CHAPTER 2

Independence and Status

The British Nuclear Experience

Britain was the first non-superpower to acquire nuclear weapons after the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), testing its first nuclear weapon in 1952. But despite becoming only the third nuclear-armed state, Britain faced profound uncertainty about its status and prospects as a world power. Britain had been on the winning side in World War II, but its finances and major cities had been ravaged by the war. Britain continued to hold on to much of its empire and remained the preeminent power in the Middle East, but tides of nationalism and decolonization were rising around the world. Britain retained the ambition of a global power but was increasingly dependent on the United States for its own security. What could nuclear weapons offer a state seeking to hold on to what it had as its position became increasingly hard to maintain?

This chapter examines the ways in which nuclear weapons affected British foreign policy after Britain acquired a deliverable nuclear capability in 1955. British elites believed that nuclear weapons helped Britain address two primary political concerns: reducing its dependence on the United States, and maintaining its position in international politics. Britain used nuclear weapons as a substitute for conventional forces it could no longer afford, granting it the ability to bolster its increasingly shaky alliance commitments. And by providing Britain with a source of deterrence under its own control, nuclear weapons allowed Britain to operate more independently of the United States. Ultimately, however, although nuclear weapons were useful to Britain, they were not a "get out of jail free" card. Even with nuclear weapons, Britain could not resist the broader currents of nationalism, decolonization, and political and economic decline indefinitely. Britain's status as a global power would ultimately come to an end despite Britain's nuclear arsenal.

The British case is particularly useful for testing the theory of nuclear opportunism because it represents a "hard case" for the theory. Many theories

of, or commonly held intuitions about, international politics expect a state like Britain to have little need to prominently emphasize nuclear weapons in its grand strategy. For example, for scholars who expect that nuclear weapons primarily change the foreign policies of revisionist states, Britain was a status quo state, seeking to hold on to its position in the world. For those who expect that nuclear weapons are most useful to weak and vulnerable states needing to deter severe threats, Britain was relatively secure, with substantial conventional military power, a nuclear-armed ally committed to its protection, and highly defensible sea borders. These factors suggest that Britain would have relatively little need for nuclear weapons, and that acquiring nuclear weapons would have little effect on British foreign policy. If the theory of nuclear opportunism performs well in a case in which we expect that nuclear weapons would have little effect, this would provide an important validation for the theory.

When Did Britain Acquire Nuclear Weapons?

To look for changes in British foreign policy caused by nuclear weapons, we must first identify where to look. When did Britain acquire the relevant nuclear capabilities that might cause it to change its foreign policy?

As discussed in chapter 1, we need to pay attention to the intended British nuclear posture, the manner in which Britain intended to use its nuclear weapons, and the particular technological and military capabilities that such uses required. This enables us to identify the appropriate point in time at which to look for changes in foreign policy behavior.

The British planned to deliver their nuclear weapons to the air bases and cities of the Soviet Union.[1] British doctrine thus required a strategic bomber force with sufficient range to reach targets within the Soviet Union.[2] Britain did not have these capabilities when it first tested nuclear weapons in 1952. As the historian Matthew Jones writes in the official history of the British strategic deterrent: "The success of the first British atomic test . . . although undoubtedly important for reasons of status and prestige, did not yet offer the UK a capability that made any appreciable difference."[3] British leaders understood the importance of delivery capabilities. Indeed, the Air Ministry initiated the procurement process for new and sophisticated bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons as early as August 1946 (before the final political decision in January 1947 to develop and manufacture a nuclear bomb).[4] In 1954, two years *after* Britain's first nuclear test, Prime Minister Winston Churchill nonetheless acknowledged that "we ourselves have no effective nuclear deterrents [though] we are making progress. . . . British possession of nuclear weapons of the highest quality and on an appreciable scale, *together with their means of delivery* . . . should greatly reinforce the deterrent power of the free world."[5] Anthony Eden, Churchill's successor as

prime minister, noted in his memoirs that "alone among the allies of the United States, we were making nuclear bombs *and building air power to deliver them*."[6] Similarly, the chief of the air staff Sir John Slessor argued in 1954 that Britain's "ability to put those bombs down where we want to" was the crucial capability Britain required to gain benefits from nuclear weapons.[7]

It was in 1955, three years after Britain's first nuclear test, as Britain's new Valiant bombers came into service and trials to match the new weapons to the delivery vehicles were undertaken, that Britain was finally able to deliver nuclear weapons to targets in the Soviet Union.[8] The Canberra bombers that Britain possessed before 1955 were capable of (though had not been designed for) delivering atomic weapons but did not have the range to reach the Soviet Union.[9] On May 31, 1955, a top secret command directive was sent to the air marshal Sir George Mills informing him that he was now responsible for maintaining the Valiant bombers "at the highest standard of operational efficiency" so that they would be ready "to strike immediately [upon] Her Majesty's Government decid[ing] that an atomic offensive is to be launched."[10] Britain's delivery capabilities would improve further after 1955. For example, the Valiants were less capable than the Victor and Vulcan bombers (collectively known as the V-bombers), which came into service in the late 1950s; Britain did not conduct a live drop from an aircraft until October 1956; and it was not until 1960 that British Bomber Command had its full planned complement of V-bomber squadrons. Nonetheless, the Valiants provided Britain with a basic strategic delivery capability from 1955 onward.[11] As a secret Royal Air Force (RAF) history of the development of the strategic nuclear deterrent argues, it was in 1955 that "an A-bomb could have been deployed operationally by the RAF."[12] It is therefore in 1955 that we should expect that nuclear weapons would begin to affect British foreign policy.

Britain's Strategic Environment

What effects should we expect nuclear weapons to have had on British foreign policy? The theory of nuclear opportunism requires us to examine the strategic environment in which Britain found itself in 1955 to make predictions about how nuclear weapons would change British foreign policy, using the sequence of variables laid out in chapter 1.

The first variable in the sequence is the presence of a serious territorial threat or ongoing war requiring the dedication of significant national resources. Britain was not involved in any war at the point at which it acquired nuclear weapons. And as an island nation with considerable conventional power and a particularly powerful navy, Britain did not face serious territorial threats. British strategists were certainly acutely aware of Soviet military power, undoubtedly viewed the Soviet Union as an adversary with

aggressive intentions, and feared Soviet nuclear coercion. However, the Soviet Union did not pose a proximate threat to the British mainland, and British strategists recognized that the English Channel and Western Europe (and the large number of US and NATO forces stationed there) provided a substantial buffer between them and the Soviet Union.[13] While Britain certainly faced challenges within its empire, these did not pose threats to the British homeland, and primarily emerged from internal demands for self-determination within the colonies, rather than external foes.[14] And despite Britain's ongoing decline (discussed further below), it remained a conventionally powerful state. It was the third most powerful country in the world and continued to preside over a large empire and network of bases across strategically important regions, including remaining the dominant power in the Middle East.[15] The threats that Britain faced, therefore, do not amount to the level necessary to classify Britain as facing severe territorial threats.

The second variable in the sequence is whether the state acquiring nuclear weapons has a senior alliance partner that helps provide for the state's defense. Britain did possess such an ally: the United States. The Anglo-American relationship, which had grown closer before World War II, transformed during the war. Even before the term "special relationship" was coined in a private communication by Winston Churchill in 1943, the United States had taken a key role in financing British security and supporting the British position in the war through the destroyers-for-bases deal in 1940 and Lend Lease in 1941.[16] Cooperation between the two countries was so significant during the war that US Army chief of staff (and future state and defense secretary) General George Marshall claimed that Anglo-American planning in World War II represented "the most complete unification of military effort ever achieved by two allied states."[17] After the war, as British elites came to recognize the extent of British decline, American ascendancy, and the increasing Soviet threat, a consensus emerged that the partnership with the United States contributed in important ways to British security.[18] Underpinned by a mutual interest in containing Soviet power and reinforced by cultural and linguistic ties, the Anglo-American relationship would play an increasingly important role in providing for British security. The Anglo-American loan of 1946, the Marshall Plan (around 30% of which was invested in Britain), and the formation of NATO all formalized this relationship in the immediate postwar period. By the time Britain acquired nuclear weapons, the United States was a core contributor to British security.

The third variable in the sequence is whether the state is rising or declining in power relative to its key competitors. It is clear that Britain was in long-run relative decline.[19] Britain had emerged from World War II victorious but bloodied and economically weaker than in 1938: the value of British gold reserves had dropped from $864 to $453 million, a quarter of Britain's overseas investments had been sold to help fund the war effort, Britain's external liabilities had risen from £760 to £3,353 million, and exports were down

30 percent.[20] In the immediate aftermath of the war, British officials retained some optimism that Britain could recover its status as a great power.[21] However, Britain could not reverse the downward trends it faced. Britain suffered balance-of-payments crises in 1947 and 1949 and had to turn to the United States for economic support in 1945, 1947, and 1949.[22] Well before the end of the 1940s, British officials had concluded that "weaknesses seemingly provisional in 1945 were . . . permanent. Optimism about the long-term recovery of world power status for Britain was displaced by pessimistic appreciations of ebbing power."[23] This view was shared by American officials, with Secretary of State Dean Acheson declaring bluntly in 1947 that "the British are finished. They are through."[24]

Correspondingly, by the end of the 1940s, Britain was in the midst of retrenchment. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Burma had achieved independence, and Britain's ability to safeguard its interests around the world was open to serious doubt. The claim that Britain was declining in relative power at the point at which it acquired a deliverable nuclear capability is confirmed by the Correlates of War Project's CINC scores, which provide a measure of a state's share of global power. Britain's CINC score in 1955 was around 20 percent lower than it had been in 1950 and nearly 50 percent lower than it had been in 1939, and this downward trajectory would continue after Britain acquired nuclear weapons.[25] There is therefore no doubt that British power was on a downward trajectory at the point at which Britain acquired nuclear weapons.

Expectations

What predictions does the theory of nuclear opportunism make for a state in Britain's position: not facing severe threats or involved in an ongoing war, dependent on a senior alliance partner, and declining in power? Figure 2.1 shows the application of the theory to the case of Britain.

First, the theory suggests that Britain should not have found it attractive to use nuclear weapons to facilitate aggression. It is only states facing severe territorial threats or engaged in an ongoing war that must make it a political priority to directly improve their position against the source of the threats they face. For states in Britain's position, the security environment is less constricting, and aggression is correspondingly relatively less attractive. The theory therefore does not anticipate Britain using nuclear weapons to facilitate aggression.

Second, the theory of nuclear opportunism suggests that states with a senior ally and not facing serious threats find it attractive to use nuclear weapons to facilitate independence from that ally. States whose security is partly provided for by a senior ally are constrained if they wish to engage in behaviors that the senior ally does not support. This constraint is typically

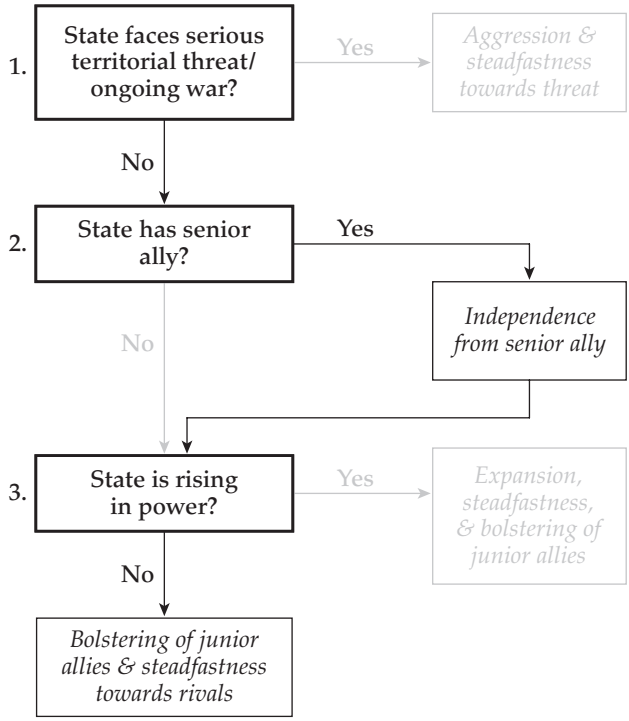

Figure 2.1. The theory of nuclear opportunism applied to Britain, 1955

binding because very few states' interests converge entirely with those of their allies. And, indeed, the United States and Britain did not have the same interests. At the highest level (and most obviously), as a 1955 memo to the British Minister of Defence Harold Macmillan pointed out, "The preservation of the United Kingdom is not of the same importance to the Americans as it is to us."[26] But even well below the level of national survival, Britain and the United States disagreed on a number of policy issues. Most prominently, the United States—itself a former British colony—was generally disinclined to prop up Britain's increasingly shaky hold on its colonies. The constraints imposed by dependence on a senior ally mean that states not facing grave and immediate security threats are likely to be eager to act more independently of their senior ally.[27] As discussed in chapter 1, nuclear weapons facilitate independence because they can serve as a partial substitute for the protection of a senior ally. The theory therefore anticipates that British elites would see nuclear weapons as a useful tool for avoiding dependence on the United States, and that Britain would have fewer qualms about acting independently of the United States after acquiring nuclear weapons.

