Description: In this episode, ER and her guests, British M.P.’s Michael Foot and William J. Brown, discuss the similarities and differences between English and American foreign policy in Asia.

Participants: Advertisement Announcer, NBC Announcer, ER, Michael Foot, and William J. Brown

(30:48)

[Advertisement Announcer:] [speaking over music] The suspense and tension attached to the story of Mr. Ocularis is the dramatic offering in The Philco Television Playhouse at nine tonight. Nelson Armstead stars in the supernatural tale of a hospital patient whose mind takes a mythical journey into the beyond while under anesthesia. See this unusual story at nine tonight. [Music ends] Next, Mrs. Roosevelt meets the public for a timely discussion. WNBT New York, Channel Four.

[Theme music begins 31:18]

[NBC Announcer:] [speaking over music] The debate over General [Douglas] MacArthur’s dismissal and the current trends in American foreign policy continues unabated here in the United States. But what has been the reaction overseas? Among our allies? Today, by means of kinescope recording, NBC Television presents Mrs. Roosevelt Meets the Public from the BBC Studios in London, England, with a discussion of America’s position today as seen through British eyes. [Theme music ends 32:07] And now, to introduce today’s discussion and her distinguished guests, here is Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] Good afternoon. Today our television program originates in the BBC Studios in London. I flew to England yesterday from Switzerland where I am attending the meetings of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Here in England, just as in the United States, the question of President Truman’s dismissal of General MacArthur has aroused strong public reaction. Some people in the States have gone so far as to claim that MacArthur’s removal was brought about as the direct result of pressure from the British foreign office. I can certainly not agree with this view. But I do want to take this opportunity while I’m here to let you know exactly what British people of different political points of view think about the removal of General MacArthur in relation to our whole United Nations far-eastern policy. I am also anxious to find out how this situation will affect Anglo-American relations from this side of the Atlantic. So I have invited two very distinguished members in British public life to join me in discussing these matters.

On my right, Mr. [William] W. J. Brown. Mr. W. J. Brown has had a very active life in British public affairs. He has twice been a member of Parliament; he will stand at the next election as an independent with Conservative Party backing for a London constituency. On my left, Mr. Michael Foot, M.P. Mr. Foot has been Labor member of Parliament for the Devonport division of Plymouth since 1945. At the last general election, Mr. Foot opposed and defeated Mr. Churchill’s son, Randolph, for this seat. He is the political columnist on the Labor Party’s national newspaper, The Daily Herald. And he is joint editor of the left-wing Weekly Tribune. Now, I have some questions that I would like to ask you two gentlemen. The first one is: there is a body of opinion in the United States which suggests that the dismissal of General MacArthur is the result of British domination of the American State Department. What do either of you gentlemen think of this?
[Michael Foot:] Well, I think it would be fantastic to suggest that President Truman had dismissed General MacArthur on British pressure, either from the foreign office, or anywhere else. I think there are always a certain number of people in the United States with anti-British views who say that uh-American policy is uh directed by a cunning lot of British, just as there are a certain number of people with anti-American views in this country who suggest that um British foreign policy is somehow directed by an unexplained process from Wall Street. But I think that those two opinions pretty well cancel out. I think there was in this country very considerable concern, as I believe there was in many sections of opinion in the United States about some of the statements made by General MacArthur and the policies that he seemed to be proposing. And uh I think that it is an advantage for American--Anglo-American relations that uh President Truman took the action that he did. But I don’t believe there is--I hope, at any rate, that there is no great difference between British and American policy on this issue, and if you take the statement made by General [Omar] Bradley on the Far Eastern policy, I believe that that is in general accord with Briti-the British policy here on the subject.

[William J. Brown:] Well now, Mrs. Roosevelt, it would be idle to pretend that there hasn’t been a good deal of feeling in Britain about General MacArthur. Um part of that feeling has centered upon his policy, and part of it has centered upon his person. As regards policy, there is a substantial difference of emphasis between the American and the British point of view about the relative importance of Asia and Europe. That’s the policy point of view, and I have no doubt that other questions will bring us nearer to that particular point. As regards the personal point of view, it is implicit in the whole English outlook that it is for governments to determine policy, and it is for generals to carry out the policy. That doesn’t prevent the general from having a view, which he can express to his government. Uh it doesn’t prevent him resigning if he finds the government policy intolerable. But what was quite inconceivable to the British mind was that General MacArthur, who’s greatly admired in this country for his soldierly qualities, should stay on as Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations forces making speeches plainly critical of the policy of his government, writing letters to political opponents of the government, and in short behaving in a fashion that nobody else behaves in in England except Mr. Aneurin Bevan. [William J. Brown laughs] (37:55)

