From the Memorandum by British Foreign Secretary A. Eden to the War Cabinet, 9 August 1944

Soviet policy in Europe

SECRET

On the 7th June I circulated to the Cabinet a paper, W.P. (44) 304, on Soviet Policy in the Balkans[[1]](#footnote-1). It has occurred to me that my colleagues would like a similar review of the part we may expect Russia to play in the remaining areas of Europe, the extent to which our interests and influence will be affected and the policy which we should therefore follow.

2. The annexes to this paper cover respectively: 1. Germany; 2. France; 3. Central Europe (Poland, Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia); 4. Italy; 5. the Low Countries and Switzerland; 6. Scandinavia; 7. the Iberian Peninsula.

3. In attempting to estimate Soviet policy in the post-war period, there are clearly two broad possibilities: The first is that the Soviet Government will try a policy of collaboration with ourselves and the United States (and China), whether within the framework of a World Organisation or without it, if it fails to materialise. This, having regard to their immense task of rehabilitation and reconstruction and their ardent desire to resume as rapidly as possible their interrupted programme of internal development, I consider much the more likely, provided that the Kremlin is convinced of our intention to keep Germany weak and does not become suspicious that this country and the United States are seeking to build up a combination of European States against her around a revived Germany[[2]](#footnote-2). Even if this proviso is met, Soviet collaborative spirit would almost certainly suffice to restrain them both from using the methods of undisguised power politics in their dealings with other countries and from trying to exercise an undue influence on their internal affairs. Alternatively, the Soviet Government may decide that it will pay them best to break all the rules, to take full advantage of post-war disorder in Europe, to come out in open antagonism of everything which Russian propaganda has associated with “capitalism” and “imperialism” and to use all their immense power and influence in support of extreme Left-wing movement in the countries of Europe, including even Germany. During the period when she is principally concerned with internal rehabilitation and development (which one might put at a minimum of five years and probably at much longer), Russia will, I believe, try the former policy. The annexes to this paper are based on that assumption. They therefore assume that Russia will refrain, at least during that period, from territorial aggression and from attempts to enhance her own influence in foreign countries by methods and to an extent that would seriously indispose opinion in this country and the United States. This would not, however, prevent her from supporting, within these limits, movements and parties in foreign countries that look to Moscow for inspiration and, in general, taking the side of the “proletariat” against the “Capitalist”.

4. I should add one thing more on this point. It may well be that there are still two schools of thought in the Soviet Union: one collaborationist, the other holding that the Soviet Union can and should trust nobody and must rely upon her own might and such use as she can make of her friends in foreign countries. Fortunately, from all the evidence and appearances, it seems that Stalin is the protagonist of the first school and that it is in the ascendant. It should put constant aim to strengthen the hands of the collaborationists by paying regard to the Soviet Government’s reasonable demands and views, by informing and consulting them freely and frankly. Equally, we shall, I believe only earn their respect and achieve a real measure of collaboration by being as outspoken about our own requirements, views and interests as they frequently are with us about theirs. We should always remember the complete success of the frank approach made by the Prime Minister in his broadcast of the 22nd June, 1941, when, in offering collaboration, he made it clear that we would have nothing to do with Communism in this country[[3]](#footnote-3).

5. As regards the estimate of our own interest which lie in the background of the annexes to this paper, I take our strategic interests in Europe which might be affected by the spread of Soviet power and influence to be:

a. the security of the United Kingdom against long-distance air attack and, still more, against the domination of Europe by a single Great Power;

b. the security of our vital sea and air communications, in the Mediterranean and elsewhere[[4]](#footnote-4).

