

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

Johanna Honkonen

“CYRENAICA IS PARAMOUNT”

Britain’s Position as a Great Power in Deciding the Fate of the Former Italian
Colony of Libya from the Labour Cabinet’s Perspective, 1945–1949

Master’s Thesis, History
Tampere 2017

University of Tampere

School of Social Sciences and Humanities

HONKONEN JOHANNA: "Cyrenaica is paramount" – Britain's Position as a Great Power in Deciding the Fate of the Former Italian Colony of Libya from the Labour Cabinet's Perspective, 1945–1949

Master's thesis, 101 p., annexes, 6 p.

History

May 2017

Britain had emerged from the Second World War victorious and willing to take its place in the post-war world alongside other great powers, the US and the USSR. However, the war had taken its toll on the British Empire, and its resources along with its international prestige were wearing thin. The newly elected Labour Government was not about to allow Britain's status as a great power to fade. Instead it attempted to secure the country's rank in the international community by directing its imperial aspirations towards strengthening Britain's position in the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

In the Potsdam Conference of 1945 a Council of Foreign Ministers was established to prepare the necessary post-war peace treaties. Britain along with the US, the USSR and France were responsible for the Italian peace treaty which included settling the fate of the former Italian colony of Libya. Libya consisted of three separate regions: Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan. From early on, Britain had its eyes set on acquiring a UN trusteeship of Cyrenaica where it had been the occupying power since 1943. The trusteeship would make Britain the formal administrative power there, and thus support its great-power ambitions in the Middle East. The Labour Cabinet decided to pursue this trusteeship but was met with more obstacles than it had expected. In the end, Britain was unable to obtain the trusteeship.

This research study focuses on analysing what the Labour Cabinet's pursuit for a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica reveals about Britain's status as a great power during the immediate post-war years from 1945 to 1949. The issue is explored through three main themes: Cyrenaica's strategic meaning for Britain, Britain's relations with the US and the USSR, and Britain's imperialistic nature. The final assessment of Britain's great-power position is based on the four requirements for a great power set in this research study, and on evaluating what the failure to acquire the trusteeship meant for Britain's status. The aim of this research study is to offer a new perspective on Britain's post-war great-power position by examining it through this particular case of Britain trying to obtain the trusteeship of Cyrenaica, and to demonstrate that Cyrenaica deserves more attention in the research of British history.

The main primary sources for this research study are selected Cabinet conclusions, Cabinet memoranda and the Cabinet Secretary's notes from July 1945 when Labour took Office, to November 1949 when the UN decided that Libya would become an independent state. The Cabinet papers were screened by using a wide keyword search on the online database of the National Archives. The keyword search was essential for finding the relevant documents for this research study from the vast amount of material. The focus in studying the material was on Libya, the Council of Foreign Ministers and its parties, British Middle Eastern policy especially in Egypt, British imperialism, and the most significant Cabinet members in this case: Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. The two represented opposing views on whether a trusteeship of Cyrenaica would be beneficial for Britain. Attlee remained unenthusiastic but Bevin was determined to obtain the trusteeship.

The Cabinet papers provide an overall picture of the main events, discussions and decisions, spiced with occasional intriguing details found in the Secretary's notes. The problem with the Cabinet papers as source material is that even if differing opinions are expressed in the memoranda, the conclusions are designed to portray unity, and can therefore be very vague. To be able to make good use of the Cabinet papers requires extensive knowledge of their historical context, as well as support from such research that has been able to access more detailed departmental documents, such as papers from the Foreign Office and the Chiefs of Staff.

The findings of this research study support the generally accepted view that Britain was no longer a considerable great power after the Second World War. In the case of trying to acquire a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica, Britain fails to meet three out of the four set requirements for a great power: its military resources were underwhelming, it was not equal to the undeniable great powers – the US and the USSR – in either military capacity or prestige, and it was not acknowledged as a great power by the international community. The one requirement that Britain does meet is that it kept on acting as if it still was a great power, and conducted its policies accordingly. The stubborn belief expressed especially by Bevin that Britain could and would obtain the trusteeship it so greatly desired by relying on its old imperial great-power strategies is evidence of this.

This research study continues to argue, that not only does the case of the Cyrenaican trusteeship reveal Britain's lost great-power status, it does it better than the major imperial events of that time which are usually at the forefront of studies regarding this topic. The situation in both India and Palestine was such that it would have been impossible for any great power to keep them under control. Withdrawing help from Greece and Turkey for the US to take over, can be seen as a strategic move to cut overseas expenditure while making sure that the US was tied up in world affairs and thus unable to pull back into isolationism, which would have left Britain to face the USSR alone in Europe.

Cyrenaica, on the other hand, was an underdeveloped area that mostly consisted of inhospitable desert. Its only value was its location by the Mediterranean and on the western border of Egypt – and it had paramount strategic value only to Britain. This issue has been deemed so insignificant that it is tragically underrepresented in research of history and barely mentioned in the history books – and no wonder since much bigger events were taking place at the same time as the Cold War realities began to set in. However, by failing to acquire the trusteeship of this small and next to unknown territory where it was already the occupying power, Britain truly fell flat on its face. It had been a dominant power in the Middle East for a long time and was one of the victorious Three Powers in Potsdam – this rather humble objective was something it should have easily accomplished. Yet it did not. Failing in small world affairs rather than in the major ones speaks volumes of a country's great-power status – or the lack of it.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Research Question and Previous Research	2
1.2 Primary Sources and Method	4
1.3 Theory and Essential Concepts	7
1.3.1 Defining a Great Power.....	7
1.3.2 Cyrenaica and the Sanusi	10
1.3.3 The International Trusteeship System and the Council of Foreign Ministers	12
2. The Decision	15
2.1 Middle East – The Lifeline of the British Empire.....	15
2.2 The Roots of the Trusteeship Claim.....	18
2.3 “We have quite enough of these awkward problems already”	22
3. The Significance	26
3.1 Strategic Prospects	26
3.2 Egypt First.....	32
4. The Rivals	37
4.1 Goals, Interests, and Expectations.....	37
4.2 Anglo-American Relations: A Junior Partnership?.....	42
4.3 Anglo-Soviet Relations: Mutual Suspicion.....	49
4.4 The Curious Case of Italy.....	56
5. The Imperialists.....	60
5.1 The Empire as a Source of Power	60
5.2 The Long Shadow of the Mandate System	66
5.3 “Little Englanders” or “Old-fashioned Patriots”?	70
6. The Rejection	74
6.1 Imperial Influence in Decline.....	74
6.2 “Frequent Charges of Exploitation”	79
6.3 Imperialistic State of Mind.....	83
7. Conclusions.....	88
Bibliography.....	96
Primary Sources	96
Literature	97
Journal Articles	98
Online Sources	100

Annex I: Chronology	102
Annex II: Members of the Labour Cabinet 1945–1951	105

Maps

<i>Map 1: The Three Provinces of Libya, 1945</i>	10
<i>Map 2: Libya from a Global Perspective</i>	10
<i>Map 3: Cyrenaica’s Strategic Position in the Mediterranean and the Middle East</i>	28

1. Introduction

In the summer of 1945, the disastrous Second World War in Europe had finally come to an end, and it was time to discuss the post-war peace treaties. The Three Powers that had emerged victorious from the war, the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union, gathered in Potsdam to contemplate the future. The head of the British delegation at the beginning was the war-time Prime Minister and a national hero, Winston Churchill, who was accompanied by the Labour leader, Clement Attlee. Then, against all expectations, Churchill lost the July general election thus making Attlee the Prime Minister whilst the Potsdam Conference was already underway.

Despite the twists in domestic politics, Britain had every right to take its seat at the table of great powers. After all, it had survived the Blitz, defeated the Axis troops in North Africa, overpowered Italy, participated in the D-Day Normandy landings, and with the other Allied Powers defeated Hitler's Germany. Even if war had taken its toll on Britain and it had suffered serious defeats in the Far East, its accomplishments along with its vast Empire made it an equal to the US and the USSR – or so it seemed.

In the meanwhile, in Cyrenaica – an eastern province of the former Italian Colony of Libya – the old ruling class, the Sanusi were cherishing hopes of Cyrenaica becoming an independent state. The Sanusi forces had fought alongside the British in the North African Campaign, and together they had driven away the Axis troops from Libya by 1943. However, Britain had been occupying the region since then, and had grown to appreciate the strategic possibilities that Cyrenaica could offer. When the peace treaty negotiations began, Britain had no intentions of leaving. It had its eyes set on a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica. Little did the recently elected Labour policymakers know that regardless of all their relentless efforts to acquire the trusteeship, the pursuit would end up falling flat on its face.

1.1 Research Question and Previous Research

One of the most complex and controversial issues in the history of post-war international relations.¹

Saul Kelly uses this quote in both his articles² *Britain, the United States, and the End of the Italian Empire in Africa, 1940–52* and *Desert Conquests. Early British Planning on the Future of the Italian Colonies, June 1940–September 1943* to describe the situation of the former Italian colonies during the immediate post-war years. He suggests that this complexity is among the reasons why the issue is so underrepresented in academic research. An additional reason, according to Kelly, might be the enormous amount of primary source material available in the archives of Britain, France and the US, which “can daunt even the most intrepid of researchers³”. Kelly stresses the need to re-examine this matter. In his own research, Kelly focuses on the intricate Anglo-American relations and Britain’s plans during and after the Second World War. He concludes that while Britain aimed to hold on to its dominant position in the Middle East, the American policies were more fluctuating as the Cold War pressures began to set in.

Two other researchers have also immersed themselves in the issue but from the USSR’s perspective. Jonathan Knight in his article *Russia’s Search for Peace: The London Council of Foreign Ministers* (1978) published almost four decades ago, and a more recent one, Sergei Mazov’s article *The USSR and the Former Italian Colonies, 1945–50* (2003). Mazov’s study is particularly elaborate since he had at his disposal the documents from The Archive of Russian Foreign Policy (Russian Foreign Ministry Archive). Both scholars argue for the practical nature of Stalin’s policies instead of them being driven by a strict communist ideology.

I have yet to cross paths with research that would focus exclusively on the post-war British point of view when discussing Cyrenaica, and Britain’s position in the negotiations regarding the former Italian colony of Libya. This research study explores the various aspects of Britain’s strategies and motives, as well as the events which contributed to both the Labour Cabinet’s aspirations to obtain a trusteeship of Cyrenaica and its failure to achieve this. In addition, it places the issue into the context of Britain’s declining status as a great power during the immediate post-war years – there is no shortage of research regarding this topic. In most cases, the main points considered when discussing

¹ “A quote from G.H. Becker, *The Disposition of the Italian Colonies*, (Annemasse, 1952), 231.” According to Kelly 2000, 51; Kelly 2014, 1006.

² Kelly has also published a book regarding the issue: *War and Politics in the Desert: Britain and Libya during the Second World War*, London: Silphium Press, 2010. Even though the book’s topic predates the main focus of this research, it is extremely regrettable that it was unavailable.

³ Kelly 2014, 1007.

Britain's great-power status in the late 1940s are the Indian independence, Palestine, weak economy, dependence on the US, nuclear weapons, and the beginning of the Cold War. These issues are, of course, addressed in this research study as well, but here Cyrenaica takes the stage. The objective of this research study is to show how a seemingly small matter from the side-lines of historical research can reveal a great deal about Britain's international prestige – or the lack of it.

Therefore, the precise research question is: What does the Labour Cabinet's pursuit for a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica reveal about Britain's status as a great power during the post-war years of 1945–1949? There are three main themes explored to answer this question: 1. Britain's aspirations in the Middle East, 2. Britain in relation to the US and the USSR, and 3. Britain's imperialistic nature. These also form the structure of this research study. The final assessment of Britain's great-power position is based on the four requirements for a great power set in this research study, and on evaluating what the failure in acquiring the trusteeship meant for Britain's status.

The first two chapters will explore Britain's power position and interests in the Middle East, and how Cyrenaica fits into them. They also explain why the trusteeship of Cyrenaica held considerable strategic meaning to Britain, and why it was deemed important. The middle chapter takes a closer look at the negotiations meant to decide the fate of Libya and Britain's role in them. It focuses on studying Britain's relations with the other two Potsdam Powers, the US and the USSR, and what they convey about Britain's power position. The two final chapters introduce the foundation of Britain's past status as a great power: the Empire built on imperialism and colonialism. They consider how imperialistic the Labour Cabinet's chosen strategies were, their successfulness, and were these strategies applied based on the assumption that Britain was a great power. The negative effects of Britain's reputation as an imperialistic power are also discussed.

The time frame is the period of July 1945–May 1949. It begins when Labour took Office, and ends when the UN General Assembly decided against the motion which would have granted Britain a trusteeship of Cyrenaica. After the unfavourable decision Britain stopped pursuing the trusteeship and concentrated on other strategies to achieve its objectives in Cyrenaica. Relevant causes and consequences outside this time frame are, naturally, considered when needed.

As a case study, this research study concentrates strictly on great-power politics and the Labour Cabinet's foreign policy regarding the pursuit of a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica, and issues relevant to it. Topics such as domestic policy, internal party politics, economy, and military capacity will be addressed when necessary, but not otherwise considered in detail. This research study also does not seek to investigate specific views of individual Cabinet members, but instead focuses on the two most significant and vocal actors in this case: Prime Minister Clement Attlee and the Foreign

Secretary Ernest Bevin, who represented opposing views of whether it was profitable for Britain to even pursue the trusteeship. Due to their statuses, they are also best represented in the research materials.

There is a great deal of previous research that does not focus solely on post-war Libya or on the negotiations, but provides valuable information and deductions regarding a wider context. In his book *Britannia Overruled, British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (2000) David Reynolds presents a vividly written account of Britain's power position, and whether it should be considered to have been "great". He also offers detailed information about the peculiarities of British policy-making. Reynold's book served as an inspiration to attach the pursuit of a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica to Britain's position as a great power – even if Cyrenaica is only mentioned once and in a subordinate clause in the entire book. But this also serves as a reminder of the massive lack of attention this issue has received. This research study aspires to prove that when discussing Britain's post-war great-power status, Cyrenaica deserves to be considered with more length.

There are many considerable pieces of research offering an extensive overview of Libya, the Middle East and Britain's policies there, which provide essential context in which Cyrenaica can be better understood. To mention a few, there is L. Carl Brown's book *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game* (1984), Steven Bianci's book *Libya: Current Issues and Historical Background* (2003), and Osamah F. Khalil's article *The Crossroads of the World: U.S. and British Foreign Policy Doctrines and the Constructs of the Middle East, 1902–2007* (2014).

As presented before, Kelly, Mazov, and Knight provide detailed information regarding the negotiations, pre-war planning, and both Anglo-American and Anglo-Soviet relations. To better understand the Labour Cabinet's role and views in this case, and the overall foreign policy of the party, the most extensive sources are Partha Sarathi Gupta's book *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964* (1975), and both Kenneth O. Morgan's book *Labour in Power: 1945–1951* (1985) and his later published article *Imperialists at bay: British labour and decolonization* (1999). To complement the aspect of imperialism, William Roger Louis provides an insight to Britain's imperialistic history in the Middle East as well as to British imperialism in general – and even touches on the issue of Britain's role in Libya's independence in his book *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization: Collected Essays* (2006).

1.2 Primary Sources and Method

The primary source material for this research study consists of selected Cabinet papers during Labour's time in Office: from July 1945 to November 1949, when the UN decided that Libya will become a unified independent state. The reason why the time frame of the materials considered

exceeds the one of this study, is that some papers after May 1949 offer valuable insight to how the failure to acquire the trusteeship was received.

The Cabinet Papers are available for download on the National Archives' website. They include Cabinet memoranda, Cabinet conclusions and Cabinet Secretary's notebooks. These offer an intriguing and carefully fixed view on the policymaking of the leadership. The main duties of the Cabinet are to control policy and coordinate the activities of governmental departments. It consists of the Prime Minister, who is the head of the Cabinet, and many of the ministerial heads of departments, as well as additional members relevant to the issues discussed in the meetings. During peacetime, there are approximately twenty members in the Cabinet, but during both world wars the number of members was brought down to enable a more rapid decision-making process. In practice, the Cabinet proceeds by joint discussion and decision-making. Because of the required collective responsibility of the Cabinet, the members must often compromise their own views to reach coherence in overall policy. Traditionally, if a minister cannot agree to a collective decision, they resign.⁴

As Reynolds presents, the Foreign Office was mostly responsible for handling foreign policy issues – which would include Cyrenaica. When diplomatic issues reached the Cabinet, they often came “pre-cooked” by the Foreign Office dominated by Bevin. However, the way foreign policy was handled in post-war Britain was rather fragmented since the vital aspects of external policy, the Empire, and defence were handled by separate rival departments. This made it “difficult for anyone to see the problems of British power as a whole”. Regarding issues related to high policy⁵, the relationship between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary was the most crucial factor.⁶

Cabinet memoranda and Cabinet conclusions are different in their nature. Memoranda are meant to offer further information and possible solutions to the Cabinet on important matters which often call for urgent attention. They can also be used to present a minister's point of view on a matter that has caused disagreement. Memoranda can include, for instance, reports, letters or telegrams. Conclusions⁷ state what the Cabinet has decided, and summarise some of the ideas and opinions that have risen during the conversation. They are meant to express unity; therefore, all the voting results are presented as unanimous to match “the principle of the unity of Cabinet”.⁸ However, at times opinions and disagreements make their way into the conclusions, often as critique to a specific

⁴ “How Cabinet works”, *Cabinet and Government: Cabinet government* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/default.htm>]. Accessed 15 Apr. 2017.

⁵ “High policy” refers to highly important issues such as war and peace. (Reynolds 2000, 41.)

⁶ Reynolds 2000, 42–44.

⁷ It is worth noting that the documents of the British government that would normally be referred to as “minutes” are actually called “conclusions”. (“How the Records Work”, *Cabinet and Government: Cabinet government* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/how-the-records-work.htm>]. Accessed 15 Apr. 2017.)

⁸ “How the Records Work”, *Cabinet and Government: Cabinet government* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/how-the-records-work.htm>]. Accessed 15 Apr. 2017.

memorandum that one or more Cabinet members disagree with. The Secretary's notes, although not many of them have been published, contain more detailed information about the actual conversations.

The post-war Cabinet papers include two different reference types. The references now in use begin with a shorthand revealing the document's type: 128 for conclusions, 129 for memoranda, and 195 for Secretary's notes. The old reference, which is used in the Cabinet papers themselves, begins with a two-letter series indicator followed by the meeting number, the year, and the item number.⁹ This research study provides both types of references when addressing a Cabinet document.

The amount of Cabinet papers from July 1945 to November 1949 is rather overwhelming at best. To find relevant source material, the papers have been screened by applying a keyword search. The keywords used are related to the main topics, such as "Cyrenaica", "Libya" and "Council of Foreign Ministers" – to mention a few. Based on the content of the papers found by using this method, it was possible to widen the search with new keywords attached to more limited time frames. All of this made it possible to try and track down such documents that the original keyword search might have missed. All in all, the process of gathering relevant Cabinet papers was rather flexible instead of stubbornly systematic in the sense that it did not rely only on a predefined set of words.

When analysing the material, the focus was on identifying how Cyrenaica and other issues relating to it were discussed: what was suggested, what was deemed as important and what was not, what were the responses like, and what were the final decisions. Instead of attempting to pursue any kind of linguistic analysis by concentrating primarily on specific words, the aim was to track down the main arguments and understand the overall picture, and then proceed to attach it to its historical context and the research literature. After this analysis, it was possible to see what events and issues were not discussed in the Cabinet papers.

Understanding and interpreting the Cabinet papers requires extensive knowledge of their historical context, for they can be ambiguous in their language and in presenting events. In addition, the Cabinet papers – especially the conclusions which are "meant to express unity" – alone do not provide all-inclusive information about the case. This can be deduced from studies such as Kelly's which have been able to make use of, for instance, the Foreign Office papers, and can therefore paint a more

⁹ "CAB 128 post war conclusions", *Cabinet and Government: Meetings and Papers* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/cab128-post-war-conclusions.htm>]. Accessed 24 Apr. 2017; "CAB 129 post war memoranda", *Cabinet and Government: Meetings and Papers* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/cab129-post-war-memoranda.htm>]. Accessed 24 Apr. 2017; "CAB 195 The Cabinet secretary's notebook", *Cabinet and Government: Meetings and Papers* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/cab-195-cabinet-secretarys-notebooks.htm>]. Accessed 24 Apr. 2017.

detailed picture of the issue with all the juicy details, so to say. Regrettably, the departmental papers are not available for online access.

However, despite their vague language and lack of details, the Cabinet papers do present an account of the main events and arguments for and against the trusteeship. They portray the Prime Minister's reluctance towards the trusteeship – even if he ended up formally endorsing it – as well as the eagerness of particularly the Foreign Secretary and the Chiefs of Staff to obtain the trusteeship. Especially the memoranda bring out more specific individual views. At times, the Secretary's notes offer revealing reactions and choices of expressions. Therefore, with the help of secondary sources it is possible to explore the events in a rather profound way.

While the Cabinet papers are the main primary source, this research study also makes good use of additional primary sources, which act as supportive material by providing information without having to rely on secondary sources alone. These sources used are *The Charter of the United Nations* provided by the United Nation's official website, and historical documents from Lillian Goldman Law Library's "The Avalon Project" such as *The Covenant of the League of Nations*. The latter represents a less traditional way of accessing primary sources. Research of history tends to rely on literature, academic journals and archives even with current day's easy availability to a large variety of source material on the World Wide Web. Finding them requires some effort and careful consideration of whether the source is reliable. The UN website can justifiably be trusted, and so can the Avalon Project, as Christine Bombaro presents. She describes the Avalon Project as "an example of a scholarly website that is not a journal¹⁰". Instead, it is a collection of links that lead to primary sources that consist of a wide range of historical documents. It does not provide secondary source articles. Bombaro states, that even without being a journal, "[...] it is a scholarly source. This is evidenced by its hosting site, Yale University, and by the notes and citations included with each document [...]"¹¹.

1.3 Theory and Essential Concepts

1.3.1 Defining a Great Power

The difficulty in assessing Britain's great-power status is that there is no textbook-definition for the term "great power" on which everyone could see eye to eye on. Instead there are various interpretations which have evolved over time and include different attributes into the requirements for a state to be considered as a great power. This research study defines a great power mainly by exploring the ideas presented by Reynolds, John J. Mearsheimer in his book *The Tragedy of Great*

¹⁰ Bombaro 2012, 223.

¹¹ Bombaro 2012, 224.

Power Politics (2014) and Hedley Bull in his book *The Anarchical Society* (1977). Mearsheimer's arguments are based on his theory of offensive realism¹², while Bull represents the English School¹³ on this matter. Reynolds, however, does not attach his arguments to any particular school of thought. This does not prevent him from offering various valuable arguments on the subject. After considering the views presented by these three, a definition for a "great power" used in this research study is formed. This definition creates the framework in which Britain's great-power position is evaluated.

Mearsheimer's offensive realism defines a great power largely based on its relative military capability. To be accepted as a great power, a state must have the necessary military assets to be able to put up a serious fight in a conventional war against the world's most powerful states. Mearsheimer also recognises the importance of latent power, meaning socio-economic ingredients such as wealth and population: a state cannot be considered a great power without a large population able to create considerable wealth that can be used to build a formidable military establishment.¹⁴

Reynolds argues, that wealth does not automatically lead to military strength, since it takes political choices to turn economic resources into military strength. Mearsheimer agrees by presenting that in order for a state to reach a great-power position, it needs to use its resources wisely as well as have access to mobilizable wealth that can be spent on defence. However, Reynolds does not fully accept the realist view. He argues that power is not a *possession* but a *relationship*. His theory on power is based on the core argument that power is relative and cannot be measured simply in terms of the size of armed forces or the resources that can easily be transformed into military might, such as population, natural resources and economic strength. He points out that when examining the sources of a state's power, such elements as national unity and morale, the coherence of the governmental system, and the quality of leadership and diplomatic skill should also be taken into consideration.¹⁵

Bull presents three main requirements for a great power. Firstly, there must be more than one Power with equal status to one another – it is not possible to have a single great power. By this he means that, for example, the Roman Empire cannot be counted as a great power but as a political entity with a historically unique status. Secondly, great powers must have superior military strength compared to lesser Powers. Thirdly, in order to be a great power, others need to recognise this great-power status.

¹² Offensive realism seeks to challenge the "prevailing optimism about relations among the great powers". (Mearsheimer 2014, 4.) It argues that states are searching for ways to increase their share of power at all times. (Mearsheimer 2014, 21.) Other bedrock assumptions of offensive realism are that states are potentially dangerous to each other through military capacity and can never be sure about other states' intentions. Great powers are rational actors whose primary goal is to survive. Due to all of this, all great powers fear each other. This situation results to an endless pursuit of power over others. (Mearsheimer 2014, 30–32.)

¹³ As opposed to realist theories, Morris presents a broad interpretation of the English school's approach: "[...] power and its distribution are necessary but not sufficient explanatory factors." (Morris 2011, 328.)

¹⁴ Mearsheimer 2014, offensive realism 5, latent power 55, population and wealth 61.

¹⁵ Reynolds 2000, 32; Mearsheimer 2014, 61–62; Reynolds 2000, 4.

This recognition includes that the others trust the great power with duties and responsibilities in the international system, and the great power willingly accepts these. Therefore, for example, Nazi Germany does not properly count as a great power.¹⁶ Bull's theory is still widely used, and by no means out of date even if it was created during the Cold War. For example, Justin Morris favours it – as opposed to realism – in his article *How Great is Britain? Power, Responsibility and Britain's Future Global Role* (2011), where he assesses Britain's current great-power position.

To make matters more complicated, there is another term that deserves attention: a "superpower". William T. Fox coined this concept in 1944. He placed three states in this category: the US, the USSR and Britain. There were two defining factors why Britain still stood out in 1945 to fit that category: it had survived the war while other pre-war great powers – such as France – had been defeated and even humiliated, and it had a vast global network provided by the British Empire.¹⁷

Bull has little understanding for the term superpower. He argues that "the concept of a 'super power', however, adds nothing to the old one of a 'great power'." According to him, it would be no different to call the "superpowers" "great powers", and the others as "middle powers" or "lesser powers". He sees it as a term that was created to describe the post-war US and USSR because they were so significantly superior to the old European great powers Britain, France and Germany. But unlike Fox, Bull does not see Britain as being equal in power status to the US and the USSR. Neither do Mearsheimer or Reynolds – even though Reynolds adds that Britain was definitely *acting* like a great power.¹⁸ This research study does not use the term superpower because it adds nothing to the study. On the contrary, including the term here would only overcomplicate matters since it would lead to questions such as "Can Britain be interpreted to have been a great power because it was stronger than some lesser powers but not equal to the superpowers?", which serve no purpose when answering the research question.

Reynolds points out, that terms such as great power and superpower are useful shorthands but can lure us into viewing power as something permanent, and thus falling under the illusion that a great power would be a great power in every single situation. Reynolds continues to explain that power can be a fickle thing which is by no means a permanent possession but in fact varies from situation to situation, as well as over time, due to its relative nature¹⁹:

A strong economy may not be decisive if the country's armed forces are ill-prepared for war. A large army may be irrelevant if the country has no will to fight, or if its leaders are distracted by other concerns at home or abroad. A state with limited economic resources may be able to secure unexpected advantage by diplomatic dexterity. And the reputation for being powerful

¹⁶ Bull 1977, 200–202.

¹⁷ Freedman in Dockrill & Young 1989, 2.

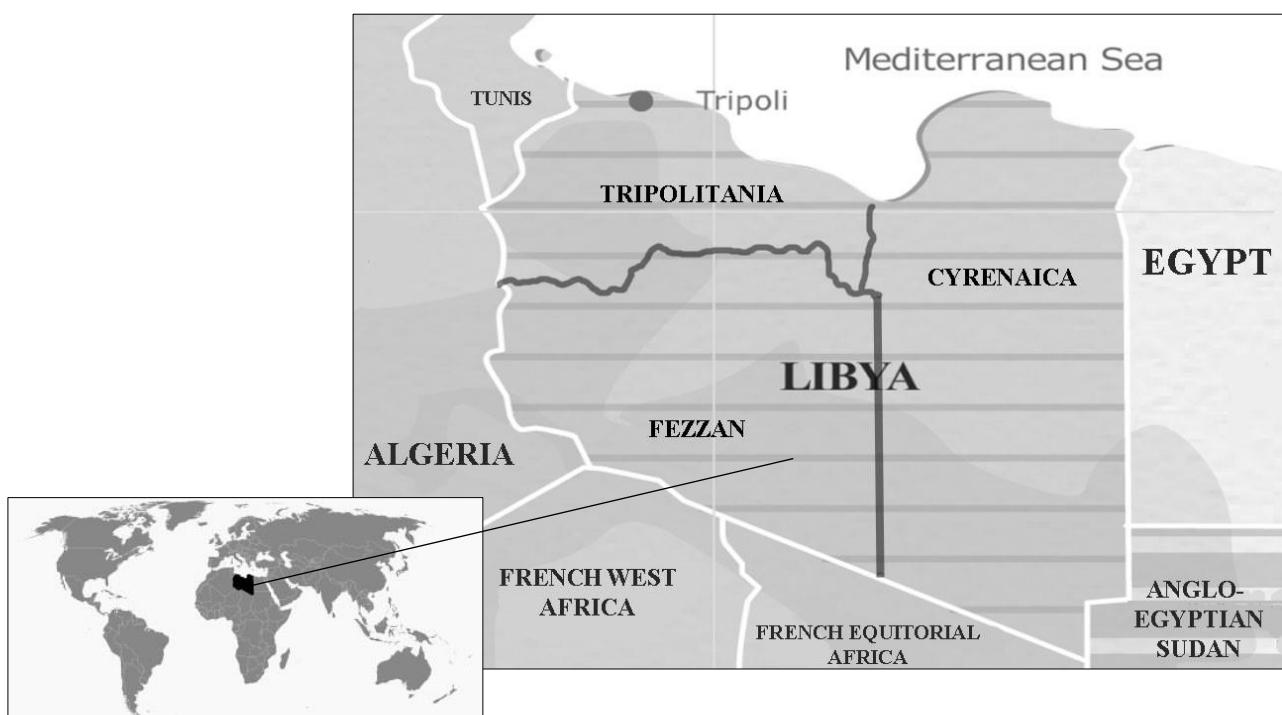
¹⁸ Bull 1977, 203; Mearsheimer 2014, 354; Reynolds 2000, 2.

¹⁹ Reynolds 2000, 5.

may insure influence long after economic and military strength has waned, particularly if war can be avoided.²⁰

Based on the exploration of these differing theories, this research study sets four requirements for a state to be considered a great power. Firstly, it needs to possess significant military strength and the resources to maintain it. Secondly, it needs to be comparable to other great powers in both military power, and prestige. Thirdly, the international community must recognise the state's great-power status and thus trust it with special duties and responsibilities. Fourthly, it must regard itself as a great power when conducting its policies, and act on the basis of this assumption. Through these four requirements Britain's status as a great power is both assessed and determined.

1.3.2 Cyrenaica and the Sanusi



Map 1: The Three Provinces of Libya, 1945.²¹ Map 2: Libya from a Global Perspective.²²

The region nowadays called Libya traditionally consisted of three separate regions with their own histories and identities: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan. “Libya” is an old classical name which had been used by the Greeks to vaguely describe most of North Africa and its Berber inhabitants. The name had not been used since, until the Italians restored it to describe their new annexed territory

²⁰ Reynolds 2000, 4.

²¹ “Map Resources for 1945”, *The Cabinet Papers: Maps in Time* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/maps-interactive/maps-in-time.htm?&1945>]. Accessed 20 Mar. 2017. Edited by adding the approximate borders of the Libyan provinces, and relevant place names.

