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The United States and Eastern Europe in 1945

A Reassessment

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There was a time when it all seemed so simple. The Soviet Union, it was said, sought to Communize Eastern Europe at the end of World War II; the Western powers, and especially the United States, were deeply opposed to that policy; and the ensuing clash played a decisive role in triggering the Cold War. But historians in recent years have been moving away from that sort of interpretation. This is not because there has been a fundamental shift in our understanding of Soviet policy. Some scholars, to be sure, claim that the USSR, even in the latter part of the war, did not plan to Communize any of the countries in Eastern Europe—that “nowhere beyond what Moscow considered the Soviet borders did its policies foresee the establishment of communist regimes.”¹ But the prevailing view today is rather different. Soviet leaders might not have had a “master plan” or a “detailed blueprint” for the Communization of Eastern Europe, but by the end of the war, it is now commonly argued, they did have certain general goals and a certain general strategy for achieving those goals. The USSR, according to this view, would initially take a relatively moderate line and Sovietization would not be on the agenda. But the Communists would “proceed step by step” and would gradually tighten their grip on power. Eventually the “appropriate moment” would come, and at that point, as the Soviet leader Josif Stalin himself put it, the “mask” would come off and the “maximal program” would be put into effect.²

1. Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 21. See also Geoffrey Roberts, “Ideology, Calculation, and Improvisation: Spheres of Influence and Soviet Foreign Policy, 1939–1945,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (October 1999), pp. 671–673; and Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin’s Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 245–253. For a more moderate version of this argument, see Melvyn Leffler, “Inside Enemy Archives: The Cold War Reopened,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (July–August 1996), pp. 122–124; and Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), p. 29.

2. For the comments about “proceeding step by step,” the “appropriate moment,” and Sovietization

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That view is by no means universally shared, but most major scholars have indeed come to interpret Soviet policy in those terms. Vladislav Zubok, for example, argues in his most recent book that Stalin was determined by early 1945 “to keep Eastern Europe in the Soviet Union’s grip at any cost” and that this point “has now been established beyond a doubt.” The Soviet leader, according to Zubok, “assumed that the Soviet sphere of influence must and would be secured in the countries of Eastern Europe by imposing on them new political and social orders, modeled after the Soviet Union.”³ Odd Arne Westad seems to agree. “As we learn more about Stalin’s post-war foreign policy,” he writes, “it seems unlikely that the Soviets would have tolerated even restricted participatory political systems in any of the countries their armies controlled in Eastern Europe.”⁴ This of course is not a new interpretation.

not being on the agenda at that point, see Georgi Dimitrov’s instructions to the Czechoslovak Communist leaders in December 1944, quoted in Elena Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky, “The Soviet Union and the Italian Communist Party, 1944–8,” in Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons, eds., *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943–53* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), p. 180 (originally quoted in an unpublished paper by the Russian scholar V. Mariina). For Stalin’s reference to a broadly based “people’s party” as “a convenient mask for the present period” and his comment about how “later there will be time for the maximal program,” see the widely cited entry for 2 September 1946 in *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933–1949*, trans. by Jane T. Hedges, Timothy D. Sergay, and Irina Faion, ed. by Ivo Banac (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 413–414. For the idea that the Soviet Union had “a remarkably uniform and to all appearances well-considered strategy to gain control of Eastern Europe while minimizing and deferring conflict with the United States,” see Eduard Mark, “Revolution by Degrees: Stalin’s National-Front Strategy for Europe, 1941–1947,” CWIHP Working Paper No. 31, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, February 2001, pp. 6–7, 22, 30–33; the quotation itself is from Mark’s contribution to the H-Diplo roundtable on Arnold Offner’s *Another Such Victory* in December 2002 (a link to the text can be found at <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/diplo/roundtables/index.html>). A number of other writers see things much the same way. See, for example, the essays by Gerhard Wettig and Donal O’Sullivan and the synthesis by the editors in the important collection of articles on the subject, Stefan Creuzberger and Manfred Görtemaker, eds., *Gleichschaltung unter Stalin? Die Entwicklung der Parteien in östlichen Europa 1944–1949* (Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), esp. pp. 15 (Wettig), 50, 80, 83 (O’Sullivan), 421–422, 429, 431, 434 (Creuzberger and Görtemaker). Note, finally, Norman Naimark’s comment in his review of the Creuzberger-Görtemaker book that the contributors “demonstrate”—not just “argue”—that the Soviet-backed “national front” policy in eastern Europe “was no more than an effort to grind down political opposition and boost the fortunes of the Communists.” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Fall 2004), p. 171.

3. Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 21; and Vladislav Zubok, “Stalin’s Plans and Russian Archives,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Spring 1997), esp. pp. 296, 299–300, 305. In 1996, in a book he wrote with Constantine Pleshakov, Zubok took a much milder view: Stalin, he and his coauthor wrote, “was prepared to keep in power ‘transitional’ regimes that would be acceptable to the West”; his “postwar foreign policy was more defensive, reactive, and prudent than it was the fulfillment of a master plan.” See Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 276–277. The change in perspective is quite striking.

4. Odd Arne Westad, “Introduction,” in Odd Arne Westad, Sven Holtmark, and Iver Neumann, eds., *The Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, 1945–89* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 3. Leffler, incidentally, has also argued that Stalin was not willing to tolerate governments based on free elections in countries like Poland. See Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, p. 33. This has been his view for quite

Years ago, traditionalist scholars like Hugh Seton-Watson and Zbigniew Brzezinski argued that the “Communist ‘takeover’ in Eastern Europe was ultimately designed and executed by Moscow for the purpose of extending its sphere of influence in Europe and the world.”⁵ But what is striking today is that most scholars seem to have concluded that this earlier interpretation was essentially correct. As Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii put it in their introduction to an important collection of essays on the subject: “Brzezinski and Seton-Watson had it right the first time.”⁶

It is *American* policy that is now seen in a new light, at least by many historians. Increasingly the argument seems to be that U.S. leaders in 1945 did not really care much about Eastern Europe—that their commitment to representative government in that region was surprisingly thin and that by the end of 1945 they had more or less concluded that the sort of political system the Soviet Union was setting up in that part of the world was something the United States could live with. The president and his top advisers, the argument runs, were not deeply concerned about East European issues. To the extent that they had any policy at all, their basic goal was to maintain a certain cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union as a kind of end in itself.⁷ But again that view is by no means universally shared, and even today some scholars find it almost inconceivable that the U.S. government could have “written off” Eastern Europe in that way.⁸ Students of Soviet foreign policy, in particular, commonly take it for granted that the Western powers were determined to

some time. In 1992, for example, Leffler said that the idea that “Soviet security interests” could be reconciled with “popular elections” was “naïve.” See Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 49. In an article published in 1986, Leffler quoted Stalin as saying at Potsdam: “A freely elected government in any of these countries would be anti-Soviet, and that we cannot allow.” See Melvyn Leffler, “Adherence to Agreements: Yalta and the Experiences of the Early Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Summer 1986), p. 102.

5. Hugh Seton-Watson, *The East European Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1950); Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960). The quotation is from a passage in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, eds., *Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944–1949* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997), p. 7, summarizing the interpretation developed by Seton-Watson and Brzezinski.

6. Naimark and Gibianskii, eds., *Establishment of Communist Regimes*, p. 8.

7. See, for example, Leffler, “Inside Enemy Archives,” p. 134; and Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, pp. 42–44. Note also the reference in passing to the “relative indifference of the West to the fate of Eastern Europe” in Naimark and Gibianskii, eds., *Establishment of Communist Regimes*, p. 7. See also Fraser Harbutt, *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America, and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 104–105, 109, 111, 115, 123, 132, 133; and Wilson Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 212, 216, 325–326.

8. See Eduard Mark’s contribution to the H-Diplo roundtable on Miscamble’s *From Truman to Roosevelt*, 10 September 2007, <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/FromTrumantoRoosevelt-Mark.pdf>, pp. 8–9.

oppose the Communization of Eastern Europe, and indeed they often criticize Stalin for provoking a hostile Western response by pursuing a “unilateralist” rather than a “cooperative” policy in this area.⁹

So, what policy did the American government actually pursue in Eastern Europe in 1945? Had U.S. leaders in fact “written off” Eastern Europe by the end of the year? Did they even have a policy in any real sense of the term, or was what passed for policy little more than a series of ad hoc responses to the problems that presented themselves? I want to get at these questions by looking at how the U.S. government dealt with this issue in 1945, from the Yalta Conference in February through the Potsdam Conference in July to the Moscow Conference in December. A final section will confront some basic questions about how American policy in 1945 is to be understood. Did U.S. leaders know what they were doing? Was a guiding philosophy, an overarching strategic concept, at work here?

From Yalta to Potsdam

How did the U.S. government deal with the problem of Eastern Europe in early 1945, say from January through April of that year—that is, through the first month of the new administration of President Harry S. Truman? The basic story is quite familiar and can be reviewed quickly. The fate of Poland was the key issue in relations between the Soviet Union and the Western powers at this time. Together with the British, the Americans made a certain effort to establish a representative government in Poland in the early part of the year. This was one of the main reasons why President Franklin D. Roosevelt went to Yalta in February, and U.S. and British leaders were pleased, even in private, with the Yalta agreement.¹⁰ According to that agreement, the government the Soviet Union had installed in Poland would be “reorganized on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from Poles abroad,” and the new provisional government would hold “free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot.” But the negotiations in Moscow on the reorganization of the Polish government did not go well. The Western powers blamed the Soviet Union for the deadlock, and on 1 April Roosevelt sent Sta-

9. See, for example, Aleksei Filitov, “The Soviet Union and the Grand Alliance: The Internal Dimension of Foreign Policy,” in Gabriel Gorodetsky, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–1991: A Retrospective* (London: Frank Cass, 1994), p. 100.

10. See the evidence cited in Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 9.

lin a letter complaining about what had happened: "I must make it quite plain to you that any such solution which would result in a thinly disguised continuance of the present Warsaw regime would be unacceptable and would cause the people of the United States to regard the Yalta agreement as having failed."¹¹ Truman, as is well known, took an even tougher line in a famous meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov three weeks later. A shaken Molotov, evidently afraid that Stalin would hold him responsible for Truman's behavior, could not even bring himself to send his master in the Kremlin an honest account of his discussion with the new U.S. president.¹²

But Truman's truculent mood soon passed. He did not want to break with the Soviet Union, and in May he sent Roosevelt's old adviser Harry Hopkins to Moscow to try to resolve the problem. Hopkins worked out a deal with Stalin whereby some non-Communist Poles, including Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the Polish leader supported by the British and U.S. governments, would be brought into the Communist-dominated government, albeit in non-essential positions. In early July the reconstituted government was recognized by the United States and Britain.

It is often assumed in the historical literature that the Hopkins mission represented something of a turning point. Eduard Mark's view is typical of the way most scholars have come to interpret this episode. "For all the brave rhetoric" Truman permitted himself in his first weeks in office, Mark says, "virtually his first act in relation to Eastern Europe was to accept what Roosevelt had vowed he would not: in return for Stalin's renewed promise to permit free elections, the United States recognized a 'thinly disguised continuance' of the Lublin regime as the interim government of Poland."¹³ Other scholars go a bit further and suggest that the United States was basically writing off Poland—that the Americans were accepting the fact that a Communist-dominated regime was being imposed on the country, that the broadening of the government was just "temporary window-dressing," that the "concessions" Stalin had made were merely "cosmetic" in nature, that Truman was not particularly concerned about the fate of Poland as such, and that the overriding U.S. goal at this point was just to settle the dispute.¹⁴

11. Roosevelt to Stalin, 1 April 1945, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1945, Vol. 5, p. 195 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS*, with appropriate year and volume numbers).

12. See Zubok, *Failed Empire*, pp. 14–15. Note also the careful analysis of this episode in Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, pp. 114–123.

13. Eduard Mark, "American Policy toward Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1946: An Alternative Interpretation," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (September 1981), p. 327.

14. See Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, pp. 156–158; Harbutt, *Iron Curtain*, pp. 105–107;

But this general argument cannot rest solely on evidence from the period of the Hopkins mission itself. To be sure, there is some evidence from that period that points in this direction—for example, Truman’s reference to the importance of getting “Uncle Joe” to make “some sort of gesture—whether he means it or not,” or Hopkins’s remark in one of his meetings with Stalin that Poland as such was “not so important” and that the United States had “no special desire to see any particular kind of government” in that country.¹⁵ But the argument that a fundamental shift in American policy on Poland took place at this time—that from May 1945 on the United States essentially gave the Soviet Union a free hand in Poland—rests not so much on evidence of this sort as on a study of how the U.S. government dealt with this issue in the latter half of 1945. For it is important to note that the U.S. government at the time did not see the deal Hopkins worked out with Stalin as a capitulation. Key State Department officials still believed there was a chance that Poland would not become a Communist police-state and that the country might instead end up with a good deal of internal autonomy and political freedom.¹⁶ The real test of U.S. policy came only later, when it gradually became clear that this was not to be—that in all probability there were not going to be any “free and unfettered elections” in Poland and that the Communists were determined to hold on to power there no matter what.

