

Anthony Eden, Full Circle: excerpt on the nine-power conference

Caption: In his memoirs, Anthony Eden, British Foreign Minister from 1951 to 1955, describes the negotiation process at the Nine-Power Conference held in London from 28 September to 3 October 1954.

Source: EDEN, Anthony. Full Circle. The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Sir Anthony Eden. London: Cassell, 1960. 619 p. p. 167-169.

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Anthony Eden, *Full Circle*

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On the following day, Ministers from the six European powers, the United States and Canada, assembled in London for the nine-power conference. The opening sessions, and the private conversations which I had with the delegates, convinced me that the British offer which I had proposed would be needed, if the conference was to succeed. In particular, Adenauer and Lester Pearson, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, appealed to me for a lead in this direction. Late that night, my colleagues met to consider our decisions.

Though I was only asking that we should continue our present practice, the commitment was a grave one, on account of its duration. It was not surprising, therefore, that some doubts were vigorously expressed, despite which my colleagues gave me the authority for which I asked. It was now necessary to make the best use of it. I decided to take Mr. Dulles into my confidence and to set the stage as best we could between us. As host Foreign Secretary, I was in the chair throughout the conference and I arranged with Mr. Dulles that, at a given moment, he would make his statement recommending in this new context the renewal of the American pledge to E.D.C. I would then follow up with Her Majesty's Government's offer. All this worked out well.

Mr. Dulles said:

If, out of the elements of the situation with which we are dealing, if by using the Brussels Treaty as a nucleus, it is possible to find in this new pattern a continuing hope of unity among the countries of Europe that are represented here, and if the hopes that were tied into the European Defence Community treaty can reasonably be transferred into the arrangements which will be the outgrowth of this meeting, then I would certainly be disposed to recommend to the President that he should renew a pledge comparable to that which was offered in connection with the European Defence Community treaty. ... In reason, you can count on us.

Having thanked Mr. Dulles for his statement, I said that I was conscious that my own country had a part to play. I then gave the assurance which Her Majesty's Government had authorized, to maintain on the mainland of Europe four United Kingdom divisions and the Tactical Air Force for so long as the majority of the Brussels Treaty powers desired it:

My colleagues will realize that what I have announced is for us a very formidable step to take. You all know that ours is above all an island story. We are still an island people in thought and tradition, whatever the modern facts of weapons and strategy may compel. And it has been not without considerable reflection that the Government which I represent here has decided that this statement could be made to you this afternoon. I want only to add this: we are making it in the same spirit as Mr. Dulles spoke just now, because we hope that by doing so we shall make a contribution to enable this conference to succeed, and re-create confidence on this European continent and make it possible for us to show an example of unity to the world.

The reaction was immediate. All understood the real meaning of what I had said. Britain would hold her military place in Europe, to keep the peace. It was not our numbers that mattered, but our presence. Here, in the context of the 'fifties, was the flag for which Foch had asked so many years before. It would fly in Europe now, to keep closed the conflicts of the century, and the cost would not be dear.

From this point on, the conference moved rapidly forward. Only M. Mendès France, with his sights set on retaining a majority in the French Assembly, was reluctant to match the concessions of the other delegates with some of his own. In this he was probably wise, for he had a fickle Chamber to deal with. In addition to

the American and British declarations, other countries made contributions of great importance. The Benelux powers renounced the right to manufacture atomic, bacteriological or chemical weapons. The Germans renounced not only this, but also the right to manufacture guided missiles, large naval vessels and bombers. Mendès France, however, clung tenaciously to his plan for an arms pool to achieve the co-ordinated production and standardization of European armaments, under the aegis of the Brussels Treaty organization. The scheme had obvious attractions, but raised endless practical difficulties. In particular, the Americans would naturally be reluctant to channel all their supplies through the new Brussels Treaty structure. Under pressure, the French eventually agreed not to make acceptance of their plan a precondition of their agreement to the other proposals before the conference; instead, a working group was set up to consider it. On the question of safeguards and armaments control, the conference agreed to a modified version of the scheme which Mendès France had put to me in Paris. An agency for the control of armaments was to be set up as part of the Brussels machinery, which would ascertain by inspection that the agreed levels of armaments were not being exceeded.

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