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**“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**

by  
**Vladimir O. Pechatnov**  
Translated by **Vladislav M. Zubok**  
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**“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<sup>1</sup>**

The autumn after the allied victory of 1945 has been often considered by historians of Soviet foreign policy as a political lull, a pause between the end of the titanic war and the beginning of the Cold War. The absence from Moscow of the main protagonist, Joseph Stalin, who at that time was on vacation on the Black Sea, as well as the paucity of information on what happened inside the Kremlin, has contributed to this impression. However, investigation of Stalin's archive reveals another causal link between Stalin's absence and the availability of evidence. Only because the *vozhd* left for rest and earlier his deputy, Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov, had left for London to take part in the meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers, can we now read their correspondence. It preserved for posterity in exchanges that normally were not put in writing and disappeared forever as an echo in the silence of the Kremlin's chambers. Key excerpts from this correspondence cited below are published for the first time and, when put in historical context, provide perhaps the best guide yet available to the true motives and methods of Stalin's policy at the critical juncture between the alliance with the West and the Cold War against it. To a somewhat lesser extent this is also true of 1946 when Molotov was often away for Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) sessions and Paris peace conference so that his correspondence with Stalin covered a wide range of postwar settlement issues. The documents quoted are located at the former "Stalin fond" (fond 45, opis 1) that has been in the process of reorganization and transfer from the Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (*APRF*) to the Russian Center for Preservation and Study of Documents of Contemporary History in Moscow (*RTsKhIDNI*).

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The London session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in September 1945 was the first diplomatic encounter of the Allies after the Potsdam Conference, with an agenda that included preparing draft peace treaties with European satellites of Germany, as well as finding solutions for other issues of the postwar peace settlement. It was the first serious test for the coalition of victors after the complete end of hostilities of the Second World War. Not surprisingly, Soviet diplomacy prepared for it with utmost seriousness, although in haste. The main Soviet positions for the conference had been discussed and formulated in the instructions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [CC VKP (b)] for a delegation of the USSR headed by Molotov.<sup>2</sup> But their implementation was contingent on the course of negotiations and, therefore, received the unflagging attention of the Kremlin's chief diplomat: Stalin. Every day, often more than once, Molotov informed Stalin about the talks and received from him brief commentaries and instructions that Stalin dictated or wrote by his own hand. This system of "remote control" emerged earlier, during Molotov's diplomatic missions of 1940, 1942 and April-May of 1945.<sup>3</sup> A particularly intense exchange of views between the strategist and the negotiator took place during the London session of the CFM.

The conference opened on 11 September 1945, with the discussion of a procedural question: to authorize participation of representatives of France and China in the discussion of all issues at the conference, including peace treaties. This proposal of U.S. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes and Foreign Secretary of Great Britain Ernest Bevin deviated from the letter of the Potsdam agreements. They read that only the countries that participated in the war and

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir O. Pechatnov is a Professor at the Moscow Institute of International Relations. An abridged version of this paper was published in Moscow-based journal *Istochnik*, no. 2-3, (1999). The author is grateful to Jim Hershberg, Michael Hunt, John Lewis Gaddis and Christian F. Ostermann for their very helpful suggestions on this paper.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent overview of London CFM based on Soviet documents from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, see Galina Agafonova, "Diplomatischekii krizis na Londonskoi sessii SMID" in Stalin *i kholodnaia voina*, ed. Alexander Chubarian (Moskva: Institut, 1998), pp.63-83.

<sup>3</sup> For Stalin-Molotov correspondence of 1941-1942 see Oleg Rzheshesky, *Voyna i diplomatiia: dokumenty, kommentarii, 1941-1942* (Moskva: Nauka, 1997).

signed the armistices with the satellites of Germany could decide on issues on peace treaties with these countries. Thus, according to the Potsdam formula, France could take part in decisions only on a peace treaty for Italy, and China, only for Japan. But since this was a proposal to allow France and China only to discuss peace treaties, without the right to vote, Molotov agreed to it. Before long he would regret making this concession bitterly.

At the outset of the conference both Stalin and Molotov seemed to look with some optimism at the prospect of reaching an agreement with the Allies, as they had managed to do before. An indication of this mood to preserve wartime cooperation was a decision, taken in those days, to reciprocate the visit of General Dwight D. Eisenhower to Moscow in summer 1945 with a visit of Marshal Georgy Zhukov to the United States. President Truman had invited the marshal back in August, but the Kremlin had been dragging its feet.<sup>4</sup> Finally, on September 14, Molotov received a report from his deputy Andrei Vyshinsky about the CC's deliberations on this question. "Com. Stalin said," Vyshinsky reported, "that at first we believed it would be better not to authorize this trip, but such a refusal might be taken negatively by President Truman. He might feel crossed, thinking that, had Roosevelt invited Zhukov, we would probably not have declined it; and now we are declining Truman's invitation, because we hold him in low esteem. Com. Stalin suggested that perhaps we should accept the invitation and Zhukov should go to the United States. Com. Zhukov did not express any wish to go to America. Com. Stalin would like to know your opinion: would it be advisable to decline Truman's invitation?" Molotov responded firmly: "I consider it advisable to authorize Zhukov's trip to America at Truman's request." The People's Commissar did not want to offend Truman, not to mention Stalin. On September 17, Moscow informed the Americans about the visit officially, and they immediately began preparations for it.

At the same time the Kremlin leadership understood well that now, with the unifying factor of war gone, bargaining with the Allies would become much more difficult than before, particularly since the United States had in its possession a new lever for pressure, the atomic bomb. Nevertheless, the Kremlin did not want to curb its postwar ambitions. On the contrary, Stalin's instincts led him to be extra pushy and tough; he saw this as the best means to devalue the Americans' new atomic ace.

The first serious conflict at the conference erupted, as expected, on the issue of recognition of pro-Soviet governments in Rumania and Bulgaria. The United States and Great Britain sympathized with the anti-Soviet opposition in those countries and refused to discuss peace treaties for Rumania and Bulgaria until governments of those countries were reorganized on a broader democratic basis. The CC instructions had anticipated a linkage between consideration of peace treaties for Balkan countries and the one for Italy, which was a main priority for the Western Allies.<sup>5</sup>

In his dispatches to Molotov, Stalin instructed him to stick to the agreed line, particularly on Rumania, whose leader, Petru Groza, and his delegation had just visited Moscow. "The Rumanians feel fine," Stalin informed on September 12. "They will stand firm and, by any account, the Allies' machinations will be defeated. You must also stand firm and make no concessions to the Allies on Rumania." Stalin not only sketched for Molotov a general line of behavior, but also noted that his position in conversations with the Allies was so far too defensive. He supplied him with arguments for going on offensive. "It should be said directly that representatives of America and England in Rumania supported anti-Soviet elements such as [Ilie] Radescu and his friends, and this is incompatible with our Allied relations... In case the Allies remain implacable with regard to Rumania, Bulgaria, etc., you should, perhaps, let Byrnes and Bevin know that the government of the USSR would find it difficult to give its agreement to the conclusion of a peace treaty with Italy. Here you can use such arguments as their unfair attitude to our proposals on Italy's colonies and on the unresolved issue of Soviet reparations from Italy."

In his cable on the next day Stalin continued: "What might happen under such conditions? It might happen that the Allies could sign a peace treaty with Italy without us. So what? Then we have a precedent. We would get a possibility in our turn to reach a peace treaty with our satellites without the Allies. If such a development would mean that the current session of the Council of Ministers winds up without taking decisions on major issues, we should not be afraid of such an outcome either." Evidently Stalin had no inclination to compromise on what for him was a vital issue—the consolidation of Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe even at the risk of breaking down the conference.

Molotov responded. "At the earliest convenience I will use the arguments in favor of our policy in Rumania that you have given." And indeed on the same day he made a detailed declaration on this question at his meeting with Byrnes, where he assiduously reproduced all the meanderings of Stalin's argument. As his own contribution, Molotov added the complaint that Byrnes had departed from Roosevelt's course when "the relations between the Soviet Union

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<sup>4</sup> For a background of this episode see Victor L. Mal'kov, "Pochemu Zhukov ne poekhal v Ameriku", *Amerikanskii ezhegodnik* 1993, (Moskva, 1994), pp. 166-169.

<sup>5</sup> See Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation [hereafter: AVPRF], fond [f.] 0431, opis [op.] 1, papka [pap.] 1, delo [d.] 1, listy [ll.] 14 -15.

and the United States had been quite different.”<sup>6</sup> But the Americans and the British did not give in, and after many altercations the Balkan question remained unresolved in London.

Stalin’s remark about the Italian colonies was no improvisation. Their potential use for expansion of Soviet influence in the strategic area of the Mediterranean had long appealed to the Soviet leadership. The Commissariat of Foreign Affairs began to work on this issue conceptually in 1944, in the framework of the Litvinov commission.<sup>7</sup> In June 1945 during the San Francisco conference the Soviets tested the diplomatic waters on this issue for the first time. In a note from Soviet ambassador to the United Nations Andrei Gromyko to Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, the Soviet government expressed its wish to become a mandate trustee for some of those territories.<sup>8</sup> The Americans, still interested in Soviet assistance against Japan, agreed in principle to support this claim. This whetted the Kremlin’s appetites.

The directive from the CC for Molotov at the London session instructed him to insist on the USSR’s right to receive an individual trusteeship in Tripolitania.<sup>9</sup> However, in London, the Americans “forgot” about their promises, and Stalin urged Molotov to forcefully remind them. “On the issue of Tripolitania,” he cabled Molotov September 16, “you should press from the angle that in San Francisco the Americans had promised to support our demands to receive mandate territories. I have in mind the letter from Stettinius. This argument should be forcefully pushed forward.”

“As to the fact that the Americans fear that we will establish a naval base in Tripolitania or in the part of Libya that we would obtain, you should tell them that we agree to make concessions to the Allies on this point. But we should still insist that our naval vessels in a limited quantity would have an opportunity to stay in Tripolitanian ports. We on our part should insist on an individual mandate, since this kind of trusteeship had been discussed in San Francisco.” In conclusion Stalin made yet another political concession to the Allies: “You may say to the British that their wishes regarding a visit by our soccer team, as well as the opera-ballet company, meet with no objections on our part.”<sup>10</sup>

Persistent Soviet encroachments on the strategic domain of the British could not help but raise the hackles of the Allies, especially since Moscow’s geopolitical plot was quite visible behind the diplomatic facade. “It was hard to argue our case,” recalled Molotov later.<sup>11</sup> But he had to follow his instructions. Next day he raised this question again in conversation with Byrnes, citing the moral rights of his war-ravaged country as well as the rich Soviet experience in solving nationality problems. He reported to Stalin that “Byrnes pretended he was not familiar with the Gromyko-Stettinius correspondence. On my part I leaned hard on him [*navalilsia na nego*], saying that Americans are not fulfilling their own promises on the issue of the mandate territories from the first time as we proposed this question (Tripolitania) for discussion. Byrnes tried to explain that American commitment was of a general nature (incidentally, he thus forgot his first declaration about being unaware of Stettinius’ promise) and there was no specific commitment to support us regarding Tripolitania. I said that you have no other mandate territories to offer. Byrnes equivocated [*vertelsia*] and hedged with meaningless phrases. At the first opportunity I will press [*nasiadu*] again on him, and others.” Meanwhile during the talks Molotov did not even mention military vessels, speaking only about “bases for the Soviet merchant fleet.” But by that time the military commanders in the United States, not to mention in Great Britain, were categorically opposed to any Soviet presence in the Mediterranean. For that reason, Molotov’s “leanings” and “pressures” produced no effect on the Allies. The British were particularly implacable. “Byrnes jumped up,” recalled Molotov years later with a degree of exaggeration, “He shouted: “This is shocking! Shocking! Shocking! You have never been there!” The British record has Molotov merely asking: “So you do not want to give us even a corner of the Mediterranean?” and Bevin responding with a windy geopolitical explanation.<sup>12</sup>

But Molotov did not give up hope. On September 19, he wrote to Stalin, summarizing the results of the first

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<sup>6</sup> AVPRF, f. 6, op. 7, pap. 43, d 678, l. 70.

<sup>7</sup> S. Mazov, “SSSR i sud’ba byvshykh ital’ianskikh koloniiv (1945-1950 gg.)”, in *Rossia i Italiia*, ed. N. Komolov, (Moskva: Nauka, 1998), pp. 212-215.

<sup>8</sup> AVPRF, f. 6, op. 7, pap. 15, d. 149, l. 1.

<sup>9</sup> AVPRF, f. 0431, op. 1, pap. 1, d 1, ll. 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> This message is also cited in S. Mazov, op.cit., p. 220 (Mazov was right in his guess about Stalin’s authorship of this document); the Soviet soccer team “Dynamo” visited England in late October 1945: the total score of this first Soviet postwar sport breakthrough to the West after four games was 19 to 4 in favor of “Dynamo.”

<sup>11</sup> Feliks Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovim* (Moskva: TERRA, 1992), p. 103; translated as *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev*, ed. Albert Resis (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945 - 1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 135.

week of the conference, that the Americans must have “agreed in advance with the British,” and that the French and Chinese “followed them.” This situation, he hastened to add, was “normal for the start” and “ahead lies bargaining and an intense search for compromise.”

Stalin apparently by then did not share Molotov’s optimism. And he must have been alarmed by the mention of the French and Chinese in the context of peace treaties. He demanded angrily, via Vyshinsky, to “pay attention” to their inadmissible participation in the discussion of peace treaties with Finland and the Balkan countries. Molotov admitted that “the instructions of com. Stalin” were correct, but attempted to evade them by pointing that “because we did not consider this issue a significant one, we agreed with it, particularly since Bevin and Byrnes insisted on it.” This was a lame excuse, giving the flavor of kow-towing to the Allies. Stalin’s patience snapped. On September 21, again via Vyshinsky, he sent Molotov a harsh “instruction from the Highest Quarters” [“Instantsiia”] in which he demonstratively dropped a comradely way of calling Molotov “ty” [analogous to “tu” in French and “Du” in German] and adopted the dry and formal “Vy” [like “Vous” or “Sie”]. “You must adhere to the decisions of Potsdam about the participation of only involved states...When only the Anglo-Saxon states, i.e. the United States and England, opposed the Soviet Union, neither of the two raised a question about a majority or minority. Now, when in violation of the decisions of the Berlin conference and with your connivance, the Anglo-Saxons managed to bring in the Chinese and French, Byrnes got a chance to raise the question about majority and minority.”

