we wish to play a constructive role', and that 'we do have an influence and in particular an influence in Washington'.[212]

While being relatively more reticent in seeking a high-level political dialogue, the government would still pursue 'with all vigour' the trade and technological interactions that 'bring practical benefits' to Britain. It would also continue to promote cultural exchanges that allowed intellectuals from the Soviet Union to meet their British counterparts. These were an 'investment for the future' in that they might contribute to some softening in the adherence to the communist ideology among the ruling elites. These bilateral interactions would be 'compartmentalised' from the fluctuations in the 'general political climate' of the relationship.

Overall this new policy summed up the experience of the contacts with the Soviet leadership in the first years of the Labour government. British leaders had established a frank and full dialogue with their Soviet counterparts. But this was only of real value in addressing the main international issues when there was a realistic probability of acting as an intermediary with the American administration. The policy recognised that this was less and less likely and advocated that British ministers should now adopt a more distant stance to their Soviet counterparts.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia

No sooner had this new policy been agreed than the whole tenor of East-West relations was disturbed by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. In concert with the other members of the Atlantic Alliance, the British response was carefully calibrated. There was strong condemnation of the invasion, signalled by a suspension of political and some other contacts with the Soviet regime. Yet, the reaction was sufficiently constrained to allow an early resumption of the relationship. There was by now a

[212] DBPO III,I, document no 11, OPD(68)45, 'Memorandum of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on the Relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe', 17 June 1968.

growing momentum towards a European détente. The Soviet hegemony of Eastern Europe had long been accepted as an unpalatable reality that the West was powerless to change. Western governments were not therefore prepared to allow the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia to negate the possibility of an easing of East-West tensions.

In the first half of 1968, the remarkable reform movement within the Czechoslovakian Communist Party was escalating into a full-blown challenge to Communist orthodoxy. These developments caused grave concerns to the Soviet leaders and their Warsaw Pact allies. If unchecked, they could become a contagion that might undermine communist control in the other countries in Eastern Europe, and even in the Soviet Union itself. Through the summer of 1968, a Soviet-led coalition of Warsaw Pact governments (with the notable exception of the Romanians) sought to brow-beat the Czechoslovaks into abandoning their reforms. But the Czechoslovak leader Alexander Dubček and his colleagues refused to be cowed by this bullying, and finally Brezhnev decided to bring the 'Prague spring' to its dramatic end.[213]

British ministers and officials had initially been encouraged by the developments in Prague. Western governments had a long-standing policy of promoting contacts with Eastern Europe. These were designed to inculcate Western ideas within the Communist elites and hence reinforce domestic movements for internal reform.[214] The events of the Prague spring were seen as a justification of this policy. British officials noted to their German counterparts that developments in Czechoslovakia had 'largely vindicated our policy of patiently developing contacts at all levels with Eastern Europe over the past years'.[215] Gore-Booth remarked: 'What is now happening in Eastern Europe was what many had long hoped would happen, but had hardly expected in Czechoslovakia'.[216]

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[213] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: William Heinemann, 2005), pp. 436-47.
[214] Geraint Hughes, 'British Policy toward Eastern Europe and the impact of the "Prague Spring", 1964-68', *Cold War History*, 4 (2004), 117-21.
[215] TNA, FCO 28/30, 'British policy towards the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe', Anglo-German Consultations, Bonn, 25-26 April, 1968.
[216] DBPO III,1, document 10, 'Record of the Ninth Meeting of the Conference of Her Majesty's Representatives in Eastern Europe, held at 5.15 p.m. on Friday, 10 May, 1968', pp. 42-8

However, as the summer of 1968 unfolded, these hopes of a breach in the iron curtain faded as the Soviet leadership and their Warsaw Pact allies steadily increased the pressure on their Czech counterparts. On 14-15 July, the Soviet, East German, Polish, Bulgarian and Hungarian leaders met in Warsaw and dispatched a letter from 'the fraternal Parties' to the Czechoslovakian Party. This called for the suppression of the anti-communist political organisations, re-establishment of control of the mass media, and a 'decisive and bold offensive against right-wing and anti-socialist forces'.[217] Commenting from Moscow, Geoffrey Harrison observed that 'this brutal document speaks for itself'. It was an exercise of 'naked power politics' in which the Soviet government was making it clear 'that it will not in any circumstances or at any price tolerate the disruption of its dominance in Eastern Europe'.[218]

There was now a very real possibility of a Soviet invasion. Soundings in Washington revealed that, in the view of the Johnson administration, Western leaders could not exert any influence on Soviet actions.[219] This opinion was emphatically endorsed by Harrison. In his view the issues at stake were 'fundamental' to the position of the Soviet leadership 'both ideologically and strategically'; and they would act in whatever way they 'think best calculated to achieve their purpose of reinstating trustworthy leadership in Czechoslovakia'. They would 'not (repeat not) be deflected by any other considerations'.[220] Based on this advice, Michael Stewart restrained himself to registering British concerns to the Soviet ambassador, Mikhail Smirnovsky. He argued that 'events in Czechoslovakia should not develop in such a way as to damage the prospects for continued improvement in East-West relations'. The ambassador responded by simply stating that the Soviet government did not accept warnings.[221]

With Wilson and Stewart on holiday, it fell to Lord Chalfont to receive the news of the invasion. At 01:30 a.m. on the 21 August 1968, Smirnovsky informed the British

[217] TNA, FCO 28/49, 'The Soviet War of Nerves against Czechoslovakia', Barker to Stewart, 8 August 1968; 'The Czechoslovakian Story', Harrison to Stewart, 20 August 1968; Hughes, 'British Policy toward Eastern Europe'; Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 436-47.
[218] TNA, FCO 28/47, telegrams 1137 and 1138, Moscow to Foreign Office, 18 July 1968.
[219] TNA, FCO 28/48, telegram 6528, Washington to Foreign Office, 19 July 1968.
[220] TNA, FCO 28/48. telegram 1164, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 July 1968.
[221] TNA, FCO 28/48, telegram 2026, Foreign Office to Moscow, 30 July 1968.

minister that the military forces of the Warsaw Pact had entered Czechoslovakian territory 'to render the Czechoslovakian people all necessary assistance'.[222] In fact some 500,000 troops had invaded, with the predominantly Soviet force augmented by contingents from the GDR, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria.[223]

Prior to the invasion, British officials had been considering the most appropriate Western reaction. They sought to balance two potentially antithetical factors. Firstly, the reaction should be of sufficient scale to ensure that the Soviet government 'does not get away with its crime before world opinion'. Yet it would be dangerous to react by 'shutting the door all together on East-West contacts'. They proposed a calibrated response. There would be a suspension of 'Governmental contacts which could be interpreted as whitewashing the Soviet Union'. Yet they would seek to continue interactions in 'those technological, cultural and other fields which do promote knowledge of the West, the interruption of which might be welcome to the Russians'. It would also not be advantageous to disrupt East-West trade as this served 'Western interests both politically as well as economically'.[224] In the intermediate aftermath of the invasion, the British government began to put in place this balanced response.

Wilson and Stewart returned to London immediately and issued a statement condemning the invasion as a 'flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and of all standards of international behaviour'.[225] Stewart made a protest to Smirnovsky.[226] He also instructed British diplomats to raise the issue in the United Nations Security Council. [227] This government action was complemented by expressions of public protest. Three thousand people demonstrated in London with motorists sounding their horns to show support for the protestors. A concert by the Russian State Orchestra in the Royal Albert Hall was

[222] TNA, PREM 13/19933, Chalfont 'Note for the Record', 21 August 1968.
[223] Judt, *Postwar*, p. 444.
[224] TNA, PREM 13/1993, telegram 1948, Foreign Office to Washington, 22 July 1968.
[225] TNA, PREM 13/1993, 'Czechoslovakia', Press Notice by 10 Downing Street, 21 August 1968.
[226] TNA, PREM 13/1993, telegram 2104, Foreign Office to Moscow, 21 August 1968.
[227] A draft resolution was subsequently tabled calling for withdrawal of the Warsaw Pact forces. As expected, it was vetoed by the Soviets - TNA, PREM 13/1993, telegram 3106, Foreign Office to UKMIS New York, 21 August 1968; TNA FCO 28/56, 'Security Council Proceedings on Czechoslovakia 21-23 August 1968'.

held up by audience shouts of "Freedom for Czechoslovakia" and "Hands off the Czechs". Even the British Communist Party condemned the invasion as "completely unjustified".[228]

On the following day, a Cabinet meeting was held with more ministers returning from holiday. Stewart argued that the British objective should be to 'obtain worldwide condemnation of the Soviet action but to avoid being singled out as particularly hostile'. This moderate line was accepted. However in a display of his Walter Mitty-tendencies, Harold Wilson also wanted to send a message via the hotline to Kosygin urging the withdrawal of the invading forces.[229] He was subsequently dissuaded by Stewart on the grounds that the hot-line should be saved for 'messages that will receive an answer not simply a retort'.[230]

An official in the Foreign Office, Peter Hayman, was given the delicate task of developing detailed recommendations for a partial freeze of British contacts with the Soviet Union. This had to strike the balance between expressing outrage with Soviet actions while also maintaining working relations. Some cancellations were obvious and agreed immediately, others were more difficult to judge. Michael Stewart had already cancelled planned visits to Hungary and Bulgaria, and invitations were withdrawn for the Soviet aviation and health ministers to visit Britain. The Anglo-Soviet historical exhibition was cancelled, and the meeting of the Anglo-Soviet Consultative Committee was also abandoned.

In the commercial area, there was a more nuanced approach. The forthcoming visit by Tony Benn to Moscow to review the technology agreement was indefinitely postponed. However Anglo-Soviet meetings at official level on technology and other issues were sanctioned, and there was no interruption of Anglo-Soviet trade. There was also a restrained reaction in the cultural arena. Mutual exchanges of academics and students

[228] *The Times*, 22 August 1968
[229] DBPO III,1, document 14, 'Extract from Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street on 22 August 1968 at 10 a.m.', pp. 69-74.
[230] TNA, PREM 13/1993, Stewart to Wilson, 22 August 1968.

arranged under the Anglo-Soviet cultural agreement would go ahead. These 'contribute to the flow of ideas that we wish to promote and which in present circumstances are more important than ever'. The entrepreneur Victor Hockhauser was allowed to continue the promotion of the tours by Soviet musical artistes, although he would be pressurised to cancel the visit of the Red Army choir.[231] This balanced reaction was replicated by other Western governments.[232]

The OPD Cabinet committee addressed the implications of the invasion for NATO policy. While the military balance in Europe had not changed substantially, events in Czechoslovakia were seen as a timely reminder of the intrinsic menace of the Soviet regime. It would reinforce, among governments and public alike, the continuing need to maintain the credibility of NATO's deterrence. It provided an opportunity for NATO to 'reinforce and express the solidarity of the Alliance'. This in turn would also discourage 'any irresponsible and hard line elements in the Soviet government'. As part of this process, the British government would make some small, but symbolic, additions to their military commitment to NATO.[233]

The Soviets appeared unmoved by these Western gestures of disapproval. They would accept no criticisms of their actions, and maintained their right to regulate the internal affairs of the 'Socialist commonwealth', a position formalised in the Brezhnev doctrine.[234] They argued that the West had no legitimate prerogative to interfere in these internal 'socialist' affairs, and these should not be used as an excuse to inhibit the development of détente. This line was displayed when Stewart met Gromyko at the United Nations in October 1968. The foreign secretary argued that the invasion made

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[231] TNA, FCO 28/54, Hayman to Stewart, 24 August 1968; FCO 28/373, Hayman to Stewart, 25 August 1968; TNA, FCO 28/54, Circular telegram 8, 26 August 1968; Hayman to Stewart, 28 August 1968; guidance telegram 216, 30 August 1968.
[232] TNA FCO 28/33, telegram 520, UKDEL NATO to Foreign Office, 28 August 1968.
[233] TNA, CAB 148/38, OPD (68)58, 'The Czechoslovakian Crisis and British Defence Policy', 20 September 1968; CAB 148/35, OPD (68) 17th meeting, item 1, 25 September 1968: CAB 148/38, OPD (68) 63, 'NATO and Czechoslovakia', 28/10/68; CAB 148/35, OPD (68) 19th meeting, item 1, 31 October 1968.
[234] For details of the Brezhnev doctrine see *Pravda,* September 25, 1968; translated by Novosti, Soviet press agency. Reprinted in L. S. Stavrianos, *The Epic of Man* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1971), pp. 465-6, available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1968brezhnev.html> [accessed – 16 September 2010].

'the efforts to achieve détente very difficult'. It had 'served to check all the more promising signs'. Progress would be possible only if the Soviet troops left Czechoslovakia. He would not be a 'true representative of his country if he did not speak out clearly'. Gromyko responded that the Soviet government 'did not accept British advice on this subject', it was the 'business of the Soviet Union'. The Soviet foreign minister did not agree that events in Czechoslovakia should affect bilateral relations, 'the improvement of which was a fundamental interest of the Soviet government'. Any break between the two governments was a British responsibility.[235]

In November 1968, the ministerial meeting of the Atlantic Alliance formally confirmed the West's balanced response to the invasion. The communiqué strongly condemned the Soviet action and reaffirmed the Alliance's determination to defend its members against any Soviet military aggression. Yet it also stressed the continuing interest in exploring the feasibility of a European détente:

> In any event, consistent with Western values the political goal remains that of secure, peaceful and mutually beneficial relations between East and West. The Allies are determined to pursue this goal, bearing in mind that the pursuit of peace must not be allowed to split the Alliance. The search for peace requires progress, consistent with Western security, in the vital fields of disarmament and arms control and continuing efforts to resolve the fundamental issues which divide East and West.[236]

It was clear that the Western allies would shortly resume the bilateral political relations with the Soviets that had been disturbed by the invasion. The only question was the tactical one of how to engineer the resumption.

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[235] TNA, FCO 28/779, 'Record of a Meeting ... 7 October [1969] at 5.30 p.m.'
[236] TNA, FCO 28/768, 'Final Communiqué', 16 November 1968.

Conclusions

One of the central issues addressed in this study is the British role in the continuing conflict between the two competing blocs of the Cold War: the extent to which British leaders still exercised an important influence on the rivalry directed by the two superpowers. Wilson's interactions with Kosygin and Johnson in the first four years of his premiership provide some important insight on this question.

Wilson's approach derived from the traditional stance of British post-war prime ministers in seeking a privileged role within the Soviet-American interactions. He was aided in this ambition by an international context that was relatively conducive to this role. The rising tensions over Vietnam militated against the development of the direct Soviet-American dialogue. There had been no summit meeting between the American and Soviet leaders since 1961, and the situation in Vietnam made it unlikely that such a meeting would be convened in the near future. This possibility was further diminished by the Sino-Soviet antagonism that constrained Soviet freedom of manoeuvre in developing relations with the Americans. Wilson's direct relationship with the Soviet leadership was therefore a potentially useful addition to the American communication pathways with their Soviet counterparts.

Wilson also had some attraction to the Soviet leadership. The traditionally close British relationship with the Americans made him a useful conduit to Johnson, especially on the issue of NATO plans for nuclear sharing. Yet this was not the only Soviet motivation in seeking a dialogue with the British prime minister. The interactions were also part of a general Soviet policy of promoting European détente. This was supported by a wide programme of visits between Soviet and Western European leaders (with the notable exception of the West Germans). As expressed by Wolfe, during these contacts the Soviet leaders were 'tirelessly preaching the advantages of co-operation with the Soviet Union and the dangers of subjection to American political and economic hegemony'.[237] This line is illustrated by Kosygin's continual criticism of the British acceptance of

[237] Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe*, pp. 292-3, quote on p.313.

American leadership of the Atlantic Alliance, compared with the truculence shown by de Gaulle. Kosygin's exchanges with Wilson were probably motivated as much, if not more, by this wider pattern of European engagement, as by the opportunity of creating a conduit to Lyndon Johnson.

Despite these relatively favourable circumstances, Wilson had to force his role as intermediary between the Soviets and Americans. It had to be manufactured rather than arising as a natural outcome of the pattern of international relations. In large part, this difficulty occurred because Vietnam was the major immediate source of East-West tensions. The post-war British role in the superpower relations had been forged in addressing the Cold War tensions in Europe, not issues in the wider world. Vietnam was not a promising subject on which to attempt to mediate. Britain had no direct involvement in the conflict and little engagement with American decision-making. Johnson tolerated rather than encouraged Wilson's interactions with Kosygin on the subject and, as described by Dumbrell and Ellis, he did not value Wilson's potential contribution as an intermediary. In American eyes, such indirect approaches gave rise to an ever-present 'risk of "entrapment" by allies into unwanted lines of conduct and commitment'.[238]

It was not the intrinsic utility of Wilson as an intermediary that catapulted him into the frantic diplomacy on Vietnam in February 1967. Rather it was the coincidence that Kosygin was visiting Britain while Johnson was promoting the Phase A/Phase B plan, and there was a temporary pause in the bombing. This made the prime minister's involvement inevitable. Nonetheless Wilson should be given credit for seizing the initiative and in all probability encouraging Kosygin to exceed his brief in advocating the de-escalation plan to Hanoi. After the failure of this initiative, British leaders did not again play a significant part in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict. The role as an intermediary between the Soviet and American leaders had always been tenuous: more a reflection of Wilson's eagerness than a strategic requirement. As expressed by

[238] John Dumbrell and Sylvia Ellis, 'British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives, 1966-7: Marigolds, Sunflowers, and "Kosygin Week"', *Diplomatic History*, 27 (2003), pp. 113-149, quote page 148.

the British ambassador in Washington, Patrick Dean, the Americans and Soviets had 'developed something akin to a private language for communicating with one another on a wave-length of their own'.[239] This did not require a British translator.

In contrast with Vietnam, the issues of nuclear sharing and non-proliferation provided more fertile soil for Wilson to become engaged as a junior partner in the superpower dialogue. As the second nuclear power in the Atlantic Alliance, Britain had a direct stake in the issue and it was natural that Kosygin should seek an engagement. Wilson used this opportunity adroitly to intervene in the deliberations of the Johnson administration and contribute to the final demise of the MLF proposal. Yet, surprisingly, and perhaps significantly, he was then excluded from the subsequent manoeuvres to agree a non-proliferation treaty. British diplomats laboured long and hard in Geneva to agree the treaty language. But Wilson was not given a role in the high-level Soviet-American dialogue that reached the compromise on which the treaty was based. This contrasts with Macmillan's subordinate but significant role in securing the partial test ban treaty of 1963.[240]

During 1967-8, there had been, on the surface, a continuation of the active Anglo-Soviet political dialogue. Brown, Wilson and Stewart visited Moscow and there was close engagement on the major international issues. Yet the interactions had lacked substance. The British leaders could not bring diplomatic leverage to resolving either the continuing agony in Vietnam or the stalemate in the Middle East. In Europe, their policy on détente had to be developed in close concert with their allies.[241] Even in nuclear affairs, the possession of an independent capability did not give access to the superpower relationship. The embryonic Soviet-American contacts on the limitation of their strategic arsenals (including anti-ballistic missiles) proceeded without a British

[239] TNA, FCO 28/356, Dean to Hood, 4 May 1967.
[240] Nigel J. Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 193-219.
[241] See following chapter

contribution.[242] The blunt fact was that British leaders had no cards to bring to the table of the Anglo-Soviet diplomatic poker game.

It is reasonable to conclude that 1967-8 marked a turning point in the role of British leaders within the superpower interactions of the Cold War. In the post-war period, as British economic and military power declined, the role as a junior partner to the Soviet-American interactions had become less and less viable. The reality was summed up by Dean Acheson in December 1962. His speech at West Point has become famous for his observation that Britain 'has lost an empire and has not yet found a role'. But he went on to remark that Britain 'attempting to work alone and to be a broker between the United States and Russia has seemed to conduct policy as weak as its military power'.[243]

Macmillan had to some extent defied this judgement by utilising his intimate 'Mac-Jack' relationship with John Kennedy.[244] And Wilson had also at first escaped these realities by his determined initiative to engage with the new Soviet leaders. But even this master politician could not continue to defy Britain's structural weakness. By 1967, the opportunity to act as 'a broker between the United States and Russia' had finally expired. No future British prime minister was again to exercise the privileged influence on world affairs that reflected Britain's long traditions as a great power. Wilson deserves credit for preserving this residual British role past its 'sell-by date', rather than criticism that he could not sustain it longer.

The diplomacy also provides some evidence on another of the issues addressed in this study – the relationship between ministers and officials in determining the approach to the Anglo-Soviet relationship.

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[242] Dumbrell, *Johnson and Soviet Communism*, pp. 78-86.
[243] Douglas Brinkley, 'Dean Acheson and the 'Special Relationship': The West Point Speech of December 1962', *The Historical Journal*, 3 (1990), pp. 599-608, quote on page 601.
[244] For a recent account of Macmillan-Kennedy relationship see D. R. Thorpe, *Supermac: The Life of Harold Macmillan* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2010), pp. 492-8, 528-33, and 554-6. A detailed account of their interactions is also given in Nigel J. Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War.*

The record strongly suggests that Wilson was the main architect of the interactions with the Soviets. Stewart and Brown played their roles, but it was the prime minister who supplied the initiative and drive. On coming into office, Wilson embraced the main elements of British policy with regard to the East-West conflict. He enthusiastically sought to maintain the special relationship with the Americans, was a steadfast supporter of the Atlantic Alliance, and retained the commitment to the Polaris nuclear force. But he was also determined to engage with the Soviet leadership and pursued this goal with drive and determination.

There are indications that the officials in the Foreign Office were less than enthusiastic on Wilson's courtship of his Soviet counterparts. The direct evidence for this proposition is thin, but there are clear sign-posts. For example in the second half of 1965, he had to cajole his officials to explore the possibility of securing a summit meeting with Kosygin. At one stage, he insisted on weekly reports and he also modified initial drafts of replies to Kosygin that were 'too negative'. Officials were also to the fore in 1967-8 in promoting a more cautious stance to the relationship that eschewed high-level political initiatives. The enthusiasm with which they promoted this change of policy suggests some element of discomfort with Wilson's approach. This is also signalled in the call for a change of style. The 1968 OPD paper on policy towards the Soviets argued for an end to activities primarily designed to create a favourable climate or generate goodwill. It also advocated 'tough' talking in dealing with Soviets. This was 'likely to be far more effective than any attempt to woo them, which they will take as further evidence of weakness': 'understatement and suavity do not pay when trying to make a point clear to the Russians'.[245] These strictures can be read as an implied criticism of Wilson's more forthcoming approach in seeking an ongoing engagement.

Further evidence of the attitudes of the Foreign Office officials is provided by some remarks in 1966 by one of Wilson's private secretaries, Oliver Wright (who was himself a diplomat). He berated the 'Soviet experts' for living in the past and ignoring the

[245] DBPO III,I, document no 11, OPD(68)45, 'Memorandum of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on the Relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe', 17 June 1968.

evidence of the partial détente since the Cuban missile crisis. He accused them of spending 'so much of their time doing analyses of Soviet Holy Writ that they tend to ignore the actions of the Soviet government'. Wright concluded that 'if war is too serious a matter to be left to the generals, East-West relations are too serious a matter to be left to the Kremlinologists'.[246]

Finally, it is surprising that Harold Wilson accepted the rejection of his policy of seeking a productive relationship with the Soviet leadership set out in the OPD paper. Perhaps, he was weighed down with an increasingly difficult domestic situation in which economic difficulties combined with vicious press attacks and cabinet splits. As one biographer wrote, he was a 'prime minister with little support in the country, the press or the Government, who survived only because of the inertia of his Party, and the lack of mechanisms for getting rid of him'.[247] More likely, this astute politician would have sensed that the prospects for personal diplomacy with the Soviet leadership were not propitious. If opportunities did present themselves in the future, then it is unlikely that he would have been constrained by Foreign Office prose, no matter how tightly drafted.

* * *

The period of high-profile diplomacy between the British and Soviet leaders had now come to an end. In Part 2, we will turn attention to the next stage in the development of the relationship. Priority would now be given to persuading the Atlantic Alliance to take a more accommodating stance towards European détente. In the absence of the high-level political dialogue, the focus of Anglo-Soviet interactions now devolved onto the continuing trading, scientific and cultural links.

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[246] TNA, PREM 13/1043, Wright to Wilson, 4 April 1966.
[247] Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 509.

Part 2

The next two chapters complete the examination of Anglo-Soviet relationship during the period of Labour government from 1964-70. In chapter 4, we consider the development of the political relationship from the aftermath of the invasion of Czechoslovakia until the Labour's loss of power in the election of June 1970. This political dialogue was accompanied by an ongoing set of exchanges on the smaller scale 'bilateral' topics. These tended to be undertaken somewhat independently from the political struggle over geopolitical issues. In chapter 5, we depart from the chronological approach to give an integrated account of the 'bilateral' interactions during the whole period of the Labour government.

The restoration of the relationship with the Soviets in the first half of 1969 was orchestrated through visits to Moscow of ministers with economic portfolios, although the political symbolism was clear. The events in Czechoslovakia had been quietly forgotten, and the Anglo-Soviet relationship would no longer be fettered by the constraints imposed after the invasion. However, the renewed political interactions were markedly different from those practised during the previous four years.

During the break in the political dialogue, British ministers and officials had consolidated the change in strategy first enunciated in mid-1968. Recognising the lack of British traction on the main geopolitical issues, there would be less emphasis on a high-profile dialogue with the Soviet leaders. Rather, effort would be concentrated on consolidating British influence within the Atlantic Alliance. In keeping with this strategy, and somewhat surprisingly, Harold Wilson lost his enthusiasm for meetings with his Soviet counterparts. He declined Kosygin's invitation to make an early visit to Moscow, even when encouraged by Richard Nixon to make the trip. The main onus for developing the policy towards East-West relations now devolved onto the foreign secretary, Michael Stewart. He focussed his attention on the Atlantic Alliance and

helped to orchestrate a relatively accommodating response to the Soviet proposals for a conference on European security.

Throughout their period in office, the Labour government placed great emphasis on promoting economic relations with the Soviet Union. Harold Wilson believed that his close relationship with Kosygin could lead to increased Soviet imports that would help the British balance of trade. For his part Kosygin encouraged this expectation, while never actually delivering the increased orders. There was also an ideological motivation for seeking closer economic ties with the Soviet Union. The centrally planned Soviet economy, with its emphasis on technological development, was something of a model for Labour's own economic strategy. For the left wing of the party, such as Tony Benn, increased economic exchanges were an antidote to what was perceived as American dominance of the Western economy. Yet despite sustained efforts, Labour ministers were no more successful than their Conservative predecessors in expanding British access to the Soviet markets.

In contrast to their proactive approach to economic relations, ministers were content to leave the development of scientific and cultural exchanges primarily to their officials. As a result, the programme proceeded largely as a project that was owned and progressed by the bureaucrats with little ministerial direction.

The carefully modulated government-sponsored exchanges on the 'bilateral' topics were on occasions disturbed by controversies provoked by the activities of specific individuals or groups. These typically included the capture of intelligence agents, the defection of Soviet citizens, and Soviet actions against British citizens in the USSR. Such incidents featured prominently in the British media, aroused parliamentary attention, and influenced perceptions of the Soviet regime among the British public. The capacity of British ministers to promote the relationship with their Soviet counterparts was to some extent conditioned by these reactions. The Brooke case examined in Chapter 5 provides an extreme example in which the fate of one individual came close to derailing the entire diplomatic strategy.

Intelligence activities also had the potential to destabilise the Anglo-Soviet relationship. The number of KGB agents among the Soviet establishments in London had been growing steadily. This emphasised the case for some structured government action to address the issue. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Stewart took the first modest steps by capping the numbers that could be assigned to the Soviet embassy. The Soviet reaction was relatively restrained and Stewart did not take further action. The spat was but a foretaste of the major confrontation that would be precipitated by Stewart's Conservative successor (see chapter 7).

The developments described in these chapters bear upon a number of the research questions. In 1972-5, European détente and the concomitant CSCE became the dominant political issue in the Anglo-Soviet exchanges. Stewart's initiative towards the Atlantic Alliance throws some revealing light on the developing attitudes to détente among the Labour leadership. As will be seen in Part 3, these differed markedly both from the approach of the Conservative government and the underlying views of the officials. Secondly, the efforts of the Labour government to promote economic relations reveal that, despite the blandishments of the Soviets, there was only the most tenuous link between the political and commercial interactions. Finally the assessment provides the first indications of the potential for disputes over intelligence activities to inhibit the political relationship between the two governments. This is revealed in the reaction to the capping of the numbers in the Soviet embassy and is also a prominent element in the Brooke case.

Chapter 4

An increasingly inconsequential relationship, January 1969 - June 1970

During late-1968 and into 1969, British ministers cautiously repaired the breach in the Anglo-Soviet relationship resulting from the events in Czechoslovakia. By mid-1969, the visits of cabinet ministers Tony Benn and Tony Crosland to Moscow signalled the end of the period of estrangement. However, in a continuation of the trend established in 1968, British leaders showed a marked reluctance to engage in a high level political dialogue with their Soviet counterparts. Rather, foreign secretary Michael Stewart placed his emphasis on promoting a greater commitment to European détente within the Atlantic Alliance.

A bilateral Cold War

The resumption of relations with the Soviets was almost derailed by a spat over intelligence activities. The numbers of Soviet diplomats and other personnel based in London had been growing steadily, and it was well known that a large proportion of these were in reality agents of the KGB. Their activities were closely monitored by the British security services (MI5) and regularly broke into public view when their British contacts were caught and prosecuted.[248] MI5 estimated that there were some 135 agents in Britain. Of these, 94 were masquerading as diplomats or support staff in the Soviet embassy, constituting over half of the embassy's total complement. The remaining agents were located among the staff of the Soviet Trade Delegation (28) and Soviet commercial and media organisations (13).[249] The rupture in relations following the invasion of Czechoslovakia presented an opportunity to tackle this issue. As expressed

[248] A comprehensive history of MI5 is given in Christopher Andrew, *Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin Books, 2009). For an over-view of Soviet intelligence activities see Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1999), especially pp. 518-69.
[249] TNA, PREM 13/2009, Stewart to Wilson, 27 September 1968.

by the head of the Eastern European and Soviet department (EESD) of the FCO, Sidney Giffard, 'when relations are at low ebb is the right moment for getting out of the way unpleasant transactions'.[250]

At the end of September 1968, Stewart wrote to Harold Wilson arguing that it was 'necessary and timely to do something about the Russians'. He proposed that the total permitted complement of the Soviet embassy should be capped at the present numbers. This would be a signal that 'we are not prepared to accept the way things have been going'. It was hoped that this move would prompt Soviet restraint of their intelligence activities. But Stewart had not ruled out the further more drastic step of cutting Embassy numbers if this first move did not have the required effect. He would not act against the Soviet Trade Delegation, but would be watchful for any evidence that the Soviet government were 'packing it with more intelligence officers'.[251] Officials in the FCO acknowledged that this action could further undermine Anglo-Soviet relations, yet they would not let this deter them. While they did not want to 'go out of our way to make relations between us and the Soviet Union colder', when there is a 'job to be done' then 'we should do it'.[252]

After the home secretary, Jim Callaghan, and Wilson had given their agreement, the permanent under-secretary at the FCO, Paul Gore-Booth, informed the Soviet ambassador of the restrictions.[253] He asked the Soviet government to limit the embassy staff to 80 diplomats (subsequently agreed as a ceiling of 86), 60 non-diplomatic staff and eight service staff. He also stressed that this should not result in retaliation against the British embassy in Moscow. This had a complement of only 40 diplomats and they

[250] In October 1968, the Foreign Office had been merged with the Commonwealth Relations Office to form the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). At the same time the Eastern European and Soviet department (EESD) replaced the Northern department. EESD had responsibility for contacts with the Soviet Union. The quote is from TNA, FCO 28/779, Giffard to Hood, 7 November 1968.
[251] TNA, PREM 13/2009, Stewart to Wilson, 27 September 1968.
[252] TNA, FCO 28/779, Giffard to Hood, 7 November 1968.
[253] TNA, PREM 13/2009, Cubbon to Halls, 10 October 1968; Palliser to Day, 21 October 1968; Maitland to Andrews, 8 November 1968.

were 'not indulging in the practices of which we are complaining'. The action would be announced to the press.[254]

The Soviet reaction came three weeks later. It was disguised in the form of a general complaint about British attitudes following the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Yet it seems clear that the démarche was precipitated by the capping of the embassy numbers. On 2 December, the recently appointed British ambassador in Moscow, Duncan Wilson, was summoned to receive a statement from Gromyko. The interview had been arranged at short notice and it appeared that the Soviet foreign minister had even taken his own staff by surprise. The senior official responsible for relations with Britain, Markeev, was observed 'taking down some of Gromyko's remarks with great diligence, as if he was not acquainted with them'. This pattern seems consistent with the KGB having forced this tactic upon the foreign ministry as a reaction to the capping of the embassy numbers.

Gromyko's statement began by painting a positive picture of the recent development of Anglo-Soviet relations. It then accused the British government of 'now taking a different road' by 'using the events in Czechoslovakia as a pretext' for 'complicating and aggravating the relations between our two countries'. The statement then presented a list of British acts perceived as being unfriendly. This included a specific reference to 'the discriminatory and totally arbitrary decision by the British government to limit the staff of the Soviet embassy in London'. The note also accused the British of being one of the leaders in advocating 'a stand of direct confrontation with the Soviet Union' at the recent meeting of the Atlantic Alliance. The note finished by asserting that the Soviet government was forced to conclude that 'the normalisation and development of Anglo-Soviet relations is not perhaps part of the British government's plans'. Consequently it would be compelled to regard the development of these relations from a 'different angle'.[255]

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[254] DBPO III,1, document 19, telegram 2380, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (hereafter FCO) to Moscow, 4 November 1968, pp. 91-3.

[255] DBPO III,1, document 20, telegram 1828 Moscow to FCO, 2 December 1968, pp. 93-6; TNA, FCO 28/780, telegram 2332, FCO to New Delhi, 4 December 1968.

This Soviet démarche proved to be a unilateral attack on the British government with no similar initiatives taken towards other NATO allies. The Soviets sought to increase the impact by releasing the note to the press without any warning, and before any British response. It was prominent in all the British papers on 4 December, the headlines stressing Soviet anger at the British disruption of relations: 'Cold war rap from Russia' in the *Daily Express*, 'Russian anger staggers Whitehall' for the *Sun*, and 'Britain accused of hostility' in the *Daily Telegraph*.[256]

This very public Soviet declaration forced British ministers and officials to clarify their position on the resumption of the full spectrum of relations with the Soviet government. In particular, they were forced to assess the extent to which a resumption of the interactions would be made conditional on events in Czechoslovakia. The debate over the formulation of a suitable reply again revealed that Harold Wilson was uncomfortable with the tendency of the officials in London to take a rather confrontational line. It also gave the first indications that the new ambassador in Moscow, Duncan Wilson, would take a more emollient approach to the Soviets than his colleagues in London. This divergence of opinion between London and Moscow was to become a marked feature of future policy-making (chapter 7).

The initial draft reply submitted to No 10 referred to relations being restored when the Soviet government showed respect for the 'sovereign rights of European countries'.[257] Duncan Wilson considered that this was too severe. It would be interpreted by the Soviet side as implying that relations would be 'cut to a minimum until they get out of Czechoslovakia'. It would therefore intensify the dispute.[258] The second draft did not allay the Ambassador's fears as it still required the Soviet government to respect the 'sovereign rights of independent countries'.[259] But Harold Wilson now came to the

[256] For sample of the press reaction see FCO 28/780
[257] TNA, FCO 28/780, telegram 2353 and 2354, FCO to New Delhi, 5 December 1968; telegram 138, Madras to FCO, 6 December 1968.
[258] TNA, FCO 28/780, telegram 1847, Moscow to FCO, 9 December 1968.
[259] DBPO III,1, document 21, telegram 2489, FCO to Moscow, 9 December 1968.

rescue. He regarded this formulation as 'too governessy' and put forward a blander version that was used in the final document.[260]

The final reply, which was made public, was short, clear and business-like. It rebutted the Soviet accusations, rejecting 'the suggestion that they [the British government] used the invasion of Czechoslovakia as a pretext for a change of policy'. Rather they wanted to pursue the 'policy of better understanding and deplore the fact that progress so far has been halted by the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia – a sovereign independent member of the United Nations'. Furthermore, the British government had not stopped all contacts, as it 'firmly believed that we must continue to do business together where there is business to be done, in the political, commercial and cultural fields'. Formulated by Wilson, the final paragraph was notably imprecise on any conditions that must be met for a restoration of relations. It stated that the British government and the British people wanted the best possible relations with their Soviet counterparts. But this was not solely a British responsibility, it was also dependant on the 'policies and actions of the Soviet Union'.[261]

This whole episode provides an intriguing foretaste of how political relations and espionage activities could become entangled. It seems clear that both the British and Soviet governments were searching for a way to restore the political dialogue after the rupture caused by the invasion. Yet the British used the intervening period to address their intelligence concerns. This in turn provoked the Soviets to react by intensifying the political antagonism. In the end both sides compromised. The Soviets confined themselves to verbal protests without taking reciprocal action against British diplomats. They did however signal quite clearly that further British action would have political consequences. In response, the British did not take further steps to limit Soviet espionage which continued unabated. The net effect of the exchanges was to preserve a basis for resuming the political dialogue, while postponing the clash over espionage.

[260] TNA, FCO 28/781, Palliser to Barrington, 9 December 1968.
[261] TNA, FCO 28/781, Giffard to Hayman, 10 December 1968; telegram 2498 FCO to Moscow, 10 December 1968.

This would take place in 1971, when the Conservative government took rather more robust action than their Labour predecessors.[262]

Cautious engagement

British ministers and officials now turned their attention to restoring a large element of normality to the Anglo-Soviet relationship. The agreed approach was to undertake ministerial visits to Moscow that were focussed on commercial rather than political issues. Both the minister of technology, Tony Benn, and the president of the board of trade, Tony Crosland, were eager to visit Moscow. They both argued that economic advantage would be lost unless the ministerial interactions were restored.[263]

FCO officials, strongly supported by Duncan Wilson in Moscow, endorsed a visit by Benn as a useful first step in this restoration process. He would undertake the review of the Anglo-Soviet technology agreement, which had been cancelled following the invasion.[264] The visit could therefore be presented as business trip rather than an expression of renewed goodwill toward the Soviet regime, and it would not look like 'giving in to the threat' posed in Gromyko's note. There were also competitive issues. The French government was proceeding with a meeting of the Franco-Soviet Grande Commission and hence would have a commercial advantage if there was no comparable British action. Stewart gave his approval for the trip and it was scheduled with the Soviets for May 1969.[265]

Nonetheless, the FCO officials had some residual concerns on Benn breaking the post-Czechoslovakian ice in the Anglo-Soviet relationship. The minister of technology was a political loose cannon, prone to make his own foreign policy. He was also known to be

[262] See chapter 7.
[263] TNA, FCO 28/787, 'Summary of the 9th Meeting of the ad hoc Inter-Departmental Committee on East-West Exchanges', 25 November 1968.
[264] DBPO III,1, document 18, telegram 1733, 4 November 1968, pp. 87-90; TNA, FCO 28/848, telegram FCO to Moscow, 19 December 1968; telegram 1883, Moscow to FCO, 19 December 1968.
[265] TNA, FCO 28/848, Barrington to Manley, 3 January 1969; Smith to Barrington, 10 January 1969; telegram 28, Moscow to FCO, 15 January 1969.

favourably disposed towards the Soviets. There was a distinct possibility that he would destabilise the carefully nuanced position on the relationship that had been developed since the invasion.[266] Stewart took the precaution of warning Benn not to take unilateral political initiatives, but, as he probably half-suspected, his cabinet colleague was not to be constrained by these strictures.[267]

Immediately on his arrival in Moscow, Benn engineered a meeting with Kosygin by indicating to his host, Vladimir Kirillin, that he had an important message from Harold Wilson. This was a deliberate exaggeration. There was no formal message, just a phone conversation in which Wilson had asked Benn to pass on his good wishes to the Soviet premier.[268] During the 40-minute encounter, Kosygin sprang a surprise by inviting Harold Wilson to visit Moscow the following month. He indicated that there were a 'number of political issues of interest to the two governments', including the Middle East, on which it might be useful to have a personal discussion with Wilson.[269]

Hughes has argued that Wilson had deliberately used Benn to outmanoeuvre Stewart. In this reading, knowing that Stewart would not approve of an early meeting with Kosygin, the prime minister had covertly briefed Benn to procure the invitation from the Soviet premier.[270] This seems unlikely. There is no documentary evidence that Wilson briefed Benn to this effect, and the subsequent interactions show that Wilson had no enthusiasm for an early trip to Moscow. It is much more likely that Benn acted on his own initiative, making an over-effusive input to Kirillin regarding the prime minister's desire for improved relations. One point is however clear. The alacrity with which Kosygin responded to Benn's prompting demonstrates the Soviet eagerness to restore the political dialogue with Western governments.

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[266] TNA, FCO 28/787, Giffard to Hayman, 9 December 1968; FCO 28/848, Giffard to Hayman, 23 December 1968.
[267] TNA, FCO 28/850, Barrington to Brimelow, 7 May 1969; FCO 28/851, Brief on 'Anglo-Soviet Relations'.
[268] TNA, PREM 13/3429, telegram 484, Moscow to FCO, 14 May 1969; FCO 28/792, Barrington to EESD, 16 May 1969.
[269] TNA, FCO 28/784, Wilson to Greenhill, 21 May 1969; FCO 28/852, 'Record of a Meeting ...', 11 May 1969.
[270] Geraint Hughes, *Harold Wilson's Cold War: The Labour Government and East-West Politics, 1964-1970* (Woodbridge Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2009), p. 158-9 and 163.

