

Research article

The 'Anglo-Saxon Triangle' Downplayed by Canada's Department of External Affairs, 1946–1956

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Abstract

In July 1951, Canada's Department of External Affairs despatched a secret policy paper to the heads of overseas Canadian posts, instructing Canadian diplomats abroad not to refer to Canada's 'inner triangle' with Britain and the United States or encourage its development into a formal alliance. The explicitly named 'Anglo-Saxon triangle' was acknowledged affectionately as a 'cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy' but was regarded as damaging to the ultimate goal of a North Atlantic community inclusive of continental Europeans. The 'inner triangle' comprising Canada, the United States and Britain had to be concealed, and diplomats were warned not to speak of it publicly as an objective of policy, lest another triangle would form, that of a Franco-German-Italian grouping that would split the prospects of a North Atlantic alliance. The discovery of this secret despatch provides some explanation of why references to the North Atlantic Triangle faded from statements in the post-war years.

Keywords North Atlantic Triangle; Anglo-Saxon triangle; Franco-German-Italian triangle; Department of External Affairs; North Atlantic community; Western Europe.

Introduction

The publication of John Bartlet Brebner's *North Atlantic Triangle* in 1945 pushed the configuration of a triangle among Canada, Britain and the United States into Canadian public consciousness.¹ Scholars praised the book, with one reviewer going so far as to suggest that the book should be 'required reading for every intelligent citizen of the three countries with which it deals'.² Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had already done much to validate the existence of a triangle by having long referred to Canada's propensity to serve as the interpreter linking together the two powers, a sentiment that was shared by other civil servants in the Department of External Affairs, notably Lester Pearson, the Ambassador to Washington (1944–6). Gradually, however, amid rising public speculation that Canadian policymakers were intent on positioning the country in a posture of subservience, the Department of External Affairs set out to emphasise that decision-making occurred independently of the other two powers, and that Canadians should not be regarded as a 'corps of professional interpreters'.

Not only did domestic grounds justify obscuring the triangle, but international considerations also made it necessary. According to a hitherto unpublished classified policy paper that was prepared by the Department of External Affairs and circulated to the heads of Canadian posts abroad in the summer of 1951, the objective of keeping the British and American governments together in their foreign policies was regarded succinctly as 'a cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy'. Moreover, the paper explicitly acknowledged the existence of an 'Anglo-Saxon triangle' but instructed Canadian diplomats not to refer to it in public or in private; they were forewarned that an open recognition of their 'inner triangle' might marginalise their European allies and inadvertently encourage the formation of a separate 'Franco-German–Italian triangle', which would hinder transatlantic solidarity and thwart their objective of creating a North Atlantic community.³ The 'Anglo-Saxon triangle' was to be deliberately downplayed and any mention of it muted.

The post-war climate: a new era in Canadian foreign policy?

The compartmentalisation of history into distinct phases is necessary for the historian, yet one must be careful not to insert a break prematurely. In the years immediately preceding the Second World War, and over the course of the war itself, Prime Minister King had impressed on

the public his diplomatic conduct. His occasional wartime meetings with President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill were photographed and publicised, with the intended effect of persuading Canadians that their country had matured and served as an important intermediary between the two powers. King often referred publicly to Canada's role as the 'interpreter', which he hoped to make manifest by his own actions.⁴

It was against the backdrop of the war that Brebner worked on his manuscript and finally completed the draft in 1942. He shared it with James T. Shotwell, his trusted academic colleague at Columbia University, who encouraged him to change the title of the book from 'Rival Partners', as he considered that it was both 'a little too challenging in wartime' and 'a bit unctuous'.⁵ The simple alteration of the title would have a sizeable impact on the book's popularity. The new title, *North Atlantic Triangle*, had broad appeal and a constructive effect in exalting Canada's post-war status.

In reviewing the published book in January 1946, Frank H. Underhill, the revered scholar of Canadian history at the University of Toronto, commented on Canada's altered relationship with the other two powers, saying that 'our part in past Anglo-American relations would be that of the little brother who makes a nuisance of himself by tagging along behind the big boys when they go off for a ball game'. He continued to suggest that Canada had reached maturity and rubbed shoulders with the other powers: 'We have now outgrown the little boy stage ... we are now a member of one of the teams in the World Series.'⁶ For the individuals making up the Department of External Affairs, the post-war atmosphere presented them with new opportunities, and they were determined to get up to bat often, rather than to sit passively on the sidelines.

The changes that took place following the war, particularly the division of the world into two ideological camps, imparted a sense of responsibility to Canadian diplomacy. The detection of Soviet spy rings following the war revealed that their former ally could not be trusted, and that older relationships needed to be counted on. Lester Pearson, in his position as the ambassador to the United States, referred to the importance of the Anglo-American relationship to Canada in a dinner address he delivered in South Carolina on 20 February 1946:

Canadian-American relations, as we see them, must be a part of Anglo-American relations. I mean by this simply that our position in Canada would become quite impossible if we were ever asked

to choose between the U.S.A. and the U.K. That, for us, fatal contingency is, thank God, a pretty remote one now. It is a matter of life and death to keep it remote. We consider co-operation in the English speaking world a first essential of international policy.⁷

Pearson's willingness to work towards 'cooperation in the English speaking world' is congruent with Churchill's subsequent call for a 'fraternal association of English-speaking peoples', famously delivered in Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946. A few days before Churchill delivered the speech, during a stay at the British embassy in Washington, he received Pearson as a visitor and shared the text with him. While seated at his bedside, Churchill read aloud that it was necessary that 'the constancy of mind, persistency of purpose, and the grand simplicity of decision shall rule and guide the conduct of English-speaking peoples in peace as they did in war'. Pearson would not disappoint him.

Pearson spoke again on the direction of Canada's post-war policy in international relations on 13 May 1946. His message was concordant with Churchill's own sentiments and with those of his own prime minister:

The basis of my country's foreign policy is a simple one. Subject always to our obligations as a member of the United Nations, we desire to maintain the closest possible relations of friendship with the U.S.A. and the U.K. and do what we can to see that these two countries remain on terms of friendly understanding with each other. Canada knows well that, if they fall apart, her own position would be impossible, as she would be forced to choose between her two friends. That would be an impossible choice.

