

The United States, Differentiation, and Balkan Cooperation during the Cold War

I. Introduction

“As an international system the Cold War was riddled with contradictions” concedes Arne Westad.¹ The Cold War divided the Balkan peninsula along ideological lines, but soon the region emerged as a location for converging strategic dilemmas. The enduring preoccupation of the Balkan states with national borders was thwarted by the awe-inspiring Cold War frontline that dissected it. Tito’s Yugoslavia opted for a policy of equidistance from the superpowers, which introduced ambivalence and prevented the establishment of neat division. The Cold War purportedly enabled Greece to escape the tyranny of its geography and become, politically and even culturally, non-Balkan. The dislocation was even greater for Turkey, displaced from both the Balkans and the Middle East. The Cold War did not impede the superpowers from testing each other’s resolve or from sowing discord in each other’s sphere of influence. The hunger for development in the Balkans offered the United States opportunity to “hone in” the instrument of “differentiation,”² that was an integral feature of containment from 1949, and was bequeathed by each Cold War U.S. president to his successor. It aimed to exacerbate imperceptibly, any tensions in the Soviet bloc, by rewarding primarily through trade, Eastern European countries that manifested signs of independence from the U.S.S.R or made moves to internal liberalization.³

This essay looks at the role of the Balkan peninsula in U.S. Cold War policy and examines the effects of differentiation on local developments and the evolution of the Cold War. It uses the term “the Balkans” as the collective noun for the region, the term used by most who hail from it. For all the stereotypical images it may invoke, it also defines the region not just as a space for internecine nationalist conflict but also as a space for seeking cooperation in the form of a “Balkan Federation” or “Balkan Union” stretching from “the Alps to Cyprus” – efforts that were undertaken not only by socialists and communists, but also by liberal internationalists.⁴

¹ Odd Arne Westad, “The Balkans: A Cold War Mystery,” in *The Balkans in the Cold War*, edited by Svetozar Rajak et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 355–362.

² Effie G. H. Pedaliu, “The US, the Balkans and Détente,” in *The Balkans in the Cold War*, edited by Svetozar Rajak et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 197–218.

³ *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*) 1949, Volume V: *Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1975), document 10.

⁴ Leften Stavrianos, *Balkan Federation: A History of the Movement Toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times*, (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1964); Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons (eds), *The Soviet Union and Europe in*

To reject it in favour of a deliberately evasive and opaque geographical term like Southeastern Europe, could promote the stereotypes it intends to avoid as well as ahistorical approaches to the study of the region and in the long run, historical amnesia.⁵

II. The Legacy of WWII

Liberation found Balkan societies deeply divided and seeking divergent political futures. Total war, collaboration, resistance and survival had become intertwined with pre-existing disputes and regional competition. Nazi Germany's and Fascist Italy's conquests were accompanied by energetic occupations through the "puppet" governments of Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania and had created a combustible security environment. The Soviet Union's success in pushing Hitler's armies westward appealed to popular mood in the occupied Balkans more than the slower-moving Anglo-American strategy that aimed to divert Nazi Germany away from reinforcing the shores of France.⁶ Allied "grand strategy" in the Balkans was experienced as a clamp that increased the ferocity of occupation, intensified disunity and bifurcated local resistance into communist and anti-communist groupings. It bred frustration and fostered suspicion. The cynicism evinced by the Stalin–Churchill percentages agreement in 1944 anticipated a future based on division.⁷ It also revealed that American opposition to spheres of influence was flexible. In Athens, the December Events demonstrated that Britain, starved of the resources it needed to finance its postwar strategy, could resort to heavy-handedness to avert Communist takeovers.⁸ In the Balkans, the shape of peace had

the Cold War, 1943–53, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 125–35; Alexandros Papanastassiou, *Vers l'union balkanique* (Paris: La Conciliation Internationale, 1934).

⁵ Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Alex Drace-Francis, "The Prehistory of a Neologism: 'South-Eastern Europe'," *Balkanologie: Revue d'études pluridisciplinaires* 3 (1999) 2: 1–10; Paschalis Kitromilides, "Imagined Communities and the Origin of the National Question in the Balkans," *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989) 2: 149–94; Mark Mazower, *The Balkans* (London: Phoenix Paperback, 2000); Maria N. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 27–30, 46.

⁶ Michael Howard, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 42, 70; Matthew Jones, *Britain, the United States and the Mediterranean War, 1942–44* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), 99–100; Paolo Fonzi, "Beyond the Myth of the 'Good Italian': Recent Trends in the Study of the Italian Occupation of Southeastern Europe during the Second World War," *Südosteuropa* 65 (2017) 2: 239–59.

⁷ Albert Resis, "The Churchill-Stalin Secret 'Percentages' Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944," *American Historical Review* 83 (1978) 2: 368–87; Eduard Mark, "American Policy Toward Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1946: An Alternative Interpretation," *The Journal of American History*, 68 (1981) 2: 313–36.

⁸ John O. Iatrides, *Revolt in Athens: The Greek Communist "Second Round," 1944–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Mark Mazower (ed.), *After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 24–41; Panagiotis Delis, "The British Intervention in Greece: The Battle of Athens, December 1944," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 35 (2017) 1: 211–37; Leften Stavrianos, "Two Points of View: The Immediate Origins of the Battle of Athens," *American Slavic and East European Review* 8 (1949) 4: 239–51.

been imagined in a multiplicity of ways and was contested before it had even arrived. The communists were convinced that the future belonged to them and nationalists were equally determined to prove them wrong.

III. From Total War to Cold War

The Cold War did not begin over the Balkans, but Cold War tensions manifested there and in neighboring Italy earlier than in other parts of Europe. Peace finally arrived only when the United States intervened and the Soviet Union restrained its proxies. For this to happen, both superpowers had to come to terms with their new status as the hegemonies of two antagonistic blocs. The United States revised its dismissive attitude to Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean matters once it came to view these through the lens of a looming geopolitical conflict.⁹ The Mediterranean Sea emerged as an arena of competition over ideology and energy resources. Its significance to Western security was upgraded. U.S. foreign policy makers had to ascertain how developments in the Balkans could affect the security of Italy, the Eastern Mediterranean and wider American interests in the region.¹⁰ By early 1945, the United States recognized that the political situation in Italy was fluid and that, because of British weakness, it had to assume responsibility for the country's reconstruction. Italian instability raised the prospect that civil war could spread westwards from Greece, destabilizing the whole of Europe. The events at Venezia Giulia of March 1945¹¹ in conjunction with the menacing and parallel Yugoslav territorial claims against the Austrian provinces of Carinthia and Styria¹² and Tito's obvious eyeing of Greek Macedonia led the United States to conclude that Yugoslav regional hegemonism was not wholly devoid of Soviet input.¹³ By 1946, the Americans came to view the Balkans as a Soviet stepping-stone to reach Western Europe, to undermine the security of

⁹ John O. Iatrides (ed.), *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports: Greece, 1933-1947* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980).

¹⁰ Geoff Swain, "The Cominform: Tito's International?" *The Historical Journal* 35 (1992) 3: 641-63; John O. Iatrides and Nicholas X. Rizopoulos, "The International Dimension of the Greek Civil War," *World Policy Journal* 17 (2000) 1: 87-103.

¹¹ Marina Cattaruzza, *Italy and its Eastern Border, 1866-2016* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Robert E. Niebuhr, *The Search for Cold War Legitimacy: Foreign Policy and Tito's Yugoslavia* (Boston: Brill, 2018); Bogdan C. Novak, *Trieste, 1941-1954: The Ethnic, Political, and Ideological Struggle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Roberto G. Rabel, *Between East and West: Trieste, the United States, and the Cold War, 1941-1954* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988).

¹² Robert Knight, "Ethnicity and Identity in the Cold War: The Carinthian Border Dispute, 1945-1946," *International History Review* 22 (2000) 2: 274-303; Dusan Biber, "Yugoslav and British Policy towards the Carinthian Question, 1941-5," in *The Phoney Peace: Power and Culture in Central Europe, 1945-49*, edited by Robert B. Pynsent, 100-12, <<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10078356/3/SSEES0021.pdf>> (2 March 2021).

¹³ Jeronim Perović, "The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9 (2007) 2: 32-63; Svetozar Rajak, "No Bargaining Chips, No Spheres of Interest: The Yugoslav Origins of Cold War Non-Alignment," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16 (2014) 1: 146-79.

Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Italy and the Middle East. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan frustrated Soviet strategy towards Greece and Turkey. Stalin would not risk direct conflict with the United States or jeopardize Soviet gains in Eastern Europe for the sakes of the Southern European communists, so, he accepted the new architecture of the Balkans as it emerged after the Tito–Stalin split in 1948 and the defeat of the Greek Communists. He also made clear that the Soviet Union was unwilling to accommodate endless squabbling over borders within its bloc.¹⁴

The Cold War frontline in the Balkan peninsula was “secondary” or “peripheral” to the superpowers only in contrast to the ultimate Cold War border, the Central Front. This did not, however, make it negotiable. The expansion of NATO in 1952 to include Greece and Turkey and the establishment of the Warsaw Pact in 1955 meant that the “South Region” of the Warsaw Pact and the “Southern Flank” of NATO coincided in the Balkans. Both Moscow and Washington realized that it was in their interest to maintain the post WWII status quo by controlling their allies’ nationalistic impulses and to keep them in line. Over time, the Cold War seemed have helped to keep “uncharacteristically calm” a region where ambitions to correlate national borders with national identities had remained unmet since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ Stability came at the cost of division, compromised sovereignty, and the hasty cloaking of identity politics into wider ideological constructs. All, increased unpredictability.

For the war-ravaged Balkan states, the Cold War meant both regression and transformation. Great power competition and familiar clientelistic relations returned but also turned the region from a backwater into a frontline. The Graeco-Bulgarian border, as Evanthis Hatzivassiliou has demonstrated, remained prone to skirmishes that could draw in the superpowers. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1946, Greece, with civil war still raging and having suffered three Bulgarian invasions, sought borders that afforded security from its intrusive neighbor.¹⁶

Theodora Dragostinova has shown how Bulgarian insistence on borders providing Bulgaria

¹⁴ Geoffrey Roberts, “Moscow’s Cold War on the Periphery: Soviet Policy in Greece, Iran, and Turkey, 1943–8,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 46 (2011) 1: 58–81; Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 38–9; Mark Kramer, “Stalin, Soviet Policy, and the Establishment of a Communist Bloc in Eastern Europe, 1941–1948,” in *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928–1953*, edited by Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 264–94.

