Note form the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, A. Eden to Prime Minister, W. Churchill, 29 November 1944

P.M./44/732.

PRIME MINISTER.

SECRET.

Your minute M.1144/4 of 25th November [[1]](#footnote-1).

I agree that we must have an early talk about the so-called “Western Bloc”.

2. Let me say at the outset that I entirely agree with you that it would be both absurd and highly dangerous for us to enter into any commitments for the defence of Norway, Denmark, Belgium or Holland except in conjunction with the French and as part of some general plan for containing Germany evolved under the aegis of a World Organisation. On these two points the Foreign Office has never had any doubts and I have repeatedly made them clear myself.

3. I further agree with you that the Western European countries behaved very foolishly between the two wars and were grossly unprepared to meet the blow when it fell. But our own record in this period was not entirely praiseworthy and we only escaped their fate by the skin of our teeth and thanks to the Channel. It has always seemed to me that the lesson of the disasters of 1940 is precisely the need to build up a common defence association in Western Europe, which would prevent another Hitler, whence so ever he may come, pursuing what you have so aptly called the policy of “one by one”. The best way of creating such an association would obviously be to build up France and we can only hope that during the period of the occupation of Germany such a build up will be possible. It is, in fact, only when we evacuate Germany that the desirability of any regional defence organisation of Western Europe arises in a concrete form.

4. Nevertheless, there seems every reason to start thinking about it now, since if our Western European allies and more especially the French have the impression that we are not going in future to accept any commitments on the Continent, it may well be (as you suggest) that they will come to the conclusion that their only hope lies in making defence arrangements, not with us, but with the Russians. And surely the development of long range missiles proves that somehow or other, if we are to retain our independence, we must obtain some kind of “defence in depth”?[[2]](#footnote-2)

5. As I see it, then, a properly organised Western Europe can provide us with depth for defence and large resources for manpower which would greatly ease our burden and enable us to avoid a huge standing army which would cripple our economy. Hitler’s strategy of “one by one” not only gave him ideal bases from which to bombard us and assault our sea communications, but also deprived us of a manpower pool of over sixty millions. Consequently, we have once again had to strain ourselves to the utmost to raise a large army as well as a powerful Air Force and Navy, and even then we could not have hoped for victory without the manpower of Russia and America. Meanwhile, Hitler has himself had the labour of millions of these Western Europeans, which has greatly helped him to keep up the numbers of the German Army. This situation might be avoided in the future if we have some system whereby France in the first instance and the smaller Western European Allies in the second agree to organise their defences together with us according to some common plan. I see no reason to suppose that such an arrangement would result in the maintenance by us of a huge standing army, though I think we should have to reconcile ourselves to making a rather larger land contribution than the famous two divisions which was all we had to offer last time.

6. You ask how the idea of “what is called the Western Bloc got around in the Foreign Office and other influential circles”. I think the idea was first mooted in connexion with the preparatory work for the World Security Organisation talks at Dumbarton Oaks. Concurrently, the Foreign Ministers of Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands were all spontaneously telling me that their countries had learned the bitter lesson of 1940 and were determined in future to collaborate closely with us for the joint security of Western Europe and in particular to continue and expand the arrangements by which, during the war, we have trained and equipped their reconstituted national forces. I also had some correspondence with Duff Cooper, on the subject which was circulated to the War Cabinet (W.P. (44) 409 of 25th July.[[3]](#footnote-3)

7. In view of all this, on my instructions the Foreign Office invited the Chiefs of Staff in June to consider the question of some regional security system to cover Western Europe as part of the machinery necessary to make effective a general system of European security under a World Organisation. (A copy of the Foreign Office memorandum is attached at Annex A). While reserving their considered views on the whole question of the future security of the United Kingdom, the Chiefs of Staff replied that from the military point of view they saw great advantages in the proposal for a special regional association in Western Europe, which would “be a start in building up a strong association of nations in Western Europe to provide us with the depth which is becoming increasingly necessary to our defence.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

8. As the outcome of this favourable opinion of the Chiefs of Staff, our representatives at the Dumbarton Oaks conversations were able to play their part in securing the provisions contained in Section VIII of the agreed scheme of recommendations which looks forward to the establishment of regional security associations within the framework of the World Organisation. I attach the text in question (Annex B), and also that of another provision (Annex C) which would permit the establishment of regional sub-committees of the Military Staff Committee. During the discussions at Dumbarton Oaks neither the United States and Soviet Delegations appeared to have any objection to the possible development of a Western European association under these provisions.

9. The key to the matter is at present the attitude of the French, and we must wait to see what comes out of General de Gaulle’s talks at Moscow.[[5]](#footnote-5) In December 1941 Stalin spontaneously urged that we should, in our own interest, take charge after the war of security in Western Europe (see marked passage on page 1 of record of interview with Marshal Stalin on December 16th, 1941, Annex D),[[6]](#footnote-6), and I cannot believe that he would oppose the creation of a special regional association in Western Europe provided this were an integral part of the general system of world security, under the control of the World Organisation, and that it were made perfectly clear that it was directed against a resurgence of Germany.

*A.E.*

29th November, 1944.

[TNA, PREM 4/30/8]

Key words: Post-war order.

1. In all likelihood, this was in reference to Churchill’s note, in which he expressed his scepticism about the idea of a Western bloc, taking into account that before the revival of French power (which, according to his estimations, would take up to 5 - 10 years) the rest of the West European countries would be too weak. Churchill believed that the UK will be able of defend itself on its own by relying on a strong Air Force and Navy (From Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary, 25.11.44 // TNA, PREM 4/30/8). NKGB fixed-post spies would promptly inform Moscow on Churchill’s and Eden’s correspondence on the issue (OGB. T. 5. Kn. 2. p. 632–633). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Earlier, in July 1944, Attlee articulated a similar point of view in a memorandum entitled ‘Foreign Policy and Flying Bomb’: ”The advent of the flying bomb and the possible arrival in the near future of the long-range rocket have far-reaching implications in the field of foreign policy… From our point of view Norway, Denmark, Holland and France are necessary outposts of Britain and, inasmuch as Britain is now as she has been for a hundred years a shield for the United States, outposts of America as well” (W.P. (44) 414, Memo by Attlee, 26/07/1944 // TNA, CAB 66/53). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See: Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs A. Eden to Mr. Duff Cooper, dated 25 July 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As an example of Joint Chiefs of Staff deliberations on this issue, see: COS (44) 955 (O), Report by COS, 08/11/1944 // TNA, CAB 80/89. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. De Gaulle's visit to Moscow took place between 2 and 10 December 1944 and ended with the signing of the Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance for 20 years. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Stalin then advanced the idea to Eden that in order for Britain to ensure its post-war security it is necessary for Britain to conclude a military alliance with Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as have military and naval bases in France, Norway and Denmark. See the Soviet minutes: SSSR i germanskiy vopros. T. 1. p. 124–135. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)