ESSAYS

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THE CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE IN THE STRATEGIC PLANS OF THE SOVIETS (1922–1947)

A HISTORICAL ESSAY

Abstract
This essay presents the political situation in Central & Eastern Europe prior to and during World War II from the point of view of Soviet foreign policy and war plans. One part of this essay is a synthetic reconstruction of scenarios for the Sovietisation of the Central & Eastern European countries occupied by the Red Army in the years 1944–1945.

Keywords: Soviets, foreign policy, Sovietisation, war plans, Central & Eastern Europe

ESSAYS

Introduction

The German historian Andreas Hillgruber, author of the essential monograph *Hitlers Strategie und Kriegsführung 1939–1941*, once expressed the view that

> "the Russian invasion of Central Europe cannot be presented in the spirit of Soviet interpretations as 'a simple reaction to German aggression'. Rather, it was a question of an undeniable 'programme' as far back as autumn 1940, which provided for the 'extension of the Soviet sphere of rule in Europe – after the assumed defeat of Germany in the war in the West – to the centre of the continent, and adopting a position there [for] confrontation with the US and Great Britain.'" (Hillgruber 1990, 56)

Is this position correct? This article is an attempt to reflect on this subject. We are particularly interested in a general presentation of the USSR's policy and strategic plans. Of course, Soviet policy during the Second World War and at the beginning of the Cold War has already been the subject of countless studies, which cannot be even briefly reviewed here. This only outlines a greater problem, as this is a subject for an entire book. There is voluminous literature on the subject concerning every single issue discussed in this. Given that this paper is an essay, only the basic literature will be quoted.

The Fight Against the Versailles-Riga Order

The peace of Versailles left Central & Eastern Europe in a state of political chaos, as it merely regulated the eastern borders of Germany and part of the territorial legacy of Austria-Hungary (Articles 80–87 of the Treaty). The future 'marking' of the Poland's Eastern boundaries was merely mentioned (Poland's frontiers were to be delineated at a later time, according to the disposition of Article 87 of the Treaty). The very existence of Baltic states was not even discussed, although they were already a political reality. The Polish victory on the Vistula in the summer of 1920 saved the entire region, not only Poland, from Bolshevism. The peace of Riga (March 18, 1921) completed the geopolitical order established by post-World War I treaties. A new geopolitical order emerged in the shaping of which Soviet Russia could only acquiesce, but it was erected against

Russia – at least Lenin and his successors thought so. In this way, aversely to Soviets – free Central & Eastern Europe emerged, built on the ruins of the empires, and Poland was the most important of the new nation-states.

The fight against the Versailles order, or rather the Versailles-Riga order, was the overriding goal of Soviet political strategy in the interwar period. Lenin described the Peace of Versailles as "an unheard-of, thieves' peace" (Batowski 1988, 406). The Soviet dictator believed that

> "by destroying the Polish army, we are destroying this peace of Versailles, on which the entire system of current international relations is maintained. If Poland became Soviet, the peace of Versailles would be destroyed and the entire international system, achieved by the victories over Germany, would be destroyed…," and that "the peace of Versailles oppresses hundreds of millions of people"

because it represented the consolidation of capitalism (Andreus [Niezbrzycki] 1945, 34; Lenin, Stalin 1937, 331). The Soviet leader's plan failed in 1920 because the Polish victory (achieved despite the lack of any substantial foreign aid) over the Red Army prevented it, but the Kremlin did not abandon its plans to reverse this course of events.

There can be no doubt that Lenin had been counting on a possible victory for the Communist revolution in Germany. Based on that, on November 11, 1918 he made a formal proposal to the leader of the Independent Social Democratic Party to conclude an alliance between the 'new Germany' and Soviet Russia (Duraczyński 1994, 33). This plan failed, but it is certainly instructive for historians.

One of the Soviet leader's first thoughts after the defeat at Warsaw was that the rise of a new Poland as a large state aspiring to the role of the "third power", at the expense of Russia and Germany, would open up a great and natural opportunity for rapprochement and cooperation between Moscow and Berlin. Both these powers were anti-system powers. Through their alliance, Moscow wanted to reverse the effects of the defeat it had suffered in its war against Poland in the summer of 1920. The Polish state was an important element of the Versailles system, and the structure of the Eastern European order was largely constructed around Poland; that state of affairs was noticed even by the unsympathetic Western politicians (e.g. Italian Prime Minister Francesco Nitti in his book *Europa senza pace*; Nitti 1923).

The criticism of Poland's role in international relations and the Versailles order was most convergent with German views on this subject. As early as the autumn of 1920, Lenin had been thinking about rapprochement with Germany, which did not want to come to terms with the existence of Poland as its neighbour within its Versailles borders (Lenin's hopes for Germany were expressed in September 1920; Lenin 1955, 138). As the Soviet leader said, Russia "can count on Germany, because Germany hates Poland and will be ready to cooperate at any moment to suppress it" (quote from Karski 1992). In September 1920, he decided that

> "the attempts to create Greater Poland are grist to our mill, because as long as Poland makes these claims, Germany will side with us. The stronger Poland is, the more Germany will hate it, and we will be able to exploit this indestructible hatred" (quote from Nowak 1996, 41).

The geopolitical configuration provided by the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo grew out of the efforts to overthrow the Versailles-Riga order. This treaty – like the Treaty of Berlin of April 24, 1926 – laid the foundations for the political cooperation between Germany and the Soviet Union.

There was already an 'eastern orientation' in the policy of Weimar Germany, undoubtedly advocated by both minister Walther Rathenau (signatory to the Rapallo agreements), and the founder and head of the new *Reichswehr*, General Hans von Seeckt, as well as Hugo von Maltzan (an influential figure in the *Auswärtiges Amt*), and the ambassador to Moscow, Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau. This idea arose out of the conviction that in the future collaboration with Russia would allow the Polish state to be removed from the map of Europe and the borders of 1914 to be revived. Von Seeckt even spoke of the "annihilation of Poland", and that "her existence is unbearable" (quote from von Riekhoff 1971, 310; Sobczak 1973, 16, document dated November 11, 1922. For more on Germany's 'negative Polish policy' and the related propaganda narrative of the Weimar era 1919–1933, see my study *Niższość cywilizacyjna wrogiego narodu. Niemieckie dyskursy o Polsce i Polakach 1919–1945* [The civilisational inferiority of a hostile nation. German discourses on Poland and the Poles 1919–1945], Kornat 2020, chapter I). In any case, these statements have long been familiar to historians; they testify to the continuation of German 'negative Polish policy', which Moscow wanted to exploit to the maximum in its own interest (this classic formulation was introduced by Klaus Zernack in his article 'Negative Polenpolitik

als Grundlage deutsch-russischer Diplomatie in der Mächtenpolitik des 18. Jahrhunderts'; Zernack 1974, 144–159).