That, ladies and gentlemen, in a word, is Canada's position in international affairs. It also emphasizes her opportunity to act as a link, if you wish to call it that, between our great mother-country and our great neighbour. We in Canada are now in a position to play that part more effectively than ever before.

We will, I know, do our very best to promote friendship and understanding between all peace-loving states, and to maintain in particular the closest possible relations between Washington, London and Ottawa.⁸

Pearson's words, generally unknown by contemporary Canadians, indicate a repetitive tendency to operate within the bounds of a triangular

world view. The international scene was not promising, and there were internal cleavages within Canada between English and French Canadians that made external affairs an uneasy issue, particularly as the French Canadians were assumed to be isolationist and the Liberal Party relied upon Quebec for electoral support. King understood the uneasy Canadian platform better than most, but at 72 years of age he realised that he would not be fit to steer the country through the post-war years. On 4 September 1946, King gave the external affairs portfolio to Louis St-Laurent, his trusted minister from Quebec who had counselled him during the conscription crisis a few years earlier, and on the same day he appointed Pearson as the Under-Secretary for External Affairs (1946–8). Upon taking up his appointment, conflicts in Palestine and Iran threatened the Anglo-American relationship and provided Pearson with ample conflict to capture his attention.

The readiness of the Department of External Affairs to embark on an active role in international affairs was announced in the inaugural Gray Lecture in January 1947, delivered by St-Laurent. In this landmark speech, entitled 'The Foundations of Canadian Policy in World Affairs', the external affairs agenda was clearly framed around five main principles, which consisted of the need to maintain national unity; political liberty; the rule of law; Christian values; and the willingness to accept international responsibilities. While the content was not particularly revolutionary, its very delivery signified an altered approach to international affairs; previously, when King had held the external affairs portfolio, he had deliberately avoided speaking specifically about contentious issues, a tactic he used to hinder his opponent's ability to come up with a suitable retort. The lecture seemed to announce that there was a new external affairs agenda to accompany the beginning of a new era.

Over the course of the immediate post-war years, new terminology was introduced which conveyed vivid mental images. Churchill's internationally broadcast address in Fulton put into circulation the construct of an insurmountable 'iron curtain' that separated European countries from each other. American journalist Walter Lippmann subsequently popularised the 'Cold War' catchphrase with his book of the same title.⁹ Following the success of President Harry Truman's speech in March 1947 in which he appealed to Congress to provide funds for Greece and Turkey, and General George Marshall's address at Harvard University in June in which he urged that further funds be provided to assist in Europe's recovery, the projected image of the United States was one of caretaker to the peoples across the North Atlantic. To obstruct the Soviet Union from encroaching on the area, George Kennan, the new head of the

department's policy planning staff, published an article anonymously in *Foreign Affairs* in July advocating for a strategy of containment.¹⁰

In the midst of the general mood of insecurity, the subsequent proposal to create a Western alliance was well received in Ottawa; Escott Reid, then Canadian Assistant Under-Secretary of External Affairs, publicly suggested at Lake Couchiching on 13 August 1947 that the peoples of the Western world should collectively unite to create a regional security organisation. In American policymaking circles it was hoped that Western Europe would pull together and develop a political personality of its own that would be capable of withstanding Soviet pressure. The American interest in rebuilding Western Europe went hand in hand with its strategy to contain communism, an endeavour that extended beyond regional perimeters to confront the global pandemic.

By the end of that year, Pearson and St-Laurent approved the participation of a Canadian delegation in the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea. The move had come after an American proposal, and Canadian representatives were increasingly put at the forefront of international dialogue. Canada was also represented as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, starting in January 1948, the same month that King announced his retirement. The subsequent year promised to be as tumultuous as the previous one. In February the Prague coup brought into focus the real security concerns in Western Europe.

To meet the security threat on the European continent, on 11 March 1948 British Prime Minister Clement Attlee proposed a tripartite meeting among British, Canadian and American representatives in Washington, as an extension to the Brussels Treaty that was to be signed by Britain, France and the Benelux countries on 17 March. From 22 March to 1 April, secret negotiations took place at the Pentagon to discuss the scope of a transatlantic security alliance.¹¹ This had been motivated not only by the recent Soviet advance in Czechoslovakia, but also by the rumours of a Soviet approach to Norway to conclude a non-aggression treaty, which indicated a threat to Scandinavia, coupled with ongoing insecurity in Germany and communist parties gaining support in France and Italy. The exploratory talks in Washington were kept secret to avoid drawing the attention of the Soviets, offending the Europeans with a meeting among 'Anglo-Saxons' and alerting the wider domestic publics of future security commitments before a concrete agreement was reached.

A transatlantic security alliance would bring London and Washington into closer alignment, an objective that had long featured in the minds of Canadian civil servants. The memoirs of one high-profile civil servant,

Vincent Massey, were published in 1948. Massey had served as Canada's first Minister in Washington (1927–30) and as the High Commissioner to London (briefly in 1930, and steadily from 1935 to 1946), and his monograph, *On Being Canadian*, provided advice to the next generation of Canadian statesmen. On the Anglo-American relationship, he wrote: 'It is obvious that we should do all that we can to promote such mutual understanding. Canada has a vested interest in Anglo-American goodwill; Anglo-American estrangement might well be our undoing.'¹²

Massey's advice to adhere to the Canadian objective of promoting the alignment of British and American foreign policies had resonance with his contemporaries in the civil service. As a recent study indicates, in the crises brought forward that year in the United Nations that focused on Palestine, Kashmir and Indonesia, the Canadian representatives reached decisions that were entirely dependent upon the views taken up by Britain and the United States.¹³ Pearson spoke frankly on the subject of Canadian principles of foreign policy in a meeting of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs held in Vancouver on 21 June 1948, in which he explained the importance of Anglo-American relations and the post-war postulates of Canadian policy:

It will be remembered that the one great nightmare of pre-war Canadian governments was a clash, a divergence of policy, between the two governments – American and British – with both of which Canada had to keep in step ... There is no danger of that kind in the United Nations – in which British and American policies usually march side by side. So we can stride along beside them ... It is, of course, to our interest to strengthen any organization which brings London and Washington into closer alignment ... [T]he earlier postulates of policy still – almost unconsciously – apply.¹⁴

Pearson's avowal that Canada would 'stride along beside' Britain and the United States in the forum of the United Nations warranted a subsequent need to do some back-peddalling to deter speculation that the Department of External Affairs was advocating a subservient posture and tailoring its foreign policy according to British and American positions. In part to appear distinct from Britain and the United States, Canada did not participate in the airlift to counter the Soviet blockade of Berlin that began that same month in June, in spite of an informal appeal made by Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary.¹⁵ King had actually given instructions to Norman Robertson, the High Commissioner in London, to ask Bevin to refrain from making a publicised request for transport planes.

