

## ИСТОРИЯ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ И ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКИ

### The Problem of Returning of American Diplomats to Liberated Czechoslovak Republic

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The article examines the circumstances of the return of American diplomats to the territory of Czechoslovakia liberated by the Red Army in the first half of 1945. On the basis of archival documents, the interaction between American and Soviet diplomats concerning the dates of the arrival of American representatives in the Czechoslovak Republic with the view to officially restoring the US Embassy in this country was studied. The political context that accompanied the coordination of the quantitative composition of the American mission, its routes to the destination and the location of the embassy in liberated Prague in May 1945 is also examined. The starting point for the analysis is the conclusion of the Central European Division of the US State Department made in January 1945, supported by the opinion of the US Ambassador to the USSR A. Harriman, that the relations of the Czechoslovak Government with the American, British and Soviet Governments were “excellent” and did not pose any problems. The development of the US-Soviet dialogue on Czechoslovak problems in January-April 1945, however, did not confirm these optimistic forecasts. Documents from the National Archives of the United States and a number of other sources made it possible to reconstruct

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the situation in Soviet-American relations with regard to the Czechoslovak Republic, to investigate Washington's reaction to the refusal of the USSR to allow American diplomats to enter the Czechoslovak Republic, the attempts of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations to overcome Moscow's objections and outline possible responses. In May 1945, a way out of the impasse was found.

*Keywords:* World War II, Soviet-American relations, American-Czechoslovak relations, history of Czechoslovakia, E. Beneš.

## **Проблема возвращения американских дипломатов в освобожденную Чехословацкую республику**

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В статье рассматриваются обстоятельства возвращения американских дипломатов на освобожденную Красной Армией территорию Чехословакии в первой половине 1945 г. На основе архивных документов изучено взаимодействие американской и советской дипломатий по вопросу о сроках прибытия американских представителей в ЧСР с целью официального восстановления посольства США в этой стране. Рассмотрен также политический контекст, сопутствовавший согласованию количественного состава американской миссии, маршрутов ее продвижения к пункту назначения и определению места размещения посольства в освобожденной Праге в мае 1945 г. Отправной точкой для анализа служит сделанное в январе 1945 г. заключение Центрально-европейского отдела госдепартамента США, подкрепленное мнением посла США в СССР А. Гарримана, о том, что отношения чехословацкого правительства с американским, британским и советским правительствами «превосходны» и не представляют никаких проблем. Президент республики Э. Бенеш считался политиком, способным выстроить прагматичные отношения со всеми союзными государствами. Развитие американско-советского диалога по чехословацкой проблематике в январе — апреле 1945 г. тем не менее не подтвердило этих оптимистичных прогнозов: вопрос о возвращении американской дипломатической миссии в ЧСР решался медленно, в процессе его обсуждения пришлось преодолеть многочисленные разногласия. Документы из Национального архива США и ряд других источников позволили реконструировать ситуацию, сложившуюся в советско-американских отношениях по поводу ЧСР, исследовать реакцию Вашингтона на отказ СССР разрешить въезд в ЧСР американских дипломатов, попытки администраций Рузвельта и Трумэна преодолеть возражения Москвы и наметить возможные варианты ответных действий. В мае 1945 г. выход из тупиковой ситуации был найден. Тем не менее этот затянувшийся спор создавал негативный фон для развития американско-советских отношений в Восточной Европе и впоследствии использовался в качестве одного из аргументов в пользу политики сдерживания на ранней стадии холодной войны.

*Ключевые слова:* история Чехословакии, Вторая мировая война, советско-американские отношения, американско-чехословацкие отношения, Э. Бенеш.

Entering World War II, the United States emerged from voluntary isolation and actively engaged in solving international problems. With the approach of victory, Washington's attention increasingly concentrated on the liberated countries of Europe, on the

restoration of normal diplomatic relations with their governments, and on forecasting further development. The Americans reasonably hoped that after the victory over the totalitarian regimes these countries would embark on the path to democracy and rapprochement with the United States. One of these states was the Czechoslovak Republic. Divided and liquidated in March 1939 as a result of German aggression, in 1945 it was liberated by the Soviet and American troops.

Despite the abundance of scholarly works devoted to the history of World War II and the origin of the Cold War, the problem of the transfer of American diplomats to Prague after the liberation of Czechoslovakia from the Nazi occupation has never been specially explored either in Russian or in English historiography. Mostly in the ascertaining tone, it is touched upon by V. V. Mar'ina<sup>1</sup> and V. O. Pechatnov<sup>2</sup>. The undoubted achievements of these authors made it possible to single out the return of American diplomats to the capital of Czechoslovakia as an independent research problem of considerable interest in the context of broader topics — “the outcome of the World War II and the origin of the Cold War. In 2012, Lukes's book<sup>3</sup> was published in the United States, where this issue was mentioned in the general context of the development of the situation in post-war Czechoslovakia, with an emphasis on the activities of Ambassador L. Steinhardt after his arrival in Prague in mid-July 1945. However, the question of the transfer of diplomats to Prague and American-Soviet tensions concerning this issue was not addressed in detail here either. In the works on the history of diplomacy of the early Cold War it is either declared or implied, but, as a rule, without description and analysis<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, this topic requires thorough coverage because of the importance of restoring the sequence of events and their detailing in order to understand the origins of the Cold War.

