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Author's Response to Ralph Dietl's, "A Veiled Challenge. Anglo-French Nuclear Co-operation, 1959-1960," an H-Diplo Article Review of Mervyn O'Driscoll, "Explosive Challenge: Diplomatic Triangles, the United Nations, and the Problem of French Nuclear Testing, 1959-1960," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11:1 (Winter 2009): 28-56. DOI: 10.1162/jcws.2009.11.1.28. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/jcws.2009.11.1.28> .

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR229-Response.pdf>The original review may be found at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR229.pdf>Author's Response by **Mervyn O'Driscoll**, University College Cork*A Nuclear Chimera? Anglo-French nuclear diplomacy*

Ralph Dietl's "A Veiled Challenge" is a lengthy effort to review "Explosive Challenge" in a global, regional and sub-regional framework.¹ However, Dietl appears to misread the objective and significance of "Explosive Challenge", and he overplays his case somewhat. In doing so, he uses the review as an opportunity to make the case that an incipient *entente cordiale* was in train during 1959, underlining a conclusion of "Explosive Challenge" (O'Driscoll, p. 56). He goes further and proposes that the "United Kingdom was interested in creating a window of opportunity for France to proceed with her national nuclear program in order to establish an Anglo-French regional hegemony in the future order of Europe" (Dietl, p. 6). Here, Dietl offers a fascinating and valuable construal of the United Kingdom's role in the world order in 1959 and 1960 (Dietl, p. 2), and he possesses strong credentials to comment on the general area of American-European relations. His extensive review is informed by his two-volume work on Western security policy and associated work, and is worthy of both careful consideration and comment.² Nonetheless, it is not the intention of this reply to engage in a detailed

¹ Ralph Dietl, "A Veiled Challenge. Anglo-French Nuclear Co-operation, 1959-1960," *H-Diplo Article Reviews*, No. 229, 11 May 2009. <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR229.pdf>; Mervyn O'Driscoll, "Explosive Challenge: Diplomatic Triangles, the United Nations, and the Problem of French Nuclear Testing, 1959-1960," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 11: 1 (Winter 2009), pp. 28 - 56.

² Ralph Dietl, *Emanzipation und Kontrolle. Europa in der westlichen Sicherheitspolitik, 1948-1963*, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006/07).

assessment of Dietl's propositions as that would require a full-length scholarly article. My forthcoming monograph on Anglo-French nuclear cooperation will address some of these issues, so this reply is restricted to select general observations, analytical questions and interpretive issues.³

At the outset it is necessary to reiterate the subject of "Explosive Challenge": how did the Anglo-Americans, particularly the British, respond to the upsurge of criticism at the United Nations against the long anticipated first French nuclear test series (O'Driscoll, 28)? The article noted that Charles de Gaulle retrospectively alleged that an "Anglo-Saxon" campaign was waged to increase international public anxieties about the health effects of nuclear testing, with the connotation that it was part of an "Anglo-Saxon" conspiracy to stoke international opprobrium against the forthcoming French tests. This represented a provocative but imprecise charge by a former head of state that could be construed as an attack against the governments of the UK and the United States.

"Explosive Challenge" was not intended to offer an exposition on Western nuclear policy and Western strategic relationships, although some background and linkages were recognized. It was not appropriate to engage in a lengthy historiographical debate about the nature and operation of the Euro-Atlantic security community. My forthcoming book will consider the perennial bugbear of Anglo-French nuclear cooperation and elaborate on these relationships and issues.

In contrast, "Explosive Challenge" focused on a specific set of interlinked issues revealed from a detailed reading of the records of the United Nations and the official archives of the UK and U.S. governments. The records consulted related to rising international disquiet about the first French test series and the resulting climactic debates in the fourteenth session of the United Nations during autumn 1959. The network of interconnected concerns that made British policymakers apprehensive was, in particular, the impact of the tests on British efforts to manage decolonization effectively in Britain's best interests, the growth of the non-aligned movement in the UN, and the advisability of accommodating de Gaulle in a form of a "package deal" which might include a nuclear dimension in order to induce reconciliation on European regional integration. The latter was an increasingly potent influence. The central argument was that the British accommodation of French sensitivities to tackle the international public's uproar was an early step in the direction of scoping a deal with de Gaulle. However, Dietl devotes negligible acknowledgement to this dimension of any overall Anglo-French "deal". It is notable Dietl expends very limited space to addressing the actual case study expanded on in "Explosive Challenge".

