CHAPTER IV
THE NATO FACTOR

The Road To NATO, 1945-1949

In spite of the deep involvement of the United States in the Second World War, along with the rest of the Allied powers of Europe, and the 'very special' relationship built between the United States and the United Kingdom during the War, neither the British nor the other West European countries were sure of the continued American interest and involvement in the security of the democratic West after the War. Most Europeans, in fact, feared that the United States might again resort to a policy of isolationism and withdraw into its own hemisphere. In the first four post-War years, British perceptions of the US were dominated by such spectres of abandonment. In February 1945, when the end of the War was in sight, President Roosevelt had indicated at Yalta that he did not expect American troops to remain in Europe for more than two years after Hitler's overthrow.

With the division of Europe into the 'communist East and democratic West', with the so-called 'iron curtain' between them having become a fait accompli, and the Soviet Union already having gained the image of a military Superpower, a major British preoccupation in the immediate aftermath of the War was to forestall the US withdrawal from Europe. The first post-War British government was convinced that the American power had to be firmly anchored in Western Europe, if the latter's economic health were to be restored, and if an effective counterweight to the Soviet military power were to be fashioned.

If this was a major foreign policy consideration for the West European powers, particularly the British, there were serious economic and strategic considerations as well to be addressed by them. By the end of the 1940s, Britain was spending 10 per cent

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or more of its GNP on defence. In spite of their best efforts to cut down the defence budget, they could not succeed in bringing it down to the pre-War level. As a proportion of GNP, the defence budget of the Attlee government never fell below 6 per cent, or twice the pre-War level. Viewed from the fact that the War and decolonisation had considerably weakened the British economy, the kind of claim that the defence budget was making on British economy could not have been sustained for long. Britain had to, necessarily, look for solutions elsewhere to address her security concerns. Besides having to reckon with a politically and militarily divided Europe and a war-torn economy, Britain had various other interests and commitments too to be taken care of.

In less than an year of the conclusion of the War, it became quite clear for the British that there were not many meeting points with the Soviet Union on matters of foreign and defence policy interests to Britain. The political turmoil aided by the Communists in France, and the Communist infiltration into Greece worsened the situation. The biggest source of tension, the main issue around which the most serious difference of opinion centered, however, was Germany. The British government's approach, in 1945 was directed to ensure that Germany, while stabilized politically and socially, and economically restored, could never again become a military threat to Britain, as in the past.

In May 1947, about two years after the end of the War, based on the perceived level of hostility between Britain and the Soviet Union during those days, the British Chiefs of Staff had come to the conclusion, that a war with Russia cannot be ruled out. Their Report said:

The issue which cannot be avoided is that our Defence Policy must at present be based on the possibility of war with Russia...

We are convinced that we can reduce the risk of war if from now onwards we and our potential allies show strength and a preparedness to use this strength if necessary...

For the complete text of Churchill's famous speech at Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March, 1946, which he himself had titled 'Sinews of Peace,' see, pp. 7285-7293.

In the past we have relied on building up an alliance of European countries to unite with us from the very beginning in resisting aggression. There is now, however, no combination of European Powers capable of standing up to Russia ... .

Nevertheless, any time which we can gain to improve our defences would be of such value that every effort should be made to organize an association of Western European Powers, which would at least delay the enemy's advance across Europe ... .

We must have the active and very early support of the United States (which) alone, because of her man-power, industrial resources, and her lead in the development of weapons of mass destruction, can turn the balance in favour of the Democracies.5

The Report also listed prevention of war as among the fundamental objectives of British defence policy. This was to be achieved by demonstrating British military strength and preparedness as also by supporting the efforts of the United Nations. In the event of a war Britain was to focus on mobilizing the full support of the Commonwealth, the United States and Western European States. The Chiefs of Staff also built up a case for increasing and exploiting Britain's scientific and technical lead, in the development of weapons of mass destruction.6

Although the political leadership appeared unconvinced about the possibility of an immediate war with Russia, a perusal of the policy pursued by the Labour government in the early post-War years would reveal that it was convinced of the need to institutionalize Anglo-American and Western European unity as also of the need to carry on with the atomic bomb project to deter any aggressive moves from the Russians. They were also convinced that if Britain and the United States presented a strong enough front, Russia would not pursue her policy beyond the point at which yet another war could not be prevented.7

Though Britain desperately wanted American involvement in the European defence efforts, she did not think it prudent till the Americans came along. Rather than

6 Ibid., para. 33.
7 Geoffrey Goodwin, n.2, p. 187.
waiting for the American initiatives, Britain began to explore immediate alternative options within Europe, for institutionalizing the unity of Western European nations. While warning the Western world of the possibility and dangers of another war, British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin stated that the danger of another war would recede provided the opponents of dictatorships could present a really united front and provided the necessary means were made available by those who have them. Through the Foreign Secretary, Britain was again stressing that the European security concerns could be addressed only by evolving a collective security arrangement with the involvement of the United States, the only power known to have the means at that point of time.

The early independent European efforts contributed to the evolution of the Western Union which was given practical shape by the Brussels Treaty on 17 March 1948, under which Britain, France and the three Benelux countries enjoined in a mutual collective self-defence arrangement for over the next fifty years. The speed with which this Treaty was signed showed the desperation of the West European countries to have a collective security arrangement, even without the United States, against the potential common enemies.

Article IV of the Brussels Treaty which inter-alia, said: "If any of the High Contracting Parties should be the object of an armed attack in Europe, the other Contracting Parties will, in accordance with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, afford the Party so attacked all the military and other aid and assistance in their power." This was the first major formal agreement for the collective defence of Western Europe against any possible external attack, in the immediate post-War years. Article IV, in fact, provided for automatic assistance in the event of an attack on any of the signatories by any other country.

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8 Ernest Bevin’s Speech in the House of Commons. For the Complete text of Bevin’s Speech in the House of Commons on 22 January 1948; see, UK, Commons, Parliamentary Debates, Session 1947-48, Vol.446, Cols. 383-409 (emphasis added).
10 Ibid., p.4.
Parallel with this development, several initiatives were made for the economic cooperation among the West European countries and between the United States and Europe. Simultaneous with this, hectic moves were made, under Oliver Franks, the British Ambassador to the United States, to bring the United States into the new fabric of Western European defence. These moves were given further momentum by the visit of a powerful British delegation to Washington, led by a leading Labour MP, Gladwyn Jebb, from 22 March 1948, from which was to emerge the idea of a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to deal with the defence and security of the West. NATO was formally established in Washington on 4 April, 1949.

NATO, by definition, is essentially a mutual defence pact. Article 5 of the Treaty, inter-alia, states:

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action, as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area, the member countries commits to provide assistance to each other in the event of an attack on any one of them.

The words 'as it deems necessary' gives the attacked country the option to decide on what kind of assistance it is due from its partners. This assurance of assistance involving the American military power was what Britain had been striving for ever since the end of the War.

The most prominent personality who worked hard for the creation of NATO,

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11 For a more detailed analysis of the circumstances leading to the establishment of NATO and British role in it, see, A. Bullock, Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary1945-1951 (London, Heinemann, 1983), pp. 513-548.
12 There were twelve original signatories to the Treaty : UK, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Canada and the United States. Subsequently, Greece and Turkey joined the Treaty, in October 1951; the Federal republic of Germany, in October 1955; and Spain, in December 1981; In December, 1997, Protocols were published for future entry in to force with respect to Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic. Christopher Hill & Karen E. Smith, n.9, pp.6-7.
13 For the Text of the North Atlantic Treaty, see, Christopher Hill &Karen E. Smith, n.9, pp.6-9.
was ironically, British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin. “These historic and fateful events”, rightly commented Kenneth Morgan, “formed an extra-ordinary saga of achievement by Ernest Bevin. The period between Marshall’s Harvard Speech on 5 June 1947 and the establishment of NATO, in April 1949, was a period of sustained creativity on the part of Labour Foreign Secretary, Bevin.” 14 NATO was the result of Bevin’s delicate efforts to entangle American and European destinies. 15 Bevin strongly believed that it was for the British, as Europeans, to give the lead spiritually, morally and politically, in Western Europe, to help in forming what he himself called a ‘Third Force’ after the United States and the USSR. 16 Western European Union remained a dominant theme of Bevin’s policy, but he always saw it within the broader framework of an Atlantic Alliance. This explained why Britain remained less enthusiastic about the creation of the European Defence Community and an exclusive European Army. 17

The Conservative government that returned to power in November 1951 also subscribed to the Labour line in managing Britain’s defence and economic policies vis-à-vis the Continent. 18 One of the most striking features of British political life in the immediate post-War years was the extent to which both the Labour and the Conservative governments succeeded in maintaining an extra-ordinary degree of political continuity in defence policy. 19 Britain’s War-time Conservative Prime Minister, Winston S. Churchill was actually credited with having “mobilized the English language and sent it into battle”, during the Second World War. 20 In fact, one of the major preoccupations of Churchill, in the aftermath of the War, was to help in cementing the Anglo-American relationship for the future. 21 The establishment of NATO itself was the best example of that desire for continuity.

