The London Conference of Foreign Ministers (September-October 1945) and the Peace Treaties with Germany's Former Allies (I)

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The London session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in September 1945 can be catalogued as a landmark of the origins of the cold war but, surprisingly, it has not received the attentions it deserved. While historians repeatedly acknowledged its role as a symbol of the rapid degradation in inter-Allied relations, it was very often dismissed as a secondary development; its details were neglected or, even worse, were distorted to fit different sets of interpretations about "atomic diplomacy", Soviet reactive policies, etc.

The CFM as an institution was largely born out of American fears and visions about and of the post-war world. The Council was the best possible compromise between the different sets of pressures which influenced the decision to create it. It was meant to become a Great-Power forum which was supposed to take the burden of peacemaking off the shoulders of the UN. Moreover, the State Department wanted to avoid repeating what it saw as the fundamental flaws of the Versailles Peace: the unwanted inclusion of medium and small Powers, the prolonged negotiations, the involvement of the Heads of State. The U.S. officials were also interested in applying the lessons if the inter-Allied negotiations during the last war: the partial failure of the European Advisory Commission for lack of political weight, difficulties in negotiating with anyone other than Stalin or Molotov. Equally, the Council was an opportunity for high-level personal diplomacy.

In the end, however, the Council was crushed under the weight of the peacemaking agenda as the three main Allies entered the post-war period unable to agree unambiguously upon several basic principles which were to govern their *post-bellum* behaviour. Yalta and Potsdam were exercises in ambiguity and even what should have been a straightforward act – the foundation of the Council of Foreign Ministers – was marred by hurried negotiations, major differences, and an ever-present willingness to paper over those misunderstandings, even when they were poised to generate more trouble later. Thus for example the procedural stalemate which provided the formal explanation of the London Conference's failure was really the result of a fifteen minutes meeting in Potsdam between Molotov, Byrnes, and Eden on 20 July 1945 during which the Anglo-American representatives failed to grasp the differences between the negotiations of the past few days and the written agreement which resulted from the lightning meeting.[1]

Since the Potsdam Conference did not set clear limits for the Council's agenda and the peacemaking process had much larger implications for the configuration of the post-war world, the negotiation of the peace treaties became intertwined with issues which brought into the discussion the very nature of the relationship between Soviet Russia and the West: the future of Eastern Europe could not be separated from the problem of the Allied control in Japan, the so-called "Anglo-Soviet cold war" in Turkey and Iran,[2] the British attempts to organise a Western European system or the issue of atomic energy. Furthermore, as it was bound to happen, difficulties in one peace treaty bore upon all others, leaving British officials, for example, to wonder whether Soviet demands in North Africa were genuine or whether they were tactical responses to the Western activism in Romania and Bulgaria.

The failure in London was the corollary of Roosevelt's equivocal legacy for inter-Allied relations as symbolized by the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe. Despite the still persistent image, Roosevelt did not entertain illusions about Soviet behaviour in Eastern Europe, but he hoped that a continued show of goodwill would in the end moderate that behaviour. In addition, Roosevelt had a much more nuanced view on spheres of influence than he led the Soviets or his own officials to believe.[3] Although Roosevelt's prestige and authority would have given him more space to manoeuvre after May 1945, later debates about what Roosevelt would have done had he lived were almost entirely futile since the Truman administration acted in a completely different context: victory in Europe was past while Soviet conduct in Poland and Romania or towards Turkey raised questions about the future.

Initially, the negotiation of the peace treaties and the carrying out of the Yalta Declaration were approached separately, but the American refusal to extend diplomatic recognition to the new regimes in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania blurred any previous distinctions.[4] The failure at Potsdam to do more than simply acknowledge the divergences regarding the representative character of the governments in question and the status of the Allied Control Commissions meant that the CFM was now forced to deal with them. Additionally, the Soviet refusal to discuss the political crisis in Romania, a "liberated territory" transferred to the Council the entire debate concerning the reorganization of the Allied Control Commissions, as well as their agenda. As a consequence, the Council became, at least during its London session a substitute for the projected Emergency High Commission for Liberated Europe,[5] a development resented by the Soviets who feared a potentially hostile majority in the Council, an unwelcome prospect as it could entangle Soviet strategy in Eastern Europe.

The central dilemma for the Anglo-Americans was how to preserve the cooperation with the Soviets while redefining its terms. They had already tried it at Potsdam, but the risk of complete failure had been unacceptably high. The Soviets had a somewhat similar dilemma since the creation of a belt of "friendly" states raised several questions. How were relations with the ex-allies to be managed so that the Soviet objectives in Eastern Europe would be recognized as legitimate and would not lead, at least in the short term, to a complete collapse of the Grand Alliance? Secondly, how was Soviet control going to be imposed so as to prevent potential civil conflicts which would have made very dangerous even a very limited Western intervention?[6] Preserving at least the semblance of cooperation with the Anglo-Americans would be essential if the right answers were to be found. Implicitly, the peace treaties offered themselves o large part of these answers: they would have legitimized both Soviet objectives and the instruments used to fulfil them (pro-Soviet governments, reparations, military presence). Achieving diplomatic recognition for the Romanian, Bulgarian and Hungarian governments represented the nucleus of the Soviet agenda for London, but this was far from being the sole aim; Stalin wanted also to pursue the goal of a Soviet presence in North Africa, to get the largest possible share of the Italian reparations, to support Yugoslav territorial demands, to accelerate the repatriation of Soviet citizens.

One of the most persistent hurdles on the way towards a compromise in Eastern Europe was the Soviet leadership's inability to grasp the significance of Eastern Europe for inter-Allied relations. During the private meetings Molotov had with Byrnes in London the Soviet Foreign Minister repeatedly proclaimed his conviction that a hidden agenda was behind the Anglo-American attempts to force Groza's resignation. There is much to the argument that all these were firstly part of the negotiating tactics used by the astute Soviet minister, but we can also ask ourselves if the Soviet leadership really understood the impact Russian policies in Eastern Europe had on the survival of the Grand Alliance.

In effect the Eastern European objectives of the two camps were irreconcilable in two cases: if the Anglo-Saxons aimed at recreating

the *cordon sanitaire* on the Western borders of the Soviet Union or if the latter intended to bolshevize the region.[7] The compromise solution – a Soviet open sphere of influence – could offer but an extremely fragile basis for negotiation, especially if we take into account the traditional enmity between Russia/Soviet Union and its Western neighbours, the latter's political configuration[8] as well as the nature of the Stalinist system itself. The mixture of ideological isolationism and drive towards international recognition of its Great Power status, of "ideological purity" and territorial expansion (it didn't matter if the final objective was achieving security or exporting revolution – the two were complementary, not mutually exclusive) meant that an autonomous Eastern Europe was not really a choice for Russia. The Soviet Union strove to establish a "geo-ideological" security zone in Eastern Europe.[9] Furthermore, during a period of economic prostration and American atomic monopoly, the concept of an open sphere was bound to be nonsensical for the Soviets. Thus, lacking economic power on a scale comparable to that of the United States and being patently unable to offer an appealing ideological model, the Soviet Union could not afford such an "enlightened" sphere of influence.[10]

As for the Western readiness to accept the creation of an open Soviet sphere, it has been recurrently signalled both by Churchill and Roosevelt, although this acceptance was conditioned by Soviet tactfulness in establishing and strengthening it.[11] Soviet brutality in Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria not only made inter-Allied relations more difficult to manage, but bode future trouble as the question of Soviet real intentions regained its urgency. To put it succinctly, a completely subservient Eastern Europe could be very well a security belt, but it could also very easily become a springboard for future aggression.

Both the American and British officials acknowledged their own inability to exert direct influence on developments in regions close to the Soviet border. They could not challenge Soviet authority in Eastern Europe; they could only attempt to modify the nature of that authority.[12] From this point of view, American policy was very consistent throughout most of 1945 as the intention to discuss in London the issue of the Romanian and Bulgarian governments was simply a continuation of the proposals for tripartite responsibility in liberated territories. Refusing to grant diplomatic recognition to the Soviet-backed governments in Bucharest and Sofia meant using diplomatic instruments in order to modify Soviet behaviour and set certain acceptable limits, to "dilute" what threatened to become a hermetically closed sphere of influence.

