

Ideas of Multipolarity in the Conceptual Frame of the Soviet Diplomacy during the Final Phases of the Second World War (1943–1945)¹

Iskander E. Magadeev

MGIMO University

Abstract. This article aims to identify the conceptual landscape occupied by ideas of post-war multipolarity within the strategic discourse of Soviet diplomacy during the latter phases of the Second World War. Particular emphasis is placed on the intellectual contributions of two prominent Soviet diplomats, Maxim Litvinov and Ivan Maisky. In the paper, the author draws upon both published and archival source materials including the diaries and records maintained by officials within the Soviet Foreign Office, as well as documents produced by the “Litvinov Commission.”

While the diplomatic theories formulated by Litvinov and Maisky during the years 1943–1945 have been subject to analysis by Russian and international scholars, existing scholarship has for the most part focused on the content and nuances of their perspectives on specific international “questions.” Departing from this convention, this article adopts a methodological approach that seeks to explore the underlying conceptual foundations upon which the ideas of Litvinov and Maisky were constructed. Additionally, the essay introduces a novel dimension by surveying the viewpoints of other Soviet diplomats (Solomon Lozovsky, Boris Shtein, Yakov Surits, and Yevgeny Tarle), who have garnered relatively less scholarly attention.

The author pays special attention to the nature of Litvinov and Maisky’s conceptualization of the international landscape following the war as a multipolar system, although the term “multipolarity” is not explicitly used. The article addresses such issues as how the Soviet diplomats envisioned the post-war security architecture, whether they considered Soviet-American bipolarity inevitable, and what factors and circumstances influenced their foreign policy conceptualizations. The resurgence today of discussions surrounding the trajectory of multipolarity in the 21st century underscores the pertinence of this historical inquiry.

The key conclusion of the article is that the conceptual framework embraced by Soviet diplomats in 1943–1945 was not centred on notions of bipolarity or an imminent Cold War. While acknowledging the potential escalation of tensions between the USSR and Western nations led by the United States and Great Britain, they favoured collaboration among the principal powers of the anti-Hitler coalition, grounded in an implicit understanding of their respective “spheres of influence.” Although Soviet Foreign Office

¹ English translation from the Russian text: Magadeev I.E. 2023. Idei mnogopolyarnosti v konceptual'nom arsenale sovetskoy diplomatii na zavershayushchih etapah Velikoy Otechestvennoy vojny (1943–1945 gg.). *Vestnik MGIMO-Universiteta* [MGIMO Review of International Relations]. No. 16 (6). P. 124–152. DOI: 10.24833/2071-8160-2023-6-93-124-152

officials did not discount the possibility of the formation of a united Anglo-American front against the USSR, they believed that Soviet diplomacy should actively work to prevent such an outcome by capitalizing on the fissures between Washington and London.

Keywords: USSR, Soviet diplomacy, Great Patriotic War, Second World War, post-war world, Litvinov, Maisky, multipolarity

The growing intensity of debates surrounding the future of multipolarity and the multipolar world in the 21st century compels us to revisit earlier interpretations of these concepts, particularly those offered by Soviet diplomats and expert community.

During the Cold War, Soviet analysts predominantly regarded the notion of ‘multipolarity’ as a foreign concept originating in the English-speaking world; notably, it was frequently enclosed in quotation marks (Primakov et al., 1983, p. 214; Kunina, 1988, p. 158). Even throughout the 1970s and 1980s, despite increasing familiarity with and analysis of Western international relations theories, multipolarity was largely framed within the context of “contemporary U.S. foreign policy ideas” (Anichkina et al., 1979, p. 128) and “bourgeois predictions about the evolution of international relations” (Kokoshin, 1978, p. 53). Scholarly works often asserted that, “regardless of how ‘multipolarity’ was rationalized, the fundamental reality of international relations – the rivalry and competition between two social systems – was supplanted by a narrative aligned with the imperialist worldview” (Kunina, 1988, p. 158).

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Soviet experts generally viewed the concept of multipolarity as a means to “draw attention away from key transformations that demonstrate clear social progress toward socialism” (Petrovsky, 1976, p. 197). However, opinions varied – though not always explicitly – regarding whose interests the potential emergence of a multipolar world would serve: the USSR’s or the USA’s. This diversity of views was often reflected through citations of different perspectives from Western, primarily American, experts.

On one side, there was the notion that the United States, as “American theorists contend, benefits from the fragmentation or ‘multipolarity’ of Eurasia, characterized by its division into several centers of ‘gravitational force’ and the presence of at least two poles of state power” (Iakovlev et al., 1976, p. 160). Conversely, Soviet experts were also intrigued by Western analysts’ arguments suggesting that multipolarity – interpreted as increased foreign policy independence of Western European countries from the United States – could enhance Soviet influence in Europe (Khromushin, 1974, p. 36).

Henry Kissinger’s essay, *Central Issues of American Foreign Policy* (Kissinger, 1969, p. 51–97), which expressed concerns about the growing trend toward multipolarity in international relations, attracted significant attention. Kissinger was cited as stating that “political multipolarity makes it impossible to impose an American design”

(Trofimenko, 1976, p. 63; Khlebnikov, 1984, p. 34). Emphasis was placed on his view that “political multipolarity does not necessarily guarantee stability. Rigidity is diminished, but so is manageability” (Kokoshin, 1978, p. 53). In this context, bipolarity was portrayed as a more manageable and stable international framework, within which the Soviet Union asserted an equal status alongside the United States.

It was only toward the final years of the USSR that Soviet experts began to more confidently articulate the idea that “to some extent, multipolarity, viewed as a potential model for the global world order, reflects the increasing diversity of social paths of human development” (Sergunin, 1989, p. 9). Some researchers even proposed that “multipolarity now represents a more complex stage in the evolution and functioning of the world’s social bipolarity, rather than serving as a way to move beyond it” (Iakovlev, 1990, p. 105). The assertion that “economic multipolarity has already become a significant element in the international landscape” was accompanied by predictions that “by the end of the century, multipolarity is expected to emerge in the political realm as well” (Kholodkovskii, 1991, p. 22).

During the Cold War, issues related to a multipolar world largely remained marginal in Soviet expert analyses. This tendency aligned with the official foreign policy and ideological priorities of the Soviet state. Typically, Moscow emphasized parity with Washington and regarded bipolarity as reflecting the privileged status of the USSR alongside the United States within the prevailing international system. At the same time, multipolarity – understood as the growing independence of Western Europe from the United States – was viewed more favorably. By the late Soviet period, expert assessments began to acknowledge the possibility of a multipolar world, while also recognizing that “the second global center of power, the USSR, had lost its superpower status” (Pleshakov, 1991, p. 22). Consequently, Soviet discussions of multipolarity largely faded after 1991. In contemporary Russia, “the concept of multipolarity in global politics is most commonly linked to Yevgeny Primakov,” with its origins traced back to 1996.²

At the same time, despite avoiding the specific terms ‘multipolarity’ and ‘multipolar world,’ not only experts but also Soviet diplomats frequently interpreted international developments through these conceptual frameworks. This was particularly true for the first generation of officials at the USSR People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (NKID, or Soviet Foreign Office), who operated during the interwar period – a time marked by the existence of multiple centers of international influence. Some scholars have even described the 1930s as a unique ‘tripolar’ era, with the United States, the USSR, and Germany serving as the key power centers (Schweller, 1998). Examining the views of Soviet diplomats regarding the structure of international relations helps

² Kortunov A.V. Pochemu mir ne stanovitsya mnogopolyarnym [Why the world is not becoming multipolar]. *Russia in Global Affairs*. June 26, 2018. URL: <https://www.globalaffairs.ru/articles/pochemu-mir-ne-stanovitsya-mnogopolyarnym/> (accessed: December 20, 2023) (in Russian).

clarify the origins of multipolarity concepts within the Russian diplomatic and expert tradition, thereby deepening our understanding of how these ideas have evolved and transformed over time.