The interests of Czechoslovakia during the war were represented by the Government-in-exile in London headed by President E. Beneš. Wishing to ensure the independence of his country in the future and to protect it from the new German aggression, Beneš was building a security system for the republic. He intended to establish close relations with two poles of the postwar world — the Western powers and the USSR. To secure the support of this plan, in 1943 Beneš at first visited Washington, and then Moscow. In the US he managed to convince the American leadership of the benefits of developing close relations with the USSR, and announced his intention to restore democracy in the Czechoslovak Republic as well. In Moscow he spoke of the affinity of the Slavic nations and their need for a common struggle against German aggression. In the USSR was signed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Postwar Collaboration, which demonstrated the new character of relations between the two governments.

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<sup>1</sup> Mar'ina V. V. *Sovetskii Soyuz i chekhoslovatskii vopros vo vremya Vtoroi mirovoi voiny. 1939–1945.* Book 2. Moscow, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Pechatnov V. O. *Stalin, Roosevelt, Truman. SSSR i SShA v 1940-kh godah.* Moscow, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Lukes I. *On the edge of the Cold War. American Diplomats and Spies in Postwar Prague.* Oxford, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Costigliola F. *Roosevelt's Alliances: how personal politics helped start the Cold War.* Princeton, 2012; De Santis H. *The Diplomacy of Silence: the American foreign Service, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War, 1933–1947.* Chicago, 1979; Hamby A. *Man of Destiny: FDR and the making of American Century.* N. Y., 2015; Kolko G. *The Politics of War: the World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943–1945.* New York, 1968; Leffler M. P. *For the Soul of Mankind: the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War.* New York, 2007; Miscamble W. D. *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima, and the Cold War.* Cambridge, 2008; Offner A. *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945–1953.* Stanford, 2002.

After the Soviet troops had liberated the eastern part of Czechoslovakia in 1944, Beneš was asked to return home through Moscow to form a new government. This proposal was adopted on January 1, 1945. The place of temporary residence of Czechoslovak Government was Košice in Eastern Slovakia<sup>5</sup>.

The transfer of the Czechoslovak Government to the liberated territory raised the question of its escort by foreign diplomats. The US recognized the Czechoslovak Government-in-exile in July 1941. Diplomatic relations were maintained through the American mission to the Allied governments in exile in London under ambassador A. J. Drexel-Biddle. After his retire in early 1944, this function was performed by Chargé d'Affaires R. Schoenfeld. In December 1944, L. Steinhardt was appointed American ambassador to Czechoslovakia. Previously he represented the United States in Sweden, Peru, the USSR, and since 1942 in Turkey. In early 1945, he was to leave Ankara and go to the residence of the Czechoslovak Government through the US.

By that time the State Department considered the development of the Czechoslovak situation as the most prosperous among other countries in the region. Its Government did not deliver serious problems to the Allies. This was particularly noticeable against the background the relations with Polish exile Government, which had in a permanent conflict with the USSR and sought the support of the United States and Great Britain. Beneš seemed an intelligent politician, guided by pragmatic interests and managed to build normal relations with all major allied powers. The US Ambassador in Moscow, A. Harriman, considered Beneš's policy as a good example of a reasonable approach to how it was possible and necessary to build relations with Stalin<sup>6</sup>.

The State Department's Central European Division Memorandum of January 11, 1945, noted: "The Czechoslovak Government's relations with the British and Soviet Governments are excellent, and present no problems. Czechoslovak-American relations remain excellent ... The United States intends to continue to recognize, and to work in close cooperation with, the present Czechoslovak Government in the prosecution of the war and in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Czechoslovakia and the rest of Europe"<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, there was an opinion at the Department of States, that Czechoslovakia could be an indicator of the Soviet intentions towards the whole Eastern and Central Europe, of the Kremlin's ability to keep promises achieved at the United Nation's conferences.

The Americans assumed that the Czechoslovak Republic will seek to restore the democratic system. The re-establishment of the diplomatic mission there was seen as an important task for the near future. Washington believed that it could rely on his allies in this aspect, including the USSR. According to the "Declaration on liberated Europe" signed at the Yalta conference on February 11, 1945, the three main powers were to contribute to ensuring the democratic development of European nations<sup>8</sup>.

On January 10, H. Ripka, Czechoslovak Secretary of State (Deputy Foreign Minister) in London, informed the First Secretary of the American Embassy J. Bruins about Moscow's proposal to form a new Czechoslovak Government on the liberated territory

<sup>5</sup> Československo-sovětské vztahy v diplomatických jednáních 1939–1945: dokumenty. Díl 1, Březen 1939 – červen 1943. (hereinafter — ČSVDJ). Praha, 1999. Dok. 207, 208.

<sup>6</sup> *echatnov* V. O. Stalin, Roosevelt... P. 143.