From the political and commercial standpoints, we require the speediest possible restoration of order and security in Europe, and that as many as possible of the Governments ad peoples of Europe should seek our friendship and guidance and should give us their confidence. Our financial power has largely gone […]. We must maintain our influence by gaining the sympathy of the new Governments and generations that will come to power after the war. In the nineteenth century the power of this country in Europe was immensely enhanced by the fact that she stood for progress in the political as well as in the industrial fields and was prepared to use her influence in support of popular democratic forces in their struggle against autocracy. In the post-war period our influence in European countries will much depend upon whether, in attempting to restore order out of chaos – and there can be little doubt that it will in varying degrees be a new order, not a return to the old- these countries adopt (as there may well be a temptation to do in the pursuit of quick, drastic and “progressive” solutions) methods and regimes such as would be likely to seek inspiration in Moscow, or whether they will model themselves on the methods of the Western democracies, and especially Great Britain, because they judge from what they see here that these methods can command success in tackling the appalling social and economic problems of the post-war Europe. The annexes to this paper, therefore, seek to foretell what type of regime is likely to emerge in the various countries dealt with. It will be seen that the forecasts are on the whole favourable, and that the Soviet Government, during the immediate post-war period when unrest will be greatest in Europe, would wish to avoid directly indisposing the Anglo-Saxon democracies by undue interference in European countries, the conditions in Europe generally will be such that we ought, if we play our cards well, to be able to maintain our influence and position in most, if not all, European countries.

6. While I am convinced that the foundation of our post-war European policy must be the Anglo-Soviet Alliance, aimed at preventing any recurrence of German aggression, I see no reason why within this framework we should not work to consolidate our position in three groups of European countries with which our relations have been traditionally close and intimate:

a. the Western Countries: France, the Low Countries, The Iberian Peninsula, especially Portugal;

b. the Scandinavian countries; and

c. the Mediterranean Group, comprising Turkey, Greece and eventually Italy.

7. At the same time, while avoiding any direct challenge to Russian interests in Central European countries adjacent to the Soviet Union, we should avail ourselves of every opportunity to spread British influence in these countries, profiting for this purpose from the new relationship we have established during this war with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and from the moral authority and esteem which we may reasonably expect to enjoy in Hungary, Romania and Austria when these countries have been liberated from the German yoke.

ANNEX 1.

GERMANY[[5]](#footnote-5)

[1]. BOTH logic and the available evidence suggest that Russia’s attitude to Germany in the post-war period will be governed by the determination that she shall be rendered permanently innocuous, and secondarily that Germany shall be forced to contribute to the maximum possible degree both in labour and goods to the reparation of the damage she has caused in Russia.

2. The Soviet Government is unlikely to forget that in spite of ten years’ preparation for a defensive war they were unable to prevent Germany, with almost 100 million fewer inhabitants than Russia, from overrunning in four months a vast area of Soviet territory and from almost capturing Moscow, which might have meant defeat. They will long remember that again in 1942 Russia was only saved by the vastness of her expanses and of her sacrifices of man-power and material. Both the Soviet Government and the Soviet people must dread the possibility of German recovery - and they deal in drastic remedies. It is natural, therefore, that Stalin should be an advocate of the dismemberment of Germany. He requires a settlement which will “completely exclude the possibility of fresh aggression on the part of Germany” (Stalin, the 6th November, 1943). The Soviet Government has long since in their internal propaganda dropped the distinction which they made at the beginning of the war between good and Nazi Germans. They have devoted every device of publicity to arousing a passionate hatred of the Germans, which reinforced by appalling German atrocities and destruction has borne full fruit, except perhaps in certain non-Russian areas lately in German occupation, such as the westerly parts of the Ukraine, where conciliatory tactics seem to have had some success. The Soviet Government are likely, therefore, to set the greatest store by the co-operation of their Allies in the most stringent and effective measures for preventing a revival of Germany, or if we argue that a prosperous Germany is necessary if Europe as a whole , and Great Britain in particular, is to be prosperous. M. Maisky recently told a British official that he foresaw in this one of the greatest obstacles to the establishment of relations of real confidence[[6]](#footnote-6). […]

6. It seems safe then to assume that Russia will only seek a combination with Germany if she believes that the other world Powers design to restore Germany as a bulwark against herself. Especially is this assumption safe during the first five years or more after the war, while Russia must herself repair the damage she has suffered and further exploit her own internal resources in order to render herself invulnerable against all comers. […]

8. The remedy is the continuance of the closest possible degree of co-operation with the Soviet Government, especially in all that concerns Germany, and the avoidance so far as possible of all signs of friendship for Germany or weakness towards her. No doubt we in this country, and more still the Americans, will find it difficult to agree with all the Russian draconian ideas about the post-war treatment of Germany. When such cases arise we must do our best to meet the Russians half-way and should be at pains to explain convincingly to them the reasons for our disagreement.