This Stalin directive became a turning point for the conference. Historians have long argued about the motives behind it, most of them thinking that the procedural issue was just a pretext for squeezing concessions from the Western partners by a threat to abort the conference. This new evidence from Stalin-Molotov correspondence tends to support this interpretation to the extent that it confirms that Stalin early on was ready to sacrifice the London session in case his basic demands were not met. Yet there is no indication in his instructions to Molotov that would reveal this pretext plot; to the contrary—Stalin emphasized the centrality of procedure and Molotov’s subsequent remarks to Bevin on its “trivial importance”<sup>13</sup> do not necessarily mean that Stalin thought the same. It is possible that the strategist was hiding his real purpose even from his chief negotiator in order to make him more single-minded in pursuit of a procedural struggle.

But Stalin’s fury also seemed to be genuine, since he attributed real importance to the principles of the Potsdam formula. After Potsdam, in-house guidelines on this point to Soviet diplomats circulated by the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs read: “This decision that confines the number of our partners to a sufficient minimum, is the most flexible and satisfying from your viewpoint.” It was more convenient and customary for Stalin to act in the framework of “Big Three,” playing on the contradictions between the United States and Great Britain, rather than dealing with four potential adversaries. The fact that the Anglo-Saxons united on the issue of vital importance for the USSR and were able to “bring in the Chinese and the French” was an unpleasant surprise for the Kremlin, which had expected “junior members” of the Council to be easier to deal with. Characteristically, Molotov, even before Stalin dressed him down, “upbraided” George Bidault during a private dinner on September 21 “for not supporting him, indicating that the other members [of the CFM] were usually lined up against him.” The French minister immediately informed Byrnes and Bevin about this conversation.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, in the context of growing resistance on the part of the Allies, even a slight departure from the Potsdam formula was unacceptable for Stalin.

In any case, the harsh reprimand from the “Instantsiia” sent shivers down Molotov’s spine. “I admit that I committed a grave oversight. I will take immediate measures,” he replied to Stalin. “I will insist on immediate cessation of common sessions of five ministers...It would be better, of course, this way, although it would be a sharp turn in the proceedings of the Council of Ministers.”

It was a sharp turn indeed. On the same day, September 22, Molotov flabbergasted his partners by declaring that “the mistake of September 11” should be urgently corrected. Otherwise, he would not be able to participate in further discussion of peace treaties. Having made a mistake, Molotov now gripped the new position in a deadly clutch and did not yield an iota. Byrnes and Bevin were completely lost guessing the reasons for this somersault. Byrnes suggested in conversation with Western Allies that Molotov “used the matter of procedure as only an excuse for breaking up the Conference because he could not have his own way.”<sup>15</sup> Familiar with Molotov’s extraordinary obstinacy, the Western foreign ministers decided to appeal over his head to Stalin—despite the fact that Molotov admitted that he acted on Stalin’s instructions in yet another gaffe that created a perception of his distancing from the head of the state. Molotov’s partners overlooked it but not Stalin who would add it to his grudges against Molotov. Truman and Attlee sent urgent special messages to the Generalissimo, asking him to “return” Molotov to the

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in Patricia Ward, *The Threat of Peace: James F. Byrnes and the Council of Foreign Ministers, 1945 - 1951* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1979), p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter - *FRUS*), 1946, vol. 2 (Washington: GPO, 1970), p. 330.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*



conference and to agree that the continuing participation of France and China would not violate the Potsdam agreements. "Truman's message smacks a bit of panic," Molotov commented in his cable to Stalin on September 23. "They, particularly Bevin, at first did not even hear of returning to the strict adherence to the decisions of the Berlin [Potsdam] conference. But then I told him that they would achieve nothing, if they decline my proposal that is not only fair but also a time-proven one. This is what Byrnes must have presented to Truman as my declaration of walkout from the Council of ministers. Yet the Council has worked even today and, of course, would continue to work, but would have to remove the lapse in fulfilling the decisions of the Berlin conference. I think a reply to Truman should be along these lines." Stalin did reply along these lines, but with more cunning. It must have not occurred to him, yet, that Molotov had already betrayed his authorship. So he pretended at first that he had "queried Molotov" about his position and only then, having allegedly "received an answer," wrote to Truman about his agreement with "Molotov's position."<sup>16</sup> Although the Council continued to operate in the same group, the discussion of peace treaties de facto stopped, and the procedural debates that replaced them, screeched to a halt.

On September 20, Byrnes, in conversation with Molotov, unexpectedly introduced a proposal to negotiate a treaty on demilitarization of Germany for 20-25 years. It envisaged a gradual dismantling of the allied military occupation of Germany along with its disarmament. In Byrnes' opinion this idea addressed Soviet fears of a revival of "the German threat." Molotov hastened to express his interest in this proposal, and in his report to Stalin the next day he sounded even more positive: "I believe that we should support Byrnes' proposal on the four powers treaty in order to prevent new aggression by Germany, while not revealing excessive zeal. To be sure, this would be acceptable only if Americans more or less move in our direction on the Balkan countries." The People's Commissar suggested the continuation of talks with Byrnes on this issue.

Wrong again! At first (on September 21) Stalin put an end to further initiatives of Molotov on this subject (under the pretext that "you are expecting an answer from Moscow in a few days"), and only the next day did he disclose to his gullible deputy the real content of American Trojan Horse. Byrnes' proposal, another directive of the "Instantsiia" explained, pursues four goals: "First, to divert our attention from the Far East, where America assumes a role of tomorrow's friend of Japan, and to create thereby a perception that everything is fine there; second, to receive from the USSR a formal sanction for the US playing the same role in European affairs as the USSR, so that US may hereafter, in league with England, take the future of Europe into their hands; third, to devalue the treaties of alliance that the USSR has already reached with European states; fourth, to pull out the rug from under any future treaties of alliance between the USSR and Rumania, Finland, etc."

Stalin with his inherent predisposition for worst-case scenarios proved again his rare talent of imagining the most negative of possible motives and consequences of the seemingly attractive initiative of Byrnes. But at the same time he revealed, willy-nilly, his own calculations. As he had come to expect a prompt withdrawal of Americans from Europe, Stalin had no intention to share with them (or anybody else for that matter) the role of a European hegemon. The same aspiration to preserve Soviet geopolitical predominance in the heart of Europe can be seen in Stalin's unwillingness to pay for de-militarization of Germany (i.e. for elimination of German threat) with a pullout of Soviet troops from this country. However, he could not admit this openly. Therefore, Stalin continued: "Having said this, it would be, of course, difficult to reject an anti-German pact with America. But we should exploit American fear of the growing influence of the USSR in Europe and should stipulate that the US-Soviet anti-German pact would be conditioned on an anti-Japan pact with the US. Hence our proposal: to conclude, first of all, an anti-Japan pact, so that in the following move or simultaneously, to sign an anti-Germany pact, but to indicate to the (American) partner that without the anti-Japan pact we cannot possibly conclude an anti-German pact with the U.S."

Stalin could hardly genuinely have expected to really score this double play. He viewed the linkage between two pacts as a way to negate Byrnes' offer and as another lever for pressure on the United States in order to undercut the American monopoly over postwar Japan. The rest of his cable to Molotov was devoted to this topic. Stalin demanded that Molotov raise once again the issue of implementation of decisions to create a full-fledged Allied Control Council in Japan, with a substantial role there for the Soviet Union. "The American proposal to organize an advisory committee has as its aim to delay indefinitely the issue of the Control Council and to provide [General Douglas] MacArthur with the authority to resolve single-handedly all the questions, military or civilian, in Japan. We consider it urgent to put an end to the unrestricted rights of MacArthur and the institution of the one-person rule by [edinolichn] a high commander of four powers who, as it is known, can do whatever comes to his mind, without even informing

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<sup>16</sup> *Perepiska predsedatelia Soveta Ministrov SSSR s prezidentami SShA i prem'er-ministrami Velikobritanii vo vremia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny, 1941-1945 gg.*, vol. 2 (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1957), pp. 269, 270.

others about his decisions.” At the end of his cable Stalin dictated to Molotov the arguments in support of this demand. The main among them was that the one-person command was justified under war conditions but no longer adequate for the tasks of peacetime.

Molotov followed these instructions to the letter, but to no avail. Byrnes only promised to think about the anti-Japan pact, and on the issue of the Allied Control Council the Americans dug in their heels and, with British support, even prevented Molotov from including this issue in the conference’s agenda. Reporting on this to Moscow, Molotov suggested writing directly to Truman. In his reply of September 26, Stalin rejected Molotov’s proposal outright and in a candid passage vented his angry frustration regarding the Allies. “I consider it to be the height of impudence that the British and the Americans who call themselves our Allies, did not even want to hear us on the Control Council in Japan. One of the Allies, the Soviet Union, declares that it is not satisfied by its position in Japan, but the people who call themselves our Allies, refuse to discuss our declaration. This demonstrates that they lack a minimal sense of respect for their Ally. Should we then hint to Byrnes and Bevin that, under such circumstances, we would have to withdraw our people from Japan, since we cannot share any responsibility for the policy of US and England with regard to Japan?” “We have information,” continued Stalin in a conspiratorial mode, “that the Americans put their hands on the gold reserve of Japan that accounts for one-two billion dollars, and took the British as their accomplices. We should let them guess that we understand it as the real reason that the Americans and British resist the organization of the Control Council and want to keep us at arm’s length from Japanese affairs, despite [the fact] that the British themselves recently proposed to organize the Control Council in Japan.”

The next morning Molotov translated the *vozhd’s* fury into diplomatic language. The Soviet government, he stated, “was surprised” by the Allies’ treatment of its request. Then followed a thin innuendo about Japanese gold. “How should we explain this? What do the USSR, Britain and US have to fight for [in Japan]? There are rumors that the Americans seized 1-2 billions of Japanese gold. The British probably learned about it. Perhaps this is an obstacle to participation of a Soviet representative in the Control Council on Japan?” The Allies were quick to retort. According to the Soviet record of the conference, “Bevin says that gold is of no interest to him, and Americans have plenty of gold. Molotov remarks that the more gold you have the more you like it. The Soviet government does not object to having gold either. Byrnes says that he heard nothing of anybody seizing gold. But if somebody had found gold, does Molotov really think that Americans would have put it in a sack and shipped it to America [?] Molotov remarks that he said nothing of a sack.”<sup>17</sup> On September 27, Molotov summarized the exchange to Stalin: “Byrnes and Bevin pretended that they know nothing about Japanese gold and are not interested in it.”

Molotov suggested another approach: to link the Japanese question with discussion of the British-American draft of peace treaty with Italy which the Western Allies wanted to push through as soon as possible. Molotov wrote to Stalin: “I retorted that, if we agreed on the issue of the Control Council on Japan, then it would be easier to resolve that question. I stressed that both we, and the British, Chinese and Australians, find a need to create a Control Council in Japan. Only the Americans were against even discussing this question, and from the US side this is a dictate, we cannot put up with it, etc. I hope that the above-mentioned formula with a linkage to the Italian peace treaty would not encounter objections. Then I would finesse its confirmation in the process of talks with Byrnes and Bevin: either by hardening it in an unacceptable sense, if Byrnes makes no proper concessions, or by softening it, if Byrnes makes some concessions (on the Balkans and Japan). I am waiting for your answer on whether this working assumption is a valid one.”

On the eve of that day, September 26, Byrnes attempted to break the deadlock by suggesting an agreement to convene a peace conference in exchange for accepting the Soviet position regarding the procedure for the discussion of peace treaties in the Council. He seemed to have in mind transferring the issue to a peace conference where the West would have more votes. Such a compromise and Molotov’s deliberations on some possible concessions did not find Stalin’s support. On September 27, he wrote to Molotov: “It looks like the Americans would not want to leave the London Council with empty hands. They would try to obtain the Council’s decisions. The Allies are pressing on you to break your will and force you into making concessions. It is obvious that you should display complete adamancy [*nepreklonnost*]. On the other hand, it is possible that the Americans, in order to obtain the Council’s decisions, would make some concessions to provoke you into some serious concessions, using the “tit-for-tat” principle. I think that even in this case you should display absolute adamancy. It is possible that the session of the Council would come to naught, in short, would be a failure. But even in this case we should not grieve. A failure of the conference would mean the failure of Byrnes, and we must not grieve over that.”

Stalin seems to have come to firm conclusion that a fiasco of the conference that could be blamed on the Anglo-Americans would be preferable to fruitless negotiations, not to mention Soviet concessions to help the Americans “save face.” Molotov seemed to be in agreement with the *vozhd*, but still hoped that the Allies would give in under his pressure. “I agree that the decisive moment has come,” he responded on September 28. “I agree that it is

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<sup>17</sup> AVPRF, f. 6, op. 7, pap. 2, d. 33, l. 111-112.

better to let the first session of the Council of Ministers end in failure rather than to make substantial concessions to Byrnes. I believe that now we can either rip off the veil of optimism [*blagopoluchiiia*] whose appearance the Americans would like to maintain, or to obtain from them (that means from the others, too) substantive concessions in favor of the USSR. Perhaps we will not obtain American concessions both on the Balkan countries and on Japan. But without substantive concessions on the part of Americans on at least one of these issues (the Balkans or Japan) we, in my opinion, should not agree with them on the main current issues. But if the Americans (and the British) give in on at least one of these questions, we should make a deal with them. Then the success of the work of the Council would be to our benefit.”<sup>18</sup>

But the Allies had no desire to make “substantive concessions.” Similar to the Soviet side, they were rather ready to face a breakdown of the conference. Byrnes recalled: “The Soviet leaders knew of our people’s strong desire for peace and they thought we would not dare let the conference fail. Our stand at London required them to make a re-evaluation; it made them realize they could not force us to accept their position. It was, in a very real sense, a test of strength.”<sup>19</sup>

This uncompromising stand of the Allies, for the first time in the war and postwar period, made even the patient Molotov lose his nerve. Confronted with the resistance of Byrnes, Bevin, and Bidault to repeated Soviet demands to speed up repatriation of the Soviet citizens who were in the West during the war, Molotov made the following proposal to Stalin: the Soviet press should “begin publication of a number of scandalous facts about our citizens who find themselves in the hands of Americans and others, indicating that that the Soviet government has brought this outrage [*bezobraziiia*] to the attention of a given government (US, British, French) and demanded to take urgent measures. This may help us to get under their thick skin.”

