

Introduction.

By the time the Soviet Union entered the Second World War in June 1941, the France of the Third Republic, so familiar to Moscow throughout the inter-war period, was already out of it. The rapid French collapse of May – June 1940, which David Reynolds referred to as the “fulcrum of the twentieth century”,¹ had greatly astonished the Kremlin. It had not been expected that the French military, regarded as one of the strongest in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, or even the French political leadership, however weak and venal it may often have been, would be crushed so quickly. As George-Henri Soutou revealed,² relations between Vichy France and the Soviet Union were not bad, but after June 1941, the start of the German aggression and the beginning of the Great Patriotic War for the USSR, “the past was all forgotten”, as the British statesman Lord Beaverbrook put it in 1942.³ A new page in the history of the Second World War and Soviet-French relations had been turned.

Vichy’s joining Nazi Germany in the war against the Soviet Union, breaking off diplomatic relations on the 30th June and later sending troops to the Soviet-German front, had an immense impact on Moscow’s position on France during 1941–1945. Using the dichotomy between the “real” and “symbolic” France, as made by Joseph V. Stalin, head of the Soviet Government, during the Tehran Conference of 1943,⁴ it might be said that, for Moscow, particularly during the first years of the war, it was Vichy that was the “real” France fighting against the USSR while the Resistance movement headed by General Charles de Gaulle represented rather the “symbolic” one. Certainly, the Resistance, which was actively harming Germany, was endorsed and supported by Moscow: the internal Resistance primarily through the channels of the French Communist party (PCF) and special agents sent to occupied France,⁵ and the external Resistance, represented by de Gaulle and his organisations, “Free France” and later “Fighting France”, by more traditional diplomatic means. One sign of this was the official recognition of de Gaulle as the “leader of all Free French wherever they were” who joined him in “supporting the cause of the Allies”, made on the 26th September 1941.⁶

¹ David Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 23.

² Georges-Henri Soutou, “Vichy et Moscou, de 1940 à 1941,” *Relations internationales*, vol. 107 (2001), pp. 361–374.

³ National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey [Hereafter NA] CAB/66/22 Russia. Note by the Minister of War Production, W.P. (42) 71 (7th February 1942).

⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers* [Hereafter FRUS]. *The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran 1943* (Washington: GPO, 1961), p. 514.

⁵ Donal O’Sullivan, “Dealing with the Devil: The Anglo-Soviet Parachute Agents (Operation ‘Pickaxe’),” *Journal of Intelligence History*, vol. 4 (2004), pp. 33–63.

⁶ Andrei A. Gromyko et al., eds., *Sovetsko-frantsuzskie otnosheniya vo vremya Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny, 1941–1945: Dokumenty i materialy* [Soviet-French relations during the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945: Documents and materials] [Hereafter – SFO], vol. 1 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1983), pp. 51–52.

The narrative of the Soviet Union having warmly supported de Gaulle while the latter had been frustrated by the frostier attitudes of London and Washington during the War became an important theme in the post-war memoirs of several Soviet officials⁷ and in the Soviet historiography of Soviet-French relations in general.⁸ The most vivid symbol of this Soviet-French friendship was the French Normandie-Niemen fighter squadron which fought against the Wehrmacht on the Soviet-German front from March 1943.⁹

Taking into account the rather “special” relations which existed between the Soviet Union and France even during the Cold War,¹⁰ the wartime experience was regarded as a good example of mutually beneficial cooperation between states with different social, economic and political systems. It is indicative in this sense that even the Soviet diplomatic records of the Tehran Conference of 1943, published in 1978, were corrected in such a way as to not offend Paris on account of some of Stalin’s remarks about de Gaulle.¹¹ The time of détente and good relations with Valéry Giscard d’Éstaing was not ripe for stinging remarks about the recognised French leader, even if made in the past. The Soviets were not alone in such alterations. Earlier the same pattern, for example, had been seen in Winston Churchill’s memoirs, where some war-time estimations of Dwight Eisenhower, US President at the publication of the memoirs, were omitted,¹² or in the memoirs of de Gaulle himself, written in the 1950s, where the General presented his Soviet policy during the war as tougher than it had been in reality.¹³

Using new archival and published documental evidence, this paper attempts to give a more correct picture of the French vector of Soviet foreign policy during 1943–45. I have taken as my starting point the “decisive turn” of the winter – summer of 1943 on the Eastern Front and in the War in general, marked by the great Soviet victories at Stalingrad and Kursk and the Western Allies’ victories in Italy and the Atlantic, taking the analysis up to the Yalta Conference of February 1945, which, according to common opinion, shaped the post-war order in Europe and

⁷ See, for example, the memoirs of the Soviet naval attaché in London during the War: Nikolai M. Kharlamov, *Trudnaya missiya* [Difficult mission] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983).

⁸ Yurii V. Borisov, *Sovetsko-frantsuzskie otnosheniya (1924-1945 gg.)* [Soviet-French relations (1924–1945)] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1964); Vera Antyukhina-Moskovchenko, *Sharl’ de Gol’ i Sovetskii Soyuz* [Charles de Gaulle and the Soviet Union] (Moscow: Mysl’, 1990), et al.

⁹ See, for example, the introductory words of the Chief Air Marshal Alexander A. Novikov, commander of the Soviet Air Forces in 1942–1946 in: Vasilii I. Lukashin, *Protiv obshchego vraga* [Against the common enemy] 2nd ed. (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976), pp. 4–6.

¹⁰ These relations were marked by active cooperation in the spheres of economics, trade, space and others, and conducted by the established mechanism of bilateral political consultations, something not so frequent in the contacts of countries from opposing blocs.

¹¹ Aleksei A. Gromyko et al., eds., *Sovetskii Soyuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiyakh perioda Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny 1941-1945 gg.* [The Soviet Union at the international conferences of the period of the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945], vol. 2 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1978). See on this topic: Geoffrey Roberts, “Stalin at the Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam Conferences,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 9 (2007), pp. 6–40.

¹² David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (New York: Random House, 2005), pp. 437–438.

¹³ Georges-Henri Soutou, “La France Libre et la place de l’URSS dans le système européen”, in Georges-Henri Soutou et Émilie Robin Hivert, dir., *L’URSS et l’Europe, de 1941 à 1957* (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008), p. 137.

worldwide. Three important themes are emphasised in this paper. The first is that of Moscow's attitude to the French leaders headed by de Gaulle. The second is the evolution of the Soviet position with respect to France. The third is that of Soviet estimations regarding the place of France in the post-war world. This paper expands on the themes raised in the recent publication "Correspondence between I.V. Stalin, F. Roosevelt and W. Churchill during the Great Patriotic War. Documental research", published in May 2015 by MGIMO-University Professor Vladimir O. Pechatnov and myself as junior co-author.¹⁴

Formulating a position in a shifting environment: the Soviet view of French policy in January – May 1943.

The year 1943, crucial for the course of the Second World War in general, was also very important for the Soviet position on de Gaulle. As formerly supposed, "it was only in 1943 that Stalin began to take de Gaulle seriously".¹⁵ On the 27th January, during his meeting with Roger Garreau, the representative of "Fighting France" in Moscow, Stalin said to him that he "would never recognise another France" than that represented by "Fighting France".¹⁶

The growing interest in de Gaulle had been evident in Soviet diplomatic circles since late 1942. The detailed reference note on the National Committee of "Fighting France" (at 49 pages) was compiled in the Soviet embassy to the Allied governments-in-exile in London on 12th December.¹⁷ Many of the estimates in this reference note would persist later. Opinions concerning de Gaulle were mainly positive: his military views were appreciated (his book "Towards the Professional Army" of 1934 witnessing "his understanding of the character of modern warfare and of the role of armoured and mechanised troops in it"); his attitude to the Soviet Union was regarded as favourable; and his ideal, a "strong and independent France", provoked no critical remarks. One litmus test was de Gaulle's favourable attitude to Pierre Cot, one of the pronounced pro-Soviet politicians who received approval constantly from the different Soviet diplomats.¹⁸

De Gaulle was preferred to his rival General Henri Giraud, who, according to the Soviet information in the abovementioned reference note, had "expressed his fidelity to Pétain".¹⁹ He established communications with the US embassy in Vichy

¹⁴ Vladimir O. Pechatnov, and Iskander E. Magadeev, *Perepiska I.V. Stalina s F. Ruzvel'tom i U. Cherkhillom v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny. Dokumental'noe issledovanie* [Correspondence between I.V. Stalin, F. Roosevelt and W. Churchill during the Great Patriotic War. Documental research], vol. 1-2 (Moscow: Olma Media grupp, 2015).

¹⁵ Soutou, "La France Libre", p. 143.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Archive of foreign policy of the Russian Federation], Moscow [Hereafter – AVP RF]. F[ond]. 136. Op[is]. 27. P[apka]. 183. D[elo]. 4. L[ist]. 1-49. Reference note on the National Committee of Fighting France (12th December 1942).

¹⁸ AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 51, 108 From Dekanozov's diary (16th February 1944, 11th July 1944).

