Divinely Sanctioned: The Anglo-American Cold War Alliance and the Defence of Western Civilization and Christianity, 1945–48

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Journal of Contemporary History 2000 35: 385
DOI: 10.1177/002200940003500304

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As Foreign Secretary in the 1945 Labour government, Ernest Bevin made a profound contribution to shaping the international order that was to prevail for the next forty years. An examination of the evolution of Bevin’s ‘spiritual’ concept of western union provides crucial insights into two contentious postwar issues: the nature of the Anglo-American alliance and Britain’s attitude toward European unity.

Britain, to remain a significant force in the postwar world, was faced with three options: ‘It could try to lead a united Europe as a force in world politics; it could develop the commonwealth as an alternative power bloc, a course often favoured by the Labour left; or it could revive the wartime Anglo-American alliance to stand against Russia.’ As these alternatives were not mutually exclusive (Churchill spoke of them as being interlocking), there has arisen considerable scholarly disagreement over Bevin’s priorities. In the early 1960s Anthony Nutting and Nora Beloff suggested that the British government missed the opportunity to take the lead in efforts at European integration. Numerous historians, Bevin’s official biographer, Lord Bullock, among them, discern scant evidence of commitment to western European unity on Bevin’s part, and neglect his expressed aspirations for Britain to match both the USA and the Soviet Union. For John Charmley, this is the most significant...
aspect: ‘Bevin was not aiming at prolonged dependence on America, just at using her as a crutch until Britain regained her strength.’

The difficulty in assessing Bevin’s policy aims was exacerbated by the problem that two of his major objectives, British economic independence and US support, appeared interdependent, each required the other. Historians Avi Shlaim and Geoffrey Warner see Bevin’s European policy as far more sophisticated than generally supposed. Shlaim argued that in 1947–8 Bevin’s intention was to create a superpower base in Europe which would allow Britain to act as a superpower, while Warner saw considerable vision in Bevin’s study of a European customs union, arguing that he sought a ‘partnership between equals’ with the USA. But, as the American historian John Lewis Gaddis has noted, these policies would have been popular in the US State Department where policy-makers wanted to create a confident, strong western Europe independent of US support.

The recognition by key administration figures on both sides of the Atlantic, despite significant domestic opposition, that Britain and the USA each needed the other is crucial to disentangling the objectives underlying the way in which British policy was presented. President Truman and Dean Acheson, his Secretary of State, subscribed to the view expressed by Lewis Douglas, US ambassador to London, explaining Anglo-American relations to fellow US ambassadors in 1950:

There is no country on earth whose interests are so wrapped around the world as the UK . . . . She is in more vitally strategic areas than any other nation among the community of Western nations. She is the centre of a great Commonwealth . . . . She is the centre of the sterling area . . . . held together . . . . by an intricate and complicated system of commercial and financial arrangements built up tediously by the British . . . . There is no substitute for the sterling area and none can be erected in any short period of time. But beyond all these considerations the UK is the only power, in addition to ourselves, West of the Iron Curtain capable of wielding substantial military strength. This assembly of facts . . . . makes a special relationship between the US and the UK as inescapable as the facts themselves.

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5 John Charmley, Churchill’s Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship 1940–57 (London 1995), 236; John Kent, ‘The British Empire and the Origins of the Cold War, 1944–8’ in Anne Deighton (ed.), Britain and the First Cold War (New York 1990), 165–83, adopts the same position: ‘The overriding aim until 1949 was the re-establishment of Britain as a world power equal to and independent of both the United States and the Soviet Union, an aspiration which reflected the Foreign Office view that British weakness was a temporary rather than a permanent phenomenon.’


8 This is evident from Truman’s campaign on behalf of the 1946 British Loan, regardless of the opposition. See Terry Anderson, The United States, Great Britain and the Cold War, 1944–47 (Columbia 1981), 131.

Tensions arose as Britain adjusted to secondary-power status, but, more importantly, the two nations shared political and cultural values, a wealth of connections, and a significant degree of interdependence in promoting Soviet containment. Problems arose when conflicting national interests impinged upon the priority of combating the enemy and because the USA needed to appear impartial in dealing with its allies. But the Americans were sensitive to British needs and policies, recognized Britain as their staunchest, most stable and powerful ally, and often did not object to de facto as opposed to de jure special relations.10

The sources for Cold War historiography, position papers, correspondence, memoirs, and so forth, are by nature more likely to record disagreement than agreement, and hence emphasize areas of discord. However, in the immediate postwar period, tacit understandings, which by their nature are rarely documented, indicate a more nuanced relationship than has often been appreciated, marked by a remarkable degree of tolerance which shows that, while each sought to use the other to promote its own national interests, there still existed ties of unusual closeness. This was evident in the ‘dual policy’ identified by Anne Deighton, who revealed how from May 1946 ‘the appearance of great power co-operation was publicly maintained, but the remorseless focus of British policy was directed to securing an effective Western alliance to contain Soviet might in Germany, in Europe, and throughout the world’.11

From 1945 and early 1946, the Foreign Office had been keenly aware of American unwillingness to ‘gang up’ with a Britain it suspected of seeking to establish an Anglo-American front against the Soviet Union.12 In his early months especially, Bevin had to take careful note of British public opinion in general towards the Soviet Union, a vociferous back-bench opposition within his own Parliamentary Labour Party, and public opinion in the USA. Autumn 1946 witnessed an important turnabout in Anglo-American relations as far as the Soviet Union was concerned with, ironically, increasing American anti-Sovietism bringing about a tendency to question Britain’s western commitment. The Anglo-American Financial Agreement had ultimately passed through Congress in July primarily because of the growth in American opposition to the Soviet Union.13 With an American public increasingly hostile towards the Soviet Union, and a British public which the Foreign Office believed ‘for the most part desires close relations and alliance with Russia’, it was exceedingly difficult for government spokesmen to align rhetoric with reality simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic.14

10 Dobson, Anglo-American Relations, op. cit., 102.
13 Washington Embassy to Ernest Bevin, 15 August 1946; T 236/479.
In September 1946, Newsweek noted: ‘Cooperation is becoming so close that the foreign policies of Washington and London are practically identical, although the fiction of independence is still maintained.’ Then, in November 1946, the Democrats were dealt a crushing blow in the congressional elections as the Republicans won control of Congress with substantial majorities. The ‘class of 46’ were not only extremely conservative, they won on a platform of raising tariffs and reducing taxes, expenditures, national debt and foreign aid. By early 1947, popular cries for demobilization, Anglophobic speeches and the Republican victory meant that Truman faced immense difficulties if he wanted to assume responsibility for western democracy, as the British wanted, along with a privileged position for themselves.

US globalism was a radical departure from traditional US foreign policy. To secure public and bipartisanship Congressional support, the Truman administration exaggerated the Soviet threat. A key component in this process became the presentation of containment as a crusade to save western civilization and Christianity from an atheistic Soviet Union. Truman's provision of an ideological rationale based on Christianity to justify political actions in the international arena enabled the Foreign Office to offer a calculated response which, with the support of willing Church leaders, helped ease the doubts of an American public wary of a socialist Britain, while suggesting the pursuit of an independent course to those at home worried about an overly close alliance with an America in which the forces of reaction seemed to be gaining momentum. Truman’s strategy emulated President Roosevelt’s construction of a ‘theology of war’ in the struggle against nazi Germany, providing the Foreign Office with an opportunity to resurrect the wartime alliance during which Hitler’s possible conquest of Europe had unrelentingly been portrayed as a threat to Christian civilization.

Throughout Labour’s term in office, the Foreign Office sought to influence American public opinion to a degree unprecedented in peacetime, presenting Britain as a good long-term investment, a leader in Europe and, naturally, an indispensable Cold War ally. Traditional American prejudice against socialist planning was an obstacle. American officials warned that British socialism might deter the extension of American aid. Another obstacle was George Washington's farewell address, warning against entangling alliances. According to Henry Kissinger, this practical maxim became an ideological value whereby diplomacy was regarded with suspicion and 'arms and alliances were

16 The Republicans elected governors in 25 states and, for the first time since the bull market days of 1928, won control of Congress, gaining 56 seats in the House and 13 in the Senate. The majorities were substantial: 51 to 45 in the Senate and 245 to 188 in the House.
19 Ibid., 428.
considered immoral and reactionary'. To overcome this homegrown ideological value Truman resorted to one even older and more powerful. In the celebrated Puritan phrase that Ronald Reagan, responsible for the ‘Second Cold War’, often quoted, America was to be ‘a shining city on a Hill’, a light to the nations. Truman played on the nation’s sense of a special mission and providential destiny in leading America toward global commitments.