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18 Ibid., p.9.
21 For details, see, Chapter V of the present study.
After going through the experience of the First and the Second World Wars, West Europeans could never have felt secure with a militarily superior Communist Soviet Union in the neighbourhood. Coupling the equally strong American military power with that of Western Europe was the only way out for the latter. The first post-War British government, under the leadership of Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, and Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, therefore, strove hard to realize this foreign and defence policy objective of Britain right from the inception of the new government in 1945. They largely succeeded in their aims and laid the road map for the future British governments before they gave way to the Conservatives in the 1951 elections.

All governments since 1945, Labour and the Conservative, have been the heirs of the legacy left behind by the first post-War Labour government and have had to work within that framework, developing the implications of strategies initiated in the early post-War years. Commitment to NATO is one of the most crucial among them. With the establishment of NATO Britain no longer assumed the major responsibility for containing the Soviet Union. Thus, at one stroke, Britain achieved the objective of "keeping the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down."22

Consolidating the Gains of NATO, 1949-1968

By 1954 all the leading members of NATO – Britain, France and the United States – came to agree broadly on the need to accommodate West Germany in the Atlantic Alliance. At a Nine Power Conference on European Integration and German Rearmament, convened by Britain and attended by the United States, Canada and the Western European Union (WEU) countries, it was decided to expand the WEU to include Germany and Italy and admitted Germany as a full member of NATO, after laying down specific conditions against German rearmament.23 By the mid-1950s the North Atlantic Treaty arrangements were well established.

23 Baumann, n.17, pp.10-11.
Already there were signs of the United States and the United Kingdom working closely within the NATO. The foundations for this was laid during the Second World War, which had witnessed a remarkable degree of unification of military effort to be achieved by the two allied nations. The personal ties and friendships, between the civil-military elements of both the countries, born out of necessity during the War, were effectively sustained thereafter by a real measure of mutual cordiality after the War.  

With the establishment of NATO, Britain also became an active participant in the Cold War. Even though, to begin with, the British intention was to effectively counter the Soviet threat by building structures that would help in deterring aggression, British role in shaping that deterrent in itself was enough to make Britain a participant in the cold war. In a way, inadvertently, in Northedge’s words, Britain became one of the ‘architects’ of the cold war itself. During the cold war days, NATO was to be the main structure of deterrence for the West, invested with the responsibility to defend the member-countries, in the event of a final showdown between both the blocs. During those critical years, Britain was in a position to act as an arch between the United States and Western Europe, helping initially to establish NATO and thereafter to maintain the cohesion of the Alliance. As far as the British share in the Military side of this strategy was concerned, the top priorities were her own air defence, security of the North Atlantic sea routes, and her commitments to Western Europe’s land defence.

Formation of NATO was, undoubtedly, the biggest achievement of the post-War Labour government’s foreign policy. It was one of the products of determined British diplomacy, in the immediate post-War years. First of all, it was the means by which Britain was enabled to harmonize her interests and obligations in Europe with her ties with America and Canada. Secondly, from a purely British point of view, it

27 This was made the basic thrust area of British defence policy in the Defence Review of 1968. For details, see, Chapter II.
was the ideal type of international organization with maximum scope for cooperation, without compromising on her own notions of sovereignty. More important of all, NATO was not simply an assurance of American help in the event of war, but the framework for building up an effective counterpoise to Soviet power.²⁸

Even though there have been occasions when Parties, out of office have tried to underplay the significance of NATO for Britain, none of them in office, since 1949, had sought to negate its importance. Not only was it helping Britain to have an effective say in managing East-West relations, arms control negotiations, maintaining peace in Europe, and, while containing Germany, helping the Alliance to use the German economic and military strength in the interest of Western Europe itself, it was also facilitating Britain's continued presence in the rest of the world without compromising on her security within Europe, where it mattered the most. During the late forties and the early fifties, British forces were involved, in different degrees, in military operations in Malaya, Korea, Kenya, and Libya. In 1954, perhaps Britain had reached the peak of her post-War involvement in different parts of the world. British forces were present in four countries in the Mediterranean, ten countries in Africa, three in the Middle East, and five in the Far East, i.e., twenty-two countries/strategic locations outside Europe/NATO area.²⁹

Considering the kind of situation it was faced with in Europe, it was obvious that Britain could think of a widespread military presence and readiness to intervene militarily in different parts of the world, only because of her membership in NATO during those years. It is another matter that this arrangement suited NATO also as it was keen to retain its pockets of influence and maintain military presence in as many areas as possible as part of its strategy of containment against the Communist Bloc. These British/NATO interests were pursued with equal vigour by all the governments that followed the first post-War Labour government.

The period from the establishment of NATO, in 1949, to the period of the radical revision in Britain’s defence policy in 1968 had witnessed a remarkable degree of continuity and consistency in Britain’s defence policy planning. The period between 1949 and 1968 had seen six changes in governments under four Conservative and two Labour Prime Ministers. None of them questioned the relevance or viability of NATO for Britain. All governments since 1949, have accepted NATO, as the foundation on which British post-War defence policy is laid – what Stephen Kirby described as the ‘irreducible’ commitment in Britain’s post-War defence policy.30

Britain, which was otherwise opposed to any kind of supranational arrangements which could compromise her sovereignty, had willingly subscribed to the North Atlantic Treaty, in spite of the fact that she is bound by treaty to provide and maintain certain specified and substantial military forces, and also to relinquish some independence over their control.31 About 95 per cent of Britain’s defence resources have been committed to NATO. Four out of the five British defence roles are oriented to NATO. This include the land and air commitment to the Central front, the defence of the Eastern Atlantic, home defence and the nuclear deterrent.32 According to Wyn Rees, ever since Britain effected her military withdrawal from areas East of Suez, the Atlantic Alliance has been the central focus of Britain’s security interests and the principal area in which Britain has sought influence.33

Successive British governments have had to weigh the importance of a vital, but shared and interdependent, security interest in Europe against her more independent interests elsewhere, and they have had to decide how best to meet the constant and substantial military demands of the NATO commitment and the widely variable and more open-ended demands of her military commitments outside of Europe.34 This was largely true in the case of other leading West European powers.

33 Ibid., p.89.
34 Stephen Kirby, n.31, p.70.
also. As David Sanders observed, "throughout the 1950s and the 1960s - as the Cold War deepened and then receded - NATO constituted the basis of Western Europe's defence."\(^{35}\)

However, by the late sixties Britain was faced with a situation of having to make a critical choice between her vital European interests and the extended interests it had sustained outside Europe in spite of decolonisation and serious economic decline, even after the War. For many, the question, in fact, was, how could Britain continue to maintain such large-scale military presence outside Europe in to the fifties and the sixties? The answer, probably, lies in the membership in NATO itself.

With the immediate homeland area already under the protective umbrella of the North Atlantic Alliance, reinforced by the might of the United States, and the main identified enemy, the Soviet Bloc, held under check, Britain could afford to sustain interests in areas beyond Europe and the North Atlantic. As part of NATO's larger global strategy the British interests and military presence served NATO's interests as well. In the eventuality of another global crisis, this British capability would have been of enormous value for the Alliance. This conclusion clearly emerges from the fact that during the crucial years of the cold war, in the mid-1950s and throughout the 1960s, thanks to the British presence in Africa and the Gulf, the Warsaw Pact could not succeed in making any major intrusions into these areas.

**Re-affirming the NATO Orientation: The 1968 Defence Review**

However, various factors (elaborated in Chapter II) intervened making it difficult for Britain to maintain a global military presence, along with a substantial commitment to the NATO area where the fundamental British interests always remained. The result was the radical Defence Review announced by the Labour government, in January 1968.\(^{36}\) Essentially this Review only reaffirmed the pre-eminent position that NATO occupied

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\(^{36}\) The factors contributing to the Review and the major changes announced by it are dealt with in Chapter II of the present study.
in Britain’s defence planning. The most notable point in the Review was Britain’s withdrawal from various parts of the world and reassertion of her commitment to remain a European Power as an integral part of NATO. “The foundation of Britain’s Security Policy,” the Review said, “lies in the maintenance of peace in Europe....Our first priority, therefore, must still be to give fullest possible support to the North Atlantic Alliance.”