King, feeling too tired from political responsibility to go on as Liberal Party leader, announced his retirement in August. The office of the prime minister was to go to St-Laurent, and Pearson was appointed Minister of External Affairs on 10 September 1948. There remained a desire to take on a more robust external affairs agenda with King gone. Speaking to an audience at the National War College in Washington, DC, on 25 October 1948, Arnold Heeney, the Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, attempted to introduce a fresh perspective regarding Canada's role in external affairs. He urged his audience to stop thinking of Canadians as 'a race of Anglo-American hermaphrodites' and to recognise that Canada was not a 'satellite' of either of those two powers.

We should not, I suggest, be any longer regarded as a sort of corps of professional interpreters between Britain and the United States. No doubt we shall continue to perform this role. But we're rather tired of being 'interpreters' and 'links' and 'bridges' ... Today Canada is at once a member of the Commonwealth and a North American nation, the modest but stout ally of both Britain and the United States and satellite of neither.¹⁶

To further dispel suspicions that Canada was a subservient ally to Britain and the United States, Pearson also took to the airwaves on 20 January 1949 to deliver a public lecture transmitted nationwide by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation. His talk was to address the question of Canada being 'a satellite state in matters of foreign policy', and on the matter of Canada voting with the British and American representatives in the United Nations Security Council, Pearson asserted that Canada was 'not following somebody else's line', but rather that 'we and our friends have common interests and that we often agree about the way in which we should act. This is not the role of a satellite; it is the role of the good and cooperative member of the international community.'¹⁷ Increasingly, however, American policymakers would be the first to set a course of action, and as obliging allies, Canadians would stride swiftly to their side.

Towards a North Atlantic community: the danger of two triangles

The creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 1949 by its 12 founding members was an important step forward in

securing the North Atlantic area against Soviet aggression, but the optimistic vision of progressing towards 'better, safer ground' that Pearson forecasted at the time of the treaty's signing was marred a few months later, in August, by the explosion of the Soviet Union's first atomic bomb. To address the heightened insecurity in Europe, talks soon arose over whether the recently created Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) could provide a military contribution to the defence of the region.

Konrad Adenauer, the recently appointed Chancellor of West Germany, tried to allay fears of German revanchism in an interview he gave on 7 November 1949 to the *Baltimore Sun*, a newspaper read by President Truman. Adenauer pledged to improve Franco-German relations and work within the limits of French 'psychology' over its insecurity.¹⁸ He understood that the United States and West Germany had converging interests, as both desired to prevent a communist advance into West Germany and into the rest of Europe; both were also in favour of West German rearmament; and both were in favour of Franco-German cooperation as a precursor to an integrated Europe. From Adenauer's perspective, transatlantic solidarity and European integration were mutually sustainable and would give the West a stronger hand against the Soviets.

The prospect of integrating Europe was gaining momentum in France, an undertaking that had to involve changing Frenchmen's attitudes on the subject of Germany. Jean Monnet, a French public official appointed to devise a plan for France's economic recovery, contemplated Franco-German cooperation during his trip to the Alps in spring 1950 and reached the conclusion that Germany must no longer be feared, but must be recognised as a direct link to France's post-war recovery.¹⁹ The Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, drafted by Monnet and read by Robert Schuman, the French foreign minister, emphasised France's commitment to cooperate with West Germany by proposing the pooling of coal and steel under a High Authority to make war between them 'materially impossible' and to take the first step towards a 'federal Europe'. Several months later, in October, the French government also proposed the creation of a European army incorporating a military contribution from West Germany. The advantage of the Plevin plan, named after René Plevin, the French minister of defence who proposed it and subsequently became prime minister, was that German soldiers could contribute to the European army without raising a new German army.

British attitudes towards the proposed European army were sceptical; of overwhelming concern was whether the transatlantic alliance

would be able to accommodate a separate European force within it. Bevin likened the concept of a European force to an undesirable growth, a sort of 'cancer' which threatened the 'Atlantic body'.²⁰ Similar concerns were voiced in Canada. Historian Lionel Gelber addressed Toronto's Empire Club in November 1950 and posed the question: 'Would the unity of Europe add to the unity of the West or detract from it?' He concluded that a European segment would fracture the transatlantic alliance and ultimately weaken the security of the North Atlantic area.²¹

From the American perspective, however, a Franco-German rapprochement was necessary, and so the French proposal for a supra-national European army could not simply be overlooked. A compromise was reached in December 1950 that came to be regarded as the Spofford Compromise, named after Charles M. Spofford, the US deputy representative on the NATO Council. Spofford asserted that the transatlantic alliance, underpinned by NATO and the French proposal for a European army, were complementary goals; Western Europe first needed NATO as an immediate response to its current insecurity, and thereafter the European army could assume responsibilities. The integration of Western Europe and the development of the transatlantic alliance were seen as compatible objectives, and as conducive to broader American interests in defending Western Europe from Soviet encroachment and curtailing communism.

It was the American perspective that carried the most weight in Ottawa, given how indispensable the United States was in defending Western Europe and fighting against communism worldwide. Anti-communist coalitions formed in the United Nations, and the lofty ideal of collective security was soon understood to be regrettably unrealistic. John Holmes, serving as a diplomat in the Canadian UN Division, expressed his concern to Escott Reid, who was then serving as Deputy Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs. In his letter, dated 29 December 1950, Holmes divulged that 'it is the decisions of the U.S. Government which really count. It is they ultimately who will decide which countries can be defended and which must be abandoned.'²² Cognisant of the Americanisation of the United Nations, the Department of External Affairs sought to be cooperative and receive guidance from Washington over which conflict areas should receive Canada's attention.