In any event, Kosygin's invitation was an embarrassment to the British prime minister and caught his advisors unaware. The ambassador in Moscow, Duncan Wilson, was generally in favour of an active dialogue with the Soviet government, noting that 'discussions at the highest level could clearly be very valuable'. But even he feared that Kosygin's main interest was to 'recover the appearance of full respectability' with the 'hope of an extra dividend from alliance splitting', and that any visit in the near future would be premature.[271] Neither the staff in No. 10 nor Michael Stewart were keen on an early visit, recognising that it might cause difficulties with Britain's allies. Duncan Wilson was instructed to give a holding response. He was to indicate that parliamentary business prevented Harold Wilson coming to Moscow in the near future. Nonetheless, the door was to be left open for the possibility of accepting Kosygin's invitation at a later date.[272]

The main component of Benn's trip was detailed discussions of the interactions resulting from the Anglo-Soviet Technology Agreement of early 1968. Both sides professed themselves very satisfied with the progress achieved and agreed to extend the interactions. Yet the main significance of the visit was symbolic. Benn was the first minister from a NATO country to visit the Soviet Union since the invasion of Czechoslovakia. It gave a signal that Western relations with the Soviets were returning to normal. In the words of Duncan Wilson, the visit was 'something of a landmark in Anglo-Soviet relations, and in East-West relations generally'. The ambassador welcomed this development: although a 'period of restraint and coolness' was necessary, it remained in 'our long term interest to encourage the habit of consultation on behalf of the Soviet authorities'.[273]

Some three weeks after Benn, Anthony Crosland, arrived in Moscow to sign the extension of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement. This agreement had been negotiated at

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[271] TNA, FCO 28/792, Wilson to Greenhill, 21 May 1969.
[272] TNA, PREM 13/3426, Barrington to Youde, 21 May 1969; telegram 443, FCO to Moscow, 28 May 1969.
[273] DBPO III,1, document 32, Wilson to Stewart, 'Visit of the Rt. Hon. Anthony Wedgwood Benn, MP, to the Soviet Union', 27 May 1969, pp. 158-62.

official level and Crosland's visit was largely ceremonial to 'keep high level business dealings in good order'. As with the case of Benn, the visit was conducted in a very friendly manner.[274]

With these two ministerial visits completed, Anglo-Soviet relations appeared to have almost been restored to their pre-invasion level. Certainly any echoes of the disapproval over Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia were becoming faint. Nor was there continued discussion of relations being conditional on the evolution of events in Prague. Ministers and officials justified this position to the public, and perhaps to themselves, with the palliative that the ministerial exchanges were confined to 'business', and were not a signal or friendship or good will. As Duncan Wilson noted it was important that the Benn visit 'should be, and should be seen to be, on a business like basis'.[275] But this was a fig-leaf which placed few practical constraints on future relations.

Confirming the change of direction

Having re-established the basis for Anglo-Soviet political dialogue, the debate resumed among ministers and officials on its objectives and purpose. In the period prior to the invasion, a more circumspect approach had been adopted.[276] This recognised that there was little scope for British initiatives to mitigate the major East-West tensions. The direct interactions between the leadership of the two countries, as practised by Wilson and Kosygin, were seen as bringing little benefit. This policy was subject to further review in the light of the suppression of the Prague spring. This resulted in a further shift away from a direct political dialogue with the Soviets in favour of greater emphasis on seeking a coordinated approach within the Atlantic Alliance.

[274] DBPO III,1, document 33, Wilson to Stewart, 10 June 1969, pp. 162-4.
[275] DBPO III,1, document 32, Wilson to Stewart, 'Visit of the Rt. Hon. Anthony Wedgwood Benn, MP, to the Soviet Union', 27 May 1969, pp. 158-62.
[276] This policy development is discussed in Chapter 3.

The review of British policy had been initiated as part of the programme of actions agreed as a response to the invasion.[277] After a prolonged process of drafting and consultation, a paper was approved by the OPD cabinet committee and, in May 1969, circulated to diplomats around the world. Stewart's cover note indicated the importance that he and his officials attached to the analysis. Rather pretentiously, it declared that the dispatch addressed the 'implications of the invasion of Czechoslovakia for East-West relations in the next five to ten years'.[278] It was written on two levels.[279] Firstly it gave a wide-ranging analysis of the general factors likely to impact the overall development of East-West relations. This was followed by a detailed recommendation on the future evolution of bilateral Anglo-Soviet interactions.

The analysis started from the long-standing Western premise that the aim of Soviet foreign policy was to expand Soviet influence and control wherever there was a suitable opportunity. The West must therefore continue to 'contain' this Soviet ambition. This model set limits on what the process of European détente could achieve. In reality, it would be a means of optimising interactions between two competitive systems, rather than a resolution of the intrinsic antipathy. This wider goal would have to await a weakening of the hold of communist orthodoxy on the Soviet government, a development which, at best, this was foreseen as lying in the far distant future.

Turning to specific British policies, the dispatch stressed again the limited scope for unilateral British initiatives in addressing East-West relations. Rather than seeking an independent role, the British government would seek to influence events as 'an important member' of the Atlantic Alliance. It would closely coordinate its policies with those of its allies and 'contribute and be seen to contribute our full sabre to the Alliance'. And by 'developing carefully considered views of our own', it would seek to 'influence our allies toward a fruitful collective policy'. This theme had also been spelled out bluntly in Stewart's cover note to the OPD Cabinet Committee:

[277] TNA, FCO 49/240, Peck, 'Czechoslovakia: British Policy including Defence Policy – brief for study', 27 August 1968; details of the drafting and consultation process can be found in files FCO 240-1.
[278] DBPO III,1, document no 31, Stewart to Wilson, 15 May 1969, pp. 138-9.
[279] DBPO III,1, document no 31, Stewart to Wilson, enclosure 'The Longer-Term Prospects for East-West Relations after the Czechoslovakian Crisis', pp. 138-57.

> As an independent power acting alone, we cannot achieve much *vis á vis* the Soviet Union: as an influential member of the alliance and in due course of a united Western Europe, we have a very considerable part to play.[280]

Even if there was little scope for major initiatives, the dispatch endorsed a full restoration of the relationship with the Soviets on the 'bilateral' topics. The main focus of this dialogue would be the long-standing policy of fostering increased economic, scientific and cultural contacts with the Soviet bloc. These were aimed at delivering direct economic benefits and also providing a conduit to spread Western ideas.

This dispatch built on the analysis of 1968 and represented something of a turning-point in Anglo-Soviet relations. No longer would British leaders seek to continue the post-war tradition of direct intervention in the superpower dialogue as a trusted confidant of the Americans. Instead, the Wilson administration turned to manipulation of the North Atlantic Alliance as the most appropriate route to mitigate East-West tensions.

Wilson leaves the stage

The dispatch also marked a change in Harold Wilson's attitude to the Anglo-Soviet dialogue. In the period up to 1968, the prime minister had dominated the interface with the Soviets, pushing hard to establish a personal role as an intermediary between the two superpowers. In contrast, after the invasion, he showed a reluctance to engage, even when opportunities presented themselves.

For example in August 1969, Wilson briefly entertained Richard Nixon at Mildenhall airbase as the American president broke a return journey to the United States. During the

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[280] TNA, FCO 49/242, OPD(69)8, 'The Longer-Term Prospects for East-West Relations after the Czechoslovakian Crisis, Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealths Affairs to OPD', 18 February 1969.

discussion, the president 'suddenly got excited' when Wilson mentioned Kosygin's invitation to visit Moscow. Flattering Wilson, Nixon remarked that he had read the reports of the prime minister's previous visits to Moscow. These indicated that Kosygin sometimes said to Wilson 'things clearly he wished to be ferried to Washington but which it was difficult for him to put directly'. Wilson confirmed that, when they were talking alone, Kosygin had 'said things to me with great strength and sometimes with considerable indiscretion ... when there was some message that he clearly wanted to get across'. Nixon then suggested that 'there was a lot to be said' for Wilson visiting Moscow before he came to Washington. There was a possibility that the Soviet leaders might use the occasion to give 'one or two signals on SALT, or on Vietnam, or on the Middle East'.[281]

Here was the new American president offering the chance for Wilson to play the role of intermediary that he had fought so hard to establish with Lyndon Johnson. Yet Wilson did not take the initiative to accept Nixon's offer. Rather, he coyly proposed that they take advice from 'those competent to give the matter deep thought'. In the subsequent exchanges both British ministers and officials and Nixon's national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, sought to bury the idea, even when Nixon subsequently returned to the proposition. Wilson meekly accepted their advice and the possibility of an early visit to the Kremlin was shelved.[282]

Wilson was not to visit Moscow again during his remaining time in office. In 1970, on the advice of Stewart, he did finally accept Kosygin's invitation to travel to the Soviet capital.[283] Yet he allowed the foreign secretary to insist that the visit be delayed until after the ministerial meeting of the Atlantic Alliance in May 1970. As a consequence, it

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[281] TNA, PREM 13/3009/1, 'The Prime Minister's Account of his Conversation with President Nixon at Mildenhall on Sunday, August 3, 1969', 5 August 1969.
[282] TNA, PREM 13/3429, Youde to Wilson, 5 September 1969; Stewart to Wilson, 16 September 1969; telegram 2510, Washington to FCO, 16 September 1969; telegram 1875, UKDEL United Nations New York to FCO, 18 September 1969; Youde to Wilson, 19 September 1969.
[283] TNA, PREM 13/3429, telegram 241, Moscow to FCO, 28 February 1970; FCO 28/1109, Brimelow to Stewart, 4 March 1970; Graham to Moon, 18 March 1970.

was scheduled to occur after the general election called for the 18 June 1970 and was negated by Labour's defeat at the polls.[284]

Wilson's passive attitude to interactions with the Soviets during 1969-70 is something of a surprise. It did however mirror his passivity when the policy reviews of 1968 led to the adoption of a more restricted view of the potential for Anglo-Soviet relations. It could have been that the image of Czechoslovakia still lingered and he feared that a meeting with the Soviet leadership would raise a firestorm of disapproval at home. Alternatively, he may simply have lost his zest for such initiatives, worn down by a multitude of domestic problems as his government showed every sign of unravelling. In any event, this was not the same prime minister who had set off to Moscow with so much energy in February 1966.

The British approach to East-West relations was now focused more on manipulating the stance of the Atlantic Alliance than on creating a bilateral interface with the Soviets. Michael Stewart became increasingly active in this alliance diplomacy, seeking to promote an accommodating response to the continuing Soviet overtures on détente. It is worth considering Stewart's initiatives in a little detail. Over the remaining period of this study, European détente became the central component of the Anglo-Soviet relationship, and Stewart's initiatives provide an important context for these later interactions. We begin with a brief review of the reciprocal moves taken by the Warsaw Pact and the Atlantic Alliance in the mid-sixties to promote détente. This sets the background for Stewart's interventions.

Interactive initiatives

The main plank of the Soviet thrust on European détente was the proposal for a security conference of all European states. This was a well-worn Soviet concept that had first

[284] TNA, PREM 13/3429, Moon to Wilson, 18 March 1970; Stewart to Wilson, 6 April 1970; Barrington to Moon, 7 April 1970; Moon to Hartles, 20 April 1970; Moon to Resident Clerk Moon, 13 June 1970. TNA, FCO 28/1110, Graham to Stewart, 3 April 1970.

been floated in 1954 in an attempt to deflect the Federal Republic of Germany from joining NATO.[285] Brezhnev resurrected the idea in March 1966 during his opening speech to the 23rd Congress of the Communist Party. Among the topics in his wide-ranging address was a proposal for 'an appropriate international conference' to discuss the issues of European security.[286]

The phrase 'European security' embraced an imprecise and elastic concept. At its heart were approaches to mitigate the military confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. However, the concept also embraced the notion of some form of political accommodation between the two contending blocs. In this context, the Soviets aimed to secure international recognition of the post-war political and geographical status quo, including the existence of two Germany states and the Polish-German border.

Soviet proposals were made more explicit in July 1966, following a meeting of the Warsaw Pact leadership in Bucharest. The proposals were contained in a 'Declaration ... on the strengthening peace and security in Europe'. It was described by *Izvestia* as 'the most comprehensive and realistic plan for European security ever offered to the people of Europe'.[287] The Bucharest declaration put forward a seven-point plan that was essentially a repetition of established Soviet rhetoric, albeit in a more coherent form. British officials described it as a 'hold-all for almost all the [Soviet] ideas on European Security that had been put forward'.[288] It conceded little to Western positions. In particular, it called for the recognition of the 'reality' of the existence of two German states, based on their current frontiers. The document concluded with a call for the 'convocation of a general European conference to discuss security in Europe and organising general European cooperation'.[289] The Bucharest declaration was reinforced in April 1967 by a further formal statement on European security. This derived from a

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[285] Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe: 1945-1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 74-8; Wilfried Loth, *Overcoming the Cold War: A History of Détente, 1950-91* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave, 2002), p. 28.
[286] Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe*, p. 286.
[287] *Ibid.*, pp. 296-311; quotes on p. 304 and p. 311.
[288] TNA, CAB 133/346, 'Background Note: Warsaw Pact Declaration on Europe' (PMV(M)(2)(66)3).
[289] 'Declaration issued at the close of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact on the strengthening of peace and security in Europe, Bucharest (5 July 1966)', <http://www.ena.lu/> [accessed 15 March 2010].

conference of European Communist parties, including those from Western Europe, held in Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) in Czechoslovakia. Although couched in more ideological language, the statement mainly confirmed the agenda agreed at Bucharest.[290]

While offering nothing new, the Bucharest and Karlovy Vary declarations were nonetheless powerful pieces of propaganda. They created an impression that the Soviet threat had subsided and that the Soviet leadership were seeking an accommodation between the two blocs that divided Europe. As expressed by British officials, 'it was couched in reasonable sounding terms so that the West's rejection of most of its proposals would appear unreasonable'.[291] These formal statements were supported by a wide-ranging programme of visits by Soviet leaders to Western European countries. These included the visit by Kosygin to Britain in February 1967.

In parallel with these overtures from the Warsaw Pact, the Atlantic Alliance was developing its own policy. In large part this was a reaction to the challenge from Charles de Gaulle to the unity of the Alliance.[292] The French president had been enunciating an idiosyncratic approach to East-West relations, based on the assertion that the division of Europe into two competing blocs was outdated. The only way to resolve European tensions was by a return to a natural state of international relations based on the multi-polar interaction of independent sovereign states. This proposition was encapsulated in his famous call for a "constructive entente from the Atlantic to the Urals".[293] De Gaulle's rhetoric implied that some breakthrough in the Cold War tensions was feasible, and that he himself could lead the process of European détente, using his 'neat and misty

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[290] Raymond I. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan, revised Edition* (Washington DC: the Brookings Institute, 1994), p.129; TNA FCO 28. 405, 'Brief on European Security Conference'; a transcript of the statement can be found at <http://www.ena.lu/> [accessed 15 March 2010].

[291] TNA, CAB 133/346, 'Background Note: Warsaw Pact Declaration on Europe' (PMV(M)(2)(66)3.

[292] A good general account of De Gaulle's challenge to the Atlantic Alliance and the British and American response is given in James Ellison, *The United States, Britain and the Transatlantic Crisis: Rising to the Gaullist Challenge, 1963-8* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). The American aspects are covered in Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), while the French perspective is given in Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States and the Atlantic Alliance, translated by S. Emanuel* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

[293] Bozo, *Two Strategies*, pp. 160-1.

formula' of *détente, entente et coopération.*[294] De Gaulle reinforced this rhetorical challenge in March 1966 by withdrawing French forces from the integrated NATO command (although France remained within the Alliance).

The other allies were reluctant to allow de Gaulle to continue as the unilateral advocate of a European détente. In December 1967, the Alliance accepted a proposal by the Belgian foreign minister, Pierre Harmel, to conduct a study of its future tasks. After extensive, complex and often fraught intra-alliance diplomacy, in December 1967 the Harmel report was unanimously adopted (with this unanimity including the French).[295] Although somewhat anodyne in its formulation, the report made a significant commitment to détente. It started from a reaffirmation of the Alliance's primary role of deterring and, if necessary, responding to aggression. The report then went on to argue that 'military security and a policy of détente were not contradictory but complementary'. Therefore the 'second function' of the alliance would be to 'pursue the search for progress toward a more stable relationship in which the underlying political issues can be solved'. It continued:

> The Allies are resolved to direct their energies to this purpose by realistic measures designed to further a détente in East-West relations. The relaxation of tensions is not the final goal but is part of a long-term process to promote better relations and to foster a European settlement. The ultimate practical purpose of the Alliance is to achieve a just and lasting peaceful order in Europe accompanied by appropriate security guarantees.[296]

This stance did not include endorsement of the Soviet proposals for a European security conference, nor did it provide recognition of the two German states. The Alliance was

[294] Ellison, *Transatlantic Crisis*, p. 96.
[295] Accounts of the negotiations leading up to the acceptance of the Harmel report can be found in Ellison, *Transatlantic Crisis*, pp. 111-4, 174-83; Andrew Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO: Britain, America and the Dynamics of Alliance, 1962-8* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2006), pp. 135-7; Bozo, *Two Strategies*, pp. 192-7.
[296] The text of the Harmel report is available at <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts.htm> [accessed on 24 March 2010].

still committed to the concept of Germany reunification. This was expressed in the communiqué accompanying the Harmel report: 'the peaceful settlement of the German question on a basis which would take account of the German people's fundamental right to re-unification was an essential factor for a just and lasting peace-order in Europe'.[297]

In seeking to put some flesh on the bones of this commitment to détente, the Alliance focused on seeking a mutual reduction of forces by NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This became known as 'Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions', leading to the enduring abbreviation MBFR. In June 1968, at the ministerial meeting in Reykjavik, the fourteen members of NATO's integrated defence system issued a declaration on MBFR. In keeping with the Gaullist position, the French dissociated themselves from the initiative. The declaration argued that 'the ultimate goal of a lasting peaceful order in Europe requires an atmosphere of trust and confidence'. MBFR could be a significant step in creating this trust. The NATO allies called on the Warsaw Pact to 'join with them in this search for progress towards peace'.[298]

The Reykjavik declaration entrenched different priorities within the two alliances with regard to European détente. The Atlantic Alliance placed heavy emphasis on MBFR. In contrast, while constantly using the rhetoric of disarmament, the Soviet government showed no readiness to negotiate practical steps. Rather, their priority was to secure acknowledgment of the post-war division of Germany and its border with Poland. The tension between these different priorities was to be a recurring feature of the East/West interactions over a European security conference.

During 1969, both the Warsaw Pact and the Atlantic Alliance developed their positions. Just seven months after the tanks had rolled into Prague, the Pact members reopened their campaign for a European security conference. After a meeting in Budapest, the Pact leaders issued a declaration calling for the 'convocation of a conference on European security'. This would aim to 'jointly find ways and means leading to the

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[297] *Ibid.*
[298] The text of the Reykjavik communiqué and declaration are available at <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts.htm> [accessed on 24 March 2010].

liquidation of the division of Europe by military groupings and to peaceful cooperation among European states and people'. In a sad irony, Alexander Dubček is listed among the signatories.[299] At the end of October, the Pact issued a further declaration. This welcomed an earlier offer from the Finnish government to 'assist in the preparation and holding of the all Europe conference'.[300] It also suggested that a conference could be held in 1970 based on a limited agenda.[301]

The Atlantic Alliance responded in April with a small but significant step towards recognising that East-West negotiations might indeed be feasible. While the allies continued to reject the proposal for an early conference, they did commit to undertake bilateral contacts with the Pact governments. These would explore 'which concrete issues best lend themselves to fruitful negotiation and an early resolution'. An assessment would then be made of the most appropriate approach to initiate negotiations on these 'concrete issues'. The Alliance also insisted on the direct involvement of the Americans (and Canadians) in any negotiations.[302]

These developments of the formal positions of the two alliances were conducted against the background of significant diplomatic initiatives. These provided some substance to underpin the collective rhetoric on détente.

The most important of these initiatives was launched by Willy Brandt, who became the Federal German chancellor in October 1969. Brandt sought to conclude agreements with the Soviets and subsequently with the governments of Eastern Europe (including that of East Germany). In this *Ostpolitik*, the chancellor was willing to come close to recognising the reality of the two Germanys and the frontier with Poland. This had the potential to remove one of the roadblocks that had long impeded progress toward a post-war European settlement. Brandt also indicated that if the German-Soviet negotiations

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[299] TNA, FCO 41/411, 'Brief on East-West Relations'. The text of the declaration can be found at <http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?lng=en&id=18022&navinfo=14465> [accessed on 10 January 2010].
[300] DBPO III,I, document 35, note 7.
[301] TNA, FCO 41/419, Telegram 380, FCO to UKDEL NATO, 1 November 1969.
[302] TNA, FCO 41/412, 'Final Communiqué', 11 April 1969.

were concluded satisfactorily, then he would lend his support to the holding of a European security conference. [303]

In parallel with these unilateral German moves, two other important negotiations were commenced. These concerned the future of Berlin, and the limitation of the nuclear arsenals of the two superpowers. The status of Berlin had been in limbo since the building of the Wall had dissipated the prolonged crisis initiated by Khrushchev in 1958. In late 1969, the Soviets and the three Western occupying powers exchanged a series of notes on the possibility of holding negotiations to resolve the status of the divided city. In March 1970, these resulted in the opening of quadripartite talks between the occupying powers.[304] On a wider canvas, in November 1969 the American and Soviet governments finally began the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) in Helsinki.[305]

Stewart takes a lead

It was against the background of this gathering momentum towards European détente that Michael Stewart prepared to take his own initiative within the Atlantic Alliance. In July 1969, he instructed the British delegation to the North Atlantic Council (NAC) to seek a 'constructive result [on détente]'. This could then go forward for agreement at the NATO Ministerial meeting in December [1969]'.[306] As well as addressing the substance of the Alliance position, Stewart was also concerned to counter the propaganda advantages arising from the proactive position of the Warsaw Pact. He instructed the delegation that during the ministerial meeting, 'there should be public account of Western initiatives both in and outside NATO'.[307] And he later expressed the wish to 'set a record of the UK's positive and constructive attitude'.[308]

[303] Julia Von Dannenberg, *The Foundation of Ostpolitik: The Making of the Treaty between West Germany and the USSR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 16-66.
[304] Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, pp. 135-9; Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), pp. 405-12.
[305] Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 149.
[306] TNA FCO 28/575, Brimelow to Burrows, 28 July 1969.
[307] TNA FCO 28/575, Brimelow to Burrows, 28 July 1969.
[308] TNA, FCO 41/418, telegram767, UKDEL NATO to FCO, 5 December 1969

In specific terms, Stewart wished to respond to the Warsaw Pact's proposal for an early European security conference by striking 'the right balance between the extremes of outright rejection and unconditional acceptance'. He was keen for the allies to develop their own proposals on how they might undertake 'eventual collective discussions'.[309] The foreign secretary was also eager to ensure that MBFR should continue to feature prominently in the Alliance proposals. This had a pragmatic motivation. Some allies were planning a unilateral reduction in the military forces that they committed to NATO. MBFR would be a way of 'getting a Warsaw Pact offset for what will happen in NATO anyway'.[310]

Stewart was reasonably satisfied with the consensus position that emerged from the ministerial meeting: he had achieved 'the greater part of our objectives'.[311] The ministers agreed a new tactic for responding to the Soviets. They insisted that a European security conference could only be convened after there had been progress on specific issues of interest to the West – MBFR, Berlin and Brandt's negotiations with the Soviets. The declaration issued after the meeting stated that progress on these topics would 'make a major contribution to improving the political atmosphere in Europe', and 'would help to ensure the eventual success of such a conference'. In effect, the Soviets would not be granted an all-Europe conference to endorse the post-war territorial realties unless there were reciprocal concessions on the issues of concern to the West. The Alliance had succeeded in demonstrating a positive attitude to détente without premature concession on Soviet desiderata.[312]

During the first few months of 1970, Stewart continued to press his allies to make a commitment to eventual multilateral negotiations. He had significant support, which in large part was a reaction to the bilateral negotiations being undertaken by the Americans on SALT and the Germans on *Ostpolitik.* These posed a danger to the other Alliance members 'of being left out of this peace-making process'. In response, some argued that

[309] TNA, FCO 41/418, telegram767, UKDEL NATO to FCO, 5 December 1969
[310] TNA, FCO 41/419, 'Brief on Balanced Force Reductions'.
[311] TNA FCO 41/418, telegram 767, UKDEL NATO to FCO, 5 December 1969.
[312] TNA, FCO 41/418, telegrams 768 and 769, UKDEL NATO to FCO, 5 December 1969.

the Alliance itself 'must maintain and develop a forward-looking attitude to the possibilities of negotiations in which all could join'.[313] This concept was, however, opposed by the Americans. Nixon and Kissinger were taking a confrontational position toward the Soviet government. This was based on the concept of 'linkage' in which concessions in one area would be balanced by a reciprocal accommodation in another. Specifically they sought to procure Soviet help in ending the conflict in Vietnam. Brandt had presented them with a fait accompli when launching his *Ostpolitik*. They had no wish to see a wider set of multilateral negotiations that could lead to further unbalanced concessions.[314]

In the NAC, the British ploughed on with their proposal, even at the risk of arousing American antagonism. They decided to cooperate with the Belgians in developing a draft communiqué containing an invitation to other governments to begin 'multilateral exploratory contacts'.[315] In the ministerial meeting itself, American objections were overcome and the Alliance defined a path towards a European security conference. This had three stages. Firstly there would be bilateral 'exploratory conversations with all interested parties on all questions affecting peace'. This would lead to 'multilateral contacts' to 'explore when it will be possible to convene a conference or a series of conferences on European security and co-operation'. The final stage would be the multilateral negotiations themselves. The Alliance retained the caveat defined in the earlier ministerial meeting. Any move to set up such multilateral negotiations must be preceded by progress in the Soviet-German interactions and the quadripartite talks on Berlin. In a separate declaration, the Alliance repeated their invitation for 'interested states to hold exploratory talks' on MBFR.

As well as establishing the mechanism by which a conference could be convened, the communiqué also addressed the subjects that should be considered. These should include 'the development of international relations with a view to contributing to the

[313] TNA, FCO 41/607, Burrows to Douglas-Home, 7 July 1970; FCO 28/625, telegram 221, UKDEL NATO to FCO, 24 April 1970.
[314] TNA, FCO 28/903, 'Brief on 'European Security'. For the American policy on linkage and the reaction to *Ostpolitik* see Kissinger, *White House Years* pp. 129-30 and 529-34.
[315] TNA, FCO 41/626, Burrows to Brosio, 30 April 1970.

freer movement of people, ideas and information'. This laid the groundwork for 'Basket III' of the eventual CSCE (chapters 6 and 9).[316]

The Rome ministerial meeting marked a major, perhaps decisive, step on the road towards a European security conference. As Stewart put it, 'we have talked a lot about an era of negotiations and we have now defined in our communiqué the practical steps which should make this possible'.[317] Progress would be slow and uncertain, but after Rome it was more a question of when, rather than if, there would be a conference. Stewart and the British diplomats had played an important role in moving the Alliance toward this position, highlighted by their willingness to take a contrary line to that of the Americans. Stewart reported to Duncan Wilson that it 'was a decidedly successful meeting', and that the outcomes 'embody in every essential the proposals which I put to the meeting'.[318] The foreign secretary spelled out to press correspondents his determination to make progress on détente. The Warsaw Pact had made proposals for a conference. While these were clearly unacceptable, 'we British felt then very strongly that we [the Alliance] had got to put [to] ourselves this question: if not this conference, then what? We had got to try and seek for a way of getting into discussion'.[319]

Despite the imminence of the general election, Stewart was extremely active in following up the Rome declaration. In the two weeks after the meeting, British ambassadors had contacts with the governments of all non-Alliance European countries.[320] In London, Stewart himself met with the Soviet, Polish, Romanian, Hungarian, Swedish and Finnish ambassadors.[321] In his meeting with the Soviet ambassador, Smirnovsky, he gave a highly optimistic view of a potential timetable. He informed the ambassador that given satisfactory progress on Berlin, SALT and *Ostpolitik* the multilateral preparatory talks could begin by the end of 1970 or early in

[316] Final Communiqué and 'Declaration on Mutual and Balanced force Reductions', Ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council, 26-7 May 1970, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_26788.htm> [accessed on 20 February 2010}.
[317] TNA, FCO 41/633, 'Mr Stewart's briefing of British correspondents after conclusion of N.A.T.O meeting in Rome on 27 May, 1970'.
[318] TNA, FCO 41/472, telegram 491, FCO to Moscow, 28 May 1970.
[319] TNA, FCO 41/633, 'Mr Stewart's briefing ... 27 May, 1970'
[320] The sole exception was the Vatican.
[321] TNA, FCO 41/633, Waterfield to Brimelow, 12 June 1970.

1971. The foreign secretary also stressed that 'contrary to criticism' the British government 'had worked in Rome for the Alliance to agree on as positive a move forward as possible'.[322]

Stewart had given a significant lead to the development of a more accommodating Alliance policy toward détente. And he was showing real energy in pursuing the policy in practice. Yet he was not to enjoy the fruits of his efforts. Labour lost the election of 18 June 1970 and a Conservative government led by Edward Heath came to power.

Conclusions

After the resumption of relations in mid-1969, the British government confirmed its decision not to continue the high level political engagement with the Soviet leadership. Rather than focus on the direct bilateral Anglo-Soviet interface, Michael Stewart gave priority to shaping the policy of the Atlantic Alliance. This poses the question of Stewart's motivations in taking such a proactive stance on promoting European détente within the Alliance debates.

The foreign secretary appears to have had a combination of motives. Perhaps at the heart of these was a sense that there was a real opportunity to reduce Cold War tensions. In a speech in November 1969, he declared:

> I am inclined to believe ... that there is now a chance – a better chance - than we have had for some time of getting at least some relaxation of tensions between East and West in Europe.

No doubt also, he felt some pressure to match the initiatives of his European rivals. Without the high-profile engagement with the Soviet leadership, the government lacked a flagship project to signal their interest in détente. They could therefore appear less

[322] TNA, FCO 28/1111, telegram 508, FCO to Moscow, 1 June 1970.

active than other Western European governments in the search for an East-West accommodation: an image that would have little appeal to the left-wing anti-American elements in the Labour Party.

Some sense of the discomfort of Stewart's colleagues is provided by the Cabinet discussion in December 1969 following his report on the Alliance ministerial meeting. Cabinet members drew a pointed contrast between the government's perceived inertia and the initiatives being pursued by other governments. Brandt was progressing *Ostpolitik*, the Americans were negotiating SALT, while the French were promoting a system of bilateral contacts. The British government 'did not appear to have taken any comparable initiative'. It therefore 'ran the risk of being accused of rigidity and lack of enthusiasm for a *détente* between East and West'. In defence, Stewart argued that the British had kept the concept of MBFR alive in the Alliance, were involved in the quadripartite talks on Berlin, and earlier had played a significant role in securing the non-proliferation treaty.[323] Nonetheless, one can perhaps conclude that Stewart would have been driven by this Cabinet discomfort to take a higher-profile role within the Alliance.

Certainly the need to counter the image of British inertia in promoting détente was a factor determining his approach to the Rome ministerial meeting. This image had also been accentuated by Soviet propaganda.[324] In a telegram prior to the Rome meeting, Stewart spelled out his concerns to the British permanent representative in the NAC, Brian Burrows:

> You should be aware, as an indication of my views, that apart from my arguments on substance, I do not feel that I can indefinitely accept a situation in which the UK is widely but wrongly alleged to be one of the

[323] DBPO III,I, document 39, 'Extract from Conclusions of a Cabinet Meeting ...', CC(69)60, 11 December 1969. As there is no attribution of the remarks made during the discussions, an assumption has been made on when Stewart is speaking.
[324] TNA, FCO 41/625, Waterfield to Brimelow, 24 March 1970.

> most obstructively negative members of the Alliance on East-West relations.[325]

A third strand in Stewart's motivation was a desire to respond to the prevailing public mood. The relentless Warsaw Pact propaganda promoting a conference was having an effect. Stewart described this in a speech in Washington in early 1970. Despite its 'practical weaknesses and political ambiguity', the Soviet proposal for a conference was 'a simple one' that the public could easily grasp. The West 'had not yet proposed anything which has such a simple attraction'. As a result, the idea of a conference 'is beginning to acquire reality and momentum of its own, irrespective of its practical merits'. There was a real risk that the Alliance 'could find ourselves going into a conference simply because it's there'. To counteract this risk, the Alliance needed 'to have in our arsenal sensible practical proposals about the methods of conducting East-West negotiations'.[326]

An official, who worked closely with Stewart on European security, paraphrased this strand of his motivations thus:

> that in order to convince public opinion, and especially the younger generation, of the need for the alliance, and indeed to vote for NATO's necessary defences, we must show that we are positive in our approach to détente and that, if this does not take place, it is not NATO but the other side which is being obstructive.[327]

Jeremi Suri has argued that the need to satisfy domestic opinion was a general driving force behind the movement of the political elites to embrace détente in the early 1970s. He contends that détente was a reaction to the wave of global protests that swept the world in 1968: that Soviet, Chinese and Western leaders 'colluded to stabilise their

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[325] TNA, FCO 41/626, telegram 169, FCO to UKDEL NATO, 8 May 1970.
[326] TNA, FCO 41/739, Waterfield to Private Secretary (to Stewart), 28 January 1970. These are the notes prepared for the speech. It is possible that the delivery might have shown some variation. Nonetheless they probably represent the thoughts of the Foreign Secretary as communicated to his officials..
[327] TNA, FCO 41/625, Waterfield to Brimelow, 24 March 1970.

societies and preserve their authority'. The grand sweep of Suri's analysis seems rather overdrawn, especially when applied to the Soviet politburo or Mao Zedong's regime. Nonetheless, in the restricted context of Western Europe and the United States, his analysis has some merit. There was rising domestic discontent with the political orthodoxy of the Cold War, not least over the continuing American military action in Vietnam. The opportunity to mollify this domestic turmoil was a powerful incentive for the political leaders to seek an accommodation with the Soviets, and in the case of Nixon and Kissinger also the Chinese.[328] Certainly it seems to have a played a role in shaping Stewart's approach.

Stewart's determined initiative to prod the Alliance along the path to détente probably reflected the interaction of these factors. The prospect of substantive progress in reducing East-West tensions provided a direct motivation for the initiative. This was reinforced by the need to counter an image of British inertia compared with its allies. Further encouragement was provided by a requirement to convince the general public to continue their support for the Alliance and its concomitant military costs. In any event, Stewart had placed the British government at the centre of the Alliance strategy to seek a favourable response to Soviet overtures.

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In the following chapter, we will conclude the assessment of the relations with the Soviets conducted by the Wilson government by examining the interactions on 'bilateral topics'.

[328] Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), quote p. 261.

Chapter 5

'Bi-lateral' topics, 1964-70

> Most of our bilateral relations were quarrelling about spies and negotiating extremely boring agreements on trade and culture.

This is how Roderic Braithwaite summed up his experience as a junior diplomat in Moscow in the mid-1960s. The observation points to the reality that the majority of the interactions between British and Soviet officials were not taken up addressing the major structural tensions of the Cold War. Rather they were dealing with the smaller scale 'bilateral' topics.[329]

In this chapter, we will examine the Anglo-Soviet relations on these bilateral issues during Harold Wilson's first administrations from 1964-70. The account begins with an exploration of the overall British policy, followed by a brief assessment of the programme of cultural and scientific exchanges. The bulk of the chapter is then devoted to exploring the two issues that dominated the interchanges – economic relations and the case of Gerald Brooke. These two topics are treated as half chapters. They illustrate the two different aspects of the 'bilateral' agenda. Economic relations were given continuous attention by both governments as an integral component of their diplomatic strategies. In contrast, Gerald Brooke was a young British lecturer with no official standing who was arrested and imprisoned by the Soviet authorities from 1965-9. During this period, his case gradually acquired a disproportionate degree of prominence and threatened a disruption of the relationship on the same scale as that resulting from the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

[329] Gillian Staerck, 'Witness Seminar: the Role of HM Embassy in Moscow', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 14 (2000), 149-161. A good summary of these 'bilateral' topics is given in TNA, FCO 371/177680, 'The Secretary of State's Visit to Moscow, July 1964: List of Briefs'.

British policy and the culture wars

In addition to seeking direct economic benefits from enhanced trade, the main British motivation in engaging on the bilateral topics was to encourage a wide range of contacts with the Soviet managerial elite. In 1964, Duncan Wilson had crystallised this approach in a celebrated paper written while he was a senior official in London.[330] This recognised a 'generation gap' among Soviet leaders. While the new generation of young leaders would hold on to power as tenaciously as their predecessors, they could be expected to develop a difference in outlook.

> But, partially as a result of the policy of peaceful co-existence, they should grow up with at least a considerably wider knowledge of the world outside the U.S.S.R., and consequently less disposition to consider and deal with it in terms of simple Marxist-Leninist categories.

This trend among the leadership would be complemented by 'a new generation of technicians and bureaucrats who have been encouraged to absorb in their fields the wisdom of the West'. They would have contacts with their Western counterparts. Despite restrictions placed upon them, they were likely to learn more about 'Western policy and practice' than the Soviet leaders would wish. Promotion of wider contacts between British and Soviet society was designed to encourage this 'empirical strain' among the Soviet elite.

British diplomats were fully cognisant of the limitations of this approach. As the ambassador to Moscow, Humphrey Trevelyan, warned in 1964, the Party leaders only permitted exchanges with Britain because they judged the 'effect on their political outlook acceptably small'. There were therefore 'limits to the effectiveness of this policy as a means of influencing the assumptions, doctrines and the political strategy of the

[330] TNA, FO 371/182766, Gore-Booth to Stewart, 10 November 1965.

C.P.S.U. [Communist Party of the Soviet Union]'.[331] Nonetheless, the promotion of these contacts was an enduring staple of British policy. Indeed, it became almost a default position to justify continuation of the Anglo-Soviet relationship at times of political estrangement. The policy was spelt out in the major statement on Anglo-Soviet relations circulated in May 1969:

> increasing contacts of all sorts with Soviet scientists, intellectuals, technologists etc., even allowing for the fact that they have little immediate effect, are an essential part of our long term effort to change attitudes in the Soviet Union.[332]

While these ambitions were associated with all aspects of the interactions on the bilateral topics, they were most prominent in the cultural area.

Anglo-Soviet cultural relations were regulated by an agreement first signed in 1959 and renewed biennially. This provided for limited exchange visits for educational and scientific purposes, and cooperation in performing arts, broadcasting and tourism. By the mid 1960s, these cultural interactions had settled into a fairly well-defined pattern. The program of exchange visits worked reasonably well. Each year some 20 to 30 British and Soviet citizens were spending extended periods in each other's country, mainly to study at Universities or other institutions. Officials recognised that the main Soviet motivation was to access British scientific and technological advances: 'acquiring the maximum know-how at the lowest cost'. Nonetheless, the exchanges were still regarded as worthwhile. The young Soviet scientists in Britain would 'learn more about life outside the Soviet Union than their government bargains for'. As they progressed to influential positions within the Soviet hierarchy, their attitudes would continue to be influenced by their stay in Britain.[333]

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[331] TNA, FO 371/177681, 'Dispatch 114, United Kingdom Policy towards the Soviet Union', Trevelyan to Gordon-Walker, 19 November 1964.

[332] DBPO III,I, document 31, Steward to Wilson, enclosing 'The longer term prospects for East-West relations after the Czechoslovakian Crisis', 15 May 1969, paragraph 55, p. 155.

[333] TNA, CAB 133/365 'Brief on Cultural, Scientific and Technological Exchanges'; FCO 28/838, Brash to Peak, 13 May 1969.

There were also exchanges of cultural performances. The Soviets sponsored a wide range of events in Britain from the highbrow Bolshoi ballet to the mass entertainment of the Moscow State Circus or the Red Army ensemble. In contrast, and in keeping with the strategy, British cultural promotions in the Soviet Union tended to be focused on the Soviet elite by featuring classical music, ballet and theatrical performances. In addition, there was an 'extremely modest' programme to encourage the teaching of English. A Russian language quarterly magazine, Anglia, was also produced, with a permitted circulation of 100,000.[334]

It is difficult to make any quantitative evaluation of the impact of these contacts on attitudes on each side of the Iron Curtain. They were but one component of an extensive East-West propaganda battle, described by Tony Shaw as 'unparalleled in scale, ingenuity and power'.[335] In these 'culture wars' both sides sought to 'assert their civil, ideological, and moral ascendancy'.[336] The Soviet portfolio of performances in Britain included many elements with popular appeal, thereby ensuring that they reached a mass audience through television. They were augmented by Soviet participation in televised international sporting events such as the Olympic Games and soccer world cup. At least in the recollections of this author, this combination engendered some questioning among the British public of the Cold War stereotype of a universally hostile Soviet Union. Could the fresh-faced soldiers of the Red Army choir singing the Volga Boat Song really pose such a potent threat to Western civilisation? And could the society that produced the nymph-like gymnasts and the imperious goalkeeper, Lev Yashin, really be so different and antagonistic?[337]

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[334] TNA, CAB 133/372, 'Brief – Cultural and Scientific Exchanges'; DBPO III,I, document 12, 'General observations by the Foreign Office on certain problems associated with the promotion of further co-operation with the Soviet Union', 18 June 1968, pp. 58-64; DBPO III,I, document 42, Wilson to Brash, 13 January 1970, pp. 211-4

[335] Tony Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda and Consensus* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), p.1.

[336] David Andrews and Stephan Wagg, *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

[337] This is an impressionistic picture drawn from the author's own recollections of the period.

Whether the rather modest British efforts had a significant impact on the attitudes of the Soviet nomenklatura must be open to some doubt. Yet Duncan Wilson remained convinced. Writing in January 1970, by which time he was the British ambassador in Moscow, he commented that there is 'at least a chance that this money [spent on cultural relations] may turn out to be amongst the best investments in the future ever made by the Western democracy'.[338]

Economic relations

On assuming power, Harold Wilson and the Labour government made a determined attempt to widen the basis of Anglo-Soviet economic relations. This was not simply a result of rational calculation of commercial advantage. There was also an emotional and ideological component, reflecting the prominent position of the Soviet Union in Labour's economic thinking.

The Soviet Union was not a traditional trading nation that sought to compete and prosper in expanding global markets. Rather, trade was a state sponsored activity designed to augment the autarkic centralised Soviet economy. It was tightly controlled by the all-encompassing state bureaucracy, with the Ministry for Foreign Trade acting as the gatekeeper. Trade with the West had a limited and tightly defined role. Sales of the natural resources of the Soviet Union provided foreign currency, which could be used to make purchases for the domestic market. Within this general pattern, trade was a vehicle for accessing Western technology to improve the productivity of Soviet industry.[339]

In the 1960s, trade promotion was an increasing priority for British diplomats around the world, as the country struggled with a chronic balance-of-trade deficit.[340] However, in

[338] DBPO III,I, document 42, Wilson to Brash, 13 January 1970, pp. 211-4.
[339] TNA, CAB 133/365, 'Civil Technological Collaboration with the U.S.S.R. (other than aircraft and space).
[340] For diplomatic priorities see John W. Young, *Twentieth Century Diplomacy: A Case Study of British Practice, 1963-1967* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 31-58. A good summary of

the case of the Soviet Union, the nature of the economic system meant that British ministers and officials had an unusually large role in the development of trade and other economic relations. Companies could not access the labyrinthine Soviet bureaucracy without the support of officials both in London and Moscow. It was also believed that developing the overall political relationship between the two governments could have a direct impact on Soviet willingness to place contracts.

In the build-up to the 1964 election, Harold Wilson had crafted a clarion call for the modernisation of the British economy. Productivity would be transformed by the comprehensive application of technology within the context of a national economic plan. To a large extent it was a strategy that was reinforced by a perception of the economic advances made by the Soviet Union. One of Wilson's closest economic advisers, Thomas Balogh, was an admirer of Soviet central control of the economy, coupled with the high emphasis on technological skills. In 1959, he endorsed Khrushchev's prediction that the economic progress of the Soviet Union would 'bury' the West.[341] Balogh declared that on present trends Soviet output per head would exceed that of Britain 'in the early 1960s'.[342]

Wilson launched his ideas in his celebrated speech to the 1963 Labour Party conference. A Labour government would invest in science and technology and forge a new Britain 'in the white heat of this [technological] revolution'. The Soviet Union was a prominent component of the speech. Firstly it was a potential market for the advanced technological output that would be produced by the Wilsonian revolution. He informed his audience that the 'Russians have talked to me of orders [for chemical plants and products] amounting to hundreds of millions over the next few years'. And the Soviet Union was also an exemplar of what could be achieved by the potent combination of technology deployment and scientifically based economic planning. He rejected the

Britain's post-war economic performance is given in Jim Tomlinson, *Public Policy and the Economy since 1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 238-76.

