

# 2017

## H-Diplo

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Article Review  
No. 675  
27 January 2017

Article Review Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse  
Web and Production Editor: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

**Stephen Twigge. "The Atomic Marshall Plan: Atoms for Peace, British Diplomacy and Civil Nuclear Power." *Cold War History* 16:2: 213-30. DOI:**

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2015.1117450>.

URL: <http://tiny.cc/AR675>

Review by **Alex Mankoo**, University College London

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On 8 December 1953, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower delivered his 'Atoms for Peace' speech to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, in which he proposed the idea of an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the UN. Eisenhower suggested that nuclear powers make ongoing contributions to the IAEA from their stockpiles of uranium and fissionable material as part of the Agency's mission to promote the peaceful purposes of atomic energy whilst combating nuclear proliferation (221). The IAEA was established on 29 July 1957, less than four years later. Stephen Twigge's valuable contribution to the historiography of this formative period of the IAEA focuses on the tensions that arose between the U.S. and the UK as a result of British concerns over the scope of the Agency.

The creation of the IAEA took place in the wake of the U.S. Atomic Energy Act, otherwise known as the McMahon Act, in July 1946. The McMahon Act effectively scuttled the wartime relationship of nuclear cooperation between Britain and the U.S. by restricting international access to American nuclear information and technology. Therefore, the IAEA eventually became an opportunity to restore these bilateral relations. However, Twigge's article shows that the road to restoration was not without its obstacles. In fact, some British officials seriously considered rejecting British involvement in the IAEA entirely, and were at some points actively looking to discourage or defer its foundation (225-226).

The McMahon Act had generated a considerable amount of distrust toward the U.S. amongst British policy makers. After Eisenhower's speech, the Cabinet's Official Committee on Atomic Energy (AE(O)) (chaired by Lord Plowden, chairman designate of the Atomic Energy Authority) raised concerns that without Soviet involvement, the IAEA could turn into an 'Atomic Marshall Plan.' They feared it might give the U.S. an opportunity to demand additional uranium and gain "worldwide influence in the development of atomic energy for industrial purposes" (221-222). This contradicted British hopes to establish independent nuclear collaboration across the Commonwealth, a policy approved by the Cabinet in April 1953.

Twigge's core argument is that, during the formation of the IAEA, British policy aimed first and foremost to restore a nuclear relationship with Washington rather than foster multilateral nuclear diplomacy. However, he

notes that this priority was not because of shared Anglo-American ideology or British desire to support U.S.-centric international policy. Rather, it was driven by British interest in access to U.S. nuclear weapons and strategic planning, which would aid Britain in establishing itself as a vanguard of civil nuclear technology. As such, Twigge argues, British policy was markedly ambiguous toward the idea of the IAEA, shifting from “warm enthusiasm to qualified rejection before settling on a policy of grudging acceptance” (213). Twigge’s focus on the ambiguity and tensions in British nuclear strategy well places his work alongside John Baylis’s analysis of Britain’s policy of deterrence during the early Cold War.<sup>1</sup>

Head of Modern Collections at the National Archives, Twigge clearly and diligently charts the stages of British sentiment toward the IAEA using primary sources that include papers and correspondence from the Cabinet, Foreign Office, the Lilienthal Committee and the Department of Energy. Noticeably, his account recognises both the shifts in the official British position on the IAEA as well as the nuances of the views of the key individuals involved in developing this position.

Initial enthusiasm for Eisenhower’s Atoms for Peace proposal – both the draft and the speech itself – mainly reflected support for the notion of rethinking atomic energy as a peacetime technology rather than a military one. Furthermore, individuals such as Lord Cherwell, Churchill’s principal scientific advisor on nuclear matters and paymaster-general of the Cabinet, could not “imagine that agreement would ever be reached” on the roles of such an organisation (220). Consequently, although enthusiasm was a way to foster Anglo-American relations, opinions such as Cherwell’s give the impression that he considered the IAEA a pleasant idea that would likely never materialise. This makes Twigge’s suggestion that Britain’s first response to Eisenhower’s speech constituted “warm enthusiasm” feel like somewhat of an overstatement, especially given that his account shows how quickly it dissipated into trepidation.