[ER:] Well that, of course, is the point of view which a great many uh people, I think, in the United States felt uh motivated the president’s action, which was a constitutional action, with that. Well um, more or less, you two gentlemen agree on that question. So--

[Michael Foot:] We hate to have to do it, but I think there is general agreement on this subject. [ER laughs]

[ER:] Well now, I come to the second question. There is a suggestion that Britain’s foreign policy in the Far East, particularly in regard [William J. Brown coughs] to recognition of Communist China, runs contrary to the United Nations’ policy there, primarily because of the importance to Britain [William J. Brown coughs] of Hong Kong as a trading center. What do you have to say about that? Which of you would like to speak first? [ER laughs]

[Michael Foot:] Well, I-I-I think it’s quite wrong to suggest that British policy in the Far East has been contrary to United Nations policy, because I think that British policy is in complete conformity with United Nations policy. Uh as for uh Hong Kong, um of course, British interests in the Far East play a part in determining their policy just as American interests in the Far East play a part in determining theirs. But uh Britain took part in the resistance to the aggression in Korea [William J. Brown coughs] because we believe that aggression has to be resisted, and uh the fact that we hold positions in the Far East o-only makes that policy more necessary. And indeed, of course, Britain had been -- long before the beginning of the Korean War, had been resisting communist aggression of a different type in Malaya and had been spending very considerable resources on doing so. So I don’t think there’s any conflict between United
Nations policy and British policy in the Far East, either for Hong Ko -- for the reason of Hong Kong or any other reason.

[William J. Brown:] Well-well-well, I-I must be quite honest about this, there’s a substantial difference between British and American policy uh in the Far East, and we must begin by recognizing that. Uh the British government has recognized the communist government of China. Uh the Americans have stubbornly re-refused to recognize that government, and-and here is a-a very substantial difference of policy. But in my view, Mrs. Roosevelt, it does not derive from trade. I wouldn’t underestimate the importance of trade from the British point of view, because we are a-a considerable nation living in a small island very much dependent upon foreign trade for our-for our livelihood. But it-it is not in trade that the explanation of the difference between the British and the American point of view about Asia is to be found. The essential difference is that we think the danger spot is Europe. We think that it is in Europe that the battle of the world will be decided. It is only in Europe that Stalin can get the steel and the coal which alone could redress the economic disparity between the communist part of the world and the free world. And uh we are a little averse from getting bogged down in an Asiatic war which, if we don’t win it, uh would uh tie up a great deal of our resources and which, if we did win it, would be indecisive anyway, because the decisive theater in the British point of view is Europe. Now that I think is the explanation, and not trade. (41:29)

[ER:] We uh -- I think perhaps we would agree um about the importance uh and-and the reasons that you give. But uh we I think are still doubtful uh of whether the recognition of Communist China uh makes it any less certain that we will have um difficulties in, I don’t know--

[William J. Brown:] Well uh on this particular point, Michael and I would probably uh differ, and if we do, we shall be back in our permanent standing relationship. Now I was opposed to the recognition of Communist China, personally. I do not believe that you can compromise with communism; I do not believe that you can appease it; I think you’ve got to resist it everywhere that it shows it--its head, but as uh-uh recent speech by our Mr. Herbert Morrison, our new foreign secretary, said uh, “It is the British view that any people is free to choose the government it desires.” I may say in parentheses that uh to talk about the freedom of the Chinese people to choose the present government to me is a contradiction in terms, but there you are. I not only disagree with Michael Foot, I disagree also with Herbert Morrison. [ER laughs]

[Michael Foot:] Uh-you see he-he disagrees with me even before I’ve stated what I’ve got to say on the matter. But I think that uh the recognition of Communist China by the British was perfectly wise, and perfectly right. It doesn’t mean to say that the British government uh likes communist methods or condones the methods that have been used in China, not for a moment. But i-if we want peace--and certainly that is the paramount desire of British policy, and I’m sure of American policy--if we want peace, we’ve got to be prepared to negotiate with other governments even if we dislike them. And in the case of th-China, I think it was quite clear that uh the Chinese communists had won the civil war; they were the effective government of China, and it’s—it’s really a very serious barrier to even the possibility of getting a negotiated peace in the Far East to which the American government are as much committed as we are committed-- it's a very serious barrier to that if uh you were to say, “We will not negotiate with this government,” and give the impression, as some statements have given the impression, that there is a desire to re-fight and restart the uh Chinese civil war. And therefore, the British recognition of Communist China, I think, was a practical contribution to trying to seek a settlement, and I hope that there will be eventual agreement between Britain and the United States on that subject.