In Ottawa, Arnold Heeney, then serving as Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, received a classified letter from the Canadian Permanent Delegation in Geneva, dated 18 January 1951, which proposed that Canada and its North Atlantic partners should prepare 'a plan of global strategy' to decide which areas must be defended 'by force',

and which areas can only be held 'by words, or bluff if you will'.²³ Covert meetings were proposed so that 'serious work' could be conducted 'behind closed doors'; in so doing, Canadian policymakers could determine which areas of the world would be the targeted recipients of Canadian aid. A more cohesive alliance among countries in the North Atlantic area was deemed necessary, underlined by the danger of communist expansion; yet on a rudimentary level, there was still debate over which countries formed part of the North Atlantic area, a geographical region too vast to neatly delineate its perimeters.

Debate continued over whether an American military presence in Europe should be permanent or gradually replaced by a workable European army. David Bruce, the American Ambassador in France, helped to persuade Dean Acheson, the Secretary of State, that a permanent American commitment was needed in Europe to avoid the rise of rival national armies. Consensus with Bruce's position was found among other Atlanticists in the State Department, notably John Hickerson and Theodore Achilles, his deputy in charge of Western European affairs. Spofford and Milton Katz, the American special representative to Europe, were also in favour of the development of a single North Atlantic body working in all fields, not exclusively military in nature. In April 1951, Achilles shared the American interest in a permanent American presence in Western Europe with his Canadian and British counterparts, namely Dana Wilgress, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, and Evelyn Shuckburgh, the British head of the Foreign Office's Western Department. The British Foreign Office offered immediate support for the American preference for a permanent presence, or indeed for 'any American initiative' that directed attention towards the idea of a 'community' which had 'long-term and non-military aspects'.²⁴

To discuss the scope of a community among North Atlantic partners, Lester Pearson travelled to Western Europe in July 1951 and met with various political leaders in a number of capital cities. From a diary he kept of his travels, it is evident that the question of membership in the alliance bore heavily on his mind, particularly whether Greece and Turkey should be admitted. He was concerned that the extension of the transatlantic alliance to the Mediterranean would confirm Soviet fears of encirclement and provoke a retaliation of some kind, but the military and strategic strength of these countries made their inclusion necessary.

While Pearson was still abroad in Europe, on 17 July 1951 the Department of External Affairs despatched a classified policy paper to the heads of overseas Canadian posts.²⁵ The paper, entitled 'Western

Europe and the North Atlantic Community', was part of a series of policy papers intended to bring greater focus and clarity to longer-range thinking on Canadian foreign policy, but this was the first of the papers to be given general circulation so that Canadian diplomats abroad could be informed of departmental policy. The paper reasoned that the progression of American military power was likely to become a more acute problem, and that greater influence could be exerted on Washington collectively as a means to stabilise the 'eccentricities of United States foreign policy'.²⁶

Given the Canadian desire to bolster the cohesion of the North Atlantic area, the policy paper explicitly stated that the pattern of Canada's 'inner triangle' with Britain and the United States should not be stated in public, nor should it be permitted to develop into a formal alliance. Discretion was urged; at a time when integrative efforts were being made to cohesively bind countries in the North Atlantic area into a community of states, any perception of an inner 'Anglo-Saxon triangle' could fracture the structural integrity of the whole. Of serious concern was that the perception of their existing triangle would inadvertently encourage the formation of a second triangle, composed of a 'Franco-German-Italian group' that could, in a few years, be dominated by the Germans. The policy paper is sufficiently illuminating to be quoted at length here:

As Canada has especially close relations with both the United Kingdom and the United States and as Canadian foreign policy is seldom subject to severe strains or embarrassing choices while the United Kingdom and United States Governments are in agreement, a cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy might be expressed as doing everything possible to keep the United Kingdom and United States Governments together in their foreign policies ...

The question then arises whether the Anglo-Saxon triangle is a desirable development not only from the point of view of Canada – for whom it is essential – but from the larger point of view of the North Atlantic community. Undoubtedly, the same sort of doubts and misgivings must arise in the minds of continental Europeans when they consider the Anglo-Saxon triangle as arise in our minds when we worry about the possible growth of neutralism crystallizing around Strasbourg or around a Paris–Bonn–Rome axis. If, from the broader point of view, two inner triangles are allowed to develop within the North Atlantic community, there is a danger

that, instead of strengthening the whole structure, they may cause it to split ...

... From the purely Canadian point of view, nothing could be more satisfactory than a firm enduring partnership, whether expressed formally or not, with the United States and the United Kingdom. Yet we cannot get on without our partners on the European continent, and though we may usefully pursue the pattern of our 'inner triangle', we must not state it publicly as an objective of policy. Indeed, both publicly and privately, we must work for the development of the North Atlantic community as a whole through a larger measure of real co-operation and genuine trust with our continental European partners. The open espousal of what amounted to a United States–United Kingdom–Canadian alliance might split NATO still more fundamentally than the projected Franco-German–Italian grouping threatens to split Western Europe ...

... A more intimate and more formal kind of co-operation between the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada might come about if Western Europe were overrun, but if we were in present circumstances to strive for more intimate and formal co-operation it would be bound to increase continental fears that the Anglo-Saxons were planning to let the Continent go almost by default in the first round.²⁷

As Canada was in a relationship that could not be spoken about, acknowledged or formalised, its position in the triangle was to be purposefully obscured. An alternative grouping within NATO of the United States, Britain and France was put forward as offering a better safeguard to continental security; such a tripartite alliance made the 'most obvious sense' both politically and militarily from the perspective of the Department of External Affairs. The policy paper urged its diplomats to 'be prepared to do everything' in order 'to strengthen Western Europe, but *as part of the North Atlantic community*'.²⁸

For France, collaborating with the 'Anglo-Saxons' provided a cornucopia of opportunity. Of particular benefit was that it would diminish the likelihood of the United States directly collaborating with West Germany and bolstering it to take on a preponderant role in Western Europe. French statesmen held onto hope that they might assume the leadership position on the continent, and harness West Germany's rearmament by imposing restraints in the European army.

