Early Indications of a Freeze: Greece, Spain and the United Nations, 1946–47
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This article examines the place of the United Nations as a forum in which early Cold War tensions were visible among the former wartime allies with particular reference to the cases of Greece and Spain. It looks at the roles that the Big Three allocated to the United Nations in their post-war foreign policies and how these changed during the period and in particular the way in which the United Nations became less a forum for maintaining great power unity and more one in which Cold War tensions were publicly and damagingly demonstrated.

In many analyses of the origins and development of the Cold War, the United Nations is treated as something of a Cinderella body, not quite central to an understanding of the worsening relations between East and West after 1945. This is, I feel, a fundamental oversight. Whether the origins of the Cold War lay in a clash of power politics or in ideological divisions, the forums of the UN provided instant, repeated and public evidence of the deteriorating relationship between the former wartime allies. Yet the omens for a continuation of the grand alliance of the USA, the Soviet Union and Britain seemed propitious when the UN Charter was signed in San Francisco in June 1945. The birth of the UN appeared to be a public indication that wartime cooperation could be carried into the post-war world through the forums of the new organization. However, expectations were to be tested in the very first week of the UN’s life when, in January 1946, the Soviet Union charged that British troops in Greece were a threat to international peace and security. The case of Greece was to develop into a source of tension and ill will among the Big Three within the Security Council and the General Assembly and rumble on until 1952. And while trouble for the UN brewed at one end of the Mediterranean, it was also fermenting at the other as the post-war world came to terms with the Franco regime in Spain: an unwelcome legacy of the 1930s and one
which many states hoped to see overthrown by the UN. These two cases, Greece and Spain, were symptomatic of the worsening set of relations between Britain and the USA on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other, and patent demonstrations that the Cold War was not limited to the problems of Central and Eastern Europe. What seems plain from the proceedings of the UN in early 1946 is that relations between the British and the Soviet Union broke down first, with the Americans largely spectators of the propaganda and invective that marked Anglo-Soviet exchanges in the Security Council in January and February 1946. However, by 1947 the situation had changed with the formulation of the Truman Doctrine and American assistance to Greece leading the US to take a more prominent role in the UN as it sought to use its forums as part of its containment policy. Thus the very public, open, fracture of relations in the UN was an indication of the different types of post-war world that East and West sought to see created and defended by the UN.

The position of the UN as the centre-piece of British foreign policy after 1945 might have been expected given the election of a Labour government with a massive majority, keen to demonstrate its internationalist credentials. Prime Minister Clement Attlee publicly stated this in October 1945.1 However, British involvement in planning for the UN went back to the summer of 1942 when the Foreign Office drew up its ‘Four Power Plan’ for a post-war international organization. This long paper, which was approved by the Cabinet in November 1942, was built on the assumption of continuing great power cooperation to control Germany and Japan in the post-war world.2 Yet not all policy makers were sanguine about the prospect of cooperation with Russia once hostilities had ended. Leo Amery at the India Office in 1942 was to dismiss the assumption of continued Russian goodwill in a future UN. For him, Anglo-Soviet cooperation resulted from German and Japanese aggression ‘rather than from any inherent identity either of outlook or of interest with ourselves or with the United States’.3 In addition, throughout 1944 the Foreign Office was to have a running skirmish with the Chiefs of Staff and their policy planners who were sceptical of the UN ever materializing and dogmatic over the future threat from Russia.4 By late 1945, however, some of the scepticism towards the UN as a forum for future harmony among the Big Three had seeped into the Foreign Office. While some, such as Professor Charles Webster, Gladwyn Jebb and Jack Ward of the Reconstruction Department, were keen to stress its importance,5 more influential voices such as Sir Orme Sargent, who would become Permanent Under Secretary in 1946, were less enthusiastic.6 His planning paper on British foreign policy, ‘Stocktaking after VE Day’, in July 1945 did not even mention the role of the UN.7 However, the fact that Sargent’s predecessor, Sir Alexander Cadogan, was appointed as Britain’s representative with ambassadorial status to the UN Security Council – itself an indication of where Britain thought the power in the UN should lie – was a mark of the formal British support for the new body. And while Sargent had omitted any reference to the UN in his projection of post-war British foreign policy, he did see British objectives to be, where possible, the maintenance of great power collaboration. Therefore, for the British, the UN had at the least to be a forum where post-war divisions were not publicized.8
Although our knowledge of Soviet aspirations towards the UN is less than full, we do know that the Soviet Union wished to be involved in the conferences and meetings which framed the UN, both as a recognition of its status in international politics and to protect its security interests: it had after all been excluded from Versailles in 1919. Beyond that we know that Stalin was consistent in his belief that post-war international security had to rest on the continuing cooperation of the Big Three, and that some key thinking in Soviet foreign policy circles in 1944 and 1945 echoed this. Stalin was probably not too interested in the sentiments and principles behind the UN Charter; the key issue would be whether the Big Three would agree on the structure of the post-war world and be able and willing to use the UN to support and defend this structure. It was also fairly clear that being in a minority in all forums of the UN, the Soviet Union was not going to allow the new organization to take decisions that were against its interests. For this reason the Security Council rather than the General Assembly was the key forum for the Soviet Union since veto rules provided protection for the major powers. However, when UN sessions began in January 1946 against a backdrop of dwindling great power unity, the Russians seemed prepared to use the new body as a forum in which to embarrass the British and create divisions between them and the Americans while also seeking to appeal to smaller, impressionable states. Frank Roberts, the British Minister in Moscow, explained Soviet policy to Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, along these lines in 1946 and Soviet actions over Greece in January 1946 seemed to fit this explanation, with apparently irresponsible charges against the British designed to harvest the support of what the Soviets would portray as oppressed peoples.