As David Sanders rightly observed, “that it was the world role rather than the NATO role which was to be sacrificed reflected the government’s recognition that it was in Europe, rather than in the Empire, that Britain’s primary interests were now located.”

A former Permanent Under Secretary in the Ministry of Defence (MOD) echoed the same thoughts when he poignantly observed: “We had a choice to withdraw from East of Suez, we could not have withdrawn from Europe.”

Britain’s “retreating to Europe” policy and rededication to the Atlantic Alliance had its effect on the NATO strategy also, as was reflected in the new defence planning initiated in the NATO Defence Ministers’ meeting in May 1968. The NATO Military authorities developed a new strategic concept to replace that of 1956 (from massive retaliation to flexible response).

Major proposals in the new strategic formulations were: (1) it was recognised that the assessment of the Military threat, which the Alliance forces face, should take into account the intentions as well as the military strength of the Warsaw Pact countries; (2) it was recognised that Britain should receive timely, possibly prolonged, warning of any change in the political situation that might make war in Europe more likely; (3) it was accepted that NATO strategy should be based on the forces that member countries were prepared to provide; and (4) it was agreed, within the total resources available to NATO, that adjustments should be made, particularly in the air forces, with the objective of extending the conventional phase of hostilities should a war break out so as to give more time in which any decisions to use nuclear weapons could be taken.

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38 David Sanders, n.35, p.234 (emphasis added).
39 Observations made by Michael Quinlan, former Permanent Under Secretary in the Ministry of Defence (MOD), during the interview with the present Researcher in London on 11 June 2003.
40 NATO’s defensive deterrent strategy was based, from early fifties to the late sixties, on the doctrine of massive retaliation, as enunciated by the then US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles in 1954. By late sixties, when the Soviet Union also acquired remarkable nuclear capability, NATO revised its strategy to that of flexible response, as advocated by the then US Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara. For details see, Carol Edler Baumann, n. 17, pp.1-7.
The developments in Europe in the late sixties was also supportive of the British policy of strengthening the NATO defence. The most notable of such developments was the invasion of Czechoslovakia, by the Soviet Union and her allies, in 1968. This event further necessitated a rekindling of interest in a militarily viable and a politically unified NATO for all its members. Though Britain ultimately saw the invasion as a course of action within the Soviet sphere of influence only to sustain the status quo, the efficient and swift conventional occupation of Czechoslovakia, however, highlighted the deficiencies and vulnerabilities of NATO's own conventional force levels and military options.

The NATO Ministerial Council meeting held in the wake of the Czechoslovak crisis, nevertheless, reaffirmed the renewed political solidarity among its allies who agreed that the continued existence of the organisation was more than ever necessary and that they would work towards the improvement of NATO forces "in order to provide a better capability for defence, far forward as possible". This decision inevitably committed NATO members to substantial development of conventional forces. Britain also very quickly responded to this situation and in February 1969 announced its agreement to contribute to the establishment of a new on-call Allied Naval Force in the Mediterranean and to make other improvements in its conventional commitments.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia highlighted the military role of NATO for Britain as well as for other European NATO members. But politically it still wanted to seek secure, peaceful and mutually beneficial relations between East and West, and, accordingly, work was to continue on formulating policies for détente in which the "traditional need for confrontation between East and West was de-emphasised." However, what was not foreseen was the speed with which a climate conducive to the resumption of détente policies would emerge as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the two Superpowers opened on 17 November 1969 at Helsinki.

43 David Sanders, n.35, p. 236.
Britain, which, as a nuclear power, had a very deep interest in the progress of the SALT, clearly felt that her relations with Washington were not to be relied upon entirely to ensure that her interests would be considered in the negotiations. In the past, whenever Britain felt that its voice was not listened to, it took the lead in formulating a 'European Opinion' so as to make it more effective. The same policy was adopted here also. Britain now became the leading advocate of the creation of a 'European defence identity' within NATO so as to ensure that the European members could maximize their influence on the negotiations by consulting together and speaking with a common voice. Thus, Britain and her European allies, by the late sixties, came to regard the membership in NATO as an invaluable channel of communication and influence with respect to all kinds of negotiations between East and West as well as between Western Europe and the United States. Britain by then was convinced that the best way to influence the shape of the political reality in Europe was to work within NATO rather than outside it.

The Defence Review of 1968 marked a fundamental change in Britain's defence posture. The immediate Alliance response to the British call to change the NATO strategy had partially recognised and redressed Britain's grievances expressed at various levels about ignoring the European interests by the Super Powers. Earlier, in 1966, with a view to evolving a more effective and a united European voice on crucial nuclear issues Britain, under Harold Wilson's Labour government, had taken the initiative for establishing the Nuclear Defence Planning Committee and the Nuclear Planning Group.

The then Defence Secretary, Denis Healey, had played a major role in promoting the idea that "what was essential in NATO's nuclear strategy was less military doctrine than political arrangements for consultation and participation at the highest level in decisions which touched upon the very survival of the nations involved".\textsuperscript{44} Healey is also credited with having played a leading role with his US counterpart, Robert McNamara, "in

\textsuperscript{44} Christopher Coker, n.19, p.22.
revising NATO’s war fighting strategy and elaborating the guidelines for the use of tactical nuclear weapons.  

The Conservative Interlude – 1970-74: Failed Attempt to Sustain the Over-stretch

The Conservative Government that followed the Labour in 1970 again tried to re-establish Britain’s world role and it marked a reversal of Labour’s policy of confining to Europe. While accepting NATO as Britain’s first strategic priority, it declared the Conservative Government’s first objective to be the resumption, within Britain’s available resources, of a proper share of responsibility for the preservation of peace and stability in the world. Edward Heath, the new Prime Minister, asserted that “the voice of Britain is going to be louder and clearer than it has been and it will be an unmistakably British voice.” Therefore, while recognizing the preeminent position that NATO occupied in the defence of Britain, the new government claimed: “British interests and responsibilities are not confined to the NATO area. Britain’s political and trading interests are worldwide and they can flourish only in stable conditions. She must be willing, therefore, to play her part, though on a scale appropriate to her resources, in countering threats to stability outside Europe.” However, Heath himself became aware of the constraints in pursuing a global policy in course of time.

Deviating from the 1968 Defence Review commitment, the new Conservative Government was, at least initially, able to think in terms of spreading or retaining Britain’s commitment beyond Europe and NATO area mainly because the détente negotiations were already on and moving in the direction of recognising the status quo in Europe. Besides, the nuclear deterrence and the balance of terror, based on mutually assured destruction (MAD), could allow these former colonial powers to venture upon further adventures in various parts of the world. Britain also did not get an enthusiastic response from her European neighbours when she wanted to re-establish her European identity.

Apart from this political rationale, militarily also, Britain felt it necessary to keep alive her interests beyond Europe. Heath’s Conservative Government was quite sceptical

47 The Times (London), 18 November 1970.
49 Britain’s attempt to enter the European Economic Community was strongly resisted by the French, under President Charles De Gaulle. Britain managed to gain entry only in 1973, after De Gaulle demitted office.
about the Soviet motives in Europe and elsewhere. For Heath the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was an affirmation that Moscow still had the intention to use force to defend her interests. In a speech in London, on 12 November 1973, he voiced his fear of the unchecked growth of Russian Power:

Over the last few years the relative military power of the United States, Russia and Western Europe has been changing. The Soviet Union has achieved nuclear parity with the United States. This means that the Soviet union can negotiate from a position of strength in the talks on strategic arms limitations.  

Besides, Britain believed that the security of Western Europe always remained under the shadow of the potential threat of a militarily strong Soviet Union. These genuine fears actually convinced Britain of the need to strengthen the European arm of NATO through increased British integration into NATO instead of the initial plan to stretch the already weak British arm beyond the NATO area. This idea was reflected in Edward Heath’s later statement:

It would be foolish to disregard the constantly increasing armed strength of the Soviet Union and the old-fashioned class-ridden views still so predominant in the speeches and writings of communist ideologues. We must not, therefore, ignore our defences. Fundamental to this is the continued alliance between Europe and North America.  

This understanding about the uncertain Soviet motives determined the British attitude to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) which eventually led to the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. Outlining his government’s general approach in the CSCE Heath said, in March 1972: “...what I want to see emerge from a Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe is a Europe which is more secure. We all want to live in a continent in which attempts inspired from abroad to undermine the society and institutions of each nation are brought to an end. And we want to see genuine measures of practical cooperation.”