Although the British had no interest in participating in the French scheme for a European army, there was an overwhelming acceptance that cooperation with their Western European allies was essential in order for the United States to commit itself to the defence of the continent. Churchill told Pearson as much during an informal half-hour meeting they had on 24 July 1951 at the House of Commons in London; the following day, Pearson relayed the conversation to St-Laurent: 'On North Atlantic he was emphatic that anything that can be done to strengthen it and encourage USA to get stronger and whole heartedly committed to the defense of western Europe should be supported.' Churchill told Pearson that American help was necessary or else Western Europe, in the next year or two, would be a 'very easy victim' for an enemy invader.²⁹

The French scheme for a European army had previously received a lukewarm reception in the United States, but a major policy shift swiftly occurred in July, when Dwight Eisenhower became the new American commander of the Supreme Allied Command of Europe (SACEUR), headquartered in Paris, and came out publicly in support of the idea. Eisenhower, along with John McCloy, the US High Commissioner to West Germany, and David Bruce, managed to persuade the Truman administration to accept the French plan for a European army as the only means to get the French to accept German rearmament. There were several American advantages to the French scheme; in particular, the European army offered dual containment in terms of keeping the Soviets out of Western Europe and keeping Germany in. Furthermore, a European army would enable the United States to withdraw its own troops from the continent and thereby reduce federal expenditures.

When Churchill's Conservative government regained leadership in the election in October, British as well as American defence expenditures were set to rise, and France was to be on the receiving end. The Mutual Security Act in October 1951 strengthened the defence of Western Europe on a reciprocal basis within NATO. This legislation featured the condition that the armed forces of any recipient be equipped for service in NATO and deployed accordingly. France received substantial defence assistance from the scheme, which enabled it to undergo a major expansion and modernisation of its armed forces, and ultimately helped in reviving its fallen status in Europe and abroad. Georges Bidault, the French minister of defence, saw to it that funding was allocated to fight against the communists in Indochina.

The French expectations, however, that the alliance with the 'Anglo-Saxons' would expedite the modernisation of its armed forces, propel it towards great-power status and allow it to maintain its besieged colonial

empire would only be partially fulfilled; moreover, the French intention to take on a position of leadership in a European defence community would not be realised. At the Lisbon Conference, from 20–25 February 1952, the United States succeeded in getting the NATO Council's endorsement for the European defence community, thereby transforming the French proposal into an American endeavour. To showcase the intended congruency between the transatlantic and European defence initiatives, it was also agreed upon at Lisbon that NATO would be headquartered in Paris.

As for the non-military dimension of the transatlantic alliance, there was a distinct lack of commitment from NATO members. Pearson presided over the Committee of Five, a group established in September 1951 and composed of the foreign ministers of Canada, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway, to focus on developing Article 2 of the NATO treaty that called for greater socio-economic and political cooperation among members. Reluctance ensued over being obliged to accept labour mobility within the alliance, and when the committee's report was presented at the Lisbon Conference, there was little of substance to it. The anxieties and apathy of other member states ultimately resulted in the non-military dimension of the alliance being sidelined.

The NATO alliance was to remain military in essence, and the presence of the 'Anglo-Saxons' in the defence of Western Europe gained ground on the same day that the European Defence Treaty was signed on 27 May 1952 by France, West Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries, which launched the idea of the European army. Concurrently, the Tripartite Declaration was issued in which Britain, France and the United States promised to regard a defection from the European army as a threat to their own security and take action. The United States had thereby underwritten the defence of Western Europe with its strategic nuclear force, and so too had Britain, as it was preparing to become the world's third nuclear power – a distinction which it earned upon the success of its nuclear test on 3 October 1952.

The signing of the European Defence Treaty was a landmark achievement for European integration, even if the prospects of gaining parliamentary ratification seemed to many to be poor. Over the next two years, French discomfort over the defence of Western Europe simmered. Debates raised valid points regarding the reluctance to see Germany rearmed; fear of German preponderance in the European force, particularly given that France was preoccupied with the war in Indochina and other colonial commitments; and the absence of British membership. Suspicions also grew in France that Eisenhower, inaugurated as President

in January 1953, was too keen for the European force to materialise, and that domination by the 'Anglo-Saxons' was looming.

Progress in ratifying the European Defence Treaty was disappointingly slow and, regardless of the death of Joseph Stalin in March and the armistice reached in Korea in July, the Soviet Union still represented a malicious force that remained threatening. Over the course of 1953, the Eisenhower administration undertook a reevaluation of its defence programmes and shifted towards greater reliance on nuclear weapons over conventional forces. At the end of that year, from 4–8 December, the leaders of the United States, Britain and France met in Bermuda to discuss their common strategy in defending Western Europe. Taking the place of the French prime minister, who was ill, Bidault met with Eisenhower and Churchill and was subjected to an intense diatribe directed against France's resistance to German rearmament; the 'Anglo-Saxons' informed him that unless a shift in sentiment occurred in France, the entire transatlantic alliance would be destroyed.³⁰ Bidault remained in solidarity with his American and British colleagues at the subsequent four-power conference in Berlin that began on 23 January 1954, but the security of Western Europe remained an unresolved issue.

The objective of collaborating with France and diminishing the existence of the 'inner triangle' among the United States, Britain and Canada was intended to bring about the security of Western Europe. Canadian policymakers remained receptive to the principles outlined in the classified memorandum circulated years earlier, in spite of having swapped positions with one another. Heeney had left his work in Paris at NATO headquarters to take up the position of ambassador to the United States (1953–7), replacing Hume Wrong, who was to become Under-Secretary in Ottawa, taking over from Dana Wilgress; and Wilgress took up Heeney's former position in Paris (1953–8). As these individuals orbited around the Department of External Affairs, and others remained fixed in a given position, as was the case of Pearson, who continued to serve as Minister of External Affairs under the premiership of St-Laurent (1948–57), they were able to fulfil Churchill's earlier call for the 'constancy of mind' to feature in the conduct of diplomacy.