Even as Dietl seeks to qualify certain aspects of "Explosive Challenge" he agrees with its overall interpretative thrust, essentially, that the UK was seeking to reposition itself in order to "build bridges" to France and thus reach a compromise over the Common

³ Manuscript in preparation for consideration by appropriate publishers.

Market. He largely concurs that the United States' global interests and overarching Atlantic interests in the fields of nuclear non-proliferation and decolonization limited its flexibility to bend to the UK's desires (Dietl, pp. 2, 9). Dietl accepts the argument that issue linkages are frequently overlooked by public opinion, and that issue linkages resulted in British and to a lesser extent American support for France against the anti-testing lobby in the fourteenth session of the United Nations in 1959 (Dietl, p. 9). While "A Veiled Challenge" draws upon concepts and terms such as systems, multi-level bargaining, two-level games, secret diplomacy, and public diplomacy as analytical tools, they are nevertheless inherent constituents of the substance of the argument of "Explosive Challenge".

Dietl's explanations of de Gaulle's motivations in making a retrospective claim that the "Anglo-Saxons" purposively provoked or stoked popular international criticism of the proposed French tests are plausible, if uncorroborated (Dietl, p. 9). However, does Dietl's suggestion that de Gaulle in 1970 "might" be seeking to conceal embarrassing Anglo-French defense discussions in 1959 or to compose an epitaph to his political career negate the fact that he made the imprecise allegation? Should de Gaulle's assertion stand without question or correction on the public record? Counterfactuals are useful tools, but in this case Dietl's contention is just that, a counterfactual. No evidence is forthcoming from Dietl to dispense with the findings delineated in "Explosive Challenge". In response to Dietl's counterfactual it could logically be contended that despite the disputes within the Anglo-American-French nuclear triangle and about the nature of NATO, both the UK and U.S. Governments had a lot to lose by encouraging the international protest against French tests. The internal UK appraisal of its position in 1959 as outlined in "Explosive Challenge" drew just such conclusions.

More seriously, Dietl asserts that "Explosive Challenge" presents no evidence to prove or disprove that the UK and/or U.S. did or did not stoke an international outcry against the French tests in 1959 (Dietl, p. 9). The article was a result of an intensive examination of the records which revealed no evidence that the highest levels of the British Government and American Government conspired to provoke an international outcry. Conversely, such evidence as exists in the UK cabinet records indicates that the UK endeavored to temper UN protests against the expected first French test despite possessing competing interests in relation to East-West relations, the Commonwealth and the colonies.⁴ Neither does evidence exist that the highest levels of the U.S. administration intensified international condemnation, even though agreed U.S. policy was opposed to French nuclear ambitions and was concerned about the complications it created in East-West arms control and disarmament talks. Official UK and U.S. archives (UK Cabinet, UK Foreign Office, UK Prime Minister, U.S. State Department, or U.S. Presidential records), the personal papers of UK cabinet ministers and the public record of the United Nations were utilized in building the case in "Explosive Challenge". The currently available evidential base all points in one direction – there was no Anglo-American conspiracy to

⁴ See, for example, "Explosive Challenge," p. 49 n. 99, 100.

pressurize France to halt its planned first test series by purposefully fuelling an international uproar on the basis of accessible evidence.

The objective of “Explosive Challenge” was thus to take a neglected high profile international issue as a case study and consider its implications with particular attention to Macmillan’s detectable efforts to reorient the UK towards the European Economic Community, and to discuss the repercussions for the Commonwealth. A major difference of approach and perspective exists between “A Veiled Challenge” and “Explosive Challenge”. “Explosive Challenge” adopts a case study method, i.e., examining Anglo-American diplomatic management of a particular challenge, the approaching first French nuclear test series (O’Driscoll, pp. 28, 29). By contrast, Dietl delivers a macro-analysis of the dynamics and structures of the UK’s diplomacy in the “Euro-Atlantic security system”. It lays out a form of framework to explicate this system, the UK’s position within it and its various constituent subsystems. The approaches are complementary.