Truman’s Cold War oratory was suffused with religious imagery. A fervent ideologue with Bible belt origins, Truman imbued US postwar policy with a sense of mission. He appealed to the messianic convictions of the American people to overcome inherent American isolationist tendencies: he stressed the common religious bonds that linked the USA and Europe, he argued that global responsibilities were a God-given duty, and he justified containment by demonizing the ‘godless’ Soviet Union.

The Foreign Office, conscious of the self-righteous caste of US foreign policy and its public’s penchant for moralistic principles, also used moral suasion to cultivate support from the American people. To serve British interests, the Foreign Office endorsed Truman’s characterization of the Cold War. The perception of the Cold War as one of history’s great religious wars can be attributed to Anglo-American propaganda exploiting the crusade concept, transforming containment into a morality play in which western civilization and Christianity were defended from the encroachments of a godless communism which sought the domination of the former and the eradication of the latter.

The Foreign Office skilfully used religion to indicate to Truman British support for his policies, while making it appear to Bevin’s Cabinet colleagues that he was pursuing independent policies compatible with Labour’s socialist aspirations. This underlay the concept of a ‘spiritual’ union of the west, supposedly Bevin’s idea for promoting British leadership throughout the world.

Bevin and Truman were building on foundations laid by Churchill and Roosevelt during the second world war, when religion had also been assigned a crucial role. Through the institutional device of the Religions Division, a Ministry of Information department, support had been sought for the British war effort from influential Christian groups in the USA. The collaboration of Church leaders had been essential to the success of the Religions Division, lead-

20 Henry Kissinger, White House Years (Boston 1979), 58–9.
23 The question of American ‘exceptionalism’ suggested here remains highly contentious, but there is an abundance of literature confirming that it remains significant in the way in which America sees itself and it is, therefore, an important element in presentation, if not in implementation, of foreign policy. See J. Lepgold and Timothy McKeown, ‘Is American Foreign Policy Exceptional? An Empirical Analysis’, Political Science Quarterly, 110, 3 (1995).
ing to recommendations for a postwar ‘Overseas Religious Relations Branch’ to be supervised by either the British Council or the Foreign Office. This was rejected for a course suggested by Kenneth Grubb, a leading Anglican layman as well as Controller of Overseas Propaganda in the Ministry of Information, who pointed out that:

The desire of the religious bodies themselves to pursue their own international connections is a spontaneous one and they need, not so much stimulation, as some guidance and help which would seem most naturally to come from the Foreign Office.

An informal arrangement already existed between the Foreign Office and the Church of England Council on Foreign Relations (henceforth CFR), which performed for the Church the same function as the Foreign Office did for the state. From its origins, CFR, which sought to bring together the churches as the League of Nations did the states, ensured that its functions were, if not complementary, at least in no way opposed to those of its secular counterpart. A member of the Foreign Office served on CFR from its inception, officially in an individual capacity, unofficially as a liaison to maintain ‘harmony’ between the ‘ideas and projects’ of the two bodies.

As the end of the war approached and postwar policies assumed priority, the wartime contacts developed by the British churches with other Christian churches and organizations around the world were perceived as valuable in promoting British interests. Additionally, the global Christian network could complement diplomatic efforts promoting international co-operation. As the wartime alliance disintegrated, religious opposition to atheism meant organized Christianity was viewed as a natural ally in the containment of communism.

Despite the serious implications for dialogue in the international arena, at crucial points in the congealment of the Cold War, Truman advanced relations with Pope Pius XII, the locus of ideological opposition to communism in western Europe in the immediate postwar era. US–Vatican relations provide an effective yardstick for measuring the scale and degree of changes in American policy from the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union to a more rigid stance in the early part of 1946, to a confrontation in 1947 which seemingly excluded negotiation and presented the Soviet regime as the incarnation of evil. British responses to these changes and to the developing relationship with the Vatican highlight the religious component and its significance in postwar Anglo-American relations, and the question of Foreign Office policy toward European unity.

24 Maclennan, June 1944, INF 1 416; R.R. Williams, 12 January 1945; INF 1 953. Emphasis in original.
25 Grubb to David Scott, FO, 26 January 1945; INF 1 953.
26 Douglas to Perowne, 30 October 1943; FO 370 858. Loxley, Minute, 4 November 1943; FO 370 858.
27 Memorandum, Director of Religions Division, June 1944; INF 1 416.
The transition in US policy from accommodation to firmness was a series of acts, which in its formative stages was carefully shaped to appear to the Soviets as an expression of an Anglo-American joint design — one that seemed to portend that coming-together of American power and British world-wide connections ‘which was believed in Washington to be the particular Soviet nightmare’.29 The symbolic statement of this was the Fulton speech in which Winston Churchill, on 5 March 1946 in Truman’s presence, advocated an Anglo-American ‘fraternal association to resist Soviet expansion’. Prior to Fulton, Myron C. Taylor privately informed Churchill that he was shortly to visit Pius XII on behalf of the president. Taylor, a former president of US Steel, had been Roosevelt’s and was then Truman’s personal representative to the Vatican. Churchill requested Taylor to convey to Pius XII his greetings and best wishes, declaring: ‘I am for the Pope. . . . I join Him in combating Communism. . . . He has been outspoken against it very consistently. . . . I have great admiration for the Pope.’30 Churchill’s message was a direct response to papal warnings that if all truly religious people did not stand together, civilization was likely to be destroyed. At Fulton, with Truman at his side, Churchill declared: ‘Except in the British Commonwealth and in the United States, where Communism is in its infancy, the Communist parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilisation.’ The crusading theme of defending western civilization and Christianity, deployed to effect in the second world war, was brought back into play to facilitate the countering Anglo-American mission Churchill advocated.31 This and Truman’s subsequent public announcement that he was sending Taylor as his own personal representative to Pius XII was a symbolic warning to the Soviet Union of a profound shift in US policy.32

Shortly after this, on 14 May 1946, an anti-communist alliance with the Roman Catholic Church was considered by the Foreign Office Russia Committee, established in April to oversee and co-ordinate Anglo-Soviet relations, following the suggestion of Lord Addison to Attlee that it might be made use of in the anti-communist struggle.33 Foreign Office reactions were varied. Brimelow thought it ‘a most dangerous suggestion’.34 Hankey advised: ‘Let’s

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30 ‘Churchill at Palm Beach, 24 February 1946’, Note by Myron C. Taylor, Taylor Papers, Truman Library.
31 Interestingly, Churchill used religious imagery in advising Bevin on the importance of the ‘special relationship’ in November 1945 in a letter marked ‘Most Secret’: ‘Whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder. . . . The future of the world depends upon the fraternal association of Great Britain and the Commonwealth with the United States. Without it, there can be no war. Without it, there can be no peace. . . . What we may be able to achieve is, in fact, Salvation for ourselves, and the means of procuring Salvation for the world.’ Churchill to Bevin, 13 November 1945; FO 800 513.
32 Truman to Taylor, 20 April 1946, 1946 Taylor Reports, Truman Library.
33 Addison was born in 1869, Secretary for the Dominions 1945–October 1947, then Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords: Morgan, Labour in Power, op. cit., 54.
34 FO 371 56885, 23 April 1946.
keep clear of the Vatican. Their ways are not ours, and they are rather in dis-
grace all over Europe for trimming during the war.35 Despite such views, the
Russia Committee’s conclusions reveal that although reluctant to be openly
identified with the Vatican, the Foreign Office was not at all averse to sup-
porting its anti-communist activities:

The Committee was of the opinion, however, that as the Roman Catholic Church was one of
the most powerful anti-Communist influences it might be of advantage, without directly
seeking the cooperation of the Vatican, to assist the Church in deploying its influence by
facilitating the movements of its emissaries, or by other inconspicuous means. It was recom-
manded that His Majesty’s Minister at the Vatican should be furnished with information
regarding the Communist activities for use in his contacts with members of the Papal
tenourage, Catholic bishops visiting Rome, or other influential members of the ecclesiastical
hierarchy. It was further recommended that in the circular despatch to the heads of Missions
abroad, their attention should be drawn to the potential importance of organised religion in
combating the spread of Communism.36

