DIFFERENT ENDS OF THE TELESCOPE: GREAT BRITAIN'S PROBLEMS WITH AMERICAN OPINION DURING WORLD WAR II

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During World War II the British Government was acutely aware of its dependence upon an alliance with the United States not only to win the war but to maintain Britain as a primary power after it. The importance of the American connection lay behind Churchill's proposals, made on more than one occasion, for something closer even than an alliance. He urged a merger of armed forces and of military and, to some degree, foreign policy directorates, and even speculated about common citizenship.[1] But the mood of America was never such that notions like these could become realities. True, Americans accepted a combined US–UK military command during the war, effective principally in the European Theater, but they would go no further. Although there was admiration for Britain and a spirit of cooperation, there were also powerful negative attitudes.[2]

It is those attitudes and the official British reaction to them that this article investigates. It will not try to discuss all the events or policies involving the two countries during the war and its immediate aftermath, but only those relative to some of the principal American feelings and opinions that troubled British policymakers.

American attitudes that particularly concerned Whitehall focused on four general subjects: Britain's war effort, its importance as a world power, isolationism, and colonialism. The first two were matters of perception, the second two of more basic political philosophy.

As early as the first quarter of 1942 reports had reached Whitehall that Americans were critical of Great Britain's war effort. The British Embassy in Washington saw the end of the Anglo–American honeymoon that began in the immediate post-Pearl Harbor era and that in its prime included a flying visit from Churchill to Washington even before 1941 was out. Within as little as three months of that trip strong criticism was being heard of Britain's performance in the war, focused on its military reverses and the quality of its officers. Furthermore, the suspicion was aired in the United States that the British Government was hoarding forces in the UK to defend the home islands rather than sending them to the fighting fronts and also that it was conducting its war effort mainly in the interests of the empire.[3] Moreover, following Japan's attack on American positions in the Pacific, not only did Asia become the focus of popular attention, obscuring the earlier image of Great Britain struggling valiantly and alone, but the United States began to feel its own superiority of strength. Britain's Embassy in Washington believed that in 1942 'even outside the Isolationist ranks the view gained powerful support that the war should be largely American led and American managed'.[4]

In May 1942 HMG began a drive to offset this American view by publicizing its war effort both on the battle fronts and on the home front.[5] Indeed, Britain had engaged in this kind of activity before, but previously the object had been to convince Americans to send war supplies at a time when the United States was technically neutral.

The new effort met obstacles even at home. Armed service departments were always reluctant to release useful data for fear of endangering national security, and, meanwhile, ministers and their staffs engaged in long and sometimes acrimonious arguments about the best means of telling the story.[6] Nonetheless, the story was told in various ways and through various media. For example, a series of pictorial graphs suitable for reproduction in newspapers and magazines were distributed in the US from 1942 until 1944.[7] Principal themes were (1) British sacrifice of comforts in order to win the war, (2) the extent of British war production, (3) the extent of British support to the US war effort (reverse lend-lease it was called), and (4) the extent and effect of British fighting, emphasizing the Battle of Britain and the Blitz.

The effects were uneven. Sometimes it seemed that Americans were responding, as when Sir Ronald Campbell, Minister at the British Embassy in Washington, said US opinion of the UK had risen as a result especially of El Alamein, plus the 'growing offensive power of the Royal Air Force'.

In addition, he believed Americans had come to realize that Britain had already dealt successfully with problems they themselves were being called upon to face, such as rationing and labor shortages.[8] But more often the atmosphere seemed discouraging. Eden told Lord Halifax, then British Ambassador in Washington, that Americans had 'a much exaggerated conception' of the military contribution they were making in the war. 'They lie freely about this', he said, '. . . and we are too polite to put them right, or it may be difficult to do so without giving information to the enemy'. Consequently, Eden stated, Americans thought, incorrectly, that they were making the major fighting effort, and he added, 'we must blow our own military trumpet rather more, and this we have plans to do'.[9]

Halifax agreed with these views, observing that the US press provided such lopsided coverage that 'the reader therefore, gets a vivid impression that the Americans are fighting hard and a vague impression that there may be some British troops somewhere about'. He urged London to provide material to its officials in Washington about both Britain's casualties and its war production and also suggested that American war correspondents be attached to British units at the fronts. Finally, he recommended that when the time came for British troops to go to the Pacific, that they do so via the United States, being seen from coast to coast.[10]

Churchill, also concerned about American denigration of Great Britain's war effort, once told Halifax that he believed Britain's 'weight in the war is not unworthy of the Chinese "Titan" ', mocking not only popular American admiration for China but Roosevelt's determination to treat it as one of four great allies.[11] Halifax in turn suggested that when the Prime Minister was at Quebec in September 1944 he make a broadcast reviewing the performance of Canadian and British troops.[12] Ostensibly simply for Canadian gratification, the broadcast would also be of 'immense value' in the United States, he said.

Minister of Information Brendan Bracken suggested that besides extolling its own war effort, Britain should praise America's less. He stated that 'For nearly two years British Ministers, soldiers, newspapers and of course, the B.B.C. have been using lyrical language about the weapons and help we have been receiving from the United States'. The result, he said, was that 'a large number of Americans believe that our production is trifling and that America has borne the brunt of producing the weapons and planes used by the British'.[13]

Meanwhile, in the autumn of 1944 efforts were going forward in London to produce a Government White Paper illustrating Britain's contribution to the war. At the same time consideration, especially in the Ministry of Information, was being given to ways in which the paper might have greatest impact. Frank Darvall of the American Division proposed to the Director General, Cyril J. Radcliffe, that 'the whole resources of the ministry should be mobilised for the purpose, and a concentrated campaign to put the statistics across through every available medium, given priority over almost everything else'.[14] He suggested a popular pamphlet, displays, 'high brow and low brow' feature articles, 'a book or books', films, and 'mobilisation of all B.B.C. services to give these facts and figures the maximum play when they appear, plus advance notice to the press that the figures are coming'. The Director General agreed.

