Radosław Żurawski vel Grajewski

THE IMPACT OF THE SOVIET FACTOR ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH-CZECHOSLOVAK RELATIONS DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

ABSTRACT

The article is an attempt to observe the evolution of the role of the Soviet factor in British-Czechoslovak relations during the Second World War. In the months preceding and at the beginning of the war, its influence was barely noticeable. The USSR then acted as an ally of Germany. Only in August 1940 did the FO note attempts to establish cooperation between the Soviet government and the Czechoslovak Provisional Government. From the fall of 1940, contacts were developed between the Soviet and Czechoslovak intelligence services. The role of the Soviet factor in Czechoslovak policy began to grow rapidly from the summer of 1941 – the entry of the USSR into the war with Germany and Moscow's full recognition of the Czechoslovak government in exile. The USSR's position on this matter forced Great Britain to similarly recognize the Czechoslovak authorities. Since then on, the Soviet factor as a lever for achieving political goals in relations with the British was used permanently and on an increasing scale by Czechoslovak diplomacy. Moscow's support (this time ineffectively) was also used to force the British to recognize the pre-Munich borders of the ČSR and the so-called "Revocation of Munich" – thus recognizing the invalidity and illegality of the Munich Agreements of 1938 from the very beginning of their existence. London observed with concern the decline of Czechoslovak diplomacy into the position of a Soviet vassal, especially clearly visible in the forced abandonment of its plans for federation with Poland demanding by Kremlin. From these positions, the FO opposed Beneš's visit to Moscow, which was expected already in April 1943 and which threatened to deepen Poland's isolation after the Soviet authorities broke off relations with it. Beneš tried to discredit the opinions about the Soviet invader policy and eventually paid a visit to Moscow and led to the signing of the Czechoslovak-Soviet alliance agreement, but only in December 1943. From that moment on, ČSR was perceived on the Thames as a country in the Soviet sphere of influence and the structures of the Czechoslovak authorities in exile were considered to be infiltrated by communists – and therefore by Moscow. When withdrawing its opposition to the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty, the British government simply drew pragmatic conclusions from the fact that the Red Army, as an ally in the war with Germany, was a fundamental factor in bringing about the defeat of the Third Reich and as such was needed by London, and from the belief that then the Soviets will occupy the Czechoslovak lands and in any case they will have a huge influence on the decision regarding

them. This belief also largely determined the British activity towards the uprising in Slovakia in 1944 and Prague in 1945. It was considered that this was a Soviet zone of military responsibility and only occasionally any military activity was undertaken there, encountering reluctance from the Soviet side. The title of a voluntary vassal of the USSR permanently stuck to the Czechoslovak government in exile. This situation strengthened the FO's tendency to reduce interest in Czechoslovak affairs. Beneš's capitulation to the occupation and annexation of Transcarpathian Ruthenia to the USSR confirmed, in the eyes of the FO, the thesis that the Czechoslovak authorities were subordinated to Stalin's orders. This became fully visible after the ČSR authorities returned to the country via Moscow, where the government was reconstructed, giving most of the influence to the communists. Attempts to persuade the Americans to outdo Soviet troops in taking Prague, as well as hopes of maintaining British influence in post-war Czechoslovakia, turned out to be in vain.

RADOSŁAW PAWEŁ ŻURAWSKI VEL GRAJEWSKI

is a Professor in the History Institute of the University of Lodz, and a head of the Department of Contemporary World History. His research interests cover the history of diplomacy in the nineteenth century, with particular reference to the British Empire in the first half of the century, the history of Polish Great Emigration after the 1830–31 November Uprising (especially the Hôtel Lambert), the history of diplomacy in the period of the Second World War, with special focus on British-Czechoslovak relations, and the problems of myths, stereotypes and national traditions.

This essay is an attempt to trace the evolution of the Soviet factor in British-Czechoslovak relations during the Second World War. Initially, in the months preceding the war, its influence was barely perceptible because Great Britain had reduced its interest in the Czechoslovak question, which was no longer regarded as a current political issue, increasingly being seen rather as an important historical experience. After the capture of Prague by the Wehrmacht on 15 March 1939 and the collapse of the Czechoslovak state, it was unclear whether any political entity still existed that could be viewed as representing Czechoslovak interests, with the relationship with it treated as British-Czechoslovak relations. Neither the authorities of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, which were subject to German rule, nor the government of formally independent Slovakia fit the bill. Meanwhile, the Czechoslovak pro-independence émigré community – at this point politically divided and lacking recognised organisational structures – could be perceived only as essentially private circles of people who were publicly active to various extents and only represented themselves.

It is also no surprise that in May 1939, when questions were being asked in the Foreign Office (FO) about the position the British government should take concerning recognition of the Protectorate's administration, Lord Halifax, the foreign secretary at the time, wishing to keep his options open, opposed discussing the letter sent by former Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš to the League of Nations.[1] In this letter, Beneš protested against Hungary's annexations of Czechoslovak territories. The formal reason for this British opposition was the fact that the letter was from a private individual, as Beneš was at the time, and not from the government of Czechoslovakia (which, after all, did not exist). However, Great Britain and the other world powers represented in the League of Nations Council were forced to change their position by an initiative of Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky, who, on behalf of his government, on 29 May accepted responsibility for protesting on behalf of Czechoslovakia, thereby moving matters forward. Yet, the outbreak of war meant that further discussion on the subject became irrelevant.[2]

1 Letter from E. Beneš to J. Avenola, 13 May 1939, also sent to G. Bonnet, E. Halifax, V. Molotov, 13 May 1939 (French version), School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), Lis. 3/1/10; Telegram "en clair" from the United Kingdom Delegation to the FO, 22 May 1939, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), FO 371/22898, C7519/7/12, pp. 100–01; 105th Session of the Council of the League of Nations. Extract from final minutes of the 1st private meeting held on 22 May 1939, Geneva, TNA, C7655/7/12, p. 108.

2 Documents collected under the joint title: Communication to the Council of the League of Nations of a telegram from Dr. Benes, TNA, FO 371/22898, C9459/7/12, pp. 159–64; *Memoirs of Dr Eduard Beneš. From Munich to New War and New Victory*, transl. by Godfrey Lias (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954), pp. 71–73; Andrzej Essen, 'Międzynarodowa działalność emigracji czechosłowackiej w latach 1939–1940', in *Niemcy w polityce międzynarodowej 1919–1939, Na przełomie pokoju i wojny 1939–1941*, ed. by Stanisław Sierpowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 1992), IV, p. 386.

In the early part of the war, the USSR was in fact an ally of Germany and had no influence on British-Czechoslovak relations, not counting the antiwar propaganda of Czechoslovak communists in Great Britain who were countering the pro-independence activity of their émigré compatriots and the Provisional Government of Czechoslovakia (PGC) they had established. The communists responded to London's recognition of this government by publishing a pamphlet entitled *Czechoslovakia's Guilty Men. What the Czechoslovak Provisional Government Stands For*, in which they blamed the PGC for the loss of the army in France and accused it of intending to restore the "bourgeois" Czechoslovak state and making use of English imperial interests. They called upon Britain to withdraw its support for Beneš and regarded the Soviet Union as the only power that could be relied on, forgetting that it was still allied with Hitler at this time. The pamphlet gained some traction in the British press (*News Review*, the *Daily Worker*, *World News and Views*, and the *Evening Standard*), which criticised government personnel and the tensions present in the Czechoslovak army that was being formed in Britain.[3] The targets of their attacks demanded an intervention from the FO, indicating Comintern as the driving force behind the campaign, but officials from the FO's Central Department who were dealing with the matter, while acknowledging that the accusations were unwarranted, opted to ignore the protests. Indeed, it was hard to respond in any sensible way, apart from sending denials to the papers, which would have caused further discussion on the issue, but this was in neither the PGC's nor the FO's interest.

Until 1941, the Czechoslovak government did not officially inform the British services about the existence of contacts between the Soviet and Czechoslovak intelligence during the period of German-Soviet cooperation. Yet, such contacts were formed as early as January 1940 through the representative of the Czechoslovak information service in Bucharest, Colonel Heliodor Píka. In July 1940, when the PGC was receiving recognition from Britain, Píka was appointed coordinator of this cooperation

3 *Czechoslovakia's Guilty Men. What the Czechoslovak "Provisional Government" Stands For* (pamphlet, print p. 15), TNA, FO 371/24289, C10777/2/12, pp. 242–48; or *Czechoslovakia's Guilty Men* (copy – typescript), Archiv Ústavu Tomasza Garrigue Masaryka (hereafter AÚTGM), fond 38, sign. 66/1, počet listů 69–169, pp. 139–68; 'Trouble Among Czechs', *Evening Standard*, 15 August 1940 (cutting), TNA, FO 371/24289, C11483/2/12, p. 278; 'Diplomacy. More "Guilty Men" (cutting)', *News Review*, 12 September 1940, p. 279; Robert Bruce Lockhart, 'Entry of 16 and 19 August 1940', in *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, 1939–1965*, ed. by Kenneth Young, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1973–1980), II (1980), p. 73; Ladislav K. Feierabend, *Politicke vzpomínky*, 3 vols (Brno: Atlantis, 1994–1996), II (1994), p. 34; Jan Kuklík, *Vznik Československého národního výboru a prozatímního státního zřízení ČSR v emigraci v letech 1939–1940* (Praha: Karolinum, 1996), p. 162; Bohuslav Laštovička, *V Londýně za války: Zápasy o novou ČSR, 1939–1945* (Praha: SNPL, 1960), pp. 78–79.

between the intelligence services in top secrecy from the British.[4] In fact, when the PGC was being formed, Beneš was endeavouring to instil a favourable view of the USSR among British politicians. He voiced his belief that Moscow would soon enter the war against Germany and, through his services, provided the British with extensive intelligence on the Soviets. The British intelligence services treated this with a large pinch of salt, however, especially after verification of some information showed that it was mere gossip.[5] Beneš's pro-Soviet propaganda was rather limited in its effects. British politicians (Clement Attlee – the then-deputy prime minister and Labour leader; William Watson Henderson – minister Arthur Greenwood's political secretary; Sir Harold George Nicolson – parliamentary secretary to the information minister) still reckoned that if the USSR finally joined the war against Germany, this would take place in the distant future when the latter country was economically and militarily exhausted by the war with England.[6]

In the second half of August 1940, the British ambassador to Sweden, Victor Mallet, reported on attempts made through the Soviet embassy in Stockholm to initiate cooperation with representatives of the PGC. The Soviets were apparently promising Beneš full recognition of the former status of the Czechoslovak Republic. Influenced by these reports from the Czechoslovak president through the FO, in early September Beneš appointed Vladimír Kučera as Czechoslovak envoy to Sweden and ordered him to encourage the Soviets to embark on further talks in London.[7] The Soviet offer was greeted with profound mistrust in the Central Department. It was anticipated that, in an effort to secure its own goals regarding Czechoslovakia, at the appropriate time the Kremlin would "make use not of M. Benes and his friends, but of Red puppets of their own". No objections were lodged regarding the prospect of Czechoslovak-Soviet contacts, however, on the assumption that "There is always a chance that this kind of

4 'Doc. No. 55, instruction from E. Beneš, 19 July 1940', in *Československo-sovětské vztahy v diplomatických jednáních 1939–1945: dokumenty* (hereafter ČSVDJ), vol. I: *březen 1939 – červen 1943*, ed. by Jan Němeček and others (Praha: Státní ústřední archiv, 1998), pp. 145–47; Antonín Benčík and Václav Kural, *Zpravodajové generála Píky a ti druzí* (Praha: Merkur, 1991), p. 11; Karel Richter and Antonín Benčík, *Kdo byl generál Píka. Portrét čs. Vojáka a diplomata* (Praha: Doplněk, 1997), pp. 60–63. For evidence of these contacts see also Soviet documents: doc. No. 377, 13 September 1940, telegram from I. Maisky to NKID, in *Dokumenty vnešnej politiki SSSR* (hereafter DVP), 24 vols (Moskva, 1959–2000), XXIII, *1940 – 22 ijunja 1941*, 2 vols (Moskva: Meždunarodnye otnošenija, 1995), I, p. 597; doc. No. 598, 18 December 1940, telegram from I. Maisky to NKID, in *DVP*, XXI, II, pp. 221–13. For more, see Jan Gebhart, Jaroslav Koutek and Jan Kuklík, *Na frontách tajné války: kapitoly z boje československého zpravodajství proti nacismu v letech 1938–1941* (Praha: Panorama, 1989), pp. 292–312; Stanislav Kokoška, 'Československo-sovětská zpravodajská spolupráce v letech 1936–1941', *Historie a vojenství*, 46/5 (1997), 37–52; Jan Němeček, 'Edvard Beneš a Sovětský svaz 1939–1940', *Slovanské historické studie*, 23 (1997), 179–93.

5 Robert Bruce Lockhart, *Přichází zúčtování* (Brno: František Borový, 1948), p. 132.

6 Politické věcí, Velká Británie, G. Winter's reports from talks with C. Attlee, 12 October 1940 (2437/dův/40) and with W. Henderson, 18 October 1940 (252/dův/40), Archiv Ministerstva Zahraničních Věcí (hereafter AMZV), LA–D, oddíl 4, regál 70, č. 61; Harold Nicolson, 'Entry of 11 February 1941', in *The War Years, 1939–1945: Volume II of Diaries and Letters*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 145.

7 Telegram from V. Mallet to FO, 15 August 1940, TNA, FO 371/24291, C8554/7325/12, p. 166; Telegram from E. Beneš to V. Kučera (after 15 August 1940), TNA, FO 371/24291, C8554/7325/12, p. 167; Telegram from FO to V. Mallet, 7 September 1940, TNA, FO 371/24291, C8554/7325/12, p. 168.

thing will furnish us with means of making trouble between the Germans and Russians, if it does nothing else".[8] The fact that the Soviet embassy in London had made contact with Czech émigré circles was also noted.[9]

In autumn 1940, the resumption of cooperation between Czechoslovak and Soviet intelligence was the subject of talks between Beneš and General František Moravec, head of the Czechoslovak intelligence service. In confidential instructions prepared for the general, the president emphasised that Czechoslovak politicians working with the British "are not their minions or slaves" and would collaborate with anyone against Hitler. Due to his mistrust of the Soviets and reluctance to conspire against the British in this matter, Moravec was apparently sceptical about these negotiations. Yet, Moscow insisted on keeping the talks secret, justifying its demands with concerns about compromising its own neutrality. Despite warnings also coming from the resistance movement in occupied Czechoslovakia regarding Moscow's plans regarding the Sovietisation of Europe, Beneš did not share these concerns and ordered Moravec to prepare plans for cooperation with the Soviet intelligence service.[10] He foresaw a mutual exchange of information, with the caveat that the parties would come to an agreement by which materials received by Czechoslovakia from the Soviets would be passed on to Britain.[11] The planned meeting took place in late December. As Moravec reported, "the matter of secrecy of cooperation was, as far as the English were concerned, agreed quickly because both sides had an equal interest in it".[12] From this point, this cooperation continued to develop, although Beneš realised that he would not be able to hide it from the British and Poles forever.[13]

Yet it was only the efforts to secure London's full recognition of the Czechoslovak émigré government in summer 1941 that revealed the rapid growth in importance of the Soviet factor in British-Czechoslovak relations. Beneš first sought Moscow's support in this matter in August 1940, discussing with the Soviet ambassador to London the possibility of receiving such recognition and for the USSR to accept the principle of uninterrupted legal continuation of the existence of the First Czechoslovak

8 Minute of H. W. Malkin, 20 August 1940, minute of F. K. Roberts, 19 August and R. H. Bruce Lockhart, 5 September 1940, TNA, FO 371/24291, C8554/7325/12, p. 164.

9 Minute of F. K. Roberts, 18 September 1940, TNA, FO 371/24291, C8554/7325/12, p. 165.

10 František Moravec, *Špión, jemuž nevěřili* (Praha: Rozmluvy, 1990), pp. 278–81; 'Doc. No. 110, instructions from E. Beneš for F. Moravec, 7 November 1940', in *Dokumenty z historie československé politiky 1939–1943* (hereafter *AOB&M*), ed. by Libuše Otáhalová, 2 vols (Praha: Ceskoslovenska Akademie, 1966), I, pp. 139–40; Němeček, *Edvard Beneš a Sovětský svaz*, p. 191; Zbyněk Zeman, *Edvard Beneš – Politický životopis* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 2000), pp. 195–97.

