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Anglo-American and Soviet Perceptions on the Reorganization of the Postwar World

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Abstract: There were numerous divergences over the strategy and especially over the purpose of the war between the Allies. W. Churchill showed quite often his disagreement towards the American point of view regarding the British Commonwealth, while in return, the American president, F.D. Roosevelt, seemed to not understand why the American soldiers should fight for saving the interests of the British Empire. In this respect, I.V. Stalin stated quite plainly that he could no longer tolerate the new glacis state at his western borders because this particular situation had led to a second territory invasion during a single generation which insisted in the acknowledgement of territory claims and the founding of “friendly governments” within the buffer states from Central and South-Eastern Europe.

Keywords: domination; military; politics; coalitions; soviet

Introduction

While the Soviets’ claims towards Eastern Europe were considered by the British quite justified and opportune, the American view was nuanced due to the installment of a sustainable and equitable postwar climate: through the founding of the United Nations Organization, better measures could be set for the postwar international relations.

The burst of the World War II took by surprise, both military and politically, most of the European countries, especially those from the East and Southern-East. The results of the conciliatory politics led by the Anglo-French Allies towards Germany’s demands materialized in the abandonment of the Central and Eastern Europe against the Nazi expansion and Soviet aggression. The hopes of a direct military confrontation between the two countries, Nazi Germany and USSR, shattered once with the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact on August 23, 1939 at Moscow and represented the failure of the Anglo-French politics both in Europe and worldwide. The German domination, imposed in Central and Eastern Europe, was done progressively, amid the USSR’s generous help, fact stipulated in the additional and secret protocol of the aforementioned pact. This pact focused on the division of the area between the two states into spheres of influence. In this context, the Anglo-French Allies, fully aware of the inherent difficulties in the international arena, felt constrained to abandon both politically and military the entire Central and South-Eastern Europe to the Nazi-Soviet interests. The period after September 3, 1939, date corresponding to reissuing the act of war by the Allies against Germany, characterized itself through passiveness and was known in history under the name “la drole guerre” (Vianu & Buse, 1979, p. 70).

Wehrmacht’s striking victories on the Western front which culminated with the exclusion of France out of the war on June 3, 1940, would create an unfavorable situation for the Great Britain who faced a Nazi possible invasion. England’s failure alongside with the Barbarossa operation (June 22, 1941) considerably eased the situation as well. Moreover, the Japanese attack from Pearl Harbour (December

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7, 1941) would trigger immediate military and political consequences, the USA joining the British and the Soviets in the war. This moment represents in the opinion of all World War II analysts the decisive factor for the establishment of an international coalition, the conflict taking on real global proportions in all four hemispheres.

The imminent moment (Fish, 1993, p. 84), seemingly desired and looked forward by the public opinion which opposed to the Axis states, coincided, as per the majority of analyses made on contemporary international relations, with the start of a global and forceful engagement of the USA in contemporary international relations (Fish, 1993, p. 84). The engagement of one of the greatest economic powers in the world at that time was greeted both locally and externally, in Great Britain, USSR and China, countries with an extremely precarious military, political and economic situation, their military operations proving to be unfavourable on the front (Churchill, 1996, p. 37). In return, the USSR leader confirmed later on that “without the USA’s help, the Soviets and the British would have never won the war against Germany” (Gardner, 1996, p. 243).

There were numerous disputes over the strategy and especially over the purpose of the war between the Allies. W. Churchill showed quite often his disagreement towards the American point of view regarding the British Commonwealth (Churchill, 1996, p. 51), while in return, the American president, F.D. Roosevelt, seemed to not understand why the American soldiers should fight for saving the interests of the British Empire (Gardner, 1996, p. 166). The same USA president stated during the discussions held with his advisors that it is not the “purpose of the USA to protect the British interests, either real or imaginary” (Fontaine, 1992, p. 222). US intention of giving up the isolationist principles (Monroe Doctrine) in order to engage more in international affairs was done gradually and under the pressure of American circles, which were very strong from a political, military and financial point of view. Among the authorities and the American public opinion, there was the belief that the rapid installment of dictatorial regimes in Europe and in the Far East would limit even more the US participation in international commerce, thus leading to a severe economic and political decline. In conclusion, the immense material and financial potential had to be used with the purpose of preserving the economic freedom in international relations.

