

Bulgaria in British Foreign Policy
1943 – 1949

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

London School of Economics and Political Science

September 1999



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Abstract

The thesis analyses Britain's political involvement in Bulgaria during 1943 – 1949. It explores Britain's motives for seeking increased influence in the country and traces the most significant British attempts to shape Bulgarian politics. It examines British strategic decisions and diplomatic activities in Bulgaria against the background of the evolving domestic political situation and of Soviet objectives in the Balkans. Evidence from British archives is tested against recently released Bulgarian and Russian sources. The study clarifies problems central to the interpretation of post-war Bulgarian developments and addresses the question of British attitudes to the whole of Eastern Europe.

Bulgaria's marginal place in British political and military thinking is found to be at odds with the country's recognised strategic importance. Towards the end of the Second World War, Bulgaria attracted the attention of the British Government occasionally, mostly in the context of broader regional issues such as that of the Balkan Federation. Although the realisation of limited capabilities to influence Bulgarian developments coloured Britain's wartime approach, never did British policy makers disavow interest in Bulgarian affairs.

The research establishes that in the armistice period British policy towards Bulgaria was overwhelmingly governed by traditional geopolitical factors. These focused around Bulgaria's potential military threat of British imperial positions in the Eastern Mediterranean and overshadowed any proclaimed British commitment to democracy. Britain's priorities were complicated by the emerging Cold War as a Soviet-dominated Bulgaria was perceived as a springboard for Communist penetration of Europe. Ironically, British unwillingness to challenge Soviet influence in the northern Balkans exacerbated the very dangers Britain was striving to alleviate. Wavering British support for the Bulgarian anti-Communist Opposition only served to expose Britain's weaknesses and further antagonise the Soviet Union. This engendered continuous restraint and gradually led to the isolation of Britain from Bulgarian politics after British recognition of the Bulgarian Communist Government in 1947.

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Acknowledgements

During the time I have worked on this thesis many people have given me generously of their knowledge, time and kindness. Any effort to explain here exactly what they have done and how valuable it has been for me would be inadequate. I wish to thank them all and in particular Dr.Anita Prazmowska, Dr.Maria Dowling, Dr.Edmund Green, Malcolm Mackintosh, Dianko Sotirov, F.L.Simpson, Lord Denis Greenhill, Boyka Purvanova, Irina Ognyanova, Olga Khavanova, Sergei Listikov, my family.

I am also thankful to the staff of the archives and libraries where I carried out my research: the Public Record Office in Kew, the British Library of Political and Economic Science and the Library of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London, the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the General Department of Archives, the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ^{St.} St.Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia, the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation and the Russian Centre for Preservation and Study of Modern History Documents in Moscow.

I gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the London School of Economic and Political Science, the Central Research Grant Fund and the British Federation of Women Graduates.

List of abbreviations

AFHQ	Allied Forces Headquarters
AMVnR	Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sofia
AMVR	Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Sofia
AVPRF	Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow
BAN	Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
BANU	Bulgarian Agrarian National Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party
BLO	British Liaison Officer
BMM	British Military Mission
BoT	Board of Trade
CC	Central Committee [of the Bulgarian Communist Party]
COS	Chiefs of Staff
EAM	National Liberation Front, Greece
ELAS	National Popular Liberation Army, Greece
FF	Fatherland Front
FO	Foreign Office
Force 133	SOE section dealing with the Balkans
FORD	Foreign Office Research Department
HMG	His Majesty's Government
JIS	Joint Intelligence Sub-committee

KKE	Communist Party of Greece
MEW	Ministry of Economic Warfare
NC	National Council [of the Fatherland Front]
NKID	People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, Moscow
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, Moscow
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
OVERLORD	Allied cross-Channel invasion
PID	Political Intelligence Department
PRB	Press Reading Bureau
PWE	Political Warfare Executive
RAN	Russian Academy of Sciences
RTsHIDNI	Centre for Preservation and Study of Modern History Documents, Moscow
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
SOE	Special Operations Executive
TOLSTOY	Moscow Conference, October 1944
TsDIA	Central State Historical Archive, Sofia
TsPA	Central [Communist] Party Archive, Sofia
UNO	United Nations Organisation
UNSCOB	United Nations Special Commission on the Balkans
VKP(B)	All-Soviet Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
WCO	War Cabinet Office

Introduction

Modern Bulgaria's development has continuously been influenced by the changing balance of power in Europe: Bulgaria's very emergence as a separate nation-state in 1878 was as much the outcome of Great Power negotiations as of the national struggle for independence. Starting with the somewhat misleadingly labelled Russophiles and Russophobes just after Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottoman Empire, right through to pro- and anti-Western proclivities in post-Communist Bulgaria, foreign policy orientation has been a major constituting force in Bulgarian politics. The influence of a succession of Great Powers in the Balkans affected not only the country's place in international affairs but also the configuration of the internal political forces. This reflected largely the fact that in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the Bulgarian political elite sought external support for Bulgaria's territorial ambitions.

Bulgaria's central situation in the Balkans attracted the attention of all European powers bidding for influence on the Peninsula. The country's proximity to the Mediterranean Straits made it a suitable stepping-stone for extending control over the Eastern Mediterranean and for the penetration of the Middle East. However important it was, Bulgaria's strategic position was often exaggerated in both Bulgarian popular perceptions and foreign policy doctrine. For the Great Powers, dominance over the country was rarely so pivotal as Bulgarian political wishful thinking would have it. The discrepancy became evident on a number of occasions, most notably when in the early 1900s Russia – universally seen as Bulgaria's protector – embraced the cause of Serbia in preference to that of Bulgaria.

The question of Bulgaria's historic significance is related to the struggle among the major European states for leadership in world affairs. In later modern times Russia and Great Britain showed consistent interest in the Balkans. The former used its cultural and historic links with the South Slavs in order to secure its expansion towards warm-water seas; the latter relied on influence in the Mediterranean countries to protect routes to its overseas imperial possessions. The resulting controversy crystallised in the so-called 'Eastern Question' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when European affairs were dominated by rivalries over the territorial legacy of the declining Ottoman Empire. This in turn intensified attention to Bulgaria which could be used as an outpost for pressure on, or a stronghold for the defence of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Straits.

In the inter-war years France and Germany were active in the Balkans using the region as a political and economic base for their conflict over the post-First World War *status quo*. However, at the end of the Second World War it was Soviet Russia and Great Britain which re-emerged as the main contenders for dominance over the Balkans. This was a consequence of their wartime military and political involvement in the region. It also reflected the evolution of their long-term geopolitical priorities.

Finding explicit accounts of British foreign policy objectives in the historical literature is difficult. To a degree this reflects the practical non-ideological approach of the Foreign Office and other British foreign policy making institutions. Nevertheless, there doubtless were overall principles and beliefs underpinning Britain's specific diplomatic and political actions. In the twentieth century, Britain has taken part in every major political process and remained a determining factor in European affairs. Therefore, empirical investigation into Britain's relations with individual powers would form an essential element of any attempt to uncover the logic of European developments. For this, the end of the Second World War is an especially opportune moment: the imminent defeat of Germany left a vacuum on the

continent which initiated a new phase of political settlement. Against such a background, Britain's involvement in Bulgaria in the final stages and immediately after the Second World War is a topic deserving historical research. It illuminates Britain's perceptions of itself as a Great Power, which should have a say in developments across the world.

The main significance of the subject lies in the understanding that British attitudes to Bulgaria during 1943 – 1949 formed an important aspect of the renewed Anglo-Russian controversy in the Balkans. In its turn, the evolution of the British-Soviet relationship had an impact on Britain's approach to Bulgaria. In order to rationalise this two-way process it is necessary to establish not only the main elements of British planning for Bulgaria but also how these were related to the acknowledged intensity of the Soviet interest in the country. A further step would be to analyse the British interpretation of Soviet ambitions in the country and the adjoining region in comparison to the actual motives and plans governing Soviet actions. For this, it would be vital to observe the interaction of strategic and ideological factors bearing on Britain's behaviour. Not only did Britain fear that the Soviet Union coveted areas of traditional British dominance but it suspected that the spread of Communism would be used for the achievement of such a goal.

From Britain's perspective Bulgaria's vulnerability to Soviet pressure exposed to Soviet penetration the southernmost Balkans, where Britain had long-standing interests. An adequate explanation of British actions in Bulgaria hinges on the emphasis that these depended on the projection of their consequences on Britain's Mediterranean and Middle Eastern interests rather than on the effects they would have in Bulgaria alone. This was the fundament of Britain's approach to Bulgaria and it is necessary to underline that for strategic purposes Bulgaria was always perceived and treated as a part of the Balkans which should be differentiated from the more elusive category of Eastern Europe. To this, however significant, Bulgaria's shared wartime experience with Romania's and Hungary's and the

similarity of its post-war pattern of communisation to that of Poland and Czechoslovakia were only additional dimensions.

A worthwhile line of analysis is to assess how the ongoing division of Europe into two hostile military and ideological blocs in 1943 – 1949 was reflected in British actions towards Bulgaria and how this affected Bulgarian internal affairs. The reverse side of this question is to find out how the small and insignificant Bulgaria added to the tension in relations among the Great Powers. Bulgaria's position can be investigated as a test-case for some of the early inter-Allied clashes which gradually developed into the Cold War. Looking into the points of confrontation over the country would reveal whether it could be placed among the immediate causes for the conflict. This would place British policy to Bulgaria in a broader analytical framework and address the problem of Britain's aims in areas of secondary importance.

All these issues demand tracing how Britain's objectives were transformed into concrete military, diplomatic and political actions regarding Bulgaria. It is essential to explore the process through which Britain's Balkan interests and the renewed British-Russian tension took the shape of, for example, support for the Bulgarian Opposition or opposition to the South Slav Confederation scheme. To that end, the three parts of the thesis cover three chronological periods each of which reflects distinct stages of European developments at the end and immediately after the Second World War. Firstly, attention is focused on dual developments during 1943 – 1944, namely British efforts to detach Bulgaria from Germany and political planning for post-war Bulgaria. The relation between the two throws light on Britain's short- and long-term priorities and establishes a point of departure for the assessment of future British strategies.

The second part covers the years 1944 – 1947 when the Allied Control Commission for Bulgaria functioned. This was the time when Britain had military and political

representatives in the country. It is interesting to follow their impressions of local events, the recommendations these engendered and the final actions undertaken after discussion with experts in London. As this is the period of Britain's association with the Bulgarian anti-Communist Opposition, it allows investigation into the practical interaction of strategic and ideological objectives in British foreign policy. The final part tackles the period following the conclusion of the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria in 1947. This is an attempt to take the analysis of British policy to Bulgaria further than has so far been done in the historiography of the subject. It maps Britain's diminishing interest in a country where the Communist Party's position was consolidating under undisputed Soviet domination and where Britain's opportunities and willingness for active policy were severely restricted.

* * *

The historiography of international relations of the latter stages of the Second World War and the early post-war period has often focused on Eastern Europe and assessed the policies of all Three Big Allies towards the area. Historians have been predominantly concerned with the role of political developments in Eastern Europe in the origins of the Cold War. This has led to investigation of British and US perceptions and reactions to Soviet actions in the region in addition to analysis of the long-term factors which informed the formulation of British and US policy. The well-known traditionalist and revisionist schools accept that at the end of the Second World War British and US leaders had little practical alternative to the spheres-of-influence solution in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.¹ The controversy between the two emerges from the differing interpretations of the meaning and the reasons for the establishment of this formula. The revisionists

argue that the Soviet Union had a legitimate right to dominate the countries lying to its west, especially having in mind that Britain and the USA had devised the Italian precedent and insisted on exclusive control over Japan.² They also contend that the tensions between the two Western Allies and the USSR were exacerbated by actions such as those proclaimed by the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. These are seen not only to have condemned Soviet behaviour in Eastern Europe but also to have been correctly perceived by the Soviet leadership as waging a campaign to force the Soviet Union out of Eastern Europe. In contrast, the traditionalists hold that Britain and the USA only reluctantly conceded Soviet domination over Eastern Europe in recognition of their own inability to prevent such a development. The West is credited with continuing to uphold the values of democracy and human rights as outlined in the Atlantic Charter and the Yalta Declaration, even after Western recognition had been granted to the Eastern European Communist Governments.³ A later trend in historiography, the so-called 'post-revisionism' challenges both traditionalists and revisionists. It tries to introduce new sources as well as new ideas, mainly the theory of mutual misunderstanding and misconception of each other's objectives. Influential works in this category are those of Wojtech Mastny who discusses Soviet foreign policy during 1941 - 1947 in terms of 'the intricate relationship among Moscow's military strategy, diplomacy and management of international Communism'.⁴

¹ Hammond, T.T. (ed.) *Witnesses to the Origins of the Cold War*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982; Lundestad, G. *The American Non-policy towards Eastern Europe 1943 - 1947*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1978

² Kolko, G. *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy 1943 - 1945*. New York: 1968; Clemens, D.S. *Yalta*. New York: Oxford UP, 1970

³ Feis, H. *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin. The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967; McNeill, W.H. *America, Britain and Russia. Their Cooperation and Conflict*. London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970

⁴ Mastny, V. *Russia's Road to the Cold War*. New York: Columbia UP, 1979; Mastny, V. *The Cold War and Russian Insecurity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996

Post-Communist Russian scholars attempting to analyse newly available documents have curiously reproduced this debate. Some come to the conclusion that senior Russian diplomats were guided mostly by geo-strategic considerations rather than desire for communisation of Europe.⁵ Others claim that careful examination of the interaction between the ideas of world Communism and Russian imperialism reveals that the two were not necessarily contradictory; in fact it is even possible to perceive them as complementing each other.⁶

As the bulk of historical literature on the Cold War originates from the USA it deals mainly with the Soviet-US controversy and treats Britain as the junior partner in the Atlantic relationship. Such a view has been reiterated by the British historian Elisabeth Barker who describes Britain's position 'between the superpowers' as being motivated by a growing concern for its own weakness and acknowledgement of its limited ability to influence world events and pursue independent policy.⁷ In contrast, Anne Deighton traces the roots of British post-war diplomacy back to the patterns of wartime thinking and planning. She claims that it is vital for the interpretation of British policy to understand that Britain regarded itself as a Great Power able to determine the course of events in Europe. Above all Britain justified its right to do so not by its military or economic strength, but by virtue of its expertise in international affairs.⁸

While the course and substance of the Cold War debate has been taken into consideration during the research and writing of the thesis, it should be pointed out that this forms only the

⁵ Pechatnov, V.O. 'The Big Three of Soviet Foreign Policy: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post-War Relations with the United States and Great Britain.' Working Paper no.13. Cold War International History Project: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, July 1995. p.17

⁶ Reynolds, D. (ed.) *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe. International Perspectives*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1994. p.60

⁷ Barker, E. *The British between the Superpowers 1945 - 1950*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983. p.60-62

⁸ Deighton, A. (ed.) *Britain and the First Cold War*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989; Deighton, A. 'The "Frozen Front": The Labour Government, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War 1945 - 1947.' *International Affairs*. vol.63, no.3, summer 1987. p.449-464

general background against which British policy towards Bulgaria in 1943 – 1949 is discussed. Mainly, this is a result of the effort to place the British approach in the context of longer-term relations and attitudes to the country and the adjoining region. The objective has been to show that while exacerbating British-Soviet tensions in the immediate post-war period, clashes over Bulgaria had a longer history and were not engendered solely by the emerging Cold War.

Historians have rarely turned to British, or for that matter Great Power, policy towards Bulgaria. Both Martin Kitchen who looks at the British-Soviet relationship during the Second World War and Victor Rothwell who discusses at length Britain's foreign policy in the early Cold War mention Bulgaria only in passing. This is done in the context of wider issues such as the political connotations of the opening of a Second Front in the Balkans or the Balkan Confederation scheme. The treatment of Bulgaria is overshadowed by attention to developments in Central Europe such as the Polish question or the political evolution of Czechoslovakia.⁹ It would be right to acknowledge that such preoccupations follow the priorities of the British Foreign Office. However, they also help confirm the standard view that Bulgaria's case deserves little attention due to the country's traditional pro-Russian proclivities and the smooth installation of the Soviet political model.

The thesis has been more influenced by deliberate searches for the main factors which determined Britain's post-war diplomacy apart from, or in parallel to, the Cold War. John Kent's interpretation is particularly powerful: it is based on the premise that Britain's desire to sustain its imperial positions was the main driving force of British foreign policy. What mattered for Britain was that its domination in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean should not be disputed by any other Great Power - which in the

⁹ Kitchen, M. *British Policy towards the Soviet Union during the Second World War*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986; Rothwell, V. *Britain and the Cold War 1941 - 1947*. London: Cape, 1982

circumstances after the Second World War could only mean the Soviet Union. As Britain regarded Greece and Turkey as the crucial link in its imperial policy, it was prepared to divert Soviet pressure on these two countries to the northern part of the Balkans.¹⁰ Such an interpretation, which places Bulgaria, as well as Romania and Yugoslavia, on the fringes of the British interest, picks up themes present in the works of Elisabeth Barker. She also sees Bulgaria predominantly as part of Britain's Balkan rather than Eastern European policy. Although quite concise, Barker's analysis of British attitudes to Bulgaria is thorough and consistent and as such is a notable exception in the literature. Her most valuable contribution is the assertion that Bulgaria was not unimportant or marginal for British foreign policy makers and yet they were not prepared for a clash with the Soviet Union over it. Barker approaches Bulgarian developments from a wider Balkan perspective and casts light on the importance of the country in relation to its neighbours.¹¹

Even so, the evolution of British policy towards Bulgaria has not been recounted and analysed in detail. As Barker's research rarely extends beyond 1945 a common impression has been formed that developments after the Potsdam Conference and especially after the Moscow Council of Foreign Ministers in December 1945 are barely worth looking into. Some advance has been made towards overcoming this by works on the Allied Control Commission for Bulgaria, the most comprehensive of which is Michael Boll's monograph.¹² However, as these are predominantly based on US documentary or memoir material, they focus on the activities of the US political and military missions in Bulgaria.¹³

¹⁰ Kent, J. *'The British Empire and the Origins of the Cold War.'* Deighton, A. *Britain...* p.165-183

¹¹ Barker, E. *Truce in the Balkans*. London: Percival Marshall Company Ltd., 1948; Barker, E. *Macedonia, Its Place in Balkan Politics*. London: RILA, 1950; Barker, E. *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976; Barker, E. et al. (eds.) *British Political and Military Strategy in Central-Eastern and Southern Europe in 1944*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988

¹² Boll, M.M. *Cold War in the Balkans: American Policy towards Bulgaria 1943 - 1947*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1984

¹³ Black, C.E. *'The Start of the Cold War in Bulgaria: A Personal View.'* *The Review of Politics*, vol.41, no.2, April 1979. p.163-202; Horner, J.E. *'Traicho Kostov: Stalinist Orthodoxy in Bulgaria.'* *Survey*.

Historiography also lacks meaningful exploration of the interaction between Western and Soviet policy towards Bulgaria. Practically no attempts have been made to juxtapose Soviet intentions as revealed from contemporary Soviet archives and the British perception of these as based on Soviet actions in Bulgaria and the rest of Eastern Europe in 1943 – 1949.¹⁴ Little effort has gone into investigating how the British interest in Bulgaria – limited as it was – was translated into specific actions in the country. Most existing accounts revolve around British political involvement with the Bulgarian anti-Communist Opposition. The prevailing deductions are ideologically coloured and claim that this followed either from Britain's commitment to upholding democracy in Bulgaria or, on the contrary, from Britain's imperialistic designs for Bulgaria.¹⁵ A corollary of the latter is the implicit assertion by a number of Bulgarian scholars that Bulgaria had a special role in the British post-war scheme for the Balkans.¹⁶ Such a self-centred opinion is mainly the result of the lack of a comparative perspective and little effort to find out the place of Bulgaria in the larger and more complicated European, or at least Eastern European picture.

* * *

vol.24, no.3, summer 1979. p.135-142; Horner, J.E. *'The Ordeal of Nikola Petkov and the Consolidation of Communist Power in Bulgaria.'* Survey, vol.28, no.2, summer 1984. p.75-83; A few articles on the ACC in Bulgarian are mainly narratives containing numerous technical details, Pintev, S. *'Nachalna deinost na Suyuznata Kontrolna Komisia v Bulgaria, oktomvri 1944 - januari 1945.'* Istoricheski Pregled, god.XXXV, no.4/5, 1979. p.196-203; Pintev, S. *'SSSR, SASht i Velikobritania i Moskovskoto primirie s Bulgaria, septemvri - oktomvri 1944.'* Izvestia na Bulgarskoto Istorichsko Druzhestvo, kn.32, 1978. p.241-259

¹⁴ The problem is mentioned in Dimitrov, V. 'The Failure of Democracy in Eastern Europe and the Emergence of the Cold War, 1944 – 1948: A Bulgarian Case Study.' DPhil: University of Cambridge, 1996.

¹⁵ Roberts, Fr. *Dealing with Dictators: The Destruction and Revival of Europe 1930 - 1970*. London: Weidenfield&Nicolson, 1991; The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs. The Reckoning*. Boston: Houghton Muffin, 1965; Churchill, Sir Winston. *The Second World War*. vols.III - VI. London: Cassell, 1948 – 1954; Feis, H. *Churchill...* Frankel, J. *British Foreign Policy 1945 - 1973*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975; Keeble, Sir Curtis. *Britain and the Soviet Union, 1917 - 1989*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1990

¹⁶ The definitive Soviet-period work is Trukhanovski, V.G *Vnesnyaya politika Anglii v period Vtoroy mirovoy voiny 1939 – 1945gg*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970. For the prevalent Bulgarian interpretation see Gunev, G. and I.Ilchev. *Winston Churchill i Balkanite*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1984; for comparison see Rachev, St. *Anglo-Bulgarian Relations during the Second World War 1939 – 1944*. Sofia: Sofia Press, 1981 and Rachev, St. *Churchill, Bulgaria i Balkanite*. Sofia: Sotri, 1995.

The majority of published English-language sources used for the thesis pertain to the wider question of British-Soviet relations in the early Cold War years. Amongst them the most enlightening have been those in the series *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, published by the Historical Branch of the Foreign Office. The volume dealing with Eastern Europe in the mid-1940s contains seminal documents highlighting the turning points in British foreign policy regarding the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence. Another useful publication of earlier British Government material is *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin: British Documents on Anglo-Soviet Relations*.¹⁷ The secret wartime correspondence between Roosevelt and Churchill comprises parts of the debate between British and US leaders regarding the conduct of the Second World War and its political consequences for the Balkans and Bulgaria. It offers glimpses of the decision making process regarding such crucial issues as the bombing of Bulgaria in 1943, the October 1944 percentage agreement and Soviet behaviour in occupied Bulgaria.¹⁸ The importance of personal diplomacy is further clarified by the messages exchanged between the British and US Heads of Government and Stalin.¹⁹

None of the mentioned collections matches the time span and subject scope of the sections on Bulgaria in the annually published by the US Department of State *Foreign Relations of the United States*.²⁰ These documents detail the daily contacts between the US representatives in Bulgaria and their colleagues and superiors in Washington. They often throw light on how the country was treated in inter-Allied talks and how the difference of

¹⁷ Ross, G. (ed.) *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin: British Documents on Anglo-Soviet Relations 1944 - 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985

¹⁸ Loewenheim, Fr.L. et al. (eds.) *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*. New York, 1975

¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. *Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill, Attlee, Roosevelt and Truman, 1941 - 1945*. London: Lawrence&Wishart, 1958

²⁰ United States Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1943 - 1955. Washington, DC, 1961 - 1985

attitudes between Britain and the USA was translated into concrete actions directed to Sofia or Moscow. The series also reveals to what extent British views influenced and were influenced by those of the USA. It is another documentary volume, *The American Military Mission in the Allied Control Commission for Bulgaria 1944 – 1947*, that is unique among English-language published sources in its dealing specifically with Bulgaria.²¹

When the dissertation was started, the published archival material from Bulgaria was dated, negligible and only consisted of officially scrutinised Communist Party and Government proceedings.²² Some progress has since been made by the appearance of documentary collections, dealing with wartime and immediate post-war issues, including the methods used by the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP)* to seize control of the country.²³ The publication of the diary of the Bulgarian Communist leader Georgi Dimitrov has been extremely valuable, especially since the original is still not available to researchers.²⁴

A similar picture emerges regarding Soviet and Russian publications.²⁵ Although the question of Soviet Government and Communist Party archives continues to represent a politically-loaded issue in Russia, problems related to developments in Bulgaria are illuminated by an increasing number of publications. These trace the link between Party and

²¹ Boll, M.M. *The American Military Mission in the Allied Control Commission for Bulgaria 1944 - 1947*. Boulder, Colo.: Columbia UP, 1985

²² *The Trial of Nikola D. Petkov, August 5 - 15, 1947: Records of the Judicial Proceedings*. Sofia: Ministry of Information and Arts, 1947; *The Trial of Traicho Kostov and His Group*. Sofia: Press Department, 1949; *Ustanovyavane i ukrepvane na narodnodemokratichnata vlast septemvri 1944 – may 1945*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1969; *Vunshna Politika na Narodna Republika Bulgaria: Sbornik ot dokumenti i materialy v dva toma 1944 - 1962*. Sofia: Durzhavno Izdatelstvo 'Nauka i Izkustvo', 1970

* Its full name was Bulgarian Workers Party (Communists) but BCP will be used hereafter

²³ Toshkova, V. et al. (eds.) *Bulgaria, nepriznatiyat protivnik na Tretiya Raih*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na MO 'Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets', 1995; Ognyanov, L. et al. (eds.) *Narodna Demokratiya ili Diktatura*. Sofia: Literaturen Forum, 1992

²⁴ Dimitrov, G. *Dnevnik 9 mart 1933 – 6 fevruari 1949*. Sofia: Universitetsko Izdatelstvo 'Sv. Kl. Ohridski', 1997

²⁵ Valev, L.B. et al. (eds.) *Sovetsko-Bolgarskie otnosheniya i Svyazi, 1944 - 1948gg.: Dokumenty i materialy*. Moscow: Nauka, 1981

Government in the foreign policy decision making process in the Soviet Union, as well as the influence of Moscow on the Eastern European Communist Parties.²⁶

The quantity and variety of unpublished sources relevant to the thesis is overwhelming, especially allowing for the fact that new documents are annually released not only from the until recently sealed Soviet and Bulgarian archives but also in Britain. The bulk of primary sources consulted for the dissertation is of British origin and is kept in the Public Record Office at Kew. These are mostly documents generated by two Foreign Office Departments - the Southern, which dealt with Bulgaria and its neighbours, and the Northern, which dealt with Soviet Russia. In addition, there were documents emanating from the Foreign Office Research Department (FORD), as well as correspondence with various other British Government bodies such as the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the Political Warfare Executive (PWE), the Board of Trade (BoT), etc. FO files also contain the flow of communications between London and British political and military representatives in the country. This material gives the most complete picture of the process of decision making. Following in detail discussions within and between FO Departments regarding policy towards Bulgaria in 1943 – 1949, the sources reveal the elaboration of British wartime and post-war objectives and track their practical implementation. They also uncover the various options available to British policy makers and uniquely – their assessment of results and consequences.

In comparison, evidence coming from various Bulgarian and Russian archives is patchy. This is to a great extent due to the fact that these archives have been partially open for a few years only and still lack precise operational rules and routine. Another difficulty is posed by the lack of a well-established methods of decision making and the lack of any Bulgarian or

²⁶ Lebedev, N.S. *et al.* (eds.) *Comintern i Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina*. 2 vols. Moscow: Pamyatniki istoricheskoy myisli, 1994, 1997; Volokitina, T.V. *et al.* (eds.) *Vostochnaya Evropa v Dokumentah Rossiyskikh Arhivov 1944 – 1953*. vol.1, 1944 – 1948. Moscow: Sibirskiy Hronograf, 1997

Soviet equivalent of the British FO minutes, which trace in minutiae the range of opinion and options from which final policy emerged. Still, the examination of the available documents from different Bulgarian institutions – the Ministries of Foreign and Internal Affairs, the Central Committee (CC) of the Bulgarian Communist Party – as well as the personal archives of prominent Communist Party and state leaders, as Georgi Dimitrov, Vassil Kolarov and Traicho Kostov, enables partial reconstruction of the policy making process. These materials disclose how far Bulgarian leaders were able to exercise their own initiative regarding Western activities as opposed to merely acting on Soviet orders.

Soviet archives have preserved documents enabling reconstruction of policy making regarding Bulgaria, the Balkans and Eastern Europe. It is particularly useful to compare the views and intentions emanating from Soviet sources with contemporary Western interpretations and reactions. Examination of the released Soviet archives is crucial in establishing the relation between Soviet military strategy and post-war planning for Eastern Europe as reflected in the case of Bulgaria. The interaction between the Soviet design and the strategy of the Bulgarian Communist Party is another outstanding issue. Moreover, some clarification is possible of the Soviet position in negotiations over Bulgaria and the limits to which Stalin was prepared to go in the clash with the Western powers over Eastern Europe in general. All this throws additional light upon the relevance of the methods employed by the Western Allies to promote the democratic future of Bulgaria. It also helps to judge the extent to which Britain's perceptions of Soviet aims were correct and whether British tactics were adequate to Soviet intentions.

Part One

‘What Will Be the Place of Bulgaria at the Judgement Seat?’ *

Chapter One

Bulgaria in British Post-war Planning

Since the latter half of the nineteenth century Bulgaria's place in British foreign policy had been determined by a number of inter-related political, strategic and economic factors fused in the so-called Eastern Question. Even after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the intricacies of this Great Power controversy for dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean were to a degree still relevant to Britain's Balkan policy. Before and during the Second World War Britain retained its commitment to securing the naval routes to its imperial territories in the Middle East. This overriding objective shaped Britain's relations with the individual countries in the region.

Bulgaria could influence developments not only in the Balkan Peninsula but also across Eastern Europe. At the heart of the Balkans and bordering the Black Sea, the country attracted Britain's attention as it stood close to the Mediterranean Straits, an area of traditional British interest. In the nineteenth century, the approach towards Bulgaria was complicated by the British perception of the country as closely attached to Russia because of ethnic and cultural similarities. Such an opinion continued to hold sway after the First World War despite a number of open rifts between Russia and Bulgaria in the late nineteenth and

* Winston Churchill in the House of Commons, 2.08.1944

the first half of the twentieth century. Britain considered Bulgaria a convenient stepping-stone for the fulfilment of Russian aims of predominance in the Eastern Mediterranean. Centuries-long Russian engagement in conflict with the Ottoman Empire affected the development of the whole Balkan Peninsula and the adjoining areas. Britain had been jealously watching Russian military successes and the increase of Russian influence in proximity to the Straits.¹ Bulgaria's significance lay in its links with parts of the European continent vital for Britain's security and trade. Such attention as was paid to Bulgaria should be placed in the context of Britain's involvement in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, which had to be safeguarded against the encroachment of adversaries like Russia. On its own account, the country had little value for British post-Second World War policy planning.

The Eastern Mediterranean was an internationally recognised zone of British interest. The Balkans were the natural hinterland to this sensitive area. A Great Power controlling the Peninsula could use it to defend or menace the Straits and with this, communications to the Middle East. Accordingly, strong influence over Greece and Turkey was central for Britain's security in the Mediterranean. This would undoubtedly be enhanced by amicable relations with Bulgaria. The precariousness of Britain's position in the region had been clearly demonstrated by the Bulgarian occupation of Aegean Thrace and Macedonia in 1941 – 1942. The presence of Bulgarian troops there created serious military difficulties for Britain throughout the Second World War. From the British perspective, Bulgarian withdrawal from these territories would bring a distinct strategic advantage to the Allied military effort against the Axis. In the longer term, Britain's position in the Balkans would benefit if as a

¹ Barker, E. *Britain in a Divided Europe*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1971. p.11; Kennan, G. *Russia and the West under Lenin and Stalin*. London: Hutchinson, 1961; Kennan, G. 'The X Article.' Gati, Ch. (ed.) *Caging the Bear: Containment and the Cold War*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1974. p.9-23; Ragsdale, H. (ed.) *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. p.211-246; Cohen, A. *Russian Imperialism*. London: Praeger, 1996. p.48-56

result of British influence Bulgaria could be persuaded to co-operate with its neighbours and thus cease to be a cause of regional instability.

The Sources of British Policy towards Bulgaria.

By the start of 1942, the British Government began investigating the question of European post-war settlement. The initial efforts were mostly intellectual exercises, contained within the Foreign and the Dominions Offices. The first 'planners' at the FO Reconstruction Department, headed by Gladwyn Jebb, were mainly engaged in constructing different scenarios for the post-war international re-alignment of forces.² At that time, attitudes towards Bulgaria, as towards the other European small powers, were governed by tradition and above all by its role in the continuing armed conflict.

Military Considerations.

During the war Britain looked towards Bulgaria only occasionally, discussing it mainly as an ally of Germany. However, British officials noted that the country was unique among the signatories of the Tripartite Pact in that it had managed to abstain from active participation in any war theatre. It had only been engaged in Axis operations of secondary importance, such as the occupation of Greek and Yugoslav territories and in providing supplies for German regiments in the Balkans. The Bulgarian King had withstood pressure from Hitler to send troops to the Eastern front. Moreover, having declared war on Great Britain and the United States in December 1941, Bulgaria maintained diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union throughout the war. Both the Bulgarian Government and Opposition greatly emphasised this limited involvement in the war, hoping that it would secure benevolent treatment by whichever side emerged victorious.³

² Jebb, G. *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn*. London: Weidenfield&Nicolson, 1972. p.113-119

³ Miller, M.L. *Bulgaria during the Second World War*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford UP, 1975. p.53-62

Indeed, in the earlier stages of the war those British diplomatic and military experts who had followed the course of Bulgaria's association with the Axis acknowledged the peculiarities of the Bulgarian position. The FO Southern Department had some understanding of the country's predicament between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. But the closer to the Balkans fighting moved the less tolerance of Bulgaria's behaviour British observers displayed. They rejected the Bulgarian Government's claims of 'symbolic' participation in the war. The British Government could not play down Bulgaria's contribution to the maintenance of stable Axis control over the Balkans. It was Bulgarian troops which held down local resistance and thus freed German divisions to fight elsewhere.⁴ Above all, Bulgaria's political and diplomatic difficulties could not significantly influence British long-term policy. Factors going beyond the immediate wartime concerns prevailed in shaping the general attitude towards Bulgaria and ultimately determined its standing at the end of the war. It was Britain's broad interest in the region which dictated the elaboration of specific policies towards Bulgaria.

Through its leverage in the Balkans, Britain had played an important role at various points in Bulgaria's modern history. However, even during the short-lived 'Bulgarian Agitation' in 1876 – 1878 in defence of the Bulgarian Christian population from the atrocities of the Ottoman authorities, Britain had not been involved in internal Bulgarian developments.⁵ Britain had predominantly been concerned with strategic issues relating to Bulgaria's claims for territorial enlargement which could disturb the equilibrium in the Balkans. Mostly, Britain had tried to parry excessive Soviet aspirations towards the Eastern Mediterranean. In 1943 – 1944, no British diplomat or politician claimed that Britain should aim for unequivocal control over Bulgaria.

⁴ HS5/180, SOE memorandum, 7.06.1943; FO371/37152, R6704, Howard to Barker, 28.06.1943

What mattered to Britain was that no Great Power hostile to its interests should dominate Bulgaria. In the changing military circumstances this could only be attained by the establishment of British physical presence in the field. In early 1943, the Southern Department took the view that 'the obvious and easiest solution would be that we and the Americans by an invasion of the Balkans should be on the spot and in a position to police that part of the world'.⁶

Such considerations had practical value only if supported by adequate military actions. In 1943, while Southern Department officials were suggesting the deployment of British military and possibly civilian authorities in Bulgaria, the British Chiefs of Staff were rationalising Churchill's idea for an attack on 'the soft under-belly of the Axis'.⁷ Churchill's initial argument at the end of 1942, just as the subsequent British military planners' recommendation for a fighting front in the Balkans, was based on the necessity for maximum diversion of forces and damage to Axis communications.⁸ But neither the Prime Minister, nor his military commanders were able to overcome their US counterparts' opposition. High-ranking US politicians and officers had a stiff 'doctrinal objection to anything to do with the Balkans'.⁹ They considered anything but massive concentration of force for the cross-Channel invasion of Europe to be a wasteful diversion and engagement in 'pinprick warfare'.¹⁰ There was an additional US suspicion that the real British motives were rooted in imperial aspirations to secure a sphere of influence in the Balkans.¹¹ In October

⁵ Shannon, R.T. *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, 1876*. Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1963. Saab, A.P. *Gladstone, Bulgaria and the Working Classes, 1856 – 1878*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard UP, 1991

⁶ Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.134

⁷ Churchill, W.S. *The Second...* vol.IV. p.433

⁸ McNeill, W.H. *America...* p.221, 304-305

⁹ Macmillan, H. *The Blast of War 1939 – 1945*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1967. p.503

¹⁰ Stimson, H.L. and McGeorge Bundy. *On Active Service in Peace and War*. New York: Harper&Bros, 1947. p.437

¹¹ Leahy, W.D. *I Was There*. London: Victor Gollanz Ltd., 1950. p.191; Lord Ismay. *The Memoirs of General the Lord Ismay*. London: Heinemann, 1960. p.287, 323; Macmillan, H. *The Blast...* p.190–191, 503–504;

1943, mainly upon US insistence, the Three Allies decided against opening a front in the Balkans. This happened despite the fact that Allied forces were engaged in Italy from where it was possible to push towards the north-western Balkans.¹² It also made futile Britain's continuous attempts to secure Turkey's unequivocal commitment on the Allied side.¹³

In fact, the British Commanders in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, notably General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson and General Sir Harold Alexander, who were responsible for the elaboration of Balkan strategy, were comparatively little concerned with its long-term implications. It was the Foreign Office and the War Cabinet which had to project military decisions into British post-war interests.¹⁴ In late 1943 and even in the first half of 1944, they conceded the priority of immediate wartime objectives over peacetime planning. Even Churchill, the person most aware of the political consequences of an Allied offensive, or the lack of it, in the Balkans had to bow to the military rationale. In the conflict between short- and long-term policy, the former prevailed.

Britain's Support of Bulgaria's Neighbours. Before the Second World War, Britain's attitude to Bulgaria had been formulated in conjunction with longer-standing relationships with Bulgaria's neighbours. Bulgaria's siding with Germany confirmed the basic negative assumptions towards it in British foreign policy making circles. Bulgaria's signing of the Tripartite Pact on 1 March 1941 restored the clarity of the inter-war strategic situation in the Balkans. This had been blurred during the period of Bulgarian neutrality proclaimed in September 1939. Searching for foundations of the post-war settlement, the British Government could not avoid looking back at the recent pattern of relations. In the

American Secretary of War Stimson was among the few who believed in Churchill's sincerity, Stimson, H.L. *On Active Service...* p.437, 447.

¹² Howard, M. *Grand Strategy*. London: HMSO, 1966. vol.IV, part I. p.275

¹³ Deringil, S. *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the Second World War: An 'Active' Neutrality*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. p.133-165

¹⁴ Woodward, Sir E.L. *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*. London: HMSO, 1971. vol. II. p.273

First World War Bulgaria had fought and lost on the side of the Central Powers, subsequently displaying vigorous revisionist criticism of the Versailles system. Moreover, historical examples of amicable political relations between Bulgaria and Great Britain were few and far between.

Between the wars a relatively small number of Bulgarian politicians advocated pro-British orientation. The scarcity of fruitful economic contacts was glaring. Indeed, Bulgaria produced few commodities in demand on the British market, and most of them could be easily obtained from some of its neighbours. In the 1920s and 1930s, Britain was not prepared to make purchases for political rather than economic profit, leaving Germany plentiful space for manoeuvring in the field of investment and trade with Bulgaria. By 1939, Germany was not only Bulgaria's largest trade partner, but also received most of the exportable surplus of the country in exchange for credits and supply of much needed armaments. Germany utilised this situation and positioned itself as Bulgaria's reliable ally in peace and war.¹⁵

In the late 1930s, the FO conducted an extensive internal debate on the need to counterbalance the *Reich's* economic domination of Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria. Few practical solutions were found as British companies could not beat the prices Germany offered for Bulgarian goods.¹⁶ Any proposed actions were relatively mild as it was feared that Berlin would view these as an economic challenge. During 1937 - 1938 the FO was determined to show that Britain's purpose was not to deny Germany access to Eastern Europe but to re-establish economic equilibrium there. Even though the Bulgarian Government itself desired to contain the German economic penetration, Britain's attempts to

¹⁵ Miller, M.L. *Bulgaria...* p.7

¹⁶ Dimitrov, I. *Anglia i Bulgaria 1938 – 1941: v navecherieto na Vtorata svetovna voina*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1983. p.15-16; Rendel, Sir George. *The Sword and the Olive: Recollections of Diplomacy and the Foreign Service 1913 - 1954*. London: Murrey, 1957. p.141-144; Deringil, S. *Turkey's...* p.24

activate economic relations with Bulgaria failed. This was predominantly the result of Britain's inability to change its trade patterns, in order to achieve diplomatic and political goals.¹⁷

In diplomatic terms, Britain had made half-hearted efforts to prevent Bulgaria's attachment to the Tripartite Pact. It had insisted on Bulgaria's remaining neutral but had offered no positive encouragement, which could have been used either by the Bulgarian King or by pro-Western politicians to oppose aligning with Germany. Most importantly, Britain upheld the Versailles Treaty, universally perceived in Bulgaria as the source of all evils. Bulgarian statesmen generally overlooked a detail in Britain's position, namely that it was prepared to contemplate peaceful territorial alterations to the peace settlement.¹⁸

Britain had little ground for rapprochement with Bulgaria whose domestic and foreign policy were driven by unfulfilled territorial aspirations. In the years leading up to the Second World War, the only offer that could have tempted Bulgaria to stay away from the Axis was some territorial acquisition which Bulgarian ruling circles could present as a step in the direction of 'Bulgarian national unification'. This was the very thing Britain could not promise or even contemplate, constrained as it was by commitment to Greece and Yugoslavia. However, belated British approval was declared for Rumania's return of Southern Dobrudja to Bulgaria in August 1940. This small piece of compromise passed largely unnoticed in Bulgaria as it was disproportionate to the support shown by Germany which had actually forced Rumania's hand.¹⁹

¹⁷ FO371/24873, R43, BoT to FO, 1.06.1940, R1697, MEW to FO, 6.02.1940; FO371/24882, R5681 – R7795, Sofia – FO, May – October 1940; Kaiser, D. *Economic Diplomacy and the Second World War: Germany, Britain, France and Eastern Europe 1930 - 1939*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980. p.170-195

¹⁸ Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.8, 57

¹⁹ FO371/24862, R939, Rendel to FO, 12.01.1940; FO371/37151, R5372, Rose minute (hereafter minutes will be indicated by the name of the author only), 18.06.1943; Miller, M.L. *Bulgaria...* p.30; Dimitrov, I. *Anglia...* p.22

The British Government had officially endorsed Balkan unity but also insisted that any initiative should originate from the Balkan states themselves. However, the FO understood that the proponents of the *status quo* who joined in the Balkan Entente stood to benefit from maintaining Bulgaria's image as unwaveringly pro-German; without making any concessions they could rely on British support. Still, the value of the Balkan Entente for British strategy remained paramount.²⁰ Indeed, any attempt to draw Bulgaria closer to Britain risked appearing to favour it at the expense of its neighbours. The strategic advantage of neutralising Bulgaria would then be outweighed by the danger of antagonising its adversaries.

In the initial stages of the war Bulgaria was relatively inconspicuous among the enemy states. In the course of the war the British Government became increasingly aware of the military difficulties Bulgaria posed for the Allies. Most British experts grew intensely hostile to any attempt on the part of the Bulgarian Government to present itself as merely caught in the vortex of Great Power politics. As a result, the significance of the tense inter-war Bulgarian-British relations was magnified. To an extent, the state of affairs preceding the war was replicated during its latter stages. Since the autumn of 1943 British military and political planners had agreed on the desirability of knocking Bulgaria out of the conflict. As very small numbers of Allied troops would be available for the Balkans, Britain had to devise effective measures for the application of diplomatic pressure. Any contacts with Bulgaria brought up before British officials the familiar question of arousing 'at once... the deepest suspicion on the part of the Greek, Yugoslav and Turkish Governments'.²¹

²⁰ FO371/24869, R3730, Rendel to FO, Clutton, 17.03.1939

²¹ FRUS 1943, vol.I, p.489, British Embassy Washington *aide-memoire*, 6.04.1943

In late 1943 and 1944, the FO declared that it was impossible 'to give the Bulgarians the slightest sympathetic consideration'.²² Even when the Bulgarian Government showed willingness to establish unofficial contacts with the Allies, the FO believed that it was simply trying to get itself 'out of scrapes' which it had got into through its own fault.²³ British attitude was augmented by what the British Balkan experts recognised as 'the violent anti-Bulgarian feeling in both Greece and Yugoslavia'.²⁴ Their Governments-in-exile constantly pressed Britain to make a commitment to harsh punishment of Bulgaria for its role in the war. They did not fail to protest at a single instance when through propaganda or otherwise Britain tried to display mildness in order to detach Bulgaria from the Axis. So vociferous were these protests that the Head of the Southern Department Sir Orme Sargent feared that they might have exactly the opposite effect. Some 'latent Bulgarophilia in the British public' could find 'a favourable breeding place in the irritation and disillusionment which our Greek and Yugoslav allies are bound to cause us as time goes on'.²⁵

Planning for Bulgaria was further complicated by the territorial demands of its neighbours against it. Britain had repeatedly stated that territorial changes would have to await the peace settlement. The Greek representative in London Romanos was eager to secure British commitment to an enlarged post-war Greece. In September 1943, he complained that in a speech the British Prime Minister had not mentioned the Greek hope for rectification of the frontier with Bulgaria.²⁶ Even Turkey, still nominally neutral and on relatively good terms with Bulgaria, criticised BBC broadcasts advising Bulgaria to side with the Allies. The Turkish Government hinted that it wondered whether the Bulgarian treachery was going to

²² FO371/37153, R11655, Soviet *aide-memoire*, 29.10.1943

²³ FO371/37002, N1246, Kuibyshev to FO, 16.01.1943

²⁴ FO371/37153, R2129, Eden brief, 9.03.1943

²⁵ FO371/37153, R11655, Sargent, 24.07.1943

²⁶ FO371/37248, R9396, Romanos to Laskey, 28.09.1943, R9740, Eden brief, October 1943

be 'condoned and forgotten'. This confirmed the FO's impression that Turkey would manoeuvre for the acquisition of the Sakar massif from which Bulgaria presently dominated Adrianopol.²⁷

Accumulating evidence made the FO sceptical as to its ability to induce Bulgaria to abandon the Axis. The British Government was precluded from making even the vaguest of promises to Bulgaria. Apparent British support for Greece and Yugoslavia and attempts at drawing Turkey closer convinced the Bulgarian Government that its only chance of keeping the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty was to remain on Germany's side. The FO fully realised that it could not offer any positive encouragement to Bulgaria and was thus tying the hands even of those circles in Bulgaria which could promote the anti-German case. The feeling of impasse made the FO reluctant to explore the possibilities of rapprochement with Bulgaria. It had some historic sense of failure and was anxious not to lay up incalculable difficulties in its plans for the future of South Eastern Europe.²⁸

British Perceptions of the Soviet Role in the Balkans.

British foreign policy makers acknowledged that, as long as Britain was seen as the champion of the interests of Bulgaria's neighbours, Sofia would look to another Great Power for protection. In early 1943, beginning to feel uncertain about Germany's ultimate ability to win the war, Bulgaria's rulers were increasingly likely to try to reinvigorate relations with the Soviet Union. The FO had to consider the consequences of such a development on British interests. In early 1943, Sir George Rendel, British Ambassador in Sofia in 1938 – 1941 and to the Yugoslav Government-in-exile during the war, reminded the FO that, first among the lesser powers Bulgaria had realised that 'in modern conditions small states cannot stand alone'.²⁹

²⁷ FO371/37158, R5885, Clutton to Helm, 10.07.1943, FORD paper, 13.07.1943; Woodward, Sir E.L. *British Foreign ...* vol.IV. p.109, 110, 117

²⁸ FRUS 1943, vol.I, p.493, State Department (hereafter State) to FO, 28.04.1943

²⁹ FO371/37173, R974, Rendel to Sargent, 1.02.1943

Other British Eastern European experts believed that at the current stage of the war the majority of the Bulgarian people were 'as always fervently pro-Russian'. Some diplomats claimed that only just before the arrival of the Red Army on the banks of the Danube would the anti-Communists in Bulgaria see the imminent dangers of Soviet occupation.³⁰

The FO feared that it was not only pro-Russian feelings which might bring renewed Russian influence over Bulgaria. Balkan specialists recalled that in November 1940 the Soviet Union had proposed to Bulgaria a pact of mutual assistance which would have given the Soviet Union the right to establish naval and military bases within range of the Dardanelles. During the negotiations for an Anglo-Soviet treaty in 1941 - 1942, Soviet security guarantees for the Balkan countries had featured prominently on the Soviet agenda. Stalin had confided in Eden his design for domination of Romania, and the FO surmised that he would also advance to Bulgaria.³¹ It would only be necessary for the Soviet Union to champion some of Bulgaria's pre-war territorial claims to become the 'virtual mistress of the country'. Then Britain would encounter difficulties in distinguishing between 'purely Bulgarian and ultimately Russian interests'. Rendel was certain that Russia would push south until it obtained military, naval and air bases in the Adriatic and the Aegean. He warned that if the British Government did not wish to see Russian bases 'at Split and Dubrovnik, and probably at Dedeagatch, Kavala or even Salonika', it should in the first place prevent the appearance of these at Varna and Burgas.³²

Rendel claimed that the Soviet Union would not resist the temptation to establish its influence in South Eastern Europe. He even foresaw the possibility of 'a spontaneous movement... which would result in the creation of a number of small states or republics

³⁰ FO371/37157, R1592, Clark Kerr to FO, 20.02.1943

³¹ Howard, M. *Grand Strategy*. vol.III, part I, p.273; Swain, G. 'Stalin's Wartime Vision of the Post-war World.' *Diplomacy and Statecraft*. vol.7, no.1, 1996. p.78-79

³² FO371/37173, R974, Rendel to Sargent, 1.02.1943

which would then spontaneously ask for admission into the Soviet Union'. In such a case it would be 'impossible for the Soviet Union to refuse to have anything to do with it, whatever its undertakings before the Western powers about non-intervention in South Eastern Europe'. Such a development could start from Bulgaria and would have profound consequences on the internal situation of Greece and even more Yugoslavia, where the extreme left anti-monarchists were very strong.³³

The fact that Communists were becoming increasingly prominent in the small Bulgarian resistance only complicated the issue of the Soviet role in Bulgaria in particular and in the Balkans as a whole. Their Communist ideology could become the instrument for spreading Soviet influence to the south and even west of Europe. What the Southern Department began considering in the spring of 1943 was whether Britain could, and moreover should, aim 'to save' Bulgaria from possible bolshevisation.³⁴

Uncertainty about Soviet Plans. In the latter stages of the war, the biggest hindrance to the elaboration of a clear British policy towards Bulgaria was the lack of solid knowledge of Soviet plans and attitudes. By 1943, the only definite conclusion the FO had reached was that Soviet influence in the Balkans was going to expand. The more intricate question was, however, whether this increased influence was likely to be coupled with imposition of the Soviet form of government. Stalin had repeatedly proclaimed that the Soviet Union did not aim at 'the seizure of foreign territory', nor did it intend to impose its 'will and regime upon the Slavonic or any other enslaved nations'.³⁵ The FO saw all these as propaganda statements. British officials did not fail to notice that no Soviet declaration mentioned the aspirations of indigenous Communists across Europe. Nevertheless,

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.113; Barker, E. *'Problems of the Alliance: Misconceptions and Misunderstandings'*. Barker, E. *British Political...* p.45-46

throughout 1943, British foreign policy makers were prepared to give the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt.

From different pieces of contemporary evidence the FO ascertained that Stalin's ideas about Bulgaria, and indeed other East European countries, fluctuated. In December 1941, when the Soviet Union desperately needed military support, Stalin had suggested to Eden that Turkey might be given a portion of Bulgaria south of Burgas.³⁶ Such an opportunistic approach indicated to the FO that Stalin was not led by sentiment but was mostly concerned about concrete wartime achievements. That is why later, in 1943, the Southern Department discussed the possibility of asking the Soviet Union to threaten Bulgaria with war and to proclaim that unless Bulgaria capitulated, the Soviet Union could not guarantee its independence. Such a proposition, however, touched on the question of the future of South Eastern Europe. The Soviet Government had hitherto shown reluctance to commit itself 'in any way' on this subject.³⁷ It was doubtful whether the British Government was ready to make such decisions, either.

In 1944, the FO continued to speculate about Soviet intentions towards Bulgaria. Even in the spring and summer of that year, when Moscow exerted open pressure on the Bulgarian Government to desert the Germans, Soviet short-term plans were unclear to British officials. As no precise information could be obtained from the Soviet Government, British observers could only surmise that the USSR strove to establish a 'dominating moral position'. This raised further questions: would Soviet Russia demand something tangible, for example air

³⁵ FO371/36991, N983, radio intercept, 8.02.1943; Dilks, D. *'British Political Aims in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe.'* Barker, E. *British Political...* p.24

³⁶ FO371/37158, R5885, FORD paper, 2.07.1943: Woodward, Sir E.L. *British Foreign...* vol.IV. p.83

³⁷ FO371/37158, R12535, Southern Department to Eden, 3.12.1943

bases, or seek to ingratiate itself with the Bulgarians by offering them an outlet to the Aegean?³⁸

There is substantial evidence, confirmed from newly available Soviet archives, that not even the Bulgarian Communist leader Georgi Dimitrov residing in Moscow had clues about the precise Soviet plans for Bulgaria. This, in turn, casts doubts over the existence of such plans.³⁹ The best available indications of Soviet foreign policy thinking are the reports of three Soviet Foreign Ministry Commissions which functioned from the end of 1943 to mid-1945 and dealt with different aspects of post-war reconstruction. These were headed by Maxim Litvinov, Kliment Voroshilov and Ivan Maisky, all experienced Soviet diplomats with deep understanding of the mechanisms of Kremlin policy formulation. It is reasonable to assume that their analyses could not have differed much from the opinions of their superiors.⁴⁰

According to the reports the three Commissions submitted to Molotov between January and November 1944, the USSR's main objective was to become so strong that no power in the world could contemplate aggression against it. To achieve this, the Soviet Union should aim to emerge from the war with strategically favourable boundaries. The countries neighbouring it should sign treaties of mutual aid and give it 'the necessary number of land, air and naval bases'.⁴¹ In this respect, neither Britain nor the United States were expected to create major difficulties, apart from voicing some ideological objections. It was believed they would simply bow to the inevitable, with Britain most probably seeking an accord with

³⁸ FO371/43583, R8542, FO memorandum, 30.05.1944

³⁹ Dimitrov, G. *Diary...*; Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.55; Muraviev, K. *Subitiya i Hora. Spomeni*. Sofia: Bulgarski Pisatel, 1992. p.341, 413

⁴⁰ Filitov, A.M. '*V komissiyah Narcomindela...*' Rzhshevskiy, O.A. (ed.) *Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina. Aktual'nye voprossy*. Moscow: Nauka, 1995. p.55

⁴¹ Filitov, A.M. '*V komissiyah...*' p.57

Soviet Russia on the basis of spheres of security. The Commissions recommended that the Soviet Union should strive to maintain good relations with the Western Allies.⁴²

The three high-ranking Soviet diplomats seemed to take for granted the existence of a second, equally important, Soviet aim. They insisted that the European continent should become Socialist as only this would preclude the possibility of new wars and thus guarantee Soviet security. Some post-Communist Russian scholars claim that the Commissions' papers referred to revolution merely because this was the current political jargon.⁴³ Such a conclusion is questionable, especially since the reports clearly pointed out that a policy of communisation would be the greatest challenge to the desired understanding between the Soviet Union and the West. Soviet promotion of a proletarian revolution across Europe was judged to be especially damaging to relations with Great Britain. Simultaneously, in the diplomats' minds the Soviet Union was undoubtedly going to support any indigenous movement towards what was termed 'real democracy'. In some cases, such as those of the German satellites, the establishment of 'Popular Front Governments' would require outside pressure. The reason why these documents were relatively devoid of excessive Marxist terminology lies in the very context in which they were conceived and produced – there was no need to state the obvious. Moreover, the Commissions were not required to question the necessity or feasibility of revolution, but to forecast its international consequences.

From such occasional glimpses of Soviet policy formulation, it becomes evident that there was no contradiction between the different driving forces of Soviet foreign policy. Naturally, during the war the defence of Soviet territory held priority over lending support to foreign revolutionaries. The spread of revolution should not put the security of the Soviet Union at risk. As the stability of the European situation depended on preserving the alliance with the

⁴² Pechatnov, V. 'The Big Three...' p.7

⁴³ Filitov, A.M. '*V komissiyah...*' p.61

Western powers, Communism should only be established in countries which were not of crucial importance to the Western Allies.⁴⁴

Looking into the enemy countries' future, Soviet officials initially asserted 'the principles of broad democracy in the spirit of the national front'.⁴⁵ However, they predicted that the implementation of these principles could require a degree of external intervention, preferably exercised jointly by the Three Allies. But in Soviet eyes 'the retrograde record of the West' cast a doubt over such a possibility. Therefore, Europe should be divided into zones of interest and each Big Power should abstain from developing close, especially military relations with the countries not falling within its own sphere. The proposed line of division, apparently drawn on the basis of maximum Soviet interest, placed Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Romania in the Soviet zone of influence. The aim of undermining Turkey's position as the sole guardian of the Straits was underlined by the Soviet diplomats. They considered that as long as Britain was confident that Bulgaria would receive no outlet to the Aegean, it would not object to Soviet influence over that country or Romania. Soviet foreign policy specialists emphasised the importance of reassuring Britain that it would not lose control over the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁶

On the whole, Soviet planners assessed the situation in Europe realistically. They clearly outlined the maximum Soviet aims in Eastern Europe and considered the means for their attainment. Their most significant achievement was an adequate understanding of the Allies', and especially of Britain's preoccupations, thus outlining a firm and reliable basis for negotiations with the Allies.

⁴⁴ Swain, G. *'Stalin's Wartime...'* p.73; Pechatnov, V.O. *'The Big Three...'* p.22-23

⁴⁵ Filitov, A.M. *'V komissiyah...'* p.57

⁴⁶ *Ibid*; Pechatnov, V. *'The Big Three...'* p.3

British Judgement of Soviet Aims.

The lack of reliable information of Soviet aims led British foreign policy makers to make assumptions on the basis of developments they were able to observe. Comparing British speculations on Soviet plans to the actual Soviet behaviour reveals the extent to which British planning and strategy rested on reality. It is now evident that most British analysts correctly assessed the predominance of the geopolitical motive in Soviet foreign policy but were also right not to overlook the role of Communist ideology.

In late 1943 and the first half of 1944, British policy makers professed no unanimous opinion regarding the USSR's ultimate foreign policy objectives. The majority agreed that in Eastern Europe Stalin would strive to preserve and expand the concessions he had extracted from Hitler in 1939 – 1940. The FO generally accepted that, in addition to Poland and the Baltic republics, the Soviet Union would aim to establish a strong influence over the Balkans. How far such plans were going to damage British interests depended on whether Soviet dominance would be exerted only over the foreign policy of the region.

Within the FO, different perspectives produced varying attitudes to the Soviet Union. The Northern Department, which covered the USSR, expressed serious doubts that the latter had cut-and-dried long-term plans, and even more that the FO had adequate knowledge of them. The experts on the Soviet Union maintained that Soviet and British interests were not necessarily antagonistic. One opportunity for reconciliation would arise from cautious British actions in the Balkans. Christopher Warner, Head of the Northern Department, repeatedly warned that if the Soviet leadership detected any British preparation for confrontation, they would respond in kind and would ultimately 'hold the higher cards'.⁴⁷

The Southern Department, on the other hand, had been long convinced that the Soviet Union would invade the Balkans. This view began to be taken into greater consideration by the

British Government in the spring of 1944 as Soviet troops were pushing the German armies across the western Soviet border. The beginning of fighting beyond Soviet territory precipitated yet another attempt on the part of the FO to evaluate possible dominant tendencies in post-war Soviet foreign policy. Simultaneously, Eden and Churchill voiced anxiety regarding the consequences of Soviet westward advances and imminent proximity to the Eastern Mediterranean. Neither of the two leaders was categorical that the Soviet conduct would be troublesome, both were increasingly worried and nervous.⁴⁸ Eden was also disturbed lest British suspicions were leaked outside the narrow policy making circles thus increasing the possibility of confrontation. Eden deemed it extremely important that the FO should not treat the emergence of a direct clash of interest regarding the Balkans as a foregone conclusion.⁴⁹

FO discussion papers from the first half of 1944 reveal British thinking about the potential Soviet threat and the required reaction to it. Acting on Eden's instructions, various FO Departments 'assemble[d] the evidence in their possession of [the] Soviet intention and the manner in which the Soviet Government appeared to be carrying it out'. The result was a broad policy paper which was circulated in the FO and became the basis for a memorandum for exclusive distribution to the War Cabinet.

The FO pointed out that the spread of Russian influence and communisation of the Balkans were separate trends, not to be confused. The fact that the Balkan resistance leaders were mostly Communist did not necessarily mean a 'systematic attempt by some organisation to communise the whole Peninsula'. Indeed, British officials showed concern not so much for the expansion of Communism as for the spread of Russian influence. They confirmed earlier

⁴⁷ FO371/43646, R9092, Warner, 7.06.1944

⁴⁸ Kent, J. *British Imperial Strategy and the Cold War in the Middle East*. London: Leicester UP, 1994. p.17-18; Dilks, D. 'British Political...' p.22-23, 28-29

⁴⁹ FO371/43646, R9092, FO memorandum, 7.06.1944

views that 'Russia was out' for a predominant position in South Eastern Europe. This could be achieved through the establishment of friendly Governments in most Balkan countries, for example by the Partisans in both Yugoslavia and Greece. In many cases the Communists were bound to emerge as the governing force after the war and the Soviet Government was using them as a means to an end, but not necessarily an end in itself. British experts conceded that the Soviet Union could justify its building-up of Communist-led movements on purely military grounds, especially since Britain itself was supporting – or had supported – Communist guerrillas in most countries. The FO recognised that, ironically, 'the Russians have merely sat back and watched us doing their work for them'. The most important conclusion contained in the FO policy paper was that the Soviet threat to British interests should not be exaggerated as this could itself precipitate a direct conflict.⁵⁰

The analysis of Soviet demands and the means to fulfil them was supplemented by an attempt at defining potential measures to prevent the spread of Soviet influence in the Balkans. Four theoretical alternatives were put forward. Dropping of support for the Communist-led movements and boosting the more moderate elements was one possibility, as was the opposite, namely full support to Communists 'to take the wind out of the Russians' sails'. Either of these options would cause extreme embarrassment to Britain as it would involve reneging existing agreements and military commitments, especially in Greece and Yugoslavia. The same held true of a suggestion for a British-Soviet undertaking not to interfere in the Balkans. The only feasible option seemed that Britain should focus on Greece and Turkey while availing itself of 'every opportunity to spread British influence'. Deliberate efforts should be made to avoid direct challenges to Soviet Russia.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

In this and later papers, the FO approached the subject of Soviet influence in the Balkans from a clearly strategic perspective. Its main conclusions were incorporated in subsequent position documents such as the Post-Hostilities Planning Committee study of 'The Effect of Soviet Policy on British Strategic Interests' from June 1944. This repeated that the Soviet Union would most certainly occupy Romania, strengthen its favourable position in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and demand military bases in the first two countries. The Committee accepted that Britain could only counter such developments by diplomatic means which would hardly be effective. Consequently, later in June 1944, the War Cabinet confirmed the original recommendation of the FO, namely that Britain should consolidate its position in Greece and Turkey and try to spread influence in the rest of the region, avoiding a conflict with the Soviet Union.⁵²

Thus, the line of British post-war involvement in the Balkans was more or less clearly drawn. As the extension of British influence was restricted by what was perceived to be growing Soviet ambitions, the limited British resources had to be concentrated in crucial areas. Bulgaria fell outside these. The FO did not dispute what it called the 'dominating moral role' of Russia in Bulgaria and realised that to challenge this would only serve to exacerbate Anglo-Soviet relations. The result would then be precisely the opposite of what was needed for Britain to defend the Eastern Mediterranean successfully.⁵³

The Need for Co-operation with the Soviet Union.

In June 1944, the Northern Department of the FO drew attention to the possibility that the Soviet Union and Great Britain mutually recognised each other's interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Straits. The experts at the FO Soviet desk thought that any British effort to build influence in Bulgaria and Romania against the Soviet Union was bound to fail. They recommended that

⁵² Barker, E. 'Problems...' p.45-47

⁵³ Kent, J. *British Imperial...* p.14

instead of conflict zones these two countries should become the testing ground for co-operation with the Soviet Union.