It should be emphasised that the Soviet ambitions to bring about territorial changes in Central & Eastern Europe did not yield any response from Germany. When the Soviets presented the German side with the concept of reducing Poland to its 'ethnic boundaries' during the military talks of 1928, the German delegation replied that it was not empowered to negotiate such matters (the talks were conducted by General Werner von Blomberg and Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, see Carsten 1962, 217–244. Manfred Zeidler has written extensively on the subject of Soviet-German cooperation: Zeidler 1994). Weimar Germany – disarmed and, under the influence of Stresemann, focused on the cooperation with the Western powers – was unable to bring itself to agree to a partition of Poland, although German society (or at least its political elites) undoubtedly wanted to implement such a scenario.

At its root, the rapprochement with Germany was of much greater importance in the strategic calculation of the Soviet leaders than our observation of the Moscow-Berlin relations alone would suggest. I refer here to the thesis concerning the need for the Communist empire to take advantage of the future conflict between capitalist states. At a secret conference of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) in early 1925, Stalin made this very clear. He stated that

> "if war begins, it will not be for us to sit with our arms folded; we will do better by being the last to act. And we will step forward to throw the decisive load on the scales, a load that could be decisive." (Stalin's speech at the conference of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) in January 1925, Stalin 1951, 320).

In Soviet terms, the rivalry within the 'imperialist camp' was between the 'sated' states (which had no territorial claims to other states and which also had their own colonies) and those seeking to change the borders and the overall balance of power in the world to their advantage. As a result of those tensions, destabilisation of the capitalist system was inevitable; and thus the 'second imperialist war' was bound to take place (this conception can already be found in Lenin's article 'On the slogan of the United States of Europe'; Lenin 1987).

Soviet diplomacy intended to do anything in its power to exploit the contradictions between the capitalist states. Stalin was not convinced of the durability of the Versailles order. In his speech to the 14th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) he asked:

> "[…] What is the guarantee that the peace of Versailles and its continuation, Locarno – which legalise and juridically sanctify Germany's loss of Silesia, the Gdańsk corridor and Gdańsk, Ukraine's loss of Galicia and West Volhynia, Belarus's loss of its western part, Lithuania's loss of Vilnius, etc. – what is the guarantee that this treaty, which has dismembered a number of states and created a number of points of contention, will not share the fate of the former Franco-Prussian treaty, which severed Alsace and Lorraine from France after the Franco-Prussian war? There is no such guarantee and there cannot be one." (Stalin 1950, 271).

The Policy of 'Collective Security'

As is well known, the government of the USSR concluded a series of non-aggression treaties with its European neighbours (with the exception of Romania). These agreements were supplemented by multilateral acts of international law, the conventions of July 3, 1933 on the definition of aggression. The British ambassador to Poland William Erskine wrote that "a right psychological moment to confirm and stabilise this state of things" had arisen in the relations between Poland and the USSR (Report of December 7, 1932 to John Simon, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in London. The National Archives (Kew-London), Foreign Office 371, 16292, N.7257/25/63). In fact, this entire operation, as the previously mentioned agreements, was actually a great tactical manoeuvre by the Soviet government.

In the years 1933-4, there was a shift in Germany's foreign policy under the rule of the National Socialists. This policy broke the 'Rapallo line' in relations between Berlin and Moscow. The global impression that the Kremlin had decided to join the defence of the territorial *status quo* in Europe was unfounded. This belief mistook tactics for strategy, which are two very different things.

The tactic of fighting for 'collective security' in Europe became the response to the anti-Soviet turn in Germany's foreign policy. This is how the cooperation between the USSR and France was born, which was expressed as a large political project in the Eastern Pact (1934–1935). A defensive bloc embracing the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic states (including Finland) would have been created. However, the negotiations collapsed as a result of the opposition in Poland (Kamiński, Zacharias 1998, 151; detailed view: Zacharias 1981).

The idea of cooperation (or even alliance) with the Western powers against Germany was intended to lead the Soviet Union out of its

hitherto unsatisfactory international situation. However, Robert C. Tucker, a well-known American historian (and the author of an important article *The Emergence of Stalin's Foreign Policy*), was proved right when he wrote ironically:

> "Stalinist diplomacy did try to build a system of collective security in Europe. Stalin confidently sought to create a strong political and military anti-German coalition based on England and France. However, he did not want the Soviet Union to be a member of this coalition when war broke out." (quoted from Conquest 1996; see Tucker 1977, 585–589).

There was, however, a specific intention behind the concept of 'collective security'. The Eastern Pact project – had it been implemented – would have opened up a prospect for the Central and Eastern European countries of gradually becoming dependent on the USSR. It is impossible to imagine that such a bloc of states might exist without Poland granting the Red Army the right to march through its territory. To accept this would mean the loss of sovereignty in time of peace; and in wartime, it would mean suicide, committed by the government that agreed to it (thus was sealed the fate of the Baltic states, which, in October 1939, agreed to host Soviet bases on their territories).

There were debates as to whether Polish diplomacy was right to bury the draft of the Eastern Pact. The answer is that it was done not out of any unrealistic ideas about the role of the Polish state in Europe at that time, but rather due to its sensitive geographic location. Suffice it to say that Poland prevented the peaceful entry of the Soviets into Central & Eastern Europe in the years 1934–1935. It should be stressed that the Polish foreign minister Józef Beck could clearly see the real intentions of Moscow, as demonstrated by the instruction he gave in June 1935 to Roman Dębicki, the Polish envoy in Belgrade:

> "With regard to Soviet Russia, it was Poland which was first among the bourgeois states to create a *modus vivendi* with them, and which is determined to maintain it. Nevertheless, we claim that the most dangerous thing is to create a sphere of influence. If Soviet Russia wants to inherit France's sphere of influence, that is equally dangerous." (Józef Piłsudski Institute in America, New York, Roman Dębicki's Collection, ref. no. 40/2. The instructions were to be used during talks between the Polish diplomat and the Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović).

In Central and Eastern Europe, Soviets did manage, through informal politics, to win over two states that they wished to use for their own interests, namely, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia, but they cannot be viewed as mere subordinates (Pfaff 1990, 548–576).

The policy of 'collective security' should be considered as no more than an empty slogan. However, at the time it met the needs of European public opinion. It also gave the Soviet state a false image of a spokesman for peace.

It is by all means worth emphasising that while concluding a mutual aid pact with France in May 1935, Soviet diplomacy made a parallel offer to Germany to improve their relations. It was a draft of a non-aggression treaty proposed by Foreign Affairs Commissar Litvinov (*Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik* 1975, 138. A telegram from the Reich's Ambassador in Moscow von der Schulenburg to the Auswärtiges Amt of May 8, 1935, following a conversation with Litvinov on that day). This initiative was complemented by the concept of mutual arrangements regarding the Baltic states. There was no mention of Poland, since Moscow was aware that good relationships between Warsaw and Berlin persisted. Germans did not reply to the Soviet proposal. However, it seems to have been a portent of the Soviet concepts of 1939 which resulted in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.