Among the first generation of employees at the Soviet Foreign Office, two prominent diplomats – Maxim Litvinov and Ivan Maisky – stand out. They are sometimes described, albeit conditionally, as ‘pro-Western’ within the highest ranks of the NKID (Pechatnov, 2013, p. 90). This tentative label stems from their belief in the possibility of cooperation between the USSR and major Western powers during various phases of international relations in the 1930s and 1940s. Nonetheless, both diplomats consistently prioritized advancing Soviet interests. The perspective of Canadian historian Michael Jabara Carley, who reviewed historiographical debates regarding the foreign policy orientations of Georgy Chicherin and Litvinov, is particularly relevant here: “Historians and contemporaries have often observed that Chicherin was pro-German, and Litvinov pro-British. This is untrue; they were both pro-Soviet. The primacy of the interests of the Soviet state was their shared preoccupation” (Carley, 2019, p. 104).

Throughout their public service careers, Litvinov and Maisky amassed considerable practical experience. Litvinov served as the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR from 1930 to 1939, then as Deputy People’s Commissar from 1941 to 1946, and as Ambassador to the United States between 1941 and 1943 (for further details, see: Sokolov, 2002). Meanwhile, from 1932 to 1943, Maisky was the USSR’s permanent representative to Great Britain – initially as envoy and later as ambassador – before assuming the role of Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs from 1943 to 1946 (for more information, see Pozharskaya, 2004).

While serving at the NKID headquarters and abroad, Litvinov and Maisky balanced hands-on diplomacy with insightful reflections on international developments, consistently adhering to the dominant communist party and Soviet state policies. Their expertise was highly valued by the Soviet leadership during the Great Patriotic War and World War II. This trust was reflected in their 1943 appointments as chairmen of two key NKID commissions: Litvinov led the peace treaties and post-war order commission (the Litvinov Commission) (Filitov, 1995), while Maisky chaired the reparations commission (the Maisky Commission) (Zhigalov, 2014).

The perspectives of several prominent members of the Litvinov and Maisky commissions also warrant attention. Among them are four notable figures: Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs Solomon Lozovsky (Balandina, Davydov, 2020, p. 78–91); historian and diplomat Boris Shtein, who served as ambassador to Finland (1933–1934) and Italy (1934–1939) (Baryshnikov, Plenkov, 2015); NKID adviser Jakob Suritz, who held plenipotentiary representative positions in Germany (1934–1937) and France (1937–1940) (Sizonenko, 1991); and finally, academician Yevgeny Tarle, whose work on the Litvinov Commission represents “the only documented instance of his involvement<...> in actual foreign policy work, beyond propaganda and journalistic activities” (Kaganovich, 2014, p. 237).

This article focuses on the ideas about the post-war world formulated by Soviet diplomats during the final stages of the Great Patriotic War, between 1943 and 1945. At first glance, this topic appears to have been thoroughly studied. The memorandums by Litvinov and Maisky attracted significant attention from both domestic and foreign historians as early as during the extensive declassification of archival documents in Russia – the so-called “archival revolution” of the 1990s (Pikhoia, 2014). These sources remain widely used in current research on various facets of Soviet foreign policy during the Great Patriotic War. Scholars have analyzed Litvinov and Maisky’s vision of the USSR’s future relations with the countries of the anti-Hitler coalition and Axis opponents (Roberts, 2002; Pechatnov, 2006; Roberts, 2006; Arzakanian, 2010; Ageev et al., 2014; Gorozii, 2018). Their assessments of key issues concerning the post-war international order in Europe and globally – such as the Soviet, German, and Italian ‘questions’, among others – have also been explored (Sal’kov, 2009; Narinskii, 2010; Afiani, 2016; Sindeev, 2020). Additionally, their reflections on the political and strategic lessons of the war (Pechatnov, 2009; Magadeev, 2020), as well as their personal and formal interactions with the Soviet political leadership, other diplomats, and representatives of the anti-Hitler coalition (Sokolov, 2001; Pozdeeva, 2008; Pechatnov, 2010; Khakhalkina, Zhigalov, 2019) have been studied extensively.

This study is distinguished by the clear formulation of a research question, alongside a fresh interpretation of various archival and published documents. The primary aim of this article is to outline the general conceptual framework underlying the foreign policy ideas of Soviet diplomats concerning the post-war world. The author seeks to address several questions that have often been insufficiently explored in historiography: How did Soviet diplomats envision the post-war world? Did they consider bipolarity inevitable? What factors shaped their foreign policy ideas between 1943 and 1945? Which specific aspects of post-war multipolarity did they regard as most significant? The renewed interest in discussions about multipolarity in contemporary international relations underscores the relevance of this inquiry.

The study’s source base consists of published and archival notes from NKID officials submitted to their superiors and top government leaders, alongside records from the Litvinov Commission meetings. These documents not only capture the core positions Soviet diplomats aimed to communicate to higher authorities but also reveal the diversity of opinions expressed during confidential discussions. A critical analysis of these perspectives, as revealed in the documents, enables the reconstruction of the conceptual framework underpinning the foreign policy ideas of several leading NKID figures. Through a comparative historical analysis of the views held by Litvinov and Maisky – further enriched, in Maisky’s case, by contrasting his official memorandums with entries from his personal diary – the study aims to uncover both shared and unique perspectives of the two diplomats, highlighting the nuanced ideas that often went unspoken or ‘between the lines’ in their memos and proposals.³

³ Maisky I.M. 2009. *Dnevnik diplomata*. London. 1934–1943 [A Diplomat’s Diary. London, 1934–1943]. Book 2. Part 2. Ed. A.O. Chubarian. Moscow: Nauka (in Russian).

A new 'balance of power' in the post-war world

The terms 'multipolarity' and 'multipolar world' were unfamiliar to Litvinov, Maisky, and many later Soviet experts. Nevertheless, both diplomats effectively employed several concepts rooted in the framework of *Realpolitik*.

From the early days of the Soviet state, some Soviet diplomats – including the Soviet representative in Germany, Adolph Joffe – frequently based their practical work on “national interests in the spirit of *Realpolitik*” (Vatlin, Lannik, 2023, p. 35). In analyzing the views of the Litvinov Commission members during 1943–1945, scholars have similarly noted their “*Realpolitik*-inspired great-power thinking” (Kaganovich, 2000, p. 358). At the first meeting of the Litvinov Commission on September 8, 1943, academician Tarle emphasized that “all points should be developed from the perspective of maximizing the security of Soviet borders against future attacks, while also taking into account the future of Europe in terms of securing the greatest possible stability in peace and security.”⁴ Moreover, several fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism – such as the role of international struggle and the balance of power dynamics among ‘imperialist’ nations – fit naturally within a conceptual framework closely aligned with classical ‘political realism’.

Following the conclusion of the ‘radical turning point’ in the Great Patriotic War and World War II, Soviet diplomats recognized that the post-war ‘balance of power’ would differ significantly from the situation before 1939. This did not entail abandoning the broader conceptual framework of multipolarity that described the interwar period but rather anticipated a fundamental transformation in its internal dynamics and substance. As early as December 26, 1941, amid the success of the Soviet counteroffensive near Moscow, Lozovsky acknowledged that “the war is in full swing, with no known end in sight,” yet he was confident that “the outcome of the war is clear.” In his view, the post-war challenge would stem from the fact that “four great powers – Germany, Japan, Italy, and France – would be incapacitated, leaving the USSR, Great Britain, and the United States to determine the future course of international affairs.”⁵

The Litvinov Commission developed comprehensive plans aimed at ensuring Germany’s long-term weakening and even its potential dismemberment (Filitov, 2023, p. 15–71). Prior to the Commission’s establishment, Maisky, in his early diplomatic proposals for the post-war era, emphasized the necessity of Germany’s “industrial disarmament” – primarily through the significant reduction or elimination of its military industry. He argued that, “[u]nder such circumstances, even in the worst-case scenario, Germany would not be able to launch another act of aggression as swiftly as

⁴ *SSSR i germanskiy vopros. 1941–1949 [The USSR and the German Question. 1941–1949]*. 1996. Documents from the Archives of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Compiled by G.P. Kynin, J. Laufer. Vol.1. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya. P. 239 (in Russian).

