

The London Conferences on Anglo-American Relations and Cold War Strategy 25 January-25 June 1950.

Brief for the UK Delegation (no. 4). "The general approach in bipartite conversations with the American delegation" 21 April 1950. HMSO, DBPO series II, vol II, p.69-76

II The ground to be covered

3. The State Department have suggested that the Bipartite Talks between the Secretary of State and Mr. Acheson, to take place on May 9th and 10th, should aim in the first place at establishing an understanding between the United States and the United Kingdom as to the basic relationship between our two countries and the role which each could play most effectively to ensure world prosperity and progress. The subsequent tripartite discussion with M. Schuman, and the proceedings of the Atlantic Council would be conducted in the light of the general understanding reached between the Secretary of State and Mr. Acheson regarding the basic relationship.

4. The Bipartite Talks beginning on April 24th ought to prepare the ground fully for the talks between the Secretary of State and Mr. Acheson. It should be our aim to reach provisional agreement over as wide a field as possible for their approval, and to narrow down points of disagreement for their consideration. 5. [...] 6. [...] 7. [...].

III General considerations

8. The American suggestion that we should aim in the first place at establishing an understanding about the basic relationship between the two countries is an important development. It is the first time since the war that they have approached us as a partner on the most general issues of policy. But it is not an entirely sudden departure. It has been evident for some time past that as the United States moved out into world affairs, she was becoming increasingly conscious, first that the strength and prosperity of the United Kingdom, both in her own right and as the leading member both of the Commonwealth and of Western Europe was an essential factor in the security of the United States; and second, that the United States cannot get the main lines of their foreign policy right, whether in Europe, the Middle East, or Asia, without our help.

9.. This line of thought coincides with our own thinking. We may compare the analysis and conclusions contained in the paper on Western Consolidation produced by the Permanent UnderSecretary's Committee.

10. There is therefore a good prospect that we shall find that our basic lines of thought are not far apart.

11. We accordingly have an unprecedented opportunity for discussing and perhaps reaching a wide measure of agreement with the Americans in the whole field of foreign policy. It is recommended that we should make the most that we can of this opportunity, and should not hesitate to discuss fundamental problems with complete frankness.

IV Method of approach

12. Experience has shown that in discussion with the Americans two rules are worth observing. First, complete and if necessary blunt frankness. Second, to avoid in the first stages a didactic approach or implying that we know all the answers and have cut and dried solutions ready. It is better to take the line that there is a common problem to which it is important that we should both find the right answer. We have certain ideas which we should like to look at together, without being sure that they are necessarily right.

The Americans may have others, which we may not have thought of. The result of this joint approach to a problem is often that the Americans prepare themselves the solutions which we favour.

V The first meeting

13. With these points in mind, it is suggested that the first meeting or meetings should be devoted to a general discussion of Item 1 of the proposed agenda, on the basis of a joint approach as a group to a common problem. We might suggest that, subject to any later decision, there should be no formal notes kept and that all those participating should be free to express their views completely frankly and without formal commitment. The Americans could speak first if they wished.

VI Our own general thesis

14. Our own general thesis might be that we have to ask ourselves whether the Western World can survive the dangers which threaten it. We believe that it can, provided the problem is tackled courageously and in the right way. We have looked at the possibilities that the United States, the Commonwealth, Western Europe, or the Commonwealth and Western Europe together, could each as a single force provide for their own security. Our analysis so far indicates that none of them can do so. In particular, a weak neutral Western Europe is undesirable, and a strong independent Western Europe is impracticable at present. Our general conclusion is that the safety of all these countries or groups of countries lies in Western consolidation on the lines of, and largely within the framework of, the Atlantic Pact. Such a grouping alone can afford the industrial and strategic strength, and the political impact, necessary for survival. Our analysis further leads us to judge that closer cohesion within Europe can only be developed on a stable and lasting basis within this framework. Judging by M. Bidault's recent speech French minds are working in a similar direction.

15. So far, valuable progress has been made in developing strategic machinery under the Atlantic Pact. No comparable progress has been made in the development of the Pact for peaceful purposes, and in particular of political and economic machinery. Such development is provided for by Article II of the Pact, and we believe that it is important to make progress in this direction during the forthcoming meetings. If we agree on this principle at the outset, detailed work upon it can follow.

16. But the successful working of any machinery under the Atlantic Pact depends upon a working partnership between the United States and the United Kingdom (as the leading member, both of Western Europe and of the Commonwealth). If our two countries are working at cross purposes, paralysis of effort is bound to be the result.

17. We think that the conclusion to which this reasoning points is that both our Governments should work on the general principle that within a common approach to world affairs, and with full regard to their obligations as members of the United Nations and, in the case of the United Kingdom, as a member of the Commonwealth, they should endeavour to strengthen each other's position in the world on the basis of mutual respect and cooperation. It should be contrary to the policy of either Government to injure the other or to take advantage of the other. On the contrary, it should be their parallel and respective policy to strengthen and improve each other's position by lending each other all proper and possible support. (This is an adaptation of the principles already endorsed at the highest level on both sides in respect of the Middle East - circulated as Annex A).