Accordingly, in the MBFR (Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction) talks, Britain

51 British High Commission in India, BIS, B 142, 17 March 1972, p.3.
52 For Helsinki Final Act, see, R.K Jain, Détenue in Europe: Implications for Asia (Delhi, Radiant Publishers, 1977), Appendix - 12, pp.311-32.
53 BIS, B 142, n.51.
suggested various practical measures to promote greater co-operation in Europe, especially in the humanitarian and other levels, so as to effect a lifting of the iron curtain in Eastern Europe and the Soviet union and to help build up confidence among the people of Europe. Britain emphasized that the relative stability between the two collective security systems (the NATO and the Warsaw Pact) of Europe must not be disturbed. Britain apprehended that the Soviet Union was looking towards a situation in which “sheer disparity of military strength would leave Western Europe with no convincing strategy and no confidence in its ability to sustain a confrontation if one occurred.” Since it was not clear “whether the Russians are genuinely interested in the resolution of outstanding major issues or merely in Western endorsement of the status quo in Europe on Soviet terms,” Britain wanted the Western policies to be governed by the twin objectives of defence and détente - and that while the West would engage the Soviet Union and its allies in discussions to achieve a real and lasting relaxation of tensions between the East and the West, the Military strength of NATO was to be maintained at levels sufficient to deter aggression.

Similar scepticisms marked the British attitude to the MBFR. In the British calculation MBFR was fraught with grave risks that once it takes place it may not be possible to maintain the balance the NATO and the Warsaw Pact maintained in Europe. Britain feared that it would have a weakening effect on the NATO and that the balance might tilt in favour of the Warsaw Pact. Moreover, if the troop reduction involved the American and Soviet forces, taking geographical factor into account, any forces the USSR might pull out from Eastern Europe would move only the 100 to 700 miles on land routes to the Western Russia and could be reintroduced much more quickly and easily than those of the United States whose forces would have crossed the 3000 miles - Atlantic. This meant that any settlement both in the CSCE and in the MBFR talks, should necessarily have the full confidence of West European nations and no solutions would be possible in that way without the establishment of a proper machinery for on the spot verification which Russia was not willing to agree to. Therefore, Britain rejected the possibility of any serious arms reduction agreement between the two blocs.

Britain, on the one hand, was convinced of the need to agree on force reduction in Europe and, on the other, believed that such measures could not be pursued in conditions of military imbalance between the two blocs and also that such agreements should not lead to the creation of any imbalance. Therefore, it suggested that NATO, besides maintaining the military strength to sustain the confidence of Western Europe, should also take into account the political intentions as well as the military capability of the Warsaw Pact, in planning its defence strategy. This British, and the general European scepticism, was reflected all-through the détente and the MBFR negotiations. That explains why both the blocs failed to arrive at any agreements on the MBFR and also why détente negotiations failed to produce concrete and lasting results. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act only recognized the status quo in Europe and thus legitimized the division of Europe into two mutually antagonistic power blocs without resolving the core issues of conflict.

For Britain the détente negotiations and the Helsinki Final Act were significant in many ways. Firstly, Britain was satisfied that its views about European Security prevailed over the initial opposition to serve her own immediate interests. Secondly, Britain was able to establish her European identity more strongly and she had been projecting a European perspective and presenting Europe's case as against a purely British position all through the negotiations. Simultaneously with the negotiations, Britain had also been taking steps to strengthen European defence co-operation at various levels, including in the nuclear field, without negating the importance of the 'American connection' for the security of Europe.

Thirdly, détente process for Britain was a pointer to a not often recognized fact about Britain's foreign and defence policies, namely, the inherent continuity and consensus that cut across all party ideological differences. The early political initiatives for the process were made under a Labour Administration and all major negotiations were held under the 1970-74 Conservative government, whereas the Helsinki Final Act was signed by the Labour government in August 1975. Fourthly, the Labour government's optimism about détente encouraged it to undertake yet another defence Review in 1974 which would provide for further cut in British defence spending. And lastly, it was the frustrating experience from détente in the late 1970s that compelled Britain to reverse its pacifist policies and resort to increased spending on defence, partly in response to the NATO
modernisation plan and partly out of Britain’s own changed perceptions about European security.

The Defence Review of 1974

The Labour government, on returning to power again, in 1974, thought that defence was continuing to take a larger proportion of the British annual budget than what it could actually afford. Since the 1968 Review decisions were not totally implemented before they lost power in the 1970 elections, they were determined that before it was too late an effective balance between commitment and capability was struck and the defence budget was maintained at a reasonable level. Hence, on 21 March 1974, it was announced in the House of Commons that “the government had initiated a Review of current defence commitments and capabilities against the resources that, given the economic prospects of the country, we could afford to devote to defence.”

The aim of the Review was to achieve savings on defence expenditure of several hundred million pounds per annum over a period, while maintaining a modern and effective defence system. Explaining the rationale for the Review, the Labour government made it clear that the 1968 Review commitment continues to remain the new government’s firm policy. But the Conservative government’s 1970 Supplementary Statement on Defence Estimates, while accepting that the NATO should remain the first priority of the defence policy, placed more emphasis on a willingness to face threats to stability throughout the world. So when the Labour Government was returned to office again in early 1974, it inherited a defence programme beyond what the British economy could sustain and what the forces could effectively support.

Already many in Britain had begun to see the frequent cuts in defence as “damaging national morale” as also affecting Britain’s “ability to defend her freedom and her political and economic interests in the world.” However, the foresight and determination to strike a balance between capability and commitment was already demonstrated by the previous Labour government in the 1968 Review. For the Labour Party this was a point of no return - withdrawal to Europe and NATO was a foregone conclusion for them. Britain was the only European member to contribute to all the major

areas of the North Atlantic Alliance: to the Central region in Europe to the Eastern Atlantic and the Channel Command areas; to the defence of the United Kingdom and its immediate approaches; to the Mediterranean; to the Alliance’s strategic and tactical nuclear deterrent; to the specialist reinforcements forces available for deployment to the Central region and to the Northern and southern flanks. Britain’s remaining few outside commitments in various parts of the world also imposed an extra burden which none of her European Allies and trading competitors was bearing.

However, throughout the post-War period Britain’s economic performance had lagged behind that of her European Allies in NATO. For many years Britain’s annual average growth rate has been little more than half that achieved by France and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). For these reasons the government decided that resource must be released for investment and improving the balance of payments. This required a reduction of defence expenditure so as to bring it at par with that of her major European Allies.

The following table will illustrate Britain’s claims:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of GNP spent on Defence</th>
<th>Per capita income (in dollars)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2,950</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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60 Cmd. 5976, n.58, p.3, Figure I.
<p>| | | | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>5,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from the above table that Britain with a lower per capita income, was spending disproportionately higher on defence as against the other NATO Allies. While making the Review, the government announced that it was determined that the process of adjustment should not be at the cost of essential security interests of Britain and her NATO commitments. The Review, as it was done in the background of détente, about which the Labour Government was very optimistic, was in anticipation of a stable political condition in Europe and elsewhere. Hence it covered the whole of the forward period from 1975-76 to 1983-84 to make possible an orderly adjustment of its defence structure to meet the different sets of commitments and capabilities and to allow for full military, financial, manpower, equipment and industrial planning. The Review, however, did not result in any dilution of Britain's NATO commitments but instead it reaffirmed Britain's continued commitment to NATO recognizing it as the "linchpin of British Security." Here again, like in the 1968 Review, the emphasis was on reducing British commitments outside the NATO area and Europe.

After considering the political and military aspects of European Security the Review stated:

...until détente is clearly established upon a lasting foundation of mutual security, we would take a cautious view of the intentions of the Warsaw Pact. We cannot exclude the possibility [that] the Warsaw Pact might try to use its massive military power, especially its conventional weapons, to bring political pressure to bear on Western countries in the hope of influencing their external and even their domestic policies... . It is essential in order to deter any more adventurist policy and to

61 In 1974 there were only 13 members in NATO.
62 Cmdn. 5976, n.58, p.2.
63 Ibid., p.2.
64 Ibid., p.7.
sustain the momentum of détente that the political cohesion of the Alliance should be maintained as well as an effective military strategy... 65

Accordingly, the Government declared its continued commitment to the preservation of the credibility of NATO'S strategy and political cohesion and to the maintenance of an effective military contribution to the Alliance forces. The small reduction proposed in the Review was to help ease the strain on British economy and to help share the burden equally by all the major NATO European powers. The government also declared its intention to concentrate British military efforts in those areas where it believed Britain could make the most significant contribution to her own security and equally that of the Alliance. It was also decided to retain the existing tactical and strategic nuclear weapons in support of NATO without going for a new generation of strategic nuclear weapons.66

Consequent to the Review, from 1976 onwards, all major war-ships of Britain were committed to NATO in the Eastern Atlantic and Channel with no more war-ships committed to the Mediterranean areas.67 The effect of these measures was the progressive reduction of one-seventh in the Navy's planned numerical strength, with increased specialization provided for in Nuclear Powered Submarines. Thus it was a cost-effective measure without sacrificing efficiency. The shape and size of the Army was to be adjusted to meet the new framework of defence priorities and the demands of the economy. The fighting capability of the BAOR was to be enhanced. A reduction in the strength of the Army by 15,000 and some reductions in the RAF were to be effected without affecting the commitment to NATO.