At the same time Anglo-American strategy and arguments were never taken to their logical conclusion, beyond requesting the reorganization of East European governments and free elections.[13] Was such an open sphere compatible with the medium and long-term preservation of Soviet influence in the region? What would happen if these elections were won not necessarily by anti-Soviet forces, but by political parties traditionally favourable to the West? The only way out of this conundrum would have been the guarantee that these pro-Western forces would maintain a friendly attitude towards the Soviet Union. It was not impossible since any realist would have understood that the balance of power in Eastern Europe had shifted dramatically in favour of the USSR, but it was unlikely govern the polarized political climate. To allow an autonomous political evolution would have meant to risk relegating the Communist parties to the background and implicitly lose the only trustable guarantee. These fundamental questions remained unanswered and, in some cases, they were never asked in the first place.[14]

An open Soviet sphere of influence would have required a fundamental change of the Soviet system itself. Lacking this, Soviet Union's central aim in most liberated territories was the establishment of absolute control.[15] The paranoiac suspicion and the tendency to see behind any Western action the same absolute cynicism that was its own defining characteristic prevented the Soviet leadership from reaching a compromise on

this issue.[16] Soviet behaviour in areas it controlled directly could only be a replica of its political culture and environment.

Things were not made easier by the absence of any wartime agreement regarding the limits and nature of the Soviet sphere of influence, each of the two sides feeling free to construe the vague informal arrangements.[17] The latter had to meet simultaneously the demands of Western domestic politics and the requirements of Grand Alliance politics and meet they did but the result was that the American public opinion expected free elections in Eastern Europe while the Soviets believed they had a free hand.[18] The burden of this ambiguity was to prove fatal once the common enemy was no longer.

On the other hand, Soviet policies, if they were meant to ensure continued cooperation with the Allies, could hardly be more inopportune as they were not merely conceived to counter any interference in its own sphere of influence, even at the price of destroying any appearance of cooperation, but to dispute the dominant position the other Great Powers enjoyed in regions they thought vital for their security. Even if the reasons were arguably defensive or tactic, the British and Americans were bound to see them as indications of a pattern already revealed in Eastern Europe.

For many Westerners the very creation of the CFM signalled the Soviets' willingness to continue collaborating with Britain and the United States. But since the new organization was "condemned" to address the question of the Romanian, Bulgarian and Hungarian governments' representativeness, the Council was responsible for redefining the fundamentals of the Grand Alliance. Thus the viability of the new international order was going to be put to the test for the first time.[19]

Atomic Diplomacy?

Revisionist historian[20] stated again and again that the CFM London session in September-October 1945 was no less than an attempt to permeate the Soviet sphere with the help of American atomic monopoly. In reality, although far less dramatic, the main diplomatic weapon used in London was simply the refusal to grant recognition to the Romanian and Bulgarian governments and the implicit refusal to sign peace treaties. From this point of view American actions were consistent with the attitudes of the pre-atomic age.

This does not mean that the atom bomb did not play a role in overrating the effectiveness of the American strategy in London (although one would have to doubt if there ever was such a strategy in London) and in making Soviet policy even more unyielding. The very existence of the revolutionary weapon probably had a greater impact on Soviet behaviour; the American diplomatic aggressiveness was considered the direct result. Molotov's refusal to grant even the slightest concession can be interpreted as part of a preventive attack intended to counterbalance the diplomatic consequences of the bomb. Therefore Stalin decided to greet the American atomic monopoly with a mixture of arrogance and derision[21] and the London Conference offered the ideal environment. Molotov's behaviour was described as "reverse atomic psychology": the Soviet Foreign Minister repeatedly ridiculed the significance of the atomic bomb, even stating while supposedly inebriate "We have it [the atomic bomb]". Otherwise Soviet officials failed to manifest publicly any concern for the American atomic monopoly, refrained from identifying it as a threat to Soviet security and did not denounced the US for pursuing an "atomic diplomacy".[22]

Nonetheless, with or without atomic weapons, denying recognition to the three East European governments put American policy on a direct collision course with the Soviets especially so if we agree that one of Stalin's central objectives was to provide diplomatic protection to the still frail communist or pro-communist regimes in the area.[23] The Secretary of State could not envisage using the threat of nuclear war, but could hope to use the prospect of an

international system for the control of atomic energy – or the lack of it[24] – to extract concessions on the peace arrangements in Europe. Byrnes applied both strategies throughout the last months of 1945.

The decision to use the A-bomb against Japan was overwhelmingly a military decision. Byrnes' opinions about the diplomatic advantages of the new weapon – not at all unnatural since he was leading the American diplomatic apparatus – were not debated within the administration before Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[25] An announcement to the world regarding Washington's intention to establish an international regime for the control of atomic energy was simply an impossibility govern the brief interval between the first atomic explosions and the London CFM session as it would have entailed preliminary discussions with the British, and, more importantly, securing a favourable consensus both within the administration and the Congress. This however should not obscure the fact that at the beginning of September there were important members of the administration who warned against delaying an atomic agreement as it would have a devastating effect on current American-Soviet relations.

Since Stalin saw the A-bomb as upsetting the military-diplomatic balance, any American display of doggedness in London was bound to be interpreted as "atomic diplomacy". His initial reaction to Truman's announcement in Potsdam showed this much.[26] Whether or not Byrnes had an atomic bomb "in the pocket", Soviet behaviour during the London session would be the same.

Furthermore, some historians displayed the tendency to approach the behaviour of the American delegation in London in a rather reductionist manner, all in an attempt to give credibility to the concept of an "atomic diplomacy". But, as this article will try to demonstrate, American policy evolved significantly both between the climax of the political crisis in Bulgaria and Romania and the beginning of the London session and throughout the Conference. During the last days of the meeting the States Secretary did everything possible to avoid a failure, even at the price of completely reversing his initial stance.

In conclusion, "atomic diplomacy" seems too powerful a phrase.[27] At the same time there is no doubt that the two atomic blasts represented a crucial part of the background because the very existence of the new weapon (an inescapable reality) seemed to offer an implicit advantage to those who possessed its secret, while the Soviets were determined not to budge for fear that any concession would create the impression that the impact of the American atomic monopoly was felt even within the walls of the Kremlin.[28]

The first CFM session began on 11 September 1945 and ended in total stalemate on the October 2nd. The main delegations were lead by some of the central characters of the era. In what was, at least for the American Secretary of States, an exercise in personal diplomacy, their different personalities could not but play a crucial role, as did their positioning in the domestic power structure: Byrnes, the consummate practitioner of the art of compromise, the could-have-been president who had to reconcile with the role of could-be universal peacemaker, hostile to the Stated Department bureaucracy and having a complicated relationship with president Truman;[29] Bevin, the anticommunist trade-unionist, defender of British imperial interests, hot-tempered and sometimes liable to fall into Molotov's traps; the Soviet Foreign Minister, imperturbable, almost inhuman in his ability to hide any emotion, absolutely loyal to his leader but a target nonetheless for his master's efforts to reassert his authority. Unfortunately for them, Byrnes, Bevin and Bidault did not fully understand that Stalin's control in foreign affairs was total or that Molotov was by no means an autonomous actor. Even when Stalin rejected at the end of September Truman's and Attlee's appeals for a more conciliatory stance, the general impression was that the Soviet leader was in fact the prisoner of his Foreign Minister's inflexibility.

