Introduction: Problematising the Maintenance of Nuclear Weapons

"Atomic weapons are useful because of the stories people tell about them, the fears those stories inspire, and the actions by which people respond to those fears"

—John Canaday[1]

This book investigates *how* it is possible that a state maintains nuclear weapons.[2] This is unusual. The conventional nuclear research agenda does not consider the maintenance of nuclear weapons much of a puzzle. In short, nuclear weapons are seen as so obviously useful for a state engaged in "self-help", that no right-minded government would ever willingly give them up (Chapter 2). Nuclear weapon possession has thus prompted a great deal of investigation into how best to *manage* these weapons, but far less on how states maintain them. Indeed, Security Studies, informed by Realism (e.g. Waltz, 1979), was traditionally concerned with

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[2] Doty (1993, p. 298) provides in my view the most lucid account of what "how-possible" questions entail: "In posing such a question, I examine how meanings are produced and attached to various social subjects/objects, thus constituting particular interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others. What is explained is not why a particular outcome obtained, but rather how the subjects, objects, and interpretive dispositions were socially constructed such that certain practices were made possible".

studying nuclear weapons management strategies: deterrence and arms control, and addressing the security challenges that changing nuclear technology posed to the Cold War nuclear balance (Buzan & Hansen, 2009; Freedman, 2004; Williams & Krause, 1996). After the Cold War, Security Studies—efforts at "widening" notwithstanding—switched its nuclear focus from deterrence to anti-proliferation (Krause & Latham, 1998). Meanwhile, maintenance of nuclear weapons by great powers remained largely ignored. Instead, one finds variations of the puzzle: Why do *non*-nuclear weapons states exist? (Hymans, 2006) Those few that did pose the opposite "why" question, tend to debate the factors that cause states to *acquire* the bomb: whether they be security (the dominant answer), prestige, or domestic interests (Sagan, 1996). One might assume disarmament research would be promising; after all, if a state ceases to maintain its nuclear weapons it has *de facto* disarmed. However, as Levite (2009) lamented, disarmament remained much understudied not least because of the absence of data to work with. Moreover, until recently, what disarmament research had been undertaken typically sought to explain the few states that have already given up or reversed their nuclear weapons programmes. Again, this angle precludes puzzling over how countries *maintain* their nuclear weapons.[3]

However, over the course of the last decade, Security Studies has begun to wake up. A new "wave" of more critical nuclear scholarship has emerged, running parallel and intermingling with the successful transnational movement to establish a treaty banning nuclear weapons (Borrie, 2014; Bolton & Minor, 2016; Fihn, 2017). Diverse in their objects of analyses, and theoretical approach, this "new wave" of nuclear research shares a scepticism to the narrow materialist ontologies that characterise conventional security scholarship (Lupovici, 2010; Rublee & Cohen, 2018). For instance, the interpretivist wing, of what Lupovici (2010) termed the "4th wave" of deterrence scholarship, illuminates how social contexts are crucial to understanding how threats become "threats", why certain countries consider nuclear weapons to be necessary while others abscond, and what societal functions nuclear deterrence play beyond those written on the tin (e.g. Lupovici, 2016; Ritchie, 2016). Meanwhile, the "nuclear norms" research agenda has provided compelling explanations for the non-use of nuclear weapons (the "nuclear taboo") and a

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[3] For a review of the conventional nuclear research agenda see Sagan (2011).

sophisticated theoretical lens for making sense of the norm contestation that has animated the Non-Proliferation regime in the last decade (Rublee & Cohen, 2018; e.g. Tannenwald, 2007, 2018). This new wave of critical scholarship has also permeated British nuclear scholarship: William Walker (2010, 2018) and Nick Ritchie (2010, 2016, 2019) in particular, have pioneered an array of interpretivist concepts—e.g. actor network theory, identity, norms, among others—to shed light upon, and sometimes contest British nuclear weapons policy (see Chapter 2). Ultimately, by broadening the horizons of nuclear research, this burgeoning body of interpretative scholarship has made nuclear weapons policies far more amenable to systematic, empirical analysis and enabled security scholars to escape their positivist straightjacket.