After Churchill presented the White Paper to Parliament at the end of November, it was distributed around the world. In the United States care was taken to get it to key journalists and to other influential persons in government and private life.[15] On November 23 Brendan Bracken described it to major London publishers, to whom he sent advance copies, as 'the most valuable source book for British publicity the Government has produced',[16] and later he said, 'it had a fine reception in the press and on the radio throughout the world, and especially in the United States'.[17] The Ministry's Reference Division, reporting on 'overseas publicity and distribution' said that in the United States 'staggering results were achieved, especially in New York'. The Ministry, of course, was speaking of its own work, so its reports may have been somewhat exaggerated, but quotes from papers and broadcasts substantiated its claim that American journalists were impressed and even 'shocked' at Britain's enormous sacrifices.[18]

But to keep Americans awed was a more difficult task. If the White Paper dammed up cynicism or ignorance for a while, it did not do so for long. On March 25, 1945, for instance, the British Embassy in Washington was calling for figures to counter a contention of Drew Pearson that there were three million Americans on the Western Front compared with 250,000 British. Or witness Eden's reaction the following month, five months after the release of the White Paper, when he was struck again by the lack of credit accorded to Britain in America. On April 29 while at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco he wired Churchill that he was 'seriously perturbed' at the skimpy press coverage of British military operations and said that even Senators and Government officials unconsciously assumed that only the American and Russian armies were 'in the picture'. He added, 'it is of the utmost importance from a political standpoint that we should use every effort to bring home to the Americans what we have done and are doing'.[19]

When the war in Europe ended, Bracken urged publication of secret data on British casualties, production, etc. 'while the world (was) still thinking and talking about VE-day'. The object was to add to the 'little general knowledge Americans have about the size of the British contribution to victory in relation to their own and to that of Russia'.[20]

Meanwhile, John S. Knight, publisher of *The Chicago Daily News* had begun an exchange in mid-1945 with Lord Beaverbrook on the subject of Britain's contribution to the war effort.[21] The first round consisted of an open letter from Knight to Beaverbrook printed in *The Daily News* on July 14, 1945 saying in effect that Americans did not think Great Britain was pulling its weight in the war.

particularly against Japan. The statement 'they are at a loss to understand why the mighty British Navy is not taking a more active part in the Pacific' must have been especially galling to Britons aware of HMG's efforts, particularly at the Second Quebec Conference, to involve the British Navy in the Pacific War and of Admiral King's staunch determination to exclude it.[22] In fact, General Douglas MacArthur, American Army commander in that theatre was equally opposed to using British and Commonwealth troops. When coerced by top-level agreement at Potsdam to include them in plans for the final assault on Japan, he wrote a note to the British Chiefs almost insulting in both its requirements and its obvious unwillingness to have their units in his ranks.[23]

At any event, Beaverbrook answered with a letter in his *Daily Express* showing the extent of British production, men at arms, casualties, etc.and pointing out how high the involvement and sacrifice of Great Britain was in percentage terms, rather than simply in numbers. Both letters were published in both papers.

His Majesty's Government felt that Americans needed convincing not only that Great Britain was making a strenuous and effective war effort, but that it was, in Bracken's words, 'one of the greatest and most progressive industrial nations in the world'.[24] In mid 1943 the Washington Embassy said, 'The aim of British publicity in the United States has been to maintain before the public a clear picture of the British . . . as an advanced society of democratic peoples and an ally whose strength will be no less vital in the peace to come than it is in the partnership of war'.[25]

But as the war continued and Americans' self-confidence grew, it became harder to convince them that they needed British strength. The Embassy in Washington noted even in 1942 that 'New conceptions of the post-war world tended to relegate Britain to a junior position in what however, was still thought of as an Anglo–American condominium'.[26] A fear of sliding or being nudged into a second place in the alliance would haunt the British Government, especially the Foreign Office, throughout the war years and into the postwar era. A major task for British officials was to keep that from happening, even though in terms of armed forces and economic strength their country was clearly out-matched. They hoped, however, that knowledge, experience, and influence could make up the balance, along with strategic benefits offered by Britain's worldwide Empire and Commonwealth. The problem, they knew, was to convince Americans of this.

In April 1943 Campbell said it was necessary to show the U.S. that it needed Great Britain and its Empire to insure American security. Americans had not appreciated that fact, he believed, because they considered Britain's attitude to be either 'patronising or suppliant' and because they had great confidence in their continental fastness.[27] He added that the British should project an image of efficiency, portraying themselves, when interests coincided as 'efficient collaborators', and when they did not, as 'honest competitors, the kind of up-to-date people a good American can do business with . . .'

Nevile Butler, head of the North American Department of the Foreign Office, also demonstrated concern for Imperial prestige when he wrote to Richard Law regarding British participation in a food conference to open in the United States in

the spring of 1943. (Law, Minister of State in the Foreign Office, was to head the UK delegation.) The letter stated:

> Alan Dudley is much impressed by the opportunity that the Food Conference offers for influencing American opinion concerning British Empire–American relations, and particularly for demonstrating to the American public the strength and unity and resources which make the Empire a valuable partner in world affairs. He, therefore, thinks it most important that both before and during the Conference the British Empire delegations, and particularly that of the United Kingdom, should concern themselves not only with furthering the success of the Conference, but with trying to produce a favorable effect on American opinion from the viewpoint of the British Empire as a whole. I think myself that you will have the above very much in mind, but pass it on to you . . .[28]

But American attitudes, viewed from Whitehall, showed signs of deteriorating rather than improving as time went on. Nearly two years later Law told Churchill:

> I see a great deal of evidence from the United States which suggests not only that the Americans tend to underrate our war effort, but also that they are tending to regard us as a factor of little account in world affairs in the future. They are beginning to feel that it is Russia, not we, who are the only partners equal to them in strength, and they even evince some admiration for what they call the 'toughness' of the Russians.
>
> It has always been quite clear that our future depends on there being a feeling of genuine partnership between the United States and ourselves. The situation as it is developing in Europe makes such a partnership even more necessary. I do not believe that it will be possible to realize an Anglo–American partnership in any real sense unless the American people can be made to understand, as they do not yet understand, the value of the contribution which we have made and can continue to make.[29]

Churchill wrote at the bottom of Law's minute: 'Noted. I do not fear these particular dangers'. A strange note surely, for Churchill had feared for the Anglo–American relationship before. Perhaps, however, he distinguished between the British being held at arm's length, as they had been by Roosevelt at Tehran and on subsequent occasions,[29a] and having their potential underestimated, which was essentially what was bothering Law. Yet as Law pointed out, if that potential was misunderstood, the Anglo–American partnership, so dear to Churchill, would probably never be realized. Moreover, if Churchill was optimistic, Law's pessimism more accurately reflected thinking in the Foreign Office and the Embassy in Washington. They grew ever more concerned with the 'junior partner' issue as the war in Europe and then in Asia came to a close and Americans became increasingly aware of their unparalleled might.