When Heeney delivered an address on 27 January 1954 to the Pilgrims of the United States in New York, he revisited an earlier understanding about Canada's position with respect to the other two members of the tacit 'Anglo-Saxon triangle'. He shared with his audience that the Department of External Affairs was still committed to serving as the 'interpreter' between them:

The stake which we Canadians have in Anglo-American friendship needs sanction in no text. Since her earliest beginnings, Canada has been a party at interest in every issue, whatever its nature or origin, capable of dividing or uniting the American and British peoples. When the policies of Britain and the United States have diverged, Canadian counsels have been darkened and confused. Any disagreement on fundamentals between Washington and London has at once been reflected in embarrassment and uncertainty in Ottawa ...

On such occasions as this it is customary to refer to us Canadians as the interpreters in Anglo-American affairs, endowed by Providence with the gift of tongues that can be understood on both sides of the Atlantic. We can explain cricket in the language of baseball, the glories of Harvard in the idiom of Oxford. No doubt this is still true. Nor should we seek to avoid this traditional Canadian role. For we share with both Britain and the United States much that we value most – in the past and in the present ...

Now in this anxious atomic age our attachment to the preservation of your partnership is stronger than ever.³¹

The common threat of a Soviet attack justified the building of radar lines in the Canadian Arctic to give warning of incoming Soviet bombers. The United States shared the cost of the Pinetree line along the 49th parallel, Canada covered the cost of the mid-Canada line along the 55th parallel, and in June 1954 the proposal was put forward to build a third radar fence along the 70th parallel, which became the Distance Early Warning line, with the cost covered by the Americans.

The relations within the 'Anglo-Saxon triangle' were reinforced during a visit by Churchill to Ottawa in June. During the trip he referred to Canada as 'the master-link in Anglo-American unity' and reminded listeners at a press conference held at the Department of External Affairs that 'good continuous, intimate, trusting relations between Britain, and Canada and the United States' remained the 'foundation and security of world peace'.³² Although Churchill was fond of using melodramatic and exaggerated language,³³ his message is sufficiently repetitive to suggest that it was marked by sincere conviction.

The intentions of the 'Anglo-Saxons' to develop a tripartite alliance with France continued even after it appeared that the European Defence Treaty would not be ratified. The new Prime Minister of France, Pierre

Mendès, offered assurances to Churchill during a meeting at his residence in Chartwell that West Germany would have to join NATO, so there was some comfort that softened the French parliament's rejection of the European Defence Treaty on 30 August 1954, which scuppered plans for a European army. The following October, West Germany was proposed for membership in NATO on the conditions that it produced no nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and that its troops would remain within the NATO structure.

The transatlantic alliance was strengthened by West Germany's inclusion, thereby easing the concern about there being 'two inner triangles' within the alliance. However, the threat of disunity within the alliance never disappeared altogether, nor did the unshakeable feeling that the 'Anglo-Saxons' had a stronger foundation for partnership and a superior vantage point from which to oversee the defence of Western Europe, which left France on the perimeter rather than in the centre. In spite of the intentional downplay of the 'Anglo-Saxon triangle', France did not find itself wholly comfortable in the folds of an 'Anglo-Saxon' embrace. By the end of the year, Mendès engaged privately with a select group of his own Cabinet ministers over the possibility of possessing a military use of nuclear energy. The highly secret meeting that took place on 26 December 1954 was motivated by a begrudging understanding that the world was divided between those that possessed nuclear power and those that did not, and he sought for France to join the higher ranks as soon as possible – irrespective of the anticipated dissent from the 'Anglo-Saxons'.

Being helpful during the Suez Crisis

The Suez Crisis is one of the best-known disputes in which the governments of the United States and Britain were at loggerheads. Once President Abdel Nasser nationalized the canal in July 1956, British strategists came together with their French and Israeli counterparts to conjure a plan to dispose of him. Anthony Nutting, the British Deputy Foreign Secretary, has provided much of what is known of the plan to counter the crisis.³⁴ A series of confidential meetings held at Chequers resulted in the plan for Israeli forces to attack Egypt across the Sinai Peninsula, thereby seizing the disputed area. Britain and France could subsequently order a withdrawal of the forces, and then occupy the canal under the pretence of safeguarding it from further fighting. The plan, known as Operation Musketeer, was put into play on 29 October, when the Israeli military

moved against Egypt and towards the canal. As anticipated, Nasser did not abide by the Anglo-French ultimatum to withdraw ten miles from the Canal, and so on 31 October Britain and France forcibly intervened and began to bomb selected points.

In the United States, the Eisenhower administration took the stance that the British had behaved like an imperial power, which was 'rough' and 'unacceptable'. The Americans, in the closing days of a presidential election campaign, were particularly incensed that their friends had launched an attack without prior consultation. Canada's position was extremely awkward, as public opinion was divided between those inclined to compare Nasser to Hitler and applaud the Anglo-French assault, and the others who bemoaned the use of force against an emerging state.³⁵ Added to the political sensitivity of this situation in Canada was that both aggressors involved were 'mother countries' that pulled upon emotive bonds of kinship.

Lester Pearson, in a telegram sent to Prime Minister Anthony Eden, urged the necessity of an Anglo-American convergence. In his words, it would be a 'tragedy beyond repair' if their relationship were to weaken, as it would jeopardize the peacefulness of the world:

The deplorable divergence of viewpoint and policy between the United Kingdom and the United States in regard to the decisions that have been taken, and the procedure followed, is something that will cause as much satisfaction to the Soviet Union and its supporters as it does distress to all those who believe that Anglo-American co-operation and friendship is the very foundation of our hopes for progress toward a peaceful and secure world. That co-operation and friendship, which you yourself have done so much to promote, has now served the world well for many years. It would be a tragedy beyond repair if it were now to disappear, or even to be weakened. It is hard for a Canadian to think of any consideration – other than national survival or safety – as more important. This aspect of the situation is very much in our minds here at the moment, as I know it must be in yours.³⁶

Over the next few days while Britain and France flouted the UN demand for a ceasefire, Pearson worked with the UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld to develop the proposal for a peacekeeping force. Pearson presented the resolution on 3 November, and without opposition from the Assembly, it was passed in the early morning hours of 4 November

by a vote of 57–0 with nineteen abstentions. Nutting later reflected that Pearson ‘had thrown us a straw and we were clutching at it in a desperate attempt to extricate ourselves from our predicament’.³⁷

The proactive leadership of the Canadian government was praised around the world, and on 6 November Eisenhower called St-Laurent to offer his thanks for ‘a magnificent job’. Domestically, however, many Canadians claimed that Canada had sold out Britain in its hour of need. The aim of the Department of External Affairs’ Suez policy had not been anti-British, but rather, as long-time civil servant John Holmes later reflected, they had been trying ‘to rescue the old lady from an unfortunate and uncharacteristic aberration’.³⁸ Pearson also reflected with a feeling of certainty that the British government was ‘grateful’ for the line followed.³⁹ The Canadian government’s role in resolving the Suez Crisis was part of their long-term international foreign policy strategy in bringing about, and maintaining, Anglo-American amity.