As the remnants of the former global commitments, despite the 1968 Review commitment to withdraw all forces from East of Suez by the end of 1971, Britain still maintained forces in various parts of the world, including in Hong Kong, Gibraltar, Belize, the Falkland Islands, Cyprus, West Indies, Gan, Mauritius, Brunei, Malaysia, the Gulf, et.al. Britain also continued to be a member of the CENTO and SEATO, without her forces being declared to them. Along with Britain's domestic economic problems and the

65 Ibid., pp.8-9.
66 Ibid., p.10.
67 Ibid., p.16.
changed international environment the Defence Review was also the result of an in depth Review of strategy. This study convinced Britain that her security was essentially linked with the NATO strategy and strength and that her own capability for action, in both peace and conflict in non-NATO areas had shrunk considerably. Hence, the Statement on Defence Estimates said:

The government is working and will continue to work for real and lasting détente in Europe through the North Atlantic Alliance which we regard as an instrument of détente no less than of defence. Progress in pursuit of détente, if it is not to be illusory, must be based on a strong and united NATO Alliance across the Atlantic and within Europe.\textsuperscript{68}

Another notable point in the Review was that it announced the government's desire for increased European defence co-operation within the framework of the Alliance. In the course of 1974, the British Government proposed that Europe should strengthen its own arrangements for equipment collaborations and evolve a rational policy towards the procurement of United States defence equipment.\textsuperscript{69} Various steps were taken in this direction also. Britain accordingly had already initiated a $1000 million European Defence improvement programme in 1970.\textsuperscript{70}

Though the Review did not provide for any major structural reform of the defence effort other than by cutting away at the most peripheral commitments and the government had expressed its continued commitment to maintain its four distinctive NATO roles, the government's policies were not free from criticisms from within the Labour Party and without. In fact the left wing Labour MPs had demanded severe cuts in defence expenditure and to direct the savings into welfare measures and employment-generating activities. The projected cut to the tune of £4700 m over a ten year period was described as 'inadequate' by them.\textsuperscript{71} A substantial section of the left-wingers even refused to vote for the Review and the new policy announcements were passed in Parliament because of the Conservatives abstaining in the voting.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 26.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p.29.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} The International Herald Tribune (Paris), 4 December 1974.
\textsuperscript{72} The Times (London), 17 December 1974.
Even more severe an attack on the government's policy was mounted by the Defence Study Group appointed by the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party in 1974 with Ian Makardo as its head. The Study Group not only challenged the fundamentals of government policy but prepared the outlines of an alternative policy.

The Report of the group suggested that an economically weak country like Britain should not devote a greater part of her GNP to defence purposes than her European Allies like Germany, France and Italy. It also was of the opinion that a reduced defence spending by Britain will contribute in its own ways towards lessening international tension.\textsuperscript{73} The cost and utility approach to defence dominated the Study Group Report and a number of options were discussed. This included abandoning \textit{Polaris}, reducing the surface fleet and in particular abandoning the three anti-submarine warfare cruiser, halving the Army in Germany, abandoning the multi-role combat aircraft in favour of existing aircraft, using precision guided ammunitions to enhance NATO's defensive power, \textit{etc.}

The study group recommended a non-nuclear defence within NATO, with Britain giving up all her nuclear weapons and removing American nuclear bases. However, the response of Labour government to the report was predictably hostile, with virtually no common ground being found with the reformers. The government's position was implied in the statement of the Secretary of State for Defence, Fred Mulley: "Just as it is no good having a defence policy which could bankrupt the society it is designed to defend, it would be wrong to endanger national security in our concern for social justice."\textsuperscript{74}

The Government defended each of Britain's defence roles, implicitly rejecting the possibility of further economies, opposed a major expansion of the German defence effort and warned that any reduction of efforts by Britain could easily precipitate a general 'unraveling' of NATO.\textsuperscript{75} As Peter Malone observed, unlike the French, no post-War British government could have enjoyed the luxury of challenging American commitment.

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Sunday Times} (London), 31 October 1976.
in the certainty that it would endure. Whereas "French Gaullism was an irritant, British Gaullism could well have unraveled the whole structure of Atlantic defence."  

One consequence of this has been a 'peculiar sensitivity to allied and, particularly, American opinion in British deliberations'. In fact, to a great extent, it was the British, under a Labour government, who were the architects of the American commitment to the defence of Europe. Therefore, though a section of the ruling party felt the need for a radical revision of Britain's defence policy, the government could not have subscribed to such harsh demands without weighing its implications on the Alliance, especially on the Atlantic connections. The publication of the Study Group report and the Government's hostile response marked the beginning of a major and sustained conflict within the Labour Party over defence policy which persisted for a long time, almost throughout the seventies and eighties, with some sections within the Party supporting unilateral nuclear disarmament by Britain and demanding the withdrawal of American missiles deployed in British territory. However, experience over the years show that there has always been some ambiguity in the Labour Party in defence policy making, with some sections occasionally demanding unilateral withdrawal from NATO, and supporting a non-nuclear defence policy for Britain. Such extreme views, held with strong commitment while in opposition, have always been diluted while in power. This government-Opposition dichotomy of the Party has provoked severe criticisms from Party activists at different times and had its unfavourable electoral consequences on the Party. Once in power, the Labour Party has never gambled with the nuclear deterrence or with Britain's membership in NATO. On the contrary, it has been playing a leading role both in developing the appropriate deterrent, their delivery systems and even in formulating the Alliance deterrence strategy.

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76 Peter Malone, n.15, p.29.
77 Ibid.
80 Labour Defence Secretary, Denis Healey, along with his US counterpart, Robert McNamara, had played a major role in evolving and adopting the strategy of Flexible Response for NATO in the late 1960s; See, Chapter III of the present study for further details.
The results of the 1979 and 1983 elections proved that the Labour Party’s inconsistent stand on defence and disarmament has hindered rather than helped it in the elections. The British electorate, appeared unconvinced of Labour’s perception on European defence.\(^{81}\) Those who had followed the Labour’s positions on defence in the previous decades, however, believed that once in power again, it is bound to take a realistic stand on defence which would inevitably have to be a pro-NATO one. Writing in the mid 1980s, former Labour Secretary of State for Defence, Denis Healey, laid down the possible direction of the Labour stance on deterrence for the immediate future thus:

The main objective of a Labour government in NATO would be to persuade its allies to cooperate in building an effective conventional deterrent in Europe. ...yet we recognize that we cannot change NATO strategy unilaterally and that NATO strategy must be indivisible. So we shall continue to cooperate in the existing strategy until we succeed in changing it as the Kennedy Administration did in the 1960s.\(^{82}\)

This statement of Lord Healey reflected both the elements of continuity and change in the Labour’s attitude to nuclear weapons and to the Alliance strategies. It also indicated the possible direction of British/NATO’s future nuclear deterrent policy. But when one considers the fact that this is an issue on which even the leading political Parties within Britain could not come to agree and, therefore, to expect a grouping of nations with divergent perceptions of the degree of threat from the identified adversaries to agree, could be too unrealistic.

One of the objectives of the 1974 Defence Review was to re-establish the Euro-centric nature of the British defence policy.\(^{83}\) But the proposals in the Review went to the extent of restricting British capabilities to pursue a military role even within NATO itself.\(^{84}\) The political experience and military perception of the Labour Party in the mid-seventies made such a Review necessary and possible. The global political situation in the early seventies was also favourable to think of such a Review as there was remarkable improvements in East-West relations, and Europe was becoming free from the cold war hang-ups as détente negotiations were going on in Europe. But this hope for peaceful co-

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\(^{81}\) David Sanders, n.35, p.248.
\(^{83}\) Cmdn. 5976, n.58, p.1.
\(^{84}\) For details of the proposed reductions see Ibid., pp.1-16.
existence did not last long. Even before the Labour Government could start implementing its decisions in the Review, various developments in Europe and elsewhere forced it to reconsider its entire stand on defence as détente started showing signs of crisis by the late 1970s itself.

Moscow’s support for Vietnam in its invasion of Kampuchea in 1978; its use of the Cuban proxy in Angola in 1974-75, and in Ethiopia in 1977-78; its financing of Cuban support for the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1978-79; and its invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 “revealed an aggressive superpower intent on the gradual incorporation into its own spheres of influence of as many lesser powers as possible.”