¹⁵ Directorate of Intelligence, Instability in the Balkans, 15 June 1983, CIA/(FOIA)/ESDN (CREST): CIA-RDP85T00287R000501610001-0.

¹⁶ Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, “Negotiating with the enemy: the normalization of Greek-Bulgarian relations, 1960–1964,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 4 (2004) 1: 140–61; Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, “Security and the European Option: Greek Foreign Policy, 1952–62,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995) 1: 187–202.

economic advantage, involved control of areas disputed by Greece. Problems also arose between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia over the borders of the People's Republic of Macedonia. The two countries were able to settle some of their differences in 1946, but Moscow had to intervene.¹⁷ Albania grew distrustful of its neighbors and hegemon alike. In the Balkans, nationalism remained alive on both sides of the Cold War divide. Kapka Kassabova has described this pervasive distrust on the Balkan frontline beautifully: "the Turks were nervous about the Soviets and the Greeks, the Greeks were nervous about the Soviets and the Turks, and the Bulgarians were nervous about everyone."¹⁸

IV. America and the Balkans during the 'High Cold War'

America was drawn into the Balkans reluctantly. The region remained one of secondary importance, but American strategists could hardly ignore that Soviet lines of communication to the Mediterranean ran through the Balkans, especially with Albania offering basal facilities until 1962. Any American policy towards the region would be complex. The various communist Balkan states chose different paths to achieving socialism and each posed unique security considerations. The U.S. was hampered by restricted information and intelligence. Within this environment, two major concerns prevailed, namely preventing Soviet power from spilling south and an ability to reach behind the "Iron Curtain" in a way that did not provoke major war.¹⁹

The region offered unique terrain. Its diversity appeared to represent a model of the looming bipolar conflict. It would enable the United States to better adapt containment to weaken "Soviet Communism," and assess the limits of brinkmanship under the relative opacity the alarm the Greek Civil War was generating. From 1946 to 1949, the United States gained clear indications of the efficacy, limitations, and potential of containment. There was a palpable sense that its methods could lead to victory when Yugoslavia flipped. The Tito–Stalin split of 1948 lessened Italian defensive vulnerability from the Ljubljana Gap and made the Greek Civil War more manageable. Above all it represented, a minute yet significant, 'roll-back' of Soviet power. From 1949, "keeping Tito afloat" by extending political and economic support

¹⁷ Theodora Dragostinova, "On 'Strategic Frontiers': Debating the Borders of the Post-Second World War Balkans," *Contemporary European History* 27 (2018) 3: 387–411.

¹⁸ Kapka Kassabova, *Border: A Journey to the End of Europe* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2017).

¹⁹ Dionysios Chourchoulis, *The Southern Flank of NATO, 1951–59* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).

to Yugoslavia enabled the United States to set out its stall of alternatives to the Soviet satellites.²⁰

The “loss” of Albania and Bulgaria in the late 1940s did not come about due to a lack of trying, but was accepted after a reassessment of American capabilities and strategic priorities. The long-term lessons were that policy objectives and exit strategies needed to be carefully calibrated. Practical information was gained on how long dissent could survive under systematic state persecution and when to cut aid and contact with dissident movements.²¹ The CIA’s first major joint operation with the British against Albania, codenamed Operation BG/FIEND, began in June 1949, a few months before the end of the Greek Civil War, and lasted, intermittently, until 1953. It resulted in the destruction of anti-communist Albanian networks that had been compromised from the start and it provided the newly minted CIA with invaluable insights as to how to approach future covert operations. The unfathomable betrayal exposed by this operation was to shape the US’s emotional understanding of the conflict, the enemy and eventually, its allies.²²

Bulgaria made President Truman realize the limits to diplomacy and power.²³ In the mid to late 1940s, American economic interests in Bulgaria experienced relentless hostility, and embassy staff in Sofia suffered systematic persecution. The point of no return was reached with the show trial of the former general secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Traicho Kostov, who was accused of collusion with Tito. No sooner than had the U.S. ambassador to Bulgaria, Ronald R. Heath, reported that “Titoism” was not “a significant political force in Bulgaria,”²⁴ when he found himself framed, embroiled in the Kostov indictment, and declared *persona non grata*. Truman closed the embassy, suspecting that the Bulgarians would not

²⁰ Lorraine M. Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

²¹ Michael M. Boll, *Cold War in the Balkans: American Policy towards Bulgaria 1943–1947* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1984); Vesselin Dimitrov, *Stalin’s Cold War: Soviet Foreign Policy, Democracy and Communism in Bulgaria, 1941–48* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Vasil Paraskevov, “Conflict and necessity: British–Bulgarian relations, 1944–56,” *Cold War History* 11 (2011) 2: 241–68.

²² James Callanan, *Covert Action in the Cold War: US Intelligence and CIA Operations* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 73, 77, 78, 80; Albert Lulushi, *Operation Valuable Fiend: The CIA’s First Paramilitary Strike Against the Iron Curtain* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2014); Stephen Long, “CIA-MI6 psychological warfare and the subversion of communist Albania in the early Cold War,” *Intelligence and National Security* 35 (2020) 6: 787–807.

²³ Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, 7 January 1948, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the US, Harry S. Truman, 1 January to 31 December 1948* (Washington DC: Office of the Federal Register, NARA, 1948), 7.

²⁴ *FRUS* 1949, V, document 219.

have dared to push matters so far without Moscow's approval. His suspension of diplomatic relations with Bulgaria was designed to send the U.S.S.R. a shot across the bows.²⁵

Greece and Turkey were also assigned special roles. As Larry Kaplan put it, Greece was identified as "an arena of international conflict" and Turkey as "a barrier."²⁶ The elevation of the strategic value of both countries into valuable bricks in the wall of containment via the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan embedded them into the "free world." The ferocity unleashed in August 1949, during the final clashes of the Greek Civil War, in mount Grammos, served as a demonstration of America's firepower and underscored that this was a line not to be crossed. Two months later, General James Van Fleet, the Director of the Joint United States Military, Advisory and Planning Group in Greece mooted rolling back "the iron curtain still farther in the Balkans."²⁷ With the end of the Greek Civil War and the solidifying of the "Iron Curtain," U.S. policy towards the Balkans settled into a blend of caution mixed with dynamic adventurism. Holding the line and keeping the balance of power stable did not preclude probing or economic and commercial exchange. Despite the passing of the Export Control Act in 1949, economic warfare and economic statecraft went hand in hand in U.S. Cold War foreign strategy."²⁸

Through its newly established National Security institutions as well as the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe (RFE), the Truman administration attempted to reach hearts and minds behind the "Iron Curtain." If containment appeared to be static under Truman's watch, this was because those who calibrated the message were prudent in their pledges. Clear instructions had been issued not to 'promise imminent liberation or encourage active revolt.'²⁹ In the Balkans, "roll-back" and "differentiation" as permutations of containment were evident from the late 1940s. The United States had the opportunity to trial more safely than elsewhere in Europe the precepts of NSC 58/2, namely to seek "the gradual reduction and eventual elimination of preponderant Soviet power from Eastern Europe without resort to war; [...] through fostering Communist heresy among the satellite states."³⁰ Eastern Europe remained the big prize, but the Balkans were essential in shaping the guidelines of NSC 58/2

²⁵ Ibid., document 206.

²⁶ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *A Community of Interests: NATO and the Military Assistance Program, 1948–51* (Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of Defence, 1980), 4–7.

²⁷ *FRUS* 1949, Volume VI: *The Near East, South Asia, and Africa* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1977), document 249.

²⁸ *FRUS* 1949, V, document 10.

²⁹ *FRUS* 1950, Volume IV: *Central and Eastern Europe; The Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1980), document 8.

³⁰ *FRUS* 1949, V, document 10.

and for the conclusion –enduring through the Cold War – that trade was the best means available to make U.S. influence “most concretely [...] felt” behind the “Iron Curtain.”³¹

The “Cold War Respite” provided by Stalin’s death facilitated the convening of the Geneva Conference in 1955.³² “The spirit of Geneva” ran out steam as the German issue remained intractable and Khrushchev trained his sights on the Third World. President Eisenhower’s version of détente, combining the relaxation of tensions alongside active psychological warfare, had reached as far as it could go in the face of Soviet intransigence over “verification.” By 1956, the limits to any “roll-back” by “liberation” in Eastern Europe without direct Western involvement had been exposed twice – in East Germany in 1953 and in Hungary in 1956. After the U.S. reconsidered its policy towards Eastern Europe, it adopted NSC-5811/1, which recommended the expansion of “non-strategic trade with the Soviet-dominated nations for primarily political purposes.”³³

In this climate, differentiation was customized to be applied individually towards Eastern European countries.³⁴ In the Balkans, the fermentation of nationalism as a means of “accelerating evolution towards independence from Soviet control” took primacy over the promotion of internal change. The main tools of the policy would be economic and cultural, but with the proviso that these could not be construed as “stirring up” rebellion.³⁵ Albania’s hostility to the U.S. and its fear of Greece, Italy, and Yugoslavia made it less amenable to any entreaties from the US.³⁶ Romania was judged to be a better candidate for cultivation³⁷ and Bulgaria would not be ignored. Since 1957, Bulgaria had been making positive noises about reengaging diplomatically with the United States and the United States suspected that the British were sharing only “filtered” information about developments in Sofia.³⁸ Secretary of State Christian Herter, suggested that diplomatic relations be restored as soon as the Bulgarians retracted their charges of espionage against Heath.³⁹ An agreement on

³¹ Ibid.

³² Gunter Bischof and Saki Dockrill (eds), *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

³³ *FRUS* 1958–1960, Volume X, Part 1: *Eastern Europe Region; Soviet Union; Cyprus* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1993), document 5; Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower’s New Look National Security Policy, 1953-61* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

³⁴ *FRUS* 1958–1960, Volume X, Part 1: document 6.

