STALIN, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, AND THE MARSHALL PLAN: NEW DOCUMENTATION FROM CZECHOSLOVAK ARCHIVES

Founded in Prague in 1990, the Institute of Contemporary History devotes its efforts, among other things, to the publication of hitherto inaccessible archive materials. Multi-volume editions of documents concerning various thematic groups are being prepared, which will be of great value for Czechoslovak historiography and beyond. Consequently, an agreement was concluded with the publishers of the journal Bohemia, under which selected documents will appear here in irregular intervals in English translation und thus be made accessible to the international public.

The first instalment of the series presents the minutes of a discussion between Stalin and members of a governmental delegation from Czechoslovakia held in Moscow on 9 July 1947 and concerning Czechoslovak participation in the Marshall Plan. The document is introduced by Karel Kaplan and supplemented with an analysis by Vojtech Mastny. It was translated from the Czech by John M. Deasy.

Introduction by Karel Kaplan

In the post-war history of Europe, on the way into the Cold War and Europe's division into two camps, the Marshall Plan played a significant role. In view of the change in the Soviet Union's European policy, one may speak of a milestone. It was also an important event in post-war Czechoslovakia, which stirred up and influenced that country's political life. Of the states within the Soviet sphere of influence, only the Prague government decided to attend the Paris Conference on the Marshall Plan. Poland, which originally had the same intention, changed her attitude. The Czechoslovak government discussed the Marshall Plan on 24 June 1947 for the first time and, for want of information, it instructed a commission of ministers to pursue the matter. On July 4, the government approved attendance at the Conference in Paris which had been convened by Great Britain and France. It decided that it would be represented by the Ambassador in Paris, and entrusted its Presidium with appointing the delegation and the "issuing of instructions." It further decided to send a government delegation to Moscow, headed by Prime Minister Klement Gottwald, with Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk and Foreign Trade Minister Hubert Ripka, who was replaced by Minister Prokop Drtina because of illness. Two days later, the Soviet diplomat Bodrov handed Minister Masaryk a note about the results of the preliminary negotiations of the three Foreign Ministers of the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain on the Marshall Plan when Minister Molotov had walked out. Bodrov answered Masaryk's repeated question about Czechoslovak attendance at the Conference that "he did not have any instructions in this respect," and did not exclude the expediency of Czechoslovak attendance. One day before Bodrov's visit, Gottwald received a telegram from the Central Committee of the CPSU

recommending Czechoslovakia's attendance. On July 7, the Presidium confirmed the government's decision on accepting the invitation to Paris for July 12. However, on July 8, Moscow sent Gottwald a second telegram expressing a negative attitude towards the Prague government's decision. It is not known whether Gottwald received the telegram before the delegation's departure to Moscow. On July 9, the Presidium approved the instructions for the Czechoslovak delegate to the Paris Conference. On the same day, the delegation conducted negotiations with Stalin and Molotov. They informed the Prague government about the results and recommended that the government's original decision concerning the Marshall Plan should be amended. On July 10, after a long and dramatic discussion, the government revoked its attendance at the Conference in Paris.

The following document is a record of the negotiations held by the Czechoslovak government delegation with Stalin and Molotov on 9 July 1947. It was prepared by a Czechoslovak diplomat and comes from the archive of the then Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the People's Party, Jan Šrámek. The document is part of the volume of documents *"The Marshall Plan and Czechoslovakia"* to be published by the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (ČSAV) in Prague.

MINUTES OF A VISIT TO GENERALISSIMO J. V. STALIN ON 9 JULY 1947*

Present: Generalissimo J. V. Stalin
Minister of Foreign Affairs V. M. Molotov
Prime Minister Kl. Gottwald, Ministers J. Masaryk, P. Drtina
Ambassadors: Heidrich, Horák,
Chargé d'affaires: Bodrov

By way of introduction, *Prime Minister Gottwald* said that the Czechoslovak Government delegation had three questions in mind about which they wished to speak with Generalissimo Stalin and Minister Molotov.

These are 1) attendance at the Paris Conference
2) the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty
3) economic and trade negotiations.