The American attitude toward all of the Big Three nations was roughly reflected in a Gallup Poll reported to London on July 16, 1945. Responding to a question asking which nation would be most influential in the postwar world, 63% said the United States, 24% said Russia, and 5% said Great Britain. John Balfour, new Minister at the Embassy, quoted this poll in a 12-page letter to Bevin on August 9, 1945, which was printed two weeks later and distributed among Foreign Office officials.[30] Balfour also commented that America was abandoning Roosevelt's

'grand design' for fighting the war and keeping the peace, i.e. 'coequal collaboration of Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States', and added his suspicion that it was 'groping toward a new order of things' in which Great Britain, still a 'bastion of Western European security' and 'the focal point of a far-flung oceanic system', was nevertheless 'expected to take her place as junior partner in an orbit of power predominantly under American aegis'.

B.E.T. Gage, a member of the North American Department, attended the San Francisco Conference and then remained in the United States throughout much of the summer of 1945. Based on his talks with businessmen, journalists, and 'others', a group which he admitted was perhaps not 'entirely representative', he said he thought Americans believed:

1. The world's future depended on 'two colossi', the Soviet Union and the United States. Britain was so weakened economically by war and her Commonwealth was so scattered that she could almost be overlooked in American policy.
2. The United States should support the Commonwealth, however, to enable it to survive as a junior partner, helping to counterbalance the Soviets.
3. Britain was 'as full of tricks as a monkey' and would probably outsmart the United States and its inept State Department in commercial and political dealings, thus dragging Americans into things not in their interest. (British statesman were already well aware that many Americans, including officials, considered them clever and crafty to a perilous degree. Although this American perception did not bring forth the kind of organized British reaction caused by the other American views mentioned in this article, it was a constant problem to Whitehall.)[31]

Whether or not these depressing assessments of American attitudes were correct, they poured into London 'ad nauseam,' as one official put it, and clearly made themselves felt in the British Government. On November 20, 1945, for example, the Washington Embassy's Information Office prepared a memorandum entitled 'confidential guidance . . . a general line which British officials in the U.S. may find useful'.[32] It stated:

Public Relations Line
The line set out in this paper may be summarized thus:
With firmness and conviction we should show —

a. 2 Backlashers that in peace as in war we are able, tough, determined and dependable;
b. that the British Commonwealth and Empire will continue to be an essential world-wide system of strength and stability in a confused world;
c. that we will overcome the severe but temporary difficulties resulting from our war sacrifices, and rebuild our leadership in production and world trade;
d. that we are determined to set an example to the world in political democracy, individual freedom and social progress;
e. that the aim of British foreign policy is to promote peace, prosperity, and freedom, through international understanding, goodwill and energetic co-operation in the United Nations Organisation and otherwise;
f. that we seek a close working partnership with the United States, compatible with our responsibilities in the United Nations Organisation.

Isolationist attitudes in the United States also caused great anxieties in Whitehall. If the definition of isolationism is imprecise, British officials concerned with American affairs used the word often and meant, whatever else, an American reluctance to become involved significantly in European political matters.[33] HMG however, was determined that its trans-Atlantic ally should pay a prominent role in the postwar world, especially in Europe, where British policy called for the containment of Soviet expansion and depended on the active support of the United States. In other areas also, Britain's power and prestige were linked to the alliance Consequently, for the men conducting the UK's foreign policy and concerned with its status as a world power, it was clear that isolation for America would mean decline for Great Britain. Halifax spoke for most, if not all, of these officials when he mentioned 'the prime necessity' in all British planning of blocking an American return to isolationism.[34]

An intense discussion of this subject took place in London in the summer of 1943, centred on Walter Lippmann's recently published book, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic*. A copy circulated in the upper echelons of the Foreign Office, drawing a great deal of comment, almost all of which approved the theme while arguing with details.[35] Lippmann urged the United States to bring its foreign policy into line with its extended commitments and called for a postwar alliance with the Soviet Union and Great Britain. The Foreign Office thought highly not only of the suggested US–British alliance (less so presumably of the recommended US–Soviet tie) but of the general call to end isolationism, a prerequisite to alliance. Hence officials were gratified that Lippmann's book seemed to be receiving ample attention in the United States, including among Government policymakers. The Embassy in Washington said that Wendell Willkie and Clare Boothe Luce plus Senators Austin, Lodge, Wiley, and McNary supported the main 'alliance' thesis. It also reported that the book had been made available to from five to six million subscribers to *Reader's Digest* in abridged form and predicted it would 'have an important effect upon the development of (American) public opinion . . . towards foreign affairs'.[36]

In spring of 1944, a Gallup poll showed that American isolationist sentiment was much on the wane, at least judging from attitudes towards a possible international peacekeeping organization. According to the findings, 72% of Americans approved U.S. membership in a 'new League of Nations or world peace council', their political party preference or geographic region seeming to make little difference In the case of Democrats 74% approved, and in the case of Republicans, 70%. The Middle West, often considered a stronghold of isolationism, approved by 71%, only 1% less than the national average. U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain John Winant sent a newspaper account of this poll to Churchill who scribbled on it 'good' and then, indulging a pet peeve, added whimsically 'but only on the condition China should be the head of it'.[37]