<sup>7</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, Europe. Vol. IV / eds E. R. Perkins, S. E. Gleason. Washington, 1968 (hereinafter FRUS).

<sup>8</sup> Sovetskii Soiuz na mezhdunarodnikh konferentsiakh perioda Velikoi Otechestvennoi vojni, 1941–1945 gg. Sbornik dokumentov. Vol. 4. Moscow, 1984. P. 231–232.

as soon as possible<sup>9</sup>. On January 20, the Czechoslovak Minister in Ankara M. Hanak informed Steinhardt about its acceptance and Beneš's intention to return home as soon as the military conditions permit. In this connection, the transfer of American diplomats to the new Czechoslovak Government residence became an issue. The exact time of this relocation was unknown. Steinhardt planned to go to Washington in late February, and then to return to Europe. The head of the Central European Department, D. Riddleberger, noting that the Czechoslovak Government could "desire that you take charge of your new mission as soon as possible in order to provide the advice and support of this country", asked the Ambassador not to worry and not to change his plans. Temporary American mission in Czechoslovakia could be headed by Bruins<sup>10</sup>, since he had served in the American Embassy in Prague before the war<sup>11</sup>.

At the end of January it became known that the Czechoslovak Government could go to the USSR not earlier than March. It intended to visit Moscow and hold negotiations with the Soviet authorities there, agree on the provisional government's composition with the Czechoslovak Communists and representatives of the Slovak resistance. Beneš informed Schoenfeld that he hoped for the fast arrival of diplomats from all allied powers. But American Chargé did not consider it possible to send the embassy staff along with the Czechoslovak president to Moscow. Serious disagreements with the USSR arose at that time. Schoenfeld believed that such act by the US would require the permission of the Soviet Government, "which it might be loath to give". To avoid this, he suggested to transfer embassy staff through Italy. The first group was to include the Ambassador or his deputy (or both), several employees and a Military Attaché. Bruins temporarily had to lead the mission<sup>12</sup>.

The Department agreed with these recommendations, noting that it was necessary to send basic personnel as soon as the Czechoslovak Government was ready to move to the liberated area. It was preliminary planned to notify the Soviet authorities of the delegation's date and route<sup>13</sup>.

On March 9 and 11, two planes with Czechoslovak politicians left London and proceeded to the USSR<sup>14</sup>. From there they were to go to the temporary Government residence, Košice. The remaining Czechoslovak Government officers should have been to sail by a British ship later from Glasgow to Romania, and onward to Slovakia. Foreign diplomats planned to depart along with them. The Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry asked the diplomatic corps to be ready to leave at any time after March 15. Some part of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry staff under Ripka's leadership remained in London. Its head, Minister J. Masaryk, after the negotiations in Moscow had to return to England, and then to go to the conference in San Francisco<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Files 860F.01/1-1045 // US National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (NARA). Record Group 59. File, 1945–49.

<sup>10</sup> Riddleberger to Steinhardt. Jan. 26, 1945 // Laurence A. Steinhardt papers, 1929–1950. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (Steinhardt Papers). Box 46; File 860F.01/1-2045 // NARA. RG 59.

<sup>11</sup> *Lukes I.* On the edge... P.34, 57.

<sup>12</sup> File 860F.01/1-2945 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>13</sup> FRUS, P. 425; File 860F.01/1-2945 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>14</sup> File 860F.01/3-1045; // NARA.RG 59; 860F.01/3-1245 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>15</sup> File 860F.01/3-1345 // NARA.RG 59.

The list of American and British delegations was transferred in February to the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in London, I. A. Tchichaev, who promised to request a pass for diplomat's transfer through Romania. American group consisted of 10 officers: the head — Bruins, 4 vice-consuls, the Assistant Military Attaché, senior economic analyst, and 3 clerks. Schoenfeld recommended asking the US embassy in Moscow and the American representatives in Bucharest to contact the Soviet authorities for assistance in the travel<sup>16</sup>. Later the delegation was expanded. An experienced career diplomat A. Klieforth was appointed as the Counsellor of the Embassy and the head of the delegation. In his welcome letter to Steinhardt on March 12, he reported that many of his friends were envious of this appointment, as they considered Czechoslovakia to be the key Slavic country, the "political weather center of Europe"<sup>17</sup>.

On March 17, Beneš landed in Moscow, where he was staying for two weeks. The Czechoslovak president met with Stalin and Molotov, negotiated with the Czechoslovak Communists. On March 24, it became known, that the Head of the 4<sup>th</sup> European Department of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, V. A. Zorin, was appointed as the new Soviet Ambassador to Czechoslovakia<sup>18</sup>. It was reached an agreement on the new Government composition, in which the Communists were introduced. Beneš informed the American Ambassador in Moscow Harriman about the reached agreements. Czechoslovak Ambassador in Moscow, Social Democrat Z. Fierlinger<sup>19</sup> was appointed as the Prime Minister. Leaving Moscow by train on March 31, the Czechoslovak delegation led by Beneš arrived in Košice on April 3. The creation of the Government was announced the next day.