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 141.

it had in recent times.”⁶ Later, as head of the NKID reparations commission, Maisky maintained this approach. He believed that, when determining and justifying the total sum of reparations and the mechanism for collecting them from Germany, the Soviet side needed to consider not only the losses suffered by the USSR and other countries, but also the “broader goal of Germany’s economic disarmament.”⁷ Litvinov supported this perspective as well. In a memorandum to People’s Commissar Vyacheslav Molotov dated October 9, 1943, he observed that “the necessity for Germany’s comprehensive disarmament – including the dissolution of its army, the removal of its navy and air force, the demolition of military fortifications, and the destruction of its military industry – is an almost universally accepted axiom.”⁸

Although issues concerning Japan were not examined in as much detail – given its longstanding neutrality toward the USSR – it was understood that this key Axis ally of Germany was also expected to weaken after the war.⁹ In a memorandum dated January 10, 1944, unaware of Stalin’s prior assurances to the Western Allies about the USSR’s forthcoming entry into the war against Japan, Maisky stated that the Soviet Union “is not interested in initiating a war with Japan, but it is very interested in Japan’s military defeat, because without this condition lasting peace in Asia cannot be ensured.”¹⁰

Preventing and deterring any future aggression from Germany and Japan following their defeat was intended to serve as a cornerstone not only for international stability but also for post-war cooperation among the leading powers of the anti-Hitler coalition. Another important, albeit unpublicized, foundation for this cooperation was the tacit agreement to divide ‘security zones,’ a term Litvinov used as “a substitute for ‘zones of influence.’”¹¹ Overall, “Soviet diplomats believed that the most effective way to achieve their objectives was through continued collaboration with the United States and Great Britain.<...>Although Moscow expected tough bargaining, particularly over Poland, it favored an agreed division of spheres of influence over confrontation or the use of force.” (Aganson et al., 2020, p. 454).

According to Litvinov’s vision, “our maximum sphere of interest, or more precisely, the security zone, should encompass Finland, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Turkey.”¹² This largely implied a significant expansion of the USSR’s “strategic buffer zone” and the establishment of a

⁶ Maisky to the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, January 9, 1943. *Dokumenty vneshney politiki SSSR [Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR]*. 2016. Vol. 26, Book 1, covering the year 1943. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Maykop: Poligraf-Yug. P. 30 (in Russian).

⁷ Maisky’s memorandum to Stalin, December 20, 1944. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 583 (in Russian).

⁸ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 288 (in Russian).

⁹ Lozovsky’s memorandum to Stalin and Molotov, December 26, 1941. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 142-143 (in Russian).

¹⁰ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 347 (in Russian).

¹¹ Litvinov’s memorandum to Molotov, October 9, 1943. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 277 (in Russian).

¹² Litvinov’s memorandum to Molotov and Vyshinsky, January 11, 1945. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 596 (in Russian). See also: *Iz zapiski Litvinova [From Litvinov’s memorandum]*, November 15, 1944. *Sovetsko-britanskiye otnosheniya v 1943–1953 gg.: Dokumenty i materialy [Soviet-British Relations in 1943–1953: Documents and Materials]*. 2021. Ed. A.O. Chubarian and O. A. Westad. Moscow: Aspect Press. P. 241 (in Russian).

new “depth of defense” along its western and southern borders, with Stalin expressing particular concern over the vulnerability of the southern frontier (Roberts, 2011, p. 74–75). It was expected that the United Kingdom’s security zone would include the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, and Greece, while the United States’ security zone would cover the countries of the Western Hemisphere. Meanwhile, certain countries – Denmark, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy – could, as Litvinov suggested, form a “neutral zone where both sides [the USSR and Great Britain] would cooperate on equal terms with ongoing consultations.”¹³

Soviet diplomats hoped that the existence of such ‘spheres of interest’ would not only avoid hindering post-war cooperation among the “Big Three” but would actually provide a fundamental basis for their collaboration (Roberts, 1999, p. 656, 672–673). Furthermore, Litvinov did not rule out the possibility that Soviet diplomacy could play a role in formalizing the division of zones of responsibility within the framework of the emerging International Security Organization (the future United Nations). This formalization would lend greater legitimacy and strength to these divisions: “<...> the United States would bear primary responsibility for the security of the countries in the Americas and certain parts of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans; Great Britain, the USSR, and China would each have their own security zones, for which they would be individually responsible in some cases and jointly responsible in others, with these arrangements agreed upon in advance by mutual consent.”¹⁴

The Soviet Foreign Office believed that an implicit division of ‘spheres of interest’ would not provoke strong opposition from Washington and London. In fact, there was some convergence between Soviet and Anglo-American post-war planning, framed within the context of the anti-Hitler coalition. By the summer of 1944, the British Foreign Office envisioned the post-war security architecture in Europe as comprising a “Western European system” led by Britain and “some similar security system in Eastern Europe” led by the Soviet Union, with the Anglo-Soviet treaty of May 26, 1942 serving as a bridge between these two systems.¹⁵ Through classified materials from the U.S. State Department, obtained via the Main Intelligence Directorate of the People’s Commissariat of Defence, Soviet diplomats understood that Washington recognized Moscow’s foreign policy ambitions: “To strengthen its military security and expand access to the sea, the Soviet Union has a direct interest in the states of Central and

¹³ Litvinov’s memorandum to Molotov and Vyshinsky, January 11, 1945. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 596 (in Russian).

¹⁴ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *Mezhdunarodnaya organizatsiya bezopasnosti* [International Security Organization], April 25, 1944. *Archives of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (the “Russian Foreign Policy Archives”). Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 144, Sheet 22 (in Russian).

¹⁵ From Foreign Office to Chiefs of Staff, 22 June 1944 (in COS (44) 113) *The National Archives of Great Britain*, Cabinet Office 80/44.

Eastern Europe (including Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece) as well as in Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan.”¹⁶

Moscow’s readiness to accept an unspoken division of ‘spheres of interest’ did not imply a willingness to preserve the colonial and semi-colonial status quo. Drawing on historical traditions, the Soviet Union was prepared to support anti-colonial movements, many of which were primarily directed against Great Britain and France. Litvinov even suggested that the “colonial problem” might provide a “potential foundation for Soviet-American cooperation.”¹⁷

Between 1943 and 1945, the boundaries of the USSR’s post-war ‘sphere of interests’ were far from predetermined, and, as is evident, its eventual shape differed significantly from the maximal vision originally conceived by Litvinov. The ongoing uncertainty surrounding the post-war international landscape was also reflected in the shifting perspectives of Soviet diplomats on various international matters. For instance, the Soviet Foreign Office’s stance on the ‘Transylvanian question’ evolved markedly: starting from Litvinov’s June 1944 proposal advocating the establishment of an independent Transylvanian state under Soviet protection, to the ultimate decision to integrate Northern Transylvania with Romania. Following the rise of the pro-Soviet government led by Petru Groza in March 1945, Romania increasingly came to be seen as a prospective ally rather than an adversary (Islamov, Pokivailova, 2008, p. 148–185).

In early 1944, Maisky remained uncertain about Poland’s future foreign policy focus, which largely shaped Moscow’s willingness to authorize the extent of Poland’s post-war strengthening. In a memo dated January 10 addressed to Molotov, Maisky wrote that “the USSR’s objective should be to establish an independent and viable Poland, but we have no interest in a Poland that is too large or too powerful. Historically, Poland has almost always been an enemy of Russia, and it is impossible to say with certainty whether future Poland will genuinely become a friend of the USSR (at least for the next generation).”¹⁸

A similar reasoning, which connected the USSR’s attitude toward a country with the degree of its friendliness to Moscow – often ensured by the presence of communists in power – is evident in Maisky’s views on Germany and Litvinov’s on France. In a telegram dated January 9, 1943, Maisky reflected on Germany’s future, suggesting that the best safeguard against renewed German aggression would be the establishment of a socialist regime through a “full-blooded and profound proletarian revolution.”¹⁹ However, he regarded such an outcome as unlikely. Similarly, in a memo to Molotov

¹⁶ U.S. Department of State Document, entitled *The Soviet Union’s Regional Policy*, February 16, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 143, Sheet 27.