Still British statesmen, like many American counterparts, remained unconvinced by reports of the death of American isolationism and treaded warily when they suspected themselves of being in its presence Reviewing the second quarter of 1943, the British Embassy in Washington stated that American public opinion 'continued to grow increasingly favorable to international commitments of one kind or another in all parts of the country with minor regional variations' but added,

'The isolationists are not dead or asleep, but merely lying doggo, realizing the present unpopularity of full-blooded isolationism'.[38] It went on to express doubts that Senators Taft, Bricker, and Wheeler, for example, were converted to internationalism despite statements they had made giving it various degrees of support. Even 10 months later, on July 3, 1944, Eden would suggest to the cabinet 'that no more efforts be made to promote specifically European organisations', in part because these efforts might appear to the Soviets as attempts to create a hostile bloc, but also because they might 'tend to encourage isolationism in the United States'. He apparently feared such efforts would enable isolationists to argue that Europe did not need, and perhaps did not even want, the United States involved in its affairs.[39]

American criticism of colonialism in general and the British Empire in particular was another matter of constant concern to British officials. Outstanding in this regard during the war years was the issue of Indian independence. For example, on October 12, 1942 Halifax wrote to Eden regarding a trip he had just taken to Pittsburgh and St. Louis. If these cities were proper indicators, he said, less 'anti-British' feeling existed in the United States than one assumed from the Washington atmosphere. Nevertheless, he reported, many people, especially intellectuals, were 'greatly disturbed about India', but viewing the situation 'with abysmal ignorance'.[40]

Halifax, like other British statesmen, noted that Americans tended to equate India with the Philippines, where the United States had agreed to relinquish colonial control. Furthermore, they compared the issue on the subcontinent with their own experience, seeing India as 'an aspiring Colonial legislature struggling with reactionary Royal governors'.[41] He tried to explain Britain's position. For example, he met in October 1942 with top-level journalists and publishers when, he reports, all but Henry Luce were willing to see the British side to at least some extent.[42] The journalists concurred, he said, that British policy toward India, even the 'stiff' parts, would be 'reasonably well accepted' in the United States if something were added about the 'British purpose of assisting India to achieve her full destiny . . .' 'Do try', he urged Eden, 'to get something of this sort into any further statement that may be made'.

In his reply, Eden said that even Luce's recent attack on Britain in *Life* would do good on the whole because 'it was too extravagant to be credited',[43] an opinion in which the Washington Embassy concurred.[44] Nonetheless, that attack — an open letter to the British people stating that the U.S. was not fighting to maintain the Empire — was taken very seriously in London.[45] His Majesty's Government paid a great deal of attention to the American press and radio, and regarded *Life* as a major force in molding American opinion.

Of the American journalists, Drew Pearson was probably the most irritating. In September 1944 he wrote a column that particularly annoyed Churchill, criticizing, among other things, his alleged statement that the Atlantic Charter did not apply to India. Halifax, who had been urged by Whitehall and Number 10 Downing Street to get some correction of the article, told Churchill that he had 'repeatedly pressed Hull . . . to get some public correction given to this mendacious mischief'. He was always told, however, that the matter was before the President, 'where it now is, and looks like remaining, unless you think it worth while to stir it up'.[46]

Halifax suggested that Roosevelt present some corrective remark in the public statement he and Churchill would make after the meeting they were holding at Quebec. But by then Churchill had changed his mind and indicated preposterously that he had never given much thought to the matter. 'I have of course followed the Drew Pearson incident', he told Halifax, 'and I cannot think it is of the slightest importance'. Then, after calling Pearson a champion liar, he warned against worrying too much about 'minor jars', and added, 'In the United States there is so much free speech that one thing cancels out the other and the great machine crashes on. I do not propose to trouble the President on these points when everything is going so well in all directions.'[47]

Perhaps he was remembering Beaverbrook's advice given him less than a month earlier when, in a rage, he had drafted a telegram to Hopkins about a Pearson column on Greece. Beaverbrook's counsel then was much the same as Churchill's now to Halifax. He said, 'Drew Pearson is irresponsible, corrupt, and paid 200,000 dollars a year for telling lies about Britain. He thrives on denials and longs to be contradicted by the Prime Minister and the President.'[48] But Churchill's message to Halifax also said, 'The President has been very good to me about India throughout these years and has respected my clearly expressed resolve not to admit external interference in our affairs. A public statement by him might only add to his burdens.'[49]

Along this same line, when Eden was visiting Washington in March 1943, Hull asked him if there were ways in which 'we could help keep down anti-British sentiments', relative to India. Eden, according to Hull's account, stated that the United States government had been so helpful in this regard that he had no suggestion to make.[50] Later, Truman, too, would get high marks from Halifax because once at a dinner at the British Embassy before he became President 'he spoke out about India with trenchant good sense and complained, if I remember rightly, of American ignorance and confusion on the subject in a manner which left nothing to be desired'.[51] It seemed to be the position taken by journalists more than by the U.S. Government that immediately concerned HMG.

A powerful voice was added to the criticism of empire of 1942 when Wendell Willkie, Republican presidential candidate two years earlier, made an extensive trip that included much of Britain's overseas realm. Upon his return he was frequently and publicly critical of the British colonial system,[52] and his book, *One World*, based on his trip, received attention at the highest levels of HMG. One of Churchill's aides, Sir Desmond Morton, read it at the Prime Minister's request, marked certain pages for Churchill's attention, and told his chief 'the book aims at founding an American policy against all Empires and is therefore subtly anti-British'. He said it also pointed out, equally subtly, the great opportunities for the U.S. to exploit commercially the Middle East, Africa, China and Russia, adding wryly, 'political tutelage of backward peoples is wicked, but commercial exploitation without responsibility is to be encouraged'.[53]

Meanwhile, the British Embassy in Washington, while reporting that *One World* was having 'phenomenal sales', said it gave the impression that America, which was 'rising to the height of its material and spiritual power', had a duty to expand its sway and to provide 'political deliverance' for underprivileged nations.[54]