9. We must also be careful in all our dealings with other European countries, and especially the countries of Eastern Europe, to give the Soviet Government no cause to think we are building up a *bloc* against her. For the Soviet Government would rightly consider that such a *bloc* would inevitably sooner or later require German co-operation.

[…]

ANNEX 3.

Central Europe.

[1]. THE main Soviet interest in Central Europe is to prevent conditions returning in which Germany will again be an actual or potential threat to Russian security and in which Central European States between Germany and Russia will be faced with the choice of **either** co-operation with or being overrun by Germany and so ceasing to exist as independent nations. The maintenance of the independence of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Austria against German infiltration, and the linking up of at least the first three within the Russian security system in Eastern Europe is as vital an interest of the Soviet Government: as is the independence of the Western European States to us. Russia has hitherto shown herself suspicious of these Central European States forming a federation since she fears that such a bloc under Polish leadership might be as hostile to Russia as to Germany and might result in a revival of the old “cordon sanitaire” which followed the Bolshevik revolution[[7]](#footnote-7).

2. The Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty is probably a true indication of Soviet policy in Central Europe. It binds Czechoslovakia closely to the Soviet Union, and also provides for the subsequent accession of neighbouring States, e.g., Poland, in resistance to German aggression. There is no reason to suppose that the treaty could not be further extended to include Hungary and Austria, if the future regimes and policies of those countries made such a course desirable.

3. Although Soviet foreign policy is fundamentally hostile to the pre-war semi authoritarian regime in Poland, and to the Hungarian oligarchy, there have been no signs of any Soviet desire to impose Communist regimes in any of these Central European countries. In fact, Russian relations are closest with Czechoslovakia, which is a “petit bourgeois” country with a capitalist structure of society and a prosperous lower-middle class and peasantry.

4. The above general considerations apply to the area as a whole but the position differs considerably in the individual countries which, therefore, require separate treatment.

Poland.

5. There is, unfortunately, a long tradition of deep-seated hostility between Poland and Russia, embittered by the Soviet entry into Poland in September 1939 and by subsequent Polish-Soviet differences during the war. Russia is determined to prevent any revival of Polish policy as it existed between the two wars, when Poland had ambitions to play a role of a Great Power, to act as a balance between Germany and Russia, and, in alliance with the Great Powers of the West, as a barrier against closer Russian contacts with Europe. Soviet policy is, therefore, fundamentally opposed to the return to power of any of the pre-war Polish ruling elements and to any revival of the Pilsudski tradition. She is determined to eradicate once and for all the possibility of territorial disputes between Poland and Russia in the East and at the same time future Polish-German rapprochement would be impossible by the extension of Polish frontiers at German expense to the Baltic and to the West[[8]](#footnote-8). There have been signs that the Russians are ready to welcome a new regime in Poland with a broad basis of popular support in the democratic Peasant and Socialist parties[[9]](#footnote-9). While Russian territorial and strategic requirements will certainly be far-reaching, there is some reason to hope that, provided such a democratic regime takes root, Poland will be left with genuine independence and free from excessive Russian interference in her internal affairs.

6. Poland, however, provides the most likely source of dispute between this country and Russia in view of our special relations with Poland arising out of the Anglo-Polish Alliance and of the fact that the war arose out of Polish resistance to German aggression. Large numbers of Poles have, unfortunately, pinned their faith to British and American support against the territorial and strategic demands which Russia will make of Poland. It would be fatal, not only to Anglo-Soviet relations and therefore to the future prospects of peace in Europe, but also to Poland herself if we encouraged the Poles to rely upon such support instead of staking everything upon achieving good relations with Russia. At the same time, there are clearly limits to the concessions which Poland can be expected to make and which this country could condone. Soviet intentions as at present known to us, however, justify confidence that an acceptable solution can be found as a result of which there should emerge from this war a strong and independent Poland with its centre of gravity move to the West and to the Baltic, and closely allied with Russia. Once Soviet suspicions regarding Polish intentions and even British policy towards Poland have been finally removed, there is no reason why we should not take every opportunity to increase our economic exchange with Poland and to spread British influence, chiefly in the cultural sphere. We should, however, be most careful not to undertake military commitment in regard to Poland except jointly with the Russians. We should equally avoid encouraging the Poles to look westwards to London to the exclusion of cultivation their all-important relations with Russia and we should prevent misunderstandings by exchanging views with the Soviet Government in regard to Poland.