²² “Map of World with Countries - Single Color, WRLD-EPS-01-0011” *Free Vector Maps* (This download is the intellectual property and copyright of FreeVectorMaps.com, Striped Candy LLC) [<https://freevectormaps.com/world-maps/WRLD-EPS-01-0011>]. Accessed 17 Apr. 2017. Edited by highlighting Libya.

designed to be a single unified colony.²³ Under the Ottoman rule – which collapsed as a result of the First World War – Libya was a somewhat indefinite area between Tunis and Egypt, which overall enjoyed a very light administration. It was sparsely populated mostly by bedouins whose social system was mainly tribal. G. Tracey Watts describes it as a “backwards, reactionary community”.²⁴

Cyrenaica’s religious and political leaders had been the Sanusi²⁵ ever since the Sanusi order’s founder, a “holy man” Muhammad Ali, assumed the title of “Grand Sanusi” in 1830. He settled in Cyrenaica, where his son and successor Muhammad brought the local bedouin tribes under the influence of the Sanusi order. By the turn of the century they all owed loyalty to a single Sanusi leader. The one succeeding Muhammad in 1902 was Idris²⁶, who at the time was so young that a regent was appointed until he was old enough to lead the Sanusi order. He remained as the leader of the Sanusi even while staying in Egypt from 1922 to 1947 as an exile. He was proclaimed as King Idris I on 24 December 1951 when Libya became a sovereign state.²⁷

In 1912, the Lausanne Peace Treaty between the Ottomans and Italians granted independence to Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. In spite of this, Italy occupied these territories. In 1934 Tripolitania and Libya were formally joined together as a single colony to be a part of the “new Roman Empire²⁸”, while Fezzan remained a military area. The opposition against Italian rule for practically its entire duration was most aggressive in Cyrenaica, and several wars were fought there during the Italian reign.²⁹ The Sanusi had fought against Italy in both World Wars, aligned with the Central Powers in the First, and with the Allied Powers in the Second, hoping they would gain independence. By 1943 the Allied Powers had defeated the Axis troops in Libya. As a result, both Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were placed under British military administration, and Fezzan under the French. After years of negotiations between the Allied Powers, where Britain attempted to obtain a trusteeship of Cyrenaica, the UN General Assembly decided on November 1949 to combine all three historic regions into one sovereign state of Libya by January 1952.³⁰

²³ Bianci 2003, 51; 70.

²⁴ Watts 1951, 69.

²⁵ Whomever were responsible for transcribing the Cabinet papers clearly had no certain knowledge of how “Sanusi” should be spelled in the English language, since it varies between “Sanusi”, “Senusi” and “Senussi”. For this reason, there are different spellings in direct quotes from the Cabinet papers. The clear majority of the research literature spells it as “Sanusi”, as does this research study.

²⁶ There are numerous interpretations of what name and spelling should be used when referring to him. To mention a few: Sayyid Idris (Louis, Kelly), Muhammad Idris as Sanusi (Bianci), Syed Mohammed Idris al Senussi (the Cabinet papers, but with different variations of this) and Muhammad Idris ibn al-Mahdi al-Sanusi (Thompson). However, most end up simply calling him “Idris” (e.g. Kelly, Thompson, Bianci) and therefore, so does this research study.

²⁷ Bianci 2003, 65–69, King Idris I 75.

²⁸ Sidaway 2012, 297.

²⁹ Bianci 2003, 67–71.

³⁰ Bianci 2003, the First World War 67, the Second World War and independence 71–74.

Despite Italy's attempt to create a unified Italian colony of Libya, the differences between the old provinces ran deep even after the war. Brown argues that when Britain took over Cyrenaica, there were little to no signs left of Italian colonialization³¹. Watts adds to this by stating that there was “no love lost between the Arab of Tripolitania and the Arab of Cyrenaica³²”. The post-war Cyrenaica was evidently its own distinctive region.

1.3.3 The International Trusteeship System and the Council of Foreign Ministers

The United Nations trusteeship system was created to organise governance in the occupied territories not yet ready for independence. This was a continuum to the League of Nation's mandate system which had been created after the First World War. The mandatory powers had been meant to govern the mandate areas which were “inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world”. The mandatory powers had also been responsible for offering “administrative advice and assistance” until the territory could “stand alone”.³³

The UN was formally established in the San Francisco Conference, where on 26 June 1945 *the Charter of the United Nations* and *the Statute of International Court of Justice* were signed. Before this, there was some debate about the aims of the UN trusteeship system, especially in regards to such territories which would be too small to even defend themselves if given full independence. Nevertheless, the final recommendation was “the promotion of the progressive development of the peoples of trust territories should be directed toward “independence or self-government””.³⁴

The trusteeships were defined in detail in Chapter XII of the Charter of the United Nations. According to the Chapter XII, Article 76, a trusteeship was meant to:

[...] promote the political, economic, social, and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territories, and their progressive development towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned, and as may be provided by the terms of each trusteeship agreement [...].³⁵

Therefore, it should be noted that the trusteeship system did not mean for the trusteeships to last forever, but only until the territory was ready for “self-government or independence either as separate

³¹ Brown 1984, 92.

³² Watts 1951, 72.

³³ “The Covenant of the League of Nations (Including Amendments adopted to December, 1924)”, *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art22t]. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017.

³⁴ “1945: The San Francisco Conference”, *United Nations: History of the United Nations* [<http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1945-san-francisco-conference/index.html>]. Accessed 8 Apr. 2017.

³⁵ “Chapter XII: International Trusteeship System”, *Charter of the United Nations* [<http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-xii/index.html>]. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017.

States or by joining neighbouring independent countries”. A Trusteeship Council was also established and defined in Chapter XIII to supervise the work of those administering the territories under trusteeships³⁶. The trusteeship Council consisted of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: the US, the USSR, Britain, France and China.³⁷

In the Potsdam Conference during the summer of 1945, the US, the USSR and Britain decided to create a Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) to do the preparatory work for the peace treaties that would eventually be submitted to the UN. This included settling the future governance of the former Italian colonies of Libya, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia³⁸. The CFM consisted of the Foreign Ministers of the US, the USSR, Britain, France and China, labelled as “the Five Powers”. The Three Powers sent invitations to France and China to invite them to be a part of the CFM. The first CFM was meant to assemble in September at the latest. Instead of all the members having to be responsible for every separate peace treaty, it was agreed that only the states that were “signatory to the terms of surrender imposed upon the enemy State concerned” would take part in the negotiations. France was separately mentioned as having the right to be a part of preparing a treaty for Italy.³⁹

However, in the first CFM in London September 1945, the Soviet Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov insisted that the peace treaties should be drafted by the Three Powers alone, who were the signatories to the armistice agreements of Germany’s ex-satellites. France would be allowed to participate in the negotiations regarding the former Italian colonies, and China would be completely excluded. Molotov’s demand was eventually met, even if Bevin noted this to be “legally right but morally unsound”.⁴⁰

Five CFMs and one interim meeting took place before May 1949 when the UN General Assembly ruled against the individual trusteeships.⁴¹ The most important ones for this research study are the first two: the 1945 CFM in London and the 1946 CFM in Paris. During these two the fate of the former Italian colonies was discussed the most, and the most dramatic twists occurred. The proposals regarding the ex-colonies were made on the basis of the UN trusteeship system, and two types of

³⁶ “Chapter XIII: The Trusteeship Council”, *Charter of the United Nations* [<http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-xiii/index.html>]. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017.

³⁷ “Trusteeship Council”, *United Nations* [<http://www.un.org/en/sections/about-un/trusteeship-council/index.html>]. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017. “The Trusteeship Council suspended its operations on 1 November 1994, a month after the independence of Palau, the last remaining United Nations trust territory.”

³⁸ Kelly 2000, 51.

³⁹ “The Berlin (Potsdam) Conference, July 17–August 2, 1945”, *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade17.asp]. Accessed 8 Apr. 2017.

⁴⁰ Knight 1978, 145.

⁴¹ “A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949”, *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/decade.asp]. Accessed 17 Apr. 2017. For details, see Annex I: Chronology.

trusteeships were suggested: a UN collective trusteeship where a joint international governance would be established, and an individual trusteeship where a single power would administer a trust territory.

In the Paris Peace Conference in 1946, a time limit was set for the still inconclusive CFM to reach a decision. It would have one year to settle the matter, and should it fail to do so, the issue would be referred to the UN General Assembly. The time limit was set to begin when Italy's peace treaty was ratified and came into force, which was on 15 September 1947, and would thus end on 15 September 1948.⁴² Later, a Council of Foreign Ministers' Deputies was also set to consider the future of the former Italian colonies and submit their recommendations for the CFM to consider. Their meetings began on 3 October 1947, and they signed their report on 31 August 1948 which is, however, dated 1 September 1948. The Deputies had also sent a Commission of Investigation – usually referred to as the Four-Power Commission – to explore the former Italian colonies and the wishes of the locals. Their trip began in November 1947 and ended in May 1948.⁴³ In the end, the CFM could not reach a decision by the deadline, and the issue was referred to the UN.

Because this piece of research aims to study the relations between the Three Great Powers at the time, France will not be considered in great detail in the main chapters. If Britain's position as a great power alongside the US and the USSR was debatable, France's was much more obvious. It had been occupied during the war and it was not a deciding party at the Potsdam Conference where the CFM was established, but instead was invited along by the Three Powers.

Judging by the research material, France's role in the negotiations was rather small: it is hardly ever mentioned in the Cabinet papers, and even the research literature only superficially explores its position. However, France's interest towards Fezzan, where it was the occupying Power, was noted. This was demonstrated, for example, in the Deputy Foreign Secretary Noel Charles' report, circulated by Bevin in 1948. There he described the findings of the Four-Power Commission in Libya by stating that “[...] in the Fezzan the French have gone to great lengths to obliterate all signs of Italian administration, and to incorporate the area into French Africa [...]”.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, for most of the time France supported placing the colonies under an Italian trusteeship. According to Mazov, France

⁴² Mazov 2006, 71.

⁴³ CAB/129/29/32: C.P. (48) 222, "Former Italian Colonies. Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.", 13.9.1948. Attachment: C.F.M./D/L/48/IC 202, "Council of Foreign Ministers (Deputies). Former Italian Colonies. Recommendations to the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Deputies of the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, The United States of America, the French Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics appointed to consider the Question of the Disposal of the former Italian Colonies", 1.9.1948; Mazov 2006, date of the signing 71.

⁴⁴ CAB/129/29/32: C.P. (48) 222, "Former Italian Colonies. Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.", 13.9.1948. Attachment: C.F.M./D/L/48/IC 202, "Council of Foreign Ministers (Deputies). Former Italian Colonies. Recommendations to the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Deputies of the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, The United States of America, the French Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics appointed to consider the Question of the Disposal of the former Italian Colonies", 1.9.1948.

estimated that it had far better chances to secure its position in Fezzan and in the entire French North Africa through a weak Italy than collective or individual trusteeships⁴⁵.

2. The Decision

2.1 Middle East – The Lifeline of the British Empire

Placing such heavy emphasis on the Middle East and the questions attached to the region while discussing Cyrenaica might at first glance seem a bit odd. Is Cyrenaica, as well as the entire Libya, not more obviously a part of North Africa than the Middle East in a strictly geographical sense? There are, however, two main reasons why Cyrenaica – especially in this research study – is unquestionably linked to the Middle East to such an extent it cannot be ignored.

Firstly, there is the problem of defining “the Middle East” and what areas it includes. Where does it start? Where does it end? What is it in the middle of? Khalil has considered this dilemma in great detail by exploring the changing definitions of the Middle East, which only emerged as a term referring to a more or less specific region in the early twentieth century. Varying from Eastern India to the Persian Gulf, or from Morocco to Afghanistan, a definitive interpretation of the Middle East has remained elusive.⁴⁶ Khalil came to the conclusion, that the reasons behind the highly shifting nature of the geographical definitions of the Middle East were the military, political, and economic interests of Britain and the US. They defined the area based on their subjective foreign policy views and spheres of interest.⁴⁷ Therefore, the whole concept of the Middle East can be interpreted as being more closely linked to politics than geography – and indeed, in both the Cabinet papers as well as in the research literature there seems to be no consistent logic about when Libya is referred to as a part of “the Middle East” and when as “North Africa”. This only supports Khalil’s deductions: the Middle East is defined within the political context of the question at hand.

This conclusion brings us to the second – and even more important – reason: in this particular political situation Britain treated Cyrenaica as a part of its extensive strategy regarding the Middle East and the whole Mediterranean area, both vital to the Empire. Therefore, Britain’s situation and history in the region must be explored before being able to fully grasp the reasons behind the British desire to obtain the trusteeship of Cyrenaica, and its significance to Britain’s great-power aspirations.

Britain had been slowly but steadily growing its presence in the Middle East since the nineteenth century, when it was the occupying power in Aden, Cyprus – which Brown here counts as a part of

⁴⁵ Mazov 2003, 58; CAB/129/9/15: C.P. (46) 165, “Disposal of the Italian Colonies. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs”, 18.4.1946.

⁴⁶ Khalil 2014, 305.

⁴⁷ Khalil 2014, 343.

the intangible Middle East – and Egypt. During the twentieth century, Britain increased its occupancy in the region after the First World War by receiving the League of Nations’ mandates of Transjordan, Palestine and Iraq.⁴⁸ France had been the main threat to Britain’s position in the Mediterranean and North Africa through its aggressive foreign policy throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ After the First World War France became the other Western power which began to dominate the Middle Eastern politics when it was granted the mandates of Syria and Lebanon.⁵⁰ However, during the interwar years there was room for outsiders as well, such as Italy in Libya.⁵¹ Even if Bevin in August 1949 still acknowledged that there had been a “traditional rivalry” between Britain and France in the Middle East⁵², Brown argues that this rivalry “that could be traced back to Napoleon’s landing in Egypt” came to an end right after the Second World War, when both Syria and Lebanon were transferred to the UN. Therefore, Britain became the clear dominant power in the Middle East.⁵³

The focus of British Middle Eastern politics was Egypt. Britain conquered Egypt from the Ottoman Empire in 1882, and it remained under British military occupation until 1914, when it was labelled as a protectorate⁵⁴. Egypt received limited independence in 1922 and nominal independence from 1936 onwards, until the Anglo-Egyptian treaty was signed to pull out the last remaining British troops from the Suez base in 1954.⁵⁵

There was an obvious reason for Egypt’s importance, for it held the key to imperial communication lines: the Suez Canal. The Canal was also essential to the protection of India, the Empire’s “crown jewel”.⁵⁶ The Suez Canal, designed to be an international waterway connecting the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, opened for general use on 17 November 1869. It was built by a predominantly French company, the *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez*. The British government had sought to crush the Canal project which they feared would destroy the British monopoly of sea access to East Africa and Far East via the Cape of Good Hope. They were concerned that it could also jeopardise Britain’s strategic position in the Mediterranean by “giving an almost infinite

⁴⁸ Brown 1984, 90–91.

⁴⁹ Johnson 2003, 9.

⁵⁰ Reynolds 2000, 103.

⁵¹ Brown 1984, 107.

⁵² CAB/129/36/33: C.P. (49) 183, “Middle East Policy. Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs”, 25.8.1949. Includes: “Middle East Policy. General Principles and Problems.”

⁵³ Brown 1984, 133.

⁵⁴ “Before 1917, protectorates would have been the normal method, as had been used in much of tropical and North Africa since the 1870s. Protectorates offered the advantage that they were not necessarily permanent and in their early form commonly involved leaving indigenous rulers and their political structures in place, thus avoiding the expense of a full-blown colonial administration.” (Fieldhouse 2006, 341.)

⁵⁵ Brown 1984, 90–91.

⁵⁶ Khalil 2014, 305–306.

extension to the shores of the Mediterranean”, as Halford L. Hoskins phrased it in his article *The Suez Canal as an International Waterway*, published in July 1943.⁵⁷

Hoskins proceeds to introduce how Britain, to ensure the protection of its own imperial interests, ended up taking a great interest in the Suez Canal from the very beginning of its existence. Formally, Britain had had what Hoskins describes as a “special position” in the Canal area since 1888, when “the Powers concerned⁵⁸” signed a convention where the Canal’s international status was confirmed by agreeing that it should be open to all vessels – merchant or military – in times of both peace and war. Egypt, which was under British occupation, was to protect the Canal when needed. Hoskins labels the Convention as something that “was reduced to an academic declaration and remained technically inoperative” since it was informally accepted that Britain might disregard the Convention if necessary. However, it did function as a bedrock of how the Canal’s situation was defined after the First World War. The Treaty of Versailles formalised Britain’s position in the Canal zone and in Egypt which had *de facto* existed since 1882. During the war, the Canal had been essentially a British waterway and an Allied line of communication.⁵⁹

Following the Egyptian independence, Britain was determined to remain as the protector of the Suez Canal. The 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Alliance settled the dispute by allowing British troops to oversee the protection of the Canal, thus securing the same rights it had had since the 1880s.⁶⁰ As Hoskins describes it, there has been:

[...] an unbroken line of descent, from the early days of British occupation of Egypt to the present time [1943], of the principle that the peculiar character of British interests in the East entitle that State to a special position in Egypt for the purpose of serving the international community as the guardian of the Suez highway.⁶¹

Britain remained in Egypt mainly because stronger measures to guard the Suez Canal had to be taken due to the fear of Russian or French aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Safeguarding the Suez Canal – which was considered as an imperial lifeline – became the primary focus point of British Middle Eastern policy. Succeeding in this required strong British presence in the area.⁶² This policy remained unchanged still in the 1940s, when the Foreign Secretary of the Wartime Coalition Government, Anthony Eden stressed the unquestionable importance of the Suez Canal. He defined the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East to be the world’s most important strategic areas. Eden’s argument stemmed from Britain’s growing concern of securing the imperial

⁵⁷ Hoskins 1943, 373.

⁵⁸ Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia, Spain, Turkey and the Netherlands. (Hoskins 1943, 376.)

⁵⁹ Hoskins 1943, 376–379.

⁶⁰ Hoskins 1943, 383.

⁶¹ Hoskins 1943, 384.

⁶² Brown 1984, 110.

lines of communication, which were highly dependent on British domination of the region surrounding the Suez Canal, as well as the Canal itself.⁶³ In 1945 when the war was over, the British Empire was still standing – though shaking – which meant that the Middle East and the Suez Canal were no less important to Britain than they had been for almost a century.

2.2 The Roots of the Trusteeship Claim

Before the First World War Britain had been mostly supportive of the Ottoman Empire's rule in the Middle East, but after the war and the breakdown of the age-old Ottoman Empire, Britain needed to re-estimate its geopolitical strategies. The adapted approach aimed to maintain friendly relations with the local Arab population by pursuing close contacts with the tribal or provincial leaders.⁶⁴ The most relevant of these pursuits to this research study were Britain's relations with Cyrenaica's most influential force, the Sanusi. British contact with the Sanusi began during the First World War when the Sanusi aligned with the Central Powers against Italy. After being beaten by the British in Egypt, the pro-British Idris took the lead and negotiated a favourable peace treaty for the Sanusi with Britain in 1917.⁶⁵ This developed into a closer liaison, which was reactivated during the Second World War.⁶⁶

Italy was notorious for its brutal conquest of Libya, which was followed by Mussolini's colonisation designed to create an Italianised Libya filled with Italian settlers to last forever.⁶⁷ In this light, it is not difficult to understand why the exiled Idris in Egypt was eager to join forces with Britain in order to liberate Libya – particularly Cyrenaica, the heartland of the Sanusi – from the Italian occupation. However, the Sanusi were aiming higher than just driving away the Italians: they were aspiring to achieve independence.

During the Second World War, Idris gathered a small force⁶⁸ of Libyan refugees to join British military efforts. The Sanusi willingly fought alongside the British in the eventually victorious North African campaign. In the words of Brown: "Thus began a British-Sanusi working alliance and comradeship in arms."⁶⁹ This cooperation developed a political nature when after the war Britain remained as the occupying power in Cyrenaica until the final settlement of the region was reached. The British officials were not, however, overly enthusiastic to support Idris' claim for the

⁶³ Smith and Zametica 1985, 240.

⁶⁴ Brown 1984, 107, 113.

⁶⁵ Bianci 2003, 67.

⁶⁶ Brown 1984, 113.

⁶⁷ Brown 1984, 128.

⁶⁸ Five Libyan battalions were organized by the British after August 1940. The Libyan Arab Force became better known as the Sanusi Army, and it served under British command until the end of the desert war meant to drive the Axis Powers away from Libya. The war came to an end in January 1943. (Bianci 2003, 72.)

⁶⁹ Brown 1984, 132.

independence of Cyrenaica at any point during the war, as Todd M. Thompson presents in his research article.⁷⁰

Kelly supports Thompson's view of British reluctance towards the Sanusi independence. Britain began to plan the future of the Italian colonies already in June 1940, following Italy's declaration of war on Britain and France, and its attacks aimed at British positions in North and East Africa. The British Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, General Sir Archibald Wavell was not enthusiastic about a post-war independent Libya, and advised against giving the Sanusi Forces any more than a mere expression of hope regarding future independence. As Thompson continues, the Colonial Office wanted to take advantage of Libya's diplomatic value in a wider game between Britain, Egypt and the Arab World. It was suggested that Libya should be an autonomous province of Egypt, which was believed to please the Pan-Arab nationalists. The British officials in Egypt were not keen on the idea of an independent Libya lead by Idris either.⁷¹

The idea of turning Cyrenaica into an Egyptian province gained more popularity among the British policymakers in 1941, since it was widely believed that there would be a chance that Egypt would allow Britain to place strategic bases there. However, it was recognised that the Sanusi would not be satisfied by this solution. Since the war was still raging and there was no certainty of how it would end, Britain did not see it wise to make exact promises to Egypt no more than to the Sanusi. There were concerns that such a commitment would encourage Egypt to play a more predominant role in Arab politics which would greatly affect Britain's position in the Middle East. The only realistic options to the Egyptian rule over Cyrenaica were then estimated to be either British or international control. This would free the Sanusi from the Italian rule they so loathed, and provide Egypt with guaranteed protection on its western border as well as strengthen Britain's position in the area west of Egypt. All of this was believed to be received well by the Arabs. However, still no official announcements were made.⁷²

Kelly ties the British ideas of the future governance of Cyrenaica into a wider context of British aspirations in the Middle East and their need for a strong foothold there by arguing that:

[...] the start of British planning on the future of the Italian colonies should be seen as part of the process of preserving the paramount influence of Great Britain in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East and dealing with the threat posed by Italy and its colonies to the British position in the region.⁷³

⁷⁰ Thompson 2009, 294–295.

⁷¹ Kelly 2014, 1007; Thompson 2009, 298 – 299.

⁷² Kelly 2014, 1011 – 1012.

⁷³ Kelly 2014, 1023.

In 1941 Idris made a direct request for British support for establishing a united Libyan nation including both Cyrenaica and Tripolitania under his rule. The petition was met with a frosty welcome at the Foreign Office, since it was not seen as something that would in any way further British interests. The Foreign Secretary Eden met with Idris to make clear that the Sanusi could not be included in the British Military Administration, and that the future of Libya could only be decided after the post-war Peace Conference.⁷⁴ Therefore, throughout the war, the British persistently refused to make any formal commitment to Libyan independence or any other solutions.⁷⁵ However, Idris and his followers in Cairo had their minds set on an independent state of Libya with Idris as the Amir.⁷⁶

After the front lines had been shifting back and forth for quite some time, Britain gained its third and final occupation of Cyrenaica after the victory in El Alamein in November 1942. The victory gave Eden the opportunity to appease the Sanusi and safeguard good relations with them. On 8 January 1942, he announced that “His Majesty’s government is determined that at the end of the war the Senussi in Cyrenaica will in no circumstances again fall under Italian domination⁷⁷”. While the Foreign Secretary made his grand promise, the Foreign Office remained relentless in its demand that Idris would not be placed as a ruler of Cyrenaica while the war was still going on. It was feared that such an action would lead to Britain being accused of prejudicing the peace settlement.⁷⁸ Also, Eden’s term “Senussi in Cyrenaica” was vague at best. Thompson argues that:

Interpretation of the meaning of the phrase would largely determine the character and shape of Britain’s administration of ex-Italian territories in North Africa and had far-reaching implications over Britain’s post-war diplomatic strategy.⁷⁹

Thompson’s argument is proven accurate when examining the CFM negotiations regarding the future of the former Italian Colonies. Eden’s pledge would become something that Britain could cling onto repeatedly to defend its own interests in Cyrenaica by insisting to keep the Italians out. Whether the potential usefulness of this promise was a calculated strategy or a happy accident, it would be a crucial diplomatic weapon in the becoming tough negotiations regarding the future of Libya.

The Libyan campaign ended in 1943 once the Italians had been fully defeated. The responsibility for the area was divided between Britain and France: the British were occupying Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, and France was given the responsibility for Fezzan.⁸⁰ Cyrenaica had a substantial role

⁷⁴ Thompson 2009, 302.

⁷⁵ Collins 1974, 10.

⁷⁶ Kelly 2014, 1019.

⁷⁷ “Libya Operation (Senussi Force), Anthony Eden, 148, FO 371/46114, TNA.” According to Thompson 2009, 303.

⁷⁸ Kelly 2014, 1018.

⁷⁹ Thompson 2009, 303.

⁸⁰ Collins 1947, 10.

in the Foreign Office's plans for the future. Britain hoped that the Suez Canal could be protected from satellite bases instead of placing British troops directly in the Canal Zone. Cyrenaica was as optional choice for such a base.⁸¹ The following year, the Foreign Office acted on this plan by recommending the establishment of a Sanusi Emirate under Egyptian protection. This solution was believed to be in accordance with Britain's strategic needs in the region and acceptable to the local population.⁸²

The British officials in Cairo expressed their concern over the Foreign Office's plans. They emphasised that the Sanusi along with most of the Cyrenaican people were "anxious to avoid Egyptian influence" and thus placing Cyrenaica under Egyptian control might not be favourable to British interests either.⁸³ The Chief Civil Affairs Officer in Middle East, J.N.D. Anderson agreed with this view. In July 1945, he stressed the antipathy of the Cyrenaicans towards the idea of being placed under Egyptian governance. Therefore, given the public opinion in Cyrenaica and Britain's need to maintain the benevolence of the locals, he favoured establishing an autonomous Sanusi Emirate either under British guidance or by joining Cyrenaica to Britain through a treaty.⁸⁴

In August 1945, the new Labour Government had already taken Office and Bevin was running the show in the Foreign Office. Bevin's Foreign Office approved the views of Anderson and the Middle East Defence Committee, which had accepted Anderson's paper with the addition of installing "the Sheikh of Senussi" as a temporal ruler⁸⁵. These papers were accepted as the basis for the Foreign Office's policy before the opening of the 1945 London CFM on 11 September. Therefore, they had now decided that the most favourable option was to pursue a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica⁸⁶. The Foreign Office seemed confident in its views. However, they would be challenged in the Cabinet before the CFM meeting.

Exploring the Anglo-Sanusi relations pre-dating the negotiations in London at length serves a purpose: they present the strong long-time relations between the British and the Sanusi, and Britain's deep-rooted interest in Cyrenaica which dated back to 1940. They also explain why the Foreign Office finally decided to pursue a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica: it had to consider the Sanusi resentment towards Italy and Egypt, contain Egypt's political power in the region, and maintain good relations

⁸¹ Kelly 2014, 1021.

⁸² "Annex, Italy's Overseas Empire, 17 March, 1944, U 3431/57/70, FO 371/40601, TNA." According to Thompson 2009, 309.

⁸³ "Middle East Defence Committee, Future Policy in Cyrenaica, Note by CCAO R. D. H. Arundell, 13 Nov. 1944, IC, FO 1015/81, TNA." According to Thompson 2009, 310.

⁸⁴ "DC (45) (Revised), Middle East Defence Committee: Future of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, Note by Chief Civil Affairs Officer, Middle East, J. N. D. Anderson, 10 July 1945, 198, U5577/51/70, FO 371/57090, TNA." According to Thompson 2009, 311.

⁸⁵ "Diary 1, Sir Miles Lampson, 27 June 1945, Box 6, Sir Miles Wedderburn Lampson 1st Baron Killearn (GBI165-0176), MESCA." According to Thompson 2009, 311.

⁸⁶ "Minute, Lord Hood, 24 Aug. 1945, 199, U6443/51/70, FO 371/50791, TNA." According to Thompson 2009, 312.

with the Arab population to support its overall interests in the region. What is also significant in this case is that an independent Cyrenaica was never seen as a favourable option. As a result of all this, British control of Cyrenaica was deemed as the best possible outcome.

2.3 “We have quite enough of these awkward problems already”

As thoroughly explored in the previous chapter, the idea of a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica was not born out of thin air nor invented by the Labour Government, which had to pick up where the previous leadership left off. The question of acquiring the trusteeship of Cyrenaica arose in the new Labour Cabinet during September 1945, and resulted in debates over whether such a trusteeship was desirable.⁸⁷ The discussion was triggered by the proposal initially put forward by the Foreign Office, and by Attlee’s memorandum – which Morgan describes as “impressive⁸⁸” – where he strongly opposed Britain trying to acquire any trusteeships of the former Italian colonies.⁸⁹ Those favouring the trusteeship emphasised the strategic importance of Cyrenaica, while the other side refused to see the insignificant trusteeship leading to anything but trouble.

The Cabinet members opposing the trusteeship strongly questioned the strategic potential of Cyrenaica due to the development of air warfare and the atomic bomb.⁹⁰ It was also argued that the British Empire would not be able to defend itself alone in the post-war world, but would need to rely on other members of the UN. Therefore, finding ways to make the UN more effective should be of greater importance than bolstering British military force by securing bases in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.⁹¹ Later the Minister of Health, Aneurin Bevan continued to argue that the strategic picture might change after the UN was properly up and running, and he therefore found the arguments for strategic benefits to be unconvincing.⁹²

There was concern that other nations would view such a trusteeship as mere British expansionism. It was suggested that the US, or even one of the Scandinavian countries should undertake “the burden of trusteeship”. A trusteeship could also involve Britain “in difficult questions arising out of claims for self-government from these territories”.⁹³ In his memorandum, Attlee had already presented that there was no prospect of Cyrenaica paying for its own development, and the more Britain would do

⁸⁷ CAB/129/2/12: C.P. (45) 162, “Disposal of the Italian Colonies and of the Italian Mediterranean Islands, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs”, 10.9.1945.

⁸⁸ Morgan 1985, 241.

⁸⁹ CAB/129/1/44: C.P. (45) 144, “Future of the Italian Colonies, Memorandum by the Prime Minister”, 1.9.1945.

⁹⁰ Which is often referred to simply as “the Bomb”.

⁹¹ CAB/128/1/10: C.M. (45) 27th Conclusions, 3.9.1945.

⁹² CAB/128/1/13: C.M. (45) 30th Conclusions, 11.9.1945.

⁹³ CAB/128/1/10: C.M. (45) 27th Conclusions, 3.9.1945.

for them, the quicker “shall we be faced with premature claims for self-government”. Attlee finished his argument by stating: “We have quite enough of these awkward problems already.”⁹⁴

Both the history and the prevailing situation of the British Empire can rightly be interpreted as supporting Attlee’s closing arguments. Already during the interwar years, the British Empire was showing signs of growing unrest. Incidents such as the massacre in Amritsar⁹⁵ and the rebellions in the mandate territories of Iraq and Palestine made matters worse, and many colonies kept making petitions and calls for structural reforms. These demands found receptive audiences in Europe among such groups as humanitarians, intellectuals and activists. Strikes and riots became an Empire-wide problem which forced the British government to invest heavily in development and welfare programs in the colonies. But the imperial power to govern had its limits, and when push came to shove, the only way to keep the people under control was brute military force. This happened, for instance, in Iraq where the British Air Force ended up using such extreme measures as bombing the local rebellious forces to regain control.⁹⁶

As Burbank and Cooper argue, the possibility of anticolonial revolutions should Britain fail to convince its subjects of the benefits of the governing imperial institutions was not the only challenge. There lied an equal danger in succeeding in this. Realising what belonging to the Empire could offer, the imperial citizens might start demanding social and economic resources equivalent to those living in the British Isles. In the era when Labour strived to create a welfare state this could prove to be extremely costly in the colonies.⁹⁷ Attlee and the opponents of the trusteeship had to be aware of these potential future difficulties, which could partially explain their lack of enthusiasm in adding more territory to the British Empire.

There had also been concerns over the heavy cost that the trusteeship could impose on British taxpayers.⁹⁸ The Chancellor of Exchequer, Hugh Dalton continued to draw attention to the possible economic burden the trusteeship could bring about.⁹⁹ According to Reynolds, the Treasury and Board of Trade – represented in the Cabinet respectively by Dalton and Sir Stafford Cripps – made strong cases during the immediate post-war years against Britain’s overwhelming responsibilities by urging that costly overseas military commitments needed to be reduced to achieve financial balance.¹⁰⁰ Bevin, however, dismissed any economic grievances by stressing that accepting the financial burden

⁹⁴ CAB/129/1/44: C.P. (45) 144, “Future of the Italian Colonies, Memorandum by the Prime Minister”, 1.9.1945.

⁹⁵ “During 1919 official overreaction to popular unrest in the Punjab [India] led to the imposition of martial law and thus to the notorious ‘Amritsar Massacre’, when troops under the command of General Dyer shot and killed nearly 400 Indians who were not engaged in political activity.” (Pugh 2012, 244.)

⁹⁶ Burbank & Cooper 2010, 391–392.

⁹⁷ Burbank & Cooper 2010, 413.

⁹⁸ CAB/128/1/10: C.M. (45) 27th Conclusions, 3.9.1945.

⁹⁹ CAB/128/1/13: C.M. (45) 30th Conclusions, 11.9.1945.

¹⁰⁰ Reynolds 2000, 153.

in certain cases – like this one – was necessary. He had made the same point already in his earlier memorandum which was being discussed in the meeting.¹⁰¹ Therefore, economic interests did not seem to have had a significant influence in holding back Bevin's and the Foreign Office's ambitions to acquire the trusteeship.

