

## 10. The USSR and East-Central Europe

### The USSR at the Countries of East Central Europe and Balkan on the End of War

A peculiarity of the Tehran conference was that its participants touched only briefly on the substantive issues of the post-war settlement Germany. They focused their attention on issues to do with the organization of the area between the USSR and Germany, and only in this context was the issue of Germany's future addressed. The shift of initiative in the war to the USSR, whose army stood near the borders of Poland and Romania at the time of the Tehran meeting, shaped political discussion and political actions in the period between 1943 and 1945. Churchill's plans for the region, based upon a concept of federal states in Eastern Europe and the Balkans that would ensure continued British influence, were unsustainable.<sup>310</sup> They came up against Soviet worries that a new version of the inter-war 'sanitary cordon' would be created. It is difficult to agree with those who think Stalin wished to immediately begin laying the groundwork for the future Socialist bloc. At that time, Soviet thinking was vague in nature and did not extend beyond a basic framework.<sup>311</sup> Stalin did indeed wish to create units that would allow the Soviets control over the territory, but he conceived this only as an effort to create governments in neighbouring countries which would be 'friendly' to the USSR, by which he meant governments made up of antifascist parties and organizations. He preferred communists to have a strong position, but did not treat this requirement as a litmus test. His chief emphasis was on a positive relationship between these countries and the anti-Hitler coalition, including the USSR.

Something that cannot be left out of the story is the dissolution of Comintern, which came in May 1943. The nature of its program led to its demise: through it, communist parties attained independent decision-making on political issues in their own countries, weakening their rigid dependency upon Moscow.<sup>312</sup> At the

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310 *SSSR i germanskij vopros*, Vol. 1, pp. 209–210 (Record of interviews between Maisky, the Soviet ambassador in London, and Eden, the Foreign Minister of Britain, 3.5.1943).

311 Cf. *Sovietsky faktor v Vostochnoy Evrope 1944–195D3: Dokumenty*, Ed. Volokitina T. V. Moskva, ROSSPEN 1999 Vol. 1, pp. 8–10.

312 Georgi Dimitroff, *Tagebücher 1933–1943*, Ed. Bayerlein Bernhard, Berlin, Aufbau-Verlag, 2000, pp. 689–696 and 700–701 (Stalin's interview for Reuter about dissolution of Comintern, 28.5.1943).

time, the Western allies perceived the step positively, as signalling the upcoming liberalization of communism, although they insisted the USSR respect their interests and influence.<sup>313</sup>

We have no knowledge of any comprehensive concept Stalin might have had for the post-war organization of Europe and the world. But his basic notions may be distilled from his attitudes at the Big Three meeting, from his dialogues with statesmen and diplomats in the Alliance, and from internal statements he made or that were made by other leading Soviet politicians and diplomats. Stalin's concept was malleable, depending upon the evolution of the war and the changing balance of power among the Allies. Several points, however, were constants. First, he was convinced that Germany would remain the key threat to the USSR and its allies after the war. The objective then had to be to forestall any renewal of Germany's military potential. Stalin wished not only to destroy the basis of German militarism. He supported plans for its territory to be restricted and parcelled up, and the population to be transferred. But these plans were not particular to Stalin. They were shared in various degrees by other members of the Big Three, and reflected the thinking and feeling of a generation which had experienced two destructive world wars started by Germany. Stalin's own plans were based upon his conviction, once shared with his political counterparts, that left to its own devices, Germany would initiate another war of aggression over the ensuing two or three decades.<sup>314</sup> His opinion was shared by those around him. Maisky's notes said, 'For a period of 30 to 50 years, we must strive to neutralize Germany to the maximum extent possible so that it will never again think of launching aggression against anyone.' He thought it would take 'two generations' to eliminate the war's consequences.<sup>315</sup>

Another element of Stalin's thought, that the permanent nature of the threat posed by Germany would form the basis for maintaining the coalition between the USA, Great Britain, and the USSR, is also noteworthy. He had originally conceived the USSR's post-war relationships in terms of the long-term collaboration among the countries which had been part of the anti-Hitler coalition, and was probably reinforced in this opinion by his contact with the leaders of the Allied countries, particularly Roosevelt and his administration. In many respects, Roosevelt's administration was open to the USSR, and this often made arriving at

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313 *SSSR i germanskiy vopros*, Vol. 1, pp. 673–675, notes 101, 102, 103.

314 Cf. Stalin I., *O Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne Sovetskogo Soyuza*, Moscow, OGIZ, 1946, 5<sup>th</sup> edition p. 146 (Speech 6.11.1944); also *Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam*, ed. Fischer A., p. 47.

315 *SSSR i germanskiy vopros*, Vol. I., p. 335.

compromises easy. Many Soviet documents were thus written around the notion of collaboration by the Big Three.<sup>316</sup>

This trend in thinking was more than short-term; it was also reflected in the way the post-war reconstruction of the country was conceived. This was a central point for Maisky. His proposals noted that the USSR was ‘very interested in maintaining the nature of... economic relationships with the USA and Britain... It is clear that both these superpowers will play a significant role in global trade... Under certain conditions—and this is important—they may be a source of aid in the post-war reconstruction of our economy... The optimum variant for reparations will cover only a portion of our war loss; aid from the USA and from Britain thus becomes key...’

Maisky’s theory was that the ‘capitalist upper class’ in these countries would be interested in providing aid on a commercial basis, as part of long-term loans. From the USSR’s standpoint, such aid would be desirable ‘under favourable conditions... based upon the Lend-Lease Act’. Economic negotiations with the Americans and Britons were to ensure the USSR would be supplied for a period of five to ten years after the war. These supplies targeted ‘restoring production of the most important goods. The USA and Britain (particularly the former) will use their understanding of their obligations as allies, and the list of goods will be specified based upon the opportunities available under the Lend-Lease Act’. Maisky was aware that his ideas could only be implemented if the mutual relationships between the countries were in order. He therefore added that it was 1) necessary to ensure peace in Europe and Asia for a period of 30 to 50 years, and that 2) the USSR had to come out of the war with strategically advantageous borders, meaning the 1941 borders expanded to include Petsamo, Finland, which it had acquired, southern Sachalin, and, in the Far East, Kuril. Other wishes included a common border between the USSR and the Czechoslovak Republic, and that the requirements imposed by the Soviet Union in its negotiations with Britain in 1942 be met. The latter meant concluding agreements with Romania and Finland that would allow the USSR to build military, air and navy bases on their territory, and securing transit for the USSR across Iran to the Persian Gulf.<sup>317</sup> Maisky’s ideas on peace, however, embodied a deep contradiction, because they strove to retain long-term peace on an imperialist basis.