Third, the theory anticipates that states that are reasonably secure but declining in power are likely to view maintaining their position in international

politics as a political priority, and view nuclear weapons as a useful tool in pursuing that goal. The theory therefore predicts that British elites should have found bolstering and steadfastness to be particularly attractive. States in relative decline find maintaining alliances in which they are the senior partner to be increasingly costly and hard to sustain. Nuclear weapons provide a lower-cost way of sustaining an alliance, because by adding a nuclear component to the alliance, the state can make an alliance commitment with fewer conventional forces. States in relative decline therefore tend to see nuclear weapons as a way of making existing commitments of this sort more affordable. Thus, the theory predicts that Britain would use nuclear weapons to bolster existing junior allies. Similarly, steadfastness—standing more firmly in defense of the status quo—is attractive for states trying to hold on to what they have, and the theory therefore predicts that Britain would use nuclear weapons to facilitate steadfastness.

Finally, the theory suggests that Britain would not find expansion attractive. For states declining in power, holding on to what the state already has poses enough of a challenge. Widening a state's goals in international politics is unlikely to be feasible or attractive for such states, even if they acquire nuclear weapons. Similarly, compromise is not attractive to such states. For states seeking to maintain their position in international politics, giving up that position after acquiring an additional source of military power is unattractive.

The theory of nuclear opportunism, therefore, anticipates that Britain would use nuclear weapons to facilitate the bolstering of existing allies, steadfastness in response to challenges, and independence from the United States, but would not use nuclear weapons to facilitate expansion, aggression, or compromise. In addition to these changes in British behavior, the theory also has implications for British elite thinking about nuclear weapons. British elites should have believed nuclear weapons were useful tools for advancing their interests, and, specifically, as tools for facilitating independence from the United States (that is, they should have believed nuclear weapons would help them reduce their dependence on the United States), and for bolstering allies and resisting challenges (that is, they should have believed nuclear weapons would help them maintain their position in international politics).

British Thinking about Nuclear Weapons

Did British elites think about nuclear weapons in the way the theory anticipates? The theory of nuclear opportunism expects that British political and military elites should have viewed nuclear weapons as a solution to specific political problems. In particular, the theory predicts that British elites would view nuclear weapons as a solution to the problem of dependence on the

United States, and as a tool that would help the British maintain their position in international politics despite ongoing British decline. Outside analysts certainly believed that British strategists thought in these terms. As a 1949 memo to the US secretary of state outlined, the British motivations in pursuing a nuclear program were "(a) Freedom of action in terms of national self sufficiency . . . (b) National prestige and position . . . [and] (c) Uncertainty and apprehension as to the attitude (and continuity of attitude) of the U.S. towards the U.K."[28] But did British elites think in this way?

AVOIDING DEPENDENCE ON THE UNITED STATES

It was in the aftermath of World War II that Britain began to pursue nuclear weapons in earnest and in which the most comprehensive thinking took place about what nuclear weapons would offer Britain in the postwar world. But the British program had its origins during the war. It is worth examining British thinking about nuclear weapons during World War II, because at first glance it would seem that the extensive Anglo-American cooperation in the Manhattan Project indicates that concern about British dependence on the United States was not prominent in British thinking at the time.

In fact, even during the war, concern about dependence on the United States was a key theme in British thinking. Indeed, the British had initially been reticent about cooperating with the United States for precisely this reason. The British had been the first government to identify the military potential of nuclear energy (after British officials learned of a memo written by two scholars at Birmingham University[29]), and a committee of scientists concluded in June 1941 that it would "be possible to make an effective uranium bomb" that would be "likely to lead to decisive results in the war."[30] Because the British were ahead of the Americans, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote to Churchill in October 1941 proposing a joint venture, stating, "It appears desirable that we should soon correspond . . . concerning the subject which is under study by your MAUD Committee . . . in order that any extended efforts may be coordinated or even jointly conducted."[31] Churchill only responded some two months later expressing a vague willingness to collaborate with the Americans.[32] British officials discussing the possibility of collaboration raised concerns about the possibility of information leaking to the enemy, but this was a largely instrumental excuse. The primary reason to avoid collaborating with the Americans was a desire to retain complete control over the British nuclear program.[33] The British believed (correctly, at that stage) that their bomb project was more advanced than the American one, and were concerned about relying on American goodwill as well as the loss of scientific prestige and intellectual property of potentially significant commercial and strategic value. As Lord Cherwell, Churchill's scientific adviser, had written in advocating for an independent British program, "However much I may trust my neighbour . . . I am very much averse

to putting myself completely at his mercy."[34] Churchill agreed, writing to his chief of staff that "action should be taken in the sense proposed [by Cherwell]."[35]

By the summer of 1942, however, the British had reluctantly come around to the necessity of collaboration. British scientists visiting the United States in 1942 realized that the Americans had overtaken the British in understanding the processes for producing fissile material, and concluded that the costs of collaboration were outweighed by the vast resources the Americans could dedicate to the project and the greater protection that they could confer upon a weapons program.[36] In a memo to Churchill recommending pursuing a joint project, the home secretary Sir John Anderson acknowledged that "the Americans have been applying themselves with enthusiasm and a lavish expenditure. . . . In these circumstances I have come to the conclusion [that] work on the bomb project [should] be pursued as a combined Anglo-American effort. I make this recommendation with some reluctance, as I should have liked to have seen the work carried forward in this country. We must, however, face the fact that the pioneer work done in this country is a dwindling asset. We now have a real contribution to make to a 'merger'. Soon we shall have little or none."[37] Ultimately, the British came to conclude that cooperation with the Americans was now the quickest path to possessing nuclear weapons under British control. Dependence on American efforts, however, was never intended to be anything other than temporary.[38] As Anderson explained to Churchill in 1942, cooperating with the Americans would allow British scientists to "take up the work again [after the war], not where we left off, but where the combined effort had by then brought it."[39] In another memo in 1943, he argued that "we cannot afford after the war to face the future without this weapon and rely entirely on America."[40] Britain's unwillingness to make dependence on the United States a permanent feature of its nuclear program was exacerbated by the frustrations it experienced as part of the Manhattan Project, with Churchill complaining to Roosevelt in 1943 about the lack of access to information that British scientists were getting.[41]

British concern about dependence on the United States persisted in the postwar era for three main reasons. First, Britain was concerned that the American commitment to the defense of Western Europe was less than absolute. As Prime Minister Clement Attlee later argued, "There was always the possibility of [the United States] withdrawing and becoming isolationist again. The manufacture of a British atom bomb was therefore at that stage essential."[42] Even though the United States formalized its commitments to Western Europe through the Marshall Plan, the formation of NATO, and the deployment of US conventional forces, debates in the United States made clear that support for an enduring US military commitment to Western Europe was far from unanimous.[43] In the atomic realm, cooperation swiftly

stopped after the war. President Harry S. Truman did not feel bound by the Quebec agreement that Roosevelt and Churchill had negotiated during the war, which had guaranteed Britain "full collaboration" on "military and commercial" applications of nuclear technology, and the passage of the McMahon Act in 1946 further prohibited such cooperation.[44] Second, British planners were well aware that British and American interests diverged on important matters. Of course, it was widely known that there were plausible scenarios in which the United States would not be inclined to help Britain prop up its increasingly shaky hold on its colonies. However, even within potential war scenarios in which US and British forces would be on the same side, British elites doubted that the United States fully shared British priorities. As Churchill argued in the House of Commons in 1955, the British could "not be sure that in an emergency the resources of other powers would be planned exactly as we would wish, or that the targets which would threaten us most would be given what we consider the necessary priority in the first few hours. These targets might be of such cardinal importance that it could really be a matter of life and death for us."[45] Third, British elites worried about entrapment and the compromises that dependence forced Britain to swallow. For example, Britain's experience of the Korean War, in which Britain felt forced to back Washington despite substantial Anglo-American disagreements over its conduct, emphasized that reliance on the United States could force Britain into conflicts it would not otherwise need to fight.[46] Similarly, US forces stationed in Britain could be a potentially high-priority target for Soviet forces if a conflict threatened to escalate to the nuclear level, and threatened to suck Britain into a potential US-Soviet conflict. As Churchill stated in 1951, "We must not forget that by creating the American atomic base in East Anglia, we have made ourselves the target and perhaps the bull's eye of a Soviet attack."[47]

British elites viewed an independent nuclear capability as a solution to this problem. In 1946, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin declared that "we've got to have this [nuclear weapons]. . . . I don't want any other Foreign Secretary of this country to be talked at by a Secretary of State in the United States as I have just had in my discussions with Mr. Byrnes. We have got to have this thing over here whatever the costs. . . . We've got to have the bloody Union Jack flying on top of it."[48] In 1947, as the final decision to build the bomb was made, Bevin argued that "we could not afford to acquiesce in an American monopoly of this new development."[49] Prime Minister Attlee struck a similar tone, saying "we couldn't allow ourselves to be wholly in their hands. . . . We couldn't agree that only the Americans should have atomic energy."[50] On other occasions, Attlee used more emotive language to communicate the same point, arguing that the Americans "were inclined to think they were the big boys and we were the small boys; we just had to show them they didn't know everything."[51] Such views were shared by

British military leaders. The Chiefs of Staff argued that "it would be most unwise for the United Kingdom to be completely dependent on the United States and to accept the serious political disadvantages of not having a stock of atom bombs under its own control," and that it would not "appear compatible with our status as a first-class power to depend on others for a weapon of this supreme importance."[52] Similarly, Sir John Slessor advised that "we cannot possibly leave to an ally, however staunch and loyal, the monopoly of this instrument of such decisive importance."[53] For the chief scientist of the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence (MOD), failing to keep pace with nuclear technology would leave Britain "rely[ing] on the whim of the United States for the effectiveness of the whole basis of our strategy."[54]

Of course, nuclear weapons were never seen as a full substitute for the relationship with the United States, and Britain continued both to invest in the Anglo-American relationship and to hope that the United States would ultimately protect the British if a major security threat emerged. Indeed, the paradox of Britain's nuclear program was that, in the words of Matthew Jones, "the pursuit of independence also had as a goal the re-establishment of a nuclear relationship with the United States that some—at home and abroad—would see as compromising the exercise of national sovereignty."[55] British officials believed that having an independent nuclear program would allow Britain to gain greater benefits from its relationship with the United States, particularly in the realm of nuclear cooperation and influence over American nuclear choices. As Lord Cherwell wrote in a memo to Churchill, "The possibility of achieving full collaboration concerning plutonium and hydrogen bombs with the U.S. will vanish unless we have something [nuclear weapons] of our own to show."[56] Similarly, Britain hoped that an independent nuclear force would allow it greater influence over US targeting plans.[57] That Britain would seek both independence and influence is not surprising: having more plausible exit options from the alliance (that is, greater independence) should simultaneously have strengthened Britain's voice within the alliance (that is, resulted in greater influence).[58] In this way, British nuclear weapons were both a substitute for the alliance with the United States and a tool of influence within it.

From the earliest days of the British nuclear program, therefore, and despite the pressures of fighting a world war that forced Britain into reluctant nuclear cooperation with the United States, British elites clearly believed—much as the theory of nuclear opportunism expects—that nuclear weapons were a useful tool with which to reduce their dependence on the United States. As I argue below, it is therefore unsurprising that the British became more willing to act independently of the United States after acquiring nuclear weapons. After all, this was an important reason that Britain had acquired nuclear weapons in the first place.

