Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs A. Eden to Mr. Duff Cooper, dated 25 July 1944[[1]](#footnote-1)

SECRET

W.P. (44) 409

25th July 1944

War Cabinet

Policy in Western Europe

Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

I circulate herewith, for the information of my colleagues, a copy of a despatch from Mr. Duff Cooper[[2]](#footnote-2) regarding our policy in Western Europe, together with my copy of my reply.

Foreign Office, 25th July, 1944 A[nthony].E[den].

[…]

*Mr. Eden to Mr. Duff Cooper*[[3]](#footnote-3) *(Algiers)*

(No. 311. Secret.)

Sir, Foreign Office, 25th July, 1944

I have now considered your important despatch No. 295 of the 30th May concerning our policy in Western Europe[[4]](#footnote-4) and should like to congratulate you on the masterly way in which you have dealt with an issue of profound significance to this country and to the British Commonwealth of Nations.

2. With the first nine paragraphs of your despatch I find myself in complete agreement[[5]](#footnote-5). In particular it is clear to my mind that any World Organisation which may be constituted must be reinforced by various systems of alliances. In parenthesis I would here point out that efforts on the part of some people in this country to foster and strengthen an alliance against Germany and Japan were in the thirties always impeded by those who declared that such action on our part would only succeed in creating an Axis which might not otherwise have been formed. [[6]](#footnote-6) We must not fall into this type of error again.

3. In paragraph 10, however, you proceed to discuss the Russian factor and seem to suggest that the best means of preventing the Soviet Union from dominating the Continent of Europe would be *(a)* by the creation of some group in Western Europe and *(b)* by the establishment of a Poland which would be “as strong and as prosperous as possible.” It is common ground that this country will be bound to resist an attempt by any other State to achieve the domination of the Continent of Europe. It follows, therefore, that if the Soviet Union attempted to pursue such a policy we should be bound to resist her by every means in our power. You rightly point out that there are good grounds for hoping that fears of Russia may prove to be illusory, but you nevertheless suggest that in order to guard against such dangers, and notably in order to prevent any Russo-German *rapprochement*, we should have recourse to the measures indicated above.

4. It is here that I take issue with your argument. I would not, of course, suggest that there is no danger of the Soviet Union pursuing a policy of expansion in Europe, but I feel strongly that the policy suggested by you would increase that danger (if it exists) rather than diminish it. It is above all important that any proposals for closer association between ourselves and the Western European allies—or even with the States of Western Europe—should be for the sole purpose of preventing a renewal of German aggression. It would be fatal, as I see it, to let it be understood that there is any other purpose in such an association. If we did so, we should be throwing away the considerable chances of the U.S.S.R. pursuing a policy of collaboration after the war, and, more than that we should be risking the deployment against us in Europe of Russia’s immense capacity for power politics and disruption. Not only, indeed, would the Russians try to prevent the formation of our system of alliances by all means in their power (and they have very considerable means in their power) but also the States of Western Europe, confronted by the stark alternative of choosing between ourselves and Russia, might hesitate to commit themselves and adopt the policy of terrified neutrality, or alternatively of appeasement, which characterised the dismal period between the wars. All this would mean the end of the “World Organisation” and the hopes of European recovery.

5. If, therefore, any healthy system is to be built up in Western Europe—and on this I shall have more to say later—it must be squarely based *(a)* on the Anglo-Soviet alliance, *(b)* on an expressed intention never again to permit the revival of a powerful Germany, and *(c)* if possible within the ambit of a World Organisation, itself resting on an alliance, or close understanding, between the United Kingdom, the United States and the U.S.S.R.