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316 Reference is made particularly to documents prepared by Maxim M. Litvinov, Ivan M. Maisky, Jakov Z. Suric and others, e.g., *SSSR i germanskij vopros*, Vol. 1, also see Reynolds etc., *Sojuzniki, protivniki, potomki*, in: *Soyuzniki v vojne 1941–1945*, pp. 425–426.

317 *SSSR i germansky vopros*, Vol. I., 351–352.

The issues brought up by Maisky and Litvinov served as the foundation upon which to prepare discussions with the Allies that were to be conducted by diplomats at home and abroad known to support working with the Allies—an important point. The list of conditions for permanent peace was not particularly short, but it did not call for creating an isolated block of countries or altering the social system in the ‘friendly countries’. What it did aim at was ensuring was ensuring the USSR’s position as a global superpower. Maisky added that the USSR should see that the post-war regimes established in countries west of its borders were ‘built on the basis of a broad democracy’. He saw the United States as a country engaged in dynamic, expansive imperialism, but in spite of this, he was also aware of the danger in straining the relationship with both it and Britain, which he preferred to continue on friendly terms.<sup>318</sup>

Here we are speaking in general terms about the Soviet conception of foreign policy. But historians cannot succumb to the temptation to consider the ideological rhetoric put forth by Stalin and his diplomats an adequate expression of the objectives that had been set. In negotiating with Western politicians, Stalin chose different words and different arguments than he employed within the Communist environment. However, it would be a gross mistake to consider his statements in the Communist environment the only real expression of his thinking. The Soviet leadership, particularly Stalin, was aware it could not push immediately for social change of the Soviet type in European countries. For this reason, other potential solutions were considered. Geoffrey Roberts noted Stalin’s statements during the Yalta Conference: ‘We must part with the notion that the victory of socialism may only be brought to fruition through the intermediary of the Soviet government. It may also be obtained... using other forms of state systems such as democracy, the parliamentary republic, or even the constitutional monarchy.’<sup>319</sup> Included in this was also Stalin’s interest in the concept of ‘socializing democracy’ proposed by Edvard Beneš. Beneš presumed socialist reforms could come as part of a pluralistic political and economic system based upon an alliance relationship with the USSR while maintaining friendly relationships with the USA and Great Britain.<sup>320</sup> Later, Stalin embodied these ideas in the concept of what he called the ‘specific paths to socialism’, which he promoted in

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318 *SSSR i germanski vopros*, Vol. I., 355–356 and 359.

319 G. Roberts, *Stalin’s War*, pp. 287–288. These ideas were independently recorded by Bulgarian communists Vasil Kolarov and Georgi Dimitrov, who was the Comintern Chairman at that time.

320 See *Sovietsky faktor v Vostochnoy Evrope 1944–1953: Dokumenty*, (Ed. T. V. Volokitina etc.) Moscow, ROSSPEN 1999 Vol. 1, Vvedeniye pp. 5–22.

1946. Yelena Zubkova, the Russian author, states that in 1945–47, the Soviet leadership also considered the same pattern of socialist reform for the Baltic States, although the area had been made part of the USSR.<sup>321</sup> That this concept was more than just a manoeuvre is probably also testified to by its becoming the subject of an international campaign, gaining numerous supporters not only among the leading communist parties, but also outside them. Later, during the ‘Cold War’, Stalin persecuted these very supporters as enemies.

The situation in the region was given not only by the relationships among the superpowers, but also by the internal attitudes toward the Soviet Union and Russia within the individual countries, which were frequently negative. These attitudes had been in existence since the czarist empire and Soviet policy during the interwar period hadn’t done much to help. To the contrary; the annexing and Sovietisation of many countries on the eve of the war reinforced these attitudes, making Soviet dominance unpalatable to a great number of the region’s people. During the war, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Finland supported Hitler and the local fascist regimes and Soviet authorities were rebuffed even when they reached out to politicians in civic parties and people of all social strata.<sup>322</sup>

In the region where the USSR gained a position of dominance, only three countries were part of the anti-Hitler coalition: Poland, the Czechoslovak Republic, and Yugoslavia.<sup>323</sup> Geopolitically, Poland, which can hardly be described as a country friendly to the USSR, was the most important. The gap was not solely due to the obvious issues – the events of 1939, the border, and later, Katyn—it was also the outgrowth of many years of common history. In the analysis cited above, Maisky noted: “In the past, Poland has almost always been Russia’s enemy... and no one can say with certainty whether a future Poland will be a friend to the USSR.”<sup>324</sup> Poland’s rejection of the USSR and the USSR’s lack of confidence in the Polish civil resistance were long-term and difficult to overcome.

In Yugoslavia, some areas in particular supported friendly relations with Russia for religious, cultural, and ethnic reasons. At the governmental level, this became fully manifest only after the Communists led by Josip Broz Tito seized power. Subsequently, the relationship between the USSR and Yugoslavia seemed warm and friendly on the outside, but internally, it was characterized by hidden tension.

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321 See Zubkova Jelena, *Pribaltika i Kreml’ 1940–1953*, Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2008, p. 130.

322 Geller M./Nekrich A. *Utopia u vlasti*, pp. 453–454.

323 Albania was not considered to be an independent state and its status had not been designated.

324 *SSSR i germanski vopros*, Vol. I., p. 341.

