

Topic Overview

What is a ballistic missile?

A ballistic missile is so-called because it is initially powered by a rocket engine until it leaves the Earth's atmosphere. At this point the engine cuts out and the missile falls towards a preprogrammed target along a ballistic trajectory under the pull of the Earth's gravity, much like a thrown ball; hence the term 'ballistic' (Stocker, 2004b, p.2). The most common type are Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), which are capable of carrying several nuclear warheads distances of several thousand kilometers at speeds of up to 7km a second (Schlosser, 2013, p.226)

What is ballistic missile defence?

Ballistic missile defence (BMD) is an outgrowth of the nuclear arms race and is an attempt to circumvent the logic of mutually assured destruction. It is a US military system which is intended to detect, track, differentiate between decoys and intercept incoming ballistic missiles armed with weapons of mass destruction (Carter and Schwartz, 1984, p.97). Radars and satellites detect the launch of incoming ballistic missiles and calculate their trajectory. This information is then passed to command and control centres that launch missiles containing self-guiding rocket propelled 'hit-to-kill' vehicles from silos in US territory and AEGIS cruisers which slam into and destroy the incoming missiles with blunt impact kinetic energy (Kadish cited in Stocker and Weinack, 2003, p.68). This process has been likened to hitting a bullet with a bullet (Armbruster cited in Ranger et al., 2002, p.108), except that it is much more difficult as ballistic missiles at full speed travel at around 7km a second, much faster than the muzzle velocity of even powerful rifles (Hruska, 2014). An attack is also likely to be en-masse, containing thousands of missiles, and each missile in turn may release decoys to confuse any would-be defence system (Carter and Schwartz, 1984, p.52). Therefore the technical and computational challenge of making BMD work is immense.

The history of ballistic missile defence

Ever since the Germans began developing ballistic missiles during the Second World War the US has been researching ways of destroying them (Futter, 2012, p.9). This research was inconsistent during the Cold War of the 50s and 60s, as it was deemed to undermine the strategic stability gained from mutually assured destruction (ibid, p.12). The Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty signed by the US and USSR in 1972 (with a protocol adding further restrictions in 1974) massively restricted research on ballistic missile defence (ibid, p.13). Research on BMD began again in earnest when President Reagan announced the Strategic Defence Initiative, commonly known as 'Star Wars' (ibid, p.15). However, Reagan's proposed project and subsequent scaled-back versions of it - George HW Bush's Global Positioning Against Limited Strikes (GPALS) or 'Brilliant Pebbles', Clinton's National Missile Defence - did not break through the constraints of the ABM Treaty (ibid, p.5). It was not until the Bush

Jr administration that the ABM Treaty was abandoned by the US and research and development on BMD expanded to unprecedented levels (ibid, p.6).

Ballistic missile defence operational status 1997-2010

During the period with which this study is concerned – 1997 to 2010 – BMD technology advanced considerably and several components of its overall system became operational and were deemed able to defend against a limited ballistic missile attack on the US homeland by Iran or North Korea (Department of Defense, 2010, p.iv). By 2010 this architecture included: 26 ground-based midcourse interceptor silos at Fort Greely, Alaska, and 4 at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California; upgraded radars in Alaska, California, Greenland and the UK (RAF Fylingdales), along with Sea-Based X-band (short-wavelength high-resolution) radars mounted on towable oil-rig platforms; Aegis destroyers and cruisers; all linked via a sophisticated command and control infrastructure (ibid, p.15) including RAF Menwith Hill.