7. To sum up, we should therefore continue our present policy of encouraging in every way possible a resumption of relations between Russia and Poland and a final solution of Polish-Soviet territorial and strategic problems. We should continue to support the Polish Government under Mikolajczyk, who represents precisely those solid democratic elements on which the future Poland can best be built. Without intervening directly more than is necessary, we should at the same time show the Soviet Union that a fair deal for Poland is essential to future good relations between Britain and Russia, while also encouraging the Poles to face realities and to show a reasonable spirit of compromise […]

[TNA, CAB 65/33]

Keywords: Post-war order, Poland

1. Eden’s memorandum was imbued with fear about the growing Soviet influence in the Balkans, with the desire to avoid open confrontation: “we should of course guard ourselves against the assumption that it is inevitable that, in the Balkans, there should be a direct clash of interests and sooner or later a conflict. If we make it clear that we think there is an irreconcilable clash of interests between two Powers in the Balkans, the Russians, who hold so many cards there, will work on the same assumption. We should not hesitate to make our special interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and therefore in Greece and Turkey, and indeed our interests elsewhere in the Balkans, clear to the Russians: but in any steps we take to build up our influence, we must be most careful to avoid giving the impression of a direct challenge”. W.P. (44) 304, Memo by Eden, 07/06/1944 // TNA, CAB 66/51). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. These ideas intersected with a lengthy Foreign Office memorandum of April 29, 1944 See: Foreign Office memorandum: «PROBABLE POST-WAR TENDENCIES IN SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY AS AFFECTING BRITISH INTERESTS», 29 April 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “No one has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have for the last twenty-five years. I will unsay no word that I have spoken about it. But all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding…”. For the full text see: Robert Rhodes James, ed. Churchill Speaks: 1897-1963 Collected Speeches in Peace & War (Leicester: Windward, 1980), p.761-764. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This passage in the document, in fact, summed up the characteristics of Great Britain’s strategic interests, and was part of an earlier report (dated 6 June 1944) by the Post-Hostilities Planning Subcommittee. See: Post-Hostilities Planning Sub-Committee Report: EFFECT OF SOVIET POLICY ON BRITISH STRATEGIC INTERESTS, 6 June 1944.. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The main idea of this addendum was repeated (sometimes word for word) in passages in a memorandum of 29 April 1944. See: Foreign Office memorandum: «PROBABLE POST-WAR TENDENCIES IN SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY AS AFFECTING BRITISH INTERESTS», 29 April 1944. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In a way, Maisky raised it in his earlier report to Molotove. See: ‘From the note ‘On the desirable foundations for the future of the world’ from the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, head of the Commission of the USSR People's Commissariat for damages caused by Nazi Germany and its allies to the Soviet Union, I.M. Maisky, to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, V.M. Molotov, dated 10 January 1944.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Molotov spoke directly to Eden about this during the Moscow Conference in 1943. The federation project "reminds Soviet people of the ‘cordon sanitaire’ policy, which, it is well known, is directed against the Soviet Union and is, therefore, perceived negatively by the Soviet people". (Moskovskaya konferentsiya. p. 180). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The idea that the USSR’s preference to push Poland’s western border was dictated by, among other things, the desire to prevent a Polish-German rapprochement in the future, took root in Eden’s thinking. In January 194,5 he wrote that, “the Russians consider that they have an interest in pushing Poland as far to west as possible, this embroiling her permanently with Germany and making her dependent upon Soviet support and protection” (W.P. (45) 48, Memo by Eden, 23/01/1945 // TNA, CAB 66/61). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Polish Peasant Party was established in March 1931 through the merger of small peasant parties. Its program included the expropriation of landed estates without compensation and their distribution among the peasants. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)