Anglo-French nuclear cooperation feelers and discussions were an ongoing process that long predated 1959. For instance, an Anglo-French steering committee for defense cooperation founded in early 1957 periodically discussed the possibility of cooperation on nuclear matters with little or no prospect of success on the basis of commercial, technological and logistical differences, in addition to the counter-proliferatory consequences of the Anglo-American nuclear agreement of 1958.⁵ The so-called “secret” defense links of 1959 were not a new phenomenon but part of an ongoing Anglo-French dialogue between officials (Dietl, p. 8). These links showed limited prospect of success in the nuclear area, despite periodic hopes that the nuclear cooperation card would act as a catalyst for a greater Anglo-French convergence of interests and policies. The U.S. was frequently concerned about any hint of an Anglo-French nuclear *entente cordiale* during the 1950s and 1960s. There were intermittent intimations that Macmillan and some of his closest advisers reflexively toyed with the idea, and these grew more frequent and urgent just prior to and during the UK’s first application to join the EEC. Occasional feasibility studies by British officials and ministers repeatedly concluded that there was little basis for fruitful collaboration particularly if the United Kingdom had to unilaterally gift information to the French derived from American sources. Only an overriding political willingness from the top-level could overcome this.

In this regard, Dietl neglects the Anglo-American special relationship as a factor, or else fails to acknowledge its influence in the debate on Anglo-French relations in the nuclear and strategic arena specifically. The strategic options open to the UK government were stark: either abandon the Anglo-American “Special Relationship” and embrace France and Europe as an alternative or persuade the U.S. to include France in a form of enlarged

⁵ For example, see Mervyn O’Driscoll, “‘Les Anglo-Saxons’, F-I-G and the Rival Carolingian and Atlanticist Conceptions of ‘Advanced’ Armaments Research & Development, 1957–8,” *Journal of European Integration History*, 4:1 (1998), pp. 105–30. Dietl has also considered Anglo-French links most notably in *Emanzipation und Kontrolle*, Vols. I – II, and “‘Une Deception Amoureuse’: Great Britain, the Continent and European Nuclear Cooperation, 1953–57,” *Cold War History*, 3: 1 (October 2002), pp. 29 – 66.

trilateral “Special Relationship”. Here there was a “basic split” between the Anglo-Americans and France in 1959.⁶ Macmillan considered the maintenance of the “Special Relationship” paramount in his conduct of UK foreign policy following the UK’s bruising experience at the hands of American dollar diplomacy during the Suez crisis. He was not hopelessly disillusioned with it in 1959. In that respect Macmillan granted the “special relationship” and the resultant restored Anglo-American nuclear weapons cooperation arrangement (1958) structural power to inhibit his freedom of maneuver. Macmillan was gradually recognizing that de Gaulle’s interests had to be addressed and accommodated in some way during 1959, and that it was in the best interests of the United Kingdom to accomplish this if it was in the realm of the possible. Serious difficulties existed within this triangular relationship, particularly in security matters between the U.S. and France. The UK attempted to play a mediating role with a view to settling the European economic organization dispute to its advantage as well. However, Macmillan would not compromise Anglo-American relations to do so. That is the overriding weakness of Dietl’s perspective: Macmillan’s ability to meet de Gaulle’s demands was limited by the U.S. position in 1959 and it would continue to do so until 1962. Efforts to soften the conflicting American and French visions and positions were insufficient without a fundamental alteration of either side’s perspective. In the absence of a Franco-American convergence the UK adhered to a US-dominated Atlanticist vision of European security as the U.S. was the underwriter of the entire Euro-Atlantic security community.

It is correct to observe that the pattern of intra-Alliance relations that were to come to dominate Gaullist era later still had not settled into what statesmen would consider an immutable pattern in 1959.⁷ Successful trilateral negotiations to address de Gaulle’s requests for nuclear cooperation (either British or American), a tridirectorate of the West (especially NATO), and respect for national sovereignty were considered attainable by Macmillan and to a lesser extent by Eisenhower. The Franco-German axis remained fragile at this early stage in 1959. Macmillan with his strong belief in personal diplomacy and summitry supposed he could intercede between Eisenhower and de Gaulle, recognizing that on some issues the UK was closer to the French position than it was to that of the United States, but there was no serious indication that Britain was considering any fundamental reorientation in British foreign policy away from the U.S. towards France at this early stage in October and November 1959. In mid to late 1959 Macmillan was beginning to appreciate that the reaching of a gentleman’s agreement with de Gaulle’s France was critical to maintaining Britain’s declining world role, and he was unable to reach this Anglo-French understanding without U.S. permission to share nuclear technology as part of a “package deal”. As usual Macmillan was “feeling his way” in an evolving situation. It was only in 1960 that he began to favor a nuclear deal with France. Even then he was only prepared to drop hints to de Gaulle. Macmillan’s

⁶ Dietl, “A Veiled Challenge,” p. 8; O’Driscoll, “Explosive Challenge,” p. 36.

⁷ See Jeffrey Glen Giaque, *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Western Europe, 1955-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002), pp. 89 – 90.