The Cabinet members who preferred obtaining the trusteeship argued that contrary to what the opposing side was saying, neither the UN nor the atomic bomb would be highly effective for a long time. Therefore, they would not have a significant effect on the strategic side of things. Thus, regarding the near future acquiring the trusteeship would be extremely valuable in a strategic sense. The war had demonstrated how crucial it was for Britain to control the Mediterranean, since the loss of that control had led to "heavy losses and great inconveniences". The First Lord of the Admiralty, A.V. Alexander also stressed the strategic importance of the former Italian colonies from the point of view of protecting imperial lines of communication.¹⁰² By "imperial lines of communication" the First Lord of the Admiralty was presumably referring to the Suez Canal in addition to the need of British control in the entire Mediterranean area.

Both the Chiefs of Staff and Bevin also emphasised how crucial the British control over the Mediterranean area was regardless of the advent of air power:

The security of the route through the Mediterranean and Middle East is vital to the safety of the British Empire. This area is one for which we must, I submit, retain, under the World Organisation, primary responsibility, which we should firmly refuse to share with the U.S.S.R.¹⁰³

It was not seen as likely for the US to shoulder responsibilities in Cyrenaica, and if Britain itself would not undertake the trusteeship, the risk was that the area would be returned to Italy. This would "create great dissatisfaction in the Arab world". Another, even more dreaded potential outcome was that the USSR would gain control of Cyrenaica and thus increase its presence in the Middle East – this was clearly described as a "danger". The possibility of setting up a Jewish settlement in Cyrenaica was also briefly discussed, although it was acknowledged that this would be resented by the local population, the Sanusi.¹⁰⁴

Regardless of the arguments made against the trusteeship, the pressure from the Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office overpowered the opposing views. According to Kelly, the Cabinet decided on 11

¹⁰¹ CAB/129/2/12: C.P. (45) 162, "Disposal of the Italian Colonies and of the Italian Mediterranean Islands", Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 10.9.1945.

¹⁰² CAB/128/1/13: C.M. (45) 30th Conclusions, 11.9.1945.

¹⁰³ CAB/129/2/12: P.P. (45) 162, "Disposal of the Italian Colonies and the Italian Mediterranean Islands, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", 10.9.1945.

¹⁰⁴ CAB/128/1/10: C.M. (45) 27th Conclusions, 3.9.1945.

September that Britain should try to acquire the trusteeship of Cyrenaica in the London CFM¹⁰⁵. This decision is a prime example of the vague language used in the Cabinet conclusions. Kelly clearly states in his research that “The British Cabinet had, indeed, approved on 11 September the joint FO-CO scheme as the basis of the British negotiating position at the conference [...]” – he had earlier explained that this scheme between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office meant acquiring a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica¹⁰⁶.

However, in the Cabinet conclusions from that meeting on 11 September Bevin never directly suggested that a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica should be pursued, but merely hinted it as a possibility among others. There were also arguments from other Cabinet members both for and against the trusteeship. The conclusion of this discussion was as follows: “The Cabinet – Authorised the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to adopt in his discussions on the Council of Foreign Ministers the general line which he had indicated to the Cabinet.”¹⁰⁷ It is nowhere near implied in the Cabinet conclusions that the “general line” meant the suggestion to obtain the trusteeship. Knowing this would require access to the papers of other departments, which Kelly’s research is based on.

Nevertheless, in the attempt to prevent a Soviet trusteeship of Tripolitania, Britain ended up supporting the American proposal of a collective trusteeship instead.¹⁰⁸ Due to the necessary diplomatic strategies Britain did not make an official claim for a trusteeship of Cyrenaica until the 1946 Paris CFM.

The years-long planning and the intense debate prove that the decision to acquire a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica was not a whim nor a random act to demonstrate British power in the post-war negotiations. It was the result of long-term policy considerations and was believed to hold true strategic value – even though not everyone in the Cabinet agreed. And it was, most importantly, a *British* trusteeship they were after in the first place. Another valuable aspect that can be seen in these discussions is that the focus was on whether acquiring a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica would be profitable to Britain. The possibility of being unable to obtain the trusteeship should it be found desirable was not even entertained – and why would a state that saw itself as a great power expect its request to be denied?

¹⁰⁵ Kelly 2000, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Kelly 2000, 53.

¹⁰⁷ CAB/128/1/13: C.M. 30th Conclusions, 11.9.1945.

¹⁰⁸ CAB/128/3/3: C.M. 32nd Conclusions, Confidential Annex, 15.9.1945.

3. The Significance

3.1 Strategic Prospects

Let there be no mistake that the dominant motive was the establishing of a strategic base in Cyrenaica.¹⁰⁹

The debate over a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica was eventually won with arguments supporting its strategic importance. Therefore, it should be further explored what strategic benefits Cyrenaica was expected to offer, and how they could have strengthened Britain's position as a dominant power in the Middle East and thus reassert its great-power status. Despite the high value placed on Cyrenaica, as the region became more unstable and Britain's resources grew thinner, priorities had to be reassessed – and in the end, nothing was more important to the Empire than the Suez Canal.

Many scholars support what is evident in the Cabinet discussions regarding the trusteeship: Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff saw Cyrenaica as a strategically significant territory for military facilities, which would help to secure the interests of the British Empire in the Middle East. Louis is confident in his estimation above about the primary British objective regarding a trusteeship of Cyrenaica, and he is not considerably challenged. Fieldhouse agrees with Louis, and adds that securing Cyrenaica under British control was hoped to offer a replacement for the British base in the Canal Zone.¹¹⁰ Brown points out another dimension in Cyrenaica's strategic meaning. During the Second World War Britain seemed to be close to achieving what no other great power had before: the monopoly over the Arab world from Libya to the Persian Gulf.¹¹¹ In his review, Ashton highlights the importance, which both Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff saw, that British control of the Middle East would secure its position as a great power.¹¹²

At the time, Libya was rather unimpressive and mostly consisted of sand. Bevin acknowledged that the three separate regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan – collectively named as Libya – were “separated from each other by inhospitable and thinly populated desert” and suffered from unquestionable poverty¹¹³. Louis supports this by describing Libya as “the fourth-largest state in Africa

¹⁰⁹ Louis 2006, 506–507.

¹¹⁰ Fieldhouse 2006, 503.

¹¹¹ Brown 1984, 132.

¹¹² Ashton 2011, 152. Ashton's article is a review of Steven G. Galpern's (ed.) book *Money, Oil and Empire in the Middle East: Sterling and Postwar Imperialism, 1944–1971*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Regrettably, it was not possible to gain access for the book itself. Fortunately though, Ashton's review contains information from Galpern's work highly useful for this research, and is therefore utilised as a source.

¹¹³ CAB/129/9/15: C.P. (46) 165, "Disposal of the Italian Colonies. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", Annex A, 18.4.1946.

[...] two and a half times the size of Texas, but it is 95 per cent desert¹¹⁴". Considering the population, Louis presents:

In 1945 it possessed a population of 880,000, of which about 68 per cent was Muslim and about 5 per cent Italian. During the war, the Italians had been driven out of Cyrenaica, and the Italian community of some 40,000 was now concentrated in Tripolitania.¹¹⁵

C. Collins continues to explain that the Italians remaining in Tripolitania were mostly businessmen. There was a very small bourgeoisie in Cyrenaica and no substantial working class. He describes the tribal system organised under the Sanusi leadership in the rural areas as weakened yet predominant. Bevin also recognised that the Cyrenaicans were united in alliance to the Sanusi religious fraternity and strongly opposed the restoration of Italian reign. In his view, they appeared to favour independence under the rule of Idris along with British support.¹¹⁶

The possibility of crude oil reserves in Libya had been considered before its independence. Still, as Collins argues, no occupier had made any significant efforts to exploit or further research this possibility – large quantities of oil were not discovered until 1959. Both Clayton and Ashton in his review stress the importance of Middle Eastern oil to Britain's post-war financial stability. The Suez Canal and Egypt were crucial for oil transports from the Persian Gulf and especially from the Abadan oil refinery in Iran¹¹⁷, and therefore Clayton labels the Middle East as the foundation for British power. Should the flow of Middle Eastern oil cease, it would become impossible to secure the value of sterling as an international currency and therefore sustain the viability of the sterling area as a sphere of British financial influence.¹¹⁸

Ashton's review summarises the simple logic behind this equation: "If oil, paid for in sterling, was Britain's most valuable raw material import, it reduced Britain's financial dependence on the US [...]" The Treasury emphasised the economic importance of the area, meaning mainly the transport lines for oil.¹¹⁹ Therefore, even if the Treasury opposed any unnecessary increase in overseas expenditure – a trusteeship of Cyrenaica being one of them – it could not downplay the importance of the Middle East as a source for the precious oil.

¹¹⁴ Louis 2006, 506.

¹¹⁵ Louis 2006, 506.

¹¹⁶ Collins 1947, 10; CAB/129/9/15: C.P. (46) 165, "Disposal of the Italian Colonies. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", Annex A, 18.4.1946.

¹¹⁷ Britain had dominated this oil refinery until Iran nationalised it in 1951, and forced the British out. Britain was unable to resist this due to its weakened military power and the US's disapproval of using force. (Reynolds 2000, 179–180.)

¹¹⁸ Collins 1974, 12–13; Ashton 2011, 152; Clayton in Brown and Louis 1999, 298–299.

¹¹⁹ Ashton 2011, 152.

As can be seen in the previous descriptions, there was nothing particularly desirable in Libya itself – apart from its location. Bevin described this in April 1946 while also drawing attention to the already existing British presence in the region:

[...] its primary importance to us lies in the fact that these territories are at present in our possession by right of conquest and are under British military administration, and that they flank the main line of Imperial Communication between the United Kingdom, India, Australia and New Zealand. The war with the Axis has demonstrated their strategic importance and any decision as to their disposal must be closely related to the broad question of Imperial Defence.¹²⁰



Map 3: *Cyrenaica's Strategic Position in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.*¹²¹

The Map 3 shows the significance of Cyrenaica's location: it is by the Mediterranean, on Egypt's western border, and conveniently close to the Suez Canal. A military base in Cyrenaica was argued – due to this location – to strengthen Britain's strategic position in the Middle East as well as help control the Mediterranean. Still, it should not be overlooked that Egypt, and above all the Suez Canal, were the focus of British interests in the region. Cyrenaica was never more important to Britain than Egypt. But Britain's hold on Egypt began to slip – and that shook things up.

¹²⁰ CAB/129/9/15: C.P. (46) 165, "Disposal of the Italian Colonies. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", 18.4.1946.

¹²¹ "Map Resources for 1945", *The Cabinet Papers: Maps in Time* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/maps-interactive/maps-in-time.htm?&1945>]. Accessed 20 Mar. 2017. Edited by adding the approximate borders of the Libyan provinces, the Suez Canal, and relevant place names.

In May 1946, Bevin reported a danger of a revolutionary movement in Egypt, and even though it was not directed strictly to the British it could force them to get involved. Therefore, British troops should withdraw from Cairo as soon as possible. Cabinet agreed to inform the responsible officials to reduce the number of British troops.¹²² A few months later Bevin expressed concern regarding the difficulties in the Anglo-Egyptian treaty negotiations at that time. They seemed to be unable to reach an agreement that would satisfy both parties regarding military cooperation and British military presence. Bevin suggested that should Egypt continue to refuse Britain a secure military position, it could arrange its bases elsewhere – Cyrenaica, for example.¹²³

The British fears of losing the goodwill – if they ever truly even had it – of the Egyptians were well justified. The Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 which had granted nominal independence to Egypt still permitted Britain to maintain troops in the Suez base, and allowed it to have transit rights¹²⁴. However, as Brown points out, Egypt had actively sought to decrease British influence in the area for practically the entire time of British control which lasted until their retreat from Suez in 1954, and thus their confrontation should not be belittled¹²⁵. Therefore, seeking alternatives for a British military base outside of Egypt was not an overreaction. Bevin's suggestion for a Cyrenaican base can fairly be seen as reasonable: placing British troops there would both help secure the Suez Canal from a manageable distance while also putting them into a position from where they could still breathe down on Egypt's neck when necessary.

The need to secure British interests in the Middle East even if Egypt's cooperation could no longer be counted on was, however, not the only strategic aspect associated with a Cyrenaican military base. This can clearly be seen when the Dominion of South Africa expressed its strong support for the British trusteeship of Cyrenaica. Its lengthy statement highlighted not only the fear of Soviet expansionism, but tied Cyrenaica into a wider discussion regarding nuclear weapons by directly suggesting that Cyrenaica could be used as a base for an atomic bomb – often simply called “the Bomb”.¹²⁶ The new weapon of mass destruction that the US had introduced to the world by dropping two of them on Japan in August 1945, changed the world which had now entered “the atomic age¹²⁷”.

¹²² CAB/128/5/45: C.M. (46) 45th Conclusions, 13.5.1946.

¹²³ CAB/129/10/19: C.P. (46) 219, “Revision of Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs”, 5.7.1946.

¹²⁴ Brown 1984, 124.

¹²⁵ Brown 1984, 92.

¹²⁶ CAB/129/2/39: C.P. (45) 189, “The Italian Colonies, and British Interests in the Mediterranean-Red Sea Route. Views of the South African Government. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.”, 25.9.1945. Annex II.

¹²⁷ DeGroot 2005, 105.

The Bomb was raised as an issue already when the Cabinet first argued about the necessity of a British trusteeship for Cyrenaica, and whether the existence of the Bomb supported it.¹²⁸ However, the link between a Cyrenaican military base and a British Bomb were not discussed again in the Cabinet for a simple reason: the British Bomb was a top-secret project¹²⁹. It was not even introduced to the Parliament until May 1948¹³⁰. However, the Bomb held such significant value to Britain – and the entire international community – that the rationale behind building one and placing it in Cyrenaica deserves some further consideration.

Both Margaret Gowing – who has done extensive research regarding the British atomic energy¹³¹ – and Gerard DeGroot agree that the value of a British Bomb was above all symbolic. Gowing argues that the decision to build it was not a response to any assumed immediate threat, but based on the belief that it would preserve Britain's status as a great power. Naturally, it would also serve defence purposes in case of another war. DeGroot suggests that Britain saw itself as a power equal to the US and the USSR – the latter one, to the horror of Britain, successfully tested a Bomb of its own in August 1949¹³² – and thus deserved to have this weapon of mass destruction as well. Britain also saw itself as a morally superior nation, and could therefore be trusted with such a weapon.¹³³ Kennedy adds that the allure of a nuclear deterrent at the time was also based on the estimation that it would be a rather inexpensive way to retain great-power independence – a calculation which turned out to be tragically flawed in the coming years.¹³⁴

Reynolds explains the strategic value of Britain's own nuclear deterrent which it decided to pursue. Britain – unlike the US at that time – would have been in the reach of a Soviet Bomb should it build one. Being a small densely populated island, it would suffer excessively as a result of a nuclear attack. Because of this Britain needed a Bomb of its own.¹³⁵ In this light, it can be argued that the base for this deterrent needed to be located away from the British Isles, in the hopes that it would draw any possible nuclear aggression towards the base to destroy Britain's counter-attack capability instead of

¹²⁸ CAB/128/1/10: C.M. (45) 27th Conclusions, 3.9.1945.

¹²⁹ Britain had had a highly developed preparatory nuclear programme which was moved to the US to be a part of the Manhattan Project during the war because of the lack of resources and security risks. (DeGroot 2005, 42; Gowing in Dockrill and Young 1989, 31.) In August 1945, Attlee gathered a secret Cabinet Committee to decide on the country's future nuclear policy. Both Attlee and Bevin were concerned about the possibility of the US isolating itself from world affairs like it had done after the First World War. This could severely affect Britain's security, and a nuclear deterrent was seen as a solution to this conundrum. In January 1947, an even more secret sub-committee was established, and it decided that Britain should build its own Bomb. The Parliament, however, was not informed of this decision until May, 1948. (DeGroot 2004, 218–219).

¹³⁰ DeGroot 2004, 219.

¹³¹ For more information, see Margaret Gowing's books: *Independence and deterrence: Britain and atomic energy, 1945-1952, Vol. 1, Policy making & Vol. 2, Policy execution*. London: Macmillan, 1974.

¹³² DeGroot 2004, 145.

¹³³ Gowing in Dockrill and Young 1989, 38–39; DeGroot 2004, 215.

¹³⁴ Kennedy 1989, 477.

¹³⁵ Reynolds 2000, 152.

obliterating London. Therefore, having a base for nuclear weapons in Cyrenaica can be seen as a fairly reasonable suggestion.

Instead of directly discussing the British Bomb in-the-making, there was talk about placing long-range missiles in a military base in Cyrenaica – or somewhere else in the Middle East. In April 1946, The Chiefs of Staff concluded that this would be the only valuable deterrent against Soviet aggression.¹³⁶ They had also calculated that missiles in the Middle East could reach the South-Eastern USSR.¹³⁷ Building a bomber base in Palestine was also considered.¹³⁸ This was a bold new suggestion, and the idea of bombing the USSR from the Middle East was to remain at the core of British strategic planning for quite some time.¹³⁹

Attlee, however, remained unconvinced by the idea of placing either long-range missiles or a nuclear deterrent in the Middle East. He feared that what Britain saw as defence, the USSR could interpret as preparations for an attack, and therefore “increase the likelihood of war¹⁴⁰”.¹⁴¹ He did not see the base as an alternative target for an attack instead of the British Isles. The Prime Minister expressed serious doubt of whether any Middle Eastern country would allow such a base in their land. He also hoped that securing Britain’s access to the Persian Gulf oil could be achieved through diplomatic negotiations with the USSR instead of bolstering British military presence in the region.¹⁴²

As presented here, the trusteeship of Cyrenaica can justifiably be argued to have held genuine strategic importance for Britain in the immediate post-war years. The trusteeship was meant to strengthen Britain’s position in the Middle East and thus protect its old interests there, especially the Suez Canal and the oil transports, by having a military base – be it nuclear or not – in Cyrenaica. The base was also aimed to counter the growing threat of Soviet aggression. A firm grip on the Middle East would have retained Britain’s international prestige and reassert its great-power status as well. Also, Egypt’s ever-growing reluctance towards British military presence on its soil only added to the willingness to secure another close-by location for British troops.

¹³⁶ “CAB/131/1, DO (46) 47, 2.4.1946.” According to Smith and Zametica 1985, 246.

¹³⁷ “COS(46)108th mtg, 12 July 1946, CAB 21/2086.” According to Kelly 2000, 59.

¹³⁸ Clayton in Brown and Louis 1999, 298–299.

¹³⁹ Smith and Zametica 1985, 246.

¹⁴⁰ “COS(46)108th mtg, 12 July 1946, CAB 21/2086.” According to Kelly 2000, 59.

¹⁴¹ Reynolds 2000, 158. Attlee’s concern can be seen as foreshadowing the yet-to-be-coined logic of the now classic “security dilemma”. According to Mearsheimer, it was presented by John Hertz in 1950 as a way to explain what creates tension among the power-pursuing states by arguing that “the measures a state takes to increase its own security usually decreases the security of other states”. (Mearsheimer 2014, 36.)

¹⁴² “COS(46)108th mtg, 12 July 1946, CAB 21/2086.” According to Kelly 2000, 59.

3.2 Egypt First

Bevin might have placed high strategic value on Cyrenaica from the very beginning, but at the same time he also acknowledged the increasing difficulties in settling the question of Libya. Already in September 1946 he described the complexity of the situation as follows:

It has become increasingly evident that finding a solution for the Libyan problem is a matter of great difficulty and importance. Its geographical importance in relations to Imperial Defence needs no emphasis and the Chiefs of Staff have recently stressed the strategic importance of Cyrenaica as a result of the trend of negotiations for a revision of the Egyptian Treaty. At the same time, the position of Libya as a disputed frontier between Europe and the Arab States makes it difficult to find a solution which will satisfy our military requirements, the interests of Italy and France, Libyan nationalism, and the regional claims of the Arab States.¹⁴³

The following year of 1947 was a turning point for Britain in many ways that affected its aspirations in Libya and the Middle East in general. Losing control in different places around the world only emphasised the importance of the Middle East for Britain as a potential replacement for the lost spheres of influence. However, Britain's existing position in the region also faced growing difficulties in Palestine and Egypt. These events caused Britain to reassess its priorities more than once during the upcoming years.

In 1947 Britain was forced to recognise that the costs and difficulties of maintaining India with its ever-growing nationalist movements were beyond its means. Therefore, during the first two months of the year, the decision was made to withdraw from there. In addition to cut down costs, Britain also had to withdraw its economic support to Greece and Turkey in March 1947.¹⁴⁴

Controlling Palestine also proved to be overwhelming when the hostilities between the Palestinians and the growing Jewish population kept escalating. Simultaneously Britain was under enormous pressure from the US not to prevent Jewish immigration into the territory. When Britain failed to reach an agreement between the two parties to form a binational state, it pulled back from the immensely costly campaign. In February 1947 Britain announced that it would pass the problem on to the UN, and abandon its Palestine mandate and withdraw its troops by May 1948.¹⁴⁵

The events in Palestine also affected Britain's Egyptian policy. Attlee suggested that Britain would concede to Egypt's request it made already in 1946, and withdraw British troops from the Canal area. However, both the military and the Conservatives in the opposition saw the Suez Canal not only as essential to the Empire, but as a symbol of Britain's splendour. They successfully pressured Attlee to remain in Egypt.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Egypt tried to use the situation to its gain by renegotiating the rules

¹⁴³ CAB/129/13/4: C.P. (46) 354, "Policy in Libya", 23.9.1946.

¹⁴⁴ Reynolds 2000, 164; Folly 2012, 153.

¹⁴⁵ Clayton in Brown & Louis 1999, 298–299.

¹⁴⁶ Clayton in Brown & Louis 1999, 298–299.

set in the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in any ways possible. One example which came up in the Cabinet was the Egyptian demand that while travelling through Egypt to the Canal Zone where Britain had military facilities, British troops should not wear official uniforms. In his telegram to the Cabinet addressing the issue in April 1947, Bevin recommended “that a firm stand should now be taken against the attempts of the Egyptian Prime Minister to undermine our position under the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936”.¹⁴⁷

Attlee was also overruled by the Chiefs of Staff in the summer of 1947 when it came to Libya. Behind the scenes, the Prime Minister had persistently resisted the idea of a military base in Cyrenaica – as presented in the previous chapter – because he refused to see it offering any real strategic benefits worth the cost. In the end, the Chiefs of Staff managed to hammer out their preferred policies in the Middle East against the Prime Minister. Kelly presents the meaning of this as follows:

The defeat of Attlee by the Chiefs of Staff and the adaptations of an anti-Soviet, Middle East-based defence strategy by June 1947, which threatened to be undermined by the economic crisis and the lack of secure foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean, enhanced the importance for the British government of securing Cyrenaica as a peacetime base.¹⁴⁸

The Chiefs of Staff also stressed the importance of cooperation and good relations between Britain and the Arab population. There was a growing fear that if the Anglo-Arab relations deteriorated, the Arabs would turn to the USSR. It was recognised that this should also be an important angle for the Americans to consider. It was emphasised that British interests in the Middle East would be difficult to protect without any facilities in Egypt and permanent assured control of Cyrenaica.¹⁴⁹

Britain’s anxieties kept growing when the Minister of Defence’s memorandum about the defence requirements came out in September 1947. It was a gloomy document which captured the weakened state of Britain. The main argument of the memorandum was that the armed forces must be significantly reduced, which was recognised as a huge but necessary risk. These reductions would in practice mean, that the British army would be unfit in “quality or quantity” to participate in a major war or respond to any contingencies for at least five years “and for a considerable further period during which they are being built up”. This would mean consciously weakening Britain’s position overseas, including the Middle East. The Minister of Defence saw all of this as something that “must be accepted in the prevailing economic and financial circumstances” and urged the Cabinet to accept “the serious risks and political consequences involved in reducing the strength of our Armed forces”.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ CAB/128/9/38: C.M. (47) 38th Conclusions, 2.4.1947.

¹⁴⁸ Kelly 2000, 60.

¹⁴⁹ CAB/129/11/17: C.P. (46) 267, “Palestine. Anglo-U.S. Report – Military implications. Report by the Chiefs of Staff”, 10.7.1946.

¹⁵⁰ CAB/129/21/22: C.P. (47) 272, “Defence Requirements. Memorandum by the Minister of Defence”, 30.9.1947.

The annex, to which the memorandum was based on, is even grimmer in its language. It reveals that Britain must base its defence policies on the assumption that no major war would break out in the next five years. It also makes a sinister notion by stating “if attacked we must fight with what we have”. The best way to avoid any offensives is to give the world the impression that Britain still has considerable military strength: “Priority must be given to forces which in peace give the best visible show of strength and therefore have the greatest deterrent value [...]”. Egypt was estimated to be paramount for Britain: “a large mass of valuable stores in Egypt which cannot be abandoned without serious effects on our war reserves” – whereas Cyrenaica is only briefly acknowledged as a place that could hold three battalions.¹⁵¹ By prioritising “visible show of strength” it can be argued that the post-war British defence relied mostly on appearance and hope that there would be no such war in the near future that would call their bluff. Therefore, the required military strength for a great power was built on illusion.

The Minister of Defence also clearly preferred strong British presence in Egypt over Cyrenaica. Bevin, however, had not abandoned his determination to secure Cyrenaica as a British stronghold. In 1947, Bevin attempted to improve the situation by making plans to turn the Middle East into a replacement for India as an important market for British goods. He envisioned that it could be developed into a prosperous producing area, which would benefit the British economy. In Bevin’s plans, Cyrenaica was earmarked as an important British base in the Middle East much as a response to the retreatment from Palestine and the still-growing disagreements with Egypt regarding the British troops in the Canal area.¹⁵²

Bevin’s vision receives understanding from scholars. Kennedy suggests that by abandoning old responsibilities in 1947, Britain was focusing on places which were strategically more important to its imperial interests: “the Suez Canal rather than the Palestine, Arabian oil rather than India”.¹⁵³ M. Collins shares Kennedy’s interpretation regarding the growing importance of the Middle East as an alternative to the lost strongholds. He suggests that: “With India liberated, Palestine abandoned, and Malaya under threat, active steps were taken to reorient British imperialism towards the strategically important site of the Middle East [...]”.¹⁵⁴ During 1947, it was beginning to look more and more apparent that the Middle East was taking the centre stage in British overseas interests.

¹⁵¹ CAB/129/21/22: C.P. (47) 272, “Defence Requirements. Memorandum by the Minister of Defence”, 30.9.1947. ANNEX: D.O. (47) 68, “Defence Committee. Defence Requirements. Memorandum by the Minister of Defence”, 15.9.1947.

¹⁵² Kent in Dockrill & Young 1989, 53–55.

¹⁵³ Kennedy 1989, 474.

¹⁵⁴ Collins 2013, 25.

Things did not, however, proceed smoothly. In January 1948, the Secretary of State for War¹⁵⁵, Emanuel Shinwell estimated that the delay in CFM reaching a decision regarding the future of Libya was hurting British interests in the Middle East. The Cyrenaican people were getting frustrated and because of this “the way is made for the propaganda of other interested parties greatly to the detriment of our position.”¹⁵⁶ What was most likely the cause of such concerns was the growing Arab nationalism. Peter Sluglett argues that during the Ottoman rule the whole concept of “Arab nationalism” and aspirations for self-governance had been something that was only debated amongst the local intellectuals. Nothing that could have been compared to movements such as the Indian National Congress, which was founded already in 1885, existed. The “invention” of more widespread Arab nationalism took place under the British and French mandate rule during the interwar years. As Sluglett presents it: “the Arabs regarded them as colonizers and thus never saw themselves as having been ‘liberated’”.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, Arab nationalism was deeply rooted in anti-British views.

The Cabinet discussed Shinwell’s memorandum and stressed the importance of maintaining the goodwill of the Cyrenaicans. It was believed that the best way to achieve this was to transfer more power to the locals in managing their internal affairs. Also, a “constructive and liberal policy” should be pursued. This was particularly important due to the decision to move British troops from Palestine to Cyrenaica during the summer: approximately 8000 troops would be transferred by August 1948. Therefore, the total number of British troops there might rise as high as to 20 000.¹⁵⁸ Secretary’s notes reveal the points made during the discussion regarding Cyrenaica: “Importance of getting a foot in here. Will be tricky.” and “Emir is friendly”.¹⁵⁹ Based on this, the Cabinet was well aware that the situation in Cyrenaica was getting “trickier” but seemed fairly confident that it could be managed.

Still in February 1948 Bevin estimated that “[...] Cyrenaica is paramount, and our whole policy in regard to the disposal of these colonies must therefore be based on it.”¹⁶⁰ It was not until after the UN General Assembly voted against individual trusteeships in May 1949 and thus destroyed the Foreign Secretary’s hopes to acquire the trusteeship that Bevin flip-flopped on the issue. He then began to place emphasis on Egypt instead of Cyrenaica – as the Minister of Defence had done two years earlier.

¹⁵⁵ Secretary of State for War ceased to be a Cabinet position on 4 Oct. 1946. (Morgan 1985) Therefore, Shinwell was a junior minister, and held this post during 1947 –1950. (Gupta 1975, 409.) This is why Shinwell as a Secretary of State for War is not included in annex II.

¹⁵⁶ CAB/129/23/4: C.P. (48) 4, “Cyrenaica. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War”, 5.1.1948.

¹⁵⁷ Sluglett 2014, 414.

¹⁵⁸ CAB/128/12/5: C.M. (48) 5th Conclusions, 19.1.1948.

¹⁵⁹ CAB/195/6/5: C.M. 5 (48), Secretary’s Notes, 19.1.1948.

¹⁶⁰ CAB/129/24/13: C.P. (48) 43, “Future of the Ex-Italian Colonies in Africa: Provisional Policy of His Majesty’s Government. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign affairs.”, 4.2.1948.

During the autumn of 1949 Bevin circulated two lengthy memoranda in the Cabinet regarding Britain's Middle Eastern policies. In the first one he stressed how "it is necessary to have our main base in Egypt" to counter the main threat which he estimated to be the possibility of Soviet aggression. Cyrenaica only appears in the document twice and very briefly – and is not even mentioned until page five. These remarks mostly deal with the estimated amount of money spent on occupying Cyrenaica.¹⁶¹ In the second document Bevin emphasised the importance of Anglo-American cooperation in the case of a possible conflict, and even raised the possibility of an attack on the British Isles. He proceeded to argue: "In the event of war there is no alternative to the use of Egypt as the main base. Cyrenaica and Transjordan can afford adjuncts but not a substitute."¹⁶²

Louis goes so far in his admiration of Bevin's abrupt shift in tactics that he even suggests that "Bevin and the members of the Labour Government foresaw the eviction from Egypt", which would explain Britain's Middle Eastern policies in the immediate post-war years. Morgan challenges the idea of the Labour leadership's ability to foresee the future by pointing out that during the Attlee government's time in Office, no one foresaw the end of the Empire nor contemplated downsizing it – on the contrary, Bevin pursued to expand it by attempting to take over territories such as Cyrenaica. Anthony Adamthwaite has little sympathy for Bevin's Foreign Office. He concludes that it was overall flawed in its policies. It was unable to analyse either present or future situations, and therefore unable to produce recommendations for actions – and during such a time when Britain had so few cards to play in international relations, more skill and deliberation should have gone into deciding how to use them. Bevin's attempts alone were not enough.¹⁶³

Based on the views of these scholars it is difficult to form a coherent picture of Britain's post-war strategies in foreign policy. However, the Cabinet papers give the impression that instead of having a clear road map, the Foreign Office mostly reacted rather hastily to whatever situations they were suddenly faced with. In most cases, they formed their policies in accordance with the US.

The Cabinet papers support the view that the most important matter in British Middle Eastern strategies was Egypt, and Britain was determined to stay there. Even if Cyrenaica had genuine strategic value which only increased after the loss of Palestine and India, once a trusteeship was off the table it was reduced to more of a back-up plan should things go wrong in Egypt. As resources grew thinner, Britain was forced to prioritise – and it chose to prioritise Egypt and British presence in the Suez Canal. However, attempts to secure British interests in Libya were not completely

¹⁶¹ CAB/129/36/33: C.P. (49) 183, "Middle East Policy. Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", 25.8.1949. Includes: "Middle East Policy. General Principles and Problems."

¹⁶² CAB/129/37/9: C.P. (49) 209, "The Middle East. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", 19.10.1949.

¹⁶³ Louis 2006, 507; Morgan 2008, 236; Adamthwaite 1985, 235.

abandoned even after the trusteeship was lost and Libya became independent, as the forthcoming chapters will demonstrate.