1. Czechoslovakia's participation at the Paris Conference

Prime Minister *Gottwald stated* that we had, it is true, answered the invitation to Paris positively, but with numerous serious reservations which give us the possibility of a free decision. The Government of the ČSR was resolved to withdraw its delegate immediately if this should turn out to be necessary. But now a new situation has arisen as a result of the fact that we are the only one of the Slav states and the only one of all the East European states which has accepted the invitation to Paris. Therefore, the Government of the ČSR would like to know the attitude of the USSR.

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* Throughout the translation, quotation marks have been set exactly as in the Czech original, so as to reflect a certain irregularity in their use by the Czech author. Thus, no attempt has been made to differentiate between simple quotations and quotations within quotations, and frequently the ends of quotations are unmarked.

Generalissimo Stalin said:

After Molotov's return from Paris, the Government of the USSR received news of Yugoslavia's attitude. Then Tatarescu made an enquiry. Initially, the Soviet Government did not answer and concluded that it would be correcter to go to the Conference and then, if it should turn out necessary, to leave the Conference. However, after the reports from the Ambassadors of the USSR had arrived, a different opinion had formed: The credits which are referred to in the Marshall Plan are very uncertain and it turned out that "using the pretext of credits the Great Powers are attempting to form a Western bloc and isolate the Soviet Union" (Generalissimo Stalin said this verbatim).

Generalissimo Stalin continued: "France herself has no programme for a revival of her economy, she is in a difficult financial situation, and Great Britain is also in dire financial straits and is struggling with difficulties of an economic nature, and in spite of this both Great Powers are trying to put together a programme for the economic revival of Europe. But the main creditor is the USA, because neither France nor England has a kopeck. For these reasons, the Paris plans did not appear serious to the Government of the USSR, and now the Government of the USSR has become convinced on the basis of factual reasons that it is in fact a question of isolating the USSR.

Therefore the Government of the USSR sent telegrams to Tatarescu, Yugoslavia, and the Poles; the Poles wavered initially, but then they decided not to accept the invitation. That is why the Government of the USSR was surprised by our decision to accept the invitation.

Generalissimo Stalin continued: "For us, this matter is a "question of friendship."[1] You would not have any direct advantages from attendance at the Conference. Surely you do not want "kulbany je kredity"[2] (i. e. credits which would endanger our economic and political sovereignty). "The terms of credit will certainly be bad, said Generalissimo Stalin and added:

"We consider this matter to be a fundamental question on which our[3] friendship with the USSR depends. If you go to Paris, you will show that you want to cooperate in an action aimed at isolating the Soviet Union. All the Slav states refused, even Albania was not afraid to refuse, and that is why we believe that you should withdraw your decision."

Minister Masaryk points out that in our country at the time of the decision on attending the Paris Conference the situation was determined by the general knowledge that with respect to raw materials we are 60–80 % dependent on the West. The managers of state enterprises keep saying to Minister Masaryk that it is necessary to go to Paris in order not to miss the opportunity of obtaining some credits.

When the Polish Government delegation arrived in Prague last week, Minister Masaryk spontaneously and unofficially asked some of the members how the Polish Government would decide about Poland's attendance at the Paris Conference. The Polish guests generally replied that Poland will go to Paris and that she will be represented by at least her Ambassador. Minister Masaryk requests that the impression should not arise from this remark that we perhaps wanted to hide behind our Polish friends. As far as Czechoslovakia's possible attendance at the Paris Conference is concerned, Minister Masaryk told the Polish guests that, if we were to accept the Franco-British invitation to attend the Paris Conference, we would do this with many reservations, namely in such a manner that we can leave the Conference at any time we should ascertain that this is not welcome to the Soviet Government or that our industry's hopes prove to be positive[4].

In conclusion, Minister Masaryk emphasized that all political parties are agreed that Czechoslovakia may not undertake anything which would be against the interests of the Soviet Union. The delegation will promptly notify Prague that the Soviet Government considers acceptance of the Anglo-French invitation to be an act directed against it, and Minister Masaryk does not doubt in the least that the Czechoslovak Government will act accordingly without delay. But Minister Masaryk here requests that the Soviet Government help us in our delicate situation. We do not have any great illusions; perhaps the matter could be fixed in such a manner that one would go to the Conference on one day and leave it on the next.