During Beneš's stay in Moscow, foreign diplomats prepared for the forthcoming sailing. In London Bruins solved the issues of supplying and equipping the embassy with the necessary items. Klieforth provided the necessary support in Washington. The ship was loaded with diplomatic baggage<sup>20</sup>. It was planned to declare the closure of the London diplomatic office for visits on the departure date and to restore the Embassy officially on the day of arrival to the Czechoslovak Government's location<sup>21</sup>. On March 22, after the first meeting with Molotov, Beneš informed Harriman about the Soviet People's Commissar's agreeing with the planned transfer. On March 26, Schoenfeld reported that the Soviet authorities would not require diplomats to apply for Soviet visas, but they would need Romanian transit permits. The Czechoslovak Government was going to get them<sup>22</sup>.

Two days before the departure, Moscow unexpectedly changed its position. On March 27, Zorin told Fierlinger that the Soviet authorities objected to the foreign diplomats' arrival because of the military situation in the Košice area and the problems with their accommodation. The Soviet command considered it necessary to postpone diplomat's arrival for some time, and subsequently to transport them in small groups. There were no objections to the Czechoslovak staff<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> File 860F.01/3-1745 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>17</sup> Klieforth to Steinhardt. March 12, 1945 // Steinhardt Papers. Box 95.

<sup>18</sup> Harriman to Schoenfeld. March 25, 1945. // NARA.RG 84. Box 2.

<sup>19</sup> FRUS. P. 430–433; *Lukes I. On the edge...* P. 34.

<sup>20</sup> *Lukes I. On the edge...* P. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Grew to Schoenfeld. March 23, 1945; Schoenfeld to Stettinius. March 26, 1945 // NARA.RG 84. Box 1.

<sup>22</sup> File 860F.01/3-2645 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>23</sup> *Mar'ina V. V. Sovetskii Soyuz...* P. 323.

The next day at 15:15 the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in London I. A. Tchichaev sent a relevant note of the Soviet Government to Ripka. He immediately invited American and British diplomatic representatives and read it to them. Tchichaev also verbally informed Ripka that the Soviet authorities in Romania had been instructed to reject the request for a transfer of diplomats through that country. The Czechoslovak Deputy Minister expressed his regret about Moscow's actions<sup>24</sup>. On March 29, a ship with Czechoslovak government employees sailed without a foreign diplomatic corps<sup>25</sup>.

An unexpected change of Soviet position during the negotiations on the Czechoslovak Government was an unpleasant surprise for the State Department. Motives of Moscow were unclear. The reasons indicated by Zorin could indeed have taken place. Military operations continued in Czechoslovakia. On March 24, the Czechoslovak Government delegate to the liberated territory F. Nemeč reported on the possibility of hosting a delegation of no more than 20 members in Košice without problems with accommodation and meals. Masaryk sent a telegram to London asking to postpone diplomat's departure until the situation became clearer. However, the British could provide the next ship only six weeks later.

On March 25, Fierlinger discussed the issue with Zorin. The Czechoslovakian Ambassador reported that 50 foreign diplomats planned to accompany the Czechoslovak government staff. Zorin replied that his Government was hesitant about their admission to the front-line territory. The earlier consent to the pass concerned only Czechoslovak citizens. Because of the issue urgency Zorin promised to give a definitive answer in the near future. On March 27, accurate information on the number of delegation members was provided to Moscow: it was planned to deliver to Romania by April 12–14 a group of 242 people, including 28 British, 10 American, 4 Belgian and 10 Dutch diplomats. On the same date, Zorin notified Fierlinger of the need to postpone the arrival of the diplomatic corps<sup>26</sup>.

The State Department was not aware of these problems. On March 14, Schoenfeld sent an information of the Czechoslovak newspaper "*Czechoslovak*" about the situation in Košice. According to it the city was managed by the Slovak National Council commission, heating and lighting were restored in hospitals and public buildings, schools, a library and a theater were organized, a radio station operated and 2 newspapers went out<sup>27</sup>.

The unexpected decision of the Soviet Government during the negotiations in Moscow and the strengthening of the Communists' influence in new Czechoslovak Government caused serious questions and aroused suspicions of the Kremlin's intentions. Shortly before that the creation of a pro-Soviet government in Poland was announced. The USSR not only recognized it, but also forced Beneš to take a similar step, after which the relations between the Czechoslovak and the Polish Government-in-exile in London were broken off. That was the matter to think about Soviet plans for Czechoslovakia.

In a message to Harriman, it was stated that the Department did not understand the reasons for Moscow's unexpected decision "in view of the agreement on concerted action of the three powers contained in the Declaration on Liberated Europe signed at Yalta". The State Department instructed Schoenfeld to express to Ripka "the regret that the mission

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<sup>24</sup> File 860F.01/3-2845 // NARA.RG 59; FRUS.P.429.

<sup>25</sup> File 860F.01/3-2945 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>26</sup> Dok. 256 // ČSVDJ; *Mar'ina V. V. Sovetskii Soyuz...* P. 323.

