

# The International Environment in 1946–47 Between Peace Negotiations and Balance of Powers

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**L**OOKING BACK, the roots of the new postwar order are to be found in the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, when an agreement establishing the principles of a United Nations Organization was signed. Thus, the major actors of the system decided on the necessity and opportunity to set up a new international organization. In this respect, we should consider that moment as the real start of the new world order in the aftermath of the Second World War. Unfortunately, the war conditions and the complexity of wartime alliances impose a quasi-exclusive approach to this process. Therefore, after May 1945 the reasons related exclusively to the war were no longer valid and all states should have been able to take part in the future negotiations for a new peaceful system. At the same time it is hard to blame only one component of the Big Three (the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union) because at that time they were living a transition from the wartime alliance to the mutual suspicion-based competi-

tion, as each of them intended to gain a wider influence sphere in the postwar system.

Those who had claimed the League of Nations' failure had accused the lack of the technical conditions necessary for a working peace. The whole interwar political science literature emphasized the lack of basic economic conditions for the defeated states to be able to pay the war reparations, the absence of security guarantees, and the inequality among nations. All these were the outcomes of a misleading negotiation process at the 1919 Peace Conference. Twenty-five years later, after another world war, the Great Powers repeated the same mistakes on which a new world order has been built.

In this article I argue that the new world order set up at the 1946–47 Peace Conference was a half-hearted commitment which enforced the division of the international system into a bipolar one. Two sorts of arguments endorse this thesis. Firstly, the spheres of influence had been established before the settlement of the new principles of international law. Secondly, the preparations for the peace negotiations were made by the Council of the Foreign Ministers in its five meetings, which represented another exclusive body by virtue of its decision-making process.

## Spheres of Influence Shape the New International Law

**C**HRONOLOGICALLY AND technically speaking, the meetings of the three leaders of the Allied countries meant first of all the establishment of influence spheres, and only then the setting up of the principles for a renewed international law.

Between January 1941 and August 1945 there were 23 meetings at the highest level. The first meeting to which Stalin participated took place in Moscow (September 1941) when an Allied aid to the Soviet Union was decided. Then the three countries' leaders had six other meetings (Moscow, August 1942; Moscow, October–November 1943; Tehran, November–December 1943; Moscow, October 1944; Yalta, February 1945; Potsdam, July–August 1945). Therefore, Roosevelt met Stalin twice; Churchill, however, met the Soviet leader four times.

Checking the agenda and analyzing the conclusions of the three powers' meetings between 1941 and 1945, we could notice the prevalence of the security issue over the postwar international cooperation. Though I agree completely with G. Roberts's remark that "no other source sheds as much light on the attitudes, policy preferences, and personal interactions of the leaders of the Allied coalition,"<sup>21</sup> I consider that a deep analysis of the Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam

conferences is without a doubt necessary for a correct understanding of the Paris peace negotiations.

Worth mentioning here are the reasons of the Soviet participation in all these international conferences, as an actor that was very anxious to take part in the reconstruction of the postwar international system. In this respect, a very interesting analysis published by G. Roberts in 1999 highlights five phases of the “Soviet spheres of influence policy”<sup>2</sup>:

- 1939–40: agreement with Nazi Germany shaping limited spheres of influence for the purpose of “immediate and urgent security needs”;
- 1940–41: the Soviet diplomatic action to set up a “security bloc in the Balkans” after France had been invaded by Germany;
- 1941–42: a new alliance with Britain and the United States looking to reaffirm the right to territory gained under the terms of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Agreement;
- 1943–44: “the Grand Alliance phase” between the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union.
- 1944–45: “unilateral imposition of a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.”

This classification created by Roberts reveals that the USSR’s participation in these alliances was determined by the desire to achieve the Soviet security requirements. It seems that it was not the Kremlin’s intention to provoke a counter-system in competition to the Western construction. In Roberts’s point of view, “blocism, antagonistic coalitions and camps” could be interpreted as an outcome of a misperception.<sup>3</sup> From this explanation, I could admit just that in all these meetings we could observe a mix of diplomatic mistakes and ideological misperceptions.