Then *Generalissimo Stalin* returned to our participation in Paris and said: "Participation at the Conference puts you in a false light. It is "a break in the front,"[5] it would be a success for the

Western Great Powers. Switzerland and Sweden are still wavering. Your acceptance would certainly also affect their decision."

„We know," Generalissimo Stalin continued, "that you are our friends, there is nobody in the Government of the USSR who would doubt the friendship of the ČSR for the Soviet Union. But through your participation in Paris, you would indeed prove that you had allowed yourselves to be misused as a tool against the USSR. Neither the Soviet Union nor the Government would put up with this. ("ne perevarili by")[6].

Minister Drtina will not repeat the reasons for our course of action in the matter of the Paris Conference which Minister Masaryk has already explained. However, he stresses that also the party to which he belongs would not participate in anything in the field of foreign policy which would appear as an act directed against the Soviet Union. He greatly welcomes this opportunity to emphasize this here. He wants it to be known that Minister Drtina's party will also consistently pursue such a policy as is necessary to prevent such deals. But Minister Dr. Drtina asks that Generalissimo Stalin and Minister Molotov consider one point: The economic situation of the ČSR is different from that of the other Slav states, except, of course, the Soviet Union, i. e. the living standard of the ČSR is dependent above all on foreign trade; and here, unfortunately, the situation is such that 60–80 % of our trade depend on the West.

Generalissimo Stalin remarks that our trading balance with the West has been passive.

Minister Dr. Drtina says that this is possible, but that the turnover of our trade with the West is large.

Generalissimo Stalin remarks that our exports to the West are not great enough to cover our imports if we have to pay in foreign currency.

Prime Minister Gottwald said that we have to pay in foreign currency and that we only have a little.

Generalissimo Stalin laughed and said: "We know that you have foreign currency" and, turning to Minister Molotov, he said with a smile: "They were telling themselves that they could obtain credits and therefore they did not want to miss this chance."

Minister Dr. Drtina asks Generalissimo Stalin to look at the situation in our country taking into account the fear which our population has, that namely the detachment from the West should not result in general impoverishment. That would not only have serious economic consequences, but also political ones. Our foreign trade with the Soviet Union, which attained a considerable level last year by comparison with the pre-War level, took a downward turn this year. Minister Drtina expresses the hope that the negotiations which are currently beginning in Moscow will improve this state of affairs.

As far as our attendance at the Paris Conference is concerned, the Government will certainly prepare itself in accordance with what we have determined here, Minister Dr. Drtina remarks and adds what Minister Masaryk already said, that the Government has decided unanimously about our attendance in Paris.

In conclusion, *Minister Masaryk* asks that the Soviet Government facilitate our way out of the situation.

Minister Masaryk asks Generalissimo Stalin to forgive him for speaking openly and says that in our present situation we need a kind of consolation prize, a gesture of the Soviet side.

Generalissimo Stalin then passed on to the economic situation and said: "Your situation is better than that of France and England. You could draft a programme for the economic recovery of France and England. The USSR is prepared to help you in your economic affairs. I will just quote some points:

1) We need "obsadnyje truby"[7] drilling pipes for oil fields. It would be a matter of a supply for 3–4 years.
2) We also need pipes for petroleum pipelines.
3) Tracks for narrow-gauge railways for the forestry industry.
4) Wagons.
5) Electric motors (smallish ones).

In this connection, *Prime Minister Gottwald* remarked: "We export light industry products, glass, china, footwear, textiles, etc. to the West. But the USSR has not purchased such products up to now."

Generalissimo Stalin: "We can buy these procucts as well. Generalissimo Stalin added: "Our harvest is good this year. The size of our country leads to the fact that only now can we see the situation clearly. The agricultural plan has been fulfilled, indeed exceeded. We can help our friends: Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Poland, and also you."

In reply to Generalissimo Stalin's question how the harvest would be in our country, Prime Minister Gottwald declared that it will turn out worse than last year and that it will be necessary to procure at least 300,000 tonnes of wheat.