The UK's role in BMD

Two vital components of the US BMD system are located in North Yorkshire; RAF Fylingdales, and RAF Menwith Hill. Menwith Hill became operational in 1960 as a communications hub and listening post for the US military (CND, 2012, p.32). In 1997 it also became the European relay ground station for the Space Based Infra-Red System (SBIRS); a satellite system which would detect the heat signatures of ballistic missiles launched anywhere on earth (Taylor, 2008, p.5). In 2003 Menwith Hill received further upgrades which would enable the detection of launches to be fed into the US BMD system (ibid, p.19). RAF Fylingdales radar base was built in 1963 in order to detect the launch of Soviet nuclear missiles aimed at the UK, Western Europe and the US (Ministry of Defence, 2002, p.22). This information would then have been passed to UK and US command which would have retaliated with their own nuclear weapons. In 2003 software and hardware upgrades at Fylingdales made it also capable of tracking incoming ballistic missiles as part of the US BMD system (Stocker, 2004b, p.195).

The UK's relationship with the US in the context of international relations and its impact on BMD

In order to understand the Labour government's decision to agree to the upgrades of the UK sites it is important to examine the UK's relationship with the US within the structure of the international environment. In an anarchical international system in which there is no universal authority, states must do what they can to maximize their power in order to deter attack by potential aggressors (Dyson, 2009 p.11). Therefore, in order to augment its power in this anarchic international system and gain protection, the UK allies itself with US foreign and defence policy. This is made easier due to the linguistic, cultural and historical affinity between the UK and US; sometimes referred to as the 'special relationship' (Casey, 2009, p.284). This pressure from the international system is a structural constraint on British governments of whatever party. Hence the integration of Fylingdales and Menwith Hill into US BMD

architecture is just another facet of this drive. Essentially the British government's decision to upgrade Fylingdales and Menwith Hill was a continuing hedge to ensure the UK would come under the umbrella of BMD's protection as the system matured. A concrete illustration of this thinking is shown in the following statement made in the House of Commons by Foreign Secretary Geoff Hoon in January 2003, and is worth quoting at length:

the key consideration is that it would represent an invaluable extra insurance against the development of a still uncertain, but potentially catastrophic, threat to the citizens of this country. There is not yet an immediate threat to us of this kind, but there is a distinct possibility that this threat could materialise in the relatively near future. It would therefore be irresponsible for the Government to leave the United Kingdom without a route map to acquire a defence against this threat. An upgraded Fylingdales radar would be a vital building-block on which missile defence for this country and for our European neighbours could later be developed, if the need arises and if we so decide (Taylor, 2008, p.9).

In addition, the UK stood to gain industrial and business benefits from its involvement in BMD. Also in 2003, Hoon and the US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two countries. Specifically this MOU established the UK Missile Defence Centre (MDC), intended to be a forum for the exchange of scientific and technical information between US and UK defence companies, and an interface between the MOD and the US Missile Defence Agency (ibid, p.16).

The international context overshadowing BMD

As a foreign policy and defence issue, the last Labour government's involvement in BMD was almost entirely eclipsed – both as a news story and as a topic of academic investigation – by 9/11 and the UK's subsequent involvement in the invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq and the resulting domestic counter-terror situation. Perhaps this is understandable; though the funding stream for BMD research and development in the US ran into the tens of billions during this period (Kadish cited in Stocker and Weinack, 2003, p.70), in 2002 the British equivalent amounted to £4 million a year (Youngs and Taylor, 2003, p.56). Moreover, despite the upgrades to the two Yorkshire sites, their mission remained largely similar to that set during the Cold War, and so media outlets perhaps deemed it not very newsworthy. Had the US decided to place interceptor missiles themselves in the UK however, then BMD could have become a live issue. Both the American and British governments stated that 9/11 had strengthened the case for BMD (Smith, 2005, p.459; Futter, 2012, p.125) since it demonstrated the lengths determined aggressors might go to; next time the attack could be from a nuclear tipped ballistic missile.