³⁵ *FRUS* 1958–1960, Volume X, Part 2: *Eastern Europe; Finland; Greece; Turkey* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1993), documents 32, 33 and 34.

³⁶ Ibid., document 31.

³⁷ *FRUS* 1958–1960, X, Part 1, document 6.

³⁸ Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America’s Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947–1956* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

³⁹ *FRUS* 1958–1960, X, Part 2, documents 31, 32, 34, 42.

reestablishing diplomatic relations was arrived at in 1959, the U.S. embassy in Sofia reopened in 1960 and the issue of economic relations appeared on the horizon. Thus, the Eisenhower Administration bequeathed to its successors tense, but improving relations with the region.

V. JFK, the Balkans and “the art of playing the diffusion of power within the Communist world”

In 1961, differentiation and bluster met. For Nikita Khrushchev “peaceful coexistence” came to signify “a form of intense economic, political and ideological struggle ... in the international arena.” On 6 January 1961, he welcomed the newly elected U.S. president by proclaiming the “liberation wars would continue to exist so long as imperialism exists,” and that “peace cannot be begged for; it can only be assured by active purposeful struggle.”⁴⁰ During his election campaign, John F. Kennedy promised that the United States would not forget East Europeans nor agree to “any formal approval of the status quo.”⁴¹ He asked his transition team to rethink U.S. policy towards Eastern Europe and charged his secretary of state, Dean Rusk, with intensifying the “exchange of persons programs behind the ‘Iron Curtain’.”⁴²

Kennedy’s ability to advance differentiation meaningfully was to be disrupted by wider Cold War policy concerns, frequent crises in the Caribbean, Southeast Asia and Berlin, but, above all by tragedy. Bulgaria and Romania had signalled their willingness for better relations with the United States. Both wanted to spur their industrialization, and Kennedy’s policies to promote development seemed worth exploring. The invasion of the Bay of Pigs heightened Cold War tensions; it disrupted coordination with allies and delayed progress behind the “Iron Curtain”.⁴³ Demonstrations took place outside U.S. embassies in the Balkans as well as in the rest of Eastern Europe. The newly reestablished mission in Sofia was ransacked and calls for

⁴⁰ Report by Nikita Khrushchev presented at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow on 6 January 1961: “For New Victories of the World Communist Movement,” 6 January 1961 <<https://novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/evans/HIS242/Documents/1961ConferenceReport.pdf>> (1 July 2021).

⁴¹ A. Paul Kubricht, “Politics and Foreign Policy: A Brief Look at the Kennedy Administration’s Eastern European Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 11 (1987) 1: 55–65.

⁴² John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, (hereafter JFKL), Papers of John F. Kennedy, Presidential Papers, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, National Security Action Memoranda [NSAM]: NSAM 13, re: Exchange of Persons Behind The Iron Curtain, JFKNSF-328-014.

⁴³ John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* <<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/234470>> (1 June 2021).

protection were ignored by the Bulgarian authorities.⁴⁴ The subsequent crises over Berlin in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis (CMC) in 1962 kept tensions high, fomenting changes behind the “Iron Curtain” that had a negative effect on the security situation in the Balkan peninsula and reigniting suspicions between Bulgaria and Greece. Albania would finally achieve the isolation it craved by seeking the patronage of China. Romania would use the CMC to improve relations with the United States.⁴⁵ At loggerheads over Cyprus, Graeco-Turkish tensions combined with “flexible response,” talk of an “opening to the left,” and domestic political and economic pressures. Both felt that their national interests were not being valued adequately by their allies at a time of Bulgarian bellicosity and Soviet threats. The CMC affected Yugoslavia deeply too. Washington had hurt Yugoslavia’s economy and its ability to access defense materiel because of its trade with Cuba. Adding insult to injury, the Americans kept Yugoslavia on the list of “captive nations.” All this happened at the critical moment when Tito was staking his claim to the leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and worsening East–West relations could diminish the scope for the NAM to succeed. Tito denounced American actions and used delaying tactics in negotiations with them over trade and technical assistance.⁴⁶ His visit to the White House in October 1963 left him underwhelmed when he was met with congressional hostility and street protests.⁴⁷

There were reservations over the value of differentiation within the Kennedy administration that led it to adopt an aloof attitude to promoting trade with the Soviet bloc and especially the Balkan countries. Its reluctance was dictated both by domestic and foreign policy concerns. Conservative groups had grown stronger and were demanding a bolder policy towards Eastern European countries.⁴⁸ By September 1963, Kennedy’s foreign policy team was interpreting the Sino-Soviet split as offering confirmation that the CMC had promoted bloc fragmentation and that in mitigation the Soviets were creating “controlled instability” by piling up the pressure on areas of vulnerability such as Southeast Asia and Berlin, as well as Greece and Austria which shared borders with the Balkans.⁴⁹ They were convinced that Soviet naval

⁴⁴ Veselina Uzunova, “Bulgaria and the United States in the 60s: From Confrontation to Détente: A Cold War Case Study,” *Hiperboreea: Journal of History* 6 (2019) 2, 51–58.

⁴⁵ Larry Watts, “Romania Security Policy and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” Wilson Center, CWIHP, e-Dossier No. 38 <<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/romania-security-policy-and-the-cuban-missile-crisis>> (3 August 2021).

⁴⁶ *FRUS* 1961–1963, Volume XVI, *Eastern Europe; Cyprus; Greece; Turkey* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1994), document 88.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ A. Paul Kubricht, “Politics and Foreign Policy: A Brief Look at the Kennedy Administration’s Eastern European Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 11 (1987) 1: 55–65.

⁴⁹ *FRUS* 1961–1963, Volume VIII, *National Security Policy* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), documents 143 and 93.

strategy with its focus on submarine construction was designed to disrupt the defense of Western Europe.⁵⁰ A de-aligned China did not offer much solace either. It needed to be factored into policy anew. Wary of antagonizing Congress, Kennedy did not dare make any moves to open China up – even along the lines of a traditional “Open Door” policy.⁵¹

Evaluating the utility of détente proved difficult and contentious. All could see that the Chairman of the Policy Planning Council, Walt Whitman Rostow, had a point when he stated that “détente for all its subtleties and difficulties was essentially more wholesome an environment than the eyeball-to-eyeball world of 1961–62,”⁵² but he also pointed out potential disadvantages. The Allies and Third World countries could infer that through détente that the superpowers may stifle their own aims and such an impression could lead to regionalism. A relaxation of tensions could also reduce “fear of communism,” make “local communism respectable,” and have an insidious effect, for example “on Italian and Greek domestic politics.”⁵³ Therefore, “the art of playing the diffusion of power within the Communist world”⁵⁴ needed to be pursued with caution and only after coordinating with the Western European allies,⁵⁵ and informing public opinion.⁵⁶ Between September and November 1963, however, when fate tragically intervened, neither differentiation nor the Balkans got much attention because of the deteriorating situation in Vietnam.

VI. “Building Bridges”

President Lyndon Baines Johnson had to satisfy a plethora of challenging and emotionally charged popular expectations. He had to fulfill the hopes raised by his charismatic slain predecessor and those raised by his own political agenda, against a background of domestic volatility fuelled by the escalating conflict in Vietnam. His ambitious “great society” domestic program was accompanied by the equally ambitious policy of “building bridges” with Eastern Europe, his own version of differentiation. Walt Rostow designed the theoretical

⁵⁰ Ibid., document 120.

⁵¹ Ambassador James W. S. Spain, interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy, 31 October 1995, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <<https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Spain,%20James%20W.S.toc.pdf>> (1 July 2021).

⁵² *FRUS* 1961–1963, VIII, document 143.

⁵³ Ibid., document 142.

⁵⁴ Ibid., document 143.

⁵⁵ JFKL, Papers of John F. Kennedy, Presidential Papers, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, National Security Action Memoranda [NSAM]: NSAM 13, re: Exchange of Persons Behind The Iron Curtain, JFKNSF-328-014.

⁵⁶ *FRUS* 1961–1963, VIII, document 143.

underpinnings of policy and would oversee its implementation as Johnson's national security advisor. "Trade" and "culture" were to be deployed to underpin national security, promote a settlement in Central Europe that would reconcile German unity with European security, and also lessen the pressure in Vietnam.⁵⁷ At the core of Johnson's deployment of differentiation was always Vietnam. Romania and Yugoslavia would be singled out for special attention because of their potential to act as "back channels," in the case of the former, to establish communication with Vietnam and China, and the latter, to temper anti-Americanism in the NAM. It was an ambitious and risky venture seeking to generate political change in Eastern Europe by using "trade to drive hard, realistic political bargains."⁵⁸

The policy rested on the hypothesis that in the Eastern bloc, "the current trend to autonomy" would continue. It sought to weaken the Soviet Union's grip over its satellites by taking advantage of nationalism and vanity behind the "Iron Curtain."⁵⁹ The CIA warned there was a possibility of Soviet overreaction and advised against "dramatic and flamboyant actions."⁶⁰ "Building bridges" established a loose hierarchy of eligibility. Yugoslavia remained the firm favorite, Romania was deemed worth exploring, and Bulgaria, although assigned the role of the "outsider," would not be neglected either. For "building bridges" to work Johnson needed to review both the restrictive legislative framework on trading with Communist countries as well as his chances of success. The Miller Committee that evaluated the policy reported back in May 1965 in support of the idea and urged Johnson to promote enabling draft legislation.⁶¹

Securing a positive change in East–West relations was a high priority for Johnson but not in his gift. The Soviet Union, Congress and America's allies also had their roles to play. In the unstable international environment of the 1960s, the policy encouraged paranoia in both foes and allies. Vietnam diverted attention away from the procedural details for an East–West trade bill. On 11 May 1966, it was not Johnson, but an unenthusiastic Rusk, who sent the draft bill to a Congress becoming progressively more restive over Vietnam.⁶² For such a deal to pass, it really needed Johnson, the operator, to throw his weight about. He decided, however,

⁵⁷ *FRUS* 1964–1968, Volume X, *National Security Policy* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2001), document 80.