[341] Wilfried Loth, 'The Cold War and the social and economic history of the twentieth century', in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Volume II, Crisis and Détente, The Cambridge History of the Cold War,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 503-23 (p. 515).

[342] Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 275-6.

totalitarian communist methods. Yet Britain must find an equally effective approach using 'all the resources of democratic planning'.[343] On achieving power, Wilson shaped his government to make good on his economic strategy, establishing two new economic ministries to stand alongside the Board of Trade. The Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) was to spearhead economic planning, while the Ministry of Technology had the brief to stimulate the application of technology.

There was therefore a natural inclination for the new government to place a high priority on fostering economic links with the Soviet Union. The Soviet economy exemplified the same principles of planning and the application of technology that were seen as the solutions to Britain's economic malaise. This was coupled with, in historical hindsight, an exaggerated sense of Soviet technological capacity and industrial progress. An initiative towards the Soviet Union also pandered to residual anti-Americanism within the Labour Party, and resonated with Harold Wilson's belief that he had a particular expertise in dealing with the Soviets.

The improvement of economic relations with the Soviet Union was progressed on two fronts. Firstly there was a sustained effort to promote British exports. Wilson sought to utilise his developing political relationship with Kosygin as an additional lever to facilitate Soviet purchases. The second element was the development of technological interactions between British business and Soviet enterprises as a precursor to future lucrative contracts. Both of these initiatives were launched when Kosygin visited Britain in February 1967.

Kosygin takes the lead

By the mid-1960s, Anglo-Soviet trade had settled into an established pattern regulated by trade agreements between the two governments. The first of these had been signed in

[343] Simon Heffer, *Great British Speeches: A Stirring Anthology of Speeches from Every Period of British History* (London: Quercus, 2007), pp. 236-40.

1959 and extended in 1964 for a further five years. As shown in table 1, in the four years following the agreement, exports to the Soviet Union had been slowly increasing. By 1963, they had reached £53m, although this still constituted only 1.5% of total British exports. Soviet imports were consistently higher, leaving a substantial trade deficit.

Table 1 - Balance of Anglo-Soviet trade 1959-63 (£ million)[344]

	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
UK exports to USSR	27	37	43	42	55
UK imports from USSR	63	75	85	84	91

This pattern had led to a sterile dialogue between the two governments. British ministers argued that the trade deficit harmed the balance of payments and that the Soviet authorities should reduce this deficit by purchasing more British goods. The Soviets countered that the impact on the British balance of payments was not as severe as represented due to the re-export of furs, diamonds and precious metals.[345] The balance of the argument was with the Soviets. Examining the problem in 1969, British officials noted that the price of Soviet goods included the costs of transport and insurance (on average 9%). When allowance was also made for the re-export of Soviet commodities, then the trade was close to balance. Further, the prices of raw materials imported from the Soviet Union, such as timber, were attractive compared with alternative sources. The key British priority was not the trade imbalances, but the need to increase the total level of exports to the Soviet Union.[346]

Harold Wilson was determined to use his dialogue with Kosygin to boost British exports. During his two visits to Moscow in 1966, he made direct appeals to the Soviet

[344] TNA, FO 371/177679, Brief on Anglo-Soviet trade.
[345] See for example, TNA, CAB 133/345, 'Trade Brief'; PREM 13/1216 'Meeting of Cousins with Patolichev', 23 February 1966; CAB 133/346, 'Trade Brief'; CAB 133/365, 'Trade Brief'.
[346] TNA, FCO 28/820 Brief STT(69) 8 – 'Bilateral balance of Trade'.

premier to increase the level of Anglo-Soviet trade. Indeed the communiqué from the February visit recorded a commitment to 'study both short and long term measures to widen the basis and to develop a higher level of trade in both directions'.[347] But there was little progress, and exports to the Soviet Union remained stubbornly flat. The total of £50m achieved in 1966 was in fact below the level of 1963 and described by officials as 'extremely disappointing'.[348] Furthermore this was a period in which large Soviet contracts for capital goods had been awarded to other Western European countries. Italy had received a £300m contract for plant and equipment including an order for a Fiat car plant worth £125m, while Renault had secured a £30m contract to rebuild the Moskvitch car plant.[349]

Kosygin's visit to London in February 1967 provided a further opportunity to seek increased exports. Wilson pressed his ministers to identify large Soviet orders that could be announced during the visit: a 'British quid for a Soviet quo'.[350] Such an announcement would bolster the prime minister's political standing by demonstrating an economic return from his interactions with the Soviet leaders. Yet he was to be disappointed. Despite a frantic round of meetings between ministers and officials, no projects were identified of sufficient size to justify such an announcement.[351] A Cabinet committee meeting chaired by Wilson identified only a threadbare set of initiatives amounting to little more than window dressing.[352]

Technology interactions formed a second strand of the preparations for Kosygin's visit. British companies and research institutes were already developing nascent technological relationships with their Soviet equivalents. Ostensibly, the objective was to explore jointly technological options to address common industrial challenges. Yet both sides had ulterior motives. The Soviet goal was to obtain free of charge access to know-how

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[347] TNA, PREM 13/1216, 'Visit of the Prime Minister to the Soviet Union, 21-22 February, 1966', 'Communiqué'.
[348] TNA, CAB 133/365, 'Trade Brief'.
[349] TNA, CAB 133/346, Brief on 'Trade'.
[350] TNA, FCO 28/428, Halls to Nichols, 14 January 1967.
[351] TNA, FCO 28/428, 'Meeting President of the Board of Trade with Lord Chalfont and Peter Hayman', 18 January 1967; Hayman to Buxton, 20 January 1967;
[352] TNA, FCO 28/428, MISC 136 (67) 1st; Jay to Wilson, 3 February 1967.

that otherwise they would be forced to purchase. British companies saw the interactions as a conduit to future commercial deals: they were 'primarily to maintain the goodwill of a valued customer'. British officials in the Ministry of Technology sought to integrate these initiatives into an overall framework that could be agreed with Kosygin. They saw this as a facilitating mechanism for promoting future trade, arguing that 'the development of our technological relationship with Soviet industry is the surest way of reaping commercial benefit'.[353]

During his visit Kosygin was eager to promote the bilateral Anglo-Soviet relationship, constantly searching for joint initiatives. And this approach was prominent in the exchanges on economic relationships. On trade, the Soviet premier caught his British hosts by surprise in proposing the development of a long-term more fundamental interaction. He argued that 'in really serious talks on trade questions one had to think in terms of a long-term agreement from five to ten years'. The Soviet government ran a planned economy, and so had to know their requirements over a long term. As this economy was growing much faster than that of Britain, the Soviet government could increase trade levels. A long-term trade deal could increase trade by two or three times 'but not overnight'. The Soviet planning organisation, Gosplan, and other Soviet ministries could get together with their British counterparts and settle the details. This approach was replicated when the discussions turned to technology interactions. Kosygin averred that these exchanges could not proceed 'on a short term, three monthly basis'. Rather they required 'long term agreements' and 'if there could be pooling of effort, great economies and resources and gains in know-how could be achieved'.[354]

Perhaps not surprisingly, Wilson and his ministerial colleagues welcomed Kosygin's proposals. Their economic philosophy was based on planning coupled with the application of technology. Kosygin's concept of a strategic approach to Anglo-Soviet economic interactions fitted well with these preconceptions. It might be a harbinger for a

[353] TNA, CAB 133/365, Brief on 'Civil Technological Collaboration with the U.S.S.R. (other than aircraft and space)'.
[354] TNA, PREM 13/1840, 'Record of Meetings during visit of Mr Kosygin to London', Second Formal Meeting, 7 February 1967.

new level of British exports to the Soviet Union based on a shared economic model. The communiqué issued at the end of the visit contained the following statements:

> It was desirable to develop longer-term planning arrangements related to the forward planning of their respective economies, to enable both sides to develop productive capacity for expanding trade in both directions.

and

> It was agreed that the expansion of scientific and technological cooperation directed towards a more rational use of their respective industrial, scientific and technical capabilities could be of great advantage to both countries.[355]

Yet these simple statements hid a multitude of ambiguities. They implied that, based on joint planning, the British economy would invest to meet specified future needs of the Soviet Union. In return the British market would provide a demand for designated Soviet goods. This international division of labour would be based on a shared development of technology. Was Kosygin really proposing that the Soviet Union would depend on a permanent basis on goods produced in the capitalist West? And did a Labour government really believe that planning could be extended to the interactions between their free market economy and the command economy of the Soviet Union? It seems likely that both sides had become ensnared in a superficially attractive but ill-defined concept.

The initiative to develop a long-term trade agreement yielded a much lower level of subsequent Anglo-Soviet engagement, than the expansion of technology exchanges. This reflected both a divergence in the degree of the continuing Soviet interest in the two topics, and also the energy and motivation of the British ministers involved.

[355] TNA, PREM 13/1840 'Communiqué', 13 February 1967.

A long-term trade agreement

The concept of a long-term Anglo-Soviet trade agreement based on joint economic planning was soon causing serious mental indigestion within the Board of Trade. One official remarked that grappling with the concept 'is a little like Alice's game of croquet, with the additional complication that it is played in a fog'. The implications 'are so enormous that we cannot get to grips with them'.[356] No progress was made when the concept was discussed in London with Soviet trade minister, Nikolai Patolichev in April 1967. Nor were British and Soviet officials any more successful when they met in Moscow in June. It was becoming apparent that the Soviets had no interest in following through on Kosygin's proposal. They argued that there was no need for a long-term protocol as the five-year agreements already provided a sufficient basis to develop future trade. Furthermore, despite the optimism expressed by the Soviet premier, there were few concrete prospects for an expansion of British exports.[357] As summed up by an official, Peter Hayman, 'we seem to be almost back to the pre-Kosygin visit situation'.[358]

The failure to make progress reflected shortcomings on both sides, coupled with the nebulous nature of Kosygin's concept. It became clear that the proposal was a personal hobby horse of the Soviet premier with no support from his subordinates. This in itself is an interesting reflection of the lack of coherence within the Soviet regime. After the commitment was made in London, the Soviet bureaucracy, in the words of a British diplomat, found a way to 'quietly shelve it'.[359] On the British side, there was a lack of creativity in seeking to exploit the opening. Although in its original form it lacked practicality, it nonetheless could have been the starting point for launching an amended concept.

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[356] TNA, FCO 28/429 Rothnie to MacMahon, 3 March 1967; MacMahon to Rothnie, 16 March 1967.
[357] TNA, FCO 28/430, 'Anglo-Soviet trade talks, June 1967, first draft of paper for CCP', 7 July 1967; Sutherland to Hayman, 11 July 1967.
[358] TNA, FCO 28/430, Comment on 'Anglo-Soviet trade talks, June 1967, first draft of paper for CCP', 7 July 1967; Sutherland to Hayman, 11 July 1967.
[359] TNA, FCO 28/1587, Ratford, Moscow, to Bellamy 17 September 1971.

Wilson's attempt to utilise a close relationship with the Soviet leadership to improve trade levels proved ineffective. Anglo-Soviet trade remained stuck in a seemingly unchangeable pattern. There was a peak in exports to £100m in 1968, but this reflected a general increase in Soviet purchases from the West, rather than any specific British success. After this, despite continuing efforts by officials in both London and Moscow, exports remained relatively constant, and never exceeded 1.6% of total UK exports.[360]

Technology exchanges

In contrast to the deadlock on trade, there was rapid progress in establishing the wide range of Anglo-Soviet technological interactions foreshadowed during Kosygin's visit. This in part derived from determined British leadership, but also reflected a greater degree of Soviet interest.

The newly created Ministry of Technology had made an uncertain start, but it rose in prominence when the charismatic Tony Wedgwood-Benn was appointed as the secretary of state in July 1966. Benn was young, ambitious, politically and socially adept, and precociously intelligent. He had been a member of Wilson's 'kitchen cabinet' during the election campaigns, often writing key passages of his speeches. While he had lost some of his intimacy with No. 10, he retained ready access to Wilson. He also had an ear sensitively attuned to the political rivalries within the Labour party and consistently polled well in the elections to the National Executive Committee.[361]

Benn had a keen interest in establishing technological relations with the Soviet Union, and this was at least in part ideologically motivated. Benn's political orientation was to the anti-American, pro-Soviet tendency among the Labour Party. For example, while still in opposition, he observed in his diary in April 1964, after a lunch with the Soviet ambassador:

[360] TNA, FCO 28/237, ' Trade Brief'.
[361] Benn's diaries give a revealing, if self serving, insight into his political life, Tony Benn, *Out of the Wilderness: Diaries 1963-7* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

> The truth is that the Communist-anti-Communist gulf in the world socialist movement has shrunk to practically nothing and we discussed the way in which it should be bridged. The economic case for socialist planning in the West, together with the slow development of inter Party democracy in Russia are paving the way for socialist co-operation[362]

Beside the ideological motivation, Benn used the promotion of technical cooperation with the Soviets to enhance his personal political profile. Throughout the period of negotiations with the Soviet authorities, he was determined to play the leading role and to minimise the contributions of other ministers.

The concept of structured Anglo-Soviet technological exchanges did however pose problems for the ongoing Western accord on trade with the Soviet Union. In 1949, fifteen Western nations had agreed to restrict the supply of goods and materials that might enhance the military capability of the communist bloc. This embargo was still in place in the 1960s, administered by the Committee for Exports to Communist Countries (COCOM).[363] The British, together with other Western European governments, regarded the lists of prohibited goods as too broadly drawn, and as such forming unnecessary barriers to trade. In contrast, the Americans took a harder line, maintaining a strategic embargo that was in fact tighter than the COCOM lists.[364] The approach agreed with Kosygin to share technological developments with the Soviet Union was almost bound to lead to friction with the Americans. It was a confrontation that Benn, with his left-wing bias, embraced enthusiastically.

The minister of technology was swift to follow up on the opening created by the discussions with Kosygin. Two months later he was in Moscow for meetings with Vladimir Kirillin, the head of the State Committee for Science and Technology (SCST). The two ministers sketched out an ambitious agenda for Anglo-Soviet cooperation. This

[362] Benn, *Out of the Wilderness*, p. 105.
[363] TNA, CAB 148/38, 'Future of COCOM', OPD(68)51, 10 July 1968.
[364] TNA, FO 371/177676, Barnes to Wilson, 23 January 1964.

spanned the spectrum of activity from long-term research to shorter-term industrial collaboration. There was even a commitment to joint economic planning to identify 'growth points in industry that would serve as a basis for an intensified exchange of products and industrial processes'. The sweeping scale of these proposals caused some nervousness when reported to London. Yet after an exchange of telegrams, Benn was given the go-ahead to sign a memorandum of understanding with Kirillin.[365]

Benn would have realised that these sweeping proposals would cause disquiet among his Cabinet colleagues. He was clearly straying into the jurisdictions of both the DEA and the Board of Trade. Further, such unprecedented degree of collaboration with the Soviets was bound to unsettle relations with the American administration. On his return, Benn plunged into battle by sending Wilson a memo pushing forward his ideas.[366] The foreign secretary, George Brown, reacted by seeking to constrain this activity within an overall policy framework for Anglo-Soviet relations. He noted that the Soviet government had 'been dragging their feet' on many of the initiatives agreed during Kosygin's visit. If they were keen on a technology agreement then we 'might be able to use this to get progress on other things we want'.[367]

There was then an intricate and extended inter-departmental argument within Whitehall, which was eventually settled in Benn's favour.[368] Following further negotiations with the Soviets, a final agreement on technological cooperation was signed during a visit by Kirillin to London in January 1968. In contradiction of long-established protocol, Benn insisted that the agreement be signed in the Ministry of Technology and not the Foreign Office. As he noted in his diary, he 'regarded this as a big scoop because I wanted to develop our own foreign policy and not find that we were just an agent of the Foreign Office'.[369]

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[365] TNA, PREM 13/1840, telegram 595, Moscow to Foreign Office, 18 April 1967; Mullet to Wilson, 19 April 1967; telegram 883, Foreign Office to Moscow, 20 April 1967.
[366] TNA, PREM 13/1840, Benn to Wilson, 9 May 1967.
[367] TNA, PREM 13/1840, Brown to Wilson, 18 May 1967.
[368] TNA, PREM 13/1840, Halls to Wilson, 15 June 1967; Stewart to Wilson, 19 June 1967; Trend to Wilson, 24 June 1967. FCO 28/487, 'Notes of a Meeting, Anglo-Soviet Collaboration', 8 June 1967. FCO 28/371, Benn to Kirillin, 8 August 1967.
[369] Benn, *Office Without Power* p. 21.

Not surprisingly, the agreement caused something of a backlash from the Americans. They expressed their concern that the British government had 'walked into quick sand'. Perhaps inadvertently, British collaborators would end up disclosing technology that the Americans regarded as classified and dangerous to their security. This in turn could make American officials 'careful over what they will reveal to us'.[370] Later in the year, the Americans showed their teeth by blocking the sale of computers to the Soviet Union. Benn sent one of his own officials to Washington to try to resolve the issue, but the reception was 'icy cold'.[371] If technological cooperation with the Soviet Union was to prosper, then Benn would have to contend with continuing American opposition.

The Anglo-Soviet agreement led to a flourishing set of exchanges between British and Soviet technologists. Initially eight Anglo-Soviet working groups were established, and a further seven were set up following Benn's visit to Moscow in May 1969.[372]

In one sense, the programme was a success. It fulfilled the British political goal of intensifying contacts with Soviet technologists as a route to influencing their ideological orientation. However it did not meet its economic objectives. There was little evidence that the contacts made in the working groups led to major contracts for participating British companies. Still less did it signal the advent of the 'socialist co-operation' between the communist and non-communist world foreseen by Benn. British companies also paid a heavy price both in terms of opportunity cost and the loss of proprietary information. Writing in 1972, the ambassador in Moscow, John Killick, concluded that it was 'plain that in terms of know-how we are giving away very much for very little at the expense of the time, effort and money of senior British industrialists'.[373]

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[370] TNA, FCO 28/372, Dean to Greenhill, 2 March and 28 March 1968.
[371] Benn, *Office Without Power*, pp. 82, 89 and 95; TNA, CAB 148/35, OPD(68)13 meeting, 12 July 1968, items 3 and 4; CAB 148/38, 'Future of COCOM', OPD(68)51, 10 July 1968.
[372] TNA, FCO 28/820, Brief STT(69)4, 'Technological Collaboration with the Soviet Union'.
[373] TNA, FCO 28/2092, Killick to Bullard, 20 September 1972.

Conclusions

The extended interactions on economic issues reflect on some of the research questions of this study. This was one area in which the Labour government adopted a different ideological position from their Conservative predecessors. It was also a topic on which Benn and his officials in the Ministry of Technology challenged the Foreign Office's direction of the interface with the Soviets. The record also indicates that despite the protestations of the participants, there was in reality very little interaction between the political and economic aspects of the relationship. Trade followed the same stagnant pattern established under the Conservatives. It neither increased when the Anglo-Soviet political relationship was active, nor decline when the relationship was more strained.

Wilson's government pushed hard to build an overall political relationship with the new Soviet regime, and used this to promote both trade and technological interactions. When Kosygin countered by proposing the exploration of a longer-term interactive economic relationship, Wilson and his colleagues were ready to reciprocate. In part, this reflected Labour's political orientation. A commitment to top-down economic planning coupled with the deployment of technology provided an ideological and administrative basis for responding to the Soviet overtures. This was reinforced by an exaggerated respect for Soviet economic and technological competence. At least in the case of Tony Benn, there was also an inclination to see the potential for some softening in the East-West economic divide. He considered that technological cooperation was 'in fact a new and important area in economic relations'. It would 'allow economic plans of each to take account of supplies from the other'.[374] There can be no certainty on how a Conservative government would have responded to Khrushchev's successors. It does, however, seem reasonably certain that they would have taken a more sceptical stance to Kosygin's overtures.

In the end, the interactions brought few practical results. In large part, this reflected the basic incompatibility of two very different economic systems: one an autarkic command

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[374] TNA, FCO 28/852, Manley to Graham, 8 October 1969.

economy, the other operating in the capitalist free market. Kosygin had put forward a pipedream of some form of integrated economic planning spanning the two countries that could be the basis of future trade. British officials could not translate this into a workable proposition. What is more, it also appears to have enjoyed little support among the Soviet bureaucracy.

There was more progress on technological exchanges, with Benn's enthusiasm being matched by an equally accommodating Soviet response. Yet the two governments had very different goals. The British saw them as a precursor to lucrative contracts, the Soviets as a means of industrial espionage. The Soviet sponsoring organisation, the State Committee for Science and Technology, was thoroughly penetrated by the KGB.[375] The technological exchanges were, in reality, a quasi-legitimate extension of the covert Soviet intelligence gathering on British technology. [376] It is not going too far to say that Benn was duped by Kirillin.

In terms of the internal dynamics within the British government, there was a marked difference in the areas of trade and technology. Diplomats and officials from the Board of Trade worked relatively smoothly together, each contributing their specific expertise to the common goal of improving export levels. This was probably facilitated by the heavy emphasis on trade promotion in the definition of the Foreign Office's role. This had featured in the Plowden (1963) and Duncan (1969) reviews, and senior diplomats would have been fully aware of the importance of cooperating with their Board of Trade colleagues.[377] Conversely, there are no indications that trade ministers or officials were eager to stray from their specialism and seek to influence the overall policy on Anglo-

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[375] The SCST's principle representative in London, Akimov, was among the agents expelled in 1971, DBPO III,I, document 84, Killick to Crawford, 25 November 1971, pp. 422-5. John Killick, the ambassador in Moscow, observed in 1972 that it 'goes without saying' that the SCST includes a 'heavy measure of KGB participation and activity', TNA, FCO 28/2092, Killick to Nullard, 20 September 1972.
[376] For an over-view of Soviet intelligence activities see Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1999), especially pp. 518-69: details of Soviet intelligence activities in Britain in this period is given in TNA, PREM 15/1935, 'Expulsion of Soviet Officials from the UK: For Unattributable Use', 24 September 1971.
[377] John W. Young, *Twentieth Century Diplomacy*, pp. 31-58.

Soviet relations. The one understandable exception was a tendency to complain that political tensions were undermining trade prospects.

There was a very different pattern in the technology area. Tony Benn was determined to take the lead in interactions with the Soviets, and was following an agenda that was more pro-Soviet and anti-American than that of either George Brown or Michael Stewart. He was prepared to fight intra-Whitehall battles to get his way, using his relationship with Wilson as an effective lever. It was due to his initiative that the interface between the British and Soviet business communities was greatly expanded. He laid the groundwork for a potentially significant shift in Britain's economic orientation within the established Cold War framework. That this did not materialise reflected more the Soviet determination to retain their autarkic model, than any British reluctance. It demonstrated that a determined minister with an essentially domestic portfolio could have a significant impact on British foreign policy.

Overall, the Wilson government, with Benn very much to the fore, made a determined effort to develop the economic relations with the Soviet Union. This was based on the familiar hope of expanding British exports. In dialogue with Kosygin, they established some new approaches leading to a wider set of Anglo-Soviet interactions. Yet, in the final analysis, the agenda was controlled by the Soviets, whose only interest was to acquire British technology at minimum cost. They did not allow wider political issues to interfere with this goal, and it was a goal that brought only peripheral benefits to the British economy.

The case of Gerald Brooke

Periodically, tensions were created between the two governments by the activities of individuals. These mainly concerned Soviet citizens who defected while in Britain, and KGB harassment of British visitors to the Soviet Union. These incidents caused flurries of antagonism. Yet these bouts of diplomatic indigestion were relatively short-lived,

with both sides accepting that such incidents were an ongoing, if irritating, component of the relationship.

The one marked exception was the case of Gerald Brooke, a young British lecturer in Russian from Holborn College in London. In April 1965, Brooke was arrested by the KGB whilst leading a group of student-teachers in Moscow. He was subsequently found guilty of passing propaganda material to Soviet dissidents and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. Over the next four years, this case gradually acquired a quite disproportionate degree of prominence and threatened to disrupt the overall Anglo-Soviet relationship. This was only avoided by a humiliating British climbdown in the face of Soviet pressure.

This section will describe how the Brooke case acquired such unusual potency in disturbing the relationship between the two governments, and assesses the factors that forced the British volte-face. This reveals how domestic political considerations intertwined with foreign policy objectives in determining both British and Soviet attitudes. It also reveals the high priority that the Labour government gave to the maintenance of the relationship: a priority that was higher than that subsequently demonstrated by their Conservative successors.[378]

Brooke's arrest and imprisonment

During their visit to Moscow, Gerald Brooke and his wife Barbara twice visited a Russian couple in their flat. During the second visit, KGB agents burst in and caught the Russians extracting leaflets and other material from the padded cover of a photograph album. This had been given to them by Brooke. The two Britons were arrested and taken

[378] This section is drawn from the author's article prepared during the course of this study, Roger H. Platt, 'The Soviet Imprisonment of Gerald Brooke and Subsequent Exchange for the Krogers, 1965-1969', *Contemporary British History*, 24 (2010), 173-91.

to the Lubyanka. Barbara Brooke was released after interrogation, but her husband was kept in custody.[379]

Setting a pattern that was to be followed throughout the case, there was immediate press and parliamentary interest in Britain. Brooke was seen as an innocent victim and there were calls for the government to secure his release. His case was enthusiastically taken up in Parliament by his constituency member, the future prime minister Margaret Thatcher. She urged the government to impress upon the Soviet authorities 'how strongly we in this House and this country feel' about the lecturer being imprisoned without access to the British consul, an act which she argued went against the 'rights of natural justice'.[380]

The initial Foreign Office assessment confirmed that Brooke was 'not engaged in intelligence work'.[381] Yet neither was he entirely innocent. MI5 soon discovered that Brooke had become involved with a Russian émigré body, Narodnyj Trudovoj Soyuz (NTS) - the Popular Labour Union. As summarised by MI5, the main activities of NTS were 'propaganda against the Soviet Union and in clandestine operations behind the Iron Curtain'. In the past, NTS had also had connections with the British intelligence services, although these had been discontinued in 1956 due to KGB penetration.[382] The material given by Brooke to the Russian couple had been supplied by NTS. He had knowingly acted as a courier for Russian dissidents and was therefore guilty of subversive activities under Soviet law. In the words of Howard Smith, head of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, '[t]o this extent therefore the Russians are playing it straight'.[383]

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[379] TNA, FO 371/182809, telegram 822, Moscow to Foreign Office, 26 April 1965; Cartledge to Youde, 30 April 1965.
[380] TNA, FO 371/182809, telegram 1480, Foreign Office to Moscow, 30 April 1965; extract from *Hansard*, 30 April 1965; Youde to Trevelyan, 6 May 1965; and Parliamentary Question by Henry Brooke MP, 10 May 1965; FO 371/182810, Parliamentary Question by Gilbert Landon MP, 14 June 1965 and by Margaret Thatcher MP, 30 June 1965.
[381] TNA, FO 371/182809, Greenhill to Stewart, 29 April 1965.
[382] TNA, FO 371/182810, telegram 1573, Foreign Office to Moscow, 6 May 1965; Youde to Trevelyan, 6 May 1965; Smith to Trevelyan, 20 May 1965; 'The N.T.S. (Narodnyj Trudovoj Soyuz)', undated; Smith to Greenhill, 26 May 1965.
[383] TNA, FO 371/182810, Smith to Trevelyan, 20 May 1965.

Almost immediately, the Soviets began hinting that they would consider an exchange of Brooke for two Soviet agents, Helen and Peter Kroger, who were imprisoned in Britain.[384] These were a married American couple who had received sentences of 20 years after their arrest in 1961 in connection with the Portland spy case. In fact, they had a long history as Soviet agents. Their real names were Morris and Lona Cohen and in the 1940s they had been involved in the stealing of information on the atomic bomb project.[385] Foreign Office officials rejected the idea of an exchange out of hand. The Krogers were 'big fish caught in a serious espionage case' and were 'in no way comparable with Mr Brooke'. And it was decided not to respond to the Soviet hints that a deal to free the lecturer might be possible.[386]

With no response from the British government, Brooke was brought to trial on 22 July 1965. In a staging reminiscent of Stalin's show trials, it was held in a Moscow theatre with an audience of 600, and in front of TV and film cameras. The lecturer was charged with anti-Soviet subversive activities. He pleaded guilty to all charges and was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. As might be expected, the trial received headline treatment in the British press, including evocative pictures of a stern-faced Brooke seated in the dock flanked by Soviet guards.[387]

Even at this early stage, the Soviet and British positions over Brooke were becoming clear. In British eyes, he was at worst a 'foolish young man' who had got himself in trouble with the Soviet authorities. Any approaches to obtain his freedom should therefore be part of the normal bilateral relationship between the two governments. There could be no question of undertaking the kind of exchange that might be considered in the case of a bona fide intelligence agent. Not surprisingly, the Soviets took a different perspective. Brooke had been involved with an organisation overtly

[384] TNA, FO 371/182810, telegram 1091, Moscow to Foreign Office, 28 May 1965; telegram 1146, Moscow to Foreign Office, 5 June 1965; Smith to Greenhill, 8 June 1965.
[385] Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, pp. 173-4, 193-4, and 535-6.
[386] TNA, FO 371/182810, Smith to Greenhill, 8 June 1965.
[387] *Daily Mirror*, 23 and 24 July 1965; TNA, FO 371/182811, telegrams 1512, Moscow to Foreign Office, 22 July 1965 and telegram 1542, 23 July 1965.

hostile to the Soviet Union and consequently was part of the intelligence 'game'. He was therefore a legitimate subject for an exchange for Soviet agents, which was an accepted process in this shady world. It was this difference in perception that entwined Anglo-Soviet diplomatic and intelligence interactions and caused the great difficulties in resolving the case.

Appeals for clemency and rejection of an exchange, 1966-8

During 1966-8, as Harold Wilson established his political dialogue with the Soviet leadership, parliamentary and media interest in Brooke continued. Wilson and other British ministers raised the case whenever they held discussions with their Soviet counterparts. They did not attempt to question the legitimacy of the lecturer's conviction under Soviet law. Rather, ministers appealed for clemency. In this appeal, they stressed how damaging the treatment of the lecturer was for the image of the Soviet government in Britain. And they indicated how much a gesture of clemency would be appreciated by the British public.[388] The Soviet response was uncompromising, making it increasingly explicit that Brooke would only be freed in exchange for the Krogers.

In September 1965, the Soviets had followed up their private hints that Brooke could be exchanged by placing this prospect in the public domain. Almost certainly on the basis of Soviet-inspired leaks, on 21 September the *Daily Mirror* ran a front-page story under the headline 'Brooke for Red Spies Swap Deal', and *The Times* carried a similar report the following day.[389] The British public were therefore aware of this potential route to procuring the lecture's freedom when Wilson made his first visit to Moscow in February 1966. During the visit Wilson made an appeal to Kosygin for clemency. While the Soviet premier did not respond directly, later in the day a formal reply was given to the British ambassador. This argued that Brooke had in fact been treated leniently. His behaviour could have warranted more serious charges and a sentence of up to fifteen

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[388] TNA, FO 371/182765, 'Meeting of Secretary of State with Mr Gromyko: Mr Brooke', 1 October 1965.
[389] *Daily Mirror*, 21 Sept. 1965 and *The Times*, 22 September. 1965; TNA, FCO 28/835, MacDonald to Gwynn, 1 September 1965.

years' imprisonment or even death. A pardon for Brooke could only be considered 'in the event of the British authorities showing reciprocal humanity towards the Krogers'.[390]

Speaking at Heathrow airport on his return, Harold Wilson delivered a public rejection of this proposition. An exchange was unacceptable as the Krogers' crimes were 'out of all relations to his [Brooke's]'. It 'would expose British tourists to arrest on trumped-up charges whenever we had a Russian spy in prison'.[391] The case had now become entwined at the highest level in the dialogue between two governments, with the British public, media and parliament eager spectators to the tug-of-war.

During the next two years, British ministers continued to appeal for clemency whenever they met the Soviet leaders. Yet the unwavering Soviet response was that an exchange for the Krogers was the only way to secure the lecturer's release. Perhaps the best opportunity to influence Soviet attitudes was during the visit of Kosygin to Britain in February 1967. Media interest in the case was high and a conciliatory gesture by the Soviet premier would have generated a wave of favourable publicity, fitting admirably with his overall agenda for the visit. Yet none was forthcoming. When asked about the case in a press conference, Kosygin ducked the issue, saying that he could not interfere in court decisions.[392] Harold Wilson was no more successful when he raised the case in private. Kosygin told him that, 'even if the Prime Minister gripped him by the throat he could not say anything new'.[393]

The following year, during a visit to Moscow, the foreign secretary, George Brown, went some way to meeting Soviet demands. This was, however, a personal intervention that arose when, in a typical inebriated state, he wandered off his brief. He hinted to Gromyko that if the Soviets were to release Brooke unilaterally, then he would 'see what

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[390] TNA, FO 371/188973, telegrams 438 and 439, Moscow to Foreign Office, 23 February 1966.
[391] TNA, FO 371/188973, telegram 701, Foreign Office to Moscow, 25 February 1966; FO 371/188974, telegram 586, Moscow to Foreign Office, 16 March 1966; *Guardian* 25 February 1966.
[392] TNA, FCO 28/466, Article from the *Daily Mail*, 10 February 1967.
[393] TNA, PREM 13/1840, 'Fifth Formal Meeting, 10 February 1967'.

he could do about the Krogers'.[394] This inadvertent intervention also came to nothing. The Soviets did not follow up on Brown's input, leaving the British free to close the loophole opened by the foreign secretary's intemperate remarks. This was done in October 1967, with a public statement making it 'plain beyond doubt that an exchange will not take place'.[395]

Harold Wilson's visit to Moscow in January 1968 provided a further opportunity to address the Brooke case face to face with the Soviet leaders. During the visit, Wilson had a long discussion on the issue with the Soviet head of state, Nikolai Podgorny. His approach was coloured by the fact that he had only just learned about the true nature of NTS.[396] He informed Podgorny that now he understood the facts about 'the organisation which had made use of this misguided young man', he 'could more readily understand the indignation and concern of the Soviet government'. Wilson once again appealed for clemency, stressing the strength of feeling in Britain on the issue. It was damaging the image of the Soviet Government and 'was still darkening and indeed to some extent poisoning Anglo-Soviet relations'. But Wilson had no success in producing a more lenient Soviet attitude. Podgorny complained about the prominence given to the case in Britain. He had the impression from the British press that 'the purpose of the Prime Minister's visit was not to improve bilateral relations or to discuss questions of international importance or of mutual interest, but solely to bring about the release of Brooke'.[397]

During this period, the Soviets fostered media stories of the harsh conditions of Brooke's imprisonment and the possibility of him receiving an extended sentence. This was done through planting material with journalists and by the release of other prisoners. For example in October 1967, the *People* splashed a report by a recently released fellow prisoner, Alexander Dines. This portrayed the lecturer spending long days carving chess

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[394] Denis Greenhill, *More by Accident* (York: Wilton, 1992), p. 128; TNA, FCO 28/467, Greenhill to Gore-Booth, 30 May 1967.
[395] TNA, FCO 28/468, telegram 2977, Foreign Office to Moscow, 20 October 1967; FCO 28/469, telegram 3043, Foreign Office to Moscow, 27 October 1967.
[396] TNA, FCO 28/471, Pallister to Greenhill, 21 February 1968.
[397] DBPO III,I, document 3, 'Record of meeting between Mr Wilson and President Podgorny in the Kremlin at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 24 January 1968', pp. 14-22.

men in an effort to fulfil high work quotas, and enduring an inadequate diet. [398] In November, a British seaman, John Weatherly, was prematurely released from an eighteen-month sentence for brawling in Leningrad. In what was seen by British officials as a deliberate Soviet ploy, he had met Brooke before his release. Weatherly's inaccurate report that Brooke was suffering from tuberculosis made headlines.[399] An article in *Izvestia* was used to raise the possibility that Brooke could yet face more serious charges. The article warned 'those displeased with the humanity shown by the Soviet organs to Brooke' to be careful about defending 'an agent'. This could achieve only one thing: 'Brooke would get his full deserts as a spy' with a possible increase in sentence of up to 15 years.[400] These stories were picked up in the British press, with Foreign Office officials deducing that there had been KGB briefing.[401] The Soviets seemed to believe that this publicity would lead to public pressure on the British government to secure the lecturer's release.

Despite the Soviet manipulation, there was general media and parliamentary support for the government's policy. It was accepted that ministers were making every effort to secure the lecturer's release. And there was little appetite for yielding to Soviet demands for an exchange for the Krogers. A *Guardian* leader in March 1966 was typical of the reaction. It argued that to 'accept an exchange would be to yield to blackmail' and that this could be repeated.[402] Brooke's unfortunate position was seen as evidence of the cruel and oppressive nature of the Soviet regime, rather than of British government inertia. There were some calls for the curtailment of cultural and other relations. But overall there was a consensus that bilateral relations with the Soviet government should continue, despite the inhumane treatment of the lecturer.

[398] TNA, FCO 28/469, story in the *People*, 29 October 1967.
[399] *Guardian*, 4 November 1967; TNA, FCO 28/469, Smith to Hayman, 8 November 1967.
[400] TNA, FCO 28/470, telegram 2173, Moscow to Foreign Office, 28 December 1967.
[401] TNA, FCO 28/835, Jenkins to Giffard, 4 March 1969.
[402] *Guardian*, 25 April 1966.

The endgame, January – July 1969

The deadlock over Brooke was broken in the first half of 1969. The lecturer was due to complete his sentence in April 1970 and the Soviet government risked losing their bargaining chip. To avoid conceding their advantage, they began the process of bringing new charges of espionage. When confronted with the reality of Brooke's sentence being extended, British resolve collapsed and an exchange for the Krogers was agreed.

The Soviets undertook a sustained process to coerce their British counterparts into accepting an exchange. At each stage, the threat to Brooke was made ever more explicit. Yet this was accompanied by indications that the Soviet government would display some flexibility in making the release of the Krogers more palatable to British sensitivities. The first approach was made informally in Moscow in February 1969. A Soviet official, Sukhodriev, indicated that Brooke would shortly be accused of espionage and anti-Soviet behaviour. He then exhorted the British government to 'show some inventiveness' in finding 'some mutually acceptable solution'.[403]

Even with this specific threat of an extended sentence, the opinion of the Soviet experts in the Foreign Office was that the government should resist an exchange. The head of the Eastern Europe and Soviet department, Sydney Giffard, recommended that the government should 'stand firm, on the basis of no deal'. Any exchange would be a victory for the KGB. It would allow them to demonstrate to their agents in Britain that if they were caught, 'they will always be looked after well, and that they need not fear long captivity'. His superior, Peter Hayman, 'strongly endorse[d] this recommendation' and the head of MI5 took the same view.[404]

Despite these firm positions, the permanent under-secretary, Denis Greenhill, took a different view. He expressed his horror at the thought of Brooke serving an extended

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[403] TNA, FCO 28/835, Giffard to Hayman, 12 February 1969; telegrams 179 and 180, Moscow to FCO, 28 February 1969; telegram 183, Moscow to FCO, 1 March 1969.

[404] TNA, FCO 28/835, Giffard to Hayman. 3 March 1969, Hayman comment 5 March 1969; FCO 28/835, Note of a Meeting between Sir Denis Greenhill and Sir Martin Furnival-Jones, 3 March 1969.

sentence. And he judged that a retrial of the lecturer would 'cause such a storm here that our relations with the U.S.S.R. would go back to zero'. If Brooke was given another sentence, then Greenhill argued that 'we should ... consider very carefully an exchange'.[405] Greenhill makes clear in his memoirs that he took the initiative to persuade Michael Stewart, now restored as foreign secretary, to give serious consideration to the Soviet proposition.[406]

On 20 March 1969, Greenhill revealed this more accommodating line obliquely to the Soviet ambassador, Mikhail Smirnovsky.[407] The Soviet response was to increase the pressure. The following month, Sukhodriev stated that Brooke had now been formally charged with espionage, with the clear implication that he would have his sentence extended. However, he also indicated that 'even at this eleventh hour' some solution might be possible based on 'previous proposals'.[408]

The fate of Brooke continued to feature prominently in the press, again probably reflecting Soviet connivance. On 31 March, the *Daily Mail* ran a front-page spread giving the 'first authentic and detailed account of the prison life of Gerald Brooke'. The report was based on the account of three German students who had been held in the same camp as Brooke. The students claimed that the KGB was building a 'framed dossier' to allow Brooke to be tried as a spy. This was intended to raise the lecturer's status to that of a 'fully-fledged spy' so that he would be a more suitable subject for an exchange with the Krogers.[409] One of the students appeared on British television urging the government to accept the Soviet proposal. He argued that 'Gerald has suffered enough' and for 'humanitarian reasons, they should exchange'.[410]

The more specific Soviet threats convinced Stewart that he should seek some form of exchange to secure Brooke's release. He was stoutly opposed by the home secretary, Jim

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[405] TNA, FCO 28/835, Giffard to Hayman, 3 March 1969, Greenhill comment 5 March 1969
[406] Greenhill, *More by Accident*, pp. 127-9.
[407] TNA, FCO 28/836, Greenhill to Stewart, 'Brooke', 20 March 1969.
[408] TNA, PREM 13/2923 telegrams 432 and 433, Moscow to FCO, 28 April 1969.
[409] TNA, FCO 28/836 extracts from *Daily Mail* of 31 March, 1 April, and 2 April 1979.
[410] TNA, FCO 28/836 extract from *The Times*, 3 April 1969.