In the past, the Vatican had indicted socialism along with communism and
Bevin, with an innate prejudice against Catholics, opposed Addison’s sugges-
tion.37 However, after the defeat of the communists in the important 1946
Italian election, perceived as an international contest to which the Vatican had
made a significant contribution, Taylor declared to Truman: ‘The cause of
Communism versus Christianity and Democracy transcends minor differences
in Christian creeds. It is the Great Issue of the future and thus of today.’38

Truman was persuaded that what had been effected in Italy could be
applied throughout Europe, and indeed on a global scale. The USA tradition-
ally perceived itself as the manifestation of Truth, Justice and Freedom placed
on earth by a God whose purpose was to make of it an instrument for extend-
ing His spiritual and material blessings to the rest of humanity. The defeat of
nazi tyranny strengthened the Americans’ belief that they were a special moral
force in the world with a unique mission, endowing them with a potent
crusading quality. Enhanced by Truman’s style of leadership, a sense of mis-
sion became in many ways the most powerful ideological force in postwar
American culture.39 It was endowed with the added advantage of at once
obscuring and justifying US foreign policy. Some in the Foreign Office thought
Britain should adopt the same course.40

During 1947 it became increasingly clear that the USA had embarked on a
holy war in alliance with the Vatican, while increasing prominence was given
to the ideological and totalitarian character of Soviet foreign policy. George

35 FO 371 56885, 24 April 1946.
36 FO 371 56885, 14 May 1946.
37 Bevin’s prejudice is mentioned by Gladwyn Jebb, The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn (London
1972), 176-7.
38 Taylor to Truman, 11 June 1946, WHCF Box 44, Truman Papers. Emphasis in original.
39 Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch (eds), The War in American Culture: Society and
Consciousness during World War II (Chicago 1996).
40 See, for example, Nichols to Sargent, 3 August 1946; FO 371 56787.
Kennan’s 1946 assessment in the ‘long’ telegram became the established verity: ‘The notion that the Soviet Union sought world domination became a fundamental postulate of American national security doctrine.’ The importance of ideology was evident in Truman’s address of 12 March 1947 to a joint session of Congress, in which he expressed the necessity of choosing between alternative ways of life. This was followed by the Truman Doctrine, enunciated on 14 March, calling for 400 million dollars in aid, mostly military, to Greece and Turkey to help ‘free peoples’ resist totalitarianism.

In August 1947, a widely publicized exchange of letters took place between the President and the Pope in which, although both adhered to the convention of not naming the Soviet Union, each severely indicted it, pledging resources to a lasting peace built on Christian principles. Truman acknowledged Pius XII as a central figure in the western alliance. The exchange was a symbolic repudiation of accommodation and negotiation, Pius XII stating that there could be no compromise with an avowed enemy of God. It was also a strategic move, providing moral justification for containment, placing the blame for deteriorating international relations on the Soviet Union, and, like the Marshall Plan, encouraging dissent within the Soviet sphere wherein now resided large populations of Roman Catholics. The Vatican diplomatic corps were rightly convinced that Taylor’s return to Rome in August raised the curtain on an effort to mobilize Europe on a spiritual plane comparable to the earlier efforts on the political and economic planes.

Foreign Office doubts about the wisdom of this were reflected in Oliver Harvey’s statement: ‘What we feel is that all the Pope’s anti-Communist propaganda would be more convincing if he had a more positive line to show as regards the Nazis and Fascists, their heirs and assigns and those who collaborated with them.’ However, Britain’s financial weakness, as Bevin acknowledged, ‘necessarily increased the need to coordinate our foreign policy with that of the only country which is able effectively to wield extensive economic influence — namely the United States.’

In March 1947, the British embassy in Washington had advised that ‘the missionary strain in the character of the Americans . . . leads many of them to feel that they have now received a call to extend to other countries the blessings with which the Almighty has endowed their own’. The following August it was reporting that ‘in spite of all the exuberant confidence and bombast with which

41 M. P. Leffler, ‘From the Truman Doctrine to the Carter Doctrine: Lessons and Dilemmas of the Cold War’, Diplomatic History, VI (Fall 1983), 247–54.
42 Ibid.
43 Truman to Pius XII, 6 August 1947, full correspondence published in New York Times, 29 August 1947, 1 and 11.
44 Ibid., Pius XII to Truman, 26 August 1947.
45 Parsons’s Diary, 17 October 1947, Parsons Papers, Truman Library.
46 Oliver Harvey, Superintending Under-Secretary of the German Department, to Osborne, Minister to the Vatican, 26 February 1947: FO 371 67917.
much of the public has embraced the role of world leadership. Americans are genuinely afraid of standing alone. Endorsing America’s ‘mission’ was a means of indicating to the USA that it did not stand alone and of promoting the policy co-ordination Bevin desired. This required considerable care owing to the highly vocal opposition to Bevin’s foreign policy from within the Parliamentary Labour Party, from quite significant sections of the public outside Westminster, and notably from within sections of the trade union movement. A visit to the Balkans by the Archbishop of York, Cyril Forster Garbett, provided the ideal opportunity. Truman and Pius XII were trying to bring the Orthodox Churches into their planned anti-communist religious front. The Church of England enjoyed good relations with the Orthodox Churches, East and West. In October and November 1947, Garbett, who only a few months before had been deeply critical of Vatican policies, visited Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia with a remit undertaken at the behest of Lord Halifax, former ambassador to the USA, to help President Truman reach the Orthodox leaders he felt it would be desirable to approach.

Indicative that this was important to Truman, Halifax was approached by Taylor on the President’s behalf. He subsequently saw Garbett personally and informed Taylor that the Archbishop would do his best in this regard. Significantly, Garbett met with Roman Catholic as well as Orthodox leaders to discuss co-operation over peace and general action against ‘the common enemy’. In his meeting with Tito he twice warned the Marshal of adverse British reactions should there be any persecution of the Roman Catholic Church. Garbett’s actions were reported by Charles Peake, the British ambassador in Yugoslavia, to the Apostolic Nuncio, Monsignor Hurley, former Bishop of Florida and the principal American representative on the staff of the Vatican Cardinal Secretary of State. Hurley’s entry into Yugoslavia had been facilitated by Taylor’s office to which he passed information. It can be assumed that Hurley informed Taylor and Truman about Garbett, as he did the Vatican, which responded with a message of gratitude and appreciation. As America looked to develop, in alliance with the Pope, a spiritual offensive against the Soviet Union, the Foreign Office effected a profound gesture of support about which parliament and public alike were quite unaware.

48 Inverchapel to FO, 13 March and 23 August 1947, Foreign Office Records, FO371/67035/R3482 and 61056/IAN2982.
51 Taylor to Truman, 12 November 1947, WHCF Box 46, Truman papers, Truman Library.
52 Ibid.
54 Taylor to Truman, 25 June 1946; WHCF Box 44, Truman Papers.
55 Peake to Garbett, 5 April 1948; Garbett Papers.
Prior to the official proclamation of the Cold War at the beginning of 1948, the Foreign Office assiduously prepared British public opinion for the dissolution of the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union by means of what was euphemistically termed an ‘education campaign’.56 Thomas Brimelow, who served in Moscow as head of the Consular Service from June 1942 to June 1945, and thereafter in the Northern Department, outlined the considerations in September 1946 which prevented the Foreign Office from openly emulating America’s tough posturing:

In Great Britain a general realisation of the pattern of Soviet policy will come about slowly, and while it is forming every allowance will be made to the Russians and none to the Foreign Office. The result of this will be a split in public opinion between those who blame the Russians and those who blame the Foreign Secretary. If we are to keep this split to the smallest possible proportions — and this we must do if we are to reduce the effectiveness of communist propaganda inside this country — we shall have to show patience, forbearance and a strict correctness in all our dealings with the Russians. We cannot afford to be in the wrong.57

This meant that until late 1947 Bevin was a good deal more restrained in his public statements than he otherwise might have been, and he cultivated the impression that he was sincerely concerned to achieve agreement with the Russians. Britain’s leading ecclesiastical figure, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, was party to reinforcing this impression. Fisher, responding in November 1946 to a complaint about his Church’s ‘very obvious timidity in saying, or doing anything, that could even remotely be construed into criticism of Russia or her vassal states’, explained:

In this country the first thing is to do everything in our power to lead Russia into the ways of cooperation with other nations . . . Russia is becoming more sensitive to Western opinion. . . . At present our national duty is twofold: to stand firm for our own principles and to try to reconcile Russia. This precisely is what Bevin is trying to do. It would be a grievous thing if the Church here made his task harder by coming out with provocative denunciations of Russia.58

Prior to this, Fisher had been making such provocative denunciations of Russia next door to the USA in Canada, that the ‘Archbishop gave the Press the opportunity to headline him as saying that “fear, pride and greed guide Soviet creed”.’59 Interestingly, British press reports of the Archbishop’s speeches in Canada omitted to mention what was a radical departure from Fisher’s line at home.