Tito could make his own decisions. On the international level and as regarded the country's internal politics, Tito took a much more radical course than Stalin recommended. In the end, this led to a long-lasting conflict between both countries.

Out of the entire region stretching from the Baltics to the Black Sea, it was the relationship between the USSR and the Czechoslovak Republic, whose government-in-exile had obtained key compromises from the USSR without hurting its friendly relations with the USA and Great Britain, that had developed most favourably. Because of this, the Czechoslovak government-in-exile initially profited most from the positive atmosphere current in the anti-Hitler coalition between 1943 and 1945. The Czechoslovak delegation, led by President Benes, travelled to Moscow immediately after the Tehran meeting, feeling positive not only about its negotiations with Stalin, but also about a number of key promises for the post-war period: 'In general, our proposals and requirements really will be supported by the Allies... The maintenance of all agreements and negotiations both with us and with Britain and America may in my opinion be expected with absolute certainty. Respect for what was promised in Moscow and Tehran to the Anglo-Saxons should not be subject to doubt. The Soviet Union considers itself a global equal, is proud of its role and position, and will not wish to abandon that,' Beneš reported after returning from Moscow.<sup>325</sup>

We mention the USSR's significant isolation in the region, because it contributed substantially to the difficulty with which compromises were reached by accelerating the conflicts which, after the disintegration of the Big Three, led to the Cold War. From 1943 on, this was most clearly reflected in the 'Polish issue', but the situations in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Yugoslavia were also affected. Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, the leader of the Polish government-in-exile, confronted though he was with the publication of information about the Katyn murders, nevertheless gravitated towards compromise with the Soviet government under pressure from both Roosevelt and Churchill. But as a member of the Peasant Party, he did not have sufficient support among those in the exile community or the resistance to effect one, and as a result, he was not able to play the role well during the Tehran conference.<sup>326</sup> Mikolajczyk's government thus lost the chance

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325 *Československo-sovětské vztahy v diplomatických jednáních 1939–1945: Dokumenty*, Vol. 2, červenec 1943–březen 1945, ed. J. Němeček et al. Prague, SÚA, 1999, p. 173 (Tel. report from Edvard Benes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated 18.12.1943).

326 *Přepiska Předsedatelya Soveta Ministrov SSSR*, Vol. II, doc. 203, 214, 215, 217, 219, 220, 223; pp. 145–146, 151, 152–153, 154–155, 156; cf. Paczkowski A., *Pół wieku dziejów Polski 1939–1989*, pp. 124–127.

to establish itself in liberated Poland, where it was clear the Soviet army would be the decisive military factor. The Western Allies, unless they wished to butt up against Stalin, had to seek compromise by concession, with the end result being a Polish border that followed the 1920 'Curzon Line'.<sup>327</sup> In the spirit of Stalin's proposals, the USSR and the West agreed that Poland would be compensated for its territory by being granted a portion of eastern Prussia and that part of Germany that lay east of the Odra River.<sup>328</sup> Poland, though, was a sovereign state and the Big Three, particularly the Western powers, could not unabashedly dictate conditions to the Polish government without discrediting the principles of the Atlantic Charter.

The situation, then, developed as follows: In summer of 1944, Roosevelt arranged a visit to Moscow where he met with Stalin and arranged a meeting between Stalin and Mikolajczyk intended to signal Stalin's willingness to continue negotiations. Meantime, events marched on. The Soviet army crushed the powerful German army group called 'The Centre' in Belarus, broke through the German lines, and came to a halt on the right bank of the Vistula River in Warsaw. The fate of the Polish government was now an acute problem. Mikolajczyk could not reorganize the government on his own say—he was bound by the decisions of the Polish government-in-exile and the attitude of the USSR and the Western Allies. Stalin wanted to see a government with which he could make an arrangement, and he insisted that those he considered double-dealers, who played against both the Germans and the USSR, should not take part.<sup>329</sup> Stalin argued that Poland was a key pathway to Germany and the Soviet leadership needed a 'loyal ally' that would provide a secure base. He proposed a compromise: creating the government from among representatives of the London exile and the 'Moscow Polish', with the latter being in the majority but chaired by Mikolajczyk. He further conditioned the creation of this government on a direct agreement between Mikolajczyk and representatives of the Moscow Polish. This

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327 The Soviet government was willing to allow for modifications at Białystok and in the south but not to give up Lwow and Vilnius to Poland. A. Paczkowski, *Pół století dějin Polska (from Polish: Pół wieku dziejów Polski 1939–1989)*, pp. 69–70.

328 See Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam: Die sowjetischen Protokolle von den Kriegskonferenzen der "Großen Drei", Hrsg. Fischer A., Köln, Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1985; pp. 7–13 (Fischer A., *Einleitung* and pp. 67–87; Perepiska Predsedatelja Soveta Ministrov SSSR, Vol. II., doc. 180, pp. 132–134.

329 *Československo-sovětské vztahy*, Vol. 2, 213. In December 1943 Stalin declared to Benes that, in principle, he did not reject a government in London but he could not allow for it to include people with clearly anti-Soviet tendencies.

was unacceptable to both Mikolajczyk and the Western Allies. It meant establishing the 1941 borders, and establishing a government in which the majority consisted of emigrants to Moscow.<sup>330</sup>

This situation, almost impossible to resolve, saw an uprising in Warsaw organized by the local Home Army (Armia Krajowa), which acted at the bidding of the London government. The Soviet leadership was confronted with a situation in which the Polish resistance, recognizing the authority of the government-in-exile, sought to occupy the Polish capital. The insurgents did not adequately take into account the Soviets' lack of touch with this government, nor its rejection of it. Mikolajczyk was in Moscow when the uprising broke out but Molotov refused to hear him out, and so Stalin was informed only during his personal meeting with Mikolajczyk on the third day of the uprising. By this time, the Soviet offensive had already come to a halt.<sup>331</sup> Stalin promised Mikolajczyk help, but later he came to the conclusion that the uprising had been the 'criminal act of rabble-rousers' and harmed both the Polish people and the Soviet army. Stalin did not indicate the reason for his change of mind, but it must have been because the Communist resistance did not take part in the uprising. The Red Army rejoined the battle at Warsaw, but not before the uprising had been ended and the insurgents surrendered. The entire episode had a long-term harmful effect on both Poland and the USSR. Up to 20,000 insurgents died, along with 150,000 to 200,000 Warsaw residents, as the Germans systematically blew the city up. Warsaw was to disappear from the map.<sup>332</sup>

