

'Britain wants to use Europe so as to maintain its position on the international stage' from La Libre Belgique (14 February 1957)

Caption: On 14 February 1957, during a meeting in Bermuda between the American President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, the Belgian Conservative daily newspaper La Libre Belgique outlines the United Kingdom's foreign policy.

Source: La Libre Belgique. 14.02.1957, n° 45; 74e année. Bruxelles: Société d'édition des journaux du Patriote. "L'Angleterre veut s'appuyer sur l'Europe pour conserver son rôle international", auteur:INTERIM , p. 1.

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Britain wants to use Europe so as to maintain its position on the international stage

The British view the meeting between Harold Macmillan and President Dwight D. Eisenhower that was held in Bermuda from 21 to 24 March as putting the finishing touches to the diplomatic, military and economic measures that the United Kingdom has undertaken in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis. Once again, it is a matter of restoring the close cooperation, as equals, that existed between the two countries under Churchill. It should be said that, for British politicians and the media, it is a matter of restoring *Anglo-American* cooperation, not establishing an Anglo-Franco-American triumvirate. The Americans agree with this. The Suez Crisis allowed American policy-makers in the State Department and in the Pentagon to free themselves from the legacy of what they considered was too close an alliance with France and Great Britain that had adversely affected American policy.

British diplomatic circles are not taken in by the Macmillan Government's attempts to maintain illusions for propaganda purposes. It is now recognised in Whitehall that there can be no more talk of the 'three great Western powers'. The Suez Crisis has finally confirmed the status of France and Great Britain as second-rate powers. The realists in Whitehall and Westminster are saying that it is essential to adapt as quickly as possible to the new situation. Britain still has an extremely important role to play on the international stage, even if it is no longer in the same league as the two giants, the United States and the Soviet Union. But there is one proviso: it should not become, or be regarded as, an American 'satellite', and it should be able to speak on behalf of its European allies.

The Americans seem to understand this psychological reaction. President Eisenhower fully endorsed the British proposal for a meeting with Mr Macmillan in Bermuda, on British territory. Mr Macmillan himself managed to invite Louis Saint Laurent, the Canadian Prime Minister, to attend a meeting in Bermuda on the day after President Eisenhower's departure.

Apart from these minor details aimed at protecting British pride, the British Government intends to adapt to the new realities. Hence the combined approach, which seeks to reduce commitments abroad and establish a new power base for Great Britain.

Firstly, it means avoiding the economic bankruptcy, which, in the longer term, is inevitable, by making major cuts in military and civilian spending. British troop numbers in Germany will be cut, even if the number of divisions remains unchanged. British bases in Jordan will soon be closed, and these measures will then be extended to bases in Libya. Troop levels in the Far East will be reduced to the minimum required to ensure a British 'presence' in Malaysia and Singapore. Sooner or later, Great Britain will have to accept a solution to the Cyprus problem, within the NATO framework, so as to be able to withdraw the large number of troops currently engaged in operations against the 'terrorists'. (On the other hand, it is believed that reinforcements will be sent to Aden and to the independent Arab principalities on the Persian Gulf in order to preserve British influence in a region of 'vital' importance to the free world.)

Under these plans, the British authorities regard American aid, in whatever form, be it guided missiles or loans and grants, as an extremely important part of their joint defence efforts.

Alongside these plans, we are witnessing a 'painful review' of British 'splendid isolation' and of Britain's European policy. The same Government that had snubbed the Schuman Plan now understands that only close economic and political cooperation with Europe can safeguard the independence of Europe and of Britain. The proposal to create a free-trade zone was followed by the idea of reviving Western European Union (WEU). In response to an invitation from John Selwyn Lloyd, the Foreign Ministers of the seven members of WEU will meet in London on 26 February to discuss, belatedly, it should be said, disarmament, the future of European cooperation and, in particular, cooperation in the field of weapons research, development and manufacture. The German issue, Eastern Europe and the creation of a genuinely 'European' policy towards the USSR are all subjects that will necessarily arise during the talks between the seven Ministers.

Although Guy Mollet has stolen his thunder, the British Prime Minister, like Churchill and Eden before him, will try to pass himself off to President Eisenhower as Europe's spokesman. He will give Britain the credit for having brought Europe closer together because of the Suez Crisis. At the same time, Mr Macmillan does not intend to champion a 'third force', an idea that seems to have been buried for good. But Great Britain believes that it has the right to take on the 'leadership' role because of the influence that it still exerts in the world and that it can exert for the good of Western Europe. The hope in London is that, faced with the new Soviet diplomatic offensive, the United States will take greater account of the interests of its European allies in the Middle East, in Africa and ... in Europe itself.

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