Bevin’s dilemma was how to support the American anti-Sovietism he had

57 Brimelow, minute, 9 September 1946; FO 371 56835.
59 Anglican Outlook (Canada) December 1946; quoted in Religion and the People, a small circulation left-wing Anglican newsletter, February 1947.
encouraged without outraging his own backbenchers and British public opinion. Brimelow had suggested the need to develop a doctrine, 'the British way of life', to counter that of communism. His proposal for 'a basic, logical, coherent and sober doctrine that will be acceptable to men of common sense everywhere, and that we can oppose to the communist ideology of struggle, hate and revolution', became a strategy to win American approval. Unknown to Brimelow, it was already being explored as British officials had been advised by their US counterparts to persuade Americans that the way of life in which they placed so much faith was in all fundamental aspects 'much the same as the British way of life'.

In a survey of Foreign Office views on an anti-communist doctrine, Sir Charles Nichols first suggested Christianity and then observed: 'There is one alternative to communism which we could project and propagate and that is democratic socialism, or as it may be termed, "Socialism without dictatorship" — in short, social democracy as we understand it and are now implementing it.' The Foreign Office was already authorized to propagate propaganda in favour of social democracy, with a view to demonstrating its superiority over communism as a political creed. Labour took office in 1945 amid high hopes that its socialist message could be applied abroad as well as at home. Bevin's conviction that attacking communism would benefit socialism revealed the same naivety as that shown by George Orwell, who thought that the publication of 1984 would strengthen social democracy. As conservative Foreign Office officials were more able to appreciate, socialism and Russia were interrelated ideas and those concerned with operations in the USA considered that emphasizing socialism might prove detrimental to British interests. The sensitivity and caution with which British officials handled the socialist issue was encouraged by American officials, equally anxious to secure Congressional support for aid to Britain and who warned that Britain's socialism might indeed act as a decisive obstacle.

This presented obvious difficulties for the construction of a doctrine which would satisfy both British and American public opinion. Matters were not helped by demands from within the Parliamentary Labour Party for a socialist foreign policy and for safeguards against Britain's becoming a US satellite. In the November 1946 debate on foreign policy, the demand for a 'socialist alternative' to existing policies was widely supported and R.H.S. Crossman, one of Bevin's most vociferous critics, made a vigorous attack on the government's 'drift into the American camp'. In the voting on several amendments, about 120 Labour MPs were not accounted for. Within a few months the 'Keep Left' was officially formed, mostly of members of what would later be called the Tribune group. Their aim in foreign policy was to work for a third force between the two superpowers and independent of both blocs, exacerbating

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60 Anstey, 'The Projection of British Socialism', op. cit.
61 Sir Charles Nichols to Orme Sargent, 3 August 1946; FO 371 66362.
62 Lambert, minute, 29 November 1946; FO 371 66362.
further the difficulties of those officials engaged in promoting closer Anglo-American relations.64

Bevin lacked any concept of what a Labour, let alone a socialist, foreign policy should involve, and being in general agreement over fundamentals with his officials, it was the Foreign Office in its individual and collective judgment which pronounced on most questions.65 This was apparent in the introduction of a religious component and the emphasis on ideology in policy-making. Although Bevin served a long apprenticeship in the Baptist chapel, throughout his political life he was a consistent advocate of economistic solutions, something of which Bishop Bell complained to Fisher in 1950.66 The received wisdom that Bevin possessed a wide-ranging knowledge of foreign affairs and ‘a definite vision in broad terms of the policy he wanted to pursue’ is challenged by the fact that the concept of a ‘spiritual’ union of the west, attributed to him, was not his at all.67 Churchill, at a United Europe meeting in the Albert Hall in May 1947, at which Fisher took the chair, spoke of a ‘spiritual conception of Europe’.68 The idea reflected a rational, logical and clever Foreign Office response to Truman’s anti-communist crusade, to which Bevin’s early political and religious development made him receptive.69

Throughout the summer of 1947, press and public opinion surveys undertaken by the British embassy in Washington made it clear that anti-communism would be the main issue conditioning American public attitudes towards the extension of further aid. Although at the war’s end American sympathy for the Soviet Union had rapidly diminished, owing to the sheer ineptitude of the Soviets and their blundering behaviour abroad and, at home, the first stirrings of the Great Fear,70 the Truman administration did not believe that the Soviet

64 John Saville, ‘Ernest Bevin and the Cold War’, Socialist Register (Manchester 1984), 95.
69 Indicative of the connection in Bevin’s mind between religion and politics was a memorable action he initiated for the Bristol Right-to-Work Committee. To enlist the support of local clergy he organized a demonstration of the unemployed who one Sunday in November 1908 marched into Bristol cathedral and stood a silent reproof of the consequences of that state. In 1909, during a political crisis in his life, Bevin briefly contemplated becoming a missionary, highlighting the strength of the ties between his religious and political interests. Peter Weiler, Ernest Bevin (Manchester 1993), 6–7.
70 On 14 October 1945 it was noted in the Foreign Office that Russian ‘intransigence’ was greatly helping the British attempts to bring the USA to the British way of thinking. FO 371/44538/AN 3159. Joseph E. Davies, a former American ambassador to Moscow and a sympathetic interpreter of the Soviet Union, wrote in a private letter of 8 January 1946: ‘I know of no institution that needs a high pressure “public relations” organization as much as the USSR. They do not seem to get their case across, even when, as it happens sometimes, they have a good case.’ Quoted in J. L. Gaddis, ‘The Insecurities of Victory: The United States and the Perception of the Soviet Threat after World War II’ in M. J. Lacey (ed.), The Truman Presidency (Cambridge 1989), 235, note 68.
Union posed a direct military threat to the USA. Instead, the containment doctrine that evolved from early confrontation with the Soviet Union prescribed primary reliance upon the greatest US asset of all, economic power.\(^71\) Even as key officials became increasingly alarmed by the Soviet threat, approaches to defence questions revealed that everyone was looking for a cheap alternative and the administration remained committed to low defence spending and a balanced budget.\(^72\)

Ideological conflict was perhaps the cheapest of all options. In its original form as expressed by Kennan, the doctrine of containment was an ideological call to arms, and was generally recognized as such by both sides. The Washington embassy reported the growing importance of ideological factors in the Truman administration. In September 1947 the ambassador, Lord Inverchapel, stressed ideological reliability as being more important to the Americans than economic viability.\(^73\) Subsequently, Bevin told a group of visiting US Senators that the British people had ‘written Russia off in terms of cooperation’. Addressing an American Legion dinner in September, he underlined the United Kingdom’s role as a bastion of western civilization.\(^74\)

Owing to the dominance of anti-communism in the American psyche, Sir John Balfour, with the rank of Under-Secretary of State, urged from Washington in August 1947 that Ministers of the Crown ‘drive home the distinction between British socialism and Soviet communism’, and that they also emphasize ‘the determination of His Majesty’s Government to stand firm in the defence of Western values against all totalitarian threats’.\(^75\) At the end of August came Truman’s important exchange of letters with Pius XII. It provided British officials with a decisive means of drawing a potent distinction between communism and socialism: belief in God. It was also a means of reminding people of the common bonds that united the two nations.