MAINTAINING BRITAIN'S STATUS AND POSITION

Similarly, the desire to maintain Britain's position and status in international politics in the face of its decline regularly appears in British elites' discussions of acquiring nuclear weapons. This argument often took the form of assertions that Britain's status demanded that it remain at the forefront of military technologies: the historian Margaret Gowing, for example, writes that underpinning the British decision to build nuclear weapons were beliefs that "Britain as a great power must acquire all major new weapons, a feeling that atomic weapons were a manifestation of the scientific and technological superiority on which Britain's strength, so deficient if measured in sheer numbers of men, must depend."[59] Lord Cherwell advised Churchill that "it is surely vital, unless we are to become a second-class nation armed with inferior weapons, that we should be in a position to make our own bombs."[60] A draft 1954 air force command directive to Air Marshal George Mills argued that the incoming Valiant squadrons and the nuclear weapons they would carry would provide Britain "the opportunity of again speaking with equal voice with other great powers."[61] Similarly, Sir John Slessor argued that British nuclear weapons were necessary "if we want to remain a first-class power."[62] After acquiring nuclear weapons, British ambassador to the United States Harold Caccia wrote in 1957 that "our acceptance as a great power now rests to a large extent on our having a nuclear program."[63] As discussed above, arguments about the utility of nuclear weapons for maintaining Britain's status combined with concerns about dependence on the United States. It is hard to imagine a more explicit articulation of both of these views than the summary offered by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, who argued explicitly in a 1958 television interview that Britain's nuclear status gave Britain "a better position in the world and one as a great power . . . [and] made the [United States] pay greater regard to our point of view."[64]

In addition to these somewhat amorphous claims that Britain's status as a global power demanded the possession of nuclear weapons, there were also more concrete strategic arguments made connecting the maintenance of Britain's position with nuclear weapons. In particular, British elites believed they would be able to use nuclear weapons to substitute for conventional forces that were becoming increasingly unaffordable. Nuclear weapons thus provided a way to reduce overall defense expenditures while maintaining Britain's global commitments and allowing Britain to retain its position in the world even in the face of economic decline.

British elites had recognized well before nuclear acquisition that Britain's conventional posture would be profoundly affected by nuclear weapons. For example, a 1945 memo by Prime Minister Attlee recognized that "the emergence of the atomic bomb meant that many of our present ideas on such matters as strategic bases and frontiers . . . must be regarded as obsolete,"[65]

and in 1946 the Cabinet Defence Committee "declined to endorse the conclusions reached by the Chiefs of Staff on British strategic requirements in the Middle East" until they were able to assess the importance of "the latest developments in weapons and methods of war."[66] Moreover, British elites were under no illusions about the increasing economic difficulties facing the country, concerns that were exacerbated by the force buildup that occurred after the outbreak of the Korean War. These concerns continued throughout the 1950s, with incoming prime minister Anthony Eden told by his minister of defence in 1955 that "unless existing programs were revised, the cost of defence would rise during the next four years from £1,527 million in 1955 to £1,929 million in 1959."[67] Eden agreed that this was unsustainable as he initiated a reappraisal of British defense policy, stating: "We must now cut our coat according to our cloth. There is not much cloth."[68]

By the time Britain tested its first nuclear weapon, British elites had begun viewing nuclear weapons as a solution to the problem of maintaining the British position despite its increasing economic weakness. By substituting nuclear weapons for conventional forces, Britain could maintain its position at lower costs. In his private notes in 1952, Sir John Slessor was explicit that avoiding retrenchment despite the "economic crisis" facing Britain would require "preserving and increasing the main deterrent—atomic air power."[69] The idea of using nuclear weapons as a substitute for conventional forces was emphasized strongly in the 1952 Global Strategy Paper, one of the first documents to lay out an explicit strategy based on nuclear deterrence.[70] And, indeed, starting in 1955, Britain began to substitute nuclear weapons for conventional forces. Although the 1952 Global Strategy Paper had endorsed nuclear weapons being used as a substitute for conventional forces, the 1952 paper did not result in an immediate shift in Britain's force structure.[71] Reinforcing the argument above that Britain needed the ability to deliver nuclear weapons before British strategy could change, it was in 1955 that the concepts articulated in the 1952 paper began to be reflected in Britain's conventional posture.[72] British conventional manpower stayed between 800,000 and 850,000 between 1951 and 1954, but beginning in 1955, British manpower began to decrease at a significant rate, dropping to 750,000 in 1956, 700,000 in 1957, 615,000 in 1958, 565,000 in 1959, and 520,000 in 1960.[73] After acquiring nuclear weapons, Britain thus reduced its manpower by around a third in five years. Similarly, overall defense expenditure was held constant in 1956 (a decline in real terms and as a percentage of gross national product [GNP]), and subsequently fell as British planners placed greater reliance on nuclear weapons.[74] British elites were clear that this substitution was occurring. As Eden stated explicitly, it is on "the atomic weapons that we now rely, not only to deter aggression but to deal with aggression if it should be launched. . . . We are spending too much on forces of types which are no longer of primary importance."[75] To avoid Britain's defense commitments further damaging the British

economy, he believed it essential to continue to move toward greater reliance on nuclear weapons.

The 1957 Defence White Paper ossified these trends. The minister of defence, Duncan Sandys, had his powers strengthened by the prime minister so that he would be able to succeed in securing substantial further reductions in military expenditure and manpower, and reorienting British forces toward nuclear weapons.[76] Sandys was not motivated simply by cost cutting and had a broader strategic vision emphasizing the utility of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles that emerged leading Britain's efforts against German V-1 and V-2 missiles during World War II.[77] Nonetheless, he aimed to reduce annual expenditure from around £1,600 million to around £1,300 million and proposed further deep cuts in the size of the armed forces from 690,000 to 375,000 and to end conscription, a development Prime Minister Macmillan explicitly stated in the House of Commons "must depend on the acceptance of nuclear weapons."[78]

Crucially, however, nuclear weapons did not simply permit Britain to reduce expenditure on conventional forces. They would allow Britain to do so *without changing* Britain's political commitments or overall strategic position. As an internal RAF history stated: "The nuclear dimension of defence . . . was seen as providing the opportunity for economies in defence . . . without any sacrifices in national security or international influence."[79]

Overall, British elites thought about nuclear weapons in the way the theory of nuclear opportunism suggests. British elites clearly believed nuclear weapons would be useful to them: first, as a solution to the problem of dependence on the United States, and, second, as a tool with which Britain could maintain its position in the world by substituting nuclear weapons for conventional forces.

British Foreign Policy

British elites therefore thought about nuclear weapons in the way the theory suggests. But did British foreign policy actually *change* after acquiring nuclear weapons? Was British elite thinking about how nuclear weapons would be useful to Britain actually translated into British foreign policy? This section asks whether British foreign policy behavior changed in 1955 in the way the theory expects.

Much of this evidence is correlational—it shows that changes in behavior occurred at the time the theory expects that behavior would have changed. In some cases, we can find clear evidence that nuclear weapons *caused* the change; for example, as I show below, Britain was explicit that it was using its nuclear weapons to bolster existing alliances. In other cases, it is less clear that nuclear weapons caused the change. However, even correlational evidence can be powerful if combined with the evidence of British elite thinking

discussed above. For example, if British elites repeatedly stated they wanted nuclear weapons to reduce their dependence on the United States, and then began behaving more independently after acquiring nuclear weapons, then the behavior and elite thinking are consistent in a way that suggests nuclear weapons likely caused the change in behavior we observe.

AGGRESSION AND EXPANSION

As discussed above, Britain had status quo preferences when it acquired nuclear weapons: Britain was trying to hold on to what it had. And British elites viewed nuclear weapons in this light—they did not view nuclear weapons as a tool that would be useful for expanding the British position in the world or behaving more aggressively in ongoing disputes. It would therefore be surprising if Britain were to engage in either increased aggression or expansion in the period following nuclear acquisition—merely holding on to what Britain already had was challenging enough.

And, indeed, there is little evidence that Britain began behaving more aggressively after acquiring nuclear weapons. Figure 2.2 shows the MIDs involving Britain over time (for comparison, the disputes of other countries are included). If Britain became more aggressive after acquiring nuclear weapons, we would expect to see Britain involved in more conflict in the period after acquiring a deliverable capability. As can be seen, Britain was involved in between two and three MIDs per year on average, but this did not change substantially after 1955 (restricting the sample to MIDs in which Britain was the revisionist power does not change the results). In the ten years preceding 1955, Britain engaged in an average of 2.6 MIDs per year, and in the ten years following, Britain engaged in an average of 2.3 MIDs per year.[80] While Britain was involved in more militarized disputes than most countries in the world (as would be expected given the British position in the world and its relatively powerful conventional military), there is little evidence of a substantial change when Britain acquired nuclear weapons. If anything, the number of MIDs involving Britain may have decreased slightly after 1955.

Another indication of aggression would be if Britain became substantially more willing in the post-1955 era to aggress against its rivals. Britain's only enduring rivalry over the period was with the Soviet Union, and there is little evidence that Britain became more aggressive toward either the Soviet Union or its proxies.[81] Britain remained committed to resisting encroachment by the Soviet Union—particularly in the Middle East where Britain remained (for the time being) the dominant power. And, as I discuss below, Britain became more willing to stand up to challenges to its position after acquiring a deliverable capability. This behavior certainly led to tensions with the Soviet Union on occasion, most notably during the Suez Crisis, in which the Soviet Union made clear threats to the United Kingdom. But in these cases the Brit-

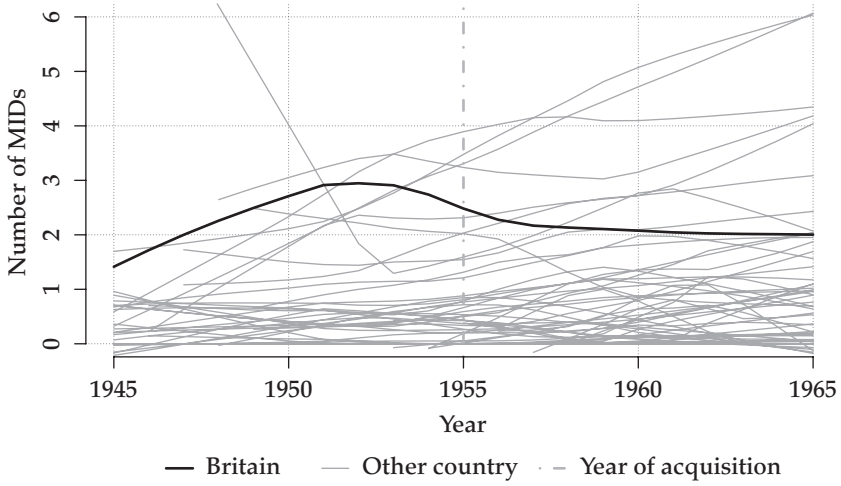

Figure 2.2. MIDs involving Britain over time

ish were responding to what they perceived to be serious challenges to the status quo (in the case of Suez, the nationalization of the Suez Canal), and so these behaviors are more accurately seen as instances of steadfastness than aggression.

Similarly, Britain did not expand its interests over this time period. As I discuss in detail below, Britain sought to use nuclear weapons to bolster its existing allies in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, but did not seek to widen British commitments. Britain hoped to use nuclear weapons to place increasing emphasis on nuclear weapons at the expense of conventional forces, and thereby reduce the cost of *maintaining* British commitments. Nor did Britain initiate any new rivalries over the period.[82] Little consideration was given to expanding the British position in the world, and such an effort would have been foolish for a declining state such as Britain to engage in.

BOLSTERING

When Britain acquired a deliverable nuclear capability, its military and economic power was far less than that of the Soviet Union and the United States. Despite this, Britain's commitment to play a major role on the world stage remained, and of the eleven and a third British Army divisions, ten and a half were stationed outside the United Kingdom, spread across Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.[83] This section examines the three major alliance networks of which Britain was a part: the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in Asia, the Baghdad Pact in the Middle East (which in 1958 became the Central Treaty Organization [CENTO]), and NATO in Europe. In each of these alliances, beginning in around 1955, Britain sought to

use nuclear weapons to bridge the gap between the political commitments that Britain had adopted and Britain's declining conventional military and financial resources. By the late 1950s, all three alliances would see Britain's commitment become increasingly dependent on nuclear weapons. Thus, despite ongoing efforts to reduce defense expenditures, Britain used nuclear weapons to bolster its existing allies. Nuclear weapons offered a cheaper and more affordable way to maintain the credibility of its commitments to allies.