⁵⁸ Thomas A. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 20; Mitchell Lerner, "'Trying to Find the Guy Who Invited Them': Lyndon Johnson, Bridge Building, and the End of the Prague Spring," *Diplomatic History* 32 (2008) 1: 77–103.

⁵⁹ *FRUS* 1964–1968, X, document 84.

⁶⁰ *FRUS* 1964–1968, Volume XVII, *Eastern Europe* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), document 6.

⁶¹ *FRUS* 1964–1968, Volume IX, *International Development and Economic Defense Policy; Commodities* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1997), document 172.

⁶² *FRUS* 1964–1968, XVII, document 6; Editorial Note, *FRUS* 1964–1968, IX, document 181.

to take Rusk's advice and not spend too much political capital on the bill, and this sealed its fate.⁶³ As Post Master General John A. Gronouski put it: "The East-West Trade Bill died a-borning, [...]. It was introduced and that was all."⁶⁴ Congress hampered Johnson's policy for two years so he moved through the powers vested in the presidency to reduce export restrictions on some U.S. goods, lifting many travel restrictions and promoting scientific and academic exchange. Both Romania and Bulgaria hungered after MFN status as they chased accelerated development and their leaders' international prominence.⁶⁵ They capitalized on any scope for maneuver within the confines of the Warsaw Pact with minimal risk, since the U.S.S.R. was encouraging its satellites to enhance trading relations with the West in order to reinvigorate its own stagnating economy and gain access to new technology.⁶⁶

"Building bridges" in the Balkan peninsula was beset by obstacles. Yugoslavia needed financial assistance and American–Yugoslav relations needed attention. By 1965, the outlook for the Yugoslav economy had worsened significantly and Tito embarked on economic reforms designed to underpin Yugoslavia's faltering experiment of reconciling socialism with market economics. He needed more investment. The Johnson administration sought to improve trade with the country, assuming, wishfully, that this would give it extra leverage over Tito, compelling him to tone down his criticism of American policy in Vietnam and influence other NAM countries to do so too. The path to improved relations and sales of defense materiel proved thorny, as Congressional hostility to Tito remained high.⁶⁷

There was also ambivalence on Tito's part. He needed to maintain equidistance from both superpowers in order to preserve his influence within the NAM. His stance over Vietnam and curtailment of diplomatic relations with Israel after the Six Days War gave him the opportunity to project an image of independence, offer support to a NAM fellow member state, Egypt, but also to appease Brezhnev. To keep the bilateral relationship with the U.S.

⁶³ Ibid., document 172.

⁶⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, John A. Gronouski, Interview 3 (III), interviewed by Paige E. Mulhollan, 14 February 1969, oral history transcript, LBJL Oral Histories, 13, <<https://www.discoverlbj.org/item/oh-gronouskij-19690214-3-00-04>> (5 July 2021).

⁶⁵ Thomas A. Schwartz, "Moving Beyond the Cold War: the Johnson Administration, Bridge-Building, and Détente," in *Beyond the Cold War: Lyndon Johnson and the New Global Challenges of the 1960s*, edited by Mark Lawrence and Frank Gavin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 76–94.

⁶⁶ Steven J. Rosen and James R. Kurth (eds.), *Theories of Economic Imperialism* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1978), 231–60.

⁶⁷ *The New York Times*, 1 August 1965; David L. Larson, *United States Foreign Policy Towards Yugoslavia, 1943-1963* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979).

ticking along, he habitually accompanied his waywardness with some pro-U.S. utterances.⁶⁸ Still, Yugoslavia had already secured a relatively advantageous position vis-à-vis its communist neighbors. It had access to normal commercial credits, PL-480 credits, and it had been awarded MFN status.⁶⁹ It was the only country Johnson could use to demonstrate that differentiation could also bring about internal liberalization. Since 1959, the Yugoslav criminal justice system had undergone some reform. In July 1966, the purging of Aleksandar Rankovic, the powerful proponent of “Yugoslavism,” paved the way for further liberalization. Cosmetic exercise or not, the feeling in DC was that state control over life was loosening in Yugoslavia and that “building bridges” was working.⁷⁰

Bucharest did not take sides in the Sino-Soviet split, but it grabbed all the opportunities it offered to distance Romania from “Soviet hegemonism.”⁷¹ Gheorghe Dej’s so-called “Romanian declaration of independence” in April 1964, allied to his policy of “food-for-machines trade with West,” his decision to stop jamming the VoA and RFE in 1963, and the suggestion that Romania could act as a “back-channel” for the United States with North Vietnam made Romania a good prospect for the “building bridges” program.⁷² Dej’s successes became clear later, during Nicolae Ceaușescu’s reign of terror. Within three months of Ceaușescu’s accession to power, an agreement was signed with the United States, on 1 June 1964, to establish full embassies, expand trade, and enhance cultural and scientific cooperation.⁷³ The Romanian shopping list impressed the United States. It ranged from machinery to technology to enhance their oil industry. The Pentagon and the Departments of the Interior and Commerce recommended that the government refuse because Romania supplied twenty per cent of North Vietnam’s petroleum needs. The State Department closed ranks with the White House even suggesting that Romania was moving towards internal liberalization.⁷⁴ Romania was also useful in approaching China. The Johnson administration used the visit of the Romanian premier, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, to convey to China that the United States had “no designs on her territory or her philosophy” and that it wished to trade.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ *FRUS* 1964–1968, XVII, document 178; Jonathan Colman, *The Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson: The United States and the World, 1963–1969* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2010), 116–18.

⁶⁹ *FRUS* 1961–1963, XVI, document 88.

⁷⁰ Dejan Djokic (ed.) *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

⁷¹ Elena Dragomir, “The perceived threat of hegemonism in Romania during the second détente,” *Cold War History*, 12 (2012) 1: 111–34; Cezar Stanciu, “Fragile Equilibrium: Romania and the Vietnam War in the Context of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1966,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18 (2016) 1: 161–87.

⁷² *FRUS* 1964–1968, XVII, document 141.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, document 143.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, document 150.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, document 157.

Ceaușescu also proved to be more reliable than Tito, as he was not encumbered by connections to the NAM.⁷⁶ Despite furious congressional opposition, Johnson's funneling of investment to Romania would increase.⁷⁷

Elitza Stanoeva has pointed out the 1960s were “a particularly dynamic period in Bulgaria's interactions with the West.”⁷⁸ The Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) was a rudder of stability for the Bulgarian economy, but Bulgaria coveted brisker industrialization. Post-Stalinist economic reforms offered the Bulgarians the opportunity to explore trade with the West vigorously.⁷⁹ In 1962, Todor Zhivkov became prime minister. His approach to accessing the glitter of “building bridges” and trade with the EEC would resemble careful toe dipping in a pool as to not upset relations with the Soviet Union. Relations with the United States remained difficult with “spontaneous” demonstrations besieging the U.S. embassy in Sofia with alarming regularity, prompting an American diplomat to comment that improvement in relations between the two countries was like “the first smiles one gets from a [...] baby. One is not entirely sure whether the smile is real or simply a gas pain.”⁸⁰ Yet, persistently, Zhivkov and his foreign minister Ivan Bashev, conveyed messages to the United States that they wished to expand scientific, technological, industrial, and cultural exchanges, buy entire industrial plants, even if all this meant “financial sacrifice” for Bulgaria. What Bulgaria wanted above all else was MFN status.⁸¹ The U.S. embassy was particularly supportive. It informed DC that Bulgaria would not move away from the Soviet Union because of its economic and cultural affinity, but in terms of internal liberalization, Bulgaria was “among the moderately progressive regimes of Eastern Europe.”⁸² Washington however

⁷⁶ The CIA's Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000095039.pdf> (1 April 2021); James G. Hershberg, “The Soviet Bloc and the Aftermath of the June 1967 War,” CWIHP e-Dossier No.13, <<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-soviet-bloc-and-the-aftermath-the-june-1967-war>> (15 April 2021); “Polish Record of Meeting of Soviet-bloc leaders (and Tito) in Budapest (excerpts),” July 11, 1967, Wilson Centre, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, KC PZPR, XI A/13, AAN, document obtained by James G. Hershberg and Wanda Jarzabek; translated by Jan Chowaniec <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113622>> (3 August 2021).

⁷⁷ *FRUS* 1964–1968, Volume XIV, *Soviet Union* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2001), document 156.

⁷⁸ Elitza Stanoeva, “Balancing Between Socialist Internationalism and Economic Internationalisation: Bulgaria's economic contacts with the EEC,” in *European Socialist Regimes' Fateful Engagement with the West: National Strategies in the Long 1970s*, edited by Angela Romano and Federico Romero (London: Routledge, 2020), 161–89.

⁷⁹ Ivan T. Berend, “What is Central and Eastern Europe?”, *European Journal of Social Theory* 8 (2005) 4: 401–16.

⁸⁰ *FRUS* 1964–1968, XVII, document 32.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, documents 34, 35.

⁸² *Ibid.*, document 32.

could not overlook that Bulgaria was country that was exporting weapons, know-how and aid to anti-Western forces in Africa, and Latin America.⁸³

“Building bridges” precipitated unexpected consequences in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia sought increased engagement, expanded trade, and cultural and scientific exchanges but liberalization, however, remained moot. At the same time, it caused resentment and unease to America’s allies in the region. It fused with other sources of instability that agitated the countries of NATO’s Southern Flank, namely the aftereffects from the CMC, strains over Cyprus, disquiet over the possibility of a relaxation of tensions between East and West, and moves towards more inclusive socio-political systems. Feelings that trust was being compromised arose in Greece and Turkey. The tensions proved too much for the fragile Greek democracy to endure and a junta of erratic and opportunistic army colonels hijacked it in April 1967. Turkey continued its road to political and social instability, seemingly never being able to come to terms with the “Johnson Letter” of 1964. Both countries remained in NATO, but keeping them on board would soon pose challenges to NATO’s cohesion.

