

# BRITISH AND US RELATIONS WITH BULGARIA, 1949-1959: THE BULGARIAN-AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC SPLIT AND BRITAIN'S FUNDAMENTAL ROLE

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## Abbreviations

ACC - Allied Control Commission  
BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation  
CIA - Central Intelligence Agency  
DOS - Department of State  
FO - Foreign Office  
FRUS - Foreign Relations of the United States  
NSC - National Security Council

TNA - The National Archives  
UK - United Kingdom  
UN - United Nations  
US - United States (of America)  
USSR - Union of Socialist Soviet Republics  
VOA - Voice of America

## Introduction

On February 20, 1950, the American Minister in Bulgaria, Donald R. Heath, delivered a note to the Bulgarian Government declaring that the United States would withdraw its Legation from the country. This note initiated the only diplomatic split between the US and a Soviet satellite country during the Cold War.

Ever since America and Bulgaria reinstated diplomatic relations after World War II, the relationship between the two countries could be labeled as “icy.” Stalin quickly pulled Bulgaria into the Soviet orbit, and after the elimination of the political opposition, it became one of the most Kremlin-loyal communist countries. The DOS’s decision to sever diplomatic relations was the culminating effect of years of Bulgarian harassment, which greatly limited the Legation’s ability to function. It had trouble obtaining visas and housing for its staff, and some of its Bulgarian employees were arrested, tortured and even murdered. In addition, the Bulgarian government conducted a thorough propaganda campaign against the Western “imperialists” and would regularly conduct show trials and have those accused admit to working for Western spy rings.

In February 1949, fifteen Protestant pastors were put on trial and charged with espionage on behalf of American and British secret intelligence services.<sup>1</sup> On 30 November of the same year, the Bulgarian government published accusations against Traicho Kostov, former General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Minister Heath, among others, was accused of plotting with Kostov to undermine Bulgaria with help from Josip Broz Tito.<sup>2</sup> The accusations were false and made even more ludicrous

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<sup>1</sup> R. J. Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford, 2007), 335.

<sup>2</sup> *The Trial of Traicho Kostov and His Group* (Sofia, 1949), 34-35.

by the fact that Heath and Kostov had never met,<sup>3</sup> nor did they share a common language and thus could not have had a secret conversation.<sup>4</sup>

The situation was further complicated by the fact that a Bulgarian employee at the American Legation, Mikhail Shipkov, was secretly hiding from the Bulgarian police in the attic of the Legation from August 23, 1949 until sometime in February 1950. Shipkov worked at the Legation as a translator and on August 20, 1949, he was arrested and interrogated for 32 hours. He was tortured until he confessed to spying for both the British and American missions. Once released, he returned to the Legation, wrote an affidavit claiming his confession was false, handed it to Heath, and then refused to leave the building.<sup>5</sup>

While Shipkov hid in the attic, the DOS tried to balance concern for Shipkov's safety with trying to rectify its crumbling relations with Bulgaria. On January 19, 1950, the relations between the two countries worsened after Heath was declared *persona non grata* due to the allegation of espionage made in the Kostov trial. The next day, the DOS sent a note to the Bulgarian Chargé in Washington, Dr. Peter Voutov, threatening that if the Bulgarian government did not retract Heath's *persona non grata* status America would break diplomatic relations with Bulgaria.<sup>6</sup> After weeks of waiting for a reply and receiving none, Heath finally severed relations on February 20, claiming the lack of response was proof Bulgaria did not want to continue relations with America.<sup>7</sup>

The British Legation suffered the same amount of harassment from the Bulgarian government, and British citizens were also accused of espionage in the Kostov trial. However, Kostov accused no current employees at the British Legation. The British chose not to respond to the allegations and, unlike the Americans, the FO did not break diplomatic relations with Bulgaria. The British decision not to break relations benefitted America because the FO regularly sent information about Bulgaria to Washington. Thus, America was able to sever relations but continue to have an ear on the ground. The FO also used the opportunity to tailor which type of information it gave America in order to selectively influence the American intelligence service.

The Bulgarians began to send messages that they were interested in reinstating relations with America in 1953. However, relations were only restored in 1959 because, while the DOS was in favor of reinstating relations, it could not convince the American Congress during the height of McCarthyism. In addition, Bulgaria was not an extremely strategically important country, and, because America still had a source for intelligence on the country, the DOS was in no rush to restore relations.

## Historiography and Methodology

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<sup>3</sup> US DOS, *FRUS 1949* vol. v (Washington, 1976), 364, editorial note.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Courtney, interview by Charles Kennedy, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, 4/03/1992, accessed 10/06/2015, <http://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000240/>.

<sup>5</sup> *FRUS 1949*, vol. 5, 344-346, Heath to Acheson, 23/08/1949.

<sup>6</sup> *FRUS 1950* vol. 4, document 260, Acheson to Voutov, 20/01/1950.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, document 258, Acheson to Voutov, 21/02/1950.

Because there is little scholarship about the Bulgarian-American diplomatic split, this article has relied heavily on primary sources. The key sources used are the US Government's published *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, declassified CIA reports, interviews with US DOS and British FO employees who worked in Bulgaria, and FO documents from the National Archives in the United Kingdom. Between 1949 and 1959, the British Embassy in Washington and the FO would inform each other of particularly informative conversations they had with DOS staff about US policy towards Bulgaria. Therefore, the FO records are an important source for the development of the DOS's opinion on the future of Bulgarian-American relations.

The work of Marietta Stankova<sup>8</sup> has been helpful for background on this paper, especially her book *Bulgaria in British Foreign Policy 1943-1949*, as it provided the foundation for this paper's study of British policy in Bulgaria. Vasil Paraskevov's work<sup>9</sup> has also been helpful as it provides a detailed overview of the time period discussed in this paper.

In terms of early Cold War scholarship, Norman Naimark's essay "The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944-1953" and Svetozar Rajak's essay "The Cold War in the Balkans, 1945-1956" have both been principle sources in placing the Bulgarian-American diplomatic split in the larger context of the Cold War and specifically the Cold War in the Balkans.<sup>10</sup> John Lewis Gaddis's fundamental book *Strategies of Containment* has also helped put this diplomatic split in the context of US policy during the Cold War.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Bulgarian-American diplomatic split is widely absent from history books, it is an important example of early American and British Cold War policy and a concerning instance that could have led to the severance of American relations with all satellite countries. This article will focus exclusively on the British and American perspective during the diplomatic split of 1950-1959 and the events leading up to the split in 1949. The two countries' foreign policies towards the communist world were so intertwined during the early Cold War that it is necessary to analyze both to investigate thoroughly the policies and meaning behind the diplomatic split. The present work attempts to add to the subject as, to the author's knowledge, no other historian has written about the Bulgarian-American diplomatic split focusing on American and British policy.