4. The Rivals

4.1 Goals, Interests, and Expectations

The unsolved fate of the former Italian colonies after the war led to a complex situation where the Four Powers had to find a way to cooperate effectively to find a solution that would satisfy all parties. However, the realities of the Cold War were already creeping in. The negotiations grew more and more difficult as time went on, and the world being divided into two rival blocs was beginning to show. Everyone would have to pick a side.

The previous chapters presented the long history of Britain as a significant power in the Middle East as well as its determination to remain as one. The Middle East was also an important piece in the puzzle of Britain's great-power position. However, after the Second World War Britain was not the only one with strategic interests regarding the Middle East. As opposed to the end of the First World War, Britain and France were not the only players in the scramble of the former colonies of the losing side, but the US and the USSR had entered the game – and they had emerged from the war much more powerful than the two old colonial powers. Fieldhouse summarises the situation from the British point of view:

In winning this strategic position, the British competed in a cockpit of international rivalry for supremacy in the eastern Mediterranean. The solution had to be acceptable to Britain's European neighbours, France and Italy, as well as the United States.¹⁶⁴

Libya was without a doubt an important strategic area for Britain. However, to better understand why the Four Powers never reached a unanimous decision over the fate of Libya, the motives of the US and the USSR need to be explored. What were their history and possible ambitions in the region? As Khalil explains, the Middle East possessed high significance in the prevailing world politics:

Hegemony over the Middle East as defined by Washington and London meant dominance over the historical crossroads of commerce, culture, continents, and religion [...] The presence of vast resources, the Suez Canal, and the Holy Land in the same region ensured that its importance was simultaneously genuine and symbolic: the country that controlled the Middle East, in effect controlled the crossroads of the world.¹⁶⁵

Unlike Britain, the US had not been a prominent figure in the Middle East nor displayed much interest in becoming one. After the First World War, there was a brief time after Wilson's Fourteen Points¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Louis 2006, 503–504.

¹⁶⁵ Khalil 2014, 344.

¹⁶⁶ The US President Woodrow Wilson gave a speech on 8 Jan. 1918 that came to be known as “Wilson's Fourteen Points speech”. It was a very idealistic speech full of optimism regarding the future of international relations. For

when the US took a slight interest in Middle Eastern politics. That, however, came to an end rather quickly when the US retreated into political isolationism for the interwar years.¹⁶⁷ The US's isolationism from world affairs became most obvious when the US Senate did not ratify the Treaty of Versailles nor did the US join the League of Nations. The main reasons behind these decisions were President Wilson's poor health after the Peace Conference and the Congress' opposition to both. The US did, however, find indirect ways of protecting its interests in the Middle East.¹⁶⁸ According to Sluglett:

Particularly after the onset of Wilson's illness, the United States was quite prepared to allow Britain to exercise substantial political control in the Middle East provided that this control would act as an umbrella under which American interests could prosper and be protected.¹⁶⁹

The US interests in the Middle East consisted mostly of oil. Especially from the 1920s onwards, private US oil interest in the region increased significantly.¹⁷⁰ Oil's importance had kept on rising ever since it became a vital commodity to industrialised America and Europe in the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁷¹ In 1942 the US State Department recognised the Middle East to be the most important oil producing area outside of the US and the USSR.¹⁷² However, official State-driven American interests for the Middle East were not activated before the Second World War.¹⁷³

During the war, the US State Department treated Libya as a unit and preferred direct international control. According to Kelly, they hoped to create a nation which would "look to the United States as their natural trading partner and moral guardian". However, already in 1943 the US Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed the international control fearing that it would attach the US to a territory where a conflict with the USSR might occur.¹⁷⁴ The US became somewhat suspicious towards Britain as well after the British general election of 1945. The British US Ambassador Lord Inverchapel noted that there had been concern in the US that a socialist Labour government would align itself with the USSR¹⁷⁵. All things socialist were easily interpreted as possible sympathy towards communism and the USSR by the US leadership. In this light, it can be argued that Britain's chances of receiving unconditional support from its ally, the US, were slim in 1945.

example, he called "for an end to secret diplomacy and made other lofty appeals for world disarmament, freedom and navigation, the removal of barriers for free trade [...]" etc. (Sluglett 2014, 417.)

¹⁶⁷ Brown 1984, 105.

¹⁶⁸ Sluglett 2014, 418.

¹⁶⁹ Sluglett 2014, 418.

¹⁷⁰ Brown 1984, 123.

¹⁷¹ Khalil 2014, 309.

¹⁷² Khalil 2014, 329.

¹⁷³ Brown 1984, 123.

¹⁷⁴ Kelly 2000, 52.

¹⁷⁵ Folly 2012, 154.

Unlike the US, the USSR and its predecessor the Russian Empire had shown great interest in increasing their presence in the Mediterranean and the Middle East for a good long while. G.E. Wheeler argues, that despite the Revolution, the USSR continued to cherish the old ambitions of expanding Russian influence there. These objectives were not only based on promoting Russian interest in the region, but were also estimated to offer security from potential offensives from the West. However, Wheeler does not sugar-coat things when stating in his article published in 1959, that Russian attempts to establish a foothold in the Middle East had been until the more promising Soviet efforts in the 1950s “a history of failure”.¹⁷⁶ He continues to argue that before the Second World War “the Arab world was barely conscious of Russia’s existence”. It was the joint occupation of Persia (the present-day Iran) with Britain during the war that offered a chance for the Soviets to explore the Middle East in detail and familiarise themselves with the local culture, while Britain promoted its ally’s fine qualities to the inhabitants.¹⁷⁷

Russia had been debarred from the Versailles agreements because of their separate peace treaty with Germany in 1918, and Stalin was determinant to bring the USSR back to the forefront of European politics, where it had been conspicuous by its absence during the interwar years.¹⁷⁸ The USSR’s post-war objectives were mainly focused on controlling as much of Europe as it could. In addition, it also showed interest in expanding its influence in the Persian Gulf because of the oil reserves there, as well as across the Third World Countries. However, it did not seek to necessarily invade them but aimed at creating Soviet-friendly client-states run by communists.¹⁷⁹

The USSR’s main interests in the Mediterranean area were, according to Mearsheimer, Greece and Turkey.¹⁸⁰ The USSR was also very interested in gaining a trusteeship of Palestine. However, this idea was abandoned as unlikely to happen since despite all the trouble in the area, Britain was not expected to surrender its mandate. Therefore, as an alternative for this, Libya was rated high in the list of Soviet interests due to its location by the Mediterranean.¹⁸¹ Perhaps the post-war years would finally grant the Russians a significant position in the region which they had tried to achieve for so long.

When it came to these aspirations, the USSR saw Britain as its main competitor since taking over Libya would greatly benefit the British Empire which would then control all the eastern and middle parts of the Mediterranean.¹⁸² Britain had held a strong position in the Middle East for a long time

¹⁷⁶ Wheeler 1959, 295.

¹⁷⁷ Wheeler 1959, 298.

¹⁷⁸ Reynolds 2000, 109; Knight 1959, 138.

¹⁷⁹ Mearsheimer 2014, 193.

¹⁸⁰ Mearsheimer 2014, 323.

¹⁸¹ Mazov 2006, 52.

¹⁸² Mazov 2006, 53–54.

and was already occupying both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.¹⁸³ It was assumed that Britain would determinately object any Soviet attempts to gain presence in the area, but a Soviet-American alliance was considered to solve the problem. The Soviets presumed that strengthening British influence in the Mediterranean might not suit the American interests either. This was because the USSR believed that Britain would be one of the US's main competitors in the future.¹⁸⁴ However, this was no a set-in-stone belief, and before the 1945 London CFM the Soviets were worried that together the British and the Americans would block all Soviet attempts to increase its influence in the Mediterranean.¹⁸⁵

Kelly argues that Britain did not view the USSR as an immediate danger to Britain yet during the war. In 1943 the Foreign Office had described the USSR as a friendly and cooperative power which would understand the vital strategic meaning of the Red Sea to the British Empire. It was also at that time when the USSR first indicated that it would support Italy losing all of its colonies, and was expecting to be consulted on the future of those territories.¹⁸⁶ According to Adamthwaite's research, the Foreign Office did not see the USSR as a threat in 1944 but instead deduced that its main objective was security – but suspicion grew during 1945.¹⁸⁷ In the immediate post-war years, the Foreign Office became increasingly hostile towards the USSR because it was now considered a potential danger to Britain and British interests. Bevin was also notably anti-communist and stressed the Soviet threat.¹⁸⁸

In July 1945 – just before Labour took office – the Foreign Office produced an extensive analysis of Britain's post-war prospects in a document *Stocktaking after VE Day*, drawn up by the Deputy Under-Secretary of State, Sir Orme Sargent. The document was not optimistic about Britain's post-war prospects. It noted that out of the Three Powers, Britain was the weakest from both geographical and numerical point of view. The international situation was estimated to be less favourable than it had been after the end of the First World War, since instead of Britain and France, Europe was now mostly controlled by the US and the USSR.¹⁸⁹

Sargent deemed it unlikely that neither of those two powers would consider British interests should they interfere with their own. He also pointed out how the US already viewed Britain as a second-rate power. Sargent suggested two main approaches to fix the unfavourable situation: Britain should encourage cooperation between the Three Powers, the Dominions, France, and smaller West European powers which were not under Soviet control. He also stressed the importance of Britain

¹⁸³ Knight 1978, 151.

¹⁸⁴ Mazov 2006, 58.

¹⁸⁵ Knight 1978, 139.

¹⁸⁶ Kelly 2014, 1021.

¹⁸⁷ "Rohan Butler & M. E. Pelly (eds.), *Documents on British Policy overseas*, Series 1, Vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1984), No. 102." According to Adamthwaite 1985, 226.

¹⁸⁸ Folly 2012, 151.

¹⁸⁹ "Rohan Butler & M. E. Pelly (eds.), *Documents on British Policy overseas*, Series 1, Vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1984), No. 102." According to Adamthwaite 1985, 226.

having an independent policy from the US and the USSR.¹⁹⁰ If someone was cherishing the idea of Britain as a post-war great power, it certainly was not the pre-Bevin Foreign Office.

Based on this document, the British leadership was fully aware that to protect Britain's interests it would have to take the views of its much more powerful counterparts into serious consideration. The Cabinet tried to keep track on what to expect from the US and the USSR in the upcoming negotiations. Brown argues that Britain's only possible great-power rival for the role as the dominant power in the Middle East after the war seemed to be the US. However, it was hoped that the US would agree for the British responsibilities in the Middle East to continue.¹⁹¹ This hope would have included maintaining Britain's position in Cyrenaica.

These hopes suffered a setback when later in September Bevin informed the Cabinet that the Washington Embassy had reported that the US would be willing to allow Italy to keep all of its colonies – as the USSR had deduced as well.¹⁹² Bevin saw this as being the result of the Americans' desire to keep the USSR out of Africa, and feared that it could severely hurt Britain's prestige in the Middle East. However, he also agreed that any Soviet claims for trusteeships should be resisted.¹⁹³ In the Cabinet meeting discussing the Foreign Secretary's memorandum, Bevin assumed that the USSR would support the territories to remain under UN supervision while each of the Allied Powers could establish bases there. Bevin was convinced that such an arrangement would lead to a conflict between the Powers.¹⁹⁴

In the first CFM both Britain and the USSR were extremely surprised when the US Secretary of State, James Byrnes suggested a UN collective trusteeship of Libya, instead of returning the colonies to Italy as the two had expected.¹⁹⁵ A collective trusteeship meant that after a ten-year period Libya would gain independence. Despite Britain's aspirations to acquire a trusteeship of Cyrenaica, the Cabinet decided that the best strategy was to support the US proposal at that time – even if it was not in accordance with British interests.¹⁹⁶

The USSR on the other hand favoured a system of individual trusteeships, and requested a Soviet trusteeship of Tripolitania. It would have preferred a trusteeship of Cyrenaica for its better location closer to the Black Sea, which was strategically vital to the USSR. But Britain had such a significant

¹⁹⁰ "Rohan Butler & M. E. Pelly (eds.), *Documents on British Policy overseas*, Series 1, Vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1984), No. 102." According to Adamthwaite 1985, 226.

¹⁹¹ Brown 1984, 134

¹⁹² Knight 1978, 151.

¹⁹³ CAB/129/2/12: C.P. (45) 162, "Disposal of the Italian Colonies and the Italian Mediterranean Islands, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", 10.9.1945.

¹⁹⁴ CAB/128/1/3, C.M. (45) 30th Conclusions, 11.9.1945.

¹⁹⁵ Knight 1978, 152.

¹⁹⁶ CAB/128/3: C.M. 32nd Conclusions, Confidential Annex, 15.9.1945.

foothold there that the USSR went for Tripolitania instead, since it did not believe in its chances in acquiring a trusteeship of Cyrenaica or the whole Libya.¹⁹⁷ It also became clear in the first CFM that the possibility of using the assumed rivalry between Britain and the US to Soviet gain was groundless.¹⁹⁸

It was becoming increasingly clear that Britain would have to navigate between the US and the USSR instead of being able to disclose its own claim for a trusteeship. This supports the Foreign Office's earlier view, that Britain was not on equal ground with these two great powers. The clashing interests of the Four Powers and their unwillingness to give in resulted to the ending of the first CFM in a peculiar situation where the former Italian colonies were not "owned" by any state after the war. The whole issue, according to Mazov, "turned out to be among the most difficult problems of the post-war settlement".¹⁹⁹ As further investigation of the negotiations reveals, Mazov's assessment is not an exaggeration.

4.2 Anglo-American Relations: A Junior Partnership?

Even though Britain had emerged victorious from the war, and all the lost territories of the Empire were back under British control, it had seriously overstretched its resources in the war, and was in desperate need of American financial aid. Kennedy argues that as opposed to the situation after the First World War, during the immediate post-war years it was impossible to believe that Britain would still be at the centre of world affairs. But the illusion of Britain as a great power lingered even among the Labour politicians determined to make the creation of a welfare state their priority.²⁰⁰ This illusion significantly affected Britain's attitude when entering the negotiations. However, it became clear already in the first CFM that Britain was unable to dictate its terms and expect others to agree. Instead, it had to put aside its own aspirations for a trusteeship to pursue a more important goal: preventing the reoccurrence of US isolationism.

When Byrnes proposed a collective trusteeship, Bevin saw this as an American attempt to block Soviet interests. From the American point of view, a collective trusteeship leading to Libya's independence would be in accordance with the genuine will of the Allied Powers to support the freedom of the former colonies, and assure that they would not be used to further any nation's own military advantages.²⁰¹ In his report, Byrnes himself describes the idea behind the collective trusteeship proposal as follows:

¹⁹⁷ Mazov 2006, 56.

¹⁹⁸ Mazov 2006, 58.

¹⁹⁹ Mazov 2006, 51.

²⁰⁰ Kennedy 1989, 472–474.

²⁰¹ CAB/128/3/3: C.M. 32nd Conclusions, Confidential Annex, 15.9.1945.

There was general agreement that the Italian colonies should come under the trusteeship provisions of the United Nations Charter. Various views were expressed as to the preferred form of trusteeship for the colonies. The American Delegation was particularly gratified that [...] special consideration of the American proposal for a truly international administration directly responsible to the United Nations with a view to the attainment of the greatest degree of independence of the inhabitants [...] It is our view that the object of a trusteeship should be to promote the self-government of the people of a colony and not to enrich a trustee or increase its economic or military power.²⁰²

Kelly argues that Byrnes' proposal was mainly motivated by the will to prevent any potential clashes between Britain and the USSR in the Mediterranean, where the US might have to come to Britain's aid. Therefore, he was trying to act as an "honest broker" by suggesting a collective trusteeship instead of individual ones. Byrnes also saw this solution as something that would "promote collective security in the Middle East as an alternative to British control". It was clear that the US was not keen on the idea of Britain controlling the entire Mediterranean. This was a view that Molotov shared with Byrnes, since he was worried that France and Italy alone were too weak to prevent British domination.²⁰³

Kelly continues to argue that Attlee, already doubtful about a British trusteeship, favoured Byrnes' plan. Even Bevin – though "as eager as Churchill and Eden to defend Britain's position" – was willing to support this because he did not believe that the time was right to present Britain's claim for a trusteeship of Cyrenaica.²⁰⁴ Though, as Knight describes the situation, Bevin welcomed Byrnes' proposal "with a massive lack of enthusiasm".²⁰⁵

The Cabinet papers offer support to both Kelly's and Knight's arguments. Bevin tried to delay in taking a stance after Byrnes' suggestion. He was concerned that the US proposal would treat Libya as a whole – not as separate regions as Bevin preferred – and that Byrnes would not back down on this. Bevin believed that the US proposal was also aimed at trying to please the public opinion at home which might change in time. Therefore, Britain's procrastination would be a useful strategy. However, the Cabinet did not share the Foreign Secretary's views and decided it had "everything to gain" by supporting the American suggestion.²⁰⁶

If it were accepted it would mean that the United States were committed to playing their part in the affairs of this part of the world and to taking a share in responsibility for it. [...] Not only

²⁰² "First Meeting of Council of Foreign Ministers, London, September 11 To October 2, 1945: Report by Secretary Byrnes, October 5, 1946." *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade18.asp]. Accessed 8 Apr. 2017.

²⁰³ Kelly 2000, 53–54.

²⁰⁴ Kelly 2000, 53.

²⁰⁵ Knight 1978, 152.

²⁰⁶ CAB/128/3/3: C.M. 32nd Conclusions, Confidential Annex, 15.9.1945.

would they be carrying a share of political responsibility; we might also reasonably hope that they would bear a part of the cost.²⁰⁷

The Cabinet also pointed out how this solution would look good in public. The final decision of the Cabinet meeting was that Bevin was to support the US proposal of a collective trusteeship.²⁰⁸ This disagreement demonstrates how Bevin was determined not to give in to the US and pursue a trusteeship of Cyrenaica, whereas the Cabinet prioritised ensuring American involvement in world affairs.

Just before the 1946 Paris CFM Bevin pointed out that if Britain hoped to ever secure American support for their interests, they must agree at least to the principles of a collective trusteeship – which were “no imperialist exploitation”. In addition, they would have to accept that Libyan independence should be recognised as soon as practicable.²⁰⁹ Bevin seemed to have been right, since in Paris Byrnes was still reluctant to support a British trusteeship and kept opposing individual trusteeships obtained by any power.²¹⁰ However, according to Kelly:

The military members of the American delegation at Paris hinted that the United States might be prepared to support Britain’s acquisition of strategic rights in Cyrenaica, in view of its intended withdrawal from Egypt.²¹¹

And indeed, after the Peace Conference in 1946, Bevin expressed hopes that the US would no longer be so eager to push for a collective trusteeship but would instead be “more disposed to consider proposals for separate solutions for the various colonies according to their individual requirements” – though they had not directly said so. “There is fairly general acceptance of the United Kingdom’s special interest in Cyrenaica.”²¹² However, as the Secretary’s Notes reveal, Bevin did complain about being in a lonely position in Paris, and that there had been hostility towards Britain.²¹³ So clearly everything was not going smoothly.

During the 1946 New York CFM, Bevin “had not found US Secretary of State James F. Byrnes a congenial negotiating partner”.²¹⁴ Despite Bevin’s troubles with Byrnes, Folly argues that the Anglo-American relations developed rapidly in the immediate post-war years as a response to the new peace-time conditions, and uncertainly moved towards a partnership already in 1946. However, the key year

²⁰⁷ CAB/128/3/3: C.M. 32nd Conclusions, Confidential Annex, 15.9.1945.

²⁰⁸ CAB/128/3/3: C.M. 32nd Conclusions, Confidential Annex, 15.9.1945.

²⁰⁹ CAB/129/9/15: C.P. (46) 165, “Disposal of the Italian Colonies. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs”, 18.4.1946.

²¹⁰ Kelly 2000, 54.

²¹¹ Kelly 2000, 59.

²¹² CAB/129/13/4: C.P. (46) 354, “Policy in Libya”, 23.9.1946.

²¹³ CAB/195/4/49: C.M. 63 (46), Secretary’s Notes, 1.7.1946.

²¹⁴ Folly 2012, 153.

in the Anglo-American relations was 1947 with the Marshall Aid, the Truman Doctrine, and the breakdown of cooperation with the USSR.²¹⁵

Just before these decisive events of 1947, Bevin got the opportunity to talk in private with his new counterpart, the US Secretary of State, George C. Marshall. Bevin repeated the same grievances he had already discussed with Byrnes. He put the blame of Britain's post-war difficulties on the Americans, especially due to the abrupt ending of the Lend-Lease²¹⁶. While making his point of Britain not receiving enough financial support from the US to be expected to hold on to all of its post-war commitments, Bevin addressed the issue of Cyrenaica. He blamed the Americans for the failure of gaining a good settlement on this issue, and added that occupying the region was costing Britain £50 million a year. Bevin refused to see a connection between Britain's economic difficulties and Labour's alleged socialism, but insisted that the problems were caused by American policies. He demanded the US to recognise the impact of such policies and, therefore, see Britain in a different light.²¹⁷ The Foreign Secretary was certainly unwilling to view Britain as a junior partner to the US when giving the new Secretary of State such a harsh welcome. In spite of this, as the year 1947 went on the Anglo-American relations developed towards a closer alliance due to mutual interests – or a mutual enemy.

On 12 March 1947, the US President Truman addressed the Congress and proposed American aid to Greece and Turkey, since Britain was no longer able to support them. He recognized Britain's situation:

The British Government, which has been helping Greece, can give no further financial or economic aid after March 31. Great Britain finds itself under the necessity of reducing or liquidating its commitments in several parts of the world, including Greece. [...] The British government has informed us that, owing to its own difficulties can no longer extend financial or economic aid to Turkey.²¹⁸

Then the President proceeded to stress the importance of American relief to both countries and uttered the famous words that would be the foundation of the "Truman Doctrine". This became the prevailing Cold War policy in American commitment to contain the spread of communism along with Soviet expansion:

²¹⁵ Folly 2012, 150.

²¹⁶ Since March 1941, the Lend-Lease allowed the basically-bankrupt Britain to keep on buying from the US on credit, and thus concentrate on its war efforts, production and essential imports. The Lend-Lease was abruptly terminated after the victory over Japan in August 1945, leaving Britain to face extreme financial difficulties without much-needed American help. The US did eventually write off a substantial amount of Britain's war-time debt (from \$21 billion to \$650 million), and agreed to provide a new loan which, however, was not ratified by the Congress until July 1946. (Reynolds 2000, 143, 150–151.)

²¹⁷ "Bevin to Inverchapel on the 3rd of February 1947, FO/800/51." According to Folly 2012, 155–156.

²¹⁸ "Truman Doctrine, President Harry S. Truman's Address Before a Joint Session of Congress, March 12, 1947" *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: 20th Century Documents : 1900 - 1999*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp]. Accessed 11 Apr. 2017.

I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way. [...] The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died. We must keep that hope alive.²¹⁹

The Truman Doctrine is particularly important to this research study due to its dramatic effect on American views regarding Libya. Kennedy argues that the Truman Doctrine indicated American concern over the USSR seeking to fill the power vacuum created by Britain's withdrawals from Greece and Turkey. Khalil agrees by adding that the Truman Doctrine was "publicly targeted at Greece and Turkey against internal Communist subversion and external pressure from the Soviet Union". Brown stresses Britain's role in this by suggesting that the Truman Doctrine was for the most part inspired by the British warnings that the USSR was threatening the position of the Western Powers in Greece and Turkey. It has even been suggested – by for example Francis Williams – that Britain giving up its responsibilities was a strategic move made in the hope of the US taking over and thus tying itself irreversibly to world affairs. Otherwise Britain could be left alone to face the USSR in Europe.²²⁰ Regardless of Britain's motives or that the Doctrine was targeted primarily on Greece and Turkey, the US had now pledged to resist the spread of communism all over the world. This would include Libya.

The Marshall Plan also played its part in reshaping US interests in the Middle East. According to Khalil, the economic help provided by the Marshall Plan and the success of it was accomplished with cheap oil from the Middle East shipped to Europe via the Suez Canal. Therefore, securing the oil import from the Persian Gulf became highly important in the American policy to contain communism, to which the Marshall Plan was aiming to by bringing countries under the US umbrella by offering financial aid.²²¹ Therefore, the security of the Suez Canal was no longer served British interest alone.

The US was especially worried that underdeveloped countries not truly ready to govern themselves – such as Libya – would if given independence be especially vulnerable to communist infiltration. This was enough to somewhat soften the US's attitude towards the British Empire. Therefore, as M. Collins argues, the US would not stand in the way Britain's imperialistic goals as long as the British Empire could be used as a bulwark against communism. Kelly adds to this by stating that the "US government was prepared from 1947 to follow the British lead in Libya in order to secure its strategic

²¹⁹ "Truman Doctrine, President Harry S. Truman's Address Before a Joint Session of Congress, March 12, 1947" *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: 20th Century Documents : 1900 - 1999*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp]. Accessed 11 Apr. 2017.

²²⁰ Kennedy 1989, 479; Khalil 2014, 315; Brown 1984, 177; "Francis Williams, *Ernest Bevin* (London: Hutchinson, 1952), 263–4." According to Folly 2012, 155.

²²¹ Khalil 2014, 315.

needs”.²²² These strategic needs most likely referred to an air base at Mallaha (Okba bin Nafi, east of Tripoli) which the US had constructed during the war and was seeking to expand. The Americans were willing to pay for the rights and rent of the base which would eventually become known as “Wheelus Field”.²²³ Brown adds to this by listing the important things for the US in the Middle East: oil, global communications, the containment of communism, and the decolonisation of the local states while also ensuring that they would remain with the Western camp.²²⁴

The relations between the two countries deepened during the Anglo-American defence talks at the Pentagon in late 1947 – yet another delicate foreign policy issue not discussed in the Cabinet papers. There Marshall “formally abandoned Byrnes’s policy of collective trusteeship for ex-Italian colonies and supported a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica”, which was endorsed by Attlee and President Truman to prevent USSR influence in the region. It was agreed that the trusteeship could be best attained in the UN rather than in the CFM – or at least any unwanted outcomes could be prevented until Britain could negotiate with independent Cyrenaica about having strategic bases there.²²⁵ It is worth pointing out that they were planning to build an independent *Cyrenaica*, not *Libya*. This suggests that the Americans had agreed to adopt the British view of treating Libya as separate provinces.

Both Kent and Kelly acknowledge that the 1947 London CFM marked the breaking down of the CFM, and therefore as Kelly argues, the end of the cooperation between the Three Powers. This led to a hiatus in dealing with the former Italian colonies until the Italian Parliamentary Elections in April 1948. It then seemed that Britain could rely on America’s diplomatic support, as long as the focus was on the defence of Western Europe and not solely the British Empire.²²⁶

In the official report of the Deputy Foreign Ministers on 31 August 1948, the US finally expressed formal support to Britain’s trusteeship of Cyrenaica, and it was listed as the recommendation of both countries in the report.²²⁷ Following this, in November Bevin and the Secretary of State for War, Shinwell circulated a memorandum containing several annexes in the Cabinet where they stated with great confidence:

²²² Collins 2013, 27–28; Kelly 2000, 66.

²²³ Louis 2006, 507.

²²⁴ Brown 1984, 177.

²²⁵ Kelly 2000, 61.

²²⁶ Kent in Dockrill and Young 1989, 62; Kelly 2000, 61.

²²⁷ CAB7129/26/23: C.P. (48) 113, “Responsibility for the Administration of the Former Italian Colonies in Africa. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War.”, 27.4.1948. Attachment: C.F.M./D/L/48/IC 202, “Council of Foreign Ministers (Deputies). Former Italian Colonies. Recommendations to the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Deputies of the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, The United States of America, the French Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics appointed to consider the Question of the Disposal of the former Italian Colonies”, 1.9.1948.

We shall make every effort to secure the necessary two-thirds majority in the Assembly in favour of United Kingdom trusteeship for Cyrenaica, but even when this has been achieved, there will remain the problem of reconciling the trusteeship with the desire of the inhabitants for immediate independence.²²⁸

Therefore the British trusteeship of Cyrenaica was a matter of “when” – as it had always been to Bevin – and now with American support he was determined to see this through. However, as Kelly presents, Britain and the US could only agree on a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica and a French trusteeship of Fezzan – Tripolitania remained a question mark. Due to the US Presidential Elections in 1948, the issues – now referred to the UN – was postponed to be voted on in the spring of 1949 to Britain’s great dissatisfaction.²²⁹

At a meeting of senior Whitehall²³⁰ officials in early January 1949, it was decided to give priority to securing “a special relationship” with the US. This was based on the conclusion that Britain would not be able to rely on the European countries as a last resort.²³¹ In this light, it is not difficult to see why Britain hurried to support the US proposal for Libyan independence after the UN General Assembly had voted against the individual trusteeships thus destroying British hopes of receiving a trusteeship for Cyrenaica. As Louis describes it:

At a critical time in 1949, the British rallied to an American plan for ‘independence’ that would simultaneously satisfy the traditional aim of American anti-colonialism and check the danger of Soviet expansionism.²³²

Louis suggests that the strong American support for Libyan independence was partly due to guilt caused by reluctantly supporting the British, French, and Italian trusteeships against their own anti-colonial principles. From there on, the US was a strong supporter of independence throughout the African colonies. “It appeared to the British that the same naive panacea for the ills of the colonial world of the war-time years had now resurfaced with a vengeance.”²³³

As the negotiations regarding the future of Libya show, the US was completely uninterested in supporting British interests there until 1947, when they became consistent with its *own* interests of blocking the spread of Soviet influence no matter what. After formally supporting a British trusteeship – which took a long time – and then failing to secure it in the UN General Assembly, the US quickly attempted to regain its moral high ground by insisting it should never had supported such an imperialistic venture in the first place. Sargent’s earlier estimation in *Stocktaking After VE Day* that

²²⁸ CAB/129/30/31: C.P. (48) 261, “Cyrenaica. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for War.”, 9.11.1948.

²²⁹ Kelly 2000, 63.

²³⁰ “Whitehall” is often used to refer to British central governmental administration because most of the administrative buildings are located by or near the road named Whitehall in London.

²³¹ Sir Richard Clarke, *Anglo-American economic collaboration in war and peace, 1942–1949*, ed. Sir Alec Cairncross (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), p. 208, doc. No. 27. According to Adamthwaite 1985, 228.

²³² Louis 2006, 503–504.

²³³ Louis 2006, 513.

the US saw Britain as a “second-rate power” still seemed accurate in 1949. When it came to the settlement of Libya, Britain was never an equal partner to the US but merely something it could use to its own advantage without any genuine interests to Britain’s main objectives.

4.3 Anglo-Soviet Relations: Mutual Suspicion

The USSR can be argued of having been mostly responsible for defeating Hitler since the rest of the Allied forces did not land on French soil until June 1944.²³⁴ There was a growing suspicion in Moscow that its allies were purposely letting Germany and the USSR bleed each other dry by stalling with the landing. This way the Western Powers, by suffering less heavy losses, could dominate the post-war Europe.²³⁵ The USSR felt that its Western Allies did not come to its aid in its hour of need, but instead with Britain concentrated on its Mediterranean bias and the US preoccupied with the Pacific, the USSR was left to face Germany by itself for three years.²³⁶ After the war, the USSR argued that it had both legal and moral grounds to be included in deciding the fate of the former Italian Colonies because the British had only been able to occupy North Africa because of the achievements of the Red Army against Germany and Italy in Europe.²³⁷

The USSR had suffered greatly during the Second World War where an estimated amount of 16 million Soviet citizens had lost their lives, and majority of the industries and infrastructure in the invaded areas had been destroyed beyond repair. However, the USSR was in a much better position than the war-shattered Britain since it had expanded its territorial power across Eastern Europe and thus reclaiming much of the territorial power it had lost as a consequence of the First World War and the Russian Revolution.²³⁸ On top of this, Mearsheimer estimates that after the war the USSR’s economy was the most powerful in Europe.²³⁹ The USSR, and especially its Foreign Minister Molotov went to the 1945 London CFM determinant to achieve a foothold in the Mediterranean they felt they deserved. To the Soviets’ disappointment, no one would back their request for the trusteeship of Tripolitania.²⁴⁰

Molotov justified the Soviet claim by referring to the heavy losses the USSR had suffered when fighting the Italian troops., and by stating that “the Soviet had wide experiences in establishing friendly relations between different nationalities”. Molotov also pointed out – when arguing with

²³⁴ Mearsheimer 2014, 112.

²³⁵ Mearsheimer 2014, 160.

²³⁶ Reynolds 2000, 146. According to Reynolds, it was already the Munich Agreement of 1938 that convinced Stalin that little help could be expected for Eastern Europe from the Western Powers. (Reynolds 2000, 146) So Stalin’s suspicion towards his allies ran deep.

²³⁷ Mazov 2006, 53–54.

²³⁸ Knight 1978, 146.

²³⁹ Mearsheimer 2014, 73.

²⁴⁰ Mazov 2006, 58.