By 1968, Soviet and some Eastern European leaders came to perceive “building bridges” as malicious both for them and for communism per se.⁸⁴ Vlad Zubok, in a deeply evocative essay, has painted a picture of a Soviet leadership that was divided over de-Stalinization and how to deal with moves towards more autonomy in its European satellites while it faced a Russian society also split over how far to embrace the spirit of the 1960s.⁸⁵ The Soviet Union decided it had had enough of both the *zeitgeist* and differentiation and confronted its dilemmas by asserted its authority, adopting the “Brezhnev Doctrine” and indicating forcefully that any “bridge” ought to be built directly with it and not over it. Czechoslovakia’s fate in August 1968 would put an abrupt end to “building bridges” at a moment when Johnson

⁸³ Radoslav Yordanov, “Fishing in the desert: Unravelling the Soviet Bloc’s economic activities and intelligence gathering in Ethiopia in the 1960s, with particular reference to Bulgaria,” *The International History Review* 43 (2021) 1: 109–21; Jordan Baev, “Bulgarian Military and Humanitarian Aid to Third World Countries: 1955–75,” in *Warsaw Pact intervention in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War*, edited by Philip Muehlenbeck and Natalia Telepneva (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 298–326; “Information on Latin America and Cuba: Delivery of Weapons to Cuba and Latin America,” 2 February 1966, Wilson Centre, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, International History Declassified, Central State Archive of Bulgaria (TsDA), Sofia, Fond 1-B, Opis 51, a.e. 592; edited by Jordan Baev, <<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116372>> (3 August 2021).

⁸⁴ Mitchell Lerner, “‘Trying to Find the Guy Who Invited Them’: Lyndon Johnson, Bridge Building, and the End of the Prague Spring,” *Diplomatic History* 32 (2008) 1: 77–103.

⁸⁵ Vladislav Zubok, “Soviet society in the 1960s,” in *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968*, edited by Günter Bischof et al. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 75–102.

had come to see it as the cornerstone of his legacy. Its brutal demise however should not obscure the fact that despite the challenges it faced, its contradictions and half-hearted application, it had not been futile. As Thomas Schwartz has pointed out, “Johnson’s achievements [. . .] stand out as creating the essential basis for easing relations.”⁸⁶ The legacy of “building bridges” in the Balkans was, however, more problematic. It reinforced existing suspicions and resentments.⁸⁷

VII. Superpower Détente and Differentiation

In 1967, in his Bohemian Club Speech, Richard M. Nixon elaborated on his thinking on foreign policy. Under his stewardship, the United States would encourage “more trade with the USSR and Eastern Europe,” and taking aim at Johnson’s foreign policy, he continued, “I believe in building bridges but we should build only our end of the bridge.”⁸⁸ Nixon and his national security advisor Henry Kissinger confronted power shifts in the international system by seeking a direct understanding with the U.S.S.R. through negotiations, trade, and arms control. On the surface, it seemed to use the same tools as all its predecessors, but superpower détente would be a tenuous policy of deliberate ambiguity, and a “sticking plaster” strategy to enable the US to overcome the international and domestic price Vietnam was exacting. Nixon and Kissinger tried to pursue differentiation and détente simultaneously and balance out clashing, almost incompatible outcomes, as differentiation aimed to foment change by compromising the foundations of the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and détente, to reestablish the primacy of the superpowers. This was a détente with no agreed rules – one where relations with the U.S.S.R. would be prioritized over relations with Eastern European states while volatile areas such as the Mediterranean were excluded.⁸⁹ Selective differentiation and détente increased Balkan vulnerability and local countries came to perceive the “era of negotiations” as a high-risk, zero sum game for the region.⁹⁰

Most Balkan states had invested in a continuing “High Cold War” as assuring their security, development, political stability, and social cohesion. Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Turkey

⁸⁶ Schwartz, “Lyndon Johnson and Europe,” 20.

⁸⁷ Pedaliu, “The US, the Balkans and Détente,” 197–218.

⁸⁸ *FRUS* 1969–1976, Volume I, *Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969–1972* (Washington, DC.: United States Government Printing Office, 2003), document 2.

⁸⁹ Effie G. H. Pedaliu, “‘A Sea of Confusion’: The Mediterranean and Détente, 1969–1974,” *Diplomatic History* 33 (2009) 4: 735–50.

⁹⁰ Pedaliu, “The US, the Balkans and Détente, 1963–73,” 203–8.

saw any kind of détente as an unwelcome development. Yugoslavia had been less than comfortable with the casual way many NAM leaders treated Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia.⁹¹ Now, it needed détente for the NAM to continue to be relevant and to prosper but the aloofness of superpower détente affected it intensely. Its interests in the Mediterranean and the Balkans did not align with the United States.⁹² Tito, during his first full state visit to DC in 1971, was told by President Nixon that countries could “have good relations with the United States but without going so far as to provoke the Soviets into using their might to stop movement toward independence.”⁹³ Nixon’s caveats came at a time when Yugoslavia was negotiating to resolve complex internal, international, and economic problems and Brezhnev was toying with the idea of using its economic problems and its nationalities, stirring for greater autonomy, to make good Zhivkov’s threat “to introduce order in Yugoslavia, too.”⁹⁴

For Nixon and Kissinger, Romania was a better indicator of the Soviet mood towards détente and differentiation. They focused differentiation on it to the detriment of Yugoslavia, thus clearing the path for Ceaușescu to emerge as America’s “favorite dictator.” Romania considered détente as having the potential to bring about a squeeze of the small powers by the superpowers, and asserted its right to trade directly with the EEC and the United States.⁹⁵ For Bulgaria, détente coincided with a moment when exporting to the EEC was becoming more difficult.⁹⁶ Finally, Greece and Turkey had their own misgivings. The Greek Junta perceived that with détente, its geostrategic importance would be diminished. For the Turks, talk of détente was increasing domestic instability and also opening up the prospect of reduced financial aid reaching Ankara. Balkan states on both sides of the ideological divide were coming to the conclusion that the superpowers were promoting their own interests relegating theirs and that détente was agitating their domestic politics in an unwholesome way.⁹⁷

⁹¹ John R. Lampe, “Yugoslavia’s Foreign Policy in Balkan Perspective: Tracking between the Superpowers and Non-Alignment,” *East Central Europe* 40 (2013) 1–2: 97–113.

⁹² Alvin Z. Rubinstein, “The Evolution of Yugoslavia’s Mediterranean Policy,” *International Journal* 27 (1972) 4: 528–45.

⁹³ *FRUS* 1969–1976, Volume XXIX, *Eastern Europe; Eastern Mediterranean, 1969–1972* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), document 234.

⁹⁴ Milorad Lazić, “The Soviet Intervention that Never Happened: Records of a Tito-Brezhnev call suggest the Kremlin mulled intervention in Yugoslavia in 1971” in *Sources and Methods* (A blog and the History and Public Policy Program, Wilson Center), 4 December 2017 <<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-soviet-intervention-never-happened>> (2 July 2021).

⁹⁵ Dragomir, “The Perceived Threat of Hegemonism,” 124; Angela Romano, “Untying Cold War Knots: The EEC and Eastern Europe in the Long 1970s,” *Cold War History* 14 (2014) 2: 164–5.

⁹⁶ Stanoeva, “Balancing Between Socialist Internationalism and Economic Internationalisation,” 161–89.

⁹⁷ *FRUS* 1961–1963, VIII, document 142.

Superpower détente, as pursued by Nixon, raised real fears in the region of a “Melian” fate and bred regionalism, encouraging dialogue among Balkan states across the Cold War divide.⁹⁸ The Greek dictators wished to show their Western allies that contempt for their “regime” did not prevent them from seeking out other allies. They weaponized relations with their Balkan neighbors and the Soviet Union in their efforts to blackmail the West. Romania, in turn, felt uncomfortable with Soviet and American hegemonic tendencies and superpower détente exacerbated its fears.⁹⁹ Ceaușescu pursued the cause of multilateral détente as a means of undermining the Soviet grip over the communist states of the Balkans.¹⁰⁰ The Bulgarians pushed back against such actions vehemently, since their wish to accelerate improvements in relations with their neighbors was not accompanied by any desire to undermine their close relationship with Moscow. In 1968, while airing his misgivings about transmitters for VoA and RFE programs on Greek soil, the Bulgarian Ambassador to the United States, Luben Guerassimov, had also told Assistant Secretary John M. Leddy that the dictatorship in Greece “was hindering the development of a better atmosphere in the Balkans.”¹⁰¹ But, soon, Bulgaria would liaise directly with the Greek dictators. By May 1970, Bashev held his nose and visited Athens. There was no mention of political prisoners in Greece but a series of agreements were struck. In autumn, Gogo Kozma, the Albania foreign minister visited Sofia, Zhivkov met Ceaușescu and progress was made in defusing tensions in Yugoslav–Bulgarian relations that had been evident since January 1969 over “the Macedonian issue.” Bemused by all this activity, Suleiman Demirel, the Turkish prime minister, also visited Sofia. In June 1971, the Romanian foreign minister, Corneliu Mănescu, visited Athens to promote Ceaușescu’s plans for Balkan cooperation.¹⁰² The regional détente was strictly bilateral in nature, but the maneuvering coincided with Chinese diplomatic and commercial activities in the Balkans. Soviet concerns arose that the United States, after its opening to China, was using it to undermine Moscow’s position in the peninsula. Such complications led the United States to consider the exploratory Balkan micro-détente as a hindrance to its wider interests.¹⁰³ In this environment, differentiation could not be deployed fully without undermining détente. The strategy of “linkage” that Nixon/Kissinger pursued towards the

⁹⁸ Ivor F. Porter (UK delegation to NATO) to Bryan Sparrow (EESD, FCO), 12 February 1971, TNA/FCO 28/1501; Pedaliu, “The US, the Balkans and Détente, 1963–73,” 207.

⁹⁹ Paschalis Pechlivanis, “An Uneasy Triangle: Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Greek Colonels and the Greek Communists (1967–1974),” *International History Review*, 43 (2021) 3: 598–613; Ioannis D. Stefanidis, “America’s Projection and Promotion of Democracy: The Voice of America, the Greek Dictatorship and Ceausescu’s Romania,” *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 32 (2017) 33: 167–237.

¹⁰⁰ Cezar Stanciu, “A lost chance for Balkan cooperation? The Romanian view on ‘regional micro-détente’, 1969–75,” *Cold War History* 19 (2019) 3: 421–39.

¹⁰¹ *FRUS* 1964–1968, XVII, document 35.

