

# Renew the U.S.-UK Military Defense Agreement, or End the Imperial Nuclear War Alliance?

Sept. 14—*American Schiller Institute leader Dennis Speed and EIR military analyst Carl Osgood made the following remarks, edited for use here, to the International Peace Coalition online [meeting](#) Sept. 13, 2024. Osgood's presentation on the 1958 Mutual Defense Agreement (MDA) made between Great Britain and the United States was introduced by Speed providing certain crucial elements of the context in which this happened.*

**Dennis Speed:** Three years ago, when he saw the move to threaten China with war over Taiwan in 2021, the late Daniel Ellsberg, author of *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*, posted online classified documents originally copied back in the 1970s that showed that “The U.S. military planners pushed for nuclear strikes on mainland China in 1958 to protect Taiwan from an invasion by communist forces.” That’s taken from a CBS News report from 2021.

In an interview, Ellsberg told CBS News reporter Michelle Miller, “I was part of a plan that should never have been made; that was a crime against humanity. The plan was to hit every city in the Soviet Union, and every city in China, with nuclear weapons. There was no plan for fighting the Soviets that did not also involve annihilating the Chinese population. The result was a readiness to annihilate 600 million people; a hundred Holocausts. When I say ‘crime against humanity,’ it was actually a crime against the existence of the human species.” The reporter was pretty agitated, so she said, “This sounds like the end of days; that was the plan?” Ellsberg responded, “Yes.”

Now, that same year, 1958, something called the UK-U.S. Mutual Defense Agreement was made law on July 3, immediately after the revocation of what was called the McMahon Act. To tell you why this has come to our attention for today, I’m going to let Carl go right ahead, since there’s a present discussion that’s probably going on somewhere near the White House with the “collective Biden” about making this act a permanent arrangement.

## Eviscerating Sovereignty

**Carl Osgood:** Thank you, Dennis. They may or may not be discussing it at the White House today. If they don’t discuss it, it’s because the decision has already been made. I’ve been looking at the MDA for some years, but it recently came to my attention again with an article in the *Financial Times* on September 2, which reported that both U.S. President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer had issued the required parliamentary notifications for amending the agreement, and were looking for approval from the U.S. Congress and the British House of Commons. The *Financial Times* quoted Malcolm Chalmers, who is the Deputy Director of the Royal United Services Institute in London. This is the most senior military think tank of the British establishment. Basically, what the amendment does is, it repeals all of the expiration clauses in the agreement that require that the agreement be renewed every so often; in this case, every ten years. And what Chalmers said was, “It’s good news for the UK that it doesn’t need to worry about a future U.S. administration using a future renewal of the treaty as leverage.”

As a certain colleague of mine put it, this is not only Trump-proofing the agreement, but nation-state proofing it, so that it just goes on and on without any future review and renewal at all.

Now, my main task here is to give a thumbnail sketch of the history of this agreement. The history really goes back to the Manhattan Project, which really didn’t begin with the Manhattan Project; it really began in 1940 with a British program called Tube Alloys, which was the beginning of the investigation of the military capability of nuclear fission as a weapon. This was eventually folded into the Manhattan Project, because the British, under wartime conditions, simply didn’t have the resources to be able to devote to figuring out how to build an atom bomb. So, their project was folded into the Manhattan Project; there was a British team in Los Alamos that was led by Dr. William Penney, who was the top British physicist. The Que-

bec Agreement of 1943 between the U.S., Britain, and Canada provided for the sharing of atomic bomb information; there were Canadians involved in the project also. Presumably—I haven't reviewed the documentation on this—but presumably the British involvement in the Manhattan Project also gave them a say in the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan. But they were deeply involved in this.

Now, the McMahon Act, which Dennis referred to, was also called the Atomic Energy Act of 1946. This established the Atomic Energy Commission to provide for civilian control of the atomic weapons. Basically, the nuclear establishment that had been created by the Manhattan Project was now brought under civilian control through the Atomic Energy Commission, which it established. This included the provision outlawing the sharing of nuclear weapons-related information with foreign countries. This is what locked both the UK and Canada out of any more nuclear sharing with the U.S. The British were very perturbed about this.