11 'Doc. No. 120, note by J. Smutný on E. Beneš's instructions for F. Moravec, 1 December 1940', in *AOB&M*, I, pp. 147–48; or 'Doc. No. 67, report by J. Smutný on a conversation between E. Beneš and F. Moravec, 1 December 1940', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 166–67.

12 'Doc. No. 70, report by F. Moravec on a meeting with the representative of the Soviet intelligence service, 23 December 1940', in ČSVDJ, I, p. 170.

13 'Doc. No. 142, E. Beneš's letter to Col. L. Svoboda, 24 March 1941', in *AOB&M.*, I, pp. 191–92; or 'Doc. No. 64', in *Dokumenty a materiály k dějinám československo-sovětských vztahů* (hereafter *DMDCSV*), *březen 1939–prosinec 1943*, 6 vols (Praha: Academia, 1975–1988), IV (1982), 2 vols, I, pp. 118–19.

Republic. The president's colleagues interpreted this as an expression of his irritation at the FO's stance, which had no intention of going beyond the formula of recognition of the PGC, as well as a means of exerting pressure on the British to persuade them to accept the Czechoslovak demands.[14]

Beneš wielded a whole arsenal of diplomatic measures to achieve this goal. One was the idea of a Polish-Czechoslovak confederation, which he treated somewhat instrumentally and the British strongly supported. Beneš argued that progress on negotiations in this matter was not possible until both sides received equal political and legal status, which in turn required that the Czechoslovak authorities be granted the same legal status as the Polish government-in-exile, meaning full recognition. The Poles and British saw the idea of a confederation as an opportunity to create a political organism in Central Europe that would be capable of maintaining an independent entity between Germany and the USSR. Yet the position presented in talks with the Poles and British by the Czechoslovak side was fundamentally different from that which it adopted in relations with the Soviets. In October 1940, Zdeněk Fierlinger, the former Czechoslovak envoy to Moscow, assured the Soviet ambassador to London, Maisky, that it was the British who were insisting that Beneš should come to an agreement with the Poles, but he "rejected everything targeted against the [Soviet] Union" and would always remain loyal to it.[15] Despite similar pledges of loyalty made to the British ally, the Soviets were informed of the internal relations in Churchill's government and the positions played in it by various ministers. Maisky referred to the information relayed by Beneš on the situation in Germany and Central Europe as "extremely valuable information".[16]

Meanwhile, the developing situation in the war was leading to another strategic breakthrough of fundamental importance for British-Czechoslovak relations. Signals had been reaching London for some time of an imminent German attack on the Soviet Union, leading British intelligence to seek ways of verifying these reports. The Czechoslovaks were considering which diplomatic channels to use to admit to the British that they were maintaining clandestine contacts with Soviet intelligence, when, on 3 June 1941, SOE head Colonel Colin Gubbins visited Moravec seeking information on Czechoslovak views about the expected aggression against the USSR. Doubts remained in the War Office about the prospect of an impending outbreak of a German-Soviet war. Moravec was therefore able

14 Feierabend, *Politicke vzpomínky*, II, p. 96.
15 'Doc. No. 60, extract from report on Z. Fierlinger's conversation with I. Maisky, 2 October 1940', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 152–53.
16 Iwan Majski, *Wspomnienia ambasadora radzieckiego, Wojna 1939–1943*, 3 vols (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1967–1970), III (1970), p. 187.

to inform Gubbins that Czechoslovak intelligence had a liaison officer, Colonel Píka, in Moscow, along with other officers who had been stationed there since late April. No further explanations proved necessary. The only reaction to this information from the British side was to hand Moravec a questionnaire concerning the USSR.[17] Soon after war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union, the British decided to use their Czechoslovak contacts to forge links with Soviet intelligence. Given the British embassy in Moscow's opposition to directly cooperating with the Soviets and – taking into account the possibility of an anti-communist uprising in the USSR caused by the crisis of the war – its wariness of being compromised by direct cooperation with the Bolsheviks, it was decided that this task would be entrusted to the Czechs, with Moravec being heavily leant on.[18]

Nevertheless, the intensification of collaboration between the British and Czechoslovak intelligence services did not accelerate negotiations on London's full recognition of the Czechoslovak government. The Czechoslovak side (Beneš and Jan Masaryk, the foreign minister) put continual pressure on the FO in this respect, noting practically on the eve of the German invasion of the USSR that lack of progress on this important issue would ultimately lead to a situation in which it was not Great Britain – hitherto Czechoslovakia's most important ally and the only major power at war with Germany – but Moscow that would be the first to recognise the Czechoslovak government, which would be a failure for British policy.[19] Czechoslovak diplomacy made masterly use of the extremely important Soviet factor which appeared in the struggle for recognition of its government in late June. Beneš received news of the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union ecstatically, and on 25 June informed R. H. Bruce Lockhart, the British government's liaison officer to the PGC, of the Soviet authorities' favourable position regarding full recognition of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile. He also underlined the excellent development of Czechoslovak-Soviet intelligence cooperation with the participation of Colonel Píka[20] in Moscow and Moravec in London, noting his concern that the Czechoslovak government might be recognised by the Soviets before it was by the British and US governments. These warnings were treated very seriously at the FO. Although there were doubts over the Kremlin's

17 'Doc. No. 178, note by J. Smutný, 4 June 1941 based on the account of F. Moravec', in *AOB&M.*, I, p. 222. See also: Benčík and Kural, *Zpravodajové generála Píky a ti druzí*, pp. 24–30; Richter and Benčík, *Kdo byl generál Píka*, pp. 86–89; Jiří Šolc, 'Československá zpravodajská skupina v SSSR (duben–červen) 1941', *Historie a vojenství*, 5 (1997), 53–65.

18 'Doc. No. 206, note by J. Smutný, 22 June 1941', in *AOB&M*, I, p. 252.

19 'Doc. No. 186, note by J. Smutný, 14 June 1941', in *AOB&M*, I, pp. 228–29; Rozmluvy s Lockhartem (od polovice června do 15. července 1941), AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 110/2, krabice 348, Velká Británie, pp. 98–99.

20 Report by R. H. Bruce Lockhart for O. Sargent, 28 July 1941, TNA, FO 371/26410, C8720/4140/12, p. 48.

desire for swift recognition of Beneš's government, since "they may have communist puppets of their own",[21] the decision was taken to accelerate negotiations on this matter.

However, Soviet support for the Czechoslovak government's position proved conclusive. The British felt threatened in their position as leader in the struggle to liberate conquered European nations, fearing that sympathies in some of them could turn towards Moscow. While they were still deciding how to satisfy Czechoslovak demands, on 8 July Beneš met with Maisky, who in the name of Moscow proposed full recognition, offering an exchange of representatives of the two governments and help with organising a Czechoslovak army in the USSR.[22] This proposal brought unbridled joy from Beneš and Masaryk. It also had a sizable impact on the attitudes of the British, whom Maisky informed on 4 July about the Soviet government's intentions regarding recognition of the Polish, Czechoslovak and Yugoslav governments-in-exile in London.[23] "The Soviet Union's full international recognition of Czechoslovakia caused a little perturbation in British government circles and the Foreign Office", Zdeněk Fierlinger rightly noted.[24] Indeed, the broad and immediate form of recognition of the Czechoslovak government proposed by Moscow "forced the hand" of British diplomacy. The Kremlin even promised to accept the argument regarding the legal continuation of the existence of the First Republic and permitted Fierlinger to return to Moscow in his former guise as Czechoslovak ambassador. This turn of events exerted serious pressure on Britain to swiftly satisfy Czechoslovakia's demands, while also placing Beneš's diplomacy in a completely different negotiating position regarding the British government. Great Britain's prestige was clearly at stake. However, the final decision had to be consulted with the dominion governments, which of course took time, especially as the administrations of Australia and the Union of South Africa were opposed to a broader form of recognition. The situation was undoubtedly ripe for final decisions from the British side. A conclusion came at the war cabinet meeting of 14 July, strongly influenced by Soviet actions, which the British were open about. Eden himself offered this argument in favour of his proposals: "Now that Russia had given full recognition,

21 Minute by F. K. Roberts, 28 June 1941, TNA, FO 371/26410, C7140/7140/12, p. 6.

22 'Doc. No. 88, report by E. Beneš on a discussion with I. Maisky, 8 July 1941', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 201–05. Maisky received instructions on this matter from Moscow a few days earlier: 'Doc. No. 75, 3 July 1941, telegram from NKID to I. Maisky', in *DVP*, XXIV (2000), p. 107.

23 'Doc. No. 80, 4 July 1941, telegram from I. Maisky to NKID', in *DVP, XXIV*, p. 111; Alexander Cadogan, 'Entry from 4 July 1941', in *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan O. M. 1938–1945*, ed. by David Dilks (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), p. 391; Letter from R. H. Bruce Lockhart to A. Eden, 9 July 1941, TNA, FO, 371/26394, C7680/7140/12, p. 154 (print pp. 16–17); See also: Zeman, *Edvard Beneš – Politický životopis*, p. 198. Only Makins received this information calmly, arguing that, although the USSR's recognition of the Czechoslovak government would likely heighten Russophile moods in Czechoslovakia, it should not have a significant impact on the country's relations with the USSR and Great Britain. See Minute by R. M. Makins, 11 July 1941, TNA, FO 371/26410, C7680/7140/12, p. 13.

24 Zdeněk Fierlinger, *Ve službách ČSR. Paměti druhého zahraničního odboje*, 2 vols (Praha: Svoboda, 1947–1948), II (1948), p. 19.

the Foreign Secretary thought that we ought to do the same, notwithstanding the fact that Beneš's Government did not have the same continuity as the other Governments of States which had been occupied by Germany and had taken refuge in this country". The cabinet therefore decided to fully recognise the Czechoslovak government and inform the dominions of its decision, requesting their comments on the decision taken by HM Government.[25] The British war cabinet also sought recognition of the Czechoslovak government by the United States. The crowning argument was again the need to oppose Soviet influences in Czechoslovakia.

On the morning of 16 July, Bruce Lockhart informed Beneš that the British cabinet had decided to remove the adjective "provisional" from the name of the Czechoslovak émigré government, recognising it de jure and appointing a British government envoy to it, while retaining reservations concerning borders and the continued existence of the First Republic.[26] Yet the Soviets were a step ahead of British diplomacy. That same day, Maisky submitted a draft Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement to the Czechoslovaks which included full recognition of the Czechoslovak government, and he declared Soviet readiness to sign it as soon as it was accepted by the Czech's Soviet counterparts. Clearly aggrieved towards the British, Beneš deemed recognition from Moscow as a highly significant step "because this is recognition in the form of the first inter-state, allied agreement formed by the Third [sic] [Czechoslovak] Republic".[27] It is worth noting the phrase that Beneš uses here, "Third Republic", which casts an interesting light on his official claims about the uninterrupted legal continuation of the existence of the First Republic. A day later, as soon as the Soviet draft was translated into Czech, the president wanted the agreement to be signed the very same day. Masaryk was opposed, wishing to inform the FO about this move first, and indeed on 17 July he took the ready text to Bruce Lockhart to read.[28] "It was now a race between us and the Russians", the British representative commented.[29] The same morning, Maisky loyally warned Eden about the signing of the Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement that would take place the next day.[30] In this situation, on the same afternoon, 17 July, at the next meeting of the British war cabinet, it was decided that in the coming days a public announcement should be

25 War Cabinet 69 (41), 14 July 1941, TNA, Cab. 65/19, p. 28 (print p. 140). See also: telegram from Dominions Office to the governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and to the UK High Commissioner to the Union of South Africa, 16 July 1941, TNA, FO 371/26394, C8119/1320/12, p. 219 (draft p. 220); and Minute by F. K. Roberts, 15 July 1941, TNA, FO 371/26394, C7977/216/12, p. 144.

26 Rozmluvy s Lockhartem (od polovice června do 15. července 1941), AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 110/2, krabice 348, Velká Británie, p. 100.

27 'Doc. No. 199, note by J. Smutný, 16 July 1941', in *AOB&M*, I, pp. 244–45, or 'Doc. No. 90', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 208–10; and 'Doc. No. 80, letter from I. Maisky to E. Beneš, 16 July 1941', in *DMDČSV*, IV, I, pp. 146–47.

28 'Doc. No. 202, note by J. Smutný, 17 July 1941', in *AOB&M*, I, pp. 246–47. See also 'Doc. No. 91, letter from E.'Beneš to I. Maisky, 16 July 1941', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 210–11.

29 Bruce Lockhart, *Přichází zúčtování*, p. 159.

30 Letter from A. Eden to S. Cripps, 17 July 1941, TNA, FO 371/26410, C8029/7140/12, p. 32.

made regarding Great Britain's full recognition of the Czechoslovak government, with the dominions also being informed of the intention to make this proclamation if there were no prompt objections.[31]

Meanwhile, at noon on 18 July, Masaryk and Maisky signed the Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement, which did not require ratification and was immediately binding.[32] Four hours later, on Eden's orders, Bruce Lockhart brought Masaryk to the FO. A note presented to Masaryk stated that HM Government had decided to appoint "an Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Dr Beneš as President of the Czechoslovak Republic" and was willing to accept a similar representative from the Czechoslovak side. The note also declared that the British government recognised the legal position of the president and government of the Czechoslovak Republic as identical to other Allied émigré heads of state and governments and was committed to using the forms "the Czechoslovak Republic" and "the legation of the Czechoslovak Republic" in future official relations. Henceforth, Great Britain would treat the question of the provisional nature of the Czechoslovak government as an internal matter. The British continued to refuse to recognise the legal continuation of the existence of the First Republic and rejected any commitment to postwar borders in Central Europe. Furthermore, the British government, citing discussions held with the anti-Nazi Sudeten Germans concerning their participation in Czechoslovak government structures, reserved the right to maintain jurisdiction "over certain categories of former Czechoslovak nationals" on British territory.[33] According to the agreement, the new ambassador to the Czechoslovak government would be the experienced diplomat Philip Bouverie Bower Nichols. Recognition in the form adopted by the British government was not entirely satisfactory to Beneš, who demanded that the issue of the Sudeten Germans be removed from the official note, asking for an appropriate caveat to be made in another document – which the British side accepted.

From the British point of view, the plan's objective seemed to have been achieved. It was noted that even the Czechoslovak communists – of course with the Kremlin's approval – had formed a common front around

31 War Cabinet 71 (41), 17 July 1941, TNA, Cab. 65/19, p. 34 (print p. 148); Telegram from Dominions Office to the governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK High Commissioner to the Union of South Africa, 17 July 1941, TNA, FO 371/26394, C7797/1320/12, p. 163.

32 Agreement between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Czechoslovak Republic, 18 July 1941, TNA, FO 371/26410, C8083/7140/12, p. 36; or, in the Czech version: 'Smlouva mezi Svazem Sovětských Socialistických Republik a Republikou Československou', in *Šest let exilu a druhé světové války. Řeči, projevy a dokumenty z r. 1938–45*, ed. by Edward Beneš (Praha: Orbis, 1947), p. 258; or 'Doc. No. 118', in *DVP*, XXIV, p. 165. See also: Feierabend, *Politicke vzpomínky*, II, p. 155; Zeman, *Edvard Beneš – Politický životopis*, p. 199.