¹⁰² Pechlivanis, “An Uneasy Triangle,” 598–613.

¹⁰³ Pedaliu, “The US, the Balkans and Détente,” 197–218.

U.S.S.R. entailed compromise and accepting, tacitly, Soviet primacy in Eastern Europe in return for concessions in Vietnam.¹⁰⁴

The exploratory Balkan micro-détente did not have the vigor to survive a world oil crisis in 1973, or the onset of the slow death of superpower détente when its overhyped aims encountered the Yom Kippur War, political upheaval in Italy, and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. These events combined to reveal the limitations of superpower détente as a process, its haphazard arrangements, and its crude treatment of volatile areas such as the Mediterranean and the Middle East.¹⁰⁵ As the philosopher and poet George Santayana put it, “wisdom comes by disillusionment.” Kissinger was “neuralgic” about the Mediterranean, but he could not “read” it or appraise with a cool head the collapse of the dictatorships in the Southern Flank. He saw only “nightmares and not opportunities.” His instincts proved wrong on Portugal and Greece and then, later, Spain.¹⁰⁶ The realization was dawning that “neither SALT nor trade nor credits had basically altered the competitive character of the East–West relationship.”¹⁰⁷ Détente and differentiation intersected with the dynamics unleashed by *Ostpolitik* and the EEC’s growth as a political and economic actor.¹⁰⁸ For the Balkans, opportunity and security seemed to point firmly to Brussels and Helsinki. The Helsinki spirit offered scope for greater maneuver between the superpowers, but access to the EEC could flourish only if tensions between the superpowers were kept low. The Balkan states revised their dim view of détente and would resist its demise later.

President Gerald R. Ford had to ensure the survival of the increasingly unpopular policy of détente in domestic public opinion at a time when his European allies were pursuing a version based on more liberal aspirations. At the same time, Ford needed to contain the damage done to U.S. prestige by Vietnam, Watergate, his predecessor’s uncritical support of Southern European dictators, and possible conflict between Greece and Turkey. In the background, the

¹⁰⁴ Douglas E. Selvage, “Transforming the Soviet Sphere of Influence? U.S.-Soviet Détente and Eastern Europe, 1969–1976,” *Diplomatic History* 33 (2009) 4: 671–87.

¹⁰⁵ Pedaliu, “A Sea of Confusion,” 735–50.

¹⁰⁶ Victor Gavin, “The Nixon and Ford Administrations and the Future of Post-Franco Spain, 1970–6,” *International History Review* 38 (2016) 5: 930–42; Mario del Pero, “The Cold War and the Portuguese Revolution,” and Charles Powell, “International Dimensions of Democratisation: Revisiting the Spanish Case,” in *The Greek Junta and the International System: A Case Study of Southern European Dictatorships, 1967–74*, edited by Antonis Klapsis et al. (London: Routledge, 2020), 203–14 and 215–27; Thomas A. Schwartz, *Henry Kissinger and America Power* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2020).

¹⁰⁷ *FRUS 1977–1980, Volume I, Foundations of Foreign Policy* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2014), document 66.

¹⁰⁸ Suvi Kansikas, *Socialist Countries Face the European Community: Soviet-Bloc Controversies over East-West Trade* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014).

U.S.S.R. was determined to capitalize on American woes worldwide. Kissinger's retention at the helm of the State Department ensured the continuity of Nixonian foreign policy in both spirit and substance at a moment when both the United States and the world were changing fast.¹⁰⁹ Ford needed to decide how to apply differentiation to the Balkans when the region had entered a period of intense instability and insecurity. The Balkans were coming to terms with sluggish growth, growing deficits, rising inflation, the consequences of local conflict, and the return to democracy in Southern Europe. There were internal tremors in Yugoslavia first and then in Bulgaria and Albania as secularism gave way to growing identity politics, separatism, and a more assertive Islam.¹¹⁰ All propelled another bout of Balkan cooperation for security, economic development and local solutions across bloc allegiances. The Balkan détente of the second half of the 1970s was different in nature than its earlier iteration. It was about creating enough space for national interests to be pursued even when the superpowers preferred to ignore them.

It was initiated by democratic Greece, which decided that its best defense lay in the internationalization of its problems by rallying friends, searching for new economic and trade relations with old foes, and seeking entry to the EEC. As Eirini Karamouzi and Lykourgos Kourkouvelas have discussed in their respective articles, Constantinos Karamanlis, the Greek prime minister, took "the Helsinki spirit" on the road, visiting Belgrade, Bucharest, and Sofia and attempting to rekindle the by now moribund earlier Balkan détente.¹¹¹ He adopted an inclusive approach. His *Nordpolitik* was not devoid of elements of *Ostpolitik*; Turkey was not excluded.¹¹² Balkan détente offered the Karamanlis government breathing space to reprioritize Greek defense away from the "danger from the North," now deemed to be less imminent, and address its vulnerability to a NATO ally, Turkey, but without forgetting that it faced a double and concurrent threat from both its neighbor and communism.¹¹³ John Foster Dulles' "hooked fish" was not about to snap the line no matter how disappointed it became with the Americans' mealy-mouthed approach towards the Turkish threat. The temporary

¹⁰⁹ *FRUS* 1969–1976, Volume XXXVIII, Part 1, *Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1973–1976* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2012), document 38.

¹¹⁰ Fikret Karcic, "Islamic Revival in the Balkans, 1970–1992," *Islamic Studies* 36 (1997) 2–3: 565–81.

¹¹¹ Eirini Karamouzi, "Managing the 'Helsinki Spirit' in the Balkans: The Greek Initiative for Balkan Co-operation, 1975–1976," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24 (2013) 4: 597–618; Lykourgos Kourkouvelas, "Détente as a Strategy: Greece and the Communist World, 1974–79," *International History Review* 35 (2013) 5: 1052–67.

¹¹² *FRUS* 1977–1980, Volume XXI, *Cyprus; Turkey; Greece* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2014), document 184.

¹¹³ Effie G. H. Pedaliu, "'Footnotes' as an Expression of Distrust? The United States and the NATO 'Flanks' in the Last Two Decades of the Cold War," in *Trust, but Verify: The Politics of Uncertainty and the Transformation of the Cold War Order, 1969–1991*, edited by Martin Klimke et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 237–58.

withdrawal of Greece from the integrated military command of NATO reflected this, but it was not a departure. Karamanlis never sought to hinder the operation of the US bases in Greece despite the huge political cost to his own party.¹¹⁴ “Greece belong[ed] to the West,”¹¹⁵ but it would also adopt regionalism and multilateralism, the most available diplomatic weapons to the small powers.¹¹⁶

Bulgaria joined in but rejected any multilateral Balkan approaches that could antagonize the Soviets. It kept Moscow informed of local diplomatic initiatives while making it clear that it did not wish to become a mere onlooker and pointing out to Leonid Brezhnev that Bulgaria’s isolation would also be detrimental to Soviet regional interests.¹¹⁷ Zhivkov, fearing that “the Cypriot scenario” could be reenacted against his country and under pressure from the Soviet Union, was relieved when the Turks sought improvement in their bilateral relationship and he reciprocated. Turkey and Bulgaria signed an Agreement of Good-Neighborliness and Cooperation in 1975, and a new trade agreement in 1976.¹¹⁸ Expanded trade and cultural diplomacy were the tools Bulgaria chose for international engagement¹¹⁹ and Zhivkov’s attitude to Balkan cooperation mirrored his priorities. He was willing to act as the Soviet Union’s *locum tenens* for as long as his interests coincided with Soviet aims, which was the case most of the time.¹²⁰

Romania saw this as another chance to promote its persistent search for multilateral regional dialogue to undermine the blocs, gain greater access to local markets, enhance Ceaușescu’s international role, and bolster his increasingly repressive rule. Ceaușescu sought to promote Romanian regional influence by acting as a bridge between China and the Balkans,¹²¹ yet, he did not scorn the opportunities bilateralism could yield. He achieved improvement in Romanian relations with Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, and Yugoslavia. In 1975, he welcomed to

¹¹⁴ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XXI, document 21.

¹¹⁵ Eirini Karamouzi, *Greece, the EEC and the Cold War 1974–1979* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹¹⁶ Angela Romano and Laurien Crump, “Challenging the superpower straitjacket (1965–1975): Multilateralism as an instrument of smaller powers,” in *Margins for Manoeuvre: The Influence of Smaller Powers on the Cold War Era*, edited by Laurien Crump and Susanna Erlandsson (New York: Routledge, 2021): 13–31.

¹¹⁷ Kostadin Grozev and Jordan Baev, “Bulgaria, Balkan Diplomacy, and the Road to Helsinki,” in *Helsinki 1975 and the Transformation of Europe*, edited by Oliver Bange and Gottfried Niedhart (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 160–74.

¹¹⁸ Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish Experiment in Democracy, 1950–1975* (Boulder: Westview, 1977), 407–9; Michael B. Bishku, “Turkish-Bulgarian Relations: From Conflict and Distrust to Cooperation over Minority Issues and International Politics,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 14 (2003) 2: 77–94.

¹¹⁹ Theodora Dragostinova, “The East in the West: Bulgarian Culture in the United States of America during the Global 1970s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 53 (2018) 1: 212–39.

¹²⁰ *FRUS* 1977–1980, Volume XX, *Eastern Europe* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2015), document 90.

¹²¹ Pedaliu, “The US, the Balkans and Détente,” 197–218.