Before the Labour Government gave way to the Conservatives in the 1979 election, it took various decisions which were essentially against the spirit of the Review commitments. This included the NATO decision to increase defence spending by 3 per cent per annum, in real terms, for the period 1979-86, Theatre Nuclear Forces (TNF) Modernization, attempts for the replacement of Polaris in the 1990s, etc.

The Early Thatcher Years, 1979-86

With the return of the Conservatives to power in May 1979, Britain was found once again, reversing the Labour’s Review decisions and showing interest in the long-range projection of military power. According to Wyn Rees, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher strongly believed that it was the then prevailing security structure in Europe that kept the Continent free from war and provided unparalleled stability and, therefore, tampering with the system could lead to the unraveling of the Atlantic Alliance. Thatcher, therefore, was determined to preserve the status quo and resist any radical change that many in the Opposition seemed to want.

In the Soviet supported activities in various parts of the World, Britain perceived serious threats to vital Western markets, trade routes, and sources of oil and raw materials. This led Britain to revive and project its military power beyond the NATO areas. The new government’s Statement on Defence Estimates in 1980 proclaimed its intention to “integrate defence and diplomacy in the service of security.” The Statement was released in the context of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It said: “If we are not to

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85 David Sanders, n.35, p.241.
87 Wyn Rees, n. 32, p.89.
witness further such adventures [like Afghanistan] in even more sensitive areas for the West, we must respond with firmness and resolve and in solidarity with all the free nations of the world."

Taking note of the emerging crisis of détente and the renewed cold war situation the Statement added: "In the face of the threat posed to us by the military build up of the Warsaw Pact we believe that this is a time for giving a higher, not lower, priority to defence for our allies as well as to ourselves." The Statement identified the gravest potential threat for Britain as coming from the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries, which could be used directly in a military confrontation with the economic interest of the West world-wide. Reaffirming its commitment to NATO, the Statement said:

The United Kingdom could not face this challenge alone. Even if we could hope to do so, purely in military terms, our political and economic survival is so closely bound up with that of our own allies in Europe and North America that our continued security and freedom cannot be seen in isolation... . In the thirty one years since its formation NATO has succeeded in deterring aggression. It is in this country's vital interest that it continues to do so... . This government is wholeheartedly committed to NATO and determined that the United Kingdom shall pull its weight... . The US commitment to the defence of Europe remains the vital foundation of NATO's political and military strength. It reflects our American ally's appreciation of the importance to their own security of the continued security and liberty of Western Europe.

One central theme that ran through the Conservative government's first defence policy Statement, on returning to power at a crucial time in the history of the Alliance and Europe as such, was its commitment to the NATO Alliance. For example, it said, "All the Allies would commit their land and air forces to any battle on or over the European continent... . These commitments parallel the United States' commitment to the security of Europe. This sharing of risks and burden is a source of great strength to NATO."

The government also fully endorsed the Long Term Defence Programme (LTDP) initiated under the Labour Government. As against the ambiguous position taken by the Labour Party about the nuclear issue the Conservative government reaffirmed its

89 Ibid., p.2.
90 Ibid., p.7.
commitment to retain nuclear weapons and pursue its nuclear research programme and support the TNF modernization plan. On the issue of the TNF modernization, in fact, Britain played a crucial role in mobilizing support among the other European NATO members for the deployment of American Cruise and Pershing II missiles in NATO Europe. The Thatcher government was convinced that in order to avoid a 'dangerous gap' emerging in NATO's theatre nuclear capability and thereby weakening the Alliance's strategy of flexible response, it was essential to have the American missiles in Europe. Thatcher's commitment to retain and strengthen Britain's nuclear deterrence, in spite of the growing popularity of the anti-nuclear movements within the UK and all across Western Europe and her solidarity with an equally fiercely anti-communist American President, Ronald Reagan, were crucial in shaping NATO's response to Soviet nuclear deployment strategies in Europe.

The United Kingdom had realized the importance of developments in the Third World for the NATO Alliance as a whole and insisted that outside NATO area interests also should become the responsibility of the Alliance as a whole. This is precisely what Britain did through the defence Reviews of the sixties and the seventies. Britain's "retreat to Europe" was not after totally renouncing all its extra-European interests, especially in the former colonies which are mostly today's Third World countries, but largely as a domestic solution for the domestic economic compulsions and based on the strong belief that Britain's extra-European interests were equally vital interests of the Alliance as a whole, and hence the NATO Alliance would take care, within which Britain could, in turn, pursue and protect her interests.

This argument could be reinforced by the fact that whenever the trading interests of these countries were seriously threatened either by the unilateralist policies of any trading partner or by the expansionist policies of an antagonist power or even by the conflict between two trading partners, the affected Western Powers generally ventured to use the military as an instrument of foreign policy in the service of economic interests.

91 Ibid., p.9.
93 Ibid., pp.236-244. An opinion poll conducted in Britain, France, West Germany and Italy, in 1981, showed overwhelming majorities either opposing the use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances or approving their use only against a nuclear attack. Those supporting a nuclear attack against a conventional Soviet attack on NATO ranged from 12 to 19 per cent; Cited in, Denis Healey, n.82, p. 723.
The Suez Crisis in 1956, the developments in Africa in the late seventies, threat to Iran to interfere militarily if the Persian Gulf was blocked, etc. were only a few among many such instances.

It was, thus, apparent on the face of the policy of withdrawal to Europe that it was a policy of trying to keep the bread and eat it too. The fact that Britain has been successful, to some extent, explains the role NATO plays in her overall defence posture. This was possible only so long as NATO effectively deterred the Warsaw Pact aggressions wherever it was intended to do, and, Britain, on occasion, as in the case of the Falklands crisis, was left alone to take care of exclusively British commitments outside NATO areas. The 1985 Statement on Defence Estimates said that the United Kingdom attached great importance to the maintenance and development of bilateral relations with its European allies and was also playing a leading role in the work of the major multilateral organizations devoted to European defence co-operation.

Britain is also involved in a number of collaborative projects in defence production with other NATO countries. In the field of co-operation in development and procurement of defence equipment the most significant progress had taken place in 1984 in the formation of the Independent European Programme Group (IEPG) which was composed of all the European members of the Alliance, except Iceland. This included some of the very important weapons programme for the future, like the European Fighter Aircraft, various missile systems, multiple launch rocket system, etc. However, Britain has taken care to ensure that increased European co-operation did not become an alternative to trans-Atlantic co-operation, but instead only strengthen and supplement the Euro-Atlantic co-operation.

Whatever changes in the British and general NATO strategic thinking appeared to emerge, that were not the result of mere changes in government in Britain, followed by similar changes in the United States, West Germany and France. They arose mainly from perceptions borne out of Soviet violations of the spirit of détente by building up a massive nuclear and conventional military power throughout the 1970s, and by using that power to advance Moscow's own ambitions in different parts of the world. That the British Government took stock of these threatening situations seriously was evident from its defence policy Statements of 1980, 1981 and of the years that followed.
The inconsistent positions taken by the Labour Party, ever since it lost the elections in 1979, though posed a challenge to many of the assumptions underpinning the NATO Alliance, it was contained before reaching a boiling point. The fact that the Labour Party itself failed in projecting a united stand, with the former Prime Minister, James Callaghan, and his senior Ministerial colleagues in the Party taking a more pro-Atlanticist and pro-nuclear position, on such highly controversial issues like membership in NATO, nuclear deterrence, INF modernization, etc. weakened the Party’s popular base as also the credibility of their arguments itself. The Party’s position, while in government, was fresh in the minds of the people during the 1979 and 1983 elections and the 1983 result with a mere 27 per cent vote share was one of the poorest ever performance by the Party in the national elections.

The inconsistency in the policy posturing of the British Labour Party on some of the crucial defence-related issues become apparent from the following facts: It was the first post-War Labour government that was chiefly instrumental for the establishment of NATO in 1949 and prior to that, in 1947, took the crucial decision to proceed with the British independent nuclear deterrent; it was another Labour government that took the initiative for the formation of a Euro-group within NATO in the 1960s; it was the same Labour government that played a leading role in transforming the nuclear deterrent strategy of massive retaliation to that of flexible response; it was a Labour government that initiated a Euro-centric defence policy for Britain in the late 1960s; again the Labour Party was at the helm of affairs when the Helsinki Final Act was signed in 1975 and witnessed the emerging crisis of détente in the late 1970s and initiated strong responses against the Soviet bloc, including the decision to modernize the Theatre Nuclear Forces (TNF).