The preparatory activity began in Washington and London immediately after the end of the Potsdam meeting and revealed the

existence of a certain amount of optimism on both sides of the Atlantic. This state of mind was certainly misplaced since a great part of the success in Potsdam was due to the possibility of deferring of some of the thorny issues to the Council of Foreign Ministers. This optimism was far from being unanimous. As the French ambassador observed, some British officials had concluded after the Berlin Conference tat the "negotiations have been extremely unwieldy and the solutions to many of the problems will have to be reached by the Conference of the Foreign Ministers, the creation of which was the most visible success of the meeting, if not the only one".[30] However, the Foreign Office hoped, for example, to reach an agreement on the general lines of the treaty with Italy after a few meetings,[31] while the State Department devoted great energy to organizing the work of the special deputies of the Foreign Ministers, expecting evidently that the latter were going to reach a compromise fairly easily. During the trip to London, Byrnes told a journalist that it would take three weeks at most to reason the Soviets out.[32] On 8 September 1945, during a meeting with the Soviet chargé d'affaires, Novikov, Dean Acheson, recently appointed Undersecretary of State, stated that Byrnes hoped to be back in Washington after two or three weeks, while the Soviet diplomat preferred to be more cautious. Given the outcome of the wartime inter-Allied negotiations it is probable that Stalin and Molotov were themselves fairly confident.[33]

Anglo-American optimism may seem excessive in retrospect, but the London Conference was to prove in many ways a new experience. They had to face up to the post-war realities and had to deal with an increasingly uncompromising Soviet position at a time when they felt they had gone as far as they could to reach a compromise. The American upbeat attitude was at least partly responsible for the US failure to reach a preliminary understanding with the British. The other reason was the effort to avoid the common charges emanating from the Congress for subordinating US policy to British interest and the routine Soviet accusations of ganging-up. Nonetheless, throughout the conference the appearance of unity was maintained thanks to the constant British attempts to bring the two foreign policies into line as an antidote to the rising tensions between Great Britain and Russia.[34] Exploitation of the failure to present a common Anglo-American front represents the most satisfactory explanation for the all-out Soviet offensive against British interests in the Mediterranean. Anglo-American disunity could be exposed if only the Americans' refusal to support British imperial interests could be brought to the surface.

Obviously, from Whitehall's point of view the main point of interest on the agenda was the peace treaty with Italy. While many British officials believed that nothing could come of any efforts to counter Soviet policy in the Balkans, in Italy no effort was to be spared in order to avoid the situation developing on the same pattern. Any Soviet involvement in Italian affairs was unwelcome even if this meant giving up having any say in Bulgaria, Hungary or Romania. At least this is what general Alexander, Allied commander of the Mediterranean theatre thought.[35] Such a *quid pro quo* was highly unlikely. After the Bulgarian political crisis had reached its climax at the end of August with the postponement of the elections, Bevin was determined to break the vicious circle which made any Soviet concessions in Italy on Western compliance in Eastern Europe. A separate peace treaty with Italy offered one possible answer.[36] This apparent determination underlines one of the fundamental ambiguities of the British policy in Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War because Bevin's reaction lends itself to a twofold interpretation, although the practical consequences were essentially the same: either as acquiescence of Europe's division or as a rejection of spheres of influence coupled with an admission that Eastern Europe was beyond Britain's reach. Countless contemporary British documents contain implicit references to the spheres of responsibility in Europe. Nevertheless, a

substantial ambiguity survived as there was a fundamental contradiction between the messages that the Foreign Office exchanged with British representatives in Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria and British diplomats' activism on the one hand and the tendency to pursue a "quiet diplomacy" in the area on the other hand.

Two main causes account for this lack of precision: firstly, the certainty the policy of Soviet exclusion from Italy was inherently weakened by pursuing an active policy in the Balkans; secondly, the perceived need to follow the American lead in Eastern Europe. Even if the effectiveness of the American policies was considered doubtful and there were risks involved, British officials saw even greater risks in proceeding independently.

The peace treaties with German's ex-satellites had the potential to undermine the post-war relations between the three Great Powers. The requirements of alliance politics had temporarily silenced the disagreements regarding Eastern Europe and, after all, "the Balkan states played a relatively small role in inter-Allied relations for the greater part of the war".[37] The Potsdam decision to give priority to the peace treaties with Italy and Germany's ex-satellites dramatically reversed the situation and placed the Balkans states at the centre of the first post-war test of inter-Allied relations.

The US perseverance – entirely predictable given the talks in Potsdam – in refusing diplomatic recognition to the ex-enemy governments gained renewed significance as the political conditions deteriorated, especially in Romania and Bulgaria. While in the case of the former the Potsdam Conference encouraged the opposition parties and the King in their belief that the Anglo-Americans were going to support a change of government, in Bulgaria things were bound to come to a head with the approach and then postponement of the elections scheduled for August 24. The postponement of the Bulgarian vote and the American role in the onset of the Romanian constitutional crisis are vital in any attempt to understand US policy during the London Conference.

Somewhat dissatisfied by his government's passivity and given the improbability of Western actions to prevent fraudulent elections taking place in Bulgaria, Harriman wrote back to Washington on 9 September 1945 that the United States should at least follow the British example and pass to the press relevant information to the press. "I think this is the least we can do."[38]

Things were not however as grim as the British and American ambassadors saw them from Moscow. On the previous day British Foreign Secretary Bevin asked Balfour, the chargé d'affaires in Washington, to convey to the State Department Britain's intention to intervene in the Bulgarian political crisis and to ask for American support. Current electoral law in Bulgaria was unacceptable and the resulting government could not be recognized. All these should be stated very clearly and publicly, thought Bevin. In spite of this British attitude was far from unequivocal. The Foreign Secretary emphasized that refusing to recognize the Bulgarian government "as representative" did not and should not affect *de facto* relations. The latter operated in the realm of practical considerations.[39]

Although encouraging, the rejoinder from Washington showed that the State Department intended to follow a parallel line. Balfour found out the next day during a meeting with Dunn, Byrnes' future deputy in the Council of Foreign Ministers, that the Americans envisaged sending a protest note themselves, even if the general situation in Bulgaria and not the flaws of the electoral legislation provided the main argument for refusing to recognize the government thus elected. While Dunn's memo to Byrnes after the meeting simply recommended action before the elections, Balfour's version of the conversation offered an explanation for the American choice: avoiding references to the non-democratic electoral legislation left the door open for a subsequent recognition of the government.[40] The State Department did not want to take step which could have hindered a compromise.

During the two days that followed Byrnes took the decision to communicate to the

authorities in Sofia that the United States was unable to recognize the government which would have resulted from the elections and the American representatives acted accordingly on 13 August. The aim however was not only to warn Sofia of post-electoral difficulties, but also to achieve an immediate influence on the course of the political struggle in Bulgaria. The major divergences between Moscow and Washington could not be more flagrant when on 14 August general Biriusov, the president of the Allied Control Commission, notified the Bulgarian government of the Soviet decision to renew diplomatic relations.[41] In this way the Soviets were positioning themselves for the London Conference, and, more urgently, they tried to counter the impact of the American note on the government of the Fatherland Front.

The prompt reaction in Washington caught the Foreign Office off-balance, but, given Bevin's preoccupation to ensure a coordinated Anglo-American policy in Eastern Europe, the response was equally swift. On 20 August Bevin criticized vehemently the situation in Bulgaria and a note to Sofia announcing London's decision to deny recognition to any government resulted from the elections followed immediately.

One must not discount the importance of pressures coming from the periphery, from the British diplomats in Bulgaria. Houston-Boswall, the British politic representative in Sofia, was able to portray the situation in terms of a conflict between democracy and totalitarianism which was about to reach a decisive stage. Consequently, a determined Western reaction could be equally decisive. Houston-Boswall was arguably right when he stated that the crisis in Bulgaria represented a unique opportunity. The Soviets could counter the political stalemate and the Western pressures only through a forceful and plainly visible intervention, but "it is a well-known fiction (to which the Russians adhere very pertinaciously) that the USSR, which operates by fifth-column methods through local Communists, never interferes with the internal affairs of another country".[42]

The British efforts to align the two countries' policies were met with indifference at the State Department. Balfour's official demarche on 9 August received an official reply on 20 August, in fact a public statement already two days old.[43]

US actions throughout the following weeks and the constant lack of preliminary consultations led to an increasingly tensed relationship between Bevin and Byrnes which would reach its low point in Moscow in December 1945. When, on 24 August, Bevin warned Byrnes that "the time has come to decide whether or not to acquiesce in this block of [East European] countries remaining indefinitely in the Soviet sphere of influence" and that it was vital to find the right instruments to achieve such objectives, his irritation was apparent:

> "There is a danger that uncoordinated methods of handling this very delicate and important problem may lead to the two Governments failing to combine their policies to the greatest advantage. As an example in point, the United States Government took a separate initiative in Roumania against the Groza Government. In Bulgaria, although a joint policy was in essentials agreed upon, the United States political representative acted somewhat in advance of His Majesty's Government in regard to the coming elections. It seems clear that in challenging, as the American and British Governments have done, the predominant position which the Soviet Government was built up for itself in these two countries, the two Governments are embarking upon a course which will call for the most careful navigation."[44]

The intention at the top of the Foreign Office to set clear objectives, find appropriate instruments and establish how far the Anglo-Americans were able or willing to go in confronting the Russians was reasonable enough, but the absence of a reply from Washington was more than anything else a consequence of the fact that Byrnes did not have the answers and was not really exerting

himself to find any. How far were the Western Allies supposed to go was an issue that Byrnes was forced to confront that very day. Faced with Barnes' desperate pleas for action and before receiving news about the Bulgarian government's decision to postpone the elections, the State Secretary informed him that the "[State] Department is not making representations to Moscow nor can it support your action."[45]

Faced with this apparently coherent Anglo-American front, dealing with a political crisis which prevented them from maintaining even the appearance of democratic practices, aware that such a concession was only temporary and could be of tactical utility, the Soviets accepted, to the surprise of the Bulgarian Communists, to postpone the elections, hoping thereby to undermine the Western refusal to extend diplomatic recognition to the Romanian, Bulgarian, and Hungarian governments.[46] Soviet objectives revealed themselves throughout the conversations: the setback was in reality a minor one; the real important issue was preserving the structure of the government in Sofia. Acknowledging the fundamental weakness of the Western position in Bulgaria, Stalin observed that the Bulgarian opposition had to be allowed to manifest itself if this was the price to pay in order to avoid a breakdown in inter-Allied relations.[47] At the same time, Bulgaria provided an important lesson for the Soviet leaders as to the negative impact a convergence between Western pressures and domestic political crisis could have.

Arguably more important was the Anglo-American analysis of the Soviet decision as it was vital in moulding the Western policies during the London session of the CFM. Reactions in Washington and London were substantially different. The Foreign Office admitted that the postponement of the Bulgarian elections was "more than we had expected", but warned that it was only a small step forward. One of the possible results could be elections "held in a few weeks' time with the simple difference that the irregularities are more effectively camouflaged."[48] It was without a doubt a setback for the Soviet Union and the Bulgarian communists, but it was equally obvious that the Soviet policy was essentially unaltered."[49]

On 30 August the State Department delivered its own evaluation of the temporary outcome of the Bulgarian crisis. Barnes could find out that despite British reticence officials in Washington "feel that the moral effect of postponement not only in Bulgaria but also throughout the Balkans will contribute greatly to development of events in that [democratic] direction and we are consequently anxious that no subsequent steps be taken which might detract from that victory".[50] Thus officials in Washington, including state Secretary Byrnes, expected this "victory" to have a regional impact and overestimated the importance of Western actions in forcing a Soviet concession. This largely explains American firmness during the first days of the London Conference. At the same time, Byrnes' message to Byrnes on 24 August revealed already how far the United States was willing to go in confronting the Soviets. Choosing the "victory" in Bulgaria as a probable precedent for subsequent evolution of Romania, Hungary or Bulgaria, Byrnes disregarded the fact that the complete stalemate in Romania could very well play the same role. Accordingly, the "temporary setback" for the Soviets in Bulgaria became in the weeks that followed the foundation for the US policy towards the defeated states in Eastern Europe.

In a sense the American analysis was correct. If the combination between external pressures and domestic crisis was the most effective instrument the Western Powers had at their disposal then the negotiations for the peace treaties offered the ideal environment to exert those pressures. Both the merits and limits of such a policy were clearly visible: the rapid conclusion of the peace treaties was a sensitive issue for the Soviets and denying them to the pro-Soviet governments in Sofia, Bucharest - or Budapest could encourage opposition forces. But if this was in all probability the right moment since the domestic political crisis in Bulgaria and Romania created a window of Soviet vulnerability – and it was more fictitious than

real –, this did not justify choosing the Bulgarian case as a pattern for the future while ignoring Soviet success in blocking any change in Romania.

Moreover, the success in Bulgaria made a success in Romania even less likely. As one British official argued at the beginning of September, just before the start of the CFM in London, the postponement of the Bulgarian elections provided the most unfavourable background to the negotiations in London since the Soviets could not allow their momentary failure in Bulgaria to set an example for other states in the area and especially in Romania where their security interests were vital.[51] Five days before the London Conference, Clark Kerr, the British ambassador in Moscow wrote to Bevin that the extraordinary American power explained Stalin's relative moderation in Bulgaria and Romania during the past few weeks, but warned his Minister that the Russians "do not intend to let the Balkan situation to get out of hand."[52]

This reading of the events was reinforced by the generalized British scepticism regarding the real significance of the "victory" in Bulgaria. The different political configuration n Romania would have prevented the Soviets form making similar concessions as their position and that of the Romanian Communist Party would have been unacceptably weakened.

The case of Romania is perhaps more telling. The American diplomats played a crucial role in the outbreak of the constitutional crisis caused by Prime Minister Groza's refusal to resign in August 1945. Even before that Romania had played an increasingly important role in Soviet-American relations and, after Potsdam, it largely replaced Poland as a test case for Soviet intentions in Europe.[53]

The political crisis in Romania was in many ways a microcosm of American policy in Eastern Europe, of the conflict between the American global strategy built on the principle of US-Soviet cooperation and American policies in areas where Soviet behaviour ran directly counter to this strategy. More than anything else however, it was a test for the discrepancy between declared American aims and means available to achieve them. In Romania too the tensions had reached unprecedented levels. The monarchy was highly popular and had the potential to play a critical role, the traditional parties were still powerful while the relations between the Communists and their fellow-travellers (mainly Social-Democrats) worsened. A defeat for the Romanian Communists – Groza's resignation – so soon after the postponement of the elections in Bulgaria would have created an inadmissible situation from the point of view of Soviet interests in Eastern Europe.

All these made even more important the question of how far the American initiatives should go. Immediately after the Potsdam Conference, the State Secretary was warned by the political representative in Romania, Melbourne, that the Romanians believed the interval up to the London Conference to be crucial. In the same message the American diplomat confirmed that the King would take no initiative it Anglo-American support was not forthcoming.[54] At that time, the instructions issued by the State Department on 21 June 1945 continued to govern the the political representative's actions.[55] It meant among other things forgoing the political crisis in Romania as an asset for the coming negotiations in Potsdam. The failure to reach a compromise changed the situation dramatically.

Byrnes wanted to bring again the situation in Romania to the fore of inter-Allied negotiations. A renewed political crisis would have allowed him to link two essentially separate issues – the peace treaty and the domestic crisis in Romania – and to overcome the expected Soviet refusal to discussing the fate of the government in Bucharest. Nonetheless the State Secretary was not impervious to one vital factor: their close association with the Western powers represented for the time being a source of vulnerability for the Romanian opposition parties. These conflicting pressures led to vacillations and a new set of ambiguous instructions for Melbourne:[56] the outbreak of a crisis was to be encouraged but the American

involvement had to remain inconspicuous. Groza's firm refusal to resign and the staunch Soviet support rapidly exposed the limits of the American initiative and, on 25 August, when the crisis was reaching its climax Byrnes asked Melbourne to avoid any contacts with Romanian leaders.[57] Byrnes was therefore fully aware that any degree of identification between the opposition in Romania and the Western Powers could only force the Soviets to identify themselves with the fate of the Romanian Communists. The confrontation developed quickly into a domestic and international stalemate. Washington's repeated attempts to call upon the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe failed, but in a sense Byrnes knew he did not have to worry: the Soviets would not be able to avoid the Romanian issue during the London Conference.

Throughout this whole period British policy in South-East Europe was built on a paradox: the initiative was being relinquished to the Americans while at the same time Britain was trying to guide American activism. Bevin was certainly mindful that the two Western Powers – and especially Britain – could not have viable separate policies in Eastern Europe. Britain's was the end corollary of a plurality of influences and one of the most powerful was without a doubt the American attitude. Things were nonetheless more complicated. The decision to follow the American lead in Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary did not end the debate within the British government as to the ultimate Russian objectives in those countries. The ever-present ambiguity towards the Soviet Union continued unabated.