Bucharest both Karamanlis and his Turkish counterpart Bülent Ecevit.¹²² For Turkey, mired in socio-political and economic turmoil as well as international disapproval, renewed Balkan détente offered the means to allay the fears of its neighbors and block the unfolding Greek regional “charm offensive.” It prioritized reconciliation with Bulgaria for fear that improved Graeco-Bulgarian relation could solidify into a security concern.¹²³ It remained loyal to NATO, despite Ecevit’s threats. However, in its effort to mitigate the effects the half-hearted U.S. arms embargo over Cyprus was having on its ailing economy, rising oil prices, and the costs of occupation, it reached out to the U.S.S.R.¹²⁴

Karamanlis’ “step-by-step” rapprochement with Greece’s neighbors culminated in the Athens Conference in 1976, reopening the “Balkan kaleidoscope,” as Richard Clogg put it at the time.¹²⁵ All Balkan states were represented apart from Albania. They all wanted more freedom for maneuver, but apart from Romania, at this stage, no other participant wished to do away with their patrons’ protection. Despite the fact that four of the participants were plagued by intractable disputes, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia over the “Macedonian issue” and Greece and Turkey over Cyprus and the Aegean Sea, all sat around the table and talked. In time, Karamanlis’s rapprochement with Bulgaria, which he had started simply to blunt the “threat from the north,” developed into direct personal diplomacy with Zhivkov. The two rebuilt the Graeco-Bulgarian relationship on more constructive and enduring foundations.¹²⁶ This success opened channels of communication and enabled anaemic trust to develop, leading *Pathé News* as well as the Foreign Office to comment that it had reduced ‘tension in the Balkans’.¹²⁷ It also shaped the regional environment the new U.S. administration would encounter upon President Carter’s election.

¹²² Michael M. Boll, “Turkey between East and West: The Regional Alternative,” *The World Today* 35 (1979) 9: 360–68.

¹²³ Ferenc A. Váli, *Bridge across the Bosphorus: The Foreign Policy of Turkey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 205; İlhan Uzgöl, “The Balkans: Turkey’s Stabilizing Role,” in *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power*, edited by Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirisci (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 49–70.

¹²⁴ Cissy E. G. Wallace, “Soviet Economic and Technical Cooperation with Developing Countries: the Turkish Case,” unpublished PhD. thesis, LSE, 1990, 110–13; Gökay Bülent, *Soviet Eastern Policy and Turkey, 1920–1991: Soviet Foreign Policy, Turkey and Communism* (London: Routledge, 2006), 104–5.

¹²⁵ Richard Clogg, “Balkan Kaleidoscope,” *The World Today* 32 (1976) 8: 301–07.

¹²⁶ Nikolai Todorov, *The Ambassador as Historian: An Eyewitness Account of Bulgarian Greek Relations in the 1980s* (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1999); Karamouzi, “Managing the ‘Helsinki Spirit’ in the Balkans,” 597–618; Kourkouvelas, “Détente as a Strategy,” 1052–67.

¹²⁷ Embassy in Sofia report, 2 February 1976, TNA/FCO 28/2866; *Greece: Bulgarian President Zhivkov Meets Karamanlis 1979*, 1:20 min., Corfu, Reuters, 30 April 1979, Reuters – British Pathé–Historical Collection, <<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVA18GIGHGDAQOA4L7S2WRANW0XK-GREECE-BULGARIAN-PRESIDENT-ZHIVKOV-MEETS-KARAMANLIS/query/Corfu>> (10 May 2021).

VIII. The Balkans and “Reciprocal Accommodation”

In his election campaign, President Carter signposted that he understood American public opinion’s growing introspection and fatigue with foreign policy adventures. Any suspicion of continuity with the Nixon–Ford–Kissinger era had to be dispelled. His promise to restore America’s moral authority had proven popular, but in an increasingly interdependent world where neither superpower could fully control rising geopolitical tensions, morality and realism would clash. He had inherited an already “wounded détente” that, during his presidency, became all but “a policy of nominal but suspended détente.”¹²⁸ In view of vocal transnational activism and a resurgent Congress, Carter calculated that he had to conclude the SALT II negotiations swiftly while highlighting the Soviet Union’s main weaknesses and contradictions: “the mistreatment of their own citizens”¹²⁹ and an economy that could not meet their aspirations.¹³⁰

Up until Carter, there had been some faint-hearted mention of “internal liberalization,” but human rights abuses were never an obstacle to applying differentiation. Differing priorities and tactics within Carter’s foreign policy team led to an inability to identify the issues where compromise with the Soviet Union could be achieved. Human rights as a weapon was wielded in a heavy-handed way by Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter’s national security advisor, undermining the more nuanced approach of the State Department and made “the Soviets feel [...] hemmed in,”¹³¹ reducing the United States’ ability to harness the tensions generated by its human rights policy and prevent these from harming progress on SALT II.¹³² David Skidmore maintained, “the tragedy of the Carter Administration was one of historical timing.”¹³³ Its policy was directed towards a Soviet Union that was increasingly adopting a bunker mentality. The “spirit of Helsinki” facilitated the growth of networks across the Cold War divide, and transformed dissent in Soviet bloc.¹³⁴ It gave dissidents behind the “Iron

¹²⁸ Raymond Garthoff, Final Report to NSC, 22 December 1982, <<https://www.cis.pitt.edu/nceer/pre1998/1982-625-4-Garthoff.pdf>> (4 February 2021).

¹²⁹ Stuart E. Eizenstat, *President Carter: The White House Years* (London: Macmillan/St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2018).

¹³⁰ Elizabeth Clayton, “Rising Demand and Unstable Supply: The Prospects for Soviet Grain Imports,” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 67 (1985) 5: 1044–8.

¹³¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977–1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 162.

¹³² *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, document 17.

¹³³ David Skidmore, *Reversing Course: Carter's Foreign Policy and the Failure of Reform* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996).

¹³⁴ Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Curtain” hope that their anguish would not go unheard; their message chimed with international public opinion, but made the Soviet leadership more defensive, eager to reassert its control over Eastern Europe and double down on emphasizing ‘national sovereignty’.¹³⁵ At the Belgrade Conference of 1977, the deterioration of relations between East and West revealed a waning of the will to approach the Cold War through a spirit of compromise.

“Historical timing” and regional dynamics posed challenges to Carter in applying differentiation to the communist Balkans states. All, irrespective of bloc allegiance, looked at the dissonance between “national sovereignty” and “human rights” with cynicism and most leaned towards national independence. The contradictions and inflexibility of Carter’s and Brzezinski’s differentiation influenced outcomes in a region now reconciled to détente and ready cooperate with a newly democratized Greece now distanced from NATO and seeking entry to the EEC. The Athens conference was not an inconsequential affair. It was followed in 1979 by a meeting in Ankara, in 1981 in Sofia, in 1982 in Bucharest, and in 1984 and 1988 in Belgrade, where the first Foreign Ministers’ conference took place. Issues connected with development and growth proved the best areas for cooperation, as they had been in the past though the strained Graeco-Turkish relationship continued to create complications.

Carter encountered this effervescent environment in the Balkans. He had two levers in his relations with the communist countries: either to offer them a “big enough carrot” or to use a “big enough stick.” In the end, he found that he could use neither, as threatening to ditch differentiation at this juncture was deemed counterproductive. He had to pacify his allies, restore American authority in the region while curbing the U.S.S.R. from capitalizing on the woes of the Southern flank. He had to absorb more instability due to his prevarication over European defense and Tito’s failing health. Carter’s differentiation thus had to be accommodated within a “détente” that dared not speak its name, and combined with the promotion of human rights and intensified covert operations behind the “Iron Curtain.”¹³⁶ Brzezinski saw covert action as the most effective means to achieve U.S. political objectives and “to produce internal evolution in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.”¹³⁷ Investment was sought for upgraded transmitters for RFE and Radio Liberty (RL) as well as the CIA’s

¹³⁵ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, document 36.

¹³⁶ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, documents 1, 17, 20, 23, 49, 52, 54, 58, 59.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, document 46.

“book program” to expand human rights activism.¹³⁸ All the while Eastern European governments grew more sullen.

The publicizing of human rights abuses in the Eastern bloc allied with differentiation was a double-edged sword for the U.S. government. It could never deliver the unwaveringly moral policy that the public expected and the nuances of differentiation and the realities of its application came to hurt Carter personally.¹³⁹ For the purposes of differentiation, Presidential Directive 21 classified Eastern European countries, and by extension, the Balkan countries according to their degree of internal liberalization and extent of independence from the U.S.S.R. in international affairs. Measuring internal liberalization remained problematic and such stratification did not give real scope for rewarding those who made some progress or sanctioning those who regressed. Isolationist Albania was thus, left to its own devices and preferential treatment for Yugoslavia was upgraded. Romania was no longer ranked above Yugoslavia, but its eligibility to “receive preferred treatment” was reaffirmed. PD-21 placed Bulgaria on a tier that specified that “no initiatives ought to be taken to improve relations unless it tangibly and demonstrably advance[d] specific US interests.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, PD-21 established a rigid pecking order which dispensed with experimentation – hitherto a *sine-qua-non* of U.S. engagement with the Balkans – and did not always work as the United States had intended.

As early as March 1977, the Carter administration decided to adhere to the recommendations of NSC-28 that “using withdrawal of MFN treatment as a sanction against human rights” was not desirable as it was deemed to set “a damaging precedent.”¹⁴¹ Both Yugoslavia and Romania avoided pressure and increased their demands for U.S. finance and military supplies that included sensitive new technology and police equipment even as Ceaușescu’s increasing despotism and repression was becoming apparent.¹⁴² Charter 77 and the Jiu Valley miners’ strike attracted yet more attention to conditions there. The U.S. Congress’s ire grew and made the renewal of Romania’s MFN status an uncomfortable annual ritual that necessitated a presidential waiver from “the freedom-of-emigration requirements” specified in the Jackson–

¹³⁸ Ibid., documents 3, 17, 20, 23, 49, 52, 54, 58, 59.

¹³⁹ Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 422.

¹⁴⁰ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, document 16.

¹⁴¹ *FRUS* 1977–1980, Volume II, *Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2013), document 73. For the full document see Jimmy Carter Library, PRM 28, Memorandum: Human Rights, 8 July 1977, <https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/memorandums/prm28.pdf> (3 August 2021)

¹⁴² *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, document 252; *FRUS* 1977–1980, II, documents 206, 223, 224, 228, 231, 234.