In the reality of the Polish-German conflict, which revealed itself fully in the spring of 1939, the USSR's position in international relations rose sharply. This brought the prospect of war in Europe. In particular, the British guarantees for Poland proved favourable for the Soviets. The British historian E.H. Carr believed that the English guarantee practically ended the isolation of the USSR and gave Stalin an excellent bargaining position:

> "It was long hoped to draw Soviet Russia into a system of mutual guarantees against aggression. […] In the first place, having already guaranteed Poland, the British Government had in effect guaranteed Soviet Russia, whose territory was effectively screened by Poland against any attack from Germany. The Soviet authorities may therefore have felt that they had now little to gain by entering into a specific commitment with Britain; and they professed to be somewhat nettled that Britain should have given a guarantee to Poland without first approaching the Soviet Government" (Carr 1939, 185–186).

Adam B. Ulam, a Polish-American Sovietologist, the author of an important synthesis of the USSR's foreign policy entitled *Expansion*

and coexistence. The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-67, wrote that:

> "It is not too much to say that the British declaration of March 31 made possible the whole train of events leading to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939, and thus was indirectly responsible for the most momentous development of Soviet foreign policy since Brest-Litovsk. On its face, the British government's pledge guaranteed Poland; in fact, *its timing and circumstances* provided a guarantee to the USSR and doomed the Polish state" (Ulam 1968, 267; affirmative comments by Wandycz 1988, 101–118).

In 1939, the Soviet Union was in an exceptionally favourable international position. The Western powers wanted it to fight against Germany, and the latter wanted to ensure its nonalignment, or its cooperation against Poland, in the coming war.

Parallel Negotiations with the Western Powers and Germany (1939)

It should be stated clearly that on the eve of World War II the Soviet Union was conducting parallel negotiations with both the Western powers and Germany. Evidently, Stalin must have planned in advance an agreement with Germany. Such an agreement was indeed concluded, and it was Hitler who "let the Bolsheviks invade the West", inviting them to the Poland's partition, since such an opportunity was blocked for the Soviets, mainly by Poland itself and its equilibrium policy (the statement "Hitler let the Bolsheviks invade the West" comes from a German historian Golo Mann, see Mann 2007, 499).

In its political and military talks with the governments of Great Britain and France, the Soviets put forward demands for defining 'indirect aggression' against third countries in Central & Eastern Europe, and then for allowing its troops to march through Poland and Romania. The implementation of these concepts gave the Soviets control over the Baltic states, Poland and Romania. At the same time, Soviet diplomats continued the efforts to improve relations with Germany, which turned into talks on defining and delimiting the zones of the two powers' interests.

Neither the theory of indirect aggression nor the demand to allow the Red Army march through Poland and Romania brought

about an agreement. The Western powers were unable to meet these expectations. Only later did Władysław Studnicki's thesis that the Western powers would repay the Soviets with Eastern Europe for their help in the war against Germany, come true.

The Hitler-Stalin Pact, which established the *de facto* tactical alliance between the USSR and Nazi Germany, was the result of activities rooted in Bolshevik political thought starting in the autumn of 1920. This 'reversal of the covenants' was not understood in general. Even those who learned about the secret protocol of the Pact at the end of August 1939 did not understand it properly. The reason for this was as follows: the anti-Communist and anti-Soviet attitude of the leader of the Third Reich, on the one hand, and the Soviet anti-fascist attitude, on the other, had been so strongly manifested to the world that they stuck in the collective memory. As Gerhard Weinberg put it, Stalin was willing to help Germany in the fight against the Western powers, bearing in mind the long-term process of building up Soviet power in a world shaken by the war between the capitalist powers. From Hitler's point of view, in the reality of 1939, what counted was getting all the help he could in order to win the war with the West as soon as possible; however, no matter how important and difficult he considered it to be, he only regarded it as an introduction to unlimited territorial expansion in the East:

> "This [Hitler's lack of interest in agreement in USSR] would now change as there was interest on both sides: Stalin to stay out of a European war, strengthen the Soviet Union, and deal with Japan's expansionist policies in East Asia; Hitler to remove the possibility of an alignment of the Soviet Union with the Western Powers and to isolate Poland, which, unlike Czechoslovakia, had a very long border indeed with Russia" (Weinberg 1980, 568).

The Soviet dictator's utterance addressed to Dimitrov, the head of the Communist International, on September 7, 1939, is of crucial importance as it expresses an opinion that the collapse of the Polish state was a desirable eventuality that that would open up new opportunities for the expansion of the 'socialist system' in Europe (Dimitrov 2005, 340). "We have nothing against them [the capitalist states] fighting each other and weakening each other," argued the Soviet leader. In his statement, delivered just four days after the Western powers declared war against the Third Reich, there was the conviction that

> "it would be good if Germany's hands were to shake the position of the richer capitalist states (especially England). Not comprehending this,

> Hitler, contrary to his intentions, is undermining and weakening the capitalist system." (Narinskiy 1996, 179–180).

The Soviet dictator was very clear about Poland:

> "The annihilation of this state under favourable circumstances would mean one less bourgeois-fascist country. What would be so wrong if, as a result of the defeat of Poland, we spread the socialist system to a new territory and population?" (Dimitrov 2005, 341).

No other statement of the Soviet dictator, attested in the sources, is as direct and instructive as that one. It should be added that, the Dimitrov's *Diaries* is not a secondary source, or a memoir, but a collection of current notes. Several conclusions may be drawn from the abovementioned quote:

(1) Stalin saw Germany as a causative power of disintegration and ruin of the world's capitalist system,

(2) he expected a prolonged and devastating conflict between the capitalist powers,

(3) he assumed that Hitler did not understood that he works for the Soviet Union against his own interests,

(4) he opted for a subsequent destruction of Poland as an exceedingly desirable historical event.

The narratives perpetuated by some historians – even today, after so many years – that Moscow negotiations were supposedly a lost chance, through Poland's fault, to create a 'Great Coalition' against Hitler before World War II was unleashed, have no real basis whatsoever.

Undoubtedly, in the summer of 1939, Stalin calculated that if, as a result of the international crisis, a war broke out between Germany and the Western democracies, then after an inevitable exhaustion of both warring parties, the USSR would gain solid foundations to its international advantage.

Upon receiving Eden, the British foreign minister, in December 1941, Stalin stated unequivocally that it was the interwar balance of power that had made the Soviet-British agreement impossible: Britain wanted to defend this balance, and the Soviet Union wanted to overthrow it (a statement from July 1940 – see *Dokumenty* 1995, 394–399, doc. no. 240).