If one tried to define Whitehall' frame of mind on this specific issue using a single word, it would have to be "scepticism". Scepticism about the Soviet desire to cooperate, scepticism about the possibility of pursuing a substantive Anglo-American policy in Eastern Europe, and scepticism about the approach the State Department had chosen. The revival of the Yalta Declaration seemed to the Foreign Office to be a lost cause and could do more harm than good since any such attempt would only expose Western impotence in the area.[58] As we have already shown, while the State Department tended to emphasize the significance of the "Bulgarian victory" and its value as a precedent, the Foreign Office officials believed that the Soviets could not allow it to become a precedent. They were also more acutely aware of the immediate consequence such Western initiatives could have for the democratic opposition forces. Bevin explained his own scepticism in a telegram to Le Rougetel, the British political representative in Romania, on 18 August 1945:

> "I have been reluctant to authorise you to give any advice or encouragement to the King and the opposition party leaders because we should be quite unable to protect them from the consequences of an attempt, constitutional or otherwise, to overthrow the present Government. Even though the Americans are now intervening vigorously in Romanian internal affairs we still cannot assume this responsibility."[59]

Conflicting signals coming from British diplomatic representatives in the region and from the Americans increased the uncertainty. The fact that before the Potsdam Conference the preferred strategy for the British had been the rapid conclusion of peace treaties – the exact opposite of the American option – did not help very much. British officials hoped that one the treaties were signed the Soviet troops would withdraw and the countries in question would regain a reasonable degree of autonomy.[60] How the Soviets could be determined to accept peace treaties which undermined their interests in the long run they did not say.

The Foreign Office had been baffled to find out that the Americans were pursuing a policy it saw as ineffective and even dangerous. Delaying the peace treaties could only push the regimes in questions on the road towards totalitarianism.. The decision to pursue an independent line at Potsdam was confirmed by Halifax, the ambassador in Washington, a day before the start of the

Conference when he wrote to Eden that the State Department had not even considered the possibility of failing in their diplomatic offensive.[61] Despite this Anglo-American differences were never allowed to come to the surface and in the end the British independence of thought did not manifest itself throughout the Conference.

As we have already stated, the Americans were right to insist that the peace treaties offered a one of a kind opportunity to exert pressure on the three regimes, even if they overestimated their effectiveness. At the same time, the sceptics in the Foreign Office were also right to insist that the Soviet sphere could not be opened if the Anglo-American insisted on using an instrument – the conclusion of the peace treaties and implicitly the diplomatic recognition of the three governments – which the Soviets planned to employ in order to "legalize", to legitimize their own sphere of influence. The American strategy set the two sides on a collision course.

The experience in Potsdam and in the following weeks eroded swiftly Britain's willingness to follow an independent line on the issue of the peace treaties. Under the new administration they quickly became just another brick at the foundations of a reinforced Anglo-American relationship. The consistency displayed by the Americans during the Conference on the question of the peace treaties, Stalin's deceiving moderation in accepting the right of his partners to question the democratic credentials of the three East-European governments[62], Churchill's unwillingness to pursue a policy which would have placed Britain and Russia on one side and the United States on the other, the immense number of issues where American support was considered crucial, the coming negotiations for an American loan, all played a part in the reversal of the British policy. Bevin wrote to the ambassador in Moscow on 20 August the extending diplomatic recognition to the Romanian, Bulgarian and Hungarian governments was out of the question as the three regimes were considered unrepresentative.[63] Three days later he said as much in the House of Commons.[64]

This alignment process – as we have already suggested – was not simply about adopting a specific American policy. It was an attempt to make Western demarches in Eastern Europe more effective, to guide as much as possible the American initiatives and at least to avoid American unilateralism in a region where any violent Soviet reaction would affect primarily British interests.[65] It was also an attempt to make Britain a relevant partner for the United States.[66] Although they were crucial, all these tactical considerations tell only part of the story. British officials were far from being immune to the argument that something had to be done to stop the slide to the far left of the three regimes and, more importantly, that something had to be done to prevent the Soviets from using these states as a springboard for further subversion and expansion. The attempt to avoid "disunity" with Washington and the fear that British activism in Eastern Europe could bring Moscow's retaliation in Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East account for a large part of this pervasive ambiguity. In the particular case of Romania – Bevin thought – the initiative had to be ceded to the Americans because they were at the roots of the current crisis.[67]

Gaining a certain degree of control over American policy in South-Eastern Europe was however difficult in more ways than one. Bevin's call for a clarification of Anglo-American policy could only be overambitious. The short debate is spurred inside the Foreign Office outlined the existence of two schools of thought: on the one hand the advocates of a long-term policy based on the principle of Great Power non-interference in the region. Left by themselves, the East European states would in the long run renew their cultural and economic ties with the West while a regional policy of economic integration could prevent their becoming dependent on the USSR.[68] On the other hand there were the "realists" who believed than any attempt to pursue a proactive policy in Eastern Europe could only arouse suspicions in Moscow, hampered an Anglo-Soviet understanding on issues of greater interest to Great Britain, and did not

stood any chance because the two Western Allies would not and could not use the threat of force. One of the proponents of this latter group was Thomas Brimelow, one of the Foreign Office's Soviet experts. His memo prepared for the London Conference argued that Britain could not afford an anti-Soviet policy in Eastern Europe because it could not afford a hostile Soviet policy in other regions of the world. Furthermore, Eastern Europe has already become *de facto* a Soviet sphere of interest. However, interestingly enough, Brimelow thought that the peace treaties were the lat opportunity not to dispute Soviet control, but to influence the way it was exerted.[69] The peace treaties and the peacemaking process were indeed the last opportunity to preserve at least some of the British positions there.[70]

The final version of the brief destined for the British delegation at the CFM papered over these disagreements. While the central aim – preserving the independence of the three countries – was clear enough, the ambiguity over the conclusion of the peace treaties persisted. The brief acknowledged that the three governments could not be recognized but at the same time "we should seek to abolish existing Allied control because in practice 'Allied' means 'Russian'".[71]

Finally, the complexity that characterized the British policy towards Germany's former allies in Eastern Europe was not emphasized enough. Starting with different estimates of Soviet intentions, of Russia's willingness to continue to cooperate, and of Eastern Europe's importance for Great Britain, British officials reached sometimes conflicting conclusions. In the absence of a consensus, the American attitude as well as the belief that Britain could not afford an independent policy in the area became the determining factors. The potentially damaging consequences of following what appeared to be a tough American policy were recognized, but the alternative was considered unacceptable, especially if it implied adopting the Soviet view – the immediate conclusion of the peace treaties – and opposing The Americans'. Otherwise, Bevin was much more inclined to find a compromise because he was convinced the Soviets could not be persuaded to change the course.[72]

British efforts to coordinate the two policies and to find out more about the American attitude in East-European affairs continued until the last day before the London Conference, even after Secretary Byrnes boarded a ship on his way to Britain. There was a question whose answer Bevin and his subordinates desperately sought: what would happen if – as it was very likely – Molotov unshakably refused to withdraw the Soviet support for the Groza government? On 8 September, Balfour, the British chargé d'affaires in Washington asked Freeman Matthews, one of the top State Department officials, that very question. Matthews preferred however to remind him that "publicity is the only weapon". Though Balfour probably found the answer disappointing, it said a lot: beyond a public confrontation, beyond a diplomatic battle fought before the eyes of the world there was nothing the West could do. Matthews seemed convinced that the threat of publicity, combined with the political difficulties they were encountering in Romania, would be enough to force the Kremlin to give up on Groza.[73] London's attempt to formulate a common policy for the CFM ended in failure.[74] Byrnes did not want to restrict his own freedom of manoeuvre. If he didn't find it necessary to keep his Department or his President informed, he certainly wouldn't provide the British with information.