“The war represents an attempt to materialize political objectives through fight, and these political objectives must be taken into consideration while planning military operations. Our political objective must be the defeat of Germany...” (Constantin, 1995, pp. 161-162) wrote the former US ambassador in Paris and in Moscow, W. Bullitt, in an attempt of reshaping the external affairs of the White House through a stronger involvement in Europe and worldwide with the aim of supporting the democracy. Naturally, each of the Big Three had their own agenda, beliefs, and reasons for entering the war and each of them tried to legitimize their objectives in the eyes of their coalition partners. At the same time, each of them felt constrained to adhere and support unfailingly those principles till the war ended. Harmonizing the interests of three nations proved to be extremely difficult to materialize “till the Peace Conference from Paris (June 1946), numerous issues remaining unsolved even after that (Baciu, 1996, p. 212). The *fait accompli* policy, the incapacity of reaching one’s goals in certain areas which were outside influence, would need adjustments and permanent reconsiderations of the Allies’ objectives *vis-à-vis* the constantly growing Soviets’ demands.

Given Germany’s obvious ascent, the traditional British politics, concerned about balancing the European power, became more and more incompatible with the conciliatory politics towards the promoters of the Third Reich’s expansionism. “For the last 400 years, the British politics has been that of opposing to the strongest country in Europe, weaving solid coalitions with other states in order to cope with the fire ball such as Spain, the French Empire and then Germany (Hatchet & Springfield, 1991 p. 25). For U.S., the State Department’s view focused on US entering the war not only for saving

England, but also for preventing it from repeating the mistakes made during World War I (Hatchet & Springfield, 1991 p.160). Direct beneficiary of the international order, installed after the Great War, the US had reached the conclusion in the summer of 1940 that Great Britain was not sufficiently strong to maintain the healthy climate it had cultivated for material development and the evolution of a decent social order. The Russian-German and the Japanese spheres of influence had divided the world and if they became permanent, then the future of U.S. as a liberal democracy was in danger” (Gardner, 1996, p. 101). In return, the United States had instead a much more idealistic perception of the world, declaring itself, at least in principle, as determined opponents against the spheres of influence because of them fueling nothing but instability in terms of international politics and economy, facts which could not have prevented a potential new crisis, similar to the one from the ‘30s. The American historian, Barton J. Bernstein, wrote in “The American Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Cold War: "It's our hope," not only for our own well-being, but also for the interest and the prosperity of the whole world, that transactions and trade be made freer than they have ever been in history (Winkler, 1996, p. 49).

The Soviet Union represented a special and totally uncomfortable case, in regards to Western democracies, their hostility and mistrust leading to an increased political-diplomatic isolation of the USSR. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact from August 23, 1939, just like the Rappalo Treaty, was, on one hand, a natural consequence of the Soviets’ effort to take the USSR out from the diplomatic isolation and, on the other hand, represented an attempt to maintain the Soviet state outside the war, by obtaining at the same time significant concessions regarding its western frontiers. Scrupulously exonerating itself from its contractual obligations unto a capitalist state, such as Nazi Germany, Kremlin considered it was underpaid. This experience will only increase its mistrust towards the capitalist world, including towards the British and the Americans who had become its Allies (Fontaine, 1992, p. 199). Constrained to enter the war, the Soviets made out of their assurance and influence over Eastern Europe a cornerstone by installing “friendly governments” in relation to Western Allies. Invading the territory twice in less than a generation made Kremlin to use the sphere of influence solution in order to ensure the security and integrity of the USSR. Lacking means of natural defense such as oceans, seas, rivers, mountains, swamps or impenetrable jungles, the Soviets used this as a sufficiently plausible reason, a clever mean masked to justify the moving towards the western part of the border, through the installment of the “friendly governments” in Eastern Europe. Aware of the huge Soviet military and human potential, indispensable for the defeat of Nazi Germany, the Anglo-American Allies considered the Soviet claims to be righteous and saw them as a compensation for the significant material and human losses suffered by the USSR. Both London and Washington agreed that “the Soviet Union must dispose a glacis, a buffer area made out of states whose politics should not have harmed USSR’S security interests” (Constantiniu, 1997, p. 5). According to the American foreign affairs, these states would have to independently preserve and benefit from the advantages of a democratic regime, but their external politics had to be subordinated to the USSR’s demands by adopting a non-hostile attitude towards the Soviet state.