The whole sequence of events leading to the TNF modernization starting from December 1975 to April 1978 when the NATO Ministerial meeting in Denmark endorsed the importance of modernizing NATO’s TNF, the Labour Party was in power in Britain. It was, therefore, no surprise that their eventual opposition to the actual deployment of the American missiles in the British territory surprised everyone, including the Americans. The United States viewed the Labour Party’s attitude as signs of

complacency creeping into the European thinking. Jean Kirk Patrick, the former US Ambassador to the UN, reacted to the adverse British and some other European opinion on issues vital to the Atlantic Alliance saying: "...the past decades of stability and economic development have transformed the security and well being of Europe that it is easy to forget the reality of destabilization, intimidation and outright aggression in the late forties .... Diversity of the interests and views of the members in matters outside the treaty area has resulted in some dramatic conflicts inside the Alliance."95

However, these divergence in perception on specific issues were not allowed to reach a point of no return and thereby to pose any challenge to the integrity of the Alliance by the member countries. It, however, talks of the democratic nature, flexibility and resilience of the Atlantic Alliance that the occasional differences of opinion among the member countries, on specific issues, have not affected the cohesion of the Alliance when it actually came to responding to issues that had a vital bearing on their security.

The Falklands Crisis: A Test-case For NATO Solidarity For Britain

The Falklands War of 1982 (and many other military interventions after that) demonstrated that the British defence forces are organized to play a global role, if necessary. It comprised a set of forces that still purport to discharge, albeit on a shrinking scale, virtually all the military functions undertaken by even the largest military powers. But in reality, this multifarious functions are discharged only within the context of the Alliance or with its tactical support.

Falkland Islands, a cluster of islands situated in the South Atlantic, has been a disputed territory between Britain and Argentina for almost a century and a half. The name Falkland Islands was given in 1960 in honour of the then Treasurer of the Royal Navy, Viscount Falkland. These islands were also known by the Spanish name, Islas Malvinas among the Argentineans. Britain’s claim to the islands is based on the discovery of these islands by the English Captain, John Davis, in 1592 and on the unbroken presence of British settlers there since 1832. Not only do the Islanders claim to be of British origin, they have expressed time and again their refusal to be part of Argentina.

95 Ibid., p.70.
Argentina's claim of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands has been long-standing. As a result, even in 1920s and 1930s the cruisers of the Royal Navy's South American Squadron were required to pay periodic visits to Port Stanley, the Falklands capital, to check possible Argentine invasions. The Argentine claims got some kind of recognition when, in December 1965, the UN General Assembly passed a non-mandatory Resolution (No. 2065) on the issue. The Resolution, in its preamble, referred to the "cherished aim of bringing to an end everywhere colonialism in all its forms", one of which covers the case of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) and invited the governments of Argentina and of the United Kingdom to proceed without delay with negotiations with a view to finding a peaceful solution to the problem, "keeping in mind the provisions and objectives of the Charter of the United Nations and of Resolution 154 (XV) (on colonialism) and in the interest of the population of the Falkland Islands" and requested the two governments to report to the Special Committee and to the General Assembly at its next session. Since then negotiations have been held at various levels, without success, to find a solution to the problem. As a result, tension began to build up between Britain and Argentina over the issue, which reached its culmination in the invasion of the Falkland Islands by the Argentinean forces on 2 April 1982.

The conflict was significant for Britain for several reasons. Firstly, it was a test-case for the British resolve to project her military power once again outside NATO area in defence of her economic, political and military interests. Secondly, it was a test-case for the ability of British forces to undertake military tasks outside NATO area in an eventuality. It also provided an example of the reliability of NATO in safeguarding Britain's security interests—a test-case for NATO solidarity and also, to some extent, for the Anglo-American 'Special Relationship' in times of crisis, although the crisis was technically outside the general framework of NATO.

When the Argentineans invaded and took over the control of the Islands from the small garrison of the British forces stationed there, on 2 April 1982, the general

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97 This issue which had a crucial bearing on the Anglo-American relations also, is dealt with more elaborately in Chapter V of the present study.
assessment was that the British will not be able to do much of anything about retaking them in the absence of sufficient air power and logistical support proximate to the operational area. A retired American admiral told the Washington Post, "The British made the decision to structure their navy to only certain NATO tasks and have lost their ability to conduct independent operations in the process." Britain, under Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, however, was determined that "aggression must not be allowed to succeed and freedom must be protected against dictatorship." For Britain the whole issue was a litmus test for the Alliance solidarity and her own resolve against unforeseen adversities. Without the support of her NATO Allies, both moral and material, even if it was assumed that it was militarily possible to retake the Islands, politically it would have been impossible. The NATO Euro-group in its meeting on 7 May 1982 condemned the Argentine invasion and asked Argentina to comply with the UN resolution and urged the need to seek a negotiated settlement. Putting the whole dispute in a North Atlantic context, John Nott, British Defence Secretary, said in the meeting: "The Atlantic Alliance’s response provided irrefutable evidence of the strength of our commitment to the same ideals. It also represented a concrete expression of the growing recognition in NATO that Western interests were not limited to the Treaty area." Pointing out the lessons of the conflict for the overall NATO strategy John Nott added:

This is not to say there can be any deflection on our part from the Alliance’s primary purpose which is to deter the Soviet threat... The Falkland crisis, in an important sense, had strengthened the allied deterrent in showing the solidarity of the countries and in proving Britain’s defence capabilities in a fashion that can leave few doubts in Soviet minds as to their readiness and effectiveness.

A communique issued by European Defence Ministers (the twelve NATO Euro-group defence ministers) on 6 May 1982, also emphasized "the importance of maintaining the principle that aggression or occupation of territory by force should not be allowed to succeed." The full NATO Defence Planning Committee meeting, on 7 May 1982, also

100 The Times (London), 7 May 1982.
101 Ibid.
102 The Times (London), 7 May 1982.
extended its total support to Britain over the Falklands dispute.\textsuperscript{103} The North Atlantic Council meeting in Luxembourg on 17-18 May 1982 also reaffirmed its support for the British position.\textsuperscript{104}

Besides these common positions taken in the NATO and other European forums, some of the NATO countries also individually declared their support for the British position and extended moral and material assistance. Since the crisis began on 2 April 1982, the French Government took an unequivocal position: it condemned the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands as a violation of international law and insisted on the strict application of the Security Council Resolution calling for the restoration of the \textit{status quo ante}, though it refrained from taking a stand on the issue of sovereignty of the disputed Islands. Claude Cheyson, the French Minister for External Affairs, made the French position explicit when he said: “Our solidarity [with Britain] is not linked to any other affair. It has been complete. We have certainly, as a country, adopted the strongest stand at the side of the British ... . So long as the Security Council Resolution on the Falklands is not respected (by the Argentines) we shall support the British.”\textsuperscript{105}

France also helped Britain with all possible information about its previous arms sales to Argentina, in particular the \textit{Exocet} Missiles, which caused some damage to Britain during the conflict. After the Argentine invasion, the French Government stopped supplying arms and military spares to Argentina. It also refused to make available to Argentina the technical know-how to fix the already supplied missiles on the under wing of the \textit{Super Entendard} aircraft meant to fire the \textit{Exocet} missiles. Besides France, West Germany, Turkey, Canada and the United States individually and collectively supported Britain. A statement by the Turkish Foreign Minister on 7 May 1982 said: “Turkey is in solidarity with Britain over the Falkland Islands dispute. We are conscious of the fact that our membership in the NATO alliance is a cause for solidarity with Britain over the dispute.”\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{The Times} (London), 19 May 1982.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{The Times} (London), 8 May 1982.
Spain, however, for obvious reasons, refused to take a categorical position on the
dispute but instead offered to mediate in the dispute. It had important historical, political
and emotional ties with the Latin Americans. The Spanish King, Juan Carlos' statement
identified Spain both as an American and as a European country. It said: “We know
very well that Europe is our nearest geographical horizon, and we also know that Europe
without Spain would be mutilated... But Spain must be faithful at the same time to an
historic destiny of universal dimensions. We are a European country but we are likewise an
American country.”

However, the initial show of solidarity with Britain in the European Community as
well as in the NATO alliance did not last till the end of the war. Italy, because of certain
political problems attached to her “strong-blood ties” with Argentina, reinforced by the
common religious bond, refused to extend prolonged unconditional support to Britain.
Ireland also because of her pronounced neutral status, refused to extend the economic
sanctions agreed immediately after the invasion. West Germany, when it began to feel the
economic impact of the loss of trade, also wanted to reconsider the steps and advocated a
peaceful solution to the dispute. The initial support Britain received from all these
countries was important in boosting the British morale when the crisis erupted. Since,
technically, it was an issue outside the boundaries of the ‘treaty area’ Britain did not take
the wavering by some of her NATO Allies seriously.