¹⁹ The Soviet embassy to the Allied governments-in-exile in London would later manage to get hold of some memoranda sent by Giraud to Pétain in 1942. See: AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 183. D. 4. L. 58-98. Bogomolov to Lozovsky (24th April 1943).

and consented to take part in the planning of the American operation in French North Africa. According to common opinion of all Frenchmen in London, Giraud is a reactionary like Weygand, an ardent adversary of communists and enemy of the policy of the united front".²⁰

What worried the Soviet diplomats about de Gaulle were his unwillingness to formulate a clear political program (he desired to assemble all forces irrespective of their political affiliations) and, particularly, his entourage. Two powerful commissars, René Pleven (Foreign Affairs and Colonies) and André Diethelm (Finances), were regarded by the Soviet officials as "the men of the Comité des forges" and the main authors of Maurice Dejean's dismissal from the post of Commissar for Foreign Affairs in October 1942. On the contrary, Dejean, who had a reputation as a "Red Commissar", won some sympathies of Soviet officials. Along with Pleven and Diethelm, another object of Soviet suspicions was Colonel Passy (André Dewavrin), chief of de Gaulle's Secret Service. The information which Aleksandr E. Bogomolov, the Soviet Ambassador to the Allied governments-in-exile in London, obtained about Passy from talks with various French politicians in London was very negative: he was suspected of having had relations with the pro-Fascist Cagoulauds movement before the War, of maintaining connections with Pétain, and of being a puppet of the British Secret Intelligence Service.²¹ The negative opinion of the Soviet Foreign Office (officially known as the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, NKID) about de Gaulle's entourage was shared by Comintern. Georgi Dimitrov, head of the latter, wrote in his diary on the 23rd December: "De Gaulle's entourage is repulsive and full of spies".²²

Beside political and ideological factors, what really interested the Kremlin were the actual capabilities of de Gaulle and his organisation. Though the number of troops of "Fighting France" increased (from 35,000 in November 1940 to over 60,000 in December 1942),²³ it remained modest, and the position of de Gaulle himself was insecure. Though things improved somewhat after the meeting with Churchill, Roosevelt and Giraud in the Anfa Hotel at Casablanca, NKID and Comintern officials were cautious not to be overfriendly with de Gaulle.

It was not totally clear in the beginning of 1943 how consolidated the positions of de Gaulle in the interior and exterior Resistance movement were and what would be his future. Vladimir G. Dekanozov, the influential Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, wrote to Dimitrov on the 7th February, referring to the telegrams of Bogomolov: "Comrade Bogomolov considers that it is hardly expedient to conclude the formal agreement between the [French] Communist

²⁰ 'United front' – the term used to designate joint actions of communists and other forces fighting against the Nazis.

²¹ AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 184. D. 10. L. 2ob, 13, 30-31. From Bogomolov's diary (30th April, 1943; 17th May 1943, 29th May 1943)

²² Ivo Banac, ed., *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933-1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 251.

²³ AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 183. D. 4. L. 41. Reference note on the National Committee of Fighting France (12th December 1942).

Party and de Gaulle now, he thinks that this should wait till the position of de Gaulle becomes clear in the actual situation”.²⁴ Following Dekanozov’s ideas, on the 8th February, Dimitrov made recommendations to two leading French communists in Moscow, Maurice Thorez and André Marty, on “not concluding a formal agreement, but rather confining ourselves for now to mutual declarations of a joint struggle by Communists and Gaullists against the occupiers and on maximum intensification of that struggle in France itself”. The idea of Marty’s trip to London to meet the Gaullists and, possibly, to sign these “mutual declarations” was not abandoned in February-March, as evidenced by Dimitrov’s diary, though it would finally be dropped in July in view of British and Gaullist opposition.²⁵

Another circumstance influencing NKID and Comintern estimations of de Gaulle was more ideological. Bogomolov and Dimitrov were highly suspicious of the political orientations and credibility of the Gaullists. In the beginning of February, Dimitrov, having been informed by Marty about his discussions with General Ernest Petit, head of the French military mission in Moscow, had warned the French communist “once again to be extremely cautious, because all such persons as Petit are intelligence agents”.²⁶ Bogomolov’s impressions of Petit were more positive²⁷ but, in general, his opinions of de Gaulle were very cautious. In March, he cabled to Moscow that “antagonisms between Gaullists supported by Communists and the followers of General Giraud appeared in France. These disputes do not signify that de Gaulle is more democratic than Giraud. They are both anti-democratic and reactionaries. But de Gaulle is closer to the National Resistance Front in France”.²⁸

Internal estimates within the NKID were not quite as uniform as is sometimes indicated by scholars. There were more positive estimations of de Gaulle coming from the Soviet Ambassador to Great Britain Ivan M. Maisky. In January, when contemplating the possible body to govern those parts of the French colonial empire which had broken away from Vichy, he summed up the Soviet position in his diary in the following manner: “The aim of all of this is to create a more authoritative French centre which could be more independent in regard of England and the USA. Moscow does not want to be drawn into the game of the General’s ambitions. It is not recommended that any declaration be made to the British government. But de Gaulle is preferable to Giraud”.²⁹ Later, in June, Maisky stressed two key factors as to why it was that de Gaulle outweighed Giraud in

²⁴ Dekanozov to Dimitrov (7th February 1943). Cited in: Mikhaïl M. Narinski, “Moscou et le Parti communiste français pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale (1942 – 1944)”, in Soutou et Hivert, dir., *L’URSS et l’Europe*, p. 233.

²⁵ Banac, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, pp. 259, 261-263, 282.

²⁶ Ibid., 259.

²⁷ AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 184. D. 10. L. 1. From Bogomolov’s diary (16th May 1943).

²⁸ Cited in: Marina Ts. Arzakanyan, “Le rapprochement franco-soviétique pendant la Seconde guerre mondiale”, in Soutou et Hivert, dir., *L’URSS et l’Europe*, p. 133.

²⁹ Ivan M. Maiskii, *Dnevnik diplomata. London. 1934–1943* [A diplomat’s diary. London. 1934–1943], vol. 2, pt. 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 2009), p. 192.

Moscow's eyes: the former took an "uncompromising attitude" towards Germany and Vichy and supported "the restoration of a democratic regime".³⁰

On the contrary, Giraud and former Vichy followers, Moscow thought, had preference over de Gaulle in the eyes of London and Washington. The Soviet Ambassador to Washington, Alexei A. Gromyko, repeatedly emphasised the idea that "undoubtedly the English and the Americans want to obtain the union of the Frenchmen at the expense of de Gaulle's concessions and the weakening of his influence. That would mean the relative strengthening of Giraud's positions"³¹. De Gaulle himself supported such a conceptual dichotomy. On the 11th May, speaking to Bogomolov, he underlined: "My contradictions with Giraud are the contradictions between the position of France and that of the United States".³²

Information about the pro-Vichy sympathies of Washington also came through intelligence channels. Some reports by the People's Commissariat of State Security (NKGB), one of the main Soviet foreign intelligence agencies, laid it on thick stating that "there is an opinion that the American government without doubt would make a deal with Pétain if it had such a possibility".³³ Regarding Giraud as more accommodating to the British and the Americans, Moscow had an important motive to support de Gaulle as a rather more independent leader who might pursue a more balanced policy, not solely based on recommendations from Washington and London.

Nevertheless, in May 1943, de Gaulle's score was not very high in NKID circles. While attending the results of the de Gaulle – Giraud negotiations on the new overseas Resistance body, Bogomolov was not particularly encouraging to de Gaulle, informing him rather evasively that "the general position of the USSR is to support and sympathise with all anti-Hitlerite forces, which are participating in one way or another in the struggle against Hitlerite Germany."³⁴ The meeting that took place with de Gaulle on the 26th May, before the General's departure to Algiers for negotiations with Giraud, left Bogomolov with a bad impression: "... from the very beginning it was clear that de Gaulle had given up in his struggle against Giraud and is going to Algiers in a very nasty mood".³⁵ Dejean, whose opinion was rather important for Bogomolov, played his role in shaping the low Soviet estimate of de Gaulle's chances. During a meeting on the 22nd May, Dejean was highly critical of de Gaulle. He told Bogomolov that de Gaulle had retreated from his position on the creation of a provisional French government (only an executive committee would be created), had given in to the Americans on the question of the

³⁰ Ibid., p. 319.

³¹ SFO, vol. 1, p. 218-219. See also: Ibid., p. 227-228.

³² AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 184. D. 10. L. 15. From Bogomolov's diary (28th May 1943).

³³ Nikolai P. Patrushev et al., eds., *Organy gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine: Sbornik dokumentov* [The state security agencies of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War: Collection of documents] [Hereafter – OGB] vol. 4, pt. 2 (Moscow: Rus', 2008), p. 283.

³⁴ AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 184. D. 10. L. 16. From Bogomolov's diary (28th May 1943).

³⁵ Ibid. L. 4. From Bogomolov's diary (30th May 1943).

military command and, finally, Dejean criticised de Gaulle's "childish policy" regarding the British: "De Gaulle amused himself for a long time making silly scenes to Churchill and now he pays for it by being left without [British] support in the face of the USA".³⁶

Rapprochement with caution: The Kremlin, NKID and de Gaulle in June-October 1943.

It seems that creation of the French Committee of National Liberation (CFLN) in Algiers on the 3rd June (with de Gaulle and Giraud as co-presidents) was responsible for pushing de Gaulle's ratings in Moscow higher. The General was undoubtedly not written-off. In the instructions sent by People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav M. Molotov to Bogomolov on the 16th June, the day after receiving the British note about the CFLN and one day before Garreau asked for Soviet recognition of the Committee, there was more of Maisky's earlier ideas than the estimations of Bogomolov and Dimitrov. Molotov emphasised the fact that de Gaulle had wider support in France than Giraud and that the former maintained an unappeasable attitude to Vichy and Nazi Germany.³⁷

In addition to the establishment of the CFLN, the successful mission of Jean Moulin to France, crowned in May 1943 by the creation of the National Council of the Resistance which expressed its support for de Gaulle,³⁸ also gave the General more weight in the eyes of Moscow.³⁹ Furthermore, taking into account the role and influence of French communists in the home Resistance, the rapprochement between the latter and de Gaulle was a guarantee for Moscow that de Gaulle's attitudes to Vichy would remain firm and that his foreign policy stance would not be anti-Soviet. In talks with Frenchmen in London, Bogomolov stressed the idea that Gaullism in France and Gaullism in London were not the same thing: the former was regarded as a movement linked to broader social and political forces, whereas the latter represented more narrow political strata.⁴⁰ The stronger the representatives of the home Resistance were in the CFLN, the better it was for Moscow.

