

An Anglo-American Balance Sheet - August 1964

Our alliance with the United States Is the most important single factor in our foreign policy. The long association between the two countries and their shared or complementary interests in all parts of the world have meant that other things being equal, each has come to accept the support of the other in its international dealings. The degree of support thus given is based more on a general assessment of the benefits each derives from cooperation than on calculations of precise notional advantage in each case.

2. It is sometimes suggested that Her Majesty's Government would get more out of the Anglo-American relationship if they behaved from time to time like General de Gaulle. Apart from the fact that General de Gaulle has so far obtained little if anything from the Americans as a result of his attitude towards them, the position of France in the world is fundamentally different from our own. Unlike us the French have few remaining world-wide commitments and responsibilities, and they are not in the last resort dependent on their overseas trade. For good or ill they have therefore greater freedom of manoeuvre. The stock-taking that follows shows clearly enough that any attempt on our part to emulate them would do us for more harm than good.

3. The disparities of power and wealth between the United States and Britain rule out any exact balance sheet of national advantage: each wants different things of the other. In general the Americans want our support for the policies which they as leaders of the Western world judge right for the West as a whole. We provide a useful European check on their own policies and from time to time act as a vehicle for them. In some circumstances we are able for historical reasons to play a part which they cannot. Moreover, they look to us as their major partner and as a power with world-wide interests for practical cooperation in a wide variety of fields, from the development of joint defence facilities to the conduct of economic policy. They particularly value their intelligence relationship with us, and ability freely to exchange views on all world problems. We may not always agree with their judgements of what is in the Western interest and may see the hand of domestic political pressures and interests. We may also think that, as has so often happened in the past, their timing is sometimes wrong. Rightly or wrongly the Americans tend to convince themselves that their policies have a moral validity of their own and thus deserve our support: this limits their sense of gratitude when such support is given.

4. We on the other hand largely seek American support in dealing with our colonial or post-colonial problems or in protecting certain of our overseas assets, such as oil. Here the Americans tend to see imperial policies in a new guise. When these demonstrably serve a Western interest they will usually support them. But when they appear to cut across American (or what the Americans regard as Western) policies in the developing world, they are reluctant to help us. Indeed they may only be brought to do so if they need our support elsewhere or as a result of diplomatic pressure, as for example in Malaysia or South Arabia. Some Americans may think we too give a moral quality to our policies, but we are more often accused of being unreasonable than self-righteous.

5. We also need American support for our policies in and towards Western Europe, N.A.T.O., O.E.C.D., G.A.T.T. and so on. The United States commitment to the defence of Europe and to liberal trading policies within the free world economic system are national interests which are no less vital to us because they are shared by our other allies. In these fields, although there are differences of approach, particularly in the military field and that of East/West trade, the objectives of the two countries are closely matched.

6. The following is a list of the main circumstances in which we need American help and the Americans need ours. It points up the fundamental disparity of power between the two countries. It is not intended to be exhaustive and covers only those subjects with a high political content. It does not include the numerous occasions on which both countries need the help of the other in approximately equal measure. Insofar as it refers to the future, it is composed on the assumption that President Johnson will be returned at the forthcoming election.