Callaghan. The two ministers argued their case in a meeting with Harold Wilson. Stewart put forward a proposal developed by Greenhill that an offer should be made to free the Krogers a 'few months' after the release of Brooke. Callaghan objected. He argued that, despite the sophistry of the proposition, the Soviet government and the British public would see it as an exchange and not two separate events. Such an arrangement was clearly favoured the Soviets. A compromise was agreed. The Soviet government would be told that if Brooke was released as planned in 1970, then the British government was prepared to 'consider' an early release of the Krogers. There was, however, no mention of a specific time interval between the releases.[411] Greenhill delivered this message to Smirnovsky the same afternoon.[412]

This was the start of a complex multi-stage negotiation. The Soviet response to the British offer once again combined an escalation of the threat to Brooke with some flexibility over the terms of an exchange. In Moscow, a Soviet official indicated that the lecturer would be tried in a matter of months and could expect a sentence of between seven and fifteen years.[413] Three days later, on 9 May 1969, Smirnovsky suggested to Greenhill that it might be possible for Brooke to be given a pardon based on a commitment that the Krogers would be subsequently released. This would, however, depend on the extent of the delay between the two releases. He suggested that the Soviet government would accept a one-to-two-month interval.[414]

Jim Callaghan was still reluctant to concede an early release of the Krogers and much intra-governmental diplomacy was required to agree a British response to the Soviet proposition.[415] To appease the home secretary, it was decided that Greenhill would offer a seven-month delay between the pardoning of Brooke and subsequent release of the Krogers.[416] On 30 May, Smirnovsky relayed the Soviet reply. This again escalated the

[411] TNA, PREM 13/2923, PS (Stewart) to Youde, 28 April 1969 and Gruffydd-Jones to Youde, 29 April 1969.
[412] TNA, FCO 73/130, Greenhill to Stewart, 29 April 1969.
[413] TNA, PREM 13/2923, telegram 465, Moscow to FCO, 5 May 1969.
[414] TNA, FCO 73/130, Greenhill to Stewart, 9 May 1969.
[415] TNA, FCO 73/130, Greenhill to Stewart, 11 May 1969; PREM 13/2923, Callaghan to Stewart, 15 May 1969.
[416] TNA, FCO 73/130, Greenhill to Stewart, 'Meeting with Soviet Ambassador', 19 May 1969.

threat to Brooke by indicating that his new trial would begin in just four to five weeks. This was however also accompanied by a Soviet concession in that they suggested that the delay between the releases could be extended to three months.[417]

Once again, Michael Stewart and Jim Callaghan disagreed on how to respond to this latest Soviet offer. Callaghan argued that the British government should stick to its proposal, and accept the risk of a retrial and longer sentence for Brooke. Stewart was in favour of accepting the Soviet proposition in order to 'bring this situation to an end as quickly as we can'. Finally, Callaghan conceded that he would accept a three-month gap, if it was considered 'necessary on grounds of foreign policy as well as on humanitarian grounds'.[418]

On 26 June, the issue was discussed in Cabinet. Stewart advanced the case for accepting the latest Soviet proposal. His argument had two main strands. Firstly there was the humanitarian consideration that Brooke was in poor health and could not cope with an extension to his prison term. The foreign secretary also contended that if the government refused an exchange, then they would be forced to take retaliatory action if the lecturer's prison sentence was extended. Such retaliation would have an adverse effect on Anglo-Soviet relations 'when it was important for us to be able to play a full and effective part in the dialogue between East and West'. There was by no means unanimous support from his Cabinet colleagues. Some made the self-evident point that the government was yielding to blackmail: 'If the Soviets could recover two valuable agents in exchange for a British subject who had committed no real offence they would score, and be seen to have scored, a notable success'. But there was also sympathy for the foreign secretary's difficult dilemma. Harold Wilson summed up by concluding that the majority view seemed to favour accepting Stewart's proposal, and the Cabinet agreed that the Soviet offer would be accepted. A week later, this decision was communicated to an official

[417] TNA, PREM 13/2923, telegram 456, FCO to Moscow, 30 May 1969; the final agreement also included some 'makeweights'. These were the early release of two Britons imprisoned in the Soviet Union for drug smuggling, and the settlement of cases in which Soviet and British citizens were seeking permission to marry.
[418] TNA, PREM 13/2923, Allen to Greenhill, 6 June 1969; Stewart to Callaghan, 10 June 1969; Youde to Wilson, 13 June 1969; Trend to Wilson, 25 June 1969.

from the Soviet embassy and the final details were hammered out over the next four weeks.[419]

Just before midday on 24 July 1969, four years and three months after his arrest, Gerald Brooke's flight from Moscow touched down at Heathrow airport.[420] Three months later, the Krogers departed on a flight to Warsaw. Greenhill later admitted that 'the photograph of a defiant Mrs Kroger' on the steps to the aeroplane 'made me wonder, for a few moments, whether we had let our hearts run away with our heads'.[421]

Conclusions

There is little doubt that the resolution of the Brooke case was a significant gain for the Soviet Union. The British government had expressed forcibly and often their determination not to release the Krogers. Ruthless pressure by the Soviet authorities had forced them into a humiliating climbdown. Why had the case reached such a degree of prominence, and why had it ended in such a supine British surrender?

The two contending governments had very different perceptions of Brooke's activities which determined their attitudes to the case. In British eyes, he was at worst foolish and misguided. The government believed that the KGB was holding the lecturer as an innocent hostage in order to procure the release of the Krogers. It was not prepared to compromise its counter-intelligence activities, or encourage further hostage taking, by agreeing to an exchange for the convicted Soviet spies. In contrast, the Soviets held that, due to his involvement with NTS, Brooke was tantamount to a British agent, and they were determined to utilise him to force the release of the Krogers. These two mutually incompatible positions almost guaranteed that the case would turn into in a high profile struggle.

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[419] DBPO III,I, document 34, Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, 26 June 1969, pp. 165-69; TNA, PREM 13/2923 'Note for the Record', 8 July 1969.
[420] TNA, FCO 28/840, telegram 774 Moscow to FCO, 24 July 1969.
[421] Greenhill, *More by Accident*, p. 129.

The Soviet victory in this tug-of war reflected the relative priority given to intelligence and diplomatic objectives within the two domestic decision-making systems. This was a period when the Soviet government was seeking a détente with the West. More specifically they were actively promoting a European security conference to gain recognition of their post-war political and territory gains. This provided a clear diplomatic incentive to prevent the Brooke case disrupting the political relationship with their British counterparts. Nonetheless, the Soviets not only refused to respond to British pleas for clemency, they were prepared to escalate the case by the threatening to extend the lecture's sentence. Indeed Soviet tactics deliberately sought to inflame British public and parliamentary indignation as a means of pressuring the British government, even if this had an adverse effect on the overall Anglo-Soviet relationship.

The priority given by the Soviets to securing the release of the Krogers probably reflects the powerful position of the KGB within the Soviet regime. Officials within the Soviet foreign ministry gave indications to their British contacts that they were sensitive to the adverse impact of Brooke's imprisonment on Anglo-Soviet relations, and that they wished to resolve the case. However, British officials concluded that the continuing Soviet intransigence indicated that the KGB was in fact 'controlling this question'. Evidently, the Soviet security organisation had sufficient authority to pursue the Krogers' release, irrespective of any adverse consequences for the Anglo-Soviet political relationship.[422] The chairman of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, signalled the priority of the case when he conspicuously presented the Krogers with the Order of the Red Star on their return to Moscow.[423]

In contrast, Stewart and Greenhill were deeply concerned over the potential adverse impact of the Brooke case on the Anglo-Soviet relationship. They worried that the public, media and parliamentary reaction to an extended sentence would force them to rupture the relationship. This would then inhibit British leaders from playing a full role

[422] TNA, FCO 28/468, telegram 2977, Foreign Office to Moscow, 20 October 1967.
[423] Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive*, p. 536.

in the developing East-West détente. In the words of Greenhill,there was a 'strong possibility of a period ahead of East/West negotiations with the Americans in the lead' He considered it to be 'essential that we are not disqualified from taking an appropriate part in these negotiations by having this quarrel with the Russians, legitimate as it is, as an albatross around our necks'.[424] This position was disputed both by the Soviet experts in the Foreign Office and by Callaghan on behalf of MI5. But in contrast to the position adopted by the Soviets, the needs of foreign policy outweighed those of security. The British fear of disrupting the relationship compared with the Soviet indifference, coupled with a genuine humanitarian concern for the young lecturer, forced the volte-face over the Krogers.

A Conservative administration might have struck a different balance. When they came to power in 1970, prime minister Edward Heath and foreign secretary Alec Douglas-Home soon demonstrated that they placed less weight on maintaining a bilateral relationship with the Soviet leaders. They stayed relatively aloof from the moves toward détente and seemed to rather enjoy their reputation as the sceptics of the Atlantic Alliance. In 1971, they demonstrated decisively that they were prepared to sacrifice the bilateral relationship in order to address security issues by expelling 105 Soviet agents. It seems probable that they would not have given in to the Soviet blackmail over Brooke. Rather they would have been prepared to impose the restrictions on Anglo-Soviet interactions demanded by the domestic reaction to an extended sentence. The one caveat to this judgement is whether they would have been swayed by sympathy for the personal hardship being inflicted on the unfortunate lecturer.

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During their five and a half years in office, the Labour government's policy on the Anglo-Soviet relationship evolved significantly. In 1964-8, Harold Wilson had set the pace in developing a direct interaction with the Soviet leaders. The political dialogue on

[424] DBPO III,I, document 30, note 5, pp. 137-8.

Vietnam and nuclear sharing had been matched by the efforts to establish an enhanced economic relationship. Yet this direct political interface faded to be replaced by a focus on working within the Atlantic Alliance to promote momentum on European détente. In Part 3, we will consider how the incoming Conservative administration addressed the challenge of interacting with the Soviet superpower.

Part 3

The Conservative government that came to power in June 1970 took a singular approach to Anglo-Soviet relations. The prime minister Edward Heath and foreign secretary Alec Douglas-Home placed little value on direct contacts with the Soviet leadership, and eschewed the opportunity to engage in a high-level political dialogue. In September 1971, they expelled 105 intelligence agents, accepting the concomitant disruption of the relationship with relative equanimity. Although Douglas-Home subsequently sought to re-establish political interactions, this was motivated more by a concern with protecting British standing within the European Economic Community (EEC) than a desire to take any meaningful initiatives with the Soviet leaders. In any case, the approach was severely circumscribed. There would be no gestures of contrition for the expulsions and the foreign secretary continued to make public warnings on the expansionist dangers posed by the Soviet Union. Indeed, Douglas-Home assumed a self-appointed role as the 'Cassandra' of the Atlantic Alliance by maintaining a determinedly sceptical position on the prospects for establishing a meaningful and lasting accommodation with the Soviets.

This recalcitrant stance gradually forced the Soviet leaders to take the initiative to re-establish a high-level political dialogue. The catalyst was the role of British diplomats in the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). During the multilateral preparatory talks (MPT) from November 1972 to June 1973, the EEC established an effective caucus that coordinated the efforts of the Western and neutral delegations. These delegations pressed for Soviet concessions in return for formal recognition of the post-war political and geographical status quo in Europe. Somewhat surprisingly, their coherence forced the Soviets and their allies onto the defensive. They were obliged to concede that the agenda for the CSCE would include consideration of human rights, and the promotion of greater movement of people, ideas and information between East and West. The British delegation gradually established a leading role in the negotiations and it was clear that they would also be influential in the conference itself. It was almost certainly a desire to influence British policy on the CSCE that led the Soviet leadership

in 1973 to seek a high-level political engagement with their British counterparts. At first, they still sought a British gesture that would demonstrate some degree of repentance for the expulsions. When none was forthcoming, they meekly surrendered and invited Douglas-Home to Moscow on his own terms: as he expressed it 'no price was asked or paid'.

The stance taken by Heath and Douglas-Home towards the Soviets differed both from the pattern established by post-war British leaders and the approach being adopted by their major western allies. Traditionally British prime ministers had sought to interact directly with the Soviet leadership. When coupled with the 'special relationship' with the Americans, it provided the hope of mediating between the two superpowers and retaining at least some element of Britain's war-time status as one of the 'big three'. This policy had been followed by Churchill and Macmillan, and Harold Wilson sought to continue this approach with his active diplomacy in 1964-8. In contrast, Heath and Douglas-Home rejected both parts of this policy. Not only did they show little interest in a dialogue with the Soviet leaders, they also modified the relationship with the Americans. They did not seek a privileged position with the Nixon administration in determining Western strategy towards the Cold War. Rather, having secured British entry into the EEC, they aimed to build a politically integrated Community as the partners in the trans-Atlantic dialogue. It is unlikely that a British role as an intermediary between the two superpowers would have been viable in the 1970s, as Nixon and Kissinger pursued their direct interface with the Soviet leadership. Nonetheless, it is surprising that Heath and Douglas-Home made no attempt to maintain this long-standing element of British foreign policy.

The stance of the British leaders is also surprising in its contemporary context. The period 1970-4 saw the flowering of East-West détente. In Europe, this was led by the remarkable *Ostpolitik* initiative of Willy Brandt. In direct negotiations with the Soviets, Brandt conceded recognition of the division of Germany and its border with Poland. He hoped that this would lead to an amelioration of East-West tensions that might eventually allow reunification of Germany. The French government under Pompidou

also maintained an active relationship with the Soviets as a symbol of French exceptionalism, with Pompidou and Brezhnev exchanging state visits. These European initiatives were complemented by an accommodation between the two superpowers. After an uncertain start during the early years of Nixon's presidency, the American-Soviet dialogue gathered pace in 1971. And the following year, it burst into full life with the visit of President Nixon to Moscow and the return visit of Brezhnev to America one year later. There was also progress at the institutional level, as the Atlantic alliance gradually edged forward towards the opening of the CSCE process.

In contrast to their allies, Heath and Douglas-Home stayed on the sidelines of this gathering process of détente. They did not seek a high-level dialogue with the Soviet leadership, and also reversed Michael Stewart's policy of promoting agreement to a European security conference within the Atlantic Alliance. The only direct British involvement in the détente process, prior to the opening of the MPT, was the participation in the quadripartite talks on Berlin. Yet even here, the initiative was taken by Kissinger in promoting a solution via his infamous back channels.

While all the evidence is that Heath and his foreign secretary shared similar views, in general Douglas-Home took the lead in defining British policy towards the Soviet Union. His approach was based on a deep-seated view that the Soviet regime followed an ideologically motivated foreign policy that was fundamentally hostile to the capitalist West. He took particular exception to the Soviet concept of 'peaceful co-existence' that still allowed the continuation of the historical struggle for supremacy between the communist and capitalist worlds. Douglas-Home saw Soviet overtures on détente as a stratagem within this ongoing struggle, designed to undermine the Western capacity to contest Soviet ambitions. These views, and the resultant policies, were supported by his principal advisor on Soviet affairs, Thomas Brimelow, and the officials in London. They were, however, disputed by both the ambassadors in Moscow, Duncan Wilson and John Killick, who advocated a more accommodating stance towards the Soviets. Their advice was rejected and the Moscow embassy exercised only a marginal influence on the formation of the British policy.

Examination of Anglo-Soviet relations during this period demonstrates the influence of the political leadership on the formation of policy, despite the high structural rigidities of the Cold War. The underlying views of Douglas-Home shaped an approach at variance with previous polices and contemporary precedent. The record also reveals the role of officials in determining this policy. Diplomats based in London supported and reinforced the political preferences, while the objections from the Moscow embassy were ignored. Finally, in a wider context, the study demonstrates Britain's changing role within the bipolar post-war world. The growth of European détente and the accommodation between the superpowers left little scope for the traditional British role as an intermediary between the Soviet and American governments. Rather the British leaders sought to exert their influence within the multilateral forums of the Atlantic Alliance and EEC. And it was the multilateral negotiations of the CSCE that activated Soviet interest in resuming a bilateral dialogue.

The following three chapters provide an account of the diplomacy of the Heath government towards the Soviets in the period 1970-4. It opens in chapter 6 with an analysis of the British involvement in the multilateral processes of the Atlantic Alliance and the EEC as the CSCE became a reality. This is then complemented by an assessment of the development of the direct Anglo-Soviet relationship. Chapter 7 covers the initial political interactions leading to the rupture caused by the expulsion of the intelligence agents in September 1971. It also examines the interface on the 'bilateral issues' of trade, and cultural and technological exchanges. The following chapter considers the restoration of the relationship, essentially on British terms, and draws some conclusions for the complete period.

Chapter 6

The 'Cassandra' of the Atlantic Alliance, 1970-74

Immediately on becoming foreign secretary, Alec Douglas-Home crafted a more sceptical policy towards European détente. This guided the Conservative government's approach to the multilateral diplomacy on European security including the MPT in Helsinki and the opening phases of the CSCE in Geneva. This chapter gives an account of this change in policy and of the British role in the emerging of the CSCE process. It provides the context for the examination of the direct Anglo-Soviet relationship in the following two chapters.

A change of direction on European détente

During his period in office, Edward Heath's primary foreign policy focus was on securing British entry into the EEC and the development of the European project. He largely delegated the conduct of East-West relations to Douglas-Home.[425] However the foreign secretary maintained a strong relationship with the prime minister and enjoyed Heath's full support. Indeed, the evidence indicates that they shared common views on relations with the Soviet bloc. In his autobiography, Heath acknowledged that he 'was served loyally and supremely well' by his foreign secretary.[426] Nonetheless, it was Douglas-Home and the FCO officials, rather than the prime minister, who shaped the policy towards European détente.

Douglas-Home was a familiar and much-appreciated figure among the diplomatic community. In earlier Conservative administrations he had served as commonwealth secretary from 1955-60 and subsequently as foreign secretary from 1960-3. He had succeeded Harold Macmillan as prime minister in October 1963, holding the office for just a year before losing the 1964 election. As noted by his biographer, 'the warmth of

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[425] D. R. Thorpe, *Alec Douglas-Home* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996), p. 406.
[426] Edward Heath, *The Course of My Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998) p. 468.

the letters he received from embassies around the world [on his appointment as foreign secretary] indicated the regard in which he was held'.[427] The permanent under-secretary at the time, Denis Greenhill, recalled that:

> The return of Douglas-Home to our Department was most welcome. The greatest blessing that the Foreign Office can have is an experienced Secretary of State, admired in his own country, respected abroad by friend and foe and gifted with an instinct for foreign affairs.[428]

Douglas-Home had a quintessential Tory aristocratic background. After following the time-honoured educational path to Eton and Oxford, he became an MP in 1931 at the age of 28. He had taken his seat in the House of Lords in 1951, when he assumed his inherited title as the 14th Earl of Hume. However in 1963, he surrendered his title and moved back to the Commons to allow him to become prime minister.

The foreign secretary had firm views on the threat to the Western world posed by the Soviet Union. His biographer attributes the initial development of Douglas-Home's anti-communist position to his reading during the prolonged period he spent as an invalid in 1940-2. He read *Das Kapital* 'from cover to cover' and as well as works by Engel and Lenin, and he 'knew the *Communist Manifesto* almost by heart'. Perhaps his views were also in some ways a reaction to the stain of appeasement that had tinged his early career. He had been Neville Chamberlain's parliamentary private secretary throughout his premiership, and had accompanied Chamberlain to his infamous meeting with Hitler in Munich.

Douglas-Home first demonstrated his anti-communism in public in 1945 during a parliamentary debate on the Yalta conference. In his speech, he attacked Churchill for his failure to secure adequate safeguards to prevent Soviet domination of Poland. His scepticism on the long-term motivations of the Soviet regime was reinforced by his experiences as foreign secretary in the early 1960s. He had been intimately involved

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[427] Thorpe, *Douglas-Home*, p. 406.
[428] Denis Greenhill, *More by Accident* (York: Wilton 65, 1992), p. 144.

with some of the critical events of the Cold War. These included the building of the Berlin wall, the confrontation over Cuba, and, on a more positive note, the agreement of the Partial Test-Ban Treaty. Douglas-Home summarised his views when speaking in the House of Lords in June 1960:

> ... one of the most disconcerting features of communism has been this: that it also lays down the doctrine that conciliation may be used as a tactical weapon; and one of the terrible difficulties of doing business with the Russians has been ... knowing whether their motives toward peace are true, or whether they are manoeuvres in a cold and relentless campaign of aggrandisement.[429]

Two developments in East-West relations prompted Douglas-Home and his officials to undertake an early assessment of British policy on European détente. The first of these was the Warsaw Pact's response to the Alliance's Rome declaration of May 1970, which had set out the steps that might lead to the convening of a European security conference (see chapter 4). The Pact's reply was handed over in the first weeks of the new government. It was reasonably accommodating to the Western position on the modalities of any security conference. Thus it accepted American and Canadian participation, the holding of multilateral preparatory talks, and a broadened agenda. And for the first time, there was a reference to the possibilities of MBFR, although this was 'ambiguous and highly qualified'. British officials expected that the Pact declaration would 'be widely interpreted as coming a long way to meet the suggestions put forward by NATO in Rome'.[430]

Some two months later, this accommodating attitude by the Warsaw Pact was complemented by significant progress towards East-West agreement on the future of Germany. In August 1970, after intense negotiations, Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* bore fruit when agreement was reached on a Soviet-Germany treaty. The treaty signed by

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[429] This account is taken from Thorpe, *Douglas-Home*, pp. 63-133, 205-252, and 404-8; quotes on pages 115 and 215.

[430] TNA, FCO 41/634, telegrams 231-4, FCO to UKDEL NATO, 26 June 1970; FCO 28/906, 'European Security: Background to recent proposals by NATO and Warsaw Pact', WOD, 1 July 1970.

Brandt and Kosygin in Moscow on 12 August, with the accompanying documentation, went a long way to recognising the existence of East Germany and its border with Poland. There were some nuances in the language that allowed Brandt to claim that eventual reunification of Germany was not entirely excluded. Yet overall the treaty was a clear acknowledgement of the territorial status quo resulting from the Second World War.[431]

The consensus view of British diplomats was that the treaty was overwhelmingly in the favour of the Soviets.[432] As expressed by Robin Edmonds, the chargé d'affaires in Moscow: 'On the substance of all the Central European issues (except one, explicit recognition of the German Democratic Republic), the Russians have gained the substance of the argument which has continued on German problems since the formation of the two German states'.[433] In the view of deputy under-secretary Thomas Brimelow, the treaty 'has changed the political situation in accordance with some of the long-standing aims of Soviet diplomacy, whereas neither the Soviet government nor the Warsaw Pact Governments have yet committed themselves to any changes favourable to the West'.[434] Yet there was also some acknowledgement of the force of Brandt's long-term strategy. In truth, the German chancellor had only recognised the realities resulting from Germany's defeat in the Second World War, justifying his claim that 'nothing is lost which has not long been gambled away'.[435] In return, he hoped to move forward European détente so as to create a 'situation in which the future reunification of Germany may become possible'.[436]

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[431] This account of the Soviet-German Treaty and accompanying documents is taken from TNA, PREM 15/1522, McCluney to Moon, 18 August 1970 and Julia Von Dannenberg, *The Foundation of Ostpolitik: The Making of the Treaty between West Germany and the USSR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 46-66.

[432] TNA, PREM 15/1522, McCluney to Moon, 18 August 1970; PREM 15/1522, McCluney to Moon, 28 August 1970; DBPO, III,I, document 48, 'Letter from Sir D. Wilson (Moscow) to Mr Bendall', 3 July 1970, pp. 243-6; DBPO, III,1, document 50, 'Letter from Sir T. Brimelow to Mr Edmonds (Moscow)',14 August 1970, pp. 250-8; TNA, FCO 28/1094, Edmonds to Douglas-Home, 24 August 1970.

[433] TNA, FCO 28/1094, Edmonds to Douglas-Home, 24 August 1970.

[434] DBPO, III,1, document 50, 'Letter from Sir T. Brimelow to Mr Edmonds (Moscow)', 14 August 1970, pp. 250-8.

[435] TNA, FCO 28/1094, Edmonds to Douglas-Home, 24 August 1970.

[436] DBPO, III,1, document 50, 'Letter from Sir T. Brimelow to Mr Edmonds (Moscow)', 14 August 1970, pp. 250-8.

Whatever the final balance of advantage, the Soviet-German treaty fundamentally altered the Western position on the German question. Since they had ended their occupation of West Germany in 1955, the Western allies had refused to recognise the GDR or formally acknowledge its frontier with Poland. Although this position had become increasingly hollow and formulaic, it nonetheless represented a barrier to any agreement with the Soviet bloc on European security.[437] This impediment had now been partially removed. Yet there remained the considerable hurdle of achieving agreement on Berlin. Brandt had made this a prerequisite for the ratification of the treaty. And despite many wearing rounds of the quadripartite negotiations, there was no sign of a breakthrough. Nonetheless, the Soviet-German treaty, coupled with the subsequent agreement with the Polish government, was a decisive step that significantly smoothed the path towards a European security conference.

In the light of these developments, Douglas-Home and his officials began a formal review of policy towards European détente and the possibility of a European security conference. This was under the control of Thomas Brimelow. He had established himself as the most powerful voice in the FCO on East-West issues, based on his unparalleled experience of dealing with the Soviets. Brimelow had been a consul in the Baltic States during the Soviet take-over and had seen for himself the KGB at work.[438] Posted to Moscow in 1942, he had served there throughout the war, visiting Stalin on several occasions. Brimelow had been again posted to the Soviet capital in 1951-4 and 1963-6 and, in the interim, had been head of the Northern department of Foreign Office, which had responsibility for relations with the Soviets.[439]

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[437] For the development of the Western position on the 'Germany question' in the post-war period see R. Gerald Hughes, *Britain, Germany and the Cold War: The Search for a European Détente, 1964-1967* (Abingdon UK: Routledge, 2007).
[438] George Walden, *Lucky George: Memoirs of an Anti-Politician* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1999), p. 145-6.
[439] The *Independent* (London), Obituary of Lord Brimelow by Tam Dalyell, <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_19950804/ai_n13998273obituary: Lord Brimelow> [accessed 27 January 2008}.

All advice to Douglas-Home was channelled through Brimelow.[440] His style combined a capacity for strategic thinking with formidable command of detail. He often redrafted briefs and submissions from his departmental heads before they were passed to the foreign secretary. While there is no indication that he had widely divergent views from his superior Denis Greenhill, the evidence indicates that he rather than the permanent under-secretary was the major source of policy advice on East-West relations. Later when both men were peers in the House of Lords, Greenhill acknowledged that on 'matters concerning the Soviet Union ... there is no greater authority in the House than he [Brimelow], and indeed I think no greater authority in the country'.[441] Douglas-Home's regard for his deputy under-secretary is indicated by his surprising decision to promote him to permanent under-secretary in 1973, even though he was already 58 and could be expected to serve only two years.[442]

With the potential route towards a security conference now relatively clearly signposted, Brimelow delivered something of a rebuke to his officials, and perhaps also to himself. He noted that so far British attention had been directed almost solely to responding to the Warsaw Pact manoeuvres and that '[w]e have dealt hardly at all with what ought to be the substance of our position on the basic issues'. The planning staff of the FCO was asked to undertake a study to define the British interests and how these could be best served.[443]

The result was a sceptical assessment of the potential for a meaningful East-West détente. This started from the traditional Cold War analysis. It averred that there were irreconcilable tensions in Europe. These arose from the 'juxtaposition of two profoundly opposed political systems'. They also derived from the fact that the Soviet Union had a 'revolutionary philosophy, a record of expansion during and immediately after the

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[440] Brimelow supervised both the East Europe and Soviet Department (EESD) concerned with relations with the Soviet bloc and the World Organisations Department (WOD) which coordinated policy towards the Atlantic Alliance and had lead responsibility for policy on a European security conference.
[441] The *Independent* (London), Obituary of Lord Brimelow by Tam Dalyell, <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_19950804/ai_n13998273Obituary: Lord Brimelow> [accessed 27 January 2008].
[442] Thorpe, *Douglas-Home*, pp. 434-5.
[443] TNA, FCO 41/743 Brimelow to Waterfield and Bendall, 8 August 1970; Waterfield to Bendall, 6 August 1970; Bendall to Brimelow, 7 August 1970.

Second World War and of recurrent pressure on West Berlin'. East-West tensions were judged to 'spring from a source too deep to be removed by negotiation'. Rather they must be held in check by a firm deterrence. This sceptical view of the value of détente was to permeate throughout the policy making of the Heath government. It not only determined attitudes towards a European security conference, but, as discussed in the following two chapters, it also had a decisive influence on the bilateral relationship with the Soviet government.

The analysis conceded that it was possible to achieve some elements of East-West accommodation, even if the fundamental antagonisms would remain. Even so, it saw little scope for achieving even this limited détente through the kind of European security conference being promoted by the Warsaw Pact. If agreement was reached on Germany and Berlin in the current negotiations, then 'the number of major problems susceptible to negotiation becomes small'. The Soviets would not tolerate interference in Eastern Europe. Proposals for a freer exchange of information, people and ideas would 'come up against the fundamental Soviet ideas of how their society should be organised'. A conference with a limited agenda 'would be futile: it would not promote peace and would serve no basic Western objective'.

The concept of negotiations on mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) was judged to be equally problematical. The NATO doctrine called for a 'flexible response' to Soviet aggression. In this, conventional forces must be capable of at least delaying a Soviet advance to avoid instant recourse to the nuclear option. The Warsaw Pact had a significant numerical advantage in conventional forces and the NATO capability was already at the lowest possible level that would provide a flexible response. Balanced reductions would hurt the West disproportionately more than the Warsaw Pact, handing them a strategic advantage and destabilising the balance of power. This would be reinforced by the geographical realities. Any Soviet forces that were withdrawn from Central Europe would retire only a few hundred miles, while American forces would be relocated across the Atlantic. It was also highly unlikely that the Soviets would accept asymmetric forces reductions to resolve these problems. Despite constant NATO calls

for mutual force reductions, it was noted that 'no severely objective assessment of the merits or demerits of the policy has ever been agreed or even attempted'.

Despite this pessimistic assessment, the paper accepted that the momentum toward a conference was becoming unavoidable. Public opinion in Europe would expect it as a natural consequence of *Ostpolitik*, the Berlin negotiations, and the Alliance's commitment to multilateral preparatory talks and MBFR. While such a conference would have no positive value, neither would it pose severe risks. As summarised by Bendall, the head of the responsible department, a conference 'will not serve UK or Western interests, but is unlikely seriously to harm them'. He recommended that the British government should take a neutral position within the Atlantic Alliance, seeking neither to accelerate nor to obstruct the inevitable movement toward a conference.[444]

Douglas-Home was persuaded by this analysis. He thought that the 'conference will happen'. Yet the government 'could play it slow'.[445] He instructed the British delegation to the North Atlantic Council (NAC) that a 'conference may be inevitable, but it should be approached without haste'. The delegation was enjoined not to make any detailed proposals to the NAC and to signal that the British attitude 'will be one of caution, and of maintaining unity within the Alliance'. The foreign secretary indicated that he would pursue this cautious line at the ministerial meeting in December 1970. He would point out 'the difficulty, inherent in a European Security Conference, of avoiding disadvantages to the West'.[446]

This new position represented a significant retreat from that followed by Michael Stewart. British ministers and diplomats would no longer seek an active role in promoting the conference as a demonstration of British enthusiasm for détente. Rather, while not being obstructive, they would be cautious and sceptical. It is somewhat unclear whether the Labour and Conservative governments held significantly different views on the prospects of achieving a long-term political accommodation between the two blocs

[444] TNA, FCO 41/744, Bendall to PUS (Greenhill) and PS (Private Secretary to Douglas-Home), 16 September 1970.
[445] TNA, FCO 41/746, Graham to Bendall, 28 September 1970.
[446] DBPO III,I, document 52, telegram 344, FCO to UKDEL NATO, 12 October 1970, pp. 264-7.

that divided Europe. Harold Wilson and Michael Stewart had always supported a strong NATO and did not seem blind to the long-term threat posed by the Soviet Union. Yet the volte-face did signal a very major divergence on the need for active participation in the détente process.

Stewart had been convinced that active and visible British involvement was essential. Not the least of his motivations was to respond to public expectations that there was a real possibility of a meaningful reduction of tensions. He summed up his position soon after leaving office in a parliamentary debate:

> A generation is growing up that is asking itself: has the future nothing better to offer us than two powerful armed camps glaring at each other across the immense walls of armaments that they have piled up? It may be that with the best will in the world ...the countries of N.A.T.O. will not be able to do better. What would be unforgivable would be for them not to try with all their strength.[447]

In contrast, Douglas-Home saw no need to pander to public enthusiasm for détente. Indeed, he was concerned that excessive public optimism on the prospects for an East-West accommodation would undermine the commitment to NATO. He was determined to highlight the continuing menace posed by the Soviets, and the need to maintain an adequate deterrence. The foreign secretary was also concerned by indications of aggressive Soviet behaviour around the world. In replying to the analysis sponsored by Brimelow, he noted the continuing supply of arms to Egypt and Syria; evidence of the construction of submarine bases in Cuba; and attempts to interfere with the air corridor to Berlin on the eve of the resumption of the quadripartite negotiations. In his view, these demonstrations of Soviet expansionist ambitions argued for a cautious line on European security. He averred that any progress in Europe would be 'dependent on Soviet behaviour elsewhere'. This he held to be 'distinctly unsatisfactory', and he

[447] *Hansard* 6 July 1970, speech by Michael Stewart.

contended that this continued evidence of Soviet aggression 'might easily kill this idea [of a European security conference] altogether'.[448]

While the evidence is limited, there are strong indications that officials were more comfortable with the cautious approach of Douglas-Home than the more participatory stance of Stewart. As will be discussed in the following chapter, Thomas Brimelow certainly shared these views, as he revealed in his dialogue with the ambassador in Moscow, Duncan Wilson.

The general position of the officials is perhaps encapsulated by Crispin Tickell who was appointed in early 1972 to head the World Organisation department (WOD) responsible for interactions with the Atlantic Alliance. In an internal analysis, he argued that events such as the German-Soviet treaty and the Berlin agreement (which had just been completed) engendered a false and overly optimistic view among the European public. They encouraged a belief that détente would lead to a 'more rational and stable system in Europe', that 'in short Czechoslovakia notwithstanding East and West can kiss and make friends'. He argued that governments contributed to 'promoting this illusion' by not spelling out the reality that 'détente is highly relative and a product of particular and ephemeral times'. No good would come from a European security conference, which 'would probably turn out to be a jamboree of propaganda whose results could strengthen the Russian grip on Eastern Europe, while weakening the cohesion of Western Europe'.[449] If these views were typical of those of FCO officials, then it is probable that they welcomed the change of policy towards European security advocated by the new government.

The CSCE becomes a reality

Despite the cautious line taken by Douglas-Home, momentum towards a European security conference was by now unstoppable. And in May 1972 the Atlantic Alliance

[448] DBPO III,I, pp. 262-4; TNA, FCO 41/746, Graham to Bendall, 28 September 1970.
[449] TNA, FCO 41/1044, Tickell to Wiggen, 6 March 1972.

signalled its agreement to participate. As these developments unfolded, British ministers and officials played a reserved role, neither impeding nor encouraging the evolving Western acceptance of a conference.

One of the critical factors in promoting the final agreement by the Alliance was the increasing accommodation between the two superpowers. Mutual suspicions had limited Soviet-American contacts in the first two years of the Nixon presidency. However, these contacts did begin to intensify in 1971 through the back channel established by Henry Kissinger and the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin. This allowed private communications between the White House and the Kremlin without the involvement of the State Department.[450] The relationship blossomed fully in May 1972 when Nixon visited Moscow, signing a host of Soviet-American agreements including one to limit the escalation of the nuclear arsenals (SALT).

Nixon and Kissinger were in fact suspicious of European détente, seeing it as a potential disturbance to their direct dealings with the Soviets. Yet as this topic was so central to the goals of Brezhnev and his colleagues, it was inevitable that it would become entangled within the evolving superpower relationship. These Soviet-American contacts in fact facilitated the two key developments that would make a security conference acceptable to West. These were the agreement reached in the quadripartite negotiations on Berlin and the identification of an acceptable approach to talks on MBFR.

The Berlin agreement was brokered through the back channel. In January 1971, Kissinger agreed with the Soviet leadership that they should work towards a successful conclusion of both the ongoing SALT talks and the quadripartite negotiations on Berlin. To facilitate this, Kissinger set up a second back channel that allowed him to link the quadripartite negotiations to his direct discussions with Dobrynin. As expressed by Kissinger, '[a]gainst all the odds, this three-dimensional chess worked'. The first step was a breakthrough on SALT announced on 20 May 1971. This was followed by rapid

[450] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1995), pp. 200-1; Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston and Toronto: Little Brown and Company, 1979), pp. 138-41.

advances in the Berlin negotiations. All elements of an agreement were in place in late July, and this was finally signed on 3 September 1971.[451]

The Atlantic Alliance had a confused and ambiguous position on MBFR. The allies had first indicated their interest in the Reykjavik declaration of June 1968, and this had been reiterated in the communiqués from the subsequent ministerial meetings. But while there was enthusiasm among the allies for reducing military expenditure, it proved difficult to conceive of a scheme which would not leave NATO dangerously exposed (as exemplified by the British studies discussed above). In fact, the main driving force behind the proposal was the preservation of American force levels in Europe. Led by the formidable Senator Mansfield, there was growing Congressional pressure to reduce the number of American troops. The MBFR initiative was designed to forestall any unilateral action by the Congress. It offered evidence that the Administration was addressing the subject of troop withdrawals, but tied these to an agreement of reciprocal reductions by the Warsaw Pact.[452] It was a cynical exercise in realpolitik by Nixon and Kissinger. They would insist on MBFR negotiations to stall Mansfield, while having no intention to bring them to a successful conclusion. One consequence of this strategy was that the Americans would not consent to a European security conference unless there were parallel negotiations on MBFR.[453]

The Soviets had consistently ignored the Alliance's blandishments on MBFR. Yet Brezhnev would have to agree to some form of compromise if he was to achieve a security conference. The final approach was settled in the negotiations surrounding the president's visit to Moscow. The Americans and Soviets agreed that separate MBFR talks would be held in parallel with a European security conference. This unilateral American action caused some friction with their allies, but the Americans carried the day and gained agreement to this twin-track approach.[454]

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[451] Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 788-841, quote on p. 808.
[452] TNA, FCO 28/1569, 'Brief on MBFRs'.
[453] Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 947-9.
[454] Helga Haftendorn, 'The link between CSCE and MBFR; Two sprouts from one bulb', in Andreas Wenger, Vojtech Mastny and Christian Nuenlist, eds., *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965-75* (Abingdon UK: Routledge, 2008), pp. 235-58.

As the Alliance foreign ministers gathered in Bonn in late May 1972, all obstacles to the convening of a European security conference had been cleared. The communiqué from the meeting confirmed that the governments of the Alliance were ready to 'enter into multilateral conversations concerned with preparations for a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe' or CSCE: a name suggested by the French.[455] In late November 1972, the process began when the multilateral preparatory talks (MPT) opened in Dipoli, near Helsinki. In January of the following year, delegations from the countries of the Warsaw Pact and the Atlantic Alliance (with the exception France, Iceland and Portugal) met in Vienna in parallel negotiations on MBFR.[456]

Seven years after Brezhnev had first made his proposal for a European security conference at the 23rd Party Conference, the Alliance had finally committed to making it a reality. As Kissinger notes, Soviet diplomacy was 'extraordinarily persevering', constantly putting forward 'variations of the same proposal year after year': 'Like drops of water on a stone, Soviet repetitiveness has a tendency sooner or later to erode the resistance of restless democracies'.[457] This pattern had been evident in the tussle over a security conference. At least in part as a response to Soviet propaganda, the public of Western Europe wanted to see their governments taking initiatives to secure détente. As described by a British position paper, Soviet persistence had forced the West to accept 'the Soviet thesis that support for a Conference is the only acceptable evidence of willingness to work for *détente*'.[458]

Despite their reservations about its utility, British ministers and officials were committed to participation in the CSCE process. They now faced the challenge of developing an approach to the negotiations.

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[455] Niklas H. Rossbach, *Heath, Nixon and the Rebirth of the Special Relationship: Britain, the US and the EC, 1969-74* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 178.
[456] DBPO III,III, notes on p. 21. The MBFR negotiations quickly descended into deadlock that lasted until 1989 when its 'seemingly fruitless labours [were] brought to a conclusion' – DBPO III,III, p. xv.
[457] Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 413.
[458] DBPO, III,II, document 1, 'Draft Position Paper: The Conference on European Security: the Next Phase', February 1972.

The EEC and British policy on the CSCE

During 1972, there was a significant evolution of the British approach to the CSCE, largely attributable to their participation in the EEC processes. The defensive attitude restricted solely to preserving Western solidarity was complemented by a more proactive stance. The conference would be used to seek small but meaningful concessions from the Soviets. The focus would be on forcing Soviet recognition of the importance of human rights; undermining to some extent their basis for justifying the hegemony of Eastern Europe; and securing a commitment to enhanced contacts between East and West.

The aspiration to join the EEC was an element of the foreign policies of both Conservative and Labour governments during the 1960s. The hopes of Macmillan and Wilson had been dashed by the Gaullist vetoes in 1963 and 1967. However, when Edward Heath came to power in June 1970, the departure of de Gaulle had produced a more encouraging environment for a renewed British application. This was pursued with vigour by the determinedly pro-European Heath, and the negotiations were successfully concluded in 1971. The Prime Minister signed the treaty of accession early in 1972, with Britain becoming a member of the EEC on 1 January 1973.

British ambitions to join the EEC were not simply a matter of economics. Increasingly, politicians and officials had considered that Britain could utilise the membership of a politically integrated Europe as a means to bolster its declining geopolitical position.[459] This ambition lay at the centre of Heath's approach. He foresaw that the Community could develop into a powerful actor on the world stage. This would then provide a mechanism for the restoration of British influence in the world, albeit that this would be exercised in partnership with the other members of the Community. He was even prepared to surrender some elements of the Anglo-American special relationship in

[459] John W. Young, *Britain and European Unity 1945-1999* (2nd edn. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 79-81, 96-7, and 100-111; Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War: Heath, Brandt and the Dream of Political Unity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 47-9.

pursuit of this vision. In the long term, his aim was to substitute the increasingly unequal Anglo-American relationship with a 'US-EC relationship of equals'.[460]

As Heath negotiated Britain's entry during 1970-1, the six members of the EEC were taking steps to restore a positive momentum to the development of the Community, after a period of paralysis induced by de Gaulle's intransigence.[461] As part of this approach, agreement was reached in October 1970 on mechanisms to integrate the foreign policies of the member states. This process of European Political Cooperation (EPC) was relatively modest, being confined to a non-binding mechanism for consultations between member governments. Nonetheless it was the first step by the Community to become an actor in international relations.[462]

In February 1972, the British were invited to join the EPC, which was heavily focused on the preparations for the CSCE. At this time, the British policy had not advanced significantly since the Brimelow analysis of September 1970. A position paper confirmed that ministers saw no practical utility in the conference. British objectives were wholly defensive in seeking to prevent the Soviets from weakening the coherence of Western institutions.[463]

In contrast, the six governments of the EEC had been developing some proactive goals. These were designed to force the Soviets to make compromises as a price for the West's formal recognition of the post-war status quo. The concept of promoting 'freer movement of people, ideas, and information' had been introduced by the Belgians and had attracted support from the other members.[464] The Germans had an obvious interest in seeking to ameliorate the consequences of a divided country. For the French, it was a means of weakening the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe - in Pompidou's phrase, a route to 'spread the virus of liberty'.[465] Another strand of the search for Soviet concessions

[460] Rossbach, *Heath, Nixon*, especially pp. 1-4, quote p. 2.
[461] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 30-8; Young, *Britain and European Unity*, pp. 98-9.
[462] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 42-6.
[463] DBPO III,II, document 1, 'Draft Position Paper: The Conference on European Security: The Next Phase'. February 1972, pp. 1-15.
[464] Daniel C, Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 39-43.
[465] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 57-60, quote on p. 60.

was promoted by the Dutch, who shared much of the British scepticism of the long-term benefits of détente. They aimed to use the CSCE to undermine the Brezhnev doctrine through emphasising the right to self-determination.[466]

The British adopted these EPC positions without difficulty, and they subsequently formed the basis of the agreed Alliance approach to the MPT negotiations.[467] As expressed by Tickell, the growing political consensus among the Nine was 'born of natural feelings of shared interest and coming alive in the workings of the Davingon Committee [EPC]'.[468] This consensus position was reflected in the British brief for the MPT delegation. The solely defensive concerns that had distinguished previous British positions were now balanced by proactive Western goals aimed at forcing Soviet concessions. To a large extent, this change in policy can be ascribed to the influence of Britain's EEC partners.[469]

In fact, as much by accident as by design, Douglas-Home and his officials had acquired a positive strand to their East-West policy. Up to now, their scepticism towards the reality of European détente had been translated into a passive reactionary position. While the Germans, Americans and the French made strides to engage with the Soviets, the British were restricted to warning of the continuing danger posed by Soviet expansionist ambitions. To a large extent, ministers and officials were spectators at the developing drama of European détente. They had been dragged along by their allies towards a CSCE that they considered to have no value. However, now that, for better or worse, the CSCE was a reality, it provided an opportunity to play a constructive role. British ministers and officials could channel their distrust of the Soviets into forcing them to compromise during the negotiations. They now had a part to play in the continuing drama.

