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DEFENSE OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND OFFICE OF SECURITY REVIEW

Interview with NO CLASSIFIED INFORMATION FOUND

Lord Flowden

Jun 21, 2017

October 2, 1962

by Alfred Goldberg

- Q. What was the British role in conceiving NATO? Were there significant Anglo-American discussions before NATO was proposed?
- A. My direct experience with NATO was limited to my service with the TCC. Gaitskell was supposed to be the third member and I was designated as as his alternate. Because of the impending election, Gaitskell never served and I replaced him, although I don't believe I was ever formally Vice-Chairman.

I can't remember anything of Anglo-American discussions leading to NATO. I was aware of what was going on from the economic side because of my position with the Treasury. There is no doubt at all that among senior leaders of both parties there was always the feeling of the necessity to maintain the link with the United States. All British thinking was how to keep the Americans interested in Europe so that we never have 1914-17 and 1939-41 again. It was that more than anything that delayed acceptance of the Common Market and things like that until recently. I was a convert to the Common Market only because I feared that it might weaken the American link. Always we held to the idea of hanging on to the Anglo-American alliance. This attitude still runs through all the thinking of the people in the services, and in the Civil Service. You won't find any sensible person who thinks that Europe on its own is a militarily viable proposition.

Q. Why was NATO so much more acceptable to Great Britain than was a European Defense Community?

A. The constant theory has been the Anglo-American alliance. We feel that we must keep the Americans in Europe. We have looked outward from Europe for a long time, but at the same time we have tried to keep out of it. We maintained the balance of power for 400 years. We have managed to keep out of Europe but we couldn't stay away from it. Philip II, Louis XIV, Napoleon, the Kaiser, Hitler are all witnesses to that. The bulk of the opposition comes from the deep-rooted instinct not to get enmeshed in Europe. Because there is so much in common between the United States and the United Kingdom (but not as much as is often said) NATO has been much more acceptable to us.

Q. Other than the Soviet menace, what factors have affected Atlantic and European movements toward integrated defense and economic organizations and arrangements?

A. Jean Monnet said to me many years ago --1948, I think-- that there should be closer economic integration between the United Kingdom and France. He said that we must realize that almost every nation on the continent of Europe had been defeated and occupied by a conquering army. Therefore, the people of Europe were disillusioned with their governments and political forms and were seeking something different. In Europe, therefore, there has been a negative impulse toward the environment that has nothing to do with the Russians. The countries on the continent never did really take part in the victory in 1945. There was a feeling of shame on the part of the French and the Germans, who suffered such terrible defeats. In this country it has been most difficult to realize the change in our position since we were at the peak in 1945. It is still difficult for people to

realize these changes and they don't want to realize it. In the United Kingdom the feeling that we were weaker and that it should not happen again came from the top, not from the people at the bottom. We felt that the best chance for the future would be to influence an alliance. We feel the need for an inner alliance with the Americans within a broader one. People were saying that this would be the American century and some thought that we would play the role the Greeks played in the Roman Empire.

The great economic unifying influence, of course, was Marshall Aid. One of my first exercises as chief planner for the Cabinet Office in 1947 was to work out what the daily calory ration of the British people would be when our reserves ran out in the autumn. It was, I think, on the order of 1,700 calories. During the war we never fell below about 2,700 calories. Our situation and that of Europe was such that we needed help.

The European countries got used to working together economically during OEEC. The United States very wisely said: this is the amount and you have to divide it up among yourselves. The working of the OEEC was very much different from that of the EEC. The continental countries did not have the same food problems as the United Kingdom, but they did have their troubles -- balance of payments, rehabilitation, etc. The main drive toward the European Community has been mainly political, not economic. Certainly this has been so in Monnet's mind.

- Q. In the earlier years of OEEC and NATO was there recognition by the nations involved --especially the United States and the United Kingdom-- of the changes in national policies and institutions that might be required?
- A. Let's go a little further back. The United States and the United Kingdom had been cooperating from 1940 onward. During the war we worked very closely together. After the war cooperation didn't seem to be frightfully new because most people in Whitehall had been doing this sort of thing with the United States for years. The United States was much more anxious than we to shrug off the wartime experience and go back to normal. It wasn't in our own interest or that of the Free World for us to act on our own anymore. There was pressure to maintain these links with the Americans.

I would say there was a singular lack of awareness among the public and even among people in positions of influence of movements toward union in Europe. They didn't believe it could happen. I remember people in the Foreign Office saying, "Collections of weaknesses don't become strength." The TCC had to be set up because the United States and the United Kingdom were carrying a disproportionate share of the NATO burden. The whole attitude of the Americans and British was that we've got to get these other countries to make their contribution. They were all doing too little by comparison with us. We underestimated the political and economic strength of Europe. That has been one of our weaknesses. I would guess that Monnet was surprised too.