So when exactly did the Americans begin to understand what was going on in that country? To answer that question we first need to answer a more basic question: What exactly *was* going on there? On the surface the answer is simple. Well before the war in Europe had ended the Soviet Union had begun to build a Communist police state in Poland. But the story behind that development is not as simple as one might think. It is not at all clear that Stalin intended from the start to Communize Poland, and it is by no means inconceiv-

James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943–1954* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 63–67; William Taubman, *Stalin’s American Policy: From Entente to Détente to Cold War* (New York: Norton, 1982), p. 107; A. W. DePorte, *Europe between the Super-Powers: The Enduring Balance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 97; John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 235; and Lisle Rose, *After Yalta* (New York: Scribner’s, 1973), p. 43.

15. See McAllister, *No Exit*, p. 64; Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, p. 145n; and Harbutt, *Iron Curtain*, p. 106.

16. Note, for example, Joseph Grew’s comment at the time, quoted in Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, p. 160. Grew, as Miscamble notes, generally took a “tough line on the Soviet Union.” See also Harriman to Acting Secretary, 28 June 1945, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference)*, Vol. I (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 728 (hereinafter referred to as “*FRUS*, Potsdam,” with appropriate volume number). The British attitude was more guarded. See Churchill to Halifax, 6 July 1945, and Anderson to Hankey, 16 July 1945, in *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, Ser. I, Vol. 1 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1984), pp. 5–6, 318–319 (hereinafter referred to as *DBPO*, with appropriate series and volume numbers).

able that in 1942 or even 1943 some sort of accommodation between the Soviet Union and the Polish exile government in London could have been worked out. To be sure, that government would have had to accept the Curzon line as Poland's new eastern border—that is, it would have had to accept the loss of half of Poland's prewar territory (an area, however, in which only a minority, albeit a large minority, of the population was ethnically Polish)—and even if that condition had been met, there was no guarantee that Poland would not have ended up as a Communist state. But whatever hope there may have been that Poland's fate would be different depended on the Polish government's acceptance of Moscow's demand for recognition of the new western border of the USSR.

The London Poles, however, would not accept that demand, and this either led Stalin to view the Polish government as “unfriendly” (and the forces loyal to it as hostile) or gave him an excuse for doing so. Indeed most of the leaders of the exile government and of the Home Army, the military organization within Poland loyal to that government, from the start viewed the USSR (after Nazi Germany) as “enemy number two.” Home Army leaders, in fact, created an organization that was intended to serve as the nucleus of an “anti-Soviet resistance movement.”¹⁷ In such circumstances, it is scarcely surprising that by mid-1944 at the latest Soviet policy on the Polish question was no longer based on the idea that an accommodation could be reached with the Polish authorities in London—if indeed the Soviet Union had ever honestly wanted to reach a genuine understanding with the London Poles. Soviet policy now became increasingly clear. The exile government would be replaced by a new Communist-dominated government which the Soviet Union would set up in the country, and the forces loyal to the government in London would be disbanded or otherwise liquidated soon after the Red Army moved in. By this point, Stalin had little reason to hold back. He certainly did not expect, given the attitude of the Western powers, that in moving ahead with that kind of policy he would be running much of a risk in geopolitical terms. He was

17. See especially Jan M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 1–68. On the “doctrine of two enemies,” see pp. 137, 278, 312. For the document referring to the Soviet Union as “enemy number two,” see p. 144. On the “anti-Soviet resistance movement,” see p. 194; John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds, *Poland 1939–1947* (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1986), pp. 149–151; and Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 96. Note also the report from Ukrainian Minister of State Security Savchenko dated 28 March 1944 and sent to Stalin on 10 April by Nikita Khrushchev, then head of the Ukrainian Communist Party, quoted in its entirety in Jeffrey Burds, “The Early Cold War in Soviet West Ukraine, 1944–1948,” *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, No. 1505 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Center for Russian and East European Studies, 2001), pp. 19–20. According to that report, an armed resistance movement linked to the London government was being organized in what Soviet officials considered the “western *oblasts* of Ukraine and Belorussia.”

convinced, as he told the Polish Communist leaders in October 1944, that the alliance with Britain and the United States would “not break up over Poland.”¹⁸

So, as Soviet troops in 1944 moved into territory that had been part of Poland before the war, one of their main goals was to disarm the Home Army units they found there. There was some resistance, and Soviet policy hardened.¹⁹ “At the end of September,” according to the Polish scholar Krystyna Kersten, “Stalin, who had been briefed by the Polish Communists as well as by the Soviet ambassador, the NKVD, and military counterintelligence, acknowledged that it was necessary to strike in a sufficiently powerful fashion to liquidate all opposition and subdue society.”²⁰ The result, Kersten argues, was a “turn to intense political repression in October,” a development referred to in the literature as the “October turn.”²¹ The goal was “the annihilation of active opposition”—or, in the words of one of the Polish Communist leaders, “the neutralization of those who oppose the program of the PKWN,” the acronym for the Communist-dominated proto-government.²² But the new policy was not a success. There was an “upsurge in guerrilla activity” in the spring of 1945. Society as a whole had been alienated, and the Communists had been unable to establish a real political base in the country.²³ As a result, the Communists adopted a new and somewhat softer policy—a shift scholars refer to as the “May turn”—and were ready in fact to accept a certain broadening of the government.²⁴ The Hopkins mission and its aftermath—the inclusion of some non-Communist Poles, especially Mikołajczyk, in a reconstituted “national unity” government—are to be understood in this context.

But these changes were made for essentially tactical purposes. The Com-

18. Meeting of the PKWN [Polish Committee of National Liberation] with Comrade Stalin, 9 October 1944, in Antony Polonsky and Boleslaw Drukier, *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 298. For perhaps the best English-language overview of developments in Poland in general during the 1944–1945 period, see Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland*, pp. 137–197. On the timing of preparations for the establishment of a Communist-dominated regime in Poland, see Leonid Gibianskii, “Osteuropa: Sicherheitszone der UdSSR, sowjetisiertes Protektorat des Kreml oder Sozialismus ‘ohne Diktatur des Proletariats?’” *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2004), p. 125, esp. the Polish and Russian sources cited in note 27.

19. See Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland*, pp. 150–161; and Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, pp. 93–97.

20. Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, pp. 98–99.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 103. See also Polonsky and Drukier, *Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland*, pp. 108–109; Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland*, p. 172; John Micgiel, “‘Bandits and Reactionaries’: The Suppression of the Opposition in Poland, 1944–1946,” in Naimark and Gibianskii, eds., *Establishment of Communist Regimes*, p. 93; and Andrzej Paczkowski, “Poland, the ‘Enemy Nation,’” in Stéphane Courtois, ed., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. by Mark Kramer and Jonathan Murphy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 372–376.

23. Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland*, p. 174.

24. See *ibid.*, ch. 7, esp. pp. 188–197.

munists were not seeking a real accommodation with the rest of society and were not interested in any genuine form of power sharing. They were determined, as they themselves said at the time, to hold on to their “hegemony” within Poland by whatever means turned out to be necessary. As the Communist leader Władysław Gomułka told Mikołajczyk in Moscow in June, “we shall never hand over power.” The non-Communist parties were in effect warned that they would be tolerated only if they did not seriously contest Communist hegemony in the country. Otherwise they would be “ruthlessly destroyed.”²⁵

The Polish Communists could pursue this sort of policy only because they had the Soviet Union behind them. As Stalin reminded them “on at least several occasions,” their whole political system rested on Soviet military power.²⁶ The Soviet leader was not seriously interested in getting the Polish Communists to settle for less than total control. The fate of Poland, in his view, would not be decided by “free and unfettered elections.” The will of the majority would not be the controlling factor. A relatively small but highly disciplined party was all that was needed. “A membership of 200,000,” he told Gomułka in late 1945, “is a force that can overturn a whole country if it is well organized, well managed and controlled, and if it has instructions about what to say and how to say it.”²⁷

The goal was “hegemony.” That implied that sooner or later all possible sources of opposition to Communist rule would have to be tamed or destroyed. For the time being, however, for both domestic and foreign policy reasons, it made sense to take a relatively soft line—to ease up on the repression and pretend that the party was truly interested in reconciliation and national unity. To be sure, the apparatus of the police state continued to grow, the press was by no means free, and opponents of the regime were sometimes arrested or beaten up. But the level of repression in mid-1945 was not nearly as great as it might have been. The Communists did not monopolize Polish political life, and other parties, especially Mikołajczyk’s party, were more or

25. See *ibid.*, pp. 196, 201–202; Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, p. 193; Polonsky and Drukier, *Beginnings of Communist Rule*, pp. 49, 126; and Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), p. 144.

26. Andrzej Paczkowski, “Polish-Soviet Relations 1944–1989: The Limits of Autonomy,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, Vol. 29, Nos. 2–4 (Summer-Fall-Winter 2002), pp. 283–284. One such comment is quoted in Donal O’Sullivan, *Stalins ‘Cordon sanitaire’: Die sowjetische Osteuropapolitik und die Reaktionen des Westens 1939–1949* (Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), pp. 243–244: “If it weren’t for the Red Army,” Stalin told the Polish Communists in the Fall of 1944, “you wouldn’t last a week.”

27. “Gomułka’s Memorandum of a Conversation with Stalin,” 14 November 1945, in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue No. 11 (Winter 1998), p. 135.

less tolerated. Mikołajczyk himself was relatively optimistic. He knew his party could not operate with total freedom, but he also knew how deeply unpopular the Communists were in the country. He therefore thought that his party and its allies would be able to win even minimally free elections. There was no guarantee, of course, that such elections would ever actually be held. The Soviet Union would have the final say in the matter, but in Mikołajczyk's view the USSR might be willing to tolerate a non-Communist but "friendly" Poland on its border. This turned out to be an illusion, but it was not preposterous in June 1945 to think, given the political situation both within Poland and in the wider world, that Stalin might be willing to settle for an arrangement of this sort.²⁸

How did the Western powers react to what was going on in Poland at the time? The prevailing view in late June, when the new Polish "national unity" government was set up, was that the situation was not hopeless. No one could be sure, of course, that things would not turn out satisfactorily. The whole affair of the sixteen Polish resistance leaders, arrested after having been invited in for talks and then put on trial in Moscow even as the negotiations for the establishment of a "national unity" government were going on elsewhere in that city, was not a good sign. But even people like Averell Harriman, the U.S. ambassador in Moscow—the man who had warned Truman in April 1945 about a new "barbarian invasion of Europe"—believed there was a "fair chance" that Poland might end up as a relatively free country.²⁹ After all, hadn't Stalin told Hopkins that Poland would become a Western-style democracy like Holland?³⁰

It was hard at that time to know what would happen in Poland. Things, it seemed, could go either way. But it was not long before the Western governments began to get some information about how the situation was developing in that country, and the news was not good. On 25 July, while Secretary of State James Byrnes was at Potsdam, he was told about some "disquieting reports" that had come in from Poland via the British Foreign Office. One of the non-Communist Polish leaders had reported that the "Polish people enjoy

28. On the political situation in Poland at the time, see Paczkowski, *Spring Will Be Ours*, pp. 154–159, 161–162, 169; and Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, p. 193. On Mikołajczyk, see Coutouvidis and Reynolds, *Poland*, pp. 202–208; Kersten, *Establishment of Communist Rule*, pp. 186–190; and Harriman to Secretary of State, 28 June 1945, in *FRUS: Potsdam*, Vol. I, p. 728. For Mikołajczyk's "cautious optimism" in mid-July, see Clark Kerr to Eden, 16 July 1945, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 1, Microfiche Suppl., Calendar 319i.

29. Truman Meeting with Top Officials, 20 April 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. V, p. 232 (for Harriman's remark about a "barbarian invasion"); and Harriman to Secretary of State, 20 June 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. I, p. 728.