33 Draft version of note from A. Eden to J. Masaryk, 18 July 1941, AÚTGM, fond 40/XVIII/13/18, Anglie, pp. 358–60.

Beneš.[34] However, amid the voices of satisfaction with the Allies' unity, warnings also appeared in August in the British press (*The Times*, *The Economist*) about bringing about a situation in which German influences in Central Europe would be replaced by Soviet ones.[35]

The Soviet factor proved to be the most important one in the last stage of negotiations as it also affected the final form in which British recognition was given. The USSR's appearance among the participants in the anti-Hitler coalition gave Czechoslovak diplomacy an effective tool for putting pressure on the FO in the form of the Kremlin's support for their demands. From the British point of view, this Soviet support for Czechoslovakia also increased the value of cooperation with its Czechoslovak ally, which had excellent contacts with Moscow and could be useful either in gathering information on the Soviet side, or – in the initial phase – in establishing organisational intelligence cooperation, or also, further down the line, influencing other British allies that were not so enthusiastic about the USSR. However, this change in the importance of the Czechoslovak ally for Great Britain and the strengthening of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile's position towards other Allied governments-in-exile resulted not so much from the legal status of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile but rather from the particular Czechoslovak-Soviet relations and the general course of the country's policy towards the USSR adopted by Beneš. From this perspective, Britain's full recognition of the Czechoslovak government only confirmed the growing importance accorded to this ally due to the importance of the Soviet factor at that time, but Britain itself did not give it any such significance. All the hitherto existing legal and political reservations put forward by the British side remained valid. This was why HM Government, wishing to honour its pledges and treat its commitments seriously, could only give the Czechoslovak side full recognition under certain conditions. As a result, this recognition was narrower than that offered by the Soviets. In the veritable race that began after 22 June 1941 to satisfy the Czechoslovak demands, the FO was at a disadvantage – assuming that it would abide by certain rules of play, boiling down to respect for the British signature on a negotiated document. The Soviets had no such limitations. They could immediately pledge everything to the Czechoslovaks without concerning themselves about the legal aspect. In the practice of Soviet diplomacy, such signatures in no way bound the freedom of its future political decisions, on condition

34 'Doc. No. 212, report by R. W. Seton Watson for PID, 5 August 1941', in *R. W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with Czechs and Slovaks. Documents 1906–1951*, ed. by Jan Rychlík, Miroslav Bielik, and Thomas D. Marzik, 2 vols (Prague: Ústav T.G. Masaryka, 1995), I, pp. 596–97.

35 Feierabend, *Politicke vzpominky*, II, p. 143.

that the Kremlin had sufficient military power to be able to disregard its commitments in a given area.

From this point on, Czechoslovak diplomacy constantly and increasingly used the Soviet factor as leverage for achieving its political objectives in relations with the British. Immediately after securing full recognition of the Czechoslovak government, Beneš began a campaign seeking to annul the Munich Agreement of 1938, deem it non-existent, and thus secure a return to the legal and territorial status of the Czechoslovak Republic. In October 1941, he informed Britain that the issues he was raising concerning the territories lost at Munich were being addressed much more boldly in broadcasts coming out of Moscow and that London's continued silence on this matter could cause disappointment among the Czechoslovak public and radicalisation of moods in this occupied country. For the time being, these arguments were ineffective, as the FO was reluctant even to create the impression that Great Britain felt any kind of obligation to support efforts to restore Czechoslovakia's pre-Munich borders.[36]

Concern was caused, however, by the Central Department's intention to admit communists to the Czechoslovak National Council. It was assumed that Beneš was, on the one hand, bowing to pressure from Czech leftist circles and Soviet ambassador Maisky, and, on the other, was concerned about unfavourable reactions to such a move from the British government. The feeling at the FO was that the Home Office should be consulted, and even the British military counter-intelligence agency MI5, which was expected to be opposed, especially as communist candidates for the National Council had just been released from British internment camps. The thinking was that, should it become necessary to place the Czechoslovakian communists there again, this would be more difficult if they had the status of members of the Czechoslovak National Council and the associated immunity. Generally, the FO treated the communists as "a community which so obviously took its orders from a foreign source".[37] However, Beneš vouched for the patriotism of the four Czech communists identified as future members of the National Council and strongly denied that they were in the service of Moscow.[38] But even then, fresh symptoms

36 Memorandum by E. Beneš, 3 October 1941, What is required from the Czechoslovak point of view for the successful conduct of the war, TNA, FO 371/26389, C11137/235/12, pp. 1–6 (or AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 110/2, krabice 348, Velká Británie, pp. 258–63); Minutes by G. E. Millard, 9 October, F. K. Roberts and R. M. Makins, 10 October, O. Sargent, 11 October, and A. Cadogan, 13 October and F. K. Roberts, 24 November 1941 (no page numbering). See also: Piotr M. Majewski, 'Dyplomacja brytyjska wobec przyszłości Sudetów i planów wysiedlenia mniejszości niemieckiej z Czechosłowacji, 1939–1942', *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 33/44 (2001), 65–86 (p. 70).

37 Minutes by G. M. Millard, 10 October and F. K. Roberts, 11 October 1941, TNA, FO 371/26394, C11155/1320/12, p. 255.

38 Minute by R. H. Bruce Lockhart, 23 November 1941, TNA, FO 371/26394, C11155/1320/12, p. 256; Letter from P. Nichols to R. M. Makins, 26 November 1941, p. 257; Letter from F. K. Roberts to Hutchinson from HO, 27 November 1941, p. 261; Letter from A. I. Tudor (HO) to F. K. Roberts (FO), 8 December 1941, TNA, FO 371/26394, C13765/1320/12, p. 321.

of independent activity – not consulted with the Czechoslovak government – of Czechoslovak communists in Britain were already becoming apparent. It was their initiative, led by Jož̌a David and with the communist Evžen Löbel as secretary, that led in late summer 1941 to the formation of the British-Czechoslovak Friendship Club. There was no uniform British position on this new initiative. While the Ministry of Information and the British Council were opposed, Nichols, unfamiliar with the personalities of the people forming the club, intervened with Ripka to initiate cooperation with it, which ultimately ensued.[39]

In December, while speaking to Eden at a British-Soviet conference in Moscow,[40] Stalin backed Czechoslovak diplomacy's position regarding the country's postwar borders, stating that "Czechoslovakia is to be restored to her former [pre-Munich] frontiers, including Sudetenland. [...] Moreover, the territory of Czechoslovakia is to be enlarged in the South at the expense of Hungary...".[41] Eden avoided any firm resolutions on this issue, citing the commitments the British government had made to the United States that it would not enter into any secret agreements regarding postwar borders in Europe, but he clearly supported the idea of a Polish-Czechoslovak confederation, which Stalin made no comment on.[42] We can assume that Stalin's declaration had some impact on the FO's position regarding Beneš's proposals. Out of concern that Soviet diplomacy might begin to interfere in the issue, it was decided that Beneš should be encouraged to present his plans for the territorial shape of Czechoslovakia, which he did.[43] Hubert Ripka, the minister of state in the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also cited Soviet support regarding the country's future borders when speaking to Nichols in January 1942. Strong pro-Soviet tones in Ripka's statements could also be found in his speech to the Czechoslovak National Council: his pronouncement that "the Czechoslovak-Soviet Alliance may become one of the cornerstones of Czechoslovak policy" caused some alarm in the FO.[44] Playing the Soviet

39 Report by H. Ripka, 16 October 1941, Státní Ústřední Archiv (hereafter SÚA), fond č. 1, H. Ripka 1-5-19-2, p. 98; Report by H. Ripka, British-Czechoslovak Friendship, AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 104/1, krabice 342, Velká Británie, p. 205; Feierabend, *Politicke vzpomínky*, II, p. 148.

40 For more, see Jacek Tebinka, *Polityka brytyjska wobec problemu granicy polsko-radzieckiej, 1939–1945* (Warszawa: Neriton, 1998), pp. 173–77.

41 'Doc. No. 4, record of meeting of J. Stalin, V. Molotov, and I. Maisky with A. Eden and S. Cripps, 16 December 1941', in *War and Diplomacy: The Making of the Grand Alliance. Documents from Stalin's Archives* (hereafter *W&D*), ed. by Oleg A. Rzheshevsky (Amsterdam: Routledge, 1996), p. 11; or 'Doc. No. 328', in *DVP*, XXIV, p. 502. See also: 'Doc. No. 5, Confidential', in *W&D*, p. 22; and Llewellyn Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, 5 vols (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1970–1976), II (1971), pp. 221–23; and Winston Churchill, *Druga Wojna Światowa*, 12 vols (Gdańsk: Phantom Press, 1994–1996), III (1995), 2 vols, II, pp. 252–53. See also: 'Doc. No. 130, report by J. Kraus, 16 January 1942, on H. Ripka's conversation with K. V. Novikov', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 276–78.

42 Eugeniusz Duraczyński, 'ZSRR wobec projektów konfederacji polsko-czechosłowackiej (1940–1943)', *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 29/3 (1997), 129–53 (p. 134).

43 Report by H. Ripka, 22 December 1941, SÚA, fond č. 1, H. Ripka 1-5-19-2, pp. 329–30; Memorandum Regarding the Question of the Frontiers of the Czechoslovak Republic, TNA, FO 800/873, pp. 1–22.

44 Expose on Foreign Policy delivered by Dr. Hubert Ripka to the Czechoslovak State Council on 7 January 1942, TNA, FO 371/30833, C1000/310/12, p. 7 (whole document pp. 1–11); 'Letter from P. Nichols to A. Eden, 23 January 1942'.

card, which Ripka was evidently doing in his discussion with Nichols, was accompanied by a warning that with their policy the British were undermining the authority of President Beneš, who was encountering strong opposition not only in the National Council, but even among ministers much less willing to compromise on borders than he was. However, the only argument in favour of satisfying Beneš's demands that was treated seriously by the FO was the concern that rejecting them could undermine the trust that Britain enjoyed with the Czechoslovak public and a turn of its sympathies towards the USSR. And yet, as Frank Roberts, head of the FO Central Department, noted, "On the other hand, Russian policy, unlike our own, is based on opportunism and can afford to give sweeping paper promises to the Czechs one day with complete disregard to earlier Soviet policy (e.g., breaking off relations with the Czechs), or to future Soviet intentions. We cannot hope to compete with the Soviet Government on this plane and we should not attempt to do so".[45]

The painstaking Czechoslovak-British negotiations on repealing Munich proceeded without visible progress in the following months. Both Beneš and Ripka met with Eden and Nichols on numerous occasions. Among the arguments made in the discussion, Ripka warned that, lacking a plan of action for Czechoslovakia, the British and Americans would be forced to accept the Soviets' position in talks with them and would therefore agree to the rebuilding of the Republic with its pre-Munich borders. This in turn would be interpreted by the Czechoslovak public as a concession forced by the Soviets, meaning that the Kremlin would be seen as the only defender of Czechoslovak interests among the major powers.[46] The FO's stance on the Czechoslovak demands was viewed similarly in memoranda to the Central Department by Bruce Lockhart, a devoted friend of the Czechoslovak cause. He claimed that a lack of support from London for the idea of returning the Sudetenland to the borders of the rebuilt Czechoslovakia, while also accepting Polish ambitions regarding Eastern Prussia, would result in accusations of Britain treating its allies unequally, would provoke jealousy between these allies, and would hamper Polish-Czechoslovak cooperation, pushing the Czechs into the arms of the Soviets "against their will".[47]

In fact, Beneš also sought support directly from Bruce Lockhart and Reginald Leeper, head of the FO's Political Intelligence Department, in an effort to influence Eden. Without backing down from a threat of sorts,

45 Minute by F. K. Roberts, 20 January 1942, TNA, FO 371/308 34, C1101/326/12, p. 35.
46 Report by H. Ripka, 12 February 1942 on a conversation with P. Nichols, AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 110/1, krabice č. 348, Velká Británie, pp. 210–12. See also, in a similar tone, the next conversation: 'Doc. No. 148, extract from H. Ripka's report, from 24 March 1942, on a conversation with P. Nichols', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 311–12.
47 Bruce Lockhart, 'Entry of 9 March 1942', in *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart*, II, p. 144.

Beneš demanded outright that Bruce Lockhart "explain to Eden that the situation is no longer one in which [Beneš] is permanently standing cap in hand on the steps of the Foreign Office. The English have constant reservations about our proposals, but in doing so they are simply pushing us to appeal to the Russians. We do not want to do that, but indeed, if the Russians agree to our proposals and offer us their support, it is understood that we cannot reject it and so will not reject it".[48] What Beneš said immediately after this warning must have been even more startling to the British. His statements portrayed him as a politician practically forced to work with the Poles, who, treated by him as an anti-Soviet factor, were for fundamental reasons an unacceptable partner for the Czechoslovak side, which was willing for a union with Moscow to sacrifice not only the Polish-Czechoslovak confederation – in this regard a subject of concern particularly for the FO – but even an alliance with the British. "The English constantly wanted to play with the Poles and still wanted an agreement between the Poles and us, but in their games with the Poles against the Russians they are directly hindering if not preventing our agreement with the Poles", he declared. "Indeed, it may be that the Russians will want to play with us on the one hand against the Poles, and on the other against the English. But where this might lead".[49] The last sentence was not a question, making it even more of an assertion that in this game Czechoslovakia could find itself on the Soviet side.

Given the lack of progress in the negotiations, Beneš announced that they were being halted, but as early as April he resumed attempts to break the impasse. However, the FO assessed and consequently rejected his proposals as "clearly hopeless" because they did not go beyond the previous formula. However, questions were asked about what had persuaded the Czechoslovak president to present these proposals, given the foreseeable failure of this initiative. Roberts rightly surmised that a strong impulse for Beneš's actions had been information about the ongoing British-Soviet negotiations over an allied pact, during which the Kremlin demanded London's recognition of the USSR's boundaries from before 22 June 1941. "Clearly Dr. Benes supposes that, having decided to meet the Russians over their frontiers, we cannot refuse to meet him over the Czechoslovak frontiers", Roberts argued.[50] However, the president's calculation was entirely wrong; after all, since, in the agreement being prepared with Moscow, London was challenging the Polish government's claims to the prewar

48 Report by H. Ripka, 12 March 1942. Rozhovor s panem presidentem, SÚA, fond č. 1, H. Ripka 1-5-19-3, pp. 66–69; or 'Doc. No. 145', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 306–07.
49 Ibid.
50 Minute by F. K. Roberts, 20 April 1942, TNA, FO 371/30834, C4047/326/12, p. 120.

eastern borders of the Polish Republic,[51] it was even less willing at the same moment to strengthen Czechoslovak claims to the pre-Munich borders of the Czechoslovak Republic. The FO saw such unequal treatment of Britain's two allies, Poland and Czechoslovakia, as a potential threat for the future of Polish-Czechoslovak relations, whose evolution towards a confederation it still favoured.

All that Beneš's diplomacy had managed to achieve for now was to instil the belief in British politicians that it had excellent relations with Moscow, despite the increasingly clear threat from the USSR to the whole of Eastern Europe. This impression was heightened by Czechoslovak politicians' frequent playing of the Soviet card, which they treated as an important asset that supported their demands. An emphatic example of this was Nichols' next meeting with Beneš, on 1 May. This British representative officially informed the president that the FO had decided to suspend further negotiations but leave the matter open. Beneš, expressing his regret that no agreement had been found on the issue, immediately referred to the ongoing British-Soviet negotiations, aiming to sign an alliance treaty between the two powers also concerning their postwar cooperation. He was surprised that Britain in its talks with the Soviets was considering the possibility of handing East Prussia to Poland, presumably as compensation for its loss of the Eastern Borderlands, while also causing difficulties for the Czechoslovak Republic in matters for which it was largely to blame. He also warned the British diplomat about his plans to visit Moscow in summer 1942, during which he intended in some unspecified way to prevent the Kremlin's interference in internal Czechoslovak matters in the future as well as to discuss the USSR's position on the Polish-Czechoslovak confederation and the future shape of the Czechoslovak state. Nichols was clearly shocked by this information but without hesitation backed the idea of persuading the Soviet government of the benefits of forming a Polish-Czechoslovak confederation. He was also mindful of the fact that the date of the visit to the Soviet Union mentioned by Beneš was simultaneously supposed to represent a time frame within which all the contentious issues in British-Czechoslovak relations should be clarified to avoid a situation in which Czechoslovakia would have settled relations with Moscow but not with London. Beneš made it clear that the consequences for Prague's postwar orientation could be critical.[52]

51 Tebinka, *Polityka brytyjska wobec problemu granicy polsko-radzieckiej*, pp. 199–201.

52 Rozhovory pana presidenta republiky s velvyslancem P. B. Nicholsem. Rozhovor s Nicholsem dne 1 května 1942, AÚTGM, fond EB-V, karton 79–82, Anglie IV; Report by H. Ripka, 1 May 1942, p. 167, TNA, FO 371/30834, C4668/326/12, letter from P. Nichols to R. M. Makins, 1 May 1942. See also: SÚA, fond č. 1, H. Ripka 1-5-19-3, p. 140.