The British historian Richard Overy wrote that Hitler wanted to take over Poland in order to establish his "Central European empire" and thus gain space for an imminent confrontation with Stalinist Soviet

Union (Overy 2009, 152). While this statement is correct, it is necessary to add that, by analogy, Stalin was trying to prepare a strategic space for himself to appear in World War II as the 'third force'.

The Soviets' desire to destroy the Versailles order – now documented beyond any doubt – has been demonstrated. No revisionist Western historiography will be able to refute this, as the sources themselves speak eloquently enough. Of course, for political reasons, contemporary Russian historiography firmly defends the legitimacy of Soviet foreign policy, and interprets the agreement with Germany as purely defensive and having been forced upon it.

In 1939, the Versailles order was destroyed by an alliance of two partitioning totalitarian powers. The Soviet Union fully and triumphantly returned to the stage of history as a great power, Alan Taylor wrote (Taylor 1961). It achieved the expansion of its borders by moving west.

Wartime Plans

Richard Overy correctly stated that after the invasion of Poland, Germany faced a rapidly arming colossus in the east – whose Communist leaders were not willing to give anyone else a free hand (Overy 2009, 153). Indeed, the Soviet strategy during World War II was offensive *par excellence*. Three main phases can be distinguished therein:

(1) from September 1939 to June 1941, that is, during the operation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as the partitioning agreement between the two totalitarian powers;

(2) from the German invasion to the Soviet victory at Stalingrad (February 1943);

(3) from Stalingrad to Potsdam (February 1943 to July/August 1945).

(1) In the first phase, the Soviet policy aimed to capture all the territories promised to the government of the USSR in the secret protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In this way, Moscow wanted to 'consummate' the pact. It failed in one case, that is, Finland which managed to defend itself in the difficult winter of 1939-40 and achieved a compromise peace. The fact that Soviets seized not only Bessarabia but also northern Bukovina in their ultimatum to Romania demonstrates that they did not adhere scrupulously to the content of the secret protocol of August 23, 1939. (see Dębski 2003; McSherry

1968; see also the following Russian expositions: *Voyna i politika* 1999; *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya* 1990, 38–52).

The talks between Molotov (the head of the government) and Hitler, and Ribbentrop in November 1940 in Berlin show unequivocally that the Soviet Union had European ambitions, which were defined very clearly. The USSR's strategic orientation was turned towards the West. Hitler and Ribbentrop's offer to the Soviet Union to join the Pact of Three and expand towards British India, to leave the management of Europe to Germany, clashed with completely different concepts formulated in the Kremlin. It was well known that the Soviet status as the world power depends on the state's active presence on the European continent.

The deterioration of German-Soviet relations in the spring of 1941 is linked (as is well known) to the discussion concerning the military intentions of the Soviet Union on the eve of the outbreak of the war with the German Reich. This debate remains open, even though it has recently gone quiet. Since it is not possible to bring this matter up right now, let us only make two observations. First, one of the arguments for the thesis that Operation Barbarossa was indeed not a preventive action is the lack of any traces thereof in General Franz Halder's meticulously kept *Kriegstagebuch* (Halder 1971, Halder 1973, Halder 1974). Second, one cannot claim that Soviets did not plan the offensive war in light of the fact that General Kirill Meretskov prepared such a plan already at the end of 1940.

It is obvious that Hitler explained all his acts of aggression as preventative moves, or as having been forced by the need to respond to attacks by his enemies. It is also true, however, that Moscow conducted staff studies on the possibility of launching a preventive strike against Germany, which was expressed (but not accepted) in a memorandum by Marshal Zhukov from May 1941. This blow was supposed to strike while German army was concentrating its troops in the USSR's Western frontiers.

Both sides reasoned in terms of a preventive strike; both sides strove to strategically anticipate the enemy's moves; both sides wanted to destroy the main forces of the enemy in advance.

(2) As for the Soviet plans for the post-war future in the period between the invasion of Germany and the victory at Stalingrad – it is difficult to say what they were. This was a period of many unknowns. The breakthrough repulsion of the Wehrmacht's offensive against

Tehran Conference – Joseph Stalin, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at the Russian Embassy in Tehran, November 28 – December 1, 1943. US Signal Corps photo. Library of Congress, Digital ID cph 3a33351

Moscow (December 1941) stopped the Blitzkrieg, but did not in itself determine the fate of the war.

One thing is certain, though. At that time, the Soviet leadership made certain concessions with regard to the Polish cause. One should mention here the official cancellation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 and the Pact on Friendship and Borders of September 1939; the recognition of the government of the Republic of Poland in exile; the release of prisoners and prisoners of war, and the consent to the formation of the Polish army in the USSR, which took place as a result of the Sikorski-Maysky pact of July 30, 1941.

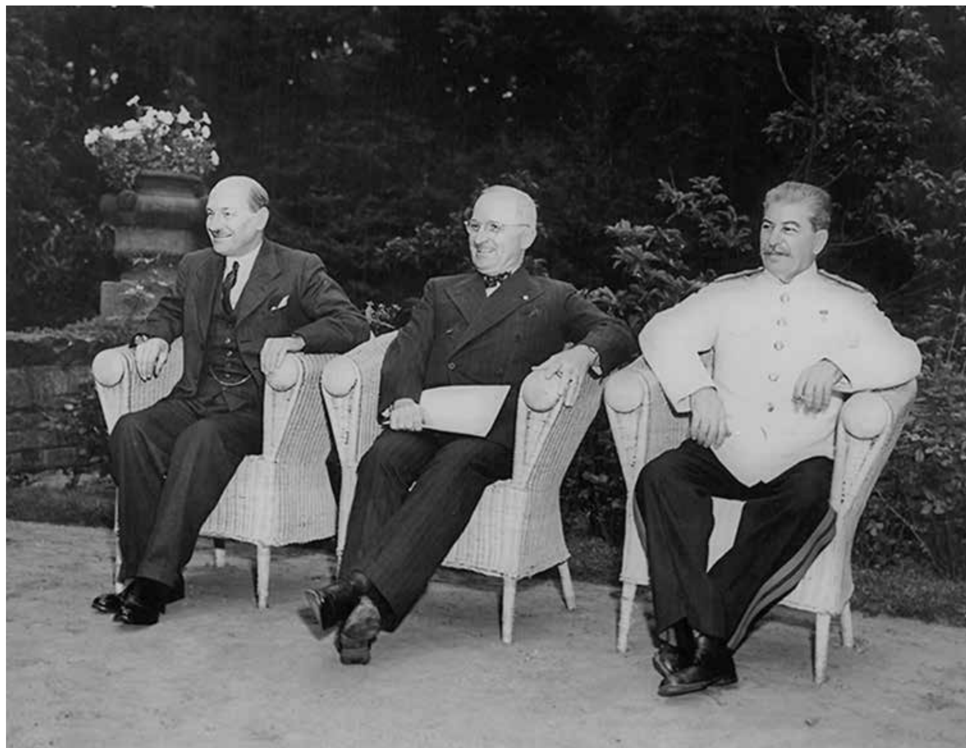
(3) After the victory at Stalingrad, the Soviet concept of an offensive entry into Central and Eastern Europe crystallized. By then it was certain that Germany would not win the Second World War. Their dominance in the Intermarium area would be discontinued. The Soviets wanted to prevent the rebuilding of independent nation-states in this zone, and instead create a system of states there which would be dependent on Moscow.