Indeed, strip away realist *doxa* regarding the desirability of nuclear weapons and a research agenda-defining international puzzle emerges. Only nine nuclear weapon-armed states exist, while 186[4] get by without nuclear weapons, and most seem quite content with their non-nuclear status.[5] Moreover, at least 50 countries have the technical capability to build nuclear weapons yet only nine have chosen to do so (Hymans, 2006, p. 457). Rather than chomping at the bit to join the nuclear club, most non-nuclear weapons states have instead imposed stricter limitations on their ability to develop nuclear weapons. Indeed, going beyond the measures that are required by the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), in July 2017, 122 states voluntarily adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Considering that non-nuclear security is the norm, and maintaining nuclear weapons relatively odd, the realist puzzle becomes a function of their theoretical commitments rather than empirics (Hymans, 2006). Thus, instead of asking why non-nuclear weapons states have *not* acquired the bomb, it would make more sense to consider the few states that maintain such unpopular, yet expensive weapons to be the puzzle.

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[4] There are 188 signators to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), 183 of them have signed as Non-Nuclear Weapons States (NNWS). Currently four countries are not signatories: Pakistan, India, Israel, and North Korea (which withdrew in 2003). India, Pakistan, and North Korea have openly tested nuclear weapons, while Israel's nuclear weapons programme is an open secret.

[5] Most seem content with not having nuclear weapons, but are not necessarily content with the Nuclear weapons states (NWS) continued possession of nuclear weapons.

Indeed, taking this puzzle as its starting point, the following chapters seek to make nuclear weapon states *strange*. Picking up and running with Nick Ritchie's (2013, 2016) notion of "nuclear regimes of truth", this book problematises the *discursive maintenance* of nuclear weapons in the UK. While various answers to *why* states acquire nuclear weapons have been posited, these explanations typically ignore the ongoing processes of legitimation that keep these weapons in service: how the social and material objects constituting these reasons are constructed, maintained, remodelled, reified and sometimes discarded. This book does not dispute any one of these explanations per se but contends that governments have considerable power in *producing* the security, status, and domestic political meaning that enable the maintenance of their nuclear weapons. Indeed, because nuclear weapons are represented to "work" by not being used, this book contends that their deterrence utility is *transcendental*—what nuclear weapons have (or have not) deterred is impossible to prove (Chapter 4). This transcendental quality of nuclear weapons discourse grants nuclear states a peculiar flexibility in representing the weapons' benefits; however, it also has a flip-side. In the absence of proven "effects", the positive meanings attached to nuclear weapons also require considerable imagination, adaptation, and thus discursive labour to remain salient, avoid decay and thus enable maintenance. To be clear then, by investigating the maintenance of nuclear weapons, I do not mean documenting meticulously the materials required to keep the nuclear weapons system going nor endeavouring to reach inside the minds of policymakers and uncover why they made consecutive decisions to renew British nuclear weapons. Rather, this book investigates the UK governments' role in constructing the social world within which it is embedded: how the consecutive UK governments (re)produced a foreign policy discourse that constituted their nuclear weapons as legitimate and desirable.

To undertake this task, this book conducts a longitudinal discourse analysis of the UK's nuclear policy of two key periods: 1980–1987 and 2005–2009. By historicising and deconstrucing several of the UK discourse's nuclear "truths" "from "Thatcher to Blair", the book documents how maintaining the UK's nuclear weapons has often required difficult and not always entirely successful discursive labour. Indeed, look closely, and several of the axioms that underpin Britain's nuclear rationale require considerable imagination and careful narration to become plausible, let alone accepted. For instance, consecutive governments have

relied upon a peculiarly British version of the "nuclear peace" to legitimate maintenance, asserting that its nuclear weapons have "proven" to work in the past and thus can be expected to work in the future (Chapters 5 and 6). As Thatcher (1984) put it the UK's "nuclear deterrent has not only kept the peace, but it will continue to preserve our independence". Yet, the only proof provided is absence: what Britain's nuclear weapons have deterred exists only in the collective imagination. In other words, the attacks to which Thatcher alludes will forever remain transcendental; existing in an alternative reality in which Britain did not maintain nuclear weapons. However, instead of arguing—like so many have before (Chapter 2)—that Britain's nuclear peace is a myth, this book documents how the nuclear peace is maintained and reproduced: What stories need to be told, evidence presented, and alternatives marginalized, in order to keep Britain's "nuclear peace" in currency? Exploring this, as well as the other moving parts of Britain's nuclear regime provides the topic of this book.