We have already spoken of the fact that historians are neither judges nor prosecutors; their task does not lie in issuing rulings. Stalin was certainly less than enthusiastic that the uprising had put him in a situation from which there was no easy way out. It is not up to us to judge whether Soviet troops could have crossed the Vistula at that point in time. Zygmunt Berling, who commanded the Polish forces approaching Warsaw at that time, did have Soviet support, but he was unable to make the crossing. The losses suffered by the Red Army in the operation that brought it to the banks of the Vistula amounted to 200,000 irreversible losses

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330 *Perepiska Predsedatelya Soveta Ministrov SSSR*, Vol. II., doc. 218, pp. 153–154; also see Roberts G., *The Stalin's War*, pp. 251–260.

331 Mikolajczyk negotiated with Molotov 31.7.1944 but did not have updated information on the uprising and Molotov made it *de facto* impossible to discuss the topic. See *Vostochnaya Evropa v dokumentakh rossiyskikh arkhivov*, Vol. 1, ed. T. V. Volokitina et al. Moscow / Novosibirsk, Sibirskiy chronograph, 1997, pp. 48–52.

332 Roberts G., *The Stalin's War*, p. 251–254; also *Stalin i powstanie Warszawskie*, ed. A. Przygoński, Warszawa, Grażyna, 1994.



and 590,000 injured.<sup>333</sup> It may thus be presumed that Soviet troops were urgently in need of a rest. The British historian Geoffrey Roberts examined in detail the veracity of statements that the Red Army had purposely come to a halt on the banks of the Vistula and rejected them.<sup>334</sup> Around the same time, the Soviet army and Czechoslovak troops crossed the Carpathians to support the Slovak National Uprising, but without success and at the price of 30,000 irreversible losses out of a total 130,000 casualties.<sup>335</sup>

The motives that led the Polish government-in-exile and the Home Army to the uprising are clear. Nevertheless, decisions were not made on the basis of 'law' but were simply an outgrowth of the balance of power and the fact that it was at that moment unfavourable to the Polish government-in-exile. After Stalingrad and Kursk, the ball was in the USSR's court as far as the war was concerned, and the Western Allies' attitude also stabilized. In his dialogue with Benes, Stalin touched on interference in internal Polish affairs, and Benes translated what he said for Mikolajczyk: 'Do you consider us so stupid that we would wish to interfere in Polish affairs?... We just had the Moscow conference, we had the Tehran conference. We want peace for several generations. Do you think we have time to care about such things?'<sup>336</sup> This 'spontaneous' reaction gave the impression that agreements were possible. Not only did Benes believe it—Roosevelt and Churchill did, as well.<sup>337</sup> There is no way for us to determine in retrospect how the situation might have developed had the Polish government-in-exile accepted Stalin's offer to create a joint government with the Communists chaired by Mikolajczyk. This would likely have forced recognition of the Warsaw Uprising and made it difficult to write off as a 'criminal act by rabble-rousers'. But not much would have been changed in terms of the Soviet government's attitude to what had taken place in Poland.

The unwillingness of the government-in-exile to compromise, certainly not an even-handed approach, sharply and rapidly reinforced the power of the pro-Moscow group which, with the USSR's support, started to take control. The unwillingness to compromise also influenced Stalin and the Soviet leadership to

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333 See *Rossiia i SSSR v voynah XX veka*, p. 296.

334 Mel'uchov M. I., *Operaciya "Bargation" i Varshavskoe vosstanie 1944 goda*, in: *Voprosy istorii* 11/04, pp. 43–57.

335 See *Rossiia i SSSR v voynah XX veka*, p. 299.

336 *Československo-sovětské vztahy* Vol. 2, p. 213.

337 *Perepiska Predsedatelya Sovieta Ministrov SSSR*, Vol. I, doc. 311, 313, 315, 316, 321, 322, 323; pp. 251, 252–253, 253–256, Vol. II, doc. 214, 215, 217, 218, 219, 220, 223; pp. 151–155, 156.

believe that they did not depend upon an agreement with the Western Allies or with the Polish civic resistance to deal with the 'Polish issue.' Stalin's justification was that the Home Army fighters had not avoided armed conflicts with Soviet soldiers, and some Polish politicians pushing their own ideas did not avoid conflicts with representatives of the Lublin administration.<sup>338</sup> He also noted the danger of Polish civil war and the murder of Soviet soldiers.<sup>339</sup> Soviet interest in compromise with the Polish civil resistance and the government-in-exile fell markedly.

## Churchill, Stalin and the "Percentage Agreement"

The Polish matter was not the only thing at stake. The Soviet leadership had gained confidence that its army would be capable of occupying a significant area in eastern Central Europe and the Balkans and of penetrating into Germany. The steps it took, it took with greater confidence than before. This was reflected in Stalin and Molotov's greater focus on the unresolved problems of post-war organization in Europe and around the world. Nevertheless, given the economic and military might of the USA, which had multiplied during the war, and Stalin's resultant wish to keep healthy relationships with America and with Britain, because of its clout as a member of the Big Three, the plans for post-war organization did not turn on doctrinal considerations, nor on any effort to establish communist regimes in the occupied countries, at least not at this point.

By 1944, however, the Germans' eastern front was collapsing faster than the ability of the Allies to agree many key issues that would determine the outcome of the war and the nature of post-war developments. On the one hand, the Allied invasion of France in June 1944 allowed the movement of Allied troops to the German border; on the other, this success had come late in the war. The Soviet army was already entering Central Europe and the Balkans, and this prompted new disagreements.<sup>340</sup> These disagreements were not only between the USSR and the Western Allies; the USA and Great Britain also had differences of opinion. They were motivated by Churchill's attitudes, which were influenced

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338 Based upon the city of Lublin where originally the pro-Soviet Polish administration set up camp.