30. Hopkins-Stalin Meeting, 27 May 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. I, pp. 38–39.

practically no civil liberties, that Soviet officials are behind each local government, and that secret service under Soviet direction is making many arrests.”³¹ The British were in fact receiving a good deal of negative information and often shared what they learned with the Americans. Some of that information came from Mikołajczyk, who was also at Potsdam and met with high British officials a number of times. On 25 July he told British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that things had taken a turn for the worse in Poland. The head of the Communist-dominated government there, Mikołajczyk said, was trying to set up a one-party system.³² Many people were being arrested, he told another key British official. The Soviet army and the secret police (NKVD) “exercised a general terror” in the country.³³ Mikołajczyk, another British official noted, was “far from cheerful about the present trend of events in Poland” and was convinced “that the battle for Poland’s independence was now joined.”³⁴ The outcome of that struggle was still in doubt. Things might still turn out satisfactorily, but only if the Red Army and the NKVD left the country first.³⁵

The Western governments were now in direct contact with Soviet leaders at Potsdam. How did they deal with this issue? “Of Stalin’s purposes” with respect to Poland, George Kennan wrote, there was at this point “no longer any excuse for ignorance or doubt”—and that assessment, though perhaps a bit too strong, was essentially correct.³⁶ But the Americans did not seem overly concerned with what was going on in Poland. The British were somewhat more active, but even they did not press the Soviet Union very hard on the core issue. At Potsdam the three powers discussed certain questions about Poland, most notably the demarcation of Poland’s western border. But the key question of whether a Communist police state was going to be imposed on that country was not dealt with in any serious way. The Polish problem, in Truman’s view, had been “settled” by the agreements worked out during and immediately after the Hopkins mission, and U.S. leaders in general were eager to put that whole issue behind them.³⁷

31. Grew to Byrnes, 25 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 647. For the original British report, see Hankey to Eden, 19 July 1945, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 1, p. 765.

32. Eden-Mikołajczyk Meeting, 25 July 1945, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 1, pp. 681–682.

33. Clark Kerr–Mikołajczyk Meeting, 25 July 25 1945, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 1, pp. 683–684

34. Allen to Warner, 25 July 1945, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 1, pp. 903–904.

35. Bevin-Mikołajczyk Meeting, 31 July 1945, and Annex, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 1, pp. 1058–1060; and Sargent to Cadogan, 30 July 1945, *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 1, pp. 1039–1040.

36. George Kennan, “An Historian of Potsdam and His Readers,” *American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (April 1961), p. 289.

37. Note especially Truman’s reaction to the news from Moscow that Hopkins had worked out an arrangement with Stalin, in Eben Ayers, *Truman in the White House: The Diary of Eben A. Ayers*, ed. by Robert H. Ferrell (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991), entry for 1 June 1945, p. 39. Churchill’s attitude at the time was very different. See Churchill to Truman, 4 June 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. V, p. 324.

From Potsdam to Moscow

So the Potsdam evidence strongly suggests that by July 1945 at the latest the United States had decided to acquiesce in what the Soviet Union was doing in Poland—a point that is confirmed by what we know about U.S. policy in the post-Potsdam period in late 1945.³⁸ This conclusion is important in its own right, but it also bears directly on the question of how U.S. policy toward Eastern Europe in 1945 more generally is to be interpreted. For if the U.S. government was willing to accept what was going on in Poland, does it really make sense to think that the United States would make a serious effort to prevent the Communization of countries like Romania and Bulgaria?

Nonetheless, there is a puzzle here. The Americans at Potsdam and after might have been relatively passive on the Polish question, but they seemed to take a strong stand at Potsdam on Romania and Bulgaria, and they pursued a vigorous policy in those countries in mid-August, soon after the conference adjourned. At Potsdam, for example, the U.S. government proposed that the control commissions in Romania and Bulgaria “henceforth operate on a tripartite basis” and that elections be conducted there under three-power “supervision.”³⁹ U.S. leaders, moreover, repeatedly emphasized that the United States would not recognize the governments of Bulgaria and Romania until they were “set up on a satisfactory basis,” and at the first plenary meeting at Potsdam the U.S. delegation submitted a proposal for the “immediate reorganization of the present governments in Rumania and Bulgaria.”⁴⁰ So it seemed that the United States was taking a tough line on the issue.

Soviet leaders, however, came away from Potsdam with the sense that (as Molotov put it) the decisions made at the conference relating to “Bulgaria and the Balkans” were “to our advantage” and that “in effect, this sphere of influ-

38. See, for example, Geir Lundestad, *The American Non-Policy towards Eastern Europe, 1943–1947* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1978), pp. 209, 211.

39. Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, 20 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, pp. 152, 155; and U.S. Proposal on the Implementation of the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe, 21 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 647. The word “supervision” was too strong for Churchill and even Truman, so Byrnes proposed softening it to “observation.” The next day, however, he was again talking about “supervision of elections.” See Truman-Churchill-Stalin Meeting, 20 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 166; and Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, 22 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 229.

40. Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, 20 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 151; Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, 22 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 207; Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, 24 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 231; Truman-Churchill-Stalin Meeting, 21 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 326; Truman-Churchill-Stalin Meeting, 24 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 371; and U.S. Proposal on the Implementation of the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe, 17 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 112. For the two documents quoted, see *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, pp. 1, 216, 644.

ence has been recognized as ours.”⁴¹ What led them to draw that conclusion? The Americans, to be sure, had dropped the proposal for the “supervision of elections” and had opted for compromise language on the question of diplomatic recognition.⁴² But that really did not mean much. The proposals had been dropped because the Soviet Union would not agree to them, not because the U.S. government had changed its position. What, then, was the basis for the Soviet view that the United States had written off the Balkans?⁴³

Perhaps something was said, something that did not find its way into the documents, that led the Soviet participants to conclude that the Americans’ tough talk was once again not to be taken too seriously. There are certainly many indications that U.S. leaders were not deeply concerned about the fate of Eastern Europe. Truman was not outraged by what Soviet troops were doing in the areas they occupied. At Potsdam, as he later noted, he had been a Russophile “as most of us were.” He actually liked Stalin and enjoyed doing business with him.⁴⁴ The Soviet leader, he thought, was “honest—but smart as hell.”⁴⁵ Yes, of course, the Soviet Union was out to dominate the area the Red Army now occupied, but that was something the United States could live with. Adolf Hitler, in Truman’s view, had opened the floodgates. The result, he said, was that “we shall have a Slav Europe for a long time to come.” He then added his own personal gloss: “I don’t think it is so bad.”⁴⁶ Soviet leaders might have sensed that the U.S. government was not deeply concerned about Eastern Europe, and Molotov’s remarks about Western acceptance of the Balkans as a Soviet sphere of influence should perhaps be understood in that context.

But if Stalin and Molotov really did come away from Potsdam with that impression, they were in for a bit of a shock. American officials in both Roma-

41. *Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, entry for 6 August 1945, p. 377. Similar comments were reported at the time by the Yugoslav ambassador in Moscow. See Mastny, *Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, p. 22; and Roberts, *Stalin’s Wars*, p. 279. The Russian historian Leonid Gibianskii originally presented this evidence in a 1994 article that both Mastny and Roberts cite.

42. For Byrnes’s reference to a “compromise,” see Byrnes-Molotov Meeting, 30 July 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, p. 480. For the new language, compare a U.S. proposal of 30 July with a corresponding proposal of 26 July, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, pp. 628, 630.

43. In this paragraph, and indeed in the article as a whole, I use the term “the Balkans” to refer essentially to Romania and Bulgaria. The term was commonly used this way at the time.

44. See Leffler, *Soul of Mankind*, pp. 42–44; and Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, pp. 37–38. As late as October, Wallace still regarded Stalin as “a fine man who wanted to do the right thing.” See John Morton Blum, ed., *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace, 1942–1946* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 490.

45. Truman diary entry, 17 July 1945, in Eduard Mark, “‘Today Has Been a Historical One’: Harry S. Truman’s Diary of the Potsdam Conference,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July 1980), p. 322.

46. “James Forrestal Diary,” Entry for 28 July 1945, in *Forrestal Diaries*, Vol. 2, Forrestal Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton NJ; extract available online at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/documents/forrestal.html>.

nia and Bulgaria had for some time believed that U.S. policy in those countries had been too passive. Now that President Truman had said that the United States would not recognize the Communist-dominated governments there, they felt they could play a more active role. In Romania especially, U.S. officials now encouraged the Communists' opponents to take action. The non-Communist groups in Romania were in fact anxious to act before the Communist grip on power became irreversible. But they were unwilling to move unless they were assured of Western, above all U.S., support. On 11 August, Byrnes seemed to give them the signal they were waiting for. U.S. representatives in Romania were told that if asked they could tell the opposition leaders that the United States hoped to see "a more representative regime" established there.⁴⁷ That was precisely what they did: U.S. officials were in "virtual daily contact" with opposition leaders, and the Romanian king, encouraged by all this, on 19 August "demanded the resignation of the Roumanian government."⁴⁸ The British were amazed by what U.S. diplomats were doing: "The Americans are intervening vigorously in Roumanian internal affairs," one British official wrote. "In fact they have begun a full-scale plot against one of the Russians' favorite puppets."⁴⁹

Stalin was angered by what he called his allies' "machinations" in Romania, and especially by the role the Americans had played in provoking the crisis.⁵⁰ The Soviet leader was certainly not prepared to accept a change in Romania's government. The United States, for its part, did not want an armed confrontation. Indeed, U.S. officials on the scene probably went much further in encouraging the Romanian opposition than Byrnes had intended.⁵¹

47. Byrnes to Melbourne, 11 August 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. V, pp. 565–566.

48. Melbourne to Byrnes, 14 August 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. V, p. 567; and Elizabeth Hazard, *Cold War Crucible: United States Foreign Policy and the Conflict in Rumania* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1996), p. 124.

49. Foreign Office minute, 16 August 1945, quoted in Paul Quinlan, *Clash over Romania: British and American Policies towards Romania, 1938–1947* (Los Angeles: American Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1977), p. 141. For the story of this mini-crisis, see Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, pp. 140–145; Lundestad, *American Non-Policy*, pp. 237–242; and Hazard, *Cold War Crucible*, pp. 121–126.

50. Stalin to Molotov, 12 September 1945, quoted in Vladimir Pechatnov, "The Allies Are Pressing on You to Break Your Will: Foreign Policy Correspondence between Stalin and Molotov and Other Politburo Members, September 1945–December 1946," trans. by Vladislav Zubok, CWIHP Working Paper No. 26 (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, September 1999), p. 2.

51. Did Byrnes understand that his 11 August dispatch would "greatly stimulate local demands to overthrow the [Communist-dominated] Groza government"? Lundestad says that he did (*American Non-Policy*, p. 240), and in his n. 105 on p. 550 he cites three documents to back up that contention: two telegrams from Melbourne, the U.S. representative in Bucharest, and Byrnes's own 11 August dispatch. But these documents scarcely prove the point. The plan, as Melbourne reported it in one of those documents, was that the king would dismiss the government only after all three Allies had authorized him to do so. He would not proceed without first getting the Soviet Union's consent. In such circumstances, Byrnes might well have felt that there was little harm in authorizing U.S. officials in

With the war against Japan nearly over, Byrnes obviously had much more important things to worry about. All sorts of issues had to be dealt with. In such circumstances, he could scarcely exercise close day-to-day control over the situation in Romania. But when he realized what was going on, he pulled in the reins. U.S. representatives in the country were instructed on 25 August to avoid contact with the opposition for the time being. The king was to be advised that “measures which might further provoke Soviet officials” should be avoided.⁵² As the Norwegian historian Geir Lundestad notes, the active American policy had lasted a mere two weeks.⁵³

In Bulgaria the story was very similar, although perhaps not quite so dramatic. U.S. officials on the scene, who had long felt that American policy toward that country was much too passive, were encouraged by the line their government took on the issue at Potsdam. Byrnes, again on 11 August, instructed the U.S. representative in Sofia, Maynard Barnes, to make a tough declaration to the Bulgarian government: “We cannot overlook the preponderance of current evidence that a minority element in power in the country is at present endeavoring by the use of force and intimidation to prevent the effective participation in the scheduled elections of a large democratic section of the electorate.” The implication was that the United States would not recognize a government that resulted from this sort of electoral process.⁵⁴ The policy itself was not new. “What *was* new,” as Lundestad notes, “was that the Bulgarian government was directly informed about this attitude and, equally important, this was done at a time when the Bulgarian Opposition was becoming more restive than before.”⁵⁵

Barnes was pleased by this new turn in U.S. policy, but he took a tougher line than Byrnes had intended.⁵⁶ The secretary of state, upset by what his en-

Romania to reiterate existing policy. Indeed, he warned U.S. officials in Bucharest not to get too deeply involved in what the Romanian opposition was doing—to avoid comment on any “particular plan of action” and to speak only “in general terms.” It is hard to avoid the conclusion that officials on the scene got more deeply involved in the opposition plot than Byrnes would have liked. Two of the documents cited by Lundestad are readily available in *FRUS*, and the third, Melbourne’s 9 August 1945 telegram to Byrnes, is available on microfilm in *Records of the U.S. Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Romania, 1945–1949* (Wilmington, VA: Scholarly Resources, 1987), reel 2. This last document is also available at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/useef/usee.html>.

