

# FRANCE AND BRITAIN

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*A Report by  
a Chatham House Study Group*



LONDON

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Royal Institute  
of International Affairs

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## FOREWORD

The Council of the Royal Institute of International Affairs some time ago invited a group of experts, representing a variety of opinions and pursuits, to discuss the problems raised by Anglo-French relations after the war. This Report is a summary of the conclusions which emerged from their discussions, which extended over a period of about two years, and were conducted in face of the difficulties presented by a rapidly changing situation.

The Study Group's terms of reference were broad and assumed nothing but the declared objectives of United Nations' policy. At times, the Group may have transcended even this limitation, as, for example, in its consideration of the alternatives to Anglo-French co-operation and of the consequences which might be expected to result from them. It has been felt, however, that Anglo-French relations have in the past suffered, and may again suffer, from an imperfect understanding both here and in France of the strategic and political conditions from which the Entente arose; and that full understanding is the necessary basis of the new and still more intimate association between the two peoples which is now beginning to emerge.

This preliminary inquiry having been completed, the Group went on to consider, in the general context of United Nations' policy, the special function of the Anglo-French Entente and the means by which that understanding could most effectively be sustained. Considerations of space have precluded any but the most general treatment of these subjects, but an attempt has been made to indicate the essentials of the problem and to sketch the broad outlines of a policy towards France. No purpose can be served here in summarizing the Group's conclusions, which are set forth fully in a final chapter. They represent the views of the Study Group, which collectively accepts responsibility for them, although each member does not

necessarily subscribe individually to every statement in the Report.

Chatham House,  
10 St James's Square,  
London, S.W.1.

May 17th, 1945.

ASTOR  
*Chairman of the Council.*

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*Chapter I*  
*INTRODUCTORY*

While British post-war policy is already committed by obligations contracted and pronouncements made since June 16th, 1940, French policy is not quite so clearly laid down. The French Provisional Government has indeed taken over the obligations and commitments of the French Committee of National Liberation and those contracted by the French National Committee which preceded it, and evidently assumes all obligations contracted by France before June 1940. Thus the French Provisional Government and any conceivable successor it may have will no doubt consider itself bound by the Franco-British "Solemn Declaration" of March 28th, 1940<sup>1</sup> as well as by French adherence to the United Nations Declaration and therefore to the Atlantic Charter. But since June 1940, owing to the situation in which she was placed, France has until quite recently participated as an equal to such a limited extent in the major decisions of Allied policy that she is not in every respect as fully committed as Britain. This Report however is concerned primarily with British policy, and it must begin with an account of the general commitments which this country has already assumed and within the limits of which that policy must be formulated.

Our immediate obligations to France are clear. They were indicated by Mr Churchill in the House of Commons on September 28th, 1944, when he said: "I have repeatedly stated that it is the aim, policy, and interest of His Majesty's Government, of this country of Great Britain, and of the Commonwealth and Empire, to see erected once more, at the earliest moment, a strong, independent, and friendly France," and by Mr Eden, who, speaking in the same Debate, declared that

<sup>1</sup>The two Governments agreed not to discuss peace terms except by mutual agreement, and to maintain after the war community of action in all spheres for as long as necessary to safeguard their security and reconstruct with other nations an international order.

His Majesty's Government wished to see France "an equal and a potent partner in all our affairs."

The more general principles of British policy are set forth in the Atlantic Charter. It would be hard to argue that there is anything in that document which might fairly be called a legal commitment. It is solely an expression of principles and desires. Nevertheless, it has acquired a unique moral authority which has made it the accepted basis for the discussion of post-war problems, here and in America. No British Government is likely to feel free to depart from it in any essential respect.

The Charter, which originated in a joint declaration of principle by Mr Churchill and President Roosevelt, was later accepted by the rest of the United Nations. It consists of eight Articles. Article I is a repudiation by the signatories of all territorial ambitions. Article II expresses their desire to see no territorial changes which do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned. Article III asserts the intention of the signatories to respect the rights of all peoples to choose their own forms of government. Article IV states that the signatories will endeavour, though with due respect to their existing obligations, to assure to all nations, victor or vanquished, access on equal terms to raw materials. Article V expresses their desire for full collaboration between all nations in the economic field, with the object of improving labour standards and assuring social security throughout the world. Article VI embodies the hope that the peace may establish two of the four freedoms, freedom from fear and freedom from want, and Article VII concerns the freedom of the seas. Article VIII embodies three distinct ideas. It expresses, in the first place, the view that "for spiritual as well as for realistic reasons" nations must come to the abandonment of force. It goes on to specify the means by which this end may be approached. It declares that pending the establishment of a wider system of security those Powers which threaten aggression must be disarmed. It also states that the signatories will apply all practical measures to reduce the burden of arms for peace-loving peoples.