The American position towards the United Nations was less straightforward than that of either of its wartime allies. The Roosevelt administration had been at the forefront of planning for a post-war international organization in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor, but American ideas were shaped by two contrasting positions towards the structure of the future UN. One was universalism: an American belief in equality for all states and the adoption of the rule of law for international relations. The other, somewhat echoing Stalin, was for the continuation of the wartime condominium in the future UN with post-war international relations and security being controlled by the Big Three. The end result which emerged in consultation with America's wartime allies at Dumbarton Oaks in 1944 and Yalta in 1945 was something of a compromise: a universal organization in which all peace loving states would be represented but with the dominant roles of the great powers assured through their permanent membership of the Security Council and their powers of veto. However, in assigning the veto to the permanent members, the UN founders made great power cooperation a pre-requisite for the future success of the UN. Without the goodwill and cooperation of the Big Three, the UN could not possibly function effectively. The Roosevelt and early Truman administrations were in other words signing up to a conception of the United Nations not too dissimilar from that of the Soviet Union. It was to be a forum of cooperation and one in which the Americans thought, or hoped, that interests would either not clash at all or do so only
in a fashion which the UN would be able to resolve. When Edward Stettinius, who had been Roosevelt’s last Secretary of State, was appointed the first head of the American delegation to the UN with what Stettinius assumed would be co-equal status with James Byrnes, the Secretary of State, it appeared to indicate the significance of the UN for post-war American foreign policy.\footnote{14}

Not all American policy makers however were so taken with these aspirations. Dean Acheson, number two to Byrnes at the State Department, considered the Charter impractical. It was born of an American idealism to extend the institutions and practices of a liberal democracy to international affairs: a substitute even for diplomacy.\footnote{15} George Kennan, later the author of containment and US Minister at the embassy in Moscow in 1946, took a similar and fundamentally realistic view. As he saw it, American faith in the role of the UN ignored the realities of post-war international affairs. The Americans hoped for cooperation in the UN in maintaining a peaceful world. But Kennan believed that Moscow attached no particular value to a peaceful world. What Stalin wanted was for the UN to endorse a great power hegemony of the Big Three and to use its forums to win American and British acceptance of spheres of influence, something which US policy makers resolutely opposed but which Stalin was already creating in eastern Europe as the UN began its work in 1946.\footnote{16} Thus the American and Soviet conceptions of the UN had a common feature – the maintenance of great power cooperation – but they differed in their assumptions about the foundations for that cooperation. The British also saw that great power cooperation was important for post-war security but they felt that in order not to threaten it, key areas of interest should be specifically excluded from the UN: its forums should be used to demonstrate areas of agreement not to highlight ruptures in the relationship. But as the Security Council convened in London in January 1946, it was the British and Soviet clash over Greece which was to epitomize the rapid decline in relations among the former allies and to induce precisely what the British wished to avoid: a very public fracture.

**The Case of Greece, 1946–47**

The background to the Greek case in the UN was the competition between Britain and the Soviet Union to establish spheres of influence in the Balkans. The British had been pressing for an agreement with Stalin over post-war influence in the Balkans from May 1944, in order to protect their strategic routes through the Mediterranean and to the Middle East.\footnote{17} For this the defence of Greece was crucial. The outcome was the notorious percentages agreement of October 1944 in which the British gained a free hand in Greece in return for Soviet dominance in Rumania. Lincoln McVeagh, the American Ambassador to the Greek government in exile, recognized Britain’s precarious strategic position in the face of the developing Soviet military threat by 1944 and in a stream of despatches urged Roosevelt to make a commitment to the reconstruction of the Balkans before the Soviet Union did so, since post-war American security interests would not be dissimilar to those of the faltering and brittle British. Roosevelt, however, was all for placating Stalin as the Red Army forced its way into the
Balkans throughout 1944, and in the circumstances Churchill was obliged to protect British interests unilaterally. The American position on the percentages agreement was to ignore it, and in so doing to ignore the military realities imposed by the Red Army. The agreement smacked of secret diplomacy and spheres of influence, precisely those aspects of international politics which the American legalistic, even moralistic, approach so abhorred. Indeed Stettinius, as American Under-Secretary of State, criticized British intervention in Greece in December 1944. There was therefore so great a vacuum in US foreign policy towards Greece throughout 1944 and 1945 that when the Soviet complaint against the British troop presence in Greece was made, the Americans stood by as impartial onlookers.