### **The Bevin Intervention**

In October 1946, which was just a couple months after the signing of the Atomic Energy Act, there was a Cabinet meeting. The British Prime Minister was Anthony Eden. There was a Cabinet meeting on October 25, 1946. At this discussion—this is what has been reported about it—the ministers who were present at the meeting were about ready to throw in the towel on Britain ever being a nuclear power. At a certain point in the meeting, Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary at the time—Dennis could tell you a lot more about him—walked into the meeting and completely turned the discussion around. He said, “That won't do at all; we've got to have this. We've got to have this thing whatever it costs. We've got to have the bloody Union Jack on top of it.” That quote is not in the official documentation from the meeting, but it was reported some years later by another minister who was there.

Bevin's intervention set into motion the British program to develop its own nuclear bombs. William Penney, who had led the British team on the Manhattan Project, was the leader of that effort. So, the British detonated their first atomic bomb in October 1952; their first H-bomb in 1957. But the real intent behind this was not so much an independent British arsenal, but rather to create the conditions for the repeal of the

information-sharing restrictions that had been included in the McMahon Act. Adding to the British anxiety about those restrictions was that [Nikita] Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union, had basically announced a nuclear testing moratorium. This was not a formal agreement among anybody; the nuclear powers at the time were the U.S., Britain, and the Soviet Union. But it was basically a unilateral announcement by Khrushchev to put pressure on the U.S. and Britain. The British had only conducted 11 nuclear tests up through early 1958—including their H-bomb test; while the U.S. had conducted, actually, 195 tests. That meant that the U.S. had much more testing data than the British had, and the British wanted access to that U.S. testing data, because they feared that a permanent moratorium on nuclear testing might go into effect and they would not ever be able to conduct any more nuclear tests.

So, there was discussion by the U.S. Congress; this was encouraged by President Dwight Eisenhower's administration, to repeal that information-sharing restriction. Eisenhower got the bill finally on June 30, 1958. The MDA was signed on July 3 and took effect 30 days later. Now, Article II of the agreement—just to specify, this is as it was written in 1958—provided for the “sharing of classified information necessary for: a) the development of defense plans; b) the training of personnel and the employment of and defense against atomic weapons; c) the evaluation of capabilities of potential enemies; d) the development of delivery systems; and e) the development of military reactors.” This included naval reactors for submarines.

The MDA itself was then followed by the Polaris Sales Agreement [PSA] of 1962, which [U.S. President John] Kennedy negotiated with Harold MacMillan, the British Prime Minister, at their famous Nassau summit in late December of that year. In between the MDA and the Polaris agreement, the British had attempted to develop missiles for the delivery of their nuclear weapons, because these weapons could no longer be delivered by bombers. Developing Russian air defenses soon threatened to make the bombers obsolete. So, they wanted to develop missiles to lengthen the life of the bombers. They tried developing a missile called the Blue Steel; there was also an Anglo-American project called Sky Bolt. Both of these failed. [U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara cancelled the Sky Bolt program,

and this caused a political crisis in Britain; this was around October-November of 1962. So, Kennedy offered the British the Polaris missiles, the first U.S. submarine-launched missile, on condition that they commit their force to NATO. That was Kennedy's condition for doing that. MacMillan went along with that and agreed with it. It led to the building of the British submarine force, and the retirement of all the bombs and missiles that they were trying to develop. The MDA and the PSA have been the basis for the U.S. and UK nuclear sharing agreements ever since.

Now, the MDA, I know, has been amended several times since 1958. The first time was actually 1959, but the essence of the agreement remains the sharing of classified information for the development of defense plans.

### **A Shameful Silence in Congress**

As far as the Congress goes, I will just mention that [President] Biden did send a letter to

the Congress on July 29, describing the amended change—the repeal of the provisions that had end dates on them—and asking for Congressional consideration. I can tell you that in 2014, ten years ago, the last time this happened, a similar resolution was put before the Congress by the Obama administration at the time. Both the House and the Senate voted it up on voice votes—unanimous consent-types of votes. So, it really went through with very little controversy; no controversy, really, since there was no objection to not having roll-call votes. I imagine that's exactly what is going to be set up again sometime between now and the end of December when those provisions expire. So, that's what could certainly happen in the Congress, what they did before.

That's where I'll leave it. I certainly will entertain any further discussion about the MDA and the U.S.-British nuclear sharing arrangements.

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