Whereupon Generalissimo Stalin replied that the USSR could give us 200,000 tonnes of wheat, also barley and oats. He added that the USSR would buy clover seed from us. Prime Minister Gottwald said that we could also supply hops and sugar. Minister Masaryk said jokingly that our beer is better than the Soviet one. Generalissimo Stalin remarked that good beer is brewed only in Estonia.

Prime Minister Gottwald returned to our attendance in Paris and asked Generalissimo Stalin and Minister Molotow to make our way out of the difficult situation easier.

Generalissimo Stalin said: "I can show you the reason given by the Bulgarian Government for refusing to attend. The Romanians refused without giving a reason.

The Poles replied that they would accept American credits, but that they would like to negotiate with the USA directly, without intermediaries."

"Then, as far as you are concerned," Generalissimo Stalin said, "you could announce to Paris as follows: In the recent past it has become evident that the acceptance of the invitation could be interpreted as a blow" (stroke)[8] "against the USSR,[9] in particular since none of the Slav or other East European states accepted the invitation." Generalissimo Stalin added: "I believe that the sooner you do that, the better."

2. *The Franco-Czechoslovak Treaty*

Generalissimo Stalin said: "I read President Beneš's note about the treaty in question. I gained the impression that President Beneš is of the opinion that the USSR for some reason does not wish for your treaty with France. Precisely the opposite is the truth. We want your treaty with France, but we want that that this treaty should not be worse than your treaties with the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Poland."

We know your draft, we also know the French one and found that the French draft is worse in two essential points than your treaties with the states mentioned above.

1. France does not guarantee you immediate, automatic help. And yet for the ČSR precisely the obligation of immediate help is indispensable. This is not so important for the USSR; in the event of an invasion we can withdraw for hundreds of kilometres and then begin with the offensive, but for you a mere 30 km mean dangerously much in view of the small size of your territory. In your treaties with the USSR, Yugoslavia, Poland, there is a clause about immediate help; why should your treaty with France be worse?

2. The French draft limits France's help just to the case that you should be invaded by Germany. But it does not guarantee you any help for the case that you should be invaded by any ally, satellite of Germany. It is possible though that the Hungarians or Austria would invade you, but in this case, France would not be obliged to come to your help. Bear in mind that France once before has failed to adhere to her obligations to you as an ally.

The Government of the USSR does not intend to advise you not to conclude any treaty with France, but it does advise you not to make a worse treaty than those with Yugoslavia and Poland.

Generalissimo Stalin continued: "In our treaty with England (the treaty is for twenty years, i.e. until 1962), there is a clause that England is obliged to help us immediately, and not only against Germany, but also against satellites. On the other hand, our treaty with France contains the clause about immediate help, but there is no clause about any help against the satellites."

Generalissimo Stalin added: "We failed to include this in the French treaty (eto my prozevali")[10]. This happened because the treaty with France was not so important for us. As a matter of fact, with the treaty, we wanted to enhance France."

Minister Masaryk: points out that only one day before the flight to Moscow, the French Ambassdor to Prague said to him that Czechoslovakia was asking France to give more than the USSR had granted. Ambassador Dejean proposed agreeing by an exchange of letters that if France were to broaden her obligations towards the USSR in the future, the mutual Franco-Czechoslovak obligations would automatically be broadened.

Generalissimo Stalin and Minister Molotov stated: The initiative came from England that the Soviet-British treaty of friendship should be extended to fifty years. The Soviet Government is prepared to do this, but demands that some articles, which weaken the treaty, be improved. Bevin did not raise any objections to this during his visit to Moscow, but when the negotiations began, it became clear that the British proposals actually worsen the treaty considerably. The new British draft actually aims at removing from the treaty the clause about immediate help, and also about help against Germany's satellites. However, the Government of the USSR decidedly insists on the treaty's remaining unaltered in this point and, moreover, demands the addition of the following clause to the treaty:

"Both parties shall not participate in coalitions directed against one of the parties to the treaty, but they shall also not participate "in actions or measures aimed directly or indirectly"[11] against one of the treaty parties." The British Government does not agree with this clause. For these reasons, the negotiations are not being continued for the moment.