52. Byrnes to Melbourne, 25 August 1945 in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. V, p. 594.

53. Lundestad, *American Non-Policy*, pp. 241–242.

54. Byrnes to Barnes, 11 August 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. IV, p. 283.

55. Lundestad, *American Non-Policy*, p. 268.

56. Michael Boll, *Cold War in the Balkans: American Foreign Policy and the Emergence of Communist Bulgaria, 1943–1947* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), pp. 136–150. See also Lundestad, *American Non-Policy*, pp. 257–271; and Vesselin Dimitrov, *Stalin’s Cold War: Soviet Foreign Policy, Democracy and Communism in Bulgaria, 1941–48* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 117–127.

voy in Bulgaria was doing, rebuked Barnes on 24 August.⁵⁷ Again, Byrnes was tightening the reins. Again, the tough policy, such as it was, had lasted a mere two weeks—indeed, for the same two weeks in each case.

But these events were enough to anger Soviet leaders, and they took an exceptionally hard line on Balkan issues at the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in September 1945. Stalin was personally calling the shots at this point, and he made sure that Molotov, the Soviet representative at the meeting, was utterly intransigent.⁵⁸ As for the Americans, some historians argue that Byrnes (in an attempt to practice “atomic diplomacy”) also took a tough line at the start of that conference. When that proved unproductive, the argument runs, Byrnes wanted to compromise but was prevented from doing so by John Foster Dulles, the Republican in the U.S. delegation, who threatened to resign and have Byrnes denounced as an appeaser if he yielded on this issue. Other historians say that Byrnes initially was inclined to compromise but after being provoked by Molotov’s attacks on U.S. policy, hardened his position early on and took a tough line for the rest of the conference. The interpretations differ, but the bottom line is the same: The U.S. government in the final analysis was uncompromising on Romania and Bulgaria at London.⁵⁹

The evidence, however, points in a very different direction: Byrnes made it quite clear at the London meeting that the United States was willing to accept the Communist-dominated regimes in those two Balkan countries. This point is important because of the light it sheds on U.S. policy as a whole in the latter half of 1945. It means that the policy Byrnes pursued at the Moscow Conference in December, a policy based on America’s willingness essentially to accept Soviet control of Eastern Europe, had been in place for months.

57. Boll, *Cold War in the Balkans*, p. 150; and Lundestad, *American Non-Policy*, pp. 269.

58. Pechatnov, “The Allies Are Pressing on You,” esp. pp. 1–2, 6.

59. For the first sort of interpretation, see Robert Messer, *The End of an Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman, and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 132–133; Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), pp. 122–130, esp. p. 124; and Arnold Offner, “Another Such Victory: President Truman, American Foreign Policy, and the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (April 1999), p. 136. Copies of two documents cited by Offner to support his argument in that passage—messages that Truman sent to Byrnes during the conference—can be found at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/usee/usee.html>. For the second type of interpretation, see Mark, “American Policy toward Eastern Europe,” pp. 327–328; and James Gormly, *The Collapse of the Grand Alliance, 1945–1948* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), pp. 65–69, 85. With regard to the claims that are commonly made about Dulles’s behavior at the London meeting, it is important to take account of the evidence presented in Ronald Pruessen’s careful study, *John Foster Dulles: The Road to Power* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), pp. 281, 318–319. In late 1945 Dulles was already inclined to accept Eastern Europe as a Soviet sphere of influence. On the Romanian question specifically, Pruessen shows, Dulles took a relatively soft line at London. Dulles viewed the policy of non-recognition as likely to prove “barren” in the long run.

That in turn means that what happened at Moscow was no flash in the pan—that the policy Byrnes pursued at Moscow had a deeper base. It also implies that the Potsdam policy—America’s refusal to recognize the Bulgarian and Romanian governments as long as they were not truly democratic—was not rooted in a strong U.S. commitment to representative government in Eastern Europe. The Potsdam meeting ended in early August, and by September Byrnes was already taking an accommodationist line on this issue. The rapid change in the U.S. line shows how shallow the commitment was.

What is the proof for these claims? They rest essentially on one key point: namely, that Byrnes at London repeatedly suggested that the arrangement that had been worked out for Poland after the Hopkins mission could serve as a model for settling the Romanian and Bulgarian problems. He first proposed a solution along these lines at a private meeting with Molotov on 16 September, a few days after the conference started. He began by praising the arrangement Hopkins had worked out with Stalin in the spring. “Everyone,” Byrnes said, “was satisfied with the compromise” that had been reached on that issue. He hoped that the Romanian problem could be handled the same way. In dealing with Romania, he “inquired whether it would not be possible to proceed as we had in the case of Poland.” His Soviet counterpart said no and repeatedly suggested that the United States wanted to see a government in Romania that was hostile to the USSR—complaints that obviously have to be understood in the context of what had happened in that country in August. Byrnes was offended by those charges, but Molotov’s attacks on U.S. policy did not lead Byrnes to drop his plan. Instead, he simply “repeated his suggestion that some solution along the lines of that adopted in Poland would be the best.” Later in that meeting he again argued that the Polish arrangement could be taken as a model, noting that “once the agreement with Poland had been reached it had worked out very satisfactorily.”⁶⁰

Byrnes had another private meeting with Molotov three days later. The Soviet foreign minister again claimed that the United States in the past had supported a Romanian government hostile to the USSR and was now unwilling to support the “friendly” government that had come to power there. Byrnes said there was not a “grain of truth” in that accusation. But although obviously angry, he did not drop his idea of using the Polish settlement as a model: “He recalled that for weeks and weeks after Yalta we had discussed Poland and had eventually reached a solution which gave various parties in Poland adequate representation. He said no one would be happier than he if

60. Byrnes-Molotov Meeting, 16 September 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, pp. 195–197, 200.

some such solution would be found in this connection”—that is, on the Romanian question.⁶¹

But then Byrnes made another move. Angered by Molotov's accusations, Byrnes disregarded the advice of his advisers (including Dulles) and submitted to the full Council of Foreign Ministers a document calling for a sweeping reorganization of the Romanian government.⁶² That document gave the impression that Byrnes was now taking a very tough line, but in reality this move has to be understood in bargaining terms. It was just a shot across the bow. In submitting the document, Byrnes was in effect warning Soviet leaders what lay in store for them if they remained intransigent. In substantive terms, U.S. policy had not actually hardened.

The proof is that just two days after the document was distributed, at the very meeting of the full Council in which it was discussed, Byrnes again emphasized that the arrangement Hopkins had worked out with Stalin on Poland was basically quite satisfactory from the U.S. point of view; the clear implication was that the Polish arrangement could serve as a model for dealing with Romania. “After Yalta,” he said, “when the situation in regard to the Provisional Government in Poland was improved the United States was very happy about this and its relations with the Polish Government were excellent, although we knew of things about which we were surprised and which we hoped would be remedied.”⁶³ Toward the end of the conference, in another private session with Molotov (British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin was also present this time), Byrnes again suggested that the Polish settlement could serve as a basis for dealing with the Balkan problems. He was convinced, he said, that by the time the peace treaties with countries like Romania and Bulgaria were ready to be signed, the three main allied governments “would have found some way out of the difficulty. After all, they had been confronted with an equally difficult problem in Poland, although he realized the circumstances were different, yet they had found a solution.”⁶⁴ Nor was that the last time his remarks about the Balkans pointed in that direction. On 30 September, as the conference was winding down, in yet another private meeting with Molotov, Byrnes made it clear that sweeping reorganizations would not be necessary and that only relatively minor changes would be required. The U.S. government, he said, “wished to find some means of justifying such a step as recogni-

61. Molotov-Byrnes Meeting, 19 September 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, pp. 243–247.

62. Gormly, *Collapse of the Grand Alliance*, pp. 68–69. For the document itself, see U.S. Suggested Directive, 19 September 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, p. 266.

63. Fifteenth Meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, 21 September 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, p. 293.

64. Byrnes-Molotov-Bevin Meeting, 28 September 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, p. 437.

tion,” and “if some change could be made in the governments of these countries [Bulgaria and Romania], it might be a way out.”⁶⁵

How is all this to be interpreted? It is simply a question of putting two and two together. On the one hand, Byrnes was proposing that the Balkan issues be settled by taking the Polish settlement as a model. On the other hand, the Western governments were now under no illusions about what was going on in Poland. That country, a British diplomat in Warsaw reported on 17 August, was fast becoming a police state; “the so-called security police control everything” and “people disappear (in dribbles not masses) all the time.”⁶⁶ On 7 September the British ambassador sent a report to London summarizing the situation in Poland. The press there was not free; “political arrests continue”; and the promises about free elections and so on “have not been carried out.”⁶⁷ The U.S. ambassador in Warsaw, Arthur Bliss Lane, was even more pessimistic.⁶⁸ To make sure that Byrnes understood the situation, Lane flew to London just as the conference was about to convene to report to Byrnes in person.⁶⁹ The Office of Strategic Services, the main U.S. intelligence agency at the time, told Truman on 5 September that the Polish Communists were creating a “virtual one-party system.”⁷⁰ By October the situation in Poland had become clear to the whole world.⁷¹ But Western leaders certainly knew what was going on in that country well before journalists were able to publish their

65. Byrnes-Molotov Meeting, 30 September 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, p. 489. Byrnes even held up the Polish settlement as an example of the not very “exacting” standard the U.S. government was applying in its negotiations with the Soviet Union on Eastern Europe more generally. See Byrnes’s nationwide radio report on the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting, 5 October 1945, in *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. 13, No. 328 (7 October 1945), p. 509.

66. Hankey to Warner, 17 August 1945, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 6, 1 pp. 5–16.

67. Cavendish Bentinck to Foreign Office, 7 September 1945, in 860C.00/9-1945, U.S. State Department Central Files, Record Group 59, U.S. National Archives, College Park, Maryland. This is also available on microfilm in *Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files: Poland, 1945–1949* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1986), reel 1.

68. Warner Memorandum of Conversation with Arthur Bliss Lane, 14 September 1945, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 6, Microfiche Suppl., Calendar 21i.

69. Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1948), pp. 173, 175.

70. Donovan Memorandum for the President, September 5, 1945, in Truman Papers, Rose A. Conway Files, Box 10, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO. Also available in Records of the Office of Strategic Services: Washington Director’s Office Administrative Files, 1941–1945, U.S. National Archives, Microfilm Publication M1642, Roll 25, Frames 627–628 and also at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/usee/usee.html>.

71. Note especially a series of articles that Gladwin Hill published in *The New York Times* in October 1945: “Poles Found Cowed by Fear Into Submission to Regime” (22 October); “Polish Reds Rule by Ersatz Parties” (24 October); and “Freedom of Speech and the Press Found to Be Only Myth in Poland” (26 October). This marked quite a change in that newspaper’s reporting of the Polish affair. The main article the *Times* had published prior to that point on the political situation after the Moscow accord, Sydney Gruson’s “Polish Freedom Reported Growing: Observers Say Independence is Far Greater Than Had Been Expected Abroad,” *The New York Times*, 19 July 1945, p. 7, had given a rather different impression.

findings. Indeed, the way top U.S. officials referred to the situation in the fall of 1945 suggested that the press reports came as no surprise and that these officials had known for some time that “Soviet policies and actions” in the countries occupied by the Red Army were “directed towards the establishment of complete Soviet domination and control over all phases of the external and internal life of those countries.”⁷²

So Byrnes certainly knew what he was calling for when he proposed that the Polish settlement be taken as a model for dealing with the Romanian and Bulgarian problems. If those Balkan problems were not settled at London, this was not because Byrnes had taken an intransigent line. It was because Molotov, on Stalin’s orders, had been absolutely uncompromising on the matter. Stalin was willing to allow the conference to end without an agreement, but that did not mean he wanted to break with the Western powers. His tough line—his “policy of tenacity,” he called it—was also a shot across the bow. The London meeting was for Stalin a kind of “combat reconnaissance” operation. As Vladimir Pechatnov says, Stalin “wanted to continue bargaining, albeit in a highly harsh manner, on the terms as close as possible to Soviet ones.”⁷³

How did Truman react to all this? The British ambassador in Washington, Lord Halifax, saw the president on 25 September. Truman, Halifax reported, was “frankly fogged as to what had apparently so soon and so darkly clouded the atmosphere of Potsdam.” This implies that Truman’s tough stand at Potsdam on Romania and Bulgaria is not to be taken too seriously. If he had been serious about the issue, he would scarcely have been surprised by the deadlock at London. In any event, Truman thought he might be able to deal with the problem the same way the Polish problem had been resolved in the spring. “He was thinking very hard,” Halifax wrote, “about sending another special emissary to Marshal Stalin. I said another Harry Hopkins? To which he replied or possibly Hopkins himself. But he was still thinking hard about it.”⁷⁴ The events in Poland had obviously not discredited the policy associated with the Hopkins mission in Truman’s mind. The president evidently agreed with Byrnes that the sort of arrangement Hopkins had worked out with Stalin in May for Poland could serve as a model for resolving the Balkan problems.