British troops had been sent to Greece to defend Britain’s sphere of influence in the eastern Mediterranean following the German evacuation in 1944. They brought some stability which allowed the creation of a government of national unity including members of EAM (the National Liberation Front) who were controlled by the Greek Communist Party. Yet it was a fragile coalition which soon disintegrated when civil war broke out between Greek government forces and ELAS, the military wing of EAM, in December 1944. The British troops then took sides against ELAS which, being defeated in Athens, retreated to the north to wage a debilitating guerrilla war against the Greek government with the support of the communist regimes of Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria. In these circumstances the Soviet Union was prepared to create discomfort for the British in Greece in spite of the percentages agreement and raised the British presence both at Potsdam and in the Council of Foreign Ministers meetings in London and Moscow in 1945. The UN was a further forum, and a public one, in which to skewer the British diplomatically, especially as the Russians were on the receiving end of complaints against their troops in Iran made in the first week of the UN’s opening session. The Soviet delegation, led by the Deputy Foreign Minister, Andrei Vyshinsky, responded by denouncing the presence of British troops in Greece as a threat to international peace. What was significant was the speed of Vyshinsky’s response, coming as it did within two days of the Iranian complaint, suggesting some deliberate, premeditated action to drive a wedge between the British and the Americans. This would exploit American irritation towards British troops in Greece and ignore conciliatory British moves to restrain the Iranians from bringing their charge against the Russians. The Soviet complaint was discussed in the Security Council on Trygve Lie’s first day in post as UN Secretary General, a day he termed his ‘baptism of fire’. The verbal battle between Bevin and Vyshinsky was brutal, bitter and abusive and even necessitated the convening of one secret session of the Security Council. In open debate the Russian accused the British troops of overseeing the ‘white terror’ perpetrated by ‘fascist scum’ in Greece and forced Bevin into a robust defence of the British role in Greece and British foreign policy generally. Vyshinsky, the prosecutor at many of Stalin’s 1930s show trials, exhibited a lawyer’s forensic skills yet his arguments lacked much credibility. The idea that the relatively small British force in Greece posed a threat to the estimated 800,000 Russian, Yugoslavian and Bulgarian troops on Greece’s northern borders appeared ludicrous. Bevin thought as
much and considered the Soviet charges lacked bite, that Vyshinsky did not believe them himself and that he was using Greece as a link with Bulgaria and Rumania. The Soviet representative even admitted as much to Bevin, saying that the Russians would withdraw their charge were the British to recognize the Bulgarian and Rumanian governments despite their non-compliance with the Yalta agreement on free elections in eastern Europe.  

Bevin rejected this and fought his corner, demanding that the British be given a clean bill of health in Greece. Eventually Stettinius, acting as an honest broker, devised a compromise whereby the President of the Security Council asked for all sides to accept his summary of the various points made by delegations without mentioning the presence of British troops or taking a vote and then consider the matter closed. This was accepted by the Russians and the British, yet their brusque, vituperative language and open condemnation of each other showed the British public – the Security Council was sitting in Church House, London at the time – and those further afield that not all was well in the relationship between at least two of the Big Three.

The respite in the UN over Greece created by the Stettinius compromise was brief, for in March a right-wing government was elected on a small turnout, a victory for conservative forces and one which could be put down to the British influence in Greece. The Greek communists rejected the results and tension flared on Greece’s northern borders. By August, by which time the UN had moved to New York, the British were again placed in the dock, this time by the Ukrainian delegation who blamed the presence of British troops for incidents which had occurred on the Greek–Albanian frontier. The British having been exonerated earlier in the year did not believe the matter warranted further discussion in the Security Council. The US delegation at the UN, this time moving somewhat closer to the British position, also considered the Ukrainian case dishonest and frivolous, but the State Department, driven by the idea of the UN as a forum for open diplomacy where nothing should be excluded, upheld the Ukrainian’s right to be heard while making it clear that they would not support any charges against the British. In the subsequent debate, the Greek and Ukrainian representatives presented their views and the Albanians were also invited – in the face of British opposition but with American support – to state their case. At the conclusion, the Soviet Union proposed a resolution which called for an end to provocations from the ‘aggressive monarchist elements’ on the Greek–Albanian border, but this failed to gain support – an unsurprising outcome given the strength of the pro-Western camp within the Security Council. The Americans, sensing the need to investigate the border incidents, favoured the creation of a small commission by the UN. To this the British were opposed, feeling its very presence would provoke incidents and lend credibility to the Ukrainian charges. But the Americans were unconvinced and in September proposed a three-man commission, which did not include a Soviet representative, to examine the border incidents only to see their resolution met with what was to become characteristic of the Security Council in 1946: a Soviet veto.

Tension continued throughout the rest of 1946 however, forcing the Greek government to present the UN Secretary General with a list of border violations.
As a result, by December, in a reversal of position, the Security Council voted unanimously to create a Commission of Investigation comprised of representatives from members of the Security Council.33 The Americans were consistent in their support for a commission while the British, in recognition of the Greek government’s claims against its communist neighbours, withdrew their reservations and endorsed it. The Americans had by now received intelligence reports indicating that the Soviets planned, perhaps acting through Yugoslavia, to dislodge Macedonia from Greece and to support Bulgarian claims for Western Thrace.34 Such reports, which recalled McVeagh’s earlier fears, might be substantiated by a UN investigation. In fact the evidence of direct Soviet interference in the Balkans before the Truman Doctrine is mixed. There is much to the argument that Stalin sought to restrain the Greek Communists before 1947, but could not oblige Tito’s Yugoslavia to do the same. Stalin may well have probed the West in general, and the British in particular, but done no more than this before 1947 in order to deny the British a justification to argue against Soviet actions in eastern Europe.35 Thus, while Soviet support for the UN action is less easy to explain, it may reflect the fact that by December 1946 the Russians were at least guaranteed a place on the Commission and could use their presence for political advantage, something which would not have been possible under the earlier American proposal. Furthermore, continued Soviet opposition to the Commission might have been seen as confirmation of the Greek charges.