[ER:] Well, at present, I’m afraid; we are still rather far apart. [Michael Foot: Mhm.] But we have got rid of those two points. So now I would like to ask you to give an indication of what Britain’s foreign policy in the Far East um, with special reference to the recognition of Communist China, really is. I-I gather
from what you have said that it um-that it is uh a feeling of the practical negotiation um that is necessary, and therefore um you were recognized. But um I think perhaps uh as a member of the Labor Party in this country, I’ll ask you first to tell us um what the whole outlook out there seems to you to be, and then perhaps we’ll find out if our other guest agrees with that outlook. (45:10)

[Michael Foot:] Well, I-I-I think that what the British government wants—which is what was also stated in the uh declaration made when Mr. Anthony [Eden] saw President Truman at the end of last year--is a negotiated settlement in Korea and the Far East, and uh an attempt to prevent the extension of the war. I think the-what--they want that partly for the strategic reasons that have been mentioned by Mr. Brown, but also because of the uh futility, in our view, of o-of engaging in a war with uh China. The Japanese tried to fight the Chinese for about ten or fifteen years, and they spent on the huge resources on the enterprise, and they weren’t uh near victory, even at the end of the whole of that endeavor. And we also think it would be quite wrong to try and restart the whole of that civil war. And therefore, we want the negotiated settlement. I believe it’s a great tragedy, both for the Chinese people and for the rest of the world that so far the Chinese government in Peking has refused all the perfectly fair and proper offers of a ceasefire, which were put forward by the United Nations. But I believe that military events in Korea recently in the last few months may have had--may have some effect upon their view, and that it’s much wiser for us to keep open the possibility of such negotiations than it is to slam the door, to apply sanctions, or to extend the war which would play into the hands uh--the only people who would really profit from such a policy would be the people in the Kremlin.

[William J. Brown:] Um --

[ER:] Do you have anything you want to add?

[William J. Brown:] Uh yes please, uh Mrs. Roosevelt. Eh you-you asked the question “What is our policy in Asia?” [ER: Yes.] The answer is we haven’t got one. What we’ve got is a hope! [ER laughs] Which is quite a different thing. Now, the hope is that --

[ER:] That’s what most people have at present. [ER and William J. Brown laugh]

[William J. Brown:] Yes --

[Michael Foot:] At any rate, a hope is better than despair. And I think the other policy would be based on despair.

[William J. Brown:] Well, it do-just let me proceed, Michael -- uh the hope is that Communist China is not indissolubly and permanently tied up with Soviet Russia. The hope is that the Communist International will cease to function. I believe that hope to be quite unfounded. It doesn’t correspond with the dialectic, and I think that you’ve got to regard Communist China as part of the Communist International which is waging war upon the free world. Now I don’t in the least object to the hope of an agreed settlement in Korea. And I don’t in the least object to governments trying to cash in, as it were, on the present military situation in order to achieve a peaceful settlement in Korea. But anybody who believes that even if you get it, you have begun to solve your problem, either in Asia or in Europe, has either not read the dialectic--you see--or having read it, uh the dialectic has failed to register any impression whatever upon his mind.

[Michael Foot:] Well eh, I’d just like to say one word on the subject of the dialectic; if-uh Bill Brown thinks that what has happened since Karl Marx enunciated has corresponded with what he prophesized, well I think it’s—a lot has gone very wrong with the dialectic because uh part of the dialectic suggested -- or the Communist argument suggested -- that uh revolution was going to take place in the heavily
industrialized nations first. In fact, it’s uh taking place much more in the peasant countries of the world where there is a serious land problem. And I believe that it --

[William J. Brown:] If you’re telling me that Marx made mistakes, that Lenin made mistakes that [Michael Foot: Unclear terms] Stalin made mistakes, I entirely agree. But they’re still equally objectionable at the end of it.

