3 A Quid Pro Quo Deal?

Once it was decided that Britain must join the Community, the British met – as we have seen – with a well-prepared French resistance tactic. In Macmillan’s eyes the only way to overcome this seemed to be a deal with de Gaulle, and what else of real value could the British possibly offer to the General, but help with his force de frappe programme. The whole idea had, however, a catch to it: it could only be realised by the exclusion of Germany, and as such went against the foundations of de Gaulle’s Europe. A question of prime importance, therefore, should have been, how de Gaulle could convince Adenauer that the British ideas about nuclear matters were good for Europe. Thus Britain found herself in a fundamentally different position from the United States, whose strong and open opposition to European nuclear co-operation Adenauer had to expect at this moment. The most important catch was, however, that the British government was bound up in nuclear matters with the Americans, whose agreement was thus urgently required. This chapter will follow up the British decision to try such a deal with de Gaulle, considering what was in the deal, how the British approached the new American Administration, and attempt to establish how far Macmillan was prepared to go over this matter.

3.1 THE ‘NUCLEAR CARD’

As soon as the Prime Minister’s questionnaire had been tabled and it had become clear that the British government was planning to go ‘into Europe’, speculation as raised in Whitehall and the embassies about how to deal with the Frenchman. While most of these speculations still considered a bit of informal tripartism and support for a confederal Europe would do the job, the British ambassador to Paris, Lord Gladwyn, came to the conclusion that this was not going to be enough. Analysing de Gaulle’s speech of 31 May 1960, on international affairs, he suggested a deal over ‘triptisme’ or ‘atomic energy’ and offered
himself as an intermediary. Macmillan agreed, but foresaw already that it was not a question of an ‘or’ but an ‘and’:

Political infiltration really means doing a deal with the French. I can see what they want and I have always thought it might be worth doing. Support them in this general attitude towards NATO, give them the Bomb, perhaps some V-bombers and generally support the idea of a Confederation of Europe instead of a Federation.

Or, in the words of his Private Secretary, Philip de Zulueta: ‘we must find a bigger card’. Accordingly the issue of a nuclear deal featured prominently in Macmillan’s Grand Design at the turn of the year. Supposing that de Gaulle would sign the Test Agreement in Geneva, Macmillan foresaw good support from the Americans so that the General would get his nuclear weapon virtually for free. In order to ‘avoid a straight nuclear deal’ (which could have been exploited by de Gaulle in public and seriously harmed Anglo-American relations at this stage) Macmillan developed the following formula: ‘to give France the satisfaction of a nominally “independent nuclear force” while subjecting them … to moral constraints [comparable with the Anglo-Americans]’.

Finally, however, Macmillan did not reach Cabinet agreement on the form of such a deal. The Chequers discussions ended inconclusively: Sir Norman Brook advocated, with the knowledge of the Prime Minister, a ‘system of pooling nuclear forces … to direct France’s nuclear aspirations and preventing the emergence of a German nuclear force’. Meanwhile the Minister of Defence still argued that by accepting France as a nuclear power a joint control in NATO on tactical (nuclear) weapons and consultation about their usage outside of NATO would enable Britain to keep its independent deterrent. There was, however, general agreement that de Gaulle should be offered a somehow more concrete tripartite co-operation, which could even involve some degree of institutionalisation for matters outside of NATO.

3.2 FIRST APPROACHES TO THE AMERICANS

The initial approach to the new American administration over the issue was carefully planned. First attempts to outline such