The dying Hopkins was in no condition to go to the Soviet Union a second time, and it was Byrnes who went in December to Moscow. A deal was worked out quickly. There would be minor changes in the composition of the

72. Bohlen memorandum of 18 October 1945, quoted in Eduard Mark, “Charles E. Bohlen and the Acceptable Limits of Soviet Hegemony in Eastern Europe: A Memorandum of 18 October 1945,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (April 1979), p. 207.

73. Pechatnov, “‘The Allies Are Pressing on You,’” pp. 8, 14.

74. Halifax to Bevin, 25 September 1945, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 2, p. 367.

Communist-dominated governments in Bulgaria and Romania; the usual promises about free elections would again be made; and the United States would recognize the new governments. It was the Hopkins mission all over again, but this time it was even clearer than it had been in May that the Communists' promises would not be honored. The United States was in effect accepting the fact that the Soviet Union would have a free hand in Romania and Bulgaria.

Few historians would perhaps put it so bluntly, but this essentially is the way the Moscow agreement is usually interpreted. Stalin himself viewed it as a Soviet victory, and the U.S. mission in Bucharest "regarded the agreement as a 'sell-out' and threatened to resign en masse."⁷⁵ But not everyone thinks the Moscow agreement should be interpreted in those terms. The decision to recognize the Communist regimes in the Balkans, it is sometimes argued, was merely a tactical move, and the Moscow agreement did not really mean that the United States was writing off Romania and Bulgaria. Byrnes, the argument goes, thought that the signing of peace treaties would lead to a withdrawal of Soviet troops from those countries and that, with the Red Army gone, the Communists would not be able to hold on to power there. But if peace treaties were to be signed, the United States would first have to recognize the "still-unrepresentative governments of Bulgaria and Romania, as otherwise the United States could hardly conclude treaties with them."⁷⁶

What is to be made of this interpretation? The idea that it would make sense for the West to go this route—to negotiate peace treaties in the hope that they would lead to the withdrawal of Soviet troops and thus to dramatic political changes in the countries in question—was certainly in the air at the time. The British, for example, often made this kind of argument, even in mid-1945.⁷⁷ But there is not much evidence to show that Byrnes was actually thinking along these lines at the end of the year. The strongest piece of evidence cited in support of this thesis is from a volume of memoirs Byrnes published in 1958, in which he claimed that until peace treaties were signed "the Soviets would have an excuse to keep large military forces in the Balkans and in Austria," and that, protected by those forces, "their agents could work to take control of, or strengthen the Russian hold on, occupied countries."⁷⁸ But

75. Zubok, *Failed Empire*, p. 34; and Quinlan, *Clash over Romania*, p. 151.

76. Eduard Mark, contribution to H-Diplo Miscamble Roundtable, <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/FromTrumantoRoosevelt-Mark.pdf>, p. 8; and Mark, "American Policy toward Eastern Europe," p. 330.

77. "Brief for the U.K. Delegation to the Conference at Potsdam," c. 10 July 1945, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 1, p. 152.

78. James F. Byrnes, *All in One Lifetime* (New York: Harper, 1958), pp. 318–319. Other evidence cited by Mark in his 1981 article and elsewhere does not strike me as very strong. I posted it on-line so

it is hard to believe that for Byrnes in late 1945 such legalistic arguments carried much weight—that he actually thought that if peace treaties could be signed, the Soviet Union, deprived of an excuse, would pull its forces out and allow the Communist regimes in the area to collapse. In any event, the way Byrnes used the Polish precedent at London—the way he held up the earlier arrangements that had been worked out for Poland as a model for how the Balkan countries should be treated—shows quite clearly what the real policy was. Soviet leaders were in effect told that what had happened in Poland was acceptable, that the United States could live with the situation that was developing there. Why would Byrnes have given them that message if his goal was to save some hope for representative government in Eastern Europe as a whole?

Understanding the Byrnes Policy

Byrnes has not fared well in the hands of the historians. He is often viewed as someone for whom politics boiled down to deal-making—as someone who was therefore too prone to compromise, too prone to think he could deal with Stalin the same way he had dealt with his colleagues in the Senate, and as someone who had no real strategic concept, no overarching sense of political purpose. But in reality Byrnes was no appeaser. In 1945 he took a harder line on some key issues than some of the most prominent Cold Warriors of the 1950s took at the time: a harder line than Dean Acheson on the question of sharing U.S. nuclear secrets with the Soviet Union, and a harder line than Dulles on the defense of the Turkish Straits.⁷⁹ On some issues—for example, questions relating to the occupation of Japan—he was from the start as hard as nails. He refused point blank even to discuss the Japan question in any serious way when Molotov brought it up at the London conference.⁸⁰

Byrnes clearly wanted to reach certain understandings with Stalin, but that does not necessarily mean that he viewed deal-making as an end in itself. The real question is what if anything Byrnes was trying to accomplish—with whether the deal-making was directed toward some larger end, with whether

that interested readers can draw their own conclusions: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/usee/usee.html>.

79. For Acheson, see James Forrestal Diary, entries for 21 September and 16 October 1945, in *Forrestal Diaries*, Vol. 3, Forrestal Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University. For Dulles, see Byrnes to Truman, 19 October 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VIII, p. 1256. On Dulles, see also Pruessen, *Dulles*, pp. 318–319.

80. Council of Foreign Ministers Meeting, 11 September 1945, *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, p. 118n; Council of Foreign Ministers Meeting, 24 September 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, p. 339; and Council of Foreign Ministers Meeting, 25 September 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, pp. 365–366.

the different aspects of his policy had a common taproot, with whether they were rooted in a certain vision of the kind of world he wanted to see take shape.

Although Byrnes was not very open about it, he did have a vision of this sort. The basic problem he faced was obvious. The United States and the Soviet Union would be by far the two most powerful countries in the postwar world. How should they relate to each other? Questions pertaining to Eastern Europe had a certain importance in that context. Soviet troops were tightening their grip on countries like Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. Should the United States try to prevent them from doing so? Given that the United States was not going to go to war over the issue, there was a limit to how much the U.S. government could accomplish. In all probability, Europe was going to be divided anyway. In such circumstances, wouldn't it make sense to reach some sort of understanding with the Soviet Union? The United States would make it clear that it was willing to live with a Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe—that it would be willing to live with the Communist regimes that were the instruments of Soviet control there—and the Soviet Union, for its part, would respect U.S. interests on the western side of the line of demarcation in Europe, as well as in certain other key areas like Japan. The two sides could get along not by trying to “cooperate,” Roosevelt-style—that is, by trying to work hand-in-hand with each other on whatever problems turned up. Instead, they could get along by pulling apart.

But the policy aimed at something more than just a de facto partition between East and West. The goal was to create an agreed framework—to make sure that the separation was based on a genuine understanding, and that it had a certain official status. That was why diplomatic recognition was so important and why Soviet participation in the various advisory bodies being set up for Japan mattered as much as it did. The United States, in recognizing the proto-Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, would not exactly be giving its seal of approval to what the Soviet Union was doing in that part of the world. But the policy would be more than just one of passive acquiescence. Byrnes was willing to go a bit further than that. He was willing to give the message that the United States accepted the new status quo in Eastern Europe—that it was willing to live with the new political order the Soviet Union was setting up in that region—and that this was something that the U.S. government by no means had to do.

Recognition, the critics charged, meant that the U.S. government would be “lending respectability” to the “stooge governments” the Soviet Union had installed in the region.⁸¹ There is certainly something to this charge; indeed,

81. George Kennan, *Memoirs, 1925–1950* (Boston: Little Brown, 1967), p. 255.

recognition had political value for that very reason. But recognition was not a gift. It was part of a more far-reaching policy. Byrnes's goal was to put U.S.-Soviet relations on a relatively solid basis without sacrificing any of America's core interests. The sort of arrangement he had in mind would on balance be quite satisfactory from the U.S. point of view. Western Europe, after all, was more valuable than Eastern Europe; Italy, Greece, and Japan counted for more than Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania. But if the arrangement he was reaching for could be worked out, U.S. interests would not have to be defended simply by raw military power. An agreement, even a tacit understanding, would introduce a certain element of stability into the system that would otherwise be lacking.

How solid is this interpretation? Did Byrnes actually pursue this sort of policy—that is, a policy rooted in the idea that an understanding had to be reached with the Soviet Union and that at the heart of that understanding would be a common acceptance of the notion that Europe would be divided between East and West? The answer, of course, turns on what the evidence shows. When you look closely at what was going on, do you see this kind of philosophy at work? When you look, for example, at Potsdam, do you get the sense that U.S. policy there was rooted in a strategic concept of this sort?

The German question was the main issue at Potsdam, and Byrnes's policy in this area was quite striking. Basically his policy was built on the assumption that Germany was going to be divided between East and West. The argument supporting this conclusion is somewhat complicated, but because James McAllister and I have both developed it in some detail elsewhere only the bare bones of the argument will be presented here.⁸² The heart of Byrnes's policy on this issue was his plan for dealing with the reparation question. His basic idea was that each side would take what it wanted from its zone of occupation in Germany. But this implied that Germany could not be run as a unit for the purposes of foreign trade. For if Germany were treated as a unit, any deficit the country would run would have to be financed by the allies as a whole, so the bigger the deficit, the greater the burden on the American taxpayer. What this meant is that the more the Soviet Union took from its part of Germany, the bigger the overall deficit would be. In effect, American taxpayers would end up financing part of Germany's reparation deliveries to the Soviet Union,

82. See Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, pp. 15–33; McAllister, *No Exit*, pp. 84–98; and Laure Castin-Chaparro, *Puissance de l'URSS, misères de l'Allemagne: Staline et la question allemande, 1941–1955* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002), p. 145. Note also the comment by the editors (Jochen Laufer and Georgij Kynin) of *Die UdSSR und die deutsche Frage: Dokumente aus dem Archiv für Aussenpolitik der Russischen Föderation*, Vol. 2: 9 Mai 1945 bis 3. Oktober 1946 (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 2004) that the Potsdam reparations settlement “amounted to the recognition of two spheres of influence in Europe” (p. lxxxii) and their reference (p. cvii) to the “only partly formally agreed upon peace settlement.”

and this the U.S. government would simply not countenance. Hence exports and imports would also have to be managed on a zonal basis, and any deficit would be the responsibility of the country in charge of that particular zone. But the management of foreign trade was the key to the overall economic treatment of Germany. Without a common regime for exports and imports, the two parts of Germany would have to relate to each other economically as though they were foreign countries. The management of the economy, in turn, had major political implications. The economic division of the country would mean that it was probably going to be divided politically as well.

Was any of this understood at the time? Byrnes and the other U.S. and allied officials involved with these questions at Potsdam knew perfectly well what the implications of the reparation plan were. He and his main collaborators favored the plan because it was in line with a more far-reaching political concept. The thinking was that the two sides could get along best by pulling apart. Byrnes repeatedly argued that trying to run Germany on a unitary basis would lead to unending conflicts. He therefore wanted each power to have a “free hand” in its own zone.⁸³ The assumption was that this would lead to a division of Germany between East and West. Byrnes and other key U.S. officials at Potsdam did not doubt that the Western powers (including the French, who were not even present at the conference) would be able to pull together and run western Germany as a unit. Byrnes himself usually referred at Potsdam to the “western zone,” in the singular. Soviet forces would control eastern Germany, but they had to be kept out of the western part of the country. It was for that reason that Byrnes rejected the whole notion of an internationalization of the Ruhr.⁸⁴ Germany, he told the French in late August 1945, would be a country of 45 million—and that meant a country composed of the three western zones, which at that time had a combined population of roughly 45 million. He took for granted that the old Germany of 65 million would cease to exist—that the eastern zone would not be part of the Germany that he assumed would come into being.⁸⁵

But this was not a situation that Byrnes proposed to bring about by fiat. He did not propose to present Soviet leaders with a simple *fait accompli*. On the reparation issue, he knew that the West had the power to impose the solution he had in mind. The Soviet Union, as one of the U.S. delegates at

83. See Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, pp. 26–27.

84. See, for example, Byrnes-Bidault Meeting, 25 August 1945, in *Documents diplomatiques français 1945*, Vol. 2, p. 345; Note de la Direction d'Amérique, Conversations à Washington et à New York sur certains problèmes européens, 31 August 1945, in *Documents diplomatiques français 1945*, Vol. 2, pp. 382–383; and, especially, Chauvel to Massigli, 2 September 1945, in *Documents diplomatiques français 1945*, Vol. 2, p. 407. See also McAllister, *No Exit*, p. 86.