In their correspondence, the two comrades discussed and resolved other foreign policy issues. For instance, Stalin asked his deputy about a proposal of the Western Allies on Austria that looked suspicious: to replace old Reichsmark notes with a new currency —the Alliance Schilling. Molotov responded: “I consider undesirable the exchange of Reichsmark for the Alliance Schilling. This, of course, could make us dependent on the Allies. It would be better for us to accelerate the adoption of an Austrian currency and to help them [the Austrians] in this business. This would be also more advantageous for us politically.”

As September was about to end the debates returned again to the procedural question, and with a vengeance when Bevin compared the methods of his Soviet colleague to those of Hitler. Molotov rendered the following version of this scandalous episode in his September 30 report to Stalin, while describing how he “drove” Byrnes to despair and dressed him down with the use of a new logical device - if any member of the Council decides subsequently to back off on any decision, then it becomes null and void. The Commissar on Foreign Affairs clarified with satisfaction: “This was a hint on our demand to revise the Council’s decision of September 11. On this Bevin, with his usual frivolity [*razviasnost*] declared that he could not agree with such an interpretation of Ministers’ rights and that the method of renunciation of commonly adopted decisions was very close to the method of Hitler.”

“I declared that if Bevin did not take these inappropriate words back, then I would not be able to participate in this conference.” With this remark, Molotov headed for the exit, but Bevin made excuses and this ended the incident. However, more procedural recriminations finally brought the conference to a halt. At one point Byrnes was ready for a compromise but failed to overcome internal opposition from John Foster Dulles.<sup>20</sup> The conference’s failure became obvious, and all the sides were thinking only about shifting responsibility. On October 2, Molotov reported to Stalin on yet another refusal of Byrnes and Bevin to revise the ill-fated Council decision of September 11 and surmised that they had decided to break off the conference. “It means that we should be ready for an open anti-Soviet demarche from our ‘respected Allies.’ Our response will have to depend on the character of their assault.” This time Stalin responded in an approving and even soothing tone: “I confirm your position. Do not see Byrnes’ machinations in the tragic light, but take it easy. We will lose nothing, only they will.” On the next day the conference ended without even a final communiqué. In his circular cable on the conference’s results Molotov tried to claim a moral victory: “The first

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<sup>18</sup> This exchange more or less resolves another contentious argument among Cold War historians over what was the principal issue for the Soviets to break the conference over—Japan or the Balkans: both were equally important. See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp.265-266; Lloyd Gardner, *Architects Of Illusion. Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy, 1941-1949* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), pp. 94-95; Herbert Feis, *Contest over Japan* (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> James Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (New York: Harper and Row, 1947), p.105.

<sup>20</sup> Ward, *The Threat of Peace*, pp. 40-41.

session of the Council of Ministers,” he wrote, “ended in a failure of certain American and British quarters attempting to launch for the first time since the war a diplomatic attack on the foreign policy gains that the Soviet Union made during the war.”<sup>21</sup>

Upon Molotov’s return from London, it turned out that the Soviet delegation did not have a stenographic record of the conference sessions. Stalin cabled to the Four [*chetverka*] in the Politburo [Molotov, Lavrenty Beria, Georgy Malenkov and Anastas Mikoyan ]: “We discover that the people in the leadership of the USA and England are much more familiar with the course of the conference than we, the Soviet leaders, are.” It must have been because they had at their disposal the detailed record of all meetings. “All this testifies to our backwardness and lack of experience in this area.” Stalin’s order: to compile a stenographic report of the London talks in five days for distribution among the members of the Four.

This correspondence between Stalin and Molotov lays bare their genuine attitude towards their recent comrades-in-arms: the Anglo-Saxons are hostile, duplicitous, and anti-Soviet at heart, they understand only the language of firmness and strength. At worst, they are hidden enemies, at best - rivals, and if they are allies then it is in name only. However, the same documents show that Stalin at that point hardly aimed at a rupture in relations with them. He viewed the London session as an exploratory “combat reconnaissance” operation and wanted to continue bargaining, albeit in a highly harsh manner, on the terms as close as possible to Soviet ones. To signal his displeasure with the Allies’ behavior, Stalin recalled Soviet representative General K. Derevyanko from Japan. He also canceled a “good will” gesture regarding Truman, the already scheduled visit of Zhukov to the United States.<sup>22</sup> At the same time he kept the door to negotiations open. Soviet propaganda presented the outcome of the London conference as a temporary setback. In a speech on the anniversary of the October Revolution (edited by Stalin himself) Molotov called the results of the London CFM “a warning” but said that similar “difficulties” inside the anti-Hitler coalition “occurred even during the war.”<sup>23</sup> About the same time Stalin reacted positively to Truman’s proposal on a simultaneous withdrawal of American and Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia. He wrote to the Four: “I think that we should accept the proposal of Truman. If the Four also agree with this, then I could write a necessary response to Truman, on the condition that the Czechoslovak government has no objections.” In this war of nerves Stalin counted on the first step to a post-London compromise to be taken by the Allies. And he was proved right.

In Washington and London the Allies discerned Stalin’s plot. In their analysis of the results of the London conference the Foreign Office experts remarked: “The Russians still want to cooperate and collaborate with the Western countries, but they want to do this if at all possible on their own terms and they are engaged now in trying to get themselves in as strong a position as possible.”<sup>24</sup> The U.S. embassy in Moscow also urged Washington not to be hasty with conciliatory steps, but, instead, let “the Russians stew for a while in the present situation” and to “maneuver” them “into making the first step.”<sup>25</sup> But Stalin had more patience than Byrnes.

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In early October 1945, Moscow was abuzz with rumors about Stalin’s mysterious disappearance from the Kremlin. On October 10, TASS made an official clarification that “Com. Stalin departed for vacation to rest,”<sup>26</sup> but this did not convince everyone, particularly among foreign observers. They had gotten so used during the war to the invariable presence of the *vozhd* at his desk and to the Aesopean language of the Soviet press, that they took the official

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<sup>21</sup> Cited in Vladimir Shustov, “A View on the Origins of the Cold War and Some Lessons Thereof,” in *Beyond the Cold War: New Dimensions in International Relations*, ed. Geir Lundestad and Odd Arne Westad (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1993), p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> Americans were quick to get the message: “I gather there is a tightening of lines here and the usual pressure that comes after disagreement,” commented Ambassador Averell Harriman to his staff upon his return from London. “Zhukov is not going to the United States. That is the usual procedure. It will get tougher down the line”. In its report to the State Department the Embassy could not resist an ironic comment “on the postponement of Marshal Zhukov’s visit to the US because of illness”, reporting that “it is encouraging to note that at least the Marshal is not ill enough to stay in bed. The same evening he was supposed to start his flight to USA he attended a Moscow theatre, apparently in good health”. (Ambassador’s Staff conference, 10 October 1945, W.A. Harriman Papers, Library of Congress (LC), Chronological File, October 8-15, 1945, Cont.183; Daily Secret Summary 15 October 1945. National Archives [NA] II, College Park, MD, Record group [RG] 59, General Records of the Executive Secretariat, January 1945 - October 1945, Box 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Pravda*, 7 November 1945.

<sup>24</sup> *FRUS*, 1946, vol. 2, p. 559.

<sup>25</sup> George Kennan to Berlin and Vienna, 6 October 1945, Chronological File, October 1-7, 1945, Container 183, *W.A. Harriman Papers*, LC.

<sup>26</sup> *Pravda*, 10 October 1945.

version as a trick for simpletons.

The Moscow diplomatic and journalistic corps buzzed like a beehive trying to discover a secret meaning of what had happened behind the Kremlin walls. Diplomats reported home fantastic versions. Even the experienced US ambassador Averell Harriman, who met with Stalin many times and was familiar with Kremlin habits and rules, cabled to Washington: "The report on Stalin's departure 'for rest' is absolutely without precedent and merits most serious attention." Harriman took as especially significant that in this report Stalin was called not the Generalissimo, as was the norm, but merely chairman of the Council of Ministers.<sup>27</sup>

The foreign press was filled with speculations on the grave illness and possible retirement of the aged leader. The usually well-informed *Newsweek* commented, for instance: "Stalin's health fails. According to American information, during the Berlin conference he had two minor heart attacks. He also suffers from kidney disease."<sup>28</sup> And a Turkish newspaper even reported on the death of the great dictator. Foreign observers were most concerned by who would succeed Stalin. Among possible successors they most often named two people who had become prominent during the war and whom world public opinion considered the symbol, along with Stalin himself, of the new diplomatic and military power of the Soviet Union. They were the Commissar of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav M. Molotov and Marshal Georgy K. Zhukov. The *Chicago Tribune* commented: "Stalin may leave his post. As reported, the ambitious aspirations of Marshal Zhukov to become a dictator have full backing of the army, while Molotov is backed by the Communist Party. Stalin is over sixty and this, according to information, is one of the factors behind the current maneuvers of his successors." Among these "maneuvers" the newspaper mentioned the unusual behavior of Molotov at the London conference of foreign ministers, and the sudden "refusal" of Zhukov to visit the United States. On October 24, the British *Daily Express* wrote that Stalin was getting ready to pass the affairs of the state to Molotov, while becoming "an elder statesman" (TASS translated it foggily as "senior statesman").

In fact, Stalin was in fairly good shape and was not even thinking about retirement. He had left Moscow, however, for his first vacation in nine years at his favorite dacha near Sochi at the Black Sea. It was there that he read all these numerous TASS reports grouped under title "rumors in foreign press on the state of health of comrade Stalin." The reports, in view of their highly sensitive nature, were distributed only to Stalin and Molotov.

Any other statesman would only wave off these rumors as a nonsensical nuisance. Not Stalin. During many years of absolute power he acquired a habit of treating his own persona with utmost seriousness, as the symbol of the state. Therefore, he took these insinuations (as he would put it himself to his lieutenants later) as not a simple offense, but as "desecration" [*poruganiie*] and dishonor for the Soviet power. Another question, inevitable given Stalin's mentality, emerged: who circulated these rumors in Moscow, who let them spread out of the country? Either our people when left unwatched were simply letting their tongue loose, he evidently calculated, or there was some evil plot afoot. Like his favorite czar, Ivan the Terrible, Stalin took advantage of his absence from Moscow not only to rest, but also to see how his lieutenants would behave in the deserted Kremlin, particularly Molotov who had for the first time stayed in charge as *de facto* acting head of state. Stalin's special attention, judging by his underlining, was drawn to an article on Molotov written by a Norwegian physician, Kurt Evang, who had just returned from Moscow. Not so much the author, but his report interested Stalin. This Nordic traveler wrote: "My general impression from my conversations with the foreign press and in Russian circles boils down to the fact that Molotov has become a most prominent citizen of the Soviet Union, second only to Stalin. The reasons for his prominence are not in his official position, but rather in his ability to gradually win over great respect and authority. For public opinion of the United States, Britain and other freedom-loving countries Molotov stands out as a representative of the new strong Soviet Union that demands a position of equality among the greatest powers of the world." These references to the growing authority and autonomous role of his first deputy put Stalin on the alert. Who knows what Molotov could put in his head about his importance? Or perhaps even worse — was he already acting to promote such reports?

During the vacation of the "Boss" most important papers kept coming to him for his approval from the Kremlin. Stalin daily received two or three dozen documents on domestic and foreign policy. Among them were many intelligence reports from various sources, including the regular information of the MGB (Ministry of State Security) on gossip in the diplomatic corps. Thus Stalin was able to watch developments in Moscow from afar through two

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<sup>27</sup> Averell Harriman to the Secretary of State, 10 October 1945, W.A. Harriman Papers, LC, Chronological File, October 8-15, Container 184. Another report on the subject which reached Truman's desk (most probably originating from the FBI) alleged that "Stalin has probably been deposed as leader of Soviet Russia" and been replaced by "the new group probably under Molotov's domination" (H. Truman to J. Byrnes, 24 November 1945, Decimal Files, 861.00/11- 2445, RG 59, NA).

<sup>28</sup> This and subsequent excerpts from foreign press are given in a reverse translation from their TASS Russian language version.

somewhat twisted mirrors - handed to him by his secret police agents and the foreign press.

At his dacha Stalin lived the life of a hermit, well organized and reclusive. He slept and walked during the daytime and worked with documents late into the night. He received practically nobody, even of his closest lieutenants, preferring to communicate with them via the high-frequency [VCh] line, through mail couriers and infrequent telephone calls. The only exception, with the consent of the Politburo's Four, he made for Harriman who carried a personal message from President Truman. Stalin was eager to see whether Americans would make new concessions, first of all on the issue of enhancement of the Soviet role in the occupation of Japan—something he had doggedly pursued since August. However, Harriman brought no concessions, and the haggling over Japan and the peace treaties continued. Nevertheless, the Ambassador's public comment upon his return to Moscow on October 27 that "Generalissimo Stalin is in good health and rumors about his illness have no foundation" had the effect of dampening down speculation about the *vozhd's* condition.

Yet, the Americans were adamant on Japan and finally, on November 3, soon after the meeting with Harriman, Stalin received from the Four a draft answer to an American note about the control mechanism for Japan. Even earlier, when Stalin had studied the record of conversation between Molotov and Harriman, he had underlined with irritation a paragraph where Molotov, even though in a personal and tentative way, agreed to the US procedural proposal on voting in the American version of the Commission on the Far East. The proposal was to pass decisions by majority of two or even three votes on the condition that the United States belonged to this majority. The draft of the Four not only repeated this position, but also in effect agreed that the US Commander-in-Chief in Japan, General Douglas MacArthur, should have unchallenged authority in all questions.