Prime Minister Gottwald asked whether Generalissimo Stalin is of the opinion that the signing of the French treaty on our part might somehow have an effect, for example, on the British-Soviet negotiations. Generalissimo Stalin said: "If you were to sign the treaty, it would certainly have a negative effect on these negotiations" –

3. Economic affairs

In conclusion, *Prime Minister Gottwald* spoke about economic questions.

1. In Moscow there is a delegation of our railway experts at present. In accordance with last year's negotiations, we assumed that the so-called "booty railway material"[12] (wagons) is our property, but we found that the USSR considers these things to be her property.

Prime Minister Gottwald requested that the Government in the USSR should help us in this respect. Generalissimo Stalin said that it would be necessary for our delegation to speak to the Minister of Railways and give him a detailed list of the Czechoslovak requests.

2. The Prime Minister informed Generalissimo Stalin about Hungarian matters. He emphasized that the Hungarians have been sabotaging the transfer agreement and are sabotaging it now, claiming that the agreement had been made by Gyöngyösi. Generalissimo Stalin said that there is now a better Government in Hungary, but Prime Minister Gottwald answered that this Government is also sabotaging the transfer agreement. He added that he has only mentioned this for Generalissimo Stalin's information.

3. Prime Minister Gottwald further mentioned our interned persons and the families of Svoboda's troops. Generalissimo Stalin said that it is necessary to draw attention to these matters by a note.

The visit ended at 24.30 hours[13]

[1] The Czech text contains the Russian term "vopros druzby".
[2] The Czech text here contains a Russian term the meaning of which is not clear; possibly a misheard "kuplennie kredity" (bought credits).
[3] sic.
[4] sic.
[5] The Russian term "proryv fronta" set in quotation marks is used here.

[6] The Russian text is placed in parentheses behind the Czech.
[7] The Czech text contains the Russian term in quotation marks.
[8] The alternative term is set in parentheses outside of the quotation marks.
[9] The Czech text just contains the abbreviation SSR.
[10] The Russian text is set in parentheses in the Czech text; the quotation marks are also set as here.
[11] The text in quotation marks is quoted in Russian.
[12] The Russian term "trofejnoe zeleznoderoznoe" is used and is misspelt as rendered here.
[13] 00.30 hours.

Analysis by Vojtech Mastny

The Soviet rejection in July 1947 of the American invitation to participate in the Marshall Plan has long been recognized as a milestone on the road to the Cold War. But what the milestone actually marks has not been entirely clear. Was Moscow bent on rejecting the plan all along, or did it originally consider accepting it and subsequently reverse itself? Why did it take part in the preparatory discussions convened in Paris at the end of June? Did Stalin deliberately mislead his east European allies about his intentions, only to demand their own rejection as the acid test of their willingness to obey him unconditionally? The document printed above and published here for the first time sheds new light on all these questions. It is the contemporary record of the meeting in Moscow on 9 July 1947, as a result of which Czechoslovakia withdrew its previously announced intention to participate in the American program[1].

Both apologists and critics of Soviet policy have maintained that Moscow always regarded the Marshall Plan unacceptable and merely joined the Paris discussions to dissuade others from participating. Three months later, Stalin's chief ideologist Andrei A. Zhdanov retrospectively denounced the American offer of aid as a sinister design aimed at depriving European states of their sovereignty and reviving Germany's "monopolistic concerns." He added pointedly that "it was well known beforehand that the USSR would refuse American assistance on the terms proposed by Marshall" and went to the Paris talks only to "expose" its true nature[2]. Zhdanov's *post mortem* seemed to substantiate the premonition of U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, Walter Bedell Smith, who already on June 23 had cabled to Washington that Soviet Foreign Minister Viacheslav M. Molotov was going to Paris "for destructive rather than constructive purposes."[3]

Yet the Soviet conduct at the conference rather showed that Molotov, having arrived there with a retinue of some hundred assistants, wanted assurances that he could have the American cake and eat it, too. He tried to induce the United States to extend

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[1] Unless indicated otherwise, all source references in this essay are to the document printed above.
[2] Zhdanov's speech at the founding meeting of the Cominform, September 22, 1947, Rush, Myron (ed.): The International Situation and Soviet Foreign Policy: Key Reports by Soviet Leaders from the Revolution to the Present. Columbus, OH 1970, p. 135.
[3] Smith to Secretary of State, June 23, 1947, Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS] (1947), vol. 3. Washington, DC 1972, p. 266.

the Marshall aid on Soviet rather than its own terms. Countering the American insistence that the recipient states take the initiative in jointly calculating their needs and cooperate in ensuring the most effective distribution of the available resources, Moscow simply wanted each to announce its needs, whereupon Washington would be expected to deliver[4].