Byrnes – that they were not looking for reparations from the former Italian colonies, or to use them for military purposes. When reporting to the Cabinet, Bevin worried that the USSR would try to increase its influence in the African continent. Bevin also acknowledged the USSR’s strong negotiating position by pointing out that it had “been very successful in establishing her position, conquest on the end of the war, in the various territorial areas in which she was interested in Europe and in the Far East”.²⁴¹

After Bevin’s report, The Chiefs of Staff even considered approving the Soviet trusteeship of Tripolitania – provided that it would also lead to Britain receiving the trusteeship of Cyrenaica – on the grounds that via a single power trusteeship the USSR would only have control over that particular area. Should there be a system of a collective trusteeship, as the US had suggested, the USSR could use its influence in the UN to include itself in the affairs of every former Italian colony. However, the Chiefs of Staff stressed how important it was to keep any hostile power away from the Mediterranean, and from a strategic angle a Soviet base there would be “most undesirable”. With a collective trusteeship, no individual nation could establish military facilities in the area, which was preferable compared to the possibility of Soviet military presence in the Mediterranean.²⁴² Therefore, the Chief of Staff ended up strongly opposing a Soviet trusteeship.

One of the most tale-telling moments in the Anglo-Soviet relations at the time was a private talk between Bevin and Molotov on 23 September 1945 during the first CFM. The discussion had a passive-aggressive tone, and brought out mutual suspicion as well as Molotov’s bitterness about the Soviet demands not receiving support. Knight adds that Molotov’s complicated personality did not make the negotiations any easier²⁴³.

Bevin informed the Cabinet about this conversation in October 1945. During the conversation Bevin had stressed that they should reach a position where there would be no room for suspicions regarding one another’s motives. Bevin pointed out that Stalin had made a statement to Churchill that the USSR had no interest in the Mediterranean. He urged Molotov to be frank with what the USSR wanted, and Bevin would be equally frank with British ambitions. Equality what just what Molotov said he wanted, and for the Soviets not to be treated as an inferior race like by Hitler. Molotov suggested that the USSR and Britain had been able to get along during the war only because the USSR was needed

²⁴¹ CAB/128/3/3, C.M. 32nd Conclusions, Confidential Annex, 15.9.1945.

²⁴² CAB/128/3/3: C.M. 32nd Conclusions, Confidential Annex, 15.9.1945.

²⁴³ Knight 1978, 141. Here Knight paints a harsh picture of Molotov: “Molotov was vain, cold, intolerant, precise, quick to give and take offence, incapable of seeing beyond his own viewpoint. His suspicion was boundless, but he could point it to having served him well in surviving the intrigues of Soviet Politics. [...] Molotov’s strength as a diplomat was tenacity; his weakness was inflexibility.”

while it suffered heavy losses. Molotov also strongly criticised the rejection of the one trusteeship the USSR had asked for.²⁴⁴

Bevin assured Molotov that the Labour Party or any member of it had never regarded the Soviets as an inferior race. However, there was a growing feeling in Britain that they were being treated as inferiors both by the Soviets and the Americans. Molotov denied this on his part. Bevin tried to convince Molotov that by seeking to acquire a trusteeship of Cyrenaica, Britain was not after wealth since there was “nothing but sand”, but was thinking only of the security of the British Empire. The trusteeship of Cyrenaica would also be important to Egypt where Britain had great responsibilities. Molotov expressed that the USSR would support Britain in this.²⁴⁵

Both Knight and Mazov have studied this conversation and can add to Bevin’s report. Mazov presents how Bevin was hesitant to consider any kind of compromise leading to a Soviet base in the Mediterranean. He stressed that Britain worried about something happening there which could cut the Empire in half, and therefore refused Molotov’s offers.²⁴⁶ Knight argues that Molotov continued to challenge Bevin by accusing the Allied Power of treating the USSR in an ill manner by blocking its access to the Mediterranean where Britain had a monopoly – all the USSR wanted was place for its merchant fleet. However, as Knight continues, the Russian merchant fleet in 1945 was nowhere sizeable enough to profit from facilities in Tripoli, and Stalin’s view for a yet-to-be-built Soviet Navy was its role as “loyal helper of the Red Army”. Therefore, Knight argues that the strategic value of Tripolitania was neither commercial nor military, but offered Soviets an existing stronghold in the Mediterranean should something happen in world affairs where such a position would be useful.²⁴⁷

In a later meeting between Bevin and Molotov during the 1945 London CFM, Bevin again tried to explain to Molotov that a Soviet trusteeship of Tripolitania was something Britain could not support, since that would place the USSR as a new power in the area that was a “lifeline” to the British Empire.²⁴⁸ Britain also refused a USSR deal where it would support a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica if in exchange for British support for a Soviet trusteeship of Tripolitania. Instead Britain prioritised Anglo-American relations and supported the US proposal.²⁴⁹ The two could not see eye to eye since neither of them seemed willing to compromise: Molotov wanted Soviet presence in the

²⁴⁴ CAB/129/3/18: C.P. (45) 218: “Cabinet. Anglo-Soviet Relations. Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.”, 11.10.1945.

²⁴⁵ CAB/129/3/18: C.P. (45) 218: “Cabinet. Anglo-Soviet Relations. Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.”, 11.10.1945.

²⁴⁶ Mazov 2006, 60–61.

²⁴⁷ Knight 1978, 149–150.

²⁴⁸ Knight 1978, 153.

²⁴⁹ Kelly 2000, 54.

Mediterranean, and Bevin wanted to keep them away at any cost. Based on their conversations, it can be argued that an Anglo-Soviet agreement on the future of Libya was never in the cards.

There was severe doubt amongst the British leadership towards the USSR's motives from the very beginning. Wheeler points out that questioning Russian – at the time Soviet – objectives in world politics has traditionally been more of a rule than an exception. In Wheeler's words: "Russia's aims have always caused mystification and suspicion."²⁵⁰ Knight argues that British politics also held on to a tradition of their own, dating back to the nineteenth century: "[...] the status quo in the Mediterranean, however it might be arranged between Italy, France and Britain, must exclude Russia."²⁵¹ Reynolds stresses that the careful approach of the Labour Government towards the USSR was not due to any socialist sympathies, but instead suggests it was a product of both caution and suspicion: because Chamberlain had been wrong about Hitler, Britain needed to be careful with Stalin.²⁵²

However, Kelly points out that both the USSR and the US had more pressing interests at the time than Libya, such as the situation in the Far East and the Balkans, and the issues relating to nuclear weapons. He also stresses that the bipolar battle lines in world politics had not been fully formed:

But the extent of East-West divide at this point should not be exaggerated. In fact, the limits of Anglo-American co-operation on the Italian colonies were made at the Moscow Conference in December 1945 when Byrnes showed no desire to back a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica or to alleviate Bevin's fear that the Soviet Union was trying to undermine British empire.²⁵³

The USSR, however, remained suspicious that together Britain and the US were working to block Soviet aspirations. In the 1946 Paris CFM the USSR resulted in supporting a collective trusteeship with Italy's participation, and a Soviet-Italian trusteeship of Tripolitania. As Mazov presents, this was based on the estimation that Italy would be such a weak partner that the USSR could gain influence in the region through it. The USSR also feared that the collective trusteeship supported by the US and Britain would result into spheres of influence between only those two. When Britain proposed an independent state of a united Libya by combining the territories of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, the USSR interpreted that the British knew that this would be rejected and was only trying to provoke the discussion and undermine Soviet claims.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Wheeler 1959, 302. Along with this notion Wheeler offers a wonderful anecdote: "In 1815 during the Congress of Vienna one of the Russian delegates suddenly died. The story goes that when Metternich heard this, he said, 'I wonder what his motive was'."

²⁵¹ Knight 1978, 154.

²⁵² Reynolds 2000, 149.

²⁵³ Kelly 2000, 54.

²⁵⁴ Mazov 2006, 62–63.

The British proposal caused Molotov to withdraw the claim for Soviet participation in a trusteeship for Tripolitania and demanded that all colonies should be returned to Italy. Both France and the US were supportive of this, but Britain was not. The US soon went back to its original proposal of a collective trusteeship. Molotov's saw this kind of shift as proof that Britain and the US were acting together "in a conspiratorial manner, against the other countries 'legitimate interests'".²⁵⁵

In April Bevin had expressed his worries that should the final decision over Libya's future be delayed much longer, it might help the USSR to place itself better for asserting claims in the Mediterranean, and "Libya may become infected with the Soviet propaganda". He also referred to the Soviet request for a sole trusteeship of Tripolitania as being "embarrassing".²⁵⁶ Later Bevin reported to the Cabinet that the USSR had withdrawn their claim for the trusteeship of Tripolitania, and now supported the French proposal of returning all the colonies back to Italy.²⁵⁷ The USSR used this as leverage in the negotiations against a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica – once they had presented their claim in Paris – by stressing how they had withdrawn their own trusteeship claims.²⁵⁸ The "embarrassing" Soviet demand for an individual trusteeship did not stop Britain from presenting its own claim a little later – and being judged by the USSR for doing so.

As things kept moving back and forth, and there were no signs of reaching an agreement a frustrated Byrnes proposed further postponement. Kelly argues, that this was a small victory from the British point of view, since everyone had resisted Soviet claims and its attempts to try to interfere in British interests in the region. After the Peace Conference Bevin believed that the USSR would not renew any of its direct claims²⁵⁹. Nevertheless, as Kelly continues, Britain and the US were still far from reaching an agreement.²⁶⁰ However, it can be argued that from a Soviet point of view the two Western Powers seemed more and more united since they kept on refusing all Soviet proposals.

Knight argues that after Molotov's failure in securing the trusteeship in London due to the opposition of other Powers and the increasing tension in Soviet relations between Britain and the US in Paris 1946, Stalin adopted a more practical approach. He was not going to allow continuing disagreements to danger the post-war agreements and the USSR's significant power position in. Instead of considering the Middle East and the Mediterranean as absolute priorities, he placed a higher value on Eastern Europe.²⁶¹ As Knight puts it:

²⁵⁵ Mazov 2006, 64.

²⁵⁶ CAB/129/9/15: C.P. (46) 165, "Disposal of the Italian Colonies. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs", 18.4.1946.

²⁵⁷ CAB/128/5/45: C.M. (46) 45th Conclusions, 13.5.1946.

²⁵⁸ Kelly 2000, 58.

²⁵⁹ CAB/129/13/4: C.P. (46) 354, "Policy in Libya", 23.9.1946.

²⁶⁰ Kelly 2000, 58.

²⁶¹ Knight 1978, 157.

[...] Russia in 1945 was much like the Western powers: a status quo power that was far more willing to take risks to maintain territories acquired by the end of the war than to attain new ones.²⁶²

Mazov agrees with Knight's views about Stalin's practicality. He that regarding Libya the USSR was more interested in its strategic location rather than spreading the communist ideology in the hopes of inspiring revolutionary development. Their main interests there were to gain presence in the Mediterranean and they showed remarkable persistence and flexibility in their diplomacy to achieve this age-old Russian objective by changing their official position several times.²⁶³

Adamthwaite argues that in 1946 Bevin still had hopes for collaboration with the USSR.²⁶⁴ However, the difficulties in dealing with the Soviets kept piling up from the British perspective already at the end of that year. When Bevin briefed the Cabinet about the New York CFM held during November and December 1946, he complained about how the USSR had a much better negotiating position due to its territorial claims, which had already been conceded during the war. Bevin criticised the decision of Britain not having asserted any territorial claims of its own regarding Cyrenaica by stating:

[...] it was unfortunate that we had ourselves renounced in advance any claim to territorial advantage as a result of the war; for, if we could have asserted our right to retain Cyrenaica, we could have spared ourselves our present difficulties in retaining a foothold elsewhere in the Mediterranean.²⁶⁵

The Secretary's notes of that meeting reveal Bevin using stronger language than written in the Cabinet Conclusions: he had suggested that Britain should have claimed Cyrenaica by "conquest", which is much more aggressive than "claim to territorial advantage" or "assert our right to retain". It was no wonder that Bevin seemed so frustrated and grumbled about the troublesome situation, considering another tale-telling detail regarding the negotiations which can also be found in the Secretary's notes. The USSR kept on pressing their own views, and things had gotten so bad that the US delegation had spent one whole day just sitting silent.²⁶⁶

Therefore, if Bevin had had any hopes of finding common ground with the USSR, they were gone by the end of 1946. The difficulties continued in the following year. This can be seen in the report by the Foreign Deputy, Sir Noel Charles, from the Deputies Commission's meeting in London in the late 1947, he described the complex situation:

²⁶² Knight 1978, 157.

²⁶³ Mazov 2006, 49.

²⁶⁴ Adamthwaite 1985, 228.

²⁶⁵ CAB/128/9/1: C.M. (47) 1st Conclusions, 2.1.1947.

²⁶⁶ "We were mistaken in asserting no territorial claims. Med. problem wd. have bn. Easier today if we had claimed Cyrenaica (conquest) [...]", "Russians began by ignoring all recomms of Paris Conference and pressing own original views. [...] Climax when the U.S. Delegn abstained from all comment and sat silent for a day.", CAB/195/5/1: C.M. 1(47), Secretary's Notes, 2.1.1947.

It can truly be said that had the question of deciding the fate of the former Italian Colonies been left to the three Western Powers to settle, some more satisfactory solution would have been found in a few meetings.²⁶⁷

During the Four-Power Commission's visit to Libya on their tour of the former Italian colonies from November 1947 to May 1948, tensions between the Western Powers and the USSR escalated to the point where the Soviet delegation was called back to Moscow in the middle of the trip. Behind this move was the Soviet decision to concentrate on supporting the Italian communists in the upcoming general elections by championing returning the colonies to Italy – or as worded in the Deputies' report: "a bid for the votes of the Italian population for the Italian Communist Party by announcing unequivocal Soviet support for the return of all her colonies to Italy".²⁶⁸

When all Soviet suggestions met opposition in the Deputy Foreign Minister's Conference, the USSR suspected that the Western delegation were trying to delay the solution on purpose so it would go to the UN where they had majority.²⁶⁹ The USSR definitely did not want the issue to end up in the hands of the UN General Assembly.²⁷⁰ In the Deputies report signed on 31 August 1948, the USSR proposed that Libya should be placed under an Italian trusteeship for a definite acceptable term, which was rejected by others.²⁷¹ Since an agreement was not reached, to avoid the UN the Soviets called for an immediate gathering of the CFM to settle the issue. The Western Powers agreed to this but from the Soviet point of view they did their best to make it impossible to reach a decision. The US and Britain would not even send their Foreign Ministers to this CFM session but were represented by other officials. The meeting failed to reach unanimity, and the issue moved to the UN on 15 September 1948.²⁷² As Mazov examines, the USSR adopted a new approach after failing to reach its objectives:

Only after it had exhausted all peaceful means to receive 'a little place of its own in the Mediterranean' did the Soviet Union demand immediate independence of Libya, Somalia and Eritrea, trying to gain influence over the rising national liberation movement.²⁷³

²⁶⁷ CAB7129/26/23: C.P. (48) 113, "Responsibility for the Administration of the Former Italian Colonies in Africa. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War.", 27.4.1948. Attachment: C.F.M./D/L/48/IC 202, "Council of Foreign Ministers (Deputies). Former Italian Colonies. Recommendations to the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Deputies of the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, The United States of America, the French Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics appointed to consider the Question of the Disposal of the former Italian Colonies", 1.9.1948.

²⁶⁸ CAB/129/29/32: C.P. (48) 222, "Former Italian Colonies. Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.", 13.9.1948. Attachment: C.F.M./D/L/48/IC 202, "Council of Foreign Ministers (Deputies). Former Italian Colonies. Recommendations to the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Deputies of the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, The United States of America, the French Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics appointed to consider the Question of the Disposal of the former Italian Colonies", 1.9.1948.

²⁶⁹ Mazov 2006, 69.

²⁷⁰ Kelly 2000, 62.

²⁷¹ CAB7129/26/23: C.P. (48) 113, "Responsibility for the Administration of the Former Italian Colonies in Africa. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War.", 27.4.1948. Attachment: C.F.M./D/L/48/IC 202, "Council of Foreign Ministers (Deputies). Former Italian Colonies. Recommendations to the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Deputies of the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, The United States of America, the French Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics appointed to consider the Question of the Disposal of the former Italian Colonies", 1.9.1948.

²⁷² Mazov 2006, 71–73.

²⁷³ Mazov 2006, 75.

As Brown points out, in the Middle East the US was burdened with its ally's imperialistic past which caused it to inherit the passionate anti-imperialism of the local population. The USSR, however, had the advantage of being seen as an outsider.²⁷⁴ This would be the basis of future Soviet policies in the Middle East.

The growing difficulties between Britain and the USSR during the negotiations only enhanced the already existing suspicions they had towards each other, until it reached a point of mutual hostility. Both were questioning each other's motives and believed the other was working directly against them, which only added to the growing Cold War tensions. What is notable about the Soviet views on Britain is that it had originally considered Britain as being a strong – if not the strongest – opponent on its own. However, as the negotiations went on, the USSR began to refer to Britain more often as a partner to the US, and regarding those two nations as a unit unaware of the disagreements between them. This suggests that Britain as itself was not seen as a powerful player anymore, but its danger towards the USSR lied with its alliance with the US, and their ability to keep the USSR away from the Mediterranean.

4.4 The Curious Case of Italy

Italy had a peculiar effect on the negotiations regarding the future of its former colonies, even though it was not even a part of those negotiations. Returning the colonies to Italy or granting it a trusteeship of one or more of them was continuously proposed, and seemed to gain support easier than other solutions. Both the Italian-Sanusi relations and the Italian parliamentary elections in April 1948 became powerful tools in the disputes between the Powers.

The Libyans had enjoyed a rather loose governance under the Ottoman Empire. Especially as a contrast to this, the Italian regime was “harsh and oppressive”, even “a brutal régime, and a régime of fear”. Whatever the Italians might have accomplished during their rule – such as establishing schools, hospitals and a civil administration – were buried under this.²⁷⁵ Especially the Sanusi fiercely opposed the restoration of any form of Italian control after the war, and in 1942 Foreign Secretary Eden had assured them that Britain would not let this happen, as discussed earlier in this research study.

In Potsdam Italy – on the losing side of the war – was already viewed in a rather accepting light by the Allied Powers:

For their part the three Governments have included the preparation of a Peace Treaty for Italy as the first among the immediate important tasks to be undertaken by the new Council of Foreign Ministers. Italy was the first of the Axis Powers to break with Germany, to whose defeat she

²⁷⁴ Brown 1984, 177.

²⁷⁵ Watts 1951, 70.

has made a material contribution, and has now joined with the Allies in the struggle against Japan. Italy has freed herself from the Fascist regime and is making good progress towards reestablishment of a democratic government and institutions.²⁷⁶

Already in the first CFM, France supported that Libya – presumably Fezzan excluded – should be placed under an Italian trusteeship. Due to Eden’s pledge to the Sanusi, Britain found this proposal to be “morally unbearable” as well as strategically. Later in the 1946 Paris CFM the USSR moved from requesting a Soviet trusteeship of Tripolitania to proposing a joint Soviet-Italian trusteeship of Tripolitania. Britain, unwilling to give the USSR any foothold in Libya and unhappy with the US proposal of a collective trusteeship, answered this by proposing independence for Libya consisting of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. Bevin concluded that neither the US nor the USSR would dare to publicly oppose this since it could severely damage their interests and especially the US’s reputation as “democratic powers”.²⁷⁷

Molotov called Britain’s proposal “selfish” and decried it as an attempt to expand Britain’s influence through an independent Libya. Therefore, the USSR made a counter-proposal of returning all colonies under Italian administration, and withdrew its claim for a trusteeship²⁷⁸. Both the US and France were willing to support the Italian trusteeship of Libya, since neither of them wanted Libya to become independent either. This gave Britain a chance to finally assert its claim for a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica by invoking to Eden’s promise to the Sanusi.²⁷⁹ Bevin described this in his memorandum:

I have made it plain on repeated occasions that His Majesty’s Government intend to abide faithfully by the pledges given to the Senussi tribes of Cyrenaica, not to restore them to Italian domination.²⁸⁰

Bevin’s pledge might have been a powerful argument especially from an ethical perspective, but he also acknowledged all the trouble that an Italian administration in Libya could cause to Britain. Even though there were still a lot of Italians in Tripolitania, there were practically none in Cyrenaica. Therefore, the Italians would be outnumbered by a hostile population there, and might need British military involvement to secure their position. This could hurt Britain’s relations with Egypt and the Arab League and provoke further unrest. However, Bevin was willing to return other colonies to Italy, with the exception that Britain would get the trusteeship of Cyrenaica.²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ “The Berlin (Potsdam) Conference, July 17-August 2, 1945”, *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade17.asp]. Accessed 8 Apr. 2017.

²⁷⁷ Kelly 2000, 53–56.

²⁷⁸ CAB/128/5/45: C.M. (46) 45th Conclusions, 13.5.1946.

²⁷⁹ Kelly 2000, 56–58.

²⁸⁰ CAB/129/10/8: C.P. (46) 208, “Council of the Foreign Ministers, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs”, 22.5.1946.

²⁸¹ CAB/129/10/8: C.P. (46) 208, “Council of the Foreign Ministers. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs”, 22.5.1946.

The 1946 Paris CFM demonstrates well how Italy was used as a pawn in the negotiations. This was not necessarily a bad thing from Italy's point of view – with any luck, a proposal supporting Italian administration in at least some of its former colonies could have been accepted. Therefore, Italy could have potentially gained something without ever sitting on the table where the decisions were made – or at least attempted to be made.

The CFM negotiations did not delay the Peace Conference or led to Italy keeping its colonies. In the Paris Peace Conference in 1946 Italy was formally deprived of its colonies:

Article 17 in the Peace Treaty: Italy renounces all rights to its former colonies. The final disposal of the colonies will be decided jointly by the governments of Britain, the US, the USSR and France within a year from the date when the Peace Treaty comes into force. If the Four Powers cannot reach an agreement within a year, the matter will be resolved by the UN General Assembly.²⁸²

During the early 1948, Britain briefly entertained the idea of requesting a trusteeship of the entire Libya. The Cabinet recognised that in this case it must safeguard Italian interests in Tripolitania. Italy was also important in a wider context of the growing tension between the West and the East:

The Italians have been encouraged by both the French and the Russians to hope that they may be given back Tripolitania in the form of a United Nations trusteeship; and if they are not compensated elsewhere, the resultant disappointment will militate against those elements in Italy who are working with us for the inclusion of their country in a Western Union.²⁸³

Bevin deducted that while Italy was officially asking for the return of all its colonies, it did not really expect this to happen, so they could be reconciled with less.²⁸⁴ This episode supports Kelly's arguments that Britain was concerned on securing the rights of Italian settlers in Tripolitania. The US was also willing to support Italian interests in Tripolitania since it desired to secure its strategic facilities there. However, unlike the USSR, the US did not want to see the matter "become an Italian election issue", so no formal announcements were made at that point.²⁸⁵

Gupta estimates that in 1948 Europe was already divided into two distinctively different ideological blocs²⁸⁶. Much as a result of this, the Italian parliamentary elections on 18 April 1948 became a priority for the USSR. To support the Italian communist and socialist party the Popular Democratic Front, the USSR declared that it supported returning all the former colonies to Italy. However, the Soviet efforts did not pay off as The Christian Democratic Party won the majority in the parliament. It was clear that the USSR would much rather had increased its influence in Europe than in Libya – Italy being essentially important to it. However, since the plan did not bear fruit and Italy joined the

²⁸² CAB/129/13/4: C.P. (46) 354, "Policy in Libya", 23.9.1946.

²⁸³ CAB/128/12/12: C.M. (48) 12th Conclusions, 5.2.1948.

²⁸⁴ CAB/129/24/13: C.P. (48) 43, "Future of the Ex-Italian Colonies in Africa: Provisional Policy of His Majesty's Government. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign affairs.", 4.2.1948.

²⁸⁵ Kelly 2000, 61.

²⁸⁶ Gupta 1975, 285.

Marshall Plan. Thus, Molotov assessed on 10 September 1948 that “the Italian trusteeship was no longer desirable since the Italian government had officially joined the US plan of military and economic assistance” and that Italy would therefore be in “an unfriendly position towards the USSR”.²⁸⁷

Italy was decided to use for Soviet gain in another way: they would now first propose an Italian trusteeship for all the former colonies. When this would duly be opposed, the USSR could present their true preferred plan as a compromise solution, that was to transfer the colonies under a UN trusteeship – the same proposal the US had made already in 1945. At that time, the USSR’s main objective was to avoid the issue from moving on to the UN, and they believed that this proposal would gain support. However, the new-old Soviet compromise solution was not accepted either.²⁸⁸ This demonstrates how the USSR tried to use Italy to advance its own leverage in the negotiations, just like Britain had.

Before the UN General Assembly’s vote in May 1949, Bevin forged a plan together with the Italian Foreign Minister, Carlo Sforza to take to the UN – this was known as the “Bevin-Sforza plan”. This was signed by the two Foreign Ministers on 6 May. There they agreed that Britain would acquire a trusteeship of Cyrenaica, Italy of Tripolitania, and France of Fezzan. After a period of ten years, Libya would gain independence.²⁸⁹ Louis sees the Bevin-Sforza plan as evidence that Bevin had at least tried to work together with Britain’s European allies.²⁹⁰

However, the Bevin-Sforza plan failed when the suggestion for Tripolitania’s could not be agreed on. The motion fell short of being approved with only one vote.²⁹¹ After this, Britain began supporting Libyan independence along with the US. Therefore, Italy was no longer useful – nor popular. According to Louis, the entire Bevin-Sforza plan was received with resentment. The rest of the world saw it as a blatant attempt to restore Italy’s colonial reign.²⁹² Therefore, Britain began to step back from Italy, perhaps in the hope that it would no longer be associated with such negative views that the idea of an Italian trusteeship had inspired.

All of this is almost painfully obvious in the Cabinet papers from the end of May when the new plan was discussed. It was decided to make a statement to formally support Cyrenaica’s desire for self-government and to promote it. Britain would also recognise Idris as the Amir, and in consultation with him “set up a Cyrenaican Government with responsibility over internal affairs”, and nothing

²⁸⁷ Mazov 2006, 70–72.

²⁸⁸ Mazov 2006, 72–73.

²⁸⁹ Bianci 2003, 74; Mazov 2006, 73.

²⁹⁰ Louis 2006, 505–506.

²⁹¹ Bianci 2003, 74.

²⁹² Louis 2006, 506.

would be done “to prejudice the eventual unity of Libya”. It was then noted that “unfortunately, however, the terms of this proposal became known to the Italian Foreign Minister” who was “greatly disturbed” that he had not been consulted, and if such a declaration was made, he would resign from Office. Because of this, the Cabinet agreed to give Sforza an opportunity to formally comment the proposition before making public declarations.²⁹³

The Italian involvement was labelled as “unfortunate” in the Cabinet Conclusions, but the Secretary’s notes reveal an even harsher attitude towards the Italian Foreign Minister. They reveal that France was believed to have leaked the plan to Italy, and it was complained how these two only cared about Cyrenaica because of how it would affect on their own interests. It was stressed that Britain did mean to achieve Libyan independence, while France and Italy did not. The real cherry on top in this conversation was the wording of the final agreement: “Consult Sforza on wording and try to get him sweet, as a matter of courtesy.”²⁹⁴ Clearly, the Cabinet no longer placed high value – or even respect – to Italy.

Even if Italy’s value as leverage declined after the unfavourable UN vote – at least in Britain’s eyes – it can still be argued that it had a surprisingly significant role in the negotiations, even though it had been on the losing side of the Second World War. What is particularly interesting in regards to Britain is that it seemed that the other Powers were generally more accepting towards the possibility of Italian reign over Libya than British, since it was suggested and supported more often – and in 1946 by all three against Britain. Therefore, it can be suggested that Italy’s interests were considered far more in the negotiations than Britain’s – even if it was only used as means to an end. This does not speak highly of Britain’s supposed position as a great power in the negotiations.

5. The Imperialists

5.1 The Empire as a Source of Power

*It was the empire which made Britain great.*²⁹⁵

When examined closer, it is not difficult to agree with Reynold’s core assumption above. The Empire did not only make Britain literally great, as in size, but it provided resources, manpower, and international prestige – all things vital for a great power. The Empire put the “great” in Great Britain.

²⁹³ CAB/128/15/39: C.M. (49) 39th Conclusions, 30.5.1949.

²⁹⁴ “Fr. & Ital. always concerned about Cyr. Because effect on their interests.”, “We do mean to achieve independence: they don’t want it.”, CAB/195/7/35: C.M. 39(49), Secretary’s Notes, 30.5.1949.

²⁹⁵ Reynolds 2010, 23.

Therefore, exploring the British Empire, its foundations and its actions, is crucial in understanding Britain as a great power. How did it achieve that status in the first place? How did it conduct its policies? What was Britain like as a mandate power at the height of its power position? What were the imperial views of the new Labour Cabinet? By answering these questions, it is possible to further analyse British great-power policies as well as great-power thinking during the immediate post-war years.

Before going into specifics of the British Empire and its role behind Britain's "greatness", it should be defined what an empire actually means in contrast to a nation-state. Burbank and Cooper offer a comprehensive explanation of the difference:

Empires are large political units, expansionist or with a memory of power extended over space, polities that maintain distinction and hierarchy as they incorporate new people. The nation-state, in contrast, is based on the idea of a single people in a single territory constituting itself as a unique political community.²⁹⁶

Britain itself was a small, geographically unimpressive island state, both separated and protected from the rest of Europe by the sea. However, by extending its influence throughout the world, and by acquiring colonies to be exploited for economic benefits during the nineteenth century, Britain created an empire which made it an undisputed world power. David Omissi stresses the necessity of the colonies behind Britain's great-power status, since they provided financial wealth which also contributed to domestic peace²⁹⁷. At the very heart of the process of creating a colonial empire were systems known as imperialism and colonialism. Neither of these -isms have specific textbook definitions that could be applied in all cases. Therefore, it is specifically British forms of imperialism and colonialism that should be examined. For the most part, they consisted of economic exploitation, indirect rule, military control, idealism, and a condescending attitude towards people who – from a British perspective – belonged to a different "race".

The simple and short definition for imperialism²⁹⁸ offered by Burbank and Cooper is that it is an extension of power over space. However, this can be exercised in more than one way. Imperialism could, for instance, mean legally recognising another state's sovereignty but in practice treating that state only partially autonomous.²⁹⁹ The nominal independence granted to Egypt in 1936 can be seen as an example of this.

²⁹⁶ Burbank & Cooper 2010, 8.

²⁹⁷ Omissi 1997, 242.

²⁹⁸ According to Burbank & Cooper, the historic root of the word 'imperial' extends to the Roman Empire, where the word 'imperium' "first referred to the king's power to impose execution or beatings, to draft citizens into armies, and to command armies on campaigns". (Burbank & Cooper 2010, 28.)

²⁹⁹ Burbank & Cooper 2010, 293–294.

The simplified definition for colonialism, according to Ania Loomba, is “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods”.³⁰⁰ Loomba also offers an excellent suggestion of how to better understand the relation between imperialism and colonialism, which deserves to be quoted at length:

One useful way of distinguishing between imperialism and colonialism might be to separate them not in temporal but in spatial terms and to think of imperialism [...] as the phenomenon that originates in the metropolis, the process which leads to domination and control. Its result, or what happens in the colonies as a consequence of imperial domination is colonialism [...] Thus the imperial country is the ‘metropole’ from which power flows, and the colony [...] is the place which it penetrates and controls. Imperialism can function without formal colonies [...] but colonialism cannot.³⁰¹

Loomba labels British colonialism as “administrative colonialism” as opposed to “settler colonialism”. This means that Britain used the local authorities and already existing power structures to set up its colonial administration, instead of creating an administration consisting solely of British officials and operating in complete accordance with British practices.³⁰² Brown agrees with Loomba by arguing that British imperialism had for long been based on indirect rule in political and administrative matters.³⁰³

Robert Johnson highlights the flexible nature of British imperial rule. In some places it was – as he calls it – “benign despotism”, and in others it was executed mostly through voluntary cooperation with the local rulers. He continues: “British imperialism can thus be defined as the exercise of power over the domains Britain controlled [...]”.³⁰⁴ Occupation of a territory was often the last resort, since the British preferred to gain control through diplomacy and compromise with the locals. The process was always a delicate balance between potential costs and benefits.³⁰⁵ Burbank and Cooper argue that for British imperialism, “imperialism of free trade” was the essential strategy. It meant exercising economic power enhanced by occasional military invasions. Pugh also recognises the importance of such a strategy. He stresses that Britain’s urgent need for new profitable economic opportunities was the biggest motivator behind the accelerated colonialism especially in Africa.³⁰⁶

However, according to Reynolds British imperialism and the quest to acquire colonies was more than a by-product of economic motivations, and therefore financial interests should not be over-exaggerated. Instead of focusing on “imperialism of free trade”, the “authoritarian and ideological” aspects of British imperialism also deserve consideration. Reynolds argues that this ideological sphere

³⁰⁰ Loomba 2015, 20.

