Gergő Bendegúz Cseh

The activity of the British and American military missions in the Allied Control Commissions of Italy, Rumania, Bulgaria and Hungary
(1943-1947)

Consultant professor: István Vida DSc

2009
I. The aim of dissertation
During the last few years several articles and books have been published in connection with
the activity of the Allied Control Commission for Hungary. These publications mainly focused
on the goals and methods of the soviet element of the commission since the Soviet Union
had predominant position in this body. The role of the other two military missions of the
commission were not studied in detail by the mentioned publications. The main goal of this
dissertation is to examine the participation of the United States and Great Britain in the Allied
Control Commission for Hungary and to compare the structure, jurisdiction and functioning of
this kind of control commissions in Italy, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland.

II. Summary of the dissertation results
The foundations of the post-war European peace order had been outlined in London,
Washington and Moscow by the turning point of the Second World War in 1943. From the
experiences gained during the war Soviet, American and British policy-makers were seeking
the guarantees of the international peace settlement to avoid the explosion of a new world
war. Hence the members of the “Great Alliance” intended to sustain this alliance after the
end of hostilities and to find new forms and structures of the international cooperation. These
intentions were realized in the establishment of new international organizations as UNO, IMF
(International Monetary Found) and IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and
Development). There were also other inferences drawn from the experiences of the war
especially in London and Moscow. The British and Soviet foreign policy tried to secure the
strategic security of these countries by the proper shaping of the traditional spheres of
influence and by the method of the balance of power. These principles of policy were
officially rejected by the United States and President Roosevelt on one hand, but the
American practice of “bearing military responsibility” resulted in similar areas of interests on
the other.
By the experiences of the German attack of 1941 the idea of the neccessity of a special
cordon sanitaire between Germany and the Soviet Union was strengthened in Moscow. The
Soviet foreign policy endeavoured to form a zone of allied or at least neutral countries along
the western frontiers of the country. These Soviet intentions were in accord with British
policies aimed the protection of the empire and traditional British spheres of interests after
the year of 1943. Churchill and Stalin were ready to accept the interests of strategic security
of the great powers mutuallly. They also calculated upon the fact that occupying forces would
have predominant influence on the political course of the loser axis countries.
The first defeated German ally, Italy had been belonged to the area of western interests and
was out of the Soviet zone of security. During the preparation of the armistice agreement for
Italy it was evident in London, Washington and Moscow that the terms of the agreement and
the mechanism of the occupation would establish precedent for the agreements with other defeated countries.

In the shaping of the mechanism of the occupation system in Italy the United States had primary role. Among the military goals of the United States the earliest conclusion of hostilities had absolute priority so the political considerations raised mainly by the British prime minister were overshadowed by the aspect of military efficiency. This aspect at the same time meant the indivisible authority of command of the occupying American and British forces excluding the third ally from the decision making in the theater of war. The armistice agreement for Italy was formulated by the western allies and did not mention the role of the Soviet Union at all. The Allied Control Commission for Italy was established under the orders and general directions of the Allied Commander-in-Chief.

The United States and Great Britain were seeking the way of prolonging the allience with the Soviet Union at the same time so besides the Allied Control Commission an other body called Allied Advisory Commission was also established in Italy. In this commission equal rights were granted for the Soviet Union as well as other participants: the United States, Great Britain, France, Greece and Yugoslavia. The Advisory Commission as a consultative body, however had no decisive authority and could not control or supervise the activity of the Allied Commander-in-Chief.

The western powers limited the soviet participation in the decision-making process primarily in favour of earliest conclusion of campaign in Italy and also in order to avoid political disturbances. This latter aspect was also motivated by military considerations since British and American high command feared the decreasing support from the local population in case of political backing of the Soviet Union to the Italian communist party. However, in this field the United States and Great Britain evidently practiced political aspects to the effect that Italy was considered part of western hemisphere and they tried to isolate the traditionally strong Italian leftist movements from the direct connections with the Soviet Union.