Crimean Conference – British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin at the palace in Yalta, February 1945. US Signal Corps photo. Library of Congress, Digital ID cph 3a10098

It is not particularly original to talk about the importance of the Teheran Conference (November/December 1943) for creating the conditions for the establishment of Soviet domination in Central and Eastern Europe. The concept of opening a second front in the Balkans (silently abandoned during the 1943 Quebec conference) had failed. It was then foregone decided that the Red Army would enter Central and Eastern Europe without facing any competing force.

The Soviet policy was invariably based on the concept of spheres of influence. The motivation behind this tactic in relation to Poland, as the most important state in Central and Eastern Europe, was simple: the Soviet Union needed a Poland with a 'friendly government'.

As for the territorial shape of the future Poland from the Soviet perspective, not much can be said. However, we have a document of special importance that Ivan Maysky (the former ambassador to London) prepared as chairman of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs committee for the study of future peace conditions. The Maysky memorandum from the end of 1943, i.e. the time of the Tehran conference, contains a draft of the concept of a smaller Poland, without



Potsdam Conference – British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, President Harry Truman, and Joseph Stalin, August 1, 1945. US Signal Corps photo. Library of Congress, Digital ID cph 3a14367

the Eastern lands stolen from the state as a result of the 17 September 1939 aggression, but without any territorial compensation in the west at the expense of Germany (Werblan 1997, 133–152).

The Polish eastern border on the so-called Curzon Line was established in Tehran, an agreement that was concealed from the Polish government. If we accept that the Maysky memorandum expressed more than just his own views, it is certain that the Soviet tactics concerning the Polish state's western border was its direct outcome.

The 1945 Potsdam Agreement established a temporary demarcation between Poland and Germany (understood as a territorial whole). US President Harry Truman recalled:

> "I said it had been decided at Yalta that Germany would be occupied by the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States, and France, and that the Polish frontiers would be favorably considered by the four governments but that final settlement of the frontiers would be effected at the peace conference." (Truman 1955, 404; Polish translation of the quoted passage cited by Zabiełło 1958, 536).

However, contrary to Truman's words, there was no compromise in Potsdam. The border of Poland was decided by Stalin using the method of establishing facts on the ground.

There is no doubt that after Tehran the Soviets wanted, first of all, to bring to fruition the options which were projected in the agreements reached there (see David M. Glantz 2006, referring to the failed Chișinău-Iași operation).

The famous agreement with Stalin on the spheres of influence in the Intermarium, which he concluded with the Prime Minister Churchill in October 1944 in Moscow, remains a document of little relevance – the only exception being Greece.

Naturally, the Western powers did not give the Soviet dictator a carte blanche to Sovietise the peoples of the Intermarium. First of all, they consented to the 'liberation' of these nations by the Red Army; however, such a 'liberation' would have been an enslavement. This US line of policy (with which Great Britain aligned) was determined by the idea of a permanent US-Soviet alliance, which seemed logical, convincing, and justified to President Roosevelt – and to which there was no strategic alternative.

Scenarios of Sovietisation

The Sovietisation of the Intermarium nations was carried out in several stages. It happened in two ways:

(1) by rigging elections (in Poland) and

(2) by taking over the law enforcement institutions and breaking up the non-Communist political parties.

A specific model for the general establishment of the Soviet domination in the Intermarium area may thus be formulated (I do not share Anne Applebaum's point of view which puts emphasis on the differences the implementation of the Communist system in the individual countries over which the Soviet Union extended its control, see Applebaum 2012, Applebaum-Sikorska 2013). Rather, I would distinguish the following stages, all of which were undoubtedly carried out with premeditation:

(1) In each country, the establishment, but also the camouflage, of a Communist party.

(2) The establishment of a National Front.

(3) The announcement of a compromise, reformist programme.

(4) The establishment, at all costs, of an interim coalition government on the territory of each liberated country.

(5) Holding general elections and forming a coalition with non-Communist parties.

(6) Establishing a formally multi-party government, with Communists, crypto-Communists or persons affiliated with their agents taking the 'power' ministries (internal affairs, security, military, justice).

(7) The removal of non-Communist parties from the coalition government, and a physical crackdown on the coalition partners using special measures.

(8) Moscow-controlled 'unification' of the forces of the 'workers' movement', and the re-centralisation of the direction of the Communist parties under Moscow's leadership.

(9) The crackdown on 'nationalist deviations' within the Communist parties under the banner of its purification.

(10) Intensive Sovietisation of the country – in the fields of social life, the economy, culture, etc.

Item (1).

The creation and disguise of the Communist party in such a way that the term 'Communism' was not used in the name was implemented to win over some people in each country. This was supposed to diffuse tension arising in the societies of Central and Eastern Europe from the fear of Communism. A forceful introduction of patriotic slogans which were slandered by the Communist propaganda from Moscow in the interwar period – was intended to win over the local society. With these methods it was most convenient to speak of the need to fight for liberation and to call for the consolidation of all patriotic forces. As for their names (as we know), in Poland the Communist group was called the Polish Workers' Party, but in Romania a much more emphatic name was used, that is – the Party of Peace. In Bulgaria, however, it was not necessary to use a different name as the Communist party had functioned there under the 'Workers' name since 1919.

The dissolution of the Comintern in Moscow in May 1943 was one element of this tactic. The camouflage tactics were not needed in Czechoslovakia; apart from Yugoslavia, it was the only country in which the Communist movement had a certain degree of public support.

Item (2).

The concept of the 'National Fronts' was the only 'public relations' way to overcome the marginalisation of the Communist party as an extreme group which the societies of Central and Eastern Europe suspected of working for Moscow. The creation of a formation such as the National Front, i.e. a coalition of all the political forces in

favour of fighting against Germany, gave the Communist party an enormous boost of joining the main groups fighting for liberation from German rule.

By way of example, let us note that the National Front in Hungary, i.e. the Hungarian Front, was established in June 1944. It appealed to the nation by way of patriotism and the fight for liberation (Tomaszewski 1992, 20). In Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Workers' Party managed to win over the Bulgarian People's Peasants' Union and the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Workers' Party for the idea of the Patriotic Front, which was followed by the appearance of a declaration on July 17, 1942.