85. Byrnes-Bidault Meeting, 23 August 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. IV, p. 720. For the original French text, see *Documents diplomatiques français 1945*, Vol. 2, p. 333.

Potsdam put it, would have to “bow” to whatever the United States and its friends decided they would allow the USSR to receive from western Germany, and, as Molotov himself pointed out in reacting to the original Byrnes concept (according to which each power would simply take whatever it wanted from its zone), “if they failed to agree on reparations, the result would be the same as under Mr. Byrnes’ plan.”⁸⁶ This was absolutely true, but Byrnes did not want to slam the door in Molotov’s face. The secretary of state put a high premium on getting Soviet leaders to accept this sort of arrangement voluntarily. He was therefore willing, if necessary, to sweeten the pot for them and in particular was willing to give them a major share of the plant and equipment considered unnecessary for the west German peacetime economy. This again shows a certain general concept at work: The important thing for Byrnes was not just that each side have full freedom of action in its part of Germany but that this arrangement be based on an understanding that the two sides would voluntarily forge.

How did Soviet leaders react to all of this? Stalin was delighted to see Byrnes pursue this kind of policy. The Soviet leader was also inclined to think that there would be “two Germanys”—he had in fact predicted as much in a meeting with German Communist leaders a month before Potsdam—and he was not deeply opposed to that sort of arrangement.⁸⁷ At the conference itself, he was happy to go along with a plan—the Byrnes reparation plan—that took as its premise the idea that each side would have a free hand in the area it occupied.⁸⁸ He was so taken with that basic idea that he even

86. See Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, pp. 28–29.

87. The notes of this 4 June 1945 meeting between Stalin and German Communist leaders were first published in 1991. See esp. Manfred Wilke, “‘Es wird zwei Deutschlands geben’: Entscheidung über die Zusammensetzung der Kader,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 March 1991, p. 6. The document was also published in Rolf Badstübner and Wilfried Loth, eds., *Wilhelm Pieck: Aufzeichnungen zur Deutschlandpolitik 1945–1953* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), pp. 50–52. Many scholars think that Stalin’s comment about two Germanys should not be taken at face value. Indeed, because Stalin goes on to talk about “securing the unity of Germany through a unified KPD [German Communist Party], a unified ZK [Central Committee], and a unified workers’ party,” some scholars argue that this document actually supports the view that the Soviet leader favored a unified Germany. But those interpretations strike me as rather forced. My own feeling is that Stalin’s talk there about German unity is to be understood in light of the fact that the German Communists were in Moscow to discuss the manifesto that would soon be issued to launch their new party: Stalin apparently was just laying out the official line the KPD was to take. The Soviet leader, after all, was scarcely outlining a workable political strategy. It is hard to imagine that he actually thought that having a “unified KPD,” a “unified ZK,” and so on would really “secure the unity of Germany.” Given what we know about Stalin’s general strategy at this time in the part of Europe he controlled, his thinking probably ran as follows: Germany would be divided, but the Communists for the time being would have to play a certain game and take a moderate line on major political issues; in particular, they should come across as supporters of German unity. For the text of the KPD’s 11 June *Aufruf*, see Peter Erler, Horst Laude, and Manfred Wilke, eds., *Nach Hitler kommen wir: Dokumente zur Programmatik der Moskauer KPD-Führung 1944/45 für Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), pp. 390–397. The penultimate paragraph on p. 396 is of particular interest in this context.

88. See Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, pp. 31–32. Note also a widely cited passage from the mem-

proposed that another major issue, the distribution of Germany's foreign assets, be dealt with in much the same way—that everything west of the “line running from the Baltic to the Adriatic” would go to the United States and its friends, and everything east of that line would go to the USSR.⁸⁹

Soviet policy in the eastern zone is another important indicator. It also suggests that Stalin was already thinking in terms of a divided Germany, with the eastern zone under Communist control. In that zone, behind a façade of moderation, the rudiments of a police state were gradually being put in place. As Walter Ulbricht, one of the top Communist leaders, said at the very start of the occupation: “It’s quite clear—it’s got to look democratic, but we must have everything under our control.”⁹⁰ But that policy could scarcely go unnoticed for long. People in the western zones were bound to react, and the Western allies would feel freer to create their own political system in the part of Germany they controlled. The more forcefully the Soviet Union moved ahead in the eastern zone, the less chance there was that Germany could be run as a unit. One can therefore infer from what was going on in the eastern zone that a unified Germany was not a major Soviet goal.

The evidence from the diplomatic sources for the post-Potsdam period points in the same general direction. Contrary to what some scholars have argued, Soviet leaders were not particularly interested at this time in setting up central administrations under four-power control.⁹¹ They were against work-

of Soviet defector Gregory Klimov: “It was often said in the economic spheres of the [Soviet Military Administration in Germany] headquarters that the Kremlin regarded the decisions of the Potsdam Conference as a great victory for Soviet diplomacy. The Moscow instructions emphasized this aspect at every opportunity.” Gregory Klimov [Grigorii Klimov; in German: Gregory Klimow], *Berliner Kreml* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1951), pp. 158–159. For the English translation, see Gregory Klimov, *The Terror Machine: The Inside Story of the Soviet Administration in Germany* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 147. Note, finally, Molotov’s comment on Potsdam many years later: “The main question at Potsdam was about reparations, but the Polish question was also of great importance. The Americans offered us a way out of the situation that reduced friction between us and our Western allies.” See Albert Resis, ed., *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1993), p. 53.

89. Notes of Plenary Session, 1 August 1945, in *FRUS*, Potsdam, Vol. II, pp. 566–569.

90. Quoted in Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), p. 303. Ulbricht’s comment is often taken as a good indicator of what Communist policy in eastern Germany boiled down to at that point. The phrase itself, for example, is used in the title of Monika Kaiser’s article on eastern Germany in the 1944–1949 period in Creuzberger and Görtemaker, eds., *Gleichschaltung unter Stalin?* and is also used in the title of the first chapter in Dirk Spilker, *The East German Leadership and the Division of Germany: Patriotism and Propaganda, 1945–1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

91. For the argument that Soviet leaders sought to form central administrations that would allow them to extend their influence over Germany as a whole, see, for example, Gerhard Wettig, *Bereitschaft zu Einheit in Freiheit? Die sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik 1945–1955* (Munich: Olzog, 1999), p. 81. See also Mastny, *Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, p. 24. In reality, the USSR did not make much of an effort to do so. See Laufer and Kynin, eds., Introduction to *Die UdSSR und die deutsche Frage*, Vol. 1, pp. lvi, lxiv; and, in the volume itself, the letter from Semenov to Sobolev (16 October 1945; p. 148) and the Smirnov memorandum (3 December 1945; pp. 187–188). Note also the discussion of the issue in Castin-Chaparro, *Puissance de l’URSS*, pp. 155–163. As is well known, the French vetoed the

ing out a “common import-export program” for all of Germany—which would have had to be done if that country were to be run as an economic unit.⁹² And they had little interest in working out a plan for the German economy as a whole. The four occupying powers were supposed to come up with such a plan—the “level of industry” plan—but Soviet officials made it abundantly clear that they did not take that effort very seriously.⁹³

That Soviet policy on Germany has to be seen in a somewhat broader context. Stalin tended to think in terms of spheres of influence. He wanted a free hand in his own sphere in the east and was willing to see the Western powers dominate the part of Europe that lay on their side of the line of demarcation in Europe.⁹⁴ Everyone familiar with this subject knows about Stalin’s reported comment to the Yugoslav Communists in April 1944: “Whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own social system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise.”⁹⁵ This is evidence not just of Stalin’s intention to Communize Eastern Europe, but also of his willingness to accept Western Europe as a Western sphere of influence.

This basic philosophy about how things should be organized was also

establishment of the central administrations in the Allied Control Council. Soviet leaders, however, were not particularly upset by the French action; France, it was felt, was to be treated rather gently in this area. See Gunther Mai, *Der Alliierte Kontrollrat in Deutschland 1945–1948: Alliierte Einheit, deutsche Teilung?* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), pp. 91, 91n. Note also Maiski to Molotov, 19 November 1945, in Laufer and Kynin, eds., *Die UdSSR und die deutsche Frage*, Vol. 2, p. 182. The Soviet Union also declined to go along with General Clay’s proposal to circumvent the French veto by setting up the central administrations only in the U.S., Soviet, and British zones. See Laufer and Kynin, eds., *UdSSR und die deutsche Frage*, Vol. 2, p. 694 n. 214; Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, p. 44 n. 39; and Castin-Chaparro, *Puissance de l’URSS*, pp. 153–154. For the most detailed study of this issue, see Elisabeth Kraus, *Ministerien für das ganze Deutschland? Der Alliierte Kontrollrat und die Frage gesamtdeutscher Zentralverwaltungen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990). Kraus also argues that the Soviet Union was not seriously interested in setting up central administrations in this period (see esp. pp. 118, 349–350). A related argument is sometimes made to the effect that by allowing all-German political parties to begin operations in Berlin—parties the USSR would have some control over—Soviet officials hoped to be able to influence developments in Germany as a whole. For an analysis of that argument, see Dietrich Staritz, “Parteien für ganz Deutschland? Zu den Kontroversen über ein Parteiengesetz im Alliierten Kontrollrat 1946/47,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April 1984), esp. pp. 241–245, 255–256.

92. See Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, pp. 30, 45.

93. See especially the account of the negotiations in G. D. A. MacDougall, “Some Random Notes on the Reparation Discussions in Berlin, September–November 1945,” in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 1, p. 527.

94. Note especially in this connection the moderate line the Soviet Union took at the time in matters relating to countries on the Western side of the line of demarcation in Europe. On France, for example, see Georgette Elgey, *La République des illusions, 1945–1951*, rev. ed. (Paris: Fayard, 1993), pp. 50–54; and Irwin Wall, *French Communism in the Era of Stalin* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 30–31. On Italy, see Silvio Pons, “Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of the Cold War in Europe,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 3, 5, 14–15, 20–22, 25–26. On Greece, see John Iatrides, “Revolution or Self-Defense? Communist Goals, Strategy and Tactics in the Greek Civil War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Summer 2005), esp. pp. 17–18.

95. Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1962), p. 114.

reflected in the kinds of arguments Stalin and Molotov made when dealing with U.S. or British complaints about what was going on in Eastern Europe. They often responded by pointing out that the USSR was excluded from having any say over what was being done in the areas controlled by the Western powers. The Soviet Union, Stalin wrote Truman on 24 April 1945, was not interfering with what the Western powers were doing in Greece or Belgium. Why, then, were the Americans making such a big fuss about Poland?⁹⁶ As Soviet leaders saw it, the West was applying a double standard, and they genuinely resented it. One is struck, for example, by Molotov's comment on a memorandum by another high Soviet official regarding the Polish question during the Yalta period: "Poland—a big deal! But how governments are being organized in Belgium, France, Greece, etc., we do not know."⁹⁷

The Western powers, it is important to note, did not dismiss these sorts of argument out of hand. From the start, officials in the West understood that what was done in the areas occupied by U.S. or British troops could serve as a precedent for what the Soviet Union would do in Eastern Europe. As American and British forces moved into Italy in 1943, the U.S. government, invoking the "doctrine of the supremacy of the Theatre Commander," made clear that the Soviet Union would have little say about how Italy would be run.⁹⁸ The implications were hard to miss. As General Dwight Eisenhower, then Allied commander in the Mediterranean theater of operations, pointed out at the time, the choices the Western allies now had to make would "establish precedents far-reaching in scope."⁹⁹ The British, in particular, could see that the kind of arrangement the United States had in mind "might become a precedent for excluding Anglo-American participation in any Armistice Commission set up in a predominantly Russian theatre."¹⁰⁰ The U.S. approach, in their view, meant that the Western powers might well find themselves "completely in the cold when it comes to winding up hostilities with Finland, Hungary and Rumania."¹⁰¹ Foreign Secretary Eden referred specifically to Po-

96. Stalin to Truman, 24 April 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. V, pp. 263–264. See also Stalin-Churchill Meeting, 18 July 1945, in *DBPO*, Ser. I, Vol. 1, p. 389.

97. Quoted in Vladimir Pechatnov, "The Big Three after World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post War Relations with the United States and Great Britain," *CWIHP Working Paper No. 13* (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, May 1995), p. 23.