The next day Stalin sent a sharp rebuke to the entire Four and, above all, to Molotov for ad-libbing and liberalism. He immediately discerned a repetition of Molotov's "conciliatory mood" during the London session. Stalin wrote to the Four: "Molotov's manner of separating himself from the government, to picture himself as more liberal than the government is good for nothing [*nikuda ne goditsia*]." The American proposal on the procedure of voting in the Far Eastern Commission Stalin called "duplicitous," aiming at "our isolation." Instead he urged the Four to insist on the principle of unanimity and, correspondingly, on the possibility of suspending MacArthur's decisions until consensus was reached among all four members of the control mechanism. The Politburo immediately reacted with a preemptive initiative of its own: it denounced Molotov's behavior in easily recognizable words ("to recognize as incorrect the manner of Molotov to separate himself from the government and to picture himself as more liberal than the government"). The guilty party attached a repentant postscript: "I will do my best not to repeat these mistakes." But Stalin, not convinced of Molotov's reliability, composed a didactic, densely-packed reply to the Americans. Most unusual for the documents of this kind, the note emphasized complete solidarity of the Soviet government with Stalin on this issue. But first he inquired of his colleagues about possible corrections since he "was not convinced of impeccability of the draft." The Four in one voice flashed back: "We have no objections."

No sooner Stalin had dealt with the gaffe on Japan than there was another one, this time concerning Great Britain. On November 9, *Pravda*, following a personal instruction by Molotov, published excerpts from one of Churchill's speeches in the House of Commons. There Sir Winston went out of his way to praise the Soviet people and its *vozhd*. Churchill spoke about "the feeling of deep gratitude that we owe to the noble Soviet people," referred to "the feelings of camaraderie and friendship" between the British and the Soviets. Particularly expressive (even in the clumsy TASS translation) was Churchill's panegyric to Stalin: "Personally I cannot help feeling the greatest admiration for this truly great man, the father of his nation who ruled the destiny of his country in time of peace and the victorious defender of her in time of war."<sup>29</sup>

Publication of similar praise by Western leaders was a standard practice of Soviet wartime propaganda and the praise from the mouth of the last Western member of the Big Three should have flattered the ego of the Generalissimo—at least Molotov must have thought so. But Stalin, who saw further than his lieutenants and was already thinking in terms of his postwar agenda, was preoccupied with things more important than mundane pride. He had already begun to spur his terribly exhausted and ravaged country towards a new round of exertion and sacrifice in the name of consolidation of the great might of the Soviet state and his personal power. Already under preparation were the blueprints of the first postwar five-year plan, and colossal efforts and means were being directed to the atomic race with Americans. Propaganda was gradually reminding the Soviet people of the enemy encirclement and capitalism. And here was Churchill with his eulogies distracting them and even some Soviet leaders, while in reality (as Stalin knew very well from his agents in Great Britain) Churchill was rallying the British establishment for a resolute opposition to the Soviet Union.

Stalin seized this opportunity to shake up his lieutenants, wake up their class vigilance, knock out of them their knee-jerk reaction of respect for the Western Allies—the one that developed during the war and was no longer

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<sup>29</sup> *Pravda*, 9 November 1945.

needed. "I consider the publication of Churchill's speech with his praise of Russia and Stalin a mistake," he cabled to the Four on November 10. "Churchill does all of this because he needs to sooth his bad conscience and camouflage his hostile attitude to the USSR, in particular the fact that Churchill and his pupils from the Labor Party are the organizers of a British-American-French bloc against the USSR." The unmasking of Churchill was followed by the main thesis—a warning to the Soviet top circle. "There are now many in the seats of authority who hurl themselves into infantile ecstasy when hearing praises of the Churchills, the Trumans, the Byrnes and, conversely, lose their heart after unfavorable references from these misters. In my consideration, these are dangerous attitudes, since they spawn in our ranks servility before foreign figures. Against this servility before foreigners we must fight tooth and nail. But if we continue to publish these kinds of speeches, we will thereby implant servility and fawning. [*ugodnichestvo i nizkopoklonstvo*]. Needless to say, Soviet leaders are not in need of praise from foreign leaders. Speaking personally, this praise only jars on me. Stalin."

One recalls the words of a Russian poet Nikolay Nekrasov: "What makes us happy? Not the mob's sweet serenades, but cries of rage and venomous insults." With utmost clarity, citing his personal case, Stalin demonstrated to his lieutenants the example of the only correct attitude to the West from then on. He fully realized how his words would reverberate among all "in the positions of authority," how they would make them bend over backwards competing in toughness and xenophobia. Thus five months before Churchill's Fulton speech and almost one year before the official campaign of Zhdanovshchina, Stalin de facto conducted a chamber rehearsal of this forthcoming anti-Western campaign among his closest subordinates, using the tarnished figure of Churchill as a convenient straw-man. In response came, predictable like echo, Molotov's mea culpa: "I consider it a mistake, because, even in our printed version it came through that the praise of Russia and Stalin served Churchill to camouflage his hostile anti-Soviet aims. In any case, this speech should not have been printed without your [tvoi] consent."

Meanwhile, the foreign press continued to spoil the *vozhd's* vacation. Now it was a delay in Stalin's return to Moscow that caused a new wave of rumors. They spread in Moscow where even Stalin's daughter wrote to her father about speculations on his health.<sup>30</sup> On December 1, the British *Daily Herald* referred to "Soviet sources in Moscow" and returned to the topic of possible return of Molotov to the post of the head of government (in 1941 Stalin replaced him at this post). The newspaper reported that anonymous and, yet very influential Russians "would like the outside world to finally understand the total fallacy, now or ever, of an idea that Stalin is a supreme dictator of the Soviet Union. The Russians would like the outside world to understand that there are enough people in the Soviet Union to conduct political affairs during Stalin's vacations."

This hint that people in Moscow could survive without Stalin apparently evoked his indignation. Stalin was outraged not only by British scribblers and their informers, but also by Molotov's neglect, for it was his responsibility to organize censorship for telegraphic reports of foreign correspondence from Moscow. Stalin called Molotov and asked for an explanation. Molotov responded (according to Stalin who later described the conversation in his cable to the Four) that "he believed that we must treat foreign correspondents more liberally and we might even clear their writings without too much ado." Stalin responded that "it would hurt the interests of our state." After that Molotov, naturally, promised to remedy the situation. Therefore one can easily imagine Stalin's reaction when just a day later he read a Reuters report about "...weakening of censorship in the USSR". The agency directly named Molotov as an initiator of this new readiness of the USSR "to lift the Iron Curtain" and referred to confirmation from some foreign correspondents that censorship of their dispatches from Moscow indeed had become significantly more liberal than before. Witnesses reported spicy details that accompanied Molotov's decision. At a ceremony for the diplomatic corps in the Kremlin on November 7, first Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers Molotov who represented in Stalin's absence the supreme Soviet leadership suddenly came with a glass of wine in his hand to one American correspondent and said: "I know that you journalists want to remove Russian censorship. What would you say, if I agree to this, on the conditions of reciprocity?" The journalist, according to Reuters "was delighted by Molotov's words and offered a toast to greater mutual understanding."

Stalin called Molotov again and this time the call produced such an effect in the Kremlin that even twelve years later, when Anastas Mikoyan disclosed it at the June 1957 Plenum of the Central Committee, he could recall the

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<sup>30</sup> *Iosif Stalin v obiatyakh sem'yi*, (Moskva: Rodina, 1993), p. 95. Much wilder versions of Stalin's situation circulated in Washington: the US Legation in Bern, citing sources around Marshal Zhukov's staff, alleged that the dictator had run away from it all with a young Georgian princess, leaving his subordinates split into hardliners ("Molotov-Kaganovich group") and pro-Anglo-American doves headed by Zhukov himself. See: US Legation in Bern to Secretary of State, 17 December 1945; Acheson to Bern, 21 December 1945, Decimal Files, 861.00/ 12-1745, 861.00/12-2145, RG59, NA.

smallest detail. “He [Molotov - V.P.] was at a reception and his conversations with foreign journalists implied an impression that he had given authorization to pass the writings of foreign correspondents without censorship. Stalin read about it and attacked him: ‘Who gave you the right to lift the censorship?’ Molotov answered that he did not do it. Stalin then said: ‘You can blurt out anything when you are drunk!’ [*Ty v pianom vide mozheshe vse boltat!*].”<sup>31</sup> (As some witnesses confirm, during his diplomatic career the Foreign Commissar did exceed his norm once or twice at formal occasions, but this time, according to Mikoyan, he “came back from the reception being quite sober”).

After this explanation Stalin demanded the Four to investigate and identify those who were guilty so as to prevent future telegraph dispatches with “new slanders against the Soviet government.” The Four in their reply sought to find mitigating circumstances, admitting some errors by rank-and-file bureaucrats from the Press Department of the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs [NKID], and promising “to strengthen the controls.” They also sought to explain away the behavior of Molotov at the ill-fated November reception. “The words imputed to him he never pronounced.” At the same time the Four had to recognize that “some slackening of the censorship over the cables of foreign correspondence had occurred in November as a result of Molotov’s instructions to the Press Department of NKID.” Again Molotov!

One can only guess why Molotov decided to respond to the multiple complaints of foreign correspondents about the arbitrariness of NKID’s censorship. Not long before this incident he had received a long and emotional letter from a group of foreign journalists with a detailed description of cases in which their dispatches had been emasculated and delayed for no reason. Molotov refrained from an official response to the letter, but initiated inspection of the Press Department, which revealed (as the dispatch from the Four relayed) that “censors of this Department often deleted without any justification some passages and expressions from the cables of foreign correspondents.” Perhaps this motivated Molotov to make his unauthorized gesture of “good will” to the Western press corps. Such liberalization, as he tried to explain to Stalin, seemed to make sense “now, when the war is over.” But it was precisely this assumption, that there were no more enemies and one could relax, that jarred Stalin more than anything else, as could be seen in the episode relating to the publication of Churchill’s speech.

It is hard to say whether Stalin really suspected that Molotov had begun a big political game with the West behind his back, or simply concluded that Molotov had become intolerably autonomous. But given Stalin’s boundless suspiciousness, we could surmise it was the former more than the latter, in particular since this interpretation seemed to tie together all of Molotov’s “errors,” beginning with his behavior at the London conference. Other sources of information could also push Stalin in this direction, particularly from Beria whose agents must have been reporting any unusual step by Molotov. Anyway, Beria’s deliberate peddling of incriminating materials on Molotov was one of the accusations raised against him at the July 1953 CC Plenum.<sup>32</sup>

But even if Stalin decided it was just arbitrary behavior on Molotov’s part, he would still have wanted to teach Molotov (as well as his other lieutenants) a severe lesson about subordination and vigilance. The Great Dictator staged it masterfully as a short play of three acts.

Act One. Stalin conspicuously ignores Molotov and turns the Four into the Three by cabling to Malenkov, Beria and Mikoyan on December 6 that he regards their response on censorship “absolutely unsatisfactory” and considers it as an attempt “to paper over [*zamaza!*] the affair.” He sees it as a result of “naivete of the three,” on one hand, and of the “sleight-of-hand of the fourth member,” i.e. Molotov, on the other hand. “Molotov read all these calumnies that damaged the prestige of our state. Why did he not stop them?” “None of us,” Stalin lectures, “has the right to act single-handedly in changing the course of our policy. But Molotov appropriated this right to himself. Why? For what reason? Perhaps because these calumnies were part of his plan?” (There is the blackest suspicion of Stalin!) “Until I received your cable,” Stalin concludes, “I thought we could limit ourselves to a reprimand for Molotov. But now it is no longer sufficient. I became convinced that Molotov does not really care much about the interests of our state and the prestige of our government. He cares more about winning popularity among certain foreign circles. I cannot consider such a comrade as my first deputy.” In other words, Molotov’s resignation was put on the agenda, with still unclear personal consequences (at least, he is still named “comrade”).

The Grand Inquisitor carefully orchestrates the next steps toward a humiliating punishment: he instructs the Big Three to summon Molotov and read him the cable without giving it to him. (“I am sending this cable to you, not to him,” he adds conspiratorially, “since I do not trust some people in his circle”). Stalin thus makes the Three into a plenipotentiary tribunal, Molotov into a culprit taken by surprise, and his own cable the verdict on the Molotov case.

Act Two. On the same day the Three, complying with the demand, call the still acting first deputy of Stalin “on the carpet” and read to him the dispatch. This must have been a scene worthy of Shakespeare’s pen: gloating, fear,

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<sup>31</sup> Storage Center for Contemporary Documentation (hereafter: *TsKhSD*), f. 2, op. 1, d. 258, l. 67. (For transcript of the June 1957 Plenum of CC, see *Istoricheski Arkhiv*, nos. 3 - 6, (1993) nos. 1-2, (1994).

<sup>32</sup> See for instance the report by Georgi Malenkov and speech of Vyacheslav Malyshev, *TsKhSD*, f. 2, op. 1, d. 45, ll. 5, 40. (For the transcript of the July 1953 CC Plenum, see *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, no. 1-2, (1991).



and hidden sympathy on their part, and of smitten resignation on his. The difference between the Boss' dressing-down routines and the declaration of political mistrust "in front of the comrades" was crystal clear to all the participants in this macabre ceremony, but its plot was clear only to the playwright in Sochi. Years later, after the post-Stalin rehabilitation of Molotov, Malenkov and Mikoyan admitted self-critically their "forced silence" in front of Stalin's denunciations against their senior comrade.<sup>33</sup> As for now, they sent Stalin an account that read as follows: "We summoned Molotov, read the cable to him. Molotov, upon some reflection, said that he had committed a lot of mistakes, but thinks that it is unfair to mistrust him politically. He shed some tears [*proslezilsia*]. We reminded him of his mistakes." The Three then enumerated all the known sins and peccadilloes of Molotov, beginning with the London CFM session, where, as they recalled with Stalin's prompting, the People's Commissar "referred without any need to the instruction of the Government [i.e. Stalin's instruction of September 21 - V.P.] and behaved in such a way that suggested in the eyes of foreigners that Molotov was for a policy of concessions and that Soviet Government and Stalin were for a policy of intransigence." The comrades-in-arms made one more contribution to the indictment: "at the banquet on November 7 [Molotov] consented to an appointment for Churchill's son...The appointment with Churchill's son was cancelled, because we spoke against it." (Randolph Churchill was at the time visiting Moscow as a journalist)

But following verbatim the instructions from the Boss was not enough for the members of the Three, since they knew that they were being tested as well. So they decided to take one step further, to offer their political assessment of Molotov's behavior while trying to make it as close as possible to what they guessed was Stalin own. "Finally, we said to Molotov that all the mistakes he committed recently, including the mistakes in the matter of censorship, form a pattern of a policy of concessions to the Anglo-Americans, and in the eyes of foreigners there is the impression that Molotov has his own policy distinct from the policy of the government and Stalin and that they may do business with him, Molotov [*mozhno srobotatsia*]." This was a grave indictment indeed, but the Three refrained from organizational proposals on Molotov's future fate in expectation of Stalin's final verdict.