339 *Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam*, published by Fischer A., pp. 136–137. Stalin speaks of 212 murdered members of the Soviet army and forays attacking military warehouses. For more detail see *NKVD I polskoje podpolje 1944–1945. (Po "osobym papkam" I. V. Stalina)*, Ed. Noskova. A. F. Moscow, Institut slavianovedenia i balkanistiki AN RF, 1994.

340 Churchill W. S., *The Second World War*, Vol. VI, pp. 354–356.

by worries that the USSR's influence would grow once the USA pulled out of Europe. America's pullout from Europe had been mentioned by Roosevelt, who was re-elected for a fourth term in office around the meeting of the Big Three in Yalta in early 1945.<sup>341</sup>

An American pullout from Europe was vital to the British but brought its problems. It placed Britain in the position of being forced to take over the representation and, potentially, the defence of Western European interests, complicated further still by the political trappings of Britain's own 'empire'. It did not feel itself competent to fulfil these roles. Churchill considered establishing France as a European superpower, saying that the long-term need to control Germany would make French assistance essential. It was at this time that the first hints began appearing in the press of a 'Western Bloc'. Churchill denied it to Stalin, but these messages were in fact one of the topics of his extensive correspondence with Field Marshal Jan Christian Smuts, whom he also introduced to Roosevelt. The time for such plans had not yet arrived, however, and France's role, given its capitulation in 1940, was still open to doubt. Churchill therefore asked himself, 'What is there left for France to win that will make the French appear to come to Germany as true victors?'<sup>342</sup>

What is important, though, is that Churchill's thoughts differed from Roosevelt's. And this was true not only as regarded the role of France, but also when it came to the issue of Central Europe and the Balkans. But their differences did not centre strictly on individual topics. Churchill was a supporter of traditional British conservatism which had a twenty-five-year history of rejecting Bolshevism and rejecting any collaboration with the USSR as a state. By contrast, Roosevelt was interested in a broadly conceived liberal conceptualization of the post-war world, a world which would be supported by the newly established United Nations, by the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank, and agreements on the post-war administration of Germany. He was against the creation of a world dominated by spheres of influence held by superpowers and came up with proposals to eliminate colonialism. In general, he did not wish a tense relationship with the USSR, but rather wished to involve the Soviets in the post-war system and to find compromises acceptable to both sides.<sup>343</sup> This naturally does

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341 *Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam*, Ed. Fischer A, p. 113.

342 Churchill W.S., *The Second World War*, Vol. VI., pp. 244–262; G. Roberts, *Stalin's war*, pp. 351–56.

343 Churchill W.S., *The Second World War*, Vol. VI., p. 356 (particularly a letter from Roosevelt to Churchill dated 28.9.1944).

not speak to whether his policy correctly apprehended the reality of the post-war world that arose, or whether it would lead to a successful outcome.

Current developments in the war prompted Churchill to take steps different to those of Roosevelt. One factor was that, because of their late landing at Normandy, the Western Allies had very little at their disposal with which to influence the war in Continental Europe, particularly in Central Europe. Another was that the governments-in-exile of Poland, the Czechoslovak Republic, Yugoslavia, increase operated in London, and the British had taken on obligations toward them that they could not easily shrug off. But the headway made by the Soviet army endangered the implementation of these obligations.

Because of his position in the Big Three, Churchill could not afford to generate a dispute with the USSR. Liberating Central Europe and the Balkans from Nazi bondage was at stake. Challenges like these would not only meet with a lack of understanding from the public, they would probably also lead to a parting of the ways with Roosevelt. Churchill hence tried to create a general awareness of the danger that accompanied the arrival of Soviet troops in the region, but he also sought opportunities to make a separate agreement with Stalin. He did so with Roosevelt's approval, but he had not fully informed Roosevelt what he was up to.<sup>344</sup>

The threats involved generally related to the administration of the countries into which Allied troops had marched. Stalin had initially objected<sup>345</sup> to the British and Americans acting in Italy, but in doing so, they set a precedent, one Stalin found convenient in the end because it gave preference to dependent regimes in the countries that had fought on Hitler's side.

Expectations for the countries of the anti-Hitler coalition were otherwise: they had their governments-in-exile, exile institutions, political party centres, military units, and so on. Once the front was gone, it seemed there would be no obstacle to them taking the administration of their countries back into their own hands. But what happened in practice was different. The front passed through these countries, and the resolution of many issues was delegated to the army headquarters staff of the occupying armies. These frequently influenced the selection of people, and determined which party would be considered representatives of the antifascist regimes. This was true not only of countries occupied by

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344 See Rzheshesvsky O. A., *Stalin i Cherkhil' (Churchill)*: pp. 420–421 and 423.

345 *Perepiska Predsedatelya Soveta Ministrov SSSR*, Vol. I, doc.. 172 and 174, pp. 143–147 and 148–149.

the Red Army but also of Greece, occupied by the British, and Italy, occupied by the British and the Americans together.

In countries occupied by the Red Army, however, things were complicated by the fact that its commanders had only a vague notion of the lifestyle of these countries, let alone such matters as the rule of law, contractual obligations, and the norms of an economic, social, and political life that were fundamentally unlike those in the USSR. The Soviet army was, in fact, entering countries with which it had had only limited intercourse prior to the war. This was naturally strongly influenced by the USSR's relationships with politicians in civic life and its potential disagreements with British or American soldiers and diplomats, both on a broad level and during negotiations at Allied Control Commission meetings.

