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# Britain and Disarmament The UK and Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons Arms Control and Programmes 1956-1975

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# Britain and Disarmament

The UK and Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons  
Arms Control and Programmes 1956-1975



John R. Walker



# INTRODUCTION

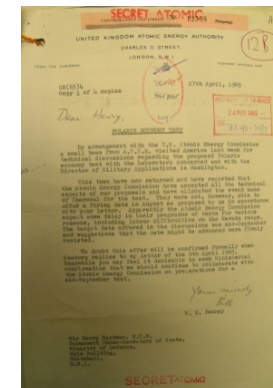
- > First time UK NBC programmes and arms control policies examined in detail based on primary sources drawn from wide range of government departments: AB, AIR, AVIA, CAB, CJ, DEFE, FCO, FO, PREM, WO and T.
- > **Not** an official history – personal views only.
- > Contents.
- > Origins.
- > Key Points.
- > Common themes.
- > UK and arms control.
- > Personalities.





# CONTENTS (1)

- > Three nuclear weapons chapters.
- > Three on Chemical Weapons.
- > Three on Biological Weapons.
- > Annex on draft Biological Weapons Conventions.
- > Chronology of some main events.
- > List of full National Archives files consulted/cited.





## CONTENTS (2)

- 1 Introduction: Britain and Disarmament: Weapons Programmes and Arms Control: Balancing Conflicting Requirements
- 2 The UK's Offensive CW Programmes: Abandonment and Aspirations 1956–1969
- 3 'Inappropriately Hilarious': The UK and Incapacitating Chemical Agents
- 4 A Tale of Two Riot Control Agents: UK Attitudes to CS and the 1925 Geneva Protocol and CR in Warfare and Law Enforcement 1969–1975
- 5 The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention: Origins of the UK Proposal to Separate BW from CW 1968
- 6 The UK and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention Negotiating History: March–September 1971: The Key Months



## CONTENTS (3)

7. The UK and Why 'Research' Was Dropped from the Draft Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
- 8 The UK Nuclear Weapons Programme, Fissile Material Cut-off and Safeguards 1956–1973
- 9 UK Nuclear Weapons, the Atlantic Nuclear Force (ANF) and the NPT 1962–1968
- 10 UK Nuclear Weapons and the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks 1969–1973
- 11 Conclusions: Britain and Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Arms Control and Disarmament

# ORIGINS



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- > Three nuclear chapters emerged from AHRC UK nuclear weapons history project at Southampton University 2005-2007.
- > UK weapons programme and arms control: NPT, cut-off, SALT/ABM, CTBT.
- > Other chapters' origins go back to mid 1980s.
- > Why did the UK abandon its offensive CW programme? Background for UK negotiations for the CWC in mid 1980s. Nobody knew. What about continuing interests in offensive programmes?
- > What was the origin of the BTWC? And what were the issues at the time? What was ACDRU's role?
- > How was the BTWC concluded? Lessons for CWC and on-going work.
- > Was offensive research covered?
- > History of UK interest in incapacitants and decision on CS – impacts /relevance for current policy preoccupations.
- > What about common themes? Longstanding interests? Wider lessons? Role of history in supporting policy.



## KEY POINTS: NUCLEAR

- > Early work on verification: CIRCUS at Windscale for cut-off.
- > Challenges of ensuring effective verification for disarmament treaties whilst maintaining defence interests.
- > Importance of contingency planning: cf responses to threat of cut-off in 1960s.
- > Key requirement to maintain UK-US cooperation and exchanges under 1958/59 and 1963 Agreements.
- > Need for UK to be seen to taking supportive role in disarmament and not as an obstacle.
- > Shortages of fissile material seemingly a constant problem for UK to meet weapons programme requirements.
- > Polaris Improvement Programme; coping with ABM developments and need for US assistance.
- > Were UK concerns over US cooperation being curtailed ever a real risk?





## KEY POINTS: CHEMICAL

- > Programme abandoned for essentially economic reasons: could not afford to replace old stockpile and produce GB nerve agent: summer 1956.
- > Recurring feature in UK defence policy: commitments and resources.
- > Suez crises prevented UK from informing Eisenhower.
- > By early 1960s interest in getting back into offensive programme: 1963.
- > Particular interest in incapacitating agents to meet range of out-of-area scenarios; interest in VX and GB – US support needed.
- > Conservative government's decision never fully implemented by Harold Wilson's Labour Governments: resources the main issue.
- > Incapacitants: finding safe and effective agent a major challenge.
- > CS no longer seen as falling under 1925 Geneva Protocol: Cabinet decisions, one of few occasions when CB arms control considered at this level. Previous occasion was decision to launch BWC initiative.
- > Acute anxieties over the use of CR in Northern Ireland.