The Commission made investigations from January to April 1947 but it was fairly clear from the start that the Cold War divisions were already manifest in the way the various delegations on the Commission approached their tasks. The Soviet and Polish teams wished to stay in Athens and thus report on the Greek government rather than address the alleged communist infiltration on the borders and the Soviet Union indicated that it would not consent to any report which blamed Greece’s neighbours for the instability.36 In return, the British and Americans expressed reservations over the communist sympathies of Secretariat members attached to the Commission, particularly its Canadian Press Officer, and questioned whether Lie, the Secretary General, was to be trusted in controlling these errant individuals.37 The Commission reported in June and the divisions which were developing in the Security Council were reflected by the publication of a majority report of nine members and a minority report of two – the Soviet Union and Poland.38 The majority report found evidence that communist forces in Yugoslavia and to a lesser extent Albania and Bulgaria had supported the guerrilla war in Greece and were responsible for violations of Greek borders. The Soviet Union and Poland, however, dissented, taking the now standard communist line that Greece was responsible for a campaign of terror, threats, blackmail and torture assisted by ‘fascist bands’ to ensure the Commission received a pro-Greek version of events.39 The majority report also recommended that the Security Council create a further successor commission to investigate future border violations, to which not surprisingly the Soviet Union objected. For the Americans, the report confirmed their own intelligence information and reinforced the changes which were taking place in US foreign policy with the articulation of the Truman Doctrine.
The Case of Spain, 1946–47

At the other end of the Mediterranean to Greece was Franco’s Spain; a regime with which the international community had cause to feel it had some unfinished business given its collaboration with the Axis. The Franco government’s unwelcome survival caused the Attlee and Truman governments severe embarrassment when the UN convened in 1946. It was clearly an offence to democracy, but one which the British and Americans hoped to see removed by the Spanish people themselves. Spain created particular difficulties for the Americans with some Latin American states: Mexico, for example, had sponsored the resolution at San Francisco to exclude Spain from the UN precisely because it bore the imprimatur of fascism. For Attlee’s government, Franco was a particularly obnoxious rebel, a persecutor of the Left and the scourge of the republican movement. However, Britain had important trade and commercial links with Spain and also with Argentina which had a close association with Franco’s regime. And Spain occupied a strategically important position at the western end of the Mediterranean. The Spanish case may not have been as critical as that of Greece in the developing Cold War, but in 1946 neither the British nor the Americans could afford the political instability and even the danger of renewed civil war which might result from any attempt to oust Franco. Consequently they were not prepared to intervene with force or support economic sanctions against him.

The Soviet position on Spain was relatively straightforward. The Soviet Union was understandably hostile to Franco given his links with the Axis, and the role of the Spanish Blue Division on the Eastern Front had created deep resentment in Moscow. Soviet belligerence towards Franco was thus both ideological and visceral. His removal would also allow the Soviet Union to use Spain’s influence in North Africa and Latin America for Soviet interests. Moscow would not contemplate open military action against Spain and could do little to mobilize anti-Franco forces within the country, but it could and would, use public opinion in the West to increase pressure for Franco’s removal. Moscow would certainly oppose any permanent agreement which kept him in power while using all available forums to mobilize opinion against him: the creation of instability in Spain was a Russian goal. The UN was thus an obvious forum for Soviet purposes. This was explained to Byrnes by Kennan in February 1946. 

Attlee’s government might therefore have expected the Soviet Union to raise the question of Spain at the UN sooner rather than later given its experience with Vyshinsky over Greece. Yet to Britain’s dismay it was the French who, with Soviet support, first attempted to haul Franco before the Security Council in March 1946. The General Assembly, guided by a Polish resolution in February, had already condemned Spain, a not unusual reaction given the ill-feeling towards Franco among UN members. But the French sought more than pious words. In protest at the continuation of the Franco government, they closed the frontier with Spain and looked for American support in the UN for firmer action against Franco. Acheson in the State Department thought that UN expressions of condemnation might not be enough and that the USA in particular risked being seen as paying mere lip service to the UN Charter over this issue, but Byrnes
refused to side with the French. For Byrnes, the position of Franco was an internal Spanish matter.\textsuperscript{43} The British, for their part, were resolutely opposed to Security Council interference in Spanish affairs: the issue was one of domestic jurisdiction which fell under article 2(7) of the UN Charter. The British feared French action would cause them embarrassment and ‘land the Security Council in very deep water’.\textsuperscript{44} Attlee sought to dissuade the French,\textsuperscript{45} and was prepared to join them and the Americans in issuing a tripartite statement, approved at Cabinet level, warning Spain not to expect cordial relations while Franco remained in power and hoping the Spanish people would move towards democratic government peacefully.\textsuperscript{46} However, this was seen by the Foreign Office and by some in the American Embassy in London as a mere irritant to Franco. The note significantly excluded the Soviet Union and did not represent unified great power action and Franco, while perhaps enraged that appeals could be made over his head, knew that he could afford to sit tight.\textsuperscript{47} The British and Americans were in a dilemma: if they attempted to remove Franco, they risked being accused of intervening in the domestic affairs of another country – precisely what they suspected Yugoslavia and Bulgaria of doing in Greece. On the other hand, if they eschewed direct intervention, could they realistically press for a political solution ahead of what the Spanish people might accept and in so doing create turmoil in Spain and work to Moscow’s advantage?\textsuperscript{48} The British had no great desire to see the UN take further action against Franco. While there were domestic pressures on Attlee’s government for action from the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress, these could be balanced by economic arguments against and by Bevin’s reluctance to involve British servicemen in military action against Spain which might lead to a new civil war.\textsuperscript{49} Bevin came second to none in his abhorrence of the Franco regime, but he considered it contrary to Britain’s interests to do anything to destabilize the region or promote action in the UN which might discredit the new organization and even strengthen Franco.\textsuperscript{50} The British were thus driven by the desire to let matters lie. Not all shared this sentiment however.