One of the most important characteristics of the Atlantic

Charter is its emphasis on the close relationship between political and economic factors. It does not conceive the possibility of an international system which will, at one and the same time, secure peace and fail to secure freedom from fear and want for "all the men in all the lands." It is thus concerned not only with the abolition of war but with the need for social and economic reform on an international scale. The ideal to which it points is a world-wide organization for the maintenance of peace and the direction of the economic activities of all nations to the end of common prosperity.

The Charter does not in any way suggest that these aims will be easily or quickly achieved. It refers explicitly to an interim period pending the establishment of a general system of security. For that period it lays down the principle of discrimination against ex-enemy Powers. The absolute disarmament of such Powers, accompanied by measures to lessen the burden of armament for peace-loving peoples (a phrase which implies that the "peace-loving peoples" will retain their military forces) is perhaps the only concrete recommendation which the document contains. It is not stated how long this period is to last, but it is clear from official statements subsequent to the Charter that the Allied Governments do not think of the restoration of enemy countries to equality with the Allies as anything but a very long-term project.

The Allies are thus pledged to work for a general system of security, and the outlines of such a system have already been sketched at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference. These proposals are still tentative and cannot come into force until they have been approved by the United Nations as a whole, but the Governments of Britain, Russia, and America have already expressed satisfaction with the results of the Conference and there can be little doubt that whatever is finally agreed will bear a close resemblance to the Dumbarton Oaks plan. It is proposed that under the new system the duty of taking and enforcing decisions should fall chiefly to a Security Council on which Britain, Russia, America, China, and—"in due course"—France, will be permanently represented and which will other-

wise consist of six members, chosen at two-yearly intervals, by all the member States. This Council will be assisted by a General Assembly in which all the Powers will be represented, but which will have strictly limited functions and a good deal less influence than that formerly exerted by the League Assembly. One very material point remains to be cleared up: it is not yet decided whether the rule of unanimity will hold good in the Council or whether a majority vote will be enough to authorize action. If the first alternative is accepted (and this seems likely) no action could be taken against one of the Great Powers, and the organization would confine itself to dealing with the minor threats to peace.

In three important particulars this system differs from the League. In the first place, it is based on a much franker recognition of the importance of power. Not only does it accord a much clearer ascendancy to the Great Powers but it provides for the exercise of their strength in the only way which can stop aggression. Nowhere is it suggested that economic sanctions or expressions of moral disapprobation will suffice to keep the peace. Specific provision is, on the contrary, made for military action and it is clearly intended that this action should be as rapid and overwhelming as possible. Secondly, the purposes of the proposed organization are much wider than those of the League. The Dumbarton Oaks Conference deliberately avoided any attempt to define aggression and leaves the Council free to judge by its own standards what constitutes a threat to peace. Finally, there is no suggestion that the new organization will be incompatible with particular arrangements between member States so long as such arrangements are consistent with its objects. The League also left room for such groupings, but the concession was so vague as to make it possible for many informed supporters of the Covenant to maintain that they were inconsistent with its provisions. It is clearly recognized, on the other hand, that the system proposed at Dumbarton Oaks cannot be effective unless it is supported by regional agreements. It is provided, for example, that the Council may delegate the responsibility for taking action in any particular case

to a member State whose geographical position specially fits it for the task.

From the point of view of this Report, two facts about the Dumbarton Oaks scheme are particularly important. First, France is, in course of time, to have a place in the new organization equal to that of the other Great Powers, and this means that one of her most insistent claims is already satisfied. Secondly, Britain need not feel inhibited by her wider commitments from cultivating specially close relations with her neighbours in western Europe. This leaves us free to explore with France the prospect of achieving such relations, and we may do so in the knowledge that we are serving the common interest of the United Nations as well as fulfilling one of the most urgent requirements of our own security.