Vanik amendment of 3 August 1975.¹⁴³ As Paschalis Pechlivanis puts it, “the continuity that Carter showed in his approach to Romania is indicative of his failure to efficiently implement the human rights principle in his foreign policy.”¹⁴⁴ Nor could the United States meet Yugoslav and Romanian requests as they involved supplying systems deemed to be too sensitive.¹⁴⁵ It left both dissatisfied and Carter open to charges of hypocrisy when he failed to link publicly, the refusal of such requests with human rights while the international media failed to highlight his tougher stance on Bulgaria.¹⁴⁶

Relations with Bulgaria had been on a good footing since 1975, when it had signed a consular agreement with the United States. In 1977, there was a cultural exchange agreement, renewed again in 1979, in 1978 a scientific exchange agreement, and in 1979 an agricultural agreement. From 1978, Petur Mladenov, the Bulgarian foreign minister, even employed a New York public relations firm to advise on acquiring MNF status and Export-Import Bank loans. All Bulgarian efforts were rebuffed, despite the Carter administration’s decision to treat it “as a sovereign state responsible for its own actions.” Carter’s differentiation simply could not accommodate a country unwilling to compromise its close links with the Soviet Union or its erratic behavior internationally.¹⁴⁷ Raymond Garthoff, the experienced U.S. ambassador to Bulgaria, held that Bulgaria’s human rights record was no worse than Romania’s or Hungary’s, both receiving preferential treatment, and that the Bulgarians appeared to be making better progress on issues of concern.¹⁴⁸ They had expedited matters swiftly in “the divided family cases” in their jurisdiction, as the case of the family of Atanas Slavov, a Bulgarian writer who resided in New York showed and they were not blocking emigration.¹⁴⁹ It was also the first Eastern European country to settle favorably the claims of private American bondholders. In 1979, relations between Bulgaria and the U.S.S.R. appeared to tense over economic planning, future industrialization and Bulgaria’s sustained efforts to improve relations with the United States and the EEC.¹⁵⁰ Western observers speculated whether it would “take the Romanian [...] path.”¹⁵¹ Garthoff’s suggested that this was a good

¹⁴³ Paschalis Pechlivanis, *America and Romania in the Cold War: A Differentiated Détente, 1969–80* (London: Routledge, 2019), 140–63.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 179.

¹⁴⁵ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, documents 246 and 252.

¹⁴⁶ John R. Lampe, “Yugoslavia’s foreign policy in Balkan perspective: Tracking between the superpowers and non-alignment,” *East Central Europe* 40 (2013) 1–2: 97–113.

¹⁴⁷ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, document 88.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., documents 91, 92, 93.

¹⁴⁹ Theodora K. Dragostinova, *The Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021).

¹⁵⁰ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, document 95.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., XX, document 90.

moment for the United States to grant it preferential economic treatment and lessen its economic reliance on the U.S.S.R. His advice was not heeded because the CIA's less optimistic analysis swayed the administration.¹⁵² Zhivkov's conduct on the international scene still suggested that he was heavily influenced by Soviet prompting.¹⁵³ In 1978, the poisoning in London, of the Bulgarian defector, writer, and broadcaster for the BBC World service, RFE, and DW, Georgi Markov, gave new meaning to the words "Bulgarian umbrellas" and generated major disquiet in Washington.¹⁵⁴ The Carter administration dealt with the matter discretely through diplomatic channels,¹⁵⁵ but the affair revealed the complexity of Bulgaria's destabilizing role on the international scene.¹⁵⁶ Zhivkov's contrary behavior meant that many avenues for change could not be explored even when he improved cooperation by, for example, impeding narcotics trafficking and apprehending terrorists while Yugoslavia did not.¹⁵⁷

Balkan cooperation presented problems to the United States. Brzezinski's tweaks of differentiation and emphasis on human rights prompted a steadily more confrontational U.S.S.R. to pay more attention to Balkan developments limiting the United States' scope to deploy differentiation effectively. It also sought to create mischief in NATO's Achilles heel, the Southern Flank by exploiting the fact that Carter maintained the United States' chronic inability to mediate effectively between its two NATO allies because it needed to prioritize containment.¹⁵⁸ A Soviet "charm offensive" towards Greece and Turkey was pursued with vigor. Both reciprocated, but without compromising their Western ties.¹⁵⁹ By the mid 1970s, Turkey had emerged as one of the top non-communist recipients of Soviet aid in the form of technical and economic assistance and from 1980 Soviet energy too.¹⁶⁰ The fall of the Shah in Iran in January 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December led to the Carter Doctrine in January 1980. Turkey, "the eternal barrier," was earmarked for additional aid in 1980. Greece was reintegrated into NATO in October 1980 before what the State Department

¹⁵² Ibid., document 90.

¹⁵³ Ibid., document 88; Aurel Braun, *Small State Security in the Balkans* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

¹⁵⁴ Richard H. Cummings, *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe, 1950–1989* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2009), 58–80; Rufus Crompton and David Gall, "Georgi Markov: Death in a Pellet," *Medico-Legal Journal* 48 (1980) 2: 51–62.

¹⁵⁵ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, document 88.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., document 94.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., documents 94 and 95.

¹⁵⁸ Athanassios Antonopoulos, *Redefining Greek–US relations, 1974–1980: National Security and Domestic Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 133–208; Aylin Güney, "The USA's Role in Mediating the Cyprus Conflict: A Story of Success or Failure?", *Security Dialogue* 35 (2004) 1: 27–42.

¹⁵⁹ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, document 37.

¹⁶⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey 1977* (London: IISS, 1978), 64–68.

called the “anti-NATO party of Andreas Papandreou” came to power.¹⁶¹ In a setting in which relations were already intricate, Carter’s foreign policy, with its inflexible application of differentiation and its human rights message, left the communist Balkan states as well as Greece and Turkey nonplussed.

For a stratified differentiation policy to work, it needed support from and coordination with the United States’ European allies. By this time, the Europeans sensed that détente was slipping away and were less than forthcoming. They worried that too much attention to human right abuses in the Soviet bloc would end up cranking up Soviet tensions, undermine the pledges of Helsinki, and adversely affect the EEC’s trading relations with Romania and Bulgaria.¹⁶² West German unhappiness too, with U.S. covert operations from Germany made Chancellor Helmut Schmidt express his discomfort over the activities of the RFE/RL and the lack of German control over them.¹⁶³

President Reagan was to supercharge differentiation with bombastic rhetoric in which ‘human rights’ were employed as an overt “roll-back” weapon.¹⁶⁴ Such a policy in an area like the Balkans could have easily ossified the status quo. The region did not react well to the application of “maximum pressure.” The rise of the Second Cold War in the 1980s, and Reagan’s implementation of an accelerated differentiation led to intensified cooperation in the Balkans. Even Bulgaria shifted to multilateralism and would embark, with Greece and Romania, on initiatives to make the Balkans a ‘nuclear free zone.’¹⁶⁵ In Greece, Papandreou who knew how to win elections, also knew that NATO was the only guarantor of Greek security. Despite his being a thorn in the side of NATO with his “footnotes,”¹⁶⁶ in the end, as Nils Ørvik observed, by 1984 Greece “belonged to the West much more than it had in 1974.”¹⁶⁷ Papandreou made virtue of ambiguity by dressing it in fiery anti-NATO, anti-EEC, and nationalist rhetoric that allowed him to achieve a landslide electoral victory in 1981.¹⁶⁸ Romania continued to play the system at a time when its debt was spiralling, and would

¹⁶¹ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XXI, document 21.

¹⁶² Christian P. Peterson, “The Carter Administration and the Promotion of Human Rights in the Soviet Union, 1977–1981,” *Diplomatic History* 38 (2014) 3: 628–56.

¹⁶³ *FRUS* 1977–1980, XX, documents 52 and 54.

¹⁶⁴ Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 54: *United States Policy toward Eastern Europe*, 2 September 1982, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd54.pdf>, accessed 1 September 2021.

¹⁶⁵ Dragostinova, *The Cold War from the Margins*, 94.

¹⁶⁶ Pedaliu, “Footnotes”, 237–58.

¹⁶⁷ Nils Ørvik, *Semialignment and Western Security* (London: Groom Helm, 1986), 1-14.

¹⁶⁸ Eirini Karamouzi, “‘Out With the Bases of Death’: Civil Society and Peace Mobilization in Greece During the 1980s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 56 (2021) 3: 617–38; Eirini Karamouzi and Dionysios Chourchoulis, “Troublemaker or Peacemaker? Andreas Papandreou, the Euromissile Crisis, and the Policy of Peace, 1981–86,” *Cold War History* 19 (2019) 1: 39–61.

continue closer cooperation with Greece and Bulgaria, while Yugoslavia became increasingly introspective and less active in regional politics as it attempted to map out an uncertain future without Tito. Maneuvering continued until the end of the Cold War, and many of the Balkan countries would use their experiences of local *détentes* in the 1970s and the 1980s to assemble the framework for future post-Cold-War relations despite the instability caused by the Balkans Wars of the 1990s.

IX. Conclusion

For the Americans, the major interest in the Balkans was in its geostrategic location. The United States did not design the policy of differentiation exclusively with the communist Balkans states in mind, but it was where it was first tested and refined. Its legacy there was deeply contradictory. Although access to Western credit offered the prospect of attaining aspirations, in the long run this also opened the way for “walking into a debt trap.”¹⁶⁹ Moreover, its effects could not to be contained within its target countries but radiated out to influence U.S. allies too. The policy ran more smoothly during the High Cold War when it was conceived and designed. Its combination with *détente* proved to be trickier and even dangerous. The two policies were contradictory in nature and their effects incompatible. Their concurrent application proved to be unsettling for Balkan states across the Cold War divide. They acted as millstones, grinding down their national ambitions and priorities, provoking consecutive bouts of regional cooperation which went as far as they could in a region where suspicion and the Cold War acted as barriers. The constant balancing and unpredictable behavior of Balkan governments during this period revealed the internal contradictions of a policy that was supposed to promote change imperceptibly. The successes of differentiation are not easy to measure. Its aim was to keep nationalism alive behind the ‘Iron Curtain’. In the Balkan region, where calculations were based more on realism, nationalism, and cynicism and less on ideology, this was not a difficult task. How far can one credit differentiation and nationalism for the end of the Cold War? It seems more plausible to maintain that the collapse of the U.S.S.R. was due to its failure to provide for the needs and hopes of its people, its reliance on fear to conceal its limitations, and its resorting to abusing the civil liberties and human rights of its own citizens. In this sense, credit needs to go to the policy of containment rather than one of its individual strategy strands.

¹⁶⁹ Berend, “What is Central and Eastern Europe?” 401–16.