This article is divided into four parts. The first part will focus on the US response to the events leading up to and the immediate aftermath of the diplomatic split of February 1950. The declaration of Minister Heath as *persona non grata* was declared the reason behind the US decision to sever relations with Bulgaria; however, in truth, the US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, and Heath were already discussing cutting relations because of the

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<sup>8</sup> Marietta Stankova, *Georgi Dimitrov: A Biography*, (London, 2010) and Marietta Stankova, *Bulgaria in British Foreign Policy, 1943-1949* (London, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Vasil Paraskevov, "Conflict and Necessity: British-Bulgarian Relations, 1944-1956," *Cold War History* 11:2 (2011), 241-268.

<sup>10</sup> Norman Naimark "The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944-1953" and Svetozar Rajak "The Cold War in the Balkans, 1945-1956" in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume I* (Cambridge, 2010) 175-197 and 198-220.

<sup>11</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*, (New York, 1982).

Bulgarian militia's treatment of the local Legation staff. America's decision-making process during 1949-50 had an underlying personal aspect, which was hidden from the public and the Bulgarian government until after it severed relations. This paper will argue that the reasoning behind America's eventual decision to cut diplomatic relations with Bulgaria was due to a combination of multiple factors: attacks against the American Legation and its local employees, accusations made against Minister Heath during the Kostov trial and his declaration as *persona non grata*, Acheson's unwillingness to look like he was appeasing the USSR, and finally, the fact that Acheson saw the country as the "...least valuable guinea pig in which US can afford [to] sacrifice official representation."<sup>12</sup> All factors played an important role in the decision making process. However, concern over Shipkov's safety delayed the eventual severance of relations, which were only cut after Shipkov had fled the Legation, and thus, nothing more could be done to save him.

Members of the British FO were also accused of espionage during the Kostov trial, and, therefore, the second part of this paper will focus on the British response to the accusations and the policy behind their decision not to sever relations. Both Paul Mason, Minister of the British Legation, and various staff at the FO agreed that the British had more to gain by keeping a mission in Bulgaria. The choice not to make a statement against Kostov's allegations meant there was little media attention to the British aspect of the trial. This, in addition to the fact the accusations were made against British citizens who were no longer working in Bulgaria, allowed the British to keep diplomatic ties with Bulgaria without looking weak in the eyes of the world.

The third part of this article will analyze US-British relations during and after the diplomatic split, and the important exchanges between the two countries. Since their victory in World War II, the British and Americans worked closely together in Bulgaria originally as partners in the ACC.<sup>13</sup> The "common enemy" brought the two countries together throughout the Cold War, especially in the intelligence field.<sup>14</sup> This close relationship continued on after American closed its Legation. During the time of the diplomatic split, America still wanted information about the situation in Bulgaria due to the possibility that the USSR might invade Yugoslavia through Bulgaria. The DOS requested information from the FO, who dutifully sent reports to Washington, which even included information on the effectiveness of VOA broadcasts.<sup>15</sup> Information from the British Legation in Sofia allowed the United States to feign indifference about Bulgaria while still receiving intelligence on the country.

The last section is dedicated to the process and reasoning behind the American decision to reinstate diplomatic relations in 1959. This change of policy came about for a few reasons: Kostov had been rehabilitated by the Bulgarian government in 1956, the Bulgarian government apologized for the accusations made against Minister Heath, and,

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<sup>12</sup> *FRUS* 1949, vol. 5, 368, Heath to Perkins, 29/11/1949.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Boll, *The American Military Mission in the Allied Control Commission for Bulgaria 1944-1947* (New York, 1985), viii.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Deighton, "Britain and the Cold War, 1945-1955" in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol.1* (Cambridge, 2010), 121.

<sup>15</sup> TNA, FO371/87559, RB10345/39, Sykes to Ruddock (US Embassy London), 02/08/1950. All FO archival documents cited in this paper are from TNA.

with the political decline of Senator McCarthy, American politicians and popular opinion turned away from demanding an unforgiving hard line against communism. As all these factors came together, America was able to reinstate relations with Bulgaria without appearing to be appeasing the USSR.

### **1. Deterioration of Western-Bulgarian Relations and the Bulgarian-American Diplomatic Split, 1949-1950**

In 1949, America did not view the satellite states as independent, but rather completely under Soviet rule. The July 1, 1949 DOS policy statement on Bulgaria provides a good illustration of the importance America attached to the satellite country. It declared, “[t]he long range objectives of the US toward Bulgaria are a segment of our broad policy goals with respect to the USSR.”<sup>16</sup> The policy statement claims that, although the Bulgarian government is not free to develop its own foreign policy, it is still in the interest of the US to keep a mission in the country, in order to gather information on the weaknesses of the government, which could be exploited in the future.<sup>17</sup>

Although relations between Bulgaria and America were always tense, the path towards a diplomatic split did not begin until August 1949, when a local employee at the American Legation, Ivan Secoulov, was arrested and died in prison. His death was declared a suicide, but Heath suspected foul play. Although Heath wanted to publicize the episode,<sup>18</sup> he asked Acheson if the government could “delay official protest and publicity while we explore possibility of saving other employees.”<sup>19</sup> The main employee in question was Shipkov. From this point onward, the DOS’s policy towards Bulgaria would be affected by consideration for the Bulgarian employees in the Legation. However, this concern was kept from the public, as secrecy was key in order for America to negotiate with the Bulgarian government.

On August 23, 1949 Heath wrote to Acheson reporting that Shipkov was hiding in the attic of the Legation, after the Bulgarian militia tortured him for 32 hours. In regards to the torture and killings of local employees of the Legation, Heath wrote, “[t]hey must know that under normal circumstance such persecution of [the] Legation would have led to [a] break of relations which cannot be the desire of Bulgaria (read the Kremlin) at this juncture.”<sup>20</sup> This correspondence is the first instance when Heath and Acheson discussed the possibility of a break in diplomatic relations.

In order to understand the DOS’s motives during this situation, it is necessary to recognize that the DOS believed the Kremlin was the puppet-master of Bulgaria. In September 1949, Acheson argued the Shipkov affair was part of a broader Soviet/Bulgarian plan to “discover limits of pressure US will countenance before evoking possibility of break in relations.” He also was inclined to believe that the incident was part of a calculated attempt to lead to a diplomatic rupture. Acheson thought the Soviets/Bulgarians wanted a

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<sup>16</sup> *FRUS 1949*, vol. 5, 339, DOS Policy Statement, 01/07/1949.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, 340, Heath to Acheson, 01/08/1949.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 341, Heath to Acheson, 01/08/1949.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 346, Heath to Acheson, 23/08/1949.

diplomatic split in order to remove America's listening post as a means to carry out armed activities against Yugoslavia.<sup>21</sup> Acheson's thoughts on the Soviet reasoning regarding the Shipkov incident are important because it shows what he was willing to sacrifice when he finally decided to end relations with Bulgaria. Unfortunately, it is not possible to check the Soviet motivations because there are no released Soviet diplomatic documents about the Bulgarian-American diplomatic split.<sup>22</sup>