At Tehran, Roosevelt met Stalin for the first time, being hosted by the Soviet embassy. From their discussions two different agendas emerged. On Roosevelt’s agenda the question of trade was crucial, while on Stalin’s agenda the issue of a second front in Europe against Germany was at the top of the list. This meeting between both leaders reveals the nature of the future world order they imagined. In the mind of the Soviet leader, France should not have been admitted in the narrow circle of the winners. Stalin said that “it is necessary for the French people to understand that collaboration with the Germans does not come free. It must carry penalties.”<sup>4</sup> Roosevelt presented to Stalin his plan for an international organization including three components:

- a general organization of all united nations;
- an executive committee of ten or eleven states;
- a police committee of four states (Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and China).

Discussing on this topic, Stalin suggested the setting up of two organizations: one for Europe and another for the Far East. This sounded like a similar suggestion made previously by W. Churchill. In this logic, the three powers intended to divide their influence geopolitically. Thus, in Europe, in the event of a potential aggression, Britain and the Soviet Union were authorized to send troops, while the US intervention would be limited to supplying ships and planes.

Concerning the territorial issues, the Big Three admitted that Finland would be an independent state, but Stalin insisted on territorial adjustments and demanded that the Finns pay reparations for war damages. At the same time, the Soviet archives demonstrate Stalin's concerns about the eastern frontier of Poland, but also the Soviet Union's interest to reopen the Straits question.

In 1944, at Bretton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks, the Great Powers were anxious to create the institutional framework for the postwar world order. If at the Bretton Woods Conference 44 nations took part in a very complex discussion establishing an International Monetary Fund and an International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference the agreement for a United Nations Organization was signed by the representatives of four states: China, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States. In fact, broadly speaking, both conferences were concluded as a set of statements of principles concerning the postwar international order.

Before insisting on the importance of the Yalta Conference, just a few references are needed to complete the puzzle of the environment of the future peace conferences starting in 1946. In this logic, the meeting in Moscow (October 1944) between Churchill and Stalin along with their ministers Eden and Molotov has its crucial importance in the rebalancing of powers in Europe. Starting with September 1944, Kremlin was keen on the fate of the Danube region. Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary were occupied by the Soviet troops on their way to Berlin.<sup>5</sup> In this period, with a little resistance from Britain and the United States, the Soviet Union began the process of securing its real control over the region. On 9 October 1944, in the famous meeting with Stalin in Moscow, Churchill presented a plan for the possible division of influence among the three powers. In his Memoirs, Churchill presented this episode like one underlining how strange it would be that the fate of millions of people should be decided by two men. Whatever the truth of this interpretation, doubtlessly Stalin knew how to turn in his favor the meaning of the famous percentages.<sup>6</sup>

At Yalta (February 1945), the three leaders finally shaped the future spheres of influence in Europe. Beyond the topic of the German question, the session of 6 February demonstrated Stalin's ability in a competitive negotiation. Making fine allusions to the previous bilateral meeting in Moscow, the Soviet

leader requested freedom of action in the Balkans and Poland, in exchange for his non-involvement in Greece. Later on, the tacit acceptance of this game by F. D. Roosevelt's administration was criticized by the US Congress as a weakness of the former president and his aides in front of Soviet communism.

The Western leadership changed in 1945. Clement Attlee became Britain's prime minister in July 1945 and President Harry Truman took office in the US in April 1945. Only Joseph Stalin remained in office in the following years, but his agreements with the previous Allied partners seemed hollow to the new leadership. The Potsdam Conference (July 1945) could be seen as the first cause of the future Cold War. The diplomatic mistakes made by Churchill and Roosevelt at Yalta were tactically exploited by the Soviet delegation in all the upcoming negotiations on the future world order.

At the Potsdam Conference a Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) from five states (the USSR, the United Kingdom, the United States, China and France) was set up. The main task of the new Council was to prepare the texts of the future peace treaties with the former enemies. In this sense, each treaty was supposed to be drafted by the states which signed the previous armistice agreements.

The Conference Declaration presented the main conclusions regarding the plans for Germany and the policy on: the payment of reparations; some territorial adjustments; and, more important for Romania, the decision to deny the accession of some countries to the UN, but to accept states that had remained neutral during the war. As in the case of the Bretton Woods Conference, when the absence of some states was justified by their belligerent position on the Axis side, one year later Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Italy and Romania were not invited at the San Francisco Conference, although at that moment they had signed the Armistice Agreements. Even after the conclusion of the peace treaties these states were not accepted, their applications for membership to the UN being strongly opposed by the United States and the United Kingdom. These major actors accused violations of the human rights clauses of the treaties. The Soviet Union requested in the UN Security Council the same attitude regarding Finland and Italy, because the former enemies should be treated equally and their admission to the UN had to be collective.