Item (3).

The National Front was intended to offer the public a compromise, reformist programme to dispel all suspicions that Communism was being institutionalized. The idea was to conceal all traces of the notion that the ultimate goal was the Sovietisation of the country.

The Communists who led the front declared themselves to be a democratic party that did not want any more power other than that granted by the citizens in the ballot box. They announced that a coalition government would be formed after the liberation.

The Košice programme for Czechoslovakia, announced on April 5, 1945, declared that the property of Germans, Hungarians and traitors to the nation be nationalized. Overall, it announced land reforms. The political system was supposed to be pluralistic. "No country in Central and Eastern Europe has had such an opportunity" (Tomaszewski 1992, 31; a quotation from the statements of Prokop Drtina, a Czech politician, associate and confidant of Edvard Beneš). The anti-fascist forces agreed in full, although the formation of new parties was forbidden.

The Szeged programme presented for Hungary on November 30, 1944 was equally moderate. Limited land reform (confiscating the estates of the nation's traitors and war criminals) and limited nationalisation (of the large banks, mines and power plants) were declared. The promises also extended to social benefits and a general plan for rebuilding the country. All these solutions were compatible with the principles of parliamentary democracy.

The policy of the National Front was always carried out with the help of democratic phraseology. The idea of national unity was of central importance. There were declarations of respect for political pluralism. Above all, gradual reforms were promised.

Item (4).

It was essential to establish a provisional government, although not necessarily in the capital, and as soon as Germany withdrew from some part of the national territory, at least. A non-Communist, or at the very least someone who was not associated with the Communist movement, was put up for the position of prime minister. This could be someone with no political background or former activity whatsoever, but all that matters is that they fulfilled the short-term task of running the cabinet as a figurehead. Only one thing mattered – that such a person be entirely dependent on the Communists.

In individual states which the Soviets took over, various puppets with no real importance came to light, introduced only to simulate the non-communist character of the transitional government. In Romania, the figurehead was Petru Groza, an industrialist from Transylvania; in Poland, Edward Osóbka-Morawski, effectively a nobody (apparently, the same can be said about Bolesław Bierut; however, the latter was, in fact, a Stalin-appointed Soviet governor in Warsaw).

In some countries it was necessary to arbitrarily set up an institution imitating parliament, such as the Country National Council (*Krajowa Rada Narodowa*) in Poland. In other countries, there was no such need. For instance, in Czechoslovakia, President Beneš, who returned to Prague from exile (incidentally, the only head of a government in exile to do so), was appointed the lawmaker (until the regular authorities were formed).

Item (5).

It was not an option to allow the party with the greatest public support (as expressed by popular vote) to form the government. Moscow could not allow this, even if the victorious non-Communist party would then invite the Communists to participate in the government. Holding the general elections was supposed to lead to only a slight regrouping of the balance of power from the provisional government. This meant a formal maintenance of the coalition of Communists with non-Communist parties – of course, just for a while.

Item (6).

The elections were followed by a formal creation of a multi-party government, but the price for this was that the 'power control' ministries should go to the Communists (or crypto-Communists), or to individuals affiliated with the Communists. These included the

ministries of internal affairs, security, the army, and justice. (In Poland and Czechoslovakia, 'non-aligned' soldiers headed the armies.) They offered the option of their extraordinary, special use against partners from the government coalition, at the right moment, of course. This gave the Communists – who were slim, or at least in minority in each country – a chance to gain full and unlimited power without resorting to electoral procedures, or even without having to rig elections at all.

Item (7).

A special operation, in two stages: striking at their partners in the coalition government, and physically cracking down on the coalition partners using special measures. The models for this kind of operation were Hungary and Czechoslovakia in February 1948 (the so-called Prague *coup d'état*, 'Victorious February'). The Prague coup has shown that to gain the absolute power the Communists needed to take over the 'power control' ministries and use their competences accordingly, without the need to rig the elections.

Item (8).

The operation to unite the 'workers' movements' in the captured countries and the re-centralisation of managing the Communist parties under Moscow's leadership were, of course, the tasks of great importance for the Soviets. (The dissolution of the Comintern in May 1943 was a typical action just for show.) To this end, a well-known conference was convened in Szklarska Poręba in September 1947, which established the Information Bureau of the Communist Parties (Cominform) based in Moscow. The model of the Comintern's governance over Communist parties was restored.

Item (9).

A controlled crackdown on the 'nationalist deviations' within the Communist party of each country under Soviet control was carried out. The idea was to eliminate those Communists who would be able to provide an alternative in the struggle for power against those who had a mandate from Moscow.

Item (10).

The intensive Sovietisation of the countries under Moscow's control, in the fields of social life, economy, culture, etc., followed. In Poland, the symbol of this process was the nomination of Marshal Rokossovsky as commander-in-chief of the army at the beginning of 1949.

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The programme of this multi-stage policy aimed to unify the outer provinces of the Soviet empire. This, of course, took time.

A typical satellite state of the Communist type met the essential features of a colonial organism exploited by the metropolis (referred here is the period 1948–1956). The study of law and politics by Polish thinkers in exile created two concepts of defining what such a state is. Tytus Komarnicki, a lawyer and diplomat, introduced the concept of a *satellite state*; in brief, this is a state organism established and organized as a result of external interference. Adam Pragier, a socialist politician, proposed the term 'indirect occupation' (see the letter from Adam Pragier to Prof. Krystyna Marek, *Wiadomości* (London), July 26, 1970). Both suggestions are useful.

The satellite state or the state organism created as a result of indirect occupation has several typical, institutional solutions which confirm its special character. Here, we should mention institutions, such as (1) Soviet advisers in central offices; (2) control of the armed forces by exercising of the supreme command at the hands of Soviet officers; (3) the functioning of security services based on close dependence on the Soviets.

Clearly, a satellite state of the Communist type has a certain amount of internal autonomy. The official language of the nation which is the nominal ruler of the country is maintained, but the culture is to be 'national' only 'in form', while being 'socialist in content'.

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As we can see, the model of Sovietisation outlined here raises questions about the Polish case as something that was, in fact, quite separate, although the final goal, i.e. Sovietisation, was also planned for Poland, and it brought "a defeat of all political concepts and all ways of fight against the uncompromising Soviet domination", as Professor Krystyna Kersten put it (Kersten 1986, 358). Therefore, we will devote a few remarks to the similarities and differences involved in the Polish way of Sovietisation.

It is appropriate to begin with the statement that various 1944–1945 declarations setting out the paths for Sovietisation in the individual states – those of Szeged, Košice and Lublin – were basically similar in regard to their form. They promised specific system and social reform packages compatible with parliamentary democracy, without

introducing the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which was supposedly the most democratic dictatorship in history, as Lenin said.