Theorising Nuclear Regimes of Truth

This book's problematisation of *maintenance* is grounded in (my reading of) Foucault's notion of *Regimes of Truth*.[6] Rather than conceiving language as reflective of reality, this book holds that language is a *productive* meaning-producing force in its own right (Chapter 3). In short, this approach assumes that no physical or social object has an *a priori* social meaning that transcends social construction and therefore every "truth" contained in language must be considered political. Here, what depiction of the world dominates over other alternatives is not the result of it being a superior reflection of reality, but a function of *productive* power: the power to produce, circulate, distribute, and regulate statements about the social world that form more or less coherent frameworks—*discourses*—for making the world intelligible. These discourses have political consequences; they constrain what we think of, and therefore what we can

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[6] This book builds upon (and complements) Nick Ritchie's conceptualisation of the UK's nuclear policy as a regime of truth. However, as Chapter 2 will explain, my discursive approach differs substantially because it conducts a longitudinal analysis that spans two governments' decision for renewal, problematises the process of meaning production across time, and draws upon a different analytical framework (Hansen, 2006).

do (Neumann, 2008, p. 62). As *regime* suggests, truths require mainte-
nance: discursive labour to keep functioning. Indeed, rather than treating
the international as external reality whose truths we can reveal with careful
objective study, this book investigates the UK government's complicity in
producing, maintaining, and modifying a *regime of truth* about the inter-
national and surrounding its nuclear weapons that makes make nuclear
maintenance possible.

While my reading of Foucault underpins this book' problematique,
I also draw upon Lene Hansen's *Foreign Policy/Identity Nexus* frame-
work to structure the analysis (Chapter 3). In brief, Hansen develops
a systematic framework for analysing how particular foreign policies are
(de)legitimated via reference to states' collective identities. However, this
book does not merely use Hansen's framework, but seeks to develop it.
Indeed, like a lot of post-positivist work, Hansen's framework privileges
identity construction over policy representations. While Hansen's Foreign
Policy/Identity nexus can accommodate more emphasis on policy repre-
sentations, Chapter 3 suggests she under-theorises it at the expense
of collective identity construction. Chapter 3 addresses this weakness
by incorporating *nukespeak* and theorising the role of metaphors in
foreign policy nexi.[7] Second, I suggest that Hansen's assumption that
foreign policymakers seek merely legitimate and enforceable foreign poli-
cies occludes how long-term policies may generate explicitly positive and
desirable meanings. Indeed, as Foucault (1980, p. 119) noted, productive
power—manifested by and through discourse—does not only repress—far
from it—but induces pleasure as well as social pressures. Chapter 3 will
thus theorise why adding *desirable* to the assumed objectives of foreign
policymakers can provide greater analytic depth to Hansen's framework,
and allow it to better illuminate non-urgent, long-term foreign policies,
such as nuclear weapons maintenance. Finally, building on this incorpo-
ration of desirability, Chapter 3 theorises how Hansen's conception of
degrees of Otherness can be utilised to illuminate instances of *status seeking*
in the international and help understand how nuclear weapons enable
Britain to perform privileged international status, at least to its domestic
audience. Chapter 3 will also elaborate on how treating international
status as a discursive phenomenon can contribute to the burgeoning

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[7] As my analysis will show, I certainly consider identity constructions to be key to
understanding the UK's nuclear policy, just that their interplay with policy representations
should be analysed more closely and explicitly.

status literature in IR (e.g. Beaumont, 2017; Ward, 2017; Wohlforth, De Carvalho, Leira, & Neumann, 2018).