Bulgarian-American relations once again took a turn for the worse after the Bulgarian press published the indictment against Kostov. In a telegram from Acheson to Heath on 7 December 1949, Acheson declared that the DOS was giving "serious consideration to interrupting dipl relations" with the Bulgarian government, especially if the Bulgarian government recalled Heath.<sup>23</sup> However, according to Acheson, breaking diplomatic relations with Bulgaria would have had more positive aspects than negative. Acheson claimed the Kremlin and other satellite governments would see that there was a limit to the amount of ill treatment America would take before breaking relations, which would hopefully lead to better treatment for US Legations in other countries. In addition, a vigorous reaction to this provocation would make the Soviets think America would act in a similarly decisive way if the USSR attacked Yugoslavia. The DOS thought one negative aspect of a severance of relations would be the potential threat that America could be forced to withdraw all its missions. However, it was not of much concern because Acheson did not think it likely the Soviets would attempt this.<sup>24</sup> Acheson's reasoning would play an important role in the eventual decision to sever relations. This incident provides insight into the fact that America viewed Bulgaria as a sort of testing ground for US policy toward the USSR and its other satellites during the early Cold War. US actions in Bulgaria were meant to be a sign for the USSR. Bulgaria was seen as a low-risk country in which to conduct such statements because it was on the periphery of the Soviet empire and it was not an important country for US or Western trade.

Although Acheson argued there could be positive effects from severing diplomatic relations, the documents show that the idea of breaking relations was considered a last resort. Both Heath<sup>25</sup> and Acheson<sup>26</sup> agreed that if the Bulgarian government did not request Heath's recall after the Kostov trial, diplomatic relations should not be broken. This was due to the seriousness of breaking relations with Bulgaria, but it also had another, more personal, factor: Shipkov. In a telegram to Heath, Acheson declared that, even if Bulgaria recalled Heath, the final question of whether or not relations would be severed had to be delayed somewhat. Acheson explains that, "[o]ne of reasons for thus delaying

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 348, Acheson to Heath, 28/08/1949.

<sup>22</sup> Vitka Toshkova, "USA in Bulgaria's Political Fate: 1919-1989," *Bulgarian Historical Review* 1-2 (2008): 58.

<sup>23</sup> *FRUS 1949*, vol. 5, 366, Acheson to Heath, 07/12/1949. Acheson's writing is heavy with abbreviations and simplified grammatical structures. All spelling and grammar mistakes are original to the documents.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 368, Acheson to Heath, 07/12/1949.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 371, Heath to Acheson, 09/12/1949.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 372-373, Acheson to Heath, 12/12/1949.

final break is hope successfully execute proposal outlined ur 1038 Dec 9.”<sup>27</sup> This message has not been declassified; however, the Office of the Historian claims that the message “reviewed possible measures to be taken in the Shipkov case.”<sup>28</sup> Shipkov was still hiding in the attic of the Legation and therefore, if America were to break relations with Bulgaria, the US government would abandon him. Once again, this highly personal factor played a role in US foreign policy.

The Bulgarian government did show some flexibility and agreed to print Heath’s denial of the Kostov trial accusations. However, Heath did not believe the Bulgarians had much agency in this action and believed this flexibility “...was due to Kremlin’s unwillingness to have US break relations at this precise time and over this precise issue, and, I might add, in this particular country.”<sup>29</sup> Throughout the lead-up to the diplomatic split, the DOS saw itself playing chess with the Soviet Union, and Bulgaria just happened to be a pawn.

The situation intensified after Heath was declared *persona non grata* on 19 January 1950. The next day, Under Secretary of State, James Thompson, and the officer in charge of Balkan affairs, John Campbell, met with Voutov in Washington to discuss the matter. They delivered an official diplomatic note demanding that the Bulgarian government withdraws its January 19 note declaring Heath *persona non grata*, or “...the United States Government will be obliged to withdraw the United States diplomatic mission from Bulgaria and ask for the recall of the Bulgarian diplomatic mission from the United States.”<sup>30</sup> This threat would place America in a difficult situation in the future. The Bulgarians never did retract their note and, thus, America had to break relations or else it would be seen as a country capable of being pressured to retract on its threats.

Only one day passed between Bulgaria declaring Heath *persona non grata* and America threatening to cut diplomatic relations. The reason for this is most likely that, as mentioned above, both Acheson and Heath had already decided it was the necessary move to make if Heath was recalled. Another reason for the timing was that by January, the DOS and CIA were able to come up with a plan for Shipkov’s escape.<sup>31</sup> The CIA concocted the plan in Washington; however, Raymond Courtney, Vice Consul in Bulgaria, described the plan as “...a really childish, and impossible scheme.”<sup>32</sup> A British Legation employee, who Courtney claimed worked for British intelligence, also helped plan Shipkov’s escape by providing fake papers.<sup>33</sup>

While the decision of whether or not America should break relations with Bulgaria was well thought over by Heath, Acheson and even President Truman, how the DOS severed relations appears to have been done haphazardly. There was a gradual process of breaking relations with Bulgaria consisting of two meetings with Voutov. The conduct of

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 379, Heath to Acheson, 22/12/1949.

<sup>30</sup> *FRUS* 1950, vol. 4, document 260, Acheson to Voutov, 19/01/1950.

<sup>31</sup> John Campbell, interview by Richard McKinzie, Harry S. Truman Library, 26/06/1974, accessed 12/06/2015, [www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/campbell.htm](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/campbell.htm), 200.

<sup>32</sup> Courtney, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Courtney, 7.

the DOS employees and the decision of who should be present at the meetings shows that the actual severance of relations with Bulgaria was not as important as how it played into America's policy towards the USSR.

The first meeting was with Under Secretary James E. Webb and Campbell on December 12, 1949. Campbell described the meeting as "...the funniest incident, because Mr. Webb didn't have any of the background of this business; I don't know whether he even knew where Bulgaria was."<sup>34</sup> Webb took control of the meeting and "...went right through one point after another in the most severe, almost offensive language, insulting this poor guy [Voutov] and blaming him for all these unspeakable things his government had done."<sup>35</sup> The fact that the DOS chose Webb to conduct the meeting with Voutov, even though he had hardly any background knowledge on the accusations of the Kostov trial or the Shipkov case, shows how little the DOS prioritized relations with Bulgaria. It is worth noting, however, that Webb's report on the incident<sup>36</sup> did not mention his harsh conduct, and it is possible that Webb's superiors were unaware. Therefore, one is unable to undeniably conclude that this was the DOS's desired way to conduct the conversation.

The next meeting was on February 16, 1950 between Voutov, Campbell and Thompson.<sup>37</sup> In this meeting the DOS made it clear that if the Bulgarians did not revoke Heath's *persona non grata* status, the US would not send another Minister, but would, without a doubt, sever relations. It is noteworthy to mention the significance of who was present, or rather, who was not present at the meeting, which essentially made it clear to the Bulgarians that a severance would happen. In his interview, Campbell notes, "Bulgaria wasn't worthy of an Assistant Secretary, even, to break relations. So, we did it at the Deputy Assistant Secretary level."<sup>38</sup> Although the DOS thought through the decision to end relations, how they chose to do it shows once again that the decision was less about Bulgaria itself, and more about the USSR and America's policy towards the USSR.