Eden confirmed the necessity of continuing collaboration with Moscow and repeated the importance of declaring this publicly. He insisted that the British Government should appear to be informing, consulting and respecting the views of the Soviet Union:

We should not hesitate to make our special interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and therefore in Greece and Turkey, and indeed our interest elsewhere in the Balkans, clear to the Russians: but in any steps we take to build up our influence we must be most careful to avoid giving the impression of a direct challenge.⁵⁴

Such views coincided with trends apparent in earlier FO thinking. In late 1943, in messages to Churchill, Stalin had revealed a desire, before discussing military strategy, to resolve 'all the fundamental questions concerning ... mutual security and ... legitimate interests'.⁵⁵ At the same time British Government officials too were becoming aware of the necessity to raise with the Soviet leaders the issue of post-war settlement.⁵⁶

Lack of unity among the Allies had been variously displayed throughout the war. The increasingly rapid military developments after mid-1943, revealed the necessity for making decisions quickly, which in turn increased the possibility of divergence of policy between Soviet Russia and Britain. FO observers were particularly aware of the lack of mutual consultation and information about Eastern Europe. They predicted a number of political questions that would arise in the event of military operations there. In July 1943, E.M.Wilson at the Northern Department underlined the negative effects of the lack of discussions with the Soviet Union about policy in Europe in general:

⁵⁴ FO371/43646, R9092, FO memorandum, 7.06.1944

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Kitchen, M. *British Policy...* p.106-109

...unless there is some measure of agreement... on general political strategy in Europe there will be increasing heart-burning about tactics, and minor disagreements about tactics will become magnified into major disagreements about strategy and principles.⁵⁷

He recalled that it was British troops which were and would be fighting on other peoples' territory, a fact placing on Britain the primary responsibility for starting negotiations 'to get our practical strategy in respect of these territories agreed'. If the situation was not amended in time, 'when the Russians begin fighting on other peoples' territory they will see very little need to consult us, and by that time the situation will have deteriorated almost beyond repair'.⁵⁸ Wilson pointed to examples of Soviet compromises such as Stalin's abstention from concluding a treaty with the Czechoslovak Government-in-exile. He warned that Stalin was not going 'to behave' so well indefinitely unless Britain made some specific approach.⁵⁹

Such fears were reiterated by higher-ranking Government officials. Robert Bruce Lockhart, Head of the Political Warfare Executive, held that an arrangement with the Soviet Union should be a main *desideratum* of British policy. He believed 'that Britain and the United States cannot guarantee frontiers or even comparative peace in Central and Eastern Europe without a full understanding with Russia'.⁶⁰ Sir Stafford Cripps, former Ambassador to Moscow and War Cabinet member, expressed similar views. He was convinced that 'easy as it is to prompt the Soviets into mischief, it should be easier still to harness them to responsible policy'. He warned that if, for example, the Soviet Union was excluded from the current discussions over Italy, there would be 'hell to pay'. Stalin would interpret this as an invitation to exclude the Western Allies from decisions relating to Central and Eastern Europe: 'This he may in any case. But why provide him with a moral right and legal

⁵⁷ FO371/36991, N4574, Wilson paper, 25.07.1943

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; FO371/36991, N499, Preston memorandum, 21.10.1942

⁶⁰ FO371/36992, N4531, Bruce Lockhart paper, 9.08.1943

justification.’⁶¹ Reviewing advice for rapprochement with the Soviet Union, Sargent complained that it constituted ‘a minor form of appeasement’. But he admitted that ‘a store of goodwill and confidence should be built up, so it could be drawn upon when relations become really difficult’.⁶²

Already in mid-1943, Rendel had pointed to the extreme complexity of an agreement with the Soviet Union in relation to the Balkans. He claimed that the importance of urgent political discussions between the Allies could not be overestimated. These should clarify not only ‘the fate of the whole of South-Eastern Europe South of the Danube, and possibly South of the Carpathians, but also the major issue of the future relations between the Soviet Union and Western Europe, at a point where the interests of the two are likely to impinge on each other most acutely and dangerously’. Rendel called for the formulating of ‘a clear and consistent policy designed to ensure the real independence and prosperity of this important area’. Rendel insisted that the matter required urgent treatment by a special committee which should be guided by political rather than academic aims and should put forward constructive and well-defined suggestions for policy towards South Eastern Europe:

The various intricate aspects of this vitally important and urgent problem could be collated, classified and simplified, and... the issue could be presented in a complete yet compact and manageable form which would enable HMG to take a clear decision.⁶³

Rendel’s proposal was welcomed by the Southern Department which agreed that ‘waiting on events was likely to be fatal’ as they ‘would not wait for [the British Government] to make up [its] mind’. Officials dealing with the Balkans saw clear advantages in determining exactly what they wanted in the region so that they ‘could seize any opportunity’. They accepted that suggestions were bound to be amended in the light of future developments but

⁶¹ FO371/36992, N4717, Cripps to Eden, 10.08.1943

⁶² cited in Kitchen, M. *British Policy...* p.117

⁶³ FO371/37173, R6753, Rendel to Eden, 21.07.1943

this was preferable to simply waiting on Soviet moves. Nothing came of these ideas. In August 1943, Sargent made some preliminary moves to choose a chairman for the proposed committee. His actions were, however, suspended without explanation shortly after the sudden death of the Bulgarian King Boris III in August 1943.⁶⁴

‘Negative’ Planning for Bulgaria. On Eden’s orders Rendel’s letter to the FO from February 1943 was printed for circulation in the War Cabinet. The letter drew particular attention to the importance of Bulgaria for the formulation of long-term British policy towards the whole Balkan region:

... when the last act of the drama begins, ... the centre of the stage will be held ... by Bulgaria. Bulgaria - insignificant as she may seem when judged by standards of major world politics - holds a key position in South-East Europe out of all proportion to her own intrinsic importance. We have twice been led into misfortune by ignoring or belittling the Bulgarian issue. But its bearing on the problem of the future of South-East Europe as a whole is so vital...⁶⁵

The Southern Department perceived such comments to be an elaboration of a ‘favourite thesis’ of Rendel’s. Exaggeration and bias were attributed to the diplomat whose pro-Bulgarian feelings were well-known. Simultaneously, the logic of his repetitive statements was difficult to refute. Partly, the irritation of the FO derived from the fact that simply acknowledging Bulgaria’s significance was not sufficient at the current stage of the war. The specialists at the Bulgarian desk realised that a more active attitude was needed but was hampered by Britain’s having few contacts with Bulgaria and little information about the state of affairs within the country. Indeed, the brief on Bulgaria compiled for the Secretary of State for the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in October 1943 was barely

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Sargent to Craigie draft, August 1943

⁶⁵ FO371/37173, R974, Rendel to Sargent, 1.02.1943

adequate. The FO was reduced to appealing to the Soviet Foreign Ministry for up-to-date information; the reply was in such general terms as to be of little practical use.⁶⁶

No Guarantees for Bulgarian Sovereignty.

The lack of hard knowledge certainly added to the FO's inclination to elaborate policy towards Bulgaria in essentially negative terms. Although some Southern Department officials had privately expressed understanding for Bulgaria's difficult position, British public pronouncements emphasised that the country could not expect soft treatment at the hands of the victorious Allies. The proclaimed British attitude was in full compliance with the principles of unconditional surrender of Germany and its satellites. Even when in late 1943 and 1944 unconditional surrender was no longer considered an effective approach and was silently dropped from Allied propaganda, no concessions to Bulgaria were ever seriously contemplated.⁶⁷

The British Government's primary demand was the cessation of Bulgarian occupation of Greek and Yugoslav territory. This was repeatedly stressed as the first requirement to be imposed by the Allies on a defeated Bulgaria.⁶⁸ Even more importantly, the British Government displayed ambiguity towards Bulgaria's independence after the war. Some internal FO documents reveal beliefs that Bulgaria should retain its sovereignty, yet it was considered vital that no official statement or propaganda should raise any 'false hopes on this score'.⁶⁹ On the contrary, in order to force Bulgaria's detachment from the Axis, it should be constantly repeated that unless Bulgaria changed sides in the conflict, Britain would not pledge itself to the survival of an independent Bulgarian state. These views were communicated to the US State Department and formed the basis of Eden's brief for the

⁶⁶ FO371/37173, R6753, Rose, 6.08.1943; FO371/37153, R10192, draft brief, 4.10.1943

⁶⁷ FO371/37152, R6499, PWE directive, 19.08.1943, R7451, Barker - Howard, 9 - 19.08.1943, R9332, Barker - Howard, 5, 8.10.1943, R9601, R1226, PWE directives, 3.11.1943, 3.12.1943

⁶⁸ FO371/37248, R9740, Eden brief, October 1943

⁶⁹ FO371/37151, R6037, Eden to Halifax, 27.07.1943

Moscow Conference in October 1943.⁷⁰ The official British position was milder than alternatives investigated within the FO. For example, Douglas Howard, Head of the Southern Department, predicted that the resolution of the Bulgarian question lay either in 'carving up Bulgaria between Yugoslavia and Greece with perhaps a separate Macedonian state or, annexation of some sort by Soviet Russia'.⁷¹ Such explicit opinions were, however, an exception among British diplomats and civil servants.

British lack of interest in Bulgaria's existence as a separate state was greatly influenced by a negative attitude towards the ruling Bulgarian dynasty. King Boris III was held personally responsible for Bulgaria's siding with Germany and the Bulgarian Government's decision to that effect was regarded as 'deliberate and having been taken in full knowledge of the consequences'. The fate of the King was a matter of indifference to the British Government, all the more so since his actions fitted with the pattern of Saxe-Coburg treachery towards Britain.⁷² Even Rendel, who during his mandate in Sofia had been quite respectful of Boris, agreed that the King's 'continued presence in the country was only likely to compromise the Bulgarian case still further'.⁷³ Boris's death in August 1943 did not bring a change in the FO's views on the Bulgarian monarchy. However, criticism of the Bulgarian Royal Family was silently dropped from British propaganda. The FO and the PWE agreed that they should not antagonise the Bulgarian public opinion which was generally sympathetic to Boris's young successor and the widowed Queen Mother.⁷⁴

The FO maintained these views in the face of a somewhat more lenient US attitude towards Bulgaria. In early 1944, aiming like the British Government to knock Bulgaria out of the war

⁷⁰ FO371/37153, R10192, draft brief, 4.10.1943

⁷¹ FO371/77151, R6037, Howard, 22.07.1943

⁷² FRUS 1943, vol.I, p.492-493, FO to State, 28.04.1943

⁷³ FO371/37173, R974, Rendel to Sargent, 1.02.1943

⁷⁴ FO371/37152, R8169, PWE directive, 3.09.1943

the State Department elaborated a 'long-range' plan for that country. In US diplomatic thinking it was vital to give some encouragement to Bulgaria. Under the influence of officials, who like Rendel had served in Sofia before the war and continued to monitor Bulgarian developments, several proposals were forwarded for discussion with the FO. Among these was a declaration that there existed no intention to change the Bulgarian borders of March 1941 or to breach the country's independence as long as the occupied territories were evacuated. The State Department went so far as to recommend an enquiry into a possible autonomy of Macedonia within Yugoslavia, and some minor territorial alterations which would benefit the western Bulgarian border.⁷⁵ All this was unceremoniously ruled out by the FO which judged its US counterpart to be too sympathetic to the Bulgarians as a whole and to King Boris in particular. Some Whitehall officials even spoke of an 'American appeasement plan' in direct contradiction to British policy. Therefore, they quickly and firmly 'disabused' their US colleagues 'of any idea that support can be usefully given' to Bulgaria.⁷⁶ This was in line with the earlier British rejection of anything but a negative policy and negative propaganda to Bulgaria. In July 1943, Howard had warned that the Bulgarian Government could not be expected 'to risk their necks and take matters in their own hands if they are given no encouragement to think that by doing so they will receive better treatment'. That is why he recommended 'a bare announcement on the lines of [the] famous Albanian declaration to the effect that there will be an independent Bulgaria after the war'.⁷⁷ But Sargent was opposed to 'the smallest carrot' for Bulgaria,

⁷⁵ Toshkova, V. 'SASht i izlizaneto na Bulgaria ot Tristranniya Pakt, yuni- septemvri 1944g.' *Istorigheski Pregled*, kn.4, no.5, 1979. p.206

⁷⁶ FO371/77151, R6037, Clutton, 18.07.1943, Howard, 22.07.1943

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*



ruling out even a statement about the retention of Dobrudja. Eden approved of such toughness.⁷⁸

The firm refusal to issue any assurance of Bulgarian independence spelled difficulties for British policy towards Bulgaria. There was little ground on which the FO could initiate contacts with Bulgarian politicians and use them for the promotion of British wartime and post-war interests in the country. An additional problem arose from the uncertainty as to whether Britain should just aim to detach Bulgaria from the Axis or seek a longer-term influence over the country.

The Idea of a Balkan Federation. With almost no effective tools with which to influence Bulgaria, the FO could only 'wait and see how events turn out'.⁷⁹ The only proactive element in its strategy was the concept of a Balkan Federation, in which Bulgaria would participate. Such an option was approved by most British diplomats and civil servants who were involved in policy making regarding Bulgaria.

In May 1942, the Greek and Yugoslav Governments-in-exile signed a Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance. This had been encouraged by Britain which recognised the Royal Greek and Yugoslav Governments as Allies. The Treaty itself centred on wartime co-operation against German and Bulgarian occupation of the Balkans. The two signatories and their British mentors also viewed it as the foundation stone for a peacetime federal scheme. In mid-1942, Britain supported preliminary discussions on the subject between the Yugoslav and Greek exiled leaders and Bulgarian émigré politicians in the Middle East, represented by Dr. Georgi Dimitrov*. Even though the latter was not officially recognised by the Allies as the head of a Bulgarian Government-in-exile, co-operation with him featured highly in any

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Eden to Halifax, 27.07.1943

⁷⁹ FO371/37153, R10192, draft brief, 4.10.1943

* Dr. Georgi M. Dimitrov was a Bulgarian Agrarian leader, popularly known in Bulgaria by his initials, G.M. in order to be distinguished from his namesake, the Communist Georgi Dimitrov.

intentions to extend British influence in Bulgaria after the war. The FO looked particularly favourably upon the left wing of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU), of which Dr. Dimitrov was President. Amongst the other advantages it could provide for Britain, the organisation was known for its open anti-monarchist feelings and its long-held commitment to the idea of a Balkan Federation.⁸⁰

In early 1943, the FO Research Department was instructed to look into the feasibility of grouping together various Balkan states. The result was a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the foreseeable effects of such an action on the economy, internal and foreign policy of the region, as well as its wider international repercussions. As different combinations of states were considered, it became clear that a union of the Balkan countries could form a part of a whole series of new supra-national groupings. The Baltic republics could be brought together, as well as the Central European states. The Balkan Federation would constitute an important element in a new European post-war order, intended to bring security and stability to volatile regions of the continent.

For the FO analysts, a large Balkan state only made sense if it included Bulgaria. In Britain's perceptions Bulgaria's nationalist pretensions had caused a number of conflicts in the region in the course of the previous eighty years. As on historical and ethnic grounds Bulgaria continued to have territorial claims towards all its neighbours, it would remain a source of Balkan instability. This would be further aggravated by economic difficulties. A Federation might be a way of overcoming Bulgaria's grievances as the country would share economic benefits with its neighbours and have a stake in their prosperity and stability. Most significantly, engagement with the defence of the whole region was likely to constrain Bulgaria's revisionism.⁸¹

⁸⁰ FO371/37173, R587, Rendel to Sargent, 18.01.1943

⁸¹ FO371/37156, R1310, research papers, R2729, McCartney paper, 22.03.1943

Neutralisation of the Balkan “powder keg” was distinctly advantageous to the whole of Europe and would have positive implications for British security. Imperial economic and political interest clearly dictated that Britain should seek a long-term settlement for the endemic problems of the region. Of additional but not smaller importance was the fact that a Balkan Federation established under the British aegis would have broader consequences for Britain’s international position. It could become a vital barrier to the extension of Soviet influence in proximity to the Mediterranean Straits. This in fact was the critical motive for Britain’s support and encouragement of a Balkan Federation. The FO was predominantly thinking in terms of the need to consolidate British influence in the Aegean region and use it as the basis for penetration further inside the Balkan Peninsula.

Throughout 1943, the British plan for a Balkan Federation was elaborated with traditional power-political patterns in mind. It was placed in the context of perennial British strategic objectives and gave only marginal consideration to political development inside the countries which were intended to form the constituent federal parts. The establishment of enduring democracy in the Balkan countries was perceived as desirable and ultimately contributing to the stability of the proposed Federation. But this was not a primary concern for British policy makers.

For all the FO papers and discussions devoted to it, the plan for a Balkan Federation was in fact only sketchily developed. Questions such as the countries which it would encompass, their political outlook, the fate of their existing dynasties were left unanswered, or sometimes unexplored. However, the most significant error of judgement made by the FO on this subject was to mention it to Turkey in early 1943 in an attempt to ascertain Turkish possible reaction. At that time, the Turkish Government was preoccupied with the Communist danger it considered to be emanating from Soviet Russia. This was aggravated by the possibility of the establishment of a large predominantly Slav state along Turkey’s

European border. The Turkish Foreign Minister Numan Menemencioglu discussed the tentative British proposal with diplomats from various Balkan countries, including Bulgaria. He also attempted to involve Arab states in what became his own initiative for a Mediterranean Bloc. The FO was appalled at the Turkish indiscretion; the proposal was bound to become known to Stalin and be interpreted as a bulwark against Soviet penetration.⁸²

Whether this happened is unclear, but the Soviet Union had the last say regarding the Federation scheme. The idea had surfaced during the Anglo-Soviet treaty negotiations in 1942. Then Molotov had demonstrated a studiedly negative attitude, which became all the more pronounced at the time of the Yugoslav-Greek agreement.⁸³ Nevertheless, Eden reverted to the Balkan Federation idea in Moscow in October 1943. The British proposal was formulated in such terms that it could be viewed as a positive step towards the banishment of spheres of influence from international politics. Although this principle was of central importance for the US Government, Secretary of State Cordell Hull demonstrated little interest, leaving the issue to be resolved between the Soviet Union and Britain.⁸⁴

Although both Eden and Molotov declared officially that their Governments did not favour separate spheres of influence in Europe, they did not reach an agreement on the Balkan Federation scheme. There was almost no discussion of the British proposition. Instead Moscow produced a statement that the plan was not appropriate as the nations concerned had not been consulted. Such an important step as the creation of a Federation should be the result of 'free, peaceful and well-considered expression of the will of the people'. The Soviet

⁸² TsDIA – AMVnR, f.176, op.15, a.e.48, l.149, 173, Ankara to Sofia, 6.02.1943, a.e.49, l.24, Ankara to Sofia, 12.02.1943; FO371/37179, R5081, Cadogan – Yovanovic conversation, 4.06.1943; This is not mentioned in Deringil, S. *Turkey's...* p.133-166, nor in Livanios, D. 'Bulgar-Yugoslav Controversy over Macedonia and the British Connection, 1939-1949'. DPhil: University of Oxford, 1995

⁸³ FO371/36992, N4906, FO memorandum, 10.08.1943

⁸⁴ Sainsbury, K. *The Turning Point*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985 p.88-90; Hull, Cordell. *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*. New York: Macmillan, 1948. p.1298

Union did not view the existing émigré Governments or even the future first post-war Governments to represent adequately 'the aspirations of their people'. It also believed that in the proposed form the Federation idea resembled too closely that of a *cordon sanitaire* directed against the Soviet Union.⁸⁵

The unfavourable Soviet reaction forced the British Government to drop the whole subject until a more suitable moment. To all intents and purposes, however, the Balkan Federation scheme was permanently deleted from British plans for a post-war settlement. There was considerable uncertainty as to what could take its place. An acceptable substitute was not found and Britain did not prepare adequately to exploit the vacuum which would result from German withdrawal from the Balkans.

At the same time, the British Government became extremely watchful of any Soviet attempts to take up the idea of a Balkan Federation and give it a suitable form for the Soviet Union. In May 1944, an FO paper traced some indications of Soviet intentions to foster the unification of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. For Britain such a move would have several negative effects. It would isolate Greece and weaken its position vis-à-vis its northern neighbours. It was certain to revive Bulgaria's claim for an Aegean outlet, again to Greek disadvantage. Most importantly, a South Slav Federation would certainly be under direct Soviet patronage, and would threaten both Greek and Turkish positions in the Mediterranean. In practice all this constituted a direct challenge to the British interest and influence in the region.⁸⁶

* * *

British planning for post-war Bulgaria was predominantly based on strategic priorities. In its historic British attitudes, relations with Bulgaria's neighbours and above all the legacy of

⁸⁵ FO/37031, N6921, Moscow conference proceedings, 19 – 30.10.1943

centuries of rivalry with Russia featured high. The latter factor was complicated by the fact that Russia was now a Communist state, whose power mechanisms and political logic were not yet fully comprehended by British foreign policy makers. At this stage, concerns for democracy in Bulgaria, if present at all, played a supplementary part to security considerations.

Suspensions about the ultimate Soviet aims in the Balkans and Bulgaria were common currency in the FO. Nevertheless, there emerged a consensus among British Government officials that no active measures for counteracting Soviet influence unfavourable to Britain should be formulated. This was left for the future when Soviet aims and claims would be clearer. Not knowing what privileges the Soviet Union might demand in Bulgaria, it was deemed impossible for the British Government to determine its reaction in advance.

Britain failed to devise the slightest inducement for Bulgarian withdrawal from the Axis. Neither could it commit itself to any specific plan about Bulgaria's post-war development before it made sure that the Soviet Union would also associate itself. All this clearly amounted to the concession of Soviet predominance in Bulgaria. The only condition imposed was that Soviet interests in Bulgaria did not threaten British influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Most strikingly, however, the FO could not even consistently follow a policy of disinterest and detachment. While it consciously chose not to take any actions regarding Bulgaria, it continued to regard the country as a possible zone of future interest.

⁸⁶ FO371/43583, FO memorandum, 30.05.1944

Chapter Two

Getting Bulgaria Out of the War

When Bulgaria joined the Tripartite Pact on 1 March 1941, Britain broke off official relations but did not declare war. It was the Bulgarian Government of Professor Bogdan Filov that declared war on Great Britain and the United States in December 1941, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. From that moment British political and military strategists sought to force Bulgaria out of the war. They gave priority to the need to disengage the country from the Axis and get it either to return to neutrality or to turn against Germany. Any British initiatives to that end were influenced by political considerations. The British Government was fully aware that in Bulgaria British geopolitical interests were up against strong Soviet aspirations for dominance. All British Government bodies, which looked into wartime and post-war issues relating to Bulgaria, had to take into account the possible reaction of the Soviet Ally. Policy formulation and propaganda to Bulgaria were also shaped by Britain's involvement with the Governments-in-exile of Greece and Yugoslavia, reflecting the importance Britain attached to these two countries.

The Frustrations and Failures of the SOE. Britain directed a great deal of its wartime efforts regarding Bulgaria towards establishing a network of special agents and obtaining relevant military and political information. Such activity was hindered by the fact that Bulgaria was not occupied but allied to Germany, a fact not conducive to the development of a significant resistance movement.

The Special Operations Executive was the clandestine British organisation most active in Bulgaria during the Second World War. It had developed as a branch of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and later merged with similar structures from other

Government Departments. Its structure and objectives were spelled out in a founding document approved by the War Cabinet in June 1940. This entrusted the newly established organisation with 'all operations of sabotage, secret subversive propaganda, the encouragement of civil resistance in occupied areas, the stirring up of insurrection, strikes, etc.'¹

Very early in its development the SOE clashed with a number of agencies with which it had to co-ordinate its actions in Bulgaria, as well as the rest of Europe. The intelligence agencies resented the fact that SOE's subversive methods could endanger informers who worked best in an atmosphere of calm and stability. The Political Warfare Executive protested that its carrying out of a consistent propaganda line was impeded by the sparse and often contradictory information it received from the SOE. The Chiefs of Staff believed that SOE's actions which were of a limited military scale and impact, no matter how impressive psychologically, were a waste of effort and personnel which should be employed in regular fighting.

The SOE was often attacked by the Foreign Office, which jealously guarded its domain of external relations against friend and foe alike. A prime example of this was the negative attitude of the British Minister in Sofia, Rendel who strongly objected to the commencement of secret operations in Bulgaria before the declaration of war. He was overruled by instructions from London but this did not mean that the diplomatic establishment had overcome its suspicions and reservations towards the SOE. These were even more pronounced in the case of Bulgaria where the FO had minimal contacts and restricted influence, all of which could easily be monopolised by the SOE. The

¹ West, N. *The Story of SOE, Britain's Wartime Sabotage Organisation*. London: Hodder&Stoughton, 1992. p.20–21; Foot, M.R.D. *SOE 1940 – 1946*. London: BBC Publications, 1986; Stafford, D.A.T. *Britain and European Resistance 1940 – 1945*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979; Sweet-Escott, B. *Baker Street Irregular*. London: Methuen, 1963. Most of these mention operations in Bulgaria only in passing.

complicated relationship between the FO and the SOE in Bulgaria shaped some aspects of Britain's approach and policy towards that country during the latter stages of the war.

SOE vs FO Contacts with Bulgaria. The preparation for work inside Bulgaria combined various political and military elements. Few available sources outline specific objectives. The broad picture can only be obtained from the existing operational material, bearing in mind that plans were constantly being altered to accommodate the changing perception of the situation in the country. Even so, documents from 1942 - 1944 show that some considerations remained constant and obviously formed the backbone of ideas about Bulgaria. Emphasis was given to the need to contact the biggest possible number of anti-Axis organisations and bring them into the loose coalition of a National Front. This was to unite all forms of resistance under the broad slogan of Bulgarian independence. Its political aims would be the distribution of propaganda, the mobilisation of anti-Hitler public opinion and pressure on the Bulgarian Government to exit from the war. Simultaneously, the National Front would hinder Bulgaria's war effort in every conceivable way, including by sabotage and subversion. Initially the SOE considered that its ultimate task in Bulgaria in conjunction with the united opposition forces would be the staging of a revolt, if and when the British military authorities judged it appropriate.²

In its preliminary work in Bulgaria the SOE did not exclude collaboration with any group which shared anti-Government and anti-German feelings. Soundings and contacts in 1940 -1941 confirmed the expectations that in practice there were few political formations which were worth cultivating. These were the left wing of the Agrarian Union, the Military League and the Protoguerovists, that is the federalist left wing of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO). The maintenance of links with the Military League led by Damian Velchev was deemed especially important as the

² HS5/181, D/H2 to D/H1, 28.10.1940

organisation had undisputed influence over the Bulgarian army and police force. Realism prompted British officials to recognise that though these officers opposed Bulgarian involvement with Germany, they were not necessarily pro-British. Contacts with the Bulgarian military were also hindered by the utterly conspiratorial nature of their organisation and their strong desire for independence, which prevented them from accepting funding from foreigners. In contrast, the Protoguerovists were eager to receive as many weapons and ammunitions as possible. Their terrorist methods were ideal for sabotage and, if necessary, for assassination, although in common with the officers they agreed to work 'with', rather than 'for' Britain.³

Shortly before the British Legation left Bulgaria in 1941, the SOE in London received a report from one of its agents visiting Bulgaria that 'complete understanding' had been reached between the above three organisations. The most categorical commitment was that of G.M., the left Agrarian leader. Negotiations with him had not been easy but, once he accepted co-operation with the British secret services, the latter had many occasions to confirm that he was 'a man of exceptional judgement and mental honesty'.⁴ Among the first successful operations of the SOE in Bulgaria was organising G.M.'s escape from Bulgaria in the truck transporting the archives of the British Embassy to Turkey in February 1941. G.M. was then helped to make his way to the Middle East. With British help and under British supervision he set up the Free and Independent Bulgaria Committee, which was in charge of two radio stations broadcasting into Bulgaria from the Middle East. There he also served as the resident authority on all matters Bulgarian. G.M. actively worked for the renewal of his contacts with his followers and fellow-politicians

³ HS5/181, D/H2 to D/H1, 28.10.1940, report D/H2 to D/H1, 28.11.1940; Amery, J. *Approach March*. London: Hutchinson, 1973. p.175. The links of the Protoguerovists with the Bulgarian Communists are revealed in Semerdjiev, P. *BKP, Makedonskiyat vupros i VMRO*. Detroit, Michigan: Macedono-Bulgarian Institute, c.1990. p.60, 84

⁴ HS5/181, D/H2 to D/H1, 28.10. 1940

inside Bulgaria. He duly prepared messages to be smuggled over the Turkish border or by sea. Very few of these reached the addressees and even fewer were answered.⁵

When Bulgaria first entered the war the SOE maintained that G.M. was the representative not only of his Agrarian faction but also the authorised envoy of the other two organisations which had shown an inclination to collaborate with the British services in Bulgaria. There is indirect evidence that initially the British Government was prepared to treat him and his associates as friendly exiled political leaders. On 21 September 1941, Lord Glenconner, Head of SOE in Cairo, wrote to G.M. and his aide Kosta Todorov that they were recognised as the heads of a Bulgarian pro-British organisation and as such would be helped on the principles of Lend-Lease.⁶ This was contrary to the intentions of the FO which vigorously opposed and effectively precluded any official recognition of G.M.'s political status. Consequently, Todorov, who had appeared in London in 1942, created a few unpleasant incidents for the FO. He remonstrated at being denied what he regarded as promised backing for his attempts to act as the representative of an émigré Government.⁷

In the summer of 1943, the relatively smooth relations between the British special services and G.M. suffered further. Upon intervention from the FO, G.M.'s movements and responsibilities for propaganda to Bulgaria were restricted. This precipitated doubts in the SOE whether he would continue the association with it at all; the more so since at the very same time he had been approached by the US secret services. There is no clear indication why restrictions were placed on G.M.'s duties. The recurring FO resentment of

⁵ Rendel, G. *The Sword and the Olive: Recollections of Diplomacy and the Foreign Service*. London: Murrey, 1957. p.178; Moser, Ch. *Dimitrov of Bulgaria. A Political Biography of Dr. George M. Dimitrov*. Ottawa, Il.: Caroline House Publishers, 1979. p.169-170

⁶ HS5/183, Lord Glenconner to Dr.G.M.Dimitrov, September 1941

⁷ HS5/183, SOE communications, SOE to FO, September 1941; Todoroff, K. *Balkan Firebrand*. Chicago, Il.: Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 1943. p.312-313

the SOE does not offer a persuasive explanation. An important factor for limiting G.M.'s activities could have been the apprehension that he would indeed form a Government-in-exile, which would then seek official British support. A British refusal would be embarrassing in view of the erstwhile involvement and recognition would be impossible without scandalising the vociferous Greeks and Yugoslavs.⁸

After the withdrawal of the British Legation, the FO tried to establish its own channels for communication with Bulgaria. Among the few means it had were the services of the former Bulgarian Minister in London Nikola Momchilov, who had resigned his post on Bulgaria's adherence to the Axis. The Southern Department had a very favourable opinion of him and he was prepared to co-operate with the FO, even though he knew it had ruled out his idea of setting up a Bulgarian Government-in-exile in London. In the summer of 1942, Momchilov had suggested that he write personal letters to three senior Bulgarian officers who were serving with the Bulgarian occupation corps in Yugoslavia. The letters were cleared with the Chiefs of Staff and then dispatched through secret channels.⁹

In his letters Momchilov warned that Bulgaria's future position would be determined in the course of the coming Balkan campaign which was going to be a joint operation of all Three Allies. The central theme of the letters was to urge responsible Bulgarian circles to stop helping the Germans and not 'to sit back and wait for the Soviet troops'.¹⁰

In early 1943, following the same procedure, Momchilov wrote twice to General Mihov, Bulgarian War Minister, and also to the Bulgarian Ministers in Switzerland, Spain and Sweden. There is evidence in the Bulgarian archives only of the letter to the Bulgarian

⁸ HS5/180, special report: April - September 1943, 1.10.1943; HS5/190, D/H2, 28.09.1944; Young, K. (ed.) *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart*. vol.2, 1939 - 1965. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980. p.115; Moser, D. *Dimitrov...* p.159

⁹ FO371/37151, R3420, Momchilov to Sargent, 10.04.1943

¹⁰ Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.157; FO371/37151, R3420, Momchilov to Sargent, 10.04.1943, R3952, Momchilov to Sargent, 30.04.1943; FO371/37152, R10716, Momchilov to Sargent, 24.10.1943

Ambassador in Madrid Purvan Draganov which was duly presented to King Boris III and the Bulgarian Government in the summer of 1943. The Soviets had learned about these approaches and immediately requested more information. This alarmed Eden who feared that the USSR might suspect Britain of dealing behind the Soviet back.¹¹

The FO had no illusions about the minor value of these communications. At the time, however, their chances appeared no less likely than those of the missives G.M. was preparing. British officials found the effort worthwhile as it could open an alternative channel with Bulgaria, involving political circles different from the ones with whom the SOE hoped to work.

Momchilov, as well as Dimitar Matsankiev, another Bulgarian exile in London, persistently tried to persuade the FO of the enormous importance of securing contacts with the Bulgarian army which consisted of half a million well-equipped, trained and disciplined men. There were historical reasons to believe that the rank-and-file were anti-German. Elisabeth Barker at the PWE judged these arguments to be imaginative and over optimistic but was inclined to accept the plausibility of the existence of some anti-Government centre within the Bulgarian army; indeed 'it would be contrary to Balkan tradition if there were not'.¹²

The Southern Department was well aware of the advantages that would be derived from stable links with Bulgarian officers. In this it was at one with the SOE which had made some contacts with representatives of the Military League and was hopeful of renewing them. The SOE estimated that the military were among the few groups in Bulgaria which were capable of bringing about a revolution. The FO agreed with this and was prepared to authorise contacts with the army, although it firmly forbade any political dealings with either

¹¹ Moser, D. *Dimitrov...* p.159; Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.214

¹² FO371/37155, R817, Matsankiev memorandum, 12.01.1943, R4215, Barker to Southern Department, 8.05.1943; FO371/43589, R7421, Momchilov to Southern Department, March 1944; FO371/43586, R7482, Momchilov to Howard, 10.05.1944

Communists or Agrarians. The FO accepted that one British objective should be to cause the fall of the Bulgarian Government by revolution. But what it had in mind was, should the opportunity arise, 'to engineer a military revolution which would at the worst neutralise the Bulgarian army as an effective fighting force, and at the best turn it into a pro-Allied force'.¹³

The increased attention – if only on paper – towards the Bulgarian army reflected the growing necessity in the course of the war to achieve practical results in Bulgaria. After the successful Allied landings in Sicily it was obvious that a Bulgarian *volte-face* could be decisive for the whole Balkan Peninsula. This overshadowed any political considerations. Action in the field became imperative, all the more so since propaganda broadcasts from London and Jerusalem were the only success Britain could claim. G.M.'s contacts barely gave signs of existence; the previous January the SOE had dropped 'blind' and lost J.S.Morgan, their best-trained officer for work in Bulgaria.¹⁴

It was at this point that the FO's tolerance of the SOE Bulgarian section wore thin. In September 1943, the death of King Boris III marked an important political crossroad for Bulgaria of which little became immediately known in London. Sargent recorded the desperate need for information by wondering 'have we any idea what is happening in Bulgaria? Can nobody tell us anything... C? SOE? Middle East Intelligence?' His subordinates dryly commented that the SOE's Bulgarian contacts were 'rotten'.¹⁵ Ironically, the FO was to a great degree dependent on situation briefings provided by the special services. These were often ambiguous and sometimes downright contradictory, and

¹³ FO371/37153, R5322 and HS5/180, Major Boughy - Howard, 16.06.1943, 21.06.1943; FO371/43587, R2808, SOE plan, 4.02.1944

¹⁴ HS5/180, memorandum on Bulgaria, 7.06.1943

¹⁵ FO371/37153, R8978, Sargent, Rose, 13.09.1943; Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.215

deepened the criticism of the same diplomats who had themselves stood in the way of establishing a secure underground network in Bulgaria in the first instance.

British Military Missions in Bulgaria.

A fresh attempt to collect information and influence events in the country was required. For this the FO authorised the dispatch of a British Military Mission, led first by Mostyn Davies and after his death by Frank Thompson. Their actions were accompanied by controversy and bad luck, which caused tendentious interpretations of British policy towards Bulgaria.¹⁶ With hindsight, it is now possible to say that in the winter of 1943 – 1944, British policy makers evaluated Bulgaria on purely military grounds and emphasised the necessity to knock it out of the war despite the possible political cost. What is probably most striking is the fact that both the FO and the SOE regarded work with the Bulgarian Communists as not only advantageous but also highly desirable.

At the beginning of the war the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact embarrassed Communists across Europe. They could no longer pursue their erstwhile anti-fascist rhetoric and tactics as their main enemy, the fascists, were bound by a treaty with their principal patron, the Soviet Union. When Bulgaria joined the Axis, the Bulgarian Communist Party was still suffering from this confusion. Nevertheless, British observers considered it one of the staunchest anti-Government forces, which could also boast past terrorist actions and a history of underground survival. British special agents had not sought direct connection with the Communists themselves. The SOE believed that, if necessary, G.M. who was in the left wing of the Agrarian movement would be able to attract Communists for common action. The FO's attention was drawn to the Communists when in early 1943 reports of increased Communist activity accumulated in London. This led to an enquiry in February 1943 from

¹⁶ The accusation was initially publicised by the Bulgarian Partisan leader General Slavcho Trunski in *Rabotnichesko Delo*, 26.11.1947. It was tirelessly repeated by Bulgarian Communist historiography and

the FO to the SOE London Headquarters in Baker Street, as to why no direct links with the Bulgarian Communists had been made. The SOE's reaction was acid:

...having been accused by the Foreign Office of working only with the Communists in Greece, we are now politely ticked off for not working with them in Bulgaria. ...in Yugoslavia they are quite incapable of making up their minds whether to support their accredited Ally the Yugoslav Government, or the so-called Communists supported by Russia. ...it is too much to expect the Foreign Office to be consistent.¹⁷

The confusion was more apparent than real and lasted only until British policy makers clarified in their minds the relation between the military contribution of the various resistance movements in the Balkans and the future strategic position of the territories in which they operated. Indeed, the news of successful Communist fighting was more often than not accompanied by warnings from people coming out of Bulgaria that the leftist elements were getting too strong and clearing the ground for radical social changes to be backed by the approaching victorious Soviet army.¹⁸ At the same time, officers with leftist and sometimes openly stated Communist inclinations worked in the SOE itself. In the case of Bulgaria it is not obvious whether they played as significant a role as the one attributed to them in relation to the resistance movements in Yugoslavia.¹⁹

One advantage that sprang from the lack of reliable contacts and sufficient information about the internal developments in Bulgaria was that in a way it freed British policy makers to undertake what they considered the most practicable course. They were not restrained by

recently re-surfaced in Thompson, E.P. *Beyond the Frontier: The Politics of a Failed Mission*. Woodbridge: Merlin Press, 1997.

¹⁷ HS5/185, DH/V to CD, 27.02.1943

¹⁸ De Santis, H. *The Diplomacy of Silence: the American Foreign Service, the Soviet Union and the Cold War 1933 – 1947*. Chicago, IL: Chicago UP, 1980. p.108; FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.317, Berry to Hull, 25.03.1944

¹⁹ Foot, M.R.D. *SOE...* p. 145-147; Beloff, N. *Tito's Flawed Legacy*. London: Gollanz, 1985. p.89-93

any alliances with political elements inside the country whose position they might endanger by uninformed action.

The short story of British involvement with the Bulgarian Partisans is relatively well-known despite the scarcity of memoirs and secondary literature. Two Missions were dropped in zones controlled by the Yugoslav Partisans on the border with Bulgaria at the end of 1943. They managed to find Bulgarian guerrillas and established contact with representatives of the Central Committee of the BCP, which effectively controlled Bulgarian armed resistance. The Missions' brief was to estimate the potential strength of the underground Bulgarian movement and gather evidence for a considered opinion as to whether Britain should support it.²⁰

The little that was known about Bulgarian resistance made some British officers suspicious of getting involved with simple 'never-do-wells' who could also turn out to be anti-British. But the belief that even such people could be useful prevailed:

Whether these are good Bulgarians or bad Bulgarians... are questions, which do not interest SOE. What interests SOE is that these are Bulgarians who are prepared to fight and commit sabotage against the Bulgarian Government and the Germans although this means risk of torture or death for them. Such men can be useful to us.²¹

The reports of the British Liaison Officers (BLOs) –as the Missions' heads were called - were favourable to the Bulgarian Partisans. The latter claimed to have divided the country into twelve operational zones, which were under the command of a central military authority. Information about the numbers and actions of detachments in each zone was forwarded to Cairo, together with information about the political organisation behind the resistance – the Fatherland Front coalition of anti-Government parties. This body also

²⁰ HS5/180, memorandum on Bulgaria, 7.06.1943; Rachev, *St. Churchill...* p.193

²¹ HS5/180, Bulgaria situation report, March 1944

directed armed town units, which were responsible for a wave of political murders, especially in Sofia. In order to forestall suspicions that the Fatherland Front was simply a facade for the Communists, the latter claimed that not all guerrillas were Communists and that the Communist Party was but one of the founders of the Fatherland Front.²²

It is now evident that the Bulgarian Communist leaders in charge of links with the BLOs misrepresented the role of the Communist Party in the armed resistance in Bulgaria. The British officers were told that there were about 12,000 Partisans in Bulgaria. This figure was not doubted initially and supplies were apportioned accordingly. Post-war Western historiography accepted these numbers as opposed to the hugely inflated ones put forward by the Bulgarian Communists after September 1944.²³ New sources reveal that the Communists used different internal statistics. In March 1944, the CC reported to Moscow that 'there were twenty-six Partisan detachments altogether with the overall number of Partisans at 2,320'.²⁴

to
Not being able to verify it, the SOE in the Middle East had no reason to distrust the received information. The strong figures seemed to be indirectly confirmed by the constant stream of news about the upsurge of leftist opposition to the Bulgarian regime. The BLOs did not express the slightest doubt about the sincerity of their Communist contacts and could not even guess at the discrepancy between reality and the data they were given. They themselves were attached to what we now know were the biggest Partisan units operating in relatively favourable circumstances on the Bulgarian-Yugoslav border. The BLOs also assessed

²² FO371/43579, R724, Talbot-Rice to Howard, 14.01.1944, R3645, BLO report, 21.02.1944, R3646, BLO reports, 23.02.1944

²³ Bell, J.D. *The BCP from Blagoev to Zhivkov*. Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1986. p.63

²⁴ The first communications from the BLOs in Bulgaria claimed that the Partisans were 'several thousands', later they were reported at about 12,000, FO371/43587, R2808, SOE plan, 4.02.1944. The lower figure is confirmed by a communication to Tito stating a total of around 2,800 Partisans, AMVR, OB15513, vol.IV, 1.32; Daskalov, D. *Zhan Suobshtava. Zadgranichnoto Byuro i antifashistkata borba v Bulgaria 1941 – 1944*. Sofia: Universitetsko Izdatelstvo 'Sv.Kl.Ohridski', 1991. p.187. An even smaller figure, 2,180, is quoted in Dimitrov, G. *Dnevnik...* p.414.

favourably the opportunities for the Partisan forces in Bulgaria to grow: the population was assumed to be of generally leftist inclinations, attracted by the Partisan slogans and occasional personal examples of courage. Another positive factor was the perceived mounting popular discontent with the Bulgarian Government's internal and foreign policy.

Such analysis of the situation in Bulgaria led the SOE to resolve to assist the Partisans. The Bulgarian section highlighted the crucial element of time: at this moment comparatively small supplies of arms would go a long way and eventually make a big difference. An even more significant result would be the knowledge that aid had been sent by Britain and the USA. This would give the British clandestine organisations a good chance of gaining the Partisans' confidence and establishing mutual co-operation on a firmer basis. It could convince the Bulgarian guerrillas to provide the SOE with the necessary military information and accept BLOs for other parts of the country.

From the start the SOE realised that the usefulness of the Bulgarian movement depended on the extent of British help. For the Bulgarian Partisans to play their potentially important part, it was vital that they receive regular drops of supplies. Sorties were planned to start in February. There should be twenty in that month, increasing to fifty in May. These should provide the Bulgarian Partisans with at least 7,500 rifles, 18 tons of explosive materials and demolition accessories and 2,000 pairs of boots.²⁵

The FO had approved support for the Bulgarian Partisans. The SOE Bulgarian section had been apportioned stores for the equipment of 15,000 men but transportation aircraft was not available due to other more urgent tasks. The original planning was modified to fifteen possible sorties in February, with the hope for compensation in the following months. In

²⁵ FO371/43587, R2808, Force 133 appreciation, 4.02.1944

practice, however, the combination of lack of aircraft and bad weather conditions reduced the number of successful sorties in February and March 1944 to three.²⁶

These logistical difficulties were further aggravated by the re-structuring of the SOE brought about by the general course of the war. Following the move of the Allied Headquarters, the SOE operational centre was transferred from Africa to Bari in Italy at the beginning of 1944. For technical reasons, however, the Bulgarian and Romanian sections remained in Cairo. This made the lines of command and decision making extremely complicated. These crossed even more when the Balkan Allied Force was made responsible for the operation of special duty aircraft in the region but not for the special operations themselves. At roughly the same time a special Balkan Affairs Committee had been established to co-ordinate all Allied actions in the region by reconciling conflicting views. This, however, encountered US resistance from the very beginning.²⁷

The position of the BLOs in Bulgaria was not made easier by the suspicions of the Partisan leaders. In March 1944, the CC received a letter from its exiled head Georgi Dimitrov ordering it to treat with caution any British approaches and to make no political undertakings. Dimitrov warned that imperialist Britain might try to trade immediate material help for future political influence in Bulgaria. After the war, prominent guerrilla leaders asserted that as time went on and supplies did not come, the Partisans began wondering whether Britain had not set out to disrupt the Partisan organisation. They suspected that Britain aimed at destroying the Partisans' potential for taking power in Bulgaria at the end of the war.²⁸ These allegations were made in the early Cold War period and reflect the then attitude of the Bulgarian Communists to Britain. The assertions have little value for the

²⁶ HS5/180, situation report, March 1944

²⁷ FO371/43654, R4736, Lord Moyne memorandum, 8.03.1944; FO371/43655, R10986, 9th meeting of AFHQ Political Committee, 16.05.1944

appreciation of British policy as emerging from the contacts between the SOE and the Partisans as they fail to take into account Britain's priorities of the moment. They are indicative, however, of the lack of trust of the Bulgarian Communist guerrillas for Britain and therefore of the shaky original basis of the relations of the SOE with the Partisans.

The plan for SOE activities listed purely military objectives. The overall aim was to secure German withdrawal from Bulgaria and to cause the fall of the Bulgarian Government. If 'revolution' was mentioned it was in the sense of a military *coup* which would neutralise Bulgaria as an active enemy. The FO liaison at the Middle East Headquarters Kit Steel admitted that he looked upon the Partisans as an instrument of pressure on the present Government: 'What happens after Bulgaria turns on Germany... is no concern of ours so long as the damage to the Germans has been done'.²⁹ Strict instructions were dispatched to the BLOs in Bulgaria not to get involved in internal Bulgarian affairs at all. In propaganda too, the FO insisted on strict neutrality as far as Bulgarian politics was concerned. As late as the summer of 1944, they did not wish to appear to be promoting the image even of their known collaborator, the Agrarian G.M..³⁰

The same tactical considerations were put forward by high-ranking SOE officers in Cairo and London while assessing the SOE actions in Bulgaria after the Bulgarian army captured and executed Frank Thompson in June 1944. The review concluded that the Bulgarian Partisans' actions had a negligible influence on the military configuration in the Balkans. Their inability to engage in serious warfare with the German or Bulgarian army was the primary cause for Britain's decision to cease the contacts. By August 1944 Lord Moyne, the Minister Resident in the Middle East, had professed that the Bulgarians 'had shown

²⁸ Dragoicheva, Ts. *Povelya na dulga*. vol.3. Sofia: Partizdat, 1980. p.495–496; *Rabotnichesko Delo*, 26.11.1947; Lebedev, N.S. *Comintern*...p.425, 443

²⁹ FO371/43579, R3646, Steel to Howard, 24.02.1944

themselves immune to our attempts to build up serious resistance movement in Bulgaria proper such as would have appreciable influence on events there'. He concluded that 'the Bulgarian Partisans were incomparable with the Yugoslavs in terms of conquering free zones'. For Lord Moyne, a high proportion of the Bulgarian guerrillas were 'simply traditional brigands: risking the life of spirited young officers not to speak of arms deliveries to most undesirable elements are not worth the candle'.³¹

Secret Operations in Bulgaria and the Allies. The Soviet and US secret services also operated in Bulgaria during the Second World War. In terms of intensity and success, the wartime activities of the British secret services in Bulgaria do not stand up to comparison to those of their Soviet counterparts. It was characteristic of the British-Soviet wartime relationship that whereas Moscow was informed about British special operations, Soviet subversive efforts Bulgaria were not admitted to the Allies. This was partly due to the working habits of the Soviet services, which were burdened by bureaucratic rules and obsessed with security.³² More importantly, the Soviet Government withheld information about any actions in Bulgaria because it did not wish to give any idea about its objectives in the country.

Relations between the British and US special services were open and, in most cases, mutually beneficial. At first, the USA displayed little interest in Bulgaria. The US High Command had made it abundantly clear that in general it preferred not to interfere too prominently in the Balkans. In September 1942, an agreement was reached between the newly formed US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the SOE. According to this, in the Middle East the OSS would be subordinate to its British counterpart. The arrangement was

³⁰ FO371/43587, R2808, SOE plan, 4.02.1944; FO371/43585, R6050, FO to Cairo, 9.04.1944; FO371/43586, R9693, Clutton, 21.06.1944

³¹ FO371/43579, R12750, Lord Moyne to FO, 15.08.1944

³² Deane, J.R. *The Strange Alliance*. London: John Murray, 1947. p.27-33

adhered to until in the autumn of 1943 Colonel William Donovan, the Head of the OSS, proposed to the US Joint Chiefs of Staff a scheme dealing with Bulgaria. This was 'a long-range plan' for Bulgaria but its immediate objective was to contact the Bulgarian Government and secure its withdrawal from the war. The plan looked into possibilities to enhance US subversive efforts, mostly understood as attempts to divert Bulgaria from participating in further military operations against the Allies. One part of the scheme envisaged 'organisation and direction of guerrilla warfare and any other form of action against the Germans'. Few US servicemen stationed in the Balkans could undertake such operations. That was why, even though it was developed at a department responsible for secret warfare and 'black' propaganda, the plan foresaw the predominant use of diplomatic methods.³³

The British special services were anything but pleased at the sudden outburst of US interest in Bulgaria, which they viewed as threatening to their whole position in the region. Churchill was vehemently against any notion of US actions in the Balkans being carried outside British command and control. His advisers at the FO and the SOE were sure of their superior knowledge and had nothing but scepticism for the US initiative.³⁴

These rivalries were purely tactical and temporary. They did not carry with them any implications for the political future of Bulgaria. The British and US special services, which had both been set up to function in the extraordinary circumstances of the war, aimed at specific wartime results. Frictions with the Soviet services were at a different level and reflected the strained relationship with that Ally.

In Moscow, the SOE and the OSS had their own representatives, separate from the Military Missions of the Two Western Allies. Their functions turned out to be little more than

³³ Boll, M.M. 'US Plan for a Post-war Pro-Western Bulgaria: A Little-Known Wartime Initiative in Eastern Europe.' *Diplomatic History*, vol.7, no.2, 1983. p.125-130

representative. They were in touch with the NKVD, the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs, to which they passed low-level military intelligence. They arranged for Soviet Missions to be transported to Yugoslavia and Italy with British help, in the hope that these efforts would be appreciated and reciprocated. But 'sharing secrets with Stalin' remained a difficult and thankless business.³⁵

Recognising the limited nature of its contacts with Bulgaria, the SOE approached the Soviet special services with requests for details on developments in the country. British officials expected that the Soviet services possessed more up-to-date information, as the Soviet Union maintained relations with Bulgaria and had retained its Embassy in Sofia. All the Allies received from the Soviet side, however, was general political outlines, which gave few insights and hardly went beyond what was known from British and US sources.³⁶ This clearly illustrates Soviet reluctance to participate in joint actions and Soviet unwillingness to communicate specific knowledge to the Western partners.

In mid-1944, despite erstwhile frustrations, the FO agreed that the SOE should renew contacts with the NKVD, mainly for the purpose of consultation. By then the Bulgarian section in the Middle East and the SOE at Moscow had separately put forward the idea that Soviet assistance should be requested again. A joint impromptu plan was made to ask the NKVD 'to lend' the Bulgarian Communist political émigré Georgi Andreichin to the SOE. After some thought this was dropped as too risky and unrealistic. Nevertheless, the SOE

³⁴ Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.11, 15–16, 28; Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.118-120

³⁵ Smith, B.F. *Sharing Secrets with Stalin: How the Allies Traded Intelligence 1941 - 1945*. Lawrence, Ka.: UP of Kansas, 1996. p.188; HS5/173, FO to SOE Cairo, 9.07.1944

³⁶ Barker, E. *Churchill and Eden at War*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976. p.274; Mastny, V. *Russia's Road...* p.97-98; FO371/43587, R781, Balfour to FO, 13.01.1944; FO371/43579, R775, Talbot-Rice to Dew, 4.01.1944; Daskalov, D. *Zhan...* p.196

continued its efforts to obtain operational information, mainly enquiring about possible Bulgarian contacts and dropping points for Allied planes carrying supplies.³⁷

The SOE was right to suspect that Moscow possessed information on Bulgaria which it simply refused to disclose to its war Allies. Indeed, apart from diplomatic relations, throughout the war the Soviet Government maintained contacts with the Bulgarian Communists. This was done initially through the Comintern. When the Comintern was officially disbanded in May 1943 the Department for International Information (DII) of the CC of the Bolshevik Party assumed its functions.³⁸ Dimitrov, the Head of the Comintern, also presided ^{over} the Foreign Bureau of the Bulgarian CC and was recognised as the leader of the BCP by the Communists inside Bulgaria. Dimitrov had wireless links with Bulgaria – one direct and another through Tito, who passed telegrams across the Bulgarian border. Dimitrov could also send letters to his comrades inside Bulgaria through Comintern couriers. Two radio stations broadcast over Bulgaria from Soviet territory.³⁹ Recently published materials make it clear that all directives to the Bulgarian Communists were approved and, in certain cases, inspired by Stalin and his close associates.⁴⁰

In Bulgaria Moscow employed a combination of political and subversive elements among which the Bulgarian Communists were the most important. In July 1941, in response to the German invasion of the USSR, the BCP decided to prepare for an armed uprising. In August Stalin ruled against this: Dimitrov informed the internal leaders that after most careful

³⁷ HS5/179, report on Bulgaria, 1.03.1943

³⁸ Lebedev, N.S. *Comintern...* p.72-80

³⁹ Bell, J.D. *The BCP...* p.58; Daskalov, D. *Zhan...* p.184–185; Dimitrov, G. *Dnevnik...* p.258–282

⁴⁰ Issussov, M. *Stalin and Bulgaria*. Sofia: UI 'Sv.Kl.Ohridski', 1991; Daskalov, D. *Zhan...*; Lebedev, N.S. *Comintern...* p.175

examination 'by the highest authority', it had been concluded that it would be impossible to support an uprising from outside and therefore it would be doomed.⁴¹

Instead, the Soviet Government encouraged the setting up of armed town units and of guerrilla bands to operate in the countryside. The Soviet Government, however, made it clear that it had no arms to spare for the Bulgarian resistance. The first time the Soviet Government did send in weapons and ammunitions was on 8 September 1944, when a Communist seizure of power was imminent.⁴² In addition, the Bulgarian Communists were directed to gather military intelligence as was done for instance by the spy ring of General Vladimir Zaimov who was caught by the Bulgarian police and executed in June 1942.⁴³ The Soviet secret services also aimed to reinforce the Bulgarian resistance: Bulgarian émigrés* were dropped by parachute and transported by submarine to the Bulgarian Black Sea coast in 1941 – 1942.⁴⁴ As neither NKVD nor Red Army archives have been opened, the precise information sent to Moscow by its agents in Bulgaria is not known. Undeniably, this information was crucial for the Soviet Government's assessment of the political and military situation in Bulgaria.

Neither the Bulgarian Partisans nor the NKVD related any of their operational knowledge to their British contacts; the latter were not even informed that at the time the BLOs were with the Bulgarian resistance, at least two Soviet-trained Bulgarian-born radio operators were sent in through Yugoslavia.⁴⁵ The British special services were not aware either that the BCP –

⁴¹ Valeva, E.L. '*Kurs na vooruzhennuyu bor'bu bolgarskogo naroda. Perviyie partizanyi (yun' 1941 – fevral' 1943g.)*.' Marina, V.V. (ed.) *Dvizheniya Soprotivleniya v stranah Tsentral'noy i Yugo-vostochnoy Evropy 1939 – 1945*. Moscow: Radiks, 1995, Moscow: Institute of Slavonic and Balkan Studies, 1995. p.211-214

⁴² Daskalov, D. *Zhan...* p.281; Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.234; Lebedev, N.S. *Comintern...* p.12

⁴³ Bell, J.D. *The BCP...* p.60

* All were Soviet subjects and operatives of the NKVD.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.59; Valeva, E.L. *Kurs...* p.221-222

⁴⁵ Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.206

with Soviet knowledge – had contacts with Bulgarian Opposition politicians. Of these, probably most forthcoming was the future Prime Minister Ivan Bagryanov who even promised to soften police and army measures against the Partisans in return for a political compromise.⁴⁶

The Soviet Government's unwillingness to work with the British services in Bulgaria stretched to an extent which was detrimental to the interests of the Bulgarian Communists. In March 1944, when the weather finally permitted the dispatch of supplies to the Bulgarian resistance, the SOE could not find the necessary aircraft. The Soviet air force was asked whether it could organise drops of British materiel in eastern Bulgaria including captured German weapons. The Partisans themselves had specifically asked for these and the Soviet army was known to have them. Months passed before the British appeal received a reply: the Soviet military forces would neither send the weapons nor provide safe dropping points.⁴⁷

The Logic of Military Necessities. The subversive efforts of the British special services in Axis territory were not developed *per se*. Their purpose was to support the overall military strategy of the Allies, to prepare and supplement operations by the regular armed forces. This logic was certainly applied to the Balkans: while SOE actions were being carried out on the ground, British military and political leaders were discussing a possible major Allied offensive on the Peninsula.

The idea of large-scale operations in the region had been first endorsed in 1942 when it seemed that these could be an extension to a successful campaign in North Africa. True, at that time British military planners put the stress on undermining the Italian position in the Central Mediterranean. But they were very much aware that this would have decisive

⁴⁶ Dimitrov, I. *Ivan Bagryanov – tsaredvoretz, politik, durzhavnik*. Sofia: AI 'Prof. Marin Drinov', 1995. p.65-66

⁴⁷ HS5/180, SOE memoranda, 19.03. – 6.04.1944

consequences eastward where Turkey's entry into the war was only one of a series of important strategic objectives.

Churchill, supported by the Southern Department, was the greatest proponent of the idea of a Second front in the Balkans.⁴⁸ He put it forward whenever he found a suitable opportunity at either military or political discussions. Although his stubborn adherence to the Balkan front was undoubtedly related to various long-term considerations, his initial motives were above all military. Only in mid-1944 did Churchill stress that his cherished Eastern Mediterranean initiative was also designed to resolve 'the brute political issues' between Britain and the Soviet Union. In this Churchill himself was motivated by imperial concerns at least as much as by anti-Communism which had been a formidable characteristic of his political outlook before the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ It can be speculated that if Allied military operations had been carried out in the Balkans they would have enhanced British influence. This, however, would not have necessarily meant a decrease in the role of the Balkan Communist parties. Neither did it signify a British preference for political over military objectives in the course of the war.⁵⁰

An invasion of South Eastern Europe was continuously deliberated at British-US 'top-brass' conferences, and while none of them endorsed it completely, it was not categorically discarded until mid-1944. In mid-1943 the invasion of Sicily not only brought fighting closer to the Balkans but also made military action there physically possible. This had a profound impact on Hitler's satellites among which Bulgaria was believed to be particularly impressed by developments in Italy. Roosevelt agreed that this situation should be exploited by the Allies. At the Casablanca Conferences in January 1943 and the Washington Conference in

⁴⁸ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.201

⁴⁹ Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.124; Dilks, D. '*British Political...*' p.28; Kent, J. *British Imperial...* p.9; Barker, E. *Churchill and Eden...* p.282; Campbell, Th. and G.C.Herring (eds.) *The Diaries of Edward R.Stettinius, Jr. 1943 – 1946*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1975. p.214

May 1943, the US Chiefs of Staff had given consent to explore the option favoured by their British counterparts. But because for US military planners a Balkan campaign remained militarily undesirable, the possibility for it became distinctly remote by the time of the Quebec Conference in August 1943.⁵¹

At Teheran at the end of 1943 the US military commanders firmly refused to deploy troops in the Balkans. This did not prevent Churchill from bringing up the question in the summer of 1944, when General Alexander promoted the idea of taking advantage of the Ljubljana gap. The last attempts to convert the US Chiefs were made in August and September 1944 when Churchill tried to substitute the landings in the south of France for operations in the Adriatic. He could not prevail over the joint front of Roosevelt and Stalin who – each for his own reasons – expressed preference for a cross-Channel invasion (code-named OVERLORD). This decision had far-reaching consequences as the subsequent absence of Western troops in the Balkans proved a major hindrance for British and US post-war strategy. But the course and above all the outcome of these discussions leaves no doubt as to the priority of military over political objectives.⁵² The possibility of landings in the Balkans was evaluated chiefly in terms of how it would influence the preparation for OVERLORD by pinning down as many enemy divisions as possible.

Military objectives were also paramount in Soviet planning. Until the end of 1942 Stalin repeatedly urged the Western Allies not only to advance in Europe, but suggested that the Second front might be opened in the Balkans. Even if he was merely probing British

⁵⁰ Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.184

⁵¹ Stimson, H.L. *On Active Service...* p.428–443; Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.11; Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.115–118; Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.211

⁵² FO371/43655, R9612, 13th meeting of AFHQ Political Committee, 6.06.1944; Dilks, D. *'British Political...'* p.28; Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.124; Barker, E. *'Problems...'* p.40–53; Kennedy-Pipe, C. *Stalin's Cold War: Soviet Strategies in Europe 1943 – 1956*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995. p.41; Harvey, J. (ed.) *The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey*. London: Collins, 1978. p.324; Stimson, H.L. *On Active Service...* p.447

intentions with the aim of diverting them, as Elisabeth Barker suggests, he was also envisaging short-term military achievements.⁵³

A direct attack on Hitler's Eastern European satellites by Britain and the United States could have had distinct advantages for the Allied war conduct. Some contemporary British observers even thought that a skilful and well-timed action could bring about the surrender of the whole of South Eastern Europe in weeks. The collapse of one Axis satellite would have had an immediate effect on the others, and the collapse of more than one would be fatal for Germany. In late 1943 and in 1944, Germany was becoming increasingly dependent on the resources of its satellites. The denial of the Romanian oil fields, which were Germany's only substantial source of natural oil, could have had far-reaching repercussions. Bulgaria's strategic importance lay in the fact that the Balkan range could be considered the forward bastion guarding the Danube, which was the essential transport route for Romanian oil. The defence of the mountains, in turn, depended on the possession of Sofia and the railways north of it.⁵⁴

The Balkan countries were aware of their strategic significance to Germany. They were becoming ever more apprehensive of future Allied strategy, especially after the Allied successes in North Africa and Sicily and the reversal at the Eastern front. For Bulgaria, one of the high points of alarm was at the beginning of 1943, when the Adana Anglo-Turkish conversations were alleged to have spelt out military efforts directed against it.⁵⁵ Reports reaching Sofia from most Bulgarian diplomatic missions abroad dealt with the possibility of a Balkan invasion. The ones that refuted it were no less disturbing as they discounted it on the grounds of some kind of Western understanding with Soviet Russia from which

⁵³ Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.112; Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.109

⁵⁴ FO 37173, R5514, *The Observer* excerpt, 20.06.1943; FO371/43587, R2808, Force 133 appreciation, 4.02.1944

⁵⁵ TsDIA – AMVnR, f.176, op.15, a.e.48, l.167–168, Ankara to Sofia, 5.02.1943

communisation of the region would ensue. If this was in any degree true, the Bulgarian ruling circles were once again facing the difficulty they had experienced at the start of the war, namely how to balance between Germany and the USSR.⁵⁶

This apprehension was exploited by British military planners who knew about it from intercepted enemy diplomatic messages. Even if a Balkan campaign was not forthcoming, fear of it could divert attention first from Sicily and then from Western Europe where the real landings would take place. In 1942, leaflets dispersed over Bulgaria by British planes and broadcasts from the Middle East asserted that the next Allied actions would focus on the Balkans and would involve the entry of Anglo-American forces in Bulgaria. This would force Bulgarian capitulation before the Western Allies.⁵⁷ This line of propaganda was later extended to augment the strategic deception necessary to guard the plans for OVERLORD. The British secret services even suggested simulating Allied military activities along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast to imply imminent land invasion of the Balkans. The idea fell through for lack of Soviet support.⁵⁸ All the false leads, however, impressed Bulgarian politicians. They also most probably alarmed Soviet intelligence despite the fact that it knew of British deception techniques in advance. One misconception the Soviet Ally might have shared with the Bulgarian enemy was that since Britain had long-standing imperial interests in South Eastern Europe, it meant to intervene to re-establish a dominant position there. Such thinking was rooted in late nineteenth-century rivalries but was also fed by the pre-war perception of Britain as the protagonist of anti-Bolshevism.

The FO Southern Department was of course aware that no substantial troops would be dispatched to Bulgaria but some officials still hoped that at least a token force would be

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, a.e.59, 1.35, Madrid to Sofia, 31.05.1943, 1.82, 7.07.1943 Budapest to Sofia, a.e.60, 1.37, Berlin to Sofia, 24.07.1943, 1.75, Bucharest to Sofia, 27.07.1943, a.e.67, 1.5, Budapest to Sofia, 11.10.1943

⁵⁷ Rachev, *St. Churchill...* p. 158–160, 221

available to signify British interest there. This was very different from Romania where the only realistic and desirable option was that of Soviet occupation.⁵⁹

Even when it was perfectly clear that no major fighting would take place in the Balkans, the Bulgarian ruling circles continued to believe that if and when they decided to surrender to the victors, an Allied force would be present to protect them from the Germans.⁶⁰ All these political conjectures seemed to be reinforced by the Allied air attacks over Bulgaria.

Bombing Bulgaria. It is not very clear how the idea of bombing Bulgaria originated. Perhaps it had occurred to the military planners naturally, once important communications and transport points in the Balkans and especially the Ploesti oil fields came within reach of bases in southern Italy. Bulgaria itself had few strategic centres of great importance. In fact the first raids over its territory took place when weather or other obstacles did not permit attacks on Romanian targets which had higher priority. In the autumn of 1943, attention to bombing Bulgaria gradually increased. One reason for this was that bombing German troops on Yugoslav or Greek territory – which had also been discussed - carried the danger of inflicting casualties on the civil population of Allied Governments.⁶¹

Bombing Bulgaria was a legitimate, though a secondary military aim in its own right. The first recorded suggestion was made by the British Chiefs of Staff in early October 1943. This was taken up by the Defence Committee presided over by the Prime Minister on 19 October 1943. It was revealed that Bulgaria had eight divisions helping the Germans to garrison Yugoslavia and Greece and employed forces against 'guerrillas who are our friends and

⁵⁸ FO371/43587, R2241, Clutton, 11.02.1944; Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.115, 122; Miller, M.L. *Bulgaria...* p.115; Deane, J.R. *The Strange Alliance*. p.19, 41–42, 148

⁵⁹ Percival, M. 'British - Romanian Relations, 1944 – 1965.' PhD thesis: University of London, 1997. p.16

⁶⁰ Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.121; Miller, M.L. *Bulgaria...* p.169; Young, K. (ed.) *The Diaries...* p.285

⁶¹ Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.17; Miller, M.L. *Bulgaria...* p.166

whose resistance is growing daily'. Churchill spoke in very harsh words insisting that the activities of the 'Bulgarian jackals' could not be tolerated any longer, 'however much they might be under the heel of the Germans'. A sharp lesson had to be administered to Bulgaria with the primary objective of making its troops withdraw from occupied territories and of stretching German forces even further.⁶²

The Defence Committee 'carefully considered the best method of bringing the Bulgars [sic] to heel. All agreed that surprise air attacks on Sofia, accompanied by leaflets citing the fate of Hamburg and Hanover, would have best and most immediate effect.' It was thought that a 'relatively small diversion of air resources' would be 'well worthwhile'. All the more so as it could also bring significant political results, especially since the death of King Boris III in August 1943 had destabilised the internal situation in Bulgaria.⁶³

The first raid on Sofia was carried out on 14 November 1943 when the marshalling yards, the airfield and a number of civilian buildings were hit. The raid's general effect was judged to have been 'out of all proportion to the military significance of the target'. The Bulgarian Government had become seriously concerned with both further bombing and the sharp decline in public morale. It was even suspected that continued raids might result in internal upheaval 'such as would constitute a grave embarrassment and threat to Germany's whole military structure in the Balkans'.⁶⁴

More attacks followed in December 1943 and January 1944, all of which were estimated to have satisfactory results. Administrative life in Sofia was brought to a virtual standstill, the inefficiency of the air defence was exposed. The population of the capital fled to the

⁶² FO371/37161, R12382, Air Ministry to Washington, 20.10.1943

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Air Ministry to Commander-in-Chief ME, Sargent, 26.10.1943

⁶⁴ FO371/37161, R12466, PWE memorandum, undated

countryside where its tales spread panic and anger against the Government and Germany.⁶⁵

As a result of the raids, at the beginning of 1944 Bulgaria appeared to have become the most vulnerable of the three Axis countries in Eastern Europe: civil discontent was growing and the morale of the army was falling. In early February 1944, an appreciation by the SOE Balkan team forecast that a concentrated attack 'may be able to break Bulgaria within a few months – possibly in the summer'.⁶⁶ Therefore, the Middle Eastern Command which was in charge of the air-attacks over Bulgaria decided that the geographical scope of attacks should be extended before Sofia was allowed to recover. For instance, there was a good strategic argument that Plovdiv and Kazanluk should be bombed. Both were important railway centres within twenty miles of which Partisans were operating. The latter 'would no doubt secure valuable recruits and encouragement from a breakdown there similar to that at Sofia'. The Commanders of the Navy suggested attacks on the Black Sea ports and traffic.⁶⁷

Historiography has practically neglected the fact that bombing was co-ordinated with the Bulgarian Partisans. As the possibility of direct military attack on Bulgaria was becoming remote in the spring of 1944, Britain was eager to strengthen its contacts with the Bulgarian guerrillas and give them some evidence of good will. When informed through the BLOs, the Partisan leaders approved of bombing in general. They asked that such points in Sofia and the country were struck so as the effect would be particularly damaging for the Government in both material and political terms. Simultaneously, they warned the Allies to avoid the working-class quarters of Sofia so not to inflict casualties on that part of the population best disposed to the resistance movement.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ HS5/173, FORD memorandum, 25.01.1944

⁶⁶ FO371/43587, R2808, Force 133 appreciation, 10.02.1944

⁶⁷ Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.23; AIR9/462, Cairo to Resident Minister Algiers, 28.01.1943

⁶⁸ HS5/180, Bulgaria situation report, 23.02.1944

By April 1944, the importance of Bulgarian targets, which was subject to frequent reviews, had fallen. A few minor air-raids over Bulgaria took place in the early summer of 1944. Without eliminating Bulgaria as a possible target, priority was given to targets in Romania and Hungary. Attacks on these countries were thought likely to force them to withdraw troops fighting on the Eastern front.⁶⁹

Bombing was another aspect of Allied policy to Bulgaria on which Britain sought Soviet concurrence. While the question was being discussed in London, in October 1943 in Moscow Eden suggested that Stalin should be informed of the planned air-raids over Bulgaria. Stalin turned out to be 'surprisingly forthcoming'. This pleased Churchill despite his understanding that Stalin's permission had not been necessary as the USSR was not at war with Bulgaria. The FO appreciated Stalin's 'being in the business' and wanted to capitalise on this unexpected success. Southern Department officials discussed how to make the Soviet support for the bombing of Bulgaria known to the Bulgarian Government and population. Indeed, the Bulgarian Government had been given the cold shoulder when it had approached the Soviet Embassies in Sofia and Ankara to ask for mediation to stop the air-raids. But this was different from making the Soviet Government openly associate with the Allied bombing, as such a step could diminish Soviet prestige in Bulgaria.⁷⁰

Even though US bombers had taken part in the attacks, the US Government changed its mind on the subject of bombing Bulgaria at least once. In February 1944, while an OSS mission dealing with Bulgaria was still in Istanbul, the USA suggested that bombing should

⁶⁹ AIR9/462, Air Ministry to AFHQ Algiers, 4.04.1944

⁷⁰ FO371/37161, R12382, Moscow to FO, 23.10.1943, PM to Eden, 24.10.1943; FO371/43589, R7420, Clutton, Sargent, 22.03.1944; Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.216–218; Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.22

be temporarily ceased in order to allow Bulgaria to send a peace mission to Turkey in relative safety. Churchill refused.⁷¹

As a rule, plans for bombing were made with no other political objectives in mind than the detachment of Bulgaria from the Axis. There was some notion of the most desirable post-war developments from a British point of view but this was of distinctly secondary importance in day-to-day thinking before the end of the war. This was a logical result from the limited contacts and knowledge about the political situation in Bulgaria resulting from Britain's failure to establish stable communication with those political elements whom it could have felt able to support after the war.