Stalin subsequently told the Czechoslovak representatives that the credits mentioned in the Marshall Plan were "very uncertain." He more likely meant that he did not believe the United States could possibly be so generous without ulterior purposes. In any case, he rightly observed that the credits were a formula which the great powers were trying to use "to form a Western bloc and isolate the Soviet Union."

In Paris, Molotov first proposed to find out how large credits the U.S. government was prepared to extend and whether Congress was willing to approve them[5]. However, since no one familiar with the American political system could expect an answer to this hypothetical question, he soon abandoned the inquiry, trying instead to win West Europeans, particularly the French, for his concept of a Marshall Plan on Soviet terms. Testing how strong were the persisting French fears of Germany, he proposed to discriminate in the provision of aid against the Germans and their former allies. He supported the French idea of a steering committee of the aid recipients, provided no inquiry would be made into their resources and the ex-enemy states would be admitted at most in an consultative capacity[6].

Some members of the French delegation estimated that Moscow believed the European nations would be unable to draw up an effective plan whereupon the United States would be unwilling to advance the credits[7]. The Czechoslovak document printed above adds weight to this estimate of the Soviet premises. Stalin was skeptical especially about the ability of France and Great Britain to get their act together. He told the Czechoslovak delegation that they both were in great financial difficulties, yet were "trying to put together a program for the economic revival of Europe." He implied that they could not possibly succeed unless they were prepared to act as the front men of the United States. In Stalin's opinion, "the main creditor is the United States, because neither France nor England has a kopeck."

From this analysis, it follows that Stalin must have originally believed that winning the two destitute powers for his concept of a Marshall Plan on Soviet terms was both necessary and feasible. During the session on June 30, Molotov restated the terms, at which point he was handed by an aide what was or was made to appear a decoded message just received from Moscow[8]. The message, whose content remains unknown, did not change the Soviet position: Molotov simply continued to repeat it. What did change was that later in the day, in a departure from its previous insistence on secrecy, the Soviet delegation made the position public at a press conference[9]. It may be

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[4] Caffery to Secretary of State, July 1, 1947, FRUS (1947), vol. 3, pp. 303–304.
[5] Caffery to Secretary of State, June 28, 1947, ibid., pp. 297–298.
[6] Caffery to Secretary of State, June 28 and 29, 1947, ibid., pp. 299–300.
[7] The estimate by Maurice Couve de Murville and Hervé Alphand reported by Caffery to Secretary of State, July 3, 1947, ibid., p. 309.
[8] Caffery to Secretary of State, July 1, 1947, ibid., pp. 301–302.
[9] Ibid., p. 303.

surmised that the message had given Molotov the necessary authorization to do so, then wait for a possible effect and finally, if none were forthcoming, walk out of the conference and leave town. This was, in any case, what happened by July 2.

Whatever their opinion about its material worth, the Soviets evidently overestimated their ability to have the Marshall Plan on their own terms. Otherwise they would have hardly left their east European allies so completely unprepared for its rejection. One of the allies, the dogmatic revolutionary Yugoslavia, had been, if anything, even more apprehensive of a putative imperialist ploy than Stalin was. Yet even this Yugoslavia at the beginning of July indicated to the British and French ambassadors its intention to attend a second preparatory meeting, which their governments proposed to reconvene in the French capital on July 12[10]. When Stalin met with the Czechoslovak delegation on July 9, he used the Yugoslav position as the point of departure in his explaining how the Soviet policy had changed.