On February 20, 1950, Heath delivered a note to the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry declaring the withdrawal of its Legation in Bulgaria and requesting that the Bulgarian Mission be withdrawn from Washington. On February 21 the note was declared official and the same note was delivered to Voutov in Washington and published in the press.<sup>39</sup> Heath claimed that after the note was delivered to the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry, the Bulgarians indicated that the Foreign Minister might finally agree to meet Heath, which would mean Heath would receive an answer to the DOS's January 20 note. This caused the delay of the note's publication, as Heath thought an agreement could be reached. However, it was a trick by the Bulgarian FO to prepare a statement on how America had harbored a spy in its Legation.<sup>40</sup> Once the decision was finalized, in accordance with the DOS's plan to act

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<sup>34</sup> Campbell, 200.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *FRUS* 1949, vol. 5, 373-375, Webb's Memorandum, 12/12/1949.

<sup>37</sup> *FRUS* 1950, vol. 4, document 265, Thompson's Memorandum, 16/02/1950.

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, 203.

<sup>39</sup> *FRUS* 1950, vol. 4, document 268, Acheson to Voutov, 21/02/1950.

<sup>40</sup> *FRUS* 1950, vol. 4, document 270, Heath to Acheson, 21/02/1950.



forcefully and quickly,<sup>41</sup> the Department released a statement to the press declaring their motives behind the diplomatic split on the same day they delivered the note to Voutov.

The press release included information on the death and arrests of local Legation employees: Joseph Dimitrov, Dragan Peev and Ivan Secoulov. It also included a separate section about the case of Mikhail Shipkov. On the same day, the Bulgarian government published indictments against Shipkov and four others, which implicated Heath and other American Legation employees in espionage.

The Cold War was a war being waged on many fronts, one of the most important being in the hearts and minds of the people. The February 21 press release explaining why America ended diplomatic relations with Bulgaria is a strong example of how America used propaganda as a way to win over public opinion. While it was an instrument of propaganda, it was based on fact. Shipkov's capture did play a crucial role in America's policy-making process. In Campbell's interview he highlighted the importance the Shipkov case had in the final decision. He states, "[i]t was a bizarre question, because here were high affairs of state, the question whether diplomatic relations between two states would be maintained or broken, depending on how our Legation could cope with this individual case."<sup>42</sup> Campbell also mentioned that top DOS personnel such as Dean Rusk, George Perkins, Fred Reinhardt and Llewellyn Thompson participated in "long conferences" where they discussed what to do about Shipkov.<sup>43</sup> Campbell's statement is supported by Courtney's interview in which he mentioned that the Bulgarian government's refusal to allow Shipkov to leave Bulgaria was "a contributing factor to the decision to sever relations."<sup>44</sup>

The police arrested Shipkov on February 14, 1950. His trial was held from March 6-8, 1950 and he was sentenced to 15 years in prison.<sup>45</sup> Before his trial, on March 4, the US government released Shipkov's affidavit to the press, which he wrote after he had been first arrested and tortured by the Bulgarian militia.<sup>46</sup> His affidavit detailed his interrogation and how he had been tortured into confessing to spying for America and the Britain. He proclaimed his innocence and requested that his statement, "...be made public and used to justify both the good name of the Legation and my name in case the militia attempt to make use of the confession they drew out of me."<sup>47</sup>

In the DOS's October 20, 1949 memorandum, one course of action to take in regards to the situation in Bulgaria was to issue a press release including Shipkov's affidavit and the details of past abuse suffered by local Legation employees such as Secoulov. However, this option was rejected at the time because it risked breaking diplomatic relations.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, once the DOS delivered the diplomatic note severing relations, Shipkov's affidavit was not included in the 21 February press release. This was because

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<sup>41</sup> *FRUS* 1949, vol. 5, 371-372, Heath to Acheson, 09/12/1949.

<sup>42</sup> Campbell, 199.

<sup>43</sup> Campbell, 200.

<sup>44</sup> Courtney, 6.

<sup>45</sup> *FRUS* 1950, vol. 4, document 267, editorial note.

<sup>46</sup> *DOS Bulletin* no. 558, 13/03/1950, 389.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, 394.

<sup>48</sup> *FRUS* 1949, vol. 5, 358-359, memorandum on US-Bulgarian relations, 20/10/1949.

publishing Shipkov's statement put his life in danger as he accused the militia of torture. Shipkov had been trying to escape Bulgaria, and it was only on February 21 the DOS realized he had been captured. The eventual release of his affidavit on March 4 required further discussion in the DOS.

The dramatic events finally came to a conclusion on 24 February, when Minister Heath and all American Legation employees and their families left Bulgaria. With the severance of relations with Bulgaria, the DOS believed they had shown the USSR strength and stood their ground. Indeed, Acheson warned Heath on February 7, 1950 that "[p]rolonged failure by US to fol up strong stand which has recd practically unanimous support here wld risk interpretation as appeasement and be likely stimulate other satellites to further repressive measures which we had' hoped vigorous action in Bulg might forestall."<sup>49</sup> In the same telegram, Acheson remarked that if the Bulgarians recalled Heath's *persona non grata* status, the US should not break relations with Bulgaria, which shows how easily the split could have been avoided. However, whether due to a Soviet or Bulgarian decision, Heath's status was not recalled and the Americans had to live up to their ultimatum.

The DOS had trapped itself in a corner when it had threatened to break diplomatic relations if Heath's *persona non grata* status was not recalled. However, it appears that there was not much regret in the DOS's decision to issue the threat. In 1950, America viewed satellite countries as completely under the Soviet thumb, which is seen in the DOS correspondence discussed above. Logically speaking, there was no real reason America should have had missions in satellite states if they did not view them as independent. However, the US interest in gathering intelligence as well as the possible public backlash from removing US missions in Eastern Europe were two reasons why America did not break all diplomatic relations. Bulgaria was the one satellite country where relations were severed because it was not an important country for gathering intelligence, and because the DOS's threat to end relations if Heath's *persona non grata* status was not removed meant that, if America did not go through with its threat, it would look weak. The DOS feared this could result in the USSR acting more assertively against America.

## 2. British Policy During the Bulgarian-American Diplomatic Split, 1949-1950

Between 1949 and 1950, the British Legation experienced the same level of harassment as the American mission in Sofia. In addition to the accusations made against the British in the Kostov trial, between 1948 and 1949, the British had two members of their Legation staff declared *persona non grata*, and two other members of staff were also expelled.<sup>50</sup> However, the FO, unlike the DOS, did not sever relations because they understood they had more to gain from keeping their Legation in Bulgaria. They believed even the small amount of intelligence gathered in Bulgaria was worth more than a symbolic stance.