The Futile Peace Negotiations. British Balkan experts were well-aware of the political difficulties created by the fact that no Anglo-American troops would enter Bulgaria. There was no enemy army approaching the frontier to whom the Bulgarians could surrender, as in 1918 when they had asked for armistice from the British Commanders at Salonika. On their part, Bulgaria and the other satellites could not fail to notice that the Allies were stretched to the extreme in the Eastern Mediterranean. The small Axis powers used this to procrastinate in their approaches for peace, hoping to extract better terms later.⁷²

Renewed Political Contacts. The Bulgarian Government used different approaches made to its representatives abroad to sound out the intentions of the Western Allies. Most of these contacts took place in neutral countries and produced no particular commitment on either side. They were more often than not initiated by the US special services trying to side-step British supremacy in the Balkans. In Switzerland, Nikola Momchilov had sent letters to the Bulgarian Ambassador in Bern; Allen Dulles of the OSS was in touch with the Bulgarian Consul in Geneva. There were also US attempts to

⁷¹ FO371/43587, R2160, Resident Minister Algiers to FO, 1.02.1944, R2333, FO to Washington, 12.02.1944

influence Bulgarian political circles through the Bulgarian Mission in Stockholm.⁷³ The most intensive and fruitful contacts were those made through the Bulgarian Mission in Turkey. Nikola Balabanov, the Bulgarian Ambassador, was a skilled diplomat who was extremely realistic about Bulgaria's position in the war. He made good use of the post in Ankara, constantly trying to examine how both sides in the conflict regarded Bulgaria. He also received valuable information from Istanbul, one of the busiest centres of intelligence throughout the war. Balabanov was among the first to recommend to the Bulgarian Government the establishment of early links with the Western Allies in parallel to such with the Soviet Government. Additionally, he thought contacts with the Greek and Yugoslav Governments-in-exile and resistance movements would be useful, as their association with the Allies was likely to have a great impact on Bulgaria's future.⁷⁴

All these contacts yielded little beyond the illusion on both sides that alternative routes of communication were being kept open. Their value faded rapidly in late 1943 and early 1944 when the air attacks seemed to be producing immediate results. Bombing was intended to speed up Bulgaria's defection, which would then help knock Romania out of the war. Initially, it was even hoped that the three Eastern European satellites would desert Germany at approximately the same time; this would produce a considerable strategic advantage for the Allies before OVERLORD. Some observers believed that the satellites were following 'limited adherence to the German cause... determined largely by the same reasons which determined our Turkish ally, in his slightly more favourable position, to a policy of neutrality'.⁷⁵ Therefore, it was essential for the Allies to devise a policy, which would lure the satellites with as little detriment on the latter's existence as

⁷² Young, K. *The Diaries...* p.284–285

⁷³ TsDIA – AMVnR, op.176, op.15, a.e.77, 1.90, 28.03.1944, Stockholm to Sofia; Miller, M.L. *Bulgaria...* p.111–113; Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.9; Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.227

⁷⁴ TsDIA – AMVnR, op.176, op.15, a.e. 48, 1.84–87, Ankara to Sofia, 8.01.1944

nation states as possible.⁷⁶ Such an opinion of the motives behind the satellites' behaviour was occasionally voiced by some British analysts in late 1943 and early 1944. It was in effect contrary to the Casablanca formula of 'unconditional surrender' to which the US Chiefs of Staff attached the greatest importance.⁷⁷ Ostensibly, British military planners went along with their US counterparts but never found this rigid approach either very convincing or effective. The FO tried to introduce whatever degree of flexibility the situation afforded.

There had been no inter-Allied discussions of possible joint policy towards Bulgaria. This was partly due to the fact that British actions were dependent largely on the success of bombing. But while the Western Allies were attacking Bulgarian cities from the air, the Soviet armies were moving steadily towards Bulgarian territory. By the spring of 1944 no military plans had been co-ordinated. Attempts to obtain some indication of Soviet views on the future of Bulgaria and the South Slavs had produced little beyond a professed general desire for amenable Governments. It seemed to the Southern Department that Stalin was showing a pronounced reluctance to commit himself to any future political or military course in Bulgaria. Such an attitude could be, and usually was, interpreted as a Soviet intention to strike a separate deal. Alternatively, the FO observers were reassuring themselves that, maybe just like the British, the Soviet Government had not managed to achieve any definite political results and was loath to admit it.⁷⁸ Besides, the British diplomats, who were mostly interested in Bulgaria on account of its closeness to Greece, were getting tired of the slow and non-committal Bulgarian requests for talks in the first half of 1944. They began

⁷⁵ FO371/37173, R5514, *The Observer* excerpt, 20.06.1943

⁷⁶ FO371/43646, R4242, SOE Cairo review, 4.03.1944; FO371/43657, R4608, Lord Selbourne, 10.03.1944

⁷⁷ FO37/37151, R6037, Halifax to Eden, 6.07.1943

⁷⁸ FO371/43596, R3421, FO to Algiers, 5.03.1944; FO371/43583, R67485, Clutton, 4.04.1944, Howard, 6.04.1944

expressing the opinion that, instead of listening to Bulgarian complaints and explanations, the Allies should present firm conditions not for negotiations but for armistice.⁷⁹

In the autumn of 1943, bombing itself had been planned as only one component of a broader Allied strategy. It was to be part of 'a determined threefold attack' consisting also of support to subversive elements and effective propaganda. The goal would be Bulgaria's detachment from the Axis, irrespective of whether it was done under the present or a new Government.⁸⁰

Britain preferred that Bulgaria should emerge from the war as a democratic country. Britain's efforts to influence the policies of the wartime Bulgarian Governments concentrated on the moderate Bulgarian political elements. The latter, while being opposed to the alignment with Germany, were not aiming at radical internal transformation. Another factor Britain had to consider was the necessity to maintain a common front with Soviet Russia, not only in combat but in propaganda too. The steady Soviet military advance resulted in extremely good propaganda for the Soviet Union, something which made some British conservative circles complain that the West was deliberately enhancing the Soviet image. On the whole, British policy makers fully realised that without solid Soviet support any Western initiative in the Balkans would have a limited success.⁸¹

The OSS too sought Stalin's approval before putting its own plan for Bulgaria into action. The plan had been elaborated at the end of 1943 under Colonel Donovan's supervision. It envisaged the initiation of preliminary talks with the Bulgarian Government. The central figure in the plan was the Bulgarian-born financier Angel Kuyumdjiiski who had recently been granted US citizenship and then given the rank of Colonel in the US Army.

⁷⁹ FO371/43588, R3558, Lord Killearn to FO, 4.03.1944, R3897, Sargent, 22.03.1944

⁸⁰ FO371/43587, R2808, Force 133 appreciation, 4.02.1944

⁸¹ Young, K. *The Diaries...* p.302, 309

Kuyumdjiiski was attached to a special mission headed by Colonel Jadwin and was able in about two months in Istanbul to renew his contacts among Bulgarian politicians and businessmen. At the end of February 1944, he believed that his efforts were about to result in a mission authorised by the Bulgarian Government to receive official Allied terms for Bulgarian surrender. The OSS and the State Department thought that this was the best possible outcome as it would both put an end to Bulgarian participation in the war and leave the Bulgarian Opposition untainted by surrender and therefore eligible for future office. US diplomats with longer experience in Bulgarian affairs than Jadwin, Kouyumdjiiski or even Donovan were not so optimistic. For them it was obvious that the Bulgarian Government still had room for manoeuvres.⁸²

British services dealing with Bulgaria had not been told of the exact nature of the US project before it was outlined in Moscow. On this occasion, the OSS had specifically tried to avoid its British counterpart after Churchill had refused Roosevelt's request to authorise Donovan's initiative.⁸³ The FO openly disapproved of the Jadwin-Kuyumdjiiski affair: it felt sidelined and above all expressed scepticism about the USA's ability to handle negotiations properly. It also insisted that any Bulgarian envoys should talk to representatives of all Three Big Powers. In comparison, the Soviet Government seemed content to leave things in US hands. It expressed the desire to be kept informed of the progress of the contacts but abstained from practical involvement in the US initiative. The Soviet Ambassador in Cairo – where the Bulgarian emissaries were expected – was instructed to follow possible negotiations but not to present any views.⁸⁴

⁸² FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.300, Washington to Moscow, 10.02.1944, p.302, Roosevelt to Churchill, 25.02.1944, p.310, Stettinius to Winant, 4.03.1944, p.311, MacVeagh to Hull, 7.03.1944, p.307, Istanbul to Hull, 3.03.1944; Rachev, *St. Churchill...* p.225; Miller, M.L. *Bulgaria...* p.170–172

⁸³ Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.12-18

⁸⁴ FO371/43587, R2537, Clark Kerr to FO, 21.02.1944, R2160, FO to Moscow, 12.02.1944, R2161, Lord Killearn to FO, 9.02.1944, R2331, FO to Washington, 12.02.1944

Bulgarian Attempts at Double-dealing.

Bulgarian handling of the talks with

the Jadwin mission revealed both inflated expectations about the outcome of the war and faulty perceptions of the interests of the Allies. Contacts had been authorised in the belief that generally the USA had a more lenient attitude to Bulgaria, unlike Britain which was committed to the protection of Greece and Yugoslavia. The Bulgarian Government of Dobri Bozhilov tried to extract preliminary concessions from Kuyumdjiiski, mainly with respect to Bulgaria's retention of the occupied territories. Indeed, the question of the so-called national unification predominated in the thinking of Bulgarian politicians and precluded a more realistic analysis of the international situation.

The death of King Boris in August 1943 had caused a shock in Bulgarian governing circles. Bulgarian politicians and diplomats had feebly begun to consider the possibility that they were involved with the losing side in the conflict. Gradually, they became more willing to establish links with the Allies and prepared to dissociate themselves from Germany. This made them desperate to learn about any Allied deliberations on the fate of the Balkans.

At the end of 1943 after the Moscow and Teheran Conferences, the Bulgarian Legations across Europe were very active in reporting rumours about decisions reached by the Big Three. Some claimed that Stalin had taken the upper hand, others that the traditional British diplomatic skill had prevailed. The common theme was the conviction that there could be no agreement among the Allies. One Bulgarian Ambassador waved aside the possibility that the official communiqués were saying the truth and thought that Bulgaria's lot would be easier if only it could be found out 'who had deceived whom or whether they had all deceived each other'. Naturally, Germany sought to increase Bulgaria's fear that a deal had been reached to

apportion the Balkans to the Soviet Union. Bulgarian military intelligence too supported this view.⁸⁵

The leading figures in the Bulgarian Government refused to believe in the existence of a common Allied plan and thought that Britain and the Soviet Union were 'playing hide-and-seek'.⁸⁶ A lonely sober voice was that of the Bulgarian Minister in Turkey: from the beginning of 1944 his reports stressed that there would be no imminent serious rupture among the Three Allies. He advised that Bulgarian foreign policy should not be constructed on the false premise that it would be able to benefit from the existing inter-Allied differences. He was able to point to numerous examples, which showed that the principal role in the Balkans had been delegated to Stalin.⁸⁷

But the conviction – or rather hope – of inter-Allied conflicts was difficult to shake off. Bulgarian Prime Minister Bagryanov (June – August 1944) even believed that both Britain and the Soviet Union were ready to conclude a separate peace with Germany.⁸⁸ Therefore his tactic was at the same time to alleviate German suspicions and divert Soviet pressure. Bagryanov's big illusion was that because they did not want their confrontation extended to the Balkans, both Germany and the USSR had an interest in Bulgaria maintaining relations with both of them. The Bulgarian Government repeatedly concluded that it was best for it to wait and avoid taking sides until the outcome was clearer; then Bulgaria should quickly attach itself to the victor from whom it could hope for a satisfactory peace settlement. The Soviet Union should be wooed with the idea that Bulgaria would join it and the same

⁸⁵ TsDIA – AMVnR, op.176, op.15, a.e.68, l.6–7, Bern to Sofia, 30.10.1943, l.29, Moscow to Sofia, 29.10.1943, l.21, Stockholm to Sofia, 2.11.1943, l.56, Madrid to Sofia, 6.11.1943, l.67, Madrid to Sofia, 10.11.1943, l.74, Berlin to Sofia, 11.11.1943, a.e.69, l.101–102, Army Staff to Foreign Ministry, 16.11.1943

⁸⁶ Mishkov, G. (ed.) *Dnevnikut na Purvan Draganov – bivsh minister na vunshnite raboti ot 12 yuni do 1 septemvri 1944*. Sofia: VIK 'Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets', 1993. p.12

⁸⁷ TsDIA – AMVnR, op.176, op.15, a.e.75, l.15, Ankara to Sofia, 18.03.1944

⁸⁸ Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.233

possibility should be used to threaten Britain. In other words, Bulgaria was to try to keep all sides happy: not to provoke a German occupation and to improve relations with the Soviets at the same time. The ultimate objective was while keeping a low profile to reach an agreement to get out of the war with Britain and the USA. This was dictated by alarm that, unless Bulgaria joined the West, it would not be able to avoid a Soviet-backed Communist take-over. At the same time, there was a vague fear that if British troops entered the Balkans, Soviet ^{troops} would do the same.⁸⁹

The positive result of these speculations was the revival of contacts with Western representatives. But the Bagryanov Government did not regard an armistice with the West as an urgent matter. Foreign Minister Purvan Draganov had in mind to start conversations, not negotiations. Georgi Kisselov, who was sent on a peace seeking mission to Istanbul in June 1944, was 'provided with a [deliberately] vague formula': he should not promise Bulgaria's pulling out of the war but should maintain that Bulgaria still hoped for a peaceful solution of the national question. But by the summer of 1944 Bulgarian ruling circles finally realised that the territorial question was unlikely to be settled favourably for Bulgaria. The Government was only just coming to terms with the necessity to withdraw its troops from Serbia, but it preferred this to follow rather than precede negotiations.⁹⁰

The importance of the national question was overriding in Bulgarian political thinking. The opportunity to secure the Bulgarian territorial interest made even giving in to Soviet pressure acceptable to some political circles, represented in Bagryanov's Cabinet. In the context of Bulgarian internal politics, this meant co-operation with the Communist Party, which could even be brought into the Government. Bagryanov himself had established personal contacts with the Communists even before he became Premier. These were not very fruitful but they

⁸⁹ Dimitrov, I. *Ivan Bagryanov...* p.64–68, 73–74; Mishkov, G. *Dnevnikut...* p.39, 54

⁹⁰ Dimitrov, I. *Ivan Bagryanov...* p.71–73; Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.39

illustrated a rising political trend. At the beginning of 1944 most prominent politicians who were not desperately pro-German talked not only to the Bulgarian Communists but also sought direct links with the Soviet Union, usually through its Embassy in Sofia. Most of them tried to determine what terms the Soviet Union would offer Bulgaria to withdraw from the war. The standard reply was that the Soviet Government would insist on withdrawal from Serbia.⁹¹ Confirming the demands of the Western Allies, the Soviet Government was not necessarily driven by the same motives as they.

While the Bagryanov Government was continuing its balancing act, events in the Balkans were moving fast. On 2 August 1944 Turkey broke off relations with Germany. The same day in a speech in the House of Commons, Churchill referred to Bulgaria in very strong words. He said it had played a 'petty and cowardly part' in the war and had little time to repent.⁹² Pressure from the USSR was also mounting. Despite intensified diplomatic signals that Bulgaria should hurry, the Cabinet decided it could not break with Germany before 'leaning' elsewhere.⁹³

In late July 1944, still trying to win time, the Bulgarian Government curtailed German activities in the country and prepared to repeal anti-Jewish laws and withdraw from Serbia shortly. This prepared the way for a new and already official Bulgarian peace feeler, led by the former President of the Bulgarian National Assembly, Stoicho Moshanov.⁹⁴ As early as 21 June 1944 he had been sounded out with a view to his going to Turkey. His mission was eventually confirmed a month later. Three more weeks passed before he actually held his first conversation with the British Ambassador to Turkey Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen

⁹¹ Daskalov, D. *Zhan...* p.182; Dimitrov, I. *Ivan Bagryanov...* p.62

⁹² *Hansard*, vol.402, 2.08.1944, cols.1483-1484

⁹³ Moshanov, St. *Moyata missiya v Cairo*. Sofia: Bulgarski Pisatel, 1991 p.242; Mishkov, G. *Dnevnikut...* p.68

⁹⁴ Miller, M.L. *Bulgaria...* p.182; Moshanov, St. *Moyata missiya...* p.225-404

on 16 August.⁹⁵ The long delay suggests lack of urgency on the part of the Bulgarian ruling circles to forestall any Soviet approach to Bulgaria. On the contrary, led by wrong evaluations of British interests, Bagryanov hoped that Soviet pressure on Bulgaria would disturb Britain and the United States and in consequence would make them less demanding towards the country. Knatchbull-Hugessen advised that the Bulgarian Government should speed up its moves. But the British Ambassador acted on the understanding that it was time for a quick solution of the question of the Bulgarian armistice. British diplomats were not guided by any the intention to pre-empt Soviet action with respect to Bulgaria.

While Moshanov was making his first moves in Ankara, the Bulgarian Government began a campaign to support his mission with domestic measures. In a Parliamentary debate it was admitted that the previous Government had erred in declaring war on Britain and the United States. This did not impress Britain, especially since the speeches of the Bulgarian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister contradicted each other on the question of Bulgaria's imminent external orientation. Ostensibly for Germany's reassurance, Draganov proclaimed that Bulgaria was continuing with its erstwhile policy, simply using different methods. Neither were the Allies convinced by Moshanov's appeals that nothing drastic could be done before Bulgarian troops were taken out of Serbia. While they were trying to ascertain how authentic and serious the new emissary was, he had to return to Sofia for consultations after the Romanian *coup* of 23 August 1944.⁹⁶

Despite these setbacks, the FO decided to proceed with the talks. It also planned consultations on Bulgaria with both its US and Soviet colleagues. On 27 August the British Embassy in Turkey instructed Moshanov to go to Cairo to obtain the terms for a Bulgarian armistice. In his memoirs written about twenty-five years later, Moshanov claimed to have

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p.233–234, 237–238, 261

⁹⁶ Rachev, *St. Churchill...* p.260-265; Dimitrov, *I. Ivan Bagryanov...* p.79-81

immediately felt that he should procrastinate. Among the various explanations he put forward was a conversation on 30 August with Dr.Floyd Black, the former Director of the American College in Sofia. Allegedly the latter advised Moshanov to delay so as not to create difficulties among the Allies⁹⁷ US archives have preserved no evidence of such a statement made to Moshanov by Dr.Black.⁹⁸ The Turkish Foreign Minister gave Moshanov exactly the opposite advice: in order to prevent the large Soviet army on the Danube from entering Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Government should surrender immediately.⁹⁹

In the circumstances, of more immediate importance was the absence of the Ambassadors of all Three Allies from Cairo. The designated Head of the British delegation Lord Moyne was in Italy. The US Ambassador MacVeagh had not come back from Washington whereas his deputy was not yet fully authorised to participate in the talks.¹⁰⁰ Such a state of affairs contardicts the thesis of some Bulgarian scholars that both Britain and the USA desired to get Bulgaria out of the war as a matter of urgency.¹⁰¹ Examination of the evidence shows that Britain was not at all concerned to conclude a hurried agreement with Bulgaria. Britain's responsibility for the delay in negotiations should be analysed against the background of the whole process of wartime planning for the country. Then, the failure to perceive the Cairo talks as urgent fits in the broader pattern of lack of strong British interest towards Bulgaria.

While Moshanov was in the Middle East, the Red Army was quickly approaching the Danube. The nearest British troops were at least 1,500 miles away from Bulgaria. Moshanov was also acutely aware that the Bulgarian Communists were going to play an increasingly

⁹⁷ Rachev, *St. Churchill...* p.278; Moshanov, *St. Moyata missiya...* p.289–290

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p.302–304. There is a hint of this in Balabanov's message of 2.09.1944 in TsDIA – AMVnR, op.176, op.15, a.e.87, 1.73; FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.380, Berry to Hull, 30.08.1944; Toshkova, V. *SASht...* p.213

⁹⁹ TsDIA – AMVnR, op.176, op.15, a.e.87, 1.83, Ankara to Sofia, 4.09.1944

¹⁰⁰ Rachev, *St. Churchill...* p.280

¹⁰¹ Toshkova, V. *SASht...* p.214

important role in Bulgarian politics after the war. He had left Sofia for Cairo amidst negotiations to include Communists in the Bulgarian Cabinet. While Moshanov was waiting to begin talks with the Western representatives, he learned of the formation of the new Bulgarian Government led by Konstantin Muraviev but noticed there were no Communists Ministers in it. Moshanov found himself in the position of representing a Government which he believed could not last long. Also, he was required to sign an armistice which would not be lenient to Bulgaria. He had gone to Cairo hoping that he was going to take part in negotiations; instead he was soon made to understand that he was merely going to be presented with the Allied terms which simply had to be accepted.

Moshanov's behaviour was confused and contradictory. He feared that he was going to be held morally responsible for armistice terms which he would be given no chance to soften.¹⁰² This would endanger his hopes for active participation in post-war Bulgarian politics. That explains why Moshanov tried to obstruct the conclusion of the armistice by raising doubts about the validity of his own credentials in a telegram to the new Bulgarian Premier. To Lord Moyne, Moshanov made a long and roundabout statement which prompted the Allies to check his authorisation. In communications to Sofia, Moshanov repeated that he would accept a new mandate 'if entry of Soviet troops does not change the situation'.¹⁰³

In a personal letter he sent to the Communist leader Dimitrov three years after the armistice negotiations, Moshanov admitted that he had 'diverted' the handing of the text of the armistice on the 1 September 1944 and was personally responsible for the failure of the mission. He had decided not to 'betray the future of his country' when its independence had been seriously threatened by the West. He even claimed that he had related the events to the

¹⁰² Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.45; Moshanov, St. *Moyata missiya...* p. 319, 321,345–348

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 325–326; 339, 349; Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.283

Soviet representative who had complimented him on having performed 'a great service not only for his country but also for the whole of Slavdom'.¹⁰⁴

Soviet Opportunism. The Soviet Union had continuously declined to take part in Three-Power joint action in Bulgaria but Britain and the United States had not given up the idea.¹⁰⁵ They were very much aware of the political leverage the USSR had and were eager to use it for what they considered the common purpose of getting Bulgaria out of the war. In February 1944, the FO was looking into ways of intensifying pressure upon Bulgaria. Sargent wrote to Eden that 'the Russians should be asked to enter the picture as well'. So far, whenever approached by the FO Moscow had procrastinated showing evident unwillingness to commit itself. Sargent thought that 'the Russians sit pretty, maintain diplomatic relations and wait for the day when they can step in not as conquerors but as deliverers'.¹⁰⁶

In the spring of 1944, the Soviet Union began demonstrating a greater interest not only in Bulgaria, but in the Balkans as a whole. The pressure applied by Moscow on the Bulgarian Government to distance itself from Germany was greeted by the FO as long overdue. But Soviet criticism of British behaviour in relation to Greece was disquieting. Eden told the FO that there were 'unhappily increasing signs of Russia's intentions to play her own hand in the Balkans regardless of our desires and interests'. In early July 1944 his concerns were recorded in a document circulated to the Cabinet, reporting that the Soviet Government was using the Communist-dominated movements to gain a predominant position in South Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ TsPA, f.146, op.4, a.e.235, Moshanov to Dimitrov, 10.12.1947; Moshanov, St. *Moyata missiya...* p.224. This is not confirmed by the record of the conversation sent by Yakovlev to Moscow, Volokitina, T.V. *Vostochnaya Evropa...* p.105-109.

¹⁰⁵ Mastny, V. *Russia's Road...* p.97-98

¹⁰⁶ FO371/43588, R3181, Sargent to Eden, 21.02.1944

¹⁰⁷ The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs...* p.459

This assessment was made at a time when both London and Washington were receiving a stream of intelligence reports about increased Soviet activity in Bulgaria. The West suspected the existence of links between the Soviet Union and the Bulgarian Communists but had no firm evidence of this. On the other hand, there was reliable information about the renewal of old and the establishment of new contacts between Bulgarian Opposition figures and Soviet representatives in Sofia. An illuminating example was the case of Petko Stainov, a leading member of the political circle *Zveno* and considered a staunch Anglophile. After the severe January 1944 air-raids over Sofia, he had made a strong speech in Parliament in support of friendly relations with the Soviet Union. He, as well as the Democratic Party leader Nikola Mushanov, another pro-Westerner, began visiting the Soviet Legation every other day. Other centre-right Bulgarian politicians, for example Atanass Burov and Alexander Girginov were also in touch with the Soviet Minister Alexander Lavrishchev and his aides.¹⁰⁸

There is little contemporary evidence of the purpose of these encounters. But from the circumstances in which they were taking place it can be surmised that the Bulgarian political elite was striving to keep open links with Moscow. Most of the political leaders tried to demonstrate amicable relations with the Soviet Minister as they foresaw the increasing role of the Soviet Union in Bulgarian affairs. The aim of both Government and Opposition was to ascertain the Soviet attitude towards the country.

The Soviet Government put increased diplomatic pressure upon the Bulgarian Government to break off relations with Germany.¹⁰⁹ In January 1944, Lavrishchev told the Bulgarian Premier Bozhilov that the Soviet Union would intercede with Britain and the USA to stop

¹⁰⁸ FO371/43579, R729, PRB Stockholm to Southern Department, 8.01.1944, R6168, Last to Rose, 12.04.1944; FO371/43583, R4126, FO memorandum to PID, 8.03.1944, R5382, Angora to FO, 3.04.1944; FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.318, Berry to Hull, 25.03.1944; Muraviev, *K Subitiya...* p.349, 351, 377

¹⁰⁹ Mastny, *V. Russia's Road...* p.199

the bombing if Bulgaria withdrew from Serbia. The same offer was repeated in February, when Lavrishchev stated that the omission from Soviet propaganda of the demand that Bulgaria should withdraw from Aegean Thrace was not incidental.¹¹⁰ Soviet representatives were signalling a preparedness to make some concessions to Bulgaria which at the time compared favourably with the air strikes by the West.

In March 1944, Fyodor Gushev, the Soviet member of the European Advisory Commission (EAC) in London, declared that this body should not discuss the terms for Bulgaria. Molotov commented that it was simply too early. Both British and US experts seemed to interpret this Soviet aloofness as simply reflecting the fact that the Soviet Union was not at war with Bulgaria. Both Western Allies told the USSR that they would welcome any future Soviet observations on developments related to Bulgaria. Western diplomats understood that the Soviet Government reserved the right to reopen the question of the Bulgarian armistice when it would be in a stronger military position in the Balkans. Neither the British and US representatives in the EAC, nor their superiors saw anything worrying in this.¹¹¹

In the spring of 1944 Soviet diplomatic efforts to precipitate Bulgaria's exit from the war intensified. This coincided with the heavy Soviet offensive on the Eastern front which marked the advance of the Red Army into Eastern Europe and the Balkans. No documentary evidence has been found that at this time the Soviet Government had set plans for military and political action regarding Bulgaria. It is plausible that Stalin simply waited to see the outcome of fighting on Polish and Romanian territory, as well as the development of the internal Bulgarian situation before deciding on a specific course of action. This does not mean however that he was going to be a passive observer of events either in Bulgaria in particular or in the Balkans as a whole.

¹¹⁰ Filov, B. *Dnevnik*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na OF, 1990. p.625, 659, 665

Gradually, the Soviet attitude towards the Bulgarian Government stiffened and in mid-April 1944 the latter was faced with Soviet complaints that it was aiding the German war effort by providing transportation, ports and air-fields to Axis troops retreating from the Eastern front. To Bulgarian protestations of innocence, the Soviet Government replied with demands for the re-opening of Soviet Consulates and establishment of new ones so as to be able to verify Bulgarian claims for non-collaboration with Germany. The Bulgarian Government was told it should appreciate how much Soviet Russia was doing to save Bulgaria from evil Western designs.¹¹² Unwilling to comply with the Soviet demands, the Bozhilov Government resigned at the end of May 1944.¹¹³

The new Government of Ivan Bagryanov soon realised that Soviet demands would have to be met. Foreign Minister Draganov saw his task as satisfying them only partially and maintaining the balance between Soviet pressure and German influence as long as possible. Prophetically, Draganov wrote to a friend that Bulgaria had no more than three months of independence. Therefore, he began preparation to open talks with Britain and the USA. He also sent a special personal letter of good will to Molotov. In the reply, the Soviet Foreign Ministry asked outright whether Bulgaria was ready to break with Germany.¹¹⁴

Throughout this intense exchange of communications the Soviet Government did not inform its Allies about developments in Bulgaria or about its part in them. In late August 1944 Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, the British Ambassador in Moscow, related to Molotov rumours that Bulgaria was going to ask the USSR for an armistice as soon as the Red Army appeared on the Danube, and in response the Soviet Government was going to intercede with the Allies

¹¹¹ FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.313-315, Winant - Hull, 13, 17.03.1944, p.316-317, Hull - Harriman, 17, 19.03.1944; Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.32

¹¹² TsDIA – AMVnR, op.176, op.15, a.e.78, 80, Ankara to Sofia 6.03., 20.05.1944

¹¹³ Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.219

¹¹⁴ Mishkov, G. *Dnevnikut...* p.2; Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.255, 259

so that Bulgaria could keep the occupied territories. The Soviet Foreign Minister refuted these stories as complete lies. It was only then that he admitted that the state of Soviet-Bulgarian relations deserved attention, and promised to let the British Government have the relevant papers.¹¹⁵ In the meantime, the Soviet Union had professed no opinion or interest in the most recent Bulgarian peace initiative in Turkey.¹¹⁶

In late August and early September 1944, Soviet diplomats in London, the Middle East and Sofia undertook a series of steps regarding Bulgaria which at first sight appear unrelated and confusing. In their entirety, however, they reveal a logic aimed at neutralising as far as possible the Bulgarian armistice talks with the Western Allies, and the transfer of initiative to Moscow. All this was done with the knowledge that the Red Army was crossing Romania and would soon appear on the Bulgarian northern border.

On 24 August, after the Romanian *coup* which had forced Moshanov to return to Sofia, the Soviet delegate to the EAC finally agreed to participate in the discussions of the Bulgarian armistice. He agreed to most of the clauses dealing with the withdrawal of Bulgarian troops from any occupied territories, demobilisation of the Bulgarian armed forces, dissolution of paramilitary organisations, release of Allied prisoners-of-war, etc. But on 29 August, when Moshanov had again gone to Turkey to resume armistice talks, the Soviet representative was withdrawn from the deliberations in London. On the same day, the Soviet *Chargé d'Affaires* left Sofia where only a junior diplomatic officer remained in the Legation. Similarly, Moshanov was astonished to discover that the Soviet Ambassador had left Cairo where the final negotiations were going to take place.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ AVPRF, f.06, op.6, no.241, p.23, l.124–125, Molotov – Clark Kerr conversation, 20.08.1944

¹¹⁶ FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.355, Stettinius to Winant, 12.08.1944, Harriman to Hull, 12.08.1944, p.356, Winant to Hull, 14.08.1944

¹¹⁷ Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.220–222; Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.276, 280; Dimitrov, I. *Ivan Bagryanov...* p.83; Moshanov, St. *Moyata missiya...* p.310. Mastny thinks Gussev's withdrawal from the

On 17 August in one of its last acts, the Bagryanov Government declared complete neutrality in the continuing war. This was conceived as a temporary measure before breaking off relations with Germany. The Soviet Government's attitude to Bulgarian neutrality was misleading. The official Bulgarian declaration was repeated on Moscow radio so both Bagryanov and the Western Allies assumed that the Soviet Government accepted Bulgarian neutrality. The Bulgarian Communists were, however, informed that this was not the case. Only on 30 August did the Soviet Government deny any earlier approval and officially informed its Allies that it was not recognising the proclaimed Bulgarian neutrality.¹¹⁸ As soon as this attitude became known, Bagryanov announced his resignation, hoping that a Bulgarian Cabinet crisis would delay compliance with the Soviet demand that Bulgaria declare war on Germany.

Coercion from Moscow was well-timed as it followed the Bulgarian decision of 29 August finally to order the Bulgarian occupation forces to leave Macedonia. Simultaneously, German troops began leaving Greece. Joint Anglo-American intelligence explained the Soviet behaviour as caused by discontent with the plans for negotiations with Bulgaria; the pressure on Bagryanov had specifically aimed at stopping the Cairo negotiations in which the USSR did not participate.¹¹⁹ These were indications that the Soviet Government was beginning to have second thoughts about Bulgaria. However, Soviet unwillingness to participate in the current talks was not fully appreciated by the West. Britain and the USA were deluded by their own preparedness to let Soviet Russia influence or even join the Cairo negotiations at any time. The West also believed that the Soviet Union might be prepared to make concessions in order to alleviate fears of the imposition of Bolshevism.

EAC signified a desire to get Bagryanov under the Soviet wing in return for subservience, Mastny, V. *Russia's Road...* p.200.

¹¹⁸ Miller, M.L. *Bulgaria...* p.192

¹¹⁹ Toshkova, V. *Bulgaria, nepriznatiyat...* p.14-16

Simultaneously, in conversations with Bulgarian representatives several Soviet Ambassadors in neutral countries voiced displeasure that Bulgaria had not approached Moscow for mediation. This was accompanied by hints that probable Soviet terms would be more lenient than those offered by Britain and the USA.¹²⁰

It seems plausible that it was only at the end of August 1944 that Stalin prepared plans for the military advance in Bulgaria.¹²¹ It was evident that Bulgaria was not going to offer resistance to the Red Army. The political influence resulting from a Soviet occupation of the country would be achieved without any material or human losses. But this does not point to the conclusion that Stalin had always planned the occupation of Bulgaria. On the contrary, just like the Western Allies, he had been led by military factors above all. He also employed political measures to influence the course of the war. Now that the military situation in the region was clear, Stalin could concentrate on political developments. This was when the USSR declared war on Bulgaria.

The new Bulgarian Government of the right Agrarian Konstantin Muraviev was formed to solve a single issue, that of getting Bulgaria out of the war. It needed to sign an armistice with Britain and the USA and finally declared war on Germany. It hoped to use the fact that Bulgaria still had diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Government was asked to mediate the Bulgarian armistice. The Soviet Ambassador in Turkey Sergei Vinogradov, through whom the request was made, initially agreed readily but then quickly retreated. This was another sign that Soviet plans were still unclear. To get the Soviet Union's support, Muraviev tried hard to include Communists in his Government. However,

¹²⁰ TsDIA – AMVnR, op.176, op.15, a.e.83, l.10, Stockholm to Sofia, 3.08.1944, a.e.87, l.29, 46, Ankara to Sofia, 1.09., 31.08.1944

¹²¹ Mastny, V. *Russia's Road...* p.199–200; Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.268; Dimitrov, I. *Ivan Bagryanov...* p.83

their position fluctuated, depending on Soviet plans, and finally they backed out of the deal.¹²²

The Soviet Government declared war on Bulgaria on 5 September 1944 at 6 p.m. Moscow time. It seems that the Bulgarian Government learnt of the Soviet declaration of war from the radio and had to determine its authenticity via Ankara. Only half an hour's notice was given to Clark Kerr and the US Ambassador, Averell Harriman. The Red Army was already poised at the Danube but when asked whether it would enter Bulgaria, Molotov gave a non-committal answer. No immediate Soviet intentions were disclosed to either Harriman or Clerk Kerr.¹²³

The Soviet decision to declare war on Bulgaria was made very late. For it military opportunities were of paramount but not sole importance. The Soviet Commanders considered Bulgaria 'off to one side from the main highway of the war' and accordingly reduced the numbers of the army which was to enter the country.¹²⁴ For Moscow the declaration of war on Bulgaria was necessary for Soviet troops to have a pretext of occupying the country. Soviet occupation of Bulgaria was dictated by political rather than military considerations. The Red Army waited for three days between the declaration of war and crossing the Bulgarian frontier. Soviet troops entered Bulgaria on the very day when the Soviet Government officially announced that it would grant the Bulgarian request for armistice.¹²⁵

Communist-time historiography never gave an explanation for the Soviet delay. It could not have been caused by fear that the last few retreating German formations were going to occupy Bulgaria or even stage a fight. Such possibility could easily have been dealt with by

¹²² Muraviev, K *Subitiya...* p.361, 387, 413; Swain, G. '*Stalin's Wartime Vision...*' p.85

¹²³ FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.398, Steinhart to Hull, 6.09.1944

¹²⁴ Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.57-60

the 500,000-strong Bulgarian army alone. It was no secret that Bulgarian fears of German occupation had been exaggerated in order to justify procrastination. The Soviet Command was fully aware of the political situation and was supplied with last-minute military information by Communist Party members from northern Bulgaria.¹²⁶

Nor did the Soviet troops stand aside so that the Communist-dominated Fatherland Front could take power with local forces only. The Red Army was already on Bulgarian soil at the moment of the *coup d'état*. The Soviet army had stopped to wait for an internal uprising which had been instigated by Communist Party circulars and a manifesto to the people. However, the country was relatively calm as the new Government had just assumed office and the last German troops were leaving. Once inside Bulgaria, the Soviet troops advanced initially only 120 miles; they entered Sofia on 15 September 1944 after a slow march.¹²⁷

The only plausible explanation of this delay is that the Soviet Government waited for the Western reaction to the Soviet declaration of war on Bulgaria. At 5 p.m. on 7 September 1944 Lord Moyne informed Moshanov that it would be put on record that Bulgaria had requested armistice, that it had not received the terms and that the talks had ended because of the Soviet war declaration.¹²⁸ Only after this final conversation between the representatives of the Western Allies and Moshanov in Cairo did the Soviet armies enter Bulgaria. Stalin's improvisation in Bulgaria had gone very smoothly indeed.

British Attitude to Soviet Occupation of Bulgaria.

The FO was somewhat taken aback by the Soviet declaration of war on Bulgaria, especially as this came at a time when it seemed that finally Bulgaria was making a serious effort to get out of the war. Once the Western Ambassadors in Moscow had reported the news to their Governments, they

¹²⁵ Toshkova, V. *Bulgaria, neprinatyat...* p.19; Chakalov, G. *Ofitser za svruzka*. Sofia, Lari, 1993, p.25

¹²⁶ Dimitrov, I. *Ivan Bagryanov...* p.78; Toshkova, V. *Bulgaria, neprinatyat...* p.18

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p.21, 31; Rachev, St. *Churchill...* p.281, 286

returned to Molotov to find out the Soviet motives and intentions. They had been instructed not to express disapproval of the Soviet action. Clerk Kerr was directed to find out whether the Soviet Government had decided to join or proposed to end the current Cairo conversations as under the new circumstances they constituted separate peace negotiations. Molotov refrained from giving a direct answer and went into a long tirade about the whole course of Soviet relations with the last three Bulgarian Governments. He insisted that the Soviet break with Bulgaria was useful for all Three Allies. Beyond this statement which neither of the two Ambassadors challenged, he did not give any indication of the next Soviet move in Bulgaria.¹²⁹

Admittedly, Molotov could not have made commitments to any firm course. At the time, the Soviet actions regarding Bulgaria did not follow a firmly set plan. To a great extent they were formulated in response to the attitudes demonstrated by the other Big Powers. Stalin had always shown great interest in Bulgaria. However, while fighting with the Germans was still going on, he was not prepared to risk a major confrontation. Caution was characteristic of Stalin's behaviour. Before entering Bulgaria he waited to see that the West would not protest about the unilateral action of issuing a war declaration. When they entered Bulgaria, the Soviet troops were given strict orders not to interfere with internal developments as they were not carrying out a Communist revolution but a military operation. Soviet representatives told Bulgarian diplomats that they were not going to quarrel with their Allies over Bulgaria.¹³⁰

Despite displeasure at not being informed earlier, Britain and the United States quickly recognised the new situation. The changed position of the Soviet Union vis-à-vis the

¹²⁸ Rachev, *St. Churchill ...* p.294; Moshanov, *St. Moyata missiya...* p.358

¹²⁹ AVPRF, f.06, op.6, No.242, p.23, l.62–64, conversation Molotov - Harriman and Clark Kerr, 6.09.1944; FO371/43583, R14080, Clark Kerr to FO, 6.09.1944; FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.397, Harriman to Hull, 5.09.1944, p.401 – 402, Harriman to Hull, 7.09.1944

Bulgarian armistice talks was acknowledged with no hesitation and the Bulgarian armistice mission in Cairo was frozen until it was clear how further negotiations would proceed. This readiness to accommodate the Soviet views must have been registered in Moscow. It was a clear sign that the Western Allies were prepared to accept, even if not welcome, the Soviet action. Stalin understood that the West was not going to object to his having dealt firmly and unilaterally with Bulgaria. But this was also a precedent for future relations over the country.

In fact, the Soviet declaration of war on Bulgaria could partially be explained by British insistence that something should be done about Bulgaria by the Three Allies in concert. Throughout 1944, the FO had been in favour of increased Soviet pressure on Bulgaria and initially even regarded the Soviet move as aid to Britain's initiative.

Since the Red Army had began fighting on non-Soviet soil, there had been warnings in Britain against the possibility that the Soviet Union would soon be in a position to determine the future of Eastern Europe alone.¹³¹ But at that particular moment, the spring and summer of 1944, the FO had been worrying about the opposite, namely how to get the Soviet Union involved in policy towards the region. Britain recognised the Soviet interest, reinforced by geography and tradition, and was eager to use it for the purpose of eliminating Bulgaria from the European conflict. All the more so, since it had been long obvious that any effective military measures could be undertaken by Soviet troops only. For Britain, any consideration of the war operations was detached from positive post-war policy. The FO recognised the need for political planning but at the same time did not forget Soviet susceptibilities.¹³² Western analysts concluded that to a great extent the Soviet Union would determine the

¹³⁰ Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.27

¹³¹ De Santis, H. *The Diplomacy...* p.109

¹³² AIR9/461, PWE to COS, 16.04.1944

course of future developments in Bulgaria; therefore the less it perceived the Allies to threaten its natural claims, the less severe its eventual dominance would be.¹³³

The lack of co-ordination with the USSR had been judged to be detrimental to British political and propaganda efforts in Bulgaria. FO approaches to induce the Soviet Government to influence Bulgaria had in most cases ended without success.¹³⁴ There was a distinct feeling at the Southern Department that Soviet Russia wanted to preserve its special position in Bulgaria and therefore British intervention could harm British-Soviet co-operation.

In any case, the main British worries were about interests in Greece. In the spring of 1944, the FO began considering how to make sure that the Soviet Government understood the great importance of Greece for Britain.¹³⁵ When at the end of May 1944 Eden spoke to the Soviet Ambassador in London Fyodor Gussev, he made it clear that Britain did not object to the intensification of Soviet pressure on Bulgaria. Bulgaria's withdrawal from Greece would be of great military and political value for Britain's involvement there.¹³⁶

Simultaneously, the FO was considering how to make Moscow at least announce solidarity with Britain's actions regarding Bulgaria. British Balkan experts believed that any initiative with which the Soviet Union was associated had bigger chances of success in Bulgaria. Therefore, at the end of August the FO noticed with satisfaction that clandestine stations broadcasting over Bulgaria from the USSR were attacking the Bagryanov Government with increasing violence. British civil servants were not in the least perturbed by the fact that after having issued a statement which ostensibly

¹³³ FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.351-352, Berry to Hull, 21.07.1944

¹³⁴ FO371/43585, R17441, Clutton, 3.02.1944

¹³⁵ FO371/43596, R3421, FO to Algiers, 5.03.1944; FO371/43583, R67485, Clutton, 4.04.1944, Howard, 6.04.1944, R7443, Lord Moyne to FO, 9.05.1944

¹³⁶ FO371/43583, R8327, Eden to Clark Kerr, 26.05.1944

recognised the newly proclaimed Bulgarian neutrality, Moscow was also urging action by the Bulgarian Partisans to remove the Government and bring the Fatherland Front to power.¹³⁷ Western diplomats in Turkey worried about the contradiction in Soviet statements but before such observations were seriously considered by the FO or the State Department, they were overtaken by events.¹³⁸ In any case, as late as 29 August Knatchbull-Hugessen told Moshanov that since the Soviets recognised Bulgarian neutrality, all that had to be done was the conclusion of an armistice with the Western Allies.¹³⁹

At the same time, Britain hoped that the Soviet Union would not be satisfied by the announced Bulgarian neutrality and would press Bulgaria to turn against Germany. Between 29 August and 4 September 1944 Clark Kerr wrote to Molotov at least twice approving of the Soviet policy of dispelling Bulgarian notions that refuge could be taken in neutrality. On 31 August 1944 Eden thanked Gushev for the views expressed on Soviet radio and said that Soviet propaganda would be of great help while negotiations with Bulgaria were going on in Cairo.¹⁴⁰ When Moscow withdrew Gushev from deliberations on the Bulgarian armistice at the EAC, this was interpreted by both the FO and the State Department as a go-ahead for Britain and the United States to deal with Bulgaria. As late as 4 September Lord Moyne wrote to London that Soviet propaganda and Soviet withdrawal from the EAC and the Cairo talks meant that 'the Russians would settle on our own terms'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ FO371/43586, R13699, Lord Killearn to FO, 29.08.1944

¹³⁸ FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.381, Berry to Hull, 30.08.1944

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, Harriman to Hull, 26.08.1944, p.377, Winant to Hull, 29.08.1944; Knatchbull-Hugessen, Sir Hughe. *Diplomat in Peace and War*. London: John Murray, 1949. p.204; Moshanov, St. *Moyata missiya...* p.298 – 299

¹⁴⁰ FO371/43584, R15149, Clerk Kerr to Molotov, 29.08.1944, R15150, Clerk Kerr to Molotov, 4.09.1944

¹⁴¹ FO371/43583, R13685, Eden to Clark Kerr, 31.08.1944, R13963, Lord Moyne to FO, 4.09.1944, R14012, FO to Moscow, 5.09.1944; FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.395, British Embassy Washington to State, 4.09.1944

In the spring and summer of 1944 with the Bulgarian question evidently coming to a crisis, Britain had even considered proposing to the Soviet Government that it declare war on Bulgaria. In the end, when this happened without its prior agreement, the British Government was astonished but not worried.¹⁴² It was eager to find an explanation as to why the Soviet Government had not consulted it. Only then did the FO realise that it had not been informed of at least three communications between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union.¹⁴³ British civil servants and diplomats disagreed as to whether it had always been the Soviet plan to act alone in Bulgaria or whether Moscow had undertaken a last-minute action in order to join the armistice negotiations.¹⁴⁴ Turkey, preoccupied with fear of the Red Army on its northern border, blamed Britain for delaying the Cairo talks and thus giving Soviet troops the opportunity to occupy Bulgaria.¹⁴⁵ Bulgarian Premier Muraviev later wrote that in the crucial days after 5 September 1944, both Britain and the United States demonstrated a total lack of involvement with Bulgaria.¹⁴⁶

* * *

The stubborn aversion of the British Ambassador to subversive methods coupled with the unfavourable political situation in Bulgaria had left the British special services with insufficient time to prepare the foundation for their work in the country before the evacuation of the British Legation in early March 1941. As a result the SOE suffered a series of setbacks in its operations in Bulgaria and was able to complete only a fraction of its objectives in the rest of the Balkans. The two British Military Missions sent in with huge difficulties towards the end of the war, ended in disaster. As Sargent concluded in June

¹⁴² FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.361, British Embassy *aide-memoire* to State, 20.08.1944; Kennedy-Pipe, C. *Stalin's Cold War...* p.45

¹⁴³ FO371/43584, R14275, Clerk Kerr to FO, 9.09.1944

¹⁴⁴ FO371/43584, R14137, McDermott, 8.09.1944, Clutton, 9.09.1944

¹⁴⁵ FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.392, Steinhart to Hull, 2.09.1944

¹⁴⁶ Muraviev, K. *Subitiya...* p.381

1944, the work of the SOE had hardly been satisfactory and 'ever since the beginning of the war, their one and only showpiece has been [the Agrarian] Dimitrov'.¹⁴⁷ This sober assessment of the futility of wartime links made British foreign policy makers realise how weak the basis for the promotion of Britain's post-war interests in Bulgaria was.

Whitehall officials generally agreed that it was leftist organisations, which were going to force Bulgaria's break with Germany. It was not illogical for British planners to envisage that the detachment of Bulgaria from the Axis could be accompanied by serious political or social turmoil. Such likelihood was usually associated with the growth of the role of the Communists as the most vociferous opponents of Germany. The prospect of increased Communist influence anywhere in the Balkans was viewed by most British policy makers as undesirable. It became even less palatable when considered as a stepping-stone for strengthening the positions of Soviet Russia in the region. Simultaneously British officials realised that one of the few methods to diminish the chances of a Communist seizure of power, was British preparedness to support anti-Communist elements in Bulgaria. However, in the last months before the Bulgarian surrender, the options and advantages of British involvement in Bulgarian internal politics remained largely unexplored. In fact, in the course of the war, there had been steady deterioration of the importance of political planning regarding Bulgaria and attention was increasingly concentrated on military goals. The closer real fighting moved to Bulgaria's boundaries, the more British planners were prepared to drop their political schemes.

Despite Britain's limited ability to affect Bulgaria's participation in the war, most British officials dealing with Bulgaria believed it possible and planned for a most significant role at the time the country decided to back out of the conflict. The fact that the United States had made it clear that it would not consider occupying Bulgaria and that the Soviet Union

¹⁴⁷ FO371/43586, R9693, Sargent, 22.06.1944

was not at war with Bulgaria, left the British Government with the impression that it would have the leading part in the peace negotiations. British politicians and diplomats had always recognised the special position of Russia vis-à-vis the Balkans. But the radical change of situation, which occurred when the Soviets reached the Danube and declared war on Bulgaria, caught virtually all British planners unprepared. The tortuous peace talks in Cairo lost momentum and it soon became obvious that Britain's plans had to be adjusted to reflect the new balance of internal and external forces in Bulgaria.

Part Two

‘Britain Has to Be A Little More than A Spectator’ *

Chapter Three

The Principles of British Post-war Policy towards Bulgaria

Throughout 1943 and 1944, British policy towards Bulgaria had been most concerned with the necessity to force the country out of the war and break the main Axis link in the Balkans. British efforts were only partly successful as Soviet pressure proved to be the primary factor behind Bulgaria's exit from the European conflict. British diplomats had foreseen the increased role of the Soviet Union in South Eastern Europe in the final stages of the Second World War. They expected Soviet influence not only in Bulgaria but in the whole region to extend into the post-war period. To British planners the sober acknowledgement of Soviet strength did not imply relinquishment of British long-term interests in the Balkans.

Whitehall plans for the preservation of Britain's world role consistently recognised the Balkan Peninsula's strategic importance as flanking the Mediterranean route to British imperial possessions. Both before and during the war, Britain had paid a great deal of attention to its traditional ally Greece; considerable diplomatic and military resources had also been invested in the effort to enlist neutral Turkey in the Allies' camp. The British Government had a vested interest in the security, stability and prosperity of these two

* Churchill in conversation with Stalin, Moscow, 9.10.1944

countries which guarded the approaches to the Straits. British political and military analysts had to enquire into the consequences of potential Soviet strategic gains near the Straits, possibly combined with the 'export' of the Soviet socio-political system in the area. The British Government faced the question of whether through the countries it had occupied at the end of the war, Soviet Russia would be able to penetrate the continent even further to the south and west.

The vital significance of these matters inspired the Foreign and War Offices to renew attention to Bulgaria whose position under Soviet occupation was acquiring special dimensions. The country bordered both Greece and Turkey and could easily become a base for ideological or military aggression against them. Bulgaria's defeat in the war had not destroyed its claims to adjoining territories. Soviet support for these claims could facilitate the emergence of Bulgaria into an instrument of Soviet foreign policy, whatever the latter's objectives. To preclude such a possibility, Britain would have to strive to built up Bulgaria's abilities and will to resist Soviet pressure. To achieve this goal, British policy makers were required to devise practical methods to ensure that Bulgaria developed into an independent, economically viable and democratic nation state.

The Consequences of the Percentage Agreement for Bulgaria. The British Government preferred to maintain amicable relations with the Soviet Government after the war. On the other hand, quite early in the war, British foreign policy makers had identified areas where the interests of the two Great Powers overlapped and which could become the subject of a renewed Anglo-Soviet controversy. The potential of the Balkans to stir trouble in European relations was easily recognised, especially in view of their having been one of the primary reasons for the Nazi-Soviet breach in late 1940. The logic of British foreign policy thinking required a course of action, which would accommodate both Britain's desire for sustained influence in the region and its hope of not alienating

the USSR because of this. For a short period between the autumn of 1944 and the spring of 1945, such a delicate balance seemed to have been found in the so-called percentage agreement which Churchill and Stalin struck on the eve of 9 October 1944.

In the non-Communist world the deal was known before the opening of the British archives as most of the direct and indirect participants spoke of it in their memoirs.¹ The release of the relevant Soviet documents after the collapse of Communism marked official Russian acknowledgement of the previously denied percentage agreement. The Russian records seem more detailed than the British but on the whole confirm the veracity of the long-released British papers.²

It is hardly necessary to repeat the details of the famous episode on the evening of 9 October 1944. By his own admission, Churchill put on a note a series of percentages, which would show the division of responsibility in the Balkans between Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Stalin approved it with a large blue pencil tick.³ This rough copy then became the document, which served as the basis for the following negotiations by the British and Soviet Foreign Ministers. The system, which emerged from the Moscow negotiations between 9

¹ Churchill, W.S. *The Second...* vol.VI. p.197–199; The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs...* p.482–483; Hull, Cordell. *The Memoirs...* p. 1252–1258; Stettinius, E. R. *Roosevelt and the Russians. The Yalta Conference*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1950. p.20–22; Bohlen, Ch. *Witness to History 1929 – 1969*. London: Weidenfield&Nicolson, 1973. p.163–165; Harriman, A. and E.Abel. *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin 1941 - 1946*. New York: Random House, 1975. p.356–358; Harvey, J. *The War Diaries...* p. 359. The British interpreter at the meeting did not refer to the deal, Birse, A.H. *Memoirs of an Interpreter*. London: Michael Joseph, 1967. p.170. One of the Russian interpreters mentioned Churchill's proposal but denied the conclusion of a deal, Berezhkov, V. *History in the Making. Memoirs of World War II Diplomacy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984. p.369–374.

² The Russian records are in AVPRF, f.6, op.6, p.23, no.228 and in the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (APRF), f.45, op.1, no.282. The Russian record of the Churchill - Stalin conversation of 9.10.1944 has been put into an English translation in Rzheshesky, O.A. 'Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe (1944 - 1945): Liberation or Occupation? Documents and Commentary.' Lecture. Oxford: St.Antony's College, April 1995. The British records are in PREM3, 66/7, FO181, 990/2 and FO371/43601 and have been published in Siracusa, J.M. 'The Meaning of TOLSTOY: Churchill, Stalin and the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944.' *Diplomatic History*, vol.3, no.4, fall 1979. p.443–463.

³ Churchill's account, Churchill, W.S. *The Second...* vol.VI. p.197–199, has been quoted by many historians, Feis, H. *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967. p.448–449; Resis, Albert. 'The Churchill-Stalin Secret "Percentages" Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944.' *American Historical Review*, vol.83, no.2, April 1978. p.368–369; Siracusa, J.M. 'The Meaning...' p.443–444

and 11 October 1944, was intended to represent roughly the respective share of the two Big Powers in Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Hungary.

While Churchill was explaining his idea to Stalin he did not mention Bulgaria at all. In Churchill's initial note Britain's influence in Bulgaria was fixed at twenty-five percent. In the course of the following two days, Eden had to make further concessions by which Britain's portion in Bulgaria was reduced to twenty percent.⁴

Messages from the British delegation in Moscow to the British Cabinet and the Foreign Office explained that the percentages did not determine the number of British or Soviet representatives on the prospective Allied Control Commissions for Germany's ex-satellites. Nor did the figures signify the presence of pro-Soviet or pro-Western members in the countries' future first post-war Governments.⁵

Churchill deliberately tried to alleviate the fears of the US administration that an old-fashioned secret bargain had taken place behind the small nations' backs. In telegrams to President Roosevelt and his advisor Harry Hopkins, the British Prime Minister denied in advance any potential accusations that a spheres-of-influence deal had been executed.⁶ This was in accord with an earlier message to Roosevelt in which in May 1944, Churchill had stated that Britain did 'not of course wish to carve up the Balkans into spheres of influence'.⁷ Churchill himself had asked Stalin to agree that in official releases the phrase 'dividing into spheres' would be glossed over by suitable diplomatic language.⁸ According to the Soviet stenographer, Churchill said:

⁴ FO371/43601, R16315, Eden to FO, 10.10.1944

⁵ PREM3, 66/7, p.177, Strang and Sargent to Eden, 11.10.1944, p.176, Eden to Sargent, 12.10.1944; Resis, A. *The Churchill - Stalin Secret...* p.371

⁶ PREM3, 66/7, Churchill to Hopkins, 12.10.1944; FO371/43647, R16426, Churchill to Hopkins, 11.10.1944

⁷ Feis, H. *Churchill...* p.340

⁸ Siracusa, J.M. *The Meaning...* p. 447

The Americans will be shocked at seeing this document. But Marshal Stalin is a realist and he, Churchill, is not distinguished by sentimentality, while Eden is an absolutely wicked man. He, Churchill, did not show this document to the British Cabinet, but the British Cabinet usually consent to what he, Churchill, and Eden suggest. As for Parliament, the Cabinet has a majority in Parliament, and even if this document is shown to the Parliament, they will understand nothing of it.⁹

During and after their Moscow visit, Churchill and Eden repeatedly stressed what the percentages were *not*. Both vigorously refuted the few attempts on part of FO to translate the percentages into practical measures to be taken up by British representatives in Eastern Europe. As early as 12 October 1944, Eden wrote to Sargent that 'too much attention should not be paid to percentages which are of symbolic character only'.¹⁰ Churchill, the ultimate authority on the percentage deal, later insisted:

...the system of percentages [is intended] to express the interest and sentiment with which the British and Soviet Governments approach the problem of these countries, so that they might reveal their minds to each other in some way that could be comprehended. It is not intended to be more than a guide...¹¹

Despite the rhetoric, a close inspection of Churchill's proposal to Stalin reveals that he had done exactly what he was refusing to acknowledge. Deciphering the contents of the famous half sheet of paper is possible only in the context of the spheres-of-influence concept, whereby the rival Great Powers struck an agreement to apportion disputed territories. In October 1944, the Soviet Union and Great Britain reached a compromise by which they recognised each other's interests in certain areas of the Balkans and Eastern Europe and drew a line between their respective zones. The later practical complications arose only

⁹ Rzheshesky, O.A. 'Soviet Policy...' p.7

¹⁰ PREM3, 66/7, Eden to Sargent, 12.10.1944; Holdrich, P.G.H. 'A Policy of Percentages? British Policy in the Balkans after the Moscow Conference of October 1944.' *International History Review*, vol.IX, no.1, February 1987. p.31-32.

¹¹ Churchill, W.S. *The Second...* vol.VI. p.203-204

because the agreement did not envisage closed spheres in which each power would have exclusive influence. Instead of a division on purely geographical terms, Churchill suggested a scheme in which a majority share in one country was offset by a minority share in another, whereby an overall equilibrium seemed to be maintained.

The official record suggests that real bargaining started only after Stalin had 'ticked off' Churchill's original set of figures. It was the failure to reach a complete understanding on Bulgaria that proved the greatest obstacle to sealing the scheme immediately. Until they took up the question of Bulgaria, the Big Two had struck a perfect deal: the percentages for Greece were reciprocated by those for Romania, in both Hungary and Yugoslavia a fifty-fifty division was contemplated. In these cases, not much discussion had been necessary. From the beginning *Churchill* conceded a much greater Soviet interest, declaring that 'Bulgaria owed more to Russia than to any other country'. Stalin challenged the degree of interest in Bulgaria which Britain professed.¹² Several times the discussion deviated from and then returned to Bulgaria, treating it as a part of a broader framework which involved also Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia and even Italy. Stalin and Churchill were unable to agree on what exactly was included in their respective shares in Bulgaria and referred the Bulgarian issue for clarification to their Foreign Ministers.¹³

Two subsequent conversations between the British and Soviet leading diplomats dealt predominantly with Bulgaria. In the course of the war this was possibly the moment when the greatest deal of attention was paid to Bulgaria at the highest level. What can be extracted from the Moscow negotiations is the best example of British policy thinking on the country. Two premises ruled Britain's attitude, both related to Bulgaria's geographic position. Firstly, Bulgaria was a country on the Black Sea, where the Soviet Union should have complete

¹² Siracusa, J.M. *'The Meaning...'* p.448, 450

¹³ Resis, A. *'The Churchill - Stalin Secret...'* p.373-374

freedom. Secondly, Bulgaria should withdraw its troops from Greece which was in Britain's sphere of influence.¹⁴ Churchill also told Stalin that unlike Romania where it was a spectator, Britain wanted to be 'a little more than a spectator in Bulgaria'.¹⁵

The Moscow talks were unique in that the issues were discussed and solved in the undisguised language of power politics.¹⁶ The larger implications of the percentage agreement can be comprehended in relation to the shifting balance of power in Europe in the second half of 1944 which Churchill had been observing with increasing apprehension.¹⁷ Even before the Soviet armies appeared in the Balkans the FO discussed the traditional Soviet involvement there. Churchill's sensitivities were triggered not by any definite Soviet actions but rather by what he understood to be Soviet threats to take action.

At the end of April 1944, after the suppression of the Greek forces' mutiny in the Middle East and the dispatch of an SOE Mission to Romania, Molotov accused the British Government of disregarding the legitimate interests of the people concerned. Before Soviet troops started their march across the Balkans, further small and not necessarily related incidents were constructed by British diplomats into a logical chain of events, which seemed to indicate rising Soviet ambitions in the Balkans. One crucial occasion for display of this suspiciousness was the secret dispatch on 25 July 1944 of a Soviet Military Mission to the Greek Communists.¹⁸ Eden had already drawn attention to 'Russia's intentions to play her

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.376-377

¹⁵ The Russian record attributes this phrase to Eden, Rzheshesvsky, O.A. 'Soviet Policy...' p.7.

¹⁶ Kimball, Warren F. *'Naked Reverse Right: Churchill, Roosevelt and Eastern Europe from TOLSTOY to Yalta and a Little Beyond.'* *Diplomatic History*. vol.IX, no.1, winter 1985. p.2

¹⁷ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.127; Feis, H. *Churchill...* p.349

¹⁸ FO371/43636, R11461, PM to Eden, 1.08.1944; FO371/72194, R5413, FO paper on British and Soviet interests in the Balkans, 10.08.1943; Iatrides, J.O. (ed.) *Ambassador McVeagh Reports: Greece 1933 – 1947*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980. p.572; McNeill, W.H. *America...* p.390; Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.139; Xydis, St.G. *'The Secret Anglo-Soviet Agreement on the Balkans of 9 October 1944.'* *Journal of Central European Affairs*. vol.XV, no.3, October 1955. p.257, 259. At the same time the Soviets increased their attention to Turkey, Deringil, S. *Turkey's...* p.175-176.

own hand in the Balkans regardless of our desires and interests'.¹⁹ After consultation with the FO, the Foreign Secretary reported to the Cabinet that 'the Russians were using the Communist-dominated movements to gain a predominant position in South East Europe'.²⁰

The manner of the Soviet Government, not consulting or even informing its Allies of particular actions, was itself another reason for British irritation. In the autumn of 1944, Britain's willingness to clarify its existing and future standing vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the Balkans grew in proportion to the concentration of what looked like Soviet attempts to gain a serious political foothold in the region. In fact, acutely conscious of the strategic issues at stake, British diplomats had tried unsuccessfully to establish a common Allied policy in the Balkans for almost a year since the Moscow Conference of October 1943. At that time, preoccupied with military issues the Soviet Government refrained from entering into political discussions so as not to prejudice its standing at the end of hostilities.²¹

After October 1943, the British Chiefs of Staff had reviewed measures for British defence in the post-war era. In mid-1944, the Post-Hostilities Planning Committee defined the only foreseeable danger as a breach with the Soviet Union. Eden's opinion was that unless it incorporated an Anglo-Soviet alliance, any security scheme would precipitate the very danger it was intended to decrease.²² The successful conduct of the war had prompted the FO to emphasise the need for an early understanding with Soviet Russia on a number of post-war issues. This was especially true of the Balkans where British influence was under challenge. In the first half of 1944, it was becoming less certain that the military disposition at the end of hostilities would bear favourably on vital British strategic and economic

¹⁹ The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs*... p.459

²⁰ FO371/43646, R9092, FO paper and Eden memorandum, 7.06.1944

²¹ Sainsbury, K. *The Turning Point*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985. p.53-61; The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs*... p.412, 417

²² Keeble, Sir Curtis. *Britain*.... p.188-189

interests in the region. Realising that their forces might not be sufficient to safeguard a large and unstable zone, British policy makers had to introduce a degree of flexibility in their tactics. They had to work out a clear idea of what the minimum British interests were and how to secure them.²³ British diplomats could only achieve this clarification in response to a sound understanding of the changing Soviet objectives and their possible manipulation.