In April 1946 the Polish government, with Soviet approval,\textsuperscript{51} sought to destabilize Spain by claiming in the Security Council that Franco’s regime constituted a threat to international peace under article 39 of the UN Charter. In response, the Council formed a sub-committee to investigate the claim. This reported in June that Spain posed no immediate threat to peace, thereby removing the grounds for any future Security Council enforcement action against Franco.\textsuperscript{52} The committee did, however, conclude that Franco’s regime constituted a potential long-term threat to international peace and security under article 34 and thus recommended that the case be transferred to the General Assembly with a further recommendation that unless Franco stood down the Assembly should advise UN members to sever diplomatic relations with Spain. For the Soviets, Spain was a key security issue and should be dealt with by the Security Council and they thus refused to commit themselves to handing over the Spanish case to the Assembly.\textsuperscript{53} After prolonged discussion, the Security Council rejected the recommendation to transfer the Spanish case to the General Assembly, choosing instead to keep it under continuous observation itself, but leaving open the prospect of the case being brought before the Assembly at some future date.\textsuperscript{54}
In these circumstances, the British were forced to come down against any future reference to the UN. They did recognize that some benefit might derive from the Assembly discussing the case where it would be free from the ‘atmosphere of ideological prejudice which had pervaded the Security Council’ and where there might be the possibility of receiving a definitive ruling that article 2(7) applied to Spain thus ending any future UN involvement. However, since it was impossible to foretell the way the argument would go in the Assembly, there was no guarantee that discussion would permanently remove Spain from the UN agenda. Consequently the British delegation in New York was directed not to raise the case in any UN forum.

However, in October 1946, the Poles, in spite of some Soviet doubts, successfully pressed for the matter to be transferred to the General Assembly. Gromyko had apparently thought the issue fruitless if, as he saw it, the British and Americans were determined to support Franco. Yet the Soviet Union, while not predisposed to see the Security Council supplanted, could use the opportunity to create some mischief and cause embarrassment for the West. The American position was that the Security Council had wisely decided to keep Spain under consideration, but that there should be no further action in the UN for the time being since any international condemnation might actually strengthen Franco. The British had evidence that domestically Franco was on ‘the crest of a wave’ following French, Polish and Russian attacks on him and the friction which his regime generated among the great powers in the UN; there had, in addition, been a good harvest and his position had been strengthened.

The British were gratified by the State Department’s attitude but were concerned about the wider American public reaction to Franco and questioned whether the West could hold the ring in the UN General Assembly with anti-Franco feelings running so high. As a result, far from pushing for non-discussion of Spain, Britain had to become involved in the Assembly in order to deflect the UN from taking too strong a line. Worryingly for the British, Lie had asked the Assembly to provide guidance for members in their diplomatic relations with Franco, something which the Foreign Office doubted was within his authority and which marked him out as ‘clearly playing the Soviet game’. The British thus took steps to check this course of action, even at one point seeking to table a draft resolution linking Spain’s future membership of the UN to the introduction of free elections, but urging member states to retain diplomatic relations with Franco’s regime.

This was not a particularly radical approach as Spain was barred from UN membership for this reason anyway. As the British had suspected, they faced a hostile General Assembly. In December 1946 it adopted a resolution which excluded Spain from the UN’s Specialised Agencies and recommended the withdrawal of members’ ambassadors from Madrid and called for future Security Council action, presumably under Chapter VII if, at the end of a ‘reasonable time’, Spain had not created a democratic government. Both the British and the Americans had strong reservations about this step. Bevin was convinced by the Security Council sub-committee that Spain posed no threat to any neighbouring state; it lay outside the province of the UN Charter and he was very much opposed to the Spanish question being exploited in the UN solely for mischievous propaganda.
purposes and considered the withdrawal of ambassadors a futile gesture. Yet Britain and the Americans voted for the resolution, in Britain’s case to reflect the spirit in the Assembly against Franco. The Polish–Soviet campaign to undermine Spain, and to orchestrate a breach of relations with it, appeared to have paid off.