To understand why this was necessary, an appreciation is required not simply of the deep suspicion of socialism that resided in the USA, but also of the mood of antagonism to American-style capitalism which existed in Britain, almost unimaginable today. It should be recalled that A.J.P. Taylor considered that nobody in Europe believed in the American way of life, while George Orwell dismissed capitalism as a failed system.\(^76\) In August 1948, the US ambassador in Britain, Lewis Douglas, observed ‘an undercurrent of feeling

\(^72\) Ibid., 217–19.
\(^74\) FO 371/61038 AN 3852/17/45.
\(^75\) J. Balfour to M. Wright; FO 371 61003 AN 2922/1/45.
here against the US in and out of government. . . . At times their attitude toward the US borders on the pathological.‘77

The Foreign Office dilemma was how to endorse anti-communism for American consumption without provoking another Labour Party rebellion. By the middle of 1947 the risk of a split in the Labour Party and its implications were being seriously discussed.‘78 The solution can be seen in the creation of the Information Research Department (IRD), allegedly for the promotion of social democracy but whose raison d’être was indisputably anti-communism. In October 1947, Bevin’s Parliamentary Private Secretary, Christopher Mayhew, presented the Foreign Secretary with a confidential paper which proposed a covert ‘propaganda counter-offensive’ against the Russians by means of a specifically-created Foreign Office department. In a meeting on 18 November called to discuss Mayhew’s proposal, Orme Sargent, agreeing on the need for offensive rather than defensive propaganda, advocated offering the world ‘something in which it could believe’.‘79 Ivone Kirkpatrick, pointing to the lack of progress made in converting communists in Europe, urged that something more than mere exhortation to observe the British way of life and copy it was called for.‘80

Upon the collapse of the London Council of Foreign Ministers in December 1947, Bevin told US Secretary of State Marshall that ‘he now felt that the spiritual consolidation of western civilisation was possible’,‘81 and outlined his plan for ‘a sort of spiritual federation of the West’, proposing ‘not a formal alliance, but an understanding backed by power, money and resolute action’ which would serve to guarantee west European security and prevent the Soviets from filling the power void in Europe.‘82 This marked the beginning of the series of discussions and negotiations leading to the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty and the eventual formation of NATO for which Bevin required not only the support of the USA but also of his Cabinet colleagues. The ‘spiritual’ component became the means by which both were secured. It was used to suggest to the Cabinet that Britain was following an independent course from the USA, while it confirmed to the USA Britain’s full support for its anti-communist ‘crusade’.

This latter position was, of course, much more in accord with Foreign Office sensibilities than was the promotion of social democracy. Certainly, the Foreign Office was prepared to make capital out of having a socialist government wherever benefit could be derived, as Kirkpatrick made clear in October 1946 when he recommended that ‘no publicity should give the impression that

77 Foreign Relations of the United States (henceforth FRUS), vol. III, Department of State publication, Washington DC 1948, 1113.
78 FO 371 66371 N 9549.
80 Ibid.
81 FRUS 1948 (III), 2, Gallman telegram 6585, 17 December 1947.
Britain was in the throes of a revolutionary turmoil . . . but capital could be made out of the socialist state in England in those countries where such publicity was desirable'. By virtue of their background, upbringing and education, Foreign Office officials were poor publicists for socialist ideals, which was why successive Labour Party conferences between 1946 and 1948 witnessed resolutions for the democratization of the Foreign Service and the replacement of those in high diplomatic posts. Still, the major factor inhibiting socialist publicity by the Foreign Office was its conviction that this was an issue requiring extremely careful handling in the USA. This resulted in an approach centred in large part on apology. Fearful of America's apparent failure to draw a distinction between socialism and communism, and eager to forge a close Anglo-American alignment, embassy and Foreign Office officials sought to play down the changes effected by the Labour government, play up its commitment to personal liberty and the democratic process, and emphasize its dissociation from Soviet communism, most of which could seemingly be facilitated by an open commitment to Christian ideals.

In early January 1948, Bevin presented to the Cabinet a memorandum, ‘The First Aim of British Foreign Policy’, which outlined necessary measures to ‘stem the further encroachment of the Soviet tide’, and argued:

It is not enough to reinforce the physical barriers which still guard our western civilisation. We must organise and consolidate the ethical and spiritual forces inherent in this western civilisation of which we are the chief protagonists. This in my view can only be done by creating some form of union in Western Europe, whether of a formal or informal character, backed by the Americas and the Dominions.

Frankly stating that without US finance western union could not succeed, Bevin notably claimed that it was to Britain rather than America to which much of the free world would look for leadership:

Material aid will have to come principally from the United States, but the countries of Western Europe which despise the spiritual values of America will look to us for political and moral guidance in building up a counter-attraction to the baleful tenets of Communism within their borders and in recreating a healthy society wherever it has been shaken or shattered by the war.

These were strong words. However, bearing in mind the importance attached by the Americans to their own moral leadership, it is hardly credible that the Foreign Office intended challenging them in this sphere:

During World War II the Americans developed a sense of power, righteous power. On the whole . . . they considered it their right, their duty, and their opportunity to lead the world. No ally, even the closest, could expect to change the directions of American policy.

83 Minutes of meeting, CO1 Overseas Production Conference, commenting on Information Officers’ Conference October 1946, CP(46)29. INF 12/61.
85 Ibid., 421.
87 Ibid. Emphasis added.
The Foreign Office sought not to change it, but to harness it to British interests. While the paper presented to the Cabinet suggested British moral leadership as an alternative to that of the USA, a summary of Bevin’s views sent to Marshall implied that British efforts would complement American. The anti-communist rhetoric and the emphasis on the spiritual component reflected the need to secure Congressional support for ERP (European Recovery Programme) appropriations, combined with the need to forge an American role in western Europe’s defence, neither of which were assured at the beginning of 1948. The summary, presented ‘very secretly’ by Inverchapel, noted the need to ‘guard our Western civilisation’ by organizing ethical and spiritual forces; and claimed that most of the countries concerned ‘have been nurtured on civil liberties and on the fundamental human rights’, while all sought ‘some assurance of salvation’.89

When 16 European nations had met in Paris between July and September 1947 to discuss the Marshall Plan, the British view that economic co-operation should be multilateral and functional prevailed over the American arguments for European economic integration.90 Now Bevin emphasized that while treaties between the nations might differ, they would be bound together by their ‘common ideals’. Bevin’s paper created a favourable impression in the State Department. John Hickerson, the Chief of the Division of European Affairs, thought ‘Mr Bevin’s objective is magnificent’, and, together with John Foster Dulles, a deeply committed Christian, supported American participation.91 Kennan, Director of the Policy Planning Staff, initially blocked participation, but recommended that Marshall should indicate ‘whole-hearted sympathy and support’ and welcome the project ‘just as warmly as Mr Bevin welcomed your Harvard speech’. Notably suspicious of Bevin’s intentions, ‘if the idea is really that which Mr Bevin sets forth in his memorandum’, Kennan judiciously advised: ‘Military union should not be the starting-point. It should flow from the political, economic and spiritual union — not vice versa.’92

There was a somewhat different emphasis in the paper Bevin presented to the Cabinet, which suggested that British prestige, leadership and world power could be restored by assuming the lead in the spiritual sphere which would facilitate the development of Britain’s colonial resources and put Britain on an equal footing with the USA and the Soviet Union, graphically demonstrating that it was subject to neither:

89 FRUS 1948 (III), 5.
91 FRUS 1948 (III), 6–7, Memorandum by the Director of the Office of European Affairs (Hickerson) to the Secretary of State.
92 FRUS 1948 (III), 7, Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Kennan) to the Secretary of State.
Provided we can organise a Western European system such as I have outlined above, backed by the power and resources of the Commonwealth and of the Americas, it should be possible to develop our own power and influence to equal that of the United States of America and the USSR. We have the material resources in the Colonial Empire, if we develop them, and by giving a spiritual lead now we should be able to carry out our task in a way which will show clearly that we are not subservient to the United States of America or to the Soviet Union.93

Bevin was effectively arguing that Britain should retain and continue an imperial policy. Foreign Office officials may have hoped that stressing moral and spiritual leadership might have made it more palatable to the anti-colonial left.94 Bevin and his officials thought that without the Empire Britain would sink to the level of a second-rate power, thereby losing US support which they assumed was conditional on their being able to continue to act as a world power.95 This again raises the question of whether Foreign Office aspirations to reinstate Britain as a world power were motivated by concern to become independent of America, or to secure the ‘special relationship’.