Labour, the EU, NATO and BMD

BMD had a divisive impact on the UK's relationships with NATO and the EU. This was because Blair wanted to be both a good European and a good Atlanticist (Clarke cited in

Seldon, 2001, p.611), and prevent a decoupling of the US and EU over defence issues. To this end he sought the UK to play a role as a bridge between the EU and the US in foreign and defence issues (Vickers, 2011, p.175). However, this course of action faced several challenges in regards to BMD. First of all was the fact that most EU member states, though also NATO members, were highly sceptical of ballistic missile defence (Stocker, 2004b, p.17). They tended to prefer diplomacy and international arms limitation treaties as a source of strategic stability and believed that a missile defence shield would only serve to encourage missile proliferation (ibid, p.ix). However, they were also aware of their geographical proximity to states of concern, particularly in the Middle East, and that it would be politically and technically difficult for EU members to develop their own missile defence shield separately to NATO (ibid, p.23). The US also needed European cooperation on BMD since several components had to be based there in order for the system to provide early warning of launches from the Eastern hemisphere (ibid).

There were also several outstanding questions about BMD's place in NATO's existing military alliance command structure; would BMD cover all European NATO member states or just those that hosted components of the system? Bush Jr had stated that over time BMD would cover all US allies (Ranger et al., 2002, p.44); so was BMD to be an integral part of the NATO defence architecture or something outside or additional to it? In due course the US sought to deal negotiate directly with individual EU/NATO member states about the possibility of placing BMD components on their soil, which would form a core part of NATO's mission (Futter, 2012, p.36). Though plans by the Bush administration in 2007 to have placed BMD radars and interceptor missiles in the Czech Republic and Poland by 2013 (Hildreath and Ek, 2010, p.1) were shelved by the Obama administration in 2009, which duly announced its own plan to place similar components in Romania by 2015 and Poland by 2018 (Arms Control Association, 2013). The EU itself acquiesced in these developments (Stocker, 2004a, p.2). The UK was caught in the middle and ultimately chose to side more with the US than the EU on the BMD issue (Sperling cited in Brown, 2010, p.31) since it was already well integrated into BMD via Fylingdales and Menwith Hill (Smith, 2005, p.452).

Tony Blair's foreign policy outlook and BMD

An examination of Labour's decision to upgrade Fylingdales and Menwith Hill would not be complete without taking into account the influence of Tony Blair's particular foreign policy outlook. Blair was Prime Minister from 1997 to 2007, just over 10 years of the slightly under 13 years in total that Labour was in power. Hence the foreign and defence policy decisions the Labour government took during his term of office were heavily influenced by his leadership. On the rare occasions that Blair did address BMD directly – detailed negotiations and statements being made by various Defence secretaries – he stated that he was not opposed to the US developing such a system (Butler, 2003) and allegedly unsuccessfully lobbied for interceptor missiles to be based in the UK (Taylor, 2008, p.19). Examining numerous foreign policy statements made by Blair on wider foreign and defence issues, it may be inferred that Blair supported BMD and the UK's involvement in it for the following reasons:

1. The need to promote the UK's national interest by maintaining the alliance with the US (Dyson, 2009, p.7); agreeing to upgrade Fylingdales and Menwith Hill helped to maintain this alliance. It also provided a hedge for the UK's future protection under the BMD system as it matured.
2. Liberal interventionism (Plant cited in Beech and Lee, 2008, p.151): Blair's belief in the need to intervene in the internal affairs of states which through the violation of international norms and 'shared values' (Vickers, 2011, p.184) posed a threat to wider international stability and thereby British national security; BMD would allow the US and its allies to intervene against nuclear armed states because it would provide a shield against nuclear retaliation (Ranger et al., 2002, p.44).

However, it is important not to overstate the importance of Blair's particular foreign policy outlook as an overly significant factor in his administration's decision to incorporate BMD into the UK's security policy. In other words, that without Blair there would have been no British involvement in it. This is demonstrated by the firm continuity in missile defence policy after Gordon Brown succeeded Blair as Prime Minister in 2007. Although Brown had different foreign policy priorities such as the reform of international institutions and globalisation (Rush and Giddings, 2008, p.201), he was just as committed to the special relationship as his predecessor (Sperling cited in Brown, 2010, p.33), and it was under his premiership that Menwith Hill was upgraded to play its part in BMD.

As well as Prime Ministers there were also several different Presidents during this period. It is the interaction between these heads of state over the issue of BMD that is considered next.