The UK Case: Acquiring, Maintaining and Renewing Trident

The UK constitutes an intriguing case for problematising the discursive maintenance of nuclear weapons. Since 1952, Britain has spent tens of billions of pounds building, maintaining, upgrading, and modifying its nuclear weapons systems.[8] Parallel to the material manifestations of the bombs themselves, consecutive UK governments have produced hundreds of thousands of words attaching meanings to the UK's nuclear weapons and their nuclear weapons policy. From the UK's earliest nuclear "gravity bombs", to the UK's current nuclear submarine launched intercontinental ballistic missile system (Trident), consecutive UK governments have necessarily had to present their nuclear weapons to their domestic public as legitimate and desirable, and thus ultimately as a good and right allocation of resources.[9]

However, all this does not happen in a vacuum; the UK government does not have a monopoly on imbuing its nuclear weapons with meaning. Rather, the government is just one socially powerful actor within national politics, and one state among many more in the international. To borrow Derrida's (1984) term, nuclear weapons sustain a "fabulously textual" realm in which governments, institutions, politicians, anti-nuclear activists, academics, security professionals, newspapers, and

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[8] For example, the current nuclear weapon system, Trident, cost more than 15 billion to acquire, and around 3–4% of the defence budget to run (Hartley, 2006, pp. 678–679). The total life cycle costs of the current system (Trident) are expected to be 25 billion (at 2005/6 prices). While opponents dispute some of these figures, whether UK nuclear weapons are considered a good use of resources tends to come down to whether one believes in the security benefits accredited to British nuclear weapons: if one believes nuclear weapons keep the UK safe they are cheap, if one believes they are "worse than irrelevant" and dangerous they are a waste of money (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Hence, this book focuses much more on the representations that account for Tridents utility and legitimacy rather than the economic representations.

[9] It is important to note the difference between the decision-making and the ultimate presentation of policy. Particularly in the early years, nuclear decision-making was made in secret without parliamentary approval. The decision made was only later announced and presented to the public. Nonetheless, even though the decision was taken beforehand, the future decisions depended on the acceptance of those earlier decisions.

other states provide competing representations of what the UK's nuclear weapons mean, what they do, and what they have done. Indeed, the fact that nuclear weapons—through deterrence—are said to work by not being used, encourages wildly divergent accounts of the UK's nuclear reality. Analysts have little concrete successes or failures to ground their arguments, but must instead make do with a fuzzy peace correlation, continuously patrolling but hidden nuclear submarines, and a great deal of words. For example, David Cameron (2010), the former Prime Minister, was fond of claiming that the UK's nuclear weapons were the UK's "ultimate insurance policy", which has kept the UK safe for 60 years. At the same time, some defence analysts, such as Michael MccGwire (2006), claim those same weapons are "irrelevant" and offer little more than a "comfort blanket" that merely make the UK *feel* safe. For the UK to maintain its nuclear weapons then, it requires a sufficient number, or at least the necessary people, to share an understanding closer to Cameron's rather than MccGwire's.

Maintaining the acquiescence of sufficient numbers of Britain's citizenry has not always been easy. More than any other nuclear-armed state the UK's nuclear weapons programme has been contested in mainstream politics (Quinlan, 2006). Indeed, the UK government's nuclear regime of truth has undergone several periods of sustained contestation. In the 1950s the UK's nuclear weapons laboratory at Aldermaston was a constant site for mass protests; moreover, in 1964, 1983, and 1987 Labour stood for election on the promise of removing all nuclear weapons from UK territory.[10] While in 2007, the New Labour government managed to set in motion the process of renewing its nuclear weapons until the 2060s, it sparked a considerable fight in parliament. The Labour leadership had to enforce a three line whip on their party to ensure the bill passed[11] and even then, they had to rely upon the opposition party to get the bill passed (Ritchie, 2012). Moreover, domestic public opinion—which has generally hovered around 50% approval for

[10] Although Labour won the election, they reneged on their promise to disarm the UK's nuclear weapons. Instead of getting rid of the UK's nuclear weapons, they merely decided to cut the number the UK would purchase from the US from five nuclear Polaris submarines to four (Scott, 2006).

[11] Enforcing a three-line whip on a party implies that anyone that votes against the party line will receive severe reprisals, and risk getting thrown out of the party. Indeed, four Labour ministers resigned their posts in the cabinet in order to vote against Trident.

Trident— has long seemed ambivalent to nuclear weapons, even if this has not always been reflected in the policies of the mainstream parties.[12] Thus, the British case illustrates how presenting maintaining nuclear weapons to be a legitimate foreign policy can prove difficult, and thus why investigating their discursive maintenance is a potentially fruitful object of inquiry.