At the FO, Beneš's proclamations about his planned trip to Moscow were seen as a promise of a renewed "diplomatic attack" about annulling Munich immediately after the signature of the negotiated British-Soviet agreement. It was also reckoned that the heralded objective of Beneš's visit to Moscow provided an excellent illustration of the essence of the increasingly evident Soviet political ambitions to stretch the sphere of the Kremlin's exclusive influences to the whole of Eastern Europe. It was expected that the USSR intended to occupy Finland, the Baltic states and Romania, bring about a close union between the Czechoslovak Republic and Yugoslavia, squash Hungary and encircle Poland. This forecast of the development of the situation, it was thought, must by its very nature have been more alarming to Beneš than it was to the FO. This was also the explanation for his intention to attempt to prevent events from developing similarly through diplomatic negotiations with the Soviets, while also persuading the British to support both the Czechoslovak and Polish territorial demands to Germany and Hungary. However, the FO's position was that Great Britain could ultimately accept such a solution, but not at this moment of the war.[53] Furthermore, it was seen as obvious that "this manoeuvring of Dr. Benes will have little or no effect on Russian policy, though it may well be an embarrassment to ourselves".[54] FO officials were convinced that the Soviets would soon give Beneš the choice between co-operation with the USSR and a union with Poland, and thus that Moscow would firmly oppose any plans for a Czechoslovak-Polish confederation.[55] This analysis led to the conclusion that a speedily agreed British-Soviet treaty, even if it might be interpreted as London's consent to the realisation of the Soviet political programme, would in fact put British diplomacy in a better situation than if no such treaty existed because towards the end of the war it would give Britain a certain foothold that it would be able to use in negotiations aiming to curb the Kremlin's ambitions. However, certain high-ranking FO officials (William Strang, Orme Sargent) did not believe that Britain would be able to stand up to the Soviet plans in a situation with a shattered Germany and the USSR as a member of the victorious coalition. Reluctantly, they concluded that the only chance to curb Moscow's expansion would be to retain a sufficiently strong Germany after the war that would be capable of offsetting Moscow's power.[56] No conclusions for the British-Czechoslovak negotiations were drawn from these reflections, leaving them in suspension. Yet the ongoing intensive

53 Minute by R. M. Makins, 7 May 1942, TNA, FO 371/30834, C4668/326/12, p. 138.
54 Ibid.
55 The Soviets made this opposition clear to the Czechoslovak government: 'Doc. No. 163, 15 May 1942, Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with A. J. Bogomolov', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 331–33.
56 Minutes by P. F. Hancock, F. K. Roberts and R. M. Makins, 7 May, A. R. Dew, 9 May, W. Strang, 12 and 14 May, O. G. Sargent, 13 and 14 May 1942, TNA, FO 371/30834, C4668/326/12, pp. 138–39.

British-Soviet talks, during which particularly pro-Soviet views were promoted by Bruce Lockhart, had a strong influence on Eden's decisions,[57] leading on 26 May 1942 to the signing of a treaty establishing an alliance between the two countries that pledged mutual assistance and cooperation for a period of 20 years.[58]

Beneš was genuinely delighted by the content of the Anglo-Soviet agreement. He expressed his hope to the British that this act would also prompt the Poles to rely on an alliance with Moscow. At a meeting with Eden on 4 June, Beneš assured him that "the Soviets will stick to the agreement and loyally implement it – as I know them and can gather from their policy to date"[59], thereby proving that he in fact knew little about the nature of the state whose sincere conduct he was so ardently vouching for. He also repeatedly told his British interlocutors that the USSR had no intention to Sovietise Czechoslovakia or Poland, which was in fact impossible in his opinion. Regarding the repeal of Munich, however, no progress was made. Irritated by this state of affairs, Beneš concluded his next discussion with Nichols on 5 June by informing him confidentially about an official Soviet declaration that A. J. Bogomolov had handed Ripka the previous day. In it, the Soviet ambassador stated that the USSR supported the complete reconstruction of the Czechoslovak Republic with its pre-Munich borders. For now, this was an oral declaration not confirmed by any document, but even in this form it was a major boon to Beneš's position in his negotiations with the British. To mitigate the impression that this information would make on Nichols, the president immediately accentuated the major significance of the freshly signed Anglo-Soviet Treaty, adding that Bogomolov's declaration made no difference to Czechoslovak policy towards Poland, "which we always planned and understood on condition of Polish agreement with the USSR".[60] This final claim marked a significant change in Czechoslovak policy regarding the question of a Polish-Czechoslovak confederation, pointing to a swift collapse of the whole idea. An agreement with the Soviet Union had never previously been presented to the Polish side as an essential condition. However, it was characteristic of

57 Bruce Lockhart, *Přichází zúčtování*, pp. 230–32.

58 'Doc. No. 107, Dogovor meždu Sojuzom Sovetskich Socialističeskich Respublik i Soedinennym Korolevstvom v Velikobritanii o sojuze v vojne protiv gitlerovskoj Germanii i ee soobščnikov v Evrope i o sotrudničestve i vzaimnoj pomošči posle vojny, 26 maja 1942 g.', in *Sovetsko-anglijskie otnošenija vo vremja velikoj otečestvennoj vojny 1941–1945: Dokumenty i materjaly v dvuch tomach* (hereafter SAO), 2 vols (Moskva: Politizdat, 1983), I, pp. 237–40. See also: Martin D. Brown, *Dealing with Democrats. The British Foreign Office and the Czechoslovak Émigrés in Great Britain, 1939 to 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang AG, 2006), pp. 190–92.

59 Rozhovory pana presidenta s Edenem. Rozhovor s Edenem ve F.O. dne 4 června 1942, AÚTGM, fond EB-V, karton 79–82, Anglie II.

60 Rozhovory E. Beneše 1940–1944. Rozhovor s Nicholsem dne 5 června 1942, AÚTGM, fond EB-V, karton 79/1, Velká Británie, p. 98. On the course of Beneš's meeting with Nichols of 5 June see also: Letter from P. Nichols to R. M. Makins, 9 June 1942, TNA, FO 371/30834, C5797/326/12, pp. 177–79. For the Soviet declaration, see 'Doc. No. 168, 4 June 1942, Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with A. J. Bogomolov', in ČSVDJ, I, p. 342. Molotov further confirmed this declaration in a conversation with Beneš on 9 June – 'Doc. No. 171, 9 June 1942, report by E. Beneš on a conversation with V. M. Molotov', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 348–51.

the hierarchy of importance of problems in the British perspective that Nichols's report completely overlooked information on the Soviet position regarding the Czechoslovak borders but addressed Beneš's declaration regarding the future of the Polish-Czechoslovak confederation, in which the president expressed the belief that ultimately he would have to negotiate with different Poles than those with whom he had spoken in London.[61] Beneš soon confirmed his position to Bruce Lockhart, reporting on his meeting with Molotov on 9 June, at which he had assured the Soviets that Czechoslovakia "would not participate in any larger European confederation without previous consultation with Russia".[62]

Beneš's ever more frequent proclamations, unambiguously demonstrating that the Czechoslovak authorities saw Moscow's assent as a sine qua non condition for Czechoslovakia's participation in any broader Central European confederations with the participation of Poland or Hungary, were of great concern to the FO. The Central Department was also not receptive to the idea of the Czechoslovak president paying a visit to Moscow. On the other hand, the declared intention to convince the Soviets of the need to form a Polish-Czechoslovak confederation, which Beneš cited as the reason for this trip, was welcomed, and it was even proposed that Eden should meet Beneš again to encourage the Czechoslovaks to continue their rapprochement with the Poles. Since the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of 26 May did not contain any mention of borders, it was also reckoned that Beneš's negotiating position had not changed and he should therefore limit his demands, which in the form he presented were regarded as unacceptable, although continued discussion on the subject was agreed to.[63] Further talks took place at Beneš and Ripka's meeting with Eden and Nichols on 25 June. The foreign secretary questioned his interlocutors in detail about the state of Czechoslovak-Soviet relations, especially in the context of the relationship with Poland. As for repealing Munich, he received from the president a rather hypocritical assurance that he wanted first of all to reach an agreement with the British and had never intended to use Soviet help to put pressure on them. However, this came with the information that the Czechoslovak side had received verbal assurance from the Soviets concerning the reconstruction of the pre-Munich Czechoslovak Republic and expected to soon receive a written version. Furthermore, immediately after this declaration, Ripka tried to mobilise the foreign

61 Letter from P. Nichols to R. M. Makins, 9 June 1942, TNA, FO 371/30834, C5797/326/12, pp. 177–78.
62 Bruce Lockhart, 'Entry from 13 June 1942', in *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart*, pp. 173–74. Cf. Letter from R. H. Bruce Lockhart to O. Sargent, 13 June 1942, and Report by R. H. Bruce Lockhart for O. Sargent, 13 June 1942 (no page numbering – three pages), TNA, FO 800/837; and 'Doc. No. 113, Reception of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic Eduard Beneš (9 June 1942)', in *W&D*, pp. 285–88.
63 Minutes by P. F. Hancock and F. K. Roberts, 11 June, R. M. Makins, 12 June, H. W. Malkin, 13 June, and A. Eden, 14 June 1942, TNA, FO 371/30834, C5797/326/12, pp. 174–76.

secretary to make faster decisions, suggesting that his country wanted to reach an agreement with Britain before it received written confirmation of the USSR's position on Munich. But this only brought an angry reaction from Eden, who declared that such a move from Moscow would counter the "spirit and commitments stemming from the British-Soviet agreement". Beneš sought to mitigate the situation by explaining that it was not a separate Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement that was meant, but merely simple confirmations of the USSR's stance on the matter.[64]

Interestingly, a similar game was played with Beneš by Alexander Bogomolov, the Soviet representative to the governments-in-exile in London. On 13 July, the Czechoslovak president informed him of the course of negotiations with the British on annulling Munich, seeking written confirmation of the Soviet position on the borders of Czechoslovakia. But he only received an assurance that as soon as the Czechoslovaks received an official note on this issue from Eden, Bogomolov would send a relevant report to Moscow. At the same time, the Soviet ambassador suggested a suspension of Czechoslovak-Polish talks on a confederation and three days later officially informed Masaryk that the USSR was opposed to further negotiations aimed at bringing about a union between these two countries. This could only be interpreted as an attempt to link the Czechoslovak authorities' approach to the issue of a confederation, which suited Moscow's interests, with the possibility of obtaining the written Soviet support they desired for the reconstruction of Czechoslovakia with its 1938 borders.[65] As for the demand to break off negotiations with the Poles regarding the confederation, the Czechoslovaks seemed surprised. Although Beneš and Ripka rightly identified the reasons for which the USSR opposed creating larger political structures in East-Central Europe, reasoning that in future this would make it difficult for it to subdue this region, Ripka rejected Nichols's suggestion that Eden might intervene with Maisky on the issue, assuring that in his talks with Molotov the British foreign minister had stressed the FO's favourable position toward the planned confederation.[66]

At this point, information on the Soviet position regarding Czechoslovakia's pre-Munich borders had already reached the press. *Daily Herald*

64 Rozhovory E. Beneše 1940–1944, report by H. Ripka on E. Beneš and H. Ripka's meeting with A. Eden and P. Nichols, 25 June 1942, AÚTGM, fond EB-V, karton 79/1, Velká Británie. It is telling that Eden devoted a three-sentence paragraph to the discussion on revoking Munich in his report on the meeting, whereas his account of the debate on Czechoslovak-Polish-Soviet issues was more extensive: Report by A. Eden for P. Nichols, 25 June 1942, TNA, FO 954/4A, C6483/1257/G, p. 176.

65 'Doc. No. 177, 13 July 1942, E. Beneš's report on a conversation with A. J. Bogomolov', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 362–64; 'Doc. No. 178, 15 July 1942, MZV report on J. Masaryk's conversation with A. J. Bogomolov', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 365–66; Toman Brod, *Osudný omyl Edvarda Beneše 1939–1948. Československá cesta do sovětského područí* (Praha: Academia, 2002), p. 140.

66 'Doc. No. 179, 16 July 1942, extract from H. Ripka's report on a conversation with E. Beneš', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 366–67; Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with P. Nichols, 23 July 1942, AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 110/1, krabice č. 348, Velká Británie, p. 186; Report by P. Nichols for F. K. Roberts, 24 July 1942, TNA, FO 371/30835, C7361/326/12, pp. 57–58.

correspondent Willian Norman Ewer asked the FO about this issue, forcing ministry officials to consider the possible public interpretations of the impact of the Soviet declaration on British policy.[67] Furthermore, on 5 August 1942, when, following painstaking negotiations, an agreement had finally been reached on annulment of the consequences of the Munich treaty, and after an exchange of notes, Masaryk and Beneš suggested in a radio broadcast that Britain had accepted the complete rejection of the outcomes of Munich, causing a wave of criticism at the FO. Central Department officials were particularly surprised by the fact that the Czechoslovak president had paid more attention to the Soviet position on Munich than the British-Czechoslovak exchange of notes on this agreement, which after all offered the opportunity for a public statement on the issue. It was also noted that, by providing information about the USSR's confirmation of Czechoslovakia's pre-Munich borders, both Beneš and the Soviets had ignored Eden's warning that such written assurances from the Kremlin would violate the Anglo-Soviet agreement and could face opposition from the British government.[68] Contrary to his own propaganda, Beneš was of course aware of the differences that remained between British and Czechoslovak views on the legal issues associated with the Munich agreements. He also thought that a major contributing factor in the success of the negotiations was the pressure that the FO had felt as a result of Soviet diplomacy's position on the issue. In his eyes, the British hesitation increased the level of the country's guilt for Munich. The British position did not fully match that of Czechoslovakia. London announced that since the Germans had themselves wrecked the agreement of September 1938 by invading Prague on 15 March 1939, Britain saw itself as released from any obligations resulting from it. Yet this did not mean acceptance of the idea of uninterrupted continuation of the existence of the First Czechoslovak Republic, nor, less still, a commitment to restore its pre-Munich borders. The important albeit not fully understandable reason for this cautious British position on Beneš's proposal to simply acknowledge that the Munich treaty had been brought about by force and was thus invalid from the outset was not only political concerns but also formal and legal ones. After all, in terms of legislative procedure, the agreement had been signed and ratified by the British parliament absolutely legally. Therefore, the risk of accepting that it had been invalid from the outset, as if it had never existed, was that it would create an extraordinary legal precedent

67 Letter from W. N. Ewer to W. Ridsdale, 17 June 1942, p. 184; letter from W. Ridsdale to O. Sargent, 18 June 1942, TNA, FO 371/30834, C6167/326/12, p. 183.

68 Minute by F. K. Roberts, 18 August 1942, TNA, FO 371/30835, C7933/326/12, pp. 80–81; Minutes by F. K. Roberts, 16 August and D. Allen (?), 17 August 1942, TNA, FO 371/30835, C7933/326/12, p. 82, and also letter from P. Nichols to A. Eden, 12 August 1942, TNA, FO 371/30835, C7933/326/12, p. 82.

resulting only from political reasons. In the precedent-based English legal system, this could have serious unforeseeable consequences. The Soviet side, not a signatory of the Munich agreement, did not consider such formal and legal restrictions. This meant that it was able to offer more to Czechoslovakia regarding its annulment, and faster than the British could.

August 1942 also marked a turning point in British attitudes to Polish-Czechoslovak relations. Probably influenced by Soviet declarations, Britain began to show reserve regarding the plans for a union between the two countries.[69] In September 1942, Beneš told Nichols that his country would remain loyal to the Poles, but he also declared that if the Soviet opposition was sustained, the Czechoslovaks would abandon all talks on a confederation.[70] In an effort to rid itself of some of the responsibility for the failure of this idea, Czechoslovak diplomacy tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Soviets to make a clear declaration to the British and Poles regarding its opposition on this issue.[71] At the same time, Eden, during meetings with Beneš and Masaryk on 2 and 13 November, attempted to persuade the Czechoslovak politicians to influence the Soviets in some way in order to allay their doubts over London's intentions concerning the confederation. The foreign secretary continued to support this idea and suggested a meeting of representatives of the British, Soviet, Czechoslovak and Polish governments to jointly discuss the matter. However, Beneš resisted this suggestion, proposing instead a straightforward Polish-Czechoslovak treaty of alliance approved by London and Moscow, and the British side accepted this idea.[72] Issues concerning the alliance dominated Beneš's November discussions with Eden. They were clearly marked by the particular significance that both sides attached to maintaining good relations with the USSR and the good services mission of sorts that the FO was ready to entrust to Beneš.