NKID actions were fully in tune with Stalin's position. The specificity of the latter consisted in the broader view of Soviet diplomacy as a whole that Stalin was better placed to have. Moreover, he was sometimes able to overstep ideological barriers, the sort of action that would have been risky for other Soviet officials. The episode of November-December 1942 when Stalin approved the American deal with Admiral Jean François Darlan against the opinions of Molotov, Maisky and

³⁶ Ibid. L. 7-8. From Bogomolov's diary (29th May 1943).

³⁷ AVP RF. F. 059. Op. 10. P. 23. D. 183. L. 106-107. Molotov to Bogomolov (16th June 1943).

³⁸ SFO, vol. 1, p. 187.

³⁹ Soutou, "La France Libre", p. 143.

⁴⁰ AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 184. D. 10. L. 13. From Bogomolov's diary (29th May 1943).

Ambassador to the USA Maxim M. Litvinov might be cited as proof of Stalin's ability to be pragmatic.⁴¹

Stalin preferred de Gaulle to Giraud but did not want the "French question" to prejudice the main thrust of his diplomacy – the relations with the USA and Great Britain that resolution of the crucial, "second front" issue depended on. The fact that de Gaulle's attempts, made from 1942 onwards, to organise a personal meeting with Stalin failed (in April 1943, the General even tried to interest the Kremlin dictator by effecting eventual contact with his son Yakov who was in the German camps),⁴² certainly demonstrated that too close a rapprochement with the CFLN did not constitute a priority for Moscow. Various grandiose ideas emerging from de Gaulle's entourage (in August 1943, the director of his cabinet, Gaston Palevsky, said to the Soviet representative in Algiers that "all important affairs of post-war Europe would be decided by two powers – the USSR and France"⁴³) also failed to improve the image of CFLN in Stalin's eyes.

Stalin's actions on the question of CFLN recognition during the summer of 1943 revealed the above-mentioned pattern. After Molotov expressed to the British Ambassador Archibald C. Kerr the Soviet desire to recognise the CFLN according to the French formula ("as the body, capable henceforth of leading French military efforts and of supporting inter-Allied cooperation and providing for and defending all the interests of France"), Churchill, in a personal message of the 23rd June, asked Stalin to wait. The latter consented,⁴⁴ not because he was accustomed to giving in, but because relations with the British were of more importance in his eyes than those with the French. This was particularly true during the summer of 1943 when Stalin, seeing how the Italian armistice negotiations were proceeding, wanted to increase Soviet participation in the Anglo-American dialogue. In a message of the 22nd August, proposal he made to Roosevelt and Churchill that a tripartite military-political commission be created "for consideration of problems related to negotiations with various Governments falling away from Germany"⁴⁵ was a clear sign of this intention. The time was not ripe for disputes with London and Washington on the "French question".

At the same time, the desire persisted to demonstrate that the Soviet Union had a more friendly approach to the CFLN than the USA or Great Britain. It revealed itself in the formula of the joint recognition of the CFLN made on the 26th August. When passing on this news to Raymond Schmittlein, Garreau's deputy in Moscow, Molotov characterised the Soviet formula of recognition as being merely "more brief and more simple" than the American and the British one, but in reality it was more than that: the CFLN was recognised by Moscow as "the representative of the

⁴¹ Pechatnov and Magadeev, *Perepiska*, pp. 293, 298-302.

⁴² SFO, vol. 1, p. 259.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 253.

⁴⁴ Pechatnov and Magadeev, *Perepiska*, vol. 1, pp. 489-490.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 531.

national interests of the French Republic and the governing body of all French patriots, fighting against Hitlerite tyranny”,⁴⁶ which gave it far more weight than the British or American formulations. The French Foreign Ministry later saw in this Soviet formula a desire to conserve the “advance” over the British and Americans on the question of recognition that had already been acquired in 1942.⁴⁷

Another important motive of Moscow for granting such a formula was to strengthen the position de Gaulle, who was associated with the idea of CFLN as a prototype of provisional government. Earlier in June, reacting to Churchill’s message to Stalin, Molotov wrote to Bogomolov: “As you see, the English and the Americans continue to postpone the recognition of the Committee trying, possibly, to obtain full submission of de Gaulle to Giraud, that is in fact, submission to their line on the question of the attitude to the French Committee and to French affairs in general, or even trying to obtain de Gaulle’s elimination”.⁴⁸ De Gaulle’s steps subsequent to the recognition of CFLN, first of all the creation of the Consultative Assembly in Algiers on the 17th September “in which all shades of opinion were represented, including the Communists”,⁴⁹ proved to Moscow the value of the steps it had taken. The CFLN’s prevarication over the agreement to receive a Soviet diplomatic representative in Algiers “produced some discontent in the Kremlin”⁵⁰ (according to the French Foreign Ministry estimate) but did not give rise to any profound change in the Soviet position.

De Gaulle’s next attempt to organise a visit to Moscow (in the autumn of 1943 he spoke about this with the Soviet representative in Algiers, Avalov, alias of the Soviet intelligence officer Ivan I. Agayants) met with a warmer response than in the past. On the 13th October, Bogomolov, who had finally obtained French consent to arrive in Algiers, informed de Gaulle that Moscow was well-disposed regarding his possible visit but needed more detailed propositions from de Gaulle, including the proposed date of the visit.⁵¹ The absence of any propositions from de Gaulle and Stalin’s political realignment towards the Western Allies prevented this visit from being realised in 1943.

The Moscow conference of the foreign ministers of the three main Allies (19th-30th October 1943) showed clearly that the process of the Soviet-French rapprochement knew its limits. Stalin’s decision to improve relations with the USA and Great Britain influenced the Soviet stance on the “French question”, engendering a more reserved tone. In preparing for the conference, Soviet officials formulated Moscow’s views in the following manner: “If the English government initiates

⁴⁶ SFO, vol. 1, pp. 250-252.

⁴⁷ Archives Nationales, Paris [Hereafter AN], Archives privées [Hereafter AP], Papiers Bidault 457 AP 82. Note sur les rapports franco-soviétiques de 1941 à 1944 (25 Octobre 1944).

⁴⁸ AVP RF. F. 059. Op. 10. P. 23. D. 183. L. 96-99. Molotov to Bogomolov (25th June 1943).

⁴⁹ Maxwell Adereth, *The French Communist Party: a Critical History (1920-84)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 123.

⁵⁰ AN, 457 AP 82. Note sur les rapports franco-soviétiques de 1941 à 1944 (25 Octobre 1944)

⁵¹ Marina Ts. Arzakanyan, “De Goll’ i Rossiia” [De Gaulle and Russia], in Pyotr Cherkasov, ed., *Rossiia i Frantsiia* [Russia and France], vol. 7 (Moscow: Nauka, 2006), p. 366.

discussion on the question of the formation of a French government, then the Soviet delegation should state as follows: ‘In principle the Soviet Government does not argue against the formation of a French government. But, as it is known, the Soviet government has only recently obtained the possibility of sending its own diplomatic representative to Algiers and does not have the necessary information even for the discussion of the question, never mind speaking about taking any decision on it’”.⁵²

Moscow had no desire to hurry, not only because the results of the internal struggle between de Gaulle and Giraud still seemed unclear at that point, but also due to a desire not to disturb relations with the USA and Great Britain. Differences between London and Washington concerning de Gaulle made the situation even more complicated. The NKID had devoted a great deal of attention to these before the Moscow conference. The voluminous note “On the US and British position on the French question” (comprising 45 pages), prepared by Solomon A. Losovsky, Molotov’s deputy, and Comintern veteran Dmitrii Z. Manuisky, was a clear indication of this fact. In addition to the Anglo-American disagreements, this note stressed the following ideas: Great Britain and the USA had placed their bet on reactionary forces in France out of fear of the revolutionary movement, and they aimed to reduce the French colonial empire.⁵³

During the Moscow conference, Molotov, as head of the Soviet delegation, tried not to sharpen the differences with the English and Americans. On the 24th October, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Anthony Eden presented his “Main scheme of governing the liberated France”, minimising the role of the CFLN in favour of the Allied military commander. Molotov clearly indicated that he had important caveats about it. Though the internal NKID estimations were harsh – the British wanted “to obtain from the Soviet Union sanction for the uncontrollable activity of Anglo-American AMGOT in liberated France”,⁵⁴ – Molotov preferred to act more diplomatically. The question was referred to the European Advisory Commission (EAC).

Another important aspect characterising the Soviet position on France was revealed clearly during the Moscow conference, namely, that France was not regarded as a member of the privileged Big Three club, and that there would be bodies where only the USSR, USA and Great Britain would be represented. On the 23rd October, during an internal meeting with Soviet officials, Stalin, judging from a rare source, the handwritten notes of Molotov’s deputy Andrei Y. Vyshinsky, insisted that initial membership in the London Commission (future EAC) would be limited to three states.⁵⁵ On the 24th October, an NKID document, which appeared

⁵² AVP RF. F. 07. Op. 4. P. 26. D. 13. L. 49. Our propositions to point 4 of the agenda (s.d.) [October 1943].

⁵³ The main points of this memorandum were summarised by Molotov in his note to Stalin on the 18th October. See: AVP RF. F. 06. Op. 5-b. P. 39. D. 6. L. 25.

⁵⁴ AVP RF. F. 06. Op. 5-b. P. 42. D. 44. L. 97 [S.n.]