This series of Big Three meetings showed that these great actors agreed to adjust the rules of the future world order in the balance of powers logic and afterwards in the sense of human rights violation officially claimed by the Western Powers.

## The Preparations for the Peace Negotiations Were Led by the Council of the Foreign Ministers in Its Five Meetings

**T**HE THEORY of international negotiations emphasizes the substantial role of the preparatory phase in the negotiation process. In this phase the actors negotiate principles and procedures within a general framework agreed by all parties.

In the case of the 1946–47 peace negotiations, the general framework remained in the balance of powers logic. Between 1941 and 1945, the Big Three negotiated their geopolitical positions in the postwar international system. Beyond the internal pressure of the public opinion, the war costs had determined the Allied states to accelerate the conclusion of a peace. Once the armistice agreements concluded, it could enter into a new diplomatic logic.

Even if I am not in agreement with Stephen D. Kertesz's pessimism, when he writes that "after the Second World War a constructive peace settlement was not in the cards,"<sup>7</sup> I go along with his pertinent conclusion that "at the Congress of Vienna in 1814–1815 and at the Conference of Paris in 1919, the values of the major victorious powers were roughly the same and their vision of the future was compatible. This was not the case after the Second World War."<sup>8</sup>

The manner in which the negotiations were prepared showed an exclusive approach of the Great Powers. The lack of consensus among the great actors led each party to adopt a competitive style, resulting in a distributive bargaining in contrast with the values claimed in the previous meetings.

The competitive approach in the peace negotiations had also been caused by the new leadership in Britain and the United States. Clement Attlee and Harry Truman had formed a different opinion about the Soviet position in the international system. They had to overcome Churchill's diplomatic mistakes and Roosevelt's hesitations during the wartime meetings with the Soviet leader. The Western and Soviet approaches concerning the future political and judicial order were separated by great differences in the interpretations of the peace. Spheres of influence had been negotiated in wartime, now the peace negotiations should follow the balance of powers logic.

The analysis of the negotiations environment must follow the logic of the Council of Foreign Ministers' meetings between 1945 and 1947. There were five main meetings, indicating the complexity of the negotiations (London, September 1945; Paris, April–June 1946; New York, October 1946; Moscow, March–April 1947; London, November–December 1947). The CFM assumed the role of preparing the peace treaties with the countries of the Axis Alliance.

There were six states defined as “enemy states”: Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Romania. At the very beginning of the new Council activity, procedural difficulties were invoked by the British Foreign Secretary himself, Ernest Bevin. This is why the first Council meeting (London, September 1945) discussing peace treaties for the enemy states (excluding Germany) broke up without an agreement. The main disputed item on the negotiations agenda was the treaty with Romania. I quote the following excerpt from Ernest Bevin’s statement before the House of Commons of 9 October 1945:

*There were before the Council proposals by the Soviet, British and United States delegations. We took the Soviet proposals as a basis and several points raised in the British proposals were disposed of. We then proceeded to discuss the United States proposals regarding the draft peace treaty with Rumania. These United States proposals brought up the whole question of the recognition of the Government of Rumania, since it has been made clear in them that the United States Government, while ready to discuss a draft, would not negotiate a peace treaty with Rumania until a broadly representative government had been established in that country. Much the same issue came up in connection with the draft treaty for Bulgaria. Since on this subject there was a great divergence of view, I proposed, in the hope of easing the difficulties of the position, that an independent inquiry should be made into conditions in these two countries. . . . I was therefore surprised when Mr Molotov told Mr Byrnes and myself on the morning of 22<sup>nd</sup> September that we had all violated the Berlin Agreement.<sup>9</sup>*

These explanations of the British Foreign Secretary outline the game played by the Soviet delegation. We could better understand this gambit in the context of the influence spheres policy led by J. Stalin since 1939, if we follow the argumentation developed by Geoffrey Roberts regarding the phases of Stalin’s influence spheres policy between 1939 and 1947. The dispute provoked by Molotov on the subject of a “violation” of the Berlin Agreement was only meant to highlight the area where the USSR had not accepted the interference of the other Allies, namely Romania and Bulgaria. In this respect, we could identify a competitive strategy of the Soviet delegation at the peace negotiation meetings.