John Young suggests that hindsight made it easier to interpret Bevin’s foreign policy as always aiming at the Atlantic pact. He cites Michael Howard’s argument that Bevin’s idea of a ‘third force’ confirmed his long-term hope to become independent of, and equal to, America, albeit in the wider framework of an anti-Soviet alliance.96 It needs to be borne in mind, however, that the Labour left favoured the ‘third force’ concept. In the formulation of British propaganda to support western union, Mayhew persuaded Bevin to use the term ‘third force’, arguing that it could ‘be used generally for the anti-Communist forces to which we are anxious to give a lead’.97 IRD had its intellectual roots in social democracy and Mayhew’s early papers talked of creating a socialist ‘third force’ in Europe half way between Washington and Moscow. Mayhew clearly perceived the term as a means of preventing controversy within the Parliamentary Labour Party over relations with the USA.98 Warner and others in the Foreign Office opposed the suggestion. In western Europe the term already had a specific connotation in French politics and could not, it was felt, readily be taken over by the Foreign Office and given a different

94 ‘Bevin always assumed that the British Empire, official and unofficial, was crucial for the economic well-being of Britain itself, and that the Empire was a major component of the general political position of Britain in the world. Such positions were clearly implicit on his pre-1939 thinking: they became unadorned and explicit during the years when he was Foreign Secretary, and thereby matched the intellectual premises of his senior officials at the Foreign Office.’ Saville, The Politics of Continuity, op. cit., 97.
95 Bullock, Ernest Bevin, op. cit., 351.
97 C.F.A. Warner to Mayhew and Sargent, 1 January 1948; FO 953 128.
98 In an interview with the journalist James Oliver, 18 July 1995, Lord Mayhew admitted that the use of the term ‘third force’ was a tactical ploy to counter left-wing opposition should IRD’s operations be disclosed; cited in Paul Lashmar and James Oliver, Britain’s Secret Propaganda War (Stroud 1998), 27.
connotation. Warner, aware that the USA opposed the ‘third force’ concept, was anxious that the term not be used in such a way as to become part of the basic directive in the Foreign Office’s new publicity line, as it might be viewed badly in Canada, and ‘once we have started using it, it would be very awkward to slither out of it, supposing that the close association in policy with the USA which our security and our material needs force upon us was found to make it inappropriate’.  

However, where it was necessary to protect Bevin from his own backbenchers, indeed, even from members of the Cabinet, the Americans were prepared to be understanding, as had been demonstrated the previous year when Waldemar J. Gallman, minister at the American embassy in London, reported to Marshall that

Foreign Office officials directly charged with Soviet affairs have recently and repeatedly indicated that while there is no change in substance of United Kingdom policy towards USSR, every move must be carefully considered and planned from point of view of protecting Bevin from Labour Party rebels. . . . In light of Labour rebellion Bevin and Foreign Office now take greater pains to avoid creating impression he is ganging up with the United States against Russia.  

The extent to which each administration appreciated the difficulties the domestic sphere could cause another was illustrated during an interlude in the talks over Korea in December 1950 when in ‘an almost unique moment of bonhomie . . ., Truman and Attlee commiserated with one another over their respective domestic oppositions’.  

Attlee had been seriously let down by Truman twice — first with the sudden termination of lend-lease; second, on the issue of atomic co-operation, yet he blamed Congress, not the President.  

Attlee supported Bevin’s endeavours to ensure that there would be no repetition of the 1946 Labour rebellion. The day before the Foreign Secretary addressed the Cabinet, Attlee’s 1948 New Year broadcast endorsed Bevin’s policy and prepared the way for it. Addressing what he called the reasoned case for British socialism, which implicitly supported Bevin’s Third Force, Attlee spoke of a ‘British Approach’ which he stressed would not be a half-way house between American capitalism and Russian communism, but an organic development of western European civilization. At issue, he pointed out, was the preservation of the British way of life in a world dominated by two non-European powers, both of which were opposed to colonialism. Attlee gave philosophical justification to the third force idea, stating:

At . . . one end of the scale are the Communist countries; at the other end the United States. . . . Great Britain . . . is placed geographically and from the point of view of economic and

99 C.F.A. Warner to Mayhew and Sargent, 1 January 1948; FO 953 128.
political theory between these two great continental states. . . . Our task is to work out a
system . . . which combines individual freedom with a planned economy.103

Attlee’s words were similar to views expressed by the ‘Keep Left’ group.104
Equally significant, Attlee’s speech, which could well have had adverse repercus-
sions in the USA, instead created a favourable impression. Although Attlee
had emphasized the positive role of British socialism in the postwar world and
specifically stated that Britain was not aiming at a watered-down version of
the American way of life, the US press focused on the speech’s anti-communist
content. The result, as the Washington embassy informed the Foreign Office,
was that reports from American correspondents in London led to the con-
viction that HMG would shortly redefine British foreign policy in terms which
would make it clear that Britain recognized itself as a ‘defender of western
values’ — the theme of Truman’s important State of the Union address
delivered that same week — rather than a mediator between east and west.105

Against this background, Bevin, arguing ‘that the Russian and Communist
Allies are threatening the whole fabric of western civilisation’ making it
necessary ‘to mobilise spiritual forces, as well as material and political, for its
defence’, informed the Cabinet:

It is for us, as Europeans and as a Social Democratic Government, and not the Americans, to
give the lead in (the) spiritual, moral and political sphere to all the democratic elements in
Western Europe which are anti-Communist and, at the same time, genuinely progressive and
reformist, believing in freedom, planning and social justice — what one might call the ‘Third
Force’. . . . We should advertise our principles as offering the best and most efficient way of
life. We should attack, by comparison, the principles and practice of Communism, and also
the inefficiency, social injustice and moral weakness of unrestrained capitalism.106

Although Marshall’s speech of 5 June 1947, against the background of a
rising level of diplomatic conflict between the Soviet Union and the west,
dramatically altered the politics of the Left within the Parliamentary Labour
Party, the Foreign Office was clearly wary that the subsequent US–Vatican
alliance, announced in the Truman–Pius XII exchange of letters in August,
might revive opposition. The Vatican’s anti-communist crusade had attracted
a good deal of criticism, not least in the serious press. As early as July 1946 the
Observer had declared Pius XII to be a greater threat to Europe than Stalin,
while The Economist declared his crusade as ‘still the illiberal reactionary and
potentially Fascist force which it was under Hitler’. The Economist warned:
‘The worker may not relish direction from Moscow, but he prefers it to
Rome.’107 Direction from the USA would be equally unwelcome, which was
why the Foreign Office was concerned about allegations from some Labour

103 The Times, 5 January 1948, 4.
104 J. Schneer, ‘Hopes Deferred or Shattered: The British Left and the Third Force Movement,
105 Washington to Foreign Office, Weekly Political Summaries, 10 January 1948; FO 371
68018 AN0113.
107 Quoted in Religion and the People, July 1946.
MPs that the Truman administration wished to impose its way of life on other countries.

To counter these charges and promote the new policy, Bevin insisted that past British publicity had been confined to explaining and promoting the British way of life, now more was required and Britain must go on the offensive.\(^{108}\) The offensive to which Bevin referred was influenced by the perceived need to pander to the demands of one audience while not alienating another. This was particularly discernible in the concept of a rival ideology to communism that embraced ‘Christianity’, to which both Americans and British could respond positively. Foreign Office documents reveal that the term ‘social democracy’ was not to be used in British publicity: the ‘slogan’ to be used was “Democratic Socialism” as distinct from “Social Democracy” (with its Marxist associations).\(^{109}\) Although this was to be presented to the Cabinet as the means of strengthening western European socialist parties under British leadership, it needs to be remembered that the Truman administration knew that it had to work with these parties and in this, as in so many other areas, the British were a potentially useful conduit — and a test case for Congress.

Bevin’s suggestions can be seen as constructing an acceptable image of socialism for an anti-socialist nation which, nonetheless, remained committed to New Deal ‘welfarism’ and whose constitution enshrined individual rights. Bevin told the Cabinet:

> We cannot hope successfully to repel Communism only by disparaging it on material grounds, and must add a positive appeal to Democratic and Christian principles, remembering the strength of Christian sentiment in Europe. We must put forward a positive rival ideology. We must stand on the broad principles of Social Democracy which, in fact, has its basis in the value of civil liberty and human rights.\(^{110}\)

Implicit was the suggestion that Labour’s socialism was inadequate for British foreign policy. Bevin used the Soviet threat as justification for the construction of a new ideology for foreign policy purposes. Its aim, however, was not, as Bevin claimed, to combat communism, but to please the Americans. At this point in time Marshall Aid had still not secured Congressional approval.

The American historian Richard Hofstadter famously observed: ‘It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one.’\(^{111}\) The components suggested by Bevin embraced the political values of the classical liberalism to which Americans were deeply committed. In the USA, ‘Love of country has meant love of liberalism’.\(^{112}\) In a 1946 Independence Day oration, John F.