From the early 1950s, Britain had sought to formalize the many alliance relationships it had in Asia, with the hope of better protecting British interests in the region, including maintaining the security of Malaysia and Singapore, and protecting the British position in Hong Kong. Britain had been excluded from joining the 1951 Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) but succeeded in September 1954 when the United States, United Kingdom, France, Pakistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand created SEATO.[84]

After the establishment of SEATO in 1954, South-East Asian states made a number of attempts to persuade British planners to confirm the details of British conventional deployments to the alliance. However, while British elites believed that SEATO served important strategic and political purposes, Eden and other senior leaders were unable to commit large numbers of conventional forces to the region beyond those in Malaya (now Malaysia), and the alliance lacked the ability to meet a large-scale Chinese offensive with conventional forces. The United States was also unwilling to make any firm commitment of forces to the defense of South East Asia (and certainly not forward-deployed forces as in NATO), or even to participate in an institutional architecture that would facilitate military planning for the region.[85] SEATO member states were well aware of, and uneasy about, the alliance's apparent lack of military capability. The Chiefs of Staff acknowledged that "it has also proved difficult to convince the Australians that the United Kingdom regards the defence of South East Asia . . . of being of equal importance to theatres nearer home."[86] The Philippines complained to the United States about "the utter lack of accomplishment of the organization," feelings shared by other treaty members.[87] Both Britain and the United States were aware of these concerns, with a State Department official telling the British embassy in Washington that "we must breathe life into the blue baby [SEATO]."[88]

Nuclear weapons offered a solution to this problem and were thus used to underpin the credibility of the alliance.[89] Plans to use nuclear weapons, it was concluded, could reassure British allies without producing a greater call on British resources. In February 1956 the Joint Planning Staff concluded that it was "essential that the future strategy for the defence of the treaty area . . . be based on the assumption that nuclear weapons would be used by SEATO" and that "large scale reductions in our conventional forces would not be possible unless . . . it may be assumed that nuclear weapons would be used."[90]

The British Joint Planning Staff emphasized that "the use of nuclear air power must form the basis of our strategy [in the Far East]. Care should be taken, therefore, to avoid undue emphasis being placed on the land campaign in the development of a strategic concept for the region."[91] At the SEATO Council meeting in March 1956, it was agreed that nuclear weapons would be incorporated into SEATO military planning assumptions. In the same year, the British Joint Intelligence Committee stated that "nuclear counter measures will be available" for the defense of British interests in Asia.[92] Britain thus began to draw up plans for nuclear deployments to the region, and in February 1957, it announced publicly that its contribution to the defense of the treaty area would indeed include nuclear-capable delivery platforms, including V-bombers flown from the UK, and carrier-borne aircraft based in Far Eastern waters.[93] British force requirements for SEATO missions included squadrons of nuclear-capable aircraft, and Britain drew up more specific plans to use nuclear weapons in particular scenarios, such as against targets in China or North Vietnam.[94] Such plans appear to have worked as intended by facilitating the withdrawal of conventional forces while simultaneously reassuring allies. For example, when Australian prime minister Robert Menzies visited London in 1957 to be briefed on the implications of the Sandys White Paper (which included plans to reduce British deployments in Malaya from 20,000 to 11,000), he was mollified by plans to deploy three squadrons of V-bombers to the region if a major threat appeared imminent.[95]

The same story played out in the Middle East. Britain remained the most militarily powerful state in the Middle East for much of the 1950s, but British conventional capabilities were increasingly stretched and economically unsustainable as the defense of Western Europe became a relatively higher priority for British planners than the Middle East. The British were well aware of these trends. A 1950 report for the Chiefs of Staff acknowledged "the little the United Kingdom can actually do to protect the Middle East,"[96] and in 1952, the Chiefs of Staff informed the cabinet that "we are faced with the fact that the United Kingdom cannot afford to maintain its present forces [in the Middle East]."[97] In April 1955 Britain sought to reinforce its position in the Middle East by joining the Baghdad Pact. Britain believed the pact served multiple ends: to protect the northern limits of the Middle East against the Soviet Union, to limit Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's influence throughout the Middle East, to constrain increasing American influence in Iraq, and to protect British oil investments in Iraq and the Persian Gulf.[98] The extent to which Britain hoped to use the pact as a tool for pursuing its economic and political goals in the Middle East irritated the United States, which ultimately declined to join for that reason: as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles noted, "The British have taken it over and run it as an instrument of British policy."[99]

Britain could not, however, afford to contribute large numbers of conventional forces to the alliance, and there was a widespread understanding that

a conventional defense of the Middle East in global war was well beyond Britain's capabilities. A Joint Planning Staff paper in 1956 concluded bluntly that Baghdad Pact allies "cannot afford to maintain adequate forces . . . to fight a conventional war with Russia."[100] As in Asia, British reticence to commit conventional forces caused unease among allies, with the Joint Planning Staff noting that "it required a lot of talking to persuade the other planners that the United Kingdom was not trying to avoid helping in the land battle."[101] Ultimately, the Ministry of Defence had to acknowledge that "we have neither the men nor the money . . . to make the Baghdad Pact effective militarily."[102]

Nuclear weapons, as they had in Asia, provided a solution to the problem of maintaining alliance credibility while reducing conventional force commitments. The Chiefs of Staff concluded that "many of the targets selected [in war plans for the defense of the Middle East] are suitable for conventional attack, but nuclear attack would make possible a more economical Allied requirement of forces and munitions."[103] Another report by the Chiefs of Staff on British requirements in the Middle East argued "the implications of nuclear strategy have outmoded a concept embracing large conventional forces."[104] Minister of Defence Harold Macmillan discussed the utility of nuclear weapons for defending the Middle East and Asia explicitly in 1955, when he stated in the House of Commons that "the power of interdiction upon invading columns by nuclear weapons gives a new aspect altogether to strategy, both in the Middle East and the Far East. It affords a breathing space . . . for the assembly . . . of larger defensive forces than can normally be stationed permanently in those areas."[105]

Accordingly, nuclear weapons became increasingly prominent in British plans for the defense of the Middle East. In 1955, a British planning document confirmed that Britain planned to launch nuclear attacks from the Middle East, and in 1956 the Joint Planning Staff wrote that "the main United Kingdom contribution to the military effectiveness of the Baghdad Pact will be nuclear interdiction."[106] A Joint Planning Staff document concluded that "there can be no doubt that it is only by the use of nuclear weapons that the Soviet threat can be reduced sufficiently to bring it within the capability of the Baghdad Pact to withstand. The concept of defence of the Baghdad Pact area . . . is therefore based on the use of such weapons [which] must be provided for them [by the United Kingdom]," while another stated that "the whole concept for the defence of the area in global war relies on nuclear interdiction."[107] Britain sought to use its nuclear weapons as its primary contribution to the Baghdad Pact in 1955, seeking to avoid large force commitments by instead relying on the threat of massive nuclear retaliation to deter aggression.[108] An internal RAF history makes clear that "nuclear strike was seen as the main component of the assistance which could be offered [to the Baghdad Pact]," although there was ambiguity about exactly how and under what circumstances Britain would conduct nuclear operations in

support of the Baghdad Pact.[109] However, Britain was not squeamish about deploying nuclear assets close to the Middle East. As early as November 1955, "the plans were for two [British] Canberra B2 squadrons" to be deployed in the Middle East Air Force, and "it was considered that they would then, or shortly afterwards, be capable of carrying nuclear weapons."[110]

As Britain acquired a deliverable nuclear capability, it thus sought to shore up its increasingly shaky alliance commitments in the Middle East, much as it had in Asia. Nuclear weapons allowed Britain to bolster its allies in the Middle East and maintain its position and influence without making conventional military commitments it could no longer afford.

Britain's most important alliance, of course, was NATO—the alliance that played an important role in providing for Britain's own security. Here, too, Britain sought to use nuclear weapons to strengthen the credibility of NATO while reducing British conventional and financial commitments to the alliance. In doing so, Britain also showed greater independence from the United States, by seeking to change NATO strategy in Europe against American wishes.

The MC 48 strategic concept that NATO adopted in 1954 caused unease in London because of its vision of a "two-phase war" in which conventional forces would fight even after a thermonuclear exchange between the Soviet Union and the United States.[111] Britain was unwilling to make the conventional commitments necessary to make such plans for "broken back" warfare credible. Much as it had in Asia and the Middle East, Britain argued that its nuclear weapons allowed it to place less emphasis on its conventional forces, with the cabinet agreeing that while Britain should "express our readiness to maintain, for the next few years, the present fighting capacity of the United Kingdom . . . the introduction of new weapons might call for some variation in the size and shape of our forces." What this meant in concrete terms was that it might be "possible to maintain the present fighting capacity of our forces on the Continent with fewer men."[112] Britain began to increasingly voice disapproval of NATO's strategy and sought to encourage NATO as a whole to change its posture during the Annual Review process. As Eden argued in a letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower in July 1956, "A 'shield' of conventional forces is still required: but it is no longer our principal military protection. Need it be capable of fighting a major land battle? Its primary military function seems now to be to deal with any local infiltration, to prevent external intimidation and to enable aggression to be identified."[113] The Chiefs of Staff agreed that "as long as we [NATO] have the deterrent and are prepared to use it, it will be effective against lesser forms of war in Europe [in addition to deterring nuclear war]" and that as a result, "it will not be necessary to maintain large conventional forces."[114] Large numbers of conventional forces or other deterrents "do not add materially to the effectiveness of the primary deterrent and their cost weakens the economic strength of NATO states."[115] Similarly, Minister of Defence Walter

Monckton rejected the idea that NATO needed to build up conventional forces sufficient to hold and defeat an all-out attack by the Soviet Union.[116]

The Americans did not appreciate British efforts to change NATO's strategy, expressing concern that British conventional withdrawals would cause other NATO members to make similar withdrawals. Secretary of State Dulles argued that "we find unacceptable any proposal which implies the adoption of a NATO strategy of total reliance on nuclear retaliation" and that "the European nations should increasingly assume a greater share of responsibility for the ready forces required on the Continent to provide the shield which NATO strategy envisages."[117] In a meeting with Macmillan, he was equally blunt: "We do not wish our capability to be so exclusively dependent on atomic weapons that there is no measure of flexibility" and that "the US [could not] accept the idea that there was no need for substantial manpower because any attack would set off massive retaliation and in that provide a sufficient deterrent."[118] Ultimately, neither the United States nor Britain backed down. NATO did not change its strategy in accordance with British preferences, but the British did not give way to American preferences. Britain did reduce its own conventional commitment at the NATO Council meeting in December 1956.[119] Further reductions were made over the next few years, with Britain gaining NATO acceptance for a reduction of 31,500 men (leaving around 63,000) by April 1958.[120] As with its alliances in Asia and the Middle East, Britain's strategic ambition and political commitments to Europe had not changed, but the conventional commitment it was willing to make had been reduced: "The Army's tasks, within and outside Europe, remained; it simply had less with which to meet them."[121] Overall, therefore, British policy toward NATO represents the British using nuclear weapons to facilitate a combination of bolstering and independence from the United States.

The same pattern was therefore observed across Britain's most important alliances in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. In 1955, as Britain came into possession of a deliverable nuclear capability, it explicitly sought to use its nuclear weapons to bolster its relationships in Asia and the Middle East. Britain used nuclear weapons to increase alliance credibility while reducing British expenditures and conventional commitments to those alliances. In NATO, Britain sought to pursue much the same strategy but ran into American opposition that hindered British efforts to persuade the alliance to move in the direction that Britain sought. In short, British nuclear weapons affected British foreign policy toward its alliances through the efficiency mechanism described in chapter 1: they reduced the costs of Britain's alliance commitments. As an RAF internal history states: "Overall, no overseas commitments had been dropped, but reductions in the level of military support were in prospect and the RAF [the service with the ability to deliver nuclear weapons] was seen as having a major part to play in offsetting their effect."[122] This is consistent with the expectations of the theory of nuclear opportunism.