³⁰¹ Loomba 2015, 28.

³⁰² Loomba 2015, 23.

³⁰³ Brown 1984, 134.

³⁰⁴ Johnson 2003, 1.

³⁰⁵ Johnson 2003, 10.

³⁰⁶ Burbank & Cooper 2010, 448; Pugh 2012, 107–110.

contained “deliberate empire-building, racist³⁰⁷ nationalism and calculated social control”. Johnson also strongly argues for the racist nature of British imperialism, where racial identities were seen as something that prevented the colonies from being capable of improvement on their own. This led to the condescending nature of British assistance, often found humiliating by the locals. Burbank and Cooper add to this by agreeing that theories of social evolution and racial distinction were significant factors contributing to the imperial entitlement to rule others.³⁰⁸

The ideological sphere did not only contain racial issues, but also ideas regarding Britain’s duty to help those less developed to govern themselves, which is most famously described in the poem “White Man’s Burden” from the late nineteenth century written by “the popular bard of empire³⁰⁹” Rudyard Kipling.³¹⁰ As Johnson explains, highlighting the morally righteous motives behind imperialist idealism supported the interpretation of British imperialism as a “benevolent mission³¹¹”:

In 1878, the Earl of Carnarvon envisaged an imperialism which bound together ‘a great English-speaking community’ and delivered ‘wise laws, good government, and a well ordered finance... a system where the humblest may enjoy freedom from oppression and wrong equally with the greatest; where the light of religion and morality can penetrate into the darkest dwelling places. This is the true fulfilment of our duties; this, again, I say, is the true strength and meaning of imperialism.’³¹²

Nevertheless, maintaining the Empire required something more than just administrative arrangements, economic measures and idealism: brute force. Even if Britain often sought to exercise softer and more cost-effective forms of power before resulting to aggression, military had always played a vital role in the British Empire and what was seen as British imperialism in both acquisition and maintenance of the Empire. It both protected the Empire from external threats as well as secured internal order by keeping the colonies under control when needed. The basis of British military power was its superior navy which reached all four corners of the world.³¹³ A strong navy was all that Britain needed to keep the possible invaders at bay due to its geographical position as an island state.

³⁰⁷ Both Reynolds and Johnson use the terms “racist” and “racism”. Applying these terms, which are mostly understood in their modern context, in research of history is highly problematic and contains the danger of anachronism. To perhaps enlighten the meaning of the term in this historical context, Johnson offers a quote from John Nottingham, a District Officer in North Tetu, Kenya during the mid-1950s: “I don’t know how you define racism, but being patronising, being paternal, being nice but being very tough are all part of this pretending that the people you’re dealing with are children.” (Johnson 2003, 11.; Nottingham’s exact position: Sanger Clyde, *Reporting Britain’s atrocities in Kenya*, The Guardian, 20.7.2012 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/20/reporting-britain-atrocities-in-kenya>]. Accessed 28 Mar. 2017.) Johnson also offers another, more simplistic definition for racism: “[it] is a belief that some races are inherently superior, and that others are inferior and those races therefore require different treatment.” (Johnson 2003, 107.) Whatever the offered definition for “racism”, this research study takes the term with a grain of salt, while it does not seek to question or in any way deny the historical evidence of British often treating people other than white Caucasians as inferiors.

³⁰⁸ Reynolds 2000, 28; Johnson 2003, 11; Burbank & Cooper 2010, 448.

³⁰⁹ Reynolds 2000, 9.

³¹⁰ Pugh 2012, 111.

³¹¹ Johnson 2003, 3.

³¹² Johnson 2003, 3.

³¹³ Johnson 2003, 4–5.

According to Mearsheimer, the fact that the British Isles were protected by water was the basis for Britain's status as a great power for four centuries.³¹⁴ However, this naturally changed along with the rise of air power.

Reynolds demonstrates the importance of the British military by suggesting that even though Britain did not have the military capacity to have a say in the European wars during the late nineteenth century, it was above all the British *threat* of force that kept the British Empire together. Even though the British army was not considered a menace on the Continent, it was without a doubt superior in the British colonies.³¹⁵ Mostly due to this, Britain never made any serious attempts to dominate the continental Europe.³¹⁶ Also, regardless of the expansionist nature of Britain, while being an undeniable great power it never sought to conquer another great power. The wars it fought were aimed at strategic interests and defence.³¹⁷

In the late nineteenth century, the British Empire consisted of the so-called White Colonies³¹⁸, the Indian Empire, and several protectorates and colonies in Africa, the Far East, the Pacific, and South America.³¹⁹ The Empire reached its peak – at least in a geographical sense – after Britain emerged victorious from the First World War. As a result, Britain received more control over the former Ottoman Empire by receiving mandates for Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine.³²⁰ The Empire thus covered nearly a quarter of the Earth's land area with over 500 million imperial subjects.³²¹

The First World did not have major destabilising effects on the British Empire. According to Reynolds, “the empire and the international system gradually became more stable and less threatening” after the immediate post-war instability had calmed down. Pugh agrees that at that time imperialists had many reasons to be happy since both imperial unity and strength had proven themselves during the war: both India and the Dominions had sent approximately 2,5 million troops, and the leaders of the White Colonies took part in the Imperial War Cabinet. However, he continues to argue that these significant imperial contributions during the war only created an illusion of imperial power: “In reality the interwar Europe was weakened by economic depression, by nationalism, and divided counsels at home.”³²²

³¹⁴ Mearsheimer 2014, 126.

³¹⁵ Reynolds 2000, 26.

³¹⁶ Mearsheimer 2014, 265.

³¹⁷ Mearsheimer 2014, 136.

³¹⁸ Meaning Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. (Reynolds 2000, 23.)

³¹⁹ Pugh 2012, 107–110.

³²⁰ Reynolds 2000, 103–104; Pugh 2012, 242; Brown 1984 90–91.

³²¹ Reynolds 2000, 23.

³²² Reynolds 2000, 102; Pugh 2012, 242.

Reynolds adds to the weakening aspects of the Empire by pointing out that Britain did not “own” these “possessions”, and in most cases the control was only skin-deep. And whereas the newly-defined Dominions gained a fairly independent position in 1931³²³, the non-white colonies were regarded as incapable of self-government even well after 1945. Britain also had little to no interest in developing the colonies. Reynolds calls this a “cut-price empire – Britain was getting little out, but putting little in”.³²⁴

Imperial contributions in the Second World War were crucial when the Dominions mobilised 2 million and India 2,5 million troops to fight alongside the 5,9 million troops raised by Britain.³²⁵ The imperial power was not only obvious in drafting troops, but in controlling colonial economies and suppressing political rights. According to Reynolds, during the war Britain’s actions were more imperialistic than ever before. An example of this was the nominally independent Egypt where the British formed a government favourable to Britain by force³²⁶. The cost of the Empire was also rising, especially when Britain had to pay for the Indian army’s participation in the war, which resulted in Britain being in huge debt to India once the war was over.³²⁷

After the war, British policymakers still believed that it would be possible to retain the status of a great power. The basis for this kind of thinking was the Empire:

A familiarity with all regions of the world, some excellent contacts and a shared heritage suggested that there would still be a distinctively British sphere of influence to be cultivated and exploited. Part of the genius of the British Empire had been to maintain itself for a remarkably small administrative and military outlay. Skillful diplomacy might at least to some extent compensate for reduced power.³²⁸

Therefore, it can be argued that Reynolds’ opening statement in this chapter held true in 1945: the Empire was believed to make Britain great.

³²³ Meaning the former “White Colonies”. At the 1926 Imperial Conference the Dominions were defined as “autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown”. This was embodied in the Statute of Westminster in 1931. (Pugh 2012, 242.) Dominions were simultaneously *within* the British Empire and *members* of the Commonwealth with equal status to that of Britain. While the Dominions were seen as a part of the same polity with the colonies, this particular terminology separated the two as having very different political positions. (Burbank & Cooper 2010, 390.) This transformed the ‘white’ Empire into a ‘Commonwealth’ of independent nations each with the same monarch. Britain as the Mother Country was left with an unlimited obligation to defend the Dominions but enjoyed no guarantees of Dominion support, diplomatic or military, in return. (Barnett 1995, 18.)

³²⁴ Reynolds 2000, 24–25.

³²⁵ Reynolds 2000, 23.

³²⁶ “When King Faruq tried to form a government which would be more under his control than under the British, Ambassador Sir Miles Lampson “arrived at the royal palace the night of February 4, 1942 accompanied by British troops. Within an hour the ultimatum was accepted. Egypt’s majority party, the Wafd, that had so often been denied office by British or royal machinations (or both) was now brought to power on British bayonets. The Wafd fulfilled its part of the bargain, maintaining public order during those months leading up to the decisive battle of El Alamein.” (Brown 1984, 131.)

³²⁷ Reynolds 2000, 155.

³²⁸ Freedman in Dockrill and Young 1989, 3.

5.2 The Long Shadow of the Mandate System

The idea to request for a trusteeship of Cyrenaica – or asking for a trusteeship in general – could have been inspired by the mandates Britain received after the First World War. If it had been trusted with such responsibilities before, surely the same could be achieved again? However, the world was not the same anymore, as Britain found out. During the CFM negotiations, Britain consistently failed in attempting to assure its interlocutors that it should receive a trusteeship. One of the reasons behind such obvious reluctance towards British rule in the Middle East could – in addition to those already discussed – have been its controversial history as a mandatory state.

Attlee had acknowledged this problem already in September 1945, when he expressed his concern over the possibility that Britain's history as a mandatory power could work against it in trying to acquire any trusteeships of the former Italian colonies:

After the last war, under the system of mandates, we acquired large territories. The world outside not unnaturally regarded this as a mere expansion of the British Empire. Trusteeship will appear to most people as only old mandates writ large.³²⁹

Attlee's grievances were not in vain – the results of the British mandates had not yet been forgotten. During the 1946 Paris CFM, when Molotov accused Britain of only trying to expand its Empire, the Soviet press snatched at the opportunity to put the imperialistic Britain in its place. This was done by drawing attention to how Britain had built military bases in its now-independent former mandate states of Iraq and Transjordan. The press accused Britain of attempting this again with Libya.³³⁰ The old mandate system had come back to haunt Britain.

The only party that offered its support for a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica based on its success as a mandatory power was South Africa. The High Commissioner for the Union of South Africa stated in his memorandum that the British single-power mandates after the First World War were a “record of trust beyond reproach”.³³¹ However, it should be noted that at that time the Prime Minister of South Africa was a soldier and statesman Jan Christian Smuts³³², who had been an essential force behind establishing the League of Nations and therefore had had a large influence in creating the mandate system as well. Sluglett describes Smuts as having been “a firm believer in the civilizing mission of the white races: Europeans were fit to sovereignty, but others were not”.³³³ In this light it can be

³²⁹ CAB/129/1/44: C.P. (45) 144., “Future of the Italian Colonies”, Memorandum by the Prime Minister., 1.9.1945.

³³⁰ Kelly 2000, 57.

³³¹ CAB/129/2/39: C.P. (45) 189., “The Italian Colonies, and British Interests in the Mediterranean-Red Sea Route. Views of the South African Government. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.”, 25.9.1945. Annex II.

³³² Gupta 1975, 409.

³³³ Sluglett 2014, 418.

argued, that notions regarding Britain's successfulness as a mandatory power coming from the South African administration ran by Smuts can justifiably be dismissed as extremely biased.

The mandate system was created in reference to the Arab territories formerly under the Ottoman rule.³³⁴ It was originally coined in the Covenant of the League of Nations, which was hammered out at the Paris Peace Conference, and endorsed and adapted in April 1919.³³⁵ The outlines of the system were specified in Article 22 as follows:

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation [...] The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it [...]³³⁶

In the Middle East, Britain received the mandates of Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine, and France of Syria and Lebanon.³³⁷ It was specifically pointed out in the Covenant that certain territories which had been under the Ottoman rule:

[...] have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone.³³⁸

Brown argues that the mandate system was created as a result of the traditionally imperialistic powers Britain and France being hampered by the newly evolving ideas of imperial stewardship affecting the post-First World War atmosphere. The system "provided a principle for a temporary trusteeship, justified only to the extent that the mandatory guided the mandated territory on the road to independent statehood".³³⁹ The supporters of the mandate system hoped it would prove to be an improvement on colonialism. As Sluglett observes, Article 22 "embodies much of the League's much-vaunted idealism". Both the League and the mandate system were based on "international optimism" – or "Wilsonianism" due to his Fourteen Points Speech.³⁴⁰

³³⁴ Burbank & Cooper 2010, 382.

³³⁵ Sluglett 2014, 416.

³³⁶ "The Covenant of the League of Nations (Including Amendments adopted to December, 1924)", *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art22t]. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017.

³³⁷ Reynolds 2000, 103.

³³⁸ "The Covenant of the League of Nations (Including Amendments adopted to December, 1924)", *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art22t]. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017.

³³⁹ Brown 1984, 89.

³⁴⁰ Sluglett 2014, 416– 18.

Indeed, the US had had a significant influence in the creation of the mandate system, until it withdrew into isolationism. Not only were the mandates idealistically based on “Wilsonianism”, but as Fieldhouse argues, they were supposed to replace the old practice of protectorates which the US viewed as overtly imperialistic.³⁴¹ Now the old-fashioned imperialists would be forced to adapt to a different world along with different kinds of governing arrangements. The mandate system represented a much more indirect form of rule, and received a legal definition in the League of Nations.³⁴² Regardless of all this, as a mandatory power Britain kept acting the same way it had always conducted its policies in the Middle East: through its old practices of indirect imperial rule.³⁴³

The British mandate of Iraq serves as a telling example of the nature of Britain as a mandatory power. Fieldhouse argues that what the Arabs there needed was exactly that “administrative advice and assistance”: help to create a viable independent state. However, most of the Iraqi people were not welcoming to British governance, and wanted them out. A large majority viewed them as conquerors, which resulted in violent outbursts. Britain never won over the hearts and minds of the locals.³⁴⁴

In Iraq, Britain actually managed to build a state with efficient administrative structures and political institutions. However, it failed to protect the minorities, most notably the Kurds and the Shia minority. Nevertheless, in 1931, Britain assured the League of Nations that the rights of the minorities were secured in a fully democratic system. Fieldhouse argues, that this was a blatant lie. Britain needed to convince the League that Iraq was ready for independence – which it was not – for Britain to abandon its mandate to protect its own interests.³⁴⁵ Being a mandatory power was, after all, a costly business.

Because of Britain’s actions, Iraq became independent before the rights of the minorities were in order. This led to an inferior position especially for the Kurds in the new state – and as Sluglett argues, this “Kurdish problem” lives to this day even if in a different form.³⁴⁶ Even after receiving nominal independency in 1932, the country was still run by British advisers and ambassadors. The Iraqi independence was, as Fieldhouse describes it, “largely a fiction”.³⁴⁷ The British maintained their military control even after the independence by having air force and naval bases there, and remained in Iraq until 1955.³⁴⁸ As Fieldhouse presents, Britain left its mandate state when it was convenient for itself, whether the state was truly equipped for independence or not, and continued to use its influence

³⁴¹ Fieldhouse 2006, 341.

³⁴² Brown 1984, 117.

³⁴³ Fieldhouse 2006, 347.

³⁴⁴ Fieldhouse 2006, 341–343.

³⁴⁵ Fieldhouse 2006, 343–344.

³⁴⁶ Sluglett 2014, 424.

³⁴⁷ Fieldhouse 2006, 343.

³⁴⁸ Fieldhouse 2006, 343.

in more indirect ways – as did France with its mandates.³⁴⁹ This way Britain was able to secure its interests in the region without the burden of governing or developing the mandate state.

When estimating the legacy of the mandates system, Sluglett points out that Britain and France did introduce meritocratic civil services in their mandate states, and created technical services and government branches to promote things such as education, public health and agriculture. However, the number of negative aspects of the mandate rule was substantial. Even if the system was created to provide a better option for colonialism, the mistake was to give the mandates to the traditionally colonial empires. Furthermore, there was never a functioning system for the League to regulate how the mandate states were administrated.³⁵⁰

Both Brown and Sluglett label the mandate system as unsuccessful. Brown sees the rhetoric of the system as nothing but hypocrisy of the old European Powers trying to seemingly accommodate to Wilson’s principles while also nurturing their imperial ambitions. Sluglett adds that the mandates remained within the framework of the imperial world which created them, no matter how much idealism was invested in them. Fieldhouse joins them by suggesting that the motives of the mandatories were strongly influenced by European imperialism at that time, and they were merely seeking their own advantage.³⁵¹

Sluglett continues by arguing that the outcome of the mandates “was not all that different from the colonized countries” – except for two things. Firstly, the mandates generally did not last long, and secondly, behind the system there was at least the idea that the mandatory powers would assist and guide the states placed in their care, and help them to reach the point where they could be fully-functioning independent states. However, the eventual lack of development in political structures or other institutions of civil society indicates that neither Britain nor France put much effort into achieving this.³⁵²

Brown argues, that regardless of its success, the mandate system did represent a change of heart in the European system: “Europe was no longer unreservedly imperialist in good conscience.³⁵³” Kennedy, however, points out that that the impact of neither Wilson’s ideals nor Lenin and the Russian Revolution – no matter how different in their ideologies both men shared the distaste for

³⁴⁹ Fieldhouse 2006, 348.

³⁵⁰ Sluglett 2014, 425.

³⁵¹ Brown 1984, 89; Sluglett 2014, 416 – 418; Fieldhouse 2006, 340–341.

³⁵² Sluglett 2014, 425.

³⁵³ “The telling phrase used by Henri Brunschwig to describe the general mentality of European imperialism before the First World War. See his *Mythes et Realities de l’Imperialisme Colonial Francais 1871–1914*, (Paris, 1960).” According to Brown 1984, 89.

colonialism – managed to bring down the Western colonial order and imperial control. It took a more extreme shock for this to happen: the Second World War.³⁵⁴

Interestingly, no record of strong objections towards the obvious French aspirations in Fezzan can be detected, even though it did not succeed in following the League's idealism any better than Britain but was also an imperialistic mandatory power. This suggests that while Britain's poor reputation as a mandatory power was well acknowledged, and most likely played a part in other nations being sticky about a British trusteeship, it was not the main reason behind it. The issue was far more complex, as this research study presents, but the general presumptions attached to Britain and how it had governed its mandates did not further its trusteeship claims either. Britain's record of taking care of its international great-power responsibilities was rather unfavourable.

5.3 “Little Englanders” or “Old-fashioned Patriots”?

*In the first flush of victory after the war, the Labour leadership, especially some of those who had participated in the coalition ministry, had regarded Britain as a great power. Contradictions between the domestic aim of building and maintaining a welfare state and maintaining military bases abroad had very soon become apparent.*³⁵⁵

If the Empire was the source of Britain's position as a great power, and the Empire was founded on imperialism – colonialism being a part of it – when considering Britain's post-war great-power status, Labour's stance in all this requires exploring. How imperialistic was the Labour Cabinet in its policies, and what was Labour's general attitude towards imperialism and the British Empire?

The Labour Party won the general election on 26 July 1945. Labour gained 393 seats out of the possible 640, whereas Conservatives (in coalition with National and National Liberal candidates) gained 210 seats, and polled 47,7 % against Conservatives' 39,7 %.³⁵⁶ This “Labour Landslide” – as it is often called – came as a surprise to the public who expected Churchill to win.³⁵⁷ Morgan argues that this victory could be best explained by the circumstances brought about by the war: “Labour was uniquely identified with a sweeping change of mood during the war years, and with the new social agenda that emerged.”³⁵⁸ The new government was strongly committed to creating a welfare state

³⁵⁴ Brown 1984, 89; Kennedy 1989, 370–371.

³⁵⁵ Gupta 1975, 301.

³⁵⁶ “Briefing Paper, Number CBP7529, 7 July 2016: UK Election Statistics: 1918–2016”, UK Parliament: Parliamentary Business: Publications & Records: Research Publications: Research Briefings: UK Election Statistics: 1918–2016, House of Commons Library [<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7529#fullreport>]. Accessed 15 Apr. 2017.

³⁵⁷ Blake 1985, 307.

³⁵⁸ Morgan 1985, 44.

which was inspired by the Beveridge Report³⁵⁹.³⁶⁰ Even if Labour's main goals were concentrated on domestic policies, it could not ignore imperial issues and Britain's status in the international community.

The harsh truth was that after the Second World War Britain desperately needed its colonies and colonial resources for foreign exchange and world influence.³⁶¹ However, Britain's imperial prestige had been severely damaged during the war when it was unable to defend its Empire in the Far East. Japan successfully occupied Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaya and Burma in 1942, and posed a serious threat to India.³⁶² The imperial forces had been defeated by an Asian army which broke the myth that white Europeans were somehow superior to others. This destroyed much of the mystique behind the invincible British imperial power. Johnson argues that even though Britain emerged victorious from the war, it came with a great cost. Not only was Britain bankrupt, but it had lost its imperial prestige which would eventually lead to decolonialisation.³⁶³

When the Labour Government took Office, it was face to face with a situation where it needed to retain Britain as a great power while the main source of that power – the Empire – seemed to be crumbling. This in practice meant dealing with difficult issues in imperial and foreign policy, which were traditionally not Labour's areas of expertise. According to Morgan, the Labour Party had placed little emphasis on imperial politics when it was founded in 1900 and for a considerable time thereafter: "On empire, Labour was governed by a simple gut instinct that it was against it, just as it was against capitalism and war."³⁶⁴

A general shift in the British political scene began during the Edwardian era, and furthered Labour's growth. The traditionally prioritised politics of the constitution, the law, the Church, and foreign policy gave way to questions regarding the economy, the level of unemployment, the standard of living, and social welfare.³⁶⁵ Labour – which was mostly concentrated on domestic issues – established its position as the second major party as a consequence of this shift, and the 1918 Representation of the People Act which created an electorate that included the working-class majority of the population who were willing support Labour. This forced the Conservatives to pay more

³⁵⁹ Sir William Beveridge, chair of the government's Committee on Social Insurance published his report in December 1942, and this famous report came to be known as "the Beveridge report". The report supported the reconstruction of the social-welfare system, and advocated for things such as national minimum wage, national health service, family allowances, and government's responsibility to maintain the economy in such way that unemployment would not rise too high. (Pugh 2012, 259.)

³⁶⁰ Blake 1985, 317.

³⁶¹ Burbank & Cooper 2010, 411.

³⁶² Pugh 2010, 264.

³⁶³ Johnson 2003, 183–184.

³⁶⁴ Morgan 1999, 234.

³⁶⁵ Pugh 2010, 135.

attention to this new domestic set of issues that had attracted Labour voters, which lessened the party's emphasis on imperial affairs.³⁶⁶ It did not, however, erase the Empire or its significance. Therefore, Labour had to define its stance on imperial matters during the interwar years if it wished to participate in governing the British Empire.

In the mid-1930s, the party leader Attlee summarised Labour's views as follows:

The Empire was going to continue into an indefinite future; Labour, free from imperialist nostalgia and committed to the principle of constructive planning, was the party to run it.³⁶⁷

Labour's exact strategies for running the Empire remained rather vague apart from its benevolent imperial views and willingness to decolonise India.³⁶⁸ Nicholas Owens describes Labour's attitude towards the Empire in the 1930s as varying between "useless" and "a threat to their cause". The Empire itself had no purpose in Labour's domestic programme, and was regarded mostly as a corrupt conspiracy that extracted wealth from the colonies to strengthen the capitalist system back home. The Labour Members of the Parliament would much rather had spent money on fighting the unemployment at home than on overseas issues.³⁶⁹ Morgan describes the interwar Labour as "instinctively anti-imperial".³⁷⁰ Gupta summarises the situation as follows:

Ever since, at the end of the First World War, the Labour Party had emerged as the alternative Government to the Conservatives, it had been ambivalent in its approach to Britain's imperial commitments. A large body of opinion inside the movement was representative of 'little Englanders', who were preoccupied with social transformation at home and anxious to avoid military and political entanglements abroad.³⁷¹

In 1945, there was hope within the party – even strong assumptions – that the newly elected Labour government would end the "continuity of policy"³⁷² and pursue a more socialistic foreign policy. As Weiler presents, the Labour leaders did not share these aspirations expressed by the more radical side of the party, and made it clear that they would continue the foreign policy that had already taken shape in the war-time coalition.³⁷³ Weiler continues to argue that the actual decision to hold on to Britain's status as one of the Three Great Powers was already made during wartime, and the Labour government continued to practice similar foreign policy as the Conservatives to maintain the

³⁶⁶ Pugh 2012, 195–197.

³⁶⁷ Morgan 1999, 235.

³⁶⁸ Morgan 1999, 235.

³⁶⁹ Owens in Brown & Louis, 1999.

³⁷⁰ Morgan 1985, 188.

³⁷¹ Gupta 1975, 346.

³⁷² There had been a principle of "continuity of policy" between the parties ever since the late nineteenth century. In practice this means, in the words of the Liberal Lord Rosebery in 1895: "Whatever our domestic differences may be at home, we should preserve united front at abroad." However pressing the differences between party leaderships, they could generally always agree on the main lines of foreign policy and thus a new government would not impose major changes. (Reynolds 2000, 37.)

³⁷³ Weiler 1987, 54–55.

country's imperial status.³⁷⁴ Both Attlee and Bevin had been a part of Churchill's war-time coalition government, along with other Labour representatives Herbert Morrison, Sir Stafford Cripps, and Arthur Greenwood. All of them besides Morrison had also been members of the War Cabinet.³⁷⁵ They all were members of the post-war Attlee Cabinet as well, therefore bringing the ideas shaped in the war-time coalition along with them.

Reynolds agrees with Weiler's arguments that the Attlee Government brought no exception to the practice of "continuation of policy", and did not fundamentally differ from the Conservative's views that Britain needed to remain as a great power.³⁷⁶ However, Reynolds also stresses that "policy must be understood by reference to personalities as well as structures".³⁷⁷ Martin Pugh supports this by observing that there was no shift to the left in foreign policy, basing his argument on personalities as well as on the influence of the war:

This was partly the result of the wartime experience of the Labour ministers and partly the accident of personality. Post-war policy was dominated by Ernest Bevin as Foreign Secretary and by Clement Attlee, both old-fashioned patriots who remained keen that Britain should retain her status as a Great Power.³⁷⁸

Gupta points out that for the British electorate which had given Labour the majority, the creation of a welfare state was more important than imperial issues. The government, however, viewed Britain as a great power with a significant global role to play. Possible contradictions between these aims were never fully realised. Especially Bevin was convinced that building a welfare state and maintaining Britain's status as a world power were necessarily linked to each other.³⁷⁹

The Foreign Secretary was the most vocal supporter of Britain's great-power status in the Cabinet, and willing to go to great lengths to protect it. "There'll be no messing about with the British Empire," Bevin reportedly announced when entering the Foreign Office.³⁸⁰ Morgan describes Bevin as "physically imposing and temperamentally aggressive, had the presence and personality that Attlee lacked". Barnett labels Bevin as "a robust working-class patriot" who was determined to hold on to Britain's traditional place in the world order.³⁸¹ The Prime Minister has generally been seen as a more cautious figure than the Foreign Secretary, and not the keenest imperialist. He often supported what Reynolds calls "preference for calculated withdrawal from excessive commitments"³⁸².

³⁷⁴ Weiler 1987, 69.

³⁷⁵ "Winston Churchill 1940", *Cabinet and Government: Government's Who's Who* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/winston-churchill-1940.htm>]. Accessed 26 Apr. 2017.

³⁷⁶ Reynolds 2000, 37.

³⁷⁷ Reynolds 2000, 60.

³⁷⁸ Pugh 2012, 311.

³⁷⁹ Gupta 1975, 283.

³⁸⁰ Pugh 2012, 311.

³⁸¹ Morgan 1985, 49; Barnett 1995, 43.

³⁸² Reynolds 2000, 57–58.

Smith and Zametica argue against this traditional view of Attlee being overshadowed by Bevin, and thus quietly endorsing his policy in international affairs. According to them, Attlee was, in fact, a figure of major importance in conducting policy for foreign and defence policy, and he “emerges as Bevin’s opponent is several fundamental issues”. Reynolds agrees with this by arguing that Attlee, who for instance was eager to build the British Bomb, was by no means a “Little Englander”.³⁸³

However, Attlee promoted Bevin to be the one to deal with major issues in international diplomacy instead of himself thus supporting the image of him not having a significant role in foreign policy.³⁸⁴ But according to Smith’s and Zametica’s research based mostly on documents of the Foreign Office and the Chief of Staff, Attlee was actually very straightforward in expressing his own views which often differed from those of the two Offices.³⁸⁵ Attlee’s persistent demur to the trusteeship, which can be detected from the Cabinet papers as presented earlier in this research study, supports this view.

Personalities collided in the Cabinet, as these “old-fashioned patriots” were not, as explained before, in complete agreement on how Britain’s great-power status should be retained. As much as the Cabinet papers aim to portray unity, these disagreements surfaced at times, as the discussions regarding a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica demonstrate. But even if Attlee and Bevin had different views when it came to this particular issue, in general they worked extremely well together: Attlee usually backed Bevin, and Bevin in return had a strong sense of loyalty towards the Prime Minister³⁸⁶.

Both Labour figureheads took on the imperial role quite easily: Attlee, despite all his socialism, held both the Crown and imperial connections in high regard, and Bevin “was also stirred by the by the sentiment of empire, especially in the Middle East”.³⁸⁷ The one thing they both agreed on was that neither of them wanted to dismantle the British Empire.³⁸⁸ Therefore, the Labour government was no less imperialistic than previous governments, and consciously acting as if it was a great power.

6. The Rejection

6.1 Imperial Influence in Decline

Following the assessment of the Labour Cabinet’s imperialistic nature, it needs to be considered what were the policies and tactics the Cabinet resorted to in attempting to acquire a trusteeship of Cyrenaica. Were any imperialistic measures adopted? If imperialism had once built the British

³⁸³ Smith and Zametica, 1985, 237; Reynolds 2000, 175.

³⁸⁴ Smith and Zametica, 1985, 237–238.

³⁸⁵ Smith and Zametica, 1985, 251.

³⁸⁶ Blake 1985, 321.

³⁸⁷ Morgan 1985, 193.

³⁸⁸ Pugh 2012, 314.

Empire and thus its position as a great power, surely these practices could work again? However, practicing imperialism in the 1940's turned out to be quite different from what it perhaps once was.

The preferred strategies in this case were trying to rely on imperial prestige provided by the Dominions, securing the support of the locals acting as benevolent imperialists, and taking the moral high-ground whenever possible. Bevin still believed in Britain's position as a great power and conducted his policies in both imperial and foreign affairs accordingly. If the Empire was the basis of Britain's great-power status, by extended logic it seems sensible for Britain to attempt to make good use of it during the negotiations. After all, it can be argued that occupying nearly a quarter of the world's land mass carries with it a significant amount of political leverage in the international community – a world power with such a vast empire could hardly be ignored by others.

The Labour government was very closely associated with the Dominions³⁸⁹ – even though Britain's prestige in the Dominions had been severely damaged during the war. The nightmare of imperial overstretch became a reality already in 1940 when Britain was forced to inform Australia and New Zealand that it was unable to send its fleets to their aid because those were tied up in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean fighting Germany and Italy. Therefore, these Dominions had to rely on American help instead.³⁹⁰

Apart from the strong views presented by the South African High Commissioner in September 1945³⁹¹, the Dominions did not demonstrate any particular unprompted interest in the potential British trusteeship of Cyrenaica. Bevin, however, wished to give the Dominions a chance to express their views on the matter from early on, on the grounds that they had also fought in the war against Italy. The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs informed the Cabinet that the Dominions did not object the principle of the trusteeship system but “attached the utmost importance to a clear prior understanding as to what the form of such trusteeship was to be”. The Dominions also found the trusteeship forms to be very complicated.³⁹²

The decision made in the first CFM that only the Four Allied Powers – the US, the USSR, Britain and France – would decide the fate of the former Italian colonies raised concerns in the Cabinet. It was feared that this could upset the Dominions.³⁹³ The Cabinet papers do not reveal if any of the

³⁸⁹ Morgan 1985, 192.

³⁹⁰ Reynolds 2000, 139.

³⁹¹ CAB/129/2/39: C.P. (45) 189, “The Italian Colonies, and British Interests in the Mediterranean-Red Sea Route. Views of the South African Government. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.”, 25.9.1945. Annexes I and II.

³⁹² CAB/128/3/3: C.M. (45) 32nd Conclusions, Confidential Annex, 15.9.1945.