⁵⁵ Vyshinsky’s note was as follows: “Membership of Lond[on Commission] – from 3 states” [underlined in original]. See: AVP RF. F. 07. Op. 4. P. 26. D. 13. L. 10b [S.n.].

as a reaction to Eden's propositions about the EAC, stated clearly: "To consider it inappropriate that the representative of the French Committee have a permanent seat".⁵⁶

Thus, while giving the CFLN favourable treatment in matters of recognition, Moscow was not simultaneously prepared to entertain all the ambitious goals of de Gaulle and his entourage, or to seriously harm relations with the USA and Great Britain. As Vyshinsky and de Gaulle agreed later during the meeting on the 23rd November in Algiers, the best option for the Soviet Union and CFLN was to build bilateral friendly relations without damaging their cooperation with London and Washington.⁵⁷ In the beginning of November, Dejean's analysis followed the same paradigm; he advised the French Foreign Ministry not to attempt to use Moscow as leverage against London and Washington.⁵⁸ It was evident that any such attempts would harm Soviet-French relations.

Stalin's changing attitude: France in the Soviet diplomacy and post-war planning from Tehran conference to de Gaulle's visit to Moscow.

By the end of 1943, Soviet policy regarding the CFLN pursued several different aims: to strengthen that wing of the CFLN headed by de Gaulle which was preferred over men linked to Vichy; to facilitate the work of the French communists and growth of their influence in France once the label of "foreign agents" had fallen out of use (as had been one of Stalin's ideas during the dissolution of Comintern in May 1943);⁵⁹ to help such potential leadership of France as was more independent in relations with the USA and Great Britain. All these aims could be attained through cooperation with de Gaulle. But, as Stalin's position during the Tehran conference (28th November – 1st December 1943) revealed, Soviet diplomacy concerning the "French question" had other important aspects too.

After the discussions in Tehran, the Western Allies were really surprised. On the 13th December, in his account of the conference made to the Cabinet, Eden mentioned "one of the most interesting facts", namely the critical mood of Stalin in regard to France and his view of the French state as "rotten".⁶⁰ As early as the 28th November, during his personal meeting with Roosevelt, Stalin, perhaps intentionally saying precisely the words Roosevelt would be glad to hear, criticised de Gaulle sharply. According to him, de Gaulle "was not realist in policy. He considers himself as a representative of the real France that he certainly does not

⁵⁶ Kynin, Georgii P., and Jochen Laufer, eds., *SSSR i germanskii vopros: Dokumenty iz Arkhiva vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [USSR and the German question: Documents from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation], vol. 1 (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1996), p. 329.

⁵⁷ The French record of the meeting is published in: Charles de Gaulle, *Voennye memuary: Edinstvo 1942–1944* [War Memoirs: Unity, 1942–1944] (Moscow: AST, 2003), pp. 676–679.

⁵⁸ AN, 457 AP 82. Note de Dejean sur les relations franco-soviétiques (3 Novembre 1943).

⁵⁹ Banac, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, pp. 275–276.

⁶⁰ NA, CAB 65/40/15 War Cabinet, 169 Conclusions, Confidential Annex (13th December 1943).

represent. De Gaulle did not understand that there are two Frances: the symbolic France, which he represents, and the physical France, which should be punished for her aid to the Germans”.⁶¹ These ideas were developed by Stalin during the dinner *à trois* on the 28th November. The memorandum of the US delegation summarised them as the “thesis that the French nation, and in particular its leaders and ruling classes, were rotten and deserved to be punished for their criminal collaboration with Nazi Germany... He [Stalin] appeared to attach little importance to De Gaulle as a real factor in political or other matters”.⁶²

Stalin also took a strong stance against the reestablishment of the French colonial empire in its entirety. Contrary to Dejean’s expectations that the CFLN could enlist Soviet support on this issue,⁶³ Stalin, at his meeting with Roosevelt on the 28th November, promoted the idea that Indochina should not be returned to the French.⁶⁴ Later, on the 30th November, Molotov discussed with Eden and H. Hopkins the possibility of transferring Bizerte and Dakar under international control.⁶⁵

What were the reasons behind Stalin’s position as formulated in Tehran? Charles Bohlen, a member of the American delegation, thought that it was primarily diplomatic sounding.⁶⁶ This reason certainly had its place but other factors were also important. Firstly, many of Stalin’s demands regarding France concerned the colonial territories, as anti-colonialism had for a long time been a strong theme of Soviet foreign policy. The gaining of independence by former colonies widened the space for Soviet diplomatic manoeuvring. Secondly, Stalin’s sharp remarks had, among others, the aim of discrediting the former French elites and the Vichy regime, thereby preparing ground for the political renovation of France after the war.

Pursuing his political goals, Stalin at the same time expressed ideas which, it seemed, sat most deeply in his mind. He argued with Churchill in Tehran that the French had “opened the front” to the Germans and had not fought seriously in 1940,⁶⁷ later going on to develop the same thesis with an interlocutor whom he regarded with more sympathy. On the 17th May 1944 in Moscow, during his talk with the Polish-American Professor Oskar Lange (a source little used by historians of Soviet-French relations), Stalin spoke about the absence of patriotism in France before the war, comparing it negatively to Britain. He stressed the idea that a new generation, not affected by the Germans, “masters to corrupt people”, must be

⁶¹ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii [Russian state archive of social and political history], Moscow [Hereafter RGASPI]. F. 558. Op. 11. D. 234. L. 4. Record of the meeting between Stalin and Roosevelt (28th November 1943). This phrase was omitted in the published version of the record. See: *Sovetskii Soyuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiyakh*, vol. 2, p. 90.

⁶² FRUS, The Conference at Cairo and Tehran, p. 514.

⁶³ AN, 457 AP 82 Note de Dejean sur les relations franco-soviétiques (3 Novembre 1943).

⁶⁴ Gromyko, *Sovetskii Soyuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiyakh*, vol. 2, p. 91.

⁶⁵ RGASPI. F. 558. Op. 11. D. 234. L. 64. From Molotov’s diary (30th November 1943).

⁶⁶ FRUS, The Conference at Cairo and Tehran, p. 514.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

raised in France. Stalin emphasised that the Vichy contribution to the German war effort was significant: “If Hitler did not have France now, he would be in an extremely bad way”.⁶⁸ Certainly Stalin was not alone in these estimates. The attitude to the French leaders of 1940 expressed by Maisky, who occasionally showed more empathy for Western statesmen than other NKID officials, was close to Stalin’s. In February 1943, thinking about the war as a “cruel historical test”, he concluded that “France simply failed”.⁶⁹ In January 1944, he doubted that the “contemporary generation of Frenchmen would be able to overcome the spiritual consequences of the catastrophe that they have survived if the course of events does not result in a real proletarian revolution”.⁷⁰

A third factor influenced Stalin at Tehran. When he spoke of the weakening of France as punishment for her role in the war, these words seemed to reflect *inter alia* his uncertainty concerning the political status and orientation of France after the war. For Stalin, who seriously feared the resurrection of Germany and the repeat of German aggression,⁷¹ a strong France represented a possible ally in this eventual new struggle. As Stalin said to General Petit during their meeting in Moscow on the 15th September 1943, “in the future, France will be reborn ... we will aid the French from now on. Until, he adds as a joke, we need help ourselves”.⁷² At the same time, Stalin certainly paid a compliment to Petit. He was not so sure that France would soon be reborn and, it can be supposed, he was not sure in 1943 either if such a potentially strong France would really be an advantage for the Soviet Union.

Stalin’s words in Tehran showed that alongside the question “Who will lead post-war France?”, another had gained in importance; “What will be the future place and political alignment of France in Europe and the world?” By the end of 1943, certainty of the final German defeat had become pronounced in Moscow. Maisky’s extensive note of the 11th January 1944, one of the first detailed analyses of the post-war world and of Soviet interests in it, had a special section on France. Maisky’s main idea reflected the caution felt about too strong a future France: “For the USSR it is advantageous, in my opinion, to endorse the restoration of France as a more or less major (*krupnoi*) European power, though it would be disadvantageous to make special efforts to restore its former military might”.⁷³ But the important part of equation which was not mentioned by Maisky was the question as to what people would govern this “more or less major European power”.

⁶⁸ The Soviet record of the meeting is published in: Al’bina F. Noskova, “Stalin i Pol’sha. 1943-1944 gody” [Stalin and Poland. 1943-1944], *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya* [Modern and current history], no. 3 (2008), p. 135.

⁶⁹ Kynin, Laufer, *SSSR i germanskii vopros*, vol. 1, p. 195.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁷¹ He spoke repeatedly about it both to the capitalist leaders during the international conferences and to foreign communists and pro-Soviet figures in a more amicable atmosphere. See, for example: Gromyko, *Sovetskii Soyuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiyakh*, vol. 2, p. 117; Noskova, “Stalin i Pol’sha”, p. 133; Banac, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, p. 368.

⁷² SFO, vol. 1, pp. 269-273.

⁷³ Kynin, Laufer, *SSSR i germanskii vopros*, vol. 1, pp. 338-339.