Ultimately, however, the conflict instead of weakening its trust and confidence in
NATO helped only to reinforce them. The White Paper, The Falklands Campaign: The
Lessons, issued soon after the conflict was over, detailed the special problem the British
Task Force faced in conducting the operation in the South Atlantic. Aircrafts and
equipments were constantly in demand to perform unfamiliar tasks which were important
to the occasion. However, it cautioned against generalizing the experience gained from the
war saying that “the bulk of the emergency practices used were special to the operation and
because equipment requirements were narrowed to the immediate task of countering
specifically known Argentine capabilities... .” Though eventualities of the South Atlantic
type could arise in the future, the whole campaign cannot be over-estimated as to ignore

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the long term security threat to Britain which comes from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.\textsuperscript{109}

Another notable result of the campaign was that it marked a departure from the British commitment in 1968, not to deploy its forces outside Europe for any major operation individually. In the light of the Falklands conflict the British Government had decided to maintain a sizeable garrison on the Falkland Islands for the foreseeable future. And this was to be done without affecting its NATO commitment.\textsuperscript{110} Britain's success in the conflict, in most unusual circumstances, owed both to the NATO solidarity and the British resolve and capability. Britain acknowledged this allied help immediately after the war. To quote the Defence White Paper issued after the war:

From the outset the Government were heartened by the understanding and support of the United Kingdom's partners in the European Community, our Allies in NATO and not least, our friends in the Commonwealth. This international support which in many cases represented a clear choice of principle over material interests by the Governments concerned was of value in bringing home to the Argentine leaders the extent of their international isolation. It was also extended, in some instances, to the provisions of material help which was of direct benefit to the task force.\textsuperscript{111}

It was the lack of solidarity in NATO, as was reflected in the American position, that forced the humiliating British and French withdrawal from Suez in 1957. In the Falklands conflict the support Britain received from her allies in NATO was important in creating a favourable international public opinion for Britain, in boosting the morale of the British forces, and, in some cases, militarily also. When the conflict ended Britain had re-established her claim over the Islands on a stronger footing. It provided lessons for the future also. Britain still has various interests outside Europe. If, in an eventuality, these interests are to be defended militarily, then the position NATO takes will be a fundamental factor for Britain in deciding to use its own forces in defence of such interests outside Europe. One of the secrets of success of the British forces in the Falklands conflict was that it was part of a global military structure and trained, as part of the NATO

\textsuperscript{111} UK, HMSO, Cmnd.8758, n.109, p.15.
integrated military command, to fight in any part of the world. The British Naval contributions to NATO is of a size and nature that still owed much to the imperial days. This makes it possible for the British Navy to play an effective NATO role and, in an eventuality, a global imperial role.

Conclusion

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was established in 1949 primarily at the British initiative and it remained a key factor in Britain’s defence and security policy since then. Ever since Britain effected her military withdrawal from the East of Suez, the NATO became the central focus of her defence policy. To a great extent, it has been an instrument which helped to preserve Britain’s position as an important medium ranking European power with enormous global influence and interests. With the back up of a highly professional armed forces, supported by a whole range of conventional and nuclear capabilities and an effective diplomatic skill, Britain has maintained an influential position in the North Atlantic Alliance. Since its establishment, NATO has been the mechanism through which Britain has pursued its important objective of preserving peace in Europe.

NATO helped Britain to sustain its global role next only to the one played by the two superpowers, throughout the post-war period, a pointer to how prudently the post-War governments have presented UK’s foreign and security policies. As observed by Brian White, “It was the successful adaptation to Britain’s reduced circumstances after the Second World War that enabled successive British governments to play a central role in East-West relations from the late 1940s until the 1960s.”112 The British membership in NATO and its commitment to lead it from the front in Europe, undoubtedly, facilitated playing this seemingly impossible role for the post-War, post colonial Britain, successfully.

Except for the rhetoric of a section of the Labour Party, in the mid-eighties the dominant role that NATO plays in Britain’s overall defence policy has been recognized by all successive British governments since the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It may be noted that the 1968 Statement on Defence Estimates, which announced far-reaching changes in Britain’s policy, recognized NATO as the “foundation

112 Brian White, n. 26, p.155.
of Britain’s Security.” The 1974 Defence Policy Statement recognized NATO as the “linchpin of British Security” and the 1979 Statement of Defence Estimates, the last of the Labour Government’s, said: “What is most remarkable about the NATO Alliance is that it has been able to ensure security for Europe for an unusually long period of time and that in its absence the risks of war would have been far higher…. The entire pattern of Alliance defence embodies the firm commitment of the United States to the security of the whole Alliance.”

All the Defence Policy Statements made by the Conservative government since 1980 also repeatedly affirmed the importance of NATO for Britain and the government’s commitments to it, despite the fact that this period also witnessed considerable strain in the relationship between the Euro-group and the Atlantic partner on issues like the ‘burden sharing’ and on the role of the nuclear weapons in the Alliance’s military strategy. During this period, the European public, including the British, increasingly questioned the credibility of deploying nuclear missiles in their countries. But despite all public criticisms and organised movements – like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), European Nuclear Disarmament Movement (END), etc. – against it, the Thatcher government decided to stand by the NATO decision. The British government’s principal objective during this period was to preserve the status quo and resist radical change.

It is well accepted among the NATO members that the collaborative relationship in defence exists side by side with a competitive relationship in economic activities. On matters like the Siberian Gas Pipe Line issue and on the question of transfer of technology to the East, Britain took a common position with her other European allies, which was not to the liking of her closest Atlantic partner, the United States. Constituted as it is of free and independent sovereign nations, differences of views are bound to develop in NATO. Turning the argument against those who questioned the efficacy of NATO, the 1983 Statement on Defence Estimates claimed that these developments “do not mean that the Alliance is in a state of crisis” and that “the forces that united the Alliance are far too strong to be broken by temporary differences”.

Secretary, Lord Carrington’s words: “We have learnt to sing in harmony whereas others in the East, for example, can only sing in unison.”115

A notable change in Britain’s overall defence policy towards NATO in the mid-eighties was its attempt to strengthen the “European Pillar” through the informal Eurogroup within the Alliance. The Thatcher government, in the early 1980s, got firmly identified with a forward position in the European foreign policy, inviting the description of being the ‘spear carrier’116 in the new phase of East-West confrontation, with the leadership for the West provided, this time, by the U.S. President, Ronald Reagan. Britain, however, took the lead in engineering common European responses to crises in Afghanistan and Poland and had made major proposals for the strengthening of European political cooperation.

In the second phase of the cold war, however, Britain’s role was essentially reactive, compared to its proactive role in the 1940s. The second Conservative Administration, under Thatcher, which was elected in a landslide victory in June 1983, was seen showing keenness to improve relations with the East, as against the tough anti-Soviet posturing of the first Thatcher government of 1979-1983. A new European orientation, this time a broader one, was reflected in the second Thatcher Administration’s efforts to build bridges with the Eastern Bloc. She took a leading part in exploring the possibilities of peaceful co-existence with the Warsaw Pact countries, including the Soviet Union. Her own friendly overtures and the inclination to talk to the East European countries was the starting point in the second phase of détente between the power blocs. The visit of Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe to Hungary in September 1983, his successful meeting with his Soviet counterpart, Gromyko, in January 1984, and the subsequent visit of Prime Minister Thatcher to Hungary, in February 1984 were to mark a change in policy orientation whereby Britain, while showing the readiness to take on the East and keeping open the option to deal with them from a position of strength, was trying to engage the Warsaw Pact countries from the NATO side.

Britain’s post-War defence policy was shaped largely in response to the spectre of the Soviet threat both to Europe and to the newly independent countries of the third world.

116 Brian White, n.26, p. 162.
The peculiar circumstances in which Britain found itself at the end of the War, left her with no other choice but to entangle the United States with the defence of the democratic West. NATO was the institutional mechanism devised to realize this objective. Through NATO Britain was also able to protect her interests in all the three circles of her interests, viz; the Commonwealth circle, the Atlantic circle and the European circle. Thus by drawing the United States in to the defence of Europe, Britain was able to combine its security interests in both the European and the Atlantic circles, and maintain a significant out-of-area capability for the rapid deployment of troops, air squadrons and naval forces to almost any part of the world.

If Foreign Policy is determined by a country’s essential national interest, the British national interest requires Britain’s continued membership in NATO and its full participation in its defence strategy and planning. Given the politico-military atmosphere that prevailed in Europe till the late 1980s, Britain and the other West European countries could not, probably, have enjoyed almost half a century of peace and security, but for the collective strength and solidarity projected in and through the NATO. Whatever the content and nature of political debate taking place in Britain, it is difficult to conclude that any future British government would want to compromise on the country’s commitment to NATO in an effort to derive temporary domestic political advantages.