³⁹³ CAB/128/6/1: C.M. (46) 63rd Conclusions, 1.7.1946. There was a legal aspect to the Dominions' status that called for consulting them, since according to the Royal Proclamation of 1931, the British Dominions were simultaneously within the British Empire and members of the Commonwealth with equal status to that of Britain. (Burbank & Cooper 2010, 390.) However, this matter was not discussed in the Cabinet.

Dominions expressed particular dissatisfaction over being left out of the formal negotiations. However, given that South Africa had declared such strong opinions regarding the issue, it can be argued that they might not have welcomed this decision with great delight.

During the 1946 Paris CFM the differing views within the Commonwealth surfaced when the Dominions presented their views to the Cabinet. Australia and New Zealand were willing to support the US suggestion of a collective trusteeship in case Britain could not secure the trusteeship of Cyrenaica. As for South Africa, the US proposal was unacceptable because it might increase Soviet influence in the Mediterranean. The one thing all the Dominions agreed on was that the Soviet claims for a single trusteeship in any of the former Italian colonies should be firmly opposed.³⁹⁴ However, as they were not official parties in the negotiations, the Dominions' views were not discussed at length later in the Cabinet. Bevin, however, resented the fact that they had been excluded from the formal talks.

There is a particularly straightforward example from the Conference of the Deputy Foreign Ministers in the autumn of 1948, which demonstrates the negative attitudes towards Britain's persistent requests to consult the Dominions. When the British Deputy Foreign Minister, Sir Noel Charles wanted the Dominions to be able to present their views since they were also signatories of the peace treaty and "their troops had played a principal part in liberating the territories concerned", he was met with a cold response. The Soviet Deputy downplayed this suggestion by arguing that on these grounds the views of, for example, Belorussia would be equally important.³⁹⁵

Even though not having the Dominions actively supporting its cause might have faded the increasingly unpopular imperialistic aura surrounding Britain, it can be argued that this also hurt Britain's bargaining position. By not being able to bring the Dominions into the negotiations, Britain lost a significant amount of its international influence. But as Gupta argues, the fairly independent Dominions "did not always march in step with British plans"³⁹⁶. Reynolds supports this view by pointing out that after 1945 "the positive ties of kinship weakened" as national identities strengthened in the Dominions³⁹⁷. So even if Bevin had been able to try and rely on the Dominions in the attempt of securing the trusteeship, there were no guarantees that he would have gotten the kind of support he was looking for – especially since the Dominions had already differed in opinions before.

³⁹⁴ Kelly 2000, 54–55.

³⁹⁵ CAB/129/29/32: C.P. (48) 222, "Former Italian Colonies. Note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.", 13.9.1948. Attachment: C.F.M./D/L/48/IC 202, "Council of Foreign Ministers (Deputies). Former Italian Colonies. Recommendations to the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Deputies of the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, The United States of America, the French Republic and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics appointed to consider the Question of the Disposal of the former Italian Colonies", 1.9.1948.

³⁹⁶ Gupta 1975, 287.

³⁹⁷ Reynolds 2000, 29.

The Dominions were not the only imperial aspect which affected the attempt to secure the trusteeship. The breaking down of the Empire was hurting Britain by creating new international opponents: former colonies. The Cabinet was well aware of this potential problem. In November 1948 the possible trouble caused by the former British colonies was briefly addressed in the Cabinet by suggesting that Pakistan could oppose a British trusteeship in the UN.³⁹⁸ The Cabinet agreed that India and Pakistan should therefore be informed of the broad outlines regarding the issue since they were interested.³⁹⁹ This information sharing was most likely a way to try to secure some loyalty and support from the former colonies by displaying effort to treat them as equals.

As a result of all this, it can be argued that Britain was not a part of these negotiations as an empire but more as a nation – or worse, as a fading world power as the Empire began to show signs of falling apart when Britain lost its hold on Palestine as well as India. This could only have weakened Britain's position in the negotiations.

It became very clear very fast that the other Allied Powers would not grant Britain the trusteeship of Cyrenaica based on its strategic and imperial interests – nor simply because Britain had asked for it. Allies or not, supporting Britain's geopolitical aspirations was not on the top of anyone's list of priorities, as seen before in this research study. Therefore, Britain needed to find alternative arguments to make its claim for the trusteeship seem justified, and thus turn it into something that the international community could approve of with good conscience.

During the summer and autumn of 1946 the Cabinet discussed how to convince the CFM that Britain should acquire the trusteeship of Cyrenaica. From the Cabinet papers, two main strategies stand out: Britain's trusteeship would be the will of the Cyrenaican people, and Britain's moral responsibility. Bevin described the situation: “[...] it is important that the commission shall be impressed by the desire of the inhabitants to remain associated with us, *e.g.*, under a British trusteeship leading up to independence”. According to Bevin, the locals had expressed their preference for a continued association with Britain since 1940.⁴⁰⁰ The Cabinet agreed that the Four-Power Commission set to evaluate the situation in the former Italian colonies “should be impressed by the desire of the people to remain under our administration”.⁴⁰¹

As a result of these discussions, Bevin resorted to using Britain's moral responsibility as the reason why Britain could not accept the solution of restoring Italian administration in Cyrenaica. It cannot

³⁹⁸ CAB/129/30/35, C.P. (48) 265, “Cyrenaica, Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster”, 16.11.1948.

³⁹⁹ CAB/128/13/34: C.M. (48) 74th Conclusions, 18.11.1948.

⁴⁰⁰ CAB/129/13/4: C.P. (46) 354, “Policy in Libya, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs”, 23.9.1946.

⁴⁰¹ CAB/128/6/21: C.M. (46) 83rd Conclusions, 26.9.1946.

be said for certain, how heavily this burden of moral responsibility was weighing on Bevin or the rest of the Cabinet. However, acquiring a reputation of breaking promises would hardly be an asset in securing good relations with the Arab population. In this light, clinging onto Eden's earlier pledge worked as both preventing Cyrenaica from falling into the Italian hands, and demonstrating how Britain honoured its promises. Britain attempted to display itself as a champion for the Arab interests against other Powers who were willing to restore Italian rule in Libya. However, as discussed earlier in this research study, this strategy only led to preventing an Italian trusteeship – not to securing a British trusteeship in 1946.

Things began to seem a bit brighter from the British perspective when Idris returned to Cyrenaica in 1947 after his exile in Egypt since 1922. His return was for the most part the result of Britain's efforts of urging Idris to return permanently to Cyrenaica.⁴⁰² Idris' close relations with Britain could have been interpreted by the Cabinet as a supporting factor for the British claim for the trusteeship – after all, now there was a pro-British leader in Cyrenaica. But as explored earlier, Idris had had his heart set on independence ever since he joined forces with Britain in the war⁴⁰³.

By 1948 Britain had begun to make concrete plans on how to secure the support of the Cyrenaican people and Idris. In his memorandum, the Secretary of State for War informed the Cabinet that steps had been taken towards creating an Advisory Council in Cyrenaica. There the local inhabitants would be suitably represented and could act in the framework of the current administration. The Secretary also emphasised how disappointed the people were with the constant postponements of settling the question of administration in the area.⁴⁰⁴ The Cabinet agreed that the goodwill of the people must be secured, and this was to be done by transferring more responsibility to them in internal affairs and pursuing constructive and liberal policies.⁴⁰⁵ However, all of these administrative reforms were not guaranteed to secure local acceptance towards British rule through a trusteeship.

Britain's hopes and assumptions for the support of the Cyrenaican people or the Sanusi seemed to have been wishful thinking, and not only because Idris had presented his wishes to form an independent Cyrenaica already during the war. According to Kelly, Bevin's proposal of Libyan independence (which he later withdrew) in Paris 1946 had made an "excellent impression in Cyrenaica"⁴⁰⁶. In this light it seems rather unlikely that a British trusteeship was what Idris and the

⁴⁰² Bianci 2003, 74.

⁴⁰³ Bianci 2003, 72

⁴⁰⁴ CAB/129/23/4: C.P. (48) 4, "Cyrenaica, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War", 5.1.1948.

⁴⁰⁵ CAB/128/12/5: C.M. (48) 5th Conclusions, 19.1.1948

⁴⁰⁶ Kelly 2000, 56.

Cyrenaican people were truly hoping for. Louis even argues, that Idris was happy when the Bevin-Sforza Plan failed, and the British trusteeship of Cyrenaica was off the table⁴⁰⁷.

It can be argued that Britain did resort into imperialistic strategies in some ways – whether this was a conscious choice or not remains a mystery. It attempted to use the power of the Empire to increase its influence. The British also tried to act as benevolent imperialists who would guide those less developed to adopt a western model of administration while also holding true to their old imperial practices which included building administrative structures in cooperation with the locals. In this light, Britain was treating Cyrenaica the same way it treated its colonies. However, it was unable to resort to other imperialistic practices, such as securing its rule by military force or using Cyrenaica to its economic gain – on the contrary, the continued occupation of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania was a financial burden to Britain.

It can also be argued that in this case, rather than practicing imperialistic policies, Britain was arranging the administration in accordance with the very principles of the trusteeship system: further progressive development until the locals could achieve self-governance or independence. This suggests that the trusteeship system itself had some similarities with the ideas of benevolent imperialism.

In the end, all these strategies proved insufficient. Britain had managed to secure the support of the US for its trusteeship of Cyrenaica, and France and Italy were in cahoots with Britain in the Bevin-Sforza plan. However, all of this was a result of them seeking to further their own interests. Not because Britain's imperial might would have pressured them to support it. Not because they saw Britain as somehow being morally responsible for Cyrenaica. Not because they placed any particular emphasis on the will of the Cyrenaicans. Britain failed to convince the international community of the benefits of the Bevin-Sforza plan, and the UN General assembly rejected their proposals. The power of imperial prestige was clearly fading, and it took Britain's great-power status down with it.

6.2 “Frequent Charges of Exploitation”

Imperialism was not in fashion after the Second World War – especially not in the US and the USSR. The US had been a vocal critic of British imperialism already during the war, and pressed Britain hard on the question of India's independence. The US did not approve what it saw as British imperialism, and questioned the morality of it. The American views affected the entire international community which led to Britain trying to steer away from anything that might be considered as imperialistic.⁴⁰⁸ This was evident in Attlee's views already in September 1945 when the Prime

⁴⁰⁷ Louis 2006, 511.

⁴⁰⁸ Reynolds 2000, 30; Weiler 1987.

Minister worried that Britain acquiring trusteeships of the former Italian colonies would seem like “a mere expansion of the British Empire” to rest of the world.⁴⁰⁹

The US had made its anti-imperialistic policies formal during the war by pressuring Britain into accepting the principles of the Atlantic Charter, which was signed by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill on 14 August 1941. This document had a significant role in defining Anglo-American post-war relations. It was partially aimed at ending the colonial rule of the British Empire and preventing the Empire from expanding in the future. Especially the first three principles of the Charter suggested this:

First, their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other; Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned; Third, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them;⁴¹⁰

Since Britain’s economic struggles lasted much longer than the government had anticipated in 1945, Britain grew more and more reliant on US financial support. Although Britain initially viewed this “special relationship” between the two as an equal partnership, it was made clear – even though never formally stated – that the US would not support British imperial interests and therefore would only accept liberal colonial policies which would aim at independence.⁴¹¹ Had Britain been a completely self-sufficient great power, strong enough to hold its own without American help, it might have been able to interpret the principles of the Atlantic Charter more as guidelines than actual rules. However, Britain was desperate for cooperation with the US during the post-war years, and because of this, American anti-imperialism continued to affect British policies.

The US acted in accordance with its anti-imperialistic views right from the beginning of the CFM negotiations. When the US had proposed a collective trusteeship in the 1945 London CFM, one of the main principles of such an arrangement was that “there should be no imperialist exploitation of the ex-Italian Colonies”. Bevin expressed his frustration before the 1946 Paris CFM by stating that “the Commonwealth would be exposed once more to a charge of imperialism if any part of the Italian Colonies were placed under British rule”.⁴¹²

The USSR was even less forgiving than the US when it came to imperialism. The Marxist theories interpret that there is a strong connection between imperialism and capitalism, both equally horrible.

⁴⁰⁹ CAB/129/1/44: C.P. (45) 144., “Future of the Italian Colonies”, Memorandum by the Prime Minister., 1.9.1945.

⁴¹⁰ “Atlantic Charter”, *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>]. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017.

⁴¹¹ Clayton in Brown and Louis 1999, 294–295.

⁴¹² CAB/129/9/15: C.P. (46) 165, “Disposal of the Italian Colonies. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs”, 18.4.1946.

During the First World War, Lenin had even published a writing called *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* directed against “the United States of Europe”.⁴¹³ Despite that Stalin was perhaps pursuing his objectives from a realist perspective rather than idealistic, anti-imperialism was still deeply rooted in the foundations of the communist USSR.

During the 1946 Paris CFM Molotov expressed resentment towards the idea that the British Empire would expand when Soviet expansionist claims were dismissed. He continued to suggest that Britain already had enough colonies. Bevin responded by stating that he considered such accusations rich coming from a country covering a significant amount of the world’s surface.⁴¹⁴ What this exchange of words reveals – apart from the slightly taunting nature of it – is that from the Soviet perspective Britain was only attempting to hoard more colonies. Molotov definitely saw Britain as an imperialistic actor – as well as practically every Western Power – despite the USSR’s own expansionism.

The Empire was not particularly popular at home either after the war – although as Morgan points out, “the people were also capable of being excited by the majesty and pomp of empire”. According to Pugh, in 1945 when Labour won the election, the public was far more interested in domestic issues than imperial affairs. Even losing India did little to upset them – or as Pugh himself puts it: “most people frankly did not give a damn”.⁴¹⁵ It can be argued that this most likely had little to do with the public’s ideological or moral critique towards imperialism itself, but was mostly caused by the war-torn nation wanting to focus on increasing its own everyday wellbeing. Imperial issues could have seemed very distant to people whose main concern was to improve their own living standards as they tried to move on from the horrors of war. Whatever the reason behind it, the unpopularity of the Empire amongst the electorate surely did not make pursuing imperial goals any easier for the Labour Government.

All of this did not go unnoticed in the Cabinet. It was perfectly aware of the disfavour of the British Empire and everything referring to imperialism. In addition to Bevin’s earlier remark of “once again” being accused of imperialism, two particularly telling examples of this self-awareness can be found in the Cabinet papers, which reveal how delicate the situation was.

In April 1947, the Secretary of State for War informed the Cabinet about the findings of a Cabinet approved Working Party that had been sent to Cyrenaica to assess the situation there. He stressed the importance of making a public statement of policy regarding future intentions towards Cyrenaica. This would inform the local people of “the more liberal treatment which it is the intention shortly to

⁴¹³ Eudin 1954, 278.

⁴¹⁴ Kelly 2000, 57.

⁴¹⁵ Morgan 1985, 194; Pugh 1997, 260–261.

accord to the territory”.⁴¹⁶ However, the Cabinet was reluctant to make any public announcements right after receiving the memorandum.⁴¹⁷ Their views remained unchanged still after a month, when the Cabinet concluded that making a public statement before the proposed Four-Power Commission had travelled to Cyrenaica to explore and ensure the wishes of the inhabitants could have “undesirable international repercussions”.⁴¹⁸ This was a view put forward by Attlee, and the rest of the Cabinet agreed with it.⁴¹⁹

The Cabinet did not specify what these dreaded “undesirable international repercussions” were. However, it can be argued that Britain announcing specific plans on how to govern a territory which it had not yet acquired – and might not acquire at all – would not have been met with great enthusiasm amongst the international community. Such behaviour could have very well been interpreted to be not only arrogant and pompous, but imperialistic: Britain would have seemed extremely eager to expand its Empire by making preparations for it in advance.

Another example was a slightly awkward complication regarding the problematic nature of the name “Colonial Office”. The issue first arose in January 1949 while the Cabinet was discussing how to arrange the administration of those former Italian colonies still under British occupation between different Offices. Transferring the administration of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica under the Colonial Office was opposed on the grounds that:

[...] the title “Colonial Office” gave rise to misunderstanding and prejudice, particularly in the United Nations, where the term “colonial” was associated with past examples of colonial exploitation by European countries. There were good grounds for considering whether the title should now be changed.⁴²⁰

The Cabinet decided that a working party would be set to examine the “desirability of changing the name of the Colonial Office”.⁴²¹ The problem was address again in April 1949. Attlee brought this to the attention of the Cabinet in his note, where he encouraged the Cabinet to discuss the possibility of changing the name.⁴²² He based his note on the report of the working party⁴²³, where they suggested that the title of the Colonial Office “is not altogether appropriate since some of the territories under the Colonial Office are not, technically speaking, Colonies”. But the working party’s concerns did not only concentrate on the name being technically inaccurate but on how the rest of the world

⁴¹⁶ CAB/129/18/26: C.P. (47) 126, “Cyrenaica, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War”, 11.4.1947.

⁴¹⁷ CAB/128/9/38: C.M. (47) 38th Conclusions, 22.4.1947.

⁴¹⁸ CAB/128/9/48: C.M. (47) 48th Conclusions, 20.5.1947.

⁴¹⁹ CAB/195/5/48: C.M. 48(47), Secretary’s Notes, 20.5.1947.

⁴²⁰ CAB/128/15/5: C.M. (49) 5th Conclusions, 20.1.1949.

⁴²¹ CAB/128/15/5: C.M. (49) 5th Conclusions, 20.1.1949.

⁴²² CAB/129/34/7: C.P. (49) 77, “Administration of Overseas Territories, Note by the Prime Minister”, 11.4.1949.

⁴²³ The working party was set by the Cabinet in January 1949 “to examine the allocation between the Foreign Office, Colonial Office and Commonwealth Relations Office of responsibility for the administration of overseas territories and to consider the desirability of changing the name of the Colonial office”. (CAB/129/34/7: C.P. (49) 77, “Report by the Working Party”, 11.4.1949.)

interpreted it. They pointed out that the title “is liable to give rise to misunderstanding, particularly in the United Nations, where we are subjected to frequent charges of exploitation”. However, changing the name could also backfire:

Indeed, the very making of a change might be made the subject of a specially virulent attack such as, for example, that we were showing typical British hypocrisy in attempting to disguise our colonial exploitation by a change of a name.⁴²⁴

In the end, the working party advised against changing the title of the Colonial Office or the Colonial Secretary. This was due to both the possibility of it being seen as a hypocritical move, as well as regarding the legal meaning of the word “colony”. The working party pointed out the difficulty in finding a replacement word for it since it had a statutory meaning, and had been used in numerous Acts of Parliament.⁴²⁵ This problem created by a mere word which referred to Britain’s imperialistic nature demonstrates how careful the Cabinet had become with being associated with anything even remotely referring to imperialism.

Britain did attempt to convince the world – and especially the US – that as opposed to the common belief, it had renounced its old imperialistic policies. This campaign stressed that the exploitation of the colonies was a thing in the past, and had given way to the ideas about development. However, Weiler does not deem these efforts of having had any crucial effect on policies towards Britain.⁴²⁶ But the fact that Britain at least made conscious attempts to seem more liberal, democratic, and modern – and therefore more acceptable – in the eyes of the world proves that it was very much aware that its imperialistic past was becoming a burden in international relations.

6.3 Imperialistic State of Mind

During the late 1948, Britain was already assured that it had the American support for its trusteeship claim. Following the failure of the CFM to reach unanimity, the Foreign Secretary was fiercely furthering the cause behind the scenes, determined to win the vote in the UN General Assembly that had been postponed to the spring of 1949. However, the Cabinet was showing signs of – if not growing tired of the issue – perhaps being preoccupied with other more pressing matters. A tale-telling situation during November 1948 demonstrates both the high value that Bevin placed on the trusteeship and the Cabinet’s decreasing enthusiasm. But perhaps more importantly, it presents the most significant detail which reveals Britain’s imperialistic attitude towards Cyrenaica – despite all its efforts to avoid such a stigma.

⁴²⁴ CAB/129/34/7: C.P. (49) 77, “Report by the Working Party”, 11.4.1949.

⁴²⁵ CAB/129/34/7: C.P. (49) 77, “Report by the Working Party”, 11.4.1949.

⁴²⁶ Weiler 1987, 60.

In the memorandum circulated in November 1948, which Bevin had composed together with the Secretary of State for War, it was proposed that Britain should work together with the Amir and assure him of the benefits of British governance hoping that the willingness of the people of Cyrenaica to live under a British trusteeship would secure Britain the required two-thirds majority in the General Assembly. The memorandum's annexes even included a "Draft Trusteeship Agreement for Cyrenaica", a "Draft Treaty Between His Majesty and His Highness the Amir Sayed Idris El Senussi", a "Draft Financial Agreement Between His Majesty and H.H. The Amir Sayed Idris El Senussi" and a "Draft Constitution for Cyrenaica" – all prepared by the Former Italian Colonies Committee which had been set up earlier by the Cabinet to consider the issue.⁴²⁷

In the meeting addressing this memorandum, the Cabinet decided to invite the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Hugh Dalton to set up a small committee of Ministers to examine the annexed draft agreements. They were to submit their recommendations for consideration at the Cabinet's meeting a week later.⁴²⁸ In that later meeting the Cabinet accepted the content of the draft agreements. However, it was decided that only the "Draft Trusteeship Agreement for Cyrenaica", would be given to the UN, and other documents would be kept secret.⁴²⁹ This was based on the notion made by the committee of Ministers that limiting the Amir's power for an undefined time – as the annexed treaties suggested – could be interpreted as giving Cyrenaica no real hope for genuine self-government. Such impression could subject Britain to criticism. Therefore, it was recommended that the documents should be kept secret.⁴³⁰ This goes with their earlier decision in 1947 of not publishing specific administrative plans regarding a region that was not formally placed under their rule after the military occupation would end.

This seemingly small detail reveals a great deal about British imperialistic thinking that extended to the Foreign Office. The main thing that separated the trusteeships – and the mandates before them – from plain colonialism was that they were not meant to last forever. The core idea of a trusteeship was that it would include a predetermined time limit. The US had suggested a time limit of ten years in 1945 for the collective trusteeship it proposed. But now, Britain was reluctant to commit to a time frame which would eventually result in it losing its administrative position. Britain had gladly given up its mandate of Iraq in 1932, but it had done so in its own preferred time which suited its own interests, and not by agreeing to a fixed time limit – it seemed to have similar hopes for the Cyrenaican trusteeship. Therefore, the committee of Ministers' estimation was correct: the draft treaties did not

⁴²⁷ CAB/129/30/31: C.P. (48) 261, "Cyrenaica, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for War", 9.11.1948.

⁴²⁸ CAB/128/13/30: C.M. (48) 70th Conclusions, 11.11.1948.

⁴²⁹ CAB/128/13/34: C.M. (48) 74th Conclusions, 18.11.1948.

⁴³⁰ CAB/129/30/31, C.P. (48) 265, "Cyrenaica, Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster", 16.11.1948.

offer genuine hope for independence. Shaking off old imperialistic ways of thinking was clearly difficult.

However unflattering this particular detail looked, there remains the possibility that Bevin was not consciously trying to act in an imperialistic way. In his article, Weiler presents Louis' views on Bevin's strong commitment to maintaining Britain's imperial position in the Middle East – but in his own way. Bevin wanted to achieve this by non-traditional means, which meant introducing development plans that would benefit the common people, and negotiating new Anglo-Arab treaties to make their relations more equal to ease social unrest and nationalist resentment.⁴³¹ But new measures did not mean new objectives:

Postwar circumstances required a fresh approach of attempting to deal with the Middle Eastern states as partners rather than dependants, but the goal was traditional: the preservation of Britain's status as a world power with a paramount position in the Middle East.⁴³²

It can be argued that there is a “non-traditional” approach in these draft treaties Bevin proposed, because they do indicate a rather equal form of administration between the British and the local administrative structures. But since the main goal was, just as Louis suggests, to acquire a trusteeship of Cyrenaica to strengthen Britain's position in both the Middle East and the international community, it can be seen as merely another example of economic imperialism because British financial assistance was a central part of the draft treaties. The British would be the benevolent imperialists, again offering to help those less developed to govern themselves and develop their society while also providing the necessary funds for it. The idea of more equal Anglo-Arab relations than before does not erase the imperialistic aspect – especially when the “undefined” time frame is added to the mix. If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it must be a duck.

Another interesting aspect in this case is the response the memorandum along with all the annexes received in the Cabinet when it got together to discuss the documents for the first time. It was noted that the Cabinet members had only gotten “this lengthy document” the previous day and thus had had little time to study it. Attlee even asked “Need this be taken at once?”⁴³³,⁴³⁴ Even though the Cabinet's complaints were well justified – it is indeed a lengthy document – the tone of these comments suggested that they might not have shared Bevin enthusiasm about the trusteeship anymore – although it should be noted that Attlee never had, and he was probably not alone with his views. It almost

⁴³¹ “Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism*, 737, (Oxford, 1984).” According to Weiler 1987, 67–68.

⁴³² “Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism*, 737, (Oxford, 1984).” According to Weiler 1987, 68.

⁴³³ CAB/195/6/55: C.M. 70(48), Secretary's Notes, 11.11.1948.

⁴³⁴ CAB/128/13/30: C.M. (48) 70th Conclusion, 11.11.1948.

seemed like the small committee of Ministers was appointed to study these documents and present their recommendations based on them, so the other members of the Cabinet could avoid reading the entire thing.

It can be argued that the disinterest of the Cabinet could have been a sign of suspicion towards Britain's chances to win over the UN General Assembly, even with American support. Perhaps Bevin's optimism was not contagious. But since no such direct reference to this can be found in the Cabinet papers, this theory remains an educated guess based on the general mood detected from the Cabinet papers. The other reason why the Cabinet seemed unwilling to make this particular issue their main priority could have been because a lot was happening in the world that probably grasped their attention more firmly.

The previous year had brought Soviet expansionism as well as Britain's decision to withdraw from Greece, Turkey, Palestine and India. The Marshall Plan became active in 1948, which along with the decline of British overseas power contributed to the growing US influence in world affairs. A power vacuum had emerged, and the US was stepping into it when Britain could not.⁴³⁵ In addition to all the imperial setbacks in 1947, the winter that year had been the most difficult one since 1929. Due to severe coal shortages that year, both transport and industry were halted, which caused considerable domestic hardship.⁴³⁶ Considering the breaking down of the British Empire, Britain's decreasing international prestige, Britain's growing dependence on the US, and troubles at home, it can be reasonably suggested that still in 1948 the Cabinet – and especially the electorate – might have had greater grievances at that time than a trusteeship Britain was not guaranteed to receive.

Bevin's optimism might not have been as immense as his vigorous preparations for British administration as a trusteeship power suggest. Already in January 1949 he was willing to entertain the idea that the UN General Assembly might decide against Britain's wishes. In his memorandum, he assessed Britain's position by stating the "definite intention to remain in Cyrenaica as a trustee power (or if this proves unacceptable to the General Assembly, then on the basis of some direct arrangement with the Amir)".⁴³⁷ Even contemplating the possibility of failing to acquire the trusteeship and thus having to make bilateral arrangements with Idris reveals that Bevin was preparing for the worst.

Bevin's instincts were right. The UN General Assembly rejected the Bevin-Sforza plan, and the British claim for a trusteeship of Cyrenaica along with it. As a result, Bevin now suggested that "In

⁴³⁵ Pugh 2012, 312.

⁴³⁶ Folly 2012, 154.

⁴³⁷ CAB/129/32/12: C.P. (49) 12, "Administration of the Former Italian Colonies in Africa, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for War", 17.1.1949.

Cyrenaica, the best plan might be for us to encourage the Emir to proclaim himself and put himself in a position in which he could conclude a treaty with the United Kingdom Government". The Cabinet simply "took note of the Foreign Secretary's statement" without making any immediate decisions of policy based on it.⁴³⁸

The failure to acquire the much-desired trusteeship did not seem to raise any major outbursts – at least not in the official Cabinet papers. Perhaps the Cabinet's lack of enthusiasm earlier was foreshadowing this – they now had bigger problems. Considering Britain's weakened international status, they simply could have decided to pick their battles more carefully, and Cyrenaica might not have been seen as something worth fighting for. Therefore, not acquiring the trusteeship would not have been a major concern. Maybe they simply gave up – but the Foreign Secretary did not, as presented earlier in this research study. He quickly moved to support Libyan independence along with the US.

Reynolds offers an interesting view regarding this changed course of action: a determined reassertion of British informal imperialism through financial and economic development emerged in the late 1940s.⁴³⁹ The idea of giving up on the trusteeship and instead trying to reach a bilateral agreement with an independent Libya fits into Reynolds' theory of informal imperialism as a part of Britain's strategies at that time. This way Britain could achieve a strong position in Cyrenaica by other, more discreet ways, which would not be so clearly seen as imperialistic by others – and thus hopefully inspire less critique. The Labour Cabinet was far from giving up on British imperialistic pursuits – it simply changed tactics, which suggests its great-power aspirations were not abandoned either.

Fieldhouse strongly supports the view that Britain continued to be an imperialistic actor, even when it failed to acquire the trusteeship and had to deal with an independent Libya instead:

The Libyan State was a British creation within the context of Anglo-American collaboration and United Nations sponsorship. Its formation reveals the classic themes of British imperialism, recast in a post-war mould: the search for indigenous support, in this case with the Senusi of Cyrenaica; the quest for minimal yet necessary funds for the military occupation and administration during a period of prolonged British economic crisis; and the attempt to gain the cooperation of the United States and the United Nations to secure British strategic rights.⁴⁴⁰

Pugh joins Fieldhouse by arguing that by stubbornly remaining in the Middle East, Britain was nurturing its imperial interests. It still held on to the Suez Canal, and to Iraq which acted as a client state for oil and as a base against the now hostile USSR. As Pugh describes it: "The imperial habit of mind was hard to die."⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ CAB/128/15/36: C.M. (49) 36th Conclusions, 19.5.1949.

⁴³⁹ Reynolds 2000, 31.

⁴⁴⁰ Louis 2006, 503.

⁴⁴¹ Pugh 1997, 261.

Imperialism and British strive for a great-power status certainly seemed to have been next to impossible to separate from each other. However, these traditional imperialists in the Labour Cabinet were not necessarily the only ones guilty of such strategies in the post-world world. Burbank and Cooper argue that even though the Second World War was the beginning of the end for the old international order based on relations between empires, it did not end imperial ambitions around the world – and both the US and the USSR were acting in a much more imperialistic manner during their rivalry for world hegemony than they cared to admit⁴⁴² .

Bull supports these views regarding the US and the USSR. Their actions were simply defined with a different term than imperialism. According to Bull, their position in Latin America and Eastern Europe was described best as them being “hegemonial powers”.⁴⁴³ By this he means:

Where a great power exercises hegemony over the lesser powers in a particular area or constellation, there is resort to force and the threat of force, but this is not habitual or uninhibited but occasional and reluctant. The great power prefers to rely upon instruments other than the direct use of threat or force, and will employ the latter only in situations of extremity and with sense that in doing so it is incurring a political cost. The great power is ready to violate the rights of sovereignty, equality and independence enjoyed by the lesser states, but it does not disregard them; it recognises that these rights exist, and justifies violation of them by appeal to some specific overriding principle. As Georg Schwarzenberger has written, hegemony is ‘imperialism with good manners’^{444, 445}.

Therefore, at the end of the day, all great powers can be argued to act in an imperialistic way, regardless of what particular term they are hiding behind. All Three Powers were practicing the same tactics: trying to increase their influence in Libya be it through an individual or a collective trusteeship – or eventually by supporting its independence and hoping to reach favourable bilateral agreements. But in the post-war world great powers like the US and the USSR could get away with it because no one was strong enough to challenge their practices, like Britain had been challenged continuously in its attempts to acquire the trusteeship. This speaks volumes of Britain’s lower status in the international community.

7. Conclusions

Britain went into the first CFM negotiations with great confidence without even questioning its chances of acquiring a trusteeship of Cyrenaica. Yet it became very apparent very quickly that this was no cakewalk. Britain could not even assert its claim until the following year, and was met with continuing resistance. Despite the eventual American support and the Bevin-Sforza plan to take to

⁴⁴² Burbank & Cooper 2010, 370.

⁴⁴³ Bull 1977, 215 – 219.

⁴⁴⁴ “Georg Schwarzenberger, ‘Hegemonial Intervention’, *Yearbook of World Affairs* (London: Stevens & Son, 1959).” According to Bull 1977, 216.

⁴⁴⁵ Bull 1977, 215 – 216.

the UN, the fierce efforts of the unyielding Foreign Secretary proved insufficient. In the spring of 1949, Britain found itself without a trusteeship and without any hope of getting one.

The objective of this research study was to evaluate what the process of the Labour Cabinet attempting to secure a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica reveals about Britain's great-power status during the immediate post-war years. The conclusions will be presented by first assessing the results based on the previously defined requirements for a nation to be regarded as a great power, and then continue to analyse what the failure to acquire the trusteeship adds to the findings. Finally, the significance of this particular case in understanding Britain's post-war great-power position, and what this research study can add to it will be explored along with recommendations for further research.