Prime Ministers, Presidents and BMD

As an American military system, the tempo and scope of US BMD policy changed from president to president over the period 1997-2010, with the British PM merely reacting to these changes. The first coincidence of PM and President was that of Clinton and Blair from May 1997 to January 2001. President Clinton did not want to develop a missile defence system that would have abrogated the ABM Treaty, though he was forced to by North Korean missile tests and the subsequent domestic political pressure to authorize further research (Futter, 2012, p.87). Accordingly, in 2000 the Foreign Secretary Robin Cook stated that the government valued the stability that the ABM Treaty provided (Butler, 2003). This stance was also echoed by Blair (Rusbridger and Freedland, 2004). However, it was during the correlation of the Bush and Blair administrations between January 2001 and June 2007 that cooperation between the two leaders over BMD was at its most fruitful. As part of standing 'shoulder to shoulder' with the US after 9/11 – Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon and Foreign Secretary Jack Straw argued that the attacks strengthened the case for missile defence (Stocker, 2004b, p.202; Smith, 2005, p.459) – the British government agreed to the upgrade of RAF Fylingdales so it could play a role in BMD (Taylor, 2008, p.9). In order to develop BMD the US withdrew from the ABM Treaty in 2002. Suddenly the Labour government's position became that it was not the ABM Treaty itself that was important, but strategic nuclear stability achieved by whatever

mechanism (Ministry of Defence, 2002, p.26). If this mechanism was now to be BMD, then so be it.

In marked contrast, Bush and Brown – July 2007 to January 2009 – did not enjoy a close relationship (Wilson, 2007). However it was during this period that the Brown government agreed to an upgrade of Menwith Hill also allowing it to play a role in BMD (Hansard, 2007). Brown and Obama did not have much time to build close links during the relatively brief time their terms of office were aligned from January 2009 to May 2010. Obama's focus on BMD shifted more to Eastern European states and the promise of a phased approach to installing missile defence architecture in the region to counter intermediate range missile threats from Iran (White House, 2009). Whatever the particular constellation of Prime Ministers and Presidents that resided at Number 10 and the White House, the fact remained that the UK's involvement in BMD was opposed by several Ministers, Labour MPs and major affiliated trade unions (Richardson, 2001; CND, 2008a).

BMD and the Labour Party

BMD, and in particular Britain's involvement in it through Fylingdales and Menwith Hill, was a controversial issue for Labour in its last term of office. Though the government was in favour of agreeing to the upgrades of the UK sites, there were a significant number of Labour MPs, and even Ministers (such as Peter Kilfoyle and Peter Hain), who were very much opposed not only to the UK having any role in BMD, but also to the existence of the US missile defence system in its entirety (BBC News, 2002; Stocker, 2004b, p.193). They saw it as a dangerously destabilizing programme that would lead to greater proliferation of nuclear missiles in an attempt to overwhelm it (BBC News, 2001b), and that far from being a defensive system it would be a shield behind which the US could pursue an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy, perhaps even including nuclear first-strike options without fear of nuclear reprisal (CND, 2007). Labour's internal debate on BMD is intimately bound up with nuclear weapons and the tension within Labour between those who saw Britain's nuclear weapons as the ultimate deterrent and would only countenance multilateral disarmament (Vickers, 2011, p.29), and those who argued that the UK should take the moral lead and unilaterally scrap them (ibid, p.219). Though the dispute within the Labour Party did not disappear during its last term of office, in terms of policy making the pro-nuclear, pro-BMD Labour leadership (BBC News, 2001a) was absolutely dominant during this period, and saw its stance as part of a whole raft of policy reforms put in place to make Labour more electorally appealing (Vickers, 2011, p.147).