6. I now come to your second proposal, namely, that a powerful Poland should be created to act as “a barrier between Russia and Germany” and your statement that “apart from hatred, there is nothing but Poland to divide Russia from Germany and therefore the stronger and more powerful Poland becomes the better for the peace of the world.” Essential though it is that the first nation which took up arms against Hitler should have a truly free and independent national life, I suggest that this judgment reverses historical facts. Poland, whether free or partitioned, has for 150 years been a link between Prussia and Russia rather than a barrier. It was, indeed, the means by which Bismarck secured from Russia that assent to the creation of a unified Germany which she had refused in 1848-49. And it was the tension between Russia and Poland that was a cause of the failure to bring Russia to our side in 1939. A Poland on good terms with the Soviet Union might have a chance of being strong, independent, and prosperous: a Poland on bad terms with the Soviet Union would be a danger to the peace of the world and the security of these islands.

7. With paragraph 16 to the end of this despatch[[7]](#footnote-7), on the other hand, I find myself in very general agreement, though the extent to which we can work towards “the formation of a group of the western democracies bound together by the most explicit terms of alliance” is in practice limited by various factors. In the first place we have to consider our relations with the United States. There is no doubt that, rightly or wrongly, the American Administration is suspicious of proposals which would tend, in their opinion, to divide up the world into a series of “*blocs*”. Not only do they fear that such *blocs* would become mutually hostile, but they also believe that their formation would tend to reinforce those isolationist elements in the United States who are above all anxious that their country should undertake no commitments in Europe, but rather concentrate on preserving its power and influence in South America, and possibly, in the Far East as well.

8. Whatever justification there may be for these fears, the fact remains that only by encouraging the formation of some World Organisation are we likely to induce the Americans—and this means the American Senate—to agree to accept any European commitments designed to range America, in case of need, against a hostile Germany or against any European breaker of the peace. It is quite on the cards, indeed, many would say that it is likely, that the American Senate will never enter into such general obligations; but the chance remains, and so long as it does it would be folly to throw it away by undue emphasis on policies which cut across the lines on which the present American Government is working. For there is surely no doubt that in the event of our obtaining such an obligation there would be small reason to fear German or indeed any other aggression in Europe for a long period to come[[8]](#footnote-8).

9. The immediate and declared pursuit of the policy recommended by you in paragraph 21 of your despatch would hence only be desirable if we decided that it was useless to expect any American guarantee of the European peace settlement, and had to make do with that settlement being guaranteed by us and our friends on the one hand and by Soviet Russia and her friends on the other. In that, perhaps likely, event, how could we best organise a western group such as you contemplate? In the first place, presumably, we should have bilateral or multilateral treaties of mutual defence against Germany. Such treaties would be the foundation of the whole system, and indeed there would be every advantage in our working discreetly towards them in the period during which we shall be uncertain whether a World Organisation, with its necessary commitment on the part of America, is going to come into being or not. In any case, there should be no more difficulty about grafting them on to the World Organisation than there was in grafting the Locarno treaties on to the League of Nations[[9]](#footnote-9). Such a system would of course not have to take German susceptibilities into account, as Locarno did, and would go further than Locarno by providing for staff talks, common plans for defence and so on. If, in addition, it were possible to standardise armaments and armaments production, it is evident that the total strength of the group will be very considerably increased.

10. But as I see it you aim higher than this, and contemplate what would be a sort of union, at any rate in the economic sphere[[10]](#footnote-10). Though this is perhaps outside my province, I rather question whether we could arrive at anything like an economic union unless we had political union as well; and whether we shall all of us be ready for a political union, even after the present war, seems to me to be open to the gravest doubt. You will already have noticed that M. Van Kleffens[[11]](#footnote-11) has publicly repudiated Field-Marshal Smuts’s[[12]](#footnote-12) suggestion that Holland, among others, might join the British Commonwealth of Nations. [[13]](#footnote-13) As for France, I cannot imagine that if (for instance) the Prime Minister’s offer of 1940[[14]](#footnote-14) was extended to a Provisional Government under General de Gaulle it would have the slightest chance of acceptance. In all these circumstances it rather looks as if plans for some closely integrated Western Union would be doomed to failure. Only in the event of real friction between the Soviet Government and this country would it seem to come into the field of practical politics. For then the Western European countries might conceivably become so frightened that they would agree to the abandonment of their respective sovereignties—unless, indeed, as suggested above, they adopted the rather easier path of relapsing into a terrified neutrality.