On December 7, a repentant letter from Molotov himself reached Stalin's dacha. It was perhaps the most emotional document of his life ending in pathos: "Your ciphered cable is imbued with a profound mistrust of me, as a Bolshevik and human being, and I accept this as a most serious warning from the Party for all my subsequent work, whatever job I may have. I will seek to excel in deeds to restore your trust in which every honest Bolshevik sees not merely personal trust, but the Party's trust---something that I value more than life itself." The Molotov's cable, for all its emotional style, was carefully crafted. It had all necessary ingredients for fulfilling the ritual of repentance before the Party: a sincere penitent tone, a readiness to accept well-deserved punishment, and an unbounded faith in the Party and in Stalin personally.

Act Three. Stalin sadistically waits for two days (one can imagine Molotov's feelings during this pause) and then responds on December 9 with a nocturnal cable (registered at 1.15 AM), addressed to the Four again thereby returning Molotov to the inner circle. Stalin had gotten the desired effect, and it was time for magnanimity and a final assessment. Besides, some promising signs appeared on the international horizon that made this conclusion to the Molotov drama all the more timely. Pro-Soviet forces prevailed in the parliamentary elections in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Moreover, in an effort to untie the post-London knot, Byrnes offered to hold another meeting with the ministers of foreign affairs in Moscow, this time in the framework of the Big Three. Viewing Molotov as a villain and Stalin as a savior, Byrnes, in Robert Messer's words, "saw no hope of stopping Molotov except by appealing to Stalin."<sup>34</sup>

Byrnes' offer was all the more pleasing to the Kremlin that it had not been cleared with the British and (according to the US ambassador in London) was "deeply resented by both Bevin and the Cabinet."<sup>35</sup> Once again there was room for playing on Anglo-American differences. In brief, the course of events seemed to demonstrate the correctness of Stalin's strategy, beginning with the London session. One only had to apply final touches to this picture by placing the "mistakes of Molotov" in a broader political context. And Stalin did in his concluding message to the Four. "From analyzing the international events for the period from the London conference of five ministers to the forthcoming conference of three ministers in Moscow, one can come to the following conclusions.

"1. Thanks to our tenacity we won the struggle" on the composition of the Moscow conference, because the

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<sup>33</sup> See the concluding speech by Georgi Malenkov at the July 1953 CC Plenum, TsKhSD, f. 2, op. 1, d. 38, l. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Robert L. Messer, *The End of an Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman, and the Origins of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p.134.

<sup>35</sup> *FRUS*, 1945, vol. 2, p. 581.

exclusion of China and France “means a retreat of the US and Britain from their position in London.”

“2. We won the struggle in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The testimony to this is in the results of elections in those countries. If we had stumbled [*kolebnulis*] on the issues regarding those countries and had not held on, then we would have definitely lost there.”

“3. At some point you,” Stalin reminded Molotov, “gave in to pressure and intimidation on the part of the US, began to stumble, adopted the liberal course with regard to foreign correspondents and let your own government be pilloried [*vidali na poruganiie*] by those correspondents in expectation that this would placate the US and Britain. Of course, your calculation was naive. I feared that with this liberalism you would undercut our policy of tenacity and thereby let our state down. At that time the entire foreign press yelled that Russians were caving in and would make concessions. But an accident [an allusion to his personal - and providential - intervention] helped you and you returned in time to the policy of tenacity.” Then Stalin formulated his main commandment with regard to Western Allies. “It is obvious that in dealing with such partners as the US and Britain we cannot achieve anything serious if we begin to give in to intimidation or betray uncertainty. To get anything from this kind of partner, we must arm ourselves with the policy of tenacity and steadfastness [*stoikosti I vyderzhki*].

“4. The same policy of tenacity and steadfastness should be our guide in our working toward the conference of three ministers.”

This coda of Stalin’s summed up the results of the post-London period and was simultaneously a top-secret overture to the Moscow CFM. In general the outcome of the conference was satisfactory to the Kremlin. There were only small alterations agreed upon in the governments of Bulgaria and Rumania, the Soviets managed to open the road to Western recognition of the regimes in those countries. As Molotov’s circular letter to Soviet missions abroad put it: “Decisions on Bulgaria and Rumania strengthen the situation of their democratic governments friendly to the Soviet Union and at the same time because of small concessions they allow England and the USA to recognize the Rumanian and Bulgarian governments in the near future.” Also an agreement was reached to establish the Far Eastern Commission and the Allied Council on Japan, as well as on the procedure of a peace conference. Moscow also made concessions by agreeing to a broader composition of this conference and to a proposal by Great Britain, Canada, and the US to create a UN Commission on Atomic Energy. But the Kremlin saw the overall balance of concessions as favorable to the USSR and this implied a promising future. Molotov’s circular letter summarized the outcome of the conference in the following way: “At this meeting we managed to reach decisions on a number of important European and Far Eastern issues and to sustain development of cooperation among the three countries that emerged during the war.”

But this optimism proved short-lived. Byrnes fell out of Truman’s favor for having compromised too much and for having poorly informed him on the course of the negotiations; upon Byrnes’ return to Washington, the President blamed him for arbitrary behavior and (so Truman later stated) for “babying the Soviets.”<sup>36</sup> It now appears that this was almost a mirror image of the described collision between Stalin and Molotov.<sup>37</sup> Soon the Americans would back off on some of the Moscow agreements (beginning with Japan). Britain and the US were moving fast to their hard line with regard to the Soviet Union. What lay ahead was not another Yalta, but Fulton.

The final point. In the fall of 1945, Stalin pardoned Molotov, but did not forgive or forget—neither him nor Georgi Zhukov, who also happened to be on the list of contenders for the Kremlin throne. Stalin fired Zhukov as First Deputy Minister of Defense in June 1946, and removed Molotov from the head of Foreign Ministry in January 1949 when he used in justification the same correspondence about “mistakes of Molotov” (distributed for “eyes only” information to the Seven of the Politburo). The third and last round in this story played itself out in a broader milieu,

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<sup>36</sup> Harry Truman, *Memoirs: 1945. Year of Decisions* (New York: Signet, 1955), pp. 492-493.

<sup>37</sup> During the Moscow conference Molotov still seemed to be in the doghouse with Stalin, as evidenced by Stalin’s famous public rebuke of Molotov regarding the latter’s flippant attitude regarding atomic weapons. The incident took place at a Christmas Eve reception hosted in the Kremlin by the Soviet leadership. During a series of toasts, Molotov facetiously asked U.S. atomic advisor and Harvard University president James B. Conant to display the atomic bomb in his “waist-coat pocket.” But as those present raised their glasses, Stalin sharply interrupted the foreign minister’s toast, saying the bomb was “too serious a matter to joke about” and “we must work together to see that this great invention is used for peaceful means,” and seriously praised the accomplishment of the scientists who had worked on the atomic project. Though some U.S. and British witnesses wondered whether the scene was staged, the new evidence of Stalin’s capricious treatment of Molotov seem to corroborate the impression of American diplomat Charles Bohlen, who wrote that “There in the banquet hall of the Kremlin we saw Stalin abruptly change Soviet policy without consulting his number two man. The humiliated Molotov never altered his expression. From that moment on, Stalin gave the atomic bomb the serious consideration it deserved.” See Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1920-1969* (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 249, and James G. Hershberg, *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age* (New York: Knopf, 1993), pp. 255-256, 824 fn. 91. Of course, Stalin had already privately been taking the bomb seriously, at least since Hiroshima, as shown by his appointment of Beria on August 20 to head a special committee to speed the development of atomic weapons. See David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

at the CC Plenum of October 1952 where Stalin shocked the uninformed members of the Central Committee with his ferocious attack on Molotov and Mikoyan (the latter, as we will see, had his share of “mistakes”) as “cowards” and “capitulators” before the world imperialism. To prove his point the dictator again referred to Molotov’s blunders during his own vacations.<sup>38</sup> “Had Stalin lived one or two years longer, I would not have survived,” Molotov recalled many years later.<sup>39</sup>

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The Paris session of the CFM took place in late April 1946 to resume the work begun in London and Moscow on the issues of postwar settlement. By that time the relations among the Allies had grown palpably tense. Each side defined the other as the “principal enemy,” the Truman Administration and the British government increasingly worked together on an anti-Soviet basis, and already contingency plans for an all-out war with the USSR were under scrutiny in Washington. Churchill had already made his Iron Curtain speech at Fulton. In March-April the first open conflict among the Allies erupted on the floor of the UN Security Council on the “Iran Question.” Nevertheless, both sides preserved some interest in a speedy conclusion of peace treaties with the former satellites of Germany and this gave some hope for the success of the Paris talks.

This time in the wake of the Western concessions on Rumania and Bulgaria in Moscow the Soviet Union did not object to French participation in a discussion of peace treaties with the Balkan countries, counting again on creating divisions among the Allies. And indeed the French government, faced with forthcoming elections and Soviet military presence in neighboring Germany (not to speak of communists in the government), could hardly afford a tough line toward Moscow. French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault warned his Western colleagues early on that “given the present state of French forces” and the potential threat of Russian occupation of his country he could not be expected to take a very strong line.” The French minister, as recorded sarcastically in an American memo, “twice mentioned the possibility of finding Cossacks on the Place de la Concorde.”<sup>40</sup>

The first session began on April 25 with the discussion of the Byrnes proposal about Germany’s demilitarization and the future of former Italian colonies. On the first issue the USSR adhered to the evasively negative position defined by Stalin in September 1945, while Bevin and Bidault maintained solidarity with Byrnes. As for the second issue, the Soviet leadership still did not give up its attempts to penetrate the strategically important Mediterranean and even tried secretly to solicit Italian and French communist support in this matter. Molotov sent almost identical messages to both Palmiro Togliatti and Maurice Thorez with a clumsy interpretation of Soviet aims as congruent with Italian and French interests. “In the opinion of Moscow friends [Soviet vernacular for foreign communists - V.P.],” read the message to Thorez, “democratic France should be interested in the Soviet Union obtaining a free exit from the Black Sea and an ability to directly participate in matters of the Mediterranean where England seeks to obtain almost a monopoly position and where the USA influence has grown considerably.”<sup>41</sup>

The official propaganda machine began to work over ordinary Soviet folks trying to explain why the Soviet Union so badly needed distant and unknown Tripolitania. The NKID’s instructions to the leading newspapers on this issue were crystal clear but difficult to follow. “We must obtain at least one Italian colony under our trusteeship whether an individually or collectively,” a Molotov aide dictated when commissioning an article to “*Pravda*” editor-in-chief Peytr Pospelov.<sup>42</sup>

This time the Soviet delegation received new instructions to pursue a more flexible line. It envisaged, beside an individual trusteeship, a joint Soviet-Italian trusteeship, in which an Allied country (such as the Soviet Union)

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<sup>38</sup> No transcript of Stalin’s remarks at that CC Plenum has yet been found; for an eyewitness account of Stalin’s remarks see, Konstantin Simonov, “Glazami cheloveka moego pokolenia (razmyshlenia o Staline),” *Znamia*, no. 4, (1988), pp. 97-100. Simonov perceptively saw Stalin’s motive in trying to discredit Molotov as his probable successor (Op.cit., p.98).

<sup>39</sup> Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, p. 279.

<sup>40</sup> *FRUS*, 1946, vol. 2, p. 70. In fact, US GIs were more likely than Cossacks to show up on Place de la Concorde about that time: it was only at the last moment that Dean Acheson was able to talk President Truman out of sending troops to Paris to prevent a “communist coup” during the forthcoming election (Leahy Diary, 3-4 May 1946, *W. Leahy Papers*, LC).

<sup>41</sup> For a similar message to Togliatti see Mikhail Narinskii, “Evropa: problemy granits i sfer vlianiia (1939 - 1947)”, *Svobodnaia mysl’*, no. 3, (1998), p.92.

<sup>42</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 629, op. 1, d. 94, l. 182.

would appoint a chief administrator while Italy would provide his deputy. But Molotov's efforts to trade this concession for something more substantial went nowhere.<sup>43</sup> To make matters worse, Byrnes in his opening conversation with Molotov pointedly raised a question about the goals of Soviet foreign policy. "Is it a search for security or expansion?" Molotov avoided a rebuttal and this was noticed in the Kremlin (since the Minister reported his conversations to Stalin quite truthfully). On May 30 the *vozhd* addressed his strong reprimand on behalf of the "Instantsiia:" "We believe that in your conversation with Byrnes your conduct was not entirely correct. Byrnes pushed, and you were on the defensive, while you had all the reasons to attack." Stalin cited specific examples of "arguments for attack" (US bases and troops abroad) and in conclusion instructed Molotov "to avoid excuses and a defensive posture, but instead to hold a position of denunciation and attack against imperialist trends of the United States and Great Britain." In the next cable Stalin supplied yet another ace argument citing himself: "Byrnes told you [now Stalin used "ty" again - *tranzs*] about the expansionist tendencies of the USSR and that it was necessary to prove their absence. In response, you must tell Byrnes that he seems to share the slanderous attitude that Churchill expressed in his anti-Soviet speech in the United States and that Stalin has thoroughly criticized. Under such circumstances the Soviet government may have a pretext to let the Soviet media make a series of commentaries against the imperialist policy of the US government. Byrnes must be convinced that the Soviet press has no lack of appropriate materials for publication."