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[466] Floribert Baudet, '"It was the Cold War and we wanted to win": Human rights, "détente", and the CSCE' in Wenger, *European Security System*, pp. 183-5.
[467] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 57-68.
[468] DBPO III,II, document 6, Tickell to Butler, 27 March 1972.
[469] DBPO III,II, document 17, 'CSCE: Draft Brief for the United Kingdom Delegation to the Multilateral Preparatory Talks', 13 November 1972, pp. 73-80.

The MPT and the opening of the CSCE

In November 1972, 34 national delegations gathered in Dipoli (near to Helsinki) for the opening of the MPT negotiations. The Western allies and the Soviet bloc had very different objectives. As expressed in a FCO brief:

> The Russians and their allies want it to be short, declamatory and empty of real substance: while the allies want it to achieve real – if modest – progress towards practical measures to lower East-West barriers and advance cooperation.[470]

The role of the MPT was to agree the agenda and format for the CSCE itself. For the Western delegations, the key battle was to ensure that the agenda was sufficiently wide and precise to compel the Soviets to address the issues on which they were seeking concessions. The negotiations spanned six months, only being concluded in early June 1973. They proved something of an unexpected success for the Western powers, who secured most of their desiderata.

The nine members of the EEC played a leading role in the MPT. In large part this reflected a lack of interest by Nixon and Kissinger.[471] As expressed by one of Kissinger's staff, the CSCE was 'not important' to the Americans as he 'could not conceive that the Russians would agree to anything disadvantageous to them'. The American delegation was therefore maintaining a low profile, 'leaving the lead with EEC countries'.[472] In response, the nine EEC delegations retained a large measure of coherence throughout the complex negotiations. They also formed effective links with the other members of the Alliance, and with the delegations from neutral countries who were sympathetic to their goals.[473] This 'extremely effective' cooperation was seen by the British as one of the EEC's 'first achievements in the field of foreign policy'.[474]

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[470] TNA, FCO 41/1067, Tickell to Daunt, 14 November 1972.
[471] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 60-8 and 123-127; Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, p. 70.
[472] DBPO III,II, document 25, Graham to Bullard, 12 March 1973, pp. 102-4.
[473] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 127-34; TNA, FCO 41/1284, telegram 411, FCO to Paris, 12 May 1973.
[474] DBPO III,II, document 29, telegram 178, FCO to Helsinki, 28 March 1973, pp. 114-5.

The agreed recommendations confirmed the Western concept of a three-stage CSCE process. This would begin with an initial meeting of foreign ministers, which would be followed by a period of detailed negotiations by national delegations. Only when these had reached an agreement would the final meeting of leaders be convened. A broad agenda for the negotiations was agreed, divided into four chapters or baskets. Basket I set out ten principles governing the behaviour of states, which would be further defined and elucidated. The second basket was concerned with economic and technological issues, while basket III would consider 'Co-operation in Humanitarian and other Fields, including Human Contacts, Information, Culture and Education'. The final basket dealt with possible follow-up mechanisms. The recommendations from the MPT also set out in some detail the subjects that would be addressed in each of the baskets.[475] These corresponded closely to the proposals made by the West. The leader of the British delegation, Anthony Elliot, observed that 'it was remarkable how little was given away'.[476]

This format was a considerable victory for the West. It ensured that the Soviet leaders could not conclude the CSCE without reaching an agreement on subjects that bore on their domestic conduct. They would be forced to negotiate over the human rights granted to their citizens and on increasing the movement of people and ideas between East and West. There were also constraints placed on their central goal of gaining recognition of the political and geographical status quo. The formulation agreed at the MPT retained the possibility of future peaceful changes to frontiers, including the eventual reunification of Germany. It also contained language that refuted the Brezhnev doctrine and the Soviet hegemony of Eastern Europe.[477]

With some justification, the Western negotiators were very content with what they had achieved. Elliot argued that the Soviets had seriously misjudged the multilateral nature of the MPT process. In this, all countries, independent of size, had an equal voice and

[475] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 110-7; Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, p. 61-3.
[476] DBPO III,II, document 37, Elliot to Douglas-Home, 'CSCE: The First Two Hundred Days', 13 June 1973, pp. 136-46.
[477] DBPO III,II, document 37, Elliot to Douglas-Home, 'CSCE: The First Two Hundred Days', 13 June 1973 pp. 136-46; Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, p. 61-3; Möckli, *European Foreign*, pp. 115.

decisions were reached by consensus. Among the 34 delegations, the Soviets had only their six Warsaw Pact allies on whom they could depend for support. This placed them on the defensive and required them to rely on 'rational argument rather than the exercise of power'. As a result, the Soviets had been forced to make compromises and the West had 'emerged from the process in a position of clear advantage'.[478]

According to Elliot, the British played a significant role in the negotiations 'leading the Nine from behind'. This is confirmed by Henry Kissinger, who acknowledged the British role in organising the 'diplomatic witches brew' of potential agenda points into the four baskets.[479] The delegation also succeeded in establishing a political dialogue with the Soviets. This had been achieved despite the 'icy stage' in the overall Anglo-Soviet relationship resulting from the expulsions of 1971 (see chapter 7). By the end of the process, the British were 'fully accepted as a delegation with whom the Russians thought it necessary and profitable to do business'.[480]

After the closure of the MPT, the Soviet leadership sought to recover lost ground. In July 1973, Gromoyko gave a hard line speech to the meeting of foreign ministers called to inaugurate the formal opening of the CSCE process. In this, he vehemently maintained that agreements reached at the CSCE would have no bearing on the domestic policies of the Soviet regime.[481] This diplomatic input was reinforced by a public crackdown on dissidents within the Soviet Union. As noted by Daniel Thomas, this seemed designed to 'demonstrate ... that it [the Kremlin] would not be constrained by the human rights norms in the CSCE'.[482]

When the CSCE negotiations opened in Geneva in September 1973, these demonstrations of Soviet intransigence were reflected in the tactics of the Warsaw Pact delegations. They set out to block any meaningful progress on the areas of interest to the

[478] DBPO III,II, document 37, Elliot to Douglas-Home, 'CSCE: The First Two Hundred Days', 13 June 1973 pp. 136-46.
[479] Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), pp. 640-1.
[480] DBPO III,II, document 37, Elliot to Douglas-Home, 'CSCE: The First Two Hundred Days', 13 June 1973 pp. 136-46.
[481] Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, p. 64; DBPO III,II, document 40, Bullard to Wiggin, 5 July 1973, pp. 157-9.
[482] Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, p. 65.

West. This quickly produced a deadlock and by the time the Conservative government left office in early March 1974, there was 'little to show for six months' detailed work'.[483] It was clear that there would be a long struggle as the two sides waited for the other to blink first. It would now fall to the incoming Labour foreign secretary, Jim Callaghan, to manage the British strategy within the CSCE (see chapter 9).

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The policies on détente followed by Douglas-Home in the multilateral context were also reflected in the conduct of the bilateral Anglo-Soviet relationship. The sceptical attitudes on Soviet motivations meant that the government placed little value on the interactions. They were prepared to rupture the relationship in September 1971 by the action against espionage agents, and subsequently maintained a very wary stance towards resuming the political dialogue. Conversely, the increasing British role within the CSCE process provided the Soviets with a motivation to re-establish a political interaction, despite the lose of face caused by the expulsions. In the next two chapters, we turn to consideration of these bilateral interactions, before drawing some overall conclusions on the developments in British policy during this period.

[483] DBPO III,II, document 57, Elliot to Douglas-Home, 'CSCE: The Second Stage So Far', 15 December 1973, pp. 213-22, document 68, minute by Tickell, 15 March 1974, pp. 250-3; document 53, telegram 560, UKMIS Geneva to FCO, 8 November 973, pp. 201-4; document 68, minute by Tickell, 15 March 1974, pp. 250-3 (quote from p. 251); TNA, FCO 28/2377, Brief on 'East/West relations, CSCE and MBFR', November 1973; Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 127-34.

Chapter 7

Estrangement over intelligence agents, 1970-71

In his first eighteen months in office, Douglas-Home took a restrained approach to Anglo-Soviet relations in which he made no high-profile initiatives to engage with the Soviet leadership. This policy differed from the traditional post-war British position that prized a direct interaction with the Soviet leaders as a route to influence on the world stage. It also stood in marked contrast to the approach being followed by the French, German, and, increasingly, the American leadership, who were undertaking an active dialogue with their Soviet counterparts. It reinforced the perception of the British leaders as the 'last of the cold warriors', a perception that they seemed to embrace with insouciance and indeed with an element of pride.

This policy was challenged by the British ambassador in Moscow, Duncan Wilson, who argued that British interests were best served by fostering a closer dialogue with the Soviets. His input was however dismissed by Douglas-Home and Brimelcw who continued with their cautious sceptical approach. In September 1971, they were prepared to dislocate the political relationship by expelling 105 Soviet espionage agents who were masquerading as diplomats and officials. Interestingly, this disruption did not extend to the 'bilateral' topics, with trade and cultural and scientific exchanges being relatively unaffected.

In this chapter, we will examine the evolution of the relationship during this early period of the Conservative government. The account begins with an examination of the dispute over policy between Moscow and London. This provides a valuable insight into the underlying attitudes of Douglas-Home and Thomas Brimelow which structured the singular British approach in both the multilateral and the bilateral context.[484] It also reveals the ongoing tensions between the officials in London and the diplomats in

[484] This dialogue has also been examined in less detail in Curtis Keeble, *Britain, the Soviet Union and Russia* (Basingstoke UK: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 278-80 and Michael F. Hopkins, ''Worlds Apart': The British Embassy in Moscow and the Search for East-West Understanding', *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2000), 131-48 (pp. 142-44).

Moscow as they struggled over the direction of British policy. This tension was to be repeated in 1972-3 with a different ambassador ensconced in the Soviet capital. The account then considers the expulsion of the agents in 1971 and concludes with an assessment of the interactions on the bilateral issues. The slow process of re-establishing the political dialogue will be explored in the subsequent chapter.

Disputing policy on Anglo-Soviet relations

The dispute over policy towards the Soviets was undertaken during the period November 1970 to February 1971. By this time, Douglas-Home had revealed the major direction of his thinking both in his public speeches and in the development of the sceptical position on European détente (see chapter 6). This prompted Duncan Wilson to argue forcefully for a more proactive engagement that would be congruent with that undertaken by leading Western allies. This difference of view resulted in an extensive dialogue between London and the embassy in Moscow disputing the approach that should be adopted towards the Anglo-Soviet relationship.

In November 1970, Wilson made a formal input to London seeking to influence the British stance during the impending ministerial meeting of the Atlantic Alliance. This was couched in the format of a dispatch analysing Soviet foreign policy. This format served to lift the communication out of the normal diplomatic flow. It indicated that this was the considered view of the Ambassador and his staff, and by tradition was addressed directly to the foreign secretary. Wilson does not refer directly to the new cautious stance towards European détente that had been developed by Brimelow and endorsed by Douglas-Home some weeks previously. Nevertheless, his contribution does seem designed to counter this approach.

The ambassador argued that Soviet attitudes were becoming less ideologically driven. Perhaps exaggerating the likely extent of British influence, he urged a positive response to Soviet overtures on détente, as an obstructionist policy might harden attitudes in Moscow.

> The Soviet leaders seem to have decided to take certain political risks in order to pursue, mainly for economic reasons, a new policy of intensified contacts with Western Europe; and to require a new political framework to make these respectable – Soviet/German treaty, Berlin Agreement, European Security Conference, Standing Commission. If we, out of distrust or sheer caution, appear to be hampering the development of this framework, we may be faced with a Soviet move toward isolationism or cold war opposition to the Western world which would be no doubt simpler for us than the present more ambivalent attitudes, but would also be a lot more expensive and explosive. This, I believe, is the main danger against which we should guard ourselves as far as possible.

The ambassador went on to argue that a responsive policy might also yield some commercial gains, stating that 'I am convinced that there will be some economic rewards for a rather more forthcoming line by Her Majesty's Government on political questions'. He also advanced his traditional argument that increased trade and other interactions with the Soviets would provide a pathway to inculcate Western ideas among the 'technocrats and scientists'. This was of potential long-term importance as they were the 'only class in the Soviet Union which can bring pressure to bear on the Party for social change'.[485]

This clarion call for a positive approach to détente and a closer Anglo-Soviet relationship was given a formal rebuff in a dispatch from Douglas-Home, drafted by Brimelow and his staff.[486] This argued that the Ambassador had placed too much emphasis on the ministerial component of the Soviet government and neglected the role of ideology. It asserted that the real centre of power in the Soviet Union was to be found within the Communist Party. The Party leaders seem to 'regard the foreign policy of the Soviet Government as only a part, and neither a very major or determinant part, of a world wide historical and political process that follows the laws of the class struggle as

[485] TNA, FCO 28/1094, Wilson to Douglas-Home, 'Soviet Foreign Policy', 16 November 1970.
[486] TNA, FCO 28/1094, Giffard to Brimelow and attached comments from Brimelow and Greenhill, 26 November 1970.

formulated by Marxism-Leninism'. Douglas-Home had found Wilson's analysis 'perhaps too selective and too optimistic'. The West should be cautious in responding to Soviet overtures, it 'should walk warily'.

The dispatch went on to downplay the advantages that might derive from the Anglo-Soviet relationship. In political terms, the British government had 'less to offer' than its Western European partners. It was unlikely therefore that a closer political relationship would lead to economic benefits. Douglas-Home argued that the Soviets were mainly interested in political engagement as a means of 'wedge driving' to disrupt the unity of the Atlantic Alliance. The British government 'had no intention of letting ourselves be exploited for such purposes'. As a result, 'if we remain loyal members of NATO, not much in the way of political or economic lollipops will come our way'. The dispatch also concluded that enhanced contacts with the West would not prove an effective vehicle for modifying the ideological orientation of the Soviet managers and technocrats. It averred that the Soviet government could be expected to 'exercise the tightest control on the extent and possible political implications' of these contacts: 'the CPSU will keep its technicians on tap, not on top'.[487] It concluded by emphasising the low priority given to Anglo-Soviet relations compared with other foreign policy issues, especially the application to join the EEC. It stated that 'the plain fact is that in the near future, our national interest is to develop our relations with Western rather than Eastern Europe'. British policy would not be anti-Soviet, but 'our priorities lie elsewhere'.[488]

Wilson was not convinced. He found the analysis in Douglas-Home's dispatch 'out of date', it was the 'past projected into the future'. [489] He responded with a second dispatch. This emphasised that he took a different view to that of Brimelow and his staff, stating that 'the differences in analysis between your [Douglas-Home's] advisors in London and this Embassy are large and important'. He went on to argue that London's emphasis on Marxist-Leninist ideology as the basis for Soviet foreign policy was misplaced. He also maintained that despite the best efforts of the regime to prevent it, contacts with the West would indeed be expected to influence long-term Soviet attitudes.

[487] This comment had been derived from a remark made by Bertram Wolfe thirteen years previously.
[488] DBPO III,1, document 57, 'Sir A. Douglas-Home to Sir D. Wilson', 1 December 1970.
[489] TNA, FCO 28/1117, Wilson to Greenhill, 31 December 1970.

The ambassador then repeated his call for a more active Anglo-Soviet engagement. He emphasised that, compared with their major allies, 'in the field of political, parliamentary and official relations' the British government 'have been and remain inactive'. Wilson called for more high-level interactions with the Soviet leaders; a moderation of the constant emphasis in public statements on the Soviet worldwide military threat; and less concentration on espionage issues.[490]

Again the ambassador was rebuffed. The reply expanded the argument that compared with their major allies, the British government had nothing to offer their Soviet counterparts. The USA was a superpower; the Federal German government was conceding recognition of the status quo in Eastern Europe; and the French leaders threatened the coherence of NATO. As a result, 'the coming period may not be a suitable one for establishing or maintaining any new kind of relationship with the Soviet Union'. Some consideration would be given to a change of style as there was 'no advantage in causing annoyance gratuitously to any foreign country, least of all a superpower'. Yet this would be circumscribed as '[w]e must be very careful to ensure that our change of style is never used ... as an argument for less firmness when firmness is necessary'. Or in other words it should not inhibit taking firm action against Soviet espionage activities.[491]

Notwithstanding Wilson's input, the complementary positions of Douglas-Home and Brimelow were the basis of a continuing restrained British policy towards relations with the Soviets. They also informed the decision to risk the rupture of the relationship by the expulsion of KGB agents. In their view, the Anglo-Soviet dialogue had little intrinsic utility. Consequently, there was little to lose by taking decisive action against the agents. As Douglas-Home wrote to Heath on the eve of a visit by Gromyko to London in October 1971, there were 'no general political considerations of a bilateral or

[490] DBPO III,1, document 60, Wilson to Douglas-Home, 'Soviet Foreign Policy', 8 February 1971, pp. 298-310.
[491] DBPO III,1, document 60, Wilson to Douglas-Home, 'Soviet Foreign Policy', 8 February 1971, note 22, pp. 309-310.

international nature' that prevented the government from 'speaking plainly' on Soviet espionage.[492]

As well as being a break with the policy of the previous government, as noted by Hill and Lord, the Conservative approach was, 'curious from both historical and contemporary perspectives'.[493] The deliberate neglect of a dialogue with the Soviet leadership was out of keeping with the policy followed by earlier Conservative prime ministers, Churchill and Macmillan, and the next Conservative leader, Margaret Thatcher. Also, it differed markedly from the contemporaneous approaches being taken by Brandt, Pompidou and Nixon.

The distinct position taken by Douglas-Home, supported by Heath, seems to be an example of individual statesmen determining a course of action that differed from the consensus. All the structural factors of the East-West relationship favoured closer engagement with the Soviets. It would align the government with their allies and the escalating movement towards détente. This was certainly the policy being followed by the Labour government just prior to the election. Michael Stewart had been promoting a positive attitude towards a European security conference and Harold Wilson had scheduled a visit to Moscow. Stewart summed up his attitude to European détente during the Commons debate of 6 July 1970. Here he argued 'the tide is now moving in the direction of conciliation, and it is of vital importance not to lose that tide'.[494] The fact that the Conservative government took such a sceptical stand on détente, and eschewed closer bilateral relations with the Soviets, can be ascribed primarily to the personal views of the foreign secretary.

Douglas-Home's stance was supported by his officials in London. Indeed there seems to have been a mutual reinforcement of the hard-line position in the interactions of the foreign secretary and his chief advisor, Thomas Brimelow. Yet it was disputed by the ambassador in Moscow. Why did such an experienced diplomat differ so markedly from

[492] TNA, PREM 15/1935, Douglas-Home to Heath, 27 October 1970.
[493] Christopher Hill and Christopher Lord, 'The foreign policy of the Heath government' in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon ed., *The Heath Government, 1970-74; A Reappraisal* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 285-314 (p. 309).
[494] *Hansard*, volume 893 cc 339-462, 'Foreign Affairs', 6 July 1970, speech by Stewart.

his colleagues in the assessment of policy towards the Soviets? Duncan Wilson's objections probably reflected two strands of motivation. Firstly the ambassador held a different view to Douglas-Home and Brimelow of the benefits to be derived from détente and a close Anglo-Soviet relationship. He ascribed less prominence to the role of ideology in the Soviet policy-making process and hence held out more hope that engagement could lead to some form of long-term accommodation. Brimelow acknowledged this difference of view when writing to Wilson after the ambassador's retirement in mid-1971. He wrote that their main point of difference was on 'the extent to which ideology has been eroded among the Soviet leaders'.[495]

While Wilson had a firm intellectual basis for challenging the position taken in London, his role as ambassador in Moscow probably provided a second strand of the motivation. It is of course to be expected that ambassadors should argue for close relations with their host governments. This is a natural consequence of being focused solely on the interactions with one specific set of leaders, coupled with a professional desire for their work to have meaning within the policy-making process. In the limit, the ambassador can be accused of 'going native', of giving precedence to the interests of his hosts over those of his own government. Certainly all ambassadors to the Soviet Union during the period of this study tended to argue for an enhanced relationship and the benefits that would result from this. There is no reason to assume that Wilson was immune from these pressures.

In any event, Wilson's arguments found little traction in London and the policy enunciated by Douglas-Home and Brimelow held sway.

The breakdown of the Anglo-Soviet relationship

Having outlined the intellectual basis of Douglas-Home's policy on Anglo-Soviet relations, we will now consider the development of the interactions during the first eighteen months of the Heath government. The decision in September 1971 to expel 105

[495] TNA, FCO 28/1567, Brimelow to Wilson, 6 September 1971.

Soviet agents, plunged the relationship into crisis just as détente in Europe and between the superpowers was gaining real momentum.

Neither Heath nor Douglas-Home had envisaged an early meeting with the Soviet leadership.[496] Yet a few months after taking office they responded to Soviet hints and issued an invitation for Andrei Gromyko to visit London. British officials saw the visit as an opportunity to address both the political and intelligence aspects of the relationship. It would allow the new government to demonstrate that they 'are interested in developing business-like Anglo-Soviet relations'. It was also seen as an opportunity to communicate directly to the Soviet leadership their 'determination to take a firm line on Soviet espionage activities'.[497]

Gromyko's visit was preceded by a crisis in Berlin that was a throwback to the dark days of Khrushchev's sabre-rattling. The quadripartite talks on the divided city were due to resume on 30 September 1970. The day before, the Soviet authorities informed the three Western powers that the air corridor to the city would be closed for two hours in the morning of the following day. Douglas-Home took the lead in suggesting to the Americans and French that, as in the sixties, the three wartime allies should assert their right of access to Berlin by sending military flights. These were duly dispatched and encountered no opposition. This 'dangerous as well as silly game' played by the Soviets could only have confirmed the British foreign secretary's hard-line views as he prepared to meet Gromyko in London.[498]

The two foreign ministers who began their discussions on 28 October 1970 were no strangers to each other. They had had many interactions during Douglas-Home's first period as foreign secretary, including the successful negotiations on the Partial Test Ban Treaty and on Laos. There was also some level of personal respect between the two men, despite the deep ideological divide that separated them. Gromyko's wife was

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[496] TNA, FCO 28/1111, Giffard to Brimelow, 22 June 1970; telegram 587, FCO to Moscow, 25 June 1970.
[497] TNA, FCO 28/1124, Mallaby to Brimelow, 13 August 1970.
[498] This account is taken from Niklas H. Rossbach, *Heath, Nixon and the Rebirth of the Special Relationship: Britain, the US and the EC, 1969-74* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 166-7.

believed to have 'taken a shine to the man she described as "The English Lord"'.[499] Douglas-Home and Gromyko tackled the gamut of 'international' issues. And as expected, one of the major focuses was on European security.

Gromyko made a powerful argument for convening a European security conference, concluding with the observation that the Soviet government 'did not understand the apparent British reservations about the conference proposal'. Douglas-Home's response followed the agreed cautious British line. He simply remarked that the 'British, as practical people, would like to know before endorsing the idea of a conference, what the conference would do'. And he confirmed that the Atlantic Alliance would be considering the issue during its next meeting.[500]

The two foreign ministers also discussed at length the quadripartite talks on Berlin which were still deadlocked after eight rounds of negotiations.[501] They agreed on the main dimensions of the compromise required to reach agreement. In this, the Soviets would guarantee access to West Berlin and facilitate greater contacts across the Wall. In return, the West would curtail Federal German political activities in the city. Yet they made no specific proposals to break the impasse in the negotiations. It was left to the delegates in the four-power talks to continue their search for an accommodation acceptable to both sides. In fact the deadlock was only to be broken in 1971 by the intervention of Henry Kissinger and his back-channel diplomacy.

The remainder of the talks ranged over the continuing stalemate in the Middle East and Vietnam. There was no meeting of minds with the dialogue mainly a repetition of set positions. Douglas-Home did argue that the British and Soviet governments could still play a role in the settlement of the Vietnam War as co-chairmen of the Geneva implementation mechanisms. This proposal had not been raised with this degree of enthusiasm since the heady days of Harold Wilson's initiatives in 1966-7. Perhaps this reflected Douglas-Home's experience in 1962, when he and Gromyko had co-chaired an

[499] D. R. Thorpe, *Alec Douglas-Home* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996), pp. 220-22.
[500] DBPO III,1, document 53, 'Record of a Conversation ... at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 27 October 1970', pp. 268-73.
[501] TNA, FCO 28/1131, Brief on 'Germany, Berlin, European Security and East-West relations'

international conference that reached agreement on the neutrality of Laos. In any event, the Soviet foreign minister firmly rejected the suggestion, insisting that the only viable approach was for an American withdrawal and the establishment of a coalition government in the South.[502]

In one sense the political discussions with Gromyko were a success. A top-level political dialogue had been re-established with six hours of talks ranging over the major international topics. These were the first such talks with the Soviet leadership since 1968, and both sides confirmed their wish to improve the relationship. Yet the discussion had been devoid of real content. On issues such as the Middle East or Vietnam, the unvarnished truth was that the British government had no influence that it could bring to bear. In the case of European détente, there was a direct British interest. However Douglas-Home took a cautious, sceptical stance and was committed to maintaining a common position with his allies. This militated against any constructive engagement with his Soviet counterpart. Taken overall, the discussions were simply a ritualistic exchange between the government of a superpower and that of a second rank state, suspicious of Soviet motivations, but lacking the power to influence its behaviour.

The sub-plot of the Gromyko visit was the British determination to tackle the issue of KGB agents in London. Since the limitation imposed in November 1969 on the numbers assigned to their embassy, the Soviets had increasingly used the Soviet Trade Delegation (STD) as a means of introducing intelligence agents. The staff of the STD had been growing, and MI5 had evidence that it was a base for 'reconnaissance of defence, industrial and commercial targets and the recruitment of spies'.[503] The permanent under-secretary in the FCO, Denis Greenhill, had raised British concerns formally with Gromyko's deputy, Semen Kozyrev, in April 1970. However, the only response had

[502] DBPO III,1, document 54, 'Record of a Conversation ... at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, 27 October 1970', pp. 274-9; TNA, FCO 28/1131, 'Record of a Conversation ... at 11.15 a..m. on Wednesday, 28 October 1970'.
[503] DBPO III,I, document 43, 'Note by Mr A. M. Simons ...', 19 January 1970, pp. 214-5.

been a vehement denial that the Soviet Union was engaged in espionage.[504] The issue would now be raised with the Soviet foreign minister himself.[505]

The foreign secretary broached the subject informally after a dinner. Gromyko issued a formulaic denial that the Soviet government maintained spies in London, arguing that those identified had been the victims of false evidence engineered by MI5. [506] He did, however, invite his counterpart to write to him on the subject and Douglas-Home subsequently sent a remarkably blunt note. This drew attention to 'the scale and nature of intelligence activities conducted in his country by Soviet officials'. It identified the STD as the centre of Soviet 'inadmissible activities' that included the running of agents, instruction in the use of clandestine tricks, and payments to British citizens for confidential information and restricted commodities. Douglas-Home finished by noting that these activities were a growing obstacle to improving Anglo-Soviet relations. He hoped that Gromyko would handle this personal letter 'in the spirit of your opening remarks to the Prime Minister and myself'. In other words, if Gromyko wanted to improve relations then the Soviets would have to curb their intelligence activities.[507]

Following these inconclusive exchanges, the Anglo-Soviet political dialogue remained becalmed, with British officials seeing little value in engaging with their Soviet counterparts.[508] However by the middle of 1971, there were further British moves to resume the dialogue. In June, Denis Greenhill visited Moscow to return the visit made by Kozyrev the previous year; and it was also agreed that Douglas-Home would travel to

[504] DBPO III,1, document 45, 'Record of talks between Sir Denis Greenhill and Mr Kozyrev ...', 7 April 1970', pp. 219-28; TNA, FCO 28/1118, telegram 302, FCO to Moscow, 7 April 1970.
[505] TNA, PREM 15/1935, Douglas-Home to Heath, 27 October 1970.
[506] DBPO III,1, pp. 267-8; TNA, PREM 15/1935, Graham to Moon, 27 October 1970 and Graham to EESD, 29 October 1970.
[507] DBPO III,1, document 58, 'Letter from Sir A. Douglas-Home to Mr Gromyko', 3 December 1970, pp. 292-4.
[508] DBPO III,1, document 61, 'Letter from Mr K.B.A. Scott (Moscow) to Mr J.L. Bullard', 26 February 1971, pp. 311-4; TNA, FCO 28/1566, Bullard to Scott, 16 March 1971; Telegram 641, Moscow to FCO, 10 May 1971; Bullard to Brimelow, 25 May 1971; Brimelow to Wilson, 1 June 1971; Wilson to Brimelow, 14 June 1971.

the Soviet Union in February 1972[509]. However these overtures were to be subsumed by the major schism resulting from the British decision to expel 105 Soviet officials.[510]

Expulsion of Soviet agents

Douglas-Home's blunt letter to Gromyko on intelligence activities had produced no Soviet response. Indeed, rather than ameliorating the situation as a gesture of goodwill, the Soviets seemed determined to escalate the conflict. In April 1971, the Soviet authorities expelled a British diplomat from Moscow in retaliation for the expulsions of members of the STD caught undertaking espionage. In a deliberate snub, the news was delivered during the 'Days of British Music', a major British cultural event taking place in the Soviet capital.[511] The incident fuelled the view that the ministerial side of the Soviet government were 'pretty powerless vis-á-vis the Committee of State Security [the KGB]'.[512] In July, there were further tit-for-tat expulsions of British diplomats. This action was again timed to cause maximum embarrassment, with the expulsion order being delivered on the eve of Denis Greenhill's arrival in the Soviet capital.[513] Gromyko then reinforced the message during a meeting with the permanent under-secretary. He stressed the potential adverse impact of British counter-intelligence activities on Anglo-Soviet relations and expressed the hope that 'artificial problems created by the British "special service" [MI5] would disappear'. The two governments 'could then concentrate on areas where we could make concrete progress together'. Greenhill defended the British position robustly, noting that Douglas-Home's letter had 'been unanswered and in effect ignored'.[514]

[509] TNA, FCO 28/1564, Wilson to Douglas-Home, 5 July 1971; TNA, FCO 28/1570, Bullard to Wiggens/PS, 28 July 1971 and 22 September 1971.
[510] This was been the subject of a study by Geraint Hughes and hence will be covered relatively briefly here: Geraint Hughes, '"Giving the Russians a Bloody Nose": Operation *Foot* and Soviet Espionage in the United Kingdom, 1964-71', *Cold War History* 6 (2006) 229-49.
[511] DBPO III,1, notes pp. 337-8.
[512] TNA, FCO 28/1566, Brimelow to Dobbs, 6 May 1971.
[513] TNA, PREM 15/1935, telegram 870, Moscow to FCO, 21 June 1971.
[514] DBPO, III,1, document 67, telegram 895, Moscow to FCO, 24 June 1971, pp. 344-7; document 68, telegram 910, Moscow to FCO, 25 June 1971, pp. 348-51.

In London, consistent pressure from MI5 was 'educating' ministers and officials that the Soviet activities were a significant threat to national security. This could not be contained solely by reacting to individual cases, rather some systemic action was required.[515] Growing public, press and Parliamentary concerns strengthened the case for a decisive solution. Following representations from several MPs, Edward Heath instigated the development of a radical proposal to address the issue. This was given the code name FOOT. It proposed to inform the Soviet government that the total number of Soviet personnel in Britain would be reduced to a maximum of 400. In conjunction with this step, a substantial number of known KGB agents would be expelled immediately.[516]

As might be expected, Duncan Wilson argued against such precipitate action, fearful of the impact on Anglo-Soviet relations.[517] His advice was rejected. A senior cross-Whitehall meeting, chaired by Greenhill, recommended a single decisive blow. Both Greenhill and Brimelow argued that action needed to be taken not just to respond to the threat to national security, but to put Anglo-Soviet relations on a sensible footing. There would undoubtedly be a major Soviet reaction, but this would be worthwhile to remove the current hypocrisy. As Greenhill remarked, there was a need 'to remove to a large extent [from the relationship] those elements which prevent the growth of mutual confidence'.[518]

At the end of July 1971, following further intensive consultations in Whitehall, Douglas-Home and the home secretary, Reginald Maudling, agreed a plan of action with Heath.[519] This was activated in September after the successful conclusion of the quadripartite negotiations on Berlin. The precise timing was determined by a desire to pre-empt adverse publicity over the defection of Oleg Lyalin, a KGB agent in London

[515] Christopher Andrew, *Defence of the Realm: the Authorised History of MI5* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), pp. 566-7.
[516] DBPO III,1, notes pp. 337-8.
[517] *Ibid.*
[518] DBPO III,1, document 66, 'Record of a meeting ... on Tuesday, 25 May 1971 at 3.30 p.m.', pp. 339-42.
[519] DBPO III,1, document 70, 'Memorandum from Mr Maudling and Sir A. Douglas-Home to the Prime Minister', 30 July 1970, pp. 359-62; TNA, PREM 15/1935, Heath to Maudling, 3 August 1971.

who had been cooperating with MI5.[520] In the afternoon of Friday 25 September, Greenhill handed the Soviet chargé d'affaires, Ivan Ippolitov, a list of ninety Soviet officials who were asked to leave Britain within two weeks, and a further 15 officials who were currently out of the country and would not be allowed to return. The total number of Soviet officials permitted to reside in Britain would then be capped at the residual level after the expulsions had been enacted. Any further cases requiring expulsion would reduce this cap by one. The permanent under-secretary then indicated that any Soviet countermeasures could result in even more onerous restrictions. Greenhill finished with the plea that 'once this cancer of large scale and expanding intelligence activities has been eradicated', then the two governments could 'build a mutual relationship on a much healthier basis'.[521]

Ippolitov, who was himself a member of the KGB, had little option other than to issue the standard denial of any Soviet malpractice, and to agree to transmit the démarche to his government. The Conservative administration had completed the biggest single action ever taken by a Western government against Soviet espionage activities. Denis Greenhill would have sipped his gin and tonic with some satisfaction that Friday evening. It was a marked contrast to the humiliation that he had had to endure some two years earlier as he negotiated the British volte-face over Gerald Brooke. Certainly the members of MI5 held a high-spirited celebration party at their headquarters.[522]

The final act in this drama was played out on the following Monday when Douglas-Home met with Gromyko in New York, where both foreign ministers were attending the United Nations. In his biography of Douglas-Home, Thorpe paints a human picture of the encounter. The British foreign secretary is recorded as puncturing Gromyko's bellicosity. He had 'burst out laughing' at his Soviet counterparts initial outburst. And had retorted: 'Do you really think that Britain can "threaten" your country? I am flattered to think that this is the case'. He professed that he had no animosity toward the Soviet foreign minister personally as it was obvious that he 'did not know what the KGB

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[520] DBPO III,1, document 73, 'Minute from Sir A. Douglas-Home to Mr Maudling', 11 September 1971; TNA, PREM 15/1935, Moon to Barrington, 15 September 1971; Barrington to Moon, 16 September 1971, and Moon to Graham, 21 and 23 September 1971; Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, pp. 567-71.
[521] DBPO, III,1, document 76, telegram 1075, FCO to Moscow, 24 September 1971, pp. 388-92.
[522] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 572.

was doing'. He hoped that he had been of service by 'letting him know who all these KGB people were'. As reported by Douglas-Home, this jibe provoked the only emotional reaction from Gromyko.[523] Thorpe summarised the encounter as follows: 'The combination of politeness and put-down deflated Gromyko by making him appear a mere functionary who was not *au fait* with the USSR espionage programme'.[524]

The action was greeted with great approval by the press and public. It was seen as a glorious exception to the general picture of national decline that had been endured since the end of the war. Here, at last, was the British lion standing up for itself and inflicting a 'bloody nose' on one of the superpowers.[525] MI5 received congratulations from their colleagues throughout the Western world, 'enhancing the Service's prestige with its foreign friends and allies'. In contrast the expulsions took the KGB by surprise and had a severe impact on its activities.[526]

The action was however vehemently attacked by the leader of the opposition, Harold Wilson. It threw an unflattering light on the stance taken by his government. It posed the question of whether it had been too lax on espionage, and had let Soviet spies flourish for fear of upsetting the Kremlin. This impression was likely to be strengthened as Wilson had just returned from a high-profile trip to Moscow in which he had held some five hours of talks with Kosygin. [527] The Labour leader tried to recover ground in an intemperate interview on BBC radio, accusing the government of being heavy-handed and of pulling a stunt to influence a forthcoming by-election. Not surprisingly, Heath delivered a furious counterattack, describing Wilson's attitude as 'contemptible'. As prime minister, Wilson had known the position on Soviet intelligence activities, 'but did not deal with it'.[528]

[523] TNA, PREM 15/1935, telegram 1183, UKMIS NY to FCO, 28 September 1971.
[524] Thorpe, *Alec Douglas-Home*, pp. 417.
[525] George Walden, *Lucky George: Memoirs of an Anti-Politician* (London: Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1999), p. 146.
[526] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, pp. 571-575.
[527] TNA, FCO 28/1571, telegram 998, FCO to Mosocw, 10 September 1971; telegram 1316, Moscow to FCO, 13 September 1971; Scott to Bullard, 17 September 1971.
[528] Copies of newspaper reports of Wilson's interview are given in TNA, FCO 28/1574

The Soviet reaction

The immediate Soviet response was relatively mild. Two British diplomats were expelled, together with a naval attaché, an archivist and some British businessmen in Moscow. The recently negotiated visit of Douglas-Home to the Soviet Union in early 1972 was cancelled, together with other planned ministerial visits and meetings. Yet no ceiling was imposed on the number of British diplomats in Moscow, and the Soviet government accepted that the expelled British embassy personnel could be replaced.[529] There is no firm evidence, but it seems probable that this restrained response reflected a Soviet desire to avoid destabilising the gathering momentum towards European détente. Douglas-Home judged that the countermeasures would 'catch the headlines but [do] us minimum damage'. He agreed with Heath that they would accept the Soviet action, without further escalation.[530]

This was not quite the end of the struggle over intelligence agents. In 1972, a 'visa war' developed as the British government resisted Soviet attempts to reintroduce KGB agents to their staff in London. In return, the Soviet authorities refused to issue visas to British diplomats wanting to join the Moscow embassy. After prolonged negotiations, including the direct intervention of Douglas-Home, a compromise was agreed. The Soviet government tacitly accepted the ceilings imposed after the expulsions, and withdrew 14 visa applications for identified KGB agents. In return, the British abandoned five of its own applications for diplomats assigned to Moscow.[531] A kind of guerrilla war did continue with the KGB constantly seeking to introduce known agents and the British responding by refusing to grant visas. However both sides were keen to avoid a confrontation, and the intelligence issue gradually faded from prominence.[532] The exercise had proved a British success. It reduced permanently the number of KGB

[529] TNA. PREM 15/1935, Telegrams 1522, 1523, 1524, 1527, Moscow to FCO, 8 October 1971.
[530] TNA, PREM 15/1935, Douglas-Home to Heath, 11 October 1971; Moon to Graham, 12 October 1971; DBPO III,1, document 80, telegram 1527, Moscow to FCO, 8 October 1971, note 4, pp. 406-7.
[531] DBPO, document 90, 'Record of a conversation held during lunch at the Soviet Embassy', 7 March 1972, note 12, p. 450; TNA, FCO 28/2037, Bullard to Brimelow, 'The Anglo-Soviet Visa War', 8 March 1973; FCO 28/2032, telegram 603, FCO to Moscow, 28 June 1972; telegram 609, FCO to Moscow, 30 June 1972; and telegram 631, FCO to Moscow, 4 June 1972.
[532] TNA, FCO 28/2033, telegram 1319, FCO to Moscow, 29 August 1972; Guy to Alexander, 22 September 1972; and telegram 1240, FCO to Moscow, 13 November 1972.

agents in Britain to a rump of around 50, although this gain was partially offset by an increase in agents from other members of the Soviet bloc.[533]

The action fitted with the prevailing attitudes of Douglas-Home and his officials. They emphasised the continuing threat posed by the Soviet Union to the West, and placed little value on European détente, regarding it as a Soviet stratagem to weaken Western unity. The 'inadmissible activities' of Soviet officials in Britain were seen as a domestic manifestation of this continuing Soviet antagonism. They demonstrated the hypocrisy of Soviet protestations of a belief in 'peaceful co-existence', and they must be confronted just as firmly as the Soviet military threat had to be deterred by NATO. Given the low estimation of the potential for 'reconciliation' between East and West, a disruption of Anglo-Soviet relations would be a small price to pay for confronting Soviet aggression.

Interactions on bilateral issues

As a result of the firm action against the agents, at the end of 1971 Anglo-Soviet relations were at impasse. Business could be done in those areas that gave a positive benefit to the Soviet side, including trade, technical collaboration, and long-term student exchanges. But the Soviet leadership showed no appetite for political discussions.[534] We close this chapter with an assessment of these ongoing 'bilateral' interactions, before turning in the subsequent chapter to the gradual process of political reengagement during 1972-3.

Somewhat surprisingly, the regular programme of cultural and scientific exchanges was relatively unaffected by the disruption of the political relationship. The regular flow of Soviet performers to Britain continued almost unabated. This is illustrated by the *Days of Soviet Music* in November 1972, during which Soviet classical musicians undertook a programme of 32 concerts at venues throughout the country.[535] There was also no disturbance to the educational exchanges under which students spent periods at

[533] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 573.
[534] TNA, FCO 28/2014, telegram 62, Moscow to FCO, 13/1/72; and Scott to Walden, 14 January 1972.
[535] TNA, FCO 28/2073, 'Festival of Soviet and Russian Music, November 1972'

universities and research institutes in each other's country.[536] The Soviet decision to continue these interactions probably reflected their calculation of self-interest. Performances by Soviet artistes helped to project a benign image of the Soviet Union that was one element in the campaign to mobilise Western opinion in support of détente. A high-profile cancellation, coupled with the inevitable British reaction, would have been counterproductive in emphasising the continuing threat posed by the Soviet regime. The educational exchanges were also to the Soviet advantage, providing them with access to British science and technology.