<sup>27</sup> Schoenfeld to the Secretary of State. March 14, 1945 // NARA.RG 84. Box 2.

will not be present during the initial stages of reconstruction and our hope that every effort will be made by his Government to make possible continued American representation”<sup>28</sup>. Harriman was instructed to obtain Soviet visas on an individual basis, at least for the minimum embassy staff “to ascertain if the Soviet authorities are using the situation in Košice as a nominal excuse for their refusal to admit the representatives of friendly governments during the initial stages of political reconstruction, or whether they wish to exclude any diplomatic representation during this period”. The group included a Counsellor, a First Secretary, a code clerk and a stenographer. The Department’s dispatch noted that American representation under the Czechoslovak Government was “highly desirable” at the initial stage of the political reorganization in Czechoslovakia in order to ensure a coherent policy of the three powers to assist the liberated peoples in democratically solving their pressing political and economic issues. The State Department also asked to find out whether Beneš was accompanied by the Soviet Ambassador Zorin and whether the Soviet Government officially transferred the Košice district to Czechoslovak civil authority<sup>29</sup>.

Schoenfeld initially regarded the problem with sending the US diplomatic mission as a small delay. He intended to learn the details from Masaryk after his return to London and believed that the basic staff could be sent by plane to Italy in 2-3 weeks. He considered it necessary to include the Military Attaché to the first group. If Zorin’s arrival to Czechoslovakia was confirmed, Schoenfeld recommended the Department to insist that the American delegation was allowed to leave immediately, “since the Soviets could in this case interpose no valid objection”<sup>30</sup>.

In a personal letter to Steinhardt, Schoenfeld wrote more frankly. He pointed out to the serious inconveniences because of “our Soviet friends” habit to act at the last moment. “We were singularly fortunate in being able to get all of our baggage and supplies off the ship and, except for a minor amount of pilferage, suffered no important loss... I was delighted with the strong reaction of the Department to our telegram reporting the changed plans and its action in directing Averlll Harriman to request the immediate clearance by the Soviet authorities for a small advanced group... I do not see how the Soviets can have the face to hold us up for any length of time in view of the fact that their own Ambassador is already in the country...” — wrote Schoenfeld<sup>31</sup>.

On April 7, Harriman reported about making a new visa request. He confirmed that “Zorin has definitely went to Košice with Beneš and his name has appeared prominently in Soviet press despatches from that city”. The Ambassador was alarmed by the situation in Slovakia, where the power belonged to the local council under the Communist’s leadership, who gave Moscow an “effective control of civil affairs in the area”. According to Harriman, this meant that the Soviet-Czechoslovak Civil Affairs Agreement was only “observed in form, although violated in spirit”<sup>32</sup>.

On the same day Schoenfeld reported on the conversation with Masaryk who had returned to London. The latter expressed regret over the delay with the arrival of foreign diplomats whose presence in Košice he considered extremely desirable. The Minister confirmed that the Soviet Ambassador had accompanied Beneš, having thoughtfully said that

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<sup>28</sup> File 860F.01/3-2845 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid; File 860F.01/3-2945 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>30</sup> Schoenfeld to the Secretary of State. April 14, 1945 // NARA.RG 84. Box 1.

<sup>31</sup> Schoenfeld to Steinhardt. Apr. 18, 1945 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>32</sup> File 860F.01/4-745 // NARA.RG 59.



it was wrong. Schoenfeld replied: “Not, if the other diplomats could also be there”<sup>33</sup>. Masaryk said that he planned to go to the US on April 15, but he intended to seek permission from the Soviet Ambassador for foreign diplomats even after his departure. In a private talk with his friend, American Lieutenant M. Rehor, Masaryk noted that the Czechoslovak Government was disturbed that American diplomats were not allowed to proceed to Czechoslovakia and the Russian excuse was very weak. The Communists, he said, were “going wild”, having received so much power<sup>34</sup>.

The leadership of the US State Department had reasons for discontent. The reason was not just a sudden change of an agreed plan, but the presence of the Soviet Ambassador as an only representative of the allied powers. This seemed to be a violation of the Yalta agreements with regard to the liberated nations. Another important argument was expressed to the Department by the American representative in Romania: such an unilateral action of the USSR could be interpreted as a sign of weakness of American positions and a blow to the prestige of the United States<sup>35</sup>.

Meanwhile, a direct connection with the Czechoslovak Government since its transfer to Košice was actually interrupted due to objections by the Soviet authorities. The main source of information about the events in Slovakia was the Soviet press<sup>36</sup>. Its reports confirmed some fears. On April 6, Harriman transmitted to the State Department the articles of the Moscow papers about the arrival of the Government delegation to Slovakia. According to them, peasants welcomed its members with Beneš's and Stalin's portraits, with slogans “Thanks and glory to the liberators — the Red Army”, “Glory to our liberator, Stalin”, “ovations honoring Beneš and liberator of Czechoslovakia, friend of Slavs Marshal Stalin”, greetings to the Soviet Ambassador Zorin<sup>37</sup>. At its first session, the new Government sent a greeting to Stalin<sup>38</sup>. Roosevelt's congratulations to Beneš on his return home, sent to Harriman, were not delivered to Košice due to lack of communication<sup>39</sup>.