Yet the break with Spain by the international community was not total: the rupture of diplomatic relations fell short of the imposition of economic sanctions. Trading links were maintained which, as the British Cabinet had already recognized, were vital for economic recovery. Bevin did not relish the reintroduction of wartime controls which sanctions would have brought nor did he wish to oblige the Royal Navy to enforce them, especially as the Americans were selling oil to Spain without restriction. Both the British and Americans remained concerned that additional UN action, diplomatic or economic, would further bolster Franco’s domestic support; support which did not seem to wither to any extent in the wake of the Assembly’s resolution. Thus in early 1947 the State Department had come to the conclusion that raising the Spanish issue in the UN was actually beginning to suit Soviet interests: Moscow was interested in keeping Franco in power ‘until revolution results from political and economic distress’. The regime was not a threat to international peace, but it was a source of acute embarrassment to the USA and Britain in the UN, obliging them to act as ‘defenders of fascism and reaction’. And the US could not offer economic assistance to Spain as a way of staving off civil strife and communist influence. The Americans thus began to see great dangers in the UN taking further action and agreed that there should be no foolish move to bring the case of Franco before the UN once more. They did see merit in encouraging opposition groups within Spain though, but Bevin was reluctant, seeing American ideas as ill-considered, having little effect on Franco and tending to suit the Soviet Union: the advice from Sir Victor Mallet in Madrid supported Bevin. The State Department was disappointed with the British reaction and in the circumstances then considered delivering a secret démarche to Franco, to convince him to go. The US would not act without Britain however, and London again showed no inclination to offer support. Not only were the British particularly concerned about the support Franco was gaining from potential UN action against him, they also had a more general anxiety, with one eye on their own colonial possessions, that further UN action would breach article 2(7) of the UN Charter, and constitute interference in the internal affairs of a state. Happily for the British, the State Department was, by the summer of 1947, prepared to state publicly that UN action against Spain was forbidden under the UN Charter. But that in itself was soon to change, for in November 1947 the General Assembly sought to reaffirm the December 1946 resolution on Spanish diplomatic isolation by expressing its confidence that the Security Council would exercise its responsibilities as soon as it considered the Spanish situation required it. The British, Americans and the Russians all voted in favour but it did not receive a two-thirds majority and thus some member states took it as a signal to slacken the tension between the international community and Spain. The British vote was odd in that it supported a resolution which sought to reaffirm a UN stance with which the British had not been entirely
happy, but can be explained by the way in which the new resolution removed any doubt that it was for the Security Council to decide when to exercise its functions against Spain and not the General Assembly.\textsuperscript{77} Such were the conundrums which Spain created in the United Nations.

By the time of the 1947 reaffirmation resolution on Spain, the USA had reshaped its foreign policy and through the Truman Doctrine laid the foundations of containment as the basis of US foreign policy for the next 30 years at least. This shift, which came as a result of British weaknesses in Greece, involved American acceptance of the responsibilities which the British could no longer fulfil. The Americans had then to adjust their approach to the UN. The Truman Doctrine was a unilateral commitment, one which excluded the UN. By March 1947, many in the US foreign policy-making community had begun to feel reservations about the UN. It was slow, cumbersome and bedevilled by the Soviet veto. The urgency of the American support to Greece was such that Truman’s government was able to argue that the constraints of time were the key factor which forced the US not to refer the matter to the UN, but this should have fooled no one. Had the USA sought UN endorsement for the assistance rendered to Greece, it would, on the basis of the experience of the first year of the UN, have been faced with Soviet hostility in yet another public wrangle and had no guarantee that the UN Security Council would deliver its approval. The solution was hence to deny a role to either the Security Council or the General Assembly. Tellingly, the American delegation to the UN was not even made aware of the coming commitment before it was made public.\textsuperscript{78}

**Greece, Spain and the United Nations after the Truman Doctrine**

The report of the UN Commission of Investigation to Greece released in the summer of 1947 appeared to endorse the fears articulated in Truman’s address to Congress earlier in March. It reiterated what some US policy makers had already feared in December 1946: that Greece was being infiltrated by forces from the north which were aiding ELAS and the Greek Communists.\textsuperscript{79} The Americans, who were increasingly taking the leading role in confronting the Soviets in the UN, did not fully know the level of Soviet involvement, but had, in the circumstances, strong grounds for suspicion.\textsuperscript{80} Russian press attacks on Greece, echoed by the Soviet delegation in the UN, plus Soviet probing into Turkey and Iran were enough to remove doubt from the official US position: McVeagh’s warnings to Roosevelt had proved all too prescient.

When the Soviet Union vetoed the Commission’s proposal for a successor Commission – only to be expected given the pro-Western tone of the original report – the issue was eventually moved to the General Assembly by a procedural vote not subject to the veto. By this time, the Americans had dropped their role as mediator in the Security Council and in spite of a number of attempts by the Soviet Union to remove the issue of Greece from the Assembly, the Americans were able to win approval, in October 1947, for the creation of the United Nations Special Committee on the Balkans (UNSCOB). This had a remit to monitor the frontier between Greece and its northern neighbours, with the latter being clearly identified in the enabling
resolution as being responsible for earlier violations of Greek borders. A clearer indication of the built-in pro-Western bias of the early General Assembly would be hard to find. UNSCOB was to be composed of representatives from the Security Council members, but both the Soviet Union and Poland boycotted it on the grounds that the American enabling resolution had already found Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia guilty of interference in Greek domestic politics. As a consequence, none of these countries cooperated, forcing the new committee to operate on the Greek side of the frontier only.

The reports and the activities of UNSCOB now acted as a conduit for the ill-feelings amongst the Big Three over Greece to be fed into the public arena on a regular basis. Thus in 1948 the Soviet Press accused the Truman administration of using the discussion of the Greek question for ‘new demagogic publicity’ and to justify its expensive ‘military, political adventure’ in Greece. Overall the West was denounced for using the UN as an instrument of ‘aggressive expansionism’ and members of the British UN delegation in particular were compared to Ribbentrop – high in the Soviet pantheon of double-dealers and deceivers – or described as titled warmongers. UNSCOB submitted a set of reports through 1948 and 1949, most of which detailed evidence of continued violations of the Greek borders and military assistance given to the rebel partisans by Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. These states responded with counter-claims against the Greek government’s ‘expansionism’. However in 1949 the situation was to change when Tito’s regime broke with the Soviet Union and took the decision to close its border with Greece. This had the effect of dramatically reducing the traffic across the frontier, which was reflected in the reduced number of violations reported by UNSCOB. Tito also withdrew his support to the Greek rebels and as a result the Greek civil war rapidly came to an end and relations between Yugoslavia and Greece improved. Although border violations continued between Albania, Bulgaria and Greece, their intensity lessened and in January 1952 the Greek government suggested that UNSCOB should be wound up. It was replaced by a small UN presence in the form of a sub-commission on the Balkans, but the Greek issue effectively drifted off the Cold War stage.