At the beginning of January 1943, however, some British conservatives' opinion on Czechoslovak diplomacy's pro-Soviet stance seemed to become widespread, reinforced by the Czechoslovaks' approach towards the idea of a confederation with Poland. At Eden's next meeting with Beneš, the president informed the foreign secretary of Moscow's strong opposition

69 Tadeusz Kisielewski, *Federacja środkowo-europejska. Pertraktacje polsko-czechosłowackie 1939–1943* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1991), pp. 199–200.

70 Rozhovory pana presidenta republiky s velvyslancem P. B. Nicholsem. Navštěva velvysl. Nicholse, 18 September 1942, AÚTGM, fond EB–V, karton 79–82, Anglie IV, pp. 212–213.

71 'Doc. No. 198, 21 October 1942, Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with A. J. Bogomolov', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 403–07.

72 Letter from A. Eden to P. Nichols, 2 November 1942, TNA, FO 954/4A, C10614/151/G, p. 20; Minutes by F. K. Roberts, 1 November 1942, TNA, FO 371/30835, C10581/326/12, pp. 226–28; 'Doc. No. 202, 3 November 1942, report by J. Masaryk on a conversation between E. Beneš and A. Eden (1 November is given here as the date of the meeting)', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 410–11; Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with P. Nichols and W. Strang, 5 and 10 November 1942, AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 110/1, krabice č. 348, pp. 181–82. See also: Report by H. Ripka, 25 November 1942 on a conversation with F. K. Roberts, 24 November 1942, SÚA, fond č. 1, H. Ripka 1–5–19–4, pp. 390–92; or AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 104/1, krabice č. 342, pp. 411–13; or extract from this report: AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 104/6, krabice č. 342, p. 8.

not only to the plans for a confederation, but even to a Polish-Czechoslovak alliance. Eden promised that the British, and even he personally, would broach this subject with the Soviets as well as the Poles, which seemed to satisfy Beneš. Nevertheless, he confessed to Fierlinger that he did not believe that Moscow would agree to a Polish-Czechoslovak pact, with the latter responding by warning him that another English survey on the subject would cause dissatisfaction in the Kremlin.[73] As it turned out, Eden did not even address this question in his discussion with the Soviet ambassador on 8 February, despite his promise.

Meanwhile, from April 1943, the Czechoslovaks increasingly often signalled to the British that Beneš intended to go to Moscow with the objective of signing an alliance agreement between the Czechoslovak Republic and the USSR. From the FO's point of view, this Czechoslovak initiative appeared at the least opportune moment – when Polish-Soviet relations had been cut off as a result of the Katyn question. Despite this, intensive Czechoslovak-Soviet consultations continued regarding the planned pact. Beneš kept the British informed, while also even passing on to the Soviets confidential information obtained in discussions with British politicians, including Churchill. At the same time, Czechoslovak diplomats suggested to FO officials that the Soviets were interested not in the communisation of Poland but in forcing the British and Americans to agree to their demands for the western borders of the USSR.[74] Beneš himself went to great lengths to persuade British politicians of the Soviet government's genuine intentions and readiness to honour their agreements. He also did what he could to allay any Western concerns about the Soviets' predatory intentions. In a climate of seeking closer ties with the USSR, both diplomacies readily agreed that the condition for building the Kremlin's trust in the Western Allies' intentions was to give it the Baltic states and Eastern Poland as well as assure it the requisite influence on the shape of the postwar political order in Europe.

However, the intention to sign a Czechoslovak-Soviet alliance treaty at this stage aroused major opposition in the FO, which regarded the course of Czechoslovak diplomacy – seeing a swift rapprochement with the Soviets and abandoning links with Poland – as dangerous because it threatened to isolate the latter and weaken its position with the USSR.

73 TNA, FO 954/4A, C1212/859/G, letter from A. Eden to P. Nichols, 29 January 1943, p. 21; Rozhovory pana presidenta s Edenem, abridged description of E. Beneš's conversation with A. Eden, 29 January 1943, AÚTGM, fond EB–V, karton 79–82, Anglie II; 'Doc. No. 261, from February 1943, information from E. Beneš and J. Masaryk for Z. Fierlinger', in *AOB&M*, I, pp. 311–12; or 'Doc. No. 217, 15 February 1943', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 438–39; 'Doc. No. 218, 21 February 1943', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 440–42; Fierlinger, *Ve službach ČSR*, II, p. 112–15. See also: Marek K. Kamiński, *Edvard Beneš kontra gen. Władysław Sikorski. Polityka władz czechosłowackich na emigracji wobec rządu polskiego na uchodźstwie 1939–1943* (Warszawa: Neriton, 2005), pp. 262–63.

74 Report by H. Ripka, 30 April 1943 on a conversation with W. Strang, AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 104/1, krabice č. 342, Mezinárodní vztahy Velká Británie, pp. 145–48; or 'Doc. No. 227', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 464–65.

Nichols presented an official interpellation on this matter to Masaryk, informing him that the British government would deem Czechoslovakia's planned actions a misstep, "especially given Polish issues".[75] Britain's efforts to halt or at least delay the Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement met with a reminder on the issue, sent from Moscow via Fierlinger.[76]

On 16 June, soon after returning from the United States, where he had been since early May, Beneš met with Eden, telling him about the support he had received for his policy towards the USSR from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He also reported on the mission which (he thought) Roosevelt had given him for his planned trip to Moscow, which was to secure from the Soviets a solution to the question of incorporating the Baltic states and Polish Eastern territories into the USSR that would be acceptable to the American public. However, Beneš's avowed intention to begin his trip to Moscow at the beginning of July with the goal of signing a Czechoslovak-Soviet mutual assistance pact was met with protests from Eden, who said that it would violate the so-called "self-denying ordinance" – an informal agreement that Beneš had made with Molotov in 1942 compelling both Britain and the USSR to refrain from signing treaties concerning the postwar period with smaller Allied states.[77] He also pointed to the negative consequences of such a move for Czechoslovak-Polish relations and suggested signing a trilateral treaty that would include Poland. With Polish-Soviet relations broken off, however, this would have been impossible in the foreseeable future, and in fact it entailed a proposal to temporarily abstain from actions in this respect.

Upon informing Bogomolov of his discussion with Eden, Beneš faced pressure not to yield on the matter of the Czechoslovak-Soviet accord, even if it meant conflict with the British. The president agreed with the Soviet ambassador regarding the option of amending the text of the planned agreement in such a way as to circumvent potential reservations from the FO. He also openly admitted that it was purely for tactical reasons – with British and American views in mind – that he had deliberately constructed the draft agreement so that it could be trilateral and seen as friendly to the Polish government. But even this explanation did not change the Soviet ambassador's negative attitude to the prospect of signing an accord including Poland, resulting in Beneš's immediate withdrawal from further

75 AMZV, LA, oddíl 4, regál 68, č. 446, Smlouvy, note of 2 June 1943 (č. 3669/dův/43) – unsigned. Almost identical text see Dispatch from J. Masaryk and H. Ripka to E. Beneš, 2 June 1943, Doc. No. 247, 3 June 1943, SÚA, fond č. 1, H. Ripka 1–161/5; "Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with P. Nichols", in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 490–92.

76 'Doc. No. 228, 7 May 1943, telegram from Z. Fierlinger to E. Beneš on a conversation between A. J. Kornejczuk and K. V. Novikov', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 466–67; and 'Doc. No. 233, 13 May 1943, telegram from Z. Fierlinger to E. Beneš', in ČSVDJ, I, p. 471.

77 For more, see Brown, *Dealing with Democrats*, pp. 194–99.

support for the idea of a trilateral pact.[78] At the next meetings, the Soviets stepped up their efforts to secure a swift deal, denying that there was any informal British-Soviet agreement prohibiting it, but this was met with growing pressure from the FO to thwart Czechoslovak diplomacy's plans. After his next meeting with Beneš on 24 June, Eden noted, "Nevertheless, the more I reflected over his [Beneš's] proposal, the less it appealed to me". He warned that the signing of the planned pact "would undoubtedly be interpreted, not only in this country [Great Britain], but throughout the world, as indicating that Czechoslovakia had definitely joined the Russian camp, if, indeed, it was not said that Czechoslovakia was now in the Russian pocket. This would [...] be [...] clearly against the long-term interests of Czechoslovakia herself". Eden added that the FO would not see any problem if such a treaty were concluded after the war. His proposal was to agree with the Soviet government to sign a joint declaration of the two governments' intention to conclude the proposed pact in the future and prepare guarantees in writing that the USSR was willing to give to Czechoslovakia.[79] While Eden's arguments did not convince Beneš, he received full support for his position at a war cabinet meeting on 28 June.[80]

Beneš therefore faced pressure on two fronts. Caught between the Soviet demand to sign a Czechoslovak-Soviet accord as quickly as possible and the British opposition to it, following his next discussion with Bogomolov he agreed to give the Soviets a decision on a possible postponement of his visit to Moscow and welcomed the promise that Ambassador Maisky would discuss the planned pact directly with Eden.[81] On 30 June, Beneš tried to persuade Eden to give his approval for the visit to Moscow itself, where the proposed treaty had been agreed upon but not signed, but the British minister also found this to be excessive.

Meanwhile, on 2 July, the foreign secretary met Maisky, who assured him that the Soviet government was only interested in expanding the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty of 18 July 1941 by transforming it into a pact similar to the Anglo-Soviet treaty and extending its validity to 20 years. Maisky also claimed that none of the points of the Anglo-Soviet agreement prohibited its signatories from similar engagement with other countries and that they were therefore free to do as they pleased in this regard. Eden did not share this view, and as proof that it was not the case he presented

78 'Doc. No. 254, 18 June 1943, report by E. Beneš on a conversation with A. J. Bogomolov', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 504–06 and 'Doc. No. 249, 19 June 1943, extract from a report by A. J. Bogomolov for the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs of the USSR on a conversation with E. Beneš', in *DMDČSV*, IV, I, pp. 367–69.

79 All quotations in this paragraph, see Letter from A. Eden to P. Nichols, 25 June 1943, TNA, FO 954/4A, C7363/2462/G, p. 26.

80 War Cabinet 89 (43), 28 June 1943, TNA, Cab. 65/34, p. 154 (print pp. 108–09).

81 'Doc. No. 264, 30 June 1943, report by E. Beneš on a conversation with A. J. Bogomolov', in ČSVDJ, I, pp. 523–25.

the Soviet ambassador with a recording of the discussion he had had with Molotov on 9 June 1942 as well as a memorandum communicated by the FO to Maisky himself on 27 July 1942, showing that Britain's opposition to the two powers forming agreements with smaller allies, including in the postwar period, was clearly stated.[82] He also explained that the British objections regarding the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty resulted mainly from concerns at the negative impact it might have on Poland's situation. Maisky rejected these forecasts, warning that any further British opposition would not be met with understanding by Moscow "and not only Russo-Czech but also Russo-British relations would be affected". This ensured that the tone of the discussion remained frosty. With no agreement reached, the sides merely promised to continue to analyse the issue.[83]

In fact, though, the foreign secretary was prepared to make concessions. His position was shared by Alexander Cadogan, the permanent under-secretary for foreign affairs, who thought that Britain was unable to prevent the signing of a Czech-Soviet pact. Eden again addressed the issue at a war cabinet meeting on 5 July, proposing that, given the Soviet denial of the existence of an undertaking not to sign treaties with smaller allies, the British ambassador to Moscow, Archibald Clark Kerr, should be instructed to intervene by reminding Molotov of this commitment. Should this be unsuccessful, the British side were to agree to sign a Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty, while also insisting that it be constructed in such a way as to allow it to be later converted into a trilateral agreement including Poland. The cabinet approved this proposed course of action.[84] Yet before the instructions could be sent to the British ambassador in the USSR, the FO received word that on 7 July Beneš had met with Bogomolov, who had advised him to postpone his visit to Moscow until autumn unless a treaty was signed now.

Discussions on this issue therefore continued between Soviet, British and Czechoslovak diplomats, in London and Moscow as well as within the Czechoslovak government and at meetings of the National Council (16 and 22 July). Most Czechoslovak ministers favoured signing an agreement with the USSR, even if it meant conflict with Britain – although this was something they wished to avoid if possible.[85]

82 Enclosure 1. Extract from record of Mr. Eden's conversation with M. Molotov at the Foreign Office on 9 June 1942, pp. 28–29; Enclosure 2. Aide-mémoire communicated to M. Maisky on 27 July 1942, TNA, FO 954/4A, C7700/2462/G, p. 29.

83 Letter from A. Eden to A. Clark Kerr, 2 July 1943, TNA, FO 954/4A, C7700/2462/G, p. 28.

84 War Cabinet 93 (43), 5 July 1943, TNA, Cab. 65/35, p. 10 (print pp. 127–28); Cadogan, 'Entry from 5 July 1943', in *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, p. 540.

85 Resolution of the Government on July 16th 1943, AMZV, LA, oddíl 4, regál 68, č. 446, Smlouvy; 'Doc. No. 11, 16 July 1943, Report by H. Ripka on a meeting of the Czechoslovak government' in ČSVDJ, vol. II (*červenec 1943–březen 1945*), ed. by Jan Němeček and others (Praha: Státní ústřední archiv, 1999), pp. 36–37.

Meanwhile, in late July the Soviet chargé d'affaires in London, Arkady Sobolev, presented the FO with an official memorandum on the British-Soviet agreement not to sign treaties with smaller allies. The Kremlin accepted that this question had been the subject of informal talks between the two sides but argued that no binding resolutions had been made. Since the FO stuck to its view, the controversies remain unresolved.[86] Discussions on the matter also continued into the next weeks, while the Czechoslovaks, following Bogomolov's advice, waited for the result of the Anglo-Soviet negotiations. Although these did not end until 2 November, they culminated in failure, and, given the lack of agreement, it was mutually agreed that they should be abandoned.[87]

Czechoslovak diplomacy, somewhat sidelined from the discussion in August, also based its view of the situation on the unofficial news it received from minor FO officials. These suggested that the dispute between Britain and the Soviet Union on signing treaties with smaller allies was not just about prestige. The British feared that consenting to the signing of a Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty would become "the beginning of a rush of Central European states to form alliances with one major power or another",[88] which would soon lead to the question of recognition of borders, thereby hampering any chance the powers had of freedom in making decisions at a peace conference. Perhaps a more important argument discerned by the FO against such alliances was the worry that they would lead to the emergence of two blocs of allies and thus create the conditions for a confrontation between them.

On 31 August, the question of a Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty again became a subject of discussion for Eden and Maisky. The Soviet ambassador tried to sound out whether Britain would withdraw its objections to a declaration of the possibility of Poland joining it at any moment. The foreign secretary undertook to consider this issue. After the meeting he concluded that it was incumbent to try to persuade the Kremlin to abandon the idea of an accord with Czechoslovakia and, should this prove unrealisable, ensure that it was "as anodyne as possible".[89]

In the first half of September, it briefly seemed that the FO's opposition to Beneš's visit to Moscow had been withdrawn, but Eden soon disavowed Bruce Lockhart's proclamations on this matter. Although he

86 'Doc. No. 237, 26 July 1943, Pamjatnaja zapiska pravitel'stva CCCP pravitel'stvu Velikobritanii', in *SAO*, I, pp. 408–09; or Enclosure. Aide-mémoire, 26 July 1943, TNA, FO 954/4A, N4280/66/G, p. 30; See also Letter from A. Eden to A. Clark Kerr, 26 July 1946, p. 30; and Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 596.

87 'Doc. No. 282, 1 October 1943, Pis'mo posla Velikobritanii v SSSR narodnomu komissaru inostrannych del SSSR', and 'Proekt noty o soglašenijach meždu glavnymi i malymi sojuznikami po poslevoennym voprosam', in *SAO*, I, pp. 465–67; 'Doc. No. 287, 8 October 1943, Pis'mo narodnogo komissara inostrannych del SSSR poslu Velikobritanii v SSSR', in *SAO*, I, pp. 470–71; Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 598–99.