In Poland, the idea of the National Front failed after two unsuccessful attempts to introduce it. Apart from the Polish Workers' Party, the Country People's Council (*Krajowa Rada Narodowa*), established on the night of December 31, 1943, included only small left-wing groups of no political significance. As is well known, the negotiations between the underground leadership of the Polish Workers' Party and the Government Delegation for Poland, held at the start of 1943, broke down and did not yield any results. Nor did Stanisław Mikołajczyk's joining of the so-called Government of National Unity as leader of the agrarian Polish People's Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL), lead to the creation of a National Front; the talks they held in February 1946 did not bring any agreement. The Communists 'generously' offered the peasants' party 25 percent of all the seats in the Sejm, but Mikołajczyk did not accept the offer, in order so as not to deprive Poles of the right to competitive elections. As Jerzy Holzer pointed out, terror and repressions launched by Communists in Poland had initially the widest range in all of the Soviet-controlled states (Holzer 2012, 81).

What the Communists in Poland called the Democratic Bloc – which 'won' 80 percent of the votes in the rigged elections in January 1947 – was not a coalition of the main parties of the wartime Underground Poland, but rather of fictitiously installed crypto-Communist leaderships imposed on political groups which before 1944 had had absolutely nothing in common with the Communist movement: the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, PPS), and the People's Party (*Stronnictwo Ludowe*).

It must be said that in Poland, the elections were postponed until January 1947 but then brutally rigged, in a manner unparalleled to any other Soviet-controlled Intermarium countries. This falsification drastically altered the actual electoral preferences, and was not simply a 'correction' of the real voting results.

"[…] resignation from holding free and unfettered elections in Poland, which was a part of the Yalta conference agreement, might not lead to acceptance of the breach of the spirit and letter of Yalta"

– as Krystyna Kersten pointed out, which is impossible to agree with (Kersten 1989, 233), for – after the forged elections – the Anglo-Saxon powers as the counterparts of Yalta agreements lost any influence on the course of events in Poland.

The repressions against those Communists in Poland who were dealt with in the course of the fight against 'right-wing nationalist

deviation' were not as bloody as those in other Soviet-subjugated countries. Gomułka, the PPR's leader, despite being ousted from the party leadership, was not subjected to a show trial, he was also not "prepared" to such show trial with tortures – as it was the norm in the investigations against almost all of eliminated from the ruling elites communist leaders in the Soviet-controlled states. It would be a historical lie not to mention this. Of course, the process of Sovietising Poland did take place; However, certain important enclaves were left intact while it did. It is essential here – without any pretence to originality – to mention the Catholic Church, whose hierarchy retained relative independence. The very existence of the Church made it impossible to fully totalitarianise the country, as it inevitably meant that two worldviews could exist legally: the Communist and the Catholic. Private farming, covering about 75% of the total agricultural population, survived. The Stalinist period (1948–1956) was too short to lead to the full Sovietisation of science and culture.

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Among the states of the Intermarium, three did not experience the 'benefits of Leninism' (as formulated by Alfred Erich Senn; Senn 1959, 220): Finland, Greece, and Yugoslavia.

First, we must turn to Finland. As we know, the country was not 'Finlandised' as a result of the Winter War (1939–1940), even though the conclusion of the Hitler-Stalin pact had included the country in the Soviet sphere of interests. The Moscow Treaty of March 12, 1940, forced the cession of some of its territories, but Finland remained independent. The Soviet idea for a so-called Democratic Republic of Finland, to be headed by the Comintern activist Kuusinen, was postponed *ad acta*.

After the Third Reich invaded the USSR on June 22, 1941, Finland declared war on the Soviets in order to recover the territories it had lost to Moscow's peace. In the face of the Soviet army's initial defeat on the Eastern Front, the Finnish-Soviet war, called in the historiography a 'Continuation War', resumed. In the Tali-Ihantala battle fought at the turn of June and July 1944, the Finnish forces managed to inflict on Soviet troops significant losses, which must have impacted the subsequent exceptional Soviet moderation in the interference in the country's internal affairs, which was absolutely crucial. Finland returned to its 1940 borders; the country also broke with the Third Reich and the internment of German soldiers followed.

The Finnish-Soviet pact on friendship and mutual aid, forced on Helsinki by Moscow, and concluded on April 6, 1948, made Finland a *de facto* ally of the Soviets, but did not make the country dependent on Moscow. Then followed the phenomenon of 'Finlandisation'– as defined by Walter Laqueur – which later became the dream of the Polish democratic opposition in the 1970s (Laqueur 1979).

Greece survived. Its Sovietisation turned out to be impossible. The Churchill-Stalin agreement on 'influence' of October 1944 kept the country under British control. The Communists took up the armed struggle. The coalition of political groups which had been fighting for liberation was broken up. There was a civil war; the British intervened. The Soviet side did not give significant help to the Greek Communists. Thus, in this case, the deal to share influence worked.

Yugoslavia was emancipated from Soviet domination. The Communist order introduced by Tito even anticipated what Moscow dictated. In spring 1948, Tito broke with Stalin. Titoism went on a separate path from Communism and adopted an anti-Soviet face (Ulam 2014; see also the study by Michał J. Zacharias, Zacharias 2004). In this way, the fate of Yugoslavia became separate. It retained the Communist regime, but gained considerable independence and, for example, participated in the movement of non-aligned states.

Austria followed yet another path. As is known, the Moscow Conference (of the allied powers' foreign ministers in October 1943) adopted a decision to reconstruct this state as Hitler's 'first victim'. However, the country was divided into zones of occupation, on analogy to Germany. The Soviet troops occupied also their sector of divided Vienna. The neutralisation of Austria – by the provisions of the state treaty of May 15, 1955 – remains an exceptional phenomenon. It came about for one particular reason; Moscow wanted to apply the variant of perpetual neutralisation in order to test the solution which it proposed to apply to Germany. Stalin's note of March 10, 1952, to the governments of Western powers, offering perpetual neutralisation of Germany is worth mentioning in this context (this was the dictator's last major move on the international arena) (see Ruggenthaler 2009, 269–304).

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There were three major opportunities for the Soviet expansion in Central and Eastern Europe after the establishment of the Communist regime in Russia:

Option 1: Rendering the other states dependent in conditions of peace with diplomatic means at least at the beginning of the struggle for the Central and Eastern Europe. The Eastern Pact was the peculiar test-case to this idea. Within the (in i essence Franco-Soviet) formula of collective security, the Soviet Union assumed the role of the main guarantor of order in Eastern Europe. The road to Moscow subjugating the Baltic states, Czechoslovakia – and Poland – would be open. Let us add that Poland remained the key to the Soviet domination in the region.