At the beginning of 1944 it had become obvious that the control mechanism esteblished in Italy by the US and Great Britain did not correspond to the pattern agreed on at the Moscow conference of foreign ministers in November 1943. The Soviet Union was excluded from Italian affairs and this arrangements were considered as precedent by Moscow.

The occupying military authorities interfered into political processes in Italy but this kind of intervention was limited into the period of hostilities with German troops. During this time the Allied Control Commission for Italy aimed to block political processes and not to determine the outcome of political changes.

After the end of hostilities and occupation of Rome Great Britain and the United States revised their Italian policy. This revision was clearly represented in the Hyde Park Declaration in September 1944. From that time they gradually delegated majority of
administrative powers to the Italian authorities which was simbolically represented in the renaming of the control body from Allied Control Commission to Allied Commission. At the same time the Red Army reached the frontiers of Rumania, Bulgaria and Finland. Rumania and Bulgaria traditionally had not been belonged to the area of western interests but on the basis of the Soviet claim for strategic security these countries become part of the inner circle of the would-be Soviet *cordon sanitaire*. The interests of the great powers in Central and Eastern Europe were simbolically represented in the so called percentage agreement between Churchill and Stalin in October 1944. This agreement did not obliged the United States but Stalin and Churchill adhered consistently to the demarcation of their areas of interests in point of Bulgaria, Rumania and Greece. Hence the United States played more active role in formulation of armistice terms for Rumania and Bulgaria. However it was accepted in London and Washington that Rumania and Bulgaria would be occupied by the Red Army so the Soviet Union would be in predominant position to control the execution of the armistice terms.

The occupation system established by the Soviets in Rumania was based on the Italian precedent. Instead of direct military administration the execution of armistice terms were fulfilled by a temporary government. The armistice agreement with Rumania did not mention the participation of British and American ally in the control commission and the control body was subordinated to the Soviet High Command. Unlike in Italy, however, there was no advisory commission based on equal participation set up in Rumania or other Eastern-European countries occupied by the Red Army.

During the negotiations of Rumanian armistice terms the United States and Great Britain tried to postpone the final settlement of territorial questions to a post-war peace conference and to avoid the inclusion of amount of reparations to be paid by Rumania. The Soviet Union, however, insisted on keeping territories that had been seized by the Molotov-Ribbentropp pact of 1939 and also on inclusion of concrete amount of Rumanian reparation. On the basis of experiences gained from Rumanian armistice control system the western diplomacy made an attempt to include guarantees of tripartite functioning of the control commission in the Bulgarian agreement. Since Bulgaria had not been at war with the Soviet Union until September 1944 there seemed to be a chance for this. After the proclamation of war by the Soviet Union in September 1944, however, the final armistice terms were dictated by Moscow. Nevertheless, some concessions were included in the armistice agreement with Bulgaria in favour of anglo-saxon allies although without any guarantees to take advantage of these concessions. The armistice period was divided into two parts: from the signing of the agreement to the end of hostilities in Europe, and from that moment to the ratification of peace treaty. The agreement granted in principle broader power for the American and British military missions for the second period, but the permanent Soviet chairmanship proved to be
sufficient for the Soviet Union to realize her policy aims in Bulgaria also. The amount of reparations was excluded from the Bulgarian agreement unlike in the case of Rumania or Hungary. The total sum of reparation to be paid by Bulgaria was defined later at the Paris Peace Conference.

Molotov and Eden had an arrangement in October 1944 that western delegations would not participate in the work of the control commissions until the final defeat of Germany. By this deal the control commissions in Eastern- and Central-Europe had no regular meetings and could not work as bodies until summer 1945. By this time, however, Petru Groza had seized the power in Rumania and the communist party had gained dominant position through the Fatherland Front in Bulgaria.