88 Report by J. Kraus, 18 August 1943, č.j.5913/dův/43, SÚA, fond č. 1, H. Ripka 1–5–24, pp. 45–46.

89 Woodward, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 597.

left the final decision to Beneš himself, he warned that should the president decide on a prompt visit to Moscow, "Churchill would certainly be most indignant".[90] The dilemma the Czechoslovak leader faced was framed most emphatically by Strang in four sentences summing up the British stance: "we don't want you to go now; the visit is inopportune because of the Poles; you are head of a sovereign state; if you insist on going, we shall not stop you".[91] Beneš was uncomfortable in such situations and delayed the decision. On 24 September, the Czechoslovak government accepted this position, adopting a declaration that was also communicated to the Allied governments. This asserted the desire that a Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement be made promptly but also declared that a goal of Czechoslovakia's policy was to bring about closer ties between Britain and the USSR and not to deepen problems that emerged. This was also the explanation given for a brief delay in signing the Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement until the controversies between the major powers could be cleared up.[92] Soon after, however (on 2 October), the Czechoslovak government again expressed its wish for a swift accord with the Soviets. This declaration was translated into English, given to the FO, and was again sent to Moscow and Washington. In a dispatch to the Soviets, Ripka requested no further delays with this issue. Fierlinger informed that the Soviets were ready to sign an agreement at any moment; he also noted a change in the draft sent by Beneš that would mean it did not need ratification but would be binding as soon as it was signed.[93] He also denied suspicions of any machinations from the Soviet side and noted the Kremlin's reluctance for the Czechoslovaks to give the British detailed information about the state of their negotiations on signing a treaty. In Moscow, these negotiations were regarded as a purely Soviet-Czechoslovak issue. He also warned that Molotov would be unwilling to discuss this issue with Eden at the planned conference of ministers representing the three major Allied powers that would take place in Moscow between 19 and 30 October.[94]

Meanwhile, Eden – irritated by the repeated declarations from Czechoslovakia about its desire to swiftly conclude an agreement with the USSR, in which all the blame for the delay was placed on the British – on

90 'Doc. No. 23, 8 September 1943, report by J. Smutný on J. Masaryk's conversation with I. Maisky and A. Eden', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 56–57; or 'Doc. No. 301', in *AOB&M*, I, pp. 364–65; Kamiński, 'Władze czechosłowackie na emigracji wobec perspektywy wizyty Edvarda Beneša w Moskwie (czerwiec–październik 1943 r.)', *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 39/3 (2007), 76.

91 Bruce Lockhart, 'Entry of 13 September 1943', in *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce-Lockhart*, II, p. 260.

92 Raport MZV on a meeting of the Czechoslovak government, 24 September 1943 (č.6917/dův/43) – English version, AMZV, LA, oddíl 4, regál 68, č. 446, Smlouvy; and Report by Nosek, 2 October 1943; or Politické věci, zprávy: SSSR 1940–1944, AMZV, LA–D, oddíl 4, regál 70, č. 114; Czech version: 'Doc. No. 26', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 59–62.

93 'Doc. No. 282, 2 October 1943, telegram from Z. Fierlinger to E. Beneš', in *DMDČSV*, IV, I, p. 409.

94 Information from J. Nosek from text of Z. Fierlinger's dispatch to MZV, 4 October 1943, AMZV, LA, oddíl 4, regál 68, č. 446, Smlouvy; and 'Doc. No. 33, 7 October 1943, telegram from Z. Fierlinger to MZV', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 71–72; Fierlinger, *Ve službách ČSR*, II, pp. 156–59.

7 October summoned Masaryk and informed him of his dissatisfaction at the way the Czechoslovaks were presenting the situation to the public. He noted that the fact that the postponement of Beneš's visit to Moscow had come at the suggestion of the Soviets was consistently ignored, with the conduct of the British government constantly blamed. He similarly criticised the interpretation of the events associated with the negotiations on the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty in the dispatches sent by the Czechoslovak government to its British, Soviet and American counterparts. Eden also stated that the FO would officially respond to the Czechoslovak declaration of 24 September. Privately, he added that the Czechoslovak authorities' stance had undermined the British government's sympathy for them. "Your government has gone mad and can think of nothing but an accord with Russia", he asserted.[95]

Informed of Eden's criticism of the actions of Czech diplomacy, Beneš put all the blame for the sharp wording of the declarations and dispatches sent to Washington and Moscow on Minister Ripka, who had apparently not listened to the president's advice to soften the text. Masaryk – the least keen of the Czechoslovak ministers on closer ties with the Soviets but also supinely loyal to Beneš – was clearly agitated by the whole situation and the role he had come to play in it. As foreign minister, he took responsibility for the form of the Czechoslovak notes but could not contain an eruption of anger. "The government approved it, the president too, so I had to accept it", he told Beneš. "But I've just about had enough of this. They all shit their pants [sic] about the communists, everyone quakes before them. I have people in the administration who immediately inform the communists and the Soviet embassy of everything – I don't know who I can talk to and who I can't. It's exactly the same in the National Council – the Soviet embassy knows what's been discussed in the National Council before you do. I have communists alongside me in the government. [Minister of state Jaroslav] Stranský and [Minister of National Defence Gen. Sergej] Ingr announced to me that we must have an agreement with Russia, even if it means completely separating from England and America". Masaryk's opinion made an impression on Beneš, who concluded that "the government's actions, Ripka's efforts to please the communists and Russians, [...] what the National Council [and] Fierlinger have led us [the Czech government] to a losing position with the English, and given us nothing with the Russians".[96]

95 'Doc. No. 317, 8 October 1943, report by J. Smutný on J. Masaryk's conversation with E. Beneš', in *AOB&M*, I, p. 388; or 'Doc. No. 34', in CSVDJ, II, p. 73.
96 'Doc. No. 317, 8 October 1943, report by J. Smutný on J. Masaryk's conversation with E. Beneš', in *AOB&M*, I, p. 388.

However, the Soviet pressure to quickly sign an accord continued to grow. On 11 October, Vasily Valkov, Soviet embassy advisor to the Allied governments in London, urged Ripka to ensure that – since Czechoslovakia had already accepted the Soviets' draft treaty – Beneš immediately travel to Moscow to sign it. Yet the Czechoslovak minister of state pointed to the British opposition and demanded from the Soviets that not only Czechoslovak politicians but also Eden state plainly and categorically their determination to reach an agreement with Czechoslovakia. He also had the impression that Valkov had received instructions to bring about a Soviet-Czechoslovak accord before the conference of ministers in Moscow so that Eden could be presented with a fait accompli, while the collection of resultant tensions could be transferred to British-Czechoslovak relations. He was strengthened in this conviction by a visit of representatives of the Czechoslovak communists, who tried to force the same upon him as Valkov, evidently instructed to do so by the Soviet embassy.[97]

At the same time, Beneš and Masaryk began to dampen Fierlinger's zeal somewhat concerning the immediate signing of an agreement. Beneš presented a series of minor remarks on the Soviet draft, which he fundamentally accepted, but this meant that agreeing the final text required a further exchange of correspondence. He wanted the Soviets to understand that Czechoslovakia also had obligations to the British and that any conflict with the latter could be dangerous to his country's vital interests.[98] Beneš was gravely concerned by the news that, before departing for Moscow, Eden had admitted to several leading British journalists that Czechoslovakia's conduct had made things very difficult for him and vowed to be tough in negotiations on Czechoslovak issues. He had also pledged to declare his désinteressement regarding the actions of Czechoslovak diplomacy, stating that all that he was prepared to accept was a declaration of "pro futuro" intentions and the signing of a Czechoslovak-Soviet accord after the war. Beneš's reaction was quite unexpected. He declared that Eden's idea to merely initial a general agreement – saving the signing of a pact until after the war – coincided completely with what he had wanted from the outset. More importantly, he declared that, contrary to the Russians' wishes that he should go straight to Moscow, "he will not go until the atmosphere clears up and will not sign an accord [unless] there is an agreement about this between England and Russia".[99] The FO's negative stance on the intention of signing a Czechoslovak-Soviet pact was

97 'Doc. No. 35, 11 October 1943, Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with V. A. Valkov', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 75–77.
98 'Doc. No. 36, 13 October 1943, telegram from E. Beneš to Z. Fierlinger', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 77–79; or 'Doc. No. 324', in *AOB&M*, I, pp. 396–97; Fierlinger, *Ve službach ČSR*, II, p. 161–63.
99 'Doc. No. 324, 16 October 1943, record of J. Smutný's conversation with E. Beneš', in *AOB&M*, I, p. 395.

confirmed by a note from 16 October. Presenting this, Nichols expressed the hope that the whole matter would be resolved during the forthcoming conference in Moscow.[100] The British anticipated that the Czechoslovak--Soviet agreement would not be signed before the end of the war.[101] Notified of this by Beneš, Fierlinger asked the Soviets to include the issue in talks with Eden, who was already in Moscow, and exert pressure on him to abandon his reservations.[102]

On Molotov's initiative, the future of the Czechoslovak-Soviet pact was indeed discussed at the conference in Moscow on 24 October. Eden's reaction can be described as a hasty retreat from his previous positions, ending in almost overt capitulation. He stated immediately that he was not opposed to Beneš's visit and began to discuss the British-Soviet arrangements not to enter agreements with smaller Allied states. He approved of the proposed accord between Czechoslovakia and the USSR with no reservations, merely requesting 24 hours to consult Churchill on the matter, which Molotov accepted.[103] Eden recommended that the British government should accept the signing of the treaty and approval of the Czechoslovak president's visit to Moscow.[104] The Czechoslovaks were informed of the resolutions first by the Soviets (26 October) and then by the British (28 October).

On 23 November, after preparations lasting almost a month, Beneš departed for Moscow, where, following a long and circuitous journey, he landed only on 11 December, signing the long-awaited pact the following day. The parties in the agreement undertook to offer mutual assistance in the fight against the Third Reich and its allies in Europe, vowed not to take part in any discussions with the German government that did not renounce its aggressive intentions and, without mutual agreement, not to enter peace negotiations with Germany and its allies. Furthermore, the treaty also constituted a Czechoslovak-Soviet military alliance against Germany and its allies that was intended to operate also in the postwar period if Berlin or its allies returned to a policy of expansion. It also contained a resolution on close postwar political and economic cooperation between Czechoslovakia and the USSR with respect for mutual independence,

100 *Memorandum* of British government to Czechoslovak government, 16 October 1943, AMZV, LA, oddíl 4, reg l 68, č. 446, Smlouvy; and 'Doc. No. 39, 18 October 1943, Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with P. Nichols', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 84–85. See also: 'Doc. No. 41, 19 October 1943, Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with P. Nichols', in ČSVDJ, II, p. 90.

101 Eduard Táborský, *Prezident Beneš mezi Západem a Východem* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1993), p. 182.

102 Telegram from Z. Fierlinger to E. Beneš, 21 October 1943 (the second from that day – according to J. Nosek's report, č.7601/dův/43), AMZV, LA, oddíl 4, regál 68, č. 446, Smlouvy; or Report from J. Nosek, 22 October 1943 č7596/dův/43).

103 Telegrams (No. 1155 and No. 1156) A. Clark Kerr to FO, 23 October (received 24 October) and 23 October (received 25 October) 1943, TNA, Cab. 120/737; 'Doc. No. 303, 24 October 1943, extract from minutes of a meeting of the Moscow conference of foreign ministers of the USSR, USA and Britain', in *DMDČSV*, IV, I, pp. 431–33.

104 Telegrams No. 75 and 81, A. Clark Kerr (on the orders of A. Eden) to FO, 24 October 1943, TNA, Cab. 120/737 and No. 86, 25 October 1943, TNA, Cab. 120/737.

sovereignty, and non-interference in the partner's internal affairs. Clause five of the pact prohibited the parties from signing any agreement or entering a coalition against either one of them. The agreement became valid upon signing and was to remain in force for 20 years, after which time it was to be automatically extended every five years unless one of the parties announced the intention to terminate it. A separate document attached to it was a protocol envisaging the possibility of a third country bordering Czechoslovakia and the USSR which had been the victim of German aggression joining the agreement. While its name was not mentioned, it was clear that only Poland satisfied these criteria.[105]

A wealth of literature and published transcripts exists on the order of proceedings and talks between Beneš and Stalin of 14, 16 and 18 December.[106] These reveal that the Czechoslovak president yielded entirely to the wishes of the Soviet dictator as well as a desire to coordinate Czechoslovak foreign policy with that of the USSR, and even imitation of Soviet models in postwar Czechoslovak domestic policy, with Beneš referring to the need for Moscow's intervention on these matters and repeated mentions of hostility towards Poland and Hungary.

Britain thought that Beneš would be able to play the role of mediator in Polish-Soviet relations and help resurrect relations between the Polish government in London and the USSR. Despite having no specific information on the president's discussions in Moscow, however, Eden soon concluded that the FO should not support his style of mediation.[107] On his way back from Moscow, Beneš met with Churchill in Marrakech. According to the Czech president, the British prime minister claimed that he had always been open to a Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty and emphasised the need for Poland's inclusion. He also agreed to the transfer of Germans from Czechoslovakia, promised the pre-Munich borders and even more, and supported Czechoslovak foreign policy unreservedly.[108] Beneš gave him an account of the Moscow talks and recommended the Soviet proposal to resolve the Polish problem by coopting Kremlin henchmen into the Polish government in London. Having already sanctioned giving

105 'Doc. No. 324, 12 December 1943', in *DMDČSV*, IV, I, pp. 455–57; or in the English version: TNA, FO 371/38920, C2068/35/12, pp. 153–55.

106 Here I will only cite: Doc. No. 1, report by J. Smutný on E. Beneš's discussion with J. Stalin, 12 December 1943: Vojtěch Mastný, 'Benešovy rozhovory se Stalinem a Molotovem', *Svědectví*, 47 (1974), 467–78; or English version: Doc. No. 1, in Vojtěch Mastný, 'The Beneš–Stalin–Molotov Conversations in December 1943. New Documents', *Jahrbücher für Gesichte Osteuropas*, 20/3 (1972), 376–80. Extensive passages have been translated into Polish and annotated by S. Kirkor: Stanisław Kirkor, 'Rola Benesza w sprawie polskiej w 1944 roku', *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 26 (1973), 39–56. See also: Stefan Michnik, 'Jeszcze o rozmowach Benesza na Kremlu', *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 32 (1975), 215–18.

107 Telegram No. 3161, from FO to HM Government's representative in Algiers, 30 December 1943, TNA, FO 371/38920, C86/35/G/12, p. 47.

108 'Doc. No. 205, 4 January 1944, record of the plan for E. Beneš's conversation with W. Churchill', in *Czechoslovak-Polish Negotiations of the Establishment of Confederation and Alliance 1939–1944*, Prague 1995, pp. 376–77; 'Doc. No. 74, 11 January 1944, extract from E. Beneš's telegram to Z. Fierlinger', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 196–97.

the Polish Eastern Borderlands to the Soviets at the Tehran Conference, Churchill fully agreed with this view.

The Czechoslovak enthusiasm regarding the agreement was accompanied by scepticism and often sharp criticism from FO analysts. "Time will show whether the new Czech realism, which seems to consist of absolute faith in the unqualified support and good intentions of the U.S.S.R [...], is in fact anything more than a façade of realism", was Roberts' verdict.[109] Ultimately, the main priority of British policy resulting from the imperatives of the war – the desire to work together with the USSR – prevailed over all the arguments that led London to express reservations concerning the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty. Given the British government's far-reaching readiness to make concessions on the Polish question, the increasingly evident fact that the future of this part of Europe would be largely determined by the Red Army that occupied it towards the end of the war, and the enthusiasm of the Czechoslovaks to place themselves in the Soviet sphere of influence, London, mired in a military struggle against the Germans, could hardly be expected to involve itself in a political conflict with Moscow in defence of the future of countries which in reality it was unable to help greatly. In the end, the only winners were the Soviets. By signing the treaty, they managed to further isolate Poland, undermine the prospects of British influence in Czechoslovakia, and weaken the political position of the émigré Czechoslovak government. Although formally this position was strengthened by the pact, in reality it meant that Beneš's administration accepted Moscow's patronage and even sought to encourage the Kremlin to extend its power further still over Poland and Hungary. Late 1943 and early 1944 can also be pinpointed as a distinct political turning point in relations between the Czechoslovak émigré administration and the British government. Britain, whose significance in Czechoslovak policy had diminished since the USSR entered the war with Germany, now definitely lost its position to Moscow as Czechoslovakia's key ally, and Czechoslovak-British relations became much cooler. On the other hand, the British government, having taken strategic – and beneficial to the USSR – decisions at Tehran concerning the future of Central Europe, was also unwilling to become more active in its rivalry with the USSR for influence in what it saw as a less important part of the continent.