11. I observe that, in your view, the Western system, whatever it may turn out to be, ought to consist not only of ourselves and France and the minor Western Allies but also, perhaps subsequently, of Sweden, Portugal, Spain and Italy. With Portugal[[15]](#footnote-15), of course, we already have an alliance and with the other States mentioned it might well be possible to concert regional measures for defence against Germany; but if I am right in holding that even a modified form of union would be impossible between ourselves and France, it would *a fortiori* be impossible between ourselves and Spain and Italy. It is a matter for debate, and for subsequent investigation by the economic authorities, to what extent, if at all, and in default of any measure of political union, the States mentioned could be grouped for economic purposes. One of the main troubles, as it seems to me, would be that, on the one hand, it seems almost out of the question that both we and they should jointly agree on the creation of a sort of Western European District of Colombia. If we could do either of these things, then, and only then, should we establish a power factor equal in every way and perhaps superior to our two great Allies. And if we did so there would be every reason to try to absorb in it an independent Rhineland Republic, or even a larger slice of Western Germany. But in default of this it appears to me that we can only build up from the bottom, in other world, on the basis of common defence against renewal of German aggression.

12. There is one final consideration. Unless we are very careful we shall find that the natural corollary to a Western group under our aegis is the creation of a similar group under Russia’s aegis, implying the division of Europe into the spheres of influence with Germany as a no-man’s-land in between. To some extent this progress is inevitable, in so far as Russia is clearly aiming at some system in Eastern Europe in which she would take the lead. [[16]](#footnote-16) The Soviet-Czech treaty[[17]](#footnote-17) is the first step in this direction, and it has been left open for signature by other States, and specifically by Poland. In any case, so long as the centripetal force holding our Western group together is fear of Germany all will be well. But will that fear last? Germany will be at great pains to exorcise it and she may succeed sooner than it would seem possible at the present moment. In that case any Western group would tend to disintegrate unless a new cement were found to keep it together and the only possible cement that I, and indeed you, can see would be the fear of an aggressive and expansionist Russia. As I have already said, a Western group formed on such a basis would be a disastrous development, since it would lead to the division of Europe into two hostile camps with Germany in a position to throw her weight on either side.

13. To sum up, a Western group would be welcome as part of any organisation to be set up by Britain and Russia, in the first instance, for the protection of Europe against a new German aggression; but a Western group organised as a defensive measures against the possibility of Russia embarking at some future date on a policy of aggression and domination would be a most dangerous experiment which might well precipitate the evils against which it was intended to guard.

14. From the political point of view, therefore, I suggest that our policy should be directed towards establishing some kind of defence system in Western Europe whether we are successful in creating a World Organisation or not. If we are unsuccessful the need for it will be immeasurably greater. The strategic issues involved in such a policy are now under consideration by the Chiefs of Staff, and we must await their views before elaborating our policy in any greater detail. The economic issues, too, will have to be the subject of more intensive study. In the meantime I trust I have sufficiently indicated our main political ends and the means whereby we may hope to achieve them.

I am, &c.

ANTHONY EDEN

[TNA, CAB 66/53]