¹⁷ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *O vzaimootnosheniyakh s SShA* [On the Relations with the United States], January 10, 1945. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 7, Folder 17, File 173, Sheet 50 (in Russian).

¹⁸ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 341 (in Russian).

¹⁹ *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*. Vol. 26. Book 1. P. 28 (in Russian).

dated March 25, 1944, Litvinov analyzed possible post-war relations with France based on comparable logic. He noted that if “a government is established in France whose friendship we can confidently rely on” (hinting at a communist-led government), Moscow would be ready to shift its policy “within 24 hours.” Nonetheless, Litvinov still viewed France primarily as a post-war ally of Great Britain and the United States and therefore recommended “strongly opposing the return of France to the rank of a great power.”²⁰

When analyzing the structure of the post-war International Security Organization, Litvinov based his views on the assumption that “the four Great Powers – the USSR, the United States, Great Britain, and China – which have demonstrated their strength in the current war, must assume a leading and decisive role.”²¹ The unexpected and swift defeat of France in 1940 clearly influenced perceptions of France’s role and status in the post-war world. As Maisky observed, “this war was an astonishing lesson for all humanity<...> France simply failed.”²² In January 1944, the former Soviet ambassador to Great Britain maintained that the prospect of rebuilding “a strong French army and, more broadly, the revival of France as a genuine great power” in the post-war period “appeared highly doubtful.”²³

Generally, Litvinov and Maisky did not base their expectations on the scenario of revolutionary upheavals in Europe or the establishment of communist regimes across European countries, which were *a priori* considered friendly to the USSR. Nonetheless, they did not entirely dismiss this possibility. As early as February 2, 1943, Maisky cautiously noted in his diary that if Soviet forces liberated Europe without the Western Allies opening a second front, it could create more favorable conditions for expanding Soviet influence and establishing socialist regimes on the continent.²⁴ However, Maisky regarded the broader democratization of post-war Europe as the more probable outcome, one in which “cooperation between the USSR and the USA would be possible, though not always easy.”²⁵

Litvinov viewed the situation with greater concern; however, he also did not see the ideological antagonism between the former anti-Hitler coalition allies as inevitable. From his perspective, the United States would be particularly interested in ensuring the “complete stability” of European countries by supporting “bourgeois-democratic or even conservative governments that would not face the threat of social upheaval.” Litvinov recognized that this could lead to conflicts, believing that “different approaches to restoring order and establishing power in some European countries might

²⁰ *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 146, Sheets 25, 28–29 (in Russian).

²¹ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *Mezhdunarodnaya organizatsiya bezopasnosti* [International Security Organization], April 25, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 144, Sheet 18 (in Russian).

²² Maisky to Molotov, February 13, 1943. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 194–195 (in Russian).

²³ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 339 (in Russian).

²⁴ Maisky I.M. *Op. cit.* P. 210–211 (in Russian).

²⁵ Maisky’s memorandum to Molotov, January 10, 1944. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 349 (in Russian).

lead to misunderstandings and friction between us on one side, and Britain and the United States on the other.” He noted that such tensions “could be either temporary or prolonged, depending on how events unfold.”²⁶ However, the overall message of his detailed memo “On the Relations with the United States” dated January 10, 1945, went beyond simply anticipating inevitable Soviet-American antagonism.

As for China, Litvinov held an ambivalent view regarding its future role and status. On one hand, as reflected in his thoughts on the future International Security Organization, he was willing to include China – unlike France – among the powers granted a leading position in the organization’s Council. On the other hand, Litvinov did not regard Kuomintang China as an equal to the “Big Three” powers in terms of strength. He even considered it possible that, in the post-war period, “the United States’ interest in China <...> could grow significantly, potentially leading to the establishment of an American protectorate over China.”²⁷

At the Litvinov Commission meeting on April 28, 1944, the chairman – echoing the opinion of the absent Tarle, who opposed equating Kuomintang China with the “Big Three” powers – remarked: “I understand that we are dealing with three Great Powers, and China will be listed nominally, but we must speak of four,” primarily due to the U.S. position.²⁸

Maisky advocated for strengthening Soviet influence in China but remained cautious, stressing that “the extent of assistance to China in its development and transformation into a genuine great power should depend on the nature of the forces that will hold power” in the country after the war. The diplomat did not rule out the possibility that within 20 to 25 years, a “US-Chinese alliance hostile to the USSR” might emerge.²⁹

The dynamics of relations among the leading powers in the post-war world

Although the “Big Three” powers were expected to hold dominant positions in the post-war world, the precise nature of their ‘triangular’ relationship was not pre-determined. This configuration varied across different documents produced by Soviet diplomats.

At times, the United States and Great Britain were perceived as prepared to unite on several issues based on a shared anti-Soviet stance. Reflecting on the struggle for political control in post-war Europe, Litvinov observed that “in this respect, American interests coincide with British ones.”³⁰ Similarly, Maisky predicted that “if the early

²⁶ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *O vzaimootnosheniyakh s SShA* [On the Relations with the United States], January 10, 1945. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 7, Folder 17, File 173, Sheet 48 (in Russian).

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 49.

²⁸ *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 23 (in Russian).

²⁹ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 354, 359 (in Russian).

³⁰ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *O vzaimootnosheniyakh s SShA* [On the Relations with the United States], January 10, 1945. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 7, Folder 17, File 173, Sheet 49 (in Russian).

post-war period sparks proletarian revolutions in Europe, relations between the USSR on one side, and the United States and Britain on the other, will inevitably become tense and possibly acute.”³¹ Maisky’s analysis was grounded in the assumption that the “Big Three” powers would initially reach a basic agreement on the ‘German question’ “immediately following the war”, but he cautioned that “there are no guarantees this agreement will endure for long.”³² Lozovsky also articulated the idea that, at a future peace conference, “on the most critical issues, we may face a united front of capitalist powers against us.”³³

However, the emergence of Anglo-American – or more broadly Western – solidarity grounded in anti-Soviet sentiment was not seen as inevitable. In fact, as Lozovsky stressed during the Litvinov Commission meeting on April 28, 1944, “our general line, our entire policy” aimed to “prevent the formation of a bloc between Great Britain and the United States against the Soviet Union.”³⁴

Soviet diplomats held two perspectives side by side: the potential for an Anglo-American alliance opposing Moscow and the expectation of a more intricate and shifting international landscape after the war. Using terminology from international relations theory, their assessments reflected a concept of ‘tripolarity,’ which was seen as providing the USSR with greater scope for diplomatic maneuvering and the ability to exploit tensions between the United States and Great Britain (Schweller, 1998).

Maisky argued that in the post-war era, “the logic of events will increasingly push Britain toward the USSR, as its primary struggle will be with the United States.” On this basis, he advised “leveraging the Anglo-American contradictions in Soviet interests, with the aim of fostering closer ties with Britain.”³⁵ Litvinov expressed a similar view but focused on Soviet-American rapprochement grounded in opposition to Britain. He believed that “the inevitable escalation of economic competition worldwide between the United States and Great Britain should encourage both powers to maintain [sic] the best possible relations with us, to avoid a prolonged alliance of one against the other. Equally important is our effort to prevent frequent coalitions between them against us.”³⁶

Litvinov paid particular attention to the potential for Anglo-American rivalry in the colonies, which he hoped the Soviet Union could exploit to broaden its international presence and influence. In a memo dated June 28, 1945, reflecting on the international administration of former Italian colonies, Litvinov observed that “in the

³¹ Maisky’s memorandum to Molotov, January 10, 1944. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 358 (in Russian).

³² Maisky to the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, January 9, 1943. *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*. Vol. 26, Book 1. P. 29 (in Russian).

³³ Lozovsky’s memorandum to Stalin and Molotov, December 26, 1941. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 141-142 (in Russian).

³⁴ *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 24 (in Russian).

³⁵ Maisky’s memorandum to Molotov, January 10, 1944. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 358-359 (in Russian).