The value of Greece for British strategy in the Balkans had never been questioned in Whitehall. British influence there had to be retained at any cost. The FO considered the possibility of any Soviet intervention fatal. Although earlier in the war British analysts had given Soviet intentions towards Greece the benefit of the doubt, they were never inclined to watch developments passively. By mid-1944, the steady approach of the Soviet armies to Greece coupled with Soviet pressure on the Straits seemed to form an ominous combination. What was more, Britain itself had seen to the strengthening of the Greek – and Yugoslav – Communist movements as a part of the general anti-Axis military effort. In the early summer of 1944, the clash between British short- and long-term interests had come to a head.²⁴

For two months in the summer of 1944, the Prime Minister put an enormous effort into persuading not only the British War Cabinet but above all, the US President and State Department that there was a way to keep the Soviet Union out of Greece. His proposed method was to agree with the Soviet Union that for the duration of the war in Europe Britain should take the lead in Greece, and the Soviet Union in Romania. Overcoming the difficulties posed by an evasive Roosevelt and a State Department adamantly hostile to any idea of 'division of responsibility', in mid-July 1944 Churchill wrote to Stalin that the

²³ Ross, K.G.M. *'The Moscow Conference of October 1944 (Tolstoy).'* Barker, E. *British Political...* p.68

²⁴ The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs...* p.459

scheme could go ahead. The initial understanding was that this was a temporary agreement which would be tested in the course of the following three months.²⁵

Because of US reluctance and slowness to accept the British proposal, there was some confusion in the FO as to whether the three-month trial period was ever enforced. Also, as the Soviet Union maintained its links with the Greek Communists, it appeared to be acting beyond the temporarily agreed boundaries of its zone.²⁶

The provisional wartime division of spheres of influence in the Balkans clearly gave Stalin a clue about Britain's ultimate goals. It was perfectly clear that Britain would not tolerate any Soviet pretensions to Greece.

British attitude to the other Balkan countries is still subject to differing historical interpretations. Bulgaria is a particularly confusing case. British policy makers were on the whole realistic about their minimal influence over wartime developments in that country. But they were also reluctant to trade it off as easily as Romania had been for freedom of action in Greece. Indeed, at one moment in June 1944, when Churchill was particularly anxious to bring the US President round to his point of view, he mentioned that the trial agreement would also cover actions in Bulgaria.²⁷ But he did not repeat this, possibly because it seemed to raise rather than alleviate US suspicions.

FO officials preferred to keep Bulgaria in Britain's sphere, or at least not to forsake it at the very beginning of negotiations. They realised that in the worst possible scenario, Bulgaria would have to be assigned to the Soviet zone. In August 1944, an FO memorandum stipulated that Britain could not concentrate on the country.²⁸ Eden's own opinion fluctuated.

²⁵ FO371/43636, Churchill - Eden, May-October 1944; Harvey, J. *The War Diaries...* p.344, 348

²⁶ Ross, K.G.M. '*The Moscow Conference...*' p.69-70

²⁷ Hull, C. *The Memoirs...* p. 1453-1258

²⁸ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.128; The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs...* p.460

In the spring of 1944, the Foreign Secretary seemed to be more inclined to abandon Bulgaria as at that moment Soviet danger to Greece was perceived to be too great. In the summer, when he thought the three-month agreement obliged the Soviet Union to keep away from Greece, Eden spoke of retaining British influence, although not at the cost of a resulting antagonism with the USSR. It now seems that Eden was waiting for some clarification of the Soviet attitude towards Bulgaria. This would be telling of future Soviet intentions and would also give Britain a basis for the formulation of its own objectives.²⁹

In the course of the trial period between July and September 1944, in the intensive exchange of opinions about the Balkans, neither Eden nor any FO Balkan specialist denied the Soviet Union a greater interest in Bulgaria. What the FO insisted on was that the British Government should not reveal its preparedness to abandon Bulgaria in unfavourable circumstances. Bulgaria had to be kept as a reserve bargaining card, possibly to be played in the final negotiations. This is what happened in Moscow and this is why suddenly Bulgaria constituted such a difficulty in October 1944. In the end, Eden was bound to accept less British influence in Bulgaria than Churchill had contemplated. The crucial reason for this – apart from Soviet intransigence – was that from the summer of 1944 the ambiguous British attitude to Bulgaria had made it impossible for the Government to decide on any firm demands for privileges in that country. At the October 1944 negotiations Eden repeatedly stated that all he wanted was to make sure Britain had more voice in Bulgaria than in Romania but made it clear that ultimately he cared for Greece, and Turkey. As resoluteness had been lacking in relation to Bulgaria its abandonment ‘in the real battle’ was almost a foregone conclusion.³⁰

²⁹ Resis, A. *'The Churchill - Stalin Secret...'* p.375; Barker, E. *British Policy...* p.143; Garson, R. *'Churchill's Spheres of Influence': Rumania and Bulgaria.* *Survey*. vol. 24, no.3, summer 1979. p.144-145, 153-156

³⁰ FO371/43601, R16186, Eden, 6.10.1944, R16586, Eden to Sargent, 15.10.1944; The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs...* p.483

Given the FO's down-to-earth approach to Bulgaria, the Prime Minister's and the Foreign Secretary's actions in Moscow caused no worry in London.³¹ British civil servants barely changed their attitude towards the Balkans after the percentage deal. They simply continued to work on the assumption that the Soviet Union would have a greater say in all the countries which did not have a special status in British foreign policy. The advantage lay in the fact that the FO could rest reassured that the Soviet Government had no hostile intentions towards Greece.³²

Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office characterised the news of the percentage agreement as 'nothing much' but was relieved that some understanding in regard to the Balkans generally seemed to have been reached.³³ Sargent was glad that 'Eden had done well'.³⁴ Oliver Harvey, Eden's Private Secretary, who was often markedly critical of Churchill's foreign policy methods, voiced no objections to the Moscow agreement at which he was present. He was especially content with the result of 'Eden's plain speaking'. What is more, three months after Moscow, Harvey still thought that there was 'much to be said for Russian claims to play a leading part in the East... as we claim in West'. He even admitted that it was time for Britain to accept that it could not 'have [its] cake and eat it as HMG always expect[ed]'.³⁵ On the whole those British officials who were familiar with the terms of the percentage deal approved of it or accepted it as the least bad solution. They had probably resigned themselves to granting the Soviet Union a free hand in the Balkans apart from Greece, and had seen in the Moscow negotiations one last British attempt to gain more than the absolute minimum. Churchill himself came back from

³¹ FO371/43601, R16547, Sargent to Eden, 11.10.1944; Holdrich, P.G.H. 'A Policy ...' p.45, interprets this as criticism by the Foreign Office.

³² Harvey, J. *The War Diaries...* p.363

³³ Dilks, D. (ed.) *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan O.M. 1938 - 1945*. London: Cassell, 1971. p.672

³⁴ Young, K. *The Diaries of Sir Robert...* p.360

³⁵ Harvey, J. *The War Diaries...* p.363, 368

Moscow sure that he had reached not only a realistic agreement but also the best possible for British interests in Greece.³⁶

Among the positive results of the percentage deal Britain could count the assertion that it would remain the leading Mediterranean power. In exchange, Churchill conceded that the Black Sea was a Soviet lake, probably not forgetting that the Black Sea was significant for the Soviet Union exactly because it opened to the Eastern Mediterranean.³⁷ At the same time, Stalin increased pressure on the Straits by reiterating a demand for a new international agreement on the regime of passage through them. Churchill readily recognised the need to substitute the obsolete Montreux convention. Stalin assured Churchill that the Soviet Government had no plans to make any country Communist. Stalin claimed that he was exercising restraining influence on the local Communist Parties in the occupied countries. However, by saying that some Communists would not listen even to him, Stalin seemed to be warning of the difficulties he could create in Eastern Europe.³⁸ Without giving any firm commitment Stalin touched upon British sensitivities.

Because of its ambiguity the percentage scheme has been interpreted differently in historiography. One analysis maintains that the preliminary three-month deal predetermined the final disposition of the forces.³⁹ A radically opposite assertion is that the Moscow figures represented an already existing on the ground division.⁴⁰ A third version claims that quite opposite from trying to perpetuate the situation at the time, Churchill in fact made a bid for larger British influence in the Balkans than could be secured with the few thousand British

³⁶ Garson, R. *'Churchill's 'Spheres...'* p.145

³⁷ Xydis, St.G. *'The Secret...'* p.263

³⁸ Resis, A. *'The Churchill - Stalin Secret...'* p.375

³⁹ Xydis, St.G. *'The Secret...'* p.256

⁴⁰ Holdrich, P.G.H. *'A Policy...'*; Kennedy-Pipe, C. *Stalin's Cold War...* p.47

troops in Greece.⁴¹ If the latter is accepted, then it was quite an opportunistic bid which Churchill had no resources to support. He could only rely on Stalin's good will and this was exactly what he did not trust and therefore pressed for a division of responsibilities. The most he could hope for was to have Stalin's word so that, if necessary, he would be able to show later that Stalin had violated it. But this could hardly be the case with an unwritten secret understanding which Britain could not admit even to its US Ally. The fact was, as Churchill told the House of Commons on 18 January 1945, that he had tried to avoid disagreement with Soviet Russia.⁴² The result of his attempt was uncertain because there was no mutually acceptable interpretation of the percentages. The crucial achievement was that Britain had secured Greece.⁴³

The Problems of the Bulgarian Armistice.

While the Anglo-Soviet talks were taking place in October 1944, armistice negotiations with Bulgaria began in the Soviet capital on 15 October 1944.⁴⁴ Unaware of the percentage deal, the Bulgarian representatives were among the first to experience its practical effects. The elaboration of the terms, with which Bulgaria was presented by the victors, was a test for the feasibility of the Moscow deal. Earlier inter-Allied discussions of the Bulgarian armistice had revealed serious differences arising from the uneven geopolitical importance of Bulgaria for each of the three principal Allies.

Britain and the USA had already decided to make Bulgarian withdrawal from the occupied territories a preliminary condition for armistice negotiations. This and some other terms of the Bulgarian armistice were the subject of some 'pretty vigorous

⁴¹ Garson, Robert. 'Churchill's 'Spheres...'

⁴² Holdrich, P.G.H. 'A Policy...' p.42

⁴³ *Ibid.* p.37 -40

⁴⁴ Dimitrov, G. *Dnevnik...* p.443

exchanges' between Eden and Molotov in Moscow, becoming related to the final version of the percentage scheme.⁴⁵

The last three wartime Bulgarian Governments had been unable to draw Bulgaria out of the war for the simple reason that they hoped to extract territorial concessions from the Allies. The Muraviev Government broke off with Germany but did not cancel Bulgarian administration of the 'new lands' in Yugoslavia and Greece, either. Even while the Red Army was overrunning Bulgaria, Bulgarian troops remained in occupation of Yugoslav Macedonia and Greek Aegean Thrace. British observers interpreted this as an indication that Bulgaria was going to try to get from the USSR what Britain had denied it. After all, only four years earlier, in its proposal for a non-aggression pact the Soviet Union had offered Bulgaria an outlet on the Aegean in return for Soviet bases on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast.⁴⁶ Another disquieting factor for British policy makers was that the USA did not fully oppose the Bulgarian territorial claims, just like it had been in favour of some concessions to Bulgaria at the end of the First World War.⁴⁷

To Britain all these developments looked very unsatisfactory; after all, a considerable part of Britain's war effort in the Balkans had aimed at putting an end to Bulgarian occupation of parts of Greece and Yugoslavia. After Bulgaria had been knocked out of the war, Britain had been given no categorical assurances that the Soviet armies were going to stop on the southern Bulgarian border. This issue became a matter of great significance.

British wartime planning had deemed it essential that Bulgaria should be forced out of the war in such a way as not to affect the interests of the small Balkan Allies and the security

⁴⁵ The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs*... p.482-483

⁴⁶ FO371/43613, R13392, FORD paper, 24.08.1944; FO371/43600, R15270, Laskey, 26.09.1944; FO371/43649, R20431, Leeper to FO, 11.11.1944

⁴⁷ FO371/43613, R13392, FORD paper, 24.08.1944; FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.343, proposed terms, 17.06.1944

of the Straits. Instead, in September 1944 with Soviet involvement, if not encouragement, Bulgaria was likely to acquire a position from which it could threaten the fragile Balkan equilibrium. There was no regular Greek force to stop any invasion. No British detachments had yet been dispatched to Greek territory, but even if they had been, they would not have been prepared for an Anglo-Soviet clash. The situation attracted a great deal of attention as British military and political leaders followed closely the slightest movement of Soviet and Bulgarian troops on the Bulgarian-Greek border. On 16 September 1944, in an attempt to ascertain the intentions of the new Bulgarian Government regarding Greece a British Military Mission arrived in Sofia from Drama in northern Greece. The British officers informed representatives of the Bulgarian Government that imminent British landings were going to take place at Dedeagatch, Kavalla and to the east of Salonika.⁴⁸ The message implied that any remaining Bulgarian troops in Greece would soon face British military detachments. It was meant to dissuade the Bulgarian Government from harbouring any hopes of continuing the occupation of Greek Thrace. On 21 September 1944, after consultation with the Joint Planning Staff Churchill wrote to Stalin that British troops would soon land in Greece so there was no need for a Soviet advance in that direction.⁴⁹ Sending this information to Stalin was designed to pre-empt any dreaded Soviet move towards Greece. On 27 September, with the British divisions still a week from their arrival in southern Greece, Churchill wrote a second message to Stalin, informing him of his wish to go to Moscow.⁵⁰

The timing of these telegrams is not coincidental. They suggest that Churchill and Eden felt the need to talk to Stalin in person while the situation in the Balkans was still unsettled. The appearance of the Red Army in the Balkans could be explained by military expediency, but

⁴⁸ Toshkova, V. *Bulgaria, nepriznatiyat...* p.39

⁴⁹ Holdrich, P.G.H. *'A Policy ...'* p.30

the British leaders feared it could prejudice long-term developments. Most British analysts were convinced that British influence and prestige would sustain a great blow if the Soviet army crossed into Greek territory or Bulgarian detachments were allowed to remain there indefinitely. That is why Churchill wanted to make an effort to compensate with political negotiations for what Great Britain lacked in military presence in the region. British anxieties were complicated by the fact that Communist guerrillas were especially active in the northern Greek provinces, still controlled by Bulgarian troops. If EAM, the leftist resistance movement headed by the Greek Communist Party, was to get material and military support from Soviet Russia, a Greek civil war could easily flare up. These considerations were on Churchill's mind when in Moscow he told Stalin that they should not 'get at cross purposes' but should work to prevent the eruption of 'mini-wars' in the Balkans.

Even though it now seems that they were not intended to provoke Britain, Bulgarian actions in Aegean Greece were a cause for British concern. Already on 11 September 1944, the Fatherland Front Government sent to the Kavalla region two Government Ministers, the Communists Dobri Terpeshev and the Social Democrat Dimitar Neikov, accompanied by one of the leaders of the Bulgarian Communist resistance in southern Bulgaria. They met representatives of the Greek Partisans and promised them the Bulgarian Government's help. They urged local EAM-ELAS detachments to come down from the mountains and take over power in the countryside. On their part, the retreating Bulgarian civil authorities were instructed to hand over control of local affairs to the population. All this aroused the suspicions of British observers, as it was evidently meant to aid Greek left-wing resistance against nationalist guerrillas loyal to the London-supported Greek Government-in-exile. For this reason, Terpeshev's speeches on his tour

⁵⁰ Feis, H. *Churchill...* p.441

of Aegean Thrace which drew parallels between the struggle of Bulgarian and Greek Partisans and extolled the decisive intervention of the Soviet army in Bulgaria sounded all the more menacing.⁵¹

The situation in Thrace, aggravated by the Soviet presence in the Balkans, worried Whitehall officials. Their fears were exacerbated by the panic which had overwhelmed the Greek Government-in-exile when Bulgaria had turned on Germany and declared that Bulgarian troops were going to help drive the Germans out of the Balkans. The Greek Royal Government flooded the FO with protests against any Bulgarians remaining in Greece under any pretext.⁵² The Greeks were eager to prevent later Bulgarian claims for participation in the liberation of Greece. Bulgaria could then campaign for a co-belligerent status, which in Greek eyes was a single step away from renewal of territorial aspirations. Even at such a precarious moment Greek exiled leaders confirmed their own counter-demands for the rectification of the border at Bulgaria's expense.⁵³ British diplomats found themselves under the double burden of their own apprehensions and the genuine, if somewhat overplayed, Greek alarm. And Greek mistrust of Bulgarian intentions for Eastern Thrace seemed all the more justified since it was shared by the Royal Hellenic Government and the left-wing EAM activists.⁵⁴ This fact was not to be discounted as it was important that after the war Britain should remain on good terms with the future Government of Greece, whatever the latter's political complexion.

In October 1944, the British perceptions were that the USSR was assuming a threatening stance regarding Greece. Scrutiny of Soviet behaviour reveals that by October 1944 Soviet Russia was prepared to relinquish any position in Greece. Major Micklethwaite-

⁵¹ Rachev, *St. Churchill...* p.305, 309, 316

⁵² FO371/43600, R15274, Papandreou to Leeper, 1.09.1944

⁵³ FO371/43602, R18455, Athens to FO, 13.11.1944; FO371/43649, R20431, Leeper to FO, 19.11.1944

⁵⁴ Toshkova, *V. Bulgaria, nepriznatiyat...* p.23

Miller of the SOE, who had spoken with the Bulgarian Deputy War Minister in Sofia on 16 September 1944, had been explicitly told that 'the [Bulgarian] troops will go out and will not intervene in Greek affairs'. Informing Dimitrov in Moscow about the incident, Kostov added that 'whether there were new or old authorities in the regions left by Bulgarian troops, this was a Greek affair'.⁵⁵ It is notable that immediately after the visit of the British officers in Sofia, the Bulgarian Government issued a statement that it did not want to be dragged into the internal quarrels of the rival Greek groups and asked for instructions by the Three Big Allies on this matter. This shows that by mid-September 1944 the new Bulgarian Government of the Fatherland Front had practically resigned itself to the idea that Bulgarian administration of the Aegean territories had to be cancelled. The Bulgarian civil authorities were recalled from the region.

There is no documentary indication that these signs were noticed by the British Government. Obviously, the reports of the SOE officers were also disregarded in London. What British officials observed carefully were the activities of the Bulgarian Government's delegation and the ambiguous behaviour of the Bulgarian commanders in Greece. Another development which drew the attention of the FO was the Soviet Government's declaration that the left flank of the Third Ukrainian Front needed to be guarded from possible attack by the Germans retreating from Greece and placed the Bulgarian troops in the Aegean region under direct Soviet command. The responsibility for the remaining Bulgarian military regiments in northern Greece was undertaken by the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ It was noted in London that in early September 1944 the Soviet 17th Army had already undertaken intelligence operations in Greece.⁵⁷ Also, on 17 September 1944 when Soviet troops had entered Sofia, all Bulgarian armed forces, including

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.39

⁵⁶ Rachev, *St. Churchill...* p.315-323

regiments outside the country had been placed under Marshal Tolbukhin, the Commander-in-Chief of the Third Ukrainian Front. Britain's fear was that if the Soviet army were given orders to take over all territories administered by Bulgaria, it could reach the Mediterranean in hours.⁵⁸

A clash of interest on the question of the Bulgarian withdrawal from Greece became evident between Britain and the Soviet Union. The problem surfaced on 10 October 1944 when in the conversation with Molotov Eden spoke emphatically about developments in northern Greece. He pointed out that 'the Bulgarians were behaving with increasing insolence' towards Britain and 'had even dared' to place British officers under house arrest.⁵⁹ So agitated was Eden about Bulgarian behaviour, that he repeated three times in a row how important it was that all Bulgarian troops should evacuate Thrace without delay.⁶⁰ Eden pointed out that he considered the intolerable Bulgarian actions to be condoned by the Soviet Government. The British Foreign Secretary insisted that Molotov should instruct the Soviet High Command to order an immediate Bulgarian withdrawal from Greek territory. Molotov seemed embarrassed and made a faint attempt to persuade Eden that no Soviet armies were engaged in any operations in Greece. On the whole Molotov did not deny responsibility for Bulgarian actions there. Only after Molotov promised that Bulgarian troops would be taken out of the northern Greek provinces, did Eden agree to a twenty-percent share for Britain in Bulgaria as opposed to the twenty-five initially claimed by Churchill. A similar change was agreed for Britain's percentage in Hungary.⁶¹ Recalling the Moscow meeting in his memoirs, Eden expressed general

⁵⁷ Toshkova, V. *Bulgaria, nepriznatiyat...* p.31

⁵⁸ FO371/43599, R14799, Earle (WCO) to Sargent, 16.09.1944; FO371/43647, R14858, FO to Moscow, 17.09.1944; FO371/43647, R15409, Joint Intelligence Sub-committee report, 19.09.1944

⁵⁹ The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs...* p.482

⁶⁰ Siracusa, J.M. *'The Meaning...'* p.454-455

⁶¹ Holdrich, P.G.H. *'A Policy ...'* p.31

satisfaction. The one particular result he thought worth mentioning was that the Soviet Government 'would summon the Bulgars out of Greece and Yugoslavia' the same evening.⁶² On 11 October 1944 the Bulgarian Government was informed that its troops had a fortnight to clear Thrace as a preliminary condition for the conclusion of an armistice with the Allies.⁶³

The question of Bulgarian troops in Thrace resurfaced once again shortly after the Moscow summit - in the EAC, to which the Bulgarian armistice had been referred for final adjustments. In the discussion of Western participation in the Allied Control Commission (ACC) for Bulgaria, the US delegate stubbornly kept denying the Soviet Chairman more powers than those accorded to the British and US representatives. Then the Soviet delegate mentioned that Bulgarian military detachments should be allowed to stay in Greece as they now formed a part of the fighting Soviet army.⁶⁴ Gussev certainly acted on instructions from Moscow but it is doubtful that these were intended as anything more than bargaining tactics to obtain concessions on other matters of importance to the Soviet Union. The Soviet diplomat, therefore, was probably simply underlining how easy it would be for the USSR to complicate affairs in the Mediterranean if it did not obtain satisfaction elsewhere.

It is extremely difficult to establish whether in the autumn of 1944 Stalin was prepared to support Bulgarian claims to the Aegean, as was the general impression among British observers at the time.⁶⁵ Traditional historians infer the confirmation of this view from

⁶² The Earl of Avon. *The Eden Memoirs...* p.482

⁶³ FO371/43601, R16433, Eden to Sargent, 11.10.1944, R14688, Sargent to Eden, 12.10.1944; FO371/43647, R16458, Eden to Sargent, 12.10.1944; Volokitina, T.V. *Vostochnaya...* p.73-75

⁶⁴ Resis, A. *'The Churchill - Stalin Secret...'* p.380

⁶⁵ FO371/43589, R11992, Sargent and Clutton, 28.07.1944, Eden to PM, 10.08.1944; FO371/43649, R21989, Sargent memorandum, 5.12.1944

later Soviet hostility to Greece and pressure on the Straits.⁶⁶ Such a conclusion is contradicted by the fact that already on 6 October the Bulgarian troops had in fact been ordered to leave Thrace. On that day Stalin personally spoke with Dimitrov explaining that it was the British demands that were delaying the Bulgarian armistice. Stalin pointed out that his own priority was to retain the Bulgarian army intact in contrast to Britain which wanted to disarm it. Stalin expressed confidence that the Bulgarian armistice negotiations would be concluded soon and even intended to induce their pace by pledging an early Soviet withdrawal from Bulgaria, 'at the worst after the defeat of Germany'.⁶⁷ So, Stalin had assessed correctly the agenda of the October 1944 political conversations Churchill initiated. Stalin was very much aware of the priorities of the British leaders and was able to exploit the weaknesses in Britain's position in the Balkans, using the Soviet bargaining points to their fullest potential. For almost a week Soviet and Bulgarian leaders managed to keep the imminent Bulgarian evacuation from the Aegean provinces secret. This made all British observers extremely nervous and willing to sanction Soviet gains in almost all parts of the Balkans and indeed Eastern Europe, as long as the Soviet Union stayed away from Greece.

Newly available sources show that Stalin had not lost long-term interest in the Mediterranean. But as advised by the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs in late 1944 he decided to concentrate on strategic matters first. It was necessary to make the control of the Straits part of a lasting larger Soviet-British deal, based on 'amicable demarcation of the security spheres in Europe according to the principle of geographical proximity'.⁶⁸ If his recollections are to be believed, Molotov favoured more restraint than Stalin as far as

⁶⁶ Xydis, St.G. *'The Secret...'* p.264

⁶⁷ Dimitrov, G. *Dnevnik...* p.441-442

⁶⁸ Zubok, V. and C.Pleshakov. *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev*. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard UP, 1996. p.92-93

pressure on Turkey was concerned. Molotov also remembered that the Bulgarian Communists used to urge that Bulgaria be allowed to annex a part of Greece:

It was impossible... you had to stay within limits. Raising this issue would have caused trouble right at the beginning of the peace. The English and French would have been opposed. I consulted with the Central Committee and was told not to bring it up, that the time was not right. We had to remain silent on this issue. But Kolarov was urging it. It was desirable but not timely.⁶⁹

Neither Kolarov nor Dimitrov have left straightforward evidence of the Bulgarian desire to acquire part of Aegean Greece. Post-war Bulgarian historiography has hardly mentioned any Bulgarian territorial pretensions although before the conclusion of the Peace Treaty, the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed several memoranda on the so-called national question to the victorious powers.⁷⁰ The Bulgarian Government of 9 September 1944 had renounced its predecessors' policy of occupation of Yugoslav Macedonia and Greek Thrace calling for peaceful resolution of the territorial disputes with Bulgaria's neighbours.⁷¹ In Craiova on 6 October 1944 the FF Government and Tito signed an agreement stipulating that Bulgarian troops should remain in Macedonia and fight against the retreating Germans under Soviet command. Tito was on his way back from Moscow where he had discussed the terms of the agreement with both Stalin and Dimitrov.⁷² The FO did not fail to notice these developments but attention remained focused on northern Greece.⁷³

⁶⁹ Resis, Albert (ed.) *Molotov Remembers. Inside Kremlin Politics. Conversations with Felix Chuev.* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993. p.65

⁷⁰ FO371/58582, R9250, Sofia to FO, 15.06.1946, R10573, Bulgarian to UK delegation Paris, 5.07.1946; FO371/66929, R1846, Cooper (Paris) to FO, 8.02.1947; Traikov, V. '*Bulgarskata podgotovka za Parizhkata mirna konferentsiya.*' *Makedonski Pregled.* god.20, kn.1, 1997. p.23-38

⁷¹ TsPA, f.1, op.7, a.e.23, Kostov to Dimitrov, 8.10.1944, a.e.30, Kostov to Dimitrov, 12.10.1944; Ognyanov, L. *Narodna...* p.10, 12; *Ustanovyavane...* p.45, 133

⁷² Dimitrov, G. *Dnevnik...* p.440

⁷³ FO371/43601, R16315, Eden to FO, 11.10.1944; FO371/43649, R19241, Eden memo, 21.11.1944; Roberts, W.R. *Tito, Mihailović and the Allies 1941 – 45.* Durham: Duke UP, 1987. p.270

The Establishment of the Allied Control Commission for Bulgaria. Churchill had

gone to Moscow in order to protect Greece from Soviet intervention. Stalin understood this and in turn had set out to probe how far he could go in the Balkans as long as he stopped short of direct intervention in Greece. The negotiations on the composition and functions of the ACC for Bulgaria revealed the priorities of both Britain and the USSR and the concessions they were ready to make to secure these. The clarification of the basic principles of the armistice administration for Bulgaria became a trial run for the practical implementation of the percentage agreement.

Already in the second half of 1943, the British and US Governments had begun paying a great deal of attention to preparations for the peace settlement. They had mapped out the political, economic and other problems that would arise on the cessation of hostilities and started looking into possible solutions. One of the most urgent issues was that of preparing the armistice terms for Germany and its principal satellites, including Bulgaria. At that time, British diplomats believed that the peace settlement should be founded on solid inter-Allied agreement. This principle was behind Eden's proposition at the Moscow Conference in October 1943 that 'a clearing house for any European problems connected with the war... arising either before or after the cessation of hostilities' should be set up.⁷⁴ This became the London-based European Advisory Commission.⁷⁵ To British disappointment, the US and the Soviet Governments considered the Commission to be little more than an extension of normal diplomatic activity and consequently their representatives had limited competence.

The British delegate in the EAC, Sir William Strang wrote later that despite long periods of inactivity and drawn out negotiations caused by the Soviet belief that time was on their side, 'never once... was there ever any serious misunderstanding... or any breach of given word'.

⁷⁴ Lord Strang. *Home and Abroad*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1956. p.201

⁷⁵ Sainsbury, K. *The Turning...* p.69-75

Strang insisted that the work of the EAC 'stood the test of events and ... plans went smoothly into operation when the time came to apply them'.⁷⁶ The example of the Bulgarian armistice shows exactly the opposite. In May 1944 it had been agreed that the EAC should prepare terms for Bulgaria. Despite the fact that in the summer of 1944 the British Government was making a concentrated political effort to knock Bulgaria out of the war, the draft of the Bulgarian armistice was not ready until late August.⁷⁷ This explained at least partially Britain's procrastination during the unfortunate Moshanov mission.

On 29 August 1944 the Soviet delegate in the EAC withdrew from the deliberations of the Bulgarian armistice. At the time British observers interpreted this as a show of disinterest and agreement that the Western Allies should have the last say about Bulgaria. Only with hindsight did they realise that Gussev's withdrawal meant that the Soviet Government had decided to impose its own conditions on Bulgaria under completely changed circumstances.⁷⁸ The Soviet Government's objective was not simply to participate in the discussions for Bulgaria, as Strang claimed: the Soviet Government was already doing this by invitation from its British and US partners. What is more, even when the Soviet Union was not at war with Bulgaria, the Western Governments had been willing to accept tripartite participation in the envisaged ACC for Bulgaria.⁷⁹ When the Red Army occupied Bulgaria, the Soviet objective changed so as to draw the country into the larger Soviet strategic design.

Preparations for the Bulgarian armistice at the EAC began in earnest after the end of the Moscow Conference in October 1944. However, the EAC only worked out the formalities of the text. All significant decisions had been taken by the Soviet and British Foreign

⁷⁶ Lord Strang. *Home...* p.205

⁷⁷ FO371/43590, R14123, Howard to Earle, 7.09.1944; FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.367–370, Winant to Hull, 25.08.1944

⁷⁸ FO371/43598, R13528, FO memorandum, 29.08.1944; FO371/43597, R13778, Eden, 30.08.1944; FO371/43600, R15276, Strang to Eden, 21.09.1944; FO371/43599, R14505, Gussev to Strang, 9.09.1944

⁷⁹ FO371/43590, R13641, COS committee meeting, 25.08.1944

Secretaries in their talks on 10 and 11 October, and in the letters they exchanged shortly afterwards. Strang admitted that British Eastern European experts did not expect to have much say in the Bulgarian armistice regime as Soviet predominance in 'the immediate wartime future' had been expressed 'in the figures given by the PM to Stalin in Moscow'. He also voiced the resignation of most senior British diplomats and civil servants in that 'the effect of the armistice, no matter what the text might say, was to open the way for exclusive Soviet influence'.⁸⁰ In an already lost battle, British representatives, helped to some extent by their US colleagues at the EAC, fought to preserve some say in the armistice settlement. Friction centred on the prerogatives of the representatives of the Three Big Powers in the ACC for Bulgaria.

By the end of August 1944, the various British and US administrative bodies in charge of armistice preparations had reviewed and reached a broad understanding on the main points of the armistice instrument. Apart from recalling Bulgarian troops within the Bulgarian boundaries as of 1 January 1941, these included demobilisation of the Bulgarian army, giving the Allies free passage across the country and securing any required material and financial facilities. In addition, an enabling clause was devised so that the Bulgarian Government was obliged to fulfil any demands made by the Allies. Although the preliminary drafts foresaw Anglo-American occupation of Bulgaria in extraordinary circumstances, such a development was not realistically expected by either British or US planners. Most importantly, no provision was made for any foreign control body to be introduced in Bulgaria. It was shortly before the entry of the Soviet army into Bulgaria that the British Chiefs of Staff raised the question of a Control Commission. This was accepted by the US Joint Chiefs only after the occupation of Bulgaria. When Gushev rejoined the

⁸⁰ Lord Strang. *Home...* p.224-225

EAC sessions on Bulgaria, he confirmed his Government's wish for such a controlling mechanism.⁸¹

Gussev insisted that the proposed ACC should be run entirely by Soviet officers commanding troops in Bulgaria. Agreeing that the Soviet member would be the chairman, the British suggestion was that he should simply be *primus inter pares* in a truly tripartite commission. This view was upheld firmly by the US administration throughout the negotiations on the Bulgarian armistice, which in October 1944 moved from London to Moscow and back.⁸² The US Government had so far displayed little concern for Bulgaria, it intended to take a relatively lively interest in the future.⁸³ In the first instance, increased US influence was to be conveyed through the ACC. The US Ambassadors to Moscow and London were given instructions to endorse the principle of equal participation in the Bulgarian ACC to the end, stopping short of US refusal to sign the armistice. Even after the Anglo-Soviet deal in Moscow made the US position untenable, the State Department proceeded to place on record its objections to exclusive Soviet rights in the ACC. The United States also reserved the right to bring up this question at a later date.⁸⁴ Consistent assertion of the necessity for full tripartite membership in the ACC was motivated above all by general US ideas about the peace settlement and not by particular interest in Bulgaria itself. The impression of the future US representative in Bulgaria Maynard Barnes was that the Bulgarian negotiations were not followed by the US War, Navy or State Departments 'with any particular interest or intelligence'.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.31–35, 46; Black, Cyril E. 'The Start...' p.170

⁸² Toshkova, V. *Bulgaria, nepriznatiyat...* p.29–30; Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.47–51

⁸³ Black, C.E. 'The Start...' p.165

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.170–171; Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.49–51

⁸⁵ Barnes, M. 'The Current Situation in Bulgaria.' Lecture. Washington, DC: The National War College, 3.06.1947. p.7

In any case, it was the rather more pragmatic British attitude to the problems of the Bulgarian armistice which carried the day in Moscow in October 1944. To use Barnes' words, the British leaders 'did not pull a fast one' on the USA, they were trying to get a deal.⁸⁶ In the protracted and repetitive talks with Molotov on 10 and 11 October Eden opened the bargaining on the Bulgarian ACC with the proposal for equal representation. Molotov maintained firmly that this was not feasible. He protested his inability to understand how three people could have the same responsibility and proclaimed that it could only create confusion. Moreover, the eighty-percent share already allocated to the Soviet Government would become meaningless if the representatives of the other two had equal shares. Finally, a compromise was found in the decision to allow for two distinctive periods in the existence of the ACC. Until the end of hostilities with Germany, the Soviet High Command would be in full charge; in the second period which would last until the conclusion of the Peace Treaty, there would be increased participation of the British and US elements of the Commission.⁸⁷ In letters to Molotov after the talks, Eden practically gave away the right to any Western participation during the first period.⁸⁸

Historians have claimed that the establishment of the Bulgarian ACC followed broadly the precedent of Italy where Britain and the USA both had occupying armies and as a result claimed exclusive say in the armistice regime.⁸⁹ While the situations in Italy on the one hand, and Bulgaria and Romania on the other, can be superficially compared, it is apparent from the available records that in the Moscow conversations the Soviet leaders

⁸⁶ Barnes, M. 'The Current Situation...' p.10

⁸⁷ Resis, A. *'The Churchill - Stalin Secret...'* p.377-378, 381-383; Siracusa, J.M. *'The Meaning...'* p.457-461

⁸⁸ FO371/43601, R16444, WO to BMM Bulgaria, 13.10.1944, R16586, Eden to Sargent, 15.10.1944; FO371/43591, R18888, Eden to Molotov, 15.10.1944; FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.461-464, Winant to Hull, 11 and 18.10.1944

⁸⁹ Black, C.E. *'The Start...'* p.167; Barker, E. *'British Policy towards Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary 1944 - 1946.'* McCauley, M (ed.) *Communist Power in Europe 1944 - 1949.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977. p.201-203; Boll, M.M. *'Reality and Illusion: The Allied Control Commission for Bulgaria as a Cause for the Cold War.'* *East European Quarterly*, vol.17, no.1, 1984. p.422.

did not touch upon this question. Yet it certainly was on the minds of British officials who were very conscious of Britain's position in Italy and wanted to prevent the Soviet diplomats from raising it officially.⁹⁰

The only concession Molotov made in Moscow was that a representative of the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff should also sign the Bulgarian armistice along with the Soviet Commander of the Third Ukrainian Front.⁹¹ This was a purely symbolic gesture and gave Britain little satisfaction for three years of war with Bulgaria. In the eyes of the FO, it was even less meaningful since worrying developments were shaping on the ground. The Soviet military authorities had already expelled SOE and OSS teams from Bulgaria on the pretext of improper accreditation. In addition, the Soviet High Command in the country claimed that the political representative of the British Government had arrived without the necessary Soviet permission and was refusing to receive him and facilitate his work.⁹² All this contained little promise for Soviet-British co-operation in and regarding Bulgaria. The picture was complicated by the fact that the political agreements undertaken by the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary in Moscow were made known to none of the British diplomatic or military officers sent to Bulgaria. They had been dispatched to the country with little knowledge about the preceding developments and with only the most basic terms of reference for their mission. It is no wonder then that initially they honestly believed that their task was to take a full and equal part in governing ex-enemy Bulgaria.

The Armistice between the Allies and Bulgaria was officially signed on 28 October 1944 in Moscow. The Bulgarian delegation included Government Ministers representing the different parties in the FF. It was given no chance for bargaining: it had been summoned to

⁹⁰ FO371/43600, R15158, Clerk Kerr to FO, 23.1944

⁹¹ Siracusa, J.M. *'The Meaning...'* p.456

⁹² Pintev, St. 'Nachalna deinost na Suyuznata Kontrolna Komisia v Bulgaria, oktombri 1944 - januari 1945.' *Istoricheski Pregled*, god.XXXV, no.4/5, 1979. p.198

formalise an act of unconditional surrender. By then an official joint Allied Military Mission had verified the complete withdrawal of Bulgarian troops from Thrace.⁹³

The attitude displayed towards Bulgaria during the Moscow negotiations in October 1944 showed that the Second World War had changed little in Britain's relationship with that country. It was evident that British diplomats gave priority to stabilising their relations with the other Great Powers. During the talks between the British and Soviet leaders it became obvious that the general principles determining the approach to Bulgaria were deeply rooted in the traditional power politics of the region. Once again, more than anything else Bulgaria attracted British attention by virtue of its geographic location and complicated relationship with its neighbours. The Moscow meeting also provided a precise and detailed miniature of future British behaviour towards the country.

The Meaning of Yalta and Potsdam for Bulgaria. The Moscow negotiations demonstrated that the Soviet Union would quickly fill any vacuum resulting from British inability, unwillingness or hesitation to uphold British interests. Throughout the war Stalin had been interested in extending and stabilising Soviet influence over Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. He could do so only after he had established that Churchill did not regard these countries as of primary importance. This is precisely what Stalin managed to confirm at the time of the percentage agreement. His political achievement was certainly underpinned by the military advantages the Soviet Union enjoyed in the Balkans. In the months after the TOLSTOY meeting, the westward military advances of the Red Army continued and caused British leaders to worry whether it would stop at the agreed line in Central Europe. But this renewed anxiety about Soviet intentions did not mean that British policy makers expressed any remorse about the rightness of the percentage agreement.

⁹³ FO371/43602, R17355, Armistice agreement with Bulgaria, 28.10.1944; FRUS 1944, vol.III, p.481, Kennan to Washington, 28.10.1944; Boll, M.M. *The American....* p.5

At the same time, noticeable nuances in Britain's attitude towards the Soviet Union developed. British observers did not deny Soviet predominance in the ex-satellites but they resented the methods with which it was being asserted. They were concerned with accumulating indications of Soviet interference in the internal affairs of the occupied countries. Above all, they were perturbed by hostile Soviet behaviour towards the Western representatives there.⁹⁴ This gradual change of heart was especially characteristic of Churchill who did not have much trust in Soviet intentions anyway. Outwardly he maintained his understanding with Stalin. Churchill could not but admit that when civil war erupted in Greece in December 1944, Stalin had kept his word not to interfere. Without denying that he had recognised the Soviet lead in Bulgaria and Romania, Churchill was however disturbed by the fact that in these countries Communist-controlled Governments were ruling by force and with complete Soviet support. One way for the British Prime Minister to keep his promise and yet let Stalin know that Soviet actions in Eastern Europe were not considered legitimate, was to persuade the USA to exercise some moderating influence on Soviet behaviour.⁹⁵

During the first half of 1945 no British official was given authorisation to challenge the percentage agreement. Accounts of the limitations and humiliations under which they were placed became a constant feature of reports from the Western representatives in the ex- satellites. These representatives were equally confused by the failure of their superiors to initiate any adequate action on a suitable international scale. Even though few British diplomats had been informed by the FO about the exact nature of the understanding between Churchill and Stalin, a number of men in the field independently came to the conclusion that some *quid pro quo* must have been achieved. Their greatest concern,

⁹⁴ Kennedy-Pipe, C. *Stalin's Cold War...* p.48, 61-66

⁹⁵ Kimball, W.F. *'Naked Reverse...'* p.16-24

however, was the realisation that their leaders might be entertaining false ideas about the real Soviet attitude to Big Power co-operation.⁹⁶

As far as Bulgaria was concerned, the percentage deal overshadowed the subsequent Three-Power summits at Yalta and Potsdam. Despite its increasing unease concerning developments in the ex-satellite states, the British Government was not prepared to announce publicly that there had been an agreement, let alone that Stalin was not respecting it. Therefore, the only possible course was to try if not to supersede, at least to rectify the effects of the Moscow agreement. British adherence to the US-sponsored Declaration for Liberated Europe at Yalta in February 1945 could be seen as such an attempt. It stood halfway between belated reassertion of the principles of democratic government and restraint from confrontation because of the Soviet methods of application of the percentage deal. If this was so, however, Stalin remained immune to such sophisticated expression of disapproval of his behaviour in Eastern Europe. He signed the Declaration with quite a different meaning of democracy in mind, and after Yalta several times reminded British representatives of the October 1944 bargain.⁹⁷ This served to make it clear to the British leaders that Stalin was not satisfied with receiving assurances of the strategic security of the Soviet zone. British diplomats realised that for the Soviet Union security was equated with territory, and what was more, complete domination of the acquired territory. Only then would the USSR refrain from meddling in the others' zones.⁹⁸

It is commonly agreed that the fate of Eastern Europe was finally determined at the Yalta summit. In fact, apart from Poland, which of course had been one of the greatest concerns for the British Government throughout the war, no other Eastern European country was

⁹⁶ Boll, M.M. *The American ...* p.7

⁹⁷ Heller, A. and F. Feher. *From Yalta to Glasnost*. Blackwell publishers, 1990. p.7; Alperovitz, G. *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam*. London: Secker&Warburg, 1966. p.148

discussed meaningfully by the Allied leaders. Harvey feared that the Conference would be the 'usual scramble leading to the usual half-digested decisions' and was soon able to confirm this prediction.⁹⁹

The internal situation in Bulgaria, which together with Romania was at the time of the Yalta Conference keenly watched by the FO, was not placed on the agenda. The subject of Bulgaria was briefly touched upon when British grievances regarding Soviet domination of the ACC, the Bulgarian-Yugoslav treaty and Bulgarian reparations to Greece were recorded.¹⁰⁰ The closest the Big Three came to paying attention to the Balkans at all was in a general and indecisive review of the international regulation of the Straits. Both Stalin and Churchill reiterated their agreement for the revision of the Montreux convention by which they confirmed their positions from the previous October. Regarding Yugoslavia, it was decided to endorse a compromise between the Partisans and the London-based Government-in-exile, which could again be interpreted as practical implementation of the fifty-fifty deal.¹⁰¹ So, as far as the Yalta talks touched on questions raised at TOLSTOY, the general framework tended to be confirmed. The lawyers at the FO argued that neither Stalin nor the British Government 'were committed very much' by the Yalta Declaration. The major advantage they saw was that the document provided 'an excellent bargaining counter'.¹⁰² Stalin was given almost no reason to suspect that Soviet

⁹⁸ Kennedy-Pipe, C. *Stalin's Cold War...* p.54; Gaddis, J. *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997. p.15

⁹⁹ Harvey, J. *The War Diaries...* p.373, 377

¹⁰⁰ Roberts, Fr. *Dealing...* p.73–75; Feis, H. *Churchill...* p.547

¹⁰¹ Clemens, D.S. *Yalta*. London: Oxford UP, 1970. p.258-262

¹⁰² Jebb, G. *The Memoirs...* p.153-154

actions in the ex-satellites were resented or that they could become the cause for a major inter-Allied controversy.¹⁰³

Already in late February 1945, the FO had decided to 'let sleeping dogs lie' and not invoke the Declaration except for the specific purposes of inducing the USA to accept responsibility for some other areas of British interest, such as Greece. FO officials discussed the idea whether Britain could agree to a degree of Soviet influence in Western Europe in exchange for the same for the British Government in Eastern Europe. There was no unanimous view. Sargent explored the question as to whether Britain should join the United States in invoking the Declaration in an attempt to stop the Soviet Union from "cooking" the elections in Bulgaria and Romania. He advised against this and repeated that the only value of the Declaration was in committing the United States to European affairs. But Britain had to be very careful with US involvement in Eastern Europe as 'the Americans are only too prone to espouse a cause enthusiastically and later let us down with a bump'. Also, Britain had to consider whether for example claims in Romania would not make Stalin take an inconvenient line on Italy.¹⁰⁴

After the Yalta Conference, however, the relative British complacency with regard to the northern Balkans steadily decreased. Diplomatic signals from the Soviet-occupied countries drew attention to the growing arrogance of the local Communist parties, derived above all from their firm belief in Soviet backing. British doubts that the Soviet military and political representatives exercised a strong influence on the ruling coalitions found constant confirmation. The ultimate proof came in late February 1945 with the Soviet-supported imposition of a Communist Government on the reluctant Romanian King. At the same time, the FO was markedly reluctant to take up with the Soviet Government the

¹⁰³ Kovrig, B. *Of Walls and Bridges. The United States and Eastern Europe*. New York: New York UP, 1991. p.19

issue of political conditions in Romania and Bulgaria. There was no official British criticism of the Soviet-directed change of Government in Bucharest.¹⁰⁵ Nor did senior FO officials wish in any way to get involved in a dispute over the forthcoming elections in Bulgaria.¹⁰⁶ One reason for this was that the problems of the Polish settlement were forcefully coming to the fore of political discussions between the Soviet Union and its Western partners. The FO preferred to concentrate on the solution of this most serious of questions, and did not wish to irritate and distract the USSR with disputes of significantly lesser priority. Another inducement for Britain to refrain from making public comments on the situation in Bulgaria and Romania was the ever-present fear that Russia could retaliate in Greece, Italy or another country of primary interest for Britain.¹⁰⁷

After Yalta British foreign policy makers set out to re-examine British policy towards South Eastern Europe, which was inextricably entangled with the conduct of Anglo-Soviet relations. British diplomats faced the crucial question whether Soviet actions in the ex-satellite states illuminated future Soviet intentions for the area. In addition, they wondered whether the Soviet Union was going to maintain friendly relations with its Western Allies or whether it would use its powerful position to dominate the post-war continent. As usual, there was not a straightforward answer to these complicated questions and the real task of the FO specialists was to look into possible scenarios and work out adequate solutions. The result was a memorandum signed by Sargent on 13 March 1945 and soon afterwards circulated to the War Cabinet. In it there was reiteration of the fear that the Soviet Union had deliberately set out to violate the Yalta agreements. But there was also an allowance for the fact that Soviet behaviour remained consistent

¹⁰⁴ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.363

¹⁰⁵ Saiu, L. *The Great Powers and Romania, 1943 - 1947*. Boulder, Co: Columbia UP, 1992. p.83-91

¹⁰⁶ FO371/48123, R4072, Howard, 5.03.1945, Sargent, 6.03.1945

with what it was before Yalta and that the countries concerned had themselves not been renowned for their democratic traditions. The overall inclination of the collective authors of the paper was that the British Government would be much wiser in accepting the historic realities in the northern Balkans and resigning itself both to undemocratic regimes and Soviet predominance there. The alternative would only risk deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union without any realistic hope that political conditions could be improved, and would therefore spell the definite failure of all British objectives in the region.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, Sargent was worried that Britain might be seen as abandoning certain countries, like Bulgaria and Romania, in the belief that it would be able to save others. This would amount to admission that it was willingly operating within certain geographical limits and therefore abdicating its right as a Great Power to be interested in the whole of Europe.¹⁰⁹

The end of hostilities in Europe brought a new reappraisal of British foreign policy incorporated in another memorandum, written by Sargent in July 1945 and entitled 'Stocktaking after VE-Day'. Endeavouring to assess Britain's international position in the foreseeable post-war years, this document recognised the decrease in material resources for which Britain would have to compensate with skilled diplomacy and the support of the United States. Three-Power co-operation was still considered central to British foreign policy but depended on accurate assessment of Stalin's long-term objectives. Sargent voiced an emphatic opinion that the Soviet Union was not likely to pursue further territorial expansion but would instead opt for the consolidation of its power in Eastern and Central Europe. This meant the establishment of Communism in the countries

¹⁰⁷ FO371/47883, N8674, Clerk Kerr to FO, 10.07.1945; Percival, Mark L. 'British-Romanian Relations 1944 – 1967.' PhD: University of London, March 1997. p.51-55

¹⁰⁸ Saiu, L. *The Great Powers...* p.95–96

controlled by the USSR which in its turn would become the greatest long-term danger for British security and influence on the continent. This time Sargent seemed to have reversed his advice of a month before and wrote that Britain should not be afraid to take the lead in an independent, anti-totalitarian policy in relation to Eastern Europe. But once again, he stated that British efforts should differentiate between the countries in the region: on this occasion he mentioned that Communism might have to be accepted in Romania and Hungary but not elsewhere, including Bulgaria.¹¹⁰

While the FO was re-evaluating British relations with the Soviet Union, the State Department was re-confirming the basic belief of US foreign policy that spheres of influence should be discouraged. This was directed equally against Great Britain whose imperial aspirations the US diplomats still suspected. What remained unclear was how US politicians hoped to reconcile the idea of no special zones of interest with continued insistence on good relations with the Soviet Union which was evidently going against its undertakings at Yalta. Among US diplomats, Kennan was the only one who saw the post-war international dilemmas in terms close to those of his British colleagues: where it was not able or willing to confront the USSR, the USA need not challenge Soviet supremacy.¹¹¹

As a rule, however, until the Potsdam summit the Truman administration continued Roosevelt's search for general co-operation with Soviet Russia.¹¹² This was in a sense one step behind the British Government, which was becoming more conscious that a confrontation with the Soviet Government was approaching. Nevertheless, the British

¹⁰⁹ Hamilton, K.A. *'The Quest for the Modus Vivendi: the Danubian Satellites and Anglo-Soviet Relations 1945 – 46.'* *Occasional Papers*. no.4. FCO Historical Branch: London, 1992. p.5–7; Ross, G. *The Foreign Office...* p.60, 210-217

¹¹⁰ Keeble, Sir C. *Britain ...* p.198; Ross, G. *The Foreign Office...* p.210-217

¹¹¹ Bohlen, Ch. *Witness...* p.175-176; Kennedy-Pipe, C. *Stalin's Cold War...* p.51

¹¹² *Ibid.* p.79; Alperovitz, G. *Atomic...* p.134-136

political analysts were realists enough to recognise that the Balkans were not going to be the subject of such a showdown. In fact confrontation almost flared up in an area closely related to the Balkans. In May 1945, Tito's troops occupied Trieste in an attempt to annex it to Yugoslavia. This was seized upon by Churchill who saw in it a suitable occasion to demonstrate to the USA how Soviet foreign policy operated. Churchill was convinced that the Soviet Union had plans for Trieste to become a Soviet-controlled outlet to the Mediterranean and that Tito was acting upon orders from Moscow. It is not clear whether this was the case but it is now certain that Tito withdrew his forces from Trieste on orders from Stalin who balked in the face of firm and unanimous British and US action.¹¹³ The whole episode was reminiscent of the Bulgarian withdrawal from northern Greece: the British Government took an inflexible position, as its Mediterranean interests were perceived to be under a strong threat. Abiding by the percentage deal the Soviet Union pulled out of an area it had recognised as of greater British concern. So, a month before Potsdam, it was confirmed by practical measures that the Moscow understanding was still in force. Nor was it superseded by the decisions at the last Three-Power Conference in July 1945.

Potsdam changed little as far as British attitudes to the ex-satellite countries were concerned. Of course, President Truman made a strong impression by insisting on the implementation of the Yalta Declaration. In his view the Three Allied Governments should agree on the necessity of immediate reorganisation of the present Governments in Bulgaria and Romania.¹¹⁴ But these questions were overshadowed by more imminent ones – like the administration of defeated Germany - and effectively slid into the background. The results of the Potsdam Conference regarding Bulgaria can be best

¹¹³ Dinardo, R.S. 'Glimpse of an Old World Order? Reconsidering the Trieste Crisis of 1945.' *Diplomatic History*, vol.21, no.3, 1997. p.365-381

¹¹⁴ Truman, H.S. *Memoirs*. New York: Doubleday, 1955. p.382–386; Bohlen, Ch. *Witness...* p.234

exemplified by two contrasting statements made by the US President and the Soviet Foreign Minister. On his return to the USA, Truman repeated the assertion that the Balkans were not going to be in any one power's sphere of influence.¹¹⁵ At precisely the same moment, Molotov privately reassured Dimitrov that 'in general the [Potsdam] decisions are favourable to us. In practice our sphere of influence has been recognised'.¹¹⁶

* * *

The period between the summer of 1944 and the Potsdam Conference was vital for the clarification of Bulgaria's place in the general British policy. This was the time when British foreign policy planners elaborated and tested the rationale of Britain's position, taking into account Bulgaria's place in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. It was predominantly strategic factors that ruled Britain's attitude. Concern for Bulgaria's internal development and even the establishment of Communism were little more than functions of the military danger the country could be able to pose to the Eastern Mediterranean.

British diplomatic conduct in October 1944 yet again confirmed the priority of Greece in Britain's Balkan policy. This tendency was unequivocally recognised by the predominant majority of British politicians and diplomats. At Moscow it was made perfectly clear to the Soviet leaders that Britain was willing to go to almost any lengths to secure its predominance in Greece. As there was no British military presence in the region comparable to the Soviet armies stationed in the northern Balkans, Churchill and Eden tried to extract all the political concessions they could from Stalin. They understood too well that the Moscow deal was going to have a bearing on post-war developments, but justified it mainly as having prevented much more threatening alternatives.

¹¹⁵ Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.139-140

The percentage agreement touched on the most sensitive issue of future Anglo-Soviet relations. It was an attempt to define the limits of British and Soviet policy in an area of mutual interest and therefore diminish the possibilities for a conflict of interest. That is why it helped to postpone the onset of the conflict, which later developed between Russia and Great Britain. Because of the percentage agreement, the strategic aspect of the Balkans was not among the earliest causes of increased Russo-Western hostility after the end of the Second World War. However, the negotiations had also exposed the fact that a full agreement was hardly possible and therefore served to alert the British Government to the need to fortify its Mediterranean positions.

Britain's recognition of its inability to commit enough resources to secure predominance in Bulgaria was combined with the long-standing acknowledgement of Soviet interests. This explained the British Government's adherence to the spheres-of-influence idea. It was Churchill who put into practice this approach. However, careful examination of the opinions prevailing in the Foreign Office reveals that ultimately the spheres-of-influence division was intellectually supported by a number of civil servants before and especially after the percentage agreement. It was the almost unanimous acceptance of the agreement of those British Government figures and officials who knew about it that secured its application throughout the armistice period.

¹¹⁶ Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p.87

Chapter Four

Observing the Establishment of Communist Rule in Bulgaria

The conclusion of the armistice changed the essence of Britain's relations with Bulgaria. Great Britain came to believe that by having categorically insisted on and obtained the withdrawal of Bulgarian troops from Aegean Thrace, it had successfully defended its strategic positions in the region. Through its participation in the Bulgarian armistice regime, the British Government also hoped to have some say in Bulgaria's post-war development, particularly in the foundation of a stable democratic political system. A combination of historical and geographical factors had long made British foreign policy planners realise that theirs could not be the dominant influence in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, because of Bulgaria's proximity to the Mediterranean, Britain could not afford to waive its interest in it.

Bulgaria had been assigned to the Soviet zone without too much misgiving on the part of Great Britain. Ironically, for Britain the importance of Bulgaria grew as a result of the Soviet occupation. With its military facilities under strict Soviet control and its Government looking for internal and international support to Moscow, Bulgaria would almost certainly become an instrument of Soviet foreign policy. Bulgaria's own dealings with its neighbours and its attitude to the Western Powers would be determined by, and therefore would be symptomatic of, Soviet post-war plans and behaviour. In the second half of 1944, British leaders were becoming increasingly worried that the Soviet Union might use its newly acquired positions of power in the Balkans to encroach on territories beyond those conceded to it and so endanger long-term British interests outside Eastern Europe. That is why, the establishment and reinforcement of Soviet authority in Bulgaria, greatly enhanced by the presence of the Soviet army, had a direct bearing on Soviet-British relations.

British attention was equally focused on the possibility that Bulgaria could adopt Communism as a state ideology. British concern over this did not arise solely from aversion to Communist ideology. The much deeper anxiety was that a Bulgarian Communist Government would in all likelihood be willing to follow Soviet leadership. Then the USSR would have a stable foothold in the Balkans which could be easily used for offensive purposes, should Soviet objectives require it. Such a development would be a double threat, undermining British interests in the region both from a moral and a strategic perspective. Great Britain, which had few positive ideas on how to influence Bulgarian post-war development, considered its interest to lie in preventing a complete Communist domination in Bulgaria.

The lack of reliable links with Bulgaria during the war had revealed that any long-term policy formulation necessitated sound and timely knowledge of events in the country. In the immediate post-hostilities period this requirement would be served by British membership of the Allied Control Commission. The British Government believed that observations made by its political and military staff in Bulgaria would throw light on the actions of the little-known local political actors, but also on the methods and aims of Soviet foreign policy in Bulgaria, the Balkans and Europe in general. The ACC would be an experiment in lower-level Great Power co-operation: its functioning would test the desire of the Soviet Union to maintain friendly relations with its Allies.

Involvement in the First Post-war Elections in Bulgaria. Given the country's low priority in British foreign policy, there is little direct documentary evidence on British objectives in post-war Bulgaria. The large quantity of available archival material on the question of the first Bulgarian post-war elections, however, suggests that the Foreign Office considered this event of great significance. It was believed that the manner of carrying out of the elections would illuminate the direction in which the Bulgarian regime would evolve.

This, in turn, would indicate whether the USSR would be content with establishing control over Bulgarian foreign policy or would insist on complete domination of internal developments too. Analysing diplomatic reports from all Soviet-occupied territories, the FO would be able to test the hypothesis of a grand Soviet design for the establishment of Communism in Eastern Europe.

British Doubts about Bulgarian Democracy. Even though the British Mission had initially little knowledge of Bulgaria, its members grasped quickly the essentials of the small but complicated Bulgarian political scene. Already before the conclusion of the armistice Soviet authorities showed suspicion of any foreign presence in Soviet occupied Bulgaria. In early September, an SOE team sent from northern Greece to Bulgaria was unceremoniously thrown out of the country by the Soviet High Command.¹ In October Soviet hostility culminated in the refusal of General Sergei Biryuzov, Commander of the Soviet forces in Bulgaria, to receive the British representative who had arrived before the Bulgarian armistice was formally completed. Soviet attitudes to British officials in Bulgaria changed little after the conclusion of the armistice. On 29 November 1944, an order issued by Biryuzov, in his capacity of Acting Head of the ACC, forbade the Bulgarian Government any direct contacts with the Western Missions.² The Soviet High Command in Bulgaria went to extraordinary lengths to obstruct the activities and even physical movement of the Western members of the ACC. It was aided by the Bulgarian Communists who believed that the setting up of the ACC with US and British representatives had somehow worsened the internal situation in Bulgaria.³ This issue was indicative of Soviet

¹ Mendelsohn, J. (ed.) *Covert Warfare. The OSS – NKVD Relationship, 1943 – 1945*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989. doc.64, OSS Cairo to Secretary of State, 25.09.1944, doc.66, US Army Forces Cairo to War Department, 26.09.1944

² Black, C.E. *'The Start...'* p.171–175; Boll, M. *'Reality...'* p.426

³ RTsHIDNI, f.17, op.128, a.e.750, l.16, Kostov report, 26.01.1945

attitudes towards the Western Allies. Gradually, it became a legitimate reason for the worsening of inter-Allied relations.

Some practical problems were resolved at the Potsdam Conference which marked the beginning of the second period of the functioning of the ACC. But in the words of one American contemporary, 'it had already become a habit for Russia to push us in the face, and they continued to do so'.⁴ Despite the Soviet High Command's obstructions, the British military and political representatives managed to send home accurate and balanced reports on people and events in Bulgaria. Initially, they tried to analyse the nature of the ruling coalition of 9 September 1944. As the wartime National Assembly was disbanded, the Government ruled by decree. Since the Fatherland Front had seized power by a *coup d'état* it needed to confirm its legitimacy through proper elections.

The FF Government included four members from each of the BCP and *Zveno*, two each from the Agrarian and Social Democratic parties, as well as some independent politicians. British observers noticed that in the Government, the Communists were in charge of Internal Affairs and Justice. This gave them strong positions which reflected the initial overwhelming influence of the Communists within the coalition. British officials were concerned that the Communists would seek to reinforce their own position in the country by infiltration of the security forces and the judicial system. The procedures of the People's Courts and the special powers of the Interior Minister were certainly perceived as steps in that direction.⁵

The People's Courts were set up by a Government Decree in October 1944 before the arrival of British and US representatives. Their proclaimed task was to try German collaborators and wartime criminals; however, they were immediately turned into instruments of political

⁴ Barnes, M. 'The Current Situation...' p.9

vengeance. The former Regents, all Ministers in the wartime Cabinets and deputies of the last two National Assemblies were put to trial. Communist Party archives reveal that the verdicts were not taken in court but in the Communist Politburo. Traicho Kostov personally instructed the Public Prosecutors not to 'measure who is guilty of what' but to 'look out for the slightest thing that would prove the guilt of these bandits'. He insisted on the most severe sentences.⁶ One hundred high-ranking Bulgarian politicians, civil servants and court officials were shot on 1/2 February 1945 while many others were imprisoned. By April 1945 11,122 people had been tried, 2,618 sentenced to death and 1,046 executed.⁷ In comparison, in documents not intended for public consumption, the Communists themselves admitted to the Soviet Government that under what they called the 'fascist rule' between 1923 and 1944, of a total of 1,590 death sentences for political crimes, 199 had been carried out.⁸

Before the establishment of the People's Courts, the Government turned a blind eye to the maltreatment and murders of activists and supporters of right-of-centre parties by Communists zealots immediately after 9 September 1944. After April 1945, when the People's Courts ceased their activities, cases of political opposition were dealt with under two of the earliest laws of the Fatherland Front Government, the *Decree for the Protection of the People's Power* and the *Law for Labour Educational Institutions*.⁹ Through the use of these laws the small Bulgarian intelligentsia was decimated and inhibited from any serious future political activity. That the Communists intended the physical elimination and psychological destruction of non-Communist politicians was clear for the British

⁵ FO371/48644, U827, Sofia to FO, FO minutes, 3 – 8.02.1945; FO371/48166, R3192, Sofia to FO, FO minutes, 13 – 20.02.1945

⁶ Ognyanov, L. *Narodna...* p. 24-29

⁷ Semerdjiev, P. *Narodniyat sud v Bulgaria 1944 – 1945g. Komu i zashto e bil neobhodim*. Jerusalem: Macedonian-Bulgarian Institute, 1997. p.406; Crampton, R.J. *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987. p.149

⁸ AVPRF, f.74, op.26, p.16, no.6, l.116, MID note, 21-22.12.1944

⁹ Ognyanov, L. *Narodna...* p.29

representatives in Bulgaria who reported in detail to their Government. However, the content of the laws if not the spirit of their implementation could be formally interpreted as following the provisions of the armistice to punish fascists and warmongers. On account of this the FO chose not to raise the problem of political executions with the Bulgarian Government.¹⁰

The Communists' aspirations to political monopoly could be discerned in their drive for predominance in the FF Committees, which sprang as a countrywide network of support for the Government. As at the national level, the Committees were supposed to include members of all participant parties but practically everywhere there was more than an equal proportion of Communists. The continuous efforts of non-Communist Ministers to secure representation for their followers met with the official agreement of their Communist colleagues, only to flounder on the intransigence of local Communists who demanded exclusive rights as anti-fascist fighters. This situation was used by the BCP to claim sweeping popular support and demand an even greater share of power. Gradually, not only foreign analysts but also non-Communist political leaders in Bulgaria realised that both centrally and locally, the FF was used by the Communists as the means of intervening in the other parties' affairs.¹¹ The picture was further complicated by the fact that the non-Communist Government parties contained numerous factions. Some of these were not averse to co-operating with the Communists in exchange for more political power.

After 9 September 1944, the wartime ban on political activity was not lifted and the FF parties were the only legal political organisations. Even though they had subscribed to a common programme, tension appeared soon after the coalition had gained power. The main

¹⁰ FO371/48644, U827, Sofia to FO, FO minutes, 3 – 8.02.1945; FO371/48166, R3192, Sofia to FO, FO minutes, 13 – 20.02.1945

¹¹ NA, RG220, entry 108, box 90, OSS report, 30.12.1944; Bell, J. *The BCP...* p.82; Crampton, R. *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*. London: Routledge, 1994. p.223; Max, S.M. *The United States, Great Britain, and the Sovietization of Hungary, 1945 - 1948*. Boulder, Co: Columbia UP, 1985. p.33-39

reasons were Communist violence and the BCP's dictatorial aspirations in the Government. By January 1945, the disharmony among the ruling parties was no longer hidden. British representatives did not regard these circumstances as conducive to democratic practices. They followed with intense attention any signs that the Government intended to carry out elections soon. They considered that in the prevailing atmosphere it would 'be very easy for a one-party Government to establish itself' and this 'would inevitably take the form of some kind of Communism'.¹²

The Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe gave additional force to Britain's argument that free elections and the establishment of a multi-party system were the most basic prerequisites for the stable democratic evolution of Bulgaria. In early 1945, the British political representative in Sofia, William Houstoun-Boswall, alerted his superiors to the possibility of elections for the National Assembly as early as May. Several Bulgarian Government officials, most notably the Communist Secretary of the National Council (NC) of the FF, Tsola Dragoicheva had made pronouncements to that effect. She had explained that there would be a single list of FF candidates; the ratio of deputies from each party would be decided at the forthcoming FF congress. The British representative did not think the moment ripe for elections. He quoted even some Communist leaders as judging that 'passions were running too high and time would be necessary for the public to return to something like normal after the present trials and executions'. Houstoun-Boswall suggested that Britain, together with the USA, should declare keen interest in the proposed Bulgarian general elections. The two Great Powers should publicise their expectations of free and democratic elections. They should make known their reservations whether the present regime would be able to ensure secret voting and the freedom of all parties to nominate candidates. Houstoun-Boswall believed that by formulating clear criteria the two Western

¹² FO371/48123, R4072, Howard, 5.03.1945

powers could put off the elections for some time. To stimulate the attention of his own Government the diplomat reminded it that the Bulgarian would be the first post-war elections in a former German satellite and as such could set a precedent for the rest of Eastern Europe.¹³

At the time when Houstoun-Boswall was making these recommendations to the Foreign Office, the US Government had already taken action with regards to another ex-satellite. The State Department had protested to the Soviet Government about the imposition of a new, Communist-dominated Government in Romania in March 1945 which had been formed as a result of Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Vyshinski's direct intervention. The US protest was flatly rejected by Molotov who claimed that the implementation of the Yalta Declaration was not a joint responsibility of the Three Great Powers but of the Soviet Allied Control Commission.¹⁴ The State Department did not accept this interpretation and considered itself bound by promises made at Yalta. On 5 April 1945, the US Ambassador in Moscow made another protest to the Soviet Government. This time the note dealt with the prospect of elections in Bulgaria which in the USA's opinion did not conform to the democratic principles upheld by the Allies. The US note proposed the establishment of some machinery for consultation between the Big Three on the question, for example an independent tripartite committee to look into the timing and preparation of elections. The most important requirement was that the Bulgarian Government should be stopped from carrying out elections in the foreseeable future.¹⁵ The Soviet reply precluded any discussion by pointing out there were no imminent elections in Bulgaria. It also made clear that the

¹³ *Ibid.*, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 28.02.1945

¹⁴ Lundestad, G. *The American Non-Policy...* p.232-233; Boll, M. *Cold War...* p.94-95

¹⁵ FO371/48123, R6011, Halifax to FO, 30.03.1945

Soviet Government would look on any further US action as interference in Bulgarian internal affairs.¹⁶

It is doubtful whether in the early spring of 1945 the Bulgarian Communists were seriously thinking of elections.¹⁷ Available documents make it possible to suggest that the Western representatives' anxiety about the premature timing of the elections was somewhat exaggerated. The Bulgarian Communists began planning for elections only in May 1945. This is when the Communist Politburo looked into possible methods for interference in the other Fatherland Front parties with the aim of breaking their unity.¹⁸ Early fears for the manner in which elections would be carried out, however, were perfectly relevant. The short diplomatic exchanges about the allegedly untimely elections revealed the positions each of the Three Big Allies was going to take regarding Bulgaria when elections did eventually take place.