At the other end of the Mediterranean, the Truman administration also adjusted its approach to Spain. The British still felt themselves bound by the December 1946 resolution despite seeing it as essentially futile and they did not wish to give Franco any succour in the UN by restoring full diplomatic relations. The Americans took a different view. They were now, after March 1947, more concerned to use what resources they had to oppose communism. In October, Kennan, by then Head of the US Policy Planning Staff, recommended the development of relations with Spain, advice which was approved by George Marshall at the State Department. The Americans began to make links with Franco through Congressional visits and there was a slow, but gradual, head of steam developing in American politics to normalize relations. In 1949 the US fleet called into the Spanish port of El Ferrol and members of the Senate Armed Services Committee visited Madrid. The State Department was under resolute pressure from Congress, which was less concerned about the stain of
fascism on Franco than with his potential as an ally in the developing Cold War: the American position was to 'let sleeping dogs lie'.\(^8\) The events in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and the start of the Berlin Blockade only further assisted Franco, by showing Spain as a pro-Western, virulently anti-communist and relatively stable regime in an increasingly important strategic area.

By 1949, Bevin was still firm in refusing to rehabilitate Franco, and wary of both possible American backsliding,\(^8\) and suggestions that individual states be allowed to decide independently on the return of ambassadors to Madrid.\(^9\) But one suspects that Franco and possibly Bevin knew that with the failure of the UN to reaffirm the 1946 resolution with sufficient support the policy of isolation was falling apart. A senior Foreign Office official drew this conclusion in no uncertain terms. The full odium of the Western policy fell on the British as the Americans could 'always find enough Generals and Congressmen to flatter the vanity of the Spanish people while the French continue to cultivate economic and other relations with the Spaniards with their left hand while pretending to reprove them with the other'. The isolation of Spain had failed and Britain should work for normalization.\(^9\) Even Churchill, the leader of the opposition could mock the British position of having an ambassador in Moscow but not one in Madrid when the normal Spaniard enjoyed a much freer life than the average Russian.\(^9\) Yet while the British and Bevin remained resolutely opposed to Franco's rehabilitation and clung to the 1946 UN decision, factors beyond Spain were shifting American opinion further and further towards accommodation. The success of the 1949 Chinese revolution and in 1950 the outbreak of the Korean war pushed the Americans to reappraise their approach to Spain in the UN. In late 1950 the General Assembly's Political Committee recommended a relaxation of Spain's diplomatic isolation. The Americans argued strongly for full diplomatic exchanges to be restored,\(^9\) while the Russians saw this as the first step to easing Spain into UN membership and threw Roosevelt's words about there being no room for fascists in the UN back in the face of the American delegation.\(^9\) The Russians were, however, in the minority and in November the General Assembly voted to reverse the 1946 resolution and allow the return of ambassadors. The British and French abstained; the Soviet Union voted against and the USA voted in favour: for Franco it was a great Spanish victory and a key step on Spain's road to international rehabilitation amongst the Western powers at least. Within five years Spain had entered the UN and, like Greece before, had slipped off the main agenda of the UN and the Cold War.

**Conclusion**

The cases of Greece and Spain therefore provided clear, public evidence of the worsening relations among the Big Three in the UN from the very beginning of the organization's history. The manifestations of this breakdown were numerous: the invective and verbal clashes and the sheer unpleasantness which marked the debates over both countries; the use of the Soviet veto; the use of the UN as a forum for propaganda, for embarrassment and for highlighting divisions; and the concerns
especially of the British, and to a lesser degree the Americans, that the UN Secretariat was less than neutral in its approach to the two cases. All were features of the handling of Greece and Spain in the UN after 1946. Given the potentially divergent expectations each of the Big Three had held of the UN, the dissent and divisions should not have been a total surprise, but they clearly disturbed some such as Bevin who hoped, in vain, that the UN might avoid clashes of interests. While all Big Three wished to see cooperation continue after 1945 this was built on different conceptions of what the UN should be for. For the Soviet Union it could not be allowed to undermine Soviet interests but might endorse Soviet spheres of influence; for the Americans this was precisely what the UN should stand firmly against.