Simultaneously, from early 1944 the FO's main subject of interest regarding Czechoslovakia became its relations with the USSR. Against the background of apparently excellent Czechoslovak-Soviet ties, certain actions by the Kremlin were noted that suggested that the structures of

109 Quoted in: Martin Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union During the Second World War* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 188.

the Czechoslovak émigré government created around Beneš's group were not necessarily the only political group that Moscow would ultimately be willing to support as candidates to take over the administration in Czechoslovak territory captured by the Red Army. Articles in the Soviet press making the Czechoslovak government responsible for the lack of armed interventions and sabotage against the Third Reich in the occupied country were increasingly frequent, as the FO noted, and the Czechoslovak communists in London made similar criticisms.[110] Responding to British enquiries about the reasons for this, Beneš was evasive, remaining certain of Soviet support on the most important issues for him: restoring Czechoslovakia's pre-September 1938 borders and acceptance of mass resettlement of Germans from its territory. In his view, he did not have to rely too much on HM Government's position in these matters. On 23 March, he told Nichols outright, "Let the British government, the Foreign Office take note that after my trip to Russia we have all international affairs resolved. We also consider our border issues – all of them – to be resolved, not only against Germany and Hungary, but also against Poland, *and I shall not quarrel with anyone about this* [original emphasis]. The pre-Munich borders will be restored [...]. Our foreign policy and diplomatic activity will therefore now be peaceful [and] limited. [...] You will no longer have many endeavours from us. We will quietly await the end of the war".[111] Nonetheless, he proposed launching a discussion on the conditions for a broad understanding on borders, reparations and transfers, adding that the Czechoslovak side had Soviet support on all these matters and did not expect the FO to take a different position.

Meanwhile, the Czechoslovak émigré government was receiving increasingly bad press in the United Kingdom. Beneš's renewed calls to arms to his country, despite his denials, were unanimously interpreted as a consequence of Soviet pressure, and the view that Czechoslovakia would in future lie in the Soviet sphere of influence became increasingly widespread.[112] This was also the moment when the FO began to discern that Czechoslovakia was taking certain actions to improve its image in the West, emphasise its desire to maintain ties with the Anglophone powers, and forge at least minimal guarantees of remaining able to operate in future if the Soviets' actions in the occupied Czechoslovak territory failed to match the hopes of the country's government. These new Czechoslovak

110 Telegram No. 132 from J. Balfour to FO, 18 January 1944 (received 21 January 1944), TNA, FO 371/38920, C924/35/12, p. 97; Laštovička, V *Londýně za války*, p. 334.

111 Rozhovory pana presidenta republiky s velvyslancem P. B. Nicholsem. Rozmluva s Nicholsem v Aston Abbots dne 23. března 1944, AÚTGM, fond EB–V, karton 79–82, Anglie IV. See also: Antonín Klimek, 'Plány Edvarda Beneše na poválečný vývoj Československa. (Od návratu z Moskvy v lednu 1944 do povstání na Slovensku)', *Střední Evropa*, 30 (1993), 25–31 (p. 25); Zeman, *Edvard Beneš – Politický životopis*, p. 218.

112 Zeman, *Edvard Beneš – Politický životopis*, p. 219.

initiatives were, firstly, an expectation that when the Red Army entered Czechoslovakia, the British would help to transport representatives of the Czechoslovak authorities and groups of officials who would immediately set about organising an administration in the liberated lands so that this responsibility lay in Czechoslovak, not Soviet, hands. On the other hand, efforts were made to sign an agreement with the Soviets regulating the status of their army in Czechoslovakia when they arrived, the draft of which was prepared in such a way that it could potentially refer to all Allied armies able to operate there. This was interpreted at the FO as an expression of Czechoslovak diplomacy's desire for the country to be liberated not only from the Red Army, but also from US and British troops. However, it was regarded as being part of the Soviet sphere of responsibility for military activities, which did not mean a lack of British interest in this area. Britain therefore decided to support the idea of the proposed Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty but would not agree to negotiating a similar agreement in which it was included, pointing out that it was highly improbable that its army would find itself in Czechoslovak territory. Moreover, Britain refused to make any commitments to assist in transferring the representatives of the Czechoslovak government and administration, suggesting that this question should be agreed with the Soviets. The reasons for this were technical: the need to make flights over quite a long distance from southern Italy to eastern Czechoslovakia, and above all the belief that without previous consultations with the Soviet government and securing approval for landing aircraft at Soviet airfields, such flights would be very risky.[113] The discussion on striking an agreement on the rules governing the stay of Allied armies in Czechoslovakia was ultimately resolved by the Soviets, who proposed to the Czechoslovak government that the words "Allied forces" be replaced with "Soviet forces", to which they readily agreed. The document was signed on 8 May and immediately came into force.

Despite the negative response from the FO, the Czechoslovak government did not abandon its efforts to form a similar agreement with Britain. It argued that Czechoslovakia needed a treaty with the United Kingdom for broader political reasons, to assure its people that London was not leaving them to the mercy of the Soviets, as well as – by the very fact of its signing – to make an impression on the Soviet government that

113 Letter from P. Nichols to J. G. Ward, 14 March 1944 (46/16/44), TNA, FO 1049/19; See also: Letter from P. Nichols to J. G. Ward, 16 March 1944 (46/18/44), TNA, FO 1049/19; Scheme of Arrangement to Operate when the Allied Armies Enter Czechoslovak Territory; FO instruction (redacted by O. Harvey) for P. Nichols, March 1944 (U2153/2152/G), TNA, FO 1049/19.

would temper any unfavourable intentions it had towards Czechoslovakia.[114] But the FO did not budge from its previous position, arguing that such a move would likely result in a similar request from the Poles and Britain could not offer Poland such a commitment due to the USSR.[115] Eden was willing at best to make a declaration in the House of Commons about Britain's interest in preserving close and friendly ties with Czechoslovakia,[116] but he refused to accept any new treaty obligations. There was a realisation in the British ministry that, while Beneš did not want to be left alone with the Soviets, if pushed to choose between East and West, he would choose the East. This was a very sober assessment of the attitude of the Czechoslovak president, who, at the same time in a conversation with the Soviet ambassador, Viktor Lebedev, suggested that the USSR should already prepare itself for a future war. Beneš predicted that the Soviet Union would be attacked by the West with the use of the rebuilt German forces. "We in any case will go with the Soviets", he promised.[117]

Impressed by the advances of the Soviet offensive on the Eastern Front in summer 1944, the British tried to clarify the objectives and conditions of their own policy towards Central Europe. On 9 August, Eden presented a memorandum containing this as one of its subjects to the war cabinet. This said a great deal about the FO's perception of the political situation at the time and its potential future development in the context of Soviet actions and intentions. It recognised Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary as key countries for the Soviet security system and thus closely associated with the USSR. Soviet opposition to any Central European federations was cited as resulting from fears of a bloc of states under Poland's leadership emerging in this part of the continent that would be hostile to both Germany and the USSR and would form a kind of cordon sanitaire towards the Soviets, referring to a political idea popular since the First World War. The Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty of December 1943 was regarded as a probable indicator of the Kremlin's political intentions for this area. This, it was noted, not only connected Czechoslovakia with the USSR but

114 Letter from P. Nichols to A. Eden, 9 May 1944 with enclosures: Enclosure 1. Agreement concerning the Relationship between the Czechoslovak Administration and the Commander-in-Chief on the Entry of Soviet Troops into Czechoslovak Territory, 8 May 1944, TNA, FO 1049/19, U4177/2152/74; Enclosure 2. BBC Czechoslovak Programme Broadcast by Dr. Hubert Ripka, 8 May, 1944, TNA, FO 1049/19, U4177/2152/74; Enclosure 3. Soviet Monitor, Special Bulletin, 1 May, 1944 (report from Vyshinsky's press conference, 30 April 1944) – no page numbering – in total six pages of print, TNA, FO 1049/19, U4177/2152/74. Telegram No. 2, 8 May 1944, from P. Nichols to FO. Text of agreement of 8 May 1944. See also: Fierlinger, *Ve službách ČSR*, II, pp. 253–54; Hubert Ripka, *S východem a západem* (Londyn, 1944), pp. 80–82; Brod, *Osudný omyl Edvarda Beneše 1939–1948*, p. 293.

115 'Doc. No. 88, 3 May 1944, Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with P. Nichols', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 252–53.

116 He was steadfastly urged to do so by Nichols, who wrote: "It is to our own advantage that they [i.e. the Czechs] should turn to us as well, for they occupy a unique strategic position in Europe to which we cannot remain indifferent. We do not want them to become merely a Russian satellite, and if we don't, mustn't we do what we can to encourage them to look to us as well as to the East?". Letter from P. Nichols to A. Cadogan 20 July 1944, TNA, FO 371/38923, C9608/63/12, pp. 10–10A.

117 'Doc. No. 98, 12 July 1944, extract from a report by H. Ripka on E. Beneš's account of his conversation with V. Lebedev', in ČSVDJ, II, p. 266.

also permitted Poland's accession, thus creating a major bulwark against potential future German aggression. Britain assumed that the Soviets were sufficiently certain of Beneš's support to allow him to sustain a policy of balance between East and West and hoped that in this situation Czechoslovakia could be a bridge between the two parts of the continent that was as useful for the Soviets as it was for Britain and France. It was expected that the USSR would accept Czechoslovakia's social structure and not seek Sovietisation but would use the country as a military buffer against the threat of German aggression. Britain saw its role as to develop economic and cultural exchange with this "'petit bourgeois' State", paving the way to spread British influence throughout Central Europe.[118] Yet the Warsaw Uprising and the associated experiences in relations with Moscow would soon put these views to the test.

With the possibility of an uprising also on the cards in Slovakia, in July 1944 the Czechoslovak government approached the Special Operations Executive (SOE) to request arms. However, although the FO were receptive to this initiative, they made the decision dependent on the Soviet position, concerned that if the Slovak units did not rebel and remained faithful to the Germans, the weapons supplied to them could be used against the Red Army, for which the British did not want to take responsibility. The Czechoslovak government therefore requested armaments from the USSR, but both the British and the Czechoslovak interventions were met with an evasive response from Moscow. Simultaneously, behind Beneš's back, the Soviets began talks with General Ferdinand Čatloš, defence minister in Jozef Tiso's Slovak government. He promised to switch to their side with his army but stood for independent Slovak statehood and demanded that the national character of the Slovak army be maintained, which was, of course, contrary to the political programme of the Czechoslovak émigré government.[119] When an uprising in Slovakia actually started (29 August), it surprised both the British and the Czechoslovak governments. After the experiences with Stalin's stance on the Warsaw Uprising, there were fears in the FO that any bold British initiative regarding support for the insurgency in Slovakia could provoke the Kremlin to take a hostile position. On the other hand, given the seemingly good Czechoslovak-Soviet relations, it was reckoned that the uprising would receive support from the Soviets themselves, and independent requests from the Czechoslovak government

118 Extract from the Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on Soviet Policy in Europe, 9 August 1944, in Vilém Prečan, *V kradeném čase. Výběr ze studií, článků a uvah z let 1973–1993* (Brno: Doplněk, 1994), p. 58.

119 'Doc. No. 105, 26 August 1944, telegrammed instruction by E. Beneš and J. Masaryk for Z. Fierlinger', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 275–77; See also: Eduard Táborský, 'Beneš and Stalin: Moscow 1943 and 1945', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, 13/2 (1953), 154–81 (pp. 169–170); Táborský, *Prezident Beneš mezi Západem a Východem*, pp. 204–07.

would be more effective without British support. British politicians were convinced of the necessity to negotiate everything with Moscow to avoid a repeat of the tragedy of Warsaw.[120] The British government's position was that "Slovakia is in the Russian sphere of operations", leaving the initiative to the USSR.[121] However, numerous attempts to secure Soviet approval for Britain providing the insurgents with tangible support fell short. Either these requests went unanswered or matters were dragged out so long that they became obsolete. Lebedev even suggested that the Slovak Uprising might be a German provocation. Waiting for an initiative or even collaboration from the Soviets would therefore mean abandoning all efforts to assist the insurgency. The Czechoslovak government also did little to influence its Soviet ally in this matter. Admittedly, it repeatedly entreated the British government to supply arms to Slovakia, but it also explained the Soviets' unclear position by citing their surprise regarding the uprising and the uncertainty regarding the extent to which it had been agreed with the Czechoslovak government in London. One even gets the impression that the Czechoslovak government's interventions with both its allies were made pro forma, but in fact they were not interested in securing effective and rapid support for the insurgents. Beneš even expressed understanding for a situation in which it turned out that no support would be offered, leaving the whole issue to the Western Allies to negotiate with Moscow.[122] The apparent reason for this was the president's concerns that the leaders of the uprising could become his rivals for power in the reborn Czechoslovakia.

The experience of efforts to gain help from the Kremlin for the Slovak Uprising, as well as the conclusions that Czechoslovak politicians drew from observing the Soviets' response to the Warsaw Uprising, had a distinct impact on their general attitude to the USSR.[123] Many of them, previously very much pro-Soviet and anti-Polish, in private conversations with FO officials now openly criticised the actions of the Soviet authorities and voiced concerns about their intentions and future plans.[124] As a result, following the American example, on 18 September the British sent their own military mission and some armaments to the insurgent-controlled territory, regarding the Soviets' silence as tacit acceptance of their proposed

120 Prečan, *V kradeném čase*, pp. 78–98; (for more see ibid., pp. 84–86; ibid., pp. 48–49).
121 Telegram from A.M.S.S.O to J.S.M (Washington), 6 September 1944, TNA, Cab. 120/737.
122 Rozhovory pana presidenta republiky s velvyslancem P. B. Nicholsem. Rozhovor s Nicholsem dne 7 září 1944, AÚTGM, fond EB–V, karton 79–82, Anglie IV, pp. 182–83 and "Doc. No. 117, 5 September 1944, Report by H. Ripka on a conversation with P. Nichols", in CSVDJ, II, pp. 294–95. See also: František Vnuk, *Rebelanti a Suplikanti (Slovenská otázka v ilegalite a v exile 1944–1945)* (Lakewood: Jednota, 1989), pp. 135–37.
123 Feierabend, *Politicke vzpomínky*, II, pp. 176–79.
124 Report by F. K. Roberts, 5 October 1944, TNA, FO 371/38921, C14122/38/9/2, pp. 136–37; see also Minutes by A. Eden, October 1944, W. Churchill, 9 October and A. F. C. Gatehouse, 17 October 1944, TNA, FO 371/38921, C14122/38/9/2, pp. 135, 137.

actions and then simply informing them of their implementation.[125] Material Soviet support for the uprising was also offered from 4 September onwards – in fact in its final phase, when its imminent failure was evident. A limited offensive was also mounted in the Carpathians, in the direction of the Dukla Pass, ending with a massacre of the infantry attacking without adequate artillery support and enormous losses, including among the participating Czechoslovak units. In early November, the insurgents' resistance was broken, and Slovakia again found itself under German occupation.