[Michael Foot:] Yes, but uh don’t let’s-get on to the idea of thinking that somehow or other, there’s some inevitable dialectic that’s going to work out; it’s nothing of the kind. In the case of the Chinese, if you take the long-term interest of the Chinese people – which even on certain Marxist principles might influence their government -- they have a long-term interest to trade and have association with the-with the United States, and with Britain, and with the other free countries of the world. They will need, if they’re going to develop their country, machines which they will not be able to get from the Soviet Union precisely because the Soviet Union is very short of those things themselves. And therefore, I believe that if we do not do anything catastrophic, and if we do not take a fatal course of engaging in a new general war with the Chinese, then there is a prospect that you can have happening in China what has happened in Yugoslavia, and I’m sure if we’d had a discussion here a week before the announcement that Marshal Tito had broken with the Kremlin, Bill Brown would’ve been just as emphatic in saying that it’s absolutely impossible to think that any such development could possibly occur, and that anybody who suggested anything of the sort would-obviously didn’t know the first thing about the dialectic.

[ER:] It interests me very much to find that there is much the same division here that there is um [William J. Brown: In America.] at home! And uh at home they’re always saying exact-- to the government, “Give us your exact policy.” And I think I find here um much the same tendency uh to feel that an exact, laid-down, word-by-word policy is almost impossible in the present situation. [ER laughs] [William J. Brown: All that we have, Mrs. Roosevelt --] Oh, the world over, perhaps, we have the same trouble today!

[William J. Brown:] W-what we have is not a policy, Mrs. Roosevelt, it’s a timid tentative. (50:38)

[ER:] [laughs] Well, one can say what one wants about that, [William J. Brown: Mhm] but now I’m going to ask a question which um does affect us. Uh is there anxiety in this country lest the great power and wealth of the United States might tempt her to dominate the United Nations?

[William J. Brown:] Uh, y-yes.

[ER:] Which one of you wants to answer? You do, all right! Go ahead. [ER laughs]

[William J. Brown:] Um I-I would say that uh th-there is some anxiety on that score, but not much. The much greater anxiety is not that um A-America will exert undue influence, that’s not the anxiety. The anxiety is how would--it will exert the influence? And uh if I may put it quite colloquially, uh the uh-the British are a very old people, in fact you may positively think them decrepit, but in the course of centuries, they have developed a kind of uh-uh-belief that seems uh never either so good or bad as they seem. And that makes our approach to all problems m-more tentative, more reserved than we feel is the case with America. And we feel that the Americans are much more likely to rush their fixes, you see? Uh-sh-quite logically, but we’ve learned that life is more than logic. And uh there is a difference of emphasis there which I think is very much more important than the uh fear of the British of undue American influence. It’s not the influence we fear, it’s how it will be exerted. Mhm.

[Michael Foot:] Well, I-I would agree, I wouldn’t--I think there is anxiety on certain aspects of American policy in this country, although I wouldn’t put them in the same terms as the question. I think there is anxiety partly on the grounds that uh Bill Brown has stated, that uh--going back again to the Far Eastern
situation, that many people feared that the Americans would rush into a policy which would have uh fatal consequences without uh considering the full implications of them. I think there’s also uh at the present moment uh perhaps even deeper anxiety not about the foreign policy so much, eh but about the effects of the rearmament program in the United States. In the sense of the effect it’s having on the raw material situation in Europe and in particular in this country. If the United States is going to use raw materials at the pace that they are proposing in this rearmament program, it will disrupt the rearmament program of the Western powers and indeed affect the general economic life of the-of Western Europe. And there is grave anxiety that we have not yet reached a full planned arrangement about the disposal of raw materials. I think there is deep anxiety of the-o-on that subject at the present time.

[William J. Brown:] Yes. Yes, I agree.

[ER:] Do you think that that uh would tend to dominate the um United Nations, that policy? Or-or is that more a-a uh something that affects the Western powers?

[Michael Foot:] Well, I think what we’ve got to try and get is uh what we had to a-a-in a greater degree during the war, and that is a system of allocating the scarce raw materials between the United States and the Western nations, and the nations that are joined in the Atlantic Pact. And I don’t think we’ve yet got anything like the full planning machinery for doing that, and indeed it could lead in this year to very great consequences in Europe which would affect the international situation if there was a-if there was a reversal of the recovery in Europe, of course, it would play into the hands of the Kremlin. (54:15)

[ER:] Well, that, of course, uh has to do with foreign policy, but I-I don’t think it has to do with the immediate fear that you might have of-of the influence that the United States will exert on the United Nations. [William J. Brown: Well, on that, Mrs. Roosevelt, um -- um--] It does have. But um do you really have any fear of the United Nations trying--of the United Nations becoming dominated by United the United States?