The US action in Moscow had been co-ordinated with the FO, which had reluctantly pledged support; a British representation was handed to the Soviet Government a whole week after the ^{one} US. Houstoun-Boswall was more than sceptical about the US proposal. He predicted that participation in any tripartite body would simply make British and US representatives 'look ridiculous and shoulder the responsibility' for the results. He had in mind much subtler means of influencing the Bulgarian authorities and public, for example British propaganda for democracy, journalistic coverage of events in Bulgaria and above all encouragement of the moderate FF elements by official pronouncements of British interest.¹⁹

On their part, the Balkan specialists at the Southern Department agreed with the general

¹⁶ AVPRF, f.74, op.27, p.17, no.18, 1.29, MID to Roberts, May 1945; FO371/48124, R8082, Roberts to FO, 6.05.1945; Lundestad, G. *The American Non-Policy...* p.197-205

¹⁷ Boll, M. *Cold War...* p.96

¹⁸ Ognyanov, L. *Narodna...* p.34

¹⁹ FO371/48124, R6239, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 4.04.1945

premises behind the State Department's move but considered it unwise to raise the questions of the Romanian Government and of the Bulgarian elections simultaneously. They preferred a gradual approach by which matters would be resolved one at a time. Undoubtedly, British officials still felt themselves tied down by the provisions of the percentage agreement and expressed content that at least it was the USA who had taken the lead.²⁰

FO officials dealing with the Balkans were not too concerned about the timing of Bulgarian elections. Nor were they unduly worried ^{as to} how to react to improper behaviour by the Bulgarian Government. At the time they were preoccupied with internal deliberations as to whether the acceptance of the Yalta principles overruled the TOLSTOY agreement and whether they should continue to abide by the ratio fixed in October 1944.²¹ The alternative was to voice their views regarding Bulgaria and Rumania, and above all to insist on these views being taken into account by the Soviet Government. The main British anxiety was whether to take a firm attitude regarding a country subject to Soviet control. This could cause not only 'bitter reproaches from Moscow' but possible retaliatory action in territories in which Britain had 'a much more lively interest than... in Bulgaria'.²²

Although disconcerted by Communist excesses in Bulgaria, Houstoun-Boswall too understood that the question should be considered from the *wider* angle of British long-term interests of co-operation with the USSR. And yet he reminded the FO that the elections would show how the Soviet Government proposed to apply the Yalta Declaration. He reported that the Soviet compromise on the composition of the Polish Government, the Soviet agreement for Bulgarian withdrawal from Thrace and Tito's abandonment of Trieste were interpreted across the political spectrum in Bulgaria as signs of the Soviet Union

²⁰ FO371/48124, R6081, US Embassy London to FO, 31.03.1945, Churchill, 3.04.1945, Clerk Kerr to Molotov, 12.04.1945

²¹ FO371/48123, R4072, Howard, 5.03.1945, Sargent, Cadogan, 6.03.1945, Eden, 8.03.1945

²² FO371/48124, R6239, Williams, 9.05.1945

assuming a defensive position.²³ At the Southern Department, Howard found it premature to draw any conclusions on Bulgaria on the basis of these examples. Indeed, most British observers wondered whether Stalin would think it worthwhile to make some concessions or would decide that the principle of Soviet prevalence in Bulgaria was too important to be put at stake by working together with the West.²⁴

British analysts saw the internal significance of the coming elections in Bulgaria in that they would confirm the existing political structure and would lend constitutional approval to the present Government.²⁵ However unpalatable this seemed, knowledge of Balkan history justified doubts as to whether the legitimisation of the Communist-dominated Government could be prevented by such measures as a democratic electoral law and mitigation of Communist terror. Sargent repeatedly recorded his scepticism of the outcome of even relatively free elections anywhere in the region. He wrote that the last war had impoverished and reduced most of the population to a state of complete apathy. He did not expect ordinary people 'to fight for parliamentary institutions, which in any case they never learnt to rely on or respect'. Instead, he could understand how they could wish 'to obtain a minimum of security and stable government even ... at the cost of their political or personal liberties'.²⁶ Sargent recalled that even in the calmest inter-war years parliamentary institutions in the region had been inefficient and corrupt, and had, as a rule, been replaced by some form of dictatorship. All this had made the majority of East Europeans increasingly susceptible to Communist propaganda and almost predetermined Soviet-style totalitarianism. Sargent's view was that this coincided with the intentions of the Soviet

²³ FO371/48128, R12876, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 31.07.1945; FO371/48159, R11158, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 29.06.1945

²⁴ FO371/48159, R11158, Stewart, 1.07.1945

²⁵ FO371/48122, R3785, FO to Angora, 3.04.1945

²⁶ FO371/48219, R5063, Sargent memorandum, 13.03.1945

Government and made British chances to introduce free institutions into these countries 'somewhat dim'.²⁷

Sargent's reasoning led him to conclude that the establishment of totalitarian regimes across Eastern Europe was almost inevitable. He felt that the British Government should resign itself to its inability to change such an outcome. Most importantly, since it was highly unlikely that British protests would alter the overall direction of developments, such useless actions should be abandoned as they could only antagonise the Soviet Government.²⁸ This thinking applied not only to Bulgaria but to most of Eastern Europe. It was especially pronounced, but not exclusive to those countries which had sided with Germany during the war. To some extent, this repeated pre-war patterns of Britain's behaviour dominated by reluctance to get involved in a region to which another Great Power laid claims.

Preparation for the Elections.

Ironically, at the time when leading British policy makers were advising restraint regarding Bulgaria, prominent Bulgarian Communists were forming extremely hostile opinions of Britain. In January 1945, in a report for the Department of International Information of the CC of the Bolshevik Party*, Kostov accused the British representative of leading the non-Communist Fatherland Front parties to question the Communists' predominance in the administration of the country. Kostov blamed the British Mission for encouraging the Agrarians to challenge the Communists.²⁹ He was however aware that such accusations should be voiced with great caution and used for internal purposes only as relations with Britain should not be affected.³⁰ Communist activists understood the need to maintain outward tripartite Allied

²⁷ FO371/48123, R4072, Sargent, 6.03.1945

²⁸ FO371/48219, R5063, Sargent memorandum, 13.03.1945

* full name All-Soviet Communist Party (Bolsheviks)

²⁹ RTsHIDNI, f.17, op.128, a.d.750, l.16-17, Kostov report, 26.01.1945; TsPA, f.146, op.4, a.e.182, p.3, Kostov to Dimitrov, 2.06.1945

³⁰ TsPA, f.146, op.4, a.e.174, Kostov to Dimitrov, 9.02.1945

co-operation. In February 1945, the Communist Orlin Vassilev, Director of the Bulgarian National Radio, wrote to Georgi Dimitrov that reforms should be 'carried out on a more indefinite, more vague, temporary basis of democratic compromises' due to 'the particular international situation and the impossibility for the USSR to interfere openly in [Bulgarian] internal dealings'.³¹

When in June 1945 the Regency Council set the polling day at 26 August, Houstoun-Boswall could report that all his grim predictions about the elections looked well on the way to fulfilment. The Fatherland Front had announced that its members would stand on a single list. According to the agreed in advance distribution of seats, of the 267 prospective deputies, the Communists and Agrarians were allocated 95 each. Houstoun-Boswall thought that the true proportion of Agrarians and Communists was three to one.³² The more worrying development was that in May left-wing splinter groups had overtaken the leadership of both the Agrarian and Social Democratic parties with active Communist support. At the beginning of June Nikola Petkov, Cabinet Minister and leader of the BANU group which participated in the FF, was removed from the leadership of the Agrarian Union and his Cabinet position became questionable.

Judging by these signs, British observers could only guess that the Communists were escalating their interference in the other parties' affairs. What they did not know was that the Politburo had passed a special resolution that the strengthening opposition within the Fatherland Front should not be allowed to form parties outside it. Another decision called for increased Communist support for the so-called 'healthy forces', i.e. leftist pro-Communist elements in the other parties. The Communist leadership was also preparing to launch a

³¹ RtsHIDNI, f.17, op.128, a.d.758, l.21, Vassilev to Dimitrov, 10.02.1945; Clemens, D. *Yalta*. p.268–270 claims that before Potsdam Stalin favoured free elections in Eastern Europe.

³² FO371/48128, R11987, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 11.07.1945

discrediting campaign against G.M. and Petkov.³³ The Communists continued to keep up the appearance of coalition unity, to appeal to the other parties for co-operation and to denounce the, as yet anonymous, enemies of the Fatherland Front.³⁴ Stalin personally advised dealing carefully with Petkov and his supporters. Before being thrown out of the Cabinet and the ruling coalition, they had to be 'unmasked' so that they would not 'emerge as martyrs and fighters for freedom'.³⁵

The British Government had only indirect evidence of Communist interference in the other parties' affairs and could not make Communist behaviour the subject of any official action. Instead, the preferred British course was to raise objections to the Electoral Law and insist that any Government formed as a result of it could not be viewed as representative or democratic. This was done simultaneously by the British delegation at Potsdam and the British representative to Bulgaria.³⁶ Houstoun-Boswall suggested to his superiors a joint Anglo-American declaration that neither power would recognise the Bulgarian Government.³⁷ The US State Department favoured international observation of the Bulgarian elections, but this was not acceptable to the FO.³⁸ Although British displeasure with the Bulgarian Electoral Law was genuine, refusal to support international monitoring might have been influenced by Stalin's statement that the presence of foreign observers in the Greek elections – another US suggestion - 'would be an insult to the Greek people and an interference in Greek internal affairs'. If Stalin was reluctant to sponsor a precedent,

³³ Ognyanov, L. *Narodna...* p.34

³⁴ Dimitrov, G. *Izbrani suchineniya*. Sofia: Partizdat, 1972. vol.VI. p.212-213

³⁵ Dimitrov, V. 'The Cominform and the Bulgarian Communist Party: Embarking on a New Course?.' Conference paper. International Colloquium 'L'Unione Sovietica e l'Europa nella Guerra Fredda (1943 - 1953)': Cortona, Italy, September 1994. p.5

³⁶ FO371/48223, R12235, Stewart, 18.07.1945

³⁷ FO371/48128, R12711, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 31.07.1945

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Stewart, 20.07.1945; FO371/48128, R12711, FO to Sofia, 28.07.1945

which might then be used to urge similar measures in Eastern Europe, the same may be said of the British Government.³⁹

Following closely the course of events in Bulgaria, the FO received information not only of official pronouncements but also of the views of the principal opposition figures. The latter increasingly consulted members of the British Mission. Houstoun-Boswall was able to report that in mid-July the Government-sponsored negotiations between the two factions of the Agrarian Union, those of Obbov and Petkov, failed because the latter had been refused the right to publish a newspaper and to campaign independently. This caused Petkov's resignation from the Government. He then dispatched a letter to the Allied Missions, the Allied Control Commission, the Bulgarian Prime Minister and Regents, protesting against Communist terror against non-Communist candidates and asking for postponement of the elections.⁴⁰ In August the remaining Agrarian and Social Democrat Ministers, as well as the independent Petko Stoyanov, Finance Minister, left the Government too. The different opposition groups – those which had just left the Government and others which had never participated in it - formed the 'United Opposition' and published a co-ordinated electoral platform. The newly constituted Opposition proclaimed that it was not against the Fatherland Front but only supported it in its original form of a true coalition of independent political organisations with equal rights, as it had been on 9 September 1944. The centrepiece of the Opposition programme was the restoration of political rights and freedoms as defined by the suspended Turnovo Constitution.* The programme also emphasised the necessity to take the

³⁹ FO371/48223, R12235, TERMINAL briefs, 30.06.1945

⁴⁰ FO371/48128, R12616, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 26.07.1945

* The democratic Bulgarian Constitution adopted by the First Grand National Assembly in 1879 in the old Bulgarian capital, Turnovo. It was disregarded after the 19 May 1934 *coup d'état*.

militia out of Communist hands and stop Communist interference in the affairs of public institutions or the private life of Bulgarian citizens.⁴¹

Most of the Opposition's demands echoed the views of the British representative that a high standard of electoral conduct should be set in Bulgaria. Meanwhile, the British Mission in Sofia was receiving clear indications that the Opposition and wider anti-Communist circles in Bulgaria relied on staunch British support. At the end of July, Exarch Stephan, the Head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, spoke to Houstoun-Boswall about the need to raise interest in the Bulgarian elections in the West. The Exarch had just returned from Moscow and was convinced that if Britain wished to take up the question with the Soviet Government, the latter would certainly take British considerations into account and tame the Communist extremists. The Exarch also insisted that if the anti-Communist Opposition received Western public endorsement, they would be much more willing to precipitate an electoral crisis.⁴² In August Houstoun-Boswall received information that the *Zveno* leaders had not yet withdrawn their confidence from the Government solely because they were not sure of consistent British support for the Opposition.⁴³ The same was true of the two non-Communist Regents who privately appealed to the British Government to take some firm action.⁴⁴

Communists in Bulgaria were certain that the British and US diplomats were secretly encouraging the Opposition. The latter too seemed to take Western involvement on their side for granted. In fact, British policy makers hoped that the impending political crisis in Bulgaria could somehow be avoided.⁴⁵ The FO felt that it could be embarrassed by further

⁴¹ Ognyanov, L. *Narodna...* p.35-36

⁴² FO371/48128, R12347, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 21.07.1945

⁴³ FO371/48129, R13862, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 17.08.1945

⁴⁴ FO371/48129, R13863, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 17.08.1945, Stewart, 18.08.1945

⁴⁵ FO371/48128, R12616, Stewart, 27.07.1945

active involvement with the Opposition. Petkov was judged to be in considerable political and personal danger and Houstoun-Boswall was instructed to make it clear that the consequences of the Opposition's actions were its own responsibility. The British Government felt that as it would not be able to offer any protection, it was not justified in giving Petkov and his associates any direct encouragement.⁴⁶

An additional factor accounting for British hesitation was the ever-present concern for Soviet retaliation in Greece, where the political situation almost mirrored that in Bulgaria.⁴⁷ Closely supervised by Britain, the Greek Government was in the middle of preparations for its first post-war elections. The British Government believed that its involvement in Greece would guarantee the democratic conduct of the elections and the veracity of the result. But the Greek Communists severely criticised Britain for creating unjust political conditions. The British Government was particularly sensitive to such accusations which were believed to reflect the views of the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

The British Government's position was complicated by sudden US activity. Both the US representative in Bulgaria Maynard Barnes and Ambassador Harriman in Moscow had for some time complained to their superiors about the lack of evident US interest in the Bulgarian electoral issue. Their grievances appeared to have been heeded when in a speech on 9 August 1945 President Truman paid renewed attention to Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. On 15 August, the State Department presented the Bulgarian Government with a note stating that the USA would only resume diplomatic relations with a representative Government, which the one formed after the approaching elections would not be.⁴⁹ On 18

⁴⁶ FO371/48128, R12711, FO to Sofia, 28.07.1945

⁴⁷ FO371/48223, R13696, Dixon, 14.08.1945

⁴⁸ Iatrides, J.O. *Ambassador...* p.691–694; Stavrakis, P.J. *Moscow and Greek Communism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989. p.84-94

⁴⁹ FO371/48128, R13766, Washington to FO, 15.08.1945

August, Secretary of State James Byrnes said the same in a public statement exposing Communist machinations in Bulgaria.⁵⁰ The Cabinet in Sofia did not fail to notice that the British Government was slow to associate itself with any of the US declarations.⁵¹

The FO was greatly offended by the USA's failure to consult it about the final text of the US note of 15 August 1945. Simultaneously, the FO felt under immense pressure to act with regard to Bulgaria.⁵² British diplomats in the field saw a chance for 'an outstanding diplomatic victory in Soviet-controlled Europe' where British prestige and influence had reached 'the lowest possible ebb'.⁵³ In contrast, Whitehall officials preferred to 'keep to generalities' and undertake a course which, while making their views clear, would not expose them to a diplomatic rebuff. The Southern Department had very little hope indeed, that any Western rebuke of the Bulgarian Communists' methods would serve to promote democratic standards in the Bulgarian electoral campaign. British experts predicted failure of any such initiative and were convinced it would harm Britain's standing in Bulgaria. They recommended therefore a very mild approach which would be in step with the USA, without committing Britain to any radical measures in case of falsification or violence at the polls.⁵⁴ There was even serious consideration whether it was not better to wait until the Bulgarian elections had taken place: it would be easier to object to a manifest fraud whereas any superficial change of the Electoral Law could still conceal Communist intimidation.⁵⁵ Finally, on 20 August 1945 the Bulgarian Government was handed a note which simply

⁵⁰ FRUS 1945, vol.IV, p.295, Byrnes to Barnes, 18.08.1945

⁵¹ FO371/48129, R13862, Houston-Boswall to FO, 17.08.1945

⁵² FO371/48128, R13766, Stewart, 15.08.1945,

⁵³ FO371/48129, R13863, Houston-Boswall to FO, 17.08.1945

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Stewart, 18.08.1945

⁵⁵ FO371/48128, R13548, Stewart, 12.08.1945

outlined the reasons for British disapproval of electoral conditions in Bulgaria. This was immediately publicised by the British Foreign Secretary.⁵⁶

The timing, motivation and content of Britain's declaration suggest that British policy makers favoured a distinctly lower-profile campaign against Bulgaria than had been launched by the USA. There had been insufficient high-level co-ordination between the two Western powers regarding electoral conditions in Bulgaria. The eventual British note resulted much more from desire that Britain should not be perceived as lagging behind the USA than from conviction that a British involvement in Bulgaria would serve a useful purpose.

The Unexpected Postponement. Dispatching the note of 20 August to the Bulgarian Government, the FO felt it had done its best as far as Bulgarian elections were concerned. British policy makers were not optimistic of their abilities to influence significantly Bulgarian internal developments and their action had partly been taken as a precaution against future accusations of acquiescent silence in the face of approaching totalitarianism. Three days before the date of the scheduled elections, a coincidence of factors afforded an unforeseen opportunity for a much greater Western involvement on the spot.

At a press conference on the evening of 22 August 1945, the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Petko Stainov stated that the British and US notes had produced a great political effect but had no juridical power. He explained that the Bulgarian Government was subordinate to the ACC, which was the only institution competent to decide whether the elections could go ahead.⁵⁷ Historiography has accepted that Stainov's statement motivated the Heads of the US and British Missions in Sofia to seek a meeting with the Chairman of the ACC and

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, FO to Moscow, 20.08.1945

⁵⁷ FO371/48129, R14209, BMM to WO, 22.08.1945

demand discussions regarding the elections. Stainov has been credited with a certain degree of independence, which provided an opportunity for Western action. Some authors also maintain that the US political representative boldly surpassed his instructions, practically inducing Stainov to make his statement.⁵⁸ While these assertions cannot be refuted, available documents reveal that the incident was even more complicated.

Events in Sofia were triggered by news from Romania where the British and US representatives in the ACC had just initiated political conversations with the aim of resolving a Government crisis. This provided an impulse for the British and US diplomats in Bulgaria to demand an appointment with Biryuzov about the pending elections. Judging by reports sent to London, Stainov gave his press conference after these demands had been registered.⁵⁹ Russian archives, on the other hand, show that on 22 August Stainov twice visited the Soviet Mission. During the day he saw Biryuzov and recounted a conversation with Barnes who had warned that the US and British notes were a step short of pulling out of Bulgaria. In the evening Stainov talked with the Soviet political adviser Stepan Kirsanov.⁶⁰

If Stainov relayed his conversation with Barnes correctly, the latter did indeed exceed his instructions to a much greater extent than already supposed by historians. Barnes' warning might have been the reason for Stainov's press statement. On the other hand, it is equally possible that after being apparently cautioned by the American, Stainov informed the Soviet authorities and it was they who advised him to make his statement. As the content of Stainov's meetings with the Soviet representatives is not known, any suggestion of possible Soviet influence on the Foreign Minister's statement for the press would be purely speculative. All the released documents disclose is that during the crisis he was in close contact with the Soviet Mission.

⁵⁸ Boll, M.M. *Cold War...* p.146

⁵⁹ FO371/48129, R14209, BMM to WO, 22.08.1945

While the US and Soviet representatives were actively engaged in the events preceding the crisis of 22 August 1945, the British diplomats in Bulgaria seemed to have stood aside. They supported their US counterparts but did not themselves initiate any action. Such an attitude was in line with FO directives. In the next two days, however, British representatives in Sofia played their part in the quickly evolving events.

On 23 August, identical notes from the US and British representatives to the Soviet High Command in Bulgaria took issue with Stainov's statement of the previous day, asking for postponement of the elections until the ACC devised measures which would assure free and democratic conduct.⁶¹ The FO was less than enthusiastic at the news. Sargent in particular considered a written request on behalf of the British Government for postponement of the Bulgarian elections a rather unfortunate step. He was anxious lest the Soviet Union would interpret it maliciously as interference and then use it to pose as the defender of Bulgarian independence. He was certain that a mere postponement would not automatically remedy conditions. Most significantly, in his understanding the earlier British note to the Bulgarian Government had been intended as 'a warning and nothing else'.⁶² In effect, Sargent's comments were critical of Houstoun-Boswall for sending the unauthorised note to Biryuzov. Even so, the FO did not explicitly order its representative to abstain from further actions.

Upon Biryuzov's invitation, the US and British representatives presented their demands at a full meeting of the ACC at midnight on 23/24 August. They insisted on postponement of the elections until the Government secured freedom of speech, press, radio and assembly and guaranteed free and secret balloting. In addition, the main Opposition parties should obtain the right to hold their own party conferences and any other parties which could prove sufficient popular support should be legally registered. The fulfilment of these conditions

⁶⁰ AVPRF, f.74, op.27, no.18, p.17, l.30, Kirsanov to MID, 22.08.1945

⁶¹ FO371/48129, R14328, BMM to FO, 23.08.1945

should be entrusted to an interim 'Cabinet of Affairs', in which the powers of the Prime Minister should be assumed by the Regency Council and all principal parties should hold Ministries.⁶³ The last point had not even been mentioned in correspondence with the FO or the State Department – another indication that the Western representatives in Sofia had obviously acted spontaneously.

The Soviet members of the ACC tried to prevent a discussion of the Bulgarian situation. Kirsanov made a four-hour exposé going over each article of the Electoral Law legalistically and insisting that it was a model of democracy. He was finally interrupted by General Crane of the US Mission who reminded him that Britain and the USA had no intention of recognising the Bulgarian Government under the present circumstances. Crane suggested that the ACC should take responsibility to avoid a major inter-Allied conflict over Bulgaria by simply postponing the elections. Biryuzov simply agreed to refer the question to Moscow and adjourned the meeting at 5 a.m. The British representatives were satisfied that finally a frank exchange of views had occurred in a friendly atmosphere. They did not for a moment believe that postponement of the elections could be announced practically on the eve of the poll.⁶⁴

At 11 p.m. on 24 August Biryuzov convened another tripartite meeting. He read out a letter from Stainov to the ACC effectively asking for postponement of the elections in view of the US and British representations. The ACC briefly discussed the letter and agreed a reply recommending postponement.⁶⁵ No one was more surprised at this outcome than the very

⁶² FO371/48129, R14209, FO to Washington, 24.08.1945

⁶³ FO371/48129, R14365, BMM to FO, 24.08.1945

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ FO371/48129, R14356, BMM to WO, 25.08.1945, R14436, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 27.08.1945; Mackintosh, M. 'Stalin's Policies towards Eastern Europe, 1939 – 1948: the General Picture.' Hammond, T.T. and R.Farrell (eds.) *The Anatomy of Communist Takeovers*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1975. p.239-240

people who had pressed for it.⁶⁶ Indeed, in his first telegram to London General Oxley thanked the Foreign Office for the support he believed it must have provided by co-ordinating representations in Moscow and Washington.⁶⁷ Months after the event Houstoun-Boswall continued to wonder at the Soviet Government's climb-down in such a short time and could only explain this by it having been taken by surprise.⁶⁸

In its internal correspondence, the FO frankly admitted that the postponement of the Bulgarian elections well surpassed its greatest expectations. Houstoun-Boswall and General Oxley were congratulated. Senior officials felt, nevertheless, that success could be more realistically attributed to luck or Bulgarian hesitation rather than to Western intervention. This attitude might be partly explained by the FO's reluctance to admit that an US initiative it had not approved from the start, had indeed succeeded. It is also significant of the FO's ability to recast past actions in a favourable light that after the postponement it informed the British press that the matter of the Bulgarian elections 'had been fully discussed' in the ACC and the decision had been reached after 'satisfactory co-operation'. Several months later, even Houstoun-Boswall began to claim that it had always been Britain's objective to postpone the August elections in Bulgaria.⁶⁹

The FO could not but acknowledge that the postponement of the elections was the most important Western achievement in Bulgaria since the signing of the Bulgarian armistice. This could have significant consequences in as far as theoretically it increased the chances of a fairer second electoral campaign. It demonstrated the practical possibility for application of the principles of Great Power co-operation and seemed to mark the real beginning of the

⁶⁶ FO371/48131, R17892, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 12.10.1945

⁶⁷ FO371/48129, R14329, BMM to WO, 24.08.1945

⁶⁸ FO371/48131, R17892, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 12.10.1945

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

second period in the work of the ACC for Bulgaria.⁷⁰ On the other hand there was renewed British apprehension about the price Soviet Russia would try to extract for its concurrence with Western demands in Bulgaria. Even British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin feared that the Soviet Government would raise its stakes on some subject vital for Britain, such as fastening the conclusion of the Italian Peace Treaty to the international recognition of Bulgaria. The FO expected to witness increased Soviet attention to Greece.⁷¹

With these reservations in mind, the FO was bewildered at the subsequent US actions in Bulgaria. On 27 August the US Secretary of State sent a note to the Bulgarian Government expressing satisfaction with the decision to postpone elections. In addition, as a token of approval, the United States agreed to the appointment of an unofficial Bulgarian representative in Washington, for which Bulgaria had long asked. The Bulgarian official press quickly seized the opportunity to proclaim that diplomatic relations with the USA were restored. The greatest shock for the FO came upon receipt of the news that Barnes had even proposed bestowing a suitable US order on General Biryuzov.⁷² The FO specialists saw in all this examples of 'incredible muddled thinking'. Their general conclusion was that success had deprived the State Department of 'all sense of proportion'.⁷³ They were also worried that the conciliatory US actions would 'stultify the denunciation by Byrnes and Bevin and... discourage the moderate elements that there is consistent Anglo-American policy'. British observers were most displeased that the State Department's precipitate action had been undertaken without any consultations with London.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ FO371/48129, R 14329, Stewart, 25.08.1945, FO to Sofia, 25.08.1945

⁷¹ FO371/48129, R15115, Lawford to Sargent, Hayter to Lawford, 28.08.1945

⁷² FO371/48129, R14437, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 27.08.1945; FO371/48130, R14591, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 28.08.1945

⁷³ FO371/48130, R14591, Stewart, Sargent, 30.08.1945, Cadogan, 31.08.1945

⁷⁴ FO371/48129, R14437, FO to Washington, 31.08.1945

Preparation for Elections in November 1945.

British policy makers did not

overrate the effect of the postponement of the Bulgarian elections. They soberly understood that all the Bulgarian Government had conceded for the moment was not to hold elections which it knew would have been unfair.⁷⁵ However unexpected, this only constituted 'an initial step towards the satisfactory solution of the internal political situation' in Bulgaria.⁷⁶

The British political representative in Bulgaria agreed with his US colleague that 'any disposition ... to rest on our oars can only give final victory in Bulgaria and throughout Eastern Europe to the Communists and the USSR'.⁷⁷

The postponement of the elections did not bring any significant change in Britain's assessment of its own limited capabilities to influence developments in Bulgaria. The incidental success underlined the belief that British interest in the country could be defended only by constant pressure in Sofia and Moscow. To make its views known and taken into account, the British Government had to tackle specific cases with determination and a clear notion of its objectives. In practice, in the late summer of 1945 the carrying out of free and unfettered elections in Bulgaria became an objective of British foreign policy in its own right. British representatives in Bulgaria saw their role as ensuring the establishment of the conditions outlined by the British and US delegates in the ACC at their crucial meeting with Biryuzov on 23 August.

Liberalisation Measures.

The FO considered that priority should be given to the

need to alter the Bulgarian Electoral Law. According to the existing Law, the Government could disenfranchise Opposition supporters or expel Opposition members from the future Parliament. Houstoun-Boswall encouraged the Opposition to publicise its criticism of the Law and put forward proposals for amendments. He asked some Opposition leaders to

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ FRUS 1945, vol.IV, p.314, Barnes to State, 28.08.1945

prepare for him extensive memoranda on the Electoral Law with points on which he himself could press the Government for improvements. Despite his clear sympathies, the British representative kept a good degree of objectivity which he considered the best protection against Soviet accusations of prejudice. He had the greatest understanding of the difficulties under which the Opposition laboured but also felt frustrated with some of its 'childish demands and complaints'.⁷⁸ He and the FO severely criticised several Opposition proposals, notably that for disenfranchisement of soldiers on the grounds that they would vote according to the orders of their Communist commanders.⁷⁹

By 14 September, when the *Decree for the Amendment of the Electoral Law* was published, the FO was satisfied that since the time of the postponement of the elections most of its demands had been favourably addressed. The last formal British objection was against the right of the Government to remove deputies from the Assembly but the FO decided not to press this point further.⁸⁰ For Houstoun-Boswall, there was not 'very much ground for complaint about the Law itself, at any rate judged by Balkan standards'.⁸¹ Both he and his superiors understood that the outcome of the elections depended on the application of the Law 'with a reasonable degree of fairness'.⁸²

In the optimistic aftermath of the August electoral postponement, British diplomats had also considered possible the introduction of a neutral Cabinet to carry out elections. The leaders of the Opposition Agrarians and Social Democrats had welcomed this suggestion and the Western representatives unobtrusively set out to promote it among Bulgarian political circles. Houstoun-Boswall had particular influence over one of the Regents, Venelin Ganev,

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.317, Barnes to State, 3.09.1945

⁷⁸ FO371/48131, R16061, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 19.09.1945

⁷⁹ FO371/48131, R17057, Stewart, 9.10.1945

⁸⁰ FO371/48131, R15717, Stewart, 25.09.1945

⁸¹ FO371/48131, R16832, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 22.09.1945

an Anglophile member of *Zveno*. Ganev told Houstoun-Boswall that the other two Regents, including the Communist Todor Pavlov subscribed to the idea of a 'Cabinet of Affairs'. In the first week of September they had managed to convert Prime Minister Kimon Georgiev to it. In fact, a week after the postponement of the elections Georgiev had mentioned the possibility of 'strengthening and broadening' the basis of the Government, that is including members of the Opposition.⁸³ However, on 7 September, as Houstoun-Boswall was informed, hours after the Prime Minister had been persuaded to resign in favour of a caretaker Cabinet, General Biryuzov had called on the Regents. He had stated in categorical terms that the Soviet Government had decided that elections in Bulgaria should be carried out under the current Government failing which the USSR would withdraw protection from Bulgaria. It is not easy to interpret Biryuzov's threat but the effect it had was that the Prime Minister declared that he would remain in office unless the Three Allies jointly recommended otherwise. Privately, Georgiev had complained that he was powerless since there were about 200,000 Soviet troops in Bulgaria and less than three British divisions in Greece.⁸⁴

Still, in the middle of September the NC of the FF initiated negotiations for the inclusion of the Opposition in the Government. When the Opposition put forward ten firm conditions, among which were the appointment of an Agrarian as Premier and another non-Communist at the Interior Ministry, the talks were ended abruptly.⁸⁵ It is difficult to see why they were started at all after Buryuzov's firm statement unless the Bulgarian Communists had hoped for some easy compromise, which Britain and the USA would accept as a show of goodwill. Another factor might have been the Soviet Government's

⁸² FO371/48131, R16308, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 23.09.1945

⁸³ FO371/48131, R15511, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 11.09.1945

⁸⁴ FO371/48131, R15519, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 12.09.1945

⁸⁵ *Narodno Zemedelsko Zname*, no.41, 28.09.1945

desire to appear flexible shortly before the Council of Foreign Ministers was due to meet for its first session in London. Stalin personally explained to leading Bulgarian Communists who flew to Moscow on the day after the postponement of the elections:

It would be better if the Opposition was legalised, so you could handle them and force them to act loyally instead of going underground. It is in your interest that there should be Opposition... It is even beneficial for you to have an Opposition of 50 - 60 people: you will boast to Bevin that you have an Opposition.⁸⁶

At the end of August, reviewing the political situation, the Communist Politburo concluded that the Communist Party needed to regain the political initiative by supporting certain measures of liberalisation. As a result, political amnesty was proclaimed and politicians who had not entered the Fatherland Front were released from prison. On 7 September, non-FF parties were legalised with the right to publish newspapers and campaign for election. This allowed the establishment in Opposition of Petkov's Agrarians, Kosta Lulchev's Social Democrats and the Democrats led by Nikola Mushanov and Alexander Girginov.

The governing coalition understood that the establishment of a number of parties outside it would further undermine its claims of being the sole legitimate representative of the majority of Bulgarians. In a desperate attempt to be seen to be broadening its basis, the Government admitted the re-established Radical Party into the FF and its leader Stoyan Kosturkov became Minister of Education, even though until 9 September 1944 he had been staunchly pro-German. There was also an unsuccessful attempt to incorporate the newly emerged right-wing Agrarians led by Dimitar Gichev even if this went against the wishes of the FF Agrarian fraction.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Isusov, M. *Stalin...* p.33

⁸⁷ TsPA, f.1, op.7, a.e. 52, l.1, Dimitrov to Kostov, 18.10.1945; *Ustanovyavane...* p.214; Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno-politicheskata sistema v Bulgaria, 1944 - 1948*. Sofia: BAN, 1993. p.75

Many Communist activists admitted that compromises had been made under strong Soviet insistence to comply with the demands of the West.⁸⁸ Initially, the Bulgarian Communists were severely shocked by the postponement of the elections, all the more so since they had not been consulted about it. Soon afterwards they were reassured by Stalin that they were to remain in overall control of Bulgarian affairs. However, the Soviet leader also advised them to accept the necessity of maintaining good relations with Britain and the USA and for the time being 'not to shout too much about their eternal friendship with the Soviet Union'.⁸⁹ Vassil Kolarov was sent from Moscow to Sofia to boost the morale of his co-partisans. He led the renewed electoral campaign for the BCP with vigour, proclaiming that the main tasks of the Communists in the new National Assembly would be to adopt a new Constitution and proclaim a Republic. Kolarov was more than once overheard saying that even though the Soviet Government would make some seeming concessions in Bulgaria, he had been sent to make sure that these did not come to much. He was convinced that the views of neither the British nor the US Governments mattered, as both would capitulate once confronted with a *fait accompli*.⁹⁰

The Opposition was far from content with the changes to the Electoral Law or the relative political relaxation, which it considered to be mere window-dressing. It related to the Western representatives the daily threats towards its leaders and supporters by the militia or Communist activists. Such encounters were especially vicious outside the capital where foreign observers rarely appeared and therefore could not report direct evidence to their Governments. The British and US diplomats knew, however, that a number of the most prominent pre-war leaders had been sufficiently terrorised by being constantly

⁸⁸ Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.79

⁸⁹ Dimitrov, V. 'The Cominform...' p.6

⁹⁰ FO371/48131, R15519, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 12.09.1945

moved from prison to house arrest to hospital and back to prison even before their political activities were legalised.⁹¹

British Assessment of the Situation.

The British Government was reluctant to increase official pressure on the Bulgarian Government. As a result, the British Mission in Bulgaria had no clear instructions on how to proceed and relied mainly on its own judgement. As the British political representative understood the situation, the postponement of the elections had given the Opposition the previously denied chance to present its case and make a bid for power in Bulgaria. This opportunity should be used by the Opposition even in the prevalent atmosphere of incertitude and pressure. The Bulgarian Opposition had to be persuaded to put up a real fight against the Communist-dominated Government. The practical goal Houstoun-Boswall and his colleagues set themselves was to keep up the spirit of the Bulgarian Opposition and give it all the necessary moral support. Britain also perceived its role in overseeing the course of pre-electoral developments and scrutinising the maintenance of general democratic conditions in Bulgaria.⁹² Britain's efforts concentrated on the Agrarian Party as it was believed to be supported by at least eighty percent of the population. Another aim was to convince the various Opposition groups to combine their strength and unite against the Communists. This was partly achieved when upon Houstoun-Boswall's advice the right-wing Agrarian Gichev joined Petkov, who had already become the centre of anti-Communists resistance.⁹³

One unexpected difficulty encountered by Houstoun-Boswall was that frequently the Bulgarian Opposition turned a deaf ear to his doctrine of self-help. He reported an unhealthy tendency among Opposition leaders 'to lie back ... content with the reflection

⁹¹ FO371/48131, R17057, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 5.10.1945; TsPA, f.1, op.7, a.e.351, l.1, Kostov to Dimitrov, 31.05.1945; FRUS 1945, vol.IV, p.316, Barnes to State, 30.08.1945

⁹² FO371/48131, R17057, Stewart, 9.10.1945

⁹³ FO371/48131, R17254, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 10.10.1945

that everything is in the hands of [the Western Governments]'.⁹⁴ Gradually, the British diplomat himself lost confidence in the aptitude of the Bulgarian politicians. Occasionally, he even doubted the democratic potential of the Bulgarian nation in whom 'five hundred years of Turkish rule [had] implanted a slave mentality too deeply'.⁹⁵

Daily observation of the Bulgarian political scene convinced British political and military officers in Bulgaria of the truth of the Opposition's allegations about the dependence of the Bulgarian Communists on Moscow. As a result both General Oxley and Houstoun-Boswall recommended that the British Government, in conjunction with the US Government, should apply political pressure in the Soviet capital. Houstoun-Boswall was ready to believe the rumours that in the face of another joint British and US action, Stalin would not deem it expedient to support the Bulgarian Communists.⁹⁶ But Houstoun-Boswall's major concern was that he was left without a clear idea of the political and strategic importance his Government attached to the country.⁹⁷ He was aware of the inability of the Southern Department to elaborate a general and consistent line of policy towards Bulgaria. He accepted the argument that British involvement in Bulgaria would affect relations with Soviet Russia and have a long-term impact on the whole post-war European configuration of forces. But his preferences lay on the side of testing Soviet will to co-operate in practice. He was not informed of the fact that internal FO debates were leading senior diplomatic staff in London to lean increasingly in the direction of a compromise with the Soviet Union. This would amount to confirming the spheres of interest in the Balkans. Such an attitude was reflected in Britain's decision not to take any action in Bulgaria until the outcome of the discussion of the Eastern European situation at the approaching London

⁹⁴ FO371/48132, R18371, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 27.10.1945

⁹⁵ FO371/48130, R15267, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 8.09.1945

⁹⁶ FO371/48131, R17254, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 10.10.1945

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Council of Foreign Ministers was clear.⁹⁸ There the Western delegations demanded democratisation of Bulgaria and Rumania while Molotov insisted that the regimes in both countries were fully representative and should be internationally recognised. In the wake of this deadlock, the FO briefly weighed up and dismissed the chances for a second postponement of the Bulgarian elections.⁹⁹

In September and October 1945, despite great reservations the FO observed with certain satisfaction and even surprise the progress of the Bulgarian Opposition. The latter was praised for taking full advantage of the freedom of the press and showing much courage in its anti-Government campaign, all of which seemed to justify Britain's efforts.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the decision of the Opposition to boycott the elections came as a disappointment. The legitimacy of the reasons for abstaining from the vote was fully recognised by British officials and diplomats who had long concluded that the elections would definitely be manipulated. The FO could also foresee one advantage in that, without the presence of the Opposition in the future Parliament, the latter could not claim to be representative. And yet, the FO instructed Houstoun-Boswall to press Petkov to go to the polls.¹⁰¹ There is no documentary evidence to suggest the motives behind this decision but most plausibly it was related to the overriding fear in the FO that anything which could be interpreted as British obstruction in Bulgaria might bring Soviet retaliation elsewhere.

The Consequences of the Etheridge Mission.

While British foreign policy makers were gradually realising that their involvement in the Bulgarian elections was not producing the desired results, their US counterparts decided to make another effort to influence political developments in Bulgaria. In October 1945, US Secretary of State Byrnes

⁹⁸ FO371/48131, R16061, Stewart, 25.09.1945

⁹⁹ FO371/48131, R17057, Stewart, 9.10.1945

¹⁰⁰ FO371/48131, R16660, Stewart, 2.10.1945

¹⁰¹ FO371/48131, R17703, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 17.10.1945

charged Mark Etheridge, a respected and experienced journalist and publisher, with the inspection of conditions in the country. Etheridge's appointment came on the heels of the conspicuous failure of the London Council of Foreign Ministers. Barnes had been present at the London summit and had tirelessly repeated to State Department officials his case for tough pressure on Soviet Russia in whose hands he believed Bulgaria's fate lay. For this reason, Barnes approved the dispatch of the Etheridge mission.¹⁰² Cyril Black, one of Etheridge's principal assistants, who had profound knowledge and first-hand experience of the Balkans shared Barnes' impressions. Black believed that the Etheridge mission was called for by the hardening US attitude to the Soviet Union which had yet to be matched by a shift in US public opinion.¹⁰³

Etheridge spent two weeks in Bulgaria, where he conducted conversations with politicians from all shades of opinion and sounded both the Soviet and the British representatives. The Opposition leaders described most forcefully the constant threats and obstruction of their activities by the Government. They restated the main political demands presented to the Government in September. Petkov also explained his decision to boycott the approaching elections partly as a result of the small likelihood that the USA would press for a second postponement. Etheridge considered the Opposition's refusal to take part in the elections as a wrong step and said as much to the Bulgarian Prime Minister. Etheridge pressed Georgiev to admit that a possible solution was to reconstruct the Fatherland Front in its original form which had been supported by the overwhelming majority of Bulgarians. But Georgiev repeated the official line that the Opposition leaders themselves stood in the way of the Government being re-formed.¹⁰⁴ To the Regency Council, Etheridge spoke of the

¹⁰² FO371/48132, R18146, Washington to FO, 24.10.1945

¹⁰³ Etheridge, M. and C.E.Black. *'Negotiating on the Balkans.'* Dennett, R. and J.E.Johnson (eds.) *Negotiating with the Russians.* Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1951. p.185

¹⁰⁴ Etheridge, M. *Negotiating...* p.191; Black, C.E. *'The Start...'* p.187

impossibility of having a representative Bulgarian Government without the Agrarian Union. He prompted the Regents to extend the deadline for the nomination of candidates for election, an idea suggested to him by a number of anti-Communists.¹⁰⁵

On 9 November 1945, Etheridge met Georgi Dimitrov who had just arrived from Moscow to take part in the final stage of the electoral campaign. The leader of the Bulgarian Communists stated firmly that his presence in Bulgaria had been required to make sure a second postponement did not take place. He tried to reassure the US envoy that the Communists had no intention of monopolising power and intended to rule in alliance with the rest of the FF parties. He even mentioned the possibility of discussing the inclusion of Opposition Agrarians and Social Democrats in the Government after the elections. However, the overall impression the US delegation carried away was that all concessions the regime might make before the elections would be purely cosmetic. Etheridge formed a suspicion that the Communists intended to crush any opposition after the regime had won at the polls.¹⁰⁶

The Bulgarian Communists believed the USA's involvement in Bulgaria to be 'a cunning manoeuvre against the Government'.¹⁰⁷ Etheridge's arrival was seen as a pretext to postpone the elections once again, which would severely undermine the authority of the Government and increase the ambitions of the right-wing parties. Therefore, even before Etheridge met with the most prominent non-Communist figures in the Government, Kostov had achieved a clear understanding with Georgiev and War Minister Damyan Velchev. The latter agreed

¹⁰⁵ TsPA, f.146, op.4, a.e.192, 1.3-4, Kostov to Dimitrov, 22.10.1945

¹⁰⁶ Black, C.E. *'The Start...'* p.189; FO371/48194, R19201, Washington to FO, 12.11.1945.

¹⁰⁷ TsPA, f.146, op.4, a.e.192, 1.3-4, Kostov to Dimitrov, 22.10.1945

that the elections would not be postponed, the Government would not be reconstructed and if the Opposition wanted to negotiate with the FF no outside mediation was necessary.¹⁰⁸

In the course of consultations in Bulgaria, the members of the Etheridge mission were increasingly convinced that the proper conduct of the elections required reorganisation of the Government and registration of separate party electoral lists. And if these conditions were to be met, the elections would have to be postponed for a second time.¹⁰⁹ It was not certain that the State Department would approve such a solution. Etheridge was under the double pressure to find an alternative means of demonstrating undiminished US interest in Bulgaria and also somehow to prepare the way for a necessary US retreat on the subject of the Bulgarian elections. He proposed that his delegation should proceed to Moscow: after all Dimitrov himself had made it clear that important decisions regarding the Bulgarian elections had been taken there. Heading for the Soviet capital, Etheridge was specifically instructed by Byrnes to recommend the postponement of the elections. This would allow enough time for the preparations of Opposition electoral lists of candidates and for the reorganisation of the Government to include Opposition representatives. Another point to press was the reorganisation of the militia, the control of which had to be taken out of Communist hands so that it could not be used as an instrument of repression over non-Communists.¹¹⁰

The Soviet Government had access to full information about the course of the Etheridge mission as daily reports from Sofia reached Dimitrov when he was still in Moscow. The Bulgarian Communists were even able to relay to the Soviet Government details of Etheridge's meeting with the Prime Minister who had not hesitated to disclose them to

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Etheridge, M. *Negotiating...* p.192

¹¹⁰ FO371/48132, R18750, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 3.11.1945; Black, C.E. *The Start..* p.189

Kostov.¹¹¹ The Soviet Government had responded to Etheridge's arrival in Sofia by dispatching there the Soviet journalist Ilya Ehrenburg as a special correspondent. Ehrenburg's articles for the Soviet press were carefully scrutinised by the DII. They extolled the achievements of the Fatherland Front and insisted that it had wide support from all progressive elements in Bulgarian society just while Etheridge was preparing to present exactly the opposite case to the Soviet Government.¹¹²

In Moscow the special US representative was received by Vyshinski. In the conversation with Vyshinski, Etheridge made little secret of his negative judgement of conditions in Bulgaria. Vyshinski was not impressed and insisted that his own information was quite the opposite. He ruled out postponement of the elections claiming that it would be an unjustifiable intervention. The Soviet Government would have considered a request from the Bulgarian Government but Vyshinski was sure that such a request would not be forthcoming. This was the reverse of what Etheridge had found out in Bulgaria: only days earlier the Bulgarian Prime Minister had indicated that he would have made such a request had he been a free man.¹¹³

Britain's Reaction to the Etheridge Mission. Houstoun-Boswall found Etheridge agreeable and 'very level-headed'.¹¹⁴ The British political representative in Sofia hoped the US mission was going to send a correct picture of the Bulgarian situation to Washington but failed to see how this would influence immediate developments in the country. What is more, in contrast to the Communist Kostov who expected Etheridge's appearance to cheer

¹¹¹ TsPA, f.146, op.4, a.e.192, l.4, Kostov to Dimitrov, 22.10.1945

¹¹² RTsHIDNI, f.17, op.128, a.e.759, l.70-77, Ehrenburg draft article 19 – 22.10.1945

¹¹³ FO371/48194, R19324, Moscow to FO, 14.11.1945

¹¹⁴ FO371/48132, R18348, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 26.10.1945

the spirit of the Opposition, Houstoun-Boswall was afraid that the Opposition would lie back and place everything in the hands of the American.¹¹⁵

The appointment of the Etheridge mission caused mixed feelings at the FO. Firstly, British Balkan experts were slighted that they had not been consulted properly. Throughout the mission, there was abundance of complaints about short notice of the different stages of the venture and US failure to observe the principle of prior co-ordination.¹¹⁶ The FO was overcome by sudden jealousy of the increased US role in the region. The Southern Department somewhat hesitantly claimed that Great Britain had a greater interest than the USA, not only in Bulgaria but also in Romania which Etheridge was to visit too. Only rarely was a voice heard saying that Britain should not object to the more direct US methods as long as they achieved results.¹¹⁷ Therefore, the British Government reserved the right to make its own views known to the Soviet Government.¹¹⁸ British distrust of the US approach was to an extent matched by US desire to try to solve the Bulgarian problem alone. The State Department requested that there be no parallel British action as Etheridge's greatest asset was his being regarded as an independent enquirer.¹¹⁹

Only when Etheridge arrived in Moscow were British experts able to form a clear and objective opinion of his views. Etheridge talked with the British Ambassador Clerk Kerr and the *Chargé d'Affaires* Frank Roberts and tried to explain how the specific actions he had recommended fitted in with US long-term policy. Etheridge proclaimed Bulgaria to be of similar strategic importance to Poland, with the added advantage of being accessible to the West from Greece and Turkey. His ideas revolved around the possibility for the West to buy

¹¹⁵ TsPA, f.146, op.4, a.e.192, 1.4, Kostov to Dimitrov, 22.10.1945; FO371/48132, R18371, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 27.10.1945

¹¹⁶ FO371/48132, R18899, FO to Washington, 10.11.1945

¹¹⁷ FO371/48132, R18750, Stewart, 5.11.1945, Williams, 6.11.1945

¹¹⁸ FO371/48194, R9168, Washington to FO, 12.11.1945

¹¹⁹ FO371/48132, R18899, Washington to FO, 7.11.1945

Bulgarian products for political reasons and secure free Bulgarian commercial access to the Aegean through Salonika and Dedeagatch. The West could save the Bulgarian Agrarian Union just as it had saved the Polish Peasant Party, by showing consistent interest in it. According to Etheridge, the West should work for the withdrawal of the Red Army from Bulgaria.¹²⁰

Even after this update on the progress of the mission, the FO retained a certain dislike of it. British observers could not overcome the feeling that the whole venture had 'somewhat flimsy grounds' and showed distinct relief at its predicted 'rapid and inglorious conclusion'.¹²¹ British officials were especially sceptical of the practical results of the Etheridge talks. British diplomats received indications that Etheridge's consultations were causing some Bulgarian Communist leaders to waver with regard to the carrying out of the elections. That is why Dimitrov had been promptly sent to Bulgaria to force through the elections on 18 November without any compromise with the Opposition.¹²² Some British analysts even saw in the abortive September talks between the Bulgarian Government and Opposition a sign that the Soviets had been considering changes in the regime to which the Etheridge mission had put an end.¹²³ On the whole, the FO concluded that the US action had been too aggressive and had actually stiffened the resolve of the Bulgarian Communists who did not want to appear vulnerable to Western pressures. This can now be confirmed by evidence from letters from Kostov to Dimitrov discussing the best ways to demonstrate that the Bulgarian Government 'would not waver at outside intervention and the Communists would stand firm' in the face of insidious manoeuvres.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ FO371/48132, R20247, Moscow Embassy to FO, 20.11.1945

¹²¹ FO371/48132, R18899, Williams, 8.11.1945; FO371/48194, R19327, Sargent, Dixon, 16.11.1945

¹²² FO371/48132, R18899, Williams, 8.11.1945

¹²³ FO371/48131, R17623, Stewart, 17.10.1945

¹²⁴ TsPA, f.1, op.7, a.e.393, l.2, Kostov to Dimitrov, 5.07.1945

The Question of Another Diplomatic Note.

At the conclusion of his Moscow visit

Etheridge recommended to his Government that it issue a diplomatic note on the question of the Bulgarian elections. This should stipulate that the coming Bulgarian elections were not going to be held in a satisfactory democratic manner and therefore the United States would not recognise the emergent Government.¹²⁵ Immediately, Houstoun-Boswall took the opportunity once more to persuade his superiors that a strongly worded note would tilt the balance in Bulgaria. It could precipitate the resignation of the Regency Council, which in turn would create enough justification for the postponement of the elections.¹²⁶ Neither this nor previous communications on the subject specified the expected advantages of a second postponement. The British representative seemed to be accepting the belief – or rather the hope - of the Opposition leaders that another postponement would mean explicit criticism of the Communists who would therefore alter their behaviour. Indeed, this scenario had been discussed with the Regents and some Opposition figures but Houstoun-Boswall overlooked the fact that even the USA was not asking for a new postponement. Apart from that, to the British representative in Sofia, some official pronouncement that the Bulgarian Government did not meet the criteria for recognition seemed to be the only ‘stick’ Britain had left in Bulgaria.¹²⁷

On 14 November 1945, the US Government requested Britain’s support for a note of protest and the FO’s initial reaction was to oblige promptly.¹²⁸ On second thoughts, however, British officials realised that the proposed statement would make it impossible for Britain to recognise the Bulgarian Government not just after the elections but for some considerable

¹²⁵ FO371/48194, R19324, Moscow to FO, 14.11.1945

¹²⁶ FO371/48194, R19326, Sofia to FO, 15.11.1945; Kostadinova, T. *Bulgaria 1879 - 1946. The Challenge of Choice*. Boulder, Co.: East European Monographs, 1995. p.86

¹²⁷ FO371/48132, R18348, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 26.10.1945

¹²⁸ FO371/48194, R19327, Washington to FO, R19201, Stewart, 14.11.1945

time afterwards.¹²⁹ It became important, therefore, to find a middle course which would keep in step with the USA but also not tie the hands of the British Government. The compromise was discovered in a formula which would not state that Britain could not recognise or have diplomatic dealings with the new Bulgarian Government. It would be confined to saying that Britain did not consider the Bulgarian Government as 'democratic and representative'.¹³⁰ This subtle distinction was hardly going to be acknowledged outside Western diplomatic circles, and the FO quickly dropped it. The members of the Southern Department began arguing that as the situation in Bulgaria had not changed since August, the note which had been sent to the Bulgarian Government then was still in force and rightly expressed the official British views. Foreign Secretary Bevin personally reviewed Britain's position and concluded that it would be a mistake to send a new note. The only remaining problem was how to wriggle out of the US proposal. A pretext was found in the fact that the US Embassy in London had not forwarded its Government's request for support to the FO.¹³¹

At the end of the Etheridge mission, the British Government faced the question of whether to repeat its action in Bulgaria from the previous August, namely to state before the ballot that the emergent Government would not be regarded as representative. This would amount to admitting that the tactics employed so far had not produced any significant result. Despite the August postponement of elections and the ensuing Western pressure campaign on the Bulgarian Government, the conditions for the establishment of democracy in Bulgaria had barely improved. British official circles had to recognise that their best diplomatic efforts regarding Bulgaria were all but wasted. The FO was rapidly moving towards the opinion that since it could not influence Bulgarian developments, it should not object to them and

¹²⁹ FO371/48194, R19201, Williams, 14.11.1945

¹³⁰ FO371/48194, R19201, Sargent, 15.11.1945

thus merely expose British impotence in the face of dictatorship. What is more, the deadlock in relation to Bulgaria and the other ex-satellites was being used by the Soviet Union to prevaricate on other issues of importance for the West. That is why senior British diplomats began pressing more vigorously than ever for a compromise to be reached at the approaching December Council of Foreign Ministers in Moscow.

On 16 November 1945, the Opposition made a last desperate effort to recreate the conditions that had brought the August postponement of elections. It sent identical letters to the Prime Minister, the ACC and the Allied Missions stating that the political atmosphere in the country had not improved but on the contrary, the terror of the authorities had increased.¹³² Almost simultaneously, the United States delivered a note to the Bulgarian Government expressing conviction that the results of the elections would not reflect the democratic choice of the Bulgarian people and therefore refusing to recognise the new Government.¹³³

This action was not matched by a similar British one, despite Houstoun-Boswall's numerous warnings that the Bulgarian Government and, he believed, the Soviet Government were 'openly banking ... on divergence of opinion between HMG and USG'.¹³⁴ Indeed, the lack of a British note softened the blow of the US declaration but Houstoun-Boswall's last-minute appeals did not activate any change of mind at the FO.¹³⁵ During the week of the Bulgarian elections, the Mission in Sofia was left without any communications from London whatsoever. In vain did the representatives in Bulgaria plead for 'any (even private)

¹³¹ FO371/48194, R19327, Sargent, Dixon, 16.11.1945

¹³² Ognyanov, L. *Narodna...* p.45-47

¹³³ FO371/48132, R19440, US Embassy to Sargent, 16.11.1945, R 19454, BMM to WO, 16.11.1945

¹³⁴ FO371/48132, R18348, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 26.10.1945

¹³⁵ FO371/48132, R19498, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 17.11.1945

indication of the attitude of HMG'.¹³⁶ It was almost a week after the elections that an FO letter explained to Houstoun-Boswall that the British Government had resolved 'not to tie *[its]* hands with a public statement'.¹³⁷

As scheduled, the Bulgarian general elections took place on 18 November 1945. There was little overt physical violence on the polling day. The Government reported a turnout of 85.2 percent, of which 88.3 percent voted for the Fatherland Front. Boycotting the elections, the Opposition had campaigned for the casting of blank ballots. The Government proclaimed these invalid. The number of blank ballots together with the number of people who had genuinely abstained from the vote constituted just below a quarter of the electorate. The smallest Government majority was observed in the constituencies of the biggest towns,

This could be attributed to more stringent supervision closer to administrative centres. In addition, the fact that the publication of results in Sofia and some other major towns was delayed suggests falsifications.¹³⁸

On the basis of the official statistics, the FO concluded that at least a quarter of the Bulgarians were opposed to the Government. This was not considered an implausible result given that the electorate was largely illiterate, the electoral campaign had taken place in an atmosphere of Communist intimidation and psychological coercion, and the Opposition 'had not put up a serious show'.¹³⁹ In any case, British observers had not expected more than forty percent for the Opposition in a fair election.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, Houstoun-Boswall wrote that members of the ruling coalition had been allegedly shaken by the real results of which they were aware. There were rumours that local Communist leaders had been

¹³⁶ FO371/48194, R19541, Sofia to FO, 17.11.1945

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, FO to Sofia, 23.11.1945

¹³⁸ Kostadinova, T. *Bulgaria...* p.88

¹³⁹ FO371/48132, R19781, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 20.11.1945

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Stewart, 23.11.1945

‘upbraided’ by Georgi Dimitrov who himself had been reprimanded from Moscow for having misled the Soviets. It was also said that a secret Soviet mission had been sent to Bulgaria to investigate the real state of affairs.¹⁴¹

In the anticlimax after the elections, British diplomats tried to analyse the developments of the previous months in view of the necessity to modify policy to Bulgaria. Houstoun-Boswall could claim to have the best insight into the machinations of the Bulgarian Communists whom he had observed closely for more than a year. He was convinced of their being manipulated according to the objectives of Soviet foreign policy. He expected the radical left elements in the FF Government to work for the implementation of political and economic measures, which would not only consolidate their power but also strengthen the Soviet hold on Bulgaria. Apart from binding the Bulgarian economy to the USSR, the British political representative predicted the proclamation of a Republic to be followed by steps for the establishment of a South Slav Federation.

Houstoun-Boswall’s outlook was inevitably shaped by his proximity to the Bulgarian political scene. Naturally, he felt more emotional about events in Bulgaria than his superiors in London. Nevertheless, he was not misled about the low priority of the country in overall British policy. But he held that the pattern evolving in Bulgaria, where the Soviet hold was the firmest, would illuminate future developments in the rest of Soviet-dominated Europe. Incidents in neighbouring countries, like the proclamation of the Yugoslav Republic, could in turn indicate correctly the direction in which Bulgaria would go. For Houstoun-Boswall, only a holistic approach to the region could slow the Soviet determination to fortify Soviet positions in the Balkans. He was categorical that Bulgaria was being permanently drawn into the ‘vortex’ of Soviet security with its strategic as well as purely ideological dimensions. The real importance of this was, of course, its bearing on the protection of British

¹⁴¹ FO371/48194, R20177, Sofia to FO, 29.11.1945

communications and interests in the Near and Middle East. This required a thorough re-assessment of policy towards Bulgaria and clarification of British long-term objectives.

Houstoun-Boswall's general examination of the unstable British position in Bulgaria was not followed by any concrete proposals for action. He was aware that Great Britain could lend Bulgaria no 'physical aid in any shape or form to stand up to its liberators'.¹⁴² All he could suggest was that British disagreement with the strengthening of Soviet control over Bulgaria should be made clear to the Soviet Government and this should be done from the position of a common Anglo-American front.¹⁴³ Houstoun-Boswall's assessment was confirmed by Clerk Kerr who saw no way to reverse the decisive Soviet influence over Bulgaria. British diplomats in Moscow warned of Soviet malicious capability to interpret British action with regard to Bulgaria as aimed at weakening the Soviet hold. They advised the FO not to bring the question of the Bulgarian regime to the attention of the Soviet Government. This would only rock overall Soviet-British relations without any real chance for local advantages. Any momentary British gains in Bulgaria would most certainly be compensated by Soviet trouble making in areas of far greater importance for Great Britain.¹⁴⁴

The Southern Department agreed with the gloomy judgement of the picture in Bulgaria and could not see any obvious formula for improvement. British policy makers became increasingly uncertain that they should try to apply any pressure on the Bulgarian issue as they had serious doubts whether Bulgaria could be converted into a genuine democracy at all. Simultaneously, however, some reluctance to give up completely the erstwhile aim of promoting political and economic freedom lingered in the FO. The two conflicting lines

¹⁴² FO371/48194, R20451, Sofia to FO, 3.12.1945

¹⁴³ FO371/48194, R20177, Sofia to FO, 29.11.1945

¹⁴⁴ FO371/48194, R20830, Clark Kerr to FO, 12.12.1945

of reasoning informed the search for an adjusted British approach to Bulgaria in the months after the November 1945 elections.¹⁴⁵

* * *

Britain had followed the USA in the effort to secure the August 1945 postponement of elections in Bulgaria. In the course of this episode, it had become clear for British policy makers that they had managed to slow down the advance of Communist power in Bulgaria only because the Soviet Government had apparently been presented with a unified and strong Anglo-American front. At the time, the postponement had assumed an importance of its own but once achieved, it required the elaboration of further means to follow up and build upon the scarcely expected success. The period between August and November 1945, when elections were finally carried out was crucial for the clarification of long-term British attitudes to Bulgaria.

In retrospect, the FO realised that the practical effect of the August postponement of the elections was somewhat dubious. It was little more than an exception which did not change the intentions of the Bulgarian Communists but certainly alerted them to the need to proceed with their plans more carefully so as not to cause international embarrassment for their "Big Friend". But they were also able to consolidate their position by reorganising the ruling political coalition they dominated and by working for the disintegration of the Opposition. Nor had the postponement of the Bulgarian elections brought any change in the pattern of British-Soviet relations regarding Eastern Europe. The momentary Soviet acquiescence in Western demands did not lessen overall Soviet influence in Bulgaria which was based foremost on the links of the BCP with the Soviet Union. The correct evaluation of this situation drove British foreign policy experts to the

¹⁴⁵ FO371/48194, R20451, Williams, 6.12.1945, Sargent, 7.12.1945, R20830, FO draft to Houstoun-Boswall, Dec.1945

unequivocal conclusion that there was precious little they could do to affect the course of events in Bulgaria. That is why they had to cut losses and save face while aiming to preserve influence in the southern part of the Balkans.

British hesitance to get involved over Bulgarian affairs in the second half of 1945 had been overruled by unusual US activism at the time of the postponement of the elections. At that time, US recognition of Soviet interests in Eastern Europe was still not judged incompatible with the existence of independent democratic states. The Etheridge mission was launched as an attempt to overcome the deadlock regarding Bulgaria. Its advice for a second electoral postponement served no useful purpose in British eyes. The futility of the US initiative convinced the British Government that no precipitate action was desirable in Bulgaria. It also made the FO conscious of the need to persuade the United States that there was no feasible alternative to the increasing British resignation to the situation in Bulgaria.

Chapter Five

Recognising the Bulgarian Communist Regime

After the elections of 18 November 1945, British representatives in Sofia continued to scrutinise the Bulgarian political scene. They were especially interested in the correlation of political forces in the Government and the relations between the ruling parties within the Fatherland Front. Correct and timely information about political developments would indicate to the British Government the direction in which the country was likely to evolve both internally and internationally. Even small details assumed extraordinary importance, as it was becoming increasingly difficult for foreign observers to follow the trends inside the Bulgarian Government.

The electoral results provided the Fatherland Front Government with a certain degree of legitimacy. The position of the Communist Party, which had been the chief architect and beneficiary of the elections, was also stabilised. The Soviet Union had restored full diplomatic relations on 14 August 1945 but Bulgaria's rulers still needed to secure recognition by Great Britain and the USA.¹ This would bestow upon the Bulgarian regime the moral privilege of acceptance in the international community. Recognition would also allow Bulgaria to resume normal international trade. This was a crucial element in the country's post-war reconstruction and would ultimately strengthen the Communist position.

The Soviet Union clearly had a stake in both the moral and economic aspects of Bulgaria's recognition. The resumption of normal relations could be interpreted by friends and foes of Communism alike as acquiescence in the exclusive Soviet influence over Bulgaria. Since it was suspected that Soviet conduct in Bulgaria formed a part of the larger pattern of

establishment of Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe, Britain's attitude to the country had to be consistent with overall British policy to the Soviet zone.

In the British interpretation, political developments in Bulgaria and the other Soviet satellites in 1945 – 1946 could be seen as contrary to the provisions of the Yalta Declaration. At the same time, looking at Eastern Europe, British policy makers reached a consensus as to the existence of a Soviet threat to British positions in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. This overruled any general anxiety for democracy in Bulgaria in particular and in Eastern Europe as a whole. At the same time, the emerging strategic conflict could most eloquently be formulated in ideological terms: Soviet actions could be presented as anti-democratic. At the end of 1945, Sargent wrote:

We are trying to put a limit to Russian expansion in the Middle East and in fact to build up a kind of Monroe system in that area. This makes it of vital importance that Bulgaria should be an independent buffer state. If Bulgaria remains a Russian satellite it will always be in the power of the Soviet Government to use Bulgaria to keep Turkey and Greece perpetually on tenterhooks... with disastrous effects to our whole position in the Eastern Mediterranean.²

Here was the ultimate reason for preoccupation with Bulgarian affairs. Britain's strategic aim of countering Soviet influence in the Balkans could be achieved only if non-Communists, who were not susceptible to control from Moscow, were in power. To this end, Britain was committed to supporting the Opposition, which could come into its own only if political liberties were observed. Britain had a stake in the implementation of the principles of democracy in Bulgaria which were best tested in the course of preparations for and conduct of parliamentary elections.