In late 1944, it was evident that since Beneš's visit to Moscow the attitude of the British government and public towards Czechoslovakia had cooled significantly. The label of a willing vassal of the USSR had stuck to the Czechoslovak government-in-exile for good. This situation was exacerbated by the FO's tendency to reduce its interest in Czechoslovak issues in every discussion in which the decision makers' – Eden included – aversion to Beneš's diplomacy and the man himself became visible. The uprising in Slovakia highlighted the weaknesses of both sides' diplomacies regarding the problems that concerned them while also lying in the Soviet sphere of interests. Stalin's position on the Warsaw Uprising laid bare the fragility of faith in the Kremlin's good intentions towards its neighbours, as well as the lack of genuine prospects for the great Western powers influencing Russia's actions without causing open conflict. It became equally flagrantly obvious that the desire to maintain ties between the West and Czechoslovakia , given its government's previous political decisions and the ongoing events of the war, was becoming very difficult. One might also suggest that these governments became a little lost in determining what the objective of their foreign policy should be. Unofficially, the FO continued to receive numerous signals indicating a growing awareness among Czechoslovak politicians of the threat to their country's independence from the USSR; however, priority officially continued to be given to the alliance with Moscow, and this was also the position guaranteed in the confidential discussions of representatives of Soviet diplomacy. This limited desire on the Czechoslovaks' part to emerge from the Kremlin's patronage was discerned at the FO. This, in turn, made it easier for Britain to decide to make certain gestures of support to Czechoslovakia, purely for propaganda purposes. Broader British engagement in defending its influences in the country, given the prospect of potential conflict with the USSR, was not even considered by the FO.

125 Edita Ivaničková, 'Britská politika a Slovensko v rokach 1939–1945', in *Slovensko na konci druhej svetovej vojny (stav, východiská a perspektívy)*, ed. by Valerián Bystrický and Štefan Fano (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 1994), pp. 125–30 (pp. 128–29); Prečan, *V kradeném čase*, pp. 88–90; Vnuk, *Rebelanti a Suplikanti*, pp. 138–39.

It is also not surprising that when, in late 1944, the subject of state independence of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (known by Moscow as Transcarpathian Ukraine) arose in Czechoslovak-Soviet relations, the FO only monitored it rather than assuming an official position. Following Beneš's visit to Moscow, London was confident that the matter had been settled positively in Czechoslovakia's favour. Hence the surprise of both the Czechoslovak and the British government at the Soviets' actions regarding Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which they began to incorporate into the USSR.[126] Czechoslovak politicians regarded not only the very fact of losing part of the area of the pre-Munich Republic, which Beneš was willing to accept, but especially attributing the demanded cession to the will of the local population, as also endangering other disputed Czechoslovak territories where foreign national groups (German, Hungarian and Polish) formed the majority. The situation was further complicated by the appearance of agitation in favour of the establishment of a Slovak Soviet republic and its annexation to the USSR that was conducted by certain communist partisan units in Slovakia, which was evidence of an element of Soviet blackmail of the Czechoslovak government and an instrument of pressure regarding Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Initially, Czechoslovak diplomats tried to proclaim the view that the whole issue was the result of an independent operation by Red Army officers of Ukrainian origin taking place without the Kremlin's knowledge,[127] a version at first believed by the FO. In late December, however, the Soviet government announced that it saw the drive to annex Transcarpathian Ukraine to the USSR as an "expression of the will of the local people" and fully respected it. According to the Soviet government, it could not thwart such intentions as any actions it took to prevent a "spontaneous operation" to annex this province to the Soviet Union would have been interference in internal Czechoslovak affairs. This was prohibited by the December 1943 treaty, which, they claimed, they wished to adhere to.[128] Beneš was shocked by this declaration but decided to accept the situation without an official protest. He intended to discuss this issue during his visit to the USSR that would take place during the Czechoslovak government's planned return to its country from exile, via Moscow.[129] Beneš also concluded that it was essential to visit Slovakia as soon as possible to counteract any attempts to Sovietise this part of the Czechoslovak Republic.

126 'Doc. No. 170 and 171, 5 December 1944, RLUZ resolution and decree', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 365–67; 'Doc. No 219, 5 December 1944, RLUZ letter to E. Beneš', in *DMDČSV*, IV, II, pp. 289–90.
127 Letter from P. Nichols to F. K. Roberts, 20 December 1944, TNA, FO 371/38921, C17903/35/12, pp. 175–76.
128 Eduard Táborský, 'Benešovy moskevské cesty', *Svědectví*, 89/90 (1990), 61–84 (p. 75).
129 'Doc. No. 204, 30 December 1944, E. Beneš's instruction for Z. Fierlinger', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 420–23; 'Doc. No. 205, 30 December 1944, extract from report by H. Ripka on a conversation with I. A. Chichaev and F. T. Gusev', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 424–25; 'Doc. No. 207, 1 January 1945 and No. 208, 2 January 1945, reports by E. Beneš on a conversation with I. A. Chichaev', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 428–30; 'Doc. No. 211, 4 January 1945, instruction from E. Beneš for F. Němec', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 435–37.

By early January 1945, it was already obvious that Czechoslovakia had lost Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Píka reported from Moscow that anyone voicing objections to the province's annexation to the USSR was treated as an enemy of the Soviet state and accused of undemocratic views and even fascism. It became effectively impossible to organise anything on behalf of the Czechoslovak Republic in Subcarpathian Ruthenia.[130] Nevertheless, the Czechoslovak government expressed its view that this matter would not disturb the Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship and accepted its resolution through an agreement, but only after the question of Czechoslovakia's other borders had been settled at a postwar peace conference.[131] Stalin graciously consented to delay the issue until the period following the war with the Germans.[132] This allayed Beneš's fears over Slovakia's future, yet the entire situation clearly showed how much the future of the Republic depended on Moscow's good will and confirmed the Czechoslovak émigré government's satellite status in relation to the Kremlin.

At the FO, meanwhile, the Soviet actions were interpreted as a Kremlin game that was calculated to persuade the Czechoslovak government to swiftly recognise as the government of Poland the Polish Committee of National Liberation, set up in Moscow on Stalin's orders and operating in Lublin, and mobilise the Czechoslovak government to travel to Slovakia, where they would be subject to increased Soviet pressure and simultaneously distanced from British influences. Doubts remained over whether the Kremlin really intended to separate Subcarpathian Ruthenia from the Czechoslovak Republic and annex it to the USSR.[133] In any case, the Soviet government's actions were interpreted as the latest manifestation of Soviet imperialism, interference in internal Czechoslovak affairs, and breaking agreements made previously with Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, the British warned their Czechoslovak counterparts against succumbing to Soviet pressure for quick recognition of the Lublin Committee as the Polish government in return for a positive solution to the Cieszyn question for Czechoslovakia.[134] These warnings proved to be as justified as they were unsuccessful. Concerns that rejecting the Kremlin's wishes could lead the Soviets to form a committee in Slovakia – modelled on the Lublin Committee – and ultimately to its separation from the Czechoslovak Republic resulted in acceptance of the Soviet proposition. This decision was not

130 'Doc. No. 209, 3 January 1945, extract of a report by H. Píka for MNO', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 430–32.
131 'Doc. No. 219, 12 January 1945, instruction – circular by H. Ripka on the position regarding Subcarpathian Ruthenia', in ČSVDJ, II, pp. 451–53.
132 Táborský, Eduard, 'Beneš a náš osud', *Svědectví*, 89/90 (1990), p.86.
133 Minute by A. F. C. Gatehouse, 15 January 1945, TNA, FO 371/47077, N442/28/12, pp. 16–17.
134 Záznam o rozhovoru s majorem W. Barkerem, 19 January 1945 (manuscript – unsigned), AÚTGM, fond 38, box 9, file 23. Telegram No. 397 from A. Eden to J. Balfour, 25 January 1945, PRO 371/47120, N655/650/12, pp. 9–10; Telegram no. 25 from DO to governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Union of South Africa, 29 January 1945, pp. 14–15.

approved by the FO, although it was expected at least from mid-January. The Czechoslovak government's motives were understood and the British side had no particular complaints.[135]

The increasingly pressing problem of the Czechoslovak government's return home – dependent, of course, on the progress of the Soviet offensive – led to major concerns among émigré politicians and in the FO over whether leaving the United Kingdom too soon could lead to their being cut off from the outside world and practical isolation behind the Soviet front. Furthermore, the domestic situation meant that lengthy hesitation on this matter was also impossible. Awaiting the end of the war in London could prove to be dangerous if the Soviets decided to appoint a temporary administration in the territory they controlled, which could easily be transformed into a Czechoslovak government competing with the structures formed by Beneš. The FO did not establish an official position on this subject. One can assume that, given the developing British-Soviet controversies on various other issues, especially the Polish question, British diplomacy was reluctant to increase its involvement in the Czechoslovak authorities' delicate game with Moscow, in which, moreover, they had neither significant goals nor effective instruments to influence the Kremlin's decisions; finally, British diplomats were not particularly encouraged by the Czechoslovaks to participate. They were therefore happy to leave it entirely up to Czechoslovak diplomacy to play the game and deal with any results that might come from it.

Beneš arrived in Moscow on 17 March 1945, together with a large section of the Czechoslovak government. While the representative setting of the visit was similar to that prepared in December 1943, the atmosphere of this set of talks was quite different. The main themes were the Soviets' equipping of the Czechoslovak army, the cession of Subcarpathian Ruthenia to the USSR, and the Red Army's actions in Czechoslovak territory. During Beneš's stay in Czechoslovakia, the country's government was also reconstructed. News of this change reached London in rudimentary form and with much delay. According to the information gleaned by Roberts directly from Beneš, Molotov had promised him support on all the key issues: returning to the pre-Munich borders, transfer of the German and Hungarian population from the Republic, and Poland's acquisition of Cieszyn Silesia. The president pronounced himself very satisfied with the discussions with the Soviets.[136] The composition of the new government

135 Note from A. Eden to W. Churchill, 18 January 1945, TNA, FO 954/4A, P.M./45/37, pp. 41–42; Telegram from O. Sargent to A. Eden, 29 January 1945, TNA, Cab. 121/454, p. 271; report from H. Ripka, 29 January 1945 on conversations between J. Masaryk and H. Ripka and British, American and French diplomats, AÚTGM, fond EB, složka EBL 104/1, krabice č. 342, Mezinárodní vztahy Velká Británie, pp. 11–15.

136 Letter from F. K. Roberts to A. Eden, 16 April 1945, TNA, FO 371/47076, N4886/27/12.

(officially announced in Košice on 7 April) proved to be dominated by communists and their partisans, which absolutely did not reflect the support enjoyed by these political forces in society. Its prime minister was Fierlinger – long associated with Moscow – which for the British represented a clear signal of the scale of the new Czechoslovak government's reliance on the Kremlin.

However, thoughts of sustaining Prague's ties with the West were not abandoned. Certain possibilities in this respect were seen in the development of cultural cooperation as well as maintaining military relations through Czechoslovak units' return from Britain along with their equipment, although it was intended to consult the USSR on this issue. Yet reality soon tested the British plans. The Soviet government caused huge problems even regarding the return of the diplomatic corps to soon-to-be-liberated Prague, forcing both Britain and the United States to delay the departure of their own representatives to Czechoslovakia. Moscow's domination in all issues concerning Czechoslovakia seemed unassailable.

In mid-April, however, something of an opportunity for change arose. On 12 April, when leading American units were around 40 miles from the western border of Czechoslovakia, the idea emerged at the FO to ask Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, the Allies' commanding officer on the Western Front, to command his armies to advance and capture Prague before the Soviets did so. Eden was strongly in favour, and Churchill called the idea "the strategic problem of policy at the time".[137] For the FO, it was clear that such a turn of events would allow the Americans and British to send their missions to Prague without requesting Moscow's approval. Such a step, it was thought, would be hugely important not only for postwar Czechoslovak fortunes, but also for the entire region. Yet certain problems were also discerned that could result from the lack of an agreement with the Czechoslovak government concerning the rules for the American and British armies' stay in the Republic, as well as the anticipated tensions when they encountered Soviet forces, but these were dismissed as immaterial compared to the ensuing benefits. Despite this, the FO considered the possibility of the Wehrmacht holding strongly defended positions in Moravia even when the Americans were already in Prague, thus isolating the Czechoslovak government in Košice from the capital. In these circumstances, it was deemed more important for Nichols to be able to accompany Beneš as early as possible, without waiting for him to arrive

137 Churchill, *Druga Wojna Światowa*, VI (1996), II, pp. 131–32.

in Prague, meaning that his journey through the Soviet-controlled area would remain a valid concern.[138]

The Americans rejected the British suggestion, however, justifying their position with military concerns. Churchill spoke to Eisenhower in person, but neither this nor his intervention with Eden in Washington were able to change this stance. The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces were also informed of the steps taken, and it was noted that the "present aim of His Majesty's Government is to strengthen Dr. Benes' hand against communists and Russians and against any separatist tendencies. We should like to see Government for whole Czechoslovakia established in Prague as soon as possible. His Majesty's Government have urged on United States Government and American Chiefs of Staff great political advantage of General Eisenhower's forces penetrating as far as possible into Czechoslovakia and liberating Prague if possible".[139] Their objective was to exert pressure not only from the British side but also from the US president and general staff on Eisenhower to change his plans in line with British suggestions.[140] Unfortunately, President Harry Truman approved Eisenhower's position. Churchill was left with no option other than to express his full confidence in the competences of the Allied commander on the Western Front.[141] Eden, however, believed that it was political, not military, factors that had influenced the US general's decision. "The occupation of Prague by the Americans did not expose them to any danger from Germany, yet Eisenhower refrained from advancing the forces under his command forward upon receiving the opinion of the Soviet command. The Americans' failure to enter Prague meant that the Red Army could permanently put the people it trusted in power", he wrote in his diaries.[142] Receiving word of the outbreak of an uprising in Prague on 5 May 1945, Churchill again appealed to the Allied supreme command in the West to command the US Third Army to march on the Czechoslovak capital, but this appeal went unanswered.[143] Amid Soviet opposition, there was also no agreement to the RAF Czechoslovak squadrons being sent to help the uprising. Ultimately,

138 Minute by O. Sargent for W. Churchill, No. P.M./O.S./45/6, 18 April 1945, TNA, FO 371/47121, N4174/650/G12; Telegram No. 1994, from FO to British Embassy in Moscow, 21 April 1945 (received 22 April 1945) – no page numbering.
139 Telegram No. 50 from FO to SHAEF, 2 May 1945, TNA, FO 1049/19, N4701/207/G.
140 Minute by O. Sargent for W. Churchill, No. P.M./O.S./45/42, 29 April 1945, TNA, FO 954/4A, p. 58; *Draft message from the Prime Minister to President Truman*, pp. 59–60; Telegram No. 4353, from W. Churchill to H. Truman, 30 April 1945, p. 61.
141 Telegram No. 4435 from FO to British Embassy in Washington, 2 May 1945, containing telegram No. 30, from W. Churchill to H. Truman, 2 May 1945, TNA, FO PRO FO 954/4A, p. 64 (or TNA, FO 371/47121, N4548/650/G); Minute by O. Sargent for W. Churchill, No. PM/OS/45/76, 6 May 1945, p. 68; Copy of a Minute (Ref: C.O.S. 644/5) dated 2 May 1945 from Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee to the Prime Minister, TNA, FO 371/47121, N4548/650/G; Extract from COS (45) 115th Meeting, 2 May 1945, Operations in Czechoslovakia.
142 Anthony Eden, *Pamiętniki*, 1938–1945 (Warszawa: PAX, 1970–1972), II (1972), p. 420.
143 Churchill, *Druga Wojna Światowa*, IV (1996), p. 180.

the Red Army captured Prague on 9 May. The diplomatic battle that London had waged with the Allied military command and US government for American forces to enter the city – which could have had a major political impact on the future of the Republic – therefore ended in defeat. HM Government clearly discerned a threat in the USSR dominating not only Czechoslovakia but the whole of East-Central Europe. Without support from the United States, however, it was unable to resist it alone. Despite its efforts to engage American forces in the game against the Soviets, Washington's failure to understand the British intentions and the importance of the solutions it was proposing meant that they came to nothing. This was also the moment of the defeat of the Third Reich, meaning an end to the war in Europe.

The previous political elites failed to oppose the communists, who, with Moscow's support, had taken control of key positions in the Czechoslovak government. Although Beneš again took office as president, his actual influence on political life in the reconstructed state was increasingly minimal. Finally, in February 1948, the communists assumed full power in the Republic, amid passivity from the ambassadors of the English-speaking powers and supine acceptance from the president.[144] Czechoslovakia was now under full control of the USSR and would remain so until 1989.

144 Marek Kazimierz Kamiński, *Polska i Czechosłowacja w polityce Stanów Zjednoczonych i Wielkiej Brytanii 1945–1948* (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 1991), pp. 283–328.

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