Unlike the DOS, who publicized a press release one day after the Bulgarian government announced the Kostov trial accusations, the British remained silent.<sup>51</sup> In the

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<sup>49</sup> *FRUS* 1950, vol. 4, document 263, Acheson to Heath, 07/02/1950.

<sup>50</sup> Stankova, *Bulgaria*, 168.

<sup>51</sup> *DOS Bulletin* no. 545, 12/12/1949, 911.

first days after the accusations were announced, the FO and Minister Mason agreed on a policy: do nothing for the time being. One reason for the hesitation was that Mason insisted on knowing if the espionage accusations were not true before making a statement.<sup>52</sup> The FO supported Mason's hesitation because it wanted the Legation to express a cool indifference to the allegations, "since we do not (repeat not) wish to give the impression that we are unduly concerned about the charges."<sup>53</sup> The FO believed any interest shown in the allegations could be viewed as a sign of guilt.

Mason's hesitation is understandable, as there were intelligence officers working at the Legation at the time of the Kostov trial.<sup>54</sup> However, the FO was able to get in touch with the British citizens who were accused, Colonel William Bailey and former First Secretary of the British Legation in Sofia, Stephen House, who denied ever participating in espionage against Bulgaria. While the FO released their denials to the press, the British still refused to make a statement denying the allegations. Sir Anthony Rumbold, head of the Southern Department, claimed Bailey and House's denials, in addition to Kostov's denial in court of the accusations he made under torture, "dispose[ed]" of most of the allegations.<sup>55</sup>

On 15 December 1949, the FO sent a telegram to the British Ambassador in Washington stating how it interpreted the Soviet motives behind the accusations. The FO argued that Bulgaria was an important listening post and that the West should be cautious that this might be an attempt by the Kremlin to trick the Americans into breaking relations. If they did succeed, the Soviets, according to the FO, might try to force the Americans to break relations with all satellite countries. The American and British missions were so connected in Eastern Europe that if this occurred, the FO warned, "...His Majesty's Government might well have to follow suit."<sup>56</sup>

Two days later, the British ambassador to America, Sir Oliver Franks, wrote to the FO explaining he had conveyed the FO's stance to the DOS. He reported back to London that Thompson argued the Kremlin did not want America to break relations with Bulgaria because it would remove the illusion that the satellites were independent states and that it would increase the threat of America recognizing a government in exile.<sup>57</sup> The fact that America thought the Kremlin did not want the US to break relations is perhaps one reason why it risked threatening to sever relations if Heath's *persona non grata* status was not recalled.

The FO did not agree with the American interpretation and argued that, even if the Americans were right and the USSR wanted America to maintain its mission in Bulgaria, "...it does not follow that it must therefore be in our interest to withdraw them."<sup>58</sup> The British did not want to risk threatening to break relations because they were unsure the USSR would back down. The British stood by their original argument that they had

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<sup>52</sup> FO371/78249, R11281, Mason to FO, 01/12/1949.

<sup>53</sup> FO371/78249, R11420, FO to Mason, 08/12/1949.

<sup>54</sup> Courtney, 7.

<sup>55</sup> FO371/78250, R11618, FO to Mason, 17/12/1949.

<sup>56</sup> FO371/78250, R11551, FO to Washington, 15/12/1949.

<sup>57</sup> FO371/78251, R11794, Franks to FO, 17/12/1949.

<sup>58</sup> FO371/78251, R11704, FO to Washington, 22/12/1949.

more to gain from maintaining a mission in Bulgaria, and therefore insisted on not making a statement against the Kostov trial accusations, as it would only provoke the Bulgarians.

This position, however, was unsatisfactory for Mason. He cautioned the FO by arguing that the typical British “silent contempt” over the obviously ridiculous allegations “...will be regarded as an admission or at least as proving inability to deny.”<sup>59</sup> He also warned that without an official statement the Bulgarians would see it as British weakness and would most likely not ease their harassment of the Legation and its employees.<sup>60</sup>

Much to his chagrin, Mason was unable to change the minds of the FO. Rumbold argued that Mason was wrong and that the FO did not need to make a statement due to several factors: the Bulgarians themselves knew the accusations were false, a statement would not stop the Bulgarians from framing the British government in the future, and the world opinion was already in favor of the British because “nobody attach[ed] any credence” to the accusations.<sup>61</sup> He also maintained that the situation was different for the Americans because the head of their Legation was accused, while the British citizens accused were no longer in Bulgaria.<sup>62</sup>

In the Cold War propaganda battle, time was of the essence, and unlike the Americans, the British took a cautionary “wait-and-see” attitude. Rumbold acknowledged that 22 days after the announcement of the allegations, “...as the trial recedes into the past and the issue of an official denial, at this late date, would provoke surprised comment.”<sup>63</sup> The FO and Mason had discussed the best possible British response so thoroughly that the moment had passed and it was too late to act. This hesitation was a reoccurring theme of British policy towards Bulgaria in the early Cold War.<sup>64</sup>

Although Mason wanted the FO to make a statement against the allegations, both he and the FO believed America and Britain had more to lose by cutting relations with Bulgaria than by weathering the abuse.<sup>65</sup> When it came to Bulgaria, the British were able to understand when to fold their cards. By 1949, the British had fully accepted they would not be able to force Bulgaria out of the Soviet orbit. Mason himself described Bulgaria as “a country whose policy, short of some major upheaval, British policy has, as I see it, little chance of influencing to any serious degree, perhaps for many years to come.”<sup>66</sup>

Since the end of World War II, Britain had become painfully aware of how little influence it had in Bulgaria. Bulgaria blatantly violated the human rights clause of the post-war Peace Treaty, yet Britain never tried to invoke the legal power of the Treaty. If the FO had, it would have failed, and it would have been obvious to the world that Britain had no authority in Bulgaria. Therefore, knowing the extent of its power and not wanting to look weak, Britain could never fully question Bulgaria’s actions and its violations of the Treaty.

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<sup>59</sup> FO371/78251, R11785, Mason to FO, 19/12/1949, also quoted in Stankova, *Bulgaria*, 171.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> FO371/78251, R11785, Rumbold’s comments in FO minutes, 22/12/1949.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Stankova, *Bulgaria*, 171.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, 169.

<sup>66</sup> FO469/4, RB1021/1, Mason to McNeil, 19/01/1950.

Britain was reduced to a simple observer in Bulgaria—a true symbol of the West’s powerlessness in the Soviet sphere.<sup>67</sup>

Another important reason why the British might have not made a statement against Kostov’s accusations was that Bulgaria was not very important to Britain, and therefore not worth the risk. Ever since the war, Britain’s main concerns in the Balkans had been Greece and Turkey. Bulgaria was only a consideration because of the threat of communism spreading to its neighbors.<sup>68</sup> As the archives show, most decisions about Bulgaria were made without Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin’s input. This was in contradiction to the Americans. Heath was in constant contact with Acheson, and President Truman was kept abreast of the events happening in the country, even before Heath was declared *persona non grata*.