Other problems arising out of the Charter, and particularly those presented by conflicting interpretations of the document, will have to be solved by allied statesmanship after the war. The whole question of the application of the Charter to Germany is still very confused. Mr Churchill, in the House of Commons on February 22nd, 1944, said emphatically that it could not apply to her "as a matter of right." This statement led to much criticism and one member asked to whom the Charter could apply if not to Germany. It seemed from the Prime Minister's later remarks that he was chiefly concerned to emphasize that the Charter was not in any sense the equivalent of President Wilson's Fourteen Points, and to ensure that no German Government to which we gave peace should be able to argue that we were bound by the terms of the Charter to any particular settlement or that surrender had only been made on the understanding that those terms would be observed. The question seems to be less whether the provisions of the Charter will hold good in any particular case than how these provisions can be reconciled with each other. In this connection Mr Attlee made it clear in the House of Commons on July 15th, 1943, that Article II would not prevent the Allies from establishing permanent bases on the territory of ex-enemy States if such bases were thought necessary on grounds of security. Similarly there is a potential

conflict between Articles IV, V, and VI on the one hand, and Article VIII on the other. The difficulty of effectively disarming aggressor States while increasing their economic prosperity is particularly apparent in the problems presented by German heavy industry. Such possible discrepancies between one part of the Charter and another do not at all detract from its usefulness or reduce its moral authority. They simply show the need for a definite system of priority. In this connection one principle can be regarded as a safe guide to policy, namely, that the need for ensuring security on which in the last resort everything depends must take precedence over other considerations.

In addition to commitments arising from the Charter, Great Britain has acquired other more specific obligations. The Dumbarton Oaks proposals start from the assumption that the Great Powers will maintain the co-operation they have achieved during the war, and that without this co-operation no peace system can be effective. Even before those proposals were published, Mr Churchill had expressed the view that "upon the fraternal association and intimate alignment of policy of the United States and the British Commonwealth and Empire depends more than on any other factor the immediate future of the world," and it has for long been a settled principle of British policy that close consultation should be maintained with the United States and that whenever possible the two countries should act together and in harmony. This *entente* derives its vitality from the fact that it is regarded by both peoples as having a specific and necessary function in the general system of security. It will be strengthened if it is made clear to United States opinion that Britain is determined to shoulder a full weight of responsibility in those regions where she commands influence. The American connection, far from justifying indifference towards Europe, is in itself a strong case for the acceptance by Britain of the role of leadership in European affairs which she is increasingly called upon to assume. Arrangements between particular Powers are often more enduring when they are directed to larger objects than the security of those Powers. This point is well illustrated by a quotation from *The*

*Times* of September 7th, 1943, where it is stated that "it is a matter of experience that the nations of the Commonwealth never felt their identity of purpose more strongly than when, in the exercise of their newly-defined sovereignty, they operated together within the framework of the League of Nations." There is every reason to believe that this rule will hold good in the case of Anglo-American relations.

Most outstanding of all the obligations which Britain has undertaken since 1940 is the Anglo-Soviet Alliance. Its terms pledge Britain and Russia to support each other in resisting any act of aggression committed against either of them by Germany and her allies during a period of twenty years. This Alliance is the basis of British policy in Europe and represents a striking departure from traditional British reluctance to undertake commitments in eastern Europe. It is evidence of Britain's resolve that Germany shall never again be allowed to establish her ascendancy over this strategically and economically important region, and it will help to remove the tension which previously existed between the British idea of limited Continental commitments and the traditional foreign policy of France.

Such, in broad outline, is the system of international organization to which Great Britain is committed. It is against this background that the question of Anglo-French relations has to be considered.



## *Chapter II*

### *BASIS OF ANGLO-FRENCH CO-OPERATION*

The Anglo-French Entente, formed at the beginning of the present century, was the basis of British policy in Europe until the military defeat of France in 1940. Before attempting to assess the prospects of its future consolidation it may therefore be useful to consider its origins and the nature of the interests which kept it in being for so long.

#### BEFORE 1914

At the beginning of the century there seemed little reason for supposing any necessary identity of interest between the two countries. They were traditional enemies; the British Empire had been largely acquired in conflict with France; the greatest war in modern English history had been fought against France; apart from a period of collaboration under the July Monarchy and again during the Crimean War, the relations of the two countries had been uncertain and often hostile for the greater part of the nineteenth century. In 1870 Britain had done nothing to prevent the defeat of France by Prussia. British opinion, not yet alive to the dangers implicit in the growth of Prussian power, did not conceive British interests to be involved in the conflict, though much sympathy was felt with the French especially at the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. In the last quarter of the century British and French commercial and imperial interests conflicted at many points, especially in Morocco, Egypt, and the Far East. In these circumstances it was hardly surprising that important sections of British opinion should have looked to Germany rather than France as a possible ally. Attempts to achieve agreement with Germany on the question of relative naval power failed, however, and anxiety in this country at the increase of German naval armament and the tendencies of German foreign policy prepared the way for an approach to the French. Had Britain been able to convince herself that German