By the end of 1947, alignments in the UN had solidified in no small measure due to the experience of dealing with the cases of Greece and Spain. The Soviet Union appears to have remained fairly consistent in seeking to ensure that the UN was not used against it when it was in a minority in the organization as a whole and to take whatever opportunities that arose to exploit its open forums for propaganda purposes and Greece and Spain provided ample opportunities for this. Having been something of a broker at the start of 1946, the USA had shown its willingness by 1947 to sponsor UNSCOB and to level the accusatory finger at the Soviet Union and its communist clients over the instability in Greece. Over Spain, the Americans moved from a non-interventionist position to one at the head of the movement to bring Franco out of isolation. This robust change in the American approach to the Russians in the UN after Truman’s speech to Congress in March 1947 led even pro-Western members to express concern by 1949 that the Americans had given up on cooperation with the Russians and were seeking to drive them from the UN.95 For the British, the role of the UN as the centre-piece in British foreign policy was rather more quickly adjusted. While Bevin did not fully give up on the UN as a place to settle post-war differences until probably 1948, he did, in September 1946, ensure that a speech to be made by the Attorney General to the United Nations played down the role of the organization in British foreign policy.96 This was evidence that for the Labour government of Attlee the UN had proved to be an early disappointment, one which arose from Britain’s experience and frustration of dealing with the Russians, from being on the receiving end of a stream of invective and through the exercise of the Soviet veto in the Security Council throughout 1946. There was, thus, no doubt that by late 1947 the frost of the Cold War had hardened throughout the forums of the UN.

Notes

This article was originally presented as a paper to a conference on “The Mediterranean Cold War” held at the National Archives, Kew, in June 2002.

[1] His speech to the UN Association at the Albert Hall on 10 October 1945, in the National Archives, FO371/50891/U8810; all further FO and CAB references are to papers in the National Archives, Kew.

The differences are covered by Gorst, "British Military Planning," 91–108.

FO 371/50891/U8895, Ward’s minute, 20 October 1945 supporting a draft circular on the importance of the UN in British foreign policy; this circular was in fact never sent.


See Hilderbrand, Dumbarton Oaks, 46.

Pechatnov, "The Big Three After World War II."


Campbell and Herring, The Diaries, 409.

Acheson, Present at the Creation, 111–12.


The background to the October Agreement is well covered in Kuniholm, The Origins of the Cold War, 100–125.

Ibid., 96–100.


Lie, In the Cause of Peace, 31. According to Stettinius, Lie had to fortify himself with some stiff drinks to get through the ordeal of the Bevin–Vyshinsky skirmish; see Barros, Trygve Lie and the Cold War, 92–3.


See for example Bevin’s statements to the Security Council, UNSCOR, 1st yr., 6th mtg and 7th mtg., January 1946; and Bullock, Ernest Bevin, 220.

Campbell and Herring, The Diaries, 449.

UNSCOR, 1st yr., 6th mtg, 1 February 1946, 88.

UNSCOR, 1st yr., 10th mtg, 6 February 1946, 171–2.

Cadogan’s statement in the Security Council, UNSCOR, 1st yr., 54th mtg., 16 August 1946.


UNSCOR 1st yr., 87th mtg., SC resolution 339, 19 December 1946.


See for example Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War, 126 and Mastny, The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity, 26.

See FO371/67065/R5125, notes by the British representative to the Commission, 11 April 1947.

See FO371/67075/R3067 and FO371/67065/R4790, HM Consul [Salonica to FO], 1 March 1947.

UN doc. S/360/Rev 1, vol. I, pt.II, 28 July 1950, conclusions 106–15. (This is a revised report which was not published until 1950.)


FRUS 1946, vol. V, 1030–31 and 1049–51; note that the British suspected some in the State Department of leaking the position Cadogan was to take in the UN to the American press so as to pressurize Britain into being rather more active in the UN against Spain, FO371/60353/Z2669, Cadogan’s guidance tel. 34, 23 March 1946.

See Ahmad, Britain, Franco’s Spain and the Cold War, xix.

See FO371/60352/Z2193, Hoyer Millar’s account of his meeting with W. Perry George, Counsellor at the American Embassy in London, 4 March 1946.


FO371/6036/Z9699, Tel. 1617 relaying Bevin’s views to Paul-Henri Spaak, 12 November 1946.

See FO371/59756/UN2609, transcript of an interview between Michael Fry of Reuters and Oscar Lange, the Polish representative in the Security Council which indicates Lange had a tendency to clear material with Gromyko.

UNSCOR, S/75, June 1946.

See FO371/6036/Z6845, summary paper of the situation in the UN on Spain, 29 July 1946; and FO371/6036/Z7535, minute by Sloan, 28 August 1946.

UNSCOR, 1st yr., 49th mtg., 26 June 1946, p.441.

FO371/6036/Z7535, Minute by Sloan, 28 August 1946.


See FO371/6036/Z9096, letter from the British Embassy, Washington, 25 October 1946 relaying the views of Gromyko to the Basque representative at the UN.

See FO371/6036/Z9096, State Dept. guidance tel. 18 October 1946 given to the British Embassy in Washington.

FO 371/6036/Z8659/G, Hoyer Millar’s brief on Spain, 1 October 1946.

Ibid. Minute by Hoyer Millar, 28 October1946.

FO371/6036/Z9153, minute by Wilson, 30 October 1946.

FO371/6036/Z9705, Tel. 1694, 15 November 1946.


See the comments of Bottomley, 1198–9 and Stevenson, 1217, UNGAOR, 59th mtg., 12 December 1946.

See FO371/6036/Z8663/G, Bevin’s meeting with Mallet, 5 October 1946.

CAB 128/9, CM(2)47, 6 January 1947; the British were reliant on Spanish fruit and vegetables and Spanish potash for fertilizer to improve post-war food production. British industry also needed Spanish raw materials and Spain used its currency earnings to purchase manufactured goods from Britain and other European states so adding to general post-war economic recovery; see FO371/60343/Z5757, “Economic Relations with Spain,” June 1946.
References