Keywords: Inter-allied relations, post-war order

1. The NKGB managed to obtain and send to Moscow Eden’s despatch. See: OGB. T. 5. Kn. 2. p. 64–70. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Duff Cooper’s despatch is not included. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Duff Cooper, Alfred (1890 – 1954) – British statesman and diplomat, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1941 – 1943), British Ambassador to France (1944 – 1948). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In his despatch, received in London on 13 June 1944. Duff-Cooper stressed that “throughout her history as a Great Power it has been the policy of Great Britain to prevent the domination of Europe by any one too powerful nation”, and asserted that the Soviet Union was now posing a threat. To counter this potential threat, he called for the establishment “a group of the western democracies, bound together by the most explicit terms of alliance”, one that would include Great Britain, France, Belgium, Holland, Norway and Denmark (with a possible inclusion of Sweden, Portugal, Spain and Italy, later on). Eden circulated Duff Cooper’s despatch with his own response to Cabinet members. См.: W.P. (44) 409, Memo by Eden, 25/07/1944 // TNA, CAB 66/53. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Duff Cooper’s despatch advanced ideas about the unfeasibility of securing British security by relying only on a future international organization; the need to take into account the mistakes of the interwar period; to establish, as close as possible ties with the US; the impossibility of UK’s isolation from the continent; and maintaining the imperative of preventing the hegemony of a single continental power in Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The irony was that in the 1930s, this idea was shared by Eden’s closest associates during the war, including O. Sargent (Neilson K. Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939. Cambridge, 2006. p. 152). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Eden referred here to Duff-Cooper’s opinion that, “One glance at a map of the world should convince the observer that the nations situated on the western seaboard of Europe have interests so closely in common as to render the desirability of their mutual understanding and intimate co-operation plainly apparent”. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Duff-Cooper had a somewhat different emphasis: “The idea that Great Britain, having concluded an alliance with the United States, can afford to turn her back on Europe does not stand the test, just as the policy of isolation”. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Series of treaties signed on October 16, 1925 in Locarno (Switzerland), the main being the Rhine Pact between France, Germany and Belgium (with guarantees from Great Britain and Italy). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Within the alliance of western democracies councils might be set up on which all the Powers concerned would be represented, and of which the objects would be the integration of the defence forces and the creation of a common economic policy”, wrote Duff-Cooper. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Kleffens, Eelco Nicolaas van (1894 – 1983) – Netherlands’ statesman and politician, Minister of Foreign Affairs (1939 – 1946), Representative on the UN Security Council (1946 – 1947), Ambassador to USA (1947 – 1950), Minister to Portugal (1950 – 1954), President of the UN General Assembly (1954 – 1955). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Smuts, Jan Christiaan (1870 – 1950) – South African and British Commonwealth statesman and Field-Marshal, Prime-Minister of Union of South Africa (1919 – 1924, 1939 – 1948), close confidant of Churchill. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This is in reference to the sensational speech given by the Prime Minister of the South African Union, Feld Marshall Jan Smuts, at the Parliamentary Association of the British Commonwealth (25 November 1943), in which he warned of Russian dominance in Europe after the war and called for Great Britain to establish closer ties with Western European countries until the possible entry of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway into the Commonwealth structure. Publ. in: Selections from the Smuts Papers / Ed. by J. Van Der Poel. Cambridge, 1973. Vol. 4. p. 456-469. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This was in reference to the so-called ‘Declaration of the Union’, which was approved by the British Cabinet on 16 June 1940 and endorsed by Churchill, de Gaulle, and the then Prime Minister of France P. Reynaud. It stated that, "The two Governments declare that France and Great Britain shall no longer be two nations, but one Franco-British Union”. Historians consider Britain’s rationale behind the ‘Declaration of the Union’ to be varied, ranging from a desire to support France in a critical moment of its destruction to a desire to secure control over France’s colonies and fleet. See: Shlaim A. Prelude to Downfall: The British Offer of Union to France, June 1940 // Journal of Contemporary History. 1974. Vol. 3. No. 9. p. 27-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Portugal was traditionally viewed as Britain’s "oldest ally", dating back to the Anglo-Portuguese treaty of 1373. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A similar idea had previously been articulated in the Foreign Office memorandum, ‘Western Europe’, which was sent on 23 June to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for commentary. It noted: "The Anglo-Soviet Treaty lies at the base of our whole European policy, and we should try to reinforce it by all means in our power. The formation of some Western European security system would, however, reinforce rather than detract from the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, more especially if the Russians, with our approval, constructed some similar security system in Eastern Europe – and they will almost certainly do so whether we approve it or not” (C.O.S. 44 (113), 23/06/1944 // TNA, CAB 80/44). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Agreement on mutual assistance, signed by V.M. Molotov and the Ambassador of Czechoslovakia Z. Fierlinger in Moscow on 12 December 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)