The Armistice Agreement with Hungary was signed in Moscow 20 January, 1945. The terms regarding the control mechanism were based on the Bulgarian precedent and American and British missions had no right to participate in the activity of the commission until June 1945. Unlike in Rumania and Bulgaria, the Soviet occupation authorities did not settle the question of sovietization of Hungary during this first period. The western diplomacy took part in a more active way in Hungarian affairs and Soviet intentions were far less direct than in Rumania or Bulgaria. The amount of reparations was included in the agreement, and the fulfillment of obligation to make reparation later became the tool of Soviet economic penetration and monopolization Hungarian economy.

The case of Finland was unique among the mentioned occupied countries. The armistice agreement for Finland was very similar to that for Rumania: there was no mentioning of western missions in it and the commission was subordinated to the Soviet High Command. The United States was not being belligerent with Finland the armistice control body consisted of two military delegations only: a Soviet and a British one. The main difference was that Finland had not been occupied by the Red Army so the control commission missed the direct support of the occupying forces. Finland did not belong to the direct area of Soviet interest at the end of the war and Great Britain and mainly the United States manifested quite clear commitment to the Finnish case. Moreover Finland had waged two wars against the Soviet Union causing huge losses to the latter and succeeded in stopping the Red Army at the very moment when it was in contest with American and British troops under way to Berlin. The Allied Control Commission for Finland applied very similar tools and methods to establish communist dominance as other Soviet-led control commissions had done. In the lack of support of occupying forces this commission, however, was unable to exert decisive influence on political affairs of Finland. In this situation the prestige and successful balancing policy of Mannerheim and Paasikivi and also decreasing influence of Zsdanov could play decisive role in the Finnish political affairs.
There is a clearly visible parallelism between the activity of the Soviet-led control commissions and the Allied (Control) Commission for Italy. The Soviets granted only observer status for their western allies in Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland, they limited their travelling and made unilateral decisions without any consultations. But this parallelism was, to say, only virtual. The Allied (Control) Commission for Italy exercised real decisive authority during the period of hostilities with German and pro-German Italian troops. After a few months of occupation of Rome the strictness of control mechanism was relaxed and the greater part of authority had been transferred to the Italian government by January 1945. The control commissions in Soviet-occupied countries started their activity when the hostilities in the respective countries had been finished already. Moreover the real participation for the western missions in the work of these commissions was granted only after defeat of Germany when the strict control was unmotivated by military considerations. The “Italian precedent” so can be regarded valid only in connection with the methods and structure of control mechanism but regarding main goals there were quite different systems. The control systems in Central-Europe worked in a very similar institutional structure. These frames were prepared by the Soviet authorities as in Italy the western powers had done. After the Potsdam Conference in July-August 1945 the Statutes of control commissions were revised but the broader power granted for the American and British participants later proved ineffectual.

The rights of western military missions in Soviet-led control commissions were very similar in general but Soviet authorities maintained these rights in a very different manner. The American and British delegates and their local employees were subjects of systematic spying and sometimes physical atrocity in Rumania and Bulgaria. Moreover in Bulgaria almost an armed attack happened between Russian and Bulgarian security services on the one side and American on the other. Contrary to that situation the connection between Soviets and western missions were, so to say, kindly in Hungary mainly during the first phase of the armistice period.

In the first period of operation the ACC-s held the respective countries’ political, economic, social and cultural life under strict control. The control commissions tried to enlarge the dominance of the local communist parties in every countries, but this kind of intervention was applied quite a different way in Bucharest, Sofia and Budapest. The influence of the local communists was very weak in Rumania so the Soviet ACC was under the necessity of applying very direct demands and threats to overthrow the government and support the prime ministership of pro-communist Petru Groza. There was quite different situation in Bulgaria since the pro-Soviet communist party had extensive political background so the political and social changes were implemented mainly by local political powers. There were quite clear interventions of Soviet ACC in Hungary as well, but the the Soviet authorities did
not intend to settle the political battle during the first period of the armistice as they had done in the Balkans. Since Hungary had been stayed in a special transition sphere of Soviet interests until 1947.

The State Department and the Foreign Office regarded none of these countries as primary spheres of interests, but they had a “list of priority” of course.