Conclusion: bona fide evidence of the triangle’s post-war existence?

Brebner’s *North Atlantic Triangle* received praise from academics immediately following its publication, but the matter of the triangle’s existence was only vaguely treated in the book. Brebner himself suggested a few years later, in 1948, that the ‘triangle’ was ‘changing’; Canada, he observed, was seeking political commitments elsewhere, most notably through its membership in the United Nations, and in actively providing military guarantees to Western Europe.⁴⁰ Since then, scholarly accounts of the triangle during the early years of the Cold War have pointed to an absence of close personal ties between the political leaders of the three countries, which made relations less intimate than they had once been.⁴¹ Historians continue to grapple with the presumed existence of the triangle, with one scholar memorably likening it to the smile of the Cheshire cat – as both seem to be characterised by their very act of disappearing.⁴² This article has argued that part of the difficulty in being able to detect the triangle is due to the intentional practice by the Department of External Affairs to keep it out of public view.

The classified policy paper that was circulated to the heads of Canadian posts abroad in July 1951 provides conclusive evidence that Canadian policymakers operated with an understanding that an ‘inner triangle’ existed within NATO, and that their foreign policy objective

was to draw together British and American foreign policies. This finding directly challenges the conclusions reached by historians Lawrence Aronsen and Brian J. C. McKercher in *The North Atlantic Triangle in a Changing World*, who surmised that the triangle never existed ‘much – if ever – in the political realm’.⁴³ These scholars argued that in the post-war years, ‘Canada made it abundantly clear that it would no longer assume Mackenzie King’s version of the linchpin role’.⁴⁴ Their assumption, however, that Canada’s foreign policy objective was markedly different in the post-war years does not stand up to historical evidence.

A suggestion has been made by political scientist David G. Haglund that the triangle remained a ‘cognitive reality’ for Canadian policymakers into the years of the Cold War, a proposition that is supported here.⁴⁵ Scholarship from political psychology informs us that policymakers have an understanding of their country’s role in the world rooted not only in formative events, but also in personalities of the distant and recent past, and in culturally derived conceptions of national conduct.⁴⁶ It is believed that this understanding of the part their country plays on the international stage endures cognitively and provides a sort of road map that can be relied upon as a template for action. While ready-made beliefs can change incrementally, policymakers tend to make ‘superficial alterations’ rather than rethink their fundamental assumptions.⁴⁷ As put forward here, the ‘Anglo-Saxon triangle’ featured in the thoughts of post-war Canadian policymakers but it was deliberately downplayed due to the opinion of the Department of External Affairs that there were dangers involved in having it conjured in the minds of the public.

The Canadian policy of obscuring the existence of the ‘Anglo-Saxon triangle’ and encouraging collaboration with France was intended to bring about greater security. John Holmes, in a newspaper article he wrote for the *Financial Post* in 1964, openly referred to the existence of the triangle: ‘The conception of the Atlantic as a link rather than as barrier, the idea of an oceanic association of kindred peoples had always been implicit in our ties with Britain, France, and the U.S. in the Atlantic Triangle.’⁴⁸ In a book published years later, he further attested that the triangle had validity, but that it had been politically unfashionable to refer to it. There had been, he admitted, ‘a unique element of commitment, priority and candour in the relations of the United States, Britain, and Canada; an element rooted in habit and history, a fact of life – not a contract’.⁴⁹ A special relationship among the ‘Anglo-Saxons’ could not be made public, whether by official acknowledgement, or by an institutionalised tripartite alliance.

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Research ethics statement

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The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Notes

- 1 Brebner, *North Atlantic Triangle*. The historical text provides an account of relations between Britain and North America from 1492 to 1942. The monograph was the final volume in a series of some 25 volumes, 'The Relations of Canada and the United States', which was funded by the Carnegie Endowment in 1933. Brebner and his colleague at Columbia University, James T. Shotwell, gathered the list of contributing authors and headed the project, which included several biennial conferences.
- 2 F. Cyril James, *Survey Graphic* (2 January 1946), John Bartlet Brebner Papers, Box 6, folder 'Triangle Reviews', University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.
- 3 Departmental Policy Papers: Western Europe and the North Atlantic Community, 29 June 1951, Secret, in Library Archives Canada, Escott Meredith Reid fonds, MG31 E46, Vol. 7.
- 4 Many of King's speeches touched upon this theme; see in particular his 'Citizenship' speech delivered at Kitchener, Ontario; Old Boys' Reunion, 4 August 1925, in King, *Message of the Carillon*, 148–9.
- 5 J. T. Shotwell to J. B. Brebner, 8 September 1942, John Bartlet Brebner Papers, Box 10, University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the city of New York; and J. T. Shotwell to J. B. Brebner, no date, John Bartlet Brebner Papers, Box 12, folder 'Criticisms, etc', University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.
- 6 Frank H. Underhill, 'Review of J. B. Brebner's *North Atlantic Triangle*', *University of Toronto Quarterly* (January 1946), John Bartlet Brebner Papers, Box 6, University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.
- 7 Address given at dinner in Francis Marion Hotel in Charleston, South Carolina, 20 February 1946, Library and Archives Canada, Lester B. Pearson fonds, MG26-N9 Vol. 1 'Speeches', file: '7 Feb. 1946 to 6 Sept. 1946'.
- 8 Address entitled 'UNO as seen from Canada', delivered before English-Speaking Union, Princeton, NJ, 13 May 1946, Library and Archives Canada, Lester B. Pearson fonds, MG26-N9 Vol. 1 'Speeches', file: '7 Feb. 1946 to 6 Sept. 1946'.
- 9 Lippmann, *Cold War*.
- 10 X [Kennan], 'Sources of Soviet conduct', 575.
- 11 Zeeman and Wiebes, 'Pentagon negotiations'; Folly, 'Breaking the vicious circle'. The Canadian perspective is provided in Mackenzie, 'North Atlantic Triangle'.
- 12 Massey, *On Being Canadian*, 90.
- 13 Mackenzie, 'Knight errant'.
- 14 Address entitled 'Some Principles of Canadian Foreign Policy', given at the Annual Conference of Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Vancouver, 21 June 1948, Library and Archives Canada, Lester B. Pearson fonds, MG26-N9 Vol. 1 'Speeches', file: '11 Jan. 1947 to Dec. 1948'.