Molotov got a good opportunity to get even with Byrnes and to win kudos with Stalin on May 5 when he invited his American counterpart for dinner at the Soviet Embassy. After the meal the Soviet Foreign Minister raised again one of the most acute issues of the session, the Italian-Yugoslav border and the status of Trieste, where the USSR fully supported the Yugoslavia's territorial claims. Molotov let Byrnes know that in return for Trieste the Yugoslavs would abandon their reparation claims from Italy. Byrnes, however, refused to give in and stressed that "the US could under no circumstances turn over the predominantly Italian city of Trieste to Yugoslavia merely because the latter was an ally and in order to make a concession to the Soviet Union."<sup>44</sup>

At this moment Molotov, acting in tandem with his deputy Vyshinsky, who was also present at the dinner, pounced on Byrnes, bristling with Stalin's argumentation. He started out with a lyrical overture about there being "almost no corner in the world where the United States do not extend its glance." Experienced Charles Bohlen, also present at the meeting, wrote in a memo of conversation: "Molotov and Vyshinsky turned the discussion to a wider field and produced a series of obvious propaganda charges in support of the view that the US was engaged in a policy of 'imperialist expansion.' Mr. Byrnes pointed out with vigor the complete 'absurdity of these charges.'"<sup>45</sup>

In response to the symmetrical rebuff of Byrnes ("there is no region in the world where the Soviet Union does not have claims"), Molotov spoke from the unseen script of Stalin's instructions: "Judging from Byrnes's words about Soviet expansionist aspirations, etc, Byrnes clearly shares the slanderous pronouncements that Churchill expressed in his anti-Soviet speech in the United States. In reality, it is not the USSR but certain circles in the US that seek expansion, and the Soviet media, if the Soviet government does not contain it, may publish a sufficient number of materials denouncing imperialist encroachments of these circles."<sup>46</sup>

The same battle scene was described by Molotov in his victorious rendition to Stalin: "Byrnes started to move to the exit, while defending himself and remarked that recently he heard about Soviet news articles critical of US policies. Enhancing and deepening our criticism of the expansionist US policy, we [i.e. Molotov and Vyshinsky] finished the conversation. I believe next time Byrnes will think twice before making rhetorical attacks regarding external expansion in Soviet policy." The Americans left convinced that Molotov's outburst was genuine. "It was obvious," summed up Bohlen, "that Molotov and Vyshinsky adopted this absurd propaganda line simply because they saw that the US was not prepared to make a deal with regard to the question of Trieste."<sup>47</sup> It did not occur to the Americans that the Soviet Foreign Minister simply had to report to Stalin on his work to correct the previous mistake.

From that moment on Molotov, programmed to take a hard line, never missed a chance to retaliate threefold for every Anglo-Saxon criticism. On the next day after the memorable Soviet-American dinner Bevin only mentioned in passing that there were "new aspirants" to old imperialism, and Molotov turned on him the same gale of counter-denunciations in the course of which he put Bevin himself in a company with the war-mongering Churchill. The British Foreign Minister was clearly taken aback by such a disproportionate reaction and could only utter that he was glad to give the Soviet colleague a chance to unburden himself.

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<sup>43</sup> Byrnes' and Benjamin Cohen's behind the scene attempts to probe the ground for a possible compromise with the Soviets on the Mediterranean had by then been blocked by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. See Memorandum for General Hull, 19 April 1946, ABC 336 Russia (22 Aug. 43), Sec.1-C, RG 365, NA; and also Deborah W. Larson, *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 275-276.

<sup>44</sup> *FRUS*, 1946, vol. 2, p. 247.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>46</sup> AVPRF, f. 6, op. 8, pap. 1, d. 8, l. 34.

<sup>47</sup> *FRUS*, 1946, vol. 2, p. 249.

Yet, despite all these altercations the diplomatic bargaining began to make some progress. Molotov made another concession on the Italian colonies by dropping the Soviet demand for a merchant fleet base in the Mediterranean. Byrnes moved closer to accepting the Soviet figure of 100 million dollars in reparations from Italy. Some technical issues of preparations of peace treaties were resolved as well. The meeting was adjourned with the understanding that the remaining problems would be worked out at the next CFM session and at the Paris peace conference in the summer.

US Ambassador Walter Bedell Smith in his analysis of the mood in Moscow on the eve of the second round of the CFM conference cabled to the American delegation in Paris: "Although the Soviet delegation is quite pessimistic regarding a possible outcome of the Paris Conference, they are quite as anxious as we to avoid a complete break-up." The Ambassador noted the let-up of Soviet propaganda on Italy and predicted that the USSR would take a more flexible position on Trieste.<sup>48</sup>

Smith proved to be on the mark, in general and on Trieste. Already during the first meetings of the CFM conference both sides moved closer to each other. Byrnes and Bevin agreed to take as a basis for discussion of the Italian-Yugoslav border "the French line" (among all Western options this was the least anti-Yugoslav), and to internationalize the port of Trieste. The French proposal also suggested internationalization of the whole city. Molotov agreed with another French proposal to leave the former Italian colonies under Rome's trusteeship, trying to link this concession with the idea to turn over Trieste to Yugoslavia and playing on contradictions between the French on one hand and the Anglo-Saxons on the other. After this, however, there was no progress in the talks. Byrnes, at another dinner with Molotov on June 21, went so far as to promise to look closely at the French proposal on Trieste, but concluded, according to the Soviet record, that "he has exhausted his resourcefulness and now it is Molotov's turn."<sup>49</sup> Molotov, for his part preferred the well-trying "siege" tactics and expected that he would still be able to break American resistance. He reported to Stalin: "I considered it premature at this conversation to show our hands in seeking for a compromise, but instead prodded Byrnes so that he would reveal some new concessions, beside the unacceptable proposal by Bidault."

At this point, according to the official Soviet version of these negotiations Molotov was about to fall into a trap set by the treacherous allies. The French proposal on Trieste, explains the multi-volume *History of Diplomacy*, edited by the Soviet Foreign Ministry, was "a skilful step inspired by England and the US. They calculated that the Soviet delegation would reject the French proposal. This would have allowed them to blame the Soviet delegation for a break-up of the conference, to terminate the talks and to convene a peace conference where the US and England would be the masters."<sup>50</sup> Nobody knows what this skilful plot would have led to, but at this moment Stalin intervened. Either the Kremlin leader understood "the Allies' shenanigans" or he sensed, even at a great distance, that they indeed have reached the limit of their concessions. In fact, he definitely did not want to jeopardize his relationship with the West by refusing to compromise on Trieste and had been tipping Tito off to this eventuality during their recent meeting on May 27.<sup>51</sup>

"I think we must not derail the Paris conference of ministers because of the issue of Trieste." So telegraphed "Druzhkov" [Stalin's alias in ciphered correspondence of the period] on June 23. He continued, "The Allies apparently will not agree to turn the city and the port of Trieste to Yugoslavia. If there is an agreement on other issues, including the one on Bulgaria,<sup>52</sup> then you should introduce the Memel version. If the Memel regime is not acceptable, then we could propose a modus vivendi analogous to Togliatti's proposal, i.e. internationalization of the port of Trieste and a condominium of Yugoslavia and Italy regarding the city of Trieste."<sup>53</sup> Only as a last fallback position we may agree to

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<sup>48</sup> *FRUS*, 1946, vol. 2, p. 538n.

<sup>49</sup> AVPRF, f. 6, op. 8, pap. 2, d. 9, l. 98

<sup>50</sup> *Istoriia diplomatii*, ed. Andrei A. Gromyko (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1974), vol. 5, pt. 1, p. 44.

<sup>51</sup> See, "Poslednii vizit I. Broz Tito k I.V.Stalinu", *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, no. 2, (1993), pp. 21, 25; English translation available in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 10 (March 1998), pp. 112-34.

<sup>52</sup> The Allies delayed recognition of the government of Bulgaria because its reorganization was not completed.

<sup>53</sup> Palmiro Togliatti described this proposal in his dispatch to Stalin and Molotov sent through Georgi Dimitrov in August 1945 (RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 799, ll. 91-92). The Memel and Danzig options were also mentioned during Stalin-Tito meeting of 27 May 1946 (see "Poslednii vizit I. Broz Tito k I.V.Stalinu," p. 21). This new evidence is congruent with Roberto Rabel's, Richard Dinardo's and Leonid Gibiansky's interpretations of Stalin's basic motives during the Trieste crises of 1945 and 1946 (see, Roberto G. Rabel, *Between East and West. Trieste, the United States and the Cold War, 1941-1954* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1988), p. 88; Richard S. Dinardo, "Glimpse of an Old World Order? Reconsidering the Trieste Crisis of 1945,"

the regime of Danzig. Under any conditions the border between Yugoslavia and Italy must go to the west of the French line or at least according to the French line.”

Stalin obviously had done his homework on the intricate Trieste question. He gave Molotov two fallback positions in alteration of former instructions. Eventually they became instrumental to the solution of the Trieste knot. Correspondingly the Soviet *History of Diplomacy* could proclaim that “the Soviet delegation preempted this move by declaring that after the in-depth study of the French plan it agreed to accept this plan as a basis for discussion.”<sup>54</sup> This, however, did not happen overnight.

Next day after the conversation with Byrnes, Molotov carefully opened up the Memel option—Yugoslav administration of Trieste under the control of Four Allies, similar to the pre-war Memel (Lithuanian Klaipeda) “where the Germans constituted 75%, Lithuania appointed the governor and several powers were guarantors of its status.”<sup>55</sup> Another day passed. Molotov confronted Byrnes’ resistance to this variant, but simultaneously obtained his agreement to link the Trieste Question with other disputed issues. Then he, in accordance with his instructions, pulled from his hat the next option—the dual sovereignty of Yugoslavia and Italy over Trieste modeled after Franco-Spanish Andorra. But the Allies rejected this formula as well. During long and extenuating discussions Molotov had to retreat to the last of his reserve positions. On July 3 the Council agreed on a compromise solution proclaiming Trieste “a free territory.” All subsequent debates revolved around its status. The Soviet side continued to discern in Western proposals on Trieste some far-reaching strategic aims. Molotov summarized in his cable to Stalin on July 4: “Apparently, for the Americans and British the issue of Trieste is of great importance, since they consider Trieste as a beach-head for their control and influence in the Balkans. This, in my opinion, explains the delay at the conference.”

Another disputed issue at the conference concerned possible approaches to solution of the German problem. US diplomacy adhered to Byrnes’ plan on demilitarization of Germany that was thought to be a no-lose game since a rejection by Moscow would devalue Soviet professed anxiety about a resurrection of the German threat. The Kremlin’s attitude to this plan was elaborated during a very unusual discussion in which 38 top party, state and military officials were asked in late May to submit their views in writing. The common conclusion reached by the discussants was predetermined by Stalin’s response to Byrnes’ plan in the fall of 1945. It was practically unanimous: the US project aimed at pushing the USSR out of Germany and must be rejected (the only dissenters were Foreign Ministry’s Ivan Maisky and Nikolai Novikov, but even they expressed great reservations about the plan and proposed amendments to seriously change it). Marshal Zhukov formulated most clearly the long-term implications of Byrnes’ proposal for Soviet military presence in Europe. He concluded with military precision: “The Americans would like to finish the occupation of Germany as soon as possible and to remove the armed forces of the USSR from Germany, and then to demand a withdrawal of our troops from Poland, and finally from the Balkans.” Maxim Litvinov in his memo essentially reiterated Stalin’s argument of September 1945: “Byrnes’ gesture obviously has a purely political/propagandistic aim, namely - to create an appearance of providing a full security for us from Germany and Japan. If our security is guaranteed then many of our claims and actions that caused disagreements with the Western states would lose their meaning.” Particularly dangerous, in Litvinov’s view, was the possibility that the American proposal “would become a prelude to demand a premature termination of Germany’s occupation.” Another danger of demilitarization of Germany as seen by the participants was a Soviet inferiority in an economic competition for Germany. “Our acceptance of Byrnes’ proposal,” stressed Molotov’s deputy Solomon Lozovsky, “would have led to liquidation of occupation zones, withdrawal of our troops and political reunification of Germany, and to economic domination of the United States over Germany. Economic and political unification of Germany under American leadership would have also meant a military renaissance of Germany and, in a few years - a German-British-American war against the USSR.”

In Paris, Molotov prepared a detailed public declaration on this issue, “On the future of Germany and a German peace treaty.” As a public front to Soviet objections he cited the arguments that Byrnes’ proposal sidestepped the issues of German reparations and promoting German democracy. The draft declaration, as always, came to Stalin for vetting, and he introduced only one, but a very significant, correction that clarifies his real calculations regarding the occupation of Germany. In the discussion of the Soviet demand for US\$10 billion in reparations from Germany he deleted one sentence: “When delivery of these reparations is insured, there would be no need for occupation of German territory.” “This [deletion] is necessary,” Stalin explained to Molotov, “because we at the present stage cannot limit the time of occupation to the term of reparations delivery.” The Soviet rejection of Byrnes’ plan despite all efforts to give it a proper spin did not sell well with the Western public. It was perceived as another indication of the Soviets’ expansionist tendencies and the falsity of their professed fears of revived German militarism. “Stalin’s bluff has been

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*Diplomatic History* 21:3 (Summer 1997), p.381; Leonid Ia. Gibiansky, “Stalin i Triestское protivostoianie 1945,” in *Stalin i kholodnaya voina*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>54</sup> *Istoriia diplomatii*, vol. 5, part 1, p. 44.

<sup>55</sup> AVPRF, fond 6, opis 8, pap. 2, delo 9, l. 96

called!" said President Truman to his adviser.<sup>56</sup>

Another point to which Soviet diplomacy had to react was a French proposal on Germany that envisaged annexation of the Rhineland and the Saar coal basin (that was to be transferred under French administration), as well as internationalization of the Ruhr. The latter point coincided with Soviet position, and Stalin, for all his anger at Allied behavior on the German question, indicated to Molotov on July 12 a possibility for compromise. "We consider as dangerous the policy of Anglo-Americans and the French to snatch out of the German question single issues and resolve them in their favor. We may accept Bidault's proposal, on the condition that the British, American, and French refrain from annexation of the Ruhr and Westphalia from Germany and accept our right for reparations in the amount of 10 billion [U.S. dollars]." But there was no time for probing Stalin's idea further. The Paris conference of the CFM came to an end.