The first half of 1944 was not a very propitious period for Soviet-French relations. Analysing the reasons behind this “weakening” (*relâchement*) of bilateral cooperation, the French Foreign Ministry singled out two main factors: first, the “atmosphere impregnated seriously by pétainisme” which the Soviet representatives encountered in Algiers and which negatively affected Moscow’s attitude to the CFLN; and second, the “policy of tight cooperation with the United States” initiated by the Soviet Union after the Tehran conference.⁷⁴

Both reasons, the “internal” and “external”, were immensely important. The political situation in Algiers was not simple. On the one hand, Moscow saw that de Gaulle’s position was strengthened: the General had managed to eliminate Giraud from the position of CFLN co-president (6th November 1943) and then from the military command of its forces (14th April 1944). His willingness to include Communists in the CFLN (on the 4th April, Fernand Grenier became Commissar for Air and François Billoux became Commissar of State) was also welcomed. Instructions given by Dimitrov to the French communists in March 1944 stressed the necessity of not spoiling relations with de Gaulle and of placing “at the centre the fundamental issues of the war”: the formation of a French army and its active participation in combat, purging the state and military apparatus, and aiding the armed partisan groups in France.⁷⁵

But, on the other hand, Moscow’s attitude to the CFLN was not limited to this alone. Bogomolov’s telegrams from Algiers showed that pro-Soviet tendencies in Consultative Assembly were not strong.⁷⁶ On the contrary, the influence of the other political camp, which Moscow associated with pro-Vichy sympathies and orientation towards the USA and Great Britain, seemed to be rather significant. Among the key personalities of this camp were named René Massigli, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, who, according to Bogomolov, “dreamt” of a France dominated by rightist political parties;⁷⁷ Jean Monnet, an “old brother-in-arms of Massigli”,⁷⁸ a man “closely linked to financial circles, first of all, of the USA”, as concluded Lozovsky after the talk with Cot;⁷⁹ André Le Troquer, Commissar of the Liberated Metropolitan Territories, and “enemy of the communists”, as Garreau characterised him in talk with Dekanozov.⁸⁰

The former Soviet notion persisted that de Gaulle himself might be an acceptable personality while his entourage included pro-Vichy sympathisers. In May, Stalin shared this point of view with Lange: “Now there is de Gaulle in France but he is

⁷⁴ AN, 457 AP 82. Note sur les rapports franco-soviétiques de 1941 à 1944 (25 Octobre 1944).

⁷⁵ Banac, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, p. 304-305.

⁷⁶ AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 183. D. 4. L. 118. Sergeev to Dekanozov (27th December 1943) referring to Bogomolov’s information.

⁷⁷ AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 184. D. 10. L. 12. From Bogomolov’s diary (29th May 1943).

⁷⁸ Ibid. L. 23. From Bogomolov’s diary (17th July 1943).

⁷⁹ AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 70. From Lozovsky’s diary (21st April 1944).

⁸⁰ Ibid. L. 88. From Dekanozov’s diary (8th May 1944).

surrounded by Vichy defectors. He, Comrade Stalin, does not know whether these defectors are reliable or not. Now de Gaulle put these traitors of France on trial, but he, Comrade Stalin, does not know if this will help de Gaulle”.⁸¹ Though Moscow followed with attention such events as the arrest of former Vichy officials Pierre-Étienne Flandin, Marcel Peyrouton, Pierre Boisson and others in December 1943 and the execution of Pierre Pucheu in March 1944, there were doubts that such trials would be continued⁸² or that they would bring the renovation of the French elite and “the renewal of the French people”⁸³ (according to Dimitrov’s instructions to the French communists).

“External” reasons also mattered. After Tehran’s warming of relations with the USA and Great Britain, Moscow did not wish to disturb the new relationship. The forthcoming “Overlord” made this particularly important. As Molotov said to the Yugoslavian communists who arrived in Moscow in April, “now the situation on the fronts of struggle against Germany is such that the Allies will be more active and it is important for us to maintain good relations with them in this period”.⁸⁴ If US and British participation in the war was expected to increase, the contribution of the French forces remained rather insignificant, when judged by Soviet standards. In June 1943, speaking to Martial Valin, French Commissar for Air, Bogomolov defended the Soviet military’s reticence in the contacts with the French representatives in the following manner: “... when France once more has a 6-million army and, as a consequence, the possibility of entering into direct and specific cooperation with the Red Army on the battlefield, then the Soviet command will, possibly, go further in disclosing its plans and intentions ... When Frenchmen speak of France, they should not forget that France is in Hitler’s pocket and that the most difficult task in the liberation of France, namely the defeat of Hitlerite armies, rested mainly on the shoulders of the Soviet Union”.⁸⁵ Through his questions to de Gaulle himself, Bogomolov also alluded to the fact that the military contribution of the CFLN did not seem of great importance to him.⁸⁶

The idea that the CFLN pretended to more than its resources and forces justified was shared by more than Bogomolov. The persistent French demands concerning membership in the EAC made to Moscow from November 1943 onwards (not without British stimulation) irritated the NKID. Molotov remained noncommittal but gave a hint of hope: “in the future it will result in this [French membership in the EAC]”.⁸⁷ It was not only French demands that exasperated Moscow but some French actions too. On February 12th, speaking to Garreau, Vyshinsky expressed his astonishment that the Soviet Union had not been informed by the French

⁸¹ Noskova, “Stalin i Pol’sha”, p. 136.

⁸² AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 70. From Lozovsky’s diary (21st April 1944).

⁸³ Banac, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, p. 305.

⁸⁴ Igor’ V. Bukharkin, Stanislav Stoyanovich, et al., eds., *Otnosheniya Rossii (SSSR) s Yugoslaviei, 1941-1945 gg.: Dokumenty i materialy* [Relations of Russia (USSR) with Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Documents and materials] (Moscow: Terra-Knizhnyi klub, 1998), p. 239.

⁸⁵ AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 184. D. 10. L. 21. From Bogomolov’s diary (24th June 1943).

⁸⁶ Ibid. L. 17. From Bogomolov’s diary (28th May 1943).

⁸⁷ SFO, vol. 1, p. 312.

authorities of their intentions to conclude financial and mutual aid agreements with Britain (signed on the 8th February in Algiers). Garreau tried to soften the Soviet reaction by referring to the French dependence on Anglo-American weapons and equipment and the anti-Soviet mood of some CFLN members.⁸⁸

Nor was de Gaulle's persistent denial to permit Thorez to go to Algiers welcomed. In May, Dimitrov and Manuilsky even considered clandestine methods for transporting Thorez to France.⁸⁹ De Gaulle's famous speech of the 18th March in Algiers (in which he suggested a western European grouping that would be "extended to Africa, in close relations with the East and notably the Arab States, and whose arteries would be the Channel, the Rhine, and the Mediterranean")⁹⁰ did not pass unnoticed by the NKID. Though Garreau tried to minimise its significance and persuade Soviet diplomats that it had been a "short-sighted" step of de Gaulle,⁹¹ the Soviet point of view was guarded. On the 10th July, while speaking to Cot, Dekanozov stressed anti-federation arguments which the NKID had already developed during the Moscow conference: the debates about post-war federations were premature, federations could infringe upon the sovereign rights of the states, and they might have an anti-Soviet orientation.⁹²

Taking into account all these considerations it was not surprising that by May 1944 Stalin's prognosis about the French revival was more sombre than that which he revealed to Petit in September 1943. Making allusion to the eventual role of France as an anti-German ally, he said to Lange: "He, comrade Stalin, will thank fate if France rises sooner than he expects. But he thinks that France will need around twenty years".⁹³

The imperative of common decisions: The USSR, the "Grand Alliance" and the "French question", June-November 1944.

The Kremlin understood that while the Anglo-American landing in Normandy would liberate French territory it would at the same time constitute a serious political challenge for de Gaulle. Through Garreau it was known that the consent of Washington and London to French participation in "Overlord" had been obtained with difficulties, and even so, the contribution of CFLN forces remained small: two light armoured divisions, one infantry division and two paratrooper battalions.⁹⁴ The intelligence information from NKGB residents in Washington and London remained controversial: some cables indicated that de Gaulle followed the path of concessions to the Americans while trying to represent himself as the

⁸⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 19-20.

⁸⁹ Banac, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, p. 317.

⁹⁰ Cited in: Paul-Marie, de la Gorce, "De Gaulle and Britain," in Richard Mayne and Douglas Johnson, eds., *Cross Channel Currents: 100 Years of the Entente Cordiale* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 113.

⁹¹ SFO, vol. 2, p. 38. Cot estimated this speech of de Gaulle even harsher, as a "folly". See: AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 68. From Lozovsky's diary (21st April 1944).

⁹² AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 105-106. From Dekanozov's diary (11th July 1944).

⁹³ Noskova, "Stalin i Pol'sha", p. 136.

⁹⁴ AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 31-32. Garreau to Molotov (28th January 1944).

defender of France from communism and revolution (2nd March),⁹⁵ while others underlined that Washington's attitude to de Gaulle remained negative: Eisenhower purportedly received instructions not to do anything which could lead to the recognition of the CFLN as the French government (5th April),⁹⁶ and the Americans were prepared to make use of "reactionary elements" after the liberation of France (24th June).⁹⁷

The first events which followed the successful landing of the Western Allies also caused some anxiety that the latest intelligence estimates were right. On the 24th June, Garreau informed Dekanozov that the Americans installed a prefect in Bayeux, the first town liberated from the Germans, who had links to Vichy, disregarding thereby the wishes of the local inhabitants. Garreau criticised the American idea to have only a CFLN liaison officer in Eisenhower's staff, seeing in this schema a "modified AMGOT".⁹⁸

Despite the important events in France marked by successful actions of the Resistance and de Gaulle, the liberation of Paris on the 25th August being among the most spectacular achievements, Moscow's attitude to the provisional French government (officially created on the 3rd June) did not change significantly. Clearly, the fact that the provisional government was supported by the French population and found its base on French territory raised its prestige (earlier, in July, Bogomolov had indicated to Massigli that all negotiations about a possible Franco-Soviet treaty might take place only after the liberation of France),⁹⁹ but this did not signify that the "French question" became a priority for Moscow. In June, when Garreau tried to obtain Soviet support in negotiations with US representatives about the civil administration in liberated France, Dekanozov repeated the traditional idea that the Soviet attitude to de Gaulle was positive, but added that "it is necessary to take into account that the Soviet government wishes to be in full contact with its main Allies in this most responsible moment of the war. It is known that the Germans are trying to use all means to breach the unity of the Allies. Our aim is not to allow that and to conserve unity. This determines in a significant manner the position of the Soviet government on many questions, including the French question".¹⁰⁰ In August, Garreau's attempts to obtain Soviet commitment to support French membership in the EAC ended with the same result: Dekanozov indicated that the Big Three would have to make a common decision on this issue.¹⁰¹

Bogomolov's earlier evident sceptical attitude to de Gaulle also persisted. In his long report of the 31st August, the Soviet diplomat characterised de Gaulle as a

⁹⁵ Patrushev, OGB, vol. 5, pt. 2 (Moscow: Rus', 2007), pp. 219-220.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 296.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 537.