The Government's declaration issued after the arrival welcomed the Red Army, expressed deep gratitude to the Soviet people and to Marshal Stalin. It announced that Czechoslovakia's foreign policy would be based on close cooperation with the USSR, which guarantees freedom, security and the future happy development of the republic<sup>40</sup>. The Košice Government Program, handed over to Schoenfeld by the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry on April 20, declared the imminent implementation of socialist reforms<sup>41</sup>.

Such a rapid and substantial shift in the Czechoslovak political course could be regarded in Washington as another proof of Soviet pressure. Without waiting for a clear response from Moscow regarding the American diplomats, the State Department instructed Kennan to transfer to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs on April 26 that “we no longer consider the Soviet objections to the establishment of representation as valid and expect the Soviet authorities to make the necessary arrangements for the transit of our mission to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Czechoslovakia–Government–Foreign relations. Apr. 14, 1945 // NARA.RG 84. Box 3.

<sup>35</sup> File 860F.20 Mission/4-245 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>36</sup> File 860F.01/4-1045; // NARA.RG 59; File 860F.01/4-1245 // NARA.RG 59. *Mar'ina V. V. Vtoroi* president Chekhoslovakii Edward Beneš: politik i chelovek. 1884-1948. Moscow, 2013. P. 386.

<sup>37</sup> File 860F.01/4-745 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>38</sup> File 760F.61/4-945 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>39</sup> FRUS.P.433.

<sup>40</sup> File 860F.01/4-1145 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>41</sup> File 860F.01/4-2045 // NARA.RG 59.

Czechoslovakia... diplomatic missions. We expect that our mission will be accorded the same facilities provided to Soviet missions in Western Europe. Unless our mission is given permission to proceed immediately and be provided with facilities equal to other missions in Czechoslovakia, we must take the view that the Soviet Government is interfering with the right of this Government to carry on normal diplomatic relations with the Czechoslovak Government and that the objective of concerted action in the liberated areas agreed on at the Crimean Conference is not being carried out by the Soviet Government with respect to Czechoslovakia”.

The State Department believed that the current situation required decisive actions. Therefore, if Moscow did not receive a satisfactory response within a week, they intended to make a statement to the press that the USSR had prevented the establishment of “normal diplomatic relations” with Czechoslovakia, that is, it had violated the reached agreements. The draft document also contained a crossed out phrase suggesting, as a response, to deprive Soviet diplomatic missions in Western Europe “some of the facilities” provided them by American Government<sup>42</sup>. The State Department had serious concern about what was happening in Košice, and this demarche, apparently, was not formal.

Kennan, who went to the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to transmit the message, was received by the deputy head of the American Department, K. A. Mikhailov. According to the American diplomat, having learned about the reason for the visit, Mikhailov interrupted Kennan at the beginning and promised to resolve the issue in the near future in a satisfactory manner for the Americans<sup>43</sup>. After that, Kennan decided to refrain from transmitting the note, confining that the US Government was extremely interested in this matter and hoped for its early solution<sup>44</sup>.

At the same time, on the eve of the San Francisco Conference, the State Department prepared a memorandum for Secretary of State E. Stettinius recommending to make a protest to the head of the Soviet delegation, Molotov, demanding the admission of the American delegation to Czechoslovakia and providing to it “absolute equality with the Soviet representative in matters of communication and transportation”<sup>45</sup>. The conversation took place on May 2. Referring to the military situation, Molotov promised that the US mission would be able to start its work in soon<sup>46</sup>. There were no more answers from the Soviet side.

On May 3, the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry in London reported that the Government would move from Košice to Bratislava, and thence to Brno or Prague. In connection with the rapidly changing situation, the Foreign Ministry asked the members of the diplomatic corps “kindly to postpone for a little while their departure to Czechoslovakia”<sup>47</sup>. Kennan, never received an answer from the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, advised the Department to abandon the previous plan and send diplomats straight to Prague from the American occupation zone. He reported that he had not had any reliable information

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<sup>42</sup> File 860F.01/4-2645 // NARA.RG 59; FRUS. P. 443.

<sup>43</sup> FRUS. P. 445.

<sup>44</sup> In the report on Mikhailov's meeting, it appears that Kennan asked to accelerate the permission for the entry of 5 American officers to Czechoslovakia. Having received assurances that this issue would be resolved positively, he decided to keep a memorandum prepared on this matter with him. See: Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (AVP RF). F. 0129. Op. 29. D. 23. P. 168. L. 30.

<sup>45</sup> FRUS. P. 440.

<sup>46</sup> FRUS. P. 450.

<sup>47</sup> File 860F.01/5-445 // NARA.RG 59.

about “what is actually taking place in Bohemia and Moravia, who is exercising authority there, or where the Czech Govt is at present situated”. The Department approved this proposal<sup>48</sup>. Later, in July, Harriman informed the Department that, according to his information, the main reason for Moscow’s refusal to allow allied diplomats was the desire to prevent them from the true situation in Ruthenia, where, at that time, the movement for joining the USSR had activated with the support of the Red Army<sup>49</sup>.