INDEPENDENCE, STEADFASTNESS, AND COMPROMISE

To assess whether Britain exhibited greater levels of independence, steadfastness, and compromise after acquiring a deliverable nuclear capability in 1955, I examine British behavior in a series of crises in which Britain was challenged by other states between 1950 and 1960. Because the theory of nuclear opportunism anticipates Britain using nuclear weapons to facilitate steadfastness when challenged, we should expect to see Britain respond more forcefully to challenges after 1955. And in crises where British and US preferences diverged, we should expect to see Britain becoming less deferential to US preferences (that is, showing greater independence) after 1955. In order to do this, I examine British responses to crises in the Middle East. I choose the Middle East for three reasons. First, over this period the British position in the Middle East was subjected to numerous challenges. Examining how Britain responded to these challenges offers us a number of crises in a reasonably narrow window before and after nuclearization, thus holding a range of factors constant and making it more likely that nuclear weapons caused any changes in behavior that we observe. Second, the Middle East was a region in which US and British preferences differed substantially. As a result, examining crises in the Middle East allows us to assess whether Britain became less deferential to US policy preferences and willing to respond to challenges more independently of the United States, as the theory of nuclear opportunism would suggest. Third, I use the Middle East because Britain was the dominant power in the Middle East in the early 1950s and determined to retain its position.[123] Any change in behavior associated with nuclear weapons cannot, therefore, be attributed to conventional weakness or revisionism, as Kapur's theory of "strategic pessimism" would suggest.[124]

I examine Britain's response to six challenges to its position: the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) by Muhammad Mossadegh in 1951, efforts by Nasser to eject the British from Suez from 1952 to 1954, the Saudi occupation of Buraimi in 1952, the Suez Crisis in 1956, and subsequent crises in Oman and Jordan. I show that before acquiring a deliverable nuclear capability in 1955, Britain was extremely wary of responding to challenges with force without the support of the United States, and British responses were characterized by compromise and deference to US preferences. After 1955, Britain became more willing to use force unilaterally, paid less attention to US preferences, and was less inclined to compromise. Britain, therefore, exhibited significantly greater levels of independence, steadfastness, and a reduced inclination to compromise after acquiring a deliverable nuclear capability.

Iran, 1951 The nationalization of the AIOC by Mossadegh in 1951 had its roots in the early twentieth century. It was in 1914 that then First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill persuaded the British government to acquire

a majority stake in what was then the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC).[125] The shah of Iran had negotiated a sixty-year agreement in 1933 on the terms on which APOC could extract and sell oil, but in the aftermath of World War II, changes in the British government's tax and dividend policy led to an increasing disparity in the revenues that Britain and Iran received from Iranian oil sales.[126] These disparities fueled Iranian anger over Britain's unwillingness to renegotiate the terms of the 1933 agreement. The British were concerned that any change in AIOC's concession could damage the British economy, although the Foreign Office acknowledged internally that the Iranians had "legitimate grievance[s]."[127] In July 1949, the AIOC and Iran signed a new "supplemental" agreement that substantially increased Iranian oil revenues.[128] However, increasing anti-British sentiment within Iran meant that the Iranian parliament never ratified the deal, and on April 28, 1950, the National Front's Muhammad Mossadegh was elected to the country's premiership. With anti-British sentiment at an all-time high and Iranian anger focused on Anglo-Iranian oil, even an offer of a fifty-fifty split by the AIOC was not enough. Mossadegh had declared that "the source of all the misfortunes of this tortured nation is only the oil company," and by early May, Iran had nationalized its oil. The AIOC facilities in Iran, and the oil they extracted, now belonged solely to Iran.[129] The loss of Iranian oil was viewed as a disastrous development for Britain. In the words of the historian H. W. Brands, the nationalization of AIOC "portended the apocalypse, to judge by the reactions of some in London."[130] For three months after the nationalization of AIOC, Britain seriously considered a military response.[131] Ultimately, however, Britain decided against military intervention.

The decision not to undertake military action was not due to a lack of military options. While the British concluded that securing and holding Iran's inland oil fields would be beyond their military capabilities, a more limited plan—known as Plan Y—to occupy Abadan Island and retake control of the refinery was thought to be within British capabilities. A memorandum to the British cabinet stated that "the Chiefs of Staff have concluded . . . that it would be feasible at short notice to occupy and hold Abadan against any opposition which the Persians unaided would be likely to be able to mount."[132] The US embassy in London cabled Washington stating that it was becoming "increasingly concerned . . . [that the] UK [is] preparing [to] use force in Iran."[133] Plans were developed over the summer of 1951, and by September, Britain was in a position to launch an operation to seize Abadan Island within twelve hours of a decision to do so.[134]

Nor was the decision to eschew a military solution made because Abadan was of limited importance to the British. On the contrary, the facility at Abadan was the world's largest oil refinery, Britain's largest single overseas investment, and had played a critical role in supporting the British war effort.[135] Indeed, Abadan was of sufficient importance to the British that the

foreign secretary argued that retaining it may be worth risking Soviet intervention in Iran: "The risk of the Russians occupying Northern Persia might be worth accepting provided that we retained full control of the Abadan refinery."[136] As Britain sought to recover economically in the aftermath of the war, "sterling" or "dollar-free" oil extracted from British concessions was viewed as critically important to reducing the British dollar deficit.[137] The British believed that the status of sterling was critical to Britain's international position, to which the dollar deficit on oil posed an important threat.[138] Anglo-Iranian oil was at the center of this strategy to preserve the status of sterling. This was not only because AIOC was an entirely British entity but also because the government itself had a 51 percent stake in the company (unlike other partly British-owned companies such as Royal Dutch-Shell). The money that Britain received from Iranian oil constituted 4 percent of Britain's entire balance of payments.[139] It is no exaggeration to say that British officials both in the Treasury and at the Bank of England believed that the status of the pound as an international currency and Britain's position in the international system depended on British control over Iranian oil.[140] As Chancellor R. A. Butler stated in November 1951, America needed to understand that Britain's "economic viability was at stake."[141] The British ambassador agreed, telling US officials that the British doubted whether the United States "recognized adequately that the British are dealing with a prime strategic necessity."[142] The lack of a British military response to the nationalization of AIOC cannot, therefore, be attributed to the limited importance of the Abadan facility.

Instead, Britain decided against a military response because the United States was strongly opposed to the use of force.[143] For the United States, the dispute over AIOC was subordinate to the broader goal of keeping Iran out of the Soviet sphere, but in 1951 the United States felt too weak to provoke a dispute that might risk war with the Soviet Union. A 1921 Soviet-Iranian friendship pact gave the Soviet Union the authority to intervene if Iran were invaded, and the Americans therefore worried that British military action would "split the free world, would produce a chaotic situation in Iran, and might cause the Iranian Government to turn to the Soviet Union for help."[144] Truman instructed Attlee that "no action should be taken . . . which would result in disagreement between Iran and the free world."[145] Secretary of State Acheson wrote that the only circumstances in which the US government would support the use of force would be to "evacuate British citizens whose lives were in danger. Open Soviet intervention in Iran or seizure of power in Tehran by Communist Govt [*sic*] would, of course, also create [a] situation where use of force must be considered."[146] And a paper was presented to the British ambassador stating that "we would be opposed to the adoption of 'strong measures' by the British . . . such as the manipulation into office of an Iranian Premier of UK choosing or the introduction of force or the

threat of force."[147] Despite understanding that "there is little hope that an acceptable solution can be reached under present circumstances," the Americans insisted that Britain forgo military options.[148]

The Americans were fully aware that the "UK decision whether or not to use force will be in [the] last analysis determined by [the] extent to which [the] US [is] prepared [to] support."[149] As they anticipated, despite British irritation at the United States' reticence to assist them, the British were not prepared to act alone. Harold Macmillan's view in an April cabinet meeting was that the UK could not go against the Americans: "I do not think at this stage we should, merely in deference to the Americans' opinion, go further than that."[150] In July, he made the same argument, that despite "arguments in favour" of using force, "if we were to use force . . . it is most probable that we should . . . alienate American and world opinion."[151] The cabinet was persuaded, concluding that "military action in Persia . . . should not be contemplated unless there were some fundamental change in the situation."[152] In September, by which time Britain had well-developed military options ready to be implemented, the same arguments prevailed again. Attlee advocated against action because of US opposition: "In view of the attitude of the United States Government, [he did not] think it would be expedient to use force to maintain the British staff in Abadan."[153] Attlee's argument carried the day, with cabinet minutes recording that "it was, however, the general view of the Cabinet, in the light of the United States attitude . . . force could not be used. . . . We could not afford to break with the United States on an issue of this kind."[154]

In the absence of US support for military action, Britain was forced to pursue a purely economic approach to dealing with Iran. In particular, Britain threatened to sue anyone who purchased Iranian oil, claiming that they were buying stolen goods.[155] Foreign Secretary Eden, who would later adopt a very different approach in response to the Suez Crisis, was responsible for implementing this approach.[156] The British did, however, continue to try to persuade America to act, but were rebuffed.[157] It was only with an increasingly favorable balance of power resulting from US rearmament, combined with Eisenhower's accession to the White House, that US policy changed. In early 1953, the secretary of state and the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) informed their British counterparts that the United States was ready to take action against Mossadegh.[158] Thus, although Britain finally participated in covert action to remove Mossadegh, the episode demonstrated Britain's reliance on the United States as it responded to challenges to its position.[159]

Egypt, 1945–1954 Egypt lay at the center of British strategy in the Middle East. In particular, the network of British bases in the Suez Canal Zone constituted a huge military investment with the ability to service and maintain an army of half a million men.[160] Since 1869, the canal had played a critical

role in linking Britain to its empire in India and East Asia, facilitating British trade with Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, and in permitting the defense of the empire.[161] Britain had occupied the canal zone since 1860, and its military significance was demonstrated in World War II, when the British defense at El Alamein ended the Axis threat to the canal and, thus, to the Middle Eastern and Persian oil fields.[162] The increasing volumes of Persian Gulf oil and other goods flowing through the canal to Europe meant that the canal remained of high importance in the aftermath of World War II.[163] In the words of a 1953 memo to the prime minister, a British departure from the Suez Canal would have "far-reaching repercussions. . . . An evacuation of the Suez Canal Zone would mean the end of the Commonwealth as an independent force in the world."[164]

However, increasing currents of Egyptian nationalism were challenging the British occupation of Suez. As soon as the war ended, Egypt requested negotiations to end Britain's military presence in the country. For Egyptian nationalists, the Suez Canal was a symbol of imperialism, and a potential source of revenues currently being collected by the British and other European shareholders in the Suez Canal Company.[165] Britain was willing to withdraw forces from Suez, but only if British influence could be preserved and British access to the base during war could be guaranteed, something Nasser was unwilling to grant. Egyptian capabilities remained insufficient to compel British withdrawal, but Britain was increasingly forced to expend manpower and money defending the bases and protecting its soldiers and civilians stationed there.[166]

Despite Britain's continued military strength in the Middle East and the centrality of Egypt within British strategic thinking, the British strategy was to rely on the United States for support. Foreign Minister Eden repeatedly sought American aid, while Churchill bombarded Eisenhower with letters and telegrams pleading for American aid despite his fears that "running to the Americans for help . . . was undignified and did not increase their respect for us."[167] One letter stated that "it seems to me that you might by standing with us . . . bring about a peaceful solution in the truest harmony with the military and moral interests of the anti-Communist front. . . . If an Anglo-American team, military and diplomatic, puts our agreed plan firmly to [Egyptian president Mohamed] Neguib all may come well without bloodshed, and other blessings would flow."[168] A memo from Eden to the British ambassador in Washington stated that it "will be essential that the United States Government shall back us. . . . [The US government] should be left in no doubt that any approach to the Egyptians is unlikely in our view to bear fruit [without their support]."[169] But the British worried that the Americans would not fully support their position. As one cabinet meeting recorded, the prime minister "feared that the position of the British negotiators would be seriously weakened if the American attitude . . . remained uncertain. If there were any risk that the Americans would not support us on some condition

regarding the maintenance of the [Suez] base which we thought essential for our security, it would be better that we should enter upon the negotiations alone."[170]

And, indeed, the US position was moving further away from the British one. US officials increasingly viewed supporting the British as inimical to American goals in the region. Many in the Eisenhower administration (particularly in the State Department) favored offering US support to the new Egyptian regime and had little inclination to help prop up Britain's imperial possessions in the face of Egyptian popular opposition. Both sides became increasingly irritated by the other—for example, Dulles complaining that the British were seeking to "put him in a straight jacket [*sic*]" by forcing the Americans to take part in joint negotiations over Suez, while the British believed the Americans were encouraging Egyptian opposition to joint negotiations.[171] Ultimately, the Americans refused to participate in Anglo-Egyptian negotiations over the canal zone, thus allowing Egypt to conduct bilateral negotiations with the British without the Americans sitting on the other side of the negotiating table, allowing Egypt to play Britain and the United States off against each other.[172] The British were fully aware that they would be pushed toward accepting conditions for their withdrawal that they viewed as unacceptable.[173] Similarly, they understood that Egyptian concessions were unlikely to be forthcoming without US support.[174] According to Churchill, without "whole-hearted support" from the United States, Britain would have to pick from "painful and difficult choices."[175]