Twigge examines this dissipation in the body of the article, identifying how British officials struggled to make out the intentions of the U.S. administration, with some, such as Sir Christopher Hinton (Britain’s foremost nuclear engineer and consultant to Churchill in the matter), viewing Eisenhower’s speech with suspicion. This stemmed from reservations about the extent of atomic control the IAEA would give the U.S., and the constraints it would put on Britain’s atomic energy industry and British security interests. At worst, the proposal could have given the U.S. global dominance in the atomic energy industry and restricted Britain’s export of atomic energy as well as Commonwealth nuclear collaboration. Policy makers saw Soviet involvement in the IAEA as a way of counteracting these issues, Twigge argues. With Russia included, the IAEA would satisfy Britain’s desire to rebuild its relationship with the U.S. as well as its desire to establish itself in the atomic energy industry. Thus, “the Cabinet regarded British involvement without Soviet participation as worthless” (225).

Twigge’s claim that British policy was “characterised by ambiguity” is certainly supported by his account of events at this key juncture (227). Russia did indeed reject participation in the IAEA, bringing these tensions to a head. Twigge’s analysis here is thorough, highlighting the tensions between various British officials’ opinions on the matter, most notably those of Anthony Eden (Foreign Secretary, who felt the scheme was not at all in British interest without Russia) and Lord Salisbury (responsible for civil nuclear power), who argued that the U.S. should be discouraged from moving forward but Britain should not withdraw. However, once it became clear the U.S. was determined to push ahead, Twigge illustrates that, despite previous statements to

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<sup>1</sup> John Baylis, *Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy 1945-1964* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

the contrary, British officials (including Cherwell and Eden) no longer saw rejecting involvement outright as a viable option. This was because of the negative effect such a policy would have had on bilateral relations. Furthermore, some control in the matter was seen as better than none.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution here is Twigge's discovery of the confidential minutes of a meeting between Cherwell and the Cabinet. In this meeting Cherwell briefed the Cabinet on Anglo-American discussions in Washington on 25-27 June 1954. The minutes reveal that the U.S. had "indicated their readiness to cooperate more fully with the UK" in atomic energy development, which "included full information on US hydrogen bombs and the external characteristics of their nuclear weapons" (227). Once British officials realised that involvement would restore the Anglo-American nuclear relationship, they reversed their position and even actively engaged in drafting the IAEA charter. This volte-face is the crux of Twigge's argument. He claims the reversal shows that, ultimately, British policy favoured restoring bilateral relations over developing its civil nuclear power industry at home and across the Commonwealth.

Twigge's research is positioned between classic histories of atomic Anglo-American relations, such as those by Margaret Gowing and John Simpson, and more recent work on the topic.<sup>2</sup> The more traditional histories present the early post-war nuclear relationship as one that benefited the U.S. far more than Britain, whereas Saul Kelly has suggested that the advantages for Britain through maintaining nuclear dialogue with the U.S. have been underplayed.<sup>3</sup> Twigge's article instead reveals the finer details of the interests and concerns in the minds of British officials from 1953-1957, illustrating not only the range of advantages and disadvantages associated with the IAEA but also how many of those advantages and disadvantages were inextricably intertwined.

The article is thoroughly enjoyable, highly illuminating and represents a more nuanced reading of the tensions in Anglo-American relations from Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace speech to the formation of the IAEA. Twigge's overarching argument is sound, but what I appreciated most about the piece was the way the more subtle complexities of the British position were drawn out. The research also leaves adequate room for further work. In particular, it would be interesting to hear more on the efficacy of the role of Sir Roger Makins, the UK ambassador to Washington, in the development of the IAEA.<sup>4</sup> A take on the same events through the lens of the developing atomic industry in Britain would also prove fascinating. Finally, Twigge acknowledges that the record of the June 1954 Washington meeting is still retained. If and when these files are declassified, they will no doubt provide a wellspring of information to be mined for future work.

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Gowing, *Interdependence and Deterrence: Britain, and Atomic Energy, 1945-1952* (Macmillan, 1974); John Simpson, *The Independent Nuclear State: The United States, Britain and the Military Atom* (Macmillan, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> Saul Kelly, "No ordinary Foreign Office official: Sir Roger Makins and Anglo-American atomic relations 1945-55", *Contemporary British History* 14:4 (Winter 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Wevill recently published a book on Makins' time as ambassador – see Richard Wevill, *Diplomacy, Roger Makins and the Anglo-American Relationship* (Routledge, 2014).

## H-Diplo *Article Review*

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