The Soviets had originally maintained a fairly differentiated policy within Central Europe and the Balkans. It emphasized securing a power position in Poland, but left some room for compromise in the Czechoslovak Republic, Greece, and Yugoslavia, where there were communist radicals,<sup>346</sup> and in Hungary and the divided Austria, where the door to agreement was not wide-open but not entirely shut either. From an external standpoint, the Czechoslovak Republic's position was best: the composition of its government, its territorial sovereignty and its choice of president was accepted by the Big Three, including the USSR.<sup>347</sup> Fair amounts of room were left for economic and political plurality and for contact with the Western Allies. By contrast, in defeated Romania and Bulgaria, the Soviets followed a policy of toughness and concessions were usually superficial.

The situation in October 1944, when Winston Churchill came to Moscow, was that the liberation of the countries of Central Europe and the Balkans was not yet complete. Space for negotiation still existed. Churchill had no specific proposals in his briefcase, but he hoped that an agreement would be forthcoming on Poland that would allow for the reconstruction of its government. His efforts bore no fruit. Neither one of the two streams of the Polish resistance was willing to change its attitude, nor was Stalin willing to support a compromise that would weaken the Soviet position in Poland.<sup>348</sup> Churchill's resistance to

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346 Cf. *Vostochnaya Evropa v dokumentakh rossiiskikh arkhivov*, ed. T. V. Volokitina et al., doc. 151, pp. 443–463 (A record of a discussion between Stalin and B. Bierut and E. Osóbka–Morawski).

347 The exception was the case of Carpathian Ruthenia, which Stalin saw as ceded to the USSR as part of Ukraine.

348 See Rzheshhevsky O. A., *Stalin i Cherkhil'*: s. 469–474 (V. Pavlov's record of discussion between Churchill and Stalin, 16 October 1944).

the forced suppression of political opponents to Soviet policy was understandable. But Roosevelt was simultaneously telling Stalin that no government, even a Western one, would wish during a difficult war with a strong opponent to have an organized armed power outside its control causing trouble behind its back.<sup>349</sup>

Negotiations on the Balkans were somewhat more successful. The background to them began in April and May 1944 with the advancement of Soviet troops into Romania and the worries this brought for British governmental circles. Soviet political leaders in Romania were lacking in suitable partners among their local counterparts. This fact encouraged them to negotiate with the British to try to come to an agreement between the two on both Romania and Greece. Decisive for the resolution of the Romanian matter was the Soviet attitude; for the Greek issue, it was the British attitude. But because Roosevelt had expressed his dislike for 'spheres of influence', Churchill declared the agreement interim only.<sup>350</sup> Churchill did not make the special case of Romania and that Greece the subject of negotiations in November 1944. Rather it was the definition of the spheres of influence of the USSR versus Great Britain in the Balkans that was at issue. His proposal was specific. On a scrap of paper, Churchill proposed to Stalin that they undertake a percentage division of influence, with the USSR having 90% of the influence in Romania versus Britain's 10%, and the other way round in Greece: Britain 90%, the USSR 10%. In Bulgaria, the ratio was to be 75%:25% in favour of the USSR, and 50%:50% in Yugoslavia and Hungary.<sup>351</sup> In reality, this proposed percentage division on Churchill's part was a rough sketch of an open

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349 In this sense, the notes Roosevelt sent to Stalin at the Yalta conference in February 1945 (Roosevelt shared many of Churchill's objections) were remarkable: "Some of the statements you made today made a big impression on me, in particular your statement that your army marching towards Berlin must have its back secured. You cannot and need not put up with any interim government which would cause your armed forces any difficulties of this kind. I would like you to know I fully realise this." See *Perepiska Predsedatelya Sovieta Ministrov SSSR*, Vol. II, doc. 266, pp. 185–186.

350 Kalinin A. A., *Sovietsko-britanskije peregovory o razdele sfer vlijanija v Evropje v 1944 g.*, in *Voprosy istorii* 9/09, pp. 19–22.

351 The British expressed their dissatisfaction with Tito, who enjoyed British military protection on the island of Vis, for having travelled to the USSR without informing the British. They also expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that the USSR occupied Bulgaria without being at war with it (in contrast to Great Britain) and, finally, expressed "worries" over "civil war" phenomena appearing in the "liberated" countries. By this they meant actions taken by communists and the communist resistance. See Rzheshhevskij, O. A.: *Stalin i Cherkhil' (Churchill)*, pp. 417, 420–421, 423–424 and 429–435.

imperial barter transaction. What is remarkable is the Churchill did not differentiate between the Allied countries and the defeated Axis countries, and that he prefaced his proposal by saying that ‘the Americans and their president would be shocked by such a division of Europe into spheres of influence.’<sup>352</sup>

It was a strange whimsey to go to Moscow aiming to divide up Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Albania 50–50 with Stalin—to cajole him into recognizing the British interest in these countries and, by contrast, open him to defining the Soviet influence in Bulgaria and Romania, countries which had already been occupied by the Soviet army, as 75–25 and 90–10.<sup>353</sup> Churchill’s propositions thus confirmed the former agreements between the two countries on Romania and Greece that were not supported by Roosevelt. What is more, for Churchill they represented a *carte blanche* granted by Stalin for violent interference by the British in Greece.<sup>354</sup> Behind all this likely lay a quiet agreement between Britain and the Soviet Union on dividing up spheres of influence in Central Europe and the Balkans behind Roosevelt’s back.<sup>355</sup> Such an agreement could not take effect without the Americans’ consent, but it became a factor in the deepening disputes and misunderstandings that began to arise among the Big Three.

## Yalta and Potsdam

The negotiations between Churchill and Stalin took place in October 1944 on the eve of the February 1945 Yalta Conference. The decisions taken there have been considered of key importance to the subsequent enslavement of many Europeans in the Soviet bloc, the dividing up of the post-war world and the rise of the Cold War. But this image of Yalta falls far short of reality. Its basic outcome was not a division of Europe, but rather contradictory tendencies to try to maintain the collaboration between the victorious superpowers—something Roosevelt wished for – and to fall into more frequent conflicts, often arising from the attitudes

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352 Rzheshhevskiy O. A., *Stalin i Cherkhil’ (Churchill)*, p. 420 (V. Pavlov’s record of discussion between Churchill and Stalin, 9 October 1944).