¹ Valev, L.B. et al. (eds.) *Sovetsko-Bolgarskie otnoshenia i Svyazi, 1944 - 1948g.: Documenti i materialii*. Moscow: Nauka, 1981. p.112-113

² *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, vol.6, p.245-246, Sargent to Houstoun-Boswall, 26.11.1945

The Moscow Council of Foreign Ministers. The 18 November elections produced a National Assembly in which only the parties remaining in the Fatherland Front were represented. The Government had been reshuffled shortly before the elections. In the new configuration Petkov's Agrarians and Grigor Cheshmedzhiev's Social Democrats were substituted for leftist factions of their own parties prepared to collaborate with the Communists. Pro-Communist interference also forced a split in *Zveno*. The latter's most prominent leaders Georgiev and Stainov remained Premier and Foreign Minister respectively. They had both been regarded by Western observers as the moderate elements in the Bulgarian Cabinet. However, their behaviour before and during the elections raised Western suspicions that they might turn into 'not only willing tools ... but ... star players on the Communist side'.³

The Bulgarian Government was aware that it was not regarded as representative by Britain and the USA. In late November and December 1945, the Bulgarian Government made several unofficial attempts to find out under what terms these views might be reconsidered by the Western Governments.⁴

The Bulgarian Communists knew that the basic criterion by which Britain and the United States would judge the situation was the opportunity for normal political activity of the Opposition, which should eventually re-enter the Government. That is why one of the first tasks faced by the Communists after the elections was the reassessment of their attitude to the parties outside the Fatherland Front. At the IX plenum of the Central Committee on 12 December 1945, Kostov stated that 'because of internal as well as international considerations' the Communist Party was interested in co-operation with 'the democratic

³ FRUS 1945, vol.IV, p.384, Barnes to Byrnes, 17.11.1945

⁴ FRUS 1945, vol.IV, p.396-397, Barnes to Byrnes, 26.11.1945, p.398, Stoychev - Reber conversation, 27.11.1945

part of the bourgeoisie and bourgeois intellectuals'.⁵ At the same time, the Opposition was publicly warned by leading Communists, that unless it returned to the Fatherland Front, it would be regarded by the Communists as 'a reactionary adversary fascist force', which would be 'ruthlessly revealed and destroyed'.⁶

The Moscow Advice. On 7 December 1945, three weeks after the Bulgarian elections, Etheridge submitted his final report to US Secretary of State Byrnes. Etheridge concluded that in Bulgaria, as well as Romania, an authoritarian regime excluded representatives of large segments of democratic opinion. In both countries, the local Communists were supported by the Soviet Union, which used them to achieve domination of the Balkans as a stepping-stone towards the Mediterranean. While duly acknowledging the security considerations of the Soviet Union in the region, Etheridge's report did not accept them as legitimate reasons for the denial of free elections.⁷

Etheridge was pessimistic about the prospect for genuinely free elections in Bulgaria. Even so, he proposed a number of improvements, which could address the most obvious British and US apprehensions. The first was a demand that the newly elected Government should be reorganised to include leaders of all parties which had originally adhered to the FF programme. An equally important requirement was that the Ministries of Justice and the Interior should be taken from Communist control. The new Government would then arrange fresh elections in which all democratic parties would be free to participate on the basis of single or separate lists according to their choice. The National Assembly which resulted from the 18 November elections should concentrate on calling new elections for a Grand

⁵ TsPA, f.1, op.5, a.e.5, l.4-6, Kostov's speech, 12.12.1945

⁶ Ognyanov, L. *Narodna...* p.47

⁷ Davis, L.E. *The Cold War Begins: Soviet - American Conflict over Eastern Europe*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974. p.333

National Assembly which should revise the Constitution.* Etheridge himself understood this as a maximum programme and was prepared to regard the implementation of even half the measures as good progress. He placed his belief in the moderates within the Communist Party who were allegedly urging for an end to excesses.⁸ The report was generally approved by Barnes in Sofia, whose experience with the Soviets prompted him to point out that it was more important to insist on some positive action rather than to expect them to agree with a condemnation of the existing situation.⁹

The members of the Etheridge mission believed that their outspoken reproach of the Communist regimes in Bulgaria and Romania would shock US public opinion.¹⁰ While it is debatable that many US citizens would have shown sufficient interest in events in the far corner of Europe, it is conceivable that they would have recognised the signs of the worsening of relations between the former Allies. The US Government itself was not yet ready to reveal publicly its displeasure with events in the Soviet zone. Open and sharp US criticism of Soviet policy in the Balkans was itself certain to exacerbate tensions among the Three Allies.

Etheridge's report was circulated only among a limited circle of US policy makers and was not even forwarded to London. It was used as the main brief of the US delegation at the December 1945 Moscow Council of Foreign Ministers. The Council assembled at the insistence of Byrnes who was particularly anxious to resume discussion and reach compromises on the issue of the ex-satellites. The US Secretary of State thought it essential to overcome the deadlock from the previous meeting in London regarding Bulgaria and

* According to the Turnovo Constitution, a Grand Assembly had twice the number of deputies of an Ordinary Assembly. It could alter the Constitution and make other important decisions, e.g. ratify peace treaties.

⁸ FRUS 1945, vol.IV, p.378, Etheridge to Byrnes, 14.11.1945

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.410-411, Barnes to Byrnes, 13.12.1945

¹⁰ Etheridge, M. *Negotiating...* p.201

Romania.¹¹ He was guided at least as much by concern for the fate of democracy in Eastern Europe as by compulsion to resolve the controversy on the question of the political situation in the Balkans before the conclusion of peace treaties with the former minor Axis powers.

As the Moscow Conference was a result of US efforts to improve political conditions in Bulgaria and Romania, its outcomes are easily attributed to US action. A closer look at the proceedings reveals that the compromise reached regarding the two Balkan countries was as much a Soviet initiative. Byrnes himself confirmed that initially Stalin had refused to consider any proposal, which undermined the results of the November elections in Bulgaria. Subsequently, Stalin himself suggested an arrangement whereby members of the Bulgarian Opposition could be included in the Government in exchange for Western recognition. Faced with the prospect of another fruitless conference, the US delegation agreed.¹² On 27 December 1945, the Moscow Council issued a communiqué stating that the Soviet Government would give 'friendly advice' to the Bulgarian Government to include two Opposition politicians. They should be truly representative of their parties and willing to work with the Government. On their part, the United Kingdom and the United States undertook to recognise the Bulgarian Government once these conditions were fulfilled.

It is not easy to explain why the Soviet Union showed willingness to consider favourably some of the Western demands in Bulgaria. It is possible that Stalin desired to regain credit lost in London in September and tried to reciprocate Byrnes' obvious eagerness for an understanding over Eastern Europe. In addition, Molotov was undoubtedly impressed by the US inclination to allow Bulgaria to forego reparations to Greece and even consider the possibility of a Bulgarian outlet on the Aegean.

¹¹ Davis, L.E. *The Cold War...* p.328-331

¹² FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.47, Byrnes to Barnes, 12.01.1946, p.64, Byrnes to Cohen, 31.01.1946

Archival evidence, however, points to the Soviet Government's upholding the Moscow decision because it provided an opportunity for mending relations with the West without encroaching on the position of the Bulgarian Communists. Before making his proposal to the Conference, Stalin wrote to Dimitrov about the US suggestion that the Bulgarian Government should be reorganised. Stalin advised the Bulgarian Communists to think whether they could include in the Government one or two Ministers from Opposition circles. Stalin told Dimitrov that someone 'not too popular' - rather than Petkov - should be given 'some insignificant Ministry'. This would achieve the double result of drawing some politicians away from the Opposition and giving some satisfaction to the USA. Apparently, the Soviet leader considered the Bulgarian Communists sufficiently in control of the situation to be able to grant some minor concessions, which would not tip the overall balance.¹³

The Bulgarian Communists faithfully embraced Moscow's line convinced that Stalin intended to follow the letter of the communiqué without fulfilling the original Western expectations. Dimitrov deliberately misrepresented Britain's and the USA's position as a conspiracy to form a Government of the Opposition. He stated triumphantly that the Moscow decision indirectly recognised the November elections, the resultant National Assembly and the existing Government. He assured the Communist Politburo that the Moscow communiqué merely gave 'Britain and the USA a chance to save their face'.¹⁴ For Kolarov, the decisions of the Moscow Conference meant that the two Western powers had acknowledged the predominant interest of the Soviet Union in Bulgaria.¹⁵ Such an interpretation echoed Stalin's boasting to a Bulgarian Government delegation that he had

¹³ Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p.40-41; Dimitrov, V. 'The Failure of Democracy in Eastern Europe and the Emergence of the Cold War, 1944 – 1948: A Bulgarian Case Study'. DPhil thesis: Cambridge, 1996. p.324-328

¹⁴ TsPA, f.146, op.6, a.e.1028, l.1-2, Dimitrov at Politburo, 27.12.1945

¹⁵ TsPA, f.147, op.2, a.e.56, l.1-8, Kolarov's notebook, 29.03.1946

been able to limit what he called 'the demands of the Anglo-Americans' and in some cases discard them altogether.¹⁶

The Moscow decision was welcomed by that part of the US administration, which was inclined to compromise with the Soviet Union in the name of good post-war relations. Byrnes spoke publicly of his hope that the application of the Moscow decision would improve the democratic character of the two East European Governments and that for the first time after Yalta this would be done in conjunction with the Soviet Union.¹⁷ On the other hand, President Truman who was believed to be the leading proponent of firmness towards the Soviet Union stated firmly on 8 January 1946 that the Bulgarian Government would not be recognised without guarantees for free and unfettered elections.¹⁸ By then, the first round of talks between the Opposition and the Government in Bulgaria had already ended in failure.

The British Government had little choice but to subscribe to the compromise. Indeed, Bevin had agreed to go to Moscow only after he faced the threat of being left out of any agreement.¹⁹ His reluctance was partly due to the fact that Britain had not been consulted before the proposal for the meeting was sent to Stalin. More importantly, at the end of 1945 the British Government saw little chance for genuine long-term solution of the conflicts with the Soviet Union regarding internal developments in Eastern Europe. By this time, Bevin was convinced that the Soviet Union was aiming to undermine Britain's position in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.²⁰ British foreign policy makers were increasingly more

¹⁶ Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.92

¹⁷ AVPRF, f.74, op.28, no.19, p.20, l.1, Byrnes's statement, 9.01.1946

¹⁸ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.48, Acheson to Barnes, 12.01.1946; Black, C.E. *'The Start...'* p.192

¹⁹ Gaddis, J.L. *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941 - 1947*. New York: Columbia UP, 1972. p.276

²⁰ Adamthwaite, A. *'Britain and the World, 1945 - 9: the View from the Foreign Office'*. International Affairs, vol.61, no.2, 1985. p.245.

concerned with securing British strategic positions in the Balkans rather than with what was perceived as short-lived improvement of political conditions in the Soviet zone. Due to Bulgaria's geographic location, policy towards the country was coloured by the effort to limit Soviet influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. This geopolitical aim was translated into involvement in internal Bulgarian politics where Britain was associated with the ambitions of the Bulgarian anti-Communist Opposition.

The First Round of Negotiations in Bulgaria and Vyshinski's Mission.

After

the publication of the Moscow communiqué optimism prevailed among leading Bulgarian Communists. They confirmed their intention to avoid unnecessary clashes and take every opportunity to come to terms with Britain and the USA. They also believed that the Western powers themselves had no choice but to 'bow to the existing circumstances' in Bulgaria.²¹ Confident in their superiority, the Communists perceived the Moscow decision as a magnanimous concession to the Opposition, which now had an opportunity to get back into the Government. They were determined that their dominance of the Government should not be disrupted by the inclusion of two new members. In addition, they saw a welcome possibility to split their opponents even further. It was assumed that a few Opposition groups would want to participate in power and therefore, the Communists would be able to handpick the two Opposition representatives to enter the Cabinet.²²

This tactical plan was devised on the background of firm Soviet control over Bulgaria. The Soviet High Command was issuing orders to stop Opposition newspapers and even to

²¹ RTsHIDNI, f.17, op.128, a.e.759, l.121, CC of BCP secret letter to CC of VCP(b), 30.12.1945

²² TsPA, f.147, op.2, a.e.56, l.1-8, Kolarov's notebook, 29.03.1946

AVPRF, f.74, op.28, no.19, p.20, l.1;

FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.48, Acheson to Barnes, 12.01.1946; Black, C.E. *'The Start...'* p.192

RTsHIDNI, f.17, op.128, a.e.759, l.121, CC of BCP secret letter to CC of VCP(b), 30.12.1945, 30.12.1945

TsPA, f.146, op.6, a.e.1028, l.1-2, 27.12.1945, Dimitrov at Politburo, 27.12.1945

take plays off the stage of the National Theatre. On 18 December 1945, the Soviet delegation to the ACC had sent the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry a letter categorically insisting that communications from the ACC should be treated not as requests but as 'official orders which require precise and timely fulfilment'.²³ The Government's position was presented to the Opposition in a memorandum, which stipulated that the Opposition members who accepted office should endorse the present Government's domestic and foreign policy. Parliament would sit until the end of the current session in March 1946. The only prospective concession was that future elections should be discussed without restriction of the right to nominate separate electoral lists.²⁴

The Opposition in Bulgaria judged the Moscow decision on the whole positively. For them, the communiqué had publicly acknowledged the non-representative character of the existing Bulgarian Government and had stressed the importance of their own existence.²⁵ That is why, on 4 January 1946, the Agrarians led by Petkov, and the Social Democrats led by Pastuhov, accepted the Government's invitation to talks. They handed the Government their own proposals for the fulfilment of the Moscow decision. Insisting on Government guarantees for 'liberty of press, thought, assembly and association', the Opposition emphasised its requirement for fresh elections, to be carried out according to a new electoral law. As a sign of its own good will, the Opposition pointed out that it was ready to appoint only two Ministers as opposed to the six they had had before walking out of the Cabinet in August 1945. Despite this, the Bulgarian Government announced that the Opposition was disregarding the friendly Soviet advice and ended negotiations.²⁶

²³ AVPRF, f. 74/074, op.27, no.8, p.16, l.57-68, various communications, December 1945

²⁴ TsPA, f.146, op.4, a.e.983, l.4-5, Cabinet information, 4.01.1946

²⁵ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.46, Barnes to Byrnes, 4.01.1946

²⁶ TsPA, f.146, op.4, a.e.983, l.5, Cabinet Information, 4.01.1946

It is difficult to judge whether the brief contacts between the Opposition and the Bulgarian Government had been conducted with a genuine desire to establish co-operation. Certainly, the talks had been started mainly to give the impression of compliance with the tripartite Moscow decision. But the Communists also expected to fortify their position in the Government and increase their influence in internal politics by weakening the Opposition. It is likely that the Communists were disappointed that the Opposition showed no signs of disintegrating as they had predicted. They might have even feared that the Government could have been unwittingly strengthening the Opposition by treating it on an equal basis. If the Bulgarian Government had acted on its own by closing down the short-lived talks with Petkov and Lulchev, its actions soon found approval in Moscow.

On 7 January 1946, a Bulgarian delegation consisting of Kimon Georgiev, Petko Stainov and Interior Minister Anton Yugov flew to the Soviet capital for a special meeting with Stalin and Molotov.²⁷ The visit was shrouded in secrecy and Western observers could only guess that it was part of the process by which Bulgarian leaders were 'being coached to play their part in the formulation of the Russian foreign policy programme'.²⁸ BCP archives reveal that Stalin spent two hours with the Bulgarian delegation analysing the whole post-armistice period. He made particular efforts to assure the Bulgarian Ministers that Soviet Russia had the interests of Bulgaria at heart, pledging lasting support in return for 'certainty that Bulgaria would never become the terrain for adversary initiative and aggression'.²⁹ Posing as the protector of Bulgarian interests, Stalin also described how he had succeeded in resisting the Western Foreign Ministers' demands, which, he implied, were harmful for both Bulgarian and Soviet interests. He had only agreed to a reconstruction of the Bulgarian

²⁷ Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.94

²⁸ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.55-57, Kennan to Byrnes, 15.01.1946

²⁹ TsPA, f.147, op.2, a.e.1033, l.1, Kolarov's notebook, 27.01.1946

Government as this simply meant the inclusion of two Opposition members.³⁰ Stalin even seriously reprimanded the Bulgarian representatives for entering into negotiations with Petkov and Lulchev:

You should have just plainly pointed out the decisions of the conference and invited them to appoint two of their representatives loyal to the Fatherland Front. Why was it necessary for these representatives to give you declarations on this or that. You, with your tactic, have made the opposition think that you need them when in fact you don't need them at all...³¹

Stalin thus castigated what he interpreted as the excessive zeal of the Bulgarian Government to fulfil the Moscow advice. On the other hand, he explained that the Bulgarian Opposition's uncompromising position should be portrayed as entering into an argument with the Soviet Union itself. For this reason, the Bulgarian Government should do nothing more. The Soviet Government would assume responsibility for the failure of the Moscow decision if the Bulgarian Government strictly followed instructions from Moscow. To show that he meant business, Stalin ordered Vyshinski to depart immediately for Sofia and explain the exact meaning of the Moscow decision to the Opposition. To the visiting Bulgarian delegation Stalin confessed that in practice Vyshinski 'had no mission' apart from relaying once again the Moscow communiqué.³²

Vyshinski's meetings with the Opposition leaders were complete failures. Both Lulchev and Petkov refused to bow to threats and demands to enter the Government without being granted any concessions in exchange. Vyshinski's unyielding attitude was based on Stalin's personal instructions not to negotiate with the Opposition but simply to require it to nominate two politicians for inclusion in the Government. After two days in Sofia,

³⁰ Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p.41

³¹ Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.95

³² TsPA, f.147, op.2, a.e.1033, l.2, Kolarov's notebook, 27.01.1946; FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.50, Barnes to Byrnes, 13.01.1946; Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p.42-43; Ognyanov, L. *Narodna...* p.52-55

Vyshinski proclaimed that no compromise was feasible and left Bulgaria.³³ His departure marked the end of Soviet endorsement of the Moscow decision. Stalin might have preferred an arrangement whereby the Bulgarian Government could have presented itself as representative. But he was 'not willing to compromise ... the realities of Russian influence to obtain this end'.³⁴

Britain's Search for Alternatives. By mid-January 1946 the Moscow communiqué had become subject to two irreconcilable interpretations. The Bulgarian Government insisted that the Opposition should take up ministerial posts thus showing willingness to co-operate with the authorities. The Bulgarian Opposition pointed to the provisions in the Moscow decision that those entering the Government should be truly representative of their parties and therefore required preliminary concessions. These differences were reflected in the opinions of Soviet Russia and the Western powers which backed the interpretation of the Government and the Opposition respectively. This situation gave confidence to the Bulgarian Communists and Dimitrov proclaimed at the Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Affairs that the lack of unanimous opinion among the Three Big Allies 'untied' the hands of the Government to follow the more advantageous Soviet interpretation.³⁵

The Bulgarian Communists were anxious to attribute the refusal of the Opposition to comply with their demands to British and US influence. In documents for internal Communist use, Petkov's group was portrayed as 'organised and inspired by British and US intelligence' who urged the Opposition towards 'more energetic terrorist actions'.³⁶ In

³³ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.48, Barnes to Byrnes, 12.01.1946; Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.96

³⁴ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.56, Kennan to S/S, 15.01.1946

³⁵ TsPA, f.146, op.6, a.e.1032, 1.3-4, Dimitrov in Foreign Affairs Parliamentary Commission, 9.02.1946

³⁶ RTsHIDNI, f.17, op.128, a.e.94, 1.29, DII Bulletin, 15.01.1946 - the official representatives of Britain and the US are named as members of the respective intelligence services.

contrast to such allegations, the available British and US state archives reveal that while feeling unable to advise the Bulgarian Opposition to enter the Government, the Western Governments did little to bolster the Opposition. The British and US representatives in Sofia expended substantial energy urging their Governments to activate policy towards Bulgaria. Britain and the USA, however, experienced difficulty in deciding how to react to the failure of the Moscow decision. Both subscribed to the view that nothing in the communiqué stopped the Opposition from laying down advance conditions. They did not feel compelled to insist on the Opposition just entering the Government under any circumstances.³⁷ Despite analysing the situation in similar terms, British and US policy makers proposed different actions, just as their motives for signing the Moscow communiqué had been different.

The US political representative in Sofia urged the State Department to accept that the Moscow formula had not been based on an honest appraisal of the situation. He was in favour of firm action to resolve the deadlock but also warned that if the Great Powers did not try to enforce some compromise, 'much blood will be spilled in Bulgaria'.³⁸ Even if sceptical of these extreme pronouncements and radical recommendations, the State Department considered the moment ripe for some new 'constructive proposals', such as new elections after the dissolution of the present Assembly, to be advanced to the Soviet Government.³⁹

Unlike the State Department, the Foreign Office had little faith in Britain and the USA's abilities to exert pressure on political developments in Bulgaria. The discussion of Bulgarian affairs rarely went beyond the FO and there is no evidence that the Moscow decision was discussed by the British Cabinet. Occasional references to the difficulties of the Bulgarian

³⁷ FO371/58512, R538, FO to Sofia, 10.01.1946; FO371/58513, R1732, Washington to FO, 1.03.1946

³⁸ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.60, Barnes to Byrnes, 18.01.1946, p.66, 86, Byrnes to Barnes, 2.02.1946, 23.03.1946

³⁹ FO371/58513, R1732, Washington to FO, 1.03.1946

Opposition were made in the House of Commons but mostly these were prompted by the FO itself. Whitehall officials had long realised that there was precious little they could do to stop Communist advances and Soviet domination in Bulgaria. Analysing events from the latter half of 1945 and the beginning of 1946, they were deeply sceptical that any course short of confrontation with the Soviet Union would produce the changes Britain desired in Bulgaria. And since a definitely anti-Soviet stance was out of the question, the only rational attitude was that of conciliation and downplaying the differences with the USSR. This line of reasoning was gradually crystallising among British foreign policy makers but its adoption was preceded by some contradictory behaviour.

Signals from Sofia unmistakably pointed out that parallel to the consolidation of the rule of the Bulgarian Communists, the Soviet Government was entrenching itself even more firmly in Bulgaria. The FO concluded that it was useless to pursue any further the implementation of the Moscow advice, or for that matter, to put forward any new initiative. At the end of January 1946, the FO told the State Department that as far as Bulgaria was concerned they should both wait for the next move to come from Moscow.⁴⁰ Such a decision was a far cry from the recommendation of Houstoun-Boswall that the British Government should assume a firm attitude, abandon half-measures and refuse to negotiate with the unrepresentative Bulgarian Government at the forthcoming Paris Peace Conference in May.⁴¹ In fact, the FO had in mind exactly the opposite - not to cause any hold-up of the peace negotiations.

The confusion in the FO is especially obvious from the contradictory messages it sent to the British representative in Bulgaria. During the same week at the end of January 1946, Houstoun-Boswall was instructed to uphold the demands of the Opposition, to take special care not to antagonise the Soviets and also not to oppose any new action initiated by the

⁴⁰ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.67, Cohen to Byrnes, 2.02.1946

⁴¹ FO371/58512, R1011, FO to Sofia, 26.01.1946; FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.63, Barnes to Byrnes, 30.01.1946

United States.⁴² Senior British civil servants were reluctant to make a definite public statement about the existence of disagreements with the Soviet Union regarding Bulgaria. This was extremely exasperating to British officials in the field and annoying to the State Department.⁴³

Contradicting his own initial recommendation for silent firmness, Houstoun-Boswall proposed a strong-worded British declaration to sober up the Soviet Government. His superiors, though, were not worried by the prolongation of the indefinite state of affairs in Bulgaria, and at times even mentioned that there was 'a good scope for bargaining' there. The latter judgement was based on the assumption that eventually the Bulgarian Government would seek recognition, and on this score Britain possessed advantages.⁴⁴

Sargent himself wrote confusing minutes. He was most certain that the prospects of genuine free elections seemed distinctly unlikely. He was extremely pessimistic of British ability to influence Bulgaria and yet, even he occasionally suggested some approach to the USSR for 'diluting' the existing Bulgarian Government. Then, he thought, additional concessions for foreign journalists and for a greater degree of individual freedoms could be achieved through 'nagging'.⁴⁵ But this contained the inherent danger of actually signalling British lack of deep interest in the future of the country and above all lack of resources to underpin open disagreement with the USSR. Britain's ill-defined course towards Bulgaria was exposed even further against the background of disturbances in the Peloponnese and the Soviet-British friction at the United Nations Organisation. From this, it would be obvious to Soviet foreign policy specialists as well as to political observers in Bulgaria that the real concerns

⁴² FO371/58513, R1101, FO to Sofia, 22.01.1946, R1432, Moscow to FO, 28.01.1946, R1362, Hayter, 31.01.1946

⁴³ FRUS 1945, vol.IV, p.403, Barnes to Byrnes, 3.12.1945

⁴⁴ FO371/58512, R538, FO to Sofia, 10.01.1946

⁴⁵ FRUS 1945, vol.IV, p.405-406, Winant to Byrnes, 7.12.1945

of Great Britain in the Balkans were related to the strategic defence of the Mediterranean. Any interest in the establishment of democracy in Bulgaria took a distinctly secondary importance. Such conclusions would make it difficult for the Bulgarian Opposition leaders to maintain a courageous attitude in the face of renewed political attack from the Communists.⁴⁶

As if sensing this hesitation, at the end of January 1946, the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs pleaded with the British representative not to place his Government in the position of 'having to choose between one Ally who is here in force and the two Allies who are not physically here'. He repeated that any solution of the Bulgarian situation must be imposed from without and only by the Big Three Allies in agreement.⁴⁷

During the later half of January and in February 1946, the US State Department was actively trying to elaborate yet another initiative regarding Bulgaria which would be acceptable to the Soviet Union. The best option which emerged was to persuade the Soviets to send new advice to the Bulgarian Government, this time proposing dissolution of the National Assembly after its current session and the calling of fresh elections. The United States would then respond by agreeing to recognise the Bulgarian Government if the latter guaranteed full civil liberties.⁴⁸ It is not clear how the State Department hoped to induce the Soviets to adopt the proposed course. In any case, some US Government advisors understood that the proposition was inherently flawed since it would commit the USA to recognising the Bulgarian Government in exchange for promises, which in the light of past experience were unlikely to be honoured.

⁴⁶ FO371/58513, R1269, Sofia to FO, 24.01.1946, R1832, Sofia to FO, 4.02.1946

⁴⁷ FO371/58513, R1788, Sofia to FO, 1.02.1946

⁴⁸ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.65, 71, Byrnes to Cohen, 31.01, 5.02.1946

In view of this, on 22 February 1946, the United States sent the Bulgarian Government a note urging the renewal of negotiations between the Bulgarian Government and the Opposition. In practice the note restated the provisions of the Moscow decision.⁴⁹

The British representative in Sofia was instructed to support the US note only verbally. The British Government's intention was to register disapproval of the Bulgarian Government without entering into formal discussion. Unwittingly, the lack of a written statement complicated the situation as the Bulgarian Foreign Minister Stainov was able to tell the press that he had not received any formal British communication.⁵⁰ In the meantime the Soviet Government practically accused the USA of violating the Moscow decision by encouraging the Bulgarian Opposition to resist it.⁵¹ In its turn, the Bulgarian Government was quick to declare that until the evident differences between the Allies were cleared, it could only follow Vyshinski's authoritative interpretation of the Moscow agreement.⁵² All this finally pushed the FO to issue on 11 March 1946 an official communiqué that it agreed with the US interpretation of the Moscow decision.⁵³ On 22 March 1946 a British note was presented to the Soviet Government. This contained detailed arguments against the actions of the Bulgarian Government and outlined disagreement with the Soviet interpretation of the Moscow decision.⁵⁴

To some extent, the two notes represented a bolder British attitude towards events in Bulgaria. For this the FO had long been pressed by Houstoun-Boswall, himself influenced by Petkov's requests that Britain take a firm stand against the Bulgarian Government. While

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.75, Cohen to Byrnes, 16.02.1946, p.78, Barbour - Stoychev conversation, 22.02.1946; FO371/58515, R3848, Washington to FO, 6.03.1946

⁵⁰ FO371/58514, R3167, R3208, R3254, R3519, R3624, Sofia - FO, 26.02. – 7.03.1946

⁵¹ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.78, Novikov to Byrnes, 7.03.1946; Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.97-98

⁵² FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.85, Barnes to Byrnes, 13.03.1946

⁵³ FO371/58515, R4217, Sofia to FO, 16.03.1946

⁵⁴ FO371/58514, R3733, FO to Gushev, 22.03.1946; FO371/58515, R4520, R4611, R4612, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 12, 24.03.1946

Houstoun-Boswall maintained that Britain's manner should be as rigid as the USSR's, he fully realised that there could be little concrete achievement in Sofia where British actions would mostly be of 'nuisance value vis-à-vis the Russians'. He also saw the problem of reconstructing the Bulgarian Government in terms of 'which side holds long enough in Bulgaria while the main issues are outlined elsewhere'.⁵⁵

At this moment the British Government was closely involved in the first post-war Greek elections and would resent even remote Soviet interest which might be stimulated as a result of the diplomatic exchanges regarding Bulgaria. That is why the British Foreign Secretary ruled that the note to the Soviet Government regarding Bulgaria should be postponed for a week. He was particularly anxious that British actions should not be seen as provocative by the Soviet Government at such a sensitive moment for British policy in the Balkans. Bevin opposed any British accusation of Soviet breach of agreement.⁵⁶ In these circumstances, FO officials were trying to devise a course of action which would enable them to overcome the stalemate in Bulgaria with as little loss of prestige as possible. They hoped for but a few concessions by the Bulgarian Government to the Opposition. Even these had to be extracted in a careful and timely manner which would not jeopardise positions elsewhere and above all the relations between the Great Powers. It was of utmost importance that the attempts to resolve the Bulgarian deadlock should not hinder the continuing preparation of the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria. Then, if the Bulgarian Government could be seen to be reformed, the British side could easily extend recognition.⁵⁷ The latter consideration motivated British support for another round of negotiations between the Bulgarian Government and the Opposition.

⁵⁵ FO371/58515, R4216, Sofia to FO, 14.03.1946

⁵⁶ FO371/58515, R4611, Sofia - FO, 24 - 26.03.1946

⁵⁷ FO371/58512, R625, Williams, 12.01.1946

The Final Negotiations.

In the time between the verbal communication and the British notes the Bulgarian Prime Minister submitted his resignation and began negotiations for the formation of a new Government.⁵⁸ The British political representative judged this to be the result of nervousness in the FF and popular discontent with the present political situation. Houstoun-Boswall believed that even the Communists respected the strong support the Opposition commanded throughout the country. He found confirmation of his opinion in the fact that Petkov had again been approached by the Communists to 'work out some *modus vivendi*'. In addition, a special Soviet emissary had urged Petkov to come to terms with the Fatherland Front 'at almost any price except fresh elections'. For Houstoun-Boswall these were signs that a firm attitude impressed the USSR and made it anxious to find an internationally acceptable solution to the Bulgarian question.⁵⁹

The recess of the Bulgarian Parliament which started on 28 March 1946 provided an appropriate moment for reconstruction of the Government. Prime Minister Georgiev was prepared to agree to Petkov becoming Deputy Prime Minister and to discuss the other demands of the Opposition. The latter had not changed since the negotiations in January 1946: changes in the Government had to be accompanied by cessation of political persecution against Opposition leaders and supporters.⁶⁰

The US and British representatives in Sofia were kept informed of the talks through contacts with the Opposition. While pleased with the very fact of the negotiations, Barnes and Houstoun-Boswall estimated the possibility for a compromise differently. The US diplomat felt that the Opposition had held out for so long, that it should not stay out of the Government much longer or it would never get in. Oxley and Houstoun-Boswall advised Petkov not to abandon his erstwhile demands but to propose some compromise himself. For

⁵⁸ FRUS 1946, vol. VI, p. 87, Barnes to Byrnes, 25.03.1946; Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p. 99

⁵⁹ FO371/58515, R4575, Sofia to FO, 16.03.1946

example, he could admit that the Opposition was not in the Assembly due to its own actions and to confirm its commitment to a Republic. Britain cautioned that the Opposition should exercise 'the greatest possible moderation of speech and in the press, not to create the impression that they were only die-hards who were less able to compromise than the Fatherland Front'.⁶¹ Both the US and British representatives in Sofia were prepared to accept once more that Georgiev's attempts to negotiate were genuine. That is why they pressed for a joint British-US message to facilitate further talks.⁶²

At that moment, unknown to the Western diplomats the Soviet Union had already begun a broad offensive against the reorganisation of the Bulgarian Government. Stalin personally criticised the Bulgarian Communists about their 'modesty and lack of initiative' to secure at least four or five essential ministerial portfolios. In mid-March 1946, in a letter to Dimitrov and Kostov, Stalin and Molotov rejected the legitimacy of the Opposition's demands after the November 1945 election.⁶³ Replying to Dimitrov who had appealed for support to Moscow, Stalin's new recommendations to the Bulgarian Communists stipulated:

First, the Opposition should be ignored in every way and no negotiations with them should be held.

Second, a number of well-thought and cleverly organised measures should be undertaken to strangle [sic] the Opposition.⁶⁴

All British observers in Bulgaria learnt was that the Soviet Ambassador had explained to Georgiev that the Opposition's demands were unacceptable to the Soviet Government. As a result just when the State Department expressed satisfaction with the offers made to the

⁶⁰ TsPA, f.147, op.2, a.e.56, l.48, Kolarov's notebook, 28.03.1946

⁶¹ FO371/58515, R4794, Sofia to FO, 26.03.1946; FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.91, Byrnes to Barnes, 26.03.1946; Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.99

⁶² FO371/58515, R4855, R4904, R4906, Washington - FO - Sofia, 27 - 28.03.1946

⁶³ Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p.45

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.45-46

Bulgarian Opposition, Georgiev claimed that he had not made any such proposals.⁶⁵ For the Western diplomats there was no doubt that Georgiev's reversal was caused by the stiff and obstructive Soviet attitude.⁶⁶

On 28 March the negotiations between the Bulgarian Government and the Opposition broke down. The Opposition had not even had a chance to reply to the Government proposals before these were withdrawn.⁶⁷ A new Government took office on 31 March 1946. Far from making the executive more representative, the Communists actually obtained additional ministerial posts. Five Ministries, including that of Finance on which the Soviet Government had specifically insisted, were now in Communist hands. Of the two Deputy Prime Ministers who were added to the Cabinet, one was Communist. This happened at the expense of the other FF parties whose positions were weakened; the Social Democrats retained only two ministerial posts. The new Government issued a declaration that it would adhere to the policies of the previous one.⁶⁸

These developments rendered the fulfilment of the Moscow agreement in Bulgaria very remote. Both the British and US Governments had to face their failure to bring about the inclusion of the Bulgarian Opposition in the Government. British and US policy makers were aware of their lack of adequate diplomatic and political means to outweigh Soviet influence on Bulgarian political life. The Foreign Office concluded that there was nothing it could do at the moment. It believed that the communications sent to the Bulgarian Government had elucidated the position of the British Government and should have

⁶⁵ TsPA, f.147, op.2, a.e.56, 1.46-47, Kolarov's notebook, 29.03.1946; FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.93, Barnes to Byrnes, 29.03.1946; Padev, M. *Dimitrov Wastes No Bullets: Nikola Petkov, the Test Case*. London: Eyre&Spottiswoode, 1948. p.44

⁶⁶ FO371/58515, R4942, Sofia to FO, 28.03.1946; FO371/558516, R4952, Sofia to FO, 29.03.1946; FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.95-96, Barnes to Byrnes, 29.03.1946

⁶⁷ FO371/58515, R4941, Sofia to FO, 28.03.1946; FO371/58516, R5197, Sofia to FO, 1.04.1946

⁶⁸ Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.100

deprived the FF of any illusion of British lack of interest.⁶⁹ However, the hope that the Bulgarian rulers would appreciate British firm actions was increasingly overshadowed by the growing realisation that the Moscow communiqué had never really been appropriate for Bulgaria but Britain had been drawn into it by the United States. In April 1946, M.S.Williams at the Southern Department called the Moscow decision 'a millstone around [Britain's] neck', especially since it could not be easily renounced.⁷⁰ It would be impossible to nullify it in Bulgaria without impairing its credibility in Romania and therefore risking expulsion of the Romanian Opposition from the Government. Of even greater significance was the fact that British officials could propose no alternative to the Moscow agreement and therefore preferred to uphold it publicly since at least it committed the Soviet Union to the reorganisation of the Bulgarian Government.⁷¹

British behaviour was also dictated by an unwillingness to enter into an open confrontation with the Soviet Union regarding Bulgaria. Stalin had persistently refused to recognise the legitimacy of British and US views, and had even begun accusing his former Allies of deliberately breaking the Moscow agreement. Soviet military presence in Bulgaria was coupled with unrestrained meddling of Soviet officers and political representatives in all aspects of Bulgarian politics and economy. This was facilitated by the close political links between the BCP and Moscow. British observers admitted that attempts to check the pace of Communisation could have no more than nuisance value and would be perceived by the Soviet Union as illegitimate interference in its sphere of influence.

Towards Recognition of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria.

The failure of

the Moscow agreement on Bulgaria took place against the background of general worsening of inter-Allied relations. The end of the war exposed the lack of long-term cohesion between

⁶⁹ FO371/58516, R4992, Williams, 1.04.1946

⁷⁰ FO371/58516, R4952, Sofia to FO, 29.03.1946

the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and Britain and the United States, on the other. Increasingly, disagreements which signalled different strategic aims were coming to the fore in international politics. In a pre-election speech of 9 February 1946, Stalin prophesied that the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the West would inevitably lead to future wars. As he underlined the incompatibility of Communism and Capitalism, he was judged by contemporary analysts in London and Washington to be announcing the beginning of a new militancy in Soviet foreign policy.⁷² Stalin's pronouncement provided the occasion for George Kennan's famous Long Telegram of 22 February 1946 which explained Soviet aspirations to dominate territories beyond the Soviet borders in the context of both centuries-long Russian policy and Communist ideology. Kennan's analysis confirmed the US policy makers' worst fears that the consolidation of Soviet power in Eastern Europe was going to become the basis for a more aggressive attitude towards the former Allies. As this was generally seen to call for a correspondingly tougher policy, it was welcomed by diplomats stationed in Eastern Europe, where the ones in Bulgaria were among the most vocal and active.⁷³

British policy makers drew similar conclusions from the recent Soviet acts. In concurrence with reports of the Joint Intelligence Committee of the Chiefs of Staff, most British diplomatic experts had little doubt that the USSR aimed at the consolidation of a belt of Communist satellite states around its borders. The *Chargé* in Moscow Frank Roberts fully agreed with Kennan's assessment as to the motives and aims of Soviet foreign policy.⁷⁴ His views influenced thinking in the FO where Under-Secretary Christopher Warner suggested

⁷¹ FO371/58516, R5250, Sofia to FO, 2.04.1946, Warner, 6.04.1946

⁷² Dallin, Al. 'Stalin and the Prospects of Post-war Europe.' Gori, Fr. and Silvio Pons (eds.). *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943 - 1953*. London: Macmillan, 1996. p.188

⁷³ De Santis, H. *The Diplomacy...* p.170-178

⁷⁴ DBPO. p.315-344; Boyle, P. 'The British Foreign Office View of Soviet-American Relations 1945 - 1946'. *Diplomatic History*. vol.3, no.3, 1979. p.310; Roberts, Fr. *Dealing...* p.107-111

firmer British measures to attack and expose Communism wherever it demonstrated itself.⁷⁵

An initial step in this direction was Churchill's Fulton speech of March 1946. This was not an authorised British statement but neither did the British Government dissociate from it officially. Contemporary FO documentation shows that views voiced in the speech truthfully represented the swing of opinion taking place among senior civil servants.⁷⁶

The Familiar Difficulty of Policy Formulation.

The noticeably firmer British stand towards the Soviet Union derived from developments in Iran and Turkey where Soviet pressure threatened the security of the British Empire.⁷⁷ As far as Bulgaria was concerned, this hardening attitude was not reflected immediately in dealings with the Soviet Union. The first months of 1946 were devoted to relatively quiet observation of the consecutive failures of the political forces in Bulgaria to reach any agreement, mainly as a result of Soviet support for the radicalism of the Bulgarian Communists. The final breakdown of the Moscow decision was followed by a period of bewilderment as to what to replace it with and how to overcome the ensuing deadlock.

While not an original cause for the conflict with the Soviet Union, Bulgarian politics added to Soviet-British tension. In April 1946, the FO once again grappled with the question of granting recognition to the Bulgarian Government. The issue was brought up in relation to the forthcoming Paris meeting of the Foreign Ministers, where peace treaties with the ex-satellites were on the agenda. The problem of the non-fulfilment of the Moscow decision reappeared as the British Government had made it clear that it would sign no Peace Treaty with a Government, which did not match its criteria for being representative and democratic. At the same time, Houstoun-Boswall, who was aware of the FO's prejudice against new

⁷⁵ Warner, G. 'From "Ally" to Enemy: Britain's Relations with the Soviet Union, 1941 – 1948.' Gori, Fr. The Soviet Union... p.301

⁷⁶ Boyle, P. 'The British Foreign Office...' p.314

initiatives in Bulgaria, strove to precipitate the reactions of his superiors. His communications challenged the indecisiveness of the Southern Department by insisting that 'by studiously avoiding any action which Russia might think provocative and aggressive as she jolly well pleases', the British Government was bound to repeat its 'great pre-war mistake with Germany'.⁷⁸ Passionately, he declaimed:

It is surely better to think and do something consistently and then be slightly wrong, than to wobble and reflect and inevitably to be wrong and then to have to catch up lost ground... The time has come to commit our friends, to fortify them and to bind them clearly on our side - otherwise they will fall helter-skelter into the other camp making friends with the Power of Evil because there seems to be no Power of Good. And we are capable of being a Power of Good if only we will play our part and show some guts.⁷⁹

In a sobering reply he was warned that even though the FO understood how demanding and exasperating conditions in Sofia were, the strength of expression in some of his recent telegrams had 'prejudiced important officials against, rather than in favour of his recommendations'.⁸⁰ Indeed, FO officials were long past the stage of avoiding action so as not to stir Soviet sensitivities. By their own admission, more than ever they faced the difficulty of devising actions, which would have a real effect. That is why without entertaining hopes for implementing the Moscow decision, the FO clung to its phraseology. Unable to find a substitute for the Moscow agreement, the FO was loath to admit failure.⁸¹

Despite his frequent reminders that the first element of success in Bulgaria was to have a foreign policy and stick to it', Houston-Boswall himself found it difficult to recommend a

⁷⁷ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.398-402; Mark, E. 'The War Scare of 1946 and Its Consequences.' *Diplomatic History*, vol.21, no.3, 1997. p.383-415

⁷⁸ FO371/58518, R6586, Houston-Boswall letter, 17.04.1946

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ FO371/58521, R103365, R 11018, Houston-Boswall - FO, 9 - 24.07.1946

⁸¹ FO371/58518, R6586, Hayter, 9.05.1946

definite course of action in the spring of 1946.⁸² He agreed with the Southern Department that the general aim of British policy in the Balkan satellites should be 'to strengthen and encourage the anti-Communist elements'.⁸³ And yet, he comprehended the Southern Department's serious difficulty at this moment 'to think of any action to be really effective in checking the spread of Communism and Totalitarianism'.⁸⁴ The only possibility appearing remotely plausible at the moment was the re-launching of negotiations between the Bulgarian Prime Minister Georgiev and the Opposition.⁸⁵

The earliest opportunity for advance in this direction presented itself at the end of June 1946 when in Paris Molotov agreed that Soviet troops were going to withdraw from Bulgaria within ninety days after the signature of the Peace Treaty.⁸⁶ For Great Britain there was the distinct danger of finding itself in a situation in which to get rid of the Soviet army, it might be forced to recognise the Bulgarian Government without approving of it. Thus, even a partial success towards the implementation of the Moscow communiqué might render the approaching recognition of the Bulgarian Government more palatable. This was endorsed by the readiness of the Bulgarian Opposition to moderate its demands for participation in the Government. The British representatives in Sofia began thinking that the mere presence of the Opposition in the Government would be psychologically and politically valuable for it.⁸⁷

The FO was eager to exert direct pressure on the Bulgarian Communists through Vassil Kolarov who headed the Bulgarian Peace Delegation in Paris. The British Foreign Secretary had been advised by senior civil servants to show a very stiff attitude, not only criticising internal conditions in Bulgaria but above all repudiating the 'monstrously impudent'

⁸² *Ibid.*, Houston-Boswall to FO, 17.04.1946

⁸³ FO371/58518, R6586, Williams, 9.05.1946

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Warner, 15.05.1946

⁸⁵ FO371/58517, R6066, FO brief, 1.04.1946

⁸⁶ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.106, Barnes to Bymes, 21.06.1946

Bulgarian territorial and financial claims against Greece.⁸⁸ However, when Bevin received Kolarov on 29 June 1946, Greek issues were hardly raised. As soon as Kolarov had mentioned Bulgarian disappointment at not being recognised, he was told that the British Government would not even discuss recognition until negotiations with the Opposition were resumed. Bevin said that the Opposition had been given onerous terms which had precipitated the breakdown of the Moscow decision. He also pointed out that the persecution of the Opposition press and the behaviour of the militia had caused him anxiety because it showed that there was no political freedom in Bulgaria. Kolarov helplessly repeated the official Bulgarian line that the Opposition was to blame for the breakdown of the talks as it had imposed the impossible demand of dissolving the Assembly. He stated that there would be fresh elections in September and promised that if the Opposition co-operated the Government would also seek accommodation with it.⁸⁹

British diplomats and civil servants considered that the deliberately cold attitude and plain speaking of the Foreign Secretary had impressed the Bulgarian delegation and shocked the Bulgarian Government. This was seen as a stimulus for the Bulgarian Government to initiate a settlement with the Opposition to which end Britain's main task would be to remain equally steadfast until a genuine reconstruction of the Government.⁹⁰ Britain even became uncharacteristically eager to encourage similar US firmness. Bevin wrote to Byrnes to inform him about the talk with Kolarov and suggest a new attempt to implement the Moscow decision. In his subsequent conversation with Kolarov, the US Secretary of State essentially confirmed the British views.⁹¹

⁸⁷ FO371/58520, R9326, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 22.06.1946

⁸⁸ FO371/58520, R9547, Sargent, 26.06.1946, Henniker-Major, 27.06.1946

⁸⁹ FO371/58520, R9547, Bevin - Kolarov meeting, 29.06.1946; TsPA, f.147, op.2, a.e.1044, 1.44-45, Byrnes-Kolarov and Bevin - Kolarov meetings, 28.06.1946

⁹⁰ FO371/58520, R8277, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 1.06.1946

⁹¹ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.110-111, Caffery to Acheson, 1.07.1946

Not for the first time did similar analysis of the circumstances lead US and British policy makers to different conclusions. The US State Department surmised that the Bulgarian side would be so eager for an immediate conclusion of the Peace Treaty that it would willingly make reasonable offers to the Opposition. Until then the United States should refuse to recognise the Bulgarian Government or to sign the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria. Following this logic, the State Department issued a declaration on the Byrnes - Kolarov talks repeating that the USA could not have normal relations with the current Bulgarian Government.⁹²

While the US strategy was to wave the prospect of non-recognition so as to drive the Bulgarian Communists towards acceptance of Opposition members in the Government, Britain's aim was almost the opposite. For the FO resumption of negotiations could bring at least limited participation of the Opposition in the executive which could then be taken as a sufficient basis for the recognition of the Bulgarian Government. Recognition would make the signature of the Peace Treaty possible and three months later all Soviet troops could be out of Bulgaria, thus relieving the pressure on the Eastern Mediterranean. This prospect was so appealing to the British Government that Bevin had suggested to Kolarov that the British representative in Sofia should mediate between the Government and the Opposition. In addition, the Foreign Secretary hinted that in view of the new elections, Britain would advise the Opposition to withdraw some of its demands. This constituted the first official admission that Britain carried some influence with the Opposition and was willing to use it. Houstoun-Boswall had already ascertained that the Opposition was ready to modify its conditions for taking up office. It had dropped its requirements for the dissolution of the National Assembly and for obtaining the Ministry of Justice. It still insisted on two Opposition Deputy Ministers for the Ministry of the Interior, equal participation of supporters of all parties in the militia as well as general political amnesty for offences committed after

⁹² FO371/58521, R10784, Washington to FO, 20.07.1946

September 1944. Communicating with Opposition leaders, British observers concluded that the non-Fatherland Front parties realised that they faced one of their last chances to enter the executive before the new elections in the autumn. On their part, British experts felt they should not press the Opposition too much lest the latter came to think it was being urged to accept too little and backed out.⁹³

Simultaneously, the FO found it necessary to bring the Bulgarian question to the attention of the Soviet Government. The Foreign Secretary chose to approach Moscow alone, without asking for a supportive US move.⁹⁴ On 12 July 1946, Bevin brought up the subject of Bulgarian recognition in a conversation with Molotov and Vyshinski and suggested that both sides use their influence with the Government and Opposition respectively. Bevin informed Molotov that the Bulgarian Opposition was ready to drop the demand for the dissolution of the Assembly but in exchange its remaining demands had to be met by the Government. Without acknowledging the right of the Opposition to put forward any claims at all, Molotov agreed that the recognition of Bulgaria was an outstanding question which should be resolved before the signature of the Peace Treaty. His words left little doubt in the British delegation that the Soviet Union was well aware of the link between recognition and the Peace Treaty and was anxious to improve the international status of Bulgaria.⁹⁵

In the summer of 1946, British senior officials showed unprecedented willingness to deal with the Bulgarian question quickly and efficiently. For the first time they were prepared to accept openly the role of mediators in Bulgarian internal affairs so as to facilitate the compromise between Government and Opposition. Most uncharacteristically, Britain even

⁹³ FO371/58521, R9677, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 29.06.1946

⁹⁴ FO371/58521, R10186, Majoribanks to Hayter, 8.07.1946; FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.110, Bevin to Byrnes, 1.07.1946

⁹⁵ FO371/58521, R10430, FO to Sofia, 18.07.1946; FO371/58522, R11273, Marjoribanks, 15.07.1946

approached the Soviet Union to speed up some form of implementation of the Moscow agreement, which the FO had long held to be unrealistic.

This practical British involvement in Bulgaria occurred at a moment when it seemed that Britain could draw substantial strategic benefits in the form of complete Soviet evacuation from the country. British strategists considered that an agreement on Soviet withdrawal from Bulgaria would alleviate pressure on the Eastern Mediterranean and especially Turkey, which had been directly threatened by the Soviet Union earlier in 1946. It also meant that the Soviet Union would commit itself not to continue its actions in Iran from where it was refusing to withdraw causing a major international dispute.⁹⁶

All this was estimated to signify a real concession on the part of the Soviet Union at a time when its actions in the Middle East and Eastern Europe had helped to magnify its expansionist image. Even though it was becoming rapidly obvious that a more resolute British foreign policy to check unilateral Soviet actions was required, the British Government was unwilling to forego any possibility of collaborating with Soviet Russia on international decisions. In this sense, Bulgaria was an opportune case: British interest in it was not sufficient to justify an Anglo-Soviet clash. Once again it provided a testing ground for minor compromises on both sides.

Recognition without Conditions. In mid-July 1946, Houston-Boswall reported a most urgent appeal from the Opposition to Britain and the USA for assistance to put an end to the reign of Communist terror in Bulgaria. To the British representative it seemed that while agreeing to seek a compromise in Bulgaria, Molotov had privately given Kolarov full Soviet backing for the elimination of the Opposition from Bulgarian political life.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ De Santis, *The Diplomacy...* p.170-172

⁹⁷ FO371/58521, R10430, Houston-Boswall to FO, 12.07.1946

Given that British representatives in Bulgaria could move outside the capital only with difficulty, they were able to send to London a surprisingly accurate picture of the state of Bulgarian politics. As official encounters were rarely enlightening, the British Mission relied for detailed information on overt or covert adversaries of the regime. Throughout the latter half of 1945 and the beginning of 1946, the FO had to consider its attitudes to the problem of Bulgarian recognition on the background of accumulating news of Communist-backed arrogance and violence towards opponents of Communist rule across the country. Despite plans for the resumption of talks between the Bulgarian Government and the Opposition, British experts could not overlook the constantly increasing lawless behaviour of the Bulgarian authorities.

The renewed offensive against the Opposition in Bulgaria had begun just after the November 1945 elections and was stepped up after the January 1946 failure of talks based on the Moscow agreement. Verbal and physical assaults on the Opposition had not even stopped during the short-lived Government attempts for dialogue with it. The accelerated clamp down on the Opposition was initiated by the Communist Politburo which in early 1946 postulated that no actions against the interests of the Communist Party were to be tolerated. This led to the legislative adoption of repressive laws* which could be used by the Communist Party-controlled militia and courts of justice to maltreat, imprison and intern any real or imagined opponents of the regime.⁹⁸

Accordingly, a succession of political trials was staged in the second half of 1946, beginning with the sentencing to death *in absentia* of the exiled G.M. for treason. In this and subsequent trials there were abundant attacks against Petkov but as yet he was not brought to the dock. Social Democrat leaders like Pastuhov and Lulchev, Agrarians like

* *Law for Defence of the People's Power* (April 1946), *Law for Control of the Army* (July 1946) and *Law for Mobilisation of Idlers and Loafers* (August 1946)

Assen Stamboliiski experienced the violence of the authorities. The well-known journalists Tsveti Ivanov and Trifon Kunev, who criticised the regime in the Social Democrat paper *Svoboden Narod*, were also convicted. Simultaneously, the Interior Minister imposed arbitrary bans on Opposition newspapers for publishing allegedly anti-Soviet and anti-Yugoslav articles. All this created an ominous atmosphere in which the authorities could accuse and sentence members of different organisations. This happened to the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation led by Ivan Mihailov and the Tsar Krum Secret Military Organisation – whose existence is questionable – for a range of ‘terrorist activities’ and ‘anti-Government conspiracies’.⁹⁹

That the aim of the Communist Party was to eliminate the Opposition was demonstrated by the fact that the CC ordered Interior Minister Yugov ‘to prepare a report ... which should give details of the concrete facts revealing the existence of an Opposition centre which leads planned [anti-Government] actions, and ...state that it is necessary to take the most severe political, administrative and legal measures to stop these actions which harm the national interests of Bulgaria’.¹⁰⁰ This was an example of the methods the Communists employed to use their positions in the Government against their political opponents.

Despite the lack of firm evidence, there can be little doubt that the actions of the Bulgarian Communists were known and approved by the Soviet Government. The January 1946 onslaught on the Opposition was triggered by the Communist Politburo immediately after Vyshinski had proclaimed that it was futile to negotiate with the non-FF parties. On 29 June 1946, the day Kolarov met Bevin in Paris, the Politburo gathered in the presence of Marshal Tolbukhin, the Head of the Allied Control Commission and

⁹⁸ Tsvetkov, Zh. *Sudut nad opozitsionnite lideri*. Sofia: Kupessa, 1991. p.10-11

⁹⁹ Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.102-112

Commander in Chief of the Third Ukrainian Front, to deliberate on the need to 'cleanse' the army and remove from Government the *Zveno* leader War Minister Velchev.¹⁰¹ In the summer of 1946, several delegations of high-ranking Bulgarian Communists consulted with Stalin about the Bulgarian political situation. The Soviet leader was especially interested in the army and militia, probably wanting to know whether they would be a reliable support for the Bulgarian regime after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces. Stalin personally oversaw the changes in the Bulgarian Cabinet. On 2 September 1946, he explained to Dimitrov that in view of the worsening international status of Bulgaria Georgiev should by all means be retained as Prime Minister. The Communists should influence him to distance himself from the right wing of his own party, *Zveno*.¹⁰² These examples suggest that the accelerated persecution of non-Communists was directed from the Kremlin. Only in the case of Pastuhov's arrest was Soviet displeasure recorded. This was on tactical grounds: instead of helping make a martyr of the old and feeble Pastuhov, the Bulgarian Communists were told to target Petkov.¹⁰³

Of the numerous violent incidents reported by the British Mission in Sofia, Pastuhov's imprisonment stirred the Foreign Office the most and provoked the handing of a rare *note verbale* to the Bulgarian Government. In it the British Government not only stated its disapproval of the particular case but also protested against the lack of civil liberties and especially of freedom of the press in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian reply stuck to mere diplomatic formalities.¹⁰⁴ This increased British hesitancy as to possible further moves regarding Bulgaria. No official British reaction was registered in cases similar to Pastuhov's.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.102

¹⁰¹ Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p.47

¹⁰² Dimitrov, G. *Dnevnik...* p.533; Dimitrov, V. 'The Failure...' p.358-360, 373-376

¹⁰³ RTsHIDNI, f.17, op.128, a.e.887, l.20, Konstantinov note, 9.03.1946; Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p.43

¹⁰⁴ FO371/58515, R6455, FO communications, 5 – 19.03.1946

Witnessing the steady Communist advance, Foreign Office observers were daily convinced that in Bulgaria the only change after the Moscow decision was for worse. They entertained no illusion that British interference could bring but the slightest and temporary political improvement. Already in June 1946, Geoffrey Warner of the Southern Department admitted that he saw no way to help the Opposition and therefore had no hope that it would succeed.¹⁰⁵

The FO considered that the position of the British Government regarding Bulgaria had been expressed unequivocally on a number of occasions and was therefore well known to Bulgaria's rulers. The Bulgarian Government had had sufficient time and opportunity for compromise and since it had not offered any, no further British action was expedient. The FO stood by this view even when in May 1946 the Bulgarian Opposition sent an appeal to Britain and the USA drawing attention to the aggravated political situation. After a similar letter from the Romanian Opposition, the British Government had raised the issue with the Soviet Government. Its lack of success had led it to conclude that protests in the Bulgarian case would hardly make any headway.¹⁰⁶ British observers recognised the difficult task of the Bulgarian Opposition, and doubted that any direct British encouragement would be justified. The FO advised Bevin not to send Petkov a message of encouragement despite Houstoun-Boswall's request. The political representative was instructed simply to convey the 'general agreement of HMG with the Opposition's views' and explain that for precisely this reason the Bulgarian Government had not been recognised.¹⁰⁷ So stark did the situation in Bulgaria look to British experts that even Houstoun-Boswall, still convinced of the daily

¹⁰⁵ FO371/58519, R8277, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 1.06.1946, Warner, 5.06.1946

¹⁰⁶ FO371/58518, R7331, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 9.05.1946, FO to Sofia, 28.05.1946, Warner, 23.05.1946; FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.101, Barnes to Byrnes, 8.05.1946

¹⁰⁷ FO371/58517, R6066, FO brief, 1.04.1946

strengthening position of the Opposition, at this moment appreciated the need to await developments quietly rather than to undertake doomed haphazard actions.¹⁰⁸

As the FO perceived the situation in Bulgaria to be rapidly deteriorating, it recognised the necessity to formulate a clear course of action and implement it steadily. By the end of July 1946, the predominant opinion of FO officials was that from the British perspective it was best to grant recognition to the Bulgarian Government at the first suitable opportunity. The immediate reason underlying this view was that it had become useless to tie their hands by publicly adhering to the Moscow decision which they knew was no longer relevant. Since they had accepted that they had no chances to induce the entry of the Bulgarian Opposition into the Government, it was logical to pay less attention to Bulgarian internal affairs.¹⁰⁹

In the internal Southern Department discussion on Bulgarian recognition in August 1946, there were only a few dissenting voices like that of the newcomer to the FO Bulgarian desk R.P.Pinsent. He argued that even with the Red Army out of Bulgaria, the chances that the next elections would be free were distinctly remote. Already the Communist hold over the country was judged to be so complete that it would not make much difference whether Soviet troops were physically present. For the proponents of this line the question was, 'is it worth making an evident climb-down involving a severe loss of prestige in order to gain an illusory advantage'? Even Pinsent conceded that refusal of recognition, apart from its distinct moral satisfaction, would yield few practical advantages.¹¹⁰ Houstoun-Boswall reached the peak of frustration when he claimed that 'HMG... have decided to swallow the rape of Bulgaria by the Communists' and challenged the FO at least to display 'guts and honesty to tell the world beforehand just what we are doing'.¹¹¹ Putting aside violent

¹⁰⁸ FO371/58515, R6456, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 16.04.1946

¹⁰⁹ FO371/58524, R12682, FO draft to Byrnes, 28.08.1946

¹¹⁰ FO371/58523, R11992, FO minutes, 13 – 31.08.1946

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Houston-Boswall to Hayter, 5.08.1946

emotions brought by the horrible position of having 'to stand by impotently and watch events', he made an attempt at arguing with the sober FO decision with equally rational calculations. He tried to prove that even according to the most optimistic estimate, ratification was logistically unlikely before December 1946, which then pushed the departure of Soviet troops to the end of March 1947. Therefore he pleaded that Britain's decision to recognise Bulgaria should not be announced so far in advance.¹¹²

In Soviet military withdrawal from Bulgaria the FO saw the only noticeable benefit for Britain in the extremely unsatisfactory situation. It was estimated that as the withdrawal was not in the strict Soviet interest, Britain should secure it while the USSR was still willing to make the compromise. In the late summer of 1946, the Southern Department worried about whether it had double-guessed Soviet calculations correctly. After all, Stalin might have committed himself to withdrawal in the knowledge that the West would not recognise the Bulgarian Government soon. The British Military Mission in Bulgaria reported a strong Soviet military presence on the Turkish border and fortification of the Bulgarian-Greek border. As always, this added to British fears of an invasion of Greece and once again pointed to the need to speed up the removal of the Red Army from the southern Balkans.¹¹³

This indeed was the most pressing argument for diplomatic recognition of the Bulgarian Government. For Britain, Soviet withdrawal was judged to be the only positive development in the Balkans outside Greece. If recognition of the Bulgarian regime was the price, it should be paid without imposing any further conditions. The adoption of this logic by the FO signified the final point of an important reversal of priorities in British policy towards Bulgaria. This had begun with the realisation that recognition could actually bring the initially unforeseen advantage of Soviet military withdrawal from bases threatening the

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ FO371/58524, R12707, R13920, R14821, Sofia to FO and WO, 26.08., 28.09.1946

Eastern Mediterranean. Not long after Molotov had mentioned Soviet readiness for withdrawal from Bulgaria, this became an object of primary significance for British policy in the region. Once again, the general strategic disposition of forces in the Balkans overshadowed any earlier British attempts to influence domestic processes in Bulgaria.

The one hindrance to the fulfilment of Britain's resolution to grant recognition to the Bulgarian Government came from the United States. At the beginning of August 1946 the State Department was considering a new representation to Moscow. It would again urge the Soviet Government to persuade the Bulgarian Communists to include the Opposition in office.¹¹⁴ In addition, on 28 August 1946 the Secretary of State received the Bulgarian Prime Minister Georgiev in Paris and warned him that unless the situation was remedied there would be no Peace Treaty with Bulgaria as the US Senate would refuse to ratify it. Georgiev retorted that in the circumstances of exclusive Soviet influence his Government was the best there could be in Bulgaria. He made it clear that the only way the Bulgarian Government could comply with the US demands was with Soviet agreement, so the US efforts should be directed to Moscow. The US officials, including Barnes, urged Georgiev to start acting on the US proposal immediately and to summon the Opposition to Paris to begin negotiations. For a moment it looked as if this was going to happen as on 31 August the Bulgarian delegation in Paris handed Barnes a memorandum stating its readiness to start negotiations with the Opposition and accepting the mediation of US representatives. Three days later Georgiev shifted his ground completely, telling the US delegation he 'could not do what was politically impossible'.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ FO371/58522, R11299, FO minutes, July 1946; FO371/58523, R11992, FO minutes, August 1946

¹¹⁵ FO371/58583, R12904, R12993, R13031, R113283, Paris – FO - Sofia, 1 - 5.09.1946

The FO judged State Department officials to be 'subdued and chastened' by their experience in Paris.¹¹⁶ Moreover, it was satisfied that it had rightly declined to support any US *demarche* in Moscow of which nothing positive had come. FO officials were also horrified that their US counterparts had nearly succeeded in putting them precisely in the position they wished to avoid. Their attitude to the latest US move was mixed. Some civil servants hoped that the US representation would have some slight effect which would provide an opportunity to grant recognition to the Bulgarian Government.¹¹⁷ When on 30 August 1946, Byrnes approved recognition in principle, the FO breathed with relief that eventually the USA was coming round to the British point of view. Another, more cynical thought began creeping into British reasoning: since Bulgarian behaviour was so deplorable, it seemed expedient to recognise the Government before it committed yet another offence.¹¹⁸

Looking for Opportunities to Grant Recognition.

The longer British officials looked at Bulgaria, the firmer became their belief that they should grant it recognition if not before, then at the time of the signing of the Peace Treaty. Towards the middle of August 1946, the FO began scrutinising events in Bulgaria with the view to finding at least some positive developments which could justify the extension of diplomatic relations. Its hopes were pinned on the forthcoming elections to the Grand National Assembly for which the referendum for a Republic was going to be a dress rehearsal.

The issue of the abolition of the Bulgarian Monarchy was a matter of indifference to the British Government. Wartime plans had dismissed it as more or less irrelevant. The Bulgarian ruling dynasty had earned little sympathy from the British Government. The FO was convinced of the widespread republicanism of the Bulgarian people. British experts had no illusions that a Republic would bring Bulgaria closer to the Soviet model

¹¹⁶ FO371/58583, R13283, Paris to Sofia, 5.09.1946

¹¹⁷ FO371/58524, R12682, Warner, Dixon, 29 - 30.08.1946

and facilitate the creation of a Federation with Yugoslavia. Indeed, as a result of the political violence following the *coup* of 9 September 1944, there remained no groups or individuals in Bulgaria prepared to declare pro-monarchist feelings and thus openly challenge the Government's determination to abolish the Monarchy. Even the Opposition was well known for its republican convictions and had difficulty in distinguishing itself from the FF on the question of the form of the state. While urging a pro-republican vote, the Opposition objected to the referendum in principle as such a method was not provided for by the existing Constitution.^{*119}

The referendum took place on 8 September 1946 with a turn out of over ninety-one percent. Almost ninety-six percent of the votes were in favour of a Republic. On 15 September 1946 the National Assembly proclaimed Bulgaria to be a People's Republic.¹²⁰ As this had been expected, it provoked little official reaction from London and Washington. The matter on which they concentrated was that of the recognition of the Bulgarian Government. Exclusive attention was directed towards the elections for a Grand National Assembly which were scheduled for 28 October 1946.

Although British observers could not realistically expect the Grand National Assembly to influence radically political developments in Bulgaria, they followed closely the electoral campaign. The Opposition parties became allied in the Federation of Urban and Rural Labour. This launched a strong electoral campaign engaging in intense political disputes with the Communists and reporting in its newspapers the full extent of the terror campaign pursued by the authorities. The FO focused on the fact that the new Grand

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Warner, 17.08.1946

* The Turnovo Constitution stipulated that the form of the state could only be altered by a Grand National Assembly. This could only be summoned by the Monarch and in the present instance nine years had to pass before the King would come of age.