Meanwhile, the liberation of Czechoslovakia was coming to an end. April 25 there was a meeting of Soviet and American troops on the river Elbe, May 2 Berlin was taken by the Red Army<sup>50</sup>. April 18, the Third US Army under the command of General D. Patton went to the old Czechoslovak borders and began the liberation of Western Bohemia. The advance of American troops raised the question of the limits of their penetration into Czechoslovakia and the possible liberation of Prague. The Allied command in Europe did not consider this expedient from a military point of view. But after the deterioration of relations with the USSR, this issue began to acquire political significance. This was well understood by the British Government. Foreign Minister A. Eden and Premier W. Churchill appealed to the US leadership with a proposal to issue an order to American Army to advance to Prague, to liberate it and thereby provide serious political advantages<sup>51</sup>.

American Commander-in-chief in Europe, D. Eisenhower, opposed to it, as he did not want to take unreasonable, from the military point of view, steps for the sake of political gains<sup>52</sup>. Having agreed the limits of the US Army advance with the Soviet General Staff, he intended to grant the liberation of Prague to the Russians. But the State Department supported British position. The Acting Secretary of State D. Grew noticed that the Russians intended to gain political benefits from this situation. President G. Truman, who succeeded F. Roosevelt on April 12, was sent a memorandum with the proposal to approve the advance of American troops deeper into Czechoslovak territory and ignore Soviet objections, citing Moscow’s refusal to cooperate on the problems of Austria and Czechoslovakia, obstructing the sending of the American embassy to the Czechoslovak Government location<sup>53</sup>. The President, however, chose not to interfere in military matters and left the decision to Eisenhower.

On May 5, an uprising began in Prague, during which Czechs actively encouraged Americans and Russians on the radio to intervene and help them. Information about the possible moving of the US Army to Prague met with active objections from the Soviet General Staff, which declared the danger of mixing the two armies. To avoid conflict, Eisenhower ordered to stop the offensive on the line agreed with the Soviet command to the west of the Czechoslovak capital<sup>54</sup>. On May 9, Soviet troops entered Prague. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, the first Czechoslovak Government group headed by the new Prime Minister Z. Fierlinger was sent to the capital. The President, accompanied by the rest of the cabinet members, arrived to the capital on May 16<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> FRUS. P. 453.

<sup>49</sup> FRUS. P. 520.

<sup>50</sup> *Mar'ina V. V. Sovetskii Soyuz i chekhoslovatskii vopros...* P. 332.

<sup>51</sup> FRUS. P. 441–446; *Mar'ina V. V. Sovetskii Soyuz i chekhoslovatskii vopros...* P. 332.

<sup>52</sup> *Mar'ina V. V. Sovetskii Soyuz i chekhoslovatskii vopros...* P. 335.

<sup>53</sup> FRUS. P. 448.

<sup>54</sup> *Eisenhower D. Krestovii pohod v Evropu.* Smolensk, 2000. P. 475.

<sup>55</sup> *Lukes I. On the edge...* P. 52–53.

The State Department received information about the military operations with delay. On May 9, it informed Schoenfeld about a possible change in plans for sending the embassy. In the case of the liberation of Prague by the American army, it was planned to request the military ministry to transfer there first of all the Bruins to accept the embassy property. Klieforth as the head of the mission could arrive in the capital only after the Czechoslovak Government<sup>56</sup>.

On May 15, Ripka informed Schoenfeld about his Government's desire that the diplomats should come to Prague in the near future, asked for names and time of arrival. The next day he reported on his departure to his homeland, promised assistance and noted that the diplomats could go to Prague when they would be ready<sup>57</sup>. Ripka assured Schoenfeld that the Government had received permission from the Soviet authorities to land airplanes with the diplomats at the Prague airport, but he did not rule out the occurrence of difficulties<sup>58</sup>. The Department ordered to prepare for the departure of a group of 12 people. In 2–3 weeks, Ambassador Steinhardt was due to arrive<sup>59</sup>.

On May 23, Kennan received information<sup>60</sup> from his British colleague A. Clark-Kerr that the Czechoslovak Government had decided to transfer allied diplomatic missions from London, and the Soviet Government did not object to this step<sup>61</sup>.

On May 10, US Major C. Katek, sent to Prague, received keys from the Swiss General Consul and placed it under guard. The first American diplomat in Prague was the Bruins. In late May, he flew to Prague airport in the form of a brigadier general and safely reached the embassy. He said that the embassy building was in good condition and was ready<sup>62</sup>.

The main group of diplomats was decided to be delivered to Prague in a different way. In order not to receive the Soviet permission to land at the Prague airport, on May 29 the plane with the staff of the Embassy headed by Klieforth landed in Pilsen in the American occupation zone. From there they drove to Prague by military vehicles. They were stopped by the Soviet military at a checkpoint three times, but by evening the delegation had reached the capital. According to Washington's report, the arrival of the US mission to Prague "was greeted with real joy by all classes of people", the president and the prime minister personally expressed to Klieforth "great satisfaction and obvious relief over our arrival"<sup>63</sup>.