Option 2: Taking control of a part of Central & Eastern Europe in conditions of war, on the basis of a negotiated 'zone of interest' with either Germany or the Western powers (France and Great Britain). Soviet diplomacy tested this solution in the summer of 1939 in parallel secret negotiations with the Western powers and the Third Reich. By formulating the theory of 'indirect aggression' against the Baltic states, and then demanding the right to march the Red Army through Poland and Romania, Moscow wanted to obtain the right to move its troops into these states even before the war began. In talks with Germany, first, Soviet diplomacy postulated a general improvement in mutual relations, and then demanded a 'political base' for the trade treaty which was the subject of the negotiations; in the end, it devised the concept of the secret protocol to divide the area into 'spheres of interest'.

Option 3: Conquering Central and Eastern Europe in tactical alliance with the Western powers under conditions of war between the coalition and Germany. In this constellation, the mastery of the region was to be negotiated with the Western powers and tacitly understood by them as a kind of 'payment' for contributing to the common victory.

The first plan failed entirely. The second plan brought about some results, though on a short-term scale. Plan three was successful.

The Communists gained power in two ways:

(1) by breaking up the partner parties (non-Communist but coalition) with the help of a special operation;

(2) by rigging elections and announcing 'victory' for the Communist party and its allies.

Generally, there are three Sovietological theories pertaining to the behaviour of the Soviet state towards Central and Eastern Europe:

(1) Soviet policy is sometimes explained in terms of having been dictated by the security terms of the USSR – as understood by Stalin. There was, however, no plan for Sovietisation; that would have arisen as a pre-emptive. The installation of the Communist-type

regimes – if it was to be done – resulted from the refusal of the local non-Communist political forces to cooperate with the USSR.

(2) The Sovietisation of the Intermarium countries was forced by the Cold War, which was launched by the West (and more precisely by the US). The Soviets felt threatened – and their policy was a reaction to Washington's moves. They decided to respond by subjugating the countries that, after all, had been liberated from the 'Nazis' by the Red Army.

(3) There existed a well-thought-out strategy – from the very beginning – of expanding into and Sovietising the peoples of the Intermarium. The Anglo-Saxon powers after Yalta effectively lost their real influence on the plight of these nations, to which Churchill first referred when he made his famous speech on the Iron Curtain.

I strongly support the latter concept. We consider the theories summarised in points 1 and 2 to be completely unfounded; they appear to be nothing more than a caricature of historiography.

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The various approaches to the question of how Soviet domination was established in Intermarium Europe abound with ideas that fail to convince us. I am not arguing with the ideas and thoughts of Russian historians, or those who profess a pro-Soviet orientation in their dispute over the genesis of the Cold War. I am referring here to those interpretations which are free from such inclinations. In his book about Hitler and Stalin, Alan Bullock wrote that

> "with Germany's defeat and Hitler's death, the Grand Alliance of 1941-5 had achieved its purpose. After all its shortcomings have been acknowledged, to have combined sufficiently to accomplish that much and win a decisive victory in the greatest of all wars was enough to make it one of the most successful in history." (Bullock 1992, 985.)

John Lewis Gaddis, in his otherwise penetrating synthesis of the history of the Cold War, noted that

> "a key assumption of the 'old' Cold War history [i.e. pre-1991] was that with the defeat of Germany and Japan, the international system shifted from a multipolar to a bipolar configuration. The great powers of Europe appeared to have committed a kind of collective suicide, leaving the United States and the Soviet Union as even greater superpowers. Whereas earlier

> history had seen several large states competing within the global arena, the future now lay, or so it seemed, in the hands of only two." (Gaddis 1998, 283.)

Such an approach (refuted by Gaddis as ignoring the multidimensional nature of the Cold War political and military system; Gaddis 1998, 284) was based on the silent assumption that the Second World War created a political vacuum in Europe, which was then filled by the United States and the Soviet Union, and is also a simplification which places the American leadership of the post-war Western world on par with the Soviet domination of Central and Eastern Europe.

The Sovietisation of Intermarium Europe was the real intention of Moscow – in line with the statement of Stalin to Milovan Djilas that whoever occupies a given territory will establish his own system there (Djilas 1991). The Soviet policy cannot be understood otherwise. As E.H. Carr aptly wrote, there was no separation between foreign and domestic policy in the Soviet strategy; there is a unity of "revolutionary politics" (Carr 1964, 3). This implies the existence of two camps: socialism and capitalism. The coexistence of these systems is only a tactical symptom in the process of the fight between two forces. The default state of nature is not peace (although propaganda discusses it every day), but conflict and war (here, despite the passage of time since its publication, Edward Mead Earle's work 'Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin: Soviet Concepts of War' remains very inspiring; Earle 1944). Referring once more to Ulam, it can be said that expansion and coexistence are not condemned to be opposites, but, in fact, complement each other 'dialectically'. There is a time of expansion and a time of coexistence – and so on, in alternate phases. After 1921 (that is, after the Peace of Riga), there were several years of coexistence. The Second World War provided an opportunity for expansion after recovering from the disastrous situation brought about by the German attack of June 22, 1941.

If it is possible to assume (and the sources allow this) that the leaders of the Anglo-Saxon powers (and in particular Roosevelt) hoped that the Soviet Union would be content to deprive the national states of Intermarium Europe only of their right to freely shape foreign policy, but leave them broad internal autonomy – this was a big mistake (if that had happened, the Intermarium countries would have been given the status that Finland had after 1945). This assumption did not take into account the invasive and totalitarian policy of the USSR throughout its history. George Kennan aptly said that

> "the Allied victory in this war was burdened from the very beginning with the fact that the Allies were not strong enough to defeat Hitler without the participation of the Soviet Union. In this situation, they were unable to take a clear stance on their initial war goals. They had *to compromise with the political goals* of Stalin's regime. This put them in a false and hypocritical position. Poland was the most visible example of this." (see J. Zawodny's interview with G.F. Kennan from May 1972, published in Polish: Kennan, Zawodny 1985, 45).

This interpretation seems profoundly justified.

In the spring of 1947 – thanks to the Truman Doctrine – the West, led by the United States, went on the counteroffensive. The Cold War ensued. The strategy of containment empowered the West. It certainly helped to save the Atlantic civilisation (as put by Oskar Halecki; see Halecki 1950). However, it never took into consideration the liberation of the nations on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain. Whether and to what extent a different strategy from the United States (and thus the West) could have changed the position of these nations – without embarking on a path leading to World War III – must remain a question for another study. The great question as to whether, by occupying the Intermarium, Stalin also planned an armed confrontation with the West, or whether he intended to respect the Tehran and Yalta arrangements, must also be left for later. A historian may only claim that the Soviet dictator usually advanced as far as he could without encountering resistance. He did not feel bound with any agreements. When the risk seemed too significant – he assessed the situation, and eventually withdrew, in the spirit of Leninist thought: to make two steps forward, one sometimes has to make a step back.

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