³⁶ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *O vzaimootnosheniyakh s SShA* [On the Relations with the United States], January 10, 1945. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 7, Folder 17, File 173, Sheet 51 (in Russian).

forthcoming intensified competition with Britain, the United States would be reluctant to support Britain's overall strengthening, especially in the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean regions." From his perspective, this created a "window of opportunity" for the USSR to enhance its position. Litvinov proposed "beginning by advocating for the transfer of all Italian colonies in Africa to joint administration by the three powers – the USSR, the USA, and Britain."³⁷

The conceptual framework employed by senior NKID officials diverged from a simple bipolar model not only due to the USSR's perceived ability to leverage Anglo-American tensions but also because, in 1944–1945, Soviet diplomats recognized the significant roles of other international actors, including major European countries.

In the contemporary memos by Litvinov and Maisky, the decline of British power had not yet become distinctly apparent. Despite clear signs of growing U.S. pressure on Britain's former positions, Soviet diplomats were reluctant to dismiss Britain entirely. The situation remained ambiguous.

On one hand, during the final stages of World War II, it was clear that Britain's contribution was not only less significant than that of the USSR but also fell short compared to the United States, a factor that partly foreshadowed the emergence of bipolarity. In a conversation with the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden on August 31, 1943, Maisky pointed out that "Great Britain's losses are eight times, and the British Empire's losses seventy times less than those of the USSR." The Soviet ambassador argued that "this comparison only underscores Britain's insufficient efforts in our shared struggle."³⁸

On the other hand, between 1943 and 1945, NKID officials did not view London's post-war role solely through the lens of 'Britain's decline.' In Soviet diplomatic assessments, Great Britain – bound to the USSR by the Treaty of May 26, 1942 – was often regarded as a key partner in addressing post-war European issues. Maisky emphasized that "the military occupation, disarmament, and division of Germany could only be accomplished through agreement among the principal allies – that is, the USSR, Britain, and the United States – or at the very least, through consensus between the USSR and Britain."³⁹

It is also noteworthy that some Soviet diplomats considered it possible that the post-World War I scenario, in which the United States refrained from military and political commitments in Europe, could recur. Litvinov leaned toward this perspective, though Lozovsky disagreed with him on the matter.⁴⁰ Litvinov saw the potential

³⁷ *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 07, Folder 17, File 174, Sheets 64, 66 (in Russian).

³⁸ Maisky to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, September 3, 1943. *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*. 2016. Vol. 26, Book 2, covering the year 1943. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Maykop: Poligraf-Yug. P. 16 (in Russian).

³⁹ Maisky to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, January 9, 1943. *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*. Vol. 26, Book 1. P. 29 (in Russian).

⁴⁰ Verbatim record No. 6 of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Order Commission meeting, April 28, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheets 40, 42 (in Russian).

American withdrawal from Europe as a factor that would elevate the importance of Soviet-British relations, informally structured around the division of 'spheres of influence'.⁴¹

Members of the Litvinov Commission also cautioned against disregarding other European states entirely. For example, at a commission meeting on March 25, 1944, academician Tarle, while carefully debating with Litvinov, suggested that France "could serve as a counterweight to the Anglo-Saxons," and said he "would not object to a strong France," even though he doubted how quickly France could recover.⁴² In an earlier memo, "Franco-Russian Relations" (December 1943), Tarle had expressed even more directly the idea that Russian and French interests had historically been closely aligned. However, after receiving criticism from Litvinov, Tarle later revised his stance (Magadeev, 2023, p. 368–370).

The role of the 'French factor' was a significant topic in the internal discussions within the Soviet Foreign Office regarding the post-war world. Diplomatic opinions varied, and individual positions often evolved in response to numerous factors, including changes in the international situation.

In a memo dated March 25, 1944, Litvinov suggested that France's "friendly gestures" toward Moscow were "merely intended to tease, intimidate, and pressure Britain and America into making concessions, with France likely siding with them against us."⁴³ However, in other instances, Litvinov presented a more nuanced view that went beyond a simple confrontation between the USSR and a Western coalition including France. Opposing France's initial membership in the Council of the International Security Organization, Litvinov sought to leverage Anglo-American tensions over the 'French question.' From his perspective, as an advocate for France's exclusion from the Council, "one could probably count on America, which has less interest in France than Britain does."⁴⁴

By the end of 1945, when the Soviet Foreign Office still harbored cautious hopes for occasional solidarity with Paris and their joint resistance to Anglo-American efforts to maintain Germany as a "more or less extensive strong state,"⁴⁵ Litvinov's stance had evolved. He tended to believe that "our support for France's claims in the West – provided it does not overly strengthen France" (such as through the annexation of

⁴¹ From Litvinov's memorandum, entitled *O perspektivakh i vozmozhnoi baze sovetsko-britanskogo sotrudnichestva* [On the prospects and possible basis of Soviet-British cooperation]. *Sovetsko-britanskiye otnosheniya* [Soviet-British Relations]. P. 238–243 (in Russian).

⁴² *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 6 (in Russian).

⁴³ *Ibid*, File 146, Sheet 29 (in Russian).

⁴⁴ Verbatim record No. 6 of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Order Commission meeting, April 28, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 35 (in Russian).

⁴⁵ Litvinov's memorandum, entitled *Po povodu zapiskok Alfana o Zapadnoy Germanii* [Regarding Alphand's memos on West Germany]. *SSSR i germanskiy vopros. 1941–1949* [The USSR and the German Question. 1941–1949]. 2000. Documents from the Archives of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Compiled by G.P. Kynin, J. Laufer. Vol. 2. Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya. P. 304 (in Russian).

the Saarland) “could be highly significant for Soviet-French relations.”⁴⁶ Nonetheless, he recognized that the potential benefits of playing the ‘French card’ should not be overstated. Litvinov viewed the upcoming December meeting of the foreign ministers of the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain in Moscow as an opportunity to exchange views and gauge the overall position of the “Big Three” governments regarding France’s unique stance – at that time, Paris opposed the establishment of “central government mechanisms” in Germany.⁴⁷ Ultimately, in December 1945, Moscow prioritized coordination with Washington and London over a separate dialogue with Paris.

Suritz adopted an even more critical stance. He opposed France’s inclusion as an original member of the International Security Organization Council, arguing that “post-war France – unless, of course, a radical social revolution occurs there – would align with the Anglo-Saxons against us, rather than the other way around.”⁴⁸ His position was challenged by Lozovsky, who, unlike Litvinov and Tarle, regarded France as one of the great powers and believed that “politically, it would hardly be advantageous for us to support excluding France from the leadership [of the International Organization].”⁴⁹

The question of future relations with Italy and its role in the post-war world also remained a contentious issue among Soviet diplomats. As revealed during the meeting of the Litvinov Commission on September 4, 1944, its members held differing views. Tarle advocated for weakening Italy after the war, drawing on the historical pattern of Russian-Italian relations. From his perspective, whenever Italy was “either semi-united, as under Napoleon, or moving toward unification, as during the Crimean War and subsequent wars, it opposed us – that is, it tended, for its own reasons, to align with any adversary hostile to us.”⁵⁰

In contrast, another commission member, diplomat and historian Shtein, believed that Soviet diplomacy had promising prospects for developing post-war relations with Italy. He found Tarle’s historical arguments unconvincing, noting that “<...> no one else, like E.V. Tarle, convincingly demonstrated in his book on the Crimean War that Italy’s participation was not due to conflicting interests with Russia.” Shtein even entertained the possibility that Italy could become one of the “strongholds” of Soviet influence in the Mediterranean.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *Dopolnitel’no k raznoglasiyam s Frantsiei v otnoshenii Germanii* [In addition to disagreements with France regarding Germany], November 29, 1945. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 0136, List 29, Folder 196, File 19, Sheet 134 (in Russian).

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, Sheet 133.

⁴⁸ Verbatim record No. 6 of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Order Commission meeting, April 28, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 30 (in Russian).

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, Sheet 24.

⁵⁰ Verbatim record No. 9 of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Order Commission meeting, September 4, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 76 (in Russian).

⁵¹ *Ibid*, Sheets 78-79.