The well-known feelings of Roosevelt and many of his advisers that colonial areas should be given independence re-emerged during Eden's visit to Washington

in 1943, although the Foreign Secretary's unsympathetic reaction led Hopkins to predict that 'the British are going to be pretty sticky about their former possessions in the Far East'.[55] London, however, worried increasingly about American 'stickiness' in this regard, anticipating serious difficulties when it came time for colonial areas liberated by US troops to be returned to European metropolitan powers. Americans were fighting to guarantee all peoples the right of self-determination, according to widespread belief reinforced by a great deal of media and official comment. Therefore, if American fighting men died to free a Pacific Island, what would the home attitude be if it were quietly handed back to a colonial power in Europe? British officials suspected it could be so negative that those possessions might, in fact, not be handed back.[56] There might very well be other reasons also to delay their return — commercial or strategic, for example — but Whitehall recognized that the emotional question itself presented a sufficient problem to cause the American administration to seek other solutions. Surely this concern added urgency to the efforts of Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff, particularly at the second Quebec Conference, to get significant numbers of British forces into the Pacific War.[57] It was hoped that, if nothing else, they would provide Britain's entrée to the postwar councils that would decide the future of the Pacific area.

In late 1942 British officials decided to make a concerted effort to change American opinion about the Empire. The project, treated with great confidentiality, called for establishment of an inter-ministry entity, 'the Committee on American Opinion and the British Empire', headed by Richard Law.[58] The secrecy of Law and his colleagues surely stemmed from fear of being discovered propagandizing in America for British, and especially Imperial, policies, which could have had very negative repercussions.

The committee contacted Graham Spry, once Sir Stafford Cripps' personal assistant and at this time a member of the Ministry of Air Production, which Cripps headed. It asked him to do a systematic study, described in antiseptic language by Alan Dudley of the Foreign Office's North American Department as a 'scientific accumulation of a body of information about the many influences which have a bearing on British Empire-American relations'.[59] He was to work in both Britain and America, providing not only a report but, 'a system of information capable of expansion and development', according to Dudley, who then added more frankly that 'The Committee's terms of reference require it not to "study . . . American feeling about the British Empire" but "to study and make recommendations concerning the best methods of stimulating favourable and moderating hostile feeling . . ." '. Despite this objective to 'moderate' feeling, committee members carefully avoided mentioning that anything of the sort was part of their purpose. A draft letter from Sir David Scott, Assistant Undersecretary supervising the North American Department, to Campbell in Washington demonstrated their inhibitions.

> We leave it to you to decide whether (Spry's) visit need be made known officially to the State Department, but if you decide that this should be done you will be able to refer to him as travelling on our behalf, *without making any mention of the Committee*. If it is necessary to do so I cannot see any objection to his admitting that he is interested in the effect of American opinion on the British Empire, but we should not wish it to be thought that he is attempting to find means of influencing American opinion. That indeed is not strictly his business.[60]

Someone, perhaps Scott himself, strengthened the denial in the last sentence, changing it to read, 'That indeed is not his objective', and so the letter was sent to Campbell.

On April 21, 1943, also, when forwarding copies of notes, reports, agendas, etc. of the committee to the Embassy, Scott urged confidentiality, saying 'You will appreciate that since these papers give an insight into the actual working of the Committee, and because of some of the topics on which they touch, we do not want them to be given any wide circulation even within official circles on your side of the Atlantic'.[61] Campbell, in contrast, replied to these cautious communications with a very straightforward letter discussing approaches that might be taken specifically to shape American opinion.[62]

Spry, too, raised the question of secrecy. In a letter to Dudley on May 7, 1943 he said, 'it was originally, I believe, the view of the Law Committee that I should proceed to the United States under some "cover" '. He added that his own preference, however, was to say, when required, that he had visited the United States a year earlier to look into the subject of India as a factor in US–UK relations, and now he was widening the scope of his study to include the Empire as a whole. Thus he could be frank without stating that he was reporting to the committee, an approach the Foreign Office approved.[63]

The original idea to form such a committee seems to have come from C.J. Radcliffe, Director General of the Ministry of Information.[64] The point, he said, was to gain for Britain 'recognition of our own right to hold to our own system and a recognition of its inherent value in the world. It should, indeed, be enough if the Americans would leave us alone'.[65] A draft document describing the purpose and aims of the committee was more diplomatic and also called for more than being left alone. It said the committee's object was:

> To study and make recommendation concerning the best methods of bringing home to the American people everywhere the fact that the organisation and principles of the British Empire are such that on moral and material grounds the United States can and should cooperate with it.
>
> and to encourage all Americans to regard the British Empire as a valuable and permanent partner in guiding world affairs on a basis of peace progress and order.

This seems to have been sent to certain officials abroad for comment as there is a copy from Alan Dudley to Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, the British ambassador in Moscow, in the latter's private papers.[66]

Meanwhile, among the first evidence of attitudes turned up by the committee were opinion polls indicating that whatever Americans felt about more specific issues such as colonialism, they liked Britain in general. Before the U.S. was in the war a poll had asked, 'What foreign country do you "like best"?' Britain was the preference of 55% of the respondents, while no other country polled higher than 11%. Results of this poll were sent to London in January 1943 along with a report stating that 'recent studies' showed Great Britain to be the country 63% wanted most to be associated with after the war. The committee, however, warned that large numbers of descendants of Irish and German immigrants, groups which totalled an estimated 25% of the American population, were 'anti-British'.[67]

The actual implementation of measures to change American opinions about the Empire fell largely to the Ministry of Information, which devised films, pamphlets, newspaper feature stories, etc. for the purpose. An example of its efforts was an illustrated brochure on the colonial war effort entitled '60 Million of Us'. According to Miss E.M. Ascroft, who was in charge of the brochure's production, 'This booklet is intended to show growing — and united — effort by the colonies towards winning the war . . . (dots in the original) Solidarity of Empire behind Britain. Its market will be (a) Home Front, (b) America, (c) The Colonies themselves'.[68] This pamphlet had the double benefit in America of not only portraying the Empire sympathetically but of demonstrating its war effort.