353 The issue of Albania popped up later and the percentage influence in Hungary and Bulgaria was changed for the benefit of the USSR.

354 Approximately one month after Churchill’s visit to Moscow, the British, with no scruples, evened the score with the communist resistance in Athens and Greece. See Churchill W. S., *The Second World War*, VI., pp. 247, 253–265, 273–279.

355 Stalin requested that Finland be “punished” in return for a promise given to the Americans that he would not occupy Finland militarily. Stalin also managed to attain the quiet consent of the Allies to the USSR annexing the Baltics (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) which, however, was not recognized *de jure* by the USA.

of Churchill and Stalin. The latter's approach increasingly became one of simply announcing what he had decided, while the former put forward requirements impossible to attain via any method but force.

Overall, the negotiations at the conference went well. The differences of attitude on the part of Churchill and Roosevelt did not change the reality that the USA and Britain were close collaborators, something apparent in the implementation of military operations and in politics and diplomacy. But the USSR and the Western Allies were separated from each other by prejudices on both sides, as well as mutual distrust and differences in their social systems that were ameliorated by the war but very much still present. The USSR reproached the West for its effort to win the war at the cost of Soviet soldiers' lives and worried that its gains would be taken from it once the war had ended.

The key point at the Yalta Conference was Germany's post-war fate. In the foreground was clearly the issue of its integrity. It had been agreed in principle that the eastern sections of Prussia all the way to the Odra River would be handed over to Poland, and that the national border of Austria would be reviewed, radically reducing the territory claimed by the German 'Empire'. But what to do with Germany remained an open issue. Roosevelt, who wished to decentralize its administration and power, had in Tehran been a zealous supporter of dividing the country up. Churchill and Stalin, at their meeting in Moscow in October 1944, had been much more moderate. They agreed to Churchill's proposal to divide the country into two states – a Bavarian state to include southern Germany, and a Prussian state to include the central regions and the North. The Rhine-Westphalian industrial region and the Ruhr and Rhineland, because of their outsize economic importance, were to become an internationally administered unit. As he later confessed, Churchill was primarily interested in postponing the 'German solution' until 'Germanophobia' had passed. At Yalta, he buried proposals for the immediate division of Germany when he indicated the difficulties that would accompany the definition of the new units' borders.<sup>356</sup>

At the subsequent Allied conference in Potsdam in July and August 1945, Ernest Bevin, the new British Minister of Foreign Affairs, supported by Harry Truman and with Stalin's consent, put through a proposal that Rhine-Westphalia was to be included in the same framework—the definitive definition of Germany's borders was to be the subject of the German Peace Treaty.<sup>357</sup> But the other

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356 *Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam*, ed. Fischer A., 107–109; W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, VI., pp. 440–453.

357 *Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam*, ed. Fischer A., pp. 352–353.



side of the coin was that, at Yalta, preference had been given to dividing Germany and Berlin into Allied occupation zones, 'spheres of influence', whose piecemeal nature was to be bridged by the Allied Control Commission for Germany.

This division into new states never happened. The occupation zones, which were to be a short-term solution, instead became permanent reality for the next half-a-century. The allies could not agree the German Peace Treaty. Later, the division of Germany into occupation zones became the basis for the establishment of two German states, the FRG and the GDR. The decision to create these occupation zones was accompanied by an effort to establish France as one of the occupying superpowers, as well.<sup>358</sup> The intention was clear: the issue was not so much administering Germany as it was establishing the West as a political counterweight whose power would balance the European East dominated by the USSR.<sup>359</sup>

Germany's fate was of extraordinary importance to the USSR, not only for security but also for economic reasons. The country needed compensation for the enormous losses it had suffered during the war. German reparations alone could not resolve its problems, and the original Soviet plans did not rely solely on them. Allied help, particularly American help, was to become crucial. Talks with the British in 1944 failed when neither party could agree on the loan procedure. The British had themselves suffered deeply in the war and this was reflected in their own debt levels. Originally, they like the USSR were strongly impacted by the end of American supplies under the *Lend-Lease Act*.<sup>360</sup> The only way to allow for the development of Soviet-British economic relationships was to go back to everyday commercial relationships, but the British did not feel adequately strong financially or adequately politically motivated to give the USSR a loan under favourable conditions.

Similar issues also characterized the Soviet relationship with America. American supplies to the USSR under *Lend-Lease* expressed in dollars attain their highest level in 1944, but their quality was much lower than with supplies for Britain. They were nevertheless of great importance to the USSR, and the Soviet government relied on them being continued, given the enormous casualties and material loss the country had suffered. When Roosevelt died and Harry Truman took office in April 1945, the USA turned a deaf ear on the Soviets' difficulties.

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358 Britain and the USA carved its occupation zone out of their own occupation zones.

359 The logic behind this is clear: Italy and Germany were defeated states, Franco's Spain was out of the question and Belgium and the Netherlands were not superpowers.

360 *Soyuzniki v vojne 1941–1945*, pp. 234–235, 237–238 and 246 (treatise by T. A. Wilson, *Leviafan*).

A request for a \$1 billion loan made in February 1944 and a later request made by Molotov for a \$6.6 billion on were turned down. Both were rejected because of a lack of agreement over the conditions under which they were to be provided.<sup>361</sup> The Americans insisted on the principle of free trade, and on the operations of the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which the USSR found unacceptable because of its economic system. Later the Americans themselves and the British had misgivings because of Soviet policy in Eastern and Central Europe and the Balkans, and the original notions of collaboration came to a conclusive demise.<sup>362</sup>

The failure of these negotiations heightened the importance of reparations to the USSR. Because of its experience with reparations after World War I, the country strived in particular to get 'tit for tat'—the confiscation of property, the disassembly and transfer of industrial facilities, railroad equipment, and so on. Another portion of these reparations were to be covered by products made by German facilities and the facilities of other defeated nations. Their total extent over a ten-year period was to reach approximately \$10 billion, but the USSR was to settle in Germany's reparations to Poland from this sum.