Soviet diplomats' reflections on their diplomatic engagement with Paris and Rome to reduce these countries' alignment with Great Britain reveal the Soviet Foreign Office's generally positive attitude toward the idea of multipolarity. However, when it came to the possible emergence of an anti-Soviet 'center of power,' the NKID's stance on multipolarity was decidedly negative. This was precisely the position the NKID took regarding the proposed post-war Polish–Czechoslovak federation (or confederation), which was actively debated in 1942–1943. As Molotov emphasized, “the idea of confederation is not only devoid of vitality but also harmful and poses a danger to the Slavic peoples' struggle against German domination in Europe.”⁵²

Factors influencing the perspectives of Soviet diplomats

The aforementioned discussions among Soviet diplomats regarding the post-war world order considered several factors, with three key ones standing out.

First, members of the Litvinov and Maisky commissions, along with the top Soviet leadership, thoroughly evaluated the power potential of certain states, acknowledging that World War II had dramatically reshaped the balance of power. Half-jokingly, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin agreed at the Yalta Conference that the “entry fee” to the “very privileged club” of the three leading powers of the anti-Hitler coalition was maintaining armed forces numbering between 3 and 5 million troops.⁵³ In its efforts to limit Germany's post-war strength, the Litvinov Commission focused on several key components: territory, population size, level of industrial development and workforce, availability of raw materials and energy resources, and the state of agricultural development.⁵⁴ Expressing doubts about France's potential revival in January 1944, Maisky pointed to factors such as France's smaller population compared to Germany and “the severe political and moral crisis that the French people have endured during the current war.”⁵⁵

According to Soviet diplomats, the combined power potential, contribution to the victory over the Axis powers, and the international political influence gained from the war largely determined the leading status of the “Big Three” countries. The immense losses suffered by the USSR provided a moral and political basis for Moscow's insistence on securing its position as one of the foremost powers in the post-war world. However, the true foundation for these claims was the Soviet state's military and political strength, which had grown significantly despite the extensive damage endured.

⁵² Molotov to Bogomolov, March 11, 1943. *Documents of the Foreign Policy of the USSR*. Vol. 26, Book 1, covering the year 1943. P. 203 (in Russian).

⁵³ Proceedings of the Heads of Government Meeting, February 7, 1945. *Sovetskiy Soyuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiyakh perioda Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 1941–1945 gg.* [The Soviet Union at International Conferences during the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945]: Collection of documents. 1984. Chief editing commission: A.A. Gromyko et al. Vol. 4. Moscow: Politizdat. P. 110 (in Russian).

⁵⁴ Varga's memorandum to Litvinov, September 27, 1943. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 252–263 (in Russian).

⁵⁵ *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 340 (in Russian).

Secondly, Litvinov and Maisky placed considerable emphasis on the degree of political and ideological confrontation between the USSR and Western countries. Soviet diplomats largely linked this confrontation to the nature and character of domestic political regimes in European nations, although Litvinov and Maisky refrained from predicting the precise intensity of the resulting conflicts.

Thirdly and finally, the factor we wish to emphasize, based on the reflections of Soviet diplomats, can be characterized as ‘geographical’ or even ‘geopolitical,’ although geopolitical terminology was considered taboo in the USSR – partly due to its association with Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, Maisky was familiar with the fundamental distinction between land and sea powers, a concept discussed at the time by thinkers such as Halford John Mackinder and Alfred Thayer Mahan. From Maisky’s perspective, “post-war Europe should have only one dominant land power – the USSR – and only one dominant naval power – Britain.”⁵⁶

The geographical distance of the United States from Europe, combined with American political experience after World War I, led Litvinov to hope – even before Roosevelt’s assurances at Yalta about the U.S. stepping back from European affairs – that post-war tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States would be reduced.⁵⁷ According to this reasoning, their ‘spheres of interest’ would be geographically separated. In a memo dated January 10, 1945, Litvinov expressed the view that “there is no reason to anticipate significant friction between us and the United States in finalizing our western borders.” Furthermore, he believed that “America has little interest in European borders,” seeking primarily a general stabilization of Europe to facilitate the expansion of exports and investments.⁵⁸

Conclusions

The conceptual framework of Soviet diplomats’ ideas regarding the post-war order, developed between 1943 and 1945, was quite different from the later models of bipolarity and the Cold War. While the Soviet Foreign Office staff – particularly Litvinov and Maisky – acknowledged the possibility of growing tensions between the USSR and the Western powers led by the United States and Great Britain, they favored cooperation among the leading members of the anti-Hitler coalition based on an implicit division of ‘spheres of interest.’ Although the formation of a united Anglo-American ‘front’ against the USSR could not be ruled out – especially in the event of a communist transformation of Europe – Soviet diplomacy aimed to prevent such an alliance from solidifying and sought to exploit the disagreements between Washington and London.

⁵⁶ Maisky’s memorandum to Molotov, January 10, 1944. *The USSR and the German Question*. Vol. 1. P. 352 (in Russian).

⁵⁷ At the meeting of heads of government on February 5, 1945, the U.S. president expressed skepticism about the United States’ ability to sustain a large military presence in Europe for more than two years following the end of the war. See: *Sovetskiy Soyuz na mezhdunarodnykh konferentsiyakh perioda Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 1941–1945 gg.* [The Soviet Union at International Conferences during the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945]. Vol. 4. P. 66 (in Russian).

⁵⁸ *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 7, Folder 17, File 173, Sheets 47–48 (in Russian).

The ideas advanced by Litvinov and Maisky, which resembled a ‘tripolarity’ model involving the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain – where the Soviet Union could strategically navigate between the two Anglo-Saxon powers – coexisted within the Soviet Foreign Office alongside alternative perspectives. Some, like academician Tarle and Shtein, stressed the importance of other international actors such as France and Italy, respectively. Due to the uncertain domestic political situation in post-war China and its relative weakness, Litvinov and Maisky were reluctant to assign China a decisive role in the post-war world. Consequently, the outlook of Soviet diplomats remained largely Eurocentric.

The new ‘balance of power,’ grounded in the significantly enhanced strength of the “Big Three” powers, their decisive role in defeating the Axis countries, and their expanded international political influence after World War II, was viewed as the foundation for a new global political order. At the same time, Litvinov and Maisky placed particular emphasis on the geographical factor. The potential withdrawal of the United States from European affairs, Great Britain’s privileged status as a maritime power, and the USSR’s position as a dominant land power were seen as factors that could lessen tensions among the leading members of the anti-Hitler coalition, especially in Europe. According to this perspective, the interests of the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain would be largely divided across different geographic regions. Meanwhile, Moscow aimed to diminish London’s influence in the former colonial periphery, where, as Litvinov acknowledged, covert cooperation with Washington might be possible.

Overall, it seems reasonable to say that Soviet diplomats’ reflections from 1943 to 1945 on the post-war world did not so much predict the bipolar realities of the Cold War as lay the foundation for a shift toward a significantly transformed multipolar model. Multipolarity was a defining characteristic of the interwar period, during which many leading Soviet diplomats – and Stalin himself – developed their ideas about international relations and world politics (Wohlforth, 1993, p. 86). Litvinov’s theses, which anticipated a revival of “contradictions between Britain and France” after World War II and Britain’s “desire to maintain the balance of power in Europe, at least by supporting Germany,”⁵⁹ bore parallels to the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, Lozovsky’s remark in April 1944 highlighted that France “still has influence among a certain group of European countries,” presumably referring to the former “rear allies” of Paris – Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania.⁶⁰

Drawing on the recommendations of Litvinov and Maisky, it can be concluded that “a form of ‘concert’ among the three great powers was taking shape, grounded in the division and mutual recognition of each other’s spheres of influence” (Pechatnov,

⁵⁹ Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *Mezhdunarodnaya organizatsiya bezopasnosti* [International Security Organization], April 25, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 144, Sheet 17 (in Russian).

⁶⁰ Verbatim record No. 6 of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Order Commission meeting, April 28, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 141, Sheet 40 (in Russian).

2006, p. 254). This ‘concert,’ reminiscent of the order established after the 1814–1815 Congress of Vienna, remained an appealing model, prompting several Western statesmen to advocate its revival after both the First and Second World Wars.