Learning from the past, Britain’s choice not to react to the accusations was made with the knowledge that whatever the British did would not change Bulgaria’s actions. In the eyes of the British, Bulgaria’s “[c]omplete subservience to the Soviet Union may be taken as the first axiom of policy under the present regime...”<sup>69</sup> In the end, the Kremlin called the shots and, short of war, the FO could do little to stop the Kremlin if it did indeed want Western missions removed for the satellites. Britain’s Minister was not implicated in the trials and its local staff had not been tortured, so it had less of a need to stand up to the Bulgarians. Britain’s decision not to react meant it did not receive much world attention and therefore did not have to defend itself against allegations of showing diplomatic weakness.

### 3. US-British Relations Concerning Bulgaria

Even before the diplomatic split, Britain and America were already sharing information about Bulgaria, as the FO was sending its Bulgarian monthly economic reports to the British Embassy in America, who was most likely passing the information along to the DOS.<sup>70</sup> After the Kostov allegations were announced, the two countries often discussed the motives of the Bulgarians and Soviets, and Britain was kept abreast on the changing American policy of whether or not it would sever diplomatic relations with Bulgaria. A constant conversation was in place between the FO and the DOS, even though they disagreed on Soviet motives and the best mode of action.

The degree of closeness is illustrated in the FO correspondence of the time. The question of whether or not Britain should cut relations in solidarity with America was a question discussed in the FO. After Heath was declared *persona non grata* and it was becoming clear that America would probably sever relations, the British Minister in Bucharest asked the American Minister there if America wanted Britain to cut relations with Bulgaria too.<sup>71</sup> However, this did not become the official position of the FO; rather, the opinion of Bonar Sykes of the Northern Department eventually became the FO’s policy.

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<sup>67</sup> Stankova, *Bulgaria*, 192.

<sup>68</sup> Paraskevov, 249.

<sup>69</sup> FO469/7, Carvell to Eden, 15/01/1953.

<sup>70</sup> FO371/87558, RB10345/25, Sykes comments in FO minutes, 03/03/1950.

<sup>71</sup> FO371/87558, RB10345/5, Roberts to Rumbold, 28/01/1950.

Sykes stated, "...we shall have to try to maintain our mission as long as possible for the sake of the United States and of ourselves."<sup>72</sup> The FO knew that if America left the country, they would be in the unique position of watching Bulgaria for both states.

The Americans, on the other hand, strongly trusted the FO, which is seen by the information they gave the British in the time leading up to the diplomatic split. The DOS and Heath often gave the British information that, if somehow leaked, would seriously limit their diplomatic maneuver room. One case shows Thompson telling the British just how far they would allow the Bulgarians to push them before breaking relations.<sup>73</sup>

The close connection between the two departments remained after the US Legation left Bulgaria. The DOS and FO continued the exchange of information about Bulgaria; however, it was mostly the British doing the work. This relationship was advantageous for America, as it was able to claim it cut relations over moral indignation; however, it did not necessarily lose its listening posts, because the British Legation provided almost all of its intelligence on the country. Before America officially broke relations, they had already provisionally negotiated to receive information from the British Legation regarding Bulgaria.<sup>74</sup> This was followed by a request from the Director of the Office of Eastern European Affairs at the DOS for information about Bulgaria, only one day after Heath and the rest of the Legation had left the country.<sup>75</sup> In fact, thanks to the British, America did not have much to lose by cutting relations. Therefore, it could be easily argued that America was the biggest beneficiary of Britain's choice not to sever relations with Bulgaria.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a thorough analysis of Anglo-American relations during the 1950s, it is necessary to touch on the general relationship between the two countries in regards to Bulgaria. Britain and America held two different perceptions of the state of Anglo-American relations during this time period. Raymond Courtney, who after the American Legation in Bulgaria closed worked in the American Embassy in London, described the relationship positively. In an interview, he claimed the two countries "...were pretty much on the same wavelength. I can't recall any incident or instance that I was aware of that indicated a difference in point of view."<sup>76</sup> Sir Denis Greenhill, who was declared *persona non grata* in Bulgaria in 1948 and later became a counselor at the British Embassy in America, recalled the relationship somewhat differently. He described the close alliance and intelligence sharing as necessary for Britain due to its financial situation and because of the Soviet military threat. In the beginning of the Cold War, only America could provide the loans Britain needed and was the only military force capable of stopping the Soviets. Therefore, it was in the best interest of Britain to help America in any way possible.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> FO371/87558, RB10345/1, Sykes comments in FO minutes, 21/01/1950.

<sup>73</sup> FO371/87558, RB10345/8, Millar to FO, 15/02/1950.

<sup>74</sup> FO371/87558, RB10345/25, Campbell to Jellicoe, 27/03/1950.

<sup>75</sup> FO371/87558, RB10345/15, Burrows to Rumbold, 25/02/1950.

<sup>76</sup> Courtney, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Denis Greenhill, interview by John Hickman, *British Diplomatic Oral History Programme*, 14/02/1996, accessed 01/06/2015, <https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/Greenhill.pdf>, 1-2.

It is understandable why Courtney would view the Anglo-American relationship in such a positive light, because that is what the FO tried to portray to the DOS. The FO decided the final path of information about Bulgaria would be from the Sofia Legation to the FO and then finally to the American Embassy in London. The other option debated was from the Sofia Legation to the British Embassy in Washington to the DOS, but this was deemed undesirable as the "...Embassy in Washington seems a little over-enthusiastic about giving copies of telegram etc to the State Department...". While a potential security risk was one reason, another motive was that the Embassy "...might not spot the undesirability of passing on to the Americans a despatch or telegram giving views on some question on which we did not see eye to eye with them."<sup>78</sup> The FO did not want the Americans to know when they disagreed on matters, as it was important to keep up the image of a close relationship; this portrayal was incredibly important for both Britain's financial and military security. While this Bulgarian matter was obviously not the most important issue between the two countries, it was a way the British could prove their loyalty.

The US request for information prompted an internal discussion at the FO, but one could not call it a debate because nobody could find any reason not to forward British telegrams and reports to the DOS. In fact, some in the FO saw it as a unique opportunity. Bernard Burrows, Counselor and Head of Chancery in the British Embassy in Washington, had a positive spin on the Bulgarian-American diplomatic split. He wrote to the FO, saying, "I think generally that the expulsion of the United State Legation from Sofia affords us an excellent opportunity of helping the Americans."<sup>79</sup>

While the FO acknowledged that it was certainly "...unusual to send copies of despatches and telegrams to the govt. of another country..."<sup>80</sup> no one could find any real reason not to allow it. Therefore, the Americans received the FO's fortnightly summaries, monthly economic reports, despatches and even telegrams relating to Bulgaria. The most demanding request the Americans made was to have the British Legation make weekly summaries of how effective the VOA broadcasts were. The Legation was so understaffed that they did not even send reports back to London on the BBC's broadcasts. However, the FO managed to fulfill the Americans' request.<sup>81</sup> The DOS, for their part, did offer to reimburse the British monetarily for their trouble; however, the author found no record of an exchange of money in the archives.<sup>82</sup>

The trade of information between the FO and the DOS continued until America reinstated relations with Bulgaria. In addition, Britain supported America's protest against a Bulgarian decree that would liquidate commercial and limited liability companies. This negatively affected an American oil company, and to a lesser extent, a British company.