Such support was not forthcoming from the United States. Instead, in November 1953, the Americans attempted to use the threat of providing aid to Egypt to coerce the British into making concessions, with Dulles threatening to resume economic aid to the Egyptians and telling Eden that "time is fast running out."[176] Eden tried to convince Dulles that Britain might be prepared to "fight it out or take some other measure unilaterally" if no deal was reached, and Churchill threatened Eisenhower that it would be "difficult for Anthony and me to help you in the Far East if we have to do it in the face . . . of [a] general feeling of indignation."[177] But ultimately, any threats to the Americans were a bluff and Britain could not afford to cross the United States. As Eden acknowledged to Churchill, "The real alternative to an agreement [with Egypt] is a fight which we can ill afford and from which [we] should emerge . . . without a friend left in the Middle East."[178]

Through the spring of 1954, US pressure forced the British to make serious concessions to Egypt on the duration of the agreement, the speed of troop withdrawals, the number of British technicians who might be permitted to stay, and the conditions under which Britain would be able to return to the base. The British were ultimately forced to adopt the humiliating position that the Suez Canal base was no longer even of great importance to them, with Churchill writing to Eisenhower that the canal zone no longer merited "the expense and diversion of our troops."[179] Similarly, Eden instructed the

British negotiating team that maintaining "a concentration of equipment, supplies and facilities in the Canal Zone" was no longer desirable and that Britain could therefore "approach the Egyptian government with, in effect, an entirely new set of proposals."[180] An agreement was swiftly struck: Britain agreed to withdraw its troops without any guarantee that they could return in the event of war.[181] Churchill noted sadly that "the sooner this melancholy business [withdrawal from Egypt] is over the better for all concerned."[182]

British leaders blamed Egyptian intransigence on the lack of US support they were receiving and believed that they could secure a deal that better served their interests if the United States would only stand alongside Britain. Ultimately, however, the British were unwilling to act independently of the United States and were forced to acquiesce to American preferences.[183]

Buraimi, 1952–1954 The Buraimi Oasis, located at the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, was strategically significant to the British because of the possibility of new oil reserves in the area and its location as a strategically valuable crossroads. As a memo by the foreign secretary to the British cabinet stated: "The retention of this Oasis is essential to our position in south-east Arabia. Whoever controls Buraimi can dominate the British-protected Trucial States and the Sultanate of Muscat Oman, where we believe that big oil deposits lie within easy reach of the Indian Ocean."[184] The territory was disputed, with Saudi Arabia rejecting an agreement that had been negotiated by Britain on behalf of Oman and Abu Dhabi in 1935. Saudi leaders, including the king, Ibn Saud, were well aware of the benefits associated with controlling Buraimi and had asked US officials to assist them in forcing the British to the negotiating table.[185] The United States was eager to avoid antagonizing either the British or the Saudis and viewed both parties' intentions with suspicion: as the US ambassador to Saudi Arabia reported to the State Department, "I do not feel [the] motives of either Brit[s] or Saudis in these matters are beyond question."[186]

US efforts to prevent a British-Saudi dispute from spiraling out of control were dealt a blow when in 1952 Saudi forces occupied the oasis with the support of the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO). British officials viewed this as a significant challenge to their position in the Persian Gulf. Particularly after the nationalization of AIOC and the British "scuttle from Abadan," the Saudi occupation of Buraimi represented a further weakening of Britain's position in the Middle East that would damage British prestige and access to sterling oil.[187] Worse still, given the close ties between the United States and ARAMCO, the British viewed the Saudis as acting with the implicit approval of the United States.[188]

The British had the military capability to remove the Saudi forces and worried that the Saudis were "banking on [the] belief that [the] U.K. will not use force," which might be the "only effective way to counteract [Saudi actions]

and restore [the] Brit[ish] position."[189] Indeed, British military options were enhanced by the fact that the sultan of Muscat and Oman had raised a substantial force with which to evict the Saudi forces.[190] However, the Americans requested that the British avoid escalating the conflict and encouraged the British to seek arbitration with the Saudis.[191] One of Churchill's briefing papers emphasized the extent to which the British saw themselves as ineluctably tied to the Americans: "Each power [the United Kingdom and the United States] must support the other fully and be seen by all to do so. Lack of positive support and an affectation of impartiality by either power will be interpreted as disagreement with the other and exploited to the detriment of both."[192]

The British therefore acquiesced to American preferences and persuaded the sultan to pursue a diplomatic solution, agreeing to a temporary "Standstill Agreement" that left the Saudis in control of Hamasa, the primary settlement in Buraimi.[193] Both sides agreed to remain in their current positions and avoid taking actions that might threaten each other or prejudice a future settlement.[194] The Standstill Agreement did not last long, however, with Britain abrogating it in response to perceived Saudi violations. Encouraged by the United States, Britain and Saudi Arabia reopened negotiations on an arbitration agreement that yielded little progress. When Eden took charge of the Foreign Office in 1953, he asked why Saudi forces had not yet been evicted from Buraimi and was told that the British had been reluctant to use force because they required US support.[195] The disagreement continued. Britain insisted that British companies continue their operations in the disputed area, while Saudi Arabia (backed by ARAMCO and the United States) demanded that Britain cease any actions until the case was settled.[196] Again, however, Britain agreed to solve the dispute via arbitration under pressure from the United States, with Churchill making a personal commitment to Eisenhower to this effect.

It is clear that Britain would have liked to pursue a more muscular approach to the Buraimi dispute, but was unwilling to go against the United States. Britain's approach to the Buraimi dispute was heavily constrained by US opposition to a more forceful strategy.

Buraimi, 1955 After obtaining a deliverable nuclear capability in 1955, Britain began to respond more decisively and independently to challenges to its position. Eden bluntly stated the change in British strategy in a cabinet meeting in October 1955: "Our interests in the Middle East were greater than those of the United States because of our dependence on Middle East oil, and our experience in the area was greater than theirs. We should not therefore allow ourselves to be restricted overmuch by reluctance to act without full American concurrence and support. We should frame our own policy in the light of our interests in the area and get the Americans to support it to the extent we could induce them to do so."[197] Britain's newfound indepen-

dence was demonstrated in responding to challenges in Buraimi, Suez, Jordan, and Oman.

At the point at which Britain acquired deliverable nuclear weapons in 1955, it was in the midst of arbitration with Saudi Arabia over control of the Buraimi Oasis. In the eyes of the British, however, the Saudis were undermining the agreed-upon arbitration process, and several members of the commission resigned in response to Saudi efforts to instruct witnesses appearing before the commission. Eden informed the House of Commons that the British had abandoned arbitration on October 26, 1955.[198]

With the arbitration commission disbanded, Britain shifted its approach. In contrast to the British strategy since 1952 of seeking US political and diplomatic assistance and pursuing a peaceful solution, Britain pursued a unilateral, military approach to change the facts on the ground. Foreign Secretary Macmillan argued that the United States had "a natural instinct to appease the Saudis on account of the American oil company, Aramco" and that Britain "cannot afford to hesitate" to seize back control of Buraimi.[199] Despite the Foreign Office telling Eden two years earlier that Britain could not take military action in Buraimi because of American opposition, Britain was now prepared to ignore the United States entirely. British forces evicted the Saudis from Buraimi and returned the boundaries to the pre-1952 positions. More notable than the fact that British military action occurred was that Britain undertook it without either consulting or informing the Americans. Instead, after Eden had announced in Parliament that action was being taken, the British cabled Washington to let them know that the United States had to accept "that for the United Kingdom the issues are vital. We cannot allow this primitive and expansionist power to seize control of sources from which we draw an essential part of our fuel. Unlike the United States we have no indigenous reserves and in the last resort, we must act firmly to preserve our lifeline."[200]

This "brazen piece of unilateralism" caused outrage in Washington, with under secretary of state Herbert Hoover Jr. rebuking the British ambassador for the absence of consultation.[201] The director of the CIA, Allen Dulles, condemned the "recent British forceable occupation" as "negat[ing] five years [of] U.S. Government effort to get Saudi Arabs and British to arbitrate their boundary controversies."[202] Secretary of State John Foster Dulles vociferously protested the reoccupation of Buraimi to the British foreign office, telling the British that the United States would "state it had no advance knowledge whatsoever of [British] action and if it had would have urged that it not be taken."[203] The British were told that the United States would not support them if Saudi Arabia took the matter to the United Nations (UN) Security Council, and the British officer in charge of the Middle East section of the Foreign Office wrote in his diary: "Today we were thrown into a rage with the Americans upon receiving two notes or messages [from the Americans]—one telling us that we better go back to arbitration on Buraimi . . . and the other practically ordering us to call off the Sultan of Muscat's impending

clear-up of the rebellious Imam of Oman."[204] Indeed, US displeasure was sufficient that Eisenhower raised the issue personally with Eden during a state visit to Washington in early 1956, acknowledging Britain's legal claims to Buraimi but arguing that world public opinion thought "that the whole Arab peninsula belonged, or ought to belong, to King Saud."[205] Despite this pressure, the British resisted, declaring Dulles's position on Buraimi to be "thoroughly unsatisfactory" and resisting pressure to return to arbitration.[206] Likewise, Eden refused to give ground in his meeting with Eisenhower.[207] Britain and the United States, in the words of under secretary of state Hoover, "agreed to disagree."[208]

The reoccupation of Buraimi indicated an increase both in British independence from the United States and in British steadfastness in responding to challenges, and set a precedent for how Britain would act in response to challenges to its position in the Middle East.

Suez, 1956 It was during the Suez Crisis of 1956 that Britain's newfound independence was most dramatically demonstrated. As with the nationalization of the AIOC, the Suez Crisis involved the nationalization of an asset viewed as critical to Britain's economic and political status. Unlike in the case of the AIOC, however, Britain was prepared to act militarily without the support of (and, indeed, despite the opposition of) the United States.

As discussed above, the Suez Canal had long been viewed as critical to British security. Negotiations over the status of the canal had been a major problem for postwar British foreign policy, and a settlement had been negotiated with Nasser in 1954.[209] This settlement did not last long, however, with Nasser nationalizing the canal in July 1956 in order to raise funds for the Aswan High Dam. As with the case of Anglo-Iranian oil, the nationalization of the Suez Canal was viewed as a crucial challenge to British interests. Concerns about Britain's future ability to trade through the canal further eroded confidence in the pound and made a second devaluation of the currency in less than a decade a frightening possibility. Policymakers also feared that Nasser's rising power and anti-British nationalism would lead him to turn other oil-producing states against Britain and use the Suez Canal as a spigot with which to turn on and off the supply of oil to Western Europe.[210] Indeed, the British interests at stake over the Suez Canal were similar to those at stake over Anglo-Iranian oil. Both were challenges to the British position that would undermine British standing and prestige, both threatened access to British oil holdings, both threatened the British balance of payments and the status of sterling, and both threatened to set a precedent for how Britain would respond to future nationalist challenges.[211]

As in the case of Anglo-Iranian oil, the United States was opposed to military action by Britain to force Nasser to give up the canal.[212] Indeed, US opposition to military action was communicated directly and explicitly to the British. On July 30, Dulles told the British that "Nasser should not now

be presented with, in effect, an ultimatum requiring him to reverse his nationalization action under threat of force."[213] Similarly, Eisenhower had communicated to Eden as early as July 31 the "unwisdom even of contemplating the use of military force," and warned that "the American reaction would be severe" if the British took military action without first exhausting peaceful approaches to solving the problem.[214] Britain was under no illusions about US opposition: as a memorandum to Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd made clear, "Britain would have little or no international support . . . [and using] military force would cause a tremendous strain on the British economy." Chancellor of the Exchequer Macmillan also warned of the danger of taking military action and argued that in an extended crisis the pound would come under significant strain due to limited British reserves.[215] The United States was certainly not happy that Nasser had seized the Suez Canal, and Dulles told the British that he believed "a way must be found to make Nasser disgorge."[216] Nonetheless, the Americans believed that military action would play into the hands of both the Soviet Union and Nasser: turning Nasser into an anti-imperialist hero throughout the Arab world and pushing him further into the Soviet sphere of influence.