¹¹⁹ Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.120-121

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.122; for details on the referendum see Kostadinova, T. *Bulgaria 1879 – 1946...* p.90-92

National Assembly could provide the desired opportunity for recognition and did not preoccupy itself with details of the pre-electoral campaign in Bulgaria. The main British concern was that some inopportune US action would delay the signature of the Peace Treaty. The State Department was contemplating withdrawal of the US Military Mission from Bulgaria as a sign of utmost displeasure with political developments. British officials in London were strongly opposed to the idea mainly because they were convinced it would have no effect on the Bulgarian Government while at the same time denying the West an important source of information and intelligence.¹²¹

The greater British anxiety was that Secretary Byrnes saw no reason why the Treaty with Bulgaria had to be signed as soon as it was ready. To British civil servants he did not seem to be convinced of the importance of getting the Soviet troops out of the country.¹²² On the whole, US specialists analysed the Bulgarian situation from the perspective of democratic principles, pointing to the non-implementation of either the Yalta Declaration or the Moscow decision. That is why they still hoped that as a result of Byrnes' conversation with Georgiev, the Bulgarian elections were not going to be 'too unjust'.¹²³ Moreover, in the light of the violent election campaign, the US Government was extremely reluctant to extend recognition to the Bulgarian Government.¹²⁴

Senior Foreign Office civil servants like Sargent had been pressing for discussion and co-ordination of the whole policy towards the satellite countries with their US colleagues. They were worried that the US Government might go in the opposite direction from the British and become so committed to a policy of non-recognition as not to be able to sign

¹²¹ FO371/58525, R14052, US Embassy London to FO, 16.09.1946, R14543, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 1.10.1946, R14715, Paris to Sofia, 4.10.1946; FO371/58585, R14912, FO to Washington, 7.10.1946, R15340, British Embassy Washington *aide-memoire* to State, 9.10.1946

¹²² FO371/58585, R15464, Warner, 12.10.1946

¹²³ FO371/58525, R15254, Warner (Paris) to FO, 13.10.1946

¹²⁴ FO371/58526, R15583, Washington to FO, 23.10.1946

the Peace Treaty at all.¹²⁵ While these matters were briefly touched upon at a meeting between Bevin and Byrnes in Paris on 4 October 1946, their resolution was left to the normal diplomatic channels.¹²⁶

Britain's views were most extensively outlined in a letter from Bevin to Byrnes of 7 October 1946. For the FO the latest talks with Georgiev in Paris showed that serious modification of the present Bulgarian policy could not be expected. Using terror and unfair elections, the Bulgarian Communists were well on the way to establishing a solid Communist regime. For Britain there seemed no alternative but to resign itself to 'recognising the present Government or one similarly controlled by Communists'. This course was not seen as satisfactory but at least it would hasten the signature of the Peace Treaty and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Bulgaria. Even though for the British Government it was technically possible to sign a peace treaty with an unrecognised Government, its inclination was to simplify things by granting the Bulgarian Government recognition at the time of signature.¹²⁷

The State Department appreciated British moderation and agreed not to withdraw the US Mission from Bulgaria. It began to consider the possibility of signing the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria even though it was still firmly opposed to granting the Bulgarian regime formal recognition. In a last attempt to influence the Bulgarian Government, on 24 October 1946 Byrnes sent a letter to Georgiev reminding him that the future international status of Bulgaria depended on the conduct of the elections. Simultaneously, in order to demonstrate US interest, Barnes and the new Head of the US Military Mission General Robertson were authorised to propose a full ACC meeting in relation to the forthcoming elections. Wishing to refute any impression that it was condoning the terror perpetrated

¹²⁵ FO371/58585, R14912, Sargent to Bevin, 1.10.1946

¹²⁶ FO371/58525, R14932, Paris to Sofia, 4.10.1946

by the authorities, the US Mission requested from the Bulgarian Government a full report on recent events and insisted on visiting concentration camps and prisons, including a visit to the arrested former War Minister Velchev.¹²⁸

The FO instructed the British representative in Sofia to support the US move. Nevertheless, British officials deplored the wide range of US demands and strove to limit them. The requirement for prison inspection was judged to be especially unfortunate as it might turn into a precedent for reciprocal Soviet demands in Greece which would be unpalatable to Britain. It seemed difficult to alter the active US approach but the FO hoped that by going along with it, it would be in a better position to prevent more serious steps.

On 23 October 1946 at a meeting of the ACC, the US representatives put forward comprehensive measures to ensure freedom and fairness of elections. The most important proposal was for Opposition controllers at each polling booth. Ostensibly, the circumstances resembled those of August 1945 when elections were postponed upon joint US and British insistence. In this instance, however, Biryuzov refused to consider what he termed 'interference in Bulgaria's internal affairs'.¹²⁹ His words echoed those of Vyshinski who days earlier had mentioned in a speech in Paris that no interference would be allowed in Bulgaria where there was 'no place for Petkov or Lulchev'.¹³⁰ US foreign policy officials retreated but continued to look for ways to improve the situation in Bulgaria. Byrnes contemplated the idea of discussing the country directly with Molotov and Vyshinski at the forthcoming Council of Foreign Ministers in New York. He believed

¹²⁷ FRUS 1946, vol.VI, p.152, Acheson to US delegation Paris, 9.10.1946

¹²⁸ FO371/58524, R12444, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 21.08.1946, R12544, Houstoun-Boswall to FO, 21.08.1946, FO to UK delegation Paris, 30.08.1946; FO371/58525, R14052, Williams, 16.09.1946

¹²⁹ FO371/58526, R15609, Tollinton to FO, 24.10.1946; FO371/58525, R14268, Houstoun-Boswall to Warner, 16.09.1946

¹³⁰ FO371/58525, R15254, Warner to FO, 13.10.1946

he could get the Soviet Union 'to order the Bulgarian Communists to show some degree of co-operation with the Opposition'. Alternatively, he suggested placing the matter of Bulgarian elections on the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations.¹³¹

Apart from thinking that the proposed moves would be 'utterly useless', most FO officials discerned a hardening of the United States approach. Even more worrying was the fact that Biryuzov's behaviour in Bulgaria and Vyshinski's declarations in Paris indicated that the Soviet Union too was embracing a hard-line attitude. The FO could accept that the time for identical British and US actions and strictly co-ordinated initiatives in Bulgaria had passed. Simultaneously, it worried that the moderate British approach was being sidelined.¹³²

The only reason attention continued to be paid to the elections was because they would demonstrate the strength of the Opposition and give final indications as to whether the ruling Communists would make a compromise.¹³³ Without British knowledge, in June 1946 Stalin gave instructions about the electoral tactics of the Bulgarian Communists. He approved the preservation of the Fatherland Front in which, however, the Communists 'should do everything possible to be the first party'. If the Communists could not secure at least forty percent on the common electoral lists they should participate in the elections on their own. This was repeated in a warning by Dimitrov to the other FF parties.¹³⁴ In addition, Stalin made it clear that it was important that the Bulgarian Opposition should not boycott the ballot again. He saw it as natural that the Government to be formed after the elections would not include the Opposition. But, it was crucial for the Fatherland Front's image not

¹³¹ FO371/58527, R16212, Tollinton to FO, 7.11.1946

¹³² *Ibid.*, FO to Washington, 14.11.1946, Colville, 11.11.1946

¹³³ FO371/58519, R8277, FO minutes, 5 – 11.06.1946

¹³⁴ Dimitrov, G. *Dnevnik...* p.528; Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p.46

to be seen as dismissing the possibility of negotiations for a coalition Government too hastily.¹³⁵

In public, Communist leaders stood for calm and orderly elections, but their pronouncements revealed that they were planning severe measures against the Opposition. Dimitrov stated that 'until the elections for the Grand National Assembly the national militia and the [state] administration should be restrained'. But he also claimed that the Opposition was preparing evil acts of provocation which were going to be prevented by the militia.¹³⁶

On the eve of the elections, the United Opposition asked Great Britain and the USA to intervene again in favour of postponing the elections. This action had little but propaganda value. The British and US Governments had no means of influencing the behaviour of either the Bulgarian Communists or the Soviet political and military representatives in Bulgaria. All they could do, was to protest to the Bulgarian and Soviet Governments about the improper conduct of the electoral campaign. Indeed, they had already done so without any obvious effect. From Britain's perspective, what remained was to watch the Bulgarian situation carefully and find a suitable moment to discard responsibility for it by granting recognition to the Bulgarian Government.

Despite its unfavourable position, the United Bulgarian Opposition secured more than one fourth of the vote – 28.4 percent - and returned ninety-nine deputies to the Grand National Assembly. The Fatherland Front had 365 deputies. The new Government was formed without any Opposition participation and contained a bigger number of Communists than the previous one. For the FO the mere presence of the Opposition in Parliament seemed to

¹³⁵ Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p. 50-51

¹³⁶ Tsvetkov, Zh. *Sudut...* p.19

open prospects for altering the course of events in the country. This could be a justification for active abandoning of the policy of non-recognition on Britain's part.

On 12 November 1946, the House of Commons debated the Peace Treaties with the former Axis satellites. The FO Minister of State Hector McNeil criticised the methods used by the Bulgarian Government to obtain a parliamentary majority and expressed profound doubts that the results of the elections truly reflected the wishes of the Bulgarian people. But he was unable to state clearly what methods the British Government planned to employ in place of non-recognition in order to register disapproval of the Bulgarian regime.¹³⁷ After the debate there were voices in the FO suggesting that it was better to leave the Bulgarians guessing as to when exactly Britain would extend diplomatic relations.¹³⁸ Captain Raynold Blackburn, a Conservative MP, put forward to the FO the idea of 'conditional and gradual recognition' in exchange for strictly formulated concessions on the part of the Bulgarians. Without serious discussion, this was discarded as inappropriate by civil servants dealing with Bulgaria.¹³⁹

These few isolated cases of attention to Bulgaria did nothing to alter the official view that recognition should be accorded at the time of the signing of the Peace Treaty. The decision taken in principle by the FO was reaffirmed by the advice of its legal expert, G.G.Fitzmaurice. He failed to explain the case in clear juridical terms. His repeated opinion was that from a legal point of view, HMG had already recognised the Bulgarian Government. The British Government had sent representatives to Bulgaria, granting in essence a *de facto* recognition, which carried almost all the legal consequences. In international practice this differed from a *de jure* recognition which implied political attitude and, if it was extended, meant that Britain was satisfied with the proper

¹³⁷ FO371/58527, R16584, House of Commons debate extracts, 12.11.1946

¹³⁸ FO371/58528, R17083, Washington to FO, 18.11.1946, Colville, 3.12.1946

credentials of the regime in Bulgaria. The legal adviser was not sure whether a *de jure* recognition was necessary to bring the state of war to an end. He admitted that the whole 'recognition business' had fallen into 'a terrible mess causing endless tangles'. After weeks of confusing interdepartmental memoranda the FO arrived at the conclusion that for the British Government it 'would not be legally impossible' to sign or ratify a peace treaty with a Government which was only recognised *de facto*, as was the case with the Bulgarian Government.¹⁴⁰

With the approaching end of the Paris Peace Conference it was clear that the day of the signing of the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria was also near. This increased the desire of the Foreign Office to get the 'whole muddle' of Bulgarian recognition out of the way.¹⁴¹ It was no longer a question of securing political or even strategic advantages for Britain; the only practical benefit appeared to be the closure of a confusing and at times embarrassing question for British foreign policy. There were signals that for political and practical reasons even the US State Department was beginning to reconcile itself to the approaching recognition of the Bulgarian regime.¹⁴²

While officials in London were elaborating on a number of legal and technical details at the beginning of 1947, noticeable deterioration of the Bulgarian political situation was reported. It had become obvious that the Bulgarian Communists were intent on eliminating the Opposition and the withdrawal of the Red Army would have no effect on this. The British representative in Sofia wrote that without doubt in the persecution of opponents the Bulgarian Government 'makes use of torture as a method of interrogation,

¹³⁹ FO371/66912, R1558, Blackburn to McNeil, 21.01.1947

¹⁴⁰ FO371/58526, R15583, FO minutes, 26.10. – 22.11.1946

¹⁴¹ FO371/58526, R15583, FO to UK delegation New York, 22.10.1946, R15948, FO to Washington, 6.11.1946

¹⁴² FO371/66912, R1315, Lord Inverchapel to FO, 29.01.1947, Colville, 1.02.1947

maintains concentration camps and is in general the most barbaric of all totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe'.¹⁴³ Boyd Tollinton, Acting Head of the British Mission, believed that the prospect of the departure of the Red Army from Bulgaria had resulted in a drive to stamp out all effective opposition. Even Dimitrov, already Bulgarian Prime Minister and Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, had stated in the Bulgarian Parliament that the Opposition would be dealt with in a month. Tollinton wrote that far from enabling more normal political life to be established in Bulgaria, the signature of the Peace Treaty would become the occasion 'for an additional attempt to fix a totalitarian grasp upon further aspects of Bulgarian life with the two-fold object of settling the Soviet hand on the country and of preventing Western influence of any chance of reviving'. He recommended that as a sign of disapproval the British Government should not appoint a Minister Plenipotentiary to Sofia, but send just another political representative to act as an observer. In Tollinton's opinion, the last weapon Britain possessed was the power to deny Bulgaria trade, making it the price for certain political concessions to the genuinely democratic elements. His gravest doubts were that soon there would be no democratic elements in Bulgaria, despite the courage Opposition leaders continued to show.¹⁴⁴

At the beginning of February 1947, just before the signing of the Peace Treaty, Dimitrov made an ostensible show of good will towards the Opposition. He stated in the Assembly that 'certain collaboration is possible and necessary' but at the same time continued to insist that the Opposition was slandering the Government and the Fatherland Front as well as encouraging the dissatisfied elements in the country. This proclamation of moderation was immediately obscured by Dimitrov's words that he could throw the

¹⁴³ FO371/66912, R62, Colville, 4 – 22.01.1947

¹⁴⁴ FO371/66912, R1461, Tollinton to FO, 31.01.1947

Opposition out of Parliament in an hour and that the Communists were under obligation 'to bridle the Opposition'.¹⁴⁵

The Southern Department judged the moderating *motives* in Dimitrov's speech to be 'sickeningly insincere'. On the other hand, the very proclamation of the need for compromise with the Opposition was seen as a sign that Britain's attitude still counted for something with the Bulgarian Government. But it was to be expected that until recognition was granted not only by Britain but also the USA, the Bulgarian Communists would be on their best behaviour.¹⁴⁶ Some FO officials like D.Colville were amazed that some of the articles in the Opposition press had been allowed to appear at all which would not have been possible in Yugoslavia, Romania or Poland.¹⁴⁷

On 10 February 1947, the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria was signed. On 11 February 1947, the British representative wrote to Dimitrov informing him that HMG had decided to recognise the Bulgarian Government *de jure*. The note made it clear that the Bulgarian Government was not considered to be representative of the people's wishes. On 12 February, the Bulgarian Government replied stating satisfaction with the recognition and declaring that it would fulfil the requirements of the Peace Treaty. John Sterndale-Bennett was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary in Sofia, while Professor Nikola Dolapchiev became the Bulgarian Minister in London.

The United States Senate ratified the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria only in June 1947 against the strongly-worded advice of the US representative in Sofia who likened the Soviet non-fulfilment of the Yalta agreements to the behaviour of Germany in the prelude to the First and Second World War. President Truman used the occasion of the ratification to voice

¹⁴⁵ *Otechestven Front*, 12.02.1947

¹⁴⁶ FO371/66929, R2083, Colville, 12.02.1947, Williams, 18.02.1947

¹⁴⁷ FO371/66905, R1014, Tollinton to FO, 10.01.1947

strong dissatisfaction with the Bulgarian Government.¹⁴⁸ The delay, however, produced no effect on the situation in Bulgaria and, to the US Government's embarrassment, coincided with the arrest of Petkov. This signified the start of a new wave of terror aimed at eliminating anyone who challenged the Communist-dominated Government before the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Bulgaria. The very development which according to British policy makers could alleviate political tension in Bulgaria had the opposite effect.

British and US recognition did not improve the international reputation of the Bulgarian Government but was used to boost its internal standing and to some degree facilitated the consolidation of the regime. Without the fear that they might incur the intervention of Britain and the USA, the Bulgarian Communists could continue to repress their political opponents. To those Bulgarian politicians who were familiar with Stalin's reassurance that Bulgaria would eventually be recognised, the Soviet leader's words must have seemed almost prophetic. In early 1946, he had told a Bulgarian delegation,

Why are you so worried about that? If the Opposition does not want to enter [the Government], it is possible that they will not recognise you immediately. But the time for the preparation of the Peace Treaty is short. In about two or three months they are going to recognise you.. We were not recognised for twelve years and nevertheless we survived... If Petkov thinks that because of him Britain and America are going to go to war with us, he is gravely mistaken.¹⁴⁹

* * *

For almost half a year after the November 1945 elections Britain had practically accepted that in Bulgaria free elections 'in harmony with the Yalta agreement' were not possible. It believed that the future of its influence in the country lay with the fortunes of the anti-Communists and therefore its main efforts had been directed towards securing more favourable conditions for the Opposition. The crucial question Britain faced was how to

¹⁴⁸ De Santis, H. *The Diplomacy...* p.180-181

facilitate the entry of non-Fatherland Front politicians into the Government which would then become more representative of popular opinion.

Led by its desire to solve this problem, the British Government had subscribed to the Moscow decision, thus risking a repetition of the failure of Yalta. The wording of the Moscow communiqué could - and indeed did - become subject to two irreconcilable interpretations. Once this was obvious, Britain realised that it could not implement its views unless it stood up firmly to the Soviet Union. Although willing to take issue with the Soviet Government on different occasions, London was not ready to confront Moscow openly. Instead, British demands were scaled down which to the USSR signalled British vulnerability. Furthermore, although there was hardly any meaningful disagreement between the two Western Allies, the timing and tone of their dealings with the USSR gave the impression of a lack of coherence and consent. This was exploited by the Bulgarian Communists for their own propaganda and diplomatic purposes.

¹⁴⁹ Tsvetkov, Zh. *Sudut...* p.17

Part Three

‘We Are Supporting Certain Principles’ *

Chapter Six

British Acceptance of Communist Rule in Bulgaria

After the signing of the Peace Treaties with Germany’s ex-satellites, the divergence of attitude between the Soviet Union and its Western Allies regarding Eastern Europe continued. The controversy focused on the undemocratic nature of the regimes being established in the Eastern European countries. Britain and the USA believed the violent methods used by the Eastern European Communists to be not only condoned, but actually inspired by the Soviet Government and Communist Party. This was judged to be true to the greatest degree of the Bulgarian Government, which on various occasions was known to have strictly adhered to Stalin’s instructions.

British policy makers did not dispute the place of Bulgaria in the post-war Soviet zone of interest. Although earlier conflicts over the area had marked some of the lowest points in dealings with the Soviet Union, in early 1947 the overall importance of Eastern Europe in British foreign policy had visibly diminished. By then, British Government officials had adopted the view that nothing was to be gained from clashes over long-foreseen *faits accomplis*. In the case of Bulgaria, throughout the armistice period the British Government had shown preparedness to search for mutually acceptable solutions, hoping that compromises on specific problems would improve relations in general. This approach

had yielded undesirable results: in addition to seeing the Soviet Union assert its power in Bulgaria, the Foreign Office began worrying that the Soviet leaders perceived British mildness as a sign of weakness.

Britain's continued watchfulness of Bulgaria was justified by the country's being a test ground for the lengths to which the Soviet Union would go to safeguard its control in the areas of Soviet interest. British efforts in Bulgaria were dominated by the need to devise a course of firm and successful actions, which would have a definite impact on political events in the country. Britain explored a range of diplomatic, cultural and economic means, which would revitalise its influence and above all retard the pace of Communisation of Bulgaria.

Background of British Policy to Bulgaria. In the post-war period, British policy towards Bulgaria was elaborated in the context of Anglo-Soviet relations. The Foreign Office scrutinised each prospective action regarding the country in the light of its possible effect on the behaviour of the Soviet Union, not only in Bulgaria but also in the whole adjoining region. British officials realised that Soviet Russia was in a position to retaliate outside its zone, should it perceive any British actions as intended to curtail Soviet superiority in Eastern Europe. This had been clearly demonstrated in the negotiations over the Bulgarian Peace Treaty.¹ In the first half of 1946, Soviet reluctance to withdraw troops from Iran and suspected preparation for an attack on Turkey had confirmed the strong British fear of Soviet pressure on the Middle East.² Such considerations forced British strategists to pay greater than usual attention to Bulgaria, which could provide military bases for Soviet aggression.

* J.H.Watson, FO minute, 6.08.1947, cited in Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.388

¹ FO371/47883, R13784, Molotov - Bevin conversation, 23.09.1945; FO371/47883, N15702, Roberts to Bevin, 31.10.1945

From March 1946 to June 1947, British military planners undertook a comprehensive effort to outline the strategic position of the British Commonwealth resulting from the war. A range of issues - including estimates of possible enemy diplomacy, strategy and warfare – were examined. The various studies commissioned by the Chiefs of Staff came to one conclusion, namely that the main threat for Great Britain and its overseas territories would come from Soviet aggression in any area adjacent to the Soviet sphere. The underpinning assumption was that the Soviet Union would continue to pursue a policy of expansion by all means short of war. Any political or military vacuum created by reduced British commitment in strategic for Britain territories would in due course be filled in by the Soviet Union and would add to the latter's war-making potential. As it was difficult to predict the risks Stalin would be willing to undertake, the chance of a new war was not so remote as it had seemed immediately after the end of the Second World War.³ In the eyes of most British military experts, the Soviet Union's double motivation - Russian nationalistic desire to seize foreign lands coupled with a militant Communist ideology committed to the destruction of Capitalism world-wide - increased the threat of British long-term strategic interests emanating from the USSR.

None of the papers produced by various Government Departments responsible for war planning forecast an imminent danger from the Soviet Union. British analysts believed the Soviet leadership needed to overcome the exhaustion of the war, rebuild the economy and consolidate its gains in Eastern Europe before it could afford a breakdown of relations

² Boyle, P. *'The British...'* p.316; Adamthwaite, A. *'Britain...'* p.227; Smith, R. and J.Zametica. *'The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee Reconsidered, 1945-7'*. *International Affairs*, vol.61, no.3, 1985. p.240

³ Lewis, J. *Changing Direction. British Military Planning for Post-war Strategic Defence, 1942 - 1947*. London: The Sherwood Press, 1988. p.243-249, 316-334

with the West. On the whole, British policy makers looked upon Soviet military power as 'a source of unease, rather than a direct threat'.⁴

Stalin's insatiable security demands and the belligerent public pronouncements of Soviet statesmen caused grave concern to the British Government. Striving to acquire influence over its adjacent territories, the USSR created an international atmosphere of animosity and uncertainty, which itself increased the risk of an accidental war.⁵ Even if the Soviet Government itself was not prepared to engage in armed hostilities with its erstwhile Allies, British observers suspected it of backing Communists everywhere with material and propaganda help. Overzealous local Communists, in particular those in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, were obviously involved in supporting the Greek left-wing guerrillas. Most British officials found it hard to believe that this was not sanctioned by Moscow.⁶ Communist solidarity across the Balkans was a sufficient reminder of how vulnerable to outside pressure Britain's position in the Mediterranean was.

In British post-war military strategy the importance of the Mediterranean could not be overestimated. It was vital for imperial sea and air communications. It constituted the first line of defence of Great Britain which could not be secured from a Western base only. The region was at the centre of British strategic planning against the USSR as its continuous reinforcement would be an instrumental advantage at the start of any future war.⁷ Even though the overall British aim was to prevent war, Britain's diplomatic strength against the Soviet Union could not be maintained without proper military reinforcement.⁸

⁴ Keeble, Sir C. *Britain...* p.218

⁵ Lewis, J. *Changing...* p.295-296

⁶ FO371/47883, N8674, Clerk Kerr to FO, 10.07.1945, N15702, Roberts to Bevin, 31.10.1945

⁷ Lewis, J. *Changing...* p.285-287

⁸ *Ibid.* p.292; Keeble, Sir C. *Britain...* p.219

The Diplomatic Perspective. In 1946 – 1947, at the time of final British preparations for the conclusion of the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria and the recognition of the existing Bulgarian Government, the Foreign Office thoroughly re-examined British policy towards the Soviet Union. This was crucial for the formulation of British policy towards the Eastern European satellites, including Bulgaria. British foreign policy makers looked into issues similar to those addressed by the military planners. Naturally the diplomatic discourse revolved predominantly around the political dimensions of the unfolding international conflict, and sought political means to reinforce the British position. In general, FO studies confirmed both the premises and the conclusions of the military authorities' analysis.

In April 1946, Christopher Warner, the Head of the FO Northern Department, wrote a long memorandum entitled 'The Soviet Campaign against This Country and Our Response to It'.⁹ On the basis of this, the FO as a whole became involved in a comprehensive examination of the strategic aspects of British foreign policy. To some extent, the process of re-evaluation of attitudes to the Soviet Union had been spurred on by Frank Roberts' dispatches in March 1946.¹⁰

FO memoranda, internal communications and exchanges with diplomats serving abroad disclose that British officials had little direct evidence of Soviet thinking apart from external manifestations of policy. In Bulgaria for instance, the Soviet Union appeared to be exerting ruthless control. Coupled with local Communists' emulation of Soviet domestic policies, this supported the assumption that the same pattern would be followed across the Soviet zone. In consequence, the southward Soviet pressure on Turkey and Iran

⁹ DBPO, p.345-352; Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.255-260

¹⁰ FRUS 1946, vol.IV, p.696-709, Kennan to Byrnes, 22.02.1946; Jensen, K.M. (ed.) *Origins of the Cold War. The Novikov, Kennan and Roberts 'Long Telegrams of 1946*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993. p.17-32; Keeble, Sir C. *Britain...* p.213-214; Roberts, Fr. *Dealing...* p.107-111

and the virulent propaganda campaign against the Western democracies could not but be seen by the British Government as a prelude to attempts at increasing Soviet influence in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. This could gradually lead to take-overs similar to those executed by the Soviet Union in its Eastern European zone. Churchill's words at Fulton, that nobody knew the limits to Soviet 'expansive and proselytising tendencies', reflected the growing concerns of the British Government.¹¹

In the mid-1940s, the FO experienced difficulties in determining whether ideology or *Realpolitik* was the leading trend in Soviet foreign policy. It was impossible to ignore increasing pronouncements by top Soviet politicians about the inevitability of the clash between world Communism and Capitalism. For Roberts, this fundamental Marxist principle guided Soviet long-term strategic thinking, thus intensifying the danger of 'a modern equivalent of the religious wars of the sixteenth century' in which the opposing philosophies would struggle for domination of the world.¹² Soviet revolutionary proselytism was all the more disconcerting since it championed military superiority and could lead to behaviour not much different from that of centuries-long Russian imperialism. This could transform militant Communism into an aggressive foreign policy course which threatened on an equal scale the security of the British Empire and the democratic principles which Britain upheld.

Uncertain as to whether Marxism was the predominant motive of Soviet external policy, the FO as a whole inclined to the view that Soviet Russia could be the only future aggressor against Britain. In British estimates, the Soviet Union would certainly use its vast military potential as a threat to obtain political influence over the areas in which it was interested despite the possibility for a clash with the West. There was no doubt either

¹¹ Morray, J.P. *From Yalta to Disarmament. Cold War Debate*. New York: MR Press, 1961. p.41-49; Bohlen, Ch. *Witness...* p.271

that the Soviet Union had decided on using the international Communist movement for the achievement of Soviet strategic goals. As the military balance in Europe was in favour of the USSR, Soviet actions in Eastern Europe and claims outside it were seen by the FO as attempts to profit from the unsettled post-war state of the continent. In such a fluid situation, however, British experts judged that a substantial possibility of miscalculation existed.¹³

The acceptance of the reality of the Soviet threat prompted Whitehall officials to look for methods of mounting effective resistance against it. The first principle of British defence was that no territories should be evacuated voluntarily as this would always result in Soviet attempts to extend influence in direct or indirect ways, through the local Communists parties. In response to Soviet propaganda, Britain should point out the value of freedom, democracy and political tolerance in stark opposition to physical violence and psychological terror. Sargent suggested that one possible counterattack would be for the United Nations to indict the Soviet Government for establishing a reign of terror in Eastern Europe. Most important of all, victory in any future conflict with the USSR depended on the state of the British economy, which should be strong and viable.¹⁴

Taking into account the worst possible outcome, the FO did not disregard the search for some *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union. Despite pointing out the imperialist aspects of Soviet foreign policy, Roberts advocated the acceptance of the virtually existing spheres of interest. He recommended that Britain should insist on reciprocity but simultaneously not shy away from the establishment of cultural and trade links with the Soviet Union. Warner was not opposed to the idea that, if the USSR concentrated on its own sphere in Eastern Europe, Britain should be more careful with measures against it. However, all

¹² DBPO, p.305-311, 315-332; Roberts, Fr. *Dealing...* p.107-111

¹³ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.269; Lewis, J. *Changing...* p.257-263

British analysts insisted on demonstrating British determination never to abandon the Mediterranean, as this would result in the weakening of influence in areas crucial to Britain, in particular Iran and Turkey.¹⁵

The FO was keen to keep open channels of communication with the Soviet Union. This was evident at the last Council of Foreign Ministers in London in December 1947 where opinions were exchanged on East European matters. Such an act resembled co-operation at least superficially.¹⁶ Even so, most officials understood the futility of this approach which was reminiscent of appeasement: concessions just vanished in a bottomless pit of demands. Thomas Brimelow, a Soviet specialist at the Northern Department noted,

If we were to pursue a policy of appeasement, our concessions would be accepted without gratitude and used against us. We must therefore be firm. On the other hand, if we are actively hostile, we merely confirm the rulers of the Soviet Union in their belief that we hate and fear them, and we accelerate the deterioration of relations.¹⁷

This echoed the thoughts of some US foreign policy makers. For Charles Bohlen, the State Department expert on the Soviet Union, Bolshevik ideology paid no attention to 'what the capitalist countries did; the mere fact that they were capitalist made them the object of continuous hostility on the part of the Soviet rulers; they could not do otherwise and pretend to be Marxist-Leninist'.¹⁸ Gradually, a tougher attitude to the Soviet Union was formulated in both Britain and the USA. Despite the different foreign policy methods of the two, a converging approach in dealing with the Soviet Union became notable.

This new line of thinking in the FO was soon reflected in the public pronouncements made by British political leaders. In June 1947, in the Parliamentary debate on foreign

¹⁴ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.265

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.247-257

¹⁶ Keeble, Sir C. *Britain...* p.210-211

¹⁷ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.277

policy, Bevin admitted that confidence and trust were lacking in relations with the Soviet Union. He claimed that the British Government had not and was not, supporting 'any party or movement in any country' which was hostile to the legitimate Soviet interests. Simultaneously, he unambiguously criticised the Soviet Union for not allowing its satellites to have political and commercial ties with the West. He also condemned the Soviet Union for having

rightly or wrongly succeeded by its present policy in giving the impression to the outside world that it is satisfied with no Government however democratically elected and however well-intentioned which is not subservient to Soviet aims and indeed dominated by Communists.¹⁹

A most effective criticism of Soviet behaviour in Eastern Europe was voiced by the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee. In January 1948, he publicly summed up the perception of the Soviet threat: 'imperialism in a new form - ideological, economic and strategic - which threatens the welfare and the way of life of other nations in Europe'.²⁰ It formed the basis of the Foreign Office 'Bastion' position paper of July 1948 which summarised the considered opinion of all Departments dealing with the USSR and Eastern Europe. Its point of departure was the assumption that 'from secure entrenchment in Eastern Europe the Russians are now seeking to infiltrate Western and Southern Europe'. The employed Soviet tactic was to probe for a weak spot along the Western line, to find and to penetrate it, after which it was going to cause 'the whole line to collapse'.²¹

The hardening British attitude towards Soviet Russia which was taking shape throughout 1947 and 1948 was the result of serious analysis of Soviet policy motives by British Government institutions. Understandably, concurrent Soviet actions in Eastern Europe

¹⁸ Bohlen, Ch. *Witness...* p.271

¹⁹ FO371/66966, R8719, Bevin speech, 27.06.1947

²⁰ Keeble, Sir C. *Britain...* p.220

²¹ FO371/72196, R10197, 'Bastion' memorandum, 20.07.1948

coloured British understanding of and reactions to Soviet foreign policy. Consequently, the views of the FO and the British representatives in Moscow and in the countries of the Soviet zone, served to confirm the political assumptions and the methods proposed by the Chiefs of Staff.

The decision to take a firm stand against Soviet aggression was translated mostly into anti-Communist propaganda. It was also reflected in the uncompromising attitude towards the Soviet Union taken by Britain at the United Nations forums. Above all, it was the main stimulus to participate in the strengthening of the defence of Western Europe and to try to draw the USA closer to European affairs.²² In purely British-Soviet relations there were still friendly gestures, most notably the new Trade Agreement signed at the end of 1947 and Soviet agreement to the incorporation of the Dodecanese islands into Greece.²³

Soviet behaviour contained indications that once control over territories considered essential in terms of security had been gained, the Soviet Union could afford to display flexibility. Stalin recognised and in most cases was ready to accept the limits imposed on Soviet ambitions by the interests of his former Allies. In countries of the Soviet zone he did not contemplate compromises. The British and US influence was to be curtailed to the absolute minimum, particularly in Bulgaria which was a vital link in the Soviet zone. With its strategic location in the Balkans and having one of the oldest Communist parties, the country was a suitable ground for the speedy implementation of the Soviet model. This was facilitated by the willing collaboration of the Bulgarian Communist leaders. Their actions at home and their foreign policy pronouncements became increasingly aggressive towards the end of 1947. Since the political moves of the Bulgarian Communists were synchronised with the Kremlin, they provided good indications of Soviet policy and thinking. Any British

²² *Ibid.*; Barker, E. *Britain in...* p.64-96

²³ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p. 262-263; Keeble, Sir C. *Britain...* p.216

reaction to events in Bulgaria had to be considered in the light of the impact this would have on relations with the Soviet Union.

Anglo-Bulgarian Relations in the Aftermath of the Peace Treaty.

With the ratification of the Peace Treaty Bulgaria regained legal sovereignty and most European states established diplomatic relations with it. The Allied Control Commission terminated its activities. The Soviet Union withdrew all troops from Bulgaria by mid-December 1947. The normalisation of Bulgaria's international position enabled the Bulgarian Communists to concentrate on internal developments, triggering brutal attacks on the Opposition. Nothing characterised the Communists' drive to eliminate all active opponents better than the vicious treatment of the Agrarian leader Petkov who was arrested in Parliament just days before the USA granted recognition to the Bulgarian Government. This happened against the background of noticeable deterioration of relations between Bulgaria and the West, which official Bulgarian propaganda portrayed as offering moral and material support to the Opposition. At the same time, lacking even the flawed machinery of the ACC, the British and US Governments had to find new methods to influence Bulgaria's rulers.

In late 1947 and especially at the beginning of 1948, John Sterndale-Bennett, the newly appointed British Minister in Sofia, reported increasingly strident defiance of the Bulgarian Government regarding Britain and the United States. He noted that 'not a speech is made by a Bulgarian politician which does not include an attack upon us both and yet it is us who are held up as warmongers'.²⁴ The tone was set and maintained by the most prominent Bulgarian Communists, who were most closely connected to the Soviet Government. In two speeches at the turn of 1947, Prime Minister Dimitrov accused 'the imperialists' of employing 'diplomatic pressure, intrigues, threats, blackmail' in order 'to

²⁴ FO371/72143, R278, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 2.01.1948

hinder the peaceful development and creative construction of Bulgaria'. He also stated that those who wished Bulgaria ill supported 'the remnants of the exploiting circles' as represented by the Opposition. Dimitrov saw the ultimate proof of his allegations in the international campaign against Petkov's execution.²⁵ Kolarov, newly appointed Foreign Minister, claimed that Britain and the USA were demonstrating 'a flagrant disregard' of their Treaty obligations by refusing to support Bulgaria's application for membership of the United Nations.²⁶

The Bulgarian Communists perceived their open hostility towards the West as a legitimate counterattack in the wake of the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. By trumpeting the alleged imperialist schemes for intervention in the countries with "People's Democracy", they effectively undermined in advance any Western interest in Eastern European affairs. This reflected the Soviet Union's own profoundly altered attitude towards the former Allies. In the latter half of 1947, Soviet propaganda against "the Anglo-Americans" noticeably gained momentum ceasing to differentiate publicly between the two countries and the policies of their Governments. The newly gained confidence of the Bulgarian Communists was also rooted in developments concerning the whole emerging Soviet bloc. The founding conference of the Communist Information Bureau in September 1947 mildly criticised the Bulgarian Communist Party for following a 'vague and hesitant' course and not showing sufficient strength in dealings with the Bulgarian 'bourgeoisie, Church and Opposition'. In direct response to these observations, on 14 October 1947, the CC of the BCP resolved to 'destroy completely' the Opposition.²⁷

²⁵ *Rabotnichesko Delo*, 31.12.1947, 13.01.1948

²⁶ FO371/72135, R10432, Greenhill to FO, 8.09.1948

²⁷ Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.191-195

Observing the Final Elimination of Opposition.

British officials in Sofia were aware that since their seizure of power the Communists had never really abstained from meddling in the internal affairs of the other political parties. They had simply mitigated their interference until the conclusion of the Peace Treaty essentially gave them a free hand.²⁸

In the disappearance of the non-Government Press the British representative in Sofia discerned the first sign of the treatment that awaited the Opposition. The Communist authorities closed down various newspapers denying the non-Communists the single most effective means for the dissemination of their views. Sterndale-Bennett pointed out that 'the suppression of the Opposition press is only one symptom of a general move aiming at complete disintegration of the Opposition and its elimination as effective force'. His understanding of the situation generated no suggestion as to how to convey to the Bulgarian authorities the British Government's displeasure at the violation of civil freedoms in Bulgaria. It was even more difficult to imagine measures for stopping the Communist advance.²⁹

This difficulty was aggravated when at the very moment Bulgaria achieved independent international status, the Bulgarian Communists proceeded to eliminate – in a number of cases physically - the whole Parliamentary and non-Parliamentary Opposition. This process was a continuation of the trend set by the People's Courts, the forced emigration of the Agrarian leader Dr.G.M.Dimitrov and the hanging of Nikola Petkov. Throughout 1948, the remaining activists were discredited in Soviet-style show trials. In February the Agrarian Gichev and in November the Social Democrat Lulchev were sentenced for inciting economic sabotage and armed resistance against the regime. The Government Prosecutor

²⁸ FO371/72160, R8341, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 29.06.1948

²⁹ FO371/66907, R9439, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 10.07.1947

maintained that both had participated in “Anglo-American” conspiracies and acted on the instructions of the British and US political representatives.³⁰ Sterndale-Bennett, who had followed the judicial proceedings as closely as possible, concluded that the trials had also been directed at discrediting Great Britain and the United States. This was intended as a measure to isolate British and US diplomatic representatives from any contacts with non-Government political organisations.³¹

After the Opposition was effectively disposed of, the Communists turned the state security apparatus against all organisations which were hostile to the regime and had foreign contacts, and were therefore seen as potential centres of anti-Communist activities. This was the rationale behind the trial in February 1949 of fifteen Evangelical Pastors accused of espionage and currency offences. This time an unprecedented number of Western correspondents and missionaries were specifically implicated by name. In addition, former and serving British and US diplomats were linked with the offences of the Pastors. The FO in conjunction with the State Department expressed concern about the violation of the human rights of the accused and the improper conduct of the trial. The Bulgarian Government used this as further proof of guilty association.³²

By this time all foreign schools, colleges and courses maintained by foreign Governments, as well as all religious missions in Bulgaria, had been closed down.³³ In early 1948, the English Speaking League was among the first to disappear, immediately followed by the

³⁰ Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...* p.194–195; FO371/72131, R1754, Lord Inverchapel to FO, 6.02.1948, FO371/72132, R2120, US press release, 6.02.1948, R3592, Sofia to FO, FO minutes, 13.03.1948; FO371/72138, R12957, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 16.11.1948

³¹ FO371/72137, R12731, R12788, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 10, 12.11.1948; FO371/72138, R12957, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 16.11.1948

³² Devedjiev, H. *Stalinisation of the Bulgarian Society 1949 - 1953*. Philadelphia, Pa: Dorrance & Company, 1975. p.61-73; FO371/78300, R2523, FO brief, 2.03.1949; FO371/78298, R1916, BBC Monitoring Service, 10.02.1949

³³ FO371/72134, R9168, Greenhill to FO, 3.08.1948

British Council.³⁴ Sterndale-Bennett concluded that in Bulgaria 'anything British is a matter of suspicion and anything, which is both cultural and British, attracts the special attention of the militia'.³⁵

Attacks against the Western Missions. With the closure of the foreign cultural and educational institutions, the diplomatic missions remained the only sign of Western presence in Bulgaria. They became the next targets of repression. A succession of trials of Bulgarians working for foreign institutions took place in the middle of 1948. The most publicised was that of Yuli Genov, a long-term employee of the British Legation. Together with three journalists, who had all worked for Opposition newspapers and had maintained links with Britain, he was arrested on charges of 'activities against the security of the state'.³⁶ The British representative was quick to see in the accusations an attempt to implicate the British Legation. On this occasion he was extraordinarily concerned as Genov, and the three arrested journalists, 'did obtain information, which [was] passed on to the Legation'. 'The information was nothing more than the usual political gossip and passed in the usual informal way' but in the current political climate it was 'sufficient for a charge of espionage through an organised spy ring'.³⁷ Genov's case was reviewed by the Communist Politburo which instructed the judges to pass a 'ruthless' sentence.³⁸ Accordingly, Genov was sentenced to twelve and a half years of rigorous imprisonment.³⁹ Bulgarian residents who had any personal or business connections with the West were intimidated and mistreated by the militia. On one occasion, the British Minister learned that a British citizen

³⁴ FO371/72129, R1274, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 23.01.1948

³⁵ FO371/72130, R3686, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 18.05.1948, FO minute 31.05.1948

³⁶ FO371/72129, R86, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 30.12.1947; FO371/72131, R1427, FO minutes, 31.01.-19.02.1948

³⁷ FO371/72131, R1427, Sterndale-Bennet to FO, 31.01.1948, Conquest, 9.03.1948

³⁸ Ognyanov, L. *Durzhavno...*p.209

³⁹ FO371/72130, R6140, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 15.05.1948

living in Bulgaria had been told by a Bulgarian official 'that Bulgaria was now against England'.⁴⁰

Links with the West were rendered even more difficult by the constantly changing and increasing restrictions on the movement of diplomatic personnel.⁴¹ By 1949, the border regions, especially those to the south, were practically sealed off for the staff of foreign missions. In addition to official restrictions, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry went to incredible lengths to obstruct even leisure journeys.⁴²

The Bulgarian Government also began a campaign to impede the work of the British and US Legations. In August 1948, shortly after the expulsion of the US Vice-consul Donald Ewing, the British Pro-consul Jack Adams was declared *persona non grata*.⁴³ Months of efforts to find out the reasons for this drastic measure revealed the enormity of Adams' offences as allegedly having given 'from time to time ... presents, including chocolates to Bulgarian friends with the implication that this was in return for information with which they had supplied him'.⁴⁴ In March 1949, the Bulgarian Government made it known that the First Secretary of the British Legation Denis Greenhill was not welcome in Bulgaria. No official explanation was supplied; privately the expulsion was connected to Greenhill's having been named in the Pastors' trial as someone who had recruited the accused for the British intelligence services.⁴⁵

Greenhill's expulsion brought British retaliation against Bogomil Todorov, the Third Secretary of the Bulgarian Legation in London. This led to the declaration in July 1949 that

⁴⁰ FO371/72143, R3003, Sofia to FO, 25.02.1948; FO371/72130, R9170, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 31.07.1948

⁴¹ FO371/72136, R11745, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 14.10.1948

⁴² FO371/78289, R631-R11390, Sofia to FO, January–August 1949

⁴³ FO371/72130, R9593, Greenhill to FO, 16.08.1948

⁴⁴ FO371/72137, Dunnet to FO, 21.09.1948, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 20.10.1948

the Third Secretary of the British Legation in Sofia John Blakeway was *persona non grata*. Then Boris Temkov, the Bulgarian Press Attaché in London was sent home and in September 1949, the British Minister was forced to withdraw the Assistant Military Attaché Major B.G.Merivale-Austin in a case of pure reprisal.⁴⁶

The cycle of expulsions was becoming disadvantageous for the British Legation in Bulgaria as it was causing loss not only of prestige but also of experienced officers. Significantly, a relatively short series of reprisals would bring Britain up against the question of whether to expel the Head of the Bulgarian Legation in London. In August 1949, the new British Minister in Sofia Paul Mason suggested that Britain should retaliate directly against the Soviet Government, as he was convinced that the actions of the Bulgarian Government were incited by the USSR. The FO dismissed this suggestion on the grounds that reprisals against the Soviet Union would inflict exactly the same problems as those against Bulgaria. Moreover, similar developments were taking place in Hungary and Romania. Retaliation against the Soviet Union would imply that the satellites were not treated as independent states which in itself had to be logically followed by the withdrawal of Missions.⁴⁷

Most British officials recognised the futility of the expulsion war but considered that any sign of reconciliation would be interpreted by the Bulgarian Government as nervousness and weakness on the British side. The dilemma the FO had to resolve was 'whether to continue [a] tit-for-tat policy with the risk that it will end in a complete rupture of relations, or whether to climb down and let ... opponents win a moral victory'. Bevin himself supported a policy of full retaliation. In a telegram to Sofia he explained that he was

⁴⁵ FO371/78261, R2702, Sofia to FO, 9.03.1949; Greenhill, D. *More by Accident*. York: Wilton 65, 1992. p.64-66

⁴⁶ FO371/78264, R7323, Mason to FO, 29.07.-1.08.1949, R7811, Bateman, 11.08.1949; FO371/78265, R8724, Mason to FO, 8.09.1949

⁴⁷ FO371/78264, R7576, Mason to FO, 3.08.1949

‘prepared to face the consequences... even to the point of expelling the Bulgarian *Chargé d’Affaires*’ which would mean the breaking off of diplomatic relations.⁴⁸

The prevailing opinion in the FO was that the satellites would be only too glad to break off diplomatic relations with Britain if Britain could be made to appear responsible. Unlike Hungary, Bulgaria would not even lose trade with Britain. What Britain would miss if its missions were withdrawn from Eastern Europe was receiving ‘from time to time ... a scrap of information, which throws light on Soviet intentions’.⁴⁹ The FO had often pointed out that probably the most useful function of its personnel in Bulgaria was to collect information about developments behind the Iron Curtain, especially in view of Bulgaria’s proximity to the Eastern Mediterranean. As the Soviet Union was universally suspected of having designs on that region, it was vital for Britain to gather data on the Bulgarian armed forces ‘which might be useful and should be passed on to the Greeks and Turks’.⁵⁰

A lengthy discussion between London and Washington on the question of breaking off of relations with Bulgaria followed. Agreeing with British arguments as to the usefulness of Sofia as ‘a listening post’, US experts nevertheless believed that the balance of advantage was in favour of a break. British analysts drew the opposite conclusions. For one, the British Minister in Sofia believed that if the Bulgarian Government was anxious to get rid of his US colleague, ‘it would be a mistake to play prematurely into its hands’.⁵¹ The Southern Department accepted the Minister’s logic as it envisaged that both the British and US Governments stood to lose more than they would gain from a rupture of relations with Bulgaria.

⁴⁸ FO371/78311, R9881, FO minutes, 5.10.1949

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ FO371/72175, R1536, Wallinger, 17.12.1947, Watson to WO, 6.02.1948

⁵¹ FO371/78250, R11468, Sofia to FO, 9.12.1949

This seems to be ... one of these occasions ... in which the same solution to a problem happens to suit both sides. The Soviet Government might well wish us to maintain our missions in the satellite countries ... but it does not follow that it must therefore be in our interest to withdraw them. On the contrary, they will continue to be useful so long as they are able to obtain some inkling about what is going on behind the Iron Curtain. Our experience with Albania demonstrates the disadvantage of having no diplomatic mission in a satellite country.⁵²

The Search for Effective British Policy towards Bulgaria.

After the

signing of the Peace Treaty, the pace of Bulgaria's Communisation increased. The radicalised Bulgarian Communist Party displayed fierce intolerance to all real and potential internal opponents as well as deep-seated hostility to the Western powers. In such an atmosphere the British Government had to formulate a policy towards Bulgaria, to be also consistent with policy to other countries in the Soviet zone. The approach to Bulgaria was a component of British-Soviet relations.

Contemporary British documents dealing with Bulgaria contain little more than general policy objectives, which applied to most Eastern European satellites. The British Government desired to preserve its interests in Eastern Europe but before that it had to be certain that the countries of the region did not constitute any strategic threat to Britain. This was most pertinent in the case of Bulgaria which bordered the British Eastern Mediterranean zone of influence. Britain wanted to restore economic links with the region, as trade could prove an opening for other contacts. Attempts to maintain some political and economic influence in Bulgaria should not obliterate the fact that it had been an enemy in the Second World War and was becoming a front post in the Soviet zone. The British Government intended to make sure that Bulgaria prudently fulfilled all its Treaty obligations: it proposed to require from Bulgaria no less than the Soviet Union would from Italy.⁵³

⁵² FO371/78251, R11704, FO to Washington, 22.12.1949

⁵³ FO371/66971, R1879, FO information, 31.01.1947; FO371/66974, R8796, Campbell, 2.07.1947

Simultaneously, the British attitude to Bulgaria was conditioned by traditional views of the country's Russophilism. In mid-1947, in the Parliamentary debate on foreign policy, Christopher Mayhew, the FO Minister of State, claimed that the Bulgarian Government was 'entirely Communist-dominated and entirely subservient to Russia'. In his opinion, the prevailing pro-Russian feelings of the population would make Soviet domination more acceptable to the Bulgarian people than in other Eastern European countries.⁵⁴

With no illusions about the course of Bulgarian development, the FO was still careful that Britain should not look intent on confrontation. The policy it was trying to formulate did not envisage active political intervention to change the nature of the Bulgarian regime. British Government officials would only commit themselves to watching the situation closely and pressing the Bulgarian Government to fulfil its Peace Treaty obligations. Shortly after ratification, the Peace Treaty remained almost the only point of diplomatic and political dialogue between Bulgaria and Great Britain. Instead of being an instrument of British policy, the insistence on Peace Treaty implementation became a policy objective in its own right. This was shaped by two separate issues: Bulgarian lack of respect for human rights and failure to reorganise the army.

Dealing with the Political Trials. Already in September 1947, the Foreign Office realised that it would 'not be able physically to prevent the [Bulgarian Government] from evading such of their Treaty obligations as Communist policy demands'.⁵⁵ Shortly after the ratification of the Treaties with the ex-satellites, in the House of Lords debate Lord Vansittart suggested that in view of the persistent violations by the Soviet puppet regimes the Treaties should be reconsidered and possibly even repudiated.⁵⁶ This was hardly a

⁵⁴ FO371/66965, R8719, Bevin draft speech, 27.06.1947

⁵⁵ FO371/66976, R12522, FO to Washington, 13.09.1947

⁵⁶ FO371/66979, R14882, House of Lords debate, 5.11.1947

realistic demand, especially since the FO had decided to recognise the Communist-controlled Governments after long and painful deliberations.

The need to react to particular developments inside the Communist bloc had been championed by most Western representatives since the armistice period. Among them Sterndale-Bennett in Sofia had 'long clamoured for action', often in relation to particular instances of violation of human rights.⁵⁷ His successor Mason was also dissatisfied with the mild British reaction to the numerous charges of British espionage plots mentioned in most trials. He tried to explain to his superiors that the typical British 'refusal to be drawn and to pass over with silent contempt obviously baseless charges' was totally inadequate when dealing with Communists who regarded 'silence ... as an admission or at least as proving inability to deny'.⁵⁸ Both diplomats recommended that the British Government should adopt the US Government's approach of putting on record every single case in which it disapproved of the conduct of the Bulgarian Government. While agreeing to prior consultation with the State Department, the FO preferred to examine each case on its own merits. British Eastern European specialists in London claimed that it was neither necessary to have the same approach to all the countries in the region, nor useful to get involved in constant friction.⁵⁹

Britain's preoccupation with not appearing prejudiced against the Bulgarian Government had been vividly demonstrated a long time before the conclusion of the Peace Treaty. One of the first acid tests for Britain's attitude towards the Communist persecution of the Bulgarian Opposition had been the case of G.M.. In May 1945 he had escaped from home arrest and found shelter with a member of the British Military Mission. Receiving the news, the FO immediately instructed the British representative to remove the Agrarian leader from

⁵⁷ FO371/72154, R4837, Peck, 26.04.1948

⁵⁸ FO371/78251, R11682, Mason to FO, 19.12.1949

the British Mission and inform the Bulgarian Prime Minister that G.M. 'had simply passed through British hands'. The FO resolved to refuse G.M. political asylum without even knowing whether he would ask for it. He was driven to premises belonging to the US Mission in Sofia, where he remained for several months until his departure for the USA. Throughout this period, the main British concern was that the British Government should avoid confirming even the slightest suspicion of supporting anti-Fatherland Front and anti-Soviet activities in Bulgaria.⁶⁰

Such careful behaviour had no impact on the attitude of the Bulgarian Communists. Their hostility to Britain was motivated by ideological stereotypes rather than concrete British actions. That is why in G.M.'s case, the Bulgarian Government distinguished little between the British Government which refused to get involved and the US Government which ultimately granted asylum to the Agrarian leader. The fact that G.M. had worked for the British propaganda services during the war loomed large in the accusations against him. In every subsequent arrest of Opposition activists, the charge of being 'an agent of Anglo-American imperialism' was sooner or later brought up.

In June 1947, Nikola Petkov was accused of 'fomenting disorder and sabotage to induce foreign powers to intervene in Bulgarian affairs'. The prosecution named no particular foreign country, but the official press freely linked the accused with Britain and the USA. Petkov's case stirred Western public opinion. The extension of diplomatic relations with the USA completely overshadowed the fact that simultaneously the State Department issued a statement expressing concern over the violation of civil liberties in Bulgaria.⁶¹

⁵⁹ FO371/66978, R14041 - R14568, FO – Washington - Sofia, October - November 1947

⁶⁰ Moser, Ch. *Dimitrov*... p.224-232

⁶¹ FRUS 1947, vol.IV, p.164, notes; Horner, J.E. *The Ordeal of Nikola Petkov and the Consolidation of Communist Power in Bulgaria.* *Survey*, vol.28, no.2, summer 1984. p.77; Padev, M. *Dimitrov Wastes*... p.151-153

If this did not send a clear signal to the Communists that neither Britain nor the USA intended to get seriously involved in Bulgaria, the quasi-measures taken at the proclamation of Petkov's death sentence did. Instead of threatening to suspend relations with Bulgaria, as recommended by their diplomats, both Governments protested to the Soviet Chairman of the ACC and discussed whether to invite the Soviet side to a tripartite discussion of the case. Shortly before Petkov's execution, a desperate appeal was made to Kolarov, then President of the Republic. All actions met with the reply that the trial and sentence were an internal matter. Dimitrov went as far as stating that Petkov's sentence 'might have been commuted but for foreign intervention and attempts to dictate in ultimatum fashion'.⁶² This pronouncement only confirmed Sterndale-Bennett's words that 'guilty connection between ourselves and the accused is ... just as likely to be assumed from silence as it is from official intervention'.⁶³ Even though British officials were certain that Petkov's execution had been decided in advance of any British and US moves, Dimitrov's statement was interpreted as an unconcealed warning for future cases. It aimed at putting the Western powers on the defensive. It was obvious that in future trials, steps undertaken to alleviate the plight of the accused would inevitably be regarded as aggravating circumstances. Every suggestion for action on the part of the FO would be weighed against the possibility of unwittingly victimising the accused further.⁶⁴

British reluctance to challenge the Bulgarian authorities was rooted in the realisation that such efforts were bound to have a minimal effect. Moreover, the Foreign Office was eager to avoid any suspicions of double-dealing in the Balkans which would aggravate relations with the Soviet Union. This rationale was defeated by the fact that implication of Britons in the trials of anti-Communists continued despite official British self-restraint. To some

⁶² Horner, J.E. *'The Ordeal...'* p.82-83

⁶³ FO371/72137, R12767, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 11.11.1948

extent, the FO hesitated between adopting a moral and a thoroughly realistic, almost cynical stance. This generally accounted for a wait-and-see attitude, often taken to the point when delay made late reaction superfluous and irrelevant. One example was Kolarov's speech blaming Britain and the USA for not abiding by their Treaty obligations. This spurred a strongly worded US note of protest. The British Legation in Sofia was unanimously in favour of a similar move, while the FO United Nations Department was categorically against. The Southern Department tried to satisfy both. It did not rule out a protest in principle but deferred it for a number of tactical reasons.⁶⁵

The FO's vacillating manner was further demonstrated in internal memoranda aiming to clarify outstanding issues. At the beginning of January 1948, Geoffrey Wallinger, Head of the Northern Department, noted that 'the trend is towards toughness'.⁶⁶ He was convinced that after Dimitrov's recent shocking statements, public and Parliamentary opinion favoured swift and firm dealing with Bulgaria. He saw numerous indications from all Eastern European countries 'that toughness may at least have the effect of delaying moves by the Communists to speed their plans of consolidation'.⁶⁷ This theory was not applied: at precisely the same time, Sterndale-Bennett's appeals for vociferous criticism of the Bulgarian Government were ignored. The rather strange logic for this attitude was that 'there will be plenty of chances later to go to town on some Bulgarian incident'.⁶⁸

The FO hesitated mainly as to whether British censure of particular actions of the Bulgarian authorities should be extended into a general offensive against the regime. Article 2 of the Peace Treaty obliged the Bulgarian Government to observe human rights

⁶⁴ FO371/72138, R13034, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 17.11.1948

⁶⁵ FO371/72136, R11007, FO to US Embassy, 24.09.1948, Wallinger, 23.09.1948

⁶⁶ FO371/72129, R1837, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 20.12.1947, Wallinger, 24.12.1947 – 2.01.1948

⁶⁷ FO371/72131, R641, FO to Sterndale-Bennett, 20.01.1948

⁶⁸ FO371/72163, R2305, FO minutes, December 1947 – February 1948

and could justify attempts to stop the Communist advance. Such a course would affect all Eastern European countries, signalling an assault on the Soviet-model as a whole. Sterndale-Bennett was among the staunchest advocates of this initiative. He repudiated the British Government's narrow legalistic view of the Treaties which revealed British uncertainty.⁶⁹ The British Minister in Sofia was not deterred even by the memory of Petkov's execution as he believed British protests had been made 'in full realisation of the risk that [they] might not help him personally'.⁷⁰

Occasionally, FO specialists agreed that Britain should not become apathetic just because it could not give the people concerned any effective assistance, but their prevailing inclinations were on the side of patience and caution. From the local perspective this could only be perceived as unwittingly helping to strengthen the Bulgarian Government and diminish British prestige in the country. It could not impress the Bulgarian authorities; neither could it win the respect of the dissidents.⁷¹ If anything, the FO was growing more convinced that any involvement, for example to ask for mitigation of Genov's sentence could become the source of a potential embarrassment.⁷² By the time of Kostov's trial, when the Communists started purges of their own party, the British representatives refrained even from insisting on access to the courtroom. The FO wished to avoid the impression that it was 'unduly concerned' about the charges.⁷³

Donald Heath, the US Ambassador in Sofia, was as active as his British colleague in trying to impress his superiors with the need to protest vigorously against all Treaty violations. This would disabuse both the Bulgarian and Soviet Governments of their

⁶⁹ FO371/72170, R2582, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 14.02.1948, R2367, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 18.02.1948

⁷⁰ FO371/72130, R6140, Greenhill to FO, 15.05.1948

⁷¹ FO371/72136, R11410, Greenhill to FO, 4.10.1948, R11745, Porter, 10.10.1948

⁷² FO371/72130, R5099, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 22.04.1948, R5098, FO minutes, 22.04.1948

⁷³ FO371/78249, R11420, FO to Sofia, 8.12.1949

belief that their actions in Eastern Europe provoked no interest in the West.⁷⁴ The high point of US involvement in Bulgaria after the conclusion of the Peace Treaty was a stiff *aide-memoire* handed to Kolarov on 23 September 1948. In it, the US Government took an unequivocally critical view of the behaviour of the Bulgarian Government from the very moment Sofia had signed the Peace Treaty:

... the Bulgarian Government has prosecuted a systematic and ruthless campaign to obliterate democratic opposition in direct disregard of fundamental principles of freedom... Through abuse of the instrumentalities of political power and subversion of judicial process the Bulgarian Government has subjected substantial numbers of Bulgarian people whose only crime was a belief in the rights of man, to involuntary servitude, banishment, concentration camps, imprisonment, torture and execution. It has obliterated the Opposition party and by means of terror stifled free expression.⁷⁵

Not only did the Bulgarian Government claim a clean record in its reply but it also complained that the Great Powers had taken no concerted action under Article 35 to exercise their right to advise and enlighten the Bulgarian Government in the interpretation of the Peace Treaty. In such circumstances, British silence would 'lower the morale of Bulgarian Opposition and encourage the impertinence of the authorities'. Sterndale-Bennett approved of the tone of the US representation and called for immediate British support. He also confirmed that the Bulgarian Government's militancy was in substance related to the attitude of the Soviet Union. The latter appeared not 'in the least concerned about protests to the [Soviet] Orbit countries as long as they do not interfere with the main line of Soviet policy'.⁷⁶ British diplomats in Bulgaria drew attention to the necessity to supplement swift and blunt occasional protests with a more principled long-term approach. They sought to recommend a specific line but could only repeat the need for

⁷⁴ FO371/72136, R11007, US Embassy London to FO, 22.09.1948

⁷⁵ FRUS 1948, vol.VI, p.375, Heath to S/S, 23.09.1948; FO371/72136, R11012, R11050, Dunnett to FO, 24.09.1948

consistent acceptance, observation and control of Treaty obligations assumed by both sides under Article 2.

In January 1949, Mayhew proclaimed in the House of Commons that 'the record of the present Bulgarian Government... shows that their interpretation of human freedom is so different from ours as to make any form of protest quite unavailing'.⁷⁷ This conviction had been formed by the time of the Lulchev trial in 1948. While initially keen to continue with the handing of notes of protest to the Bulgarian Government, the FO could foresee nothing but sterile diplomatic exchanges. Unlike US foreign policy officials, the FO experts never really contemplated applying the machinery of the Peace Treaty for the resolution of arguments with the Bulgarian authorities.⁷⁸

Article 36 of the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria stipulated the procedure for the handling of disputes between the signatories about the interpretation and implementation of the Treaty. This involved the participation of the Soviet Union. Expectations of Soviet collaboration were not supported by the experience of the ACC in Bulgaria.⁷⁹ The FO believed that the first attempt to enforce the Treaty through the dispute machinery should be a 'specific, solid-ground case'. It should be related to military or economic clauses, rather than 'something so indefinite as infringement of human rights'.⁸⁰

Sterndale-Bennett was naturally upset by the irresolute attitude of Whitehall. He lamented that officials in London were 'hypnotised by the legal difficulties and overlooking the psychological aspect' and warned that the excessive caution of the British Government

⁷⁶ FO371/72136, R11326, Greenhill to FO, 2.10.1948; FO371/72136, R11672, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 13.10.1948

⁷⁷ FO371/78292, R1234, FO draft, 10.02.1949

⁷⁸ FO371/72130, R5098, Sykes, 23.04.1948; FO371/72170, R59, R2582, FO minutes, 7.01.1948, 8 - 16.03.1948, R3967, Washington to FO, 26.03.1948

⁷⁹ FO371/66972, R4928, Hoyer-Miller, 14.04.1947

⁸⁰ FO371/66982, R16687, Warner - Hickerson conversation, 18.12.1947

could be seen as lack of confidence and determination. In his view, the Treaty gave Britain a lever with respect to the satellite countries which was not available in the case of the Soviet Union. This advantage should be used consciously with the aim of throwing Communists 'off their balance' and embarrassing them wherever it was practicable. The British Minister in Sofia saw this as the only way 'to give hope to people who otherwise see none' and 'keep alive the core of potential resistance to Communists'.

It is precisely by broadening the moral, as opposed to the purely material, basis of our stand against the Communist offensive that we are most likely in the long term to defeat it.⁸¹

The FO was moving in exactly the opposite direction from its representative in Bulgaria. It assured him that it too was thinking about how 'to expose to the world the tyrannical and menacing policy' of the Kremlin-directed Communist Parties throughout Europe. But it drew different conclusions from Sterndale-Bennett's. It proposed to treat the Soviet Orbit as a whole and declare the puppet Governments Moscow's agents, rather than merely unrepresentative and tyrannical. The objective would be to draw a clear distinction between ordinary people in the satellites and their Communist rulers. While Britain would condemn the behaviour of local Communist Parties, its main target would be the USSR.⁸²

These intentions showed that the British Government was effectively ceasing to attach much importance to the Peace Treaties. By the time of Lulchev's trial, it had become 'the fixed policy of HMG not to invoke the Treaty'.⁸³ The logical extension of such an approach was that even protests on specific cases became undesirable. Bevin wrote to the British Minister in Sofia to explain that, instead of presenting notes to the Bulgarian Government based on

⁸¹ FO371/72168, R5205, Sterndale-Bennett to Wallinger, 3.04.1948

⁸² *Ibid.*, Wallinger to Sterndale-Bennett, 24.04.1948

⁸³ FO371/72139a, R13568, Bateman, 20.11.1948

Article 2, the British Government was going to seek future opportunities to expose publicly Bulgaria's treatment of human rights.⁸⁴

In the two years after the signature of the Peace Treaty Britain sent seven protests to the Bulgarian Government against the violations of Article 2 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁸⁵ The sober conclusion was that these official communications had produced no result and the British Government had to face the fact that it possessed no means of enforcing respect for human rights in Soviet-dominated states. Even worse, any attempt to do so merely demonstrated and emphasised the ineffectiveness of the Treaty machinery to deal with violations. It also advertised British impotence to achieve results in the Soviet zone.⁸⁶

Publicising the 'Bulgarian Atrocities'.

The British Legation followed closely the series of political trials in Bulgaria in 1947 - 1948. Concern with the allegations against British citizens was combined with careful observation of the ominous proceedings, which could reveal the logic of the Communist regime. This could contribute towards the analysis of the process of establishing the Soviet system in Eastern Europe. Such understanding as was acquired by the Foreign Office could then be employed in education and propaganda.

British officials were looking for methods to influence the Bulgarian Government without engaging in direct diplomatic and political clashes. These had the double disadvantage of presenting the British Government in a confrontational light and being exposed to possible rebuff by the Bulgarian side. When in January 1948, Wallinger urged adoption of a more offensive policy he had in mind above all intensified propaganda.⁸⁷ This idea had been encouraged by diplomats in Bulgaria and was taken up by a number of Southern

⁸⁴ FO371/72138, R13231, FO to Sofia, 30.11.1948

⁸⁵ FO371/78290, R6783, Sofia to FO, 7.07.1949

⁸⁶ FO371/78300, R2487, FO brief, 3.03.1949

Department officials. They considered that vigorous publicity of the unsightly events in Bulgaria would to some extent make up for British inability to implement the Peace Treaty with this country.

One fundamental fact which is clear to us and public opinion is that it is not possible to prevent the Bulgarian Government and others in the Soviet Orbit from behaving as they wish. We may, by means of successful publicity, and by means of keeping the flame of liberty alight, i.e. by pressure of public opinion outside and inside Bulgaria - be able to modify the actions of these Governments to some very slight extent... We cannot hope... to enforce the Treaty on Bulgaria. What we can do is to make the most effective use of the Treaty for publicity purposes...⁸⁸

Daily contacts with the Communist authorities provided possible topics for press and radio features. The British representatives in Sofia were especially keen on collaborating with the BBC Overseas Service in programmes for Bulgaria, which were judged to have a big impact on listeners in the country. Sterndale-Bennett was extremely glad when Georgi Dimitrov's boisterous speeches at the start of 1948 were noticed by the BBC and interpreted as proof that Petkov's execution and the treatment of anti-Communists had been motivated by political vengeance. The speeches were turned into real political news – they were quoted on the BBC Bulgarian transmissions, used for several newspaper editorials and finally formed the basis for an “inspired” Parliamentary Question.⁸⁹

The most important result from such a media campaign in Britain was the clear embarrassment of the Bulgarian Communist leadership. Its actions and statements for domestic consumption were now being widely circulated abroad.⁹⁰ Reports from Sofia confirmed that publicity was the one weapon, which deeply affected the Bulgarian

⁸⁷ FO371/72129, R1837, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 20.12.1947, Wallinger, 24.12.1947- 2.01.1948

⁸⁸ FO371/66980, R15859, Bevin memorandum for Cabinet, 24.11.1947; FO371/72167, R3320, FO to Sterndale-Bennett, 20.03.1948

⁸⁹ FO371/72131, R637, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 14.01.1948

⁹⁰ FO371/72139a, R13675, Greenhill to FO, 4.12.1948

Government. Ample evidence pointed in the direction that the appearance of materials in the Western press and radio touched the Bulgarian Government 'on the raw'. Prominent disclaimers were published in local newspapers in order to try to refute the publications. At the time of Lulchev's trial, the Bulgarian Ministry of Justice summoned a special press conference for foreign correspondents in order to give a detailed official 'explanation'.⁹¹

Even when the pressure of international public opinion was believed to have a significant impact on the Bulgarian Government, it was of little help to the defendants.⁹² The FO worried lest publicity should do more personal harm than good to the accused. It was extremely reluctant to circulate freely diplomatic reports from Bulgaria. It preferred to show the dispatches in confidence to selected journalists who could be trusted to weave them into articles. Whitehall officials hoped to develop 'a system for ordering feature articles and ... place these in the appropriate journals'.⁹³ Such an approach, however, was not to the liking of the British Press and Radio. The media handled information coming directly from the FO with care, generally regarding it as being adapted to Government interests and therefore partial. The FO often found even the Government-financed BBC European Service scrupulously objective and reluctant to broadcast what it considered to be undiluted propaganda.