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<sup>78</sup> FO371/87558, RB10345/25, Reilly's comments in FO minutes, 05/05/1950.

<sup>79</sup> FO371/87558, RB10345/25, Burrows to Rumbold, 07/04/1950.

<sup>80</sup> FO371/87558, RB10345/25, Communicative Department comments FO minutes, 18/04/1950.

<sup>81</sup> FO371/87559, RB10345/39, Mason to FO, 31/07/1950.

<sup>82</sup> FO371/87558, RB10345/25, Campbell to Jellicoe, 27/03/1950.

The Americans asked if the British would send a note of protest and, after some discussion, the British agreed.<sup>83</sup>

A noteworthy change in Anglo-American relations regarding Bulgaria occurred in 1957 concerning the current exchange of information. The British showed interest in obtaining a *quid pro quo* agreement in exchange for intelligence on Bulgaria. After the Americans had contacted the British Embassy in Belgrade for more information about Bulgaria, the FO directed its Embassy to request information about Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iran in exchange for dispatches from the Legation in Sofia.<sup>84</sup>

This change in the FO attitude can be attributed to many different factors. One was that, after Britain became a nuclear power, it became a stronger player on the world stage, giving it the confidence to work with America on equal footing.<sup>85</sup> Another factor was the cooling of the Anglo-American relationship after the Suez Crisis in 1956. It is also possible that, after the change in personnel, the FO simply saw no reason to give the Americans free information. Either way, in the late 1950s, unlike the early part of the decade, the FO tried to use the American position in Bulgaria to its advantage.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the two countries remained close, and the DOS still told the FO about developments in Bulgarian-American relations in strict confidence. In 1958, when it appeared that relations would be reinstated, John Wearing, staff in the Northern Department, anticipated the American need for British advice. He suggested sending the Americans a copy of the Sofia post report stating, “[w]e do not formally look after American interests in Bulgaria, but we are conscious that in the matter of resuming diplomatic relations the Americans shall look primarily to us for information and advice.”<sup>86</sup>

The DOS had informed the FO that one point they insisted on before reinstating negotiations was the promise of the Bulgarian government not to harass the American Legation. This was an important point because it had been a large issue prior to the diplomatic split. The Northern Department wanted the Americans to stress this point in their negotiations because of the benefits that the British Legation in Sofia could reap.<sup>87</sup>

In 1959 the potential for America to reestablish relations with Bulgaria increased dramatically. The FO was in contact with the DOS and privy to important information regarding potential negotiations. The FO even knew the Bulgarians and Americans had reached a deal before the US Congress had been informed.<sup>88</sup>

When the British Minister in Bulgaria, Anthony Lambert, heard America was entering negotiations, he wrote to the FO asking them to convey to the DOS that the harassment point should be negotiated well. He argued, “...the return of the Americans seems at present to be the only carrot the West has to offer the Bulgarian Government.” If America were to reinstate relations with Bulgaria, it would imply that Bulgaria was an

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<sup>83</sup> FO371/100526, NG1461/2, Faber to Sharp, 23/01/1952.

<sup>84</sup> FO371/128651, NG1691/3, British Legation Sofia to British Embassy Belgrade, 16/03/1957.

<sup>85</sup> Deighton, 132.

<sup>86</sup> FO371/134807, NG10345/3, Wearing's comments in FO minutes, 25/11/1958.

<sup>87</sup> FO371/134807, NG10345/5, Joy to Barker, 23/12/1958.

<sup>88</sup> FO371/142926, NG10345/6, Caccia (Washington) to FO, 24/03/1959.



independent country and would show respect for the government.<sup>89</sup> Lambert wanted to use this carrot to force the Bulgarians to stop harassing Western Legations. The harassment situation had not improved much after the Americans left, and the British Legation received the brunt of the harassment with Lambert's own young children being arrested after they accidentally wandered into a military zone.<sup>90</sup>

Lambert's enthusiasm about the potential for the Americans to alleviate the harassment faced by his Legation is obvious from his writings. However, it appears from the documents that Lambert's advice reached the DOS after negotiations had already begun. Lambert did prove useful to the Americans, as he suggested the future Military Attaché at the American Legation should belong to the Army Air Corps in order to make the exchange of information between the American and British Military Attachés easier.<sup>91</sup> Lambert also met with and supplied information to the US delegation that visited Bulgaria in order to look into possible locations for the future American Legation.<sup>92</sup>

The British played an important role in America's ability to gather intelligence on Bulgaria without maintaining a Legation. It could also be argued that the closeness of the Anglo-American relationship, and Britain's willingness to pass on information is one reason why America was able to put off reinstating relations. It is, however, necessary to note that Britain also benefited from this agreement. By providing information to America, the FO was able to influence the DOS and CIA by selectively providing information for causes important to Britain and by suggesting actions that would benefit itself.<sup>93</sup>

#### **4. Reasoning Behind the Reinstatement of Bulgarian-American Relations and Britain's Role, 1953-1959**

The year 1953 was a turning point in the Cold War. President Eisenhower approved NSC 162/2 and his "New Look" policy began to take shape. Stalin's death in March created a cautious hope in the US and UK that the USSR would loosen its grip on the satellite countries. Indeed there was a small yet noticeable shift in Bulgaria after Stalin's death. In 1953, Bulgarian officials, using French diplomats, put out feelers about possibly resuming relations with the United States.<sup>94</sup> Relations were not reinstated, but it was not due to a lack of desire on the part of the DOS or President Eisenhower. At the 177<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NSC, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Eisenhower discussed how they both had tried and failed to convince Congress it was in America's interest to maintain diplomatic ties with satellite countries.<sup>95</sup> Senator William Jenner, a devout follower of Senator Joseph McCarthy, put up strong resistance to the idea.<sup>96</sup> In 1953, McCarthyism was in full swing,

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<sup>89</sup> FO371/142926, NG10345/5, Lambert to Joy, 16/03/1959.

<sup>90</sup> *The Telegraph*, 05/062007, accessed 10/06/2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1553610/Sir-Anthony-Lambert.html>.

<sup>91</sup> FO371/142926, NG10345/5, Lambert to Brimelow, 04/05/1959.

<sup>92</sup> FO371/142926, NG10345/10, Lambert to Brimelow, 15/05/1959.

<sup>93</sup> FO 1110/684, PR1045/79, Makins to Eden, 31/06/1954.

<sup>94</sup> *FRUS* 1955-57, vol. 25, document 52, memorandum to Acheson, 03/04/1956.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> FO371/106232, NG10345/3, Galsworthy to Leishman, 29/10/1953.

and, therefore, it was hard to gather congressional support to reinstate relations with a communist country.