BMD and electoral appeal

In a first-past-the-post democratic political system such as the UK, political parties have to win a plurality of votes by appealing to the electorate who vote them in. After several years of opposition on a declining share of the vote, the Labour Party began a wholesale reappraisal of its policies, of which defence would come under particular scrutiny. Among the major reforms was the 1989 decision to scrap Labour's policy favouring unilateral nuclear disarmament

(Allan, 1997, p.63). From this newfound support for Britain's nuclear deterrent, support for Britain's role in BMD would also grow, since they are both supposedly based on protecting the UK from nuclear attack. Yet it must be noted that defence was by no means Labour's greatest electoral liability during the years of internal reform. Of much greater impact in dissuading people from voting Labour was the image of a party divided against itself on several issues (ibid, p.31), of which defence was significant, but one among many (Ipsos-MORI, 2014b; Ipsos-MORI, 2014a).

Further, although Labour's defence stance as a whole may have been a significant if not preponderant electoral liability, it must be remembered that the vast majority of the British electorate were probably not aware of the government's policy on BMD itself during Labour's last administration, let alone saw it as a salient issue influencing their vote. Indeed, BMD did not appear as even a minor issue in the general elections of this period (Richardson, 2001; Kavanagh and Butler, 1997; 2001; 2005; 2010). However, on the few occasions when opinion polling did take place, responses tended to be against the UK's involvement in BMD and in agreement that it would increase the security risk to the UK (CND, 2008b). A 2004 poll of over 1000 British citizens published in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* rated the desirability of the US policy to develop missile defence – on a scale of 0 (strongly undesirable) to 10 (strongly desirable) – well below half, at 3.83 (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2004, p.300). Though in an earlier poll a majority also agreed that the relationship between Britain and America would suffer if the UK did not cooperate with the US on BMD (Ipsos-MORI, 2001). Despite this apparent latent opposition to BMD, it remained a niche issue and not one of electoral concern for Labour. Therefore the Labour government's support for BMD must be seen not as an attempt to win votes in its own right, but as a logical outgrowth of the wider policy changes that took place within the Party from the mid-80s onward in order to outflank the Conservatives on defence, an issue in which they had traditionally held greater electoral appeal (Brown, 2010, p.2).

Theory

The theoretical framework used in this thesis draws heavily, though not uncritically, on an adaptation of Elisabetta Brighi's application of the strategic-relational approach to Italian foreign policy in her 2013 work, *Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics and International Relations: The Case of Italy*. Putting the sections that specifically cover Italian foreign policy to one side, Brighi's work contains a most excellent exposition of the strategic-relational approach as applied to foreign policy analysis in general. This is preceded by a very insightful taxonomy and critique of the strengths and weaknesses of a broad range of better known theories of international relations – such as neorealism and two-level games theory – explaining why they are not capable of accounting for foreign policy outcomes in a way that the strategic-relational approach can.

The strategic-relational approach is the theoretical model which best explains why the Labour government of 1997-2010 incorporated BMD into the UK's security policy. This is because it solves the problem of how structures interact with agents, shaping the specific policy decisions that they make. It does this by emphasising the key role of ideas as a medium in which

structures can enter into discourse with agents in their decision-making role; in this case the role that both domestic and international structural pressures played in shaping the Labour government's BMD policy.

Another strength of the strategic-relational approach when developing an analysis of defence policy is the way that it addresses the 'pre-theoretical' underpinnings of ontology and epistemology (Brighi, 2013, p.16). Ontologically, it overcomes the issues of which level of analysis (individual/state/international society) and which policy boundary (inside/outside international/domestic) are more important in determining defence policy making decisions by answering, dialectically: all of them; depending on the context and their interplay. Epistemologically, it combines both positivist and interpretative methods of investigation, allowing for mixed efficient and intentional causation between material and ideational factors (ibid, p.36), making it a particularly fruitful model for explaining complex systemic interactions between structure, agency and discourse and their influence on BMD policy outcomes (ibid, p.38).

In the strategic-relational model, structures and agents are both relational and dialectical. Structures only arise from the interactions of agents, they do not exist prior to or independently of agents; structure is the auto-generated epiphenomenon arising from the sum-total of the countless interactions of individual actors. This means that structure and agency are *relational*; one cannot exist without the other. Indeed, they both can only exist simultaneously. Accordingly, the interplay between structure and agency is a *dialectical* process; actions taken by actors in conformity with the structural constraints of the moment can cause the parameters of permissible actions to change over time (Brighi, 2013, pp.37-38).