The news editors preferred to rely on their own correspondents, rather than use ready diplomatic information. The Bulgarian authorities, however, posed many hindrances to the entry of journalists into the country. Most trials were conducted *in camera* leaving the

⁹¹ FO371/72138, R13231, FO to Sofia, 30.11.1948; FO371/72139a, R13675, Greenhill to FO, 4.12.1948

⁹² FO371/72130, R5097, FO minutes, 5.04.1948

⁹³ FO371/72133, R8342, McDermott, 29.07.1948, Talbot de Malahide, 21.08.1948

media with the feeling that their people had travelled in vain. All this made the calls for an openly tough attitude to Bulgaria difficult to translate into concrete measures.⁹⁴

By far the greatest impediment to what the FO saw as adequate publicity of Bulgarian developments was the low British public interest towards the country. Consequently, the BBC tended to include information about it in pieces dealing with the Soviet satellites in general. The FO complained that it was almost impossible to 'sell' material from Bulgaria to the diplomatic correspondents of the newspapers.⁹⁵ In response, British diplomatic representatives who felt frustrated by the meagre coverage occasionally attacked the Southern Department for not 'organising' better publicity. In relation to the Social Democrats' trial in mid-1948, Sterndale-Bennett wrote that 'public apathy... [lay] very largely in the hands of the Governments concerned and the main object of the British Government's action should surely be to awake public interest'.⁹⁶

The British Legation in Sofia received the greatest blow during Gichev's trial in early 1948. It had managed to secure the right for foreign observers to be present in court but no British journalist was willing to report.⁹⁷ When even the Foreign Secretary enquired about press coverage, the FO confessed to the futility of its attempts to induce various papers to send reporters for the trial.

We are unfortunately at a disadvantage in trying to exert pressure upon the press in regard to correspondents behind the curtain because they all feel that their men are wasted in that they can only send straight reports such as the news agencies supply and are unable, owing to censorship

⁹⁴ FO371/72143, R279, Bateman to Sterndale-Bennett, 6.02.1948

⁹⁵ FO371/72135, R10406, Wallinger, Watson, Stannarel, 4.09.1948

⁹⁶ FO371/72134, R9096, Sterndale-Bennet to FO, 30.07.1948

⁹⁷ FO371/72132, R5337, FO minutes, 3.05.1948

and/or physical danger, to provide any worthwhile comment until they have passed through the Curtain.⁹⁸

In addition to the technical problems regarding the dispatch of reporters to Eastern Europe, a range of political difficulties existed. The FO worried that media attention could expose the Government's actions abroad in undesirable light. It would not be difficult for journalists to notice that Britain's attitude to foreign trials was not the same everywhere. It would be embarrassing for the Government to answer questions about why it sent observers to Polish trials and not to Greek, and why it was willing to answer Parliamentary Questions about Polish and Bulgarian trials but not about those in Greece or Spain.⁹⁹

The FO feared that the increased publicity it favoured would bring greater public scrutiny of British policy which could then backfire. The Government could be accused of not following up its propaganda with sufficiently tough concrete measures towards the Communist bloc. The FO faced a dilemma on publicity, similar to that regarding earlier official protests to the Bulgarian Government. British foreign policy experts had no illusions about the inherent link between diplomatic moves and publicity. A bolder policy would guarantee continuous publicity and propaganda. But in this case, publicity was itself receiving so much attention because it had remained one of the few means of exerting pressure on the Communist regime in Bulgaria. It was necessary and worthwhile because it signified continued British interest in events in Bulgaria. If British attempts to make the Peace Treaty work had come to no avail, then the continuous disregard of the Bulgarian Government for its international obligations should be exposed at every suitable opportunity.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ FO371/72131, R1861, Bevin, Wallinger, 9 – 11.02.1948

⁹⁹ FO371/72200, R13066, Peck, Bateman, 20–25.11.1948

¹⁰⁰ FO371/72170, R2367, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 18.02.1948; FO371/72138, R13231, FO to Sofia, 30.11.1948

The controversial issue of publicity was complicated further when Sargent became anxious 'that the number of protests being made to the satellites and given to the press was too great and was beginning to look ridiculous'. Contrary to the Southern Department's carefully elaborated logic that where protests had no effect publicity would work, he suggested that it was 'all right to protest' as long as less publicity followed.¹⁰¹ Sargent's influential opinion rapidly changed the perspective from which the Foreign Office looked at the link between action and propaganda. Since diplomatic notes had no meaningful consequences and media coverage merely advertised defeat, both methods came to be considered undesirable. Towards the end of 1948 'the general feeling... was against advertising, by ineffectual protests... inability to enforce the Treaty'.¹⁰²

Publicity was essential but not sufficient, unless closely linked to a well-rounded approach towards the Bulgarian regime. To have any effect on the course of events in Bulgaria, Britain needed to combine international exposure of the methods of the Bulgarian authorities with political action which would secure implementation of the Peace Treaty. This was where the British Government faltered: it did nothing about violations of the human rights provisions beyond just calling attention to them. It refused to admit openly that the question of human rights in Bulgaria was related to the very essence of the political system, and that this was too broad an issue to be dealt with by the limited machinery of the Treaty.

Economic Relations with Bulgaria. While experiencing difficulties in the formulation of precise and enforceable policy towards Bulgaria, the Foreign Office was equally unprepared for dealing with British-Bulgarian economic relations. The general state of affairs between the two countries rendered the prospect of normal trade exchanges not only unlikely but also

¹⁰¹ FO371/72170, R2307, Wallinger, 9.02.1948

¹⁰² FO371/72139a, R13568, Talbot de Malahide, 18.11.1948

highly controversial. Throughout 1948, the British side needed to clarify the basic principles underpinning economic relations with Bulgaria.

Since interest in trade with Bulgaria was determined neither by a strong tradition nor a sound economic rationale, the question had highly political undertones. The international political climate made each country look upon the approaches of the other with suspicion. The Bulgarian Government seemed eager to trade but feared that Britain would impose severe conditions for compensation of the property of Allied citizens nationalised after 9 September 1944. The British Government insisted that Bulgaria should resume payment of its external pre-war debt, unilaterally suspended in March 1948. Bulgaria should also reach agreement with the foreign holders of pre-war Bulgarian Government bonds. Until this was done in December 1948, trade was conducted on an *ad hoc* basis. This involved protracted negotiations between the two sides. Long and complicated co-ordination between the various British Governmental Departments dealing with 'trade with the enemy' was required as well as painful communication with the multitudinous Bulgarian state enterprises which took 'until Doomsday' to make up their minds.¹⁰³

As on other subjects, the views of the British representative in Bulgaria and of the FO differed. Sterndale-Bennett recommended a consistent course for the conclusion of a trade agreement which would guard British economic interest. He warned that unless forced to commit itself to specific terms, Bulgaria would continue to obtain supplies from Britain without reciprocal legal binding. His line of reasoning questioned the long-term effects of British-Bulgarian trade. Bulgarian purchases in 1948 exceeded export threefold in value and consisted mainly of machines, wool, chemicals, medicines and rubber. This could contribute to the collectivisation of Bulgarian agriculture and support Bulgarian industry. Significantly,

¹⁰³ FO371/72135, R10432, Watson, 17.09.1948; FO371/72158, R5861, *note verbale*, 31.03.1948, 3.05.1948

Bulgaria was buying from the West only goods not secured by its long-standing agreement with the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴

The alternative view was that Britain was not in a position to affect internal Bulgarian policy, or for that matter, the policy of any of the satellites. Some trade 'might whet the [Bulgarian] appetite'. Unless the desired items were included in the British list of controlled exports, it would seem unwise to refuse the business. Since Britain was rarely the only exporter, others would get a share of the Bulgarian market and Bulgaria would get what it had formerly obtained from the UK without the inconvenience of meeting British demands. Moreover, Britain could make buying easy without itself buying anything from Bulgaria. The latter, as well as other satellites, would soon be in need of sterling earnings and then prepared to sign a trade agreement. If, as a result, Bulgaria became to any extent dependent on the UK, this could be turned into a useful political weapon.¹⁰⁵

The gravest British doubt regarding trade with Bulgaria sprang from scepticism that 'the Bulgarians had anything of exceptional value'. In the beginning of 1949, the Ministry of Food wrote to the Foreign Office that it had 'really no interest ... and ... saw little prospect of trade'. The biggest potential Bulgarian export was tobacco but the FO ruled out purchases. It categorically refused to allow Bulgarian tobacco to compete with Greek and Turkish even if the latter 'cost a little more'.¹⁰⁶ Such attitude shadowed pre-1939 concerns showing little change of the link between politics and trade when it came to choosing between Bulgaria and its southern Balkan neighbours.

The unyielding British attitude proved justified. While hesitating about its economic approach to Bulgaria, Britain had turned down Bulgarian requests for licences for import in

¹⁰⁴ FO371/78227, R946, Porter, 17.02.1949

¹⁰⁵ FO371/78331, R833, conversation British Embassy Washington - State Department Office of European Affairs, 15.01.1949

¹⁰⁶ FO371/78334, R1280, Ministry of Food to FO, 1.02.1949

the spring and summer of 1949. As a result the Bulgarian Government conceded that there should be a general agreement not only on trade but also on issues related to debt and compensations.¹⁰⁷ This, however, did not alter the ambiguous British conduct. Unwittingly, the FO and the Board of Trade made sure that Britain accrued no significant economic advantages which could be used to exert political influence on the Bulgarian authorities.

Even in economic relations, the FO was more interested in propaganda rather than in actual trade. Already in January 1947, in a special memorandum Mayhew promoted the idea to 'put Communism in Eastern Europe on the defensive vis-à-vis Social Democracy not only politically but in terms of living standards'. He proposed publicising the idea that that Eastern Europe was being exploited by the Soviet Union. This was discussed at a special meeting chaired by Gladwyn Jebb, Head of the FO Reconstruction Department, which decided that such an argument was too broad and easily disputed. Instead, it was more useful to concentrate on concrete topics with relatively short-term implications. Attention should focus on the great expenses incurred by the Soviet troops in occupied countries and on Soviet acquisition of former German and Italian assets in Eastern Europe. Simultaneously, the Communist Parties' lack of economic competence should be continuously exposed. But generally, it was agreed that economic propaganda could be of little political use.¹⁰⁸

The International Dimension.

As the British Government had little practical interest in Bulgaria, it stumbled over the task of how to express its attitude to Bulgarian Communism in specific foreign policy measures. By the end of 1948, the need to react to internal Bulgarian developments had acquired distinctly moral and ideological overtones. This was in sharp contrast to the FO's unwillingness to get involved in actions,

¹⁰⁷ FO371/78277-8, FO minutes and letters, 29.12.1948–13.10.1949

which were known to produce little effect inside Bulgaria and merely drew attention to British helplessness regarding the country. Still, Britain refused to dissociate itself completely from Bulgaria on account of the broader significance of events there. Not only was the consolidation of the Communist regime indicative of developments across Eastern Europe, but it had specific Balkan dimensions.

Bulgarian Involvement in the Greek Civil War. Throughout the Second World War British attention to Bulgaria had been determined by Bulgarian occupation of Greek and Yugoslav territories. Post-war relations between Bulgaria and its neighbours remained a vital factor for the British position regarding the country. British foreign policy experts could point to numerous confirmations of continuing Bulgarian irredentist ambitions. The original FF Government had reiterated its wartime predecessors' demands for Greek Thrace, or at the minimum, an Aegean outlet. This objective was common to all Bulgarian political parties, remaining a foreign policy priority for Petkov's Agrarians and Lulchev's Social Democrats even after they walked out of the coalition with the Communists.

Britain's view was that Bulgarian claims to Greek territory were all the more dangerous since they coincided with Soviet interests in the Balkans. Soviet dominance over Bulgaria would ensure that any Bulgarian expansion to the south would virtually bring the USSR to the Eastern Mediterranean to which it was believed to harbour traditional aspirations. Such British fears had found considerable proof in Soviet behaviour in Iran and towards Turkey in 1945 - 1946. British military and political analysts, on their own and in consultations

¹⁰⁸ FO371/65975, N7438, FO minutes, 9.06.1947; FO371/65947, N4247, Mayhew memorandum, 10.01.1947, EID paper, 23.01.1947

with the US Government, had concluded that securing a presence in the Straits had been among the prime objects of Soviet manoeuvres in the Middle East in the spring of 1946.¹⁰⁹

Greece stood in the first line of defence against any Soviet advance in the Eastern Mediterranean. The ongoing Civil War made the situation there especially precarious from the British perspective. Most British diplomatic and political observers believed that the Greek Communists were receiving moral and material support from the Soviet Union, which aimed to increase influence over Greece. If this method succeeded, Stalin would have the double advantage of establishing another Communist regime in the Balkans and acquiring vital strategic positions. The FO Southern Department was certain that the Soviet Union planned to obtain control of Greece or at least to diminish sufficiently British and US influence there. Soviet success in either alternative would have a long-standing impact on Britain:

Communist control of Greece would not place the Commonwealth in mortal danger but it would seriously jeopardise ... chances of defending vital areas, turn Turkey's flank, weaken Italy's strategic position and threaten communications through the Mediterranean.¹¹⁰

The British Government's concern was that unofficial Bulgarian involvement in the Greek Civil War was a vital instrument for the realisation of such a Soviet design. Since the first days of the Communist take-over in Bulgaria in September 1944, the British Government feared that instability in northern Greece where the Civil War was most acute, could easily be used to the territorial benefit of Bulgaria. The Athens Government constantly provided the FO with evidence that the Bulgarian Communist authorities were arming, training and sheltering Greek guerrillas. As a result, armed clashes regularly

¹⁰⁹ Mark, E. *'The War Scare...'*

¹¹⁰ FO371/72196, R10197, 'Bastion' memorandum, 20.07.1948

occurred on the Bulgarian-Greek border. The tension did not recede after the conclusion of the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria, which the Greek Government also signed.¹¹¹

The British Government acknowledged that Bulgarian assistance to the Greek rebels was not as crucial as that afforded by Yugoslavia and Albania. Even so, it was an important contribution to the cause of spreading Communism and disrupted the fragile balance of power in the Balkans.¹¹² British observers were convinced that Bulgarian state-organised help to the Greek Communists was carried on in close co-ordination with the Soviet Union. This derived from the assumption that as a rule Moscow actively supported and directed foreign Communists.

British analysis of the Soviet attitude to the Greek Civil War was based on overt signs such as Soviet diplomatic actions and public pronouncements castigating British involvement in Greece. Similar hostile to Britain statements by Bulgarian Communist leaders only served to confirm the British belief in a Soviet-led initiative for comprehensive aid to the KKE, the Greek Communist Party. Even the most attentive British observers had little reason to suspect lack of Soviet enthusiasm regarding the Greek Communists' efforts. It remained almost unnoticed that from the end of 1946 Stalin was behaving in a more conciliatory manner with respect to Greece. This could be surmised from the Soviet agreement to the formation of a Commission of Investigation of Greek Frontier Incidents.¹¹³ What the British Government would never have guessed was the fact that in May 1947, in a personal meeting with the Greek Communist leader Nichos Zachariades, Stalin was extremely hesitant as to the wisdom of providing money,

¹¹¹ Bozhinov, V. *Zashtita na natsionalnata nezavissimost na Bulgaria 1944 – 1947*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 1962. p.214

¹¹² FO371/72154, R4837, Sternadale-Bennett to FO, 14.04.1948

¹¹³ Stavrakis, P. *Moscow...* p.138-143

equipment and weapons to the Greek Partisans.¹¹⁴ By January 1948, Stalin had grown completely disillusioned with the KKE. He warned a Yugoslav delegation that if by supporting the Greek guerrillas Yugoslavia came to war with Britain and the USA, the Soviet Union would not come to its rescue.¹¹⁵ No such caution was directed to the Bulgarian Communists who – with Stalin's knowledge - had set up a whole secret organisation for aid to their Greek comrades.¹¹⁶ This discrepancy might merely reflect the fact that Russian archives are not yet fully open to researchers and the relevant documents have not yet surfaced. An alternative interpretation is to see the warning of Tito not so much as related to the Greek Civil War but as a sign of the growing Soviet irritation at the Yugoslav Communists' bid to become the leading regional power in the Balkans.

In any case, the British Government considered that Stalin fully supported the Greek guerrillas. This was seen as part of a larger Soviet scheme for influence over Greece in the familiar pattern of developments across the Soviet zone. The ultimate Soviet aim was judged to be political and strategic domination of the whole Balkan Peninsula. The FO understood that the proclamation of the Truman doctrine and the Marshall Plan would be an additional stimulus for Soviet determination to win over Greece with the help of its northern neighbours.¹¹⁷ Such an analysis of the disposition of forces in South Eastern Europe provided additional dimensions to the position of Bulgaria. From one direction, it was 'a springboard towards Turkey and Greece': from the opposite standpoint it was 'an important link which, if broken, might seriously weaken the whole Soviet chain'.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Zubok, V. *Inside the Kremlin's...* p.127-128; Ulunian, A. 'Grazhdanskaya voina v Gretsii i Bolgaria.' Toshkova, V. (ed.) *Bulgaria v Sferata na suvetskite interesi*. Sofia: AD 'Prof.Marin Drinov', 1998. p.140-150

¹¹⁵ RTsHIDNI, f.17, op.128, a.e.1160, l.59-62, CC of KKE to CC of Yugoslav Communist Party, 22.12.1947; Djilas, M. *Conversations...* p.182; Zubok, V. *Inside the Kremlin's...* p.135

¹¹⁶ RTsHIDNI, f.17, op.128, a.e.279, l.149-155, Kostas to CC of BCP, 15.08.1947

¹¹⁷ Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.361

¹¹⁸ FO371/72143, R279, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 3.01.1948

British representatives in Bulgaria suggested that what they believed to be Soviet intervention in Greece could be effectively deterred only by matching military measures undertaken jointly by Britain and the United States.¹¹⁹ In agreement with Heath, Sterndale-Bennett recommended resolute action to stop the progress of the Communists in Greece. For the two diplomats, resolute common Anglo-American action contained less danger of precipitating an open war than allowing Soviet subversion in Greece to continue and eventually spill over into Turkey. The latter effect would occur if Britain and the USA continued only to remonstrate verbally.¹²⁰ With some hesitation, the FO Southern Department acknowledged the value of Sterndale-Bennett's recommendations and in the late spring of 1948 started to explore the possibility of applying diplomatic pressure on Moscow both directly and through the United Nations. Preliminary efforts were however cut short by Bevin who totally disagreed that this was the time or place for a 'showdown' with the USSR.¹²¹

Any British offensive against what was considered to be the Soviet interest in the Balkans had to be backed by a real show of force. Greece offered such a possibility, as the international influence of the Soviet Union would be seriously undermined by curtailing the advance of the Greek Communists. This would have the supplementary effect of frustrating the consolidation of Communism in Bulgaria. Any British military initiative in northern Greece would alert the Bulgarian leaders as to their vulnerability caused by the contiguity with Greece and Turkey. Although somewhat unstable, Britain's position in these two countries in 1947 and 1948 could theoretically be used as a point from which to apply pressure on the southern flank of the Soviet zone of influence. For this, however, Britain possessed neither the military capability nor the necessary political will. In the immediate

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ FO371/72154, R4836, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 14.04.1948

post-war period the British Government was committed to restricting military commitments overseas which would also affect armed forces in the Balkans. To this end, the British Government looked into possibilities of reducing the cross-border tensions created by the Greek Civil War. It abstained from directly challenging the perceived Soviet involvement in Greece and therefore the whole Soviet hold on Eastern Europe.

The Danger of a Danubian Federation. Britain's concern about Bulgarian involvement in the Greek Civil War had a corollary in the question of a Bulgarian-Yugoslav Federation. The idea for closer national co-operation among all the Balkan countries liberated from the Ottoman Empire existed in Balkan political thinking since the late XVIII century. In the inter-war years it was promoted by leftist political circles as a solution to the bitter rivalries in the Peninsula, and was adopted by the Bulgarian Communist Party.¹²²

Towards the end of the Second World War the Foreign Office too had contemplated the possibility of a Balkan Federation but had come up against the Soviet veto in Moscow in October 1943. When the post-war Bulgarian and Yugoslav Governments revived the idea, Britain faced a completely different geopolitical situation. The appearance of a large state with a predominantly Slav population would certainly change drastically the balance of forces in the Balkans. In the post-war period, an additional complication arose from the fact that both Yugoslavia and Bulgaria had Communist-dominated Governments. By 1944, Britain was inclined to suspect these of easily and willingly becoming channels of Soviet influence throughout the Balkans. Therefore, in the new circumstances, the proposed South Slav Federation would have distinctly negative implications for Britain's position in the region.

¹²¹ FO371/72154, R4837, Wallinger, Bateman, 27.04.1948

In January 1945, after official Bulgarian declarations calling for the speedy establishment of a Federation, the British Government was quick to send notes to the Bulgarian, Yugoslav and Soviet Governments, voicing disagreement with the proposal. Britain agreed with the planned institution of a separate Macedonian unit in the Federal Yugoslav state but warned that it would not recognise any transfer of territory from Bulgaria to Yugoslavia hinted at by official Bulgarian statements. The British warning was firmly reiterated at the Yalta Conference.¹²³ Britain's stance reflected concern that the discussed unification of Yugoslav (Vardar) and Bulgarian (Pirin) Macedonia, within Yugoslavia or as a federal entity in its own right, would unquestionably raise the question of the status of the Greek, that is Aegean part of Macedonia.

Britain's uneasiness regarding Macedonia was exacerbated by already existing worries about Bulgarian and Yugoslav involvement on the side of the guerrillas in the Greek Civil War. FO position papers and internal communications prove that British thinking did not underestimate the strong – and indeed traditional – role of Macedonia for the position of any Bulgarian regime, including the Communist. The strength of the latter, in turn, would bear directly on the vitality of any Danubian scheme. British officials suspected that unfulfilled Bulgarian territorial demands could be linked with those of Yugoslavia which was vigorously supporting the Greek guerrillas.

It was the logical connection between the aspirations of the Greek Partisans and the Bulgarian-Yugoslav plans that made the British Government extremely watchful of any notion of changes in the southern Balkan regions. The Greek Communists were known to be fighting for 'Free Greece'. In the worst for Britain scenario, the Partisans' efforts could concentrate on Greek Macedonia with Bulgarian and Yugoslav backing. In 1947 – 1948

¹²² Semerdjiev, P. *BKP...* p.27-45; Lalkov, M. *Ot nadezhdata kum razocharovanieto*. Sofia: Vek 22, 1994. p.44-70

the KKE talked of detaching Aegean Macedonia from Greece, admitting that this could only succeed with the assistance of the "People's Democracies" to the north.¹²⁴ If Greek Macedonia effectively seceded from the Athens Government, it would not be difficult to set up a 'Free Macedonia' by the addition of territory from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Such a possibility looked all the more realistic when considered against the background of the concurrent Bulgarian authorities' promotion of a "Macedonian nation" in the Pirin region and the proclaimed intention of creating a Bulgarian-Yugoslav Federation. It would solve a number of existing irredentist and ideological problems: nationalist Bulgarian and Serbian ambitions towards Macedonia would be satisfied, while the Greek Communists could join established Communist regimes.

Above all, from the British perspective the Federation idea would put under considerable threat the independence and integrity of Greece. If a large Communist Slav state took shape to the south of the Balkans, the Soviet orbit would be extended to the Aegean thus disrupting all British plans for the reinforcement of the Mediterranean. Greece would be reduced to impotence and Turkey severed from Europe. For Britain therefore the importance of the preservation and strengthening of Greek legitimacy was such that the FO thought it prudent to prevent the Macedonian question from even becoming a subject of international discussion.¹²⁵

Britain's consideration of the Macedonian question steered clear of any judgement of the validity of the claims of either Bulgaria, Serbia or Greece as to the ethnic composition of Macedonia. The nationalist controversy had for decades marred relations in the Balkans but was *per se* of little genuine interest to the British Government. The latter was of

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.215; Livianos, D. 'Bulgar-Yugoslav...' p.208-215

¹²⁴ Howard, H. 'Greece and Its Northern Neighbours 1948 – 1949.' *Balkan Studies*, vol.7, no.8, 1966/67. p.10

¹²⁵ FO371/66985, R10224, Cooper - Menemencioglu conversation, 8.07.1948, FO *aide-memoire* to State, 21.07.1948; FO371/72341, R2745, Sargent, 23.02.1948; Rothwell, V. *Britain...* p.255

course acutely aware of the political passions these issues always inflamed in Greece and the neighbouring countries. After the Second World War, Britain refused to become entangled in the ongoing debate as to the existence and origins of any “Macedonian nation” as opposed to the mere mixture of populations of different religious and ethnic character.¹²⁶ For practical purposes Britain looked upon Macedonia mostly in geographic terms, evaluating its strategic importance in the shifting Balkan equilibrium. As Britain could neither influence the substance of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav negotiations after 1945, nor secure territorial alterations to the Greek advantage, it firmly supported the status quo regarding Macedonia, that is its division between Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Greece.

Looking for means to fortify Britain’s Eastern Mediterranean flank, British officials understood that the Soviet Union was undoubtedly going to do the same on the edges of its sphere. In the light of this, Britain was bound to reconsider the importance of Bulgaria, which bordered two countries forming a vital link in Britain’s strategic defence plan. British observation of political and military developments in Bulgaria especially focused on the issue of the South Slav Federation, which – if it came into being - would upset the strategic equilibrium in the region. Convinced of Soviet domination of both Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, British specialists had no doubt that Stalin monitored and in fact guided the progress of the Federation idea. They were certain that Stalin would not fail to understand that the creation of a large state at the centre of the Balkans would naturally increase the apprehension of the neighbouring countries. Such a result, in Britain’s view, would definitely prejudice any advantages the establishment of a firmly pro-Soviet Communist formation might entail.¹²⁷ Watching the development of the Bulgarian and Yugoslav

¹²⁶ Yugoslav and Bulgarian views on “the Macedonian nation” are discussed in Lalkov, M. *Or nadezhdata...* and Nation, R. ‘*A Balkan Union? Southeastern Europe in Soviet Security Policy, 1944-8.*’ Gori, Fr. *The Soviet Union...* p.127, 131

¹²⁷ FO371/72162, R730, Sofia to FO, 9.01.1948, R771, Belgrade to FO, 17.01.1948, R1084, Sofia to FO, 23.01.1948

Governments' plans for a South Slav Federation would give Britain another indication of the overall aims of the Soviet Union and the lengths to which it proposed to pursue them.

After the 1945 British note opposing Federation, for the next two years until the conclusion of the Peace Treaty, the Bulgarian Government was careful not to provoke further British protests on the subject. This did not mean, however, that the goal had been cancelled. On the contrary, it was simply postponed. Meanwhile, the Government was implementing internal measures which would smooth the prospective union with Yugoslavia. The unconcealed plan was to establish a customs union after the ratification of the Peace Treaty, then an alliance with Yugoslavia and Albania, and finally a Federation. In some unguarded statements, Bulgarian Communists even called for rapprochement with Greece, where they envisaged the establishment of 'a democratic regime'. This alerted Britain to the fact that indeed Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were poised to unify into one state stretching between the Black and Adriatic seas, which could then form the nucleus of an even larger Balkan Federation.¹²⁸ For Britain this constituted a design for unprecedented Communist territorial, economic and ultimately strategic gains in the Aegean. This also spelt the undisguised danger of future attempts to incorporate Greece or parts of it in the proposed Federation. The overall outcome of such a development would be Greece's engulfment in the Soviet sphere.

After the recognition of the Bulgarian Government, Great Britain had no means of influencing the course of events regarding a Balkan Federation. All it could do was to observe the process from outside and try to judge how soon the Federation was going to emerge. Diplomatic reports from across Eastern Europe suggested that its launch was not as imminent as some declarations of Bulgarian statesmen suggested. Sterndale-Bennett's growing impression in January 1948 was that in Bulgaria itself the 'formality of a

¹²⁸ Lalkov, M. *Ot nadezhdata...* p.209-221

federation even with Yugoslavia may still be in doubt and formation of a larger confederation even more so'. In Sofia it was apparent that for various reasons the question was receding into the background. There had been speculation about the personal rivalry between Dimitrov and Tito, who during his visit in Sofia had the air of 'a prospective purchaser coming to inspect the estate with a view to taking it over'. Another difficulty related to Macedonia, as it seemed to the British Minister that Bulgaria was not really prepared to see the Pirin region detached except for territorial compensation in the Aegean.¹²⁹ Nothing in Prague, Bucharest and Budapest or, for that matter, even in Belgrade made the British representatives in these cities consider the idea of a Federation practical or think that Yugoslavia was seriously contemplating it.¹³⁰ Still, the available information was often confusing and the substance of the propaganda had not changed much.¹³¹

The vague British perception that progress towards a Balkan Federation had been halted was not based on any firm evidence, and even less on knowledge of the changing Soviet position. It was known that leading Bulgarian and Yugoslav Communists had been summoned to Moscow shortly after the signing of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav Agreement for Friendship and Co-operation in Bled (Yugoslavia) on 1 August 1947. British observers however had no information about the talks with the Soviet leadership, and even less of the severe Soviet criticism of the noisy publicity with which the Agreement had been concluded. Stalin condemned the wide scope of the document, which touched on a number of political, economic and cultural issues. He was extremely displeased with the fact of its signing before the ratification of the Peace Treaty. Most importantly, Stalin

¹²⁹ FO371/66985, R10224, British *aide-memoire* to State, 21.07.1947; FO371/72162, R484, Sofia to FO, 8.01.1948

¹³⁰ FO371/72162, R52, Belgrade to FO, 27.12.1947, R740, Bucharest to FO, 16.01.1948

¹³¹ FO371/66958, R10530-R16486, Sofia, Moscow, Belgrade to FO, July-November 1947

pointed out that the precipitate actions of the two Governments gave 'the reactionary Anglo-American elements' a pretext to increase their military intervention in Greek and Turkish affairs.¹³²

Stalin's angry reaction to continued open Bulgarian and Yugoslav adherence to a Balkan Federation reached an unprecedented level in early 1948. On 17 January 1948, Dimitrov spoke to journalists about, among other questions, the Federation. Stating that the idea should be left to mature, he said that as a first step towards Federation the "People's Democracies" of Eastern Europe would enter into a customs union. Dimitrov's statement that, when it finally went ahead, the envisaged Federation might include even Greece provoked an immediate international outcry.¹³³

The Kremlin reacted swiftly: on 24 January Dimitrov received a ciphered telegram that his interview was 'judged by the Moscow friends as harmful'. It was considered to be undermining the "new democracies" and above all giving a winning card to Britain and the United States which could point to Dimitrov's inopportune words as an example of aggressive Soviet plans. According to the Soviet message, such grand designs, propagated by a well-known activist of the international Communist movement might serve as an excuse for closer alignment of Britain, the USA and Western Europe against Communism worldwide.¹³⁴ In addition to this private reproach, Dimitrov was publicly rebuked in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* which wrote that the Soviet leadership did not subscribe to 'problematic and fantastic federations and confederations'.¹³⁵ The final blow to Dimitrov was dealt on 10 February 1948 when Stalin presided over a tripartite Bulgarian-Yugoslav-Soviet meeting at the Kremlin. He castigated the Bulgarian Prime Minister for making

¹³² Gibianskii, L. 'The Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict and the Soviet Bloc.' *Gori, Fr. The Soviet Union...* p.228-229

¹³³ Nation, R. 'A Balkan Union?...' p.135

¹³⁴ Gibianskii, L. 'The Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict...' p.234-235

sweeping statements without higher authorisation. Stalin repeated that Dimitrov's declarations made easier the creation of the Western bloc. He was especially irritated by the possibility that friends and foes alike could think that it was all a Soviet idea.¹³⁶

The FO was quick to grasp that the setting up of a broad Federation would make it extremely difficult for the Soviet Union to condemn plans for Western European integration.¹³⁷ However, this was not viewed as the primary reason for the Soviet change of attitude regarding Federation. British experts had little information on which convincingly to base their analysis and could only speculate about Stalin's reluctance to deal with an extraordinarily strong South Slav state which might spur centripetal tendencies in the Soviet bloc. Retrospective interpretations of Stalin's motives were precipitated by the open Soviet-Yugoslav split later in 1948. What became immediately obvious, however, was that the Bulgarian Communist leadership was not in a position to take independent decisions about Bulgaria's external or internal affairs. The quick dropping of plans for a Bulgarian-Yugoslav Federation demonstrated clearly that even the most long-standing items on the Bulgarian Communists' agenda could be overturned at the Kremlin's insistence. If Britain needed proof that the Bulgarian Communists' loyalty to the Soviet Union stood above commitment to any specific actions, it was not going to receive a better one in a long time.¹³⁸

This trend was only institutionalised by the founding in September 1947 of the Communist Information Bureau, which undertook the co-ordination of the activities of nine Communist parties. This practically subordinated them to the Soviet Communist

¹³⁵ FO371/72162, R1349, translation of *Pravda* excerpt, Moscow to FO, 29.01.1948

¹³⁶ Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p.68-72, Djilas, M. *Conversations...* p.173-175

¹³⁷ FO371/72162, R1391, Sterndale-Bennett to FO minutes, 29.01.1948, R1777, Paris to FO, 6.02.1948

¹³⁸ FO371/66475, R11554, Roberts to FO, 6.10.1947, FO minutes, 7.10.1947; FO371/66993, R13461, R13625, FO minutes, 6.10.1947 – the Cominform is referred to as 'the new Comintern'; Gibianskii, L. *The Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict...* p.221-241

Party and through it, to the interests of the Soviet state. The leading objective of the Cominform was the acceleration of the revolutionary transformation of the countries of Eastern Europe on the Soviet model. This was to be reflected not only in their domestic developments but also in their foreign policy. The Cominform's first meeting confirmed the validity of Marxist-Leninist postulates about the inevitable clash between Communism and Capitalism.¹³⁹

The establishment of the Cominform had relatively little impact on British attitudes to Bulgaria. The new international institution was regarded as a Soviet instrument for exporting Communism and consolidating the Soviet position in Eastern Europe through the national Communist parties. Such views only justified the British Government's already existing assumptions regarding the Soviet Union's aggressive foreign policy. British experts understood that a new phase of Communist development had begun. This increased their understanding of the Soviet Union's political and strategic objectives. Simultaneously, Bulgaria's role in the Cominform was in line with British expectations and added no new dimensions in the British analysis of developments in that country. It confirmed the FO's belief that the Bulgarian Communist Party was set on faithfully emulating the Soviet model. As British observers had long accepted the advent of Communism in Bulgaria, this brought no active British reaction.¹⁴⁰

Observation of the Military Clauses of the Peace Treaty. Britain had one supplementary objection to the establishment of a Danubian Federation, namely that it would lead to the formal disappearance of Bulgaria as a separate object of international law. If the Bulgarian state no longer existed as such, its economic, military and moral

¹³⁹ Di Biaggio, A. 'The Marshall Plan and the Founding of the Cominform June – September 1947.' Gori, Fr. The Soviet Union... p.212-218; Yegorova, N. 'From the Comintern to the Cominform: Ideological Dimensions of the Cold War Origins (1945-1948)'. Conference paper. Cold War International History Project. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Moscow, January 1993. p.5-6, 22

¹⁴⁰ FO371/66993, R13889, Watson, 20.10.1947

obligations under the Peace Treaty would be nullified. In view of Yugoslavia's Allied status, the new Yugoslav-Bulgarian state could refuse to assume the responsibilities of the erstwhile Bulgarian Government.¹⁴¹ This would entail serious consequences for British interests in the Balkans, as usual related to the Greek issue. As a federal unit, Bulgaria could continue providing help to the Greek Communist guerrillas. With combined resources, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria could pose a greater threat to the existence of Greece than either of the two alone.

Even while the Federation question was fading during the unfolding Tito-Stalin dispute in 1947 - 1948, Britain was distinctly aware of Bulgaria's military capabilities. To limit these the British Government could only insist on due observation of the restrictions the Peace Treaty imposed on the Bulgarian army. Britain had abstained from enforcement of human rights observation in Bulgaria, but this did not preclude it from contesting the latter's fulfilment of the military clauses of the Peace Treaty.

In March 1948, the Bulgarian Minister of Defence Georgi Damyanov declared that the country had complied with the military articles of the Treaty, something Britain was in a position to challenge formally. Carefully compiled British information showed that although Bulgaria had indeed cut down its armed forces, it was increasing the activities of para-military organisations, including the militia, the border guards, and even sports clubs. To prove or refute such suspicions Britain needed to inspect the Bulgarian army, above all in border areas, which for some time had been practically sealed off for foreigners. British demands to that effect were justified by the assertion that proper verification and acceptance of the official Bulgarian statement could only be brought by examination.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ FO371/72162, R95, FO memorandum, 23.12.1947, R700, Fitzmaurice, 31.10.1947

¹⁴² FO371/72138, R13328, FO to Sofia, 22.12.1948

Earlier US attempts to inspect the southern Bulgarian border had been ignored or obstructed by the Bulgarian Government. The latter had declined to give assistance claiming that it was only obliged to respond to demands emanating from all Three Allied Powers, and the USSR had not supported the US initiative.¹⁴³

At the end of January 1948, Britain had agreed to participate in another US-led joint attempt at border inspection. The diplomatic notes requesting a tour of the borders were to be based on the relevant Article 12 of the Peace Treaty and not to mention alleged Bulgarian involvement in the Greek situation. The FO also agreed to back the State Department in declaring a dispute with the Bulgarian Government under Article 36 in case of renewed Bulgarian obstruction.¹⁴⁴ For the first time the Bulgarian authorities did not dispute Britain's and the USA's right of inspection but again insisted on a similar Soviet approach, which was not forthcoming.¹⁴⁵

A last-moment British reversal ruined the whole effort. The British Legation in Italy insisted that any action in the Balkans be postponed until after the Italian elections, scheduled for 18 April 1948. Bevin swiftly agreed. The embarrassed FO was left with the task of explaining to the State Department that 'the balance of advantages' had been reconsidered in an attempt 'to co-ordinate... overall policy... without undue regard for Treaty enforcement for its own sake'.¹⁴⁶ The change provoked a strongly worded warning from Sterndale-Bennett that

...in countries like Bulgaria we are unlikely to achieve effective results and therefore it is easy to argue that implementation here is of academic value which should be subordinated to practical considerations in Italy. This is false reading because the importance in Bulgaria is not in concrete

¹⁴³ FO371/72166 - 72169, FO communications and minutes, 26.02. - 27.05.1948

¹⁴⁴ FO371/72165, R1177, Washington - FO, 26 - 31.01.1948

¹⁴⁵ FO371/72165, R1733, R1746, R1747, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 5, 7.02.1948; FO371/72166, R2045, *note-verbale*, 7.02.1948, R2098, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 13.02.1948, R2432, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 19.02.1948, R2858, Bevin brief, 26.02.1948, R2995, Levyitchkin to US Embassy, 18.02.1948

¹⁴⁶ FO371/72168, R4468, FO *aide-memoire* to State, 3.04.1948

results but in psychological stand - whenever we try to soft-pedal the Communists are jubilant and our stock goes down in other quarters.¹⁴⁷

In June 1948, the question of inspection of the Bulgarian border was briefly revived in both Britain and the USA. This time Bevin dismissed it claiming that it was not 'wise to intensify a quarrel now while we have so much on our hands in Germany'.¹⁴⁸ This attitude was maintained in the face of a stream of Greek grievances, submitted to the FO not only on border incidents but also on intransigent Bulgarian behaviour over restitution of Greek property and war reparations. Greece continuously pressed the British and US Governments to implement those provisions of the Peace Treaty dealing with Bulgarian failure to fulfil its obligations. Invariably, the Greek Government was firmly told that Britain was not in the position to uphold the Greek claims against Bulgaria.¹⁴⁹

British anxiety that Bulgaria 'will simply treat the Treaty as a joke'¹⁵⁰ was confirmed by the Bulgarian Government's treatment of the Special Commission set up in December 1947 by the United Nations to investigate Bulgarian-Greek border incidents (UNSCOB). The Commission was to look into the Greek Government's allegations that the Bulgarian regime was helping the Greek Communist guerrillas. Initially, Bulgaria showed signs of co-operation with the United Nations. In mid-1947, however, the Bulgarian Government categorically refused to admit the Commission into the country, stating that it had been established illegally and infringed Bulgarian sovereignty.¹⁵¹ Simultaneously, Kolarov practically confirmed some of the accusations against Bulgaria, stating that it was right to let in refugees from 'the terror of Greece' and unwittingly admitting the occurrence of

¹⁴⁷ FO371/72166, R2727, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 27.02.1948

¹⁴⁸ FO371/72169, R6473, R6698, R7333, R7580, FO minutes, 1 – 30.06.1948

¹⁴⁹ FO371/72171-2, FO notes, February - March 1948; FO371/78439, R4257, R7926, Greek Embassy memoranda 20.04., 12.08.1949

¹⁵⁰ FO371/66981, R16308, Watson, 15.12.1947

¹⁵¹ *Rabotnichesko Delo*, 31.12.1947

frontier incidents.¹⁵² Without British knowledge, Molotov had informed Dimitrov that the USSR was no longer in favour of the UNSCOB and advised the Bulgarian Government to refuse the Commission right of entry to the country.¹⁵³

British reluctance to bring the Bulgarian Government to task about non-observation of its military obligations partially derived from the belief that Bulgaria could not pose an imminent military threat to Greece. Intelligence from the spring of 1948 testified that despite the gradual re-equipping of the Bulgarian army with Soviet help, the state of training was backward and the general efficiency very low. Some units were judged to be potentially able to stage guerrilla-style operations in Greece but the army as a whole could not be considered modern or efficient by European standards.¹⁵⁴ Such arguments showed that British policy planners distinguished between the perceived ambitions of the Bulgarian Government and the practical ability to fulfil them. They were guided by realities and considered it inappropriate to immerse Britain in disputes from which little tangible improvements would follow. The nuisance value of the incidents on the Bulgarian-Greek border was not judged sufficient to justify the initiation of the lengthy and unpromising procedure envisaged by the Peace Treaty.

Non-admission to the United Nations. The impossibility of implementing the Peace Treaty had a long-term effect on the international situation of Bulgaria. Britain had extended diplomatic relations but refused to support the Bulgarian application for admission to the United Nations Organisation. On two separate occasions, in September 1947 and April 1948, the UN Security Council reviewed the matter of new candidacies. The British delegation abstained from voting on Hungary's and Romania's applications on account of these countries' abuse of human rights. Britain, however, pointedly voted against

¹⁵² FO371/72136, R11012, R11050, Dunnett to FO, 24.09.1948

¹⁵³ Issussov, M. *Stalin...* p.100-103

Bulgaria's application, arguing that apart from constantly violating human rights, the Bulgarian Government had deliberately flouted the authority of the UN Security Council over the dispute with Greece.¹⁵⁵

The Foreign Office foresaw unwanted consequences of its vote against Bulgarian UN membership. Any argument against the entry of Bulgaria into the UNO could be used *mutatis mutandi* by the Soviet Government regarding Italy's application. This might easily happen as the Italian Government had criticised the Soviet attitude to Italy's admission in a form milder but similar to statements made by Kolarov. The FO understood that 'it would, to say the least of it, be difficult ... to maintain that the Italian Government had carried out effectively every single provision of the Italian Peace Treaty, ... but rather we wish to wink an eye at some ... occasional failures'.¹⁵⁶

On a more practical basis, the FO treated the matter of admissions to the UNO as distinct from that of the implementation of the human rights clauses of the Peace Treaty. Whitehall officials had long acknowledged that they could do next to nothing to force the Bulgarian Government, or any other totalitarian Government, to observe human rights. The British Government, however, possessed effective instruments to bar Bulgaria's entry into the UNO.¹⁵⁷

British officials realised that the Bulgarian candidacy for the United Nations could succeed only as a part of some general understanding between the Soviet Union on the one hand and Britain and the United States on the other. To this Bulgaria's, or the other satellites', domestic record would not be relevant. Such a possibility in turn reinforced British reluctance to act decisively on developments inside the country as protests might prejudice

¹⁵⁴ FO371/72156, R4744, Green memorandum, 30.03.1948

¹⁵⁵ FO371/78332, R4631, Grant, 6.04.1949

¹⁵⁶ FO371/72136, R11323, Brown, 29.09.1948

the UNO negotiations. The FO for instance reasoned that the Lulchev trial provided an admirable occasion for launching an attack on the Bulgarian Government without touching on Bulgarian eligibility for the UNO. The two questions were, however, very closely linked and the logical implication of any indictment would also clearly go against the Bulgarian application.¹⁵⁸ The conclusion was that as a compromise on Bulgarian admission could not be thoroughly excluded, the protest on the human rights issue should be forestalled. Moreover, the FO reasoned that if Bulgaria's application was rejected, a protest would become superfluous, whereas in the unlikely event of Bulgaria being admitted a protest 'would only be irrelevant'. Therefore, experts in London concluded that no protest should be undertaken before the outcome of the membership talks in Paris was known. The Foreign Office was anxious to avoid 'looking silly' which could happen if, 'having let off steam' it eventually concluded a deal with the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁹

No agreement was reached in 1948 and in early 1949 Britain reverted to the policy of public condemnation of the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet satellites. But the momentum for protests to the individual Governments had been lost. The new approach was to criticise the Soviet Orbit countries at international forums, most notably the United Nations towards which they aspired. In the spring of 1949, the UN General Assembly discussed the trials of the Bulgarian Pastors and Church leaders in other Communist-controlled countries. Despite strong Soviet opposition, the Assembly expressed deep concern at the alleged violations of human rights. As a result, the UNO brought the question before the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Great Britain together with the United States was a protagonist of the prosecution. Britain's statement on the case was careful to emphasise concern not with the

¹⁵⁷ FO371/72136, R11410, Greenhill to FO, Wallinger, 4.10.1948

¹⁵⁸ FO371/72139a, R13568, Talbot de Malahide, 18.11.1948

¹⁵⁹ FO371/72136, R11745, FO minutes, 18.10. – 2.11.1948

substance of the allegations but only with the steps that should be taken to investigate them.¹⁶⁰

The hearings at The Hague were a protracted affair. In April 1950, the International Court confirmed the validity of those articles in the Peace Treaty which related to the settlement of disputes.¹⁶¹ When the satellite states refused to oblige, the Court admitted that it was powerless to take the case further.¹⁶² This amounted to official international acknowledgement of what the FO had long maintained internally - the Treaty procedure had become unworkable and the possibilities of recourse and settlement had been exhausted.

Pursuing the case further, in 1951, the UN General Assembly invited its members to submit evidence of breaches of the human rights clauses of the Paris Peace Treaties. The British Government constructed its first case against Bulgaria, presenting as evidence the Bulgarian Constitution, the Law for the Ban and Dissolution of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union of Petkov, the General Elections Law and the Local Elections Law.¹⁶³ Subsequently, the same was done for Hungary and Romania.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, in March 1951 when the question of human rights appeared on the agenda of the imminent Four-Power talks, a Foreign Office expert wrote:

I do rather view with dismay the prospect of flogging again the dead horse of human rights in the satellites. There is frankly nothing that we can do about it here, it merely exasperates the local Governments and it makes it much more difficult for us to establish any kind of reasonable relations with them.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ FO371/87464, R1072/3, FO press release, 27 – 28.02.1950

¹⁶¹ FO371/87464, R1072/4, Registrar of International Court to Bevin, 30.03.1950

¹⁶² FO371/87464, R1072/8, FO minutes, 5.04. – 27.06.1950,

¹⁶³ FO371/87464, R1072/16, FO minutes, 18.07. - 3.11.1950; FO371/95004, R1072/10, FO brief for UN Secretary General, August 1951

¹⁶⁴ FO371/95003, R1072/4-5, FO reports on human rights in Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, November 1950 – May 1951

¹⁶⁵ FO371/95006, R1073/4, Mason to FO, 30.03.1951

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After the signing of the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria, the British Government found it almost impossible to devise a policy, which would reflect Britain's general strategic goals and achieve concrete results in the country. Already during the armistice the British Government had become aware of the discrepancy between its proclaimed commitment to democratic ideals and the practical inability to defend those who supported such ideals in the Soviet-dominated area. After 1947, the Foreign Office attempted to follow a middle course, protesting against infringements of human rights in Bulgaria but simultaneously refraining from invoking the Treaty machinery. This seemingly lopsided method was undertaken after initial disputes with the Bulgarian Government had produced no effect but had only demonstrated British political and diplomatic impotence.

Britain concentrated on reinforcing the countries which remained outside Soviet control, mainly on preventing any potential conflict with Greece's and Turkey's Communist neighbours and on speedy economic recovery to immunise these two countries against Communist penetration. Britain realistically accepted that the Soviet Union would act with parallel policies to secure and consolidate its own sphere of influence. In such circumstances, the best Britain could hope for in Bulgaria was 'to keep the flame of liberty alight' 'by demonstrating our own vitality' and 'following events here with close attention'.¹⁶⁶

As British diplomats were unable to propose adequate actions to secure British moral leadership, the idea of dropping of any actions directed against the Bulgarian Government gained force. Doubt hung over the whole rationale of an active policy, which could be interpreted as an indictment of the Communist system and could easily serve as an excuse for increased Soviet hostility. This posed the question of whether it made sense to take

any interest in Bulgaria which was small and unimportant in global terms. But developments in Bulgaria illuminated a far-reaching Soviet intention to consolidate the Soviet zone of influence on a Communist basis. This was augmented by the militancy and irredentism of Bulgaria's Communist rulers. Against the background of such soul-searching in the Foreign Office, the British representatives in Bulgaria were driven to near desperation by their status of silent observers. Their very presence in the country became a constant reminder of the impotent position of Britain vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in this part of Europe.

¹⁶⁶ FO371/72143, R279, Sterndale-Bennett to FO, 3.01.1948

Conclusion

The final years of the Second World War and the immediate post-war period formed British foreign policy in the second half of the twentieth century. Emerging victorious from the hostilities, Britain believed itself to be the guardian of democracy world-wide. However, its Great Power status was somewhat constrained by the rising strength of its two wartime Allies, the United States and the Soviet Union. This, together with Britain's economic decline, had a profound impact on its foreign policy. Nevertheless, Britain's wartime performance and its traditional role in diplomacy accounted for its continuing significant role in international affairs after the end of the war.

The transitional nature of Britain's foreign policy in 1943 – 1949 makes its examination all the more interesting and meaningful. A study of the process of anticipation of, and readjustment to the imminent post-war realities illuminates Britain's long-term interests and the principles underlying its international conduct. In the second half of 1943, when British Government Departments took up political planning for the peacetime in earnest, they had above all to consider the disposition of forces in the ongoing armed conflict. They also drew heavily on experiences from the inter-war period, understandably projecting past developments on future ones. External resemblance between Britain's attitudes and approaches before and after the war was due to the essentially stable nature of Britain's strategic and political priorities. It is interesting that in the case of Eastern Europe the pattern has re-emerged after the collapse of Communism, albeit in a different setting.

From the broad perspective of modern British history and politics, analysing British foreign policy towards Bulgaria is not an obvious topic. The distance between the two countries in

terms of geography, political tradition and international standing allowed but for few meaningful contacts in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. This situation was augmented by the lack of sustainable economic links. Any sporadic attention Britain displayed towards specific Bulgarian developments could be shown to have resulted either from historical coincidence or in relation to wider European crises.

In its own right Bulgaria had rarely been a priority for British foreign policy before the Second World War. Britain had largely accepted that other Great Powers had the right to a greater influence in Bulgaria. This meant that on the isolated occasions Britain did become involved with the country, intervention was likely to have limited effects.

1943 – 1949 was the longest single historical period during which Britain consistently manifested interest towards Bulgaria. Britain became engaged in a host of military and political problems arising from Bulgaria's participation in the Second World War and bearing upon Bulgaria's place in post-war Europe. This was unusual, especially in comparison to the inter-war period when Britain had treated Bulgaria, at best, with indifference and had given it little genuine encouragement to reconsider its growing attachment to Germany. This was also in striking contrast to the second half of the twentieth century when Britain saw in Bulgaria the most obedient satellite of Soviet Russia, almost refusing to look on Bulgaria as a sovereign country.

The years 1943 – 1949 were crucial for the entire Bulgarian socio-political evolution in the second half of the twentieth century. Despite the gradual realisation of the bankruptcy of the policy of affiliation with the Axis, successive Bulgarian Governments failed to re-orient the country towards the Allies. The Soviet Union skilfully took advantage of the resulting political and military vacuum, occupying Bulgaria and imposing its will on most aspects of Bulgarian

domestic and foreign policy. The ensuing relatively quick sovietisation of Bulgaria took place with the knowledge and acquiescence of Britain. The latter saw it fit not to intervene actively in the Soviet take-over of Bulgaria. Inability and unwillingness to oppose Soviet actions set the trend for Britain's role in Bulgaria in the latter 1940s.

The clarification of Britain's position regarding Bulgaria requires understanding of two independent processes – that of formulating British post-war foreign policy and that of Bulgaria's political evolution in the latter 1940s. Mapping the interaction of the two illuminates Britain's interest and actions in a remote country in the Balkans and highlights how these reflected the general principles and priorities of British foreign policy. Examination of Britain's attitude and approaches to Bulgaria reveals the logic of policy making towards a small power of no global importance. It sheds light on the interplay of internal and external forces in shaping Bulgaria's post-war development. Placed in the context of Great-Power relations and in comparison to developments in other countries of Bulgaria's rank, all this acquires larger historical significance.

* * *

British foreign policy towards Bulgaria during 1943 – 1949 evolved mainly as a reaction to the establishment of Soviet influence and the communisation of Eastern Europe. As such it also corresponded to the changes within the Grand Alliance. Therefore, it both derived from and contributed to the onset of the new antagonism in European affairs at the end of the Second World War, that of the Cold War.

While the Second World War was still raging, Britain's attention to Bulgaria went little beyond the necessity to secure the latter's withdrawal from the neighbouring territories it had occupied. British military strategists had judged this to be essential for the weakening of the Axis hold in the Balkan Peninsula. To this end, under the co-ordination of the Foreign Office a triple policy was designed consisting of special operations, propaganda and strategic bombing. All these had limited effects.

Sabotage and subversion, carried out by the SOE, were hindered not only by a series of mishaps but above all by inadequate pre-war preparations. The biggest problem arose from the fact that there was little genuine local resistance willing to co-operate with Britain, let alone be guided by Britain. Although well-organised and benefiting from the exiled Bulgarian politicians' insight into Bulgarian politics, British war-time propaganda to Bulgaria suffered from an overwhelmingly negative character. British official broadcasting from London and émigré channels in the Middle East condemned Bulgaria's adherence to the Tripartite Pact without offering any genuine inducement for the reversal of Bulgaria's conduct. The British Government was fully aware that nationalist ambitions were the principal driving force for Bulgaria's choice of allies. But Britain did not offer the one encouragement that might have pushed Bulgaria to turn against Germany, that of indicating that the Bulgarian territorial question might be reassessed in the future. Britain even refused to guarantee Bulgaria's continued independence after the war. The bombing of Bulgaria, undertaken jointly with the USA and with Soviet consent, caused physical destruction and administrative and economic chaos. But the air-raids fell short of forcing the Bulgarian Government to capitulate to the Allies.

The failure of British military and propaganda activities in Bulgaria in 1943 - 1944 was related to the abandonment of the Balkan front strategy strenuously propagated by British Commanders and politicians while planning the Allied war effort in Europe. Indeed, the proponents of the idea, including Churchill, were motivated chiefly by military expediency rather than the political advantages military presence in the Balkans would have afforded Britain. Such a conclusion is also confirmed by Britain's preparedness to lend assistance to the most radical war-time opposition elements in Bulgaria, the Communists, as long as they were seen to contribute to the downfall of Bulgaria's pro-German regime and thus to the defeat of the Axis in the Balkans.

The precedence of military exigencies over the elaboration of long-term political objectives resulted in one of the enduring features of British foreign policy towards Bulgaria in the mid-1940s, namely the lack of consistent political planning regarding that country. The British Government fully appreciated Bulgaria's central strategic position: influence in the country could facilitate any British aspirations to predominate in the adjoining region and seriously strengthen the traditionally important British positions in the Eastern Mediterranean. The one British political initiative, which this logic produced, was the proposal that Bulgaria joined a Balkan Federation. The timing, national composition or form of government were never clearly stipulated but most British Balkan experts thought that the idea provided the only opportunity for Britain to secure a lasting role in the whole of the Balkan Peninsula. It was precisely this view that made the Soviet Union practically veto the Balkan Federation idea in October 1943.

Contemplating possibilities for British involvement in Bulgaria, the FO was realistic enough to face the fact of its limited capabilities to influence Bulgaria's internal or external policies. British military and political planners did not underestimate the traditional Russian links with Bulgaria and the variety of methods with which the Soviet Union could determine the country's

behaviour. Therefore, the British Government did not shy away from considering how Soviet Russia could be involved in the effort to force Bulgaria out of the war. Although specific Anglo-Soviet co-operation was negligible as far as Eastern Europe was concerned, the British Government – when it was informed – generally approved of the independent political and diplomatic pressure the Soviet Union applied on Bulgaria throughout 1944. Even though the Soviet declaration of war on Bulgaria of 5 September 1944 caught Britain unawares, the latter did not hesitate to readjust the armistice terms and to join fresh Soviet-led negotiations with Bulgaria. For Britain, the sudden Soviet intervention was controversial but risking increased tension with the Soviet Union over Bulgaria was not worthwhile. To a degree, it was Britain's confusion as to the Soviet actions regarding Bulgaria, along with willingness to be seen to accommodate its Soviet Ally that allowed Soviet troops to occupy Bulgaria unimpeded.

At the end of the Second World War Bulgaria figured little in inter-Allied diplomacy. The greatest deal of attention the country received was at the time of Churchill's visit to Moscow in October 1944. On that occasion, the British Prime Minister offered Stalin seventy-five percent influence in Bulgarian affairs; later Molotov extracted from Eden as much as eighty percent. The 'percentage deal' was a prime illustration of Britain's precarious position regarding Bulgaria. Despite its debatable nature and the different interpretations it has provoked, it constituted a practical understanding between two Great Powers whose interests in the Balkans clashed. The agreement embodied a realistic assessment of Britain's own restricted influence over Bulgaria and signalled that Britain did not intend to challenge Soviet dominance there. As Britain hardly attached any intrinsic value to Bulgaria, it saw in the 'percentage formula' a method for satisfying the Soviet aspirations. At the same time, Britain reserved for itself a

modicum of influence, which was deemed in tune with its vital interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The armistice terms for Bulgaria were finally settled only after the conclusion of the 'percentage agreement', which seemed to spell political consensus regarding Bulgaria. Britain was accordingly allotted disproportionately small participation in the Allied Control Commission for Bulgaria, a body under Soviet command. Significantly for the British Government, however, this was the moment when for the first time since relations had been broken off in March 1941, it had a direct presence in Bulgaria. The British delegation in the ACC provided adequate analysis of the Bulgarian political scene and Soviet activities in Bulgaria. It became an important element in the discussion and formulation of British policy towards Bulgaria; its experiences and advice also contributed to the elaboration of British attitudes to the Soviet Union.

In 1944 – 1945, Britain affirmed its belief that it could benefit if Bulgaria followed a pro-Western foreign policy and embraced Western European values of political freedom and democracy. By mid-1945, however, the FO was able to observe the growing tension in Bulgarian domestic politics caused by the Bulgarian Communists' endeavours to establish control over the coalition Fatherland Front Government as well as infiltrate the whole national and local administration. This coincided with the widening of the cracks in the Grand Alliance exacerbated amongst else by what Britain, along with the United States, interpreted as Soviet Russia's attempts to establish its exclusive zone of influence across Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria. The British Government could not but suspect a link between these two parallel processes, which became all the more threatening since British strategist perceived in the Soviet Union the only possible future enemy. Therefore, the Bulgarian Communists'

attempts at political monopoly coupled with increased Soviet dictate over the country's internal developments and relations with the outside world spelt for Britain the establishment of a Soviet stronghold too close to the Southern Balkans. A Bulgaria controlled by the Soviet Union could become a springboard for the spread of Communism in Europe and for the undermining of British power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Contacts between the Bulgarian and Greek Communists, renewed occasional Soviet attention to Greece and the menacing Soviet attitude towards Turkey in late 1945 and 1946 all fitted the pattern.

The outcome was that Britain firmly associated itself with the anti-Communist anti-Soviet political groups in Bulgaria, mainly the Agrarians of Nikola Petkov and the Social Democrats of Krustyo Pastuhov. Being careful not to appear to be urging anti-Soviet behaviour, British political representatives in Bulgaria encouraged the Opposition's stand against the dictatorial manner of the Communists and insisted on the adoption of democratic principles in Bulgarian Government and politics. These efforts culminated in British support for the postponement of the Bulgarian general elections in August 1945 as demanded by the Opposition. The postponement remained the most important victory of Britain and the USA in Bulgaria for the whole period under review. True as it is, that the initiative was taken by the members of the two Western Missions without full authorisation from their superiors, it showed that firmness and an active attitude paid off. For once, the local British representatives were vindicated in their long-neglected recommendations of decisive and timely actions in Bulgaria coupled with strong representations in Moscow.

The postponement of the elections was however an isolated incident, which the British Government had not fully sanctioned in advance and was not prepared to repeat for fear of antagonising unduly the Soviet Union. Since the subsequent November 1945 elections were

carried out in an atmosphere not much different than that in August, the postponement had no other lasting effect than to make the Bulgarian Communists and the Soviet Union more acutely aware of the dangers of joint British and US pressure. As overall Communist dominance was not challenged and Soviet control remained at least as firm as before, Britain's boldest effort brought only temporary marginal achievements.

As confrontation had the dual effect of revealing British weakness and antagonising the Soviet Union, it resulted in continuous scaling down of British demands as to the democratic standards to be observed by the Bulgarian Government. This in turn indicated British vulnerability, bringing renewed Communist onslaughts and increasingly isolating Britain from the Bulgarian political scene. In 1946, after the failure of the Moscow decision for the reconstruction of the Bulgarian Government, Britain's main preoccupation became how to grant a speedy recognition to the Bulgarian regime. Understanding that such an act would only support the Bulgarian Communists' claim for legitimacy, the FO also realised that the opposite alternative could not alter the political course of the Bulgarian Government. After prolonged soul-searching and much disagreement with the USA, the British Government finally adopted the view that the very conclusion of the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria in February 1947 amounted to a *de jure* recognition. In this, Britain focused on the advantage of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Bulgaria which Moscow had pledged in exchange for the recognition of the Bulgarian Government.

Already in 1946, Britain steadily moved towards a passive policy in Bulgaria. After the signing of the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria, the British Government experienced substantial difficulties as to what course to adopt towards internal Bulgarian developments. The problem lay in the near impossibility to devise a policy which would co-ordinate Britain's general

strategic goals of maintaining strong influence in the Southern Balkans and keeping hostility to the Soviet Union to a minimum, and achieve concrete results of undermining the Communist strength in Bulgaria. Prolonged inter-departmental discussions of the possibilities to take Bulgaria to task in front of the international community for not observing various articles of the Peace Treaty remained little but intellectual and legalistic exercises. In practice, without any open supporters inside the country, Britain reverted to the type of negative policy towards Bulgaria it had displayed in the latter stages of the Second World War. Having recognised the near impossibility to assert the little interest it had left in Bulgaria, Britain effectively treated the country as a Soviet dependency. In 1949 relations were frozen at the lowest point. As the consolidation of the Bulgarian regime was taking place the British Legation acted more and more as a plain monitoring post.

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An objective chronicle of events and impartial analysis of the ideas and principles governing British policy towards Bulgaria in 1943 – 1949 leads to some broad logical conclusions. Above all, it becomes abundantly clear that although Britain had an interest in Bulgaria, it did not place that country among the leading British strategic priorities in the Balkans. Neither at the end of the Second World War, nor in the first peaceful years did Bulgaria assume the importance of some other East European countries of the rank of Poland, for example, over which Britain was prepared to go to considerable disputes with the Soviet Union. When compared to the extent of British involvement in the neighbouring Greece and Turkey, attention to Bulgaria acquires marginal proportions. This is clearly illustrated by the low level of decision making regarding Bulgaria. Most issues were resolved by the Southern Department of the Foreign Office with rare

intervention by the Foreign Secretary. On very few specific occasions were matters related to Bulgaria presented to the Cabinet and then mostly in an informative capacity. Only at highly exceptional moments, most conspicuously the 'percentage agreement', did the British Prime Minister devote attention to Bulgaria. On the other hand, one of the most successful events in the course of British relations with Bulgaria, that of the August 1945 election postponement, occurred on the initiative of the British representatives in Bulgaria even without proper consultation with the FO.

Even so, the fact that distinct efforts were made to elaborate policy towards Bulgaria indicates that Britain considered the country to be of some interest. Neither the low priority accorded to Bulgaria, nor the predominantly unsuccessful nature of Britain's attempts to give some practical dimension of its objectives should be confused for lack of interest. After all, any disavowal of interest would have amounted, amongst else, to Britain's resignation from its position of a Great Power, at least as far as Europe was concerned.

The main driving force of British policy towards Bulgaria throughout the reviewed period was that of British geopolitical interests. Together with the threat for European stability, the Second World War revealed weaknesses in Britain's support lines and naval communications, which compromised the security of the metropolis itself as well as that of its imperial possessions. The British approach to Bulgaria, therefore, mirrored the latter's capability to threaten militarily the Eastern Mediterranean. This is what in the British view put Bulgaria apart from Eastern Europe and gave it a special value in a predominantly Balkan context. This is also the reason for the cyclical nature of British foreign policy formulation with respect to Bulgaria.

An extension of this logic is the secondary role played by ideology. Indeed, Britain had fought the Axis on the moral grounds of preventing the establishment of a totalitarian dictatorship over

Europe. Such rhetoric was contained in the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe and could easily be adopted against the Soviet Union once it was accepted that its ultimate objective was the imposition of global Communism. However, the latter process was relatively slow and reluctant, always preconditioned on the desire not to exacerbate Soviet hostility. Therefore, it should not obscure the fact that most of British thinking about Bulgaria was carried out in purely strategic terms: the establishment of Communism in Bulgaria was analysed from the perspective of enhancing and consolidating the Soviet position in proximity to the Mediterranean Straits. Concerns for democracy in Bulgaria appeared later, and then as a function of security calculations; the best example in this respect were again the 'percentage negotiations' when urgent serious and secret negotiations were carried out in the unambiguous language of power politics. In addition, if British-Soviet disagreement over Bulgaria can be seen as adding to the tensions of the emerging Cold War, this was not because of British commitment to democracy in that country but rather because of Britain's aim to contain Soviet strategic gains in the region.

The most significant and stable feature of British policy towards Bulgaria was the realisation that Britain had no practical means of matching either the traditional Russian influence or the advantages that sprang from the Soviet occupation of the country in 1944 – 1947. The British Government readily conceded the Soviet Union predominance in Bulgarian affairs, as long as this was not used for anti-British purposes. British involvement in Bulgarian internal developments was reluctant, inconsistent and ineffective. It was problematic because it was contradictory: recognition of the dominant Soviet position did not bring disavowal of the British interest, opposition to the Soviet Union did not rule out practical British acquiescence with Soviet actions, moral support for the Bulgarian anti-Communists found little outward

demonstration. Finally, Britain's predicament in Bulgaria was exemplified in its inability to stand firmly behind a policy of disinterest and detachment.

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