

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Nottingham</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: American and Canadian Studies</p>
<p>Title of case study: Learning from History: Providing Expert Advice to the UK Government to Inform its Nuclear Defence Policy</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact Professor Matthew Jones was selected as a Cabinet Office official historian in 2008. His research has provided a historical context and knowledge base for senior Cabinet Office and Ministry of Defence officials currently engaged with strategic nuclear policymaking. Jones' research (including insights into the costs overruns, technical uncertainty, and delay of previous nuclear deterrents) has contributed to the process of policy-making, informing how senior officials responsible for dealing with debates over future options in the strategic nuclear policy field will deploy public expenditure of over £20 billion.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research The body of work, researched and published while Jones was Professor of American Foreign Relations in the UoA (2004-2013), is based on wide knowledge of the relevant archival sources in Britain and the United States, which has dealt with such issues as post-war nuclear policy, Cold War diplomatic history, and Anglo-American relations. The publications are the product of extensive archival research in the UK National Archives at Kew, the US National Archives at College Park, Maryland, and US presidential libraries. From 2008, as the official historian of the UK nuclear deterrent and the Chevaline (Polaris improvement) programme, with a base in the Cabinet Office, Jones carried out further research into the most significant UK documentary sources (both open and closed material) on British nuclear policy between the late 1950s and early 1980s.</p> <p>In published work, Jones' study of US nuclear planning, nuclear policymaking, and deterrence posture in the early Cold War period has yielded key insights into the highly politicised nature of nuclear policy, and the different factors bearing on the actions of decision-makers, ranging from domestic political circumstances, the operational demands and requirements of the armed forces, and the fragmented nature of large government bureaucracies (references 1 and 4). He also has analysed the Anglo-American nuclear relationship, where differences have arisen over consultation about nuclear use, access to information on nuclear planning, and the levels of assistance for the UK nuclear programme. This offered grounding for understanding the dynamics of US-UK cooperation over the Polaris programme in the 1960s and 1970s (a crucial part of the official history) (reference 2). Research on the nuclear policies of the Labour Government led by Harold Wilson from 1964 to 1970 has examined several tensions and debates, where the avowed policy of 'internationalising' the strategic nuclear deterrent (through such steps as the creation of an Atlantic Nuclear Force, or deployment of Polaris submarines east of Suez, where they could offer a nuclear guarantee to India) conflicted with the attractions of maintaining an 'independent' nuclear force at a difficult time in European and NATO Alliance affairs (reference 3).</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Matthew Jones, <i>After Hiroshima: The United States, Race and Nuclear Weapons in Asia, 1945-1965</i> (Cambridge University Press, 2010) [available on request]. 2. Matthew Jones, "Great Britain, the United States, and consultation over use of the atomic bomb, 1950-1954," <i>The Historical Journal</i> 54.3 (2011): 825-56 [DOI: 10.1017/S0018246X11000240]. 3. Matthew Jones (with John Young), "Polaris, East of Suez: British Plans for a Nuclear Force in the Indo-Pacific, 1964-1968," <i>Journal of Strategic Studies</i>, 33.6 (2010): 847-70 [DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2010.498284]. 4. Matthew Jones, "Targeting China: U.S. Nuclear Planning and 'Massive Retaliation' in East Asia,

1953-1955," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 10.4 (2008): 37-65
[www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/jcws.2008.10.4.37].

4. Details of the impact

Jones' publications, research experience and background in the field of nuclear history, Cold War diplomatic history, and the general area of Anglo-American relations were central to his selection by the Cabinet Office to be the official historian of the UK strategic nuclear deterrent and the Chevaline (Polaris improvement) programme (see **source 1** for Jones' formal appointment to this position by the Prime Minister). The research has equipped Jones with the knowledge, experience and arguments about the place of nuclear weapons in the Cold War, and British defence policy, that enable him to engage with senior officials in Whitehall, provide them with the historical background and context within which current strategic nuclear policy is situated, and to identify some of the key issues and generic problems associated with the maintenance of a strategic nuclear capability. The primary beneficiaries of this research have included MoD and Cabinet Office officials who are currently engaged with the UK nuclear programme and strategic nuclear policymaking. Due to the sensitive nature of the research used in the workshops and activities listed below, it is not possible to get individual feedback from participants (please refer to **source 2** in lieu).

Using an official history to inform current policy-making

The act of researching and writing an official history accrues, in and of itself, benefits to government. It is apparent that the Ministry of Defence has relatively little 'institutional memory', and the official history commissioned in 2008—with full access to the UK documentary record—is intended to provide an authoritative account of the evolution of UK strategic nuclear policy, in its full military, political, diplomatic, and technical context, between the Nassau Conference of 1962, when it was agreed that the Polaris missile system would be supplied to Britain, and 1982, when the Chevaline programme came to fruition with the first deployment of an improved version of Polaris. Kept very secret throughout the 1970s, Chevaline (a system designed to overcome Soviet anti-ballistic missile defences) was a hugely controversial programme, notable for major costs overruns, technical uncertainty, and delay. The history provides full detail of this central episode in post-war UK defence policy so that lessons learned from it can usefully inform future policy and strategy.

Expanding the knowledge base and historical context of policy-makers

Senior Cabinet Office and Ministry of Defence officials have been aware of the official history, and have been interested in exploring the historical parallels and analogies that are thrown up in their current areas of work from previous episodes in nuclear policymaking. At four 'learning from history' seminars, Jones debated and discussed some of the issues raised by the Chevaline programme, as well by the study of UK nuclear history in the Polaris era, including the origins, background, and development of the Polaris improvement programme, and the historical parallels to today. Two seminars were high-level events, involving a small group of senior officials (15 November 2011 and 23 January 2012), and two were for a wider audience of mid-range Ministry of Defence officials (24 November 2011 and 15 December 2011). Then on 20 November 2012, at the express invitation of the Cabinet Office official leading the group that is writing the Trident renewal alternatives paper for the Coalition Government, Jones offered a briefing to officials engaged in this process, and discussed issues connected with nuclear deterrence. On 29 November 2012 Jones led another session, this time with Treasury officials who were particularly concerned with the cost overruns associated with the Chevaline programme. Attendees at these briefings and seminars have included the current Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee (then Second Permanent Secretary, MoD); Director-General Security Policy, MoD; Chief Scientific Adviser MoD; Director of Strategic Technologies, MoD; Assistant Chief of Defence Staff (CBRN—Chemical, Biological, Nuclear, Radiological); head of CBRN Policy, MoD. An important indicator of impact achieved has been the requests for further briefings coming from officials, some of whom have attended more than one session.

One of the avowed aims of the Government's official history programme is that it represents an opportunity for 'learning from history', where knowledge and findings regarding past episodes can

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be used to inform consideration of current issues of policy. The seminars have expanded the knowledge base and historical context of the decision-makers involved in key decisions in the field of 21st-century British defence and nuclear policy—involving the prospective expenditure of over £20 billion of public money during the period up to the late 2020s—as the issue of Trident renewal comes to a head, and the role of an independent nuclear deterrent is once more debated. In this context, the breadth and depth of Jones' research (**references 1-4**) fulfils the role of expert advice. It has been highly valued and sought-after by the senior officials who make these decisions to allocate large amounts of public money for a project that will inevitably receive high levels of public and political scrutiny. The source named in section five can confirm the benefits that have been conferred by the impact activities stemming from Jones' official history work.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Appointment by the Prime Minister as Cabinet Office official historian, announced in the House of Commons in June 2008 (viewed 12/11/13), available from:
www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080613/wmstext/80613m0001.htm
2. Head, Corporate Memory, Ministry of Defence (contact details on file).