A similar pamphlet was developed to meet requests of the British Information Services in New York, the Ministry of Education, and some of the Voluntary Societies of the Empire Information Service. The pamphlet on 'Progress Towards Self-Government in the British Colonial Empire' sought 'to substantiate generalisations about self-government being the goal of British Imperial policy'. Its authors set out to do this 'by means of an historical survey of the whole of the Colonial Empire', but concentrating on 'constitutional advances . . . in individual territories since 1939'.[69]

Related to American feeling about colonialism was the suspicion that the British Government was restoring monarchies to European thrones and re-establishing a sphere of influence in Europe, especially in the Mediterranean, that lifeline of Empire. One of the lowest points in Anglo–American relations occurred in late 1944 and early 1945 when the matter of new governments for Greece, Italy and Belgium was before the Allies. I will not go into the well-known background of these issues, but will concentrate on the U.S. media reaction and the British response.

There was an uproar in the press on all of these points, never louder and longer than in the case of the British battle with guerrillas in Greece. Typical of the comment was that of *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, which on December 10, 1944 editorialized, 'Churchill's policy has resulted in civil war in Greece . . . The verdict of world opinion is clearly and overwhelmingly "no confidence" '. *The Arkansas Gazette* the same day scorned Churchill's claim that intervention was preventing 'mob rule by murder gangs' and suggested that the guerrillas were in a position similar to American colonists in 1776.[70]

Secretary of State Edward Stettinius fanned the flames by issuing a statement to the press clearly critical of the British policy in Greece, Italy, and Belgium and saying that the US Government had told the British not to interfere.[71]

Churchill was livid when he heard the Stettinius comment. He sent a telegram, full of hurt and anger, to Roosevelt and rebutted the Secretary of State in a speech in Parliament.[72] Matters became worse when, a few days later, Admiral King ordered U.S. Navy units to halt assistance to the British in Greece. Only after Churchill telephoned Hopkins was the order rescinded.[73] Although fences were soon mended to some degree on the official level, strident press criticism continued as the Greek crisis especially remained a very live issue until a truce was arranged with the guerrillas in February. In fact, it continued to be the subject of much adverse press comment in America long after that. But if the British had few friends among the U.S. media on that issue, their position was supported by some of the most prestigious organizations and commentators, e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, Walter Lippmann, Sumner Welles, and Raymond Gram Swing.[74]

The Foreign Office and the Ministry of Information, understandably disturbed by the atmosphere in America, searched for antidotes. Instructions to Halifax spoke of the 'violent press campaign' based on 'false premises, unfounded suspicions and unsupported prejudices in lieu of information' and called on him to 'take every possible step to check the flow of mischievous misrepresentations'.[75] He was not helped, however, by the fact that much of the press in the UK, a good deal of the population, and the British Labour Party took much the same point of view as the American journalists.[76]

Nevertheless, the British Embassy in Washington decided to mount a more aggressive public relations program. Leading the way was Richard Wright, acting counsellor of embassy who not only gave a radio interview but spoke at various times to broadcasters, columnists, and groups on the East Coast interested in foreign policy. He encouraged them all to criticize, not British, but American policy for shirking responsibility in Greece and elswhere, and he endeavored 'to dispel the legend' that the British 'sought to build up a ring of reactionary governments as a counter to Russia . . .'.[77]

He soon sent to London copies of stories supporting the British position in Greece and took credit for playing a role in their creation. He implied that he had influenced one article in *Life*, two by Joseph C. Harsch in *The Christian Science Monitor*, one by James Reston in *The New York Times*, and a broadcast by Raymond Gram Swing, all favorable to British policy in the Balkans and some critical of U.S. aloofness there.[78] Public relations efforts are often hard to evaluate, but if Wright had even a portion of the influence he suggests he had, his was laudable work indeed.

Throughout the war, despite British efforts, distaste in America for colonialism and things related to it never ended, although, with increasing American fear of the Soviet Union, it did subside. By the time the British fought Indonesian guerrillas in late 1945, there was criticism in the United States to be sure, but, judging from Foreign Office reports, it was not comparable with that when British soldiers occupied Greece.[79] Even by the end of the war America seemed to be focusing on other issues, probably in part because a weaker Britain could not hold its attention in either a positive or negative way to the extent that a powerful Soviet Union could. Some British officials, however, believed that new developments at the end of war and during the immediate post-war period both in British politics and in the Big Three relationship represented an opportunity for their country. In June 1946, for instance, Herbert Morrison, Lord President of the Council, said that during a visit to America he received the impression that Britain was missing many publicity opportunities, 'especially now that the intense unpopularity of the Russians and our attitude in India, Egypt and elsewhere are creating relatively the most favourable atmosphere which we have had there in time of peace'. The staff to handle publicity 'was desperately thin on the ground', he said, but added that 'with impending reinforcements I hope we can take the initiative and clear away bogies such as British Imperialism, which cost us so much in practical ways and which could be tackled now with real hope of success'.[80]

Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, newly named ambassador to the United States, and Ernest Bevin both agreed, and on July 16 Bevin stated in a paper of his own, 'On the information side I fully recognize the importance of taking advantage of the present atmosphere to drive home our case not only in the political but also in the economic field'.[81]

A just and fitting way perhaps to conclude a discussion of American anti-colonial attitudes is to point out that, ironically, as time went on and various features of the international scene changed Americans themselves began to be viewed as imperialists in many parts of the world. Attlee expressed the phenomenon to Francis Williams somewhat savoringly when he said 'The Americans found it hard to realize that in the eyes of Asia they had become almost a spearhead of imperialism. They'd always thought themselves so pure and clean'.[82]

The job of persuading Americans to hold different views on the four subjects discussed in this article — Britain's war effort, her importance as a world power, isolationism, and colonialism — was laced with contradictions. For example, if Americans became convinced that Britain would be a mighty force after the war, that perception could increase their tendency toward isolationism on the basis that U.S. involvement overseas, certainly in European affairs, was superfluous. Both the Coalition and Labour Governments feared such an American attitude, considering it dangerous for Britain and the West. Eden demonstrated that concern when he told the Cabinet that it should de-emphasize efforts to create specifically European organizations thereby giving an impression of potential British and European strength.[83]