When considering the influence of interwar concepts on the Soviet Foreign Office staff, certain parallels can be seen between two international political models. The first is a distinctive form of ‘tripolarity’ involving the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain, each with its own ‘spheres of interest,’ as described by Litvinov and Maisky. The second model involves the so-called pan-regional unions, which were widely discussed during the 1920s and 1930s. These pan-regional unions, as envisioned during the interwar period, could encompass the USSR, the United States, and the British Empire, along with a potential European integration alliance (Pan-Europe). Acting collectively, the latter would be able to sustain its influence despite the dominance of powerful ‘non-European’ states.⁶¹ The Soviet Foreign Office learned that references to ‘pan-regional unions’ were common in Anglo-American discussions of 1944–1945 about dividing ‘spheres of responsibility’ under the proposed International Security Organization.⁶²

The foreign policy principles established in the early years of Soviet rule, which continued to shape the thinking of Soviet diplomats between 1943 and 1945, included strategies aimed at exploiting ‘inter-imperialist’ rivalries. In this context, the Soviet Foreign Office staff underestimated the strength of Anglo-American unity against the USSR in the emerging post-war environment. Additionally, the ideas of Litvinov and Maisky advocating support for anti-colonial and national liberation movements had already become established tools of Soviet diplomacy. Unlike the previous point, this approach proved highly relevant and widely utilized during the Cold War.

In conclusion, the conceptual framework developed by Litvinov, Maisky, and other Soviet diplomats during 1943–1945 – that can be described as a model of transformed multipolarity – was marked by internal contradictions. While their perspectives were future-oriented, they remained largely influenced by the ‘shadow of the past,’ which at times provided guidance but also diverged from the realities of the new international order.

About the Author:

Iskander E. Magadeev — Cand. of Sciences (History), Associate Professor, Department of European and American Studies, MGIMO University. 76, Prospekt Vernadskogo, Moscow, 119454.
E-mail: iskander2017@yandex.ru

Conflict of interest:

The author declares the absence of any conflicts of interests.

⁶¹ Magadeev I.E. 2021. *V teni Pervoy mirovoy voyny: Dilemmy evropeyskoy bezopasnosti v 1920-e gody [In the Shadow of World War I: European Security Dilemmas in the 1920s]*. Moscow: Aspect Press. P. 808-809 (in Russian).

⁶² Litvinov’s memorandum, entitled *Mezhdunarodnaya organizatsiya bezopasnosti [International Security Organization]*, April 25, 1944. *Russian Foreign Policy Archives*. Fond 06, List 6, Folder 14, File 144, Sheets 22-25 (in Russian).

Acknowledgments:

This work was supported by Russian Science Foundation Grant No. 23-28-00622 "Strategic Culture of Great Powers in the 20th–21st Centuries: Comparative and Historical Analysis (Using the Examples of Russia and The United States),"Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

References:

- Afiani V.Y. 2016. Problemy reparatsii na Ialtinskoj konferentsii. Po dokumentam lichnogo fonda I.M. Maiskogo v arkhive RAN [The Reparations Issue on the Crimea (Yalta) Conference: Based on Documents from the Personal Provenance Fond of Ivan M. Maisky in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences]. *Vestnik arkhivista*, 5(14), 45–47. (In Russian.)
- Aganson O.I. et al. 2020. *Vtoraia mirovaia voina i transformatsiia mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii: ot mnogopoliarnosti k bipoliarnomu miru* [The Second World War and Transformation of International Relations: From Multipolarity to Bipolar World]. Ed. by L.S. Belousov, A.S. Manykin. Moscow State University. (In Russian.)
- Ageev A.I. et al. 2014. *Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina 1941–1945 godov* [The Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945]. Vol. 8. Ed. by V.G. Titov et al. Kuchkovo Pole. (In Russian.)
- Anichkina V.S. et al. 1979. *Sovremennye vneshnepoliticheskie kontseptsii SShA* [Contemporary Foreign Policy Conceptions of the USA]. Nauka. (In Russian.)
- Arzakanian M.T. 2010. SSSR i griadushchaia pobeda soiuznikov v voine: vzgliad iz Velikobritanii [The USSR and the Allies' Impending Victory in the War: A View from Great Britain]. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 5(14), 45–47. DOI: 10.24833/2071-8160-2010-5-14- 45-47 (in Russian).
- Balandina O.A., Davydov A. Y. 2020. *Vlast', informatsiia i obshchestvo: ikh vzaimosviasi v deiatel'nosti Sovetskogo informbiuro v usloviakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny* [Power, Information and Society in the Framework of the Soviet Information Bureau's Activities during the Great Patriotic War]. Evraziia. (In Russian.)
- Baryshnikov V.N., Plenkov O.Y. 2015. Diplomats B.E. Shtein i sovetsko-finliandskie otnosheniia sereдины 1930-kh gg. [Diplomat Boris Shtein and Soviet-Finnish Relations in the mid-1930s]. *Trudy Kafedry istorii Novogo i noveishego vremeni* [Works of the Department of Modern and Contemporary History], 15, 79–103. (In Russian.)
- Carley M.J. 2019. *Tainaiavoina: Zapad protiv Rossii, 1917–1930* [Secret War: The West against Russia, 1917–1930]. Istoricheskaia Literatura. (In Russian.)
- Filitov A.M. (2023). *Germaniia v sovetskom vneshnepoliticheskom planirovanii (1941–1990)* [Germany in Soviet Foreign Policy Planning (1941–1990)]. Iurait. (In Russian.)
- Filitov A.M. 1995. V komissiiakh Narkomindela... (In the Commissions of the Soviet Foreign Office...). In O. A. Rzheshvskii (Ed.), *Vtoraia mirovaia voina. Aktual'nye problemy* [Second World War. Topical Problems] (p. 54–71). Nauka. (In Russian.)
- Gorozii V.S. 2018. Komissii M.M. Litvinova po podgotovke mirnykh dogovorov i poslevoennogo ustroistva: plany v otnoshenii Zapadnoi Evropy [Maxim Litvinov's Commission on Preparation of the Peace Treaties and Post-War Settlement: Plans in Regard of Western Europe]. *Klio*, 6(138), 123–128. (In Russian.)
- Islamov T.M., Pokivailova T.A. (2008). *Vostochnaia Evropa v silovom pole velikikh derzhav. Transil'vanskii vopros. 1940–1946 gody* [Eastern Europe in the Force Field of Great Powers. Transylvanian Question. 1940–1946]. Indrik. (In Russian.)
- Kaganovich B.S. 2000. E.V. Tarle v Komissii po voprosam mirnykh dogovorov i poslevoennogo ustroistva (1943–1945gg.) [Yevgeny Tarle in the Commission of Peace Treaties and Post-War Settlement (1943–1945)]. In B. V. Anan'ich (Ed.), *Problemy vsemirnoi istorii: sb. st. v chest' akademika A.A. Fursenko* [Essays on World History: Dedicated to Academician A.A. Fursenko] (p. 351–360). Dmitrii Bulanin. (In Russian.)