Government always relied upon U.S. consent to any prospective Anglo-French nuclear collaboration between 1960 and 1962. This raises the crucial issue of timeframe.

The primary empirical focus of “Explosive Challenge” is the international uproar of the summer and autumn of 1959 in anticipation of the first French test series in early 1960. The British adjusted their attitude towards the French test from one of non-engagement to one of open support for France’s right to test despite the complications this created. November 1959 is interpreted as a significant indication of change in Macmillan’s policy towards de Gaulle’s France generally (O’Driscoll, p. 55, 56). At that point Macmillan had secured his domestic political power base by leading the Conservative Party to an overwhelming electoral victory and he commenced a policy of active engagement of France to overcome disagreement in relation to the economic organization of Western Europe, negotiation with the Soviet Union, trilateralism and nuclear cooperation in particular. Unconcerned with matters of domestic political popularity and government tenure he was emboldened to engage France by expressions of French gratefulness for the adoption of a position of British reasonableness over the French right to test. He considered that a ground for mutual accommodation existed. “Explosive Challenge” makes no pretence to systematically analyse the post-November 1959 period in terms of British policy or the Euro-Atlantic community. It simply observes that British policy on French nuclear testing in 1959 was a missing component of previous assessments of Britain’s reorientation toward the EEC, France and Western Europe in the winter of 1959/60. However, “A Veiled Challenge” does not appear to acknowledge this. Most of the initiatives undertaken by Macmillan to connect with de Gaulle commence at this point. Ironically, Dietl underlines the conclusion of “Explosive Challenge” that November was a key point in rejuvenating Anglo-French diplomatic cooperation by introducing additional evidence (Dietl, pp. 7 - 8).

It is evident that Dietl’s comments focus heavily on a short background section, “The Nuclear Triangle” of “Explosive Challenge” (Dietl, p. 2). As his exposition exemplifies, the field of Euro-Atlantic security is complex and multifaceted. The internal dynamics of Euro-Atlantic security, particularly in the nuclear domain, and the motivations of the players involved were evolving and subject to circumstance particularly in the post-Sputnik and post-Suez period. That is a worthwhile debate, but not the focus of “Explosive Challenge”. The literature elucidating Euro-Atlantic security is voluminous and growing. Indeed Dietl’s recent work in this area underlines this point.

In sum, “A Veiled Challenge” is a thought provoking review but it is possibly misdirected in a number of ways. Even as it agrees with the core assumptions and findings of “Explosive Challenge”, inter alia it overwhelmingly focuses on a general background introductory section and fails to fully appreciate the timeframe of the empirical case study. It underestimates the constraints (self-imposed or otherwise) of the “Special Relationship”. Dietl also tends to neglect the linkages between European economic questions and the Euro-Atlantic security nest of issues. “A Veiled Challenge” introduces several devices and conceptual tools to the discussion following on from the mention of

issue linkage in “Explosive Challenge”. These are potentially a useful addition to the discussion and might be profitable. Dietl momentarily introduces Robert Putnam’s two-level game concept (Dietl, p. 9), for instance, but it might be worth considering applying it to the entire Euro-Atlantic framework. The Euro-Atlantic system could be considered as an adapted two-level game (or a multi-level game) between numerous actors involving several issue linkages or “issue systems” in an interdependent world. This would combine an adapted vertical approach á la Putnam with James Rosenau’s horizontal approach.⁸ Tsebelis’ nested game approach might also be considered.⁹ There is good reason to suggest that the systematic and careful application of such concepts and tools allied to empirical research might offer some constructive insights into the complex bargaining and negotiating environment of the Euro-Atlantic system at the time. Other analytical tools might also usefully be considered for incorporation into a syncretic approach. Human agency would have to be considered, as well as the notion of transnational networks and advocacy.¹⁰ Indeed human agency is underplayed in Dietl’s analysis. Nonetheless, “A Veiled Challenge” offers an interesting and a somewhat complementary perspective to “Explosive Challenge”, even if there are some analytical and interpretive divergences and some misunderstandings of intent.

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⁸ See Sarah Collinson, “‘Issue-systems,’ ‘multi-level games’ and the analysis of the EU’s external commercial and associated policies: a research agenda,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, 6: 2 (June 1999), pp. 206-24.

⁹ For the original conceptualisation of nested games see George Tsebelis, *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). This original comparative politics approach has since been applied widely to European Union and international bargaining.

¹⁰ Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation among Democracies: The European Influence on US Foreign Policy* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Pascaline Winand, *Eisenhower, Kennedy and the United States of Europe* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993)