Adapting Brighi, this thesis rejects explanations that rely solely on 'black box' statism or the 'psychologism' of individual defence policy makers as their unit of analysis. Instead, the 'prime mover' in this thesis is constituted as the *defence policy process* itself. It holds to a *processual* notion of actorness, encompassing a plurality of actors and processes (ibid, p.3), while moving away from Brighi's reluctance to place any component above another by giving a preponderant agential role to what Self calls the 'core defence policy community': the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence, closely associated with the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor (Self, 2010, p.267).

As mentioned above, the dialectical interplay between strategic actors and strategically selective context is crucially mediated by discourse: '*ideas provide the point of mediation between actors and their environment*' (Hay, 2002, pp.209-10, cited in Brighi, 2013, p.36). Therefore, how actors interact with context is based on their mental conception of what it will and will not permit. In turn, structures auto-select certain discourses and narratives over others (ibid, p.212, cited in ibid). The product of these processes of mediation are known as policy paradigms; intersubjectively agreed-upon narratives that provide 'cognitive templates' through which the world is interpreted (Brighi, 2013, p.36).

In this thesis, the cognitive template is based on what Reifler et al call 'British militarism' (Reifler et al., 2011, p.11); a complex of beliefs based around support for military activity and national security, and concerns about British sovereignty and prestige. This definition is based on their own opinion polling in which a majority supported extra military spending (61%), maintaining overseas military bases (56%), and that participation in peace keeping missions was worth the risk to British soldier's lives (45% for, 27% against) (ibid, pp.28-261). This frames the larger policy paradigm, which appears to be that any political party that wants to win enough votes to form a government must conform to the ideational discourse of British militarism and take a conservative line on defence. The ideational discourse is the key, the link between the international and domestic influences, and their interaction with government agency. Yet it is wrong to see it as one more chain in the process of cause and effect; it is more the medium, the fluid in which the chemical reaction between these components takes place.

Having now established what the strategic-relational model actually is, and the central mediating role of ideational discourse within it, it is now possible to use it to explain why the Labour government of 1997-2010 incorporated BMD into the UK's defence policy. In Figure 1, British militarism is the ideational discourse which mediates voter's perceptions of both threats emanating from the international environment, and the Labour government's defence policies. Accordingly, when developing defence policy the Labour government must not only take into account threats from the international environment, but also the voter's perceptions of its defence policy response to these threats. The strength of the strategic-relational model is that it accounts for strategic actors – in this case the Labour government – being perfectly capable of differentiating between and navigating different levels of strategically selective environments, favouring certain strategies over others depending on what circumstances will allow (Brighi, 2013, p.36). Therefore it was entirely rational for Labour's overall defence policy to become more conservative in order to gain votes from a broader range of people, while at the same time recognizing that BMD was such a niche issue for most of the British electorate that the strategically selective context gave them the leeway to go ahead with a policy which prioritized the considerations of British national security above the opinions of voters, among which there appears to have been latent opposition.

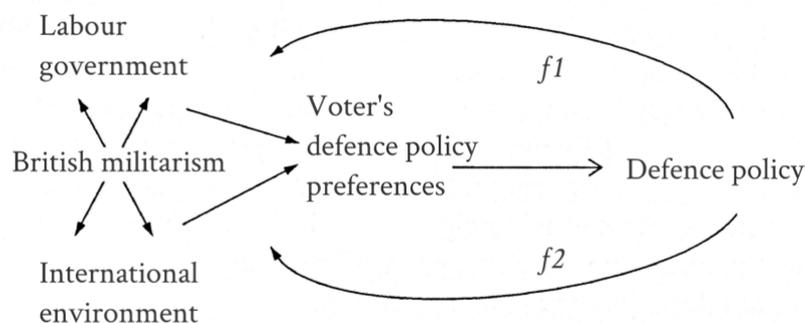


Figure 1 The defence policy process, a dialectical/strategic-relational conceptualisation (adapted from Brighi, 2013, p.37).