- Kaganovich B.S. 2014. *Evgenii Viktorovich Tarle. Istorik I vremia* [Yevgeny Viktorovich Tarle. Historian and Time]. European University at St. Petersburg. (In Russian.)
- Khakhalkina E.V., Zhigalov B.S. 2019. «Zvezdnyi chas» posla I.M. Maiskogo (iun' 1941 – iul' 1943 gg.) [The “Finest Hour” of the Ambassador I.M. Maisky (June 1941 – July 1943)]. *Voprosy istorii*, 12, 27–43. DOI: 10.3116/VoprosyIstorii201912Statyi24 (In Russian.)
- Khlebnikov P.P. 1984. *Neob"iavlennyye voyny SShA* [Undeclared U.S. Wars]. Mysl'. (In Russian.)
- Kholodkovskii K.G. 1991. Mezhdue istinoy i skhemoi [Between Truth and Scheming]. *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, 7, 19–22. (In Russian)
- Khromushin G.B. 1974. *Sovremennyi mir i ideologicheskaya bor'ba* [Contemporary World and Ideological Battles]. *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*. (In Russian.)
- Kissinger H. A. 1969. *American Foreign Policy: Three Essays*. W. W. Norton.
- Kokoshin A.A. 1978. *O burzhuaizmskikh prognozach razvitiia mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii* [On Bourgeois Forecasts for the Development of International Relations]. *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*. (In Russian.)
- Kunina A.E. 1988. *SShA: metodologicheskie problemy istoriografii (praktika issledovaniia)* [USA: Methodological Problems of Historiography (Practice of Research)]. Nauka. (In Russian.)
- Magadeev I.E. 2020. «Uroki voyny» i strategicheskoe planirovanie derzhav «Bol'shoi troiki» (1945–1949). [Lessons of World War II and Strategic Planning of the Big Three]. *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Seriia 25: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia i mirovaia politika*, 12(3), 45–84. DOI: 10.48015/2076-7404-2020-12-3-45-84 (in Russian)
- Magadeev I.E. 2023. *Prakticheskaya istoriografiia: E.V. Tarle i diskussii po «frantsuzskomu voprosu» v NKID SSSR (1943–1944)* [Practical Historiography: Yevgeny Tarle and Discussions on the “French Question” in the Soviet Foreign Office (1943–1944)]. *Noveishaia istoriia Rossii*, 13(2), 363–375. DOI: 10.21638/spbu24.2023.207 (in Russian)
- Narinskii M.M. 2010. Sovetskoe rukovodstvo i problema granits i sfery vliianiia SSSR v 1941–1946 gg. (Soviet State, Frontiers and Spheres of Influence in 1941–1946). In A. V. Torkunov, S. E. Naryshkin (Eds.). *65 let Velikoi Pobedy* [Great Victory: 65 Years Ago]. Vol. 3 (p. 52–61). MGIMO University Press. (In Russian.)
- Pechatnov V.O. 2006. *Stalin, Ruzvel't, Trumen: SSSR i SShA v 1940-kh gg.: Dokumental'nye ocherki* [Stalin, Roosevelt and Truman: USSR and USA in the 1940s. A Documentary Study]. TERRA–Knizhnyi klub. (In Russian.)
- Pechatnov V.O. 2009. Uroki Vtoroi mirovoi voyny v voenno-politicheskom planirovanii SShA i SSSR na poslevoennyi period [Lessons of the Second World War in the American and Soviet Military and Political Planning for the Post-War Period]. *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Ser. 25: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia i mirovaia politika*, 1, 116–133. (In Russian.)
- Pechatnov V.O. 2010. Posol SSSR v Velikobritanii I.M. Maisky: Po stranitsam ego dnevnikovyykh zapisei [USSR Ambassador to Great Britain Ivan Maisky: From the Pages of His Diaries]. *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*. №3. P. 187–199. (In Russian.)
- Pechatnov V.O. 2013. Stalingradskaia bitva i problema vtorogo fronta [The Battle of Stalingrad and the Second Front Problem]. *MGIMO Review of International Relations*, 2(29), 86–94. DOI: 10.24833/2071-8160-2013-2-29-86-94 (in Russian)
- Petrovskii V.F. 1976. *Amerikanskaya vneshnepoliticheskaya mysl'* [American Foreign Policy Thinking]. *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*. (In Russian.)
- Pikhoia R.G. 2014. «Arkhiivnaia revoliutsiia»: dvadtsat' let spustia [“Archival Revolution”: Twenty Years Later]. Pt. 3. In S. O. Shmidt (Ed.), *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik* (p. 4–22). Nauka. (In Russian.)
- Pleshakov K. 1991. Nashi natsional'nye interesy v perekhodnyi period [Our National Interests during the Period of Transition]. *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, 10, 15–25. (In Russian.)
- Pozdeeva L.V. 2008. I.M. Maisky i A. Iden [Ivan Maisky and A. Eden]. *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1, 171–184. (In Russian.)

Pozharskaia S. P. (2004). I.M. Maisky. In G. N. Sevost'ianov (Ed.), *Portrety istorikov. Vremia i sud'by* [Portraits of Historians. Time and Destinies] (p. 282–302). Vol. 4. Nauka. (In Russian.)

Primakov E.M. et al. 1983. *Vostok: rubezh 80-kh godov. Osvobodivshiesia strany v sovremennom mire* [The East: At the Turn of the 1980s. Liberated Countries in the Contemporary World]. Nauka. (In Russian.)

Roberts G. 1999. Ideology, Calculation, and Improvisation: Spheres of Influence and Soviet Foreign Policy 1939–1945. *Review of International Studies*, 25(4), 655–673.

Roberts, G. 2002. Litvinov's Lost Peace, 1941–1946. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 4(2), 23–54.

Roberts G. 2006. *Stalin's Wars: from World War to Cold War, 1939–1953*. Yale University Press.

Roberts G. 2011. Moscow's Cold War on the Periphery: Soviet Policy in Greece, Iran, and Turkey, 1943–8. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46(1), 58–81.

Sal'kov A. P. 2009. SSSR i Triestinskii krizis (mai – iun' 1945 g.) [USSR and the Trieste Crisis (May–June 1945)]. In U. K. Korshuk (Ed.). *Pratsy gictarychnaga fakul'teta BDU: navuk. zb* (p. 128–141). Vol. 4. Belarusian State University Press. (In Russian.)

Schweller R. L. 1998. *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest*. Columbia University Press.

Sergunin A. A. (1989). *SShA: prezidentskii lobbizm i vneshniaia politika* [USA: Presidential Lobbying and Foreign Policy]. Znanie. (In Russian.)

Sindeev A. A. 2020. Diplomaticeskii front Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny: kontury poslevoennoi Evropy v 1944 g. [The Diplomatic Front of the Great Patriotic War: The Contours of Post-War Europe in 1944]. *Sovremennaiia Evropa*, 3, 158–169. DOI: 10.15211/soveurope32020158169 (in Russian).

Sizonenko A. I. 1991. Polpred SSSR Y.Z. Surits [Plenipotentiary Envoy Yakov Surits]. *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 3, 100–117. (In Russian.)

Sokolov V. V. 2001. I.M. Maisky mezhdru I.V. Stalinym i U. Cherkhillem v pervye mesiatsy voyny [Ivan Maisky between Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill during the First Months of the War]. *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 6, 18–31. (In Russian.)

Sokolov V. V. 2002. M.M. Litvinov. In I.S. Ivanov et al (Eds.). *Ocherki istorii Ministerstva inostrannykh del Rossii 1802–2002* [Essays on History of the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1802–2002] (p. 340–353). Vol. 3. OLMA Press. (In Russian.)

Trofimenko G. A. 1976. Skvoz' prizmu «balansa sil» (kritika sovetologicheskikh kontseptsii sovetско-amerikanskikh otnoshenii) (Through the “Balance of Power” Lens (Criticising the Sovietology's Concepts about Soviet-American Relations). In A. O. Chubar'ian (Ed.). *Problemy istorii mezh-dunarodnykh otnoshenii i ideologicheskaiia bor'ba* [Problems in the History of International Relations and the Ideological Struggle] (p. 35–74). Nauka. (In Russian.)

Vatlin A. Y., Lannik L.V. 2023. Vvedenie [Introduction]. In A. Y. Vatlin, L. V. Lannik, T. Penter (Eds.). *Berlinskaia missiia polpreda Ioffe 1918 g. Dokumenty* [Berlin Mission of Plenipotentiary Ioffe in 1918. Documents] (p. 3–95). Politicheskaiia entsiklopediia (In Russian.)

Wohlforth W. 1993. *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War*. Cornell University Press.

Yakovlev A. G. 1990. Vneshniaia politika KNR: problemy issledovaniia v svete novogo myshleniia [Foreign Policy of the PRC: Problems of Studying in the Light of New Thinking]. *Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 2, 99–107. (In Russian.)

Yakovlev N. N. (Ed.) et al. 1976. *SShA: politicheskaiia mysl' i istoriia* [USA: Political Thought and History]. Nauka. (In Russian.)

Zhigalov B. S. 2014. I. M. Maisky i problema germanskikh reparatsii (1943–1945 gg.) [Ivan Maisky and the Problem of German Reparations (1943–1945)]. *Tomsk State University Journal of History*, 1(27), 56–63. (In Russian.)