Nonetheless, in conducting a discourse analysis of the UK's maintenance of nuclear weapons I am eschewing the traditional puzzles of most British nuclear weapons research (Chapter 2). Until fairly recently it remained almost untouched by the post-positivist turn in IR. Most analyses of British nuclear weapons policy have focused on the following questions: Why does the UK have nuclear weapons?[13] Should the UK have nuclear weapons?[14] How have decisions to acquire particular nuclear weapons been made?[15] What are the problems and dilemmas associated with the UK's nuclear policy?[16] Most of this research (implicitly) takes language as reflective of reality and assumes a mind-independent world amenable to objective analysis; certainly, these works do not problematise the discursive maintenance of the UK's nuclear weapons. To be sure, some scholars have begun to mobilise, if not the methodology, at least some of the terminology of this approach (Ritchie 2010, 2012, 2013; 2016; Walker, 2010, 2018). However, as Chapter 2 explains, they serve to open doors to the problematising the *discursive* maintenance of Trident rather than walking all the way through them.

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[12] However, it should be noted that this level fluctuates wildly depending on the how the question is phrased. Regardless, this indicates that the approval of nuclear weapons maintenance cannot be taken for granted in the manner realists typically assume. See Byrom (2007) for analysis of British public opinion towards nuclear weapons.

[13] See, Scott (2006), Ritchie (2010), and Stoddart and Baylis (2012).

[14] See Ritchie (2009), Beach (2009), Beach and Gurr (1999), Lewis (2006), MccGwire (2005, 2006), and Sliwinski (2009).

[15] See Freedman (1980), Ritchie (2009), Ritchie and Ingram (2010), Stoddart (2008), and Willett (2010).

[16] Some notable examples of what is a popular theme: Freedman (1980), Quinlan (2006), Ritchie (2008, 2012), Rogers (2006), Witney (1994), Freedman (1986, 1999), Walker (2010), and Clarke (2004).

British Nuclear Puzzles

The book's empirical analysis zooms in upon the UK's two most recent big nuclear-acquisition decisions: the purchase and defence of the Trident nuclear weapons system by Margaret Thatcher in 1980, and Tony Blair's decision to begin the process of acquiring a "like for like" replacement of Trident in 2007. Specifically, it will analyse two key nuclear periods of foreign policy discourse: Thatcher government's representation of its nuclear policy from 1979 to 1987, and the Labour government's representation of its nuclear policy between 2005 and 2010.[17] Choosing these two periods has the advantage that it neatly straddles the Cold War and captures how the UK's nuclear discourse adapted to new and very different circumstances. Moreover, it offers the methodological bonus that the main part of the nuclear policy that the UK needed to present as legitimate and desirable—the acquisition and then the renewal of its Trident armed nuclear submarines—was similar for both periods.[18] This combination of theory and empirics leads to the research question that animates this books analysis:

> - How have consecutive UK governments managed to represent their purchase, renewal, and maintenance of nuclear weapons as legitimate, enforceable, and desirable between the decision to purchase the first Trident nuclear weapons system in 1980 and the decision to initiate renewal in 2007?

In answering this question, the book seeks to contribute to the momentum behind the new international disarmament agenda (e.g. Egeland, 2018; Ritchie, 2013, 2019; Sauer & Reveraert, 2018). Put simply, if the anti-nuclear movement can better understand how states maintain support for their nuclear weapons programmes, they can better understand how to undermine them (Ritchie, 2013). Ceasing to maintain

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[17] I focus on the discourse around these periods because UK's nuclear maintenance to a large extent depends on these cyclical renewal decisions. Except for the continual but usually peripheral whirring of the anti-nuclearist movement, the discursive activity around UK's nuclear weapons lulls in the down-time between major decisios on renewal (see Beaumont, 2013).