- 15 At a meeting of high commissioners in London on 28 June 1948, four days after the Soviet blockade had begun, Bevin told Robertson that any assistance from other countries in providing transport aircraft would be gratefully appreciated. MacLaren, *Commissioners High*, 426. King's distaste towards Canada's participation is recorded in his diary, 30 June 1948.
- 16 Address entitled 'The Kingdom of Canada', delivered at the National War College, Washington, DC, on Monday 25 October 1948, Library and Archives Canada, A. D. P. Heeney fonds, MG30 E144, Vol. 11, File 'Speeches 1946–1953 General.'
- 17 A broadcast by Mr. L. B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, delivered over the Trans-Canada Network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation at 7:45 p.m. on Thursday 20 January 1929, Library and Archives Canada, Escott Meredith Reid fonds, MG31 E46, Vol. 7.
- 18 Adenauer, *Memoirs*, 202.
- 19 Monnet, *Memoirs*, 289.
- 20 Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, 117.
- 21 Gelber, 'Britain versus Europe'.
- 22 Draft covering letter for the memorandum on re-examining the UN, Holmes to Reid, 29 December 1950, Secret, in Library and Archives Canada, Statements and Assessments of Canada's Policy Towards the UN, RG25 Vol. 6460 file 5475-FA-40, pt. 1.1.
- 23 Re-examination of the United Nations in light of the reverse in Korea, from the Canadian Permanent Delegation, Geneva, to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 18 January 1951, Secret, in Library and Archives Canada, Statements and Assessments of Canada's Policy Towards the UN, RG25 Vol. 6460 file 5475-FA-40, pt. 1.2.
- 24 Cited in Milloy, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 72–3.
- 25 Departmental Policy Papers: Western Europe and the North Atlantic Community, 29 June 1951, Secret, in Library Archives Canada, Escott Meredith Reid fonds, MG31 E46, Vol. 7.
- 26 Departmental Policy Papers: Western Europe and the North Atlantic Community, 29 June 1951, Secret, in Library Archives Canada, Escott Meredith Reid fonds, MG31 E46, Vol. 7, 10.
- 27 Departmental Policy Papers: Western Europe and the North Atlantic Community, 29 June 1951, Secret, in Library Archives Canada, Escott Meredith Reid fonds, MG31 E46, Vol. 7, 12–13.
- 28 Departmental Policy Papers: Western Europe and the North Atlantic Community, 29 June 1951, Secret, in Library Archives Canada, Escott Meredith Reid fonds, MG31 E46, Vol. 7, 15 (emphasis in the original).
- 29 Letter from Mr Pearson to Mr St-Laurent, dated 25 July 1951, University of British Columbia Library, Rare Book and Special Collections, John Munro papers, Vol. 12, file 16 'Diary by Pearson: Trip to Western Europe in July 1951'.
- 30 Hitchcock, *France Restored*, 184–5.
- 31 Speech entitled 'Canada and Anglo-American Friendship', delivered to the Pilgrims of the United States in New York, NY, 27 January 1954, Library and Archives Canada, MG30 E144, A. D. P. Heeney papers, Vol. 11, file 'Speeches as Ambassador to US 1953–March 1954'.
- 32 Cited in Dilks, *Great Dominion*, 415, 422.
- 33 Weidhorn, 'Churchill the phrase forger'.
- 34 Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*, 93.
- 35 For an examination of Canadian public opinion during the crisis, see Earys, 'Canadian Policy and Opinion During the Suez Crisis', 102–8; Igartua, "'Ready, Aye, Ready'".
- 36 Pearson, *Mike*, 239.
- 37 Nutting, *No End of a Lesson*, 134.

- 38 Holmes, 'The Anglo-Canadian Neurosis', 256.
- 39 Pearson, *Mike*, 274.
- 40 Brebner, 'Changing North Atlantic Triangle'.
- 41 Thornton, 'Ernest Bevin; Arosen, 'From World War to Cold War'.
- 42 Stewart, 'What North Atlantic Triangle?'
- 43 Arosen and McKercher, *North Atlantic Triangle*, 8.
- 44 Arosen and McKercher, 'Afterword', *North Atlantic Triangle*, 264.
- 45 Haglund, 'North Atlantic Triangle revisited', 14. To validate Haglund's suggestion that the triangle was a 'cognitive reality' for Canadian policymakers, I conducted a study into the minds of five Canadian prime ministers from John A. Macdonald to Pierre Elliott Trudeau, using qualitative content analysis; see Silver, *Canada's Role in International Relations*.
- 46 See, for example, Vertzberger, *World in Their Minds*, 260–95.
- 47 Hudson, 'Cultural expectations', 769; Stein, 'Foreign policy decision-making', 104–6.
- 48 Newspaper article by John W. Holmes entitled 'Good Reason for Us to Stay Canadian', *Financial Post*, pages 2–3, 9 May 1964, Library and Archives Canada, MG30 E144, A. D. P. Heeney papers, Vol. 3, file 'Canada–U.S. Relations 1964–1967 Miscellaneous clippings, speeches and articles'.
- 49 Holmes, *Better Part of Valour*, 157.

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