The question of how breaking diplomatic relations with Bulgaria would affect America in relation to the USSR was at the forefront of the DOS's mind in 1950. There was little change in the DOS's decision-making process when deciding early on whether or not it should reinstate relations. The DOS's main concern was not about Bulgaria, but rather what reinstating relations would mean in regards to the rest of the communist world. The US policy of treating satellite countries as an extension of the USSR had not changed much since 1950. In December 1953, a new report, NSC 174, stated it was in the interest of America to try to eliminate Soviet influence in the satellite countries and that the methods imposed should be chosen "after calculation of the advantages and disadvantages to the general position of the United States in relation to the USSR and the free world."<sup>97</sup> The DOS closely followed this line when determining whether to reinstate diplomatic relations with Bulgaria.

In 1954, a councilor in the British Embassy in Washington, J. H. Watson, wrote to the FO after a discussion with three staff members in the DOS about the potential of reinstating diplomatic relations with Bulgaria. He stated the DOS was not inclined to reinstate relations because acknowledging Bulgaria's government would bring up the question of recognizing communist China. China was a sensitive topic at the time, and if America recognized Bulgaria it would unnecessarily complicate the issue about holding off recognition for China.<sup>98</sup>

As early as April 1956, the Deputy Under Secretary of State sent a memorandum to Dulles recommending America reinstate relations with Bulgaria. The memorandum pointed out that China was not the only concern. Some in the DOS worried resuming relations "...would be inconsistent with US policy against the establishment of relations by countries of South America and Africa with the USSR," and, thus, would signal approval of the Bulgarian regime.<sup>99</sup> However, the memorandum deemed these issues would not be a contradiction because Argentina had relations with Bulgaria, and America had relations with the USSR, but obviously did not condone its style of governance.

While the DOS recommended the resumption of relations, Dulles did not approve the measure. Once again, it was a matter of timing. A person in the DOS mentioned to William Barker at the British Embassy in Washington that even if Dulles did approve it, it was unlikely it could be executed. 1956 was an election year and, therefore, it was unlikely that the DOS would stick its neck out for Bulgaria or that such a risky and potentially unpopular policy could be successfully implemented.<sup>100</sup>

The process of reinstating diplomatic relations did not genuinely start until 1958. This is most likely due to an alteration in US policy towards the satellite states. In May 1958, NSC 5811/1 was approved. It stated that the past policy of ostracizing satellite countries resulted in limited contact with the citizens of the Soviet-dominated world. This policy was now deemed undesirable, as it limited America's ability to influence the people

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<sup>97</sup> FRUS 1952-1954, vol. 8, document 51, NSC 174, 11/12/1953.

<sup>98</sup> FO371/111476, NG10345/2, Watson to Jellicoe, 12/11/1954.

<sup>99</sup> FRUS 1955-57, vol. 25, document 52, memorandum to Acheson, 03/04/1956.

<sup>100</sup> FO371/122304, NG110345/3, Barker to Hohler, 09/06/1956.

of the satellite states and to support those working to end Soviet rule. In order to change this, America wanted to promote relations between the citizens of America and satellite countries and, in order to do that, the US needed to "...establish more active relations with the existing regimes, without creating the impression that the basic U.S. attitude toward those regimes has changed..."<sup>101</sup>

American policy towards Bulgaria developed with the overall US policy towards the satellite states. As discussed in section one, US policy towards Bulgaria in 1949 was to treat it as a subject of the USSR. In 1958, the policy had changed. A note of instructions from the DOS to all US diplomatic posts stated:

The Department does not consider in these circumstances that it would be to the advantage of the US to treat the Bulgarian nation simply as an appendage of the Soviet Union or to determine the nature and course of our relations with Bulgaria solely by the state of our relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>102</sup>

The DOS came to the conclusion that treating Bulgaria and the satellite countries in general as separate states would allow America to influence the local populations.

America was able to reinstate relations with Bulgaria because Bulgaria showed flexibility and agreed to retract Heath's *persona non grata* status, and also because American policy towards the satellite countries evolved somewhat. Although the DOS was in favor of resuming relations as early as 1953, an agreement between the two countries was not reached until 1959, and the Legation did not open until 1960. This can be explained by congressional pressure, Bulgarian hesitation to fulfill the US's demands, and because of the 1956 presidential election. However, another important part of the equation was the fact that Bulgaria was not a very strategically important country. There was the potential of the USSR using Bulgaria as a base to launch a war against Yugoslavia, but as time went on, that fear faded off into the distance. It appears from the documents that the most important aspect of having a mission in Bulgaria was to have an ear on the ground. However, since the British supplied America with intelligence about the country, America was in no rush to reinstate relations.

## Conclusion

In 1949, America saw the satellite countries as mere provinces of the Soviet Union. Therefore, according to the DOS, severing relations was not a huge risk, because America could not have true diplomatic relations with Eastern Europe as the USSR controlled their foreign policy. After making statements threatening to break relations if Heath's *persona non grata* status was not revoked, America had no choice but to take action, as backing down would be seen as appeasement. However, the decision to sever relations was held off until Shipkov left the Legation. The revision of US policy in 1958, in addition to the change

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<sup>101</sup> FRUS 1958-1960, vol. 10, part 1, document 6, Statement of US Policy Toward the Soviet-Dominated Nations in Eastern Europe, 24/05/1958.

<sup>102</sup> FRUS 1958-1960, vol. 10, part 2, document 34, DOS to All Diplomatic and Consular Posts, 31/03/1959.

in openness and attitude towards the West in the USSR and satellite countries, allowed America to reinstate relations with Bulgaria. In the late 1950s, America concluded Western engagement was the most likely method of pulling satellite countries away from the Soviet orbit. Isolation kept the world order stagnate; contact offered an opportunity to bring about change.

The FO chose not to break relations with Bulgaria because they saw the information they gathered in the country as more important than the symbolism of breaking relations. Throughout the split, Britain provided information to the DOS. While this benefited America, the British also used their position to influence America and gain a *quid pro quo* agreement. Due to the willingness of the British to supply information on Bulgaria, America felt no urgency to reinstate relations. They were able to wait until the timing was right.

The Bulgarian-American diplomatic split could have been the beginning of a complete severance of relations between America and satellite countries. In fact, both the British and Americans at one point believed this might be the eventual outcome. However, this did not happen and thus the split faded into to the background of Western Cold War scholarship. This is understandable because, in truth, Bulgaria was not a key player in the Cold War—there were no uprisings or revolutions, no strong government in exile or passionate political opposition inside. However, Bulgaria was important simply for the fact that it was not important. America used Bulgaria as a testing ground for its policies towards the communist world only because the risks were low. In fact, around 1950, America was implementing a tougher policy towards the communist world, and the split could be seen as a continuation of these actions.<sup>103</sup> The 1950 split was a learning experience for the DOS, as the DOS and even the President soon realized that America benefited more from diplomatic contact with communist countries than from symbolic gestures.

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<sup>103</sup> Robert Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (New York, 2006), 166.

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