- Q. To what extent have European Union --in its various aspects-- and NATO been working at cross purposes? What is likely to be the effect of European Union on NATO?
- A. It is possible to keep from cross-purposes if the countries outside the European Union but associated with it --the United States and the United Kingdom-- are as powerful as the Union. I think that European Union has probably operated against the cohesion of NATO. On the continent, since De Gaulle, people have taken their eye off NATO and said that the other is more important. There is a feeling among people here in the United Kingdom that the United States is trying to push us into Europe in order that it may get out itself. This is very definitely the feeling of the public rather than of Whitehall. I think the in part this movement toward European Union has meant a weakening of NATO.
- Q. How great a role has the nuclear arms problem played in frustrating development of NATO military capability?
- A. The most important thing that altered the NATO programs adopted at Lisbon in 1952 was an overestimation of the willingness of the European peoples to support these programs. The existence of the nuclear capability allowed governments to say that when it came to the crunch the Americans would bomb the Russians to hell. This was not true in the United Kingdom where the program stood. It is very significant that the U.S. and the U.K. more or less held to their program although the other countries did not. In the "Three Wise Men" exercise the nuclear argument was not raised. The U.S. had a rich economy and the spur of responsibility. The U.K. was still under wartime controls and the people by and large accepted the idea of our responsibility as
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leaders in the Free World. In Europe, the other countries had not maintained such controls and had not practiced self-denial. We were therefore asking those countries to do something they had never done before and didn't know how to do. It was not frightfully realistic of us to ask them to make as big an effort as we did at Lisbon. The people just would not do it even though the representatives had agreed to it.

Q. What were the prime motivations for development of a nuclear capability by the United Kingdom?

A. We did it because we thought it to be the price you paid for the seat at the table. Churchill and Atlee certainly thought this. De Gaulle has exactly the same motive now. People rationalized it and a great many people would indignantly deny what I have said. They might say there was a need for an independent force and for independent judgment. Some cynical ones would say that we began and had to go on because it would have looked bad and would have hurt us if we gave up. Others would say that we did it in order to be able to influence the Americans.

Q. What factors other than the Korean War produced the great upsurge of action by NATO in 1950-52?

A. Sheer fear of the Soviet Union which always put pressure on Berlin and the smaller nations. We always have had difficulties with the smaller nations within NATO because of their fear of provoking the Soviet Union.

Q. To what extent did the French call for a European Defence Community and the steps in that direction during 1951-52 complicate the work of the Temporary Council Committee during 1951-52? What were the French motivations?

A. I can remember that Monnet was much influenced but he went along with Anglo-Americans and was loyal. But he is strongly antipathetic to

national sovereignties in international organizations. Monnet went along with us on what France could bear, but he always said that they would not do it. There was an even lower burden placed on the other countries but they eventually got it reduced. In a sense, the TCC exercise was unique in these multilateral alliances. Voluntarily, twelve nations were willing to engage in a self-examination (really ~~an~~ examination by only three --U.S. U.K. and France). Their economic and military efforts were criticized in enormous detail. That sort of thing had never happened before in such an organization.

- Q. Does it seem possible to maintain separate arrangements for an economic and political establishment on the one hand and a defence establishment on the other?
- A. Yes, it is possible. The defence need may be sufficiently great to require cooperation overriding other considerations.
- Q. In balancing military requirements against budgetary considerations, in both the United Kingdom and NATO, has there been a tendency to tip the scales in favor of financial considerations?
- A. That was our terms of reference in NATO --to reconcile military requirements and with the political economic capabilities. Requirements as set by the military have always been trimmed. In our case one of the dominant considerations has been the constant preoccupation with the balance of payments since the war. This has naturally affected our ability to do things. We have to maintain military forces on the European continent. People here ask themselves why we should have to pay foreign exchange to the Germans to maintain our troops in a country that we fought so recently and that we are helping to protect now. We have been bedevilled by the unwillingness of people to think

ahead. We should think in terms of five-year budgets. When one is declining in power and cutting commitments it requires almost super-human foresight to think ahead. We have been trying to do more than we can afford ever since the war. Our military effort has been spread too thin. But I don't think that the military make adjustments ahead of time in their plans and programs because of money.

- Q. Has there been a tendency on the part of NATO countries, aside from France, to place national considerations (and even individual service considerations) above NATO considerations in the allocation of forces and other resources to NATO?
- A. To some extent that must be true, but by and large the British overseas commitments are mixed up with alliances. A few are not, but all the rest are NATO, SEATO, CENTO, etc. It is probably true that in the United Kingdom until recently the nuclear deterrent force was let alone and given what it needed. If tomorrow there should be an Atlantic Union, we shouldn't need these individual deterrent forces -- SAC and ours.