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108 Anstey, ‘The Projection of British Socialism’, op. cit., 432 and 435. Interestingly, in broaching the socialist issue in the USA, British officials had been advised that Americans were to be persuaded that their way of life, in which they placed so much faith, was in all fundamental aspects ‘much the same as the British way of life’.
109 Roberts, Minute, Top Secret, approved by Bevin, 5 March 1948; FO800/460.
Kennedy observed that the ‘characteristics of the American people have ever
been a deep sense of religion, a deep sense of idealism, a deep sense of patriot-
ism, and a deep sense of individualism’. Reference to Christianity, demo-
cracy, civil liberties and human rights could only be helpful in a context in
which pleasing the Americans and countering their anti-imperialist sentiment,
as well as that of the British and European Left, mattered.

Bevin personally seems to have been sceptical of the ideological approach,
but it seemingly offered a practical means of cultivating the USA without
alienating the Labour Party, a large part of whose own roots were in Christian
socialism. There was the additional factor that Christian Democrat parties
were gaining in strength and influence in key areas of western Europe, while
religion was generally perceived as a bulwark against communism among
third world peoples likely to find its promise of economic equality appealing.
Bevin therefore impressed upon the Cabinet that British leadership could not
be based solely on social democracy, it required a religious dimension:

. . . in the Middle East and possibly in certain Far Eastern countries such as India, Burma,
Ceylon, Malaya, Indonesia and Indo-China, Communism will make headway unless a strong
spiritual and moral lead . . . is given against it, and we are in a good position to give such a
lead. In many countries of Western Europe the forces of Social Democracy will be the main-
stay, but even in Western Europe and obviously in the Middle East and Far East our appeal
could not be only to Social Democratic Parties.

Three days after Bevin assured the Cabinet that Britain could exercise
effective leadership in the spiritual sphere, Truman, in a nation-wide broad-
cast, impressed upon the American people that the defence of the free world
was their God-given duty. In his annual message to Congress on the State of
the Union, delivered in person before a Joint Session of Congress on 7 January
1948, Truman claimed that the basic source of American strength was its
spirituality: ‘For we are a people with a faith . . . The faith of our people has
particular meaning at this time in history.’ Truman emphasized that the whole
world was looking to America for leadership and this was the hour to rededi-
cate their faith.

After gaining Cabinet approval for his proposal on 8 January, Bevin
resumed his efforts to engage the USA in his plans, secretly communicating his
project to the State Department and then outlining his concept of a spiritual
union of the west in a speech to the House on 22 January 1948, during a two-
day debate on foreign affairs which signalled to the USA that Britain was
ready to fulfil the American conditions for Marshall Aid. As Gladwyn Jebb,

113 John F. Kennedy, ‘Some Elements of the American Character’, Independence Day Oration,
1946; PF Box 94, JFK Library.
114 For an example, see William D. Graf, ‘Anti-Communism in the Federal Republic of
116 ‘Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union’, 7 January 1948, Public Papers
of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman 1948, 2.
Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, later recalled: ‘Altogether it was a very clever speech. The Secretary of State knew perfectly well what he was after, but he had to achieve his end by stages, gaining as many allies as he could in the process.’ This was important because on 19 January Marshall had told Inverchapel that he was considering what procedure would be most effective and at what point he could suggest US participation in Bevin’s plan. Bevin was not worried about the form of the American approach; he just wanted them in and saw part of his task as easing their entry. He made no mention of the USA in his speech.

According to Jebb, ‘The speech had a great echo all over Europe’. Bevin had stated: ‘We should do all we can to foster both the spirit and the machinery of cooperation. . . . Britain cannot stand outside Europe and regard her problems as quite separate from those of her European neighbours.’ Consideration needs to be given to Bevin’s speech as a straightforward strategic move in which, in order to help overcome Congressional resistance to ERP, he effected compliance with the American desire to see an integrated Europe. After all, although many scholarly interpretations have been advanced in explanation of Britain’s subsequent retreat from Europe, it did tend to coincide with the increasing US commitment to Europe and the consolidation of the ‘special’ relationship, at least in that Britain was the major beneficiary of ERP. Recalling the 22 January speech, Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Prime Minister and first Chairman of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation’s Council, observed of Bevin that ‘never again was he to show up in this light. On the contrary, he seemed surprised and even worried when he saw the ideas, which he himself had pioneered, being put into practice.’ Spaak ‘never understood why Bevin changed his view as he did’.

The possibility that Bevin’s plan for western union was a rhetorical device to facilitate an American commitment to Europe is supported by the same reluctance to develop ‘the spiritual federation’ he had proposed to Marshall in December 1947 into anything beyond a propaganda weapon. It is worth noting that at the same meeting Bevin had also emphasized his preference for the British conception of informal and unwritten understandings to written constitutions, suggesting that, even had he been sincere, Bevin never wanted a formal union. He certainly had little real interest in a ‘spiritual federation’, clearly the idea of his officials, and one that the course of events was to make unnecessary.

The 1948 Prague take-over was a cardinal error in Soviet foreign policy. It

117 Jebb, Memoirs, op. cit., 211.
118 Inverchapel to Bevin, Top Secret, 19 January 1948; FO 800/460.
119 Bevin to Inverchapel, Telegram no. 1032, Top Secret, 26 January 1948; FO 800/460.
120 Jebb, Memoirs, op. cit., 211.
121 Robin Edmonds, Setting the Mould: The United States and Britain 1945-50 (Oxford 1986), 186.
revived memories of the Munich Agreement and the subsequent German occupation of Czechoslovakia and it seemingly confirmed Bevin’s argument that the Soviet Union embodied the same ‘Threat to Western Civilisation’ — the title of a paper circulated to Cabinet colleagues on 3 March 1948 — as had the Nazis. The paper, notably, was written in early February, before the Prague coup on the 25th, by Gladwyn Jebb, who also made a major contribution to Bevin’s 22 January speech and had been an advocate of presenting the Allied cause as a Christian crusade during the war. ‘The Threat to Western Civilisation’ was presented to the Cabinet following the events in Czechoslovakia and Finland which provided the justification for Bevin to take his proposals for western union that step further toward a military treaty, something which before he had hinted at only very inferentially in his public disclosures.

The day after the coup, Bevin met with Douglas, the American ambassador, and told him that he wanted a meeting of the western governments, including the USA, because strong action was required. Stating his conviction that war was less likely if firm action was taken instead of letting matters slide from crisis to crisis as had happened in the 1930s, Bevin wanted talks with the Americans to evolve a sort of joint military and civil strategy. Claiming to be ‘anxious lest the period immediately before us should turn out to have been the last chance for saving the West’, Bevin ‘finally put into Mr Douglas’s mind the idea of a permanent consultative body in Washington’.

In ‘The Threat to Western Civilisation’, Jebb, whose Memoirs recalled that during this period he was ‘better placed to influence events than ever before’, addressed Russia in apocalyptic terms. The paper not only presented a harrowing picture of Soviet activities and intentions — ‘physical control of the Eurasian land mass and eventual control of the whole World Island is what the Politburo is aiming at — no less a thing than that’ — it also suggested that steps should be taken to associate the Christian churches in Britain with HMG’s policy regarding western union. Endorsing the paper on 5 March, the Cabinet agreed that Bevin himself should take whatever action he thought appropriate. Later that same day, Frank Roberts, Bevin’s new Principal Private

123 Ibid., 185–6.
124 Jebb, Memoirs, op. cit., 96. Jebb recalled that during the war a great deal of Foreign Office energies went into trying to think out the right lines for weakening the German war effort. He put forward a ‘Christianity versus Paganism’ line, which engendered correspondence with Rex Leeper who opposed the idea. It was Jebb who wrote the ‘Stocktaking II’ memorandum which countered Crossman’s Keep Left line, and, at Bevin’s behest, collaborated with Denis Healey to produce the stout defence of his foreign policy and the American alignment, ‘Cards on the Table’. Jebb to Sargent, 9 May 1947; FO 371/67537C UN 2622/2622/78G.
126 Top Secret record of conversation between Douglas and Bevin, 26 February 1948; FO 800/460.
128 ‘The Threat to Western Civilisation’, CP(48)72, CAB 129/25, 3 March 1948. Although presented to the Cabinet as Bevin’s own views, they were actually taken, virtually word for word, from a memorandum of the same title prepared by Jebb in the February and repeated in his Memoirs, 211.
Secretary, set out what were meant to be Bevin’s ideas in preparation for a meeting of Foreign Office officials at which they were to be addressed more fully. One crucial section, entitled ‘Spiritual and Cultural’, contained elements that derived directly from Truman’s concept of a ‘religious front’, although Roberts presented it as Bevin’s idea, claiming the Foreign Secretary believed:

... that the moment has now come to harness spiritual forces behind the whole concept of Western Union in the widest sense. The freedom of the individual is so closely bound up with religious freedom and general spiritual values that all the great religious faiths, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, etc., can be brought together on this plane in opposition to Communism. Before, however, attempting to organise Islam and Buddhism it is essential to arrive at some unity among the Christian Churches. ... In the present crisis a further effort must be made to get all the Christian Churches together on the basis of the defence of religion, peace, liberty and social justice.