[18] Comparing the rationale for two very different policy decisions would undermine comparative analysis of how those policies were represented. See Moses and Knutsen (2019) on the pitfalls of comparison in social science.

nuclear weapons, after all, is the same as disarmament. Indeed, security scholars are increasingly recognising the need to take investigation into maintenance seriously, for example, Ritchie (2010) argues: "[T] here are wider obstacles to relinquishing nuclear weapons that must be examined in order to understand why states retain nuclear weapons and will find it difficult to abandon them, even if the strategic security threats that motivated their original acquisition have diminished or faded altogether" (see also Ritchie, 2013, 2016). Meanwhile Walker (2010) sensibly suggests that giving up weapons implies "idiosyncratic implications" for each nuclear-armed state and therefore analysts should focus on understanding each state's specific relationship to their nuclear weapons in order to better understand how they can be persuaded to give them up. This book follows Walker and Ritchie's suggested research agenda. Indeed, this question opens up several puzzles related to British nuclear weapons policy.

The conventional way of problematising nuclear possession involves looking for various objective proliferation triggers that can explain why these states acquired nuclear weapons: the dominant answer usually given is "security". Once nuclear weapons have been acquired though, few scholars have investigated how the security threats (justifying the weapons' existence) are produced and maintained. While accepting that acquiring working nuclear weapons is generally considered the hard bit of putting together a nuclear weapons programme, states (to varying degrees) still need to justify the continuous costs of their nuclear weapons to their populace.[19] Informed by *Securitisation* theory,[20] this book investigates how those threats *become* threats; threats that justify nuclear weapons in the UK, while prompting little more than a shrug among non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS). However, this book also investigates how the UK constitutes other positive meanings for its nuclear weapons, beyond security alone. Indeed, most states certainly do not represent nuclear weapons desirable in the way Britain presents them to be, nor do they seem especially envious of the status and security some assert nuclear weapons afford. Indeed, as Hugh Beech wryly notes, Germany and Japan do not seem "unduly concerned" nuclear blackmail,

[19] Krebs and Jackson (2007) for example suggest that even policies that appear to be supported by consensus require a justifying "frame".

[20] See Buzan, Waever, and De Wilde (1998) for the seminal early text and (2005) Balzacq for a contemporary research agenda.

so why should the UK? (2009, p. 37) Thus, lest Britain turn into Japan and Germany, maintaining the need for the bomb requires (re)producing threats and (thus) functions for its nuclear weapons, functions that must also adapt to fit changing international circumstances. This book analyses how this is achieved: how the UK has maintained a discourse that represents its nuclear weapons as necessary when many other countries apparently do fine without them.

Second, this book speaks to a specific nuclear legitimacy problem prompted by the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the UK frequently justified the UK's purchase of nuclear weapons as necessary to defend against the threat from the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union disintegrated it left the UK's nuclear weapons without its former *raison d'être*. Given UK seemed to want to keep its nuclear weapons, this presented a political problem. Indeed, Nicholas Witney (1994), of the Ministry of Defence, wrote at length about how the UK government needed to "refurbish the rationale" for its nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War era and concluded that none of the options available to the UK appeared unproblematic. Thirteen years later, with a new nuclear-acquisition decision fast approaching, finding a convincing rationale remained elusive. As MccGwire (2006, p. 640) put it succinctly in 2006: "Today the Soviet threat is no more and we are at least 750 miles from the nearest areas of political turbulence. Anchored off Western Europe, with allies and friends on all sides, Britain is unusually secure. Do we still need nuclear weapons?" MccGwire's answer was a resounding no, but the government's was a resounding yes. This book seeks to understand how the UK found a sufficiently convincing and legitimate nuclear rationale in the post-Cold War era that successfully marginalised alternative oppositional representations, such as MccGwire's.[21]

Third, the UK, like many of the nuclear weapons states now vigorously pursues anti-nuclear proliferation policy, while simultaneously maintaining, upgrading, and renewing its own nuclear weapons programme. This policy has led to accusations by Non-nuclear states—particularly those in the Non-Aligned Movement—that nuclear weapons states such as the UK practice a hypocritical system of "nuclear apartheid". While

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[21] It is worth noting that MccGwire was certainly not alone, nor his opposition short-lived. A member of the Navy, respected security scholar and Sovietologist he wrote at length throughout the 1980s on what he considered to be the folly of deterrence, see MccGwire (1984, 1985, 1986, 1994, 2001, 2005).

acknowledging that Realism can explain *why* the UK does this, and how it physically can, it does not explain how a government can present this policy as legitimate to its domestic or international audience. This book will therefore investigate how the UK discourse reconciles the UK's maintenance and renewal of its nuclear weapons with its strong anti-nuclear proliferation policy, and its claims to be dedicated to a nuclear weapon free world.