Historians specialized in international relations admitted that this particular politics, full of concessions towards the USSR in Central and Eastern Europe, later on called “*Finlandization*”, had its origins in the attitude of the Western states during the Russian-Finish war from 1940 when Finland had been let to cope for itself against the Soviet military aggression. Despite Finland’s membership to the League of Nations, the Western states, incapable to solve their own issues and commit as warrantors of international relations in condemning the USSR as an aggressive country, were content to simply and formally protest against it. The Soviet sacrifices were cleverly speculated by Kremlin and substantially contributed to changing the Anglo-American view regarding the future order of the postwar international relations. The creation of a buffer area in Eastern Europe perfectly fitted the thesis of “an acceptable limit of the Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe, thesis which received the large appreciation

of the American officials from the White House and the Foreign Office. The starting point of establishing the peace and security conditions of international relations, represented the key-solution for all the security issues of the entire postwar world. The creation of a balance of power and adjustments to the Soviet spheres of influence had to be opened and maintained in certain limits, especially in the strategic part of the Eastern Europe” (Pop, 1997, p. 17). At the same time, the area was out of the Western Allies’ geopolitical, strategic and economic interest, with the exception of Greece which interested Great Britain.

Great Britain’s representatives considered it naturally for the Russians to take advantage from that situation which ensured the gain of a series of territories lost by Russia during the war. As per the British Prime Minister, Europe’s postwar organization would be based on an inevitable Soviet-British condominium doubled by the division of the spheres of influence. In terms of potential differences between the two Europe’s *protective* powers, these would have been solved through bilateral agreements, thanks to the U.S. lack of interest in those areas. The peculiar British approach, on one hand, and the American one, on the other hand, represented for Romania, as well as for the other Central and South-Eastern Europe countries, a first step into sliding into the Soviet influence, beyond any geopolitical and strategic feeling of the Anglo-Americans.

The detrimental attitude towards Central and Eastern Europe in the broader framework regarding the reorganization of relations and postwar world, was seemingly due to the decision of the American President, F.D. Roosevelt who stated a number of times that: “I do not want the United States to have the post-war burden of reconstituting France, Italy and the Balkans. This is not our natural task at a distance of 3,500 miles or more. It is definitely a British task in which the British are far more vitally interested than we are (Baciu, 1990, p. 165). According to the US standpoint, the main objective was “to not take part to any of the internal issues from the South-Eastern Europe” (Baciu, 1990, p. 178). The Postwar Mist Council had the same standpoint and publicly declared in a report on September 1944 that “the postwar situation from the Balkans would involve numerous difficult issues. The U.S. never had, not even in the past, a significantly direct military, political or economic interest in the area” (Chiper, Pop & Constantiniu, 1993, p. 79).

Given the political, military and economic degradation of the British Empire alongside with the presence of the *almighty* USSR in Europe and in Asia, the strategy of the American President, Roosevelt, was based on avoiding a potential Anglo-Russian conflict in the near future. Otherwise, an American mediation would have been necessary in order to harmonize everyone’s interests on the international relations arena. The U.S. prudence towards a potentially more active implication in the European affairs, and especially in Central and Eastern Europe, could not have been approached in a *sensu stricto* manner. The cooperation within the postwar world of the Big Three greatly depended on the USSR’s attitude: the American purposes on one hand and a potential Anglo-American engagement in the area, on the other hand, could have affected the USSR’S behaviour and its security interests. The official external politics of the USA would aim the integration of the Eastern and Central European countries in a new political and economic world order. Nevertheless, the task was never to rebuild the Balkans. In fact, the solution was to fulfill all responsibilities according to a healthy and practical politics in matters of international cooperation (Gardner, 1996, p. 191).

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