From the British side, the continuation of the exchanges seems to have been almost an administrative routine. The official policy was that they would 'promote evolutionary trends within the Soviet Union and improve the political atmosphere in East/West relations'.[537] Yet, as demonstrated in the correspondence with Duncan Wilson, Douglas-Home and his officials placed little value on this hypothesis. Nonetheless, the exchanges had a momentum of their own. With no pressing need to modify the approach, they progressed almost on autopilot. The one direct advantage was that, along with the economic interactions, they maintained an ongoing dialogue between the two governments. This could provide a base from which to reactivate the political interactions when it was judged appropriate.

The smooth functioning of these bilateral interactions was however threatened by an increasingly active campaign by British Jewish groups on behalf of their counterparts in the Soviet Union. Up to this time, the treatment of the two to three million Soviet Jews had not aroused controversy. They had not been treated with excessive harshness and had some possibility to emigrate, an opportunity that was denied to the rest of the Soviet population. However in 1970, the issue suddenly flared into international prominence. In mid-year, the authorities arrested 30 to 40 Jews in Leningrad on charges of attempting to hijack a plane to flee the Soviet Union. Subsequently, two of their numbers were sentenced to death. Furious protests by Jewish groups led Western governments to make formal complaints to the Soviets on the severity of the sentences. Perhaps in response to

[536] DBPO III,I, document 99, 'Brief for Lord Eccles on Cultural Relations with the Soviet Union', 16 June 1972, pp. 481-3.
[537] TNA, FCO 28/2377, 'Brief No.4, Cultural Relations'.

this Western pressure, the sentences were commuted to 15 years' imprisonment and a significant number of Jews were allowed to emigrate. The genie was however now out of the bottle. Jewish organisations in the West began a sustained political campaign in support of the right of Soviet Jews to emigrate.[538]

In Britain this campaign continued throughout the Conservatives' period in office. The Jewish groups lobbied ministers and MPs, inspired a continuous flow of parliamentary questions, and ensured extensive press coverage. There were also attacks on Soviet property in London and demonstrations at Soviet cultural and sporting events.[539] The government's reaction was rather restrained. They made some limited inputs to the Soviets, but sought to 'avoid being swept into the position of making indiscriminate representations' on the treatment of Jews.[540] For example, when Douglas-Home visited Moscow in December 1973, he felt compelled to raise the cases of twelve Soviet Jews, which had been highlighted by MPs. Although the foreign secretary did mention the cases to Gromyko, he left the ambassador to submit the details to the Soviet foreign ministry. As was probably anticipated, four days later, the Soviets rejected the input as 'nothing more than an attempt to interfere in matters which are entirely within the competence of the Soviet authorities'.[541]

This muted reaction of the British government to the treatment of the Soviet Jews is perhaps understandable. British ministers had no *locus standi* to interfere in Soviet internal affairs and could not deploy meaningful diplomatic pressure to compel the Soviets to take action. Nonetheless, there is a striking contrast between Douglas-Home's constant public condemnation of the Soviet government's expansionist foreign policy and his studious lack of concern for its internal policies. It is true that this issue was addressed in a general way by the stance taken at the CSCE, but it was not allowed to disturb the bilateral relationship.

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[538] TNA, FCO 28/ 1611, Reeve to Guy, 2 November 1971.
[539] For details of this campaign see the documents in files TNA, FCO 28/1124, 28/1607-12, 28/2094-7, 28/2392, 28/2396, and 28/2614-5.
[540] Examples of the annunciation of British policy are TNA, FCO 28/1610, Bullard to Wiggin; FCO 28/1612, Walden to Renwick, 10 December 1971; FCO 28/2392, note from FCO to Bridges, 23 October 1973; FCO 28/2396, Meyer to Holt, 21 November 1973; FCO 28/2377, Brief on 'Jews and Christians'. Quote is taken from TNA, FCO 28/1607, Walden to Brimelow and Tickell, 13 January 1971.
[541] TNA, FCO 28/2396, telegram 1514, Moscow to FCO, 12 December 1973.

This restrained British approach, of course, contrasted with the American experience. Here, Congressional pressure, orchestrated by Senator Henry 'Scoop' Jackson, forced Henry Kissinger to seek an increase in the emigration rates as a price for superpower détente. Despite considerable concessions by the Soviets, Jackson and his allies insisted that emigration of Soviet Jews should be formally linked to the granting of 'most favoured nation' status for Soviet trade. This eventually became one of the more formidable straws that broke the back of the laboriously constructed American–Soviet détente.[542]

Economic relations

The Conservative government continued Labour's efforts to increase the levels of exports to the Soviet Union, although they met with a similar lack of success.

Diplomats in Moscow and London gave significant priority to facilitating the negotiations of British companies with their Soviet counterparts in pursuit of export contracts. High level political support for the export drive was provided by the establishment of an intergovernmental 'Joint Commission for Technology and Trade'.[543] This concept had been developed by the Labour government as a follow-up to the agreement on technological exchanges signed by Benn and Kirillin in January 1968. It was hoped that the Commission would provide a vehicle that could translate the technological interactions into firm Soviet orders.[544] After prolonged negotiations that spanned the change of government, the concept of a Joint Commission was agreed with

[542] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), pp. 1272-3; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000 [Weidenfeld & Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1982]), pp. 979-1031; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000 [Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999]), pp. 128-35; Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 340-42.
[543] TNA FCO 28/1581, Press notice 'Anglo-Soviet Joint Commission for Technology and Trade', 5 January 1971.
[544] TNA, FCO 28/821, 'Protocol for the first meeting of the Permanent United Kingdom/USSR Inter-Governmental Commission ...', 15 January 1971; and Wilson to Giffard, 17 June 1969.

the Soviets and the first meeting was held in London in January 1971.[545] The British team was led by John Davies, the Cabinet minister responsible for trade and industry. While the British emphasised that the Commission should produce specific actions leading to improved exports, nothing concrete emerged. The communiqué contained only a commitment to continue the joint working groups on specific areas of technology, and some warm words on the future prospects for increased trade.[546] The next scheduled meeting was cancelled following the expulsions and the Commission did not reconvene until April 1973. Despite a bravura performance by Peter Walker, by now the minister for trade and industry, there were again no concrete results.[547]

Despite these continuing efforts of ministers and officials, the level of British exports to the Soviet Union remained disappointing. Up to 1968, exports had continued to expand, reaching a level of £105m. Yet this represented a high water mark. The data in table 2 shows that for each of the years 1969-73, exports were below the level reached in 1968. When this was finally exceeded in 1974, it was more a reflection of price inflation than volume growth.

Table 2 - Balance of Anglo-Soviet trade 1968-74 (£ millions)[548]

	1968	**1969**	**1970**	**1971**	**1972**	**1973**	**1974**
UK exports to USSR	105	96	102	89	90	97	110

Furthermore, British exports were falling behind those of their Western rivals. As shown in Table 3, in the period 1969 -72, while levels of British exports remained static, those of France, Germany and Japan all increased. In the early 1960s, Britain had been the

[545] For details of these negotiations see the documents in the files TNA, FCO 28/821-2, FCO 28/ 1140-4, and FCO28/ 1581.
[546] TNA, FCO 28/1581, telegram 252, FCO to Singapore, 18 January 1971.
[547] TNA, FCO 28/2334, Killick to Douglas-Home, 'Second Meeting of the Permanent United Kingdom/Soviet Joint Commission: Moscow 16-18 April, 1973', 4 May 1973; and DBPO III,III, document 42, Killick to Douglas-Home, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations and Mr Brezhnev's Economic Diplomacy', 7 May 1973, pp. 207-13.
[548] TNA, CAB 133/456, Brief on Trade.

leading Western supplier to the Soviet Union, but by 1974 it was sixth. British market share was down from 20% to 8%.[549]

Table 3 – Imports by the USSR in 1972 from specific countries (£ millions)[550]

	UK	France	FRG	Japan
1969	96	111	169	112
1972	90	135	205	202

This emerging pattern of stagnation caused continuous soul searching among British officials as they tried to diagnose the underlying reasons. The argument was between those who attributed it to political factors, and those arguing that it also reflected a lack of competitiveness on the part of British industry. For example, in 1971 Dobbs, a diplomat in Moscow, concluded that the relatively poor political relationship with the Soviet government was being directly reflected in the low level of import contracts. He asserted that the Soviets set limits for each country, 'determined in part by foreign policy', and that 'no amount of hard selling could take us above the upper limit'.[551] This was also the view of the officials in the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), who tended to argue that a less overtly confrontational political line would improve trade prospects.[552] One example of this concern was provided in February 1973, when an official argued that the adversarial British role in the CSCE preparatory talks could have a detrimental impact on trade. As he expressed it: 'I would hate to see us losing some trade prospects in the pursuit of political objectives which may not in themselves be of any great political significance'.[553]

The counter argument, advanced by some British diplomats, was that the low level of exports was due more to the deficiencies of British industry than to any political

[549] DBPO III,III, document 72, Despatch Garvey to Callaghan, 27/11/74, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations'.
[550] TNA, FCO 28/2377, 'Brief No. 20 Trade', note that UK figure have been adjusted to match those of table 2.
[551] TNA, FCO 28/1586, Dobbs to Bullard, 30 April 1971.
[552] TNA, FCO 28/1586, Bullard to Bellamy, 11 May 1971 and Bellamy to Bullard, 17 May 1971.
[553] TNA, FCO 41/1282, Brimelow to Preston, 27 February 1973.

discrimination. Certainly in the post-war period Britain had suffered from low productivity. For example, in the fifteen years from 1950, the productivity of British companies was increasing at only half the rate of their continental rivals.[554] This deficiency arose from a complex mix of structural factors. British industry had under-invested in new manufacturing plant, was subjected to restrictive practices and over-manning imposed by powerful trade unions, and lacked a cadre of professionally trained management.[555] These structural weaknesses tended to make British goods less attractive to the Soviets in terms of quality and cost. The British ambassador in Moscow, John Killick, summed up this view, arguing that low export levels were in part attributable to 'the simple reason that our exporters do not measure up ...to the straight commercial criteria of product, delivery and so on'.[556] His successor in Moscow, Terence Garvey, gave the specific example of the British automobile industry that was 'too pre-occupied with its own problems to wrest from the Americans, Germans, Italians and French new major Soviet contracts'.[557]

Garvey assessed the balance of evidence in late 1974. In his view, Britain poor export performance resulted from 'partially political and partly economic' factors. On the political front, the climate of détente had allowed West Germany, Japan, and the United States to assume a level of trade appropriate to their economic size: 'frustrated but natural economic ties had become respectable'. In contrast, British 'policies and attitudes' on Czechoslovakia, defence and the expulsion of diplomats had hampered the prospects for increased exports. Yet British business had also not been well placed to take advantage of the opportunities. Garvey concluded that, despite the political handicaps, 'if the British economy had been stronger we should have done better'. This judgement seems right.[558]

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[554] Keith L. Nelson, *The Making of Détente: Soviet-American Relations in the Shadow of Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 40.
[555] For a polemic, but revealing account of the long term structural weaknesses of the British economy see Correlli Barnett's trilogy, *the Collapse of British Power* (Gloucester, UK: Alan Sutton, 1972); *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1986); and *The Lost Victory: British Dreams and Realities 1945-1950* (London: Macmillan, 1995).
[556] TNA, FCO 28/1587, Killick to EESD, 10 August 1971.
[557] DBPO III,III, document 72, Garvey to Callaghan, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations', 27 November 1974, pp. 349-56.
[558] *Ibid.*

In the eleven-year period covered by this study, trade with the Soviet Union received extensive attention from ministers and officials, but with scant results. The policy of Harold Wilson to use a close political dialogue to promote British exports produced no obvious benefits. The Conservatives' more confrontational approach may have played its part in Britain's poor export performance in 1970-4, but the pattern had already been set before they came into office. Overall, this was a deeply disappointing aspect of the British government's relationship with their Soviet counterparts.

* * *

By early 1972, despite the continuing interactions on the 'bilateral issues', the political dialogue between the two governments was at an impasse. This was a period of gathering momentum towards European détente and the lack of a direct Anglo-Soviet interface was seen as a handicap by both sides. We now turn to consideration of the processes that led to re-establishment of a political engagement.

Chapter 8

Rapprochement on British terms, 1972-74

During 1972, the momentum of détente increased dramatically both in Europe and on a global scale. In May, Richard Nixon made his ground breaking visit to Moscow and, later in the same month, the Atlantic Alliance finally agreed to the convening of a European security conference. These developments provided incentives to both the British and Soviet leaders to seek a resumption of their bilateral dialogue. The prime British motivation was the desire to have a strong voice in shaping EEC policy. For the Soviets, a resumption would provide a means to influence British attitudes during the CSCE process.

Despite these incentives, the two governments approached each other warily. They made moves to encourage a return to a political dialogue, but were also concerned to avoid any suggestion that they were appeasing the other in the dispute over intelligence agents. During 1973, these carefully moderated signals led to an element of non-political engagement. The Duke of Edinburgh agreed to visit the Soviet Union and the meeting of the Anglo-Soviet Joint Commission was reinstated. Yet, despite an impassioned plea from the ambassador in Moscow, Douglas-Home refused to take any initiatives to breathe new life into the political interactions. Eventually, the impasse was broken when Gromyko invited the British foreign secretary to visit the Soviet Union without any further British concessions. In many ways, this was a success for Douglas-Home's hard-line diplomacy. He had compelled the Soviet leaders to reopen the political relationship on his own terms.

This chapter begins with an assessment of the initial manoeuvring between the two governments. It then assesses the gradual process of rapprochement culminating in Douglas-Home's visit to Moscow in December 1973. The chapter closes by drawing some conclusions on the overall pattern of Anglo-Soviet relations during the Heath government.

Initial manoeuvring

Early in 1972, Douglas-Home tabled a paper to the Cabinet committee on Overseas Policy and Defence (OPD) that set out his desire to restore the political relationship. However, he also made clear that this did not imply any change in his underlying attitudes towards the Soviet Union. The foreign secretary and his advisors retained their sceptical assessment of Soviet motivations in pursuing détente. And Douglas-Home was determined to warn of the dangers from Soviet expansionist ambitions, even if this put Britain in a relatively isolated position compared with its allies. In mid-year, two meetings with Gromyko revealed that while both sides were willing to engage on the CSCE, they were equally determined to retain their confrontational stance on wider international developments.

The paper to the Cabinet committee had been drafted by Julian Bullard, the head of the Eastern European and Soviet department (EESD) of the FCO, in close dialogue with Thomas Brimelow.[559] It argued that there was a requirement for a new approach to relations with the members of the Soviet bloc. This was necessary to protect the standing of the British government within Western political circles. It stated that the government needed to 'play an active and conspicuous part in East-West relations' if it was 'to be in a position to influence the preparations for the Conference on Security in Europe (CSCE), the Conference itself and the developments which could follow'.

The paper noted that while in the 1960s the British government was 'among the pioneers' in ministerial exchanges with the Eastern bloc, its high-level contacts now lagged behind those of other Western countries:

> The United Kingdom, lacking the status of the USA, geographically more remote than the other [Western European] countries mentioned above,

[559] TNA, FCO 28/1674, Bullard to Brimelow, 15 December 1971 and 6 January 1972.

> cold-shouldered at present by the USSR on account of the expulsion of Soviet spies, a source of growing anxiety to Eastern European sellers of agricultural produce as admission to the Common Market comes nearer, a sober and steady member of the North Atlantic Alliance, a sceptical commentator on MBFR, and the proposed Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, neither courts the Warsaw Pact governments nor is courted by them.

To correct this deficiency, the government would initiate a 'policy of closer and more frequent contacts' in which it would 'make British views known to the governments of the countries concerned' and 'keep abreast of their thinking in return'. The paper then made the traditional arguments for promoting relations with the Soviet bloc: that improved contacts would help to inculcate Western ideas within the communist elites and lead to economic benefits. As expressed in the paper, 'as part of a long-term policy of working against the whole concept of the Iron Curtain', the government sought to promote better contacts 'at all levels and in all fields'.[560]

Later in the year, the foreign secretary set out the limitations that would apply to this process of rapprochement. Writing to the British ambassadors to the countries of the Soviet bloc, he acknowledged that 'I should be sorry if the current phase of coolness in our relations with Moscow were to continue so long that it became difficult to recover lost ground'. But he then warned the ambassadors that this ambition to improve Anglo-Soviet relations would not inhibit him from highlighting the ongoing threat posed by the Soviet Union. And he was unrepentant in striking a more discordant tone compared with other Alliance leaders. He admitted that 'many of my public statements have been out of tune with those made by some spokesmen in Western Europe and even (since President Nixon's visit to Moscow) the US'. Yet he asserted that 'many of these pronouncements by other spokesmen had been less than candid'. In contrast, '[t]here is a certain tradition of plain speaking in English public life which I would be unwilling to forego'. The

[560] DBPO III,I, document 89, 'Memorandum by Sir A. Douglas-Home on policy towards the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe', DOP(72)6, 29 February 1972, pp. 438-6.

foreign secretary did, however, concede that these warnings of the Soviet threat would be balanced by statements emphasising British interest in a positive engagement – 'hoping to get across the message that plain talk about what the Communist Governments are actually doing is perfectly compatible with a sincere desire for better relations with Communist countries'.[561]

All in all, there was a clear, if rather muted, call to begin the process of building a better relationship with the Soviet government and its Eastern European allies. It constituted something of a volte-face compared with the rebuff that Duncan Wilson had received when, just over a year previously, he had advocated just such a policy. Yet this process of reengagement would be circumscribed. There would be no compromise of the firm stand on intelligence activities, and certainly no British gestures that implied contrition for the expulsions. British rhetoric on the Soviet military threat would also continue to be sharper than that of its allies. Diplomats in both London and Moscow now began to probe for opportunities to deliver against this daunting brief.

In June 1972, both Douglas-Home and the ambassador in Moscow, John Killick, had meetings with Gromyko. The encounter between the two foreign ministers took place at the formal signing of the quadripartite protocol on Berlin.[562] Gromyko projected a friendly tone by rather unusually choosing to speak in English for the whole meeting.[563] Douglas-Home opened up with an appeal for a return to normality in Anglo-Soviet interactions. His counterpart was reasonably accommodating and it was agreed that there would be an intensified bilateral dialogue on the CSCE. However, the Soviet foreign minister then went on to berate Douglas-Home for his public pronouncements on Soviet global ambitions, arguing that they were excessively hostile and 'impugned Soviet motives'. The British foreign secretary gave an equally robust response. It was

[561] DBPO III,I, document 95, 'Record of the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of HM Representatives from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe ...', 28 April 1972, pp. 467-71; TNA, FCO 28/1663, Douglas-Home to Killick, 'Conference of Her Majesty's Ambassadors in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 25-28 April, 1972', 28 June 1972.
[562] DBPO III,I, document 98, 'Record of conversation between Sir A, Douglas-Home and Mr Gromyko ...', 3 June 1972 and note 12, pp. 478-81.
[563] TNA, FCO 2034, telegram 83, Berlin to FCO, 3 June 1972.

becoming clear that while the mutual interest in the CSCE gave a basis for resuming the political dialogue, there remained a strong undertone of hostility between the two sides.

At the end of the month, Killick had a follow-up meeting with Gromyko in Moscow. His brief revealed the two facets of British attitudes towards contact with the Soviets. As had been agreed, the ambassador was instructed to review attitudes towards the CSCE, but he was also directed to raise the wider aspects of Soviet foreign policy. These included the familiar British objections to the Soviet concept of 'peaceful coexistence'. The brief made clear that Douglas-Home and his officials 'did not regard a calling for competition by all means short of the risk of global war as a suitable basis for bilateral relations'. In addition, Killick was instructed to probe Soviet activities outside Europe. Foremost among these was the recent Soviet-Iraq treaty that had led to the nationalisation of Western oil facilities. There was an also British concern over Soviet support for the PFLOAS guerrillas in Oman, their naval activities in the Gulf and Indian Ocean, and proposals for an Asian security system. This wide-ranging and provocative brief was hardly designed to mollify the Soviet leadership. Indeed it tends to indicate that Douglas-Home was more interested in needling the Soviets than laying the basis for a constructive engagement.

Killick found the Soviet foreign minister 'friendly and constructive' and the conversation 'very business-like and without rancour'. On CSCE, 'the Russians showed themselves as forthcoming as they have been with other Western interlocutors'. The ambassador judged that 'the effect therefore was to put us back in the game': no longer would he have to rely on his Western colleagues 'for first hand and up to date statements of the Soviet position'.[564] The Soviet foreign minister was much less accommodating when Killick raised Soviet activities in the Indian Ocean and Oman, and expressed British objections to the concept of 'peaceful coexistence'. As assessed by Bullard, Gromyko 'came fairly close to telling Sir J. Killick to mind his own business'.[565] The

[564] DBPO III,I, document 100, telegram 980, Moscow to FCO, 30 June 1972; and document 101, Bullard to Wiggin, 5 July 1972.
[565] TNA, DBPO III,I, document 199, telegram 980, Moscow to FCO, 30 June 1972; and document 101, Bullard to Wiggin, 5 July 1972.

Soviet foreign minister directly attacked British imperial delusions: 'The concept that Britain had special rights and privileges in certain oceans and areas still seemed for some reason to play a part in Britain's thinking'. The Soviet Union 'had the same rights on the high seas as Britain or any other power'. He also criticised once again 'frequent unfriendly [British] statements about Soviet policy'.[566]

These exchanges marked the strict limitations placed by both sides on their dialogue. The Soviets were eager to engage on the CSCE. This was a topic of central importance to them, and one in which the British government had some power to constrain Soviet ambitions. In contrast, they were not prepared to indulge the British by providing explanations for Soviet policies outside Europe. Douglas-Home was also prepared to undertake a dialogue on the CSCE, as it improved his position among his allies. Yet he would not forego the opportunity to raise, both in public and in private, the threat posed by Soviet expansionist activities. Neither had he any appetite for gestures of contrition for the expulsions. Indeed, he seemed determined to confront the Soviets on their foreign policy. It was clear that the relationship would remain tense.

Within this restricted context, the Soviets continued to send out signals that they wished to continue the engagement. There was a marked improvement in the atmospherics of the interactions in Moscow, coupled with a visit by Soviet official, Nikolai Lunkov, to London to discuss the CSCE.[567] A further signal was the invitation by the Soviet equestrian federation to the Queen's husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, to visit the Soviet Union. This invited the Duke in his role as president of the International Equestrian Federation to attend the world championships for the three-day event due to be held in Kiev in 1973. This was an event in which his daughter, Princess Anne, was likely to be a competitor.[568]

[566] TNA, FCO 28/2035, telegram 984, Moscow to FCO, 30 June 1972.
[567] TNA, FCO 28/2036, Dobbs to Walden, 11 August 1972; FCO 28/2035, telegram 1239, Moscow to FCO, 15 August 1972; and telegram 1253, Moscow to FCO, 16 August 1972.
[568] TNA, FCO 28/2035, Collins to Bullard, 15 August 1972.

Contesting policy

In the words of Bullard, by the end of 1972 the Anglo-Soviet relationship had reached a 'nicely gradated plateau'.[569] Yet it remained cool and severely circumscribed when compared with the high-level contacts practised by the American, German and French governments. As 1973 opened, there was a debate between London and the embassy in Moscow on whether this situation could be allowed to continue. The ambassador, John Killick, made a fervent plea that the government should re-establish a high-level political dialogue. It was an input reminiscent of those made by his predecessor in Moscow, Duncan Wilson, and, as in the case of Wilson, Killick was firmly rebuffed. Douglas-Home and Brimelow indicated that while they would continue to seek a gradual rapprochement, they would not consider 'more demonstrative effort to improve relations'.[570]

Killick's concerns were expressed in a long letter to Thomas Brimelow.[571] In this, he argued that the absence of a substantive Anglo-Soviet dialogue was detrimental to the standing of the British government among its Western allies. He asserted that the 'lack of contact with and direct insight into top-level Soviet thinking may seriously undermine the credibility of our counsels with both NATO and the EEC'. This might lead the allies to share the Soviet view 'that we do not matter and that we are out of step'. The ambassador urged the government to promote the relationship, both by toning down its rhetoric and by taking proactive initiatives.

He was particularly concerned that the government should cease speculating on the possibility of forming an integrated defence capability for the EEC, and especially on

[569] TNA, FCO 28/2036, Bullard to Brimelow, 6 November 1972.
[570] DBPO III,III, document 38, 'Memorandum by Sir Alec Douglas-Home for the Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee: DOP(73)5', 18 January 1973, pp.196-8
[571] DBPO, III,III, document 37, 'Letter from Sir J. Killick (Moscow) to Sir T, Brimelow', 5 January 1973, pp. 187-95.

the option of creating a joint British/French nuclear force.[572] He averred that 'to keep publicly advocating policies and courses of action which our European partners do not adopt amounts precisely to the public image of being out of step and irrelevant which the Russians wish to encourage'. Termination of this rhetoric should be accompanied by an initiative to use the CSCE process to promote a political dialogue. For example, the British delegation could take a lead in the MPT, and support this by 'bilateral exchanges of substance with the Russians'. Finally, the ambassador urged that the British government should also 'continually demonstrate that we are open for business' on the bilateral front. One opportunity was the potential visit to Moscow by trade minister Peter Walker for a meeting of the Anglo-Soviet Joint Commission. Another was the possible visit by the Duke of Edinburgh: the 'sooner he can accept the [Soviet] invitation the better'.

This input found no favour in London. As reported by Bullard, ministers, and presumably Thomas Brimelow, felt that 'there was no case for modifying our present stance toward the Soviet Union'. Neither was Douglas-Home prepared to temper his strong calls for maintaining or even enhancing the European defence capability.[573]

This position was reflected in a further paper submitted by the foreign secretary to the Cabinet OPD committee on 18 January 1973. This acknowledged that the government was 'beginning to look the odd man out and cannot claim first hand knowledge of Soviet thinking'. Even so, Douglas-Home rejected the option of making a 'demonstrative effort to improve relations'. Any dramatic British moves would be seen 'as a sign of weakness'. The Soviets would portray them as evidence that the British government had been wrong over the expulsions and in speaking 'so plainly in public about defence and security'. While ministers and officials would make 'plain our readiness to improve relations with the Soviet government', there would be no specific initiatives. Ministers

[572] For a description of Heath's nuclear policy see Niklas H. Rossbach, *Heath, Nixon and the Rebirth of the Special Relationship: Britain, the US and the EC, 1970-4* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 84-121.
[573] TNA, FCO 28/2363, Bullard to Killick, 17 January 1973.

would also continue 'quietly but firmly to make known our views on defence and security'.[574]

When the paper was discussed at the end of March, Douglas-Home set out a clear statement of his caution over détente and his position towards relations with the Soviet leaders:

> The Russians undoubtedly regarded us as the hardliners among the Western Europeans and we had this reputation among the Western Europeans themselves. But the present Soviet policy of détente was directed to long term aims hostile to Western interests and it was necessary that we should try to prevent Western opinion from being misled into weakening its political and military defences.

There were some dissenting voices over Douglas-Home's hard-line position. These probably led by Peter Walker who was concerned that it was hampering the prospects for trade with the Soviet Union. But Heath's summary essentially endorsed the overall approach of the foreign secretary.[575]

Rapprochement on British terms

The refusal of the British government to take the lead, gradually forced the Soviet leaders to make the running in restoring the political relationship. After much manoeuvring, they invited Douglas-Home to visit the Soviet Union in December 1973. The Soviet climb-down almost certainly reflected developments in the CSCE process. The British delegation had played a prominent role in forcing the Soviet concessions in

[574] DBPO III,III, document 38, 'Memorandum by Sir Alec Douglas-Home for the Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee: DOP(73)5', 18 January 1973, pp. 196-8; the term Cassandra to the Western alliance is taken from DBPO, III,III, document 40, 'Letter from Mr Bullard to Sir J, Killick (Moscow)', 28 March 1973.
[575] DBPO III,III, document 41, 'Record of Ninth Meeting of the Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee', 6 April 1973, pp. 205-7.

the MPT. It seems clear that the Soviet leaders decided to restore the high level Anglo-Soviet dialogue to exert leverage in the ongoing second stage negotiations in Geneva.

The Soviets began the process of reconciliation by facilitating two high profile visits to Moscow that fell outside the directly political sphere. At the end of January, they signalled their enthusiasm for the Duke of Edinburgh to attend the European three day event championships in Kiev. They also extended the invitation to include a visit to the Soviet capital. On Douglas-Home's recommendation, the Duke agreed to make the trip.[576] This gesture was complemented by Soviet agreement to reinstate the meeting of the Anglo-Soviet Joint Commission for Technology and Trade. This provided the first opportunity since the expulsions for a British Cabinet minister, Peter Walker, to travel to the Soviet capital.[577]

These two ice-breaking manoeuvres provided the backdrop to a continuing dialogue over political issues. In late February 1973, Douglas-Home and Gromyko met at the international conference in Paris, called as a provision of the Vietnam peace agreement.[578] Over lunch, the two foreign ministers had a relaxed discussion, covering the CSCE and MBFR negotiations, and the impact of Britain's EEC membership on commercial relations. Douglas-Home concluded that Gromyko's 'ready acceptance of my invitation [to lunch] and his general attitude indicate that he is prepared to give some impetus himself to the improvement of Anglo-Soviet relations'.[579]

The Soviets continued to signal their willingness to re-open a high level political dialogue, but they also indicated that this would require a gesture of British contrition. The Soviet ambassador, Nikolai Lunkov, told Edward Heath that the 'Soviet leadership favoured improved contacts between Britain and the Soviet Union at all levels'. However, he went on to say that 'the ball was in our [the British government's] court',

[576] TNA, FCO 29/2404, telegram 123, Moscow to FCO, 27 January 1973; Jack to Lance, 5 February 1973; Walden to Brimelow, 7 March 1973; and Curle to Willett, 8 March 1973.
[577] TNA, FCO 28/2385, Killick to Douglas-Home, 'The Second Meeting of the Permanent United Kingdom/Soviet Joint Commission: Moscow, 16-18 April 1973', 4 May 1973.
[578] DBPO III,III, document 39, 'Letter from Sir T. Brimelow to Mr Dobbs (Moscow), 6 February 1973, note 11, p. 202.
[579] TNA, FCO 28/2363, telegram 327, Paris to FCO, 27 February 1973.

and that the British should take '"positive and practical measures" to improve Anglo-Soviet relations'.[580] When no British gestures were forthcoming, the Soviets once again took the initiative. Lunkov gave Heath a note from the 'Soviet leadership'. This affirmed that the Soviet government would be 'prepared to enter into "political consultations" with the emphasis on the British and Soviet proposals for the work of the CSCE'.[581] The Soviet eagerness for a summit was further demonstrated during the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh to Moscow. The Soviet head of state Nickolai Podgorny made an explicit statement that the invitation given in 1970 for Heath to visit the Soviet Union was still applicable.[582]

Based on these developments, British officials assumed that the next Soviet step would be a formal invitation for Heath to make a trip to the Soviet Union.[583] In fact, the Soviets surprised their British counterparts by issuing the invitation to Douglas-Home. The two foreign ministers met at the United Nations in September. After a 'fairly tough' discussion on CSCE and the Soviet treatment of dissidents, Gromyko unexpectedly invited Douglas-Home to visit the Soviet Union before the end of the year. An official, Tony Acland, found that 'the transition of the waspish tone of [Gromyko's] earlier remarks to his bland renewal of the invitation was rather startling'. He concluded that it could indicate that the Soviet foreign minister 'was acting on superior orders and with personal reluctance'.[584] After some consultation, Douglas-Home agreed to undertake the visit and a date in early December 1973 was subsequently agreed .[585]

It is hard to interpret this invitation as anything but a climbdown by the Soviet leadership. They had suffered a public humiliation with the expulsion of their diplomats and had not extracted any penalty from the British government. In supporting the visits

[580] DBPO, III,III, document 44, telegram 498, FCO to Moscow, 3 July 1973, note 2, p. 216.
[581] DBPO, document 46, 'Letter from Sir J. Killick (Moscow) to Sir T. Brimelow', 14 August 1973, note 1, pp. 221-2
[582] TNA, FCO 28/2405, Killick to Douglas-Home, 2 October 1973.
[583] TNA, FCO 28/2367, Acland to Bridges, 13 September 1973; FCO 28/2368, Bridges to Alexander, 25 September 1973.
[584] TNA, FCO 28/2368, telegram 957, UK Misson NY to FCO, 25 September 1973; FCO 28/2374, Bullard to Killick, 5 October 1973.
[585] TNA, FCO 28/2368, telegram UKMIS NY to FCO, 25 September 1973; telegram 1114, Mosocw to FCO, 26 September 1973; telegram 654, FCO to UKMIS NY, 26 September 1973.

of the Duke of Edinburgh and Peter Walker to Moscow, Douglas-Home had made some subtle conciliatory gestures that had no political cost, but he had resisted anything that could be interpreted as an act of contrition. Instead he had consolidated the British role in the MPT negotiations, in which the West and the neutrals were forcing the Soviets on the defensive. It seems that Brezhnev's desire to secure a successful CSCE had overruled the residual Soviet ambitions to force the British government to pay a price for the resumption of the political dialogue. It was a remarkable success for Douglas-Home's hard-line approach, maintained against the advice of his ambassadors in Moscow. His intransigence, coupled with effective British diplomacy within the CSCE process, had forced the Soviet leadership into making the first moves.

Douglas-Home's visit to Moscow

During the period leading up to the foreign secretary's visit, the Soviet government did their best to create a warm atmosphere. A British diplomat in Moscow reported that Soviet ministries and agencies had 'evidently received a clear directive to remove us from the black list', and 'in true Soviet style, all of them are now out to show ... [they] can carry out the directive more efficiently than their neighbours'.[586] The ambassador, John Killick, who was being transferred back to London, was granted a farewell call with Kosygin. The Soviet premier turned on the charm, conducting the conversation in a 'remarkably warm and friendly atmosphere'. He observed that Anglo-Soviet relations were 'now becoming normal and friendly'. The Soviet government valued the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh, regarding it 'as a very positive factor' in the relationship. They attached 'very great importance' to the forthcoming visit of Douglas-Home, and 'wished to confirm' the invitation to Heath. Kosygin went on to affirm that 'when your Prime Minister comes here, we will map out a programme for further positive development of our relationship'.[587]

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[586] TNA, FCO 28/2368, Cartledge to Bullard, 17 October 1973.
[587] TNA, FCO 28/2368, telegrams 1241 and 1242, Moscow to FCO, 24 October 1973.

Despite these warm Soviet overtures, British ministers and officials retained their scepticism on the potential to develop a productive relationship. This was set out in a brief to the new ambassador, Terence Garvey. This repeated yet again the view that the Soviet government's underlying motivation was 'progressively to switch the balance of power in the world in favour of the socialist states'. Brezhnev's initiative for a détente in Europe was seen to be designed to undermine Western European security, by fostering the disintegration of NATO and the withdrawal of American forces. This would leave the Soviet Union as 'infinitely the strongest power on the continent'. The brief asserted that, as a result of this Soviet policy, the 'natural relationship of Britain and the Soviet Union' was 'a rather cool one given our totally different world outlooks'. The most that could be expected was a political dialogue giving occasional 'revealing glimpses of Soviet thinking', and 'educating the Soviet leaders in the real status of the Western world'. Trade could be expanded, but only at the 'great cost in private and public effort'. Technological collaboration would favour the Soviet side. And cultural contacts 'will leave the great bulk of the Soviet population untouched'.[588] This was a truly bleak minimalist view of the potential value of engagement with the Soviet leadership.

This constrained view of the Anglo-Soviet relationship set the tone for Douglas-Home's visit to the Soviet Union. The foreign secretary explained the background to selected British ambassadors, with a barely concealed flavour of triumphalism. The brief stressed that the visit was being made on Soviet initiative, and that 'no price was asked or paid'. The foreign secretary would make no concessions in British positions on détente or the CSCE. He did not regard the 'invitation of one Foreign Minister to another for a meeting in the former's capital to be requited by anything more than acceptance'. While Douglas-Home would be looking for points of agreement, he hoped that the visit 'would also provide an opportunity for discussing and clarifying points of disagreement'. 'It would be a disservice and would create illusion leading to disappointment and recrimination later, to gloss over them just for the sake of creating a "good

[588] DBPO III,III, document 49, Bullard to Garvey, 'Britain's Relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe', 2 November 1973, pp. 235-7.

atmosphere"'.[589] Douglas-Home had stood firm and forced the Soviet government into the role of demandeur. He was not about to back down when his policy had proved so successful. Rather, he seemed determined to enjoy the discomfort of his Soviet interlocutors as they were forced into an accommodation.

Sir Alec and Lady Douglas-Home landed in Moscow on the evening of Sunday 2 December 1973. As Garvey remarked, the visit 'had been programmed [by the Soviet government] for a successful outcome'. Hospitality was lavish and Soviet officials were more accommodating than normal in negotiating the communiqué. This resulted in a 'neutral, relatively short document to which Her Majesty's Government could, without shame or dissimulation, subscribe'.[590]

In the discussions on bilateral relations, détente and the CSCE, Gromyko was on his best behaviour, setting out to be 'as civil as possible, to avoid controversy, even to avoid argument'.[591] In contrast, Douglas-Home went out of his way to raise controversial topics, even to the extent of goading the Soviet foreign minister. But he drew little response. The foreign secretary raised his favourite theme of the ambiguities within the Soviet concept of 'peaceful coexistence'. He tried to 'get Gromyko to understand how irritating it is for Western free enterprise countries to put up with constant harping by the Communists on the ideological struggle and on their determination to achieve a victory over rival ideologies'. The Soviet foreign minister did not rise to the bait, simply responding that 'it would be quite unprofitable to have ideological discussion as [they] would never agree'. Douglas-Home also stressed the importance of basket III of the CSCE, emphasising 'the need for practical steps to put into the relationship [of] peaceful coexistence between East and West Europe'. While Gromyko's response was 'entirely negative', he nonetheless refrained from an aggressive exposition of Soviet desiderata. [592]

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[589] DBPO III,III, document 50, telegram 876, FCO to Moscow, 22 November 1973, pp. 237-8.

[590] DBPO III,III, document 52, Garvey to Douglas-Home, 'Visit of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the USSR – 2-5 December', 11 December 1973, pp. 245-9.

[591] *Ibid.*

[592] TNA, FCO 28/2376, telegram 1480, Moscow to FCO, 4 December 1973.

Douglas-Home commented to Heath on Gromyko's passivity. He reported that the Soviet foreign minister 'resolutely refused to be provoked by some frank speaking on my part both on our respective ideologies and about Soviet attitudes to item 3 of CSCE'. Indeed, the Soviet foreign minister seemed 'determined to maintain an harmonious atmosphere ... whatever I might say'.[593] This behaviour provides some evidence for Acland's observation that Gromyko was under orders to promote a dialogue with Douglas-Home. One can only imagine how the inscrutable, long-serving Soviet foreign minister burned inside as he was forced to accept this needling, without the freedom for a forceful response.

The other major topic of discussion was the Middle East. The visit occurred at a time of high tensions. The Yom Kippur war had broken out two months earlier. While the protagonists had agreed a ceasefire, the basis for a permanent disengagement still remained to be agreed. Henry Kissinger was in the midst of his complex diplomacy designed to give the American government the leading role in orchestrating the Arab-Israeli interactions. There were also significant tensions within the Western alliance. Hard hit by increases in the price of oil and restrictions on production, the EEC members did not support the American policy. Kissinger was following a step-by-step approach to a settlement. In contrast, the Europeans argued that Israel should be prepared to withdraw from large parts of the territory captured in 1967. A diplomatic row had erupted. The Europeans expressed their resentment of Kissinger's high handed unilateral behaviour. In response, the American secretary of state complaining vehemently that his allies were undercutting his negotiating stance.[594]

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[593] *Ibid.*

[594] For descriptions of the diplomacy during and in the aftermath of the Yon Kippur war see Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 302-31; Alistair Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, the Crucial Year* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009), pp. 227-331 and 342 -93; Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005 [Simon and Schuster, 1992]), pp. 511-72; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000 [Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1982]), pp. 450-667 and 747-99; Henry Kissinger, *Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), pp. 5-417; Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War: Heath, Brandt and the Dream of Political Unity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 184-247.

While the two foreign ministers discussed the developing situation at length, there were no clear conclusions. As Douglas-Home reported, 'Gromyko did not say anything very new, and the Russian and British positions are pretty close'. In other words, both believed in a negotiated settlement, based on Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territory.[595] In reality there was little if any scope for Anglo-Soviet cooperation. The Soviet government was seeking to preserve some role in the process orchestrated by Kissinger, while the British were working toward a coordinated EEC response. In fact neither government was to establish a significant role in the American-dominated peace process.

Following the two days of negotiations in Moscow, the foreign secretary and his wife departed for a visit to Leningrad and British diplomats tried to assess the implications of the meetings. In a thoughtful dispatch, the British ambassador, Terence Garvey concluded that the Soviet aim had been solely to 'restore the amicable relations at government level'. They had not been seeking to influence British thinking on substantive issues. Rather they were undertaking the groundwork for a relationship that could be exploited at some later stage. Garvey speculated that the main Soviet motivation was to provide a conduit to influence the British position on European détente and the CSCE. He observed that the Soviet government would 'have already seen at Helsinki, Vienna and Geneva that the UK has a significant and, for them rather troublesome, part in the working out of Western positions in European questions'. And that they would 'wish to avert the negative effect which a Britain still in bad relations with the Soviet Union could have in general development of Western policy'.

Garvey went on to speculate that a second Soviet motivation for repairing the relationship could be Brezhnev's 'personal predilections'. He appeared to 'enjoy the panoply of summitry' and his 'diplomatic successes are put to good use to strengthen his political position at home'. Exchange visits with Heath could be an attractive prospect

[595] TNA, FCO 28/2376, telegram 1480, Moscow to FCO, 4 December 1973.

for the Soviet leader, as the British 'need not be modest for the prestige of Downing Street or Buckingham Place'.[596]

Douglas-Home was reasonably satisfied with the restoration of the relationship, but as always took a cautious view of the potential significance:

> All in all I am encouraged by the fact that they clearly set store by good relations. It gives us some little leverage. But on anything even faintly related to liberalism the door is firmly looked.[597]

A month later, Brezhnev sought to extract a dividend. Heath was one of the Western leaders who received a personal letter from the Soviet leader urging faster progress at the CSCE. It appealed to the leaders to take a direct hand in resolving the deadlock in the negotiations.[598] Garvey interpreted this as further evidence that the CSCE was the main Soviet motivation in restoring the relationship. He commented that it was 'not coincident' that the 'new climate in Anglo-Soviet relations brings us back within range of Soviet arm-twisting from which previous distance freed us'.[599] The arm-twisting was however ineffective and Heath politely rebuffed the Soviet leader's input. [600]

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In February 1974, the Conservatives were defeated in a general election and Douglas-Home left office for the last time. The visit to the Soviet Union in December 1973 was the culmination of his handling of Anglo-Soviet relations during his period as foreign secretary. He had taken a relatively isolated stance among his allies in arguing that there was limited scope for close relations with an ideological adversary. And he had angered

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[596] DBPO III,III, document 52, Garvey to Douglas-Home, 'Visit of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the USSR – 2-5 December', 11 December 1973, pp. 245-9.
[597] TNA, FCO 28/2376, telegram 1480, Moscow to FCO, 4 December 1973.
[598] TNA, FCO 28/2579, Goulding to Bullard, 15 January 1974.
[599] TNA, FCO 28/2579, telegram 81, Moscow to FCO, 22 January 1974.
[600] DBPO III,II, document 62, Tickell to Wiggin, 18 January 1974, pp. 235-8; TNA, FCO 28/2579, telegrams 68 and 69, FCO to Moscow, 31 January 1974.

the Soviets by dealing decisively with their intelligence agents, and by speaking out on the continuing threat posed by their military strength and ideological subversion. Despite the warnings of Duncan Wilson and John Killick, the breakdown in the Anglo-Soviet relationship had not weakened the British position within the EEC or Atlantic Alliance. Indeed as the CSCE process developed, Douglas-Home's scepticism had been reflected in the Western determination to force Soviet concessions at the conference. The prominent British role in the MPT negotiations had resulted in the Soviet decision to take the initiative in restoring the high-level political relationship. The veteran foreign secretary had charted his own course. But at the end of the voyage, the British position was fully congruent with the Western consensus.