Stalin contended that even after walking out from the first conference the Soviet government considered attending the second, though with the intention of leaving it again if necessary. This was the same tactic that Milovan Djilas, the second highest-ranking Yugoslav communist, later reported as having been advocated to him by Molotov at the first Paris meeting in regard to east European countries[11]. In any case, none of these countries had a reason to regard Molotov's departure from Paris as Moscow's final word affecting their own freedom of action. Among them, Poland and Czechoslovakia were especially eager to partake in the prospective American bounty.

Of the two, the Warsaw government, though by this time far more communist-dominated than the Czechoslovak one, was moving ahead more decisively[12]. For its part, the Czechoslovak government proceeded with caution. On July 2, the day of Molotov's Paris walkout, Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk checked with Soviet chargé d'affaires in Prague Bobrov, and only after the Soviet diplomat had voiced no objection did he recommend to the cabinet that Czechoslovakia accept the invitation to the second Paris meeting[13].

The cabinet, presided over by the Communist Premier, Klement Gottwald, approved the recommendation unanimously on July 4, and made its decision public. By that time, Moscow had already sent out messages urging Yugoslavia, Romania, and Poland not to go to Paris; according to Stalin's account, only "the Poles wavered initially, but then they decided not to accept the invitation." Czechoslovakia was not originally included among the countries that Stalin tried to bar from attending the Paris gathering. Yet even before he voiced any displeasure with its participation, its government left no doubt that, if faced with a choice, it valued its staying in Moscow's good graces higher than the Marshall Plan.

On July 7, Masaryk instructed the Czechoslovak representatives to the prospective Paris meeting to remain reserved[14]. Paraphrasing the instructions two days later in

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[10] Korbel, Josef: Tito's Communism. Denver 1951, pp. 281–282.
[11] Djilas, Milovan: Conversations with Stalin. New York 1962, pp. 99f.
[12] Ripka, Hubert: Czechoslovakia Enslaved. London 1950, p. 53.
[13] Kaplan, Karel: Il piano di Stalin. Panorama [Milan] 15, No. 575 (April 26, 1977), pp. 179–180.
[14] Ripka: Czechoslovakia Enslaved, p. 54.

Stalin's presence, he explained them as implying attendance "with many reservations, namely in such a manner that we can leave the Conference at any time if we should ascertain that [our participation] is not welcome to the Soviet government." Masaryk further reminded Stalin that his country's "all political parties are agreed that Czechoslovakia may not undertake anything which would be against the interests of the Soviet Union." This was the axiom proclaimed and promoted by the country's highly respected President, Edvard Beneš, ever since 1943[15].

It is therefore misleading to say, as has been commonplace in Western literature on the subject, that Stalin, having decided to reverse Czechoslovakia's announced participation in the Marshall Plan, "summoned" its representatives to Moscow, nor could their reversal be described as being reluctantly executed under irresistible pressure[16]. The visit by the Czechoslovak delegation, featuring both Masaryk and Gottwald, had been planned for some time, and the Marshall Plan had not originally been on the agenda. Indeed, when the visitors met with Stalin and Molotov late at night on July 9, it was not the Soviet dictator but the Czechoslovak communist premier who started the conversation by soliciting Moscow's opinion about his goverment's acceptance of the Paris invitation.

This opening may have been prearranged if it is true, as has been plausibly suggested but not proved, that earlier that day Gottwald had already met with Stalin secretly *à deux*. Prearranged or not, Stalin's demand to cancel the decision to go to Paris was phrased rather gently, certainly by the despot's standards. The farthest he went in pressing it was by describing it as "a fundamental question," on which Czechoslovakia's "friendship with the USSR depends." He maintained that "if you go to Paris, you will show that you want to cooperate in an action aimed at isolating the Soviet Union. All Slav states refused, not even Albania was afraid to refuse, and so we believe that you should withdraw your decision."

The Soviet means of pressure were limited. Unlike in Poland and elsewhere in eastern Europe, there were no Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia, nor did communists control its government. Yet pressure was not needed, for its leaders were quite ready to oblige anyway. It was Masaryk the democrat, not Gottwald the communist, who first assured Stalin that "the delegation will promptly notify Prague that the Soviet government considers acceptance of the Anglo-French invitation to be an act directed against it," adding that he "did not doubt in the least that the Czechoslovak government will act accordingly without delay."