Despite awareness of these challenges, and in contrast to British behavior in the case of Anglo-Iranian oil, Britain quickly committed to military action in response to the nationalization of the canal. At a meeting at 10 Downing Street shortly after Nasser's announcement of nationalization, Eden made it "clear that military action would have to be taken and that Nasser would have to go. Nasser could not be allowed 'to have his hand on our windpipe,'" and told US under secretary of state Robert Murphy that Suez was a test that "could be met only by the use of force."[217] Similarly, he informed Dulles that "prompt forcible action was necessary" and requested US "moral and economic support," which Dulles refused to offer.[218] Other British officials made similar statements: Chancellor of the Exchequer Macmillan told Dulles that "utmost firmness" was required, and Dulles came away convinced that "the present determination of both the British and French is to move into the Canal area with force."[219]

On October 24, 1956, senior British, French, and Israeli officials (including the British and French foreign ministers and the Israeli prime minister) met secretly outside Paris. Agreement was reached for Israel to launch an attack across the Sinai Peninsula toward the Suez Canal. Britain and France would then make an ultimatum stating that they would protect the canal if fighting continued, and then invade when the fighting failed to stop. The goal was to seize the canal and hopefully supplant Nasser as a side effect.[220]

On October 29, the Israelis launched their invasion, with Dulles telling the president that "British and French intervention must be foreseen" and that "they may in fact have concerted their action with the Israelis."[221] Eisenhower, enraged by Israeli actions and potential collusion among the Israelis, French, and British, wrote to Eden asking for urgent clarification "as to

exactly what is happening between us and our European allies" and warning that "we may shortly find ourselves not only at odds concerning what we should do, but confronted with a de facto situation that would make all our present troubles look puny indeed."[222] Dulles and Eisenhower's instincts were correct. Britain and France issued their ultimatum the following day, which Dulles characterized to Eisenhower "as crude and brutal as anything he has ever seen."[223] On October 31, Britain began bombing Egyptian airfields, and on November 5 British and French forces began their assault on the canal zone. The Americans were enraged, with Eisenhower berating one of Eden's aides on the phone thinking it was the prime minister and then hanging up before the mistake could be corrected.[224]

By November 6, however, the British objectives had already been lost: Nasser had obstructed the canal by sinking ships filled with rocks and cement, and the British goal of unrestricted use of the canal was thus gone. The Americans feared the risk of Soviet intervention.[225] Britain and France agreed to a cease-fire, but the United States now demanded a complete withdrawal of their forces. Eisenhower refused to meet with Eden and the French prime minister Guy Mollet in Washington, and stated that he would grant such a meeting only once Anglo-French forces were withdrawn.[226] In addition to diplomatic pressure, the Americans began to turn the economic screws on the British, whose fragile economy was deeply vulnerable to the disruption of oil supplies, the selling of sterling by the Federal Reserve, and restriction of financial support from the International Monetary Fund. Chancellor Harold Macmillan met with the US ambassador on November 18 to tell him that the "British Cabinet is beginning to realize what a terrible mistake has been made" and to plead for US assistance.[227] One day later, Macmillan returned to the US ambassador to report that Eden had had a "physical breakdown and will have to go on vacation immediately" and that the "first action after Eden's departure . . . will be on withdrawal of British troops." He pleaded for an economic "fig leaf to cover our nakedness."[228] Eisenhower refused to do so until the British withdrew.[229] The British, facing no alternatives, buckled under American pressure and on December 2, Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd announced that British forces would be withdrawn from Suez.[230] Eden returned from his vacation and was swiftly forced out as prime minister, informing the cabinet two days before his resignation that "we and the French have been compelled, by a combination of the United States and the Soviet Union . . . to withdraw. . . . This has certainly done us great damage." In the same note he implicitly acknowledged that Britain's greater independence since 1955 had caused a fundamental shift in Britain's relationship with the United States: "The United States attitude to us in the Middle East dates from our refusal to give up Buraimi."[231]

While a detailed examination of the outcome of the Suez Crisis is not necessary here (what is important for testing the theory of nuclear opportunism is how the British responded to the challenge of nationalization, not the overall

outcome of the crisis), it is worth noting that the fact that Britain was ultimately humiliated by the United States does not undermine the claim that Britain exhibited greater independence than it did before acquiring deliverable nuclear weapons. In comparison with crises in the pre-nuclear era, such as the nationalization of the AIOC, the British response in Suez exhibited far less concern regarding US policy preferences and a greater willingness to stand firmly in defending challenges to the status quo. The British response is thus indicative of greater independence from the United States, regardless of the fact that the United States was ultimately able to coerce British withdrawal.

Post-Suez: Oman and Jordan In the aftermath of the Suez Crisis, the conventional wisdom is that Britain shrunk, humiliated, away from the world stage and what remained of its empire. *The Times*'s obituary of Eden in 1977 described him as "the last Prime Minister to believe that Britain was a great power and the first to confront a crisis which proved she was not."[232] This position has been echoed in a large body of historical scholarship depicting the Suez Crisis as a decisive turning point in British history.[233]

Other historical scholarship, however, argues that the Suez Crisis was not the turning point in British strategy that it is often portrayed as.[234] Indeed, British independence persisted even in the aftermath of Suez. Britain continued to respond to challenges to its position and was "prepared neither to relinquish its residual interests in the region, nor become subservient to the United States."[235] As Ashton argues, "The British were resolved to pursue the promotion of their interests through the Baghdad Pact with even greater vigour after the Suez debacle, and were certainly not ready to cast off any mantle."[236] And, indeed, Britain continued to act unilaterally in the region when it felt its interests were challenged, often "with little regard for American policy."[237]

First, Britain intervened unilaterally in Oman in 1957 in response to a request from Sultan Said, who was battling the Saudi-backed Ghalib bin Ali. Macmillan wrote to Eisenhower, telling him that "the obligations of friendship seem to us to demand that we should not desert him in times of trouble."[238] The British sought to downplay their intervention, asking the US secretary of state to "take [the] line that Oman affair is 'small stuff' and not considered important by [the] U.S."[239] Nonetheless, the United States had significant concerns about the British intervention, with Dulles informing the president of his "concern that it [British intervention] could not be quickly wound up as a minor incident but that the Arab world would be drawn in in opposition to the UK, Nasser would have a new chance to assert Arab leadership, and we would be caught between our desire to maintain an influence in some of the Arab countries . . . and our desire to maintain good ties with the UK."[240] Ultimately, the United States did not actively oppose the British intervention but was unenthusiastic about the operation, with Dulles irritated by the lack of consultation with the United States given that

the deployment of British forces came just days after he received assurances from the British that there "was no question of using British forces there."[241] Despite the humiliation Britain had suffered over Suez a year earlier, Britain nonetheless remained willing to act without US backing.

Second, Britain intervened in Jordan in the aftermath of the July 1958 coup in Iraq by pro-Nasser elements of the Iraqi army that brought down the Hashemite royal family. The coup was viewed as a significant blow to the British position in the Middle East for a number of reasons: because Iraq stood at the heart of the Baghdad Pact; because the revolution appeared to threaten oil interests in Iraq, Kuwait, and the Persian Gulf more broadly; and because of the possibility that the revolution might presage region-wide instability instigated by Nasser.[242] The British sought to encourage US intervention in Lebanon to prop up the faltering president Camille Chamoun, but the Americans worried that popular resistance to any intervention would be exacerbated by British involvement in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis.[243] As a result, the British were excluded from the planning for the operation by Eisenhower, who refused to make the operation a joint Anglo-American one: when Macmillan asked Eisenhower in a telephone conversation if he "wanted us to come with you or do you want to do it alone?" Eisenhower declined his offer.[244] Following the phone conversation with a written message, Macmillan accepted Eisenhower's decision: "I think you are right . . . that our 3,700 men should be held in reserve."[245] Instead, Britain sent its forces unilaterally into Jordan in response to a request from Jordanian King Hussein for assistance.[246] King Hussein had requested that both Britain and the United States assure him that they would come to his aid if he requested: while the British were enthusiastic, the Americans were not, with Dulles telling the British deputy ambassador that "Hussein has a better chance of pulling through without western military assistance than with it" and that the United States had "no clear idea as yet on the desirability of putting troops into Jordan."[247] Dulles expressed more direct opposition to Eisenhower, stating that he had "no enthusiasm for British forces going in," that "pan-Arabism could sweep the country very quickly" in the event of British intervention, and, four days later, that the British were "getting into a dangerous situation in Jordan."[248] Eisenhower agreed that the United States should not "get into the position of supporting Kings against their people."[249] Despite multiple direct requests from the British, the Americans refused to provide forces, though they did provide some logistical support.[250] For the British, however, US military support was not a decisive factor: Britain intervened anyway. British intervention in Jordan thus further demonstrates Britain's continued willingness to intervene militarily in countries without American assistance even in the aftermath of Suez.

What Role Did Nuclear Weapons Play in the Crises? British responses to challenges to its position in the Middle East are thus consistent with the predic-

tions made above. After acquiring a deliverable nuclear capability in 1955, Britain was more willing to respond to challenges to its position more steadfastly, with greater independence from the United States, and showed less inclination to compromise. This evidence is correlational: it shows that British behavior changed in the way the theory anticipates, but does not itself show that nuclear weapons caused the changes we observe. In the discussion of bolstering above, it is clear that British nuclear weapons were causing the changes in behavior: British officials were explicit both in private and in public that nuclear weapons allowed Britain to reduce its conventional military commitments to its alliances and rely to a greater degree on nuclear commitments to strengthen and maintain its alliances. In the crises, however, finding smoking-gun evidence that nuclear weapons caused the change in behavior is harder. Nonetheless, there are reasons to believe that British nuclear weapons caused the change.

First, the change in behavior is consistent with British elite thinking about nuclear weapons discussed above. British elites wanted nuclear weapons in large part because it would reduce their dependence on the United States and help Britain maintain its position in international politics. After acquiring deliverable nuclear weapons Britain behaved in much the way that British elites had anticipated nuclear weapons would allow Britain to behave: with less regard for US preferences and with greater inclination to act militarily to preserve the status quo in the face of challenges. This consistency between British elite thinking and British behavior across a series of crises is suggestive of a causal role being played by nuclear weapons.

Second, we can trace the mechanisms identified in chapter 1 to see the ways in which British calculations may have been changed by nuclear weapons. In this case, it is highly plausible that at least two of the mechanisms identified—the political mechanism and the psychological mechanism—would have been operative in leading British officials to behave differently in the crises after Britain acquired deliverable nuclear weapons.

British nuclear weapons should have meant British officials felt more comfortable taking actions that may have led to escalation because of the effects British nuclear weapons would have on adversaries' calculations. We see examples of this in the crises after Britain acquired deliverable nuclear weapons in 1955: Britain was prepared to take actions after 1955 that it had been careful to avoid before 1955. Indeed, British officials explicitly made reference to a willingness to run the risk of nuclear escalation to pursue the country's political aims. In the leadup to the Suez Crisis, the British foreign secretary Selwyn Lloyd informed US Secretary of State Dulles that the British were fully aware that "they were starting something that might lead to an atomic war" but that they were prepared to take action anyway.[251] Similarly, Chancellor of the Exchequer Macmillan told Dulles that "if we should be destroyed by Russian bombs now that would be better than to be reduced to impotence by the disintegration of [Britain's] entire position abroad."[252]

It is hard to imagine British leaders making such statement in the period before 1955, in which Britain deferred to US preferences in each case.