At Potsdam, the participants agreed that each treaty should be drafted by the states which signed the armistice agreements with the former enemies. Thus, a first CFM meeting should have established the general issues and then a comprehensive agreement was supposed to be drawn at deputies’ level. At a second meeting, the Council would have analyzed these drafts and decided on the controversial issues. Then the next step was a general meeting of the United Nations formulating the recommendations to be considered by the CFM. The Soviet

Union saw an advantage in this scheme, because four of the five former enemy states were in its sphere: Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary and Romania.<sup>10</sup>

As a main technique used by the Soviet delegation in the negotiation process, the procedural controversies were put on the agenda of each meeting. Therefore, the peace negotiations were unpredictable and timewasting. In the former case, the delegations of the former enemy states had a very short time to prepare their oral positions to be presented in front of the CFM; in the latter case, the Conference wasted considerable time on procedural debates, thus leaving very little time for the substance of the negotiations.

The delegations of the former enemy states came at the Paris Conference prepared to present their positions concerning the drafts of the peace treaties. Their participation in the Conference sessions was limited, except when they were invited.

Another aspect of the negotiation environment is the status of some states, because countries like Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania were occupied by the Soviet troops, and the governments of these states had been working under the pressure of the Allied Control Commissions dominated by the Soviet representatives. The case of Finland is different, because during the armistice period this state was free from foreign occupation. Instead, the Soviet delegation insisted there was no reason for changing the 1940 treaty.<sup>11</sup>

In these conditions, beyond the substance of the negotiations, the environment for the peace negotiations was altered by the impossibility to create a real position in the process without external pressure on the former enemy states. These states tried to present the arguments behind their participation in the war, but at the same time these states were represented by a new leadership which had not taken part in the wartime governments. Thus, the logic of war should have been overcome and a negotiation based on real cooperation was necessary to establish a new peace order.

**T**HE SENSE of the peace negotiations in 1946–47 has been in contrast with the principles enounced at Bretton Woods, Dumbarton Oaks, San Francisco, to name just a few moments when the leaders of the new world declared their interest in an international cooperation.

At the same time, the question of “human rights” was treated inappropriately by the three Allied powers. When the Big Three had arranged a “transfer of populations,” they had not respected any human right. In the same logic of the 1919 Peace Conference, a few great actors in the international system used the human rights issue as a means to solve a territorial conflict. The transfer to Germany of German populations from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary occurred under a political rationale. The manner in which the transfer was car-



ried out is less important than the fact the some human groups were dislocated without being previously consulted.

The wartime circumstances determined the Soviet Union to calculate its position in Europe beyond ideological reasons. Being interested in security guarantees protecting its goals in Eastern Europe, Moscow concluded two opposite alliances: firstly with Nazi Germany and then with Britain and the United States. At the end of the war, Stalin wanted to preserve the positions gained through the former agreement concluded in 1939 (Molotov–Ribbentrop) in the new alliance with the Western powers.

Churchill and Roosevelt preferred to keep these topics under wraps, as they were interested in the active participation of the Soviet Union in the war. In fact, both Western leaders had drawn up a project for the future World Order and European Order. The last meetings between Churchill and Stalin demonstrated their interest in a European balance of powers, but they had different meanings for *peace* and *security*. This misperception dramatically influenced the peace negotiations with the former enemy states, leading to the division of the world into what Walter Lippmann calls the Cold War.



## Notes

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3. *Ibid.*, 657.
4. Roberts, “Stalin,” 12.
5. John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Stalin’s War with Germany* (London, 1983).
6. Albert Resis, “The Churchill-Stalin Secret ‘Percentages’ Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944,” *The American Historical Review* 83 (1978): 368–387.
7. Stephen D. Kertesz, *The Last European Peace Conference, Paris 1946: Conflict of Values* (Buffalo, 1992), 15.
8. *Ibid.*, 16.
9. Council of Foreign Ministers (London Meeting), *Hansard 1803–2005* (9 October 1945), 35–43. Source: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1945/oct/09/council-of-foreign-ministers-london>.
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### **Abstract**

#### **The International Environment in 1946–47: Between Peace Negotiations and Balance of Powers**

The 1946–47 Peace Conference was a half-hearted agreed commitment which enforced the division of the international system into a bipolar one. The series of Big Three meetings showed that these great actors agreed to adjust the rules of the future world order in the balance of powers logic and afterwards in the sense of human rights violation claimed officially by the Western powers. The lack of consensus among the great actors led each party to adopt a competitive style, resulting in a distributive bargaining in contrast with the values claimed during the previous meetings.

### **Keywords**

peace negotiations, Great Powers, Paris Peace Conference, Romania