As the curtain was falling on the conference, Molotov succeeded in obtaining Allied agreement on a ceiling of \$100 million reparations for the USSR from Italy by linking this issue to Soviet consent to the convocation of a peace conference. It was the Soviet turn to gamble on the brink. "Under this scheme," Molotov wrote to "Druzhkov" [Stalin] in mid-July, "we, if push comes to shove, will break up the Paris conference on reparations, if our partners let it happen, and thereby they will carry the burden of responsibility for this break-up. We do not believe that they would dare to do it, but even if they do, they will find themselves at a political disadvantage, since they would be refusing the Soviet Union in our legitimate and modest demands. We believe we have more reasons to expect, that on this issue we will break their anti-Soviet stubbornness, and then we will reap a double benefit [*vdvoine vygodno*]."

"However, we believe that on the questions of Trieste and the Yugoslav border we will manage to settle on revisions for Bidault's proposal." Stalin gave his consent to the proposed tactics, and this time it worked well.

Aside for progress on the draft peace treaty with Italy, the conference agreed in general on the draft peace treaties with Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Finland, and they were close to what the Soviets initially wanted them to be. In the summary circulated among the Soviet foreign ministry personnel, Molotov reported that at the Paris conference, "we reached solutions acceptable to us."

The Paris peace conference in July–October 1946 confirmed the agreements reached at the CFM meeting, but made little progress on the remaining disputed issues: the status of Trieste, reparations from Italy in favor of other countries, and disposition of former Italian colonies. Attempts by Molotov and other "fraternal" delegations (Ukraine, Byelorussia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia) to push the West on these issues failed in the face of dogged resistance by the pro-American majority at the conference. More than that, under guidance from Byrnes and Bevin the majority succeeded in adopting a number of amendments which implied a revision of CFM decisions.

In fact, it was the first open confrontation of two hostile coalitions, two "voting machines" led by the newly born superpowers. A special correspondent of *Pravda* in Paris, Yuri Zhukov, drew a one-sided, but still colorful sketch on the atmosphere of the conference in a confidential letter to his boss, editor-in-chief Peyotr Pospelov. "Everything is laid bare to the bones. Nobody hides that it is the struggle between the two systems and there is no room for diplomacy as such. When Byrnes feels that the discussion touches on vital interests of the capitalist order, he gives a command and fifteen hands rise up automatically, irrespective of what the US position is, logical or illogical, fair or not." "Our delegation," added this eyewitness, "stands a head above all the others and there has been no occasion yet when they were able to refute the arguments of Vyacheslav Mikhailovich [Molotov] or Andrey Yannuarovich [Vyshinsky]."<sup>57</sup> This compliment smelled of mere sycophancy but was shared by a much harsher and independent authority. "In my view," cabled Stalin to his Foreign Minister, "the delegation's conduct is excellent and speeches by Molotov and Vyshinsky are fully in accord with the interests of our cause."

It was not only former allies that gave a headache to the Soviet delegation but also new ones. In early September the Yugoslav delegation, unhappy about Soviet concessions on the border with Italy and on Trieste, threatened to walk out on the conference. "The Yugoslav position," Molotov reported to "Druzhkov", "seems to me poorly thought through." It was one thing to use a threat of not-signing the peace treaty for tactical pressure, and quite another to walk away. The latter, continued Molotov, would place the USSR "in an awkward position" and, most importantly, may create a situation where "Anglo-American (or Italian) troops stay in Trieste, and we would be much worse off than under the compromise decision of the four ministers." In the end, the Soviet leadership convinced the Yugoslavs to stay.

In his final October 21 report to Stalin, Molotov highlighted the leading role of the United States as an

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<sup>56</sup> Diary of Joseph Davies, 30 September 1946, *Joseph Davies Papers*; LC.

<sup>57</sup> RTsKhIDNI, f. 629, op. 1, d. 113, l. 52.

architect of the Western bloc. "One could see manifestations of the new USA reactionary trend, particularly after the Moscow conference of three ministers last year, and now [for Americans] even democracy within the framework of the former status of Danzig turned out to be unacceptable for Trieste." As the main achievement of his delegation the minister cited frustrating "the Byrnes-Bevin plan to isolate the USSR and impose their superiority. On the contrary, we managed to prove the moral-political superiority of the Soviet Union over our adversaries [*protivniki*]." This time even Stalin was satisfied by the work of his diplomats, who had acted fully in the spirit of "tenacity and steadfastness." "Your assessment of Soviet delegation's work at the Paris peace conference is absolutely correct," he responded to Molotov, "The delegation fulfilled its mission well."

During the conference Stalin corrected Molotov only once, when he, in response to the Allied proposal to liquidate the Allied Control Commission in Italy, proposed to Stalin that the Soviet side, in revenge and before signing peace treaties, should abolish analogous commissions in the Balkan countries and in Finland. The answer from Moscow read: "Druzhkov gave instructions not be hasty in giving consent to liquidation of the Allied commission in Italy and to avoid sending our letter to Americans and the British on liquidation of the ACC in Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland." Although any real cooperation among the Allies in those bodies had long stopped, Stalin seemed to find it useful to preserve them as a facade, since the Soviet Union dominated all but the Italian one.

During the Paris conference another minor, but very characteristic episode occurred. At one of the military parades in Paris staged by the French who were enthusiasts of these undertakings, the Soviet minister was assigned a seat in the second row among representatives of small countries. In response Molotov demonstratively left the parade, but reported to Stalin about this incident ("I am not sure I did the right thing") seeking either his view or, more likely, a commendation. And indeed, on August 26, Druzhkov responded: "I consider that you behaved absolutely correctly when you left the French parade. The dignity of the Soviet Union must be defended not only in big matters, but also in minutia." That is a vivid example of how zealously Stalin defended and promoted the newly-won image of the Soviet Union as a great power and how hard he tried to develop the same psychological complex among his lieutenants.

Meanwhile, the Paris talks were only a small part of the *vozhds* concerns and duties. He was then on vacation in the south for the second time after the war. The country was ridden with famine caused by poor harvest and aggravated by corruption and theft by bureaucrats. Stalin fought against it with his usual methods. In late September he gave a dressing-down to his other deputy in the state hierarchy, Anastas Mikoyan (recently bestowed with the Lenin Order on the occasion of his 50th birthday), for his alleged failure to procure, store, and distribute the grain reserve properly. He instructed the Politburo "to deny any trust to com. Mikoyan who, because of his lack of spine, bred a host of thieves in the business of bread procurement." "Of course, neither I nor the rest of us can put the issue as squarely as you can," the decorated Mikoyan replied in a cable of repentance. "I will do everything to draw the appropriate lessons from your stern criticism so that it will serve me well in my subsequent work under Your fatherly leadership." Stalin also demanded from the Politburo that weekly reports from the Ministry of Trade about bread sales be sent to him not after five days, but on the next day after the fact. "I suspect," he wrote on September 25, "that somebody purposefully creates confusion in the business of regular reports on grain sales, so that thieves and robbers from the rationing apparatus may steal from the state with impunity."

But in this sphere, as well as in foreign policy, how could he alone watch over everything, if everybody else counted on his wisdom and omniscience? For instance, how much time and effort was wasted on twisting Iran's arms and imposing on Teheran an oil concession on Soviet terms.<sup>58</sup> Yet, Soviet diplomacy overlooked a loophole that allowed the Iranians to escape. On September 30 Stalin wrote to Molotov and to other members of the foreign policy Sextet of the Politburo a ranting cable, as he "uncovered" a mistake of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on this issue. The seven-month deadline for ratification of the Soviet-Iranian agreement on the oil concession that Soviet Foreign Ministry forced on the Iranian government, was about to elapse in October, and the election of a new Madjlis [Iranian Parliament] which was supposed to ratify the agreement, was not even scheduled. As a result "the concession may be left hanging in the air." In a quick response the Politburo sent a hurried note to the Iranian government and reprimanded the Soviet ambassador in Iran Ivan Sadchikov for "failing to secure Iran's compliance to push the agreement through the Madjlis." But in the end the concession indeed was "left up in the air" and never ratified. By the end of September Stalin also had to call off his intensive pressure campaign on Turkey after he had been confronted by the firm resolve of the US and British governments, which had begun military preparations to defend the Turks.<sup>59</sup>

Against this background the situation with peace treaties looked quite good indeed. To finalize them, another

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<sup>58</sup> For a background of this abortive Soviet-Iranian deal see, Natalia I. Egorova, "The Iran Crisis of 1945-1946: A View from the Russian Archives," *Cold War International History Project Working Paper*, no. 15 (Washington, 1996), pp. 20-22.

<sup>59</sup> For important recent findings on these preparations see, Eduard Mark, "The War Scare of 1946 and Its Consequences," *Diplomatic History*, 21:3 (Summer 1997), pp. 400-406.



CFM session convened in New York from November 4 through December 12, 1946. There were only a few questions on the agenda, of which the most important were the status of Trieste and Italian reparations. Yet, again, there was no end in sight for the diplomatic tug of war. Molotov—whom Lenin justifiably characterized as “iron ass,” Franklin D. Roosevelt named “stony ass,” and Churchill called “the man made of Siberian granite”—hoped to out-sit and out-argue his Western partners and at least wear them down enough on the main issues. But the experienced parliamentarian Byrnes and the former trade union negotiator Bevin were no rookies either. They did not yield a bit to Molotov and the gap between the two sides’ positions narrowed only very slowly.

On the issue of reparations both sides sought to defend the interests of their own allies at the expense of those of the other side. The Soviet Union struggled for Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Albania; the Anglo-Saxons and their French allies protected the interests of Italy and Greece. But while the Greeks and Italians fully cleared their steps with their protectors, the unruly Yugoslavs continued to surprise the Kremlin with unexpected improvisations. November 27 Molotov described in a cable to Druzhkov one embarrassing situation regarding Bulgarian reparations. “At the Paris conference it was decided in a vote against us that Bulgaria should pay 125 million of reparations to Greece and Yugoslavia and they should divide them evenly. The Yugoslavs then proposed the general amount of reparations from Bulgaria as 25 million of which 16 million (60%) should go to Yugoslavia, and the rest - to Greece. We have the instructions to demand 45 million, of which 30 million are for Yugoslavia and 15 million for Greece, and this is not acceptable now.”

“It is obvious that now it would be awkward for the Anglo-Americans to recognize the reparation figures way below the level accepted at the conference. At the same time Yugoslavs played fools [*sglupili*] when they presented their demands in the amount of 16 million which makes the Soviet position awkward: we cannot demand for Yugoslavia more than the Yugoslavs themselves. I am asking for your permission to reach an understanding on the following basis: for Greece - 20, maximum 25 million, for Yugoslavia - the same as for Greece, with possible lowering of this figure for Yugoslavia down to 15 million.” Concerning the reparations from Italy, the situation was the following: the Paris conference agreed to give 100 million to the USSR, Greece and Yugoslavia, as well as 25 million to Ethiopia. Molotov in his dispatch to Stalin from New York proposed “to strive to obtain 150 million for Yugoslavia, 25 million for Albania, but if the partners resist this...to agree at least on 100 million for Yugoslavia and 10 million for Albania.” Stalin approved these guidelines.

But the bargaining on reparations and the status of Trieste dragged on. The Allies stood for a strong governor’s authority (to withstand Yugoslavian encroachment) and were reluctant to pull out their troops while the USSR along with Yugoslavia wanted to curb the governor’s power and wanted to get the British and American troops out quickly. On November 25 Molotov spoke with Byrnes and the latter assured his “Soviet friend” that the US and Great Britain did not plan to stay much longer in Trieste and made some small concessions. Molotov, on his part, urged to accelerate the talks and in general sounded more optimistic than the American.<sup>60</sup> “Your conversation with Byrnes leaves a good impression.” “Druzhkov” wrote to him the day after. “I advise you to make all possible concessions to Byrnes so that we can finally get over with the peace treaties. For us, representing the interests of the Soviet state, it is now of particular importance.” Stalin’s patience seemed to have grown thin and he was not in the mood for haggling over trifles once his main goals were achieved. Instead, he wanted to lock in the results of the war as soon as possible. “It is precisely this way of a resolute untangling of all controversial issues that we have taken beginning with that conversation with Byrnes,” echoed Molotov in his response. “I now think that it would be possible to quickly solve the treaties problem.”

Then followed a series of Soviet concessions on Trieste, which came as a pleasant surprise for Molotov’s counterparts. Byrnes and his advisers attributed them wholly to their own resolve that had allegedly reduced the Soviet minister to stuttering.<sup>61</sup> They did not suspect that this time Stalin himself was on their side. But even with the green light for “all possible concessions” Molotov continued his lonely fight, until on December 5 he managed to bargain away the additional 5 million for Yugoslavia and 5 million for Albania (to which the West did not want to give even a dime). The Soviet Union obtained the desired 100 million, including the requested payments in kind from current production. “Regarding reparations, you did well.” wrote Stalin approvingly in a cable. “At the very least we may agree to the group of ships ‘B.’”

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<sup>60</sup> AVPRF, f. 6, op. 8, pap. 2, d. 13, l. 44

<sup>61</sup> Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, pp.152-154; Bohlen, *Witness to History*, pp.255-256. However, the Soviet memcon of November 25 lends even less credence to Byrnes’ version of confronting Molotov with an ultimatum than does the American one (for the latter see Ward, *Threat of Peace*, pp.162-163).

He referred to the distribution among the Big Three of Italy's Navy that had been broken into three more or less equally valuable lists "A", "B" and "C". But the group "C" included the largest and state-of-the-art battleship "Vittorio Veneto," and this whetted everyone's appetites. The main contender was Great Britain, which contributed most to the defeat of Italian Navy. The US supported the British claim out of a sense of solidarity. "It is clear they do not want to give the Soviet Union a state-of-the-art battleship," reported Molotov despondently. "I will insist on a drawing." But this ingenious offer did not take off either, so Stalin and Molotov had to put up with getting group "B."

Having increased Italian reparations for Yugoslavia, Molotov made an attempt at the end of the conference in his conversation with Byrnes to try another request on behalf of the Yugoslavs: to exchange the reparations increase for at least a minor correction of the French Line in favor of Belgrade. The Secretary of State politely but firmly declined this offer and remarked that "the Yugoslavs have been asking for too much" and that they "should be thankful to Molotov" for what they already got.<sup>62</sup> In his heart Molotov must have agreed with this assessment.