⁹⁸ AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 101. From Dekanozov's diary (26th June 1944).

⁹⁹ SFO, vol. 2, p. 83.

¹⁰⁰ AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 102. From Dekanozov's diary (26th June 1944).

¹⁰¹ Ibid. L. 116. From Dekanozov's diary (3rd August 1944).

representative of the “interests of that faction of French imperialism which had an anti-German orientation”. The Soviet Ambassador stressed pragmatic reasons for de Gaulle’s rapprochement with the Soviet Union (as a means of exerting pressure on the Anglo-Americans) and concluded that “the general direction of his policy gives more weight to the idea that de Gaulle had anti-Soviet tendencies, rather than sympathy for the USSR”. Unlike Stalin, Bogomolov thought that “in the present European situation we are not interested in the rapid rebirth of a strong France ...”¹⁰²

The real stimulus that enabled the Soviet-France rapprochement to develop had come, strangely enough, from the American side. Soon after Eisenhower designated a “French zone of interior” (20th October) free of combat where power could be transferred to the French authorities, Washington recognised de Gaulle’s provisional government (23rd October). London rushed to do the same. Recognition by Moscow, which had only been informed of the Anglo-American recognition *a posteriori*,¹⁰³ came the same day.

This shift in Soviet-French relations was distinctly felt. Even on the 21st October when speaking to Dejean in Paris, Bogomolov repeated the already familiar ideas: the necessity for the USSR to maintain cooperation with the other Allies and not to act separately, and the imperative to take into account the present realities which he opposed to the tendency of some Frenchmen to “base today’s policy on future possibilities”.¹⁰⁴ Two days later, the mood of Moscow was already different. The Soviet press praised French military efforts and was full of articles which foresaw a great role to be played by France in the future.¹⁰⁵ When notifying Garreau of the Soviet recognition (though Dekanozov underlined that the Soviet government acted unanimously with the Americans and British), he informed him privately that the Soviet government supported the inclusion of a French representative in the EAC. But he clearly demonstrated that Moscow could not understand why Paris continued to ban Thorez’s return to France.¹⁰⁶ Dekanozov welcomed “consolidation of the democratic base of the French provisional government”, alluding to its reorganisation on the 9th September by adding more representatives from the National Council of Resistance, mainly Christian Democrats (their leader Georges Bidault¹⁰⁷ becoming Foreign Minister) and Communists. The National Council was regarded in Moscow as a body which was ready to effect a more radical renovation of France and where pro-Soviet sympathies were more strongly represented than in the CFLN.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Memo by Bogomolov (31st August 1944). Published by Marina Ts. Arzakanyan in: Petr Cherkasov, ed., *Rossia i Frantsiia* [Russia and France], vol. 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 1998), pp. 272-288.

¹⁰³ SFO, vol. 2, p. 124.

¹⁰⁴ AN, 457 AP 82. Note de Direction Europe, Ministère des Affaires étrangères (25 Octobre 1944).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Garreau à Paris (24 Octobre 1944).

¹⁰⁶ AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 124-130. From Dekanozov’s diary (25th October 1944); *Documents diplomatiques français* [Hereafter DDF], 1944, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1996), p. 149.

¹⁰⁷ Garreau characterised him to Dekanozov as “quite a prominent personality ... He will play a big role in the future”. See; F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 119. From Dekanozov’s diary (10th September 1944).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. L. 118-119, 122. From Dekanozov’s diary (10th September 1944, 26th September 1944).

During the Dekanozov – Garreau talk, the outlines for large-scale diplomatic linkage were already evident: if the Gaullists lifted ban on Thorez’s return and allowed Communists to have their voice inside France, the Soviet Union would support France in certain questions of European politics. One other important element of this linkage was also named during the meeting. It was no coincidence that Garreau mentioned the fact that the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PCNL, formed in Moscow on the night of the 22nd July, soon transferred to Lublin) gave consent to receive a French representative to deal with the repatriation of French citizens. At the same time, the PCNL demanded the dispatch of a Polish representative to France. The question of establishing official relations inevitably arose.

This specific linkage of the French and Polish questions was an important aspect of Soviet diplomacy. The fact that the Soviet embassy to the Allied governments-in-exile in London managed relations with both the Polish government (until the suspension of relations in April 1943) and French authorities (before the formation of the CFLN in Algiers) had its influence but can hardly have been paramount. For Moscow, which had perceived Poland as one of the main enemies throughout the entire interwar period, and which regarded French influence in Poland as of some importance (taking into account the mutual aid treaty of 1921),¹⁰⁹ the securing of the Soviet western border meant *inter alia* that the French (and Western in general) presence in Poland would be seriously reduced.

During 1943–44, there were some apprehensions about French plans and actions regarding the Polish government-in-exile and post-war Poland. Different information came to Moscow through diplomatic channels and from the French communists, namely, the information about de Gaulle’s critical attitude towards the pro-Soviet Polish military formations in the USSR (the Polish 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division),¹¹⁰ about intelligence sharing between French and Polish officers on the territory of Iran,¹¹¹ and about the delivery of money to the Polish government-in-exile by the French authorities (from Polish funds deposited in the French Bank).¹¹² As Bogomolov’s talks with Dejean witnessed, the latter “for all his sympathies to the USSR” was in favour of a “strong independent Poland on the borders of the Soviet Union”.¹¹³ De Gaulle himself told Bogomolov that he was, on the one hand, for a “free, independent Poland”, and, on the other, for the Soviet Union having “the best strategic frontiers on the West and, certainly,

¹⁰⁹ Though historians stress that this treaty did not amount to any real alliance and French aid to Poland in the Soviet-Polish War had been limited, Moscow perceived it as being more effective. See: Frédéric Dessberg, *Le triangle impossible. Les relations franco-soviétiques et le facteur polonais dans les questions de sécurité en Europe (1924–1935)*. Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009.

¹¹⁰ AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 183. D. 4. L. 105. From Jean (1st December 1943).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 76–77. From Lozovsky’s diary (21st April 1944).

¹¹³ AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 184. D. 10. L. 9. From Bogomolov’s diary (29th May 1943).

in the Baltic". He was ready to support the Curzon Line as the Soviet-Polish border despite his regrets about the way the USSR had obtained it in 1939.¹¹⁴

This "Polish factor" in Soviet-French relations demonstrated that Moscow's attitude to the French provisional government was determined not only by the situation in bilateral relations but also by broader Soviet strategic interests. In the end of 1944, two terms were essential to Soviet reflections on the future geopolitical role of France in Europe: "sphere of interest" and "Western bloc". As early as 1943, Soviet diplomats had supposed that "post-war Western Europe, liberated from the Hitlerite regime, would be situated in the immediate English sphere of influence".¹¹⁵ The extensive memorandum with the indicative title "On the perspectives and possible basis of Soviet-British cooperation" prepared by Molotov's deputy Litvinov on the 15th November, viewed post-war Europe as being divided between two great spheres of influence: the British (Holland, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Greece) and the Soviet (Finland, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, the Slavic countries of the Balkan Peninsula, and Turkey). Though the countries in the respective spheres of influence were theoretically forbidden to conclude treaties against the will of their "patron", France, according to Litvinov, should constitute an exception, having the option to join to the Soviet-British treaty of May 1942.¹¹⁶

The Kremlin and NKID were well aware that there were other projects for the post-war organisation of Europe being discussed at the same time. November – December 1944 was the time when Moscow was bombarded by its own Ambassadors in Washington and London (Aleksei A. Gromyko and Fyodor T. Gusev respectively), as well by NKGB summaries which were devoted to one theme, namely, the plans to form a post-war "Western bloc" consisting of Great Britain, France, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg, having an anti-German as well as anti-Soviet direction.¹¹⁷

The fact that France was not considered part of the Soviet sphere of influence and that a Soviet military presence was not planned there meant that Moscow would not be able to influence French domestic politics or its foreign orientation directly. This elevated the importance of two other instruments. The first, the PCF, whose leadership in March 1944 had already been instructed not to prepare for revolution but "to popularise and defend sincere friendship between France and the USSR".¹¹⁸ On the 18th November, while instructing Thorez before his departure from Moscow, Stalin repeated that the PCF ought "to advocate the rebirth of a militarily and industrially powerful France and the creation of a democratic regime (the

¹¹⁴ Ibid. L. 17. From Bogomolov's diary (28th May 1943).

¹¹⁵ AVP RF. F. 0512. Op. 4. P. 31. D. 307. L. 10. Note by Shtein (22nd September 1943).

¹¹⁶ AVP RF. F. 06. Op. 6. P. 14. D. 143. L. 83. Memo by Litvinov (15th November 1944). See also: Vladimir O. Pechatnov, "The Big Three after World War II," *Cold War International History Project*, Working Paper No. 13 (Washington DC, May 1995), pp. 12-14. Available at <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ACF17F.PDF>

¹¹⁷ Pechatnov and Magadeev, *Perepiska*, vol. 2, pp. 316-319.

¹¹⁸ Banac, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, p. 305.