For France the CFM membership in itself was a victory and a step towards regaining the Great Power status. But, as the French leadership understood immediately, the CFM was both a way out of isolation and a way into the emerging Anglo-American-Soviet conflict.[75] Relations with the Soviets had been disappointing despite the formal treaty that bound the two sides. France ran the risk of finding herself without a continental ally, but supporting Soviet Russia on issues like Trieste or the East European governments would have been a "*choix bien aventureux*". At the same

time France seemed unable to "find any understanding for its point of view" in Washington, while the Anglo-French relationship was marred by the tensions in the Middle East and the disagreements surrounding the conclusion of an alliance.[76] Moreover, French rights and interests did not seem to have been taken into account: France was excluded from the negotiations surrounding the East European treaties and, immensely important, the Council had already been authorized to prepare the draft of a peace treaty with Germany, a treaty which would be signed when Germany had a proper government, a clear indication that the three Great Allies supported German unity at least in principle.[77] France was still haunted by the ghosts of 1919: the likelihood of Anglo-Saxon isolationism, the absence of a "reverse" alliance and, of course, the rebirth of German power. The Quai d'Orsay was deeply divided about the way forward as were General de Gaulle and his Foreign Minister Bidault. The prospects were not all bleak. As Bidault wrote after the first meeting on 11 September "tensions between the Three might help us".[78]

Germany loomed large on the French peacemaking agenda, but Eastern Europe could not be neglected entirely. Nonetheless, French contemporary documents are written more from the perspective of an observer and less from that of a participant traditionally active in the region. Officials hesitated between "maintaining our traditional democratic line" and extreme caution because the non-recognition of the three governments benefited only the Soviets, but seemed convinced that the conflict over the principles of democratic government in Romania and Bulgaria was in reality "the old eastern Question" reinvented.[79] Thus, French diplomacy tended to explain the coming confrontation in quite traditional terms, resembling those used by the British. Consequently, de Gaulle and the Quai d'Orsay chose the policy Bevin and the Foreign Office would have had it not been for the American influence: peace treaties concluded as soon as possible.

Setting the procedures and the agenda

The first session of the CFM can be roughly divided in two parts. From 11 to 22 September the controversies between Molotov and Bevin on the future of the Italian colonies and the private arguments between Molotov and Byrnes dominated the evolution of the Conference at the public level, while the arguments surrounding the recognition of the Romanian government almost monopolised the private meetings between Byrnes and Molotov. From 22 September to the end of the session this disagreements erupted in the public meetings. The Soviets orchestrated a very elaborate diplomatic counteroffensive using the procedural question to paralyze the Council and attempting to widen the agenda of the Conference to make Byrnes' position even more difficult. The last ten days witnessed the development of several compromise proposals which were generally neglected by the historians and which amounted to a complete reversal of the Secretary of State's previous policy.

The first meeting on 11 September discussed both the procedure and the agenda of the Conference. The procedural decisions would become in two weeks' time a bone of contention and finally the formal explanation for the collapse of the Conference. Bevin proposed and Byrnes and Molotov accepted that while only the signatories of the armistices had the right to vote the five members could attend all meetings. After a brief discussion the proposal was adopted.[80] Bevin saw the proposal as an interpretation of the Potsdam terms of reference, but, as the French minutes show, both Byrnes and Molotov saw it as a departure from those terms. The former went even further and demanded equal voting rights for all the five Powers.[81]

The conversations regarding the agenda witnessed the failure to draw a distinction between the Finnish treaty and the other East European peace treaties. More significantly, Byrnes and Molotov rejected British attempts to introduce "the political situation in

Romania" on the agenda. But if Molotov did not want to discuss it at all, Byrnes believed – in the words of the French minute – that it could be "attached to the draft for the peace treaty with Romania". American intentions were already clear. If the Soviets wanted a peace treaty they would have to discuss the political crisis in Romania. Reverting to the old Yalta tactics, Molotov asked unsuccessfully that the political situation in Greece be also introduced on the agenda.[82]

After two days of bickering about participation of the smaller Powers, about the absence of Greece or Japan from the agenda, Bidault observed realistically that the "prospects are not bright":

> "*Monsieur* Molotov is *monsieur* Molotov. M. Bevin is vehement and seems to be looking for a fight. M. Byrnes, visibly aware of the power he répresents and usually very skilful, falls prey to endless statements and reignites arguments already closed."[83]

NOTES:

[1] ****FRUS Potsdam II*, pp. 102, 108, 158.

[2] For the outbreak of the Cold War in the Middle East see Bruce Robert Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East. Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey and Greece*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980; Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951. Arab Nationalism, the United States and Postwar Imperialism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 51-103; Fraser J. Harbutt, *The Iron Curtain. Churchill, America, and the Origins of the Cold War*, New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, pp.117-151; John Kent, *British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War, 1944-1948*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1993; Natalia I. Yegorova, *The „Iranian Crisis" of 1945-1946. A View from the Russian Archives*, CWIHP, Working Paper No. 15, May 1996; Louise L'Estrange Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War. The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1992; *Mustafa* Sitki Bilgin, Steven Morewood, *Turkey's Reliance on Britain. British Political and Military Support for Turkey Against Soviet Demands, 1943-1947*, „Middle Eastern Studies", vol. 40, no. 2/2004, pp. 24-57; Suleiman Seydi, *Making a Cold War in the Near East. Turkey and the Origins of the Cold War, 1945-1947*, „Diplomacy & Statecraft", vol. 17/2006, pp. 113-141; Eduard Mark: *The War Scare of 1946 and Its Consequences*, „Diplomatic History", vol. 21, nr. 3, pp. 383-415.

[3] Thomas M. Campbell, George C. Herring (ed.), *The Diaries of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. 1943 – 1946*, New York, New Viewpoints, 1975, p. 214. For a concise discussion of the ambiguous Rooseveltian policy on spheres of influence see Thomas G. Paterson, *On Every Front. The Making and the Unmaking of the Cold War*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 1992, pp. 41-55. For a different vision, which underlines American opposition to spheres of influence, with all its nuances, see Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *Origins of the Cold War*, „Foreign Affairs", vol. 46, nr. 1/1967, pp. 36-40.

[4] ****FRUS. Potsdam I*, pp. 183-184.

[5] **** *FRUS. Malta and Ialta*, pp. 97-105.

[6] The questions were asked by Alfred J. Rieber in *Stalin as a Foreign-Policy Maker: Avoiding War, 1927-1953*, p.152, in Sarah Davies, James Harris (ed.), *Stalin. A New History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 140-159.

[7] The archives have not yet provided a clear answer to the question of Soviet intention to communize the region and, given the structure of the decision-making process in Soviet Russia, they are unlikely to do so. It has already been pointed out that one of the main characteristics of this process was the constant covering up of the reasons behind the decisions. In 1923, the Politburo issued an order to the People's Commissariats forbidding them to issue a written justification in case they put forward a proposal. All that was needed was the confidential agreement of the Central Committee's Secretariat. Moreover, the crucial decisions were almost always made by a select group of people; their discussions were never put down in writing and were implemented via verbal directives. (Irina V. Pavlova, *The Strength and Weakness of Stalin's Power*, pp. 35-36, in Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, Bent Jensen, Erik Kulavig (eds.), *Mechanisms of Power in the Soviet Union*, Houndmills, Macmillan Press, 2000, pp. 23-40.)

[8] By that I mean in most cases both extremely weak Communist parties and the lack of powerful political forces which would have been willing and able to support the cooperation with the Soviet Union, assuming that this was ever possible.

[9] The phrase was used Geoffrey Roberts, *Ideology, Calculation and Improvisation: Spheres of Influence and Soviet Foreign Policy, 1939-1945*, p. 673, "Review of International Studies", vol. 25/1999, pp. 655-673. Roberts doesn't believe that the Soviets intended to bolshevize the region, even though his arguments are largely contradictory. He clearly states that people's democracy regimes were seen as a transitory stage. As for the final aim, the author is much less clear.

[10] The same argument was partly made by Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Europe. From „Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 27. See also Mark Kramer, *The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: Spheres of Influence*, pp. 109-114, în Ngaire Woods (ed.): *Explaining International Relations since 1945*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 98-126. To cite only one example, during the first postwar decade, Soviet Union extracted in various ways 12-15 billion dollars worth of goods and services from Eastern Europe, a sum equivalent to the assistance the United States provided, albeit interestedly, to the states of Western Europe.