Alongside with the CFM conference, there was a session of the UN General Assembly that discussed, among other things, the two issues of special interest for the USSR: the creation of the Trusteeship Council and reductions of armed forces and armaments. When informing Stalin about the discussion on the Trusteeship Council, Molotov suggested that "we do not insist on including the USSR on the list of 'immediately interested states' regarding the former mandates of the League of Nations." Stalin underlined with irritation these lines in Molotov's cable and instructed him on November 20 to take "a position of active interest" in this issue. "Those days when the USSR could consider itself as a insignificant state regarding all kind of mandate territories, have passed... Only this position enables us to play an active role in the issue of mandates and, in case of necessity, to make concessions to our partners in exchange for their concessions." "The issue of mandate territories," Stalin said repeating his main thought, "gives us a whole range of possibilities and means of pressure on our partners, of which [*sic* - nobody dared to correct Stalin's grammar - V.P.] we should not ignore during our bargaining with partners." All the more so, he added, that for the Anglo-Americans this was a "weak" spot, and for the USSR it was "a strong, democratic point."

There were two points in Stalin's position that his deputy failed at first to notice. First, the principled one, is the pose of a great power that nobody can ignore in resolving even secondary international issues. The second, tactical, an opportunity to exploit this issue as a lever of pressure in talks with competitors. As his cable continued, it became clear that the fate of these territories per se was of little importance to Stalin. "But we should not be more leftist than the leaders of these territories. These leaders, as you well know, in their majority are corrupt and care not so much about the independence of their territories, as about the preservation of their privileges regarding the population of these territories. The time is not yet ripe for us to clash over the fate of these territories and to quarrel over their future with the rest of the world, including their corrupt leaders themselves."

These very frank remarks of Stalin say a lot about his cynical realism, cold calculations but also about his lingering inclination to continue to "bargain with partners," rather than to quarrel with them over secondary issues.

In another discussion at the General Assembly the focus was on the collision of two proposals, the Soviet one on providing data on armed forces of the great powers on foreign territories (aimed at US and UK military bases abroad) and the British amendment to emasculate it. Despite all Molotov's efforts, the Soviet proposal did not go through. On November 28 Stalin, after taking stock of the situation, turned to his deputy with almost fatherly advice. "Judging by how often you speak in the Committee number one I realize that you are nervous and getting upset over the fate of the Soviet proposal. In my opinion, you should not get upset, but rather behave more calmly." At the same time Stalin advised Molotov "to stand firm" for even "in case our proposal fails, the loser will not be us, but our partners, since it is clear to everyone, that the partners want to procrastinate on the issue of providing information about armed forces on the territories of the United Nations and other former enemy states. From time to time Vyshinsky or others should be unleashed to make their speeches."

When Molotov responded somewhat testily that he could stop speaking altogether, Stalin replied in a conciliatory tone that he had in mind something else - "to speak at a decisive moment in order to crown the whole affair." He concluded magnanimously: "I have no doubt that the Soviet delegation scored a moral-political victory beyond any doubt, despite the formal victory of Bevin." Also discussed at the session was the issue of a permanent UN headquarters: the US proposal to move it from New York to San-Francisco was supported by some Arab states "because of anti-Semitic considerations", as Molotov reported to Stalin. He also suggested to act "in bloc" with the British on this issue insisting on New York or at least Philadelphia. This time "the Anglo-Soviet bloc" prevailed.

On 12 December 1946, the CFM conference in New York came to an end. It finalized the peace treaties,<sup>63</sup> including the treaty with Italy where the Soviet side had to concede on the status of Trieste. The next day, reporting to Stalin on the results, Molotov summed up: "In a word, the peace treaties are acceptable to us in all points of substance and meet the criteria set for the delegation (except for 'the French line' of the [Yugoslav-Italian] border and the group

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<sup>62</sup> AVPRF, f. 6, op. 8, pap. 2, d. 13, ll. 71-72.

<sup>63</sup> They were signed on 10 February 1947 and enacted on 15 September 1947 after their ratification by four great powers.

'B' of the Navy)." A more detailed estimate of the conference was presented in the Minister's circular letter for Soviet ambassadors (sent out December 24) that Stalin approved. "Yugoslavia did not get Trieste. But Trieste is going to Italy as a free territory and this provides substantial political and economic advantages for Yugoslavia."<sup>64</sup> Molotov also judged as acceptable the compromise regarding withdrawal of foreign troops from Trieste "since the resolution of issues regarding the stay of foreign troops is removed from the jurisdiction of the Security Council where our partners could have dragged their feet."

"On the treaty with Italy," the Minister continued, "we managed to improve the economic part, in particular as far as reparations were concerned. On reparations, after a long struggle, we obtained a larger amount for Yugoslavia (125 million) than for Greece (105 million), as well as reparations for Albania (5 million), despite the dogged resistance of Byrnes and Bevin. This decision, of course, has a serious political significance, especially in the present situation where the US and Great Britain have increased pressure on Yugoslavia and Albania, in particular on the issue of Greece."<sup>65</sup> It should be noted that the demagogic game that our partners at the Paris conference played around the issues of reparations from Hungary and Bulgaria, and about the change of the Greek-Bulgarian border in favor of Greece, failed completely. Reparations from Bulgaria, instead of 125 million accepted at the Paris conference, were reduced to 70 million (45 millions for Greece and 25 million for Yugoslavia), and the frontiers of Bulgaria were confirmed without changes as they stood on January 1, 1941."

In conclusion, the letter contained a political estimate of the outcome of the struggle with the partners. "The Anglo-American bloc, which demonstrated its power by passing at the Paris conference, sometimes by a two-thirds vote, the so-called recommendations aimed against the interests of Yugoslavia and Albania and ultimately and mainly against the Soviet Union, in the end could not hold its position and had to retreat under our pressure, by backing off on these recommendations altogether, and in part by correcting their content to such a degree that they became acceptable to us."

"The preparation of peace treaties with Italy, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland took more than a year," wrote Molotov, "and required serious fighting, but as a result we succeeded in our principled positions and defended our interests and the interests of friendly states." This outcome despite all compromises was indeed a success for Soviet diplomacy and Molotov himself. Patricia Ward in the conclusion of her detailed study of CFM meetings points out (perhaps with a bit of exaggeration) that Molotov "was clearly dominating the others" and introduced "a new brand of diplomacy": "Chain-smoking Russian cigarettes and stroking his mustache, Molotov manipulated the others like a puppet master, time after time reducing Bevin to fury, Byrnes to impatience, and Bidault to new compromise suggestions."<sup>66</sup>

But Molotov's personal triumph was poisoned by Stalin in the end. As much as Stalin was content with the outcome of the conference (or perhaps just because of that), the *vozhd* still could not resist another dressing-down of his deputy, and found or rather created a pretext for it. At that time the USSR Academy of Science was holding its first postwar session and the Academy's Presidium decided to elect Molotov, as the number two figure of the government, to become an honorary member. (Stalin had received the same title before the war.) In New York Molotov hesitated with his answer as if sensing there was some hidden snag. The academicians appealed to Stalin for support, and he sent a special dispatch to his deputy suggesting that he should accept the honor. What could Molotov do? He gave his agreement and on the November 30 the Academy in full session after a prolonged discussion of Molotov's contribution to "Marxist-Leninist science" unanimously elected him a fellow academician. The next day all Moscow newspapers published the Academy's greetings to its new member as "one of the great Stalin's closest comrades in arms."<sup>67</sup> A similar message was addressed to Stalin but in general the Soviet press in those days paid much more attention to Molotov. Whole pages were devoted to coverage of the UN and Molotov's speeches there which were "full of Stalin's wisdom," in Academician V. Volgin's sycophantic (though literally correct) characterization.<sup>68</sup> This probably did not escape the attention of the first honorary member of the Academy.

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<sup>64</sup> The agreement on Trieste on which Soviet diplomacy spent so much effort, proved to be short-lived. Disagreements among its guarantors made normal administration of the "free territory" impossible, and in 1954 it was divided between Yugoslavia and Italy. Trieste became an Italian city.

<sup>65</sup> This seemed to be a reference to the armed skirmishes on the Greek-Albanian border inspired by Greece, and the US ultimatum to Yugoslavia following incidents with two American planes in Julian region.

<sup>66</sup> Ward, *Threat of Peace*, p.176.

<sup>67</sup> See *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* for 1 December 1946.

<sup>68</sup> *Izvestiia*, 30 November 1946

In response to the Academy's greetings, Molotov, as was the custom, sent a special cable addressed to its session where he dutifully dwelled on Stalin's role as the father and genius of Soviet science and toward the end expressed a "profound gratitude" for the "high honor" accorded to himself. The cable was meant for publication but did not appear for reasons revealed in Stalin's own cable to his "closest comrade in arms" sent on December 5—the same day that marked Molotov's victory on the issue of reparations. "I was struck by your cable regarding your election. Are you really so ecstatic about your election as an honorary academician? What does this signature 'Truly yours, Molotov' mean? I never thought that you could become so emotional about such a second-rank matter as being elected an honorary member. It seems to me that you as a statesman of the highest type must care more about your dignity." That was truly an illustration of Aesop's fable of the wolf and the lamb! It was not merely petty and sadistic tyranny, but almost a knee-jerk reflex of Stalin and all his power hierarchy - an irresistible urge to rub subordinates, even after success, in the dirt, so that they would not think too highly of themselves and remember who their master was. A proper response from below was to bow and repent. "I realize that I made a fool of myself," Molotov admitted dutifully and then added with a touch of sincerity that his "election as an honorary member does not make me ecstatic. I would have felt better had this election not taken place. Thank you for your cable."

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These new documents provide rich food for thought. They confirm, amend and sometimes correct our perceptions of the Stalin's postwar diplomacy both in its details and general content. The in-depth analysis of these documents requires additional effort, and they would be undoubtedly taken to support different interpretations. Yet some more obvious and preliminary observations of a general nature can be made even now.

The new evidence leaves no doubt about the leading, in fact almost overwhelming role of Stalin in defining the strategy and tactics of Soviet diplomacy. Typical for any dictatorship, this role in Stalin's case was further enhanced by his rare personal abilities. He towers over his lieutenants, surpassing them by far in his information and expertise, strategic scope and foresight. At the same time Molotov reveals himself as not merely "his master's voice" as it is widely believed,<sup>69</sup> but sometimes as a figure with a certain degree of autonomy, even though this autonomy at times cost him dearly. We can now better appreciate Molotov's own rejoinder to Khrushchev and other Politburo members at the CC Plenum of June 1957 when he was accused of having been Stalin's hapless robot: "More than any of you, and more than you, comrade Khrushchev, I made occasional objections to comrade Stalin and got into big trouble because of that."<sup>70</sup> Particularly noteworthy were the Stalin-Molotov disagreements during the autumn of 1945 when Molotov and the Politburo Four still acted on inertia from the wartime cooperation, while Stalin had already begun to change the tack.

Contrary to the popular Western stereotype of Stalin as a moderate and Molotov as a 'nyet' tough guy (carefully cultivated by the two), Stalin clearly was the engine behind the toughening Soviet line on such key inter-Allied issues as the future of Eastern Europe, Germany, and occupation of Japan. Domestically this toughness, as the documents reveal, became for Stalin not only the means to mobilize the country at large for a new round of rivalry with the West (as historians have long suspected), but also to consolidate around him the highest circle of the Soviet leadership, to reaffirm his personal power over them. In other words, given his pathological mistrust of everybody around him, he needed an external enemy also in order to keep his immediate circle under control. At the same time, dealing with his Western counterparts Stalin combined implacable, uncompromising stands on the main issues with flexibility and readiness for compromise on less important ones (Trieste, reparations for "his" satellites, mandate territories, etc.).

Despite his boundless suspiciousness and inherent hostility toward the Western Allies, the qualities that made him see their actions and intentions in the blackest light; Stalin in 1945-46 was still inclined towards hard bargaining with his partners. He still expected to make a deal with them—although not an "amicable" one. Reciprocated by the West, this attitude made it possible to reach agreement on more manageable issues of the postwar settlement such as peace treaties with former minor Axis powers.<sup>71</sup> It looks like there was still no qualitative change in Stalin's strategy at that time, although his fundamental ideological assumption about "the hostile West" made such a change more a matter of tactics.

Aside from this general predisposition there is little in these documents to suggest more specific ideological

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<sup>69</sup> For instance, Steven M. Minor, "His Master's Voice: Yacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov as Stalin's Foreign Commissar" in *The Diplomats, 1939-1979*, ed. Gordon A. Craig and Francis L. Loewenheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>70</sup> TsKhSD, f. 2, op. 1, d. 258, l. 48.

<sup>71</sup> For more on this mutual interest, see Ilaria Poggiolini, "Negotiating a Settlement for Italy and the Minor Axis Powers: Peace Diplomacy and the Origins of the Cold War, 1945 - 1947," in *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943 - 1953*, ed. Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons (New York: St. Martin Press, 1996), pp. 391 - 392.

motives behind Stalin's calculations and actions: he comes through as a cynical and ruthless opportunist rather than an revolutionary ideologue although, as John Gads argued recently, these two faces of Stalin may have often been more complementary than previously thought.<sup>72</sup>

The new documentation provides additional evidence of such already familiar traits of Stalin's diplomacy as "knocking at all doors" in search of possible gains, frequent use of brinkmanship and wedging tactics, brutal pressure and persistence. While often effective in the short term, this Bolshevik style was costly in the long run given its impact on Western counterparts and public opinion (to which, as these documents confirm, Stalin and Molotov were almost totally oblivious).

Finally, the documents shed more light on the well-known methods of Stalin in treating his comrades-in-arms, and also on the murky decision-making process in Stalin's Kremlin. The omnipotent master, as it turns out, after all had to follow certain rules of the game by preserving at least the appearance of collegiality.

This documentation is also interesting for what it does not say. The absence of explicit references in this Stalin-Molotov correspondence to such crucial issues of the period as the US atomic diplomacy, the crises over Turkey and Iran, while quite intriguing, does not necessarily imply that they were less significant to the Kremlin. Rather, it may be explained by a distinct CFM agenda on which both correspondents naturally concentrated and also by Stalin's and Molotov's ability to compartmentalize among different issues on their foreign policy plate.

### **About the Author**

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<sup>72</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know. Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp.13-14.