The Soviet Union's requirements, despite the fact that they covered only an insignificant portion of the total loss, were enormously high. A large portion of German industry was situated in the West, not accessible to the Soviets, and the industrial area in the southeast of Germany had been allocated to Poland.<sup>363</sup> The USSR had little opportunity to extract reparations from its own occupied zone, and the Soviet leaders trying to redress the country's war losses were unaware of the true costs of occupying a foreign territory and providing for the needs of its residents, including millions of refugees and people who had been forcefully relocated. The USSR was unaware of the colossal depth of its wartime loss. It could only be compensated to a minimal extent. An agreement drawn up in Potsdam divided Soviet debts equally among other Allied occupation zones, but these were to be partially compensated by food from the Soviet zone.<sup>364</sup> In principle, the Western Allies aimed to satisfy the greatest amount of the USSR's

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361 *Soyuzniki v vojne 1941–1945*, p. 247. American leaders could not imagine the true extent of the material loss and casualties the USSR suffered and the Soviets were reluctant to provide them actual data on the state of Soviet economy.

362 Luňák P., *Spojené státy a Západní Evropa ve studené válce*, Prague, Libri, 1997, p. 54.

363 *Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam*, ed. Fischer A., pp. 259–268 and 401. The reparation problem was to be definitely resolved by a peace agreement with Germany which, as is well known, never happened.

364 *Teheran, Yalta, Potsdam*, ed. Fischer A., 395–398.

debts from its own occupation zone, and this made the issue of reparations into a substantial source of friction between the USSR and the Allies. It complicated the economic situation in Germany and became a source of significant difficulty for the USSR during the consolidation of the situation in its own occupation zone. The Yalta Conference, intended to draw up the basis for the post-war organization of Europe, failed to meet its goals, mostly settling for temporary or provisional solutions.

The actions of both Churchill and Stalin were visibly influenced. Starting in February 1945, other events took place that significantly influenced the war's outcome. The Soviet army's rapid progress—it had leapt from the Warsaw suburbs all the way to the Odra River—came face-to-face with resistance from what remained of the German army. By contrast, the Western Allied troops were making marked gains after having defeated the Germans in the Ardennes and crossing the Rhine. By early May, they controlled a substantial section of northern and central Germany, including areas that had been earmarked for the USSR to administer under the Alliance agreements in late April 1945; moreover, German troops in Italy surrendered, thereby opening the way to Vienna and the Hungarian border.<sup>365</sup> Those German troops which remained to defend Germany's eastern border seemed, then, to be fighting much harder than their comrades protecting central and northern Germany, and Germany's defeat seemed closer at hand. This impacted German foot soldiers and officers as well as that portion of the Nazi leadership that preferred surrender.

All of this naturally was a source of nervousness for the Soviet leadership, which worried that in the final days of the war, it would lose the substantial results of its victory. Even more unsettling for Stalin was the intelligence he was getting about American and British negotiations with Heinrich Himmler's representatives in Switzerland.<sup>366</sup> He questioned whether the Western Allies would respect the agreements, and this was not pure speculation. Though the American politicians and the American leadership mostly adhered to the agreements and arrangements that had been made, Churchill's attitudes had undergone a significant transformation. He himself later wrote, '*Our countries have lost the common enemy that was almost the sole bond between us.*' In so speaking, he wished the British and the Americans—both politicians and soldiers—to know that '*Soviet Russia has become a deadly threat to the war*', and that '*a new front*

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365 Similarly, see, e.g. Roberts G.,: *Stalin's War*, pp. 308–318.

366 *Perepiska Predsedatelya Soveta Ministrov SSSR*, Vol. II, doc. 281, 283–288; pp. 198 and 202–208.

*must be created immediately to stop its expansion. This front,*' he said, *'should be as far to the east in Europe as possible.'* He recommended that the Western Allies take as their main objective conquering Berlin, liberating Czechoslovakia, taking Prague, occupying Vienna perhaps all of Austria, and striking against Tito, who was preparing to occupy Terst and its surroundings.<sup>367</sup>

The impact of Churchill's proposals should not be underestimated. To Europeans of the time, they sounded far different than they do to modern ears. His contemporaries had no idea what would ensue in Eastern Europe. To them, it was not Stalin who was the chief evil, it was Hitler and Nazi Germany, and the USSR had played an undisputed role in their defeat. A sudden disagreement with the Soviet Union such as Churchill imagined might thus quickly escalate into an armed conflict, something that was unacceptable to the majority of the democratic public and which would have unfortunate consequences for Europe.

Roosevelt had died suddenly on April 12, 1945 without seeing Germany's surrender. Roosevelt was a figure of excellence in both American and world history. He initiated the antifascist coalition and was the author of a political vision which saw the Big Three as the first step in a global organization of democratic states that would be able to permanently put to rest the danger of world wars. He was able to connect the United States, Britain, and the USSR in both the war and a political coalition that would have been impossible in prior decades. The UN, in whose founding Roosevelt was the principal mover, included in the structure of the post-war world both the USSR and the conditions for China to take part, as well. In contrast to Churchill, Roosevelt's political methodology was not one of pressure and boycott, but rather one of negotiation and compromise. He took good advantage of the opportunities offered by the scope of America's economic and military potential, regarding the USSR's presence in Europe as a fact to be dealt with, one he did not try to reverse violently but rather to shape in such a way that Allied collaboration remained possible and the USA's influence on developments in the USSR and Eastern Central Europe was maintained. Between 1945 and 1947, though, the course Roosevelt had set for American policy was abandoned. As historians, we do not possess the tools that would allow us to determine what would have happened had this course then been followed. Its potential had not been exhausted when Roosevelt died. Will to negotiate persisted on both the American and Soviet sides, as testified to by the Soviet Union's reaction to Roosevelt's death.<sup>368</sup>

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367 Churchill, W. S.: *Second World War*, Vol. VI, p. 522–529.

368 For detail see Roberts G., *Stalin's War*, pp. 323–324.