Similarly, we might expect that British policymakers would have viewed the threat of third-party intervention as less credible given British nuclear weapons. The only crisis in which Britain received such threats was the 1956 Suez Crisis. Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin communicated to Eden the "very grave consequence[s]" that would result from Britain's "aggressive war against Egypt" and the Soviet "determination to crush the aggressor," and asked provocatively, "In what position would Britain have found herself had she been attacked by more powerful states possessing all types of modern weapons of destruction?"[253] The French—who lacked nuclear weapons—were "greatly concerned by the threat," communicating to the United States that they "cannot exclude the possibility of an attack by the Soviet Union."[254] By contrast, the nuclear-armed British did not view Soviet nuclear threats as credible. Eden later commented that "we considered that the threats in Marshall Bulganin's note need not be taken literally," and his public relations adviser derided the threat as "twaddle"; the Joint Intelligence Committee concluded that the Russian threat was a bluff; and the immediate effect of the threat was to harden rather than weaken British resolve.[255] The fact that the non-nuclear-armed French took the Soviet nuclear threat more seriously than the British is entirely consistent with the political mechanisms discussed in chapter 1: Britain's nuclear weapons meant that Soviet threats were less credible to the British than they were to the French. As Groom argues, Britain's "store of atomic weapons and a credible delivery system . . . was not something that the Soviet leaders could afford to take lightly."[256]

British leaders during the period in which Britain acquired nuclear weapons also offer highly plausible candidates for the psychological and identity-based mechanisms linking nuclear weapons to changes in foreign policy. Anthony Eden, much like his predecessor Winston Churchill, epitomizes the "oppositional-nationalist" view of Britain that Jacques Hymans identifies as being most likely to view nuclear weapons as a solution to a state's security problems.[257] Eden believed Britain to be an inherently great power with the right to play a pivotal role in global affairs but whose rightful position on the world stage was constantly being challenged and undermined by both allies and adversaries in a dangerous world. Eden's aristocratic family background, the deaths of his elder brother and uncle in World War I, and his vindication after resigning as foreign secretary in opposition to the appeasement of Hitler in the 1930s all contributed to his view of Britain as an important and virtuous state in a dangerous international environment.[258] Such leaders are likely to be particularly inclined to view nuclear weapons as important tools of statecraft, and thus most likely to have their foreign policy calculations influenced by nuclear acquisition.

Overall, therefore, several plausible mechanisms link British nuclear weapons to the observed change in British crisis behavior.

Third, if British nuclear weapons did not cause the change, what did? Britain's responses to challenges in the Middle East seem to have changed dramatically in 1955, but to conclude that nuclear weapons had no effect we need a plausible alternative explanation: an additional factor that also changed in 1955. The most obvious candidate is that Churchill was replaced by Eden as prime minister in 1955: could it be that the changes in behavior we observe are due to the change in leader rather than the acquisition of a deliverable nuclear capability? While it is not possible to rule out this alternative explanation completely, there are reasons to doubt its ability to explain the changes in British behavior. First, Eden was intimately involved in foreign policy making as foreign secretary and deputy prime minister before becoming prime minister, including being the "primary architect" of several of the pre-1955 policies, including the pursuit of US assistance in responding to the 1951 nationalization of Anglo-Iranian oil and the 1954 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty.[259] Second, Eden and Churchill came from the same political party and shared a similar outlook on foreign policy, with Eden recalling Churchill commenting that "you could put each of us in a separate room, put any questions of foreign policy to us, and nine times out of ten we would give the same answer."[260] Both leaders shared the oppositional-nationalist view of Britain's role in the world that Hymans identifies as shaping leaders' views of nuclear weapons.[261] While the relationship between Churchill and Eden was often difficult and fractious, this did not stem from substantive political differences on matters of foreign policy, but rather because Eden was an impatient "heir apparent" as Churchill gradually lost his grip on power.[262] It therefore seems unlikely that Eden and Churchill differed sufficiently on matters of foreign policy to explain the changes in British foreign policy after 1955. Indeed, if anything, Eden was less inclined than Churchill to respond to challenges steadfastly. For example, Eden had argued—against Churchill—that maintaining large numbers of forces in the Middle East and in the Suez base was unnecessary, while Churchill was more inclined to place a high priority on maintaining the British position in Suez.[263]

Overall, there is good reason to think that British nuclear weapons caused the change in foreign policy we see in the crises: a greater degree of independence from the United States, a reduced inclination to compromise, and a greater degree of steadfastness when challenged. These changes are consistent with the predictions of the theory of nuclear opportunism.

Other Explanations

Do other theories explain the British case better than the theory of nuclear opportunism?

The theory of the nuclear revolution predicts that nuclear weapons would make Britain more secure, and thus that Britain would not use nuclear

weapons to facilitate aggression, expansion, or bolstering. However, the theory predicts that states may use nuclear weapons to facilitate steadfastness, independence, and compromise. It thus makes several correct predictions in the British case: Britain did indeed use nuclear weapons to facilitate steadfastness and independence, and did not use nuclear weapons to facilitate aggression or expansion. However, in contrast to the predictions of the theory of the nuclear revolution, Britain showed no greater inclination to compromise after acquiring deliverable nuclear weapons, and did use nuclear weapons to facilitate the bolstering of junior allies. Thus, while the theory of the nuclear revolution makes a number of correct predictions, it does not perform as well as the theory of nuclear opportunism.

S. Paul Kapur's theory of emboldenment predicts that weak, revisionist states use nuclear weapons to facilitate aggression. Neither of these conditions is met in the British case. As discussed above, although Britain had suffered substantially in World War II, it had not had its territory occupied and retained a powerful conventional military. Britain had the third largest military in the world and the second largest navy, and it retained a large empire that had contributed considerable military capability to the allied war effort. Britain was not, therefore, a conventionally weak state at the point of nuclear acquisition. Similarly, Britain had firmly status quo preferences: as described above, Britain's political priority was to *maintain* the British position in international politics. Thus, Kapur's theory correctly predicts that Britain would not use nuclear weapons to facilitate aggression. However, Kapur's theory does not offer an explanation for how British foreign policy should have changed: Kapur's theory therefore misses the important ways in which British foreign policy did change after nuclear acquisition.

Finally, the most plausible case-specific alternative explanation would be that the change in behavior observed reflected the change in leadership that Britain experienced in 1955. However, as discussed above, this is not persuasive as an account of the change in behavior we observe: Eden and Churchill came from the same political party, they agreed on most matters of foreign policy, and Eden had been intimately involved in British foreign policy well before he became prime minister.

Nuclear Weapons and Continued British Decline

Nuclear weapons were therefore useful to Britain as it sought to preserve its position in the world and avoid dependence on the United States. But were these merely transitory effects that dissipated over time? Or have these ideas about the utility of nuclear weapons for British foreign policy endured?

It might initially seem that nuclear weapons failed to help Britain maintain its position in the world. It is certainly true that nuclear weapons did not allow Britain to permanently defy geopolitical gravity. In time, Britain

was forced to accept a position in the world in line with its capabilities: as a nuclear-armed and active regional power rather than the imperial great power it had once been. Similarly, it is often argued that Britain subjugated its nuclear weapons to the United States, and that after 1958 Britain no longer possessed a fully independent nuclear deterrent.[264] However, the fact that Britain could not ultimately maintain its status as a global power despite acquiring nuclear weapons does not undermine the theory of nuclear opportunism. After all, the claim of the theory of nuclear opportunism is that nuclear weapons are useful and help states pursue goals that they care about, not that they are all-powerful tools of political influence or silver bullets that grant states free rein in international politics.

In fact, the effects that the theory of nuclear opportunism identifies, and the ideas about the utility of nuclear weapons that underpin those effects in the British case, have demonstrated remarkable staying power. Throughout the Cold War and since, British elites have continued to view nuclear weapons as an important component of British power and influence in the world and have sought to avoid dependence on the United States by retaining an independent nuclear capability despite the costs associated with doing so. Despite American efforts to reduce the independence of Britain's nuclear program, Britain has always viewed the right to use nuclear weapons independently as a crucial capability underpinning its position in the world and its independence from the United States, and as a powerful source of influence over the United States and American nuclear choices.

While conceptions of "nuclear independence" have changed somewhat over time, Britain has retained an "abiding adherence to national control and operation."[265] Britain has always retained ultimate control over its nuclear weapons even as it became more dependent on the United States for missile technologies and British strategic targeting became increasingly coordinated with NATO. The United States has certainly sought to reduce the independence of Britain's nuclear arsenal and take advantage of Britain's struggle to afford a fully independent nuclear deterrent: as S. J. Ball argues, US officials "moved to bring planning for [British nuclear] use under an American umbrella and to make the British nuclear force dependent on American nuclear weapons."[266] As McGeorge Bundy told President John F. Kennedy in April 1962, "We would much rather have . . . the British join with the rest of NATO in accepting a single U.S. dominated nuclear force."[267] Nonetheless, the British have always been insistent that they retain the ability to use nuclear weapons independently: as Prime Minister Macmillan told his cabinet, Britain needed to "have within our control sufficient weapons to provide a deterrent influence independent of the United States."[268] And as he argued to Kennedy in negotiating the conditions under which Britain would receive American Polaris submarine-launched ballistic missiles, "The U.K. does not want to be just a clown, or a satellite. The U.K. wants a nuclear force not only for defense, but in the event of menace to its existence, which the U.K. might

have to meet; for example: when Khrushchev waved his rockets about the time of Suez" (indeed, Macmillan's invocation of the Suez Crisis as an example of the ways British nuclear weapons can support an independent foreign policy offers further support for the argument made above that nuclear weapons contributed to British independence in the crisis).[269] In the Nassau Agreement and Polaris Sales Agreement that formalized the conditions attached to Britain receiving submarine-launched missiles, Britain secured the right to use nuclear weapons independently if it determined that "supreme national interests are at stake."[270] And, indeed, the Polaris agreement formed the basis of the 1982 deal to provide Britain with the Trident missiles that Britain continues to use, preserving Britain's ability to use nuclear weapons independently of the United States should the British government deem it necessary.[271]

Britain's commitment to nuclear weapons and the ability to use them independently of the United States has therefore continued throughout the Cold War and well into the twenty-first century. Despite British denials, it is now known that British warships carried nuclear weapons during the 1982 war to restore British control over the Falkland Islands.[272] And there was little doubt in the 2000s that the British government would commit to renewing the British deterrent, investing in a new generation of nuclear-armed submarines and extending the life of the Trident missile. The 2006 government white paper announcing its support for such investments declared that "an independent British nuclear deterrent is an essential part of our insurance against the uncertainties and risks of the future,"[273] and large majorities in parliament voted to support the process of renewing the British deterrent in both 2007 and 2016.[274] As Nick Ritchie has argued, a powerful cross-party coalition of British politicians and the permanent civil service continue to view Britain's nuclear weapons as "an essential capability" underpinning Britain's position and status as a "responsible, interventionist, 'pivotal' major power" critical to the "political and military credibility" that Britain has in Washington: precisely the ideas and effects of nuclear weapons that the theory of nuclear opportunism predicts in the British case.[275] The ideas and narratives that motivated British nuclear acquisition and the effects they have on British foreign policy have been "reproduced" by British elites with only minor adjustments in the post–Cold War era.[276]

This level of consensus is particularly notable given that many of the security threats that Britain faces in the post–Cold War era are less obviously amenable to nuclear deterrence than they were in the Cold War era. If anything, it is surprising how little a vigorous debate about the utility of British nuclear weapons among scholars and analysts has permeated the discourse of British policymakers.[277] The theory of nuclear opportunism, by showing how British nuclear weapons are useful even to a relatively secure, declining power, offers an explanation for the cross-party consensus regarding the utility of British nuclear that persists even today.

In short, the basic ideas that underpin the British nuclear deterrent—of both maintaining Britain's position in the world and avoiding dependence on, and gaining influence with, the United States—have persisted over time. They motivated Britain's pursuit and acquisition of nuclear weapons in the 1940s and 1950s, they motivated the changes in Britain's foreign policy after nuclear acquisition, and they continue to shape elite discourse about the utility of Britain's nuclear weapons even in the post–Cold War era. The theory of nuclear opportunism offers a powerful explanation for the persistence of these ideas and for Britain's continued possession of nuclear weapons even as the threats that Britain has faced have changed dramatically over the decades since British leaders first acquired them.

The evidence suggests that nuclear weapons affected British foreign policy in ways that are consistent with the theory of nuclear opportunism. As a reasonably secure state protected by a senior ally and declining in power, Britain saw nuclear weapons as a solution to two fundamental political problems it faced: dependence on the United States and maintaining its position in the world despite its long-run decline. Britain therefore found pursuing independence from the United States, the bolstering of its junior allies, and steadfastness in the face of challenges to be attractive. After acquiring a deliverable nuclear capability in 1955, Britain used nuclear weapons to facilitate these behaviors: bolstering its allies in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, and responding to challenges to its position more steadfastly and independently of the preferences of the United States, despite simultaneously cutting back on its conventional forces over the same period. These outcomes are consistent with the theory of nuclear opportunism and inconsistent with the theory of the nuclear revolution.