Once Labour's policy on BMD was enacted, it fed back into the international environment, reinforcing the UK's alliance with the US and underwriting Britain's security (f2). The act of committing to BMD policy also then reinforced the strategically selective context, making future pro-BMD policy decisions more likely (f1).

Conclusion

Ballistic missile defence is a US military system for intercepting nuclear missiles. Between 1997 and 2010, BMD developed from an experimental and untested platform to an architecture made up of sophisticated radars, interceptor missiles and a command and control network capable of destroying a limited number of nuclear missiles launched from WMD proliferators such as Iran and North Korea. During this period the Labour government incorporated BMD into the UK's security policy. It did this by agreeing to upgrades of RAF Fylingdales and RAF Menwith Hill in 2003 and 2007 respectively, both vital components in making BMD work by ensuring the detection and tracking of enemy missiles launched from the Middle East. The main reason why the Labour government decided to do this was to ensure that the UK would be able to benefit from the protection the US system could offer as it developed over time. The British defence industry also stood to benefit from collaboration with the US over BMD, the government facilitated this by establishing the Missile Defence Centre in 2003.

The UK's increasing involvement in BMD between 1997 and 2010 was almost totally overshadowed by 9/11 and the subsequent invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet the Labour government's decision on BMD also reflected and strengthened Britain's special relationship with the US, a platform upon which the UK raises its power status in the international arena. This bond was particularly strong and fruitful for BMD during the coincidence of the Bush and Blair administrations due to Blair's particularly Atlanticist and interventionist foreign policy outlook. However, Labour's decision to go along with US BMD conversely placed a strain on the UK's relationship with the EU on defence issues, as many member nations were opposed. This impasse was somewhat resolved by the US' decision to integrate BMD into NATO's command structure, thereby providing BMD cover for EU nations as NATO members, within which individual EU countries agreed to site particular components of BMD architecture on their soil.

Another reason, though of much less importance, why Labour was willing to integrate BMD into Britain's defence strategy was as part of Labour's wider policy reforms in order to make itself more electorally appealing on defence issues, an area which was traditionally dominated by the Conservatives. Though on the few occasions that opinion polling of the British public took place, the majority of participants were opposed to Britain's involvement in BMD. However the government's decisions on BMD were never a settled issue for Labour itself, with many MPs, several Ministers and sections of the wider party in outright opposition to BMD. That BMD was not an even more divisive issue for Labour during its last term of office was due to its almost complete invisibility as an issue of public concern outside of the members of pressure groups with a particular focus on the issue.

Theoretically, the strategic-relational model has the greatest explanatory power when it comes to accounting for why the Labour government incorporated BMD into the UK's security policy. This is because it is able to integrate both international and domestic structural influences on the agency of the Labour government's core defence community by immersing them in the ideational discourse of British militarism. This cognitive paradigm acts as the discursive solvent in which international and domestic structures interact with the Labour government's core defence community, framing the limits of possible defence policy. Ultimately, the last Labour government, like any government in an anarchical world, had to place national security foremost in its considerations. By allowing Fylingdales and Menwith Hill to become integrated into the US' BMD architecture the UK gained a foothold in an insurance policy that would mature alongside any developing missile threat. This is why Labour had to incorporate BMD into the UK's security policy. The primacy of the structure of international relations also explains why latent opposition from the electorate to Britain's role in BMD did not alter Labour's policy on it, since even in democratic states competent defence policy requires governments place national security above the influence of domestic pressures. In the final analysis Britain's place in the structure of international relations and the UK's need to maintain its alliance with the US was a far more powerful influence on Labour's integration of BMD into British defence policy than any minor electoral issues. The same considerations would most likely constrain a future Labour government to make similar choices concerning BMD.

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