Far from questioning the justice of the Soviet demand, the Foreign Minister curried Stalin's favor by insisting that Czechoslovakia never really had any "great illusions" about the Marshall Plan. His main concern was to solicit Soviet help in devising some face-saving procedure that would make the abject reversal palatable to the Czechoslovak and Western public. He thought that everything might be fixed by "going to the Conference on one day and leaving it on the next."

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[15] Cf. minutes of the Beneš-Molotov conversation, December 14, 1943. In: Mastny, Vojtech: The Beneš-Stalin-Molotov Conversations in 1943: New Documents. JbGO 20 (1972), p. 380.

[16] For example, in Daniel Yergin: Shattered Peace. Boston 1977, p. 316.

Other Czechoslovak delegates present, including Gottwald, at least tried to defend their original interest in the Marshall Plan by alluding to their country's dependence on Western trade. But they had no good answer to Stalin's remark that the balance of that trade was passive. In the end, they all begged him to help them undo the decision they had made unanimously. Describing his talk as "open," Masaryk spoke of the need for some sort of a "band-aid," a gesture from the Soviet side. Yet none was forthcoming from a despot never known for wanting to make life easier for his stooges. He urged Prague to simply state that "In the recent past it has become evident that the acceptance of the invitation could be interpreted as a blow against the USSR."

Upon his return home, Masaryk reportedly complained to his friends that he had left for Moscow as the foreign minister of a sovereign state and had returned from there as Stalin's stooge[17]. Pitiful though his predicament was, his government had long before circumscribed its sovereignty by making Soviet wishes the lodestar of its foreign policy. In this regard, its predictable reversal in the matter of the Marshall Plan changed little. However, there were to be further Soviet demands, with no end in sight.

During the same Moscow meeting on July 9, Stalin responded to Beneš's memorandum about the draft of Czechoslovakia's projected treaty with France. Insisting that he did not oppose the treaty, he stated enigmatically that it only must not be "worse" than those that Czechoslovakia had concluded with the Soviet Union and its east European allies. In his opinion, the defect of the draft was in its failure to make French assistance "automatic" and applicable not only against Germany but also its possible allies. He made the incredible remark that "it is, of course, possible that you might be invaded by the Hungarians or Austria."

It would have been all but impossible to divine what Stalin really wanted if he had not alluded to London's recent proposal to drop the clause about automatic assistance against Germany's potential allies from the 1942 British-Soviet treaty that was currently being considered for extension. Stalin said that he had further tried, but without success, to insert into the text a provision that would bar the signatories from taking part in any coalition aimed directly or indirectly against each other. And this was the provision he wanted Czechoslovakia to put into its treaty with France as well. To Gottwald's helpful question of whether the conclusion of the Czechoslovak-French treaty would adversely affect the Soviet-British negotiations, Stalin replied that it would, thus leaving no doubt that he opposed the treaty after all.

Little did the hapless Czechoslovak officials suspect how much the *cauchemar des alliances* haunted the mighty Soviet leader. It was suggestive of his nightmare that he needed little Czechoslovakia to help avert it and that he proceeded in such a roundabout way before arriving at the main point. But it was already too late to arrest the trend toward the eventual formation of hostile alliances that his quest for Soviet security at the price of everybody else's insecurity had so outstandingly helped to precipitate.

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[17] Herben, Ivan: Comment Staline empêcha la Tchécoslovaquie de participer au plan Marshall. Le Figaro, August 12, 1948.

Unlike Czechoslovakia, Britain and France gave in July 1947 a proof that they valued American assistance more than Soviet friendship. Summing up the outcome of the Marshall Plan crisis on July 11, Ambassador Smith viewed the Soviet veto of the Czechoslovak participation as "nothing less than a declaration of war by the Soviet Union on the immediate issue of the control of Europe." Given the Soviet sense of weakness, he was overstating the case. But he was quite right in concluding that now „the lines are drawn."[18]

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[18] Smith to Secretary of State, July 10, 1947, FRUS (1947), vol. 3, p. 327.