VII Summary of general aim

At the first meeting or meetings

18. We have been led to believe that the Americans will show us two papers regarding their general attitude on these talks. Subject to what may be said in these papers, and to what the Americans may have to say in discussion, our general aim at the first meeting or meetings might therefore be to establish three main principles:

(1) That our common security lies in Western consolidation through the development of political and economic machinery under Article II of the Atlantic Pact.

70 (2) That the successful development of the Atlantic Pact depends upon a working partnership between the United Kingdom and the United States.

That both our Governments should work on the general principle outlined in paragraph 17, which should be further defined.

The Second Round

75 19. If we could agree on these three principles, or something like them, it would be logical next to examine what measures we can both take to help and strengthen each other [...]

20. It would perhaps be for the Americans to explain what help they wish from us. But we may bear in mind that in peacetime it is only we who can give a lead in Western Europe, which will be followed; it is only we who have the knowledge of South East Asia and the respect of the inhabitants, and it is we who bear the major responsibilities in the Middle East. In time of war, they need us as fighting partners, and they need bases in our territory.

80 21. On our side, our main thesis might be on the following lines.

22. We are already on the road to regaining strength. It is our determined aim to develop that strength and to maintain our position as a World Power. (It is extremely important that we should make such an affirmation of faith in ourselves, perhaps in expanded form. The American attitude may largely depend on their estimate of our confidence in our own future.)

85 23. We have our own ideas about the basis on which our internal strength can best be developed. The Americans may not always agree with them or like them. We ourselves have serious reserves about some aspects of American internal policy and in particular their unemployment policy and the apparent absence of means to counteract severe industrial recessions and slumps which may have a grave effect on Western economy as a whole. But so far as these are purely internal matters, they are for each of us our own affairs.

24. What is essential is that, in accordance with the principle outlined in Paragraph 17 above, we should neither of us hinder the efforts of the other to build up their strength, but on the contrary help each other to do so.

90 25. For us it is vital, if we are to shoulder our share of the burdens of partnership that we should be independent of continued American financial aid by July 1st, 1952. We must measure our commitments against this overriding necessity.

26. We do not want any further grants or direct aid for ourselves. But we do want help on the following lines:

95 (a) Assistance in dealing with the problem of the sterling balances.

(b) Action on tariffs and administrative procedures connected with them, to enable us to sell a sufficient amount of goods in the American market. In other words, it is essential, both in our and in their own long term interests, that the Americans should really adapt policies consonant with their creditor positions. This is the economic counterpart and condition for the political and strategic burdens we are continuing to bear.

(c) That the Americans should refrain from weakening our sources of strength. We have in mind particularly the position of sterling and the sterling area, and the position in our Colonies. These points will perhaps need separate consideration.

100 *VIII Item 5 of the agenda*

27. 'What is the best means of assuring, as a corollary to the above questions, the continuous survey of the world-wide commitments and capabilities of both partners to determine necessary adjustments.'

28. It might be of advantage to discuss next item of the Agenda, and to invite American views.

29. We might ourselves make the following points:

105 (1) There should be full and constant exchanges of information and views, and consultation between the two Governments about all common problems.

(2) It would be of advantage to try and work out, during the second week of the present discussions, statements (as far as this may prove possible) of common principles and objectives in the various areas and subjects under discussion. This would be subject to constant review and adaptation, and would not represent hard and fast commitments. This experiment has already been tried in the difficult area of the Middle East, and has, we feel, proved of considerable value. It is perhaps capable of wider application and of further development. Common principles and objectives in all or most fields of foreign policy would be an important step forward. This suggestion might lead to a review of the topics for discussion during the second week.

110 (3) At the meeting at the State Department on the 14th September, 1949, Mr. Acheson, when informing Mr. Bevin that the United States would appoint representatives to play an active role in the work of the three European strategic planning groups, added that this statement would not in any way limit the 'ultra-secret global planning arrangements' which exist between the United States and the United Kingdom. We should not refer to this assertion in any talks with the United States officials, not all of whom may be aware of it; but if possible, we should try to obtain endorsement of the principle during the Bipartite Ministerial talks.

115 Since the United States and the United Kingdom have to consider defence arrangements for areas outside the Atlantic Region, these special bipartite strategic planning arrangements are of high importance. This should be continued and developed.

120 (4) It is essential that the spirit of partnership should be fully expressed in arrangements for the exchange of secret information and for atomic energy.

(5) It is extremely important that we should not work at cross purposes in the United Nations, and should find means of avoiding as far as possible the situation in which one country votes against the other on issues essential to either.

125 30. As regards the possibility of special bipartite machinery, additional to the above, we should be wise to feel our way cautiously and to see whether the Americans have any suggestions to make. We must also bear in mind French reactions to any overt proposal for special Anglo-American machinery in the political field. One comparatively modest possibility would be to provide for a periodical review as a whole (not merely in particular areas) of the body of common principles and objectives which may have been worked out, as suggested in paragraph 29 above.

IX Other Points for discussion

130 31.. We should of course consider, after the opening meeting or meetings, what, if any, special points merit discussion during the first week - e.g., policy towards the Soviet Union, the relationship between European integration, the Council of Europe and the Atlantic Pact, and such economic matters as may emerge.

X General

135 32. The above is merely intended to suggest an outline of approach. The points included can be expanded or varied as we go along.

33. Finally, we should make it clear that in the first phase we are not speaking from a ministerial brief, or with commitment, but exploring ideas which may be referred to higher authority when we see how the talks go.