## KEY POINTS: BIOLOGICAL

- > One of ACDRU's first task on formation in 1965 – review CB policy issues.
- > Decision to go for a separate BW treaty emerged from UK requirement to look for initiatives post completion of NPT.
- > US concerns over CB – Vietnam and CS & defoliants, but no objections to UK raising issue – but no separate treaty.
- > MOD concerns about FCO initiatives – role of Denis Healey.
- > Ideas developed under aegis of Cabinet Office sub-committee led by Sir Solly Zuckerman.
- > Working Paper developed for ENDC – notes that verification as term then understood not possible, focus on investigations into use. USSR accepted separate BW ban – March 1971. Moscow summit most important objective.
- > No explicit mention of offensive prohibition – but exchanges with Soviet diplomats implies that covered nevertheless.

# COMMON THEMES



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- > Interest in effective treaties – verification and compliance.
- > UK to be seen in a leading role – concerns over public perceptions.
- > Defence requirements to be sustained whilst committing to arms control; avoiding being obliged to make stark choices.
- > Much contingency planning; anxieties over US-USSR arms control constraining UK capabilities at key stage in programme.
- > Dependence on US – even in chemical warfare: rely on US CW deterrent and for supply of nerve agent.
- > UK to be in leading role in negotiations – careful and sustained commitments.

# UK AND ARMS CONTROL



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- > UK active in all areas; nuclear, chemical and biological; directly and indirectly. Just how big an impact on US thinking in SALT/ABM?
- > Bipartisan: Labour /Conservative governments committed to active role.
- > Ministers only rarely engaged in arms control matters – mostly in 1960s; technical work and detailed negotiations undertaken by senior officials.
- > MOD-FCO differences most marked over CBW arms control.
- > Resource constraints: recurring themes.
- > Much more to be said – other areas available to study at TNA; NPT Article III, 1977-1980 Trilateral Test Ban negotiations; SALT II 1973-1979; chemical weapons – UK draft Convention 1976 and First BTWC Review Conference; General and Complete Disarmament; UK and safeguards under the NPT.
- > Themes from 1950s and 1960s can be seen echoed in 1980s and 1990s.



# PERSONALITIES

- > Sir Solly Zuckerman.
- > Vic Macklen.
- > Henry Hainworth.
- > David Summerhayes.
- > Ronald Hope-Jones.
- > Hedley Bull.
- > Clive Rose.
- > Denis Healey.
- > Fred Mulley.
- > William Whitelaw.
- > Mervyn Rees.
- > Lord Carrington.
- > Lord Home.



# New book...

## Britain and Disarmament



The UK and Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons Arms Control and Programmes 1956-1975

John R. Walker, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK

Through a thorough exploration of British government records, this book explores the UK's nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programmes and attempts to control them between 1956 and 1975.

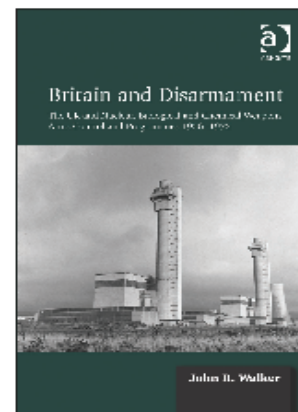
It addresses issues concerning the military, economic and political pressures that influenced policy; the degree to which the UK was a reluctant or enthusiastic player on the international arms control stage; and the effect of international agreements on Britain's weapons programmes. In so doing, it provides the first attempt to assess Britain's NBC arms control policy and practice during the Cold War.

**Contents:** Glossary; Chronology of key events: Britain and disarmament 1956–1975; Introduction: Britain and disarmament: weapons programmes and arms control: balancing conflicting requirements; The UK's offensive CW programmes: abandonment and aspirations 1956–1969; 'Inappropriately hilarious': the UK and incapacitating chemical agents; A tale of two riot control agents: UK attitudes to CS and the 1925 Geneva Protocol and CR in warfare and law enforcement 1969–1975; The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention: origins of the UK

proposal to separate BW from CW 1968; The UK and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention negotiating history: March–September 1971: the key months; The UK and why 'research' was dropped from the draft Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention; The UK nuclear weapons

programme, fissile material cut-off and safeguards 1956–1973; UK nuclear weapons, the Atlantic Nuclear Force (ANF) and the NPT 1962–1968; UK nuclear weapons and the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks 1969–1973; Conclusions: Britain and nuclear, chemical and biological arms control and disarmament; Annex; Bibliography; Index.

Also from Ashgate by John Walker:  
*British Nuclear Weapons and the Test Ban 1954–1973*  
ISBN 978-1-4094-1112-3 - 2010 - £75.00



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