[11] William Taubman, *How Much of the Cold War Was Inevitable?*, p. 191, in Francesca Gori, Silvio Ponce, *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1945-1953*, London, MacMillan, 1996, pp. 191-194; Thomas G. Paterson: *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[12] Peter Calvocoressi, *World Politics, 1945-2000*, London, Pearson Education, 2001, p.296.

[13] Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power. National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1992, p. 50.

[14] If the answer to these questions is hard to find in American or British contemporary documents, the ever-present scepticism regarding the Eastern European societies' ability to sustain democratic regimes is not. Sometimes this scepticism was real, but very often it represented a way out of the moral dilemmas posed by the coming to power of new authoritarian regimes in the region. At the same time, there were members of the Anglo-American diplomatic and intelligence services (especially those posted in the countries in question) who seriously doubted the possibility of electing a government which could be simultaneously democratic and pro-Soviet. (Elizabeth W. Hazard, *Cold War Crucible: United States Foreign Policy and the Conflict in Romania, 1943-1953*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 131-132; Geir Lundestad, *The American Non-Policy towards Eastern Europe, 1943-1947. Universalism in an Area Not of Essential Interest to the United States*, Oslo, Universiteitsforlaget, 1975, p. 242)

[15] Robert C. Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind: Studies in Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change*, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1963, pp. 167-169.

[16] John Lewis Gaddis, *We Know Now. Rethinking Cold War History*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 25.

[17] Vojtech Mastny, *Cold War and Soviet Insecurity. The Stalin Years*, New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p.20.

[18] John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p.173; idem, *Strategies of Containment. A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*, New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 12-17.

[19] Bruno Arcidiacono, *Les Balkans et les origines de la guerre froide: grandes puissances et „facteur local"*, in "Relations internationales", nr. 104/2000, pp. 413-432.

[20] The classic example is, of course, that of Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy. Hiroshima and Potsdam. The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with the Soviet Union*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1966, p.216. For a devastating critic of this book see James Maddox: *Atomic Diplomacy. A Study in Creative Writing*, „The Journal of American History", vol. 59, no. 4/1973, pp. 925-934. Several American revisionist and post-revisionist historians took a step further his arguments and refined them. Gregg Herken, *The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Weapon in the Cold War, 1945-1950*, New York, 1982, is one of the most telling cases. While his work is in most cases well documented and the impact of the atom bomb on American domestic politics is excellent, his treatment of the London Conference is disputable. The chronology of the Conference is distorted as is the evolution of the negotiations, Byrnes' attempts at compromise are ignored, while the atom bomb is ubiquous – as most historian seem to believe – by its very absence. Robert Messer, another example, in *The End of an Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman, and the Origins of the Cold War*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1982, earmarks 21 pages for the London Conference, but 10 of them deal exclusively with the atom bomb. The few jokes Byrnes made about the bomb during the few social events which were meant to enlighten the atmosphere of an otherwise very tense Conference in a city still recovering from the German bombardments can more easily be interpreted as signs of frustration at the lack of progress and not as hardly disguised threats.

[21] Vladislav Zubok, Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside Kremlin's Cold War. From Stalin to Khrushchev*, Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 43.

[22] Robert L. Messer, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129; Barton J. Bernstein, *Roosevelt, Truman, and the Atomic Bomb: A Reinterpretation*, „Political Science Quarterly", vol. 90, nr. 1/1975, pp. 64-65.

[23] Alfred J. Rieber, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
[24] ****FRUS 1945 II*, pp. 55-56.
[25] J. Samuel Walker, *Prompt and Utter Destruction. Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs against Japan*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997, p. 64. For the historiographical debate surrounding the use of atomic weapons against Japan see J. Samuel Walker, *Historiographical Essay. Recent Literature on Truman's Atomic Bomb Decision. The Search for the Middle Ground*, "Diplomatic History", vol. 29, nr. 2/2005, pp. 311-334; Barton J. Bernstein, *The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered*, "Foreign Affairs", vol. 74, nr. 1/1995.
[26] Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin. The Court of the Red Tsar*, London, Phoenix, 2004, p. 510.
[27] For the impact of the atomic bomb on inter-Allied relations in general see David Holloway, *The Atomic Bomb and the End of the Grand Alliance*, în Ann Lane, Howard Temperley (ed.), *The Rise and the Fall of the Grand Alliance, 1941-1945*, London, MacMillan, 1995. See also McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, New York, Random House, 1988, pp. 88-89, 136-145, 650-651; Thomas F. Hammond, *The Great Debate over the Origins of the Cold War*, pp. 17-19, in Thomas F. Hammond (ed.), *Witnesses to the Origins of the Cold War*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1986; Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman and the Cold War Revisionists*, Columbia MO, University of Missouri Press, pp. 37-44.
[28] Barton J. Berstein, *The Quest for Security: American Foreign Policy and International Control of Atomic Energy, 1942-1946*, „The Journal of American History", Vol. 60, No. 4/1974, p. 1015; John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 264.
[29] For contemporary opinions on James F. Byrnes see the 1974 interview with Mark Ethridge, the journalist the Secretary of States sent in Eastern Europe in 1945, in **http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/ ethridge.htm**, p. 12 and the 1972 interview with Theodor Achilles, one of the junior members of the American delegation in London, **http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/achilles.htm#3**, pp. 4-5; *The First Big Test*, in „The Time", 17 September 1945, **http://www.time.com/time/magazine**/article/ 0,9171,854443,00. html. Byrnes' behaviour was sometimes described as that of a "president for foreign policy" (Wesley M. Bagby, *America's International Relations since World War I*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 138) or as lacking experience in foreign affairs almost as much as president Truman while being a proponent of personal diplomacy (Randall Bennett Woods, *A Changing of the Guard: Anglo-American Relations, 1941-*1946, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1990, pp. 285-286). He both envied and despised Truman, he was entirely ignorant with regard to communism and hed behind him a "career of compromise". (Hugh Thomas, *Armed Truce. The Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945-1946*, New York, Atheneum, 1987, pp. 132-133) On the other hand, Byrnes enjoyed Truman's complete confidence while in London (G. Herken, *op. cit.*, p. 53). For a discussion of his policies see slso Robert L. Messer: *op.cit.* pp. 125-127, and Edward S. Mihalkanin (ed.), *American Statesmen: Secretaries of State from John Jay to Colin Powell*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 2004, pp. 88-98
[30] ****Documents Diplomatiques Français. 1945. Tome II (1er Juillet – 31 Decembre)*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 2000, p. 219. (****DDF 1945 II*)
[31] ****Documents on British Policy Overseas. Conferences and Conversations 1945, Series I. Volume 2*, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1986, p. 3. Documents on Anglo-Soviet relations during this era can also be found in Graham Ross (ed.), *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin. British Documents on Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1941-1945*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 210-281.
[32] Terry Anderson, *The United States. Great Britain and the Cold War, 1944-1947*, Columbia & London, Columbia University Press, 1981, p. 90, James F. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, London & Toronto, William Heinemann Ltd., 1947., p. 97.
[33] ******Foreign Relations of United States. 1945. Volume II. General. Political and Economic Matters*, Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1967, (****FRUS 1945 II*)., pp. 101 note 10, 110-111; Vladimir Pechatnov, *„The Allies are Pressing You to Break Your Will..." Foreign Policy Correspondence between Stalin and Molotov and Other Politburo Members, September 1945 – December 1946*, Working Paper No. 26, CWIHP, WWICS, Washington, September 1999, p. 2.
[34] Eduard Mark, *October or Thermidor? Interpretations of Stalinism and the Perception of Soviet Foreign Policy in the United States, 1927-1947*, „The American Historical Review", vol. 94, nr. 4/1989, p. 952, for Byrnes' refusal to consult beforehand with the British.
[35] ****DBPO I 2* , p. 8.
[36] Ibidem, p. 17. However, the senior officials of the Foreign Office did not seem to concur.
[37] Elisabeth Barker: *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*, London, MacMillan, 1974, p. 126; Mark Ethridge, C.E. Black: *Negotiating on the Balkans, 1945-1947*, p. 175, în Raymond Dennett, Joseph E. Johnson: *Negotiating with the Russians*, Boston, World Peace Foundation, 1951, pp. 175.
[38] Harriman to Byrnes, 9 August 1945, ****FRUS 1945 IV*, p. 281.
[39] Bevin to Balfour, 8 August 1945, PRO F.O. R12893/21/7.