98. See Bruno Arcidiacono, *Le "Précédent italien" et les origines de la Guerre Froide: Les Alliés et l'occupation de l'Italie 1943–1944* (Brussels: Bruyant, 1984); and Bruno Arcidiacono, "The 'Dress Rehearsal': The Foreign Office and the Control of Italy, 1943–1944," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (June 1985), esp. pp. 423, 425. The quotation is from a memorandum written by a Foreign Office official in September 1943, quoted on p. 419 of the article.

99. Quoted in Arcidiacono, "The 'Dress Rehearsal,'" p. 418.

100. *Ibid.*, p. 422. The quotation is from the minutes of a meeting of high-level British officials on 30 June 1943.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 423. The quotation is from a note by Gladwyn Jebb dated 6 July 1943.

land in this context.¹⁰² Giving the Soviet Union more of a say in Italy, he said, “was the only way to avoid ‘the creation of a situation in which Russia would organise an independent system of her own in Eastern Europe.’”¹⁰³ The implication here was that it was only natural, if the Western powers insisted on a free hand in Italy and other areas they controlled, for the Soviet Union to have a free hand in the part of Europe the Red Army occupied.

The same kind of point applies to policy on Germany. The U.S. government wanted to make sure that its own commander in Germany would have the final say in the American zone.¹⁰⁴ But U.S. officials took it for granted that the other zonal commanders, including the Soviet commander, would have the same kind of authority in their respective zones. The Americans were not asking for any special treatment for themselves; the basic principle they insisted on would apply across the board.

In both cases, Soviet leaders had little trouble accepting that basic philosophy. They recognized Anglo-American predominance in Italy.¹⁰⁵ In Germany, they, like the Americans (but unlike the British or even the French), took an “anti-centralist” view. The USSR, as one scholar writes, “made no secret of its determination to retain maximum autonomy in its zone.”¹⁰⁶ This was in line with what Vladimir Pechatnov referred to as Stalin’s and Molotov’s “unwritten operational presumption” that there should be “full freedom of action” within their respective “spheres [of influence] for the great powers.”¹⁰⁷

Both sides realized that there could be no double standard—not if they were to put their relations with each other on a workable basis, not if they were to reach an understanding about how they could live with each other in the postwar world. The Western governments, in particular, obviously could not have it both ways. If they wanted full control of the areas on their side of the line of demarcation, wouldn’t Soviet control of Eastern Europe also have to be accepted? If Soviet leaders were going to dominate their sphere anyway, why not accept that fact, if, by so doing, you could get Moscow to accept the status quo on the western side of the line? Stalin and Molotov were bound to

102. Arcidiacono, “*Précédent italien*,” p. 380.

103. Arcidiacono, “The ‘Dress Rehearsal,’” p. 421.

104. See the evidence cited in Trachtenberg, *Constructed Peace*, p. 22 n. 62.

105. See Arcidiacono, “*Précédent italien*,” esp. pp. 441, 443. Note also the first two sentences in Pons, “Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of the Cold War in Europe”: “After World War II Italy was included in the Western ‘sphere of influence.’ There is no evidence that the Soviet Union tried to forestall this outcome.”

106. Gunther Mai, “The United States in the Allied Control Council,” in Detlef Junker et al., eds., *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945–1990*, Vol. 1, 1945–1968 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 50–51. See also Mai, *Alliierte Kontrollrat*, pp. 82, 106–108, 218–219. Note also the evidence cited in Castin-Chaparro, *Puissance de l’URSS*, p. 131.

107. Pechatnov, “Big Three after World War II,” p. 22.

make the same kind of calculation in reverse. The basic realities of the system seemed to be asserting themselves, drawing both sides into an arrangement based on a mutual acceptance of the postwar status quo—on mutual acceptance of a divided Europe and indeed of a divided Germany.¹⁰⁸

Or to put the matter another way: By drawing parallels between Eastern Europe and the areas the Western allies controlled, Stalin and Molotov were in effect proposing a deal that would give each side a free hand on its side of the line of demarcation. The sort of argument Stalin made in his 24 April letter to Truman can thus be viewed as a kind of bid in a bargaining process. The Soviet leader was making an offer, but he was also making a threat: If the deal was turned down and if the West refused to accept the sort of system the USSR was establishing in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, for its part, would not accept the new structures the Western powers were setting up in their part of the continent. With large Communist parties in countries like Italy and France, the Soviet Union could certainly make a lot of trouble if it wanted to.

As it turned out, the two sides did reach a certain understanding at Moscow in December 1945. The Western governments would recognize the Communist-dominated regimes in Romania and Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union would accept that the United States would have the final say in Japan. Although many historians have noted this connection between the Japan and Balkan issues, they generally have made this point only in passing, as though Byrnes, eager for agreement and reversing what U.S. policy had been up to that point, decided more or less on his own to work out an arrangement on the spot in Moscow.¹⁰⁹ But in fact the Moscow agreement was the climax of a

108. This point has a certain resonance in the context of international relations theory. As Robert Jervis notes, it relates directly to the argument, associated above all with James Fearon, about how both parties to a dispute have a strong interest in avoiding the costs of conflict and thus in agreeing to a settlement that reflects their joint sense for how things would turn out anyway. This observation also brings to mind the well-known German concept of the “normative Kraft des Faktischen”—the “normative force of the factual”—a term coined by Georg Jellinek more than a century ago.

109. See, for example, Robert Messer, “Et Tu Brute! James Byrnes, Harry Truman and the Origins of the Cold War,” in Kendrick Clements, ed., *James F. Byrnes and the Origins of the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1982), p. 38; Lundestad, *American Non-Policy*, p. 101; Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, *Stalin's Cold War: Soviet Strategies in Europe, 1943 to 1956* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 88–89; Harbutt, *Iron Curtain*, p. 139; and Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman*, pp. 270–271. It is interesting to note that Herbert Feis, in his *Contest over Japan* (New York: Norton, 1967), without having seen much hard evidence, simply assumed that U.S. officials were unwilling to admit that the situations were analogous. According to Feis, Soviet leaders wanted a deal whereby the USSR would “yield primacy to the United States in Japan” in exchange for U.S. recognition of Soviet primacy in “Eastern and Southeastern Europe,” but the Americans, he says, “did not think these situations were related” (pp. 56–57). As will be seen, the Americans *did* think the situations were related, but it is not hard to imagine why someone like Feis would have argued along those lines. Because the United States was insisting on having the final say in Japan, to admit that U.S. officials recognized that the situations were analogous would be tantamount to admitting that they

process, and by looking at that process a bit more closely we can get a clearer sense of what was going on between the United States and the Soviet Union in late 1945, and a clearer sense especially of whether there was a real strategic concept at work on the American side.

What was the story here? Soon after Potsdam the war with Japan came to an end, but how was the occupation of that country to be run? The United States wanted to have the final say in managing the occupation. Soviet leaders wanted to set up an Allied control regime in which they would play a role. U.S. officials understood from the outset that they could use the East European precedents as a way of fending off the Soviet challenge in Japan. As early as 23 August, Harriman urged Byrnes to “stand firm” in resisting the Soviet proposals on Japan, pointing out that the “Russian pattern set in Hungary, Bulgaria and Rumania” was a “good precedent” in this case.¹¹⁰ The mere fact that this point was made suggests that senior U.S. officials were beginning to think in terms of a deal: if they were going to rely on the Balkan precedents to support their Japan policy, they could scarcely at the same time claim that those Balkan precedents were not valid—that is, that the Soviet Union did not have the right to set policy in Romania and Bulgaria. They could accept Soviet preeminence in the Balkans if Moscow in turn would accept U.S. preeminence in Japan.

Stalin and Molotov, for their part, were also coming to think in terms of a deal. The Americans, they knew, were intransigent on Japan. At the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in September, Byrnes had refused even to discuss the occupation of Japan. Faced with that American attitude, Molotov on 21 October proposed that the “Allied Control Commission for Japan should operate on [a] basis analogous to [the] Allied Control Commission, for example, in Rumania.” The control commission in Japan, he took care to point out, would “operate under [the] direction of [the] US representative.”¹¹¹ Stalin expanded on the point in a meeting with Harriman three days later. The Soviet Union, he said, was proposing not a “Control Council” of the sort that existed in Germany, but merely a control commission of the kind that existed in Hungary and Romania, where “the final word rested with the Soviet commander.” “It went without saying,” Stalin added, “that the United States representative, General MacArthur, should be the permanent Chairman of the Control Commission and should have the final voice.”¹¹²

were willing to let the Soviet Union have the final word in Eastern Europe. For a traditionalist like Feis this was practically inconceivable.

110. Harriman to Byrnes, 23 August 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, p. 689.

111. Harriman to Byrnes, 22 October 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, p. 768. Harriman quotes a communication from Molotov on 21 October 1945.

112. Stalin-Harriman Meeting, 24 October 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, p. 785.

U.S. officials were delighted. It seemed that Soviet leaders had decided to accept the American plan for Japan. Molotov was now “climbing down”—that was Harriman’s comment on the Soviet foreign minister’s letter of 21 October.¹¹³ Byrnes was pleased that Stalin had told “Harriman that he would be willing to approve something for Japan on [the] lines of [the] Balkan Control Commissions.” Other senior State Department officials—people like Under Secretary Acheson—welcomed the idea of a Japan arrangement explicitly based on the Balkan precedents. Indeed, the U.S. government as a whole had no problem accepting the idea that the same principles applied in both cases. The U.S. War Department in particular wanted it to be very clear that “any Control Council” scheme for Japan would be “patterned on the Balkan model.”¹¹⁴

To invoke the Balkan precedents was thus to accept the notion that the two situations—Japan on the one hand and Bulgaria and Romania on the other—were analogous. This meant that if U.S. officials proposed to have the final say in Japan, they would have to accept that the Soviet Union would have the final say in countries like Romania and Bulgaria. U.S. policy was thus being pulled toward what amounted to a spheres-of-influence deal with the USSR. Byrnes was certainly open to this sort of arrangement; he in fact preferred a cleaner separation than other high U.S. officials wanted at that point. The military authorities, for example, wanted to include Soviet troops in the occupation of Japan.¹¹⁵ But Stalin did not like that idea. If countries other than the United States sent troops to Japan, he told Harriman, “the effect would be to restrict the rights of General MacArthur. This was not desirable. In order to preserve the freedom of action of MacArthur it, perhaps, might not be advisable to send other troops to Japan.”¹¹⁶ Byrnes, much to the irritation of the War Department, agreed not with the U.S. military chiefs but with Stalin. He felt that “Stalin’s position was sound and that the presence of other Allied forces could not but be a source of considerable irritation.”¹¹⁷

113. Harriman to Byrnes (see note 111 *supra*), p. 768.

114. See Halifax to Bevin, 29 October 1945 (for Byrnes), in *DBPO* I:2:510; Trans-Pacific Teletype Conversation, 22 October 1945 (for Acheson), in *FRUS* 1945 VI:771; and Meeting of State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, 22 October 1945 (for views of official State Department and War Department representatives), in *Minutes of Meetings of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, 1944–1947*, U.S. National Archives microfilm publication T-1194 (Washington: National Archives, 1945) (single reel), p. 5. This last document is also available at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/usee/usee.html>.

115. See Joint Staff Memorandum for State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, 11 October 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, pp. 744–745; “War Department Memo, Enclosed in Marshall to Byrnes,” 19 October 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, p. 763; and Byrnes to Harriman, 20 October 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, pp. 766–767.

116. Stalin-Harriman Meeting, 24 October 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, p. 785.

117. Byrnes-Patterson-Forrestal Meeting, 6 November 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, p. 833. See also

The Potsdam philosophy was at work again. The basic idea was that a clean separation was the best solution.

Given that both Byrnes and Stalin accepted this general approach, one might have thought that a straight spheres-of-influence deal would have been worked out quickly in late October. But this was not to be. After getting the Americans' hopes up, Stalin unexpectedly changed course. It was all sweetness and light when he met with Harriman on 24 October, but when the two men saw each other the next day the Soviet leader was in a very different mood. He was now bristling with resentment at the way the Soviet Union was being treated in Japan. The Soviet government, he insisted, was not being treated with respect; "it had never been informed or consulted on Japanese matters"; "Soviet views on Japan were completely disregarded." The USSR, he said, would not allow itself to be treated as a "piece of furniture." He warned that the Soviet Union might just wash its hands of the matter and refuse to participate in the charade of an advisory commission—it would just "step aside and let the Americans act as they wished in Japan."¹¹⁸

How is this sudden shift in Stalin's attitude to be understood? What was he now objecting to? Not to the fact of U.S. control in Japan, but just to the idea that the Soviet Union should make it clear that it accepted the U.S.-dominated regime there by participating in the advisory commission for Japan that the United States wanted to set up. Maybe Stalin really did resent that the Soviet Union would just be part of the "furniture"—furniture, however, that might help give the U.S. regime there a certain legitimacy. On the other hand, he certainly knew that the U.S. government felt the same way about the role it played in the control commissions in Eastern Europe—and if by chance he did not know this, Harriman was quick to point it out.¹¹⁹ In any event, Stalin clearly understood that window-dressing of this sort had a certain political function. Taking part in Allied bodies of this sort, like sending ambassadors to a country, would not change the fundamentals. Real control would remain in the hands of the country whose armies occupied the area. But it would be a symbol of acceptance. The Soviet Union in Japan, like the United States in Eastern Europe, would not exactly be giving its blessing to the regime dominated by the occupying power. But having a representative on an advisory commission, or sending an ambassador to a new government, gave a certain message. It suggested more than just grudging acquiescence in what another power was doing in the area in question. It implied a willingness to live with the system the other side was setting up in the area it controlled.