Bevin subsequently met with Fisher and Cardinal Griffin, after which he agreed with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Stafford Cripps, a committed and active Christian, that the latter should henceforward assume the primary responsibility for pursuing the matter, and should in particular see the Moderators of the Church of Scotland and of the Free Churches. Letters had been dispatched to these two gentlemen on 12 March asking them to call on the Foreign Secretary at a convenient opportunity ‘in order to discuss certain questions connected with our present foreign policy’. It might well be that having met with the two archbishops, Bevin felt as did Sir Kenneth Grubb, by then a World Council of Churches’ official, that bishops...

... although most devoted and able... are enigmatic, and it is well to regard them with caution. If a man has a serious discussion with a bishop, it should not be à deux but with a witness, say, one’s solicitor, accountant, or psychiatrist, in attendance.

The decision reveals Bevin’s lack of enthusiasm for this ideological exercise, consistent with his remaining decidedly unimpressed when the Foreign Office and later the Defence Chiefs put forward plans for waging the Cold War as a highly ideological anti-communist crusade on all fronts. It equally suggests that the only importance Bevin attached to ideological aspects was as a means to consolidate Anglo-American relations.

The importance attached to the spiritual and moral dimension by the USA meant that this was an area in which collaboration with the Americans had to

130 R.D.C. McAlpine, FO to R. Spicer, Treasury, 15 March 1948; FO 371 73053.
be considered, as Warner informed Sir John Balfour in a secret communication to the Washington embassy in February 1948. After deliberation, the Foreign Office decided that it would be inadvisable to have any general agreement or understanding with the USA

... which would in any way tie our hands... On the whole the Americans seem to be very ham-handed in their anti-Communist and anti-Soviet publicity. Our line is likely therefore very often to differ from theirs. We should hope however by consultation in suitable cases to prevent our getting in each other’s way. We also — perhaps rashly — rather hope to be able to influence them imperceptibly in the direction of greater subtlety.134

Over the coming months, however, amidst the deepening international crisis, the British and the Americans attempted to agree a common line with which to counter communism.135 A Foreign Office working party was set up under the chairmanship of Warner to consider the spiritual aspects of western union and provide terms of reference. The first was “to examine the factors common to the Western Union countries other than political, strategic and economic which can contribute to building up the Western Union conception.”136 This problem was tackled at the first meeting of the working party, which took place on 19 February 1948. At the second meeting, it was agreed to approach various outside people with a view to getting ideas.137 One consultant, Arthur Goodhart, objected to describing the basic division between the western democracies and the totalitarian states as a conflict between Christianity and communism.138 He told the Foreign Office that it was confusing the problem with which they were faced by making a distinction between western democracy and a totalitarian state based on economic theory and a special attitude to religion, explaining that there was not necessarily conflict between religion and totalitarianism, because a country which recognized religion could be totalitarian, as in the case of Spain. He observed that there was always a tendency at times of revolt to attack established religion on the grounds that it supported the status quo, but when the revolutionary govern-

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135 Russia Committee Meeting, 28 October 1948; FO 371 71667.
137 19 and 24 February 1948, FO 953 144, EP1474.
138 Arthur Goodhart, ‘Economic Theory and Religion’, 12 March 1948, FO 953 145. An interesting comparison can be drawn between Goodhart’s views and the suggestion from J.O. Rennie, an IRD official, who proposed a ‘Purity of Motive’ theme which would at one and the same time discredit the Soviet Union and make it possible to explain how the British Administration was able to combine state direction in the economic field with respect for individual liberty. It could be pointed out, for example, how both Russia and the west supported artists and scientists — in parenthesis Rennie noted that, in fact, Russia gave materially a better deal — but Russian support was for blatantly political or aggressive motives and was therefore exploitative. Similarly, he posited that both western union and totalitarianism gave assistance or financial aid, either directly or in the form of tax relief, to mothers and children; but totalitarians were concerned with producing cannon fodder, while western governments valued and respected and cared for the welfare of the individual.
ment had become established, its conflict with the Church might cease. Goodhart noted that this was what seemed to have happened in the Soviet Union, where it would now hardly be surprising to find it playing the defender of the Greek Catholic Church in the Middle East.

Goodhart’s objections were disregarded. They were superfluous, as the Anglican and Roman leaders had already unleashed a Christian anti-Soviet onslaught, prior even to the proposal to involve the Churches being put to the Cabinet. Prague, of course, provided the justification. The practicalities of working relations between Church and state had been consolidated during the war through the Religions Division of the Ministry of Information, while leading civil servants and bishops traditionally consorted together. It was not surprising, therefore, that within a short time of Jebb’s composition the Roman and the Anglican leadership spoke out forcefully in terms which left little doubt that there existed an irreconcilable conflict between Christianity and communism. The lower clergy quickly followed suit.139

On the day the Brussels treaty was signed by five European nations, Truman addressed Congress in person to deliver a special message on the threat to the freedom of Europe. To counter this threat, Truman recommended first that action on ERP be speedily completed, and, second, that universal training legislation be promptly enacted. He urged that assistance to other nations and American strength were prerequisites in carrying out ‘America’s great purpose’.140

That same evening, discussing these recommendations before the Society of the Friendly Sons of St Patrick, Truman spoke of ‘the righteousness of our course’ and emphasized the Christian foundation of the American alliance with Europe: ‘The faith in God which sustains us, also sustains men in other lands. Together we can erect an enduring peace.’ In this speech Truman made an attack on communism which particularly stressed its atheism: ‘And even worse, Communism denies the very existence of God. Religion is persecuted because it stands for freedom under God. This threat to our liberty and to our faith must be faced by each one of us.’141

Truman’s increasing tendency, and that of his administration, to view opposition to the Soviet Union from an ideological perspective is the key to understanding Bevin’s now well-known series of papers to the Cabinet, beginning with ‘The First Aim of British Foreign Policy’ in early January 1948 and ending with ‘The Threat to Western Civilisation’ in early March, which outlined his ‘spiritual concept of Western Union’ and officially established IRD. Some historians have interpreted these documents as showing British determination under a Labour government to chart an independent course from the USA, despite the recognition of its dependency on American financial and military

141 St Patrick’s Day Address in New York City, 17 March 1948, Public Papers of the Presidents, op. cit., 186–90.
support. John Lewis Gaddis uses the ‘Threat to Western Civilisation’ to legitimate containment by pointing out that the British feared the Soviet Union as much as the Americans, which he sees as evidence that the Truman administration did not manufacture or deliberately exaggerate the Soviet threat.

Consideration of the role religion came to play in the alignment of the western powers against the Soviet Union helps to shed crucial new light on some of the most contentious issues of the period, including the way in which it has been documented. It also helps to emphasize the importance to Truman of a sense of mission and modifies some of the existing views of both the realists and the revisionists concerning his role in the Cold War. Finally, it highlights how the failure of a joint Anglo-American effort to construct a western doctrine with which to counter the appeal of communism, a task not made any easier for having in essence to satisfy both capitalist and socialist values, resulted in anti-communism, with Christian ideals and values deliberately positioned at its core, coming to serve this purpose, achieving doctrinal status in the process.

In the rhetoric of the Cold War, Christianity became a means of distinguishing between socialism and communism, of dramatizing and publicizing the Soviet regime as an evil power and the Cold War as a Manichaean conflict and of consolidating the western alliance, the ‘special relationship’ in particular. The success of Christian Democratic parties throughout western Europe in the postwar period is testimony to the effectiveness of this strategy, which contributed significantly to the intensification of the Cold War, as well as to the transformation of Christian leaders into Cold War warriors and the transmogrification of Christianity into a politicized doctrine.

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142 Charmley, Churchill’s Grand Alliance, op. cit.; Young, European Unity, op. cit.