[William J. Brown:] I d-I don’t think - I-I don’t think it would be right for anybody to say that, in view of the um discussions that took place, for instance, about the American resolution o-on China which came up at the United Nations. I think there was a-a compromise reached on that resolution which showed that uh that American policy was prepared to consider, not the British view, but the view of many other nations that were sitting there. And therefore, I think that we can-we can continue, and I c-certainly think we must do everything in our power to maintain the United Nations in operation, and I don’t believe we should be-we should have fear that is suggested in the question.

[ER:] Now um I want to ask you one question, because we have had a sort of general statement of uh discussion on foreign policy, um I wonder whether uh we would anticipate, in the event of a Conservative government, any more change of emphasis in the broad outline of the foreign policy?

[William J. Brown:] Well, I-I think not, because in this country, the um-- it has been a habit of some centuries to um to keep foreign policy rather above the party political battle. We battle about all sorts of other things, but um generally as a people on foreign policy, we speak as one. Uh there is not that clash on international affairs in Britain that there would be on uh almost any domestic controversy that you could mention. Um th-I think the substantial difference that a change of government would make is that a Conservative government would probably be more English than a Labor government.

[ER:] [laughs] Well --

[Michael Foot:] Well, I’m-I’m not a--tha-that begs a lot of questions because I don’t-nobody knows exactly what Bill Brown means by “more English.” I-- [ER: More --?] [Michael Footaughs] But I
wouldn’t agree that uh there are not some very considerable differences of opinion between the parties on foreign affairs. [William J. Brown: Well, there are. Yeah.] For instance, uh if you take the whole attitude towards um India and uh the policy which this Labor government has pursued in that respect, I don’t believe a Conservative government would have done that, and I think that would have had a very big effect on the present situation. I don’t think that uh --

[William J. Brown:] Ah yes, but uh-b-but Michael, that-th-that-th-that if I may say so is uh is an internal affair within-within the empire. I think what Mrs. Roobs-Roosevelt has in mind is foreign policy.

[Michael Foot:] Ah well, I don’t -- I-I -- but I don’t regard that as an internal matter within the commonwealth, I regard it as affecting the whole Asian policy of the British government. I think that the British government, thanks to the policy which it took in India and with Ceylon and Burma, I think greatly increased British prestige in Asia, and uh thereby the British commonwealth does make a particular contribution and can make a particular contribution to the proper development of Asia. Precisely because the British government did carry out in Asia the most dramatic retreat from imperialism of the old kind which I believe the world has ever seen.

[William J. Brown:] So much increased our prestige [ER: This we could --] that the Chinese don’t even trouble to reply to our notes.

[ER:] We could argue a long time on this question -- [Michael Foot: Ah, but it’s uh-its increased our prestige great --] because it is an internal question. But we have only a few minutes left and as I go around the world I uh find I can learn nearly as much from the questions people ask me as from though-the answers they give to my question. And I wondered if there was any question that either of you two gentlemen would like to put to me about the American scene at the moment? (58:17)

[Michael Foot:] Well, we would very much like to know your views about the controversy between President Truman and General MacArthur, if that’s a proper question to ask, and what it--and what effect you think it will have on the position of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party in the United States?

[ER:] Well, I think at the present moment it’s almost uh-uh a difficult thing to say because much depends on developments uh in the world as well as at home. But our people in the end uh are --they are giving General MacArthur welcome as a soldier. [William J. Brown: Mhm. Mhm.] Uh they think out uh questions, and while this has become a political question, I think um there will be a calm appraisal of the whole situation and perhaps change the first um reaction as time goes on. [William J. Brown: Mmm.] I don’t know whether that um uh -- no one can really prophesize what will happen on that.

[William J. Brown:] Well the-the only question I-I’d like to ask, Mrs. Roosevelt, is one that troubles me a great deal, and it-it springs out of an earlier part of this discussion: What chances are there in America of removing foreign policy from the arena of inter-party battle?

[ER:] Well, just before election I am afraid there is very little chance. Uh that has always been the case. [William J. Brown: Mmm.] But we are growing up. And I think perhaps it will improve, and now I’m sorry to say that our time has come to an end, and I must thank both Mr. Brown and Mr. Foot, and say goodbye for today.

[Theme music begins 1:00:00]
[NBC Announcer:] [speaking over music] Next week, at this same time, NBC Television will again present *Mrs. Roosevelt Meets the Public*, with another vital discussion from overseas. Today’s program was kinescoped in its London studios by the British Broadcasting Company.

[Theme music ends 1:00:44]

(1:00:45)