Byrnes to Harriman, 2 November 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, p. 819. For the reaction of the War Department, see McCloy to Acheson, 15 November 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, pp. 853–854.

118. Stalin-Harriman Meeting, 25 October 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, pp. 789–792.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 792

In saying that the USSR might not take part in the advisory commission, Stalin knew that this position afforded him a certain amount of leverage. His goal clearly was to reach a deal. Each side would give the other a free hand in the area it controlled. Each side would also make it clear that it accepted the new status quo by providing the new arrangements with a certain formal endorsement: diplomatic recognition in the case of Eastern Europe and participation in the advisory commissions in the case of Japan. And indeed the sudden shift in Stalin's line is probably to be understood in bargaining terms. First he dangled the carrot, then he yanked it away; first he showed the Americans what he was prepared to accept, but then he made clear that to close the deal they would have to make corresponding concessions of their own in Eastern Europe.

This bargaining process culminated in the arrangements worked out at the Moscow Conference in December, but how exactly did it work? It was not overt. Even Stalin, with all his cynicism, never actually said, in effect, that "we'll accept your domination of Japan if you accept the system we've set up in Eastern Europe—can we make a deal on that basis?" The direct bargaining that occurs when, for example, a house is being sold is rarely seen in international politics. The process is different in certain fundamental ways. When a house is on the market, the bargaining focuses on the bottom line: what price is the property to be sold for? The terms of the agreement of sale, the document that actually gets signed, are what matter. But in international bargaining, negotiations have a rather different function. In major international negotiations the formal texts that are agreed to are often of relatively minor importance. They are often just the tip of the iceberg, and what really matters is the 90 percent of the iceberg that lies below the surface, the whole web of interlocking understandings that takes shape during the talks.

How did the negotiation process work in this particular case? Stalin and Harriman had met in late October 1945. Two months of negotiations in Moscow followed.¹²⁰ Various American texts—plans for what would eventually become the Allied Council for Japan and the Far Eastern Commission—were the focus of these discussions.¹²¹ Soviet officials would comment, either

120. At the Moscow conference, Molotov repeatedly referred to the talks as "negotiations" and not just as "conversations" or "discussions." See, for example, "Moscow Conference, Third Formal Session," 18 December 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, pp. 658–659. By using that term, he was emphasizing the seriousness of what had been going on, and he had no qualms about using that language in front of Bevin. The message was that in the Soviet view (and in effect in America's view as well), the United States and the USSR were the only two states that really mattered in the world and that they could settle the world's problems *à deux*. This was a source of irritation for countries like Britain and France, but it was also an element of bonding between Moscow and Washington.

121. The Allied Council for Japan was the more important of the two. For the texts of the main pro-

verbally or in writing, on those American plans. The U.S. negotiators would then submit new drafts that took those comments into account. This drafting process had a certain importance (if only because it gave the message that Soviet views were taken seriously and that the U.S. government wanted to accommodate the USSR within certain limits), but what really mattered were the positions each side took in these talks. Byrnes was very tough on the Japan question. He clearly wanted the United States to have the final say in that area. But when he and other U.S. officials defended their position, they often pointed to the Balkan precedents. Indeed, Stalin himself, they noted, had insisted that the local commander would have the “last voice” in countries like Romania, and they were irritated when Moscow seemed to be drawing back from the idea that the occupying power’s hands should not be tied in any way.¹²²

And the Americans, in fact, made it clear in these talks not just that they accepted the general principle that each power would have the “final say” in the area it occupied. They also accepted the particular situation that had developed in the Balkans. Thus, for example, Harriman, in his meeting with Stalin on 25 October, noted that the United States in the past had gotten upset about the way its representatives in the Balkans had been treated—at the fact that they were essentially powerless—but this, he said, was now “past history.”¹²³ He was in effect saying that the U.S. government was now willing to live with the fact that it had little influence in Bulgaria and Romania and that the Soviet Union would call the shots in that part of the world. Byrnes made the point quite explicitly in his 7 November instructions to Harriman, a crucial document. “In view of the fact that the occupying forces were Soviet,” he wrote, “the United States accepted the ultimate right of the commander-in-chief of those forces, acting on the instructions of his government, to have final decision in matters pertaining to the occupation of those countries.”¹²⁴

posals, see *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, pp. 797–798 (27 October) and 874 (1 December); and *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, pp. 626–627 (16 December), 661–662 (Soviet counterproposal of 18 December), and 679–680 (19 December). For the main U.S. concession, compare the second paragraph in the fourth point of the 19 December proposal (*FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, pp. 679–680) with the corresponding point in the 16 December proposal (*FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, pp. 626), noting how the point the Soviet Union made in its 18 December counterproposal was in some measure accommodated (*FRUS*, 1945, Vol. II, pp. 661–662).

122. See esp. Harriman to Byrnes, 4, 6, and 12 November 1945 and Byrnes to Harriman, 7 and 17 November 1945, in *FRUS* 1945, Vol. VI, pp. 821, 831, 835, 847–848, 858. Given Harriman’s reputation as a hardliner, his eagerness to conclude an agreement on this basis is worth noting. He thought an “impasse would have serious repercussions not only in the Far East but in Europe and on world collaboration generally.” *Ibid.*, p. 831. See also *ibid.*, p. 851.

123. “Stalin-Harriman Meeting” (see note 118 *supra*), pp. 792–793.

124. Byrnes to Harriman, 7 November 1945 (see note 122 *supra*), p. 835.

So the hardening of the Soviet position had served a certain purpose. The Americans were drawn out: They were very tough on the core issue in Japan, somewhat flexible on the secondary issues relating to the control regime there, but quite accommodating on Romania and Bulgaria. Soviet leaders, for their part, had also made clear what their real feelings were; sometimes this was simply a question of the fervor—or lack of it—with which they pressed their case.¹²⁵ What all this meant is that the two sides did not need to engage in any serious horse-trading at the Moscow Conference. Their real feelings had already been revealed, and the elements of an agreement now fell into place, like ripe fruit falling from a tree.

All this is important because it gives us some insight into the question of what Byrnes was up to. In Kennan's view, there was something frivolous about the way Byrnes conducted the negotiations in Moscow. "He plays his negotiations by ear," Kennan wrote at the time, "going into them with no clear or fixed plan, with no definite set [of] objectives or limitations"; "his main purpose is to achieve some sort of agreement, he doesn't much care what."¹²⁶ Insofar as Byrnes had a goal, Kennan later wrote, it was "to rescue something of the wreckage of the Yalta Declaration on Liberated Europe, to preserve, that is, some fig leaves of democratic procedure to hide the nakedness of Stalinist dictatorship in the respective Eastern European countries."¹²⁷ But Byrnes was under no illusions at this time about the fate of Eastern Europe.¹²⁸ Nor was he just playing by ear. The Moscow agreement was not simply improvised by a secretary of state who had no clear sense of what he wanted to accomplish and was interested only in cutting a deal, more or less as an end in itself. The policy Byrnes pursued at the conference had taken shape months earlier. It was rooted in a certain set of principles—in the idea that the two sides could live with each other if they pulled apart, and in the idea that the two sides could reach an understanding based on that notion. A genuine understanding was of fundamental importance. Peace, in Byrnes's view, depended on agreement,

125. Note, for example, Harriman's comment at one point that Molotov was not "aggressively" defending his position. See Harriman to Byrnes, 24 November 1945, in *FRUS*, 1945, Vol. VI, p. 868.

126. Kennan diary notes, 19 December 1945, in Kennan, *Memoirs*, p. 287.

127. *Ibid.*, p. 284.

128. One has the sense that Byrnes understood the gist of Soviet policy relatively early on. That impression is based on certain straws in the wind—for example, a note written by a *New York Times* reporter in late February summarizing the information he had gathered from "certain people in Washington" about the Yalta conference. One of those informants—almost certainly Byrnes, who was the "main contact"—was struck by a comment Stalin had made at Yalta, supposedly as a joke. The Soviet leader had said he was "perfectly willing to agree to the proposal for an election as mentioned by Roosevelt, but [had] added facetiously that under the circumstances of Poland's occupation, he didn't have much doubt as to the election's outcome." See Catledge to Krock, 26 February 1945, p. 3, in Krock Papers, Box 1, Mudd Library, Princeton University, available at <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/usee/usee.html>.

compromise, and deal-making, at least in areas in which core political interests did not have to be sacrificed.¹²⁹ If an agreement of the sort Byrnes had in mind were reached, the peace could be based on something a bit more solid than the raw balance of power.

So the Byrnes strategy was quite extraordinary. There *was* a guiding philosophy to it. The U.S. government was trying to achieve a real understanding with the USSR on the fundamental issue of how the postwar world was to be organized. The basic idea was that the two countries would respect each other's most basic political interests—that they would respect the status quo that had come into being at the end of World War II. This involved American acceptance of the new political order the Soviet Union had set up in Eastern Europe. But in choosing to go that route, U.S. officials were not opting for a policy of appeasement. The United States would, after all, be getting something in return: The Soviet Union would essentially be accepting the political system the Western allies were setting up in Western Europe, and in Japan as well.

This was a serious policy, but Byrnes could not be open about what he was doing. As far as the public was concerned, the policy, if Byrnes had been honest about it, would probably have come across as callous. So in a sense the wool had to be pulled over people's eyes at the time, and it is perhaps not too surprising that historians should have been taken in as well. That is why, incidentally, a close analysis of the evidence is so important in this case. A superficial examination is bound to give a very misleading impression.

But when one does that analysis, a certain picture emerges: Byrnes knew what he was doing. He thought essentially in political and not moral terms. He accepted fundamental political realities for what they were, and he wanted the other side to relate to the world in that same businesslike way. On that basis, he believed, the two sides could reach a certain understanding. A genuine accommodation was possible if each side made it clear that it was willing to live with the sort of system that was clearly coming into being in 1945.

Stalin's views were not that different. He, too, was willing to accept a division of Europe into spheres of influence, at least for the time being and probably for some time to come. He wanted a free hand on his side of the line of demarcation and in return was willing to give the United States and its allies a relatively free hand on their side of the line in Europe, and in Japan as well. This was perhaps not a policy of "cooperation" in the normal dictionary sense of the term. But what Stalin had in mind *was* cooperation of a sort. The U.S.-

129. Note in this context the comment Byrnes made at the beginning of his radio report on the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting (cited in note 65 supra): "In the past I have been both criticized and commended for being a compromiser. I confess that I do believe that peace and political progress in international affairs as in domestic affairs depend upon intelligent compromise."

Soviet relationship could be based on a genuine political understanding, and if both sides accepted this sort of relationship they could get along with each other reasonably well.

So the picture that emerges is quite striking. Here were the world's two dominant powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, both with strong political ideologies. Given, however, the world each found itself in—a world in which another powerful country was playing an active role—there was a limit to how much of an ideological edge their foreign policies could have. When their desires came up against the other state's core strategic interests, they had to rein in their ambitions. Both states were under enormous pressure to accommodate to basic political realities, and the real point of the story here is that they did accommodate to those realities more quickly and more easily than one might have thought possible. Their policies were in line with the same political realities; they were therefore in harmony with each other. It thus seemed that a genuine political accommodation was in the cards in December 1945—that the foundation for a relatively stable great-power political system was being laid at that time.

This is what makes the Cold War so puzzling. If both the United States and the Soviet Union were willing to live with things as they were—if each accepted, and made clear to the other that it accepted, a divided world—where was the problem? Why couldn't the two sides just go their separate ways in peace? Why, in particular, did things move off the track so dramatically and so quickly in 1946 and 1947? A sense of what the puzzle is thus serves as a kind of springboard for the historical analysis. But that puzzle comes into focus only when you understand what the United States, and the Soviet Union as well, were actually trying to do in late 1945.

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