The very next day, American diplomats were invited to the military parade and the official banquet, having met a lot of attention<sup>64</sup>. Klieforth and Bruins once again inspected the embassy building, the Schönborn Palace, and found no tangible damage or loss. They

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<sup>56</sup> Grew to Schoenfeld. May 9, 1945 // NARA.RG 84. Box 1.

<sup>57</sup> Schoenfeld to Stettinius. May 15, 16 1945 // NARA.RG 84. Box 1.

<sup>58</sup> File 860E.01/5-1845 // NARA.RG 59.

<sup>59</sup> Grew to Schoenfeld. May 18, 1945 // NARA.RG 84. Box 1.

<sup>60</sup> FRUS. P. 455.

<sup>61</sup> A note to the British Charge d'Affairs in Moscow, signed by A. Vyshinsky, informed, that Czechoslovak government removed to Prague and approve for transfer of diplomats accredited to him from London was given on May 16, 1945. AVP RF. F.06. Op. 7. D. 310. P. 26. L. 29. A similar note to Kennan from the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs was decided not to hand. AVP RF. F.0129. Op. 29. P. 23, 168. L. 34.

<sup>62</sup> *Lukes I.* On the edge... P. 56.

<sup>63</sup> FRUS. P. 455.

<sup>64</sup> Caffery to the Secretary of State. June 3, 1945 // NARA.RG 84. Box 3; FRUS. P. 455.

formally opened an embassy on June 1, 1945, and a week later began to render consular services<sup>65</sup>.

However, the American diplomatic mission had remained incomplete until the arrival of the Ambassador. The departure of Steinhardt from Turkey was postponed for two months due to problems with finding a replacement. Departing in April to the US, Steinhardt had stayed there until the end of June, doing personal things. He arrived in Prague only on July 16, the last of the ambassadors of the allied states<sup>66</sup>.

## Conclusions

1. The situation with the return of American diplomats to Prague in the spring and summer of 1945 was one of the first manifestations of the American-Soviet confrontation in Eastern Europe. Despite the right of the Allies to help jointly the liberated peoples to restore their sovereignty and create democratic institutions of their own choice, as stated in the “*Declaration on Liberated Europe*”, an effective political cooperation in implementing the declared intention in Czechoslovakia was not achieved.

2. In addition to the differences in interpretation of the meaning of the key concepts of the “*Declaration*”, the causes of the crisis, as documented by US archives, were also covered in the State Department’s superficial assessment of the situation in Czechoslovakia. By the time the decision on the formation of the Government of Czechoslovakia on the liberated territory (January 1945) had been taken, relations with the exile Government of Beneš were described as “excellent”, so the USSR’s refusal to allow Western diplomats to Košice, where the Czechoslovak Government was formed on April 4, was perceived as an unexpected, insignificant and easily removable delay. Only at the end of April, after Roosevelt’s death, the American embassy in Moscow received instructions to make “strong statements” on this issue. However, this time the military situation was not taken into account, because of which the solution of the problem actually had to be postponed to the end of May.

3. Perceiving Moscow’s opposition as a deliberate policy to promote its interests in Central Europe, Washington was unable to take effective steps to counteract it in Czechoslovakia. Diplomatic protests had no effect, and proposals for the liberation of Prague by American troops and subsequent use of their presence for pressure on the USSR were rejected by President Truman at the suggestion of Eisenhower. The reasons for this, first of all, can be considered the absence of a developed strategy for Czechoslovakia, as well as the intention of the new head of the White House in his foreign policy at this stage to follow Roosevelt’s policy of preserving the anti-Hitler coalition.

4. In May 1945, the crisis as a whole was painlessly overcome, which created the conditions for the subsequent agreed withdrawal of American and Soviet troops from the territory of Czechoslovakia<sup>67</sup>. Nevertheless, this episode created a negative background for the development of subsequent US-Soviet relations in Eastern Europe and was used as one of the arguments in favor of a policy of deterrence in the early stages of the Cold War.

5. Of considerable importance in the case of Czechoslovakia, obviously, were some personal qualities of the American diplomats involved in the restoration of the US

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<sup>65</sup> Lukes I. On the edge... P.58.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. P.81.

<sup>67</sup> Pechatnov V. O., Magadeev I. E. Perepiska I. V. Stalina s F. Ruzveltom i U. Cherrillem v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny. Dokumentalnoe issledovanie. Vol. 2. Moscow, 2015. P.734.

diplomatic embassy in this country. Many of them, including Ambassador L. Steinhardt, did not hurry to go to the dangerous front-line region, which did not promise a comfortable life and significant career achievements.

6. The change of the president and the subsequent personnel changes in the US top leadership, the disagreements between the military command and the State Department also hampered the rapid adoption of decisions. This was supplemented by illusions about the inevitability of the revival of democratic order in Czechoslovakia and its immunity to communism, which E. Beneš advocated. These circumstances objectively contributed to the strengthening of the positions of the left forces and the rapprochement of the Czechoslovak Republic with Moscow.

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