Fourth, nuclear weapons analysts frequently debate whether the states pursue nuclear weapons for reasons of prestige or security (see Sagan, 1996). The UK is no different in this regard,[22] but frequently the discussion involves speculating about the motivations of decision-makers, and/or by ontologies that demand a material measurable manifestation of status distinct from security (Chapter 3). By taking a discursive approach this book will seek to address this issue from a different angle by showing and analysing how the UK has used its nuclear weapons policy to perform a privileged identity in relation to various Others through its foreign policy discourse.[23] Thus, by focusing instead on what privileged identity constructions the UK *does* articulate *with* its nuclear weapons policy, rather than try judge between prestige and security, this book offers a plausible means of sidestepping the methodological shortcomings that plague the debate around this issue (Chapter 3).

OBJECTIVES & OUTLINE

Broadly speaking then, this book has two separate but related objectives: First, this book will show how a discursive problematization of nuclear weapons *maintenance* constitutes a fruitful agenda for nuclear weapons research. A discursive ontology permits analysis of the wealth of empirics that positivism precludes: the millions of words that have accompanied

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[22] See Croft and Williams (1991) for a British example.

[23] This I suggest might be termed *status-seeking*—when an actor represents itself as distinguished and superior in some way to its peers. But status itself is social and dependent on recognition. Therefore, this can only constitute part of the story of acquiring status: the next step would be to investigate to see to what extent other actors in the international recognise, reinforce, and reproduce the UK's privileged identity. However, for the purposes of legitimating maintenance, domestic recognition of these status-seeking moves would be at least as important. See Beaumont (2020), on the significance of domestic audiences for state status-seeking.

governments' nuclear weapons policies. As Chapter 4 argues, the fabulously textual nature of the empirics that constitutes the nuclear weapons debate indicates the "battle over truth" is likely to remain fierce until either disarmament occurs or nuclear war ends life on earth. Indeed, nuclear weapons discourse could scarcely provide a more suitable object of analysis discourse analysis of this sort. Thus, this book lays the groundwork for post-positivist scholars to investigate and unsettle other societies' *nuclear regimes of truth*. Second, the success of these ambitions—whether my book sinks or swims—rests on the empirical findings. My conception of discourse precludes making causal claims: here, policy and identity are treated as mutually constitutive—linked through discourse—so delineating independent causal variables is impossible. However, this is a strength as much as a weakness: it permits the analysis of discursive empirics that positivist scholars' ontology and epistemology forces them to ignore, and thus allows the investigation of puzzles, they have left hitherto untouched. Indeed, the following chapters' analysis allows this book to make several theoretically informed, and empirically grounded inferences about how the UK has maintained its nuclear weapons from Thatcher to Blair, Trident I to Trident II. While neither definitive nor bullet proof, my claims should at least offer useful additional and Critical insight into the UK's nuclear weapons policy.

This book proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 locates this book in the space left mostly untouched so far by British nuclear weapons research; it argues that the security, prestige, domestic politics, and identity explanations found in the literature do not adequately address the puzzles identified above. Next, Chapter 3 discusses how and why we can usefully treat states nuclear discourses as "regimes of truth" and discusses and develops the specific theoretical framework that undergirds my analysis. Chapter 4 then sketches out and analyses the implications of the international discursive economy surrounding nuclear weapons that enables and constrains the UK's nuclear foreign policy. Chapter 5 analyses Thatcher's nuclear regime of truth, and how her foreign policy discourse represented the purchase of Trident as legitimate and desirable. Chapter 6 then investigates how New Labour imaginatively remodelled the nuclear regime truth for the twenty-first century: how it sought to overcome the instabilities in its nuclear policy discourse prompted by the end of the Cold War. Finally, the conclusion discusses the continuity and change of the UK's nuclear

regime of truth across both periods and discusses what practical use these insights offer to the international nuclear disarmament agenda.

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