Allies want a weak France as well as a weak Italy)”. Thorez was told “not to defy the de Gaulle government; to maintain a loyal stance”.¹¹⁹ The second instrument in the hands of Moscow was the diplomatic rapprochement, which aimed not only to prevent the anti-Soviet tendencies of France and its drive to the “Western bloc” but also gave more opportunities and weight to the PCF inside the country. If the Soviet Union were a partner of France, the PCF could use its pro-Soviet stance as an advantage.

Concluding these reflections about Polish and PCF factors, it can be said that the Soviet-French rapprochement was conditioned on two important concessions from Paris: firstly, French assent to the strengthening of the Soviet position in Poland and Eastern and Central Europe in general; secondly, the willingness of the French government to give more room for PCF political action inside France. The latter precondition was clearly understood by Paris. During the Dekanozov – Garreau talks of the 23rd October, Garreau said that the matter of Thorez’s return would soon be resolved.¹²⁰ On the 28th October, while preparing for his visit to Moscow, De Gaulle sent a cablegram to Thorez, permitting his return to France after the publication of decree on amnesty for war criminals (Thorez was officially considered a deserter).¹²¹ It was not by accident that de Gaulle’s desire to go to Moscow was expressed to Bogomolov only after this message was sent, namely on the 8th November. Moscow’s consent came five days later.¹²²

The understanding that Soviet-French rapprochement would not increase the possibilities of Paris in Eastern and Central Europe was slower in coming. Garreau’s meeting with Dekanozov on the 14th November took place against the background of some positive news: France had just been admitted to the EAC (Garreau saw in this the result of the Soviet initiative), and Moscow had given consent to de Gaulle’s visit. Even so, Garreau’s attempts to secure the dispatch of French diplomatic representatives to Bucharest and Sofia and a diplomatic agent to Helsinki met with a cool reception on the Soviet side: Dekanozov foresaw “great difficulties” in the resolution of this question.¹²³

In addition to the European and domestic political dimensions of Soviet-French relations, there was also a colonial aspect. Stalin’s remarks made in Tehran had not been accidental. If Europe was seen by Moscow as divided into “spheres of influence” where definite rules of the game would exist,¹²⁴ competition on the periphery seemed far more open in character. In January 1944, Maisky focussed his attention to the important post-war aim of the Soviet Union in the Arab world

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 342-343.

¹²⁰ AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 125. From Dekanozov’s diary (25th October 1944).

¹²¹ Banac, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, 342.

¹²² SFO, vol. 2, 143.

¹²³ AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 135. From Dekanozov’s diary (17th November 1944).

¹²⁴ Among these, Litvinov cited the absence of “too close relations” between countries within the “sphere of influence” and Western great powers, the absence of treaties between them which did not correspond to Soviet interests, and the absence of foreign (not Soviet) military, naval and air bases on the territories of the countries in question. See: AVP RF. F. 06. Op. 6. P. 14. D. 143. L. 84. Memo by Litvinov (15th November 1944).

(Iraq, Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt), namely, “strengthening of Soviet influence in the economic, cultural and political spheres”¹²⁵ (which he hoped to achieve without conflicts with the USA and Great Britain). Maisky thought that opening of consulates in Syria and Lebanon would be one of the first steps towards this (as well as a diplomatic mission in Iraq and consulate in Palestine).

On the 18th May, in realisation of this idea, Dekanozov informed Garreau of the Soviet desire to open two general consulates in Damascus and Beirut. According to Dekanozov, Garreau’s reacted “with great approval” reminding him that he had previously made similar propositions.¹²⁶ The question asked by the French diplomat (as to whether this supposed the opening of diplomatic missions or consulates), prompted the NKID to demand, two days later, consent for the opening of the diplomatic missions. Garreau’s answer was again in the positive.¹²⁷ Though the beginning of the process went smoothly, there was already some anxiety from the French side two months later. Establishment of diplomatic relations with Syria (21st – 22nd July) by the Soviet Union (Lebanon would soon follow) provoked Garreau to ascertain the French position: France wished to maintain her special positions and interests in these countries for the period of 20 to 25 years.¹²⁸ The position taken by the Soviet diplomat Nikolai V. Novikov (in July 1944 he had been sent on a mission to Syria and Lebanon to secure the establishment of diplomatic relations with these countries) was the opposite. Speaking to Syrian Prime Minister Saadullah al-Jabri on the 30th July and to a British diplomat on the 31st July, he repeatedly stated that the USSR would not support French demands to secure positions acquired in the Levant.¹²⁹ This was the key question: how would the Soviet-French rapprochement influence Soviet policy in this zone of special French interests?

What did the Soviet-French alliance change? France in Soviet foreign policy from December 1944 to February 1945.

Stalin’s consent to meet with de Gaulle in December 1944 can be explained by a complex set of reasons. The unanimous recognition of the French provisional government by Big Three in October had opened the way to rapprochement with de Gaulle without causing any evident damage to relations with the USA and Great Britain. The strengthening of de Gaulle’s position inside France, reorganisation of the government and consent to Thorez’s return all indicated that Moscow’s gamble on him as democratic leader had proved its worth. Moreover, rapprochement with Paris was useful as a means of forestalling any possible anti-Soviet turn of France (the idea of the “Western bloc”) and of strengthening the position of the PCNL.

¹²⁵ Kynin, Laufer, *SSSR i germanskii vopros*, vol. 1, p. 346.

¹²⁶ AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 89. From Dekanozov’s diary (19th May 1944).

¹²⁷ Ibid. L. 90. From Dekanozov’s diary (20th May 1944).

¹²⁸ Ibid. L. 112. From Dekanozov’s diary (3rd August 1944).

¹²⁹ Rami Ginat, “Syria’s and Lebanon’s Meandering Road to Independence: The Soviet Involvement and the Anglo-French Rivalry,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, vol. 13 (2002), p. 107.

De Gaulle's famous visit to Moscow (2nd – 10th December 1944), while not proceeding without difficulties, was crowned by a twenty-year alliance treaty aimed at preventing German aggression.¹³⁰ The negotiations around the treaty and the treaty itself revealed three important aspects of Soviet policy regarding France as it stood by the end of 1944.

Firstly, France was regarded by Moscow as an important ally in the event of a German resurgence. On the 2nd December, during the first meeting between Stalin and de Gaulle, the basis for agreement between the USSR and France was already discovered, namely, the threat of renewed German aggression and the common desire to prevent it. This idea governed the Molotov – Bidault negotiations in which the details of the treaty were agreed. On the 8th December, during the last formal meeting with de Gaulle, Stalin underlined it one more time using his famous geopolitical and strategic argument: "... France and Russia¹³¹ should understand each other better than others, because they are first to meet the attack".¹³² The fact that the Soviet-French military negotiations took place in Moscow was also significant. On the 6th December, during the meeting between General Alphonse Juin, Chief of Staff of the French Army, and his Soviet counterpart General Aleksei I. Antonov, besides the traditional exchange of information, Antonov proposed the idea of intelligence sharing concerning German troops on the Western front.¹³³ At the same time, Juin's references to the French forces which were available in Europe (eight divisions armed by the Americans) clearly demonstrated that the two armies were not equal.

The second aspect of Soviet policy on France was likewise nothing new. As previously, Stalin made it clear that in some questions Soviet-French relations are subordinated by Moscow to the imperatives of the "Grand Alliance". On the 2nd December, Stalin made it clear to de Gaulle that one of the crucial questions for the General – the French frontier on the Rhine – cannot be discussed *à deux* even though some earlier NKID documents had been sympathetic to the French demands in principle.¹³⁴ The same thesis – that it was necessary to listen to the British opinion – was evident in Molotov's proposition to Bidault on the 7th December to conclude an Anglo-Soviet-French tripartite agreement (the idea had been suggested by Churchill in a personal message to Stalin on the 5th December). Though Stalin himself initially proposed a bilateral Soviet-French treaty similar to the Soviet-British one,¹³⁵ he was prepared to consent to Churchill's proposal.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ The Soviet documents on de Gaulle's visit are published in: SFO, vol. 2. The French documents are available in: DDF, 1944, vol. 2. See also: Mikhaïl M. Narinski, "De Gaulle face à Staline," in Philippe Oulmont, dir., *De Gaulle chef de guerre: De l'appel de Londres à la libération de Paris 1940-1944* (Paris: Plon, 2008), pp. 464-482.

¹³¹ It seems that Stalin used this term intentionally to play up to de Gaulle – the latter always speaking about "Russia" rather than "the Soviet Union".

¹³² SFO, vol. 2, p. 198.

¹³³ DDF, 1944, vol. 2, pp. 395-399.

¹³⁴ Kynin, Laufer, *SSSR i germanskii vopros*, vol. 1, pp. 441, 445-446.

¹³⁵ This was especially evident in the French record of the meeting. See: DDF, 1944, vol. 2, p. 353.

Why did Stalin finally consent to de Gaulle's demand for a bilateral treaty? This leads to the third aspect of the Soviet policy: Moscow wanted to use Soviet-French rapprochement to further her interests in the crucial "Polish question". As Gregor Dallas put it, "de Gaulle's encounter in Moscow became a tug-of-war over Poland".¹³⁷ On the 6th December, de Gaulle reiterated his idea that an independent Poland friendly to the Soviet Union should exist after the war. He did not exclude that a Polish government different from the government-in-exile might later be recognised (subject to unanimous decision of the main Allies). Though Stalin wanted to get *de jure* recognition of the PCNL from de Gaulle as the concession for a bilateral Soviet-French treaty, this turned out to be a difficult task. On the 7th and 9th December, Molotov failed to persuade Bidault to establish diplomatic relations with the PCNL. However, de Gaulle's consent to receive representatives of the PCNL and to send his own representatives to Lublin was regarded by the NKID as an important step in the process of gaining the PCNL international recognition: it amounted to the establishment of "de-facto relations," as the NKID cablegram to the Soviet Ambassadors stressed.¹³⁸ The tactics which the French had previously followed, attempting to use rapprochement with Moscow as a means of applying pressure on the USA and Great Britain, were now adopted by the Soviet Union itself. John W. Young's conclusion about the Soviet-French negotiations in December 1944 seems justified: Stalin "made an anti-German alliance with her [France], which pleased the French Communists (whilst upsetting the British) but he had not conceded any major role for France in Big-Three decision-making"¹³⁹.