On the other hand, if Americans thought Britain was a great power, as the British government, especially under Churchill's leadership, hoped they would, they might also see it as a rival. Hence, they might reject isolationism, but compete, not cooperate, with Great Britain, especially considering their moral objections to its empire. Indeed, a competitive American fist in a glove of anti-colonial morality was something that bothered many British officials,[84] and in certain economic areas, e.g., air transportation and petroleum production, evidence of competition was available even before the end of hostilities.[85]

In general, however, British strength seems to have been increasingly discounted by U.S. policy makers. More and more, they expected cooperation but largely on American terms, a phenomenon that the British Embassy in Washington identified early in the alliance.[86]

After Japan surrendered, these issues took new shapes. The question of the UK's war effort no longer had much relevance. Furthermore, American rejection of isolationism, begun during the war, was intensified, although prominent revivals in subsequent years would prove that it had not been eliminated from American politics. Meanwhile, Morrison's conviction that the Soviet Union's unpopularity was Britain's opportunity underestimated the extent to which the Russians would dominate American attention. And if Americans now were willing to forgive Britain her Empire, already dwindling, they also considered her to be in exactly that position that Foreign Office officials, among others, wanted so desperately to avoid, that of junior partner, and very junior indeed.

NOTES

1. See Churchill's remarks at a luncheon in Washington in September 1943: Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as *FRUS*) 'Conferences at Washington and Quebec 1943 pp.166–172.
   See also his speech at Harvard that month: *New York Times* September 7, 1943. For reactions of the American press, see Cab. 66, vol. 40, W.P. (43) 398, September 1943. (All archives cited in this article are in the Public Record Office in London unless otherwise indicated.)
   See also his 'Iron Curtain' speech, although when he gave it he was out of office: *New York Times* March 6, 1946, text transcribed from a recording
2. For a study of Whitehall's desire for something beyond an alliance with America in war and peace, its efforts to achieve it, and the American reaction, see Henry B. Ryan, 'The Vision of Anglo-America and the Origins of the Cold War', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1978.
3. Thomas E. Hachey, *Confidential Dispatches: Analyses of America by the British Ambassador, 1939–45*. (Evanston, Ill., 1974, hereafter cited as Hachey), pp.61–5, political review for 1942, June 26, 1943.
4. Ibid., p.62.
5. INF 1/948 (X.293, part A).
6. *Ibid.*, Carter to Sendall, minute, January 4 1943 for an example. Here the Ministry of Information criticized Ministry of Production charts, which it said would only steep Americans in their prejudices, and wondered why *it* was not allowed to do the job, and do it properly, to begin with.
7. INF 2/50.
8. Hachey, p.88, political review for second quarter 1943, August 31, 1943. The embassy's overall review of conditions in America was changed from an annual report to a quarterly one in 1943 both because the material to be covered was so extensive and also to make the reports more current. The last yearly report was approximately six months late when the system of quarterly reporting was begun. See Hachey, p.xiv. Embassy assessments of opinion such as the one reported above were sometimes buttressed by polls but were also often impressionistic as here.
9. PREM 4 (27/9), p.639, letter, January 28, 1944. Perhaps in fairness it should be pointed out that an ethnocentric view of the war effort was not an exclusively American characteristic. A Ministry of Information periodical entitled *War in Pictures* ran a story in the July 1943 issue entitled 'How the British Commonwealth Has Thwarted Hitler'. A subhead stated 'Since the war began the triumphs of the forces and peoples of the British Commonwealth under the leadership of Winston Churchill -- triumphs repeated again and again — have broken the major strategy of the German High Command'. The text opened by saying, 'Acting in concert as one centralised Power — which, in fact, it is not — the British Commonwealth has during the course of this war outwitted the German High Command and out-fought the German Army in such a way as to smash for ever the Teutonic dream of world conquest and domination'. Records indicate that the publication was printed in 15 languages and distributed worldwide, including in enemy-occupied territory, but with about one-third of the copies going to Commonwealth and Empire nations. Its tone of single-handed combat with the German foe must have bemused the Soviets particularly inasmuch as this was about a half year after the battle of Stalingrad. See INF 2(4), document 7
10. PREM 4 (27/9), p.638, letter to Eden, February 11, 1944
11. PREM 4 (84/1), p.39, letter, January 26, 1944.
12. Halifax papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, A4.410.4.11, letter, September 9, 1943
13. INF 1/873 (X.73, part B), telegram to Halifax, February 23, 1943
14. INF 1/949 (X.293, part B), minute, September 19, 1944
15. INF 1/980 (X.293, part C).
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid. Letter to Sir Edward Campbell, June 24, 1945
18. INF 1/980 (X.293, part C).
19. Ibid.
20. Cab. 66, vol. 65, W.P. (45) 316, May 19, 1945
21. INF 1/981 (X.293, part D)
22. John Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, vol. v, (London, 1956, hereafter cited as Ehrman) p.519–24.
23. Cab. 79, no. 37, C.O.S. (45) 194th meeting, minute 1, annex, August 9, 1945
24. INF 1/873 (X.73, part B), telegram to Halifax, February 23, 1943