Considering Britain's great-power status in this case, the first requirement set for a great power was that it needs to possess significant military strength and the resources to maintain it. During the immediate post-war years, Britain was forced to cut its overseas and military expenditure even with a risk of being unable to fight in a war. Its military prestige had already taken a serious hit during the war when it had lost territory to Japan and was unable to assure the military protection of its Dominions of Australia and New Zealand. In comparison to the USSR, which had occupied most of Eastern Europe with military strength, Britain had not been able to do so elsewhere – it had only been able to retrieve the lost colonies as a result of Japan's defeat brought on by the US and the Bomb.

Bevin had expressed his regret that Britain had not taken Cyrenaica by conquest like the USSR had done in Europe. With the considerable reductions in its military capacity during the late 1940s, it seems next to impossible that Britain could have held on to Cyrenaica by force, especially considering that the costs of the continuing military occupation there were already a major concern to the Treasury. Eventually all these reductions – along with the rejection from the UN to grant it a trusteeship – led to Britain being forced to prioritise its objectives in the Middle East, and it ended up putting Egypt before Cyrenaica despite all the strategic benefits it had placed on it. Therefore, Britain clearly fails to meet the first requirement.

The second requirement was that a great power needs to be comparable to other great powers in both military power and prestige. As pointed out above, Britain's military strength was in serious decline. Having to abandon its support to Greece and Turkey for the US to take over, leads to the question whether Britain would even had been able to conquer Cyrenaica – as Bevin had suggested – let alone remain there had it not suited the other two. The US and the USSR, which both were in possession of a nuclear deterrence before Britain and had more viable economies, could have prevented it by force had they chosen to do so. Meanwhile, the USSR was able to occupy Eastern Europe without anyone having a say in it. Britain's military power was nowhere near of matching the US and the USSR.

As the negotiations revealed, Britain did not possess prestige equal to the other two of the Potsdam's Three Powers. The USSR had initially estimated Britain to be its main rival in the Mediterranean, but soon became to view Britain as an ally to the US which together formed a united front hostile to Soviet aspirations. This can be argued to be a sign of the USSR not considering Britain as an equal, but a threat only due to its assumed alliance with the US. However, the US did not have any interests in backing Britain's claim for a trusteeship of Cyrenaica despite Britain's relentless efforts to secure the much-needed American support. It was not until a British trusteeship was favourable to the American objectives that it began to form an alliance with Britain on the matter. It was estimated already in 1945 that the US saw Britain as a "second-rate power", and this seemed to hold true in 1949 as well. Both the US and the USSR were more willing to give Libya back to Italy, a small power on the losing side of the war, than agree to a British trusteeship. The US had supported an Italian trusteeship in Paris 1946, and the USSR also favoured it due to its own strategies. Whatever their motives for this, being bypassed by Italy does not speak highly of Britain's power position in the negotiations.

Both Powers also harshly criticised Britain for its imperialistic ways. The USSR accused Britain of merely trying to extend its Empire by acquiring the trusteeship. The US went so far as to announce regretting that it had ever supported such an imperialistic venture as a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica. However, as presented before, the two Powers themselves were practicing imperialism as well, just under a different concept, but neither Britain nor the rest of the world were strong enough to confront them about this. In the meanwhile, Britain almost became an international punching bag due to its imperialistic history now resented by the international community. Instead of getting away with imperialism like the US and the USSR, Britain had to try and meet the criticism by adjusting its policies accordingly. Britain was obviously lacking in prestige compared to the other two undeniable great powers, and thus fails to meet the second requirement.

The third requirement for a great power was that the international community must recognise its great-power status and therefore be willing to trust it with special duties and responsibilities. Britain had been trusted with responsibilities after the First World War by receiving mandates from the League of Nations. However, it no longer enjoyed such trust. It was unable to convince neither the CFM members nor the UN General Assembly that it was worthy of being entrusted with a trusteeship of Cyrenaica. Though it can be argued that there's a mitigating aspect to this: the UN General Assembly would have accepted a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica but the motion failed because of the General Assembly's unwillingness – by a single vote – to accept an Italian trusteeship of Tripolitania. Therefore, they did not directly refuse Britain its desired trusteeship. However, since both suggestions were tied in the Bevin-Sforza plan, when Britain along with Italy and France was

unsuccessful in securing the necessary support for Italy's claim in the UN, its own claim was denied as well. In the end, the international community did not grant Britain special duties and trusteeships it had requested. Therefore, Britain fails to meet the third requirement as well.

The fourth and final requirement for a great power in this research study was that the state must regard itself as a great power when conducting its policies, and act on the basis of this assumption. As already pointed out many times in this research study, Britain did see itself as a great power that was – or least should have been – equal to the other great powers. The Labour Cabinet was determined to retain both the Empire and Britain's status as a great power, even if Attlee's and Bevin's views on the trusteeship differed. The assertion that Britain acted like a great power is also supported by the fact that it resorted to its old imperialistic strategies which had granted it its initial great-power status – and that it expected them to work. It could also be suggested that Britain would not have requested the trusteeship in the first place, had it not viewed itself as a notable power – it had, after all, been one of the Three Powers in Potsdam, so why should it have assumed any different. Britain definitely meets the last requirement.

The conclusion based on the requirements for a great power is not flattering to the post-war Britain, since it only fully meets one of them. Therefore, based on this theory, in regards to trying to acquire a trusteeship of Cyrenaica, Britain was not a great power. There is another aspect that deserves to be explored to support these findings: a trusteeship of Cyrenaica was something that Britain genuinely not only wanted, but assumed to acquire merely by asking for it – yet it failed.

Requesting the trusteeship was not a whim but a result of long-term planning. Britain placed high strategic value on Cyrenaica in supporting its position in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, both crucial to the Empire. A military base there was estimated to greatly benefit Britain's defence capability towards dreaded Soviet aggression by placing long-range missiles there – or even nuclear weapons once it would manage to build them. Cyrenaica's significance only grew when Britain lost its hold on India and Palestine. A firm foothold in the Middle East could have provided a substitute for India, and control over Cyrenaica would have increased British presence in the region and counterbalance the lost influence caused by the loss of the Palestinian mandate. Even if Cyrenaica was never more important to Britain than Egypt, it did not fall far behind.

Especially Bevin went to great lengths to secure the trusteeship, turning every stone trying to gain the support of others for the British trusteeship. He expressed extreme determination trying to achieve his objective, yet that was not enough – even with the fact that Cyrenaica was not a priority for anyone else, and had no other value than its location. In the beginning of the negotiations the USSR was very keen to gain a significant presence in the Mediterranean through Libya. But already in 1946

it gave up on its individual trusteeship claim, because the possibility of increasing its influence in Europe with the help of the Italian general election was more important at the time. All in all, Cyrenaica – or Libya in general – was not anywhere near as important to others as it was to Britain. Still the harsh fact remains: Britain lacked the power and prestige to acquire its much-desired trusteeship of Cyrenaica.

Therefore, Britain's post-war history regarding Cyrenaica supports the widely-discussed idea of Britain no longer being a great power after the Second World War. However, this research study continues to argue that not only had Britain lost its great-power status, but failing to obtain a trusteeship of Cyrenaica provides even more significant evidence of this than the major events of that time, such as the loss of both Palestine and India, and withdrawals from Greece and Turkey.

The hostilities and violence in Palestine at the time had reached the point where it can be argued that no one could have managed the situation. This is supported by the fact that it has remained a conflict zone to this day, with neither the UN nor any great power being able to resolve the situation. India, on the other hand, had a strong nationalist movement dating back to the nineteenth century, and because of the war Britain was heavily in debt to India. Morgan argues that Britain's withdrawal from India was inevitable, since remaining there by force to resist the nationalists could have resulted in military action with "colossal cost"⁴⁴⁶. It can thus be argued that both India and Palestine had reached a state where no power – be it a great power or a lesser power – could have been able to hold on to them by force. The withdrawals from Greece and Turkey can be seen as – even if this is a somewhat controversial theory – strategic decisions rather than signs of a fading power position. By letting the US take over responsibilities there, Britain furthered involving the US in world affairs instead of it retreating into isolationism, and thus leaving Britain to deal with the USSR in Europe by itself. Therefore, these cases are not the best examples of Britain's inability to retain its great-power status.

Failing to obtain a trusteeship of Cyrenaica offers more obvious indicators that Britain was no longer a great power, than many other events and setbacks during the late 1940s. Cyrenaica was, let's face it, a remote and underdeveloped piece of desert with no other value than its location – it is not like Britain was asking, for example, the entire western Germany. In a global context, the request for a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica was a rather modest one coming from a war-time great power which had survived unoccupied and played a major part in bringing the war in Europe to an end. Britain was already occupying Cyrenaica through military administration, had close relations with the Sanusi, and all in all had a significant position in the Middle East. Everything was in Britain's favour in the summer of 1945, it *should have* succeeded in this. And still, Britain failed to acquire the trusteeship

⁴⁴⁶ Morgan 2008, 237.

it genuinely wanted. Therefore, a small case like Cyrenaica offers much stronger evidence than many other cases that Britain's days as a great power were indeed over.

However, even if the research ends here, the story does not.

After Libya had become independent as a federal monarchy under King Idris I in December 1951, Britain kept pursuing a military base in the region through a bilateral agreement – and finally succeeded in it. In 1953 – led by a Conservative Government with Churchill as the Prime Minister – Britain signed “a twenty-year treaty of friendship and alliance” with the pro-Western Libya. Through this treaty Britain received the military bases it had so desired for years, in exchange for military and financial assistance to Libya. The US also maintained the Wheelus Air Base located near Tripolitania. Despite the development aid provided by both countries – as well as smaller amounts of financial assistance from the UN, France and Italy⁴⁴⁷ – Libya remained a poor underdeveloped country, until major high quality oil reserves were found in 1959. This discovery turned Libya into a fully independent wealthy nation, no longer dependent on foreign assistance. During the 1960s, Arab nationalism penetrated Libya mostly because of the Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser, whose ideas gained support especially amongst the young generation. As a result, Britain and the US were pressured into evacuating their bases. The British withdrew most of their troops in 1966, and by 1970 all foreign military establishments had been abandoned.⁴⁴⁸ However it should be acknowledged that by then Britain's influence in the Middle East had already decreased significantly due to its withdrawal from Egypt in 1954, followed by the so-called Suez Crisis a few years later, which as Brown describes it “made a mockery of British dreams to organize the Arab world⁴⁴⁹”.

Therefore, Britain *did* eventually get the military facilities it had originally attempted to acquire through the trusteeship. However, since Britain's presence was based on a bilateral treaty and not a UN trusteeship, an independent Libya was able to terminate the treaty and kick the British out. In addition to that, the importance of those military bases to Britain at that time can be questioned. It did not secure the bases until 1953, by when its defence had already been organised on the basis of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Britain had joined this alliance mostly led by the US in April 1949⁴⁵⁰ – only a month before the UN General Assembly rejected Britain's trusteeship claim. In addition to this, the significance of the bases can be challenged due Britain's retrieval from Egypt which caused it to lose any chance of remaining as a dominant power in the Middle East. Also, during the Suez Crisis Britain was unable to use its Libyan military bases, and they even suffered attacks by

⁴⁴⁷ Collins 1974, 12.

⁴⁴⁸ Bianci 2003, 75–78.

⁴⁴⁹ Brown 1984, 139.

⁴⁵⁰ Reynolds 2000, 166.

the Libyan nationalists who wanted to prevent the British troops there from participating in the conflict⁴⁵¹.

By playing a game of “what if” – slightly less academic by nature yet highly entertaining – it is possible to contemplate what possible effects could have followed, if Britain had succeeded in obtaining the trusteeship of Cyrenaica in 1949, or already in 1945 when the Cabinet made the decision to pursue it. Could a strong British presence on the western border of Egypt have affected the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations in a way that would have allowed the British troops to remain in the Suez area, and thus allow Britain’s influence in the Middle East to continue for at least a bit longer? Also, even if Brown argues that Libya gained its independence not because it was ready for it but simply “because the great powers could not agree on any other course⁴⁵²”, it is still possible to ask if the early Libyan independence could have served as an inspiration to the growing Arab nationalism and to the likes of Nasser, despite Libya being more pro-Western than pro-Arab? This game could go on forever. But it can firmly be argued that the failure in securing the trusteeship hurt Britain’s position in the Middle East, especially since it had already lost Palestine. And losing its foothold in the one notable overseas area it still had, severely damaged any hopes Britain had in retaining its position as a great power.

In addition to – and partly making good use of – the “what if” -questions, this case opens up possibilities for following research. British presence in Libya from the early 1950s onwards could be studied in a wider context of Britain’s declining position in the Middle East, as well as within the framework of the decolonisation process within the Empire. Libya’s own history could also be assessed from the perspective of how its premature independence under a king who always remained first and foremost as a Cyrenaican and never gained high support in Tripolitania⁴⁵³, affected the development of the nation. The issue could be considered in regard to the 1969 coup which ultimately lead to the reign under Muammar al Qadhafi⁴⁵⁴, and proceed all the way to the unstable conditions in the present-day Libya.

There is yet another interesting aspect to this case. Britain has often been accused – and rarely without reason – of the difficult conditions in its former colonies due to both their imperial rule as well as their independence along the colonial borders instead of taking into account the distinctive communities in the region. By combining Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan under a Cyrenaican king to become a nation dependent on foreign support until the discovery of oil – which mostly

⁴⁵¹ Collins 1974, 15.

⁴⁵² Brown 1984, 93.

⁴⁵³ As Bianci argues in Bianci 2003, 78.

⁴⁵⁴ Bianci 2003, 80. This is the spelling of his name used by Bianci, whereas C. Collins spells the name as “Muammar Qaddafi” in Collins 1974, 15. The latter seems to be the one more commonly used in English.

profited King Idris' corrupt regime⁴⁵⁵ – did the UN succumb into making a similar misjudged decision of which the old colonial empires have been accused of to this day? The post-war history of Libya in many different contexts is definitely worth exploring further.

⁴⁵⁵ Collins 1974, 14.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

The National Archives: The Cabinet Papers [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/>].
Relevant Cabinet conclusions (CAB/128), Cabinet memoranda (CAB/129), and Secretary's notes (CAB/195) from July 1945 to November 1949.

United Nations: Charter of the United Nations [<http://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/index.html>].

“Chapter XII: International Trusteeship System” *Charter of the United Nations*, [<http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-xii/>]. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017.

Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library: The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: 20th Century Documents: 1900–1999 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/20th.asp].

”Truman Doctrine, President Harry S. Truman's Address Before a Joint Session of Congress, March 12, 1947” *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: 20th Century Documents: 1900–1999*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp]. Accessed 11 Apr. 2017.

Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library: The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/decade.asp].

“First Meeting of Council of Foreign Ministers, London, September 11 To October 2, 1945: Report by Secretary Byrnes, October 5, 1946.” *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade18.asp]. Accessed 8 Apr. 2017.

“The Covenant of the League of Nations (Including Amendments adopted to December, 1924)”, *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art22t]. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017.

“The Berlin (Potsdam) Conference, July 17-August 2, 1945”, *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: A Decade of American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1941–1949*, New Haven: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade17.asp]. Accessed 8 Apr. 2017.

Literature

- Barnett, Correlli, *The Lost Victory: British Dreams, British Realities 1945–1950*. London: Macmillan, 1995.
- Bianci, Steven, *Libya: Current Issues and Historical Background*. New York: Nova Science, 2003.
- Blake, Robert, *The Decline of Power 1915–1964*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Bombaro, Christine, *Finding History: Research Methods and Resources for Students and Scholars*. Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2012.
- Bull, Hedley, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. London: Macmillan, 1977.
- Burbank, Jane & Cooper, Frederick, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Brown, L. Carl, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game*. London: Tauris, 1984.
- Clayton, Anthony, “‘Deceptive Might’: Imperial Defence and Security, 1900–1968”. In William Roger Louis & Judith M. Brown (eds.) & Alaine Low (associate ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. 4, The Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, 280–305.
- DeGroot, Gerard, *The Bomb: A History of Hell on Earth*. London: Pimlico, 2005.
- Dockrill, Michael & Young, John, W. (eds.), *British Foreign Policy, 1945-56*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989.
- Fieldhouse, D. K., *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914–1958*. Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2006.
- Freedman, Lawrence, “Introduction”. In Dockrill & Young 1989, 1–8.
- Gowing, Margaret, “Britain, America and the Bomb”. In Dockrill & Young 1989, 31–46.
- Gupta, Partha Sarathi, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964*. London: Macmillan, 1975.

- Johnson, Robert, *British Imperialism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Kennedy, Paul, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. London: Fontana Press, 1989.
- Kent, John, "Bevin's Imperialism and the Idea of Euro-Africa, 1945–49". In Dockrill & Young 1989, 47–76.
- Loomba, Ania, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London/New York: Routledge, 2015 (3rd edit., 1st edit. published in 1998).
- Louis, William Roger, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization: Collected Essays*. London/New York: I.B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2006.
- Mearsheimer, John J., *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014 (updated edition, first published in 2003).
- Morgan, Kenneth O., *Labour in Power: 1945–1951*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Omissi, David, "European Imperialism, 1971–1945". In Martin Pugh (ed.), *A Companion to Modern European History 1871–1945*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998 (Reprinted), 236–261.
- Owen, Nicholas, "Critics of Empire in Britain". In William Roger Louis & Judith M. Brown (eds.) & Alaine Low (associate ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. 4, The Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, 188–211.
- Pugh, Martin, *State and Society, A Social and Political History of Britain since 1870*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012 (4th edit., 1st edit. published in 1994).
- Reynolds, David, *Britannia Overruled, British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2000 (2nd edit., 1st edit. published in 1991).

Journal Articles

- Adamthwaite, Anthony, "Britain and the World, 1945-9: The View from the Foreign Office", *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–)* 61:2 (Spring, 1985), 223–235.
- Ashton, S. R., "Money, Oil, and Empire in the Middle East: Sterling and Postwar Imperialism, 1944–1971", review of *Money, Oil, and Empire in the Middle East: Sterling and Postwar Imperialism, 1944–1971*, by Steven G. Galpern (ed.), *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39:1 (Mar. 2011), 152–156.

- Collins, Carole, “Imperialism and Revolution in Libya”, *MERIP Reports* no. 27 (Apr. 1974), 3–22.
- Collins, Michael, “Decolonisation and the ‘Federal Moment’”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24:1 (Mar. 2013), 21–40.
- Eudin, Xenia J., “Moscow’s Views on American Imperialism”, *The Russian Review* 13:4 (Oct. 1954), 276–284.
- Folly, Martin H., “‘The impression is growing... that the United States is hard when dealing with us’: Ernest Bevin and Anglo-American relations at the dawn of the cold war”, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 10:2 (Jun. 2012), 150–166.
- Hoskins, Halford L., “The Suez Canal as an International Waterway”, *The American Journal of International Law* 37:3 (Jul. 1943), 373–385.
- Kelly, Saul, “Britain, the United States, and the End of the Italian Empire in Africa, 1940–52”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 28:3 (2000), 51–70.
- Kelly, Saul, “Desert Conquests. Early British Planning on the Future of the Italian Colonies, June 1940–September 1943”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 50:6 (Oct. 2014), 1006–1026.
- Khalil, Osamah F., “The Crossroads of the World: U.S. and British Foreign Policy Doctrines and the Constructs of the Middle East, 1902–2007”, *Diplomatic History* 38:2 (2014), 299–344.
- Knight, Jonathan, “Russia’s Search for Peace: The London Council of Foreign Ministers, 1945”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 13:1 (Jan. 1978), 137–163.
- Mazov, Sergei, “The USSR and the Former Italian Colonies, 1945–50”, *Cold War History* 3:3 (Aug. 2006), 49–78.
- Morgan, Kenneth O., “Imperialists at bay: British labour and decolonization”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 27:2 (1999), 233–254.
- Morris, Justin, “How Great is Britain? Power, Responsibility and Britain’s Future Global Role”, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* vol. 13 (2011), 326–347.
- Sidaway, James D., “Subaltern geopolitics: Libya in the mirror of Europe”, *The Geographical Journal* 178:4 (Dec. 2012), 296–301.
- Sluglett, Peter, “An improvement on colonialism? The ‘A’ mandates and their legacy in the Middle East”, *International Affairs* 90:2 (2014), 413–427.

Smith, Raymond & Zametica, John, "The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee reconsidered, 1945–7", *International Affairs* 61:2 (Spring 1985), 237–252.

Thompson, Todd M., "Covert Operations, British Views of Islam and Anglo-Sanusi Relations in North Africa, 1940–45", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37:2 (Jun. 2009), 293–323.

Watts, G. Tracey, "The British Military Occupation of Cyrenaica, 1942–1949", *Transactions of the Grotius Society* 37 (1951), 69–81.

Weiler, Peter, "British Labour and the Cold War: The Foreign Policy of the Labour Governments, 1945–1951", *Journal of British Studies* 26:1 (1987), 54–82.

Wheeler, G. E., "Russia and the Middle East", *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–)*, 35:3 (Jul. 1959), 295–304.

Online Sources

"1945: The San Francisco Conference", *United Nations: About the UN: History of the United Nations* [<http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1945-san-francisco-conference/index.html>]. Accessed 8 Apr. 2017.

"Briefing Paper, Number CBP7529, 7 July 2016: UK Election Statistics: 1918–2016", *UK Parliament: Parliamentary Business: Publications & Records: Research Publications: Research Briefings: UK Election Statistics: 1918–2016, House of Commons Library* [<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7529#fullreport>]. Accessed 15 Apr. 2017.

"The Cabinet Papers", *The National Archives* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/default.htm>]. Accessed 24. Apr. 2017.

"CAB 128 post war conclusions", *Cabinet and Government: Meetings and Papers* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/cab128-post-war-conclusions.htm>]. Accessed 24 Apr. 2017;

"CAB 129 post war memoranda", *Cabinet and Government: Meetings and Papers* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/cab129-post-war-memoranda.htm>]. Accessed 24 Apr. 2017;

“CAB 195 The Cabinet secretary’s notebook”, *Cabinet and Government: Meetings and Papers* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/cab-195-cabinet-secretarys-notebooks.htm>]. Accessed 24 Apr. 2017.

“Clement Attlee 1945”, *The National Archives: The Cabinet Papers* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/clement-attlee-1945.htm>] Accessed 8 Apr. 2017.

“How Cabinet works”, *Cabinet and Government: Cabinet Government* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/default.htm>]. Accessed 15 Apr. 2017.

“How the Records Work”, *Cabinet and Government: Cabinet government* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/how-the-records-work.htm>]. Accessed 15 Apr. 2017.

“Map Resources for 1945”, *Maps in Time* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/maps-interactive/maps-in-time.htm?&1945>]. Accessed 20 Mar. 2017.

”Winston Churchill 1940”, *Cabinet and Government: Government’s Who’s Who* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/winston-churchill-1940.htm>]. Accessed 26 Apr. 2017.

“Map of World with Countries - Single Color, WRLD-EPS-01-0011” *Free Vector Maps* (This download is the intellectual property and copyright of FreeVectorMaps.com, Striped Candy LLC) [<https://freevectormaps.com/world-maps/WRLD-EPS-01-0011>]. Accessed 17 Apr. 2017.

Sanger, Clyde, “Reporting Britain’s atrocities in Kenya”, *The Guardian*, 20.7.2012 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/20/reporting-britain-atrocities-in-kenya>] Accessed 28 Mar. 2017.

“Trusteeship Council”, *United Nations: Main Bodies* [<http://www.un.org/en/sections/about-un/trusteeship-council/index.html>]. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017.

Annex I: Chronology⁴⁵⁶

Event	Date	Main Decisions, Proposals and Outcomes
The San Francisco Conference	25 Apr.–26 Jun. 1945	Signing of the Charter of the United Nations and the Statute of International Court of Justice. Creation of the International Trusteeship System.
The Potsdam Conference	17 Jul.–2 Aug. 1945	Establishment of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM).
The Labour Government	26 Jul. 1945	The Labour Government took Office. Clement Attlee became the Prime Minister following Winston Churchill.
Council of Foreign Ministers, First Meeting, London,	11 Sept.–2 Oct. 1945	UK: Supported the American proposal of a collective trusteeship. USA: Proposed a collective trusteeship. USSR: Requested a Soviet trusteeship of Tripolitania.
Interim Meeting of Foreign Ministers, Moscow	16 Dec.–26 Dec. 1945	USSR, UK and USA present.
Council of Foreign Ministers, Second Meeting, Paris	First part: 25 Apr.–16 May 1946 Second Part: 16 Jun.–12 Jul. 1946	UK: First proposed Libyan independence, opposed Italian rule, later made a claim for a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica. USA: Opposed Libyan independence, supported Italian rule, returned to proposing a collective trusteeship USSR: First proposed a Soviet-Italian trusteeship of Tripolitania, then withdrew its trusteeship claim and proposed an Italian trusteeship of Libya.
Paris Peace Conference	29 Jul.–15 Oct. 1946	Italy was formally deprived of its colonies. The CFM would have one year to agree on the fate of the former

⁴⁵⁶ Based on: The National Archives: The Cabinet Papers [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/>]; United Nations [<http://www.un.org/en/index.html>]; Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library: The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy: 20th Century Documents: 1900–1999 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/20th.asp]; Bianci 2003; Brown; 1984; Kelly 2000; Mazov 2006; Morgan 1985.

		Italian colonies. The time frame would begin when the Italian peace treaty was ratified.
Council of Foreign Ministers, Third Meeting, New York	4 Nov.–12 Dec. 1946	No agreement on the issue of the former Italian colonies.
Council of Foreign Ministers, Fourth Meeting, Moscow	10 Mar.–24 Apr. 1947	No agreement on the issue of the former Italian colonies.
The Beginning of the CFM time frame	15 Sept. 1947	The Italian peace treaty was ratified. The CFM would have one year to reach a unanimous decision over the fate of the former Italian colonies.
The Conference of the Deputy Foreign Ministers	30 Sept. 1947–31 Aug. 1948	The Deputy Foreign Ministers of the Four CFM Powers were appointed to find a solution to the fate of the Former Italian Colonies.
Idris returned to Cyrenaica	Nov. 1947	A local administrative council to advise British administration was created.
The Four-Power Commission (the Commission of Investigation)	8 Nov. 1947–31 May 1948	Delegations from UK, the USA, the USSR, and France toured the former Italian colonies.
Council of Foreign Ministers, Fifth Meeting, London	15 Nov.–16 Dec. 1947	No agreement on the issue of the former Italian colonies.
Italian Parliamentary Election for the first Republican Parliament	18 Apr. 1948	The Christian Democratic Party won defeating the left-wing Popular Democratic Front.
The Deputies submit their recommendations	31 Aug. 1948	UK & USA: Proposed a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica. USSR: Proposed an Italian trusteeship of Libya.
A Conference between the Four Powers summoned by the USSR	Early Sept. 1948	UK & USA: Supported a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica. USSR: First proposed an Italian trusteeship of Libya, then proposed a collective trusteeship.
The deadline of the CFM time frame	15 Sept. 1948	The CFM had failed to reach a unanimous decision. The issue of the former Italian Colonies was submitted to the UN General Assembly.
The Third Session of the UN General Assembly	5 Apr.–18 May 1949	UK: Proposed a British trusteeship of Cyrenaica, an

		<p>Italian trusteeship for Tripolitania and a French trusteeship for Fezzan (known as the Bevin-Sforza plan).</p> <p>USA: Supported the Bevin-Sforza plan.</p> <p>USSR: Proposed a five-year collective trusteeship of Libya.</p> <p>UN: Voted against the Italian trusteeship in May, which led to the rejection of the entire Bevin-Sforza plan. The issue was postponed.</p>
The Fourth Session of the UN General Assembly	20. Sept.–10 Dec. 1949	<p>UN: Decided in Nov., that Libya, comprising Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan, would become an independent state by January 1952.</p>
Libyan independence	24 Dec. 1951	<p>Libya became independent under King Idris I.</p>

Annex II: Members of the Labour Cabinet 1945–1951⁴⁵⁷

Cabinet Members of the Labour Government in Office from 26 July 1945 to 26 October 1951.

Position	Name	Dates
Prime Minister	Clement Attlee	26 Jul. 1945–26. Oct. 1951
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs	Ernest Bevin	27 Jul. 1945–9 Mar. 1951
	Herbert Morrison	9 Mar. 1951–26 Oct. 1951
Lord President	Herbert Morrison	26 Jul. 1945–9 Mar. 1951
	Viscount Addison	9 Mar. 1951–26 Oct. 1951
Lord Chancellor	Lord Jowitt	27 Jul. 1945–26 Oct. 1951
Lord Privy Seal	Arthur Greenwood	27 Jul. 1945–17 Apr. 1947
	Lord Inman	17 Apr. 1947–7 Oct. 1947
	Viscount Addison	7 Oct. 1947–9 Mar. 1951
	Ernest Bevin	9 Mar. 1947–26 Apr. 1951
	Richard Stokes	26 Apr. 1951–26 Oct. 1951
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Hugh Dalton	27 Jul. 1945–13 Nov. 1947
	Sir Stafford Cripps	13 Nov. 1947–19 Oct. 1950
	Hugh Gaitskell	19 Oct. 1950–26 Oct. 1951
Minister for Economic Affairs	Sir Stafford Cripps	29 Sep. 1947–13 Nov. 1947
Secretary of State for Home Affairs	Chuter Ede	3 Aug. 1945–26 Oct. 1951
First Lord of the Admiralty	A.V. Alexander	3 Aug. 1945–4 Oct. 1946
Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries	Tom Williams	3 Aug. 1945–26 Oct. 1951
Secretary of State for Air	Viscount Stansgate	3 Aug. 1945–4 Oct. 1946
Minister for Civil Aviation	Lord Pakenham	31 May 1948–28 Feb. 1950

⁴⁵⁷ Based on: “Clement Attlee 1945”, *The National Archives: The Cabinet Papers* [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/cabinet-gov/clement-attlee-1945.htm>] Accessed 8 Apr. 2017; Morgan 1985.

Secretary of State for the Colonies	George Hall	3 Aug. 1945–4 Oct. 1946
	Arthur Creech Jones	4 Oct. 1946–28 Feb. 1950
	James Griffiths	28 Feb. 1950–26 Oct. 1951
Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations	Viscount Addison	7 Jul. 1950–26 Oct. 1951
	Philip Noel-Baker	7 Oct. 1947–28 Feb. 1950
	Patrick Gordon Walker	28 Feb. 1950–26 Oct. 1951
Minister for Defence	Clement Attlee	27 Jul. 1945–20 Dec. 1946
	A. V. Alexander	20 Dec. 1946–28 Feb. 1950
	Emanuel Shinwell	28 Feb. 1950–26 Oct. 1951
Secretary of State for the Dominions	Viscount Addison	3 Aug. 1945–7 Jul. 1947
Minister of Education	Ellen Wilkinson	3 Aug. 1945–10 Feb. 1947
	George Tomlinson	10 Feb. 1947–26 Oct. 1951
Minister for Fuel and Power	Emanuel Shinwell	3 Aug. 1945–7 Oct. 1947
Minister of Health	Aneurin Bevan	3 Aug. 1945–17 Jan. 1951
Secretary of State for India and Burma	Lord Pethick-Lawrence	3 Aug. 1945–17 Apr. 1947
	Earl of Listowen	17 Apr. 1947–26 Oct. 1951
Minister of Labour and National Service	George Isaacs	3 Aug. 1945–17 Jan. 1951
	Aneurin Bevan	17 Jan. 1951–24 Apr. 1951
	Alfred Robens	24 Apr. 1951–26 Oct. 1951
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster	Hugh Dalton	31 May 1948–28 Feb. 1950
	Viscount Alexander	28 Feb. 1950–26 Oct. 1951
Paymaster-General	Arthur Greenwood	9 Jul. 1946–5 Mar. 1947
	Viscount Addison	2 Jul. 1948–1 Apr. 1949
Minister without Portfolio	A. V. Alexander	4 Oct. 1946–20 Dec. 1946
	Arthur Greenwood	17 Apr. 1947–29 Sep. 1947

Secretary of State for Scotland	Joseph Westwood	3 Aug. 1945–7 Oct. 1947
	Arthur Woodburn	7 Oct. 1947–28 Feb. 1950
	Hector McNeil	28 Feb. 1950–26 Oct. 1951
Town and Country Planning	Hugh Dalton	28 Feb. 1950–26 Oct. 1951
President of the Board of Trade	Sir Stafford Cripps	27 Jul. 1945–29 Sep. 1947
	Harold Wilson	29 Sep. 1947–24 Apr. 1951
	Sir Hartley Shawcross	24 Apr. 1951–26 Oct. 1951
Secretary of State for War ⁴⁵⁸	Jack Lawson	3 Aug. 1945–4 Oct. 1946

⁴⁵⁸ Ceased to be a Cabinet position from 4 Oct. 1946. (Morgan 1985, 507).