Conclusions

We close this account of Anglo-Soviet relations during the Heath government with an assessment of the evolution of the relationship in the context of the research questions addressed in this study. This begins with an examination of the extent to which the individual preferences of Heath and Douglas-Home shaped the overall policies despite the structural rigidities of the Cold War. Attention is then turned to the details of the policy-making process and the roles of officials both in London and Moscow in determining the stance adopted. Finally a brief assessment is made of how much the changing pattern of interactions with the Soviet superpower reflected Britain's declining importance within the international system.

Structural determinants and personal preferences

The most significant feature of the Conservative approach was that it placed such a low value on maintaining a high-level political relationship with the Soviet leadership. This stance differed markedly from that adopted not only by the previous Labour

government, but also by earlier post-war Conservative administrations.[601] Both Churchill and Macmillan had prized direct interactions with their Soviet counterparts. And they had sought to position these interchanges as an integral component of the superpower dialogue by maintaining the 'special relationship' with the American president.[602] Normally the aim was to moderate the extremes of the Soviet-American antagonism, as summed up in Churchill's famous aphorism that 'to jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war'.[603] Harold Wilson was operating in a less directly confrontational era, as Brezhnev and Kosygin sought a dialogue with Western European governments, notwithstanding the fact that that American-Soviet interactions were still constrained by the escalating conflict in Vietnam. Nonetheless, the Labour prime minister sought to continue the direct British involvement in the superpower rivalry by acting as an intermediary between the Soviets and the Americans. In contrast, Heath and Douglas-Home chose to place much less priority on maintaining a high-level Anglo-Soviet relationship. This poses the question of how much this change of approach reflected the personal preferences of the Conservative leadership, and how much it was conditioned by changes in the international context. In fact, both elements were important.

The early 1970s saw a rapid evolution in the overall pattern of East-West interactions, which significantly reduced the scope for a meaningful bilateral Anglo-Soviet political relationship. Perhaps the most important factor was the emergence of a direct American-Soviet relationship. Nixon and Kissinger were determined to handle this on a personal basis and saw no need for third party mediation.[604] There was therefore little if any

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[601] This observation was made by Christopher Hill and Christopher Lord, 'The foreign policy of the Heath government' in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon ed., *The Heath Government, 1970-74: A Reappraisal* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 309.
[602] For Churchill's diplomacy see: Uri Bar-Noi, *The Cold War and Soviet Mistrust of Churchill's Pursuit of Détente, 1951-1955* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); Klaus Larres, *Churchill's Cold War: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); and John W Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign: Britain and the Cold War 1951-5* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). For Macmillan's interactions with the Soviet leaders see: Nigel J Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (Basingstoke UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 193-219; John P. S. Gearson, *Harold Macmillan and the Berlin Wall Crisis, 1958-62* (Basingstoke UK: Macmillan Press, 1998); Curtis Keeble, *Britain, the Soviet Union and Russia* (Basingstoke UK: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 250-70.
[603] Speech at the White House, 26 June 1954, Oxford Dictionary of Quotations.
[604] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), pp. 112-62, 522-57, 788-841, 1124-64, and 1202-1257.

opportunity for Heath and Douglas-Home to continue the direct British involvement in the superpower interactions. As the American leaders were reluctant to allow even their own State Department to play a role, they would have been extremely unlikely to empower a British contribution.

The scope for British initiative with the Soviet leaders was also curtailed by the growth of the interactions between Western European governments and their Soviet counterpart. This was leading to an increasingly crowded set of multi-polar East-West relationships. Furthermore, as British diplomats constantly noted, the British government was less attractive than their allies as a dialogue partner for the Soviets. Thus the Americans were the rival superpower. The West Germans held the key to the recognition of the post-war geographical status quo. And the relatively independent position of the French still offered the potential to destabilise the Atlantic Alliance.

In the 1970s, Britain ministers had much less opportunity to craft a meaningful Anglo-Soviet dialogue than their predecessors. They were shorn of their position as an intermediary with the American government, and were operating within the context of competing bilateral relationships. These structural factors would have reduced the importance of the Anglo-Soviet dialogue in any event. But the individual preferences of Heath and Douglas-Home also played an important part in determining the singular British position.

Heath eschewed on ideological grounds the traditional prime ministerial ambition of forging a close and privileged position with the American president. He was a committed European who saw membership of the Community as a vital component of Britain's future. He was prepared to surrender some elements of the Anglo-American special relationship in pursuit of his vision of an integrated Europe. In the long term, his aim was to replace the increasingly unequal Anglo-American relationship with a 'US-EC relationship of equals'.[605] Rossbach has demonstrated that Heath's policy towards the Americans was nuanced, with the approach varying dependent on the issue and also

[605] Rossbach, *Heath, Nixon*, especially pp. 1-4, quote p.2.

being modified over time.[606] Nonetheless, as Möckli has described, Heath was prepared to forego large elements of the 'special relationship' in favour of making the EEC as an independent actor on the world stage.[607] This was summed up by Henry Kissinger, who recalled that Heath 'was content to enjoy no higher status in Washington than any other European leader. Indeed, he came close to *insisting* on receiving no preferential treatment'.[608] If there had been any residual potential for a British role as an intermediary between the two superpowers then Heath's fixation with Europe would have mitigated against its exploitation.

The opportunity for a continuing Anglo-Soviet political relationship was further reduced by Douglas-Home's views on détente. The foreign secretary took a more sceptical stance than his allies or his predecessors. He reversed Stewart's initiative to gain acceptance of a security conference within the Atlantic Alliance. He also showed little interest in promoting an Anglo-Soviet dialogue, even when other Western powers were fostering closer relations with the Kremlin. Furthermore, he then placed the government in an even more isolated position with his decision to fracture the Anglo-Soviet political relationship by the expulsion of the agents. This effectively closed the door to a meaningful British contribution to the gathering momentum of European détente. Somewhat ironically, when coupled with the prominent role of the EEC in the CSCE process, this sceptical position prompted the Soviets to resume a dialogue on British terms. Yet this was confined to the one issue of the CSCE negotiations. It was a far cry from the direct involvement of previous British leaders in seeking to resolve the major East-West issues.

In summary, the personal preferences of Heath and Douglas-Home combined with the structural geopolitical realties to determine the minimalist nature of the Anglo-Soviet political relationship during this period. This then leaves the counter-factual question of whether a Labour government adopting an alternative policy would have produced a different outcome.

[606] Rossbach, *Heath, Nixon.*
[607] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy.*
[608] Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 932-5, quote p. 933.

There can be little doubt that if Wilson had won the 1970 election, he and Stewart would have sought a closer Anglo-Soviet engagement. However, it seems unlikely that this would have led to meaningful results. Even if Wilson had recovered his enthusiasm for seeking to mediate the superpower relationship, it is hardly conceivable that Nixon and Kissinger would have acceded to the resurrection of a prominent British role. In the area of European détente, the Western position was always likely be dominated by the Soviet-German interactions, moderated by the Americans. The most likely outcome would have been that Wilson and Stewart continued a high-level political dialogue with the Soviet leaders, but failed to achieve any influence on international events. Indeed, such a dialogue could have been counterproductive by making the British leaders vulnerable to Soviet pressure for concessions at the MPT, and inhibiting firm action against the intelligence agents.

By 1970 Britain's place at the high table of East-West relations had been lost. Heath and Douglas-Home responded to this reality by accepting that there was little value in direct Anglo-Soviet relations. Rather, they sought an alternative source of influence within an integrated ECC. Perhaps this pragmatism was preferable to a continued search for a dialogue with the Soviet leaders that was but an echo of a lost status.

The role of officials

This study throws a revealing light on the role of officials in determining the British policy. Douglas-Home's instincts found ready reinforcement from his staff in London under the leadership of Thomas Brimelow. The sceptical assessment of the long-term value of détente appears to have been a consensus opinion, and there was also strong support for robust action against the espionage agents. While there is no hard evidence, the record gives a 'feel' of the officials being more in tune with the stance of Douglas-Home than that of Michael Stewart. Certainly, this is the impression given by George

Walden in recalling his experience as a desk-officer in EESD during this period.[609] And as we shall see in the following chapter, the preferences of the officials were also demonstrated by their resistance to the reversal of the policy by the incoming Labour government.

Despite the general support in London, the government's policy was questioned by both the ambassadors in Moscow, Duncan Wilson and John Killick. Why should two experienced diplomats take such different views from their colleagues? Was this based on an intellectual analysis that would have conditioned their views irrespective of whether they were based in London or Moscow? Or was their dissatisfaction primarily conditioned by their role as ambassador?

The two ambassadors were very different in their background and experience. Wilson had a reputation as an intellectual, as befitted his double first from Balliol, and was considered an expert on policy towards the Soviet Union.[610] In contrast, John Killick had joined the army in 1939 aged twenty and remained in military service for the next eight years. In the words of his obituary, 'the army had put a clear stamp on his personality and appearance which he never lost'.[611] His appointment to Moscow was his first experience of service behind the Iron Curtain and he later recounted:

> With hindsight, and even at the time, it was pretty clear to me that I was not being posted to Moscow because of my tremendous Soviet expertise, or knowledge of Russian, but simply to hold the fort there during what promised to be a difficult period following the expulsion of 105 Russian KGB men.[612]

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[609] George Walden, *Lucky George: Memoirs of an Anti-Politician* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1999), pp. 139-51.
[610] FCO 28/1623, Biographical note on 'Sir Archibald Duncan Wilson GCMG.'
[611] *The Times*, 19 February 2004, Obituary of Sir John Killick, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article1023358.ece> [accessed 3 March 2010].
[612] Churchill College Cambridge, Diplomatic Oral History Project, Interview with Sir John Killick, <http://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/archives/collections/BDOHP/Killick.pdf> [accessed 3 March 2010].

Wilson certainly had an intellectual basis for his objections to the policy formulated in London. He disagreed with Brimelow on the role of ideology in determining Soviet foreign policy and was a long-standing advocate of closer Anglo-Soviet interactions. In contrast, Killick was a robust ex-army officer with no direct experience of dealing with the Soviets. He had no *a priori* reason to dispute the line developed in London. While difficult to prove, it seems probable that both men were influenced to some extent by the context of their role as ambassador. Isolated in Moscow, they had no avenue to influence British foreign policy other than engagement with their host governments. It would be understandable if they were attracted by arguments that justified such an engagement.

Whatever the combination of intellectual analysis and concern with promoting the prominence of their embassy, both Wilson and Killick delivered trenchant criticism of the consensus of opinion in London. Why then did this have so little impact on the policy-making process? The explanation might lie in the overall decline in the role of ambassadors during this period, augmented by the distinct difficulties of interacting with the Soviet government.

As noted by Young, in the 1970s there was a lively debate on the value of embassies. Governments had more frequent contacts with their counterparts both in direct meetings and in multilateral forums, and there was an increasing range of information available from the media. The input from embassies was becoming an increasing small component of the data used to formulate policy.[613] From his vantage point in the private office of the foreign secretary at the end of the decade, Walden observed 'how quickly the power and influence of ambassadors was draining away'.[614]

In addition to this general decline in ambassadorial influence, the diplomats in Moscow suffered specific handicaps in seeking to make a distinctive contribution. They had very limited contacts with Soviet ministers and officials. Further their Soviet interlocutors invariably confined themselves to a well-defined official line with little or no informal

[613] John W. Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy: A Case Study of British Diplomatic Practice 1963-76* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 60-6.
[614] Walden, *Lucky Jim*, p. 231.

discussion. There was none of the gossip and leaking that was found in many capitals, and, under the watchful eye of the KGB, interactions with non-governmental actors were severely restricted. Diplomats were therefore reduced to deducing Soviet motivations from analysis of formal speeches and the contents of the tightly controlled Soviet press. In reality, their sources of information were hardly more intimate than those available to the officials in London.[615] As a consequence, their policy recommendations were based more on a different interpretation of a common information base, than on any privileged insight into Soviet thinking. This minimised their influence, especially when confronted by such an experienced Kremlinologist as Thomas Brimelow.

Britain's declining world role

Finally, this study provides a vivid illustration of Britain's changing role within the international system. For over two centuries, it had been one of the great powers that determined world affairs.[616] However, in the post-war era, this had become less and less of a reality as the country's relative economic and military strength declined. The Empire had been lost and, after 1967, Britain no longer deployed its military forces on a world-wide basis. It was reduced to a medium-sized European power with a chronically weak economy, and a nuclear deterrent dependent on American largesse. The echoes of its role in the wartime Grand Alliance and its leading contribution to establishing the Atlantic Alliance began to grow ever fainter.

Scholars have often used the loss of Empire, or the increasing asymmetry in the Anglo-American special relationship, to assess the post-war decline of British global influence. The relationship with the Kremlin provides a further calibration. The British role in

[615] A good description of the operation of the Moscow embassy in this period is given in Keeble, *Britain, the Soviet Union and Russia*, pp. 288-95. Further insight is given in Michael F. Hopkins, ''Worlds Apart': The British Embassy in Moscow and the Search for East-West Understanding', *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2000), 131-48 and Gillian Staerk, 'The Role of HM Embassy in Moscow, *Contemporary British History*, 14 (2000), 149-61.
[616] Somewhat arbitrarily, the start of Britain's role as a great power is taken as its participation in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14) – Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 36.

mediating the dialogue between the two superpowers was one of the remaining vestiges of its former status, and its decline gives an indication of Britain's changing position in the world. The role was losing traction during the era of Harold Wilson, but during the Heath government it was abandoned completely. There was no attempt at maintaining an independent dialogue with the Soviets, or a 'special' role in influencing American policy towards the East-West geopolitical confrontation. Indeed the British government had less leverage on East-West relations than their German and French colleagues. The early 1970s saw the extinction of the last flickers of Britain's post-war ambitions to remain as a major determinant of the direction of global affairs. From now on, British influence would be exercised as part of the multilateral processes or, in the eras of Thatcher and Blair, as a junior and compliant auxiliary to the American super-power.

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The period of Conservative government in 1970-4 saw a significant change in the nature of the Anglo-Soviet relationship. The combination of the structural changes in the pattern of East-West interactions and the personal inclinations of the two leaders markedly reduced the prominence of the dialogue. By the time the Conservatives left office, the relationship was reduced to sparing over the CSCE process, coupled interactions on the relatively trivial 'bilateral' topics. In the next chapter we will explore the attempts by the incoming Labour administration to reverse this pattern by re-establishing a more vibrant Anglo-Soviet interaction.

Part 4

In early 1974, Britain was in the midst of another of the industrial crises that so disfigured the Heath administration. The Arab-Israeli war of October 1973 had interrupted oil supplies to Western Europe and the National Union of Miners was quick to exploit the resulting energy shortage. When the miners' leaders announced a national strike, Edward Heath responded by calling a general election on the issue of 'who runs the country'.[617] This resulted in a hung parliament and Heath failed in his subsequent efforts to form a coalition with the Liberals. As a result, on 4 March Harold Wilson once again became prime minister at the head of a minority Labour government. This limped on until October, when, in a second general election, Labour was confirmed in power with an overall majority of just three.[618]

Wilson appointed Jim Callaghan as the new foreign secretary and was content for him to take the lead in shaping foreign policy. Callaghan soon announced that he wished to improve relations with the Soviet government. In place of the sceptical stance taken by Douglas-Home, he would make a 'substantial effort' to develop the relationship. This abrupt change of policy disturbed his officials. They expressed their concern that the foreign secretary might be willing to pay too high a price in return for an enhanced relationship. Yet as the dialogue with the Soviets unfolded, it became clear that Callaghan shared the basic positions developed by his predecessor. He would remain loyal to the Western determination to force Soviet concessions at the CSCE, and he would not allow known Soviet agents to enter Britain as diplomats or trade officials. Nonetheless, he did not accept the aggressive, dismissive attitude to the bilateral Anglo-Soviet relations shown by Douglas-Home, and demanded new initiatives to enliven the interactions.

[617] For accounts of the Heath government see Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon ed., *The Heath Government, 1970-74* (London: Longman, 1996); Martin Holmes, *The Failure of the Heath Government,* 2nd edn. (Basingstoke UK: Macmillan Press, 1997); Dominic Sandbrook, *The State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970-4* (London: Allen Lane, 2010); Philip Ziegler, *Edward Heath: The Authorised Biography* (London: Harper Press, 2010), pp. 318-442.
[618] Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 607-15 and 643-7; and James Callaghan, *Time and Chance* (London: William Collins, 1987), pp. 308-9.

Callaghan's strategy to improve the relationship was built around a visit by Harold Wilson and himself to Moscow in February 1975. The Soviets made every effort to maximise the prestige of the visit with Brezhnev playing a prominent part. Yet there was little progress on substantive international issues. As expected, the major subject of the discussions was the CSCE, with the interactions reflecting the continuing deadlock in Geneva. Callaghan took the lead in resisting the Soviet pressure, and his determined and skilful defence of the Western position earned the admiration of his officials. Despite the lack of substance, both sides were keen to present the visit as a significant step forward in their relationship. They declared that it marked 'the opening of a new phase'.

In the visit to Moscow, Wilson and Callaghan restored the political dialogue with the Soviet leadership to something like the intimacy enjoyed in 1964-8. Yet this was something of a hollow victory. In truth, Britain simply did not have a position in the world that would support a meaningful dialogue with the Soviet leadership on the major international questions. The attraction of the British leaders was their capacity to influence Western policy on European détente and the CSCE through their role within the Atlantic Alliance and the EEC. When this issue was not to the fore, the relationship was reduced to a portfolio of inconsequential bilateral interactions.

When Labour returned to power in early 1974, the CSCE negotiations in Geneva were firmly deadlocked and this impasse lasted into the following year. It was only broken in March 1975 when Brezhnev introduced a self-imposed deadline. As the West stood firm, it was the Soviets who were forced to make the compromises that allowed agreement to be reached on the general secretary's timetable. The Final Act of the CSCE was signed by 35 government leaders in August 1975 at a glittering ceremony in Helsinki. It represented a success for the West. Although it conceded recognition of the post-war territorial realities, it did not explicitly recognise Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. The Western negotiators had also forced the Soviets to acknowledge that individual human rights were a legitimate component of international relations. At the time,

diplomats were doubtful that the Final Act would have a major impact on Soviet behaviour, but over the next fifteen years it played a role in destabilising the Soviet bloc.

The renewal of the bilateral Anglo-Soviet political relationship and the conclusion of the CSCE are assessed in the final chapter of this study. The analysis allows some deconstruction of the factors that controlled the substance of the Anglo-Soviet relationship. Under the stewardship of Douglas-Home, structural changes in the international environment were conflated with the foreign secretary's low opinion of the utility of the interactions. In contrast, Callaghan was eager to maximise the political dialogue. This allows the structural constraints to be examined unencumbered by the adverse impact of Douglas-Home's insouciance. The change of government also provides further insight into the role of officials in determining policy. They were most reluctant to accept any dilution of the hard-line approach developed by Douglas-Home, confirming that they were more in tune with Conservative than Labour preferences.

Chapter 9

'A new phase in the relationship', 1974-75

This chapter examines the Anglo-Soviet interactions during the 17 months from the formation of the minority Labour government to the final signing of the CSCE agreements on 1 August 1975. It begins with an assessment of Callaghan's change of policy towards Anglo-Soviet relations culminating in the visit of Callaghan and Wilson to Moscow in February 1975. This is followed by a relatively full account of the completion of the CSCE negotiations and an assessment of the significance of the Final Act.

A change of policy

On his return to office, Harold Wilson adopted a much less prominent position than during his first period as prime minister. Rather than seeking to dominate every issue, he chose to delegate the initiative to his experienced ministerial team. He described this change of approach using a football analogy. In 1964, he had sought to 'occupy almost every position on the field, goal keeper, defence, attack', now he would be a 'deep lying centre half' coordinating play.[619] In part, this change of style reflected changes in the prime minister himself. He had endured a bruising five years in government facing endless crises and having to keep the peace between the warring factions in his party. And there had been little respite while in opposition as he struggled to hold the party together on such issues as Britain's membership of the EEC. In his own evocative, if inelegant, description, 'he had been wading in shit ... to allow others to indulge their conscience'.[620] All this had taken its toll. As expressed by his biographer, he had lost the 'demonic energy of the 1960s' and was 'slowing up psychologically and perhaps

[619] Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, pp. 617 and Philip Ziegler, *Wilson: The Authorised Life* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 412-3; quotes from Pimlott.
[620] Ziegler, *Wilson*, pp. 380-387, quote p. 387.

also physically'.[621] Wilson was in fact to continue as prime minister for only two years, springing a major surprise when he resigned in March 1976.

The foreign secretary, Jim Callaghan, had been a senior player during Wilson's first period in office, holding the posts of chancellor of the exchequer and home secretary. He had clashed with Wilson over trade union reform and the prime minister had treated him with suspicion as a potential rival for his leadership. But by 1974, in Pimlott's phrase, while they 'were not friends: they had given up being enemies'. The two 'battle scarred warriors' formed a good working relationship in which Wilson was content for Callaghan to take the lead on foreign policy.[622] In the case of East-West relations, this replicated the pattern set in 1969-70, when Michael Stewart had taken the major initiatives.

Callaghan came from humble origins. His father, a naval petty officer and subsequently a coastguard, had died when he was 10, and he had been brought up by his widowed mother. He had left school to become a junior civil servant, but soon found his métier in the union movement, becoming a full-time official of the civil service union at 24. He volunteered for the navy in the war and was recalled from his ship in the Far East to win his seat in the Labour landslide of 1945. He had served as a junior minister in the Attlee administration before rising to prominence in the Labour Party hierarchy during the subsequent long period of opposition. His appointment as foreign secretary, and subsequent elevation to prime minister, would make him the only individual to have held all four of the great offices of state.[623]

Callaghan was a skilled pragmatist and a formidable political infighter. He had survived the devaluation crisis of 1967, rehabilitated himself as home secretary, and had had sufficient political strength to lead the opposition to Barbara Castle's union reform

[621] Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, pp. 617.
[622] Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, pp. 669; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), p. 608.
[623] Callaghan, *Time and Chance*.

programme.[624] Like that other self-made foreign secretary, Ernie Bevin, Callaghan had no problems in dealing with the academically-educated diplomatic elite. Indeed, he reflected on 'two happy years in this Rolls Royce Department'.[625] Despite his relative inexperience in foreign affairs, he quickly established himself in his new role. At his first meeting of the EEC Council of Ministers he delivered a bruising input as he demanded a renegotiation of Britain's terms of entry.[626] And in July 1974, he had his baptism of fire in international crisis management as he responded to the Greek-inspired coup in Cyprus and the subsequent Turkish invasion.[627] Henry Kissinger reflected that he 'combined an avuncular personality with abundant good sense' and praised him for 'the solidity of his judgement, his calm in crisis, and his practicality'.[628] One of his junior officials in the FCO subsequently described him as a 'superb performer who everyone loved'.[629]

Callaghan came into King Charles Street set to alter some of the approaches to foreign policy established by Heath and Douglas-Home. Most notably, he rejected the ambition to develop a politically integrated EEC as the main lever for exercising British influence. Rather, he returned to the traditional Atlanticist orientation in which primacy would be given to maintaining good relations with the American administration.[630] More germane to this study, Callaghan also wished to restore the Anglo-Soviet relationship, so neglected during the Heath government. As he recollected:

> I was anxious to restore high level Anglo-Soviet contacts following a three year interval during which relations between the Heath government and the Soviet Union had been entirely frozen as a result of Alex Douglas-Home's expulsion of 105 Russian spies from London in 1971. I had no quarrel with

[624] Paul J. Deveney, *Callaghan's Journey to Downing Street* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[625] Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, p. 294.
[626] Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 302-3.
[627] Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, pp. 364-5, and 331-357; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 192-39.
[628] Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 609.
[629] John W. Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy: A Case Study of British Practice 1963-76* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 25.
[630] Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 302-9; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 606-10.

> his decision… [but] it seemed to me that a change of government was a suitable occasion to mend fences, to explore prospects for increasing our stagnant trade and to get to understand current Soviet thinking and objectives.[631]

He set out these intentions in a statement in the House of Commons, committing the government to 'look for opportunities to build a safer and more productive relationship with the Soviet Union'. He repeated this sentiment on a subsequent visit to Bonn, when he 'announced his intention to seek an improvement in East/West relations in general and Anglo/Soviet relations in particular'.[632]

In inviting Douglas-Home to Moscow in December 1973, the Soviet leaders had clearly signalled their interest in re-establishing the political relationship with their British counterparts. They were quick to confirm this ambition with the incoming Labour government. In his first meeting with Wilson, the Soviet ambassador, Nikolai Lunkov, gave the prime minister a warm personal message from Gvishiani (Kosygin's son-in-law) and other members of the Kosygin family. He indicated that the Soviet leadership had been delighted with the election result and hoped that Wilson would pay a visit to Moscow in the near future.[633] Three days later, the Soviet ambassador informed Callaghan that the Soviet leadership wished to elevate Anglo-Soviet relations 'to a higher level' and build a 'relationship of mutual trust and understanding'. In these meetings, Lunkov also deployed the traditional Soviet stratagem of using economic incentives to induce a favourable political stance by stressing the size of the potential Soviet export contracts. [634]

Following these initial contacts, Callaghan set out his position in a telegram to the ambassador in Moscow, Terence Garvey. He would take the Soviets at their word and 'make a substantial effort over the next six months to improve Anglo-Soviet relations

[631] Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, pp. 364-5.
[632] DBPO III,III, document 66, 'Paper by Mr Hattersley for Mr Callaghan', 30 July 1974, and note 1, pp. 317-27.
[633] TNA, FCO 28/2581, 'Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and the Soviet Ambassador', 7 May 1974.
[634] TNA, FCO 28/2581, Bullard to PS (Brimelow), 10 May 1974.

and we shall see how successful we are in practice'. And he reiterated the long-held hope of the previous Labour government that closer political relations would lead to economic benefits. He speculated that 'an improved political atmosphere may result in contracts we might not have secured otherwise'. The foreign secretary acknowledged that the Soviet and British governments had different motives and that there were dangers in this initiative - the 'snares and arrows are clear enough'. While he had 'no intention of paying a price that is not justified', he would 'not be prejudiced against any proposal that they [the Soviet government] may make because of its origin'. Callaghan concluded with the hope that he could develop with Garvey a 'fresh and more helpful approach to Anglo-Soviet relations'.[635]

This sudden change of policy required something of a volte-face by the FCO officials. Although as loyal civil servants they would follow the direction of their political masters, there are clear indications that they were most uneasy with Callaghan's new initiative towards the Soviets. They offered persistent warnings that this new approach should not surrender ground that had been hard-won under the Conservative foreign secretary.

Julian Bullard, head of EESD, cautioned that the Soviet government 'were making a deliberate play at Britain'. He speculated that they were seeking British acquiescence to an early conclusion to the CSCE and an accommodation on espionage agents in London.[636] The caveats in the telegram to Moscow warning against 'paying a price that is not justified' are reminiscent of the language used by Douglas-Home, and probably reflect the input of officials. The concern that Callaghan was about to make unwarranted concessions was also evident in Garvey's immediate 'off the cuff' reply to the foreign secretary's input. The ambassador speculated that the Soviets saw Britain as a partner who 'might crack the front in Geneva, facilitating the triumphant summit conclusion of the CSCE operation'. He warned against surrendering the British position on the CSCE or the ceiling on Soviet staff in London in exchange for 'the prospects of expansion of bread and butter export business plus a glimpse of some very large contracts'. This

[635] TNA, FCO 28/2581, telegram 308, FCO to Moscow, 15 May 1974.
[636] TNA, FCO 28/2581, Bullard to Killick, 9 May 1974; Bullard to Garvey, 10 May 1974.

would not be a 'worthwhile bargain'. The problem was 'one of opening up the game' to exploit commercial opportunities without 'paying a price that is not justified'.[637]

A further indication of the tensions between the incoming ministerial team and the FCO officials can be seen from the interactions with the junior minister Roy Hattersley. Callaghan asked Hattersley to prepare a general position paper on relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. During the development of this paper, the minister took serious issue with the attitudes of his officials. He accused them of over-estimating the ideological basis of Soviet actions: 'supposing that every Soviet move forms part of an unflinching pursuit of the goal of world communism'. He also asserted that they were stubbornly conservative, being 'reluctant to initiate policy' and preferring to 'react against initiatives that are from them [the Soviet government]'.[638] As a consequence, other Western countries had been allowed to take the lead on détente. Hattersley averred 'that our best interests are served by activity'. While he recognised the need for Alliance unity, he argued that the government should 'no longer regard ourselves as the sheet anchor of defence against the hurricane of détente'. Yet the paper gave no concrete suggestions for how such a policy of activity might be enacted. The review of strategy for CSCE and MBFR gave no new insight, and on the 'bilateral' topics he was reduced to suggesting 'a methodical application of small initiatives'.[639]

Bullard was uncomfortable with this ministerial attempt to disturb ongoing policy. He argued that it was necessary to 'convey to Mr Hattersley the point that there had been a certain continuity in British policy toward the East that transcend[ed] changes of Government in London'. He added:

> To seek for "new" attitudes and initiatives may be an understandable emotion, but it confuses the issue by obliging officials to ransack their minds and their cupboards for types of action which have never

[637] DBPO III,III, document 59, telegram 507, Moscow to FCO, 15 May 1974, pp. 289-91.
[638] DBPO III,III, document 66, 'Paper by Mr Hattersley for Mr Callaghan', 30 July 1974, note 22, p. 326,
[639] DBPO III,III, document 66, 'Paper by Mr Hattersley for Mr Callaghan', 30 July 1974, pp. 317-27.

previously been thought to be in British interest, but which could now be so represented. Naturally these do not exist.[640]

Although Callaghan endorsed the general thrust of Hattersley's paper, Bullard ensured that it would be kicked into the long grass. Dismissing it as 'a rather foggy outcome to what has been a rather foggy exercise', he refused to circulate the paper. This was justified on the basis that it contained 'quite a lot with which officials disagreed', and that there had been no opportunity to put these points to Callaghan.[641]

In Part 3 of this study, it was concluded that the FCO officials were more supportive of the hard-line attitudes developed by Douglas-Home than the more accommodating stance taken by the previous Labour ministers. This is confirmed by their reactions to Callaghan's change of policy. They showed themselves attached to Douglas-Home's scepticism on the value of détente, and they feared that Callaghan would make concessions to the Soviets in order to renew the political dialogue. George Walden was a junior official in EESD during Douglas-Home's tenure. He later summarised his view of the previous Labour government's approach to the Soviets, which probably reflected general attitudes among the officials. He wrote that 'conditioned by the Wilson years, we [the British government] were reaching the stage where it was deemed impolitic as well as impolite to say "boo" to Moscow'.[642] Given such attitudes, it is not surprising that the officials reacted with alarm to Callaghan's initiative to improve the relationship.

Despite the concerns of his officials, Callaghan's position was in fact very similar to that of Douglas-Home on the substantive issues of East-West relations. He was just as determined to extract concessions in the CSCE negotiations. As he confided to Garvey, 'he would like to get the maximum out of the Third Basket' and he 'realised that the solidarity of the Nine and the Fifteen was vital'.[643] He was also a supporter of NATO. He asserted to Lunkov that the government's 'policy was firmly founded in NATO' and

[640] DBPO III,III, document 66, 'Paper by Mr Hattersley for Mr Callaghan', 30 July 1974, note 8, p. 319.
[641] DBPO III,III, document 66, 'Paper by Mr Hattersley for Mr Callaghan', 30 July 1974, note 24, p. 327.
[642] George Walden, *Lucky George: Memoirs of an Anti-Politician* (London: Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1999), p. 145.
[643] TNA, FCO 28/2582, Alexander to EESD, 30 May 1974.

there 'was no prospect of Britain leaving NATO or breaking it up'.[644] Callaghan was equally resolute in the domestic arena, firmly resisting the continuing Soviet attempts to reintroduce known KGB agents into Britain.[645] His private secretary, Anthony Acland, who had also served Douglas-Home, later remarked on the similarity in the views of the two foreign secretaries. When Callaghan was talking, he would imagine 'Alec Douglas-Home's voice almost superimposed and saying exactly the same thing ... about the importance of NATO ... the importance of being vigilant against the Soviet Union, the importance of the American relationship'.[646]

Callaghan's stance posed a difficult challenge to his officials. He wished to improve bilateral Anglo-Soviet relations, but lacked a meaningful project to drive his ambition. To the Soviets, closer relations were a means to engineer progress on the CSCE. Yet Callaghan was determined to preserve the unified Western approach to the Conference, and he refused to respond to Soviet overtures for an Anglo-Soviet accommodation. Outside of the CSCE, there were no comparable East-West issues on which the British stance was likely to be of interest to the Soviets. Despite Bullard's strictures, Callaghan's officials were therefore obliged 'to ransack their minds and their cupboards'. This did not lead to new initiatives, but rather to the recycling of tried and tested hobby-horses that would generate little more than activity for activity's sake.

The results of this 'ransacking' were set out in a carefully drafted note from Callaghan to Gromyko dispatched in June 1974. The foreign secretary asserted his wish to 'create a safer, more productive and more durable relationship with the Soviet Union'. Yet the note went on to set out a thin insubstantial agenda of potential interactions. On the CSCE, there was merely a promise to 'work constructively' to achieve the progress required for a conclusion in mid-1974. This was followed by the usual list of 'bilateral' interactions - increased trade, enhanced cultural relations, discussion between Soviet and British officials on current international issues, and regular meetings of

644 TNA, FCO 28/2581, Bullard to PS (Brimelow), 10 May 1974: see also Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, p. 365.
645 Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, p. 365.
646 Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy*, p. 25.

parliamentarians.[647] Here was the reality of Anglo-Soviet relations in the mid-1970s laid bare. No longer was Britain a meaningful player in addressing the conflicts of the superpower-dominated world. The bilateral relationship was reduced to a conduit to keep open a channel of communications both between the two governments and, in a carefully controlled manner, between the two societies. Perhaps, Douglas-Home's recognition of this reality was preferable to Callaghan's unrealistic hopes that the bricks of a substantive dialogue could be constructed from such unpromising straw.

Wilson and Callaghan visit Moscow

The most obvious demonstration of an improvement in the Anglo-Soviet political dialogue was the visit of Wilson and Callaghan to Moscow. Both sides made great efforts to present the visit as marking a 'new phase' in the relationship.

Despite their protestations that they would welcome a prime ministerial visit, the Soviets proved reluctant to agree a precise date. After much detailed diplomacy, it was finally agreed that Wilson and Callaghan would travel to Moscow in mid-February 1975. Even so, the Soviets would not make a commitment that the visit would be hosted by Brezhnev, who was by now the clear leader of Soviet interactions with the West. [648] However, this reflected the poor health of the general secretary rather than any diplomatic manoeuvring.[649]

In preparation for the visit, the ambassador in Moscow, Terence Garvey, submitted an erudite dispatch offering a witheringly realistic assessment of the current state of the Anglo-Soviet relationship. It sought to sweep away any lingering delusions that the

[647] DBPO, III,III, document 61, telegram 350, FCO to Moscow, 3 June 1974, pp. 294-7.
[648] TNA, FCO 28/2588, Alexander to Bridges, 14 June 1974; Telegram 390, FCO to Moscow, 18 June 1974; FCO 28/2583, Garvey to Bullard, 2 August 1974; Bullard to Garvey, 13 September 1974; FCO 28/2584, telegram 738, FCO to Moscow, 1 November 1974; FCO 28/2591, Patrick to Weston, 30 December 1974; FCO 28/2722, No 10 to Weston, 3 January 1975.
[649] Brezhnev suffered a heart attack after the summit meeting with Gerald Ford in Vladivostok, 23-4 November 1974. His meeting with Wilson was his first public appearance since the attack. See Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 299.

country's former pre-eminence in global affairs still gave British leaders a privileged position in the eyes of the Soviet rulers.

The analysis started from the self-evident premise that 'only the US can treat with the Soviet Union as an equal'. In contrast, other Western countries 'can effectively advance or defend their interests only from within the security of an Alliance'. Within this general subordinate position, there were 'gradations' in the capacity of the Western governments to develop a relationship with their Soviet counterparts. The Soviets retained an interest in relations with the West Germans due to 'a substratum of fear of an eventual resurgence of power and ambition, combined with respect for existing German economic strength and ingenuity'. The French government was attractive due to its 'past record and future potential ... as a well-tried source of discord within the Atlantic Alliance', while the Japanese might have a future role in the Sino-Soviet conflict and were a potential partner 'for the development of Siberia's natural resources'.

The ambassador went on to argue that, in contrast to their allies, the British government lacked specific initiatives of interest to the Soviet leadership. Rather, the British attraction derived solely from the capacity to influence the policies adopted by NATO and the EEC. He did not totally discount the value of a direct bilateral Anglo-Soviet relationship. But the value of 'renewing and revitalising' contacts would be mainly seen in the strengthening of the British position in Western political circles, rather than in any direct impact on Soviet policy.[650]

Here, from a leading diplomat, was a confirmation of the gradual shift in British policy towards the Anglo-Soviet relationship. There could be no resurrection of the intermediary role in the superpower interface to which Wilson had aspired with some success in his first period in office. Now the attraction of the British government to the Soviets was based only on its capacity to sway Western opinion in multilateral negotiations.

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[650] DBPO III,III, document 72, Garvey to Callaghan, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations', 27 November 1974, pp. 349-56.

Despite this limited potential, Callaghan was looking for positive results from the visit to Moscow. He and Lunkov agreed that it should be 'a landmark in Anglo-Soviet relations'.[651] Officials approached the preparations for the visit somewhat warily. They recognised the abrupt change of style from that adopted by Douglas-Home just over a year ago. As Garvey expressed it, the challenge was 'how to present this visit in a manner which avoids the worst hazards of sucking up to the Russians and at the same time giving expression to the Secretary of State's recorded intention of making a go at Anglo-Soviet relations'. The ambassador suggested that they should develop with the Soviets a 'Joint Statement' coupled with a 'Protocol on Consultations' that could be signed by the two leaders in Moscow. These documents would indicate that an approach to developing a new phase in the relationship had started, but avoid claims 'to have achieved the millennium' or the use of 'saccharine language'.[652]

Even with this limited aim, Garvey still encountered resistance among his colleagues in London. They were reluctant to shed the insouciant attitudes developed under Douglas-Home. The ambassador expressed this in a colourful turn of phrase: 'I have no hesitation in recommending a long spoon to those who sup with the Soviet government, but I think ... that the Department over-estimates the length of the handle'. He berated his colleagues with the argument that 'if we allow them [the Soviets] to conclude that we have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing, they will draw the consequences and no good will be done, including no Brezhnev'. Rather, they must 'work their passage' by taking a relatively constructive approach during the preparatory discussions with their Soviet counterparts.[653] Perhaps as a result of Garvey's strictures, negotiations began with the Soviets on the wording of the documents, although these were only finally settled during the visit itself.[654]

At least in terms of atmospherics, the visit turned out to be something of a triumph. When the British leaders landed at Moscow airport at 4pm on Tuesday 14 February 1975, Kosygin and Gromyko were waiting with a clutch of the Soviet leadership, an

[651] TNA, FCP 28/2589, Meeting of Callaghan and Lunkov, 5 November 1974.
[652] TNA, FCO 28/2591, Garvey to Killick, 31 December 1974.
[653] DBPO III,III, document 73, telegram 65, Moscow to FCO, 16 January, 1975, pp. 357-8
[654] DBPO, III,III, document 77, Brimelow to Garvey, 3 April 1975, pp. 379-82.

impressive guard of honour, a stirring band, fluttering Union Jacks and cheering crowds.[655] Later, as noted by Brimelow, who rather surprisingly had not been part of the delegation:

> When Mr Brezhnev, at the head of his entourage, strode into St Catherine's Hall in the Kremlin, on the evening of the arrival in Moscow of the Prime Minister and Mr Callaghan – a moment of considerable drama – it became clear that the Soviet leadership had decided to make the visit a success. Some of the journalists experienced in covering the Soviet scene who accompanied the party to Moscow made no secret of their surprise at the red carpet treatment given to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State.[656]

Brezhnev went on to play a full part, attending three sessions of talks, hosting a Kremlin lunch, and participating in a final ceremony at which the documents agreed at the summit were signed.[657]

Although the discussions covered a wide variety of topics, including the Middle East and Cyprus, as might be expected the CSCE gave rise to the most intense dialogue.[658] The negotiations in Geneva were deadlocked, and it must have seemed to Brezhnev and his colleagues that an agreement was as far away as ever. The Soviets made great efforts to induce a more accommodating line from their British counterparts, but Callaghan stood firm behind the agreed Western position. In the first formal meeting, Brezhnev made an emotional appeal for progress. He derided the negotiations in Geneva as focussed on inconsequential trivia, rather than the key issues of war and peace. He asserted that the delegates 'were digging around in the Third Basket discussing tourism

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[655] DBPO, III,III, document 74, 'Record of meeting ... at 6 p.m. on Thursday, 13 February 1975', pp. 359-67.
[656] DBPO, III,III, document 77, Brimelow to Garvey, 3 April 1975, pp. 379-82.
[657] DBPO III,III, document 76, Garvey to Callaghan, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations: The Prime Minister's visit and the 'New Phase'', 4 March 1975, pp. 372-8.
[658] TNA, PREM, 16/688, 'Visit of the Prime Minster and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the Soviet Union, 13-17 February 1975'.

and questions of opening a bar or a café in some-one else's country'. He went on to argue that

> [w]hat people were really worried about was the possibility of a terrible catastrophe, as a result of which the entire race could perish. He knew what war meant; that was why he was dedicated to strengthening peace. That was the policy handed down by Lenin and that was what mattered, not bars and cafés.[659]

Writing some 13 years later, Callaghan observed that he had 'no doubt that we had listened to the real Brezhnev' and that he was 'convinced of [Brezhnev's] horror of total war'.[660] This provides some indication that Brezhnev's remarkable tenacity in pushing through the CSCE process was not simply an exercise in realpolitik. At least in part, it was motivated by a determination to prevent his country suffering a repeat of the horrors it had endured in 1941-5.