25. Hachey, p.66, political review for 1942 by H.M. Embassy in Washington, dated June 26, 1943.
26. Ibid, p.62.
27. FO 371-34089, paper A 3480.
28. FO 371-34090, paper A 4440, May 11, 1943.
29. PREM 4 (27/10), p.836, minute, May 11, 1945.
29a. For an account of Churchill's concern and displeasure in this regard, see Lord Moran, *Winston Churchill, A Struggle for Survival*, (London, 1966), pp.154-166, but especially p.157. Churchill's feeling is also evident in his own description of the Tehran Conference in his memoirs. See *The Second World War*, vol.v. (London 1952, hereafter cited as Churchill). p.331.
30. FO 371-44557, paper AN 2560.
31. FO 371-44574, paper AN 2438, record of conversation, Gage-Hickerson, July 20, 1945.
32. Attlee papers,University College, Oxford, box 6, file O-P.
33. For example, see Cab. 66, Vol. 53, W.P. (44) 409, July 25, 1944, Eden's letter to Duff Cooper, July 25, 1944.
34. Halifax papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, A4.410.4.15, letter to Eden, December 14, 1942.
35. FO 371-34181, paper A 6825.
36. Ibid.
37. PREM 4 (27/10), p.1186, letter, July 4, 1944.
38. Hachey, pp.92-3, political review for second quarter 1943, August 31, 1943.
39. Cab. 66, vol. 52, W.P. (44) 370, memorandum entitled 'Future World Organisation'.
40. Halifax papers, Churchill College, Cambridge, A4.410.4.15.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., letter, Eden to Halifax, October 15, 1942.
44. Hachey, p.75, political review for 1942, June 26, 1943.
45. See, for example, FO 371-34114, paper A 852. The open letter appeared in the October 12, 1942 edition of *Life*, p.34.
46. PREM 4 (27/10), p.1121, telegram, September 12, 1944.
47. PREM 4 (27/10), p.1120, telegram, September 15, 1944.
48. Ibid., p.1124, telegram, August 25, 1944.
49. Ibid., p.1120, telegram, September 15, 1944.
50. *FRUS*, 1943, vol. iii, p.8.
51. PREM 4 (27/9), p.578, telegram, April 13, 1945.
52. PREM 4 (27/1), entire file.
53. PREM 7 (4), papers of Desmond Morton, minutes to the Prime Minister, 1941-43, minute of April 19, 1943.
54. Hachey, p.96, political review for second quarter 1943, August 31, 1943.
55. *FRUS*,1943, vol. iii, p.34, memorandum, Hopkins to Roosevelt, March 22, 1943.
56. FO 371-44536, AN 935, weekly political summary, March 17, 1945 and Ehrman, vol. vi, pp.224, 229.
57. Ehrman, vol. v, pp.517-24.
58. FO 371-34086, paper A 78.
59. FO 371-34089, paper A 3315, minute, April 9, 1943.
60. Ibid., April 22, 1943, emphasis in the original.
61. Ibid. Presumably when he spoke of 'official circles' he referred to the large British official establishment in America at that time, rather than American 'official circles' Surely there was to be no circulation of any kind within the American Government, much less wide circulation. This assumption is strengthened by his letter to Campbell noted earlier, saying that no mention of the committee should be made to the State Department.
62. Ibid., paper A 3480, letter, April 30, 1943.
63. FO 371-34090, paper A 4284.
64. FO 371-34086, paper A 78, minutes of the first meeting, December 30, 1942.
65. Ibid.
66. FO 800/300, p.232. This was a draft, and the typography was as shown here.
67. FO 371-34086, paper A 1070. See also FO 371-34114, paper A 852, which contains a report by the U.S. Office of War Information dated December 16, 1942 and analyses in some detail American negative attitudes toward Great Britain.
68. INF 1/245 (G.P. 365/19, parts A and B)

69. INF 1/665 (G P 491/18), minute of Professor Harlow of MOI Empire Information Service, December 7, 1944. The purpose of Harlow's minute was to ask if the author might sign this pamphlet because, among other considerations, signed materials were more acceptable among 'school teachers and discussion group leaders (who were) intensely suspicious of Government "propaganda"'.
70. These and other clips and comments which were sent to Whitehall are in FO 371-48233, paper R 849. Churchill's remark (inexactly quoted by the *Gazette*) was made in a speech to Parliament, the text of which is in Charles Eade, *War Speeches by the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill* (London, 1945, hereafter cited as Eade), vol.vi, p.273.
71. Robert E. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins, an Intimate History*, New York, 1948, hereafter cited as Sherwood, p.838.
72. For the telegram, dated December 6, 1944, see PREM 3 (472), p.60. Churchill again defended his position in Greece in a telegram to Roosevelt on December 17, 1944. See *FRUS*, 1944, vol. v, pp.159–60. See also Churchill, vol. vi, p.255. For the text of the speech, see Eade, p.273.
73. Sherwood, pp.840–42. PREM 3 (212/5). For British military reaction to the King order see Cab 79, no. 84, C.O.S. (44). 396th meeting (0), minute 10, December 11, 1944.
74. FO 371-48235, paper R 2755 and FO 371-44555, paper AN 117, weekly political summary, January 9, 1945, discuss this fact. American feeling in general at this time is discussed by FO officials in documents in FO 371-44555, passim.
75. FO 371-43709, paper R 21149, telegram, FO to Halifax, December 16, 1944.
76. FO 371-43768, paper R 21170, minute, H.A.C. Rumbold, January 1, 1945; FO371-43736, paper R 19936, telegram, Leeper to FO, December 4, 1944, and FO 371-48238, paper R 10239, telegram, Halifax to FO, June 13, 1945, for problems caused British officials by the Press in the UK. Regarding the Labor Party position see *The Times*, December 14, 1944; FO 371-43709, paper R 20928, and Alan Bullock's, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, vol, ii, pp.340–47.
77. FO 371-44556, paper AN 929, letter, Wright to Broadmead, February 26, 1945 and paper AN 1165, letter, Wright to Butler, March 12, 1945.
78. Ibid. Copies of these articles are in FO 371-44556, paper AN 929.
79. FO 371-44539, papers AN 3744 and AN 3804, weekly political summaries of December 9 and 15, 1945.
80. PREM 8 (321), memorandum, June 24, 1946.
81. Ibid., memorandum, July 16, 1946.
82. Francis Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers*, London, 1961, p.238.
83. Cab. 66, vol. 52, W.P. (44) 370, memorandum entitled 'Future World Organization'.
84. Churchill's aide, Sir Desmond Morton provided just one of many examples of this view when he reported to the Prime Minister on Wendell Willkie's book *One World*, which he felt both criticized empire and highlighted U.S. economic opportunities in colonial areas. See PREM 7 (4), papers of Desmond Morton, minutes to Prime Minister, 1941–43, minute of April 19, 1943.
85. See Ryan, pp.95–108.
86. Hachey, p.66, political review for 1942 dated June 26, 1943.