The general lines of the Soviet policy on the "French question" as they were clearly demonstrated in December 1944 would remain largely the same by the time of the Yalta Conference. The idea of France forming part of the British sphere of influence was retained. On the 11th January, reiterating the main ideas of his November memorandum, Litvinov stressed the fact that France was in the British sphere but nonetheless she should maintain her alliance treaty with the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁰ Molotov's main concern was Poland. For him, the situation around the French government gave the opportunity to insist on the Soviet upper hand in Polish affairs. In February 1945, Molotov noted on one of Vyshinsky's memorandum: "Poland, that's a big affair! But we do not know how the governments in Belgium, France, Greece, etc. are to be organised. We were not asked ... We didn't interfere, because this was the zone of actions of Anglo-American troops [underlined in the original – I.M.]..."¹⁴¹ Whether it was intentional or not, even the original names of the CFLN and PCLN (recognised as

¹³⁶ An internal NKID report about de Gaulle's visit underlined that it was the French leader who had insisted on a bilateral, Franco-Soviet treaty, though the Soviet side, reacting to Churchill's proposal, "declared that for us the idea of a trilateral treaty was acceptable". See: AVP RF. F. 059. Op. 12. P. 6. D. 33. L. 129-131. From Moscow to Soviet Ambassadors (14th December 1944).

¹³⁷ Gregor Dallas, *1945, The War That Never Ended* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 329.

¹³⁸ AVP RF. F. 059. Op. 12. P. 6. D. 33. L. 129-131. From Moscow to Soviet Ambassadors (14th December 1944).

¹³⁹ John W. Young, "Stalin and de Gaulle," *History Today*, vol. 40 (1990), p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ Kynin, Laufer, *SSSR i germanskii vopros*, vol. 1, 596.

¹⁴¹ AVP RF. F. 06. Op. 7. P. 39. D. 588. L. 1. Molotov's resolution on Vyshinsky's memo [s.d.] [February 1945].

the Provisional Government of Poland by the Soviet Union on the 5th January 1945) were very similar.

There was little change in the Soviet attitude towards French participation in Big Three summits. Though de Gaulle was particularly angered by Roosevelt's actions before and after the Yalta Conference (absence of invitation and preliminary talks, and an invitation to meet in Algiers *a posteriori*), all three leaders were in fact against de Gaulle's invitation.¹⁴² The fact of French military weakness mattered. As Churchill and Stalin agreed in Yalta, the entrance fee to the Big Three club was too high for France; between 3 and 5 million soldiers.¹⁴³

It was Churchill, not Stalin, who was the main defender of the "French cause" at Yalta, securing her participation in the Control mechanism for Germany while Stalin was sceptical about this proposition.¹⁴⁴ Stalin continued to regard France as part of the Western world, a country which was always closer to Great Britain and the USA than to the USSR; this view persisted even in spite of the alliance treaty.

What really interested Stalin at Yalta was how to use the "French argument" to forward Soviet interests in the "Polish question". Anglo-American differences on the question of French membership in the Control Commission for Germany (Churchill endorsed this while Roosevelt opposed) gave Stalin diplomatic leverage. "Stalin could expect to ensure British cooperation on Poland and other controversial matters by siding with the Francophobic President, which he promptly did. The Soviet leader, always a skilled negotiator, could now juxtapose Britain's need for France with the Soviet need for a 'friendly' Poland".¹⁴⁵ During the plenary meeting of the 8th February, he also tried to establish another parallel: between a de Gaulle government which "also was not elected, and composed of different elements" and the Provisional Government of Poland: "Why demand more from Poland than from France?", he asked.¹⁴⁶ Though this kind of argumentation brought little in the way of results, in the end Stalin's version of a solution to the "Polish question" would prevail.

Thus, though it appears strange, the alliance treaty did not change much with regard to the Soviet attitude to France. By the end of December, Bogomolov was already preventing French diplomats from expecting any radical changes in matters of bilateral relations. He insisted that it was necessary to act with prudence, not to use the Soviet-French alliance against the USA and Great Britain, not to rush into dispatching diplomatic representatives to former Axis countries, but to have a

¹⁴² Marina Ts. Arzakanyan, "Frantsiia i Ialtinskaia konferentsiia" [France and the Yalta conference], Paper presented at the conference "70-letie Ialtinskoi konferentsii glav gosudarstv antigitlerovskoi koalitsii" [70 years of the Yalta conference of the leaders of anti-Hitlerite coalition] (Moscow, 25th-26th February 2015).

¹⁴³ Gromyko, *Sovetskii Soyuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiyakh*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1984), p. 110.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 65-67. Though Stalin consented in the end, he took into account that territory for the French zone of occupation was given by the British and the Americans, not by the Soviets.

¹⁴⁵ Fraser J. Harbutt, *Yalta 1945: Europe and America at the Crossroads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 292.

¹⁴⁶ Gromyko, *Sovetskii Soyuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiyakh*, vol. 4, p. 144.

policy based on real and not potential possibilities. As one French diplomat concluded, “in general, it is necessary to act with prudence. Russia holds prejudices against France yet”.¹⁴⁷

French reactions to Yalta enforced these prejudices. In March, speaking to Georges Catroux,¹⁴⁸ the new French ambassador to Moscow, Stalin raised a number of claims with the French. He disliked that they addressed their grievances about Soviet actions to the British and not directly to the USSR, and he refuted the information that the Soviet Union had not recognised the privileged position of France in Syria and Lebanon at Yalta. On the last point Stalin showed some comprehension of French interests. He asked Catroux: “Do you want to stay there [in Syria and Lebanon]?” After General’s answer (“Yes, it is a strategic carrefour”) Stalin said: “I understand”.¹⁴⁹ Stalin’s words were evasive but, to judge from the subsequent steps of the Soviet Union in the Syrian and Lebanon questions,¹⁵⁰ it seemed that his anti-colonial mood had not disappeared. The Soviet-French anti-German alliance did not mean that the USSR would support France in the Middle East.

Conclusion.

In October 1944, stressing the changing realities of the military and political situation in Europe and the world, Bogomolov said to Dejean: “The USSR is a very Great Power. Suffering incredible losses, it ended the isolation in which it had sojourned for so long. It was a very bloody drama but here is the result. Henceforth it will be impossible to underestimate the role of the Soviet Union in Europe”.¹⁵¹ The Second World War radically changed the balance of power between the Soviet Union and France, strengthening the role of former and weakening the position of the latter. This position of strength characterised Soviet policy on France for the whole period of 1943–45 and explains many of its features: the ideas about the unreality of certain French claims and demands, the desire to conserve the privileged Big Three decision-making process, and the dependence of the Soviet French policy on the dynamics of relations inside the “Grand Alliance”.

That is not to say that the reputation of the pro-French character of Soviet actions – from extended recognition of the CFLN in August 1943 to bilateral alliance in December 1944 – is without foundation. But the motives of these actions were

¹⁴⁷ AN, 457 AP 82. Conversation avec Bogomolov (25 Décembre 1944).

¹⁴⁸ Information which came to Moscow about Catroux before his appointment was different. The Soviet embassy to the Allied governments-in-exile characterised him as a former friend of Giraud, with Cot telling the Soviet officials that Catroux “is reactionary like all military men, but first of all, he is a good soldier and has given many services to the Committee [CFLN]” and, finally, Garreau speaking of him as an “intelligent, quite educated political personality”. See: AVP RF. F. 136. Op. 27. P. 183. D. 4. L. 46. Reference note on the National Committee of Fighting France (12th December 1942); AVP RF. F. 0136. Op. 28. P. 186. D. 8. L. 69, 141. From Lozovsky’s diary (21st April 1944), From Dekanozov’s diary (28th December 1944).

¹⁴⁹ AN, 457 AP 82. Catroux à Paris (20 Mars 1945). The Soviet record may be found in: SFO, vol. 2, pp. 291-297.

¹⁵⁰ Ginat, “Syria’s and Lebanon’s Meandering Road to Independence”, pp. 96-122.

¹⁵¹ AN, 457 AP 82. Note de Direction Europe, Ministère des Affaires étrangères (25 Octobre 1944).

pragmatic. Besides the permanent strategic reason (to prevent renewed German aggression) there were other more fluid ones. In 1943, this was mainly support of de Gaulle as a more acceptable leader than the Anglo-American protégés, while in 1944, it was the desire to forestall any possible anti-Soviet drift of France, to strengthen the position of the PCF and to reinforce PCNL legitimacy.

The treaty of alliance and mutual aid of the 10th December 1944 constituted the high point of the Soviet-French rapprochement, while demonstrating simultaneously its limits. It did nothing to alter Moscow's view of France as part of the British sphere of influence or Stalin's estimate that she was too weak to be a member of the Big Three club. French attempts to play Britain against the Soviet Union and vice versa were not excluded and prompted suspicions.

During the whole period, de Gaulle's factor was of great importance. In this sense, Soviet-French relations in 1943–45 could be regarded as part of interactions over a broader period. There is something to say for comparisons between Soviet-French relations during the two de Gaulle eras: 1941–1946 and 1958–1968. In both cases, Moscow viewed the General with suspicion, but recognised him as a French politician truly capable of affording himself significant freedom of manoeuvre in relations with Washington and London. And this asset, both in the times of the "Grand Alliance" and during the Cold War, was always appreciated in Moscow.