The British leaders stoutly defended the importance of Basket III and made no concession on other points of contention.[661] Brezhnev raised the subject again the following day, leading to a long interchange between Callaghan and Gromyko on the technicalities of the language being negotiated so painstakingly in Geneva.[662] This was continued at a later meeting between the two foreign ministers at which Callaghan proved himself a match for his Soviet counterpart. He was on top of all the details, firm in defending the Western positions, but also willing to offer some new thoughts.[663] It was an impressive performance from this hard-bitten former union negotiator. Bullard regarded the meetings as a 'personal success' for Callaghan who had faced 'his baptism of fire from Gromyko'.[664]

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659 DBPO, III,III, document 74, 'Record of meeting ... at 6 p.m. on Thursday, 13 February 1975', pp. 359-67; quote from Callaghan taken from Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, p. 366.
660 Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, p. 367.
661 DBPO, III,III, document 74, 'Record of meeting ... at 6 p.m. on Thursday, 13 February 1975', pp. 359-67.
662 TNA, PREM 16/688, 'Record of a Meeting ... on Friday, 14 February, 1975, at 11.00 a.m.'.
663 TNA, PREM 16/688, 'Note of a Meeting between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Soviet Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kremlin: 14 February, 1975 (afternoon)'.
664 DBPO III,III, document 76, note 14, p. 375.

After 'tough' bargaining, officials finally agreed the wording of the documents that would be signed at the closing ceremony.[665] The centrepiece was the 'Joint Statement'. This had met its brief in giving an aura of importance to the visit, even though it included little of substance. It presented the visit as marking 'the opening of a new phase in Anglo-Soviet relations and would make a positive contribution towards consolidating international peace and security, especially in Europe'. In the accompanying 'Protocol on Consultations', there was a commitment to 'enlarge and deepen political consultation on important international problems of mutual interest and on questions of bilateral relations'. It also expressed the aim that the two foreign ministers, or their representatives, should meet at least once a year. Brezhnev, Kosygin and Gromyko all accepted Wilson's invitation to visit Britain.[666]

Wilson and Callaghan were satisfied with their visit. The prime minister gave an ebullient, if exaggerated, account to Parliament. He asserted that 'from my experience of negotiations with them over 28 years, I was encouraged by the extent to which we were dealing with real issues not platitudes'. He went on:

> I believe that the visit has marked, as we hoped it would, the opening of a new phase in our relations with the Soviet Union – a phase in which there is reason to hope that these relations will be safer, warmer and more constructive than we have enjoyed for a number of years.[667]

Callaghan was his usual pragmatic self. He refused to engage with his officials in an 'analysis of who did best out of the visit'. His attitude was 'the visit took place; was a reasonable success; he had approved instructions ... for the necessary follow-up actions'.[668]

[665] DBPO III,III, document 76, Garvey to Callaghan, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations: The Prime Minister's visit and the "New Phase"', 4 March 1975, pp. 372-8.
[666] TNA, FCO 28/2777, 'Joint United Kingdom-Soviet Statement', 17 February 1975.
[667] TNA, FCO 28/2770, extract from *Hansard*, 18 February 1975.
[668] TNA, FCO 28/2777, Acland to Killick, 1 April 1975.

The visit to Moscow did indeed mark the opening of a new phase in the Anglo-Soviet political dialogue. The tensions arising from the expulsions, buttressed by the sceptical attitude of Douglas-Home, had been replaced by a new willingness to maintain the relationship. This had required movement from both sides. The Soviets had made the initial concessions only to receive little in the way of reciprocal enthusiasm from Douglas-Home. With the incoming Labour administration taking a more constructive stance, the stage had been set for the rapprochement. As expressed by Garvey, while in Soviet eyes the British government might not be fully the equal of their American, French and German counterparts, they were 'no longer the odd man out'.[669]

But it did not represent a new phase in the substance of the relationship. Wilson and Callaghan did not engage in the Soviet-baiting so enjoyed by Douglas-Home. Nonetheless, they had maintained the established British position on the CSCE and had not softened Britain's commitment to a firm military deterrence. They had also failed to identify a new Anglo-Soviet initiative that might lead to an easing of East-West tensions. There were no equivalent to Wilson's attempts in 1964-8 to mediate on Vietnam and promote a non-proliferation treaty. As Garvey noted, the renewed relationship simply provided an opportunity to explore 'whether a power of Britain's size can influence through frequent contacts the views of the Soviet super power on international issues'.[670]

The nature of the Anglo-Soviet relationship

Callaghan introduced a change of attitudes towards the relationship with the Soviet leadership. In place of the sceptical, minimalist position taken by Douglas-Home, he sought to maximise the scope of the interface. With the political attitudes now in favour of an active engagement, the quality of the Anglo-Soviet relationship in this period is more directly reflective of the underlying structural factors. The record indicates that

[669] DBPO III,III, document 76, Garvey to Callaghan, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations: The Prime Minister's visit and the "New Phase"', 4 March 1975, pp. 372-8.
[670] *Ibid.*.

these placed severe limits on the potential for a substantive Anglo-Soviet dialogue, irrespective of the preferences of the British political leaders. Britain did not have the economic or military strength to allow its leaders to play a direct role in mediating the East-West antagonism of the Cold War. Nor was there scope for them to exercise a significant indirect influence. The traditional British role as an intermediary between the two superpowers was no longer viable, and there was little opportunity for a distinct bilateral contribution to European détente.

Heath had deliberately sought to downplay the 'special relationship' with the Americans in favour of developing an integrated EEC as an actor on the world stage. This would have militated against any close involvement in the superpower dialogue, even in the unlikely event that Nixon and Kissinger had permitted this. Callaghan's experience confirmed the lack of opportunity for this traditional British role. He had quickly restored the primacy of the interactions with the Americans and established a strong bond of mutual respect with Henry Kissinger. But this did not extend to a role as an intermediary with the Soviets. The direct relationship between the superpowers was now so extensive that there was no need or opportunity for third-party intervention.

In the context of European détente, the French and West German governments had firmly established their own direct dialogues with the Soviet leadership. As Garvey spelled out so eloquently, there was little opportunity for the British bilateral interface to make a distinctive contribution. The major British engagement with the Soviets was in fact in the multilateral context of the CSCE. This gave a hypothetical opportunity for Wilson and Callaghan to enhance the bilateral relationship by negotiating a separate 'deal'. Yet this was never a real option. Callaghan valued the strong Western coordination at Geneva, and was as determined as Douglas-Home to extract Soviet concessions. He would not jeopardise Western solidarity by bilateral deal-making.

Callaghan had changed his predecessor's insouciant attitude towards the Anglo-Soviet relationship, and by mid-1975 had established a dialogue comparable with that of his allies. This did not, however, lead to the identification of new opportunities for engagement on major international issues, which might have been previously obscured

by Conservative intransigence. Rather, the interaction had served to confirm the full extent of Britain's declining influence on world affairs. There was now no pretence that the British government could intervene with their Soviet counterparts to address the major geopolitical issues. Some 30 years after Churchill had sat alongside Stalin at Yalta, the Anglo-Soviet dialogue was restricted to vacuous declarations and an arid list of worthy but trivial 'bilateral' interactions.

Success in Geneva

There was one exception to this bleak picture of an inconsequential British role in world affairs. In Geneva, British diplomats continued to play a leading part in the ongoing struggle to force the Soviets to compromise at the CSCE. When Callaghan became foreign secretary in March 1974, the negotiations were deadlocked. The struggle continued inconclusively over the next year, until from March 1975 onwards an increasing flow of Soviet concessions allowed agreement to be reached. In this section, we will review the course of these negotiations, and evaluate the Final Act signed in Helsinki on 1 August 1975.

In early 1974, the Soviets were caught on the horns of a dilemma. They clearly wanted an early conclusion to the CSCE negotiations that would allow a summit meeting of national leaders to be held in midyear. But they were also seeking to recover the ground lost at the MPT. Here, they had allowed items of advantage to the West to be embedded in the four baskets that constituted the agenda of the negotiations (see chapter 6). The Warsaw Pact representatives were therefore negotiating stubbornly in Geneva to limit the impact of these items of the agenda. As reported by the British delegation, while the Soviets were anxious to conclude the process by July, they were equally determined to 'pay the minimum price, notably in Committee III'.[671]

[671] DBPO III,II, document 67, telegram 145, UKMIS Geneva to FCO, 28 February 1974, pp. 248-53.

As the negotiations progressed, the Soviets abandoned their hopes of an early summit and continued to stonewall on the West's desiderata. This in turn left the Western delegations with little option but to 'sit it out', if they were to achieve an agreement with an acceptable balance between the two sides.[672] The negotiations degenerated into seemingly endless struggles over the wording of possible agreements within each of the baskets. As described by Henry Kissinger, the participants 'toiled away like so many monks elaborating sacred texts'.[673] Frustrations built up. One Canadian delegate compared the process to the collective drafting for the Ministry of Truth in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four.*[674] A Polish colleague remarked that 'in the past people used to see how many angels could be balanced on a pin, but now they wanted to see how many square brackets could be inserted into a sentence'.[675] Despite these frustrations, the West maintained its unity with the EEC delegations continuing to take a leading role.[676] Slowly their perseverance was placing the Soviets on the defensive. They were making it plain to Brezhnev and his colleagues that a triumphal concluding summit could only be achieved by making compromises with Western requirements.[677]

The negotiations in Geneva dragged on into 1975. It was only after sixteen wearying months of engagement that the signs of a breakthrough began to emerge. This was catalysed by a self-imposed deadline on the Soviet negotiators. This was signalled in March, when Brezhnev wrote to senior Western leaders appealing for the negotiations to be concluded by midyear.[678] In Geneva, it soon became apparent that the Soviet delegation were trying to meet this deadline, but had not been authorised to offer the concessions that would make this possible. The head of the British delegation, David Hildyard, noted that they appeared 'to be searching rather desperately for ways of moving while making minimum concessions'. Consequently, his Soviet counterpart was 'in a highly nervous state'.[679] In response, the Western negotiators continued to hold

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[672] DBPO, III,II, document 82, telegram 458, UKMIS Geneva to FCO, 22 May 1974, pp. 288-90.
[673] Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 642.
[674] DBPO III,II, document 81, 'Minute from Mr Tickell on CSCE', 20 May 1974, pp. 286-8.
[675] DBPO III,II, document 83, telegram 500 UKMIS Geneva to FCO, 31 May 1974, note 4, pp. 291-2.
[676] Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy*, pp. 127-34.
[677] Details of this stage of the negotiations are reported in DBPO III,II, documents 69-74, 76, 79, 81-4, 86-8, 90, 93 and 94. These are contained between pp. 254-326.
[678] DBPO III,II, document 115, telegram 172, UKMIS Geneva to FCO, 14 March 1975, note 3. p. 388.
[679] DBPO III.II, document 117, 'Minute from Mr Tickell on CSCE: Easter Break', note 2, p. 393.

firm, giving no indications that they would accept an unsatisfactory agreement. As the Soviets wanted an early conclusion more than the West, it was they who were forced to give ground. With mounting momentum, over the next four months the Soviets began to make the necessary compromises that allowed agreement to be reached.[680]

The British delegation was an active participant in this frantic final stage of the negotiations. Hildyard asserted that it 'played a considerable role in almost every sector', and that the satisfactory conclusion was 'due at least as much to us [the British delegation] as to any other Western participant'.[681] In part, the effectiveness of the British diplomacy reflected the relatively isolated stance on European détente that had been adopted by Douglas-Home and Thomas Brimelow. This allowed the delegation to take the role of honest broker. As expressed in a briefing paper prepared for Callaghan:

> We have a major asset in that we are free from the commitment to individual hobby horses which distorts the perspective of a number of participants: and we are therefore able to take the overall view. This is recognised both in the Western group and in the Conference as a whole.[682]

In the early hours of 19 July 1975, the last remaining issues were settled and a deal was done. In Hildyard's words, after '22 months of extremely tough negotiations', agreement was reached on '115 pages of Declarations, Resolutions and Recommendations'.[683] The delegates were left in an 'atmosphere of rather artificial bonhomie and general exhaustion'.[684] Ten days later, Wilson and Callaghan travelled to Helsinki for the long-awaited summit meeting. At this, the documents agreed in Geneva would be formally signed as the Final Act of the CSCE. They were joined by the leaders of 34 other countries, including eight presidents, 17 heads of governments, and six party secretaries,

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680 Daniel C, Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 85-7; DBPO III,II, documents 121-35, pp. 405-17; and pages xxxi-xxxiv.
681 DBPO III,II, document 136, Hildyard to Callaghan, 'CSCE: The Conclusion of Stage II', 25 July 1975, pp. 447-54.
682 DBPO III,II, document 104, 'Paper by the FCO on CSCE', 27 November 1974, pp. 351-8.
683 DBPO III,II, document 136, Hildyard to Callaghan, 'CSCE: The Conclusion of Stage II', 25 July 1975, pp. 447-54.
684 DBPO III,II, document 134, telegram 586, UKMIS Geneva to FCO, 19 July 1975, pp. 440-3.

headed by the leaders of the two superpowers, Leonid Brezhnev and Gerald Ford.[685] The British ambassador in Helsinki described the event as a 'happening, of impressive scale, illuminated by brilliant sunshine and the elegant architecture of Alvar Aalto's Finlandia Hall'.[686]

Harold Wilson won the ballot to make the first speech to the conference and to chair the final working session. With his capacity for the telling phrase, he caught the spirit of the hopes bound up in Basket III:

> there is no reason why in 1975 Europeans should not be allowed to marry whom they want; hear and read what they want, travel abroad where and when they want, and meet whom they want.[687]

The second stage of the CSCE in Geneva had been a mammoth negotiation. For example, consideration of the ten principles of relations between states had occupied 337 official meetings, while basket III had extended over 761 negotiating sessions.[688] The process had become an overriding priority for the Soviets, dominating its bilateral relations with Western European governments and becoming a significant element in the superpower dialogue. The conclusion of the CSCE after such a prolonged effort poses two obvious questions. What was the balance of advantage between the two contending blocs, and what was the long-term significance of the Final Act?

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[685] The Principality of Monaco was invited to the signing ceremony in addition to the 34 countries involved in the negotiations in Geneva: Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, p. 86.

[686] DBPO III,II, document 139, Elliot to Callaghan, 'The CSCE Summit: Finland's Place in the Sun', pp. 464-69.

[687] *Ibid.*

[688] Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, p. 86.

The Helsinki accord

The Final Act of the CSCE process was full of compromise and deliberate ambiguity.[689] Nonetheless, it represented a net gain for the West. The Soviets had achieved their primary goal of international recognition of the post-war territorial status quo in Europe. In reality this was not a major advance as it had been conceded before the MPT even began.[690] It was also, to some extent, circumscribed by language that allowed the possibility of future changes to frontiers. In return, the Soviets had been forced to accept commitments that were very unpalatable to them. These included an emphasis on human rights and the provisions in basket III to encourage greater movement of people, information and ideas. The Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobyrnin, records that the members of the Soviet politburo were 'stunned' by the final language agreed in Geneva. Several members 'had grave doubts about assuming international commitments that could open the way to foreign interference in our political life'.[691]

The issue of the permanency of European frontiers had been one of the most hard-fought of the CSCE. The Soviets wanted frontiers to be proclaimed as 'immutable', thus enshrining the post-war borders and the existence of the GDR. In contrast, the West sought to maintain that frontiers could be changed by peaceful agreement, thereby keeping alive the feasibly of the eventual reunification of Germany. The final compromise was largely negotiated by Henry Kissinger directly with Gromyko and the Federal German government.[692] This went some way to meeting Soviet requirements by committing states to regard each other's frontiers as 'inviolable' (but not 'immutable'). However elsewhere in the document there was a reference to the West's desideratum. It stated that the states 'consider their frontiers can be changed ... by peaceful means and by agreement'. In fact, the Final Act was more explicit than Brandt's German-Soviet

[689] The text of the Final Act is given at, http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1975/08/4044_en.pdf> [accessed 16 September 2010].
[690] The Federal German treaties acknowledged the existence of the GDR and its border with Poland, and Alliance governments had subsequently formally recognised the East German state.
[691] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1995), pp. 346.
[692] DBPO III,II, document 13, note 2, p. 383; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 639.

treaty (and the associated documentation) in recognising the feasibility of eventual German reunification.[693]

The Final Act did not formally recognise the Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe, nor did it acknowledge a division of the continent based on socio-economic systems. Indeed it contained language that contradicted the assertion of the Brezhnev doctrine that the Soviets retained the right to intervene in other 'socialist countries' to combat 'anti-socialist forces'.[694] It committed states to respect 'each other's sovereign equality' and 'each other's right to freely choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems'. And it recorded that the states agreed to 'refrain from any intervention, direct or indirect, individual or collective, in the internal or external affairs ... of another participating state'.[695]

There was however one sense in which the CSCE process did indeed recognise the 'political realities' of Eastern Europe. Critics of the agreement contended that simply by co-signing such a high-profile document, Western governments had endorsed the Soviet-style regimes established in the post-war period. This, though, had little practical significance as the West had long ago abandoned any hope of 'rolling back' communism and 'liberating' Eastern Europe. But, by formally acknowledging this reality, the Final Act provided a lightning rod for all those critical of this process of détente. This criticism was particularly virulent in the United States, fanned by the rhetoric of Alexander Solzhenitsyn.[696]

[693] The references are in the 'The Declaration of the Principles Guiding the Relations between Participating States'. Principle III refers to the inviolable of frontiers, while principle I refers to the peaceful change of frontiers. For the text of the Final Act see reference 689. For the language in the Soviet-German treaty and associated documents see TNA, PREM 15/1522, McCluney to Moon, 18 August 1970.
[694] The Brezhnev doctrine can be found at *Pravda,* September 25, 1968; translated by Novosti, Soviet press agency. Reprinted in L. S. Stavrianos, *The Epic of Man* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: PrenticeHall, 1971), pp. 465-6, available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1968brezhnev.html> [accessed 16 September 2010].
[695] The references are in the 'The Declaration of the Principles Guiding the Relations between Participating States' in principles 1 and VI. For the text of the Final Act see reference 689.
[696] Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 647-652 and 660-3; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 347-8.

The West had extracted a price in return for this limited endorsement of the post-war status quo. This centred on the provisions concerned with the rights of individual citizens. The states committed to 'respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief'.[697] The act also contained the results of the fraught negotiations on basket III. This set out a range of measures designed to promote 'freer movement and contacts' and 'freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds'. These embraced the reunification of families; marriage between citizens of different states; enhanced travel facilities; improved circulation of oral, printed, filmed and broadcast information; and improved working conditions for journalists.[698] The Final Act marked a landmark statement that the rights of individuals were a proper concern for international relations. This was a concession that, as expressed by Thomas, 'directly contradicted the ideology, structure and practice of the Communist party-state'.[699]

British ministers and officials were content with the gains made by the West. Hildyard judged that, while there was no alternative to recognition of the status quo, 'a satisfactory price was extracted for this recognition, while the potential awkward consequences were avoided'.[700] Roy Hattersley echoed this judgement in the House of Commons. He argued that the negotiations had 'proved sufficiently successful to justify them being enshrined and endorsed by a summit meeting'. He also contended that '[n]o position which the West needed to hold has been sacrificed in the achievement of the overall result'.[701] This view was endorsed in the media. *The Times* averred that the documents 'on the whole demand greater changes in conduct from the Soviet Union than from the Western countries'. It later concluded that 'it is difficult to imagine anything better being achieved'.[702]

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[697] The reference is in principle VII of the 'The Declaration of the Principles Guiding the Relations between Participating States'. For the text of the Final Act see reference 689.
[698] This forms the section of the Final Act devoted to Co-operation in Humanitarian and Other Fields'. For the text of the Final Act see reference 689.
[699] Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*, p. 262.
[700] DBPO III,II, document 136, Hildyard to Callaghan, 'CSCE: The Conclusion of Stage II', 25 July 1975, pp. 447-54.
[701] *Hansard*,15 July 1975, vol. 895 cc1274-341
[702] *The Times*, 23 July and 28 July 1975.

The long-tern impact of the CSCE

Contemporary commentators were cautious in their assessment of the potential of the agreements signed in Helsinki to mitigate future Soviet behaviour. Hildyard, accepted that they may 'pay only lip service to the agreements reached'.[703] Garvey noted that the Soviets 'will try to make use of the small print in the Final Act and its voluntary character, to minimise the action they need to take under Basket III'.[704] Comments in the media echoed this caution, although they also signalled some causes for optimism. The *Guardian* showed considerable foresight in arguing that 'the liberal elements in the Soviet countries can be expected to make major use of the results of the Geneva negotiations'.[705] The *Observer* noted that it 'may raise the threshold of Soviet tolerance of national independence in Eastern Europe' with 'a decision to intervene being taken with more reluctance'.[706]

These Western commentators had some justification for their wariness of the Soviet intentions. According to Dobyrnin, Gromyko had assured the Politburo that they could control the application of the CSCE agreements to their domestic situation. He asserted that '[w]e are masters in our own house'. Thus, 'from the very start, the Politburo's acceptance of the Helsinki humanitarian principles implied some noncompliance'.[707]

The Final Act proved to be of much greater significance than was realised at the time. Most commentators now agree that it played an important role within the 'multifaceted explanation' for the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989-91.[708] The most compelling case is made by Thomas. He uses a constructivist analysis to highlight the influence of the international human rights norms established by the Final Act. These provided the

[703] DBPO III,II, document 136, Hildyard to Callaghan, 'CSCE: The Conclusion of Stage II', 25 July 1975, pp. 447-54.
[704] DBPO III,II, document 141, Garvey to Callaghan, 'CSCE and Westpolitik', 9 September 1975.
[705] *Guardian*, 20 July 1975.
[706] *Observer*, 27 July 1975
[707] Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, pp. 346.
[708] Adam Roberts, 'An 'incredibly swift transition': reflections on the end of the Cold War', in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *Volume III, Endings, The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 513-34, quote p. 533.

motivation and structural context for an escalation of dissident activity within the Soviet bloc. Importantly, these dissident groupings established 'Helsinki networks' with sympathetic organisations within the West. These allowed both Western state and non-state actors to demonstrate their support for the dissidents, and this was further reinforced through the periodic CSCE review conferences.[709] This internal and external pressure helped to strengthen the hand of the reformist element in the Soviet regime. It contributed to Mikhail Gorbachev's decision to change the Soviet state's relationship with its people and relax the control of Eastern Europe. As argued by Rey, the 'principles enunciated in the Final Act ... were to become an essential part of Gorbachev's perestroika': the Final Act 'constituted ... inside the system, the victory of the reformers over the conservatives'.[710]

With Duncan Wilson as the most prominent and consistent advocate, British diplomats had long argued that increased contacts with the West would destabilise the Soviet regime. It is somewhat ironic that this was brought about by the confrontational stance of Douglas-Home and Brimelow, and not by the relations with the technological elite championed by Wilson. When mediated through the mechanism of the CSCE, and supported by Western unity, this confrontational approach allowed a direct challenge to Soviet internal policies. The resulting Final Act provided the vehicle by which Soviet dissidents, interacting with their Western supporters, inculcated Western ideas on human rights among the future political leaders.

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The signing of the Final Act marks a fitting end to this study. It represented the high water mark of the process of détente instigated by the Soviet leadership that came to power in October 1964, simultaneously with Harold Wilson assuming office in Britain.

[709] Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect*; Rosemary Foot, 'The Cold War and human rights', Leffler and Westad, *Endings*, pp. 445-65, especially p. 459. Review conferences took place in Belgrade (1977-8), Madrid (1980-3) and Vienna (1986-9).

[710] Marie-Pierre Rey, The USSR and the Helsinki process, 1969-75: Optimism, doubt, or defiance?', in Andreas Wenger, Vojtech Mastny and Christian Nuenlist, eds., *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965-75* (Abingdon UK: Routledge, 2008), pp. 65-81, quote p. 78.

During those 11 years, Anglo-Soviet relations had undergone a profound change. In 1966-8, Wilson had maintained the post-war prime ministerial ambition of acting as an intermediary between the two superpowers. By the time of the Helsinki summit, Britain had lost this role. The direct superpower dialogue needed no mediation from British leaders, and, within Europe, the British government was just one of those seeking Soviet attention. Britain was a medium-size economic and military power, without a worldwide Empire. It only had the capacity to influence the major issues of the East-West conflict through its voice in the forums of the West. This voice was by now less distinct and persuasive, as the last echoes of the country's war-time eminence finally became too faint to have contemporary meaning.

Conclusions

This study presents a picture of the Anglo-Soviet relationship over some 11 years. This runs from the simultaneous assumption of power by Harold Wilson in Britain and the 'collective' Soviet leadership in October 1964, to the signing of the Final Act of the CSCE in August 1975. Throughout the account, conclusions have been drawn on the development of the relationship during specific periods. In these concluding pages, some overall observations are advanced. These focus firstly on the processes by which British policy was conceived and executed, and then on the evolution of the relationship within the context of the developing structure of East-West relations.

Making British policy

The development of the foreign policy of any state is a complex activity with multiple actors. Scholars have advanced some general observations on the main characteristics of this process within post-war British governments, with Reynolds providing a perceptive summary of these conclusions.[711] This is complemented by Young's detailed appraisal of British diplomatic practice during the period of this study.[712] This scholarship is used to provide a general context within which to assess the processes used to define the British policy towards the Soviets during the Wilson and Heath governments.

In formal constitutional terms, foreign policy differs from much of its domestic counterpart. As expressed by Reynolds, it is the 'undivided preserve of the Crown and its ministers'.[713] In other words, the legislature does not have a formal role in ratifying the treaties and international agreements that are the instruments of foreign policy. This is in marked contrast to the role of parliament in scrutinising and voting on domestic legislation. In keeping with this constitutional position, in the post-war period external

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711 David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century 2nd edition* (Harlow UK: Pearson Education, 2000), pp. 36-61.
712 John W. Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy: A Case Study of British Diplomatic Practice 1963-76* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 1-30.
713 Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 36.

relations were predominantly the preserve of the executive branch of government. Parliament had a role in defining the overall parameters of foreign policy: 'setting the bounds of what is ideologically acceptably'.[714] But it did not normally become directly involved with the day-to-day execution of that policy.

Rhodes has enunciated the concept of a 'core executive' to describe the components of the executive branch of government that take policy decisions. This is defined as

> all those organisations and procedures which coordinate central government's policies, and act as the final arbitrators of conflict between different parts of the government machine.[715]

This concept recognises that the 'core executive' will vary from one policy area to another. In terms of foreign policy, it was centred on the prime minister and the foreign secretary. They were supported by diplomats located both in the Foreign Office (later FCO) in London and in diplomatic posts throughout the world. In general, few diplomatic issues reached the Cabinet. Even those that did were 'precooked' by the Foreign Office officials, and the prime minister and foreign secretary were only challenged on rare occasions.[716] The Foreign Office officials also sought to act as gatekeepers within Whitehall, ensuring 'that all contacts with other governments, or at least information about those contacts, passes through its departments'.[717] This Foreign Office control was far from perfect, especially in the financial and defence areas, but, in Hennessy's words, its officials 'never liked any individual or any institution interfering with its monopoly of dealing with "abroad"'.[718]

There was always the potential for conflict between the prime minister and his foreign secretary. The nature of this relationship varied considerably depending on the

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[714] Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 41.
[715] R. A. W. Rhodes, 'From Prime Ministerial Power to Core Executive' in R. A. W, Rhodes and Patrick Dunleavy, ed. *Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 11-37, quote from p. 12.
[716] Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 42; Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy*, pp. 18-21.
[717] Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 45.
[718] Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 45; Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy*, pp. 20; Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall* (Pimlico edition, London: Pimlico, 2001), p. 405.

personalities involved. As expressed by Young, 'sometimes they were bitter rivals; sometimes the prime minister asserted his leadership; and at other times the foreign secretary was given a wide degree of independence'.[719]

There was also the potential for conflict between ministers and their officials. Throughout the post-war era, there was a large degree of continuity between the two political parties on the main elements of foreign policy. This coherence was preserved by the entrenched institutional attitudes of the long-serving diplomatic community. In the words of Reynolds, 'largely untouched by the ebb and flow of elections, [they were] able to guide politicians along established grooves'.[720] When the politicians sought to shift the balance of foreign policy from the 'established grooves', they could expect to meet resistance from their officials.

Public opinion, the media and backbench MPs of the ruling party could all play a role in constraining the policy options. This was not a general phenomenon, and much diplomatic manoeuvring escaped such widespread comment. Nevertheless, it could have a powerful effect when specific issues caught the interest of the political activists, media commentators, or the general public.[721]

The management of the relationship with the Soviets in the period of this study accords reasonably well with these general observations. Policy was primarily determined by the executive branch of government, although on specific issues, parliamentary, media and public opinion could have a determinant impact on the tactics employed. For example, Harold Wilson's search for an Anglo-Soviet initiative on Vietnam was in large part a reaction to left-wing pressure within the Labour party. Similarly, public opinion left the government with little option other than to disrupt the relationship in 1968 in protest over the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Public concern was also a significant factor in determining Michael Stewart's attitudes towards European détente in 1969-70, and it continued to place some restraints on the sceptical position subsequently adopted

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719 Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 42-3; Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy*, quote pp. 21.

720 Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 37.

721 Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp. 38-42; Young, *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy*, pp. 18-21, quote p. 20.

by Douglas-Home. But the clearest example of the executive being constrained by public and parliamentary concern was in the handling of the Brooke case. In this long running episode, the external pressures were deliberately manipulated by the KGB and severely curtailed the government's options. If the Soviets had extended the lecturer's sentence, ministers would have been forced to disrupt the relationship in protest. Such an action would have run directly against their interest in playing a full part in the accelerating process of détente. This dilemma could only be resolved through the humiliating acceptance of the exchange for the Krogers.

The prime minister and foreign secretary, supported by Foreign Office officials, constituted the 'core executive' that determined the policy on relations with the Soviets. Discussion in Cabinet, or in the Cabinet committee on 'Overseas Policy and Defence', was normally rather limited. Other members of the Cabinet were too fully occupied with their own departmental responsibilities to make detailed input on the Anglo-Soviet relationship. There were exceptions. These tended to arise on issues on which there was already public and parliamentary concern. Thus Michael Stewart's proposal to accept an exchange of Gerald Brooke for the Krogers caused a strong divergence of views with some of his Cabinet colleagues. There was also Cabinet disquiet over Stewart's perceived lack of initiative in promoting détente in late 1969. This unease among his colleagues may well have reinforced Stewart's determination to promote multilateral negotiations between the members of the Atlantic Alliance and the Warsaw Pact.

The extent of prime ministerial involvement in the relationship with the Soviets varied significantly during the period. In 1964-8, Harold Wilson was the dominant force, although in the later periods of his government (1969-70), he was content to delegate the leading role to Stewart. Wilson continued this delegatory approach on his return to office in 1974, with Jim Callaghan taking the initiative in seeking a revitalisation of the Anglo-Soviet interactions.[722] Similarly, in the Conservative government of 1970-4, it was Douglas-Home rather than Edward Heath who was the main architect of the policy towards European détente and the Anglo-Soviet relationship. However, within the

[722] The prime minister did however undertake a joint visit to Moscow with Callaghan in early 1975, and he gave the opening speech at the CSCE summit meeting in Helsinki.

governments of both parties, the prime ministers and their foreign secretaries seemed to have shared broadly similar views and there was little friction.

There was a large element of continuity in the policies of the two political parties. Both centred their approach on the need to contain Soviet expansionist ambitions by unwavering support for the Atlantic Alliance. There were however important differences in their degree of enthusiasm for balancing this deterrence with a political engagement with the Soviets. In general, the Wilson governments took a positive approach to the development of the direct Anglo-Soviet relationship. They also favoured a proactive policy towards European détente within the councils of the Atlantic Alliance. In contrast, Heath and Douglas-Home took a sceptical position on the possibilities of a meaningful détente with the Soviet bloc, and hence placed little value on the Anglo-Soviet interface.

The Labour policy was in large part a continuation of the British post-war ambition to be a direct participant in the interactions between the two superpowers. In contrast, the sceptical position adopted by Heath and Douglas-Home was discordant with this long-standing trend. This was evident both in the neglect of the bilateral relationship with the Soviets, and in the deliberate renunciation of the special relationship with the Americans. This singular approach seems to have reflected the personal anti-Soviet views of Heath and Douglas-Home. These were coupled with the prime minister's determination to build a politically integrated EEC, as the main vehicle for the future exercise of British influence on international events.

The Foreign Office (later FCO) officials seem to have had more sympathy with the sceptical Conservative position than with Labour's more active promotion of the Anglo-Soviet relationship. Harold Wilson was forced to cajole the diplomats into supporting his search for a relationship with Kosygin. As noted by Curtis Keeble, his enthusiasm for the dialogue 'may have on occasions made his officials wince'.[723] When the Conservatives came into office in 1970, officials responded with alacrity and enthusiasm to the more guarded stance taken by Douglas-Home. The dialogue between Brimelow

[723] Curtis Keeble, *Britain, the Soviet Union and Russia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 270-1.

and Duncan Wilson gives a clear indication that the London-based staff were fully supportive of the foreign secretary's sceptical position. Moreover, on Labour's resumption of power in 1974, the officials proved less than enthusiastic in their support for Callaghan's search for a 'new phase' in the Anglo-Soviet relationship. Indeed, their reaction to Roy Hattersley's attempt to define a new set of initiatives came close to passive resistance. None of this implies that the officials failed to offer their full professional support to the policies of the Labour government. Only that their personal analyses of the value of the Anglo-Soviet relationship were more in tune with the sceptical approach of Douglas-Home.

The political relationship was conducted in tandem with the more routine interactions on the 'bilateral' topics. Governments of both persuasions supported the maintenance of cultural and scientific interactions, and the pursuit of increased levels of trade. Labour's ideological orientation did promise some innovations in the economic relationship, but this vision soon proved to be a mirage. In large part, both governments were content to delegate the interactions on the 'bilateral topics' to their officials, who operated within well-grooved bureaucratic procedures. These interactions often involved a range of other ministries, and also required the participation of the members of the British cultural, business and academic communities. In general, the Foreign Office maintained a high degree of control over this broad interface with the Soviets. This was a natural consequence of the complex Soviet bureaucracy, which could only be navigated by utilising the expertise of the diplomatic community. The irrepressible Tony Benn provided the one exception to this generalisation, as he rather bypassed the Foreign Office in creating the network of technology exchanges.

There was relatively little interaction between the political dialogue and the exchanges on 'bilateral' topics. The Soviets consistently hinted that an accommodating political position would be rewarded by enhanced prospects for British exporters, but this did not unduly influence the British political policy. The 'bilateral' interactions did though provide one useful political function. They gave both sides a low-risk mechanism to signal a desire to change the political climate. For example, in his visit to Britain in 1967, Kosygin used the creation of 'bilateral' initiatives to demonstrate his enthusiasm

for a closer political dialogue. Similarly, British ministers used the economic interactions to repair of the relationship after the invasion of Czechoslovakia. And in 1972-3, economic interactions were combined with a royal visit to the Soviet Union to facilitate the restoration of the political dialogue disrupted by the expulsion of the agents.

Espionage was the one 'bilateral' topic that did disturb the political relationship. This is evident in the struggle over the Brooke/Krogers exchange, and most obviously in the expulsion of the 105 Soviet agents in 1971. This entanglement reflected the intrinsic inconsistency between the diplomatic and intelligence components of Soviet policy. Brezhnev and Kosygin were seeking a closer political relationship as a route to promote a European détente, but they also sanctioned the KGB to pursue their hard-line approach on espionage issues. This faced the British ministers with an unpalatable choice: either acquiesce to the Soviet actions on espionage in order to preserve the political relationship, or take action and accept concomitant rupture of the dialogue. In the Brooke case, Michael Stewart chose acquiescence, while Douglas-Home preferred confrontation over the KGB agents.

In summary, like other aspects of British foreign policy, the Anglo-Soviet relationship was essentially managed by the executive branch of government. Parliamentary and public opinion set the ideological framework for the relationship and occasional intruded on the management of specific issues. But in general it was the prime minister and foreign secretary, with their officials, who conceived and executed the policy. While there was a significant degree of continuity, the Labour and Conservative governments showed important differences of emphasis. Labour ministers were rather more eager than their Conservative counterparts both to sustain a dialogue with the Soviets and explore the possibilities of establishing an East-West détente. In general the Foreign Office officials were more supportive of the sceptical Conservative position.

A changing relationship

Writing in late 1974, the British ambassador to Moscow, Terence Garvey, described the paucity of the Anglo-Soviet relationship compared with the relatively rich interactions enjoyed by the Americans, Germans, French and even the Japanese:

> The reality that the UK does not possess any comparable or similar claim on Soviet attention is apt to be obscured by memories of a time, when as allies against Nazi Germany, the UK and the Soviet Union spoke as equals – memories which the Russians were in the habit of reviving when it suited them as an anti-German gambit, but about which they are now more reticent since the advent of Ostpolitik. The institutional relics of a period in which the discrepancy of scale were less marked, such as Britain's role as a depository Power for the Nuclear Test-Ban and Non-Proliferation Treaties, our share of quadripartite responsibility for Germany and Berlin and our Co-Chairmanship of the Geneva Conferences on Indo-China can nevertheless still constitute distractions from current reality and encourage misapprehension of the true substance of the Anglo-Soviet relationship of 1974. [724]

This elegantly summarised a marked evolution in the nature of the relationship over the eleven years of this study. In his initial diplomacy with Kosygin, Harold Wilson maintained the post-war British role as a junior participant in the superpower interactions. Yet by 1975, British ministers had long been excluded from the formation or execution of American policy towards their Soviet rival. Nor could they demand Soviet attention through their capacity to influence international events. Rather, the Soviet interest in maintaining a political dialogue was based solely on the desire to engender a more accommodating British line within the multilateral processes of the CSCE.

[724] DBPO III,I, document 72, Garvey to Callaghan, 'Anglo-Soviet Relations', 27 November 1974, pp. 349-56.

After 1967, ministers and officials were forced to acknowledge the structural diminution of the geopolitical importance of the Anglo-Soviet relationship. As the impact of Wilson's initiatives on Vietnam and nuclear sharing faded, there was no comparable project to add significance to the high-level interactions. They lapsed into a formulaic torpor. This in turn led to a reformulation of the British policy which now deliberately eschewed political initiatives with the Soviet leadership. In place of the direct Anglo-Soviet political dialogue, Michael Stewart gave his attention to developing a positive approach to détente within the Atlantic Alliance. In this, he had some success as reflected in the Rome declaration of June 1970.

The Conservative government that came to power in 1970 further degraded the importance of the Anglo-Soviet dialogue. Both Douglas-Home and his senior advisor, Thomas Brimelow, were sceptical that Western engagement with the Soviets would yield a sustainable reduction in East-West tensions. They judged that Marxist-Leninist ideology still played a critical role in determining Soviet foreign policy. Soviet promotion of détente was seen as merely a temporary stratagem within a long-term expansionist ambition, therefore to be treated with extreme caution. In keeping with this ideological position, Douglas-Home placed little emphasis on the direct Anglo-Soviet interface. This was reflected in his insouciant attitude towards the disruption that would be the inevitable consequence of his decision to expel 105 Soviet agents. As a result, when the momentum towards global and European détente accelerated in 1970-2, the British government had only the most perfunctory interface with the Soviet leadership.

Somewhat accidentally, Douglas-Home's sceptical position towards détente facilitated a significant British role within the long-running CSCE negotiations (1972-5). It allowed the delegation to take the role of an honest broker within the EEC caucus that dominated the Western side of the negotiations. Western solidarity ultimately forced the Soviets to make concessions on human rights in the CSCE Final Act. These were to have an important role in the eventual destabilisation of communist rule within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. British ministers and diplomats deserve some of the credit for this achievement.

British involvement in the CSCE prompted the Soviet leadership to seek to repair the rupture in the political relationship resulting from the expulsion of their agents. This initiative received a perfunctory response from Douglas-Home. However, when Labour returned to power in 1974, Callaghan made a determined effort to revitalise the Anglo-Soviet dialogue. The resulting interactions confirmed that the Soviets were primarily interested in finding a means to engineer progress in the deadlocked CSCE negotiations. Outside this multilateral context, Callaghan could not create a substantive political agenda for this 'new phase' in the relationship.

The contraction of the geopolitical importance of the Anglo-Soviet relationship in this period reflected the impact of long-standing structural changes in Britain's relative position in the post-war world. These had seen British leaders gradually lose the capacity to act as an independent actor in addressing the major international issues of the day.[725] The privileged role in the superpower dialogue enjoyed by Macmillan, and continued by Wilson, was something of an anachronism that disguised this overall pattern. It reflected a continued intimacy with the American administration, rather than the intrinsic importance of British power.

Even when Wilson established his dialogue with Kosygin in 1966-8, the privileged position of the Anglo-Soviet interactions within the relations of the two superpowers was something of a hollow shell. Continuing evolution of the overall structure of international relations made it inevitable that even this limited influence would disappear. Already weakened by the loss of the Empire, Britain's global leverage was further eroded by the withdrawal of military forces from East of Suez.[726] This was coupled with the gradual, often uncertain, but nonetheless remorseless development of a direct Soviet-American dialogue. Whatever scope remained for an Anglo-American 'special' relationship in the 1970s, it did not include a substantive British role in the development of American relations with their superpower rival. Even the British nuclear deterrent no longer gave the government access to the SALT discussions, as the

[725] A good overview of the Britain's changing position in international relations is given in Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled.*
[726] While this decision might have been postponed by a Conservative government, Britain's parlous finances would probably have eventually forced a similar retrenchment.

escalation of the Soviet and American arsenals made it (and the French equivalent) strategically inconsequential. Finally, détente was taking hold in Europe, and, as British diplomats recognised all too clearly, the French and the West Germans had more scope for a direct initiative with the Soviets. Brandt offered the main Soviet desiderata of recognition of the post-war status quo in central Europe. De Gaulle, and to a lesser extent Pompidou, offered a route to destabilise the Atlantic Alliance. British leaders had no equivalent negotiating positions. These long-term structural factors ensured that the British capacity to maintain a substantive political relationship with the Soviet leadership was bound to suffer a terminal decline.

By 1975, the deterioration in the content and significance of the Anglo-Soviet relationship was complete. In 1966-8, Harold Wilson had conducted his interactions with the Soviet leaders within the traditional post-war British role as a privileged junior partner to the Americans. This was a role that preserved some fragments of the long-standing British capacity to be an independent actor in addressing the geopolitical issues of the day. By 1972-5, the Anglo-Soviet dialogue reflected a British role as a member of the EEC operating within the context of a multilateral negotiation. It was an evolution dictated by structural factors. Wilson may have delayed the transition by his political adeptness. Heath may have embraced it by his determination to incorporate Britain into a politically integrated EEC. But the reduction in Britain's relative economic and military power made the deterioration of British influence on the two superpowers inevitable.

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