[40] Balfour to Bevin, 9 August 1945, PRO F.O. R13399/21/7; Dunn to Byrnes, 9 august 1945, *** *FRUS 1945 II*, p. 281.
[41] ****FRUS 1945 IV*, pp. 286-287. For Byrnes' instructions and the note the American representative in Sofia, Barnes, sent to the Bulgarian government see Ibidem, pp. 283-285.
[42] Houstoun-Boswall to Bevin, 17 August 1945, PRO F.O. R13863/21/7. See also Houstoun-Boswall to Cadogan, 16 August 1945, PRO F.O. R14453/723/7, and Cadogan to Houstoun-Boswall, September 1945, PRO F.O. R14453/723/7 for possible
[43] ****FRUS 1945 IV*, pp. 295, 297.
[44] ****FRUS 1945 II*, p. 102
[45] ****FRUS 1945 IV*, pp. 308-309. By action Byrnes meant in fact the conditions set by the Anglo-American representatives during a meeting with General Biriusov and which would have enabled the two governments to recognize the results of the elections.
[46] For the last-minute efforts to reach a compromise in Bulgaria see ****FRUS 1945 IV*, pp. 301-308, ****DBPO I 6*, pp. 32-35, especially the exhausting nightly meeting between the Anglo-American representatives and General Biriusov on 23-24 August 1945.
[47] Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars. From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006, p. 297.
[48] Bevin to Houstoun-Boswall, 25 August 1945, PRO F.O. R14239/21/7
[49] Clark Kerr to Bevin, 30 August 1945, PRO F.O. R14361/21/7. Vyshinsky had told the British Ambassador that "our [British] appreciation fo political situation in Bulgaria and of electoral campaign is totally at variance with incontrovertible facts at the disposal of the Soviet Government".
[50] Byrnes to Barnes, 30 August 1945, ****FRUS 1945 IV*, pp. 316-317. Italics are ours. Barnes' reply, although more guarded, betrayed almost the same sense of optimism Răspunsul lui Barnes, sosit peste trei zile, deşi mai temperat, trăda şi el acelaşi optimism întrucât îşi manifesta speranţa că „această oportunitate extraordinară" va putea fi exploatată „în interesul principiilor pentru care am luptat în două războaie mondiale." (Ibidem, p. 318)
[51] Frank Roberts to Bevin, 9 September 1945, PRO F.O. R15270/28/37.
[52] ****DBPO I 6*, pp. 64-65.
[53] Geir Lundestad, *The American Non-Policy towards Eastern Europe, 1943-1947. Universalism in an Area Not of Essential Interest to the United States*, Oslo, Universiteitsforlaget, 1975, pp. 107, 110.
[54] ****FRUS 1945 V*, pp. 562-564. The British shared his opinion Foreign Office to Istanbul, 8 August 1945, PRO F.O. R13142/28/37: „King Michael has always adhered to view he would not take any step to change the government without knowledge and approval of US Government and ourselves."
[55] ****FRUS 1945 V*, p. 560: „Department would not wish its view that Groza Govt doea not meet definition of broadly representative interim regime contained in Crimea Declaration and that manner of its installation was inconsistent with the Declaration to be taken as encouragement of local efforts to overthrow the regime by force during armistice period when ultimate responsibility for maintenance of order rests, by agreement of principal Allied Govts, with Soviet High Command in Rumania and while we are still seeking to reach agreement with the Russians on a common Allied policy on the Rumanian political situation." The use of constitutional means to force the resignation of Groza's government was therefore not excluded, but the State Department acknowledged that the Soviets had the ability to counter any challenge to the government they supported.
[56] See footnote 16. For the complete version of Byrnes' message see ****FRUS 1945 V*, pp. 565-566: During a conversation with his British colleague Melbourne commented that, no matter how vague, communications of that nature could not fail to influence the actions of the Romanian opposition. (Le Rougetel to Bevin, 14 August 1945, PRO F.O. R13705/28/37).
[57] Ibidem, p. 594.
[58] ****DBPO. Potsdam*, pp. 110-111
[59] Bevin to Le Rougetel, 18 August 1945, PRO F.O. R13745/28/37. The belief that the Soviets would not make any concessions in Romania was not the only explanation for the more cautious policy in Romania. British greater interest – as manifested during the negotiations leading to the percentage agreement in October 1944 – for Bulgaria was natural given its proximity to Greece and Turkey.
[60] ****DBPO Potsdam*, pp. 81-82, 152
[61] Ibidem, pp.111, 153, 288-289.
[62] ****FRUS. Potsdam II*, p. 1492.
[63] ****DBPO I 6*, pp. 19-20.
[64] Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères du Royaume de la Belgique (AMAERB), Dossier 10958 BIS, 2e trimestre, Le Baron de Cartier de Marchienne to Paul Henri-Spaak, 23 August 1945, p. 2.
[65] *** *DBPO I 2*, pp. 16-17.
[66] *** *DBPO I 6*, pp. 65-67.

[67] ****DBPO I 6*, p. 23, footnote II: from 22 to 24 August numerous telegrams were exchanged between London and Washington: the State Department, while assuming some of the responsibility for the crisis blamed Melbourne who was considered largely responsible. At the same time the American officials tried to convince the Foreign Office to pursue a more active policy in Romania.

[68] ****DBPO I 2*, pp. 46-48.

[69] Ibidem, pp. 37-38. The line of demarcation he drawn between the refusal to grant diplomatic recognition to the regimes in question and a vigorous Anglo-American policy in Eastern Europe is largely artificial because the Soviets could only such a refusal as an active intervention in the politics of the region. See also ****DBPO I 6*, pp. 46-47, 59, for Brimelow's analysis regarding Russia's ability to intervene in Western Europe and the probability of them using Greece again to deflect any criticisms against their own policy in Romania, Bulgaria or Hungary.

[70] Elisabeth Barker, *Britain in a Divided Europe (1945-1970)*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971, pp. 47-48.

[71] ****DBPO I 2*, pp. 110-114.

[72] A. Bullock, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

[73] Balfour to Foreign Office, 8 September 1945, PRO F.O./R15238/28/37.

[74] A. Bullock, *op.cit.*, p.129; H. Thomas, *op.cit.*, p. 191.

[75] ****DDF 1945 II*, pp. 1, 32-33, 50-51, 53.

[76] Ibidem, pp. 51-52, 219, 391, 406; ****FRUS 1945 IV*, pp. 709-716; Yann Lamézec, *Les efforts britanniques en vue de restaurer la France à son rang de Grande Puissance à la fin de la seconde guerre mondiale*, „European Review of History", vol. 8, nr. 2/2001, pp. 224-231; A. Bullock, *op.cit.*, p. 145. Improving relations with Great Britain seemed to Bidault at least the only solution. As he told Bevin immediately after arriving in London the German question was rather secondary in importance and was simply a "convenient myth" which could provide a solid foundation for the Anglo-French relationship. (Ibidem, p. 447)

[77] Ibidem, p. 205.

[78] Ibidem, p. 454.

[79] Ibidem, p. 375.

[80] ****DBPO I 2*, pp. 102-103. The procedural decision was hotly debated during the latter part of the Conference. While it is clear that the decision deviated from the Potsdam terms of reference, the same terms of reference allowed the Council to adapt its procedures (****FRUS Potsdam II*, p. 1479). Thus Bevin's proposal had some legal basis. On the other hand, even British officials later recognized that it has been a hasty decision. For a critical analysis of the proposal see ****DBPO I 2*, pp. 497-498.

[81] ****Documents Diplomatiques Francais, 1945. Annexes (11 septembre – 2 octobre)*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1996, p. 3 (****DDF 1945 Annexes*).

[82] ****DBPO I 2*, p. 107.

[83] ****DDF 1945 II*, p. 454.